



Disempowerment of Men in Rural and Urban East Africa: Implications for Male Identity and Sexual Behavior

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Summary. — Patriarchal structures and stereotyped notions of gender hide the increasing disempowerment of many men in rural and urban East Africa. Socioeconomic change has left men with a patriarchal ideology bereft of its legitimizing activities. Unemployment or low incomes prevent men from fulfilling their male roles as head of household and breadwinner. Women's roles and responsibilities have increased. This affects men's social value, identity and self-esteem. Multi-partnered sexual relationships and sexually aggressive behavior seem to strengthen male identity and sense of masculinity. Strategies to improve sexual and reproductive health must take into account how socioeconomic changes have affected traditional gender roles and male sexual behavior. © 2001 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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1. INTRODUCTION

I think that when we talk about the position of women in Africa and see how miserable it is, quite often we forget that these miserable women are married to miserable men (Wanagari Maathai, 1992. Kenyan women's activist).

While the impact of socioeconomic change on women's lives in East Africa has been widely documented, such documentation does not exist on men's lives. Stereotyped notions of gender roles and relations abound with men as the dominant gender who have profited more from the development process than women. Based on qualitative research by the author, first, in rural Kenya from mid-1980s to mid-1990s and then in urban Tanzania in 1996–97, the aim of this article is to illuminate underlying and so far overlooked factors which contribute to an understanding of how socioeconomic change has affected men and eventually their sexual behavior. The following arguments are pursued: first, socioeconomic change in rural and urban East Africa has increasingly disempowered men; second, this has resulted in men's lack of social value and self-esteem; third, with unemployment and problems fulfilling social roles and expecta-

tions, male identity and self-esteem have become increasingly linked to sexuality and sexual manifestations: in their frustrating situation, multi-partnered (“extramarital”)—often casual sexual relations—have become essential for masculinity and self-esteem.

Furthermore, this paper is based on the assumption that the patriarchal system resides precisely in the fact that male authority requires a material base while male responsibility is culturally and normatively constituted. In both rural Kenya and urban Dar-es-Salaam, however, socioeconomic change has brought increasing economic hardship and changing norms and values, and these in turn have weakened the material base of male authority. Male roles have become unclear and contradictory. Research by the author shows that a majority of men cannot fulfill expected male roles and responsibilities as head of household and breadwinner, and many suffer from feelings of inadequacy and lack of self-esteem. Many are met with contempt from women who are left with increasing responsibilities. This has both theoretical and policy implications. Theoretically, there is a need to revise stereotyped notions of the “dominant” gender and to

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investigate the effect of socioeconomic change on men's life situation. Policy-wise, both at the national and international levels, there is a need to consider the negative consequences of male disempowerment in relation to efforts to empower women and to improve sexual and reproductive health.

The background of the research is presented in Section 2. In order to understand the implications of changing male and female roles and relations and to capture the social actors and their strategies in day-to-day living, the analytical framework of the research has combined concepts from anthropology, psychology and sociology. These theoretical tools and the methodology are dealt with in Sections 3 and 4, respectively. Socioeconomic change and male disempowerment both in Kisii and Dar-es-Salaam are discussed in Section 5. The implications for masculinity, self-esteem and sexuality are discussed in Section 6. The conclusion revisits my initial arguments and discusses theory and policy implications in more detail.

2. BACKGROUND

Over the past 20–30 years, it has been widely documented that socioeconomic change and breakdown of traditional social institutions in sub-Saharan Africa have left women in a disadvantaged and vulnerable situation with increasing burdens and responsibilities (Boserup, 1970 and many others). The term patriarchy has been widely used to describe male superiority over women, and the conditions that privilege men and put women in a subordinate position *vis-à-vis* men—without equal access to family property, inheritance of land, and educational opportunities, etc. Precisely because of patriarchal structures working to the detriment of women, hardly any attempts have been made to investigate and analyze the impact of socioeconomic change on men's lives, and how men are dealing with their new situation. Consequently, the very important observation by Boserup (1980) that the change in women's work has been less radical than that in men's work has never been pursued.

It is now widely accepted that not only has poverty been feminized, but with the AIDS pandemic sweeping over sub-Saharan Africa women's sexual and reproductive health has deteriorated drastically. The HIV virus also causes male infertility, hormonal change and

impotence (Busingye, 1997). But, more women than men are HIV positive with Dar-es-Salaam being one of the most affected regions in sub-Saharan Africa (Bureau of Statistics, Planning Commission, 1996). In most cases, women have been infected by their husbands/partners (Kapiga *et al.*, 1994). Married women are more at risk than unmarried women who are said to be able to negotiate use of condom more easily. National governments are now in the process of making efforts to improve sexual and reproductive health—strongly pushed by donor agencies and local nongovernmental organizations. In this process, there is an increasing recognition of the need to address and involve men in sexual and reproductive health approaches to make them responsible partners. In spite of the fact that the cultural, social and attitudinal context of male sexual behavior is attributed increasing attention (cf. among others Orubuloye, Caldwell, & Caldwell, 1994), men's changing life situation and how it may interact with their sexual behavior have not yet been explored.

As my research clearly reveals, men's sexual behavior patterns cannot be understood and dealt with unless the underlying reasons for such behaviors are analyzed. Consequently, both in Kisii and in Dar-es-Salaam focus for the research was on the impact of socioeconomic change on gender roles and responsibilities; the underlying reasons for gender antagonism; cultural ideals of manhood/masculinity versus womanhood/femininity; specific characteristics of (hegemonic) masculinity; how are they constructed? How do they change? How are they linked to notions about social roles, social value, self-esteem and perception of self; how are they linked to sexuality and sexual behavior?

3. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The main features of my conceptual framework are as follows: Gender and gender relations, "masculinity" and "femininity" are neither universal nor static, and they do not reflect biological "givens." They are products of social and cultural processes which vary through time and space. As such masculinity and femininity are not given by nature or rooted in individual characteristics, but are largely products of social and cultural processes. In the overwhelming amount of research on identity (in various disciplines) only few efforts

have been made to distinguish between male and female identities, how they have been constructed, and what gives "value" to these respective identities. Such a distinction has been crucial to this research.

For this purpose, analytical tools are used, which combine symbolic and sociological approaches and which focus on the cultural construction of self through an analysis of gender identity and sexuality. Marriage is seen as constituting one of the most important institutions within which gender ideology is produced and reproduced, and is fundamental for the construction of gender and sexuality. Sexuality is seen as an integral part of gender identity. It is a cultural construct constituting the cornerstone of marriage. Marriage and sexuality affect, in particular, male social value. Sexual (and reproductive) behavior takes place in a cultural, social, economic and historical context where individuals are faced with ascribed norms and values, power structures, different gender and social roles which entail certain rights and social values. Social value is fundamental to men's and women's identity, self-esteem and also to gender relations. Thus, as concepts of gender identity and sexuality are stamped by social value, and with social value affecting, in particular, sexuality, social value has constituted a key concept of the research (Ortner & Whitehead, 1989; Caplan, 1991 and many more). These concepts are combined with more dynamic approaches to understand actors' strategies, the discrepancy between the official and the unofficial discourse, and the gap between say and do (Giddens, 1991; Bourdieu, 1986).

The new masculinity literature has provided particularly important tools by stressing that there is a considerable discrepancy between men's and women's public agreement with the dominant ideology of gender, and the great range of their actions. In addition, while a patriarchal ideology may be embodied in the lives of socially dominant men, this does not mean that all men are successful patriarchs. In fact, few men match the blueprint. Masculinity, like femininity, is always liable to internal contradiction and historical disruption. Moreover, there is a close link between masculinity, sexuality, manifestations of sexual power and violence (Cornwall & Lindisfarne, 1994; Cornell, 1995; Bourdieu, 1998). These new tools together with parallel observations from (medical) research in the Western world are used to analyze the disempowerment of men

and its implications for male identity and male sexual behavior in rural and urban East Africa.

4. METHODOLOGY

Research in Kisii was carried out at different periods from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s.

Research in urban Dar-es-Salaam took place during one year (1996–97). While the initial study in Kisii consisted of both survey data (723 women and 200 men in their reproductive age) as well as qualitative data, the subsequent Kisii studies were based on qualitative data collection, life histories and focus group discussions with a selection of men and women from two villages included in the first study (Silberschmidt, 1991, 1992a,b, 1995, 1999). All interviewees belonged to the Gusii tribe, and were either Catholics or Seventh Day Adventists. The vast majority had not completed primary education.

The qualitative data collection in urban Tanzania took place in three low-income squatter areas of Dar-es-Salaam: Manzese, Tandale and Vingunguti/Buguruni. In-depth interviews were carried out with 38 women and 53 men by means of structured, semi-structured, and open-ended interviews. In addition, and in order to discuss major issues that came up in the in-depth interviews, 13 focus group discussions (each with 8–10 participants) were conducted with different groups of men (aged 16–65) and women (17–69). The interviewees had different religious and ethnic backgrounds—a majority being Muslims. The majority had a primary education. Seven out of the 53 men had attended secondary school. Only one of the 38 women had attended secondary school.

5. SOCIOECONOMIC CHANGE AND MALE DISEMPOWERMENT

With their unique historical and economic developments, in particular after independence,¹ and with Kisii being rural and Dar-es-Salaam urban; these two locales necessarily have many differences. Both areas also have some of the same characteristics with 41% of the rural population in Kenya and 61% of the urban population in Tanzania living below the poverty line (Fields, 2000). Moreover, both rural Kisii and urban Dar-es-Salaam have experienced an overall economic decline,

economic instability, unemployment and lack of income earning opportunities—for men in particular. There is a large percentage of female headed households, breakdown of social and political institutions, high birth rates, low use of contraceptives, high HIV seropositivity, and—not the least—changing norms and values.

(a) *Socioeconomic change in rural Kisii*

Kisii, situated in the Western part of Kenya is among the most productive cash and food crop regions in the country. The district is populated almost exclusively by one tribe, the Bantu-speaking Gusii people. Most of them (say) they are Christians (60% Catholics and 40% Protestants mainly Seventh Day Adventists). In 1907, the population was estimated by the British Administration at 75,000. Since then, the population has multiplied by at least 20. Population density, land pressure, unemployment, criminality, violence and alcohol abuse mainly by men are among the highest in the country. Unemployment is seen as a particularly serious problem, because there is not enough land to secure survival. Even if the peasantry is in a process of disintegration, a large proportion of household reproduction remains based on peasant agriculture and relies on female labor (Orvis, 1985, 1988; Silberschmidt, 1992a,b, 1999). According to statistics, one-third of the households are female-headed. Households, where married women are solely responsible for the farm management constitute a much larger percentage (Silberschmidt, 1992a,b, 1999). Fertility rates declined from eight in the 1980s to 6.5 in 1991 (World Bank, 1993). By 1992, STD/HIV figures were alarming with one-third of pregnant women being HIV positive (Dept. of Obstetrics, Kisii District Hospital, personal communication, 1992).

