# WOMEN'S MOBILIZATION IN UGANDA: NONRACIAL IDEOLOGIES IN EUROPEAN-AFRICAN-ASIAN ENCOUNTERS, 1945–1962*

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A rich and growing literature describes colonial engagements between African and European women, including missionaries, civil servants, administrators, administrator's wives, and educators. Scholars have increasingly recognized that colonial women were varied in their interests, the way they saw their own roles, their view of empire, and in the assumptions they made about the societies they lived in.[1] Scholars have been grappling with the dual and contradictory identities of colonial women as reflected in the references to "missionary-imperial feminism," "feminist imperialism," and "maternal imperialists." Still others like Kumar Jayawardena have examined the anticolonial efforts of British women and those who identified with women's struggles in South Asia.[2]

This article builds on the work of Deborah Gaitskell, who showed how some missionary women who worked with African church congregations in and around Johannesburg between 1907 and 1960 built interracial relationships at a time when religion was one of the only ways to bridge the racial divide. She found a far greater persistence of religious solidarity among women than among men.[3] In a similar vein Modupe Labode working in South Africa and Aparna Basu in India have argued that the marginalization of Western women in their own societies made them less hierarchical and authoritarian and therefore closer to the local

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[1] Hilary Callan, "Introduction," in Hilary Callan and Shirley Ardener, eds., *The Incorporated Wife* (London, 1984), 6; Margaret Strobel, *European Women and the Second British Empire* (Bloomington, 1991) 72; Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel, eds., *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance* (Bloomington, 1992), 6; Helen Callaway, *Gender, Culture and Empire: European Women in Colonial Nigeria* (Chicago, 1987).

[2] Susan Thorne, "Missionary-Imperial Feminism," in Mary Taylor Huber and Nancy Lutkehaus, eds., *Gendered Missions: Men and Women in Missionary Discourse and Practice* (Ann Arbor, 1999); Antoinette Burton, "The White Woman's Burden: British Feminists and the Indian Woman," in Chaudhuri and Strobel, eds., *Western Women and Imperialism*, 137–57, esp. 151; Shirley S. Garrett, "Sisters All: Feminism and the American Women's Missionary Movement," in Torben Christensen and William R. Hutchison, eds., *Missionary Ideologies in the Imperialist Era, 1880–1920* (Aarhus, Denmark, 1982); Barbara Ramusack, "Cultural Missionaries, Maternal Imperialists, Feminist Allies: British Women Activists in India, 1865–1945," in Chaudhuri and Strobel, eds., *Western Women and Imperialism*; Kumari Jayawardena, *The White Woman's Other Burden: Western Women and South Asia During British Rule* (New York, 1995).

[3] Deborah Gaitskell, "Female Faith and the Politics of the Personal: Five Mission Encounters in Twentieth Century South Africa," *Feminist Review* 65 (2000), 68–91.

population than male missionaries.[4] Likewise, Maina Singh has written about the contributions of American Protestant women missionaries who influenced women's education in India by founding women's colleges in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She draws heavily on interviews with women alumnae of the colleges in the 1940s.[5]

An important part of the story of women's mobilization in Uganda from 1945 to 1962 was how racist ideologies were actively challenged by women's mobilization across racial lines in ways that were less evident in men's associations at the time. African, European, and Asian women worked together in organizations to develop a nonracial ideology that provided a glue that held them together in trying to advance Ugandan women and their rights. It was not always smooth going, as I show in this essay, and interracial and interreligious solidarities were not easily forged. But these were the overarching goals of the multiracial women's organizations in this period, especially the national organizations.

One reason these linkages were formed in ways less evident in other parts of Africa was the fact that a group of African women leaders had comparable education to the European women in Uganda at the time and some of the university-trained African women were even better educated than their European and Asian colleagues. Those African women who had gained a university education in England shared some cultural affinities with British women, which eased their social relations. Education for women in Uganda had a head start compared to other colonies as a result of the early efforts of missionary women, especially of the Anglican Church Missionary Society. Ugandan women were already attending secondary schools by the late 1930s and entered Makerere College as early as 1945. In the neighboring countries of Tanganyika and Kenya, girls did not start acquiring secondary education until the late 1940s and it was much later that they entered university. The delays in education for women were even greater in the French, Belgian, and Portuguese colonies.

The demise of British colonial domination and the closing of the chapter of British rule in the Ugandan protectorate provided an important backdrop for these interracial relationships among women. The role of the Europeans was defined increasingly as overseeing the introduction of a new era in which Africans were to rule and were to be in charge of their own political destiny. Europeans in women's organizations saw many of the associations as vehicles to facilitate this process and ensure that women were seen as part and parcel of the changes that lay ahead.

The current women's movement in Uganda is one of the most politically powerful social movements in Africa today. In writing my book *Women and*

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[4] Aparna Basu, "Mary Ann Cooke to Mother Teresa: Christian Missionary Women and the Indian Response," 187–208, and Modupe Labode, "From Heathen Kraal to Christian Home: Anglican Mission Education and African Christian Girls, 1850–1900," 126–44, both in Fiona Bowie, Deborah Kirkwood, and Shirley Ardener, eds., *Women and Missions: Past and Present—Anthropological and Historical Perceptions* (Oxford, 1993).

[5] Maina Singh, *Gender, Religion, and "Heathen Lands"* (New York, 2000).

*Politics in Uganda*,[6] I show that some of the reasons for this lay in the earlier efforts at women's mobilization in the 1950s and 1960s. In the historical background presented in that book, I focused on the contributions of African women activists in the postwar period. In researching this history, however, I discovered that European and Asian women worked very closely with African women with a sense of shared purpose. It is to these interactions that I will turn in this article in order to problematize some of the ways we have thought of the reformist-minded colonial women.

The earlier literature on colonial women focused on incorporated colonial wives who were defined by their husband's occupations.[7] Other scholars looked at the ways in which colonial encounters shaped domesticity in such arenas as girl's schooling, women's clubs, and domestic service,[8] and still others explored the civilizing and sanitizing projects of missionaries.[9] Missionary and reformist activities of European women were often described in terms of cultural imperialism, encouraging local populations to align themselves more closely with Western culture than their own. Reformist women saw the problems of African women only as products of indigenous practices and not as a consequence of colonial interaction with indigenous practices.[10] Regardless of how committed the European women were to women's education and improving the status of women, Margaret Strobel and others argued that they could not escape the racist hierarchical way of thinking of their relationships with African women: "The familiar nurturing, helping role adopted by these women interfered with their attempting or achieving a genuine identification with indigenous women as equals."[11] She argued that colonial women carried with them a view of local societies that was constrained by ethnocentrism and prevailing gender ideologies, although there were significant differences among the attitudes of missionaries and others. Strobel recognized that many missionaries and other reformists were able to respect and help local people, not only to impose on them European culture and Christian ideologies. But the absence of indigenous leadership in secular and Christian circles was seen by Strobel and other scholars as a source of paternalism or maternalism.[12]

Ann Stoler highlighted the ambiguous position of European women in Dutch, British, and French colonies as both subordinate to colonial men but also facing restrictions on their economic and political options when compared to men, even

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[6] Aili Mari Tripp, *Women and Politics in Uganda* (Madison, 2000).

