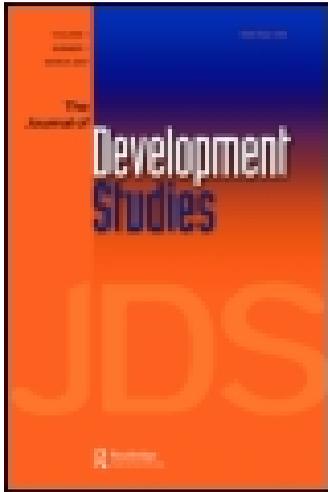


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Gender and Livelihood Diversification: Maasai Women's Market Activities in Northern Tanzania

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ABSTRACT *East African pastoralists are increasingly diversifying their livelihoods to bring cash into the household. While men dominate these activities, women's contributions to household economies through new market activities make them pivotal players in livelihood diversification. This article compares Maasai women's income-earning activities at local markets with their market activities at the gemstone mining area of Mererani. It shows that women's economic activities simultaneously challenge and reify a pastoral gender system and that this differs according to a woman's family and household status. In addition, it addresses the implications of these processes for rural development initiatives aimed at empowering women.*

East African pastoralists are commonly portrayed as exceedingly dependent on livestock for their livelihoods. Indeed, livestock are an important part of pastoral economies and social lives, however, most pastoralists are diversifying their livelihoods to pursue non-livestock-based income-generating activities in both rural and urban areas (Hodgson, 2011; Homewood, Kristjanson, & Trench, 2009; McPeak, Little, & Ross, 2011). Because these strategies have implications for poverty and development, they have captured the attention of policy-makers, development practitioners and scholars who strive to understand (and in some cases promote) the processes through which pastoralists supplement their income in ways that allow them to continue to herd livestock but also bring cash into the household. For Maasai in northern Tanzania, the income-generating strategies receiving the most attention in the literature include land cultivation for crop production (Galvin et al., 2002; Homewood et al., 2009; McCabe, 2003; McCabe, Leslie, & DeLuca, 2010; McCabe, Perkin, & Schofield, 1992), increased market integration (Fratkin, 2001; Zaal, 2011), involvement with tourism and conservation (Goldman, 2003; Nelson, Gardner, Igoe, & Williams, 2009), and migration to urban areas for wage-labour opportunities (May & McCabe, 2004; May & Ole Ikayo, 2007). This work is valuable for drawing attention to the variation that occurs in livelihood diversification and its increasing importance to Maasai society. However, the primary emphasis is on men's activities and their economic contributions to households and communities.

To a certain extent, this focus is appropriate and represents the continued salience of a gendered division of labour among Maasai (Hodgson 2005), where men have been more involved than women in livelihood diversification, and men have access to the most profitable activities. But in the face of increasing impoverishment within the Tanzanian state and the general disempowerment of Maasai as a population (Coast, 2002; Davis, 2011; Galvin, Boone, Smith, & Lynn, 2001; Goldman, 2003; Homewood & Brockington, 1999), men's diversification activities are often not enough to support

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the household, and women are responding by increasing their income-earning activities as well. In addition, in recent years local NGOs have promoted income-earning activities for Maasai women in northern Tanzania by supporting women's groups, providing education and training, and locating markets for women's products (Hodgson, 2011).

Despite new engagements with the market economy, the literature on Maasai women's income-earning activities has usually focused on their control over milk; their activities selling animal hides, herbal medicine, beadwork, and other local wares; and their involvement with small-scale vegetable production (Brockington, 2001; Coast, 2002; Grandin, 1988; Hodgson, 2011; Little, Smith, Cellarius, Coppock, & Barrett, 2001; Talle, 1988). Recently, however, Maasai women in Simanjiro are diversifying the goods they sell and the markets in which they sell them. Expanded market participation and new engagements with income-earning activities have important impacts on pastoral households and make women pivotal players in pastoral livelihood diversification.

The increase in Maasai women's income-earning activities in Simanjiro evokes the question of how these activities articulate with dominant gender roles, responsibilities and norms. In other words, how do Maasai women's new economic activities fit into and affect a *gender system* where social relations of inequality are institutionalised through a system of beliefs and practices that establish women and men as two distinctly different categories (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004, p. 510)? Maasai women's and men's access to resources, participation in income-earning activities, labour practices and household roles reflect expectations, behaviours and structures of access and inequality that constitute a gender system. In the context of Maasai women's income-earning activities, the considerable variation in gender practice demonstrates that both women and men define and redefine their access to and control over productive resources throughout the course of their lifetimes.

