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CLASS & SEX IN THE POLITICS OF WOMEN FARMERS

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Are women universal victims of processes such as colonialism, development, and modernization? Perhaps not. As cross-cultural studies indicate, women were neither universally powerless, nor similarly situated, before such processes began.¹ Furthermore, rural capital penetration, which creates and enhances class differentiation within societies,² is associated with differentiation among women as well. This differentiation has important consequences both for that emerging class structure and for the political mobilization of women in pursuit of 'women's interests.'³

How do class and sex interests affect the politics of women? Social scientists in industrialized and industrializing nations have addressed themselves to this important question.⁴ Yet sex, rather than class, was emphasized in earlier writing on women and development. Observers conclude that modernization has detrimental effects on women, resulting in women's declining status and increased dependency on men.⁵ A further refinement in this literature points to a paradox: while women's access to income and opportunities may increase, changes in the wider economy reduce their proportional control over resources, thus marginalizing women and solidifying dependency.⁶ We know dependency inhibits participation by the poor,⁷ this is expected to affect women's participation as well. But to what extent are all women dependents? That women were differentially marginalized as a group was not an issue in this early literature.

Later writing on women and development, however, recognized differential marginalization, raising questions about our ability to analyze sex alone.⁸ One theorist criticizes the notion that Javanese women are a homogeneous group on any grounds.⁹ Much of this later women and development literature accepts earlier findings, but emphasizes that primary burdens resulting

from development are placed on nonelite women.¹⁰ Still, the thrust of this literature has been economist and policy oriented, rather than on the meaning of findings for politics. Certainly a critical step in these processes involves analyzing the extent to which women act politically to alleviate or transform these documented inequities.

To what extent are women a homogeneous group, with shared interests? Anthropologists have identified a "public-private" distinction, which focuses on the sexual dichotomization of work,¹¹ yet we know that women's public, or nondomestic, roles vary immensely in different historic epochs and regions.¹² Nevertheless, we can assume that women potentially share "private" interests related to reproduction, mothering, and some domestic activity, though certainly their experiences are affected by the opportunities and life styles of the class in which they reside. Although women share few "public" interests, the growth of state structures and expansion of state services--which appear to disproportionately benefit men--may have made more uniform the existence of explicit women's interests, a consequence of intentional and unintentional discrimination. Still, household affiliations and resultant interests compete in priority to hypothetical women's interests. Because of class differences, interests do not uniformly affect women, and women stand to differentially gain and lose in support of certain issues.

Shared interests are, of course, critical to the types of women's organizations that emerge and the issues they articulate. Our knowledge of African women's politics is limited to studies of elite women,¹³ and to village level studies.¹⁴ Though wealthy women's attitudes and lifestyles diverge from ordinary women, we have little information about whether that divergence is problematic for the linkage between differentiated classes

of women. A type of class analysis has called our attention to the increased invisibility of women's organizations under colonialism,¹⁵ as well as the role of international racial stratification in reducing the significance of Lesotho village politics, in which women increasingly participate.¹⁶ Thus far, no studies have examined internal community class relations and their implications for the politics of women.

Leaders are the crucial articulators of "women's interests" within women's organizations, and between those organizations and other political actors. The extent to which organizational leadership is dominated by women of a different class is critical for determining organizational issues and political style. Given the near inevitability of disproportionate elite influence in organizations, the probability that elite material interests are reflected is great, unless counteracted by leadership representativeness and accountability, and member awareness of options in setting organizational goals. An elite theorist has referred to women as "the most under-represented group in the political elite of the world."¹⁷ Though few in number, women elites have enormous significance for women, as these women are perceived to represent other women. Yet if a tradition exists for group cooperation across class lines, or if the degree of women's subordination is marked, resulting in solidarity among women, prospects for representativeness are heightened.

To understand political power relations, we must examine the larger structure of politics and women's activity therein. Though African women rarely exert political authority over men, they more commonly exercise authority over other women for certain functionally specific areas, such as agriculture, trading, religion, and mutual aid societies.¹⁸ Some West African societies are characterized by what one theorist has labeled the

"dual-sex political system," in which each sex group manages its own affairs. In "single-sex systems," women can achieve distinction and recognition only by taking on the roles of men in public life and performing them well.¹⁹ It is women's integration into a larger political context, then, that is of prime analytic significance in the contemporary political scene.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the implications of differential marginalization among women for the politics of women within the larger political context. Specifically, the paper examines the effects of class and sex for politics, by focusing on the distribution of agricultural services in a community of western Kenya undergoing class differentiation. The focus on agricultural activity and the distribution of agricultural political goods falls not only within a "public" sphere, but is generally recognized as either an indicator or source of women's status.²⁰ In the first part of the paper, I describe the varying material situation of women by class as well as factors which lead to wealthy women's increased identification with families, rather than in solidarity with other women. I compare the sexual distribution of government agricultural services, between elite and nonelite women, and among nonelite women. Whether agriculture is a "women's issue" is explored in this section. In the second part of the paper, I explore the significance of the findings for the politics of women and for the solidification of the emerging rural elite class. The paper concludes with several dilemmas of women's sex-based political action.

