

Participatory Action Research - Feminist Trailblazers & Good Troublemakers

Welcome to the companion site to the podcast, Participatory Action Research Feminist Trailblazers and Good Troublemakers. We talk with feminists PAR Trailblazers about their work, struggles, and successes bringing feminist values and ways of being to PAR. We explore their insights for the future of a PAR intentionally informed by intersectional feminisms.

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Transcript – Hosts Patricia Maguire and Jessica Oddy

Marjorie Mbilinyi: Participatory Action Research and Transformative Feminism in Tanzania (No 1) **Podcast aired May 29, 2022**

Welcome, you're listening to Participatory Action Research Feminist Trailblazers and Good Troublemakers.

I'm Patricia Maguire. I'm a longtime advocate of feminist-informed participatory research and teacher action research. My co-host today is Jessica Oddy.

Jessica Oddy:

Hi everyone. My name is Jess and I'm a PhD student at the University of East London, Center for Migration Refugee and Belonging. And I'm passionate about critical and feminist-informed Participatory Action Research,

Patricia Maguire And our guest today is Marjorie Mbilinyi

Before introducing Marjorie, I want to tell you a little bit about this podcast series. So participatory action research has long promoted its liberatory and transformational goals. So we ask: without meaningful inclusion of intersectional feminisms, what is PAR liberating us from and transforming us into?

In this series, we intend to amplify the contributions of early feminist and women trailblazers in PAR. We'll have conversations about their work, their struggles, and their successes bringing feminist values and ways of being to PAR. And hopefully together we'll revision a participatory and an action research that's deeply informed by intersectional feminisms.

Today it's our pleasure to welcome Dr. Marjorie Mbilinyi of Tanzania. She's a scholar activist and one of THE earliest participatory action researchers.

I'm going to start with a brief and selective bio. You know, Marjorie's been doing this work for 50 plus years so we just have to give a brief intro to some of her work and Marjorie has asked us to emphasize that she couldn't have - and she didn't do any of this alone - that she's always worked collectively and collaboratively.

Since the early 1970s, yes, that's the 1970s folks, Marjorie has fought for gender and class justice in Tanzania, and she's worked with feminist allies across the African continent, indeed, the Global South and the Global North. They called their approach Transformative Feminism, which we'll explore today.

Teaching at the University of Dar es Salaam in the 70s Marjorie organized along with other faculty staff and students who were fighting to democratize the university and that was during Tanzania's post-colonial pivot to socialism and self-reliance.

Due to the blatant patriarchy at the university, Marjorie has said she even had to fight for the right to even study and research women and gender issues. She helped build the Transformative Feminist coalition. They created alternative spaces in the university, within the emerging participatory research community, and within the international development sphere.

Marjorie carried out active PAR work in rural Tanzania as part of the larger Jipemoyo project which was one of really the biggest and the earliest PAR projects in the world in the 70s and 80s. And she worked particularly with marginalized and often preliterate, rural and agrarian women

And finally, she joined with other women to organize and lead feminist initiatives in civil society organizations. And we'll hear about some of that work today. She helped organize the Institute for Development Studies Women's Study Group, you'll probably hear that as IDS; the Women's Research and Documentation project, and perhaps of most import, the Tanzania Gender Networking Programme. So listen for Marjorie to talk about TGNP. After retiring from the University of Dar es Salaam in 2003, she was the principal policy analyst at TGNP, the Tanzania Gender Networking Program. And they use cycles of reflection and action of PAR to build the movement.

Welcome Marjorie. It's a joy to have you with us today. Jess is going to get us started.

Jessica Oddy:

Marjorie, you said that in part you came to Participatory Action. Research through your work in participatory pedagogy in the Department of Education at the University of Dar es Salaam. Could you tell us about that and how that led to your involvement in PAR?

Marjorie Mbilinyi:

Sure. In the Department of Education, of course, the dominant mode was probably what I used to call the copy copy method of pedagogy, where the teacher either writes on the blackboard or gives out notes and the students are expected to more or less regurgitate what they have memorized from the teacher. Whereas a lot of us in the late 60s, were excited by education for self-reliance, which

called for creativity, critical thinking and so on, and so on And so, I incorporated that into my own teaching at the university which meant it was an interactive, participatory pedagogy. And of course, when you're doing a lecture facing 300 students, it's more challenging. I used to have case studies I presented to the students and I was modeling after some of my professors at Cornell University where I did my first degree. And get the students excited by that case study and then even those who seemed shy, often women, would stand up because of the nature of the case study. But the case study had to be relevant to their own lives.