Before British colonial rule, the division of labor was clear. Women were the food producers and men were dependent on women for food. Men were warriors defending their territories against attacks from other tribes. Men took an active part in political decisions. Cattle herding was a major male activity. Cattle, representing wealth and power, had a high symbolic value and constituted the major part of the bride price which was transferred in exchange for a woman's productive and child-bearing capacity. Polygyny was a cardinal feature of the household. The more cattle a man had, the more wives he could marry, and

the more land could be cultivated by the household. Through marriage he controlled his wife's sexual and reproductive powers, and got custody of the children born to his wife. Manliness was closely linked to self-control and dignity. Human procreation was a blessing, infertility a great tragedy. Ideas concerning public manifestations of sexual activity were strict but relatively permissive in terms of clandestine sexual acts. Adultery was a serious offence, although men had much greater latitude in their sexual activities. Adultery committed by a woman was considered more serious (LeVine & LeVine, 1966; Mayer, 1949; Mayer, 1973).

The invasion by the colonial power drastically altered the precolonial social and economic structure. Taxation was introduced, and to generate cash for taxes, men were recruited to construct railroads and urban centers. Kisii men became known as hard-working and responsible laborers, and Kisii became one of the most important reservoirs for migrant male labor. The rise of wage labor external to the household economy meant that some men could live on their off-farm earnings—separate from their families—without reinvesting those earnings in the household economy. But, as long as wage labor remained external to the household and only short-term, such men would eventually have to return to the household economy. Many women were left for years on their own to manage the farm.

By the eve of the Mau Mau rebellion (1952), the symbiosis between the peasant and migrant labor modes of production began to break down. The peasant economy supplied more labor than the wage economy could absorb. After WW II, a shift toward increased production of industrial goods began. This created a demand for skilled and semi-skilled workers rather than for large numbers of unskilled workers. The majority of Gusii migrants were unskilled and casually employed workers. This set the stage for a profound change in the migrant labor system. The effects of these changes on the labor force became increasingly apparent in the decade after independence. Moreover, employment did not keep pace with a population growing at an estimated 3% per annum, and employment as a percentage of the population declined (Stichter, 1982).

In Kisii, men's former identity prestige-giving activities gradually disappeared. There were no more tribal wars to fight; cattle camps had been eliminated because it was more profitable to use

land for cash crops. Therefore, on their return to Kisii in the 1960s, many were discouraged and returned to the urban areas—only to find that their labor was not needed. As a result, the majority of migrant workers had to return to Kisii, where most of them remain today. Unemployment along with the intensified population growth—not only in Kisii but on a national scale—is now a major problem. While some men have seasonal work on tea plantations in the neighboring Kericho district during peak seasons, long-term migration figures are very low with only 5,000 (mainly men) registered as working outside Kisii (Ministry of Planning & National Development, 1992).

(b) *The development of the “provider” ideology and new values*

In the 1940s and 1950s a new situation gradually emerged whereby women were no longer able to feed their families. Population growth, smaller land plots and emphasis on the cultivation of cash crops instead of food crops made the survival of the household dependent on men’s financial aid. This was new, since employment and trade were regarded as supplements rather than substitutes for the produce of the fields. Thus, men got a new social role—that of a breadwinner. But most men could not fulfill this role and the expectations linked to it. Life in town was expensive, and salaries were low. The urban minimum wage only provided the barest essentials for a single man (White, 1984). Consequently, remittances from husbands were often irregular or nonexistent. The substantial change in the need for both men’s and women’s contributions to family support challenged the ideology of separate spheres. On the one hand, it initiated a shift from men’s dominance and responsibility as head of household to a pattern of absent migrant—tax-paying men with responsibility toward the state—rather than the household. On the other, the role of head of household became closely associated with economic responsibility. A new type of social value system, the “provider” ideology, emerged with new obligations and responsibilities for men.

Thus, a new discourse began. New values and logics were created—meshing with old ones. Men still owned the land. But men’s difficulties in providing financial assistance to the household undermined their social roles as heads of households and their social value. The disappearance of cattle camps had a very negative

effect on the payment of cattle for bride price. With an increasing number of men unable to provide bride price, marriage was increasingly substituted by temporary “unions.” Women’s access to land—their means of production—became insecure, and marriage no longer provides a life-long security for women. In the 1940s “runaway” wives became a common phenomenon, and male control over women started to weaken. In spite of their increasingly vulnerable situation, women had to learn how to make ends meet on their own—without any assistance from their absent husbands.

The vast majority of women interviewed in the Kisii studies still had the primary responsibility for the farming activities. They were also involved in informal trade—ranging from the sale of tomatoes and some vegetables to the sale of more profitable cash crops. These women learned to develop their own goals and strategies. In particular, they learned to overcome patriarchal forms of control. For instance, many interviewees had special arrangements with local dealers so that they could sell some of their cash crops without their husbands’ knowledge.

While these women generally recognized and accepted certain formal rights and privileges that were reserved for men, they had no illusions about men as conscientious providers. When matters of intrahousehold (financial) responsibilities were discussed, women of all ages would start out giving stereotyped answers: The husband provides school fees; he buys household necessities (sugar and tea) and clothes for his wife and children. When we were through the formalities, however, the same women acknowledged that only a minority of their husbands contributed household necessities. Recurrent and general observations by women were: “a woman is better off without a husband;” “if only he was dead;” “a husband is like an extra baby in the house;” “men are so delicate; they break so easily;” “our sons have nobody to take as a model.”

