

## WESTERN FEMINISM IN TANZANIA: ADVOCATING FOR A CONTEXTUAL GENDER FRAMEWORK IN TANZANIA

Received: 05-06-2025

Accept: 15-07-2025

Published: 22-08-2025

BY

\*EZEKIEL KATEMI,\*\*DR. SR. NEEMA MBUTA

Jordan University College, P.O. Box 1878, Morogoro, Tanzania

### ABSTRACT

This work advances the thesis that Western feminism, in both its philosophical underpinnings and practical applications, is ill-suited to the foundational and socio-political realities of Tanzania. The central argument is that Western feminism, rooted in Euro-American notions of individual autonomy and secular liberalism fails to resonate with Tanzanian communitarian worldview, its cooperative gender complementarity embedded in its philosophical anthropological perspective. The problem is not merely one of context or cultural diversity but of fundamentally divergent ontological and ethical assumptions about personhood, family and society. However, this article shows that, Tanzanian social life rests on the ground of communal interdependence and mutual respect between genders, values that re preserved in philosophical underpinnings of *Ujamaa*, which also uphold family unit.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, Western feminist thought evolved in industrialized, capitalist societies with different historical struggles such as the women's suffrage movement, workplace equality and reproductive equality which when transplanted into Tanzania without adaptation disrupt rather than enhance social harmony. This work is organized mainly into three sections. After the introduction; the first section traces the historical trajectory of western feminism through its four waves, the second section makes explores how the metaphysical foundation of reality is perceived differently by the Western feminists' perspective from that of the African perspective. The third section retains the discussion to the context of Tanzania where the notion of womanhood is expounded. In this section, it will be shown why Western Feminism is not the right approach to tackle the gender problem in Tanzania. With ongoing philosophical debates, this work engages critically with postcolonial feminism, African womanism and indigenous philosophical frameworks which protect both men and women for the purpose of making a fair and equal world. it aligns with scholars like Mondin, Lombo and Russo, and John Paul II, who argue on the complementarity of men and women as relational beings living together in the family and community.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, this article contributes in decolonizing feminist thought by articulating an African-centered gender philosophy that upholds equality within the framework of relational personhood and social cohesion. It also offers policy makers, and educators a blueprint for gender policy that preserves Tanzanian values, strengthens family cohesion and ensures equitable development for both men and women. in doing so, it affirms that genuine gender justice in Tanzania can only emerge from a framework that is contextually grounded and philosophically coherent.

**Key words:** Western Feminism, Ujamaa, Metaphysics, Philosophical Anthropology

### Introduction

The discourse of feminism has become a global phenomenon, often promoted as a universal struggle for women's rights and gender equality. At its core, feminism aims to address the systematic injustices and inequalities that women face in different spheres of life, economic, social, political and cultural dimensions.<sup>3</sup> However, despite its global reach, feminism is not a monolithic concept. It is deeply rooted in specific cultural, historical, and philosophical contexts. The dominant strand of feminism emerged from liberal, secular and individualistic cultures of Europe and North America.<sup>4</sup> This form of feminism has been exported to non-western societies under the assumption of universality, without adequate consideration of indigenous worldviews, cultural values, *Ujamaa* socialism in Tanzania, and a metaphysical sense of gender complementarity which views gender not as a battlefield for rights but as a cooperative foundation for societal well-being.<sup>5</sup> *Ujamaa* is a Swahili word which literally translates to relatives.<sup>6</sup> It is the philosophy which seeks to liberate a human being in various dimensions of his or her life.

Thus, this article traces proceeds from the thesis that the future of gender equality in Tanzania requires a contextualized gender framework, one that upholds universal principles of dignity and equality but rooted in Tanzanian heritage and philosophical traditions. To substantiate this work, the discussion will unfold in three key parts, first, it will explore the origins, principles and thematic waves of Western feminism drawing attention to their historical specificity. Second, it will assess the assumptions on the metaphysical conclusions made by feminist thinkers and African ontologists on what defines the essence of women. Third, it will delve into understanding the notion of womanhood in the context of Tanzanian and its philosophical foundations of *Ujamaa*, stepping up to assess the consequences of western feminism in Tanzania, and the way forward to counteract the negative impacts on the path of enhancing a contextualized gender framework founded on mutual respect of identity and dignity of individual human beings.

