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Women's rights and gender equality in Africa:
a focus on Uganda, from pre-colonial times until nowadays

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A Isabella e alla meravigliosa donna che diventerà,

affinché possa sognare, senza limiti di nessun genere.

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ACRONYMS

AAWS Association of African Women Scholars

ACHPR African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

ACRWC African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child

AfDB African Development Bank

AGDI African Gender and Development Index

AGI Africa Gender Index by UNECA and AfDB

AmwA Akina Mama wa Afrika

ANC African National Congress

AU African Union

AWPS African Women's Progress Scoreboard

BPfA Beijing Platform for Action

CEDAW Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

CEEWA the Council for the Economic Empowerment of Women in Africa

CSW United Nations Commission on the Status of Women

DP Ugandan Democratic Party

ECOSOC UN Economic and Social Council

FAS *Femmes Africa Solidarité*

FEDSAW Federation of South African Women

FGM Female genital mutilation

GBV Gender-based violence

GDI UNDP Gender Development Index

GEWE AU strategy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

GGGR World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report

GGI World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index

GII Gender Inequality Index

GSI Gender Status Index

HIV/AIDS human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome

LEGCO Legislative Colonial Council

MDG Millennium Development Goal

NCC National Consultative Council

NCR National Resistance Council

NCW National Council of Women

NGO Non-governmental organisation

NRA National Resistance Army

NRM National Resistance Movement of Uganda

OAU Organization of the African Union

PAWO Pan African Women Organization

SDG Sustainable Development Goal

SDGEA Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa

SSA Sub-Saharan Africa

STC-GEWE Specialized Technical Committee on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

UAWL Uganda African Women's League

UAWO Uganda Association of Women's Organizations

UCW Uganda Council of Women

UN United Nations

UN Women United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

UNC Uganda National Congress

UNDP United Nations Development Programme

UNECA United Nations Economic Commission for Africa

UNICEF United Nations Children's Fund

UNSCR United Nations Security Council Resolution

UPC Uganda's People Congress

UWESO Uganda Women's Effort to Save Orphans

VAW Violence against women

WB World Bank

WEF World Economic Forum

WGDD Women, Gender and Development Directorate of the AU Commission

WHO World Health Organization

WiLDAF Women in Law and Development in Africa

YWCA Young Women Christian Association Uganda

YWG Young Wives Group Uganda

TERMS IN LUGANDA LANGUAGE

Baganda: The people of the Buganda empire, also called Ganda or Waganda

Bakopi: Peasants

Bambejja: Palace of the princesses

Buganda: The empire of the Baganda people

Gombolola: Sub-counties

Kabaka: The title of King of Buganda empire

Katikiro: Prime Minister

Lubuga: The title of Queen-sister in the Buganda empire

Luganda: Bantu language spoken by Baganda

Lukiiko: Parliament of Buganda

Lusaka: The royal palace of the queen mother

Muluka: Parishes

Namasole: The title of queen mother in the Buganda empire

Saza: Counties

INTRODUCTION

«Girls cannot dream of doing what boys do». With these words Peace, a 30-year-old woman, describes the situation of women in her country, Uganda. This sentence illustrates in the simplest way that gender inequality and the lack of rights for women are still one of the greatest obstacles to the empowerment and emancipation of millions of girls across the world. At the same time, it sheds light on the gap between women's and men's opportunities, both in everyday life and in the long term.

It goes without saying that women are crucial to the development of their societies and the future of their country, representing half of the global population. Therefore, it is fundamental to investigate the nature and causes of gender-based discrimination and to examine the solutions used to address inequality. The present work aims precisely to analyse how gender equality and women's rights – in the political, economic and social spheres – have evolved, or regressed, in the African continent. The time frame covered by the study ranges from the pre-colonial period to the present day. The purpose is to deconstruct the Western stereotypes of African women as destitutes in need of charity from the West. Rather, their leadership skills, economic entrepreneurship, and strategies of resistance to oppression are highlighted.

The focus of the research is on the history of Ugandan women and their struggles to achieve gender equality. The reasons underlying the choice of Uganda as a case study are essentially two. First, the existential connection of the author of the present work with this country, which has been both the validation and the starting point of her interest for the African continent and for women's rights. During her visit to Uganda, the author had the possibility of travel from the Southern to the Northern and the Eastern regions of the country, observing the different realities of the women in the cities of Kampala and Gulu, and in the rural villages. These were realities of emancipated and progressive women, but also of subordinate and exploited ones relegated to secondary roles. The gender inequality present in the country was evident, at times pervasive, as well as the struggles women were dealing with every day.

Proud and colourful women of the Karamojong tribe in traditional clothes,
photographed by the dissertation author in July 2019 in the village of Nakapelimoru (northern Uganda).

Second, compared to other African countries, the Ugandan government and women's movements have made significant efforts to improve the status of women in recent decades. Therefore, it was deemed interesting to explore the background of the current situation and assess the extent to which formal achievements are positively reflected in the daily lives of Ugandan women.

The research question guiding the analysis is: what have been the factors of oppression and the drivers of empowerment that have influenced the long-term development of women's rights and gender equality in Uganda? In order to answer the above question and provide a more comprehensive understanding, this study has investigated further issues. First, to what extent have British colonialism and Western gender stereotypes influenced the role of women in Africa? Second, what is the relationship between the nature of national government and the development of women's movements? Finally, what is the state of women's rights and gender equality in Uganda today?

The goal of this work is to deepen the understanding of an under-researched topic and to examine the cause-effect relationship that led to the increase or decrease of gender equality. The answers to the research questions are provided using a gender perspective – thus taking into account gender differences when looking at any social phenomenon or process – when analysing discrimination against women at different levels – historical, legal, political and social. The theoretical and analytical frameworks, presented in the first two chapters, results functional to understand and contextualize the in-depth study on Uganda of the third chapter.

As far as the methodology is concerned, the dissertation is developed combining the document analysis and the gathering of quantitative and qualitative data through a survey. The research is conducted on the basis of both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources consist of information collected through questionnaires and brief interviews submitted to Ugandan women. The decision to enrich the study by directly interviewing Ugandan women about their thoughts on women's rights and gender equality in their country stems from a desire to give voice to those who are the direct victims of gender discrimination. The more than 200 Ugandan women who participated in the questionnaire were contacted via several channels. First, through the networks of Ugandan nongovernmental organizations – *Wilmat Development Foundation Uganda*, *Alliance for African Assistance*, and *Deborah Ricciu Espandere Orizzonti Uganda* – with whom the author of this dissertation has worked in recent years. Secondly, through the online platform *LinkedIn*, which allowed to get in touch with several Ugandan women who appeared to be very supportive and interested in expressing their opinions on the subject. Secondary sources include books, academic papers, official documents and reports of national governments, international and nongovernmental organizations specialized in women's rights and gender issues. The sources have been selected on the basis of their capacity to answering the research questions and to provide further contributions to the

elaborate. During the selection process, the sources elaborated by women and African scholars have been preferred. Among these to name but a few of the most relevant academics: Sylvia Tamale, Minna Salami, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ifi Amadiume, Oyèrónkéé Oyĕwùmí, Christine Saidi, and Aili Mari Tripp.

This research could be academically and socially relevant as it draws attention to a part of history that is often overlooked or misunderstood – the African pre-colonial period. Moreover, it shed light on the situation of women during this period and in the colonial one, attempting to debunk the biased narratives of the colonizers and Western academics. As mentioned earlier, it also collects the direct testimonies of a category of people – African women – whose sentiments and viewpoints have remained unheard far too often. Through a selection of sources that give relevance to African women writers and information gathered through the survey, this work seeks to emphasize the experiences of African women.

The present dissertation is developed as follows. The first chapter provides an analytical and legal framework to understand women's rights and gender equality in Africa. It introduces the meaning and evolution of concepts such as gender and gender equality, as well as the factors that hinder the achievement of the latter. In particular, it is made clear the necessity to reframe the notion of gender according to the African context. The international and African legislative frameworks for the promotion and protection of women's rights – such as the UN *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,* and the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* – are the object of the subsequent section. Then, a focus is made on the history and contents of the *Maputo Protocol*, which is considered as the *African Bill of Rights of Women's Human Rights*. It also gives some examples of the concrete results obtained by applying the Protocol. The second paragraph of the chapter analyses the indexes developed by international organizations, such as the United Nations, the World Economic Forum, and the African Development Bank. These are indeed useful instruments to measure the level of gender equality, and comprehend the major concerns affecting African women lives. On the basis of the data collected through these indexes, it is presented an overview of the status of women's rights in Africa in three different spheres: first, education and health; second, economic participation and opportunities; and third, political representation and empowerment.

The second chapter provides a theoretical and historical framework to investigate African women demands and to subvert Western stereotypes about them. The first paragraph begins with an account of the history of feminism and the struggles for women's rights. It then focuses on the two movements most relevant to the backgrounds and circumstances of African women: African feminism and postcolonial feminism. Originally, black women were not represented by Western feminists, so African feminism emerged out of the need to address the specific histories and realities

of women on the continent. The most influential feminists and feminist movements of the abovementioned ideologies are then discussed. Continuing along the path of colonialism, the second paragraph examines the impact of British colonialism on the roles, beliefs and rights of African women. In order to assess the effects of Western domination, the situation of women in pre-colonial Africa is firstly analysed. The common belief that all women in pre-colonial African society were submissive is debunked by showing the experiences of women in prominent positions, as well as by the work of scholars such as Christine Saidi, Ifi Amadiume, and Oyèrónkẹ́ẹ́ Oyěwùmí on this topic. This analysis of the pre-colonial period allows for a more comprehensive comparison with the situation of African women during colonialism, which is the subject of the final section of this chapter. In particular, it sheds light on how the colonial administrative system subjugated African women in the economic, social, and political spheres.

The third chapter focuses on the case study: the long path of Ugandan women to achieve gender equality. The evolution of gender dynamics and status of women in the country is analysed following a chronological order, from the pre-colonial times until nowadays, highlighting watershed moments – such as the arrival of the British, the decolonization, the establishment of dictatorial regimes and their collapse. First of all, it is presented an introductory overview of Uganda, with some basic information and data about the country. At the beginning of every paragraph has been placed a brief historical background of the period in order to contextualize what is then analysed. The first paragraph initially concerns women's lives during the pre-colonial period, investigating in particular the gender roles in the Kingdom of Buganda and within its royal family. The subsequent section gives an outline of the establishment of the British protectorate in Uganda and the consequences of this foreign rule for girls and women in the social, economic and political spheres. The second paragraph is dedicated to the role of women's movements during the transitional period which led Uganda to independence, in 1962. Afterwards, it delves into one of the most difficult eras for Ugandan women: the almost 20 years of the dictatorial regimes of Milton Obote and Idi Amin Dada, which further increased gender inequality. The harsh policies and laws enacted during these years, as well as the nearly absent political representation of women, severely disrupted their rights. The third, and final, paragraph evaluates the partial renaissance of women's movements and rights under the government of Museveni, established at the end of the '80s. A renaissance which brought women into parliaments and empowered them on multiple levels, claiming their equality with men at the constitutional level.

The conclusive section, after a digression of the work done, provides an answer to the research questions. Further, it presents a picture of the current situation of women's rights and gender equality in Uganda, developed through the views and thoughts of the 250 Ugandans who participated in the survey.

CHAPTER ONE – A LEGAL AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK TO UNDERSTAND WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY IN THE AFRICAN CONTINENT

Introduction

The first chapter presents the legal and analytical frameworks, along with the data and information, that are essential to a comprehensive understanding of the status of gender equality and women rights on the African continent. The first part provides an introduction to the concepts underlying this work: gender and gender inequality, examining both their roots and their different perceptions in the West and in Africa. It then outlines the legal framework and the provisions that have been enacted at the international level and at the African level, to empower women's rights and promote gender equality. This is followed by an overview of the current status of women's rights and the main challenges they face in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)[1], based on the indices produced by the international organizations to measure gender equality.

1.1 Gender equality and women's rights in Africa

«Freedom cannot be achieved unless the women have been emancipated from all forms of oppression»[2]. These were the words pronounced by Nelson Mandela during his speech in the South African Parliament on May 8, 1994[3]. Today, almost 30 years later, and despite the many efforts and improvements achieved, women around the world still struggle with problems which arise simply from being born a woman and belonging to the female gender. These issues concern gender inequality, sexism, patriarchal societies, gender-based violence, gender pay gaps, unpaid care work, maternal mortality, and, more generally, a lack of economic, political, social, and civil rights. Discrimination against women begins even before birth with girl child feticide – referred to by Amartya Sen as the *missing women phenomenon*[4] – and continues through the years in all spheres of life: from home, to school and workplace, hospitals, tribunals, and in the decision-making and

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[1] The geographical area of Sub-Saharan Africa comprehends all the countries of the African continent that lie south of the Sahara Desert.
[2] United Nations. "Nelson Mandela International Day, July 18, For Freedom, Justice and Democracy - Mandela Photo Gallery." UN. Accessed February 5, 2022. Available at: https://www.un.org/en/events/mandeladay/mandela_photo_gallery.shtml.
[3] *Ibid*.
[4] Jayachandran, Seema. "The Roots of Gender Inequality in Developing Countries." *Annual Review of Economics 7*, no. 1 (August 1, 2015): 63–88. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-economics-080614-115404. pp. 63-88

political organs[5]. Gender inequality is not a women's issue, but a global issue that hampers development: while poverty exacerbates gender inequality, the latter is one of the main factors hindering progress[6], so that «human development is endangered if not engendered»[7]. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of gender inequality, its roots, and its impact on the role of women in society, it is essential to first define and analyse some key concepts.

The roots of gender inequality are complex to explore and identify, given the distinct histories of countries and cultures across the world. The subordinate position of women can be explained as the result of a protracted historical processes whose origins, according to some recent studies, date back as far as 8.000 years ago, during the Neolithic era[8]. The historian and pioneer in the study of women's history Gerda Lerner investigated, through historical, archaeological and artistic evidences, the origins of patriarchy – intended as the manifestation and institutionalization of a male-dominated gender hierarchy over women – and sexism i.e. the ideology of male supremacy[9]. In her masterpiece "The Creation of Patriarchy", Lerner states that the origins of the above go back to the 2nd millennium BC[10]. Patriarchy survived the several and profound socio-economic upheavals that followed the transition from an agrarian to an industrial society[11]. Throughout history, various factors and variables have contributed to the development of a male-dominated society in which women have been both discriminated and subordinated on the basis of their gender.

These topics started to acquire academic relevance in the 70s, during the second wave of feminism in North America. Gender studies focused on the mechanisms of women's oppression and domination by men, and how both the social structure and production of narratives are gendered – the latter term indicating the division of women and men into two distinct groups[12]. These studies aim at dismantling the fixed, customary and taken-for-granted perceptions and constructions of gender in order to rewrite human relations in equal terms[13] by giving voice to women's perspectives and redefine prevailing narratives in a non-androcentric manner[14].

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[5] Avwontom, Felicia, and Nangia Rakesh. *Evaluation Matters – Gender Inequality and You*. Tunis: African Development Bank, March 2014. Available at: https://idev.afdb.org/sites/default/files/Evaluations/2020-02/2014-03%20Evaluation%20Matters%20Gender%20Inequality%20EN.pdf. pp. 6-7

[6] UN Economic Commission for Africa. *African Gender and Development Index Regional Synthesis Report – Measuring Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Africa*. Addis Ababa: UN Economic Commission for Africa, 2017. Available at: https://repository.uneca.org/bitstream/handle/10855/24142/b11874259%20.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y. pp. 1-3

[7] UN Development Programme. *Human Development Report 1995*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995. Available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.18356/152cdfb3-en. p. 1

[8] Cintas-Peña, Marta, and Leonardo García Sanjuán. "Gender Inequalities in Neolithic Iberia: A Multi-Proxy Approach." *European Journal of Archaeology 22*, no. 4 (March 20, 2019): 499–522. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1017/eaa.2019.3. pp. 499-500

[9] Lerner, Gerda. *The Creation of Patriarchy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986. pp. 1-8

[10] *Ibid.* pp. 1-8

[11] Little, William, and Ron McGivern. "Chapter 12 Gender, Sex, and Sexuality." In *Introduction to Sociology – 1st Canadian Edition*, First Canadian Edition., 367–96. Texas: OpenStax, 2014. Available at: https://opentextbc.ca/introductiontosociology/.p. 367-396

[12] Davis, Kathy, Mary Evans, and Judith Lorber. *Handbook of Gender and Women's Studies*. London: SAGE Publications, 2006. p. 2

[13] Ibid. pp. 1-5

[14] Upton, Rebecca L. "Gender." *Oxford Bibliographies*. Oxford University Press, 2019. Accessed December 19, 2021. Available at: https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199766567/obo-9780199766567-0009.xml.

One of the first academics to introduce the term gender from a new perspective was anthropologist Gayle Rubin. Her 1975 essay entitled *The Traffic in Women. Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex* examines the social and historical factors that influence gender norms and place women in a subordinate position[15]. According to Rubin, the concept of gender is a cultural construction that denotes positions, characteristics, and roles within society, taking into account social, cultural, and material differences[16]. Based on these representations, the behaviours developed reflect the status of women or men. Gender is defined not as something we are born with, nor something we have, but as something we do and perform[17]. Sex instead refers to a set of biological characteristics, both physical and anatomical, that distinguish men and women primarily in terms of their reproductive potential[18]. Gender constructions are not rigid, but constantly evolving and differing from civilization to civilization and from time to time[19]. According to Sherry Ortner and Harriet Whitehead, two feminist anthropologists, the categories of female and male, as well as the concepts of sexuality and reproduction, are symbolic notions whose meanings and social values are influenced by the cultural and historical contexts in which they are used[20]. Thus, gender roles are the result of an ideological production, according to which power structures that generally disadvantage women and privilege men are articulated in a given context[21]. This construction turns to be a hierarchical relationship in which women occupy a subordinate position in terms of status, resources and authority. Their functions, responsibilities, and behaviours are assigned on the basis of gender stereotypes, and relationships within society are organised accordingly[22]. Gender categories are so deeply ingrained in the self-perception of individuals that despite technological and socio-economic developments that have altered systems of power and configurations of resource control, these classifications have persisted over the years and continuously affect the potential of women. Currently, contexts or cultures where women and men are considered equal and enjoy the same opportunities are a rarity, while gender inequality is the commonplace. In order to break the vicious

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[15] Rubin, Gayle. "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex." In *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, by Rayna R. Reiter, 157–210. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975. pp. 157-185

[16] *Ibid.* pp. 157-185

[17] Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, Chapman & All, 1990. pp. 7-9
West, Candace, and Don H. Zimmerman. "Doing Gender." *Gender and Society 1*, no. 2 (Jun.,1987): 125–151. Available at: http://www.jstor.org/stable/189945. pp. 125–151
Eckert, Penelope, and McConnell-Ginet Sally. "Chapter 1: An introduction to gender" in *Language and Gender*. Second Edition. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013. pp. 1-3

[18] Eckert, Penelope, and McConnell-Ginet Sally. "Chapter 1: An introduction to gender" in *Language and Gender*. Second Edition. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013. pp. 1-3

[19] African Union Commission, UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and UN Women. *Women's Rights in Africa*. 2017. Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/WomensRightsinAfrica_singlepages.pdf. p. 15

[20] Ortner, Sherry B., and Harriet Whitehead. *Sexual Meanings – The Cultural Construction of Gender and Sexuality*. First. Cambridge University Press, 1981.

[21] Gender Equality Division of the Council of Europe. *Handbook for Gender Equality Rapporteurs – Gender Equality and Gender Mainstreaming in Practice*. Strasbourg, France: Council of Europe, 2018. Available at: https://rm.coe.int/council-of-europe-gers-handbook-oct-2018-2-/16808ee74b. p. 5

[22] Little, William, Vyain Sally, McGivern Ron, et al. "Chapter 12 Gender, Sex, and Sexuality." In *Introduction to Sociology – 1st Canadian Edition*, First Canadian Edition., 367–96. Texas: OpenStax, 2014. pp. 368-377

cycle that feeds gender inequalities, structural, social and cultural issues need to be examined from a gendered perspective – thus viewing gender as a lens through which examines the biased mechanism behind differences and power relations between men and women.[23]

According to Oyèrónké̩ Oyĕwùmí, a Nigerian gender scholar, gender is a construct developed specifically by Western culture whose expression is inextricably linked to European and North American beliefs in the biological determinism of human identity[24]. Oyĕwùmí, in her 1997 masterpiece *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*, has established that it has been the biological determinism of Western civilization to led to the social categorization of people into genders[25]. The Western view of world order is not universal, but it is the dominant narrative. Most gender research is therefore oriented to and based on the Western understanding of the field. There is consequently a need to reframe gender discourse in the African context. In several African societies, social roles are not inevitably based on biological functions and are not directly linked to discourses of gender and sexuality[26]. The words of Oyĕwùmí appropriately sum up the position Africa should take, when se affirms that «Africa must be studied on its own terms, and African knowledge must be a factor in the formulation of social theory»[27].

At the global level, it has been shown that the gender gap is systematically wider in developing countries than in rich countries, and Africa in particular is one of the most critical regions in which to live as a woman[28]. Below there are some data that will provide an overview of gender inequality figures on the African continent:

· 1 in 3 women have been victims of physical and/or sexual violence[29];
· Six African countries do not provide legal protection to women who have been victims of domestic violence[30];
· African women account for the majority of new HIV infections worldwide[31];

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[23] Aartsen, Marja J. "What Are the Origins of Gender Inequality?". *Springer Nature*, March 3, 2021. Accessed December 15. Available at: https://www.springernature.com/gp/researchers/the-source/blog/blogposts-communicating-research/what-are-the-origins-of-gender-inequality/18901980.
European Institute for Gender Equality. *Gender Perspective*. EIGE European Institute for Gender Equality. Accessed December 14, 2021. Available at: https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1197

[24] Oyĕwùmí, Oyèrónké̩. *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997. pp. ix-xii

[25] *Ibid.*

[26] Oyĕwùmí, Oyèrónké̩. "Chapter 1 - Visualizing the Body: Western Theories and African Subjects" in *African Gender Studies – A Reader*. 3-17. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. Available at: https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-1-137-09009-6#toc. pp. 3-6

[27] *Ibid.* xiv

[28]28 Jayachandran. "The Roots of Gender Inequality in Developing Countries". pp. 63–88.

[29]African Union Commission, UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and UN Women. *Women's Rights in Africa*. p. 11

[30] *Ibid.* p. 11

[31] *Ibid.*

- In 2017, more than two-thirds of global maternal deaths (200,000 out of 293,760) occurred in Africa[32];

- The continent has the highest percentage of women in the world who have undergone female genital mutilation (FGM) for cultural reasons, with Mali, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Gambia, Somalia and Egypt representing the worst scenarios[33];

- West and Central Africa have the highest rates of child marriage in the world. About 40 percent of young women are married before they turn 18[34];

- Women earn around 60-75 percent for every dollar men receive for the same work[35];

- Women make up only 15 percent of agricultural landowners[36], while representing the 70 percent of the workforce in the agricultural sector;[37]

- Only 36 percent of national parliamentarians are women[38].

Gender is not the only discriminating factor affecting women. When a woman is discriminated against on multiple grounds – such as race, religion, sexual orientation, marital status, age, disability, gender identity, social class, etc. – this is called multiple discrimination or intersectionality. The prejudices faced by women are consequently exacerbated, as the result of intersectional discrimination is more severe than the simple sum of the singular discriminatory factors. The term "intersectionality" has been introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in her 1989 essay *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex* to capture the dynamic in which different elements of oppression and identity intersect, overlap, and intensify to one another[39]. Given the breadth of discriminatory conditions, multiple legal frameworks are needed to protect women's rights. Efforts to achieve substantive equality must be cross-sectoral and comprehensive, as well as consistent with the principles of indivisibility and the mutually reinforcing nature of human rights[40].

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[32] Roser, Max, and Ritchie Hannah. *Maternal Mortality*. Our World in Data. Accessed December 14, 2021. Available at: https://ourworldindata.org/maternal-mortality.

[33] UNICEF Data. *Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Statistics*. UNICEF, August 2021. Accessed December 14, 2021. Available at: https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/female-genital-mutilation/.

[34] UNICEF Data. *Child Marriage.* UNICEF, October 2021. Accessed December 14, 2021. Available at: https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/child-marriage/.

[35] Musau, Zipporah. "Closing Africa's 'Elusive' Gender Gap." *Africa Renewal*, December 2015. Accessed December 8, 2021. Available at: https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/december-2015/closing-africa%E2%80%99s-%E2%80%98elusive%E2%80%99-gender-gap#:~:text=On%20wage%20disparity%2C%20although%20the,less%20than%20their%20male%20counterparts

[36] Global Agriculture. "Women in Agriculture." Global Agriculture. Accessed February 6, 2022. Available at: https://www.globalagriculture.org/report-topics/women-in-agriculture.html#:~:text=In%20North%20Africa%20and%20West,%2C%20they%20make%20up%2015%25.

[37] African Union Commission, UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and UN Women, "Women's Rights in Africa". p. 38

[38] Inter-Parliamentary Union. *Women in Parliaments: World Classification*. Accessed December 14, 2021. Available at: http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm

[39] Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics." in *Feminist Legal Theory – Readings in Law and Gender* by Bartlett Katharine, Kennedy Rosanne. New York: Routledge, 1989. Available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9780429500480-5. pp. 57–59

[40] UN Population Fund. *Human Rights Principles*. UN Population Fund, 2005. Accessed December 20, 2021. UNPF, 2005. Available at: https://www.unfpa.org/resources/human-rights-principles.

1.1.1 International and African Legal Frameworks for the promotion and protection of women's rights

The achievement of gender equality thus proves to be crucial, as it is «not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world», as stated in the fifth objective of the *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs) contained in *Transforming Our World: 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* of the United Nations (UN)[41]. The Agenda 2030 lists seventeen urgent key challenges humanity is facing, whose resolution is paramount to advancing prosperity and preserving planet Earth. The goals include calls for action to end poverty and hunger, ensure good health and quality education, combat climate change and reduce inequalities of all kinds, among which the one between the men and women[42]. The attainment of gender equality and the emancipation of women and girls around the world must be pursued by removing «all legal, social and economic barriers to their empowerment»[43]. The strategies to address these challenges are all closely interrelated, as demonstrated by the more than fifty gender-related objectives in the other SDGs[44]. For example, the plans to eradicate poverty (SDG One) go hand in hand with the empowerment of women and therefore require a gender-sensitive approach. The point twenty of the agenda accurately summarise the central role of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls:

> «[These] will make a crucial contribution to progress across all the Goals and targets. The achievement of full human potential and of sustainable development is not possible if one half of humanity continues to be denied its full human rights and opportunities. Women and girls must enjoy equal access to quality education, economic resources and political participation as well as equal opportunities […] for employment, leadership and decision making at all levels. We will work for a significant increase in investments to close the gender gap and strengthen support for institutions in relation to gender equality and the empowerment of women at the global, regional and national levels. All forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls will be eliminated, including through the engagement of men and boys. The systematic mainstreaming of a gender perspective in the implementation of the Agenda is crucial»[45].

In addition to the 2030 Agenda, numerous conventions, treaties and articles have been adopted to protect women's rights and implement gender equality. The turning point was the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW) – also known as the

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[41] UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 21 October 2015, A/RES/70/1. Available at: https://www.refworld.org/docid/57b6e3e44.html.
[42] *Ibid.*
[43] *Ibid.* p. 4
[44] UN Women Africa. *What We Do: Gender Data and Statistics*. UN Women Africa. Accessed December 16, 2021. Available at: https://africa.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/gender-data-and-statistics.
[45] UN General Assembly. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. p. 6

International Treaty on the Rights of Women[46] – on which the *UN Commission on the Status of Women* (CSW) has been working for more than thirty years, producing one of the most comprehensive documents on the subject[47], which has been adopted by 52 of the 54 African states[48]. The CSW, established in June 1946 as a branch of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), is the main global intergovernmental body dedicated to monitoring the status of women and promoting their rights[49]. CEDAW was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979, in the middle of the *UN Decade for Women 1975-1985*, as a genuine instrument requiring parties to adopt laws and procedures to end discrimination against women, which is defined as:

> «any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field»[50].

Ratifying countries must both incorporate the principle of equality into their legal systems and prohibit any discriminatory regulation[51]. The Convention's approach encompasses three aspects of women's lives: women's civil rights and legal status, which are deemed the most important; human reproduction and reproductive rights; the influence of cultural factors and tradition on limiting the exercise of women's rights[52]. The 23 members of the *Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW), established in 1982, are the experts on women's issues responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Convention[53].

In 1994, it has been established the figure of the *UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences (SRVAW)*, representing the first role of expert in these matters at the UN level, created to investigate the sources and repercussion of violence on women, and to suggest provisions to eliminate them[54]. Two years later, in 1996, ECOSOC Resolution 1996/6

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[46] UN Women Watch. *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*. UN Women. Accessed December 14, 2021. Available at: https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/.

[47] UN Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights. *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*. United Nations Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights. Accessed December 14, 2021. Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cedaw.aspx.

[48] UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies. *UN Treaty Body Database – CEDAW*. Accessed December 19, 2021. Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?Treaty=CEDAW&Lang=en.

[49] UN Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights. *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.*

[50] UN General Assembly. *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*. United Nations, 18 December 1979. Available at: https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3970.html. p. 3.

[51] UN Women Watch. *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.*

[52] UN Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights. *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.*

[53] UN Women Watch. *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.*

[54] Šimonović, Dubravka. *"25 Years in Review of the Beijing Platform for Action". UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences (SRVAW) with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.* 2020. Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/SR/Booklet_BPA.pdf. pp. 1-3

upgraded the role of the CSW by making it responsible for both the implementation of the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (BPfA) and the application of a gender perspective in UN bodies and activities[55]. The BPfA, adopted in 1995 by 189 states following the *Fourth UN World Conference on Women*, is recognized as a major global policy text on gender equality, setting out a strategic agenda for women's empowerment and equal rights in twelve priority areas[56].
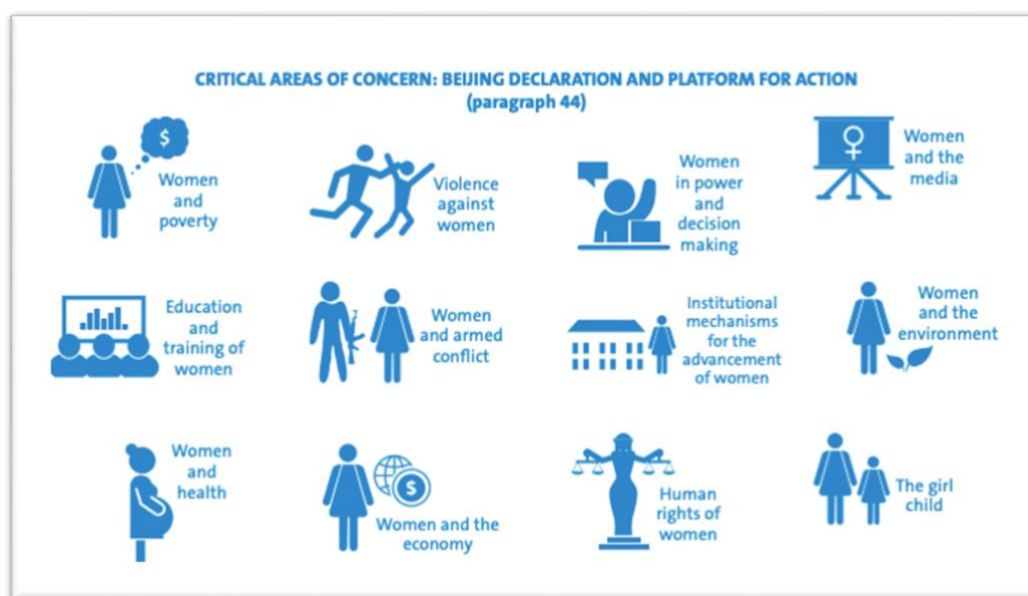
Figure 1.1 Critical areas of concern for women as indicated by the Beijing Declaration[57]

The Conference firmed up fifty years of legal and political advancements meant to ensure procedural and substantive equality[58]. The implementation of the BPfA is reviewed and evaluated every five years since 1995, leading to further policy statements and initiatives[59]. In addition, the UN *Commission on the Status of Women* prepares multi-year work plans every five years to measure progress and make additional proposals to accelerate the implementation of the BPfA[60]. ECOSOC *Resolution 2020/15* sets out the new *Multi-year Programme of Work* for the period 2020-2024, with priority themes on achieving gender equality and women's empowerment in relation to the following areas: decision-making in the social and political spheres, eradication of poverty and violence, climate change and environmental protection, technological innovation and learning in the digital era[61].

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[55] UN Women. *Commission on the Status of Women*. UN Women. Accessed December 14, 2021. Available at: https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw#multiyear.

[56] United Nations. *Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women*. United Nations, 27 October 1995. Accessed 19 December 2021. Available at: https://www.refworld.org/docid/3dde04324.html.

[57] UN Women East and Southern Africa Office. *Beijing+25 – Synthesis Report on the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*. Nairobi: UN Women East and Southern Africa Office, 2020. p. 12

[58] UN Women. *World Conferences on Women*. UN Women. Accessed December 14, 2021. Available at: https://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/intergovernmental-support/world-conferences-on-women.

[59] *Ibid.*

[60] *Ibid.*

[61] *Ibid.*

In November 1994, in preparation for the *Beijing Conference*, ministers and representatives of African governments met at the *Fifth African Regional Conference on Women* in Dakar, Senegal, and produced the *African Platform for Action*, also called the *Dakar Platform for Action*[62]. The document is a compound of national positions and interests used to design policies and implement initiatives for women's empowerment at the social, political and economic levels[63]. It was elaborated in line with the *Kampala Action Plan on Women and Peace* adopted in 1993 as a response to the conflicts and internal wars where women have been the main victims[64], and the *Abuja Declaration on Participatory Development: The Role of Women in Africa in the 1990s*, which assessed the situation of women in Africa in the context of the *Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women*[65]. These *Nairobi Strategies* – adopted at the Nairobi Conference, as the outcome of the *UN Decade for Women 1975-1985* – outlined plans to overcome obstacles to achieving the goals of the decade and to accelerate women's progress and living standards through poverty reduction techniques and gender mainstreaming in both development plans and peace management[66].

1.1.2 The Maputo Protocol

Significant achievements have thus been made in promoting women's human rights and gender equality on the continent at both regional and national levels[67]. Besides the work of the UN bodies, the African Union (AU), the Pan-African continental body gathering 55 African states, also plays a crucial role in advancing women's rights. The AU was officially established in 2002 as the successor to the Organisation of African Unity (OAU)[68]. The AU Commission and its human rights bodies have enacted several conventions concerning women's rights, including the *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights*, the *Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa* (also known as the Maputo Protocol), the *Convention Governing*

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[62] UN Economic Commission for Africa, and Organization of the Africa Unity. *African Platform for Action - African Common Position for the Advancement of Women*. Dakar, Senegal: UN and OAU, November 1994. Available at: https://repository.uneca.org/bitstream/handle/10855/1147/Bib-12834.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y. pp. i-v

[63] *Ibid.*

[64] UN Economic and Social Council, UN Economic Commission for Africa. *Kampala Action Plan on Women and Peace: adopted by the Regional Conference on Women, Peace and Development*. Addis Ababa: UN Economic Commission for Africa, 1994.

[65] UN Economic Commission for Africa. *Abuja Declaration on Participatory Development: The role of women in Africa in the 1990s*. Addis Ababa: UN Economic Commission for Africa, 1990.

[66] UN Economic Commission for Africa, African Centre for Gender and Development. *The African woman today: an overview of the implementation of the Nairobi forward-looking strategies for the advancement of women*. Addis Ababa: UN Economic Commission for Africa, 1994.

[67] African Union Commission, UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and UN Women. *Women's Rights in Africa*. p. 11

[68] Organization of African Unity. *Constitutive Act of the African Union*. Lome, Togo. July 11, 2000. Available at: https://au.int/sites/default/files/pages/34873-file-constitutiveact_en.pdf. Its main objective is to promote cohesion and solidarity among African countries, human rights, development of the continent, independence of member states, international cooperation, peace and security.

the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, the *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child*, and the *Protocol on the Statute of the African Court of Justice and Human Rights*[69].

Among all the above, the most relevant and comprehensive document on gender and women's rights is the Maputo Protocol, which was adopted in 2003 and entered into force two years later, in November 2005[70]. According to the *Women, Gender and Development Directorate* (WGDD) of the AU Commission, the Protocol can be defined as the *African Bill of Rights of Women's Human Rights*[71]. Its provisions have debunked long-held prejudices about women, thus enhancing the role of women and identifying them as equal and essential contributors to the development of the continent[72].

The first steps towards the adoption of this legal instrument date back to 1995, when *Women in Law and Development in Africa* (WiLDAF) – a non-governmental organisation (NGO) promoting women's rights – expressed the need for the OAU to formulate a document concerning explicitly the protection of women[73]. The request was accepted by the OAU, which appointed the *African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights* (ACHPR) to draught the protocol[74]. Works continued until 2001, when the process stagnated as the document was not tabled at the inaugural session of the AU in 2002[75]. The following year, another NGO, *Equality Now*, promoted a lobbying campaign that proved successful as the process was resumed by the AU, which finally adopted the document in July of the same year[76]. To date, the protocol has been ratified by almost all member states of the African Union, with the exception of Burundi, the Central African Republic, Chad, Eritrea, Madagascar, Niger, Western Sahara, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan. The only three states that have not even signed the document are Morocco, Botswana and Egypt[77].

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[69] African Union. "OAU/AU Treaties, Conventions, Protocols & Charters." African Union. Accessed December 19, 2021. Available at: https://au.int/treaties.

[70] African Union Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. *Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa*. 2003. Accessed December 19, 2021. Available at: https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/37077-treaty-charter_on_rights_of_women_in_africa.pdf.

[71] Matlosa, Khabele, Wynne Musabayana, Nebila Abdulmelik, and Jacob Nyoyo. "2016: African Year of Human Rights - with a Focus on the Rights of Women". *African Union ECHO The newsletter of the African Union Commission*, 2016. Available at: https://au.int/sites/default/files/newsevents/workingdocuments/31192-wd-au_echo_magazine_-_web.pdf. p. 4

[72] *Ibid.* pp. 1-5

[73] Wandia, Mary. "Chapter Four: Not Yet a Force for Freedom: The Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa - Rights of Women in Africa Launch of a Petition to the African Union." In *African Voices on Development and Social Justice: Editorials from Pambazuka News 2004*, by Firoze Madatally Manji and Patrick Burnett. Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota Publishers, 2009. pp. 95–100

[74] *Ibid.* pp. 95–100

[75] *Ibid.*

[76] *Ibid.*

[77] African Union. *List of Countries Which Have Signed, Ratified/Acceded to the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa*. Addis Ababa: Africa Union. October 16, 2019. Available at: https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/37077-sl-PROTOCOL%20TO%20THE%20AFRICAN%20CHARTER%20ON%20HUMAN%20AND%20PEOPLE%27S%20RIGHTS%20ON%20THE%20RIGHTS%20OF%20WOMEN%20IN%20AFRICA.pdf.
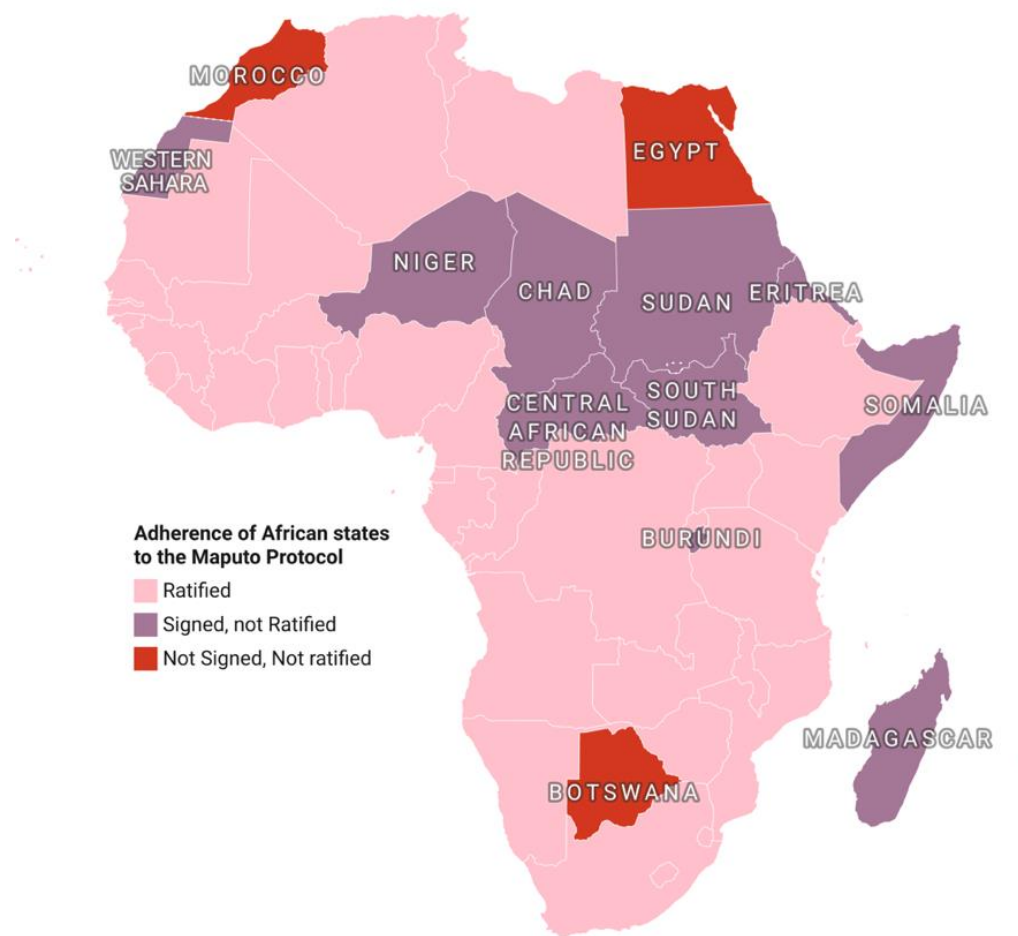
Figure 1.2 Status of approval of the Maputo Protocol by African countries[78]

The Protocol, consisting of 32 articles, is a progressive and legally binding document containing provisions ranging from sexual and gender-based violence, to economic, social and cultural rights, as well as the idea of equality and the right to non-discrimination[79]. Like the CEDAW, the Protocol also incorporate a definition of "discrimination against women" in its first article (letter f), which is described as follows:

> «any distinction, exclusion or restriction or any differential treatment based on sex and whose objectives or effects compromise or destroy the recognition, enjoyment or the exercise by women, regardless of their marital status, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in all spheres of life»[80].

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[78] Map illustrating status of approval of the Maputo Protocol, developed by the author of the dissertation on the basis of the information collected from: African Union, "*List of Countries Which Have Signed, Ratified/Acceded to the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa.*" Addis Ababa: Africa Union. October 16, 2019.

[79] African Union Commission, UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and UN Women. *Women's Rights in Africa*. pp. 8-13

[80] African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. *Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa*. p. 6

As expressed in Article 26 of the Protocol, countries are required to submit biennial reports regarding the legislative and administrative measures undertaken to comply with the Protocol[81]. The latter serves also as a powerful instrument proactively worded to oblige member states to reduce inequalities between men and women. The Maputo Protocol has been implemented across Africa in a variety of ways: directly through administrative and political measures, such as the establishment of special committees, commissions and government machineries, and indirectly through judicial decisions and court rulings demanding conformity to its articles[82].

