

Pedagogies of Feminist Resistance: Agrarian Movements in Africa

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Lyn Ossome¹

Abstract

In the historical course of agrarian transformation in Africa, the reconstitution and fragmentation of the peasantry along the lines of gender, ethnic, class, and racial divisions which facilitate their exploitation remains a central concern in the analysis of the peasant path, of which the exploitation of gendered labor has been a particularly important concern for feminist agrarian theorizations. In contribution to these debates, this article examines the ways in which feminist concerns have shaped, driven, and defined the social and political parameters of agrarian movements in Africa. Even though agrarian movements articulating gender questions are not generalizable as feminist, their concern with social, political, and economic structures of oppression and their approach to gendered oppression as a political question lends them to characterization as being feminist. Through an examination of the changing forms of women-led agrarian struggles, the article shows how women's responses to the dominant structures and conditions of colonial and post-colonial capitalist accumulation could be characterized as feminist due to their social and political imperatives behind women's resistance.

¹ Institute for Economic Justice, South Africa.

Corresponding author:

Lyn Ossome, Institute for Economic Justice, 63a Ivy Road, Norwood, Johannesburg 2192, South Africa.

E-mail: lyn.ossome@gmail.com

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Introduction

The history of women-led agrarian struggles in Africa tells the story of women's opposition to their dispossession from the life-centered resources on which they depend for the sustenance and reproduction of their family, kin, and communities. The nuances of this history are usually concealed in the literature through a preponderance with characterizing women's agrarian struggles within an anti-imperialist framework which, while crucial, misses the grounded imperatives that precipitate and drive them, at the core of which lies women's need to defend their spheres of independent production and exchange. The nature of women's roles and centrality in agrarian transitions in this regard is rendered more visible through a focus on the family-household domain as a legitimate site of class struggle, with its unique methodological and pedagogical attributes and units of analysis. Furthermore, as will be shown, the strategies adopted by feminist agrarian movements, whether in direct response to imperialism (anticolonial), or indirect response (anti-neoliberal), demonstrate the significance of gender as a contemporary agrarian question and the critique of gendered labor as an indispensable lens through which to make sense of agrarian transitions in Africa.

Modern agrarian movements in Africa emerge concretely in relation to anticolonial resistance against the primitive accumulation and dispossession that characterized colonial rule. The historical basis of primitive accumulation has been understood through two predominant lenses that highlight its gendered origins: one, as the resolution to a problem that is strategically significant in the development of capitalism, that is, the creation of the working class that is available to work for wages¹ and two, following Luxemburg (1951), as the related question of the creation of an internal market, which capitalism always encounters as a problem of insufficient demand at home and, therefore, must continuously seek and create new markets by penetrating noncapitalist markets. This it does by taking over peasant or primitive agriculture that has not yet evolved into their own commercial markets, or by going out to new colonies, the latter taking the form of colonial capitalism and, today, imperialism. Luxemburg shows that the incursion of capital and consumer goods in rural areas and the dispossession that accompanies

commodification force rural populations to purchase from the market what they used to produce for themselves.

The accompanying shrinking of the noncapitalist strata means that some rural households cannot keep up with the socially determined level of consumption, thus lowering the living standards of all workers. Capitalism, however, does not benefit from the complete destruction of noncapitalist economies, as this would lead to a 'standstill of accumulation' (Luxemburg, 1951). Feminists have shown the gendered nature of these noncapitalist economies (Luxemburg, 1951),² as fundamental to the exploitation of wage labor and as a bastion of the unpaid labor which supports social reproduction under capitalism. The relationship between capitalism's destructive dependence on the peripheries and its destruction of self-sustaining peasant communities is as such the primary dialectic through which peasant and agrarian struggles manifest from below. Furthermore, the noncapitalist realm, historically gendered by the nature of its life-producing and life-preserving processes, is the core site through which agrarian struggles take on forms that may be understood as feminist in nature.

