

Kenya: The Women's Movement and Democratic Change

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The debate on the state, democracy, and civil society in Africa has tended to ignore the gender dimension and has generally adopted a "gender-neutral" perspective. For example, elections, campaigns, and party politics have been viewed as gender-neutral processes that affect women and men equally. Similarly, the democratic process has also been treated as a gender-neutral process in which women and men have equal access to the resources, opportunities, and instruments that facilitate their participation and winning elections.

Gender-neutral analysis also assumes a dichotomy between the public and private sphere so that all political activity takes place in the public sphere, from which the majority of women are excluded, due to the patriarchally determined division of labor. But a growing body of feminist literature has shown that the private is also political, and that political processes such as democratization take place both in private and public life. Furthermore, the concept of civil society must be broadened to include informal networks, associations, and coalitions in which women participate (Jones 1993, 236; Rowbotham 1992, 16–24; Peterson 1992, 6; Parpart 1988, 208–232; Tripp 1994b).

This chapter takes as the point of departure the thesis that the institutions of the state, democracy, and the democratic process, as well as the phenomenon of civil society, are not gender-neutral. Hence, meaningful debate on and analysis of the dynamics of these phenomena and processes must account for the gender factor. As Tripp has observed:

The debate on the nature of civil society in Africa . . . has yet to fully incorporate and problematize the gender implications of civil society as it has been conceptualized in liberal theory. . . . Gender differences remain unaccounted for. Participation in the public sphere is assumed to be governed by universal, impersonal and conventional criteria of achievement, interest, rights, equality and property—liberal criteria applicable only to men (Tripp 1994b).

I take as given that women are also politically active, although the forms, strategies, and styles of their engagement in political activities may differ from those of men. This is due to the specific circumstances in which women find themselves—namely, excluded from formal politics through socially constructed barriers in the division of labor, resource allocation, and opportunities for participation. I thus concur with much of the recent literature on women and the state in Africa (Tripp 1994b; Parpart 1988). In this chapter I argue that while both the colonial and postcolonial states have maintained a linkage with the women's movement, throughout the postcolonial period this has largely resulted from the state's desire to exploit women's labor, their numerical strength, and their mobilizational abilities for economic and political gain. In the changed situation of the 1990s, however, women's groups and organizations are seeking to reverse this exploitative relationship to their advantage. Their swift move to take advantage of the political space brought about by the return to political pluralism in many African countries was the first indication of this changing relationship between the state and African women in the "critical juncture" period of the early 1990s. This chapter focuses on the Kenyan case in examining the transformations in the gendered but evolving state-society relationship in both the colonial and postcolonial era, leading to the efforts of reform of the 1990s.

The Postcolonial Political Context

Since independence from Britain in 1963, Kenya has had two presidents: Jomo Kenyatta, who ruled until his death in 1978, and Daniel arap Moi, who succeeded him. The Kenyan state has been described as undemocratic and characterized by a "backward political culture" (Muigai 1993). Over the course of three decades the postcolonial state refined and sharpened the arts of oppression and control bequeathed from the colonial state. Toward this end, the national constitution was amended over thirty times between independence and 1995, with the singular purpose of consolidating the powers of the president, and by extension, those of the state (*Daily Nation*, 25 August 1995, 3). Kenya was until 1982 a de jure multiparty state, but, except for a short stint between 1966 and 1969, operated as a de facto one-party state under the Kenya African National Union (KANU). The constitution was amended in 1982 to declare Kenya formally a one-party state in response to a failed coup and an attempt by prodemocracy forces to register an opposition political party.

Nonetheless, during the twenty-nine years between independence and the return to multipartyism in 1992, the leadership insisted adamantly that Kenya was democratic. Cited as evidence were national elections held regularly about five years apart. Most of these elections, however, were manipulated by the state, and hence, the leaders thereby elected often lacked political legitimacy and the mandate to rule. Over the years, internal

struggles for democratization were ruthlessly repressed by the authoritarian regimes of Kenyatta and Moi.

As elsewhere in Africa, however, between 1989 and 1991 the campaign for multiparty democracy intensified as a confluence of factors called into question the sustainability of postcolonial state structures. A combination of both internal and external pressures finally brought Moi's regime to its knees, and the reintroduction of multipartyism was grudgingly conceded in December 1991. In making this concession, the KANU government reluctantly agreed to the formal aspects of pluralistic democracy, but with the clear intention of capitalizing on this concession and the power of incumbency to obtain, through the electoral process, the legitimacy of its rule. In other words, the government was merely making a tactical move in a country that had become ungovernable and where repressive measures were no longer an effective deterrent against the demand for pluralism and democratic change.

