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THE UMOJA FEDERATION: WOMEN'S COOPTATION INTO

A LOCAL POWER STRUCTURE

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"Women have been left behind, but they can be leaders too."

- attributed to former (male) subchief

"The chief found women leaders because women won't obey a man."

- woman subchief

These two statements, reflecting variant perceptions of a government initiated mobilization of women, suggest organizational problems that emerged in Umoja,* a women's federation of the late colonial era in western Kenya. Organizations adapt to the surrounding environment, a process which has significant effects on organizational goal transformation, leadership strategies, and leader-member relations. The process by which subordinate groups are drawn into local power structures and the terms on which they are integrated are likely to vary according to the composition and size of the group. While studies of such processes abound with regard to racial, ethnic, or neighborhood communities, we have little information about their application to the category of women. Sexual subordination is a unique form of subordination--one that involves half or more of a community population and cuts across regional, class, and occupational boundaries.

The universal subordination of women to men--though varied across and within societies--is the result of less access to material resources, norms denigrating women, and the relegation of women to the private rather than public sphere.¹ Developing external support may be problematic for women advancing their interests as women,² particularly if female gains are seen as male losses or as a threat to social institutions such as the family. Recorded history is predisposed towards documenting organizations

*"Unity" in Swahili, though locally translated as "working together"

that "survive," perhaps accounting for the seeming absence of many organizations advancing women's interests. Women's organizations, particularly those achieving a certain degree of power, may engender reactions which make survival problematic or improbable.

In the classic interest group pattern, persons who share common interests become aware of and act on those interests, an idea based on the assumption that people are rational beings who act in self-interested ways.³ This classic perspective does not address the inequitable distribution of resources to act on common interests; subordinate groups have less access to education, contacts, money, and other resources which facilitate successful political action.⁴ It also neglects how subordinate groups internalize values which denigrate them in the larger context, thereby inhibiting the collective will to act on common interests.⁵ These factors make collective consciousness and organization among women, like other subordinate groups, problematic.

Though women's universal subordination to men implies that their interests have been jeopardized, only rarely do women's organizations emerge which explicitly advance women's interests. Women's isolation from one another, their residence and intimacy with the dominant group,⁶ and the consequent emergence of identifications based on family or male interests--which cut across female interests--further reinforce difficulties posed by the rise of sex-based interest expression and action. Moreover, it would be irrational for all members of groups with common interests to press for public, or collective, goods because if the group objective was achieved, all would gain, whether or not they had participated. This phenomenon has been labeled the "public goods dilemma," and results in organizational leaders utilizing either coercion or voluntary incentives to induce membership participation.⁷ In societies where women's political participation is considered inappro-

priate and where benefits are mediated⁸ to women via families, this public goods dilemma for women is likely to be particularly acute.

Though structural factors make the emergence of women's interest groups problematic, there are certain conditions under which women's organizations grow or flourish. Male absence, relative deprivation, female segregated work settings, and reciprocally based female coping strategies in marginal economic settings all contribute to female solidarity manifested in organizational form.⁹ We have few analyses, however, of women's organizations created and coopted by political authorities. Given the important influence of governments in influencing participation or quiescence, and the viability of government stimulated cooperatives and agribusiness organizations, a focus on women would provide new insights into this "mobilized" pattern.¹⁰

The larger political and social structure sets the stage for whether organizations among certain categories of people will emerge at all.¹¹ Though organizations are always affected by their political environment, coopted organizations, or those organizations created and absorbed into a power structure, are very likely to be dependent on that structure for survival. While dependency complicates organizational goal transformation and introduces added strain to leader-member relations, the power structure's stake in viable organizational absorption may provide leaders with an additional resource--coercion--as an incentive to induce participation. With the public goods dilemma and prohibition of women's political activity in some societies, analyzing compulsion may illustrate crucial features of power structure absorption and leadership strategies, as well as its ramifications for leader-member relations.

In this paper, I will trace the emergence and demise of Umoja, a women's federation of the late colonial era among a subgroup of the Baluyia,

the third largest ethnic group in Kenya. The research was conducted in Shikulu sublocation, Idakho location, western Kenya, from December 1974, to June, 1975.¹² Some fifty interviews were held with leaders and members of Umoja, as well as with other political figures of that era. The interviews were supported by documentation in local and national archives.¹³

I will analyze the relationship between external support and organizational goal transformation, focusing on cooptation, leadership strategies, and ultimate organizational collapse. I then examine the legacy of this historic mobilization for contemporary women. Finally, I conclude the paper and draw implications of these case findings for the integration of sexually subordinate groups into larger political units.