But was more exciting was working with my own course at third year. It was a social psychology course, And there we could really do participatory pedagogy - have group work with the students where they are very involved with running their own research. We would organize a feedback workshop.

Teachers who participated in the research would join us and go through the findings and that kind of thing. I was trying to practice what I understood to be participatory pedagogy But at the same time I can't really separate my teaching with the activism about fighting sexism at the university. Myself like many other young lecturers at the university or assistants, research assistant like me, were faced with a lot of sexism at the university and we began to reach out informally to support each other to have solidarity with each other about this.

And out of that, did come a decision to create an informal study group to give ourselves solidarity as we were struggling, over issues like appointments, promotions, access to accommodation, and so on. Some of them very practical issues. But also in the end finding access to resources to do our own research That was what led to the creation of the IDS Women 's Study Group.

Patricia Maguire - you have also talked some about your introduction to Paulo Freire and his work. Talk a little bit about how Paulo Freire's - critical consciousness – how his work informed some of your participatory pedagogy

Marjorie Mbilinyi:

But as I was doing this work and had my own paper on it, I had a research project called Secondary School Research Project, working with student teachers going into their teaching practice and I had my own base in a Secondary Girls school in town out of which we wrote a paper together called the Colonial Process in Our Secondary Schools with my federal student teacher researchers. And at that time, we're all excited about critical thinking, creativity, interactive work and all the rest of it, And was introduced somehow to the work of Paulo Freire. I realized that his work on *concientización* and all that seemed highly relevant to what some of us are trying to do in Tanzania.

And so I did reach out to him. Where this was happening in Tanzania was often not at the university. The Institute of Adult Education then was affiliated but separate or autonomous somehow from the university and there's a lot of exciting work going on there.

So, as I have said earlier, a lot of exciting work of not only participatory pedagogy, but actually participatory action research was happening outside of the university. I was fortunate to develop linkages with that as well. And of course, that validated what I was doing in the classroom or the lecture room at the university.

And if I just had another thing, very soon, both at Department of Education and then in the IDS where I moved – the Institute of Development Studies in 1980. I also became coordinator of graduate studies. And that meant I was also the coordinator of the Research Methodology Foundation courses, in both education and then 1988 in IDS. So that provided scope for me to share with students the different ways of approaching research and the significance of participatory research.

If you truly wanted to have a process of research or knowledge generation which was somehow grounded locally, where you believe your subjects that you're talking to know what they're talking about. You go to listen to them and be inspired by whether they're talking about, encourage them to analyze their situation and then begin to plan action, what we called *uttata* or the 3 As or something like that. That's the approach that we use.

And of course, this was very in line with Paulo Freire's raising of consciousness approach. So we did reach out. Actually, I personally wrote to Paulo Freire and I shared a copy of the Education for Self-Reliance paper and suggested he might find it useful to come visit Tanzania.

And this is why I think he had already been exiled and was based in Geneva, and it was arranged that he would come to visit. He was linked up to the Institute of Adult Education. And this was first, it was another second visit. It was even more formal to cement these links and maybe that's an important point to those, we discussed this earlier that there have been international linkages, many intriguing kinds of efforts to promote participatory action research in Tanzania and what's going on globally. And this was one example, it was very informal, but it was inspiring for all of us to have Paulo Freire. And he also said, one of his most critical encounters was his second trip, visiting in Tanzania, where he met with the activists in Tanzania because there are a lot of critical issues you can talk about concerning Paulo Freire's approach - a tendency to somehow idealize what is possible and perhaps underemphasized the power of the circumstances of the structural factors, which may limit what liberation can happen through dialogue.

Patricia Maguire

Let's jump off from there and talk about your Participatory Action Research work with rural women farmers that was part of that Jipemoyo project. Your work in that really had a quite an influence on me - because your work with rural women sometimes illiterate farmers really helped me see participatory action research from an intersectional feminist lens. And you've written that a lot of the early projects, women studies projects etc, that while they cut across issues that had to do with women - their labor, their double workload, whether they controlled their resources or not, that those projects didn't connect gender with class with race with neo colonialism, and what you also called economic and cultural globalism. So how is it that you were able to make those connections?

