

The Stagnation of Women's Liberation in Society: Examples from the Plays *Nguzo Mama* and *Machozi ya Mwanamke*

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ABSTRACT

This desk-based study sought to examine the stagnation of women's liberation in society by drawing on selected plays, *Nguzo Mama* and *Machozi ya Mwanamke*. Primary data were obtained through the reading of the selected texts and text analysis. A purposive sampling approach was used to select the plays because of their direct relevance to the study topic. Feminist theory was employed as the guiding framework for analyzing the data and identifying how social, cultural and economic systems continue to oppress women. The findings show that women face obstacles rooted in oppressive customs and traditions, economic dependence, and inferior gender perceptions that place women below men. It was also established that social institutions such as the family and other societal structures contribute to the gender gap that undermines women's efforts to liberate themselves. This article recommends strengthening gender education in schools and in society in order to challenge harmful stereotypes and promote gender equality in all areas of life. In response, government and development stakeholders should reinforce policies that protect women's rights and ensure equal opportunities for leadership and economic participation. Literary writers are also encouraged to continue using art to educate society about gender equality.

Keywords: Stagnation, Liberation, Woman, Plays, Feminist theory.

INTRODUCTION

Women's liberation in society is an important subject that receives considerable attention in Swahili literature, particularly within the genre of drama. Plays serve as a stage for representing everyday social realities through performance, thereby bringing to the surface different challenges confronting women in their struggle to emancipate themselves. In many African societies, women have found themselves within a patriarchal system that places them in a lower position in education, economic life, and politics. Through Swahili drama, writers show how women experience oppression linked to customs, traditions, and social perceptions. Female characters are often portrayed facing challenges such as violence, dependency, and the lack of a voice in major family and community decisions (Masebo & Nyirenda, 2021). This makes drama an important medium for initiating debate on gender equality. At the same time, selected Swahili dramas have increasingly shown social change that creates room for women to fight for their rights. Hence, this literature becomes significant for analyzing the process of women's liberation.

Swahili plays have clearly highlighted conflicts between traditional practices and modern changes affecting women's position. In many drama works, women are depicted as individuals who go through the challenges of being controlled by a patriarchal system that denies them freedom to make decisions. Female characters are presented struggling against oppressive marriages, physical and psychological abuse, and the denial of the right to participate in family decision-making. However, some contemporary plays have begun to portray women as leaders and as individuals with the ability to change their own lives and, more broadly, the lives of society. These developments indicate ideological progress in Swahili literature regarding women's status (Kahigi & Kezilahabi Research Collective, 2020). Despite these improvements, some dramas still reproduce negative images of women in society, which affects the pace of their liberation. Therefore, drama remains an important tool for analyzing and challenging oppressive attitudes towards women.

Economic dependency has also emerged strongly in Swahili drama. Women are shown participating in productive activities such as agriculture, business, and domestic work, yet being denied the rights to own property or make economic decisions (Tanzania Gender Studies Institute, 2022). This increases women's reliance on men in practice and reduces their capacity to liberate themselves. Plays also demonstrate how women are excluded from formal employment and economic leadership because of unfair social systems. Such portrayals reflect real challenges confronting women today. Through performance, audiences can see the effects of economic inequality and how it influences progress in both families and society. Thus, Swahili drama contributes greatly to raising awareness of economic barriers that hinder women's liberation.

Swahili drama has also been influenced by modern developments in media and the arts, where gender-related themes are sometimes presented in more creative ways. Through stage performance and even radio and television drama, artists portray challenges such as gender-based violence, forced marriages, and physical and emotional abuse (UN Women, 2023). Some plays still advance stereotypes that portray women as weak and dependent, potentially undermining women's liberation efforts. Despite these challenges, drama continues to be a vital medium for educating society about women's rights and gender equality. Through performance, communities can reflect on relationships and identify the need for change. Thus, drama forms an important bridge between art and social reality in mobilizing women's liberation.