Agrarian reforms carry within them the aim of transforming the role of various agrarian classes in struggles for development and democratization, equitable land ownership, and developing the agricultural production forces to enhance food security, livelihoods, and accumulation of capital; they also fundamentally entail the transformation of social relations of production. Because of the sheer scale and centrality of the peasantry in the colonized world, agrarian questions had to account for peasants in agrarian transitions,³ and peasant and agrarian struggles against land dispossession were as such an invariable feature of the violence associated with anticolonial resistance across Africa. The literature, however, has largely glossed over the decisive role that women played in these struggles and has in fact been committed to the wholesale displacement of agrarian struggles onto nationalist demands. A gendered analysis challenges this perspective and shows that many peasant revolts in Africa, besides being led by women, articulated women's productive and reproductive demands and provided a basis upon which anticolonial and anti-imperialist rebellions grew even as the latter may not have constituted women's overt aims. In what follows, I examine two key movements which highlight the gendered nature of anticolonial interventions and their feminist agrarian character. I draw on women's agrarian struggles which had preceded *Mau Mau* in Kenya and the Nyabingi movement in Uganda to illustrate the anticolonial basis upon which agrarian struggles articulate to gendered (and feminist) concerns around land.

East African Women and Anticolonial Landed Movements

In Kenya, *Mau Mau* became definitive of peasant struggles for land and freedom and has largely been considered as the bedrock of anticolonial resistance in the country. *Mau Mau*'s potency, struggle, and cause, however, cannot be understood outside of the earlier struggles which women waged in response to, and in resistance against, what they viewed as the colonial decimation of their livelihoods, communities, and productive and reproductive resources on which these depended. Women were central in the colonial political economy and, in fact, constituted the condition of possibility of the migrant labor economy that supported the process of primitive accumulation.⁴ In the early years of colonial administration in Kenya, women had not been the direct targets of rule or of colonial capitalist penetration. As Presley (1992) shows, it is men who largely constituted what was viewed in settler society as surplus labor and were the first recruits into the new tax/wage labor equation. Kenyan women's burden was initially restricted to participating in communal work projects on roads or earthworks, and they were rarely compelled to work for Europeans in the first 30 years of colonialism. This changed in the World War I era when the colonial regime specifically targeted women as desirable laborers (Presley, 1992).

As colonial records reveal, strong arm tactics were applied to gain compliance: once reforms were made to the recruitment system (in 1925) and women directly taxed (in 1934), compulsion was no longer permissible, nor necessary. The problem that the wage labor dynamic presented for women is that apart from conflicting with the traditional domestic production for both women and men, women faced a double burden, as their traditional responsibilities that included subsistence farming and daily reproduction of family and kin remained constant, while having to also provide farm labor for European settlers (Presley, 1992). They, furthermore, 'had little control over and few means to seek redress of the conditions of their employment, the nature of employment, or the remuneration they received for their labour' (Presley, 1992, p. 36). Women understood this undue appropriation of their labor and time and resisted numerous attempts by the colonial state 'to transform the female peasantry into a rural proletariat' (Presley, 1992). The well-documented instances of such resistance illustrate the fact that peasants gradually began to organize autonomously from men and in their own right as women and, in these ways, acquired an independent political voice which would later be marshalled toward achieving nationalist objectives.

Importantly, women's resistance needs to be understood as exceeding labor protests to encompass struggles over the commons,⁵ at the heart of which lay the question regarding who could or should 'exercise control over fertility' (Brownhill, 2005, p. 96),⁶ which peasant women sought to answer. As space will only grant a summary, I illustrate the preceding argument through two historical events in colonial Kenya and Uganda that marked a shift in the relationship between women and the colonial state and exemplified the expansive ways in which feminist agrarian struggles could be understood in the colonial milieu and in the period after: these were the 'female circumcision controversy' in 1929–1931 and the Nyabingi movement in the early 1900s.

