



Routledge Studies in African Development

ENGENDERING DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA

WOMEN, POLITICS AND DEVELOPMENT

Niamh Gaynor



This book is a much-needed antidote to the national level focus of most studies of democratisation and development. Drawing on a rich empirical base, it looks at the sites of everyday politics, showing how they are gendered. The chapters explore a wide range of spaces, ranging from the fast-growing 'Lion Economies' in Africa to decentralisation practices, NGOs, the media, community associations and traditional authorities. This timely book uncovers new opportunities, challenges and lessons for women's empowerment.

Professor Aili Mari Tripp, *Wangari Maathai Professor of Political Science & Gender and Women's Studies, Co-Editor, American Political Science Review, Department of Political Science, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA*

This book transcends the WID/GAD development literature to incorporate different bodies of theory, such as post-structuralism and discourse theory. It connects theoretical premises with varied empirical research in Africa, weaving a rich tapestry of insights and novel understandings. It deftly navigates different aspects of gender politics such as substantive representation, informal networks, protest and institutional politics, looking to Asia for solutions. I look forward to using it with my students.

Professor Amanda Gouws, *SARChI Chair in Gender Politics, Department of Political Science, Stellenbosch University, South Africa*



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Engendering Democracy in Africa

This book investigates women's political participation in Africa. Going beyond the formal institutions of electoral politics, it explores a range of spaces where everyday politics take place, at national and at local levels.

In recent years there have been significant improvements in the number of women elected to parliament in Africa. However, there is little indication that this is translating into better developmental outcomes, and indeed there is mounting evidence that it could in fact help to bolster some authoritarian regimes. Starting from the premise that politics is a far broader project than securing a seat in national or local legislatures alone, this book explores the opportunities for women's political participation across a number of informal spaces where women and men gather, organise and interact in a more regular and systematic manner. Combining insights from political science, sociology and feminist theory, and drawing on detailed cases from the Congo, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria and Rwanda, it examines how power in its multiple dimensions circulates across a range of everyday political spaces, while drawing attention to the links between domestic gender inequalities and the global political economy.

Inviting scholars, practitioners and activists to broaden their focus beyond formal electoral institutions if they want to support women to become more politically active, this book provides fresh insights into major issues at the heart of African studies, development studies, gender and development, democratisation and international relations.

Niamh Gaynor is an Associate Professor in International Development, Dublin City University, Ireland.

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Women, Politics and Development

Niamh Gaynor

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Engendering Democracy in Africa

Women, Politics and Development

Niamh Gaynor

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Roscommon, Ireland
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1 Engendering democracy in Africa

Beyond numbers

The last three decades have seen significant improvements in the number of women elected to parliament. At 25 per cent, the proportion of female parliamentarians in Africa¹ is almost on a par with the global average of 25.6 per cent, and women currently hold over 30 per cent of seats in national parliaments in ten African countries (IPU, 2021). Rwanda leads the way with more women than men in national parliament (61.3 per cent) and South Africa has 45.8 per cent, while Mozambique, Namibia and Senegal have more than 40 per cent respectively (IPU, 2021). Although definitive figures are difficult to source, it appears that this pattern is being mirrored at subnational, decentralised levels also (IDEA, 2021).

There is a general consensus that this increased political participation at both national and local levels is a good thing, both in terms of democracy and in terms of development. Analysts and commentators have argued that increased numbers of women in formal politics and in decision-making, most notably as they rise beyond a 30 per cent threshold, are likely to lead to increased levels of development resources being channelled into areas of strategic interest to women (Devlin and Elgie, 2008; Chen, 2010; Dahelrup, 2013). These more optimistic views are tempered somewhat by empirical evidence emerging from Africa however. Some analysts point to the fact that many of the countries making the greatest progress in women's political participation are making far less progress in terms of democracy. It is argued that, contrary to engendering and promoting democracy, increased numbers of women within governing regimes can help authoritarian leaders bolster those regimes while weakening political opposition (Goetz and Hassim, 2003; Burnet, 2008). Moreover, with some rare exceptions (see, for example, Westfall and Chantiles, 2016; Clayton and Zetterberg, 2018, on public health spending specifically), women's increased presence does not appear to be translating into more equitable developmental outcomes at national or local levels either.

Although Africa is home to some of the world's fastest growing economies, gendered inequalities persist and are widespread. More than half of the female population is food insecure (UN, 2019) and the region has the highest maternal mortality ratio in the world (UNICEF, 2019). While some progress

has been made in moving towards gender parity in education at all levels, fall-out rates among female students remain high (World Bank, 2020). Women remain concentrated in low-paid, precarious work, including the informal sector (World Bank, 2020), and high rates of gender-based violence persist (UNFPA, 2019; Muluneh et al., 2020). Moreover, as evidence from the 2008 global economic recession, the Ebola virus and the Covid-19 pandemic – just three in a series of shocks and crises which has beset the region over the last two decades – indicates, women are consistently more adversely affected than men in the wake of global shocks and pandemics (see Cohen, 2010, on the impacts of the 2008 global recession; Korkoyah and Wren, 2015, on the impacts of Ebola; Wenham et al., 2020 and the UN, 2020, on the effects of Covid-19).

This brings us to the core focus of this book. While increased numbers of women in political institutions are, in theory, expected to result in increased equality in outcomes, in practice this does not appear to be the case. Women's representation and participation in these fora, while important, is, it would appear, not enough. While others have explored why this is so, in this book I explore what more is needed. I do so from two points of departure. This first is that politics are not the sole preserve of formal institutions. In addition to and at times despite these, politics take place in and through deliberations, negotiations, bargaining and trade-offs that characterise multiple interactions in everyday life. While the focus of much of the literature and political activism to date has been on formal institutions, in particular at national levels, much of what takes place at these levels appears distant and somewhat detached from many women and men's everyday lives. My focus moves to a range of more informal spaces where women (and men) gather, organise and interact in a more regular and systematic manner in order to explore the opportunities they afford for political influence and how or indeed if they interact with more formal political institutions. While the argument that we need to move beyond formal political institutions is not new (see Cornwall and Goetz, 2005, for example), there are, to my knowledge, few, if any, systematic empirical explorations of alternative spaces where politics take place and the opportunities they afford for engendered participation in development discussions, plans, policies and programmes at local as well as at national levels. In this book I draw on a range of specific cases, including those from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria and Rwanda, to uncover and explore a number of these alternative spaces and the opportunities they provide for engendered political engagement.

My second point of departure is that the regression to a localised 'add women and stir' approach which underpins many and programming interventions in the fields of both development and women's political participation is insufficient. As others have cogently argued, gendered marginalisations (which affect both women and men) are both symptomatic and constitutive of the globalised capitalist system which, interacting with national and local development discourses and policy, depends upon women's

low-paid productive and unpaid reproductive labour, resulting in further inequalities (Elson and Pearson, 1981; Pearson, 2014). Yet, much of the analysis of the impact of women's political participation ignores this broader context and focuses on so-called 'women's issues' alone (for example, in the areas of healthcare, land rights, inheritance rights, gender-based violence and so forth). Moreover, despite much talk of intersectionality and gender mainstreaming, many development initiatives aimed at supporting women's political participation remain similarly limited in scope and ambition. Treating women as a homogenous category, training programmes and supports largely aim at adding them to existing exclusionary institutions rather than challenging and transforming these. The wider globalised material and political relations that govern the distribution and use of resources, entitlements and authority within and beyond these institutions are often ignored. I argue that a focus on and engagement with this broader globalised structural basis for so-called 'women's issues' is necessary, and that this can take place outside of as well as within formal political institutions. A critical engagement with the literatures on both democratisation and gender and development (GAD) underpins this.

Engendering democracy: Beyond fragile and authoritarian states

Much has been written about the challenges of democracy in postcolonial and post-conflict Africa (Ake, 1996; Clapham, 1996; Bratton and van de Walle, 1997; Brown, 2014). Initially heralded with great optimism with the wave of multiparty elections from the 1990s forward, commentators are now generally more subdued in relation to its prospects (Diamond et al., 2016; Stoddard, 2017; Powell et al., 2018). On the one hand, a growing authoritarianism is apparent in recent years. This is evidenced in both the resurgence of so-called 'third term' challenges in many countries, including violent suppression of public protest and dissent and, more recently, in excessively harsh and repressive state responses to Covid-19. On the other hand, a number of states are associated with chronic violence and insurgencies. As local elites collude with international resource entrepreneurs in predatory and violent cycles of extraction and exploitation, chronic violence and large-scale humanitarian displacement and migration ensue, with so called 'fragile states' appearing to have lost all control and legitimacy vis-à-vis their populations (Prunier, 2009; Reno, 2013).

Democracy, in this conceptualisation, with its focus on pluralist competition, elections and parliamentary institutions, implies liberal democracy. However, given both the history and the dynamics of political and social life in Africa, it may be unfair to expect so much from this imported model. Three factors merit some consideration in this regard. First, historically, liberal democracy remains very new to African states. Most countries only gained their independence from colonial rule in the 1960s, with some even

later. As many analysts have pointed out (see, for example, Clapham, 1982; Bayart, 1993; Mamdani, 1996), during the colonial period African territories were administered, not governed. Colonial rule was generally through coercion, not consent, with a policy of 'divide and rule' leading to dangers of ethnic tensions and irredentism at independence. Moreover, as Mamdani (1996) reminds us, during the colonial period African people were treated as subjects, not citizens. There was no tradition of a social contract and the concept of community was much stronger than that of national identity. Consequently, the newly independent states eschewed pluralism, considering it would only deepen existing ethnic divisions. As late as 1988, the continent was dominated by one-party systems (29) and military oligarchies (10) (Thomson, 2004: 230). Opposition parties were outlawed in most states and the political norm was for a highly personalised executive to govern through tightly controlled one-party structures. Liberal democracy was largely rejected for the first three decades of independence. Patronage politics and 'economies of affection' dominated, whereby politics took place through informal networks and structures based on the core principles of "whom you know is more important than what you know" and "sharing personal wealth is more important than investing in economic growth" (Hyden, 2006: 72).

Yet, in the wake of the fall of the Berlin wall and pressures from Western donors, the 1990s saw a wave of 'democratisation' in the form of a move to multipartyism and competitive elections. In just ten years, liberal democratic models came to dominate, with the number of multiparty states across the continent rising from just nine in 1988 to 45 in 1999 (Thomson, 2004: 230). Given the myriad of problems that continue to beset liberal democracies in the West, many of which are in existence for several hundred years, it appears unrealistic to expect a smooth (or even relatively so) transition to liberal democracy in just 50–60 years in Africa. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, the competitive Westminster model lies very much at odds with how social and political life is conducted in many places in Africa. As Julius Nyerere, the first President of Tanzania, famously asserted, democracy rests on "Africans talking until they agree" (Nyerere, 1961). This suggests that more deliberative forms of debate, discussion, bargaining and negotiation might prove more suitable to development policymaking within African contexts than the overtly combative, competitive modes which underpin Western liberal democratic traditions. Of course, the limitations of such deliberative models need to be acknowledged – most notably questions around who the 'Africans talking' are, who they represent and how they do so as well as what they are and are not 'talking' about.

Second, in many African contexts, as elsewhere in the world, formal institutions are rarely the place where development policies are decided upon. In real life politics and policymaking, policy is generally the result of discussions, debates, deliberations, bargaining and negotiation which take place elsewhere, often in parallel institutions, both formal and informal. African politics thus comprise a complex array of local, decentralised structures, some

modern, some traditional and many a hybrid of the old and new. Understanding how power circulates and politics operates and how gender relations play out within and around these is key to identifying opportunities for effective, transformative engagement.

And third, it is worth remembering that Western liberal states from their conception forward are highly gendered. Women were never included in the original social contract and were never part of liberal states' democratic projects. As Horn (2015: 323) has noted:

although the liberal definition of citizen appears “unsexed”, it is in fact built on a Western male model where (some) men, as property owners, formed the basis of the public sphere – the privileged space of politics. Women, on the other hand, were incorporated into the private sphere through the marriage contract as wives subservient to their husbands, rather than as individuals.

This largely continues to be the case, as evidenced in women's continued under-representation in political and economic spheres in liberal democracies throughout the world, together with a concomitant neglect of yet dependence on women's social reproductive role within national development policy (Kabeer, 1994; Pearson, 2014; Rai et al., 2014). Even states which have introduced progressive steps to address gendered inequalities still risk reifying the role of masculine protector putting those protected, women and children, in a subordinate position of dependence and obedience (Young, 2003; Durie-smith, 2018).

Liberal democratic theory may not, therefore, be the most suitable conceptual lens to employ when analysing or, indeed, attempting to engender democracy in African polities. Any attempt at such needs to begin with a consideration of what we mean when we talk about democracy and what this might entail. The literature on post-liberal democracy – most notably that of the ‘difference democrats’ – offers, I believe, some useful theoretical and practical insights in this regard. It allows for a consideration of invisible as well as visible forms of power, for more deliberative forms of debate and discussion and, through an analysis of multiple forms of discourse, compartments and behaviours, for an acknowledgement and a treatment of difference. In Chapter 3, I review this literature more fully and develop a framework of analysis which is applied to the specific cases which are analysed and discussed in later chapters.

Engendering democracy: Beyond ‘add women’s issues and stir’ approaches to development

Any book which deals with the ‘how’ of politics – the various practices, discourses, norms and behaviours which underpin the multiple spaces of politics – also needs to deal with the ‘what’ – the outcomes of the deliberations,

negotiations and bargaining that take place. The emphasis here on engendering democracy reflects a focus on the gendered outcomes of political processes. Bringing together politics and development, it calls for some reflection on what gender equality means. Many of the debates within Development Studies around gender equality, what this means and how it can be promoted, have been framed in terms of WID (Women in Development) and GAD approaches to development. The WID approach stems from Ester Boserup's seminal study of women's contribution to agriculture and food production in Africa in 1970 (Boserup, 1970). This highlighted women's exclusion from development theory and practice which, to this point, had focused almost exclusively on men. The aim of WID, at its inception in the 1970s and 1980s, was to promote and increase women's inclusion in modernist development projects and policies, including the productive economy. Combining equity and efficacy arguments, much of the focus of the WID approach was on women's education, training and access to technology, so that their participation in the productive economy could be increased. The WID approach soon came under attack from a number of quarters. The principal challenge promoted by groups such as Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) in South Asia argued that WID's embrace of markets and women's inclusion merely increased inequalities by exploiting women as a cheap form of labour and added to their existing work burden in the invisible and unrecognised sphere of social reproduction rather than paving the way for greater equality. Groups such as DAWN called for a shift in focus, from the exploitative 'add women and stir' strategy of the WID approach to one focused on broader processes of capital accumulation and their gendered impacts (Benería and Sen, 1981; Kabeer, 1994). This new focus, under the guise of what became known as the Women and Development (WAD) approach, was important in highlighting the gendered impacts of broad macro-level development policy. Proponents of the WAD approach argued that policy-makers and practitioners needed to broaden their focus beyond 'women's issues' alone to an approach which interrogated and challenged the gendered inequalities which underpinned macro-level development policy and practice. However, this WAD approach was somewhat quickly overshadowed by the GAD approach, which came to prominence in the 1990s.

The GAD approach is now well established as the most influential critique of the WID approach. Emphasising both the socially constructed nature of gender and the diversity of women's situations and experiences, the GAD school shone a welcome light on the household as a potential arena of inequality and conflict (Kabeer, 1994) as well as questioning the heteronormativity of gender development theories and practices (Bedford, 2009). Influenced in part by the post-structuralist turn towards identity politics and with a firm focus on gendered relations, the GAD approach has broadened the gender equality debate from a narrow, essentialising focus on women alone to a focus on people of all genders and none, together with the broader intersectional

status categories (class, race, ethnicity, age, ability, sexuality) that differentiate us all (Benería, 2012). This has opened the door to explore and challenge the harms that patriarchal norms, attitudes, institutions and systems present to men as well as women and to those whose subordinate identities are subject to stigmatisation, discrimination and violence.

Notwithstanding the significant contributions of these various critiques on development discourse and policy, WID approaches have proven stubbornly persistent in the development planning and practices of many of the major international development institutions as well as within states and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The popular gender equality as ‘Smart Economics’ mantra of the World Bank is just one example of this (albeit a highly influential one). Under this mantra, gender equality is once again narrowly conceived as increased women’s participation in labour markets as a boost to economic growth (World Bank, 2011). Indeed, the increased emphasis over the last two decades on gender ‘parity’ and ‘women’s empowerment’ as increased economic participation has heralded a new emphasis on the extension and intensification of women’s labour as central to sustaining capital accumulation in many African countries and more globally. As I explore further in Chapter 2, this has impacts on both women and men. Moreover, as Wilson (2015) has argued, policy measures introduced from the 1990s forward aimed at addressing some of the key facets of gender inequality (so-called ‘women’s issues’) are just one more facet of a gendered ‘accumulation by dispossession’, where the focus on ‘women’s issues’ is with a view to maximising their utility in the productive economy. This has important implications for political participation. Engendering democracy has to mean more than engaging with ‘women’s issues’ alone. It has to involve engagement with the broader material and relational constraints (and opportunities) posed by globalised markets.

While not losing sight of the important contributions of GAD to gender equality debates, I argue that the renewed emphasis on the Asian-inspired, competitive, low-wage, export-oriented model as one of the primary engines of growth within Africa’s Lion economies (see, in particular, Chapter 4) as well as the ongoing salience of globalised extractive economies in resource-rich contexts (see, in particular, Chapter 7) call for a renewed focus on the contributions of the WAD school to development theory and practice. In other words, in thinking about and exploring the ‘how’ of engendered political participation, we need to rethink approaches to gender equality *conceptually* (moving from individualised approaches focused on inserting women into existing structures to interrogating and challenging gendered discourses and practices which support such structures), *spatially* (exploring global as well as national and local opportunities and barriers to equality) and *temporally* (exploring continuities and ruptures with past colonial legacies and how these feed into contemporary relations and structures). This is the approach employed throughout the book.

Some methodological and theoretical considerations

This book draws from and is inspired by the many conversations I have enjoyed with diverse women and men over the 30 years I have been researching and working in Africa. I have a longstanding interest in how people survive, manage and/or thrive in what are often extremely challenging circumstances, and this book is a product of this interest. While it explores broad questions around gendered development policy and gendered political representation, it is more specifically grounded in my own fieldwork from a series of interrelated research projects on gender, governance and development in Burundi, the DRC, Kenya, Malawi and Rwanda over the last nine years.² Throughout the book, I draw on both the wider literature and on this fieldwork to interrogate and pose questions about women's political participation and representation more broadly and to identify ways in which women's engagement can have and is having more transformative impacts in specific instances. Methodologically, the approach is rather eclectic. As well as drawing on data from over 500 interviews and focus groups, I employ policy analysis, process tracing, discourse analysis and a structured observation within different chapters. I also draw on a range of other relevant cases and broader literature throughout the book.

Theoretically, the book sits at the nexus between politics, gender and development. Starting from the premise that politics is a far broader project than securing a seat in national or local legislatures alone, it draws from both structural and discursive theories of power to highlight both the gendered nature of development policy and practice and the multiple spaces in which contestations over this gendering and its inequitable outcomes can occur. Feminist theory is a key influence here, and the book combines influences from both structuralist and post-structuralist traditions in this field. Specifically, at the structuralist level, it draws from the subfield of feminist political economy. While many of the themes in this diverse body of literature are pertinent to gendered inequalities in Africa, there are three aspects in particular that are useful to this book. These draw, respectively, from the literature on the 'globalised economies of exploitation', which draws attention to the gendered impacts of economic policy and the globalised nature of much of this (Kabeer, 1994; Rai and Waylan, 2014); the literature on social reproduction, which draws attention to the gendered work involved in nurturing both the current and future labour force and in caring for those who cannot work (Pearson, 2014; Rai et al., 2014); and more recent literature on the political economy of gender-based violence (True, 2012; Elias and Rai, 2015).

At a post-structuralist level, the book engages with debates within African feminism on the importance of history, context and difference. Ahikire (2014: 8) has noted that "feminism on the African continent constitutes a myriad of heterogeneous experiences and points of departure", while Mama (2020: 364) argues that "Feminist thought in African contexts is grounded in complex and multi-layered experiences of indigeneity, colonialism,

dictatorial regimes, corporate extractivism, new manifestations of conflict, militarization, cultural reactions, and all the effects of contemporary neoliberal globalization". The multiple experiences of diverse women and men in these diverse contexts form the backdrop to the different areas of focus and different spaces of politics in each of the chapters. Specifically, in this regard, the book draws from the work of a number of feminist political theorists, the so-called 'difference democrats', who are concerned with issues of inclusion and difference within the wide range of political spaces which exist outside the realm of formal liberal institutions (Benhabib, 1996; Young, 2000). These concerns and preoccupations prove useful in avoiding the co-option pitfalls often associated with engagement within different political spaces. This literature forms much of the basis for the framework of analysis which is developed in Chapter 3 and is applied to the different case studies analysed in different contexts throughout the book. In addition, the emphasis on multiple discourses, practices and behaviours, which are explored in the different case studies presented in the book, also draws its inspiration from post-structuralism.

One final note in relation to the theoretical approach employed in this book as well my own positionality in this regard needs to be made. As a privileged, white, Irish woman working in a Western university, questions can certainly be asked in relation to my authority and legitimacy to teach and write on politics and gender and development in Africa. The increasing problematisation of normative Western-centric academic models of knowledge production with their erasures of the impacts of colonialism, empire, racism and discrimination (Santos, 2017; Bhabra et al., 2018) is pertinent and welcome. Equally pertinent and welcome are calls to include diverse feminist perspectives and voices in this regard (Tamale, 2020). As calls for an end to the 'epistemicide' (Santos, 2017) of multiple forms of knowledge embraced and propounded by subaltern groups rise, we need to reflect deeply on both what constitutes 'knowledge' and on the past and future role for global institutions (including educational institutions and the global development industry) in knowledge generation and dissemination. Is there still a role for Western scholarship and analysis, including my own, in this context?

I believe there is. Politics and development in Africa is now and has long been a globalised affair. As part of this global system, it behoves us as scholars, teachers and citizens to critically engage with it in ways which, in Mohanty's words (2003: 530), "build feminist solidarities across the divisions of place, identity, class, work, belief and so on". However, this needs to be done in a historicised, inclusive manner which recognises different ways of being and knowing and which above all learns to listen. This is what I have tried to do. I hope I have, at least to some extent, succeeded in this endeavour and that the diversity of women and men's voices, perspectives and experiences which I have encountered in the course of my conversations and interactions shines through and illuminates the broader arguments and analyses which frame each of the chapters.

In relation to my theoretical approach, as Jakobsen (2014: 542) has noted, “Feminist researchers ... have been discouraged from theoretical engagement by the widespread acceptance in the North of the claim that social theory, especially gender theory, is inapplicable to Africa”. Like Jakobsen, while cognisant of the wealth and richness of African feminist scholarship and activism built up over the last four decades, I build on postcolonial work that questions the ethical and epistemological superiority of the stance that theory developed in the North should not be used in the South. As Narayan (2009) has noted, framing Africa as primarily different from the Global North is as ethnocentric and imperialist as assuming sameness. Moreover, as also noted above, gendered economic, social and political marginalisation is not solely a domestic affair. The globalised political economy has long been dependant on women’s marginalisation and exploitation from the colonial period forward. Contemporary African polities and economies are no different, most notably now as ‘Africa looks East’, to Asian models for inspiration. Consequently, Development Studies must expand beyond national boundaries to the realm of the global political economy, where contributions from thinkers and commentators from the Global South and North alike prove pertinent and where good theory, wherever its origins, where relevant and thoughtfully applied, can make for good practice.

Conclusion and organisation of the book

There is now sufficient evidence to show that political presence within formal political institutions does not necessarily translate into political influence as factors such as party loyalty, patronage politics and exclusionary attitudes, behaviours and practices conspire to restrict women’s capacity to influence and impact development policy. In instances where elected female representatives have influenced policy, these have often been aided by the outstanding efforts of broader networks and movements (local and global) feeding into and building on shifting discourses, attitudes and behaviours. In this book I argue that both the spatial and the material scope of politics is much wider and deeper than that afforded by formal institutions alone. Specifically, I argue that a critical focus on and an engagement with the broader structural basis for so-called ‘women’s issues’ is necessary, and that this can take place outside of as well as within formal political institutions. The task for those seeking to engender states and democracy is to explore and uncover the many spaces and opportunities at local as well as national levels, within which exclusionary norms, attitudes and practices can be challenged and transformed. Drawing from the wider literature together with the case studies presented, a number of these are outlined in the chapters that follow.

The book is organised into eight chapters. Following this introductory chapter, the next two chapters set out the context for and the analytical framework employed in the book respectively. The subsequent four explore a number of different levels and spaces of politics. Lessons are drawn from both

the broader literature and the specific case studies presented for how political participation and democracy can be engendered in each context. The book concludes with a synopsis of its theoretical and practical contributions.

Chapter 2 addresses the commonly asked question ‘why is it necessary for women to become engaged in politics and public life?’. Tracking a continuum of inequalities that extends from the structural violence of poverty within policy and institutions, to women’s subordination and marginalisation within public life, to patterns and practices of intimate violence within the home and community, it argues, following Fraser (2005), that there can be no meaningful recognition (of women and men’s equal status and value) or redistribution (towards those discriminated against and marginalised by development policy and in public and private life) without political representation. It examines both the different dimensions and intersectional manifestations of gendered inequalities and the principal reasons for their persistence. A case study of gender-based violence in Malawi is presented towards the end of the chapter. Exploring the complex reasons for its widespread incidence, the Malawi case illustrates the political nature of gendered insecurity as part of a continuum of multiple globalised inequalities.

Having made the case for the need to engender politics and public life at a range of levels in Chapter 2, Chapter 3 moves on to explore how this can be done. Drawing in particular from the work of the ‘difference democrats’ mentioned earlier, together with insights from post-structural theories of power and democracy more broadly, the chapter develops an analytical framework which is employed throughout the remaining chapters to analyse the different case studies presented and draw practical lessons on how political engagement within them can be engendered. The *4W framework* developed in this chapter focuses on the four key questions of *where* politics takes place (spaces), *who* is involved (actors, inclusion and representation), the *ways* in which they are involved (discourses and frames, practices, norms and behaviours) and *what* development issues are included and excluded (standpoints, perspectives, interests and framing). Chapter 3 also employs post-structural theories of power to critically analyse power relations in the deployment of the ever popular and near-ubiquitous projects of ‘empowerment’ and ‘capacity building’ in development programming and practice.

Chapter 4 turns to an analysis of the political spaces which inform policy and programming at national levels. Focusing in particular on the Eastern turn among Africa’s ‘Lion economies’, it makes two interrelated arguments. First, it argues that there are significant gendered implications to the Eastern turn which to date have largely been ignored in the contemporary literature on African political economy. Four key lessons from the Asian experience for African states intent on pursuing similar paths in this regard are highlighted. And second, exploring shifts and developments in national policymaking and planning over time, it argues that under certain circumstances, national policymaking processes and fora can provide a space to incorporate the lessons and experiences of East Asian states. Broadening national discourse and

policy in ways which both move beyond ‘add women and stir’ approaches to economic development and in ways which engender discourse and policy beyond the purview of traditional ‘women’s issues’ alone, it is argued that contemporary policies and strategies can avoid some of the pitfalls associated with Asian models. These arguments are exemplified in the case study of Kenya’s *Vision 2030*, which is presented towards the end of the chapter.

Almost all African countries now have some form of decentralisation. While many studies focus on the experience of female councillors within these decentralised structures together with their effectiveness in policymaking more broadly, an often-overlooked element is their mandate to engage local citizens in policy deliberations and decision-making. Chapter 5 focuses on this aspect. Differentiating between different forms of decentralisation and placing these in a historic context, it argues that decentralisation is first and foremost a political process which in particular contexts and places can offer real and tangible opportunities to communities and individuals to open up local political spaces, engender local discourse and debate and pave the way for transformational change. A case study of Rwanda’s *Umuganda* process as part of its broader decentralisation programme is presented towards the end of the chapter. Demonstrating ruptures as well as continuities with the past, the Rwandan case offers lessons on how, even in the most challenging of hierarchical, authoritarian regimes, local decentralised spaces, when seized by individuals and communities, can offer some opportunities to challenge, diversify and engender political debate and action.

Chapters 6 and 7 turn to an examination of the role of civil society as a political actor. Both chapters draw attention to the diversity of institutions and spaces that make up civil society, to its porosity with (as opposed to its purported autonomy from) the state, its global embeddedness and to the significance of these features for political engagement with and through different civic spaces. Chapter 6 focuses on the role of both NGOs and the media, and explores opportunities and challenges to both in engendering discourse and debate within the public sphere. Enmeshed in complex relationships with both states and donors, it is argued that NGOs are hampered and impeded in mediating and animating debate and opinion formation within the public sphere. Within the mediasphere, however, while more traditional forms of print and broadcast media are coming under greater pressure and regulation, both community radio and new digitalised forms are seen to offer considerable transformative potential, although these are not without their problems also. The opportunities and challenges offered by the globalised digital sphere in informing and transforming gendered debate and action, notably when globally appropriated, are exemplified in the case study of the Nigerian #BringBackOurGirls campaign which is presented towards the end of the chapter.

Chapter 7 continues with a civil society focus but moves to a more micro scale, examining the political dynamics between community-based

associations and traditional political authorities. Specifically, taking a historic view, the chapter explores how women have collectively responded, across time, place and scale, to a range of gendered injustices, discriminations and inequalities, interacting with traditional authorities within a complex hybridised fabric of local polities. It is argued that, while community associations can serve as important sites where critical skills in deliberation, bargaining, networking and alliance-building can be developed and honed and where gendered identities and discourses can be challenged and transformed, they can also serve as sites of exclusion and discrimination, serving members' interests alone and reinforcing existing inequalities and divisions. This can happen where they become captured by and compliant to specific discourses and exigencies of traditional authorities and/or local NGOs and their donors. A case study of the political activism of a women's association in the resource-rich province of Ituri in the DRC presented towards the end of the chapter exemplifies these multiple dynamics. It also highlights the interaction of global and local forces on local women's circumstances and political action as well as providing some concrete lessons on how political participation might be engendered within local polities.

Chapter 8 concludes with a synopsis of the book's main arguments and its practical contributions. Summarising the opportunities and challenges for engendered political participation across the range of spaces examined, the chapter draws a number of practical lessons for funders, policymakers, practitioners and activists. Three core tensions running through the book are discussed, and looking forward, consideration is given to the broader social and political context in which engendered transformations are taking place.

Notes

- 1 The term 'Africa' is used in this book to refer to the region south of the Sahara Desert which is also known as 'sub-Saharan Africa' or the 'subcontinent'. This appellation is somewhat problematic but follows the conventions of both mainstream development and academia where countries in North Africa (notably Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia) are generally considered in conjunction with countries in the Middle East.
- 2 Two of these projects were carried out in collaboration with local NGOs in Burundi, the DRC and Rwanda and focused on exploring the opportunities for citizen participation in local government in the respective countries, together with popular views on politics and women's roles therein more broadly. A third project was in collaboration with an NGO in Malawi. This focused on exploring norms and attitudes around gender-based violence at national and local levels. A fourth project, again in collaboration with local NGOs, focused on examining the politically transformative potential of local women's groups and networks, both formal and informal, in Ituri province in the DRC. A fifth project aimed at exploring the process and content of Kenya's national *Vision 2030* development plan. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, travel to Kenya was not possible and interviews for this final project were conducted online.

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2 Why engender democracy

Gendered inequalities in development

Anyone working to increase women's political participation and engender democracy in Africa as elsewhere inevitably finds themselves, at some stage, confronted with the question 'why'. Why is it necessary for women to become engaged in politics and public life? Can their perspectives and interests not be adequately represented by existing experienced and skilled policymakers and legislators at local as well as national levels? What exactly is the problem? Many African countries have made significant progress in bringing forward progressive legislation and policy in relation to women's equality. Yet, one of the great paradoxes of Africa's development trajectory over the last two decades is the stubborn persistence of gendered inequalities at all levels in the context of some of the world's highest growth rates.¹ These inequalities form a continuum that extends from the structural violence of poverty within policy and institutions to women's subordination and marginalisation within public life, to patterns and practices of intimate violence within the home and community. Across a diverse range of contexts and circumstances, many women continue to routinely experience multiple forms of humiliation, discrimination, marginalisation and violation as they go about their daily lives. This is the problem.

In her seminal article on globalisation and justice, Nancy Fraser (2005: 73) famously argued that "theories of justice must become three-dimensional, incorporating the political dimension of representation alongside the economic dimension of distribution and the cultural dimension of recognition". In short, Fraser cogently argued there can be no meaningful recognition (of women and men's equal status and value) or redistribution (towards those discriminated against and marginalised by development policy and in public and in private life) without political representation. This is why democracy must be engendered. In this chapter I set out to make this case in an African context. In doing so, I make three interrelated arguments. First, that gender inequalities, in their diverse and intersectional manifestations, are the products of an interaction between shifting cultural, material and political factors. Second, that these interrelated factors are increasingly linked to and inseparable from transformations and developments within the global political economy. And third and following this, that political action and policymaking at local

as well as at national levels needs to acknowledge and highlight the globalised nature of local inequalities, problematising and interrogating the links between dominant development models and gendered inequalities, and moving beyond local and nation states to include international institutions and actors such as multinational corporations, donor agencies, international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), global media and the internet as frames of reference in addressing these.

I develop my argument as follows. In the following section, I collate and present a number of key indicators of gender inequality for a range of countries across the continent over time. These indicators are useful and I include them here as they inform much contemporary development policy and planning. However, as I go on to emphasise, they also need to be employed with extreme caution as they are both empirically flawed and conceptually circumscribed. In particular, I problematise the implicit framing of gendered inequalities as personal adversities to be addressed through women's economic incorporation in the absence of causal explanations for their marginalisation. In the section that follows, I move from description to analysis in an effort to explain and understand the principal reasons for the persistence of these complex gendered inequalities. Drawing on wider literature together with my own research in different contexts, I develop my argument in relation to their interrelated cultural, material and political dimensions. Interrogating their causes, I highlight the historic and contemporary importance of a globalised gendered accumulation by dispossession in accounting for these gendered inequalities. Finally, in the third section, I exemplify a number of these issues through a case study of gender-based violence in Malawi. The insights from this case are illustrative of the core arguments made in this chapter, namely that gender-based violence is just one facet of a continuum of inequalities; that this continuum is linked to the material and political relations that govern the distribution and use of resources, entitlements and authority within people's homes, communities and workplaces; and that this, in turn, is embedded in and influenced by the global political economy.

The analysis in this chapter necessarily reflects an overly generalised account of the different levels and forms of inequality experienced by women across the continent. Clearly, women's (and men's) experiences differ greatly as do their geographic, economic, social and political contexts. Their particular circumstances and life experiences cannot be collapsed into a general account. Nor can their resilience and agency be underestimated. My intention here is not to flatten important particularities and provide yet another universalised representation of 'the African experience' which reproduces colonial (and contemporary) binary images of female 'victims' and male 'protectors/enslavers' (Spivak, 1988). Rather, my intention is to draw attention to the confluence of cultural, material and political factors, which impinge upon women and men's differing experiences, and to highlight the common pressures and stresses exerted upon these by developments within the contemporary global political economy.

Measuring gender inequality

Discussions and analyses of gender inequality often begin with some reference to different measures and indices. These measures often form the basis for policy and planning in the area of gender equality, and therefore merit some critical attention. Institutions such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations (UN), the World Bank and the World Health Organization (WHO) produce a wide range of indicators at national levels which measure gendered inequalities across a range of policy domains. These include economic participation, education, health, political participation, human rights and demographics. A number of aggregate indicators (indicators combining a range of single indicators) have also been developed over the last 25 years in an attempt to capture gendered inequalities more broadly. These include the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Gender Development Index (GDI) introduced in 1995²; the World Economic Forum's (WEF) Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) introduced in 2006³; the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) introduced in 2007⁴; and the UNDP's Gender Inequality Index (GII) developed in 2010.⁵ Each of these is comprised of different component indices and therefore places an emphasis on different components and dimensions of gendered inequalities.

The GGGI measures gender disparities across the four areas of economic participation, educational attainment, health and political empowerment. The closer the score is to one, the higher the level of equality of outcome between women and men, while the closer the score to zero, the higher the level of inequality. The SIGI assesses inequalities in opportunities rather than outcomes and focuses on social norms and institutions. It includes five measures: discrimination within the family code, son preference, restricted physical integrity, ownership rights and restricted civil liberties. In contrast to the GGGI, higher levels (towards 1) indicate greater inequality, while lower levels (towards 0) indicate greater equality. The GDI is an extension of the UN's Human Development Index (HDI) which measures outcomes in life expectancy, education and earned income. It measures the gender-gaps in these scores and, so, is a function of countries' HDI scores. The closer the value is to one, the more equality, and the closer the value is to nine, the more inequality between HDI scores. The UN's GII differs quite significantly from its GDI in that it measures gender disparities independently of the GDI. It measures outcomes in reproductive health, 'empowerment' (measured by the share of parliamentary seats held by women combined with women's higher education attainment levels) and labour market participation (including unpaid work). As with the SIGI, higher levels (towards 1) indicate greater inequality, while lower levels (towards 0) indicate greater equality. Table 2.1 summarises the scope and content of each of these indicators. Drawing on each institutions' source website (or in the case of the OECD, its most recent *SIGI Working Paper*), it also includes a key quote to give a sense of the

different institutions' views of the agents of and purpose for gender equality. These indicators are presented for different African countries for which data is available in Table 2.2.

Before examining these tables, however, a note of caution is necessary. As noted in the introduction to this chapter, while indicators are useful in providing a snapshot of gendered inequalities as well as informing relevant policy and programming, they also have significant limitations and should be employed with care. First, and as noted by the institutions which compile them themselves, statistics and indicators are always hampered by the limited availability of relevant data in different countries as well as by their lack of reliability and comparability. Second, and more importantly, in selecting what to measure (for example, remunerated employment) and what to omit (for example, women's 'reproductive work' – see Chapter 4) statistics privilege and reify particular aspects of gendered inequalities while negating others. Statistics are never neutral. Nor are they ever apolitical. As Escobar notes, "Statistics tell stories. They are techno-representations endowed with complex political and cultural histories ... [they] reflect the crafting of subjectivities, the shaping of culture, and the construction of social power" (1995: 213). Many of the most commonly cited statistics in research and policy reports construct and reproduce a WID story of individual economic agency embedded in an enabling policy and legislative context aimed at enhancing women's participation within the globalised capitalist economy.⁶ This is reflected, to varying degrees, in the Equality Framings set out in Table 2.1 where, *inter alia*, women are depicted as 'lagging behind' and needing to 'keep up' while being overly influenced by their immediate social environs, and where gender equality matters for 'growth, competitiveness and [the] future-readiness of economies and businesses worldwide' as much as for 'sustainable and inclusive development'. Third, and most importantly, no indicator can ever manage to capture the scope and complexity of diverse women's lived experiences or the intersectionality of different markers of status and identity. Thus, they fail to capture the specificity of different experiences of marginalisation and discrimination experienced by different groups of women (and men) in specific situations. And finally, of course, no indicator can ever furnish an explanation for these complex, diverse inequalities.

As indicated above, the different composite indicators presented in Table 2.2 each highlight particular dimensions of inequality while omitting others. It is, therefore, unsurprising that different countries score differently under the different measures. Table 2.3 presents the top and bottom five scoring countries under each indicator as a way of illustrating this point.

Again, care needs to be taken in drawing comparisons across countries due to the empirical and conceptual limitations discussed above. However, a brief yet cautious glance at this table does suggest three things. First, while a small number of countries (South Africa and Namibia) score highly across all measures, a greater number score highly in just one (nine countries appear in the top five of just one indicator). The corollary also holds true, although

Table 2.1 Some popular composite gender equality indicators

Indicator (institution)	Year introduced	Constituent indicators	Equality framing	Scoring
GDI (UNDP)	1995	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender gap in HDI • Life expectancy • Education • Earned income • Economic participation • Educational attainment • Health • Political 'empowerment' (decision-making outcomes) 	<p>"The GDI shows how much women are lagging behind their male counterparts and how much women need to catch up within each dimension of human development".⁷</p> <p>"Gender parity is fundamental to whether and how economies and societies thrive. Ensuring the full development and appropriate deployment of half of the world's total talent pool has a vast bearing on the growth, competitiveness and future-readiness of economies and businesses worldwide".⁸</p> <p>"Every day, women's and men's environment – their families, communities, societies, etc. – influence what they believe and how they behave. Nothing is more important to them than what their communities and peers expect from them, both privately and publicly... Understanding the nature and extent of the obstacles to gender equality is paramount to designing effective policies that promote equality and, ultimately, sustainable and inclusive development".⁹</p>	0–1 (1 = full equality)
GGGI (WEF)	2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discrimination within the family code • Son preference • Restricted physical integrity • Ownership rights • Restricted civil liberties 	<p>"Girls and women have made major strides since 1990, but they have not yet gained gender equity. The disadvantages facing women and girls are a major source of inequality. All too often, women and girls are discriminated against in health, education, political representation, labour market, etc.—with negative consequences for development of their capabilities and their freedom of choice".¹⁰</p>	0–1 (1 = full equality)
SIGI (OECD)	2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reproductive health • 'Empowerment' (share of parliamentary seats held by women plus women's higher education attainment levels) • Labour market participation (including unpaid work) 		0–1 (0 = full equality)
GII (UNDP)	2010			

Table 2.2 Gender inequality scores for selected countries

<i>Country</i>	<i>GDI 2019</i> <i>(1 = full equality)</i>	<i>GGGI 2019</i> <i>(1 = full equality)</i>	<i>SIGI 2019</i> <i>(0 = full equality)</i>	<i>GII 2019</i> <i>(0 = full equality)</i>
Angola	0.903	0.660	–	0.536
Benin	0.885	0.658	0.398	0.612
Botswana	0.999	0.709	–	0.465
Burkina Faso	0.867	0.635	0.324	0.594
Burundi	0.999	0.745	–	0.504
Cameroon	0.864	0.686	0.518	0.560
Chad	0.764	0.596	0.454	0.710
CAR	0.801	–	0.434	0.680
Congo, DR	0.845	0.578	0.395	0.617
Congo, Rep	0.929	–	–	0.570
Cote d'Ivoire	0.811	0.606	0.428	0.638
Djibouti	–	–	–	–
Equatorial Guinea	–	–	–	–
Eritrea	–	–	–	–
Eswatini	0.996	0.703	–	0.567
Ethiopia	0.837	0.705	0.296	0.517
Gabon	–	–	0.401	0.425
Gambia	0.846	0.628	–	0.612
Ghana	0.911	0.673	0.345	0.538
Guinea	0.817	0.642	0.567	–
Guinea-Bissau	–	–	–	–
Kenya	0.937	0.671	0.355	0.518
Lesotho	1.014	0.695	0.381	0.553
Liberia	0.890	0.685	0.475	0.650
Madagascar	0.952	0.719	0.475	–
Malawi	0.986	0.664	0.411	0.565
Mali	0.821	0.621	0.460	0.671
Mauritania	0.864	–	–	0.634
Mauritius	0.976	0.665	–	0.347
Mozambique	0.912	0.723	0.243	0.523
Namibia	1.007	0.784	0.271	0.440
Niger	0.724	–	–	0.642
Nigeria	0.881	0.635	0.460	–
Rwanda	0.945	0.791	0.276	0.402
Senegal	0.870	0.684	0.370	0.533
Sierra Leone	0.884	0.668	0.476	0.644
South Africa	0.986	0.780	0.224	0.406
Somalia	–	–	–	–
South Sudan	0.842	–	–	–
Sudan	0.860	–	–	0.545
Tanzania	0.948	0.713	0.461	0.556
Togo	0.822	0.615	0.495	0.573
Uganda	0.863	0.717	0.451	0.535
Zambia	0.958	0.731	0.348	0.539
Zimbabwe	0.931	0.730	0.324	0.527

Sources: GGGI: WEF, 2020, <https://www.weforum.org/reports/gender-gap-2020-report-100-years-pay-equality>, data from page 27; SIGI OECD, <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=SIGI2019>; GDI and GII: UN HDR, 2020, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/indicators/137906> and <http://hdr.undp.org/en/indicators/68606>, respectively, all accessed August 5, 2021.