Research Site

Kenya, like many African nations, experienced twentieth century colonialism, a process which quickened capital penetration and accumulation, economic growth, and consequently, class differentiation and inequities. Such differentiation has been enhanced in the post-independence era, and government allocation of social goods reflects this class differentiation.²¹ Key government distributed social goods are agricultural technical assistance and support services in rural areas, where over three-fourths of the population resides.

The nature of political influence has dramatically changed in twentieth century rural Kenya as well. During the colonial period, centralized political institutions were grafted onto African societies which theoretically provided the opportunity for all persons, regardless of sex, to participate in politics. New criteria evolved by which political influence and cleavage emerge, criteria with differential effects on the sexes. Influence is available primarily to the wealthy and educated who tend to be men, due to their earlier access to education and wider selection of employment opportunities than women. Cleavage, which tends to be regional and meshes with ethnic or clan identities, is a key focus in electoral campaigns and administrative resource distribution. Women cut across that most fundamental cleavage in electoral settings, the kin-residence group.

Research was conducted in an administrative location of western Kenya, an area populated by the exogamous, patrilineal and patrilocal Luyia people, whose primary occupations are small-scale farming and cattle care. Maize and beans are grown predominantly for use, though their sale is also an important source of cash for farmers. A high population density has reduced the amount of land available for cattle care, and that density, plus increased needs for cash, has prompted large numbers of men to seek wage employment outside the area.²²

Women work extensively in the agricultural economy, preparing land for cultivation, planting, weeding, harvesting, and trading crops. Men work intermittently in agriculture, and their primary responsibilities are to clear land and operate plows.²³ To an already important role for women in agriculture, male out-migration has added the farm managerial task for women, and women head over a third of rural households in this district according to the 1969 government census.²⁴ Regardless of their class status, no woman is immune from what are considered female responsibilities--digging, planting, weeding, and harvesting. Agriculture would appear to be a women's issue.

Differentiation Among Women

Rural class emergence creates visible differences in opportunities and material living standards, and community politics reflect this class differentiation. Economic wealth tends to closely correlate with political power, defined as an ability to influence public policy. Women, residing in different classes, both benefit from and actively participate in determining the position of their household on an internal community class hierarchy. Money acquired from selling produce or brewing beer, as well as from absent husbands, stagger women farm managers, and all other women, along a discernable economic ranking.²⁵

To what extent is there sex solidarity, which transcends class lines? Unlike men, women are prolific joiners of separate-sex organizations that function to share agricultural information and labor, to mutually aid one another during times of crisis, and to interact socially, such as in the women's auxiliaries of churches. This being an exogamous society, all women are "strangers" when marrying into the community, a factor said to enhance solidarity in another study.²⁶ A number of indigeneous social institutions

tie all women to their husbands, including bridewealth and the custom whereby children remain with fathers upon marital dissolution, and women are dependent upon marital status for access to land. Yet usufruct land rights were traditionally guaranteed to women, and women were relatively self-sufficient food producers. (Recent land reform and the commercialization of agriculture are changing this self-sufficiency, a matter taken up later.) The development of a privileged strata has led, however, to elite women's stronger identification with their families, more than to their sex or natal kin, and there are powerful material and ideological incentives to strengthen those ties.

In order to more systematically examine differences among women, findings from two sample surveys will be presented: one, a cross-section of farmers (hereinafter referred to as nonelite farmers), and another smaller sample from the elite.²⁷

Elite marriage participants, their marital situation, and its material context offer marked contrasts to that of nonelite farmers. Elite women tend to marry men with similar privileges, skills, and education, and as a result, participate in an emerging class whose life chances are distinguishable from most people without access to such resources. Marital patterns take on a cooperative, almost business-like characteristic, and spouses work together to extract maximized political-economic resources for their families. The most important feature tying the elite family unit together is its material structure and its potential for being transformed into a highly productive and profitable economic unit. These families become social units for accumulation and investment rather than for maintenance and survival. Thus the economic "stakes" of marital cooperation are considerably higher than those of nonelite families.

Among elites, one spouse (usually the husband) generally has had some wage employment which has given these families comparatively early access to cash, relative to others in the community--cash which has been invested in farm improvements or businesses and shops. Material indicators illustrate differences between elite and nonelite farms. Three-fourths of the elite sample own cows, in contrast to less than half of the nonelites. Elite land ownership averages 7-9 acres, while nonelite farms have significantly smaller pieces, averaging 2 acres. Almost all the elite farms (90%) are conspicuous and self-identified income-earning enterprises, in contrast to two-fifths of nonelite farms. In a community atmosphere with a considerable amount of mistrust, a result of striking inequities emerging from development, wives are viewed as the only reliable managers to safeguard a sophisticated farm operation. A marital mutual dependence is created, based on a material structure beyond that of subsistence farming, and into which substantial investments have been made. Elite women engage in a considerable amount of work themselves, given the size and scale of the farm operation.