<sup>1</sup> Julius Nyerere, *Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism* (Dar e Salaam: Oxford University Press, 1968), 92-95

<sup>2</sup> John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem: On the Dignity and Vocation of Women*, Vatican, 1988, 7-10

<sup>3</sup> Saul McLeod. "Four Waves of Feminism Explained." *Simply psychology*, July 4, 2023, 5

<sup>4</sup> LeGates, *In their Time*, 2-5

<sup>5</sup> McLeod. "Four Waves of Feminism Explained", 7

<sup>6</sup> Marie Aude Fouere, ed. *Remembering Nyerere in Tanzania: History, Memory, Legacy* (Dar es Salaam: MkukinaNyota, 2015), 36

In the end of this discussion, we need to understand that, in an era of globalization, the question is not whether feminist values are important, but how they can be meaningfully adapted to diverse contexts without erasing indigenous epistemic foundations of a place. By offering a Tanzanian-centered critique of western feminism, this article adds to the growing body of literature calling for decolonized, context-sensitive approaches to gender justice.

## Introduction

The discourse of feminism has become a global phenomenon, often promoted as a universal struggle for women's rights and gender equality. At its core, feminism aims to address the systematic injustices and inequalities that women face in different spheres of life, economic, social, political and cultural dimensions.<sup>7</sup> However, despite its global reach, feminism is not a monolithic concept. It is deeply rooted in specific cultural, historical, and philosophical contexts. The dominant strand of feminism emerged from liberal, secular and individualistic cultures of Europe and North America.<sup>8</sup> This form of feminism has been exported to non-western societies under the assumption of universality, without adequate consideration of indigenous worldviews, cultural values, *Ujamaa* socialism in Tanzania, and a metaphysical sense of gender complementarity which views gender not as a battlefield for rights but as a cooperative foundation for societal well-being.<sup>9</sup> *Ujamaa* is a Swahili world which literally translates to relatives.<sup>10</sup> It is the philosophy which seeks to liberate a human being in various dimensions of his or her life.

Thus, this article traces proceeds from the thesis that the future of gender equality in Tanzania requires a contextualized gender framework, one that upholds universal principles of dignity and equality but rooted in Tanzanian heritage and philosophical traditions. To substantiate this work, the discussion will unfold in three key parts, first, it will explore the origins, principles and thematic waves of Western feminism drawing attention to their historical specificity. Second, it will assess the assumptions on the metaphysical conclusions made by feminist thinkers and African ontologists on what defines the essence of women. Third, it will delve into understanding the notion of womanhood in the context of Tanzanian and its philosophical foundations of *Ujamaa*, stepping up to assess the consequences of western feminism in Tanzania, and the way forward to counteract the negative impacts on the path of enhancing a contextualized gender framework founded on mutual respect of identity and dignity of individual human beings.

In the end of this discussion, we need to understand that, in an era of globalization, the question is not whether feminist values are important, but how they can be meaningfully adapted to diverse contexts without erasing indigenous epistemic foundations of a place. By offering a Tanzanian-centered critique of western feminism, this article

adds to the growing body of literature calling for decolonized, context-sensitive approaches to gender justice.

### 1. Historical Roots of Western Feminism

To understand why Western feminism is largely irrelevant in the Tanzanian context, it is essential to examine its historical evolution. Western feminism was a product of particular political, philosophical and socio-economic developments in Europe and North America.<sup>11</sup> From the enlightenment period to the postmodern age, feminism in the West has evolved through several waves each shaped by the dynamics of the societies in which it emerged.

The first wave of feminism began in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. It was centered on legal and political reforms, especially in Europe and North America.<sup>12</sup> Feminist thinkers like Mary Wollstonecraft were considered first thinkers of the first wave feminism. In her text, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), Wollstonecraft argued that women are not naturally inferior to men, but had been denied the opportunity to develop intellectually.<sup>13</sup> Thus, it is the first wave feminism which influenced individual rights, were women sought inclusion in the public life of service by demanding reforms in legal and political systems. On the other hand, societies in Tanzania were historically organized around extended families and kinship systems, and communal responsibilities; the ideal of individual legal identity was largely alien.<sup>14</sup> Instead, one's role was defined in relation to family and community rather than individual entitlement.

