

Female consciousness and feminism in Africa

ALLISON DREW

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

The 1970s saw a number of significant works on women's collective action and protests in Africa, inspired firstly by a recognition that, despite the significant roles played by African women in their anti-colonial struggles, they remained politically and economically disadvantaged vis-à-vis men; secondly, by the participation of African women in their armed liberation struggles of the 1970s; and finally, by the impact of the women's movement in the West on scholarship by and about women.¹ But academic scholarship follows the cycles of social movements and the 1980s and 1990s have been a period of relative quiescence for the study of women's movements in Africa. Instead, work has focussed on gender, economic development, and the state. This literature points to the gendered process of state formation in colonial and post-colonial Africa. Rather than addressing women's political confrontations, it emphasizes their exit or withdrawal from politics due to their marginalization by male-dominated states that ignore women's social needs.²

African women's seeming withdrawal from politics has been explained by reference to the introduction, often under colonial rule, of a public/private dichotomy in social relations that legitimizes the construction of politics as a male domain and relegates women to the domestic sphere. Women's organizations are seen as frequently dominated by elite women who follow the imperatives of male politicians; the majority of women, particularly in the countryside, are alienated from politics.³

Janet Bujra points to the gendered pattern of proletarianization in Africa, in which men were generally proletarianized earlier and to a greater degree than women through forced or migrant labor.⁴ As a result, women remain concentrated in subsistence and petty com-

Theory and Society 24: 1–33, 1995.

© 1995 Kluwer Academic Publishers. Printed in the Netherlands.

modity production and in petty trading. Available statistics indicate that in the 1980s women comprised approximately 35 percent of the total labor force in the African continent and 38 percent in sub-Saharan Africa. The percentage of women in industry was about 9 percent for all Africa, and 5 percent for sub-Saharan Africa; the percentage of men in industry was about 15 percent for all Africa, and 13 percent for sub-Saharan Africa.⁵ Between 1970 and 1991, female participation in agriculture declined from 81.8 percent to 76.3 percent, while male participation declined more rapidly from 70.9 percent to 59.9 percent. In the same period, women's industrial participation rose from 3.7 percent to 6.5 percent, while that of men rose from 11.0 percent to 16.5 percent. In the services, women's participation increased from 11.0 percent to 17.3 percent, while that of men rose from 16.6 percent to 23.7 percent.⁶ Capitalist development has channelled African women into subsistence and petty commodity production rather than wage labor, Bujra argues, and this has limited their political struggles to "...localized outbursts in defense of pre-capitalist forms of organization and production" and made them vulnerable to political exploitation.⁷

The notion of African women's political withdrawal is problematic in a number of respects. Methodologically, the infrequent occurrence of mass women's protests in Africa does not imply that they are politically negligible or that we should typify African women's political behavior as characterized by withdrawal.⁸ Such an assumption implies a unilinear relationship between the quantity or frequency of a political phenomenon and its qualitative, subjectively-evaluated effects. Moreover, it dichotomizes the norms and extremes of political consciousness and action. Both everyday forms of resistance and unusual, extreme challenges to the status quo illuminate social relations and social change. If daily resistance aims to maintain the balance of power in social relations or to prevent its erosion to the detriment of subordinate groups, unusual and extreme resistance aims to transform the balance of power, either by restoring social relations to a pre-existing equilibrium or, sometimes unintentionally, by overturning the pre-existing balance of power. Indeed, daily resistance sometimes transforms itself into extreme protests. Extreme or atypical cases illuminate normal social relations precisely because they directly challenge those social relations.

Historically, this apparent withdrawal does not have deep roots. Many pre-colonial African societies had structures for female political involvement, through institutions such as queens or queen-mothers and

through women's associations and networks.⁹ Colonialism saw the deliberate erosion of these structures. Furthermore, the notion of withdrawal obscures the fact that male domination of politics has historically been and continues to be contested.¹⁰ Finally, women's concentration in subsistence and petty commodity production, which seemingly underpins the public/private dichotomy, is not an adequate explanation for their apparent political withdrawal.

