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Domestic Service in Tanzania between Colonial and Post-Colonial Struggles

Gendered Approaches to Unionism

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Abstract

This article seeks to explain the reasons behind the limited involvement of women domestic workers in Tanzania in trade union activism in recent decades. To this end, it examines some historical events that are crucial for understanding the phenomenon of contemporary domestic work. In particular, it looks at the trade union activism of male domestic servants during the British colonial period, when they sought to defend a form of waged domestic service that was losing its value and respectability. Reflecting on the presence or lack of prestige and respectability associated with this labour sector over time helps to understand and interpret the testimonies of today's female workers, which were collected during ethnographic research in Tanzania between 2018 and 2019.

Keywords: domestic service; gender; militancy; Tanzania; unionism

Le travail domestique en Tanzanie entre les luttes coloniales et post-coloniales : Approches genrées du syndicalisme

Résumé

Cet article cherche à expliquer les raisons de l'implication limitée des travailleuses domestiques en Tanzanie dans le militantisme syndical au cours des dernières décennies. Pour ce faire, il adopte une perspective historique essentielle à la compréhension du phénomène du travail domestique contemporain. Il s'intéresse au militantisme syndical des travailleurs domestiques masculins pendant la période coloniale britannique, qui cherchent à défendre une forme de service domestique salarié au moment où il perd de sa valeur et de sa respectabilité. Réfléchir à la présence ou au manque de prestige et de respectabilité associés à ce secteur professionnel au fil du temps permet de comprendre et d'interpréter les témoignages des travailleuses domestiques d'aujourd'hui. Ceux-ci ont été recueillis lors d'une recherche ethnographique en Tanzanie menée entre 2018 et 2019.

Mots clés : genre ; militantisme ; syndicalisme ; Tanzanie ; travail domestique

During the European colonial period in present-day mainland Tanzania, first under the Germans (1890-1916) and then under the British (1916-1961), domestic servants were present in almost all European, Asians, Arab, and African households in coastal urban centres like Dar es Salaam.[1] The waged domestic service workforce was predominantly composed of African men, who were commonly referred to as "boy" or "boi," "houseboy," and other related terms, regardless of their age.[2] John Iliffe argues that in many African countries, paid domestic work was long dominated by men because they defended their profession for the status and reasonable remuneration it provided, while colonial officials urged African women to devote themselves to the family sphere.[3]

This article adopts the approach taken by Mélanie Jacquemin and Violaine Tisseau regarding domestic service from a broad perspective that is not limited to the "waged" labour model introduced by European colonization. Hence, it becomes clear that various forms of domestic service existed – male and female, paid and unpaid – in rural and urban areas among local African families and others[4]. These different types of domestic service reflected the multiple hierarchical relationships, dependencies, and subordination characteristics of the time. However, as Janet Bujra points out, our understanding of the phenomenon has been heavily influenced by the official statistics produced by colonial officials, who only estimated the number of domestic servants employed by Europeans and Asians, and sometimes only the former.[5]

Domestic servants played a crucial role in the colonial context. During German rule, Dar es Salaam was a growing city, with a population that might have increased from just 3,000 inhabitants in 1887 to about 22,500 in 1913.[6] Increasing urbanisation and the influx of European, Indian, and other Asian residents encourage growth in employment opportunities in male salaried domestic service. According to Robyn Pariser, German and most other European residents employed one, or in most cases several, domestic servants in their homes.[7] African men in search of well-paid and respectable work quickly entered this growing labour market, which guaranteed higher wages than other employment sectors and offered the security of permanent jobs with monthly payment. The evolving demand for domestic servants was accompanied by a need for them to be qualified and have well-defined roles. Between the 1920s and 1930s, under British colonial rule, domestic service reached its highest level of specialisation and the highest wages. British colonial archives record an increase in the number of domestic servants from about 20,000 in 1926 to 35,000 in 1942.[8]

Between the 1940s and 1950s, however, the employment sector declined dramatically. The economic crisis caused by the Second World War, the population increase in the capital, and the introduction of new labour laws radically transformed employment. The new socio-economic pressures pushed employers to hire fewer domestic servants, with more general assignments and lower wages. Issa Shivji has documented that domestic servants reacted by organizing themselves into a trade union movement and mobilizing to assert their rights, joining workers in the transport, trade, industrial, and construction sectors in the struggle.[9] By the 1950s, domestic servants' unions had spread across Africa, challenging the classic Marxist view that considers this labour sector to be inherently disadvantaged and disinclined to revolution.[10]

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[1] I wish to thank the editorial team and the anonymous referees for their critical insights, which helped improve both the structure and content of this article.

[2] Pariser Robyn (2015), "The Servant Problem: African Servants the Making of European Domesticity in Colonial Tanganyika", in D. Hoerder, van Nederveen Meerkerk E., Neunsinger S. (eds.), *Towards a Global History of Domestic and Caregiving Workers*, Leiden, Brill, p. 272.

[3] Iliffe John (2005), *Honour in African History*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p. 287

[4] Jacquemin Mélanie, Tisseau Violaine (2019), "Le balai comme objet politique. Regards sur les domesticités en Afrique", *Politique africaine*, (2), p. 8.

[5] Bujra Janet (2000), *Serving Class: Masculinity and the Feminisation of Domestic Service in Tanzania*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, pp. 6-7.

[6] Brennan James, Burton Andrew (2007), "The Emerging Metropolis: A History of Dar es Salaam, circa 1862-2000", *in* J. Brennan, A. Burton and Y. Lawi (eds.), *Dar es Salaam: Histories from an Emerging African Metropolis*, East Lansing, Michigan State University Press, p. 26.

[7] Pariser Robyn (2013), "Houseboy: Domestic Service and the Making of Colonial Dar es Salaam", PhD thesis, Atlanta, Emory University, p. 46.

[8] Bujra J., *Serving Class*, op. cit., p.7.