In 1920, the colonial regime had put in place an initiation policy to combat abortion and encourage the population growth on which the forced labor regime depended, making female initiation a crucial component of colonial governance in the 1920s and 1930s. Pre-initiation pregnancy resulted in abortion, a practice that stymied population growth and caused embarrassment to colonists eager to conceal their mistreatment of natives. Early initiation had, however, been made more difficult by: (a) Pax Britannica that banned cattle raiding, (b) colonial taxes that forced the sale of animals, and (c) colonial labor interference with agriculture (Thomas, 2003, p. 1), all of which were crucial resources on which the customary practice of initiation depended. Abortion practices were a response to the reality that early initiation had been made more difficult by the above three events, which had wiped out the bases of wealth upon which the cultural, ceremonial institution of initiation had been built. The panacea of abortion was early initiation, enforced counter to women's traditional practices and strikingly performed by men—the 'remover of the womb' (Thomas, 2003). As such, while Protestant missions called on government to ban all 'major' forms of excision and instituted laws at the Local National Councils (LNCs) that comprised of African men and the British district commissioner, the centrality of excision as a 'reproductive necessity' proved insurmountable. Minor excision, however, could be justified, and the panacea of abortion became early initiation, accompanied by mass public excisions (*Kigwarie*) (Thomas, 2003).

Women waged massive resistance against what they rightly understood as an unprecedented extension of male authority into the female domain. However, female circumcision/excision among central Kenyans in the early twentieth century was also related to 'the collectivity of women's land and labour' (Brownhill, 2005, p. 87) and culminated in a resistance that is considered to be among the crucial events in the

development of nationalist politics in Kenya (Thomas, 2003, p. 1). It became a controversial issue when British colonial officers and their Protestant missionary counterparts attempted to place a ban on the practice among central Kenyans. Their attempt was met in late 1929 by widespread protests of young African women and men who performed a dance called *Muthirigu* which the colonial government perceived as a direct threat to stability.⁷ Brownhill (2005, p. 87–88, *emphasis added*; see also Berman & Lonsdale, 1992) has argued that:

female circumcision was a militant proof of the initiates' *collective commitment to the protection of the land on which their blood fell...*[and] a display of the fearlessness with which women sealed their promise to guard against their land with their very lives. The fields in which circumcisions took place were the proving grounds of Kikuyu womanhood. There, girls became full adults and were assured husbands, land and families. Kikuyu female circumcision took place on specific grounds, in named rivers, at precise hours. The rite might at one time have signified women's sacrificial willingness to die in defense of their land that, with their labor, gave rise to the possibility of life.

The female circumcision crisis that unfolded in central Kenya as such 'demonstrated the high degree to which peasant women's resistance to colonialism was integrated into colony-wide struggles against the war, exploitation and land loss' (Brownhill, 2005, p. 89). Women understood colonial rule as an invasion of their ways of life and fought to retain agency in relation to both the direct dispossession of the land and resources that were life-centered. Women also leveled resistance against indirect modes of rule, which imposed male authority on to their autonomy, thus reconstituting women's anticolonial resistance as both a material and relational one. Colonial authority sought to subordinate women's land use practices to male authority and dominance and, in the process, severely undermined the generational system of socialization that governed social relations to land. In that context, peasant struggles had, therefore, to be understood both as a 'defense of subsistence' (Brownhill, 2005, p. 154) and as a defense of the communal labor practices upon which harmonious land relations had historically depended. In short, women's resistance was also anti-capitalist in its orientation.⁸ To the extent women understood circumcision as exceeding the embodied act of excision to encompass their unique struggles over autonomy and protection of their ways of life, women's active defense of circumcision at that historical time could be considered as feminist in its aims.

The Nyabingi movement that emerged in colonial Uganda similarly exemplifies feminist agrarian and anticolonial struggles. Women were

instrumental in the movement's leadership mainly because of their leadership role in the Nyabingi religion as *abagirwa* (spirit mediums). The Nyabingi movement, led by Muhumuza, was behind the first armed resistances against colonization in the Great Lakes region during the early 1900s. Muhumuza took the first initiative to mobilize peasants in the region into armed anticolonial resistance against colonialism in Kigezi (Murindwa-Rutanga, 2011, pp. 168–169). Using Nyabingi religion for ideological purposes to unite and encourage them, Muhumuza 'mobilised peasants into armed resistance against colonialism' and 'showed them that the only way to defend their land and interests was through collective struggle' (Murindwa-Rutanga, 2011, 169). In this instance, as with Kenya, we again encounter a collaborative discourse between colonized native men and colonial administrators that was used to suppress women's agency, and not surprisingly, Muhumuza's militant approach to peasant mobilization and resistance has often been obscured through mysticism: her agency as warrior woman was denied and her prowess rearticulated to her adherence to the Nyabingi religion. Thus (Murindwa-Rutanga, 2011, 171, *emphasis added*):