To the contrary, it is precisely Africa's partial and gendered pattern of proletarianization, a legacy of capitalism's late and uneven penetration and of its articulation with various pre-existing class and gender systems, that has limited the diffusion of the public/private dichotomy in Africa. In this article, I examine several examples of women's collective protests in sub-Saharan Africa, focussing on two types of women's consciousness, female consciousness and feminism, and I am concerned to illuminate the conditions under which these types of consciousness become politically activated.¹¹ I compare the well-known 1929 Igbo/Ibibio Women's War in southeast Nigeria and the 1958 Kom *Anlu* uprising in the Bamenda grassfields of Cameroon.¹² I then briefly contrast these with two other examples of female collective action: the organization of Kwilu women in the former Congo (now Zaire) in 1960 and a strike by Hausa women in northern Nigeria in the 1970s.¹³ An examination of these cases both as women's and as peasant movements illuminates, firstly, how capitalist penetration in female farming regions of sub-Saharan Africa has undermined and transformed the pre-existing division of labor with ramifications for women's consciousness and collective protest, and, secondly, the significance of gender in twentieth-century peasant protests.¹⁴

The gendered pattern of proletarianization provides a key to understanding women's changing consciousness. In female farming regions of sub-Saharan Africa, women's agricultural roles have been linked to their reproductive roles through an ideology that reveres women's nurturing capacities on the farm and in the home. Female solidarity developed around this ideology, strengthened through women's organizations and networks and through religious and customary practices. By transforming social relations on the land, capitalist penetration threatened one dimension of women's social roles, with ramifications on their consciousness and social identity. Moreover, capitalism's articulation with various pre-existing gender systems laid the basis for differential changes in women's conceptions about their social roles. Typically, a pre-existing female consciousness readily articulated with a

developing African nationalism; in particular conditions, feminism emerged and articulated with female consciousness. In this respect, these protests cannot be understood solely as localized or defensive struggles.

Women and peasants as sociological units of analysis

Just as the category of women has been challenged as a unit of analysis because of the diversity of women's existence around the world, so the concept of the peasantry has generated controversy on the grounds that it does not illuminate the high degree of differentiation found amongst rural cultivators. Despite their diverse experiences, women's common denominator in class societies is a socially-imposed but biologically unnecessary sexual division of labor, supported by ideologies that justify their social differentiation from men.¹⁵ Similarly, at the most abstract level, the peasantry in class societies possesses its own means of production on the land and is part of an exploitative relationship in which its surplus production is transferred to another class.¹⁶ The sharp discontinuity between pre-capitalist and capitalist peasantries comes from the transformation of the process of surplus extraction, with capitalist surplus extraction typically occurring through the market. This, in turn, transforms the terms of peasant possession: what was once relatively stable, based on an implied social contract, now becomes essentially unstable and alienable.¹⁷ While the peasantry's access to the means of production ensures its survival as a class, it is simultaneously the cause of its vulnerability:¹⁸ the squeezing of the peasantry and the threat of proletarianization gives the peasantry in the capitalist era its political volatility and explains its periodic militancy. Despite their militancy, peasant movements, like women's movements, are frequently seen as defensive and restorative.¹⁹

Women and peasants share another commonality: both are frequently studied through the prism of the household.²⁰ Belinda Bozzoli, for instance, has suggested the concept of "domestic struggle" as a means to understand changing gender relations in Africa. Distinguishing between struggles within the domestic sphere and those between the domestic sphere and the capitalist economy, Bozzoli writes,

...it may be assumed that the household *as an entity* will adopt a defensive self-protective attitude towards external forces; but that different protagonists in the internal domestic struggle will adopt different *individual* attitudes.²¹

But in the Igbo/Ibibio and Kom cases discussed below, women's social roles transcended the domestic or household sphere. Because the transformations in their social roles originated in the colonial capitalist system, their political protests cannot be understood as a spillover from the domestic sphere. These cases demonstrate that the household as an entity did not respond defensively vis-à-vis an external colonial capitalism, but that because women and men experienced the new system differently, a gendered, as well as a class-based pattern of response emerged.