The Setting: Origins of Umoja

Umoja's origins were integrally tied to a political-administrative machine context, into which an autocratic chief with pressing administrative responsibilities was situated. The style of British colonial "indirect rule" in western Kenya was decentralized from the central perspective, but highly centralized and power-concentrated at the local level.¹⁴ Low levels of government services and small numbers of educated persons made the location chief, with his administrative duties, salary, and therefore economic wealth, central to power in both Idakho location and Shikulu sublocation. In the late 1950s, colonial attention was fixed both on reducing soil erosion and on initiating land consolidation for eventual land registration. Chiefs were responsible for consolidating small, fragmented land plots for demarcation, adjudication, and registration,¹⁵ and it is with this administrative responsibility that Umoja was initially associated.

Chiefs were given a good deal of discretion in deciding just how land reform should be implemented. They worked closely with Community Development

Assistants (CDAs), who directed much of their attention at women and thereby provided a structural model for chiefs in the utilization of women in these development tasks.¹⁶ A key actor in the emergence of Umoja was the soon-to-be subchief of Shikulu, the CDA in the area. Once enclosed areas were agreed upon, boundaries were drawn and were to be made permanent by hedges of euphorbia bush (known locally as venakotsi). Labor was required to both plant and tend the euphorbia, and women were called upon for this work, in keeping with sexual division of labor whereby cultivation is a female task. Though women had always been required to do public labor, ranging from periodic labor on the first chief's farm to repairing holes in the road, the compulsory caring for venakotsi represented a regularized, weekly task that transpired for more than a year's period.

Working closely together, the chief and subchief apparently both perceived the benefits to be gained from encouraging the mobilization of women. First, a mobilization met administrative directives on land policy, and thus aided in satisfying work requirements for which they were responsible. The existence of a dynamic group reflected well on the progressive administration of the location and sublocation, both from internal and external perspectives. Internally, to have large groups of women at the chief's disposal meant the administration had access to extensive labor supplies and therefore a large capacity for communal project implementation. Since projects demanded extensive participation of all community members, there could be no success for promotional campaigns without incorporating women, as large numbers of men were absent due to migration elsewhere for employment.¹⁷ Externally, community development and local participation were promoted as progressive administrative methods. Government initiated women's groups could be easily enumerated, providing positive district level performance evaluations of the CDA and chief.

The second benefit the chief and subchief could obtain from mobilizing women is explained by women's relative autonomy, making them less amenable to government control. Government was a male affair: male officials made announcements at meetings, known as barazas, which were attended by men and further diffused by male communication systems. (A good deal of work and communication transpires on intra-sex lines among the Baluyia.) The more fully women could be integrated into authority structures, the more directly they could be controlled. One way to do so was to coopt women recognized and respected in the informal female hierarchy, and fill an existent political vacuum with women, who were a majority of adult residents. Women's integration extended support to a troubled local power structure.

Before late colonial times, women had neither autonomous political power nor institutionalized authority as do some elite women in contemporary times. Custom among the Baluyia prohibits female leadership and authority in mixed-sex settings.¹⁸ The chief, a powerful administrative executive, officially sanctioned women's entry into the formal political sphere through Umoja, created in response to development projects. The chief and subchief called upon women leaders to organize labor, disseminate information, serve on committees, and attend meetings. To make this mass female mobilization both palatable and acceptable, as well as to organize this complicated work task, leaders and organizational structures were created and developed. The institutionalization of women's political voice established a dramatic departure from the pre-existent system in which men monopolized political authority. With Umoja, the political task of representing women's interests was introduced into the male council system, thus firmly establishing the legitimacy of mixed-sex barazas.

Women gained status from the drama associated with this formal "integration of women into development" and the appointment of women leaders.

Women gained in more concrete ways as well by the provision of group-related agricultural services, in recognition of women's predominant role in working and managing farms.¹⁹ Both male and female staff lectured to special women's agricultural barazas, (for which attendance was required), and seeds were occasionally distributed at these affairs. In addition, top and mid-hierarchical level leaders in Umoja were encouraged to attend short courses at the nearby Bukura Farmer Training Center and transmit this information to women's groups. In tangible and intangible ways, all women gained from the female mobilization campaign.

Without the chief acting as legitimator, it is unlikely that these new roles for women would have been acceptable to doubtful members of the community, both women and men alike. The chief's official sanction, however, did present some major problems to organizational maintenance; the chief defined initial goals, and organizational continuity was dependent on his grace. This placed leaders in a delicate guiding position, attempting to build an autonomous and meaningful group existence, yet continuing to receive the local administration's approval.

Leaders, Structures, and Relations with the Local Administration

By the late 1950s, Idakho and the surrounding area had been undergoing intensive economic and social structural changes, resulting from the increasingly commercialized agricultural system and the absence of large segments of its male populace. As a consequence, women took on new economic responsibilities and often assumed a more independent role in households. Yet segments of Shikulu women, having acquired economic and personal resources in the past decade to exert leadership, were not accorded the same opportunities as men, precluded to them because of their sex. A portion of the female populace was receptive to mobilization, and the cooptive structure provided a useful status mobility channel.

