

## Anna Cichecka

University of Wrocław (Poland)  
ORCID: 0000-0002-7837-5684  
e-mail: [anna.cichecka@uwr.edu.pl](mailto:anna.cichecka@uwr.edu.pl)

## Andrzej Polus

University of Wrocław (Poland)  
ORCID: 0000-0002-6305-1599  
e-mail: [andrzej.polus@uwr.edu.pl](mailto:andrzej.polus@uwr.edu.pl)

# Why Did “the Bulldozer”<sup>1</sup> Want to Run Over the Women? Contextualization of Anti-Women Rhetoric in Tanzanian Politics under John Magufuli<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** This article examines the transformation of political discourse on women’s rights and women-oriented NGOs in Tanzania, focusing on successive state administrations within the same political party, led by John Pombe Magufuli and Jakaya Kikwete. The analysis unfolds through three key phases: first, characterizing the habitus of Tanzanian women’s NGOs; second, examining the evolving narratives in government-NGO relations; and third, briefly exploring the political discourse during the Kikwete and Magufuli presidencies. The research methodology is based on extensive desk research and two field studies conducted in Tanzania. Rather than adhering to a preconceived theory, our research approach is guided by theorems and selected frameworks. Pierre Bourdieu’s theoretical concepts, particularly ‘habitus’ and the ‘exchangeability of different forms of capital,’ underpin our argument and interpretation of the data. The study shows that while elements of anti-feminism are evident in Magufuli’s political discourse, accusations of promoting toxic masculinity are mainly unfounded. At the same time, it argues that the critique of women’s empowerment and women-focused NGOs can be attributed to Magufuli’s unique mode of accumulating political and economic capital, leading to heightened distrust in the relationship between these NGOs and the Tanzanian government.

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<sup>1</sup> The nickname “Bulldozer” was given to Tanzanian President John Magufuli because he was known for pushing through policies and projects with great determination and force, much like a bulldozer removes obstacles in its path.

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**Keywords:** Tanzania, women's rights, women-oriented NGOs, John Magufuli, Jakaya Kikwete, habitus, Bourdieu, political discourse

## Introduction

Under the leadership of John Pombe Magufuli (JPM), Tanzania was recognized as a country that harbored antagonistic sentiments towards non-governmental organizations (NGOs) advocating for women's rights<sup>3</sup> (Peoples, 2019; Boryczka, 2020)<sup>4</sup>. The late president was also acknowledged for his recurrent utilization of anti-feminist discourse<sup>5</sup>. His approach towards the NGO sector stood in direct contradiction to the pronouncements of his presidential predecessor. Tanzanian writer Neema Komba poetically stated, "A toxic form of masculinity has infected politics in Tanzania" (Komba, 2019, pp. 45-47). Among other noteworthy elements in the feminist dialogue, JPM was predominantly linked to his public declarations that characterized women who employed contraception as "lazy". He asserted that such women were evading their responsibilities towards child-rearing. Arguably, his most contentious policy was the prohibition of pregnant girls from attending school. This decision was contested by numerous NGOs and left-leaning media outlets (Ratcliffe, 2017). However, the president held firm and presented a range of rationales – from the potential inability of pregnant girls and young mothers to focus on their studies to the contention that their presence was causing disruptions among their peers. In response to allegations that his decision violated the constitution (notably, Tanzania has one of the highest rates of teenage pregnancy worldwide<sup>6</sup>), Magufuli resolutely reaffirmed his stance by stating, "As long as I am president... no pregnant student will be allowed to return to school... After becoming pregnant, your educational journey ends" (BBC, 2021). The anti-feminist mobilization

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<sup>3</sup> "NGOs advocating for women's rights" refer to NGOs that primarily focus their efforts, initiatives, and resources on addressing women's issues, advancing gender equality, promoting women's rights, and improving the overall well-being and empowerment of women. These organizations are dedicated to advocating for women's social, economic, political, and legal rights, often working to eliminate gender-based discrimination, violence, and other barriers that hinder women's progress. See more: Reilly, N. (Ed.). (2009). *Gender and NGOs: Feminist perspectives*. Zed Books.

<sup>4</sup> Most likely, President Magufuli will be remembered as the only world leader who openly contested the Covid-19 pandemic.

<sup>5</sup> It refers to the use of language, arguments, or actions that oppose or criticize the principles, goals, and values of feminism. It involves expressing ideas that undermine or reject the concepts of gender equality, women's rights, and efforts to address gender-based discrimination and inequalities. Anti-feminist rhetoric often seeks to challenge or counteract feminist movements and their objectives. See more: Faludi, S. (1991). *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*. New York: Crown.

<sup>6</sup> According to UNFPA, 27% of Tanzanian teenage girls 15–19 years old have either given birth or were pregnant in 2016 (UNFPA 2018).

under JPM was intertwined with anti-neoliberal rhetoric<sup>7</sup> and censure of foreign investors. Significantly, even the neoliberal publication “The Economist” refrained from producing any affirmative pieces concerning JPM, focusing instead on scrutinizing his economic determinations. Nonetheless, JPM’s political narrative cohered around themes of reinstating the “traditional family” structure and opposing “gender ideology”.

