

Participation: Structural and relational power and Maasai women's political subjectivity in Tanzania

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Feminism & Psychology
0(0) 1–21

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DOI: 10.1177/0959353515591369

fap.sagepub.com



Abstract

Across the world, women remain seriously underrepresented in governmental politics. Moreover, limited opportunities for political participation and decision-making reflect a widespread societal problem substantiated and perpetuated through gender inequities that operate at numerous levels of society. Challenging and ending systemic gender-based power imbalances is critical to understanding the potential for women's political participation worldwide. The current study uses a liberation psychology approach to test a model that examines how the dynamics of structure, power, and agency enable (or limit) women's political participation. In particular, the study examines how women's landownership influences the dynamics of relational power and individual agency that enable political participation among Maasai women in Tanzania. Surveys conducted among 225 women in northern Tanzania revealed that landownership was related to relationship power which predicted individual agency and, in turn, higher levels of women's participation at political meetings. The findings suggest that when women have access to structural resources, they gain power within their marital relationships and are thereby more likely to become engaged in political participation and decision-making. Implications for the discussion of women's political participation worldwide are addressed.

Keywords

women, political participation, landownership, power, social justice

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... the neoliberal rules for the new woman citizen... are quite clear: improve your household's economic condition, participate in local community development (if you have time), help build and run local (apolitical) institutions...; by then you should have no political or physical energy left to challenge this paradigm. (Batliwala & Dhanraj, 2004, p. 4)

A confluence of development and democratization agendas has brought citizen participation in governance to the forefront of several disciplines (Cornwall & Coelho, 2007). Efforts to enhance women's political participation, in particular, have gained increasing urgency throughout the globe, in part because women's representation in politics has come to represent an indicator of empowerment as outlined in the United Nations' third Millennium Development Goal (Cornwall & Goetz, 2005; Tripp & Kang, 2008). Moreover, this topic is timely because the 1980s, and increasingly so the 1990s, witnessed a rise in both globalization and democracy (Pateman, 2012). For example, it has been well documented that the neoliberal policies behind globalization exacerbated structural factors contributing to gender inequality (Naples & Desai, 2002). At the same time, women in many African countries, as elsewhere, have been confronting restructured democratic spaces with new opportunities for political participation (Hodgson, 2011; Tripp, 2003).

Several scholars have suggested, however, that the changing political landscape for women throughout the world offers predominantly nominal support for their involvement and often does so without considering the gendered obstacles to participation that women confront (Mohanty, 2007; White, 1996). Formalizing women's rights within these new democratic spaces without considering the dynamics of structure, power, and agency that enable or limit women's participation is not enough to create viable routes to gender justice (Hodgson, 2011). The current study takes a feminist psychological approach to understanding power and subjectivity by examining how shifting social structures for women who have been marginalized or otherwise excluded from political spaces allows them to participate meaningfully in decision-making (Andrews, 2006; Cornwall & Coelho, 2007; Sánchez & Martín-Sevillano, 2006). In particular, this study examines how structural factors surrounding women's landownership influences the dynamics of relational power and individual agency that enable political participation among Maasai women in Tanzania.

Political participation

The international women's movement, building on the 1985 and 1995 United Nations conferences in Nairobi and Beijing, respectively, created arenas in which women began to assert their varied concerns and take advantage of opportunities for political participation that were emerging in the 1990s (Tripp, 2003). As a result, in the past nearly three decades, the global average of women in representative governmental positions has increased from less than 9% in 1987 to 21.8% in 2014 (Cornwall & Goetz, 2005; World Bank, 2014a). By 2013, women in sub-Saharan Africa, in particular, held on average 21.5% of parliamentary seats, compared with half this number a decade earlier (Tripp, 2001; World Bank,

2014a).¹ Thus, actions aimed at increasing the number of women in politics during this time (e.g. quota systems) resulted in a growing number of women being, at least numerically, represented (Tripp, 2001).

Although engendering democracy by increasing women's representation may be necessary, alone it does not sufficiently address women's political *participation* (Cornwall & Goetz, 2005). In other words, when women's inclusion is predominantly numeric, there is little influence over decision-making processes (Mohanty, 2007; White, 1996). Although most participatory development strategies discuss the full and equal involvement of women, many do so through some type of nominal participation that is driven by the top-down as a display that reflects women's inclusion, rather than considering the larger social structures or psychosocial processes that may lead to transformative levels of political participation and decision-making among women (Mayoux, 1995; White, 1996).