Creation and care of boundary hedges for the nearly 2,000 households in Shikulu was no small task, and a complex organizational structure was necessary for its direction and implementation. Idakho clans and subclans are spatially segregated, and became base structures of this loosely centralized sublocation-wide organization. At the top was the woman subchief, assisted by a vice-subchief, and mid-level leaders included a liguru²⁰ for each clan or subclan, assisted by a treasurer, secretary, and askari (Swahili for police). This structure included positions culled from three authority structures. From the indigeneous Baluyia system were clan level neighborhood leaders, the liguru (plural: maguru); from the colonial government, sublocation-wide and askari posts, and from the Department of Community Development, the treasurer and secretary roles. The woman subchief, assisted by her vice-subchief, attended weekly locational barazas at the chief's center some distance away, as well as sublocational barazas. She was in close contact with the chief and subchief, and met weekly with women maguru below her.

The size of Umoja membership was large, and theoretically included all adult women in the sublocation. Membership was widely perceived as compulsory. Leaders, particularly the women maguru, aided in planning group activity and were assisted by the women askari who directed other women in their communal cultivation. To enforce membership participation and group discipline, chief-sanctioned fines were levied against those who failed to work, in the form of cash, fowl, or a household good. Treasurers collected fines and secretaries kept records of attendance and fines. Although there was no treasurer at the sublocation level, the woman subchief, consulting with women maguru, had authority to disburse clan treasuries. Local elite women disdained participation in this communal activity and were excused by a financial contribution to replace their labor.

The local male administration was heavily involved in selecting and advising Umoja leaders. The woman subchief was selected by the chief and subchief, as well as the agricultural staff. Candidates for women maguru were chosen by the chief and subchief, who then presented them to a women's baraza. At the meeting, women lined up behind the candidate of their choice, and the candidate with the longest line won. Below that level, however, women maguru selected their treasurer, secretary, and askari.

In another form of male control, the subchief regularly attended the weekly meetings that took place between top female leadership and the women maguru. This meeting would usually occur just after the woman subchief returned from the chief's baraza. Thus, women were largely disseminating information that had been obtained at the chief and subchief's directive. Indeed, the few records kept at the sublocation level were for the sole purpose of informing the chief, according to the woman subchief. Although an aura of autonomy surrounds Umoja, it was tightly observed and controlled by male administrators. Given this extensive control, it will be apparent later why leaders pursued the particular strategies they did.

The money collected from fines, fowl, and labor replacement fees in Umoja's initial stages constituted important organizational resources, under the management of women leaders. The leaders saw the money as a resource to be expended to advance the status and stability of their organization--their perception, however, being heavily influenced by the pervasive presence of the chief and subchief. Despite the low levels of cash accumulation, leaders donated money to community causes and projects as did other organizations with more solid and secure resource bases such as churches.

The bulk of Umoja money was donated for the "entertainment of visitors," and clan treasurers were required to turn over certain sums for this activity. When government officials (such as the District Officer or other middle-

ranking technical officers) visited areas, they were received with great courtesy, lavish food, and sometimes other gifts such as chickens or a sheep. Moreover, during self-help fund-raising affairs, all guests of honor and heavy contributors had to be fed. Umoja women played a large role in supplying, purchasing, and preparing food for visitors and their hosts: the chief, subchief, and elders. The subchief reportedly gave public praise to women for the way they entertained visitors. Another example of organization-building activity was found in the remaining Umoja records: a sizeable amount was donated to one of the most wealthy and influential men in the community who was building the first permanent house in the sublocation to be covered with bricks, an indicator of great prestige.

On hindsight, the over-extension of organizational funds to activities and individuals much more fully endowed than this fledging organization seems incredulous. If the organization is examined in that context where allies were necessary to build and extend a base of support so recently legitimized by the chief, however, it appears reasonable. Understandably, the chief and subchief continued to see Umoja as a useful and viable organization working to their benefit and thus deserving of sustained support. When new modes of organizational collection were developed by women themselves, local authorities readily supported them.

Organizational Transformation

Communal hedgemaking activity was gradually displaced by other organizational activities. Most hedges were up and growing, and the major activity of land reform developed into hearing complaints and adjusting boundaries. Thus, women's baraza attendance began to slacken off and the justification of Umoja's existence was in question. Umoja subsequently became a multi-purpose organization, which developed multiple sources of funding. The

process of redefining Umoja involved enlarging and expanding the traditional sphere and activity of women. Expanding organizational resources conceivably permitted internal consolidation among members with other bases than compulsion.