[7] Callan and Ardener, eds., *Incorporated Wife*.

[8] Karen Tranberg Hansen, ed., *African Encounters with Domesticity* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1992).

[9] Nancy Rose Hunt, *A Colonial Lexicon of Birth Ritual, Medicalization, and Mobility in the Congo* (Durham, N.C., 1999).

[10] Strobel, *European Women*, 51.

[11] Ibid., 71.

[12] Ibid., 57–59.

more limiting than those in metropolitan Europe. For Stoler, colonial women were in the final analysis active agents of imperial culture in their own right.[13]

Some scholars focused on particular categories of colonial women, like Beverley Gartrell, who looked at the colonial wife in Uganda but generalized about all colonial women based on these wives. She came up with the following kinds of roles for the colonial wife in Uganda, which was typical of this earlier literature on colonial women: colonial wives provided nurturing and companionship for colonial husbands. They were representatives of the home culture who were to uphold moral standards in the colony and prevent undignified behavior on the part of colonial men, i.e., sexual liaisons with African women.[14] They were also to maintain "civilized" standards and serve as a gracious hostess for visitors; provide hospitality for European travelers; serve as adornment at official functions, parties, and receptions; socialize newly arrived wives; and lend a hand in the office when work "piled up." The women were often isolated and lonely because they could not envision companionship with African women and language difficulties compounded this separation.

Gartrell admitted that some women found personal satisfaction by involving themselves in starting baby clinics, teaching literacy classes, and participating in the Red Cross. But many colonial wives did not become involved in hobbies or learning about the language, history, or nature of the countries they lived in because of the unspoken sexual fears that restricted women in white enclaves.[15] British wives were sometimes seen as more ethnocentric and concerned with maintaining racial distinctions, status, and protocol than their husbands.[16] She then concluded that under such circumstances "it would be difficult for feminist theorists to maintain that in a colonial situation there could be a 'sisterhood of the oppressed' because the forms of oppression were specific to women in various strata."[17]

While many of these descriptions are certainly relevant to the colonial experience in Uganda, there is much they do not capture about the relationship between African and European women in the postwar period. Ann Stoler's cogent warnings are relevant here: There is a need to make distinctions between colonial policy and its implementors, between company executives and their clerks, and between the various classes of Europeans involved in the colonial enterprise. The dichotomy of colonizer/colonized needs to be problematized, while colonizers should not be treated as an undifferentiated whole. Colonial agendas need to be looked at in terms of how they in reality played out in the colonies. Internal divi-

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[13] Ann Stoler, "Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in 20th-century Colonial Cultures." *American Ethnologist* 16, 4 (1989), 634–60.

[14] Beverley Gartrell, "Colonial Wives: Villains or Victims?" in Callan and Ardener, eds., *Incorporated Wife*, 168–72.

[15] Gartrell, "Colonial Wives," 177.

[16] Ibid., 180.

[17] Ibid., 183.

sions among the colonials led to differences in the quality and intensity of racism.[18]

More specifically, the Belgian Congo was not the same as British East Africa and British settlers in Kenya or Southern Rhodesia had different relations with Africans than did British colonials in many non-settler colonies and protectorates like Uganda. Missionaries had different objectives from businessmen, while civil servants and wives of military personnel were constrained in their voluntary activities differently from other expatriates. Moreover, there are vast differences in people's sensibilities if one compares the role of foreigners before World War II and in the postwar period.

A more recent literature on colonial women has started to look at them increasingly from the point of view of the formerly colonized peoples themselves. A more complex and diverse picture has begun to emerge that situates the women in the context and thinking of their times and shows the constraints under which they lived. This article is based primarily on interviews with European, Asian, and African women leaders active in Uganda in late colonialism. It does not draw parallels to experiences of women's organizations in other parts of Africa. It aims only to complicate the contradictory role European women played in this period and to suggest that their role was ambiguous at best. I have referred to the European women as "colonial women" in order to engage the literature on such women. But readers should be aware that the Ugandan women I interviewed who were active during this time period in women's organizations found this term highly offensive and several harshly criticized me for using the term in this article to describe their good friends. Their strong reactions provide some important clues about the attitudes of African women active in this period.

In the Ugandan case, the activities of colonial women served as an important prelude to future developments in the women's movement of the late 1980s and 1990s. This earlier era of multiracial cooperation came to an end as large numbers of Europeans left with the end of colonialism and as Idi Amin expelled the Asian population in 1972. Nevertheless, Ugandans are quick to remind non-Ugandans that the expulsion was not backed by the majority of nationals, who had no say in the matter. Ugandan women activists from this period learned many important leadership skills and benefited from the multiracial cooperation in ways that are evident in the new women's movement that became especially important after 1986, when the National Resistance Movement came into power.

## The Origins of Nonracialism

The prevalent ideology of the British women involved in women's organizations in late colonial Uganda was that of nonracialism. This was something emphasized to me over and again by African, Asian, and European women who had been leaders in the 1940s and 1950s. It was not a well-developed critique of racism, but it embodied the view that the only road to women's emancipation was one that

[18] Ann Laura Stoler, "Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities in Sumatra and the Boundaries of Rule," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31, 1 (1989), 136–37.

brought together women of all races and religions. This is not to say there was no racism, subtle and not so subtle, but the fact that there was this strong espousal of a nonracial ideology needs to be accounted for somehow. It does not represent the views of all colonial women in Uganda, but it represents those who were most politically active around issues of women's rights and advancement. My use of the term "nonracialism" should not be confused with the 1950s view in government circles of "multiracialism," which called for an Asian-European-African partnership but was feared by Africans to imply the entrenchment of European and Asian power and African subordination.[19]

Thus, in the postwar period and especially in the years before independence, many European women activists in Uganda did not see themselves as part of a colonial project of domination—they saw themselves rather as participants in a transition to African rule, in which they, along with African women leaders, wanted to ensure that African women would have a place in the new order that was to come.

The emphasis on nonracialism was expanded after independence to include "non-tribalism" (although the awareness was certainly there earlier). The non-tribal emphasis became even more pronounced after 1986 when the current National Resistance Movement regime came into power. At this time, the non-tribal interest of women's organizations became fused with Museveni's antisectarian and non-tribal ideology, which has resonated strongly with women in particular.[20] Thus, the idea of inclusiveness is an enduring feature of the women's movement in Uganda today and has some of its roots in these earlier efforts of women's mobilization. Today, however, the collaborations are being built along different lines because race is less salient, while ethnicity and religion have become more important differences to bridge.