Below are some examples of the positive results achieved through the Protocol that have made a real impact on the lives of women and girls on the continent. In 2019, the *Court of Justice of the Economic Community of West African States* declared that Sierra Leone's ban on pregnant girls attending school was inconsistent with Articles Two and Twelve of the Protocol because it violated girls' right to education. As a result, the government was compelled to lift the ban and guarantee access to education for all girls[83]. In 2020, the High Court of Kenya delivered a landmark judgement holding the government accountable for failing to investigate allegations of gender-based and sexual violence that occurred during the 2007 post-election unrest. As the government had violated the provisions contained in Articles Three and Four of the Maputo Protocol, it was ordered to pay compensation of USD 160,000 to the victims[84]. A similar situation occurred in Ethiopia when the *African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights* held the Ethiopian government responsible for breaching the provisions of the Protocol relating to the right to liberty, security and dignity of a 13-year-old girl who was a victim of forced marriage and sexual abuse. As a result, the government was requested to abolish the "marry your rapist" law and charged to pay USD 150,000 in compensation for failing to adequately protect the girl[85]. Another case related to child marriage occurred in Tanzania. Based on Article Six of the Protocol, the Supreme Court banned the marriage of children under the age of 18 and urged the government to eliminate the part of the Marriage Act that set the minimum age for girls to marry at fifteen. This resulted, in 2019, in the abolition of child marriage by the Court of Appeal of Tanzania[86]. On the same basis, the African Court of Justice upheld the incompatibility with the Protocol of the Mali's 2011 Family Code, which sets 16 as the minimum age for marriage, does not require proof of consensus, and favours religious and customary laws in

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[81] *Ibid.* p. 19
[82] Equality Now. "9 Ways the Maputo Protocol Has Protected and Promoted the Rights of Women and Girls across Africa" Equality Now – A Just World for Women and Girls. March 24, 2021. Accessed December 16, 2021. Available at: https://www.equalitynow.org/news_and_insights/9_ways_maputo_protocol/.
[83] *Ibid.*
[84] *Ibid.*
[85] *Ibid.*
[86] *Ibid.*
Odhiambo, Agnes. "Victory Against Child Marriage in Tanzania". *Human Rights Watch*. October 25, 2019. Accessed December 14, 2021. Available at: https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/10/25/victory-against-child-marriage-tanzania.

resolving inheritance disputes. Therefore, the Malian government has been held responsible for violations of Articles six and twenty-one of the Maputo Protocol[87]. Inheritance laws constitute a controversial issue in Africa. Indeed, also the South African government has been blamed for discriminatory provisions in the *Black Administration Act 38 of 1927*, which were judged unlawful by the Constitutional Court because they denied women inheritance rights[88]. These are examples of the binding power of the Protocol.

In other cases, some states have directly expressed reservations about certain provisions of the Protocol. This is the case of Egypt, Libya, Sudan, South Africa and Zambia on divorce; Tunisia, Sudan, Kenya, Namibia and South Africa on marriage; and Burundi, Senegal, Sudan, Rwanda and Libya on the right to health and reproductive control contained in Article 14[89]. These reservations have been expressed on the basis of the supposed incompatibility between the Protocol with the national customs, religion or beliefs[90]. Violations of women's rights are often justified by culture, which reveals harmful gender stereotypes and toxic masculinity rooted in underlying patriarchal traditions. The areas of marriage, health and property are most affected[91]. Article 2.2 of the Protocol clearly underlines that culture cannot and must not be used as a pretext for breaching the integrity of women:

> «modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of women and men through […] information, education […], with a view to achieving the elimination of harmful cultural and traditional practices and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes, or on stereotyped roles for women and men»[92].

Another source of controversy is religion, particularly Christianity and Islam, which are at odds with the articles on reproductive health and traditional customs, such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and polygamous marriage[93]. In 2006, for example, the Uganda Catholic Bishops' Conference opposed to ratify the Protocol on the grounds that Article 14, which guarantees abortion,

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[87] Equality Now. *9 Ways the Maputo Protocol Has Protected and Promoted the Rights of Women and Girls across Africa.*
[88] *Ibid.*
[89] African Union Commission, UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and UN Women. *Women's Rights in Africa.* pp. 23-24
[90] *Ibid.*
[91] *Ibid.*
[92] African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. *Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa.* p. 6
[93] African Union Commission, UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and UN Women. *Women's Rights in Africa.* p. 13

was incompatible with Christian beliefs[94]. Nevertheless, the motion was not heard, and the government of Uganda ratified the protocol four years later[95].

Although the majority of SSA countries have implemented the principles of the Maputo Protocol, due to traditions, religion, poverty, internal conflicts and civil unrest, there is still a mismatch between the standards, their domestic implementation and the injustices that African women face on a daily basis.

In addition to the Protocol, various mechanisms, monitoring bodies and resolutions were adopted to protect and empower women's position across the continent. In April 1998, during the 23rd Ordinary Session in Banjul, Gambia, the AU Commission, conscious of the need to look more closely at the issues and concerns of African women, established the *Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa*[96]. The first Rapporteur was appointed in the following year[97], representing today one of the oldest mechanisms created by the AU Commission[98]. In 2004 the AU Commission has adopted the *AU Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa* (SDGEA) in order to guarantee and encourage the quick adherence by states to the Maputo Protocol[99]. Indeed, according to the SDGEA, AU nations are committed to align their domestic legislative framework with the Protocol's provisions and with the above-cited conventions and commitments supporting women's rights[100]. In 2006, the Commission instituted the *Specialized Technical Committee on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment* (STC-GEWE), a ministerial advisory body formed by African women focusing on gender-development relations[101]. Furthermore, in 2009, it was enacted the *African Union Gender Policy* for «the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment in Africa»[102],

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[94] Fides, Agenzia. "AFRICA/UGANDA - 'No to Legalised Abortion with the Ratification of Maputo Protocol' Say Catholic Bishops of Uganda." *Agenzia Fides – Information service of the Pontifical Mission Societies since 1927*, 2006. Accessed December 14, 2021. Available at: http://www.fides.org/en/news/6614-AFRICA_UGANDA_No_to_legalised_abortion_with_the_ratification_of_Maputo_protocol_say_Catholic_Bishops_of_Uganda

[95] String Fixer. "Maputo Protocol." Accessed February 6, 2022. Available at: https://stringfixer.com/ar/Protocol_to_the_African_Charter_on_Human_and_Peoples'_Rights_on_the_Rights_of_Women_in_Africa

[96] African Union Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. "Special Rapporteur on Rights of Women in Africa". African Union Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights Special Mechanisms. Accessed December 18, 2021. Available at: https://www.achpr.org/specialmechanisms/detail?id=6.

[97] Šimonović. *25 Years in Review of the Beijing Platform for Action.* pp.1-3

[98] African Union Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. "African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights Special Mechanisms." African Union Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights Special Mechanism. Accessed December 15, 2021. Available at: https://www.achpr.org/specialmechanisms/detail?id=6.

[99] Centre for Women, Peace and Security - Tackling Violence against Women (London School of Economics). "Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA)." London School of Economics, May 10, 2016. Accessed December 8, 2021. Available at: https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/vaw/sdgea/#:~:text=The%20Solemn%20Declaration%20on%20Gender,and%20regional%20women's%20rights%20instruments.

[100] *Ibid.*

[101] African Union Commission, UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights*,* and UN Women. *Women's Rights in Africa.* p. 50

African Union. "6th Specialized Technical Committee on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: 'Scaling up Actions on Commitments to Equality and Women's Rights." African Union. Accessed December 19, 2021. Available at: https://au.int/en/6th-stc-gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment#:~:text=and%20Women's%20Empowerment-,The%20Specialised%20Technical%20Committee%20on%20Gender%20Equality%20and%20Women's%20Empowerment,and%20women's%20empowerment%20in%20Africa.

[102] African Union. *African Union Gender Policy*. African Union, 2009. Available at: https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/Gender/African_Union_Gender_Policy_2009.pdf. p. 9

which has been followed by the *AU strategy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) 2018-2028*.[103] In 2010 the AU launched the first *African Women's Decade* (AWD) *on Grassroots Approach to Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment*. Across this AWD significant steps were taken to implement the commitments made[104]. Currently, the continent has just entered the second decade dedicated to women, the *African Women's Decade on Financial and Economic Inclusion of African Women 2020-2030*[105]. In May 2013, the leaders of the AU member countries adopted *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want*, the embodiment of Africa's plans to realise the pan-African vision of a prosperous and peaceful continent, whose goals include «full gender equality in all spheres of life»[106], envisaging «a non-sexist Africa, an Africa where girls and boys can reach their full potential, where men and women contribute equally to the development of their societies»[107].

The aforementioned legal frameworks and mechanisms established at the international and African levels define the fundamental rights that must be guaranteed to every woman. Beyond this, however, there is a reality that still requires a great deal of commitment. It is therefore essential to have and develop the appropriate tools to monitor the state of progress or backlog in women's rights.

1.2 Indexes on gender equality: a useful tool to comprehend issues and concerns of African women

International organizations have developed a wide range of indices to measure and gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges of being a woman in today's world. With the help of these tools, policy makers can examine the various areas in which women are discriminated against and thus take effective actions to promote gender equality.

At the international level, the most important indices selected include: the UN Development Programme's (UNDP) *Gender Development Index* (GDI) and *Gender Inequality Index* (GII), and the World Economic Forum's (WEF) *Gender Gap Index* (GGI).

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[103] African Union. "AU Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment." Accessed December 15, 2021. Available at: https://au.int/en/articles/au-strategy-gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment.

[104] African Union. "The End of the African Women's Decade; Tracking Progress on Commitments". *Africa Renewal*. October 15, 2020. Accessed December 19, 2021. Available at: https://www.un.org/africarenewal/news/end-african-women%E2%80%99s-decade-tracking-progress-commitments.

[105] *Ibid.*

[106] African Union. "Goals & Priority Areas of Agenda 2063." African Union. Accessed December 15, 2021. Available at: https://au.int/agenda2063/goals.
African Union. "Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want." African Union. Accessed December 17, 2021. Available at: https://au.int/en/agenda2063/overview.

[107] Salami, Minna. "On the African Union's Message to Women." *MsAfropolitan*. March 9, 2015. Accessed December 17, 2021. Available at: https://msafropolitan.com/2015/03/african-union-message-women.html
African Union. "African Union Priorities on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Agenda 2063". African Union. July 28, 2021. Accessed December 19, 2021. Available at: https://au.int/en/articles/au-priorities-gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment-agenda-2063?qt-qt_documents_dp=2.

The first, the GII and the GDI, are among the five indices used by the UNDP[108] to formulate the annual Human Development Report[109]. The GII is a composite measure that calculates the impact of gender inequality on human development and the inequalities in women's performance in three different areas: reproductive health (maternal mortality ratio and adolescent birth rate), empowerment (women's representation in parliaments and adult women with secondary education) and economic status (labour market and labour force participation)[110]. According to the 2019 Report, Sub-Saharan Africa has the greatest levels of gender inequality, compared to other developing regions[111]. Maternal mortality rates (535 deaths per 100,000 live births) and adolescent birth rates (105 births per 1,000 women aged 15 to 19) are highest there, and the proportion of adult women with secondary education is the lowest (29 percent)[112]. However, a positive result is recorded in the number of parliamentary seats held by women, where SSA ranks second after Latin America and the Caribbean (24 percent)[113].
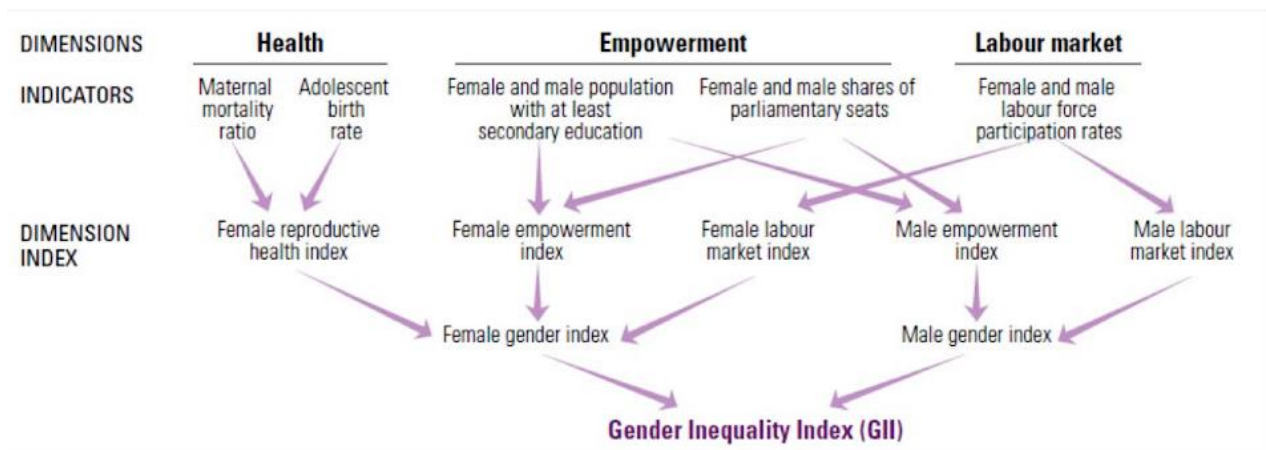
Figure 1.3 GII Dimensions and Indicators[114]

[108] Along with the *Human Development Index* (HDI), the *Inequality-Adjusted Human Development Index* (IHDI) and the *Multidimensional Poverty Index* (MPI).
Human Development Reports UN Development Programme. "Human Development Reports." UNDP. Accessed December 19, 2021. Available at: http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries?utm_source=EN&utm_medium=GSR&utm_content=US_UNDP_PaidSearch_Brand_English&utm_campaign=CENTRAL&c_src=CENTRAL&c_src2=GSR&gclid=Cj0KCQiAzfuNBhCGARIsAD1nu-97yi__JY0DTstcT9Ko7VOyz0S9dBmHfllbwb5sZpfVKy6odAe_Kd0aAgSvEALw_wcB.
[109] The Human Development Reports (HDRs) have been released most years since 1990 and have explored different themes through the human development approach. They have had an extensive influence on development debate worldwide. The reports are produced by the Human Development Report Office for the UNDP.
[110] Human Development Reports UN Development Programme. "Gender Inequality Index (GII)." UNDP. Accessed February 7, 2022. Available at: https://hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-inequality-index-gii?utm_source=EN&utm_medium=GSR&utm_content=US_UNDP_PaidSearch_Brand_English&utm_campaign=CENTRAL&c_src=CENTRAL&c_src2=GSR&gclid=CjwKCAiAo4OQBhBBEiwA5KWu_4FKBn5JYRzhYSBwZBbxlq7Lw1SwY6CEidpUrpqn2FzYQHI1x7IZBhoC2U0QAvD_BwE.
[111] The other regions classified as developing are the Arab States, East Asia and the Pacific, South Asia, Europe and Central Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean.
[112] UN Development Programme. *Human Development Report 2020*. New York: UNDP, 2020. Available at: https://www.hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2020.pdf.
[113] *Ibid.*
[114] Human Development Reports United Nations Development Programme. "Gender Inequality Index (GII)."

The GDI assesses the differences between women and men, taking into account three other essential aspects of human development, namely longevity and health, knowledge and living conditions[115]. The GDI is calculated with the same methodology used for the UNDP *Human Development Index*, but the differences in the levels of development are estimated according to the gender[116]. Among the developing regions taken into consideration – the same of the GII – SSA ranks fourth with a score of 0.894 on a scale where 1 means that there is no gap between women and men in term of development[117].
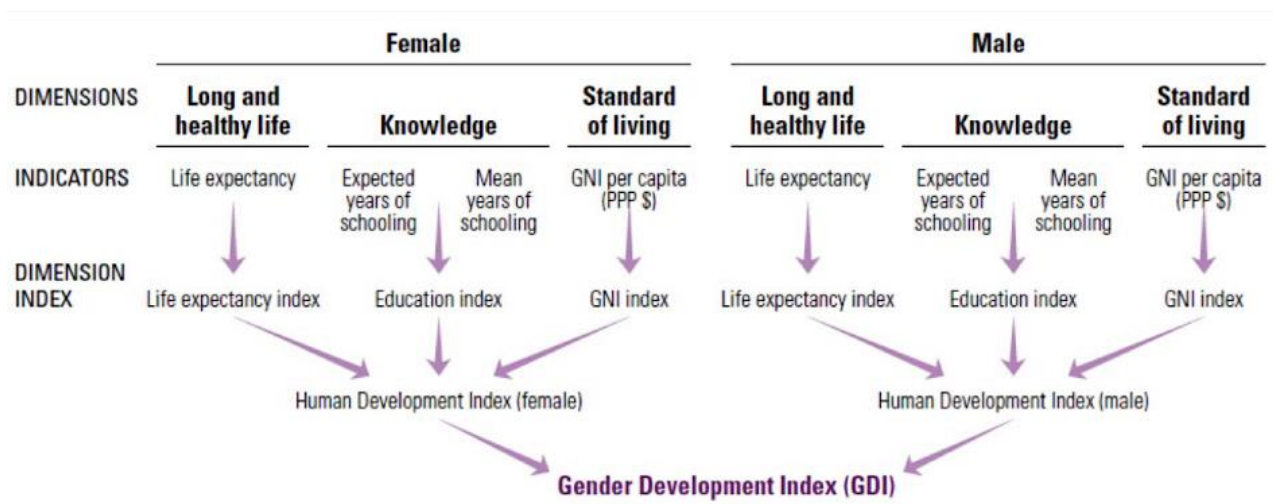
Figure 1.4 GDI Dimensions and Indicators[118]

The *Global Gender Gap Index* has been formulated by the World Economic Forum in 2006[119]. It is the tool used to produce the *Global Gender Gap Report*, which traces the evolution of gender inequalities through a framework composed of 4 sub-indices[120]. The first is the *Economic Participation and Opportunity Index*, which is composed of 3 elements, namely the *Participation Gap*, the *Remuneration Gap* and the *Advancement Gap[121]*. The first compares workforce input between men and women. The second calculates the differences in payment. The third element estimates the proportion of women among high-level positions such as managers, legislators, professionals and technical employees. The second is the *Education index*, which measures the difference between girls' and boys' educational opportunities and adult's literacy levels, analysing

[115] Human Development Reports UN Development Programme. "Gender Development Index (GDI)." UNDP. Accessed December 14, 2021. Available at: http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-development-index-gdi.
[116] *Ibid.*
[117] *Ibid.*
[118] Human Development Reports United Nations Development Programme. "Gender Development Index (GDI)."
[119] World Economic Forum. *The Global Gender Gap Report 2021*. Geneva: World Economic Forum, March 2021. Available at: https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf. p. 5
[120] *Ibid.*
[121] *Ibid.* p. 74

percentages of literacy rate and enrolment in primary, secondary, and tertiary education[122]. The third is the *Health and Survival Index*, which examines health status and access to health care using two measures: the sex ratio at birth, which reveals how many nations have a preference for male offspring – so the so-called phenomenon of "missing women"; and the difference in average life expectancy, which takes into account years missed due to factors that primarily affect women[123]. The fourth is the *Political Empowerment Index*, which compares the number of men and women in high political positions, ministerial posts and parliamentary seats, and calculates the average years women have held leadership roles[124]. According to the data and statistics of the WEF's *Global Gender Gap Report* (GGGR) 2021, which collects information from 156 countries, «another generation of women will have to wait for gender parity»[125]. In particular, also in this case, women in SSA result among the most disadvantaged, as the region is one of the most gender-unequal in the world. As reported in the GGGR, merely 67 percent of the gender gap has been filled, resulting in an overall gap of 33 percent[126]. Thus, it will take more than 120 years to close this gender gap if the current trends continue[127]. However, the forecasts are not positive. Indeed, the gap has increased by 25 years in comparison to the 2020 WEF's GGGR which had foreseen 95 years to close it[128]. There are still some positive exceptions in the African panorama, as Rwanda and Namibia which fared best among the 35 African countries analysed, by having closed 80 percent of their gap, and South Africa, Rwanda and Burundi which are ranked among the best performing countries on the overall *Gender Gap Index*[129].

1.2.1 The African Indexes

At the regional level in Africa, the *Africa Gender and Development Index* (AGDI) of the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the *Africa Gender Equality Index* of African Development Bank (AfDB), and the *Africa Gender Index*, jointly developed by UN Economic Commission for Africa and AfDB, are the most relevant.

The first, the AGDI, has been developed by UNECA as a monitoring mechanism to measure progress on gender equality in Africa and women's standing in the social, economic and political spheres, aiming at the same time at raising the awareness on African women's issues[130]. The official

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[122] *Ibid.*
[123] *Ibid.*
[124] *Ibid.*
[125] *Ibid*.
[126] *Ibid*. p. 20
[127] *Ibid*. p. 7
[128] World Economic Forum. *The Global Gender Gap Report 2020*. Geneva: World Economic Forum, December 2019. Available at: https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf p. 6
[129] World Economic Forum. *The Global Gender Gap Report 2021*.
[130] UN Economic Commission for Africa. *The African Gender and Development Index 2011 - Promoting Gender Equality in Africa*. UN Economic Commission for Africa, 2011. Available at: https://archive.uneca.org/sites/default/files/PublicationFiles/agdi_2011_eng_fin.pdf.p. iii

presentation took place in October 2004 during the *Fourth African Development Conference* in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia[131]. The three main goals of the Index are to provide African governments with: information on gender equality and the impact of implemented gender equality policies; an Africa-specific tool for monitoring progress in implementing regional and international resolutions on gender equality; qualitative and quantitative data to assess progress[132]. The AGDI analysis have been developed according to a rights-based approach that takes into account key international and African charters and agreements, including the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG)[133], as well as several provisions on gender and women's rights that are particularly relevant to African populations. The *Gender Status Index* (GSI) and the *African Women's Progress Scoreboard* (AWPS) are the two components of the Index[134]. The first component provides a quantitative assessment of gender equality calculated by comparing women's performance in the social, economic and political power areas[135]. The second is a qualitative instrument that complements the GSI. It measures the progress African governments have made in women's empowerment by assessing adopted gender policies and international conventions, and also examining the gap between political commitment and implementation[136]. AWPS has categorized the international legal frameworks and respective areas of interest into four main blocks: Women's rights and issues concerning violence against women (GBV) – CEDAW, Maputo Protocol; ACRWC, BPfA; social power in terms of capabilities; economic power in terms of opportunities; and political power in terms of agency[137]. Pilot projects for the AGDI have been implemented in the following countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Egypt, Ghana, Madagascar, Mozambique, Tanzania, Tunisia, and Uganda. The data collected in this index highlights areas where the government and civil society can work together to improve the status of women in the country[138].

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[131] *Ibid*. p. 37
[132] *Ibid*. p. ix
[133] The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – which range from halving extreme poverty rates to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education, all by the target date of 2015 – form a blueprint agreed to by all the world's countries and all the world's leading development institutions. They have galvanized unprecedented efforts to meet the needs of the world's poorest. The UN is also working with governments, civil society and other partners to build on the momentum generated by the MDGs and carry on with an ambitious post-2015 development agenda.
United Nations. *United Nations Millennium Development Goals*. UN. Accessed December 19, 2021. Available at: https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/.
[134] UN Economic Commission for Africa. *The African Gender and Development Index 2011 - Promoting Gender Equality in Africa*. p. iii
[135] Social Power 'Skills', with Indicators related to education (enrolment and dropout rates, literacy levels) and health (child health, life expectancy at birth, new HIV infections, time out of work); Economic Power 'Opportunities', with indicators related to income, access to resources, time use and employment; Political Power 'Agency', with indicators concerning the political power in the public sector (members of parliaments, cabinet ministers, judges in higher courts, members of local councils, senior positions in the civil service), and in civil society (senior positions in political parties, trade unions, employers' associations, professional syndicates; heads or mangers of NGOs; heads of community-based associations or trade unions).
[136] UN Economic Commission for Africa. *The African Gender and Development Index 2011 - Promoting Gender Equality in Africa*. pp. 1-2
[137] *Ibid.* pp. viii-ix
[138] *Ibid.* pp. 2-3

Another relevant index is the *Africa Gender Equality Index*, developed by the AfDB[139]. This index beyond measures gender equality in 52 out of 54 African countries, it is an action-oriented index that aims at the promotion of women's development and empowerment. It examines three critical components of gender parity: economic participation and opportunity, social development, and legal and institutional arrangements. Each dimension is based on a combination of factors that contribute to the configuration of a country's overall score. Scores are assigned on a scale of 0 to 100, with 100 representing full gender equality. Currently, according to the record of the *Africa Gender Equality Index 2015 – Empowering African Women: An Agenda for Action*, African countries have scores ranging from 15.8 to 74.5, with an average of 54.1. This ranking can be used to determine which countries are performing better in terms of gender equality. The top five countries in the ranking are South Africa, Rwanda, Namibia, Mauritius and Malawi[140].
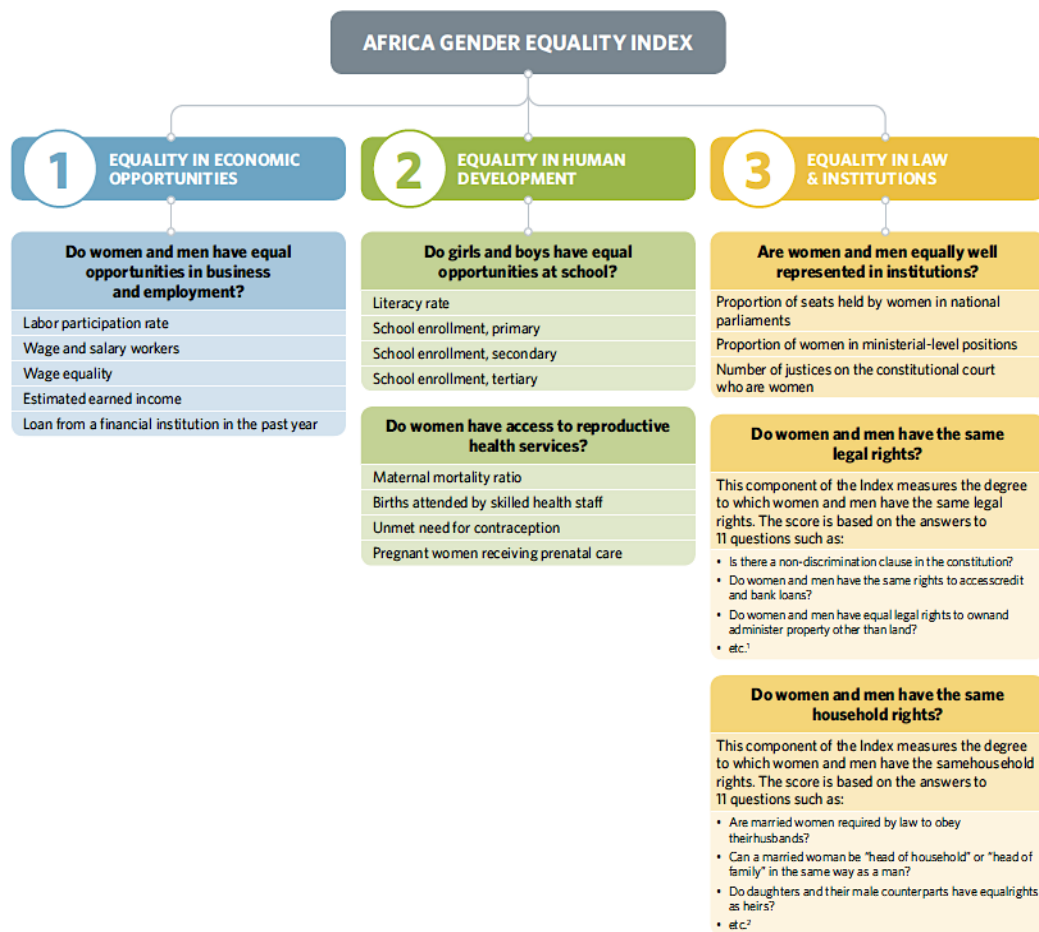
Figure 1.5 Structure of the Africa Gender Equality Index, with dimensions and indicators[141]

[139] Mizrahi, Simon, Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, Marc Kouakou, Yeon-Su Kim, and Georg Weiers, et. al. "Africa Gender Equality Index 2015 - Empowering African Women: An Agenda for Action". Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire: African Development Bank Group, 2015. Available at: https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/African_Gender_Equality_Index_2015-EN.pdf. p. 5
[140] *Ibid.*
[141] Mizrahi, Fraser-Moleketi, Kouakou, et al. "Africa Gender Equality Index 2015 - Empowering African Women: An Agenda for Action". p. 6

The last index is the *Africa Gender Index*, jointly developed by the AfDB and UNECA on the basis of their previous indices[142]. In order to provide an accurate picture to policy makers and advocates of women's rights, it collects quantitative data from all African countries on a wide range of gender equality issues. The study assesses gender equality in three areas – economic, social, representation and empowerment – and it is divided into five thematic sections: women's instruction and well-being, girls and employment, agricultural development, climate change and energy, and leadership[143]. Countries are ranked in each of these categories on a scale of 0 to 1, with 1 representing perfect equality[144]. Southern Africa has the highest regional level of gender equality, with an average score of 61 percent[145]. On the other side the percentages in North Africa, Central Africa and West Africa are of 40 percent, 42 percent and 44 percent, respectively[146]. East Africa stands in the middle with 52 percent[147]. At the national level, Namibia is Africa's best performer on AGI with a score of almost 80 percent, followed by Lesotho, South Africa and Rwanda, all with around 77 percent[148]. All of these countries, with the exception of South Africa, have undertaken initiatives to boost women's participation in politics. In Lesotho and Namibia in particular, women outnumber men in leadership and professional positions[149]. Morocco, South Africa, Algeria, Tunisia and Lesotho are top performers on social issues, with more girls than boys completing secondary school[150]. Although data were collected for all 54 African countries, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea and South Sudan were excluded from the global and regional AGI compilations due to a large number of missing variables[151].

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[142] African Development Bank, and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. "Africa Gender Index Report 2019 - What the 2019 Africa Gender Index Tells Us about Gender Equality, and How Can It Be Achieved". Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire: African Development Bank Group, 2020. Available at: https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/africa-gender-index-report-2019-analytical-report pp. 10-12
[143] *Ibid.* pp. 11-13
[144] *Ibid.* p. 11
[145] *Ibid.* p. 14
[146] *Ibid.*
[147] *Ibid.*
[148] *Ibid.* p. 56
[149] *Ibid.* p. 52
[150] *Ibid.* p. 20
[151] *Ibid.* p. 11
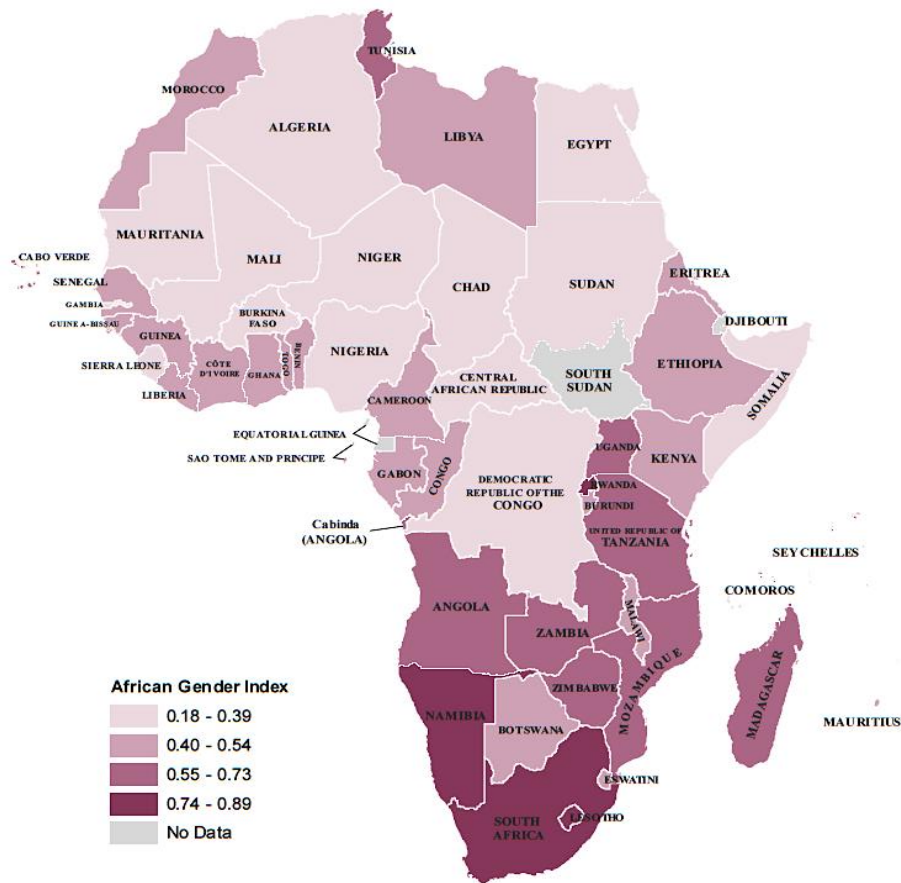
Figure 1.6 Africa Gender Index – Overall performance of 2019[152]

1.2.2 Overview of the state of women's rights in Africa

The following section provides an overview of the state of women's rights in Africa by summarizing the information and data from the last two indices – the *Africa Gender Equality Index* and the *Africa Gender Index* – and the WEF *Global Gender Gap Index* according to three macro areas: first, education and health; second, economic participation, performance and opportunities; and third, representation and empowerment at the political level.

As regards the first area, the rights of African women and girls to education and health are still not fully respected and implemented. To achieve full equality and emancipate themselves, women and girls must have access to quality education and health care. This can be achieved by government by dismantling the barriers that prevent young women from pursuing higher education and other forms of training, as well as addressing the root causes of violence and unhealthy environments, which would help them become more independent and better prepared for employment. Furthermore, women must be guaranteed also easy access to health, family planning

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[152] *Ibid.* p. 10

and immunization, as these are critical components of achieving equality[153]. The cure of preventable diseases has made significant progress in Africa in recent decades, thanks also to improved access to primary health care. Since 1990 the African maternal mortality rate has dropped by 42 percent and obstetricians are becoming more common[154]. According to the WEF index, SSA has closed the 97.3 percent of its gap in the *Health and Survival* dimension[155]. Notwithstanding the progresses, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), the region still has the highest maternal mortality rate in the world, with problems during pregnancy and childbirth representing the biggest risk factor for mortality among girls aged 15 to 19, with women living in poorer circumstances being at higher risk of unsafe abortion[156]. Women who are able to control their own fertility suffer less from the above problems, but unfortunately in most African countries less than 10 percent of women have access to contraception. Africa has great difficulty controlling fertility rates, which range from 2 children per woman in Mauritius and Tunisia to 6.5 in Uganda and 7.3 in Niger, with eleven countries having fertility rates of more than six children per woman[157]. Fertility rates and contraception are closely linked to HIV. According to some estimates, African population could exceed 2.1 billion people by 2050[158]. If the population growth rates are not reduced, there is a risk that this will have a significant negative impact on food availability, environmental protection and the overall development of the continent[159]. The governments that have had the greatest success in advancing women's health are those that have provided better education for girls, increased access to contraception, and improved the legal framework governing these issues[160]. Research has shown that high levels of education are one of the best factors holding back reproduction, and that working women are more inclined to marry later and have lower birth rates[161]. These findings have led governments across Africa to increase spending on education, especially primary and secondary education[162]. However, SSA still lags behind other regions, with a gap of more than 15 percent yet to be closed[163]. In more than half of the African countries analysed by the WEF Index, the average literacy gap between adult men and women is over 20 percent, with Chad showing the worst conditions: only 14 percent of women can read. Gender inequalities persist even in primary education, with countries such as Nigeria and Angola,

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[153] Mizrahi, Fraser-Moleketi, Kouakou, et al. "Africa Gender Equality Index 2015 - Empowering African Women: An Agenda for Action".
African Development Bank, and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. *Africa Gender Index Report 2019 - What the 2019 Africa Gender Index Tells Us about Gender Equality, and How Can It Be Achieved*.
[154] Mizrahi, Fraser-Moleketi, Kouakou, et al. "Africa Gender Equality Index 2015 - Empowering African Women: An Agenda for Action". p. 17
[155] World Economic Forum. *The Global Gender Gap Report 2021*. p. 23
[156] *Ibid.* p. 17
[157] *Ibid.* p. 18
[158] *Ibid.* p. 17
[159] *Ibid.* p. 18
[160] *Ibid.*
[161] *Ibid.*
[162] *Ibid.*
[163] *Ibid.* p. 23

presenting a gender gap between 75 and 83 percent[164]. The new generations are performing better, achieving a gender balance in primary school enrolment of 99 percent in 12 out of 35 countries[165]. Yet, there are still several reasons why it is more difficult for women to receive primary education. According to UNICEF, unsanitary conditions force 1 out of ten 10 African schoolgirls to miss or drop out of class during their menstruation period[166]. Another reason is social pressure to get married young, which forces girls to abandon school[167]. In fact, the African continent sets another sad record: nine of the ten countries in the world with the highest rate of child marriage are in Africa. A further critical factor is the widespread violence against women, which represents a serious obstacle to women's active participation in economic and social life. Women are exposed to higher levels of violence and face various health and safety issues in this context. Data have shown that 37 percent of women in Africa have been victims of domestic violence and other forms of abuse by their spouses, neighbours and friends[168]. The percentages vary widely by country and region, with Central Africa recording the highest percentage at 60 percent.[169]

The data from the second domain, concerning economic performance and economic opportunities, are the most optimistic, as SSA has closed the 66 percent of its gap[170]. Statistics show how economically and entrepreneurially engaged African women are, making up the bulk of both the agricultural sector and informal sector enterprises. However, there are still significant differences between countries: the gap between the region's top-performing country, Burundi, and the worst one, Mali, corresponds to almost 40 percentage points[171]. Concerning the percentage of women in the labour market in 23 out of the 35 countries, an average of 60 percent of women are engaged in the labour market, with Rwanda and Burundi scoring the highest at 84 and 78 percent respectively[172]. The worst performer is Senegal, where only 36 percent of women are in the labour market[173]. Thus, many women are still disadvantaged, particularly in terms of ability to stipulate contracts, access to markets and to resources. Often, the law only allows male heads of families to enter into contracts, and it is usually men who have complete control over family finances. Women also receive lower incomes compared to their male counterparts in every sector of the economy. The labour market is highly segregated by gender, so women's economic returns, in these already low-paying jobs, are minimal, leading also to have less access to basic commodities and inputs. In agricultural production

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[164] *Ibid.* pp. 28-29
[165] *Ibid.*
[166] Mizrahi, Fraser-Moleketi, Kouakou, et al. "Africa Gender Equality Index 2015 - Empowering African Women: An Agenda for Action". p. 18
[167] *Ibid*.
[168] *Ibid.*
[169]*Ibid.*
[170] World Economic Forum. "The Global Gender Gap Report 2021". p. 23
[171] *Ibid.* p. 28
[172] *Ibid.*
[173] *Ibid.*

in Ethiopia and Ghana, for example, female farmers are 26 percent and 17 percent less productive than their male counterparts, respectively, while on small farms in Malawi, women earn half as much as men[174]. Reducing this gap is fundamental to inclusive development[175]. Removing the barriers that prevent women from becoming successful farmers is one means of escaping poverty, as women are likely to invest their earnings in supporting their families, ensuring a more prosperous future for their children and generations to come. Women's labour force participation is also high outside the agricultural sector, especially in the informal sector with micro-enterprises, with the percentage reaching 90 percent in Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi[176]. Generally, women work in the informal sector more out of necessity than choice, as informal jobs do not guarantee them a regular income, leading to high levels of economic insecurity. Due to the lack of fundamental know-how, and access to financial services, as well as unequal land rights and the difficulties of managing together work and family, women's earning opportunities are severely constrained. The persistence of unequal land rights is one of the main sources of gender inequality on the continent, as land is neither owned nor inherited by women in several countries. An example of this is Mali, where women own only about 5 percent of the land, or Togo, where women are not allowed to inherit land[177]. It would therefore be essential to reform the legal framework on land to improve opportunities for women. Significant efforts have already been made in this direction to remove the legal and cultural barriers to expanding land ownership and inheritance for women. In order to change traditional rules and customs regarding land ownership, the Ministries of Women's Affair of some governments, as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia, are trying to convince traditional chiefs to include women in land inheritance[178].

The third area of interest concerns the representation and empowerment of women at the political and household decision-making levels. According to the *Global Gender Gap Index* of the WEF, the gap in this dimension is the widest (79,2 percent), since SSA has closed just the 21 percent of it[179]. Nigeria, Benin and Burkina Faso have the lowest levels of women's political participation and representation, with only 5 and 8 percent of female parliamentarians and 10 and 6 percent of ministerial positions held by women, respectively[180]. Although almost all African countries have signed the Maputo Protocol, there are still several exceptions to the concept of non-discrimination in African governments' legislations and political representation. Furthermore, many women are

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[174] *Ibid*. p. 29
[175] *Ibid.*
[176] Mizrahi, Fraser-Moleketi, Kouakou, et al. "Africa Gender Equality Index 2015 - Empowering African Women: An Agenda for Action". p. 11
[177] *Ibid.* p. 12
[178] African Development Bank, and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. *Africa Gender Index Report 2019 - What the 2019 Africa Gender Index Tells Us about Gender Equality, and How Can It Be Achieved*. pp. 39-40
[179] World Economic Forum. *The Global Gender Gap Report 2021*. p. 23
[180] *Ibid.* p. 29

discriminated against in areas such as marriage and family property, land rights and employment. For example, in 15 countries a wife cannot decide for herself where she wants to live, and in another 35 nations she is required by law to follow the decisions of her husbands[181]. Men still have a dominant position in relation to women's roles, both in the family and in the workplace. Therefore, reforms to promote gender parity at political and decision-making level have the potential to positively impact both women's position in the community and their productivity. The countries that have made the greatest efforts in this direction are Rwanda, Mozambique, South Africa, and Namibia, which have earned a place on the list of the top twenty countries listed by the WEF Index with the highest percentage of women in politics, closing their gap by more than twice the average percentage of other African countries[182]. These countries, along with Tanzania, Lesotho, Liberia, Cape Verde and Uganda are thus positive examples of women's representation at the political level[183]. Rwanda, in particular, is the country in the world with the highest percentage of women in its national parliament (60 percent), followed by South Africa (45 percent) and Cape Verde (36 percent)[184]. Data has shown that these pink quotas have increased legislators' commitment to improving family and land rights regulations and have led to greater acceptance of women in political leadership positions. In 2006, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, also known as the Iron Lady of Africa, was the first elected female president in Africa, who served as the 24th President of Liberia[185]. This was followed by Malawi in 2012 and Mauritius in 2015 with Joyce Hilma Banda and Ameenah Gurib-Fakim respectively[186]. Currently, in Sub-Saharan Africa, the only two female presidents are Sahle-Work Zewde, elected in Ethiopia in 2018, and Samia Suluhu Hassan, who became president of Tanzania in 2019 following the death of former president John Magufuli[187]. Advances in women's positions socially, politically or economically would have a positive impact on their children, their family and their community at large, creating a virtuous cycle that would benefit future generations of African women.