The second wave feminism emerged in the post-World War II period, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>15</sup> It extended the struggle beyond legal equality which was done during the first wave feminism, to challenge societal norms, cultural practices and gender roles. Simon de Beauvoir argued that womanhood was a cultural construct imposed by patriarchal society.<sup>16</sup> Thus, second-wave feminism led to the idea that, patriarchy as a systemic structure of male dominance needed to be dismantled. The home, motherhood, marriage and religion were increasingly seen as sites of female oppression. Contrary to second wave feminism, motherhood in Tanzania is not considered a sign of oppression but honor; the family is not a private prison but a source of identity and moral grounding.<sup>17</sup> In this regard, when the western feministic views are applied to the

<sup>11</sup> LeGates, *In their Time*, 2

<sup>12</sup> Paradigm Press, "Four Waves of Feminism: A Blessing for Global Humanity." *Social Sciences and Humanities*, Journal 4, no.1(2023): 59-74, 60-64

<sup>13</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, (London: J. Johnson, 1792), 19

<sup>14</sup> Jane Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and the United States, 1780-1860*, (Basingstoke: St Martin's Press, 1990), 46-50

<sup>15</sup> Kaitlynn Mendes, "What Are the Four Waves of Feminism? And What Comes Next?" *The Conversation*, March7, 2024, 19

<sup>16</sup> Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 305

<sup>17</sup> Julius Nyerere, *Ujamaa*, 83

<sup>7</sup> Saul McLeod. "Four Waves of Feminism Explained." *Simply psychology*, July 4, 2023, 5

<sup>8</sup> LeGates, *In their Time*, 2-5

<sup>9</sup> McLeod. "Four Waves of Feminism Explained", 7

<sup>10</sup> Marie Aude Fouere, ed. *Remembering Nyerere in Tanzania: History, Memory, Legacy* (Dar es Salaam: MkukinaNyota, 2015), 36

Tanzanian context, they disdain the fundamental roles and strip Tanzanian women dignity and identity by defining their status solely in terms of resistance to men.

In the 1990s, a third wave emerged, introducing intersectionality, a concept popularized by Kimberlee Crenshaw, which acknowledged that race, class, sexuality intersect to shape women's experiences differently.<sup>18</sup> Even when it claimed to be more inclusive of non-Western women, it still portrayed third-world women as homogeneous, oppressed group which needs to be saved.<sup>19</sup> This assumption strips of African women of agency, voice and cultural identity. However, in Tanzania local women have been leaders in community development without needing to frame their work as feminist as it is in the western sense. Yet, their leadership is strong and rooted in communal responsibility, not in a politics of identity.

The forth and current wave of feminism emerged around 2012. This has been characterized by digital activism and increasing focus on gender identity and sexual fluidity.<sup>20</sup> This wave does not only challenge patriarchy but the very notions of male and female as biological categories. On the other hand, Tanzanian societies are still grappling with challenges like maternal health, access to education, poverty and the need for strong family unity. Introducing debates about gender non-conformity or abolishing the concept of womanhood distracts woman from the pressing development needs of the people.<sup>21</sup> However, these ideologies often contradict traditional African metaphysical understandings of the human being. In the Tanzanian communities, men and women are not arbitrarily labeled but are seen as ontologically distinct and complementary.<sup>22</sup> The effort to erase these distinctions is not seen as liberation, it is a cultural disorientation.

## 2. The Metaphysical Understanding of Womanhood.

According to Aristotle, metaphysics is the science of "being qua being", meaning it is the study of being in its most general and fundamental sense in itself.<sup>23</sup> Metaphysics defines a woman as a rational substance whose essence includes the capacity for femininity, expressed in her natural orientation toward maternity, relationality, and complementarity with man.<sup>24</sup> This can also be traced from the philosophical anthropological perspective which defines a woman as a unity of body and soul, who realizes herself in relation, communion with a vocation to nurture and sustain life in family and society.<sup>25</sup> At the root of western feminist

theory lies the assumption that, a human person, especially the woman is a self-creating individual whose essence is shaped by social structures and subjective choices.<sup>26</sup> In contrast, Tanzanian society is steeped in traditional metaphysical anthropology which understands the human being as a substance endowed with inherent purpose, dignity, and social responsibility and so the woman.<sup>27</sup> Thus, there is a foundational difference between the metaphysical conceptions of the essence of womanhood in western feminism and classical metaphysics.