Incorporated into the sublocation-wide organizations were agricultural labor groups (known locally as buhasio) which engaged in collective planting, weeding, and harvesting. Numbering twenty or more per clan, buhasio existed on a far wider scale than in the past, when activities involved only a handful of women. In order to insure group discipline in buhasio activity, similar fines and fees were applied as those utilized in hedge-making activity. The new method of resource acquisition involved contracting with households for labor.

Another financial innovation was that of large-scale mutual aid which, prior to Umoja, had primarily operated on an ad hoc, non-cash basis. Mutual aid occurs in connection with funerals or bridewealth exchange, occasions in which a great deal of food is required to serve visitors. There were two patterns of mutual aid activity during Umoja. In one, money was collected regularly and saved in a fund which would be used during crises. In the second pattern, collections were taken when the need arose. These new activities can be interpreted as attempts by women to appropriate the value of their own labor. Money, labor and Umoja activities were widely perceived to be within the women's realm, over which they--not husbands--had authority and autonomy.

It was in another area, however, that even more radical organizational transformation took place. In delegate form, women leaders went to the subchief to request that they be allowed to conduct their own judgment barazas, in which women would judge women. Proposing that women be judged by their peers, in a setting which had always confined such judgments to men,

was a dramatic departure from existent norms of authority. In local judicial barazas, men elders would question the affected parties, reach a consensus, and assign a fine to the appropriate party in exchange for small fees. During Umoja, women elders would judge other women, assess fines, and collect fees for themselves. Thus, women's judicial barazas represented an income-earning opportunity for women elders, and usurped a good proportion of cases from men elders.

Women elders heard cases about marital problems, disagreements among women, and failure to submit to Umoja discipline. Men also lodged complaints about women with women elders. Women elders' judgments reflected strict standards about appropriate female behavior, and they reportedly dispensed equal to harsher fines than would men elders had a woman been proved to be "lazy" or "abusive" to her husband. Perhaps this harshness resulted from the precarious legitimacy on which Umoja rested. Women could thus assure they were not overstepping traditional bounds of behavior with their newfound authority.

Leaders also discouraged what was considered inappropriate behavior on the part of women. Several women leaders reported that if they saw women smoking tobacco on the road, they would rip the cigarette from the smoker's mouth. They further berated women who drank busaa at local beer clubs. Women were sensitive to the label "prostitute" for women who travelled or drank and smoked excessively, and wanted to dissociate Umoja from this image.

Though women transformed organizational goals and developed new sources of finance and administrative authority over women, leader-member conflict over the dispensation of organizational resources threatened organizational continuity. Women expanded their role in judicial authority, yet at the same time, constricted options for women as a whole. Traditional sex role standards still controlled and governed women's lives.

Organizational Collapse

The reasons for Umoja's collapse are several. Focus is on the changing political context, the attitude of men, the disaffection of leaders, and most importantly, the alienation of members. The cumulative effect of these factors was heightened in an organizational crisis over cash allocation.

Widespread suspicion about the corruptibility of an individual or group holding money characterized the political context. Besides general cynicism pervading the area, there were also allegations as to whether local administrators misused Umoja funds, as was widely perceived about them in connection with other projects. Around independence, people tired of extensive government involvement in their day-to-day lives; the late colonial era was filled with numerous regulations about soil, land, and other inconveniences which served to harrass people on a daily basis.

Independence signalled the end of chiefly autocratic rule as well, whose functions and authority shrank, as did salaries. Umoja disintegrated just prior to the time the local chief was relieved of his office. Thus, the end of official encouragement at the location level was imminent.

Men's attitude towards Umoja was less favorably disposed than earlier. Their initial interest was undoubtedly predicated upon the chief and subchief's enthusiastic backing. Some respondents reported that men supported Umoja because wives behaved better, knowing that women elders might harshly judge them. The judicial elders, however, lost jurisdiction with the emergence of women elders, representing a strong material stake for them. Moreover, a number of men opposed the idea of women travelling, which was sometimes associated with immorality. According to one male elder, "men liked buhasio, but not women leaders. They did not like women walking

from place to place, and thought they might become harlots."²¹ Still another segment of men was able to derive some gain from Umoja. A number of leaders report that men maguru borrowed money from treasuries which was never returned. These particular men were not, however, concerned with organizational maintenance, but with gleaning whatever cash was available to supplement their meager earnings.

There was some leader disaffection with Umoja as well. Activities demanded a good deal of energy and commitment, particularly for those leaders who travelled to the chief's center for weekly barazas and the sublocation barazas, in addition to meetings with other women leaders. Often they used their own money to pay travel costs associated with these meetings. Besides women elders with their income-earning judgment fees, the only solid, legitimate benefit leaders derived was that members worked their farms without pay. Some women leaders skimmed off a small proportion of treasury money as tribute; in certain areas, this pattern was openly practised and accepted by members. The prime factor contributing to leader disaffection, however, was the lack of salaries; women leaders questioned why they should remain voluntary, unpaid labor.