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[181] Mizrahi, Fraser-Moleketi, Kouakou, et al. "Africa Gender Equality Index 2015 - Empowering African Women: An Agenda for Action". p. 23
[182] World Economic Forum. *The Global Gender Gap Report 2021*. p. 29
[183] Mizrahi, Fraser-Moleketi, Kouakou, et al. "Africa Gender Equality Index 2015 - Empowering African Women: An Agenda for Action". p. 24
[184] *Ibid.*
[185] Watkins, Jared, Adwoa Ohemeng, and Ntama Bahati. "List of Female Africa Presidents – Updated July 2021." Africa Faith and Justice Network, July 14, 2021. Accessed December 19, 2021. Available at: https://afjn.org/list-of-female-africa-presidents-updated-july-2021/.
[186] *Ibid.*
[187] *Ibid.*

CHAPTER TWO – A THEORETICAL AND HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK TO INVESTIGATE AFRICAN WOMEN NEEDS AND SUBVERT STEREOTYPES

Introduction

The second chapter provides an historical and theoretical framework to analyse and understand the peculiarities of African women's background and needs. The first part begins with a brief overview of the concept and history of feminism with its three waves. It then looks at the two categories of feminism that are particularly relevant to African women's backgrounds and circumstances, namely African feminism and postcolonial feminism. This section also analyses African feminism's critique of Western and white feminists. The second paragraph examines the impact of British colonialism on the roles, beliefs and rights of African women and provides a historical overview of the so-called *Scramble for Africa*. In order to assess the effects of Western domination, the situation of women in pre-colonial Africa is first analysed, to allow for a comparison with the final section of the chapter, which focuses on examining the position of African women under colonialism.

2.1 Feminism and the struggles for women's rights

The concept of feminism can be understood as an umbrella term for several ideologies and doctrines, political and social movements, all with the same goal: to achieve gender equality in all areas of life. The main focus of feminist activists is to assert and improve women's rights in all political, economic, social and personal spheres by eliminating every form of discrimination, fighting gender stereotypes and abolishing gender-based inequalities[188]. Feminists advocate for the right to vote, rights in the workplace, for contract and property rights, for the right to reproductive and physical integrity, for the protection of women from violence, and for all the rights deemed essential to their full realization and emancipation[189].

Paradoxically, the invention of the term *féminisme* has long been attributed by modern scholars to one man, the French exponent of utopian socialism Charles Fourier who lived in the first half of the XIX century[190]. In his work *Theorie de Quatre Mouvements et des destinees generales*,

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[188] Malinowska, Ania. "Waves of Feminism." *The International Encyclopaedia of Gender, Media, and Communication*, Wiley. (July 8, 2020): 1–7. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119429128.iegmc096. pp. 1-7
[189] *Ibid*.
[190] There is no certainty about the exact date of the term coinage, which fluctuates between 1808 and 1837, the dates of the first and second editions, respectively, of his work *Theorie de Quatre Mouvements et des destinees generales*

the thinker criticised the oppression of women in French society, particularly in the household[191], claiming:

> «Social progress and changes of [social] period occur by virtue of the progress of women toward liberty, and the decline in the social order occurs by virtue of the decrease in women's liberty. […] the extension of the privileges of women is the general principle of all social progress»[192].

However, the term did not find its way into public discourse and common usage until the end of the century[193]. The first methodical formulation of the demand for women's equality dates back to the end of the XVIII century by those who can be considered the first feminists: Olympe de Gouges, author of the *Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne* of 1791, and Mary Wollstonecraft, a liberal feminist who wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* a year later in 1792[194]. Feminism and its activists gained prominence towards the end of the XIX and the beginning of the XX century. Generally, the history of feminism is divided into three distinct periods: the first wave at the end of the XIX century through the first half of the XX century, the second wave after World War II through the 1980s, and finally the third wave beginning in the 1990s[195]. Moreover, many scholars consider the year 2012 as the starting date of the Fourth wave[196].

During the first wave, the majority of feminist social and political groups, as well as feminist leaders and academics, were white women from Western Europe and North America, particularly Britain and the United States, belonging to the middle class, comparatively privileged women who had access to economic resources and education[197]. The first feminists opposed the segregation of women in the private sphere and focused their struggle on women's property and political rights, child custody, and citizenship[198]. They saw the naturalization of women's subordinate role in the patriarchal family as the cause of women's subjugation in society at large. Their goal, then, was to liberate women from the natural order into which men had placed them by asserting women's capacity for self-determination. Their first demands were for the inclusion of women in the political sphere, as the

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Offen, Karen. "On the French Origin of the Words Feminism and Feminist." *Feminist Issues 8*. (June 1988): 45-51. Available at: https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/BF02685596.pdf. pp.45-51

[191] Grogan, Susan K. "Chapter 2: Charles Fourier and the Nature of Women." In *French Socialism and Sexual Difference*, by S. Foley, 20–41. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1992. http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/9780230372818 p. 2.

[192] *Ibid*. p. 20

[193] *Ibid.*

[194] Disch, Lisa, and Mary Hawkesworth." Introduction: Feminist Theory - Transforming the Known World" In *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*. 1-12. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. p. 1

[195] Kr4økke, Charlotte, and Anne Scott Sørensen. "'Chapter 1: Three Waves of Feminism: From Suffragettes to Grrls.'" In *Gender Communication Theories & Analyses: From Silence to Performance*, by Charlotte and Anne. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc, 2006. Available at: https://sk.sagepub.com/books/gender-communication-theories-and-analyses.pp. 1-23

[196] Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "The Fourth Wave of Feminism." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Accessed December 16, 2021. Available at: https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism/The-fourth-wave-of-feminism.

[197] Eidinger, Andrea. "Feminism". *The Canadian Encyclopaedia*. December 15, 2020. Accessed December 14, 2021. Available at: https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/feminism.

[198] *Ibid.*

difference between the sexes was no longer seen as a valid reason for denying political rights such as the right to vote and to be elected[199]. A well-known example is the Suffragettes, the women's emancipation movement that was active in Britain in the late XIX century, campaigning for women's suffrage and gender equality, including legal and economic equality[200]. The movement was not universally welcomed, and demonstrations were often violently suppressed, sometimes ending with the arrest of many feminist activists[201]. Despite the hostility and difficulties, the suffragettes succeeded in achieving what they were fighting for, and similar movements developed in other countries[202]. Women began to win the first battles for their rights, but the discourses of Western feminists did not take into account the realities and problems that affected non-Western women, such as racial discrimination, economic hardships, or colonial domination[203]. An example of this is the first wave feminists in North America who viewed the right to vote or be elected as the prerogative of white women, emphasising their racial privilege over indigenous and women of colour[204].

During the second wave, the debate expanded to include new concerns such as reproductive rights and sexuality issues, and the elimination of gender discrimination in the workplace, including topics such as equal pay, contraceptives, abortion, and maternity leave[205]. A pillar of feminist thought of the period is French feminist philosopher Simon de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, published in 1949 in two volumes: *Facts and Myths*, and *Lived Experience[206]*. De Beauvoir's main argument is that man inherently subjugates the woman and designates her as the Other, an object deprived of humanity and defined in opposition to man, the latter being the subject[207]. He is essential, while she is inessential. Man exerts his power and action on the world, he creates and works, while woman is destined to be immobile, passive and dependent, waiting for him to save her[208]. The French philosopher further underlines how there are no biological, psychological or historical reasons that could justify the subordinate position of women in society[209]. However, second-wave feminist theory also overlooked racial and economic differences and continued to focus on the interests of white Western women, excluding women of colour from its representation of the world.

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[199] Disch, and Hawkesworth." Introduction: Feminist Theory - Transforming the Known World" In *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*. pp. 1-12
[200] *Ibid*.
[201] *Ibid*.
[202] *Ibid*.
[203] Eidinger, Andrea. "Feminism".
[204] *Ibid*.
[205] KrCløkke, and Sørensen. "'Chapter 1: Three Waves of Feminism: From Suffragettes to Grrls.'" In *Gender Communication Theories & Analyses: From Silence to Performance*. pp. 1-23
[206] De Beauvoir, Simone. "The Second Sex". New York: Vintage Books, 2011
Gray, Francine Du Plessix. "The Second Sex - By Simone de Beauvoir." *The New York Times*. May 28, 2010. Accessed February 6, 2022. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/30/books/review/Gray-t.html?pagewanted=all.
[207] Gray, Francine Du Plessix. "The Second Sex - By Simone de Beauvoir." *The New York Times*. May 28, 2010. Accessed February 6, 2022. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/30/books/review/Gray-t.html?pagewanted=all.
[208] *Ibid*.
[209] *Ibid*.

In the 1980s and with the decolonisation of Africa, women of other backgrounds and ethnicities began to raise their voices and develop other interpretations and perspectives of feminism. The emergence of the Third Wave in the 1990s coincides with the publication of the article *Becoming the Third Wave* in Ms. magazine by the then 22-year-old American activist Rebecca Walker, daughter of Second Waver Alice Walker[210].

«I write this as a plea to all women, especially women of my generation: Let Thomas' confirmation serve to remind you, as it did me, that the fight is far from over. Let this dismissal of a woman's experience move you to anger. Turn that outrage into political power. Do not vote for them unless they work for us. Do not have sex with them, do not break bread with them, do not nurture them if they don't prioritize our freedom to control our bodies and our lives. I am not a post-feminism feminist. I am the Third Wave»[211].

The statement was in response to the sexual harassment lawsuit brought by attorney Anita Hill against Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, who denied Hill's allegations before an all-white Senate and claimed to be the victim of a lynching[212]. Walker used the case to exhort women to continue fighting against this kind of oppression. She concludes her article by defining what being a feminist means to her, which is «integrating an ideology of equality and female empowerment into the very fibre of life»[213], it means «seeking personal clarity in the midst of systemic destruction, joining in sisterhood with women when often we are divided and understanding power structures with the intention of challenging them»[214]. Third Way feminism shed further light on the increasingly prominent need to represent the diverse backgrounds and experiences of non-Western women and to break through the monolithic view of white feminists. Thus, many sub-fields of feminism emerged, such as African feminism, postcolonial feminism, and intersectional feminism, as well as feminist organisations for queer, trans, non-gender conforming, and disabled women[215]. The issues on which the third wave focused were primarily reproductive rights, such as access to contraception and abortion, sexual emancipation, and violence against women[216]. The following sections delve into two of the new currents of feminism officially emerged during the third wave of feminism, that are

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[210] PDF4PRO. "Becoming the Third Wave by Rebecca Walker - Ms. Magazine." PDF4PRO, January 21, 2019. Accessed December 14, 2021. Available at: https://pdf4pro.com/view/becoming-the-third-wave-by-rebecca-walker-ms-magazine-55b7f0.html.
Brunell, Laura. "The Third Wave of Feminism." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Accessed December 14, 2021. Available at: https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism/The-third-wave-of-feminism.
[211] PDF4PRO. "Becoming the Third Wave by Rebecca Walker - Ms. Magazine."
[212] Austin, Sierra, Peggy Solic, Haley Swenson, and Gisell Jeter- Bennett. "Anita Hill Roundtable." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies - Special Issue: Women of Color and Gender Equity 35*, no. 3. (January 2014): 65–74. Available at: https://doi.org/10.5250/fronjwomestud.35.3.0065. pp. 65-74
[213] PDF4PRO. "Becoming the Third Wave by Rebecca Walker - Ms. Magazine."
[214] *Ibid*.
[215] Eidinger, Andrea. "Feminism."
[216] *Ibid*.

particularly relevant to African women's backgrounds and circumstances, namely African feminism and postcolonial feminism.

2.1.1 The need for an African Feminism

Even though the first feminist movements emerged in Western culture, women's self-assertion, their demands and their struggle for rights and dignity have always been present on the African continent[217]. On the one hand, some scholars such as Filomina Chioma Steady – one of the "mothers" of African feminism – deem the African women as the first true feminists[218]. Indeed, listening to the narratives of the "great matriarchs," the queens and priestesses, and all the powerful women in the political and cultural spheres, it seems that African women were *feminists before feminism*, advocating for their particular interests as women before a women's movement appeared in the West[219]. On the other hand, some scholars view the emergence of African feminism as a necessary result of the fact that Western feminists did not pay enough attention to issues such as race and the experiences of black women[220].

Be that as it may, the *raison d'être* of feminism is not new to Africa. There have always been women who were feminists, even if they did not define themselves as such, as far back as the earliest civilizations on the globe can be traced. «The truth» – according to Nigerian feminist journalist Minna Salami – «is that feminism is an absolute necessity for African societies»[221]. As noted in previous sections, Africa has the highest rates of domestic violence, female circumcision, and other harmful practises in the world; unequal access to land or education for women; high levels of gender inequality with various institutional barriers to economic and social mobility; and disempowered women within households[222].

African feminism arose as a sub-category of feminism developed by African women to address the specific realities and concerns of women living on the continent. Africa presents a variety of different cultures, traditions, and peoples, so several versions and subgroups of African feminism have been developed, such as *Womanism* (coined by Alice Walker and Chikwenye Okonjo

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[217] Dosekun, Simidele. "African Feminisms." In *The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies.* by Olajumoke Yacob-Haliso and Toyin Falola, 47–63. Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature Switzerland AG. 2021. Available at: https://link.springer.com/referencework/10.1007/978-3-030-28099-4#toc. pp. 47–63

[218] Terborg-Penn, Rosalyn. "Through an African Feminist Theoretical Lens." In *Engendering History*, by Barbara Bailey, Verene Shepherd Bridget, and Bridget Brereton, 3–19. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 1995. Available at: https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/bfm%3A978-1-137-07302-0%2F1.pdf. pp. 3-19

Decker, Alicia C., and Gabeba Baderoon. "African Feminisms." *Meridians 17*, no. 2 (November 1, 2018): 219–31. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1215/15366936-7176384. pp. 219–31

[219] Dosekun. "African Feminisms." In *The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies.* pp. 47–63

[220] Steady, Filomina Chioma. "The Black Woman Cross-Culturally". Dean C Schield, 1981.

[221] Salami, Minna. "A Brief History of African Feminism." MsAfropolitan., 2013. https://msafropolitan.com/2013/07/a-brief-history-of-african-feminism.html.

[222] *Ibid*.

Ogunyemi), *Motherism* (Catherine Acholonu), *Femalism* (Chioma Opara), *Nego-feminism* (Obioma Nnaemeka), Snail-sense feminism (Akachi Ezeigbo), Stiwanism (Molara Ogundipe-Leslie), African womanism (Mary Modupe Kolawole)[223]. It would therefore be more realistic to speak of "African feminisms" and not depict them as a monolith[224]. However, Nigerian feminist and academic Amina Mama rightly notes that «changing the terminology does not solve the problem of [white] global domination [of] northern-based white women's relative power to define»[225]. Rather than abandoning the term feminism, perceived by some as a term of Western derivation and connotations[226], African women should focus on creating their own definition of it. According to Mama, the goal should be to «retain the concept of feminism and make it our own [of African women] by filling the name with meaning»[227]. The obsession with supposed "Africanness" reiterates the dominant narratives in which Africa is characterised in opposition to the West, according to which African assumptions are weighted on the grounds of their antagonism to Europe, as the colonialists did, so articulating a polarisation of intellectual feminist thought[228]. There is thus a need to address Western feminist discourse dominance, patriarchal oppression in Africa and the legacies of colonialism as an interweaved discourse.

On November 16, 2006, the first *African Feminist Forum* was held in Accra, Ghana[229]. The conference, which gathered more than 100 African feminists from across the continent in response to the increasing threats to the advancement of women's rights in Africa, clearly stated the need for African women to identify and profess themselves as feminists:

> «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»[230].

[223] Nkealah, Naomi. "(West) African Feminisms and Their Challenges." *Journal of Literary Studies 32*, no. 2 (July 20, 2016): 61–74. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/02564718.2016.1198156. pp. 61–74

[224] Salami, Minna. "7 Key Issues in African Feminist Thought." *MsAfropolitan*. August 16, 2012. Accessed December 14. Available at: https://msafropolitan.com/2012/08/7-key-issues-in-african-feminist-thought.html.

[225] Dosekun. "African Feminisms." In *The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies.* pp. 47–63.

[226] *Ibid.*

[227] *Ibid*. p. 51

[228] Lewis, Desiree. "African Gender Research and Postcoloniality: Legacies and Challenges." In *African Gender Studies A Reader*, by Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí, 381–95. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2005. Available at: https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-1-137-09009-6#toc. pp. 381–95

[229] Dosekun. "African Feminisms." In *The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies*

[230] *Ibid*. p. 52

The uniqueness of African feminism is based on the concrete realities of African women's lives, from which different demands and goals emerge. Poverty and famine; gender based, governmental, cultural or political violence; dictatorships and corruption; imperialism and colonialism; racial discrimination; religious extremism and terrorism; female genital mutilation and child marriage; HIV, malaria, pandemics and other diseases; lack of education, inheritance and property rights; patriarchy, male privileges and sexism; and little or no voice at political and decision-making levels[231]. The above list contains the major concerns that African feminists have on their agenda. African feminist groups criticise Western women for focusing on "additional needs" while neglecting the realisation of the fundamental ones, and for their dismissive attitude towards men who should not interfere in women's issues[232].

Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie, one of Africa's most influential feminists and an expert in gender studies, has identified six broad categories under which it is possible to classify Africans' women oppressions: external oppression, e.g. neo-colonial economic institutions; traditional oppression, e.g. feudalism; African women's own backwardness; African men; racism; psychosocial oppression; and the African woman herself, having internalised all these oppressions[233]. However, Ogundipe-Leslie has left out the sexual oppression of African women. Mama instead has pointed to the inextricable link between feminism and the struggles against gender-based violence, sexual exploitation of women, and discrimination based on sexual and gender identity and orientation[234]. Another critical challenge for African feminists not included in the lists above is knowledge production. Ghanaian-American scholar and activist Yaba Blay has stressed the importance of action-oriented studies, while other academics have emphasised the fundamental role of theoretical research and contemplation, which must be pursued and not seen as privileges in comparison to Africa's urgent basic needs[235].

The first official feminist associations and interest groups emerged in Africa in the early XX century, among whom were women of distinction. Adelaide Casely-Hayford (1868-1960) was a women's rights activist who is referred to as the "African Victorian feminist" because of her significant contributions to Pan-African and feminist causes[236]. She devoted her life to asserting the right to education for girls in her country, Sierra Leone, and throughout West Africa[237]. Charlotte

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[231] Lewis. "African Gender Research and Postcoloniality: Legacies and Challenges." In *African Gender Studies A Reader*. pp.381–95. Bayu, Kasseye Eyayu. "A Comparative Analysis on the Perspectives of African Feminism Vs Western Feminism: Philosophical Debate with Their Criticism and Its Implication for Women's Rights in Ethiopia Context." *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology* 11, no. 4. (July 31, 2019): 54-58. Available at: https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.5897/IJSA2018.0783. pp. 54-58

[232] *Ibid*.

[233] Dosekun. "African Feminisms." In *The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies.* pp. 47–63.

[234] *Ibid.*

[235] *Ibid.*

[236] Rathbone, Richard. "An African Victorian Feminist? - An African Victorian Feminist; the Life and Times of Adelaide Smith Casely Hayford, 1868–1960. By Adelaide M. Cromwell. London: Frank Cass, 1986. Pp. 235. £25.00." *The Journal of African History* 28, no. 2 (1987): 320–21. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1017/S002185370002990X.pp. 320–21

[237] *Ibid.*

Maxeke (1871-1939) was a South African women's rights activist who became known as the *Mother of the Liberation Struggle*[238] or *Mother of Black Freedom*[239]. She rose to prominence in 1919 as the leader of a group of women who demonstrated against the application of the *pass system* to women[240]. In this context that Maxeke founded the *Bantu Women's League*, also known as the *African Women's League of the African National Congress* (ANC), and became its president. She was concerned with the living conditions of African women in urban areas and Bantu women, examining issues related to African domestic life and the position of women in African families. She also spoke about the consequences of racism, the situation of domestic workers, religion and land issues[241]. Huda Shaarawi (1879 – 1947) was an Egyptian women's rights activist who founded several associations in this regard[242]. In 1908, she co-founded the first Egyptian secular humanitarian association for impoverished women and children, totally run by women. A little over 10 years later, in 1920, she founded the *Wafdist Women's Central Committee*, a women's delegation for the liberation of Egypt from the British Empire, through which more women became involved in national politics. In 1923, she founded the *Egyptian Feminist Union*, of which she remained president until the end of her life, working primarily for equal rights for women, as women's suffrage, and finally twenty years later, in 1945, Sharaawi founded the Arab Feminist Union[243].

Modern feminism in Africa is closely linked to women's participation in the anti-colonial and nationalist struggles that began in the 1960s, when women's movements and organizations were formed to oppose patriarchal and imperialist domination. According to Gwendolyn Mikell, professor of anthropology and author of the masterpiece *African Feminism – The Politics of Survival in Sub-Saharan Africa,* African modern feminism emerged under different circumstances than the one in the West, particularly because it was initially shaped by resistance to colonial occupation[244]. The focus was so on the oppression, marginalization and exploitation of women within colonial and class-based power structures. As a result, African feminist actions have traditionally focused on the machinery of government and its legal framework, on various issues from women's political engagement to the constitutional provisions as essential guarantees to the exercise of active citizenship[245]. They seek to "write off" the burden and constructs of colonialism's long history to create a new vocabulary and

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[238] South African History. "Charlotte Maxeke (Née Manye)." *South African History Online*. Accessed December 14, 2021. Available at: https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/charlotte-maxeke-nee-manye.

[239] Parliament of the Republic of South Africa. "Inaugural Memory Lecture - The Life & Legacy of Charlotte Mannya-Maxeke*".* Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 2015. Available at: https://www.parliament.gov.za/project-event-details/8

[240] It was an internal passport aimed at racial segregation that severely restricted the movement of black Africans.

[241] South African History. "Charlotte Maxeke (Née Manye)".

[242] Jaffer, Jennifer. "Huda Shaarawi." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Accessed December 8, 2021. Available at: https://www.britannica.com/biography/Huda-Sharawi.

[243] *Ibid.*

[244] Bayu. "A Comparative Analysis on the Perspectives of African Feminism Vs Western Feminism: Philosophical Debate with Their Criticism and Its Implication for Women's Rights in Ethiopia Context." pp. 54-58

[245] Dosekun. "African Feminisms." In *The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies.* pp. 47–63.

tools for women to overcome the racialized trauma that has affected and continues to affect them in many ways[246]. Of particular relevance were the liberation movements that emerged in Kenya, Algeria, Mozambique, Angola, and Guinea, and the symbols of feminists who participated in anti-colonial struggles. The women of the Mau Mau Uprising[247] fought against the occupation of Kenya by the British Empire in the 1950s. They included Wambui Otieno (1936 – 2011), a Kenyan activist and politician who was arrested for spying on the British and recruiting women to search for weapons to combat against colonialists[248]. Lilian Masediba Ngoyi (1911 – 1980), the "Mother of Black Resistance", was a politician and anti-apartheid activist[249]. She was the president of the *Women's League of the African National Congress* (ANC) and of the *Federation of South African Women (*FEDSAW*)[250]*. Albertina Sisulu (1918-2011), the "Mother of the Nation", was a South African civil rights and anti-apartheid advocate who dedicated her life to promoting women's rights[251]. She joined the Women's League in the 1950s and went on to hold leadership positions in both ANC and FEDSAW[252]. Margaret Ekpo (1914 – 2006), a Nigerian women's rights activist and politician, was a pioneer of the women's movement in her country[253]. She established the *Market Women Association* in the town of Abia, where she promoted solidarity among women and advocated for their economic and political rights[254]. Later, in 1954, she founded a new market women's association, the *Abia Township Women's Association*, where she gathered many other women, turning the association into an interest group[255]. Funmilayo Anikulapo-Kuti (1900-1978) was a prominent anti-colonial activist in Nigeria and the founder in 1944 of the *Abeokuta Women's Union*, one of the most famous associations of the XX century, in which up to 20,000 women in Nigeria fought for the protection and promotion of women's rights, especially for access to education and political representation[256]. Aoua Keita (1912-1980) was a political, feminist and anti-colonial activist who worked to improve the situation of women in Mali[257]. She belonged to the *Sudanese Union – African Democratic Rally*

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[246] Salami, Minna. "7 Key Issues in African Feminist Thought".

[247] It was a war in the colonial Kenya between the *Kenya Land and Freedom Army* (KLFA), also known as *Mau Mau*, and the British authorities. Blakeley, Ruth. "4 - Decolonisation, the Cold War and State Terrorism." In *State Terrorism and Neoliberalism*, 80–105. Routledge, 2009.

[248] Otieno, Wambui Waiyaki, and Cora Ann Presley. *Mau Mau's Daughter: A Life History*. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Pub, 1998.

[249] South African History Online. "Lilian Masediba Ngoyi." *South African History Online*. Accessed December 14, 2021. Available at: https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/lilian-masediba-ngoyi

[250] *Ibid.*

[251] South African History Online. "Albertina Nontsikelelo Sisulu." *South African History Online*. Accessed December 20, 2021. Available at: https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/albertina-nontsikelelo-sisulu.

[252] *Ibid.*

[253] Nigeria Galleria. "Margaret Ekpo, Politician, Teacher, Activist, Women's Rights Activist, Entreprenuer, Prominent Nigerian". Nigeria Galleria. Accessed December 14, 2021. Available at: https://www.nigeriagalleria.com/Nigeria/Personality-Profiles/Prominent-Nigerians/Margaret-Ekpo.html.

[254] *Ibid.*

[255] *Ibid.*

[256] Tawe, Ethel-Ruth. "The Deathless Legacy of Nigerian Activist Funmilayo Anikulapo-Kuti". A2.O Magazine, October 23, 2020. Accessed December 14, 2021. Available at: https://www.a2omag.com/stories/funmilayo-anikulapo-kuti.

[257] UNESCO. "Aoua Keita Biography." UNESCO Women in African History, 2019. Accessed December 14, 2021. Available at: https://en.unesco.org/womeninafrica/aoua-keita-0/biography.

political party. Within the party, she first helped build the women's wing and then became the Commissioner for Women. Keita is known as the first elected female member of her country's parliament in Francophone West Africa. Her activism was not limited to the political arena, but she also advocated for the creation of an all-women's trade union and contributed to the establishment of the *Pan-African Women's Organization* (PAWO)[258]. This latter was founded in July 1962 at Dar El Salaam, Tanzania, with the purpose of bringing together African women via the establishment of a centralised platform for the sharing of best practises and the mobilisation of collective efforts in favour of human rights and the abolition of discrimination towards women[259]. Regarded as the "Africa's first and oldest collective women's organization", being founded even before the OAU, PAWO has made significant contributions to multiple causes throughout the years, from the continent's liberation from colonialism, to the abolition of apartheid, the eradication of gender discrimination, and the mobilization of African women. Furthermore, in February 2019 PAWO has officially been recognized as a Specialized Agency of the AU[260]. The above are just a few examples of the countless women who opposed colonialism, sexism and patriarchy throughout Africa during the period of decolonisation.

Feminism in Africa was consolidated at the institutional level with the historic *UN Decade for Women from 1975 to 1985*, which saw the proliferation of feminist actions and studies that further spread the presence of the feminist movement at the political, legislative, cultural and academic levels[261]. In the sector of academic teaching and research, the establishment of chairs in women's and gender studies in African universities in the early 1990s fostered the production of a solid body of African feminist knowledge[262]. Thus, from the end of the XX century onwards, African feminism has been concerned with both grassroots and intellectual activism, with so-called "bread and butter" issues – that is the fundamental issues affecting daily life – and with the production of knowledge and critical analysis[263]. In addition to the increase awareness of the academic sector, numerous associations, groups and networks have been established to promote African feminist ideals and empower women, among which the *African Feminist Forum* and the *African Gender Institute*, *Akina Mama wa Afrika* (AmwA), the *African Women's Leadership Institute*, *Femmes Africa Solidarité* (FAS), *ABANTU for development*, the *Council for the Economic Empowerment of Women in Africa*

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[258] *Ibid.*

[259] Union of International Associations. "Pan African Women's Organization (PAWO)". *Global Civil Society Database*, 2018. Accessed December 17, 2021. Available at: https://uia.org/s/or/en/1100019754.

[260] African Union. "The African Union Signs a Memorandum of Understanding with the Pan - African Women's Organization." African Union,February 21, 2019. Accessed December 19, 2021. Available at: https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20190221/african-union-signs-memorandum-understanding-pan-african-women%E2%80%99s-organization.

[261] Salami. "A Brief History of African Feminism".

[262] *Ibid.*

[263] *Ibid.*

(CEEWA), *Women in Law and Development in Africa* (WILDAF), *AMANITARE* and the *Association of African Women Scholars* (AAWS)[264].

2.1.2 Post-Colonial Feminism and the criticism to Western feminism

The representation and understanding of women during colonial struggles and in postcolonial nations are at the heart of postcolonial feminist theory. This latter focuses on the production and construction of gender roles in colonial narratives and the representation of women in anti-colonial and post-colonial debates. The theory considers also the implication of racial subordination and how the colonial economic, political, and social institutions and practises have affected colonised women and continue to do so in post-colonial countries[265]. The goal of a postcolonial feminist is more complex than that of a simply postcolonial theorist, because women are subjected not only to settler domination but also to oppression by patriarchal society. This double burden is referred to as *double colonisation[266]*. In this view, the colonised men do not constitute a partner or an ally, but rather contribute to the subjugation of the colonised women[267]. It was only with the rise of postcolonial feminist thought that patriarchy and heterosexism were seen as closely linked to the Eurocentrism, racism, and classism that characterised colonialism[268]. Furthermore, colonised women were excluded from the support of Western and white feminists who misrepresent their *sisters* by denying the cultural, ethnic, political, historical, and social differences that constitute their plight, thus contributing to the oppression of female identity and the female body[269]. The Western model ignores both the concept of race, by not considering the consequences of the interaction of two discriminatory factors such as racism and patriarchy, and the influence of the Western socio-historical background in formulating the model for dealing with Third World women[270]. For African women, it can be extremely difficult to disentangle racism, class prejudice, and sexual discrimination since for them these are all present at the same time[271].

The 1984 essay *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House* by Audre Lorde, an American poet who describes herself as a black lesbian feminist, can be considered one of the first works of postcolonial feminism theory[272].

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[264] Lewis. "African Gender Research and Postcoloniality: Legacies and Challenges." In *African Gender Studies A Reader*. 381–95.
[265] Tyagi, Ritu. "Understanding Postcolonial Feminism in Relation with Postcolonial and Feminist Theories". *International Journal of Language and Linguistics 1*, no. 2 (December, 2014). 45-50 Available at: https://ijllnet.com/journals/Vol_1_No_2_December_2014/7.pdf pp. 45-50
[266] *Ibid.*
[267] *Ibid*.
[268] *Ibid*.
[269] *Ibid*.
[270] *Ibid*.
[271] *Ibid.*
[272] Lorde, Audre. *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House*. Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 1984.

«The absence of these considerations [of race, sexuality, class, and age] weakens any feminist discussion of the personal and the political. It is a particular academic arrogance to assume any discussion of feminist theory without examining our many differences, and without a significant input from poor women, Black and Third World women […]. To read this program [of the NYU Institute for the Humanities conference of 1983] is to assume that […] Black women have nothing to say about existentialism, the erotic, women's culture and silence, developing feminist theory, or heterosexuality and power. […] What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy? […] How do you deal with the fact that the women who clean your houses and tend your children while you attend conferences on feminist theory are, for the most part, poor women and women of Color? What is the theory behind racist feminism? »[273].

According to Lorde, the blindness of Western feminist academics in perceiving the diversity between black and white women and their inability to recognize it as a potential strength does not allow them to overcome patriarchy[274].

In the same year, another feminist theorist, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, published her article *Under Western Eyes*, which represent a landmark for postcolonial feminist theory. The article was included in her book *Feminism Without Borders – Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, in which Mohanty has criticized the dominant role of the West in feminist and postcolonial discourse[275]. Mohanty recognises the so-called *colonialist move*: the creation of a category of Third World women who are presented as a singular and monolithic subject, part of a homogeneous group with the same concerns, experiences, and ambitions, regardless of geographic, cultural, historical, and socio-political background[276]. On the one hand, white Western feminists labelled the average Third World Woman as deeply devoted to family and religion, uneducated, powerless, and relegated to the domestic sphere, so not as an active agent but as external to social interactions[277]. On the other hand, the typical Western woman is portrayed as sexually emancipated, able to manage her own life, and express herself freely[278]. Both Western and Third World women are generally defined as victims of patriarchy, implying a dichotomy of power in relations between men and women in which the former are always the oppressors and the latter the oppressed[279]. This vision devoid women their historical and political voice. Mohanty aims, first, to eradicate the prejudice of the "First World woman as subject" and the "Third World woman as object" and, second, to deconstruct the above-mentioned

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[273] *Ibid*. p. 110
[274] *Ibid.* pp. 110-114
[275] Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. "Chapter one: Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse". In *Feminism Without Borders – Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity.* Durham, US: Duke University Press, 2003. pp. 17-42
[276] *Ibid.*
[277] *Ibid.*
[278] *Ibid.*
[279] *Ibid.*

dichotomy[280]. The main problem with this Western approach is that it generalizes and oversimplifies the needs and problems of Third World women, as they were all Western[281]. Thus, there remains a gap between the representation of these women and their real lives. As a solution, Mohanty proposes the *politics of location*[282] formulated by Adrienne Rich in *Blood, Bread, and Poetry*.

> «The politics of location. Even to begin with my body I have to say that from the outset that body had more than one identity. When I was carried out of the hospital into the world, I was viewed and treated as female, but also viewed and treated as white—by both Black and white people. I was located by colour and sex as surely as a Black child was located by colour and sex—though the implications of white identity were mystified by the presumption that white people are the centre of the universe. To locate myself in my body means more than understanding what it has meant to me to have a vulva and clitoris and uterus and breasts. It means recognizing this white skin, the places it has taken me, the places it has not let me go»[283].

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, an Indian philosopher and one of the most prominent exponents of postcolonial feminism, in her work *Can the subaltern speak?* of 1985, has questioned whether subaltern women can speak and be heard[284], or whether their fate is to be represented by «the white men [who] are saving brown women from brown men»[285]. In this context, the term "subaltern" stands for people who are deprived of agency and cannot articulate their own subjectivity[286]. According to the scholar, the woman, specifically the poorest woman in the global south, reflects the emblem of subalternity[287]. Indeed, «if, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is ever more deeply in shadow»[288]. The scholar concludes that «there is no space from which the sexed subaltern subject can speak»[289]. The rationale for this lies in the so-called *epistemic violence* of the West, through which the colonized person is constructed as Other according to the categories of European rationality[290]. The oppression of women persists not only because of the colonial legacy, but also as a consequence of postcolonial processes that perpetuate the same hierarchical pattern[291]. Women are victims of a double oppression: both by

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[280] *Ibid.*

[281] *Ibid.*

[282] *Ibid.*

[283] Rich, Adrienne. "Chapter 15: Notes toward a Politics of Location (1984)" In *Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979-1985*". New York: W. W. Norton, 1994. pp. 209-210

[284] Messina, Serena. *Femminismo e Postcolonialismo: il dibattito sullo sviluppo internazionale. Uno studio di caso in Eritrea*. Dottorato in Studi di Genere, Indirizzo Filosofia e pedagogia delle differenze di genere, Università degli Studi di Napoli "Federico II" Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, Available at: http://www.fedoa.unina.it/926/1/Messina.pdf. pp.12-18

[285] Loomba, Ania. "Colonialism/Postcolonialism". 3° edition. New York: Routledge, 2015. p. 155

[286] *Ibid*.

[287] Tarim, Stefania. *Teoria e Prassi nell'opera Di Gayatri C. Spivak*. Scuola Dottorale Internazionale di Studi Umanistici – Facoltà di lettere e filosofia. 2011. Available at: https://123dok.org/document/eqo49kz1-teoria-prassi-nell-opera-di-gayatri-c-spivak.html.p. 6

[288] *Ibid.* p. 74

[289] *Ibid.* p. 77

[290] *Ibid.* p. 78

[291] Messina. *Femminismo e Postcolonialismo: il dibattito sullo sviluppo internazionale. Uno studio di caso in Eritrea*. pp.12-18

patriarchy and by the class system[292]. Thus, Spivak seeks to deconstruct both white privilege and the dichotomy between subject and object in Western narratives, criticizing the Eurocentric vision of Western feminism that implies an imperialist narrative towards subaltern women. Western feminists have perpetuated the assumptions of imperialism and patriarchy by reproducing the dichotomy in which Western women are portrayed as the subjects of knowledge and redemption, while subaltern women are the objects of Western compassion[293]. According to Spivak, Western feminism runs the risk of repeating towards Third World women the same kind of oppression that men have practiced towards white women: «[Western] feminists must learn to learn from [the women of Third World], to speak to them, to suspect that their access to the political and sexual scene is not merely to be corrected by our superiority theory and enlightened compassion»[294].

Hazel Carby, in her 1997 article *White woman listen! Black feminism and the boundaries of sisterhood*, examines how Western feminism in the 1970s largely ignored the situation of black women not including their struggles in popular feminist discourses[295]. Furthermore, the majority of Western perspective still viewed African women's customs, traditions, and social behaviours as archaic and barbaric. Consequently, these women were portrayed as victims of their own systems that need to be saved by the West. The main problem is the ethnocentric assumption and presumption of white feminists that the Western *modus operandi* is the *one-size-fits-all* solution in the fight against women's oppression, regardless of their background[296].

In conclusion, the development of African feminism and postcolonial feminism is crucial in order to provide an adequate theoretical and philosophical framework capable of giving voice to African women's struggles and desire for emancipation, without anyone continuing to speak for them.

2.2 The Scramble for Africa

The focus on colonization has been deemed essential to examine the basis of gender inequality in Africa and the contemporary situation of African women. As African gender studies has gained prominence over the past 30 years, several important works have emerged that examine the interactions between colonialism and gender[297]. This section examines the impact of colonialism on

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[292] Tarim. *Teoria e Prassi nell'opera di Gayatri C. Spivak*. pp. 74-76.

[293] Messina. *Femminismo e Postcolonialismo: il dibattito sullo sviluppo internazionale. Uno studio di caso in Eritrea*. pp. 12-18

[294] Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics". First. New York: Routledge, 2006. p. 27

[295] Carby, Hazel. "Chapter 4 - White Woman Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood". In *Black British Feminism - A Reader*, by Heidi Safia Mirza. New York: Routledge, 1997. pp. 45-53

[296] Tyagi. "Understanding Postcolonial Feminism in Relation with Postcolonial and Feminist Theories". pp. 45-50

[297] Agbaje, Funmilayo Idowu. "Colonialism and Gender in Africa – A critical history" In *The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies*, by Toyin Falola and Olajumoke Yacob-Haliso. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland AG. 2021. Available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-77030-7_3-1. pp. 1275–1294

the traditional realities of African women and show how their lives, beliefs, ideologies, and behaviors were fundamentally altered by the new political and economic structures.

First, it is essential to define what is meant by the term colonialism. It derives from the Latin *colonus* meaning peasant[298], and according to anthropologist Stephen W. Silliman, it consists of «attempts by colonizers to control foreign territories and dominate indigenous people in order to obtain resources through dispossession, economic marginalization, labor exploitation, racism, and oppression, producing inequalities»[299]. In this dissertation, the term colonialism refers in particular to the European project of political and economic domination of the African continent during the XIX century and the XX century, which ended in the second half of the XX century with the decolonization movements and the independence of the previously colonized states[300].

The first Europeans arrived in Africa in the fifteenth century and since then slowly began to exert their influence over certain territories. It was not until the nineteenth century that European countries, as Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, and Portugal, met to officially divide up the African territories according to their respective spheres of influence[301]. The so-called *Scramble for Africa* took place in the late nineteenth century, when European nations began to impose their authority and rules on African territories, leading to the formation of new colonial states.
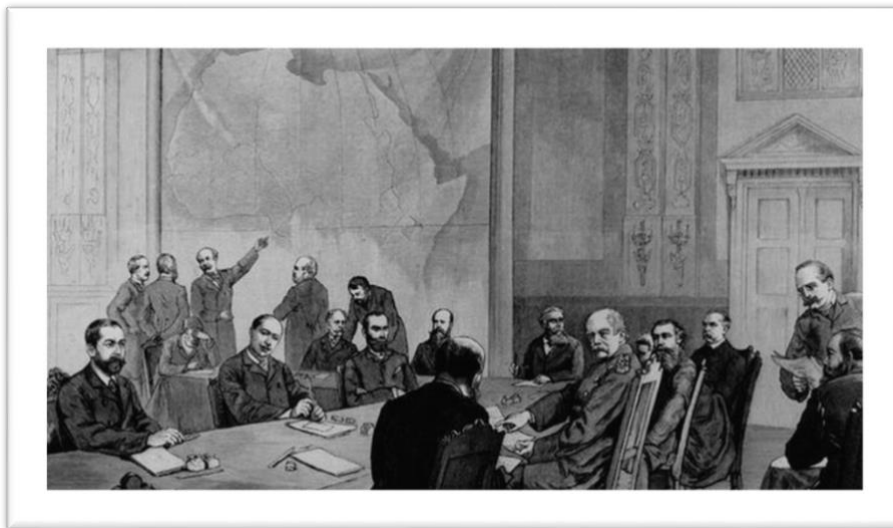
Figure 2.1 – Representation of the European Powers at the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885. European leaders met at the infamous Berlin Conference to divide Africa and arbitrarily draw up borders that exist to this day.[302]

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[298] Kohn, Margaret, and Kavita Reddy. "Colonialism." Edited by Edward N. Zalta. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2017. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/colonialism/.
[299] Silliman, Stephen W. "Culture contact or colonialism? Challenges in the archaeology of native north America". *American Antiquity* 70, no. 1 (2005): 55–74. doi:10.2307/40035268. p. 59
[300] Kohn, and Reddy. "Colonialism".
[301] Agbaje. "Colonialism and Gender in Africa – A critical history" In *The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies*. pp. 1275–94.
[302] Deutsche Welle. "130 Years Ago: Carving up Africa in Berlin". *Deutsche Welle*, February 2015 Accessed December 8, 2021. Available at: https://www.dw.com/en/130-years-ago-carving-up-africa-in-berlin/a-18278894.

With the Berlin Conference of 1884 -1885, colonialism became a reality that lasted for about 80 years in most African countries and still influences the identity, culture, economy and politics of African peoples[303]. African territories were divided among Britain, France, Germany, Portugal, Italy, Belgium, and Spain[304]. The map below is a snapshot of the division of the continent at the beginning of World War I in 1914, with the above European powers occupying 90 percent of African territory[305]. Only Abyssinia (today's Ethiopia) and Liberia did not fall under their rule[306]. Needless to say, no Africans participated in the decisions and most of them were unaware of the existence of the conference.

Figure 2.2 - Africa in 1914[307]

[303] Das, Darshana, and Aakanksha Gaur. "Berlin West Africa Conference". *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Accessed February 7, 2022. Available at: https://www.britannica.com/event/Berlin-West-Africa-Conference.

[304] Magdoff, Harry. "Partition of Africa." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Accessed February 7, 2022. Available at: https://www.britannica.com/topic/Western-colonialism/Partition-of-Africa.

[305] Collins, Robert O., and James M. Burns. "Chapter 20 - European Colonial Rule in Africa." In *A History of Sub-Saharan Africa*, 2nd ed., 295–307. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Available at: https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/a-history-of-sub-saharan-africa/88AE8322D9FC853C4747804943115E80. pp. 295–307

[306] 130 Years Ago: Carving up Africa in Berlin". *Deutsche Welle*, February 2015. https://www.dw.com/en/130-years-ago-carving-up-africa-in-berlin/a-18278894.

[307] Collins, Robert O., and James M. Burns. "Chapter 20 - European Colonial Rule in Africa." In *A History of Sub-Saharan Africa*.