Marjorie Bbilinyi:

Right, let's see. I think a part of it is earlier, you mentioned the Jipemoyo Project. And in the late seventies, I was involved with two participatory action research projects that were really putting into action this participatory action research approach, although you couldn't say, it was very explicitly through a feminist lens, although some of us were involved with a very feminist approach to what we were doing and one is Jipemoyo which was under the Ministry of Culture and the other one was a Christian Council of Tanzania project. Now, both of those cases brought me from the university to work at the local level or to work with other people working at the local level, and in both cases, they were also translating my writings, then on education into Kiswahili. But most important of course, was being on the ground.

The challenge was avoiding a case where you over romanticize what you're doing. To what extent are you really grounded locally; to what extent are you taking the lead or are you

facilitating the grassroots animators? The grassroots activists - be they women or men – to do their own assessment of the situation, analysis, and planning action. Your job as we understand it as a facilitator in this kind of Participatory Action Research work is to guide, to challenge. That does include critical challenges. So, it requires a kind of rapport where people begin to overcome our own issues within our own research process of class, race, whatever nationality, rural or urban and all the rest of it and overcome that in our dialogue with each other.

It's a very political process, the participatory action research, but for myself and other colleagues, we were doing it through a feminist lens. We didn't call it feminism those days. Because feminism in Tanzania was stereotyped by a Western kind of stereotype - as more radical feminism. And in Tanzania at least if you're in the progressive groups, you couldn't just think that men are the enemy and all women are the same, essentializing women. It's impossible.

Because then as now Tanzania was subjected to different forms of neoliberal globalization, post-colonial relationships, the past of colonization and slavery where issues of race, class, imperialism were there as well as gender. And the other thing is, we all knew women are not all the same. They're not all the same. We were taught that by Black feminist in the United States. They challenged the women's movement in the United States. Women are not all the same or working-class people challenged Marxist feminists in UK and other places, we're not all the same. You're saying women don't have access to jobs. We wish we didn't have to go to work. The challenges in the old days about WID and WAD to get women integrated into development. In the Third World, women were saying, we ARE integrated into development as oppressed and exploited women. Now, I think I should have a yellow card, I get too carried away.

But that's how the two came together. Participation Action Research, which in Tanzania, we began to call *uraghibishi*. So from the concept in Kiswahili of *uraghibishi* we used the English translation, which is animation. Now *uraghibishi* is the idea that as we're saying, is that the exploited know their situation. Our job is to go listen and learn, but also challenge.

Like in Tanzania, it is very easy for people to say, my problem is I don't get proper prices for my crops. Women will talk about this. I'm exploited in such a way. I'm blaming the government. We have a bad government. So we as facilitators would say, okay maybe, but actually underlying the government are there other forces explaining why the government cannot pay more for your crops or the traders are not able to pay? And then you encourage people to begin to think broader about macroeconomic forces beyond national governments and thinking about global imperial interests and so on. So that's where it is

the idea of generating new knowledge through a discussion with those who are the ones who are truly oppressed, and marginalized.

This is why transformative feminists will argue and especially our organization TGNP is that our mission and vision is to facilitate a transformative feminist movement, which is positioned around those women who are the most exploited and marginalized, because we believe that a true movement has to be not only composed but led by marginalized by women. By now, that is our vision and mission. The practice of it is of course, very challenging.

Jessica Oddy:

So I'm interested to hear more about these challenges and from our previous discussions, I know you mentioned that in the 1970s in, in the Tanzanian kind of academic arena, there were some intense differences between the Pan-African Marxists and the transformative feminists such as yourself. And that some of the men called your feminist analysis of race and gender, particularly in the relationship to rural agriculture, as kind of divisionary.

You've countered that far more disruptive were the divisions between neoliberal and state feminists and transformative feminists such as yourself. Could you tell us a bit more about transformative feminism which challenged both male dominance and imperialism and Pan African Marxism as well as challenged neoliberalism and racism in state and liberal or Western feminism.