Distribution of Agricultural Goods

Is emerging class differentiation reflected in the government distribution of agricultural goods and services? Biases in favor of wealthy farms have been documented in this area and elsewhere in Kenya.²⁸ Despite women's traditional and expanding role in agriculture, allegations about male preference in the delivery of agricultural services exist, and are borne out in studies of this phenomenon as well.²⁹

The Ministry of Agriculture has a four-tiered field hierarchy which has been in operation since the 1920s, though skeletal in form during the era prior to World War II. The primary tasks of the agricultural staff,

particularly at the lower two levels,³⁰ are to visit farmers (generally on an unsolicited basis), to advise and instruct them about new agricultural methods and crops, and to give lectures at "demonstration plots" wherein practical techniques are demonstrated to a group of farmers. The agricultural staff also recruit farmers to Farmer Training Centers, short courses on specialized agricultural topics, and inform farmers about government loans. Ninety-eight per cent of the staff are men, potentially problematic for serving the large female farm clientele.

I queried farmers in both samples about whether they had received a battery of services. Farms have been divided into two types: female managed, which includes both widows and women with absent husbands and accounts for forty per cent of the nonelite sample, and jointly managed farms, which are farms with a man present. The numbers of respondents who have not received the service are tabulated below, by farm management type. The data illustrate two important findings. First, elite farmers have vastly better access to all services than do nonelite farmers. This generalization holds for both women managers and farms with a man present. Second, female managers from the nonelite sample consistently receive fewer services than any other social category.

- Table One Here -

Among nonelite farmers, only half of the women managers have ever been visited by an agricultural instructor, unlike approximately three-quarters of farms with a man present. While nonelite farmers have limited access to training and loans, sex differences are more marked for these valuable services. Only five per cent of all female managed farms have ever had a household member trained, in contrast to four times as many jointly managed farms. Jointly managed farms are fourteen times as likely

to be either informed about, or recipients of loans. Nonelite women share a common interest in equitably delivered agricultural services.

The situation of elite women managers stands in marked contrast to nonelite farms, with or without a man present. Among the elite, there is near equity between the sexes in the distribution of agricultural services, with women receiving a higher proportion of services in some cases, and farms with a man present in others.

Apparent equity in loans among the elite conceals a sex discriminatory feature in procedural requirements which institutionalize a dependency of women on men. The most common form of government loan requires that some guarantee be provided to insure loan repayment, typically in the form of a land title deed or a salary. Land reform, completed for this area in 1973, consolidated and registered segments of land in individual names. In accordance with patrilineal inheritance patterns, but in conflict with female usufruct rights, title deeds were near universally registered in male names. Given women's lower access to employment limited by belated and sex-typed education, narrow occupational opportunities, and less mobility resulting from family roles, women farmers' husbands must usually apply for loans, whether they are present on the farm or not. Thus, equity in agricultural services is to some degree an elite women's issue as well.

Elite women's equitable access to services represents a wise investment of administrative resources. These hardworking women tend to be highly visible, successful farmers. Equitable service provision indicates the agricultural staff's sensitivity to elite women's influence in the community. Elite women have political clout, a result of their own material resources and achievements, as well as their participation in a powerful economic class. Agricultural staff recognize this clout.

Table Two illustrates differentiation among women in the nonelite sample. Women's access to services increases as their economic standing increases, yet even higher income women have less access to services than lower income farms with a man present.

- Table Two Here -

As the table indicates, a higher economic standing is associated with a higher average number of services. Female manager access to agricultural services, however, is always less than men of their income group. At the lower income level, disparities between the sexes are less marked, suggesting greater similarity of interests between men and women of that status. The most marked differences are to be found between men and women managers of the higher economic group. The difference between lower and higher income women managers, on the other hand, is the least marked of any other comparison within the table. Among nonelite women, the consequences of agricultural policy are less differentiated than for men. No matter their economic background, women farm managers have a common stake in reducing discrimination and increasing agricultural service delivery.

The distribution of government resources to both men and women elites vastly increases the amount of benefits received by that class relative to nonelite farmers, and solidifies their position in the emerging class structure. Such distribution also reinforces an elite woman's identification with her family, an institution from which, in part, she derives her power. Because these women experience little discrimination in agricultural services, they are unlikely to develop consciousness about its sex discriminatory features. This experience, which distinguishes elite from nonelite women, is likely to have a critical impact on which women's issues are articulated in the larger political arena, to the extent that leadership in women's organizations is disproportionately culled from the elite class.

Implications for the Politics of Women

In the previous section, I illustrated differentiation among women, and elite political power manifested in the receipt of agricultural services. In this section, I consider the political context in which women operate, and how elite women's preponderance in leading women's organizations affects the articulation of women's interests. First, however, I describe former and existent patterns of women's organizations which tend to be characterized by autonomy and exchange.

