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To cite this article: Amon Ashaba Mwiine (2022) Tracking the trajectory of feminist advocacy in Uganda: How has theory informed the practice of advocacy?, *Agenda*, 36:3, 66-76, DOI: [10.1080/10130950.2022.2112718](https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2022.2112718)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2022.2112718>



Published online: 24 Aug 2022.



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Tracking the trajectory of feminist advocacy in Uganda: How has theory informed the practice of advocacy?

Amon Ashaba Mwiine

abstract

Since Uganda's independence in 1962, feminist advocacy in Africa and Uganda, in particular, has experienced waves and critical agendas that have shaped the direction of movements and women's rights organisations. How can we map the trajectory of feminist advocacy to understand the influence of theory, in particular African feminism(s) in Uganda? This is the central focus of this article. Literature shows how women activists in Africa took centre stage, questioned women's conspicuous absence in social economic and political history and assertively challenged patriarchal oppression against women in public and private spheres.

Activists in the Ugandan feminist movement formulated advocacy strategies to resist colonial gender oppression, mobilised women to respond to the review of the constitutional provisions on women's rights, to organise even when confronted with state silencing, and to form critical alliances to meet male resistance to their political representation in Parliament head on, among others, since independence. The article draws on findings from an empirical study conducted in 2019-2021, Kampala, Uganda, on selected historical junctures and interrogates theoretical origins and motivations that could be read as having informed feminist advocacy - the feminist agenda, strategies and tactics, framing and language. I am particularly interested in how African feminists' theoretical frames critically inform shifting advocacy positions in Uganda over time to advance gender transformation, and thereby advance the theorisation of an African centred-feminist advocacy.

keywords

feminist advocacy, African feminisms, men and masculinities, Uganda Women's Movement, process tracing

Introduction

Since the early 20th century, there have been different waves of advocacy with varying critical agendas in pursuit of women's rights, equality and gender justice globally, and on the African continent, in particular. Feminist advocacy – a conscious process of developing a set of strategies whose aim is to translate feminist values such as beliefs in equality, gender justice in all its dimensions, human rights, and alliance building into action (Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) 2003) – has been a

key aspect of women's movements that question deep-rooted forms of discrimination against women. In Africa, strategies to challenge injustices that women encounter in their everyday lives date far back to pre-colonial times, during the brutal colonisation of the continent and within the post-colonial societies to date (Tamale 1999; 2020; Ahikire 2007; Tripp & Badri 2017; Gouws & Coetzee 2019). Tripp and Badri (2017, p. 1) note that before, but especially since independence, women activists in Africa have been engaged in a variety of

Agenda 36.3 2022

ISSN 1013-0950 print/ISSN 2158-978X online

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2022.2112718>

UNISA
UNIVERSITY
OF SOUTH AFRICA
PRESS

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

pp. 66–76



movements, using diverse strategies to confront issues ranging from rights to land and inheritance, to increasing female political representation, and ending domestic violence. In their book, *African Women's Movements: Changing Political Landscapes*, Tripp et al. (2009) highlight the role of educated women in political mobilisation for the rights of women in pre- and post-independence African states.

In a recent article on 'Women's movements and feminist activism', Amanda Gouws and Azille Coetzee (2019), map the evolution of women's movements and feminist activism, the key agendas, critical actors, including forging alliances with men, and the constraints faced by feminists from time to time. They cite different women's movements across Africa and how these have mobilised around key feminist agendas, demonstrating the centrality of tapping into women's collective voice, in particular, the mobilising of rural women's movements and the possibilities of gender transformation. They also, discuss the growth of more radical feminist agendas concentrated around intersections of race, class, sexuality, and how hashtag movements have created a new space, especially for the youth to contest new forms of inequalities. In so doing, Gouws and Coetzee raise conceptual debates that provide a framework within which to understand women's movements, and the feminist advocacy strategies actors adopt to demand women's rights.