A gender systems approach adds an important and unexplored dimension to the literature on gender and livelihood diversification among African societies. MaryBeth Chrostowsky and David Long (2013) show that after repatriation, Dinka women in South Sudan experienced increased income-earning opportunities in urban areas due to the education they received during asylum. While this process forged new directions in Dinka identities linked to valued forms of global capital, it also came at the expense of customary social practices that afforded these women power and space in rural settings (Chrostowsky and Long, 2013, p. 91). Some scholars have suggested that new market activities empower pastoral women with the ability to make and manage money in male-dominated economies (Buhl & Homewood, 2000; Ensminger, 1987; Little, 1987), while others provide a more complicated picture. Dan Brockington (2001) demonstrates that displaced Maasai women in northern Tanzania gained their own sources of income, but also experienced the withdrawal of male support due to men's expectations that working women should have available cash. Similarly, Elizabeth Wangui (2008) shows that development interventions in southern Kenya led to greater control over livestock herding for Maasai women but a significant loss of control over milk production, sales and cash associated with milk sales, as milk production became commercialised.

Brockington (2001) and Wangui (2008) effectively demonstrate the increased importance of Maasai women's activities to rural families and illustrate the trade-offs that income-earning activities entail. Along with Chrostowsky and Long (2013), they also reveal the difficulties with defining women's empowerment among pastoralist societies; what may represent empowerment on one hand may also signify a denial of rights and access on the other. The study presented here builds on this work by exposing the tensions that surface as Maasai women engage in new livelihood strategies outside of the home. Drawing from data collected during 13 months of ethnographic fieldwork in 2008 and 2009, including 40 in-depth interviews and several life history accounts with women,¹ I qualitatively examine two forms of income-earning activities practised by Maasai women in the Simanjiro District of northern Tanzania.² By considering women's activities outside the home, first in local markets and then in the gemstone mining area of Mererani, I compare these activities and examine the ways in which they pose challenges to the larger gender system. While some of these changes produce increased conflict in the short-term and influence the gender system over the long-term, other changes reify the gender system to the disadvantage of women who challenge the system.

This study establishes that the simultaneous challenging and reification of a gender system accompanies shifts in livelihood activities. However, it adds a more critical understanding to the literature on gender and livelihood diversification by demonstrating that age, social status, poverty, cultural norms, agency and power intersect to influence pastoral women's productive activities with differing implications for the pastoral gender system. It also shows that women's income-earning opportunities challenge men's authority and societal expectations of women as mothers and wives, and that this occurs through the actions and discourse of both women and men, who together determine how norms shift in line with notions of acceptable behaviour and desires for positive economic change. Finally, this study demonstrates that the shifting dynamics of gender and power that characterise livelihood diversification among Maasai women complicate notions of women's empowerment with important implications for pastoral development interventions today.

Maasai Social and Productive Relations and Dominant Gender Norms

The general assumption in the literature is that pastoral societies are inherently patriarchal gerontocracies where elder men hold the most power. To a certain extent, this is true within contemporary Maasai society, as women are significantly less influential and visible in economic and political spheres, with limited access to and control over productive resources. (Hodgson, 1999, 2000, 2001a, 2001b; Kipuri, 1989; Talle, 1987, 1988). Yet, there are places where pastoral women have power and use various methods to gain power (Hodgson, 1999, 2005, 2011; Talle, 1987, 1988). An overview of the structures that define women's and men's productive roles in Maasai society and the way in which they have been reinforced and challenged indicates that gender systems change over time, with differing implications for women and men.

Among Maasai, access to productive resources and the division of labour are in part given structure through customary forms of social, economic and political organisation. Although the contemporary system shows more flexibility, in many cases distinctions are made based on age and gender. Patrilineal clan organisation assigns elder men with the ultimate rights to property (livestock and land) and dictates rules of descent along the male lineage, giving elders the utmost authority as the patriarchs of their family in matters related to livestock, land and the household (Coast, 2001). The age-set system further defines social relations and mediates access to production (and reproduction) (Talle, 1988, p. 77). An age-set is a group of male peers within a specific range of ages that travels together through a series of life stages or age-grades (Goldman, 2006, p. 66; Spencer, 1993). While a woman does not belong to an age-set per se,³ upon marriage she inherits the age-set of her husband (Goldman, 2006; Talle, 1987), and women are assigned to certain social categories based on their location within a series of life phases, such as marriage and childbirth (Goldman, 2006).

Age-sets provide a framework for social interactions that are established through the overarching principle of *enkanyit* or respect for, fear of, or deference to others (Llewelyn-Davies, 1979; Spencer, 1988). At the most basic level junior men are obedient to senior men and women toward men (Coast, 2001; Talle, 1988, p. 92). A woman has very little power within the age-set system, but she is able to earn respect based on her placement in certain life phases, her position with the polygynous family structure (since a man's first wife typically has authority over the other wives), and the age set of her husband; a woman who is married to a man of an older age-set is more respected due to her association with an elder.