Table 2.3 Top five and bottom five scoring countries per indicator

<i>GDI</i>	<i>GGI</i>	<i>SIGI</i>	<i>GII</i>
<i>Top scoring (most equal)</i>			
Lesotho	Rwanda	South Africa	Mauritius
Namibia	Namibia	Mozambique	Rwanda
Botswana and Burundi	South Africa	Namibia	South Africa
Eswatini	Burundi	Rwanda	Gabon
Malawi and South Africa	Zambia	Ethiopia	Namibia
<i>Bottom scoring (most unequal)</i>			
Niger	Congo, DR	Guinea	Chad
Chad	Chad	Cameroon	CAR
CAR	Cote d'Ivoire	Togo	Mali
Cote d'Ivoire	Togo	Sierra Leone	Liberia
Guinea	Mali	Liberia and Madagascar	Sierra Leone

to a somewhat lesser extent. Just one country (Chad) appears in the lowest five of three indicators, while most appear in the lowest five of just two indicators (seven countries) or one sole indicator (four countries). This suggests that countries differ in their emphases on different aspects of gender equality and different choices of measurement indicators can reveal quite different outcomes. Second, although there appears to be some correlation between so-called 'stable democracies' and higher scores for gender equality (although not across the board), the corollary does not appear to hold true. So-called 'fragile states' appear mixed with more stable ones in the bottom scoring categories and many of the most fragile states do not appear at all.¹¹ And third, and perhaps most significantly, there appears to be little correlation between wealth and gender equality across any of the measures. Of the seven fastest growing economies in 2019,¹² just two (Rwanda and Ethiopia) appear in the top scoring categories, while one (Cote d'Ivoire) is one of the most consistently low scoring countries. Therefore, high levels of economic growth do not necessarily result in greater levels of gender equality, even across the somewhat limited set of indicators represented here. Indeed, in some cases, high levels of economic growth correlate with high levels of gendered inequalities. I will return to this point in Chapter 4 when I explore the potential implications of the 'Asian turn' in development policy with reference to lessons from Asia. For now, I turn to some broader research and literature in an attempt to explore the wider scope and deeper implications of gendered inequalities, together with their complex, interrelated causes.

Explaining gender inequality: A confluence of cultural, material and political conditions

In recent decades, there have been a number of significant efforts to tackle gender inequalities at national legislative and policy levels. The catalogue of

actions in this regard is impressive. According to the OECD, Africa has made the most significant progress worldwide, most notably in the area of legislation, in tackling gender discrimination (OECD, 2019: 184). Since 2010, five countries have introduced new legal provisions mandating equal inheritance rights to sons and daughters, thus raising the total number of countries providing equal inheritance rights to 41. Also since 2010, seven countries have enacted laws guaranteeing equal remuneration for work of equal value. In this same time period, ten countries have introduced new legislation on domestic violence. And since 2011, 13 countries have introduced legal quotas to encourage women's participation in electoral politics at local or national levels.

Yet, inequalities in all these areas persist at the level of many women's everyday lived experiences. A woman may be able to divorce her husband, but she may be subjected to domination and control by other males within either his or her own family. A woman may be able to register ownership of land, but this land may be exploited and controlled by male members of her family. A woman may be entitled to equal remuneration in her workplace, but her job may go to someone else should she demand equal pay. She may equally be entitled to work in a harassment-free environment, but again, she may lose her job should she report workplace harassment or sexual violence. Meanwhile, in the home, domestic violence may be a criminal offence, but local authorities, deeming it a domestic affair, will often turn a blind eye. Even if she is lucky enough to live close to a formal court of law, she may find it inaccessible due to a combination of cost, time and effectiveness. And a woman's elevation to public office, whether elected or nominated, can be a risky endeavour as she can often be the subject of public scorn, intimidation and even physical assault. Legislation and policy reforms, therefore, do not necessarily translate into increased equality or security. Why is this?

It is, of course, difficult and, indeed, dangerous to generalise given the vast range of situations, circumstances and experiences of diverse women across the continent. Clearly, context and personal circumstances matter, and experiences in these different domains differ greatly for different women. However, notwithstanding these important specificities, a number of broader common themes, influences and trends are apparent in the wide research and literature in this area. These, in turn, point to a historical confluence of cultural, material and political factors which are exacerbated by the pressures and stresses of the global political economy. In the subsections that follow, I examine these in more detail.

Marriage and family

Reflecting the pervasiveness of heteronormativity across many societies, marriage is widely perceived to be all-important for women and men and alike. Culturally, a 'girl' becomes a 'woman' and a 'boy' becomes a 'man' through the institution of marriage. Women and men generally marry young, and

girl child marriages are common. According to the OECD (2019), in 49 African countries, girl child marriage is both legal and socially condoned. Twenty-three per cent of girls between the ages of 15 and 19 are or have been married, either formally or informally. While important culturally, marriage transactions also form the principal basis for social and economic reproduction. Women are responsible for the household, and for men, it is important to ensure that this marriage contract is upheld and that wives adhere to their responsibilities in full. The colonial roots of such a strictly gendered public/private division which, introducing new political asymmetries within the household, stripped women of their economic independence and relegated them to the private domestic sphere where they were to be controlled and protected by men has been well documented (see, for example, Udvardy, 1998; Berger, 2016; see also Chapter 7 for more detail on this). Control over women became vital in this context and as a result their situations are now often fraught with multiple challenges and discriminations. Such pressures can be compounded when coupled with pressures such as in-laws placing undue expectations on young brides or in polygamous societies or situations where men are unfaithful. A number of studies suggest that women in polygamous marriages generally experience varying degrees of emotional difficulties such as anger, jealousy, loneliness, unhappiness and emptiness (Bove and Valeggia, 2009; Thobejane, 2014; Fenske, 2015). Mabaso et al. (2018) have shown that women in polygamous marriages in South Africa are less likely to have money for food or clothes, while my own research in Burundi revealed that women in polygamous relationships are more susceptible to rape and sexual assault (Gaynor, 2011).

This situation is compounded by the existence of a dowry or ‘bride-price’ in a wide number of contexts. This renders wives as assets or property, in service to their husbands in much the same way as livestock or machinery, rather than as partners. In many contexts, wives can be transferred, like any other asset, to other members of the family in the event of a death or separation. As an interviewee in Ituri in Northeast Congo explained to me in 2014:

For example, if my husband dies, I am given directly to my brother-in-law, I cannot refuse. If I refuse, I have to leave, leave all my children ... If, for example, I die, my family has to arrange itself to give my little sister to my husband, even if she does not want it.

Such cultural, material and political conditions also have important implications for property rights and inheritance where, as ‘property’ themselves, women have little power over land access, control or ownership (Grown et al., 2005; Deere and Doss, 2006a). In these challenging conditions, marriage can be a double-edged sword. While affording some elevation in status and power in the transition from ‘girl’ to ‘woman’, it also confers considerable pressure and responsibility on women to both increase and sustain the household, leading to considerable material pressures. For men, marriage can also

serve as a double-edged sword as it reinforces the cultural, material and political basis for hegemonic masculinities (Connell, 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005) within the home and community. It is important for men to be seen to be in charge, to be fulfilling their breadwinner role and to be in control of their wives and household (Hunter, 2006; Aboim, 2009). In situations where this is challenged – for example, where men are not managing to earn enough to support their household or where their wives appear to be gaining more power and/or autonomy – this can lead to feelings of inferiority, weakness and a loss of status within the wider community. A wide range of research focuses on the impacts of such ‘crises of masculinity’ on both men and women (see, for example, Silberschmidt, 2005, in Kenya and Tanzania; Howe and Uvin, 2009, in Burundi; Lwambo, 2013, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC); Izugbara, 2015 in Kenya; and Spall, 2016, in Angola). More recent research has begun to critique this narrative, however, with findings uncovering a greater flexibility to such hegemonic norms of masculinity with shifts evident towards ‘post-crisis’ realities of shared responsibility, egalitarianism and care within relationships (see, for example, Wyrod, 2016; McLean, 2019; McLean, 2021). These studies highlight the dynamic nature of gendered identities and point to important opportunities for change.

Divorce in many of these contexts is often eschewed or frowned upon. It is seen as bringing shame to both families and for women in particular it can often lead to insecurity (economic and personal) and increased precarity (Adedini et al., 2019). In some contexts, therefore, it is avoided at all costs. In others, however, as identities shift and the nature of families change, separations and divorce are increasingly common. Overall, as pressures and stresses on families across the continent grow – in part linked to changes in the global political economy – the nature and function of the African family is rapidly changing in practically all contexts. Increased urbanisation and migration in the context of the wider effects of global economic opportunities and crises and the effects of climate change and armed conflict have led to significant changes as families are separated, break up or are torn apart (Evans, 2018; McLean, 2021). These changes affect all members of the family. However, the burden of coping with them often falls hardest on women caught between all-consuming and increasingly demanding productive and reproductive roles. Indeed, according to recent Afrobarometer data, lived poverty has increased across the continent since 2016,¹³ and precarity and insecurity, in all its forms, is rising, most notably among women (Afrobarometer, 2020).

Land, property and food security

A number of studies have shown how women’s access to, control over and ownership of land and property increases their status and power, both within their own households and within their wider communities and public spheres (see, for example, Agarwal, 2001; Grown et al., 2005; Deere and Doss,

2006a). Empirical studies show that a more egalitarian distribution of assets between spouses correlates with both increased decision-making power for women within households (Oduro et al., 2012) and a reduced risk of dispossession (from their homes and land) by relatives in the case of widowhood or divorce (Deere and Doss, 2016b; Lambert and Rossi, 2016; HRW, 2017). Land ownership and control is also crucial at a material level given women's responsibilities for unremunerated subsistence agricultural activities such as growing vegetables, preserving harvests and raising small ruminants such as sheep and goats. As noted above, as part of their social reproductive role, women are also responsible for family nutrition through the preparation of meals. Historically, women exercised considerable control over land, seeds and food production as well as exercising considerable economic autonomy (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1994: 59–73). However, with colonialism, patterns of land use and occupancy drastically changed in many jurisdictions as colonial officials consolidated ownership and control in the hands of male owners who were often manipulated or forced to grow cash crops for export in place of food crops for local and family consumption. This colonial privileging of exports to the detriment of subsistence food production, which has continued into the postcolonial period, has adversely affected both the nutritional status of farming families and women's own status and security within their household and within their wider community (Bryceson, 2019). Material, cultural and political dimensions have combined as, as Davison (1988: 17) has argued, "The net effect of colonial capitalism has been a re-structuring of gender roles of production in areas where capitalism has taken root".

Today, although legislation has been introduced in a number of contexts to allow for women's ownership and control over land and property, significant cultural and material barriers remain. In what appears to be the only study aimed at estimating ownership rights and practices on a macro scale, the World Bank has estimated that men are still three times more likely than women to claim sole ownership over their land and property (Gaddis et al., 2018). Moreover, even where women do own and control their land, this does not guarantee them the same access to resources and supports as men. Ugwuegbu's (2009) study in Nigeria reveals that women continue to be marginalised in relation to credit and extension services as well as in their access to farming equipment and machinery. More recently, an extensive study involving 2,000 households across six countries (Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia) has uncovered similar results, reporting that women remain marginalised in accessing subsidised fertilisers and agricultural advisory services, as their husbands, perceived as household heads regardless of tenure, remain the sole targets of these services (Djurfeldt et al., 2018).

More broadly, a wide range of studies document disputes over control and ownership of land between sisters and brothers, widows and brothers-in-law, co-wives, and sons and mothers, with these often mediated through heads of families or local traditional authorities (HRW, 2003; Rose, 2006; Seeley,

2008; Feyertag et al., 2021). Women, more often than not, lose out in these cases, regardless of official legislation and tenure. In the absence of adequate access to land, food becomes scarce. When this happens, women's reproductive role within the household means that they often go without meals in an effort to sustain their husbands and families. According to UN Women (2018), Africa has the highest prevalence of food insecurity in the world, and more than half of the female population in the region is food insecure at moderate or severe levels. This situation is exacerbated by two further global developments.

The first is the phenomenon of 'land grabbing'. This involves the (often forced) displacement of small-scale, peasant agriculture by global corporate commodity chains investing in vast swathes of land for global food and fuel purposes. Prevalent since the early 2000s, when the introduction of biofuels added to the global demand for food crops, it is estimated that land grabs in Africa have amounted to 63 million hectares, an area similar to the total availability of arable land in Brazil (Feyertag, 2021). Commenting on the implications of this, McMichael (2006: 407) speaks of a "relentless assault on small farming" and argues that "local provisioning everywhere is subordinated to the combined pressures of the dumping of Northern food surpluses, an agro-industrial supermarket revolution and the appropriation of land for agro-exporting". The consequence of this, he argues, "is that new food circuits relentlessly displace small farmers into an expanding circuit of casual labour, flexibly employed when employed at all" (idem). This has clear implications for both women's access to increasingly scarce land resources and for food security more broadly. The second global development is, of course, climate change. The exacerbating global situation, with its increased climate shocks and events, is leading to greater insecurity in certain regions as food resources fall (see, for example, Olowu's research in Lesotho, 2013, or the Malawian case outlined later in this chapter). Emerging research indicates that the resultant impacts and insecurities are highly gendered as they intersect with the wide range of agro-ecological, material and political factors already discussed (Bagbura, 2010; Goh, 2012; Morchain et al., 2015; Rao et al., 2019).

Income and work

While, as noted above, colonial rule sought to strip women of their economic independence and relegate them to the private domestic sphere with responsibility for the reproductive economy alone, the material exigencies of subsistence and survival, most notably from the 1980s forward, have necessitated their engagement in the productive sphere also. Today, women work long hours due to their multiple responsibilities in both these spheres of activity. Within the productive sphere, they are predominantly concentrated in the low-paid, precarious, informal sector where they are often self-employed. Unlike other regions in the world, women dominate the informal economy in Africa. According to the ILO (2018), 89.7 per cent of women are employed

there, with this figure rising to 92.3 per cent when agriculture is included. In rural areas, informal economic activities generally take the form of hawking or ‘petit commerce’ of a range of produce. In rural and urban areas alike, women also engage in additional small-scale activities such as cooking and selling food on the street, brewing and selling local beer, dressmaking and hairdressing.

This informal sector is widely recognised as the most precarious sector of employment (ILO, 2018; Malta et al., 2019). Both women and men face risks of unstable earnings, with no access to health insurance. However, in addition to these risks, it is predominantly women who carry the double burden of informal work and care responsibilities in the home. Moreover, they are more disproportionately impacted by a lack of access to social protection (Ulrichs, 2016), more likely to experience discrimination in accessing financial and other services (Golla, 2017) and more likely to risk intimidation and abuse from powerful counterparts (Roever and Skinner, 2018). Women in the informal sector are also particularly adversely affected by global economic downturns, such as those experienced following the contagion of the 2008 global crash (Cohen, 2010; Horn, 2010) as well as more recently following Covid-19 (ILO, 2020; UNECA, 2020; Skinner et al., 2021), as they lack the economic and social safety nets often afforded to those in the formal sector. Skinner et al. (2021) report that in the strict lockdown in the second quarter of 2020 in South Africa, there was a 29 per cent drop in informal employment relative to the same period in 2019 and that recovery is proving very slow compared to formal sectors, with women most adversely affected. More broadly, female informal workers have been among the most vulnerable to Covid-19’s health and economic shocks as crowded working conditions with very little access to handwashing facilities and/or embargos on trade due to lockdowns have left families with little income or security, although remarkable examples of resilience and innovation have also been reported (ILO, 2020; Megersa, 2020; Resnick et al., 2020).

Men are also increasingly concentrated in the low-paid, precarious informal sector (ILO, 2018). As noted above, in cases of retrenchment and disinvestment, they face unemployment and challenges to their hegemonic identities as principal breadwinners. The resultant crises of masculinities can lead to severe strains on households resulting in increased unrest and violence as husbands and fathers seek to re-exert their control and/or separation as husbands and wives alike seek out more stable economic and personal arrangements with other partners (Ratele, 2008; Cruz and Smits, 2011; Hollander, 2014; Radhakrishnan and Solari, 2015), although, as noted above, more recent studies point to some dynamism and flexibility in this regard. The increasingly precarious nature of family life resulting from these broader economic pressures can also impact negatively on children, in particular on girl’s physical security as the phenomenon of ‘sugar daddies’¹⁴ increases.

Even within the formal productive sphere, women are poorly paid and subject to sexual harassment and assault with little recourse to justice.

Although, with increased urbanisation and the growth in foreign direct investment (FDI) and manufacturing in particular, opportunities for women have improved in recent decades, this has not always translated into increased income or improved living conditions. Poor pay and working conditions are the drivers for global investment, and many choose to turn a blind eye to more egregious violations within their industries. In a study of 62 farms in the cut flower and horticulture industry in Ethiopia, Tanzania and Uganda, for example, Jacobs et al. (2015: 393) found that “harassment is widespread, that many lack a vocabulary to describe or discuss this, and that female casual and temporary workers are most likely to be targeted”. These issues are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

Gender-based violence

Cutting across the vast range of spheres of different women’s lives – from their families and homes to their multiple workplaces, to their ownership and control over property, to their access to services and supports – these interrelated and ever-evolving cultural, material and political factors have important implications for women’s safety, security and ‘freedom from fear’ (UNDP, 1994). Women’s multiple experiences of inequality and insecurity – mediated through gendered discourses, norms, institutions and practices across a wide range of social spaces – highlight the multidimensional continuum of violence they face in their daily lives. From this vantage point, the reasons for the prevalence of gender-based violence across the continent (and indeed elsewhere) begin to become clear. Although often narrowly framed as a health issue or a problem of school dropouts in development planning and programming, or narrowly (and erroneously) associated with armed conflict in much of the international relations literature, its causes and consequences are far more complex and far-reaching. Although much gender-based violence is perpetrated by men, this is executed and perpetuated within particular political, social and economic contexts. And these contexts are reproduced and consolidated through gendered discourses, norms, institutions and practices which both sit within and are fuelled by political and material inequalities. These inequalities combine to render women more vulnerable to insecurity and violence, thereby contributing to the vulnerability and insecurity of all.

Gender-based violence is reported to be widespread and endemic across many parts of Africa (WHO, 2013). However, the precise scale of this issue is impossible to determine as national-level data for most countries is not being collected (Muluneh et al., 2020). Moreover, under-reporting is significant as victims are hesitant to reveal their experiences due to a wide range of barriers and obstacles they face. Cutting across cultural, material and political spheres, these include fear of stigma and shame within families and communities, financial barriers, a lack of awareness of what constitutes a sexual violation, a lack of awareness of and/or poor, ineffective services, fear of revenge, ineffective law enforcement and dominant attitudes surrounding gender-based

violence as a normal and/or acceptable component of life, necessary to sustain gendered political relations by subordination and ‘keeping women in their place’ (WHO, 2012). In Bas-Congo province in the DRC, for example, ‘rape’ is commonly understood as limited to sexual relations with a minor (officially under 18, although cases for girls over approximately 14/15 years are not regarded as very serious). Such assaults only appear to only present a problem when pregnancy ensues. Justice from this is almost always dealt with at a local level (family mediation and/or mediation with a local traditional authority) as the costs for this are far lower than at the level of the formal court. Such ‘justice’ takes the form of a negotiated settlement where the emphasis is on financial support for the baby and/or her/his grandfather rather than any form of justice or support for the victim. Indeed, the victim is not involved in settlement negotiations at all as these are handled by her male relatives (Gaynor, 2013).

In Rwanda – a country often celebrated for its achievements in the area of gender equality – a ranking of development priorities within 99 households during the course of fieldwork in six districts in the Northern and Southern provinces revealed domestic violence to be the number one concern of both women and men in rural contexts. Moreover, this was consistently linked to conflict over scarce household resources (Gaynor, 2014). Other research also points to the links between household poverty and gender-based violence (see Morrison et al., 2007, broadly; Choi and Ting, 2008, on South Africa; Hollander, 2014, on the DRC). More broadly, the links between gender-based violence and global economic transformations are now more firmly understood. Jacqui True’s comprehensive and detailed research in this area provides a robust empirical basis for her argument that “the gendered inequalities that fuel the violence against women are rooted in structures and processes of political economy that are increasingly globalised” (True, 2012: 5). In particular, her chapters on competitive globalisation and hegemonic breadwinner masculinities, on global migration and trafficking and on trade liberalisation and the growth in export processing zones elucidate the connections between many of the inequalities and precarities described above and contemporary developments within the global political economy (True, 2012: Chapters 3, 4 and 5, respectively). Writing from a somewhat different perspective, celebrated sociologist Sylvia Federici’s recent work *Witches, Witch-hunting and Women* (2018), which builds on her seminal 1998 volume *Caliban and the Witch*, complements True’s empirical work. Exploring the links between gendered dispossessions, environmental disasters and global capitalist accumulation, she makes connections between the violence of witch-hunts, enslavement and colonialism with contemporary forms of war, global capitalism and ecological destruction.

Politics and participation in public life

The implications of the multiple, interrelated inequalities, discriminations and violations discussed above on women’s political participation are

apparent. Women's social and economic subordination through a range of gendered discourses, norms, policies and practices both contributes to and is a product of their subordination within public life. While, as noted in the introductory chapter, the number of female parliamentarians at national level has increased in many countries, patriarchal attitudes towards and discourses around women in public life remain stubbornly intact. Bennett's description of such attitudes in South Africa some 25 years ago (Bennett, 1995: 80–81, cited in Hyden, 2006: 171–172) remain depressingly familiar today, "Such is the power of patriarchy ... female activities are almost always judged inferior to men's: Where men deliberate and judge; women intrigue; men exchange information, women gossip; men intercede with supernatural forces, women are witches". As Gouws (2008) reports, such stereotypical ideas remain common in South Africa, even in relation to women in high-level positions. Such views permeate local politics also, as evidenced from my own research in Bas-Congo province in the DRC. As one female interviewee notes in response to my question on the possibility of women's local leadership:

"A woman never builds a village" [popular Congolese proverb]. A woman cannot be a Chief. She is not responsible.... A woman, even if she begins something, she never finishes it, or she destroys it in the end... It is the nature of women. If they begin, they will still destroy everything in the end.

(Bas-Congo Province, DRC, January 2013)

As discussed in some detail in Chapter 7, women's marginalisation from public life was effected during the colonial period, with this continuing into the postcolonial era. Prior to colonialism, women exercised influence in different areas of public life, notably in relation to the maintenance of particular social norms and order as well as in the enactment of specific rituals linked to the fertility of humans, the land and the rain – the fundamental bases for life. Both Lindblom (1920) and Kettel (1986), cited in Udvardy (1998: 1756), detail how, among the *Kamba* and *Tugen* ethnic groups in present-day Kenya, where men had elders' councils and moots, women had their own and that these were deemed equal in importance and value to those of men. Sudarska (1986: 91) similarly notes that in various African societies, in particular Nigeria, in precolonial times "women were conspicuous in 'high places'" as queen mothers, queen sisters, princesses, chiefs and holders of other offices in towns and villages as well as being recognised as central to the economic life of their societies. However, as Staudt (1987) has demonstrated, this changed with colonialism as authorities introduced a range of policies which, imposing a radical new political order based on the European model, excluded women from the public sphere and relegated them to the domestic sphere where, stripped of economic and property rights, they were now subject to the control and protection of men. In this manner, their previous active roles

within public life were effectively delegitimised and expunged and a new political order was born.

Today, in an era of neo-patrimonial ‘big man politics’, where politics is often equated with personal wealth and power leading to sometimes violent confrontation and conflict, the appetite for women’s participation appears to remain weak. As outlined in Chapter 1, research on women’s participation at national level demonstrates that women are often used to bolster existing regimes and/or that they are relegated to ‘tea making brigades’ (Goetz and Hassim, 2003). And as we will see in Chapter 7, these patterns are reproduced at local levels also. Such discourses and practices of de-legitimation, humiliation and exclusion are likely to be reinforced in the context of the opportunities presented by contemporary globalised networks of resource extraction. It can surely be no coincidence that many of the most resource-rich states on the continent are among those with the lowest levels of female political participation.¹⁵ It can also be no coincidence that politics in some of these jurisdictions are often associated with high levels of intimidation and violence.

However, it is worth recalling the central premise of this book – politics is not the sole preserve of formal institutions alone, nor is it just a national-level affair. It is also worth recalling the evidence which shows that symbolic representation does make a difference. As Robinson and Gottlieb (2019) have shown, the presence of women in public life positively affects attitudes about women’s roles in both public life and in decision-making among women and men in both matrilineal and patrilineal systems. Other research such as that of Evans in Zambia (2016) also points towards such positive effects, highlighting the changes in men’s perceptions of women’s political capacities following a significant increase of women in politics. Women’s participation in public life at all levels certainly matters. It challenges gendered norms, discourses and practices. It brings a much-needed diversity to political institutions. And when the symbolic meets the substantive, it can lead to transformative changes in many of the areas discussed in this chapter.

Beyond the local: The globalised nature of gendered inequalities

A woman’s status within her home, community and broader environs determines her access to key material resources such as land, credit, services and a sustainable livelihood, together with her overall security and ‘freedom from fear’. And the reverse also holds. Her access to and control over material resources determines her status and security within her home, her community and her workplace. These issues are indivisible. And while differing greatly from context to context and circumstance to circumstance, they are also subject to a range of common stresses and pressures linked to the global political economy. As the global rush for Africa’s land, resources and labour continues apace (Carmody, 2011), it does so at the expense of local economies, ecologies and populations. The result is a globalised gendered ‘accumulation by

dispossession' (Wilson, 2015), whereby women's assets, resources, security and time are subordinated to the exigencies of the global economy. This impacts on gendered inequalities at all levels. And it can only be tackled through an engendered democracy which, involving women at all levels of public life, challenges and transforms the norms, discourses, policies and practices which fuel the global engines of gendered marginalisation and dispossession. The remainder of this book explores the different spaces and means through which this can be achieved. Before turning to this, however, I exemplify a number of the points made above through a case study of gender-based violence in Malawi.

Case: Gender-based violence in Malawi

On the face of it, Malawi would seem an unlikely country for a case study on gender-based violence. A small, peaceful country of some 18.6 million people in Southern Africa, its economy is primarily agricultural and its population primarily rural. Within rural areas, the principal subsistence crops include maize, cassava, sweet potato, rice and sorghum, while tobacco and tea are important commercial crops. Mirroring the more general trends described above, while women produce most of the food, they tend to have less land – 0.8 hectares on average compared to 1.0 hectares for male farmers. They also have less labour (Ngwire, 2014: 3). In addition, although a customary matrilineal inheritance system exists in the Southern region, women are still reported to be vulnerable and insecure in their ownership and control of their land in the face of male relatives (Kaarhus, 2010; Peters, 2010; Benjamin, 2020). Although long a recipient of significant amounts of donor aid,¹⁶ Malawi remains among the poorest countries on the continent. Fifty-one per cent of the population live below the poverty line of US\$1 a day. The incidence of ultra-poor increased from 22.4 per cent to 25 per cent between 2005 and 2015, and income distribution has also worsened over this time (GoM, 2017: 14). While not ranking among the most gender equal countries across the four aggregate rankings presented in Table 2.3, nor does it appear among the most unequal.

Yet, gender-based violence has been described as “a widespread but silent epidemic” across the country¹⁷ and its incidence is reported to be growing. An estimated one in five (21.8 per cent) young adult women has experienced sexual abuse prior to age 18, with this primarily perpetrated by boyfriends, classmates and acquaintances (MGDSW, 2014). According to the government's own data, one in three girls who have sex under the age of 18 is forced or coerced, and almost half of all girls in Malawi experience physical abuse (NSO, 2013). About 46 per cent of girls in Malawi are married before the legal age of 18 and almost 10 per cent get married before their 15th birthday (Makwemba et al., 2019: 23). An estimated 40 per cent of married women in Malawi have experienced intimate partner violence in their lifetimes, with past-year abuse affecting 30 per cent. According to the government, most of

this violence occurs in the home, is viewed as a private family affair and is seldom reported. National data also confirm the dominance of husbands in decision-making within households (NSO, 2013).

Gender-based violence is not just limited to the domestic sphere, however. Sexual harassment and assaults on informal workers are reported to be increasing (ILO, 2019: 41). Such incidents are also widespread in the formal economy (Malunga and Kanyongolo, 2018), and transactional sex is reported to be on the increase in many of the poorer slums in urban areas (Kamndaya et al., 2016). Gender-based violence also extends to institutions of the state itself. One high-profile case involved the sexual assault on a number of women by police officers following the disputed presidential election in May 2019.¹⁸ While the ensuing Supreme Court decision ruled in favour of the women, no police officers were charged,¹⁹ and the victims report ongoing damage to their relationships, livelihoods and standing within their communities.²⁰ The case study discussed here draws in part from research conducted in 2016 among community members and village elders in two rural districts in Northern and Southern Malawi²¹ to explore the reasons for the prevalence of gender-based violence in the home. As I outline below, our findings, together with those of other studies, evidence the arguments presented above as they uncover a mix of cultural, material and political dynamics underpinning ongoing practices of and attitudes towards gender-based violence among respondents. These are compounded by economic insecurities stemming from poor revenues from multinational corporations operating within the tobacco industry, widespread sexual harassment on tea plantations and environmental stresses wrought by climate change.

The cultural, material and political underpinnings of gender-based violence

In Malawi, as elsewhere, a woman's position within marriage is often one of subordination to her husband. For community members and village elders interviewed in our research, it is considered acceptable to 'discipline' (verbally and/or physically) one's wife if she is deemed to be transgressing accepted gender norms and not behaving in an 'appropriate' manner. Instances cited include when a wife is considered to be behaving in a 'disobedient' or insubordinate manner, when food has not been prepared, when food is burnt, when sex is refused, when a wife is considered unfaithful and/or when she comes home late. Some excerpts from our focus group discussions among both men and women within our research sites give a flavour of these views:

The husband can hit his wife when the wife is insubordinate or is unruly. For example, if the husband asks the wife 'can you go collect the water for me?'. And the wife says 'no, you have legs, why don't you go get it yourself?'

(Focus group A, male participant)

It's the frequency of the misunderstandings which causes the husband to hit the wife. Maybe today you haven't washed his clothes. Tomorrow you haven't washed his clothes. So the repetition of the disobedience, that is what makes the husband hit his wife.

(Focus group B, female participant)

The other situation is the man asking for his conjugal rights, wanting sex, and the wife saying no. Maybe they have had sex once already, but the husband wants to do it two or three or four times a day, so the wife is refusing, and the husband gets furious and starts beating the wife.

(Focus group E, male participant)

These findings are consistent with those of Conroy (2014) who, drawing from a sample of 466 young couples, argues that both male dominance and control and the quality of marital relationship are the two principal causal factors of gender-based violence within the home. Greco et al. (2015: 74) also highlight the roles ascribed to women as 'respectable' wives and mothers, noting that "women's quality of life is not realised in isolation but is to a large extent dependent on the behaviour and wellbeing of other members of the household, in particular on the children's welfare and the husband's conduct". Similar findings have also been reported by both Swidler and Watkins (2007) and Stephenson et al. (2013).

Cultural norms, discourses and practices embedded in asymmetric power relations do not alone explain the prevalence of domestic violence, however. It is also very much interlinked with material stresses and pressures within households. Other instances where it is considered acceptable to 'discipline' one's wife include when she is deemed to be squandering household money and/or when she is felt to be not working hard enough and not bringing enough revenue into the household. A microcredit scheme introduced by a local NGO, while helping alleviate some of these material stresses in the short term, has also served to both reinforce domestic hierarchical norms, with wives expected to use this revenue to 'assist their husbands', and added to women's existing responsibilities and pressures (Gaynor and Cronin, 2019). These power relations within marriage are reinforced through a dowry system which, prevalent in the Northern region in particular, as noted before, commodifies women and renders them the property of their husbands, with the expectation that they will contribute their labour, in both productive and reproductive spheres, to the household to pay this off. As one of our male interviewees explained:

According to our culture, when a man marries a wife, the man pays a lot of money for the dowry. So he says, "No, I've paid a lot of money for the bride-price, so you are my workman, you are my labourer."

Material drivers of gender-based violence in the wider community are reported within broader literature also. Kamndaya et al.'s (2016) study from the

Southern city of Blantyre finds a strong link between women's poverty and transactional sex, while Munthali and Kok (2016) reveal poverty to be one of the most important factors contributing to child marriage, especially among girls. A number of studies point to the fact that the so-called 'Sugar Daddy' phenomenon is alive and well (Poulin, 2007; Anderson, 2012; Baird and Özler, 2016). This is also widely ascribed to material stresses among young women and girls, with some proposing cash transfer programmes as a means to address this.²²

Gender-based violence within homes as well as within the wider community reflects therefore an interrelationship between gendered norms, values and attitudes of superiority and inferiority and material inequalities across society. These converge to normalise gender-based violence as an acceptable facet of everyday life in many contexts.

The global political economy of gender-based violence

In Malawi, as elsewhere, the factors outlined above are exacerbated by broader, global stresses and influences. Three examples serve to illustrate this in the Malawi case. The first relates to the tobacco industry, which accounts for almost 60 per cent of the country's total export earnings, rendering Malawi one of the most tobacco-dependent countries in the world (IMF, 2015). Tobacco leaf growing has been central to Malawi's economy since the 1890s and constituted a key component of the colonial economy. Following independence, it served as a primary source of wealth, patronage and employment for an elite cadre of wealthy landowners who were permitted to sell their tobacco to international buyers at officially recognised local auctions. However, since changes to legislation in the early 1990s which opened the market to smallholders, tobacco production has come to be dominated by small farmers who now supply 95 per cent of the country's tobacco, the vast majority of which is produced for the global market (Drope et al., 2016; Lencucha et al., 2020).

Many of our male research participants in the Southern region were dependent on tobacco as their main source of revenue. While clearly an important source of foreign exchange earnings at the national level, respondents reported that their own earnings from tobacco leaf sales continue to be poor and that their earning was insufficient to maintain their households and families, leading to financial pressures in the home which, as we have seen, are linked to domestic conflict and violence. Our participants' assertions are supported by wider research. Another study conducted the same year as our own found that Malawian tobacco farmers make an average profit of US\$79 per acre. Noting that this is substantially less than the global average (US\$351), it concludes that "tobacco farmers are not earning enough to support a sustainable livelihood" (Makoka et al., 2017, 5). These poor prices are attributed to a globalised cartel of international tobacco companies and government elites which, fixing the prices at auction, exploit local growers and impoverish smallholder households (Smith and Lee, 2018). Working on thin margins

under contract and in debt to tobacco buyers, for many smallholders, once the costs of their labour and loans are factored into the equation, their income becomes ultimately negative and they become trapped in a cycle of perpetual debt to their buyer (Otañez and Graen, 2014; Drope et al., 2016). With numerous challenges in places to pursue alternative sources of revenue (see Lencucha et al., 2020), as Smith and Lee (2018: 186) argue, “Today, a transnational elite prospers at the expense of local growers”. Impacting negatively on local household income and supports, the gendered implications of the globalised tobacco industry are clear.

A second example relates to gendered norms and practices in the country’s tea industry where, as noted above, sexual harassment and assault is reported to be widespread. Tea, like tobacco, has been grown on a commercial scale since the colonial period. Malawi was the first country in Africa to grow tea on a commercial scale and today large commercial estates, mostly owned by international companies, account for 93 per cent of production, and the industry is one of the country’s biggest employers (Malawi Carer, 2015). Work on the plantations is highly intensive, but wages are very low and industrial relations are described as ‘hardly existing’. According to both Oxfam (2016) and the IUF,²³ although women make up about 30 per cent of the industry, few of them occupy senior roles. They are mostly employed under seasonal contracts and are often forced to exchange sex for a renewal of these contracts, although most sexual assault cases go unreported (Malawi Carer, 2015). An exception to this is a recent high-profile case where a number of women working on plantations in the Southern region have sued their employer Lujeri and its British parent company PGI over allegations of rape, assault and discrimination. In 2021, both Lujeri and PGI were served with a claim issued in the High Court in London. The claim lists 22 instances of sexual harassment, 13 instances of sexual assault, 11 instances of coerced sexual relations and ten instances of rape.²⁴ Such harassment is not limited to the tea industry of course. Sexual harassment and assault are reported to be commonplace across the formal employment sector more broadly throughout the country as cultural norms and material stresses coalesce around competition for scarce jobs. In these contexts, Malunga and Kanyongolo (2012: 151) report that “gender hazing or baiting, in the form of sexual inquiries, jokes, remarks, or innuendoes” is common and that “such behaviour has the effect of reminding a woman that she is viewed as an object of sexual derision rather than as a credible co-worker”.

The stresses and pressures wrought by increased drought and flooding linked to global climate change constitutes a third way in which the global political economy impacts on local gendered inequalities. The frequency and intensity of extreme weather events and weather-induced food crises across Africa linked to climate change has been well documented. According to the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), seven of the ten countries that are most vulnerable to climate change are on the continent, with Malawi ranked as number three.²⁵ The growing regularity and severity of

climate shocks throughout the country have led to shorter growing seasons and poorer crop yields, which, in turn, have resulted in food shortages, hunger and the spread of disease. Women's multiple roles – as farmers, child carers and food providers – render them highly susceptible to these changes, with their vulnerability exacerbated by poor access to credits and supports.

These changes and their subsequent effects on household food security and incomes were noted by all our research participants in both northern and southern regions. Between 2015 and 2016, as our research was ongoing, an unprecedented drought, coming on the heels of devastating floods, ravaged the country. Many farm households suffered severe crop losses in both seasons, with women most adversely affected (World Bank, 2021). Empirical evidence from both the Shire river basin (Coulibaly et al., 2015) and Chikwawa and Ntcheu districts in the Southern and Central regions respectively (Kakota et al., 2015) reveal gendered disparities in vulnerability to climate-related shocks and associated food insecurity due to gendered inequalities in access to resources for both food production and purchase as well as credit and wider supports. Asfaw and Maggio's study (2018) demonstrates that women's lack of land tenure security also adds to their vulnerability. More recent evidence reveals gendered disparities in access to critical climate forecasting information, with more than twice as many women than men not able to access essential forecasting information due to material (no radio, batteries and/or electricity) and time constraints (Henriksson et al., 2021). As the most recent IPCC report has made clear (IPCC, 2021), the links between climate change and the global political economy are now indisputable. The inequality in impacts and responsibility are also now indisputable. For countries such as Malawi, such inequalities are compounded by gendered inequalities in asset ownership, productive and reproductive responsibilities and gendered supports and services. These combine to increase tensions and pressures within households and communities, thereby compounding the potential for gender-based violations and assaults.

Lessons from the Malawi case: The politics of gender-based violence

The Malawi case provides us with three key lessons. First, it demonstrates that gender-based violence, as one (particularly egregious) manifestation of gendered inequality, is embedded within and cannot be separated from the wide range of other inequalities that exist and persist across society. Second, it highlights the interrelated cultural and material bases of these inequalities. And third, it demonstrates how these are exacerbated by a globalised gendered accumulation by dispossession. Clearly, locally based efforts to address the widespread incidence of gender-based violence on their own will never be enough. Nor will policies and programmes which reproduce gendered norms, discourses and attitudes such as a recent UNICEF report on youth initiative rites which characterises sessions with young women teaching them 'good manners' and 'household skills' as imparting 'useful lessons ...

to initiates' (Makwemba et al., 2019: 90). As the Malawian case has demonstrated, gender-based violence is clearly a political issue. It is underpinned and driven by asymmetric power relations between women and men, between those who accumulate and those who are dispossessed and between global and local powers. As such, it needs to be tackled at these multiple levels.

Conclusion: Why democracy must be engendered

In this chapter, I have aimed to set out the context for why it is important to engender democracy. In doing so, I am aware that some of the issues discussed inevitably reflect an overly generalised account of the different levels and forms of inequality experienced by different women across the continent and that they omit and fail to recognise others. It is important to reiterate that women's (and men's) experiences differ greatly, as do their geographic, economic, social and political contexts. Of course, their particular circumstances and life experiences cannot be collapsed into a general account. Nor indeed can their resilience and agency be underestimated. However, amidst all this diversity, there are two common themes. One is the confluence of cultural, material and political factors which impinge upon women and men's differing experiences. And the second is the pressures and stresses exerted upon these factors by the global political economy.

The persistent stubbornness of a continuum of gendered inequalities and insecurities in this context calls for a politics not just of recognition, but for one of active participation and representation. As I hopefully demonstrate in the chapters that follow, such politics can bring about not just significant material gains for those most marginalised within the current system(s), but also important political and cultural gains whereby dominant and problematic norms, discourses, policies and practices can be interrogated, challenged and transformed. My hope is that this chapter has done enough to convince the reader of the need to engender policy and decision-making at a range of levels (including the global) and to read on to explore how this might be achieved.

Notes

- 1 See Chapter 4 for more detail on this latter point.
- 2 See <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-development-index-gdi> (last accessed August 3, 2021).
- 3 See <https://www.weforum.org/reports/ab6795a1-960c-42b2-b3d5-587eccda6023> (last accessed August 3, 2021).
- 4 See <https://www.genderindex.org/> (last accessed August 3, 2021).
- 5 See <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-inequality-index-gii> (last accessed August 3, 2021).
- 6 It should be noted that many other indices also exist, including the World Bank's 'Women, Business and Law Index' (WBLI), the Economist Intelligence Unit's 'Women's Economic Opportunity Index' (WEOI) and the African Development Bank's 'Gender Equality Index' (GEI), to name just a few. These provide an even more narrow and circumscribed representation of gendered inequalities than those presented here.

