**seeking the affected couple's consent. The couple was not expected to object to the arrangement, since marriage was regarded not as an individual matter but as a community concern. As the letter indicates, the writer, who found her way to a Roman Catholic mission in Tanzania and converted, could now choose to become a nun in the convent instead of getting married. She clearly draws on her sense of power to overrule her father's authority, replacing it with the Chris­tian God she now worships. This otherwise "powerless" young woman may also have been empowered through solidarity with other women; she mentions the leader,of the convent in her letter.**

**INTRODUCTION + 23**

**Along with the contentious issue of arranged marriages, especially for very young women, the Christian missionaries opposed FGM, as argued in the "Letter Opposing Female Circumcision" (1931). From 1927 to 1929, prior to the writing of the letter, female circumcision was hotly debated in Kenya, split­ting Gikuyu communities in two. Songs were composed to air the views of each side, and it must have been in such an environment that the women wrote their letter." The women who wrote the letter belonged to a group called, Ngo ya Tuiritu, the Shield of the Young Girls, formed at a Presbyterian mission station. As Christians, th.ey,invoked the church's stand on female circumcision, and appealed fo the government to do the same. However, they were also advocat­ing for, choice, insisting that women should not be forced to be circumcised. Written at a time when resisting female circumcision was not popular in most African communities, this letter stands as one of the early African women's appeals for personal choice over one's body. From the content of the letter, it is clear that not even all Christian women advocated choice or supported the church's position.**

**Another major point of contention between early Christian missionaries and the local people was a perception that the missionaries recruited converts from the margins of society, including slaves and outcasts. Many of the early women converts along the east African coast were indeed from such groups, a fact that challenged the authority of the local rulers who had often brbught the groups into existence. In other parts of the region, notably Uganda, conversion was attempted from the top down through the ruling group or family which would then tieWer the whole community to the new religion: Depending on the area and circumstances, missionaries followed both or either of the approaches.**

**African .women brought to Christianity traditional ways of organizing and mobilizing for action. According to Oduyoye (2000: ix), most African cultures provide for the creation of a women's "platform" from which to influence the community and stimulate change. Women's solidarity with other women and their impact on society as a whole is made most visible through their organiza­tions and their regular consultations with one another (Oduyoye 2000: ix). Such safe spaces act as shields of resistance to oppressive practices and struc­tures. In a 1934 "Letter to the Bishop," members of the Mothers Union in Buganda urged the Bishop of the Native Anglican Church (NAC) of Uganda to denounce injustice in the wider social and political sphere. Their letter**

**testifies to their knowledge of these issues and of the church's power over its members, including the** *Kabaka,* **King of the Baganda, who had promoted, a local chief whose record the women found despicable. Determined to fight against injustice, the mothers say they are prepared to appeal even to the colo­nial powers should the church authorities not produce the desired results. Referring to themselves as "mothers of the nation," the women wrote as moth­ers, wives, nationalists, and Christians, positions that the church had variously extolled. These women •felt empowered enough to challenge the Bishop to come up with any argument that could contradict theirs, asking quite simply, "Your Lordship, what reason is there for the promotion of an administrator who was publicly found at fault .. . ?"**

**24 + INTRODUCTION**

**Individual Christian women, empowered by education and their conception of God as their creator and image-giver, have also protested against patriarchal church leaders who abuse their leadership positions to dehumanize women. Kanyoro (2002) acknowledges the powerful ways in which women have found liberation through their own conceptions of God's revelation. In "Every Woman a Child of God," Janet Karim draws heavily from what has been con­ceived as the word of God in both the Old and New Testaments to advance the idea that women are children of God on an equal footing with men. Reacting to a particular incident in the life of the church in Malawi, Karim quotes specific biblical texts to support her argument for equality between women and men in the church.**

**But Christianity was not always liberating for women; it carried its own Western forms of patriarchal oppression:4 For example, the biblical teaching in Genesis 2:20-24, where woman is created from man's rib and marriage is con­ceived as a union in which the woman loses her own identity by becoming one with her husband, has encouraged and justified marital inequality. In the name of such teachings, abusiVe husbands have demanded unwavering submission from their wives as their "help." In some African cultures, such things were clearly conceived differently before the arrival of Christianity. According to Phiri, the Chewa matrilineal system accorded women some value and status through initiation rites., But the coming of patriarchal Christian missionaries contributed to the destruction of even such limited dignity (1997: 45). To reclaim this dignity,** some women **converts, helped by missionary women, pioneered the Christianization of initiation rites as well as the founding of women's organizations as safe spaces within the old and newly established patri­archal structures. As early as 1901, Donald Fraser, working among the Ngoni in northern MalaWi, was already instituting a more inclusive church leadership by the creation of** *balalakazi* **(women elders) in the Presbyterian Mission of Livingstonia. However, such steps were far from universally accepted.**

**Though the eligibility of women as deacons was accepted by presbytery in
  
1922, it was not until 1935, and after a strong appeal by Fraser's widow,
  
D'r. Agnes Fraser, that the presbytery agreed to recognize women elders**

on the same basis as men. And it was not until 1966—thirty years after the Church in Livingstonia had taken the'step, and more than sixty years after Fraser had first introduced *balalakazi* in uNgoni—that women became eligible for election as elders in the Church of Scotland. (Thomp­son 2002: 15-16)

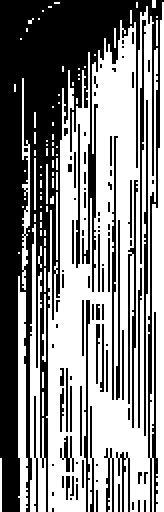
**INTRODUCTION + 25**

According to Lattinga (2000), the spread of Christianity in its original rigid European form denied African people pride in their culture and ceremonies. The mission centers were good at "brainwashing" the African converts, "divert­ing" them from their Africanness, and converting them to a Christianity clad in Western clothing. Yet, blinded by racism and class bias, the missionaries would not provide these African converts with a Western education of the same qual­ity they provided to their own children. InTrom *Slavery to School* (2001), Char­lotte Poda, who was educated in a mission school in Mombasa in the late 1940s, describes how she was driven by the poverty of Western education for Afrkans to start her own independent black school in the 1950s. The segrega­tion of Africans from whites became an issue within the churches themselves, which in some places developed separate white and African "wings."

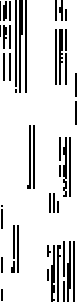
The spread of missionary education was notuniform across the region. Mis­sionaries arrived earlier in-the coastal zones, but there had to contend with the already well-established Muslim communities. Some cooler areas devoid of pestilent diseases were also more attractive to missionaries, and 'these reflect a better-developed educational network even today. in alFcases, however, women were in the forefront in the literacy campaigns, in providing voluntary labor for building schools, and in starting women's clubs to develop "suitable" skills for women, such as knitting, sewing, pot-making, and hygiene (Kimambo 1991: 130). Our early texts by women educated under foreign missionaries provide examples of attempts to train women .in European (mostly English and Ger­man) household practices and forms of dress. "Shotild Women Be Educated?" (1933) and "Women's Education" (1936, 1937), espouse the virtues of Western education to their communities, their nations, and to the women themselves. Undoubtedly, the missionaries used education as the carrot they could dangle before those they planned to recruit into the Christian world."

While they held strong appeal for many individual Africans, especially girls and women, missionary schools were often greeted with alarm by the chiefs. Shorter points out that the schools threatened the traditional structures of ini­tiation and consequently the power of the chiefs, who fought bitterly against them, refusing to enroll their children and punishing those who did (1974: 78-79). A glimpse of such opposition is provided in the notebooks of Jane Eliz­abeth Chadwick, included in the text "My Students" (1920). Chadwick describes a missionary-educated girl named Kitandi who is shunned by her community because she refuses to wail in mourning with the traditional flour­ishes when her mother dies; they understand her to be abandoning the ways of her people because of her Christian education. Hay talks of Luo women edu-

cated by the missionaries in Maseno, Kenya, being scorned and sometimes stoned by their in-laws (1976: 100), and Larsson describes similar actions against women in Bukoba, Tanzania (1991: 184-85). Various protests against missionary education expressed fear of the changes heralded by both Christian­ity and colonialism. In such an atmosphere, some women saw themselves as guardians of the community's traditions and rituals, oppressive as some of them were for women.



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Parents were often torn between conflicting desires: While many wanted the new education for their children, in part so that they might know the ways of the conquerors; they wanted also to sustain African beliefs, and African realities, to which they-were accustomed. Missionaries sometimes began by co-opting some of the influential members of the community, such as chiefs' sons, who then recruited their mothers and friends (Hay 1976: 101). With education so closely linked to religion, those who were taught to read and write were expected to become reli­gious teachers, and ofcourse, the Bible generally served as the teaching text.

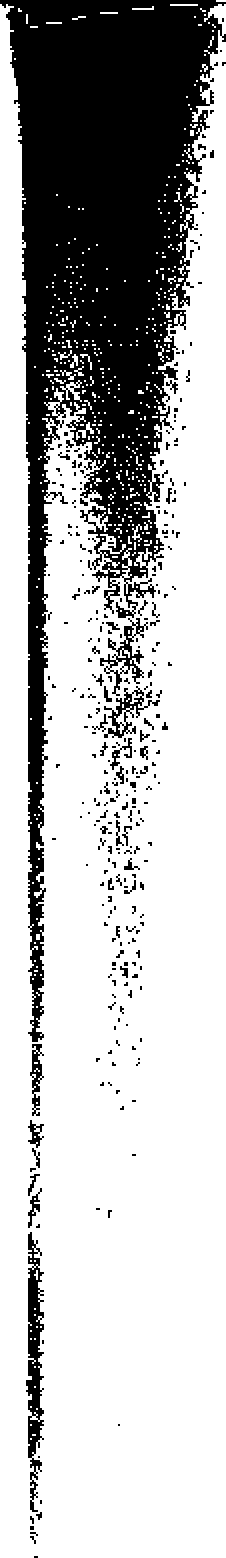
Soon the hunger for the new education became overwhelming.' Some Mus­lims even changed their names.to gain admission into missionary schools. Mis­sionaries encouraged the admission of girls, and in later years many schools came to be run by women. Women viewed the new education as emancipatory, allowing them to explore new horizons and break through the limits that had confined their mothers. They could now travel to new areas, as described in the "Women's Education" (1936, 1937); say no to arranged marriages, like the author of "Praised Be Jesus Christ" (1963); and become successful teachers of the very boys who had once scoffed at them, like Kitandi in "My Students" (1920, 1935).Their status and \*ell-being within the society were enhanded, their differences from other women marked.

Thus, the tension between knowledge transmitted through informal social­ization and that imparted through formal teaching continues today as .commu­nity elders still insist on 'locating girls and their major activities within the family "compound," within what Michelle Rosaldo has called the domestic realm (1974: 23). Formal education, on the other hand, attempts to wrench her out of this compound, into public space. Both provide refuge and a degree of self-confidence for the girl. The forme!) cradles ;the girl within a warm, safe, known, and largely~ predictableenvironment, where actions are conducted according to tradition and long-held customs, and where the support of others is laigely assured. Susan Wood, in "What We Have in-Common" (1964), notes the same need of European women settlers, to cling 'to the past.

In the early days, colonial education for women was extremely paternalistic, conceived as what Gaitskell has called "education for domesticity" (1983: 241). In Eastern Africa, for example, a Commission on Higher Education; presum­ing to know the "needs of women," recommended "home-making" courses-for women entering Uganda's Makerere University, the region's most prestigious institution (Tamale- and Oloka-OnyaA--igo 2000). The women themselves were nevertheless very eager to take up this training as an avenue to other possibili-

**26 + INTRODUCTION**

**ties. At the very least, such education gave them a better understanding of hygiene and nutrition, thus reducing mortality among their children.**



**While missionary schools spread far and wide, and continued to outstrip government schools in the years ahead, such colonial education, in a sense, bore the seeds of its own destruction. The Germans in what would become Tanzania taught prospective clerks and administrators (among whom there was not a sin­gle girl) in their own schools (Larsson 1991: 171, 173). The British. across the region had the specific objective of producing "good citizens" for the colonial governmerit. As they conceived it, African men, after basic primary education, would provide support services in their administration, while African women, for whom education was provided much later, would provide comfortable homes for their husbands. The prescription for both was servitude. The 'aim, according to the colonialists, was to "lift" Africans from the quagmire of igno­rance and depravity in which the colonialists thought they had found them, while at the same time keeping them "in their place." The colonized, however, used the education acquired for their own ends, including fighting and getting rid of the very people who provided that education.**

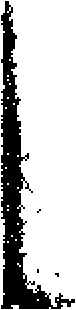
***Early Writing and Publishing***

**The interface between orality and writing reflects the historical fact of the co­existence of the two media for more than a millennium. Written literature in Eastern Africa dates from arount• the eighth century, when the Arabic script was introduced along with Islam. Some of the earliest extant manuscripts, such as** *Siri l'asirari* **(Secret of Secrets), from Kenya and dated 1663, are believed to have been written by women. Both the Arabic and Roman scripts were intro­duced within the process of evangelization. Hence, most of the early writings by women, both Muslim and Christian, are religious. The volume also includes early examples of letter writing.**

**With writing in Roman script came modern publishing. Religious texts were published for church use, and soon secular books and translations for use in schools were published and widely distributed. In 1948 the British government set up local literature bureaus, namely the East African Literature Bureau (EALB) to cater to Kenya, Tanganyika, Uganda, and Zanzibar, and the North­ern Rhodesia and Nyasaland Publication Bureau to serve what are now Zambia and Malawi. These bureaus were entrusted with the task of publishing books, mostly in local languages, for schools and the public. From the 1950s onward, some British publishing houses, including Oxford University Press and Long­man, opened local offices in the region.**