The ideology of nonracialism was evident in the first organizations formed by European women, especially those that had missionary origins. The Girl Guides, formed in 1921 by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) had a strong nonracial orientation from its inception.[21] The Guides, for example, held camps to bring girls of all races (African, Indian, European, and in 1945 a few Chinese) together to make "for better understanding of different customs and outlook."[22]

Although all national organizations espoused nonracialism, in practice there were several that were segregated. The Red Cross, as far back as 1918, organized racially integrated activities between the Asian and British communities of women, but did not include African women until after the Second World War.[23] The Uganda Women's League, formed in 1938 as a member organization of the East African Women's League, was a short-lived organization precisely because

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[19] Kevin Ward "The Church of Uganda and the Exile of Kabaka Muteesa II, 1953–55," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28, 4 (1998), 429.

[20] Tripp, *Women and Politics*, 2000.

[21] Mary Senkatuka, "African Women's Clubs," *Uganda Church Review*, No. 79 (1948).

[22] Elizabeth Jenkins, "Girl Guiding in Uganda," *Uganda Church Review*, No. 75 (1945), 56.

[23] "Mrs. Coryndon: Red Cross Fair at Jinja," *Uganda Herald*, 25 October 1918.

it was too limited in its purpose as a charity organization that, like its Kenyan counterpart, was more interested in doing things *for* Africans than *with* them.[24] Its overwhelmingly European membership had dwindled by the time it was disbanded in 1947[25] and it was replaced by the multiracial Uganda Council of Women, which grew in influence and reach.

A few more narrowly focused women's organizations remained in the postwar period to serve particular communities. The Women's Corona Society specifically worked to help expatriate women adjust to life overseas. Founded in 1949, it remained small with 23 members in 1953 and 200 by 1966.[26] Similarly, the Indian Women's Association at its inception in 1939 was formed by an Ismaili woman, Mrs. Fahmia, to bring together Indian women of all castes, creeds, and religions. At its founding meeting in Kampala attended by 200 women, one of its leaders claimed that the organization's members "must learn to feel that there was no difference between ... Indian, European, and African. That feeling of equality could not be developed unless they mixed freely and open-heartedly among the sisters of all their own communities."[27] Although the organization brought Hindu and Muslim Asian women together, it did not envision a role of cooperation with Africans outside a charity context. Thus, like the European women's associations in the prewar years, the extent of its contacts with the other races was limited.

In the postwar period, most British women active in women's organizations were involved in multiracial organizations. Those groups that did not adopt a nonracial orientation either had to change their rhetoric *and* practice or they risked a quick and natural death like the Uganda League of Women.

## The Uganda Council of Women: Going Against the Tide

In the late 1940s and 1950s nonracialism became institutionalized and most organizations made a point of including women of all races. In interviewing African, Asian and British women leaders about women's political activity and associations in the 1940s and 1950s, I was struck by how all of them mentioned that one of the biggest contributions of the women's movement at that time was to bring together all the races to work cooperatively.[28] The organizations prided them-

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[24] Audrey Wipper, "The Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organization: The Co-optation of Leadership," *African Studies Review* 18, 3 (1975), 100.

[25] "Uganda Women's League, Welfare Work," *Uganda Herald,* 6 July 1938; "The Uganda Women's League," *Uganda Herald,* 10 April 1940; "The Uganda Women's League," *Uganda Herald,* 29 November 1947.

[26] Dorothy Martin, "Women's Corona Society, Uganda Branch," *UAUW Newsletter* No. 6, December 1966.

[27] "Indian Women's Association Enthusiastic Kampala Meeting: Ladies of All Castes Unite," *Uganda Herald,* 22 March 1939.

[28] I interviewed, for example, Rebecca Mulira (Kampala, 2, 5, 9, 11 July 1995), Pumla Kisosonkole (Kampala, 10 July 1995) Joyce Mpanga (1 July 1995), Sarah Ntiro (Kampala, 9 July 1999 and 7 June 2000), Olive Burkitt (Bisley, Gloucestershire, 4 January 1996), Hemantini Bhatia (Kampala, July 1995 and Leicester, 6 January 1996), Peggy Parry (Leicester, 6 January 1996), Sarla Markandya (London, 10 January 1996), Eileen West (Cambridge, 5 January 1996), Anne

selves on their efforts to minimize the importance of religion, race, ethnicity and political affiliation so that these would not stand in the way of their efforts to form a pressure group.[29]

The impetus after the war was to expand women's mobilization across as many groups as possible. The Uganda Council of Women (UCW) is one organization that best exemplifies this trend. It was organized specifically because women in the Anglican Mother's Union felt they needed to work with Catholic, Muslim, Hindu and other women fighting for women's rights. The Mother's Union would not be adequate for this purpose because the head of the Union was the Anglican bishop's wife and the British queen was the patron. This was a non-starter for other religious groups.[30] The UCW was formed in 1946 by Mary Stuart, the wife of the Anglican bishop; Rebecca Mulira, the founder of the Young Wives Group and the Uganda African Women's League; Eseza Makumbi, founder of Forward Society (who was also known also for her starring role in an American movie "A Man of Two Worlds"); Catherine Hastie, community development officer and later an advisor to the minister of social development on women's community development, also founder of the Uganda Association of University Women; and Barbara Saben, the first woman representative to the Legislative Council in Uganda (1954–1961), the first woman mayor of Kampala (1961–1962), and activist in several women's organizations. As Barbara Saben put it, "We felt we needed to know more what the other communities were thinking. We couldn't be inward looking."[31] And so when the UCW was formed, its two main objectives focused on nonracialism: (1) "To bring women of all the different races in Uganda closer together so that they could get to know each other and more about the country they live in; (2) To establish an organisation which had at the heart the well-being of women and children of all races and creeds in Uganda."[32] Although it came to be linked to various grassroots organizations associated with the Community Development–initiated clubs and YWCA groups, the UCW's membership was made up primarily of elite educated women. By 1957 there were 9 chapters with 2,000 members and by the late 1960s there were 18 chapters.[33]

The UCW took on a variety of activities. It sought to improve conditions for female prisoners, started a school for the deaf, held English and Luganda language classes for women, and got the government to build inexpensive houses for

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Tallantire (Cambridge, 5 January 1996), Sugra Namubiru Visram (London,11 January 1996), Nancy Kirwan (Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, 3 January 1996), Gladys Essex (Birmingham, 12 January 1996), Ingrid Pasteur (Bromsgrove, 12 January 1996), Barbara Saben (Norfolk, 4–5 March 2000) and others.

[29] Carolyn Day White, "The Role of Women as an Interest Group in the Ugandan Political System" (M.A. thesis, Makerere University, 1973), 42.