In contrast, all men interviewed—often husbands of already interviewed women—and often in local bars or market places because they were difficult to find at home—they did not hesitate to emphasize their status as head of household, their control over wife and children, their right to correct (= beat) an obstinate wife, etc. These were indisputable facts. At the same time, however, both men and women agreed that “men drink and are rude to women to forget that they cannot provide the family

with blankets;" "men drink to drown their problems—and they are many." What was particularly striking was men's aggressive "macho" behavior while at the same time complaining that "women have forgotten that men are the masters;" "today women do not respect their husband;" "they humiliate the husband and tell home secrets to others." Men also complained of having bad dreams; they felt pursued and some were afraid to eat the food prepared by their wife for fear of being poisoned (Silberschmidt, 1999).

Traditionally, poor men were despised, while rich men were admired. This remains the case today. Wealthy businessmen and politicians, who can afford bride price for at least one wife, and who can also afford "girlfriends"—are highly admired. Having both gives status and respect. A general observation by men was that "a man needs at least three wives: one to bear his children, one to work and one for pleasure." Most men had not, however, provided the agreed bride price for their wife. Some had managed to pay the first "installment." In the 1970s, 33% of the households in Kisii were polygamous (Population and Development in Kenya, 1980, p. 81). Survey findings by this author indicate that less than 10% lived in polygamous unions. With only one wife, a general observations by men was that "a man needs to go outside to feel like a man." Besides "wives always complain. Therefore, if a man wants affection he has to go to his outside partner."

The intensification of their roles and responsibilities has made women increasingly aware of their own importance. The women interviewed were fully aware that the household could not survive without them. This seems to have nourished their sense of identity and reinforced their self-esteem. They complained about lack of male responsibility and lack of financial contributions. As noted by LeVine (1979), when women complain, they take a position of power. Thus, even though structurally subordinate and dependent on men for access to their means of production, women have actively responded to the new situation. In order for them to survive with their children, they have created a new social role for themselves—which is not in contradiction to the traditional image of the "entrepreneurial and strong woman." This trend, however, has fundamental consequences for the relations between genders. Both men and women interviewed admitted that "more and more women

have taken command of the home," and "harmony has gone out of the window" (Silberschmidt, 1992a,b, 1995, 1999). The same tendencies were observed in a study from Siaya, Kenya (Cohen & Atieno Odhiambo, 1989).

Summing up, today, Kisii is in a process of fundamental socioeconomic transformation and proletarianization (Silberschmidt, 1999). Gender antagonism and domestic violence have escalated, often resulting in men killing their wives and *vice versa*. Persistent rumors about men being poisoned by their wives circulate. In recent years, the district has also become known for its witch hunts and witch burnings. In this process, and with men's withdrawal from household responsibilities, men's position as heads of household is increasingly challenged. Some would even be called "figure" heads of household. Land is still inherited and owned by men, however, and most men interviewed call themselves farmers—even if their labor input in the farm activities is negligible. The few men who assisted their wives were subject to ridicule by other men and excluded from their company.

(c) *Socioeconomic change in Dar-es-Salaam*

While men migrated out of Kisii to find work, Dar-es-Salaam was at "the receiving end" experiencing an enormous influx of migrants from rural Tanzania. In 1894, Dar-es-Salaam was a minor settlement with 10,000 inhabitants. By 1957 it had grown to 130,000 (Leslie, 1963). Today the population has grown to more than 1.5 million with migrants flooding the capital hoping for a brighter and better life. All 122 ethnic groups in Tanzania are now represented. Sixty percent are Muslims. In the 1950s men in the capital far outnumbered women. Today there are only 0.9 men for every woman. The average fertility rate was estimated at 7.1 children in 1990. Contraceptive use is 10.9, which is lower than in other urban centers in Tanzania. About 30% of the sexually active population is HIV positive (Bureau of Statistics, Planning Commission, 1996).

In 1978, 84% of the men in Dar-es-Salaam had formal employment (Bureau of Statistics, 1982). Dramatic changes took place in the 1980s with many workers losing their jobs. According to the 1990–91 labor force survey, only 45% of the men in urban working population were employed. Today, only a fraction of the population is employed in the formal sector. Government salaries are far from ade-

quate to support a family. Thus, the informal sector has become overcrowded with a myriad of market vendors—men and women. Competition to survive economically has become very intense. Women, children, youth and the elderly have taken on greater responsibility. There are now more household members contributing to incomes at very low returns than in earlier periods (Gibbon & Raikes, 1995; Tripp, 1997). According to my own data, men seem particularly hit by rapidly declining real wages for those who are employed, and by increased competition for those making a living in the informal sector. Even young men with secondary education cannot find rewarding employment opportunities as they could in the past, and many end up as self-constituted parking boys or street vendors in downtown Dar-es-Salaam.

As in Kisii, the ideology of men as bread-winners is forcefully alive in those urban areas of Dar-es-Salaam, which belong to the poorer parts of the city and where field-work was conducted. Stereotyped notions shared by women as well as men interviewed are that “a man should be the head of his family;” “he should provide a house (and land if possible), pay school fees and clothes for wife and children.” Such a man has social value and is respected. But, a majority of men in the research area suffer the same fate as men in Kisii: they cannot fulfill expectations, and are increasingly withdrawing from household responsibilities. Men’s earnings are no longer the main source of income for the urban household as they were prior to the economic crisis of the 1980s. Even men’s best efforts may only feed a family for a few days every month. Consequently, men’s status as head of household is seriously challenged because wives cannot count on husbands’ support. But, when asked about their “status” in the household it was obvious to all 53 men interviewed that they were the “born” head of households. That was a “God given” fact. They clearly expressed that men had to control women, because “women are like children and should be guided by men.” Moreover, “men are the lions, and women are the sheep.” Nevertheless, men are continuously accused by women of being irresponsible husbands and fathers, and avoiding claims of children. In fact, the 53 men interviewed had fathered children with 2–4 women and had 30% more children than the 38 women interviewed.