Nor is the household a sufficient basis for analyzing peasants. Conventionally, peasants were described as male heads of households.²² Feminist analyses have led to a recognition of female labor in household-based, peasant production. In the capitalist era, peasant production often takes the form of petty commodity production, a form of production most compatible with domestic labor, as Bujra points out. Yet the development of the commercial market – the commoditization of land, produce, and labor – undermines the pre-existing household basis of production by subordinating it to capitalist exchange relations even where the pre-existing forms and processes of production remain largely intact. Because the household is not internally homogenous, capitalist development frequently intensifies pre-existing gender and age cleavages and transforms the sexual division of labor. Thus, the increasing differentiation and fragmentation of the household under capitalism, seen in extreme form where migrant labor systems operate, means that neither gender relations nor the peasantry can be understood solely in terms of the household.²³

Women's consciousness in comparative historical perspective

Temma Kaplan has introduced the concept of female consciousness as an important dimension of women's collective mobilization.²⁴ Female consciousness stems from women's nurturing role in the socially-defined sexual division of labor and refers to women's awareness of themselves as producers and nurturers of life. In summary, Kaplan explains that female consciousness manifests itself collectively when women, believing the survival of their community to be at stake, use their traditional networks to fight any interference with their ability to nurture and preserve life. Female consciousness, thus, accepts and maintains pre-existing gender relations; when these become unbalanced and women's traditional roles threatened, women fight to restore

that balance and reassert or reestablish their ability to nurture. In this respect, female consciousness is premised on the notion of an implied social contract, a conception prevalent in many peasant societies.²⁵

Female consciousness might seemingly correspond to what George Rudé has called an “inherent ideology,” that is, a belief system based on oral tradition, folk memory, and direct experience. Inherent ideologies, for Rudé, promote restorative movements; on their own they cannot generate forward-looking visions. The development of such visions in a traditional society, Rudé suggests, would depend on the introduction of an ideology derived from recorded ideas through contact with other societies or social groups.²⁶

However, female consciousness cuts transversely across Rudé’s categories, just as it spans the left/right political spectrum. Female consciousness may exist as part of a society’s inherent ideology; yet gender ideologies, and the types of consciousness generated, are continually restructured based on derived ideas. Female consciousness is highly differentiated, reflecting the different class and social environments in which it emerges, as well as its articulation with other types of political consciousness, such as nationalism or feminism. Its essentially conserving or restorative nature is seen in its capacity to buttress existing sexual divisions of labor or to link up with conservative nationalist movements.²⁷ But female consciousness may have radical implications in two respects. Firstly, under certain conditions it may propel women to go beyond the bounds of socially-accepted gender roles and, in so doing, women may begin to question and to reject their old roles. Secondly, because women’s nurturing concerns are not narrowly economic but multi-faceted and social, when working-class women inspired by female consciousness support and participate in labor struggles, they may help to broaden the demands of male workers. Thus, under specific conditions, as Kaplan suggests, female consciousness may be potentially transformative to the extent that it values human life and social needs above all else and can link up with quality of life protests and ideologies of social emancipation. Kaplan describes, for instance, how women in early twentieth-century industrial Barcelona, seeking to defend their ability to care for their families, overturned existing gender stereotypes by militantly confronting government officials and speculators in the public arena. In so doing, their own self-image as women was transformed. Until 1918 the generic term *hembra* (female) was used to complement the masculine term *vecino* (inhabitant, household head, or citizen); in 1918 women

began calling themselves *vecendaria* (female comrades or sisters), reflecting their new sense of political solidarity.²⁸

Bujra's periodization of women's consciousness indicates that female solidarity in pre-capitalist societies tends to reinforce the sexual division of labor. In this respect, such solidarity is frequently a manifestation of female consciousness. But with the development of petty commodity production and, later, capitalism, women's protests begin, unevenly and spasmodically, to challenge pre-existing gender relations and sexual divisions of labor. Bujra suggests that while social atomization and cleavages impede female solidarity, collective access to independent resources may be a prerequisite for female solidarity and for women's collective capacity to challenge prevailing gender relations. In this respect, her argument parallels Wolf's hypothesis that those peasants with tactical leverage over resources like land and with freedom to maneuver have the greatest potential for sustained mobilization.²⁹

When and under what conditions do women's movements, often inspired by female consciousness, begin to incorporate feminist demands? Feminism seeks to modify or transform pre-existing gender relations to allow women and men equal rights and opportunities within a particular socioeconomic framework. A historical movement composed of many strands, its origins are traceable to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe, when capitalism began to transform production. The pre-capitalist household was typically geared to either production for use or, as petty commodity production became more widespread, production for use and exchange. There was no stark polarity between production for use and for exchange, between private and public, domestic and social. The gradual separation of production for use and exchange reached a peak as factory production replaced the home-based putting-out system, and women, largely relegated to the now-privatized and non-productive, service-oriented domestic sphere, began sporadically to challenge their fate.³⁰ Feminism is transformed from a set of ideas to a social movement, I argue, when the contradiction between the sexual division of labor and what women are capable of doing becomes particularly apparent, for example, when women participate in national liberation and armed struggles only to find themselves relegated to subservient roles after national independence or when they achieve unprecedented educational levels, as in the post-war advanced capitalist countries, only to find themselves ghettoized in domestic or clerical work.