During the first multiparty elections in 1992, the Moi regime succeeded in orchestrating an electoral "victory" for the ruling party by misusing the power of incumbency and its control of state resources to manipulate the electoral process. However, the lack of political legitimacy of the post-1992 Moi regime and the regime's demonstrated lack of commitment to further democratic transformation led, by mid-decade, to a return to the repression and autocracy of the single-party era. In this connection, opposition members of Parliament, human rights activists, and journalists have frequently been arrested for peaceful demonstrations, speeches, publications, or investigations into human rights abuses. Editions of newspapers and publications critical of government policies have been impounded and printing presses put out of action. Licenses to hold public political meetings by opposition MPs are often denied or withdrawn at the last minute. In some instances, even educational seminars and workshops that normally do not require permits have been stopped, sometimes violently. By the end of 1995 the criminalization of political dissent was on the increase. Despite this, prodemocracy groups, including women's groups, continue to pressure the government to facilitate democratic change. While the state has resisted further change, the transformations begun in the early 1990s and the state's responses to them unleashed social forces that continue to play a role in the reconfiguration of state power in Kenya. Among the more important of these forces are women's groups. The rest of this chapter examines and analyzes the evolving relationship between the women's movement and the state in Kenya.

The Women's Movement and the Kenyan State in Historical Context

Kenyan women have a long history—dating back to the precolonial era—of mobilization and organization into informal and formal groups, networks,

and coalitions, for mutual social economic support, solidarity, and empowerment (Mönsted 1978; Musyoki and Gatara 1985; Pala 1975, 1976; Nzomo 1993c). While women's organizations have varied in size, structure, ideology, and vision, their relationship with the state has always been an uneasy one.

The colonial state first began to show an active interest in the women's movement in 1952, at the outbreak of the Mau Mau struggle for political independence. British officials recognized that women were a strategic asset and could play a significant role in determining the outcome of the war for independence. The state then moved swiftly through its Department of Community Development Affairs to encourage and support the formation in 1952 of the first nationwide women's organization in Kenya—the Maendeleo ya Wanawake (Progress for Women) Organization, or MYWO. Although this organization was created as a nongovernmental organization (NGO) with a social welfare objective, its major purpose from the standpoint of the colonial state was a political one—to contribute to the struggle against Mau Mau (Mönsted 1978). In return for MYWO's support of the colonial government, it was awarded an annual grant of £12,000 for capital development and equipment. In addition, the members of this body were exempted from forced labor, and the few appointed as leaders were paid a salary by the colonial government (Mönsted 1978; Wipper 1976). MYWO thus became the instrument through which the colonial state, and later the postcolonial state, would seek to influence the women's movement. As I noted in 1993, "The structure, character and purpose of MYWO back in 1952 bears striking similarity to the 1992 MYWO, especially its close alliance with the government and its support of the status quo" (Nzomo 1993b, 132).

The formation of MYWO also marked the beginning of an enduring ideological divide within the women's movement. One group of women organized around MYWO and allied themselves closely to the state, adopting an acquiescent and social welfarist posture. The second, comparatively radical, strand of the women's movement coalesced around the women's groups and individuals that defied colonial rule and fought alongside men in the independence struggle. The gallant but unsung heroines of the independence struggle include Field Marshal Muthoni of Nyeri, Mary Wanjiku Nyanjiru of the famous 1922 Harry Thuku uprising, the Mau Mau political activist Wamuyu Gakuru, and Ciokaraine, the only woman who rose to be chief in colonial Kenya for defying a colonial order. A 1993 attempt at documenting the heroic contributions of some of these unsung heroines of the independence struggle quite rightly notes: "You hear many stories of women who were raped, beaten, murdered, jailed, detained and generally harassed [by the colonial state] during the struggle for independence. Their stories, however, remain untold" (Kabira and Nzioki 1993, 37).

In the colonial period this second strand of the women's movement was less formalized and sporadic but significant in its impact in challenging

the colonial state, especially on issues of production and governance. In Central Province, for example, women resisted the colonial forced labor system, land use policies, and privatized modes of production (Kanogo 1987). The privatization of land and the move from subsistence farming to cash crop production had the dual effect of increasing women's workload while diminishing their traditional usufructuary rights over land and the crops they produced. Thus, while women continued to provide the bulk of the labor for cash and subsistence crops, men dominated the ownership and control of land, markets for the crops, and hence, the income accruing therefrom.

About 90 percent of the Kenyan population lives in rural areas and women form about 70 percent of the rural population. Thus, the women's movement draws most of its members from rural areas. Recognizing the important role of women's groups as agents of rural development, the Kenyan state has consistently encouraged their formation for this purpose. Independence in 1963 facilitated the formation of more formalized women's organizations and the expansion of women's groups affiliated to the MYWO. Other national organizations were also formed at independence as affiliates of international women's organizations. These included the National Council of Women of Kenya (NCWK), affiliated with the International Council of Women; the Kenya Business and Professional Women's Club, an affiliate of the International Business and Professional Women's Organization; and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). The government established a Women's Bureau in 1976. By 1990, about 23,000 women's groups were formally registered with the state (Republic of Kenya 1993, 195).