In Uganda, the idea of feminist advocacy for gender equality is rooted in and motivated by the oppressive gender regime in the pre-colonial and colonial State. Literature on women's collective mobilisation during colonialism points to the movement against women's subordination taking the form of voluntary, Christian-centred and community development-oriented women's clubs (Tamale 1999; Tripp & Ntiro 2002) coordinated mainly by wives of missionaries and colonial administrators as early as the 1920s. Women's clubs later morphed into a multi-ethnic women's movement whose earnest beginnings are traced to the 1947 creation of the Uganda Council of Women (UCW) (Tamale 1999; Tripp & Ntiro 2002; Mwiine 2021). While the women's movements reportedly slid into the political abyss with the emergence of dictatorial

regimes shortly after independence in 1962 (Tripp et al. 2009; Mwiine 2021), this state of affairs only changed in the 1990s with the emergence of what Gouws and Coetzee (2019), the Uganda Women's Network (UWONET) (2013) and Tripp and others (2009) describe as "new women's movements" in the early 1990s.

African feminisms - framing of activism and advocacy

Feminist advocacy has and continues to occur in a fluid context of burgeoning feminist theories, whether these originate from within or outside the continent. While reiterating the emergence of an African feminist body of knowledge before modern feminism, Amina Mama (2005, p. 1) argues that:

Women all over Africa organise themselves to pursue their social, cultural, political and economic interests. The now substantial body of feminist-inspired historiography on women's struggles during the colonial period indicates unequivocally that they have often mobilised and resisted as women, in order to pursue interests they had defined for themselves, and that they began to do so long before modern feminism came into being.

Conversations on the trajectory of African feminism as an independent body of knowledge are not devoid of contention. In her article, 'African feminism in context', Ahikire (2014) calls for the re-energising and re-affirmation of African feminism in its "multiple dimensions" (2014, p. 7). We can infer her frustrations with the way African feminism has experienced the challenges of depoliticisation and of being constituted in simple essential ways as the antithesis of western feminism. It is significant that the uniqueness of African feminisms is raised in the Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists (African Women Development Fund 2007). The Charter acknowledges the continent's social, economic, cultural and political diversity and the diversity of women's identities yet commits to celebrate these diversities and shared commitment to a transformative agenda for African societies and African women in particular. As a critical movement-building tool, the charter

was collectively crafted to guide the naming and politicisation of African women's experiences of subordination within the broader feminist discourse. For instance, African women's experience of colonialism in the 19th and 20th centuries cite increased demand for the basic goal of equality between women and men and later feminist reform efforts of the 1960s and 70s. Discrimination against women of every social class, racial category, ethnicity, and religion – the right to vote (suffrage), to own property, custody of children, to live a life free of violence especially in the home, access an education, the right to citizenship and many other social ills were part of the first wave of feminism informed by liberal feminist thought (Lorber 2010; Tamale 1999). Most of these feminist demands are reflected in African women's anticolonial struggles, and more recently form a large part of feminist theorisation on decolonization and reimagining African epistemologies (Tamale 2020; Oyèwùmí 1997).

In Uganda, feminist struggles have drawn both on indigenous as well as western notions of equality and social justice. The formation of women's organisations and their mass mobilisation of women to participate in constitutional reforms of the 1990s institutionalised the language of equality, women's rights and gender mainstreaming in the 1995 constitution (Matembe 2002; Tamale 1999). Semi-autonomous women's rights organisations that were formed in the post-1986 government era picked diverse issues such as post-war reconstruction, domestic violence, girls' education, political representation of women, women's economic rights, gender and environment, among others. While diverse, these feminist ideas took a reformist agenda, often advocating for women's inclusion in and rights to participate in and access public life.