[30] Interview, Barbara Saben, Norfolk, 4–5 March 2000; Interview, Rebecca Mulira 1995.

[31] Interview, Barbara Saben, Norfolk, 4–5 March, 2000.

[32] "Uganda Council of Women Looks Back on Ten Years," *Uganda Argus* 14 November 1957, p. 4.

[33] White, *Role of Women*, 47, 49.

low-income people. It lobbied for the education of girls and women; and for changes in marriage, divorce, and inheritance rights for women, including the rights of Hindu women in this regard. It encouraged women to vote and to run for office. The organization also challenged political parties for their lack of commitment to women's issues. Much energy was expended on education around voting and citizenship and encouraging women to become politically active.

In a survey of UCW members in 1960, the majority appeared to be over 30 years of age, and married; primarily teachers, community development workers, or in other social service agencies; educated up to junior secondary school in mission schools; and active in other voluntary associations.[34] The UCW was affiliated with the YWCA, the Uganda Association of University Women, Mother's Union, Catholic Women's Clubs, the Muslim Women's Society, the Indian Women's Association, and community development clubs.[35]

Nonracialism was evident in most of the organizations in this period. In addition to the UCW, it was a cornerstone of the YWCA[36] and its affiliated Young Business Women's Club, the Uganda Family Planning Association, and many other organizations. Religiously based organizations embraced nonracialism, like the Ismailia Women's Welfare Organisation that worked with Ismaili women as well as Africans and Hindus, offering courses in handicrafts, cookery, and sewing. They also provided free or inexpensive medical and dental care, a prenatal clinic, child adoption services, free food for needy families, and a widow welfare program. The program was funded by the Aga Khan Shia Imami Ismailia Organisation.[37]

The Uganda Council of Women was particularly important in these early years in providing leadership to facilitate dialogue, coordinate opinions, and express the common concerns of women's organizations.[38] The UCW saw itself as a leader not only in Uganda but in Africa in its ability to build a nonracial organization.[39] Right from its inception, its goal had been to "bring women of all the different races in Uganda closer together so that they could get to know each other."[40] As Hemantini Bhatia, an UCW leader of Indian descent, explained to me:

> I remember I read a paper at a conference of the Uganda Association of Women's Organizations on the behalf of the Uganda Council of Women. And I was very openly frank and happy to say that here we felt like one.

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[34] Ibid.

[35] "Uganda Council of Women," *Uganda Herald*, December 4, 1954, 5.

[36] "The 'Y'," Sue Stille, 35–37.

[37] "Major Leap in the Status of Women, Mrs. Mulira in U.S." *Uganda Argus*, 9 October 1963, p. 4–supp.

[38] White, *Role of Women*, 43.

[39] "Uganda Council of Women Meeting," *Uganda Herald*, 5 May 1949.

[40] "Uganda Council of Women Looks Back on Ten Years," *Uganda Argus*, 14 November 1957, 4.

> We were like sisters—the Africans, the Asians, and the Europeans.... Pumla [Kisosonkole][41] was so happy. When I got down from the podium, she came up and embraced me, and she kissed me and said she was so happy to hear an Indian woman say that. I'm giving you this background just to show you that we were also friendly. It was not only a political movement, we were very good friends. And that is why I think we lasted so long.

Bhatia underscored the point that friendships and socializing helped to solidify the political coalitions that were formed: "I had made an effort to get the African women to my home, before. Because I used to feel we were all human."

However, these efforts to build nonracial linkages challenged basic attitudes and prejudices prevalent in the European and Asian communities. Bhatia, for example, was shunned by members of her Asian community for her activism with African women. As she explained:

> So the Indian Women's Association here [in Uganda] was very angry with me. And I never really had anything to do with them. I was a member, but I didn't do anything with them. They were absolutely up in arms against me ... because of my attitude towards the races. And I remember one day, one of the ladies came and said if you like the Africans so much, why don't you marry one. It's stupid. I just ignored them and carried on my own way. And that is what made Pumla very happy. She realized that here was a person who could perhaps link up.... I used to ask them over for parties and get-togethers. Especially for our festivals—Diwali and so on. We Asians had lived here for all these years, and we'd never bothered sincerely. So I said no, we must. So I would show them our traditions, the way we decorate the homes, the sweets we serve, and the things we do during our festival.

Some manifestations of racism were quite blatant. Barbara Saben and Betty Moody started a Blood Transfusion Service with the Red Cross in the 1940s. It was for all races, but both the Asian and African donors wished to keep their blood separate from the other race. The Europeans, however, donated blood for all races.[42]

Of course, Europeans had their own race-related blindspots. Barbara Saben's husband, a successful British businessman, had hired and trained Africans in his company since the 1940s when they first came to Uganda. As Saben explained, "Because he [her husband] said, 'look here, we cannot go on ad infinitum,' and so he brought Africans into his office and he started training them to sell life insurance and things like that way back. Mind you he was a very badly criticized for that.... I think that we were aware that change was on the way."[43]

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[41] Pumla Kisosonkole was the first African woman in Legislative Council in 1956.

[42] Personal correspondence, Barbara Saben, 30 June 1999.

[43] Interview, Barbara Saben, Norfolk, 4–5 March, 2000.

The women's interest in nonracialism was also—as one might expect—not shared by the colonial authorities. This was evident when the UCW tried to get money to start a YWCA hostel for young African women who were coming to Kampala to work and needed a place to stay. The hostel would also offer classes in bookkeeping and typing.[44] The president of the organization, Mary Stuart, told the planners not to advertise its interracial character lest it be rejected on those grounds. The Government Welfare Office turned them down anyway. On the one hand, this shows how important interracial cooperation was to the organizations. It also shows how reluctant the colonial administration was to endorse such interracial cooperation. The UCW then, through Barbara Saben, learned of the Cotton and Coffee Profits Surplus Fund that was earmarked for Africans. The YWCA applied for these funds, hoping that later they could later slip in a program for interracial classes. Barbara Saben, who was active in both organizations and a member of the Legislative Council (Legco), was able to persuade the Council to allocate 37,000 shillings from the Cotton and Coffee Profits Surplus Fund in 1954 to the hostel.[45]

Some women struggled with nonracialism issues quietly in their day-to-day interactions with people of other races; others were more aggressive in their advocacy. Sugra Visram was one such woman who actively sought to build bridges and break down barriers. She was secretary of the Muslim Women's Society, but she also was a leader of the YWCA, the Uganda Council of Women, and the Family Planning Association, which she helped to found in 1957. She also started a driving school for women based at the YWCA. Born in Uganda in 1923 to an Ithnasheri family, in 1941 she married the grandson of a well-known East African businessman and Ismaili, Allidina Visram. Sugra Visram was greatly influenced by Allidina Visram, who was known as a philanthropist and as a great believer in building a nonracial society. He funded nonracial schools and other initiatives that would further this goal throughout East Africa.