**Even today, when book publishing is fairly well-established, it does not meet the needs of all, or even most, women writers. Historically, the resources have been even more inadequate. Hence, many women have published in other forms, including newspapers and magazines, and have written for radio and tel­evision as well as for the stage and other types of performance. In Tanzania in 1926, for example, Zeina binti Mwinyipembe Sekinyaga wrote her essay on**

**INTRODUCTION + 27**



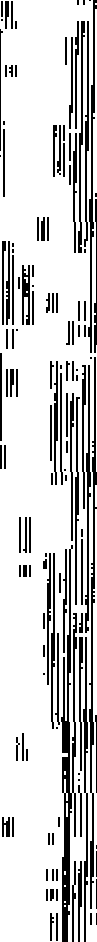
**"Civilized Motherhood," setting forth a kind of agenda for women's liberation, as a letter to the editor of *Mambo Leo,* a colonial government-sponsored monthly newspaper. In Uganda in 1932, Lusi Kyebakutika addressed the then-nascent problem of prostitution in a letter to a Luganda newspaper, the piece we call "The Word *Prostitute* Has Confused Us." And in Malawi in 1933, Emily Mkandawire, in the readers' forum of a local periodical, boldly addressed the question, "Should Women Be Educated?"**



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**Whereas between 1890 and 1950 Eastern African women's writing (in this volume and in general) consisted mostly of short pieces such as songs, hymns, and poetry, personal letters, letters to the editor, petitions and complaints, short sto­ries, and essays, after 1950, fill-length books, dramas, monographs, and other academic writing by women began to appear in both local languages and English.**

***Settler and Colonial Women***

**While fewer European women than men came to the region as colonialists and settlers, their numbers increased as the colonial economy developed and demanded their services. Settler women accompanied men as spouses, daugh­ters, and home caretakers, and also worked in the colonial economy. Some were evangelists, educators, and health workers; others ran plantations and involved themselves in colonial commerce. Settler women also collected and docu­mented local cultural artifacts, activities, rituals, oral literatures, and languages.**

**Some of the texts in this volume were written by settler and colonial women who variously tried to come to grips with Africa—the Africa of their own expe­rience, and the Africa- of European myth. Through these texts, we glimpse not only their prevailing views of African women and men, activities and culture, but also some of their ideas about Eastern African politics, economics, and development. In "Letters from Africa to a Daughter in England" (1939-1963), Nellie Grant describes the frequent movements of women between the colonies and their home country. As daughters they were educated in Europe and visited there during holidays; as mothers they sent their children to school there or vis­ited to conduct business for themselves or their spouses. Nellie Grant's letters cover the period from 1939, when colonial and settler domination in Kenya was institutionalized, to 1963, when the first elections, the forerunner to independ­ence, were held. The letters detail the settlers' comfort and security of the late 1930s, despite a worldwide depression and a plague of locusts, as well as the threat of World War II. By the 1950s, the letters reveal growing anxiety and the fear of economic ruin as African labor became unreliable due to Mau Mau resistance. In her letter of 16 March 1953, Grant writes:**

**On the Hodges' farm in Sabukia the labour all went overnight, leaving their maize, turkeys, clothes and every single thing; the Hodges will be practically bust this year as all their maize and pyrethrum is lying out unpicked; no one has been kinder or better to their labour than they have.**

**28 + INTRODUCTION**

**Colonialists, like slavers before them, could never understand why their "kind­ness" was not reciprocated by those they dominated. Grant, who like her neigh­bors tried to treat her African servants better than most whites did, is clearly distressed, even angry, that the Africans were not more discriminating in their rebellion- against the settlers.**



**Many settler women, Nellie Grant included, were not blind to the contra­dictions and conflicts engendered by colonialism. Grant's letters nonetheless indicate that the Mau Mau resistance largely defined her own ambiguous rela­tionship with African workers. On the one hand, colonialists and settlers found it convenient not to understand Africans and their reality; on the other, they harbored great fears and constructed myths and speculations about their capa­bilities and weaknesses. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Europeans' fear of African sexuality, which led them not to tolerate sexual contact and rela­tions between the races, especially between European women and African men. Nellie Grant's letters allude to these fears and intolerance, but her attitude is restrained when compared to the mainstream of white settlers.**

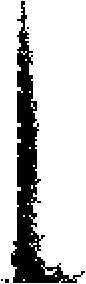
**By the early 1960s, colonialism and thus settler ambitions were in retreat. The dwindling colonial influence is captured in Nellie Grant's letter of 13 June 1960, when she writes about closing her school.**

**I have decided to say the school must go away. The teachers' houses want renewing and the school buildings are very dicky. I started the school thirty-two years ago as a tiny thing, when I had a thousand acres and quite a labor force. I have now fifty acres and there are a hundred and fifty-three children in the school of whom, twenty come from this farm, three teach­ers, and everything expanding, and lots of other schools around.**

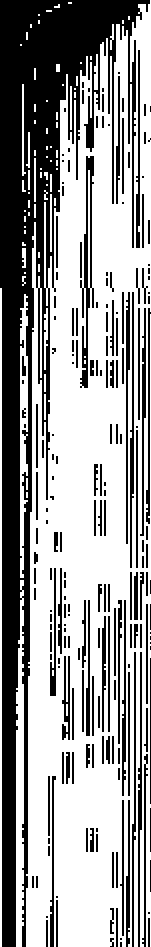
**Throughout, Grant's letters underscore some of the settler notions of alleged African unpredictability and cunning. While Grant expresses, in various ways, the pievailing view of European cultural superiority; she also reveals the fear that, if a colonial woman were too friendly with Africans, she could face nega­tive consequences from her own people.**

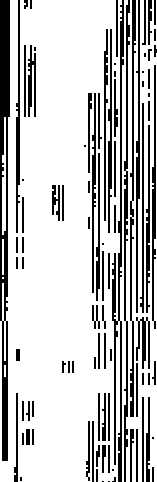
**In E. May Crawford's "Face to Face with Wangu wa Maker? (1913), a settler woman strikes an unusual balance in her attitude toward the Africans she encounters. The text carries the characteristic zeal of European missionaries in documenting local cultural events to inform those at home, but differs from many conventional European accounts of its time. Colonialist writers needed to justify the colonial and Christian mission of civilizing and ruling the local popu­lation, and often did so by putting emphasis on what they thought was "back­ward" Or "barbaric" in the African societies they observed. Such writings often critiqued local cultural, economic, and political practices and beliefs. Crawford's text, based on her encounters with Gikuyu women, is such a critique, at times dismissive and typically racist. Yet it also contains a measure of admiration and awe for some of the practices and personalities. She is impressed by the women's**

**INTRODUCTION + 29**



**creativity, their endurance and resilience, and their manual skills and aptitude at "buying and selling." She also sees them confined within a strenuous life ruled by cruel cultural norms: "Though practically slaves from childhood they bear life's burdens very philosophically and are generally ready with a laugh and a jest." While she affirms their cleverness in some areas, Crawford was not an admirer of African women's intelligence; she found them "dull and torpid," an observation claimed by other settler women and men throughout colonialism. And even as she tries to describe her observations accurately, her narrative never loses its tone of superiority or exoticism, as when she depicts the warm welcome she receives when she arrives to meet the woman chief, Wangu wa Makeri.**





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**They ascended the hill in hundreds to perform a dance in my honour. Nothing would content them but that I must be dragged into the centre of the ring, to endure with as cheerful a countenance as I could muster the din of their savage song and the smother of dust raised by their feet.**

**In the collection called "Letters • on Race and Politics," written in 1942 by Elspeth Huxley and Margery Perham, two white British women with experi­ence in Africa debate the rights and privileges of the settlers and colonialists in Kenya. Elspeth Huxley, daughter of Nellie Grant, expresses the prevailing posi­tion of the settlers in relation to native Kenyans, the direction of the country, and the settlers' status in the colony. She refutes the notion that the settlers did not have the interest of the Kenyans ai heart.**

**Africans are being taught skills and trades of all kinds. . .Therefore to sug­gest, as you seem to, that the Europeans want to sit on the Africans' heads and prevent advances seems to me to give an entirely false impression.**

**Huxley's frustration, like that of other settlers, was directed at their home gov­ernment, which seemed to waver in their support for settlers' aspirations. Writ­ing frormher authoritative post in Oxford, however, Margery Perham suggests that the settlers should stop being selfish and moderate their ambitions:**

**Any settlers who 'cannot accept this check to their attempt to dominate, which will. do no injury at all to their personal security and prosperity, should move to a country where conditions allow them the full citizen­ship to which their traditions4iave accustomed them.**

**While describing the intimate link between race relations and colonial poli­tics, the correspondence touches on the uncertainty of colonialism's future in Eastern Africa. Developments in South Africa, where settlers set the agenda for the colony's autonomy and exercised power over the local population, cautioned Britain against allowing similar excesses in the Eastern Africa region.17 The correspondence between the two Europeans points to differences of opinion**

**30 + INTRODUCTION**

**among settlers and administrators. But it also highlights the unequal political and economic position of, on the one hand, the privileged settlers who defended the right to occupy the colonies and treat local people as they saw fit, and on the other, the exploited local people. Huxley's paternalistic and conde­scending tone is symptomatic of settlers' attitudes, and her polite language does not hide-her impatience with a government she saw as lacking a clear position regarding the settlers and the local population."**

**INTRODUCTION + 31**

***Capitalism, Social Change, and the Proletarianization of Women***

**In introducing new economic demands and imposing an administration to ensure compliance, colonialism brought about sweeping social changes. The colottial period saw the reorganization of societies, the movement of peoples, and the 'emergence of different sociocultural relations within and among African communities. Social units, including new tribes, were invented to rationalize types of colonial governance that required such creations."**

**The social changes effected by colonialism changed women's lives some­times in contradictory directions. As Iliffe has put it, "the colonial world was a man's world and women probably took less part in political leadership than before, while several matrilineal societies moved towards patriliny" (Iliffe 1979: 300). The introduction of cash-crop production, for example, brought in new marital patterns or exaggerated the old ones. The growing need for cash, for taxes or personal use, and its availability in places far away from home facili­tated marital estrangements and short-lived liaisons. Men traveled from their home villages for work on colonists' plantations, in mines, or in urban centers. Women were not always welcomed in such places, and went there at their own peril and risk. Marriage was still seen as a link between families and clans who knew one another, and marrying strangers was frowned upon. In "Modern Marriages" (1936), Princess Kaiko Nambayo warns men against marrying unknown women in faraway cities: "You ought to know that it is difficult to milk a cow when you have no idea which kraal it comes from." Women often found themselves either unexpected co-wives or long-distance widows. If men marrying unknown African women was seen as a problem, so too was African women marrying European, Indian, or Arab men. C.M. binti Hassan's 1946 poem, 'An African Marries a White Through Mere Worldly Desires," high­lights the issue of interracial and cross-cultural marriage. The poet questions the colonial situation that enabled European and Asian men to marry African women, but not vice versa. She doubts the soundness of personal and family relationships governed not by mutual respect, but by imposed ideas of racial superiority and inferiority. Such a marriage, the author suggests, could only bring social alienation to the woman, her children, and her family. The disad­vantages of such unions to the women involved seem so obvious to the poet that she proclaims economic opportunism their only possible motivation.**

**Moft white missionaries and settlers were, not surprisingly, even more strongly opposed to interracial marriages. Loise Kalondu wa Maseki, the Warta--**

for of "A Courageous Woman" (2000), tells of the resistance she faced in 1954 when her daughter chose to marry a white teacher at the local mission. Both young people were Christians, but "the missionaries said that it was not God's will that a black person should marry a white person."

**32 + INTRODUCTION**

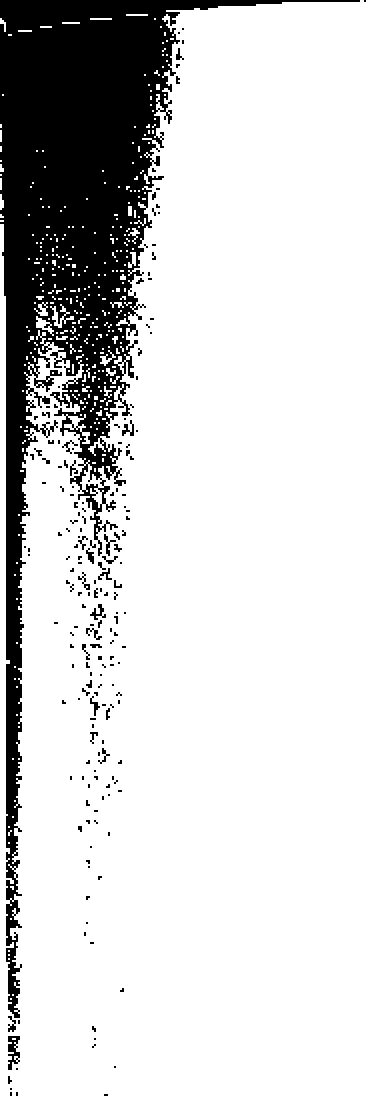
Whether by choice or by necessity, some women took advantage of the change and mobility afforded by colonialism to solve some of the social and economic problems in their own lives. Their "solutions," however, sometimes brought new problems of their own. Unattached women who sought work on the plantations or in cities4aced practical hardships as well as social and some­times legal censure. Some turned to prostitution, and even those who did not were often considered to be immoral and untrustworthy. Two colonial-era texts come to the defense of such women. In "The Word *Prostitute* Has Confused Us" (1932), a Ugandan woman, Lusi Kyebakutika, objects to the fact that, "When somebody sees a woman without a husband, she is called a prostitute." She also criticizes the double standard that condemns prostitutes, but not the men who seek out and pay for their services. In a letter to a local newspaper, she asks, "When a woman is called a prostitute, what shall a man be called?"—and then she answers her own question.