Marjorie Mbilinyi

Yes, well thanks. Because I'd like to leave here and say some of my recent work like a ROAPE interview. I remember in that one, I was really speaking bitterness about the resistance, the challenges we faced. Not everybody, by the way called themselves transformative feminists. This was more recent.

But anyway, the bitterness we faced from young Marxists, who in many cases in those days, the 70s and 80s were very dogmatic. The issue was class. So, if you raise issues of gender, and even worse, if you're raising issue of race and gender, you were dividing the masses because the main issues should be class.

So even my work on colonial education where I was talking about the racism within the education system in the colonial period, as well as the classism. And yes, as well as this exercise, people were uneasy because they said, no, the issue is class. And I tend to get diverted but even a very good friend, a colleague, Deborah Bryceson and myself wrote a paper about peasant women, they said you dividing the masses because you are talking about issues of gender,

Now, if you're working with peasant households in a country like Tanzania or in a region like Africa, the main kind of form of production is patriarchal household system. It is organized in a patriarchal way. If you're looking at the division of labor and work, both work for the market as well as work for home reproduction, it is very much structured around gender. There's no way you cannot talk about gender relations.

So those of us who are engaged in those issues would argue, How can you talk about the issues of peasant struggles without talking about the divisions also among the peasants. We don't create the divisions; the divisions are there. That was one issue.

I want to go back to when I reminded myself of my early writing, what were the real most important struggles for me in the late 60s, 70s 80s. It was really with Western feminists, neoliberals, often white but not only. And then more recently, it's also amongst urban middle class women especially in Tanzania and elsewhere, where there's an attitude of saying, "Our job is to go and enlighten rural women about their oppression, about their exploited position." Which assumes those women don't know. Whereas, all our work in PAR and our own activist work in sense of feminism was arguing the opposite - that women DO know. Our problem is learning how to listen. Because a woman in the countryside or the town is not going to use academic language to explain her situation. So we have to know enough to understand if a woman in the countryside is arguing that you know, these days they bring us fertilizer which is expired. I don't have a market for my crop. Etc. Etc. And you come back in and talk to her or them about this situation. Why do you think this is? Oh, bad government. Yes. But is there are other social forces behind that? So, you're pushing and pushing that envelope of knowledge. You the facilitator have knowledge which you share with that person on the ground who knows **where the shoe pinches**, and knows the most.

But that also means you become humble, you go to learn and to listen and not assume you know. It also means that you in the urban middle class may not be aware of how much you are oppressed or exploited. I remember in the early days, when we had global meetings of Copenhagen, the one in Nairobi and so on as well as other international meetings. When we had these confrontations between feminists from the Third World Africa and people from the "West." What was interesting is to challenge people and say you talk as if, you know, as if you are not oppressed and exploited in your own positions. Chandra Mohanty who wrote about Western feminism, is somebody who made this very clear.

Can I leap into the problem of promoting participatory action research at the university for research methodology because I think we know the dominant approach in social science research is positivism, So, not only myself, but especially that my MA candidates and others even PhD. I was working with were often challenged when they wanted to use a participatory research approach. Oh, you're being subjective. You're taking a position and

so on, whereas the positivist position is say you're objective. You don't take a position. But we know that the position of participatory action research has always been to say, and it's also a Marxist epistemology to a certain extent, historical materialism, is to say, **Every approach in research has a position.** If you do not declare where you stand on the existing dominant structures, it means you are facilitating those structures. There's no such thing as neutrality. But then you could be asked, so, how do you can you have objectivity? Surely we want to have objectivity in doing our research and the answer has been in this, not just us. It's very well known. I just don't remember their names. If your intention is to have as holistic an understanding in order to know how to move forward, to to bring change happen. Then you want to look at things from every angle. So if we're challenging exploitative extractive capitalism and neoliberal globalization and racism and patriarchy, we have to know as much as we can about the dominant forces, how they understand the world as well as about those who are dominated and oppressed and exploited. Their understanding the world in order to be able to understand reality.

You can't just go and look at what the allies or your constituency are thinking. In a way to use more militant language, you have to know what the enemy is thinking and understand it. And in some forms of animation work, people use those concepts.