Finally, among women members, there was widespread dissatisfaction about decisions regarding the dispensation of money collected. Women wanted money to be divided yearly, and when this did not happen, or when poultry sums were divided, women perceived that either women leaders or local administrators wrongfully appropriated the money. Leaders explain part of this member disaffection by saying women were "getting lazy," a wholly different perception from that of members, who saw themselves as exploited labor. During the final stages of Umoja, many women refused to work, or to pay fines when they did not work.

All these factors culminated in a final financial crisis, reflecting the inability of leaders to replace external dependency with internal support. The problem was whether to bank the money according to the chief's directive, to divide it among women, or to continue saving it locally for a larger investment or project.

Two versions of the chief's directive were reported by a number of leaders and members. In one, the chief called all women leaders to the chief's center, and explained that according to new regulations, all money was to be banked in Kakamega, the district capital. Treasurers were directed to turn over the money to his clerk, and receive a slip verifying the amount. In the second version, women relate that the subchief sent word to treasurers via husbands that money was to be banked, and that a government vehicle would collect the money at the village center and take it to Kakamega. In both versions, women leaders widely perceived that the chief and subchief were scheming to deviously acquire all the money; no leaders report turning over money to them.

After the crisis, the chief neither encouraged the group, nor provided the most minimal support, so necessary for a fledging and politically marginal organization, still heavily dependent on external support. To the chief, women represented a dispensable group, certainly one which was no great financial asset. Had members remained committed to the organization's life, it might have survived. Members, however, wanted yearly divisions while leaders wanted to retain money in the treasury. Without a resolution of this disagreement, members refused to work and leaders no longer had anyone to lead. Members no longer felt compelled to participate by the chief, an incentive which initially insured group discipline.

Though treasury amounts varied, it appears that very little money was left anyway during final stages of Umoja. Most money had gone to entertaining

visitors and making donations, and was thus indirectly siphoned by the local administration. Members probably overestimated the amount of money left to be divided, not surprising, however, given the dominance of leadership in such matters. In courting external support to sustain organizational life, women leaders became estranged from members--the crucial cornerstone to organizational survival.

Umoja's Legacy

The legacy of Umoja is important for explaining contemporary organization patterns among women in Shikulu and for the symbolic entrance of women into the local political arena.

As a result of Umoja, women now organize on a small-scale basis (clan, subclan, or lineage), and avoid saving cash for long-term investments. Umoja provides the structural model--shorn of its sublocation-wide posts and meetings--for agricultural and mutual aid activities. Agricultural groups now have the explicit policy of yearly monetary division among members. There is widespread suspicion about large-scale organization and wealth accumulation for investment purposes. Many women now say they "want to know where all the money is before starting again." Though occasional women representatives attend mixed-sex barazas, the judgment and agricultural barazas for women have totally disappeared. Women in these small-scale groups periodically become active in electoral politics or in local self-help projects. Though women continue to provide themselves with self-sustaining mutual aid and agricultural labor, they inhibit the growth of large-scale organization which would allow wealth accumulation, recognition by government personnel, or a salient political threat in the electoral process. Relatively isolated and autonomous, they are unable to compete for the increasingly valuable goods distributed in the local power arena.

Equally important is Umoja's symbolic legacy--the vivid recall of an atypical period when women exerted some very visible collective authority over themselves and within the larger political system. The establishment of a women's counterpart to the subchief was an historic first and highly dramatized women's entry into formal political authority. A group consciousness was created among women, which increased their status, recognized and consulted as they were by chiefs and government authorities. Moreover, Umoja set an important precedent in administrative style--women's formal inclusion in land and agricultural programs. Women were integrated into the communication mainstream with direct contact, access, and representation in the public process. This dramatic departure from existent norms proved to be a workable administrative practise.

Conclusion and Theoretical Implications

Cooptation provided a catalyst essential to mobilizing a subordinate group like women. As a condition of the mobilization, women leaders organized participants for administrative tasks, but in addition offered to the chief and other power figures an opportunity to appropriate organizational labor and cash surplus. Leaders were consequently authorized to utilize compulsion as a strategy to induce membership participation. In exchange, leaders gained political experience and opportunities for status mobility. Women as a whole acquired political representation, status, and agricultural services, and members subsequently developed enough power to transform organizational goals and usurp juridical authority over women. Nevertheless, conflict over the dispensation of accumulated cash proved critical to organizational survival. Membership suspicion and ultimate alienation over the disposal of cash surplus, juxtaposed with the levying of fines, destroyed the internal base so necessary to sustain organizational life. At the same

time, leaders continued to be dependent on the chief and subchief, especially so with the wrath they incurred from key men in the community. Women leaders had few allies, both within and outside the organization; with neither internal nor external support, the organization collapsed. In anticipation of reciprocity, women leaders made excessive investments to consolidate and strengthen the organization that in hindsight worked to the organization's detriment. Though leaders did not permit local administrators to re-coopt this fledgling, but ever-increasingly autonomous organization, they were implicated by virtue of Umoja's drained treasury, and consequently lost credibility among members. In the end, most resources were spent and membership commitment evaporated.