You know, a man is the real prostitute. Sometimes, you are walking on the road, when you see a man coming from a house. Then he calls you, "Madam, come and have some tea and rest. I will take you later where you are going." Yet the resting he is talking of is not good. Therefore, was it the woman who called the man?

Kyebakutika's protest seems not to have been an isolated incident. Eighteen years later, a group of women in Uganda protested not only against the label of "prostitute," but against some measures taken against independent women by the local authorities, including restrictions on their travel. Their petition, "Women Are Human Beings" (1950), echoes Kyebakutika's letter, asking, "If we are called prostitutes, can a woman make herself a prostitute on her own? First of all, is not a prostitute the man who gave us the money?" The writers condemn the colonial administration for approving the restrictions, which they see as an example of the unequal justice afforded to women.

When the men instituted the laws to forbid us-to go abroad to find work to help ourselves and our parents, the law was brought to you and to our rulers to be accepted. But we were not called to any meeting to be asked why we go abroad rather than staying at home, and what problems sent us there. . . . We are sorry when we see that women do not get the protection of our sacred government.

Several other texts show African women challenging the colonialists for being inconsistent and, by their own standards, unjust in their treatment of

colonized peoples. In "A Petition" (1930), Mwana Hashima binti Sheikh pleads with the colonial government in Kenya to recognize that she resolved a local conflict, and to reward her fairly for her service: "As far as I know if anyone serves the Government, he is usually given something as reward or pension, and I did a great work for the Government and I hope that the Government will not caseme aside."

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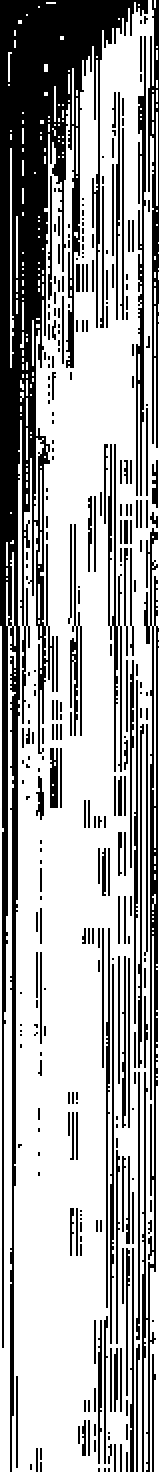
Another woman who took advantage of the changes wrought by colonialism appears in the text called "I Want a Divorce" (1922), taken from court records. In spite of her youth, Luiza defies tradition and challenges male authority by publicly pleading her case against the husband who has abandoned her. Because of her age and sex, she would likely not have been given such an opportunity in a traditibnal setting. The colonial system is also used to personal advantage by Nyense Namwandu, author of "Fighting for Widow's Property" (1947). As a Christian and an educated woman, Namwandu must have been aware of the colonial administration's position on the two issues of widow inheritance and the status of girl-children. In her appeal, she highlights the conflict between traditional African practices and the new beliefs, daring the colonial adminis­tration to back its own beliefs by acting in her favor.

Some of the new social changes were evidenced in the breaking down of social etiquette and cultural norms. In "Domestic Violence" (1939), Erusa Kibanda complains about her brother's behavior in her home. Had the extended family all been living together, as had earlier been the custom, the brother would probably have not dared to behave as he did for fear of immedi­ate social sanction from relatives around him.

Some of the effects of colonialism, however, were acutely felt in those areas where land was expropriated and new colonial economic demands were put in placefor example, with the cultivation of such cash crops as coffee, tea, and sisal. The work on these plantations was characterized by exploitive wages, intolerable and inhuman working and living conditions, and all manner of cruel treatment. Reactions against such situations were inevitable.

"Song of the Coffee Girls" (1922) exemplifies women's collective resistance and protest in Kenya in the early part of the twentieth century. This resistance was directed toward an economic system that enabled settlers and the colonial administration to conscript men and women for cheap plantation labor. Although the recruitment of men from far away was encouraged and even enforced, women and girls working in the plantations were usually nonmigrants and came from the surrounding communities. The working conditions for these women were dismal. Using both spontaneous and organized protests to draw attention to their plight, the women responded to the leadership of Harry Thuku, an African labor leader who tried to mobilize the workers to demand their rights. "Song of the Coffee Girls" paid tribute to Thuku, calling him "chief of the coffee girls," and denounced not only the colonists but the Gikuyu chiefs they had appointed, who had supported Thuku's imprisonment in 1922. Many women were among the many unarmed Africans killed by colonial police and

settlers during a demonstration demanding Thuku's release, including Mary Muthoni Nyanjiru, who had challenged the timid men to take action to free Thuku. The song could have been part of the repertoire on that fateful day."



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**34 + INTRODUCTION**

During the late 1930s and early 1940s, the effects of World War II were felt in the warring Europeans' Eastern African colonies. While African men fought with British forces, African women bore the brunt of war's impact on the home front. In the second of the letters included in "War Time in Zanzibar" (1943), Zeyana Ali Muh'd describes the shortages and other hardships women endured, as well as their resourcefulness and solidarity with other women dur­ing troubled times—a departure from the severely hierarchical nature of Zan­zibari society in that era. On a larger scale, the additional hardships faced by Africans during a war whose outcome was unlikely to benefit them only served to accelerate growing demands for liberation.

***Anticoknial Resistance and Liberation Struggles***

The oppression, exploitation, and contradictions engendered by colonialism made resistance against it inevitable. Women's resistance took a variety of forms, both individual and collective. Unfortunately, few texts from that period reflect the experiences ofwomen during struggles against colonialism. We do have texts written or recorded much later in the twentieth century, including some first­hand accounts, describing women's active participation in liberation movements.

One of the earliest women freedom fighters in Eastern Africa was Mekatilili wa Menza, who has achieved legendary status in Kenya. In a text written in 2000, Hannah Tsuma describes Mekatilili's leadership of her people, the Giriyama of coastal Kenya, in a rebellion against their British colonizers in 1913 And 1914. Mekatilili saw forced and unpaid labor and lack of respect for local cultures as a form of slavery. She showed fearlessness in the face of physi­cal danger and imprisonment, denouncing the local chiefs who cooperated with the colonizers and focusing much of her effort on mobilizing women to refuse to send their sons to fight for the British in World War I.

Mekatilili's story shows how she was able to use all the talents and draw on the resources of her position as woman, mother, community leader, orator, and performer. Traditional systems of beliefs and protection through medicines, social equilibrium, trust, and commitment, demonstrated by oath-taking, became vital factors in her campaign. In this, Mekatilili was not alone. Before and after Mekatilili, ritual and belief systems were important to the resistance movements in the region, including the Nyabingi revolts in Uganda and Rwanda during the early years of the twentieth century;" the Nehanda resist­ance of 1897-1898 in Zimbabwe; Mkomanire's Maji Maji wars of 1905-1907 in southern Tanzania (Iliffe 1979); the 1915 John Chilembwe revolt in Malawi (Rotberg 1965; Rotberg and Mazrui 1970); and the *mbiru* protest against colo­nialism in northeastern Tanzania, where women participated fully (Kimambo 1971: 1991; Spear et al. 1999).

Later, in the second half of the twentieth century, other women would also

**draw inspiration and strength from rituals and belief systems. Warrior priest­esses Alice Lenshina of Zambia and Alice Lakwena of Uganda built their polit­ical bases, using their spiritual and ritual gifts and positions. Both became charismatic leaders by harnessing both African and Christian beliefs, thus demonstrating not only women's spirituality but also their quick adaptation to elements they find useful, materially or spiritually (Roberts 1970; Berger 1976).**

**INTRODUCTION + 35**

**While Mekatilili, Lenshina, and Lakwena were self-made women, arising from among their people to become leaders, others inherited their positions as rulers. Such were Mwami Tereza Ntare of Tanzania, Princess Nakatindi of Zambia, and Chauwa Banda of Malawi. Both groups were united in perceiving colonialism as an intrusion and a threat politically and culturally. In a 1936 proclamation, published in this volume as "Fighting for My Chieftaincy," Chauwa Banda posits colonialism as a threat to the political and economic organization of her society, as well as to the individual and collective identity of her people, the Banda. Mamdani (2002) points out that the colonial project created political identities that were vertically based on race and horizontally based on ethnicity; legitimizing both new hierarchies and ethnic differences at the same time. Chauwa Banda was thus protesting the imposed political sys­tem, which the, colonizers created by handpicking local individuals and giving them power, against the wishes of authentic traditional rulers like herself The newly appointed chiefs, however, were not secure in their power: They feared conspiracies by their own people and worried about falling out of favor with the colonials. The appointment-of a male chief to replace Chauwa Banda was also symptomatic of the colonial -administration's preference for male rather than female political leaders in Africa. In the colonial era, spaces where women tra­ditionally exercised political power became less important or disappeared alto­gether. Chauwa Banda harnessed her strength as both ruler and woman by tap­ping her people's beliefs in their cosmology: "I am the descendant of Chauwa, the founder of the Abanda clan," she proclaims. She also appeals, "If you acknowledge that I am your motlier, please attend the meeting." In reminding her people that she is their mother-ruler, she was contesting the redefinition of her identity and potency.**

**Walter Rodney describes the effect on African women of colonialism's imposition of new values and identities.**

**What happened to African women under colonialism is that the social, religious, constitutional, and political privileges and rights disappeared, while the economic exploitation continued and was often intensified. It was intensified because the division of labor according to sex was fre­quently disrupted. (1972: 227)**

**Rodney argues that the colonial mentality preferred men, who entered more
  
easily and in greater numbers into the all-important cash economy (226-27).
  
Because women's work was devalued and made inferior, women's status also**

deteriorated. Colonialism thus intensified the marginalization of women by reinforcing and extending some of the worst elements of African patriarchy.

**36 + INTRODUCTION**

Of the five countries represented in this volume, only Kenya waged a fierce anticolonial armed struggle, in which women not only participated but also distin­guished themselves as military leaders. The Kenyan struggle was typical of colonies with strong settler communities, for whom defending their own interests meant opposing Africans' movements toward independence. In "Warrior Woman" (1993), Field Marshal Muthoni highlights the heroism of women leaders in the Mau Mau uprising. Writing of her own experiences in the 1950s, Muthoni describes women's courage under fire and through painful material hardships, negating any notion that women in the Mau Mau movement were the tools of men. Just as they did in Mekatilili's strux e, spiritual energies and ritual strength­ened the Mau Mau warriors' commitment, discipline, and hope for the future.

In Kenya, the years of "the Emergency"—a period of martial law declared by the British in response **to** the Mau Mau resistance—affected both the women who fought in the bush and those who remained behind in their homes. African communities—in particular the Gikuyu, who were the main con­stituents of the Mau Mau—faced severe hardships, including forced internal exile. Hannah Kahiga's "A Model Day during the Emergency" (1966) provides a firsthand account of women's day-to-day lives in one of the British concentra­tion camps. These camps—rationalized by the British, according to Nellie Grant (1939-1963), as "villagization'schemes—were designed to monitor and contain the Africans' movements. Facilities were overcrowded, meager, and often unsanitary, and residents were overworked, underfed, brutalized, and encouraged to betray those at home and in the forest. Besides the people in the "villages," reports show that by 1954 there were fifty thousand detainees and seventeen thousand convicts scattered in camps and prisons (Rosberg and Not­tingham 1966).While the strategies of war on both sides included terror and fear, the ratio of African to British deaths was likely more than one hundred to one (Elkins 2005). In the camps and in the forest, death was always close, whether brought by attacks, starvation, or disease,Women such as Wanjiru Nyamarutu, Gakonyo Ndungi, and Wambui Kamuirigo were relied on for their crucial and loyal services in the provision of food, intelligence, organization, logistics, legal counseling, and health'

Both "Warrior Woman" and "A Model Day during the Emergency" present women not as victims but as wartime fighters, overtly or subversively. They depict women bearing the suffering of war, which exacerbated daily depriva­tions, oppressions, and marginalization: But they also show women's commit­ment, resilience, resourcefulness, and courage in rising to the challenges of a war in which they themselves had a vital stake. Women's texts about their expe­riences during the Mau Mau uprising remain rare, but the ones presented in this volume, as well as Wambui Otieno's *Mau Mau Daughter: A Life History,* give us a sense of their valor in a war against colonialism.