Female consciousness and feminism are often polarized as ideal-types, in that the former presupposes solidarity based on acceptance and celebration of common experiences, and the latter, solidarity based on perception of common oppression.³¹ Indeed, where an activated female consciousness emphasizes the preservation or intensification of a sexual division of labor, its proponents may well find themselves pitted against feminists who seek to undermine such a division. Working-class or peasant women or older women with limited social opportunities may passionately defend the very roles deprecated by (often middle-class) feminists or by younger women who can envision other social possibilities. Yet the component elements of female consciousness and feminism are not mutually exclusive, as the nurturing of life is not necessarily antagonistic to gender equality as long as it is not enforced on women as their sole and exclusive domain. That development, however, would require a transformation of gender roles, which would both depend on and reinforce new forms of consciousness.³²

Women's consciousness and solidarity in Africa

In Africa, capitalism's late and uneven development has not yet completed the pervasive and sharp bifurcation between production for use and exchange, manifested in the separation of the domestic sphere from social production, characteristic of widespread industrialization. Because in many regions of Africa women's nurturing role typically transcends the domestic sphere to encompass agricultural production,³³ this provides greater opportunity for female consciousness to manifest itself on a social rather than individual, privatized scale and explains its continued prevalence in Africa.

A striking indicator of the depth and extent of female consciousness in many African societies is the association of motherhood with power, which dates from the pre-colonial and pre-capitalist era and which, as Karen Sacks notes, contrasts markedly with connotations about motherhood in the industrialized West. One facet of this is seen in what Phyllis Kaberry called the metaphysical use of the term "mother." Sayings such as "mother of the country" indicate that the notion of motherhood has been expanded to denote either women with political or symbolic authority such as queens or queen-mothers or, in the case of sayings such as "mother of the farm" or "mother of the compound," women's authority in a particular domain.³⁴

Such expressions have been documented in many areas of the continent. The organization of married women in the Igbo city of Onitsha, Nigeria was headed by an *Omu*, or mother. The Lovedu, in the north-east Transvaal region of South Africa, and noted for their high degree of gender equality, instituted queens during the nineteenth century, who were assisted by female district representatives known as “mothers of the kingdom.” The Swazi queen-mother was described as “...the Elephant, the Earth, the Beautiful, the Mother of the Country.” In central Africa, Lunda women rulers were called “mother of the kingdom,” and the Bateke’s ruling triad included a hereditary position called “mother of the kingdom.” In some cases, these expressions described women with political authority, but in others, women’s exclusion from the centers of power was rationalized in terms of this nurturing role: in the Bamenda grassfields of the Cameroons, reported Kaberry, people generally felt that “‘a woman’s work is on the farm and that she has not time to rule the country’...”³⁵

This pan-African use of the term mother to acknowledge respect for an individual woman’s political authority and/or for women’s authority in particular domains that may extend beyond the household, differs from the more restrictive Afrikaner conception of *volksmoeder* or “mother of the nation,” although that may serve to channel female consciousness. The *volksmoeder* notion was constructed by late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century male Afrikaner intellectuals striving to protect and strengthen a distinct Afrikaner national identity in response to the combined threats of British domination and proletarianization, and it signifies the relegation of Afrikaner women to the private domain of the household. Although as the “cornerstone of the Afrikaner household,” women played a particular political and social role, it was not one according individual women authority outside the domestic sphere. Wives of prominent men were upheld as examples who had successfully fulfilled this domestic ideal, to which all women could aspire. Even Afrikaner working-class women, potential non-conformists to this ideal, strove to legitimize themselves through the use of this term.³⁶ In contemporary South Africa, industrial development has widely entrenched the public/private dichotomy. There, “mother of the nation” has been applied to wives of national liberation leaders, suggesting that to the extent that women are seen with a political role extending beyond the household, it tends to be a nurturing and protective, rather than leadership, role. This conception of gender roles in politics is reinforced by cultural symbolism portraying young males as the lions of the liberation movement.³⁷

The Igbo/Ibibio and Kom cases discussed below also indicate the socioeconomic basis and depth of female consciousness in twentieth-century Africa. Unlike the privatization of domestic labor in industrialized countries, in Igbo/Ibibio and Kom societies, no sharp distinction separated the domestic and productive spheres. The two types of labor merged, at the ideological level, as women's agricultural work was an extension of their domestic, nurturing role and often took place in an extended family or kinship context. But the Igbo/Ibibio case also contains elements of feminism.