Patricia Maguire:

Well that leads into some discussions we've had where you said very clearly that you don't think that there is such a thing as neutrality in research there's always a politics of PAR. As a gender activist, later calling yourselves transformative feminists, that you had a position. You had a definite position. Although it required, you listening carefully to local people to understand their position as well. And I might be jumping a little bit forward here, but you've said that you didn't ever consider yourself to be a professional, participatory researcher. And that that you weren't really organizing around building PAR institutions, etc. But that you were using, particularly in the Tanzania Gender Network Programme, you were using PAR to build the movement. So would you talk some about that. Because I think a particular interest to listeners is understanding how through these cycles of reflection and action, the Tanzania Gender Network Programme used PAR to build the Transformative Feminist Movement.

Marjorie Mbilinyi:

Right. But even if I go back before TGNP, because another thing is, how I came into more and more the connection between critical gender analysis (which then actually they believed later transformative feminism) and PAR. You know the early work as I understand the women's movement a whole lot of it was about how women know, women are not

passive victims. They are subjects acting on their own behalf. That concept on their own behalf is very important. That our job is to work with people locally, so that they identify what they want to do on their own behalf.

That's also exactly what PAR is saying. That the people you're with, like if we go back to Paulo Freire – is that people know. Our job is to learn and then codify. He used pictures. We use pictures. Other people used popular theater. We used popular teacher. Case studies - where you create a case study and then you ask people to react to it in interactive theater where people do the same thing. But the job of that is not to tell people or to show people their reality is to provoke people to think about. And then what do you do better. Like in a good roleplay, you might break it at a certain moment and then say to the participants, “What should happen now?” and then people forget about who they are. They get involved with what should we do now? What should we do next? So, these things for not just me, for us really went together.

Learning more and more about how to do animation, which is from a progressive position as well as connecting it to feminism, especially transformative, feminism, - which is arguing the same thing. Because I mentioned that thing, that the animation is progressive, can I leap into the question of how it's sometimes extractive?

You know how in the early days, I think it was a progressive movement to promote. I remember in the States before I came to Tanzania, there was something called militant observer or something. It was drawn from the work in Latin America, not just Paulo Freire but also work done with working class and rural activists in the United States. The role of Highlander and so on is like that. Then, eventually, mainstream institutions began to adopt the idea of rapid participatory appraisal something like that?

Maguire: Rapid Rural Appraisal

Marjorie Mbilinyi:

Yes, and they were, they were adopting a lot of the words that also were part of the participatory action research movement including the World Bank. And they'd have whole series of research programs on this idea of rapid rural appraisal. That for some of us is extractive. You find a way to use participatory methods like anthropological methods, to get people to reveal more about themselves. But it doesn't have the same positionality nor the politics of participatory action researchers. You would be working with people on the ground. But you're joining forces with them in their process of demanding change. Now what that demand is depends on the location, level of consciousness and awareness and organizing in that local community.

If you come and impose on people and say you should be organizing a progressive movement, that's also not animation. It's not participatory action research. If your society is not reached that level of activism, you just have to take it slowly. You're promoting and activating, catalyzing people to think about how to make change happen. So people thought and talked about that. Here is the theory of learning that you have, know your theory of change to do that.

But it does show that every concept we used to be the old days, early days of women's movement, they were critical of the World Bank for ignoring women. And that was the WID movement - Women integrated into development. Eventually the World Bank promoted a policy statement about the invisibility of women or something like that. They accepted the critique, they adopted it into their program but they were promoting neo-liberal globalization against the interests of the majority of women according to our position. So, I guess it always means you take one step forward. But you have to be aware. It's the idea of always being vigilant about what you're doing. And I think the only way to understand what's going on is that concept of being grounded locally. You can't just do it by reading literature or social media with each other. There has to be a way in which people engage in this practice are still either themselves or the people they're working with are grounded locally.

Patricia Maguire:

We certainly raise the issue of how PAR or participatory methods get co-opted and then disconnected from their radical roots. I mean, I know in my own work in teacher action research that was a concern of mine of that these action research methods would be promoted as a methodology – like a technical method, as opposed to grounded in a whole philosophy about what you believe about knowledge creation and people's right to create knowledge, which I think comes just straight back to your premise that research isn't neutral, that there's a politics of PAR.