Generally, despite the existence of various studies on women's status in Swahili literature, there remains a gap in understanding the stagnation of women's liberation in societies within and beyond Africa. Many studies focus more on describing women's images rather than analyzing, in depth, the ongoing reasons that prevent women from achieving full freedom (African Humanities Review, 2024). In addition, there are insufficient studies examining closely how contemporary drama may influence social change related to gender equality. This leaves an important academic gap in understanding the contribution of literature to women's liberation. The relationship between tradition, economics, and portrayals of women in drama has not been explored thoroughly. There is therefore a need for new research focusing on this gap by examining the stagnation of women's liberation in the process of social development. Accordingly, this article investigates the stagnation of women's liberation in society by reference to the selected plays *Nguzo Mama* and *Machozi ya Mwanamke*.

Research Methods

This desk-based study examined the stagnation of women's liberation in society by referring to the selected plays *Nguzo Mama* and *Machozi ya Mwanamke*. Primary data were collected through reading the selected texts and analyzing the content. A purposive sampling method was used to identify the selected plays because of their direct relationship to the study topic. Content analysis was used to examine the literary, social and ideological elements emerging in the texts. Feminist theory was applied as the main framework for analyzing and discussing the data, helping to reveal how social, cultural, and economic systems contribute to stalling women in their attempts to liberate themselves. Through this approach, the study was able to identify both implicit and explicit meanings regarding gender oppression in the selected texts. Taken together, these methods ensured the credibility, depth, and validity of the study's findings.

Research Theory

Feminist theory is an analytical approach in literature that focuses on examining women's position, gender relations, and power systems that oppress or emancipate women in society. Among its key founders is Simone de Beauvoir, who, through *The Second Sex* (1949), laid essential foundations for feminist thinking by showing that women are made into "the Other" in a society governed by patriarchy. Betty Friedan also contributed through *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), which helped energize the second wave of feminism in the United States. The theory gained greater momentum in the twentieth century, especially in Europe and the United States, before spreading globally as both an academic and social perspective. Its origins lie in gender inequality, where women were seen as inferior in decision-making, economically and politically. In literature, feminist theory is used to analyse how female characters are represented, the forms of oppression they experience, and the roles assigned to them in society as portrayed in literary works. By applying this approach, the researcher can uncover hidden gender perceptions within texts and generate deeper meanings concerning women's liberation.

In the analysis of the selected plays *Nguzo Mama* and *Machizi ya Mwanamke*, feminist theory was used to identify how women are portrayed as victims of social systems shaped by patriarchal ideology. Through this lens, the study examined how female characters lack freedom to make decisions, are assigned gender roles, and are controlled in economic and social spheres (Soyinka, 1976; Moi, 1985). In *Nguzo Mama*, women are shown carrying heavy family burdens yet not given status commensurate with their contribution. In *Machizi ya Mwanamke*, women are represented as affected by harmful social perceptions that degrade them and prevent them from fully liberating themselves. Feminist theory also enables analysis of language, symbols, and themes that reveal gender inequality. The analysis shows, in a clear way, gender tensions that contribute to the stagnation of women's liberation in society.

Feminist theory is further used to reveal how tradition, customs, and social institutions perpetuate the oppression of women in societies reflected by these plays. In *Nguzo Mama*, family and social systems appear to demand female submission and servility to men, limiting personal development. In *Machizi ya Mwanamke*, society is shown as attempting to control women through shame, blame, and stigma whenever they try to cross gender boundaries. Using feminist analysis, the researcher was able to examine how characters' language, dialogue, and actions reflect patriarchal culture. The theory is also used to identify how women attempt to resist oppression, although their efforts are often frustrated by strong social power (Walby, 1990; Hooks, 2000). Thus, the analysis demonstrates that the stagnation of women's liberation is produced and maintained through interactions between culture, economics, and ideology within society.

In this article, feminist theory served as the primary tool for analyzing data, revealing how the stagnation of women's liberation is constructed and sustained through the selected plays *Nguzo Mama* and *Machizi ya Mwanamke*. The researcher examined the portrayal of women, their roles in family and society, and the challenges they face in their struggle for liberation. Through a feminist perspective, it was found that many women in these plays experience economic dependence, gender-based oppression, and harmful social perceptions that prevent them from achieving full freedom. The theory also helped interpret subtle literary meanings showing conflicts between patriarchal traditions and women's efforts to liberate themselves. Globally, it supported a deeper discussion of women's liberation challenges and provided broader understanding of how literature reflects social reality.