### 2.1 Understanding Womanhood from the Western Feminists' Perspective

One of the most influential feminist claims in modern Western thought is Simon de Beauvoir's famous assertion in *The Second Sex* (1949): "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman."<sup>28</sup> This statement represents a radical departure from classical metaphysical traditions. It implies that womanhood is not a fixed essence but a fluid social construct something externally imposed and therefore, subject to deconstruction and transformation. This view, which underpins much of Western feminist theory, was later expanded by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1990), where she argues that gender is not something we are, but something we perform.<sup>29</sup> Butler's poststructuralist approach entirely collapses the distinction between nature and culture, biology and identity, a notion which destructs the essence of being a woman.

### 2.2 Understanding of a Woman from the African Perspective

In contrast, traditional African thought, as reflected in Tanzanian society, holds a view of the person that closely resembles classical metaphysical traditions, particularly those of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. In this framework, every being has a substance, an essence or nature that defines what it is, and accidents, or secondary properties that can change without altering the thing's identity.<sup>30</sup> Applied to human beings; this means that, the essence of the substance tells us what a Being is and what it is oriented towards. For human beings, substance is rational animal possessing intellect and will, existing in the animality manifested by the body in time and space.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, the sexual difference between men and women does not change the human substance. It is an accident in metaphysical terms, a way the substance exists but a natural accident that flows necessarily from human nature. Understanding the human nature from the philosophical anthropological perspective; a woman is understood as a whole integrating the metaphysical structure (substance and accidents), teleology (final causes) and personalism (human dignity as rational and free).<sup>32</sup> From the

<sup>18</sup>Kimberlee Crenshaw, *On Intersectionality: Essential Writings*, (New York: The New Press, 2019), 43

<sup>19</sup>Crenshaw, *On Intersectionality*, 40-43

<sup>20</sup>Britannica, "The Fourth Wave of Feminism." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Accessed on July 24, 2025, at 13:00 PM. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism/The-fourth-wave-of-feminism>, 2-5

<sup>21</sup> Julius Nyerere, "Leaders must not be Masters" in *African Philosophy: An Anthology*, edited by Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 1998), 77-78

<sup>22</sup>Michael Jennings, *Surrogates of the State: NGOs, Development, and Ujamaa in Tanzania*, (Connecticut: Kumarian Press, 2007), 25-29

<sup>23</sup>Ross, "Metaphysics", 1622-1625

<sup>24</sup>Ross, "Metaphysics", 1625

<sup>25</sup>Lombo & Russo, *Philosophical Anthropology*, 190

<sup>26</sup>Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, Chapman & Hall, 2002), 17

<sup>27</sup>David William Ross, "Metaphysics" in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, edited by Jonathan Barnes, Vol. 2, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1624

<sup>28</sup>De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 304

<sup>29</sup>Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 18-20

<sup>30</sup>Ross, "Metaphysics", 1625

<sup>31</sup>Ross, "Metaphysics", 1625

<sup>32</sup>Mondin, *Philosophical Anthropology*, 218

metaphysical point of view, the substance of a woman is equal to the human person with female sex. Her female embodiment positions her necessarily to particular anthropological roles in the family and society. This suggests that all men or women do not act the same way, but rather that there are ontological differences, rooted in biology, spirit and social responsibility that define their respective roles and identities.<sup>33</sup> In order to understand the essence of the womanhood, it is important to seek the path of philosophical anthropology which does not only highlight the difference between substance and accidents on being, but it does this specifically to the human being and in the special way it does in describing the essence of the womanhood. As Battista Mondin explains in *Philosophical anthropology* (1991), substance is not merely a static essence, but a dynamic principle of activity and purpose.<sup>34</sup>

Therefore, womanhood then, is not merely a social category, it is a substantial reality with specific potentials, vocations, and relational orientations. From this viewpoint, attempting to erase or radically redefine gender roles is not just a social mistake, it is a metaphysical disorder. In many Tanzanian societies, the distinction between male and female roles is not based on domination, but on the principle of complementarity.<sup>35</sup> Men and women are seen as different but interdependent, each fulfilling necessary roles in the cosmic and social order. The woman is often associated with the earth, fertility, nurturing, and continuity; the man with protection, leadership, and provision.<sup>36</sup> These distinctions are not meant to confine but to organize society in a harmonious way.