Women form communal agricultural groups, in which six to ten women dig, plant, weed, and harvest crops for one another. Members charge each other a small fee, while contract for higher fees for nonmembers who contribute no labor. The relatively small cash sums saved are divided at the year's end by group leaders who facilitate cash and labor management. Yearly division, rather than cash accumulation and investment, is a practise resulting from past mismanagement of funds. Elite women do not generally belong to agricultural groups, preferring instead to hire laborers. Among those few elite women who do join, they replace their obligatory labor to the group with cash.

Women also form mutual aid societies which are exchange and savings mechanisms to distribute resources in times of crisis, such as funerals or bridewealth transactions, where women are responsible for feeding large numbers of visitors. In the past, and existing on a more limited scale now, resources are collected in the form of food or cash when the crisis occurs, a pattern which avoids accusations of financial mismanagement. Elite women have made their literacy skills and mobility available for an emergent form of mutual aid involving fixed monthly donations that are saved and allocated upon crisis. To prevent possible financial mismanagement, collections are recorded and safely retained in bank accounts in the distant district capital.

Elite women's participation is transforming the autonomous and non-commercialized character of women's organizations. Autonomy is useful in some respects, particularly in enhancing the organization's ability to accomplish its goals without the interference of other seemingly unrelated political conflicts. Yet autonomy is disadvantageous for the extraction of benefits available from the larger political arena. Exchange, in a society characterized by the permeation of cash and cash needs, inhibits the cash accumulation which might provide productive resources to its members. Female elites hold personal and material resources increasingly seen as necessary criteria for linking women's organizations to the larger political arena and accumulating cash. It is these women who serve as "delegates" that on occasion transmit "women's demands" to politicians and government officials, and do so well because they have contacts and are respected for educational and material accomplishments, according to values in the changing local context.

This new female leadership, however, coincides with government policy orientations toward women confined to domestic concerns. The content of government programs is an important determinant of the demands people make of a system and the ways in which people participate.³² Colonial policies introduced to benefit women were frequently permeated with western ethnocentric assumptions about women and their "proper" domestic place in the family. Both early education for girls and community development for women stressed domestic training in cookery, child care, cleanliness, knitting, and sewing. This orientation continues even now within the home economics division of the Ministry of Agriculture. Most importantly, little government effort was, or is, directed at supporting women's productive role in local agricultural economies. The effects of government policies tend to

reinforce women's near exclusion from political authority by promoting norms and values about women limited to domestic roles.

Nevertheless, other new roles for women have been introduced into which largely elite women have emerged.³³ Currently, women sit on development committees, cooperative boards, and are appointed or elected to councils (and the parliament, at the national level) to either represent women, or a general constituency. One feature of the late colonial era was the introduction of the political role "Representative of Women" at various levels of the political hierarchy, ranging from local councils to national parliaments. This role assumes that women are a homogeneous group--that they have identical interests, to be protected or advocated in a mixed-sex setting. In practice, this assumption raises questions about which women's interests are represented, what women are expected to identify as women's interests, and whether women Representatives of Women are really representative.

As has been demonstrated in the previous section, there is a great deal of differentiation among women, some of whom actively participate in expanding their family's influence. These families are structurally located in the emerging elite class, and are beneficiaries of agricultural and other government resources. There are four reasons why women elites may not be representative of nonelite women, whose interests they are perceived to articulate in the larger political sphere. The following four reasons are related to agricultural services, a critical political issue for the general local economy and for women.

First, elite women were subject to profoundly different socializing experiences from nonelite women. Their view of the world, and women's place within it, is likely to strengthen their identification with families and their advocacy of domestic policy goals for women. When most women

had little or no education, women of the contemporary elite received an education, which at that time stressed homemaking skills. In addition contemporary women elites participated in government community development programs which stressed similar domestic skills at five times the rate of nonelite women in my sample. Domestic training is likely to affect women's political articulations, particularly if it is held to represent "modern," educated thinking.

Second and related to the first reason, the domestic government policy precedent established for women has become exceedingly difficult to transcend over the passage of time. Existent government policies structure the demands people make of a system, by defining and setting boundaries on policy alternatives, for those both articulating and responding to demands. Officials who are pressured to serve women respond with the familiar policies of the domestic type, of little use in addressing women's livelihood pursuits.

Examples occurred in this research area when a multipurpose cooperative society was established with the aid of the local Member of Parliament, responsive to women delegates during his electoral campaign. Largely elite women, these delegates requested diffuse assistance ranging from "remembering the work women do" and "how they need help" to specific demands for donations to build a women's center. Women's centers have, in the last two decades, been associated with sewing clubs sponsored by the government community development programs. Such clubs are not enthusiastically received by ordinary women, as they entail time and financial costs. In the late colonial era, when one such club was initiated in the area, it attracted a tenth of nonelite women in my sample, but over half of the elite women. It is not surprising that elite women, as major beneficiaries of past home-making programs, would advocate such programs to the M.P.