President Magufuli’s forceful anti-women rhetoric sharply contrasted with the stance of his predecessor. Jakaya Kikwete vowed to increase women’s political participation, expedite the implementation of gender equality policies, and ensure that NGOs that advocate for women’s rights are in the lead in this process. During a political rally in Morogoro, he proclaimed, “I am proud to have created an enabling environment for women’s economic empowerment that has helped to improve their material well-being, [...] and it wasn’t like I was doing them a favor. It was their right” (Corey-Boulet 2018). The commitment of President Kikwete’s administration to gender equality and women’s empowerment was also acknowledged on an international scale (Madaha, 2014, p. 18).

Therefore, the significance of this research topic is multifaceted and merits thoughtful consideration. Firstly, the transition from focusing on gender equality and empowerment under Kikwete to Magufuli’s anti-feminist stance underscores a pronounced shift in Tanzanian contemporary political discourse. This shift invites analysis of the drivers and implications of such changes in official policy and rhetoric, shedding light on the evolving priorities of the Tanzanian government regarding gender issues. Secondly, the apparent paradox embedded within Magufuli’s political discourse, characterized by simultaneous anti-feminist rhetoric and anti-neoliberal sentiment, presents a unique and intriguing focus for investigation. This convergence of seemingly divergent ideologies prompts critical inquiry into socio-political dynamics, gender relations, and economic ideologies within the Tanzanian context.

It is also worth noting that the academic discourse on equality policies in sub-Saharan Africa is well-established. In the 1990s, many general studies were devoted to the shape and change in the Tanzanian non-governmental sector. In the 2000s, authors turned to case studies. The overview of the growth of the non-governmental sector in Tanzania in the 1980s and 1990s was presented by Lange, Wallevik, and Kiondo (2000). Mercer (1999) ruminated on the state of the Tanzanian government’s relations with the non-governmental sector, along with expectations as to the role of NGOs in the political process in the 20<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Anti-neoliberal rhetoric involves criticizing or opposing the principles of neoliberalism, i.e. limited government intervention, free markets, deregulation, and individual economic freedoms. It may involve advocating for stronger government control, social welfare programs, and collective solutions to economic and social issues. Critics of neoliberalism argue that it can lead to inequality, privatization, and negative social consequences, and they express these concerns through anti-neoliberal rhetoric. See more: Klein, N. (2007). *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. New York: Metropolitan Books; Harvey, D. (2005). *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

century<sup>8</sup>. Numerous publications also exist on government oversight of society and the non-governmental sector (Kelsall, 2002; Tripp, 2003). While the topic of reversing equality policies in sub-Saharan Africa is visible in the discourse, an attempt to understand the (discursive) hostility of the JPM administration towards women-oriented NGOs has not yet been undertaken.

Consequently, the **primary objective of this study is to analyze and characterize the shift in contemporary political discourse on women's rights and women-oriented NGOs in Tanzania over two successive state administrations from the same political party<sup>9</sup>.**

The article is structured into four sections. The paper first gives an overview of the methodology and theoretical background. The subsequent section attempts to characterize the habitus of Tanzanian women's rights NGOs. The third part portrays changing narratives about the government's relationship with women's NGOs. Following this, the fourth section analyzes the capital creation and accumulation under the presidencies of Jakaya Kikwete and John Magufuli. The final section of the article offers concluding reflections.

## Methodology and Theoretical Background

Our aim – to examine and portray the shift in the contemporary discourse concerning women's rights and women-oriented NGOs in Tanzania – has determined the qualitative nature of the research. This encompassed extensive desk research and two field studies in Tanzania, conducted in September 2015 and from September to October 2016. The field research involved semistructured in-depth interviews around an adaptable set of questions. These interviews were held with individuals associated with women's rights advocacy and representatives from the political sphere and intellectuals, totaling 27 in-depth interviews. Respondents were selected using a "snowball sampling" approach. Throughout these interviews, we aimed to gain insights into the perception of women's status in Tanzania and the dynamics between NGOs advocating for women's rights and the political landscape. The data analysis employed a combination of research tools and techniques: critical analysis of existing sources, content analysis, and the practical application of the Grounded Theory Method.

Given the problems with the non-transplantability of Eurocentric political science and international relations theories in the sub-Saharan African region, the research and interpretation of data were organized around theorems. They selected approaches rather

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<sup>8</sup> For instance, the role of women advocacy groups during the land reform debates of the 1990s was presented by Manji (1998) and the issue of land tenure dominated the discourse on the changes in the position of women in Tanzanian society (Melesse, Awel, 2020; Mwaipopo 2021).