### 3. Tanzanian Conception of Womanhood

The discourse surrounding the role of women in society has always existed in African cultures, long before the arrival of western feminism. In Tanzania, the concept of womanhood is deeply rooted in communal values. Unlike the Western feminist framework that views women largely through the lens of individual rights, and liberation from patriarchal structures, African conceptions of womanhood, particularly in Tanzania emphasizes complementarity, familial responsibilities, and social harmony.<sup>37</sup>

In Tanzania the individual is not understood as an isolation but as a part of a web of relationships. This view is captured in the African philosophy of *Ubuntu*, "I am because we are".<sup>38</sup> This philosophy emphasizes community, reciprocity, and the interconnectedness of all people. Within this moral order, gender roles are not adversarial but cooperative. Thus, womanhood is not about escaping familial or communal roles to attain autonomy; rather it is about fulfilling one's responsibility in harmony with others.

Tanzanian women have traditionally played essential roles as mothers, farmers, healers, and teachers. These roles are not seen as inferior or marginal but as vital to the social relationship. While Western feminism frames such roles as oppressive or limiting, within the African view, they are signs of honor, strength, and social value.

A pivotal moment in Tanzania's political and cultural history was the adoption of *Ujamaa*, the African socialist philosophy developed by the nation's founding father, Mwalimu, Julius Nyerere. In his text, *Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism* (1986), Nyerere outlined a vision of society rooted in equality, communal ownership, family cohesion, moral solidarity.<sup>39</sup> Women were central to his vision, not as victims needing rescue, but as builders of the nation. Nyerere rejected the Western liberal individualism embedded in Western feminism. Instead, he insisted on a socialism that prioritized unity and collective progress.<sup>40</sup> In this view, women were to be educated, respected and empowered within the context of their roles as wives, mothers and community leaders.

One of the most significant figures in Tanzanian history who exemplified this indigenous model of womanhood is Bibi Titi Mohammed. As a key leader in the Tanganyika African Union, during the independence movement, Bibi Titi mobilized thousands of women in support of the struggle for freedom.<sup>41</sup> Her activism was not shaped by foreign feminist ideologies, but by a profound commitment to her people, her culture, and her faith. Bibi Titi led the Tanganyika African women's Union and organized grassroots women to participate in political meetings, development work, and educational campaigns. She did not advocate for women to abandon their roles as wives and mothers; rather, she encouraged them to become politically conscious and socially active within the context of their responsibilities.<sup>42</sup>

Scholars like Susan Geiger, in *TANU Women: Gender and culture in the making of Tanganyikan Nationalism, 1955-1965* (1997), highlights how Bibi Titi's Leadership demonstrated a uniquely Tanzanian form of feminism, one that was community-based, non-adversarial, and grounded in indigenous values. Geiger notes: "Bibi Titi was not feminist in the Western sense. Her power came from rootedness in local culture and her ability to organize women in ways that preserved their social roles while expanding their public influence."<sup>43</sup> This legacy stands in contrast to later donor-funded feminist interventions, which often pressure Tanzanian women to reject traditional roles in favor of Western-style empowerment. Such approaches risk alienating women from their own communities and histories.

<sup>33</sup>John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 29-30

<sup>34</sup>Battista Mondin, *Philosophical Anthropology: Man: An Impossible Project?* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1985), 217

<sup>35</sup>John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 7-10

<sup>36</sup>David William Ross, "Nichomachean Ethics" in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol.2 edited by Jonathan Barnes (New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1984), 88

<sup>37</sup>Nyerere, *Ujamaa*, 92-95

<sup>38</sup>Michael Battle, *Ubuntu: I in You and You in Me*, (New York: Church Publishing, 2009), 34-37

<sup>39</sup>Nyerere, *Ujamaa*, 84

<sup>40</sup>Nyerere, *Ujamaa*, 84-87

<sup>41</sup>Nyerere, *Ujamaa: The Basis of African Socialism*, (Dar es Salaam: Oxford University Press, 1962), 7, 56