At election time, women's groups are typically expected to utilize their numerical strength and mobilization abilities to ensure the electoral victory of one of the local (male) politicians. Women's groups also provide food and entertainment at state functions: they dance, cook, and praise the male leaders. But they are also the ones to whom family planning officers, nutrition and health workers, chiefs, politicians, agricultural workers, and social workers go whenever they need to pass on development and political information to the community.

The point to underscore is that the Kenyan state has largely pursued patronizing policies toward women and women's associations, encouraging them to function as easy targets for manipulation and exploitation while attempting to ensure that they pose a minimal threat to the political status quo. The state recognizes that women can be easily mobilized and relied upon to make a major contribution in the production of national wealth while at the same time providing electoral support for male politicians. To that extent they are a strategic political force. Because of this, the strategy of the postcolonial state has been to keep the female constituency in its corner through a tricky balancing act between "state tokenism" on the one hand and co-optation and control on the other.

Women and State Tokenism

At the level of rhetoric, the Kenyan state has made great strides in addressing the question of women's status, at least since the mid-1970s. From the 1960s to the mid-1970s, the state acted as if the gender question as a policy issue were of no relevance to Kenya. But this position altered from 1975, when the United Nations declared a Women's Decade (1975–1985) and demanded that member states introduce policies and programs geared toward accelerated advancement of women, especially by creating national institutions to serve women and to strengthen their existing organizations.

To protect its international image and curb internal criticism, the Kenyan state superficially complied with the UN requirements. The Kenyatta regime sponsored the formation of state-controlled social groups; the seeds were thus sown for increased demands in the early 1990s. An underfunded but state-controlled national machinery for women, the Women's Bureau, was created as a department in the Ministry of Culture and Social Services. The already co-opted women's body, MYWO, was further strengthened to work closely with the Women's Bureau in registering and mobilizing women's groups and organizations. Other women's associations were either ignored, harassed, or denied support. Although women's groups and organizations multiplied dramatically during the Women's Decade—from a mere 4,300 groups in 1976 to 23,000 groups by 1990—most of them registered low performance and did not succeed in empowering women (Nzomo 1989; Wamalwa 1987).

Furthermore, presidential appointments of a few women to some key decisionmaking positions, starting in the mid-1980s, were viewed by critical analysts as acts of tokenism, meant to appease those lobbying for systematic implementation of the "1985 Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women." The appointments were also viewed as politically expedient measures aimed at rewarding the women leaders who had defended and boosted the government's international image during the 1985 UN Women's Conference in Nairobi.

Some analysts further argue that the presidential appointments in the mid-1980s had a gender-based exploitative agenda. Most of the women "rewarded" with appointments were charged with applying their domestic skills and assumed moral uprightness to "mopping out" government parastatal bodies crippled by the corruption and mismanagement of their previous male managers, only to be promptly replaced by men after completing the assigned task (Nzomo 1993c, 7). Finally, even as presidential appointments were being made in 1986, the head of state himself published a book that devoted an entire chapter to the women of Kenya, where he categorically stated, "The government and people of Kenya will give the progress of women the highest possible priority" (Moi 1986, 18). A decade later, however, it would be difficult to conclude that women have

indeed been accorded the "highest possible priority" in government policy and praxis.

Thus, for instance, in a Parliament that has since independence consisted of an average of two women out of 200 elected members, the state has never found it important to take an affirmative action measure or establish a political quota system to increase the number of women. The first woman minister was only appointed in May 1995, nearly thirty-two years after Kenya's independence (*The People*, 19 May 1995). Even then, her appointment seems to have been timed to coincide with the September 1995 Beijing Conference for Women, for which she was to head the official Kenyan delegation. Furthermore, her ministerial portfolio is the gender-stereotyped one of Culture and Social Services. Similarly, the creation in October 1993 by the state of a Task Force to Review All Laws Relating to Women was expected to assuage women activists who had been lobbying the state to remove and/or reform all laws that discriminate against women. This task force, which has since become defunct, turned out to be another act of tokenism and a delaying tactic in lieu of the comprehensive legal reform being demanded by women and human rights groups. In this domain, as in others, the Kenyan state has consistently resisted pressures to reconfigure.

Long after the end of the Women's Decade, government action on the women's question has remained at the level of high-sounding rhetoric, consisting of sweeping and vaguely worded statements of commitment and intention to promote women in development. No systematic attempt has been made by the government to mainstream gender concerns in the development process. Gender-based discrimination against Kenyan women in almost every aspect of life remained rampant in both law and social practice and with no positive action by the state.