In Tandale, one of the study areas, the majority of household were female. While there

is ample evidence of women being abandoned by irresponsible husbands, “divorces” (changing registration) filed by women have become increasingly common (personal communication with ward officer). On the one hand, divorced women interviewed say that they feel “exposed” to moral judgement and even jealousy from other women. On the other hand, they maintain that they are better off on their own. A few hopeful women, both married and divorced, would still maintain that it was better to have a husband “in case of emergencies.”

Consequently—and also as in Kisii—the form and content of the marriage contract has changed. Most men and women in my study live in more or less informal and passing unions. If a couple has been together for two years they are registered as “married” by the local authorities. Yet, a proper marriage still requires the procurement of the bride price, although most men cannot raise that money. This was already a problem 50 years ago (Leslie, 1963). The implications are that both women’s security and male control over women’s sexual and reproductive powers are at stake. In this situation, new household forms are emerging, organized increasingly around the female-headed household—a process which is fraught with tensions and negotiations over co-habital arrangements and obligations—in particular toward their children. Drinking relationships between men often take precedence over the marital relationships and obligations, and aggressions and violence between men and women are daily phenomena.

Urban life, however, has provided women with many opportunities, and the fact that many now have their own incomes has created a new awareness, autonomy and self-confidence. In the early 1980s it was unheard of for poor women to manage ambitious private enterprises. Today, women increasingly realize that they can stand on their own. This has changed women’s own view of their role in the household and in society. While women interviewed would often express self-limiting, culturally accepted expectations of them as women, in practice, they were entrepreneurial agents struggling for survival for themselves and their children. The majority—also those who referred to themselves as “housewives”—were actively involved in baking and selling *mandazis* (small sweet buns), preparing “lunches,” selling second-hand clothes, etc. Both men and women interviewed agreed that women are much harder working and enduring

than men. Therefore, when women enter the informal sector many are able to earn more than their husbands. In 1993–94, contrary to expectations, female-headed households in urban Tanzania actually constituted 18% of the highest income households, and only 13% of the poor households (World Bank, 1995).

Husbands' negative attitude toward women's employment and/or mobility in the informal sector is well known (Mgughuni, 1994), and was also considered in this study. But the vast majority of both men and women interviewed agreed that families cannot survive unless women contribute income. Both women and men would say that husband and wife should decide together on the use of "household" money. In practice, what women had earned belonged to them, and they decided how to use it, not their husbands. The largest proportion of their expenditures were on food and clothes for themselves and their children (see also Strauss, Mwabu, & Beegle, 2000). Nevertheless, husbands would always be expected to provide house rent, money for food and school fees even if these practices were honored more in theory than in practice. In addition to the observation that the more women control and manage their own incomes, the more responsibilities are given to them at the household level (Omari, 1994), my findings also indicate that when women have their own money they become less respectful of their husbands (see also Tripp, 1997).

According to the Tandale ward officer who constantly dealt with divorces filed by women, women are much more hard-working than men, they are more inventive, and they have a strength that men do not have. Many men feel destitute, and they have "no tactics to deal with their problems" (personal communication, 1997). Pastors/priests in Dar-es-Salaam are also increasingly dealing with issues of male self-esteem and problems that arise out of women's economic independence and shifting dependencies. This is supported by Tripp (1997) who notes that according to a Lutheran pastor in Buguruni one of the new problems that he encountered among members of his congregation was husbands complaining that they did not want their wives involved in projects because of how this would reflect on them and their ability to support the family. According to my interviews—and irrespective of religious and tribal background—both men and women agreed that "when husbands are crushed down economically they suffer from feelings of infe-

riority;" "a man's ego is hurt." As a result, "men loose their vigor and women take over;" and "when a man has lost control over his household and is humiliated by his wife a man's pride is hurt." In this situation, both men and women interviewed felt that many men resort to aggressive and violent behavior to demonstrate their authority. Or as often mentioned particularly by men, in order for men to "build up their pride" and "boost their ego," men need to "relax" and to be "comforted." As shall be shown below, relaxation and comfort are mainly provided by "extramarital" partners.

6. DISEMPOWERMENT, MASCULINITY AND SEXUALITY

As appears from above, in the 20th century, fundamental socioeconomic changes have taken place both in Kisii and in Dar-es-Salaam, and, today, poverty in rural and urban sub-Saharan Africa is deep, severe and massive (Ali & Thorbecke, 2000; Fields, 2000). In the recent decade, much attention has been drawn to the feminization of poverty, and the UNDP's *Human Development Report* (1995) postulates that more than 70% of the world's poor are women. But the empirical and quantitative evidence on the feminization of poverty in the developing world is ambiguous and increasingly questioned (Marcoux, 1998). While there are important dimensions to poverty that are unique to women (such as access to social capital, reproductive rights, violence and cultural factors), it is increasingly argued that there is considerable variation in the nature and extent of gender inequality across countries (Lampietti & Stalker, 2000).

The data collected both in Kisii and also in Dar-es-Salaam clearly indicate an overall context of economic decline which has caused severe economic hardship for both men and women. In addition, the data also indicate that men and women have responded differently to the economic crisis. While men have increasingly withdrawn from their traditional responsibilities because their traditional roles are moot and they are unable to fulfill new roles, women—in order for them and their children to survive—have been forced to take on new roles.

