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PhD in Urban and Regional Development  
IN VARIETATE CONCORDIA

Doctoral Dissertation  
Doctoral Program in Urban and Regional Development (36<sup>th</sup> Cycle)

# **Bodies of water: an intersectional geography of waters in rural Tanzania**

**Caterina POZZOBON**

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## **Supervisors:**

Prof. Elisa Bignante, Supervisor  
Prof. Emanuele Fantini, Co-Supervisor  
Prof. Filippo Menga, Co-Supervisor

## **Doctoral Examination Committee:**

Prof. Alison Browne, Member, University of Manchester  
Prof. Egidio Dansero, University of Torino  
Prof. Mara Ferreri, Member, Polytechnic of Torino  
Prof. Hans Komakech Referee, Nelson Mandela African Institute of Science and  
Technology  
Prof. Paola Minoia, Referee, University of Torino

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# Summary

This research investigates the complex interplay between water and gender dynamics in the two rural communities of Chamoroma and Pandambili located in Dodoma, Tanzania. The Tanzanian context contains within it a diverse set of waterscapes and hydrosocial territories shaped by the fact that the country is on the list of countries where water access has several critical issues especially in rural areas. Emerging among these critical issues is that of the presence of inequality dynamics that are reproduced in water-related issues and run along gender lines. Situated within a political ecology perspective, the study relies on the conceptualisation of water infrastructures as assemblages that go beyond their physical components to include social, political, and cultural elements that mutually influence each other. This perspective allows to explore the interconnectedness of water's physical and social dimensions, emphasizing how material water (physical infrastructure, water sources, etc.) and social water (cultural, political, economic, and social dimensions) influence and define each other. Specifically, this work is grounded in the theoretical framework of Feminist Political Ecology within which the African perspective within the study of intersectional interactions between gender, power, and the environment are investigated. The micro-scale of the body and how this is intertwined with the materiality of water is the key geographical scale at which the analysis was conducted. By focusing on the everyday embodied experiences of women, the study aims to reveal the specificities of how gendered practices and labour shape and are shaped by water access and management. The research questions guiding this study are: How does the intersection of water, gender, and rural water policies influence the waterscapes of rural communities? What are the specific types of places and subjectivities that these intersections produce? In other words, the questions refer to how water – together with what happens around it - forges women's subjectivities and their everyday direct embodied experiences with its materiality. In this sense, the hybrid elements mutually interacting to produce the specific waterscapes are considered as "bodies of water".

Methodologically, the research was constructed through a combination of qualitative methods. Document analysis of national water policies, regulations, and NGO archives, along with semi-structured interviews with key informants, provided insights into the macro policies and legal frameworks shaping local water access geographies. Photo

elicitation, semi-structured interviews, and transect walks were used to understand the spaces, places, and subjectivities created by water-society interactions, focusing on personal and everyday experiences. Participant observation of water practices, uses, management activities, and ethnographic fieldnotes allowed for a deeper investigation of the everyday dynamics of water management, capturing the roles and activities of water users and managers. The research reveals the multiple and intersecting ways in which gender dynamics significantly influence water access and management in the two studied communities, which have different socio-ecological characteristics and water management systems. Ethical considerations and positionality challenges are also addressed, particularly the implications of the researcher's identity as a Western academic conducting fieldwork in Tanzania. The use of a local interpreter was essential for mediating cultural and linguistic differences, ensuring the accuracy and relevance of the data.

The study finds that situated water access geographies are strongly shaped by dynamics that create unique local waterscapes that reproduce, challenge, and complexify gender inequalities. Women's embodied experiences with water infrastructure and management highlight the physical and emotional labour involved in water access that in turn is connected to a perpetration of slow infrastructural violence. The research shows the intersections that emerge in the two waterscapes through the key concepts subjectivity, embodiment, and materiality. The construction of individual subjectivities is mixed with objects, water, infrastructure, cultural norms, labor, emotions, fatigue, slow infrastructural violence, and water management policies that aid in the understanding of how gender dynamics connect to water and its management. The study therefore reveals the intricate relationships between gender, water infrastructure, and everyday experiences, showing how women's bodies and work are integral to the functioning of water systems. In Pandambili and Chamkoroma villages, women's participation in water management is not confined to formal institutions but is embedded in everyday collective practices of knowledge-sharing and environmental care. Through an African feminist lens, the relationship between women, their bodies, and water reveals multiple layers. While women face infrastructural violence and gender-based oppression due to unequal water access, this does not negate their agency. Overall, this research contributes to the fields of feminist political ecology and geography by providing an analysis of the situated intersections dynamics in the two communities of Chamkoroma and Pandambili.