This may be bringing us to two things, Jess and I wanted to bring up at the end. What would you say to contemporary action researchers about how to stay connected to their radical roots? How to stay connected to their critical analysis of what's going on?

Marjorie Mbilinyi:

I think that's where the concept of grounding comes in. I don't know if you're aware of the work of Walter Rodney, but he has a famous writing: *Grounding with My Brothers* or something like that. Amílcar Cabral and his studies of Guinea Bissau also talked about the need to really be grounded locally somehow.

When we began in TGNP almost all of us came from a history of some kind of engagement with participatory research locally through adult education or some other process. We began in 1992 or 1993 and became registered 93. By around 2004, we felt we're not grounded locally. And so we said we've got to go out, to send researchers using our animation approach to find out more about what grassroots women on the ground feel are the most important priorities for them.

Now, that's limited, but it's one way to check yourself what's going on. And it was very interesting because we got feedback of two kinds that was not expected I think from us. I think we expected people would be not only sharing their own priorities, but praising the work of TGNP you know. You know here you get awfully, complacent about your work. But what the response that came from some people are you have excluded some people deliberately and the people talking were members of those excluded groups.

One of the excluded groups were sex workers, - you have not made us feel welcome. Now, TGNP has Wednesday seminars which are open to the public. We believe they're open to the public. We have annual gender festivals every two years held at the TGNP headquarters. and every other year in some regional location, and so, plus our training, which we look for this and participants. I think we thought we're open. But people in their sex worker community were feeling they were excluded. Another group who said they were excluded, where people coming from same-sex communities. They said also that they have been felt made to feel excluded. Well, that challenged TGNP where we try to put into action animation is not just that we work with others, but all along our mission is to reflect on ourselves. So we we have to sit and reflect. It led to deliberate effort to reach out to this community, We have this coalition called the FemACT Coalition, Feminist Activist Coalition, which consisted or consists both of women's organizations, Women's rights organizations but also social movement organizations. And some of them withdrew from the Coalition afterwards because they said this is against our tradition. This is not customary.

You hear what I'm talking about? That that when you are open to grounding yourself, you also can bring out the contradictions within your own coalition, your own movement. This challenges you, where you stand on these positions.

I will never forget the excitement with which some of our members who were there initially, agreed that this is against our tradition later said, Look, we are not promoting certain forms of gender identity. What we are doing is saying everyone has the right to their own identity. Now, in the previous regime, even now in Tanzania, it's actually illegal to be promoted. So there's always this issue of the politics of positionality in terms of governance and so on. People could say," But why are we worried about a minority?" And I know the work of well-

known feminist named Hope Chigudu is, but also another friend anyway, there's so many. The most radical, challenging groups or constituencies within your movement are the ones who are providing you with the challenge of who and what you are as a movement. It's not the mainstream within your movement, it's those who are the most threatened.

Jessica Oddy:

What you're saying is so important and I think what to me is coming through about the context of animation in PAR and in Tanzania, is that it was very much designed on the margins with the margins. And there was this intentional outreach to communities who would perhaps traditionally have not been invited into these spaces. I think one of the things I see at least in from the UK context, is that there's still much resistance to PAR in many institutions, and I think, particularly in the times that we're in now, with hostile bordering and policing practicing and surveillance which has entered into the university, I think it's even more challenging to try to have the same approach. And so I'm really interested to know a bit more about how you were able to do this work within the university. And also, any tips or guidance that you could share with researchers like myself. Like how can we do something similar?

Marjorie Mbilinyi:

I think what's crucial is building some kind of support groups - people who join you in having the same approach. Like that was how we were able to move forward in terms of promoting gender activism solidarity, both for practical struggles at the university as well as support for the work we were doing in terms of research. And the same, with participatory action research, is linking with other people, doing a similar kind of work.

So I again I don't really completely separate the two together. When people are trying to do some kind of transformative or support students' candidates doing transformative research work, it's very important think to create spaces where it's safe for people to raise issues.

For example, I try to do that with seminars. It's a small thing, but our seminars at the university were very macho natural in a sense that destructive criticism. People would go to a seminar looking for something to bash the presenter with or the researcher with. Whereas our work in building our confidence as women was to look for what positive strengths of a presentation or an activity first. And raise that, acknowledge that and then talked about constructive criticism. Well, yes, you have to be constructive other ways or you are reproducing mistakes instead of helping people to see how to move forward. But begin with the positive.