- 7 <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-development-index-gdi> (last accessed August 4, 2021).
- 8 <https://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2020/> (accessed August 4, 2021).
- 9 OECD (2020) *The SIGI: Working Paper 34*, Paris: OECD. Available at <https://www.oecd.org/fr/publications/the-social-institutions-and-gender-index-sigi-2019-022d5e7b-en.htm> (last accessed August 4, 2021).
- 10 <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-inequality-index-gii> (last accessed August 4, 2021).
- 11 See <https://fragilestatesindex.org/> for an up-to-date list (last accessed August 7, 2021). This observation can also be explained by the fact that the relevant data for many of these 'fragile states' is not available.
- 12 According to the African Development Bank (2020), these were South Sudan (8.2 per cent), Rwanda (8.1 per cent) Côte d'Ivoire (7.3 per cent), Ethiopia (7.2 per cent), Senegal (6.8 per cent), Benin (6.7 per cent) and Uganda (6.2 per cent). Kenya, Mozambique, Niger and Burkina Faso all projected 6% growth. African Development Bank (2020) 'African Economic Outlook', available at <https://www.afdb.org/en/knowledge/publications/african-economic-outlook> (last accessed July 5, 2021).
- 13 Lived poverty is a measure of shortages of food, clean water, healthcare, heating fuel and cash income. See https://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/press-release//ab_r7_pr_lived_poverty_is_on_the_rise_in_africa_03032020.pdf (last accessed September 10, 2020).
- 14 'Sugar Daddies' are older men who form sexual relationships with young women and girls in exchange for money and gifts. The relationships are unequal and often coercive. However, they can be the only alternative to poverty and hunger for many young women and girls. See, for example, Hoss and Blackland (2018) and Gobind and du Plessis (2015).
- 15 According to the Brookings Institute, the top ten resource-rich countries in 2018 were: Nigeria, South Africa, Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Sudan, Tanzania, Zambia, Botswana and the Republic of Congo. See <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2018/08/01/7-surprising-findings-about-resource-rich-sub-saharan-africa/> (last accessed August 20, 2021). Of these, just two (South Africa and Tanzania) have over 30 per cent female representation. Of the others, one (Angola) has between 25 and 30 per cent, one (Equatorial Guinea) has between 20 and 25 per cent, three (Zambia; Republic of Congo; and Botswana) have between 10 and 20 per cent and one (Nigeria) has under 5 per cent (IPU, 2021). Data for Sudan is not available.
- 16 In 2019, Malawi received US\$ 64.8 net ODA per capita. The per capita average for the continent for that same year was US\$44.1 (sources: https://public.tableau.com/views/OECD DACAidatagancebyrecipient_new/Recipients?:embed=y&:display_count=yes&:showTabs=y&:toolbar=no&:showVizHome=no, and <https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-topics/Africa-Development-Aid-at-a-Glance.pdf>, respectively. [both last accessed August 21, 2021]).
- 17 <https://www.irishaid.ie/news-publications/news/newsarchive/2015/november/16-days-against-gender-based-violence-in-malawi/> (last accessed October 5, 2021).
- 18 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-malawi-women-protests/women-protest-against-sexual-violence-in-malawi-idUSKBN20P30M> (last accessed January 15, 2021).
- 19 <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/mar/11/malawi-police-ordered-to-pay-damages-to-women-who-say-officers-raped-them> (last accessed August 6, 2021).

- 20 The full details of this case, including the detailed testimonies of victims, are available at <https://malawilii.org/system/files/judgment/high-court-general-division/2021/25/null%202.pdf> (last accessed August 6, 2021).
- 21 The districts were Rumphu and Chiradzulu in Northern and Southern Malawi respectively. See Gaynor and Cronin, 2019, for more detail on the methodology employed and the findings from this research.
- 22 See, for example, the controversial 2011 World Bank programme (Bloomberg, 2011) “The World Bank as Sugar Daddy”, available at <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2011-03-31/aids-in-africa-the-world-bank-as-sugar-daddy> (last accessed August 24, 2021); *The Economist* (2012) “Preventing AIDS: A drug called money”, <https://www.economist.com/babbage/2012/02/15/a-drug-called-money> (last accessed August 24, 2021).
- 23 <https://www.iuf.org/news/unions-in-malawi-say-no-to-sexual-harassment/> (last accessed August 21, 2021).
- 24 “Ten rapes at tea farm supplying PG Tips”, Emily Dugan, *The Times*, March 28, 2021. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/ten-rapes-at-tea-farm-supplying-pg-tips-pfxfwpx3> (last accessed August 21, 2021).
- 25 As reported by the African Development Bank, see “Climate Change in Africa”. Available at <https://www.afdb.org/en/cop25/climate-change-africa> (last accessed August 5, 2021).

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3 How to engender democracy

The *4W* framework

Commentary and debate on the state of democracy in Africa is rarely positive. Media articles catalogue a long list of shortcomings – electoral rigging, political intimidation, corruption, political unrest, to name just a few.¹ African states dominate the red categories of popular indicators such as *Freedom House*, the *Economist Intelligence Unit's (EIUs) Democracy Index* and the *Fund for Peace's Fragile States Index*.² These rankings are complemented by a wealth of academic literature highlighting the perilous state of democracy across the continent. According to one recent source:

Half of all African states are [*now*] autocracies (36% hardline, 14% moderate), while the other half are democracies (5% consolidating, 34% defective, 11% highly defective). Between 2015 and 2017, this situation became even more stark: on the whole, the continent's autocratic countries have become more repressive, while its more democratic states have seen relatively little change.

(Cheeseman and Fisher, 2019: 5)

Indeed, in recent years, an increasingly 'authoritarian turn' within the literature on African politics and democracy can be discerned, with commentators and analysts variously focused on the resurgence of 'big man', neo-patrimonial, semi-authoritarian regimes (Birikorang, 2013; Diamond et al., 2016; Fombad, 2020); these regimes' efforts to resist democratisation (Söderbaum, 2010; Yom, 2014; Stoddard, 2017); and the link between coups and democracy (Powell et al., 2019).

While the rise in authoritarianism across a number of states is indisputable, as is the rise in chronic violence and insurgency across a number of others, the narrow conceptualisation of democracy employed across all these sources, which limits it to electoral politics alone, merits further consideration. This is my purpose within this chapter. Exploring how power operates across multiple sites and spaces in multiple contexts, I highlight the limitations of electoral liberal democratic models in accounting for and in understanding the varying levels of influence and control different women and men hold and exert over the conditions of their everyday lives. I go on to argue that

post-liberal theories of democracy, notably those of the so-called ‘difference democrats’, have potentially much more to offer in analysing and exploring opportunities for engendering democracy across these multiple sites and contexts. To be clear, my purpose here is not to propose alternative, normative models to the liberal models which are generally (implicitly, if not explicitly) espoused. Rather, my purpose is to draw upon and employ theory in a way which helps us to analyse and understand how power and politics operate in practice, with a view to examining the opportunities and potential for engendering democracy across the range of spaces examined in the following chapters. Specifically, I focus on a number of insights from post-structural theories of power and democracy to identify four key questions which assist in this task. The four questions of *where* politics takes place (spaces), the *ways* in which it takes place (discourses and frames, practices, norms and behaviours), *who* is involved (actors, inclusion and representation) and *what* issues are included and excluded (standpoints, perspectives, interests and framings) form a framework which helps in analysing political engagement at different levels. This is developed in this chapter and is applied to the case studies presented in the following chapters.

I begin the chapter with a brief outline of the norms and ideals of liberal democratic theory and demonstrate how this has been promoted by international donors since the end of the Cold War. I argue that, for both historical and social reasons, it may be unrealistic to expect a smooth transition to such a model in Africa, notably at a time when it is under considerable threat in many other parts of the world. In the second section, I move on to explore the substance of democracy – power. I identify three forms of power before going on to explore the different mechanisms through which it operates. The implications of these conceptions for the ubiquitous developmental discourses and practices of ‘empowerment’ and ‘capacity building’ are also considered here. In the final section, I develop this discussion of power further by drawing on the insights of some post-liberal democratic theorists to highlight four key factors for consideration when analysing how power circulates and operates across a diverse range of actors within and across different political spaces. These insights, which I synthesise into a *4W framework*, allow for a consideration of invisible as well as visible forms of power, for more deliberative forms of debate and discussion and for an acknowledgement and a treatment of difference. This, I argue, provides a more useful conceptual lens for thinking about what we mean when we talk about democracy and what this might entail as we begin to think about how it might be engendered across a range of different spaces.

Choiceless democracies?: Liberal democratic theory and political life in Africa

Deriving from Western ideals of liberalism and linked to the idea of individual rights, choice and freedom, contemporary liberal democratic theory

focuses on the rights of citizens to freely choose their rulers at periodic intervals (Manin, 1997). It is characterised by pluralist multiparty elections where power between the citizens and the state is balanced on election day when voters elect political leaders (Macpherson, 1977). Within liberal democracies, equality and choice is attained through this 'one citizen, one vote' process, which offers citizens a selection of candidates to choose from and an equal influence on their selection as leaders. In between elections, power is vested in these elected leaders who are expected to represent and govern in the interest of all. The focus of power thus becomes the parliament, together with a range of associated formal political institutions.

As I noted in Chapter 1, this model of liberal democracy remains very new to African states. Fears of ethnic tension and secession meant that it was largely rejected for the first three decades of independence. As late as 1988, the continent was dominated by one-party systems (29) and military oligarchies (10) (Thomson, 2004: 230). Opposition parties were outlawed in most states and the political norm was for a highly personalised executive to govern through tightly controlled one-party structures. Patronage politics and 'economies of affection' dominated whereby politics took place through informal networks and structures (Hyden, 2006). Yet, in the wake of the fall of the Berlin wall and pressures from Western donors, the 1990s saw a wave of 'democratisation' in the form of a move to multipartyism and competitive elections. Overseas aid became increasingly conditional on the establishment of 'democratic institutions', often narrowly interpreted to mean multipartyism and regular elections (Baylies, 1995; Brown, 2005). In just ten years, liberal democratic models came to dominate, with the number of multiparty states across the continent rising from just nine in 1988 to 45 in 1999 (Thomson, 2004: 230).

For many, this was a period of heady optimism. The long, snaking queues outside polling stations as people patiently waited their turn to cast their ballot spoke to the hope and promise of the time. Amid much talk of freedom and rights, this ballot box democracy promised so much. Yet, ultimately it delivered little. As inequality and conflict in many countries grew and the much-touted talk of human rights was openly flaunted, people came to realise they had been sold a falsity. The ballot box turned out to be largely a 'choiceless' form of democracy. Even in the most 'free and fair' of electoral conditions, the choice between candidate A, B and C came to matter little against a backdrop of growing insecurity and inequality where power was remote, decisions were made elsewhere and patronage politics dominated. Moreover, the competing interests of international donors in the form of commercial ties, macroeconomic reforms and concerns for stability undermined many voting choices (Brown, 2005: 193). Faced with this reality, it seems difficult not to concur with the Comaroffs', reflecting on prospects following South Africa's historic 1994 elections, rather depressing conclusion that "Democracy is a small idea, one that is more likely to bring with it Kentucky Fried Chicken and McDonald's than an amelioration of the human condition" (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1997: 126).

When assessed within the narrow parameters of electoral politics, democracy may well seem like a small idea, providing scant succour to the everyday travails associated with macroeconomic reforms and asymmetric political, social and gender relations. But when assessed within the context of how politics actually plays out and how power actually operates in the multiple spaces of everyday life, it begins to regain some promise and potency. As I noted in Chapter 1, two issues merit consideration when reflecting on the largely pejorative literature on the state(s) of democracy in Africa. First, in Africa as elsewhere, formal liberal democratic institutions are rarely the place where policy is decided upon. In real life politics and policymaking, policy is generally the result of discussions and debates, deliberations, bargaining and negotiations which take place elsewhere, often in parallel institutions, both formal and informal. African polities thus comprise a complex array of local, decentralised structures, some modern, some traditional, and many a hybrid of the old and new. Far from the formal institutions of liberal democracy, politics play out across multiple sites every day in ways which impact significantly on peoples' lives. Understanding how power circulates, how politics operates and how gender relations play out within and across these sites is key to engendering democracy. And second, the competitive Westminster model which underpins liberal theories of democracy lies very much at odds with how social and political life is conducted on a daily basis in many places in Africa. Julius Nyerere's assertion that democracy rests on 'Africans talking until they agree' (1961/1996) suggests that more deliberative forms of debate, discussion, bargaining and negotiation prove more suitable to analyses of development policy and decision-making within African contexts than the overtly combative, competitive modes which underpin Western liberal democratic traditions. This brings us to a broader conceptualisation of what we mean when we talk about democracy. For some, most notably a group of thinkers we might loosely define as post-liberal democratic theorists, democracy remains an unfinished project, with as yet unfulfilled promise, possibility and potential. The insights and contributions of these theorists, most notably the 'difference democrats', prove very useful in examining and thinking through how democracy might be engendered in the multiplicity of spaces where politics takes place. Before turning to these, however, we first need to think a little more deeply about the essential substance of politics – power. What is it? What does it look like? Where does it reside? And how does it operate?

Politics, power and difference: Understanding power relations

Politics is often defined as the exercise of power (Dahl, 1957). Power, in turn, is often defined as the capacity to influence the actions, beliefs or conduct of others. But how does this happen? What are the mechanisms and relations through which power operates? How are inequitable power relations created and consolidated? And how can they be transformed? In the context of the

wide array of interests, experiences and positionalities that cut across the multiplicity of political sites and spaces, this section aims at exploring how power relations work and what the implications of this are for politics, democracy and development. I begin by examining a number of different dimensions of power.

Three dimensions of power

Sociological theories of power, such as that of Steven Lukes (1974), generally highlight three dimensions: *direct power* through decision-making, *indirect power* through non-decision-making and *ideological power* through the shaping of others' perceptions. Many researchers interested in politics and power examine the first dimension – *direct power* – in its most visible manifestation. They study who participated in a particular process or action, who benefited, who did not, how decisions were made, etc. Their focus is on the formal institutions and sites of politics and on the readily visible manifestations of power within these. Studies such as those of Tamale (1999) and Clayton et al. (2017) in Uganda and Yoon (2011) and Mkilanya (2011) in Tanzania are good examples of this. Through examination and/or observation of public speeches made in the visible spaces of parliament, they uncover how particular legislation and policies favouring women were enacted.

Such approaches to power examine contests over interests which take place in visible, open spaces. Yet, much groundwork may well have already been done before actors enter these visible arenas. Indirect forms of power may operate to privilege the entry of certain interests or actors into particular processes or spaces through a 'mobilisation of bias' or by manipulating the 'rules of the game'. Formal political spaces, for example, may be closed to women (and to some men). Meetings may be held at a time that does not suit them. Issues of interest to particular women may not be considered. Instead, issues of interest to particular men may dominate. Such indirect forms of power are linked to both relational and structural power. This is the control actors gain over others from their position in the economic and/or social order. This position gives powerful actors the ability to shape the interests of those below them. Wealthy and/or powerfully connected elites can mould agendas, practices and procedures to suit their own needs, pushing out others. An awareness of such forms of *indirect power* draws our attention to both the gendered and economic structures that subordinate some, while privileging and consolidating the interests of others.

A third, even more disparate and elusive form of power occurs where visible conflict is hidden and/or suppressed through the internalisation of dominant ideologies, values, forms of behaviour and identities. This *ideological power* broadens our attention from both open, visible spaces of debate and contestation and from indirect, material structures, to the power of social norms, values, knowledge and acceptable behaviours – the power of discourse. Most often associated with the work of Michel Foucault (1969/1972,

1977, 1980), discourses shape our attitudes in a wide range of ways. Two of these are particularly apposite to our focus here. The first is what counts as knowledge or, to paraphrase Robert Chambers (1983) writing in the field of rural development, 'whose knowledge counts'. Discourses shape not only what is said and done, but also what is sayable and doable in any given space. They therefore set out what counts as knowledge within given settings. Possibly one of the clearest definitions of discourse I have come across comes from Iris Marion Young, who defines discourse as follows:

The system of stories and expert knowledge diffused through society, which convey the widely accepted generalisations about how society operates..., as well as the social norms and cultural values to which most of the people appeal when discussing their social and political problems and proposed solutions.

(Young, 2003: 115)

Within this perspective, power is established, exercised and consolidated through discourse, which, in turn, shapes what is understood as knowledge and 'truth' within particular fields such as development policy and programming as well as informing and regulating social interaction in a given sphere. The interactions that discourses regulate and inform can be local or global. For example, at a local level, poverty within a family can be attributed to laziness and sloth, rectifiable through a wife securing a remunerated job. As I discussed in Chapter 1, such a discourse can feed into incidents of domestic violence and can also be supported and institutionalised through a range of WID programmes and interventions aimed at increasing women's labour in the productive economy. At the interrelated national and global level, inequality and poverty can be attributed to the failure of states to seize the opportunities afforded by the global economy. This global discourse on economic liberalisation has been institutionalised as a way to reduce poverty and inequality in many countries and forms part of the 'Africa Rising' narrative, which is discussed in Chapter 4.

An important consideration here following Foucault's conception is that power is not a simple zero-sum game between those that have the power and those that do not (as implied by the more static conceptions of direct and indirect power). Instead, Foucault views power as something that circulates, with particular discourses dominating at particular times (1980: 98). And so, particular forms of knowledge or discourses compete with each other for control or power over what becomes established as the accepted knowledge or 'truth'. In a lecture delivered in 1976, Foucault noted a phenomenon of the time which was the emergence of marginalised forms of knowledge or what he called 'the insurrection of subjugated knowledges' (1980: 81). These correspond to what Chambers (1983) termed 'local knowledge'. Foucault goes on in the same lecture to highlight the importance of such forms of knowledge in deconstructing dominant ideologies and 'truths' and in providing critiques to

dominant, controlling discourses. The existence of multiple forms of knowledge or multiple discourses in multiple political spaces offers the potential to engage multiple voices, perspectives, experiences and aspirations within these spaces, including those of different women with different perspectives, coming from different positions and situations in life.

The second way in which discourses shape our attitudes is their role in determining and dictating what counts as acceptable behaviour and/or comportment. This is done through exercising what Foucault calls 'disciplinary power'. Disciplinary power is focused on the behaviour and comportment of an individual and/or groups and is aimed at 'disciplining' and controlling these in order to eliminate difference and/or deviancy, thereby increasing the possible utility of individuals within society (1977: 210). This power may be exercised by individuals or institutions within society with, as in the case of knowledge above, certain norms about what is acceptable and what is not in terms of people's behaviour dominating over others. And so, for example, it may not be deemed appropriate or acceptable for a woman to speak out freely in the presence of men in mixed company. Similarly, it may not be deemed acceptable for young, unmarried men to speak out in the presence of elders within a community. These disciplinary norms are powerful mechanisms through which one's place in society is constructed and maintained. It is important to remember however, following Foucault's conception on the circularity of power, such disciplinary norms are constantly subject to challenge, contestation and transformation. For this to happen, however, a consciousness of both the fact and the mechanisms and/or techniques of such disciplining is needed.

So far, we have seen that contrary to the assumptions underpinning liberal democratic theory, power is dispersed and circulates across society where it is manifest in a range of interrelated forms – both visible and invisible. Its expression in all these forms highlights the wide range of sites of political contestation, thereby opening up the range of political spaces beyond those posited by liberal theory alone. Foucault's work, in particular, provides valuable insights into how power operates within and across these spaces, both in terms of what issues and discourses are allowable and in terms of what behavioural norms are acceptable within them. A framework of analysis for how politics works within these spaces is beginning to emerge. In the next section, I draw on more recent work by a number of prominent post-liberal theorists to develop this framework further. Before turning to this task however, it is perhaps useful to consider the implications of these theories of power for the near-ubiquitous and ever popular development discourses and associated activities of 'empowerment' and 'capacity building'.

Implications for empowerment and capacity building

Over the last three decades, the discourse and practice of empowerment has acquired an almost universal ubiquity. Employed by a diverse range of institutions

across the development spectrum, it has attained ‘buzzword’ status (Cornwall and Brock, 2005) and widespread acceptance as a universal good. Yet, Foucault’s discursive power looms large once we begin to scratch beneath the surface and interrogate its dominant application and meaning in many contexts. For social activists interested in issues of justice and equality, empowerment is a *noun* – something that happens as power circulates, and local communities and groups seize it and mobilise to challenge elites and transform inequitable power relations. In contrast, mainstream development actors tend to deploy it as a *verb* – something to be done to others to transform their lives, most notably in relation to their economic participation. This opens the door for active interventions in the form of capacity building and/or training activities and initiatives, which can indeed serve to assist in the empowerment process, but alas, often serve to ‘discipline’ and disempower as they channel their targets into the very systems and structures that reinforce their marginalisation.

This *verbalisation* of empowerment is evidenced in the discourse employed by many mainstream development agencies. The United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goal 5, for example, is “to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”. This is to be achieved by:

Providing women and girls with equal access to education, health care, decent work, and representation in political and economic decision-making processes [*all of which will*] fuel sustainable economies and benefit societies and humanity at large.³

The World Bank speaks of “amplifying the voices of women and increasing their agency” with a view to increasing their productivity. As the Bank notes, “constraining women’s agency by limiting what jobs women can perform or subjecting them to violence, for example, can create huge losses to productivity and income with broader adverse repercussions for development” (World Bank, 2014: 1). The UK’s Department for International Development (DfID) has also talked of ‘empowering women and girls’ and ‘changing lives’. As the then Secretary of State, Penny Mordaunt, notes in the forward to the current *Vision for Gender Equality* (DfID, 2018: 1):

This Government’s Manifesto commits us to empowering women and girls around the world: working to end the subjugation and mutilation of women; promoting girls’ education; and tackling sexual violence in conflict. With the strong support of the British public, we have already changed millions of girls’ and women’s lives.

A fascinating paradox is evident in this discursive deployment of the term by international agencies. On the one hand, the *verbalisation* evidenced above ignores the multiple dimensions of power discussed in the previous section. Deploying a combination of both direct power (the power to/the power over) and structural power (the use of aid resources), it ignores all invisible forms

of power. Power appears to flow in just one direction and there is no sense of Foucault's circularity. In particular, this *verbalisation* negates both the agency of the 'women and girls' it seeks to 'empower' and the different forms of power they may already possess or may attain. It is also loudly silent on the agency of men. On the other hand, it deploys invisible forms of power itself in its framing of women's situations. The discourse used in the examples above both constructs women as powerless victims (voiceless, uneducated, poor, subjugated and mutilated) and parameters their agency, individualising it and channelling it into the productive economy in classic WID fashion. Identities are fashioned and solutions are crafted which rework and remould the spirit and intent of empowerment, stripping it of its political foundations and reconstructing it in an economic mould.

This harnessing, moulding and reconstruction of empowerment with the aid of its instrumental sister – capacity building – has not gone unnoticed. There is now a solid body of literature critiquing its instrumental appropriation and seeking to restore its political roots. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this small section here to review this literature fully or to afford it the space it deserves. However, there are five key points which are particularly apposite to our purposes in this book. First, empowerment is fundamentally political. It is about challenging and transforming asymmetrical political relations between and among different groups, be these by gender, class, status, age, sexual orientation, etc. Second, it is 'done by' individuals or groups themselves (it is a noun). It is not 'done to', 'on' or 'for' individuals or groups (it is not a verb). Third, while it emphasises the *power to* (in all its forms), an associated important dimension is what Naila Kabeer calls the *power within* (1994: 227–229). This is the power rooted in women's self-understanding of both the circumscribed nature of their lives and the reasons for this. This can inspire women (and men) to recognise and challenge gender inequalities either individually or, combining their power, collectively. Fourth, empowerment does not take place in a contextual vacuum. It meets with a range of material, structural and discursive constraints. As Parpart et al. (2003: 3) note, "Groups become empowered through collective action, but that action is enabled or constrained by the structures of power that they encounter". And fifth and related, these structures of power exist at national and global levels as well as at local. Parpart et al. (2003: 2) rightly argue that:

since even the most marginalised, impoverished communities are affected by global and national forces..., empowerment must be analysed in global and national as well as local terms ... To ignore the multilevel, interrelated character of these struggles, even in poor, marginalised communities, is to misunderstand empowerment in our increasingly interconnected global/local world.

With these five points in mind, capacity building has to be about something other than the passive training sessions we are all depressingly familiar

with, where participants are talked ‘at’ and opportunities for exchange, social analysis and conscientisation are scarce. Capacity building needs to focus on opening up spaces for such exchanges to happen. It also has to acknowledge the broader material, structural and discursive constraints groups and communities face – at national and global as well as local levels. And it has to allow empowerment to be self-generated. A core question for practitioners involved in capacity building therefore becomes, whose capacity needs to be built – women, communities, facilitators/trainers themselves and/or broader actors and political agents?

Implications for politics and democracy

Taking these different forms and mechanisms of power into consideration, the implications for politics and political contestation become clear. Politics is no longer the sole preserve of an elected elite. It is a complex, messy, everyday affair that involves a wide array of actors across multiple sites and spaces. Its dynamics and outcomes are determined by the power relations that play out within and across these spaces. And these power relations are, in turn, determined by the different forms of power that circulate, dominate and seek to transform actors’ perceptions, attitudes, behaviours and preferences across these spaces. Democracy, therefore, is a far more complex process than that offered by five-yearly personality contests alone. It goes beyond the formal trappings of liberal democratic institutions to encompass the multiple spaces and sites of politics and power across state and society alike. Involving a wide array of actors with a wide array of interests, experiences and positionalities, its key focus is how their multiple interests and voices can be included in deliberation, debates and contestation across these multiple sites. Put another way, its primary concern is how (and indeed if) democracy might be deepened and engendered through and within the wide range of political institutions and arrangements (both formal and informal) currently in place in different countries and societies. These concerns are central to the thinking of a range of what are sometimes known as post-liberal democratic theorists. In the following section, I draw on the work of some of these to expand on the framework and key questions which have begun to emerge from my discussion so far.

Engendering democracy: The ‘difference democrats’ and a *4W* framework for analysing political participation

While, as we have seen, liberal democratic theory views the state and its institutions as the primary locus of power and politics, post-liberal theorists, influenced by the post-structural contributions of thinkers such as Lukes and Foucault, conceptualise the state as a differentiated set of institutions, agencies and discourses which cut across society at large rather than being located in the state alone. Acknowledging the importance of all forms of power,

including its ideological dimension, their emphasis is on norms, practices and discourses and how these interact with policies and institutions within this wider sphere. While the areas of specific focus of these different theorists vary, two in particular are of interest to our focus on engendering democracy. The first is the focus on equity and justice. For a number of theorists discussed below, in particular Iris Marion Young, the democratic quality of a political process is measured by its ability to produce just and equitable outcomes. The use of a theoretical framework focused on equity of outcome, I believe, proves particularly apt to African polities, given the growing inequalities (gendered and otherwise) that have accompanied the so-called 'rising Africa' narrative. The second focus of interest here is the concern with democracy and difference. For the so-called 'difference democrats' such as Seyla Benhabib, Nancy Fraser, Chantal Mouffe and Iris Marion Young concerned with gendered, classist and racialised marginalisation, the inclusion of a wide diversity of actors, interests and positionalities within diverse spaces is of particular concern. Their emphasis is therefore on how such differences can be negotiated and accommodated for the optimal inclusion of all actors. Given the unequal positioning and status of many women (and men) within African society, the contributions of these difference democrats are highly relevant to our purpose. Rather than dealing with the contributions of each theorist separately, I combine these below in a framework which echoes the themes emerging from my discussion on forms of power above, namely the 'four Ws' (the *where*, *ways*, *who* and *what*) of democratic engagement in diverse spaces.

Broadening the political space: Habermas' public sphere

Arguably, one of the most influential contemporary thinkers in the field of democratic theory (and social theory more widely) is Jürgen Habermas. His seminal experience growing up in post-war Germany and his disenchantment with conservative intellectuals and political elites for whom his country's new liberal order was primarily about stability and security rather than democratic deliberation and debate echoes that of many disaffected African citizens for whom the hope and promises of democracy have dissolved and disintegrated in the face of growing inequality and authoritarianism. In 1962, he published his seminal and searing critique of the Western liberal democratic systems which, he argued, had become increasingly hierarchical and authoritarian due to growing tensions between capitalism and democracy (Habermas, 1962/1989). Within this book, he developed his idea of the 'public sphere' which he viewed as essential to democracy. The public sphere comprises the sites or spaces in social life where people come together to discuss and debate different issues of interest and relevance to them and, through the outcomes of these discussions, influence policy and political action. Institutions of the public sphere can include the media, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community groups, academia and religious communities.

As a key site of public opinion formation and influence, it is, therefore, intrinsic to *where* democracy takes place.

Contrasting the coffee houses of eighteenth-century Germany which, Habermas argued, constituted an active, participative public sphere with the various sites and institutions of the contemporary public sphere, Habermas lamented the increasing commercialisation and privatisation of this contemporary sphere. He argued that this privatisation and commercialisation had eroded the quality and democratic potential of debate within the public sphere, turning ‘rational-critical’ debate into ‘cultural consumption’. He further argued that the contemporary public sphere had now taken on ‘feudal features’ as powerful institutions of both the market and the state took it over (1962/1989: 195). Comparing the public sphere of contemporary society with that of earlier feudal societies where ruling elites sought to dominate their subjects through control of the public sphere, Habermas argued that active citizens had once again been transformed into passive consumers – of goods, services, politics and spectacle. The result in contemporary times, Habermas argued, is a ‘manipulated public sphere’, a ‘manufactured public sphere’ and a ‘decayed form of the public sphere’ (1962/1989: 215–217). The implications for democracy are clear.

Although Habermas’ bleak critique of democracy in his 1962 publication offered no emancipatory alternative, his thinking soon turned to how this manipulated public sphere could be democratised and transformed. In 1987 he published his *Theory of Communicative Action* in which he outlined how this could happen. Arguing that the “self-organised public sphere must develop a prudent combination of power and self-restraint that is needed to sensitise the self-steering mechanisms of the state and the economy” (Habermas, 1987: 365), in this work Habermas depicts the public sphere as a site of rational critical deliberation open and accessible to all, with citizens employing deliberative norms which are inclusive, reasoned and reflective, and aimed at reaching common understanding and consensus (Habermas, 1987). Within this space, each participant has an equal opportunity to be heard, to introduce topics, to make contributions and to arrive at decisions motivated solely by the strength of argument (Habermas, 1996: 305). One of the key requirements for such a reinvigorated and reanimated public sphere is therefore that it be open and inclusive to all. This clearly has implications for the role and agency of different institutions and actors within the public sphere including both media and civil society institutions (as discussed in further detail in Chapter 6) as well as for individuals. It also raises important questions around communicative norms more broadly – the *ways* in which democratic/political engagement takes place.

Democracy and deliberation: Communicative and behavioural norms

Heavily influenced by Western Enlightenment thinkers, Habermas’ work on communicative norms emphasised the importance of logical argument

as a means by which views, opinions and analyses are elucidated, with the aim of participants arriving at common understandings and views of particular issues under discussion, reaching consensus and agreement on these (Habermas, 1987). These norms have both inspired and have drawn considerable criticism from a wide range of other thinkers and theorists globally, notably from those critical of the ongoing dominance of Western Enlightenment values and thinking in the contemporary pluriverse of democracy and difference.

Habermas' work has inspired significant interest in the field of deliberative democracy in particular. For deliberative democrats, democracy revolves around the transformation rather than the aggregation of preferences. In other words, rather than a democratic outcome being defined by a majority count, it is determined by those involved informing and possibly changing their view through the power of deliberation, debate and argument – in Nyerere's (1961/1996) terms, "talking until they agree". Within deliberative fora, the idea is not to suppress difference, but to allow differences about competing perceptions of the public good to be debated in common fora that ensure the greatest degree of fairness to participants. Deliberative democrats advocate sets of overlapping discourses aimed at making sense of the world (Dryzek, 2000), shared conversations "of mutually interlocking and overlapping networks and associations of deliberation, contestation and argumentation" (Benhabib, 1996: 74).

Habermas' communicative norms have also met with some sharp critique however, most particularly from the difference democrats for whom Habermas delivers an overly rationalist conception of the public sphere which, despite claims that it makes room for difference, fails to adequately theorise pluralism and power. Specifically, critics argue that the norms of rational discourse with their deliberative emphasis on communicative reason and consensus ignore the pluralist and inevitably conflictual nature of society (Mouffe, 1996, 2005), and exclude individuals and groups for whom more emotive, less bounded and less rational forms of communication are the norm (Young, 2000, 2003), thereby reinforcing and reproducing existing exclusions and inequalities as powerful actors come to dominate the public sphere (Fraser, 1990). There are three key issues of concern here. The first is the communicative norms within political processes. Difference democrats are very critical of the privileging of argument as the primary form of communication within such processes, as proposed by Habermas. Such norms of communication or 'articulateness' (Young, 2000: 36), which tend to privilege educated, middle-class men, are both gendered and classist. As Young argues, the exchange of ideas and processes of communication in a vibrant democracy takes place as far more rowdy, disorderly and decentred processes. "Processes of engaged and responsible democratic communication include street demonstrations and sit-ins, musical works and cartoons, as much as parliamentary speeches and letters to the editor" (Young, 2003: 118–119). While Habermas and his followers are often juxtaposed in binary opposition

to these difference democrats who argue for a diversification of communication norms, both Habermas himself and certainly many contemporary deliberative democrats have moved a long way over time in taking on board these criticisms. Deliberations are now seen to include a wide range of communication acts accommodating marginalised, disenfranchised groups, including story-telling, song, protests and boycotts (Young, 2000, 2003).

The second issue of concern for the difference democrats is the associated issue of behavioural norms. This is particularly important with regard to implicit gendered rules and norms of behaviour within different public fora (as discussed in Chapter 2). Gendered roles, responsibilities, expectations and entire identities are constructed and consolidated through dominant or hegemonic discourses and norms. As Simone de Beauvoir famously asserted in a spatially different yet socially similar context, “one is not born, but rather, becomes a woman” (de Beauvoir, 1973: 301). And the type of woman (or man) one becomes emerges from the discursive norms, values and practices which circulate and dominate within different public spaces. As with communicative norms, certain norms of behaviour and comportment privilege men over women, in particular men of certain wealth, power and status. Difference democrats argue that for spaces and processes to be inclusive and democratic, a diversity of behavioural norms, in line with a diversity of communicative acts and framings, need to be not just permitted but facilitated and encouraged. As Cornwall and Rivas argue (2015: 409):

genuine inclusiveness is not only about giving people chances to have a say, it is also about creating the conditions of mutual respect in which people can not only give voice but also be heard. It is not only about inserting women into spaces created by others ... It is also about making the men in those spaces the objects of attention: making their exclusionary practices visible and unacceptable.

The third issue concerns the norms of ‘shared understanding’ and consensus which underpin deliberative democratic models and processes. Arguing that objectives of unanimity and consensus are blind to relations of power, difference democrats warn about the possibility of false consensus and exclusion. Chantal Mouffe, for example, argues that the dream of perfect harmony in social relations is not conceivable. Indeed, it is dangerous and exclusionary. As she argues, “To negate the ineradicable character of antagonism and aim at a universal rational consensus – this is the real threat to democracy” (Mouffe, 1996: 248). And so for difference democrats, democratic societies and spaces necessarily entail conflict and contestation, and attempts to negate or subvert them through consensus results in the subordination of certain groups, thereby undermining democracy. It is important to note that such inevitable, indeed necessary, conflict and contestation within political spaces does not mean violence. Indeed, being ‘reasonable’ and non-violent is a key component within deliberative processes. The challenge then becomes “not how to

eliminate power, but how to constitute forms of power that are compatible with democratic values” (Mouffe, 1996: 248).

The incorporation and encouragement of disordered and diverse forms of communication, behaviour and identity – as *ways* in which political engagement takes place – form part of this process.

Democracy and inclusion: Representation, mediation and speaking ‘with’ and not ‘for’ constituents

An allied concern of the difference democrats is the inclusion of different kinds of political actors and their diverse perspectives – the *who* of democracy (Benhabib, 1996, Mansbridge, 1996, Mouffe, 1996, Young, 2000). Drawing from John Rawls’ theory that democracy should be measured by its ability to provide just solutions, Young (2000) argues that since there is no objective common good according to which it is possible to measure whether the outcome of a political process is just or not, justice must be ensured procedurally. Processes are thus deemed democratic if “all significantly affected by the problems and their solutions are included in the discussion and decision-making on the basis of equality and non-domination, and if they interact reasonably and constitute a public where people are accountable to one another” (Young, 2000: 27). A key problem here is, of course, one of resources and numbers. If we expect every woman and man affected by a new policy on land tenure to actively participate in every meeting that takes place over the course of several years as the policy is exhaustively deliberated upon and formulated, we fall back into the dangerous WID trap of adding to existing work burdens, thereby alienating participants through their incorporation. The solution, therefore, is representation. Young, for example, argues that all those affected, in particular those heretofore adversely affected, by particular policies and decisions be represented within fora deliberating and deciding upon these policies.

The question then turns to who does this ‘representing’ and how they achieve this. Again, Iris Marion Young has many useful insights in this regard. She argues that representation is not about assuming the identity or substituting for a group of people (the constituents); rather, it is about mediating between different actors. In other words, it is not about speaking ‘for’ or ‘on behalf of’ a group, it is about speaking ‘with’ them. This draws attention to the quality of the relationship between representatives (be they elected, nominated or institutional (e.g. from an NGO)). Young goes on to argue that it follows that any evaluation of a process of representation should examine the nature of the relationship between the representative and the constituents. The representative, though separate from the constituents, should be connected to them in determinate ways. Constituents should also be connected to one another. Young (2000: 128) notes that “Representative systems sometimes fail to be sufficiently democratic not because the representatives fail to stand for the will of the constituents, but because they have lost connection with them”. And so, the nature of relations and the quality of the connection

between those who represent particular groups and constituencies and these groups and constituencies themselves are critical.

Democracy and deliberation: Beyond the individual and beyond 'women's issues'

The *where*, *ways* and the *who* of democratic processes go hand in hand with the *what* – what issues are discussed and what actions are taken following this. As we have seen, both indirect and invisible forms of power can be employed to determine what can and cannot be included in deliberations within a particular space. Be it at the level of agenda setting or at a purely discursive level, certain issues can be either determinedly on or off the table when it comes to deliberation. The inclusion and/or exclusion of particular issues are key to how democratic a process really is. Equally as important, however, if/perhaps not more so, is how (or indeed if) these issues are packaged and framed in their broader economic, social and political contexts.

Framing involves the construction or reconstruction of understanding and meaning in relation to particular problems or phenomena. Put simply, it refers to the messages conveyed in relation to particular issues, including how they came about and how they may be addressed. As such, it is related to the discourses used in relation to particular issues. While often applied to the media (for example, the often-problematic depiction of Africa in the Western media very much influences how the Western public views it), framing is constantly used, either consciously or unconsciously, by all social and political actors. In shaping how we think about and interpret the world, it is a powerful political tool.

Gender-related issues are often framed in a very limited way. Stripped of their broader social and political context, they are often narrowly framed as 'women's issues', to be addressed by individual women themselves rather than within a broader relational context. As many commentators have noted, this reflects a widespread return to the WID agenda of the 1980s, with its focus on women's agency and an attendant failure to pursue a relational approach to gender (Chant and Sweetman, 2012; Elson, 2012; Cornwall and Rivas, 2015). Intersectional status categories that differentiate women by class, race, ethnicity or ability are ignored; there is a silence about men; and there is a tendency to naturalise heteronormative understandings of partnership and a traditional understanding of the family (Prugl, 2017: 32). This is evidenced in both development representations, where, as Cornwall and Rivas have noted (2015: 407):

Representations of empowered women – running their own businesses, speaking up in public, sending their daughters to school – tend to be completely devoid of any images of the men in their lives. Where relationships come into view, they are generally of groups of women working together in imagined harmony

and in development policies and approaches where the failure to assimilate a relational approach has led development actors to construct an imagined female difference leading to narrow discourses and strategies of women's empowerment in a relational vacuum.

Two related framings, again arising from popular imaginaries of female difference and the absence of men, are both the 'business case' (Cornwall and Rivas, 2015: 406) and the 'cultural case' for women's 'empowerment'. The business case draws from binary constructions of women as strategically rational and entrepreneurial on the one hand, and marginalised and vulnerable on the other (Prugl, 2017: 32), setting the stage for the WID agenda of their economic inclusion as producers and consumers who will drive growth and progress. The cultural case, deriving from the cultural turn within feminism where, as Fraser (2013, 2019) has cogently argued, social and political struggles have become subordinated to cultural struggles, has paved the way for a relatively trouble-free passage of this WID agenda. As a 'politics of recognition' has come to dominate over a 'politics of redistribution' (Fraser, 2013), critical relational issues such as work, care and gender-based violence are increasingly framed in cultural terms rather than as part of the broader political economy, as we have seen in the Malawi case discussed in Chapter 2. Such framings matter for two main reasons. One, ignoring men, boys and women not subscribing to the entrepreneurial/vulnerable binary, they are exclusionary. And two, narrowly circumscribing both deliberation and debate and proposed policies and strategies around relational inequality, they address merely the symptoms but not the root causes of such inequality.

A key dimension to the *what* of political processes is therefore not just which issues are included and which are excluded, but also, for those issues that do reach the table, what discourses are used when talking about them and how they are framed. Who/what is responsible? Are the core drivers identified? What solutions are proposed? Do these address the drivers? Are they merely palliative or are they curative? A keen attention to both dimensions (issues and how they are framed) in relation to the *what* of democratic processes is therefore key to their engendering.

Bringing it all together: The 4W framework of political participation

These different insights can be drawn together into a comprehensive, intersecting framework which assists in analysing political engagement in and across multiple spaces in the context of a politics of inclusion and difference. Figure 3.1 represents an attempt to depict such a framework. As Figure 3.1 indicates, the *who*, the *what* and the *ways* of political participation are mutually interdependent. Which actor(s) dominate and how/if they represent their constituents will often determine the principal ways in which participation takes place (including what discourses and frames are allowed and allowable, what communication norms dominate and what behavioural

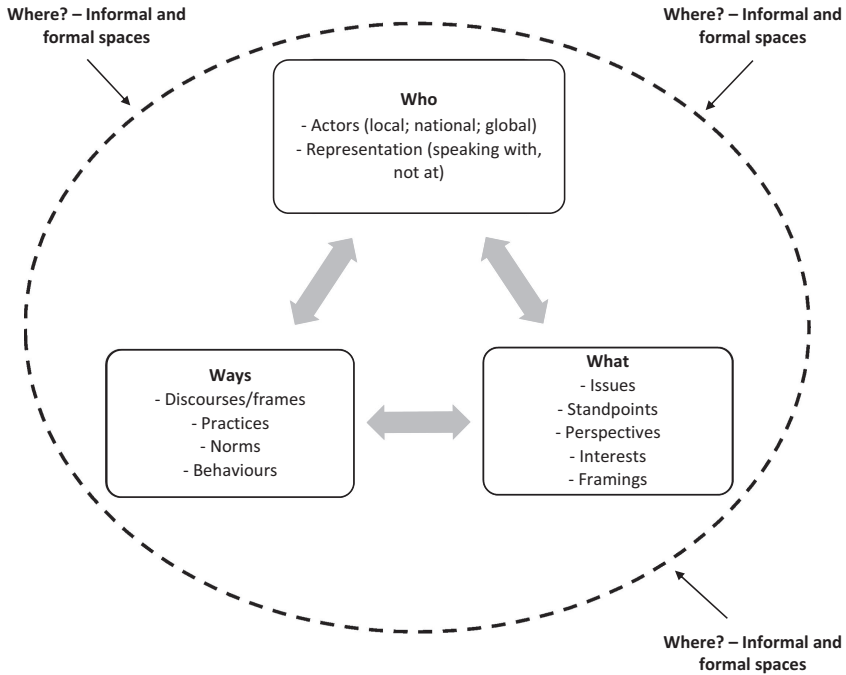


Figure 3.1 The 4W framework of political participation

norms are privileged and/or eschewed). They may also determine what issues are included in deliberations, together with their framing in the context of particular perspectives, standpoints and interests. However, the inverse may also hold true – the particular issues, interests, discourses and framings, behavioural and communicative norms included in a given process, while initially set by a select group of actors, can ultimately determine which other actors are included as well as the opportunities and limitations to their effective participation. And all of this takes place within and across a somewhat amorphous political space which, often cutting across a range of institutions and platforms – formal and/or informal, modern and/or traditional, inclusive and/or exclusive – offers a range of both opportunities and limitations for engagement.

Conclusion

This chapter has traversed quite a broad and eclectic theoretical ground. With a firm focus on how power and politics actually work in everyday contexts, across multiple sites, institutions and spaces, it has highlighted the limitations of applying normative liberal models when seeking to analyse and understand

both the workings and the potential of democracy across multiple African contexts. When viewed through this liberal prism, democracy does indeed seem a ‘small idea’. However, when viewed through a post-liberal prism, it begins to regain some of its original potential and potency. Drawing on the insights of a number of post-liberal democratic theorists, four factors have been identified for consideration when analysing how power circulates and operates across a diverse range of actors within and across different political spaces. Summarised in Figure 3.1, this *4W framework* allows for a consideration of invisible as well as visible forms of power; for more deliberative forms of debate and discussion; and for an acknowledgement and a treatment of difference. This framework, I argue, provides a more useful conceptual lens for thinking about what we mean when we talk about democracy than more normative liberal models as well as what this might entail as we begin to think about how democracy has been and can be engendered across a range of different spaces. This is my focus in the chapters that follow. I begin, in the next chapter, with a focus on national development planning in the context of the rise of the Africa’s ‘Lion economies’.