Colonial authority in Africa was essentially based on Western myths and stereotypes about the continent[308]. During the XIX and XX centuries, Western political and moral thinkers long debated the legitimacy of colonialism[309]. Enlightenment intellectuals such as Kant, Smith, and Diderot criticized the barbarism of colonialism and rejected the assumption that Europeans had a duty to "civilize" other countries, since the colonial plan conflicted with fundamental Enlightenment principles[310]. Because of their distance from national jurisdiction and domestic legal institutions, and thus from the possibility of imprisonment, colonizers felt justified in exposing the full extent of a man's violent instinct[311].

The belief in European superiority served as the intellectual basis for the beginning of colonialism, which, according to the prevailing European view, had the task of civilizing African populations, portrayed as barbarians, primitives, and even sub-humans[312]. The civilizing mission was supposed to represent a period of political dependence or tutelage by the West, which was necessary for uncivilized nations before they were able to develop and maintain liberal institutions by themselves[313]. These ideas turned out to be the moral justification to economically exploit, culturally dominate and religiously convert the African continent[314].

2.2.1 Women's roles in pre-colonial Africa

In many parts of the world before colonialism, relations between men and women were characterised by mutual respect and equality or complementarity. To better understand the impact of colonisation on gender roles in Africa, it is first necessary to shed light on the general status of women in African societies prior to the arrival of settlers. In general, the history of African women from 800 CE to 1900 has received little attention in research on gender relations and the status of women, compared to the many studies that have instead been conducted on colonial and postcolonial Africa. In addition, many historians have struggled with the lack of historical written documents, as most histories were passed down orally and indigenous archives that contained written documents were

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[308] Agbaje. "Colonialism and Gender in Africa – A critical history" In *The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies*. pp. 1275–94.
[309] Kohn, and Reddy. "Colonialism".
[310] *Ibid*.
[311] *Ibid.*
[312] Lihamba, Amandina, Fulata L. Moyo, Mugaybuso M. Mulokozi, Saida Yahya-Othman, and Naomi L. Shitemi. *Women Writing Africa - The Eastern Region*. Volume 3. New York: The Feminist Press, 2007. pp. 21-37
Agbaje. "Colonialism and Gender in Africa – A critical history" In *The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies*. pp. 1275–94.
[313] Kohn, and Reddy. "Colonialism".
[314] Lihamba, Moyo, et. al. *Women Writing Africa - The Eastern Region*. pp. 21-37.
Etienne, and Leacock. "Women and Colonization - Anthropological Perspectives". pp. 1-25.

often damaged by colonialists or missing[315]. The majority of African historiography has failed to acknowledge the contributions of women, ascribing them out of history. Furthermore, some scholars consider the term *pre-colonial* inaccurate as it would subtend the era before European colonisation as one long era without distinguishing the different historical phases and developments that occurred[316]. However, since this thesis considers the advent of colonialism as a turning point in African history, the term is used to refer to the times when African society was not yet contaminated by European colonialism.

The historical status and power of African women in the long period before the arrival of Europeans on the continent is particularly contested. In general thinking, all pre-colonial African societies are described as patriarchal and characterised by the subordination of women. Since the end of the XX century, however, scholars have begun to challenge these assumptions and question how Africans have been portrayed through the Western lens. It has been shown that African women performed various important functions as teachers, farmers, entrepreneurs, traders and craftswomen, and were also held in high esteem as mothers and elders[317]. Some women also attained prominent positions as rulers or founders of kingdoms, warriors and queens. Niara Sudarkasa, a distinguished scholar, Africanist and anthropologist, in her work *The status of women in indigenous African societies*[318], has stated that:

> «In this part of the world [Sub-Saharan Africa] more than any other, in precolonial times women were conspicuous in "high places." They were queen mothers; queen-sisters; princesses, chiefs, and holders of other offices in towns and villages; occasional warriors; and, in one well known case, that of the Lovedu, the supreme monarch [the Rain Queens]. Furthermore, it was almost invariably the case that African women were conspicuous in the economic life of their societies, being involved in farming, trade, or craft production»[319].

Sudarkasa research has documented stories of female characters who possessed political and military power as well as supernatural abilities, such as the Mwari and Mbuya Nehanda of Zimbabwe, Queen Idia of Benin, Kandake, the Queen of Kush, and the Dahomey Amazons, an all-female military regiment[320]. In pre-colonial African societies, there were various models of governance structures

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[315] Agbaje. "Colonialism and Gender in Africa – A critical history" In *The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies*. pp. 1275–94.

[316] *Ibid.*

[317] Agbaje. "Colonialism and Gender in Africa – A critical history" In *The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies*. pp. 1275–94.

[318] Sudarkasa, Niara. "The status of women in indigenous African societies". *Feminist Studies 12*, no. 1, (1986): 91–103. Available at: https://doi.org/10.2307/3177985. pp. 91–103

[319] Adesina, Oluwakemi Abiodun. "Women and Colonialism Across Africa." In *The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies*, by Toyin Falola and Olajumoke Yacob-Haliso. 1203–1218. Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature Switzerland AG. 2021 Available at: https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-3-030-28099-4_170 p. 1204

[320] *Ibid.*

which included women. In some cases, women even ruled the reign alone, such as the regents of Madagascar, Nigeria, Angola, and Ethiopia. The latter in particular is a country with a long history of women in positions of power[321]. The warrior Queen Makeda, also known as the Queen of Sheba, ruled Ethiopia for 50 years around 1000 BC and is one of the oldest examples of a ruling woman in Africa. Ethiopia also resisted colonial invasion thanks to a woman, Empress Taytu Betul – called *Zehetiopia berehan*, i.e. *the Light of Ethiopia* – whose army defeated the Italian colonisers in the famous Battle of Adwa in 1896[322]. She played a crucial political and military role in the battle which granted Ethiopia independence. Further, this is considered the greatest victory by an African army against colonialists[323]. The Empress belonged to one of the most aristocratic Abyssinian families, boasting a descent from the Queen of Sheba. Her pride and independence from her husband aroused great astonishment in Italy and Europe. The West was not used to a woman who was not submissive to her spouse, and this provoked ironic and derogatory comments. The stereotype of male chauvinist societies led to a warrior queen being seen as a fierce virago and the husband, who was man passive towards his wife. The empress is still considered a symbol of women's emancipation and the anti-colonial struggle[324]. Another example is Queen Amina Sarauniya, also known as the Warrior Queen, who ruled the city of Zaria in Nigeria for thirty-four years between 1533 and 1610 CE[325]. During her reign, she increased the lands of the Hausa people to their greatest extent ever. To this day, Queen Amina is revered as a mythical figure in her native Hausaland and abroad[326]. Queen Edwesohemaa Nana Yaa Asantewaa of Ghana (1840-1920) and Queen Nzinga Mbandi of Ndongo and Matamba (1623-1663), now Angola, both known for their anti-colonialist efforts, were also notable figures. Queen Nzinga played a crucial role in the history of her country in the 17th century and was an exceptional model of female authority as well as an outstanding diplomat and mediator[327]. She commanded armies, for which she also recruited many women, and by 1657 had developed formidable tactics in the fight against the Portuguese. Yaa Asentewaa, the Queen Mother of the Ashanti Empire, was a leader of the colonial resistance against the British in the early XX century

[321] Tripp, Aili Marie. "Women and Politics in Africa." *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of African History*, July 27, 2017. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.192.

[322] *Ibid.*

[323] Saidi, Christine. "A History of African Women from 800 CE to 1900." In *The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies*, by Toyin Falola and Olajumoke Yacob-Haliso, 1045–57. Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature Switzerland AG, 2021. Available at: https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-3-030-28099-4_167 pp. 1045–57

[324] Tripp. "Women and Politics in Africa."
Parenti, Gabriele. "L'imperatrice Taitù, Da Despota Crudele a Simbolo dell'emancipazione Delle Donne". *StampToscana*, October 27, 2018. Accessed December 14, 2021. Available at: https://www.stamptoscana.it/limperatrice-taitu-da-despota-crudele-a-simbolo-dellemancipazione-delle-donne/.

[325] African Feminist Forum. "Queen Amina of Zaria – African Feminist Ancestors". *African Feminist Forum*, March 14, 2016. Accessed December 18, 2021. Available at: http://www.africanfeministforum.com/queen-amina-of-zaria-nigeria/.
Tripp. "Women and Politics in Africa.".

[326] *Ibid.*

[327] UNESCO. *Njinga Mbandi Biography*. UNESCO Women in African History, 2019. Accessed December 14, 2021. Available at: https://en.unesco.org/womeninafrica/njinga-mbandi/biography.

and led the last rebellion before the Ashanti Empire fell under the protectorate of the British Crown[328]. Despite the defeat, Asantewaa has gone down in history as the woman who fought for her country's freedom and is revered as Ghana's heroine. In her war speech, she showed great courage by affirming:

«I must say this, if you, the men of Ashanti, will not go forward, then we will. We, the women, will. I shall call upon my fellow women. We will fight! We will fight till the last of us falls in the battlefields».
– Yaa Asantewaa, 1900[329]

The list of these powerful women could be continued, with names like Seh-Dong-Hong-Beh of Benin (XIX century), the leader of the Dahomey Amazons, who led an army of more than 6000 women in 1851, and the queens of Madagascar: Queen Rangita and Queen Rafohy from the XVI century, Queen Rasoherina and Queen Ranavalona II from the XIX century[330].

In pre-colonial Africa, there were other forms of power organisation in which women played an active role. Among the Banyarwanda (Rwanda), Bamileke (Cameroon), Lunda (Congo), Chamba (Nigeria), and Asante (Ghana) peoples, as well as in Swaziland, governance structures followed gender complementarity, i.e. the king ruled together with a female leader, usually his mother or sister[331]. The Buganda, Kitara and Ankole peoples instead had tripartite forms of power where the king, his mother and his sister shared authority. This is just a small sample of the many African women who held high positions of power in their kingdoms and fought for their people before colonisation. Much research has shown that pre-colonial African societies had a high degree of complementarity between the two genders, with women and men having similar roles in several areas. According to Sudarkasa, the concept of "neutral complementarity" better describes the balance of relations between the gender, which are in fact not conceived in terms of superiority and subordination[332].

In her work *Women's Authority and Society in Early East-Central Africa*, Christine Saidi, a researcher on the role of gender in early African history, uses a multidisciplinary approach that integrates historical linguistics, anthropology, and archaeology to examine gender dynamics in ancient Africa[333]. She points out that the preconceptions that see women in a subordinate position should be challenged in order to understand the real gender dynamics and highlight the importance of the role of women in African communities. She contends that the so-called modern *patriarchal*

[328] African Feminist Forum. "Yaa Asentewaa." *African Feminist Forum*, March 14, 2016. Accessed December 18, 2021. Available at: http://www.africanfeministforum.com/yaa-asentewaa-ghana/.
[329] Heather Agyepong. "Heather Agyepong". Accessed February 7, 2022. Available at: http://www.heatheragyepong.com/yaa.
[330] Tripp. "Women and Politics in Africa.".
[331] *Ibid.*
[332] Sudarkasa. "The status of women in indigenous African societies". pp. 91–103.
[333] Saidi, Christine. *Women's Authority and Society in Early East-Central Africa*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2010. pp. 1-5

myth has distorted female agency and obscured the power of matriarchy in Africa[334]. Saidi contends that women in East and Central Africa held important positions in the political, economic, and technological spheres before colonisation. Furthermore, she demonstrates the relevance of women, especially mothers, in the religious sphere, citing the various female initiation ceremonies and the presence of female goddesses such as Lesa, *the Mother of Life*, as examples[335]. The prominent position of mothers and their agency is also evidenced by the presence of matrilineal inheritance and succession, with evidence that matrilineality was the predominant form in the early history of the African people. In another of her works, *Women in Pre-Colonial Africa*, she has argued that most ancient African societies were in fact heterarchical systems with different centres of power in which the sexes were considered equal[336]. Although men and women held different positions and performed different roles in society, women were not considered subordinate because of their biological sex. Rather, their status was determined by their age, abilities, and family. In addition, women enjoyed a high level of respect as they were responsible for procreation and thus creating a new labour force. In the article, Saidi took the Bantu-speaking group as case study [337]. Bantu society was matrilineal, placing grandmothers at the centre of family units and advocating gender equality. An analysis of some 500 Bantu languages found that they did not contain gendered terms for leadership positions, unlike, for example, English terms for female and male leaders, such as king and queen. More than 5,000 years ago, some members of this ethnic group native to West Africa also settled in Central and East Africa. It is noteworthy that the majority of matrilineal societies that still exist in Africa today belong to the Bantu ethnic group, which currently numbers for four hundred million people living among Central Africa, Southeast Africa, and Southern Africa. They form what Saidi refers to as the *Bantu Matrilineal Belt* (BMB), an area that stretches from Angola through the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia to Tanzania and Mozambique[338]. Saidi has mentioned other examples of matrilineal societies, pointing to the ancient empires of Egypt, Nubia, Axum, and the West African Sahel, as well as semi-nomadic communities such as the Somalis and the Berbers[339].

The heterarchical systems of these civilizations were challenged by the development of more centralized societies, when several villages and communities began to shift their economies to male-dominated industries such as iron or animal husbandry[340]. Moreover, the growing importance of military power led to an upgrading of the position of warriors *vis-à-vis* peasants. The result of these

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[334] *Ibid.* pp. 8-19
[335] *Ibid.* pp. 162-166
[336] Saidi, Christine. "Women in Precolonial Africa." *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of African History*. October 27, 2020. Accessed December 14. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.259.
[337] *Ibid.*
[338] *Ibid.*
[339] *Ibid.*
[340] *Ibid.*

changes was often a gradual loss of women's political or economic power. On the other hand, elite women managed to preserve and even strengthen their religious power. An example of this is the Buganda Kingdom (Uganda), where, after the centralization process, women from elite lineages who had lost some of their economic power began to exploit their position as spirit leaders of Kubandwa – a spirit possession belonging to the Baganda religion for which women act as mediums – to assert their influence over men[341]. Furthermore, until the arrival of Europeans, the queen mother and royal sisters of the Baganda monarch were incredibly influential in the royal palace. Similar patterns existed among the communities of the Eastern Luba, a people from Central Africa, where older women were the only ones able to communicate with the gods and ancestors according to the Luban religion[342].

The Nigerian anthropologist Ifi Amadiume was one of the first to contradict the common and stereotypical notion of her continent. In her 1987 masterpiece, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society,* she has conducted a study of the Nnobi community in eastern Nigeria, from which she hails, and examined the role of gender in Igbo societies. She has described these societies as cultures with matrilineal family units, where power and wealth were not a male prerogative, but were shared equally between women and men. Women had a political voice, could hold authority roles, and influenced social norms. This was true until the arrival of the British, who, Amadiume has argued, were responsible for the oppression of women and the progression of gender inequality.

Another scholar who has worked on this issue is Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí. In the late 1990s, Oyěwùmí has debunked Western feminism and contested the assumption that African cultures were all patriarchal[343]. She has claimed that gender was a social construct imported by Westerners to their continent during colonization, and whose system was responsible for the ruin of motherhood, an essential pillar of African social institutions.

Although the arguments of Saidi, Amadiume, and Oyěwùmí may be controversial to some experts, these scholars undoubtedly offer a different perspective by challenging the stereotype of pre-colonial Africa as an absolutely patriarchal system, providing real evidences. Their intellectual works have shaken the global debate on the sociological understanding of gender issues in Africa. Moreover, all these studies have shown how colonial value and belief systems and the imposition of a Western vision of gender roles – within a religious and patriarchal framework – have influenced and altered the meaning of womanhood in Africa. In summary, African women have wielded power and influence in their societies since the dawn of time. There was a hierarchical order among African

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[341] Saidi. "A History of African Women from 800 CE to 1900." In *The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies*. pp. 1045–57.
[342] *Ibid.*
[343] Hoover, Caitlin. Reflections on 'Male Daughters, Female Husbands'. *The Google Doc Publisher.* February 23, 2016. Available at: https://gdoc.pub/doc/1yLgDHwcf6MiYU4dnWQYZju0o0_f8Hf47gLmmbv-UulE#:~:text=%E2%80%9CMale%20Daughters%2C%20Female%20Husbands%3A,across%20genders%20in%20Igbo%20society.

women, but it mainly depended on the stage of life and on the results achieved, not on their gender. For example, older women had more power over younger women, women from the elite had a higher position than ordinary women, and a woman's prestige increased when she became a mother. Yet, women were not seen as less valuable or portrayed as *the weaker sex* compared to men. On the contrary, women were respected for both their productive and reproductive abilities. At various times in African history, women have performed significant roles in their civilizations, and they have frequently exploited key historical episodes to enhance or consolidate their status within their communities.

2.2.2 African women under colonialism

Acknowledging the different experiences African women have had depending on the geographical area, colonial power and method of colonization, history and pre-existing culture, the following lines provide a general overview of what it meant to be an African woman during the colonial period, and how they had been affected by European rule[344].

During the colonial era, society was restructured, individuals were relocated, and new socio-cultural interactions arose inside and among African groups[345]. With the arrival of Europeans, African womanhood was fundamentally transformed, as were indigenous institutions, worldviews, and ways of life in Africa as a whole. A number of studies have demonstrated that colonial control lowered African women's social prestige and leadership roles, cut their incomes, and multiplied their workloads[346]. Women's lives were affected by colonialism in a variety of ways, rarely to their benefit. According to the historian Walter Rodney, during colonialism, African women lost their social, religious, and political advantages and guarantees[347] and, as claimed by the historian John Iliffe, «the colonial world was a man's world and women probably took less part in political leadership than before, while several matrilineal societies moved towards patriliny»[348]. The encounter between African women and settlers had several, and even conflicting, repercussion on the status of the former both in their traditional societies and in the new colonial settlement. Although, as demonstrated by the previous sections, women were not passive members of their communities, they were forced to

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[344] Adesina. "Women and Colonialism Across Africa." In *The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies*. pp. 1203–1218.

[345] Lihamba, Moyo, et. al. "Women Writing Africa - The Eastern Region". pp. 21-37.

[346] Chuku, Gloria. "Chapter 7: Colonialism and African Womanhood." In *The Palgrave Handbook of African Colonial and Postcolonial History*, by Toyin Falola and Olajumoke Yacob-Haliso. New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2018. Available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-77030-7_3-1. pp. 171–211

[347] Lihamba, Moyo, et. al. "Women Writing Africa - The Eastern Region". pp. 21-37.

[348] Iliffe, John. "Chapter 9: The origins of rural capitalism" in *A Modern History of Tanganyika*. 273-317 Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511584114. p. 300

constantly adapt to changing circumstances, and to struggle against physical and mental slavery perpetrated by colonizers[349].

Numerous women's rights activists attributed the roots of African gender inequality to colonialism and its legacy[350]. Several academics claimed that the advent of colonialism oppressed African women, with the establishment of *Europeanized ideas of gender imbalance*, as defined by Tara Jabbaar-Gyambrah, a global gender studies scholar[351]. Gendering originated with the division of jobs in Africa, since colonialists introduced occupational stereotypes in which women were generally categorized as housewives, nurses, and educators. European colonialism is blamed responsible for having altered gender relations in the continent and for having relegated women to the side-lines of society[352]. Settlers are widely accused of having fostered hierarchical relationships between women and men, that replaced those previously existing in African communities based on complementarity and cooperation[353], and of having disrupted many African traditions and practices, especially those according to which women hold substantial political power. According to Nigerian researcher Nathaniel Akinremi Fadipe, the imposition of alien gender paradigms and power systems has caused the present decline in women's political influence[354]. Women's and men's traditional positions in Africa varied from their counterparts in Europe.

Africa women were seen by the European settlers as inferior, even to their male counterparts, as equal to sex objects or irrational animals[355] whose potential was calculated on the basis of their reproductive and sexual worth[356]. The words of South African writer Stuart Cloete are indicative of this view of women: «They [the women] were in a sense without souls. They were bold and without innocence. They said with their dark eyes; we are women. You are a man. We know what you want»[357]. White settlers heavily sexualized African women's bodies, and as a result, strategies were developed to control Africans' sexual norms and cultural practices, such as restrictions on initiation rites, circumcision, polygamy, and sexual health[358]. Anthropologist Suzanne Spencer-Wood uses the terms *patriarchal intimate colonialism* and *patriarchal sexual colonialism* to indicate the ways in which Western patriarchy exploited women through institutionalised sexual and personal

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[349] Adesina. "Women and Colonialism Across Africa." In *The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies*. pp. 1203–1218.

[350] Wong, Dwayne. "The Colonial Roots of Africa's Gender Inequality". *HuffPost*. March 18, 2016. Accessed December 19, 2021. Available at: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-colonial-roots-of-afr_b_9486702.

[351] Agbaje. "Colonialism and Gender in Africa – A critical history" In *The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies*. pp. 1275-94.

[352] *Ibid.*

[353] *Ibid.*

[354] *Ibid*.

[355]*Ibid*.

[356] Etienne, and Leacock. "Women and Colonization - Anthropological Perspectives". pp. 1-25.

[357] Agbaje. "Colonialism and Gender in Africa – A critical history" In *The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies*. pp. 1275-94.

[358] *Ibid.*

relationships based on race and class inferiority[359]. According to the Tanzanian academic Amandina Lihamba «colonialism intensified the marginalization of women by extending some of the worst elements of African patriarchy».[360] Thus, the establishment of the European colonial rule resulted in a reinforcement of the patriarchal authority, fixing the position of African women as subordinate members of the society[361].

The British colonial authorities believed that non-Western women were enslaved and subservient animals to be sold or traded, and that only through *civilization* or *development* could they be elevated to the status of Western women[362]. The dichotomy between «subordinate domestic women versus dominant public men» has been defined by Spencer-Wood as *patriarchal domestic colonialism*[363]. These beliefs were slowly psychologically internalized by African women[364] and still persist today, in Africa as well as in many other parts of the world.

The complementarity of roles between the sexes was therefore abandoned, and women's roles in society disregarded. According to the patriarchal framework of Victorian society, women represented the weaker sex in need of a man to look after them[365]. They were considered as a man's property and the loss of control over their economic activities brought women to be financially fragile and dependent from their husbands. Spencer-Wood uses the term *colonization of women* in her postcolonial feminist theory to refer to the economic exploitation of women's unpaid household and subsistence work, as well as underpaid public labour[366]. According to some researchers, women's loss of economic independence was a contributing factor in the dissolution of gender-balanced relationships[367].

The erosion had been facilitated by the advent of Western-based education and Christian missions and schools, responsible of having aggravated the patterns of silences faced by women. The Christian missionaries arrived in Africa in the middle of the XIX century bringing with them beliefs, attitudes, and practises that contributed to the subordination of women in society and in the church. The British missionaries promoted the portray of an ideal woman based on the holy scriptures such

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[359] Spencer-Wood, Suzanne M. "Feminist Theorizing of Patriarchal Colonialism, Power Dynamics, and Social Agency Materialized in Colonial Institutions". *International Journal of Historical Archaeology 20*, no. 3 (July 27, 2016): 477-491. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/s10761-016-0356-3. pp. 477–91

[360] Lihamba, Moyo, et. al. *Women Writing Africa - The Eastern Region*. p. 36.

[361] Collins, and Burns. "Chapter 20 - European Colonial Rule in Africa." In *A History of Sub-Saharan Africa*. pp. 295–307.

[362] *Ibid.*

[363] Spencer-Wood. "Feminist Theorizing of Patriarchal Colonialism, Power Dynamics, and Social Agency Materialized in Colonial Institutions". p. 480

[364] *Ibid.*

[365] Agbaje. "Colonialism and Gender in Africa – A critical history" In *The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies*. pp. 1275-94.

[366] Spencer-Wood. "Feminist Theorizing of Patriarchal Colonialism, Power Dynamics, and Social Agency Materialized in Colonial Institutions." pp. 477–91

[367] Etienne, Mona, and Leacock Eleanor. *Women and Colonization - Anthropological Perspectives*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1980. pp. 1-25

as submissive to men, but with an evil identity and prone to witchcraft[368]. Thus, Catholicism widened disparities among the sexes and weakened the institutions that had previously protected the rights of women in society, politics, and economy[369].

Education in colonial Africa was mostly administered by Christian missions, in a profoundly gender discriminatory way. The Christian patriarchal traditions of mission education were backed by colonial law, therefore leading to an even greater educational gap between males and girls. In all the colonies, the schooling of young men and boys was privileged, leaving girls at a disadvantage in access to formal education, in the breadth of the curriculum, and in job prospects[370]. Future women were tamed in order to match with Western values, ideologies and necessities. Thus, girls had to assimilate the principles of the colonial society in order to continuing perpetrate the western model of civilizing mission and become devout catholic brides and mothers. Girls were educated to become good wives, perfect homemakers, and ideal mothers, being principally trained in childcare, cooking, sewing, domestic skill and household management[371]. They were exhorted to become «diligent mistresses of efficient households, keep their homes and children clean, feed their families in nutritious [ways], sew and do handicrafts»[372]. However, to a lesser extent, they were also taught to read, write, compute, sing and draw, along with lessons of religion, language, music, geography and agriculture. Consequently, they might attend courses related to homemaking, teacher training, or nursing and midwife. Instead, boys and young men education were focused on knowledge of literary and arithmetic, and on acquire leadership skills, in preparation for careers in the public administration, low-level bureaucratic works, and private businesses[373]. They were also trained on more practical topics, such as artisans works, carpentry, animal husbandry and agriculture. As a result of this discriminatory school system, once grown up, women found themselves even more disadvantaged in the labour market, in comparison to men. Most women were therefore excluded from the paid employment and relegated to *feminine occupations[374]*. There was the widespread assumption among African parents that the education of their daughters offered little advantage to their households, since the colonial system denied them access to jobs and employment possibilities. Thus, they preferred to

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[368] Agbaje. "Colonialism and Gender in Africa – A critical history" In *The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies*. pp. 1275-94.

[369] Etienne, and Leacock. *Women and Colonization - Anthropological Perspectives*. pp. 1-25

[370] Chuku. "Chapter 7: Colonialism and African Womanhood." In *The Palgrave Handbook of African Colonial and Postcolonial History*. pp. 171–211

[371] *Ibid.*

[372] Byfiel, Judith A. "Chapter 6 - African Women in Colonial Economies." In *The Palgrave Handbook of African Colonial and Postcolonial History*, by Martin S. Shanguhyia and Toyin Falola. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. Available at: https://link.springer.com/book/10.1057/978-1-137-59426-6. p. 156

[373] Chuku. "Chapter 7: Colonialism and African Womanhood." In *The Palgrave Handbook of African Colonial and Postcolonial History*. pp. 171–211

[374] *Ibid*.

send boys to school, rather than girls. Some people even saw Western education as a «a pollutant [that would] affect a wide range of [African] cultural practices and beliefs»[375].

The changes that most deteriorated the role of women involved the new economic system and regulations developed by the European settlers. Traditionally, women were responsible for the cultivation of the main food crops and thus formed the main force of the rural economy, thanks also to their know-how in this field. However, when the settlers decided to introduce new types of crops and Western agricultural practices, they turned to African men, and not women[376]. Moreover, African men were the ones to participate in the wage economy, in the colonial administration, in trading companies, in the mines (copper belt, diamonds, gold), for the construction for the infrastructures (mainly roads and railways)[377], etc. In this manner, colonial rulers raised «an inflation of male prestige in African societies»[378], to the detriment of African women. Even the tax system proved to be an instrument for confirming male supremacy: according to the tax infrastructure idealized by the settlers, it was the men who had to pay taxes, as they were assumed to be the heads of households and had full control over resources[379].

The introduction of cash crop cultivation by the colonialists had repercussion on African marriages. The colonists' farms, mines, and cities required men to leave their communities to find work in far-flung areas. As African men's labour was the sole commodity European authorities were interested in exploiting in the cities, wives were not welcomed in these areas. This has resulted not only in the emergence of marital disputes, but also in a severe limitation of women's freedom of movement[380]. Colonial control of migrant workforce in Africa is best shown by Northern Rhodesia (current Zambia), where unmarried women and children were forbidden to move to cities, and those who resisted such rules were sent back to their rural villages by urban authorities[381]. In Southern Rhodesia, the settlers sought to restrict the movement of women and their influx into the towns by adopting public health policies. Under the *Public Health Act of 1925*, for example, women were required to undergo a medical examination if they sought or were already working[382].

Generally, the colonial mindset valued men's work highly because they were retained more capable and incline to participate in the economic system. On the contrary, as a result of women's

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[375] *Ibid.* p. 188

[376] Collins, Robert O., and James M. Burns. "Chapter 21 – The Colonial Legacy". In *A History of Sub-Saharan Africa*, 2nd ed., 308-327. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Available at: https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/a-history-of-sub-saharan-africa/88AE8322D9FC853C4747804943115E80. pp. 308-327

[377] Obviously not all men were paid, some were brought in under coercive labor regimes.

[378] Collins, and Burns. "Chapter 21 – The Colonial Legacy." In *A History of Sub-Saharan Africa*. p. 318

[379] Chuku. "Chapter 7: Colonialism and African Womanhood." In *The Palgrave Handbook of African Colonial and Postcolonial History*. pp. 171–211.

[380] Lihamba, Moyo, et. al. "Women Writing Africa - The Eastern Region". pp. 21-37.

[381] Agbaje. "Colonialism and Gender in Africa – A critical history" In *The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies*. pp. 1275–94

[382] Chuku. "Chapter 7: Colonialism and African Womanhood." In *The Palgrave Handbook of African Colonial and Postcolonial History*. pp. 171–211.

labour being considered less valuable, women's standing also declined[383]. Women working in agriculture were paid less than the men doing the same labor[384]. According to Spencer-Wood the essence of what she has called *patriarchal economic colonialism* stands in the sexist power dynamics which favoured men's jobs with greater earnings, while women's occupations were devalued with little or no wages[385].

Several women's studies have shown how the introduction of cash crops led to the isolation of women from the global market, and so to the consequent loss of economic autonomy[386]. Indeed, women were disproportionately affected by the advent of cash crops, which commercialised agriculture and disrupted the traditional distribution of work. Crops grown for profit put stress on available resources and redirected business activity away from subsistence agriculture and handicrafts[387]. The demands of the colonisers and technological innovations were directed at men, thus favouring men's access to income and women's economic dependence, which contributed to the establishment of a patriarchal family system[388]. Indeed, while men were trained to cultivate cocoa and coffee to export, women kept cultivating food solely for familiar use. For instance, at its outset the cotton production in Uganda was in the hands of women farmers. However, in 1923, a British administrator of agricultural sector determined that cotton farming could not be entrusted to women. As a result, the implementation of innovative cotton-growing methods was reserved to males, resulting in the exodus of women from the sector. Another detrimental regulation concerned the introduction of private land ownership, as happened in Kenya in the 1950s when the *Swynnerton Act* replaced the traditional African land tenure system that granted everyone access to land, reserving it only to the male head of household[389].

At the political and institutional levels, colonialism have weakened both the decision-making power and authority of African women, and also depoliticized their influential roles within the household[390]. The various pre-colonial means of power used by elite women were «neglected under the masculine terrain of colonial statecraft»[391]. Colonial institutions and mechanisms were unresponsive to women's voices and their pre-colonial sources of influence and power[392]. In both the

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[383] Lihamba, Moyo, et. al. "Women Writing Africa - The Eastern Region". pp. 21-37.
[384] Chuku. "Chapter 7: Colonialism and African Womanhood." In *The Palgrave Handbook of African Colonial and Postcolonial History*. pp. 171–211.
[385] Spencer-Wood. "Feminist Theorizing of Patriarchal Colonialism, Power Dynamics, and Social Agency Materialized in Colonial Institutions". pp. 477-91
[386] Agbaje. "Colonialism and Gender in Africa – A critical history" In *The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies*. 1275–94.
[387] Etienne, and Leacock. "Women and Colonization - Anthropological Perspectives". pp. 1-25
[388] *Ibid.*
[389] Agbaje. "Colonialism and Gender in Africa – A critical history" In *The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies*. pp. 1275–94.
[390] Chuku. "Chapter 7: Colonialism and African Womanhood." In *The Palgrave Handbook of African Colonial and Postcolonial History*. pp. 171–211
[391] *Ibid.*
[392] *Ibid.*

French and British colonies, the only opportunities to retain any kind of power were reserved for African men, who were sometimes employed as commanders, overseers, tax collectors, interpreters, and in other bureaucratic and administrative roles[393].

In conclusion, women could be considered victims of colonialism, but not passive ones. They were eager to preserve personal advantages by adopting activities that were already in place or new ones. Similarly, to pre-colonial civilizations and notwithstanding the adverse effects of colonialism, women were not quiescent in facing colonialists, as will be seen later during the anti-colonial struggles for independence.

«The history of colonialism and African womanhood is characterized by protracted negotiations, reformulations, and contestations of strategies by African women as they dealt with diverse constituencies and conditions that mediated their lives, their households, and their communities. It was a history of African women's versatility, assertiveness, resourcefulness, survival and resilience, resistance and cooperation, collectivism and individualism, hopefulness and disappointments, and of successes and failures»[394].

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[393] *Ibid.*
[394] *Ibid.* 197

CHAPTER THREE – HISTORY OF UGANDAN WOMEN: THE LONG WAY TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY, FROM THE PRE-COLONIAL TIMES UNTIL NOWADAYS.
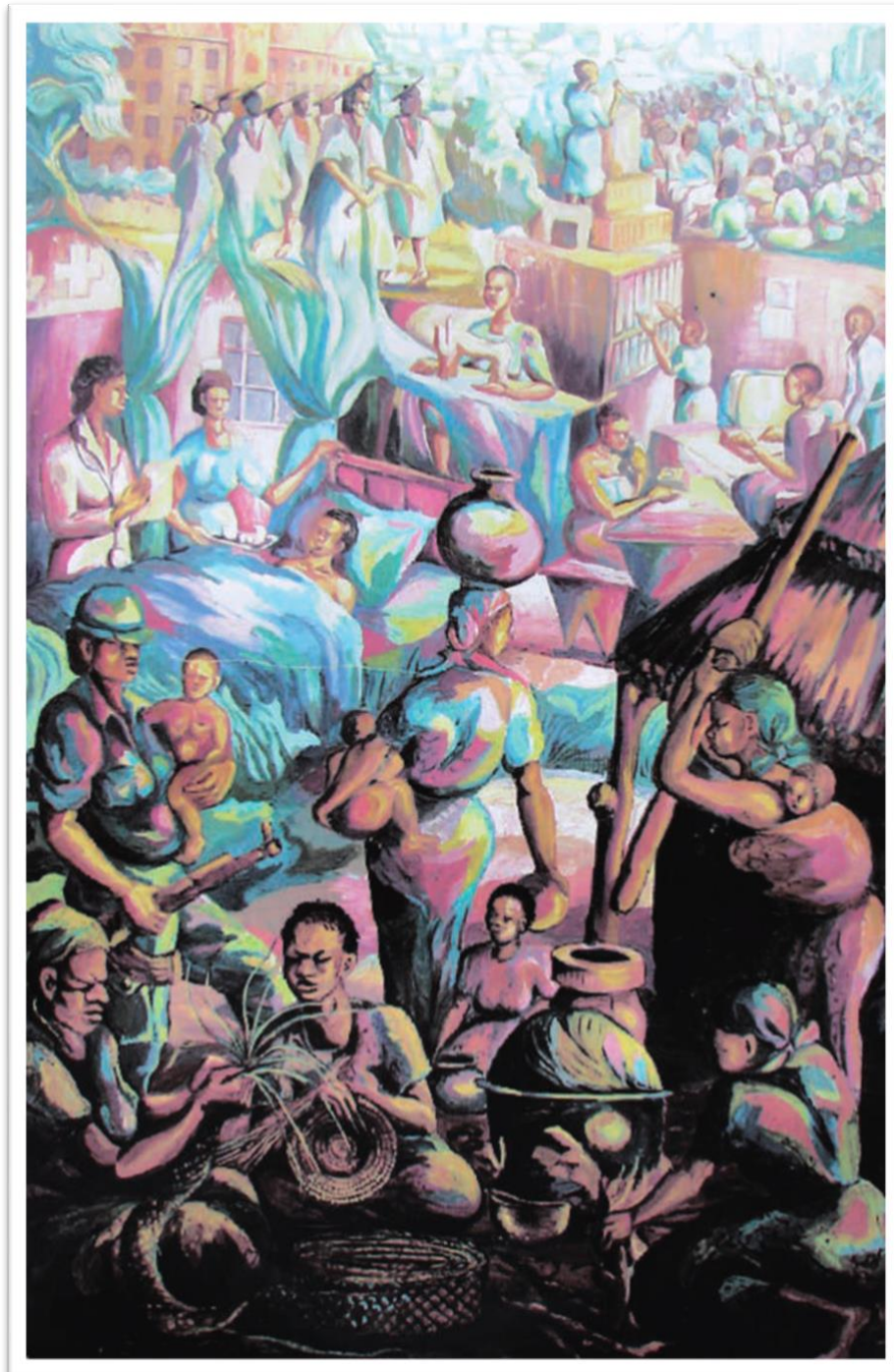
Figure 3.1 – Alex Baine, Women's Emancipation in Uganda (1989)

Oil on canvas, 164 cm x 102 cm Institute of Heritage Conservation and Restoration (IHCR) collection, Kampala[395]

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[395] Tumusiime, Amanda. "Alex Baine's *Women's Emancipation in Uganda*: A Visual Archive of the History of a New Generation of Women in Uganda". *African Arts 50*, no. 2 (Summer 2017): 58-67. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1162/AFAR_a_00344. p. 59

«I am inspired by our feminist ancestors' actions as leaders and wise women who facilitated our current strengths and continue their long tradition of resistance to patriarchy».[396]

Introduction and overview of Uganda

The third chapter introduces the case study on Uganda. It analyses the gender dynamics and status of women in the country within a historical, political and sociological framework, from the pre-colonial period to the Museveni government of the late 1980s. Based on the elements examined in the previous chapters – the women's rights legal framework, women's movements, gender roles in pre-colonial African societies and the impact of colonisation – this part examines the defining moments in the history of Ugandan women, as well as the factors of oppression and drivers of empowerment that have led to the current situation.

The first paragraph focuses on the pre-colonial situation in Uganda and therefore investigates gender roles in the Kingdom of Buganda. Special emphasis is placed on the role of the royal women of Buganda. The subsequent section gives an outline of the establishment of the British protectorate in Uganda and the consequences of this foreign rule for girls and women on a social, economic and political level. The second paragraph is dedicated to the role of women in the period of transition to independence. Afterwards, it delves into one of the most difficult eras for Ugandan women, in which their rights were severely eroded: the dictatorial regimes of Milton Obote and Idi Amin Dada. The third, and final, paragraph deals with the partial liberation of women under the government of the *National Resistance Movement* (NRM) led by Yoweri Museveni. During this period, women's movements supported by the NRM party achieved remarkable success in terms of empowerment and political representation.

Before we get into the analysis of pre-colonial Uganda, it is important to provide an introductory overview with some basic information and data about the country. Uganda is a landlocked country in eastern Sub-Saharan Africa, with a population of 45.7 million (July 2021 estimates), of which 23.19 million are women[397]. A quarter of the total population lives in urban areas and the capital Kampala is the most densely populated city[398]. Sixty-five different ethnic groups reside in the country, with the Baganda (16.5 percent), Banyankole (9.6 percent) and Basoga (8.8 percent) making up the largest portion, according to 2014 data[399]. The nation was named Uganda by

[396] Asiimire, Donath, and Twinamatsiko, Medard. "Pan African Feminist Perspectives Promoting Matriarchy. Women's Pre-Colonial Linguistic Power Perspectives, Power Loss and the Contemporary State of Affairs in Ankole Sub-Region". *Open Access Library Journal* 8, (2021): 1-19. Available at: 10.4236/oalib.1107870. p. 2

[397] O'Neill, Aaron. "Uganda - Total Population by Gender 2020." Statista. Accessed February 1, 2022. Available at: https://www.statista.com/statistics/967968/total-population-of-uganda-by-gender/.

[398] United States Central Intelligence Agency. "Uganda" in *The World Factbook*. Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 2022. Accessed January 8, 2022. Available at: https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/uganda/.

[399] *Ibid.*

colonial rulers when it became a British protectorate in 1894[400]. The name corresponds to the Swahili translation of Buganda, whose empire had been unified in the XIII century and became one of the largest in the region, as well as the centre of the country. English and Swahili are the official languages, while the other languages spoken are Luganda, Niger-Congo and Nilo-Saharan, and Arabic[401]. In terms of religion, almost 85 percent of Ugandans are Christians, with the remaining 15 percent divided between a majority of Muslims (14 percent) and other or no religion[402]. Regarding the form of government, Uganda has been a semi-presidential republic since its independence in 1962[403]. At that time, a federal constitution was enacted, with Mutesa II of Buganda, the King of Buganda, as President, and Milton Obote as Prime Minister[404]. After decolonisation, the country's economy was one of the most developed in Sub-Saharan Africa[405]. In the years that followed, however, the economic situation was disrupted by the political upheavals and internal turmoil of the dictatorial military regimes of Milton Obote (1966-1971; 1980-1985) and Idi Amin Dada (1971-1979), as well as by the 20-year insurgency of Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army in the northern region of the country, which lasted until 2008[406]. The current head of state and government is President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, who has been in power with the National Resistance Movement party since 1986[407]. In this context, the non-governmental organisation *Freedom House* has classified Uganda as a *not free country*, with a global freedom score of 34 on a scale of one hundred for the year 2020[408]. Although thanks to President Museveni relative peace and economic prosperity prevail in the country, Uganda is currently still considered as a low-income developing country by UN and the World Bank[409]. The East African nation suffers from a number of difficulties that threaten its future stability. These include exponential population growth, energy and infrastructure bottlenecks, corruption and crime, weak democratic institutions and human rights deficits[410].

Given the country's complex past, the role of women in Uganda's social, political and economic history deserves an in-depth study in order to understand the current state of gender equality, the progress made so far and the turning points since pre-colonial era.

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[400] *Ibid.*
[401] *Ibid.*
[402] *Ibid.*
[403] *Ibid.*
[404] *Ibid.*
[405] *Ibid.*
[406] *Ibid.*
[407] *Ibid.*
[408] Freedom House. "Uganda: Freedom in the World 2021 Country Report". *Freedom House*. Accessed February 6, 2022. Available at: https://freedomhouse.org/country/uganda/freedom-world/2021.
[409] World Bank Open Data. "Uganda | Data". The World Bank. Accessed February 6, 2022. Available at: https://data.worldbank.org/country/UG.
United Nations. *World Economic Situation and Prospects 2021*. New York: United Nations Publications. 2021. Available at: https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/WESP2021_FullReport.pdf.pp. 126-128
United States Central Intelligence Agency, "Uganda"
[410] United States Central Intelligence Agency. "Uganda".

3.1 Women's role: from pre-colonial Uganda to the establishment of the British Protectorate

In African history, the advent of colonialism is considered a turning point which brought about several and profound changes at the cultural, economic and political levels. In order to obtain a comprehensive picture of the impact of the British colonisers on the status of women in Uganda, it is appropriate to start with the pre-colonial period. This allow us to compare the status of women and gender relations before 1984 with the developments occurred during the following 68 years of the British protectorate.

3.1.1 Gender roles in the Buganda Kingdom

The period covered by this study begins about two or three centuries before the arrival of the colonialists, an era defined as pre-colonial. The territory of present-day Uganda consisted of many tribes and kingdoms. The two principal systems of government were the centralised kingdoms, including the Ankole, Toro and Bunyoro in the central southwest, Busoga in the southeast and Buganda in the south-central region near Lake Victoria[411]; and decentralised clans, such as the Acholi in the north, the Langi and the Lugbara[412].

