

## **Sexuality and Social Work Conference 2016**

### **Social Work by Socially Marginalized Group: A Case Study of Swahili Muslim Women Working Against Social Constraints**

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Conventional division of labor among genders is still widely accepted around the world, which stereotypes the roles of men and women and sets rigid boundaries of public and private respectively. However, there is a wide spectrum of activities besides housework contribution in which women living in Muslim countries engage and contribute. Along with recognizing their multi-faceted role, it is also necessary not to relegate or assign it as an extension of their involvement with 'feminized unpaid care labor', ignoring their active participation in larger social system and policy making. Taking the case of Zanzibar, through an ethnographic field study, it is argued that social capital is used by Swahili women as a way to mobilize people for devising initiatives, striking a balance between personal/individual and communal interests. Linking their social work with their biology, one cannot see how the Swahili women, individually or collectively engage in the public spaces, to take charge of public good. Their entrepreneurial community work, professional association and NGO involvement (i.e. both informal and formal approaches of initiating change) display that their strategies of opportunity recognition are aligned with the cultural and religious demeanors, devising contextually relevant solutions to affect society in a positive manner. It is concluded that for the contemporary Swahili women, attaining economic stability has itself become vital for retaining morals in present times.