The Stagnation of Women's Liberation in Society: Reference to the Selected Plays

The stagnation of women's liberation in society is rooted in oppressive customs and traditions that place women in an inferior position. The patriarchal system reinforces women's economic and social dependence, reducing their involvement in decision-making. In addition, poor education and the absence of equal opportunities contribute to gender oppression in contemporary societies undergoing rapid change. Then, the issue of the stagnation of women's liberation is presented in the following section.

Economic Dependence

Economic dependence is one of the key factors contributing to the stagnation of women's liberation in many African societies. This occurs when women lack ownership of productive resources, have limited access to gainful employment opportunities, or lack the ability to earn enough income to meet their needs and make independent decisions. As a result, many women are forced to tolerate environments of oppression, abuse, and discrimination out of fear that they may lose financial support from their families (Duflo, 2012). Economic dependence reduces women's participation in development processes, leadership, and crucial decisions that affect their lives and society as a whole. Despite efforts made to promote gender equality, many women continue to face systemic barriers preventing them from owning land, accessing credit, and participating fully in economic activities (Cornell, 2015). This perpetuates the gender gap in property ownership and access to development opportunities. Thus, empowering women economically through education, skills training, access to capital, and equal employment opportunities is essential for achieving their liberation and strengthening gender equality in modern society.

Men block women's economic liberation when they use their power and control over resources to prevent women from fully participating in income-generating activities and financial decision-making. In some societies, women

are denied land ownership, business opportunities, education, and well-paid jobs due to beliefs that give men a higher status (Mama, 2017). This makes women dependent on men for basic needs, undermining their ability to be economically independent. The outcome is continued poverty, increased dependence, and a weakening of women's contribution to family and social development. This study found that men contribute to stalling women's economic liberation. This is evidenced through the character in *Nguzo Mama*, where Sudi, the husband of BI PILI, obstructs her economic attempts. Although BI PILI tries to liberate herself economically by selling alcohol, her husband prevents her by taking away all the money from her sales. The writer states:

SUDI: [Kwa BI PILI] *Haya nipe pesa ulizokwishapata.*

BI PILI: *Hee! Kwa nini nikupe?*

SUDI: *Lete pesa upesi kabla sijakukong'ota* (uk.13).

SUDI: [For BI PILI] "Give me the money you have already earned."

BI PILI: "Eh! Why should I give you?"

SUDI: "Bring the money quickly before I catch you cheating" (p. 13).

This quotation suggests how a woman is restrained by her husband. It is also reflected through the use of harsh language by Sudi to insult his wife so that she does not continue her business. For example, when BI PILI is selling alcohol and has customers, Sudi calls his wife "friends" publicly. This is inappropriate for a business location, as it may cause customers to leave. Ignoring the woman has major consequences for the family and society. When women are denied participation in decision-making, education, employment, and development activities, their capacity to support the wellbeing of society decreases (Kabeer, 2016). The result is increased economic dependence, reduced self-confidence, and the possibility of domestic conflicts. In addition, women's talents, knowledge, and creativity remain unused. This leads to stagnation in both social and economic development and the persistence of gender inequality. In *Nguzo Mama*, the writer states:

"SUDI: *Acha mdomo nitakupiga mbele ya hawa hawara zako* [Anamshika]

SHABA: *Bwana Sudi acha maneno ya kitoto hapa.*" (uk.14).

"SUDI: Stop talking; I will hit you in front of your friends." [He grabs her]

SHABA: "Mr Sudi, stop those childish words here." (p. 14)

This shows how the husband ignores the woman, as depicted through Sudi. As a result, Shaba has to rebuke Sudi so that he stops his domineering behavior in the wife's business area. These words insult BI PILI and undermine her, especially because it is her husband who speaks in such a manner. Therefore, for the woman to avoid escalating the conflicts his behaviors might cause later, she may feel forced to stop the business. Ridiculing a woman involves humiliating or making her appear worthless before others. Such acts affect her psychological wellbeing by reducing her confidence, self-worth, and ability to participate fully in social and economic activities (Nnaemeka, 2018). Ridicule may lead to emotional pain, stress, and disrupted relationships within the family and society. If a man strengthens these behaviors, gender bias may intensify and prevent women from using their abilities fully for community development.