Anticolonial struggles drew to a close in the 1960s, not only in Kenya but

**throughout the region. Nationalists had organized major anticolonial opposi­tion in their countries, culminating in the formation of political parties to mobilize for independence. At this stage, women became, more clearly than ever before, indispensable to the struggle for African liberation.**

**INTRODUCTION + 37**

**INDEPENDENCE AND AFTER**

***"Take a Look at Our Joy": Women Celebrate Independence***

**The years between 1960 and 1965 were momentous ones for the women of Eastern Africa. The end of colonialism and the coming of independence brought not only the joys of liberation but also new struggles and the challenges of development. Women, along with men, had to untangle colonialism's legacy of contradictions. Having suffered some of the worst effects of colonialism, women embraced'independence with vigor and hopeful anticipation, but they also remained cautious and concerned about the future.**

**The five countries in the region became independent in succession—Tan­ganyika in 1961, Uganda 1962, Kenya and Zanzibar 1963, Malawi and Zambia 1964. In 1964, Tanganyika united with independent Zanzibar to form Tanza­nia. The British flag that had flown over the five countries was replaced by five national flags, representing governments that were led by prime ministers and/or presidents as well as parliaments. Independence, as a political milestone, at first brought tremendous euphoria, captured in the "Independence Song" sung by girls from Zambia's Roma Girls Secondary School at independence celebrations in 1964. The feelings expressed by the lyrics link the political to the spiritual.**

**Our God, take a look at our joy In this our land**

**Which you have given us,**

**That it may be ours**

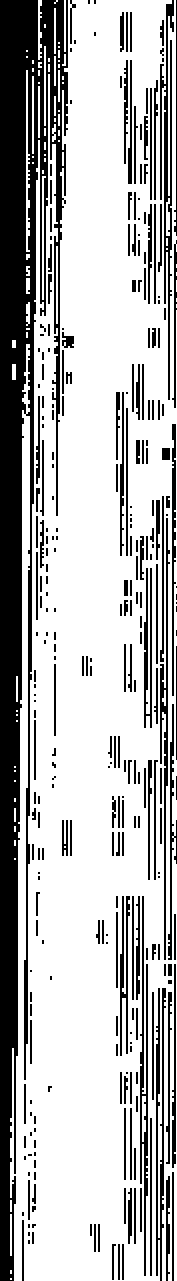
**With all that is in it.**

**Such words were echoed throughout the region as women sang and danced while asking God's blessing on the five countries—in all of their various languages.**

**In "Independence 1962," a recollection composed in 1998, Winnie Mun­yarugerero tries to remember the excitement and energy she felt thirty-six years earlier, on Uganda's independence day: "What characterized the occasion, how­ever, was the excitement that permeated the atmosphere. The excitement was so heavy and real that you could almost touch it, you felt it in your blood stream; right through your entire body."**

**Independence was as fresh as the young girls who sang the independence songs, promising development, prosperity, and new opportunities. Because the idea of independence was so intense, the often difficult realities that unfolded in subsequent decades provoked equally strong reactions: In 1998, Mun-**

**yarugerero—along with many of her generation—asks, simply but heartbreak­ingly, 'What went wrong?" What, she wonders, happened to. the dreams and hopes of independence? While Munyarugerero attributes her reaction to the disillusionment engendered by the politics and economics of the post-inde­pendence era, the text by Field Marshall Muthoni, also speaking years later, in 1993, expresses the sense of betrayal she felt because she was not accorded the recognition she deserved and had been promised for her contributions to the anticolonial struggle. Returning, after independence, from the Mau Mau strug­gle, Muthoni, and many others like her, was treated as a stranger in a country she had helped liberate. She remained a nonentity, while some—those who belonged to more privileged or dominant groups, or had more shrewdly posi­tioned themselves for the post-independence era—reaped the rewards of the battles she and her comrades had fought.**





**38 t INTRODUCTION**

**Some of Muthoni's sentiments are shared by Princess Nakatindi in "The Princess of Politics" (1963, 1971). She attributes the ills of post-independence Zambia to tribalism and -lack of economic independence, proclaiming, 'We have political power but without economic power we cannot really be free." For these women, the problem resides in the conflict between the promise of inde­pendence and the failures of execution. Through their texts, the women project a sense that the independence aspired to by most people had been hijacked by a group for its own ends. This has remained a major concern and several texts in the volume repeat this post-independence dismay.**

***Visionaries and Mothers of the Nation: Women in Parliament***

**For the women who were selected, nominated, and voted into or appointed to seats in post-independence parliaments, these legislative bodies would serve as platforms from which they could bring women's points of view to the coming battles over the development of independent Eastern Africa.'**

**In "Let us Praise Phoebe, Our MP," the singer posits women's entry into parliamentary politics as an act of subversion and a challenge to the traditional status quo, shifting the fly whisk, a symbol of power, from the men's hands to the women's. Grace Awach, who sang this song in 1994, underscores the fact that, in Kenya, women were rather late in entering parliamentary politics, becoming significantly involved only in the 1990s. In Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia, however, women.were active parliamentarians from the early days of independence. In spite of tremendous odds, the creeping betrayal and disillusionment, women, though few in number, worked hard to claim a place in formal post-independence 'politics. Their voices, some of which are included in this volume, have been at times quite radical.**

**Unlike the other women parliamentarians whose texts are published here, such as Bibi Titi Mohamed (1965) and Lucy Lameck (1965) in Tanzania, Rose Chibambo (1964) in Malawi, or Joyce Mpanga (1961, 1989) in Uganda, Barbra Johansson, author of the speeches published in this volume as "The Advance­ment of Women" (1964, 1965), came to Africa as a missionary and educator.**

She was inspired and engulfed by the political atmosphere in Tanzania in the days following independence, took up the causes of her adopted country, and became an active political figure inside and outside parliament. Like the others, she chose a public political career that gave her a platform on which to resist and challenge the male hegemony that expressed itself in the family, the society, the political parties, and the parliament.

**INTRODUCTION + 39**

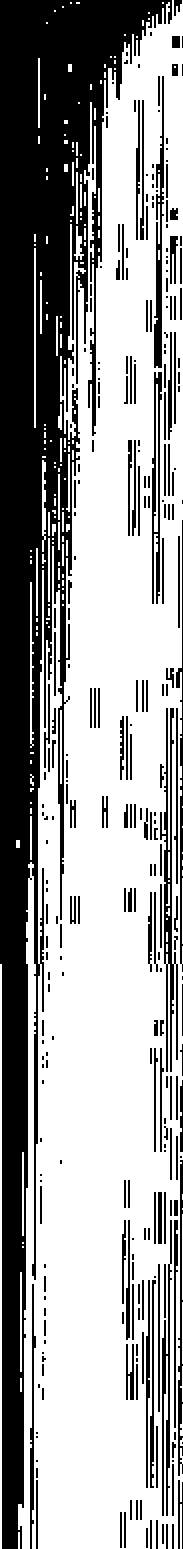
In addition to such women as Bibi Titi Mohamed, Lucy Lameck, and Rose Chibariabo, who were in politics as a continuation of their pre-independence struggles, others, including Joyce Mpanga and Phoebe Asiyo (the subject of "Let Us Praise Phoebe, Our MP"), came from the ranks of women's organiza­tions formed after independence. They entered or continued in politics' not only as a means of attaining personal advancement, but more importantly, because they hoped to use their positions to fight for the liberation and advancement of women. Princess Nakatindi (1963, 1971), for example, declares: "Politics is in my blood. I simply want to serve my people and the nation."

The few women who managed to enter parliament immediately after inde­pendence, along with many who later joined them, used their seats to confront national as well as women's issues. Those whose voices are included in this vol­ume display not only individual styles of oratory but also intense passion for the subjects they expose and address. Florence Lubega's 1959 speech, "Debate on Higher Education," brings up many of the issues surrounding women and edu­cation at that' time: While she strongly believes that secondary and university education for both men and women is essential to development in Uganda, and indeed all of Eastern Africa, she insists on the need for proper planning, poli­cies, management, and government oversight, lest both scarce resources and irretrievable opportunities be squandered.

One of the most powerful voices of this period was that of Bibi Titi Mohamed of Tanzania. In "Sacrifices for Change" (1965), she expresses an awareness of her young nation's vulnerability to being defined by the interests and relations of the Cold War superpowers. Galvanized by the support of African women who attended the All African Women's Constitutional Con­gress in 1962 in Dar es Salaam, which she chaired, Bibi Titi Mohamed became a great chai'npion of Pan Africanism, campaigning for the cause not only in Tanzania but also in Kenya. In parliament, she spoke of the need for a united anti-imperialist stance and for the liberation of the whole of Africa. She casti­gated. the superpowers, and especially the United States, for using developing nations from the Congo to Vietnam as pawns in the Cold War. The United States president, she declares, "wants to prevent Communism. Why doesn't he go to fight Communism in Russia where it all started?"

In her speech, Bibi Titi Mohamed also criticizes the postcolonial economic agenda, under which developed countries continue to build their own wealth while exploiting and weakening newly-independent states. She points out that "the whole economy of this country has built Britain," and argues that Tanza­nia's problems are compounded by the fact that in spite of independence, "many

**of us are still mentally controlled by our former colonial masters." She urges her colleagues in parliament to "let the people know that the colonialists have really left this country." She advocates social, cultural, political, and economic revolu­tions for her country and for all of Africa, turning to universally understandable metaphors to make her point:**



**We want to revolutionize, although some people from other places mis­understand the meaning of revolution. Our revolution is an economic revolution for,a better life and we should be able to reproduce a lot. Some generations die due to sick stomachs. When a child wants to develop inside one, one develops stomach problems, and you abort—is this how we are going to increase the population here? We want a revolution. We want to procreate. I too would like to have a baby and hold a child one day.**

**In "Africans Are Not Poor," also drawn from a speech made in the Tanzanian parliament in 1965, Lucy Lameck tackles many of the same issues, though she expresses them differently. Lameck speaks of self-reliance in its totality as the relevant direction for national development: "We have a great responsibility... that of laying the foundations that conform to the needs and experience of Tan­zanians themselves." She saw this foundation as politically and economically "homegrown," and in harmony "with the people's experience." This idea was tied to the notion of an African form of socialism, which she saw as the best model for development. Both Lucy Lameck and Barbra Johansson (1964, 1965) advocated this model some years before the Arusha Declaration of 1967, which was a blueprint for Tanzania's program of African socialism, called Uja­maa, and which became a pivotal document in Tanzania's contemporary his­tory. Tanzanian women supported the Arusha Declaration overwhelmingly because it promised structural changes that would benefit them.**

**One of the overriding concerns of the women leaders inside and outside of parliament has been the contradiction contained in Lucy Lameck's cry, "Africans are not poor." Africa suffers from more extreme poverty than any other continent, which in turn undermines its ability to develop and improve the well-being of its citizens through better education, health care, and other services. Yet its poverty is based upon geopolitical power structures, and not upon any lack of natural resources, which Africa has in abundance (Gioseffi 2003). As Lameck argues, Africa faces great developmental challenges because it cannot follow the mocl•set by the developed countries, which achieved their development through exploitation. Princess Nakatindi, Lucy Lameck, and Bibi Titi Mohamed all point to the need for Africa to develop its own economic power base in order to gain economic independence. It was this impulse that in part fueled support for the idea of African socialism as exemplified by the Arusha Declaration in Tanzania—which, in the end, failed to put in place an alternative to the capitalist system of development.**

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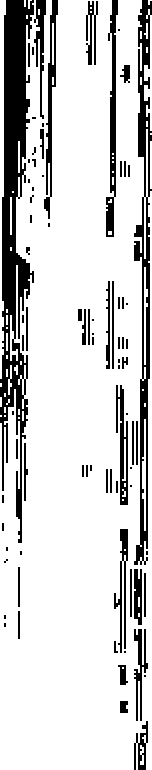
These texts also examine the functions of institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and various government and non­governmental organizations. Several of the writers in this volume find that these institutions, though garbed in development coats, in fact serve as instru­ments for the oppression and subjugation of women. They use their power to set conditions for African states and people, often without regard to the reali­ties on the ground, and without considering true grassroots needs. The solu­tions they offer are often both constricting and unsustainable, because at the grassroots level, people can neither identify with them nor own them.;The pro­grams they impose are sometimes especially insensitive to the needs of women, failing to include them in the development process and seeking to institute alien values and practices while relegating traditional sociocultural values and practices to the periphery.

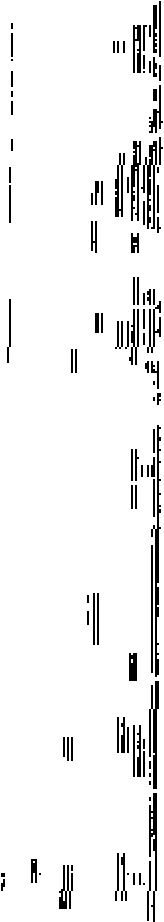
**INTRODUCTION + 41**

Development efforts have particularly left unaddressed many issues perti­nent to women's specific needs. Sarah Nyendohwa Ntiro's autobiographical text "Fighting for Women's Rights" (1999) underscores struggles for women's legal rights generally, and interventions against arranged marriages for Hindu and Muslim women specifically. The failure to address problems such as forced early marriage, female circumcision, widow inheritance, and other traditional customs that impinge upon women's rights is also noted in Lucy Lameck's speech. The societal changes required to promote women's welfare became major rallying points for Larrieek, Rose Chibambo, Bibi Titi Mohamed, Barbro Johansson, and others. "I want major revolution. I want major changes in the entire structure of our society," Johansson proclaimed in 1965. "Girls and women must have the same opportunities as men."