[9] Shivji Issa (1983), "Working Class Struggles and Organisation in Tanzania, 1939-1975", *Mawazo*, 5(2), p. 14.

[10] See Stichter Sharon (1975), "The Formation of a Working Class in Kenya", *in* S. Stichter (ed.), *The Development of an African Working Class*, London, Longman, pp. 21-48.

The situation changed in post-colonial Tanzania, when domestic servants became one of the least unionised groups of workers. Since the 1950s, as in other African contexts, there has been a gradual feminisation of paid domestic work, which has been an important form of entry into the urban economy for many women.[11] The rising cost of living transformed the structure of rural and urban households. The number of African women migrating to cities increased significantly towards the end of the colonial era and continued to grow in the post-colonial period. In 1951, women made up only 4% of the workers employed as domestic servants in private households, a percentage that increased to 14% in 1971, and reached 78% in 1990.[12] In 2006, more than 80% of people employed in domestic work were women[13]. The concomitance of lower union militancy and the increasing feminisation of domestic service has led several scholars to argue that women workers were "apolitical" and "passive" compared to their male counterparts, a perspective that has been criticized by many feminist scholars.[14] There are numerous testimonies of unionisation and collective protest by women, as was the case of South Africa in the 1950s, when more than 2,000 nannies went on strike during demonstrations against the pass laws.[15]

This article aims to find some historical explanations about why women domestic workers in Tanzania have not been very active in trade union militancy in recent decades. The reflections it contains arose from my analysis of the testimonies of women domestic workers I collected in the cities of Dar es Salaam and Morogoro between 2018 and 2019 as part of my PhD. research. My ethnographic research was facilitated by Comunità Volontari per il Mondo (CVM), an Italian NGO that supports domestic worker associations in Tanzania. The interviewees included representatives of domestic workers' associations, members of the Conservation, Hotels, Domestic Social Services and Consultancy Workers Union (CHODAWU), and domestic workers who were affiliated or unaffiliated with these organisations. During my research, I visited the offices of these organizations to collect direct testimonies from members and to consult the documentation stored there. I also interviewed representatives of organizations such as the International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF) and the International Organisation of Labour (ILO). With the indispensable support of a local interpreter – without whom the research would not have been possible – I conducted semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, open-ended in-depth interviews, and informal conversations involving domestic workers and employers both during and outside the activities promoted by CVM. In addition, I collected and analysed 25 life stories of female domestic workers (aged between 17 and 30 years) that were subsequently transcribed from Swahili to English for further analysis.[16]

Before it explores the perspective of the domestic workers I interviewed, the article examines a number of historical events that are crucial for understanding the supposedly "weak" mobilization of contemporary domestic workers in Tanzania. Events such as the formation and dissolution of the first domestic servants' union, the emergence of other trade unions, and the influence of the colonial government on them, as well as the 1956 strike (which represented a significant milestone in the struggle for national liberation), and the role of trade unions during and after the socialist period will be outlined. Without a careful review of the relevant historical literature, there would have been a risk that the anthropological research would be superficial, and lack the ability to understand and interpret the point of view of the domestic workers I interviewed, as well as the current strategies they adopt to improve their conditions, including outside trade union structures.[17]

There is a recurring reflection in the article on the influence that feelings of respectability, honour and prestige – or conversely of shame and disdain – associated with domestic service can have on the choices and strategies adopted by domestic servants to defend their interests.

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[11] Hepburn Sacha (2022), *Home Economics: Domestic Service and Gender in Urban Southern Africa*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, pp. 57-58.

[12] Bujra J., *Serving Class*, op. cit., pp.7-8.

[13] Namukasa Aishah (2011), "Africa", *in* H. Schwenken and L. Heimeshoff (eds.), *Domestic Workers Count: Global Data on an Often Invisible Sector*, Kassel, Kassel University Press, p.19.

[14] Lee-Treweek Geraldine (1997), "Women, Resistance and Care: an Ethnographic Study of Nursing Auxiliary Work", *Work, Employment and Society*, 11(2), pp. 47-63.

[15] Cock Jacklyn (1980), *Maids and Madams: A Study in the Politics of Exploitation*, Johannesburg, Ravan Press, p. 53.

[16] The doctoral research is funded within the framework of the Eureka project, which includes co-funding from the Italian NGO Comunità di Volontari per il Mondo (CVM) in Ancona, in the Le Marche Region, and the University of Urbino.

[17] To protect the privacy of the women I interviewed, all the names mentioned in this article are fictitious.

An employment sector worth defending

During the colonial period, initially under German and later under British rule, waged domestic service in Dar es Salaam was a coveted occupation for many men. At least until the 1930s, it was considered to be a privilege reserved for the few, conferring prestige and respectability. As Jonathon Glassman notes about urban centres on the coast in the late 19th century, both urban and rural, Swahili-speaking and non-Swahili-speaking ordinary citizens from coastal and inland villages sought to improve their position in the expanding trade economy by joining the coastal urban community[18]. According to Carol Eastman, people from various ethnic groups sent their children, male and female, to work for affluent Swahili households. For the males, this experience was an opportunity to receive an education and learn the skills necessary to then be employed as domestic servants in colonial homes along the coast[19]. Interestingly, Michelle Liebst describes the case of children, who were often "freed" former slaves, who provided unpaid domestic service for missionaries in rural areas as part of the missions' educational programme. Once they became adults, they began working as paid domestic servants for German colonial administrators and European travellers. In the words of Michelle Liebst: "They were, after all, aspiring to become a version of *waungwana*, coastal freemen."[20]

