

**GLOBAL FEMINISMS
COMPARATIVE CASE STUDIES OF
WOMEN'S AND GENDER ACTIVISM
AND SCHOLARSHIP**

SITE: TANZANIA

**Transcript of Sabrina Othman Faraji
Interviewer: Anneth Meena**

**Location: Unguja, Zanzibar
Date: December 15, 2022**

**University of Michigan
Institute for Research on Women and Gender
1136 Lane Hall Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1290
Tel: (734) 764-9537**

**E-mail: um.gfp@umich.edu
Website: <http://www.umich.edu/~glbfem>**

© Regents of the University of Michigan, 2022

Sabrina Othman Faraji is an entrepreneur, fashion designer and activist working to promote welfare of rural women through women economic empowerment programs such as tailoring courses. Faraji provides entrepreneurship skills for women living with HIV. She recruits some of the trained women in her enterprise called Kanga Kabisa; Faraji has worked as a fashion designer between the period of 2007 to 2013 and later promoted to Production manager of the same enterprise from 2013 to present. Faraji coordinates Zanzibar International Film Festival, she coordinates all the community-based activities e.g. Marathon, beach clean-up, women empowerment workshops, hand-made crafts exhibitions for annual women's Panorama of the Zanzibar International Film Festival, the position she has held since 2000 to present. Faraji is the recipient of several awards such as Business Woman of the Year granted by Zanzibar Ministry of Trade; Best Social Venture Award offered by Women's Chamber of Commerce and Outstanding Community Service Award offered by Zanzibar International Film Festival. Faraji is also engaged in other projects such as Lily Pads . Faraji has a Diploma in Business Management & Public Administration from the State University of Zanzibar, Tanzania.

Anneth E. Meena, born in Coast Region in 1971, is an activist, researcher and feminist. She is an independent consultant in Environment, Health and gender issues. She is passionate about women rights. She has worked in several organizations holding various positions e.g. Monitoring and Evaluation coordinator for World Vision, Arusha (2000); Project Coordinator for Forum for African Women Educationalist on Centre of Excellence school in Tanzania as a model for gender responsive curriculum and pedagogy (2001 -2002) she pioneered the establishment of a family social enterprise and became the first school manager and later first principal (2007- 2017). She has worked as an independent consultant with various Women Rights Organizations including TGNP Mtandao; Women Fund Tanzania Trust (WFT-T); Readership for Learning and Development (Soma). Meena has been involved in documenting women stories through TGNP Mtandao, WFT-T, Soma and currently with University of Michigan. She is a member of various coalitions including sextortion, women leadership and constitution.

Meena has had various academic awards such as 'The Hammad Prize Award' in recognition of exceptional written work on an international topic, 2005 with Wagner School of Public Services, New York University, New York, USA. She was one of the two recipients of an Oprah Winfrey Scholarship as a graduate at the New York University (2004 to 2005). She was a Ford Foundation Fellow (2003) with International Centre for Research on Women Washington, DC, USA. In 1999 she received small grant Research Award from Council for the Development of Social Science Research. She holds an undergraduate degree on Environmental and Geographical Sciences from University of Cape Town, South Africa (1996); Masters of Demography from University of Dar es salaam, Tanzania (2000) and a graduate degree in Masters in Science in Management for Public Services from the University of New York, USA (2005).

Keywords: Education, Community Activism, and Reform of Domestic/Family Roles

Anneth Meena: Hello, good morning, sister.

Sabrina Othman Faraji: Good morning, how are you?

AM: I am fine. Thank you for your time.

SF: You are welcome!

AM: Thank you. I would like us to begin, if you are ready.

SF: Thank God! Let us begin.