<sup>9</sup> The article's purpose is not to delve into the cultural values presented by the JPM, nor their impact on the stance towards women's rights NGOs.

than one preconceived theory. Our reasoning was supported by two theoretical concepts introduced to Pierre Bourdieu’s discourse: habitus and exchangeability of various forms of capitals. Bourdieu’s ideas are widely implemented in both development studies (Bebbington, 2007, pp. 155–162) and gender studies (Reay, 2004, pp. 57–74); nonetheless, Bourdieu’s theory usage concerning the sub-Saharan state can be seen as problematic for at least two reasons. Firstly, the philosophy of Bourdieu referred mainly to the French education system (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2011), and its transplantation as a conceptual framework into a sub-Saharan context may be seen as inadequate, expressing epistemic violence or even neo-colonialism. Secondly, we are fully aware that we chose only two (undoubtedly essential and critical – habitus and capitals) theoretical terms from Bourdieu’s philosophy, and we may be accused of reducing this author’s philosophical achievements and an inadequate operationalization of the selected terms without references, for example, to the field theory or the idea of praxis. We believe that Bourdieu’s theoretical concepts can be used to understand non-European contexts as they increase the reflectivity of both authors and readers and show how a given constellation of relations reproduces certain practices. Moreover, the utilization of selected concepts created by Bourdieu as a “thinking toolkit” (Wacquant, 2018, p. 3) is an established practice in the social sciences (Costa, Murphy, 2015, 3). Using a given concept as long as it provides additional understandings of the studied phenomenon is, in our opinion, deeply Bourdiean (the French philosopher did not leave any guidelines on operationalizing his concepts in research practice). In this sense, the contextualization of the anti-women rhetoric in Tanzanian political discourse shall be seen as a part of relations aimed at the reproduction of specific practices, and we will demonstrate that a change in JPM’s political rhetoric in one sphere does not necessarily result in changes in others.

The essential epistemological guideline derived from Bourdieu, in terms of understanding the appearance of anti-feminist discourse in Tanzanian politics, is associated with the necessity of understanding relations between – agents, structures, capitals, habitus, etc. To use Bourdieu’s lexis, we could say that the most important thing is to realize that “real is relational” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2001, p. 76). Agents (actors) operate within a given field (hierarchical relation between agents) and a given habitus (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 54).

### **The Evolving Habitus of Tanzanian NGOs Advocating for Women’s Rights**

The NGO sector in Tanzania is widely recognized as one of the most reputable organizations in East Africa (Tripp et al., 2011, pp. 62–65). NGO groups supporting women’s rights have worked effectively since the early 1990s. Their main goals were twofold – to create opportunities for social activities and to gain independence from the government. Furthermore, when the opposition was weak, the NGO sector criticized the ruling CCM party (Tripp, 2000, pp. 191–214), thus filling a gap in the political scene. The emergence of NGOs in Tanzania, as in many other Sub-Saharan countries, has been associated with implementing neoliberal reforms during the 1990s. Global monetary organizations called for an end to the one-party

state structure while simultaneously creating space for the non-governmental sector's activities (Cichecka, 2018). However, Tanzanian authorities tried to limit the establishment of new NGOs, despite the ongoing transformation and reliance on foreign aid, to manage the transition without risking their political stability (Tripp et al., 2009, pp. 63–70). Our survey respondents overwhelmingly noted that the government had pushed for cooperation between the NGO sector and themselves, resulting in varying degrees of government regulation (Shayo, 2015; Bamwenda, 2016; Kanyuma, 2016). This situation could be viewed as an external imposition, as Western powers sought to shape the Tanzanian political system, with the non-governmental aspect being an essential component. The goal was to achieve “good governance”, the dominant theme of the 1990s.

Before the 2015 election, many NGOs claimed they had accomplished their objectives of gaining increased autonomy and better communication prospects with the government (Kafanabo, 2015; Munene, 2015; Rehema, 2015). However, they faced challenges, such as the lack of a constitutional prohibition on customary law (Shayo, 2015; Stainsby, 2015). The respondents emphasized that the NGOs successfully achieved these objectives due to their careful handling of the matter and their development of various advocacy methods (Shayo, 2015; Stainsby, 2015). In other words, they adopted certain customary practices to handle the interactions between NGOs and the CCM, shaping the types of capital available to the non-governmental sector. Being recognized as a stakeholder in political debates resulted in access to political capital, while government approval enabled the NGOs to seek funding from Western donors.

Based on a literature review, advocacy forms can be categorized as lobbying, coalition building with other NGOs, watchdog activities, public speeches, social campaigns, workshops, media cooperation, discussions, research, and publishing (Tripp et al., 2011, p. 2; Kevane, 2004). Advocates can collaborate with the academic sector (Kikwa, 2016; Stainsby, 2016). In Tanzania, non-governmental organizations identified collaboration with other NGOs, networking and alliances, and compromise and discussion as vital (Yaziji & Doh, 2011, pp. 27–28; Madon 1999, pp. 252–255; Rusimbi, 2016; Stainsby, 2016; Shayo, 2015). Coalitions are a distinctive feature of NGO collaborations in the country, formed with specific objectives and often linked to political occurrences. Collaboration within coalitions provides safety for NGOs in criticizing politicians, as shared participation minimizes the risk of individual persecution (Watson, 2016). Furthermore, respondents asserted that working together enhances collective capabilities. One individual surveyed stated, “We have built a strong foundation by forming coalitions and consistently supporting each other” (Watson, 2016). Another added, “Our coalition is highly efficient and functions effectively. If individuals fail to contribute their voices, they risk being marginalized and their agenda dismissed. The collective strengthens our cause and disproves the myth that women do not support each other” (Rusimbi, 2016). Although putting pressure on the government can be difficult, the non-governmental sector can still demonstrate to external donors their coordinated activities. Thus, by adopting models of intra-sector collaboration, it is possible

to obtain political leverage (if pressuring the government proves successful) and financial support from foreign entities (Bamwenda, 2016; Tepani, 2016). According to governance theory, such coordination can be perceived by the Western world as the essence of civil society, which was created to counterbalance the influence of the government sector.