The advantages of domestic service were many, including relatively high wages, job specialisation, and the possibility of access to the urban cultural environments of the coast, which were viewed as being appropriate to a true "gentleman" (another interpretation of the term *mwungwana*, pl. *waungwana*).[21] Particularly during the period of British colonialism in the 1920s and 1930s, domestic servants' wages were significantly higher than those of sisal plantation workers, miners, and other general labourers. The variety of wages and labour specialisations for domestic servants in Dar es Salaam is clear from the 1930 edition of *The Handbook of Tanganyika*. A competent plain cook could not be hired for less than Shs.40 to Shs.50 a month, whereas a skilled cook commanded Shs.60 to Shs.80. In certain places like Dar es Salaam and Tanga, Goan cooks were primarily employed by hotels, earning around Shs.150 to Shs.200 monthly. Experienced houseboys were paid between Shs.50 and Shs.70 a month in urban areas.[22] In comparison, in Dar es Salaam District agricultural workers and unskilled labourers earned between Shs.20 and Shs.30 a month, while salaries for artisans and skilled workers ranged from Shs.30 to Shs.40 a month. However, in other areas of Tanzania outside Dar es Salaam wages were even lower.[23]

Deborah Bryceson explains that labour migration at the time involved thousands of African men from marginal areas of the country who moved to the sisal plantations along the coast and the central railway line, accepting jobs with "bachelor" wages. Economic activity in Dar es Salaam revolved around government offices and the administrative offices of various commercial enterprises, which required skilled labour. But these positions were mostly open to Indians. Many of them found employment in government offices, but they were numerous and competitive also in the private trade sector. They dominated the business landscape from small businesses to large corporations, enjoyed strong networks of mutual support, and had access to goods and capital, apprenticeships, and training opportunities that were often denied to their African competitors.[24] For African men, therefore, domestic service represented a way to escape the degrading conditions of other jobs in both the countryside and the city.

It was common for wealthy employers, Indian and European alike, to employ five or six domestic staff members, each with their own specific occupation as servants, housekeepers, gardeners, washers, nurses or child keepers, cook and cook's assistants, and so on.[25] As Michelle Liebst explains, a servant's social role was not necessarily elevated, but working for Europeans allowed them to claim status, albeit a precarious one. Servants belonged to a small and relatively affluent category of colonial-era workers who enjoyed a unique,

[18] See Glassman Jonathon (1995), *Feasts and Riot: Revelry, Rebellion, and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast, 1856-1888*, London, James Currey.
[19] Eastman Carol (1994), "Service, Slavery ('Utumwa') and Swahili Social Reality", *Afrikanistische Arbeitspapiere*, 37, pp. 93-94.
[20] Liebst Michelle (2021), *Labour and Christianity in the Mission: African workers in Tanganyika and Zanzibar, 1864-1926*, Woodbridge, Boydell & Brewer. See in particular Chapter 5, p. 182.
[21] Glassman J., *Feasts and Riot…*, *op. cit.,* p. 62.
[22] Gerald Sayers (1930), *The Handbook of Tanganyika*, London, Macmillan and Co., p. 470.
[23] Ibid., pp. 472-473.
[24] Bryceson Deborah Fahy (2018 [1987]), "A Century of Food Supply in Dar Es Salaam: From Sumptuous Suppers for the Sultan to Maize Meal for a Million", *in* J. Guyer (ed.), *Feeding African Cities*, London, Routledge, pp. 155-202.
[25] Bujra J., *Serving Class*, op. cit., p. 81.

close exposure to European cultures[26]. Carol Eastman points out that servants sometimes acquired a reputation as excellent cooks and valets, and their distinctive attire became a symbol of prestige and "civilisation". Their fine attire was associated with the *mwungwana*, and contrasted sharply with the plain clothing, with no cap or shoes, that was typical of the servant status[27]. Maria Suriano points out that in the 1940s, *maboi* (servants) participated with their employers in cultural events that included music practice, the songs and dances associated with modern colonial life, prestige, formal education, and good manners. They played the role of "key cultural brokers, as they saw their European employers dancing at their indoor parties and then taught ballroom dancing to their fellows."[28]

These favourable working conditions began to fade away as the influx of migrant labour into the cities increased. In the 1950s, while employment in the industrial and service sectors diversified considerably, thus increasing the possibility of specialisation, domestic work became a poorly paid form of employment. In those same years, albeit with the due differences, there was a domestic work "crisis" in several European countries, including England and Wales, as well as in the United States, with a significant drop in the number of domestic servants in employment.[29] Matthew Lockwood explains that in Tanganyika, with the food crisis of the 1950s and the accelerating increase in maize prices in the post-war period, wages in all sectors were being squeezed. While nominal wage increases for government and port workers did, in fact, ease their situation to some extent, the relative position of domestic servants was desperate. In 1953, a domestic servant's wage could only buy 15% of the corn he could buy in the 1930s[30]. This situation prompted domestic servants to found a union and lead an increasingly urgent collective mobilisation.

Collective mobilisation and trade union activity (1939-1949)

In 1939, the African Cooks, Washermen and House Servants' Association (ACWHSA) – the original *Chama cha Wapishi na Maboi* (Cooks and Domestic Servants' Association) – was founded in Dodoma. It was one of the first African trade unions to be registered, with official registration taking place in 1945.[31] The union sought government support to provide members with better wages and additional benefits, including medical care and bonuses, and aspired to have its own office, shop, and hostel. Members paid a monthly fee, and one of the objectives was to provide "financial assistance to unemployed servants[32]". The association's by-laws reflected considerable cohesion, emphasising that decisions would be taken without loss of time and unanimously[33].