Sugra Visram was adopted by the Ganda Mamba clan and given the name Namubiru, which she readily accepted. Visram was a businesswoman when she entered politics in 1962 as a member of the Buganda nationalist party, Kabaka Yekka.[46] She had a considerable Baganda following and was especially appreciated because she spoke Luganda fluently and often wore Kiganda clothes.[47] Asked about her Kiganda *busuti* dress, she said that she was proud to be the first Asian woman to adopt the Kiganda form of dress and she would be pleased to see other foreigners trying to adopt local customs. "This is the time for all of us to cooperate as much as possible in order to diminish differences," she is reported to

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[44] Nancy Boyd, *The Emissaries: Overseas Work of the American YWCA 1895–1970* (New York: Woman's Press, 1986), 218–19; Interview, Barbara Saben, Norfolk, 4–5 March 2000.

[45] Interview, Barbara Saben, Norfolk, 4–5 March 2000; Boyd, *Emissaries*, 218–19.

[46] Interview, Sugra Visram, London, January 1996.

[47] Interview, Rebecca Mulira, Kampala, 2, 5, 9, 11 July 1995.

have said. "If I were sent abroad to serve my mother country (Uganda), I would prefer to put on a *busuti* because it makes women smart."[48]

As Visram recollected thirty-five years later, "I'll give credit to Ugandan people for one thing ... when I was campaigning with Ugandan women, nobody ever spoke that I was an Asian. All said that 'she is our Muganda woman. She is Ugandan and she is part and parcel of us.' I was very proud of that." Visram was elected to the parliament of Buganda and as mentioned previously, she was later nominated to represent Buganda in the parliament of Uganda.

The extent of interracial identification was perhaps greater in Uganda than other colonies and it did not go unnoticed by visitors. For example, women's educational advisor to the colonial secretary, Freda Gwilliam, who had travelled widely in British-held territories, noted that compared to other colonies, there was a "greater degree of easy friendship across the barriers of race, culture and education" in Uganda. She attributed this to the great variety of organizations that provided "very real" opportunities for cooperation.[49]

Barbara Saben, who had lived in both Kenya and Uganda, gave me a sense of how Ugandan women's organizations differed from those in Kenya. She explained that the British-run East African Women's League was irrelevant in Uganda because it had not thoroughly embraced nonracialism: "But it [East African Women's League] just had no part to play in Uganda at all. Then again we were always asked to send delegates to the annual general meeting and of course we would send down an European with an African. But then where would you stay? It was very difficult in Kenya." The Kenyan Women's League did not make arrangements so that both delegates could stay together. Saben felt she could not take an African colleague "to the Nairobi Club, I couldn't take her to Muthanga, they wouldn't have her, and I wasn't going to put her through that ignominy, and some of the hotels were just as bad." This would not have happened in Uganda. Saben was also surprised to find that most Kenyan European women did not have friendships with African women. She recalled how shocked a British woman living in Kenya was when she embraced an African friend who had come to visit. In Uganda "we stayed anywhere. I mean to say, people came to dinner and they never knew who [what race] they were going to meet." [50]

The fact that there were a large number of highly educated women in Uganda, some of whom had studied and traveled abroad, had something of a leveling effect for women of this class irrespective of race. It meant that some Africans and Europeans could relate to one other with relatively greater ease because they shared common cultural and educational experiences.

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[48] "Proud of her Busuti: 'It's Smart and Helps to Diminish Differences,'" *Uganda Argus*, 18 April 1962, 4.

[49] "The Sky's the Limit for the Women of Uganda," *Uganda Argus*, 2 November 1960, 3.

[50] Interview, Barbara Saben, Norfolk, 4–5 March 2000.

### Uphill Battles Establishing Interracial Ties

Nevertheless, it was not easy to forge interracial linkages, even given Uganda's relatively racially open society. Even though there appeared to be an easy relationship between the races and cultures in tea shops, church services, and political ceremonies, Sue Stille, who served as YWCA director in Uganda (1947–1953), reported to her National Board that it was a "thin veneer" with severe tensions resting below the surface. "The British women in particular carried the heavy baggage of their culture," observed Stille. "Many would have liked to shed it. Others carried it quite unself-consciously. Two of the YWCA Board members were of this 'Colonial Service' type who don't understand that one works with and not for Africans."[51]

Some of the biggest conflicts came up across the African-Asian divide and across religious differences. As Saben explained: "In the YWCA, we certainly had a heated argument over the 'C' in our title, but Sue Stille resolved this in her own way by pointing out that the "C" embraced everybody!"[52] There was one Anglican Tamil woman of Sri Lankan origin of whom Saben said, "Today in my old age I would call her a very bigoted Anglican. And she would not accept Sugra Visram (a Muslim) as a member of the board. So Sue really knocked their heads together. And that was the way it went." The YWCA branch also had to get special permission from its head office to allow Visram to be on the board. By this time the organization had a growing Muslim and Hindu membership.

Even at a very basic level there were struggles over differences. For example, the Uganda Council of Women had three toilets at their headquarters, one for each race. Part of this may have had to do with the different types of toilets each culture was accustomed to, so while that might account for two doors, it does not explain the third door, so to speak.

### The Salience of Class Differences

Class differences, however, were perhaps more salient than racial differences. As Saben explained: One could invite a Ugandan chief over for dinner, but then you would not let the gardener in "because the chief would get up and go. It was more class not color. It was the same with the Indians.... It was money that ruled.... You certainly did not have the sugar king over to a meal with Purshottambhai Patel. You had him over with Kakubhai Kalidas Radia but certainly not with Patel. It was money that mattered there, you see. Oh, no. You learned that fairly early on."[53]

These differences in class and education became pronounced in organizations like the UCW, which drew primarily from the elite educated circles. The African members, for example, were educated in mission schools, spoke English, and had acquired Western style of dressing. Often they had travelled abroad, had careers,

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[51] Boyd, *Emissaries*, 222–23.

[52] Personal correspondence, Barbara Saben, 30 June 1999.