Collaboration between NGOs and the media is a noteworthy approach that was highlighted in promoting gender equality (Watson, 2016). According to interviewees, media campaigns play a significant role in raising awareness of gender equality and can also help NGOs reach a wider audience for fundraising purposes (Rangi, 2016). Additionally, media coverage can improve the watchdog capacity of NGOs by making cases of women’s rights violations public (Kanyuma, 2016). Representatives from the NGO sector emphasized the importance of social consultations, meetings with local communities, and discussions on women’s rights, particularly in rural areas. Engaging in such activities is crucial in promoting the participation of marginalized groups in society (Watson, 2016) and raising awareness of gender equality among civil servants and other professions<sup>10</sup>. Furthermore, according to respondents, NGOs provide women in need with free legal counsel, which is crucial (Msami, 2015). Meetings with politicians are also deemed successful in raising awareness among decision-makers and political leaders and shaping their outlook on women’s rights (Kanyuma, 2016). Diplomatic discussions with female parliamentarians were also highlighted as significant, as they help to improve the relationship between NGOs and the political arena and serve as a foundation for discussions on women’s rights (Watson, 2016).

Accordingly, it can be said that Tanzanian NGOs that advocate for women’s rights follow a set of principles and rules that are widely accepted as necessary forms of action and advocacy. These organizations use effective forms of advocacy, perceived as powerful tools to change the legal system and institutional structures. Using these methods, NGOs can participate in democratization and act effectively for gender equality (Rusimbi, 2016). It is worth noting that the forms of advocacy employed by these NGOs not only help to advance the gender agenda but also to establish cordial and productive relationships with the authorities. In other words, these organizations gain political capital by exchanging their advocacy methods within the political sphere.

The process of capital exchanges in Tanzania would not have been possible without the involvement of NGOs in the political landscape. This is an interesting issue because the political culture in Tanzania is characterized by neopatrimonialism and clientelism, which limits the activities of NGOs (Therkildsen, 2014, pp. 113–115). According to respondents, NGOs can operate independently and effectively because they consolidate the narrative of women’s rights, challenging patriarchal norms and introducing changes initially blocked by the government (Stainsby, 2015; Shayo, 2015; Rusimbi, 2016). The most significant changes brought about by NGOs were legislative transformations and the implementation of

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<sup>10</sup> For instance, the Gender Desk project at police stations (Thomson Reuters Foundation News).

positive discrimination mechanisms to increase the representation of women in parliament (Shayo, 2015; Kafanabo, 2015; Tripp, 1994, pp. 107–131). These changes provided the basic institutional framework for implementing the equality agenda.

The capital exchange between Tanzanian NGOs and the political sphere is a process that has been ongoing since the 1985 World Conference on Women held in Nairobi. Despite the political culture and government being hostile and difficult to penetrate then, NGOs persisted in advocating for implementing strategies launched during the conference and for constitutional and legal transformations to empower women (Zinsser, 2002, pp. 145–147). Over time, NGOs developed effective advocacy strategies to overcome adversities (Shayo, 2015). Although Tanzanian NGOs recognize the differences between Western and African feminist concepts (Tripp et al., 2011, pp. 14–15; Kafanabo, 2015; Stainsby, 2016), the UN conferences in Nairobi in 1985 and Beijing in 1995 significantly strengthened the position of Tanzanian organizations advocating for women's rights (Zinsser, 2002, pp. 140–143).

Another visible sign of progress in NGO-government relations, shaping the habitus of NGO-government behavior, occurred after the political and economic transformation of the 1990s. As a result of this new reality made dialogue at the institutional level easier (Tripp et al., 2011, pp. 25–29). Additionally, the NGOs' experience, initial successes, and support from foreign donors strengthened their position. This trend emerged as a significant force and persisted until the 2015 presidential election and Magufuli's ascension to power. Following this, communication between the authorities and the NGO sector experienced a renewed interruption, accompanied by distrust and distance.

However, according to a recent survey conducted by Afrobarometer, there is no evidence of conflict between women-focused non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the Tanzanian government. In 2018, at the peak of tension between the two, 73% of Tanzanians reported that the government was effectively promoting equal rights and opportunities for women (Nonjinge, 2018, p. 2). Additionally, 59% of survey participants stated that there has been an improvement in the equality of opportunities and treatment for women compared to previous years. Only 11% of respondents believed the situation had deteriorated (Nonjinge, 2018, pp. 2–3). Thus, the Afrobarometer study suggests (at least to some extent) that there has been an improvement in the relationship between women-oriented NGOs and the government during JPM's tenure.

