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Women's Movements in Africa

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Introduction

Contemporary women's movements in Africa can trace their antecedents to women's mobilization within movements for independence and in the women's organizations established early in the one-party era. Today's movements emerged during struggles for democratization and in the context of peace movements during civil war. The new political space that opened up with democratization in the 1990s and in postwar contexts after 1990, but especially after 2000, has allowed for new forms of autonomous women's mobilization. Women's activism was also inspired by changing international norms regarding women's rights, highlighted in the 1985 UN Conference on Women in Nairobi and the 1995 UN Conference on Women in Beijing. It was further buoyed by foreign donors' new interest in supporting women's mobilization, even if these funding trends were not always sustained.

As a result of such influences, the women's organizations that emerged after the 1990s were characterized by their independence from national states and ruling parties. The organizations that formed in this period selected their own leaders and had their own sources of funding, which allowed them to chart their own agendas independent of the state and dominant party and enabled them to engage in greater policy advocacy, a marked shift from earlier mobilizations.

This chapter provides a historically framed overview of the development of contemporary African women's movements. It first looks at the roots of contemporary women's mobilization in sub-Saharan Africa in

the struggles for independence and during the years of one-party rule (1960s through 1980s). It shows women occupying important roles in democratization movements from the early 1990s on, gains that influenced later mobilization. It examines how the decline of conflict in at least sixteen countries opened up new possibilities for mobilization, when women had been engaged in peace movements during war. The chapter explores the factors leading to the rise of autonomous women's movements after the 1990s and their impact on women's rights reforms. It describes the key issues that have engaged women activists and the characteristics of women's mobilization, illustrating the more general points with a closer look at Uganda as a case study.

History of Mobilization

Although African women's movements today have new agendas, strategies, and forms of leadership, they sometimes draw on older forms of protest and on experiences of women's mobilization that were used prior to colonialism and during the struggle for independence as well as during the single-party era that ran roughly from 1960 to the early 1990s. For example, women in precolonial African societies drew on forms of action based in local cultural norms to achieve strong social impact. In Cameroon they used *anlu*, or naked protests, to shame misbehaving and abusive men. Later under British colonial rule, Cameroon women drew on their tradition of *anlu* to ridicule and shame colonial male authorities in the late 1950s (Diduk 1989). Tapping into cultural symbolism of life and death, tactics of stripping were historically used as a curse against male abuse of authority, but in the modern context they have been used against repressive police and governmental authority in colonial and postcolonial Africa. Collective naked protests, for example, were used by women in prodemocracy movements in Kenya in the 1990s, the anti-oil company and environmental movements in the Delta region of Nigeria in the early 2000s, and the land struggles in northern Uganda's Amuru district in 2015.

Women have also drawn on traditions of protest that emerged during the independence struggles and wars of liberation. Women fought in large numbers in the Algerian war of independence in the 1950s. They participated as combatants, porters, and spies, but also in supporting roles as nurses, cooks, and launderers. In Kenya's Mau Mau movement, women provided fighters with supplies and in some cases fought alongside men (Kanogo 1987; Likimani 1985; Presley 1991;

Santilli 1977). Women also fought in the later armed liberation struggles in Mozambique, Guinea Bissau, Zimbabwe, and Eritrea. Women were in the leadership of the independence movement in Tanganyika during the same period: Bibi Titi rallied women, in particular, to the cause of independence, and was regarded as one of the two leading figures (along with Julius Nyerere) in that movement (Geiger 1997; Meena 1992). Women formed a women's section of the Tanganyika African National Union to demand independence, and Bibi Titi headed up this section.

Women traders had particular grievances against colonial rule and were among the most vocal advocates of independence. They rioted and protested colonial tax policies in several Igbo provinces in Nigeria in 1929, Pare District in Tanganyika (Tanzania) in the 1940s, and Bujumbura (Burundi) in the 1950s (Hunt 1989; Ifeka-Moller 1973; Leith-Ross 1965; O'Barr 1976; Van Allen 1972, 1976). In the 1940s, the Nigerian Abeokuta Women's Union, which represented over 100,000 women, organized demonstrations and tax boycotts and even sent a representative to London to present their demands to suspend female taxes. They were able to get female taxation suspended and in 1948 a woman gained a seat on the transition council that was the precursor to the parliament after independence (Parpart 1988:213).

Women's particular concerns were sometimes, but not always, articulated or addressed by nationalist movements, even when women were important participants. In some cases, as in Algeria, they were actively sidelined after independence, much to the disappointment of women activists. In other cases, such as Mozambique, women's rights issues were articulated by the liberation movement leadership, but were postponed, to be taken up after liberation. In Guinea and Mali, women's demands were seen as integral to the process of independence, and leaders of the struggle made concerted efforts to recruit women into the movement by appealing to women's concerns. Finally, in some contexts such as in Cameroon and Nigeria, women got involved in nationalist movements to advance their own gender-specific and other agendas, such as those related to taxation and market prices. For example, at least 1,000 of the 6,000 recorded petitions from Cameroon sent to the United Nations Trusteeship Council came from women nationalists. These petitions were one of the first forays of African women into advocacy within the international arena (Terretta 2007).

Post-Independence Mobilization, 1960–1990

During the first thirty years after independence, one-party systems like Tanganyika African Union and Kenya African National Union dominated the political scene in Africa. After the 1970s several governments were also led by military rulers such as Jerry Rawlings in Ghana (1979, 1981–2001), President Shehu Shagari (1979–1983) and Major General Mohammadu Buhari (1984–1985) in Nigeria, and Idi Amin in Uganda (1971–79). During this period, often the ruling party and the state controlled women's mobilization through patronage politics. The leaders of the women's organizations were often relatives of those in power and benefited from their positions in the form of salaries, cars, trips abroad, and other such perks.