Women's access to resources and labour activities are negotiated through their relationships to men (Talle, 1987, p. 55). Essentially, a woman is denied full access to property and does not own livestock.⁴ However, upon marriage she will be allocated her own milking cow(s). It is her responsibility to milk the cows, and she has authority over decisions about milk offtake and its allocation. Generally, women take care of small stock, calves, and sick animals close to home, but are not able to sell livestock without their husbands' permission (Hodgson, 2001b, p. 29; Kipuri, 1989; Talle, 1988). Women are primarily responsible for building the homes, but having done so, they are able to exert significant control over the household space.⁵

The current gender system that influences Maasai social organisation, access to and control over productive resources, and the division of labour cannot be divorced from local and trans-local political-economic processes. It is evident that gender systems change over time as a result of these processes. Dorothy Hodgson (2001b, p. 32) and others (Kipuri, 1989; Talle, 1987) suggest that colonialism, independent state formation and market-driven development interventions gave added significance to a gender binary that segregated Maasai women and men into private and public spheres respectively. Although women and men's productive activities rarely intersected in pre-colonial times, their roles were more complementary, as both were considered integral to the survival of pastoral systems (Hodgson, 2001b). For example, women played important roles in decision-making related to livestock sales, and they maintained complex regional trade relations enabling households to sustain livestock production systems (Hodgson, 2001b, p. 30).

Colonial projects that positioned Maasai men in economic and political positions as tax collectors and post-colonial, state-led, market-oriented production schemes, which encouraged men to market livestock, undermined the status of the household as a productive sphere of influence, as money became exclusively controlled by men and was then only rationed to women (Talle, 1987). As the public and private spheres were defined along gender lines, notions of control and power were cemented in the hands of men, and women lost access to livestock-related decisions and livestock products (Talle, 1988, p. 13); their roles became largely defined in terms of household duties. These processes eroded women's autonomy, and in some places it greatly reduced women's freedom of movement.

In spite of the relative salience of colonial and post-colonial legacies, currently a more flexible arrangement is emerging where aged and gendered divisions of labour sometimes intersect (Goldman, 2006; Hodgson, 2001a; Smith, 2012). Now, it is fairly common for *ilmurran* (men of the warrior age-set) to leave the village for income-earning opportunities, and there has been a push for girls and boys to attend school, which draws them away from home and reduces their household responsibilities (May & McCabe, 2004; Smith, 2012; Wangui, 2008). In some cases, the absence of young men and children has resulted in women's increased responsibilities to livestock herding and production. While it is unclear whether these processes empower women or burden them with more work, they bring to focus the flexibility of dominant gender norms and the potential opportunities for women's empowerment within a gender system. In the following case study, I examine the flexibility of dominant gender norms in the context of women's expanded livelihood activities. This adds a unique approach to the literature on livelihood diversification among pastoral societies by showing that Maasai women's income-earning activities can simultaneously pose challenges to and reify a gender system.

Maasai Women's Income-earning Activities in Simanjiro

The first part of the case study demonstrates that women have made progress in gaining access to income-earning opportunities and control over household cash. It shows that, even within domestic spaces, women can be empowered, as women's economic activities begin to pose challenges to and even reshape dominant gender norms within a gender system. Conversely, the second part of the case shows that other income-earning activities contest dominant gender norms, but that these norms nonetheless withstand the challenges and endure to the detriment of women. Essentially, challenges to a gender system do not always result in its transformation.

Local Market Activities

One afternoon, I came across a group of women and children sitting under a tree near a homestead. Recognising several of the women, I stopped, exchanged greetings and asked them why they were gathered there. Mary, a woman in her twenties with young children, responded:

We are taking a short rest from the heat of the day, but you are lucky to have found us here now. Women – all of us – have activities. For example, today in the morning we went to the forest to

cut trees for fencing the homestead. We are taking a short rest now, but this afternoon we are going to the grinding machine to grind our maize. All of us have our own businesses as well. A lot of people think women don't have anything going on because we have so many things to do for the house. Most think men are the only ones who do things to get money.

The first two 'activities' Mary mentions (tree cutting and maize grinding) are related to customary household labour. But then she also mentions that many women conduct businesses at local markets outside of these household duties. These activities make them visible actors within the public sphere and also contribute cash to the household.