The formation of the Association was also an attempt on the part of men to preserve male honour and identity, which were being threatened by the transformation of domestic service. This same scenario also manifested itself in other contexts in colonial Africa. Charles Van Onselen interprets the *Amalaita* gangs and youth groups in South Africa as a "houseboys' liberation army" that struggled to reassert their masculinity, which had been compromised during one of the early stages of proletarianization.[34] Lisa Lindsay has shown that trade unionists in colonial Nigeria manipulated and exploited the concept of the "male breadwinner" as a discursive strategy to obtain higher wages and to protest against the rising cost of living during the Second World War.[35] Similarly, in Tanganyika in the same period, masculinity was increasingly being linked to

[26] Liebst M., *Labour and Christianity*…, op. cit., pp. 151-152.
[27] Eastman C., "Service, Slavery ('Utumwa') and Swahili Social Reality", op. cit., p. 94.
[28] Suriano Maria (2011), "Making the Modern: Contestations Over Muziki Wa Dansi in Tanganyika, Ca. 1945-1961", *African Studies*, 70(3), p. 396.
[29] Sarti Raffaella (2006), "Domestic Service: Past and Present in Southern and Northern Europe", *Gender and History,* 18(2), p. 223, Table 1.
[30] Lockwood Matthew (1998), *Fertility and Household Labour in Tanzania: Demography, Economy, and Society in Rufiji District, c.1870-1986*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, p. 77.
[31] Pariser Robyn (2015b), "Masculinity and Organized Resistance in Domestic Service in Colonial Dar es Salaam, 1919-1961", *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 88, p. 114.
[32] Tsuruta Tadasu (2006), "African Imaginations of Moral Economy: Notes on Indigenous Economic Concepts and Practices in Tanzania", *African Studies Quarterly*, 9(1-2), p. 111.
[33] Iliffe John (1979), *A Modern History of Tanganyika,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p. 397.
[34] Van Onselen Charles (1982), "The Witches of Suburbia: Domestic Service on the Witwatersrand, 1890-1914", in C. Van Onselen (ed.), *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand 1886-1914, Vol 2*, London, Longman.
[35] Lindsay Lisa (2007), "Working With Gender: The Emergence of the "Male Breadwinner" in Colonial Southwestern Nigeria", *in* C. Cole, T. Manuh and S. Miescher (eds.), *Africa After Gender?*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, pp. 241-252.

earning a wage in the colonial economy. The discourse on male heads of household thus became a useful strategy for trade unions and individual workers in their dealings with employers and the state.

By September 1948, the ACWHSA boasted fifty-two branches in Tanganyika, with a total of over a thousand members. However, the association was still lacking a structure and had difficulty organising itself, and domestic servants could not afford the costs associated with union membership. In 1948, out of a total of 287 members, only 27 had paid their dues.[36] However, Marjorie Mbilinyi has observed that domestic servants were not as disorganised as it might seem. Colonial racial segregation divided European and Asian communities and African populations hierarchically in all spheres of life: residential areas were racially exclusive, schools were segregated, and types and grades of employment were divided by racial categories. Domestic servants lived in areas of the city that were completely separate from those of their employers, and they were forced to move miles to work every day. They therefore spent their "free time" in segregated communities with co-workers, which allowed them to consolidate solidarity networks, share work experiences, and mobilise to face challenges.[37]

The trade union movement in Tanganyika also progressed through inter-class alliances involving a variety of sectors such as hotel workers, dockers, traders, utility workers, and other more affluent Africans, all of whom were united by a growing anti-colonial sentiment. However, the colonial authorities made several attempts to create alliances to control the emerging trade union movement and to influence its work by directing it towards apolitical, "constructive", and "responsible" choices that did not threaten colonial state power.[38] In some circumstances, there was an alignment of interests between unions and European employers, with the union willing to accept employers' complaints against domestic servants who did not fulfil their duties. Despite these ambiguous alliances, the ACWHSA stood firm in its support for domestic servants' demands for wage increases and recognition of skilled work. It presented numerous petitions to the government and made repeated appeals to meet with colonial officials to discuss the workers' demands. Tired of the union's incessant demands, Labour Officials ceased all communication with the ACWHSA, and its registration was finally cancelled by the Register of Trade Unions in June 1949[39].

Towards the end of autonomous trade unionism (1949-1964)

For several years, and at least from 1949 to 1953, the ACWHSA refused to disband, and bombarded colonial officials with petitions and demands that reached as far as the Colonial Secretary in Britain, the Queen, and the UN Secretary-General. The intimidating tone of the complaints was even more threatening at a time when the Mau Mau rebellion had just started in neighbouring Kenya and a state of emergency had been imposed. Janet Bujra documents that there was even an explicit reference to the riots in Kenya in the letter to the Queen, where Saleh bin Fundi and other representatives of the former ACWHSA wrote: "I do not want to hit people with machetes as is done in Kenya..." (10 September 1953).[40]

The trade union leaders did not fade into the shadows when the ACWHSA was disbanded. In this period, numerous nationalist and anti-colonial movements were forming across the continent and threatening Britain's control of its colonies. The ACWHSA allied itself with Tanganyika's anti-colonial nationalist party, the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU), and its centralised trade union organisation, the Tanganyika Federation of Labour (TFL). With the support of the TANU and TFL, the domestic workers union was reborn in 1955 as the Tanganyika Domestic and Hotel Workers Union (TDHWU), appearing to be larger and better organised.[41]

Shortly after its creation, the TDHWU led one of the largest strikes in the history of Dar es Salaam. It was called in response to the dismissal of some employees in the hotel industry. It was held in December 1956, lasted about three weeks, and in addition to domestic and hotel workers, saw the involvement of workers employed in construction, building, and motor transport. It is estimated that at least 10,000 workers went on strike in Dar es Salaam that year.[42] As a result of the strike, many workers were dismissed.

[36] Pariser R., "Masculinity and…", op. cit., pp. 114-115.
[37] Mbilinyi Marjorie (1985), "'City' and 'Countryside' in Colonial Tanganyika", *Economic and Political Weekly, 20 (43)*, pp. WS-94.
[38] Bujra J., *Serving Class*, op. cit., p. 158.
[39] Pariser R., "Masculinity and…", op. cit., p.119.
[40] Bujra J., *Serving Class*, op. cit., p. 68.
[41] Pariser R., "Masculinity and…", op. cit, pp. 110-111.
[42] Ibid., p. 124.