Women's organizations were depoliticized, tending to focus on religious, domestic, cultural, and social welfare concerns, or on income-generating activities, including handicrafts. Domestic concerns involved cooking, hygiene, and how to manage a household. Some organizations were engaged in agricultural production and microcredit. Many adopted a "developmental" approach while attempting to keep women depoliticized. They focused on bringing women into development through agricultural production and informal sector activities and through microcredit and input schemes (Ngugi circa 2001). There were some legislative reforms in this period that carried benefits for women, but only if supported or initiated by the ruling party, and if posing no challenge to its priorities. Women's organizations carried out "gender sensitization" or "conscientization" (consciousness raising), but in general eschewed political advocacy, particularly if that would put them at odds with the party or government (Geisler 1995:546). At the local level their primary political role was ensuring votes for the party in power, populating political rallies in support of party leaders, and providing food and entertainment for visiting dignitaries. In some countries, like Zambia, the Women's League included among its activities a focus on women's morality and preventing women from having affairs. A similar program was adopted by the Union des Femmes du Niger (UFN), the women's wing of Parti Progressiste Nigérien (PPN), the leading party of the pre-independence period and the only legal party in the first Republic (1960–74). They demanded that women be educated and allowed entry into judicial, social, and political careers, and be supported as wives and mothers: this was a way to liberate women

and uphold them as wives and mothers, and a way to stamp out and prevent urban sexual immorality and prostitution (Cooper 1995).

Some of the organizations during the first decades of independence were women's wings of the ruling party. Others were mass organizations that fulfilled essentially the same functions. For example, Development of Women (Maendeleo ya Wanawake or MYW), the largest membership organization in Kenya during one-party rule, limited its concerns to those of child rearing, care of the household, literacy, and handicrafts, with a primary goal of supporting the ruling party, Kenya African National Union (Wipper 1975:100). As noted above, these organizations generally operated along patronage lines and their leaders came from the families of men high in government. Ghanaian first lady Nana Ageman Rawlings chaired the 31st December Women's Movement in Ghana (31DWM); Nigerian first lady Maryam Babangida was president of the Better Life for Rural Women in Nigeria; and Sophia Kawawa, wife of Tanzania's former prime minister Rachidi Kawawa, was chairperson of the Union of Women of Tanzania (Umoja wa Wanawake wa Tanzania, also known as UWT). The tradition continued into the multiparty era as first ladies were associated with their own nongovernmental organizations (NGOs): In Tanzania, Wanawake na Maendeleo Foundation (WAMA) was run by Salma Kikwete and Anna Mkapa was the chief patron of the Equal Opportunities for All Trust Fund (EOTF). Uganda's first lady Janet Museveni was a patron of the popular Uganda Women's Effort to Save Orphans (UWESO). Not surprisingly these types of NGOs have been used for explicitly political purposes. For example, the Zambian former president's wife, Vera Chiluba, used her Hope Foundation to attack the political opposition.

It is worth noting, in addition to the party-related associations, there were some Christian organizations, such as the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), Girl Guides, and Mothers' Union, which were formed during the colonial era. There were also a handful of professional organizations, but the dominant organizations were the party-led unions and leagues.

Generally, the ruling party or government or both controlled the leadership of the party-affiliated women's organizations as well as their financing and agendas. This basically kept them from challenging the status quo. Some policy measures were adopted from time to time as a result of pressure from these organizations, but for the most part, they did not tackle the difficult issues such as marital rape, land rights,

inheritance, and so on. For example, the National Council of Women's Societies in Nigeria lobbied the Government in 1986 to amend its discriminatory family planning policies that targeted only women and not polygamous men. It also got the state Commission for Women upgraded into a full-fledged Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, but it did little beyond these types of measures. The close ties between the Ghanaian government/ruling party and the 31DWM, which absorbed many of the independent women's organizations, limited the extent to which the women's organizations could press for change (Dei 1994; Mikell 1984).

Many governments relied on governmental women's policy agencies rather than on women's organizations to shape policy affecting women. In Ghana, for example, the National Council on Women and Development (NCWD) was formed through a parliamentary act (NRCD 322) in 1975 as an advisory body to the government on all issues affecting the full participation of women in national development, particularly in the areas of income generation, education, and vocational training. They also sought to eradicate prejudices against women. Their target groups included rural women, the urban poor, school dropouts, and working women. Under the Jerry Rawlings government in Ghana (1981–2000), the NCWD was able to get the inheritance laws reformed and degrading widowhood rites banned. However, the relationship between women's groups and the regime was "maintained at the expense of the women's struggle....In so doing women's issues have been shelved; or at best, they have received very casual attention" (Tsikata 1989:89).

Thus, state-affiliated women's organizations became a mechanism through which the ruling party and government depoliticized women. Although they claimed to represent the interests of all women within their countries' borders, particularly rural women, the organizations were primarily a means of generating votes and support for the party and for dancing, singing, and cooking for visiting officials. Women were further marginalized by being relegated to party women's wings, rather than integrated in a meaningful way into the party machinery, which would have afforded them more input into the party policies and candidate selection processes.

Between 1975 and 1985 most African countries established women's policy agencies or "national machineries," as they are referred to in Africa, to coordinate gender policy. Many were formed after a 1975 UN

Resolution called on member states to establish such machineries to promote women in development. Some countries formed these as ministries; others established women's bureaus or departments. These machineries were also created to serve as a link between the government and the domestic women's organizations and international institutions. However, they were often under-resourced and lacked the capacity to engage women's organizations effectively. Their commitment to women's concerns came into question in countries like Zambia and Ghana because of their weak ties to the women's movement, their weak leadership role in advancing legislative reforms, and the use of their leadership appointments for patronage purposes (Mama 2005; Phiri 2006; Tsikata 1989). In Uganda, Idi Amin created the National Council of Women in Uganda in 1978 and situated it inside the Prime Minister's office, while at the same time banning all other women's organizations. In many countries tensions arose between the women's movements and the national machineries, and women's NGOs often accused the women's policy agencies of trying to usurp the role of their organizations and of competing with women's NGOs for funding (Tripp 2000).

As single parties lost their grip and multiparty competition took hold in the 1990s, these institutional artifacts of the post-independence decades—mass unions, leagues, women's wings of parties, and state-related umbrella organizations—decreased in influence. They were sidelined by independent organizations that rose in importance, partly because donors began to redirect funding toward independent NGOs. Some of the state-related organizations strove to become independent, but generally their history weighed against them.