Cooptation and the concomittant availability of compulsion to induce participation solved two organizational problems. First, the "public goods dilemma," endemic to all organizations pressing for collective goods, is particularly acute for women because they are mediated recipients of such goods through family relationships. Organizing a large, cohesive women's group would have been unwieldy without compulsion, a technique at the disposal of women leaders. Women joined and labored in Umoja under threat of sanctions, buttressed by the chief's authority, though sanctions were made more palatable by status and material incentives which supplemented fines. Moreover, the expectation that Umoja was growing in power and in control of its own direction and finance, masked the overtly manipulative features of its origin and utility to the local administration.

The second organizational problem alleviated by cooptation and compulsion was legitimizing a subordinate group's entry into the local political arena. While a comprehensive ideology of sex egalitarianism can rapidly integrate women into politics, their absorption into political arenas without concerted

Ideological effort is problematic. Nevertheless, certain environments, such as machines, are structurally conducive to the emergence of subordinate groups. In the administrative machine structure discussed in this paper, the chief alone had the power to authorize women's integration against potential opposition. He manipulated progressive developmental thinking about women to share administrative burdens, acquire political support, and siphon funds. Yet at the same time, he gave Umoja an aura of respectability it so soarily needed to establish a presence in face of this radical departure from existent norms about women's political participation.

Yet cooptation and compulsion contributed to later organizational problems. Cooptation set constraints on organizational action, particularly on leaders' ability to dispense cash resources. Continued dependence on local administrative support, with belated responsiveness to member demands, led to insoluble crisis. Compulsion, in the meantime, had contributed to membership suspicion about leaders, and its continued use produced estrangement between leaders and members. While compulsion proved a temporary solution to the public goods dilemma, its continuation was anathema to organizational survival. With the efficacy of compulsion lessening and the failure of voluntary incentives to replace compulsion, the public goods dilemma again re-emerged.

Broader Implications for Sexual Subordination

Though this case is drawn from a local colonial context, its basic structure is not unlike those of other administrative machines, party machines, or even some mobilization regimes. A wide variety of political structures create and coopt women's organizations, their motivation ranging from pure manipulation to a genuine ideological commitment to empowering a heretofore subordinate group.²² Though fraught with difficulty, cooptive

integration may seem a viable strategy to politically powerless women. A certain drawback, however, is the tendency for the coopting institution to integrate the subordinate group only on its own terms--thereby creating, defining, and limiting the absorbed organization's activity. Freeing the organization from external dependency may not be the terms envisioned by the coopting structure, hence inhibiting genuine empowerment.

Umoja women were integrated into the political arena studied on local powerholders' terms. Despite these "tainted" origins, women acquired some collective power, independent organizational resources, leadership skills, and strategically positioned leaders. Was there a limit to the extent to which they could exert power? Is it cooptation that serves as a major constraint to the acquisition of substantive power, or the phenomenon of sexual subordination and its unique characteristics? The following speculations rest on this case, but may be indirectly supported by the historic absence of female political authority.

Sexual subordination and sex-based organization in the absence of a concerted ideology are most apparent constraints to empowerment. This is manifested in three ways, as illustrated by case findings in this paper.

First, organizational goal transformation in line with women's needs engendered reactions which made organizational survival improbable. Not only were male elders' financial interests at stake, but the whole mechanism of male social control over women was threatened. Women, however, did not use this authority in ways that differed from male elders, leading to the second factor limiting the acquisition of substantive power by sexually subordinate groups. In judging women's infractions, women leaders reinforced sex-role norms and male control over women. Though the persons administering justice differed, the structure of sex stratification and authority went unquestioned. Aware of perceived threats and hostile reactions, women's

strategy was perhaps to cushion visible reform effects and rely on traditional standards of sex-role norms and behavior. In so doing, they merely reinforce those norms, resulting in only long-term (if any) change for women. Thus, women's ideology in this process is crucial. Third and finally, the size and composition of sexually subordinate groups make the emergence of a female power bloc problematic for most political structures, which divide geographically for purposes of representation and administration. Women are tied to men at various class, occupational, and regional levels, giving rise to a number of different interests among women themselves. What does empowerment for women mean in terms of the distribution of benefits and opportunities among women as a whole? To the extent that women depend on men as mediated recipients of collective goods, women's interests will have different meanings and priorities, thus dividing women.