[53] Interview, Barbara Saben, Norfolk, 4–5 March 2000.

were married to elite men, and a large number were Baganda. They sat on the boards of various schools and companies, led voluntary associations, and many had businesses of their own or were professionals.[54] Many of these women were "firsts": they were among the first women to go to university, to study abroad, to become female members of various professions, to become members of the Legislative Council, and so on. These attributes were critical to the UCW's ability to exert political influence and build international ties, but it also set them apart from grassroots women. And so it became a constant struggle for the UCW to find ways to link up with grassroots women, and it never entirely succeeded in breaking those barriers. Although the UCW was affiliated with community development clubs, the UCW itself had few grassroots members. It was not until 1965 that the UCW specifically developed plans for how to work directly with rural women on problems of poverty, illiteracy, and malnutrition.[55]

Class differences also manifested themselves in other ways, for example, over reactions to taxation. In the early 1960s the issue of taxing women raised the ire of poor women in Teso, Toro, and Buganda, who wrote memos and mobilized against their respective local councils. In 1962, 300 women held a demonstration at the Clock Tower in Kampala and declared that they would withdraw their confidence in the Buganda government on the grounds that having women pay a tax was degrading to women and a violation of Ganda custom. Elite and educated women, however, tended to favor the taxation of women on the grounds that if women were to be accepted as equal to men, they would need to act as full-fledged citizens and pay taxes like men. The UCW, for example, passed a resolution indicating that women should pay taxes as "a contribution to the development to full citizenship of their country by giving them the right to vote and stand for elections."[56] These class differences led to different visions of economic justice, but on the question of taxation, for example, the lines of difference were drawn so that elite Asian, African, and European women would have shared a similar view in contrast to poorer women, who were primarily Africans.

European women did interact with grassroots African women in the context of missionary work—in teaching, nursing, forms of training, and in providing assistance to community development clubs. However, in this context, the racial interactions were more difficult as they would have been also for the African educated class, only more so for Europeans because of language and other cultural differences. As much as class and education facilitated multiracial interactions, these differences also divided women. Nevertheless, this was a gap women's organizations were always conscious of and sought to bridge.

Class distinctions and the small number of European and Asian women limited the possibilities for interracial contact with ordinary African women. Never-

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[54] White, *Role of Women*, 113.

[55] Ibid., 62–64.

[56] *Uganda Argus*, 1 March 1961, 5; "Women Tax Row in Lukiko: Working Wives Must Pay, Too, Say Members," *Uganda Argus*, 12 November 1962, 3; "Tax Women—'and Drive Children to Theft' " *Uganda Argus*, 30 December 1967, 6.

theless the multiracial mobilization of women from throughout the country to pass legislation relating to inheritance and marriage laws, the campaign around the Hindu Marriage Ordinance, the efforts at promoting literacy and girls' education, and many other voter and civic education campaigns actively sought the participation of grassroots women and were aimed at benefiting ordinary women first and foremost. Thus in spite of the class divide, the goals of the national women's organizations were far from self-serving and sought to narrow the gaps through working towards a common cause.

### Gender Differences in Mobilization

While most European women were involved in voluntary organizations that brought them into contact with other races, this was not the case with the men.[57] European men tended to be involved with social and drinking organizations like St. David's Society if they were Welsh, St. Andrew's if they were Scots, St. Patrick's if they were Irish, and St. George's if they were English. There were also sports clubs like the golfing club at Kololo, the Gymkhana, and Kampala Club, which drew primarily European and Asian members along with the Masonic Lodge. The British Legion organized war veterans but it is not clear whether African and European members had many dealings with one another. In 1950 there were 150 Europeans, 8 Asians, and 10,000 African members of the British Legion in Uganda. On occasion the organization raised funds for the education of African ex-servicemen's children or for a particular club around the country and aimed at fostering comradeship and loyalty among ex-servicemen.[58] Men and women of different races, mainly Europeans and Africans, came together at the Uganda Club, choral societies, in some churches, at various functions at Makerere College, at a dance hall called the Top Life Club, and at the Uganda Society, which brought together those interested in learning more about the history, culture, and other aspects of Uganda. Much of this relatively easy social mixing across the races took place in Kampala and would not have characterized racial interactions in other parts of Uganda. But for the most part, the European, Asian, and African men had no particular interest in working together around particular causes and voluntary activities in the same way women mobilized. When I asked Barbara Saben why this was the case, she replied: "I don't think that the men really felt they needed it. They were men.... They had it. I think the women were meeting a challenge and there was no challenge for the men."[59] Europeans and Asian men also were generally employed, limiting their time and possibilities for interracial cooperation.

### Why Women Needed Multiracial Organizations

Why then, did women especially feel they needed multiracial organizations to achieve their goals? Broadly based organizations enabled women to draw on vari-

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[57] "Why Help the Legion," *Uganda Herald,* 20 July 1950.

[58] Personal correspondence, Merrick Posnansky, 29 May 2000.

[59] Interview, Barbara Saben, Norfolk, 4–5 March 2000.

ous key resources of the different communities. The UCW is a good example. Several British members were in the Legislative Council (Legco) starting in 1954 and African women were appointed shortly thereafter in 1956. Barbara Saben, in particular, was a tremendous resource for the women's organizations. She was outspoken and not afraid to challenge anyone, including top officials, if necessary. "You could not ignore her," remarked Sarah Ntiro, who joined Legco in 1958. Saben had been assigned the task of teaching parliamentary procedure to all new parliamentarians, including Uganda's first prime minister, Milton Obote. She was particularly mindful of the new African women parliamentarians in showing them the ropes, as Ntiro recalled forty-two years later.[60]

Mary Stuart and later Winfred Brown were the bishops' wives, who had leverage within the influential Anglican church and the Mother's Union. Catherine Hastie and Mary Senkatuka were influential in the Community Development groups. Some UCW members were part of the Asian Mehta and Madhvani families, who controlled Uganda's sugar, tea, and cotton production. Sugra Visram was a leader of the Indian Women's Association and had connections in the Ismaili community. Many of the African women leaders had key political connections with the African political elite. Thus, all put together, these Asian, British, and African women provided important cross-cutting linkages between key sectors of society, from the British administration, to the African elite, the Baganda royalty, the Church, business, other women's organizations, all the way to the grassroots women's clubs.

Other women felt that broadening their base of support was critical to the success of various lobbying initiatives. This was evident when Asian women's rights activist sought in the late 1950s to introduce legislation that would provide protection for customary Asian marriages. Some 90 percent of Hindu marriages were not legally recognized because Protectorate law did not cover customary Hindu marriages. This meant that that Ugandan courts could not hear cases affecting most Hindu marriage and divorce disputes. Yet there were numerous incidents of Hindu women being burned alive, poisoned by their mothers-in-law, or suffering indignities that stemmed from women's lack of legal rights. Hindu wives could not claim maintenance for themselves or their children if their husband deserted them. Moreover, they could not claim any inheritance of property nor could they sue for divorce or claim custody of their children in the event of a divorce.[61] Thus Hindu women had no legal basis for the inheritance of property or for child custody.

In trying to pass legislation to rectify this situation, Sarla Markandya, UCW chairman of the sub-committee on the status of Asian women in the Protectorate, said that as a strategy it would be better for the UCW to tackle the issue than a communal organization alone because the problem affected both Muslim and Hindu women and they would be less effective if one group were to take the lead.

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[60] Interview, Sarah Ntiro, Kampala, 9 July 1999.

[61] "Move to Improve the Status of Asian Women," *Uganda Argus*, 8 June 1960, 3; White, *Role of Women*, 145–46.