Figure 3.2 – Pre-colonial kingdoms in the territory of the present-day Uganda[413]

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[411] Gascoigne, Bamber. "History of Uganda." History World. From 2001, ongoing. Accessed February 6, 2022. Available at: http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/plaintexthistories.asp?historyid=ad22.

[412] Tamale, Sylvia. "Introduction". In *When Hens Begin to Crow - Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press (Perseus Books Group), 1999. pp. 1-33

[413] Humiston, Molly. "Buganda: A Kingdom Within." *Uganda - A nation burdened by the ghosts of its past*. Accessed February 6, 2022. Available at: http://academics.smcvt.edu/mjda/GLOBAL%20COM-

Before the middle of the 17th century, Buganda was a minor realm[414]. Within less than 200 years, the Buganda Empire has succeeded in establishing itself as the dominant central power[415], doubling its territory[416] and owning the wealthiest lands in the region[417]. When British explorer Henry M. Stanley visited Buganda's capital in 1875, he discovered a well-organised city of 40,000 people surrounding the kabaka's palace[418]. Stanley subsequently wrote books lauding the Buganda's administrative abilities oriented toward modernization[419].

The origins of the Buganda Empire date back to the 15th century, when Prince Kimera arrived there from Bunyoro and became the first kabaka, the king, to rule over a supra-clan political group in the emerging state[420]. As the administrative and economic heart of the region, it has traditionally played a significant role in Ugandan affairs[421][422]. The reign developed in a feudal system led by a royal family. The kabaka nominated local rulers of the peasant population, the *bakopi*, on the basis of the individual's capacity and personal devotion to him, designing a social structure centred on the achievements of men[423]. The economy was based on the flourishing sectors of pottery, ironworking, bark cloth, and leather, as well as agriculture and pastoralism, fishing and hunting[424]. All these activities were mainly carried out by men. Weaving, brewing, water and firewood procurement were activities performed by women who were also involved in agriculture and processing of basic crops. Women were also responsible for the house and the children[425].

The political and economic spheres, at first glance, appeared to be the domain of men, and society as a whole seemed strictly patriarchal[426]. A more accurate observation shows that, even though economic activities were assigned on the basis of gender, this was done in a complementary way, without discrimination[427]. Although the emergence of a division of roles in the economy was already in place before the colonial era, it diverged from the partition which developed as a result of

CULTURE/MEDIA%20MAPPING%20Research%20Project/Uganda_FinalPhase/Uganda_FinalPhase_Exports/an-internal-kingdom.html.

[414] African Studies Center. "East Africa Living Encyclopaedia - Uganda History." University of Pennsylvania. Accessed February 6, 2022. Available at: https://www.africa.upenn.edu/NEH/uhistory.htm.

[415] Meier zu Selhausen, Felix. *Women's empowerment in Uganda: colonial roots and contemporary efforts, 1894-2012*. Doctoral thesis (PhD), Utrecht University, 2015. Available at: http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/59912/1/MeierzuSelhausen_phd_thesis_2015.pdf. pp. 1-24; pp. 34-65

[416] Byrnes, Rita M. *Uganda - A Country Study*. Second. Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992. Available at: https://www.loc.gov/item/92000513/. pp. 3-24

[417] African Studies Center. "East Africa Living Encyclopaedia - Uganda History".

[418] Byrnes. "Uganda - A Country Study". pp. 3-24

[419] *Ibid.*

[420] *Ibid.*

[421] Tripp, Aili Mari. "Chapter 2: A Foot in the Door - Historical Dimensions of the Women's Movement in Uganda." In *Women & Politics in Uganda*. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000. pp. 29–53.

[422] In this pre-colonial context, the term Uganda is used to refer to the current territory of the country, even though the unification under the official name "Uganda" occurs later with the arrival of the British colonizers.

[423] Meier zu Selhausen. *Women's empowerment in Uganda: colonial roots and contemporary efforts, 1894-2012*. pp. 1-24; 34-65

[424] *Ibid.*

[425] *Ibid.*

[426] Tamale. "Introduction" In *When Hens Begin to Crow - Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*. pp. 1-33.

[427] *Ibid.*

the capitalist way of production introduced with colonialism. Women's work was not devalued in the pre-colonial culture of Uganda, nor there was a negative assessment of the activities performed by them[428]. The majority of women were actively involved in productive activities and they were able to engage both formally and informally at the decision-making level. The dynamics of gender relations were not hierarchical but rather complementary[429]. The researches of professor Phares Mukasa Mutibwa even show that before the establishment of the Buganda empire it was possible to define gender relations in economy as interdependent, without one gender dominating the other[430]. Throughout the centuries, this gender interdependency is persisted in some Baganda's rituals, traditions and customs[431][432].

For what concerns marriage, it was a contract between the clans, but it did not constitute a commercial transaction where the good (the woman) was acquired by the groom from the family of the bride as the institution of the bride wealth[433] might suggest. The latter was rather functional to the stability of the marriage and a warranty of the well-being of the wife. Indeed, the wife – in particular the peasants ones[434] – had the freedom to leave an infelicitous relationship and return to her relatives[435]. Moreover, it was usually women, especially the paternal aunts and sisters, who were in charge of stipulating marriage contracts[436]. Mothers undoubtedly played an essential role in the household and family, contributing to social cohesion and the development of communities[437]. A key role in children's growth was played by the paternal aunt, which among all the relatives was the one towards whom the child had to show the greatest respect, the same as the father[438].

According to Ugandan academic Sylvia Tamale, there is a widespread misperception regarding women's active participation in the pre-colonial society[439]. This is mainly because an oversimplified and westernized division of the public and private spheres was applied to the Buganda gender relations, which instead have their own and different socio-cultural meanings. The political and domestic areas were conceptualized as flexible and deeply interconnected among the Baganda (name used to indicate the people of the Buganda Empire)[440]. In contrast to the common thinking,

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[428] *Ibid.*
[429] Tamale. "Introduction" In *When Hens Begin to Crow - Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*. pp. 1-33.
[430] Nannyonga-Tamusuza, Sylvia. "Female-Men, Male-Women, and Others: Constructing and Negotiating Gender among the Baganda of Uganda." *Journal of Eastern African Studies 3*, no. 2 (June 2009): 367–80. https://doi.org/10.1080/17531050902973004. pp.367-380
[431] *Ibid.*
[432] Tamale. "Introduction" In *When Hens Begin to Crow - Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*. p. 24.
[433] It was composed by gifts for the marriage, such as livestock, or some special symbol of wealth.
[434] Schiller, Laurence D. "The Royal Women of Buganda." *The International Journal of African Historical Studies 23*, no. 3 (1990): 455–73. https://doi.org/10.2307/219599. pp. 455–73
[435] Tamale. "Introduction" In *When Hens Begin to Crow - Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*. pp. 1-33.
[436] Schiller "The Royal Women of Buganda". pp. 455–73.
[437] Reid, Richard J. *A History of Modern Uganda*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. p. 149
[438] Schiller "The Royal Women of Buganda". pp. 455–73.
[439] *Ibid.*
[440] *Ibid.*

women in precolonial Uganda were not relegated to the home domain[441]. They had multiple responsibilities and influences across different spheres. Their physical absence from the decision-making fora did not make them apolitical individuals. Women influenced politics through their views and judgements, which were taken into consideration and sometimes expressly requested[442]. Furthermore, the androcentric and men-authored narrative influenced historical texts and contributed to the mainstream idea of women as excluded from their communities' politics[443]. The early missionaries described women in pre-colonial Ganda culture as having a low standing role and excluded from conflict resolution[444]. However, it is fundamental to emphasise that the majority of these missionaries were Western, white, and Christian men, who had little interest in analysing the role of African women[445]. Indeed, a closer investigation soon disproves their perception, showing how the political position was more relevant than gender status[446]. The male-dominated records have failed to recognize the historical contribution of women to the development of most African nations[447]. As French ethnologist Annie M. D. Lebeuf noted, most of our knowledge is constrained by male bias of ethnographers and by the colonial system[448]. Pre-colonial women were depicted as assets by the Eurocentric and sexist views of the first Western missionaries and anthropologists[449]. Thus, their political and economic roles were often overlooked by the mainstream historians, who failed to mention the great roles performed by women in Ugandan history in their narratives. This does not mean that pre-colonial Ugandan society was not patriarchal in orientation, but that the role of women was not as marginal as it is described in the works of Western historians[450].

Professor Sylvia Nannyonga-Tamusuza has historically studied gender roles in the Buganda Kingdom, and shown that while men generally remained in a dominant position and women in a subordinate one, the boundaries of these roles were fluid and did not remain constant, but changed, throughout time[451]. Structural relations among the genders were influenced by several cultural and political factors, so that they cannot be divided according to a basic dichotomy. The flexible and negotiable Baganda conception of gendering is different from the Western notion of man and woman[452]. It is crucial to note, however, that explaining a notion in one culture via the language of

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[441] *Ibid.*
[442] *Ibid.*
[443] Tamale. "Introduction" In *When Hens Begin to Crow - Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*. pp. 1-33.
[444] Schiller "The Royal Women of Buganda" pp. 455–73.
[445] *Ibid.*
[446] *Ibid.*
[447] Tamale, Sylvia. "'Point of Order, Mr Speaker': African Women Claiming Their Space in Parliament." *Gender & Development 8*, no. 3 (November 2000): 8–15. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/741923783. pp .8-15
[448] Schiller "The Royal Women of Buganda". pp. 455–73.
Tamale. "Introduction" In *When Hens Begin to Crow - Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*. p. 22
[449] *Ibid.* pp. 1-33.
[450] *Ibid.*
[451] Nannyonga-Tamusuza. "Female-Men, Male-Women, and Others: Constructing and Negotiating Gender among the Baganda of Uganda". pp. 367–80.
[452] *Ibid.*

another is rather challenging. Therefore, it is important to partially unhinge the Western idea of gender in order to understand that of the Baganda[453], as «among [the Baganda] them, not every female is a woman and not all males are men»[454]. Gender is "allocated" depending on power relations and socio-culturally identities, so that the non-accomplishment of these specifications might exclude the individual from one gender category, assigning him/her to the other gender[455]. Gender was not formulated on the basis of biology but reflected what an individual could or could not do, his or her role and relationship to the other gender. Some examples are evident in the Luganda (the language of Baganda) expressions *ekikazikazi* (womanly-male), which refers to an individual who is biologically a man but that acts like a woman, or the term *kyakulassajja* (manly-female) which denote the opposite, an individual who is biologically a woman and behaves like a man. According to cultural anthropologist Barbara Diane Miller, because «biological and cultural factors shape gender identities, roles, and relations, [the conceptualization of gender is] based partly on biological characteristics and is partly arbitrary»[456].

The following is evidence of how far the power of Buganda women could go in pre-colonial times and debunks the Western prejudice that all African women were oppressed. According to Professor Sandra Barnes, «African women [are] one of history's most politically viable female populations»[457]. Royal women – the Queen Mother, the Queen sister, the royal wives and the princesses – were indeed the group of women with the most important positions[458]. Queens' power and influence are by far the most evident proof that women had considerable authority at political level in pre-colonial times[459]. The gendered organization of political authority was founded on the belief that certain areas of governance were better suited to women while others to men[460]. The Queen mothers were perceived like the mothers not only of the king but of the entire nation and their authority was independent from that of their son[461]. As for Buganda's history, there is a wealth of data – quite unusual for pre-colonial times – that shows how powerful an African queen mother could be[462]. The Queen Mother, also called the namasole, was the most eminent woman in the Buganda empire[463]. As stated by Robert Pickering Ashe**, «** [the queen mother] was one of three persons who

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[453] *Ibid.*
[454] *Ibid.* p. 368
[455] *Ibid.*
[456] *Ibid.*
[457] Hanson, Holly. "Chapter 9 - Queen Mothers and Good Government in Buganda: The Loss of Women's Political Power in Nineteenth-Century East Africa." In *Women in African Colonial Histories*, by Jean Allman, Susan Geiger, and Nakanyke Musisi, 219–36. Bloomington, USA: Indiana University Press, 2002. p. 220
[458] Schiller "The Royal Women of Buganda". pp. 455–73.
[459] Hanson. "Chapter 9 - Queen Mothers and Good Government in Buganda: The Loss of Women's Political Power in Nineteenth-Century East Africa". pp. 219–32
[460] *Ibid.*
[461] *Ibid.*
[462] *Ibid.*
[463] Schiller "The Royal Women of Buganda". pp. 455–73.

could bear the title of kabaka, or king, the others being the king himself and the queen sister»[464]. Professor Laurence D. Schiller asserted that «the powers and prerogatives of the namasole were […] superior to that of all other chiefs»[465]. The title of queen did not describe merely a formal power, but a concrete and real authority, with responsibilities, prerogatives, and specific functions, to the point that in case the mother died, another woman was chosen to become the new queen mother[466]. The namasole had both direct political and judicial power, so far as to be able to decide the life and death of her people[467]. Furthermore, from the mid-1800 her palace was also one of the main location of the spiritual power, since she hosted the major mediums of the kingdom, both admired and dreaded for their alleged capabilities to benefit Ganda communities and individuals[468]. The queen mother owned vast territories across different provinces of the realm, which provided her a financial basis that fostered her independence from the king. Indeed, the inhabitants of these areas obeyed her, not her son[469]. She had her own royal palace on a hill called *Lusaka[470]*. The latter was separated from the one of the king by a river, as according to the Ganda customs the two monarchs cannot reside on the same hill[471]. She was "the king" in her own court, responsible of selecting her own chiefs and ministers[472], which responded only to her orders[473]. A demonstration of this is the visit to Buganda's capital of the British explorer John H. Speke, in 1862. At that time, the kabaka forbade everyone to meet Speke. Thus, Mr. Speke was quite surprised to receive the visit of the queen mother's brother, which in his role as a namasole's minister was immune to the king's ban[474]. The greatness of Ganda queen mothers in the administration of the kingdom has been witnessed by many foreign explorers throughout the 19th century[475]. The origins of the institution of namasole are still uncertain. According to some authors, her role is a legacy from a precedent epoch where Ganda clans were governed by women, one of whom became the wife of Kimera, the dynasty's founder. The queen mother also exerted a great influence on the decisions of her son, the kabaka, which used to consult her beforehand on principal political issues[476]. To this effect, the queen's role was to limit and counterweight the power

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[464] *Ibid.*" p. 458
[465] Nannyonga-Tamusuza. "Female-Men, Male-Women, and Others: Constructing and Negotiating Gender among the Baganda of Uganda.". p. 373
[466] Schiller "The Royal Women of Buganda". pp. 455–73.
[467] *Ibid.*
[468] Hanson. "Chapter 9 - Queen Mothers and Good Government in Buganda: The Loss of Women's Political Power in Nineteenth-Century East Africa.". pp. 219–32
[469] *Ibid*.
[470] Schiller "The Royal Women of Buganda". pp. 455–73.
[471] *Ibid.*
[472] *Ibid.*
[473] Hanson. "Chapter 9 - Queen Mothers and Good Government in Buganda: The Loss of Women's Political Power in Nineteenth-Century East Africa." pp. 219–32
[474] *Ibid.*
[475] *Ibid.*
[476] *Ibid.*

of the kabaka[477], whose rule could last only as long as he appeased the queen mother[478]. She exerted an enormous indirect influence also as a representative of the alliance of forces that had installed the monarch[479].

The other women present at court also had a certain importance, although obviously less than that of the queen mother. The Lubuga, namely the queen sister, was the second most powerful woman within the Buganda empire. She was not a direct blood sister of the king but was chosen for this position by the senior chiefs when the new kabaka was elected[480]. She exercised direct political authority on her subordinates, even deciding about their life and death. Unfortunately, her role is hardly mentioned in the historical sources. The other roles of the royal women were the princesses and the royal spouses, to which a special prestige was reserved[481].

In conclusion, the above analysis of the role of the Baganda royal women is not intended to negate the patriarchal character of their society. However, it is important to underline that in this pre-colonial society, as in many others, there is a difference between the predominantly attitudes reported by the narrative and the reality of the time and its operating principles[482]. The women mentioned represent a clear example of how in the Baganda kingdom the political role proves to be more important than belonging to the female gender, so that «the hierarchy of political status took precedence over the hierarchy of gender status»[483]. Moreover, given the structure of Baganda society, it is inappropriate to consider political power only in its direct form and formal role, since the women of Buganda exercised their authority and influence also in indirect ways and in informal circumstances. Another misleading framework that has been used to analyse pre-colonial Uganda is the one that provides a clear division between the public and private domains, while in the majority of the African societies the two spheres often overlaps. Indeed, Ganda women were able to influence public decisions from within their homes. In their role of wives, women represented the heart of the alliances between the families and played a crucial role in forming political coalitions among the different clans[484]. They were not passive observers; rather, they exploited their influence to further the interests of their own family. In their role of mothers and sisters, they held both a ritual and moral authority. Thus, it would be a misinterpretation to dismiss them as irrelevant and completely subordinate[485].

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[477] Schiller "The Royal Women of Buganda". pp. 455–73.
[478] Hanson. "Chapter 9 - Queen Mothers and Good Government in Buganda: The Loss of Women's Political Power in Nineteenth-Century East Africa.". pp. 219–32
[479] Hanson. "Chapter 9 - Queen Mothers and Good Government in Buganda: The Loss of Women's Political Power in Nineteenth-Century East Africa.". pp. 219–32
[480] Schiller "The Royal Women of Buganda". pp. 455–73.
[481] *Ibid.*
[482] *Ibid.*
[483] *Ibid.* p. 471.
[484] *Ibid.*
[485] *Ibid.*

3.1.2 Impact of colonialism on women's position

Before the middle of the XIX century, the territory of Uganda remained largely secluded from the rest of the outside world[486]. Later on, by the 1860, with the arrival of the first British missionaries and explorers, and the growing economic interests in the area, East Africa became a sphere of interest for the United Kingdom[487]. At the beginning, the British government delegated responsibility for the administration and development of the region – which included the area from the east coast to the Kingdom of Buganda – to the Imperial British East Africa Company, a trading company founded in 1888 for this very purpose[488]. However, the Company faced several difficulties, concerning firstly the construction of a railway on the border of Lake Victoria, deemed fundamental for the development of the area, but which resulted beyond the capabilities of the East Africa Company. Secondly, conflict between the factions of British Protestant missionaries and their French Catholic counterparts in Buganda significantly complicates the East Africa Company's operations[489]. Kampala's four hills became the scene of intense gunfire in 1892 among the kabaka's palace, the French Catholic, British Protestant, and the Imperial British East Africa Company led by Frederick Lugard. Even though the latter prevailed, the Company's inability to carry out its responsibilities became abundantly clear by the deaths and devastation occurred. Consequently, in 1894 Buganda was declared a British protectorate. Two years later the protectorate was expanded also to the kingdoms of Ankole, Toro, and Bunyoro, which became known as Uganda Protectorate[490]. The first appointed Special Commissioner to Uganda Sir Harry Hamilton Johnston decided that the most effective administration method was to control the area through the royals of the Buganda Kingdom. The 10th March of 1900 the Buganda Agreement was signed, laying the groundwork for British ties with Buganda for the following 50 years[491]. Under its terms, as long as the kabaka stayed loyal to the British, his role would have been recognized. The same was not true for the royal women of the Baganda, whose positions of power were not acknowledged by the British[492]. The cooperation of Buganda leaders was secured by offering them jobs in the colonial government[493].

The advent of British colonialists had a profound impact on women in Uganda, mostly negative, as stated by the social scientist Audrey C. Smock:

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[486] Byrnes. "Uganda - A Country Study". pp. 3-24.
[487] African Studies Center. "East Africa Living Encyclopaedia - Uganda History".
[488] Gascoigne. "History of Uganda."
[489] Gascoigne. "History of Uganda".
[490] Gascoigne. "History of Uganda".
[491] Kokole, O. H. , Kiwanuka, . M. Semakula M. Ingham. Kenneth and Lyons. Maryinez. "Uganda." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, June 18, 2021. Accessed December 8, 2021. Available at: https://www.britannica.com/place/Uganda.
[492] Gascoigne. "History of Uganda".
[493] African Studies Center. "East Africa Living Encyclopaedia - Uganda History".
Tamale. "Introduction" In *When Hens Begin to Crow - Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*. pp. 1-33.

«Colonial policies had a rather important influence on sex role definitions and opportunities for women. Christian missionaries and colonial administrators brought with them Victorian conceptions concerning the place of women in society. Generally, they did not appreciate the significant contributions frequently made by women and their sense of independence»[494].

When the British settled in Uganda, they brought with them their ethnocentric model of male-female relations, according to which the domain of politics was reserved for men only, and women were not allowed to access it[495]. British administration rules imposed a distinct demarcation between the public and the private sphere of life: men acted in the former, women were relegated to the latter. They imposed a division which, as noted earlier, in pre-colonial Uganda was blurred[496]. In the first period of British administration, the whole Ugandan population was denied their right to vote[497]. Women were barred from politics as a result of a purposeful and organized colonial policy[498], and their voices were largely ignored when it came to elect public officials[499]. The decision-making fora shifted from the local communities to the capitals of the colony. This change further reduced women's ability to informally influence political choices[500].

Colonial control had a profound impact also on local economic systems[501]. Sir H. H. Johnston was mandated with establishing an effective administrative system and collect taxes in the shortest time possible[502]. The Baganda chiefs were chosen by the Special Commissioner as the principal tax collectors[503] and the colonial authority progressively supplanted the pre-colonial currencies firstly with Indian rupee and then, in 1921, with the East African shilling[504]. This colonial monetization eased the tax collection from the Ugandan population, to the point that the level of taxation in the country became one of the highest compared to other British colonies[505]. In 1901, the construction of the Uganda Railroad, from Mombasa to the Lake Victoria, prompted colonial officials to launch the cultivation of cash crops – cotton, tobacco, coffee, and tea – both due to the decrease in transportation costs and to offset the railroad's running expenses[506]. The introduction of cash crops caused a

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[494] Tamale. "Introduction" In *When Hens Begin to Crow - Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*. p. 9
[495] *Ibid*. pp. 1-33.
[496] *Ibid*.
[497] Guma, Prince Karakire. "Feminism: How Women in Uganda Are Shaping the Way We Think about Sex and Politics." In *Research on Gender and Sexualities in Africa*, edited by Jane Bennett and Sylvia Tamale, 133–50. Dakar: Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), 2017. Available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvh8r1ds.13. pp. 133-150
[498] Tamale "'Point of Order, Mr Speaker': African Women Claiming Their Space in Parliament". pp. 8-15
[499] Guma, Prince Karakire. "Feminism: How Women in Uganda Are Shaping the Way We Think about Sex and Politics." In *Research on Gender and Sexualities in Africa*. pp. 133-150
[500] Tamale "'Point of Order, Mr Speaker': African Women Claiming Their Space in Parliament". pp. 8-15
[501] African Studies Center. "East Africa Living Encyclopedia - Uganda History".
[502] *Ibid*.
[503] *Ibid*.
[504] Meier zu Selhausen. *Women's empowerment in Uganda: colonial roots and contemporary efforts, 1894-2012*. pp. 1-24; 34-65
[505]*Ibid*.
[506] African Studies Center. "East Africa Living Encyclopedia - Uganda History".
Meier zu Selhausen. *Women's empowerment in Uganda: colonial roots and contemporary efforts, 1894-2012*. pp. 1-24; 34-65

significant shift in subsistence agriculture[507] and provided easy means for the Protectorate to achieve financial self-sufficiency[508]. In 1903 the British introduced the cultivation of cotton, whose production was welcomed by the peasant farmers[509]. Within 20 years, Uganda had become the top cotton-exporting country in all of sub-Saharan Africa[510]. After the Second World War, Protectorate officials focused on expanding the country's agricultural sector, encouraging the growth of coffee plantations[511]. At the beginning, both men and women contributed significantly to cash crop agriculture[512]. To pay their taxes to the colonial administration, Ugandan men had no option but to work in the cultivation of these crops. As a result, males focused on growing economic crops, whereas women engaged on growing both food and cash crops to support their family[513]. However, when cash crops became more profitable, around 1920s, men started to claim the property rights of women. Their demands were backed by both British and the local courts[514]. The introduction of a capitalist economy by British affected both women-men relations and their interaction with money[515]. The British excluded Ugandan women from the paid work sector. This exploitation significantly degraded their standing in comparison to men, having consequences on the gender relations within their households: the working man now felt that he had even more rights and power towards his wife, since he was the only one who brought and could bring home the money[516]. According to the scholar Penelope Roberts,

> «The intensification of female labour in peasant economies released male labour for the production of cash crops. Their [women's] productive labour was intensified to ensure the subsistence basis of labour reserve areas while their reproductive labour ensured the maintenance and reproduction of labour power at no cost to the capitalist wage»[517].

As a result of the Western conceptions of the appropriate roles of men and women within economy, the latter were excluded from the remunerated production[518].

> «European settlers, colonial administrators and technical advisers are largely responsible for the deterioration in the status of women in the agricultural sectors of developing countries. It was they who

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[507] Meier zu Selhausen. *Women's empowerment in Uganda: colonial roots and contemporary efforts, 1894-2012.* pp. 1-24; 34-65.
[508] *Ibid.*
[509] Gascoigne. "History of Uganda".
Meier zu Selhausen. *Women's empowerment in Uganda: colonial roots and contemporary efforts, 1894-2012.* pp. 1-24; 34-65.
[510] Meier zu Selhausen. *Women's empowerment in Uganda: colonial roots and contemporary efforts, 1894-2012.* pp. 1-24; 34-65.
[511] Kokole, Kiwanuka, Semakula et al. "Uganda".
[512] Byrnes. "Uganda - A Country Study". pp. 3-24.
[513] Tamale. "Introduction" In *When Hens Begin to Crow - Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda.* pp. 1-33.
[514] Byrnes. "Uganda - A Country Study". pp. 3-24.
[515] Tamale. "Introduction" In *When Hens Begin to Crow - Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda.* pp. 1-33.
[516] *Ibid.*
[517] *Ibid.* p. 8
[518] Tamale "'Point of Order, Mr Speaker': African Women Claiming Their Space in Parliament". pp. 8-15

neglected the female agricultural labour force when they helped to introduce modern commercial agriculture to the overseas world and promoted the productivity of male labour. Their European acceptance that cultivation is naturally a job for men persuaded them to believe that men could become far better farmers than women»[519].

According to Ester Boserup, «the corollary of the relative decline in women labour productivity is a decline in their relative status within agriculture, and, as a further result, women will want either to abandon cultivation and retire to domestic life, or to leave for the town»[520].

Based on the theory developed by Boserup, the two academics Michiel De Haas and Frankema Ewout discussed the economic origins of gender discrimination in Uganda. First of all, it is essential to underline the greater importance of women's contribution to traditional agricultural work in rural Africa, in comparison to other areas of the world[521]. This implied a higher opportunity cost of sending girls to school[522]. Thus, in a colonial framework that restricted women's employment prospects and do not favour girls' education, families themselves were less inclined to send their daughters to school[523] acknowledging that women's instruction had a poor economic payoff. As stated by the authors of the book *Women, Work, and Domestic Virtue in Uganda, 1900-2003*, «formal labour market participation in Uganda was limited to those women whose parents had been able to pay for their education and whose labor was not needed at home»[524]. A second reason behind the gender discrimination in the economic sector resides in the type of employment for which women were trained in missionary schools. Jobs as nurses or teachers, in the craft or domestic industries, rather than a way to promote gender equality in the labour market, must be interpreted as a strategy to limit employment opportunities for women to certain areas considered "feminine" and at the same time to reduce the number of women who were able work in the modern sector[525].

As far as education is concerned, the missionaries were the main actors who provided schools and instruction for the population. The members of the Anglican Church Mission Society were the first ones to arrive at the court of the kabaka Mutesa I in 1877. Two years later the Roman Catholic White Fathers also arrived[526]. Education was central to the Christian mass conversion of the population, so much so that the missionaries monopolised it through their mission schools[527].

[519] Boserup, Ester. "Loss of Status under European Rule." In *Woman's Role in Economic Development*, by Su Fei Tan, Ester Boserup, and Camilla Toulmin. New York: Routledge, 2007. Page 1 Chapter three.
[520] *Ibid*.
[521] De Haas, Michiel, and Ewout Frankema. "Gender, Ethnicity, and Unequal Opportunity in Colonial Uganda: European Influences, African Realities, and The Pitfalls of Parish Register Data." *The Economic History Review 71*, no. 3. (January 7, 2018): 965–994. Available at: https://Doi.Org/10.1111/Ehr.12618. pp. 965-994
[522] *Ibid.*
[523] *Ibid*.
[524] *Ibid*. p. 987
[525] *Ibid*.
[526] Meier zu Selhausen. "Women's empowerment in Uganda: colonial roots and contemporary efforts, 1894-2012". pp. 1-24; 34-65.
[527] *Ibid.*

Buganda's Christian adherents increased from 23 percent of the population in 1910 to 74 percent in 1959, and the country had the greatest overall number of mission school enrolments in the whole British Africa in 1938[528]. Missionary education has been cited by numerous scholars as being one of the worst factors that has negatively impacted African women in comparison to their male counterparts[529]. Indeed, it resulted in the growth of a substantial and significant gap in education levels between men and women[530]. Not only were boys more likely to receive an education than girls, but their education was considered more important than that of girls[531]. The gender literacy gap continued to widen throughout most of the colonial period[532]. This disparity started to narrow for those who were born around the 1950s and went to school after Uganda independence[533]. At the beginning of the XX century, the first schools for girls were opened, but they did not teach subjects such as English, civics, political science and law, which were essential for an active participation in domestic politics[534]. The above areas were considered exclusively reserved to men[535]. The education of girls was intended on supplying men with competent spouses and housewives[536]. Thus, it was centred on domestic skills, cooking and home economics[537]. The words of Miss Allen, a missionary who had been the head teacher of two prestigious all-girls Ugandan schools, are exemplary when she affirmed that «my staff will do their best to teach Domestic Science, House-wifery and Hygiene as it is taught in England»[538]. The colonial schooling did not equip young women with the intellectual abilities needed to engage in the Western-inspired form of government that would have been established after the independence[539]. Moreover, this strong bias on gender roles introduced by the missionary school system, based on Victorian conceptions of moral purity and domestic virtues, changed the way Ugandan people think about gender[540]. In the late 1930s, some schools began to offer more intellectual programmes for girls, and from 1945 women were allowed to attend Makerere University. However, their numbers were small, and courses were still limited to the typical "female" subjects[541].Christian and Victorian values, as previously mentioned, also affected gender relations

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[528] *Ibid.*

[529] Tamale. "Introduction" In *When Hens Begin to Crow - Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*. pp. 1-33.

[530] De Haas. "Gender, Ethnicity, and Unequal Opportunity in Colonial Uganda: European Influences, African Realities, and The Pitfalls of Parish Register Data". pp. 965–994.

[531] Tamale "'Point of Order, Mr Speaker': African Women Claiming Their Space in Parliament". pp. 8-15

[532] De Haas. "Gender, Ethnicity, and Unequal Opportunity in Colonial Uganda: European Influences, African Realities, and The Pitfalls of Parish Register Data". pp. 965–994.

[533] *Ibid.*

[534] Tamale "'Point of Order, Mr Speaker': African Women Claiming Their Space in Parliament". pp. 8-15
Reid. "A History of Modern Uganda". pp. 248-249

[535] Tamale "'Point of Order, Mr Speaker': African Women Claiming Their Space in Parliament". pp. 8-15

[536]Tamale. "Introduction" In *When Hens Begin to Crow - Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*. pp. 1-33.

[537] Tamale "'Point of Order, Mr Speaker': African Women Claiming Their Space in Parliament". pp. 8-15

[538] Tamale. "Introduction" In *When Hens Begin to Crow - Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*. p. 11

[539] *Ibid*. pp. 1-33

[540] *Ibid*. pp. 1-33
De Haas. "Gender, Ethnicity, and Unequal Opportunity in Colonial Uganda: European Influences, African Realities, and The Pitfalls of Parish Register Data." pp. 965–994.

[541] Reid. "A History of Modern Uganda". pp. 248-249

within the household. In pre-colonial Uganda polygyny[542] was a common custom. However, the missionaries and the Christian colonisers could not conceive this kind of marriage union. Thus, traditional polygamous marriages were not recognised by the British administration and it was ruled unlawful to take on a second wife after a Christian marriage.

Even African traditional land tenure notions were substantially altered by colonial administration. While the customary law ensured women stable and well-defined rights of use, the newly introduced colonial law and policies placed pressure on the traditional Ugandan institutions, negatively affecting the land guarantees of women. The colonial government developed, through policy reforms, new land tenure systems – as mailo, leasehold, freehold and customary tenure – as a method to promote their objectives through indirect control[543]. In particular, colonial administration was able to expand their authority into previously uncolonized areas thanks to the implementation of a mailo tenure system. The latter was introduced through the *1900 Agreement* and defined by the Buganda Land Law of 1908 enacted by the Buganda Parliament, the Lukiiko, and endorsed by the British Governor[544]. Once the land was allocated by the Lukiiko, deeds were issued to the owners and the property records were inserted in the land register. The consequence of the introduction of the mailo system was that a new type of land tenure was established in an area where property was formerly communally held[545]. The men head of the household acquired increasing authority and control over accessibility to the land, its use and management. As a result, women's use rights became less secure and durable. The additional powers obtained by the family head allowed him to dispose exclusively of the land property without taking into consideration the wider family. Thus, it became even more difficult for women to not only own or inherit land, but to simply have access to it[546]. Furthermore, as polygamous marriages were not recognized by the British Ugandan women were left with no inheritance rights and with no support in case of divorce or widowhood[547].

In conclusion, according to Boserup, the main legacy of European colonialism for gender inequality in Uganda has been to both strengthen, redesign and institutionalize the subordination of women, excluding the latter from the new rewarding economic activities – as the cultivation of the cash crops and industrial work[548]. Furthermore, the morality of Catholic and Protestant missionaries instructed women to remain at home and to perform purely feminine activities[549]. Although some

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[542] A polygamous relationship established between a male individual and two or more female individuals
[543] Bikaako, Winnie, and John Ssenkumba. "Gender, Land and Rights: Contemporary Contestations in Law, Policy and Practice in Uganda." *African Women and Land Studies*, 2003. Accessed February 6, 2022. Available at: https://scholarblogs.emory.edu/african-women-and-land/full-study-uganda/.
[544] *Ibid*.
[545] *Ibid.*
[546] *Ibid.*
[547] Byrnes. "Uganda - A Country Study". pp. 3-24.
[548] De Haas. "Gender, Ethnicity, and Unequal Opportunity in Colonial Uganda: European Influences, African Realities, and The Pitfalls of Parish Register Data." pp. 965–994.
[549] *Ibid*.

forms of gender inequality and subordination of women already existed in pre-colonial Ugandan society, the arrival of the British colonialists demonstrably led to a deterioration in the general situation of women[550]: «colonialists worked hand in hand with the African patriarchs to develop inflexible customary laws, which evolved into new structures and forms of domination»[551].

3.2 From Ugandan independence to the Obote and Amin dictatorial regimes (1962-1985)

By the 1950s, several reasons led the United Kingdom to prepare the ground for the independence of Uganda[552]. In 1952 the Uganda governor Sir Andrew Cohen began to lay the groundwork for the future political and economic liberation. In particular, he reformed the Uganda's Legislative Council, incorporating legislators from Ugandan districts[553]. Unlike other countries, Uganda did not gain its independence through a violent revolution or war, but rather via a gradual political process consisting of compromises between the British and the colonised nation[554]. In March 1962, the UK granted Uganda complete domestic autonomy and authority[555]. The next month, the Ugandan politician Milton Obote was elected as Prime Minister. The country gained formally independence in the October of the same year, under the constitution negotiated by Obote. The new constitution guaranteed a federal status to the four Ugandan traditional kingdoms, Acholi, Toro, Bunyoro, and Buganda. Since Buganda was the most powerful among these realms, in 1963 Obote accepted the election of Frederick Walugembe Mutesa II, the Ganda kabaka, in the symbolic role of both President and Head of State of Uganda[556].

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[550] Meier zu Selhausen. "Women's empowerment in Uganda: colonial roots and contemporary efforts, 1894-2012". pp. 1-24; 34-65.
[551] Tamale. "Introduction" In *When Hens Begin to Crow - Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*. p. 9
[552] African Studies Center. "East Africa Living Encyclopedia - Uganda History".
Britain's long-standing attitudes toward colonial power had been severely challenged by its post-war withdrawal from India, by emergent nationalist movements in West Africa, and by the emergence of a more liberal philosophy in the Colonial Office that looked more favourably on future self-rule.
[553] African Studies Center. "East Africa Living Encyclopedia - Uganda History".
[554] World Culture Encyclopaedia - Countries and their cultures. "Culture of Uganda - History, People, Clothing, Women, Beliefs, Food, Family, Social, Dress." *World Culture Encyclopedia*, 2022. Accessed February 5, 2022. Available at: https://www.everyculture.com/To-Z/Uganda.html.
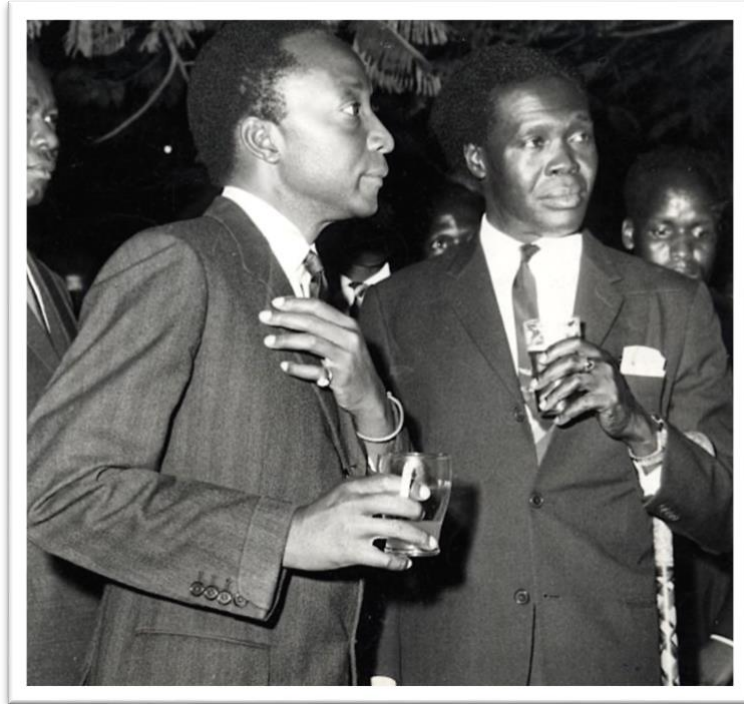[555] Gascoigne. "History of Uganda".
[556] *Ibid*.

Figure 3.3 –Kabaka Mutesa II (on the left) and Prime Minister Milton Obote (on the right)[557].

However, the collaboration between the two rulers deteriorated within a few years, and in 1966 Prime Minister ordered to his general Idi Amin Dada, the new leader of the army, to assault the royal palace. This determined the escape of the kabaka to the UK, where he died in 1969[558]. Consequently, Obote suspended the constitution and quickly enacted a new republican one in 1967, abolishing the traditional kingdoms[559], so that Uganda had become a unitary state[560]. Furthermore, he appointed himself as the new executive president, a role he held concurrently with his position as prime minister[561]. Few years after independence, Uganda had become a dictatorial regime with no space for political opposition and a diffuse discontent. However, Obote's regime did not last long, since on 25th January 1971 the Major-General Idi Amin Dada took the power through a military, and bloody, *coup d'état* – both internally and externally supported[562]. The former president was abroad and, being unable to return in Uganda, decided to settle in the nearby Tanzania[563]. The new military

[557] Katungulu, Amon. "Opinion: Obote Did Not Confiscate Buganda's Land". *Nile Post*., April 28, 2019. Accessed December 8, 2021. Available at: http://nilepost.co.ug/2019/04/28/opinion-obote-did-not-confiscate-bugandas-land/.
[558] African Studies Center. "East Africa Living Encyclopedia - Uganda History".
Gascoigne. "History of Uganda".
[559] African Studies Center. "East Africa Living Encyclopedia - Uganda History".
Gascoigne. "History of Uganda".
[560] African Studies Center. "East Africa Living Encyclopedia - Uganda History".
[561] Gascoigne. "History of Uganda".
[562] *Ibid*.
African Studies Center. "East Africa Living Encyclopedia - Uganda History".
[563] Gascoigne. "History of Uganda".
African Studies Center. "East Africa Living Encyclopedia - Uganda History".

dictator annulled the 1967 Constitution and assumed full legislative and executive authority[564]. Amin, who was initially hailed as a saviour, proved to be even crueller than his predecessor: in less than two years, Amin had established one of the Africa's most brutal dictatorships[565]. According to estimates by Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists, between 300,000 and 500,000 Ugandans were killed under his regime of terror[566]. During his 9-years dictatorship, the economy of the country seriously deteriorated. In particular, the situation precipitated from 1972, when he decided to purge Uganda of all Indians, who represented the training force of the country's economy at that time[567].
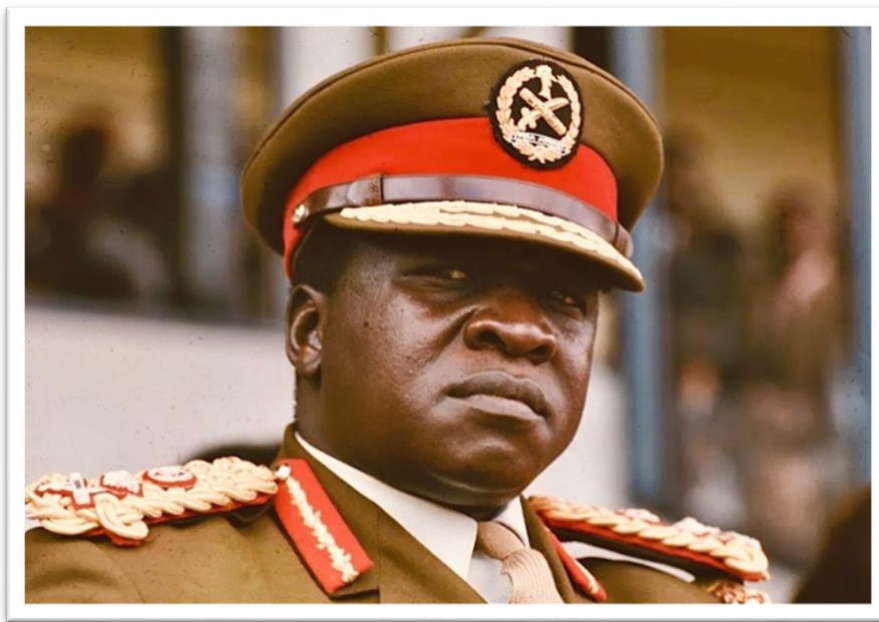

Figure 3.4 – Portrait of Dictator Idi Amin Dada[568]

These facts give only a glimpse of the brutality of his regime, which finally came to an end in 1979 when, after a war with neighbouring Tanzania, troops from that country joined Obote's private army and invaded Uganda, reaching the capital Kampala. Amin was defeated and escaped first to Libya and then to Saudi Arabia[569], where he died in 2003. After a one-year transitional government, a Ugandan officer named Tito Okello staged a *coup d'état* in May 1980 that restored Obote's authority. After six months, he was reconfirmed as president and the Obote II government began. Once again, Uganda moves from one dictatorship to the next. In fact, Obote's return by no means put an end to

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[564] Tamale. "Introduction" In *When Hens Begin to Crow - Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*. pp. 1-33.
[565] African Studies Center. "East Africa Living Encyclopedia - Uganda History".
Kokole, Kiwanuka, Semakula et al. "Uganda".
[566] African Studies Center. "East Africa Living Encyclopedia - Uganda History".
[567] Kokole, Kiwanuka, Semakula et al. "Uganda".
[568] Comparato, Nicola. "Uganda, La Storia Del Presidente Dittatore Idi Amin Dada." *Focus on Africa*, March 15, 2021. Accessed December 14, 2021. Available at: https://www.focusonafrica.info/uganda-la-storia-del-presidente-dittatore-idi-amin-dada/.
[569] African Studies Center. "East Africa Living Encyclopaedia - Uganda History".