This study also established that a man stalls women economically when the woman works intensively but the harvest does not belong to her. The patriarchal system is oppressive and exploitative to such an extent that a woman is used only for labor without receiving anything in return. In *Machozi ya Mwanamke*, the writer clearly shows this by using the wives of Madahiro Deka, Nasaa, and Malahaka as they speak. The writer states:

Nasaa: Isitoshe hizo pesa bila ya sisi kwani angezipata? Kwani ni akina nani wanaoshinda shambani kutwa mzima kama sio sisi? Kimya. Tena mtu hapumziki hata dakika moja. Ukitoka shamba, uvunjevunje kuni za kupikia, haya uende kisimani, ukirudi unapitiliza moja kwa moja jikoni (uk.24).

Nasaa: “And those monies without us how would he get them? Who else stays in the fields all day except us? Silence. And even then, one cannot rest even for a minute. When you leave the farm, you cut firewood to cook with; you go to fetch water; and when you return, you go straight into the kitchen.” (p. 24)

This description shows that Madahiro uses his wives for farming labor without involving them in the benefits after harvest. Although the wives contribute heavily to both production and the household economy, they receive nothing beyond beatings and cruel words. Despite women’s major role in production through farming, business, livestock rearing, and other development activities, some of them still suffer gender-based violence, including being beaten and abused. The persistence of such behaviors indicates a gap between the value of women’s labor and how they are treated in society. Acts of violence harm women’s health, reduce their motivation to work, and weaken development for the family and society (Sultana, 2017). Therefore, it is important to continue educating society about gender equality and respecting women’s rights.

Strengthening Oppressive Customs and Traditions

The strengthening of oppressive customs and traditions is another factor contributing to the stagnation of women’s liberation in many African societies. Such customs are built within a patriarchal system that places men in positions of power and views women as belonging to a lower category, responsible mainly for obeying and carrying out men’s decisions. In some communities, women are denied the right to own land, inherit family property, or participate fully in important social and family decisions. Practices such as early marriage, excessive bride price, and gendered division of responsibilities continue to keep women in dependency and deny them opportunities for development (Tamale, 2020). These traditions also affect girls’ access to education, because some families believe the main duty of a woman is to marry and serve her family rather than pursue further education and professional development. As a result, the gender gap persists in many social, political, and economic domains. Therefore, to achieve women’s liberation, there must be a re-examination of traditions that violate the principles of equality, human rights, and sustainable development, taking into account social changes occurring in today’s world.

Oppressive traditions against girls produce many negative outcomes for both their personal lives and broader community development. Such traditions deny girls access to education by encouraging early marriage or keeping them at home for domestic responsibilities. They also affect girls’ health through early marriages and early pregnancies that can lead to health problems. These practices create economic dependence because girls lack opportunities to obtain education and skills that would enable them to become independent. They also undermine girls’ self-confidence by making them see themselves as inferior to men, preventing them from participating fully in decisions affecting their lives. Oppressive traditions encourage sexual harassment and violence by legitimizing a system that grants men greater authority than women (Tamale, 2020). As a result, society loses valuable human resources and the meaningful contributions girls could make to social, economic, and political development. Hence, it is important to keep resisting oppressive customs so that girls can access rights, equality, and equal development opportunities.

In *Nguzo Mama*, the writer shows how men undermine women’s liberation culturally when some communities believe that men alone have rights to inherit the property of a deceased relative, regardless of the wife and children left behind. The writer shows how many African communities oppress widows. The husband’s relatives seize the late man’s property without regard for the fact that it was earned with the widow. The writer uses Kiando and Makange, who are BI SABA’s brothers-in-law, when they come to take the property of their deceased relative. The writer states:

[*Wanapita KIANDO na MAKANGE wamebeba godoro juu ya kitanda kuna vifaa vya jikoni masufuria, mwiko, Sahani, n.k. BI SABA anawaona upesi anaacha kamba na kuwakimbilia anajaribu kuwazuia*].