This situation reveals a discrepancy or inconsistency between the accounts of respondents representing women's advocacy NGOs and the viewpoint of the general public speaking out about the status of women in Tanzania. It might be argued that women's advocacy NGOs and the general public disagree. One could also argue that the situation may be explained by the spill-over effect of JPM's popularity gained through the implementation of performative austerity measures, a verbal emphasis on domestic affairs, and opposition to multinational companies operating within Tanzania's mining sector (Poncian, 2019). Furthermore, it is worth noting that Tanzania has witnessed an economic upturn, leading to its upgrade from



low to lower-middle income status by the World Bank in 2020, which could enhance public trust in the government, even regarding non-economic matters.

Considering those mentioned above, it becomes apparent that the habitus of Tanzanian women-oriented NGOs has evolved over the years and continues to fluctuate. At its core, this habitus revolves around various forms of advocacy, constituting a standardized set of actions embraced by the NGO community and closely intertwined with the political sphere.

## **Transforming Narratives in the Government’s Interaction with Women’s NGOs**

As previously noted, there has been a discursive shift between the state authorities and women’s NGOs during JPM’s presidency. His presidency was marked by an anti-feminist mobilization campaign, followed by anti-liberal discourse and nationalist rhetoric. While adopting national values initially appeared to be anti-neocolonial and in line with Julius Nyerere’s legacy (BBC, 2020), the narrative turn against women’s empowerment and women-oriented NGOs came as a surprise – both internationally and nationally (BBC, 2016).

Under Jakaya Kikwete’s presidency, most representatives of Tanzanian pro-women non-governmental organizations characterized their relations with the government as cooperative. Nonetheless, a minority of respondents deemed these interactions hostile and emphasized the importance of caution. Additionally, several respondents asserted that their relations with the government were competitive (Kafanabo, 2015). The ruling party attached importance to the gender agenda, as was emphasized, and regarded NGOs advocating for women’s rights as a valuable resource (Fowler, 1991, pp. 53–84). It has been explained that collaboration with political elites is a widespread practice, which takes the form of debates or discussions dedicated to specific social issues (Stainsby, 2015). Furthermore, respondents highlighted that significant progress had been made since the 1990s. They declared that the government was very defensive at the beginning of NGO activity (Kafanabo, 2015) and that the relationship with the political sphere was dominated by struggle and competition (Katemba, 2015). However, the respondents believed that a shift towards cooperation was possible, mainly due to NGOs’ various actions and their advocacy forms. As Rusimbi (2016) noted, “We are non-stop moving movements”.

The Coalition of Women and Constitution/Election (Wanawake na Katiba) exemplifies impactful action towards women’s rights. Established in 2015, the coalition brought together an unprecedented 65 NGOs. It formulated a manifesto and presented it to the CCM, other political parties, and individuals running for presidential office in the elections. The campaign advocated for gender equality, acknowledging the unique challenges faced by women. It also highlighted strategies to empower women as voters and candidates during elections. In addition, the NGOs campaigned for equal rights for various marginalized groups, including people with disabilities, the elderly, mothers with children, and albinos.

They also strongly opposed any forms of corruption during election campaigns (TGNP 2015). This manifesto can be considered “brave” for several reasons. Firstly, it made demands that the CCM could easily have described as too “political”. The representatives of the ruling party emphasized that the dialogue was open in the political sphere. However, the legitimacy of the non-governmental sector as a participating actor in the political process was questionable, and NGOs, which had flourished in Tanzania during the period of structural adjustment, could have been seen as agents of foreign powers. Before the 2015 election, the government developed a proposal to centralize and regulate funds given to Tanzanian NGOs by foreign donors (Ngilangwa, 2016). If a foreign entity wished to sponsor an NGO’s activities in Tanzania, it had to go through the Ministry of Finance. Additionally, this request was spread during the election season, which was directly linked to political matters. It can be argued that by deciding to develop a manifesto and present postulates at such a politically crucial time, the NGOs felt safe enough and did not see the relationship with the political sphere as threatening.

Additionally, before the JPM presidency, Tanzanian politicians supported the gender agenda and non-governmental organizations promoting women’s rights. They affirmed that NGOs were valuable and willing to assist, with the government being receptive to their involvement (Katemba, 2015; Godwe, 2015). It has been suggested that the proposed agenda of NGOs was highly beneficial, considering the government’s limitations in addressing social issues due to budgetary constraints and the scale of the problems themselves (Fowler, 1991, pp. 79–83). To articulate their relationship with NGOs, the government expressed that “(NGOs) play a significant role, [...] We are partners in development, [...] The government is open, [...] We meet, we discuss, we look for solutions” (Katemba, 2015).

Since the beginning of the JPM presidency, the narrative surrounding the relationship between the government and women’s rights NGOs has changed. According to respondents involved in non-governmental activities, they have become more hostile, unstable, and lack trust. They explained that NGOs were once again treated as political opposition and that politicians used their power against NGOs – especially those that criticized the government (Paget, 2017, pp. 163–166). The interviewees were concerned when asked about their relationship with the political sphere. They said: “We are not involved in this kind of issue, [...] We have to deal with political issues like registration. As stated by Ndunguru (2016), they clarified that being perceived as “too political” carries a substantial risk, which may lead to the organization’s termination. “When NGOs start doing politics, they have a problem” (Bamwenda, 2016). Respondents further highlighted that NGOs can only comment on specific political issues. Watson (2016) added that their organization is barred from political involvement according to the law. Failure to adhere to this regulation may lead to their organization being shut down or banned. Respondents further highlighted that NGOs can only comment on specific political issues. If there is a political scandal, a coalition is formed, and a statement is made to the media (Tepani, 2016).