Changes in Women's Mobilization Starting in the 1990s

After the 1990s, new forms of mobilization proliferated around issues such as violence against women, environmental protection, land rights, inheritance rights, poverty and debt, reproductive rights, female education, peace, and many other concerns. Some of these movements gained international prominence, like the Greenbelt Movement in Kenya, led by the late Nobel laureate Wangari Maathai, which became an important force for political change. The peace movement during the Liberian wars (1989–96, 1999–2003) gave visibility to activist Leymah Gbowee, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011 as a result of the efforts of her organization, the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace,

TABLE 1.1 Founding of Contemporary Women's Advocacy Organizations in Africa

Year Founded	Organizations Founded (%)
before 1990	5%
1990 - 1999	24
2000 - 2005	40
2006 - 2011	30

Source: *Data provided by Angelika Arutyunova, Verónica Vidal of AWID, 2013.*

in bringing about peace in that country.[1] But these are only a few better-known examples of the flourishing organizational growth that began in the 1990s. Table 1.1 shows that the number of associations founded increased rapidly after 1990, and burgeoned especially rapidly in the first half-decade of this century. The increase continued, though more slowly, after 2006, according to data from the 2011 Association of Women in Development provided to this author.

Women's Mobilization and the Opening of Political Space

The new forms of mobilization resulted from the opening of political space, which affected even the most repressive governments. Pressed by civil societies and by donors, governments began to take halting steps to liberalize, often shifting to multipartyism and electoral democracy with the aim of continuing to maintain control through more democratic means. The political opening, however incomplete, afforded women greater possibilities for mobilization. Moreover, women activists themselves were heavily involved in political liberalization processes and were often on the front lines of pressing for change. In Mali, President Moussa Traoré shot at 2,000 demonstrating women and children when they marched in front of the Ministry of Defense in 1991. The killing of women and children so incensed the public that Traoré was forced to make major concessions to the opposition before his fall in a military coup, which set in motion the political transition process. In Kenya, women were at the forefront of the democracy movement. In 1992 a group of women who had gone on a hunger strike in Uhuru Park in support of political prisoners found themselves in a violent

confrontation with police. In this incident, older women stripped themselves naked to level one of the strongest curses possible against the military police who tried to break them. More recently, in March 2011 in Côte d'Ivoire, 15,000 women held a protest to demand the resignation of President Laurent Gbagbo, who had refused to cede power after losing an election to Alassane Ouattara. The protestors included 500 women who marched naked to inflict a devastating curse on the government. The naked women held brooms and leaves in their hands while others wore black, drawing on powerful female symbolism that emphasized their role as generators of life who have the power to figuratively negate life. Gbagbo's troops opened fire on the women protesters, killing seven women and wounding 100. Gbagbo was eventually forced out of power, but only after his troops killed over 3,000 people and displaced a million.

In the 1990s we saw countries shifting from military to civilian rule and from single-party to multiparty states. We saw political opening, even if limited, with greater freedom of speech and freedom of association, and more openness to advocacy. Some countries later experienced a reversal in democratization, as has been the case with each wave of democracy historically. Some countries became hybrid regimes, neither fully democratic nor fully authoritarian, where democratic reforms were inconsistently protected and repression was unpredictable. But there has been at least some opening in most countries, allowing for women activists to mobilize. Where the lack of political opening did not allow for an autonomous civil society to flourish, as for example in Angola and Eritrea, considerably fewer improvements in women's status were evident.

Women's Mobilization and the Decline of Conflict

In many of the war-torn countries, women's movements started out as peace movements. Women have mobilized for peace in the context of conflicts like those in northern Nigeria, South Sudan, eastern Congo, and Somalia. The end of conflict also had an impact on women's mobilization, as long-standing conflicts or intense wars declined in over sixteen countries in Africa in the 1990s and 2000s. Civil wars had particular effects on women's status because their end required a reordering of the polity, unlike proxy wars or interstate wars. This allowed for women's rights activists to press for reforms in the context of peace

talks, the rewriting of constitutions, truth and reconciliation commissions, the creation of electoral commissions, and the establishment of other such institutions. The new international and donor discourses on women's rights after the mid-1990s combined with political opening helped foster new women's activism, which sped up processes of women's rights reform (See Tripp 2015 for an elaboration of these trends).

Countries affected by major conflict had experienced serious disruptions in gender relations, forcing women to play greater roles in their households and communities, and at the national level. Men and boys fled or hid to avoid conscription into militias, or they participated willingly or unwillingly in the fighting. This meant that women had to provide for their households in new ways. The involvement of some women in the fighting also challenged gendered expectations in various countries. After the war, women claimed top positions in business, politics, education, and many other sectors where they had previously not been leaders.

During the years of war in Liberia (1989–96, 1999–2003), women peace activists worked at the grassroots level and went individually to request that the various militias to lay down their arms. They organized workshops with the warlords to encourage them to stop fighting. They negotiated behind the scenes with various militia leaders to persuade them to come to an agreement. They took their pleas for peace to presidents in the region, politicians, party leaders, churches and mosques, as well as other key players. They organized women from the refugee camps to hold a sit-in at the 2003 Comprehensive Peace talks in Accra, Ghana, to press for peace, using the international media, and communicating with UN agencies, the African Union, external powers involved in the peace talks, and others. They negotiated in those same Accra peace talks to get their demands met. They also mobilized regionally with sisters from Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, and Guinea through organizations like the Mano River Women Peace Network. Liberian women's peace organizations worked with Africa-wide peacemaking organizations like Femmes Africa Solidarité.

This mobilization during the conflict was a precursor to mobilization after the war ended. A decline in hostilities did not always translate into a decline in violence for women, who often experienced continued and even heightened violence after the war in their homes and communities. The legislative and constitutional reforms regarding land, violence against women, and women's representation (minimum quotas)

were considerably more pronounced after major conflicts because of the gender disruptions that occurred. Thus it was no coincidence that the first woman elected president in Africa was in post-conflict Liberia. Rwanda, recovering after the orchestrated genocide in 1994 that killed 800,000 people, emerged as the country with the highest rates of legislative representation for women in the world after 2003. Because of the role of women's movements and coalitions, post-conflict countries had considerably more extensive legislative and constitutional changes than countries that had not experienced conflict (Tripp 2015).