She added, "We want to work with the African and European women in hope of getting ideas and help from them."[62] So the sub-committee was composed of five Hindus, two Muslims, and two Christians.[63] However, certain key Asian Muslim women leaders did not want to work on the legislation because they did not feel the problems applied to them. Thus in 1960 the UCW took up the issue of the legal status only of Hindu women. The sub-committee held meetings in the Hindu community, lobbied legislators, sought to influence key members of the Hindu community, informed women Legislative Council members about the importance of the bill, wrote letters to the newspapers, and publicized the plight of Hindu women. In spite of initial resistance from some members of the Hindu community, including the Indian Women's Association, the Committee went ahead and drafted a bill, got the support of the Hindu communities, and eventually each Hindu community decided unanimously to approve the proposed bill. By March 1960, even the Indian Women's Association was trying to exert pressure on the community to support the new legislation.[64] Sarah Ntiro, who had joined Legco as the second African woman member, brought the Hindu Marriage and Divorce Act before the Legislative Council in 1961 as a private member's bill and it was later passed. She had been asked to do so as an African woman because women in the Hindu community felt more comfortable having a non-Asian introducing the issue to Legco.[65]

Even though the initiative was taken by Hindu women, women of all races and religions in UCW worked together to pass this bill. As Bhatia explained: "The best part of this was that it was not just us: the African ladies and the European ladies all backed us. It was such cooperation. There was no discrimination."[66]

Yet another reason for working collaboratively across race was the African women's interest in expanding contacts internationally. African women sensed their isolation and felt a need to learn about and connect with international trends. Participation in these organizations brought them into contact with European women who had links to international organizations and exposure to new ideas regarding women's emancipation. The UCW, for example, became a major conduit of international news and was one of the main ways international women's associations learned about Ugandan women.[67] UCW sent African delegates to conferences all over the world. The YWCA sent two women, one of whom was Rebecca Mulira, to the US for several months of training in 1952–1953. In addition to meeting with women's groups, Mulira also met Harry Truman, Lucille Ball, and Marilyn Monroe. Later she traveled to Israel in 1971 where she met

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[62] "Move to Improve the Status of Asian Women," *Uganda Argus*, 8 June 1960, 3.

[63] Sarla Markandya (chair), Hemi Bhatia, Rajab Ali, C. T. Richardson, Jill Funk, Rashida Ahmed, Neela Korde (the first Ugandan woman called to the bar), Amy Patel, Nalini Patel (secretary).

[64] "Meetings Support Welcomed by I.W.A.," *Uganda Argus*, 8 November 1960, 5.

[65] Telephone discussion, Sarah Ntiro, Kampala, 7 June 2000.

[66] Interview, Hemantini Bhatia, Kampala, 5 July 1995.

[67] White, *Role of Women*, 68.

Golda Meir and to India in 1967, where she met Indira Gandhi. She also traveled in Ethiopia, Nigeria, Kenya, and Britain. Mulira recounted to me the impact her U.S. trip had on her:

> I saw how active each woman was.... And I said to myself, in Uganda we are sleeping, we are leaving everything in the hands of men. When I get back I'm going to do something about it.... My intention was to see that women also take part in politics, instead of leaving it in the hands of men only.

International visitors also came to Uganda, providing similar kind of exposure. The visits of Golda Meir and Indira Gandhi to Uganda, in particular, impressed many of the women activists. Sue Stille, an aggressive fundraiser, made sure every VIP got a tour of the YWCA as she sought their support. Joan Crawford and Patricia Nixon were among the visitors. At one point Ernest and Mary Hemingway's plane crashed near Murchison Falls and Stille happened to be nearby to rescue them, giving her yet another opportunity to fundraise.[68] Ultimately, these women's organizations provided a new sense of identity with women's organizations internationally. As Sue Stille explained it, "The YWCA offered them ... the sense of belonging to a global women's movement."[69]

One final reason for this emphasis on nonracialism sprung from an awareness that this was the end of the colonial era and women needed to be part of the changes that lay ahead. There was a sense that the Europeans who were in Uganda were there temporarily as part of a transition. Many British living in Uganda had not thought independence would come as fast as it did and some, like Barbara Saben, thought it came too soon because there had not been sufficient political preparation for such a transition. But the British women activists saw which way the winds were blowing and they, along with African women leaders, did not want women left in the dust. The British women knew their days were numbered. As Sue Stille wrote during her tenure in Uganda: "Our time as non-Africans is very short here. They are sick to death of us." She went on to explain that the YWCA had a role in this transition, especially because she believed that "we have no colonial fish to fry." The YWCA, formed in 1952 in Uganda, went on to become the biggest chapter in the world after independence.

For other Europeans, the limited time gave urgency to the tasks they had set for themselves. UCW President Mary Stuart "warned that cooperation between black and white, African and British could no longer be taken for granted. British rule was nearing its end."[70]

## African Women Mobilizing

As much as much as African women leaders needed to build coalitions with Asian and European women, they also had their own agendas that were not always

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[68] Boyd, *Emissaries*, 235.

[69] Ibid., 227.

[70] Ibid., 227, 219.

addressed by these multiracial organizations. African women were by no means dependent on these alliances to expand women's roles and to expand their political activity, as was abundantly clear after independence. This is important to note lest one imagine that European women were dominating women's associational life with their considerable organizational skills. African women started and joined the organizations that were relevant to them and worked with those who were most helpful to their purposes. Sarah Ntiro emphasized how African women would not have collaborated with the European women for one minute had they felt they were being forced into activities that did not correspond to their own needs.[71] At times they formed organizations of their own, other times they worked hand in hand with European and Asian women and forged close working relationships and friendships with individual women.

Prior to independence, elite women formed organizations that did not involve European women. One such group was the Forward Society, led by Eseza Makumbi, Deborah Kiwanuka, and Jane Kironde. It was formed in 1960 to encourage women's interest in political, social, and economic problems, promote leadership training, encourage the learning of English, and set up a reading room where women of all ethnicities could meet.[72] A similar organization had been formed earlier in 1953 by Rebecca Mulira, called the African Uganda Women's League. This league encouraged women to run for office, to vote, and to enter politics. At one point, for example, the League had written to the governor asking that he appoint African women to the Legco, which he did in 1956.[73]

The League became important in mobilizing women after the British governor deported the Buganda king, Kabaka Mutesa II, in 1953. When the British government announced that it might form an East African Federation, the kabaka seized on this issue, demanding assurances that such a federation would not be created and insisting on a timetable for Buganda's independence. The British government rejected these demands, but the kabaka persisted. When he refused to sign a document stipulating that Buganda would remain a province of Uganda, the Kabaka was deposed and deported to Britain. The deportation was opposed not only by the Baganda, but also by the western kingdoms, Busoga, Lango, Acholi, and other parts of the protectorate.[74]

The governor, Sir Andrew Cohen, saw himself as initiating a process of independence and regarded the kingdom of Buganda as an obstacle in the way of creating a unified nation-state. He erroneously believed that by eliminating the kabaka he was undermining conservative monarchism and paving the way for a more progressive nationalism. He seriously misread the situation and was unaware of how deeply not only the Baganda, but also the monarchists in Bunyoro and Ankole, as well as non-monarchist nationalists and people in other

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[71] Telephone discussion, Sarah Ntiro, Kampala, 7 June 2000.