Despite the concern that many attempts at increasing women's participation fail to live up to the expectations of both the implementing agencies and the women involved, it has not hindered the orthodoxy with which development strategists have sought to include women in "participatory" projects (Hickey & Mohan, 2005). Instead, "participation" has become a firmly rooted buzzword in development policy across the political spectrum (Guareschi & Jovchilovitch, 2004; Mayoux, 1995). For example, organizations such as the World Bank have produced documents highlighting the importance of participation and encouraging the implementation of participatory processes in their programmatic interventions for decades (World Bank, 1996). Most recently, this can be seen in the Gender and Development report released in 2014 as part of the women's voice, agency, and participation research series that underscores the value of enabling women and girls to participate by amplifying their independent voices in decision-making (World Bank, 2014b). Some scholars have suggested that we need to move beyond participation as a misuse of power, or the conscious reinforcement of unjust power, by developing a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics of structure, power, and agency (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). The failure to have achieved this understanding to date may be in part because most of the research and scholarship on women's political participation exists in the disciplines of development and politics, with a near neglect of examining how the power structures in women's lives prohibit their participation. Indeed, a 2006 Special Issue in *Feminism & Psychology* underscored that political psychology, though well-positioned to investigate the social relations of power, has largely neglected gender analyses and issues of oppression and marginalization (Capdevila & Unger, 2006).

Social dynamics of power and participation

In many places throughout the world, available opportunities for women to participate politically are circumscribed by male power and women's limited access to resources, leaving women little scope to participate as public decision-makers (Biglia, 2006). Moreover, spaces of power often invoke both overt and tacit forms of domination by employing stereotypes about women's capabilities, thereby

silencing them or keeping them from entering politics at all (Cornwall & Coelho, 2007). Processes of domination often function by the dominant group ascribing negative and disempowering characteristics to the subordinated or oppressed group, such as intellectual inferiority or emotional immaturity (Frye, 1983). These ascribed characteristics serve a basic function in social control by supporting beliefs of superiority among the dominant group and the internalization of inferiority among the oppressed group. It is not surprising, therefore, that critical psychologists suggest that politics is about both power and ideology (Montero, 2009). As such, according to Montero, “politics should be understood as the possibility and impossibility for . . . actions and knowledge to be known and implemented so as to affect the distribution of power and domination” (2009, p. 150). Montero (2009) explains that a *polis* (meaning “city” in Greek) is described as a space where people gather, organized according to the norms they create to facilitate living in a collective realm. Therefore, the possibility of overcoming structural inequity inherently involves participating in these spaces by playing an active role in controlling resources and decisions in one’s community (Zimmerman & Rappport, 1988).

Several scholars have suggested, when considering women’s ability to participate in political spaces, that key relationships of power shape women’s participation and inequality (Hassim, 1999; Sánchez & Martín-Sevillano, 2006). Political scientists often conceptualize power as a phenomenon that “wears a face” or is something belonging to individuals that they either “have” or “lack” (Hayward, 1998, p. 1). However, this understanding deflects focus from a critical analysis of power *relations* that understand power to be structural and dynamic in nature (Connell, 2012; Hayward, 1998; Prilleltensky, 2008). The notion of “de-faced” power, instead, conceptualizes power as the social norms, histories, and laws that shape what actors desire and are capable of in particular social contexts (Hayward, 2000). Similarly, relational theory places central importance on the patterned relations between women and men by understanding gender as multidimensional with power relations operating simultaneously at structural, relational, and individual levels (Connell, 2012). These frameworks are in line with arguments that feminist psychologists make who have suggested that an individual-level focus in research downplays the socio-historical and cultural context in which interpersonal exchanges are embedded and overlooks an intersectional analysis of the roles of multiple, simultaneous power injustices in women’s lives (Cole, 2009; Crenshaw, 1995; Fine, 1989; Grabe, Grose, & Dutt, 2015; Griscom, 1992; Moane, 1999; Stewart, 1998; Yoder & Kahn, 1992). Thus, operating from this perspective, it is not possible to adequately address women’s full and active participation in political spaces without simultaneously addressing the gendered obstacles women confront as a result of the structural or relational circumstances of their lives. The current investigation argues for an approach to power that agitates and transforms the dynamics of structure, relational power, and agency to bring about conditions that allow for greater political participation among women.