BI SABA: Ha! Shemeji mmerudi kuchukua hata kitanda! Hata sufuria! Nitalala wapi na nitapikia wapi jamani! (uk.38).

[Kiando and Makange pass by with a bed placed on a head load, and there are household items such as cooking utensils and plates. BI SABA notices quickly and abandons the rope and runs to stop them.]

BI SABA: “Ha! Brother-in-law, you’ve come back to take even the bed! Even the pots? Where will I sleep, and where will I cook, my friends?” (p. 38).

This has been observed in many African cultures: after the death of a husband, the husband’s relatives often see the widow as having no value in society. As a result, they begin to steal the deceased man’s property and take it forcibly, claiming it is their right because the deceased was a member of their family. This is clearly oppression of women, as shown through BI SABA, who is deprived of everything, including the bed, household goods, cooking utensils, and even the children, who are claimed as property of the deceased man’s brother. In some societies, widows are forced to marry their late husband’s relatives so that the family property remains within the family line. Such a practice removes the woman’s freedom to decide her own life and to choose the partner she wants (Oduyoye, 2016). It often treats a woman as transferable property rather than as a human being with dignity and rights. This can lead to family conflicts, psychological suffering, and the suppression of women’s development. Society should encourage gender equality and protect widows so that they can live with dignity and freedom.

In some societies, men believe that a woman should obey her husband in all situations without questioning his decisions. This attitude can create inequality within the family and prevent a woman from giving her views on matters affecting her. Although mutual respect and cooperation are the foundation of marriage, unlimited obedience can open the door to abuse and the oppression of women’s rights (Mbilinyi, 2018). Healthy relationships should be built on communication, cooperation, respect, and joint decision-making. Each spouse should be recognized as having equal rights, responsibilities, and a voice in the family. This study confirmed that men are a major cause of the stagnation of women’s liberation in cultural terms. In the play *Machosi ya Mwanamke*, the writer depicts traditions that demand women obey their husbands as if they were slaves. Women’s refusal to follow a husband’s demands is interpreted as if she is controlling the man. The writer states:

“MADAHIRO: ... Mtu asikudanganye bwana. Mwanamke bila kumpa amri kalikali na kuwahenyeshwa na kazi, basi hata kuwa mkeo. Sasa unafikiri kutakuwa na mabwana wangapi nyumbani. Mimi nitoe amri na yeye atoe amri? Ebo! Haiwezekani. Ujue mwanamke huyo kakutawala.” (uk.9).

MADAHIRO: “...Don’t let anyone deceive you. A woman cannot be a proper wife unless she is given strict orders, controlled, and made to work. Otherwise, if she behaves independently, what does it mean? How many ‘masters’ would we have at home? I give orders; she gives orders too? No, that is impossible. You know, that woman has controlled you” (p. 9).

This quotation reveals a narrow view of men about social relationships. Such an attitude is what stalls women’s liberation in society. Women are adults with sound judgement and self-awareness. They should not be treated as slaves, which contradicts human rights. A narrow male attitude towards women places women as incapable of participating fully in important social, economic, and political matters. Such beliefs are built by some traditions and misguided ideas that place men above women. Under these circumstances, many women lack opportunities for education, employment, leadership, and ownership of key resources. This affects women’s confidence and prevents them from using their talents and abilities fully to develop society (Meena, 2019). In the family, decisions may be made only by men while women’s opinions are ignored. This also sustains gender discrimination and gender-based abuse. To address this, society must be sensitized about gender equality, respect women’s rights, and recognize women’s contribution to family and national development.