An even more basic constraint, then, for the prospects of women's empowerment is not the process of cooptation, but the larger ideological and regime structure into which women are coopted. Structures that permit or encourage inequitable distribution on other bases besides sex ensure that collective goods for classes will take priority over sex groups, maintaining divisions among women. Women's interests have varied meaning for women in different classes, and the public goods dilemma is more heightened for women than any other subordinate group due to their dispersal among classes and units in society. This suggests that empowerment for women must occur either at a time in which women do not depend on men as mediated recipients of collective goods, or under redistributive regimes. As dependents, class issues are likely to have greater salience in political conflicts and their material meanings to women as a whole. Thus, empowerment for women is integrally tied to larger class issues in which they are a part.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, *WOMAN, CULTURE & SOCIETY* (Stanford: Stanford University, 1974); Louise Lamphere, "Review Essay: Anthropology," *SIGNS* 2,3, 1977, pp. 612-627.
- ²Interests are issues that affect peoples' life chances, regardless of their subjective perception of such interests. See Isaac Balbus, "The Concept of Interest in Pluralist & Marxist Analysis," *POLITICS & SOCIETY* 1,2 February, 1971. "Women's interests" is a concept fraught with some difficulty, and depend on some analysis of ultimate goals.
- ³Arthur Bentley, *THE PROCESS OF GOVERNMENT* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1967); (Originally published in 1908); Earl Latham, *THE GROUP BASIS OF POLITICS* (New York: Octagon Books, 1965); David Truman, *THE GOVERNMENTAL PROCESS*, (New York: Knopf, 1951).
- ⁴Michael Lipsky, *PROTEST IN CITY POLITICS* (Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1970); James Q. Wilson, "The Strategy of Protest: Problems of Negro Civic Action," *JOURNAL OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION* 5,3 (1961); Balbus, op.cit.
- ⁵Helen Mayer Hacker, "Women as a Minority Group," *SOCIAL FORCES* 30 (1951), pp. 60-69; Franz Fanon, *THE WRETCHED OF THE EARTH* (New York: Grove Press, 1963); Albert Memmi, *THE COLONIZER & THE COLONIZED* (Boston: Beacon, 1967).
- ⁶Simone de Beauvoir, *THE SECOND SEX* (New York: Bantam, 1953) (Originally published in 1949); Hacker, op.cit., Alice Rossi, "Sex Equality: The Beginnings of Ideology," in Mary Lou Thompson, ed., *VOICES OF THE NEW FEMINISM* (Boston: Beacon, 1970).
- ⁷Organizational theorists have developed different classification schemes to analyze incentives, including normative, remunerative, and coercive, by Amitai Etzioni, *A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF COMPLEX ORGANIZATIONS* (New York: Free Press, 1961), and for voluntary incentives, the distinction between material, solidary, and purposive by James Q. Wilson, *POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS* (New York: Basic Books, 1973). On the role of leadership incentive

strategies, see Robert Salisbury, "An Exchange Theory of Interest Groups," MIDWEST JOURNAL OF POLITICAL SCIENCE 13, 1 (1969) and Mancur Olson, THE LOGIC OF COLLECTIVE ACTION (Cambridge: Harvard, 1965). On the public goods dilemma, see Olson and David J. O'Brien, NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZATIONS & INTEREST GROUP PROCESSES (Princeton: Princeton University, 1976).

⁸The concept of "mediated" goods is borrowed from Jan Smith, "Communities, Associations & the Supply of Collective Goods," AMERICAN JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY 83,2 (1973), pp. 291-308. According to Smith, "consumption of the collective good by one actor may mediate goods to other actors which they do not pay for."

⁹Nancy B. Leis, "Women in Groups: Ijaw Women's Associations," and Carol B. Stacks, "Sex Roles & Survival Strategies in an Urban Black Community," both in Rosaldo & Lamphere, op.cit.; Jo Freeman, THE POLITICS OF WOMEN'S LIBERATION (New York: David McKay, 1975); Rosemary Brana-Shute, "Women's Clubs & Politics: The Case of a Lower Class Neighborhood in Paramaribo, Suriname," URBAN ANTHROPOLOGY 5,2 (1976), pp. 157-186.

¹⁰On government influenced participation, see Murray Edelman, THE SYMBOLIC USES OF POLITICS (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1964) and POLITICS AS SYMBOLIC ACTION (Chicago: Markham, 1971). The term "mobilized" is drawn from Samuel Huntington & Joan Nelson, NO EASY CHOICE: POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES (Cambridge: Harvard, 1976), p. 169.

¹¹Wilson, 1973, op. cit.; Edward Banfield, ed., URBAN GOVERNMENT: A READER IN ADMINISTRATION & POLITICS (New York: Free Press, 1969).