In her book *When hens begin to crow: Gender and parliamentary politics in Uganda*, African feminist theorist and writer Sylvia Tamale explores the influence of liberal feminist ideas on women's political representation. The author draws on parliamentary experiences to argue for pragmatic efforts by feminist activists to adopt the strategy of *negotiating* patriarchal resistance to women legislators. Similar feminist conceptualisation on negotiation of patriarchy are

raised by Obioma Nnaemeka's (2004) "Nego-feminism". Nnaemeka introduces this as a strand of African feminism strongly inspired by shared values and principles of negotiation, compromise and balance. With these new feminist advocacy positions have come feminist debates on women's sexual autonomy (Mama 2005), women's diverse identities and interests and emphasis on issues of intersectionality in pursuing the question of women's rights and social justice. Very recently, particularly in Uganda, feminist scholarship and advocacy has expanded to include conversation on critical studies of men and masculinities (Mwiine 2019) and constructive allyship between women and men in promoting gender equality (Muzee & Endeley Mbongo 2019).

How the trajectory of women's collective mobilisation at different political junctures, the strategies used to push for equality and women's rights, and how these inform and/or have been informed by feminist theory, is the subject of this article. Tamale (2006) and AWID (2003) agree on feminist advocacy – strategies such as lobbying, campaigning, research, communication and alliance building – and its unifying potential across the divide between theory and practice. AWID, in its *Advocacy Guide for Feminists*, argues that "feminist advocacy can build a critical bridge between theory and practice [especially] when feminists advocates ask the "WHY" questions, [which] enable them connect with power analysis and feminist theory" (2003, p. 2). As a critical space for translating feminist ideals and theory into action, feminist advocacy provides a set of opportunities to transcend dichotomies of theory on the one hand and practice on the other, to enable "informed activism" (Tamale 2006, p. 39) for women's rights, equality and gender justice.

Methodology

The study adopted a historical design approach, tracing a trajectory of advocacy on women's rights in Uganda. In particular, the analysis of the past events took the form of process tracing - a systematic mapping of actors, their actions and interests in institutional/ policy changes (Annesley 2010; Mwiine 2021) to critically inquire into the recent history of feminist advocacy in Uganda.

Historical analysis and archival research methods were complemented with qualitative interviews with key actors identified in historical records.¹ In-depth interviews were conducted with participants, three of whom were females and two, males. With their consent, participants in this article are identified using their names since they do not anticipate any ethical harm that could arise from their identity being known.

Two of the females (Miria Matembe and Joy Kwesiga) were involved in the founding and leadership of Action for Development, a women's organisation, in 1985 shortly after the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies Conference in Kenya, while the third (Rita Aciro) grew through the ranks of the women's movement, first as an intern in the early 1990s and now the Executive Director of the Uganda Women's Network. Male participants included Aramanzan Madanda and Mubarak Mabuya. Madanda is a former programme officer of the Forum for Women in Democracy (FOWODE), who taught gender studies at Makerere University, and served as a gender technical advisor at the United Nations level and is currently a senior Gender Advisor at CARE International in Uganda. Mubarak was a principal gender officer in the Uganda Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development in the 1990s and is currently a gender adviser at an African regional body. Participants' reflections on critical junctures in the advocacy for women's rights provides an entry point into exploring the kinds of discourses that underpinned feminist approaches at particular moments.

Study findings

The voluntary, Christian-centred and community development Women's Clubs

In Uganda, the idea of women's activism for gender equality is rooted in and motivated by the oppressive gender regime in the pre-colonial and colonial State (Tamale 1999). Archival evidence, as well as recollections from participants point to women's collective mobilisation taking the form of voluntary, Christian-centred and community development-oriented women's clubs (Tamale 1999; Tripp & Ntiro 2002). We are

reminded by Tripp and Ntiro (2002, p. 24) that "wives of colonial administrators and businessmen and Christian missionaries started the earliest women's voluntary associations soon after Uganda became a British Protectorate in 1894". These clubs which were often affiliated with national and international bodies, commonly invested in the education of girls and the welfare of the family. Some of the clubs took the form of Mothers Union, Girl Guide associations, Young Women Christian Associations, among others. Conversations with Joy Kwesiga as well as Mubarak Mabuya point to the familial and Christian nature of activism for women's welfare. Mabuya noted:

If you trace the origins, you will find that the whole issue of women's movement or advancement of women's rights, which is the underlying principle of the feminist movement, goes back to the pre-colonial and colonial times through mainly faith-based organisations like Catholic women's league and so on. By then it was about trying to understand the position of women in the family. It all started with the Christian families (Interview, 24th November 2020).