The cooperative also set up a "women's project" to market vegetables locally, utilizing a co-op vehicle for transporting the vegetables to nearby secondary schools and the district township. Such a project would have significant prospects for addressing women's livelihood pursuits, but few nonelite women were even aware of its existence. Participation was limited to a small group of elite women who were able to utilize co-op resources for themselves and their family's benefit. Expanding the beneficiaries of this program would overextend an enterprise dependent on markets with limited capacities to absorb more products.

A third factor limiting elite women's representativeness is that political articulations may reflect the material situation of articulators. Women, as has been demonstrated, have an interest in agricultural services, but the extent to which women articulators perceive agriculture to be a women's issue is affected by their own access to services. Elite women's near equity in access inhibits their awareness that agricultural services are sex discriminatory in impact. Nevertheless, the relatively recent vintage of mass agricultural services, combined with its low level of capability, has not led to a widespread consciousness about inequities in implementation, by either men or women. Moreover, women have been able to cope with changes in agriculture through their own means--organized labor and information sharing--without government assistance. Nonelite women are unlikely to communicate a sense of discrimination to their representatives, the elite women, and consequently, female agricultural inequities are a virtual non-issue.

Fourth and finally, the mode in which elite families benefit from agricultural services must be considered. In a context of scarce resources, beneficiaries might see gains for one group as losses for another. Given the scarce, but valuable resources available to a select few, elite women's

perception may be that the pursuit of family interests represents a better investment of their energy, with greater immediate return, than does the pursuit of more services for all women. Thus the paradox--those women representing women in the larger political context may either unconsciously misrepresent them, or represent their own interests as elite women.

While linkage to the larger political sphere is important for extracting the increasingly valuable services available, it is important to consider its long-term viability in addressing sex discrimination, directing useful resources to women, and representing women's interests. Economic and political processes which produce increased economic dependency of women on men, and create a competitive arena in which various political actors vie for scarce resources, may give rise to family-identified persons--largely the elite, who act out and benefit from that identification. Whether women, or women's interests as a whole, can be adequately addressed in a political system in which loyalties and voting styles are based overwhelmingly on kin or residential ties, to which sex groups cut across, is an open question. More importantly, the class-based distributive process reinforces economic inequities and further cuts across sex groups. Women elites, the only women with the personal and material resources deemed suitable to represent women in the larger arena, assimilate that political style, affecting their representative capability.

Women and Emergent Classes

Patterns of agricultural service delivery are closely linked to changing stratification patterns, and female farm management plays a critical role in solidifying positions on an emergent class structure at both ends of a hypothetical class continuum. Among elite women, female managers experience equity in agricultural service delivery, which is critical to

consolidating and expanding family influence. But for a corresponding category of women on the opposite end of the continuum, non-access to agricultural services reinforces cumulative disadvantage and solidifies poverty.

The elite women who experience equity in service patterns have a number of cumulative resources not available to nonelite women, including money, relatively large tracts of land on which to farm, education, and political influence in a setting where economic and political influence correlate closely. The interests of women in this class are closely tied to the fortunes of their family, and they actively promote and extend that fortune by their economic activity and political participation.

Women whose status places them in the middle of a hypothetical continuum have been able to maintain their productivity in response to changing economic circumstances through prodigious use of resources, both financial and organizational. These women bond together to exchange agricultural information, labor, and money in a manner largely autonomous from the government. The efficacy of this strategy is fading, however, with declining land size, and the relatively small sums of money available to women in these groups--sums which are insufficient to deal with what is becoming a costly, commercialized agricultural economy. For money, women must increasingly look to husbands who have greater accessibility to wage employment and salaries. This can only mean increasing dependency of women on men, rather than self-sufficiency in farm operations. While money from husbands is generally forthcoming among a good proportion of women, agricultural support services do not reinforce this access to cash which might be channelled into improving agricultural productivity.

Another segment of women receive no financial support from husbands. These women face discrimination because they are women, but in addition,

have little access to cash in an agricultural economy which increasingly demands basic expenditures for seeds, plowing, and fertilizer. Earning, on the whole, fairly paltry sums in the informal economic sector compared to wage employment, these women have neither access to money nor agricultural services which might alleviate their precarious economic status. Without access to services or money, their farm productivity may fall, and an absence of money may mean that their children remain uneducated. This economic status may extend for a period of several decades, and could create a generational segment of disadvantaged families. If agricultural services are instrumental in reinforcing an emergent elite, or "upper class" in rural areas, such services are equally important in reinforcing this "lower class" of economically deprived women.

Summary and Dilemmas Posed

The data from this case study indicate that there is a good deal of differentiation among women which has resulted from economic and political change. Patterns of agricultural service delivery have differential effects on the sexes, particularly among nonelite farmers. The most neglected clientele of the agricultural administration, nonelite women have bonded together to compensate for that discrimination. Elite women farmers experience equity in agricultural service delivery, and that equity reinforces both differentiation among women and the privileged position of the emerging elite class.