The 1929 Women's War and 1958 *Anlu* compared

The 1929 Igbo/Ibibio Women's War and 1958 *Anlu* indicate the salience of female consciousness as a potential mobilizing factor in women's collective protests: in both cases women united across class lines in anxiety over the rapidity of economic and political changes undermining their nurturing roles. The uprisings show some striking similarities. Both took place in highly stratified, but subsistence-based class societies with a sexual division of labor linking women's agricultural and domestic activities through the theme of fertility. Both occurred during periods of increased colonial intervention, which had direct impact on women's work and political representation, and they had the active encouragement and behind-the-scenes consultation of men.

In both uprisings women used ritualized sanctions dating from pre-colonial days in order, as Shanklin suggests, to restore the moral balance of their communities and to control family and sexual values, much as Kaplan has conceptualized the operation of female consciousness. Thus, Nkwain notes that according to oral tradition, *anlu* originated as a female defense of the community against outside attackers when the males were away hunting. In these rituals women covered themselves in palm leaves, ferns, creepers, and clay and used offensive and degrading behavior to humiliate and ostracize the person[s] who had offended them. This punishment was typically followed by forgiveness and reconciliation if the offender[s] repented.³⁸ Variations of the Igbo rituals, known as "making war" or "sitting on a man," and *anlu*, "a moving out," "*se lu*" meaning to leave, set apart, or isolate, are found around West Africa and in other parts of the continent.³⁹ Generally, but not always, offenders were men who infringed on women's customary rights and domains or humiliated them through sexual insults. These

ritualized protests, then, did not actually challenge the structure or basis of political authority or of male dominance, but were a legitimate, institutionalized means that women used to rebalance social and gender relations. Nonetheless, in temporarily turning social and gender relations upside down, they encapsulated a symbolic threat to the prevailing social order.⁴⁰

The use of these rituals in seemingly non-traditional contexts has provoked much debate concerning the extent to which these protests indicated a rupture with pre-existing belief systems. Some writers stress a continuity between the use of these traditional rituals and the new circumstances. Van Allen, from a feminist perspective, sees the Women's War as a traditional protest writ large, where women reacted as they customarily did against male infringement of their rights. While rejecting a feminist interpretation, Shanklin similarly sees the 1958 *Anlu* as a matriarchal movement whose participants believed themselves to be exercising a traditional female prerogative to seize power and rectify an intolerable situation; here, colonialism. Other writers stress a discontinuity between the traditional usage and the new conditions. Ifeka-Moller contends that the use of these rituals in the Igbo case indicates that women's solidarity was still based on their common reproductive capacity, even though they sought greater economic and political power, and she points to the contradiction between women's perceptions of themselves as bearers and nurturers of life and their new economic roles. Bujra, by contrast, argues that the Igbo protest stemmed from the contradiction between women's growing wealth and their declining political influence, and that women used traditional techniques because, excluded from formal representation, those were the only means of protest available to them.⁴¹ I suggest that both protests stemmed from a disjuncture between women's consciousness about their social roles, on the one hand, and the new social conditions that threatened their ability to fulfill those roles, on the other. Their rituals represented a solidarity based on a pre-existing female consciousness. Yet these were combined with modern petitionary methods of protest and, in some cases, non-traditional demands.

Because in both cases women attributed the threats to their social roles to colonial intervention, these female consciousness-based protests were able to link up with nationalist movements. The Women's War, unlike the *Anlu*, included feminist demands. Concerned that participation in the market economy was undermining their capacity to nurture, symbolized through subsistence production, Igbo women, historically

active in trade, nonetheless asserted their interest in controlling production and trade through demands for economic opportunities and political representation within the new system. Kom women, concerned with their loss of control over subsistence production, and lacking other economic avenues, asserted the right to govern and voiced conservative demands seemingly aimed at restoring pre-capitalist production and collective control. The Women's War with its reformist and incorporationist demands was crushed after a month; the restorative *Anlu* lasted three years.