Mabuya's recollection of the early beginnings of advocacy for women's rights resonates with Joy, a feminist activist since the 1960s. Joy recalls:

At independence, I remember, women clubs were very active at sub-county level and they were teaching women on how to improve their wellbeing not just economically but even in hygiene and all these other things. But with the change in the political system and instability after independence, those things were run down and the clubs stopped and things could not move (Interview, 20th November 2020).

Participants and archival data point to advocacy in the early 20th century centred around improving the *welfare* of women while attempting to keep them in the domestic sphere. Notably, the nature of women's associational activities, membership and motive at the time show how women's activism was influenced by western colonial discourses – sanitise,

modernise and civilise colonies within the broader colonial domesticity agenda. In this grand colonial discourse, women were constituted as minors with their “legal status as that of children – economically dependent and deriving their social status from their father or husband” (Lorber 2010, p. 1). Thus the advocacy, was against the colonial state as much as it was on colonial and African patriarchy (Tamale 1999), aimed at affording women rights as citizens of equal worth with men with all the attendant “rights to personhood, dignity and status” (Hassim 2014, p. 12).

While this phase of advocacy is dominated by the imposition of western values (including first-wave feminist values in the 1920s and 30s) on colonised communities, Tripp and Ntiro (2002) contend that women’s club associations and their focus on domestic skills were not merely a reproduction of western female domestic subordination. Authors argue that the central focus of women’s organisation on domesticity was primarily because “at that time, that is what Ugandan men and women wanted and felt they needed and the missionary educators were able to provide” (2002, p. 28).

Though the advocacy for women’s rights was influenced by western notions of domestication of women, early Voluntary and Christian-centred women’s clubs reveal ways in which women’s collective mobilisation, inadvertently ushered some of the women into the public realm of politics, gave them a sense of belonging to a global women’s movement, and inspired future women’s resistance against colonial oppression (Tripp & Ntiro 2002). Education of girls, though relatively inferior to that of boys, “offered women the opportunity to become better exposed and more amenable to activism” (Tamale 1999, p. 13). These early experiences provided a fertile ground upon which women’s collective mobilisation morphed into a more robust women’s movement. For example, in 1946, women’s activism led to the formation of the Uganda Council of Women (UCW), perceived by some feminist activists as the beginning (Tripp & Ntiro 2002) and the “watershed for the contemporary women’s movement in Uganda” (Tamale 1999, p. 10). Uganda Council of Women is characterised by Tamale as a movement with a

political agenda and “a melting pot of multi-racial women”. Indeed, women activists used this platform to be part of the anticolonial actions in which they often rallied around women’s rights such as citizenship, civic education, and voting rights as well as increasing female participation in national politics.

In the sections that follow, I demonstrate how liberal feminist thought, in particular, demands around ‘reforms’, ‘equality before the law’, ‘equality of opportunities’, ‘inclusion’ of women in the public sphere e.g. education and politics, became a popular conceptual prism that informed framing of strategies to advocate for women’s rights.