<sup>42</sup>Leander Schneider, *Julius Nyerere: Tanzanian President, Statesman, and intellectual*, 25 February, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.128>, 13 & 17

<sup>43</sup>Susan Geiger, *TANU Women: Gender and Culture in the Making of Tanganyikan Nationalism, 1955-1965*, (Heinemann: Social History of Africa Series, 1997), 172-173



### 3.1 The Role of Women in Tanzanian Societies

Before colonialism and the imposition of western legal and social systems, Tanzanian women held significant economic authority. In matrilineal communities like the *Makonde* and *Zaramo*, lineage and inheritance passed through the mother.<sup>44</sup> Women were landowners, ritual leaders and decision-makers. Even in patrilineal societies, women exercised influence through the networks of kinship, trade, and spirituality. It was colonialism, not African tradition that imposed rigid gender roles, legal disenfranchisement, the ideology of female subordination.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, the solution lies not in adopting Western feminism but in recovering and reforming the authentic cultural institutions that once gave women dignity, voice, and influence.

### 3.2 Consequences of Imposing Western Feminism in Tanzania

While intentions of Western feminism ideology rest on promoting gender equality, protection from abuse, and expanded opportunity which are noble in their origin, their application without contextual adaptation carries the potential to disrupt the mode of families in Tanzania, by influencing perceptions of gender roles which lead women in rejecting their fundamental roles. In Tanzania, these consequences are observable across several dimensions.

One of the consequences of Western feminism in Tanzania, is the breakdown of family cohesion. This happens by undermining the importance of the family as the primary source of social unit. Western feminism champions individual autonomy over communal responsibilities, leading to a shift in how many women, especially in urban centers relate to their families and roles.<sup>46</sup> However, the tendency feminist framework promote independence at the expense of interdependence endanger the family cohesion, which is basically founded on the sense of togetherness.

In his *Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism* (1968), Mwl. Nyerere underscores the family as the nucleus of the society.<sup>47</sup> This sense of the family is often disrupted by western feminist views which focus on autonomy, leads to importance of being with others in the family. In Tanzania, where the extended family remains the bedrock of society, such thinking fosters disconnection between spouses, parents and children. In recent researches, Kasambala attests that: "We are witnessing increasing divorce rates, single motherhood, and generational conflict, often encouraged by NGOs that push Western feminist narratives that devalue the traditional marriage."<sup>48</sup> This experience suggests that, the outcome is not greater freedom but gender fragmentation, especially in urban youth populations where traditional values are weakest.

Western feminism's conceptualization of womanhood centers itself on constructing ideas on free biological set ups and free from family ties, which clash directly with the African metaphysics and moral view of women.<sup>49</sup> The adoption of gender ideologies that promote fluidity, abortion rights, same sex unions and identity politics have already started eroding the substantial meaning of being a woman in Tanzania. Women who hold their substantial roles such as mothers and caregivers are now sometimes regarded as backward or unliberated.<sup>50</sup> This creates identity dissonance, where women are pressured to abandon the very roles through which they found meaning and respect.

Yet, rising the tension of gender hostility is one of the outcomes of imposing Western feministic views in Tanzanian families and communities. Instead of focusing on fostering cooperation between men and women, the imposition of adversarial feminist rhetoric often leads to increased hostility between the sexes. The portrayal of men as oppressors and patriarchy as an enemy leads to mistrust in families, schools and communities.<sup>51</sup> Nonetheless, when tracing back, history shows us that, the Tanzanian experience shows gender harmony, not gender struggle. Men and women were seen as complementary, each contributing to the welfare of the family and community.<sup>52</sup> Western feminism disrupts this harmony by introducing an oppositional framework that was not part of the Tanzanian founding sense of togetherness.

Moreover, the feminist rejection of substantial roles of women disconnects between younger and older generations of women. Elder women, who have lived their lives as respected matriarchs, now find themselves dismissed by younger feminists who see familial roles as manifesting in the forms of oppressions rather than necessity. This rupture deprives young women of the fundamental wisdom, breaks the mentorship systems.<sup>53</sup> In Tanzanian rural life, intergenerational bonds are vital for preserving social values and customs. When these values are weakened, both old and young are left disoriented.