AM: Okay. Welcome to our women and gender research, which is an international project on feminism through funding by the University of Michigan. The purpose of the project is to gather and preserve women's conversations where their activism has contributed to the struggles and issues of women. Therefore, we shall spend about an hour to discuss the following five major areas:

- 1. Your life in general,**
- 2. Your reflections on your work,**
- 3. Your views on how the feminist movement and activism affect your work,**
- 4. Your view and opinions regarding the overall needs of women,**
- 5. The existing relationships, if any, between your work and the work of other activists in the country.**

In other words, at the very beginning, we start with the story of your life. As you look back from where you are today, what do you think has contributed to your journey? What has brought you where you are including the work you are doing today? In addition, what are you proud of, or what major achievements are you proud of in your work? Welcome!

SF: My name is Sabrina Othman Faraji.

AM: Thanks.

SF: I am a mother of three children. I studied primary and secondary school¹ but could not go beyond there because my mother was not able to educate me. She raised me alone without my father but she is the one who inspired me to be brave even though I could not continue with education. She motivated me to be an activist. I started activism when I was very young just after finishing school. I started the struggle to start working life and joined a Non-Governmental Organization² that was full of men. I was the only woman and I was a leader. Even though I had little education, my Advanced Level high school education³ seemed great at that time. The people I found in the organization were all uneducated so we were not speaking the same language. I was therefore a leader in the organization of the women's center where we were helping women to learn the language in order to guide visitors. We did that process for a short time and then I joined the Zanzibar International Film Festival⁴, which is a jazz festival in the country. While there, I dealt with women's movements in order to motivate women and children prepare special platforms. I used to go to the villages to motivate women to struggle and succeed. During that entire period, I was not only working there, but also worked in the hotel where I was an assistant manager. I also met Swedish people who own this company that I am running right now. They are the ones who advised me to quit my job at the NGO⁵ that helps women and start a business. I did not study about textiles but the company owners recognized my courage and tenacity. I entered the business. I was in charge of work for a certain period; I was in charge of the shop and collected all the income. I was the one who was in charge of going to buy textile materials from Dar es Salaam⁶. During that time, I was still young and unmarried. I was very thirsty for life because my mother was poor and could not educate me. Therefore, I was able to recognize myself as a woman and realized that society expected me to be a mother who is able to run the community as well as raise my children. Therefore, I worked as hard as I could especially because my foreign colleagues are different from us and their

¹ Primary education is a term used to refer to elementary school and secondary school used to refer to high school. ("Educational Stage." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Educational_stage. Accessed 1 October 2023.)

² A Non-Governmental Institution (NGO) is a non-profit establishment independent from the government that can get involved in many different areas such as humanitarian aid, development projects, or healthcare. ("Non-governmental organization." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Non-governmental_organization. Accessed 8 October, 2023.)

³ Advanced Level high school education, also known as A-levels, are subject-based exams typically taken in Britain and other countries over a period of two years when a student is 16 or 17 years old. ("A-level." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A-level>. Accessed 23 October, 2023.)

⁴ The Zanzibar International Film Festival (ZIFF) is a non-governmental organization whose festival takes place annually and screens African cinema to start a dialogue about human rights and freedom. ("Zanzibar International Film Festival." <https://ziffestival.org/the-festival/>. Accessed 25 October, 2023.)

⁵ NGO is an acronym for Non-Governmental Organization. See footnote 2 for more information.

⁶ Dar es Salaam is the largest city in Tanzania. ("Dar es Salaam." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dar_es_Salaam. Accessed October 13 2023.)

culture is different from ours. I am also a Muslim.⁷ It was very difficult because I had to go to the hotel to follow up on the orders. I worked hard and though a woman, I was ready to meet with different people to gather ideas that would enable me to [unintelligible].

AM: Hello. It seems like you are a little stuck.

SF: Okay. Can you hear me now?

AM: Yes, I can hear you.

SF: All right. Therefore, throughout this period, I started to register my fellow women who had finished school and were staying at home without jobs. Next I started to teach them how to make wrappers called kanga⁸ because in the beginning we were only sewing uniforms but now we are making wrappers together with sanitary pads. Therefore, I started teaching them how to make skirts and sanitary pads and until now, I have student who I am teaching so that they too can stand on their own feet as women and fight as I fought and changed from being an employee to being a boss, running this office and hiring people.