Historically there have been certain conditions under which war has shaken up existing power arrangements in a way that makes women's rights reforms more likely. The presence of active women's movements is an essential ingredient in ensuring that women's rights are advanced, along with the diffusion of international norms regarding women's rights. We saw these same patterns in parts of Europe and the US after World War I, after which women gained the right to vote. We have seen them in Africa after the 1990s and especially after 2000, with the end of major conflicts. These changes in Africa had not occurred after earlier conflicts when women's movements were not actively pressing their agenda.

International Pressures for Reform

Several things had changed by the 1990s to make women's rights mobilization and reforms more likely in Africa in the context of political reform and a decline in civil conflict. Changes in international global norms influenced gender regimes. Interest in women's rights spread across Africa, promoted by the South African Development Community, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the African Union, in addition to UN agencies and other multilateral and bilateral donors. Many African women's organizations attended the United Nations conferences in Nairobi in 1985 and in Beijing in 1995, which lent momentum to women's mobilization in Africa. There was also diffusion of influences among women's organizations across the continent, particularly among women's rights activists within countries enduring conflict, and a diffusion of ideas around legislative and constitutional reforms pertaining to the adoption of quotas, rights of land ownership and inheritance, violence against women, gender budgeting, peacebuilding, and many other such issues.

Tackling Challenging Cultural Impediments

One of the innovations in post-2000 constitutions, particularly in post-conflict countries, was the provision that the constitution or statutory law would override customary law in the case of a conflict between the two. Customary law has been particularly challenging for women's rights advocates in the areas of marriage, divorce, and inheritance, and family law more generally. Gradually we are seeing changes in these areas of law. Countries where customary law or sharia law traditions are strong have encountered the greatest resistance in reforming family law to accommodate women's rights. But even among the 29 countries that recognize customary law in Africa, in 22 of them, constitutional provisions have been introduced that allow statutory law to override customary law should there be a conflict when it comes to women's rights, e.g. in Chad, Ethiopia, and Somalia. Moreover, personal law is invalid if it violates constitutional provisions on non-discrimination or equality in 5 out of 12 countries, including Sudan and Nigeria.[2]

Cultural practices that are considered harmful to women have been another area of contestation. Sometimes these involve the maltreatment of widows or young women. For example, Ghana, Benin, and Togo still have a form of ritual servitude called *trokosi*, in which families or clans use young virgin girls to pay for services or as part of religious atonement for transgressions by family members. The girls work without pay—or consent—as slaves of priests, elders, and owners of a shrine. Gradually such cultural practices that are harmful to girls and women are being challenged and abandoned. As an example of inroads against one of the most widespread practices harming girls and young women, today at least 24 African countries out of the 29 where female genital cutting persists have banned the practice, most of them since 2000. The latest to ban the practice include Gambia and Nigeria.

Some cultural practices have proven to be less problematic than others. While family law reform has been especially challenging in predominantly Muslim countries, the adoption of parliamentary quotas has not been as controversial. Many of these countries—Tanzania, Senegal, Sudan, Algeria, and Tunisia among them—have been pressured by women's movements to adopt quotas for women in the national legislatures. Today, Muslim countries in Africa, including North Africa, have on average only slightly lower rates of female legislative representation (20 percent) than non-Muslim countries (22 percent).

Senegal is a case in point. Because of weak general support for women politicians, the Senegalese women's movement pressed for quotas. Women's organizations and women party leaders, with the support of the UN and other donors, sought gender parity for the Senegalese legislature beginning in the mid-1990s, in efforts that lasted nearly two decades. The Senegalese Council of Women (*Conseil sénégalais des femmes*, or COSEF) spearheaded the parity campaign. COSEF was formed in 1994 to advocate for women's increased political participation. It was made up of women's associations, political parties, and NGOs. COSEF pressed the political parties to adopt quotas, and the parties pledged their commitment to do so. But after the 1998 elections it was evident that their moral commitment was insufficient, and COSEF decided it needed a legal means to bring about parity.

Fortunately, Abdoulaye Wade, who became president of Senegal in 2000, had made campaign promises regarding gender parity, and COSEF seized the moment to advance the issue. Again in Durban in 2002, when a group of African activists under the NGO Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS) asked him to support the 30 percent quota of women representatives within the African Union, President Wade offered to advocate for a 50 percent quota, which is what the AU adopted (COSEF 2011). In 2004, still under Wade, Senegal signed the African Union Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (commonly known as the Maputo Protocol), which includes a provision about gender equality. Senegal also added the Maputo Protocol to its constitution.

In 2005, non-governmental organizations like COSEF, together with the Monitoring Committee for the Implementation of Gender, launched the campaign "Let's consolidate democracy with gender parity!" This marked a turning point in the struggle for parity (Sane 2010). Early on, COSEF and its allies gained support from parties like the Union for Democratic Renewal (URD), the Socialist Party (PS), the And-Jëf/African Party for Democracy and Socialism, and the Rewmi Party (PR). COSEF worked with women from those parties. On March 23, 2007, almost a thousand women from all parties dressed in white and marched from the Independence Square, the symbol of national freedom, to the Palace of the Republic, the seat of political power, chanting the word "parity!" The "white march" was organized by the Ministry of Women under the direction of Minister Aida Mbodj, along with COSEF. The head of state was quick to respond to the women's

demands. Four days after the march he proposed bill No. 23/2007, known as the "parity law." It amended the Electoral Code to provide for a proportional representation party list composed of alternating candidates of both sexes. The gender parity law was finally adopted in May 2012. A National Observatory on Gender Parity, established by presidential decree, monitored the implementation of the parity law in the elections (Bissonnette 2013).

After the law was adopted, COSEF and the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Children, and Female Entrepreneurship, supported by the UN, launched a public awareness campaign in fourteen regions of Senegal and trained about three hundred women candidates on the electoral lists.[3] Thus while the impetus for the gender parity law came from women's organizations within Senegal, external actors like UN Women played an important role in supporting the domestic actors, providing both financial and technical support. As a result of the parity law and the well-aimed support, the number of female parliamentary representatives nearly doubled with the 2012 elections, jumping from 23 percent to 43 percent of the seats.

Characteristics of New Women's Movements

Autonomy

The new women's organizations which emerged after the 1990s were largely autonomous of ruling parties and the government. As a result, they set their own agendas, controlled their own finances, and selected their own leaders. They were diverse in their objectives and forms of mobilization, in contrast to the women's unions and leagues that were tied to the ruling party during the one-party era and that sought to encompass all women's interests. Moreover, they took on more advocacy causes because of their autonomy. Their independence also made it easier for them to build coalitions across ethnic, religious, and other differences. A few countries, Eritrea and Angola among them, still lack associational autonomy. The case of Angola can serve to illustrate what the absence of autonomy means.