The government’s stance towards NGOs advocating for women’s rights has been inadequate (Bratton, 1989, pp. 569–575), even before JPM. According to respondents in 2015, NGOs should align with the government rather than be in opposition to avoid causing conflicts (Munene, 2015). However, during the field research conducted after the presidential election (in 2016), respondents argued that this relationship had significantly degenerated (Paget, 2017, pp. 163–166), and NGOs were seriously worried about the future as they were constantly threatened with suspension (Stainsby, 2016).

A significant example displaying the shift in discourse to a more anti-feminist and hostile stance towards women’s NGOs is Magufuli’s statement above announcing that no schoolgirl who becomes pregnant will be allowed to resume her studies after giving birth. This declaration has also raised serious concerns about the autonomy and independence of NGOs. The President’s argument maintained that allowing these girls to resume their education would promote premarital sexual activity among their peers (BBC, 2021). Additionally, he asserted that NGOs supporting the government’s reintegration of teenage mothers were acting in the interest of foreign interests. This assertion was met with widespread condemnation from women’s rights groups, the opposition, and the broader public. Critics pointed out that Magufuli’s decision contradicted principles of human rights and civil liberties and undermined decades of progress in advancing women’s rights (The Citizen). The Home Affairs Minister, Mwigulu Nchemba, responded by issuing warnings that organizations advocating for the rights of teenage mothers may face deregistration (The Citizen). In addition to the concrete threat of losing their legal status, NGOs faced significant challenges in engaging in meaningful activities.

Thus, it is stated that the changing narratives regarding women-oriented NGOs (as well as the relationship between the government and women’s NGOs) indicate a significant shift, as evidenced by the opinions expressed by those involved and the emerging public discourse. These narratives underline an increasing tendency towards hostility and antagonism towards women’s NGOs, as well as a discernible shift towards anti-feminist discourse. Consequently, it is argued that a new conceptual framework, characterized by mutual suspicion and distrust, has become firmly established within the operational domain shared by Tanzanian NGOs and the government.

## **Capital Accumulation under the Presidencies of Jakaya Kikwete and John Magufuli**

To understand the discursive shift towards women and women-focused NGOs, examining the practices of capital generation and exchange favored by Kikwete and Magufuli is appropriate. Despite belonging to the same political party (with Magufuli as a minister in Kikwete’s and his predecessor Benjamin Mkapa’s cabinet), they have adopted different strategies to consolidate their authority (Adetunji, 2021). It can be assumed that Kikwete

and Magufuli had different perceptions of political advantages and disadvantages, which led them to pursue different approaches to different forms of capital accumulation. Culture, identity, and resistance to Western and non-African behavior patterns have emerged as a means for JPM to gain political leverage. Thus, we argue that the divergence in the two presidents' approaches to women's rights and women-oriented NGOs can be traced to different conceptions of capital accumulation and exchange.

President Kikwete was known for his favorable attitude towards foreign investment and donors who supported Tanzania's NGO sector and state finances. His term began in 2005 (Mkumbo, 2015, p. 41), a period of enthusiasm for women's rights and the neoliberal paradigm. The prominence of the gender agenda was most evident in UN proposals, most notably the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Millennium et al., 2000). The second aspect was manifested in a series of measures by international financial institutions to promote the liberalization of the economy and facilitate foreigners' access to the Tanzanian market for goods and capital (Baldwin, 1993). By the end of Kikwete's first term in 2005, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) described the country as having achieved "sustained good performance" with broad-based growth (International Monetary Fund 2005, 4). During Kikwete's presidency, Tanzania's economic performance received positive feedback from the IMF, neoliberal media such as *The Economist*, and foreign donors and advisory agencies (Deloitte, 2016). Kikwete insisted that foreign aid and investment had nothing to do with neo-colonialism. He emphasized that investment capital was the driving force behind Tanzania's development in infrastructure and agriculture. The influx of foreign funds made Tanzania more attractive and robust in the global market (Nyaluke & Connolly, 2013, pp. 44-46). He argued that foreign assistance was necessary to exploit available resources fully and that African nations should depend on foreign financial assistance until they reach their full potential because only then can independence be achieved. He acknowledged the lack of capital in Tanzania, telling *The Economist* that "resources simply do not exist" and was fully aware of this (*The Economist* 2007). Kikwete decided to rely on foreign donors to stabilize the country's macroeconomic situation. Tanzanians joked that President Kikwete spent more time on his international visits securing loans for Tanzania than in Ikulu (Ikulu is the official residence of Tanzanian presidents in Dar es Salaam). It is worth noting that Kikwete's optimistic narrative on international cooperation continued even after foreign aid to Tanzania was halted due to corruption scandals (Makoye, 2014; Kabendera, 2015). He worked to build good relations with international companies and foreign donors who supported the local NGO sector. He demonstrated this by participating in development projects funded by foreign institutions, including the Global Partnership for Education (*The Guardian*, 2021). He contributed to a more equitable relationship between Tanzanian NGOs and Western donors (Temba, 2013). Kikwete referred to the concepts of a free market and international support embedded in Tanzanian culture since 1985.