Post-independence advocacy: the ‘new generation’ of women’s movement

Another critical juncture in advocacy for women rights is the late 1980s and early 1990s rejuvenation of the women’s movement in Africa, Uganda in particular (Tripp et al. 2009; Gouws & Coetzee 2019). In the 1970s and early 80s, the Uganda women’s movement became inert under the dictatorial post-independence regime (Tripp et al. 2009; Mwiine 2021). In the 1990s a break from the previous inactivity was signalled with the emergence of what has been described by feminists as “new women’s movements” (Gouws & Coetzee 2019; UWONET 2013; Tripp et al. 2009). In their work, *Journey of passion: Two decades of advocacy for gender equality and women’s rights 1993-2013*, UWONET (2013) show how the Uganda women’s movement was reinvigorated in the 1990s. Accordingly, this new wave of the women’s movement was characterised by the emergence of many semi-autonomous women’s organisations, a new democratic dispensation characterised by a constitutional review process and Ugandan women’s participation in and building of global networks through international women’s conferences. Semi-autonomous women’s organisations were tied to the growth of educational opportunities for women, which gave rise to stronger female leadership as well as the impetus from the international women’s movement, especially after the United Nations (UN) Women’s

Conference in Nairobi (1985) and the fourth international conference of the world's women in Beijing held in 1995.

The Nairobi conference, Action for Development and other women's rights organisations emerge

The UN conference on women in Nairobi is widely talked about as the turning point in the women's movement in Uganda. Miria Matembe (2002) recalls this event as 'historical' for two reasons. Firstly, the meeting provided an opportunity for women across the world to congregate on the African continent and take stock of 10-year global progress on women's rights and secondly, because a majority of women activists, especially those who were not in the good books of the Ugandan government, were barred from attending. Joy recalls state restrictions as follows:

We were not given a chance to attend the Nairobi meeting because ... the government was the one selecting people to go, even those who had the money couldn't go. And as you might have heard people like Maxine were external in some ways because for her she has American citizenship she managed to go to the meeting. We were reading proceedings in newspapers and we knew Tanzanians, Kenyans had left us behind. But three of us, Ruth Mukama, Hilda Tadria and myself got together. I was working as an Assistant registrar in the faculty of Social Sciences. We got together and said we need to invite people who attended and that is how we invited Dr Maxine Ankrah to come and tell us what had happened in Nairobi. We then expanded that to a few more people who had attended and through some series of meetings, ACFODE [Action for Development] was formed (Interview, 20th November 2020).

The circumstances in which activists in Uganda missed the Nairobi meeting not only alerts us to political instabilities and State control over the activities of women but also reveal the resilience, strategic manoeuvre and collective mobilisation against the post-colonial state to sustain

the advocacy for women's rights and gender justice. Notably, Joy and colleagues were already members of the Association of University Women at Makerere University. Their organisational leadership capacities and determination to advance women's rights led to the formation of Action for Development. Joy later described Action for Development as a catalyst for the women's movement especially because of its role in politicising the marginal position of women in society and nurturing women leaders who subsequently started other women's rights organisations. Rooted in programming centred on women's gender-specific needs in the development process, Action for Development rekindled activism that had gone into limbo due to political repression and instability in the country. These activities included the training of women politicians who had entered public politics in greater numbers with the introduction of affirmative action policies in 1989 (Tamale 1999), running campaigns on women and the environment, protesting the normalisation of domestic violence, in particular violence against women (Mwiine 2021) and mobilising women countrywide to participate in the 1989-1994 constitution-making process (Matembe 2002). Rita highlights ways in which the post-Nairobi conference period saw the formation of diverse women's organisations but importantly advocacy in "earnest collaborations across women's organisations around common concerns such as access to education, political representation and spousal co-ownership of land" (Interview, 20th November 2020)

Conferences and building networks as an advocacy strategy

During this phase of advocacy, organising national, regional and international conferences, bringing together women's rights organisations and state actors was a common strategy for mobilising consensus, sharing experiences and framing gender equality agendas. For example, shortly after its inception, Action for Development convened a national women's conference in 1985 and set the agenda for the implementation of Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies in Uganda (UWONET 2013). A decade later, the East African