Even though Angola has multiple parties, there are few truly independent NGOs. Most are tied at some level to the dominant party, the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola or MPLA), which is able to rule through patronage, repression, and intimidation. The ruling elites maintain their power through their access to oil and diamond wealth and as a result

are able to buy off potential opponents. Through the state they also threaten opponents with loss of opportunities such as jobs, passports, bank loans, or university enrollment; at times they also use physical intimidation, imprisonment, and worse. One sees pockets of resistance in the cultural scene, but the country's policies have mainly served to create a quiescent population that does not challenge the status quo. Angolan women's organizations, almost all of them at the national level, are tied to the ruling party. Even organizations that seem independent are associated in one way or another with the ruling party and government, which means that women's organizations can only take up issues that are in accordance with the priorities of the ruling party. Although there are women in leadership positions in Angola and women constitute 37 percent of all legislators, there is little advocacy outside of the parameters set by the MPLA (Tripp 2015).

In those countries where one finds a strong and autonomous women's movement, women's rights have advanced more vigorously and a wider range of issues has been addressed. Having women in parliament or other positions of power and having a strong women's parliamentary caucus is important, but it is not enough, as the Angolan case shows. Organizations need to be autonomous in order to realize major women's rights reforms. This is borne out in the case of COSEF, which worked closely with the Ministry of Women and other governmental bodies, yet maintained its independence and hence its leverage.

Organizational Agendas

Autonomous organizations have been much bolder in challenging societal taboos. They have been more political and sometimes more confrontational in challenging government policy. Issues like domestic violence against women, marital rape, and sexual harassment only began to be addressed with the rise of independent women's organizations, as did inheritance and land laws and customary practices like female genital cutting. A few examples help illustrate the controversial issues autonomous organizations can tackle.

- In Morocco, every year thousands of children are abandoned and single mothers suffer severe discrimination as a result of social stigma, while the penal code criminalizes extramarital relations. The plight of single mothers in Morocco began to receive national

attention starting with the formation of Solidarité Féminine in the mid-1980s, and the Institution Nationale de Solidarité avec les Femmes en Détresse (INSAF) in 1999. INSAF, for example, is involved in preventing the abandonment of children born outside of marriage. It supports the accommodation of and reintegration of single mothers into society and works toward the eradication of underage girls in domestic work. It also works as part of networks and national coalitions to defend the rights of women and children.

- In Sierra Leone, a large percentage of maternal deaths stem from complications of unsafe abortions. Women's organizations were able to get the Safe Abortion Act passed in 2015, allowing abortions during the first twelve weeks of pregnancy. After the twelfth week abortion is permitted only in cases of rape, incest, lack of a viable fetus, or risk to the health of the mother.
- In Tunisia, Article 226 of the penal code rules against outrages to public decency, a catch-all law often used to target the country's LGBT community. But the country has an active LGBT movement. It includes organizations like *Shams—pour la dépénalisation de l'homosexualité en Tunisie* (Sun—For the Decriminalization of Homosexuality) and *Chouf* (See), whose members use audiovisual and multimedia tools to promote human rights and gender equality. They seek to redefine feminism to give voice to all Tunisian LGBT women.

The rise of African feminism in the post-2000 period was another development tied to the expansion of women's rights agendas. Feminism here is regarded as a goal or target for social change, not a movement per se. Mobilization around this goal of social change can take place in many different arenas—within women's movements, but also within governments and many other societal institutions (Ferree 2006).

Up until the 2000s, feminism was often seen as a Western ideology of individual women fighting against men, with men as the main enemy of women. This was a stereotypical perception of feminism that was often promoted by politicians and the media in Africa. After the 2000s, African feminists became more vocal in redefining feminism in African terms and their views gained greater acceptance, particularly among younger activists.

Organizers of the first African Feminist Forum, held in Ghana in 2006, adopted a Charter of Feminist Principles that articulated some of the new thinking about feminism on the continent:

> We define and name ourselves publicly as Feminists because we celebrate our feminist identities and politics. We recognize that the work of fighting for women's rights is deeply political, and the process of naming is political too. Choosing to name ourselves Feminist places us in a clear ideological position. By naming ourselves as Feminists we politicise the struggle for women's rights, we question the legitimacy of the structures that keep women subjugated, and we develop tools for transformatory analysis and action. We have multiple and varied identities as African Feminists. We are African women—we live here in Africa and even when we live elsewhere, our focus is on the lives of African women on the continent. Our feminist identity is not qualified with "*Ifs*," "*Buts*," or "*Howevers*." We are Feminists. Full stop.[4]

This was a remarkable document in that it was a conscious break with the earlier ambivalence and defensiveness regarding feminism. There was a recognition of the plurality of feminist perspectives and that these differences were part of the strength of the women's movement. At the same time the feminist forum pointed to a consensus on the need to address issues like "poverty, illiteracy, health and reproductive rights, political participation, and peace."

Heterogeneity of Organizations

As the foregoing examples suggest, the new organizations which emerged after the 1990s were heterogeneous compared with the organizations of the single-party era. Today, the organizational landscape includes formal NGOs working on environmental issues, reproductive rights, and female leadership, health, and education; and single-issue groups that focus on female genital mutilation, land rights, HIV/AIDS, and women's sports. Some organizations advocate for particular groups of women like the disabled, widows, single mothers, and second wives in polygamous marriages, who often experience fewer rights and privileges in marriage than first wives. There are professional associations for university women and for women judges, lawyers, media workers,

engineers, doctors, and other such groups. There are development-oriented organizations that promote women's credit and finance, trade, entrepreneurship, farming, and informal sector activities. At the local level one still finds the organizations that promote savings, farming, income-generating projects, handicrafts, sports, cultural events, and other such concerns.