AM: Congratulations on your achievements. Thank you very much for sharing. You have talked a little about the history of your work life, but you could also touch on things that you did not cover, for example, what motivated you to do the work you do? How did you come to do the work you do? You have briefly talked about some of changes you have experienced. Have you had any personal changes caused by your involvement in the movement? In what part of activism have you been specialized? Welcome.

SF: Thank you. What really motivated me to do the work I am doing is something I did not recognize in myself at first. I did not understand that I could run a business or that I have something in myself that inspires me towards fabrics and fashion. Now those who guided me were the ones who saw that I have a gift that I can give or share it with my friends. Therefore, that is what attracted me to do what I do in my work. I recognized that I have knowledge and skills that I could share.

AM: Okay. Sorry, do continue.

⁷ Muslims are people who observe the religion of Islam. ("Muslims." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muslims>. Accessed 25 October, 2023.)

⁸ Kanga is a colorful, versatile cotton fabric typically worn by women in East Africa and styled as different garments. ("Kanga (Garment." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kanga_\(garment\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kanga_(garment)). (Accessed 19 October, 2023.)

SF: My work has brought changes to others because of the changes I got. I was just an employee but now I am the one leading the office, I am hiring people, and I am meeting different people. I can now stand anywhere and say that I also own something. I experienced that change through this job. Because I did not start doing this job in the beginning, my role in the NGO was to help women among other responsibilities. So the change I experienced was to be able to go from being an employee to what I am now, the one who hires people.

AM: Okay. How does your work touch the lives of women, perhaps in the movement and how does it affect children?

SF: Okay! My work affects women because I enroll my fellow women, educate them and enable them to learn skills. They learn to sew and so when they go back to their places they teach other women who are suffering because they do not have jobs. Therefore, when they study here they go home and teach other women so that other women can be able to liberate themselves, have jobs and be independent on their own without depending on someone else to help their children. Furthermore, there are raw materials, which help AIDS⁹ victims. I give them fabrics so that they can make things like doormats or small pouches. Therefore, this is also my contribution in society to liberate other women to be able to help themselves in life.

AM: Thank you. When we come to the third part, we would ask that you reflect on your life. Here we ask you for example, how do you understand by the word feminism/activism. What does it mean to you?

SF: Okay! For me, activism means being able to recognize myself and to value myself as a woman and to give myself up to fulfil my responsibilities and life goals I have set for myself.

AM: Okay. What does it mean with regard to your work?

SF: In my work, activism means that you meet people to exchange ideas and get different things. For example, if you meet people, they know what work you do, you get an order, you get recognition, and you get an analysis of life. However, here where I am, I should not be here, I just need to go further.

⁹ AIDS, or Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome, is the advanced stage of the chronic health condition called Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), which is spread from one person to another through bodily fluids and causes infection that weakens the immune system. ("HIV and AIDS." World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/hiv-aids>. Accessed 25 October, 2023.)

AM: All right. In addition, did you say that in the same way you teach students so you also touch the lives of different people, is that right?

SF: Yes, I teach students. Yes, I teach students to know how to make wrappers and sanitary pads.

AM: Therefore, they get the knowledge and skills and they too send to the places where they come from.

SF: Moreover, there are others I hire right here.

AM: Aah! So after training there are those you do hire.

SF: Yes, those who will match my job qualifications will remain right here.

AM: Therefore, you also have to ensure that there are those who find employment and there are those who go to self-employment.

SF: Yes, some go ahead to employ themselves.

AM: Okay. Therefore, different people, including women who are AIDS victims .