### 3.3 Recommendations for Contextualized Gender Policies and in Tanzania

Western feminism emphasizes rights and competition, while Tanzania's heritage, especially *Ujamaa* emphasizes communal responsibility, interdependence and service.<sup>54</sup> Thus, gender empowerment programs should be reframed as community development programs, which empower women not in isolation, but as mothers, wives, and community leaders serving communal goals. This kind of empowerment will not lead women to abandon their fundamental roles or view motherhood and domestic leadership as inferior. Instead it should uplift these

<sup>44</sup>SwantzMarja-Liisa, *The Zaramo: An Ethnographic Survey*, (Dar es Salaam: Tanzania Publishing House, 1986), 92-95

<sup>45</sup>Marja-Liisa, *The Zaramo*, 96

<sup>46</sup>Steady, *African Feminism*, 22-26

<sup>47</sup>Nyerere, *Ujamaa*, 83

<sup>48</sup>FurahaKasambala, *Gender and Family in East Africa: Effects of Modernization on Family Cohesion in Urban Tanzania*, University of Dar es Salaam, 2016, 10

<sup>49</sup>Steady, *African Feminism*, 25

<sup>50</sup>Kimberle Crenshaw, *On Intersectionality: Essential Writings*, (New York: The New Press, 2019), 43

<sup>51</sup>Steady, *African Feminism*, 26

<sup>52</sup>Steady, *African Feminism*, 27

<sup>53</sup>Steady, *African Feminism*, 27-30

<sup>54</sup>Nyerere, *Ujamaa*, 85

roles. However, redefining women's excellence in nurturing, moral formation, and social cohesion and support women's economic roles that align with family-centered responsibilities.

However, instead of defining a woman merely by social roles or identity labels, Tanzania should adopt a philosophical anthropological view of womanhood grounded in her substance of being, dignity, and ontological value.<sup>55</sup> Thus, gender policy should reflect a metaphysical understanding of dignity which anchors equality in nature, not competitive sameness. Nevertheless, understanding that current gender policies in Tanzania often focus heavily on girls and women, neglecting the unique challenges faced by boys, such as school dropout, unemployment, and cultural disempowerment. The introduction of inclusive gender strategies that target both girls and boys with context-specific interventions. For example, mentorship programs for boys, community-based rites of passage, and vocational training initiatives

Again, media platforms must need to play a responsible role in shaping public understanding of womanhood. Content creators should develop films, stories, talk shows and educational materials that present women in their fullness, not just as careerists or victims, but as mothers, moral leaders, nurturers, and intellectuals whose dignity is intrinsic to their being. Media can be used as a powerful tool to re-humanize women by promoting narratives that align with metaphysical truth. Media campaigns should correct the widespread misrepresentation of fundamental roles as signs of weakness or backwardness. Instead, they should show that these roles, when freely chosen and rooted in love and truth, are expressions of strength and profound wisdom. Public awareness efforts should clarify that feminism is not the only framework for understanding women's dignity.

Nevertheless, this research encourages theological reflections on substance and the family. It calls upon churches and theological institutions to initiate a deeper reflection on the relationship between metaphysics and theology in understanding the family. Since theology deals with ultimate truths about human beings in relation to God,<sup>56</sup> incorporating metaphysical concepts of substance and accidents will enrich ecclesial teachings on womanhood and the family. Pastoral letters, catechetical programs, and theological curricula should incorporate these ideas to offer faithful a richer understanding of human dignity.

## Conclusion

The central argument of this study, that Western feminism is an inadequate framework for addressing gender relations in Tanzania has been demonstrated through historical and philosophical analysis. By tracing the trajectory of feminism from its European and American origins to its contemporary global manifestations, this article has revealed that the

movement is historically rooted in the contexts that are fundamentally different from Tanzanian realities. In contrast, Tanzania's historical foundation is grounded on *Ujamaa* philosophy which emphasize mutual respect, interdependence and collective responsibility where community welfare outweighs individual ambition.<sup>57</sup> In this context, women's roles were not primarily conceptualized as subordinate but as central to the survival and stability of the community. While patriarchal elements have undeniably existed in Tanzanian history, gender relations were structured within a communal and complementary framework rather than an inherently antagonistic one. This divergence in foundational values is where the core irrelevance of Western feminism to Tanzania becomes apparent. The wholeness adoption of Western feminism often focused on dismantling oppressive family structure, prioritizing individual autonomy over familial obligations, risks eroding the foundational values that uphold Tanzanian communities together.