The Kenyan state's tokenist response to the gender question is hardly unique in Africa. As one observer has succinctly stated:

African governments have continued to pay lip service to the advancement of women in development. Efforts so far can at best be described as tokenism. The usual response of government officials has been to allow one woman into the cabinet or to establish ministries of women and national bureaux. These entities amount to having "women only" programs. Such programs fail to address all aspects of development since they target small women's groups and encourage income-generating and self-help schemes. . . . The income generating schemes, national women's bureaux and ministries of women to an extent prevent the examination of the real causes and obstacles of preventing women from participating in development. They fail to address the discriminatory practices in education, marriage, legal status, domestic and other work areas (Etim 1992, 21-22).

One factor that has remained consistent throughout the history of women's struggles in Kenya is their systematic exclusion from strategic

political decisionmaking capacities in both private and public life. It is significant to note that during the struggle for independence women's major form of participation focused on social welfare rather than decisionmaking and leadership roles. It is hardly surprising then that after political independence was won, the predominantly male leadership disposed of women with relative ease and with no audible protest from the latter (Nzomo 1993b). As shown in the rest of this chapter, women's struggles for rights and inclusion in the male-dominated political arena during the 1990s, though still problematic, appear more innovative, activist, and comprehensive than at any other period in the country's history.

Co-optation and Control: The Women's Movement and the Postcolonial State

Tokenism notwithstanding, the postcolonial women's movement in Kenya would appear to have been largely shaped by a combination of a highly patriarchal social order and an authoritarian state. As I have noted elsewhere, "Those women's organizations or individuals within them that have resisted state control and/or have challenged the oppressive status quo have often come under heavy censure and harassment" (Nzomo 1993b, 134–135).

In particular, the state established various mechanisms to control the women's movement, including the legal requirement that all groups and organizations must be officially registered by the government and regulated by an NGO coordinating body located in the president's office. In this regard, the state reserves the right to register, deny registration to, or deregister existing NGOs as it deems fit. Women's, human rights, and pro-democracy NGOs are often held for ransom, as the state requires them not to engage in political activities unless they wish to risk deregistration. Indeed, to qualify for registration, NGO constitutions must clearly indicate that they will engage only in nonpolitical and nonpartisan activities.

For most of the postcolonial period prior to 1991, many women's associations either complied with the state's requirements or withdrew from both participation in formal politics and involvement with the state. The majority within the women's movement, especially those based in the rural areas, chose the latter path and carried out their activities as if the state did not exist. A few gained significant levels of economic empowerment through group activities (Musyoki and Gatara 1985; Kabira and Nzioki 1993, 75–103), while the majority registered losses or decline in both social welfare and empowerment (Nzomo 1989).

Another category, best exemplified by MYWO and the Women's Bureau, chose the path of compliance with state demands and thereby accrued rewards. Through government material support and promotion, MYWO had by the early 1980s succeeded in overshadowing about sixty or

so other national women's NGOs operating in the country. MYWO was accorded a preponderant leadership position, which was clearly manifested by its prominence at the 1985 United Nations-sponsored Nairobi World Women's Conference. The close alliance between MYWO and the state culminated in May 1987 when MYWO merged with the ruling party, KANU. From then until 1992, when this women's body formally disengaged itself from the state, KANU-MYWO functioned literally as a political wing of the ruling party, with its activities controlled by the KANU government. The most celebrated example of this control was the state-managed October 1989 KANU-MYWO national elections (*Weekly Review*, 5 November 1989; Nzomo 1994). The blatant interference and manipulation of these elections by key male political players led many observers to conclude that: "Women in Kenya are in danger of becoming appendages of men, with their fate determined by men, with little or no reference to women" (*Weekly Review*, 5 November 1989, 1).

The Kenyan state continues to control MYWO indirectly, despite the latter's disengagement from KANU in 1992. The government, for example, instructed MYWO to postpone its national elections at least four times between 1993 and 1995, primarily for reasons related to the calculated political interests of the ruling KANU government. The battle for control of this women's body seems to have taken a multiparty format since 1992.

A few Kenyan women have defied male control, however, and some even challenged the male-dominated political system with various degrees of success since the 1960s. The most notable case is that of the renowned environmentalist, Wangari Maathai, who has had running confrontations with a hostile Kenyan state for nearly two decades over environmental and human rights issues. In 1989-1990 she succeeded in stopping the government from erecting a skyscraper in the middle of one of the largest recreational parks in the center of Nairobi. However, the weakness of the Kenyan women's movement was demonstrated by the fact that no women came out publicly to support Maathai's crusade, even as the male-dominated Parliament descended upon her, hurling personalized attacks and derogatory remarks. Furthermore, some women's groups affiliated to the then KANU-MYWO held a demonstration to condemn her actions and to disassociate themselves (*Daily Nation*, 15 December 1989).