Uganda's problems[570]. Until the 1985, Obote detained power through the use of violence – with torture and killings, the economic situation continued to deteriorate, and bloody inter-tribal clashes persisted[571].

3.2.1 Women's movements towards independence

Towards the middle of the 20th century, Ugandan women became more and more oppressed by colonialism and gender discrimination[572]. Thus, the first associations began to emerge around the 1940s, and in 1946 the Ministry for Social Development began collaborating with women to assist them in the formation of clubs[573]. The concept underlying these associations was to train women and provide them with new knowledge so that they would be prepared as citizens to face the difficulties of this new era of change[574].

One particular event made the women realize that the situation was no longer bearable and that it was time to organize and act. In 1947**,** a woman who was a member of the *Young Wives Group* (YWG) lost her husband and with him all the properties they had bought together. In fact, the lands had been inherited by a son who was not legitimate, but who was fortunate enough to be born male. This episode greatly worried the members of the YWG, to the extent that they decided to unite and demand more marriage guarantees. As a result, the *Ugandan Council of Women* (UCW) – an organization dedicated to advancing women's equality – was established the same year. The creation of the UCW was a turning point in Uganda's modern women's movement[575]. The Council was founded by several women, among which Mary Stuart, wife of the Anglican Bishop, Eseza Makumbi, founder of the *Forward Society*, Barbara Saben, activist in several women's organizations, Catherine Hastie, founder of the *Uganda Association of University Women*, and Rebecca Mulira, the founder of the *Young Wives Group* and the *Uganda African Women's League*[576]. The association was thus composed of both African and European women who sought to bring together women of all races, religions, and political alignments to address women's shared concerns. The Council was linked with many other organizations, including those already mentioned as well as the *Mother's Union*, the *Catholic Women's Clubs*, the *Muslim Women's Society*, and the *Indian Women's Association*[577].

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[570] *Ibid*.
[571] Gascoigne. "History of Uganda".
[572] Tamale. "Introduction" In *When Hens Begin to Crow - Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*. pp. 1-33.
[573] Tripp, Aili Mari. *Women & Politics in Uganda*. Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2000. pp. 1-52
[574] *Ibid*.
[575] Tamale. "Introduction" In *When Hens Begin to Crow - Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*. pp. 1-33.
[576] Tripp, Aili Mari. "Women's mobilization in Uganda: Nonracial ideologies in European-African-Asian encounters, 1945-1962." *The international journal of African historical studies 34*, no. 3 (2001): 543–64. Available at: Https://doi.org/10.2307/3097553. pp. 543–64
[577] *Ibid*.

Within a decade, the Council reached 2000 members spread across the whole country. The UCW was involved in several projects, including the establishment of *Women's Centres* to provide lodging for women who were traveling for working reasons[578]. One of the most significant accomplishments of the women's movement throughout the 1950s and 1960s was the involvement and gathering of people from different ethnic groups to collaborate for the emancipation of women. As mentioned earlier, the UCW in particular believed this kind of interracial integration to be really important, stating that one of its main tasks was to «bring women of all the different races in Uganda closer together so that they could get to know each other».[579] This is also reflected in the words of Hemantini Bhatia, an Indian woman and the chairperson of the UCW, when she stated that:

> «We felt like one. We were like sisters – the Africans, the Asians, and the Europeans [...] we were all so friendly. It was not only a political movement, we were very good friends. And that is why I think we lasted so long»[580].

The basis was the belief in *non-racialism*, according to which women's liberation and empowerment could only be achieved by uniting women of all races and creeds[581]. In this context, many Europeans women active throughout the post-WWII era, and particularly during the years leading up to independence, desired to play their part in Uganda's move toward self-governance[582]. Aware that their period in the country was coming to an end, reform-minded colonial women supported Ugandan women in their demand for equal rights and emancipation.

Another important association, the *Young Women's Christian Association* (YWCA) was established a few years later, in 1952. It opened a dormitory in Kampala to provide affordable housing for working women. In addition, the YWCA promoted leadership training, advocated for marriage and divorce reforms, promoted women's rights, provided civic education, and sponsored different initiatives for young women[583].

Women's activism in Uganda was strongly tied to the anti-colonial and independence movements[584]. For instance, in 1953, a dramatic protest took place. Baganda women organized a demonstration against the deportation of their king, the kabaka, who was forced into exile by British governor Sir Andrew Cohen after his refuse to make the Buganda kingdom a mere province of the

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[578] Tripp. *Women & Politics in Uganda*. pp. 1-52
[579] Tripp. "Chapter 2: A Foot in the Door - Historical Dimensions of the Women's Movement in Uganda." In *Women & Politics in Uganda*. p. 41
[580] *Ibid.*
[581] Tripp. "Women's mobilization in Uganda: Nonracial ideologies in European-African-Asian encounters, 1945-1962.". pp. 543–64.
[582] *Ibid.*
[583] Tripp. *Women & Politics in Uganda*. pp. 1-52
[584] Tamale. "Introduction" In *When Hens Begin to Crow - Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*. pp. 1-33.

country[585] . To oppose this decision and demand the return of Mutesa II, three buses of women led by the *Mothers' Union* stormed the governor's house[586]. Sir Cohen accepted to talk only to five women – Deborah Kiwanuka, Mrs. Kayizi, Mrs. Nabigari, Rebecca Mulira, Sara Mukasa – but they declined the proposal and carried all the other women with them. These women presented the governor with a document denouncing him of deporting their monarch without consulting them, the *mothers of the nation*. Indeed, they asserted that they were the only ones who had the authority to dethrone their kabaka. As a result of their demands and protests, the king was allowed to come back to Uganda on 17 October 1955[587].

The involvement in these associations gave women more opportunities to learn about and be involved in the political decision-making system. Women's rights such as citizenship and the right to vote were central to the UCW's activities. In the 1960, a major convention on women's rights regarding marriage, divorce, and inheritance was organized by the Council. This represented an important statement for the government and the entire population. In 1956, Pumla Kisosonkole, who was president of the UCW from 1957 to 1960[588], was the first African woman ever to be represented in the Legislative Colonial Council (Legco)[589]. She and Briton Barbara Saben were the only two women among the 53 members of the Legco. The following year, three other women took their place: Joyce Mpanga, Sarah Nyendwoha Ntiro, and Frances Akello[590]. In the years before 1962, Florence Lubega, Miriam Mitha and W. H. L. Gordon were also nominated as representatives to the legislative council[591].

In the period leading up to the country's independence, these were the only women who played a role in drafting future legislation. It is important to note that none of these women were elected by vote, but that their position in the council was based on nomination. For if it was almost impossible for a woman to be elected to Legco, it was similarly difficult to vote for the elections of this members, as the words of Henry Morris and James Read show:

> « The vast majority of men could fulfil the minimum of these requirements [for voting]. A woman, on the other hand, if illiterate would be likely to qualify as a voter only on the grounds of occupancy of land, it was a matter of local custom as to whether a woman could be held to occupy land over which her husband had occupancy rights»[592].

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[585] *Ibid*.
Tripp. *Women & Politics in Uganda*. pp. 1-52.
[586] Tamale. "Introduction" In *When Hens Begin to Crow - Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*. pp. 1-33.
[587] Tripp. *Women & Politics in Uganda*. pp. 1-52.
[588] Ibid.
[589] The term LEGCO stands for Ugandan Colonial Legislative Council. It was established by the British administrators in the 1920. It was the forerunner of the today's Parliament.
[590]Tamale. "Introduction" In *When Hens Begin to Crow - Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*. pp. 1-33.
[591] Tripp. *Women & Politics in Uganda*. pp. 1-52.
[592] Tamale. "Introduction" In *When Hens Begin to Crow - Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*. p. 11

Women had been denied the right to vote in the 1956 elections of the Legislative Council. In 1961, at the express request of UCW representatives, Obote granted women the right to vote, and the following year the Constitution confirmed it for all women aged 21[593].

The case of Rebecca Mulira, a pioneering women's rights activist of international renown, typified the limitations women faced in participating in official politics. Despite her *avant-garde* thinking, Mulira's participation in the country's decision-making institutions was severely limited by the gender stereotypes of the time, as well as inadequate educational possibilities, and a system of government that contributed to the perpetuation of gender inequality[594].

Figure 3.5 – Rebecca Mulira (on the left) with other women's rights activists[595].

The activities of these organizations were not limited to the national scenario but acquired international relevance[596]. When the *International Council of Women* met in Washington, D.C., in 1963, the UCW sent a delegation of its members there. In 1964, UCW representatives also attended the *All Africa Women's Conference* in Monrovia, Liberia.

However, none of the political parties that were established in these years – namely the *Uganda National Congress* (UNC) in 1952, the *Progressive Party* in 1954, the *Democratic Party* (DP) in 1956, and the *Uganda People's Congress* (UPC) in 1958 – included women in their ranks[597]. As the country approached independence, the UCW aspired to provide women with the skills necessary to influence the opinions of the people and the government regarding women's rights[598]. To achieve this goal, the organization worked to increase women's access to education, leadership,

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[593] Tripp. *Women & Politics in Uganda*. pp. 1-52.
[594] *Ibid*.
[595] New Vision Official. "Did You Know Rebecca Mulira Contributed to Women Advancement?" Accessed February 6, 2022. https://www.newvision.co.ug/news/1527085/rebecca-mulira-contributed-women-advancement.
[596] Tamale. "Introduction" In *When Hens Begin to Crow - Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*. pp. 1-33.
[597] Tripp. *Women & Politics in Uganda*. pp. 1-52
[598] *Ibid*.

and civic engagement via the establishment of a *Citizenship Education Committee* in 1961[599].
Together with the *Uganda Association of University Women* (UAUW), the UCW organized a
campaign to educate women to vote and prepare for the pre-independency parliamentary elections.
Notwithstanding their activism, women were substantially ignored in the discussions surrounding
Uganda's independence, which were done by the colonial rulers and an elite group of Ugandan
men[600].

From 1962 to 1986 – when Museveni's National Resistance Movement took power – the
women who sat in parliament can be counted on the fingers of one hand. The first were Sugra Visram
and Florence Lubega in the post-independence legislature of 1962[601]. Then Rhoda Kalema and
Geraldine Bitamazire were elected to the National Consultative Council (NCC), namely the post-
Amin transitional legislature from 1979 to 1980[602]. Five women ran in the 1980 elections, that
confirmed Obote's return to power. Among Cecilia Ogwal and Theresa Odongo-Oduka, both of the
UPC, and Rhoda Kalema, Freda Lule, and Robinah Kasadha of the UPM, only Odongo-Oduka was
elected. From 1980 to 1985, she was the sole woman to hold a seat in Parliament among 144 male
MPs[603]. It is worth noting that the Democratic Party did not present any women among its candidates,
although it is known that one of the main reasons for its defeat in the 1962 elections was the absence
of women, both in its ranks and in its political program[604]. Women's organizations complained that
political parties were not doing enough to promote female leaders. In 1962, they requested the Prime
Minister Obote to appoint at least one woman to the country's delegation to the UN. Their request
was successful and in 1963 Obote selected Pumla Kisosonkole to be part of the delegation. Although
the Prime Minister promised to intervene for the advancement of women politicians, he fell short of
delivering on his pledges. For instance, when women's groups asked for seats in the National
Assembly in 1964, he denied their request, stressing that women had yet to educate themselves to
enter into politics[605]. The same year, however, the women's movement achieved a significant victory:
it was established a commission to examine the situation of women, the Kalema Commission[606]. In
1966, the *Uganda Association of Women's Organizations* (UAWO) was created in order to broaden
the horizons and include even more Ugandan women. It was a platform for the exchange of ideas and
experiences among Ugandan women engaged in the ongoing fight for gender equality[607].

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[599] *Ibid*.
[600] Tamale. "Introduction" In *When Hens Begin to Crow - Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*. pp. 1-33.
[601] Tripp. *Women & Politics in Uganda*. pp. 1-52
[602] *Ibid*.
[603] *Ibid*.
Tamale. "Introduction" In *When Hens Begin to Crow - Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*. pp. 1-33.
[604] Tamale. "Introduction" In *When Hens Begin to Crow - Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*. pp. 1-33.
[605] Tripp. *Women & Politics in Uganda*. pp. 1-52
[606] Tamale. "Introduction" In *When Hens Begin to Crow - Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*. pp. 1-33.
[607] *Ibid.*

When President Obote declared that the new legislative elections would be held in 1971, the UCW planned to compete in them. Thus, during its annual gathering of 1970, the Council asked the Secretary General of Uganda People's Congress (UCP), Felix Onama, the support of its party. Since they had never participated in an election before, UCW representatives were in need of assistance for the writing of the speeches and the campaign organization. Unfortunately, Onama rejected the UCW appeal. Indeed, according to him «it would be discriminatory to give women special aids to ensure their election because this action would emphasize the fact that they were women and de-emphasize their political competence»[608]. UCP Secretary General did not seem to recognise that women's organizations had been systematically barred from the political arena for decades and that consequently supporting them in this context was the least he could have done[609]. Eventually, as previously mentioned, the planned elections did not take place because in 1970 Idi Amin Dada came to power after overthrowing the Obote government in a *coup d'état*.

3.2.2 Women's condition under Amin dictatorial regime

Initially, many women hailed Amin's coup as a liberation from Obote and his harsh policies[610]. Many leaders of women's group, such as Rebecca Mulira (UCW), Thereza Mulindwa (UAUW), Sugra Visram (Uganda Muslim Women's Society), expressed sincere gratitude to President Amin for having saved Uganda by the former terrorist regime[611].

However, the situation of women began to deteriorate dramatically[612]. Instead of freeing the country from dictatorship, his rule exacerbated bloodshed and insecurity[613]. Making great use of the military apparatus to impose his authority, Amin favoured violence and an aggressive kind of masculinity, which had a catastrophic effect on women and their families. Two years after coming to power, the dictator began a kind of crusade to defend the public morality. In this context, women became the main victims of his oppressive actions. Amin issued several bans prohibiting women from wearing miniskirts, wigs and trousers, and from using beauty products such as creams, perfumes and make up. The justification was that these garments were a threat to the country's morality and the dignity of women, as well as symbols of colonialism and Westernism[614]. Notwithstanding men were

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[608] *Ibid*.

[609] *Ibid.*

[610] Decker, Alicia C. "Chapter 2: Gender, Performance, and Pain - The Rise of Amin's Dictatorship." In *In Idi Amin's Shadow - Women, Gender, and Militarism in Uganda*, 40–58. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2014. pp. 40-58

[611] *Ibid*.

[612] Tamale. "Introduction" In *When Hens Begin to Crow - Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*. pp. 1-33.

[613] Decker. "Chapter 2: Gender, Performance, and Pain - The Rise of Amin's Dictatorship." In *In Idi Amin's Shadow - Women, Gender, and Militarism in Uganda*. pp. 40–58.

[614] Tripp, Aili Mari. "Chapter 1: Women's Mobilization & Societal Autonomy - In Comparative African Perspective." In *Women & Politics in Uganda*. 1–27. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2000. pp. 1-27

open to modernity, women were expected to repudiate Western fashions and remain loyal to their heritage. Below is a short statement from a young girl of the time when miniskirts were banned, which shows how absurd this decree was:

«Lydia Balemezi could hardly believe the news. [...] The announcement seemed so sudden, so dramatic. Surely the president could not be serious. Yet there she was, ensconced in a crowded taxi barreling toward the city center in a miniskirt that had just been declared illegal. [...] The taxi was filled with young women who were making their way to work or to school in smartly pressed dresses that had suddenly become "indecent." Once the taxi reached the main stage, the women quickly entered nearby shops in search of something to wrap around themselves. Lydia was still a secondary school student and had no extra money. Therefore, she had no alternative but to give her student identity card to an understanding shopkeeper who gave her a piece of material on credit. [...] As she pushed her way forward, she […] wanted to remain invisible, unseen by the prying eyes of the state. Overzealous police officers had already descended on the park and were eagerly rounding up young women for examination. They immediately arrested and jailed those whose dresses were too short–more than 3 inches above the knee-line. Although Lydia was fortunate to escape the park unharmed, many other women were not as lucky»[615].

The prohibition of the "indecent clothing" triggered a wave of violence and abuses towards the women who lived in the cities, and the result turned out to be the opposite of what was intended[616]. Women, in fact, did not become more honourable and dignified, but only more vulnerable and exposed to the gender-based violence of the military, which now had one more excuse to abuse them[617]. The reasons that led Amin to issue this radical decree, according to some scholars, lay in his desire both to demonstrate a rupture with the Western world and to please his Muslim supporters from Libya and Saudi Arabia[618]. Other explanations saw in these impositions a strategy to reinforce his political legitimacy establishing himself as the *Father of the Nation*, as the one who has the last word on the morals of the country[619]. From independence onwards, the way women dressed became a source of debate, a battlefield among the traditional Ugandan customs and the influence of the western – and immoral – modernity. Obviously, these were futile discussions used to hide the serious political and economic problematics of the country. When Amin came to power, many citizens still complained about the moral and cultural decline of Uganda in relations to women's apparel, as it is evident from the declaration of Peace Nyenga:

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[615] Decker, Alicia C. "Chapter 3: Of Miniskirts and Morality - Femininity in Service of the State" In *In Idi Amin's Shadow - Women, Gender, and Militarism in Uganda*, 59–74. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2014. p. 59
[616] *Ibid*.
[617] Decker. "Chapter 3: Of Miniskirts and Morality - Femininity in Service of the State" In *In Idi Amin's Shadow - Women, Gender, and Militarism in Uganda*. pp. 59–74.
[618] *Ibid*.
[619] *Ibid*.

«To shame a woman is to shame a nation [...] Any woman who wears a mini-dress puts the whole nation–Uganda–to shame[...] The Government should realize that the 'mini' girls or daughters have failed their parents and the state of Uganda [...] Action must be taken to discipline and limit the freedom of mini dressers so that Uganda can unburden herself of the mini dress yoke»[620].

Amin's "crusade" evolved into the *Penal Code Act (Amendment) Decree*[621]. The punishment for violating the decree was a fine, an arrest, or imprisonment. Other morality-based directives were quickly enacted. In 1974, the President prohibited the use of trousers[622], tights, and form-fitting gowns. In the same year, he passed a law forbidding women from wearing wigs in public places. The underlying motivations and meanings were multiple:

«women [who wear wigs] looked artificial and some were really stinking because they never have time to clean their artificial hair […] the wigs [...] were made by the callous imperialists from human hair mainly collected from the unfortunate victims of the miserable Vietnam War, thus turning human tragedy into lucrative commercial enterprise [...] wigs promoted health hazards besides making our women look un-African and artificial»[623];

The following year, Amin forbade the use of cosmetics, on the grounds that women who wear makeup change their aspect so much that they look like animals. These disparaging statements denigrated women and eroded their power. Ultimately, the strategy developed into a vicious campaign against young women in the city[624].

On the guise of upholding law and order, the army used violence on women suspected to have broken these restrictions[625]. The majority of the people arrested were young women, portrayed as the principal perpetrators of immoral behaviour[626]. Initially, the restrictions were not taken seriously by the population since the consequences were not so severe. As a result, armed forces and covert operatives started to suppress the transgressions more violently. Thousands of women had been

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[620] Decker. "Chapter 3: Of Miniskirts and Morality - Femininity in Service of the State". In *In Idi Amin's Shadow - Women, Gender, and Militarism in Uganda*. pp. 62

[621] *Ibid.* p. 63

Section 162 of the Decree stated: «Every person of or above the apparent age of 14 years who in any public place wears any dress, garment, skirts, or shorts the hem-line or bottom of which is 7.62 cm above the knee-line or wears any dress popularly known as a midi or a maxi having a slit on any part of the circumference of such dress the apex of which is above the knee-line [will be in violation of the decree]». Decker. "Chapter 3: Of Miniskirts and Morality - Femininity in Service of the State". In *In Idi Amin's Shadow - Women, Gender, and Militarism in Uganda*. p. 63

[622] The prohibition on trousers was reversed after finding that these were considered appropriate dress for women in Islamic countries.

[623] Decker. "Chapter 3: Of Miniskirts and Morality - Femininity in Service of the State". In *In Idi Amin's Shadow - Women, Gender, and Militarism in Uganda*. p. 64-65

[624] Decker. "Chapter 3: Of Miniskirts and Morality - Femininity in Service of the State". In *In Idi Amin's Shadow - Women, Gender, and Militarism in Uganda*. pp. 59–74.

[625] Tripp. "Chapter 1: Women's Mobilization & Societal Autonomy - In Comparative African Perspective." In *Women & Politics in Uganda*. pp. 1–27.

[626] Decker. "Chapter 3: Of Miniskirts and Morality - Femininity in Service of the State". In *In Idi Amin's Shadow - Women, Gender, and Militarism in Uganda*. pp. 59–74.

harassed, intimidated, assaulted, and even raped as a result of their clothing choices. Women did not protest because it would have been useless: Amin did not recognize the perpetrators of violence as guilty. The only ones to blame were the women, since «if the girls had worn long dresses, they would not have been attacked»[627]. By 1975, violations were rapidly decreasing, and the majority of women wore clothes that were not considered immoral, as ankle-length dresses which they called "*Amin nvaako*" which translated means "*Leave me alone, Amin!*"[628]. Moreover, he gave the order to "clean" the streets of the city from those women who were suspected of being prostitutes, that is, any woman who was not married. In this context, its military officers exerted strong pressure on Ugandan women to marry[629].

The general situation of women was further compromised by the deep economic crisis that hit the country after Amin's decision to expel the Asian population – which at that time owned the 77 percent of Uganda's industrial sector[630]. The cost of basic necessities rose sharply, and essential goods became unavailable. People queued up early in the morning to get their hands on whatever was offered. As women had to wait in line for long period of time to get state supplies, they were precluded from participating in productive activities, while also being subjected to hunger and thirst[631].

Although women in Uganda suffered under Amin's policies, the dictator wanted to project to the outside world the image of a country that cared deeply about gender equality and women's rights. In order to do so, in 1974 he appointed Elizabeth Nyabongo Bagaaya**,** the Royal Princess of Toro, as the new Foreign Minister of Uganda. Her tenure was very short, as President Amin removed her from office considering her an immoral woman. Years after she declared that «some people who had been eyeing my post told Idi Amin that I was plotting to over-throw him and he had me placed under house arrest. […] I would have been killed. I managed to flee into exile, only to return to Uganda in 1980»[632]. Elizabeth Bagaya is a woman with a fascinating story. When the first government of Obote had been installed, she had to escape to England, where she became Uganda's first female attorney in 1966 in London. In those years Bagaya also began a career in the fashion world, with the support of Princess Margaret of England, establishing herself as an important top model.

[627] *Ibid*.
[628] *Ibid*.
[629] Tripp. "Chapter 1: Women's Mobilization & Societal Autonomy - In Comparative African Perspective." In *Women & Politics in Uganda*. pp. 1–27.
[630] Decker, Alicia C. "Chapter 4: An Accidental Liberation - Women on the Front Lines of Economic War." In *In Idi Amin's Shadow - Women, Gender, and Militarism in Uganda*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2014. pp. 75–91
[631] *Ibid*.
[632] Knapp, Francky. "Princess Elizabeth of Toro." Messy Nessy Chic, May 31, 2018. Accessed December 8, 2021. Available at: https://www.messynessychic.com/2018/05/31/vintage-muse-du-jour-princess-elizabeth-of-toro/?fbclid=IwAR05c8i6-rbqy90xjANcfwh3mZfJB68hQ_LKeon-Ik0S96lre0MO4gf2PBM.
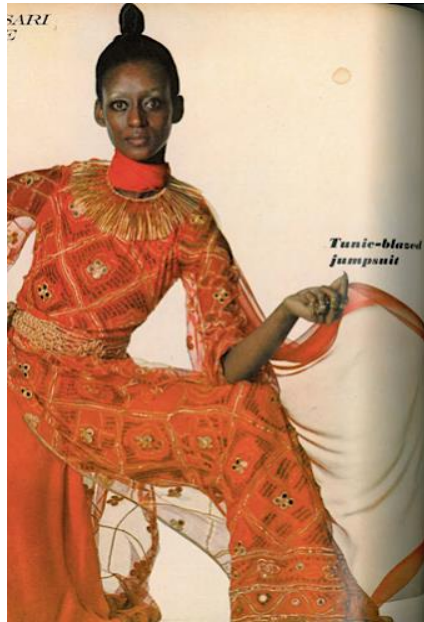
Figure 3.6 - Elizabeth Bagaya on the magazine Harper's Bazaar[633]

Figure 3.7 – Elizabeth Bagaya photographed by Yale Joel for LIFE magazine October 17, 1969[634]

As far as women's movements are concerned, they were put under severe restrictions during the Amin regime. The dictator proclaimed the progressive abolition of all autonomous women's organizations and the creation of a single national body that would unify all women's associations. In a certain way, he exploited to his advantage the UN demand to establish national groups to advance women's rights in preparation for the *UN Decade of Women.* Women's associations perceived this project as a great danger to their autonomy and their very survival. Initially, in 1976, Amin allowed the women's movement to form an association that, despite being under state control, could remain in contact with the various independent women's organisations. The following year, he issued a presidential decree that, while establishing the umbrella organisation for NGOs – the National Council of Women (NCW), banned all other forms of independent association, as stated in Art. 4 of the decree[635]: «For avoidance of doubt, it is declared that with effect from the commencement of this decree, no women's organisation shall continue to exist, or be formed except in accordance with this decree»[636]. It was quite evident that Amin established the NCW as a mean to exert control over women's organisations for his own political ends. Indeed, numerous women's groups were forced to became members of this new organization[637]. As a consequence, the majority of women's

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[633] *Ibid*.
[634] *Ibid*.
[635] Tripp. "Chapter 1 - Women's Mobilization & Societal Autonomy - In Comparative African Perspective." In *Women & Politics in Uganda*, by Aili Mari Tripp, 1–27. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2000. pp. 1-27
[636] Tripp, Aili Mari. "Chapter 2 - A foot in the door – Historical dimensions of the women's movement in Uganda." In *Women & Politics in Uganda*, by Aili Mari Tripp, 29-53. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2000. p. 49
[637] Tripp. "Women & Politics in Uganda". pp. 1-52

organizations became inactive or acted underground[638]. On the one hand, the brand-new Council was aware that it could not function without the support of the independent women's associations, but on the other hand, the latter were afraid to associate themselves with it[639]. Many women were of the opinion that the NCW was more a vehicle of suppression, with «the potential to infringe on the freedom of association which had been enjoyed by women during the pre and post-independence eras»[640].

3.3 The Museveni government of the late '80s

At the beginning of 1986, the National Resistance Army (NRA) formed a new government led by Yoweri Museveni[641], which replaced Obote as Uganda's President. This is considered a turning point in Uganda's history[642]. Museveni and its party, the *National Resistance Movement*, emerged victorious from the 1996 elections with an overwhelming majority of 74.2 percent of the vote[643], which reconfirmed his position as President – a role he is still holding.

Figure 3.8 – Yoweri Museveni swear as President in 1986[644].

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[638] Tripp. "Chapter 1: Women's Mobilization & Societal Autonomy - In Comparative African Perspective." In *Women & Politics in Uganda*. pp. 1–27.
[639] *Ibid*.
[640] Tripp. "Chapter 2: A Foot in the Door - Historical Dimensions of the Women's Movement in Uganda." In *Women & Politics in Uganda*. p. 50
[641] African Studies Center. "East Africa Living Encyclopedia - Uganda History".
[642] *Ibid*.
[643] *Ibid*.
[644] Peace, Nils. "1986 Speeches vs. 2020 Response [Museveni Edition]." MinBane. Word Press.com. Aug. 6, 2020. Accessed December 14, 2021. Available at: https://minbane.wordpress.com/2020/08/06/https-wp-me-p1xtjg-edr/ .

Under NRM governments women's condition improved significantly. Indeed, among African nations, Uganda was one of the first to remarkably expand the percentage of women in the legislative system and the executive branches of government[645]. Moreover, it is a widely held belief that the women's movement in Uganda today would not have developed as much, if the NRM had not taken control[646]. The Museveni Movement openness proved to be crucial in fostering the progress of the women's movement, providing their members with the right framework and structures to flourish. On the other hand, women's associations capacity to preserve their autonomy from the government turned out to be fundamental for their success[647].

During the regimes of Obote and Amin, the women's movement was strongly linked, controlled, and subservient to the dictatorial governments[648]. As a result of this oppression, many of its sections became isolated or forced to operate clandestinely, as noted in the preceding paragraphs. In the mid-1980s, numerous prominent women's rights groups began to organise just before the NRM seizure of power[649]. Consequently, in 1986, these associations had already devised a program for women empowerment, in particular at the political level[650]. So, they were already prepared when it came to shape the country's new policy on associationism[651].

In this context, a defining moment in the history of the women's movement in the country was the *UN Decade of Women Conference* held in Nairobi in 1985[652], which was attended by more than 15,000 women coming from 140 countries. This event gave Ugandan feminists a sense of the magnitude of the struggle they were waging and of all the rights that other women in different countries were already enjoying[653]. Feminist organisations now felt they had to start afresh with even more vigour, inspired by what they had seen in Nairobi[654].

Initially, the NRM government was distrustful towards these women's associations. Proof of this is the fact that even Janet Museveni, the president's wife, had to argue to convince him to approve the establishment of her foundation, the *Uganda Women's Effort to Save Orphans* (UWESO)[655]. Though doubts never disappeared completely, they began to diminish in the 1990s[656]. Museveni

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[645] Tripp, Aili Mari. "Museveni's Uganda: Paradoxes of Power in a Hybrid Regime". London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010. p. 2
[646] Tripp, Aili Mari. "Chapter 4: The Political Impact of the Women's Movement under the NRM" In *Women & Politics in Uganda*. pp. 68-102.
[647] *Ibid.*
[648] *Ibid*.
[649] *Ibid.*
[650] *Ibid.*
[651] *Ibid.*
[652] *Ibid.*
[653] *Ibid.*
[654] *Ibid.*
[655] *Ibid.*
[656] *Ibid.*

started to realize the potential of both women's organizational skills to achieve his objectives and to of having women in the ranks of his movement[657].

3.3.1   The women's movements under the NRM government

The legacy of violence, terror, and brutalization that 20 years of dictatorship had on gender relations and the status of women in Uganda cannot be ignored[658]. Among the consequences there was a rise in domestic violence, family dissolution, orphaned children, and so much suffering that cannot be forgotten[659]. Thus, when Museveni took power he was greatly welcomed by the population.

During a speech held in occasion of the *International Women's Day*, the 8th March 1986, he declared that since «women in Uganda had been everything in Uganda's history yet they had been disadvantaged all through history», with the NRM government the situation would have been changed[660]. At the end of the '80s, the Museveni administration promised to eradicate gender-based discrimination towards Ugandan women, both in theory and in practice[661]. During a discourse held on March 1988, the President stressed the critical role of gender parity declaring that «the challenges of development enjoin us to pay more than just lip service to the core issue of unequal gender relations in our society»[662]. The following year, in another speech, he contended that

> «there is an urgent need to destroy the prevailing (self) defeatist mentality among large sections of the womenfolk, that they are less capable than men. This mentality is a result of centuries of intimidation and indoctrination and subjugation by men. This must be fought because such subservience is an obstacle to the development of the maximum potential in women»[663].

The NRM government was the first one in the country's history to undertake serious proactive measures to promote women's participation in official politics[664].

What were the real motivations for the President's interest on women's rights and gender equality? On the international front, the appointment of women in decision-making positions was a sign of the democratisation of the country[665]. Domestically, Museveni probably recognised the electoral potential of women, who make up half the country's population, and the influence they can

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[657] *Ibid.*
[658] Boyd, Rosalind E. "Empowerment of Women in Uganda: Real or Symbolic." *Review of African Political Economy 16*, no. 45–46 (January 1989): 106–117. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/03056248908703830. pp. 106-117
[659] *Ibid*.
[660] *Ibid*. pp. 107-108
[661] Byrnes. "Uganda - A Country Study". pp. 3-24
[662] Tamale. "Introduction" In *When Hens Begin to Crow - Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*. pp. 1-33.
[663] Boyd, Rosalind E. "Empowerment of Women in Uganda: Real or Symbolic". p. 108
[664] Tamale. "Introduction" In *When Hens Begin to Crow - Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*. pp. 1-33.
[665] *Ibid*.

exert on the other half[666]. Furthermore, not to be ignored is the valuable participation of women in the ranks of the NRA during the 5 years of nationalist struggles that brought Museveni to power[667]. However, the interpretation of some of his speeches shows an underlying paternalism according to which women were still not considered completely equal, but more as subjects subordinated to men[668]. This is evident in sentences claiming that women have «emerged from the kitchen to take up political leadership» or that «more women have walked out of the bedroom into the boardroom»[669]. The roles they are granted and the initiatives in their favour therefore turned out to be concessions rather than something that was rightfully theirs[670], since «men were the natural leaders»[671].

Even if this were a mere political expedient, what is relevant is that the president's words were not in vain. In fact, notwithstanding women were totally absent from the NRM *10-Point Programme* – containing the movement guiding principles – some of the Museveni's promises turned into concrete actions in favour of women[672]. Not long after becoming President, Museveni received the visit of 20 women leaders from the *National Council of Women* and other women's rights organizations which demanded to be represented in the new state apparatus[673]. The President accepted their request, which was translated in the nomination of 9 women ministers, among which Gertrude Njuba as the new Deputy Minister of Industry, Victoria Sekitoleko as Minister of Agriculture, and Betty Bigombe as Deputy Minister in Prime Minister's Office[674]. Women began to occupy more prominent positions in the various government commissions and in the judiciary[675]. Within the latter, in 1988 Connie Byamugisha was nominated High Court Judge[676]. After the 1989 elections of National Resistance Council, 34 seats were designated to women. In addition, Rhoda Kalema and Victoria Sekitoleko were elected in open elections, winning against two men. President Museveni nominated other three women as deputy ministers, and other two had seats in the NRC as "historical members" nominated for their role in the NRA. As a result, 41 women – namely the 17 percent of the total members – held seats in the Ugandan parliament following the 1989 elections[677]. Between 1991 and 1993, five new districts were created by the NRC[678]. Thus, in the subsequent elections of 1996, the reserved seats for women increased from 34 to 39, and the percentage of women in Parliament rose

[666] *Ibid*.
[667] *Ibid*.
[668] *Ibid*.
[669] Reid. "A History of Modern Uganda". p. 85
[670] Tamale. "Introduction" In *When Hens Begin to Crow - Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*. pp. 1-33.
[671] Reid. "A History of Modern Uganda". p. 85
[672] Tamale. "Introduction" In *When Hens Begin to Crow - Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*. pp. 1-33.
Byrnes. "Uganda - A Country Study". pp. 3-24
[673] Tripp. "Chapter 4: The Political Impact of the Women's Movement under the NRM" In *Women & Politics in Uganda*. pp. 68-102.
[674] *Ibid*.
[675] Tamale. "Introduction" In *When Hens Begin to Crow - Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*. pp. 1-33.
[676] Tripp. "Chapter 4: The Political Impact of the Women's Movement under the NRM" In *Women & Politics in Uganda*. pp. 68-102.
[677] *Ibid*.
[678] Parliament of the Republic of Uganda. "History of Parliament". Parliament of the Republic of Uganda. Accessed February 3, 2022. Available at: https://www.parliament.go.ug/page/history-parliament.

to 19[679]. Of the 109 women who ran in this election, 50 won parliamentary seats[680]. The percentage of women in the parliament continued to increase, and in 2001 female MPs were 75.
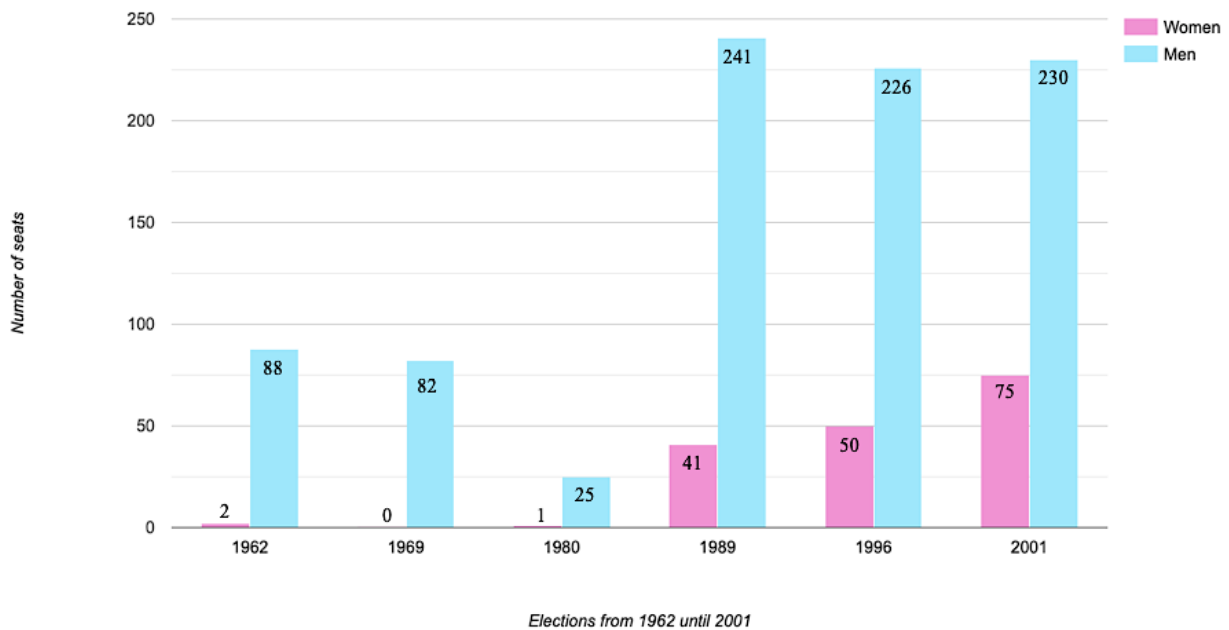

Figure 3.9 – Representation by gender in the Ugandan parliament from the independence until 2001 elections[681]

The issue of reserved seats was highly controversial. On the one hand, critics of this measure argued that this was simply a political and opportunistic tactic of the NRM to capture women's support. On the other hand, according to Christine Oryema Lalobo, a politician who participated in the elections of 1994 for the Constituent Assembly, people were «not been used to women leading and being in positions of authority»[682]. Thus, the establishment of reserved seats turned out to be an indispensable tool to promote women's participation to politics and to increase their political visibility. In this way, the population would have gradually get used to vote for women leaders[683].

The pressure exerted by women's organizations eventually persuaded President Museveni to establish a Ministry dedicated to women, in order to deal with women's needs and demands more appropriately at the national level[684]. In 1986 several women's organizations gathered in a conference with members of the NRM. The topic of the meeting concerned the outcomes of the *UN Women's*

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[679] Tripp. "Chapter 4: The Political Impact of the Women's Movement under the NRM" In *Women & Politics in Uganda*. pp. 68-102.
[680] *Ibid*.
[681] Chart illustrating the evolution of women's representation in the Ugandan Parliament in the period ranging from the independence of the country (1962) until 2001 elections. It has been developed by the author of the dissertation on the basis of the information collected from: Mwesigye, Godfrey. *Trends in the Number of Parliamentarians in Uganda – 1962 to date*. Parliament Watch Uganda and Centre for Policy Analysis, September 21, 2020. Available at: https://cepa.or.ug/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Trends-in-the-number-of-parliamentarians-162-to-date.pdf
[682] Tripp. "Chapter 4: The Political Impact of the Women's Movement under the NRM" In *Women & Politics in Uganda*. pp. 71
[683] *Ibid*.
[684] *Ibid*.

Decade Conference held in Nairobi and what they would mean for Ugandan women[685]. It was on this occasion that an organization founded in 1985, *Action for Development* (ACFODE)[686], the main organizer of the event, openly advocated for the establishment of both a women's ministry and a women's sections within each ministry[687]. The majority of these request were answered positively[688]. As a result, in February 1988, the new *Ministry of Women in Development* was established – whose first minister was Joyce Mpanga – and a new department within the NRM Secretariat, called the *Directorate of Women's Affairs*, was formed[689]. These institutions collaborated with women's groups and NGOs to address women's concerns at all levels of development strategies[690][691]. After three years, the Ministry was reformed as the *Ministry of Gender and Community Development***.** The function of the latter was to design and implement policies concerning women, and to raise awareness on gender issues at the political level. In particular, among the Ministry's purposes there were: the achievement women's equal rights via legislative and administrative reforms; the promotion of businesses led by women and their productive capacities; the active engagement of women in the decision-making processes.

In 1994, the ex-*Minister of Gender and Community Development***,** Specioza Wandira Kazibwe was appointed as Vice-President of the National Parliament[692]. She was the first woman in Uganda to hold this position, which she maintained until 2003.

Figure 3.10 – Specioza Wandira-Kazibwe, Vice President of Uganda,

[685] *Ibid*.

[686] ACFODE is a National women's rights organization founded to provide a platform for effective debate and action on women's rights, empowerment, and gender equality in Uganda. Bafaki, Regina. "About Us Action For Development". Action For Development Portal. ACFODE. Accessed February 6, 2022. Available at: https://acfode.or.ug/about-us/.

[687] Tripp. "Chapter 4: The Political Impact of the Women's Movement under the NRM" In *Women & Politics in Uganda*. pp. 68-102.

[688] *Ibid*.

[689] Tamale. "Introduction" In *When Hens Begin to Crow - Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*. pp. 1-33. Byrnes. "Uganda - A Country Study". pp. 3-24

[690] Wakoko, Florence, and Lobao Linda. "Reconceptualizing Gender and Reconstructing Social Life: Ugandan Women and the Path to National Development." *Africa Today 43*, no. 3 (1996): 307-322. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/4187111. pp. 307-322

[691] Byrnes. "Uganda - A Country Study". pp. 3-24

[692] Tripp. "Chapter 4: The Political Impact of the Women's Movement under the NRM" In *Women & Politics in Uganda*. pp. 68-102.

A further request coming from ACFODE and other women's associations concerned the abolition of the *National Council of Women*, the parastatal organization created in 1978 under Amin's government[694]. It was a reminder of the persistent threat of government hegemony over women's movement. The leadership of the *National Council* was indeed the outcome of a governmental decision, and not chosen by its women members. In its place, it should have been established an independent umbrella group. A key actor in this process was Joyce Mpanga. She sustained the necessity to coordinate women's groups though an autonomous entity, since the support for women's causes could not depend on the government in office. Thus, the *Minister of Women in Development* was in favour of the continuation of the NCW but only as an independent non-governmental organization. She asserted as follows:

> «I wanted the NCW to remain but as an autonomous NGO body. And that's why in the ministry I started a section for NGOs, a section that could co-ordinate between government and NGOs, that could receive memoranda from NGOs and bring them to the attention of the government»[695].