[r]ealising that some members were likely to lose faith in the leadership and desert the struggle or defect to the enemy or even turn against the leadership, Muhumuza drew lessons from the characteristics that people attributed to Nyabingi. One of these was to transform herself into a Nyabingi personification. She was leading a big peasant force of various ethnicities and lineages. And she was not blind to the fact that some of them were likely to challenge her military plans and legitimacy to lead men to war... This, then, called for the creation of a solid ideology, which would unite them, and keep them, under indirect fear, from rebelling or questioning her legitimacy or refusing to carry out orders. People needed to be convinced that her line of action was the correct one *as it was the Nyabingi line*.

To the British,

Mumusa was preaching an anti-European Crusade and collecting a considerable following in Rukiga. Mumusa or Muhumusa is a wellknown (*sic*) personage in Ruanda, and has formerly given a great deal of trouble to the Germans. She is one of the 'witch-doctors' who are found in this part of Africa, and who are regarded with superstitious reverence by the native. Mumusa at one time had enormous power and still has.⁹

Patriarchal ideology played a big part in determining the course and impact of the anticolonial peasant resistance which Muhumuza led.

Some of the elders ‘despised and feared this initiative and leadership by a woman,’ thought it degrading to be led to war by a woman, and felt that ‘their positions as men and leaders would be undermined if women led them to war.’ They ‘feared the consequences of such leadership and resistance after the battle,’ and ‘envisaged a situation of turmoil – where women and children would disobey them’ (Murindwa-Rutanga, 2011, 172). Their interests lay in protecting existing social relations, which they feared would be challenged by acknowledging women’s leadership. There were also those who ‘resorted to outright collaboration with the enemy [colonialists] for wealth and power, while others decided to sit back and wait rather than join forces led by women’ (Murindwa-Rutanga, 2011). Male patriarchal interests dovetailed neatly with colonial capitalist interests of accumulation. These were ‘male deals’ similar to those that Brownhill identified in Kenya as involving ‘cross-class and cross-ethnic collaboration of African men and colonialists’ and serving as ‘intermediaries to channel Africans’ land and labour into the commodified economy’ (Brownhill, 2005, p. 24).

The foregoing highlights the diverse strategies which women drew upon in order to resist changes in their societies that threatened their life forms. In colonial Kenya, as in Uganda, women emerged as key interlocutors in struggles that were being waged primarily between native men and colonists. Women’s resistance mirrored their relationship to key resources that were central to the colonial capitalist accumulation project—land and labor—and their struggles took on an agrarian form because they affected the overall political and economic structure of the colonial state. This colonial gendered structural articulation between wage labor and capital has far outlived colonialism and continues to place women at the forefront of agrarian struggles in the postcolonial state, where, in addition, movements now have to contend with the loss of national sovereignty, as imperialism’s onslaught continues unabated.

Imperialism and the Gendered Commons

Imperialism or global capitalism mediates colonial and postcolonial agrarian struggles to the extent that it is the force which mediates the relationship between center and periphery through various processes of primitive accumulation. Imperialism, that is, the need for capital to gain control of ever more raw materials and resources in the peripheries, has as such been a defining feature of late capitalism. The local problem of

imperialism, or rather its relevance in peasant struggles in the periphery, relates to the particular challenges it produces for rural movements, namely: ‘the concentration of agrarian capital and political power at national levels, its alliance with financial and industrial capital, the subsumption of national capital as a whole under international capital, and the [resultant] perverse pattern of national development’ (Moyo & Yeros, 2005, p. 2). The defining socioeconomic changes of this pattern of accumulation include proletarianization and semi-proletarianization of labor, re-peasantization, rural–urban linkages, and gender relations which mediate these processes (Moyo & Yeros, 2005). In these social relations, gender has received significant attention, albeit not concretely linking national sovereignty with anti-imperialism.