Notes

- 1 See, for example, “Is the coup making a comeback in Africa?”, *Financial Times*, August 26, 2020 (last accessed September 7, 2020); <https://www.ft.com/content/ed24cb54-7815-4b9f-a36b-a04232aa928e>; “Is Africa going backwards on democracy?”, *BBC News*, February 22, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-46971250> (last accessed September 17, 2020) “The battle for liberty in Africa: How African democrats can fight back”, *The Economist*, March 5, 2020, <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2020/03/05/how-african-democrats-can-fight-back> (last accessed September 7, 2020).
- 2 See <https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-world/scores>; <https://www.eiu.com/topic/democracy-index> and <https://fragilestatesindex.org/>, respectively (last accessed September 17, 2020).
- 3 <https://sdg-tracker.org/gender-equality#:~:text=Providing%20women%20and%20girls%20with,14%20Indicators%20for%20SDG%205> (last accessed September 25, 2020).

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4 Looking East

Africa's Lion economies and national development planning

If the literature on democracy in Africa offers little in the way of optimism, the literature on economic development more than makes up for it. Celebrating over 20 years of virtually uninterrupted growth since the late 1990s,¹ commentary – both academic and more popular – is decidedly upbeat.² Amidst a broad narrative of ‘Africa Rising’ (Young, 2012; Bright and Aruby, 2015; Khisa, 2019), a sense of Afro-euphoria has come to replace the Afro-pessimism that characterised earlier decades, notwithstanding the challenges of the recent Covid-19 pandemic. There is considerable substance to such positivity. In recent decades, the continent’s average annual GDP growth has consistently outpaced the global average and Africa is home to some of the world’s fastest growing economies. Driving these impressive statistics are the continent’s so-called ‘Lion economies’. With growth rates far in excess of those registered at the start of the 2010s, countries such as Côte d’Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Uganda and South Africa continue to perform well, despite the recent global recession (IMF, 2021a). While initially primarily fuelled by a mix of primary commodities and natural resources, many of Africa’s ‘Lions’ are now looking to diversify and sustain these growth rates into the future. An ‘Eastern turn’ in ambition and policy is discernible as states increasingly look to the experiences of successful Asian economies to emulate their models. Although the specific dynamics of these Asian models vary, a common feature across all is their labour-intensive, export-driven model of industrialisation which is dependent on a continuous supply of low-cost, generally feminised, labour.

This Eastern turn and its attendant policy prescriptions raise two important questions. First, what, if any, are its gendered implications? And second, who are the main actors driving these developments and where and how is policy determined? These questions form the basis of this chapter in which I draw from two different bodies of literature and make two interrelated claims. First, drawing on the experience of a number of East Asian economies and applying the lessons of these to Africa, I argue that there are significant gendered implications to the Eastern turn, which, to date, have largely been ignored in the contemporary literature on African political economy. I highlight four lessons for African states intent on pursuing similar paths in this

regard. And second, exploring shifts and developments in national policy planning over time, I argue that under certain circumstances, national policymaking processes and fora can provide a space to learn from the lessons and experiences of East Asian states. Broadening national discourse and policy in ways which both move beyond 'add women and stir' approaches to economic development and which engender discourse and policy beyond the purview of traditional 'women's issues' alone, contemporary policies and strategies can avoid some of the pitfalls associated with Asian models. These two arguments are exemplified in the case study of Kenya's *Vision 2030*, which is presented at the end of the chapter.

National development policy and its actors

Although formal ratification of policy and legislation takes place in national parliaments, this is just the end point of a range of lengthy processes of discussion, deliberation, bargaining and negotiation which have largely taken place elsewhere. These involve a diversity of actors, perspectives and experiences. One of the key sites at national level for such deliberations is national development planning processes. Aimed at setting development priorities and direction for distinct time periods, these have a long and a chequered history in Africa. Four main phases from independence to the contemporary period can be identified, with the latter two arguably paving the way for enhanced engendered participation.

The first phase ran from the 1960s to the structural adjustment era of the 1980s and 1990s. During this phase, national development policy was formulated through centralised processes involving tightly knit networks of executive state actors, often coordinated from a dedicated Ministry of Economic Planning or equivalent. The limited success of this centralised approach paved the way for the second phase which took place in the 1980s–1990s. This was marked by a complete abandonment of centralised policymaking as national actors were side-lined in favour of a strong international influence on policy in the form of the International Financial Institution (IFI)-sponsored Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) (Lopes, 2013; Chimhowu et al., 2019). The disastrous social and economic impacts of this structural adjustment 'lost decade' have been comprehensively documented elsewhere.³ As criticisms of both the content and the exclusionary processes that characterised the ill-fated SAPs mounted, they came to be replaced by Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), and by the early years of the new millennium, a third and quite different phase in the African states' policymaking trajectories had begun.

Originally devised by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as a condition of qualification for debt relief, PRSPs quickly became a precondition for aid disbursements from the IFIs for all countries. By 2002, they were in place in over 70 countries (World Bank/IMF, 2002). PRSPs, in theory, marked a sharp change from the narrow (in both content and

process) structural adjustment approach. According to the World Bank (2000), they were to be both nationally driven through a broad-based participatory process which brought together a wide range of state and civic actors, and poverty-focused, integrating macroeconomic, structural, sectoral and social elements. Although, as the decade progressed, criticisms of PRSP processes mounted – not least because of the clear contradiction between principles of country-ownership and broad-based consultation and the ongoing power of the IFIs in this regard (see Gould, 2005; Cheru, 2006; Gaynor, 2010: 10–13, for overviews of these arguments) – they nonetheless transformed national policymaking spaces as development policy deliberations and discourses were opened to a wide range of actors, including private sector, trade union and non-governmental organisation (NGO) representatives. Although the flurry of both donor and academic interest in these more inclusive, collaborative processes quickly waned towards the end of the 2000s, national interest and engagement with them did not. A survey conducted by the World Bank in 2007 revealed that 62 countries had developed follow-on national development plans, while a replicate survey conducted by Chimhowu et al. (2019) revealed that over double that number of countries (134) had developed such plans some ten years later (2016–2017) (both reported in Chimhowu et al., 2019: 80). National development plans and processes are reported to still be increasing in popularity around the world, and although attracting little academic attention, we now appear to be in a fourth phase of national planning which offers significant potential for engendered engagement.

In one of the few comprehensive analyses of this trend, Chimhowu et al. (2019), following a content analysis of 107 national development plans, outline four reasons for their increasing popularity. These include the impact of their precursor PRSP processes; attempts to respond to the comprehensive targets set by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (which require specific targets and plans for ongoing monitoring purposes); a nationalist move towards the development of domestic narratives and discourses of development; and a reaction to the opportunities and the limitations posed by economic globalisation. In a separate study of 108 plans, Munro (2020) largely concurs with this analysis. Two further aspects of the analysis of Chimhowu et al. (2019) are relevant to our focus here. The first is their finding that 62 per cent of the 107 plans that they examined have been developed in a bottom-up, collaborative manner. This empirically supports a similar assertion by the former United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) Director, Carlos Lopes, who notes that national development plans are characterised by “stronger ownership from African actors and a more consultative and participatory process involving a broad spectrum of stakeholders” (Lopes, 2013). And the second is the authors’ observation of the engendered nature of many of the plans from sub-Saharan Africa. As they note (Chimhowu et al., 2019: 83), “plans from sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) often have an emphasis on investment, economic growth and poverty reduction, and they single out youth and women as special groups for attention”. Overall therefore,

although attracting scant attention in the literature or indeed from donors, broad-based, participative processes are now very much part of the national development policy landscape in many African states. Departing from the donor-driven processes of the past, they appear to offer significant scope for broadening deliberations and debates on development priorities, widening both the range of actors involved and the issues and perspectives under deliberation. While this is immediately apparent in the Asian turn in domestic policymaking, it also opens important spaces for engendered participation. The necessity for such engendered engagement in the context of Africa's Lion economies is now explored in the following two sections.

Africa's 'Lions': What makes them roar?

Emerging dramatically from the economically stagnant and socially dislocating structural adjustment decades of the 1980s and 1990s, Africa's Lion economies have drawn considerable attention and debate. In 2011, both *The Economist*⁴ and the IMF (2011) reported that six of the world's fastest growing economies in the decade 2001 to 2010 were African (Angola, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Chad, Mozambique and Rwanda, respectively). While the fortunes of some of these original Lions have changed (most notably for large oil producers such as Angola and Nigeria), growth rates on the continent overall remain high; Africa continues to boast some of the fastest growing economies globally. In 2019, the IMF reported that Ghana, South Sudan, Rwanda, Ethiopia and Côte d'Ivoire were among the world's fastest growing economies, registering growth rates in excess of 7.5 per cent (IMF, 2019). While suffering an overall contraction in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, many countries continued to record growth rates in positive figures, and the IMF projects rates in excess of 5 per cent for 21 African countries in 2022 (IMF, 2021a).

While a complex range of factors lie behind the rise of the region broadly and the Lions more specifically, commentators are united in highlighting the important role played by natural resources, in particular mineral resources such as oil, natural gas and coal in this growth (see, for example, Beresford, 2016; Borhat and Tarp, 2016; McKinsey, 2016; Kimenyi et al., 2016; Taylor, 2016; Frankema and van Waijenburg, 2018). World Bank sponsored liberalisation of policy towards foreign mining interests from the 1990s forward (World Bank, 2016), combined with the growing demand for mineral resources from mineral-dependent countries, led to a significant expansion in mineral and petroleum production from 2004 to 2013. From 1990 to 2014, between 40 per cent and as high as 91 per cent of all foreign direct investment (FDI) investment in Africa was in mining and petroleum extraction (Langdon et al., 2018: 471). This investment continued apace until the fall in global prices in 2020 with, at the time of writing, analysts predicting a return to pre-pandemic levels following an expected rise in global consumer demand in 2022 (UNCTAD, 2021).

Analysts and commentators sound a strong note of caution in relation to this natural resource dependence, however. The many pitfalls and costs

associated with such dependence are well known. These include vulnerability to global fluctuations in prices, weak linkages to domestic economies, limited employment generation, tax avoidance practices among mining companies, environmental issues and negative impacts on local communities as well as additional issues commonly associated with the 'resource curse'⁵ (for a fuller account of these issues, see Langdon et al. (2018: 310–313)). Less frequently discussed but no less important are the gendered impacts of extractive industries. Both the UN (n.d.) and the World Bank (2009) note that women bear most of the cost of mining, such as family or social disruption and environmental degradation which leads to the loss of employment and income in agriculture. In addition, they argue, women face disproportionate risks in their engagements with mining operations and the communities that surround them. Harassment, gender-based violence, HIV and extreme levels of violence in resource-based conflicts are common in mining environments. Wegenast and Beck's (2020) large-N study demonstrates how multinational mining interests reduce food security among women across Africa as they encourage land grabs, environmental degradation and structural labour market shifts. Bradshaw et al.'s (2017) research reveals how patriarchal norms and behaviours are heightened and exacerbated by the extractive industry. At a more local level, both Enns and Bersaglio (2015) and Mkutu (2018) discuss the polarising and marginalising effects of oil exploration in Turkana in Kenya, as oil companies' community interactions exacerbate existing political and gendered inequalities.

While these gendered impacts go largely unrecognised by mainstream development specialists, worries are expressed in relation to the potential volatility and unsustainability of Africa's overreliance on extractive industries. Associated concerns are the lack of employment opportunities available in the largely capital-intensive extractives industry and the associated rise in participation within the low-productive, informal economy (Bhorat and Tarp, 2016; Kimeyni et al., 2016; Taylor, 2016; Frankema and Waijenburg, 2018; Khisa, 2019; Mills et al., 2020). Looking East to Asia, where, at different points of the twentieth century, many Asian Tigers (e.g. South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong) and their Southeast Asian cubs (Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam) grew their economies rapidly by exploiting their relatively low labour costs to manufacture products for the world market at lower prices than industrialised economies could, commentators' common solution is to follow a similar path. Mimicking these models, a re-orientation in direction and investment toward low-wage, labour-intensive, manufacturing industries is proposed (Bhorat and Tarp, 2016; Kimeyni et al., 2016; Cramer et al., 2020; Mills et al., 2020). As Bhorat and Tarp, in their full-length volume on the opportunities and pitfalls for Africa's Lions moving forward, argue:

where industrialization has taken place, it has generally been dominated by mining rather than manufacturing activities. In fact, in most regions and periods since the 1990s, manufacturing has declined substantially.

This weakness in manufacturing represents a key indicator alluding to the vulnerability of the growth and development trajectory of many of Africa's economies.

(2016: 7)

In their comparison of Asian and African trajectories, Mills et al. (2020: 11–12) concur, noting that:

East Asia's development has pivoted on the changing relationship between government and the private sector ... Real investment growth and long-term capital that diversify economies and create jobs, notably in industry, have remained very low in Africa compared to Asia.

And so, for many, the Asian manufacturing route is the way forward.

The overall rationale for this reorientation towards a low-wage manufacturing model raises a troubling paradox, however. On the one hand, advancing the classic economic argument that a growth in labour-intensive sectors such as manufacturing is typically more poverty-reducing than growth in capital intensive sectors such as mining, notably in the context of the continent's rapidly growing workforce, advocates argue that this will lead to greater and faster strides in poverty reduction (Khan, 1999; Ravaillon and Chen, 2007; Bhorat and Tarp, 2016; McKinsey, 2016). As Frankema and van Waijenburg (2018: 545) note, "the growing reliance on revenues from natural resource extraction has stimulated 'jobless' growth and conspicuous consumption, and too little expansion of employment in grassroots manufacturing firms with smaller profit windows than big mining companies". On the other hand, the necessity for a competitive (viz., low cost, low wage) manufacturing sector – one which can outcompete those in Asian economies – is also stressed. Advocates point out that wages in Asia are now rising. This means international manufacturing companies may be looking to relocate in search of lower labour costs. Advocates hope that Africa will be this next location. This dubious comparative advantage raises obvious questions about the quality of jobs to be created, together with their attendant impacts on poverty and inequality. At a time when "the silent hopes [are] to repeat Chinese accomplishments in combining rapid growth with accelerated poverty alleviation ... founded on the idea that Africa is getting ready to repeat the widely lauded 'Asian model' of labour-intensive export-led industrialization" (Frankema and van Waijenburg, 2018: 545–546), the experiences and lessons from Asia's decades of experimentation in this area are particularly instructive. It is to these we now turn.

Lessons from Asia's Tigers and their Cubs

Passing through the gate leading into the Hawassa Industrial Park feels a bit like crossing a boundary between Africa's past and a vision of its

future. On one side three-wheeled tuk-tuks beep their horns as they swerve around potholes on the main road running through this southern Ethiopian town. On the other side smooth asphalt forms geometric grids around the rows of new factory buildings that represent one of Africa's boldest attempts to industrialise by following in the footsteps of Asia.

The park opened three years ago, yet it already employs almost 30,000 people and has plans to double. Most of the young women working in it make clothing for companies such as PVH, which owns brands including Tommy Hilfiger and Calvin Klein.

Selamawit Malkato, 20, had never seen a factory until she came to Hawassa. But last year she stood with scores of other hopefuls outside the park's gates. Her sister already had a job inside, stitching shirts. The days are long; the pay low; the bosses strict. Still, Ms Selamawit travelled 60km from her home village looking for work in firms attracted by a supportive government and duty-free access to American markets.

“A hopeful continent”, *The Economist*, March 2, 2013⁶

It is now over 40 years since Elson and Pearson's path-breaking work on the links between the cheap, efficient and productive labour of dextrous, so-called 'nimble-fingered' women and models of export-led manufacturing development in countries of the Global South (Elson and Pearson, 1981). Together with a wide range of other scholars and researchers coming after (for example, Safa, 1981; Jokes, 1987; Chhachhi and Pittin, 1995; Jongwoo and Ling, 1998; Truong, 1999), they highlighted how this industrialisation strategy was characterised by the rediscovery of women's labour as a specific asset (cheap, productive and easy to control) with the attendant 'feminization of industrial relations' (Truong, 1999: 133) to regulate this labour. As large multinational firms relocated in search of these low-waged, malleable, easily controlled workers, the model spread, with export processing zones (EPZs⁷) across urban areas spurring large internal rural to urban migrations and leading to significant changes to household supports and family life. Although, with the exception of Mauritius, the success of EPZs in attracting FDI in Africa has been somewhat disappointing, recent years have seen a renewed interest in this model, with an associated exponential increase in EPZ construction and development across the continent (UNCTAD, 2019; Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2020). Ethiopia's Hawassa Industrial Park is just one of the many manufacturing complexes located across Africa's growing EPZs and represents an important element of national development policy for many contemporary African states.

There was and is, of course, no single 'Asian model' or industrial strategy which can be replicated or applied across the diversity of African states. Different Asian countries have followed somewhat different paths over the past decades. Notwithstanding this diversity, however, some common elements across many of the Asian Tigers and their Cubs have now been identified. In particular, the export-oriented development strategy driven by low-wage

manufacturing has been central to all models (Park, 2002; Van Donge et al., 2012). And while some studies of Asian experiences are now somewhat dated, with some of their findings perhaps overly generalised in relation to particular countries, contexts and times (Kabeer, 1994), as the excerpt from *The Economist* above illustrates, their overall findings and arguments nonetheless retain a pertinence and relevance in contemporary African contexts.

Many of the elements of the Asian model are there in the account of Ethiopia's Industrial Park: the promise and opportunity for footloose global capital, seeking a low-cost base and a growing market; the promise and opportunity for African states, seeking to reap swift rewards on investment by absorbing readily available labour and generating tax reserves; and the promise and opportunity for a young woman, enticed by the bright lights of urban modernity and released from the material drudgery and the relational shackles of her rural home. Yet, the other elements are also there: the low wages, the difficult working conditions and the strict control and regulation to ensure the essential mix of productivity and 'docility'. Although we can hope otherwise, Selamawit seems fated to follow the difficult and demanding path taken by many women before her as she struggles to combine work and responsibilities in her workplace with those at home, in the context of the growing costs and pressures associated with city life combined with diminished social capital and networks. However, her fate is certainly not predetermined. Selamawit may join with her co-workers in organising for better pay and conditions and, buoyed by this, she may grow in confidence, status and authority within her community. Ethiopian state policy may stipulate better pay and working conditions for companies seeking to locate to the industrial park, and it may offer support and services to families working there. The rich body of empirical literature emerging from Asia following its decades of experience in this area both provides a window into what is in store and offers some lessons as to how this model might work more equitably and sustainably within an African context. Four lessons can be drawn from this literature for African states and policymakers intent on pursuing a similar developmental path. These are discussed below.

Women's labour: 'Cheap', 'Docile' and disposable

There is now a voluminous body of literature documenting complaints of low wages, poor working conditions, frequent layoffs and a lack of rights and union protection for women working within manufacturing industries in many Asian countries (see, for example, Addison and Demery, 1988, on East Asia; Foo and Lim, 1989, on Southeast Asia; ILO, 2005, on Asia broadly; Berik and Rodgers, 2010, on Bangladesh and Cambodia; Gunawardana, 2016, on Sri Lanka; and Dobs and Loh, 2020, on Singapore). In 2005, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) reported that nearly 9.5 million people work in 'slave-like conditions' in the manufacturing sector in Asia, citing poor working practices such as low wages, excessive working hours,

discrimination, verbal and physical abuse, suppression of trade union activity and preventable disasters resulting in injury and/or death. In Cambodia and Bangladesh, Berik and Rodgers (2010) found strong links between pressures to improve price competitiveness and low wages and poor working conditions. Robertson et al. (2016) draw attention to the poor working conditions and labour practices in the globalised clothing industry across Asia where women are concentrated. Gunawardana's (2016) research among female workers in Sri Lanka's EPZs documents the ways in which workers lack adequate inputs to maintain their well-being, which includes, but is not limited to, time for leisure and rest, adequate wages, freedom of association, adequate nutrition, housing and job security. Exploring industrial development in Singapore from the mid-1960s to the mid-1990s, Dobbs and Loh (2020) argue that unions and workers had little say in objecting to dangerous work, with workers often having to work in perilous conditions. From the wealth of literature and empirical material available, therefore, it is clear that, in the words of one specialist in the field, "the spread of labour intensive, export-oriented manufacturing has depended on the construction of gendered production processes that are based on the exploitation and control of low waged female labour" (Elias, 2005: 203).

Two important qualifications are in order here, however. The first is that significant differences exist between different countries and different industries in relation to working conditions. Both Lim (2018) and Robertson et al. (2016) make useful distinctions between different forms of manufacturing firms and different wages and conditions within these across different Asian contexts, with national policy in some countries both making provision for and enforcing progressive worker protections. The second qualification is that, even in contexts of poor or in-existent union protection, workers can and do exercise agency in relation to these conditions. Examples in the literature include women's actions in manufacturing plants in the Philippines and South Korea (Lim, 2018: 230); in EPZs in Malaysia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka (Rosa, 1994); and in a British multinational corporation in Malaysia (Elias, 2005). Overall, however, the consensus in the literature is that the potential employment benefits offered to women by a growing manufacturing sector are significantly tempered by the poor wages and exploitative working conditions in many cases and that measures are required to improve these. In this context, valuable lessons can be learned from the progressive worker protections afforded through national policy in some Asian contexts.

Gendered transformations in the informal economy

Studies from Asia have also uncovered a correlation between a growth in female participation in formal sectors and a growth in female participation in informal sectors (Chen et al., 1999; Benería, 2001). This comes about as women seek to supplement their incomes from their manufacturing work or, failing to secure work in factories, turn to informal sector activities in an

attempt to secure some remuneration. These forms of informal work are also promoted through the many microfinance projects and schemes beloved of development agencies seeking to 'empower women' and 'build their capacity'. Encouraging women to establish capital-poor enterprises that often provide highly unstable livelihoods (Kantor, 2005; Bateman, 2011), this growth in women's participation in the informal sector has a number of consequences. First, it results in a vicious cycle of poverty and insecurity for women for whom the meagre and precarious proceeds are often insufficient to meet their daily requirements, most particularly in domestic contexts where women do not exercise complete power over these proceeds (Benería, 2001; Kabeer, 2001; Holvoet, 2005; Garikipati, 2008). Second, the rapid growth of new enterprises in particular sectors has been shown to flood the local market, oversaturating local informal economies and driving many existent small and medium enterprises out of business (Guérin et al., 2016). And third, these developments have led to gendered transformations in the informal economy, reducing opportunities and leading to growing levels of unemployment for working-class men living on the urban fringes (Kabeer, 1997). As we have seen in the Malawian case study discussed in Chapter 2, such developments can lead to crises and/or reconfigurations in hegemonic masculinities that in many cases involve men relinquishing breadwinning roles while maintaining and consolidating power in others, namely the household and community (Kabeer, 1997).

Growing gendered inequalities

While the Asian model has succeeded, to varying degrees, in reducing poverty in different countries, this has been accompanied by significant increases in inequality. Within the Asian literature, a considerable range of studies track the polarising impacts of changes in labour market and income distribution at both economic and social levels (see Ahuja et al., 1997 on East Asia; Baum, 1999 on Singapore; Wang, 2003 on Taiwan; Chiu and Lui, 2004 and Forrest et al., 2004 on Hong Kong; Tai, 2013 on Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan; and Kanbur et al., 2014 on Asia more broadly). Kanbur et al. (2014: 23), examining trends and drivers across the region, report that of the 37 economies with available data in the 2000s, 14 had a Gini coefficient of or greater than 40.⁸ This is widely considered the threshold for 'high inequality'. Countries in this category include China, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Sri Lanka and the trend of rising inequality is widespread in the region. Elsewhere, Chi and Yong Kwon (2012) document rising levels of income inequality in South Korea and Taiwan since the 1990s. A common pattern is discernible – highly skilled workers with more education see their incomes rise, while low-skilled workers see their wages either stagnate or reduce.

This trend is disproportionately felt by women. According to Oxfam, women's wages across Asia are between 70 per cent and 90 per cent of men's

due to a combination of low wages, poor working conditions and a disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care work (Oxfam, 2016). Rodgers and Zveglic (2014: 104) concur, arguing that:

For many developing countries in Asia, the emphasis on maintaining competitiveness in the world market has meant staking a claim to the low-wage niche, resulting in downward pressure on women's wages and segregation into jobs characterized by insecurity and poor working conditions. At the micro level, women's labour market participation has risen without any relief from domestic-based obligations.

This pay gap is apparent even in countries where women have higher education attainment than men, as Chang and England's (2011) findings in Taiwan reveal. New economic and social disparities are also reported in post-industrial contexts where, due to states' neglect of the gendered exigencies of the reproductive sphere, poorly paid migrant women are now employed as domestic workers (see Yeoh and Huang, 1999, on Singapore; and Cheng, 1996, and Tai, 2013, on Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan).

A crisis of social reproduction

This leads us to the fourth lesson from the Asian experience which strongly resonates with changes in urban locales in Africa as discussed in Chapter 2. A clear trend emerging from the Asian literature is the changing nature and composition of families and households as women juggle the double burden of work within their remunerated jobs and unremunerated work within their households and wider communities. A range of studies demonstrate how the continued neglect of the household as a sphere of work has led to a crisis of social reproduction in Asia with attendant impacts for female workers specifically and the development model more broadly. Social reproduction refers to the work of caring directly for oneself and others (childcare, elder care, healthcare), social provisioning (voluntary work within the community) and biological reproduction (bearing children, producing and nurturing future workers). Yet despite its centrality to everyday life as well as to the economy, it is rarely factored into development policy or planning.

The crisis in this area manifests in three ways. First, it manifests in changes in the reproductive system across a number of countries. Drawing on a range of time-series government data, Tai (2013: 1152–1153) demonstrates a crisis for households arising from economic transformations within Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Takenoshita (2020), in a book length volume devoted to the subject, also demonstrates a similar trend in these three countries as well as in South Korea and Japan. In all five countries, marriage age is increasing, fertility rates are decreasing and there is a growing number of divorces. On the one hand, this signals a newfound independence among Asian women. Yet, on the other, it also represents a broader crisis in family life.

As Tai (2013: 1153) notes, “women in Asian cities are in a dilemma over careers and families. The pressures of a job are incompatible with the demands of family life and motherhood”. This affects men as well as women where, as Takenoshita (2020: 41) argues, the decline in jobs with stable contracts and higher wages is discouraging men from marriage also.

Second, the crisis in social reproduction restricts social mobility, limiting the possibilities for women to move from lower- to higher-paid positions. For example, Lim’s research on income disparities in Singapore demonstrates that while overall gender disparities in occupation and education have narrowed over the last three decades, women remain disproportionately represented in the lower-waged sectors. She attributes this to the ongoing disproportionate responsibility for family care which, in the failure of either state supports or shifts in gendered relations within the household, result in difficulties in getting to the highest levels of the labour force (Lim, 2011). And third, as both Elias and Roberts (2016) and Gunawardana (2016) have argued, this crisis of social reproduction, while damaging to families and households, also threatens the very economic system which depends on it.

Overall, therefore, while there is, of course, much to be admired within the Asian model(s) in terms of both national growth and development and in terms of the opportunities it affords for individual security, progression and development, there are also important lessons to be drawn. As African states and policymakers increasingly look East for inspiration and direction, they should look not to replicate the Asian experience, but to learn from it. And as the space for broad-based engagement in national policy and planning remains open, interested groups and parties should seize opportunities to become involved. The overall lesson from Asia’s decades of experience is that economic policy is not gender neutral and that the much-touted model of low-cost, export-oriented manufacturing increases gendered inequalities and discriminations. The resultant effects for lives, livelihoods and family life impact women and men alike and have both material and relational consequences. With institutional arrangements and practices of production and control continuing to operate according to a gendered logic that drives inequalities in wages and conditions, while negating the essential work of social reproduction, they produce and reproduce patterns of global hegemonic masculinity while destroying the essential social fabric of economic life. To overcome such inequalities and discriminations and to facilitate more inclusive growth, African policymakers and actors will need to broaden and engender national policy discourses and spaces supporting strategies and programmes which promote fair and progressive pay and working conditions; greater public investment in infrastructure and social services; and a macroeconomic environment that supports and redistributes unpaid domestic labour across the household and community. As the Asian experience has demonstrated, failure to do so will exacerbate gendered inequalities and discriminations and undermine the essential social base of economic growth. A number of these dilemmas and dynamics are exemplified in the case of Kenya’s national *Vision 2030*.

Cases: Kenya's *Vision 2030* – the dilemmas and dynamics of Kenya's Asian turn

Ranked as the eighth largest economy in Africa and the third in sub-Saharan Africa,⁹ Kenya, now classified as a lower-middle-income country, sits proudly among Africa's Lions. Emerging from a period of significant economic stagnation and decline in the 1980s and 1990s, the country's economic performance since the 2000s has been rapid and sustained, notwithstanding the dampening effects of both the ethnic violence following the 2007 elections and the global economic recessions of 2008 and 2020 (Kimenyi et al., 2016; IMF, 2021b). With an average growth rate in excess of 5 per cent from 2004 to 2020¹⁰ and a GDP of US\$ 95.5 billion,¹¹ it is now the largest and most developed region in Eastern and Central Africa and one of the primary sources of FDI in the region.

Despite this wealth, poverty and inequality remain stubbornly high. The country's Gini coefficient stood at 40.8 in 2015, the most recent year for which it is available,¹² and income disparities are apparent across and within different sectors. Within agriculture, for example, there are stark difference in incomes between the country's many smallholders, where wages remain at or below a subsistence level since the 1970s (Fibaek, 2020), and its flower exporters, where the annual revenues of the top 20 floral companies are estimated at between \$1 million and \$100 million each.¹³ For those in the growing informal sector where most women work, precarity and insecurity are rising (ILO, 2013; Kimenyi et al., 2016). Social protection is limited, and funding for different schemes is minimal and reported to be mired in corruption (Kimenyi et al., 2016: 24–25; HRW, 2021). Poverty and inequality is also gendered. Women tend to be poorer than men and have less access to the capital and assets necessary for livelihood and income security. They are also disproportionately engaged in unpaid care work and in the informal sector (KNBS/UN Women, 2019; Crown Trust, 2021). Clearly, as the following case study which draws from documentary and interview-based research conducted in 2020 and 2021 demonstrates, development policy within Kenya remains highly gendered. However, as the case study also demonstrates, opportunities to redress this and build on the lessons from Asia also exist in the form of a vibrant women's movement which, with strong grassroots support, has proven a highly effective political actor in the past.

Development planning in Kenya: From PRSPs to Vision 2030

The history and evolution of development planning in Kenya largely mirrors the four phases outlined at the beginning of the chapter. Following a relatively closed space for policy deliberations in the 1960s and 1970s, as elsewhere, the country's experience with the PRSP process in the early 2000s opened the field of policymaking to a wide spectrum of actors. Although somewhat short-lived and overshadowed by a number of corruption scandals which

resulted in suspensions of IFI lending, the PRSP process resulted in what has been described by one commentator as ‘an entrenched consultative culture’ for policymaking within the country (Shiverenje, 2005: 28). The PRSP was quickly followed by the development of a five-year *Economic Recovery Strategy Paper* (ERSP 2003–2007) following elections and a change of regime at the end of 2002. With a focus on growth over development, it succeeded in raising growth levels from 0.6 per cent in 2002 to 7.0 per cent in 2007 (Otieno and Ndung’u, 2010). The ERSP, in turn, was followed by the country’s *Vision 2030* which was launched in 2008. This aimed at sustaining the high levels of growth and transforming Kenya into a ‘newly-industrialising, middle-income country’ by 2030 (GoK, 2007) through a series of successive five-year plans (spanning 2008–2030) and represents a strategic and concerted Asian turn in policy and direction. As we will now see, while elevating policy above Kenya’s ethnicised and regionalised pork barrel politics and ensuring a long-term plan for the country, *Vision 2030*, with its focus on growth over equity, also appears to have narrowed the breadth and ambition of the country’s development policy and risks consolidating gendered inequalities and discriminations.

Vision 2030: The ‘who’ of the process

While, in its Forward, *Vision 2030* claims to have involved a ‘broad cross-section of the Kenyan population’ (GoK, 2007: i), in practice the key actors involved at the outset comprised a relatively narrow triad of domestic state planners and business elites, together with a number of global experts. Fourie (2014: 543) has demonstrated that the principal actors involved were limited to “a specific group of Kenyan elites purposively emulating ‘models’ from abroad”, with these ‘models’ largely emanating from Asia. Both the strategy document itself and the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) responsible for its coordination draw from the models of a number of Asian countries, notably Malaysia, Singapore and South Korea. The composition of the NESC is telling in this regard. Of its 12–15 members in the period 2008–2011, one was a Malaysian engineer, one a South Korean energy consultant, one a Japanese economist and one a Singaporean management consultant, with a Chinese consultant replacing the Malaysian consultant in 2012.¹⁴

Kenya’s private sector has also wielded a significant degree of influence over the process. One private sector participant, quoted in Fourie (2012: 177), claimed that it was the private sector which initiated and drove the process. “The private sector initiated it ... *Vision 2030* was actually conceived by the private sector... the private sector was deeply involved in the whole mechanics – getting it through and pushing it through”. Irwin and Githinji (2016), in their analysis of private sector involvement in policy advocacy more broadly, support this. Their interviews with both public servants and business sector leaders reveal that both parties feel that the private sector exerts a significant influence on domestic policy with the quality of public-private sector relationships, together with the quality of evidence provided for policy

proposals identified as the key factors determining this influence. The elite nature of this sector is also emphasised and the authors note that “It is rare that they [*business leaders*] seek to mobilise grass roots support” (Irwin and Githinji, 2016: 166).

This has left broader civil society groups, notably NGOs and civil society organisations (CSOs) which had engaged in the past with the PRSP, largely out in the cold. According to Fourie (2014: 547–548), “NESC has only rarely included representatives from civil society; none hail from Kenya’s relatively vibrant NGO sector”. This is corroborated through my own interviews with CSO representatives as well as with state officials. NGOs and donors have been involved in the implementation of specific components through the ‘gender sector working group’, but this is largely about budgeting and coordination within the parameters of specific medium-term plans.¹⁵

Vision 2030: The ‘ways’ in which the process functions

As noted above, the key body responsible for the coordination of planning and vision within successive *Vision 2030* phases is the NESC. Described by its then Secretary¹⁶ as “a top advisory body to the government of Kenya on policies to fast track the socio-economic transformation of the country” (Muia, 2014), NESC was established by President Kibaki in 2004. While the plan was for its membership to rotate each four years, interviewees report that it appears to have just formally convened on two occasions – in 2007 when coordinating the overall *Vision 2030* strategy and first five-year plan, and in 2011 when coordinating the second five-year plan. Members of the NESC, notably through its Secretary, also convene bilateral meetings with different departments to advise on policy and ensure coherence with the overall scope of *Vision 2030*. The current composition of the NESC is not publically available, although its Secretary is known.¹⁷

Given the strong private sector influence over the process, it is relatively unsurprising that the two principal discourses that frame the very brief discussion around gendered roles focus on human resources and leadership, with an emphasis on women’s own responsibility in this regard. *Vision 2030* notes that “Kenya’s main potential lies in its people – their creativity, work ethic, education their entrepreneurial and other skills. To ensure significant and consistent results, the human resources will be managed, rewarded and steered to develop global competitiveness” (GoK, 2007: 23). Among these workers is an untapped female resource base awaiting development, training and ‘capacity building’. As *Vision 2030* notes elsewhere:

The capabilities of women have also not been developed to full potential due to limited access to capital, education, training and health care ... given that women play a critical role in the socio-economic development of any nation, there is an urgent need to remove all obstacles that hinder their contribution to national development.

(GoK, 2007: 133)

Measures to remove these obstacles are largely limited to cash transfers to encourage enterprise and entrepreneurship, however. For example, the account of developments in this area over the period of the second five-year plan focuses mainly on the amount of monies disbursed through different funding streams (GoK, 2018: 90), while plans for the current phase on gender equality again limit measures to funding streams and ‘capacity building’ training (GoK, 2018: xxiii).

Elaborating on the classic, individualised WID discourse, Kenyan women are admonished for ‘lagging behind’ in terms of leadership at home and in the public sphere. As the Vision notes:

Kenyan women also lag behind their male counterparts in the area of empowerment. For example, Kenya has the lowest representation of women in Parliament compared to countries such as South Africa and Malaysia... Furthermore, the contraceptive usage rate among Kenyan women is lower than that of comparable countries.

(GoK, 2007: 136)

Men are largely absent from this discourse as is the state, and it falls to women to meet the targets set in areas such as political participation, family planning and gender-based violence (GoK, 2007: 136), despite the persistent refusal of members of parliament to enact a National Equality Bill aimed at increasing formal representation in parliament despite Supreme Court and High Court orders to do so.¹⁸

Vision 2030: ‘What’ is included in the plan

Vision 2030, together with each of its interim plans, is divided into three pillars – economic, social and political. Six priority sectors are identified within the economic pillar (manufacturing, agriculture, tourism, wholesale and retail trade, financial services and business process outsourcing [BPO]) and two additional sectors have been added to the current five-year plan (2018–2022) (oil and minerals and the ‘blue economy’ [exploitation of marine resources]). In manufacturing, where the goal is “to increase its contribution to the GDP from 9.2 per cent in 2016 to 15 per cent by 2022; [and to] create [an] additional one million jobs yearly...” (GoK, 2007: 48), this is to be achieved through two flagship projects – the development of special economic zones (SEZs) in eight regions and the development of small and medium enterprise parks in five regions (GoK, 2007: 74–76). A SEZ Act was passed in 2015 and its regulations were developed in 2016. Although exact data for Kenya are not available, it is reported that women form the majority of employees in export SEZs, especially in the area of textiles and garment production (SID, 2010: 59). However, as elsewhere, conditions of employment in these SEZs are reported to be poor. SID (2010) cite lax labour laws and a lack of government supervision and regulation resulting in poor pay, working overtime without commensurate

compensation and cases of sexual harassment as among the issues facing workers in this sector.

What is missing from the respective plans is possibly more revealing than what is included, however. While each of the sectors can offer increased opportunities to women, key constraints within these (as discussed in Chapter 2) remain unaddressed. For example, within agriculture, barriers to women's access to and control of land and inputs are not addressed. Within tourism, issues in relation to gendered segregation in the labour market as well as its exploitation of women are missing. The obstacles to moving from informal to formal activities in retail trade for poorer women and men alike are absent. Opportunities within both the finance and BPO sectors are both gendered and classist, but these limitations are not noted. While the overall plan makes reference to the large wage gap between men and women, noting that "only a small portion can be explained by gender differences in education, work experience or job characteristics" (GoK, 2007: 133), it includes no additional analysis of the reasons for this differential or how it might be tackled. The situation of women and men in poorly remunerated employment such as within the horticulture and manufacturing industries is not addressed. And, as discussed above, while the growth in manufacturing offers opportunities to some, these come at some cost. Moreover, job opportunities within this sector are not sufficient to absorb labour. As in Asia, growth in this sector has been accompanied by a growth in the informal sector. As Ngui et al. (2016: 77) note:

A distinctive feature of the manufacturing sector in Kenya is the co-existence of the modern sector alongside a rapidly expanding informal sector ... Informal and precarious forms of employment have gained momentum, as the system evolves towards employment of a diverse pool of irregular, flexible, or casual workers with no formal labour contracts and employment benefits.

Some specific measures aimed at tackling gendered inequalities are incorporated into the social pillar under a section entitled 'Gender, youth and vulnerable groups'. While a number of strategies and targets are identified, including gender mainstreaming and gender-responsive budgeting, it is not clear how these will be implemented. More broadly, as commentators (SID, 2010: xv) and interviewees alike have noted, investments in services and supports are insufficient to make a significant difference. A number of years on from the inception of *Vision 2030*, high regional inequalities in quality of and access to services and supports exist (Mwenzu and Misati, 2014). As the ISS (2018: 6) has noted:

access to basic services is still among the lowest of any lower-middle income country. People in other lower-middle-income countries around the world are more than 80% more likely to have access to an improved sanitation facility and about 35% more likely to have access to clean water than people living in Kenya.

Moreover, efforts towards reducing inequality and poverty have become diluted in subsequent phases (Odhiambo, 2019: 452). Given this outcome, it is difficult not to concur with SID's (2010: xv) overall conclusion that "Vision 2030 does not address the structural determinants of inequality, and unless these are dealt with, inequality will increase".

Overall, the content and tenor of the initial plan, together with the interim plans to date, reflect a strong adherence to the illusory and now discredited theory of trickle down growth. While growth is necessary for development, it is certainly not sufficient. Both how growth is generated and how the gains from growth are distributed matter and neither of these policy areas are gender neutral. The lack of attention to the differential impacts of policy on women and men suggests that Kenya is on track to replicate some of the errors made in Asia, resulting in greater gender disparities and new forms of economic and social polarisation. In this regard, *Vision 2030* and its interim plans provide important lessons for those seeking greater equality and justice.

Vision 2030: The lessons

Before engaging with these lessons, it is timely to consider if *Vision 2030* or its interim plans matter at all any more. As commentators and interviewees alike have pointed out, the change of guard from Kibaki to Kenyatta in 2013,¹⁹ the triumph of patronage politics over policy²⁰ and the equation of large flagship projects such as those signalled in *Vision 2030* plans with 'eating',²¹ all suggest that *Vision 2030* should be left well alone and that gender equality advocates' energy and resources might be best spent elsewhere. However, as the lessons from Asia's Tigers and their Cubs show, when it comes to gendered marginalisations, discriminations and exploitations, national plans and programmes do matter – in their content, in their spirit and tone and in their process.

In terms of content – the 'what' – although many of *Vision 2030*'s original plans and programmes may now be off-track or superseded by Kenyatta's 'Big Four Agenda', its comprehensive scope bears close affinities with different Asian models. The strong adherence to a low-cost manufacturing model in recent plans, including Kenyatta's 'Big Four', is particularly significant. While certainly affording opportunities to many, these benefits are certainly not evenly distributed. As we have seen, it is not just what is included, but also that which is not that matters when it comes to Kenya repeating some of the mistakes of a number of Asian states. The complete neglect of the unpaid reproductive/care economy is probably the most glaring and, if the Asian experience is anything to go by, the most damaging omission. Growing opportunities in a range of both well-paid and not-so-well-paid sectors mean little to women juggling multiple responsibilities in their homes, their communities and their workplaces. Even for those with sufficient resources to turn to the private sector for support, employing domestic workers to assist in cooking, cleaning and childcare, new social and economic cleavages and polarities will result. Moreover, while in theory some of these better paid

positions (in management; financial services, etc.) offer the potential for social mobility for some, in practice, this is unlikely to help the many women and men forced into low-wage jobs to support families and pay off debts in ongoing precarity and lives lived on the edge. In the absence of policies which promote fair and progressive pay and working conditions, well-paid positions remain a rare luxury for a few while the majority continue to eke out meagre subsistence livelihoods. In the absence of dedicated supports to this majority, the polarised trajectory seen in many countries in Asia is likely to be replicated in Kenya.