In Simanjiro, 40 interviews with women across three villages revealed that 70 per cent participate in some type of income-generating activity. A third of these women (31%) deal directly out of their homes and sell milk, cut grass to sell as thatch for house roofs, raise chickens and sell eggs and hens, and/or make beaded jewellery and clothing to sell locally. The majority (69%) manage small businesses at local markets selling various items including sugar, soda, soap, tea leaves and beer. In general, the goods women sell out of their homes fall under their authority. Because of this, women do not need their husband's permission to participate in these activities. The sale of products that need to be purchased, such as sugar, soda and beer require a greater initial investment and women's involvement at the actual marketplace. To participate in this activity, women usually require their husband's permission (if they are married) and start-up capital. In all cases husbands granted their wives permission, and all but two of the women were given cash (anywhere from 10,000 to 40,000 TZS⁶) or a goat to sell.⁷ Despite their initial investment, women experience various degrees of success at these business ventures, and their perceptions of success vary.

Success and Empowerment

Sometimes women associate success with the sustainability of the business, as evidenced by an older woman's statement: 'Sometimes I fail because I use the money, and so there is not much profit to reinvest.' Other women measure success by what they are able to do with their profits, including grinding maize, paying for school fees and purchasing sugar, salt and beads. Still others gauge success by considering their independence from their husbands, as did a woman who said, 'We help our husbands and instead of asking them for money for grinding maize, we can pay for it ourselves.' The significance of having control over one's profits is clear in the narrative of Sarah, an older woman with several grown children, many grandchildren and an elderly husband. Sarah decided she wanted to start her own business a year prior to us meeting because she had watched other women and she believed she would be able to make her own money. She requested permission from her husband and enough cash to purchase one crate of soda (20 bottles). He agreed, and at the time of this research Sarah was working at two local markets and could afford to buy three crates of soda for each market. Sarah indicates that women's new market involvement is becoming more pervasive, accepted and, in some ways, expected within households and communities. She states:

Now, most men will not prevent women [from local market activity] because they have seen contributions to the family. Women earn cash, and men realize that if their wives are contributing cash to the household, they may not have to sell cows to support the family. Women can buy food and school uniforms, and men can contribute for livestock medicine. Now women want to be self-reliant. In the beginning everything, even salt, belonged to men. And sometimes your husband didn't give you anything, even after selling cows. Then he came and asked you for food and he beat you if you didn't have anything. So now we are more confident and can control things. Ask me who is controlling the money I make from selling sodas? I am! My husband will even borrow money from me!

Sarah suggests that women are making greater contributions to household economies, and she celebrates the control she has over her income. She also suggests that women are posing challenges

to dominant gender norms, which normally situate them in private, domestic spaces dependent on men for all ‘outside’ goods. This represents a shift in women’s economic freedom, as not long ago markets themselves were considered realms of immorality and off limits to women (White, 1990). Being married to an elderly man and having grown children, Sarah has the ability to participate in local markets and cultivate her business. She is also granted a greater degree of respect as a *koko* (an older woman usually with grandchildren), which can allow her to engage in market activities with fewer social costs. However, she explains that this has not always been the case:

Once you went back home [from working at a market], those who talked badly about you came to your house and asked for salt or sugar. ‘Ok,’ you said, ‘here, you just take this.’ After she came two or more times, she started asking you what you were doing and you said, ‘Oh, you just come, I’ll show you.’ Others came to ask for salt and started to feel shame for asking you every day for salt. No matter what you were doing, they called it prostitution, but they wanted to learn from you.

Sarah highlights the ways in which women’s activities are first judged against societal norms regarding what are and what are not appropriate activities for women to engage in. Actions violating these beliefs are perceived to be immoral (for example, prostitution) rather than empowering or challenging, providing a practical grounding for Chris Weedon’s (1987, p. 91) observation that, ‘Forms of subjectivity which challenge the power of the dominant discourses at any particular time are carefully policed. Often they are marginalized as mad or criminal.’ Maasai women’s work at local markets plainly falls under the surveillance of the community, as it takes place close to their homes within their villages. While these activities were initially assumed to be immoral, others eventually saw how women were earning money, and they became an example of possible economic change for many other women. In this case, the push back against dominant gender norms demonstrates that the gender system changed so that women’s local market participation was actually positively valued.

Beyond Economics

It is clear that notions of empowerment for Maasai women carry both economic and social meaning. Approximately a third (30%) of the total women interviewed during this research have never pursued income-generating activities. About half of these women are new young wives and half are elderly; marital status and age influence their decisions to not engage in income-earning activities due to their relatively dependent household status. Two of these women are from very poor households with small numbers of livestock, and stated that they were too busy helping with household agricultural endeavours to conduct business at local markets. Four of the women who do not participate in income-earning activities reveal a significant and unexpected link between economic status and empowerment.