Feminist agrarian struggles have articulated an anti-imperialist critique of gender (gendered labor) as a buffer against capitalist accumulation, which in turn have been directed by claims on public land and the commons. A neocolonial scramble for land has been underway in Africa for the last decade and a half and is linked to existing food, energy, and financial crises (Tsikata, 2016). Beginning in the 1980s, economic liberalization created the conditions for a second wave of large-scale land acquisitions whose impacts on the livelihoods of local communities and implications for land tenure and agrarian reforms are well documented (Tsikata, 2016). The loss of common lands related to these land acquisitions is often little remarked by the state and in policy, but has been the basis of protracted struggles between effectively landless and land poor communities. The commons are an important livelihood resource, particularly in poorer communities, and while ‘often seen by state and investors as vast lands far away from communities, thinly populated and therefore devoid of implications, these resources *have owners and users*’ whose displacement necessitates ‘long-distance travel into territory of neighboring villages involving investments in transport beyond the poor’s reach, the loss of entitlements and potential conflicts’ (Tsikata, 2016, p. 14, *emphasis added*). The ownership that women claim over the commons also needs, however, to be understood as exceeding the framework of organized anti-imperialist resistance even as they battle global capital in localized ways. This argument is illustratable in the case of the protracted resistance waged by elderly women in Amuru District, northern Uganda against large-scale land acquisition and assault on common lands.

Structural changes and elite-driven development in Uganda have culminated in various forms of resistances from below, in which women have played a decisive role. One landmark case of such social protest

took place in Amuru District in northern Uganda on 18 April 2012, when between 80 and 100 women stripped naked in a protest to block their eviction from land they claimed as rightfully theirs. They did this in front of representatives of the Local District Board and surveyors of the sugar company Madhvani Group, the firm that was seeking land in the area for sugarcane growing. The Amuru Sugar Works project owned by the Madhvani Group sought 40,000 hectares (ha) of land for a new commercial sugarcane estate and was faced with a landmark protest staged by the local community (Martiniello, 2015). Two recent scholarly articles have examined this protest in detail. Ebila and Tripp (2017) take a culturalist feminist perspective and explore the symbolic meanings behind the public displays of the female naked body in the face of repressive authority in contemporary protest movements. They show how ‘the body symbolism of motherhood was successfully used as a resource for collective struggle to protect land rights’ (Ebila & Tripp, 2017, p. 1) and argue that it revealed the ways in which people draw on the repertoire of protest tactics available to them: ‘[t]he symbolic association of women with the land made their revolt all the more powerful. The reproductive connotation of motherhood became the basis and justification for political action rather than a [traditional] symbol of passivity as is often regarded in Western Societies’ (Ebila & Tripp, 2017, p. 18). In this reading, it is gender (and its intersection with class) that structures women’s responses to dispossession, albeit in ways that reify problematic pronatalist tropes that exclude certain women and conceal wife oppression.

Another study highlighting this case (Martiniello, 2015) seeks to illustrate from a political economy perspective the ways in which ostensibly developmental projects with state backing not only threaten livelihoods, but, crucially, have compelled responses that approximate existing forms of social organization and social relations of productions of the communities so affected. The Amuru Sugar Works project, initiated in 2007–2008 but stalled at inception, was planned to create employment for 7000–8000 people and to provide livelihoods from sugarcane cultivation to 7000–10,000 outgrower farmers (Martiniello, 2015). The farmers would be housed in labor camps with 10 ha each (8 ha under sugarcane and 2 ha for food crops). The investor would supply equipment to clear, plough, and furrow the land as well as distribute treated cane seeds and give technical advice on agricultural matters. The proposed project would have displaced approximately 20,000 people, almost all family members, around the village of Lakang in this economically depressed region on the periphery, both politically and

economically, of Uganda. The overwhelming majority of small-scale rural producers rejected the proposed enclosure of their land and refused to be incorporated as either outgrower farmers or agricultural laborers (Martiniello, 2015, pp. 653–654).