In response to a growing host of injustices that women confront worldwide, several transnational feminist psychologists have called for investigations that capture the ways in which women extend their agency to ultimately challenge

power-based structural constraints to create conditions of gendered justice (Grabe, 2012; Grabe, Dutt, & Dworkin, 2014; Brodsky, 2009; Lykes & Moane, 2009; Moane, 2003). This approach is compatible with Brazilian social theorist Freire's (1970) understanding of liberation, where he argues that individuals are most likely to change their own circumstances by simultaneously working to challenge the social structures that disadvantage them (Brodsky, et al., 2012; Moane, 2003). In the past two decades, liberation psychology has become an increasingly utilized approach to understanding how individuals develop their citizenship capacities to engage as decision-makers for transformative change (Martín-Baró, 1996; Moane, 2006; Montero, 2007). Similarly, in a paper on the political psychology of liberation, Montero (2007) argues that liberation is not given, but constructed by those needing and facilitating it. The aim in the current study was to investigate how Maasai women in Tanzania are transforming their structural and relational circumstances to exert their right to politically participate as active decision-makers contributing to changing, sustaining, and maintaining their society.

Tanzania: the social context for Maasai women and political participation

Because women's experiences in the Global South are inextricably linked to systemic inequities of global power, de-colonial feminist scholars note the importance of considering the intersections among gender, economic exploitation, and other social hierarchies in the context of increasing global capitalism when attempting to understand the marginalization of women (Grabe & Else-Quest, 2012; Lugones, 2010; Mohanty, 2003). In particular, work in several African countries has emphasized the need to examine how gender relations are shaped by local and transnational processes such as colonialism and neocolonialism (Hodgson, 1999a). In many ways, Tanzania is a model country from which to conduct an investigation that examines how global processes influence gender relations that impact women's political participation. First, the growth of civil society organizations in many African countries has played an influential and critical role in maximizing new political opportunities for women that were opened with the democratization agendas of the 1990s (Cornwall & Goetz, 2005; Hodgson, 2011). Indeed, although rarely mentioned in studies of democratization in Africa, one of the most dramatic changes affecting women's political participation has been the growth of independent women's organizations, which have increased exponentially throughout Africa since the early 1990s (Tripp, 2001, 2003). In Tanzania, specifically, women's organizations constitute the largest organized sector by representing 80% of registered NGOs (Tripp, 2001, 2003). The partnering organization for the current study, the Maasai Women's Development Organization (MWEDO), began in 2000 as a grassroots women's organization in Tanzania. It was formed to challenge gendered forms of structural inequity.

In confronting the issue of women in participatory political spaces, women's organizations in East Africa have been grappling with broader citizenship

questions. For example, many women's organizations are taking women's claims to landownership and autonomy in ways not seen in the past (Tripp, 2001). In many parts of the world, land is a valuable resource, and traditions surrounding who is afforded the right to own land are generally reflective of societal power and status (Deere & Leon, 2001). Traditionally, women's access to land has been granted through male relatives because customary law often denied women formal control and ownership of land (Englert & Daley, 2008). Tanzania transitioned from predominantly customary views of land in the 1980s to an era of land reform that reflected the political struggles of women activists in the 1990s (Tripp, 2004). In 1999, Tanzania passed one of the most radical land laws in Africa with the Land and Village Land Acts making recommendations in three broad areas, one of which was gender equity (Tsikata, 2003). MWEDO has capitalized on efforts within the land rights movement to facilitate Maasai women's landownership in a strategic effort to address women's structural inequity.

Examining the role of landownership among Maasai women, in particular, has several implications for understanding the impact of land as a structural resource that may shift gendered power relations. The Maasai are a group of semi-nomadic people inhabiting southern Kenya and northern Tanzania who have suffered greatly from processes of colonization, the least of which was being displaced from fertile lands for the creation of wildlife preserves. During the early 1900s, much of Maasai territory became settled by expatriates or excised for conservation sites, with Maasai experiencing forceful marginalization to a reserved land space called Maasailand (Homewood, 1995). As colonists intervened in the political, economic, and social aspects of Maasai life, women as a group have steadily lost political rights in the past century (Hodgson, 1999a, 1999b). For example, incorporation of Maasai men into the British state system in the early 1900s extended the authority of Maasai men over a newly emerging "political" domain, thereby expanding their bases for political power and introducing new forms of property relations (Hodgson, 1999b). In particular, development projects of the 1920s and 1930s established an important and enduring precedent that Maasai men, not women, were the target of intervention, disenfranchising women from their formerly overlapping rights (Hodgson, 1999c). Together the processes of political representation and property ownership shifted gendered power relations, with Maasai men taking advantage of the British neglect of women's rights to strengthen their political authority, resulting in the devaluation of Maasai women (Hodgson, 1999b).

As processes of autonomy and interdependence previously enjoyed by Maasai men and women in the late 1800s were replaced by unequal relationships of economic dependence and political control, men began to think about Maasai women as "property" (Hodgson, 1999a, 1999b). The deterioration of women's rights has progressed into a phenomenon whereby Maasai women are not only viewed and referred to as children by men, but required to show respect to men by acting and speaking as if they were children when addressing men of their own age or older (Hodgson, 1999c). In addition to these processes relegating women to domestic concerns in the home, their supposed child-like qualities also have been used by

men to justify the sociopolitical exclusion of women by curtailing their ability to operate in the political world (Hodgson, 1999a).