It appears that Jakaya Kikwete viewed local NGOs, particularly those focused on women's rights, as a critical component of the relationship between the Tanzanian government and

foreign donors, serving as a link between Tanzania and financial support from Western countries and institutions (Phillips, 2010, pp. 111–113). NGOs in Tanzania that focused on promoting women’s rights received various forms of financial support from external sources that facilitated the achievement of their goals and improved the social landscape in the country. Promoting gender equality, women’s empowerment, poverty eradication, and improvements in maternal health were clear evidence that Tanzania was on the development path (Cela et al., 2014, pp. 197–199) and was being wisely and efficiently governed. Kikwete, therefore, used local NGOs to accumulate economic capital from foreign donors, which he could then exchange for political influence<sup>11</sup>.

John Magufuli can be seen as a symbol of opposition to President Kikwete despite being from the same political party. He began by eradicating the country’s reputation for rampant corruption and substandard public services (Muvunyi, 2016). Although this move was initially seen as an attempt to restore the confidence of Western donors by sacking allegedly inefficient and corrupt civil servants (Paget, 2017), his subsequent actions demonstrated his attitude towards working with foreign investors and benefactors. He pursued a nationalist economic policy, banning and restricting foreign companies through stifling regulations to achieve economic fairness and consolidate national industry (Harris, 2021). He gained notoriety for suing Barrick Gold Corporation for £190 billion in retrospective taxes allegedly owed on undisclosed gold exports. Also, he proposed new legislation that would require the Tanzanian government to hold a minimum 16% stake in foreign mining companies (Reuters, 2017). Magufuli aimed to centralize and nationalize Tanzania’s economy, and to achieve this, he announced that the government’s investment portfolio would be moved to his executive office, as this would allow for closer oversight of investment deals (Harris, 2021). He also imposed bans and tighter restrictions on Kenyan goods, preventing regional companies from accessing the Tanzanian market (Harris, 2021). He refuted accusations of authoritarianism, suggesting that imperialists had robbed Tanzania of profits and wealth since independence. He, therefore, proposed a solution of renegotiating Tanzania’s external political and economic relations to reduce dependence on foreign investors and donors. At the same time, the centralization of power and nationalization within the state significantly restricted the political opposition, civil society, and the media (Cheeseman et al., 2021, pp. 78–80). Also, it affected the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) focused on women’s issues. The influential representatives of the non-governmental sector, especially those working for women’s rights, faced criticism and rounds of repression (The Guardian 2019).

It must be acknowledged that corrupt practices were rampant during Kikwete’s leadership, as noted by Gray (2015, 382–403). CCM members were bribed with money in exchange

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<sup>11</sup> It is worth noting that Julius Nyerere also had a relatively positive relationship with the non-governmental sector, focusing on gender equality and supporting women’s rights. Conversely, he did not succeed in industrialising Tanzania, nor did he provide opportunities for the growth of economic capital and reinvestment in the economy (Wuyts & Kilama, 2014).

for their political support. Even Magufuli's anti-corruption mission shielded his predecessor. However, it is undeniable that Tanzania's economic resources have been drained and that the national budget has only been balanced thanks to the generosity of foreign donors. During his first term, President Magufuli initiated significant austerity measures within the state administration, gaining immense popularity on social media with the hashtag #WhatWouldMagufuliDo on Twitter (Ogunjewe, 2022). Among other things, he canceled the Independence Day celebrations and instead cleaned the streets of Dar es Salaam, an initiative similar to Paul Kagame's in Rwanda. He also cut spending on the opening ceremony of parliament by 90%, banned government officials from traveling first class, and reduced the number of ministries in his cabinet by 11 compared to Jakaya Kikwete (Anyimadu, 2016, p. 7). These measures boosted his popularity in society. Although it may seem like anecdotal evidence, our experience suggests that only taxi drivers, hoteliers, and restaurant owners in Dar es Salaam were dissatisfied with JPM's actions due to a lack of government clients.

Nevertheless, managing a country like Tanzania manually is impractical in the long run. Once again, there is a link with Rwanda, as JPM attempted to replicate Rwandan solutions in Tanzania in several ways. Magufuli used a combination of unpredictability and intimidation tactics in domestic politics, frequently visiting public offices and immediately firing civil servants he deemed ineffective. Unable to hold Kikwete's administration accountable, "lazy" civil servants became the primary source of internal opposition midway through his first term, which he successfully pacified behind closed doors within the CCM (The Economist, 2017). Simultaneously, starting in mid-2016, discussions about the dangers associated with international capital exploiting Tanzania began to be introduced into public discourse. President Magufuli opposed the EU's proposed neo-colonial Economic Partnership Agreement for the East African Community (Polus, 2018, pp. 187–204). In late 2016, he banned the export of metal concentrates, and in 2017, he engaged in a dispute with Acacia Mining, Tanzania's largest gold producer and a subsidiary of Barrick Gold. Talks with gas mining companies have also been halted. The president's final statements were to accuse the West of forcing African countries to close their economies because of the Sars CoV-2 pandemic (Makoni, 2021).