As important as the content are the 'ways' the process operates, both in terms of the discourses it employs in relation to gendered disparities and in terms of 'who' it chooses to engage and how it engages them. If gender advocates and their constituencies are not part of the conversation, discourses which assume gender neutrality in economic policy, berating women for their lack of participation while simultaneously undermining the necessary conditions for this will persist. Of course, given the political elite's apparent reluctance in this regard, getting a foot in the door, never mind a seat at the table, is certainly no easy feat. However, Kenya's women's movement has a long and vibrant history of political activism, wielding significant influence in the country's 2010 Constitutional reform process, for example. The lessons learned from this process may be useful to those seeking to engender national policy through *Vision 2030* and its associated fora.²²

Key factors contributing to the movement's success in the Constitutional reform process included the formation of a united, cross-party women's association linked to grassroots chapters around the country which mobilised in support; participation in sectoral committees, often as chairs and/or vice chairs as well as in the final drafting team; the use of research and evidence in formulating recommendations and policy; a legalistic framing of arguments and policy which proved palatable to male policymakers; and strategic use of the media to build wider support (Kabira, 2012; Domingo et al., 2016; Maranga, 2019; interviews). Many of these tactics and strategies are still employed today by a range of different groups which focus, for the most part, on traditional 'women's issues' in health, education, access to credit, etc. For example, the National Women's Steering Committee which, established in 2011, seeks to uphold many of the new constitutional provisions has been successful in a number of areas, including a programme of state de-risking of loans to women's small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and court action in relation to the parliament's intransigence on affirmative action legislation. While certainly not easy – members are routinely subject to intimidation and abuse – one of the key factors they attribute to their ongoing political access and influence is their grassroots support. As one member explains:

If there's one thing that these leaders fear, to some extent, it is the voter. They like to dismiss us in Nairobi 'you elitist women'. But when the grassroots begin to speak the same language, they do listen. Because the

grassroots have the power to remove you from your eating trough. So at some point, they do listen. So if you are able to mobilise a huge groundswell, they will pay attention.

The limitations and challenges to different movements' engagement, as noted by members themselves, should also be acknowledged. These include the challenges of developing and maintaining a unified, coherent voice while still managing to recognise and accommodate difference; having the time and resources to meaningfully engage with and mediate the voices of different constituent groups and, in the words of one interviewee, "not just use grassroots groups for numbers"; being able to broaden the communicative and discursive parameters of policy debates beyond technical planning and budgeting; and being able to broaden debate on and engagement with gendered discriminations and inequalities beyond traditional 'women's issues' in ways that do not alienate both planners themselves and the broader public. These limitations notwithstanding, the power and activism of this movement and the many others that operate across the national political space provide important lessons for individuals and groups seeking to engage with and engender national development policy.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have focused on the Eastern turn in development policy within many African states, notably the 'Lions'. Drawing on the experiences of a number of Asian economies and applying the lessons of these, I have argued that there are significant gendered implications to Africa's Eastern turn which, to date, have largely been ignored in the contemporary literature on African political economy. The experiences of Asia's Tigers and their Cubs demonstrate that economic policy is not gender neutral, nor is it therefore apolitical. As Africa's Lions continue to look East for inspiration, analysts, policymakers and gender advocates alike need to move beyond 'add women and stir' approaches to policymaking and programming. Engendering and enriching national policy discourses and debates beyond the purview of traditional 'women's issues' and engaging with the structural determinants of inequality, they can avoid some of the pitfalls associated with Asian models. The *4W framework* can hopefully assist in this regard.

In relation to 'where' such engagement might occur, while parliaments certainly matter when it comes to policy and legislation, the many policy spaces behind and around these arguably matter just as much if not more, as it is within and across these spaces that development priorities are set, bargains made and trade-offs negotiated. National development planning processes are important sites for engendered political participation in this regard. If gender advocates and their constituencies – the 'who' of participation – are not a part of these processes, assumptions of gender neutrality within policy and the attendant instrumentalisation of women will continue. In relation to the 'ways'

participants engage, carefully researched, evidence-based communications are important, but so too are broader political mobilisations through grass-roots communities and the wider media. Such inputs and mobilisations need to interrogate and challenge hegemonic elite discourses which berate women for their lack of economic and political participation while simultaneously undermining the necessary conditions for this. This means expanding the 'what' of engagement beyond traditional 'women's issues' to engage with the policies and practices of production and control which drive inequalities in wages and conditions while negating the essential work of social reproduction. As the Asian experience has demonstrated, failure to do so will result in deeper and more egregious gendered inequalities and discriminations, undermining the essential social base of development and worsening the living conditions of many.

Notes

- 1 See <https://data.imf.org/regular.aspx?key=61545852> (last accessed October 4, 2021) for a chart of sustained positive growth rates since 2004. Although growth fell to negative figures following the fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, the IMF predicts a return to positive figures (GDP of 3.44 per cent) in 2021 (IMF, 2021a).
- 2 See, for example, the contrasting covers of *The Economist* magazines of 2000 and 2011, respectively, where the narrative shifts from Africa's depiction as "a hopeless continent" to "Africa rising" or Radelet's 2010 "Emerging Africa" and Young's (2012) "growth miracle" for more academic accounts.
- 3 See, for example, Chossudovsky (1997) for an overview.
- 4 *The Economist* (2011) "The Hopeful Continent: Africa Rising", <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2011/12/03/africa-rising> (last accessed October 4, 2021).
- 5 The 'resource curse' refers to the correlation between an abundance of natural resources and poor developmental outcomes. This is generally attributable to a complex cocktail of currency appreciation (in line with increased exports), weakened governance and economic management, increased corruption and increased conflict and instability.
- 6 Available at <https://www.economist.com/special-report/2013/03/02/a-hopeful-continent> (last accessed June 6, 2020).
- 7 EPZs or their variants such as SEZs, free trade zones (FTZs) and free zones (FZs) are spaces where national laws are suspended in order to incentivise manufacturing firms aimed at the export market.
- 8 The Gini coefficient measures income inequality in a country. Lower levels (towards 0) indicate high levels of income equality while higher levels (towards 100) indicate high levels of inequality.
- 9 [https://www.businessdailyafrica.com/bd/economy/kenya-overtakes-angola-as-third-largest-economy-in-sub-sahara-africa-2291948#:~:text=Friday%20has%20shown.-,The%20East%20Africa's%20largest%20economy%2C%20that%20has%20been%20the%20fourth,\(1\)%20and%20South%20Africa](https://www.businessdailyafrica.com/bd/economy/kenya-overtakes-angola-as-third-largest-economy-in-sub-sahara-africa-2291948#:~:text=Friday%20has%20shown.-,The%20East%20Africa's%20largest%20economy%2C%20that%20has%20been%20the%20fourth,(1)%20and%20South%20Africa) (last accessed September 23, 2021).
- 10 See <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=KE> (last accessed September 23, 2021). Economic recovery since the Covid-19 pandemic is reported to be underway and the economy is predicted to grow by over 6 per cent each year for the three years 2021–2023 (IMF, 2021b: 4).

- 11 See <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=KE> (last accessed September 23, 2021).
- 12 See <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI?locations=KE> (last accessed September 23, 2021).
- 13 Figures calculated by AsokoInsight, a marketing intelligence and data provision company. Available at <https://asokoinsight.com/content/market-insights/kenya-leading-floriculture-companies> (last accessed October 19, 2020). The flower sector employs nearly two million workers, most of them women. Pay and working conditions are reported to be poor with experienced female flower pickers making US\$100 a month (Orlale, 2019).
- 14 Interestingly, this Eastern turn is complicated by the fact that a Western consultancy firm, McKinsey and Company, was also involved, with several planners crediting this firm with having brought lessons from emerging economies in Asia to their attention.
- 15 See also ActionAid Kenya (2011: 63), who argue that no structured mechanisms exist for engaging civil society in development policy deliberations with the possible exception of budget hearings which are characterised as ‘rubberstamping’ exercises.
- 16 Dr Muia currently (2021) serves as the Principal Secretary at the National Treasury.
- 17 See <https://cabinetoffice.go.ke/national-economic-and-social-council-nesc/> (last accessed January 5, 2021) for more details. Dr Vincent Nyagilo is the current (2021) Secretary.
- 18 The National Equality Bill seeks to enact the 2010 constitutional requirement that no gender should hold more than two-thirds of seats in political office. See “Kenya’s Gender Bill: Battling inequality, saving the constitution”, Marilyn Muthoni Kamuru, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2019/3/17/kenyas-gender-bill-battling-inequality-saving-the-constitution/> (accessed October 13, 2020).
- 19 Some argue that President Kibaki’s Vision 2030 has been eclipsed by President Kenyatta’s ‘Big Four Agenda’ (healthcare, food security, manufacturing and housing) which he unveiled at the beginning of his second term in 2017, although this is disputed by both the President and the NESC.
- 20 For example, Kanyinga and Mboya (2021) calculate that it costs 245 per cent of an MP’s salary to get elected, with this increasing significantly for female candidates. Once elected, the work of maintaining and consolidating the support base begins to ensure continued patronage and re-election.
- 21 Kenya ranks 124 out of 180 on the Transparency International Corruption Index. <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2020/index/nzl#> (last accessed September 30, 2021).
- 22 A detailed exploration of this movement is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, a number of comprehensive accounts are provided elsewhere, including a fascinating book-length account by Wanjiru Kabira of her own experience within the process (Kabira, 2012). See also Domingo et al. (2016) and Maranga (2019) for additional accounts.

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5 Seizing and transforming local spaces

The politics of decentralisation

The newfound international donor enthusiasm for multipartyism, liberal institutions and broad-based governance at national level throughout the 1990s was accompanied by a parallel enthusiasm for decentralised forms of governance at local levels. Through a raft of projects and programmes, states were aided, assisted, supported and cajoled into introducing a range of decentralised reforms.¹ Decentralised governance is now a fixture within a wide range of African states. Commentary and analysis on this development has followed a similar path to national-level democratisation debates – moving from optimism and hope to caution and disappointment as empirical evidence of the much vaunted democratic and developmental dividends which accompanied its introduction has largely failed to materialise. A relatively voluminous literature now exists which details the many challenges facing new decentralised entities. This culminates in the rather sobering view that decentralisation, while promising much, has, in fact, delivered little, in both developmental and democratic terms.²

These analyses, with some notable exceptions cited here, either neglect or underplay several important factors, however. First, devoid of gender analysis, they neglect the fact that many of the issues devolved to local levels are of practical and also, ultimately, strategic relevance and interest to women when compared to more complex and amorphous issues which remain at distant national levels. Second, many analyses lack an appreciation of the historical contexts of decentralisation within many African states and the ways in which these contexts hinder and/or enable political engagement today. And third, much analysis and commentary tend to focus on the supply side of decentralised reforms and practices. Attention is focused on the actions, capacities, interests and motivations of appointed and elected actors, while the actions, capacities, interests and motivations of communities and citizens go largely unnoticed. In this chapter, I try to address these imbalances. Differentiating between different forms of decentralisation and placing these in a historical context, I argue that decentralisation is first and foremost a political process which, in particular contexts and places, can offer real and tangible opportunities to communities and individuals to open up local political

spaces, engender local discourse and debate and pave the way for transformational change. I develop my argument as follows.

In the next section, I present an overview of what decentralisation generally entails in the context of the different political and administrative forms it can take. Having explored this in a contemporary context, I trace the origins of decentralisation back to its colonial roots where it principally served as an instrument of social control and manipulation, although it did allow for some local elite political engagement. I then go on, in the third section, to review both the potential and the pitfalls of contemporary decentralisation as set out in the literature. I highlight the relative neglect of the multiplicity of local spaces for community engagement afforded by decentralised reforms within this literature, together with the relative neglect of any gendered analysis of the democratic potential of these spaces (the ‘where’ and the ‘what’ of engendered political participation). These two neglected dimensions form the basis for the fourth section, where I explore the range of spaces for political participation (both formal and informal) across decentralised structures. I analyse both the opportunities and the limitations to how these spaces can be engendered (the ‘who’ and the ‘ways’), drawing attention to the actions of both elected and appointed officials and communities. In the fifth section, I exemplify some of these opportunities and limitations through an analysis of Rwanda’s decentralisation programme. Drawing from a structured observation of an *Umuganda* meeting in Kigali, supplemented with data from interviews with community members and decentralised officials, the Rwandan case demonstrates ruptures as well as continuities with the past. It suggests that even in the most challenging of hierarchical, authoritarian regimes, local decentralised spaces, when seized by individuals and communities, can offer some opportunities to challenge, diversify and engender political debate and action.

Decentralisation: Functions and origins – continuities and ruptures

Decentralisation is generally understood as the assignment of public functions to subnational governments along with the structures, systems, resources and processes and that support the implementation of these functions to meet specific public service goals (Smoke, 2015: 98). While the range of functions varies, they typically include activities and investments in relation to local infrastructure, public health, public education, agricultural extension, waste management and sanitation and local policing. The depth and extent to which this happens varies quite a lot, with significantly different political implications. Rondinelli (1998) distinguishes between three forms of decentralisation in this regard – delegation, deconcentration and devolution. Delegation is where there is a transfer of responsibility to particular actors at local levels for specifically defined functions and activities. The central state retains overall power and control over these. Deconcentration is where there is a

transfer of power to a specified administrative unit of the central government at local level. Local authorities within these units are typically not elected, but appointed and the central state generally retains control over resources and priorities in relation to activities and projects within this unit. Deconcentration therefore extends the reach of the central government to strengthen its authority at local levels “by moving executive agencies controlled by the centre down to lower levels in the political system” (Crook and Manor 1998: 6). In contrast, devolution has the opposite effect. It cedes power and control as well as financial resources to locally elected officials. Local authorities within local layers of government gain a degree of political autonomy, and decision-making around priorities and activities is informed by deliberation and consultation with local communities. Of these three forms, devolution is the most common. And according to Wunsch (2014), this form has been undertaken in more countries in Africa than anywhere else in the world.

While at this policy level the distinction between the three forms of decentralisation appears relatively clear-cut, the reality on the ground is far less so and elements of all three forms are generally apparent in a messy, complex hybrid which defies such neat classification. With a range of actors and interests involved, decentralisation is, in fact, a highly contested political issue as are its associated layers of institutions, practices and outputs. While some view it as part of a neo-patrimonial agenda aimed at preserving a monopoly of power and control over resources (with this, in itself, contested among national, subnational and local political elites), others see it as an opportunity to pursue reformist, and for some transformist objectives aimed at creating more transparency, accountability and efficiency in the management and execution of local development and opening up a meaningful space for citizen engagement in local development affairs.

These different motivations and agendas imbue much of the literature on the topic. Before we turn to this literature however, a brief historical segue is in order. While it is common to situate the origins of decentralised reforms within the 1990s, coming as they did as part of democracy’s post-Cold War third wave, the roots of decentralisation can, in fact, be traced back to the colonial period. Hyden (2017) provides an excellent overview of this period. As he notes, decentralisation was an integral part of colonial policy where it served as a form of administration and control by colonial authorities over the so-called ‘natives’. As others have noted, under the British regime of indirect rule, local chiefs were recruited to serve as local authorities to oversee the management and control of their local territory as well as to extract local taxes or tributes on behalf of the colonial authority. In cases where no local chiefs existed, these were invented (Young, 1994; Mamdani, 1996; Baldwin, 2016). A similar system existed under Belgian rule where decentralisation was executed in a strict, often punitive manner to maximise the output of local territories (Prunier, 1995). Within the French colonies also, where direct rule dominated, chiefs had a crucial role to play in the ‘encadrement des paysans’ (Geschiere, 1993: 151), exercising considerable social control and

manipulation. Thus, under decentralised colonial rule, it is prudent to remember that decentralisation served as an instrument of social control. As Mamdani has comprehensively elucidated, local communities were colonial ‘subjects’, not ‘citizens’ (Mamdani, 1996). Chiefs, whether side-lined, elevated or invented, were universally male.³ Operating on behalf of the colonial oppressor and extracting labour and taxes, they were generally resented. There was no social contract between local authorities and populations. And there was no legacy of popular participation beyond cost-sharing and labour.

Yet, there is more to this colonial story than Mamdani’s simple ‘subject’/‘citizen’ dichotomy suggests. Some of these early decentralised experiments also highlighted how politically transformative decentralised entities could be, notably towards the end of British rule in Africa when the British, in preparation for independence, introduced locally elected councils. As Hyden (2017: 100) has noted, these councils served as both training grounds for democracy, but also as the political spaces from which much of the nationalist leadership emerged. Locally elected councils were introduced in the period leading up to independence in the French colonies also, although their relative lack of power in comparison to their colonial British counterparts has been noted (Robinson, 1951) as has their general elitist-, class- and male-based leadership (Schmidt, 2009).

Although the post-independence tendency was to return to centralism (supported by international donors) with the dominant form of decentralisation (if practiced) being deconcentration rather than devolution and with the power of popularly elected local councils curbed or eliminated altogether, the legacy of these colonial experiments remains. Of course, with the colonial imposition of a strict public/private divide, women were largely absent from these structures, and even where elected, local councils tended to be comprised of local elites, with limited opportunities for deeper popular participation. However, they still demonstrated a potential to influence not just local, but national and international political relations in the context of broader geopolitical challenges and shifts underway, and they still required some level of popular legitimacy in order to do so. While history moves on, it never quite goes away. Continuities as well as ruptures with the past are ever present. Colonial legacies and their aftermath are thus important when we think about how contemporary political spaces afforded through centralised reforms may be engendered to bring about transformations in gendered relations and development outcomes.

Contemporary experiments in decentralisation: The benefits and the challenges

The more recent wave of decentralised reforms from the 1990s forward was driven by a confluence of interests and motivations within the international donor community in the context of a realignment of interests following the end of the Cold War. First, there were growing concerns around aid

effectiveness, both at home and abroad, with calls for greater transparency and accountability in the use of aid funds. Second, donor's enthusiasm for participatory approaches at micro project and programme level came to imbue broader, macro-level governance approaches as disillusionment with top-down, hierarchical approaches and strategies grew. And third, the devolution of power, authority and resources from the centre to peripheries chimed with the post-1980s fervour for a rolling back of the state and a dilution of its power. Decentralisation was thus widely hailed as a means towards increasing local transparency and accountability as well as deepening democracy. Much of the early literature emerging around this time reflected these normative aspirations.

In particular, and reflective of technocratic donor interests and motivations of the time, decentralisation was viewed as a way of increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of public service provision through increased responsiveness, flexibility and innovativeness in responding to local needs. It was felt that decentralisation could lead to more creative, innovative and responsive programmes by allowing for local experimentation and adaptation to local contexts. The quality of services and local functions produced would therefore, the theory went, improve (Crook, 2003; Smoke, 2003; Devas and Delay, 2006). It was also thought that as local governments would be better informed about local needs and preferences, development resources could be allocated in a more efficient way. Claims were made that by bringing government closer to local communities, local accountability and responsiveness would be increased. The associated expectation was that citizen and community oversight would lead to increased transparency and reduced corruption (Crook, 2003; Smoke, 2003; Ahmed et al., 2005).

Enhanced efficiencies and effectiveness in public service delivery were not the only aims, however. As disillusionment with top-down models of development blossomed, the language of decentralisation began to take on a particularly political hue with a focus on issues of democratisation, rights and pluralism (Crook and Manor, 1998; Ribot, 2002; Crawford and Hartman, 2008). The decentralisation of core functions to more local levels, where state officials could engage with citizens more directly and regularly, was viewed as means towards the creation of more inclusive, participatory and deliberative spaces for decision-making (Ribot, 2002; Olowu and Wunsch, 2004). Claims were made that decentralisation deepened democracy at local levels, affording a voice to local communities in their own development (Crook and Manor, 1998).

An associated claim was that by affording citizens greater voice and control over local affairs, decentralisation could serve as a conflict management strategy (Crawford and Hartmann, 2008). As the interconnections between security and development studies became more pronounced in international policy circles, decentralisation thus came to be seen as an increasingly important part of conflict-resolution and/or conflict-mitigation strategies within the so-called 'fragile states' (Cammack et al., 2006; DfID, 2006; Brinkerhoff, 2007).

In a similar vein, Brinkerhoff (2011) argued that decentralisation could increase social capital across local societies, enhancing the social contract between citizens and the state. And so, in a post-Cold War era of good governance and aid effectiveness, decentralisation appeared to offer something of a panacea for the international development community. Diluting and distributing heretofore centralised power and resources, it offered a route for increased local participation in public affairs; increased accountability, transparency and responsiveness; enhanced stability and solidarity; and vastly improved public services. Unfortunately and perhaps given past legacies and practices, predictably, practices and experiences of decentralisation, with a few notable exceptions across the continent, both fell and continue to fall short of many of these aspirations.

As the years unfolded, much of the ensuing literature focused on testing the normative claims of decentralisations' proponents against the far messier empirical realities in different countries and contexts. A number of key challenges became apparent. From a public administration perspective, the problem of weak local capacity is a recurrent theme and forms the basis for the plethora of donor-funded 'capacity building' workshops which often accompany the rollout of decentralised reforms. Within donor literature in particular, much emphasis is placed on institutional fragility and an attendant failure to clearly define and follow the 'rules of the game' (see for example Brosio, 2000; Ahmad et al., 2005; Dafflon et al., 2012). More broadly, confusion exists about the range of functions to be devolved, how these are to be managed and whether the capacity exists at local levels to do so (see for example Hapberg (2010) on West Africa; and Koelble and Siddle (2013) on South Africa's reforms). These 'capacity' issues sometimes serve as a smokescreen for more highly charged issues of power, wealth and control, however. In a relatively wide-ranging overview of lessons learned from decentralisation experiments, Smoke (2015: 108) notes a "continued tendency – despite rhetoric about 'context-specific reform' and understanding 'political will' – to continue to treat decentralisation first and foremost as a relatively technical public administration reform". Decentralisation is, he argues, first and foremost about power and resources, and greater attention needs to be played to this crucial political economy dimension in both the literature and in policy and programming in the area.

Certainly, many research findings attest to this view. A key political challenge which permeates the literature is the persistent reluctance by African governments to decentralise power (Conyers, 2007; Crawford, 2009; ODI, 2011). As a number of analysts have noted, decentralised institutions and practices are often introduced into neo-patrimonial contexts characterised by client-patron relations where the danger of elite capture is high (Cammack et al., 2006; Chanie, 2007; UNDP, 2009). This can result in political battles between different levels of government and branches of state power as seen in the cases of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) (Gaynor, 2016) and Kenya (Cheeseman et al., 2016), for example. It can also result in national elite capture of local actors and institutions as ruling regimes attempt

to extend and strengthen their control and/or mobilise support, creating and sustaining power bases in the countryside (see for example Crook, 2003, on Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and Tanzania; Chanie, 2007, on Ethiopia; Crawford, 2009, on Ghana; Aalen and Muriaas, 2017, on Angola, Ethiopia and South Africa; and Wunsch, 2014, more generally).

This centralisation of power and control gives rise to a number of associated challenges. The first is the key issue of funding and resources for local functions and services. While most decentralised reforms make provision for a defined amount of devolved financial resources (generally set as a percentage of the national budget), these are hotly contested and often found lacking. Siegle and O'Mahoney (2006) report that the average budget allocation to local governments in sub-Saharan Africa is less than 5 per cent of the overall national budget, while the global average stands at 14 per cent. While some argue that devolving funds from the centre reduces incentives to raise revenue locally (for example, Wunsch, 2014), others argue that most notably in resource-poor local contexts such as those found in many African contexts, local revenue generation is both unrealistic and unfair (for example, Crook, 2017). The second is the challenge of local accountability. Given the opportunities afforded to extract tributes and rents from communities through control of access to licenses, official papers, permits, local services and/or local taxes, local officials, although often enthusiastic about greater authority and autonomy decentralised to them, are often not so enthusiastic about measures that enhance their accountability to anyone (Bratton, 2012; Wunsch, 2014). Consequently, and unsurprisingly, decentralisation has been associated with increased local corruption (Crook and Manor, 1998; Treisman, 2000). This clearly has knock-on implications for local political engagement and normative claims in respect of the democratic potential of decentralised forms. It also has attendant implications for claims in relation to local conflict management, although the evidence on this is more mixed. While studies such as those by Bermeo (2002) and Saideman et al. (2002) have found that decentralisation prevents or manages ethnic violence for example, a number of large N-studies show that decentralisation has led to increased conflict more broadly (Lake and Rothchild, 2005; Schou and Haug, 2005; Siegle and O'Mahoney, 2006). Dowd and Tranchant (2018) find that higher levels of decentralisation are positively correlated with the number of violent events attributed to militia groups, but not to states or rebels. A gap in the literature continues in relation to the impact of decentralisation on local low-lying levels of local conflict, although my own research in the resource-rich Congolese province of Bas-Congo, where clientelist practices predominate and asymmetric relations prevail, suggests that it does seem likely to increase the propensity for local conflict under such conditions (Gaynor, 2015).

Taken together therefore, the analysis appears to present a relatively negative picture of the achievements and hence the potential of decentralisation across the African continent. Contrary to the claims of its proponents, in practice decentralisation appears to centralise power and control while

simultaneously increasing the potential for local elite capture, patronage and corruption. Far from improving service delivery and enhancing local democracy, the literature points to an increased marginalisation of local citizens leading to, in places, increased conflict and social dislocation. However, this literature's primary focus on testing these donor-driven aspirational claims somewhat limits this analysis, narrowly circumscribing it within a particular agenda and overlooking some of the broader possibilities and realities of these complex decentralised entities. In particular, its overt focus on relatively technocratic 'best fit' or 'best practice' supply side issues negates both the possibility of a demand side (citizen and community participation) and the range of spaces through which such participation might play out. In addition, and allied to this point, with some notable exceptions, it is devoid of any gender analysis. These two neglected features form the basis of the following section.

The politics of decentralisation: Exploring opportunities for engendered engagement

While, as we have seen, local government is often hailed as the sphere of government closest to local communities, the policy functions and services it deals with are often of particular relevance to women. The ways in which local authorities design and deliver services such as water, electricity, sanitation and waste have a direct impact on the daily lives of women as they carry out household work. As Van Donk (2000: 4) has argued, "if basic infrastructure is inadequate, women tend to be the ones having to deal with the consequences". It is generally women who nurse sick children back to health when inadequate water facilities or sanitation services result in sickness and disease. It is generally women who have to travel for household necessities such as water and fuel when these are located far from their homes. And where local schools are inadequately supported, it is generally women who have to negotiate within their household for the necessary 'fees' to support their children's education. Gender relations are therefore to the fore when it comes to the functions and efficiencies of local government.

Given this 'political proximity' as Hassim (2014: 86) terms it, it is very much in women's interests to engage with local, decentralised structures. Moreover, as Pini (2011) has noted, it is often easier for women to participate at local rather than national levels, given the burden of social reproductive work. It is also perceived as more acceptable, as many of the issues falling under local remits can be viewed as 'community issues', thereby falling more into the socially acceptable category of community care rather than the more contentious sphere of politics (Everetzen, 2001). Large-scale survey research across 30 African countries also demonstrates that more marginalised, rural residents, regardless of gender, are more likely to engage with local decentralised structures and processes than their urban counterparts due to the generally poorer quality of services within rural areas (Amoateng et al., 2014; see also Isaksson, 2010; Logan & Bratton, 2006). As Amoateng et al. (2014: 5902)

note, “Given the relationship between residential location and access to resources in sub-Saharan Africa, [our] findings suggest that the poor are more likely to participate politically”. Therefore, contrary to more modernist arguments put forward in the literature which highlight women’s lack of capacity and educational attainment as major barriers to political participation, material inequalities and/or injustices appear to constitute a major driver of political engagement. Moreover, women’s engagement at this level appears more socially acceptable and feasible than at national levels.

Although of immediate practical relevance to their everyday lives, women’s engagement with decentralised authorities and structures is also decidedly strategic and political. As well as addressing issues of immediate practical significance (such as household service provision, education, public health and sanitation), it opens doors towards more strategic shifts in power relations, increasing women’s visibility within the local public sphere and strengthening their voice. Inevitably however, such transformations in power, however incremental, often meet with some degree of hostility and resistance. As existing power alignments are challenged, barriers to women’s participation are raised and the associated challenges increase. Much of the relatively scant literature on women’s experiences with decentralisation focuses on these barriers. Studies highlight a range of challenges faced by local female councillors. These include systemic and attitudinal barriers such as “an aggressive culture, combative debate and personality conflicts, as well as male colleagues who have difficulty coping with women and so belittle and personally attack them” (Maharaj and Maharaj, 2004: 271, in Durban, South Africa); negligible influence on planning and budget decisions (Johnson et al., 2003, in Uganda); and a poor understanding of gender as a category of social inequality and of what gender mainstreaming might entail (Hassim, 2014 in South Africa). Notwithstanding this challenging and hostile environment, some positive impacts emanating from women’s engagement have been reported. In South Africa, Hassim (2014) reports some progress on practical issues such as water and electricity provision. And in Burkina Faso and Mali, Johnson (2021) reports that women’s engagement in local decentralised structures has led to greater responsiveness within these structures.

Overall, therefore, although the evidence is somewhat mixed, it would appear that many of the barriers and obstacles faced by female representatives at national level are prevalent at decentralised levels also. Yet most of this research and analysis focuses on women’s experiences within formal structures and institutions (typically local county/district/municipal councils). These, however, are just one of the many decentralised spaces for political engagement. In practice, local political participation and practical claims making are played out in person and within public meetings with a range of local political actors across a range of public spaces (Krawczyk and Sweet-Cushman, 2017; Iyer and Mani, 2019). These include both territorial and thematic committees of differing kinds. For example, Ward committees and subcommittees (on water, lighting, etc.) in South Africa and Kenya (Hicks, 2011, and IES, 2015,

respectively); Hill councils, Commune councils and associated development subcommittees in Burundi (Gaynor, 2014); and Commune councils and associated thematic subcommittees in Mali (Johnson, 2021). They also include a wide range of other spaces and processes, including public consultations and meetings from village levels upward; consultations on annual budgets; and community-based planning on specific projects and interventions. For example, in South Africa, Hicks (2011) details a range of public participation mechanisms through which members of the public can engage on annual development plans, annual budget priorities and local community needs. In Kenya, the IES (2015: 14) outlines how public consultative meetings were held across wards at sub-county level to input and prioritise projects for inclusion in the 2014/2015 annual budget. And in Burundi, I have outlined how locally elected hill councils serve as important dispute arbiters and channels for local needs prioritisation, although their gendered nature in this regard is also noted (Gaynor, 2014).

The range of spaces for participation across different decentralised contexts – the multiple and interconnected ‘wheres’ of political engagement – is hopefully now becoming clear. A crucial associated consideration is the form of engagement permitted, facilitated and/or encouraged within and across these spaces – the ‘ways’ in which engagement takes place. Do decentralised spaces exist to meaningfully engage participants in policy, programme and/or project deliberations with a view to achieving greater inclusion, engaging multiple perspectives, situations and interests and sharing decision-making? Or are they consultative fora with no facilities for or aims of shared decision-making? Are they merely information sessions, designed to pass on updates on recent policies and programmes? Or are they aimed at securing legitimacy and support for interventions, programmes and projects deliberated upon and decided elsewhere? Far from promoting local participation and democracy, do they function, as in the colonial era, as instruments of control and exploitation, designed to manage, engineer and extract labour and taxes from local communities rather than affording them a voice? To return to our framework in Chapter 3, is power within them visible or invisible? How does it circulate? And how is it manipulated and/or transformed? And most importantly, who are its principal agents?

While many empirical studies of local political spaces, such as those reviewed above, come to their sobering conclusions through a focus on either institutional design (generally characterised as a lack of meaningful, substantive participation) or attitudinal norms and associated practices within them (egregious attacks on and/or side-lining of female participants, for example), very few focus on the actions and agency of the side-lined participants themselves. In their relative invisibility, they appear passive, submissive and readily manipulated. However, both history and experience show that this is not always the case. As we have seen, a number of relatively powerless local council members of the British colonial deconcentrated regime emerged as nationalist leaders. Emerging contemporary research also highlights

incidences of challenge and resistance among local participants (Krawczyk and Sweet-Cushman, 2017; Iyer and Mani, 2019; Johnson, 2021). Analysis of the opportunities for engendering participation within these spaces therefore needs to consider the agency of all participants, not just that of elected and appointed officials. Their interests, motivations and varying forms of participation need to be considered. While, as we have seen, and let us be under no illusion, local political spaces have generally been designed with one of two purposes in mind – to placate donors eager for decentralised reforms and/or to build popular support for policies, priorities, interventions and actions which have been decided elsewhere in others' interests – the very existence of these spaces affords opportunities to challenge and contest these realities. My argument is that spaces of placation/information/sensitisation can be manipulated and/or transformed by participants themselves. It is worth remembering that decentralised governance is essentially a system of trade-offs. For local officials seeking to secure legitimacy and support for their policies and actions, some level of accountability and responsiveness is needed. For local communities whose support is required, practical claims need to be met. And so, while continuities with the manipulative, exploitative practices of the past are certainly evident, the context has and is radically changing and ruptures, dislocations and transformations are also certainly possible. With many of these issues impacting directly on women and men straitjacketed into traditional gendered roles within their local communities, such ruptures and transformations are of immediate relevance. Such hybrid dynamics – of continuity mixed with change – are evidenced in the case of Rwanda's decentralisation process, which is presented in the following section.

Case: *Umuganda* in Rwanda – democracy amidst autocracy?

Almost 30 years on from the horrors of the 1994 genocide, commentary and analysis of Rwanda's post-conflict trajectory is noteworthy for both its volume and for its intensely polarised nature. On the one hand, the small, landlocked, resource-poor state is celebrated for its remarkable development achievements. According to the World Bank database, growth has averaged 5 per cent over the 20-year period 1999–2019, with poverty rates falling from 78 per cent in 2000 to 56 per cent in 2016.⁴ A wide range of legislation and policy has been introduced in the area of gender equality, and at 62 per cent, the country holds the record for the highest number of female parliamentarians globally (IPU, 2021).⁵ On the other hand, critics point out that the benefits of growth and the reductions in poverty are not evenly felt (Finnoff, 2015; Ansoms et al., 2017; Dawson, 2018), and that legislative and national representative gains on gender equality have largely failed to translate to transformative changes on the ground (Debusscher and Ansoms, 2013; Berry, 2017; Watkins and Jessee, 2020). Criticisms also centre on the ruling regime's

increasingly centralised authoritarianism, where control is exercised from the top down and resistance and dissent is forcibly eschewed (Reyntjens, 2010; Ansoms, 2011; Twagiramungu and Sebarenzi, 2019).

While these criticisms suggest that Rwanda may be an unlikely case to explore the democratic potential of decentralised reforms, it is precisely this paradox – glimmers of democracy in the midst of autocracy – which highlights the democratic and transformative potential of decentralised spaces and practices more broadly. The following case study which draws from my own field research across six districts in the North and South of the country and in the capital Kigali in 2013⁶ demonstrates that local decentralised spaces, however tightly controlled, can be seized and transformed by communities more broadly, opening the space for engendered political participation.

Decentralisation in Rwanda: Past and present

Like many African states, decentralisation has a long history in Rwanda. Introduced during the colonial period where local chiefs were appointed first by German and then Belgian authorities, it was consolidated and developed into the postcolonial period during the first (1962–1973) and second (1973–1994) so-called ‘Hutu Republics’ (Prunier, 1995; Chrétien, 2003). During this time, decentralisation served as a rigid mechanism for centralised social control. Plans and directives for local activities and projects were dispensed from the centre, with local officials reporting upward on all aspects of local life. The crucial role played by these decentralised authorities in disseminating central orders and directing the genocidal killing within their local jurisdictions in 1994 has been comprehensively documented elsewhere (Reyntjens, 1994; Uvin, 1998; Ingelaere, 2011; Prunier, 2011).

Following the genocide and as part of efforts to bring about reconciliation and development, a new decentralisation programme was introduced in 2000. This was rolled out on a phased basis over the period 2000–2015. Cognisant of the centralised, authoritarian system of governance which was widely blamed as constituting a major factor in the genocide, together with the rigid, top-down nature of the decentralised apparatus which aided this, the new programme expressly aimed at countering this. The new *Decentralisation Policy*, which succinctly captures the interrelated problems of previous decentralised regimes including “an officialdom which erodes further the people’s say in the management of their affairs, the system being generally accountable to central government instead of being accountable to the people” (RoR, 2001: 4), placed Rwanda’s communities at its very core with a strong commitment to local political participation.

A range of spaces was developed for this to occur. These included elections of local leaders and members of local committees⁷; participation in village planning meetings aimed at prioritising local development needs and plans; personal and community access to local officials through their offices; and participation in monthly *Umuganda* community works and discussions. This

latter component forms the basis for this case study. *Umuganda* refers to the tradition, prevalent in the Great Lakes region since the colonial era, of obligatory communal labour on public projects such as road maintenance, waste clearance, maintenance of public buildings and sites. In Rwanda, *Umuganda* labour works are organised at Cell level and take place on the last Saturday morning of every month. All adult residents are obliged to participate and failure to do so can result in fines of up to RwFr 5,000 (€4.20). Following the physical work, a meeting is held where the work carried out that day is evaluated and plans for further works are discussed and agreed, together with community issues and plans more broadly. According to the country's *Decentralisation Policy*, the issues raised at these meetings feed upward to Sector and District plans. The *Umuganda* meeting described here took place on 23 February 2013 in a relatively poor neighbourhood in Kigali.⁸ *Umuganda* meetings continue to take place on the last Saturday of each month today.

Umuganda: The 'who' of the decentralised process

The *Umuganda* meeting took place outside the Cell leader's office and involved seven local officials and approximately 300 community members. The local officials, sitting at a top table, included the Cell leader (male) who chaired the meeting, four members of the Cell committee (all male), a female delegate⁹ from the Sector who is in charge of elections and a male member of the District council. Community members gathered around in a rough semicircle. There were a few benches and everyone else stood in the hot sun. Community participants roughly comprised an equal number of women and men, with a number of children coming and going also. Community members interviewed informally following the meeting reported that the roughly 300 people present comprised the majority of the adult neighbourhood.

Over the course of the 50-minute meeting, the Cell, Sector and District officials spoke for a total of 40 minutes, while community members – ten men and two women – spoke for a total of ten minutes. As we will see, other participants also intervened in a number of ways over the course of the meeting.

Umuganda: The 'ways' in which the process functioned

As discussed previously, one of the key issues in relation to decentralised processes and practices is the form of engagement permitted, facilitated and/or encouraged. While decentralised processes can meaningfully engage participants in deliberation and planning in a way which optimises inclusion and diversity, they can also function as mere information provision sessions. Or they can function, as in the pre-genocide era, as instruments of control and exploitation. The varying – and actively contested – forms of communication employed in the *Umuganda* discussion here reveal a combination of these functions. Highlighting both continuities and ruptures with the past, they point to both the dominance of a top-down, condescending approach aimed

at social control and the extraction of labour and taxes and to active resistance and opposition to this, together with a broadening of the parameters and frames of debate. Four main issues in relation to the 'ways' the *Umuganda* process evolved are salient in this regard.

The first is the ongoing prevalence of a top-down sensitisation approach aimed at social control and cost-sharing. From the outset, it was clear that the aim of the meeting was to sensitise the community on their responsibilities rather than to engage them in any wider discussion or planning. As the specific content, the 'what' of the process detailed below, indicates, continuities with exploitative methods of the past were apparent in both the different demands placed on households and in the manner in which participants were addressed. From the officials' points of view, the meeting was less about facilitating deliberation and debate and more about discipline, control and meeting specific development targets. Participants were addressed, notably by the District official who dominated the discussion, in an arrogant, condescending manner. For example, the District official invoked his knowledge of both the District budget and unspecified 'studies' to justify new household taxes when challenged, emphasising that participants did not understand the complexities of what was involved in running key services. This approach was reinforced in the discourses of officials interviewed for the research more broadly, where the necessity "to change the comportment and mentality of the population" to reach development targets was highlighted by 13 out of 15 officials interviewed.¹⁰ This resonates strongly with the arrogant, condescending, top-down practices of the past which, as Uvin (1998) has cogently argued, provoked popular resentment, frustration and anger, and constituted a significant driver of the 1994 violence.

However, a key difference to these exploitative, alienating practices is that officials' demands were met with considerable resistance during the meeting. In a rupture with past communicative practices, participants were invited to respond to the authorities' edicts. Their varied forms of communication – ranging from direct resistance framed as questioning (with two women at the end insisting on the right to speak as the Chair attempted to bring proceedings to a close); to laughter and applause to demonstrate support for other participants' interventions; to murmurs of dissent and, at one point, stony silence in the face of the Chair's efforts at discipline and control – all demonstrate that space was both available for dissent and that it was actively seized by participants. This demonstrates the possibility of broader-based participation than that afforded by the one-sided sensitisations of the past.

A third issue in relation to how the meeting was conducted also demonstrates ruptures with the past, in that it highlights some level of responsiveness to participants' resistance. When the District official invoked the aforementioned study to justify one of the new financial demands on households, the Cell leader sided with the community to note that they should have been informed of this study and its findings in advance (this was met with applause). The Cell leader went on, towards the end of the meeting, to come back to

this point and to recommend that tenders be sought at Sector level before a final household tax is agreed upon.

The fourth issue chimes strongly with the broader literature and relates to the seemingly arbitrary nature of financial demands on households, together with the potential for local corruption and patronage in this regard. Over the course of the meeting, the cost of a new education tax moved from FrRw 5,000 to 3,000, with participants also encouraged to negotiate this with the Cell leader on a case-by-case basis. The Sector official's comment that "the rules are written but the implementation is always different", although in response to a specific query on childcare, appeared to apply much more broadly. This latter issue highlights continuities with the exploitative, individualised clientelist practices of the past and points to a significant lack of transparency and accountability in relation to cost-sharing initiatives.

Umuganda: 'What' was included in the process

The 'ways' in which the process was conducted were closely linked to the issues that were included in discussions. Five issues were raised by the Cell leader at the outset. Reflecting a historical focus on the extraction of labour and taxes, the first four were a sensitisation to separate waste; the announcement of a new recycling tax of FrRw 3,000 (€2.50); a new education tax of FrRw 5,000 (€4.20); and the necessity for all members of households, not just heads, to attend *Umuganda* with a fine of FrRw 5,000 (€4.20) for those appearing without a hoe. The fifth issue also resonated with pre-genocide practices where decentralised authorities were mobilised to consolidate and extend state power. This was the announcement of a rally for Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF)¹¹ members following the *Umuganda* meeting. Thus, all five issues reflected a narrow agenda which largely mirrored those of pre-genocide decentralised regimes.

However, as noted above, participants' own interventions – as both directly articulated by the speakers themselves and as variously communicated through laughter, applause, murmurs of discontent and silence more broadly – raised a number of additional issues, broadening and diversifying the scope of the debate and highlighting the gender-blindness and inflexibility of local government policy. Six direct interventions queried the basis for and the lack of affordability of the new taxes which had been announced. These were accompanied by applause and laughter. Two further interventions in this regard (both from women and both towards the end as the Chair was attempting to bring proceedings to a close) introduced a gendered analysis to the debate. One young female participant drew attention to the precarious situation of casual workers such as herself. She noted that regular tax demands proved difficult when income was uncertain and urged that policies around this take this into account. She was told to negotiate directly with her Cell leader on this point. A second female participant, referencing the government's privileging of private industry, asked if large businesses would also have to pay

waste charges and, if so, how much. She received no adequate response to this query. A third gendered intervention came from a young man. Responding to the demand that all members of the household attend *Umuganda* works, he raised the issue of childcare. Who would take care of young children at home if both parents were required to take part? Again, the response was to approach his Cell leader to negotiate directly on this. A response to a participant's proposal that next month's labour focus on repairs to the local bridge clearly demonstrated the top-down nature of local planning. The participant was told that this was not possible as it is not included in the District development plan, although the District Council member did note that he would lobby 'on the participant's behalf'. Two final interventions – one a complaint that the local security officer¹² was absent during a recent burglary, and the other, another participant's response that the same officer's religion did not permit him to work that day – also highlight the inflexibility of local policies and structures. Overall, while local officials' own contributions demonstrated strong continuities with the functions and practices of decentralised processes of the past, their openness to dialogue and exchange with participants (although limited in scope and time) allowed for a significant broadening of the frames of the debate as well as demands for greater transparency and accountability. However, the degree to which officials could or would respond to these demands given their own pressures for upward accountability in what remains a tightly controlled, centralised process certainly appeared limited.