The atmosphere in Dar es Salaam remained tense throughout December and January 1957, and the TFL threatened to call a nationwide general strike if the workers were not re-employed. A minimum wage was established in Dar es Salaam, for which the trade unions were able to claim credit.[43] By consequence, many domestic servants were dismissed by employers who could not afford to pay their wages, according to a survey conducted by Leslie in 1956.[44] The minimum wage for women was significantly lower than it was for men: the legal wage rate for men of age was 42 shillings an hour, while for women of age it was 32 shillings an hour. If employers provided accommodation, the rate fell to 36 shillings an hour for men and 26 shillings an hour for women. This scenario offered employers a powerful economic incentive to hire young women rather than men.[45]

The TFL and its unions soon showed considerable internal weaknesses. Financial problems were evident, and the unions found themselves unable to collect dues from their members on a regular basis. The alliance between the unions and TANU began to crumble. Many union leaders resented the increasing government control over union activities, and accused the TANU leadership of deception. The government tried to limit the TFL's autonomy and the right to strike. In June 1962, the National Assembly passed three bills, one of which named the TFL as a designated federation, thus effectively giving the government control over it.[46] A second bill introduced new arbitration and conciliation procedures, making it obligatory to follow them before taking any strike action. This bill would essentially have banned official strikes and completely eliminated the possibility for trade unions to call strikes for their members at short notice. The third bill stipulated that civil servants earning more than £702 (US$1,965) per year could not be members of trade unions. This effectively excluded many leaders of state workers' unions[47]. A year later, the Minister of Labour circulated a plan to incorporate the TFL into the Ministry of Labour.

The situation came to a head in 1964 during an unsuccessful military mutiny. At least 200 trade union leaders were arrested on charges of siding with the rebellion. While they were being detained, the government took decisive action, disbanding the TFL and establishing the National Union of Tanganyika Workers (NUTA) as a government-controlled entity affiliated with the TANU and supervised by government appointees[48]. Most of the detained trade unionists were later released. Together with others who had not been arrested, they swore allegiance to and expressed their trust in President Nyerere and his government. This marked the end of autonomous trade unionism in Tanganyika[49].

Post-colonial period: from socialism to liberalisation

During the socialist period (from 1967 to the 1980s), the trade unions, which were initially considered as as an integral part of the socialist movement, were quickly closely controlled by the state. All independent trade unions were outlawed, and membership was transferred to the new central federation. The NUTA comprised nine industrial sections, including Hotel and Domestic Workers. Although there was a provision for an elected Annual Congress, the union members were essentially excluded from day-to-day management of the organisation. NUTA's administrative structure was centralised: the General Secretary and his deputy were appointed by the President of Tanzania, and all other officials were appointed by the General Secretary.[50]

Issa Shivji has documented that the number of strikes dropped dramatically during this period. Between 1965 and 1970, there were only 74 strikes involving 90,308 workers, compared to 561 strikes between 1958 and 1960 (involving about 240,000 workers) and 362 strikes between 1961 and 1964 (involving 99,382 workers). However, there was a new wave of spontaneous strikes involving almost 29,000 workers between 1971 and 1973. This time, the leadership was not in the hands of the organised trade unions but of the workers, who skilfully exploited the role of workers' committees, which had been officially established as

[43] Friedland William H. (1969), *Vuta Kamba: the Development of Trade Unions in Tanganyika,* Stanford, Hoover Institution Press, p. 22.
[44] Leslie J. A. K. (1963), *A Survey of Dar es Salaam*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, p. 5.
[45] Pariser R., *Houseboy*, op. cit., pp. 222-223.
[46] Tordofj William (1966) "Trade Unionism in Tanzania", *The Journal of Development Studies, 2(4)*, pp. 414-415.
[47] Friedland W., *Vuta Kamba*, op. cit., p. 128.
[48] Bujra J., *Serving Class*, op. cit., p. 65.
[49] Tordofj W., "Trade Unionism in Tanzania", op. cit, p. 417.
[50] Bienefeld Manfred A. (1979), "Trade Unions, the Labour Process, and the Tanzanian State", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 17.4, p. 581.

disciplinary bodies but not subject to direct supervision by trade union bodies.[51] The aim of the spontaneous and localised strikes of this period, which lasted for the next five years, was to oppose owners and bureaucratic leaders.

In 1978, the NUTA took the name "Jumuiya ya Wafanyi Kazi wa Tanzania" (JUWATA, Union of Tanzania Workers), and became a de facto extension of state power, and followed directives from the single party, the *Chama Cha Mapinduzi* (CCM, Party of the Revolution). All workers automatically became union members upon employment, and their dues were deducted from their wages. Those whose employment was difficult to keep track of, such as domestic servants, were exceptions to this rule.[52] This group no longer saw the union as a suitable instrument to represent their grievances. Many of them deplored the employment practices of the new master class, viewed the JUWATA as a corrupt body and equated it with the state power enemy of the workers. Janet Bujra documents that in the 1980s, domestic and hotel workers accounted for only 3% of total union membership; in 1986 they were 9,964 out of a total of 342,468 members[53]. For their part, JUWATA officials tried to increase the number of members by putting pressure on employers, but they were not committed to the struggle for working class rights and did not look favourably on worker unrest.

The 1980s were a period of severe economic stagnation and decline, with high inflation and a drastic drop in real wages that affected even the highest management levels. Despite this, there was no drop in demand for domestic servants: on the contrary, Asian entrepreneurs and members of the new African ruling class needed domestic support for a variety of reasons, including sustaining the wage employment of both spouses and carrying on small private business activities that were considered to be unlawful, but were unofficially widespread.[54] In this context, the female workers who were migrating from the countryside to the cities in increasing numbers saw the domestic services abandoned by men as one of the few concrete opportunities for urban employment.

