



The Second Sex: Women's Liberation and Media in Post-Independence Tanzania

By Fatma Alloo



Fatma Alloo's activism grew in the decades following Tanzania's independence in 1961, when she worked as a journalist under Julius Nyerere, or Mwalimu, the first president of Tanzania; co-founded the feminist advocacy group Tanzania Media Women's Association (TAMWA) in 1987; and co-founded the vibrant Zanzibar International Film Festival (ZIFF) in 1997. Here, she unpacks how women used the media and cultural spaces for social mobilization and shifting patriarchal norms, particularly in periods where they were marginalized from state power. In the "Reclaiming Africa's Early Post-Independence History" series, and the Post-Colonialisms Today project more broadly, we're learning from African activists and policy makers from the early post-independence era, to understand how their experience of a unique period of economic, societal, cultural, and regional transformation can aid us in the present day, when questions of decolonization and liberation are more pressing than ever.

Heba M. Khalil: *You have lived through so many changes in so many different political systems, from the Sultanate, colonialism, the Nyerere years; you've seen the dawning of liberalism and neoliberalism.*

Fatma Alloo: As you say, I've been through a lot of "-isms" in Tanzania. The other day I was reflecting that although I grew up under colonialism in Zanzibar, as a child I was not aware that it

was colonialism, I was not aware there was a Sultanate. We used to run and wave to the Sultan because he was the only one with a shiny, red car and we used to love that car, a red Rolls Royce. But as I reflect now, I realized that these were the years Mwalimu was struggling for independence in Tanganyika.

Then, of course, as you grow, life takes you on a journey, and I ended up at the University of Dar es Salaam in the 1970s, where the Dar es Salaam debates were taking place. Tanzania hosted liberation movements, and that is where socialism, communism, Marxism, Leninism, Trotskyism, Maoism, and feminism were being debated, and that's where my consciousness grew, because I was in the midst of it. As the progressive, international community at the university was ideologically fired up by Mwalimu's socialism, I began to understand that even my feminism had come from the West. Nobody had taught me that women lived feminism on the continent. This realization came when, as a student, I participated in an adult literacy program launched by Mwalimu. As students, we were sent to a rural and urban factory to teach literacy, but I emerged from those communities having been taught instead!

Heba M. Khalil: *What do you think the role of women was in Tanzania in particular, but also on the continent, in defining the parameters, the choices and the imagination of post-independence Africa?*

Fatma Alloo: Women had always been part and parcel of the independence movement in Africa. In Southern Africa and Tanzania they stood side-by-side with the men to fight, so they were very much part of it. The unique thing about Tanzania was that Mwalimu established a party called the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU), which had five wings with women being one of them. The others were youth, peasants, and workers, so as to mobilize society as a whole.

Post-independence is another story, one that very often has been narrated by men in power. There was a struggle for the visibility of women. I remember the debates in South Africa, where the African National Congress was arguing about the women's wing wanting to discuss power relations. And there was resistance to this, the party leaders would argue first let's just get independence, let's not waste our time, women's liberation will come later. It was a very bitter struggle, and of course after independence, women lost out quite a bit.

Heba M. Khalil: *Why were post-independence power structures and ideologies defeated and replaced at some point by new ideologies of liberalism and, eventually, neoliberalism?*

Fatma Alloo: The western media portrays Mwalimu as a failure. He has not failed, from my point of view. The whole issue of national unity is important. Tanzania has been a relatively peaceful country. Why? It did not happen by accident, it had to do with Mwalimu's policies—he realized he had to deal with profound divisions, and he understood the role of education. Administratively, the nation had been inherited after decades of divide and rule policies. It was divided on racial and religious bases, as Tanzania is half Christian and half Muslim. We could have had a civil war, like in Lebanon, or a tribal-oriented conflict, like in Kenya or Libya. Mwalimu really understood this from the very beginning. I remember when we started TAMWA, when the women came together, we had no idea who belonged to what tribe. He was that successful.