Women's commitment to national development and their political parties, however, provided them with neither security nor peace. When they fell out of favor with their heads of state, Bibi Titi Mohamed was jailed for many years, while Rose Chibambo and Sarah Nyendohwa Ntiro were forced into long-term exile. What befell these three women, in Tanzania, Malawi, and Uganda, was symptomatic, of the crisis in governance and the intensification of conflicts among different groups vying for political and economic dominance after inde­pendence. Rose Chibambo's 1964 parliamentary speech, published here as "The Truth Will Always Speak," details her attempts to defend herself from accusations of treason for allegedly failing to support Prime Minister Hastings Kamuzu Banda. Her position, and that of other women like her, rested on the whims of ruling men, who did not usually countenance criticism or dissent. Knowing this, however, did not deter the women from expressing contrary views on economic policies, international politics, and the behavior of (male) leaders. Despite political persecution, which in some cases meant they could no longer serve in government, these women also remained politically active, in one form or another, throughout their lives, dedicated to bringing about improvements in the lives of women through their political work

***Thorns, Ghosts, and Wandering Spirits: Conflicts and Civil Wars***



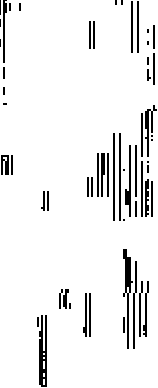


**In the years immediately following independence, there was already deep dis­satisfaction among some groups in Eastern Africa. In 1964, the armies of Tan­zania, Kenya, and Uganda mutinied. In the same year, there was a cabinet crisis in Malawi when a group of ministers revolted, and some were forced into exile. And 1964 was also the year of the Zanzibar revolution, which ousted the ruling sultanate and paved the way for the island nation to join with Tanganyika to form the current United Republic of Tanzania.**

**Throughout the region, conflicts intensified as the ruling groups struggled to give their societies political, cultural, and economic direction, while at the same *time* curtailing political freedoms and limiting political participation through establishing one-party states: Some of these conflicts developed into civil wars, which have had a great impact on the lives of women in the region, and several texts in the volume expose women's suffering in these wars.**

**Uganda has seen one of the most protracted internal conflicts in post-independence Africa. The existence of civil war in some parts of the country has been virtually continuous since 1966. Political strain within the ruling group in Uganda exploded in 1971, when President Milton Obote was ousted by Idi Amin, his army chief of staff. Amin's regime, which was generally hostile to women's rights, as well as the regimes that followed, failed to resolve Uganda's political and economic problems, instead exacerbating conflicts as different political cliques vied for power.' The impact of these conflicts was felt outside of Uganda, as hundreds of thousands of women and men took refuge in all the countries of the region. Some of the neighboring countries felt threatened by these conflicts, and indeed were drawn into them, as was the case with Tanza­nia, which went to war with Idi Amin. Tanzanian forces joined with Ugandan exiles in overthrowing Amin in 1979 and reinstalling Obote.**

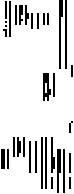
**Another coup, in 1986, installed Uganda's current president, Yoweri Musev­eni, ushering in a new and brutal period of civil war in the northern provinces of Uganda. Resistance against the Museveni government in the north was greatly influenced by a woman named Alice Auma, often called Alice Lakwena because, as a spirit medium, she was believed to be representing the spirit Lak­wena. During the 1980s, she employed her spiritual and ritual resources to mobilize one of the most enduring and controversial resistance movements in the post-independence period.' The fighting continued even more viciously after Auma went into exile and a new leadership emerged in the form of the Lord's Resistance Army, led by Joseph Kony, who also proclaimed himself a spirit medium. Arac de Nyeko's 2003 narrative, "In the Stars," laments the bru­tal effects of this conflict. The author condemns both the brutal rebel group and the corrupt and ineffectual government forces for the immense suffering on the ground. As is so often the case, this suffering has been borne largely by women, who are subject to rape as well as massacres, and by children, thousands of whom have been forced to become child soldiers. Even where women's sympa­thies lie with one side or another in civil war, they have often voiced resistance**



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**42 + INTRODUCTION**

**to the destruction war wreaks on their *lives, families,* identity, and dignity. Monica Arac de Nyeko refers to the war survivors as "a generation of thorns," living for almost two decades with "images of ghosts of dead friends and rela­tives." She also illuminates the cosmological and spiritual consequences of war. Africans are known for their reverence of the dead and for the rituals performed on burial grounds, which connect the living to the dead. Not knowing where the body of a relative lies is thus a major spiritual and psychological torment. Arac de Nyeko's family was devastated by the fact that they were unable to recover the body of an uncle, who died in the conflict. Arac de Nyeko attributes her mother's death not only to meningitis but to the spiritual and psychological effects of the war:**

**Worry had drained Ma's spirit. She carried memories. She suffered pain of knowing the past and future... . She had died knowing we would never go to school because it was always bullets and bombs. Our virginity would fall prey to wicked savagery. We would be abducted and forced to fight. Our bodies would rot in the wild.**

**Because *armed* conflict *exacerbates* the already existing inequalities that women experience, violence in various forms becomes a manifestation of the unequal power relations (Gardam and Jarvis 2001). Arac de Nyeko points to the psychological and physical trauma, the savagery of sexual violence, the bru­tal deaths, the fear, the helplessness and hopelessness, the distrust and percep­tion of betrayal from national and international bodies, expected to intervene but failing to do so. "We know nothing of treaties. . . But we know that we are going to die."**

**Similar sentiments find expression in an earlier poem from Uganda, "Pray No Revenge" (1979) by Grace Akello, who fled the brutal regime of Idi Amin. Akello's text resonates with the displacement and loss of identity and peace that is the lot of refugees and exiles. Her poem conveys not only the physical dis­placement of the living, but also the fate of the spirit that wanders aimlessly, finding solace only in death.**

**Some of the greatest conflicts, yielding the largest number of refugees, have taken place in the Great Lakes region. Uganda, Congo-Kinshasa, Rwanda, and Burundi have produced millions of internal and external refugees, and the rest of the countries of Eastern Africa, especially Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda, have served as sanctuaries. Malawi and Zambia have not been spared the refugee exodus either, since victims have tried to flee as far as possible from the atrocities of war.**

**One of the most horrendous chapters in the history of this region's conflicts has been the Rwandan genocide of 1994, in which estimates of those killed have ranged between 500,000 and 1 million people. In her text "In the Shadow of God" (2000), Ugandan writer Goretti Kyomuhendo asks, as many others have done, "Who killed them? Why were they killed?" Kyomuhendo asks the**

**INTRODUCTION + 43**

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questions in the self-contradictory setting of a church—a place where one expects to find both physical and spiritual peace and refuge—which has served as the site of a massacre, in effect a racial pogrom. Women in Rwanda were sub­ject to rape and torture as well as mass death. Agathe Uwilingiyimana, the first woman prime minister in Rwanda—in fact, in the whole eastern and central African region—was killed, as were many other women who were Tutsi or moderate Hutus. Women were targets not only in their own right, but for their affiliations as wives and relations of the intended victims. Many women also participated in the killings and the violence.

**44 + INTRODUCTION**

Mamdani (2002) attributes the genocide to several factors, primary among them the colonial legacy that endowed certain groups with a racial identity per­ceived to be superior to others. Colonialism, he argues, advocated what has come to be known as the Hamitic factor, which identified any advances in the region as foreign, brought by what were considered superior races. While the actual ethnic distinctions between the Tutsis and the Hutus were slight, the Tutsis were designated a race with origins outside the region, and thus a supe­rior one. The identities of the two groups were differentiated in part through supposed contrasts in their physical features, which were much remarked by the colonialists. These differences became the "original sin" that Kyomuhendo alludes to in her narrative. The failure of the postcolonial governments to dis­mantle this system of differentiation, instead assigning either privilege or perse­cution on the basis of ethnicity, created fertile ground for the genocide. The roots of the genocide, however, also need to be understood within a regional context, where issues of citizenship, indigenousness, and ethnic identity extend beyond the borders of Rwanda (Mamdani 2002).

One of the greatest tragedies of Rwanda was the fact that the world hesitated and turned away while the killings went on. Amid the horrors of war, however, women mourned the dead and provided solace to the victims left behind, through their presence and their voices. In .Kyomuhendo's text, however, even these merciful images are overshadowed by images of destruction and contradic­tion—the haunting image of a 'church whose outside is surrounded by "green hills wrapped in fertile volcanic soils," while "inside skulls and bones recline."

***Losses and Gains: The Late Twentieth Century***

Well into the postcolonial era, activists and educators were still emphasizing the importance of education for girls and women, signaling continued imbalances in its availability. All governments and civil society groups have paid lip service to the cliché, "If you educate a woman, you educate the family/the world," while in practice providing education disproportionately to boys and men. Access to edu­cation has been skewed over the centuries, although with•estern education the inequalities appear more pronounced. Even today, as George Malekela writes, "The psychological resistance to girls' education' may be in recession, but the structural obstacles are still intimidating. Girls have a harder time attending school because of their other responsibilities at home" (Malekela 1983). Several

of our texts reveal the extent to which young mothers, themselves children, have to be responsible for others of similar ages—for example, Mama Meli's "From Slavery to Freedom" (1950s) and Anna Chipaka's "A Bar-Maid's Life" (1980s). Special facilities for girls in school are almost totally lacking, including even such basic amenities as toilets (Nkamba and Kanyika 1998). Girls are inhibited 'or discouraged from pursuing career paths that teachers consider too "challenging" for them, such as those involving the sciences. They often experience sexual harassment from teachers and fellow students (Yahya-Othman 2000: 41-42). Girls who become pregnant while in school are barred from continuing with their education. Those who perform well are accused of offering sexual favors in exchange for good &des. Just as the title character of the story "Binti Ali the Clever" (1914) and Kitandi in "My Students" (1920, 1935) surprised even their own parents and mentors with their intelligence and foresight, so too do teach­ers and male classmates today still marvel that girls can outperform boys. Adult women wanting to achieve literacy find their household chores obliterating all else (Nyoni 1994). It is clear that those who have managed to overcome these hurdles possessed deep reservoirs of courage, diligence, and tolerance.

**INTRODUCTION + 45**

Two texts in this volume, Florence Lubega's "Debate on Higher Education" (1959)-and Martha Qorro's "Language in Tanzania" (2003) question whether pupils''cognitive development is being stunted because they are taught in a lan­guage in which they clearly lack proficiency. The fact that these texts are sepa­rated by nearly half a century shows how deeply the problem persists. Ogot cites research indicating that the high failure rates in African schools is partly a functiom of the use of a foreign language•such as English (1995: 222).

The quality of education in the region has long been the subject of intense debate. *Parents and educators, activists* and *politicians,* have all expressed *con­cern* about the curriculum and instructional methods, questioning everything from the admissions process for students and the content of examinations, to the quality of the teachers. The decline in educational quality and'accessibility, unsurprisingly, affects girls more than it does boys. Modern education comes at a price. Although governments in the region espouse free universal primary education (UPE), in effect contributions are demanded for various school proj­ects. When fees are due, parents with several children are sometimes forced to make.choices on who can go to school and who cannot (Sumra and Katunzi 1991; Graham-Brown 1991). In most cases it is the girl-child who suffers, on the assumption that she will be looked after by her future husband. If she does go to school, she is unlikely to perform as well as a boy, because she faces a heavier workload at home.

Throughout the region, the universality of UPE (where it exists at all) ends at class one of primary school. The numbers begin to dwindle as girls proceed to the.upper classes, through failure of parents to buy uniforms and pay the var­ious fees demanded by schools; through pregnancies; and through parents pulling girls out either to marry them off or to assign them household work (Hyde .1993: 114). The numbers drop even lower at the juncture of admission

into secondary school, since girls have to compete with boys for very limited places. Efforts by some governments to operate a quota system **that** favors girls and children from underdeveloped regions have recently come under attack, and in the case of Tanzania for example, were forced to cease (TGNP 1993: 84). In her 1959 speech, Florence Lubega makes a rousing call for an increase in the admission of girls to higher education, as well as for more support for universities. The same call might be made, with even greater fervor, today.

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**46 + INTRODUCTION**

In 1965, Bibi Titi Mohamed lamented the control of African governments by foreign powers, and its negative impact on African people. Her words ring equally if not more true in the present millennium. The international financial institutions dictate policies that affect African educational systems in a number of ways. Their structural adjustment programs sometimes demand that Africans cut social spending, including spending on education. They also weigh in on where remaining funds should go, urging governments to focus on primary and secondary education while effectively depriving most Africans of higher educa­tion. Cuts in funding lead to cuts in admissions and in government subsidies for school expenses, and with fewer places and less support to go 'around, girls and women are, once again, most likely to suffer the consequences 25

Apart from barriers to admission, women at universities face a harsh learn­ing and working environment. Sexual harassment from both fellow students and male lecturers is rife. Phiri describes not only the sexual harassment of stu­dents at Chancellor College in Malawi, but also the harassment of those who dare discuss the issue (2000b). At the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, the notorious practice of "Punch," wall literature attacking women, led to the suicide of Revina Mukasa in 1990, after she was harassed because she had rebuffed the sexual advances of a fellow student (Mkude 1990). At Makerere University in Uganda, there have been several recent cases of murders of women students. Generally, women feel insecure and threatened, and the secu­rity precautions in place are not sufficient to give them the confidence and free­dom they need in order to maintain matriculation at these higher-education institutions.