Igboland and the 1929 Women's War

Igboland was slowly drawn into the capitalist system through the international slave trade from the sixteenth century; but the nineteenth-century transition to legitimate trade and subsequent colonial conquest speeded up the transformations culminating in the 1929 Women's War. In pre-colonial Igboland men and women were involved in subsistence production and trade but in different roles and capacities. Men controlled bridewealth, livestock, yam and palm-oil production, and long-distance trade and this gave them greater access to wealth than women had. However, women, in addition to producing cassava and other subsistence crops, had rights to palm products not used by men, controlled their own surplus production and dominated local trade.⁴²

In this decentralized polity, where political and legal systems differed between localities, the ultimate community authority could be the village, clan, or kindred group. Although political decision-making in Igboland was characterized by "consultation and consensus," the society was not egalitarian, being stratified by class, age, and gender. Like many African societies, Igbo society showed elements of what Okonjo has called a dual-sex system, in which each sex regulated its own activities and women as a group had institutionalized means of representing their interests and redressing grievances through a network of women's associations.⁴³ The dual-sex system operated within a general framework of male dominance, as men's greater access to wealth was translated into greater political power. Thus, while women had a considerable public role through their economic activities and network of women's associations, they lacked the political power of men. However, some Igbo communities had flexible gender systems that, in exceptional circumstances, could mediate the dual-sex system by allowing women to fulfill certain roles normally ascribed to men. Typically, even

wealthy women could not act as chiefs or priests, but under special conditions women could become “female husbands” and engage in “woman-to-woman marriage” in order to acquire the wealth needed to take the *Ekwe* title, reserved for wealthy and industrious women.⁴⁴

Igbo women used the custom of “making war” or “sitting on a man” to protect their interests as wives and mothers or as producers. While not challenging men’s power and authority, this served to regulate gender relations and restrain men’s abuse of power. Although Ibibio women did not have such a technique, they nonetheless had secret societies like *ebere* (women of the land) to safeguard their interests against male transgression.⁴⁵

Although pre-colonial land tenure was largely communal, the kinship basis of land tenure did not fully circumscribe individual rights to land. Land was typically transmitted through males, who had *de jure* rights in contrast to women’s *de facto* or usufruct rights. In exceptional cases, the flexible gender system operating in some communities did allow daughters to become symbolic males or “male daughters” in order to inherit land and safeguard the father’s line of descent in the absence of a son.⁴⁶

Women’s social roles were based on their capacity to reproduce and nurture life, and caring for the family either in the home or through subsistence farming was seen as a manifestation of their nurturing capacity. These roles were reflected in an ideology manifested in culture and religion. In Nnobi, for example, a woman’s beauty was said to come from marriage and childbirth, and women sang:

Woman is principal ... is principal,
Without a woman, how can a child be born?
How can a child be born?

Women gained status from motherhood, and their fortunes as wives rested on their fertility, hence the vulnerability of the childless woman:

If not for the power of giving birth, who will give me?
Buy white fowl, who will give me?
Bring white palm-white [wine], who will give me?
If not for the power of giving birth, who will give me?⁴⁷

Earth-goddess cults linking female and agricultural fertility were common throughout the West African savannah and forest zones; in Igbo-land, women were known as “the trees which bear fruit”⁴⁸

The rapid development of capitalism had a profound impact on women's roles that clashed with their multi-faceted notion of female fertility. By the turn of the century, petty commodity production was widespread, and although subsistence production continued, local needs were increasingly filled through the market.⁴⁹

Unlike many areas of Africa, where the introduction of cash cropping pulled males into the market economy while ghettoizing women in subsistence, Igbo women were pulled into the market economy by virtue of their control of particular crops. This process began in the nineteenth century through female control of certain palm products. The palm products trade, stimulated by Britain's industrial revolution and the suppression of the slave trade, quickened the pace of economic change along the coast. While the slave trade had required fairly large capital investment, palm oil could be produced on a small scale with relatively little capital, creating opportunities for small-scale producers and traders, of whom women and former slaves figured prominently. By 1900 cassava was a cash crop, giving women in non-palm oil producing areas an avenue into the cash economy. Many women had usufruct rights to oil palm trees and plantations, enabling them to profit from the rise in demand for palm kernel oil in the 1920s. As a group, women had far more avenues for accumulating wealth than ever before: some even became moneylenders and obtained rights to immovable property, rivalling and surpassing many men in wealth. Nonetheless, women were internally stratified by income, and many were severely squeezed by the intensifying economic competition.⁵⁰