Though almost a century later, gender struggles over power and property in the context of globalization continue in Maasailand today. As Tanzania entered an era of land reform in the 1990s, it was partly driven by incentives from financial donors to privatize land holdings (Manji, 1998). A combination of precarious tenure on reserved land and a traditional communal pastoral lifestyle has attracted large international development and land privatization interests in Maasailand (Smith, 2014). Despite legal efforts that now grant women property rights, the process of privatizing land into individual titles largely has been based on customs that privilege men as owners of land (Palmer, 2008). Thus, development interventions focused on the privatization of land have enforced and strengthened men's dominant positions while further exacerbating women's subordination just as interventions had in the past. Borrowing the language of Hayward's call to *de-face* power, denial of structural power via landownership can be seen as a limit to women's boundaries of participation to the extent that it further disenfranchises women from control over resources. Challenging this power-based structural constraint has the possibility to disrupt gendered power relations and impact women's agency in a manner that opens up the space to play an active role in political decision-making.

In Maasai communities of Tanzania, all formal decision-making occurs in meetings referred to by Tanzanian Maasai as *enkiguena* (Goldman & Milliard, 2014). Although the *enkiguena* does not fit a Western model of democratic representation and structure, it is central to Maasai governing and is considered a formal institution for communication and decision-making in which all members of the community can participate equally (Goldman & Milliard, 2014). Decisions made at an *enkiguena* are determined by consensus to reflect a sign of unity with the community. An *enkiguena* is often held under the shade of a large tree, or inside an empty classroom or village office. Regardless of the location, there is an attempt made to sit in a circle so that when someone is interested in speaking they can stand in the middle of the circle and address the entire group (Goldman & Milliard, 2014). However, despite that in theory all members of the community may participate equally, traditionally women did not attend these meetings. Moreover, although everyone at an *enkiguena* has the freedom to speak and to be listened to, the Maasai notion of respect and fear associated with social norms governing behavior can inhibit some from speaking (Hodgson, 2011). Thus, it is hypothesized that landownership has the potential to address the gendered obstacles to participation that women confront by shifting their structural power and thereby impacting both their relational power and individual agency in a manner that can increase the likelihood of speaking at *enkiguenas*.

Current study

Although calls in political psychology since the 1980s have suggested that analysis of women's political participation needs to take into account the sociocultural factors related to gendered obstacles that women experience (e.g. Van der Ros,

1987), the discipline of psychology continues to keep feminist and political psychology investigations separate (Capdevila & Unger, 2006). Thus, much of the literature examining women's political participation has remained in the disciplines of development or politics. An overarching goal of this paper is to offer empirical grounding and evidence for the sociopsychological dimensions involved in women's political participation. Until recently, men's institutional power over land and interpersonal power over women have been addressed independently of each other, though a small body of work is emerging that suggests a link between the two (Grabe, 2010; Grabe et al., 2015). By investigating how the structural relations of power between men and women are related to women's political participation, we can better understand the dynamic interplay between different structures of domination as they occur at macro levels. Demonstrating links between landowning and women's power can lend strong support to the hypothesis that macro-level structural power imbalances can put women at risk for sociopolitical exclusion.

The partnership between scholarship and a grassroots social organization in the current study allows an investigation into how community contexts enable and support women's struggle for justice in an increasingly globalized world. Furthermore, by investigating the proposed processes in a community in northern Tanzania, the current focus moves away from standard Western notions of how politics and political participation are defined to seek a more inclusive and flexible notion of politics (Hirschmann, 1991). To the extent that women are excluded from political participation based on their gender, it is profoundly critical to build an understanding of participation that considers significant power dynamics between men and women. Partnerships among psychologists and self-mobilized groups of women working on social change can facilitate understandings of processes that create enabling conditions that may increase women's political participation (Grabe & Else-Quest, 2012).

Methods

Setting

The research was conducted in partnership with a woman's organization that was facilitating women's landownership as part of self-mobilized efforts aimed at women's empowerment. The Maasai Women's Development Organization (MWEDO) was started in 2000 by three Maasai women who were interested in promoting gender equality in Maasai communities while at the same time promoting and protecting Maasai culture and language in the face of radical social and economic changes (Hodgson, 2011). MWEDO strategically challenges gendered forms of structural inequities by using social and political means to educate, serve, and advocate for women's human rights through community mobilization. Within the mainstream global women's movement, MWEDO is revolutionary in that the women involved are mobilized as agents of their own liberation through support and solidarity with others

and resist imposed international agendas that view women as recipients of service, rather than agents of change.