Women's Conference, a regional event organised in Uganda to review implementation of Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies and to prepare for the UN fourth world conference of women in Beijing, "provided an opportunity and platform for sharing experiences and brought to light the need for joint action, continued networking and information sharing among women's organisations in East Africa and at national levels" (UWONET 2013, p. XVII). In Uganda, the regional preparatory conference led to the formation of Uganda Women's Network, in 1994, an umbrella organisation with diverse membership committed to "coordinate action among its membership through networking, capacity building, resource mobilisation, policy research and advocacy" (UWONET 2013, p. 8). The advancing of advocacy through forging alliances and networks at local, national, regional and continental level is applauded by Tamale (2020) in her work on *Decolonization and Afro Feminism* as an avenue through which African feminism has been translated into practice. Speaking of women's rights networks on the African continent, Tamale (2020, p. 371) observes:

Indeed, African feminism has been operating *sans frontières* (without borders) for decades, constructing bridges across the complexities of cultures, languages, religions, skin tone, educational status and generations.

Mobilising for women in constitutional review process

This phase of advocacy saw women's rights organisations and individual activists massively mobilise women nationwide to participate in the 1989-94 constitutional review process. Miria Matembe, a feminist activist, chair of Action For Development and a commissioner on the Constitutional Review Commission then, recalls how she deliberately worked with male colleagues who were very co-operative and supportive on the gender question. She recalls, "In fact some of the male commissioners played a lead role on this issue" (2002, p. 127). She arrived before the review meetings to travel around the villages to mobilise the women and ensure their attendance before the Commission. Further, Uganda Women's Network

worked behind the scenes to "support a women parliamentary caucus through lobbying, research and providing information on issues affecting women, ultimately securing what has been deemed the most gender sensitive constitution of the time" (UWONET 2013, p. XIX). These are a few of the strategies that shaped advocacy by women around the constitutional review in the 1990s. Advocacy for women's rights appears as a boiling pot of diverse ideas from the western reform feminisms of the early 20th century as well as African-centred approaches and frameworks organically devised to deal with the question of women's oppression at the time. For example, the Nairobi conference underscored a specific focus on women in development (WID). The conference also coincided with a new regime in Uganda, led by the National Resistance Movement of President Yoweri Museveni, a regime that many feminist scholars described as open to reforms, such as women's entry into politics (Tamale 1999; Goetz 2002; Matembe 2002; Ahikire 2007). Anne Marie Goetz (2002) alerts us to how women's entry into Ugandan parliamentary politics at this time was shaped by a small group of elite women whose demands, in the form of an affirmative action policy, were met without any resistance (Goetz 2002).²

Beyond western liberal feminist thought, women activists drew on their own feminist experience and wits to engage with practical experiences of oppression as they emerged. While discussing the gender dynamics of interparliamentary politics, Tamale (1999, p. 117) shares in great detail how women activists and newly elected female constituency assembly delegates (CADs) devised measures to *negotiate* patriarchal resistance to women in parliament. Tamale noted:

... women delegates used different strategies at different times to achieve their goals. For example, in order to win over as many male CADs as possible, women delegates realised that at times they had to tone down the language of their demands. During such debates they would urge "notoriously" outspoken feminists who were likely to put off many men by what men considered to be "their usual clamouring", to remain

in the shadows. Then a soft-spoken woman or even a man would be selected to present the women's case in a moderate manner acceptable to most men.

Tamale points to this as a kind of pragmatism that is necessary in any kind of negotiation between unequal parties. This negotiation of patriarchy resonates with Obioma Nnaemeka's (2004) nego-feminism. In her work, 'Nego-feminism: Theorising, practicing, and pruning Africa's way', Nnaemeka (2004) introduces nego-feminism as a brand of African feminism characterised by negotiation and negation of ego. Nnaemeka argues:

First, nego-feminism is the feminism of negotiation; second, nego-feminism stands for "no ego" feminism. In the foundation of shared values in many African cultures are the principles of negotiation, give and take, compromise, and balance. Here, negotiation has the double meaning of "give and take/ exchange" and "cope with successfully/ go around". African feminism (or feminism as I have seen it practised in Africa) challenges through negotiations and compromise. It knows when, where, and how to detonate patriarchal land mines; it also knows when, where, and how to go around patriarchal land mines. In other words, it knows when, where, and how to negotiate with or negotiate around patriarchy in different contexts (2004, p. 377).