¹² I am grateful to the U.S. Office of Education Title VI Foreign Language Fellowship Fund and to the African Studies Program of the University of Wisconsin for financial and travel funds that supported this research. I am also grateful to the Andala family who so graciously welcomed me as an

additional family member while residing in Shikulu.

Sublocations are the smallest administrative unit in Kenya, usually numbering 1,500-2,000 households in size. The subchief (formerly known as headman, and currently known as assistant chief) presides over this unit. There are nine sublocations in Idakho location, an administrative unit over which the chief presides. The chief and subchief are referred to as the local administration in this paper, and unless noted, are always men.

Phrases or words in quotes indicate common expressions or translations used by respondents.

¹³I am grateful to the Kenya National Archives for making this documented evidence available to me. Documents which contain scattered reference to women's barazas and special government programs targeting women as a clientele include post-war district Annual Reports (known initially as North Kavirondo, subsequently as North Nyanza, and currently as Kakamega), Western Province Annual Reports, Ikolomani Division Handing-Over Report (1955) and Miscellaneous File (1958-59), and the printed Kenya Colony & Protectorate Annual Reports from 1948-1961.

Without interviews, however, the only sporadic attention to women in documents would have made the historic reconstruction of this women's movement impossible.

¹⁴This description is borrowed from the characterization of urban machine politics from Banfield, Part III, op.cit. and Mary Porter & Ann B. Matasar, "The Role & Status of Women in the Daley Organization," in Jane Jaquette, ed., WOMEN IN POLITICS (New York: John Wiley, 1974). Machines are defined as political structures for personal gain designed to maintain a power arrangement through the absorption and reward of widely divergent groups and individuals. For applications of the machine concept to African politics, see Henry Bienen, TANZANIA: PARTY TRANSFORMATION & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (Princeton: Princeton University, 1970) and Edward Schumacher, POLITICS, BUREAUCRACY & RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN SENEGAL (Berkeley: California, 1975).

- ¹⁵For descriptions of land consolidation and registration procedure in Kenya, see John de Wilde, EXPERIENCES WITH AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN TROPICAL AFRICA, Volumes I & II (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1967) and P. B. McEntee, "Improved Farming in the Central Nyanza District-Kenya Colony," JOURNAL OF AFRICAN ADMINISTRATION 12, 1 (1960). Land reform is a lengthy process in western Kenya which involves information dissemination, community consensus, and committees established to insure some degree of equity in the exchange and consolidation of fragments which vary in quality, size, and location.
- ¹⁶In the post-war colonial period, community development staff, both male and female, worked with a number of innovative programs that targeted women as a clientele. For more information see Lord Hailey, AN AFRICAN SURVEY (London: Oxford, 1953) and my "Agricultural Policy, Political Power & Women Farmers in Western Kenya," (Unpublished dissertation: University of Wisconsin, 1976).
- ¹⁷Thirty per cent of the men reportedly worked for wage employment outside the district in 1937 according to Gunter Wagner, THE BANŪ OF NORTH KAVIRONDO (London: Oxford, 1949), p. 94, Volume II. The 1945 district Annual Report states that it is the largest labor exporting area in Kenya.
- ¹⁸Wagner, ibid., pp. 45-46; Walter Sangree, AGE, PRAYER & POLITICS IN TIRIKI, KENYA (London: Oxford, 1966), pp. 86, 89, 237.
- Elite women refers to women who are part of an emerging class in the area of this research. Class is defined as an aggregate of persons who stand in a similar position with respect to some form of power, privilege, or prestige. Gerhard Lenski's flexible definition is utilized in order to incorporate this relatively recent class differentiation where more rigid relations to the means of production have not yet emerged. See his POWER & PRIVILEGE (New York: McGraw Hill, 1966).

- ¹⁹Public goods theorists include both tangible and intangible items as collective goods. A frequent example is "national security," which like "status for women" is an intangible, somewhat diffuse "good." On women's predominance in agriculture see Wagner (I, p. 41) and Sangree (p. xxxvi), op.cit.
- ²⁰Originally referring to a lineage head, the liguru role has changed during the colonial era to what is now the lowest level, unpaid government appointee who administers and communicates policy at the neighborhood level.
- ²¹Personal interview with male elder, Shikulu, February, 1975.
- ²²Barbara Calloway, "Women in Ghana," in Lynne B. Iglitzin & Ruth Ross, eds., WOMEN IN THE WORLD: A COMPARATIVE STUDY (Santa Barbara: Clio, 1976); Gregory Massell, THE SURROGATE PROLETARIAT: MOSLEM WOMEN & REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGIES IN SOVIET CENTRAL ASIA: 1919-1929 (Princeton: Princeton University, 1974); Porter & Matasar, op. cit. and Hilda Scott, DOES SOCIALISM LIBERATE WOMEN? (Boston: Beacon, 1974).