MWEDO offers programs on topics such as human rights advocacy, women's economic empowerment, and cultural citizenship that are meant to address the needs raised by members in local communities (e.g. hunger, poverty, lack of clean available water and lack of health care) (Hodgson, 2011). The programs have in common advocacy and promotion of women's rights through the use of international human rights frameworks, but focus on concerns generated by local women (e.g. cultural citizenship) over concerns favored by the international community and financial donors (e.g. genital cutting) (Hodgson, 2011). For the current study, the focus is on women who have either participated in a program aimed at facilitating pastoral women's property rights and titling to land or are members of MWEDO, but have not yet participated in this program.²

Procedures and participants

To establish the research partnership with MWEDO, a critical communicative methodology was followed. In this method, an egalitarian dialogue between the researcher and leader of the organization was viewed as central to conducting research that contributes to transforming social contexts and improving the lives of the groups studied (Gómez, Racionero, & Sordé, 2010). More specifically, this involved several meetings prior to the study design to discuss the role of research with the organization's agenda for change and to recognize that an underlying goal of the research was a reconfiguration of knowledge production that shifted power and control into the hands of the marginalized (Fals Borda, 1985). Once the main aim of the research was established, the questionnaire was designed in partnership with a team of six Maasai women so that assessment reflected local reality and was not driven from the top-down. The data that were collected from participating members in MWEDO were part of a larger study conducted that combined quantitative and qualitative methods to examine links between landownership and women's receipt of violence (see Grabe et al., 2015 for a more complete description).

The study design was quasi-experimental with an "intervention" group that included women who were landowners as beneficiaries of the program offered by MWEDO and a comparison group of women who served as "controls." A list of women receiving assistance in land titling was used to sample for the landowning group. A second group was constructed from two lists of women: one that had received empowerment interventions, but did not own land, and a group that was slated to begin receiving land titling interventions in the next year. The groups of women were chosen from the same geographic locations in order to closely match the groups on a number of economic, social, and cultural variables. The total sample size was 225 women ($n=74$ landowners and $n=151$ non-landowners). Field procedures recommended by the WHO in conducting research in "developing" countries were followed to hire and train a local research team (Ellsberg & Heise, 2005).

The survey questionnaires were developed in partnership with the research team, translated into Swahili by a member of the team, and then back-translated with a local speaker to ensure that the meanings were properly conveyed before the surveys were piloted. Due to low literacy rates, the surveys were administered by locally trained research assistants.³ Measures included:

- *Demographic characteristics.* Sociodemographic data included age, number of children, education, and relationship status.
- *Landownership.* Questions assessing land acquisition and landownership were adapted from assessments by the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW, 2005). Women were asked whether or not they owned land, how much land, how the land was titled, and how the land was acquired.
- *Partner control.* Participants were asked to agree or disagree with seven items from the WHO (Ellsberg & Heise, 2005) that assessed whether their partners generally prohibit or control their abilities to carry out everyday activities (e.g. “visit family or friends”) and whether they exhibit controlling behavior or jealousy (e.g. “Insists on knowing where you are at all times; Is often suspicious that you are unfaithful; Ignores you/gets angry if you speak with another man; Requires permission before you seek health care”). Four additional items were added to assess whether partners prevented women from studying, going to the market, engaging in economic work, and attending celebrations. Affirmative responses were summed for a total score intending to reflect relational power, with higher scores reflecting greater levels of *partner* power and control. Because this scale was a count score, internal consistency was not computed.
- *Discomfort speaking at meetings.* Participants were asked if any of the following concerns made them uncomfortable to speak at meetings: “the presence of men,” “not knowing anything,” “fear of being beaten by her husband afterward,” and “that it is not a woman’s place to speak at meetings.” A sum of affirmative answers was taken as an index of discomfort. Because this scale was a count score, internal consistency was not computed.
- *Household decision-making.* Participants completed a household decision-making subscale designed by the International Center of Research for Women (ICRW, 2005) to measure decision-making within the marital relationship. There were five items that assessed who had the final decision in household expenditure decisions (e.g., “Buying food items; buying clothes for self or children”). Internal consistency for this scale was .76.
- *Political participation.* Participants were asked a series of questions regarding their attendance at both meetings called by MWEDO and traditional village or general assembly meetings called by male leaders. To assess participants’ level of political participation, they were asked to indicate “yes” or “no” whether or not they had spoken at these meetings.