Reinforcement of Gender-Based Violence and Threats

The strengthening of gender based violence and threats is among the challenges that hinder women’s liberation efforts in many parts of the world. Such violence includes physical, psychological, economic, and sexual acts

aimed at depriving women of their freedom, safety, and fundamental rights. Women who face threats or abuse often live in fear that prevents them from participating fully in social, economic, and political activities (UN Women, 2024). Threats from husbands, relatives, or community members may prevent women from reporting abuse or claiming their rights due to fear of retaliation. This affects mental health, self-confidence, and their ability to make independent decisions about their lives. In some settings, weak legal systems and poor enforcement of laws against gender-based violence continue to protect offenders, encouraging the persistence of such acts (Walby, 2015). The result is the continuation of unequal power relations between women and men, which prevents women's progress and weakens efforts to achieve gender equality. Therefore, fighting gender-based violence is an essential step towards women's liberation and social development.

In some societies, bride price is misunderstood and treated as a means to control women within marriage. Some men believe that after paying bride price, they gain authority over their wives, as if they have purchased the right to decide everything. This belief removes women's freedom to express opinions, participate in family decisions, or defend their rights when facing challenges. At times, bride price is used to justify gender-based violence, contempt, and oppression through the claim that a woman was "bought" using the bride price paid (Lugones, 2016). According to many African traditions, bride price is a symbol of respect and gratitude that strengthens ties between two families, not a tool to treat a woman as the husband's property. The problem arises when the real meaning of bride price is distorted and used to sustain patriarchal systems. Society should therefore be educated that bride price is part of marriage culture that should support love, cooperation, and mutual respect, rather than becoming a reason for controlling or oppressing women. The issue of bride price contributes significantly to the stagnation of women's liberation. In *Machochi ya Mwanamke*, the writer shows this through Madahiro, who believes that because he paid money as bride price, he has the freedom to abuse his wives as he wishes. The writer states:

MAUJA: *Kwani hizo pesa za mahari ulizotoa ndio nini?*

MADAHIRO: *Ha ha ha ha anauliza ndio nini! Ndio nini....*

Wewe unafikiri mimi bila kutoa pesa ungekuwa hapa?

Umeolewa kwa fedha mama. fedha! (anapiga piga pesa mfukoni) (uk.9).

MAUJA: "So what are those bride-price monies you gave meant for?"

MADAHIRO: "Ha ha ha! What do they mean? That's what..."

"You think I would be here without paying money? You got married with money, mother... Money!"
(He hits the money in his pocket.) (p. 9)

In this quotation, Madahiro represents many men who believe that because they paid bride price, the woman has nothing left to say or do except obey her husband. Such men are the ones who stall women's liberation. Bride price can become a source of oppression when it is interpreted as a price to own a woman rather than as an expression of respect for marriage (Mlama, 2017; World Bank, 2020). In some societies, a man who pays bride price sees himself as having authority to control his wife in all aspects of life. This deprives a woman of opportunities to participate in major family decisions, education, employment, or decisions on household resources. Some men use bride price as a pretext to justify violence, contempt, and abuse, claiming that they paid a high cost to obtain a wife. The consequence is an intensified patriarchal system that places women in a position of dependency and compulsory obedience. When women try to defend their rights, they are seen as stubborn or as disrespecting community traditions. This distorted interpretation of bride price sustains unequal relationships and becomes a source of social, economic, and psychological suffering for many women.

Bride price may also cause women to endure abuse for a long time due to fear of the consequences of leaving the marriage. In some families, the return of bride price is seen as shameful or as a financial burden, which encourages parents and relatives to pressure the woman to remain in an abusive environment. As a result, many women continue to tolerate beatings, insults, threats, and denial of basic rights in order to protect family honor.

Across Africa, some communities blame women for breaking marriages without considering the real reasons for conflict. This increases women's psychological burden and makes it harder for them to seek help in time. Although bride price, by nature, is part of culture intended to strengthen relationships between families, its misuse can turn it into a tool of oppression (Chacha, 2020; Mwangosi, 2025). Therefore, there is a need to educate society about the true meaning of bride price in order to reduce ideas that drive oppression and ensure women's rights and dignity are protected.