SF: Yes, many women who come here are victims and they come from different villages like Makokotoni,¹⁰ they come from Nungwi,¹¹ they come from Makunduchi,¹² Bumbwini.¹³ For example when I go to my movement, I find people who are struggling, so I bring them to help them lift themselves up. Therefore, if I see this person should be here, I let them stay so that they can develop themselves at home and improve their life.

AM: Okay, so do you go looking for them in the villages?

¹⁰ Mkokotoni is situated on the Tanzanian island of Unguja and is the capital city of the Zanzibar North region. ("Mkokotoni." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mkokotoni>. Accessed 31 May, 2021.)

¹¹ Nungwi is a village situated on the island of Zanzibar in Tanzania. ("Nungwi." Wikipedia <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nungwi>. Accessed 25 October, 2023.)

¹² Makunduchi is a village situated on the island of Zanzibar in Tanzania. ("Makunduchi." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Makunduchi>. Accessed 25 October, 2023.)

¹³ Bumbwini is situated on the Tanzanian island of Unguja and is a village in Zanzibar. "Bumbwini." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bumbwini>. Accessed 25 October, 2023.)

SF: Yes, because as I told you, I also work in the national jazz festival¹⁴ and I am the coordinator of the women's stage. Therefore, I have been visiting villages in order to motivate women to be independent. I am motivating the women in various ways. Therefore, I meet many people there when I go and I know how women struggle in life.

AM: Okay! Thank you. In our fourth part, we shall talk about the relationship between feminism and the movement. What is your view of feminism and activism, how do you understand these terms in general in your work?

SF: Okay! From my limited knowledge, feminism is about women and activism is what you do in the movement as a human being. I work with hotels, so I meet people and feminism shows up as I meet with other women. Now, as far as I know, activism and feminism relates to a woman and the whole process of her activities as she plans every day. I do not know, maybe you know about it more than I do.

AM: Feminism is about both women and men. It is about rejecting the stereotypes and oppressive systems. Activism is what you do to liberate women and children from oppression. Therefore, you say that you are doing these daily tasks to liberate yourself and those whose lives you touch, that it is also activism.

SF: Okay.

AM: Yes.

SF: Concerning feminism, first, you cannot recognize yourself as a woman and you cannot believe in your work because in the beginning I was not the boss at work, I was the third person at work: I had a male boss and then there was a female boss. This male boss harassed me, for example wanting me romantically but because I was self-aware. I did not come to the job because of him and I was there to do my work. He took me from my job and brought me here. Therefore, I knew my worth, so I was able to fight as a woman and I have become a boss. Therefore, being a woman and having a man's as the boss are not reasons to be able to suffer abuse. You woman should realize who you are and know your worth.

AM: You have hit spot on, thank you. In this our fifth part, talk about your work as it relates to your interaction with other activists in the country and internationally. I

¹⁴ Faraji is likely referring to Sauti Za Busara, a popular music festival in Zanzibar that features a diverse variety of African music. ("About." Sauti Za Busara Zanzibar. <https://www.festyful.com/festivals/sauti-za-busara-2024/21607/about>. Accessed 21 August 2024.)

mean, in your daily activities, are there people you work with here in Tanzania and those you work with abroad. I know your wrappers and your other products go out of the country. What is your analysis of the evaluation and expectations of the growth of Feminism in the country? What are your relationships with other women's organizations in the country, and other activists, how do you see your work in relation to the demands of women? When we talk about women's demand, it is women's movement, the networks.