In 1989 the office of the Minister of Women in Development passed to Gertrude Byekwaso Lubega. Following Mpanga's departure from the Ministry, the next Ministers did not have a significant connection with the women's movement, so they were consequently less concerned with women's associationism independence. In this context, the NRM became more interventionist towards the Minister, increasing the concerns of feminist organizations. Finally, in 1993, a new law dissolved the NCW and substituted it with a hierarchical structure of women's councils, which were not controlled by the *Ministry of Women in Development*. However, women remained sceptical and critic about this new structure.

These favourable developments also proved fertile ground for the further proliferation of feminist associations and groups active in various fields, from the social to the political, from the cultural to the economic[696]. Some examples are the associations created as a result of the increase of women engagement in business activities, such as the *Uganda Women Entrepreneurs Association Limited,* which within five years developed into an umbrella group in this field[697]. Several

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[693] Human Rights Watch. "Speciosa Wandira Kazibwe, Uganda". Human rights Watch. May 15, 2014. Accessed February 6, 2022. Available at: https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/05/15/speciosa-wandira-kazibwe-uganda.
[694] Tripp. "Chapter 4: The Political Impact of the Women's Movement under the NRM" In *Women & Politics in Uganda*. pp. 68-102.
[695] Tripp, Aili Mari. "Chapter 4: The Political Impact of the Women's Movement under the NRM" In *Women & Politics in Uganda*. p. 86
[696] Tamale. "Introduction" In *When Hens Begin to Crow - Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*. pp. 1-33.
[697] Tripp, Aili Mari. "Chapter 5: Why the Women's Movement Expanded under the NRM" In *Women & Politics in Uganda*. pp. 105–123.

professional associations were also formed, such as the *Association of Women Medical Doctors*, the *Media Women's Association*, and the *Association of Women Engineers, Technicians and Scientists*[698].

In 1996, the *Uganda Women's Network* (UWONET) – a women's association recently founded – published a *Women's Manifesto* in which were listed the most relevant concerns affecting women in Uganda[699]. Among these figured «peace, stability and unity in diversity; gender balance, equality and affirmative action; poverty and economic empowerment of women; violence against women; protection of the rights of the family […]; and women and health"»[700]. Thus, it was in these contexts that women's activism in Uganda, which was also supported by a growing global awareness of feminist issues, worked, becoming one of the most important pillars which contributed to women's empowerment[701]. Women's growing associationism had also resulted in significant participation in politics at local level[702]. Women which were active in the local councils usually belonged to feminist organizations[703], and the same was true of politics at the national level[704]. Thus, several initiatives were undertaken. In particular, women have played a key role in two important reforms concerning local administrations and the plan for the new constitution[705].

As far as the first point is concerned, the structure of local administration before the reform was organised on the basis of the principles of the colonial system[706]. Local government was thus administered by chieftains whose responsibilities encompassed anything from settling disputes between families and clans to levying taxes[707]. The participation of women's in these local committees was almost irrelevant, if not completely absent[708]. With the introduction of the *Resistance Council (RC) system*, a democratic framework was established for the management of questions of law and order, defence, local projects, elections, and the resolution of disputes between the national government and the local population. Regarding women, the reform provided that among the nine elected members of each RC, at least one seat shall be reserved to women[709]. This achievement was the joint outcome of the government affirmative action and of women's campaigning and lobbying activities. According to a woman ex freedom fighter:

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[698] *Ibid*.
[699] Tripp. "Chapter 4: The Political Impact of the Women's Movement under the NRM" In *Women & Politics in Uganda*. pp. 68-102.
[700] *Ibid*. p. 72
[701] Wakoko, Lobao. "Reconceptualizing Gender and Reconstructing Social Life: Ugandan Women and the Path to National Development". pp. 307-322
Tripp. "Chapter 4: The Political Impact of the Women's Movement under the NRM" In *Women & Politics in Uganda*. pp. 68-102
[702] Tripp. "Chapter 4: The Political Impact of the Women's Movement under the NRM" In *Women & Politics in Uganda*. pp. 68-102
[703] *Ibid*.
[704] *Ibid*.
[705] Wakoko, Lobao. "Reconceptualizing Gender and Reconstructing Social Life: Ugandan Women and the Path to National Development". pp. 307-322
[706] *Ibid*.
[707] *Ibid*.
[708] *Ibid*.
[709] *Ibid*.

«We [women] realized that it would be a mistake to wait for a place to be prepared for us. We had to begin negotiations anew to see that women are given some share of power. We knew that many, who are not so sensitized about women issues, do not want us here, if we had not spoken out, we would not be here»[710].

On the second point, several women's associations made their voices heard within the political arenas where the new Constitution was discussed[711]. In 1988, the Parliament set up a Constitutional Commission to draft the new Constitution. It was composed of 21 members, including two women: Mary Maitum and Miria Matembe[712]. The draft of the document was presented in 1993. The following year saw the elections for the Constituent Assembly, responsible of formulating the final version of the Constitution[713]. The Assembly included 52 women among its 286 members, which accounted for the 18 percent of the total composition[714]. The majority of them were part of a Women's Caucus – an a-political group dedicated to fostering agreement on matters of specific relevance to women[715]. Furthermore, a woman, Victoria Mwaka, was also appointed as Vice-President of the Assembly[716]. During the five years which led to the adoption of the Constitution, the efforts of these women and of those in the back rows turned out to be fundamental for the inclusion of articles on women's rights. In 1991, women's organizations collaborated with the *Ministry of Women in Development* in the draft of a *memorandum* which would have encouraged a national debate on the eradication of gender-based discrimination against women[717]. The new Constitution was finally adopted in 1995[718]. For the first time, gender equality has been enshrined as a fundamental principle in the most important law of the nation. The Constitution has also provided for affirmative action in cases where this is not respected[719], as expressed in Art. 32.1 – *Affirmative action in favour of marginalised group*s under which «the State shall take affirmative action in favour of groups marginalized on the basis of gender […] for the purpose of redressing imbalances which exist against them»[720]. Furthermore, among Uganda's *National Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy*, the No XV affirms that «The State shall recognise the significant role that women play in

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[710] *Ibid*.
[711] Tripp. "Chapter 4: The Political Impact of the Women's Movement under the NRM" In *Women & Politics in Uganda*. pp. 68-102
[712] *Ibid.*
[713] Parliament of the Republic of Uganda. "History of Parliament". Parliament of the Republic of Uganda. Accessed February 3, 2022. Available at: https://www.parliament.go.ug/page/history-parliament.
[714] Tripp. "Chapter 4: The Political Impact of the Women's Movement under the NRM" In *Women & Politics in Uganda*. pp. 68-102
[715] *Ibid*.
[716] *Ibid*.
[717] *Ibid*.
[718] Parliament of Uganda. "History of Parliament".
[719] Ellis, Amanda, Claire Manuel, and C. Mark Blackden. *Gender and Economic Growth in Uganda Unleashing the Power of Women*. Washington, DC: World Bank Publications, 2006. Available at: https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/7388/345160PAPER0UG101OFFICIAL0USE0ONLY1.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y p. 16
[720] Constitution of the Republic of Uganda. "Article 32 – Affirmative action in favour of marginalized groups". 1995. Available at: https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Uganda_2017.pdf?lang=en p. 32

society»[721]. This Constitution is consistent with Uganda's obligations under the *Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW), which the country ratified in 1985. The most relevant articles concerning women's rights are Art. 21.2, according to which «a person shall not be discriminated against on the ground of sex [...] »[722] and Art. 33 – *Rights of women*, which states as follow:

> « 1. Women shall be accorded full and equal dignity of the person with men.
>
> 2. The State shall provide the facilities and opportunities necessary to enhance the welfare of women to enable them to realize their full potential and advancement.
>
> 3. The State shall protect women and their rights, taking into account their unique status and natural maternal functions in society.
>
> 4. Women shall have the right to equal treatment with men … rights shall include equal opportunities in political, economic and social activities.
>
> 5. Women shall have the right to affirmative action for the purpose of redressing the imbalances created by history, tradition and custom.
>
> 6. Laws, cultures, customs or traditions which are against the dignity, welfare or interest of women or which undermine their status are prohibited by this Constitution»[723].

According to the women's movement, a fundamental pillar for women's empowerment laid in improving education policies. Indeed, acquiring a university education was seen as strategically important in order to attain leadership positions. Unfortunately, despite the progress made since independence, there was still a persistent gap between male and female education[724]. Several women's organizations, such as the *Uganda Association of University Women*, ACFODE, mobilized in this direction[725]. Firstly in 1987, they lobbied for the establishment of *School of Women's Studies* at Makerere University in Kampala[726]. Three years later the first students joined the programme. Then, they successfully exerted pressure on the Faculty Senate of the University to modify the admission criteria for women's access to university[727]. As a consequence, women enrolment at the University increased by ten percentage points over 5 years – from 30 percent in 1991 to 40 percent in 1996[728]. The improvements in the sphere of education concerned also primary and secondary schools, whose numbers more than doubled from 1978 to 1987. There was also an increase in the

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[721] Constitution of the Republic of Uganda. "National Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy - No XV Recognition of role of women in society". 1995. Available at: https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Uganda_2017.pdf?lang=en p. 17
[722] Constitution of the Republic of Uganda. "Article 21 – Equality and freedom from discrimination". p. 26
[723] Constitution of the Republic of Uganda. "Article 33 – Rights of Women". p. 33
[724] Tripp. "Chapter 4: The Political Impact of the Women's Movement under the NRM" In *Women & Politics in Uganda*. pp. 68-102
[725] *Ibid.*
[726] *Ibid.*
[727] *Ibid.*
[728] *Ibid.*

school enrolment of girls, so that 45 percent of them attended elementary schools and 30 percent high-school[729].

On an economic and financial level, women suffered from the effects of the economic crisis that had been going on since the end of the 1970s. In this context, women had to broaden their working activities[730]. Thus, the government expressed its commitment to advance gender equality and the general living conditions of women, for instance by increasing their salaries and providing them better work prospects[731]. At the end of the 1980s, the NRM approved and applied the *Structural Adjustment Programs* – SAPs of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as a means to solve Uganda's economic problems[732]. However, these plans required vast reductions in government spending on sectors such as education, social welfare and health, along with currency devaluation[733]. All these changes had a negative impact on women, worsening their situation and putting them under even greater financial pressure[734]. As a result, since 1989 women started to establish informal and semi-formal networks for savings and credit, such as the *Rotating savings and credit association* (ROSCAs), as well as credit initiatives supported by non-governmental organizations. In this way, women avoided the traditional savings and credit institutions which often operated on the basis of gender discrimination against women[735]. Similar informal mechanism, although less articulated, had been in place since colonial times, when Ugandan women had to use financial strategies to reduce poverty and social subordination resulting from the arrival of the British[736]. Moreover, these group networks have encouraged women to enter new fields of work and learn new occupations in the informal economy, previously reserved to men. In this way women started to emancipate themselves.

Nevertheless, a deeper analysis shows the other side of the coin. Some critics asserted that, in reality, certain policies and initiatives turned out to be not completely in favour of women's emancipation[737]. For instance, the ministry responsible for women's affairs has historically received the lowest share of government funding[738]. The fact that just six out of the 62 members of the post 1996 election cabinet were women serves as another illustration of the predominance of male authority[739]. Furthermore, while women are granted full voting rights since 1962, their choices were conditioned by their male relatives and partners[740]. This was the case in the 1996 elections when

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[729]Tripp. "Chapter 5: Why the Women's Movement Expanded under the NRM" In *Women & Politics in Uganda*. pp. 105–123
[730] *Ibid*.
[731] Byrnes. "Uganda - A Country Study".
[732] Wakoko, Lobao. "Reconceptualizing Gender and Reconstructing Social Life: Ugandan Women and the Path to National Development". pp. 307-322
[733] *Ibid*.
[734] *Ibid.*
[735] *Ibid.*
[736] *Ibid.*
[737] Tamale. "Introduction" In *When Hens Begin to Crow - Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*. pp. 1-33.
[738] *Ibid.*
[739] *Ibid.*
[740] *Ibid.*

numerous episodes of election-related domestic violence have been documented, in some cases up to the death of women, just because they chose independently who to vote for[741]. Some critics also noted that women appointed to positions of power usually had a lack of interest in gender issues[742].

To sum up, the most significant improvements for women since Museveni's rise to power concerned women's engagement in the political arena, the ability to run for office, the advancement to positions of leadership, and the increased ability to express themselves openly[743]. In particular, Miria Matembe, member of the NRC and former president of ACFODE; Janet Museveni wife of the President and founder of UWESO; Speciosa Wandira Kazibwe, Vice-President and Minister of Women in Development; Victoria Sekitoleko, ex Minister of Agriculture; and Betty Bigombe (former Minister of State in the PM's Office), were recognized as the most successful women national leaders[744]. The independence of the women's movement, after years of domination under the regimes of Obote and Amin, turned out to be fundamental for the development and the growth of the movement itself, and for its capacity to exert pressure at political level. In less than ten years from the begin of the NRM government, the women's movement in Uganda became known as one of the most prominent sociocultural forces on the African political stage[745].

Uganda National Policies	Uganda National Laws	International Laws and Regulatory Frameworks
· National HIV and AIDS Policy (2001) · Gender Policy of the Judiciary (2003) · National Equal Opportunities Policy (2006) · National Gender Policy (2007) · Makerere University Gender Equality Policy (2009) · Guidelines for Mainstreaming Gender in Human Resource Management in the Public Service (2011) · Gender in Education Sector Policy (2016) · National Priority Gender Equality Indicators (2016) · National Policy on the Elimination of GBV (2016)	· Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act (2009) · National Women's Council Act (1993, amended 2010) · Domestic Violence Act (2010) · Prohibition of FGM (2010) · Sexual Offences Act (2011) · Domestic Violence Regulations (2011) · Anti-Pornography Act (2014)	· CEDAW (1985) · BPfA (1995) · Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (2004) · AU Gender Policy (2008) · CARE International Gender Policy (2009) · Maputo Protocol (2010) · Commonwealth Secretariat's Gender Equality Policy (2012) · Agenda 2063 (2015) · SDGs (2016-2030)

Figure 3.11 – Overview of laws and policies adopted by the Ugandan government on gender equality[746]

[741] *Ibid.*
[742] Reid. "A History of Modern Uganda". p. 85
[743] Tripp."Chapter 4: The Political Impact of the Women's Movement under the NRM" In *Women & Politics in Uganda*. pp. 68-102.
[744] *Ibid.*
[745] Tripp. "Chapter 5: Why the Women's Movement Expanded under the NRM" In *Women & Politics in Uganda*. pp. 105–123.
[746] Ssali, Sarah, and Kabaasa Bruce. *Matrix and Analysis of the Gender Equality Law and Policies in Uganda*. Kampala, Uganda: School of Women and Gender Studies in partnership with University Forum on Governance under the Gender Equality Project, April 2019. Available at: https://www.dgf.ug/sites/default/files/rescrc/A-Matrix-and-Analysis-of-the-Gender-Equality-Laws-and-Policies-in-Uganda.pdf. pp. 19-22

Over the past twenty years, the women's movement and government have continued to work for the improvement of women's rights and gender equality, albeit with ups and downs. The following is an overview of the laws and policies adopted by the Ugandan government in this area.

The legal framework provides a relatively positive picture of the situation of women's rights in Uganda. However, it was deemed appropriate to conduct a survey to directly ask Ugandan women about the current conditions in the country and to identify the gap between the rights guaranteed by Ugandan laws and the rights that women actually enjoy. The results of the survey are presented in the conclusive part of the dissertation.

3.3.2 Brief overview of the state of gender equality in Uganda

The following lines provide an overview of the current state of gender equality in Uganda on the basis of the gender indexes analysed in the first chapter and on the Uganda country-profile formulated by the *United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women* (UN Women). Among the indexes analysed in the first chapter to measure gender equality, the following have been selected in Africa were the *Gender Development Index* (GDI) and the *Gender Inequality Index* (GII) developed by the UNDP, the *Global Gender Gap Index* by the WEF, the *Africa Gender Equality Index* by the AfDB, and the *Africa Gender Index*, jointly developed by the AfDB and the UNECA.

In the 2020 Human Development Report of the UNDP, Uganda gets a score of 0.863 in the GDI and of 0.535 in the GII (both on a scale 0-1)[747]. According to the 2019 GII, Uganda ranks at the 131° on a classification of 162 countries. The following tables provide an accurate picture of the Uganda GDI's and GII's sub-dimensions[748].

Uganda's GDI for 2019										
			Health		Education				Resource control	
F-M ratio	HDI values		Life expectancy at birth		Expected years of schooling		Mean years of schooling		GNI per capita	
GDI value	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
0.863	0.503	0.582	65.6	61.0	10.6	12.2	4.9	7.6	1,591	2,671

Figure 3.12 - Uganda's GDI for 2019[749]

[747] United Nations Development Programme. "The Next Frontier: Human Development and the Anthropocene Briefing note for countries on the 2020 Human Development Report" in Human Development Report 2020 Available at: https://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/Country-Profiles/UGA.pdf pp. 5-6
[748] *Ibid*.
[749] *Ibid*.

Uganda's GII for 2019								
Reproductive health				Empowerment			Economic Activity	
GII value	GII rank	Maternal mortality ratio	Adolescent birth rate	Female seats in parliament (%)	Population with at least some secondary education (%)		Labour force participation (%)	
					Female	Male	Female	Male
0.535	131	375.0 (every 100,000 live births)	118.8 (per 1,000 women of ages 15-19).	34.9	27.5	35.1	67.0	73.9

Figure 3.13 - Uganda's GII for 2019[750]

On the basis of the *Global Gender Gap Index,* the World Economic Forum's *Global Gender Gap Report 2021* ranks Uganda 66th out of 156 countries with a score of 0.717[751]. In the regional classification, that includes 35 countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, Uganda ranks tenth[752]. Notably, in the various sub-indices, Uganda ranks 131st in educational attainment (score of 0.898), 74th in the economic opportunity sub-index (score of 0.692), and 46th in political empowerment (score of 0.296)[753]. Uganda's best performance is in the health and survival sub index, where it has closed 98% of its gender gap[754].

Figure 3.14 - Uganda Country profile by World Economic Forum[755]

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[750] *Ibid*.
[751] World Economic Forum. "The Global Gender Gap Report 2021". p. 10
[752] *Ibid*. p. 31
[753] *Ibid*. pp. 18-19
[754] *Ibid*.
[755] *Ibid*. p. 379

As far as the indexes designed specifically for the African continent, according to the *Africa Gender Equality Index* 2015, Uganda ranks at the 13th position with an overall score of 63.4 (on a scale where 100 means gender equality)[756].
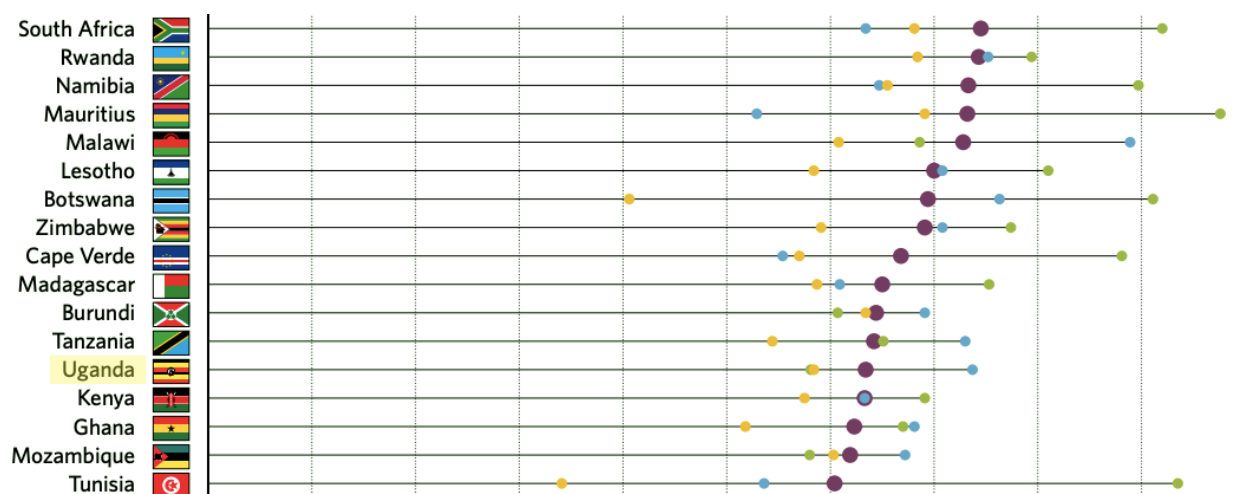

Figure 3.15 - Results of the Africa Gender Equality Index 2015[757].

Uganda rankings in the 3 dimensions:

	Overall	Economic opportunities	Human development	Laws & institutions	
	73.7 7th	58.1 34th	58.4 12th		758

In particular, Uganda ranks among the top ten countries for economic opportunities for women.

In the following table are shown the results of Uganda in the dimensions identified by the *Africa Gender Index[759]*:

Africa Gender Index (AGI) 2019			
(AGI)a			
AGI value	**Economic**	**Social**	**Empowerment and Representation**
0.613	**Gender gaps** (period 2009-2019)		
	0.663	0.916	0.379

Figure 3.16 - Africa Gender Index (AGI) 2019 [760]

The data and information collected through these indices provide insight into the current situation in Uganda. There has been progress in many dimensions. Of particular importance is the increase in the number of seats held by women in parliament, who accounted for nearly 35 percent

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[756] Mizrahi, Fraser-Moleketi, Kouakou, et al. Af*rica Gender Equality Index 2015 - Empowering African Women: An Agenda for Action*. p. 7

[757] *Ibid*.

[758] *Ibid*. p. 30

[759] African Development Bank, and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. *Africa Gender Index Report 2019 - What the 2019 Africa Gender Index Tells Us about Gender Equality, and How Can It Be Achieved*. p. 62

[760] *Ibid*.

of all MPs as of February 2021[761]. However, only 42.6 percent of the gender-related indicators data required to monitor achievement of the SDGs were measurable as of December 2020[762]. Based on the available indicators, UN Women rates Uganda's performance as low in 23.8 percent of cases, medium 13.9 percent of the time, and high for only 4.9 percent[763]. Thus, there is still a long way to go before gender equality and women's rights are fully guaranteed in Uganda[764].

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[761] UN Women. *Country Fact Sheet Uganda*. Available at: https://data.unwomen.org/country/uganda
[762] *Ibid.*
[763] *Ibid.*
[764] *Ibid.*

CONCLUSION

Gender inequality is the result of a multitude of factors that have become deeply rooted over time in a wide variety of spheres, from politics and economics to religion and society. It is precisely the pervasiveness with which it has developed and spread across countries that makes it so difficult to eradicate today. The main international organisations predict that it will take more than 120 years to achieve gender equality in Sub-Saharan Africa[765]. In the meantime, millions of women, girls and little girls will find themselves one step behind, with one less chance and one more risk. Gender inequality is not only evident in the data, that clearly shows the difference between being born a woman or a man today: it is a daily perception that haunts every woman throughout her life.

The following words by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie – a *Happy African Feminist Who Does Not Hate Men and Who Likes To Wear Lip Gloss And High Heels For Herself And Not For Men*[766], as she defines herself in the essay *We Should All Be Feminists* – illustrate why it is necessary to specifically address gender and women's rights:

> «Some people ask, 'Why the word feminist? Why not just say you are a believer in human rights, or something like that?' Because that would be dishonest. Feminism is, of course, part of human rights in general – but to choose to use the vague expression human rights is to deny the specific and particular problem of gender. It would be a way of pretending that it was not women who have, for centuries, been excluded. It would be a way of denying that the problem of gender targets women. That the problem was not about being human, but specifically about being a female human. For centuries, the world divided human beings into two groups and then proceeded to exclude and oppress one group. It is only fair that the solution to the problem should acknowledge that. […] I was once talking about gender and a man said to me, 'Why does it have to be you as a woman? Why not you as a human being?' This type of question is a way of silencing a person's specific experiences. Of course, I am a human being, but there are particular things that happen to me in the world because I am a woman»[767].

Gender inequality ranges from the subtlest details, such as the unwelcome whistling in the street, to gender-based violence, gender-pay gap, sexual exploitation, and lack of political representation. It is so widespread that many women have become accustomed to not even noticing it or to being perpetrators themselves. It is not just an ethical or moral issue, it is a practical problem, an obstacle to the full and healthy development of the whole society. Thus, in the last decades, most countries

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[765] World Economic Forum. "Global Gender Gap Report 2021". WEF, 2021. p. 7
[766] Ngozi Adichie, Chimamanda. *We Should All Be Feminists*. London, 2014: Fourth Estate. p. 7
[767] *Ibid*. p. 13-14

have sought to implement different kinds of solutions to promote women's rights and reduce gender inequality.

As mentioned in the first chapter, various legal and policy frameworks have been enacted at both the international and African levels. At the same time, international organisations have developed indices to more accurately measure progress and problems in the various areas where gender inequality manifests itself. The picture of Africa that emerges from the first chapter is that of a continent that has enacted and adhered to numerous conventions to protect and promote women's rights and gender equality in recent years. Among the most important are the UN *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* and the AU *Maputo Protocol*. On the other hand, recent reports formulated on the basis of gender indices show a continent that still lags behind in the implementation of these laws and policies. So, despite the many advances, there is still much to be done. This is what the feminist movements are fighting for, just as they have fought over the years to get us where we are today. In fact, the second chapter of this thesis is devoted to the struggles that women's movements have waged officially since the late 19th century and unofficially much earlier. The movement underwent a real evolution in the XX century, which led, on the one hand, to a differentiation into several currents and, on the other hand, to the inclusion of more and more categories of women. Even though all women are affected by gender discrimination, there are many variables that change the perception, impact and consequences of discrimination. For this reason, it was decided to focus on African and postcolonial feminism, as these movements are the most representative of African women. For the purposes of this study, it was also considered fundamental to take a step back and examine the origins of gender inequality, starting with the pre-colonial period. While it is true that patriarchal societies existed in Africa, many theories and historical examples have debunked the common Western stereotype of submissive pre-colonial African women. An analysis of women in pre-colonial Africa has allowed for a more accurate assessment of the impact of Western colonialism - at the political, economic and social levels - on African gender relations.

The issues analysed and addressed in the first two chapters were functional for the case study conducted in the third chapter. Thus, the question underlying the whole project concerns the investigation of the factors of oppression and drivers of empowerment that have influenced the long-term development of women's rights and gender equality in Uganda.

As for the former – the factors of oppression – according to the analysis carried out in the last chapter, two factors in particular can be identified that suppressed the role of women and hinder gender equality. First and foremost, British colonialism and the imposition of an administrative framework and value system external to Africa. The lives of Ugandan women were affected on a

practical level by the imposition of discriminatory political and administrative regulations that hampered their self-determination in different spheres – economic, social, educational, and so on. Colonialism also profoundly affected Ugandan women's perceptions of themselves, disempowering their beliefs and authority and modifying even the gender relations within the household. Thus, it is possible to affirm that Western gender stereotypes, imported to Africa, deeply and negatively influenced the role of women in Uganda. Secondly, the patriarchal, militaristic and violent system of the dictatorial regimes of Obote and Amin, which not only severely limited the freedom of women, but also made them the principal target of its extreme violence.

On the other side, the drivers of empowerment have been, firstly, the strength and determination of Ugandan women's movements, that since the last years of colonial domination have organized in order to promote women's rights and gender equality, surviving even the darkest periods. Secondly, the presence of a government – the one of Museveni – which effectively enacted several laws and policies in favour of women's rights and of an equal representation. In particular, more than a third of Uganda's parliamentarians are currently women, 34.9 percent to be exact – corresponding to 160 women. Thus, although actual implementation is still lacking, women's movements are able to flourish and advocate for gender equality. This is an evidence of the pivotal importance of the support of the national government for the development of women's movements.

After retracing Ugandan history since pre-colonial times, according to a gender perspective, it was deemed essential to investigate what is the state of women's rights and gender equality in Uganda today. The question was posed to those directly affected, i.e. the Ugandan women. For this purpose, a survey has been submitted to 250 Ugandan citizens, 225 of whom were women. Most of the participants are in the 25-35 age group and live in the city, belong to the middle class and have a university degree. At least 70 percent of the respondents are studying or working in a field related to gender issues and women's rights, so their knowledge on this topic seems to be above the Ugandan average. The survey was designed to explore the state of gender equality and women's rights in Uganda and to paint a picture of the gender discrimination Ugandans suffer in their country. It also examines what are perceived to be the main drivers of inequality and women's empowerment, as well as in which sectors gender discrimination is most prevalent (more details about the survey are available in the Appendix at page 122)

As shown in the graph below, according to almost 75 percent of the respondents, women do not enjoy the same rights as men in Uganda[768]. The same percentage rates the level of gender equality achieved by their country as medium/low – from 0 to 3 (223 people)[769]. While only 8 people out of

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[768] *Question 1 of the Survey on Gender Equality and Women's rights in Uganda (Carolina Cuccu, 2022).*
[769] *Question 2*

250 thinks that there is full gender equality in Uganda. Consequently, it is not surprising that more than 80 percent of female participants have directly experienced gender discrimination[770]. In addition, more than half of the participants – the 54 percent – affirmed that gender inequality highly influenced both their opportunities and choices in life in a negative way, at different levels – such as educational, working, social, economic, political[771].
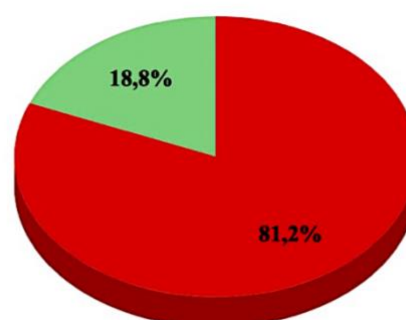
Do you think women and men have the same rights in Uganda?

25,2%

74,8%
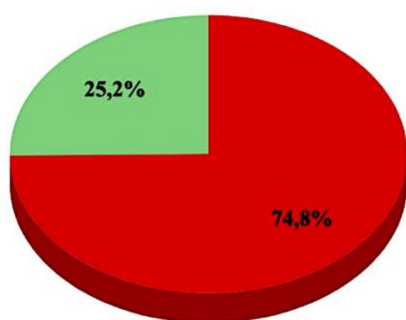
● NO ● YES

*Figure 4.1 –
Do you think women and men have
the same rights in Uganda?
(Question 1)*

Have you ever experienced gender inequality?

18,8%

81,2%

● YES ● NO

*Figure 4.2 –
Have you ever experienced
gender inequality?
(Question 4)*

*Developed on the basis of the data collected in the "Gender Equality and Women's rights in Uganda" survey
(Carolina Cuccu, 2022)*

When asked about the areas in which Ugandan women are most discriminated against, the ranking shows household in the first place, followed by religious and cultural spheres, then the working and political-institutional environments[772]. In fact, the 74.4 percent believes that home is the place where unpaid care, domestic work and parental responsibilities are not shared equally between men and women[773]. The greater burden of taking care of the house is primarily on the latter. 77 percent of respondents affirms that by addressing the unequal balance between women and men in the household, the government would also put a stop to domestic and intimate partner violence against women[774].

When asked if there is a gap between the rights guaranteed by Ugandan laws and policies and the rights women enjoy in real life, it has emerged that 94 percent of Ugandans believes that the legal

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[770] *Question 4*
[771] *Question 5*
[772] *Question 6*
[773] *Question 8*
[774] *Question 9*

framework for women is not effectively implemented, as shown by the graph below[775]. In this context, the 34 percent considers the lack of legal protections for women as one of the principal cause of gender inequality[776]. As stated by Harriet, a 38 years old woman, «the government must not only pass laws but also ensure that these laws are implemented to protect the rights of women in Uganda». According to Agnes, 38, and Rebecca, 24, the lack of implementation is also due to limited funds and problems of budget allocations.
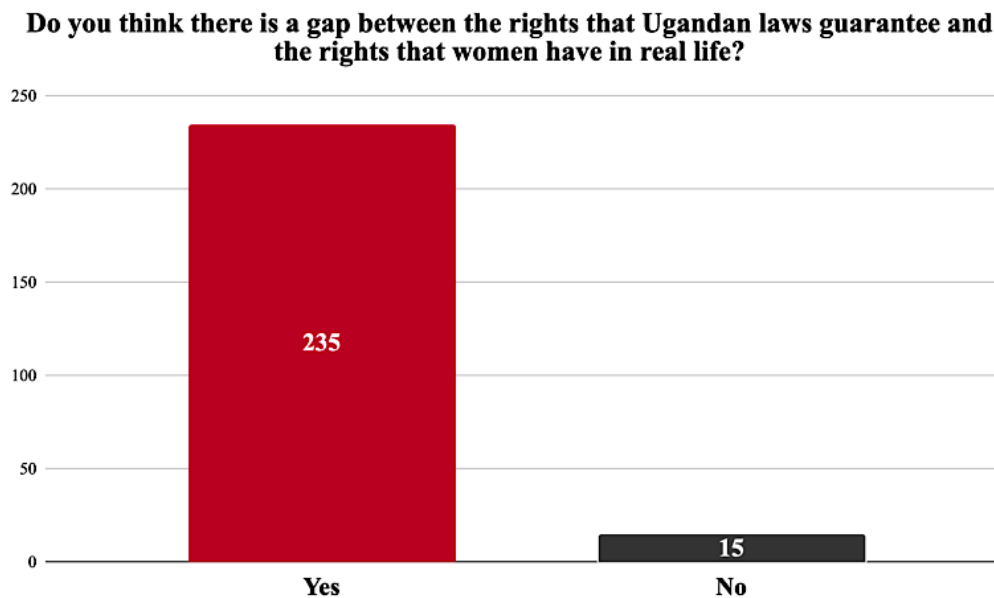
Do you think there is a gap between the rights that Ugandan laws guarantee and the rights that women have in real life?

Figure 4.3 – Do you think there is a gap between the rights that Ugandan laws guarantee and the rights that women have in real life?[777] (Question 7)

According to 78 percent of the respondents the main drivers of gender inequality are the social mindset and the stereotyped gender roles, present especially within the Ugandan culture and the religious sphere, as well as within the household – as noted previously. Another major driver, according to 67 percent, is present at the educational level, whereby boys and girls are treated unequally from an early age even within schools[778]. In fact, as stated by Evelyn, 27, «education is key - girls and boys are taught negative cultural, religious and societal norms at a young age, which greatly affects their ability to accept that women's rights are human rights». According to Peace, 30, «women are treated unequally, starts from home. Children are raised with gender roles: boys do not go into the kitchen and girls do not dream of doing what boys do. It starts there and continues in

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[775] *Question 7*
[776] *Question 8*
[777] *Developed on the basis of the data collected in the "Gender Equality and Women's rights in Uganda" survey (Carolina Cuccu, Rome, 2022)*
[778] *Question 8*

educational institutions. Society considers boys fit for leadership roles, while girls are not seen as capable of making the right decisions. Girls actually have the ability to do what boys can do, and even better. When it comes to the workplace, most institutions are slowly adapting and giving equal opportunities to women. However, there is still something that needs to be addressed. Women still do a lot of the unpaid care work in the home, but then they have to work just like men. We wake up and work 8 hours a day, but when we come home, we have to take care of the children and the husband. That is not fair. Men need to be educated that it is not a woman's divine calling to take care of everyone». Furthermore, as stated by Jane, 32, «formal and informal institutions, such as patriarchy, religion, family, marriage as well as social and cultural practices play a major role in perpetuating gender inequalities in Uganda». According to Lilian, 27, it is like a vicious circle since «the socially constructed norms and beliefs, as well as the limited decision-making power placed in women's hands, not only prevent them from achieving their personal goals, but also hold them back financially, resulting in a great inequality between the two genders».

Regarding women's involvement in politics and economic opportunities – two of the most important indicators of women's emancipation – participants ranks Uganda's level as medium-low[779]. On a scale from 0 to 5, almost the 85 percent rate women participation in the economic and political areas between 0 - 3[780]. Indeed, 43 percent believe that women and men are not equally represented in politics[781], and 60.8 percent consider the field of politics and decision-making to be one of the areas where women are most discriminated against[782]. Only the 12.8 percent consider women as appropriately involved in the political and economic spheres.

This being the general framework, it has been asked who has the primary responsibility for reducing these gender inequalities and promoting women's rights[783]. Almost 90 percent of participants indicated the national government as the main responsible (87.6 percent), followed by family and relatives (66.5 percent), and non-governmental organizations (49.6 percent). Also, feminist movements – as noted in the second and third chapter of the present dissertation – are deemed responsible of empowering women and advocating for gender equality. Indeed, as Paget, 24, points out, «it is important for all women to join the feminist movement to fight for equal rights because every woman can create and influence change at every level, by every means and on every platform». Inequality is a systemic problem that cannot be solved individually but requires the implementation of broader and

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[779] *Question 12*
[780] *Question 12*
[781] *Question 8*
[782] *Question 6*
[783] *Question 3*

more comprehensive frameworks, as well as collective movements, especially at the government level[784].

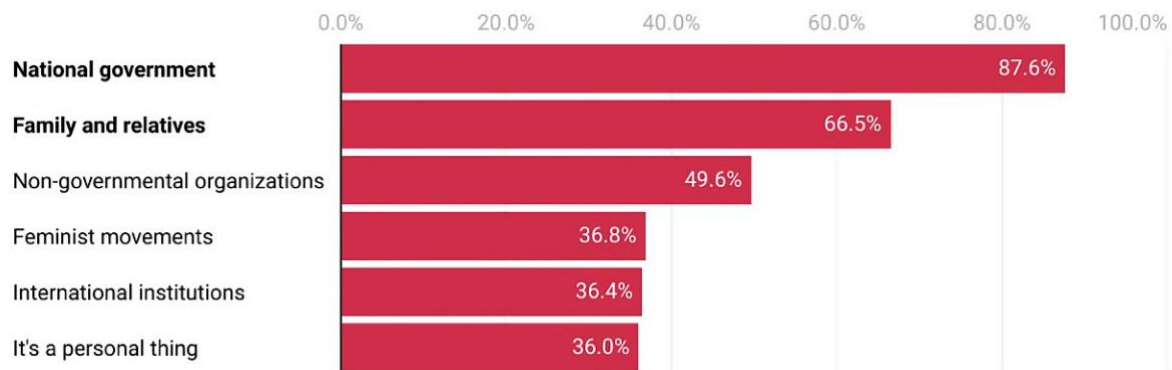**Who have the primary responsibility to enhance gender equality and promote women's rights?**

Figure 4.4 – Who have the primary responsibility to enhance gender equality and promote women's rights?[785]

(Question 3)

It was subsequently asked how the government should act and which actions should take at different level. Firstly, to fight violence against women[786]; secondly, to improve women's economic opportunities and decision-making powers[787]; thirdly, to improve girls' and women's participation and leadership in politics[788]. It is important to note that all respondents do indeed express the need for more effective state action. None of them said that the above problems are not the responsibility of the government or that nothing can be done about them.

As far as the first area is concerned[789], according to more than the 80 percent, the government should increase accountability for physical and sexual crimes against women (84.8 percent) and end traditional practices that are harmful to women and girls (82.8 percent). In addition, other participants have indicated that it is essential to «empower women so that they don't have to be so dependent on men. An empowered woman will leave an abusive environment if she can take care of herself independently», says Yvonne, 30, as well as the implementation of «programmes that involve men. [...] because they are the perpetrators of violence», affirms Vivian, 38. According to Patience, 23, «the government should make the laws more effective by ensuring that perpetrators are severely punished to deter others from inflicting violence on women». Harriet, 38, strongly recommend «working with

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[784] *Question 3*
[785] *Developed on the basis of the data collected in the "Gender Equality and Women's rights in Uganda" survey (Carolina Cuccu, Rome, 2022)*
[786] *Question 9*
[787] *Question 10*
[788] *Question 11*
[789] *Question 9*

boys to ground them early enough in their lives so that they can sustain the right attitude towards gender equality as they grow up».

In relation to women's economic opportunities and decision-making powers[790], the 84 percent think that the government should guarantee more social protection and decent working conditions for women; while the 70 percent indicates as a necessary step the achievement of equal access to education and professional training for women. The same percentage spoke in favour of state recognition, reduction and redistribution of unpaid care and domestic work. The government should also ensure equal pay for women and men (64 percent), as well as guarantee parental leave and childcare services (61 percent). As evident by the graph below, the majority of the people interviewed recognize the fundamental role played by women at economic level, agreeing with the statement which considers the achievement of gender equality as essential to end poverty and to economic development in Uganda,[791].
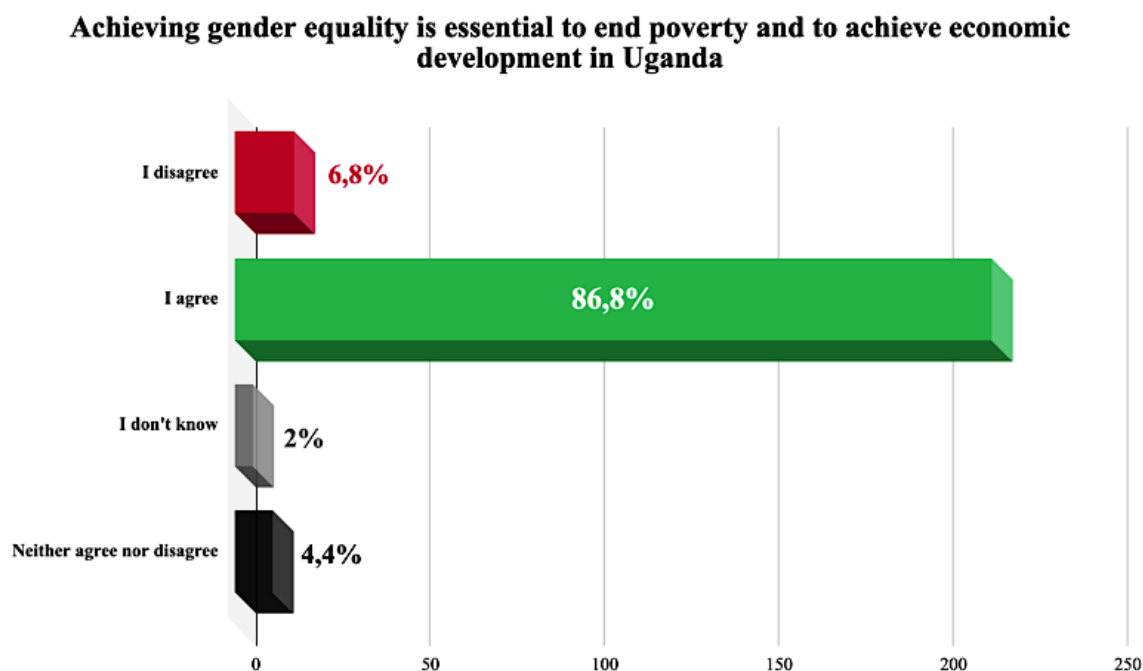

Achieving gender equality is essential to end poverty and to achieve economic development in Uganda

Figure 4.5 – Achieving gender equality is essential to end poverty and to achieve economic development in Uganda[792]. (Question 13)

Concerning girls' and women's participation and leadership in politics[793], for more than the 80 percent the direct support of the government is fundamental in this context. Women should also be encouraged to be involved in peace processes and as human rights defenders (75 percent), as well as

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[790] *Question 10*
[791] *Question 13*
[792] *Developed on the basis of the data collected in the "Gender Equality and Women's rights in Uganda" survey (Carolina Cuccu, Rome, 2022)*
[793] *Question 11*

be equally represented in politics (70 percent). Furthermore, according to the 69 percent, the importance of ensuring the safety of feminist activists and women engaged in politics should not be underestimated in order to grant women's involvement at the political level. Cynthia, 32, also highlights the need to address gender-based violence in election times.