Women's organizations come together around particular policy advocacy coalitions to advance causes with a specific focus on women, such as the adoption of legislative quotas, but also around issues which affect marginalized people more generally, such as debt, land, poverty, and climate change. Women's movements often act in concert with other civil society actors, parliamentarians, women's ministry officials, and UN agencies. One of the key areas of concern has been politics, where there have been major efforts to increase women's representation at all levels. Women's organizations in many countries—Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, Cameroon, and Mali, for example—are the most highly organized and strongest sector within civil society, which is why they are often represented in the leadership of key civil society networks. Finally, there are regional networks of women activists, including the Africa Regional Sexual and Gender-based Violence Network, Forum for African Women Educationalists, and the Women Peace and Security Network Africa, as well as international networks in which African women are active, like MUSAWA (which means "equality" in Arabic), Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML), Global Alliance against Traffic in Women (GAATW), and Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN).

Women's organizations in Africa, according to a 2013 global survey by the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), have focused their activities on the following, in rank order: women's economic empowerment, women's leadership, access to education, reproductive rights and health, gender-based violence, economic and social and cultural rights, democracy and governance, political participation, microfinance, and sexual rights. They serve a wide range of populations, listing, in order of the frequency with which they were mentioned: rural women and peasants, women with HIV, grassroots women, community leaders, women human rights defenders at risk, women with disabilities, women in post-conflict contexts, indigenous women, women in politics, and businesswomen. They employed di-

verse approaches, as well. Asked to identify the top five strategies prioritized by their organization, about two-thirds mentioned training and capacity building and/or women's empowerment programs; approximately half, advocacy, campaigning, and lobbying and/or awareness raising; about one-third, leadership development; and around one-quarter, communication and information, microfinance, sexuality education, and/or organizing meetings to analyze and strategize.

Independence of Funding

The same AWID study also found that women's rights' organizations in Africa found sources of funding independent of the state, which allowed them a measure of autonomy in delinking from state patronage networks. Several types of donors support women's rights activities in Africa. In the AWID study, women's organizations self-reported their major sources of funding, which included women's funds (37%) and self-generated funds (27%), followed by significantly less funding from international NGOs (8%), national governments (7%), local governments (6%), bilateral donors (6%), religious institutions (4%), multilateral donors like the UN (3%), foundations (1%), and local NGOs (1%) like Oxfam, Novib, HIVOS, and CARE.

Women's funds have become especially active in Africa in recent years. Focused specifically on women's needs, they often are more attuned to the specific concerns and needs of women's organizations than other, more generalized donors. The US-based Global Fund for Women works in twenty-seven African countries, making grants of US$13,000 on average. The UK- and Ghana-based African Women's Development Fund, the Netherlands-based Mama Cash, the Mediterranean Women's Fund, and the Kenya-based Action Fund for Women's Rights are similar organizations. Nationally based women's funds include organizations such as the Fonds pour les femmes Congolaises, Women's Fund Tanzania, Ghana Women's Fund, Nigeria Women Trust Fund, Pitseng Trust Women's Fund (South Africa), and the Women's Trust (Zimbabwe). These organizations fund a wide range of initiatives: women's literacy classes, programs combating violence against women, training sessions for women's leadership, and technical support in each country, with tools and information on sustainable agricultural practices.

Aside from its leadership role in setting the international agenda regarding women's rights, the United Nations has also created a

TABLE 1.2 Comparison of Women's Organizational Priorities, Donor Funding, and Gender Gap in Africa

	Organization Priority	Donor Funding	Gender Gap
Women's leadership and empowerment	51%	22%	15%
Women's economic empowerment	55	23	66
Access to education	35	22	85
Reproductive rights and health (contraception, abortion, maternal health)	28	23	97

Source: *World Economic Forum, Global Gender Index, https://www.weforum.org. Data provided by Angelika Arutyunova, Verónica Vidal of AWID, 2013.*

multi-donor fund supported by the governments of Spain, Norway, and Mexico to fast-track women's economic and political empowerment. The goal is to strengthen partnerships between civil society and governments as well as to provide long-term funding to women's rights organizations. The primary bilateral support to women's organizations comes from Spain, followed by Norway, EU institutions overall, Germany, Denmark, the UK, and the Netherlands.

Foundations tend to focus on specific concerns and regions. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation focuses on gender data gaps. The Ford Foundation supports women's rights and reproductive health in Africa; the Rockefeller Foundation, women's education; Carnegie Corporation, university education; the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, girls' secondary education in East Africa and Nigeria.

With the growing global interest in corporate social responsibility, major corporations such as Coca-Cola, Exxon, Chevron, and Intel have in recent years become interested in supporting projects benefiting women and girls. A recent study conducted by AWID, Mama Cash, and the Dutch foreign ministry found that, among 170 corporate initiatives, a total of US$14.6 billion had been pledged for women and girls around the world from 2005 to 2020. About half those resources are to go to sub-Saharan Africa.[5] The downside? As we have seen, government funding may discourage women's mobilization around more controver-

TABLE 1.3 Profile of Women's Advocacy Associations

	Africa	Outside of Africa
Median income of organization	$12,136	$65,134 overall $20,000 Latin America $24,000 South/Southeast Asia
Received donor funding	82%	82%
Receive core support	23%	31%
Have multiyear grants	15%	25%
Give grants to other organizations or individuals	25%	13%
Have lost donors in past 10 years	25%	19%

Source: *AWID 2011 Global Survey: Where Is the Money for Women's Rights.*

sial issues; the new corporate funding focuses on economic empowerment, entrepreneurship, and women's health and girls' education, but very little of it targets human rights or peace or other structural issues underpinning women's rights.

Diversification of funding helps, but the picture even so is far from rosy. There is a mismatch between the priorities identified by women's organizations and those of donors. As Table 1.2 shows, the disconnect is greatest in the areas where the gender gap, according to the World Economic Forum, is the greatest: in the area of women's political and economic empowerment (See Table 1.2). Relative to other parts of the world, African women's organizations receive the least external support in terms of core funding (AWID 2011).

Women's organizations also face numerous challenges because the types of funding they can obtain focus too heavily on short-term projects or on narrowly defined advocacy to produce easily measurable outcomes (vaccinations administered, women who learned to read, leadership training workshops held, etc.). The long, painstaking, and unpredictable work of changing and implementing legislation, policy, and culture is not so attractive to donors, because its success is contingent on so many other social actors and factors. Yet this is often where women's rights activists need the most support. Thus, activists still point

to the need for donors to think more long-term, and to focus on networks, movements, and processes of transformation to bring about structural changes that will have longer-term and lasting impact.