These women are the wives of Kato, who is undoubtedly the most successful tanzanite trader in Simanjiro due to his affluence and his ability to translate his monetary wealth into social and cultural capital. While Kato’s family does not need additional income, his wives indicate that business ventures would allow them to manage their own money, exert decision-making power over certain aspects of household economics and contribute to the household. Esther, Kato’s first wife, explains:

We are lucky to have such a husband. We are really happy because our husband is so successful. We appreciate Kato is able to send our kids to school. Only there is one thing we are thinking, but we don’t have the power of voice to tell him – we will just have to mention it to our husband in a polite way. We need our own businesses to help each other; to help our families; to help our husband. We would like to contribute. We don’t have problems, but he has many wives and many children, and he has a lot of responsibility to make sure we are all taken care of. Maybe he can open a store for one and buy a grinding machine for another. It might help us to help him. Even now, we need to ask him for money if we run out of salt. He makes sure we have clothes and

things we need, but if we have our own businesses we can do that ourselves. But we don't have the authority to make that decision, and so we will mention it politely, and if he says no, then we have to agree.

Kato's wives illustrate that it is not always the poor who seek outside income. Even though they do not have dire financial needs, Esther justifies their need for agency by illustrating both the economic and social benefits they can gain from having their own income. In fact, they may be the least empowered in the community, suggesting that agency evolves in the context of adversity.

As Sarah and some of the other women featured thus far demonstrate, Maasai women in Simanjiro have made progress in negotiating dominant gender norms to their advantage in terms of their involvement in market activities. While their activities were initially challenged, they were eventually accepted, probably because of the need for money and also because the activities occurred close to home where they could be watched. While women's local market activities give them *and* men more economic freedom, they do not radically challenge ideas about men's control over women, since they take place within a certain set of constraints that reinforce men's authority. Even so, as women conduct themselves respectfully and appropriately, by asking their husbands for permission to engage in new livelihood activities and relying on them for financial support to start these businesses, they become empowered within the expanded domestic space, as evidenced by their economic rewards and social gains. This represents a process of change, where women have more agency and greater income-earning flexibility within the pastoral gender system.

Women's Work in Mererani

In contrast to the women who engage in local market activities, some women choose a much more perilous route to income-earning activities by leaving their homes and travelling approximately 100 km to pursue work in the tanzanite mining area known as Mererani, an area that resembles a 'gold-rush' town fraught with violence, crime and illicit dealings. Since the early 1990s, money-making opportunities in Mererani have become an important form of livelihood diversification for Maasai in Simanjiro. Mererani is the only place in the world where the gemstone tanzanite is mined, and its increasing popularity in international markets has cast Maasai into a burgeoning network of people, cash and opportunity. But not everyone has equal access, nor do they uniformly benefit. In Mererani, Maasai men dominate the gemstone trade working as middlemen, buying and selling tanzanite. Although some men have not been successful trading gemstones, others have made significant profits and have gained power in their home communities based on their wealth and the perception that they are educated and cosmopolitan (Smith, 2012). Maasai women who venture to Mererani generally do not trade gemstones, and instead sell milk, tea, food and beadwork to Maasai men and others involved with the tanzanite industry.

Very few women leave home to work in Mererani. In the three villages of this study, I knew of only three women who worked there; interestingly, they were all from the same village. Each woman was interviewed during the course of this research, and I met three additional Maasai women in Arusha⁸ who were working in Mererani but originated from other villages in Simanjiro. Of these six women, only one, Nkotoi, no longer worked at Mererani at the time of this research. Nkotoi first went to Mererani in 1993 and claims she was one of the first Maasai women there. At the time, she was a widow with young children. After she made some money selling beadwork, she returned home, bought cows, and never went back. Now, she lives by herself in one of the village centres, is supported some by her son, and has several grandchildren who help her on a daily basis. She also sells chai and food out of her home during the weekly market.

Out of the other five women working in Mererani, two were widowed and two were married to elderly men. In the cases of the married women, both of their husbands encouraged them to go and believed their wives' activities could benefit the household. These men recognised that their own productive roles had diminished due to their declining health and old age, and their children were too

young to support the family. Each of the five women explained that her social and economic status was a primary influence in the decision to go to Mererani. A woman with only daughters or young children has little status and a significant lack of access to productive resources. Although a widowed woman can cross boundaries of acceptable female behaviour more easily (Hodgson, 2001b, p. 248), she generally receives very little respect, as status and resources are linked to a husband and sons; it is likely that she is also in a more precarious economic position.

The sixth woman, Nyla, first went to Mererani in 2001 with her husband. Her husband since has left the marriage, but she continues to work there. Nyla's case is somewhat unusual in that she and her husband went to Mererani together. However, her reasons for staying in Mererani echo those of the other women who work there: she needs to make money to support her children. Again, she demonstrates that the decision to work in Mererani is influenced by a woman's economic and social status. Because of this, a woman is forced to seek out activities that have higher economic returns but graver social costs.