Umuganda: *The lessons*

The case study presented here reveals Rwanda's *Umuganda* process, like its decentralisation process more broadly, to be far more complex, dynamic and nuanced than a number of its detractors suggest. While certainly demonstrating continuities with the past – both in terms of its attempted disciplining and manipulation of communities to meet ambitious development targets set elsewhere, and in its exploitation of the meeting as an instrument for the consolidation of ruling party support (through the follow-on RPF rally) – ruptures and differences from past practices and processes were also apparent. A number of lessons can be drawn from this case.

The first relates to the communication norms and processes employed. While Kigali's *Umuganda* is certainly quite a distance from the government's aspirations of the "political, economic, social, managerial/administrative and technical empowerment of local populations to fight poverty by participating in planning and management of their development process" (RoR, 2001: 8), the space afforded for questions and comments (albeit brief) did allow for broader and deeper discussion and debate as well as for the inclusion of a range of voices and views through a broader range of communicative acts. The Rwandan case demonstrates that spaces of exploitation, control and manipulation can be transformed by participants themselves. It is noteworthy

however that in the 50 minutes allocated, officials spoke for 40 – accounting for 80 per cent of the time available. Moreover, of the 12 community members who managed to speak, four had to insist on being given a space as the Chair attempted to prematurely close the meeting.

This experience highlights the importance of more inclusive communicative norms and processes. While approximately 300 people were present, just 12 managed to speak, and there was just one invitation to do so. There was no process in place to facilitate wider or more broad-based inclusion. No effort was made to gauge how representative the issues raised were or who they concerned, although the mass reaction to certain inputs provided some idea. And no effort was made to encourage inputs from those less likely to speak up. Indeed, had the meeting ended at the time decided by the Chair, no female participants would have spoken at all and the broader gendered issues would not have been raised. Moreover, participants were left with no assurances that their inputs would be fed upwards to Sector and District levels in future planning and programming. Indeed, in relation to the bridge repair proposal, the opposite was apparent. While the process appears to have progressed to some degree from the controlling, exploitative processes of the past, the onus still appears on community members themselves to make themselves heard rather than on local authorities to facilitate their participation. And while greater clarity, transparency and accountability were called for by participants, official responses reverted to the individualised clientelist practices of the past which, as history has shown, both undermine the legitimacy of the process and fuel resentment and frustration.

The second lesson relates to the issues discussed. While for officials *Umuganda* discussions were an opportunity for sensitisation on communities' own responsibilities for local development, community members themselves clearly had broader preoccupations. One of these which arose related to the lack of gender analysis in local policy and regulations. This was exemplified by the lack of attention given to caregiving roles and reproductive work when requiring full *Umuganda* attendance as well as the precarious livelihoods of female casual workers. Given that over 94.3 per cent of Rwandans are casual workers, with more women than men in this sector (ILO, 2020: 3),¹³ this is a significant omission. A second issue related to concerns around the state's privileging of private sector investment over investment in local development. This was exemplified by the query in relation to waste charges for large corporations, although it clearly relates to broader-based concerns around unequal development and the privileging of foreign corporations and investors, with few benefits to the poor.¹⁴ Both the limited time made available to air these broader concerns and the cursory and largely inadequate responses to them highlight the significant limitations and barriers to democratising and engendering local processes.

These limitations notwithstanding, Kigali's *Umuganda* meeting did reveal small chinks of democracy in the country's broader authoritarian armoury. In particular, it demonstrated that the will and the capacity for enlivened debate

and contestation is alive and well in urban Rwanda. While it is possible that discussions and interactions in Kigali proved more lively and interactive than those that may be encountered in an analogous session in a rural Cell, the broader research from which this case draws suggests otherwise. Of the 99 randomly selected community members interviewed in relation to their participation in *Umuganda* across six rural sites, 53 per cent (63 per cent male and 47 per cent female) reported having spoken at a meeting. These findings resonate with the large-N survey research mentioned earlier which demonstrates a correlation between material inequalities and/or injustices and local political engagement among women and men alike in rural areas (Amoateng et al., 2014). In a context where cultural, material and political inequalities remain acute and where the demands placed on local communities and households, notably the most marginalised, are significant, the importance of such locally accessible spaces for engaging engendered participation cannot be underestimated.

Conclusion: Engendering participation with decentralised public spaces

In this chapter I have argued that decentralisation constitutes, first and foremost, a political process which, in particular contexts and places and under particular conditions, can offer real and tangible opportunities to communities and individuals to open up local political spaces, engender local discourse and debate and pave the way for transformational change. As power circulates within and across the multiple spaces created through decentralised reforms, both continuities and ruptures with the past are apparent. In echoes of past colonial and postcolonial practices, decentralised institutions and authorities can act as instruments of social control and manipulation, extracting labour and taxes, while extending the reach of centralised regimes. However, in ruptures with this past, they can also serve as spaces for meaningful local political participation, engaging multiple perspectives in discussion, deliberation and decision-making, leading to more transformational outcomes. As we have seen, in reality most decentralisation processes constitute a messy, complex hybrid of both – old and new; past and present; continuity and change. And the extent to which decentralised processes oscillate back and forth across this spectrum is a function of the agency, power and interests of their different actors. A number of issues merit close consideration in this context.

First, in relation to the ‘who’ of decentralised processes, while much attention has been paid in the literature to the ‘supply’ side of decentralised reforms – institutions, local government officials and their ‘capacities’ – greater attention needs to be paid to the ‘demand’ side – the interests, actions and agency of communities themselves. In particular, given the practical and strategic relevance of many of the issues which fall under the remit of decentralised entities to local women, more attention needs to be paid to their activism and agency. In this regard, the multiple ‘wheres’ of decentralisation are

important. Beyond the formal institutions housed within the walls of local government buildings lie a multiplicity of additional spaces for engagement. The many local committees, public consultations and community-based planning sessions that fall under the banner of decentralised reforms afford opportunities and spaces for engagement which are arguably both more accessible and more socially acceptable than many other political fora for many women. These are the spaces where multiple voices can be heard, where lived experiences can find expression, where public norms, attitudes and discourses can be challenged and where transformative change can happen.

In relation to the 'ways' participants engage, both communicative procedures and communicative acts within and across these multiple spaces merit consideration. Little is likely to be achieved by just 'talking at' participants, most notably in a patronising, condescending manner. At best, it can invite non-cooperation and apathy, at worst, frustration, anger and conflict. The merits of two-way engagement have been seen in the Rwandan case where, as history shows, the dangers of one-way directive monologues have also been seen. With a diversity of participants comes a diversity of ways to communicate. Again, as the Rwandan case has demonstrated, laughter and applause, murmurs, muttering and silence are all expressions of assent, dissent or something in between. Greater attention needs to be paid to these different communicative acts and greater efforts need to be made to facilitate the diverse views, experiences, interests and ambitions that they represent. Listening and engaging alone is not enough, however. If decentralised processes are to deliver on their ambitions, transparency, accountability and responsiveness are required. This is how trust is built and this is how legitimacy is earned. And this is how engendered transformations happen.

As to the 'what', if we accept that decentralisation is a political process and not just a technocratic route towards more efficient and cost-effective services, then we must accept that the substance of debate within decentralised spaces will necessarily be broader and deeper also. Moving beyond the costs and efficacies of local services and outputs, debates and discussions will need to embrace and engage with their relational, structural and political underpinnings. This broader embedding of the local highlights the importance of responsiveness and action at national and global levels, as well as local, to the broader issues raised within decentralised spaces.

Notes

- 1 The complex diversity of institutional forms of decentralisation in Africa should be acknowledged. Ethiopia, South Africa and the DRC, for example, have adopted federal or semi-federal systems, while many countries on the east and west of the continent have adopted multilayered systems (Brosio, 2000; Gaynor, 2016). In some cases, for example Ghana and Uganda, decentralised reforms were initiated from within, forming part of a national process of national reform and reconstruction. In most cases, however, these reforms have been driven by external pressure from donor agencies (Devas and Grant, 2003).

- 2 Smoke (2015) provides a good relatively recent overview of the different issues, albeit without any gendered analysis.
- 3 As discussed in Chapter 7, female chiefs and chieftaincies from the precolonial era were side-lined and abolished by colonial powers.
- 4 See <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.KD.ZG?end=2020&-locations=RW&start=2000> and <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.DDAY?end=2016&locations=RW&start=2000> (last accessed September 9, 2021).
- 5 IPU (2021) <https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=9&year=2021> (last accessed September 8, 2021).
- 6 See Gaynor (2013) for the full research report.
- 7 Rwanda's contemporary decentralised administrative structure comprises Village, Cell, Sector and District levels, respectively. In theory, development priorities and planning feed upwards from Village and Cell levels.
- 8 See Gaynor (2013: 49–54) for a detailed account of this meeting.
- 9 She introduced herself as a 'delegate' and it remained unclear if this meant she was part of the Sector council or one of its committees.
- 10 These were at Cell (5), Sector (5) and District (5) levels, respectively. Officials' pressures to reach development targets are increased through the *imihigo* (performance contract) system which sets specific targets across a range of areas. Cell- and Sector-level authorities reported particular pressures in this regard. See Gaynor (2013: 24) for more detail on *imihigos* and Appendix II in the same report for an example of same.
- 11 The RPF is Rwanda's ruling party. Led by President Paul Kagame, it has governed the country since its armed wing (the Rwandan Patriotic Army [RPA]) defeated government forces and won the Rwandan Civil War in 1994. While authorities present permitted my observation of the *Umuganda* meeting, I was not permitted to observe the follow-on RPF rally.
- 12 This is one of many voluntary positions at Cell and/or Village levels.
- 13 ILO (2020) https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_760578.pdf (last accessed September 9, 2021).
- 14 See, for example, Bisoka and Ansoms (2020) on the replacement of small-scale, subsistence agriculture with commercial agribusiness through state-sponsored land grabs.

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6 NGOs, the media and the public sphere

Evolving arenas for political participation

In tandem with the moves towards multipartyism and more broad-based governance already discussed, the 1990s was also characterised by the emergence of civil society as a third key pillar in the democratic reforms sweeping across African states. Strongly supported by international donors, civil society was widely hailed as both a space where potentially errant state actions could be closely monitored and as a more efficient and cost-effective development delivery mechanism. Although diverse in scope and composition, comprising a wide array of associations, institutions and networks, both formal and informal, civil society, in this conception, came to be exclusive equated with professional non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Operating separately to the state (as the ‘N’ in the name suggests) and with purportedly close ties to ‘the poor’, NGOs were hailed as the new ‘magic bullet’ in development (Edwards and Hulme, 1997). The rise of NGOs – including those engaged in gender work – during this period and beyond, coupled with the surge in international aid flows to them, has been well documented elsewhere (see, for example, Edwards and Hulme, 1997; Pearce, 2000). The inevitable disappointment and criticisms that followed such high normative hopes and aid flows have also been well documented (Marcussen, 1996; Pearce, 2000; Mohan, 2002; Banks et al., 2015). My purpose here is not to retrace these debates in any great detail. Instead, my aim is to widen them in order to explore the democratic potential of civil society in its diversity. Specifically, returning to the classic literature on the ‘who’ and the ‘what’ of civil society and rooting this within what we might call ‘actually existing civil society’, within this chapter and the next (Chapter 7) I draw attention to the diversity of institutions and spaces that make up civil society; to its porosity with (as opposed to its purported autonomy from) the state; to its global embeddedness; and to the significance of these features for engendered political engagement with and through these different civic spaces.

In this chapter, I return to the idea of the public sphere as a site of political contestation which we first encountered in Chapter 3. Taking on board the concerns of the difference democrats, which we also explored in that chapter, my focus here is on the civil society institutions which mediate and animate this public sphere as well as the different political influences on these

institutions. Arguably, given their high visibility and elevation within the development sector, two of the principal institutions in this regard are NGOs and the media. Following a discussion of the normative role ascribed to these two institutions by public sphere scholars, I explore the opportunities and challenges to both in the African public sphere. Enmeshed in complex relationships with both states and donors, NGOs are, I argue, severely hampered and impeded in mediating and animating debate and opinion formation within the public sphere. Within the mediasphere, while more traditional forms of print and broadcast media are coming under greater pressure and regulation, both community radio and new digitalised forms offer considerable transformative potential, although these are not without their problems also. The opportunities and challenges offered by the globalised digital sphere in informing and transforming gendered debate and action are exemplified in the case study of the #BringBackOurGirls campaign, which I discuss at the end of the chapter.

Civil society and the public sphere

The question of the ‘who’ and the ‘what’ of civil society has long occupied thinkers, with theories and concepts of civil society deriving from a long and a rich tradition. From its origins in Greek philosophy where Aristotle talked about the *politike koinona* (political community/society), through to Hegel, who was the first to use the concept as something distinct from the state, through to Marx, Engels and later Gramsci, who highlighted the role of civil society institutions in constructing and consolidating as well as transforming social inequality, its importance as a site of political deliberation, negotiation and contestation has long been recognised.¹ Various conceived of as a space distinct from, influenced by and/or embedded in both states and markets, its importance as a site of deliberation, negotiation and contestation of gender relations also needs to be recognised. While the focus of many feminist theorists and activists has traditionally tended to be on nation states and the national laws and policies which perpetuate gendered inequality and discriminations, the reality that gendered inequalities persist even with progressive laws and policies in place (as discussed in detail in Chapter 2) points to the importance of engaging with people’s hearts and minds also. The public sphere is a critical arena where such levels of engagement can take place.

We first encountered the idea of the public sphere in Chapter 3. As we briefly saw in that chapter, as a key site of public opinion formation and influence as well as through its influence on policy and political action, the public sphere encompasses a range of spaces for political debate and negotiation among civil actors. It therefore opens up the political arena to a range of new, non-elite, non-traditional political actors. While my focus in Chapter 3 was on the norms of communication within this public sphere, my focus here is on the institutions and organisations which mediate and animate

deliberations and debate within these. Two of the principal institutions in this regard are NGOs and the media.

Before turning to these however, it is first useful to examine the potential and pitfalls of the public sphere as a site for engendering democracy. Discussions of the public sphere often begin with Habermas. For him, the public sphere constituted a discursive space where citizens debate issues of public concern and engage in criticism of the state in an environment free of power relations and separate to both the state and the economy.² For Habermas, critically reasoned argument (the ‘ways’ in which political participation takes place within the public sphere) was far more important than the identities and status of participants (the ‘who’ of participation) (Habermas, 1987). As we saw in Chapter 3, Habermas’ views in this regard came under severe criticism from a number of difference democrats who pointed out that his privileging of a specific ‘way’ of communication (reasoned argument) over other diverse forms of communication and over the identities and status of participants, marginalised vast swathes of people for whom ‘reasoned argument’ was not their preferred or desired form of communication. They further noted that just ‘who’ participated in these spaces mattered very much and that this was inexorably intertwined with the ‘what’ of what got discussed, debated and acted upon (Fraser, 1990; Benhabib, 1996; Young, 2000; Mouffe, 2005). In short, the difference democrats argued that Habermas’ conception was classist, gendered and elitist.³ However, this did not lead to outright rejection of the concept. Instead, attention turned to how the public sphere might be rendered more inclusive. In this regard, Young (2000) has argued for more inclusive and varied forms of communication, such as story-telling and/or protest within public fora; Mouffe (2005) has highlighted the importance of conflicting views and opinions and the dangers of forcing what she terms ‘false consensus’ within deliberations; while Fraser (1990) has proposed the use of ‘subaltern counter-publics’ as alternative discursive spaces operating in parallel to more traditional public arenas to give subordinated groups more space and scope to develop their views and positions. More recently, Srinivasan et al. (2019) highlight the importance of popular culture as an important component of African public spheres. In short, difference democrats see great potential in a multiplicity of public spheres which, recognising and welcoming a wide diversity of political actors and participants, democratise and engender both access to and the substance of discourse, debate and action across society.

So far so good. But how and where does such broad-based, inclusive public engagement take place? Who are its architects and where are the spaces for engagement? Discussion and debate in this regard often focuses on two civil society institutions – NGOs and the media. With respect to NGOs, for Habermas, social groups within civil society, operating autonomously from the state and the market, were intrinsic to the public sphere. Promoting open communication, they periodically renewed and transformed political debate

and compelled official circuits of power to be attentive and responsive to new issues arising at the periphery of the system (Habermas, 1962/1989). Contemporary thinkers and analysts have reiterated this view. In one of the most significant contributions to the 1990s debate on the role of NGOs in democracy, Cohen and Arato (1992) advocate a dualistic role for NGOs in this regard. They both animate the public sphere, ensuring vibrant debate, commentary and deliberation among civil society at large, and they channel these debates into political deliberations and decision-making at more formal levels. For Cohen and Arato therefore (1992: ix–x), “The political role of civil society in turn is not directly related to the control or conquest of power but to the generation of influence through the life of democratic associations and unconstrained discussion in the cultural public sphere”. Cognisant of the multiplicity of experiences, views and positions in society, the contributions of these scholars and others envisage a role for NGOs in animating the public sphere in a way which ensures that communications are not distorted by powerful voices and interests and that a diversity of positions, interests and perspectives are expressed. The second key civil society institution Habermas envisaged as central to animation of the public sphere was the media, in particular newspapers and other print media. Describing the print media as the public sphere’s ‘pre-eminent institution’ (Habermas, 1992: 181), Habermas envisaged a role which provided a sharp contrast to the dominance of traditional authorities, notably the political elite within the state, and which opened up new spaces for deliberation and debate. The concept of the public sphere remains central to analysis and commentary on the role of the media today, where it is often described as the ‘watchdog’ of society or the ‘fourth estate’. Its role is to supplement the other three traditional pillars of democracy – the executive, legislature and judiciary – by providing a space for opinion formation, deliberation and/or contestation, where people can express their opinion freely without any fear of coercion or control by the state or market (Splichal, 2002; Silverstone, 2007).

One of the key problems with this normative model however, as identified by Habermas and many others, is that, in contemporary times, neither NGOs or the media operate autonomously from the state or the market. Therefore, they are not politically neutral spaces and their role in mediating and animating deliberation, debate and opinion formation within the public sphere is subject to manipulation, distortion and control from powerful interests within both states and the market. Habermas himself railed against the ‘colonisation’ of the public sphere by powerful institutions of the state and market which, he claimed, turned ‘rational-critical’ debate into ‘cultural consumption’, with the public sphere taking on ‘feudal features’ as powerful institutions of both market and state took it over (Habermas, 1962/1989: 195). Media analysts and commentators similarly argue that the ever-increasing commercialisation and transnationalisation of the media has led to a dumbing down, Hollywoodisation, celebritisation and trivialisation

of its content, leading to serious erosion of its role within the public sphere (Splichal, 2002; Silverstone, 2007). NGOs and civil society organisations, through their funding requirements and upward accountability to both donors and, in some instances, states are also subject to such ‘colonisation’. A key limitation of the public sphere therefore is that, with its core institutions permeated by powerful, vested influences and interests from both state and market, hegemonic discourses, practices and norms are likely to dominate and its transformatory potential may be diluted.

So, what can be done? Within the media and NGOs alike, power imbalances and hegemonic norms combine with practices of self-censorship and silence to make it unlikely that these institutions will, on their own, be able to wrest control from their powerful sponsors in order to reclaim their role in re-animating and democratising the public sphere. However, subject to critical scrutiny and debate from the wider public sphere, they can certainly come under considerable pressure to recover their roots and/or cede the space to alternative institutions and ‘counter-publics’ across civil society. As we will now see, this is precisely what has happened and is continuing to happen across public spheres in Africa.

Challenges and opportunities to NGO mediation within African public spheres

Since the surge in interest and support for civil society in the 1990s, NGOs have continued to proliferate across Africa. Although precise numbers are difficult to ascertain, one estimate from Kenya puts the growth in the sector at 400 per cent over the period 1997–2006, with the country now home to more than 12,000 NGOs (Anderson, 2017). According to Banks et al. (2015: 707), NGOs are now bigger, more numerous and sophisticated and receive a larger slice of foreign aid and other forms of development finance than ever before. However, since their ‘magic bullet’ days of the 1990s, many NGOs have come under increasing criticism for their failures to effect any long-term transformative change. For some, their very legitimacy has been called into question. While effective in providing some much-needed short-term assistance and service provision at local levels, they are criticised as having largely failed in their broader political remit of political and economic transformation. Cognisant of the heterogeneity that characterises this sector and wary of over-generalising, my focus here is on professional NGOs rather than on more locally based community groups (which are explored in the following chapter). Drawing on some of the wider literature as well as from my own work with a number of locally based NGOs over the last 30 years, I focus in particular on the opportunities and the constraints they face in democratising and engendering deliberation and debate within the public sphere. I begin with a brief historical overview of the origins of the sector and the implications of these for contemporary work.

Origins and implications

While the impetus for NGOs' rapid growth from the 1990s forward is commonly located in the large-scale reductions in public expenditures and state services which characterised the structural adjustment decades of the 1980s and 1990s (see, for example, Hearn, 2007 and Lewis, 2005), some commentators usefully draw attention to their earlier roots within the colonial period. This historical context is important as it helps understand the constraints, challenges and opportunities faced by NGOs today, most notably in relation to transformative gender work. Both Manji and O'Coill (2002) and Jennings (2014) trace the evolution of today's NGOs to the missions and mission welfare services which expanded across much of rural Africa at the beginning of the twentieth century. As Jennings (2014: 941) observes, "Whilst the formal language of 'non-profit' or 'third' sector may not have been used, voluntary associations were neither unknown nor peculiar in colonial sub-Saharan Africa". Thus, the NGO sector was not the creation of the 1980s' 'lost decade'. Rather, it emerged out of an evolving relationship between colonial-era non-state actors and governing regimes determined to demonstrate that they were meeting their commitments to the welfare of their African subjects. Missions and mission welfare services, expanding across much of rural Africa by the beginning of the twentieth century and increasingly coordinated from the late 1920s and early 1930s, created the foundations for the emergence of Africa's formal voluntary sector as it exists today (Jennings, 2014).

The implications of these origins for contemporary gender work within and among NGOs are important. Three legacies are particularly noteworthy. First, the norms and practices of the Christian missions on gender relations are well documented (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991; Harris, 2017). These ideological forms of power both consolidated and reinforced traditional, hierarchical gender norms within local communities as well as the ongoing structural oppression of African people. Moreover, many Christian missions operated out of a position of superiority and paternalism. Their mission was to 'educate' local people to their way of acting and thinking. Similar paternalistic assumptions and patronising attitudes among contemporary African NGOs towards local communities have been noted by contemporary commentators (Mohan, 2002). These origins also help explain the widespread predilection towards capacity building and/or education programmes among NGOs today. NGO's emphasis on 'educating' by talking 'at' rather than 'with' communities has significant implications for their role within the public sphere. Arguing that an NGO's role in 'development' represents a continuity of the work of their precursors – "the missionaries and voluntary organizations that cooperated in Europe's colonization and control of Africa" – Manji and O'Coill (2002: 568) argue that today, their work contributes marginally to the relief of poverty and that "to play a role in supporting an emancipatory agenda in Africa would involve them disengaging from their paternalistic role in development". Second, the close relations between voluntary organisations and those of the church and state during the colonial

era as they worked together to deliver welfare services and supports remain in place in the contemporary era. This helps explain the preference of many NGOs for service delivery work, and indeed, their arguably high level of efficacy and impact in this regard (see Banks et al., 2015). It also helps explain both the, at times, determinately apolitical and non-transformative nature of much NGO work⁴ and the ongoing gendered biases and discriminations that permeate NGO discourses and practices today (see also below). As with their voluntary antecedents, contemporary NGOs remain ‘colonised’ (in Habermasian terms) by church and state, thereby severely limiting their transformative role within the public sphere. And third, as Jennings (2014: 943) notes, even the so-called voluntary sector that emerged in East Africa during the colonial period was highly dependent on official funding. Such dependence, notably on international donors, remains today and is, as we will now see, often identified as one of the principal constraints to NGOs’ transformative agency within the public sphere.

NGOs today: Opportunities and constraints within the public sphere

Both the democratic reforms of the 1990s forward and their own relative strength and political status have provided significant opportunities to NGOs to animate political spaces and play their part in democratising and engendering development by challenging and transforming gendered discourses and practices; supporting collective action; expanding political representation; and broadening the parameters for political debate and influence (Clarke, 1998; Boulding 2010). However, despite their growing capacity and size, many, it appears, are failing to do so. A number of constraints and contradictions have been identified in this regard. First and foremost, many commentators place the blame squarely at the face of international donors. They claim that the pressure donors place on NGOs to be accountable upward to them rather than downward to local communities has left them out of touch with their grassroots communities (Marcussen, 1996). Divorced from these and failing to represent them, NGOs have lost their critical edge and have settled for apolitical roles as service providers rather than challenging and transforming the discourses, structures and practices that give rise to broader marginalisations and discriminations. Moreover, it is argued that donors’ technocratic requirements for readily quantifiable, results-based approaches leave little space for more long-term, transformational interventions (Fowler, 2000; Mohan, 2002). As Banks et al. (2015: 710) note:

NGOs must prioritize their functional accountability to donors (in terms of targets and outputs) over their broader goals of empowerment for poor or marginalized groups. We see, therefore, that the aid system continues to overlook the systems, processes, and institutions that reproduce poverty and inequality, and has effectively depoliticized and professionalized development.

For NGOs engaged in gender work, this donor influence brings a number of additional challenges which serve to further undermine any role they may play within the public sphere. First, there is the ongoing narrow focus of donors on material deprivation and health concerns rather than on the structural and relational causes of these. Generally limited to traditional ‘women’s issues’ rather than on more broad-based gender concerns, interventions often depend upon and reinforce the domestic roles of women. As a number of scholars have argued, few NGOs engaged in gender work have successfully transitioned from small-scale providers of welfare and income-generation activities to larger-scale institutions that confront women’s unequal power in wider society and the public sphere (Marcussen, 1996; Akpabio, 2009; Dibie and Dibie, 2012). And second, the persistent trope of ‘education as empowerment’ in donor discourse and programming, which often comes framed as ‘girls’ rather than ‘women’s’ or ‘gendered’ education,⁵ focuses largely on access and individualised outcomes, not on relational inequalities. Little or no attention is paid to the now well-known reality that attending school may make little difference to gender inequalities or even may reinforce them if, for example, there are strong gendered elements in the educational institutions themselves or if education programmes constrain rather than expand the opportunities available (see Bocast, 2019 for an excellent example of the latter in Uganda). These challenges are perhaps not surprising, given emerging evidence of the significant impediments to embedding gender in the work and culture of donor institutions themselves (see Crew, 2018 on Oxfam GB; and Bruno-van Vijfeijken, 2019 on the institutional roots of recent sexual abuse scandals within Oxfam International, Save the Children and Amnesty International).

Another key constraint for NGOs more broadly lies with the challenging national political environments within which many operate. While theoretically NGOs are treated as institutions which are separate from the state, in reality, the many reciprocal arrangements between state and society, the constraining effects of market forces and the underlying agendas of donors mean that such a separation is false. Moreover, in many contexts, elite circles are not that large or wide-ranging. With many state and NGO officials having perhaps attended the same schools, living in the same neighbourhood, attending the same church and frequenting the same social clubs, NGO-state relations are characterised more by porosity than separation. In part, this also belies the difficult relational context in which NGOs operate. The increasing influence on and at times control over NGOs by their respective states is growing apace as clampdowns and restrictions on NGO activities increase. According to one source, over the last 15 years, 11 countries have adopted legislation or policies that improperly constrain NGOs (Freedom House, 2019). Less alarmingly but nonetheless equally damaging to their potential for engagement in the public sphere, many NGOs are embroiled in informal networks of power which lead to their co-option

and/or a de-legitimation or dilution of gender-focused NGO activities (see both Nabacwa, 2010 and Ahikire and Mwiine, 2020 for insider accounts of how this works in Uganda, and Rai, 2004: 592 more broadly). As Nabacwa (2010: 297) notes:

NGOs are afraid to challenge the status quo, because to do so may imply that they are questioning the government's effectiveness. This fear might be due to the historical patriarchal principle of household and community governance, in which male leadership should not be challenged, should be in control, and should be recognised as exclusive ... Rocking the boat may come at a price.

While the implications of these relations between NGOs and both international donors and their own states are clear, some commentators place the blame for their failure to engage in transformative change with NGOs themselves. Cynicism has grown as the elitism and separation of NGOs from their grassroots subaltern counter-publics becomes apparent. This critique and questioning of NGO's legitimacy is neatly encapsulated by Holloway, writing at the end of the millennium:

While people inside the NGO world still think of themselves as occupying the high moral ground, the reality is now that few people in the South see them like this. The word on the street in the South is that NGOs are charlatans racking up large salaries ... and many air-conditioned offices.
Holloway, 1999 – cited in Pearce (2000: 4)

Many NGOs lack transparent mechanisms for decision-making and have limited methods for enshrining a principle of community participation in their work (Mohan, 2002; Nabacwa, 2010; Banks et al., 2015). This separation from their counter-publics has clear implications in terms of the 'who' of political participation and therefore their ability and suitability to engage with in the public sphere. Such characteristics are not unexpected, however, given both the colonial legacies of hierarchical practices as discussed above, together with the deep political inequalities and a lack of accountability which, some argue, characterise many institutions in the international donor sector also (Bruno-van Vijfeijken, 2019).

Finally, the personal challenges encountered by NGO staff engaged in gender work as they attempt to negotiate their professional and personal lives on a daily basis should not be underestimated. It is not uncommon, for example, for staff to spend the day advising victims of gender-based violence on their legal entitlements and supports only to return home in the evening to an ongoing abusive situation themselves.⁶ In an interview on her work in this area, one prominent NGO Director shared her own challenging situation with me, where, given her standing in society and wish to protect her

children, she did not view divorce as a feasible option despite egregious levels of violence in her home:

Even me, I have suffered from terrible violence, intolerable violence from my husband. The other day I was chatting with [*name removed – male work colleague*]. And he said, but [*name removed – interviewee*], ‘so you are a liar. You speak with other women, you advise other women, but look at what you put up with at home’. I said ‘[*name removed – male work colleague*], put yourself in my place, I am a big person, look my honour ... And look at the children. I need to maintain respectability for my children.

It is also not uncommon for NGO employees to be publicly harassed and castigated for their work. As another interviewee, in a different context, told me:

Often us, the women who work in NGOs, we are treated as difficult women. We are told that we are inciting other women and causing problems. And we are asked ‘why are you inciting our women?’. We are told we are working against our culture.

Overall therefore NGOs in Africa encounter many of the same obstacles that beset NGOs elsewhere. Notwithstanding their heterogeneity, the historical and ongoing influence and control of both states and markets (in the form of international donors) severely hampers and impedes their role in mediating and animating discourse and opinion formation within the public sphere. For some, enmeshed in complex relationships with both states and markets, their role remains restricted to palliative work in the politically acceptable and non-challenging arenas of service and welfare provision. Such practices and activities, while certainly valuable in their own right, can also serve to reinforce rather than challenge and transform exclusionary gendered norms, discourses and practices. For others negotiating the intricate relational terrain of advocacy work, while their efforts have yielded some commendable gains at legislative and policy levels, these have often come at the expense of their work within the wider public sphere – most notably among the counter-publics of their grassroots. This compromised positioning and functioning leaves many NGOs condemned to, implicitly if not explicitly, reinforce traditional norms, discourses and practices. While alleviating particular situations in the short term, their activities are likely to make little difference over the longer term to themselves, their communities or their wider societies. It remains to be seen whether or to what extent growing critiques across broader public spheres (both domestic and international) will signal an end to the dominance of the donor-state-NGO monopoly. As one group of commentators note in response to growing criticism and cynicism within the public sphere, “Central to the future of development NGOs – and development more broadly – is a return to politics in the broadest sense, and a retreat from the idea that transformation is simply the aggregate of technical

interventions” (Banks et al., 2015: 715). Their inability to engage with the public sphere may well prove NGO’s Achilles heel, as the very public sphere they choose to ignore demonstrates its political potency in biting back.

Communication media: Challenges and opportunities within the public sphere

The last few decades have witnessed significant developments across Africa’s media landscape. Restrictions on private radio, television and print publications declined significantly in the early 1990s as state-controlled broadcast and print monopolies ended in most countries. In addition, financial liberalisation brought new opportunities for private actors to launch new radio and television stations, print publications and, later, websites. These changes meant a proliferation of sources and a diversification of voices within the public sphere as the number of outlets exploded. Among these many outlets, radio remains the most widely used communication medium across the continent. Even in rural communities, its penetration is vast, although its dominance is beginning to decline. According to an Afrobarometer survey across 34 countries, 42 per cent of respondents report using radio every day. Television is watched daily by about one in three Africans (35 per cent) while only 7 per cent read newspapers daily. Reliance on the internet and social media is increasing rapidly. Almost one in five Africans say they use the internet (18 per cent) and/or social media (19 per cent) daily, although there is a significant digital divide in this regard (Conroy-Krutz and Sanny, 2019).

Clearly, there are significant opportunities for public sphere engagement afforded by this diverse and rapidly developing mediascape. However, there are a number of constraints also as both state and market move to colonise the sphere. Recent years have seen an increase in state interference, with new government regulations and controls imposed on different media. In this regard, according to a recent report (RSF, 2020), “the situation in 22 of sub-Saharan Africa’s 48 countries is classified as either ‘bad’ or ‘very bad’”. The three methods traditionally used to harass and gag the media – violence, arrests and closures – are nowadays often bolstered by a new, growing range of economic forms of pressure such as simply disrupting the Internet and social media during critical periods and/or requiring producers, including bloggers, to pay fees to register (Conroy-Krutz and Sanny, 2019; RSF, 2020). In addition, the increasing commercialisation of the media more broadly is critiqued as having led to ‘public sphere failure’, homogenising production and content and centralising power (Hackett and Carroll, 2006: 10).

Significant challenges also remain in relation to engendering the public sphere via these diverse communication media. Both print and broadcasting journalism are characterised by imbalances of power in both commercial and state-controlled media, notably in recent years as media ownership conglomerates emerge. Examples include the *Nation Media Group*, *Royal Media Services* and *Standard Group* in Kenya, each of which is owned by a powerful

family. Funded by advertising from both the government and other political elites and functioning as powerful ideological state apparatuses, according to Steeves and Awino (2015: 85) these outlets “have not only consolidated men’s economic and political power, but [they] have sustained and helped reproduce hegemonic ideals and attitudes which are detrimental to the advancement of women in the media”. Numerous studies of media content across the continent demonstrate the under-representation of women both in content and in production (see, for example, research findings from the Global Media Monitoring Project⁷ on women’s representation in news coverage and Gadzekbo, 2011 for a review of gender framing studies from Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and Tanzania).

In this section, we explore the opportunities for and the limitations to challenging such gendered representations and discourses within the public sphere through two of the most popular media – community radio and digital communications media, respectively. As we will see, each is accessed and used by a different demographic – rural and urban communities, respectively. Each suffers from different forms of ‘colonisation’ and/or influence from different sources. And in terms of public sphere access and influence, each is gendered to some degree. That said, each offers significant opportunities for diverse groups and individuals to access, engage with, influence and transform gendered debate and action within the public sphere.

Community radio and the public sphere

While trends are changing,⁸ radio remains the dominant medium of communication throughout Africa. According to figures from the African Media Development Initiative (AMDI, 2006), local commercial radio grew in sub-Saharan Africa by an average of 360 per cent between 2000 and 2006, with community radio growing a striking 1,386 per cent over the same period. Across Africa in general, between 80 per cent and 90 per cent of households are reported to have access to a working radio set (AMDI, 2006). Although more recent statistics on both stations and radio use do not appear to be available, community radio is reported to be well established and widespread in many countries (Olorunnisola et al., 2020; Demuyakor, 2021). Community radio is distinguishable from both state and commercial radio as it is produced by and for the community, independently of state or commercial interests, thereby avoiding the colonisation problems associated with other media (AMARC, 2000; Janowski, 2003). It has a long tradition throughout Africa. Low production and distribution costs coupled with widespread liberalisation of the airwaves have made it the most affordable, pervasive and flexible mass medium available (Gilberds and Myers, 2012: 77). Moreover, because of its low cost and the ability to carry out domestic work while listening to it, radio is widely used by women (Gatua et al., 2010). Women’s community radio stations began emerging in Africa in the 1990s as a result of women’s marginalisation in both mainstream and alternative media. Many

studies have highlighted the success of community radio, particularly in West Africa, as women have become active producers and consumers of this content (see Steeves and Awino, 2012, for some examples). Free from both state interference and from the powerful market interests that characterise other media, community radio therefore appears to offer significant potential to diversify and engender the public sphere.

Yet, commentators and analysts point to one significant threat in this regard – what they term the ‘NGO-isation’ of community radio (Manyozo, 2009). As its popularity has expanded, community radio has received considerable attention from international funders and NGOs. While such outside funding has created a wealth of useful educational programming, ranging from health awareness soap operas, peace-building discussion programmes and farming phone-ins, another consequence of this external support – which many community stations depend on – is that many have become so dependent on sponsorship of programmes by NGOs that their daily schedules contain almost no programmes of their own creation (Gilberds and Myers, 2012: 80–81). Instead of serving as a conduit for local voices and a diversification of the local public sphere therefore, programming and content is increasingly commissioned by local and international NGOs (Steeves and Awino, 2012).

What does this mean for engendering debate within the public sphere and the associated diversification and transformation of public discourse? As we have seen above, with NGOs’ propensity to ‘talk at’ rather than ‘talk with’, to ‘educate’ and instruct rather than to animate or facilitate debate, it tends towards a monopolisation rather than a diversification of the public sphere, as it privileges an information provision function over one that sees and employs the airwaves as a locus of contestation, debate and struggle over wider structural and cultural constructions and understandings of societal discriminations and gendered inequalities. Moreover, given some NGOs’ conservatism, it can serve to reinforce and consolidate dominant gendered discourses, norms and hierarchies. In terms of stations’ sustainability, it also leads to considerable uncertainty for stations reliant on external funding. Gatua et al. (2010) note that although hundreds of community radio licenses have been granted across Africa, few stations have managed to remain on air for long due to funding issues. The one exception to this general trend which they cite is *101.7 Mama FM*, a station established by the Uganda Media Women’s Association and the first women’s community radio in Africa. However, although branding itself a community station, the station is reported to be managed and operated by professional journalists, with considerable state involvement. This is reflected in its content and management which, the authors note, focuses on educational programming for communities as well as broadcast training for female journalists.

More recent empirical studies offer differing analyses of the potential for a diversification and transformation of the public sphere through community radio. Fombad and Jiyane’s (2019) study of two stations in South Africa reveals that, although the stations serve important functions in information

provision, the service provided is gendered and skewed in favour of men. Heywood's (2020) study of a community radio station in Niger, in contrast, includes some examples of the potential for gendered transformations through conscious editorial decisions around gender balance in relation to presenters and guests as well as skills and communicative devices to ensure diversity in inputs and debates. Bello and Wilkinson's (2017) study of four stations in Tanzania also demonstrates the potential for a gendered diversification in public debate and discussion, notably in relation to some traditional practices which previously would not have been discussed on the airwaves. The authors conclude that the community radio stations "are 'forcing' a change in the system" (2017: 36). More broadly, findings in this regard are also mixed. While Demuyakor's (2021) research in Northern Ghana found a link between information diffusion and formal political participation, no broadening of debate is mentioned. In contrast, Olounnisola et al.'s (2020) study of two different stations in South Africa uncovered a broadening of the debate within the public sphere in terms of both language and issues, although the gendered implications of this are not discussed.

In theory, therefore, for reasons of cost, access and local content control, community radio does appear to offer significant potential for a diversification and engendered democratisation of local public spheres. In practice however, the results appear mixed. NGO sponsors and funders need to recognise this potential and allow for diversity in ownership, production and control of local stations. As Gatua et al. (2010: 176), surveying the broad African scene note, "there is an urgent need for a women's community radio in Africa that is entirely owned and operated by women geared to empowering the marginalized rural women by giving them access to communication and information channels". To which I might add, there is perhaps, even more so, an urgent need for diverse community radio owned and operated by a diversity of women and men, committed to facilitating and providing a space for their diverse, pluralist voices, opening up deliberation and debate, thereby democratising and engendering the airwaves and public sphere.

Digital communication media and the public sphere

Another medium which has significantly gained in popularity across Africa in recent years is the digital communication medium. In particular, mobile phone use is soaring, with one source (Pew Research Centre, 2018) reporting a doubling in mobile phone use across the continent in three years (up from 15 per cent in 2014 to 33 per cent in 2017) and citing industry projections which predict a doubling of smartphone adoption rate across the continent by 2025. In tandem with this, recent years have seen a significant increase in internet and social media use. The APi (2016) reports that 40 per cent of consumers now access the internet using their mobile devices, with this as high as 70 per cent in Kenya and Zimbabwe, 67 per cent in Ghana and 65 per cent in Nigeria. This figure is reported to be lower elsewhere however, for

example 25 per cent in Tanzania. Africa is, however, the only region in the world where internet use is increasing (Pew Research Centre, 2018). A recent Afrobarometer report on media use across 34 countries states that almost one in five Africans use the internet (18 per cent) and/or social media (19 per cent) daily (Conroy-Krutz and Sanny, 2019). Again, a note of caution is needed as there is a significant digital divide in this regard. Internet and social media use are significantly higher among younger, male, urban and better-educated populations, and there are also important differences between countries and regions regarding access (Conroy-Krutz and Sanny, 2019).

Against this backdrop, during the last five years, Facebook has grown to become the most widely used social media platform across Africa, with more than 95 million people accessing it, largely (97 per cent) through their mobile phones.⁹ Twitter usage is also on the increase, with frequency of use as intensive as Facebook, despite the lower penetration rates. According to the Pew Research Centre (2018), more than three quarters of sub-Saharan Africans who go online also use social media sites. As with internet use, however, social media use is much more common among younger men, higher earners and those with more education.

This proliferation of digital media, notably the mobile phone, has significant implications for the democratisation of the public sphere. Social media sites accessed through mobile phones are providing new spaces for alternative views and perspectives, broadening public deliberation and debate from mainstream media agendas. There is considerable interest in this growth of such new media platforms as new spaces for political participation. Facilitating the entry of a range of new, diverse voices to the public sphere, proponents argue that digital media open up public discourse and debate, complicating and challenging established norms and political processes (Blumler and Gurevitch, 2000) as well as, envisaged by Habermas, linking deliberation and debate to political action and serving as important tools for mobilisation purposes by different activists (Mutsvauro, 2016; Wasserman, 2016; Srinivasan et al., 2019). More recently, research has illustrated the power of online communities for presenting women's diverse voices, especially those perspectives that are missing from mainstream media (Allan, 2014). Examples such as the use of blogs as a site for political deliberations which challenge the patriarchal status quo in Zimbabwe (Mpofu, 2018); the #MyDressMyChoice campaign which challenged public acts of gender-based violence in Nairobi¹⁰; and the #OccupyPlayGround¹¹ campaign which tackled land grabbing also in Nairobi, all illustrate the democratising potential of digital media.