From 1985 on, in the face of the economic crisis, the Tanzanian government began a process of economic reform and liberalisation, under pressure from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The main consequences of economic liberalisation manifested themselves in drastic and punitive cuts in state employment and public services, and the growth of the informal/unofficial economy. Many workers from different social classes, from the poor to wealthy entrepreneurs, undertook additional income-generating activities in the new and growing informal economy.[55] In 1991, the Leadership Code was repealed. That same year, JUWATA gained independence from the CCM and became the Organisation of Tanzanian Trade Unions (OTTU), although this transformation did not lead to a truly autonomous trade unionism.[56]

Since then, trade unions have alternated between constant government control and efforts to establish themselves as autonomous civil society organisations. In 2000, the current federation, the Trade Union Congress of Tanzania (TUCTA), was established with voluntary rather than compulsory membership.[57] Among its affiliates is the Conservation, Hotels, Domestic, Social Services and Consultancy Workers Union (CHODAWU), which was established in 1995 with the aim of defending and fighting for the rights of domestic and other workers (conservation, hotels, social welfare, and counselling institutions).[58] However, only a small percentage of domestic workers are members. In 2013, the CHODAWU indicated only 5,200 registered domestic workers out of a total membership of 36,000. In 2019, when I visited the CHODAWU office in Dar es Salaam, the number of members had exceeded 40,000, of whom about 8,000 were domestic workers. Of these, 98 per cent were women.[59]

[51] Shivji Issa G. (1976), *Class Struggles in Tanzania*, New York and London, Monthly Review Press, pp. 134-136.
[52] Fischer Gundula (2013), "Revisiting Abandoned Ground: Tanzanian Trade Unions' Engagement with Informal Workers", *Labor Studies Journal*, 38(2), p. 147.
[53] Bujra J., *Serving Class*, op. cit., p. 165-166.
[54] Ibid., p. 10.
[55] See Lugalla Joe (1997), "Development, Change, and Poverty in the Informal Sector During the Era of Structural Adjustments in Tanzania", *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 31(3), pp. 424-451.
[56] Hagglund George (1994), "Trade Unions and Labor Education in East Africa", *Labor Studies Journal*, 19(1), p. 83.
[57] Fischer G., "Revisiting Abandoned Ground", op. cit, p. 147.
[58] International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF) (2014), *Report Findings on the Process towards Ratification of C189 in Tanzania*, Dar es Salaam, Research Reports, p. 8.
[59] Annual Report of CHODAWU, 2019, accessed on 13/08/2019 at the CHODAWU office in Dar es Salaam.

Contemporary women's domestic work

Currently, the percentage of women involved in domestic service in Tanzania is significantly higher than that of men. A 2016 study by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) revealed that there were at least 883,779 domestic workers on the mainland and 203,622 in Zanzibar. Taking into account those engaged in informal domestic work, who may not be officially recognised as workers, this figure grows to at least 1,728,228 across Tanzania, with women making up 75 per cent of the total.[60]

The same small percentage of African male domestic workers continues to work in Dar es Salaam and other cities, mainly in the homes of wealthier European and Asian families, leaving African women to do the lower paid work in the homes of less affluent Africans and Asians[61]. In post-colonial Tanzania, paid domestic work is increasingly seen as a female task, and it has lost the significance it once had. In this context, with the change in the type of work and the profile of the workers performing it, domestic workers have "forgotten" their history of collective action. During my ethnographic research in Tanzania, no one remembered specific events such as the 1956 strike or other significant actions of domestic workers. A representative of the CHODAWU union made only this general comment: "The domestic workers worked in the settlers' houses. They definitely participated in the country's struggles for independence"[62]. Several of the individuals I interviewed (domestic workers, employers, and trade union representatives) associated the domestic workers' revolts with the struggles against colonial rule, without any reference to eventual demands at the time to improve working conditions. Furthermore, with regard to trade unions, all those I interviewed, both domestic workers and representatives of current trade unions, stated that such unions "did not exist" in the past. No one remembered the ACWHSA of the 1940s or other later unions. In their testimonies, the creation of trade unions is a recent event, the result of a growing awareness of women workers' rights and an effort by various national and international organisations to make exploitative conditions at work visible.

Domestic work is devalued today. Wages are extremely low and domestic work is portrayed as a simple, unskilled job that anyone can do. The wages of the domestic workers I interviewed ranged between TZS 30,000 (EUR 11) and TZS 70,000 (EUR 26) per month, with very few exceptions of women earning between TZS 70,000 and TZS 100,000 (EUR 37). The average monthly salary was 50,000 TZS (18 euro). At the time in which we met, the interviewed women were employed as live-in domestic workers by middle-class Tanzanian households and were paid a monthly salary. However, they had also experienced periods of unpaid work or compensation in other forms in the past, such as occasional small amounts of pocket money, gifts in kind for their families, or assistance with school expenses.

Domestic workers perform a wide variety of tasks, ranging from housekeeping to childcare, and from preparing meals to washing dishes and clothes and running small household errands. There is a very thin line between paid and unpaid domestic work, which is usually performed in the service of "family members" in extended families. Most of the women I interviewed between 2018 and 2019 had spent several years – often during childhood or adolescence – doing unpaid work in exchange for an education, a promise that was often not kept. In the course of time, these women changed jobs, alternating between paid and unpaid work and moving from one house to another in the hope of finding better working conditions. Sara recounted:

> I worked for many years at my aunt and uncle's without receiving any remuneration. I was just a young girl and I accepted those conditions, but I thought that one day I would find a better job, maybe with a rich European family that pays you a lot of money and gives you fine European clothes.[63]

Whereas during the colonial period, unpaid domestic service, for instance with affluent "Swahili" households[64] or European missionaries[65], was seen by male domestic servants as an apprenticeship for future paid employment in the homes of Europeans, today many female workers see unpaid domestic work in local African households as a preparation for future paid work, perhaps with affluent African households or ideally, with "Western" families offering higher wages. However, in their various work experiences, female workers rarely encounter the desired working conditions. Moreover, the aspiration of many women is not

