



TANU Women: Gender and Culture in the Making of Tanganyikan Nationalism, 1955-1965

(Social History of Africa)

Susan Geiger

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In this book, Susan Geiger establishes gender as a category of analysis that not only situates women in African political life, but also compels readers to reformulate concepts such as "nationalism" and the "state." By highlighting the key role women played in the nationalist struggle in Tanganyika, Geiger dispels "metanarratives" of African nationalism that privilege Western-educated African male elites and generally conceive African nationalism as an imported ideology. Through her accounts of the life histories of women participants in the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU), Geiger reveals the actions and "culture of politics" through which TANU women constructed, performed and maintained nationalism in Tanzania. The striking commonality of these life histories is the extent to which women expressed a sense of personal and collective identity that encompassed far more than particular ethnic loyalties and affiliations. TANU women drew upon notions of dignity, pan-ethnic solidarity, equality, and tolerance to articulate a nationalist consciousness that has persisted in spite of economic hardship and political disenchantment. This sense of Tanzanian nationalism, rooted in the forms of popular mobilization expressed by women, challenges facile assessments of nationalism in Africa as a "success" or a "failure." Throughout the book, the life of Bibi Titi Mohamed, the most prominent woman leader during the nationalist phase (1955-65), provides a thread that connects the narratives of TANU women's activities. Geiger develops the experiences of Bibi Titi Mohamed into a metaphor for the strengths and limitations of women's political participation and the continuing gender constraints facing Tanzanian women. Methodologically innovative, solidly researched, and compellingly written, "TANU Women" is a book of broad scholarly appeal. It is also a book that should find wide use in courses on African history and politics, women in Africa, and women's studies.

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