We had free medicine, free education, but of course, all that went away with neoliberalism. My generation remembers this, and I think we have to make sure that the younger generation knows the history of the country, knows the literature that emerged from the continent. In my opinion, of all the contributions of Mwalimu, the most important was the peace and unity—*amani*, in Kiswahili.

Because Mwalimu was so successful, the West, especially Scandinavian countries, made him their darling. As you know, Scandinavian countries had not colonized Africa much, so people also trusted

them and accepted their development aid. Very sadly, it did eat away at the success of Mwalimu with his people, and eventually made us dependent on that development aid, which continues to date. Without development aid we don't seem to be able to move on anything. We have stopped relying on ourselves.

Heba M. Khalil: *What was your experience of organizing during the rapid growth of the mass media sector in Tanzania?*

Fatma Alloo: I was very active, first as a journalist in the 1980s and early 1990s, and it was extremely different. We were very influenced by Mwalimu's ideology and ready to play our role to change the world. Mwalimu had refused to introduce television because, he argued at that time, we did not have our own images to portray, to empower our younger generations. He said if we introduce television the images shown will be of the West and the imperialist ideology will continue. In Zanzibar, however, we already had the oldest television on the continent, and it was in color. When Abeid Karume attained power in Zanzibar in 1964, after a bloody overthrow of the sultanate in power, the first thing he did was to introduce not only television, but community media, so every village in Zanzibar already had these images. But television didn't come to Tanganyika until 1992 (Mwalimu stepped down in 1986), when it was introduced by a local businessman who established his own station. Until then the state had controlled the media, so history began to change as businesses were allowed to establish media.

I remember I was then in TAMWA and we had to encourage a lot of production of plays and other visuals, for which there was no market before. The radio had been powerful; when the peasants went to the countryside, they would take the radio and listen as they ploughed the land. So, the radio was the main tool that was used to mobilize society during Mwalimu's era.

The press gave women journalists little chance to cover issues of importance to women. We were given health or children to cover as our issues. Before, Tanzania had one English paper, one Kiswahili, Uhuru, and one party paper. By 1986, there were 21 newspapers, and it became easier for us to really influence the press, and TAMWA began talking about issues like sexual harassment at work. But it was a double-edged sword, because the television stations recruited pretty girls to do the news reading, and the girls also wanted to be seen on television as it was a novelty. So, while we were expanding the conversation on the portrayal of women, here was television, where women were used as sex objects. The struggle continues, *a luta continua*.

Heba M. Khalil: *How are movements trying to achieve change on the continent, particularly youth movements or younger generations, by utilizing media and cultural spaces?*

Fatma Alloo: The youth need to develop tools of empowerment at an educational level and at an organizational level. Africa is a young continent, and our hope is the youth. Many youth are very active at a cultural level, they may not be in universities but at a cultural level they are extremely visible, in music, dance, and street theater.

At the moment, you see the pan-African dream has sort of lost the luster it had during independence. Even if you look at the literature of that time, it was a collective dream for Africa to unite—Bob Marley had a song "Africa Unite," we used to dance to it and we used to really identify with it, and the literature—Franz Fanon, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Sembène Ousmane, Miriam Ba, Nawal al Saadawi—and also the films that came out. In fact, Egypt was the first country to produce amazing films; when we established the Zanzibar International Film Festival (ZIFF), in our first year we showed a film from Egypt, *The Destiny* by Youssef Chahine.

Zanzibar International Film Festival was born because we asked the question, "If we in Africa do not

tell our stories, who will?" We ask that question particularly to train and stimulate the production of films on the continent, including in Kiswahili, because while West Africa has many films, East Africa lags behind. The festival has been in existence for 21 years. This part of the world has more than 120 million people who speak Kiswahili, so the market is there. We also encourage a lot of young producers and we encourage putting a camera in children's hands, because from my own experience, children get so excited when they can create their own images. Twenty-one years later, these children are now adults, and they are the directors and the producers in this region. So, one has to play a role in impacting change and liberating consciousness on our vibrant and rich continent.

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