Thus, even though structurally subordinate to men, women have aggressively responded to the challenges of economic hardship. In this process, women have increasingly created a

new social role for themselves and have started to challenge men and their position as heads of household. Although, the main axis of patriarchal power is still the overall subordination of women and dominance of men, the material conditions have seriously undermined the normative order of patriarchy both in rural Kisii and in urban Dar-es-Salaam. As a result, patriarchy has been placed at increased risk and uncertainty. While men do have a relative freedom compared to women, particularly in sexual and reproductive behaviors, lack of access to income-earning opportunities has made men's role as heads of household and breadwinners a precarious one. With a majority of men being left with a patriarchal ideology bereft of its legitimizing activities and often reduced to "figure heads of households," men's authority has come under threat and, most importantly, so has their identity and sense of self-esteem. For patriarchy does not mean that only men have privileges—on the contrary. A patriarch and head of household has also many responsibilities. The key and the irony of the patriarchal system reside precisely in the fact that male authority has a material base while male responsibility is normatively constituted (see also Kandiyoti, 1988). This has made men's roles and identities confusing and contradictory, and many men in my studies express feelings of helplessness, inadequacy and lack of self-esteem. In fact, men increasingly seek psychiatric help (personal communication with heads of Psychiatric Department, Kisii District Hospital and Muhimbili Medical Centre, Dar-es-Salaam, respectively). This is reflected in local advertisements in the news media which offer to assist men with their depression, and loss of sexual power (impotence).

There are psychological explanations for these observations. When a person's moral universe does not "fit" social reality, a person's identity/identities and the perceptions of an individual self in relation to the other will be invalidated too. If the self-image does not correspond to the actual social reality an "acute identity diffusion" (Erikson, 1980) or an "identity crisis" takes place (Jacobson-Widding, 1983). Turning to recent research in the North, new data indicate specific male depressions caused by economic marginalization and lack of self-esteem. These depressions are characterized by increased aggressive behavior, lack of self-control, overconsumption of alcohol and often suicide (Sabo & Gordon,

1995; Stillion, 1995; Rutz, Walinder, von Knorring, Rilimer, & Pihlgren, 1997; Shajahan & Cavanagh, 1998). A study from Tanzania argues that frustrations and inner disturbances may even result in men raping children and women (Masanja & Urassa, 1993). This would explain the increasing numbers of sexual assaults in the study areas (see also Heise, 2000 for increasing international concern). Possessing no means to change their economic status, many seem to be yielding to an exaggerated "owner"/macho behavior and physical violence against women. As one man interviewed put it: "there is always a tendency for men to want to overcome women and to show them how aggressive we are. This gives respect and self-respect to us men." In this way men may translate their economic subordination into a symbolic expression which is perhaps culturally rewarding, if politically displaced.

Perhaps some parallels can be drawn from what has also taken place in industrialized countries, namely what Mies (1986) calls a "housewifization" of men. When men cannot anticipate salaried wage-labor employment—fundamental for their role as breadwinner—they find themselves in the situation of housewives: atomized, unorganized, and economically insecure. Man the hunter is faced with becoming a parasite. He is constantly vilified because of his lack of support to household needs.

In this situation conflicts of interests embedded in gender relations become more visible. The fact that women are becoming increasingly economically independent and leave husbands is a serious threat to the male ego and honor. Many men expressed outright jealousy and fear that when wives have their own business projects outside the home they may feel attracted to other men. "As soon as a husband starts declining economically, his wife will take advantage and go out to look for other men to satisfy her material needs," men would argue. Successful businesswomen in Dar-es-Salaam are even said to pay younger men for sex—a new threat to men. Thus, women's sexuality represents an active and threatening power. A man's honor, reputation, ego and masculinity are severely affected if he cannot control his wife. The code of honor is associated with an agency for self-defense against encroachment from the outside, and men are projected into an active role, the role of controller and aggressor. Faced with the fact that they are losing control over their wives, the

men interviewed constantly blamed the government for interfering in people's internal affairs by advocating equal rights: "The state is undermining men and turning women against their own husbands; women are like tape recorders; they do whatever they are told by the government."

Sexuality—like masculinity—cannot escape its cultural connection and can only be understood when contextualized. Thus, patterns of sexual behavior, attitudes toward and beliefs about sexuality exhibit considerable variation across the African continent and within regional ethnic religious and socioeconomic parameters. Traditionally, African sexual systems were based on complex sexual norms, values and moral codes. Restrictions, respect and avoidance were key notions related to sexual behavior. Thus, today's "sexual networking" (the term developed and used by Caldwell, Caldwell, & Orubuloye, 1992) and multipartnered relationships/casual sex (the terms that I prefer to use), though undeniable phenomena in many African contexts, are not the result of some traditional "permissiveness" (as argued by Caldwell *et al.*). They are the result of a breakdown of traditional norms and regulations surrounding sexual behavior. Christianity clearly contributed to the loosening of customary controls over sexuality because of its attack on indigenous moral systems in conjunction with colonial administrative and economic changes (Ahlberg, 1994; Standing & Kisekka, 1989; Heald, 1995).

The interviews with men indicate that a man's need for sexual/extramarital partners is particularly urgent "when a man has lost control over his household and is humiliated by his wife," and "when a man's ego has been hurt." Then "he needs peace on his mind;" "he needs to be comforted." One way to meet these needs is to go to the bar—officially to socialize with peers—where "money-hungry" women (according to wives) are waiting for a catch. He may also go to the *nyumba ndogo* (small houses = concubines) who will "serve a beautiful meal and give nice comfort." Wives do not have the time, energy or money for that. According to men, "when a man needs to build up his self-esteem, he drinks and seeks the comfort of other women." Both men and women interviewed agreed that "when a woman gives comfort to a man and makes him feel important, he feels like a real man." How do such statements correspond to other types of evidence? Safe sex messages over the recent

years have not escaped the attention of women and men. According to the Bureau of Statistics, Planning Commission (1996), 73% of women (7.786) and 87% of men (2.230) said that they had changed their sexual behavior. The most common change referred to was restriction of sex to one partner. Respondents in urban areas were more likely to have changed their behavior compared to rural respondents.