This period of rapid economic change coincided with Britain's consolidation of colonial rule in Nigeria. The Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria was amalgamated in 1914, and over the next fifteen years, the colonial government consolidated its legal and policing infrastructure.⁵¹ Its native administration system, based on a policy of indirect rule, eroded the authority of traditional chiefs and institutions, especially women's institutions, creating a cadre of corrupt and bureaucratic warrant chiefs, often no more than puppets, who administered colonial policy. Thus, the burden of colonialism hit women with particular severity. The spread of Christianity undermined the fertility cults so central to women's self-image. With the erosion of the dual sex system, women lost what political representation they had. Along with their integration into the market economy, their political influence declined rapidly.⁵²

These conditions provoked a series of women's protests throughout the 1920s, all concerned with issues of fertility and/or economic rights.⁵³ These social anxieties culminated in the November 1929 Women's War, catalyzed by a rumor that women were to be taxed, following the imposition of an unpopular tax on men the year before. This, together with the recent fall in the price of palm produce and the increasing costs of imports meant a drop in income for most people, with small-scale traders and cash-crop cultivators especially vulnerable to the effects of the Great Depression. For poor women, the imposition of a tax on women would increase their poverty and dependence on their husbands. For wealthy women, monopoly trading practices and male-biased laws impeded their accumulation of wealth. Women's associations and marketing networks spread the rumor of imminent taxation, and tens of thousands of women began protesting in towns throughout the region, looting European stores and factories, attacking official buildings, freeing prisoners. Police and troops squashed the uprising with fifty dead and fifty wounded, and while a subsequent Commission of Enquiry initiated selected reforms of native administration, none spoke to the women's demands.⁵⁴

These demands included political, economic, and social concerns:

1. no tax for women;
2. the removal of corrupt chiefs, Warrant Chiefs, and other court employees;
3. the institution of women's judges;
4. complaints about monopolistic British trading and retailing practices and the poor state of trade;
5. complaints about declining female fertility and prostitution.

Other, less tangible complaints revealed the growing anxiety as capitalism undermined traditional social relations and gender roles: "Our main grievance is that we are not so happy as we were before'; 'Our grievance is that the land is changed – we are all dying.'"⁵⁵

Both dimensions of women's nurturing role were threatened by capitalist social relations. On the one hand, the commoditization of crops was a threat to an ideology linking subsistence production with female fertility. On the other, the commoditization of sex through prostitution signified the separation of sex from reproduction and biological fertility. This double threat to women as nurturers of life did indeed mean that they were becoming, in their own words, "as men." To the extent that, as Ifeka-Moller argues, women's solidarity across class lines was based on their common reproductive capacity – a manifestation of

their female consciousness – then becoming “as men” would mean an erosion of their potential for solidarity. Not surprisingly, in subsequent years the mobilization of Nigerian women across class lines became increasingly difficult.⁵⁶

Igbo and Ibibio women in southeast Nigeria were subject to a triple set of contradictions stemming from capitalism’s articulation with the pre-existing gender relations. Firstly, although women became integrated into the world economy as their crops became commodities, their economic avenues were constrained vis-à-vis both British male-dominated monopolies and African men, who possessed *de jure* land rights. Secondly, their growing economic power clashed with their declining political power, as their traditional institutions and rights to political representation, which had been a means of defending their nurturing roles when needed, were undermined by colonial practices and institutions that denied women representation. Thirdly, their involvement in the market economy undermined subsistence production, the socio-economic basis of the ideological link between female and agricultural fertility, the basis of their female consciousness. Hence, they mobilized as a gender group across class lines.