Opportunities for.career advancement and further training are curtailed by patriarchal assumptions that women need to "raise their families," and that they will not be able to cope with children and a demanding job. Because the pool of women at the lower levels is small, attempts even by well-meaning administrators to recruit women meet with little success. The sciences, mathe­matics, engineering, and related disciplines present a particularly daunting chal­lenge. Significant work has been undertaken by the Pan-African Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), headquartered in Nairobi, whose objective is to improve the access to and quality of education for girls and women throughout Africa. FAWE has at least thirty-three chapters, and has mounted various programs to increase and improve the participation of girls in education, with a special focus on math and science. The Female Education in Mathematics and Science project (FEMSA) runs in ten countries in southern, western, and

**eastern Africa. The science project has also been boosted by the provision of pre-entry training for prospective university students who have not done well in the sciences. The University of Dar es Salaam conducts such courses.**

**INTRODUCTION + 47**

**FAWE also runs centers of excellence (CoEs), in which they provide an intervention package of effective strategies to address concerns in girls' educa­tion. The CoEs are expected to produce girls who are high achievers, self-confident, potential leaders and widely read. Sarah Ntiro, author of "Fighting for Worhen's Rights" (1999) has been extensively involved in FAWE's work, she herself having. been a victim of discrimination in her early school years.**

**As a positive result of the struggle to provide girls with equal access to edu­catidn, all five countries in the region are now providing free primary education. Additionally, in Kenya, Malawi, and Zanzibar, girls who become pregnant while in school can now return to school after giving birth. In Malawi, the GABLE project provided fee waivers for girls in primary and secondary schools, and set an admission target for girls of 33 percent (Dorsey 1996: 78). Other affirmative actions common in the region include the use of a lower cut­off point for qualified women university entrants, the offer of certain scholar­ships to women only, and the running, in ten countries, of the TUSEME proj­ect, which aims at empowering girls to overcome obstacles they face during the educational process.**

**One feature of both colonial and postcolonial education is the "black skin, white masks" effect that Franz Fanon talked about more than fifty years ago—the ways in which colonialism transforms the psyche of the colonized, so that they dance to the colonizer's tune. This phenomenon is now being reincarnated under independent governments, except that now the piper calling the tune is Western education and the International Financial Institutions (IFIs). The cur­ricula make little effort to address issues of African identity and social justice. Instead, individualism and competition are justified in the name of globaliza­don. Identity crisis and cultural alienation are issues rapidly emerging in the cities and towns of the region, where many young people not only do not know, but do not *want* to know, the languages, music, dances, and traditions of their communities. As Paul Zeleza argues, among the trends established by global­ization are the commercialization of learning and the commodification of knowledge (2002: 66). Everything is being privatized, and knowledge is a com­modity for sale to the highest bidder. All this deeply counters the spirit of the texts in this volume, most of which emphasize collectivism and community participation.**

**In the new millennium, the interface between socialization and education has become both more complex and more tenuous. On the one hand, parents have more and more to assume the work of schoolteacher, as pupils and stu­dents receive reduced attention in the classroom. Doing homework together, or arranging extra tutoring for children, has become the norm. On the other hand, if teachers cannot cover even the "syllabus," they are not likely to teach children about the finer points of social behavior and survival in a harsh world, much less**

to help them develop inquisitive and creative habits of mind. The girl-child emerging from the public school system is unlikely to have garnered the leader­ship qualities, confidence, independence, and sense of responsibility that Joyce Mpanga describes in "On Education" (1961, 1989) as benefits of her own schooling. And yet girl-children are not short of these qualities. Are parents shouldering a heavier burden now in the socialization of their children, or, as the Kiswahili proverb *"asiyefunzwa na mamaye hufunzwa na ulimwengu"—"one* who is not taught by one's mother will be taught by the world"—would have it, is the "world" now socializing African children? Graham-Brown (1991) notes that the increase in female-headed households also has grave consequences for education. Not only do single mothers tend to be poorer, but they also have less time to give children the support they need. Anna Chipaka's movement of her children from her home to her mother's and back again, described in "A Bar-Maid's Life" (1980s), testifies to the difficulties of such a situation. An often-asked question is the extent to which formal education empowers women and advances their development. Most of the texts here would seem to speak in favor. Nevertheless, empowerment does not necessarily mean liberation. Often, Western-oriented education offered by the school system leads to mental and cultural enslavement for both women and men, .even as it offers them some "skills." Thus graduates of the school system are not always aware of the *African* situation and *Africa's* needs, and are ill-prepared to help their countries deal with their predicaments. When it comes to the needs of African *women,* educa­tion is still less capable of clearly dealing with their needs. Only a sweeping transformation—a contemporary re-Africanization—of the whole educational system in organization, content, and language would address this entrenched problem.

**48 + INTRODUCTION**

Unfortunately in some instances education has served to sustain commonly held views about what is "befitting" for females in social relations and in the workplace (Graham-Brown 1991). Still, as Mama Loise Kalondu said in 2000 in "A Courageous Woman," "Those who did not educate their girls in those days now regret it. They realize there is wealth in education."

***New Enslavements, New Plagues***

New forms of slavery in•Africa, which are becoming more widespread each day, include the sexual trafficking of women and forced prostitution. Recent studies have revealed cases of girls as young as ten being forced into prostitution as a means of eking out a living. This new enslavement of women reverberates in the texts on women in urban slums. Urbanization, the growth of the African townships, and the accompanying migration from village to city, provide the backdrop for some of the writings by women in the post-independence period. Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye's text "Learning the Sex Trade," an excerpt from her 1993 novella *Victoria,* examines in vivid detail the plight of rural women in an urban setting who turn to prostitUtion for survival. Such village women are forced by circumstances beyond their control to break out of the rural *bona* that

shuts them in both mentally and economically, but they are as yet ill-equipped for the demands of the townships.

**INTRODUCTION + 49**

While Macgoye's character Victoria manages to achieve some success in her life through prostitution, the young woman in Elieshi Lema's 1994 story "Tryst with Peril" only *thinks* she has made it because of a first rendezvous with a man of substance, while the "Slave Girl" of Vuyo Ophelia Wagi's 1999 poem expe­riences, as a houseworker and virtual sex slave, nothing but drudgery, rape, and an unwanted pregnancy.

Cook, clean, wash, babysit, and the boss Wants more besides.

More, sir?

Skincrawl groping hard breathing And furtive looks, suggestions, plans:

"I will be at the chicken shed at dawn." He gathers eggs too?

In the last few decades, women have faced harsher economic conditions, and many have been driven to the cities to seek employment. Uneducated, but sup­posedlyrin a free market of unlimited opportunities, they find only backbreak­ing, hazardous labor on construction sites or stone quarries, or long hours in sweatshops or cleaning streets, or domestic servitude in the homes of the rich. Usually, these women are left without any of the protection that they may have enjoyed in their village environment.

In some villages, however, some traditional cultural practices may brutalize, suppress, or humiliate women. Within the institution of *nyumba-ntobo* in the Mara region of Tanzania, poor women "marry" wealthy women who need labor for their farms and children for their homesteads. The "female husbands" select male partners for their "wives" and the children born of the union belong to the "female husband." Ruth Meena describes this system in her 2003 text, and calls for an alternative culture in which women have a free choice of partners, and are not brutalized. Recent interviews with *nyumba-ntobo* "wives" aired on Tanzan­ian television, however, indicate that women choose this mode of marriage because it is more humane and less demanding of them than the usual patriar­chal marriage. In the *nyumba-ntobo* system, both the "female husbands" and the "-wives". actualize their womanhood through other women, thereby keeping males on the periphery of their lives rather than at the center. *Nyumba-ntobo* is thus a mechanism that enables women to associate mostly with other women in the context of traditional power relations, although, even then, the women still have few real choices. *Nyumba-ntobo* is thus' a form of protest as well as a means of escape from sexual and patriarchal bondage, but it remains highly imperfect and Controversial.

In the early 1980s, the scourge of HIV/AIDS emerged as yet another devas­tating obstacle in the way ofwomen's advancement in Eastern Africa. For cultural

**and biological reasons, women are the most vulnerable victims of this pandemic. Some of the voices in this volume are those of HIV/AIDS sufferers who decided to reveal publicly their HIV status. In the first of her "Two Riddle Poems" (2000), entitled "What Sugar Is This That Contains Poison?" Pelagia Katunzi of Tanza­nia employs the traditional Swahili dialogue poetry genre to raise awareness about the risk of HIV/AIDS, urging people to think carefully about the conse­quences of their behavior, as they consume the "sugar"—sex—that contains the poison of HIV/AIDS. Katunzi, who is herself HIV-positive, refuses, however, to accept the official church stand regarding AIDS prevention—that people must abstain from promiscuity or unsafe sex. She argues that such a view is based on morality rather than reality, and will not work for everyone.**



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**50 + INTRODUCTION**

**In her 1999 poem "AIDS Orphan," Vuyo Wagi captures the plight of the millions of children who have lost their parents to AIDS, and are left to take on adult tasks and responsibilities even before they have grown up. For these chil­dren, the AIDS pandemic becomes a chilling rite of passage to nowhere. In "The Wasting Disease," excerpted from Marjorie Macgoye's 1997 novel *Chira,* the pandemic becomes symbolic of the moral and social decay within the wider society, in this case Kenyan society. As the twenty-first century unfolds, the HIV/AIDS pandemic is still growing and still as lethal as ever. Women's voices are vital to the struggle to publicize and combat the disease, especially for other women.**

***The Barrel of the Pen: Writing by Women***

**Some African writers have pointed out that European languages provided an opportunity to consolidate colonial domination. This was very obvious in educa­tion. While some of the colonialists, such as the Germans, preferred to use the local languages in the schools they operated, the British made few concessions. Local languages were allowed in the very early grades, but thereafter it became important to establish English as the primary language of education, used to consolidate British rule through the teaching of British culture and the importa­tion of British books (Pennycook 1994). In the entire region, English came to represent education, and those who did not or would not speak it were consid­ered uncouth and backward. Parents were convinced that English would open doors to myriad opportunities for their children. Since formal education was not accessible to all, English became a gatekeeper for the educated elite, allowing a few to enjoy further education, good jobs, and political power (Pennycook 1994; Phillipson 1994). By the same token, the few writers who had mastered English enjoyed access to the few, mostly British, publishing outlets in the region.**

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**Here, too, women were affected by the inequities in access to education. Girls admitted to secondary and higher education were in the minority. Women in the region were exposed to Western education much later than those in southern Africa or northern Africa, for example. Hence the number of women writers in the prestigious English medium was extremely small. Even in the local languages, there were proportionally few women writers. But it is no**

accident that most of the texts in this volume—more than 60 percent—were written in African languages. African writers continue to debate the question of language. Although writers in the region have been writing in local languages for centuries, Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o recently raised the intensity of the debate: After writing several acclaimed works in English and winning an international audience, Ngugi announced in *Decolo,nising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986) that he would henceforth write only in African languages. Writers who have riot yet gained wide 'recognition, however, face the choice of either writing in their local language and reaching an African audience (of varying size, depending on the linguage), or writing in English and gaining access to an "international readership." Penina Muhando Mlama takes up this question in "Creating in the Mother-Tongue" (1990). While Mlama 'concedes that that there are various obstacles to writers using African languages; including ethnic tensions, limited proficiency, and a limited reader­ship, the society in which they create demands that they grapple with their peo­ple's problems in a way that is most accessible to them. Using African languages also defies European superiority, and insists upon the viability of African cul­ture and identity:

**INTRODUCTION + 51**

Writing for the African people today is writing for a people who have largely lost their perception of what constitutes "African," their ability to determine or influence their own way of life, their indigenous values and attitudes, and their identity as a people. . . . [I]f the writer has a genuine interest in saving the African cultural identity from this chaos (indeed, this humiliation), he or she will find many roles to play in the struggle.

Beginning in the 1960s, the establishment of regional or national publishing houses enabled several women writers to be published locally. The East African Publishing House (EAPH), the East African Literature Bureau, the Tanzania Publishing House, and the Jomo Kenyatta Foundation provided extremely valuable avenues for writers in the region. More recently, publishing firms have emerged that are either partly or wholly owned by women. These include E D, based in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania (established in 1989); FEMRITE, in Kampala, Uganda (1997); and Focus Publications, in Nairobi, Kenya (1991). The first two are owned wholly by women, emerging in response to the realities that have constrained women's endeavors generally, and especially women's writing."

FEMRITE is an association of women writers that also engages in publish­ing. One of the founders was Goretti Kyomuhendo (whose work appears in this volume). The publication of Kyomuhendo's first book brought her to the atten­tion of seven other women, who then founded a women writers' organization. Their aim was to "inspire, encourage and assist women writers to have their manuscripts published." Having set up the collective, they had to organize staffing, marketing, and distribution, as well as funding. With no shortage of

**manuscripts, they have published an average of five books a year—still only a fraction of the work their writers produce. Their refusal to borrow money from banks or microfinance institutions his kept them short of cash, but has also aroused the antagonism of rival publishers, who accuse them of ruining the competition because they get "free money" through donations (Jay and Kelly). These challenges aside, FEMRITE is one of the most successful publishing projects in the region.**

**52 + INTRODUCTION**

**Another success story of feminist publishing is that of E & D in Tanzania, owned by two remarkable women writers and gender activists with extensive experience in publishing and development. Their mission is "bringing a more gender balanced view of social development into literature and publishing." To achieve this mission, E'8(. D has structured their activities into three divisions: commercial publishing, which takes care of the trade, children's, and textbook publishing that are gender sensitive, transformative, and socially relevant; pack­age publishing, meeting specialized needs of users who may not have publish­ing capacities; and publishing and development, handling specially designed projects that are then funded by donors. Since its inception, E & D has pub­lished numerous children's books, textbooks, serious political and social trea­tises, Kiswahili novels, and the first serious English novel by a Tanzanian woman writer, Elieshi Lema, one of the publishers (whose work also appears in this volume). They have overcome many challenges with foresight and creative approaches to running their business.**

**Two writers published in this volume demand special mention in this discus­sion of identity, language, and culture in Eastern Africa. As writers and as peo­ple, they both identify themselves as African, although they are not of African descent. Neera Kapur-Dromson, author of "Seeking My Husband in Kenya" (2000), is a fourth-generation Kenyan of Indian descent. Thousands of Indians were brought to east Africa by the British, many of them to work on railway construction, and they form a "small but significant minority in Kenya and Tan­zania today. (Far fewer remain in Uganda, where they were forcibly expelled under Idi Amin.) Kapur-Dromson's story, an excerpt from a recently published novel, is told from the perspective of a young Indian woman at the turn of the twentieth' century, who makes an arduous journey by sea and rail to Nairobi, searching,for the husband who disappeared after he traveled to Africa on busie­ness. In a different context, the activities of the ruling class, the British, could not but generate their own share of women writers who produced both mem­oirs and works of fiction. One of those included in this volume, whose work has had a significant impact both in the region and worldwide, is Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye. Arriving in Kenya as a British missionary, Macgoye adopted Kenya as kher home, married locally, and has produced many works that address African themes, and especially the travails of Kenyan women. Her books have been adopted as school required readings, a rare achievement for any author. Overall, works like those of Macgoye and Kapur-Dromson introduce us to the concerns, despairs, and hopes of migrant women who have found a home on**