Given the anti-neoliberal and anti-Western narrative, donor-funded NGOs that showed political ambition during the 2015 elections cannot be considered neutral. Focusing on Western efforts to impose a superstructure unsuited to sub-Saharan societies at minimal cost was politically expedient. A commitment to "traditional African values" was proclaimed by several African leaders, including Magufuli, without any subjective evaluation. Advocacy NGOs were labeled as pioneers of this shift and faced restrictions on their activities. As a result, JPM positioned itself as an inclusive politician, promoting pro-Tanzanian policies nationally and globally. Furthermore, despite the Tanzanian government's criticism of the West, lawsuits against mining companies, and tense relations with non-governmental organizations, Tanzania managed to maintain a steady economic growth rate of around 6% between 2015 and 2019 (World Bank, 20/22). Since several sub-Saharan economies were in

recession during this period, the slight decline in GDP growth to 2% in 2020 (World Bank, 2022) is still notable. In this way, Magufuli gained political capital by revitalizing Julius Nyerere’s vision, which still resonates in Tanzania. At the same time, this strategy has not harmed the accumulation of economic capital.

Looking at the strategies Jakaya Kikwete and John Magufuli used to generate and accumulate capital during their respective presidencies, it becomes clear that they followed different paths. Kikwete’s presidency aligned with the principles of the Tanzanian political regime established in 1985, characterized by cooperation with women’s rights NGOs. Magufuli’s presidency, on the other hand, was characterized by personal rule and political prudence, similar to the legacy of Julius Nyerere. His approach to capital accumulation was reinforced by his anti-women-oriented NGO rhetoric, which he framed as detrimental to Tanzania’s interests. This comparison shows how the language surrounding women’s rights and women-focused NGOs has influenced the direction of capital creation and accumulation in the Tanzanian political arena.

## **Conclusion**

The primary aim of this study was to examine and characterize the transformation of contemporary political discourse on women’s rights and women-oriented NGOs in Tanzania across two successive state administrations, both from the same political party, namely those led by John Pombe Magufuli and Jakaya Kikwete. This analysis was carried out step by step through the following stages: the identification of the habitus of Tanzanian women-oriented NGOs, the characterization of the changes observed in the narratives surrounding the relationship between government and women’s NGOs, and finally, a brief analysis of the political discourse during the presidencies of Jakaya Kikwete and John Magufuli.

The study has illuminated the evolution and ongoing fluctuations within the habitus of Tanzanian NGOs advocating for women’s rights. This habitus, deeply rooted in various forms of advocacy, represents a standardized repertoire of actions embraced within the NGO community. However, it is significantly influenced by the dynamic political landscape. One of the most intriguing aspects of this analysis is the discrepancy between the statements of respondents representing the NGO sector working on women’s issues and the findings of public opinion research conducted by Afrobarometer. It is worth noting that this discrepancy does not pertain directly to the habitus under examination in this article. Nevertheless, it merits further reflection on the complex relationships between the Tanzanian government, the NGO sector, and society. These findings underscore the need for continued research and a deeper understanding of the dynamics in Tanzania’s evolving political and civil society landscape.

The section that concentrates on changing narratives regarding the relationship between the government and women’s NGOs explored a critical shift evident in respondents’ statements and public discourse. The emergence of narratives reflected an anti-feminist discursive

shift and a growing antagonism and hostility towards women-oriented NGOs. It is argued, therefore, that a new ideational structure of mutual suspicion and mistrust has become entrenched in the field in which Tanzanian NGOs and the government operate.

It can also be stated that during Jakaya Kikwete's presidency, Tanzanian politics were guided by the principles established in the 1980s under reforms initiated by international financial institutions. NGOs advocating for women's rights were considered "partners" of the government, which, in turn, helped to demonstrate the development of civil society or good governance and ensured access to financial support from abroad. In contrast, President Magufuli used individualized governance and political astuteness inherited from Julius Nyerere to accumulate political and economic capital within Tanzania, aiming to prevent capital outflow. He portrayed Western mining corporations as hostile towards Tanzania and exhibited hesitancy towards the Economic Partnership Agreement with the European Union. These tactics reinforced the discourse antagonistic towards women's advocacy groups and their representatives within the non-governmental sector.

At the same time, it can be concluded that although anti-feminist elements were present in President Magufuli's political discourse, the accusation that he promoted a toxic form of masculinity is unfounded. The rhetoric against women's empowerment and women-oriented NGOs, which undeniably contributed to the marginalisation of the NGO sector in political affairs, should be understood as a consequence of adopting a particular mode of accumulation of political and economic capital rooted in the legacy of Julius Nyerere and the political trajectory of President Magufuli. Yet, the same political rhetoric has also introduced mistrust and mutual suspicion into the habitus governing the relationship between women-centred NGOs and the Tanzanian government.

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