It is, however, the overt response of women to this threat of dispossession that most clearly demonstrated what was at stake with the planned sugar works. To Martiniello (2015), by resisting dispossession and challenging state violence, small-scale poor peasants were reiterating the political salience of rural social struggles and highlighting the significance of land and agrarian questions. The rise in ‘rural social protests manifested in both every day, hidden practices of resistance and moments of open, militant contestation are aimed at (re)establishing and securing access to means of social reproduction’ (Martiniello, 2015, p. 653). The event illuminated crucial aspect of peasants’ agency and brought to the fore the present dynamics of national and global political economy (Martiniello, 2015). Ultimately, Martiniello (2015) argues that persistent rural struggles in Amuru district embody not only different elements of struggles against dispossession, exploitation, concentration, and centralization but also struggles for autonomy and sovereignty. Martiniello’s powerful critique, nonetheless, does not overcome the universalizing tendency that necessarily still articulates protest as resistance to development (Ossome, 2019). More saliently, the Amuru women’s protest should be understood through their relationship to the noncapitalist realm of reproduction, which does not so much suggest a critique of modes of women’s incorporation into capitalist development, as women’s need to protect a realm of social reproduction which they understand as being crucial for the survival of their households and communities. Herein lies the possibility of reading the naked protest in relation to anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist contestations. This form of resistance led by women is, thus, both an assertion of women’s awareness of the life-centeredness that land portends and the fact that the preservation of nature is fundamentally driven by acts of care that are embodied, sacred, and existential in nature. Most often, it is ‘ordinary care-giving mothers and grandmothers [...] defending and reconstituting communal ways of being and place-based forms of autonomy. In doing so, they, like the Indigenous Others [...] draw on non-patriarchal ways of doing, being, and knowing’ (Kothari et al., 2019, p. 111).

The distinction drawn above between feminist and anti-imperialist resistance (albeit not mutually exclusive) rests on the sources of contradictions that precipitate agrarian struggles led by women. Agrarian struggles are feminist because they espouse a critique of the destruction

of life-centered resources through which families/households and communities reproduce themselves in spite of capitalism; that is, it is not the structure of capitalist accumulation (and capitalist governance) that shapes the form of resistance to itself; rather, it is the lived experiences of women that determine their pedagogical approaches to resistance. The women who stripped naked in Amuru may not have had a theoretical critique of the ways in which global capitalism impacts on their livelihoods, but their actions in resisting land acquisition by a multinational corporation, and which placed them in direct confrontation with imperialist power, shows that women understand the commons as gendered and understand their relations to them and their power in defense of the commons. If capitalism appears as the target of resistance, it is feminism that structures the modes of resistance and feminist praxis that brings conceptual clarity to the distinct ways in which women have waged agrarian struggle at different historical moments.

The State–Society Nexus

An issue brought into focus by feminist agrarian struggles is the ways in which the state is implicated in social reproduction at local levels.¹⁰ Social reproduction in contemporary capitalist economies hinges on the interplay between three major institutions: households, markets, and the state (Antonopolous & Hirway, 2010; Dickinson & Russell, 1985). The roles that these institutions play in ensuring social reproduction may both contradict and complement each other. The preceding sections have placed feminist agrarian struggles in the context of international capital/market. In this final section, I consider struggles that are situated in local, social, and political contexts, which highlight the ways in which women mobilize with and against the state as a major institution responsible for social reproduction. I highlight this relationship through a case study of the Wau Women's Association (WWA), an association in South Sudan of mostly widows that took on the state and traditional male leadership that were attempting to appropriate communal land on which women had claims (SIHA Network, 2020), and the TGNP Mtandao women's collective in Tanzania.

In 2018, a group of widows in Wau, the capital city of Western Bar el Ghazal in South Sudan, went to the governor to ask for land, which the governor agreed to give them. The distribution of the land would be witnessed by their leader who had negotiated the agreement. Previously, only men could own land, women could not. The women were granted