**African soil. These writers reveal that Africa, like the United States, is a melt­ing pot that, at its best, accepts and respects those who accept and respect it.**

**INTRODUCTION + 53**

***Into the Twenty-First Century: Still Fighting for Women's Rights***

**In "I Must Call Myself a Feminist" (2002), Miria Matembe of Uganda writes:**

**. I had refused to be called a feminist. The reason was basically that the *word feminist* did not augur well ... at the time. According to public per­ceptions of the period, "a feminist" was dangerous, a terrible woman. . . . people would distance themselves from you.... I came to understand that a feminist is a person who is struggling to uplift women . . . challenging systems and structures that oppress women.... if that is the proper desig­nation; then I must call myself a feminist.**

**As the end of the twentieth century approached, women in Eastern African forcefully addressed the global issues of gender, environment, human rights, and democratization, while continuing to grapple with their conditions of existence and the political realities within their specific societies. As the issue of gender became central to women's sociopolitical activism and discourse, many women began asking the question, "What kind of feminism?" How were African women to be part of the global feminist movement, while retaining their cultural specificity and autonomy? Was it possible to speak of an African feminism?**

**The Mexico City Conference for Women in 1975, in which Eastern Africa was represented by such militants as Wangari Maathai and others, and the sub­sequent United Nations Decade for Women (1975-1985) have had major impacts on the Eastern African women's movement. This impact was to be reflected in the offer by Kenya to host the Nairobi Conference on Women held in July 1985, which was attended by more than 13,000 international delegates. The Nairobi conference served to bring the ideas of feminism and women's struggles closer to home. In time, discourse on gender relations and equity, and gender sensitivity generally, began to influence local cultural behavior. Indeed the word *Mbeijing* (with the plural form *Wabeijing)* entered the Kiswahili lan­guage as a common referent to women, especially those engaged in the struggle for gender equity. '**

**These struggles in the international and national arena were no doubt assisted by a strong belief among east African women that change is possible through the creation or transformation of social systems. The story told in "Binti Ali the Clever" (1914), which posits the issue of gender role-playing, is a familiar tale along the east African coast. What defines Binti Ali as male or female are the clothes and ornaments she wears, and not her wit, intelligence, or boldness. Here is a notion of gender as created and sustained by custom and social practice. As such, gender roles can be deconstructed and altered, just as Binti Ali's clothes were changed. Part of the optimism in many African women's struggles arises from this belief.**

Women in Eastern Africa have planned for change in the region by organiz­ing at the community, national, and international levels. They organize as asso­ciations, NGOs, clubs, parties, and in many other forms, but they also identify themselves with issues that galvanize movements at the civic levels. Central to this dual goal is a recognition of the need to eliminate oppression and violence in whatever forms they take. The greatest oppression for African women is poverty, which works together with a variety of other factors to place them in a highly disadvantaged position. In seeking to combat this oppression, African women have become eminently resourceful, operating on multiple levels in their societies, through different types of projects and processes, always search­ing for those that can best effect systemic structural change.

**54 + INTRODUCTION**

Eastern African women have exercised their leadership not only within their families but also in churches and mosques, in community groups and national, regional, and international organizations. There are Christian and Muslim women's guilds,.councils, and associations all over the region that have general and specific religious and social objectives. They are known to be the keepers of community opinion and views, as demonstrated by the wide influence of the Mother's Union. They may or may not use religion to mobilize for social action. Church leadership and that of leading Muslim women have enhanced the social position of some women.

Such activities and engagements by women in social and economic struggles appear to offer one answer to the question, "What kind of feminism?" Through their actions, they suggest that African feminism should be a movement for change; that it should addrem the fundamental issues of gender and economic exploitation and oppression in a practical down-to-earth manner. Three Eastern African women, whose voices are present in this volume, may be seen as ,spokes­women for the cause of gender justice, representatives of feminism for change.

Miria Obote's "Speech on International Women's Day" (1984) addresses the factors that expose women's relegation to poverty and second-class citizenry. Produced twenty years after Uganda's independence, the text calls urgently for "more attention being given to women's issues ... to achieve equality." Obote describes the social, economic, and cultural disequilibrium caused by historical oppression. At the same time, she outlines the means to achieve social and political balance and eliminate oppression.

One of these ways is through solidarity and partnership with other women "As we recognize the efforts of all the women of the world in the struggle for social justice and equality" When Miria Obote proclaims, "We resolve hence­forth to be a part of the International Women's Movement," she is speaking for many women in the region who hope that the internationalization of their con­cerns propels more rapid change. But Obote's text points to the slow pace of development for women and the intensification of contradictions between women as national economic producers, and their economic and social margin­alization—this in spite of the UN Decade for Women, expected to end in 1985, a year after Miria Obote's text was composed. For those who expected that

international solidarity would "lead to total elimination of all discrimination against women," the reality must still be discouraging.

**INTRODUCTION + 55**

Nonetheless, the will and energy for feminist change have endured on the continent. During the 1990s, the women's movement was focused by the 1995 United Nations Women's Conference in Beijing, and the adoption of the Bei­jing Platform of Action, a rallying cry for gender and feminist activism. Gertrude Mongella, the secretary general of the conference and a Tanzanian, and the other women who made Beijing possible, became role -models, and symbols of the promise of Beijing. Many changes in gender relations have been attributed to women's participation in the Beijing conference. The 1997 story "Beijing Beijing," by Zambian Monde Sifuniso, captures this. spirit of change; embraced by the women but viewed with apprehension and dismay by the men left behind to deal with child care and other domestic duties (and who humorously fail to fulfill them). The main male protagonist is especially disturbed! to find that not only his wife but also his mistress has gone to Bei­jing. Beijing is thus presented as both a catalyst and a subversive element in the social status quo. Relationships—between men and women, but also between women and other women—are redefined and the "received" reality challenged. The lighthearted text manages to draw attention to the serious objectives of the women's movements and struggles—the realization of new social realign­ments in which women partake of their fair share, and the reconstruction of gender roles.

Local or international, Miria Matembe sees women's struggles as feminist struggles that incorporate not only issues of gender identity, class, race, and eth­nicity, but also all other struggles against sources of oppression. "I came to understand that a feminist is a person who is struggling to uplift women, some­one who is challenging systems and structures that oppress women," as Matembe explains in her text. African women have not always identified their struggles as "feminist," and the label has not always been acceptable in certain circles of the African women's movements. Labels aside, as Chandra Mohanty points out, and as numerous texts in this book &demonstrate, women's struggles against oppression are indeed feminist in their objectives and even in their stated agendas (Mohanty et al. 1991).

Matembe exposes. the dilemma of most "educated" African women, who for a long time could not associate their work with feminism for fear of being socially rejected. It is Matembe's recognition that the definition comes from the work, however, that makes her comfortable to name herself a feminist. Matembe's text indicates that African women have strategically avoided the label of feminism in order to avoid undermining their struggles. She writes, "It was a good strategy to vehemently deny you were a feminist and call your activism something else." This strategy has been used to counter perceptions that feminism is an imported Western concept that threatens African traditions and culture. In such situations, feminism has been seen as un-African, a con­tention that Miria Matembe's text refutes. Whatever labels they may use,

**however, African women are busy chipping away at oppression, individually and in groups that traverse the boundaries of community and nation.**

**56 + INTRODUCTION**

**Until recently, the work of Kenyan activist Wangari Maathai in building a sustainable environment led to her isolation, harassment, and imprisonment. It took major political changes to bring her recognition, which culminated in her being awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 2004.**

**Maathai started the Green Belt Movement in 1977, partly in recognition of the dwindling sources of support and sustenance for women in terms of their access to water, food, shelter, and income. Maathai realized that the environ­mental degradation then taking place was in part due to poor governance and irresponsible profit seeking. Her movement, which began as a struggle to pro­tect the environment, soon expanded to encompass democracy, good gover­nance, economic justice, and human rights. In her 2004 Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Wangari Maathai connects women's struggles against poverty and oppression to global concerns: HIV/AIDS, the environment, and democratiza­tion, among others.**

**Deeply steeped in the African tradition that views the tree as a symbol of peace, Maathai remarks: "[T]he elders of the Kikuyu carried a staff from the thigi tree that, when placed between two disputing sides,,caused them to stop fighting and seek reconciliation. Many communities in Africa have these traditions.""**

**Awareness of such traditions convinced Maathai that the struggle to pre­serve the environment is inseparable from wider struggles:**

**Although this 'prize comes to me, it acknowledges the work of countless individuals and groups across the globe. They work quietly and often without recognition to protect the environment, promote democracy, defend human rights and ensure equality between women and men. By so doing, they plant seeds of piace.**

**In her address, Maathai emerges as a pan-Africanist and internationalist, who speaks not only for Kenyan women and society, but also for the whole of Africa:**

**I know that African people everywhere are encouraged by this news. My fellow Africans, as we embrace this recognition, let us use it to intensify our commitment to our people, to reduce conflicts and poverty and thereby improve their quality of life. Let us embrace democratic gover­nance, protect human rights and protect our environment. I am confident that we shall rise to the occasion. I have always believed that solutions to most of our problems must come from us.**

**The current manifestation of globalization continues to make borders porous and national boundaries irrelevant. However, the "global village" has its owners, and they are not African women. For the women of Eastern Africa,**

globalization has meant an intensification of poverty and greater threats to livelihoods, the environment, and cultures, as well'as to peace and security in the region. Technological advances in communication, however, have enabled women 'to create networks from the grassroots to the,,glObal levels. These net­works assist women to organize political action to meet the challenges of glob­alization. Even as they continue to work ixidividually, their collective action through groups and social movements provides essential energy and strength. In the ptocess, such leading women activists as Maathai and Matembe help to unite the various strands of women's and men's struggles to create invincible civic movements, which address many of the national, regional, and global con­cerns of the twenty-first century.

**INTRODUCTION +** 57

Amandina. Lihamba Fulata **L.** Moyo

M.M. Mulokozi

Naomi **L.** Shitemi Saida Yahya-Othman

**NOTES**

1. In some communities, such as that of the Wahaya with their Omuteko schools, education was offered in traditional schools for several months. Traditional priests were also trained in isolated locations, as were some initiates.
2. Community elders have insisted that the circumcision ritual is intimately inter­twined with the training that imparts social and economic knowledge' for the initiate's survival in her environment. This partly explains the resistance to the abolition of FGM, which is likely to continue unless alternatives for the ritual are found.
3. Moyo (2005) describes how Yao women in Malawi use red beads to signal their menstrual periods, and therefore their unavailability for sexual intercourse, even when they are not menstruating.
4. Food taboos mean that women are forced to subsist on a diet that is in many ways deficient, and may actually harm women's. health. In many societies, women are not allowed to eat certain traditional delicacies, including meat, chicken, eggs, certain types of fish, and edible grasshoppers,The Maasai actually starve expectant mothers in the belief that this will bring them easier births, but this practice often results in the moth­ers being too weak at the time of delivery [Chien and Spencer 179).
5. In discussing the African concept of time, Ocaya argues that time has a founda­tion in the reality of events that become points of reference. Otherwise it does not exist merely in the mind, nor can it be seen in absolute terms. For example, some periods in history, are marked by the events that. dominated them so you may find people talking about the time of the plague to indicate the,years when there was a pandemic of bubonic plague. Failure to trace any event as far back as possible from the discussed event is what leads one to speak of "from time immemorial" (Ocaya 1989: 77).
6. The African Traditional Religion may be defined as African people's beliefs and opinions concerning the existence, nature, and worship of the Supreme Being through

**the Spirits of their Ancestors, and the divine's involvement in the universe and the created order, including human life. In this section, we choose to use the singular ver­sion of African Traditional Religion (ATR). We are aware of the current thinking on the need to speak of African Traditional Religions in plural, in acknowledgment of the diversity of religio-cultural beliefs and practices among the different African ethnic groups, clans, p.nd communities. While acknowledging the validity of such thinking, we find ourselves questioning the choice to emphasize the differences rather than the sim­ilarities, which are even more basic, especially when no such choice is made concerning Christianity and Islam, which encompass similar diversity. As long as we still speak of "Christianity" rather than "Christianities," and of "Islam" rather than "Islams," we will continue to refer to "ATR" rather than "ATRs." We might further argue for the use of "African Religion"or "AR," forgoing the "Traditional," with the understanding that every religion has its own traditions. When it appears in ATR, it seems to contain hid­den connotations, suggestions that it is backward or uncivilized. While not aligning ourselves with any such judgmental connotations, we choose to use ATR, so as to retain the emphasis on these influential traditions in the lives of Eastern African women, including those who are adherents of Islam and Christianity.**