Moral Bankruptcy and Prostitution

Women who work in Mererani are assumed (by both women and men) to be working as prostitutes. Despite the history of actual prostitution (selling sex for cash) among Maasai (Talle, 1999; White, 1990), the meanings behind the discourse of prostitution among women in Simanjiro align with practices associated with transactional sex common throughout Africa, where 'boyfriends' and 'girlfriends' exchange gifts for sex, 'as part of a broader set of obligations that might not involve a predetermined payment' (Hunter, 2002, pp. 100–101). Elizabeth, an older woman who has never been to Mererani, explains:

Here it is different. Maasai women didn't know they could make money by having sex with men until recently. We don't really think a prostitute is someone who gets paid to sleep with someone. They [boyfriends] may pay for your food, let you stay in their house, have sex with you, but they don't give you money for home. Women forget about their families. Really, other women who are non-Maasai are good at prostitution because they make money. Maasai women are not good at it – they should learn from other women about prostitution!

Nyla, who first went to Mererani with her husband, explained:

It has been a long time since I have been home [Nyla's mother, who takes care of her children, claimed Nyla had not been home in over two years]. I send money to my mother for my children, but my boyfriend in Mererani tells me not to go home because he says he will give me a lot of money.

Nyla admits to having a boyfriend at Mererani, and suggests that he controls her with promises of cash, thereby demonstrating 'prostitution', as defined by Maasai women in Simanjiro. As both Elizabeth and Nyla indicate, perspectives on prostitution, however defined by Maasai, carry economic and social meaning. One *koko* describes:

Some go [to Mererani] and sell soda and some go and sell milk, but they leave their children here. I think they are going for prostitution. If they are doing something good, you can see changes in the family but if not, you won't see the changes. You don't see any family-level changes with these women.

The discourse of prostitution is not so much about whom a woman sleeps with or if there is a material component to this exchange, but rather represents a social sanction that accompanies the challenging of social norms. This social sanction rhetorically and practically plays out, as women who go to Mererani are assumed to be engaging in 'prostitution' and are viewed as morally bankrupt. While

Maasai women have long engaged in various forms of transactional sex within their villages and urban areas, these activities are often carried out as a household strategy to support rural, livestock-based livelihoods (Hodgson, 2011; Homewood et al., 2009; White, 1990). In addition, some Maasai women in Simanjiro who have never worked in Mererani engage in certain types of transactional sex, by pursuing young Maasai gemstone traders for boyfriends because of their money and prestige (Smith, 2012). Women who participate in these types of arrangements are not ostracised to the same extent as women who leave the village and make money in Mererani.

In the rural African context, Hodgson and McCurdy (2001, p. 1) assert, “Vagabond,” “prostitute,” “wayward,” “unruly,” “indecent,” and “immoral” are just a few of the terms used to label and stigmatise women whose behavior in some way threatens expectations of “the way things ought to be.” While Mererani represents an economic option for poor women, these women challenge the notion that a woman’s place is at home taking care of her children, and their morality is judged by the length of time they are away from home, their absence from their children and their lack of contributions to the household. Undoubtedly, the fact that they are working in a mining area, often described as, ‘a place where people are fighting, and there are guns and marijuana smokers’, also factors into suspicions of prostitution. As norms constituting the gender system play out in the context of the work in Mererani, ideas about ‘prostitution’ carry economic significance and social stigma.

Social Costs

Women’s ideas about and expectations of appropriate or inappropriate behaviour in the context of Mererani serve as a source of tension within female social relations and shape their interactions with one another. Overall, women who stay in the villages and do not work in Mererani actively avoid those who do, illustrating the role women themselves play in reproducing dominant gender norms. One woman who has never been to Mererani explains:

When a woman returns [to the village from Mererani] we don’t want to be seen with her. Even if she is from the next-door homestead and was a good friend in the past, we won’t even go greet her or talk with her. If we accidentally run into each other, we will just say hi and pass, but we don’t want to interact much because she won’t really teach you good things. So long as she didn’t teach herself, how can she teach you?

Another woman concurred:

I wouldn’t really want to be a woman’s friend after she returned from being away in Mererani for a while. Because if she left her household and her kids and stayed in Mererani, I don’t think she will teach me good things. I think she will teach me bad things and try to convince me to go there.

Central to this discourse is the perception that women have nothing to gain from those who work in Mererani, and thus they are cautious about being associated with them for fear of tarnishing their own reputations. Invoking the Maasai proverb, ‘My friend, you bring me evil’ (*Shore lai kishoriki enapiak*) (Kipuri, 1983, p. 187), women in the villages believe that women in Mererani are learning ‘bad things’ (that is, prostitution). Standing in contrast to the respected ‘education’ men are thought to gain in Mererani (Smith, 2012), the euphemistic good/bad label reflects women’s submitting to or contesting gendered economic and productive roles.