land, but a problem remained: they did not have money to process transfer papers, which were to be processed through the local chief. In this process of registration, the women discovered that it was the chief himself who was stealing the land that had been designated to them. Women were surprised to find out that the chief had sold the land that had been allocated to them and had done so in collaboration with officials in the Ministry of Land. The chief then demanded from the women an office, out of which he could operate to resolve their issues and the women obliged, raising money for this purpose. They raised SP80,000 (approximately, US\$1400), out of which they handed the chief SP18000 (US\$325) for renting office space (SIHA Network, 2020). The ministry then sent a committee to assess the situation, and for that visit, women again raised money, hired chairs, and bought refreshments for the committee meeting. About 200 women gathered for that meeting. The women were sitting aside, and the men sat with the chief, with whom the men had been collaborating. Women spoke in one voice and declared that they did not want the chief. They compelled the election of a new chief who is supportive of the women-land agenda. After the victory, the WWA women now own land which is no longer being grabbed. The land case strengthened women's position in their households and also strengthened the relationship between the women's movement and the local state. Women now first go to the government if there is any issue. They see the government as having played its role in eliminating the old chief and appointing a new one, and that the action was immediate. The women who led this land case also emerged as leaders among women and continue to be approached by the women whenever they face problems (SIHA Network, 2020).

In Tanzania, struggles led by the women's collective TGNP Mtandao¹¹ illustrate the ways in which local activists prioritized their struggles over corporate 'investment and land grabbing, lack of access to timely and quality farm inputs, lack of viable markets, denial of credit, lack of viable transport to send crops to the market, or a combination of these (Mbilinyi, 2016, p. 124). In 2013, local women activists in Mshewe (Mbeya Rural District) presented a press release to the media, which denounced the *uwekezaji* (investment) policy¹² and demanded a return of their land which had been sold to a large-scale farmer (Mbilinyi, 2016). In Mondo (Shinyanga Region) in 2014, outraged villagers, both women and men, stopped the motorcade of the Minister of Water in protest against the failure of his ministry to provide them with water for years, wielding handmade posters and demanding water rights and government accountability. Their peaceful demonstration was successful in the short run, as the Minister agreed to stop and listen to the villagers' demands

and discuss what needed to be done to improve the situation with local government authorities. Their demonstration included a demand that the local Member of Parliament come and talk to his constituency, and the following month, he complied (Mbilinyi, 2016). The strategies employed by Tanzanian women in their struggles to regain control over land and natural resources have involved direct confrontations with the state and articulate citizen-based rights claims as a weapon of agrarian struggle.

Through these localized struggles typified by the South Sudan and Tanzania case studies, we see the ways in which women have managed to constitute strategic agrarian movements that appropriate their agency as citizens with recognizable claims on the state and also as political constituencies who are able to leverage this power to demand audience and action from local and national state representatives. Imperialist logics of primitive accumulation manifest locally as conflicts over land and labor. In agrarian societies which rely on a combination of wage labor, petty commodity production, and peasant farming for their sustenance—all three of which increasingly depend on access to private and common land (Naidu & Ossome, 2016)—local resistance necessarily takes the form of feminist agrarian resistance because of the crisis of social reproduction that loss of land precipitates at the level of the family/household. These struggles are led mainly, although not exclusively, by women. Because women are also fighting patriarchal structures at this local level, the state emerges as an important buffer between them and patriarchal power, and is the perspective in which women's struggles illustrated above through the examples in Uganda, South Sudan, and Tanzania ought to be understood. The state is here, however, a contradictory institution, as it functions both as a mediator of (global) capital and as the guarantor of (national) rights. This antagonism between the state and capital is central to the re-emerging debate on national sovereignty and the national question (see Moyo & Yeros, 2011; Moyo et al., 2013), a debate that exceeds the scope of this article. Nonetheless, the strategies adopted by feminist agrarian movements, whether in direct response to imperialism (anticolonial), or indirect response (anti-neoliberal), demonstrate the significance of gender as a contemporary agrarian question and the critique of gendered labor as an indispensable lens through which to make sense of agrarian transitions in Africa.

Conclusion

This article has attempted to show, through a historical critique, the location of women-led agrarian struggles within colonial and postcolonial

capitalist accumulation in Africa. The examples highlight the ways in which women oppose their dispossession from the life-centered resources on which they depend for social reproduction. However, the preponderance to characterizing these struggles within an anti-imperialist framework misses the grounded imperatives that precipitate and drive them, that is, women's need to defend their spheres of independent production and exchange. This is not at all to minimize imperialism's role in the dispossession of local communities, but rather to shift the framework of analysis from one that diminishes women's role and centrality in agrarian transitions, to a feminist lens which place at the center of its analysis the family-household domain as a legitimate site of class struggle, and as a unit of analysis with unique methodological and analytical demands. The role of African women in bringing about social and political change has been invisibilized or understood in auxiliary relation to dominant patriarchal leadership. The feminist agrarian struggles elaborated in this chapter not only restore women as proper historical subjects but also show that African agrarian histories are only partially accurate in the absence of the movements of women that form their core.