Because agriculture is women's main livelihood pursuit, and because they are discriminated against in the provision of services, women have an interest in acquiring equity in agricultural services. Yet services are extended to women almost solely in a domestic mode, one permeated with western stereotypes--a not surprising emphasis, given its colonial heritage

and the era in which it originated. The articulation of women's interests in the larger political sphere reinforces that government orientation to women. By channelling women's political energy away from income-earning orientations, efforts reinforce the subordinate position of rural poor households even further.

Given the new criteria of education and wealth deemed suitable for acquiring political power, it is principally elite women who link women's organizations to the larger sphere. On the surface, this linkage is useful to women, in order to extract valuable resources from that sphere. But elite women articulate demands for women based on their own belief system, a product of ideas transmitted to them as beneficiaries of colonial education and community development programs. Perhaps more importantly, elite women's material situation influences demands they make for women. Their equity in the receipt of agricultural services, as well as their concern for protecting their family's privileged access to those services, may have profound impacts on the issues they advocate or fail to advocate for women. Moreover, in adopting and assimilating the political style of the larger unit, women as a whole are inevitably integrated into it on a disadvantaged basis. Latecomers both to political competition and to the resources necessary to compete in the process adequately, women compete for scarce resources which are overwhelmingly distributed on a clan, residential, or class basis. Given the issues elite women articulate, as well as their political style, the likelihood of redressing sex inequities among women farmers appears dim.

These findings suggest several important dilemmas for the politics of women and the potential of that strategy for altering sex inequities in the context considered in this paper.

Differentiation among women is a reality, a near inevitable consequence of development processes. Group leaders generally have more valued personal or material resources than members. The extent to which this is problematic is conditioned by internal organizational participation, and by the degree to which common interests are shared by both members and leaders. If, during the stage in time when emerging women's organizations are linked to the larger political sphere, leaders share common discriminations in areas perceived as amenable to political or policy intervention such as livelihood pursuits, the prospects for women's unity are enhanced.

Perhaps this factor explains the viability of cross-class women's movements in western countries. While women are most certainly differentiated from one another--a problematic issue which is, and ought to be, periodically examined--women share economic discrimination, as women, in wages and employment opportunities. Professional women in developing countries with shortages in skilled personnel,³⁴ and, as has been illustrated in this paper, rural elite women, often do not experience such discrimination, or experience it to nearly the same extent. It is these women are are most likely to be the contemporary or future leaders in women's organizations. This equity, or non-discrimination, may create incontrovertible differences between women and ambiguity about their "interests" in the early stages of a women's movement.

The conditions under which all-encompassing women's groups exist and the extent to which they most comprehensively resolve member objectives may be historically unique. A cursory glance reveals this potentiality is realized in a number of African societies and in advanced technological societies. This suggests the development process itself, and the growth and institutionalization of both class and state structures (and the way

structures consolidate male interests) inhibit effective, broadly-based organization of women as women.³⁵

Given the direction of political and economic processes, improvements in the material standard of living for some segments of a populace may make women's identification with marital families even stronger than now, and increase the proportions of women with such identifications.³⁶ As has been demonstrated, the advocacy of "women's interests" may conceal a real advocacy of elite women's interests, or reaffirm elite beliefs about women's "proper" roles by making domestic training a matter of public policy. The current advantage of elite women relative to nonelite women may be, however, only temporary, given the overwhelming degree of male preference in the policy delivery process. Nevertheless, without a recognition of class based interests and divisions within and among members of women's organizations, issues voiced as "women's issues" may serve mainly to entrench the ideas and material situation of an elite class, and do little to alter the status of most women.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹For example, see selections in Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, eds., *WOMAN, CULTURE & SOCIETY* (Stanford: Stanford University, 1974); Carolyn Matthiasson, ed., *MANY SISTERS* (New York: Free Press, 1974); Ernestine Friedl, *WOMAN & MEN: AN ANTHROPOLOGISTS'S VIEW* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1975).
- ²Class 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 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).
- ³Interests 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).
- ⁴See selections in Berenice A. Carroll, ed., *LIBERATING WOMEN'S HISTORY* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1976); Aileen Kraditor, *THE IDEAS OF THE WOMAN SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT* (New York: Columbia University, 1965); Sheila Rowbotham, *HIDDEN FROM HISTORY* (New York: Random House, 1974); Ann Pescatello, ed., *FEMALE & MALE IN LATIN AMERICA* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1973); June Nash & Helen Safa eds., *SEX & CLASS IN LATIN AMERICA* (New York: Praeger, 1976).
- ⁵For example, see Ester Boserup, *WOMAN'S ROLE IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT* (London: George Unwin Allen, 1970); Irene Tinker, "The Adverse Impact of Development on Women," in Irene Tinker & Michele Bo Bransen, *WOMEN & WORLD DEVELOPMENT* (Washington, D. C.: Overseas Development Council, 1976);