[60] ILO (2016), *A Situational Analysis of Domestic Workers in the United Republic of Tanzania*, Dar es Salaam, ILO Country Office Dar es Salaam, pp. 98, 109.
[61] Pariser R., "Masculinity and…", op. cit., p. 125.
[62] Moses, 55 years old, interview conducted on 16 September 2018, Dar es Salaam.
[63] Sara, 22 years old, interview conducted on 25 October 2018, Dar es Salaam.
[64] Eastman C., "Service, Slavery ('Utumwa') and Swahili Social Reality", op. cit., pp. 93-94.
[65] Liebst M., *Labour and Christianity*…, op. cit., pp. 151-152.

to remain in domestic work. Employers experience a constant turnover of female workers and fear that their employees may leave suddenly. As one male employer put it:

> It is no longer like in the past, when it was easy to find a girl from the village. Today the girls are not grateful; they look for other job opportunities in the big cities. If they decide to leave, they leave without even giving notice.[66]

Domestic work, even when it is well paid, is generally seen as "temporary", and at best as a stepping stone to other jobs, for example in luxury hotels, or to make a change in one's life, perhaps by emigrating and working as a domestic worker abroad before seeking other job opportunities. In Ester's words:

> I would like to work for Western families because they might help me emigrate. Maybe they will take me with them to Europe, I will work as a caregiver there and then get married there.[67]

On the one hand, women are able to use domestic work to establish new relationships with affluent people in the city, enabling them to obtain a form of protection and tutelage that would otherwise be inaccessible. This is especially true for women who do not have a basic support network in their home community. Vestina, for example, claims to have found an indispensable refuge in domestic work, the only job in which it is possible to secure some form of protection on a temporary basis in the absence of alternatives,.

> My father had died and my mother, who was very sick, told me: go work as a domestic worker in the city. Learn how to live and educate yourself.[68]

On the other hand, domestic workers are subjected to multiple forms of exploitation and discrimination, and domestic work is considered by employers and the community at large to be a "valueless" occupation. Many female workers have reported cases in which employers have insulted and verbally abused them, using derogatory terms associated with the animal kingdom. For example, they used phrases such as "Dog, come here!". Between the 1920s and 1930s, men in the service of the colonists could "boast" that they were selected for a well-paid form of employment that was reserved for a privileged few who wore fine clothes similar to those of the "gentlemen" of the coast. In contrast, today's domestic workers complain that their profession is seen by others as extremely degrading, a judgment that is also reflected in their humble attire:

> It is easy to identify a domestic worker on the street. Just look at her modest clothes. People comment "that must be a domestic worker".[69]

The disdain associated with domestic work influences the tendency of female workers to view it as a transitional job. As one girl, who seemed to be worried about the passing of time, put it:

> I cannot stay in this house (the employers') forever. There will come a day when I can no longer work as a domestic worker[70].

In fact, girls are only considered "real" women after marriage and motherhood, goals that are difficult to achieve for those who work full-time as live-in domestic workers. Their situation is very different from that of male domestic servants who, during the colonial period in Tanzania, consolidated their "masculinity" through this work, achieving a certain social prestige and improving their social status.

This does not mean that domestic work cannot be a strategy for social advancement for today's women: in some cases it is, especially for women coming from conditions of extreme poverty and lacking support networks. They manage to overcome various difficulties through domestic work in the city, and can also offer material support to their families at home. However, domestic work is no longer associated with a potentially prestigious, respectable and therefore defensible occupation. In this context, what role do trade unions and the various organisations fighting for the rights of domestic workers play?

[66] Magesa, 50 years old, interview conducted on 15 October 2019, Dar es Salaam.
[67] Ester, 20 years old, interview conducted on 15 October 2019, Dar es Salaam.
[68] Vestina, 20 years old, interview conducted on 14 August 2019, Dar es Salaam.
[69] Ratifa, 25 years old, interview conducted on 26 August 2019, Dar es Salaam.
[70] Leonia, 21 years old, interview conducted on 11 August 2019, Dar es Salaam.

Trade unions, associations and collective mobilisation: is it worth it?

In 2018 and 2019, I met several domestic workers who are members of the CHODAWU union. These contacts were facilitated by the CVM, which over the past ten years has promoted the creation of domestic workers' associations collaborating with CHODAWU and international organisations such as ILO and IDWF. Trade unions and associations work together to defend the rights of women workers and promote ratification of ILO Convention 189 on decent domestic work. In this context, the association and trade union models appear to be complementary and mutually reinforcing[71]; however, women workers who are members of trade unions and associations only participate irregularly. One common scenario is for a worker to join the union, attend meetings once or twice and then not go any more. A CHODAWU representative explained:

> Sometimes they join and then disappear into thin air. They are afraid of their employers, they fear that if they participate in union activities they will lose their jobs. [...] The most difficult thing is to reach the many domestic workers who do not know about CHODAWU, especially those who live in the households of their employers. When I meet a woman on the 'daladala' (minibus), I recognise from the way she is dressed whether she is a domestic worker or not. I take the opportunity to tell her about the union and invite her to a meeting. [...] Every woman should do the same and involve other workers, but often women do not do this because they are afraid. Moreover, domestic workers have very little free time. They are always locked in the house working.[72]

The most active trade unionists I met were no longer working or had never worked as domestic workers. Most of them claimed to have had some experience as part-time domestic workers several years earlier, but their work history seemed more similar to that of many of the employers I met, rather than that of most of the domestic workers I interviewed, who did not show much enthusiasm when talking about the role of trade unions. Their lack of participation in union activities is due not only to the fear of being judged negatively by employers and consequently losing their jobs, but also to a lack of trust in the union itself. One worker explicitly said:

> CHODAWU asked me to pay a membership fee. I have difficulty saving money for my family and I am not going to give money to an organisation that is perhaps only interested in my small savings.[73]