The proposed model that linked landownership to women’s political participation was estimated using EQS maximum likelihood estimation procedures

(Bentler, 1995), with variance–covariance matrices serving as input. Missing data were handled with EQS 6.1 missing data analysis regression imputations. Multiple fit indices were used as guides to evaluate whether the data were a good fit: the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), the Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Chi-square (χ^2) goodness-of-fit statistics. A satisfactory fit is indicated by CFI values greater than 0.95 (Hu & Bentler, 1999), RMSEA values less than 0.08 (Steiger, 1990), and a nonsignificant χ^2 (Carmines & McIver, 1981). We used sample size recommendations from Bentler and Chou (1987) to inform our considerations of the sample. Bentler and Chou recommend between a 5:1 and 10:1 ratio of participants to parameters for path analysis. Because stable estimates with non-normative data require larger sample sizes, we exceeded this recommendation. We had 225 participants to three parameters (75:1).

Preliminary analyses

Demographic differences between the groups of women were tested for comparability between landowners and non-landowners to ascertain the need to control for demographic variables in subsequent analyses. As can be seen in Table 1, there were no overall differences in landowners versus non-landowners in demographic characteristics.

The average ages of the respondents for the entire sample were in the early to mid-40s and women had approximately five children on average. Nearly all the

Table 1. Sample profile.

Variable	Landowners ($n = 74$)	Non-landowners ($n = 151$)
Age (in years):		
<i>M</i>	45.24	39.02
<i>SD</i>	15.90	15.29
Range	19–80	17–84
Number of children:		
<i>M</i>	5.76	4.98
<i>SD</i>	2.47	2.23
Range	1–12	1–12
Relationship status (% partnered)	98.6	100
Education (% at levels):		
No school	80.8	81.1
Primary	13.7	18.9
Secondary+	5.5	0
Literacy (% literate)	12.2	16.6

Table 2. Differences between landowners and non-landowners on study variables.

	Landowners (<i>N</i> = 74)	Non-landowners (<i>N</i> = 151)	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
Partner control (M, SD)	3.03 (1.72)	3.58 (1.99)	.04	−0.30
Discomfort speaking (M, SD)	.432 (.575)	.589 (.676)	.09	−0.25
Household decision-making (M, SD)	11.08 (2.48)	10.24 (2.57)	.02	0.33
Speaking at MWEDO meetings (M, SD)	.419 (.497)	.278 (.446)	.03	0.30
Speaking at village meetings (M, SD)	.405 (.494)	.305 (.462)	.13	0.21

Note: Mean differences are indicated along with standard deviations. *d* = effect sizes. Effect sizes are calculated as the difference between two means divided by the standardized deviation ($d = [M_1 - M_2/s]$). Effect sizes are computed to assess the magnitude of the difference between groups. According to Cohen (1988), an effect size of 0.2 might be considered “small” (although still a notable difference), whereas values around 0.5 are “medium” effects, and values of 0.8 or higher are considered as “large” effects. A negative *d* for partner power and discomfort speaking indicates that partners controlled landowners’ mobility less and landowners reported less discomfort speaking at meetings than non-landowners. A positive *d* for household decision-making and speaking at meetings indicates that landowners were engaging in each of these activities at higher levels than non-landowners.

women were in marital relationships, with the great majority not receiving formal education nor reporting the ability to read or write.

Table 2 presents group differences in the proposed process and outcome variables: partner control, discomfort speaking at meetings, household decision-making, and political participation. As can be seen from the table, differences trend in the expected direction on all of the proposed process variables with landowners reporting less partner control, marginally less discomfort speaking at meetings, and greater say in household decision-making. The findings also suggest that landowners reported significantly greater political participation at MWEDO meetings. And, although not significant, a trend suggests greater participation at village meetings among landowners.

Table 3 presents correlations between study variables indicating how the relationship variables related to land are also related to women’s political participation.

Path analyses

To test the hypothesized model, a path diagram was constructed that details the pathways between structure (i.e. landownership), power and agency (i.e. partner control, discomfort speaking at meetings, and household decision-making), and the political participation outcomes (i.e. speaking at MWEDO or village meetings). Based on significant relationships, age was controlled when predicting the agency indicators. As shown in Figure 1, landownership was significantly negatively related to partner control, indicating that women who owned land reported experiencing less partner control.

Table 3. Correlations between study variables.