And you know, that was so hard for students and also for researchers, when we would have our own meetings and seminars, when you say, okay, begin with the strengths of the

presentation and people are looking around. They're not used to identifying the strengths because people are so locked into this destructive form of discourse. I think that's a part of it - building safe spaces where people feel are safe to imagine new ideas. To say them out loud. And maybe they'll make mistakes. But as everyone says, a pencil has an eraser. Yes, you're going to make mistakes, but I was do you learn unless you can bring those mistakes out into the open now as a professor as a supervisor of PhDs or Undergraduates. I hope I put that into action. I think sometimes I was a little bit too opinionated and it's always a challenge when you're the one having that power to put into practice what you were calling for from your own selves; but I think it's essential.

Patricia Maguire:

I think what you also brought up with the work of TGNP was, and I think this comes from the feminist lens, is that there's also a responsibility of the people in organizations to really look at their own beliefs, their own values. I mean, you talked about the challenge in TGNP to understand the biases, so to speak, that some people had about sex workers or the biases about the LGBTQ+ community.

And TGNP took on that responsibility to examine their own beliefs, their own identities. You know what, what part of sort of all the multiple identities they valued or didn't, and I think that really speaks to what is required of participatory action researchers to constantly do that self-reflective work.

Jess, you want to wind it up?

Jessica Oddy:

Well, I don't want to wind up! I think we could keep talking. But again, selfishly, perhaps because I am doing my PhD and I'm trying to get as many tips as possible. I'd love to hear what you what you'd have to say to people coming into action research, about how to go about integrating transformative or intersectional feminisms into that action research and also why does this really matter?

Marjorie Mbilinyi:

I can't think if I go back to our own situation in Tanzania where there are some people who will argue that all women are oppressed. They will generalize about all women being oppressed in good faith. In interactions with the politicians and government, it's easy to sort of generalize. and say we have to pay attention to women and even when they're talking through gender language, but it's essential to recognize the fact that not all women are the same. We have different interests.

For example, when you have the concept of economic empowerment, women's economic empowerment, I really have a knee-jerk reaction to that concept now, because if we think about it, what flashes to mind is entrepreneurial projects. Entrepreneurial projects are about promoting women capitalists, that's what they're about. They're not about working to develop the power collectively of women workers, to strengthen their power vis-a-vis capitalist exploiters or traders etc. It's about individualism. It is not about collective empowerment. And that's one of the biggest challenges is getting people to understand. Yes, women's economic empowerment but which women and is it just one because even when we were asking people in our, I think it's still being done in training and again using example of TGNP I've left employment there. But in the old days preparing for our own participatory action research, we'd be inviting people to talk about how examples of how they were empowered. And people would say, Yes, I was empowered to make more permanent roof on my house. Or I was empowered to expand my business. Now, that's still individualism. It'll be different if it was about, yes, for women's group. We were able to protect our group. We're able to strengthen the beer hall, which examples are often homebrew or something. Or the marketplace and that strengthened us as a collective of women traders etc. I think that's the kind of discussions that we've had on the issue of empowerment. I think, women thinking about partners is very good example of how you can have very different meanings.

Patricia Maguire:

I want to thank you so much, Marjorie for sharing just a small slice of your life's work and particularly how jumping off from the early work you were doing with PAR and the Tanzanian Gender Networking Programme, really used cycles of PAR to build the movement and to learn more about the communities you were working with.

For our listeners, if you want to learn more about Marjorie's work, there's a sampling of citations that are on the online Listen notes that accompany this.

I want to thank our co-host, Jessica Oddy. You can also see more of her work in using digital and PAR approaches with youth who have been in educational emergency settings. You can see more of her work also on the online Listen notes.

And I want to thank Linnea Rademaker who graciously allowed us to use the Action Research, Global Conversations platform for this series.

And to all of our listeners out there, thank you so much. Help us amplify this work, send links to your colleagues, your networks. Give us a shout out on social media.

Our next podcast interview with Renu Khanna will air in a few weeks. If you have any questions or comments, please email me at maguirep@wnmu.edu And so that's it for our

first episode of Participatory Action Research: Feminist Trailblazers and Good Troublemakers.