As with other media, challenges remain, however. The unevenness in digital media penetration and access across the continent has already been highlighted. In addition, as also noted above, state censorship and control of digital media is on the rise in many jurisdictions (Conroy-Krutz and Sanny, 2019; RSF, 2020). A number of other challenges in relation to the potential afforded by digital media for engendering discourse and debate as well as resultant policy and action also exist. These include the dangers of 'clicktivism'

or ‘hashtag activism’ which, reducing complex political and social phenomena to simple, linear narratives of individual cases of fortune and/or misfortune, ignore essential historical and political contexts together with the entanglements between local and global (Srinivasan et al., 2019). While these challenges are significant and digital media, due to ongoing access and representational issues, are certainly not a panacea for a broad-based democratisation of the public sphere, they nonetheless contribute in important ways, notably in affording a platform to citizens who have been heretofore excluded from political debate, in challenging and transforming the dominant, normative biases of public debates and in widening the public sphere beyond the local to national and global levels. These contrasting and competing dynamics are exemplified in case of the #BringBackOurGirls campaign, which is discussed below.

Case: #BringBackOurGirls – opportunities and challenges of the digitalisation of the public sphere

On the night of April 14, 2014, Boko Haram, an insurgency group based in northeastern Nigeria, abducted 276 secondary school girls who were preparing to take their West African senior school certificate exam in the town of Chibok in northeastern Nigeria. Fifty-seven of the girls escaped while 219 remained with Boko Haram where they joined at least 2,000 other women and children who had been kidnapped since the beginning of 2014 (Carter-Olsen, 2016; George, 2018; Pereira, 2018). Although, in the days and weeks that followed, parents of the kidnapped girls repeatedly called on the Nigerian government to respond, no response was forthcoming. While some parents resorted to setting up their own search parties and tried to go after the insurgents and rescue their daughters themselves, they were unsuccessful. By the end of April, in frustration with the official silence surrounding the abduction, two Nigerian women affiliated with the Nigerian NGO, Women for Peace and Justice, began tweeting the phrase ‘BringBackOurGirls’ to draw online attention to what was happening in northeastern Nigeria.¹² Within a week of the first tweets, the phrase had been retweeted one million times, and within two weeks, the issue hit the global mainstream print media (Carter-Olsen, 2016). The hashtag was mentioned more than four million times in 2014 as the message spread from Nigerian activists and citizens across the continent and all over the world. With millions of people demanding that the Nigerian government take action, the #BringBackOurGirls campaign was born (Carter-Olsen, 2016; George, 2018: 312).

This global attention shone a light on the brutal tactics of Boko Haram and, with public anger focused on the President, the Nigerian military finally began to respond, with support from a number of international bodies, including the African Coalition Force, China, Colombia, the United Kingdom and the United States. However, as the search for the girls dragged into months and eventually years, the limitations of social media as a site for

political action became increasingly apparent. A number of additional issues in relation to who was represented, the ways in which this happened and what issues were highlighted within this campaign also highlight challenges in the use of this medium which, when employed in an ahistorical, decontextualised manner, can result in an erosion and, indeed, corrosion of the public sphere.

#BringBackOurGirls: The ‘who’ of the campaign

A more detailed study into the ‘who’ of the campaign reveals a number of additional important actors who were rendered largely invisible by the unidirectional focus of the online campaign. In terms of abductees, although #BringBackOurGirls focused exclusively on the April 2014 abductions, this was not the first time that Boko Haram had launched a mass raid, nor were their targets always ‘girls’. Two months earlier, they had attacked a school, murdered the schoolboys they found there and taken about 50 girls to their hideaways. There had also been other raids besides these featuring attacks on and abductions of girls, boys and adults (male and female). Indeed, according to Pereira (2018), abductions by Boko Haram were taking place daily prior to 2014. Between 2011 and 2014, for instance, Boko Haram abducted 3,000 women and girls from seven local government authorities in Borno State. While such abductions generally took place in less dramatic form than the mass abduction of the Chibok girls, as Pereira (2018: 256) points out, the cumulative human loss was nonetheless greater. To the people of north-eastern Nigeria, Boko Haram has been a well-known threat for quite some time (George, 2018: 311–2; Pereira, 2018: 256). Yet the #BringBackOurGirls campaign focused only on the Chibok abductees.

In addition, although the online campaign narrative of abduction, coercion and conscription of the Chibok ‘girls’ suggests a homogeneity and uniformity of Boko Haram ‘abductees’, considerable diversity actually exists, in terms of identity and in terms of aspirations, among the women who join or are enlisted to the group. As Pereira (2018: 259) has argued, “There are no neat binaries of association with Boko Haram (i.e., voluntary or forced), but rather a spectrum that spans abduction, coercion, pressure, and the desire to belong”. In many instances, young women are more likely to join through the forced rather than the voluntary end of the spectrum. In other instances, however, women have opted to join as the opportunities afforded within appear more enticing than those afforded without. In some instances, women have persuaded their husbands to join also. Research carried out by the Mercy Corps (2016), for example, reveals that incentives for women to join voluntarily include opportunities for higher status accrued through affiliation to and specialised work within Boko Haram; the possibility for a quick, inexpensive wedding with the dowry to be paid directly to the bride rather than to her family; and improved livelihood opportunities and living conditions. Women within Boko Haram have come from different backgrounds

and have had very different experiences. As Khoja-Moolji (2015: 349) asserts, “The category of schoolgirls as a descriptor for the kidnapped girls in Nigeria flattens them and masks the differences in tribal affiliation and socio-economic status, which position some girls at more risk versus others”. For women from more precarious circumstances, security and survival prospects outside Boko Haram are certainly not inviting, notably given their susceptibility to sexual exploitation coupled with the widespread stigma and rejection from their communities that their association with Boko Haram has brought (International Crisis Group, 2016). And so, an important question to be considered in online debate and commentary should have been ‘bring back to where’ or, indeed, ‘to what’.

In terms of activists, although #BringBackOurGirls focused on the online public sphere, notably at an international level, support for the campaign, both within Nigeria and across the African diaspora, often coexisted with offline protest. As Maxfield (2016: 889) notes, “The campaign began in the ‘real’ world and continued there”. Originating at a physical protest in Lagos, activists continued to congregate weekly at Lagos’ Unity Fountain to host their ‘Speak Out Saturdays’. Undeterred by the state’s announcement of a prohibition on public assemblies, they continued to march, to record news interviews, to film documentaries and to speak out in multiple ways across the public sphere (2016: 888–889). The digital media campaign thus contributed to and was bolstered by a range of other communication acts by a range of additional actors within the public sphere. As we will now see, the ways in which the campaign operated also served to impact on the ‘who’, as the framing, messaging and images employed in the global public sphere fuelled increasing disenchantment and criticism within the domestic sphere.

#BringBackOurGirls: The ‘ways’ in which the campaign operated

While the images and messaging of the campaign attracted considerable international attention, both within the media (online and offline) and among political leaders and commentators more broadly, debate and reaction to this framing within the domestic public sphere became increasingly hostile to the unidimensional portrait of vulnerability and victimhood of the abductees, with some Nigerian commentators going so far as to question whether the abductions had ever taken place at all. Commenting on this development, George (2018) highlights how the digital campaign relied on a gendered notion of imperilment that centred the image of youthful female bodies threatened by sexual violence from male aggressors. She argues (2018: 310) that such “girl saving campaigns” or “girl saving projects” in privileging particular forms of sexualised suffering, “tend to reify a model of girlhood that constrains the full complexity and humanity of girls”. Moreover, they fuel a “white saviour complex”, which negates both the diverse identities and situations of the so-called ‘girls’ they seek to save as well as their diverse ambitions, motivations and agency. George (2018) goes on to outline how

the deployment of a strategically edited photo depicting a lonely, sad girl in a window¹³ served to reinforce this complex.

Two further framing mechanisms served to further negate the diverse identities, positionalities and agencies of the different ‘girls’. The first was the use of the possessive. Framing the abductees as ‘our’ girls denied their own independence and agency. Furthermore, it inferred that women’s rights, freedoms and choices are valid only in so far as they relate to campaigners’, commentators’ or activists’ own relational status. Referring to the campaign in a Mother’s Day speech, for example, Michelle Obama¹⁴ noted that “In these girls, Barack and I see our own daughters”. Indeed, a similar discourse was used by some of the campaigners in the protests related to the #MyDressMyChoice campaign mentioned previously where a number of campaigners are reported as stating regarding the victim of the sexual assault “she could be my mother sister or daughter”. Loken (2014: 1100) rightly argues that “this construction of women as worthy of political recognition due to their relationship to a more privileged agent ... risks infantilization and positions women as full political and social actors only through their potential as property”. The second framing mechanism employed related to the global appropriation of the campaign for the ever-popular global ‘education as empowerment’ trope discussed previously. This was achieved through the persistent framing of the abducted girls as ‘schoolgirls’. For example, in a 2014 article entitled ‘Girl Power’, Gordon Brown¹⁵ wrote that “the Chibok girls – kidnapped simply because they wanted an education – have become a powerful symbol of this wider struggle for girls’ rights” (cited in Khoja-Moolji, 2015: 348). As Khoja-Moolji (2015) notes, this is irrespective of the fact that Boko Haram’s grievances have less to do with girls’ education than the legacies of British colonialism in Nigeria together with broader contextual issues (see also Pereira, 2018, for a full historical contextualisation of the Boko Haram insurgency).

#BringBackOurGirls: The ‘what’ of the campaign

While the campaign was narrowly focused on the plight of the 219 abductees of April 2014, this was all played out in a wider context which the online campaign largely failed to address. I have already noted that the April 14 abductions were just one of many ongoing raids and attacks – of women and men – taking place both before and after this event. While #BringBackOurGirls focused on gender-based violence as perpetrated by Boko Haram, incidences of gender-based violence are by no means restricted to Boko Haram and/or other insurgent groups. Rather, they constitute an all-too-common feature of everyday life across many sectors of life in Nigeria, a significant militarised country which is marked by a range of conflicts (Pereira, 2018: 247). As the legacies and ongoing experiences of conflict and military rule in other countries such as Sierra Leone, Liberia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) demonstrate, an all-too-common associated pattern is the prevalence of widespread gender-based violence not only in the communities

most directly affected by conflicts, but across societies more broadly. Women and girls in camps and informal settlements in Nigeria as well as in host communities face sexual violence while collecting firewood, fetching water and using toilets and showers. Members of the Nigerian military, community self-help militias and community members have raped women and girls and engaged in other forms of sexual violence. Elsewhere, government agents have also carried out abductions of women. Since 2011, armed soldiers and police officers have preyed upon women found on the streets of Abuja, dragging them onto buses and sexually assaulting them (Pereira, 2018: 257–258). It is against this context of widespread, pervasive gender-based violence that the actions of Boko Haram needed to be considered. Yet, this wider context did not feature in the online campaign. In contrast, it did feature in debates regarding the campaign across the domestic public sphere and was one of the reasons for growing domestic opposition to the global campaign. Similarly, the historical and ongoing sociopolitical grievances which led to the Boko Haram insurgency rarely featured in the online campaign either.

#BringBackOurGirls: The lessons

So where does this rather bleak appraisal of the merits of the *#BringBackOurGirls* campaign in particular and digital communication media as a space for engendered democratisation of the public sphere more broadly leave us? What lessons can we take from this? Two key issues merit reflection. First, we clearly need to think more deeply about the kinds of publics that are created in and through digital campaigns, most notably ‘hashtagging’ campaigns and their consequences for thought, debate and action. In this regard, the insights of Khoja-Moolji (2015) are particularly instructive. She argues that if we turn our focus to a different unit of analysis than the individual, we then observe the emergence of a public that engages with epistemic violence against women and girls rather than in relation to individual instances. Through this broader contextual focus within social media, we can then begin to build and consolidate publics focused on the relational and structural conditions that give rise to the personal situations and circumstances that often dominate the digital sphere. Second, there are important lessons here for debate and action within the globalised digital sphere. The *#BringBackOurGirls* campaign highlights dangers associated with transnational deliberation and activism, particularly when it becomes hijacked by powerful global agendas and interests. This is a preoccupation for Maxfield (2016: 896–897) who while asking “Is there a place for transnational feminism, for working across national borders” responds that yes there is. Drawing on the inspirational work of both bell hooks and Mohanty who call for “political rather than biological or cultural bases for alliance” (Mohanty, 1991: 4, cited in Maxfield, 2016: 897), Maxfield (2016: 897) argues that in a campaign such as *#BringBackOurGirls*, the role of commentators and activists within the global public sphere “may rest as much on dismantling the White Saviour industrial complex and

the misrepresentation of women in the Global South as on amplifying the voices of those women”. This requires a deeper engagement with history and context; a more informed and nuanced understanding the complex entanglements and relations of the local with the global; and an honest and open exploration and exposition of the unequal gendered relations of power that produce violence against women and girls in the first place.

Conclusion: Engendering political participation within the public sphere

Returning to the politically significant idea of the public sphere which we first encountered in Chapter 3 and taking on board the concerns of the different difference democrats in this context, in this chapter I have endeavoured to explore both the opportunities and the challenges encountered by NGOs and the media in mediating and animating political debate and action within multiple public spheres. While both sectors have been characterised as key actors within the public sphere, ideally placed to mediate and animate public discourse, debate, opinion formation and activism, channelling this into elite political deliberation and decision-making, institutions within each have been subject to ‘colonisation’ by powerful interests within states and markets (and/or a constellation of these, including powerful global actors). As we have seen, such colonisation can result in a narrowing, dilution and erosion of the power and potential of civic institutions as animators of their public spheres. In particular, the global embeddedness of domestic institutions and platforms while, on the one hand, affording greater scope, access, influence and voice to domestic actors, on the other, risks stifling the parameters of debate leading to, as we have seen in the case of the #BringBackOurGirls campaign, a hollowed out, and, at times, corrosive public sphere which negates human diversity and agency and leaves the underlying conditions of gendered inequalities and discriminations unchallenged.

The public sphere remains, nonetheless, a site of significant opportunity and promise. As we have also seen from the literature and cases discussed, NGOs and media platforms have also played important roles in challenging and transforming narrow, damaging and at times corrosive gendered discourses, opening the space for broader deliberation, understanding and action. Key factors in this regard include a more thoughtful and inclusive engagement with the who, how and what of public sphere engagement. In relation to the ‘who’, a shift in approaches to and relations with the wider public is key. There needs to be a move from regarding the public as passive consumers to thinkers and political actors in their own right. And balance and diversity need to be achieved in this regard, both in terms of gender but also across the many other intersectional stratifications that characterise the contemporary public sphere.

This broadening of the ‘who’ has important implications for the how or the ‘ways ‘in which engagement in the public sphere should take place to

optimise its political potential. Communicative norms and methods need to move from talking ‘at’ to talking ‘with’ the broader public as well as providing a platform for the public to talk with and among itself. This means shifting understandings and use of the public sphere as a platform for information provision alone to a platform for a sharing and an expansion of views and understandings in different areas. The framing of gendered inequalities is critical here. Discussion and debate need to move from individualised stories of victimhood and/or personal adversity to engage with the broader norms, discourses, practices and structures which form the backdrop to these individual experiences. Moreover, gendered framings need to move beyond the tired old tropes of Western, modernist superiority in the face of African, traditional inferiority. These only serve to fuel the persistent ‘white saviour complex’ which does little to expand understanding of and engagement with the complex relations of power which produce and reproduce gendered inequalities. Such broader framings, which engage more deeply and critically with history and context, in both local and global terms, will result in a broadening of the parameters of the ‘what’ of public debate, the specific issues and outcomes under discussion, opening the space for a more informed and honest consideration of the unequal gendered relations of power that produce such issues and outcomes.

Notes

- 1 For a comprehensive overview of these different theories and influences over the centuries, see Cohen (1994). For an insightful analysis of the process of revisionism which has taken place in recent decades in relation to civil society in Africa, see Comaroff and Comaroff (1999).
- 2 Habermas defined it as follows: “By ‘the public sphere’ we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens” (1962/1989: 198).
- 3 I should note that Habermas took on board some of these criticisms in his later work. As he noted in 1992, (Habermas, 1992: 466), “An analysis of the exclusionary aspects of established public spheres is particularly revealing... gender, ethnicity, class, popular culture”. Nonetheless, he still retained his adherence to his communicative norms of procedural rationality and a drive for consensus.
- 4 Although some NGOs do engage in advocacy work, their legitimacy in this regard has been questioned due to their weak links to their ‘constituents’ or grassroots (Pearce, 2000; Banks et al., 2015).
- 5 Campaigns such as the United Nations’ International Day of the Girl Child; UNICEF’s #investingirls campaign; the UK’s Girls’ Education Challenge (GEC) (DfID, 2018); and the World Bank’s high profile five-year \$2.5 billion initiative for girl’s education (World Bank, 2016) all exemplify this. See also Girl Effect (Nike and UN Foundation) and Because I am a Girl (Plan International), together with the high prominence given to girls’ education in both the MDGs and SDGs.
- 6 Interviews with NGO leaders in Kinshasa, DRC (January 2013); Kigali, Rwanda (February 2013); Ituri, DRC (August 2014); and Lilongwe (August 2016).
- 7 Reports are available at <http://whomakesthenews.org/gmmp/gmmp-reports/gmmp-2015-reports> (last accessed November 26, 2020).

- 8 The boom in mobile phone use is one of the main changes in this regard.
- 9 <https://www.facebook.com/business/news/insights/journeys-of-connectivity-how-people-in-sub-saharan-africa-come-online> (last accessed December 8, 2020).
- 10 For details on this campaign, see <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-30429963>; <https://blogs.worldbank.org/developmenttalk/mydressmychoice-tackling-gender-discrimination-and-violence-kenya-one-tweet-time>; <https://www.itdp.org/2018/05/02/st-mag-mydressmychoice/>; <https://www.facebook.com/kilimanimumspage/>; <https://africasacountry.com/2014/11/mydressmychoice> (all accessed November 16, 2020).
- 11 For details on this campaign, see <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/poverty-matters/2015/jan/20/occupyplayground-police-used-teargas-on-our-children-but-for-now-we-celebrate-the-win>; <https://www.capitalfm.co.ke/news/2016/01/occupyplayground-one-year-later-and-the-issues-of-titles/> (both accessed November 16, 2020).
- 12 The two women were Oby Ezekwesili and Hadiza Bala Usman. Both demonstrate the porosity between civil society and state as discussed earlier. Oby Ezekwesili is a co-founder of Transparency International, a former federal Minister (2005–2007) and former World Bank Vice-President of the Africa region (2007–2012). In March 2019, she was awarded the Forbes Woman Africa Social Influencer Award for her work on the #BringBackOurGirls campaign. Hadiza Bala Usman has worked for the state Bureau of Public Enterprises (2000–2004), the UNDP (2004–2008), the Nigerian NGO Good Governance Group (2011–2015) and as Chief of Staff to the Governor of Kaduna State (2015–2016). She currently works as Managing Director for the Nigerian Ports Authority, following her appointment by the President.
- 13 The photo that was used had actually been taken three years earlier in Guinea Bissau. The original version was a full colour portrait of a girl accompanied by a number of other people. The edited campaign version is in stark black and white. Highlighting the individual woman and adding a teardrop under her left eye, it downplays the presence of anyone else in the photo by hiding them in the shadows (see George, 2018: 312–313, for further detail on this strategic editing).
- 14 US attorney and wife of former President of the United States, Barack Obama.
- 15 Former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom.

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7 Community associations, adaptive chieftaincies and the public sphere

Local politics of capture, compliance and contestation

Continuing with a civil society focus but moving to a more micro-scale, in this chapter I explore how, interacting with both traditional political authorities and broader forces, women have collectively responded across time, place and scale to a range of gendered injustices, discriminations and inequalities at local levels. While civic associationalism in general and women's associations in particular have long been an integral part of African social life, contemporary literature in this area tends to focus on their role as delivery mechanisms for local development or as self-help groups rather than as political actors in their own right (see, for example, Lewis, 2001; Gugerty, 2007; Brody et al., 2017; Kumar et al., 2019; Patnaik, 2021). A smaller body of literature does consider their political potential. However, its focus is on local groups as pathways to formal politics (see, for example, Tadros, 2014; Cornwall and Goetz, 2005). While both these bodies of literature provide important insights, my focus here is a little different. My focus is on community associations as sites of political participation themselves, and my aim is to explore the factors which both support and inhibit such participation.

I argue that, while community associations can serve as important sites where critical skills in deliberation, bargaining, networking and alliance-building can be developed and honed and where gendered identities and discourses can be challenged and transformed, they can also serve as sites of exclusion and discrimination, serving members' interests alone and reinforcing existing inequalities and divisions. This can happen where they become captured by and compliant to specific discourses and exigencies of traditional authorities and/or local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and their donors. I develop my argument as follows. I begin with a brief discussion of associational life as a political space in its own right. Highlighting factors which can both promote and/or inhibit its democratic functioning, I go on to situate these in a historic context, from precolonial to contemporary times. In the following section, I explore the rise and fall and (contested) rise again of traditional authorities/chieftaincies as important gatekeepers within local political and developmental spheres. I trace how, having largely fallen from grace during the colonial period, chiefs and customary authorities today form an essential part of the hybridised fabric of local polities, and I draw

attention to the implications of these ‘adaptive chieftaincies’ for gendered transformations. I conclude the chapter with a case study of the political activism of a community association in Ituri, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Exemplifying the interaction of global and local forces on local women’s circumstances and political action, the Ituri case provides some useful lessons on how political participation may be engendered within local polities.

Associational life as a political space: The potential and the pitfalls

It is sometimes asserted that community or social mobilisation in a transformative, political sense in Africa is weak because existing individual patronage networks prove more effective and therefore attractive to individuals and families (deWaal and Ibreck, 2013). In other words, given the choice between either investing in a community association as a means to access resources and justice or negotiating through personal contacts and patrons, individuals will opt for the latter. Commentators highlight the persistence of patronage politics and the neo-patrimonial state in this context (Hyden, 2006; Cammack, 2007). However, such a view is both gendered (in that it ignores the fact that ‘big man’ patronage politics tends to favour the wealthy and well-connected – largely male – elite) and overly materialist. It also ignores the rich history and tapestry of civic associationalism that has long existed and which continues to flourish in villages, towns and cities today. Such diverse associational forms have been crucial at times in forming public spheres and influencing political action. Today, civic associations take a wide range of forms, from self-help groups in areas such as agriculture, trade, savings and loans and funeral support; to community development associations involved in the dispersal of funds and/or resource management; to more political groups such as village or neighbourhood associations. Although a distinction is sometimes drawn between these in the literature (see, for example, Gugerty et al., 2019), the reality for most associations is much more amorphous, with groups often carrying out a wide range of functions which overlap across different categories and which confer a range of benefits on both their members and on their wider communities.

Despite this diversity, much of the literature, notably in relation to women’s associations, focuses on self-help groups. This undoubtedly reflects NGO and donor interest in these groups as vehicles of local development and women’s ‘economic empowerment’. Although studies on the impacts of these groups largely reflect this individualised focus (on members themselves rather than their wider communities and public spheres), their findings are nonetheless useful when considering the democratic potential of such groups as they often point to impacts and benefits that extend well beyond the immediate economic sphere. In a systematic review of 34 evaluation studies, Brody et al. (2017) found that women’s economic self-help groups have positive effects on

women's power in the community and household. Brody et al. (2017) also found a correlation between participation in self-help groups and the size and scope of members' wider social networks (see also Davis and Negash (2007) for similar findings in Kenya). A number of studies report that association membership supports wider participation in other civic and political institutions (Deininger and Liu, 2009; Kumar et al., 2019) as well as leading to a more powerful influence in the public sphere (Tesoriero, 2006; Deininger and Liu, 2009; Patnaik, 2021).

Members of local women's economic associations in Mozambique, Ghana, Burkina Faso and Mali all note the benefits of working together and sharing experiences that extend well beyond the economic realm also (Oberhauser and Pratt, 2004; Fallon, 2004; and Johnson, 2021, respectively). As one of Johnson's research participants, H el ene, a soumbala seasoning paste maker and seller in Burkina, notes "In associations, women learn to take their place in society and to feel a sense of value. Associations are really good" (cited in Johnson, 2021: 30–111516). Similar findings are reported among migrants working in the perilous informal sector in cities (Lindell and Utas, 2012). As the authors of an edited volume on this topic assert (2012: 410), "For marginalized groups, participation in networks and associations may also constitute channels for the creation and assertion of social identities and for attaining a sense of respect and dignity". Taken together, the findings from the literature suggest that membership of local associations can confer a wide range of benefits, ranging from a stronger sense of dignity and identity, increased confidence and articulateness, involvement in wider networks and increased power, status and engagement within the public sphere. These can combine to promote more active engagement both within associations and across broader networks, thereby enhancing associations' democratic functioning.

Coming at this question from a rather different position, Cornwall and Goetz (2005) discuss the potential for community associations (and other civic spaces) to act as sites of political apprenticeship in pathways to formal politics. While their focus is somewhat different to our focus here, they usefully draw attention to a number of factors that can inhibit the democratic functioning of associations. These include the styles of leadership of community associations and the lack of democratic procedures for accountability and decision-making (2005: 791). In these contexts, community associations can stifle rather than promote inclusive engagement, serving as a vehicle for particular leaders' or members' interests rather than any wider public good. This problem of incomplete representation and self-serving behaviour is, of course, common to all interest group politics. Moreover, well-resourced groups coalescing around specific issues are generally more powerful and therefore more successful in attaining their interests than more marginalised groups with broader concerns. This draws attention to possible links between associational and patronage politics and highlights, therefore, potential limitations in NGO and/or donor support to such groups. An allied concern in this regard is that association members may withdraw from the wider community

they purport to represent, seeking to control their members through their wider networks or any services that they may provide. Far from meditating and representing constituents' interests as advocated by the difference democrats, associations may become institutions of domination and control. A final issue is the possibility that traditional subordinated female identities may be reinforced within certain associations, thereby affording women little scope to develop their political agency.

Drawing lessons from the literature overall, it becomes clear that community associations can serve as important sites of local democracy, providing safe spaces where members can build their confidence, develop their identities and sense of self-worth, hone their skills in deliberation, bargaining and networking and enhance their power and agency within their local public sphere. Yet they equally can inhibit local democracy as specific members engage in self-serving behaviours, reinforce subordinated identities and seek to dominate and control their members and wider constituencies. As we will now see, these different dynamics have played out in different contexts over time across the continent.

Associations and democracy: Historical legacies

Civic associationalism in general and women's associations in particular enjoy a long and rich history across Africa. In the precolonial period, women are reported to have had their own public spheres of deliberation, bargaining and decision-making across many jurisdictions. For example, Coquery-Vidrovitch (1994: 162) talks of a 'remarkable cohesion' between local women in West Africa who formed associations based on both kinship and trading relationships; Creevey (2004) provides accounts of village women's associations in Senegal (the *ton*) which paralleled the associations of village men; and Udvardy (1998) provides an overview of a number of women's associations among the *Gikuyu* and *Giriama* in Kenya and the *Barabiag* in Tanzania. Tripp et al. (2009), focusing on Cameroon, Mozambique and Uganda, describe the gradual expansion in women's associations' roles from those more circumscribed around family and reproduction to broader areas, including credit associations, farming groups and mutual assistance associations. As well as their economic functions, these associations operated to preserve the relatively high social and legal status of women within their communities, operating separate to rather than with male groups. While preserving women's standing and autonomy within their societies, it is unclear how inclusive or representative they were or to what degree they served as vehicles for diverse interests or as vehicles of control. In Kenya, for example, Udvardy notes that local women's assemblies had exclusive and collective influence over domestic affairs (including incidences of gender-based violence); agricultural matters such as food crop selection; the use (although not the ownership) of land; and the discipline and regulation of the social life of girls and women (1998: 1755). Such pre-colonial groups demonstrate a strong history of women's power

and activism in their local polities therefore, although questions remain with regard to their broader representative and transformative capacities.

Moving forward in time, a number of historic accounts detail the enthusiasm with which colonial powers sought to impose a European moral order based on a strictly gendered public/private division, in which women were relegated to the private domestic sphere where they were to be controlled and protected by men (Staudt, 1986; Udvardy, 1998; Berger, 2016). This new public/private distinction assumed male dominance in the public sphere with the attendant consequence of a muting of women's participation in all aspects of public life. This was coupled with increasingly heavy workloads in the private, domestic sphere. Such developments did not go completely uncontested, however. A more militant political dimension to women's organising is apparent in accounts of collective efforts to resist colonial taxes and price controls and to contest local chiefs' capitulations to colonial demands (see, for example, Coquery-Vidrovitch's (1994) accounts of the *Lagos Market Women's Association*, the *Abeokuta Ladies Club* and accounts of various market women's activism in Lomé (Togo), Accra (Ghana) and Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire) (1994: 165–182)). These specific examples notwithstanding, women's associations and roles within the public sphere appear to have been severely eroded during the colonial period. This has left an indelible mark on contemporary social life where, as discussed in Chapter 2, women's active participation within the public sphere remains often controversial and contested.

Associations and democracy today: The enemy of 'empowerment'

Women's informal associations and networks flourish across villages, towns and cities throughout the continent today. However, while critical in assisting and supporting women in negotiating and surviving the everyday challenges wrought by the rising inequalities and marginalisation explored in Chapter 2, their broader democratic, transformatory potential is arguably weakened for two main reasons. First, as noted above, historical legacies persist in many jurisdictions and many women, both individually and within their associations, remain marginalised in public life. And second, such marginalisation tends to be reinforced through associations' links with supporting NGOs and donors who, as we have seen, limit their scope and function by largely supporting them as economic self-help groups. The focus therefore becomes on individual empowerment outcomes rather than more transformative democratic outcomes. The focus is on members themselves rather than outcomes in relation to the broader polities and public spheres which act to promote or inhibit members' choices. I have discussed the dangers of this individualised *verbalisation* of empowerment and its attendant implications for democracy at some length in Chapter 3, so I will not re-rehearse these arguments here. Suffice to note that as both the difference democrats and the relevant literatures have highlighted and, as also highlighted in the case of the women's association in Ituri discussed below, finding and using one's

voice is a critical first step in engendering democracy. Yet it is just a first step. Building networks and alliances and challenging and contesting subordinating, discriminatory discourses, practices and policies are further critical steps. Yet, wider relations, most notably those with NGOs and donors focused on 'empowering' individuals within associations rather than supporting these further steps, can subdue and dissipate such political agency. As members are encouraged to be 'resilient' – to adapt, innovate and 'empower' themselves – their 'capacity' is built to survive within the extant political order rather than to seek to engender and transform it. Such supports may be good for individual members' survival in the short term, but they can prove an enemy to democracy over the longer term.

In this regard, associations can be as marginalising and exclusionary as the forces and powers they purport to address. Depending on who is involved, how they are involved and how power operates both within and around the groups, they can consolidate and perpetuate gendered inequalities for both members themselves and communities more broadly. But they can also act to challenge and transform these inequalities. Creating spaces for deliberation, voice and action both among members and among communities more broadly, they can serve as important incubators for political activism and engendered democracy. And as we will see in the case study which follows, these conflicting and competing dynamics can often co-exist. Before turning to this case, however, we need to give some more consideration to the broader relational context for associational agency. Community associations do not exist in a political vacuum. They necessarily interact with local political institutions and actors. Arguably, one of the most significant institutions in this regard, in terms of access, agency and local power, is that of local traditional authority, to which we now turn.

Traditional chieftaincies and their adaptive political authority

Traditional chieftaincies are one of the earliest political institutions in Africa. In the precolonial period, traditional chiefs and their elders served simultaneously as executive heads, legislators, law enforcers and judges. One of their most valued functions was in the area of dispute resolution. All local disputes were brought before the chief and his elders for deliberation and resolution. Chiefs and their elders also served a central function in local development (Southall, 1956; Young, 1994; Welsh, 1996). In most cases, chiefs inherited their position from family members or were appointed by higher-level chiefs. Differences existed in this regard between patrilineal and matrilineal traditions. In the case of the former, the office passed through the father's bloodline, whereas in the latter, it passed through the mother's (Baldwin, 2016: 23).

The literature on the existence of women chiefs in this precolonial period is somewhat conflictual. Many accounts omit any reference to female chiefs in this period. Baldwin (2016: 6, ft. 9), writing primarily in relation to East

and Southern Africa, notes that women were generally excluded from chieftaincy positions, while Coquery-Vidrovitch (1994: 34–36) observes a strong tradition of women chiefs in West Africa, noting that “Women chiefs were fewer than men but not uncommon before colonisation, which was in fact hostile to them” (1994: 35).

Despite the lack of formal checks on their powers (chiefs generally ruled for life, although there are exceptions), many commentators note the requirement for chiefs to consult with their subjects for their opinion before decisions were taken on any major matter. According to one source (Baldwin, 2016: 25), “in practice more than 70 per cent of societies had leaders who were consultative, and 90 per cent had leaders with significant de facto checks on their power”, although the processes through which such consultations took place together with their levels of inclusivity were inevitably very diverse. This diversity notwithstanding, much of the literature points to a democratic approach to governance between precolonial chiefs and their local communities despite their enormous power.

Colonial manipulation: Mamdani’s ‘bifurcated state’

The significant changes to the institution of the chieftaincy brought about by colonialism have been well documented. Possibly one of the most comprehensive analyses of this is provided by Mamdani in his influential *Citizen and Subject* (Mamdani, 1996). Focusing in particular on the impacts of British colonial rule within Uganda and South Africa, his central thesis is that the ‘native question’ constituted the principal challenge for colonisers and that this was addressed through a dual system of direct rule (over ‘citizens’ in towns and cities) and indirect rule (over rural ‘subjects’). Indirect rule was achieved by the colonial administrators, either selecting a number of chiefs already in place or, where they were not, appointing new ones to govern on their behalf. This dual system formed what Mamdani termed the ‘bifurcated state’ – a modern state superimposed upon a traditional state and presided over by local chiefs. These developments significantly altered both the makeup and the democratic functioning of chieftaincies in a number of ways.

First, as agents of the colonial authorities seeking to implement ‘colonialism on the cheap’, chiefs were granted significant new powers of taxation and legislation. On behalf of the colonial authority, they were allowed to collect various fees or taxes, a portion of which they retained themselves. They were also allowed to create new by-laws and dispense justice through the imposition of new fines as well as mobilising local labour in service to the colonial authority. Second, as appointees of the colonial state, they were no longer accountable to their populace, but instead were accountable upward to colonial authorities. And third, following the edicts of their colonial patrons, many actively supported the colonial public/private divide and moved to actively suppress women’s voice and agency within the public sphere together with their economic autonomy. Female chieftaincies, where

they had existed, were abolished. These developments led to widespread abuse of power at local levels and an overall system of what Mamdani refers to as ‘decentralised despotism’ which, patriarchal and authoritarian, “presumed a king at the centre of every polity, a chief on every piece of administrative ground, and a patriarch in every homestead or kraal” (1996: 39).¹ Unsurprisingly, chiefs suffered a significant loss of legitimacy locally as a result (see, for example, Mamdani, 1996, on British East and Southern Africa; Palagashvili, 2018, on British West Africa; and Young, 1994, and Welsh, 1996, more broadly).

However, it was not just British colonial rulers who elevated existing and/or invented new chiefs. As Geschiere (1993: 151) notes:

to all colonial rulers, the French and the Germans as well as the British, it soon became a matter of policy to rule the new subjects through indigenous chiefs. In societies where such chiefs were hard to find, the French were as quick as the British to create new ‘chefs coutumiers’.

In Portuguese West Africa, indirect rule was also widely practiced. Chiefs were appointed from among African auxiliaries who had fought on the Portuguese side during its military conquest of its territories. The role of these appointees was similar to that elsewhere – tax collection, mobilisation of ‘native labour’ and the maintenance of law and order through subordination and control (Havik, 2010).

Postcolonial rebirth: The fall and rise of adaptive chieftaincies

Although nationalist leaders, enthused with ideals of political equality and democracy and viewing chiefs as hated anti-democratic despotic relics of the colonial past, moved quickly to abolish chieftaincies at independence,² with little or no state presence in many jurisdictions, many chiefs, albeit with officially curtailed powers, remained in place. When the wave of democratisation and decentralisation hit in the 1990s, political authorities and donors alike discovered that rural populations often had more contact with unelected traditional rulers than they did with their elected representatives. Moreover, despite the damage done in the colonial era, local level chiefs appeared to continue to wield significant power.³ Across much of Africa, traditional leaders were allocating land, mobilising local labour, overseeing development projects and running local courts and dispute resolution systems. Moreover, successive Afrobarometer surveys have identified an “intensity of the support for traditional authority ... presenting a stark challenge to those who still argue that traditional leadership is an unabashedly negative and decidedly undemocratic force in Africa” (Logan, 2013: 354). Survey findings report that contemporary traditional leaders continue to play an essential role in local governance, in managing and resolving conflict and in representing community identity and unity, with these views consistent between men and women

and across age categories, with less support for traditional leaders only evident among more educated respondents (Logan, 2013: 365; see also Ooman, 2005, Chapter 5 and Hassim, 2014: 99, on the high levels of support for traditional authorities in South Africa). In the case of Malawi, where chiefs are reported to play important gatekeeping functions across all areas of local development, Eggen (2011: 321) reports that “the popular legitimacy of chiefs seems as strong under liberal democracy as under previous political systems”.

Consequently, despite their rhetoric and actions to abolish the institution at the dawn of independence, throughout the 1990s many African leaders moved to consolidate and support traditional authorities, passing laws and policies which officially recognised and legitimised their role. Traditional chiefs were officially restored in Ghana in 1992 (Samuel and Halidu, 2018), in Uganda in 1993 (Englebert, 2002), in Malawi in 1994 (Eggen, 2011), in Zambia in 1996 (Baldwin, 2016: 90), in Mozambique in 2000 (Buur and Kyed, 2006), in South Africa in 2003 (Oomen, 2005) and in the DRC in 2006 (Gaynor, 2016b).⁴ While not officially restored in other jurisdictions, they nonetheless often operate with *de facto* recognition.

While it might be tempting to interpret these developments as a reaction to the failure of modernity and an attendant somewhat romanticised return to the traditional structures and relations of the past, a number of differences between these more contemporary traditional leadership institutions and their historical counterparts should be noted. First, rather than sitting side by side with official local state structures, there is now often a porosity between both, with citizens often not making any distinction between them. This is ably exemplified by Eggen (2011: 315) in Malawi, who explains how the dual character of Mamdani’s ‘bifurcated state’ persisted after independence and into the 1990s to the extent that today, “the bifurcated state is now relevant to most people – sometimes as a matter of choice, sometimes not, but generally as a cause of ambiguity. Individuals are simultaneously citizens and subjects” with little distinction made between traditional and modern leaders. The same situation has been described in Southern Africa (Nyamnjoh, 2003), in Burundi (Gaynor, 2014a), in the DRC (Gaynor, 2016b) and in Ghana (Samuel and Halidu, 2018). In some of these cases, no distinction between traditional and modern is made by citizens as no distinction actually exists, with traditional authorities occupying posts in official local administrations and/or successfully posing their candidature in local elections. More broadly, Afrobarometer research indicates that:

Africans who live under these dual systems of authority do not draw as sharp a distinction between hereditary chiefs and elected local government officials as most analysts would expect. [*There is*] an understanding of chiefs and elected officials as common players in a single, integrated political system, rather than as opponents in a sharply bifurcated one.

(Logan, 2009: 101)

Second, this porosity results in relations of both cooperation and contention between traditional and modern structures. The apparent U-turn in elite support for traditional authorities in the 1990s was not just instrumental. It also reflected a view that there were important political gains to be made from alliances with powerful local political elites. Cooperation and collaboration are important in the bid to secure and consolidate political capital. This necessarily strengthens the power of traditional leaders vis-à-vis modern elites, although it can also lead to contestation and conflict over sectoral jurisdictions and power as Manatsha's (2020) account of land conflict in Botswana illustrates.⁵

Overall, therefore, viewed as part of the modern local political sphere by many, Mamdani's (1996) traditional/modern, citizen/subject, state/society dichotomies appear not so pronounced today as his analysis some 25 years ago indicated. Chiefs are neither trapped in tradition nor helplessly co-optable by particular segments of states and/or civil society. Their chieftaincy is a dynamic institution, constantly adapting and reinventing itself to accommodate and to be accommodated by new exigencies and demands. Above all, requiring the support of local communities and constituents, it must respond to their growing claims for recognition and representation.

Implications of adaptive chieftaincies for gendered transformations

These 'adaptive chieftaincies', as I term them, have a number of implications for gendered transformations in local politics and development. First, although female chieftaincies, where they existed, were largely abolished in the colonial period, in some jurisdictions this appears to be changing. In a footnote, Eggen (2011: 319, fn. 47) notes that female chiefs are common in Malawi. He cites a 2008 National Statistics Office survey which reports that 12 per cent of households are located in villages that have female chiefs. During the course of my own research in both Malawi (Gaynor, 2010; Gaynor and Cronin, 2019) and the DRC (2015, 2016b, 2016c), I have met with and interviewed a number of female chiefs in both urban and rural settings. Bauer (2016) also reports that in Botswana, women are starting to access chieftaincy positions following the increased presence of women in national legislatures and executives. Of course, as with national legislatures, women's presence in local traditional institutions may not necessarily translate into gendered outcomes and decisions. Given the strongly patriarchal nature of such institutions, woman may well be relegated to the 'tea-making brigade' as Cornwall and Goetz (2005: 796) have termed it, or as in the case of Ituri discussed below, the 'food preparation brigade'. However, it is indicative of changes afoot within adaptive traditional polities and there does appear to be scope to engender these adaptations more deeply.

Second, as I argued in Chapter 5 in relation to modern decentralised entities, many of the issues that fall under the remit of local authorities (contested

or not) are often those of most relevance to local women and men's everyday lives. Moreover, as noted above, local traditional authorities are often the only local governance and/or judicial structure more marginalised communities have access to. There is good and bad in this. On the one hand, it is likely that, given their proximity to their constituents and their need to secure and sustain some level of legitimacy, traditional authorities have some incentive to deliver on their developmental and judicial mandates. In a comprehensive book on this topic, Baldwin (2016) argues that as chiefs tend to rule for life, they therefore have an interest in seeing to it that some developmental progress is made. Her central thesis is that chiefs are "not primarily vote brokers but 'development brokers', facilitating the delivery of development projects" (Baldwin, 2016: 10). While lacking an explicit gendered analysis, her thesis nonetheless hints at possible opportunities for broader gendered transformations, notably in the context of adaptive, dynamic local institutions. On the other hand, any optimism in this area should be tempered with a reminder that traditional institutions, however adaptive, remain primarily patriarchal and not necessarily responsive or accountable to all. This is borne out empirically through my own gender-disaggregated research on access to local structures in Bas-Congo province in the DRC. This revealed a gender bias in relation to consultations with traditional authorities in the key areas of local dispute resolution and problems with services together with a more general public reluctance to engage with local authorities due to the 'costs'⁶ involved (Gaynor, 2015). An allied consideration is the argument that in cases of 'segmentary states'⁷ such as in Northern Ghana, Sierra Leone and present-day Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, chiefs' legitimacy may stem less from their ability to deliver local development than from their control and capture of local subjects (see Jackson, 2005, and Acemoglu et al., 2014, on the case of Sierra Leone). Traditional chieftaincies may well, therefore, be good for development (for some), but they are not necessarily good for democracy – most notably in contexts where control over land and wealth trumps the need for responsiveness and accountability.

For good or for ill, however, it is important to recognise that chieftaincies and institutions of traditional authority form an essential component of the complex fabric of contemporary local political life. To come to this point, many have travelled a distance from the 'decentralised despots' of Mamdani's colonial era. Chiefs' and traditional authorities' legitimacy, in the current adaptive political context, should be understood not as a fixed quality, but as a conflict-ridden and open process in which different local power holders vie for support among and within their communities. Their willingness and ability to be responsive and accountable to these communities and to local associations and collectives within them is a function of the relative power and influence each holds over the other. These dynamic and ever-changing relations are exemplified in the case of Ituri's associational agency discussed below.