These numbers are not in agreement with my findings. While most men interviewed both in Kisii and in Dar-es-Salaam almost invariably—and irrespective of religion, educational level and ethnic background—said that it is better to stick to one partner, there was nevertheless unanimous agreement among the same men that a man cannot be monogamous: "it is against a man's nature." Both men and women agreed that men have a much stronger sexual desire than women. "Men need a lot of sex;" therefore, "it is impossible for men to be monogamous." In Kisii it was even argued that a man cannot be unfaithful. Only women can slip (Silberschmidt, 1999). In fact, 12 out of the 53 men interviewed in Dar-es-Salaam admitted that in their present relationship they had sex with several partners (one man had 30 partners, three had 9–10 and the rest between 2 and 5). Thus, there was a vast discrepancy between what men said, and what they did. Polygyny by its very existence has taught not only men but also women to believe that relations with one woman have never been part of man's nature. It was an accepted fact (though not appreciated by wives), and more so in Dar-es-Salaam than in Kisii, that "married" men have casual relationships or more stable *nyumba ndogos*. Muslim women in Dar-es-Salaam observed postpartum periods (after having given birth) surprisingly strictly (from several months up to two years). During such periods of "unavailability," women in my sample were fully aware that husbands had other partners. Nevertheless, they underlined that a "wife" should never let a "husband" know that she knew. That would undermine the respect that should be attributed to a husband.

With miserable housing—often only one room to be shared by husband, wife and children—husbands are not expected to spend much time at home. Moreover, with women getting up very early in the morning to prepare food to be sold in the market, many complained that "sex is a tiresome job." At the same time, though, women were very critical of men's sexual performance. In Kisii, a general

comment from women was that men did not know that a woman's body is like a *shamba* (field): first it has to be prepared, then it should be watered, and only then is it ready for the seeds. When I participated in weeding the fields with women working in groups, male sexual performances was often discussed. Those men who did not perform well (often because they were drunk) were ridiculed. In Dar-es-Salaam, Muslim women (mainly coastal tribes), in particular, put great emphasis on male sexual performance, and their ability to satisfy them sexually. During focus group discussions, women would discuss openly how many "rounds" they needed. If a husband did not perform well sexually, the wife had the right to complain to her husband's family. One woman said that she had been granted a divorce from her first husband on the grounds that her husband's sexual organ was too small to satisfy her needs.

While masculinity almost worldwide has become constructed from men's income-earning powers, most notions of masculinity are closely associated with virility, sexuality, potency, fertility and male "honor" (Lindisfarne, 1994; Lindsey, 1994; Cornell, 1995). White's observations (1990) observations of colonial attempts to create masculinity are relevant here: colonialists had been obsessed with the needs of working men for years, and legislated what they would earn and where they might reside. White concludes that beneath the rhetoric of social control, these were attempts to create an African masculinity that mirrored a flattering vision of the officials' own maleness. Patriarchal masculinity was embedded in British colonial discourse, and the internalization of a masculinity based on war and phallogentrism became a part of social reality.

Consequently, masculinity impinges on a number of different elements, identities and behaviors which are not always coherent. They may be competing, contradictory and mutually undermining, they may have multiple and ambiguous meanings which alter according to context and over time, and they may also vary across cultures. As such masculinity is always liable to internal contradiction and historical disruption (Cornell, 1995). Yet, certain characteristics have remained constant in spite of evidence attesting to their negative consequences. Masculinity has to be constantly reasserted in the continuous denial of "femininity" or "feminine qualities" (Jung, 1962; Seidler, 1991). According to Kimmel (1987),

sexual performance is one of the crucial arenas in which masculinity is socially constructed and enacted. Performance failure can challenge the essence of masculinity, and confront men with the possibility that they are not "real" men. This links up with the observations by Cornell (1995) that the male gender is constructed round at least two conflicting characterizations of the essence of manhood: first, being a man is natural, healthy and innate; second, a man must stay masculine; he should never let his masculinity falter. Masculinity is so valued, so prized, and its loss so terrible that one must always guard against losing it. Consequently, also successful men—models for the disempowered—must reconfirm their masculinity through sexual manifestations.

In his recent work partly based on his studies of the Kabyles in Northern Africa, Bourdieu (1998) stresses the link between masculinity, sexuality and violence with the erected phallus representing the dynamic vitality fundamental to sexuality and procreation. He points out that men are also prisoners and victims of their role as the dominating sex. Thus, the male privilege is also a trap. To exercise domination is not "inscribed" in men's nature. It requires long "socialization work." Just like "noblesse oblige," men are obliged to play their prescribed roles where "honor" is central. Contrary to women, who can only defend (virginity) or lose their "honor" (infidelity), a "real" man must fight for it—use violence to achieve glory and public recognition. Women and their sexuality represent an active and threatening power to male identity, social value and "honor". From this point of view, women as women, acquire power over men.

Summing up, with a man's identity, self-confidence and social value being closely linked to his sexuality, my data indicate that sexual activity with "extramarital," often casual partners and sexual control over women seem to compensate for the loss of social roles and social value. Drawing on norms and values which do give positive connotations to male sexual activity (contrary to that of women), such activity is a legitimate way for men to enhance self-esteem and masculinity. With sexual identity being a major element in men's social identity, sexual exploits by disempowered—not to say emasculated—men in Kisii and Dar-es-Salaam seem to be a key element in terms of male self-identification and central to men's self-esteem, social value and masculinity. With men's control over women being an

important social index for their masculine reputation, many seem to have “chosen the lifestyle” (to use the terminology of Giddens, 1991) of (aggressive) sexual behavior with multiple partners. This behavior seems to have become a tool to acquire self-esteem, a tool of domination and control over women as well as a legitimate way of manifesting masculinity. As one man put it, “if you cannot be a successful breadwinner you can be a successful seducer.”