	Land ownership	Partner power	Discomfort speaking	Household decision-making	Speaking at MWEDO meetings	Speaking at Village meetings
Land ownership	–	–0.14*	–0.11*	0.15*	0.14*	0.10
Partner power		–	0.18**	–0.27**	–0.10	0.07
Discomfort Speaking			–	–0.20**	–0.27**	–0.42**
Household Decision-making				–	0.21**	0.15*
Speaking at MWEDO meetings					–	0.43**
Speaking at Village meetings						–

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

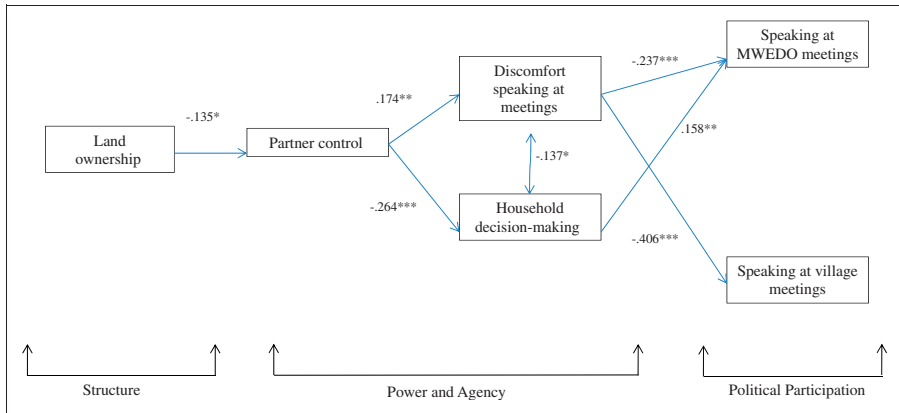


Figure 1. The hypothesized model with standardized estimates. * $p < .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

Higher levels of partner control were, in turn, positively related to women’s discomfort speaking at meetings, but negatively related to women’s household decision-making. In other words, higher levels of control were related to a report of increased discomfort speaking, whereas lowers levels of control were related to greater levels of household decision-making among women. Discomfort speaking at meetings and household decision-making each predicted women’s political participation. Specifically, discomfort speaking at meetings was related to a lesser

likelihood of speaking at either MWEDO or village meetings, whereas higher levels of household decision-making were related to a greater likelihood of speaking at MWEDO meetings. Results suggest that the data fit the model well (CFI = .92; RMSEA = .07; $\chi^2/df = 2.19$).

In order to establish that relationship power and control and women's individual agency help explain how landownership is indirectly related to higher levels of political participation, criteria for mediating conditions and a product of coefficients test were used. The conditions that must be met to establish a significant indirect relation are: (a) the independent variable (i.e. landownership) must be significantly related to the process variables (i.e. power and agency); (b) the hypothesized process variables must directly predict the outcome (i.e. political participation); and (c) a product of coefficients test, in which a calculated indirect effect is divided by a calculated standard error, is significant (Sobel, 1990). Significant *t*-values from these formulas indicate that the indirect effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable is significant. First, to test whether landownership was significantly indirectly related to individual agency via partner control, a products of coefficients test for each pathway was conducted. Results from these tests provide marginal support for the indirect relation of landownership on discomfort speaking $t = -1.61$ ($p = .107$) and household decision-making $t = 1.83$ ($p = .068$), suggesting a trend whereby landownership is marginally related to higher levels of individual agency. However, mediation tests examining the indirect effects of partner control on women's political participation demonstrated that partner control significantly indirectly predicted levels of women's political participation at MWEDO meetings via women's discomfort speaking $t = 2.14$ ($p = .032$) and their levels of household decision-making $t = -2.09$ ($p = .037$). Partner control also significantly indirectly predicted political participation at village meetings via household decision-making $t = 2.45$ ($p = .014$). These results provide support for the hypothesis that the relational power that women experience is directly related to their individual levels of agency which, in turn, directly relate to whether or not they participate politically at meetings held in their village.

Discussion

The pursuit of equality and justice calls not only for the broader-based representation of women in formal politics, but also for their participation in decision-making (Cornwall & Goetz, 2005). This study demonstrates that taking a sociopsychological approach to the investigation of women's political participation can uncover mechanisms related to structure, power, and agency that enable women's participation and, in doing so, can create viable routes to gender justice. The findings – namely that redistributing structural power (i.e. women owning land in a context whereby female landownership defied social roles) relates to patterns of relationship power and individual agency that in turn relate to political participation – provide support for the suggestion that considering larger social structures and psychosocial processes involved in gendered power is a critical factor in

facilitating transformative levels of political participation and decision-making among women.