Tamale and Nnaemeka's critical observations on how African feminist activists and scholars 'do' feminism through carefully crafted strategic manoeuvres against patriarchal forms of oppression differ from the western radical approach to 'uprooting' patriarchy and speak to a uniquely African feminist approach to challenging male dominance and indirectly engaging patriarchal oppression. These negotiations have been exemplified through the government partnership with women's rights organisations (WROs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to implement Beijing Platform for Action commitments on ending violence against women. There are other initiatives in which women activists worked closely with male allies, traditional and religious leaders, notably in the passage of the Domestic Violence Act, 2010, to address cases of violence in homes (Mwiine 2019).

The question of men in the women's movement

The question of whether men can or should be involved in the advocacy for women's rights and gender equality gained increasing relevance in feminist advocacy in the mid-1990s. At a global level, the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo adopted a call to involve men in parenting and reproductive health care. In the following year, the 4th International Conference on women in Beijing, China, had a particular emphasis on the Gender and Development (GAD) approach that later became an entry point to critical discussions on men and masculinities and patriarchy (Cornwall 2000). Feminist advocacy positions have responded to the localised contexts experienced as well as the need for translation of global feminist discourse into action.³

Notably, before the global narratives on the role of men in gender equality, women activists in Uganda were reporting their experiences in advocacy which called for men's engagement. In an interview, Joy, formerly a leader of a post-Nairobi conference women's rights organisations noted: "... we realised that you cannot actually just motivate or empower women alone without their spouses or their male leaders in the community" (Interview, 20th November 2020). In an earlier interview, Miria, one of the only two female commissioners on the 21-member team of the 1994 Constitutional Review Commission recalled how some of the men on the Commission were already committed to gender equity when the review work started. Miria also writes about men who actively supported Action for Development's work with some being "frequently invited to address women's groups in various parts of the country, especially on the topic 'women and the constitution'" (Matembe 2002, p. 131).

At the same time, other research participants e.g. Madanda, Mubarak and Rita, talk about feminist reluctance to engage with men. Mubarak particularly cited the 'Balancing the Scales', a popular approach of the Uganda Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development and how this symbol influenced activism through prioritised programming for women and girls, keeping silent about experiences of young men and

boys in cattle keeping and fishing communities. Participants noted that while the 'Balancing the Scales' approach 'named' women for political recognition and 'politicised' women's pervasive experiences of marginalisation, it also polarised men and promoted advocacy that hardly engaged with men's and boys' gender-specific vulnerability. However, a move beyond these binaries later saw analysis of women and men's gender-specific experiences in HIV prevention and treatment programmes (Siu, Seeley & Wight 2013).

These tensions would later manifest in Beijing in China where men who attended the conference were reportedly confronted with questions from feminists on whether they were in the right place. Action for Development reports on the "men who braved the forum" and the questions they confronted: "Why have you come? This is a women's conference" (Action for Development 1995, p. 10). Despite these tensions and contestations, the Beijing conference report emphasised that women share common concerns with men that can be addressed only by working together and in engaging partnerships with men towards the common goal of gender equality around the world (United Nations 1995).

There is a growing number of African feminist scholars who have particularly critically engaged with the importance of advocacy work around men and masculinities (Meer 2011; Ahikire 2014; Muzee & Endeley Mbongo, 2019; Mwiine 2019; Ratele 2008). It is reasonable to say that through these studies, there is an emerging African theory – key debates explaining how and why to engage men in advocacy without the risk of reproducing patriarchal oppression. For instance Tamale (1999), Nnaemeka (2004) and Mwiine (2019) have drawn on African feminist thought to suggest appropriate ways of *negotiating* patriarchy, especially men's political resistance to the women's rights agenda. Writing about the predicament faced by women political representatives as a numerical minority in Parliament, Hannah Muzee and Mbongo (2019) draw on feminist advocacy in Uganda Parliament to theorise the making of constructive allyship between women members of parliament and male legislators in order to promote gender equity reforms. Mwiine (2019) has described the process