The analysis conducted in chapter three has shown that since the Museveni government came to power, women's representation at political level has increased considerably. However, many women, among which Agnes, 33, believe that «even when women hold leadership positions in various government and private sectors, their voice does not really count in decision-making. They are literally used for the sake of image, to keep up appearances». In fact, Labila, 34, underlines that «although Uganda does very well in terms of equal representation of women, especially in political office, those elected lack the power and influence to bring about policy changes that address the specific needs of women». Daphine, 31, looks at the issue from another point of view, criticizing the establishment of the pink quotas, whereby «there is no need to have special positions for women in government. Women should be given positions equal to those of men. In this way, women in power would not be seen as privileged just because they are women. They would be given the same respect as men in power, because the positions they occupy are meant for any gender: men or women... or other – when we have reached the level of consciousness to accept that there are more than two genders». According to Elizabeth, 35, «the idea that the more women in parliament, the better women's concerns will be represented needs to be reconsidered, because the government spends a lot of taxpayers' money to maintain female MPs without doing a corresponding service to women».

Several women spoke in favour of conducting awareness campaigns, in order to change the future narrative of gender equality and women's rights. Irene, 42, affirms the «need to continuously create awareness, translate the laws into local languages and disseminate them widely». If it is essential to make women aware of their rights, men should also be involved, because – as Vivian, 38, explains – «they also need to be educated about these rights. I have seen men admit that they do not know women's rights and therefore, as soon as their wives demand them, violence breaks out. Achieving gender equality without involving men would be a waste of time». Sharon, 27, argues that «people need to be educated about their personal rights, because this ignorance is the cause of gender inequality».

In conclusion, Uganda still has a long way to achieve gender equality and empower women and girls. The main problem seems to be the implementation of gender policies and of women's rights. The many Ugandan women the dissertation author had the opportunity to speak with conveyed an image of strength and resourcefulness, expressing a strong awareness of the present reality and a great desire to improve it. They represent the hope for a more prosperous and less discriminatory future for Uganda

APPENDIX

Information concerning the survey on *Gender equality and women's rights in Uganda*.

The survey has been conducted during January and February 2022 and involved 250 people of Ugandan nationality. Of these, more than 90 percent are women and 96 percent are black. Participants' ages range from 22 to 56, with the 25 to 35-year-old category making up the largest share. The majority of these people are middle class and live in urban areas. Most of them have a tertiary education. At least 70 percent of respondents are studying or working in a field related to gender issues and women's rights, so their knowledge of this topic appears to be above average. Among them are students, university professors, women's rights activists and consultants, gender equality advocates, politicians, lawyers, medical doctors, psychologists, and gender experts working in international organisations and NGOs. The platform used to formulate and share the questionnaire is *Typeform* (https://www.typeform.com), a service specialized in the creation of online surveys. The personal data and information collected are and will remain confidential and protected, based on the participants' right to privacy. Participants were reached through several means. First, through the networks of Ugandan non-governmental organizations with which the author of this study has worked in recent years – *Wilmat Development Foundation Uganda*, *Alliance for African Assistance*, and *Deborah Ricciu Espandere Orizzonti Uganda*. Second, through the online platform *LinkedIn*, which allowed the author to remotely connect with numerous Ugandan individuals. The survey was designed to examine the status of gender equality and women's rights in Uganda and to paint a picture of gender discrimination faced by Ugandans in their country. It also examines what are perceived to be the main drivers of inequality and in which areas gender discrimination is most prevalent. The results of the survey are presented and explained in the conclusive section of this dissertation. Below is the template for the survey that was presented to the participants.

Survey template

Question n. 1 – Do you think men and women have the same rights in Uganda?
Answer: Yes/No

Question n. 2 – How would you rank the level of gender equality reached in Uganda?
Answer: Indicate it on a scale from 1 to 5.

Question n. 3 – Who have the primary responsibility to enhance gender equality and promote women's rights?

Answer: (indicate as many as you want) National government, Family and relatives, Non-governmental organizations, Feminist movements, International institutions, It's a personal thing, Other

Question n. 4 – Have you ever experienced gender inequality?

Answer: Yes/No

Question n. 5 – How much do you think your gender negatively influence your opportunities and choices in life (educational, working, social, economic, political etc.)?

Answer: Indicate it on a scale from 1 to 5

Question n. 6 – What are the areas in which Ugandan women are most discriminated against? (free choice)

Answer: (indicate as many as you want) Household, Culture and religion, Working environment, Politics, citizenship and decision-making level, Health issues and sexuality, Education, Other

Question n. 7 –Do you think there is a gap between the rights guaranteed by Ugandan laws and the rights that women have in real life?

Answer: Yes/No

Question n. 8 – What are the main drivers of gender inequality in Uganda?

Answer: (indicate as many as you want) Societal mindsets and stereotypes; Religion and culture do not treat women and men as equals; Unpaid care, domestic work and parental responsibilities are not shared equally; Boys and girls are treated differently growing up and in schools; Women and men are not equally represented in politics; Women and men have different employment opportunities; Lack of legal protections for women; Legacy of colonialism and western influence

Question n. 9 – Which actions should the national government take to fight gender-based violence against women?

Answer: (indicate as many as you want) Increase accountability for physical and sexual crimes against women; End traditional practices that are harmful to women and girls; Address the unequal

balance of power between women and men at home; Fund programs to support women who have experienced violence; None of these - the government should not deal with it; I don't know; Other.

Question n. 10 – Which actions should the national government take to improve women's economic opportunities and decision-making powers?

Answer: (indicate as many as you want) Guarantee social protection and decent working conditions for women; Achieve equal access to education and professional training for women; Recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care and domestic work; Increase the number of women in leadership roles; Achieve equal pay for women and men; Guarantee parental leave and childcare services; None of these - the government should not deal with it; I don't know; Other.

Question n. 11 – Which actions should the national government take to improve girls' and women's participation and leadership in politics?

Answer: (indicate as many as you want) Support women's political leadership and participation; Support women's participation in peace processes and as human rights defenders; Achieve equal representation of women in politics; Ensure the safety of feminist activists and women involved in politics; I don't know; None of these - the government should not deal with it; Other.

Question n. 12 – How would you rate the participation and leadership in politics, and the economic opportunities women have in Uganda?

Answer: Indicate on a scale from 1 to 5.

Question n. 13 – Achieving gender equality is essential to end poverty and to economic development in Uganda.

Answer: I agree; I disagree; Neither agree nor disagree; I don't know

Question n. 14 – This is a free space where you can express your thoughts about gender equality and women's rights in Uganda.

Answer: free answer

Question n. 15 – What's your name and how old are you?

Answer: free answer

Question n. 16 – What is your gender?

Answer: woman; man; other.

Question n. 17 – How did you get to know about this survey?

Answer: free answer

Question n. 18 – Are you of Ugandan nationality? Or do you live in Uganda?

Answer: Yes; No; Other

Question n. 19 – Which ethnic group do you consider yourself?

Answer: Black; White; Other

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SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

«Girls cannot dream of doing what boys do». With these words Peace, a 30-year-old woman, describes the situation of women in her country, Uganda. This sentence illustrates in the simplest way that gender inequality and the lack of rights for women are still one of the greatest obstacles to the self-determination and emancipation of millions of girls across the world. Therefore, it is fundamental to investigate the origins and causes of gender-based discrimination and to examine the solutions to address inequality. The present work aims at analysing how gender equality (GE) and women's rights (WRs) – in the political, economic and social spheres – have evolved, or regressed, in the African continent, from pre-colonial times to the present day. The purpose is to deconstruct the Western stereotypes of African women as destitutes in need of charity from the West. Rather, their leadership skills, economic entrepreneurship, and strategies of resistance to oppression are highlighted. The history of Ugandan women has been chosen as case study. The reason underlying this choice is the existential connection of the author of the present work with this country, which has been both the validation and the starting point of her interest in Africa and WRs. During her visit to Uganda, the author had the possibility to observe the different realities of the women in the cities of Kampala and Gulu, and in the rural villages. These were realities of emancipated and progressive women, but also of subordinate and exploited ones, relegated to secondary roles. The gender inequality present in the country was evident, at times pervasive, as well as the struggles women were dealing with every day. Consequently, the research question guiding the analysis is: what have been the factors of oppression and the drivers of empowerment that have influenced the long-term development of WRs and GE in Uganda? In order to provide a comprehensive understanding, this study has investigated further issues: first, to what extent have British colonialism and Western gender stereotypes influenced the role of women in Africa; second, what is the relationship between the nature of national government and the development of women's movements; finally, what is the state of WRs and GE in Uganda today. The answers to the research questions are provided using a gender perspective – taking into account gender differences when looking at any social phenomenon or process – when analysing discrimination against women at different levels. The theoretical and analytical frameworks, presented in the first two chapters, result functional to understand and contextualize the in-depth study on Uganda of the third chapter. As far as the methodology is concerned, the dissertation is developed combining the document analysis and the gathering of quantitative and qualitative data through a survey. The research is conducted on the basis of primary and secondary sources. The first ones consist of information gathered through a survey and short interviews submitted to Ugandan women, in order to give voice to the direct victims of gender discrimination. The more than 200 Ugandan women who participated in the questionnaire were contacted through the networks of Ugandan NGOs – *Wilmat Development Foundation Uganda*, *Alliance for African Assistance*, and *Deborah Ricciu Espandere Orizzonti* – with whom the author has

worked in recent years, as well as through *LinkedIn*. It is noteworthy that these women were very supportive and interested in expressing their views on these issues. Secondary sources include books, academic papers, official documents and reports of national governments, international organizations and NGOs specialized in WRs and gender issues. The sources have been selected for their capacity to answer the research questions and provide further contributions to the elaboration. Preference was given to sources written by women and African scholars. The present dissertation is developed as follows. The first chapter provides an analytical and legal framework to understand WRs and GE in Africa. It introduces the meaning of concepts such as gender and gender equality, as well as the factors that hinder the achievement of the latter. Then it analyses the international and African legislative frameworks for the promotion and protection of WRs. A focus is made on the *Maputo Protocol*, considered as the *African Bill of Rights of Women's Rights*. Subsequently, the chapter analyses the indexes developed by international organizations – as the *UN*, the *World Economic Forum*, and the *African Development Bank* – to measure the level of GE and comprehend the major concerns affecting African women lives. On the basis of the data provided by these indexes, it is presented an overview of the status of WRs in Africa in 3 different spheres: first, education and health; second, economic participation and opportunities; and third, political representation and empowerment. The second chapter provides a theoretical and historical framework to investigate African women struggles and to subvert Western stereotypes about them. The chapter begins with an account of the history of feminism and then focuses on the two most relevant movements for African women: African feminism and postcolonial feminism. The most influential feminists and feminist movements of the above ideologies are discussed. Emphasis is then placed on the impact of British colonialism on the roles, beliefs and rights of African women. In order to assess the effects of Western domination, the situation of women in pre-colonial Africa is firstly analysed, debunking common belief that all women in pre-colonial African society were submissive and recalling the histories of women in prominent positions, as well as researches of several scholars on the matter. This enquiry allows for a more comprehensive analysis of the status of African women during colonialism, which is the object of the final section of this chapter. The third chapter concerns the case study: the long path of Ugandan women to achieve gender equality. The evolution of gender dynamics and status of women in the country is analysed following a chronological order, from the pre-colonial times until nowadays, highlighting watershed moments – such as the arrival of the British, the decolonization, the establishment of dictatorial regimes and then their collapse. First, an introductory overview of Uganda is given, and a brief historical background to each period is presented at the beginning of the sections to better contextualise the subsequent analysis. The chapter first focuses on the lives of women in the pre-colonial period, examining in particular gender roles in Buganda – the most important kingdom of pre-colonial Uganda – and within its royal family. Attention is then turned to the consequences of the establishment of the British protectorate for Ugandan women in the social, economic and political spheres. The following section is devoted to the role of women's movements during the transitional period that led Uganda to independence in 1962. The analysis goes on analysing

one of the darkest periods in Uganda's history: the 20 years of Obote and Dada dictatorship, during which gender inequality worsened due to the harsh policies and laws enacted, and the lack of political representation for women. The final section assesses the partial renaissance of women's movements and rights under the National Resistance Movement government of Museveni in the late 1980s, when women began to win seats in parliament and were empowered at various levels, with their equality with men finally recognised at the constitutional level. The concluding section, after a digression on the work done, answers the research questions and paints a picture of the current situation of WRs and GE in Uganda based on the views and thoughts of the 250 Ugandans who participated in the survey.

CHAPTER ONE

Gender equality and women's rights in Africa

Despite the many efforts and improvements achieved, women around the world still struggle with problems which arise simply from being born a woman. Gender inequality stands at the basis of a lack of rights and opportunities within the economic, political, and social spheres. Discrimination against women begins even before birth with girl child feticide and continues within the household, at school and at the workplace, up to the decision-making institutions, becoming a global issue that hampers development. In the 1970s, feminists began to focus on the mechanisms that led to women's oppression and placed women in an inferior position in terms of status, resources and authority. Their aim was to debunk gender stereotypes and rewrite human relations in equal terms by giving voice to women's needs. In this context, gender roles were recognised as a construction resulting from an ideological production. To break the vicious circle that feeds gender inequalities, structural, social and cultural issues need to be examined from a gender perspective - thus examining the biased mechanism behind power relations between men and women. According to the Nigerian gender scholar Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí, Western culture's belief in biological determinism has led to this hierarchical division of people into a dominant gender (men) and a subordinate gender (women). There is a need to reframe gender discourse in the African context, which is one of the most critical places to be a woman.

International and African Legal Frameworks for the protection of women's rights

GE is a fundamental human right, the realisation of which is counted by UN among the urgent development tasks of humanity. Women's emancipation must be pursued by removing "all legal, social and economic barriers to their empowerment" with a gender-specific approach. Thus, several conventions and plans have been adopted to promote and protect WRs. The most important at the international level is the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979). Ratifying countries must incorporate the principle of gender equality into their legal systems and prohibit any discriminatory regulation. Another relevant instrument is the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995): a strategic agenda for women's empowerment.

Maputo Protocol

At the regional African level, the most important treaty is the African Union *Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa* (Maputo Protocol, 2003), which has been ratified by 42 of the 55 AU member states. This is a progressive and legally binding document that strengthens the role of women and identifies them as essential contributors to development. The Protocol has been implemented across Africa through administrative and political measures, as well as judicial decisions and court rulings demanding conformity to its articles. The examples of positive results achieved through the Protocol application are several, in particular in the areas of the rights to education, gender-based violence, and child marriage. However, some states have expressed reservations on certain provisions – especially those on marriage and reproductive control – claiming their incompatibility with their national culture and religion. In this context, Art. 2 underlines that culture cannot be used as a pretext for breaching women's integrity. Although majority of SSA (Sub-Saharan Africa) countries have adopted the Protocol, several factors still hamper its complete implementation.

Indexes on gender equality

International organizations have formulated a wide range of indices to measure gender equality and examine areas in which women are discriminated. At the international level, the most important indices are the UNDP *Gender Development Index* (GDI) and *Gender Inequality Index* (GII), and the WEF *Gender Gap Index* (GGI). The GII calculates the impact of gender inequality on human development and the inequalities in women's performance in the areas of reproductive health, empowerment and economic status, while the GDI considers health, education and living conditions. In the 2019 UNDP Report, SSA has been ranked as one of the regions with the greatest levels of gender inequality. The GGI traces the evolution of gender inequalities through 4 sub-indices: economic participation and opportunity, education, health and survival, political empowerment.

African indexes

At the African level, the *Africa Gender and Development Index* (AGDI) of the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the *Africa Gender Equality Index* of African Development Bank (AfDB), and the *Africa Gender Index*, jointly developed by UNECA and AfDB, are the most relevant. These indexes have been developed to monitor progress and to provide the governments of African countries with information on GE and the impact of related policies in three main areas: economic, social, politico-institutional. According to the *Africa Gender Index* Southern Africa has the highest regional level of gender equality, with an average score of 61%; North, Central and West Africa levels are around 40-44%; while East Africa stands in the middle with 52%.

Overview of the state of women's rights in Africa

This section provides an overview of the state of WRs in Africa by summarizing the data from the *Africa Gender Equality Index*, the *Africa Gender Index*, and *Gender Gap Index* according to 3 macro areas: education and health; economic participation and opportunities; representation and empowerment at political and household level. As regards the first dimension, the gender-gaps in education and health

dimension are the smaller, being respectively the 85% and 97% being already closed. However, the rights of African women are still not fully respected and implemented. In order to achieve complete equality, the barriers that prevent young women from pursuing higher education must be dismantled, and the root causes of violence and unhealthy environments must be addressed. Women must be guaranteed easy access to health, family planning and immunization. Notwithstanding the several progresses, according to the WHO, SSA still has the highest maternal mortality rate in the world. Less than 10% of African women have access to contraception, thus meaning a great difficulty to control fertility rates, which reach up to 7.3 per woman in Niger. As a result, African population could exceed 2.1 billion people by 2050, increasing risks of famines and poverty. Health and education are strictly interrelated: high levels of education are one of the best factors holding back reproduction, and working women are more inclined to have lower birth rates. These findings have led governments across Africa to increase spending on education. However, there is still a 15% of gender-gap in education sector, and an average literacy gap between adult men and women of over 20%. Several reasons hamper girls to receive primary education, such as unsanitary conditions, social pressure to get married young and gender-based violence. Concerning the second dimension, SSA has closed 66% of its gender-gap in terms of economic participation and opportunities for women. However, there are still significant inequalities between countries, for instance there is a difference of 40% between the region's top-performing country (Burundi) and the worst one (Mali). Women's labour force participation is high in both the agricultural sector and in the informal sector (micro-enterprises). However, they are still disadvantaged, particularly in the stipulation of contracts; in access to markets, resources, land and financial services; and in terms of income (gender-pay gap). Further, while women are responsible of the unpaid care and domestic work, family finances are controlled by men. Thus, women suffer high levels of economic insecurity. The gap in the third dimension – representation and empowerment of women at the political and household decision-making levels – is the widest (79,2%). Although almost all African countries have signed the Maputo Protocol, there are still several exceptions to the concept of non-discrimination in African governments' legislations and political representation. Further, men still have a dominant position at the decision-making level, both in the family and in the workplace. However, there are some rare positive examples, as Rwanda (60% of female MPs), and South Africa (45% female MPs). Data has shown that advances in women's positions socially, politically or economically would have a positive impact on their children, their family and their community at large, creating a virtuous cycle that would benefit future generations of African women.

CHAPTER TWO

Feminism and the struggles for women's rights

Feminism is an umbrella term for several ideologies and social movements which aims at achieving GE and WRs in the political, economic, social and personal spheres by eliminating every form of discrimination and fighting gender stereotypes. The history of feminism is divided into 3 waves. The

1st wave (1880-1950) was composed by white-Western feminist of the middle class which struggled for women's civil and political rights, but without taking into account the problems of non-Western women (as racial discrimination, and colonial domination). During the 2nd wave (1950-1980), new concerns emerged such as reproductive and sexual rights. However, even here the focus was on Western women. In the '80s women from other backgrounds and ethnicities began to develop other feminism perspectives, so in the '90s the 3rd wave began, shedding light on the need to breach the monolithic view of white feminists. Many sub-fields of feminism emerged, among which African and postcolonial feminism.

The need for an African Feminism

Filomina Steady – one of the "mothers" of African feminism – deem African women as the first true feminists. Other scholars saw the emergence of African feminism as consequence of African women exclusion from first-waves feminism. Be that as it may, the truth is that feminism is an absolute necessity for African societies, given the breadth of gender inequalities present in the continent. The major concerns of the African feminists Agenda include: gender-based violence, female-genital mutilation and child marriage; poverty; dictatorial regimes; colonialism and neo-colonialism; patriarchal culture; racism; economic exploitation; and African women's own backwardness, since, according to Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie, they have internalised all these kinds of oppression. The first official feminist associations and interest groups emerged in Africa in the early XX century, among whom were women of distinction, such as the Sierra Leonean Adelaide Casely-Hayford (1868-1960), the South African Charlotte Maxeke (1871-1939), the Egyptian Huda Shaarawi (1879 – 1947). Modern feminism consolidated in the '50-'60s when women's movements emerged to fight the oppression and exploitation of women within the colonial, patriarchal, and then dictatorial, societies. As a result, African feminist actions have traditionally focused on affecting the political structure and its legal framework, pressing for political representation and provisions safeguarding their civil rights. African feminism was consolidated at the institutional level with the historic *UN Decade for Women* (1975-1985), which further spread the presence of feminist movements at the political, legislative, cultural levels.

Post-Colonial Feminism and the criticism to Western feminism

The understanding of women struggles during colonial and postcolonial period, along with the production of gender roles in Western narratives, is at the heart of postcolonial feminist theory. It analyses the implication of racial subordination and how the colonial economic, political, and social institutions and practises have affected African women and continue to do so in post-colonial countries. Colonized women were subjected to a *double burden*: colonial domination and patriarchal society. Western feminism had ignored the concept of race, not considering the consequences of the interaction of two discriminatory factors such as racism and patriarchy. On the contrary, African women cannot disentangle racism, class prejudice, and sexual discrimination since, for them, they constant coexist. According to Audre Lorde, one of the first post-colonial feminist, «The absence of these considerations [of race, sexuality, class] weakens any feminist discussion. It is an academic arrogance to assume a

feminist theory without a significant input from poor women, Black and Third World women […]. What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy? […] How do you deal with the fact that the women who clean your houses and tend your children while you attend conferences on feminist theory are, for the most part, poor women and women of colour? ». The article *Under Western Eyes* by Chandra Talpade Mohanty represented a landmark for postcolonial feminist theory. She criticized the creation by the Western feminist of a category of *Third World women* presented as a singular and monolithic subject with the same concerns, experiences, and ambitions, regardless of their geographic, cultural, historical, and socio-political background. The Third World Woman is depicted as passive, deeply devoted to family and religion, uneducated, powerless, and relegated to the domestic sphere. Mohanty aims to eradicate these prejudices which devoid African women of their historical and political voice. Another prominent postcolonial feminist is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak according to which the woman in the Global South, reflects the emblem of subalternity, where the term "subaltern" stands for people who are deprived of agency and cannot articulate their own subjectivity. The rationale lies in the so-called *epistemic violence* of the West, through which the colonized person is constructed as *Other* according to the categories of European rationality. Spivak seeks to deconstruct both white privilege and criticizes the Eurocentric vision of Western feminism, that uses an imperialist narrative towards subaltern women. According to Spivak, Western feminism runs the risk of repeating towards Third World women the same kind of oppression that men have practiced towards white women. According to Hazel Carby, the main problem is the ethnocentric assumption and presumption of white feminists that the Western modus operandi is the one-size-fits-all solution in the fight against women's oppression, regardless of their background. In conclusion, African feminism and postcolonial feminism are crucial to provide an adequate theoretical and philosophical framework capable of giving voice to African women's struggles and desire for emancipation, without anyone continuing to speak for them.

The Scramble for Africa

The focus on colonization has been deemed essential to assess the roots of gender inequality in Africa and examines the effect of Western domination on the traditional realities of African women. The term *colonialism* stands for an «attempt to control foreign territories and dominate indigenous people in order to obtain resources through dispossession, economic marginalization, labor exploitation, racism, and oppression, so producing inequalities». In this dissertation it refers in particular to the European project of domination of the African continent, the so-called *Scramble for Africa*, which led to the formation of new colonial states. The Berlin Conference of 1884 -1885 marked the official beginning of a European domination that lasted for about 80 years and still influences the identity, culture, economy and politics of most African peoples. The belief in European superiority served as the intellectual basis for justifying the civilizing mission towards the African peoples, who were portrayed as barbarians, primitives and sub humans. The real plan turned out to be the economic exploitation, political-cultural domination, and religious conversion of the African continent. To better understand the impact of colonisation on gender

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roles in Africa, it is first necessary to shed light on the general status of women in African societies prior to the arrival of settlers.

Women's roles in pre-colonial Africa

The history of African women from 800 CE to 1900 has received little attention and the majority of African historiography has failed to acknowledge the contributions of women, ascribing them out of the main narratives. The status and power of African women before the Europeans arrival on the continent is highly contested. Generally, all pre-colonial African societies are described as characterised by women's subordination. However, by the end of the XX century, academics have begun to challenge these Western assumptions and stereotypes and it has been shown that African women performed various important functions and were held in high esteem. Some women also attained prominent roles as founders or rulers of kingdoms, chiefs, warriors and queens. According to anthropologist Niara Sudarkasa, there were more women in high positions in pre-colonial SSA than in any other part of the world. She documented histories of female characters who possessed political and military power. Of particular relevance are the histories of the Queen of Sheba, who ruled Ethiopia for 50 years around 1000 BC, and Empress Taytu Betul, whose army defeated the Italian colonisers in 1896, granting Ethiopia independence. There were pre-colonial governance structures followed gender complementarity (the king ruled together with a women), in Rwanda, Cameroon, Congo, Nigeria, and Swaziland; as well as tripartite forms of power where the king shared authority with his mother and his sister, as among the Buganda, Kitara and Ankole peoples. This is just a small sample of the many African women who held high positions of power in their kingdoms. Ifi Amadiume, Oyèrónké̩ Oyěwùmí, and Christine Saidi, examining gender dynamics in ancient Africa, pointed out that the preconceptions that see women in a subordinate position should be challenged in order to understand the real gender dynamics of pre-colonial Africa. Several researches have shown that pre-colonial African societies had a high degree of complementarity with balanced relations between the two genders. Women had a political voice, could hold authority roles, and influenced social norms. This was true until the arrival of the British, which according to Amadiume have been responsible for the oppression of women and the progression of gender inequality.

African women under colonialism

During the colonial era, society was restructured, many African traditions disrupted, and new socio-cultural interactions arose. Studies have demonstrated that during colonial domination women lost their social, religious, economic, and political power. Several WRs activists and academics attributed the roots of African gender inequality to colonialism and its legacy, which are blamed responsible for having imposed alien gender paradigms. Colonialism intensified the marginalization of women by extending some of the worst elements of African patriarchy. According to the patriarchal framework of Victorian society, women represented the weaker sex in need of a man to look after them. These beliefs were slowly psychologically internalized by African women and still persist today. The changes that most deteriorated the role of women involved the new economic system and regulations. Traditionally,

women formed the main force of the rural economy. However, when the settlers introduced cash crops and Western innovative agricultural practices, they turned to African men. This disrupted the traditional distribution of work. Only men had access to the wage economy, while women were excluded and relegated to feminine unpaid occupations. This loss of control over their economic activities brought women to be financially fragile and dependent from their husbands. Furthermore, African girls were disadvantaged also within Western-based education and Christian missions and schools, where they were educated to become brides, mothers, and perfect housewives. At the political and institutional levels, colonialism disrupted the decision-making power and authority of African women, even within the household. Colonial institutions were unresponsive to women's voices and their pre-colonial sources of influence and power. Notwithstanding the above, women were not quiescent in facing colonialists, in particular during the anti-colonial struggles for independence.

CHAPTER THREE

Women's role: from pre-colonial Uganda to the establishment of the British Protectorate

In order to obtain a comprehensive picture of the impact of the British colonisers on the status of women in Uganda, it is appropriate to start with an analysis of the pre-colonial period.

Gender roles in the Buganda Kingdom

Pre-colonial Uganda consisted of many tribes and kingdoms. Around 18th century, the Kingdom of Buganda became the dominant power of the region. The political and economic spheres, at first glance, appeared to be the domain of men. A more accurate observation shows that the dynamics of gender relations were not hierarchical but rather complementary. The majority of women were actively involved in productive activities and they were able to engage both formally and informally at the decision-making level. The political (public) and domestic areas were conceptualized as deeply interconnected, so women were not relegated home, but had multiple responsibilities and influences across different spheres. The androcentric western narrative had little interest in analysing the role of African women, thus contributing to the mainstream idea of women as excluded from their communities' politics. The role of women was thus not as marginal as it is described in the works of Western historians. According to Sylvia Tamale, there is a widespread misperception regarding women's active participation in the pre-colonial society, mainly due to the oversimplified and westernized division of the public and private spheres applied to Buganda gender relations, which have their own and different socio-cultural meanings. Therefore, it is important to partially unhinge the Western idea of gender in order to understand that of the Baganda. As mentioned before, the Buganda kingdom was led by a royal family, within which a crucial role was played by the Queen Mother. She was the most eminent woman in the Buganda empire and one of the three persons who could bear the title of monarch, along with the king himself and the queen sister. She had direct political, judicial and spiritual power, possessed vast territories and was financially independent. The queen's role was to counterweight the power of the kabaka (king of Buganda), whose rule could last only as long as he

appeased the queen mother. The queen sister was the second most powerful woman within the kingdom, exercising direct political authority on her subordinates. Common Baganda women were also able to influence public decisions, exploiting their roles to further the interests of their own family. In conclusion, it would be a misinterpretation to dismiss pre-colonial Baganda women as irrelevant and completely subordinate.

Impact of colonialism on Ugandan women's position

In 1896 the kingdoms of Buganda, Ankole, Toro, and Bunyoro were declared a British protectorate, under the name of Uganda Protectorate. While the British recognized the formal role of the kabaka, the same was not true for the royal women of the Baganda, whose positions were dismissed. The arrival of the British colonialists had profound effects on women in Uganda. The British brought with them their ethnocentric model of male-female relations, according to which politics was the domain of men, while women were relegated to the domestic domain. Concerning economy, at the beginning of 1900, colonial officials introduced cash crops and cotton cultivation: Ugandan women were excluded from these sectors and from the entire wage economy, being relegated to unpaid positions and subsistence labour. Colonial administrators are largely blamed for the deterioration of women's position in the entire productive economy. Gender discrimination resides also in the type of employment for which women were trained in missionary schools: jobs as nurses, teachers, in the craft or domestic industries. It was a strategy to limit employment opportunities for women to certain areas considered "feminine". Missionary education has been cited by numerous scholars as being one of the worst factors that has negatively impacted African women, since it resulted in the growth of a substantial gap in education levels between girls and boys. Girls education was indeed limited to domestic skills, cooking and home economics. In conclusion, the main legacy of European colonialism for gender inequality in Uganda has been to both strengthen, redesign and institutionalize the subordination of women. Although some forms of gender inequality already existed in pre-colonial Ugandan society, the arrival of the British colonialists demonstrably led to a deterioration in the general situation of women.

From Ugandan independence to the Obote and Amin dictatorial regimes (1962-1985)

In 1962, the UK granted Uganda independence and Milton Obote was elected Prime Minister. In 1967, Obote appointed himself president and turned the country into a dictatorial regime. In 1971, control of the country was seized by General Idi Amin Dada, who overthrew Obote's government in a *coup d'état*. Amin, who was initially hailed as a saviour, eventually established one of Africa's most brutal dictatorships, lasted until 1979. After a one-year transitional government, Obote's authority was restored and once again, Uganda moved from one dictatorship to the next.

Women's movements towards independence

Towards the middle of the 20th century, Ugandan women became more and more oppressed by colonialism and gender discrimination. Thus, in the 1940s the first women's associations emerged and began to make their voices heard. A turning point in Uganda's modern women's movement was the founding of the *Uganda Council of Women* (UCW) in 1947 – an organization dedicated to advancing

women's equality. The association was composed of African, European and Asians women who sought to bring together women of all races, religions, and political alignments to address women's shared concerns. The involvement in this kind of associations gave women more opportunities to be involved in the decision-making system. In 1956, Pumla Kisosonkole (UCW president) was the first African woman to be represented in the Legislative Colonial Council. In the period leading up to the country's independence, only five other women played a role in drafting future legislation. Even women's right to vote was seriously hampered by hard-to-reach prerequisites. In 1962, at the express request of UCW representatives, the new Constitution recognized women's right to vote. However, women's participation in the country's decision-making institutions continued to be severely limited by the gender stereotypes of the time, as well as inadequate educational possibilities, and a system that perpetuated gender inequality. None of the political parties that were established in these years (UNC,1952; DP, 1956; UPC,1958) included women in their ranks. Thus, notwithstanding UCW and other women's organizations activism, women were substantially ignored in the discussions surrounding Uganda's independence, and also in the following years: from 1962 to 1986 only 5 women held a seat in the Ugandan Parliament. Although Obote promised further efforts to advance women politicians, he fell short of delivering on his pledges.

Women's condition under Amin dictatorial regime

Many women hailed Amin's coup as a liberation, but the situation began to deteriorate quickly. The dictator began a violent crusade to defend the public morality and women became the main victims of his oppressive actions. He issued several bans prohibiting women from wearing miniskirts, wigs and trousers, and from using beauty products, since these represented a threat to the country's morality and the dignity of women, as well as symbols of colonialism and Westernism. These prohibitions triggered a wave of violence and abuses towards women, which became more vulnerable and exposed to military violence –harassments, intimidations, assaults, rapes. Protesting would have been useless: Amin did not recognize the perpetrators of violence as guilty, the only ones to blame were the women. Women's situation was further compromised by the economic crisis that hit the country after the expulsion of the Asian population. The cost of basic necessities rose sharply, and essential goods became unavailable: women had to wait in line for long periods of time to get state supplies and cannot participate in productive activities. Amin also progressively abolished all autonomous women's organizations and created a single national body, the *National Council of Women* (NCW) as a mean to exert control over women's movement for his owns political ends.

The Museveni government of the late '80s

In 1986, a new government led by Yoweri Museveni and its party, the National Resistance Movement, was established: this is considered a turning point in Uganda's history. Under NRM governments women's condition improved significantly. Among African nations, Uganda was one of the first to remarkably expand the percentage of women in the legislative and executive branches. Moreover, Museveni openness proved to be crucial in fostering the progress of women's movements. In the mid-

1980s, numerous prominent WRs groups began to arise with a devised a program for women empowerment, in particular at the political level. A defining moment in the history of the women's movement in the country was the *UN Decade of Women Conference* (Nairobi, 1985). After this, Ugandan feminist organisations felt inspired to start afresh with even more vigour. Museveni, initially distrustful towards these women's associations, started to realize the potential of both women's organizational skills to achieve his objectives and of having women in the ranks of his movement.

The women's movements under the NRM government

The NRM government was the first one in Uganda's history to undertake serious proactive measures to promote women's participation in official politics. Although this involvement of women in the decision-making sphere was probably a mere political expedient, what is relevant were the concrete actions taken in favour of women empowerment and representation. Women began to occupy more prominent positions in the various government commissions, at ministerial level, and in the judiciary. After the 1989 Parliament elections, 41 women (17% of MPs) held seats in the Ugandan parliament. In 1996 elections, the number of women in Parliament rose to 50, and it continued to increase in the following years. In 1988, following women's movement pressure, Museveni established the new *Ministry of Women in Development* and the *Directorate of Women's Affairs*, which collaborated with women's groups and NGOs to address women's concerns at all levels of development. In 1993, the NCW was dissolved and substituted with a structure of women's councils, controlled by the Ministry of Women in Development. Women's movements played a key role also in two important reforms concerning local administrations, where they have been granted reserved seats, and the adoption of the new constitution (1995), during which they constituted 52 out of 286 members of Constituent Assembly and established a Women's Caucus. Furthermore, their efforts were crucial for the inclusion of GE as a fundamental principle of the country and provisions on WRs. The government expressed its commitment to advance GE also at economic level, by increasing women's salaries and providing them better work prospects. Consequently, women started to emancipate themselves. To sum up, the most significant improvements for women since Museveni's rise to power concerned women's engagement in the political arena, the advancement to positions of leadership, and the increased ability to express themselves openly.

Brief overview of the state of gender equality in Uganda

Over the past 20 years, several laws and policies have been adopted, both at national and international levels so that the current legal framework provides a relatively positive picture of the situation of WRs in Uganda. However, the gender indexes data shows a country that still lags behind in several sectors. Thus, it was deemed appropriate to conduct a survey to directly ask Ugandan women about the current conditions of GE and WRs in the country.

CONCLUSION

Gender inequality is the result of a multitude of factors that have taken root over time in a wide range of spheres, from politics and economics, to religion and society. It is precisely the pervasiveness with

which it has developed and spread across countries that makes it so difficult to eradicate today. Major international organisations predict that it will take more than 120 years to achieve gender equality in SSA. In the meantime, millions of women and girls will be left one step behind, with one less opportunity and one more risk. Gender inequality is not only evident in the data that highlights the difference between being born woman or a man today: it is a daily perception that haunts every woman throughout her life. It ranges from the smallest details such as unwelcome whistling in the street to gender-based violence, gender pay gap, sexual exploitation and lack of political representation. It is not just an ethical or moral issue, but a practical problem, an obstacle to the full and healthy development of society as a whole. Therefore, in recent decades, most countries have tried to implement various solutions to promote WRs and reduce gender inequality. The picture of Africa that emerges from the first chapter is that of a continent that has enacted and adhered to numerous conventions to protect and promote WRs and GE in recent years, but which still lags behind in their implementation. So, despite the many advances, there is still much to be done, and this is what the feminist movements have been fighting for since the end of the XIX century. To gain a deeper understanding of their struggles, it is important to examine the origins and drivers of gender inequality since pre-colonial times. Thus, the research question underlying the whole project concerns the factors of oppression and of empowerment that have influenced the long-term development of WRs and GE in Uganda. The two main factors of oppression identified are: first, British colonialism and the imposition of Western gender stereotypes; secondly, the patriarchal, militaristic and violent system of the dictatorial regimes of Obote and Amin. On the other side, the drivers of empowerment have been, firstly, the successes and the determination of Ugandan women's movements; secondly, the presence of a government – the NRM one – which effectively enacted several laws and policies in favour of WRs and of an equal representation. Thus, although actual implementation is still lacking, women's movements are able to flourish and advocate for gender equality. This is an evidence of the pivotal importance of the support of the national government for the development of women's movements. After retracing Ugandan history since pre-colonial times, according to a gender perspective, it was deemed essential to investigate which is the state of WRs and GE in Uganda today. The question was posed through a survey to those directly affected, i.e. the Ugandan women. According to 75% of the respondents, women do not enjoy the same rights as men in Uganda, and the level of GE achieved by their country is medium/low. Thus, it is not surprising that more than 80% of female participants have had a direct experience of gender discrimination. In addition, the 54% affirmed that gender inequality highly influenced both their opportunities and choices in life in a negative way, at different levels. When asked about the areas in which Ugandan women are most discriminated against, the ranking shows household in the first place, followed by religious and cultural spheres, then the working and political-institutional environments. The 74% believes that home is the place where unpaid care, domestic work and parental responsibilities are not shared equally between men and women. 77% of respondents affirms that by addressing the unequal balance between women and men in the household, the government would also put a stop to

domestic and intimate partner violence. When asked if there is a gap between the rights guaranteed by Ugandan laws and policies and the rights women enjoy in real life, it has emerged that 94% believes that the current legal framework is not effectively implemented. 34% considers this lack of legal protections for women as one of the principal causes of gender inequality. The 78% of the respondents considers social mindset and stereotyped gender roles, present especially within the Ugandan culture and the religious sphere, as the main drivers of gender inequality. According to 67%, another driver is present at the educational level, where boys and girls are treated unequally and «are taught negative cultural, religious and societal norms at a young age, which greatly affects their ability to accept that WRs are human rights» (Evelyn, 27). As stated by Peace, 30: «Children are raised with gender roles: boys do not go into the kitchen and girls do not dream of doing what boys do. It starts there and continues in educational institutions. Society considers boys fit for leadership roles, while girls are not seen as capable of making the right decisions. When it comes to the workplace, most institutions are slowly adapting and giving equal opportunities to women. However, there is still something that needs to be addressed. Women still do a lot of the unpaid care work in the home, but then they have to work just like men. We [women] wake up and work 8 hours a day, but when we come home, we have to take care of the children and the husband. That is not fair. Men need to be educated that it is not a woman's divine calling to take care of everyone». Furthermore, as stated by Jane, 32, «formal and informal institutions, such as patriarchy, religion, family, marriage as well as social and cultural practices play a major role in perpetuating gender inequalities in Uganda». According to Lilian, 27, it is like a vicious circle since «the socially constructed norms and beliefs, as well as the limited decision-making power placed in women's hands, not only prevent them from achieving their personal goals, but also hold them back financially, resulting in a great inequality between the two genders». Regarding women's involvement in politics and economic opportunities – two of the most important indicators of women's emancipation – participants ranks Uganda's level as medium-low: 43% believe that women and men are not equally represented in politics, and 61% consider the field of politics and decision-making to be one of the areas where women are most discriminated against. This being the general framework, it has been asked who has the primary responsibility for reducing these gender inequalities and promoting women's rights. Almost 90% of participants indicated the national government as the main responsible, followed by family and relatives (67%), and non-governmental organizations (50%). Also, feminist movements – as noted in the second and third chapter of the present dissertation – are deemed responsible of empowering women and advocating for gender equality. Indeed, as Paget, 24, points out, «it is important for all women to join the feminist movement to fight for equal rights because every woman can create and influence change at every level, by every means and on every platform». Inequality is a systemic problem that cannot be solved individually but requires the implementation of broader and more comprehensive frameworks, as well as collective efforts, especially at the government level. It was subsequently asked how the government should act and which actions should take at different level. Firstly, to fight violence against women; secondly, to improve women's economic opportunities and

decision-making powers; thirdly, to improve girls' and women's participation and leadership in politics. As far as the first area is concerned, according to more than the 80%, the government should increase accountability for physical and sexual crimes against women (84%) and end traditional practices that are harmful to girls (82%). In this context it is essential to «empower women so that they don't have to be so dependent on men: an empowered woman will leave an abusive environment if she can take care of herself independently», (Yvonne, 30). In relation to women's economic opportunities and decision-making powers, the 84% think that the government should guarantee more social protection and decent working conditions for women; while the 70% indicates as a necessary step the achievement of equal access to education and professional training for women. The government should also ensure equal pay for women and men (64%), as well as guarantee parental leave and childcare services (61%). The majority of the people interviewed (87%) recognize the fundamental role played by women at economic level, considering the achievement of GE as essential to end poverty. Concerning girls' and women's participation and leadership in politics, for more than the 80% the direct support of the government is fundamental in this context. Women should also be encouraged to be involved in peace processes and as human rights defenders (75%), as well as be equally represented in politics (70%). The analysis conducted in chapter three has shown that since the Museveni government came to power, women's political representation has increased considerably. However, «even when women hold leadership positions in various government and private sectors, their voice does not really count in decision-making. They are literally used for the sake of image, to keep up appearances» (Agnes, 33). In fact, «although Uganda does very well in terms of equal representation of women, especially in political office, those elected lack the power and influence to bring about policy changes that address the specific needs of women» (Labila, 34). According to Elizabeth, 35, «the idea that the more women in parliament, the better women's concerns will be represented needs to be reconsidered, because the government spends a lot of taxpayers' money to maintain female MPs without doing a corresponding service to women». Several women spoke in favour of conducting awareness campaigns, in order to change the future narrative of GE and women's rights, since there is the «need to continuously create awareness, to translate the laws into local languages and disseminate them widely» (Irene, 42). Moreover, if it is essential to make women aware of their rights, men should also be involved, because – as Vivian, 38, explains – «they also need to be educated about these rights. I have seen men admit that they do not know WRs and therefore, as soon as their wives demand them, violence breaks out. Achieving GE without involving men would be a waste of time». Sharon, 27, argues that «people need to be educated about their personal rights because this ignorance is the cause of gender inequality». In conclusion, Uganda still has a long way to achieve gender equality and empower women and girls. The main problem seems to be the implementation of gender policies and of women's rights. The numerous Ugandan women the dissertation author had the opportunity to speak with conveyed an image of strength and resourcefulness, expressing a strong awareness of the present reality and a great desire to improve it. They represent the hope for a more prosperous and less discriminatory future for Uganda.