Building Unity Across Difference

One of the most striking characteristics of women's mobilization in Africa has been its capacity for building coalitions and unity across difference, particularly in the context of conflict. In the past two decades women in sub-Saharan Africa have been increasingly engaged in peace movements, grassroots peace building activities, and peace negotiations. In virtually all peace negotiations, women assiduously worked across ethnic, clan, religious, and other differences—in part because they were excluded from official representation in formal peace negotiations. In countries like Liberia, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Somalia, where the male negotiators (often warlords) sat at opposite ends of the table fighting over positions of power, representatives of women's organizations sat together and worked across difference. Unity was their starting point rather than their end point. In Somalia, women from all clans came together, calling themselves the sixth clan, in order to gain recognition in the peace process, because only a feuding clan could get representation in the talks. During Liberia's war, women joined across the Muslim-Christian divide and across ethnic and class differences to forge a united front in pressing for an end to the conflict. This type of coalition-building between Christians and Muslims has been significant in Nigeria as well, in protests against Boko Haram kidnappings and activities.

Women's peacemaking and peacebuilding initiatives have taken a variety of forms. Women in countries as diverse as Mali, Mozambique, and Uganda organized rallies and boycotts urging small arms confiscation; they led reconciliation ceremonies, and negotiated with rebels to release abducted children and child soldiers. Women peace activists have played a role in preventing the resumption of conflict by monitoring and advocating against the sale of small arms and participating in campaigns to prevent the sale of diamonds to fund armed conflict.

Rather than seeing peace as something that had to be achieved to carry out reconstruction, women activists in post-conflict countries often regarded the process of reconstruction itself as *the way* to peace. Because of their involvement in more quotidian concerns, the working

out of problems of access to water, food distribution, garbage disposal, and town cleanliness *was* the process through which peace was built in a country like Liberia. Peace was built piecemeal through the rebuilding of society. This is a radically different notion of peacemaking and departs fundamentally from the way peace negotiations are generally framed.

A Case Study: Uganda

The movement emerged at a time of change in international gender norms, and UN agencies and bilateral donors played a role in fostering women's rights reforms in Uganda as elsewhere. As the war was winding to its end, many women activists went on their own to the 1985 UN Conference on Women in Nairobi. They returned energized to change the status of women in Uganda, which they felt had fallen behind that of other countries. The first independent women's NGOs began to emerge. Some of the early demands of the movement included political power, an end to violence against women, microcredit, education for women, (including higher education), and broad legal reform.

Local-level gender disruptions had taken place as a result of the war. Women began to demand more access to resources and economic opportunities and began to push for more control within their communities both during and after the war. In the early 1990s, for example, as I describe in my book *Women and Politics in Uganda* (2000), there were a series of local-level conflicts in which women sought to control resources and were being challenged by local male leaders in doing so. For example, women fought to start and run a health clinic in Wakitaka, Jinja, against the wishes of the male local council leaders who felt that women should not take such initiatives. They sought to protect market space in Kiyembe market in the national capital, Kampala, which was being claimed by male vendors. They struggled to control the funds of the traditional birth attendants' organization in Kamuli, which were being claimed by a man. They also sought to control the terms of a World Bank infrastructure project in Kampala which would displace numerous residents. Residents of these communities depicted all of these struggles as new ones that had emerged as a result of women's newfound voice. In her study of survivors of sexual violence from the 1981–1986 war in Luwero, Liebling also found that the war had changed women's sense of themselves, and that they had come to express

themselves as autonomous and capable rather than vulnerable and dependent (Liebling-Kalifani 2004).

Ugandan women assumed new leadership roles in local councils and also in religious, political, business, civil society, and market institutions, both at the local and national level. New networks emerged to address problems of women's access to land, peace in northern Uganda, education, and other concerns. Women also led coalitions concerned with land rights, hunger, debt, corruption, and poverty more generally. The older model of having an overarching women's organization to represent all women is no longer popular. The variety of Ugandan women's organizations today reflects the diversity in the movement, which includes women who are differentiated by religion and location, but also women who have diverse interests and occupations, including second wives, sex workers, and women athletes.

Women's organizations were initially supportive of the NRM because Museveni appointed women to key ministerial posts and introduced an electoral quota for women. (This support diminished over time as Museveni remained in power over 30 years, tried to manipulate the women holding reserved legislative seats, and withheld support for key demands pertaining to land rights.) Ugandan women became one of the most important organized forces in the country. This was evident during the 1993 constitutional reform process, when women's organizations submitted more memoranda to the Constitutional Commission than did any other sector of society (Bainomugisha 1999:93).

With each election, women's coalitions issue a Women's Manifesto, articulating the key demands of women's organizations for the political parties. The 2016–2021 Women's Manifesto was the product of consultations by the Women's Democracy Group (WDG) in fifty districts. The Women's Democracy Group, a coalition of women's civil-society organizations (CSOs) in Uganda, was established in 2009 with an aim of strengthening women's leadership and influencing gender responsiveness in democratic governance. It is made up of five leading national women's associations: the Uganda Women's Network (UWONET, which acts as the coordinator), Action for Development (ACFODE), Center for Women in Governance (CEWIGO), Forum for Women in Democracy (FOWODE), and Women's Democracy Network–Uganda Chapter (WDN–U). In drafting the manifesto, the coalition consulted a wide range of CSOs, political party officials, local government representatives and administrators, academics, donors, and other key

opinion leaders from religious, traditional, business, and other institutions as well the women's leagues of six major political parties in Uganda. The coalition identified women's health, land and property rights, education, economic empowerment, and political empowerment as the key areas of concern.

As a result of pressure from women's movements, the presence of women in leadership positions in all three branches of the national government has dramatically improved. The number of women in Parliament increased from 0.8 percent in 1980 to 18 percent in 1989 and 35 percent in 2015. The number of women running for parliamentary positions more than tripled from 1996 (135 candidates) to 2011 (443). Rebecca Kadaga became the first woman to serve as speaker of the Ugandan Parliament in 2011. Speciosa Kazibwe served as vice president for almost ten years from 1994 to 2003, and has been the longest serving female vice president in Africa. In 1988 there was one woman out of 33 in the cabinet; this increased to eight in 1989. Today women hold one-third of the cabinet positions. Women are often placed in "softer" ministries, as ministers of Gender, Labour and Social Affairs, Education and Sports, Tourism and Wildlife; but they have also been appointed as ministers of Defense, Internal Affairs, Trade and Industry, and Justice and Constitutional Affairs.