The total silence of the majority of women and the disassociation campaign by the KANU-MYWO women gave some legitimacy to the punitive measures that were henceforth meted out by the state against Maathai and the Green Belt Movement (*Daily Nation*, 15 December 1989 and January 1990). The only solid show of support for her came from international environmentalists and the external donors of the construction project, who vindicated her by declining to fund it (*African Business* 1990). Similarly, in 1994, Maathai filed a high court injunction against the state for sanctioning private developers to convert a public parking lot in

the heart of Nairobi's city center into a commercial building site. Maathai did not succeed in her injunction but did raise public awareness of the environmental danger posed by the planned project. Significantly, the women's movement that had in 1992 pledged to support her for the presidency was not there to support her in 1994. What happened to bring about this change?

State-Society Relations in Multiparty Kenya of the 1990s: The Gender Dimension

The repeal of Section 2A of the Kenyan constitution in December 1991 marked the return to multiparty politics in the country and an opening for popular participation in the democratization process. Women's determination to participate fully in this process and to have gender issues mainstreamed onto the new democratic agenda was clearly evident throughout 1992. After the 1992 elections, the women's movement has struggled to sustain the momentum gained during that year but has faced a number of difficulties due to the continued repressive character of the Kenyan state. The year 1992 was a critical political moment for both men and women, but also fragile, temporary, and unsustainable, unless followed up by structural democratic reforms. It did provide some space for the women's movement to become a leading sociopolitical force in shaping democratic change in Kenya. While the Kenyan state has attempted to control the extent of reconfiguration following the opening of 1992, the forces unleashed at this time promise to have longer-term consequences for state-society relations in the country.

The muzzling of civil society groups that had characterized the thirty years of postcolonial rule in Kenya eased off considerably during the 1992 election year. One could safely argue that for that brief period, the state tolerated political activities of such diverse groups as the media, church groups, women's organizations, professional groups, and a whole array of human rights groups. Although there was still state control, there was relatively more freedom of expression, assembly, and association than in the pre-1992 era.

The political landscape changed very rapidly after the elections, however; some of the political gains made to empower civil society were lost as government reverted to its repressive style of governance (*Standard*, 24 March 1994, 2; *Daily Nation*, 18 August 1995, 3; *Daily Nation*, 25 August 1995, 16). "This whole situation has led some to conclude that democracy has failed in Kenya; it is nothing but a mirage. The opposition is weak and divided while the government becomes ever more autocratic and repressive" (*New African*, September 1994, 31). It is against this background that the women's movement in the 1990s needs to be understood.

From Welfare to Empowerment: Participation of Women in Multiparty Politics and Democratic Change in the 1990s

In the changed circumstances and new opportunities of the 1990s, the key goals of the women's movement have largely shifted from social welfare to empowerment and effective participation in the democratization process. Women have moved from making demands on the state to active participation in the effort to reconfigure state-society relations. As women's fortunes wax and wane in the turbulent political environment of Kenya, women may have stumbled but have not lost sight of these power-focused goals. Beginning with the 1992 preparatory period for multiparty elections, Kenyan women placed a high premium on political empowerment as a means of achieving other goals. This was in the hope that if enough women attained key political decisionmaking capacities, they would be able to repeal the laws that discriminate against women at the social and economic levels, and they could design alternate development policies to mainstream, rather than marginalize, women's issues.

Time was then a very scarce commodity; women had less than a year to chart out their agenda for the multiparty democratization process, strategize, hold gender-sensitization and capacity-building seminars, squeeze in a national women's convention, and even participate in the monitoring of the general elections. Despite the short preparatory time, the women's movement in Kenya made significant progress toward women's political empowerment.

As early as January 1992, women's groups embarked on a campaign to ensure that women candidates won the maximum possible number of parliamentary and civic seats in the December general elections. The target was set at 30–35 percent of the total seats. This was an ambitious target, considering that at the time women constituted only 1 percent of all MPs. Furthermore, this was the first time that the women's movement had mobilized for participation in electoral politics.

To achieve this tall order, women formulated multiple strategies to be implemented concurrently. First, they created a coalition of the diverse women's groups and organizations as the basis of charting out a common women's democratic agenda. This strategy of "Unity in Diversity" facilitated the implementation of other strategies for women's empowerment. The first test of this unity in diversity was the February 1992 National Convention that sought to bring together women from diverse backgrounds to work out a common women's democratic agenda. The meeting attracted over 2,000 delegates representing women's organizations from the grassroots to the national level and blurring the divisions between rural and urban, young and old, and various ethnic, racial, and religious groups. Apart from charting a common women's agenda for effective participation

in the democratic process, the convention delegates established nationwide gender solidarity as a strategy for empowerment.

Another important strategy was to set up programs for sensitizing women—the majority of voters—on the power of the vote and the merits of casting their votes for women. Some women's lobbying groups, notably the National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW), the League of Women Voters, the YWCA, and the Association of African Women for Research and Development, conducted grassroots civic education programs as well as gender and legal rights awareness campaigns, using training workshops, seminars, the media, posters, and relevant printed materials.

A conscious effort was also made to identify and recruit women candidates, by encouraging and building confidence in women wishing to contest political office in the elections. Toward this end, the NCSW organized national capacity-building training workshops for women candidates beginning in July 1992, bringing together about sixty women candidates from all the registered political parties. That women from across political parties could share a common training platform, and even agree on one presidential nominee, clearly indicates gender solidarity that overrides other differences (Nzomo 1993c).

Another factor that helped to provide direction to the women's movement during 1992 was the emergence of a number of new feminist lobbying groups that were much more political in their orientation and more assertive, innovative, and willing to take political risks. These included the NCSW, the League of Women Voters, and the short-lived Mothers in Action. The leadership provided by these new lobbying groups and individuals, as well as a relatively conducive political environment, greatly facilitated gender activism during 1992.

Even women's groups and organizations that had never previously articulated any political agenda became extremely vocal and critical of government. They vigorously lobbied all political parties to integrate gender issues within the context of their democratic agendas and programs (Nzomo 1993a; Nzomo and Kibwana 1993). In this regard, women also exploited the fact that in a bid to get women's votes, male politicians in Kenya were willing to concede some gender-specific demands. But in reality, the concessions made to women were largely rhetorical and/or superficial, as opposed to any fundamental commitment to change. Most political parties, including KANU, made some gender-based concessions in their party manifestos. KANU even promised to allocate most of the nominated seats to women (KANU Manifesto 1992) and agreed to the long-contested house allowance for married women in public service (*Sunday Nation*, 13 December 1992, 1–2). Neither promise was fulfilled after KANU won the elections.

The most celebrated strategy for influencing democratic change came shortly after the first national women's convention in February–March

1992. A section of the women's movement, primarily grassroots women, employed an innovative strategy to pressure the Kenyan state to release fifty-two political prisoners detained indefinitely without bail. The mothers, relatives, and friends of the political prisoners went on a hunger strike on 28 February 1992, after failing to influence the government through normal legal channels. The state's violent intervention on 4 March 1992, in an attempt to break the strike, led the women to strip naked as they cursed and challenged the attacking policemen to a duel. The stripping act traditionally signifies an extreme form of curse and defiance of the aggressor. In this case, the women were cursing and defying the authority of the oppressive Kenyan state (*Standard and Daily Nation*, March 1992; *Weekly Review*, 6 March 1992, 3-7; *Society*, 23 March 1992, 9).

In addition to the hunger strike itself that continued for almost a year, this one act yielded significant results in pushing Kenya's human rights and democratic agenda forward. Not only did the government eventually release the fifty-two political prisoners but the women's movement received a major boost in their bid to influence democratic change.

In sharp contrast to the single-party era, women activists in the 1990s have courted rather than shunned the news media in their search for empowerment. The media was aggressively sought to publicize numerous workshops and seminars starting in 1992. Many press conferences were held, especially on issues on which women were lobbying for state action. The government-controlled radio station was the most difficult to penetrate, but a few urban-based women activists managed to circumvent these controls and utilize radio both for communicating with women at the grassroots and transmitting gender education to the public. The media is now viewed as an important tool for popularizing the women's agenda and educating women and men on the gender dimension of human rights and democracy.

On balance, although women have not received as much quality coverage in both electronic and print media as they would have wished, they have at least managed to reduce the level of negative portrayal and the belittling of women's political actions. A major achievement in this regard was having the personal political profiles of most of the women candidates printed in the largest local daily newspapers, the *Nation* and the *Standard*, during the critical campaign period. In this regard, it was felt that it was important for women candidates to highlight their leadership abilities publicly and to introduce them to the target voters through the media.

Furthermore, in an attempt to influence public attitudes, the women's movement engaged in a poster campaign to show that the private arena, where most women are located, is also political and that democracy begins in the home and works its way up to the national level. Thus, for example, it was pointed out that men who are violent and domineering toward their families are likely to be autocratic national leaders as well. More importantly,

women's enormous experience in running the family "ministry," often as de facto heads, as well as being custodians of culture, welfare provisions, planning and budgeting, farming, and so on, gives them the necessary credentials for national leadership not only in the Ministry of Culture and Social Services, but also in other key ministries such as Finance, Planning, and Agriculture. Accordingly, posters were printed and conspicuously posted in public places, in public transport vehicles, and on private cars with such slogans as "A Woman's Place Is in the House: The State House," "A Parliament Without Women Is Like a Fireplace with Two Stones," and "The Homemaker Should Also Be the Statemaker: Vote for a Woman" (Nzomo and Kibwana 1993, 164-166).

Apart from the question of political empowerment, the women's democratic agenda also underscored women's social and economic rights as both human rights and democratic rights. Violence against women was singled out as a major area of the violation of women's human rights in Kenya. Activists lobbied for comprehensive legal reform to provide women with protection against all forms of violence and especially for the maximum possible punishment for rapists. Some recommended the death sentence for rape, while others opted for life sentence and castration. The issue of structural adjustment programs (SAPs) and their negative impact on women's socioeconomic and political rights was also addressed within the democratic agenda for gender.

The strategy of capacity building for women candidates went beyond civic education, skills training, and moral support. As the December 1992 general elections approached, the women's movement engaged in direct campaigning for women candidates. And finally, the NCSW and the NCWK monitored the 1992 elections as accredited observers, charged with the responsibility of monitoring gender-specific electoral irregularities and the differential impact of the electoral process on women candidates. This was the first time in Kenya's political history that the women's movement successfully pursued their gender-specific interests throughout the entire electoral process.

An entire year of advocacy, mobilizing, and enhancing gender awareness produced some impressive results. Over 250 women stood for civic and parliamentary seats in the December 1992 general elections, more than a 100 percent increase from previous elections. Despite the numerous obstacles women candidates faced during the electoral process (ranging from harassment, intimidation, and discrimination within parties to financial shortfalls, mass rigging, and other electoral irregularities), six women were elected to Parliament and about forty-five were elected councilors; one of them has since been elected mayor. In a nutshell then, the women's movement in Kenya put up remarkable pressure for women's political empowerment and the respect of women's human rights in 1992. The six women in Parliament and fifty in civic positions—the largest number of

women ever in Kenya's civic and parliamentary bodies—owe their electoral victory as much to their own efforts and competence as to the tremendous lobbying and support they received from women's groups during the electoral process. In this respect, women had demonstrated their political tenacity and determination. The rise of Charity Ngilu as a credible opposition candidate for president in 1997 shows women's continued resolve to penetrate the male-dominated political arena.

The Unfinished Women's Agenda

The modest number of women elected to political office in December 1992 elections was an important political achievement, but it fell far short of the target. Furthermore, outside the political arena many of the concerns women had identified remained unchanged. That is why women activists returned to the drawing board soon after the elections and worked out a postelection agenda to guide the women's movement to the next general elections in 1997 and beyond (Nzomo 1993c). The postelection strategies focused less on advocacy and more on building women's capacity to influence the undemocratic, male-dominated public institutions with a view to attaining rights, justice, and equity for both women and men. Emphasis was put on strategies for enhancing the autonomy of women's organizations, strengthening the ideology of "Unity in Diversity," facilitating women's participation in politics, and being able to resist state co-optation and manipulation.

Furthermore, the postelection agenda stressed the need to create political mechanisms under the control of women as an alternative to, and a negotiating instrument with, the male-dominated political institutions. Thus at a national conference in March 1993, the strategies adopted for women's empowerment included: (1) building the capacity of women's organizations and lobby groups; (2) broadening and institutionalizing gender, legal, and educational programs; (3) developing comprehensive support services for women's multiple roles; (4) highlighting women's leadership abilities and thus building a positive image of women as political and public decisionmakers; (5) utilizing civic positions for training and recruiting women for national politics; (6) initiating a women-led political party with a broad-based but gender-sensitive agenda; and (7) networking and building alliances, not only among women's groups but also with mixed-gender human rights groups and gender-sensitive men. Public policy and legal issues that required lobbying the state were seen to depend in part on the extent to which the women's movement could empower itself so as to become a powerful political force that could influence government policy.

To date, however, there is no indication that President Moi intends to facilitate any of the postelection gender demands. There seems to be an

officially sanctioned regression toward the gender insensitivity that had characterized government policy and practice during the single-party era. As noted earlier, the appointment of the now-defunct task force to review laws relating to women and the May 1995 appointment of the only KANU woman MP as minister of culture and social services have been widely viewed as tokenist gestures intended to appease government critics and to delay the more comprehensive reforms demanded by women activists and other human rights groups. Indeed, activist women's groups who are conducting civic, legal, and gender education have to date encountered more state harassment, intimidation, and obstruction than cooperation.

More importantly, existing laws and state practices still discriminate against women and violence against women is still a significant problem. The socioeconomic situation of women has tended to deteriorate rather than advance since the 1992 elections. The economic crisis has not only resulted in further economic marginalization of women and the feminization of poverty, it has also made networking among women more difficult, as it has diminished the time available to women to organize, attend meetings, and implement empowerment strategies (Nzomo 1992; NCSW 1994). The impact of SAPs, coupled with bad governance, threatens women's newfound capacity to struggle for their rights and to mobilize for democratic change. Even if the political environment were conducive, the six women MPs are still too few to influence policy change in a 200-member Parliament. Consequently, while women's voices in civil society continue to be audible in the postelection era, they are not as loud or forceful as they were during the election year.

Despite these difficulties, a number of women's lobbying groups including the NCSW and the International Federation of Women Lawyers—Kenya Chapter, the League of Women Voters, and antirape organizations have sustained the political momentum gathered in 1992 by conducting civic, legal, and gender awareness education, as well as raising public awareness on women's rights as human rights and providing legal counseling services to victims of gender violence. While the changes so far have been modest, the legacy of the political opening provided by the regime's acceptance of multipartyism is still unfolding.

Concluding Remarks: Democratic Space and Limited Reconfiguration

This chapter has attempted to survey state-society relations in Kenya, focusing specifically on the women's movement during the critical year of 1992. The analysis has highlighted the uneasy and mixed nature of the relations between the fragmented women's movement and the Kenyan state, oscillating between co-optation and resistance, compliance and defiance. It

has shown how at any one time, a section of the women's movement has acquiesced to state interests and in the process compromised the struggle for gender rights. But other sections of the women's movement have resisted state co-optation and have either withdrawn from involvement with the state and formal politics or sought alternative and autonomous channels of empowering themselves and influencing democratic change in a manner that advances the status of women.

With the return to multipartyism in 1992, the Kenyan state for a while relaxed its repressive response to civil society groups, including women's groups. This political liberalization afforded the women's movement and other civil society groups political space for dynamization and active participation in shaping the multiparty democratic struggles of the 1990s. In this process, the women's movement demonstrated its potential for being a formidable political force, capable of seeking and influencing change in a status quo characterized by patriarchy and state autocracy. Women also demonstrated a unique ability to close ranks across class, race, ethnic, religious, and other identities, and to create unity in diversity as well as a women's agenda to guide the movement in shaping democratic change. Women's ability to establish gender solidarity and put aside their differences makes them a critical social force in a country like Kenya, whose democratic progress is to a large extent being hampered by politics of ethnicity, clannism, and idiosyncratic differences. Some individual women have also provided leadership in efforts to unite the fragile and fragmented opposition political parties. The women's movement has also spearheaded the campaign for peace and reconciliation in response to the politically charged atmosphere of ethnic conflict.

The six women in Kenya's seventh Parliament have demonstrated stable leadership and principles. In a parliament characterized by insult trading and personality clashes, they have tried to address issues rather than personalities. They have also resisted the practice, endemic in the post-1992 multiparty Parliament, of opposition politicians shifting their loyalties to KANU in exchange for financial favors. The women MPs have thus shown that women leaders' style of politics can be significantly different from that of men. Their mature and principled political conduct has been notable.

The women's movement has indeed advanced and broadened, especially during the multiparty era. Women are learning to use the political space afforded by the new wave of the democratization struggles of the 1990s to lobby and demand the upholding of their human rights, the removal of gender-based oppression, and the restoration of their autonomy. There are now many more female voices of defiance and resistance than there were before 1991. Rights programs are now on the agendas of some women's organizations. This is a significant step forward from the single-party era, when programs of most women's organizations focused on

social welfare needs for improving family nutrition, shelter, clothing, and child welfare, and completely neglected strategic empowerment concerns.

Participation in multiparty politics in the 1990s has also increased awareness of the fact that incursions at the formal level of politics do not necessarily guarantee that women's rights will suddenly acquire priority on a predominantly man-made agenda. Women cannot expect male-dominated party politics to create space for gender issues. Accordingly, in their postelection agenda, women have devised strategies that involve initiating alternative political space for their issues within their organizations and groups.

In Kenya, as in many African countries, women's struggles are still taking place in an undemocratic context despite multipartyism. Democratic rules of tolerance, mutual respect, accountability, and transparency, and respect for basic human rights and freedoms, have not yet been accepted by the major political players. This indicates the resilience of the autocratic Kenyan state and its capacity to resist reform, despite pressures from civil society groups. Yet the reforms of the 1990s have also revealed the first fissures in that capacity, and thus opened the door to a process of reconfiguring state-society relations. The situation affords both opportunities and challenges for the advancement of an agenda of women's human rights and empowerment in the 1990s and beyond.