Men also perpetuate dominant gender norms. One young man elaborated:

Most of the women who went [to Mererani] are widows and when they get there they find boyfriends. Some might find one or some might find many. Because of that and because they are there for a long time, no woman can tolerate Mererani. People have bad habits, and there are lots of people from different areas. Even me, I won’t allow my wife to go around with someone who

has come from Mererani. She might teach my wife bad things. She might say, 'Oh, you are under control of your husband. I am free, just come with me.' Not only are widows there, but some married women are there as well. First she will have conflicts with her husband and then go to her father's household and say, 'My husband beats me.' While she is at her father's household, she starts to communicate with someone from Mererani, and then she will go.

This man's sentiments seem to be riding on the fear that women who work in Mererani will entice his wife with promises of freedom from his authority. The threat he perceives suggests that dominant gender norms are challenged by women's work in Mererani. However, due to the overwhelming disapproval women also express toward those who work in Mererani and the fact that they avoid them at all costs, it is clear that this man's apprehensions are unfounded. It is also evident that men are involved in perpetuating the very belief that women should not go to Mererani, and thus they contribute to 'keeping women in their place'. Overall, men do not want their own wives to go to Mererani, however, many take advantage of the services Maasai women provide there. Some purchase milk and beadwork from them, and others are involved in intimate relationships, perhaps finding in them a sense of 'home' and familiarity. Nevertheless, any approval these women receive in Mererani dramatically contrasts the ostracism they experience in their home villages.

Leaving the Village is a Double-edged Sword

The fact that women who go to Mererani experience more serious consequences than those who work in local markets begs the question of why women pursue such unconventional means for earning money when they could engage in business ventures closer to home that are more socially acceptable. When I posed this question to women who work in Mererani, they all frankly responded that they needed money to support their children. Nyla states:

People say I am doing prostitution, but I know I am working in Mererani for my children. If I stay home, my children have bad clothes and people laugh; if I go away, people talk bad. Once a woman leaves and works, people will say she is bad and a prostitute. But if you stay at home asking for things they are laughing again. I have to work, and I do not care if people are talking. I sent 110,000 TZS home yesterday with someone who was going to my village. If I decided to collect all my money and go back home today, I would have 500,000 TZS from selling milk and beads. That money would not last very long.

Nyla addresses the predicaments of being poor. She and the other women who work in Mererani show that poverty, coupled with their marginal social status, push them to pursue income-generating activities in the male-dominated market place in Mererani. These women are responsible for providing for their children, due to their widow status or because of their husbands' inability to support the household. In an effort to be 'good mothers', they go to Mererani and engage in what appear to be socially acceptable activities, such as selling milk and beadwork. In this way, women comply with their traditional responsibilities. However, they do so in a place away from home that is highly stigmatised by others. Unlike the scenario that Sarah describes in the previous section, where women eventually wanted to learn from her, women who work in Mererani are perceived to have nothing beneficial to offer and are assumed to be engaged in devious, immoral behaviour. In this case, larger shifts in political economy influence, but do not necessarily bring about positive changes in the gender system.

The discourse surrounding women who work at Mererani suggests nothing resembling empowerment, and Nyla's story is proof of the ultimate marginality of women who work in Mererani, as she passed away (allegedly from HIV/AIDS complications) shortly after this research was completed. Yet, even within this bleak atmosphere, women exhibit agency, and glimpses of empowerment appear on a very personal level. Rehema, a woman in her twenties who has worked at Mererani for three years, stated:

I don't have a boyfriend like other women there; he may take the money that is meant for my children. I now have 200,000 TZS just from selling beads. I go home two to three times a year and other women respect me because I can buy five goats, cultivate during the rainy season, and get maize, which my children eat during the dry season.

Rehema's confidence in her status at home and her sense of how she fulfils societal expectations of her as a mother show that individual empowerment can take form even in the context of adversity. Spending her money on livestock and agriculture, typically male expenditures, moves beyond normal expectations of her as a woman and pushes against dominant gender norms, as she crosses the boundaries of 'women's' expenditures. While she uses these examples to prove her success, her actions may in fact pose a threat to men's economic control. Moreover, the overwhelming resistance that is targeted at women who work in Mererani shows that Rehema's actions have significant trade-offs and do little to impact the gender system. Rehema reveals this understanding through her plea to me, 'Maybe you can help us leave Mererani so we can work at home.'

Conclusion

Maasai women in Simanjiro who engage in income-earning strategies outside of their homes demonstrate the links among production, gender and power. Henrietta Moore (1994, p. 65) argues:

While non-dominant discourses certainly provide subject positions and modes of subjectivity which might be individually satisfying and which might challenge or resist dominant modes, those individuals who do challenge or resist the dominant discourses on gender and gender identity frequently find that this is at the expense of such things as social power, social approval and even material benefits.