through which feminist activists in parliament conduct social surveillance, identify and train (SIT) male legislators who speak to and support gender equity issues in parliament. This process is conceptualised as an informal feminist curriculum in which women are afforded what Foucault (1982) refers to as disciplinary power – the ability to exercise control over the individuals they choose to work with through monitoring their actions. These "lived experiences of women in promoting gender equity legislative agendas give form to theory" on feminist advocacy involving women's agency in strategising the critical actions needed to bring transformation (Mwiine 2019, p. 7).

Conclusion: Towards a theory of African feminist advocacy

The discussion on critical junctures in the advocacy for women's rights reveals the changing historical contexts, diverse agendas and implicit and explicit conceptual and theoretical contexts that have underpinned them. Conceptual shifts in feminism in Uganda and elsewhere have involved rethinking the concept of gender – as a tool for analysis and policy – theorising feminist decolonisation and afro feminism,⁴ recentring gender power relationships and the gender-specific forms of oppression borne differently and unequally by women and men. This change in focus has been productive of debates on the value of strategic allyship with progressive men to address political resistance to legislative obstacles faced by women who as political minorities have insufficient numbers to push through important law reforms. A significant theoretical component is the contemporary debates on critical studies of men and masculinities theory in the South, opening up the question of men's role in maintaining the patriarchal oppression that is experienced by both men and women. African feminism is rich with conceptual and theoretical frames that inform advocacy on the continent. Importantly, as contemporary feminist advocacy moves into a complex phase characterised by backlash against gender justice, there is need to consciously consolidate strategies that have worked. In effect, feminist advocacy needs to keep a critical approach or window on alliance building - working with individual men and

encouraging pro-feminist men's organisations to apply feminist scholarship and advocacy (Tamale 2014; Uchendu 2008) to engage with male privilege and unequal power relations – and ensure accountable partnerships. Accountability relates to firstly, ensuring the visibility and leadership of women in activities that engage men, second the focus on gender equality in male-only groups and activities and third, where necessary, acknowledgment and protection of “women's space” and women-only and women-focused programmes (United Nations Division for Advancement of Women [UNDAW] 2008), given the deeply entrenched nature of prejudice against women. Finally, it is important to recall feminist activists' emphatic calls for the flattening of the polarities between feminist theory and advocacy by ensuring feminism speaks to advocacy and vice versa. Only then can we hope to work towards an *informed advocacy* and an African theorisation of feminist advocacy.

Notes

1. The study accessed information from Church of Uganda archives at Namirembe Cathedral, and from the resource centres of women's rights organisations (Action for Development and Uganda Women's Network).
2. According to Mwiine (2018, p. 23): “Uganda's model of affirmative action which drew on the liberal feminist notion of ‘inclusion’ took the form of reserved seats for women and was institutionalised in the 1995 constitution, offering women political representation in a separate and protected arena of women-only competition.”
3. The emergence of development discourses in which women were located as missing and unequal participants, was contested by post-colonial African feminists who took ideological issue with the neo-colonial terms of development which they saw as further entrenching women's disadvantage. The mid-1990s and later 2000s saw an emerging trend characterised by increasing demands to re-think the concept ‘gender’ in ways that highlighted the need to understand women's power relations with men and the socially constructed nature of the social and development inequalities that women faced in post-independent Africa. Gender and Development (GAD) approaches shifted the focus, going beyond the narrow concern of Women in Development (WID) which had only women's participation as the focus (Cornwall 2000).
4. This article has drawn from closely referenced works by Afro-feminist scholar and activist Sylvia Tamale. Tamale represents a pragmatic feminist endeavour to transcend what the

author terms unnecessary ‘artificial binaries’ between theory on the one hand and practice on the other. Tamale offers ground breaking work that privileges African ways of theorising – politicising African women's experiences while highlighting pragmatic measures to negotiate patriarchy.

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