Several scholars in the area of development and economics have taken existing economic and political power relations as given, accepting them as legitimate. However, the processes demonstrated in the current study suggest that there are concrete ways to bring women into the political process in a manner that alters processes of inclusion that operate within particular communities, and which govern the opportunities for women to claim their rights to participation and resources. This is in line with critical community psychologists who promote analysis and action that challenges the restrictions imposed by exploitative economic and political relationships and dominant systems of knowledge production, often aligning themselves with broad social movements to challenge the social inequalities that flourish under global capitalism (Campbell & Murray, 2004). In particular, the results from the indirect effects examined in this study suggest that relationship power explains how institutionalized power relates to women's agency and political participation, lending evidence to the idea that individuals embody social relationships and processes (Connell, 2012; Sánchez & Martín-Sevillano, 2006). This is important in light of knowing that most approaches to women's political participation are centered on categorical thinking (e.g. quotas that focus on disparities between women and men), rather than on gendered processes that impact women. For political participation to yield influence, women must be able to sway others in the decision-making process and not merely occupy seats or membership on committees.

Given the risk for scholarship to further legitimize structures of domination by privileging certain forms of Western democracy, the current study moves away from standard Western notions of politics to a more inclusive and flexible notion by examining political participation in a marginalized community of East Africa. Moreover, the findings also lend evidence to the notion that self-mobilized women throughout the world are engaging in a complex process of renegotiating structural and relational injustices that transform women's well-being (Grabe et al., 2014). Specifically, the results suggest that women's NGOs that offer an alternative view to development – by transforming traditional power structures – provide an important and effective means of achieving change on a number of different fronts: structural (e.g. property ownership), relational (e.g. marital power), and individual (e.g. comfort speaking and household decision-making). Nevertheless, it is still important to note that although this investigation demonstrates that MWEDO is directly challenging gendered structural inequities by facilitating women's landownership, it is also the case that the project of land privatization itself is embedded in a larger neoliberal development project.

It is also important to consider the methodological limitations of the current study when interpreting the results and making suggestions for future research. First, based on the demonstrated model, it is not possible to account for women's initial interest in joining the organization or if women with more progressive husbands were more likely to come into landownership. However, the variables in the demonstrated model were examined in the hypothesized order for three primary

reasons: (a) the theoretical framework used to develop the manuscript emphasizes power inequalities at structural and relational levels; (b) previously published papers by the author have examined alternate path models that suggest the structural level of power precedes the relational level (Grabe, 2010); and (c) the model presented in the current study is accompanied by qualitative findings from interviews with leaders at the organization and women in the communities that lend further support to the mechanisms at play. Regardless, because the pattern of correlations suggests a dynamic interplay between the structural and relational aspects of power, priorities for future research should include longitudinal studies to investigate the causal effects of structural change. Sound methodology surrounding the investigation of women's political participation is imperative to understand the obstacles that women confront and effect interventions that can contribute to social change in a globalized context.

Despite the study limitations, the findings have promising potential for informing both practical intervention and theory. Although notions of participation have been hijacked in the development community in apolitical ways, many scholars suggest that participation must be viewed as political because it has the potential to dismantle social structures and challenge patterns of dominance (White, 1996). Certainly, the study findings support this by illustrating that the mechanisms by which altered structural changes – the challenge to gendered power that landownership introduces – can bring about profound sociopsychological change for women that can enable political participation. Although many organizations co-opt the term “participation,” the results demonstrate that the task involves not just the empowerment of disadvantaged groups, but the transformation of broader processes and structures that perpetuate the social inequalities that so frequently undermine opportunities for women's participation. Indeed, if we are to consider women's political participation at a global level, the findings suggest that addressing structural barriers as they present locally (e.g. low levels of education, unequal pay) are imperative to achieve adequate representation and build the capacity of women leaders to more fully participate. MWEDO's efforts, in particular, emerged from a grassroots effort in the Global South that critiques colonial, capitalist, and gender oppressions in a manner that strategically addresses policies and norms that substantiate male power and control rather than conforming to agendas from international agencies. The findings demonstrate that international organizations should be informed by marginalized voices in local communities that can, and ought to, determine their own agendas for liberation.

Acknowledgements

The work in this manuscript reflects a partnership between academia and grassroots community engagement. Dr Mara Goldman, Assistant Professor of Geography at the University of Colorado, Boulder was a key academic collaborator in the administration of this project. The grassroots organization MWEDO is described within the manuscript. I am also grateful for the critical perspective of Anjali Dutt offered in several conversations on these topics in preparation for this manuscript.

Funding

This research was supported by a National Science Foundation grant (NSF 0921537) to Shelly Grabe.

Notes

1. In comparison, women in the USA in 2013 held only 18% of congressional seats, falling below the world average of 20.8% (World Bank, 2014a).
2. The partnering organization, MWEDO, implemented trainings twice a month to educate women regarding their property rights and how they could access land titling. Paralegals provided legal aid to the community so that women's names could be included in titles when land was registered.
3. Because the local language Maa is not typically a written language, the survey was written in Swahili and orally administered in Maa. The research assistants were all bilingual and received extensive training and practice in translating the written interview during administration.

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