- Marjorie Mbilinyi, "The 'New Woman' and Traditional Norms in Tanzania," JOURNAL OF MODERN AFRICAN STUDIES 10,1 (1972).
- ⁶Sidney Mintz, "Men, Women & Trade," COMPARATIVE STUDIES IN SOCIETY & HISTORY 13, (1971); Carmen Diana Deere, "Rural Women's Subsistence Production in the Capitalist Periphery," REVIEW OF RADICAL POLITICAL ECONOMY 8, 1 (1976).
- ⁷Samuel Huntington & Joan Nelson, NO EASY CHOICE: POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES (Cambridge: Harvard, 1976), p. 69.
- ⁸Nash & Safa, op.cit.; Hanna Papanek, "Development Planning for Women," Lourdes Arizpe, "Women in the Informal Labor Sector: The Case of Mexico City," and Norma Chinchilla, "Industrialization, Monopoly Capitalism, and Women's Work in Guatemala," all in SIGNS 3, 1 (Autumn, 1977).
- ⁹Ann Stoler, "Class Structure and Female Autonomy in Rural Java," SIGNS 3, 1 (Autumn, 1977).
- ¹⁰Nash & Safa, op.cit.
- ¹¹Rosaldo & Lamphere, op.cit.
- ¹²Boserup, op.cit.; Nancy Hafkin & Edna Bay, WOMEN IN AFRICA: STUDIES IN SOCIAL & ECONOMIC CHANGE (Stanford: Stanford University, 1976), p. 5.
- ¹³Audrey Wipper, "Equal Rights for Women in Kenya?" JOURNAL OF MODERN AFRICAN STUDIES 9, 3 (1971); Carol P. Hoffer, "Madam Yoko: Ruler of the Kpa Mende Confederacy," in Rosaldo & Lamphere, op.cit.; Margaret Stroebe, "From Lelemama to Lobbying: Women's Associations in Mombasa, Kenya," and Filomina Chioma Steady, "Protestant Women's Associations in Freetown, Sierra Leone," in Hafkin & Bay, op.cit.
- ¹⁴Nancy B. Leis, "Women in Groups: Ijaw Women's Associations," in Rosaldo & Lamphere, op.cit.; Patricia Stamp, "Perceptions of Change & Economic Strategy Among Kikuyu Women of Mitero, Kenya," RURAL AFRICANA 29, (Winter, 1975-76); an excellent city study has been done by Barbara Lewis, "The

Limitations of Group Activity Among Entrepreneurs: The Market Women of Abidjan, Ivory Coast," in Hafkin & Bay, op.cit.

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- 16 Martha Mueller, "Women & Men, Power & Powerlessness in Lesotho," SIGNS 3, 1 (Autumn, 1977).
- 17 Robert D. Putnam, THE COMPARATIVE STUDY OF POLITICAL ELITES (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1976), p. 32.
- 18 Annie Lebeuf, "The Role of Women in the Political Organization of African Societies," in Denise Paulme, ed., WOMEN OF TROPICAL AFRICA (Berkeley: University of California, 1960); Leis, op.cit.
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- 20 Control over valued resources and over the fruits of one's labor has been identified as a source of women's status by, among others, Friedl, op.cit.; Peggy Sanday, "Female Status in the Public Domain," in Rosaldo & Lamphere, op.cit.
- 21 Colin Leys, UNDERDEVELOPMENT IN KENYA (London: Heinemann, 1975); ILO/UNDP, EMPLOYMENT, INCOMES & EQUALITY (Geneva: ILO, 1972); Lionel Cliffe, "Underdevelopment or Socialism? A Comparative Analysis of Kenya & Tanzania," in Richard Harris, ed., THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF AFRICA (New York: John Wiley, 1975).
- 22 Thirty per cent of the men reportedly worked for wage employment outside the district in 1937 according to Gunter Wagner, THE BANTU OF NORTH KAVIRONDO (London: Oxford, 1949), Vol. II, p. 94; on contemporary male out-migration, see Judith Heyer, "A Survey of Agricultural Development in the Small-Scale Farm Areas of Kenya since the 1920s," (Nairobi: Institute for Development Studies, October, 1974).

- ²³Wagner, ibid., Vol 1, p. 41; Walter Sangree, AGE, PRAYER & POLITICS IN TIRIKI, KENYA (London: Oxford, 1966), p. xxxvi.
- ²⁴Republic of Kenya, KENYA POPULATION CENSUS (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1970).
- ²⁵On a five-point scale, based on the material value of house construction and possessions, the mean score for women farm managers was identical to farms with a man present. This scale has been subdivided into "lower" and "higher" economic standing in Table 2 of this paper.
- ²⁶Leis, op.cit.
- ²⁷This research was made possible through grants from the African Studies Program (for travel funds) and the Graduate School (for computer funds) of the University of Wisconsin, and the NDEA Title VI Foreign Language Fellowship Program.
- Cross-Section Sample: A geographically purposive sample of 212 farm households was obtained in Idakho location, Kakamega district, between December, 1974 and June, 1975. It represents 10% of the total number of households in the geographic areas targeted. My initial concern was to assure that varying distances from the road and main paths, and thus from agricultural instructors and services, would be covered. These geographic areas coincide with clan and subclan identities. Once spatial areas were designated to obtain geographic and clan representativeness, I attempted to select farms that would be representative of varying economic standings and age groupings. Numbers were based on my approximations of their proportion of the population. I did not know in advance, however, about whether the farm was female or male managed until the interview began. The close correspondence of women managers to the proportion of female heads in Kakamega reported in the 1969 Census supports the notion that my choice was "chance-like" in method. The sample is not, however, a random one, and the universe of this sample is