SF: In terms of women's demand, I have relations with women's institutions like TWCC¹⁵ in Dar es Salaam, and the Zanzibar¹⁶ there is Women's Center¹⁷, I also have relations with organizations in South Africa who do not know me, but I contact them through networks if I want to order materials and order through them. We not only exchange ideas but I also send them the samples that I make ... (Bad connection) I tell them yes I can do it. At other times, I request them to look for a production South Africa. Now they will look for it and if they do not find it, they will tell me, Sabrina, where do you get this? I tell them that I make it myself in my factory. Regarding such things related to the women's movement, I cooperate with them and we work well. For example for businesses, like mine, and including hotels, we meet, we talk and we consult. Concerning feminism, as I told you at the beginning, I like to involve my fellow women in my businesses. This is because I know that many women, especially those of us from Zanzibar, are greatly impacted by our culture, traditions and our religion, Islam¹⁸. Therefore, I like to interact with them so that I have the opportunity to share with them my life history and tell them the things I have experienced, in the hope that they will have a sense of how I got here. I hope that this challenges them to find something to emulate and ask; if she got there what stops us from getting there too. That is what feminism means to the women and me know. I meet many different people, for example in hotels and very often, these are the people who support me and my fellow women in the movement. Often my competition is with foreign women, not with Zanzibar women. Foreign women already have already advanced further and are eager to extend their hand so that I can go further.

¹⁵ TWCC, or Tanzania Women Chamber of Commerce, is an organization of over 10,000 members whose mission is to support women entrepreneurs and provide them with support in business as well as advocating for fair policies for women in business. ("About Us." Tanzania Women Chamber of Commerce. <https://www.twcc-tz.org/>. Accessed 25 October, 2023.)

¹⁶ Zanzibar is an island of Tanzania, located off the east coast of Africa in the Indian Ocean. ("Zanzibar profile." BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14115176>. Accessed 25 October, 2023.)

¹⁷ The Women's Center in Zanzibar is called Wajamama and is a women-led NGO with the goal of providing accessible holistic health care to women in the community and beyond. ("Wajamama." Wajamama. <https://www.wajamama.com/>. Accessed 25 October, 2023.)

¹⁸ Islam is a religion that originated from the teaching of the Prophet Abraham; it used the religious text called the Quran to teach the belief in one God. ("Islam." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam>. Accessed 25 October, 2023.)

AM: Thank you. What is your current vision for your organization?

SF: Being where I am now feels as if I am just beginning my journey. Where I am now is in the government one, I have rented it, it is part of the industrial government are. My vision is to have my own facilities, to be able to build and hire more people and be able to plant trees like bananas. I plan to start making things that are from organic plants and if I start doing that, I will be able to hire more people and I will progress further. I also want to be able to go far and sell things internationally. Currently I am selling small things, but I want to sell more. My target is not to sell quantity, I want to sell a little but it should be of good quality. I have planned for the money needed to add value to my work. That is the target for my business. I do not want to sell quantity like what people bring from China and dump here. No. I am targeting my customers. Those customers decide what they want: if they want linen, I sell them quality material. This is something, which is very important to me, and I focus on it in order to go further. I want to leave this part of planning, I want to have my own personal part and hire more women. Because I mobilize women right now, I need a man but my plan is to have woman who will be able to stand in the middle without a man. Because if a man gives you an order and you are a young woman, he does not respect you, but when there is a woman, you have a common language, you understand each other and it is easy to work together.

AM: Thank you very much. I was happy when you said you have someone who helps you to cut but your target is to put a woman in those jobs that men do.

SF: Yes.

AM: Thank you. In your conclusion, you have touched on your international integration in your movement. Do you have relationships with activists of other organizations in other countries other than Tanzania and if any, what contribution have they had in your work? What do people professionals from outside the country proclaim to do and how different are their actions? I am taking into consideration that in the beginning you mentioned that you have collaboration with people outside the country.

SF: Yes, I have maintained relations with outsiders. Swedish people initially owned this factory. Even though I am now the owner, the former Swedish owners have maintained contact for they take pride in that what they started is still standing and growing. So now, I have many things like labels, zips and business cards because I import. I do not source things from Tanzania or Kenya. I source them from Sweden. My contacts order from Sweden and send them to me. I also have other contacts in Holland who are bringing me

things. I did not know these people. They just looked for me just as you looked for me. I send money and they bring me the goods. There are many: some are in Denmark and some are in the United States of America. Therefore, I have different people, or people are just looking for me, we meet and discuss what to do, things like that. You find that people from those countries do not like the violence found in our less developed countries where the violence against women is very high. In my view, the most important thing is for us to be able to recognize and value ourselves. If we can recognize and value ourselves as women, no one will be able to abuse us. We should not expect free lunch. There are women who love to receive free things, let us not expect free things, let us give ourselves, let us put ourselves to work, let us make our strategies for long-term plans. With the power of God we will arrive, nothing is impossible with God.