Now, go make some good trouble yourself! Thank you, everyone.

<https://www.parfemtrailblazers.net/guests/marjorie-mbilinyi/>

Show notes

Marjorie Mbilinyi talks with co-hosts Patricia Maguire and Jessica Oddy. Marjorie is one of the earliest feminist participatory action researchers. Since the early 1970's Marjorie has fought for gender and class justice with transformative feminists in Tanzania and across the African continent. In this episode Marjorie discusses the gender discrimination she faced at University of Dar es Salaam, the early PAR projects with rural women farmers, and the genesis of a transformative feminist coalition that created alternative feminist spaces in the university, the emerging participatory research approach arena, and the development sphere. She has been a tireless advocate for gender and class justice.

This episode is brought to you by co-hosts Patricia Maguire and Jessica Oddy and is produced by Vanessa Gold. Music is by ZakharValaha from Pixabay

If you have questions or comments about this podcast, contact maguirep@wnmu.edu

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Marjorie Mbilinyi is one of the earliest feminist participatory action researchers. Since the early 1970's Marjorie has fought for gender and class justice with transformative feminists in Tanzania and across the African continent. Teaching at the University of Dar es Salaam in the '70s, she organized with other faculty, staff, and students in their fight to democratize the university during Tanzania's post-colonial pivot to ujamaa socialism and self-reliance. Due to the blatant patriarchy at the university, she had to fight for the right to study and research women's and gender issues. She was part of a transformative feminist coalition that created alternative feminist spaces in the university, the emerging participatory research approach arena, and the development sphere. She conducted several PAR

projects as part of the larger Jipemoyo Project in West Bagamoyo district and other programs, particularly with marginalized rural, agrarian women.

Marjorie also joined with other women to develop feminist initiatives and civil society organizations, such as the Institute for Development Studies Women Study Group, The Women's Research and Documentation Project, TGNP Mtandao (Tanzania Gender Networking Programme, and Fem ACT (the Feminist Activist Coalition). After retiring from the University of Dar Es Salaam in 2003, she was the Principal Policy Analyst at TGNP from 2004 – 2014. She has been a tireless advocate for gender and class justice.

Selection of Publications

Marjorie Mbilinyi (1982). My experience as woman, activist, and researcher in a project with peasant women. In Marie Mies (Ed). *Fighting on two fronts: women's struggles and research*. pp. 30-45. The Hague: Institute of Social Studies.

Marjorie Mbilinyi (1982). The unity of 'struggles and 'research': The case of peasant women in West Bagamoyo, Tanzania. In Marie Mies (Ed). *Fighting on two fronts: women's struggles and research*. pp. 102-142. The Hague: Institute of Social Studies.

Marjorie Mbilinyi (2011). Gender struggles at the University of Dar es Salaam: A Personal herstory. *Tanzania Journal of Development Studies*, Vol 11, No 1-2.

Marjorie Mbilinyi (2015). Transformative feminism in Tanzania: Animation and grassroots women's struggles for land and livelihoods. In Rawwida Baksh and Wendy Harcourt (Eds). *Handbook of Transnational Feminist Movements: Knowledge, Power and Social Change*. Pp. 507 – 527. New York: Oxford University Press.

Marjorie Mbilinyi and Gloria Shechambo (2015) Experiences in Transformative Feminist Movement Building at the Grassroots Level in Tanzania. In Akosua Adomako Ampofo, Cheryl R Rodriguez & Dzodzi Tsikata (Eds). *Transatlantic Feminisms: Women and Gender Studies in Africa and the African Diaspora*. Lexington

Janet Bujra. (August 24, 2017) Gender and politics in Africa: An interview with Marjorie Mbilinyi

<http://roape.net/2017/08/24/gender-politics-change-africa-interview-marjorie-mbilinyi/>

"Women in Tanzania (Tanganyika & Zanzibar)" accepted for publication online in the Oxford Reference Encyclopedia of African History at oxfordre.com/africanhistory and in Oxford Encyclopedia of African Women's History eds Dorothy Hodgson, Alicia Decker, Abosede

George, Tabitha Kanogo, Fatima Sadiqi, Pamela Scully, and Kathleen Sheldon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming)