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Women in Politics, A Decolonial Critique of the Politics of Affirmative Action in Uganda

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on Uganda's critical gender and political debates, this essay introduces a decolonial critique of Affirmative Action policies. Moving beyond the established debate—which pits liberal proponents (e.g., Mwaka, 1996; Kadaga, 2013; Ahikire, 1994/2013) against feminist critics who highlight its structural limitations (e.g., Tamale; Goetz, 2002)—this paper argues that such policies must be understood as a continuation of the colonial logic of difference. Engaging Mahmood Mamdani's (1996) analysis of the bifurcated state, I demonstrate how the colonial strategy of "define and rule," which governed subjects through fixed racial and tribal identities, has been repurposed by the postcolonial state. By constituting "women" as a singular, state-managed political category for empowerment, Affirmative Action inadvertently replicates the foundational colonial practice of mediating citizenship through group identity. Consequently, this well-intentioned framework risks recognizing women not as full, unmediated citizens but as members of a state-defined group. This process, while addressing quantitative underrepresentation, reinforces the very architecture of differentiated rule that sustains the postcolonial state. Ultimately, the essay contends that this logic forecloses more radical, pluralistic, and emancipatory possibilities by tying political agency to a state-sanctioned identity, thereby reproducing the subject-making dynamics it seeks to overcome.

Keywords: Affirmative Action, Decolonial Theory, Colonial Logic of Difference, Postcolonial State, Gender and Citizenship.

From Colonial Subjects to Gendered Subjects: The Paradox of Identity Politics and the Unfulfilled Promise of Universal Citizenship in the Post-Colonial State

This core tension, where identity-based advocacy risks subverting the civic universalism it seeks to inhabit, is rooted in the specific historical construction of the post-colonial state. Mamdani's (1996) critical intervention in *Citizen and Subject* demonstrates that the colonial state did not merely exclude Africans from citizenship but actively constituted them as "subjects" governed through state-enforced "customary" law. This bifurcated system created a civic space for a privileged few and a communal, patriarchal space for the governed majority. The post-independence project of forging a unified national citizenship, therefore, required dismantling this institutionalised particularism. Consequently, when contemporary political mobilisation foregrounds the category "Ugandan woman" in a manner that echoes this bifurcation—for instance, by channeling all gender claims into a separate, parallel structure of women's councils or a marginalized ministry—it risks resurrecting a form of administrative particularization. This process can effectively "subject" women anew by treating gender not as a dimension of universal citizenship but as a separate administrative file, managed through specialised channels that lack the authority of the "main" (and often implicitly male-gendered) civic sphere (Tripp, 2000).

Furthermore, the philosophical underpinnings of the universal citizen, derived from Enlightenment liberalism, themselves contain the seeds of this paradox. The ideal of the abstract, unmarked citizen, ostensibly neutral, was historically modelled on the propertied male head of household, rendering the citizen's universality a gendered construct from its inception (Pateman, 1988). The "Ugandan woman" as a political identity emerges, in part, as a necessary corrective to this false universalism, asserting embodied experience and historical exclusion. However, the peril lies in what feminist scholar Wendy Brown (1995) might term a "wounded attachment," where political mobilisation becomes fixed upon the very identity forged through subjugation. By making a politicised *difference* the sole grounds for political claims-making, such mobilisation can inadvertently reinforce the power of the state to recognise and manage populations through categories of disadvantage, rather than foster a collective agency capable of redefining the *common* good. The state's capacity to "see" its populace primarily through gendered, ethnic, or other categorical lenses is a hallmark of modern governmentality (Foucault, 1991), which can subsume radical demands into logics of administration and patronage, thereby neutralising their transformative potential for the broader political community.

Therefore, the essay's argument, following Mamdani's logic, is not a dismissal of feminist politics but a strategic caution about the mechanisms of state power. The central problem is that an over-reliance on a singular, state-recognised identity category can replicate the "decentralised despotism" of the customary by creating a modern equivalent: a gendered particularism. In this framework, women's political voice becomes legitimate only when speaking *as women* to gender-specific issues, while their authority to speak

as *citizens* on the totality of national life—from macroeconomic policy to constitutional reform—remains circumscribed (Yuval-Davis, 1997). The result is a weakened civic sphere, where the universal citizen remains an unfulfilled abstraction, and the political community fragments into a constellation of competing, state-managed identities, none possessing the full, unmediated agency promised by the classic ideal of citizenship.

After abandoning multiparty politics, which were seen as having intensified conflict and contributed to the narrow-minded politics of the past, the NRM government adopted the principle of inclusiveness.[1] In 1989, NRM established group representation referred to as 'affirmative action,' based on gender, profession and age.[2]

Liberal feminism, rooted in Enlightenment ideas (such as Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*), argues that women, like men, are rational beings entitled to the same fundamental rights and freedoms. Its main aim has been to secure formal equality—the principle that laws should be unbiased by gender. This tradition works to remove legal obstacles that hinder women from competing equally with men in the public sphere, including education, employment, and politics.

The emphasis on "legalese"—the precise language of statutes, court rulings, and constitutional interpretation—is a natural consequence of this philosophy. For liberal feminists, the law is not merely a reflection of societal norms but the chief tool for transforming them. The aim is to entrench women's rights into enforceable legal doctrines, making the state the defender of equality. As political theorist Zillah Eisenstein argued, liberal feminism aimed to extend the liberal state's promise of individual rights to women, urging the state to honour its own declared ideals (Eisenstein, 1981).

The Legal Precedent: Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964: This is the cornerstone. Title VII prohibited employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. The inclusion of "sex" was initially added by conservative opponents hoping to defeat the bill, but it was seized upon by liberal feminists, particularly those in the National Organisation for Women (NOW), founded in 1966. NOW's Statement of Purpose explicitly called for " new laws and policies to break through the barriers of discrimination" (NOW, 1966). They used the legalese of Title VII to file lawsuits and push for enforcement, arguing that passive non-discrimination was insufficient to overcome historical patterns of exclusion.

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[1] Museveni & Kanyogonya 1997: 200–1).
[2] Rubongoya Joshua, *Regime Hegemony in Museveni's Uganda: Pax Musevenica*, 2007: 74

From Non-Discrimination to Affirmative Action: The critical conceptual leap was the recognition that simply outlawing *de jure* (legal) discrimination did not eradicate *de facto* (in practice) inequality. This was a lesson learned from the civil rights movement's struggle for racial equality. President Lyndon B. Johnson's Executive Order 11246 (1965), which required federal contractors to "take affirmative action" to ensure equal employment opportunity, initially focused on race. However, it was amended by Executive Order 11375 in 1967 to include sex-based discrimination.

This was a quintessential liberal feminist victory. It used the power of the state (via contract compliance) to compel institutions to proactively recruit, hire, and promote women. The rationale, famously articulated by Johnson in a 1965 speech, was that "you do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, 'you are free to compete with all the others'" (Johnson, 1965). This logic was directly applied to women, who were seen as similarly hobbled by historical and structural barriers.

The Role of the State and Legal Enforcement: The implementation of affirmative action for women was heavily reliant on a rights-based, legalistic framework. Agencies like the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) were empowered to investigate complaints and enforce regulations. Liberal feminist organisations became adept at using this system, leveraging the legalese of compliance—setting goals and timetables, conducting disparity studies, and litigating against non-compliant employers and universities.

This development was constructed on the role that women played during the guerrilla war, which demonstrated that women could play an active role in the political transformation processes, and help change the status of women.[3] These attempts have always been premised on the idea that in the pre-colonial period, women were empowered and included in the political processes.

In this paper, I argue that the empowerment and emancipation of women in today's Uganda is a replica of the colonial logic of excluding politically defined minorities, whose legacy the postcolonial state carries forward in the name of rights, affirmative action, emancipation, and empowerment. Therefore, in attempts to correct the past injustices and marginalisation of women in the politics of Uganda, following Mamdani, I argue end up reproducing women based on their gender and not as citizens. The marginalised category is reproduced and maintained in the language of rights and empowerment. Important questions are ignored, i.e., why does a certain gender have to be looked at as such? They reproduce it. Instead of seeking to include them as citizens, they include them as women, which is the problem with many feminists and the state seeking women's inclusion in the politics of the country. This explains why, until

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[3] See Byanyima, 1992: 142; Rubongoya 2007: 79

today, affirmative action, despite its promises, has not overcome the challenges it envisaged to resolve. In order to expound on my argument, I would like to engage with the perspective that contends and celebrates affirmative action without double-checking its concealed flaws. I shall do this by engaging with Victoria Mwaka and her interlocutors, *Rebecca Kadaga* and *Ahikire Josephine,* in locating the place of women in Uganda's politics. Some of the questions I grapple with include, but are not limited to: is the problem necessarily one of absence or absence as women? If the latter is true, how then do we expect to deal with structural problems without dealing with the structure itself that created this problem? Can this improve the conditions of women if they are included as women and not as citizens? Isn't this just a reproduction of marginalisation, since it is only women included as women, and the rest are included as citizens? The paper illustrates more by building on Mamdani's structuralist critique of the affirmative action argument.

Mamdani's Logic and the Citizen/Subject Dialectic

Mamdani's (1996) dialectic of citizen and subject is fundamentally an analysis of institutional architecture. The colonial "decentralised despotism" functioned by co-opting and codifying local patriarchal structures into a state-sanctioned "customary" authority, which then governed the private, familial, and communal lives of rural subjects. This created a form of power that was legitimate precisely because it appeared indigenous and particular. Translating this logic to gender politics reveals a parallel danger: the institutional "solution" to women's exclusion can morph into a new form of particularised containment. When women's political engagement is funnelled primarily through state-designated structures like gender ministries or women's councils, these bodies can become the modern equivalent of the "native authority"—a recognised, but ultimately marginalised, platform that speaks only for and to "women's issues." As Aili Mari Tripp's (2000) analysis of Uganda suggests, while such spaces provide essential platforms, they can also absolve the mainstream, "neutral" (but de facto male-dominated) ministries and parliament from integrating gender as a core competency. The result is a form of administrative apartheid**,** where the universal citizen is governed by civil and national law, while the "woman subject" is managed through a separate, politically weaker bureaucratic track, inadvertently reinforcing the very bifurcation Mamdani critiqued.

The mechanism by which this bifurcation occurs is deeply discursive and rooted in what Althusser termed "interpellation"—the process by which ideology hails individuals into specific subject positions. Mamdani's framework shows how the colonial state interpellated the African primarily as a *tribal subject*, not a civic citizen. Applying this, the essay argues that a singular political focus on "women" risks a similar mode of gendered interpellation. When the state and civil society consistently address a person

first and foremost as a *Ugandan woman*—for instance, through policies targeting "maternal health" or "women's entrepreneurship"—they are hailed into a subject-position defined by biological and social function, rather than political agency (Oyěwùmí, 1997). As Nira Yuval-Davis (1997) argues, this process can "dilute" her identity as a citizen, a category theoretically defined by will and reason, not embodiment. Her political concerns become pre-emptively particularised; she is expected to care primarily about "gender issues," while macro-political domains like national defence, fiscal policy, or constitutional law remain implicitly coded as the purview of the unmarked (male) citizen. This creates a hierarchical dichotomy where the "citizen" engages in the rational, universal business of the state, while the "woman" is tasked with representing a specific, corporeal, and partial interest.

A critical pillar of Mamdani's (1996) analysis is his deconstruction of customary law as an "invented tradition," a colonial tool of control that ossified fluid, negotiable social practices into rigid, patriarchal codes enforced by the state. This insight exposes a profound paradox within identity politics that mobilises cultural womanhood. When advocacy for "Ugandan women" appeals to an *authentic*, pre-colonial or cultural essence of womanhood, it risks mobilising a category that is itself partially a product of the very colonial patriarchy Mamdani describes. For example, campaigns that reinforce "motherhood" as the primary political justification for women's leadership or that seek protection through revived "customary" courts may unknowingly legitimise structures built on invented traditions designed to subordinate (Chanock, 1985). Thus, the fight for recognition *as women* can become entangled with a regressive form of cultural subject-formation, where political legitimacy is contingent on performing a state- or community-sanctioned version of gendered identity that may conflict with the liberal individualist rights enshrined in the citizenship ideal. The subject is, once again, ruled through her own (invented) traditions.

Finally, extending Mamdani's logic into the contemporary neoliberal context reveals another layer of risk. The modern neoliberal state often prefers to engage with particularised, manageable identity groups rather than a cohesive body of citizens making universal demands (Brown, 2015). The category "Ugandan woman" is highly legible to development frameworks, NGOs, and state agencies that operate on logics of targeted projects, metrics, and empowerment as an individual rather than a collective political endeavour. In this system, success is measured by the number of women micro-entrepreneurs or girls in school, not by the transformation of the civic sphere itself. This form of governance through gender can effectively produce what Fraser (2013) calls a "progressive neoliberalism," where recognition of identity is divorced from a redistribution of power. The "woman subject" becomes a beneficiary or a stakeholder—a category to be "empowered" or "developed"—while the structural power of the universal citizenry remains unchallenged. Her political agency is thus channelled into proving her worth according to

developmentalist metrics, rather than exercising sovereign power as an equal member of the *demos*. In this sense, the particularisation Mamdani identified evolves from a tool of colonial despotism into a technology of neoliberal governance, still inhibiting the realisation of a truly universal and transformative citizenship.

Gender and Post-Colonial Representation of Women in Politics in Uganda.

Post-colonialism generally focuses on articulating the point of view of the subordinate, the colonised, the marginalised, the subaltern, and attempts to voice their concerns, their situation, and their desires. The post-colonial approach had its origins in novels written in ex-colonial countries but later expanded from its literary roots and became associated with the ideas of Fanon (1963), Said (1978), Memmi (1967), and postmodern analysts of power such as Foucault (1982), Deleuze (1983) and Derrida (1983, 1994). The dependency theory of the 1960s and 1970s has also been a precursor of this perspective (Amin, 1974). A major concern of these points of view has been to oppose and critique the Westphalian Enlightenment definition of politics, to deconstruct the hegemonic discourse of the powerful, to focus on language and concepts and their consequences, to challenge the centrality of the state, to challenge the public/private divide and other dualisms of liberal thought - such as reason/emotion or objective/subjective, universal/particular to identify the hierarchical, dualistic nature of western thought, to make the subaltern visible and vocal and to focus on the ubiquitous nature of power.

A questioning and sometimes rejection of universals has been central. (Hooks, 1981, 1984; Hurtado, 1996; Ong, 1999; Spivak, 1988; Mohantry, 1993; Mendoza, 2000; Jones and Tronto, 1997) and those who are at least partially grounded in ex-colonial states such as India (Guha and Spivak,1988) and Latin America (Mendoza, 2000). A third division of the divided field of gender and politics consists of those in the political science or interdisciplinary subfields of gender and international relations, gender and development, and gender and globalization, and gender and democratization that have been concerned to define as political a variety of factors not particularly recognized as political by the dominant Enlightenment view; topics such as the organization of the economy, the family, health, religious institutions, and public policy of all sorts-not necessarily electoral politics or formal political institutions such as parliaments or bureaucracies or state departments. Much of the research in this area is based on the unmasking of gender biases and discrimination, but it is also concerned with theories of power, domination, and subordination (Kabeer, 2009).

Carroll and Zerilli (1985) critique the gendered nature of political activity, which erroneously proclaimed male political activity to be universal and all important, had defined women as politically deficient. Studies of women in Uganda indicate that independence of the women's movement from the state is

critical (Howell 2001; Tripp 2000a, 2000b). At the time of formal independence from colonial rule, most African countries accorded full political rights to women. Not only did they have full suffrage rights, but they were also free to stand for any political office. Susan Geiger suggests that it was in the best interest of African nationalist leaders to present themselves as "enlightened proponents of Western democracy and equality" (Geiger 1990:227). However, it was also at independence that Africa inherited political ideologies and structures designed to consolidate male privilege and power and women's subordination.

Male authority in post-independent African states was so ubiquitous that, for a very long time, it was taken for granted. Recently, feminist theorists have begun to question the concept of "the state" and challenge the patriarchal power encoded in it (MacKinnon, 1989). There was no political ideology at independence - or, to put it another way, no strong women's movement - to challenge men's domination (Strobel 1982:126). Where women's organisations existed, these were often closely connected to the male elite who were to rule after independence. For example, at the time of independence in 1962, an autonomous national women's organisation that held the mandate for promoting the advancement of African women had leaders who were soon co-opted as wives and kin of male national leaders (Strobel, 1982).

Audrey Wipper asks the rhetorical question: "With husbands, brothers, and fathers occupying some of the most powerful positions in the country, do they have too much at stake to query certain practices, let alone take action to oppose the power structure?" (Wipper 1975:116). Susan Rogers identifies the problem not to be co-optation, but rather the uncritical acceptance of but rather the uncritical "acceptance of the sexual division of labor and accompanying gender relations as essentially unalterable conditions of human existence (Rogers 1983, 38). Staudt adds that the prospects of political systems integrating women in Africa were dim indeed, in light of the fact that national structures are themselves shaped and influenced by regional or international contexts. In the context of globalised politics, the realities of African politics within the prevailing hierarchical world economic order mean that "...[at] the top stratum, which international movers of capital dominate (Staudt 1981: 19).

January 1986 was a turning point in the history of Uganda, in which women played a vital role, as they do in most nationalist struggles (Ankrah 1987). Women were army soldiers integrated into the National Resistance Army (NRA). During those years in the bush, from 1981-1986, gender questions began to be consciously addressed by the NRA/NRM. The words and actions of the leadership of the NRA/NRM continue to reflect a consciousness of gender-based inequality and a determination to alter it. Shortly after coming to power, President Museveni addressed women directly in a speech for International Women's Day, 8 March 1986. In fact, he is locally referred to by women as a pro-women President. In that speech,

he said that women in Uganda had been everything in Uganda's history, yet they had been disadvantaged all through history (Ankrah, 1987; Weekly Topic, 16 March 1988).

In Uganda, the main institutional factors that have strengthened women's civil society presence and their engagement with politics have been the suspension of multi-party politics and the personal support of President Yoweri Museveni for women's rights. This has helped the women's movement grow from a negligible and politically co-opted social presence under the Obote regime to "one of the strongest mobilized societal forces in Uganda" (Tripp, 1997:22). Museveni's support for women's equality and their participation in politics reflects his appreciation of women's role in the Civil War as supporters of his National Resistance Army (Tripp, 1994:115).

Mugyenyi (1994) also notes that Museveni's support has been a tremendous piece of political luck for the women's movement. The ruling party, the National Resistance Movement, has also created space in civil society for women to form new associations and promote their interests independently of sectarian party interests. However, the bulk of these women's organizations remains fairly isolated from national and even local politics. This reflects a dual process: women continue to be marginalised from male-dominated local councils and other key community bodies, and also deliberately seek to distance themselves from public authorities because of experiences of corruption and fear of co-optation (Tripp, 1997: Chapter 4).

Politics of affirmative action, gender equity and its critique in Uganda.

In Uganda, affirmative action has been the basic political mechanism used by Museveni to encourage women's political participation in the Local Council (until 1996, this was known as the Resistance Council) governance system. This five-tier system starts from the village, in which Local Councils are directly elected. Village LCs send representatives to the next tier of government, and so on, up to the National Assembly in Kampala (each of the country's 32 districts is divided into five administrative zones, with Local Councils at each level). A special seat for women - the Secretary for women's affairs - is mandatory amongst the nine seats at each of the five LC levels. The objective is to institutionalise the representation of women as a special group. Each District elects a woman representative to sit in the National Assembly.

Although initially, the existence of this special seat associated women's participation in local politics solely with women's issues, women have been competing in ever greater numbers in local elections over the last decade for other seats on these councils, with a few winning the chairperson's seat in the 1992 local elections. The system has resulted in an increasingly substantial presence of women in government: since 1989, women have occupied 18 percent of National Assembly seats. The majority of these seats are

those reserved through affirmative action. In addition, although there is no explicit affirmative action provision in the civil service, by 1995, women were reasonably well-represented by virtue of both direct appointments and regular promotional processes: 21 percent of Permanent Secretaries, 26 percent of under-secretaries, and 16 percent of District Administrators (Ahikire, 1994; Elson and Evers, 1997; Tamale, 1997).

Museveni has made a point of putting women in politically sensitive, extremely high-profile positions, such as the 1988 appointment of Betty Bigombe as Minister for the Pacification of the North, where she has been the most prominent negotiator in Uganda's persistent civil war. In a country whose agriculture is dominated by women, the president has insisted on appointing women as Ministers of Agriculture. To date, the subfield of gender studies concerned with women's participation in formal political processes is most notable for drawing attention to low levels of female representation in African governments. Similar to Jean O'Barr's (1975) observations concerning the "invisibility" of women in African politics are those of Jane L. Parpart (1988), Parpart and Kathleen Staudt (1989), Gisela Geisler (1995) and Aili Mari Tripp (1996), who point out that although ruling governments and political parties have always tried to organize support among women, women have seldom achieved positions of real power and influence in Africa.

There is considerable debate amongst feminists in Uganda on the merits of the affirmative action system (see especially Tripp, 1994; Tamale, 1997; Ahikire, 1994). While its success in bringing more women into politics has been applauded, it is clear that it has not been an effective tool for ensuring the representation of women's interests. Right from the village level, the women elected as secretary of women's Affairs tend not to be the more radical women involved in women's associations. This is because male voters tend to reject those candidates in favor of more malleable women who are linked to the local male power structure, women who are related to dominant village men, who will participate in sustaining the hold of a traditional group over local men, who will participate in sustaining the hold of a traditional group over a local community (Tripp, 1994).

Tamale also highlights that the problem for women in Uganda is that they have no realistic political options outside of the NRM. The lack of political alternatives restricts the political leverage of women within their parties, which are likely to continue to dominate politics in their respective countries for some time to come (Tamale, 1997). In sum, political measures that involve affirmative action have been necessary in Uganda to increase the number of women in the legislature. But whether these women are able to bring the developmental concerns of all women into the political process depends largely on their personal proclivities, on a contingent and not structural variable (Tamale, 1997; Ahikire, 1994). To conclude this line, feminist and politics literature in Uganda (Tamale, 1999; Tripp, 2000; Staudt, 1991)

centres on questions about gender and the state, public policy and the state, representation, social movements, participation, elections, and public political institutions and the impact of colonialism. The literature fronts the political liberty of women, providing women with the space in civil society to organise autonomously, women's participation in writing new constitutions, and providing the opportunity to challenge customary law and the social power of patriarchy. Further, the literature has shown that women have been excluded from public life, that the state and many political practices are male-biased, and studies on how women can be added to or be present in existing frameworks. To further elaborate, Tamale, in When Hens Begin to Crow (1999), has written extensively about women's representation, access to political power, women's political autonomy, affirmative action, the aftermath of political participation of women, gender inequality, and empowerment in politics in the colonial, pre-colonial, and post-colonial eras, as have many others, including Tripp (2000), Staudt (1991), the Ugandan political scene. However, the questions of value, marriage, and motherhood as the designations of significance and key components of the female politicians' identities after the political inclusion, where they have attained these high positions of public office, are hardly examined and treated with the utmost centrality. Further, the literature mentioned above does not imply, let alone query, a significant degree of society's expectations of marriage and motherhood as definitive female politicians' societal value and recognition.

Women's Empowerment and Politics.

Boyd analyses the initiatives that have been taken affecting women within the structures of government and autonomous organisations since the National Resistance Movement (NRM) government came to power in January 1986 under the leadership of Yoweri Museveni. She argues that ugandan women, as women in all patriarchal societies, confront an oppressive, subordinate situation in the workplace, in the family, and in most spheres of society. Traditional gender-based attitudes are deeply ingrained in social consciousness, limiting women's access to and control over all spheres of life, be it educational opportunities, political participation, work, or legal rights (Boyd, 1988). Coupled with that traditional culture, Uganda has a recent legacy that cannot be overlooked when we examine women's empowerment. This is a legacy of state terror, civil strife, and brutalization over the past two decades, a legacy that has done deep damage to civil life. This legacy has resulted in an increase in domestic violence (Mukasa-Kikonyogo, 1987 and 1988), suicides, breakdown of families, abandoned children, a major increase in female-headed households, and major dislocations in the rural economy with far-reaching implications for rural women (Loxley,1986).

The state in Uganda institutionalized in 1986 support and participation of women, traditionally subordinate within state structures termed as empowerment of women in contemporary uganda, away from the traditional gender biases and severe economic hardship that militate against such empowerment. The most important initiative of the NRM government is the establishment of the Resistance Committees and Councils (RCs) throughout the country, a continuation of the organizational structures that existed during the civil war in "the bush." The RCs are the democratic grassroots mechanism instituted to ensure popular democratic participation. There are nine elected seats on each RC, with a mandatory place for at least one woman. The existence of these committees made mobilisation, particularly for women, easier as messages transfer more effectively between the grassroots and a given Ministry. Under these empowerment structures, the African Housing Fund provided loans via the Women's Ministry (together with the Ministries for Housing and Urban Planning and Youth, Culture, and Sports) for women in Masolita in the Luwero Triangle to build houses that were destroyed by the war.

In addressing the question of women's empowerment in contemporary Uganda, there has been a focus on gender-based attitudes and state versus autonomous organisations as routes to empowerment. But clearly, these initiatives, though significant, have a long, difficult road ahead as gender-based discrimination is still deeply entrenched. Women in Uganda are fully aware that they can never be complacent; their struggle is ongoing. In his published autobiography, President Museveni devotes a section of the concluding chapter to the role of women in the NRM (1997). After recounting legal and institutional changes favouring women during the NRM era, as well as mentioning prominent female appointees in government, he concludes his section on women by recounting two stories, both of which have the same theme. In both stories, a commoner approaches a king and asks that the king acknowledge the commoner in front of a large audience (Museveni, 1997).

This line is enriched by the implications of Women's Expanded Role in formal Politics in Uganda. The most important long-term effect of increased influence for women in formal politics concerns the possibility that women may begin to vote as a bloc in support of candidates or parties that support a feminist political agenda. The 1996 election results suggest that women tended to vote for NRM candidates, and it appears that the NRM has tried to reward its female constituency with appointments of women to high-level government positions. The NRM defends the limits it places on political competition with a distinctly liberal theory of democratisation. Museveni and the NRM assert that multiparty democracy is premature in Uganda because Uganda lacks a well-developed bourgeoisie or other adequate cross-cutting political variables necessary to sustain a stable multiparty system (Museveni, 1997).

The growth of a female bloc of voters would help undercut the NRM's arguments necessary to sustain a stable multiparty system (Museveni 1997). The growth of a female bloc of voters would help undercut the NRM's arguments concerning Uganda's historic lack of political variables that cross-cut ethnic allegiances. Another important implication of women's increased role in formal politics in Uganda concerns the possibility that women will gain better access to clientelist networks. The presence of women in high-profile government positions may increase women's access to state resources (Tamale 1999: 43). Increased access to clientelist networks may be the most important practical effect of the NRM's affirmative action policies. The presence of women at all levels of government will also serve to socialize Ugandan children to accept the role of politically powerful women.

Tamale also suggests that women legislators who occupy affirmative action positions feel beholden to the NRM (1999: 119). If women's votes become an important feature in political calculations, women are also likely to improve their chances of achieving emancipation from patriarchal power. Further, the NRM's gender affirmative action policies may also exacerbate social class divisions between Ugandan women. Similar to the tendency for women to be elected to LC posts based on their acceptability to men rather than on the basis of their ability to fight for women's rights, there may be a tendency for the government to give important posts to women based on factors of wealth, status, and education. Female appointees may have little experience with the effects of gender discrimination, and therefore, they may not be effective voices for the vast majority of Ugandan women.

Conceptualising the Situating Women in Uganda's Politics. A snapshot of the debate.

The Gender question in Uganda is both historical and political and has attracted numerous debates. One of the debates that preoccupies the study of gender and politics is on the empowerment and emancipation of women, which has been couched in the language of affirmative action. The first side of this debate argues that women have been historically marginalised politically and so need affirmative action to be able to effectively participate in politics and governance.[4] In her *Women's Studies in Uganda. Beijing and Beyond: Toward the Twenty-First Century of Women,* Victoria Mwaka is preoccupied with a central question: what explains the post-colonial marginalisation of women in Uganda's political space? The answer to this question, Mwaka argues, is the rigid and patriarchal systems of Uganda's history and traditions (1996). Mwaka has argued that affirmative action redresses the imbalances created by history

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[4] See Mwaka Victotia, *Women's Studies in Uganda*. Beijing and Beyond: Toward the Twenty-First Century of Women. Women's Studies Quarterly, spring - summer, Vol. 24, No. ½ (1996), pp. 449-464; Rebecca Kadaga, Women's political leadership in East Africa with specific reference to Uganda. Paper prepared by Rt Hon Rebecca Kadaga MP, Speaker of the Ugandan parliament, for the Commonwealth Secretariat at the Tenth Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting (10WAMM) in Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2013, 35; Ahikire Josephine, "Affirmayive Action for Women in Uganda: Navigating through the Muddy Waters and Pushing on", *Forum for Women in Democracy,* in the Daily Monitor News Paper, Friday March 8, 2013

and tradition, or customs.[5] Mwaka interprets tradition as a marker and a tool for determining one's inclusion/exclusion in national politics. This is an intellectual approach that contends that tradition is the most reliable clue to women's exclusion, and therefore interprets political marginalisation as a product of patriarchy. She believes that the political marginalisation of women in the post-colony has a history in the traditions and customs of Ugandans, who are patriarchal. These claims that emphasise the marginalisation of women as biological or traditional ignore the history of colonialism that distorted the interactive power relations of pre-colonial societies. Mwaka contends that the government's ability and willingness to initiate policies that encourage women to participate in politics is a valuable effort towards amending inequities created by "history and tradition" (1996: 453). She shows how the government has also established institutions that directly affect the political life of women and also allow them access to those structures where political power is seen as prohibited by the Constitution. According to Mwaka, Mechanisms designed for achieving equity, such as affirmative action, work to positively recognise and accommodate groups that have historically suffered systemic patterns of disadvantage due to their difference. So, for example, the positive recognition of women's differences from men would require their "special" treatment based on their differences from men in order to arrive at an equal outcome. Here, "special" does not mean "more valued" or "more entitled" but simply "unique" (Mwaka 1996: 453). It was noted that differences based on women's biological make-up or their culturally-assigned gender roles only become problematic where they perpetuate subordination and oppression. Hence, "special" treatment, such as affirmative action, was simply meant to ensure that the effects of difference were "costless." It required society and the law to treat women differently from men for women to *equally* enjoy inherent rights and fundamental freedoms. In order to remove the barriers that exclude women from full participation in society, substantive equality focuses on equality of *results* (as opposed to equality of treatment), to avoid the equality of mere rhetorical rights or opportunities.

Much as Mwaka shows how affirmative action works to recognise and empower marginalised and excluded groups to join Uganda's political space, her claims are not without flaws. First, Mwaka's argument considers political marginalisation as natural by evoking tradition as a point of departure. She actualises tradition and gives it irresistible power to condition the political actions of a society. These arguments seem to suggest that tradition is static and eternal; it does not consider the history and internal contradictions and connections to the customs of another society, of the circumstances of the time. Second, Mwaka uses the language of tradition and history without explaining what she really means. Many writers tend to deploy the concept of tradition as if it were a pre-colonial conception. Even when she attempts to use history, she does not tell us which history she is talking about. Is it colonial history?

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[5] Victoria Mwaka. *Women's Studies in Uganda*. 1996.

Precolonial history? Or postcolonial history? Scholars who deploy tradition tend to skip the colonial and rush to the precolonial to explain postcolonial predicaments. Mwaka does nothing to explain what she means by tradition and history as a tool of marginalisation. And yet, postcolonial scholars like Mamdani have shown us that tradition is a colonial invention.[6]

These narrative forms one of the core arguments raised in favour of affirmative action in politics in Uganda from the local level administrative units to central government bodies and parliament through quotas is that it is a "compensation for the structural barrier that women meet in the electoral process" caused by both overt and covert barriers that "prevent women from being selected as candidates and getting their fair share of political influence" Ahikire (2013). This is usually aimed at correcting historical wrongs. Proponents of affirmative action and women's emancipation argue that women should by no means have to carry the burden of "tearing down structural barriers on their own" (Ahikire 2013)

Like Mwaka, Kadaga, the most celebrated product of affirmative action, has argued that Uganda has made tremendous progress towards gender equality and has one of the most gender-sensitive Constitutions in the world, with many laws and policies in place to address gender imbalances and women's empowerment. However, she thinks that women, despite this development, still face numerous challenges in participatory leadership. In her critique, Kadaga mentions that it is difficult for women to transcend the values and beliefs entrenched in patriarchal systems and the tendency of men to locate women in the private sphere. Kadaga claims that "Uganda being a patriarchal society, men are dominant in decision making. Women who strive to take part in leadership are ridiculed as wanting to be 'men' – money-minded, ambitious, immoral and unruly; as a result, women become shy, lack confidence and have low self-esteem"[7] Kadaga does not tell us why men continue to ridicule women despite the promises of affirmative action enshrined in Uganda's laws and policies. Why is women's political influence still low despite affirmative action? Why do many government bureaucrats, as she claims, not really appreciate gender issues, and do not adequately provide for interventions that specifically address women's needs in sector policies, sector plans and budgets? When Kadaga tries to talk about weaknesses in the Affirmative Action project, she narrows the weaknesses she identifies to the patriarchal system (the continued dominance of men over women). Such a tendency treats patriarchy as ahistorical and natural, so she fails to problematize the colonial state structure that created the two spheres and located women in the private and men in the public. The continued blame of patriarchy and recommendation of affirmative action does nothing but reproduce the problem it tends to solve.

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[6] For more on invention of tradition, see Mamdani Mahmood, Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism. (Johannesberg and Kampala: Wits University Press and MISR, [1996] 2017).
[7] Kadaga. Women's political leadership, 2013, 35.

The debate on affirmative action is further extended by Josephine Ahikire in her *Women, Public Politics and Organisation: Potentialities of Affirmative Action in Uganda.* Ahikire argues that affirmative action, in politics in Uganda, from the local level administrative units to central government bodies and parliament through quotas, is a "compensation for the structural barrier that women meet in the electoral process" caused by both overt and covert barriers that "prevent women from being selected as candidates and getting their fair share of political influence".[8] This is usually aimed at correcting historical wrongs. Ahikire argues that women should be no mean not have to carry the burden of "tearing down structural barriers on their own".[9] These have celebrated affirmative action by arguing that women's participation in politics and political processes in Uganda has helped deepen "discussions around poverty and the meaning of development...and has given space for women to demonstrate their ability to govern". However, Ahikire contends that affirmative action constitutes a mixed blessing.

First, Affirmative action has the potential to level the playing field for marginalised women as their issues become part and parcel of public politics. These, Ahikire argues, depend on the role of the state in legitimising women's issues. Second, she argues that Affirmative action shouldn't stop at empowering individual women in the political arena; it should transcend the ideological notions of women and state power, to create an enabling environment for building a viable and effective women's movement that goes a long way to change their day-to-day position. Ahikire is critical of affirmative action from above, one that is granted by the state through its male counterparts—she argues that affirmative action from that state reinforces women's inferiority. These very sentiments were expressed by Ahikire close to a decade later. In an attempt to provide a critique towards affirmative action, Ahikire argues that the problem with affirmative action is that of collectivising women's weaknesses and individualising their strengths. And the solution offered by Ahikire to this is that the issue of women's representation should be on access to "arenas of public decision making so that various interests of women can be debated and acted upon," (Ahikire 2013). The focus should be on presence. To Ahikire, "once women's strategic presence" in areas where policies are implemented is enhanced, "the totality of the women's efforts to change systems will be felt and positive impacts realised" (2013). Ahukire extends this argument by arguing that affirmative action, [in politics in Uganda from the local level administrative units to central government bodies and parliament through quotas], is a "compensation for the structural barrier that women meet in the electoral process" caused by both overt and covert barriers that "prevent women from being selected as candidates and getting their fair share of political influence" (2013). This is usually aimed at correcting the historical wrongs. Ahikire argues that women should not be mean nor have to carry the burden of "tearing down

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[8] Ahikire Josephine, "Affirmayive Action for Women in Uganda: Navigating through the Muddy Waters and Pushing on", *Forum for Women in Democracy,* in the Daily Monitor News Paper, Friday March 8, 2013.
[9] Ahikire, 2013.

structural barriers on their own" (2013). These have celebrated affirmative action by arguing that women's participation in politics and political processes in Uganda has helped deepen "discussions around poverty and the meaning of development...and has given space for women to demonstrate their ability to govern" (ibid). Ahikire cites examples of former Vice President Specioza Kazibwe and the former Speaker of the 11th Parliament of the Republic of Uganda as the best examples and success stories of affirmative action.

Ahikire's very own critique raises several questions: is the problem necessarily of absence or absence as a woman in a political position? If the latter is true, how then do we expect to deal with structural problems without dealing with the structure itself that created this problem? Can this improve the conditions of women if they are included as women and not as citizens? Isn't this just a reproduction of marginalisation, since it is only women included as women and the rest are included as citizens? These questions can be illustrated more when we deal with Mamdani, who offers a more structuralist critique of this line of argument. Both scholars, such as Mwaka, Kadaga and Ahikire, are unsuccessful in transcending the historical categories of tradition and/or customs, and gender to explain the postcolonial marginalisation of women. Their arguments ignore the fact that customs evolve and recreate themselves through dynamic processes, responding to changing exterior conditions, as well as their own internal contradictions. Rather than view it as an activity of tradition or custom, women's marginalisation should be thought of as a conscious interaction of political power with colonialism. I recognise that, despite a power structure that, although it recognises gender inequalities, continuously advocates for women's inclusion in the already existing frameworks, which are gendered —in other words, women are understood as a category to be added in the prevailing analyses. In my view, women can't just be added to constructions that are constituted as masculine. There is a need to problematize the very structures in which women are to be made visible; otherwise, we risk reproducing another kind of invisibility.

The second side of this debate argues that affirmative politics in Africa, while quite effective in addressing the narrow reformist goal of quantitative underrepresentation, do very little to address the structural foundations of gender injustice.[10] Scholars like Aili Mari Tripp, Sylvia Tamale, and Jane Osongo argue that post-colonial attempts to empower women have tended to reproduce gender as the basis for political organisation. These interventions universalised and naturalised gender as a natural basis for the organisation of society. The consequence is to reproduce women as women instead of producing citizens regardless of their gender.

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[10] See Aili Mari Tripp. Women and Democracy: The New Political Activism in Africa. Journal of Democracy 12 (3) (2001): 141-155; Sylvia Tamale. *When Hens Begin to crow: Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999); Jane Osongo. "Affirmative Action, Gender Equity and University Admissions—Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. London Review of Education", 7 (1) (2009): 71-81.

In critiquing affirmative action, Goetz, on the other hand, suggests that the political value of specially created new seats has been eroded by their exploitation as currency for the NRM's patronage system, undermining women's effectiveness as representatives of women's interests once in office.[11] She shows us that the gatekeepers of access to reserved political space are not women, but movement elites who are, in most cases, men. These elites in NRM have promoted neo-patrimonial politics such that access to reserved positions is given based on the interests of those who hold high political power, and not the necessity for equality. She argues that the "*add-on* mechanism of incorporating women into politics has been based on a principle of extending patronage and indeed of *extending the state*".[12] The reservations for women-only competition mean that women are treated as a social group whose disadvantage justifies protected access to the state. To Goetz, this recognition is not accompanied by an acknowledgement that women as a group may have specific interests which need to be identified through a process of public debate involving women in civil society. Thus, it is their gender, not their politics, that is their admission ticket. This implicit assumption is that gender acts as a proxy for the political and social values held by an individual.[13] The efforts to include women do not threaten incumbent politicians or male aspirants. They do not challenge entrenched interests by suggesting that women as a group may have a set of interests to represent, which may change the policy orientation and beneficiaries of these institutions. This is quite an interesting and impressive analysis of affirmative action, but the idea of the idea of politics of patronage suggests that the current head of state is responsible for the marginalisation and gender injustices. Goetz's arguments suggest that the current president thrives on neo-patrimonial legitimacy, which involves the award of personal favours in the form of patronage, which has aggravated the problem of gender injustice. For example, the idea that Museveni has in his politics of patronage created special seats for women in parliament in order to gain popular support.

I want to raise two key points to explain my position. First, I emphasise that the agency to create special seats for women was from society, not from the head of state. The argument here is not whether a given set of demands is from society but whether it can be or is integrated into the colonial project. What is important to recognise is the fact that the head of State, Museveni, took advantage of the introduction of the multi-party system to get popular support to win in the competitive elections. Secondly, the agency of society has been reproduced historically and sustained in the imagination of natives. The indirect rule, for example, after independence did not require local agents of British rule but rather the imagination and institutions that were shaped by colonial rule. The challenge with Goetz's claim is that the focus is on

[11] Anne Marie Goetz. *No Shortcuts to Power: Constraints on Women's Political Effectiveness in Uganda.* The Journal of Modern African Studies, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Dec., 2002), pp. 549-575. Cambridge University Press.
[12] Goetz. *No Shortcuts to Power* 2002, pp. 558.
[13] Sylvia Tamala, 1999, 77.

individual leaders, not the structure. It focuses on individual leaders exploiting these established structures, which exploit women to their advantage, and not the structures themselves, they recreate and sustain these injustices. He ignores the fact that individuals operate within a structure that is both historical and political. These structures of oppression and marginalisation developed with colonialism.

In her *When Hens Begin to Crow: Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda,* Sylvia Tamale contends that affirmative action, despite its promises, does not deal with the oppressive political system that has remained intact (1996). She argues that affirmative action does not deal with the question of class. Affirmative action ignores the fact that the political system within which women are included is not only gendered but classed[14]. She recognises that there exist power and class differentials among women, and affirmative action does not deal with these differentials. Tamale points out that, much as it portrays a reformist strategy towards women's inclusion in politics, affirmative action does not look beyond the sex-gender redistributive aspect of its politics to deal with the underlying structural problems of the system. Thus, it can be of only limited value to the women's movement in Uganda. Tamale's view recognises the promises of affirmative action, and she regards it as a necessary first step toward the difficult road to transformative action that allows for a democracy with a wider base[15]. Her query is that we shouldn't get too comfortable with this kind of policy /policies as they end up reproducing women based on their gender, but pit certain classes of women. She problematizes how the long history of oppression and discrimination ensured a systematic exclusion of women from the so-called masculine skills, hence eclipsing them from public space. To Tamale, affirmative action can have the capacity to first and foremost bring the women up because declaring equality among unequals in specific cases only works to deepen inequalities or at best leaves the inequality intact. This is better explained by Mamdani, who argues that colonialism enabled gendered relations of power, and that the lack of decision-making has a history which started with colonialism.

The most compelling and interesting critique of affirmative action comes from Mamdani, which I explore at length. Mamdani notes that there is a need to clearly define affirmative action in the Ugandan context and its relationship to politics. Mamdani ponders whether the women Members of Parliament represent women in Parliament or simply represent the state of women since the state deliberately creates new districts in a bid to increase their number of seats. He argues that this kind of model has crippled women's participation in politics, as every woman who runs in the context as a woman Member of Parliament cannot be used as a measure for determining how much affirmative action has contributed to the general

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[14] See Sylvia Tamale. When Hens Begin to crow: Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999: 65-75
[15] Ibid, 134-137

enhancement of women's participation in politics. Mamdani points to the NRM reforms that sought to create "certain seats in the new legislative body for the representation of groups whose interests had been disregarded in the past".[16] This past should be looked at as a past with historical marginalisation and injustices towards such groups. Among others, these groups included women, people with disabilities, youth and workers.

If the inclusion of women is premised on the idea that these created positions will be voices for the marginalised women, then Mamdani wonders whether these elected women in reserved seats [meant to represent each district by "its councillor"] really represent the interests of the intended groups, given the fact that "councillors are predominantly male".[17]

He is worth quoting at length: "As regards women, one is elected to represent each district by its councillors, but since in reality the latter are predominantly male, it is not at all clear why the person so chosen should be considered to be a women's representative, except to underline her gender".[18]

This quote has a bold yet apt claim, that the attempt to include women, to create positions to represent fellow marginalised women, does nothing but reproduce the category of women which historically marginalised the group.

One of the underlying challenges Mamdani identifies with the creation of these special positions, couched in the language of affirmative action, is that the reforms come in the form of gifts from above. To this, the members who are elected have to be grateful to the ruling power for gifting them with such positions, which in the end serve the interests of the top rulers and not the group of common women they purport to represent. The representatives in the end become regime representatives and not women's representatives. These elected women become "incorporated into the ruling structures of power".[19] Therefore, other than being emancipated to represent fellow marginalised groups, they become part of the small marginalising group of rulers. This discredits the idea that affirmative action can actually emancipate women, empower them, etc.

Mamdani makes another very thought-provoking claim, that the "colonial tradition of statutorily defined groups ...as a basis of community...or work...or provision of services...or political processes" is also very problematic. The "recognition of group identities in this instance is barely a camouflaged attempt to

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[16] Mamdani Mahmood, "The Social Basis of Constitutionalism in Africa", *The Journal of Modern African Studies,* Vol. 28, No. 3 (Sep., 1990): 359-374, 370.
[17] Mamdani, The Social Basis 1990, 370.
[18] Mamdani, The Social Basis, 370.
[19] "It is worth noting that the tendency for regimes in Africa to want to monopolize power and to correspondingly deny the right of self-organisation to social groups, has usually been expressed in the language of radical politics" Ibid., p.370.

divide a majority into a variety of statutorily defined minorities to rule that much more easily".[20] Defending affirmative action based on claims of women and other marginalised groups having a right to participate in politics and other political processes in the country raises a question for Mamdani, "could not the agenda of group rights then turn out to be no more than a modern formula to divide and rule the continent?" In Uganda, and women more specifically, "what groups are to be given these rights? Are they to be what NRM defines as political minorities such as women, persons with disabilities, workers and youth?"[21] What is the possibility of registering success in struggle and safeguards to women's rights without exercising the right of the autonomous organization? These questions and the arguments raised by Mamdani point to one thing, i.e., reforms never focus on dealing with the structure that marginalises women, but instead seek to include them without any reforms to it. In the end, they just escalate the marginalisation. This is why he claimed that women are identified based on their gender and not "as citizens". This is just a replica of the colonial logic of excluding the politically defined minorities whose legacy the postcolonial state carries forward in the name of rights, affirmative action, emancipation, and empowerment. Therefore, in attempts to correct the past injustices and marginalisation of women in the politics of Uganda, following Mamdani, I argue that it ends up reproducing a woman as a woman in positions of power without transcending the categories. The marginalised category is reproduced and maintained in the language of rights and empowerment. Important questions are ignored, i.e., why does a certain gender have to be looked at as such? They reproduce it. Instead of seeking to include them as citizens, they include them as women, which is the problem with many feminists and the state seeking women's inclusion in the politics of the country. I would want to think that attempts to emancipate women in the customary domain fell short of interrogating the customary domain in particular and the bifurcation in general. Authors such as Mwaka, Rebecca Kadaga, and Josephine Ahikire, in their view of affirmative action, fail to interrogate and transcend the bifurcation of the civil and traditional spheres. This explains why, until today, affirmative action, despite its promises, has not overcome the challenges it envisaged to resolve.

Women Political Power State Nexus. Some Lessons for Uganda.

One may wonder whether **women's** emancipation and empowerment through the lens of affirmative action in women's political participation can be achieved in states in the neoliberal context. Does the state need to be necessarily gendered to ensure the effective **women's** emancipation and empowerment? **The biggest challenge that lies ahead of Uganda is to reform the state—its orientation, composition, nature and form. The Ugandan state is a postcolonial state with a colonial legacy that privileges**

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[20] Mamdani, *The Social Basis,* 1990, p.37.
[21] Ibid., p.373.``

patriarchy, the comprador elite interests and those of international capital over women's emancipation, empowerment and gendered development programmes. The argument Mamdani makes is that the nature of contemporary Uganda, like other African states, together with the politics in post-independence Africa, is just a result of the institutional legacy that colonialism left behind (Mamdani, 2017). Mamdani argues that in trying to understand the bifurcated state as the legacy of colonialism, "political analysis cannot extrapolate the nature of power from an analysis of political economy" but instead must focus on "the organisation and reorganisation of power" (Mamdani, 2017: 23).

In fact, Fanon in his insightful book *The Wretched of the Earth* argued that the African nationalists who took over power from the colonialists just wanted to change guards, not to change the status quo of the colonial regime, but to replace and take over their position and privileges (Fanon, 1961). Fanon's evocation suggests that the focus was not on changing the colonial mode of rule nor doing away with it completely for that sake, but on becoming new colonisers and beneficiaries. This kind of leadership cannot front a vision of **w** emancipation and empowerment of women and commit to it, but can only focus on sharing the benefits of the patronage outcomes and clientism. Njoku (2005), in trying to understand the source of Africa's modern state of corruption, especially in the public service in Africa today, argued that the leaders are colonial elites whose mode of rule is borrowed from the colonial period. The colonial state, he argues, had socio-political practices which were malicious and such bred the habits of corruption in the public service in contemporary Africa, which hinders women's emancipation and empowerment since it is not a priority on the agenda (Njoku, 2005: 99).

Rethinking the state will amount to rethinking the political, which imagines the future of women's emancipation and empowerment through formulating goals and strategies, and streamlining policies and institutions that view and treat women as citizens rather than based on gender. I, therefore, argue that, as far as women's emancipation and empowerment are concerned in the context of political participation and as far as Uganda is to exploit the possibilities offered by women's emancipation and empowerment, the state needs to reform first forward and become a "citizen sensitive state"—meaning not necessarily and directly coming up with political offices in the quote sense anchored in affirmative action remedies but with measures to ensure the freedoms in the first place, to reform the structure that marginalizes women which we should all pay attention formulation of a clear vision and goal for empowerment and emancipation of women and champion the effective implementation of the same outside colonial logics. Failure to rethink the state itself means the problems that Hansen (1991) talks about, of corruption, nepotism, etc., will cripple any efforts aimed at reforming the structures that marginalise women and tapping into the political office and certainly power possibilities.

When the state is reformed and strengthened, then the political leaders have to make empowerment and emancipation of women the priority on the agenda of reforming the reform structure dominated by males that marginalise women. The government has to make a decision and make empowerment and emancipation of women a political chant and order of the day. In addition, they should sensitise and convince the public to buy into the project, but that can only happen if the goal is made clear and the vision is made promising. Leaders with "Western-centric" thinking can hardly afford to promote women's political participation because it is meant to be a "nationalist" project. Such leaders are the comprador elites that postcolonial and anticolonial thinkers like Fanon[22] talked about. This explains why, until today, affirmative action, despite its promises, has not overcome the challenges it envisaged to resolve.

I agree there are gaps and fixing those gaps would be okay, but I don't think that to promote women's political participation, we need to focus efforts exhaustively on affirmative action as the only alternative and certainly darling. Does successful empowerment and emancipation of women require affirmative action always considering the politics in Uganda from the local level administrative units to central government bodies and parliament through quotas, is a "compensation for the structural barrier that women meet in the electoral process" caused by both overt and covert barriers that "prevent women from being selected as candidates and getting their fair share of political influence"[23] aimed at correcting historical wrongs before new women be can be empowered and emancipated?

I argue that the education programme of universal primary education and, of course, now universal secondary education in Uganda is not emancipatory-driven, with the intention of promoting women's emancipation, but politically driven, whose intentions are aimed at serving political interests rather than the gender discourse of nation-wide interests. I argue this because universal education is made as a political promise in Uganda, especially during campaign periods for presidential elections in Uganda, to score political points. "UPE became an increasingly important issue during the election campaign and eventually became one of Museveni's election promises" (Kjaer and Therkilden, 2011: 597). Kjaer and Muwanga note that:

The political dividends of the UPE initiative were clear; any service improvement, such as expanding access to education to those previously disadvantaged, would be credited to the NRM government, whose popularity would increase as a result. The introduction of UPE and the abolishment of school fees also coincided with the country's first elections under the new constitution, and UPE became an important

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[22] On an elaboration on this, see Frantz Fanon. 1961, The Wretched of the Earth. London: Penguin Books.

[23] Ahikire Josephine, "Affirmayive Action for Women in Uganda: Navigating through the Muddy Waters and Pushing on", *Forum for Women in Democracy,* in the Daily Monitor News Paper, Friday March 8, 2013.

campaign pledge for the government… Although the country was still operating under a no-party system, the President used UPE as part of his election pledge in the 1996 elections, making it very much part of his political agenda (Muwanga, 1999; Stasavage, 2004). Implementing the UPE programme was about making good on that election pledge that had struck a chord with voters. The abolition of the PTA's financial contributions in schools effectively signalled a fundamental change in the power relations between the government, school management and parents; the NRM and President Museveni specifically could take credit for broadening access and the inclusive delivery of education services (Muwanga, 1999)" (Kjaer and Muwanga, 2016: 15).

Another piece of literature by Kjaer and Therkilden (2011) shows that less focus on studying policies in Africa has been given to elections. They state that:

Much of the relevant literature on Africa downplays the salience of elections for policy-making and implementation. Instead, the importance of factors such as clientelism, ethnicity, organized interest groups, and donor influence, is emphasized. We argue that, in addition, elections now motivate political elites to focus on policies they perceive to be able to gain votes. This is based on analyses of six landmark decisions made during the last 15 years in the social, productive, and public finance sectors in Tanzania and Uganda. Such policies share a number of key characteristics: they are clearly identifiable with the party in power; citizens are targeted countrywide; and policy implementation aims at immediate, visible results…Political elites pursue a range of strategies in striving to remain in office. Among them is the use of policies and implementation arrangements to help expand and strengthen the coalitions that support them…both countries tried to push for Universal Primary Education (UPE) –Tanzania under Nyerere in the 1970s and Uganda under Obote in the early 1980s. As already discussed, this illustrates the well-known observation that authoritarian regimes too seek to legitimize their power through popular policies. However, in countries in which competitive elections are becoming institutionalized, there is accordingly more institutionalized pressure for popular policies than in the previous regimes. What is central to our argument is to show that elections, although not always free and fair nor with a high degree of competition, significantly motivate political elites to pursue policies that they perceive will help them to win elections. In Tanzania, the 2001 UPE policy decisions led to two million additional children being enrolled over five years. The enrolment rate increased from 53% in 2000 to more than 90% at the time of writing.31 In Uganda, UPE was introduced in 1996. Three years later, primary enrolment rates had gone up from 62% to 84%. This happened during a period when education was widely considered by many people as one of the most pressing policy challenges.33 It was also an issue of central concern for politicians in the two countries…Primary education has also been central to Ugandan politics for decades as shown by the fact that Milton Obote included UPE in his 1980 election manifesto. The re-introduction

of UPE must, however, be seen in the light of the first elections under the new National Resistance Movement (NRM) regime in 1996.38 Stasavage39 shows that even if the Ugandan political system cannot be characterized as genuinely democratic, the elections had a clear effect upon educational policies. Although there had been early programmes to increase enrolment in primary schools, the decision to remove school fees represented a sharp break with prior policy. It also represented a turnaround for the president. Prior to the 1996 elections, Museveni had rejected to prioritize education over infrastructure, referring to education as a 'non-productive sector of the economy (592-597)

In the case of Uganda, it did not end with UPE, history holds that the pronouncement for Universal Secondary Education (USE) was made in 2016, which year was a political year with general elections but also made during presidential campaigns. This orientation needs to be buried from leaders. The state needs to separate policy issues from individual politics by changing rationales and intentions/objectives—with a focus on changing the state logic. For that case, the focus shouldn't just be on offering formal education where people are not benefiting because the education helps someone score political points for winning an election, to one where education aims at promoting emancipation and empowerment of both genders where learners acquire a skill, discipline, right attitude etc. The state's attention has to be paid to improving the quality of education first of all with also focus on balancing between lower levels and higher levels of education based on the demand when it comes to fulfilling the emancipation and empowerment of women other than looking at creating districts for political patronage.

The election activities are technology-related issues that are now dependent, especially on the Internet and electric power. The Ugandan state needs to be investing in putting in place big capacity and infrastructure for the internet and also investing in ensuring technology is appropriate by making it fit the local standards and environment. The vitality of the internet calls for state intervention without which the potential of the country to reap from internet-based technologies may be rendered futile. These infrastructures need to be affordable, accessible, and reliable. The reason I suggest the question of availability being accompanied by affordability and accessibility is that in some African states, the question of availability of electricity is not actually a problem with the majority of them generating their own power from numerous sources like solar, hydro, wind energy, etc. but the cost of such power is very high to be afforded by the lower sections of the community most especially women but also its reliability is not guaranteed. This is where the state can become relevant in ensuring that infrastructures are made to match the demands of emancipation and empowerment of women other than affirmative action that reproduces them as women instead as citizens. Despite the state making some investments already, they are insufficient and not very effective. Therefore, more needs to be done and Uganda must commit more resources with a particular focus on redirection to the emancipation and empowerment of women. The

neoliberal logic of pushing the state on the margins cannot resolve these questions, the state needs to work outside the confines of the neoliberal market, especially on issues of power generation, pricing and regulation.

Streamline the gender and class questions in preparation for the emancipation and empowerment of women. If class questions, and gender questions, among others, are not resolved, the affirmative action dreams cannot deliver any positive emancipatory results, even if results are there, the question of political inequality is going continue to persist in terms of gender and class. The end result is gendered emancipation and empowerment as opposed to citizen emancipation and empowerment. Most importantly, these can all be worked out if the constitution, form, nature and character of the state are reformed—from a neoliberal and colonial nation-state to a meaningful state which isn't dictated by the limits of the modern nation-state.

Conclusion

This paper has endeavoured to render unequivocally clear the critical—and politically consequential—distinction between the universalist category of the "Ugandan citizen" and the particularised identity of the "Ugandan woman." The former constitutes an aspirational legal and political abstraction, a member of a sovereign community of rights-bearing equals whose civic identity is theoretically untethered from ascriptive markers (Lister, 2003). The latter, however, is a lived, socio-cultural subject-position, forged through historical marginalisation, gendered embodiment, and specific cultural codes (Oyewumi, 1997). The central tension arises not from the existence of this dual reality, but from a political strategy that privileges the latter as the *exclusive* mode of engagement with the state. When mobilisation collapses entirely into the identitarian frame of "woman," it risks activating what Mahmood Mamdani (1996) identified as the logic of the bifurcated state: a mode of governance that administers populations through differentiated and managed identities, thereby fracturing the collective *demos*.

Consequently, the essay's imperative warning is not a dismissal of feminist organising, which remains indispensable in confronting patriarchal structures, but a strategic critique of any approach that allows the civic to be wholly subsumed by the identitarian. The peril lies in replicating, in a modern gendered form, the "decentralised despotism" of the colonial native authority. By channelling political claims solely through specialised state organs like gender ministries or women's councils, women's issues risk becoming "ghettoised"—a separate portfolio rather than the foundational concern of all citizens (Tripp, 2000). This process transforms women from full political agents into *subjects of gender policy*, a status that, while offering targeted recognition, simultaneously dilutes their claim to authority over the totality of national political life, from infrastructure to foreign policy (Yuval-Davis, 1997).

Therefore, the ultimate objective must be to forge a dialectical synthesis that transcends a false choice. The goal is neither to abandon gendered struggle in the name of a false universalism, nor to retreat into a particularism that reinforces subjecthood. Instead, it is to leverage the particular experiences and critiques emanating from the position of "Ugandan women" to radically *transform and deepen* the very content of universal citizenship itself. As Nancy Fraser (2013) argues, justice requires both recognition and redistribution; here, that means the particular insights of gendered experience must redefine the universal, ensuring citizenship is not a hollow mask for unstated male norms but a robust, inclusive practice of collective self-rule that accommodates difference without institutionalising hierarchy.

Ultimately, following Mamdani's historical logic to its necessary end, the essay argues that without this conscious and critical synthesis, the political identification of "women" can unwittingly become a contemporary engine of subject-making. It would produce a modern analogue to the customary subject: a citizen in name but a managed identity in practice, inadvertently deprived of the full, unmediated, and equal agency that the ideal of citizenship promises. The path forward demands a political praxis that holds the tension between equality and difference, using the latter not as a terminus but as a transformative lever to achieve the former, thus forging a civic community truly worthy of the name.

Data availability

No datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study.

<u>Declarations</u>

Ethics approval and consent to participate

The author(s) declare that it is not applicable.

Consent for publication

The author(s) declare that this is not applicable.

Competing interests

The author(s) declare that they have no competing interests.

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