As Moore illustrates, behaviour changes and deviations from norms, however subtle, may challenge a gender system, but at a significant cost to those doing the challenging. The way in which these changes are occurring in Simanjiro demonstrates that activities push up against the dominant gender system and challenge assumed spaces of control and power for women and men.

The research presented here suggests that women's new market activities close to home give them access to their own cash, the ability to make economic contributions to the household and a certain degree of independence from their husbands. At home, many men encourage women's local market activities because they reduce men's need to sell livestock and do not explicitly threaten their power, since they are conducted within the norms of asking men's permission and staying close to home. While women's engagements with local market activities were initially met with resistance, they are now more accepted, showing that local changes in gender behaviour and practice can transform a gender system (Ridgeway & Correll, 2002, 2004). In time, women's local market activities may even become the conventional norm, reflecting a pattern similar to what Richard Schroeder observed in The Gambia, where women's livelihood activities shaped dominant gender norms in favour of women's control over production (Schroeder, 1999).

On the other hand, women who work in Mererani demonstrate the significant social and material consequences of engaging in livelihood activities that exceed the acceptable limits of 'women's work'. When women go afar, they cannot be watched and they have the potential to make more money; the lack of surveillance and control, coupled with the blatant challenge to women's customary household and economic roles, threaten men's power and the gender system. While women have defined another livelihood option in Mererani and unique cases show that empowerment can take place on a very personal level, it is apparent that this does little to influence the larger gender system. Yet, in this context, it is important to ask what would indicate a change in the gender system? Based on the shifts that are occurring as a result of women's *local* market activities, it could be proposed that an increased flow of women to and from Mererani, positive household changes resulting from their activities, the general

approval and support from both women and men, and the gradual removal of social sanctions could all signal changes to the gender system. Although we may question if, like women's *local* market activities, working in Mererani will become more accepted and transform the gender system, it appears that the high stakes involved continue to position this work as a last resort for women who are already economically or socially marginalised, and they must bear the burden of negative social sanctions.

A comparison of women's market activities reveals that dominant gender norms are dynamic, relational and contingent, as well as reproduced and contested in different ways within a gender system that defines expected roles, rules and relations between and among Maasai men and women. This study pushes our thinking about gender systems to include beliefs and practices that may pose challenges to a gender system. It demonstrates that age, social status, poverty, cultural norms, agency and power intersect to influence pastoral women's productive activities, and that these intersections have large implications for a pastoral gender system. As Maasai women navigate shifting political economies in Simanjiro, the variation that occurs in women's income-generating activities and the way in which they negotiate their roles illustrate that livelihood diversification is gendered and power influences productive relations.

The numerous ways empowerment is conceptualised and experienced show that women's empowerment is difficult to measure and complex to describe, as it can be implicit and masked by larger social and economic structures. In other words, even within a relatively salient gender system, Maasai women can experience empowerment within sets of constraints. In essence, women's empowerment cannot be essentialised to signify income alone and must reflect the complete context in which livelihood activities take place. Uncovering these processes is critical in the context of rural development schemes, especially as development is increasingly driven by the notion that promoting gender equality and empowering women with income-generating opportunities is an integral part of alleviating poverty and hunger in rural areas of the global south (United Nations [UN], 2013). A gendered approach to rural development must be informed by both the economic and social context in which women's productive activities take place. Historically situated and locally produced, ideological and practical manifestations of dominant gender norms and gender systems add complexity to the ways in which gender is lived and constructed and how empowerment is defined in these changing contexts.

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Notes

1. While my main focus here is on women, the relationship between masculinities and Maasai men's work as gemstone traders in Mererani certainly deserves more attention, and is discussed elsewhere (Smith, 2012).
2. The names of the villages are not mentioned here, and all proper names used throughout this article have been changed to ensure confidentiality.
3. Women also play critical roles in the customs and ceremonies of male age-sets and maintain jurisdiction over their own parallel rituals (Kipuri, 1989, p. 95; Spencer, 1993).
4. Most women continue to be prohibited from 'owning' land, but access to land is changing. Some men grant their wives land (not formal title) and other women are seeking titles from village offices.

5. Evidence suggests that this is changing in some areas where wealthy Maasai men are building 'modern' homes made out of bricks and plaster. In these cases, men are primarily responsible for building the house and are therefore able to exert significant control over this space (Goldman, personal communication, 12 December 2013; Smith, 2012).
6. At the time of this research, the exchange rate was approximately 1,178 TZS to 1 USD.
7. The two women who got permission from their husbands but no start-up capital received cash from their brothers.
8. Arusha is a busy urban center located north (50 km) of Simanjiro and north-west (30km) of Mererani.

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