At our first meeting, many women probably perceived me as a collaborator of the unions and did not feel free to express their true views. Their first comments on the union were therefore generic and positive. Later, after I had got to know them better and was interviewing them for a second or third time, they would begin to express their hesitations. One woman I had met at an information event organised by CHODAWU confided to me:

> I have noticed that these trade unionists use the same terms as politicians to get votes. They say, 'Comrade, join us!' Haven't you noticed that? I think they want to attract people because they are allies of the government.[74]

Unlike union meetings, women participate more actively in meetings of Domestic Workers' Associations, which often consist of gatherings to share work experiences with each other and discuss advantages and disadvantages, and difficulties and opportunities, and collectively develop solutions to improve domestic work conditions. However, it needs to be considered that these Associations are directly promoted by the NGO I worked with, so the dynamics I observed were strongly influenced by my relationship with the NGO itself. Moreover, becoming a member of the Associations does not entail any payment of membership fees. Rather, the hope is that they will benefit from donations offered by the NGO, for example through local economic development projects, income-generating activities, vocational training courses and other periodic initiatives promoted by the NGO. Among the activities organised by CVM are some aimed at "professionalising" the domestic sector, which have been sponsored by numerous international labour rights organisations in recent years. In 2019, CVM coordinated specific courses for the domestic workers associations in collaboration with the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) centres in Morogoro and Dar es Salaam. The training courses covered a wide range of topics, including cooking, food and beverage management, elderly and child care, housekeeping, cleaning, occupational safety, risk prevention and management, hotel

[71] See Ally Shireen (2005), "Caring About Care Workers: Organizing in the Female Shadow of Globalization", *Labour, Capital and Society/Travail, capital et société*, 38(1/2), pp. 184-207.
[72] Angel, 26 years old, interview conducted on 06 August 2019, Dar es Salaam.
[73] Amina, 23 years old, interview conducted on 24 September 2018, Dar es Salaam.
[74] Zema, 25 years old, interview conducted on 04 September 2019, Dar es Salaam.

management, reception services, and more. At the end of the course, the participants received a certificate of professional qualification labelled "domestic service."[75]

From the point of view of women domestic workers, this "professionalisation" of work does not have the same value it had for male domestic servants during the colonial period. For the latter, skilled and specialised domestic work represented an opportunity to obtain prestige and gain respectability in society. In contemporary Tanzania, female domestic workers do not demonstrate a strong attachment to the concept of "professionalism", nor are they proud of the skills associated with their work. Female domestic workers do not aspire to a career in the sector because they know that domestic work, in both Tanzania and other parts of the world, is commonly viewed as unskilled. From their point of view, the vocationalisation courses are attractive insofar as they might enable some of them to change career fields, perhaps finding employment in hotels. None of the women I met believed that the TVET certificate would allow them to improve their working conditions as domestic workers or to be perceived by others as "skilled domestic workers". Deborah made this view clear, arguing that no matter how much effort is put in, conditions for domestic workers in Tanzania will never change:

> Tanzanian employers are not willing to pay higher wages. This will never change. My first job was with an uncle. He promised me that I would go to school, but the work was so much that he only rarely let me go, while his children attended classes every day. To them I was just a village girl, and always will be... For a domestic worker, there is only one way to improve one's job status: to find a job with a very rich household, for example a Western family.[76]

Conclusion: a question of prestige

Any form of activism, whether trade union or associative, requires a considerable investment of time, energy, and often money. The numerous instances of mobilisation in Africa, both female and male, in different places and at different times, have demonstrated the capacity of domestic workers to organise and fight for their rights. One significant example of this is the men's trade union mobilisations in Tanganyika in the 1940s, when wage-earning domestic servants in the service of the colonists tried to defend a threatened labour sector that until recently had been well paid and considered prestigious. However, many domestic servants ceased to actively participate in trade unions when they came under state control, concluding that trade unions no longer represented their interests or that it was not worth investing any more energy in the defence of these interests.

In contemporary Tanzania, most women domestic workers prefer not to join unions such as CHODAWU, expressing distrust of it and believing that it is unable to bring about significant change. Instead, they choose to invest in alternative strategies outside association and union networks to improve their working conditions. On the one hand, they safeguard their relationship with their employers, thus gaining a form of protection and tutelage. At the same time, they prepare to change households several times, moving from one house to another and using the information gained from the experiences of other female workers.

The mobility of women is increasingly evident as they grow up. It is common for adolescent girls to work for a household for several years, whether kin or not, without receiving any remuneration. They then leave this household to take up paid domestic work. From then on, they change employers frequently, looking for the ideal family that can offer them a better situation. One common example is the "Western" family that might decide to take the girl abroad with them. In fact, women perceive domestic work as a "temporary" job, a potential stepping stone to a new life and new work opportunities. Domestic work is never seen as a sector that might confer prestige and respectability, except, perhaps, in the case of the "girl working in Europe or America for a very rich family!", as indicated by several female workers.

The low level of mobilisation of domestic workers in Tanzania through trade unions and associations is therefore not only due to the "little free time" they have and their "fear of employers". The history of domestic service in Tanganyika has taught us that during the colonial period, trade union and association militancy – besides being fomented by a particular anti-colonial and pro-independence sentiment – responded to the individual and collective desire of men to defend a certain threatened prestige, honour, and respectability.

[75] These qualification certificates were shown to me by the domestic workers who had attended the course when I visited them at the TVET Mikuni centre in Morogoro at the end of the course in October 2019.
[76] Deborah, 19 years old, interview conducted on 08 October 2019, Dar es Salaam.

Today, women workers are not motivated to openly defend a job that confers no prestige and whose conditions, according to many of them, "cannot change". Nevertheless, the various daily strategies they adopt to improve their living conditions reflect women's desire for and action to achieve change, even outside trade union and association networks.

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