Bias in Traditional, Economic, and Political Systems

The strengthening of bias within traditional, economic, and political systems that give men greater status than women is among the barriers that prevent women's liberation in many societies. In traditional systems, customs continue to place women in a position of dependency and treat them as secondary to men (UN Women, 2024). This is revealed through the division of labor, property ownership, and limited participation in key family and social decisions. Economically, women often face challenges accessing productive resources, credit, decent employment, and business opportunities, which keeps them behind in economic development. In political life, women's limited representation in decision-making bodies results in policies that priorities men's needs and interests (Njeri, 2018; Okeke, 2019). Consequently, the gender gap continues across different areas of life, weakening efforts towards gender equality and inclusive development. To strengthen women's liberation, these systems must be reformed by encouraging equal opportunities, equal participation in decision-making, and removing ideas that position men as privileged over women.

Women's restricted positions in religion, the armed forces, senior governmental offices, and in financial institutions remain ongoing challenges in many societies. Even though women have demonstrated strong capacity in education, leadership, and various professions, they still face obstacles arising from gender perceptions that consider men to be better leaders. In some faith institutions, women are prevented from holding certain senior leadership roles based on religious interpretations (Mwangosi, 2026). Similar patterns appear in the army and security services, where women's representation at decision-making levels remains low compared with men. The same situation is seen in government and banking institutions, where few women reach senior management and policy-making roles. As a result, women's valuable contributions to institutional and national development are lost. To overcome this, it is important to strengthen gender equality policies, provide equal opportunities for professional advancement, and change attitudes that discriminate against women so they can participate fully in all leadership and decision-making areas.

In *Nguzo Mama*, liberation struggles face significant stagnation when political and social leaders often educated men introduce liberation systems that do not reflect the realities of women living in rural areas. Women's liberation agendas are treated as political projects meant to obtain aid or popularity rather than genuine structural change. These leaders use "sweet words" about gender equality on public platforms, yet during implementation they leave women without real tools, such as poor-quality farming technology or unreliable markets for their products. This stagnation shows that educated leaders may use women's suffering as political capital. Such leaders may not genuinely intend to see women fully govern themselves, because doing so would undermine arguments used to continue seeking support from donors. The writer states:

Wanakuja hapa na nguo zao nzuri na kutupigia hotuba ndefu kuhusu ukombozi, lakini wakiondoka wanatuacha na majembe yale yale ya mkono na njaa ile ile (uk. 72).

They come here with their fine clothes and long speeches about liberation, but once they leave, they leave us with the same hoes by hand and the same hunger' (p. 72).

In society, liberation movements have often been more theoretical than practical. Women's liberation efforts and community development have mainly focused on legal aspects. Government and different institutions create laws, policies, and regulations intended to protect women's rights and eliminate different forms of gender discrimination. These laws have increased opportunities for women in education, employment, political leadership, and property ownership. They have also laid foundations for combating gender-based violence, abuse, and oppressive customs that weaken women. However, relying heavily on legal approaches alone is not sufficient to bring full liberation. Even if laws exist, enforcement is often limited by long-standing cultural

traditions and a continuing patriarchal system in many societies. For example, women may have legal rights to own property, but tradition or social pressure may prevent them from using these rights fully (Rai, 2017; United Nations Women, 2021). This shows that social development and women's liberation, even with laws, require cultural change, gender equality education, economic empowerment, and cooperation among all community members. Laws should be supported by efforts to transform social thinking and structures in order to achieve sustainable development and real equality.

Women Burdened by Roles and Being Overpowered by Duties

Women being overwhelmed and burdened with many family and social duties is another factor that hinders their liberation in society. In many societies, women are expected to care for children, maintain the household, do domestic work, and at the same time participate in economic activities that contribute to the family income (Temba, 2022; United Nations, 2024). This unequal division of labor causes women to spend long hours and energy on unpaid work. As a result, their opportunities for education, professional development, and leadership positions are reduced. The heavy burden of responsibilities affects their physical and mental health through exhaustion and stress caused by the pressure to meet societal expectations. In some societies, domestic work and child-rearing are viewed as a woman's responsibility alone, which reinforces gender perceptions that discriminate against women. To achieve women's liberation, there must be fair sharing of family responsibilities between women and men, alongside recognition of the value of care work and domestic support carried out by women. These measures would increase gender equality and enable women to participate fully in society's development.