The expansion in female leadership extended to the judiciary as well. Of today's eight Supreme Court justices, three are women. Out of forty-six High Court judges, twenty are women. A 2012 study showed that about one-third of the justices on the court of appeals and one-third of the chief magistrates are women, while 47 percent of those in Magistrate Grade 1 are women (Global Network of Women Peacebuilders 2012).

Not only did the women's movement influence the number of women in leadership positions; it also effected policy changes. In Uganda, legal reforms were spearheaded by the women's movement together with the Uganda Women Parliamentary Association (UWOPA), which has allowed women to work across party lines (Wang 2013). In 2006–2011 they were instrumental in passing a steady stream of legislation affecting women with respect to land, refugee rights, maternity leave, employment, sexual harassment, equal opportunities, defilement or rape of girls under 18, disability rights, trafficking, domestic violence, female genital cutting, and many other concerns. The International Criminal Court Act (2010) criminalized sexual exploitation of

women during conflict. A law passed in 2006 established the Equal Opportunities Commission, which had been mandated by the 1995 constitution to oversee the implementation of policies regarding women's rights. In 2010, Parliament ratified the Maputo Protocol (the African Union's treaty regarding women's rights), overcoming powerful opposition by the Roman Catholic Church and the Uganda Joint Christian Council. There are still important gaps in legislation, particularly with respect to marriage, divorce, and land inheritance, but the legislature has continued to pass laws benefiting women. The first National Gender Policy was passed in 1997 and the second Uganda Gender Policy was launched a decade later in 2007. It sought to bring a gender perspective to all levels of planning, resource allocation, and implementation of development programs. The priority areas include improved livelihoods, promotion and protection of rights, participation in decision-making and governance, and recognition and promotion of gender in macro-economic management. A National Action Plan was also passed in response to the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 requirement that countries develop policies in peacemaking and conflict resolution that address the concerns of women and girls and incorporate women into decision making processes.

The courts have also played a role in promoting women's rights. For example, in 2007, a constitutional court struck down key provisions of the Divorce Act, the Penal Code, and the Succession Act that limited women's right to inherit property. It also issued a ruling that decriminalized adultery for women (it had not been criminalized for men).

Uganda still has a long way to go before women enjoy equal rights with men. However, considerable progress has been made since the early 1990s. The reasons for the gains by the women's movement are similar to the overall patterns one finds in Africa. Uganda experienced a major conflict, which eroded traditional gender relations in a way that forced women to play more public and important roles in their households, communities, and ultimately in the nation. The end of conflict made it possible for the government to take steps to open political space. Although Uganda remained a hybrid regime which was neither fully authoritarian nor democratic, enough space opened up for women's organizations to mobilize.

Unlike in the past, when most women's mobilization occurred under an overarching umbrella organization tied to the ruling party and state, today Ugandan women's mobilization is autonomous, heteroge-

neous, mostly independent of party agendas, and has its own leadership and sources of funding. This has provided the organizations with sufficient autonomy to determine their own policy agendas and exert pressure on the country's leadership to move ahead with further reforms. At times the government has taken regressive steps, dragged its feet, and undermined women's demands. But the overall patterns suggest that there has been considerable progress for women, which came as a result of pressure from women's organizations.

Conclusions

The 1990s marked the introduction of multipartyism and the decline of the one-party state and military rule in Africa. It saw an increase in associational freedom, freedom of the press, and political rights. The 2000s saw the end of major conflicts in Africa and a decline in the numbers of conflicts starting or reigniting. Both these trends, coupled with the changing international norms regarding women's rights after the mid-1990s, helped give rise to autonomous women's organizations and coalitions as well as women's movements, which advocated for women's rights reforms. With access to their own resources and donor funds, they began to challenge the chokehold that clientelism and state patronage had on women's mobilization in the post-colonial period. Associational autonomy allowed women to select their own leaders, raise their own funds, and set their own agendas. It also made it possible for women to forge new alliances across ethnic, religious, clan, racial, and other divides. It meant that women's organizations could expand their agendas, engage in advocacy, and take up political concerns rather than simply "developmental" issues that focused on income-generating and welfare concerns. They could now more easily challenge the laws, structures, and practices that constrained them. It allowed women activists to broaden their demands and many for the first time took on issues like domestic violence, female genital cutting, and rape that had been considered taboo in the past. By the early 2010s, issues of LGBT rights, abortion, and other controversial issues were gaining traction, even if haltingly.

Until the 1990s, even governments that were generally disposed in favor of women's advancement saw the concerns of women's rights advocates as a sideshow to the broader project of development rather than part of it. But in the 1990s we began to see substantial changes in Africa in gender policy with the adoption of quotas for legislative

bodies, the adoption of gender mainstreaming practices in the development of national budgets, the closing of the gender gap in education at all levels, some improvements in health measures affecting women, and the increased availability of microcredit and finance to women. Governments began to adopt policies that addressed violence against women, sexual harassment in the workplace, family law that discriminated against women, and many other concerns women brought to the table.

Fierce cultural and political challenges remain. The weakness of civil and political liberties and the constant threat that political space will close in the many semi-authoritarian and authoritarian African states impose serious constraints on women's mobilization. Nevertheless, women are in movement in Africa and they have set in motion important and unprecedented societal transformations that are influencing international debates on women's rights.

Notes

1. Co-awarded, together with President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf.

2. See http://wbl.worldbank.org/data/exploretopics/accessing-institutions. Accessed April 20, 2016.

3. See http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2012/7/following-elections-proportion-of-senegal-s-female-parliamentarians-almost-doubles. Accessed April 20, 2016.

4. See http://awdf.org/wp-content/uploads/Charter_of_Feminist_Principles_for_African_Feminists.pdf. Accessed April 21, 2016.

5. See http://www.awid.org/news-and-analysis/womens-rights-organisations-alarmed-attempt-dilute-funding-call.