[72] "New Society for African Women," 8 June 1960, 3.

[73] Interview, Rebecca Mulira, Kampala, 2, 5, 9, 11 July 1995.

[74] Phares Mutibwa, *Uganda Since Independence: A Story of Unfulfilled Hopes* (Trenton, N.J., 1992), 14.

parts of the country, would resent the deportation. They believed Cohen was turning the country over to white settler rule.[75]

After the deportation of the kabaka, women leaders of the Mothers' Union and the African Uganda Women's League formed an alliance of subgroups called Banakazadde Begwanga (Mothers of the Nation). The women organized three buses of women who went to the governor's mansion to air their grievances.[76] Most were Ganda but many belonged to other Ugandan groups. The women wore sad faces and long sashed bark cloth and did not comb their hair as though they were in mourning. They refused to sit on chairs and put their cheeks in their palms and were quiet—signs of grief and sadness. They also refused to accept the tea that was offered. In protest, they spoke only in Luganda, refusing to speak English, although many knew it very well. The women handed the governor a memorandum reprimanding him for not consulting the mothers of the nation before deporting the kabaka. They argued that only the Ganda had the right to dethrone their king. Moreover, they argued, Uganda was a British protectorate, not a colony. "Therefore, Sir Andrew Cohen, you are wrong," Rebecca Mulira told the governor. The governor had described the women to the press at the time, saying, "There is a powerful pressure group of these women organised by people close to the Nabagereka (wife of the Kabaka) which is having an influence on the general attitude."[77]

The women also sat in protest outside government offices. As Barbara Saben, recalls, "They had a roster of women all sitting, so that every time somebody went into their office there were three or four of these women all dressed in their bark cloths. They never wavered. It was *absolutely* wonderful. All the way through every government office."[78]

The protest spread. At Makerere College, Hannah Stanton, warden of the women's residence, wrote in an unpublished manuscript that "Women defiantly wore black berets, and the men grew beards, refusing to shave until the [kabaka] returned. The women students turned their backs on the expatriate staff when it came to grace at meals. Resentment seemed to abate when the Kabaka returned from exile in 1955, and on the whole there was friendliness."[79]

## Conclusions

There are many different stories that could be told of colonial-African encounters in Uganda, depending on the time period and kinds of people involved. In this story I focused on reformist African, British, and Asian women who sought to

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[75] Christopher Wrigley, "Four Steps Toward Disaster," in H. B. Hansen and M. Twaddle, eds., *Uganda Now: Between Decay and Development* (London, 1988), 30.

[76] Interview RK, Deborah Kiwanuka, Bunamwaya, Mpigi, 5 November 1992.

[77] Cited in Kevin Ward, "The Church of Uganda and the Exile of Kabaka Muteesa II, 1953–55," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28, 4 (1998), 434. Reported in *Uganda Mail*, 5.2.1954.

[78] Interview, Barbara Saben, Norfolk, 4–5 March 2000.

[79] Hannah Stanton, *A Picture of Uganda in the 60s*. Mss Afr.s.2285, Rhodes House Library, p. 10.

advance the status of women. In building multiracial organizations, women of all races promoted a view of nonracialism that tried to make their organizations as inclusive as possible along many different lines. While they succeeded in building multiracial non-tribal organizations of women representing different religions and political affiliations, they were perhaps least successful in building cross-class ties.

Uganda was in many ways exceptional in that relations between the races appeared to be easier than they were in other colonies. However, much of this ease was superficial, hiding deeper tensions, especially between the Asian and African populations. Many of the racial tensions were never given public voice or expression, but they were no less felt. The resistance to women's interracial mobilization gives some clues as to how deep racism had cut into people's lives and consciousness.

The postwar mobilization I describe in this paper is a reminder that there always were counter-currents and individuals who tried to bridge those divides openly and willingly, regardless of the cost. Women activists had much to gain from building interracial ties. They gained leverage in government, business, community groups, and religious organizations by working with women from various racial and religious communities. African and Asian women gained important international connections and exposure to new thinking about women's emancipation. Legislative initiatives of particular communities were strengthened by interracial coalitions like the movement organized around the Hindu Marriage and Divorce Act. Passage of this act gained even greater support within the Hindu community as a result of its wide endorsement across race and religion. The Indian Women's Association was not initially behind the legislation. But later as they saw the kind of concern exhibited by non-Hindu members of the UCW and the support they received from legislators, including Hindu legislators, the association was emboldened to rally around a cause that put them at odds with some kin and some dominant members of the Hindu community.

Thus colonial-African encounters among women in Uganda from 1945 to 1962 cannot be characterized entirely by racism or by service to a colonial agenda. Reformist colonial women, knowing their stay in Uganda was finite, did much to support African and Asian women in their attempt to ensure that women would be full citizens in an independent Uganda. They fought for legislative changes to improve women's status. Moreover, the colonial agenda was neither cohesive nor immune to pressure. Even though legislators were nominated by the governor to both government and opposition seats prior to 1958, they were susceptible to popular pressures and through a consensual deliberative process were sometimes responsive to women's demands. In other words, there were serious constraints on democracy in this colonial context, but there was also some room to maneuver— and women took advantage of these opportunities.

The fact that there were coalitions of British, African, and Asian women in Uganda in the period leading up to independence who pursued a nonracial ideology as a way of struggling around common concerns points to the need for nuance and the consideration of variance in explaining the interests and strategies of reformist-minded colonial women. It also requires appreciating to a greater extent

the agency of African women, who in this time period were cognizant of not only the advantages of collaborating with European and Asian women, but also the limits of such collaboration. When it came to nationalist concerns, Ugandan women formed their own organizations like the African Uganda Women's League. Local women struggling over taxation issues formed their own protests and groups against the local administration independent of those sponsored by educated European and African women, who did not share their view on taxation. In other words, they collaborated with Europeans and Asians when it suited their purposes and acted on their own when circumstances required greater autonomy and independence of action.

The legacy of these early attempts to build organizations cutting across race, religion, ethnicity, class, and other divisions is evident today in Ugandan women's organizations that espouse a similar ideology with greater emphasis on religious, ethnic, and rural-urban unity. It is, indeed, one of the reasons the women's movement in Uganda has become one of the most important social movements in Africa today.