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Notes

1. This is one of the primary moments of capital accumulation that Marx emphasises in *Capital* (Marx, 1976, pp. 871–940).
2. By this is meant realms of reproduction that are only partially integrated into the market, or not at all, for instance, food for subsistence, some of which may be lent to petty trade but most of which goes directly to household consumption.
3. Fanon, Mao, and Cabral were the foremost theorists who wholly embraced the peasantry, recognizing their overrepresentation in the colonized world and, therefore, the impossibility of revolution that did not account for them both intellectually and organizationally (Moyo et al., 2013).
4. I have argued elsewhere that that women constituted a crucial possibility of indirect rule. The mechanisms of colonial rule needed to be understood not only in relation to the bifurcation of the colonial state but also with regard to

the structural dynamics which facilitated the stabilization of the bifurcated domains of rule. The stabilization of the tribalized domains of native authority was highly articulated to the productive and reproductive roles to which labouring women in the colonies were confined to as the migrant cash crop economy expanded (Ossome, 2018, p. xvi).

5. By the commons, I mean natural and cultural resources that include farming and grazing lands, nature, water, and forests that can be accessed and used by all members of a community without recourse to rights held in private property, through which the commons have been gradually commodified.
6. Brownhill uses the concept of fertility to characterize the heightened class struggle resulting from the defence of the commons. At the centre of the 'fight for fertility' then is 'women and their allies' effort to regain and defend their control over the prerequisites of life, especially their own bodies, labors, waters, and lands' (Brownhill, 2005; Brownhill & Turner, 2019, p. 1).
7. The circumcision debacle that affected all of central Kenya had far-reaching consequences for colonial rulers, as it gained support of anticolonial resisters such as the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA)—a Black political organisation demanding the return of land given to white settlers—and also prompted autonomous institution building by Africans, as Black teachers, parents, and students left Protestant mission stations and founded their own independent schools and churches.
8. Another distinct struggle that placed Kenyan women at the heart of peasant resistance was the 'terracing strikes' of 1947, against the forced labor of mainly women that British colonial officials directed towards the digging of terraces, ostensible as a conservation measure but a practice which in reality functioned as a mode of punishment. The terracing strikes 'showed that gendered commoners' demands were opposed not only to the colonial government and settlers, but also to the politics of moderate African anti-colonialists' (Brownhill, 2005, p. 114); for an elaboration of the nature and history of these strikes, see also Mackenzie (1998); Throup (1988).
9. Letter of Cap. Reid Maj. Jack in August 1911, cited in Murindwa-Rutanga (2011, p. 170).
10. Social reproduction would broadly include biological reproduction, everyday survival, accumulation of education and skills to participate in the capitalist economy (for workers' participation in the formal and informal labour market), acquisition of skills to ensure the survival of the households (i.e., skills to engage in household production and care work) and inculcating the necessary value system to ensure the reproduction of the patriarchal and capitalist economy. A more basic definition related to the daily reproduction of working-class households through the acquisition and provision of such basic needs as food, shelter, clothing, and healthcare (Katz, 2001).
11. TGNP Mtandao (literally 'network' in Kiswahili) is the Tanzanian Gender Networking Programme, which was established in 1993 with the vision 'to build a transformative feminist movement for social, gender transformation and women empowerment' and with the goal of increasing 'engagement

of grassroots women and other marginalized groups with gender transformation and social justice issues informed by the transformative feminist agenda' (cited in Mbilinyi, 2016, p. 127).

12. Investment policy (*uwekezaji*) is the term used by local activists to refer to corporate capitalist enterprises, land grabbing, and the overall process of primitive accumulation (Mbilinyi, 2016).

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