AM: Thank you. Hello, can you hear me?

SF: Hello. I can hear you.

AM: Thank you, maybe just to conclude, let me ask you a question, can you tell us a little about your life in brief. You said your mother brought you up and she encouraged you to join an NGO after finishing Advanced level. Maybe give us a snapshot of your life.

SF: Okay. I am from Zanzibar and my mother is from Zanzibar. She raised me as a single mother from the time I was four years old. My father left so my mother had to raise the three children. She had a business and as I grew up, I developed business skills, which my first employer spotted and hired me. My mother is an activist like me. She was a business woman. As I was growing up, we did not have our own house but after I got a job and started working, she bought a piece of land. I collaborated with my mother and we built a house. I am currently living in our house but my mother is in Oman with my brother. I have three children, my first child is 11 years old, my second child is 8 years old and my third child is 4 years old. I teach my children as my mother taught me, I do not depend on my husband. That is why I say that we women can liberate ourselves if we believe in ourselves and value ourselves. Let us not hold the view that being a young woman is shameful. A woman is the same as a man in that they are both human and were created that way. As such, we need to appreciate ourselves and plan our life strategies. We should have long-term strategies and we shall be successful. We should not have short-term strategies. We should review the long-term strategies to see where we may have gone wrong so that we correct ourselves.

AM: Thank you very much Sabrina. My other question is probably intrusive; at what age did you start working, because you said you started working when you just finished high school.

SF: I started working in 2004, now it is 18 years.

AM: Wow! Congratulations. So you started working at an NGO and then moved to the company where you are now?

SF: Yes, I started in an NGO and in that NGO we did not have an NGO, we used to meet in Forodhani¹⁹ while in Zanzibar we meet in Forodhani under a tree, we would share work there and Forodhani came up with a sponsor. He sponsored us and gave us an office but we started under the tree to start our movement. There under the tree we were teaching each other the language to enable us to use with the guests as we walked them around. I had also learned how to walk the guests, explaining the history of Zanzibar where it started. This was not the only place where I worked, at the same period I was also working in a hotel. I was working in various fields and that is why I am still motivated until today when I see how far I have come.

AM: So you learned to be a tour guide, right?

SF: Yes.

AM: You learned a language. Which language did you learn?

SF: The language I learnt since I was in school was English. In the organization, they taught us other languages. I therefore learnt Italian, French and Spanish there. Every person was taking the language he or she liked, or found easy, to enable them to work there. Each one of us who learnt these languages has their own life, we were there under the same tree, but everyone went to their own business.

AM: When you say everyone has his or her own life you mean, from being a tour guide to having your own offices?

SF: Yes. We now have offices and others have hotels.

¹⁹ Forodhani is referring to the Forodhani Gardens, a park located in Stone Town, Zanzibar, Tanzania that has a food street market in the evenings. ("Forodhani Gardens." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forodhani_Gardens. Accessed October 11 2023.)

AM: Aah! Congratulations. Thank you very much Sabrina, I wanted to know how the beginning was, I knew I had missed something and now I know I have found it because most of the tour guides I see in Zanzibar are men.

SF: Yes, there are no women. I started early and had many opportunities. I did not go back to being a guide since I am now on a different work journey.

AM: Okay! Thank you very much. Okay, Sister Sabrina, thank you very much for your time.

SF: Thank you too. Thank you very much.

AM: Thank you and welcome.

SF: Okay. You are also very welcome.