7. CONCLUSIONS

Comparing the situation of men in Kisii and Dar-es-Salaam a majority are caught in very similar and paradoxical situations. On the one hand, they are the acknowledged heads of households and decision-makers. On the other hand, more and more men do not meet the normative standard, and they find themselves in a bind between the culture they expound and the discontent and powerlessness they feel as a result of their subordinate economic status. With different historical and economic developments and different ethnic backgrounds, my research findings from rural Kenya and urban Tanzania necessarily show many differences. As demonstrated above, however, there are also so far overlooked similarities which may even be applicable to other areas in and even outside East Africa, in particular in terms of men's situation. One should, of course, be doubtful of generalizations which claim to find same phenomena and behaviors of different individuals situated in very different settings. It would be a mistake, however, not to recognize basic regularities, differences and similarities when they are there.

Thus, my research strongly indicates that socioeconomic change entailed by increasing poverty has perhaps been just as harsh for men as for women—but in a different and more obscure way. Men seem to have been submitted to a larger extent than women to new obligations and expectations and following this, new systems of social value. While there is clear evidence that women's roles have expanded and their burdens increased, similar evidence does not exist on men's roles. My data, however, clearly demonstrate that a majority of men are not able to honor their expected role as head of household and breadwinner. This has serious consequences for men's social value and it is a constant threat to their masculine pride. As a result,

men have had to find new ways to manifest themselves. With masculinity and sexuality being closely related, sexual manifestations and control over women—often acted out in violence and sexual aggressiveness—seem to have become fundamental to restore male self-esteem. This change has extensive theoretical as well as policy implications.

Theoretically, there is a need to revise the generally accepted stereotypes of male domination and women's subordination. As my research shows, even if the patriarchal ideology may be embodied (and expressed) in the lives of socially dominant men (and women), this does not mean that all men are successful patriarchs or that all women are passive victims. Stereotypes are dangerous: they are static, they do not allow for change, and they mask cultural variations. Stereotypes may even help to “naturalize” inferiority and may end up being internalized by the subordinates themselves.

The policy implications of my findings are extensive. With the AIDS epidemic sweeping over East Africa, and with more women than men now being HIV positive, women are exposed and victimized in their sexual relationships—much more than in any other relationship. Following the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo (1994) where the concept of Sexual and Reproductive Health (and Rights) was launched there has been an increasing recognition among donors and national governments of the need to address and involve men in sexual and reproductive health approaches and to make them responsible partners.

Most health promotion approaches—even if aware of complex sociocultural contexts—are based on the idea that individuals will respond “sensibly” to the information given to them. This means that health promotion approaches focus on individual change and implicitly assume that individuals have personal control over their health (Campbell, 1995). As has been shown in this article, such an assumption is an illusion in my research areas and most probably also in most other contexts. While the need for an investigation of the changing cultural, social and attitudinal context of male sexual behavior is increasingly stressed (cf. Orubuloye *et al.*, 1994) my research indicates that this is far from enough. If such an investigation is to be useful there is a need to refine and develop methodologies which reveal, on the one hand, the interaction between men's life situation, notions of male gender identity and masculin-

ity, and on the other, how male sexual and also reproductive behavior is affected.

With strategies to empower women and women's rights figuring prominently on the national and international agenda, and with sexual and reproductive health (and rights) being advocated, mainly by international agencies, it should be kept in mind that, there are often problems with translating such empowerment into convictions and action. The promotion of women's empowerment and the call for women's rights are often based on very simplistic solutions to very complex socioeconomic problems. Moreover, as observed by Cornell (1995), and in agreement with my findings, to focus only on dismantling men's advantages over women through a politics of equal rights would be to abandon our knowledge of how those advantages are produced and defended. Ironically, empowering women may also free men from taking responsibility, in particular in sexual matters. Furthermore,

efforts to empower women may have unintended and negative consequences for women, in particular in terms of their sexual and reproductive health, unless they are balanced against efforts to deal with men's increasingly marginalized situation.

While there is an increasing interest in men as a gendered constituency and a recognition of the need to "include" men in development (IDS bulletin, 2000; Chant & Gutman, 2000), there is first of all a need for overall economic empowerment of both men and women along with efforts to make both genders center on alliance work. More specifically, there is a need for real economic opportunities for both men and women, focused on lower class laborers as well as peasant farmers. Moreover, there is a need for education to redefine gender roles and to make men and women aware of the way in which socioeconomic changes have affected their traditional gender roles. These are major development challenges.

NOTES

1. After independence, Kenya and Tanzania followed different development strategies (Barkan, 1984). Kenya defined development in terms of the continued growth and elaboration of the political and economic institutions established in the country during the colonial period, and adopted a "patron-client" capitalism. In contrast, Tanzania attempted a complete break with the institutional legacies it inherited at independence, and set out as an example of one-party socialism.

Both countries, however, have encountered serious difficulties in their pursuit of development. This is not only a function of the strategies they have chosen—but also of the impact of adjustment on the respective economies, reduced prices for raw material, increased debt servicing burdens, etc. As a result, today, poverty both in rural and urban sub-Saharan Africa is deep, severe and massive (Ali & Thorbecke, 2000; Fields, 2000).

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