**58 + INTRODUCTION**

1. **A member of the editorial team of this volume visited some of the *kabaka* burial shrines in Uganda to survey the condition of the shrine "wives." He discovered that they have been virtually abandoned to their own devices and are no longer cared for by the royal authorities; hence many, who are now quite old, are leading a very uncertain existence.**
2. **Examples of U.S. slave narratives that follow this pattern, or a dose variation, include those of Frederick Douglass (1845) William Wells Brown (1848), Solomon Northrop (1853), and Harriet Jacob (1861), to name only a few. The same pattern appears in the one and only comprehensive Kiswahili slave narrative, *Uhuru wa Watumwa* (Freedom for the Slaves) by James Mbotela (1934), and in many West African narratives, including *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African* (1789).**
3. **In fact, Nimitz. maintains that some leaders in the interior, for instance those of the Yao'in southern Tanganyika, welcomed Islam and' the literacy it offered as a means of countering the challenge of colonization (1980: 8). Additionally, within the house­holds or the neighborhoods, there was likely to be someone who understood Arabic, and could offer elementary interpretation of the Qur'an, the hadith (collections of tra­ditions relating to the words and deeds of the prophet Muhammed), and the principles of social relations according to religious teachings.**
4. **Nimitz notes that the Shirazi civilization in the hinterland came under attack from both the Portuguese and the African people in the sixteenth and seventeenth cen­turies, leading to its eventual decline. But these attacks appear to have been motivated more by the desire to contrortrade routes than by opposition to Islam (1980: 4-5).**
5. **The great migrations of the Bantu people from the west and center to other parts of the continent, and the resulting intermarriages with the communities they displaced, must have had a shattering impact on the women of the time. But the intercultural con­tacts after that time have been no less devastating.**
6. **The many missionary groups arriving in the region included the British Univer­sities Mission-to Central Africa (UMCA), Church Missionary Society (CMS), Africa Inland Mission (AIM), United Methodist Mission (UMM), and Gospel Missionary Society (GMS), as well as the Church of Scotland (CSM); the French Roman Catholic White Fathers, and the German Lutheran Leipzig Mission. Their doctrines and prac­tices varied from very strict to more liberal.**
7. **Rosberg and Nottingham cite CSM *Memorandom* V (122,365) for the following lyrics:**

**INTRODUCTION + 59**

**"Little knives**

**In their sheaths,**

**That they may fight with the Church The time has come."**

**"I'm going to break all friendships, The only friendship I shall retain 'Is between me and Jehovah!"**

**The DC**

**Is bribed with uncircumcised girls So that the land may go."**

**"When Johnstone [Kenyatta in England] shall return With the King of the Kikuyu [Thuku in restriction] Phillip and Koinange**

**Will wear women' robes."**

**According to Rosberg and Nottingham, "Phillip James Karanja and Koinange, Secre­tary and Chairman respectively of the Kikuyu Association, were at this time outstand­ing in their support of the Government and missions" and for this reason were com­pared to women in the final verse.**

1. **In 1995, female employees in the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) Blantyre Synod wrote a petition demanding gender justice in conditions of service. They cited a salary structure and pension scheme that unfairly favored male employees. In reaction to the petition, the Synod, represented by the acting general sec­retary, punished these women with sanctions; and even threateried to dismiss them if they did not comply. For details, see Phiri 1996.**
2. **In some communities, such as the Baganda, the link between education and reli­gion was so close that the expression "omusomi" (literally, a student or learner) was taken also to mean a religious adherent.**
3. **ICirnambo observes that an adult-literacy campaign among the Pare in northern Tanzania, begun in 1949, had attracted fifteen hundred learners by 1951, most of them women (1991: 121). After World War II, the plan for Tanga province, in which Upare was located, aimed at enrolling 50 percent of children in primary school, against the national average of 36 percent. However, by 1952, Upare had reached 90 percent enroll­ment (127).**
4. **Settlers in South Africa not only gained their independence from Britain, but themselves became the ruling group of other colonies, and developed the notorious apartheid system which, like colonialism, engendered a fierce war of liberation. See Daymond, et al. 2003.**
5. **Kanogo (1987) has argued that the settlers' seizure of the most fertile lands not only disinherited the local Africans, but opened the door for them to become squatters. At first, the Africans found opportunities to utilize areas that the Europeans could not put under production; their situation deteriorated, however, as settlers, through the coloniii state, initiated laws that disillusioned and impoverished 'these squatters. Kanogo argues that the squatters became an important factor in the Mau Mau resis­tance as hostilities and conflicts intensified during the 1930s and I940s.**
6. In his history of Tanganyika, Iliffe has discussed the creation of tribes in Africa as a colonial initiative (1979: 318-41).

**60 + INTRODUCTION**

1. The massacre of 1922 was thus reported: "Mary Muthoni Nyanjiru (from Wait­haga in location 10 of Fort Hall District) leapt to her feet, pulled her dress right up over her shoulders and shouted to the men: 'You take my dress and give me your trousers. You men are cowards. What are you waiting for? Our leader is in there. Let's get him' (Ros­berg and Nottingham 1966: 51-52). Harry Thula' was detained from 1922 to 1931.
2. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Muhumusa and her Nyabingi cult served as an example of an African woman in the region who led her people not only to revolt against the local leadership, but also to resist an imposed foreign rule. Muhumusa was involved in a power struggle in Rwanda after the death of her husband, Mwami Kigeri Rwabugiri, in 1885. Commanding great power as leader of the Nyabingi cult, she was also credited with an outstanding personality, organizational powers, and great intelligence. She operated not only in Rwanda but also in Uganda, where she was cap­tured in 1911 after waging a war of liberation against both local and foreign aggression. See Hopkins (1970).
3. According to Kanogo (1987: 143-48), even though women were only 5 percent of the total guerrilla army, there was a large civilian "army" as well. Kanogo describes Wanjiru Nyamarutu as a political activist who became the general in charge of food, with her own large subordinate staff. She mobilized various resources for the Mau Mau movement. After successfully evading the colonialists,for many years, she was eventually arrested. Gakonyo Ndungi was known for her skills in the treatment of ailments and healing powers.\_ She was popularly known as one ,of the "forest doctors." Wambui Kamuirigo was an ardent gierilla fighter who was also a trusted executioner of traitors of the Mau Mau cause. See also Likimani (1985) and Presley (1986).
4. Throughout the region, the number of women's voices in parliament, though still small, has increased, and a few more women have been appointed full or junior minis­ters. Ministries responsible for women and gender issues in Uganda and Tanzania have also been established. In 1999 women made up 4 percent of parliament in Kenya, 16 percent in Tanzania, 10 percent in Zambia, 6 percent in both the lower and upper houses in Malawi, and 18 percent and 10 percent in the two houses in Uganda. While there were still no women holding ministerial positions in Kenya, they held 9 percent of such positions in Malawi, 13 percent in'Tanzania, 10 percent in Uganda, and 6 percent in Zambia (Tripp 2000).
5. Mamdani has argued that the regime of Idi Amin in Uganda tried to use the mantle of morality to mask policies and practices that *were* destructive to women phys­ically and psychologically. It created an atmosphere that caused women to be perceived as the enemy of national,morality, and this paved the way for groups and individuals to inflict violence on women (1983: 54-55).
6. In addition, the numbers of female university admissions are low. Uganda's Mak­erere University is doing best, with 47 percent of its places going to women. In Kenya, women's admissions are at 36 percent, In Tanzania, of the total students enrolled in pri­mary school in a particular year, only 0.4 percent gain university admission. Of those, between 20 and 30 percent are women (29 percent at the University of Dar es Salaam in 2004, for example). Women's admissions are at 20 percent in Malawi, and at similar lev­els in Zambia. While these percentages have been reached only through affirmative action, there is ample evidence that once admitted, the women do just as well, and sometimes better, than the men.
7. Oh how some of these publishers came into being and the hurdles they had to overcome, see Jay and Kelly (2002).

**INTRODUCTION + 61**

1. Indeed, the thigi tree used by the Gikuyu was also used for the same purpose by the Wachagga of Tanzania, who called it *lisale.* It was also used for the purpose of demarcating individual plots, so as to maintain peace among neighbors, by the Bahaya of Tanzania, who called it *omulamula* (literally, "tree that settles disputes"), and by the B agandai of Uganda.

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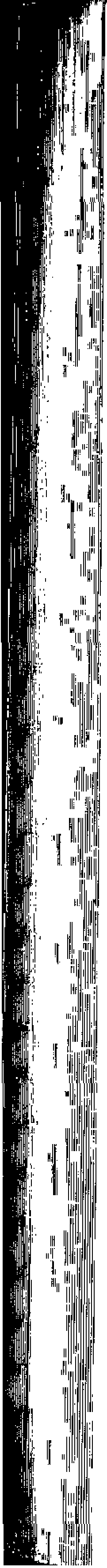
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**THE EIGHTEENTH AND
  
NINETEENTH CENTURIES**



***Sultan Fatima binti Muhammad Mkubwa*PEACE AND SECURITY**

**PEACE AND SECURITY + 71**

**Tanzania 1711 Kiswahili**

**Sultan Fatima bind Muhammad Mkubwa was the ruler of the city7state of Kilwa Island, off the coast of present-day Tanzania. Little, is known about her, life, or her reign other than that her father and her brother ruled before her and her brother's son succeeded her. She may have become the ruler of Kilwa as the eldest surviv­ing child of Sultan Muhammad Mkubwa, or she may have been serving as a regent for her brother's son until he was old enough to assume leadership of the sultanate. In some other city-states, rule was passed from mother to daughter: In the early 1800s, for example, Queen Mwanzuani succeeded her mother as ruler of Kua on Mafia Island, and in the late 1800s Sabani binti Ngumi, the ruler of Mikindani, was succeeded by her daughter.**

**Scholars have documented twenty-six women rulers of the city-states along the ,East African coast during the seventeenth, eighteenth,And nineteenth cen­turies, and there may well have been more, since the historical record in this area remains incomplete. The names of earlier women rulers became praise names for individual city-states, and these praise names were used in poetry to comment on the communities and their inhabitants. For example, as explained. by Mohamed H. Abdulaziz in his book *Muyaka: Nineteenth-Century Swahili Popular Poetry,* the Mombasa poet Muyaka bin Haji referred to Mombasa as "Gongwa of Mwana**

**"Gongwa" is an earlier name for Mombasa and "Mwana Mkisi" is the name of the legendary female ruler of Mombasa. Similarly, Muyaka referred to the people of Zanzibar as "the descendants of Mwana Aziza" after the island's legendary female ruler. Abdulaziz also finds references in poetry to "Mwana *Mize* of Lamu," "Mwana Musura of Pate,'! and "Mwana Shamba Shale of Vumba."**

**In 1711, Sultan Fatima composed a letter to Mwinyi Jumaa, whose father seems to have been from Mombasa. The scribe, whose name is not legible in the manuscript, wrote the letter in Swahili in Arabic script. Both Swahili and Arabic were used by the elites of the ,Swahili city-states during this period, and it is likely that Sultan** Fatima was **literate in both languages. While Arabic was used for communication with Omani officials and merchants and was also used, along with PortUkuese, for communication with Portuguese officials and merchants, it appears that Swahili written in Arabic script may often have been used for com­munications between Swahili city-states. Messengers who traveled by dhow transmitted letters from one city-state to another.**

**At the time Sultan Fatima wrote her letter, Portuguese control of the East African coast was waning and Omani Arab dominance of the regiodwas being established. In the** letter, **Sultan Fatima seems to indicate that she has established an alliance with or accepted the protection of the ruler of Oman. Presumably, Portuguese officials intercepted the messenger, confiscated the letter before it reached Mwinyi Jumaa, and had it translated into Portuguese in their Goa head­quarters by Bwana Ndau ibn al-Sayyid Mbwana Shah, who identifies himself in his translation as a prince of Faza Island. Faza Island is located off the northern coast of Kenya and was another Swahili city-state.**

***Ann Biersteker***

**In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compass'ionate,**

**72 + THE EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEENTH CENTURIES**

**I, the ruler of Kilwa, Sultan Fatima, daughter of Sultan and former ruler Muhammad Mkubwa, dictate this letter to our friend Mwinyi Jumaa, son of the late Sayyid Mwinyi Kaje:**

**My greetings. This letter is to inform you that I have seen the governor of the Imam and the emissaries of the Imam, Sheikh All ibn Muhammad and Muhammad ibn Mtibarak al-Eukhayt. They told me that we should be given a letter from our Lord the Imam saying that we should write to all of our subjects who are in the Kerimba region and tell them that they should come to Kilwa where God's peace prevails.**

**Anyone who wants to should come, and if she or he come with their posses­sions, no one will rob them. Those who want to sell Islamic foods should come. There is nothing to worry about. If a person intends to come to his or her home, he or she should come. There is peace, and no one will seize that person's property. Tell titiS' to all the people who are there, except the Europeans. They are the enemies of the Imam. Anyone who is a Swahili peison will not be ill-treated by an Arab.**

**The end; in peace.**

***Translated by Ann Biersteker***

***Mwana Kupona binti Msbam***

***FROM* A MOTHER'S ADVICE AND PRAYER:
  
AN EPIC POEM**

**Kenya 1858 Kiswahili**

**Mwana Kupona binti Msham was born in 1810 on Lamu Island, off the North­ern coast of Kenya, and spent much of her life on nearby Siyu Island. Her hus­band, Mohammad Is-Haq bin Mbarak bin Muhammad bin Umar L'Famau, also known as Bwana Mataka, ruled the city-state of Siyu and defended it against the conquest of Sayyid Said of Zanzibar. After his death and the conquest of Siyu, Mwana Kupona returned to Lamu.**

**Mwana Kupona Was a devout Muslim throughout her life.When she com­posed this poem in 1858, she was terminally ill and had been bedridden for about a year. Knowing that her death was near, she wrote this poem for her seventeen­year-old daughter (Mwana Hashima binti Sheikh, author of another text in this volume). The poem was to serve the daughter—and, by extension, all young women of her station—as an initiation into puberty and the life *of* a woman. Mwana Kupona died two years later, in 1860:**

**This epic poem attracted scholars in the early twentieth century, who translated**