In the selected texts, the woman is portrayed as carrying the largest burden of all household and childcare responsibilities without help from men. In *Nguzo Mama*, women are engaged in cooking, washing clothes, raising children, collecting firewood and water, yet they are still expected to go to the farms and participate in all kinds of community activities. This burden mirrors what is shown in *Machizi ya Mwanamke*, where the woman is treated as a producer and provider of internal household services while men gather in public spaces. This load deprives women of time to rest, study, or participate fully in economic and political opportunities that could free them from stagnation. Society regards domestic labor as a woman's natural responsibility, thereby keeping her within the confines of the home and preventing her from looking beyond her village or town. In *Nguzo Mama*, the writer states:

Jua halijachomoza mwanamke yuko mtoni, jua limezama mwanamke yuko jikoni, lini atapata muda wa kufikiri? (uk. 37).

"The sun has not yet risen; the woman is already at the riverbank. The sun has set; the woman is still in the kitchen. When will she have time to think?" (p. 37)

These words highlight the heavy load of responsibilities assigned to women in many traditional societies. From early morning, a woman wakes up early to reach the farm planting, farming, or harvesting to ensure the family has food. After such demanding work, more responsibilities await at home: cooking, washing utensils, caring for children, and cleaning the house. In such a continuous schedule without rest, the woman lacks time for self-reflection, education, or participation in important family and community decisions (Mwangosi & Maguo, 2025). This ongoing situation produces dependency in thinking and reduces her economic and social opportunities. There is no doubt that this division of labor is unfair because it makes a woman a servant of endless duties. Society should change and recognize the importance of gender equality so that women are given time to rest, think, and participate fully in development. Society should acknowledge that women are also central to development. Everyone has the responsibility to transform oppressive thinking through concrete actions for a better future.

This unequal division of labor deprives women of one of the most valuable resources times. Without adequate time, women cannot attend training, meetings where decisions are made, or join larger development projects. Instead, they remain trapped in the same daily cycle of poverty and exhaustion from morning to night. In *Machizi ya Mwanamke*, the writer also states:

"Yeye anarudi usiku wa manane akiwa amelewa, mimi nimechoka kwa kazi za kutwa nzima, bado anataka nimhudumie kama mfalme." (uk. 52).

"She returns late at night, drunk, while I am exhausted from working all day; yet he still expects me to serve him like a king." (p. 52).

This highlights an unequal burden in marriage, where the woman carries all domestic and emotional responsibilities without consideration. After farm work or daytime employment, the woman is expected to cook, wash, care for children, and even serve her husband without resting, even though she too is exhausted. This makes her lose dignity and the right to rest as a human being. It is therefore important for society to recognize that marriage is partnership, not one-sided servitude. Men should share household responsibilities and stop demanding services when they have not considered their partners' circumstances (Cornwall, 2016). Respect and mutual understanding should be the foundation of the family in order to promote development and peace. Without such change, women will continue to suffer in silence inside their homes. There is no true right to request service when one partner is more exhausted than the one being served. Continuing this pattern creates problems that require wide ranging discussion and a change in thinking across society, for the sustainable development of families and the nation, where everyone deserves equal dignity.

CONCLUSION

The issue of women's liberation in society continues to face many challenges rooted in oppressive customs and traditions, narrow gender perceptions, and unequal divisions of social and economic responsibilities. Women still bear a heavy burden of both domestic and non-domestic work, while being denied equal opportunities for leadership, education, and important decision-making. This has led to stagnation in both their personal development and society as a whole, because their labor is used without receiving the recognition and value it deserves. To overcome this, society must change its mindset and strengthen gender equality across all areas. Gender education should be provided from the family level to educational institutions in order to remove false beliefs that degrade women. Government laws and policies must be implemented fully to ensure women receive their rights in employment, leadership, and property ownership without discrimination. Men should also be included in the process of change by sharing family responsibilities and respecting women's contribution. Therefore, women's liberation is a responsibility of the entire society. With equality properly promoted, genuine and sustainable development can be achieved for the benefit of all.

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