Case: *Noyeau Pacifique des Mamans*⁸ – between self-help and engendered political participation

Taking its name from the river which flows through it, Ituri is a richly endowed province in North-Eastern Congo with a population of over four million. It has been the site of some of the bloodiest fighting and gravest atrocities in Eastern Congo since conflict first erupted there in 1999. Over a four-year period alone, between 1999 and 2003, tens of thousands of civilians were attacked and killed and hundreds of thousands displaced in waves of massacres and militia attacks (HRW, 2003). Following a period of relative stability, in the mid-2010s, violence again broke out in December 2017 and has continued since. From December 2017 to September 2019, over 700 people were killed and at least 142 people subjected to acts of sexual violence in the province's territories of Djugu and Mahagi (HRW, 2020; UN, 2020a). With tension and violence escalating, in May 2021 a 'state of siege' was announced by the Congolese President in both Ituri and neighbouring North Kivu provinces.⁹

While popular commentary, in line with that in relation to many African conflicts more broadly, tends to attribute violence in the province to ethnic tensions alone – notably between the agriculturalist *Lendu* and the pastoralist *Hema* communities – the ongoing violence actually stems from longstanding issues around control of land and natural resources, in particular competition over the provinces' small-scale, open pit gold mines. Mined in perilous conditions by local men hoping to earn a paltry few dollars a day, Ituri's gold has long been a lucrative source of wealth for ex-rebels, politicians and Congolese military officials who, exploiting local ethnic tensions to gain control of the mines, are involved in transnational networks of gold smuggling (Vlassenroot and Raeymaekers, 2004; Human Rights Watch, 2020). The United Nations estimates that national and transnational actors have illegally extracted billions of dollars' worth of gold. In 2019 alone, an estimated 1.1 tonnes were smuggled out of the province. This would have earned the district up to \$1.88 million in taxes had it been legally exported, facilitating the funding of much needed infrastructure and public services throughout the province (UN, 2020b). The Africa Report also attributes the recent spate of violence to the continued exploitation and expropriation of the province's natural resources by new networks of domestic and transnational national resource entrepreneurs supplying global chains as far as Dubai and Switzerland (Africa Report, 2020). Ituri's violent extractive mining economy is illustrative of the globalised nature of what are often framed as local atrocities.

In 2010, concerned by ongoing ethnic tensions and a range of gendered violence, a group of local women in Djugu territory came together to form an association which they called *Noyeau Pacifique des Mamans* (NPM). Their aim was to animate public debate and discussion on the causes of the war, notably the manipulation of local ethnic tensions by broader 'resource entrepreneurs', as well as highlighting and reducing associated incidences of gender-based

violence. A gold mining region, Djugu has been badly affected during the war, with high levels of pillaging and sexual assault, notably, as residents recall, over a horrific one-week period in 2002 when local and Ugandan militias ransacked all houses, violently assaulted residents and seized all the gold. At the time of my research (2014), inter-ethnic relations were reported to be improved, although many of the gendered issues associated with artisanal prospecting persisted. These included land shortages and conflicts, high commodity prices, prostitution, marital breakdown, gender-based violence and high levels of militarisation. Life in the province was made all the more difficult by the absence of state revenues for basic development and services. All local authorities interviewed (traditional and modern) reported having no knowledge of or access to any devolved budget. Instead, all revenue and material contributions for local development works (road, school construction, etc.) were raised locally among the population. The remarkable achievements of NPM, working in such an extremely challenging context, highlight both the potential, but also the limitations of their action in the context of wider forces. A closer examination of questions around who was involved, ways in which the group operated and what activities/actions they undertook helps elucidate this further.

Noyeau Pacifique des Mamans: *The 'who' of the association*

As I discussed above, the composition of community groups can be critical to their inclusive and/or exclusionary nature. Two issues are of note in this regard. First, as with a number of such groups established around this time, NPM, although reportedly a self-established voluntary group, quickly attracted the support of a local professional NGO, which, in turn, was supported by an international NGO. As a local community association, members of NPM received no payment or remuneration for any of their activities. However, with links to a local NGO, members had expectations that they might receive 'trainings' and make links to local authorities, all of which are considered important in securing local employment and access to resources. Such expectations suggest the possibility of an elitism in membership as well as individualised motivations centred on self-interest and progression. However, this was not entirely the case.

At the time of research, NPM comprised 20 members and membership was quite varied. The 17 members I met were aged between 19 and 57 and came from four different ethnic groups. Three were public sector employees, while 14 worked in the informal sector (subsistence farming and/or as small-scale marketeers). Fourteen were also members of other local associations demonstrating that they enjoyed wide social networks. Some members had been nominated by the local chief. Others reported that they took the initiative to join on their own. While membership was diverse, one of the members (the association's leader) was also a member of the local authority where she occupied the position of 'Judge of the *Chefferie*'¹⁰ (as the *Chefferie* chief's sister). This exemplifies the porosity between civic and political actors. It also

exemplifies the hybridity of traditional and modern structures as the traditional *Chefferie* forms part of the modern administrative apparatus. Local governance at all levels in Ituri is made up of a mix of traditional (inherited) and modern (elected) positions, with a number of modern positions held by local adaptive chiefs determined to maintain power, prestige and wealth.

A noteworthy feature of NPM's membership was that it also included a male 'advisor' (a common feature of women's associations in the region). This, it was explained, was to both assist in gaining access to local authorities and to ensure women's security if travelling to other villages or towns. However, despite time spent in the association and participation in the three training workshops on women's rights run by the supporting NGO, the advisor's own inputs and discourse indicated a consolidation of traditional female identities and subordination. This is exemplified in his articulation of the role of the group:

It is also the role of the NPM to sensitise the other women not to raise themselves above the level of their husbands. With the advice that they give, also in the churches, they give advice to women to obey their husbands.

This is not the role that female members ascribed to their group when asked the same question.

Association members' motivations for becoming involved indicate that, while the group certainly did function as a self-help group with members hoping to improve their own situations through membership, broader political aspirations were also to the fore from the outset. Three principal motivations for their ongoing involvement were raised by members. First, noting the 'NGO-ised' nature of the associations and attracted by possibilities of NGO workshops, the prospects for improved livelihoods through possible access to a local administrative post following their training was mentioned by many. As already noted, many members are farmers. As also already noted, land is, in the words of one of the chiefs interviewed separately, "the most thorny source of conflict" and women have no ownership rights. In this context and in the context of minimal private enterprise in the midst of widespread displacement and upheaval, access to an administrative post is the most viable (though extremely scarce) livelihood option, notably for women.¹¹ However, while this livelihood motivation was raised by women in relation to their own personal aspirations, it was also raised in relation to aspirations for women more broadly. A second motivation for involvement was the attraction in working alongside people from another ethnic group. As one member noted, seeing *Hema* and *Lendu* women together in a group prompted her to become involved:

when I saw that the two [ethnic] groups were sitting together - we sat together and ate together which I never saw before, working together which did not happen before - that gave me the courage and the inspiration to join.

A final motivation for many women's engagement was explicitly political. Their frustration and sense of injustice with their ongoing subordination was clear. They felt that their involvement in their association would open a space for local political engagement. One member's intervention gives a flavour of this:

What convinced me to be involved is that the village chiefs are very violent towards women. If there is a problem that concerns the woman, they do not judge that clearly [*justly*]. Even if the fault is with the man, the fault is always said to be with the woman. That always shocked me and it motivated me to be one of the defendants of the women in the face of the men at a local level.

The diversity of members and range of interests and motivations demonstrates, therefore, that, although NPM members did have their own interests in joining the group, they also, from the outset, had an interest in challenging and transforming broader structures and practices. As I have discussed above, critical skills in interest articulation, bargaining, negotiation, networking and alliance-building are central to any success in this regard. And as we will now see, this is where the principal limitations to the NPM's activism lay.

Noyeau Pacifique des Mamans: *The 'ways' the association functioned*

One of my central arguments within this chapter and one of my motivations for research in this area is my view that associations can serve as critical sites of learning in relation to both the communicative and the networking skills needed to effect engendered political participation and in terms of shifting discourses and gendered identities. Its largely *ad hoc* way of operating combined with its internalisation and adoption of dominant norms of 'sensitisation'/*sensibilisation*', unfortunately denied NPM members the opportunity to develop and hone these skills. Three key issues are salient in this regard.

First, the communicative norms and operational procedures within the association mitigated against the development of critical communicative skills. At the time of the research, although members reported regularly meeting on a sporadic, informal basis, the association was not meeting formally. Consequently, the level of inclusion and voice within the group was unclear. Group members could not articulate how specific issues came to be discussed or how decisions in relation to action on some of these were made. As we know and as the difference democrats have warned, in the absence of some agreed mechanisms (formal or informal), the risk is that some voices end up dominating while some remain silent altogether. This undermines both their democratic potential and their political potency. This was underlined by the fact that three people dominated a focus group discussion undertaken as part of the research, with frequent interventions by the male advisor. This was

despite the fact that members interviewed individually proved very articulate when given the opportunity to speak outside the broader group.

Second, and as also discussed under the ‘what’ of engagement below, the NPM unsurprisingly mirrored the approach taken by many traditional authorities and local NGOs, with its focus on sensitisation/*sensibilisation* – ‘talking at’ rather than ‘talking with’ communities. This has important implications in relation to their broader legitimacy, potentially narrowing the ‘who’ of political participation to members alone, thereby also narrowing their political potency. While it could be argued that through their training, they had secured a level of legitimacy and status within the wider community, their lack of two-way mediation with any potential constituency left them devoid of any effective representation or political base, thereby severely undermining their political power. While grassroots mobilisation in such a politically and ethnically charged context needs to be approached with caution, political legitimacy and inclusion can only be secured by ‘talking with’ and listening to community members – representing their multiple interests and preoccupations – rather than ‘talking at’ them in a manner which replicates the practices of the exploitative ex-rebels, politicians and Congolese military officials which the group sought to challenge.

And third, the framing of gendered issues by members seemed to reinforce female subordinated identities, with an individualisation of responsibility adding to women’s existing work burdens. This framing stemmed from the three training sessions on women’s rights which members had undertaken with the local NGO. On a positive note, this training appears to have had a significant impact in relation to members’ views on public life and employment. Members cited the Constitutional *parité* clause and their rights to economic and political participation. They claimed to have leveraged this to enhance their status and influence within their communities. As one member notes, “what has convinced them [men within the community] the most is what is in the Constitution. So that is what convinces them. Even if they are not happy with this [talk of *parité*], they do listen to us”, while another notes that “we would like to change the tradition that puts the woman to one side and says that a woman cannot become a chief”.¹² Yet, on a more negative note, such assertions of economic and political agency were continually framed within existing discourses of women’s responsibilities, both in the home and publicly for their own safety, with incidents of sexual assault framed as women’s own responsibility; “We sensitise people to discourage them from going to the market at night because here people have the habit of going to the market late”.

Noyeau Pacifique des Mamans: ‘What’ the association did

This framing, together with the different ways of engaging, both within the group and with the wider community, fed directly into what activities members carried out and what issues they sought to address. While, as members asserted, their primary role was to animate local dialogue and discussion on

the causes of the war and the need for reconciliation, mirroring local authorities and NGOs, this appears to have taken the form of monological sensitisations rather than dialogues. These sensitisations constituted one of the main activities. They appear to have had some positive impacts, notably in reducing ethnic tensions (through both these sensitisations and through their own public visibility as an inter-ethnic group) and in raising public debate around the non-acceptability of gender-based violence and wife desertions in the face of such. However, the broader democratic limitations of this activity have already been noted.

A second activity was collaboration with local authorities. In this, the associations' relations appear to have oscillated between wielding some level of influence – notably in relation to specific local disputes over both land and in relation to gender-based violence and being captured and acting as a 'women's wing' for local authorities. For example, many sensitisations appear to have been carried out on behalf of local authorities. As one village chief explained, such sensitisations were aimed at preserving rather than challenging the *status quo*:

These women do sensitisation in the village. They organise meetings with women and with the women chiefs [*village women nominated by the village chief to work on his behalf*] in each village. They sensitise them on cleanliness, on how they should comport themselves, on how they should maintain their village and their field. They sensitise for sanitation ... If there are problems with women, if these problems are brought to the village chief, he calls the woman chief to deal with these problems with the women.

Local chiefs also reported that association members were called on to prepare food when visiting dignitaries arrive. In this regard, members appear to fall into the 'tea-making brigade' category identified elsewhere (Cornwall and Goetz, 2005: 796) or, more accurately in this case, the 'food preparation brigade'.

A third activity was carried out independently of local authorities as authorities claimed no jurisdiction over and refused to become involved in these areas. This activity involved efforts to reduce the levels of 'fees' for local schools¹³ as well as 'taxes' on the roads.¹⁴ NPM members met with little satisfaction following a number of meetings in both instances. Both School Directors and military officials reasoned that as their pay was unreliable and sporadic, they had no option but to levy 'fees' and 'taxes' for their own income. Members' efforts in this regard highlight both the daily challenges of trying to survive in a predatory state and the limits of local actions, including those of local chiefs.

Noyeau Pacifique des Mamans: *The lessons*

The challenges to the community in Djugu and beyond are clearly enormous. In the context of high levels of insecurity fuelled by globalised networks of

violent 'resource entrepreneurs' and with little external support, NPM members' actions in attempting to improve both their own circumstances and those of their communities are remarkable and inspirational. Although, at the time of writing, unable to function in the current unrest with a number of members reportedly (re-)displaced,¹⁵ members' activism shows that communitarianism is alive and well in Ituri and flies in the face of reductionist theories of individually motivated action. It also demonstrates both the potential but also the limitations for engendered political engagement, as associations oscillate between capture and compliance on the one hand and contestation on the other. Three lessons can be drawn from NPM's efforts in this regard. The first points to the dangers and the ease with which associations can be captured, both by local political elites and by local NGOs and their donors. While association members did appear to have some level of influence on local authorities, they were also co-opted into operating as the 'women's wing' for these authorities, reinforcing local gendered norms and practices through their service. There are clearly downsides as well as benefits to supporting local adaptive chieftaincies. They were also 'captured' to some degree by the individualised 'empowerment' discourse of their supporting NGO. While members maintained their determination to work to benefit their communities, attempting to independently influence and transform some specific structures and practices in this regard, their discursive framings nonetheless persistently reflected the individualised 'empowerment' training of individual agency and responsibility.

The second lesson concerns communication norms and strategies and the limits of 'talking at' communities. Both NPM and local authorities' focus on information provision and sensitisation rather than mobilisation (talking at rather than listening) left little scope to explore perceptions, experiences and analyses of community members, to formulate strategies around these and to work together to address them. Within their own group, NPM members also missed important opportunities to develop their own skills in deliberation, bargaining, networking and alliance-building. In short, members missed valuable opportunities to imagine and articulate alternative, diverse identities and opportunities and to build coalitions of support for these. Allied to this, the association's framing of issues, problems and conflicts (including gender-related issues) left little or no scope for an analysis of their structural or systemic underpinnings. While the rights-based approach used in NGO training workshops with its strong legislative basis appears to have proven an extremely powerful frame for members, their emphasis on personal responsibility left no scope to explore or interrogate the responsibilities of others. Solutions to systemic problems were framed and exercised within a political and cultural vacuum. As such, they addressed symptoms rather than causes. At best, such solutions led to some temporary respite for some, but at worst, notably in relation to the framing of gender *parité* as being women's sole responsibility, they added to the already significant demands (physical and psychological) on individuals' and families' energy and resources.

And the third lesson concerns the limits of the local. Established at a time of profound upheaval and crisis following the war in a context where international peacebuilding efforts focused on elite settlements rather than addressing the root causes of conflict at local levels (see Gaynor, 2016b), NPM's activities have been necessarily more survivalist than transformationalist. Members focused on either helping people survive within a highly dysfunctional system or – in the case of the *parité* issue – incorporating themselves into it. In the absence of external action and support, there was little they or indeed local authorities could do to impact on the broader globalised context of extraction and violence. NPM's experience problematises the global development community's preoccupation with local 'empowerment' and 'resilience' in the face of broader structural forces and highlights the need for deeper understanding and engagement with the globalised roots of local gendered violence and oppression.

Conclusion: Engendering participation within local public spheres

Focusing on micro-scale public spheres, in this chapter I have explored the opportunities for and the barriers to women's associations' political activism within their local polities. Taking a historicised approach, I have argued that community associations can both promote and inhibit engendered democratic engagement. Providing a valuable space for exchange and alliance-building, they can serve as important sites where critical skills in deliberation, bargaining, networking and alliance-building can be developed and honed and where gendered identities, discourses and practices can be challenged and transformed. However, depending on who is involved, the ways in which associations function and what issues they choose to engage with and how they frame these, they can also service as sites of exclusion and discrimination, serving particular members' interests, reinforcing subordinated identities and seeking to dominate and control their members and wider constituencies. As we have seen, this can also happen when community associations, as part of the hybridised fabric of local polities, are captured by local authorities, with members becoming compliant in their agency and being relegated to the 'food preparation brigade'. And as we have also seen, the tendency for this to happen can be exacerbated by NGOs and donors who, viewing associational life through a narrow lens of economic self-help, through their training and support, focus on individualised outcomes. As association members are encouraged to be 'resilient' – to adapt, innovate and 'empower' themselves – their 'capacity' is built to survive within the extant political order rather than to seek to engender and transform it. Such supports may be good for individual members' survival in the short term, but they can prove an enemy to democracy over the longer term.

Nonetheless, as we have seen from both the broader literature and from the specific case of Ituri's NPM, community associations are far more complex and their members' ideals and agency more ambitious and diverse than

economic self-help alone. The individualist patronage argument which imbues much of the broader literature on African politics proves overly gendered and materialist when applied to community associationalism. It fails to explain both the wealth and diversity of community associations across a range of contexts and the range of benefits they bring to members and their wider publics. These include a stronger sense of dignity and identity, increased confidence and articulateness, involvement in wider networks and increased power, status and engagement within the public sphere. Taken together, these are critical steps to engendered political engagement. These alone, however, are not enough. As with national level politics, power, status and engagement do not necessarily translate into engendered participation. To avoid capture and compliance, more is required. Closer attention needs to be paid to the who, the ways and the what of engagement.

In relation to the 'who', two issues are key. The first is the diversity of membership and the second is members' relationships with their wider publics. Members' diverse and broader motivations for becoming involved can be captured and narrowed by the self-serving behaviours of a select few, most notably where members' mediation with their wider public is limited or overly one-sided. This diversity and broadening of members' interests and relations is closely linked to the norms and procedures or the 'ways' in which associations operate, both internally and vis-à-vis their broader publics. Valuable opportunities to develop critical skills in interest articulation, deliberation, bargaining, consensus-building and contestation are lost when associations lack the internal processes and procedures to ensure equality of participation and to ensure that a select number of voices do not dominate. Moreover, as with the broader public sphere examined in the previous chapter, opportunities for networking, alliance-building and democratic inclusion are lost when the propensity remains to 'talk at' rather than 'talk with' broader communities. Alliances are built and networked power is consolidated through two-way communication. This provides for deliberation and exchange leading to the formation of shared understandings and positions among different members of diverse communities. Although a complex and a messy process, there is power in numbers and the level of inclusivity and resultant political potency of the outcome arguably merits the effort. Such inclusive mechanisms for communication and engagement will, in turn, necessarily impact on the 'what' of engagement as collective positions and discourses emerge around both local development imperatives and the broader discourses, practices and structures which support and/or impede these. In this regard, it is important to recognise the limits of the local. As both the historic accounts of local political agency across different contexts and the specific case of Ituri discussed in this chapter have highlighted, cultural, material and relational dynamics at local levels are subject to globalised dynamics. The limits to development discourses and practices of local 'empowerment' and 'resilience' need to be recognised in this context, with broader supports taking cognisance of and seeking to compliment local actions with an engagement with the globalised roots of local gendered inequalities and violence.

Notes

- 1 I should note that Mamdani's thesis on the invention of chiefs together with his arguments on the degree to which they were granted increasing powers is contested by some (see, for example, Baldwin 2016: 34–36). This contestation notwithstanding, it is generally agreed that egregious abuses of power by chiefs during the colonial era led to an erosion of their legitimacy and their ultimate downfall by the time of independence.
- 2 See Baldwin (2016: 3–4) and Bauer (2016: 227) for details on these developments in different countries.
- 3 There are, of course, deep differences in both the authority (and the existence) of chiefs and the ways in which they have been weakened or reinforced by modern change across the diversity of Africa states. For example, while their power remains strong in many states, the institution was abolished completely in Rwanda (see Gaynor, 2016a). And while some still question the legitimacy and authority of once powerful traditional leaders in view of their oppressive legacies (see Engelbert, 2002, on the authority of the Buganda; Ntsebeza, 2005, on contested authority in South Africa's Eastern Cape), empirical evidence points to their on-going power broadly speaking (see Logan, 2013, discussed above).
- 4 In some of these instances (for example, Malawi, the DRC), traditional authorities/chieftaincies were not as weakened by nationalist leaders as elsewhere.
- 5 Customary land tenure has been abolished in many countries and is a source of significant ongoing conflict and tension in others; see the Ituri case study here for example.
- 6 Costs range, depending on how many authorities become involved and how high up the chain the incident is sent, from cases of beer, to livestock, to cash (figures of up to US\$300 were reported in focus groups).
- 7 'Segmentary states' (Southall, 1956) are precolonial states that were generally governed as small groupings of villages headed by a chief advised by a committee of headmen. These were in contrast to both strongly centralised states (such as Asante in Ghana, Hausaland in Nigeria and Buganda in Uganda), where the British had a more limited role in shaping traditional chiefs' power and in contrast to places with no political centralisation where the absence of clear leaders forced the British to appoint chiefs with no primary legitimacy at all.
- 8 Women's Peace Centre. This case study draws from broader research which I carried out with seven community associations and traditional authorities in Ituri in 2014; see Gaynor (2014b) for more details.
- 9 <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20210501-dr-congo-declares-a-state-of-siege-over-worsening-violence-in-east> (accessed May 17, 2021).
- 10 At the time of research, Ituri (then a district) was administratively divided into five *Territoires*. Each of these was made up of either *Secteurs* (modern structures with elected leaders) or *Chefferies* (traditional patrilineal structures with elected advisors). Each of these was, in turn, made up of *Groupements*, *Villages* and Groupings of ten households/*Dix Maisons*, respectively (all traditional patrilineal structures, although the local community played a role in leader selection at Village and *Dix Maisons* levels); see Gaynor (2014b: 22–23) for more detail on this complex hybridity of structures and posts.
- 11 The 2006 Constitution includes a widely disseminated article on women's 'parity'/*parité*. This is popularly framed in terms of access to employment rather than social or political *parité* more broadly.
- 12 While, in the case of NPM's leader, women can occupy specific positions within *Chefferies*, no female chiefs exist in the region. This has important implications for access to and control of land, and for wealth and power more broadly. Some chiefs who traditionally hold the land 'in the name of the community'

- essentially privatise this communal resource, selling it on to wealthy and powerful individuals or foreign and Congolese companies (see also Huggins, 2010, on this point). As a *Groupement* chief put it to me, his role as chief and that of his advisors is “to hold the power, as the elders of the clan, for those coming up in the clan”.
- 13 One of the greatest economic difficulties for families is managing to pay local school ‘fees’. The lack of state investment in education, as in all other social sectors, means that teachers’ salaries remain extremely low and sporadic and there is no public infrastructural expenditure. Education has consequently been, de facto, privatised. Primary school ‘fees’ were reported to be approximately US\$3/month, secondary school fees approximately US\$6/month and university fees approximately US\$450 per annum.
 - 14 All roads in and out of towns and villages are blocked by armed military who levy a ‘tax’ on travellers (typically 50c–US\$1), reportedly discharging their weapons if they attempt to pass without paying. For women selling produce in local markets and regularly travelling, the costs quickly escalate.
 - 15 Email correspondence with local NGO representative, October 2021.

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8 Conclusion

Lessons, tensions and reasons for hope

It is now 30 years since David Held posed the question “is democratisation an essentially western project, or is it something of wider universal significance?” (Held, 1992: 4). Challenging the then taken for granted dual assumptions that democracy was an achievement of the West which, applicable solely to formal state institutions, had no place in wider economic, social and cultural spheres,¹ his theoretically rich, geographically expansive volume drew attention to both democracy’s diverse models and manifestations across the world and to its wider significance in that context.

Yet in the decades that have followed, two trends have continued to dominate political debate and practice on the state and states of democracy in Africa. The first, as outlined in Chapter 3, is the continued focus on formal electoral politics as the principal, if not the sole, locus of politics in both academic literature and in more popular debate. And the second, as outlined in Chapter 2, is the persistence of a continuum of gendered inequalities, discriminations and violence across African societies despite the growing inclusion of women within these formal electoral structures.

In this book, I have argued that this narrow equation of democracy with electoral politics alone masks its broader potential, possibility and scope. The project of engendering democracy has to be deeper and wider than just adding women to existing political structures and processes and expecting gendered transformations to follow. While not downplaying the importance of these formal structures or indeed the importance of more diverse representation within them, focus and attention also needs to spread to the many other sites and spaces of everyday politics in which the discussions, deliberations, negotiations, bargaining and decision-making which take place have immediate impacts on peoples’ daily lives. In thinking about how these can be engendered, I argue that we need to widen and deepen our thinking in two interrelated areas.

First, we need to rethink what we mean and understand by democracy, power and politics. In this regard, drawing attention to both visible and invisible forms of power, I propose we broaden our attention from the open visible spaces of debate and contestation, to the less visible relational and structural dimensions of power which privilege the wealthy and well-connected and

on to the invisible, ideological power of norms, values, discourses, practices and acceptable behaviours and compartments which privilege particular categories of actors over others. Drawing from the contributions and insights of post-liberal democratic theorists, most notably the difference democrats for whom democracy remains an unfinished project, I develop a *4W framework* which encompasses the mutually interdependent ‘where’, ‘who’, ‘what’ and ‘ways’ of political participation. I suggest that the application of this framework to different sites of everyday politics, such as those presented towards the end of Chapters 4–7 inclusive, helps in identifying the opportunities and limitations to engendered participation in these different contexts, in that it allows for a consideration of invisible as well as visible forms of power, for more deliberative forms of discussion and debate and for an acknowledgement and a treatment of difference.

The second area requiring wider and deeper consideration is that of gender equality. In this regard, I argue that the recent emphasis on the Asian-inspired, competitive, low-wage, export-oriented model in the Lion economies (as discussed in particular in Chapter 4) as well as the ongoing salience of globalised extractive economies in other resource-rich contexts (as discussed in particular in Chapter 7) call for a renewed emphasis on the contributions of the WAD school to development theory and practice. As I have argued in particular in Chapter 2, but as also evidenced in Chapters 4–7 inclusive, gender inequalities are the product of complex interactions between shifting cultural, material and political factors, and these, in turn, are linked to and inseparable from transformations and developments in the global political economy. Specifically, I argue that this necessitates a deeper consideration of what we understand and mean by gender equality *conceptually* (moving from individualised approaches focused on inserting women into existing structures to interrogating and challenging gendered discourses and practices which support such approaches), *spatially* (exploring global as well as national and local opportunities and barriers to equality) and *temporally* (exploring continuities and ruptures with past colonial legacies and how these feed into contemporary relations and structures). A wider and deeper consideration of these two interrelated areas of gender equality and of democracy, power and politics allows for a broader, structurally embedded analysis of the opportunities and challenges to engendered democratic participation, which is both historicised and globalised and which acknowledges and engages with different constellations and manifestations of power.

Opportunities and challenges

My overall aim in this book has been to explore the opportunities for and the challenges to engendering democracy across a range of sites and spaces of everyday politics. Each chapter has explored a number of different sites. Many more remain to be explored. Across the multiple sites examined in this book, a number of opportunities and also a number of challenges have been identified.

Among the opportunities are, first and foremost, the many sites for political engagement themselves. Sites and spaces explored in this book include national planning and policy processes in the context of the 'Asian turn'; public meetings and consultations as part of decentralised reforms; local public spheres animated by local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and local and national media; globalised public spheres animated by digitalised media; and local polities involving community associations and traditional authorities. Of course, this is just a small sample of the multiple and interlocking sites of everyday politics that exist across diverse polities and contexts. And, of course, the specific opportunities these offer for engendered participation vary very much from context to context, both in terms of the political will for such engagement and in terms of the level to which power relations within them are contested, seized, manipulated and/or transformed by different actors. This diversity notwithstanding, a common theme across many of these sites is the move from hierarchical forms of governing, involving a narrow group of actors, to more horizontal modes of governance, involving broader networks of actors with differing interests, perspectives and standpoints. This is seen in Chapters 4 (in relation to national planning and policy) and 5 (in relation to decentralised reforms) in particular and, as discussed in Chapters 1 and 7, respectively, has long been the norm in the traditional governance of local hybridised polities. Such broad-based governance cultures and networks afford another opportunity for engendering democracy at different levels.

A third opportunity is found in the growing agency and voice of different actors within the formal civic sphere and among individuals and communities at informal levels more broadly. The surge in both NGOs and different forms of media across the continent from the 1990s forward has been documented in Chapter 6. This development, together with the shift from governing to governance highlighted above, has opened the space for broad-based political participation at a wide range of levels. While Chapters 4, 5 and 7 have illustrated this at specific national and local levels, Chapter 6 has also drawn attention to the importance of the public sphere as a critical site of public opinion formation and influence, notably in relation to deliberation, contestation and transformation of gendered norms and relations. While, notably in recent years, the 'colonisation', manipulation and control of this public sphere by powerful state and private interests has somewhat eroded its potential in specific jurisdictions, it nonetheless remains a powerful influence in others, as Chapter 6 demonstrates.

A fourth opportunity is found in the increased visibility of and increased awareness of the need for action on so-called 'women's issues' and, in some contexts, on broader gendered inequalities across the continent. While gendered inequalities, discrimination and violence persist, there is near universal acknowledgement that this is an egregious shortcoming and something that can no longer be ignored. As I note below, this increased visibility and awareness has been aided in no small part by the determination and activism of feminist movements – in the form of diverse networks, fora, NGOs

and community associations – across the continent. Significant gains have already been made, notably in political and developmental arenas, and this provides a solid base from which to build. From the Nairobi conference in 1985 forward, African and global feminist movements have come together to highlight and push for change on a wide range of issues as evidenced in some of the examples discussed in Chapters 2, 4, 6 and 7. This brings us to a fifth opportunity, which is the support offered by global movements and institutions. Although sometimes a double-edged sword with global interests, perspectives and agendas eclipsing those of local groups and activists (see Chapters 6 and 7 in particular), global solidarity and support is also critical in drawing attention to and amplifying national and local voices, opening up different domestic spaces to diverse women's voices. Conversely, African women's networks and groups have proven adept at forging global alliances which strengthen their political power and position locally. This is readily apparent in some of the examples presented in Chapters 6 and 7 in particular.

As the examples presented in the different chapters also demonstrate, the many opportunities for engendered political participation across the many sites can be tempered and frustrated by significant challenges. Chief among these is the almost ubiquitous experience of inclusion without voice. This is very often a function of the dominant communicative and behavioural norms which infuse different political spaces and which privilege particular categories of actors over others. This is apparent in particular in the Kenyan case discussed in Chapter 4, where the technocratic communicative exigencies of the national planning process continue to effectively exclude a wide range of voices despite its stated commitment to widespread consultation. It is also apparent in the Rwandan and Iturian cases discussed in Chapters 5 and 7, respectively, although levels of resistance to these norms are also apparent in both of these cases. A variant on this and one which emerges strongly from examples discussed in Chapters 5 and 7 also is the challenge of uneven voice or selective participation. This also relates to the communicative and procedural norms which underpin the different sites of participation. In the absence of inclusive procedural norms, as seen in particular in Chapter 7, more powerful voices, agendas, perspectives and interests can dominate, thereby undermining the inclusivity and democratic potential of different spaces.

This challenge of uneven voice can also be linked to a second challenge of what we might call 'empty representation'. This is where actors in a particular process fail to represent the interest of their broader constituencies, thereby undermining their own legitimacy in the process as well as its democratic potential more broadly. In Chapter 4, this emerges as an issue identified and to some degree addressed by the women's movement in relation to its engagement in Kenya's Constitutional reform process; in Chapter 6, it emerges as a challenge in respect to the 'colonisation' of both community radio and digitalised media more broadly; and in Chapter 7, it emerges as an issue for community associations and their forms and levels of communication with their wider communities as well as for traditional authorities' popular legitimacy

in particular contexts. A third challenge is that of voice without action. This occurs where invisible forms of power dominate and where decision-making processes are opaque or non-existent. This is seen in particular in the Rwandan case discussed in Chapter 5, where the processes for decision-making on local taxes and contributions appear unclear and subject to manipulation, notably when queried and resisted. It is also seen in the Kenyan case discussed in Chapter 4, where a strategy of inclusion in drafting committees was adopted in an attempt to counter this.

A fourth challenge relates both to which issues are included for deliberation and consideration in democratic processes (and, inversely, which are not) and in relation to their framing. If framed in a limited way which strips them of their broader political and social contexts, they tend to fall into the apolitical category of ‘women’s issues’, to be addressed by women themselves rather than within a broader relational context. This is a common challenge and emerges across all of the chapters in the book, whether it be in the form of microcredit schemes to encourage female entrepreneurship (Chapter 4); local responsibility for ‘public’ education services (Chapters 5 and 7); selective and decontextualised framings of *Boko Haram* abductees (Chapter 6); and/or women’s own responsibility for their safety from violent sexual assault (Chapters 2, 6 and 7). This limited framing links to a fifth challenge – the limits of local agency and action in the context of the inequalities and insecurities linked to the globalised political economy. Evident in cases presented in Chapters 2, 4 and 7 in particular, this again highlights the need for a more informed and honest global engagement which challenges and contests the globalised roots and drivers of gendered inequalities, drawing attention to the actions and culpability of actors in the Global North and South alike.

Many of these opportunities and challenges co-exist across the different sites and spaces of political engagement. They are also constantly in flux. Ever-changing facets of the dynamic spaces they inhabit, their influence and expression are a function of the circulation of power in and around these different spaces. And this influence and expression ultimately determines the engendered democratic potential of these spaces. Some specific lessons for funders, policymakers, practitioners and activists can be drawn in this regard.

Lessons

A number of practical lessons in the two interrelated spheres of political engagement and development programming and practice can be identified. In terms of political engagement, lessons include the need to consider the multiple and overlapping sites of political engagement – local, national and global – and to provide supports in these multiple contexts; to allow for more inclusive and representative participation, including time and resources, for participants’ engagement and mediation with different constituent groups; and the need for a broader framing of issues deliberated and decided upon within these contexts. In practical terms, this means moving beyond viewing

development policy and communications, including its gendered impacts, as an aggregate of technical interventions, addressable through specific programmes and projects in a broader policy vacuum; (re-)learning to talk ‘with’ and not ‘at’ or ‘for’ constituents, member groups and communities; reclaiming the democratic potential of the public sphere by animating public debate rather than employing it as a tool for information provision and/or ‘education’; and shifting the framing on so-called ‘women’s issues’ so that solutions and remedies can move from palliative to curative, addressing and transforming the broader structural and relational contexts in which they are embedded.

In terms of development programming and practice, there are important lessons which can be drawn in the two interrelated areas of ‘empowerment’ and ‘capacity building’. As discussed in greater detail in both Chapters 3 and 7, empowerment initiatives targeting individuals, groups and communities need to deploy empowerment as a *noun* and not as a *verb*. Empowerment as a noun is something that is allowed to happen. It occurs as power circulates in all its forms and as political actors, networks and groups are afforded the space to seize it and to mobilise in order to challenge the inequitable and discriminatory gendered policies, practices, norms and discourses they encounter in their daily lives. Empowerment as a verb is something that is done to others. It happens through specific interventions, often in the form of ‘capacity building’ workshops and training sessions sponsored by development agencies, which, while sometimes assisting in the empowerment process, more often than not serve to discipline and disempower actors, networks and groups as they seek to integrate them into the very systems and structures that reinforce their marginalisation rather than affording them the space and tools to challenge and transform them. As trainees are encouraged to adapt their behaviour, comportment and language to the structures and conditions in which they find themselves, their ‘capacity’ is built to survive within the extant political order rather than to engender and transform it. We have seen this in the cases of the ‘NGO-isation’ of community radio and community associations discussed in Chapters 6 and 7, respectively. Lessons need to be learnt in this context in relation to whose capacity needs to be built and how and in relation to dangers of the erosion and associated corrosion of the public sphere in this context.

Tensions

A number of tensions and challenges underlies the analysis and arguments which run through these chapters. The first of these relates to the scope and ambition of the book which, as I have noted in Chapter 2 in particular, risks reducing the complexity and diversity of different women and men’s experiences to yet another universalised representation of ‘the African experience’ which reproduces colonial (and contemporary) binaries and/or omissions across a range of contexts. Throughout the book, I have tried to avoid this – moving beyond ‘women’ and ‘men’ as homogenous categories to encompass

people of all genders and none in the context of the broad intersectional categories that differentiate us all. I have also tried to move beyond the tired gendered binaries of women as either victims or as successful business and political actors by shifting the focus to a broader unit of analysis than the individual in an attempt to engage with the systemic and epistemic roots of the multiple faces and facets of gendered inequalities, discriminations and violence. I have tried to consistently argue that engendered political participation requires a deeper engagement with history and context; a more informed and nuanced understanding of the complex relations of the local with the global; and a more honest and open exploration and exposition of the unequal gendered relations of power that produce egregious and interrelated discriminations and violence in the first place. I hope that I have succeeded to some degree in this endeavour, but am aware of the inevitable difficulties and tensions in an account of this scope.

A second tension is the danger of producing yet another book which reduces the broad, relational category of gender to women alone. This tension is reflected in the title I have chosen for the book – where ‘engendering democracy’ does indeed appear to involve women alone (as the ‘women, politics and development’ subtitle indicates) – and in some of the analysis which ensues which appears to place the responsibility for engendering policy and development squarely on women’s (and, at times, some men’s) shoulders. This reflects a broader political tension which underpins the transformative project of engendering democracy. As I have tried to argue from the outset, engendering democracy is about far more than adding women to existing structures and political spaces. It is about diversity and inclusion in relation to actors, discourses, norms, behaviours, issues and frames. And this is everybody’s responsibility – political and civic actors alike; women and men; local and global. Yet, and here is the rub, in the deeply inequitable world in which we all live, this means challenging and unseating globalised, structural, deeply gendered privilege. In such a world, those whose privilege is challenged have little incentive to take action. This is evidenced by the stubborn persistence of gendered inequalities, discriminations and violence set out in Chapter 2. If history has taught us anything, it is that privilege will not be challenged and little will change unless those most marginalised and discriminated demand it. I have therefore deliberately focused on women (and, at times, men’s agency) in this regard. However, as I have also argued, and as evidenced in particular in Chapters 6 and 7, local agency on its own can only go so far. Engendering democracy and development in Africa is a global responsibility. However, as the lessons from the cases in both these chapters also indicate, global actions in this regard need to be careful to support rather than colonise and restrict the parameters for local agency.

A third tension is to be found in the gaping chasm that often lies between normative theory and practical action. While in theory many of the normative proposals and lessons put forward in these chapters might well make sense, in practice there are no easy solutions and many of the challenges and

limitations outlined here are both predictable and inevitable. It is important to emphasise, however, the extent of the journey already travelled and to build on this momentum. Over the last three decades, feminist theory and activism have made significant gains across the continent, notably in political and developmental arenas (Badri and Tripp, 2017). Gender ministries are in place in many different countries; constitutional gains have been achieved; many progressive laws and policies have been introduced; and gender mainstreaming has become, well, the mainstream. While within development circles the liberal WID agenda has retained/regained its dominance, specific development programmes and projects have brought about real, tangible changes to some women and men's lives, challenging male bias and highlighting the agency and contributions of women. Reflecting on this journey travelled, Ahikire (2014: 12) notes that "Even so-called 'lip service' is suggestive of a change in the ethos that we may build on, by fostering greater and more substantive feminist engagement in the years ahead". It is often through little steps that change happens. Each little and some not so little step, outlined in the cases and in the literature analysed in these chapters, points to what is possible in the journey forward. The normative content of the chapters here is included therefore not as a blueprint but as an aide to analysing, challenging and transforming power – in its visible and invisible manifestations – along this challenging yet necessary journey. In this spirit, I hope it proves a help rather than a hindrance.

Reasons for hope

Given the largely pejorative tone of much of the commentary and literature on the state of democracy in Africa both laterally and today,² it might seem strange to end a book on democracy in Africa, not least one focused on engendering democracy in Africa, on a note of hope. Democracy, the world over, is in trouble. Rising levels of authoritarianism, populism and voter apathy are trends affecting states on every continent, not just those in Africa.³ And gendered marginalisation, discrimination and violence are features of all societies, again, not just those in Africa. So why are there reasons for hope?

First, in reflecting on the wider global 'crisis of democracy', care needs to be taken not to conflate formal institutions with their underlying democratic ideals. While evidence of a crisis in formal democratic institutions mounts as they become manipulated by elite interests (see, for example, Freedom House, 2021), this is not matched by evidence for a crisis in the public's appetite for democratic ideals, notably not in Africa. As the evidence from this book demonstrates, considerable appetite exists across diverse polities and societies for the fundamental ideals of justice, equality, dignity and fairness on which many postcolonial African states were founded. The agency and activism of the many women and men across the multiple sites explored in these chapters are testament to this. Their persistence, enthusiasm and determination in even the most intimidating situations to challenge and/or transform gendered norms, practices and policies provide much reason for hope.

Second, the acute crisis of Western liberal democratic institutions signals a need for something different. The deliberative roots of local polities across Africa, as outlined in Chapters 1, 3 and 7 in particular, combined with innovations in the modern public sphere, as explored in particular in Chapter 6, appear to offer something different, although, of course, these are not without their challenges. As the multiple voices within and across these everyday spaces diversify and amplify, perhaps these different sites of African politics in all their complexities can prove an inspiration for others seeking to rebuild legitimacy and to remould democratic practices and institutions to facilitate greater inclusion in contexts of growing plurality and difference.

And third, times of crisis are times of change. As the gendered impacts of the globalised ‘accumulation by dispossession’ that characterises contemporary political economies mount and diversify, they become increasingly difficult to ignore. There appears to be, across the world, a growing realisation of the need for global solidarity and action in the face of global challenges and responsibilities. Again, the significant gains made already by women’s associations, networks and movements across Africa cannot be ignored in this context. Their revolution may well be a quiet, perhaps even a silent one, and it may take time, but it is a revolution nonetheless. This confluence of agency, crisis and renewal provide significant reasons for hope for engendered democratic transformations and outcomes in the years and decades to come.

Notes

- 1 See Huntington (1984), Bratton (1989) and Di Palma (1990) for examples of such narrow interpretations of democracy in Africa at the time. Huntington wrote in 1984 that “Most African countries are by reason of their poverty or the violence of their politics unlikely to move democratic direction” (1984: 218). Similarly, Di Palma considered the prospects of democracy in “Africa as a whole” to be “bleak” (1990:2), while Bratton opined that the question of “whether political leaders can be installed and deposed by political will and held accountable while in office ... seems ... too remote a prospect” (1989: 430).
- 2 See the previous endnote for the dismal predictions on the eve of the 1990s wave of democratisation and Chapter 3 for contemporary catalogues of deficits and shortcomings.
- 3 See, for example, Norris (2011), Grayling (2018), Freedom House (2021), Vormann and Lammert (2021).

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