restricted to one location. The sample does not purport to generalize to all of Kenya or Africa, but rather to illustrate sex differences within a sample. Though scientific sampling techniques were not utilized, I am confident that the sample judiciously represents a reasonable cross-section of farmers in western Kenya. The basis of this confidence is my six-month residence in one of the sublocations studied with a family who so graciously welcomed me as an additional member. Through my residence there and my participation in community life, I gained in-depth knowledge of that subclan and geographic area.

Elite Sample: The elite sample was chosen through lists drawn by knowledgeable persons in the community, and supported by my community observation. The elite is distinguished from other residents by two of the following three characteristics: (1) early (1920s-1930s) access to education or local government employment by themselves or parents, (2) formal leadership positions, and (3) early adoption of agricultural innovations.

A female research assistant from the area and I conducted the interviews, and she translated questions and responses from Luluyia to English. We asked a systematic set of questions from farmers about crops, husbandry practises, sources of information about farm practises, agricultural services, and demographic information. A typical interview took forty minutes.

²⁸David K. Leonard, "Why Do Kenya's Agricultural Extension Services Favor the Rich Farmer?" Paper presented to the 16th Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association, Syracuse, New York, October-November, 1973; Joseph Ascroft, Fred Chege, Joseph Kariuki, Niels Roling, and George Ruigu, "Does Extension Create Poverty in Kenya?" EAST AFRICAN JOURNAL (March, 1972).

²⁹Boserup; op.cit.; ILO/UNDP, op.cit., p. 64 on allegations. See my "Women Farmers & Inequities in Agricultural Services," RURAL AFRICANA 29, (Winter, 1975-76).

- ³⁰The Junior Agricultural Assistant at the sublocation level (housing 1,000-2,000 farm units) and Technical Assistant at the location level (5-9 sublocations) are most involved in day-to-day outreach to farmers. They generally reside in or near the area where they work, and speak local dialects. Their agricultural training varies from three months to two years, depending on the year they entered the civil service.
- ³¹Because this is not a random sample, and thus does not report a normal distribution, the ChiSquare Tests of Significance are technically not appropriate. The size of the nonelite sample may mean it approximates normality; thus, significance tests have been included for exploratory purposes. The small size of the elite sample demands cautious interpretation.
- ³²Murray Edelman, *THE SYMBOLIC USES OF POLITICS* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1964).
- ³³In the area of this research, all women who sit on the sublocation, location, cooperative, and school committees fit the criteria of elite as elaborated upon in note 27.
- ³⁴Boserup, p. 133; Elsa M. Chaney, "Women in Latin American Politics: The Case of Peru & Chile," in Pescatello, *op. cit.*; Irene Tinker, "Women in Developing Societies: Economic Independence is Not Enough," in Jane R. Chapman, ed., *ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE FOR WOMEN* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1976), p. 124, though she also argues that educated African women are "feminist"
- ³⁵Similarly, Giele discusses a curvilinear relationship between social complexity and sexual equality in Janet Z. Giele & Audrey Smock, *WOMEN: ROLES AND STATUS IN EIGHT COUNTRIES* (New York: John Wiley, 1977), p. 11.
- ³⁶A recognition and strengthening of this process among disadvantaged groups, combined with an advocacy of equity for women, could increase the collective strength and potential redistributive response by regimes to members of that class.

Table 1. Proportion of Farmers with NO Access to Agricultural Services by Farm Management Type and Class³¹

	NONELITE (N=212)		ELITE (N=40)	
	Female Managed	Jointly Managed	Female Managed	Jointly Managed
No Visit by Agricultural Instructor	49%/42	28%/36*	--	3%/1
No Household Member Attended Demonstration Plot	62%/52	46%/59**	50%/5	41%/12
No Household Member Trained at Farmer Training Center	95%/80	80%/102*	70%/7	46%/13
No Loan/No Information About Loan Procedure	99%/83	86%/109*	30%/3	34%/10
(Knows Loan Procedure or Applied for Loan)	1%/1	12%/15	30%/3	41%/12
(Received Loan)	--	2%/3	40%/4	24%/7

*=Significant at the .01 Level
 **=Significant at the .05 Level

Table 2. Summary Service Scale* Mean, by Farm Management Type and Economic Standing Among Nonelite Farmers

	Lower Economic Standing	Higher Economic Standing
Female Managed	1.1	1.4
Jointly Managed	1.5	2.4
	N=118	N=94

*The six point scale includes no service, (1) 1 visit by an agricultural instructor, (2) 2 or more visits, (3) farmer training, (4) demonstration plot attendance, and (5) loan application or receipt