This article has advocated for a contextual gender framework for Tanzania grounded in indigenous values and historical experiences which recognize women's empowerment as inseparable from family cohesion and community stability. It resists the dichotomy between tradition and progress, affirming that Tanzanian's development goals can be pursued in harmony with its cultural heritage. However, this approach draws on communitarian ethics, Aristotelian teleology, and the metaphysical concept of substance in defining the enduring anthropological roles of women as enduring pillars of social sustainability.

As this study shows Western feminism, while historically significant in its own context, becomes blunt and potentially a destructive instrument when applied unmodified to Tanzanian society. The path forward lies in cultivating a homegrown gender discourse rooted in philosophical anthropological perspectives and socially unifying. In doing so, Tanzania contributes to a richer, more pluralistic global conversation on gender equality one that truly values the diversity of human experience.

## Bibliography

- Battle, Michael. *Ubuntu: I in You and You in Me*. New York: Church Publishing, 2009.
- Britannica, "The Fourth Wave of Feminism." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Accessed on July 24, 2025, at 13:00 PM.  
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism/The-fourth-wave-of-feminism>, 2025.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlee. *On Intersectionality: Essential Writings*. New York: The New Press, 2019.
- Geiger, Susan. *TANU Women: Gender and Culture in the Making of Tanganyikan Nationalism, 1955-1965*. Heinemann: Social History of Africa Series, 1997.

<sup>55</sup>Mondin, *Philosophical Anthropology*, 218

<sup>56</sup> John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 6-8

<sup>57</sup>Nyerere, *Ujamaa*, 85

- Jennings, Michael. *Surrogates of the State: NGOs, Development, and Ujamaa in Tanzania*. Connecticut: Kumarian Press, 2007.
- John Paul II. *Mulieris Dignitatem: On the Dignity and Vocation of Women*. Roma: Vatican Press, 1988.
- Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, Chapman & Hall, 2002.
- Kasambala, Furaha. *Gender and Family in East Africa: Effects of Modernization on Family Cohesion in Urban Tanzania*, University of Dar es Salaam, 2016.
- Kimberle Crenshaw, *On Intersectionality: Essential Writings*. New York: The New Press, 2019.
- LeGates, Marlene. *In their Time: A History of Feminism in Western Society*. London: Routledge, 2001.
- Marja-Liisa, Swantz. *The Zaramo: An Ethnographic Survey*. Dar es Salaam: Tanzania Publishing House, 1986.
- Mendes, Kaitlynn. "What Are the Four Waves of Feminism? And What Comes Next?" *The Conversation*. March 7, 2024.
- McLoed, Saul. "Four Waves of Feminism Explained." *Simply psychology*, July 4, 2023.
- Mondin, Battista. *Philosophical Anthropology: Man: An Impossible Project?* Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1985.
- Nyerere, Julius. "Leaders must not be Masters" in *African Philosophy: An Anthology*, edited by Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 1998.
- Nyerere, Julius. *Ujamaa: The Basis of African Socialism*. Dar es Salaam: Oxford University Press, 1962.
- Paradigm Press. "Four Waves of Feminism: A Blessing for Global Humanity." *Social Sciences and Humanities*, Journal 4, No.1, 2023.
- Rendall, Jane. *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and the United States, 1780-1860*. Basingstoke: St Martin's Press, 1990.
- Ross W, David. "Metaphysics" in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, edited by Jonathan Barnes, Vol. 2, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984.
- Ross W, David "Nichomachean Ethics" in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol.2 edited by Jonathan Barnes. New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1984.
- Schneider, Leander. *Julius Nyerere: Tanzanian President, Statesman, and intellectual*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.128>, 25 February, 2025.
- Steady C, Filomina. African Feminism: A worldwide Perspective. In T.T. McDaniel (Ed.), *The Black Scholar*, Vol.12, No.6, pp.24-34, 1981
- Wollstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. London: J. Johnson, 1792.