The women’s concerns about fertility are manifestations of female consciousness illustrating the resilience of pre-existing belief systems and values despite transformed conditions. The linking of concerns about fertility and economic rights throughout the 1920s suggests that women were reacting to a two-fold stress: the contradiction between their traditional and new productive roles and the discrimination they were experiencing as women in the new colonial capitalist system. The looting of British stores and attacking of official buildings cannot merely be seen as the traditional custom of destroying an offender’s hut on a larger scale; in their targets, women showed a sophisticated differentiation of the sources of their oppression, and in this respect their protest was an early manifestation of Nigerian nationalism.⁵⁷ While women used ritual techniques they combined these with deputations and demands indicating a desire for equal treatment and opportunities with men in a reformed system. In this respect, feminist demands were intertwined with female consciousness.

The Kingdom of Kom and the 1958 *Anlu*

In contrast to the 1929 Women's War, where feminist demands began to emerge alongside female consciousness, the 1958 *Anlu* lacked explicit feminist demands, despite its central preoccupation with women's social position. Moreover, while the Women's War was one of the early anti-colonial struggles that set the stage for a developing Nigerian nationalism, the *Anlu*, which occurred in the former British territory of Cameroon, became intertwined with the contest of political parties involved in Cameroon's struggle for independence and unity. Cameroon was originally colonized by Germany; following World War One, the territory was divided as League of Nations mandates between Britain and France, with Britain administering its territory as part of Nigeria. By the 1950s, the principal political cleavage between African political parties in the British territory concerned the twin questions of the future relationship between Nigeria and Cameroon and that of Cameroonian unity. In the late 1950s the pro-Nigerian Kameruns National Congress (KNC) held office; the opposition Kameruns National Democratic Party (KNDP) favored eventual unity with the French territory. In 1958 British Cameroon had regional status in the self-governing (but not yet independent) Federation of Nigeria. Many Cameroonians felt that they lacked adequate representation in Nigeria's political system and perceived Nigeria's influence as quasi-colonial. This perception was accentuated by Nigerian migration to Cameroon.⁵⁸

The Kingdom of Kom seems to have emerged as a centralized state in the eighteenth century, its expansion based on war and slave-raiding; only in the twentieth century did capitalism, stimulated by colonialism, make substantial inroads. In this highly stratified society, composed of a non-hereditary nobility and free and slave classes, the sexual division of labor appears to have been more rigid than that of Igbo society. Tradition has it that males were originally blacksmiths and females, farmers; in the twentieth century men worked in various trades while agriculture was predominantly female. Unlike Igboland, Kom had no internal markets; external trade was controlled by men. Hence, Kom women lacked some of the traditional economic avenues open to Igbo women. Here, too, were myths indicating a pre-colonial dual-sex system. The queen mother was reputed to have been influential in former times, but by the early twentieth century her power had declined, and the institution was abolished by the *Fon*, traditional Kom ruler, as it was in other areas of the Bamenda grassfields. Nonetheless, women

still periodically used the *Anlu* sanction to rebalance gender relations and maintain social norms.⁵⁹

Land was communally-owned and each village or lineage head managed its own land, regulated by custom. Men controlled the transmission of land, and women had usufruct rights, obtaining land from their husbands or occasionally friends and mothers-in-law. In popular conception, men owned the land, and women, the crops. Yet Kaberry adds that these grasslands people generally viewed rights to land in terms of an individual's kinship group rather than sex. Women's roles as mothers and as providers of crops and of food for their families were extensions of each other symbolized by the widespread use of the term mother to signify authority in particular domains and by numerous fertility rites linking female and agricultural fertility.⁶⁰

But by the mid-twentieth century women's control of the production process was jeopardized, as the introduction of cash crops transformed pre-existing social relations. Unlike Igbo women, who became integrated into the market as their traditional crops became commodities on the world market, Kom women became ghettoized in subsistence production, which was squeezed as pressure on land increased. In a pre-capitalist economy women could always fulfill their roles as farmers and providers despite their lack of *de jure* rights. But the concept that men own the land, women the crops became unworkable in a capitalist economy. The expansion of cash cropping put pressure on land. As land increased in value, men, as traditional owners, had an incentive to rent or sell; as land became privatized, it was lost to the community or lineage, impinging on women's usufruct rights and on their subsistence production.⁶¹ The increasing economic vulnerability which women experienced under these circumstances in turn weakened their traditional networks and organizations, which declined as poorer women found it difficult to pay the membership fees.

Like the Women's War, the 1958 *Anlu* was not an isolated uprising; the Bamenda grassfields saw numerous women's protests that decade. The 1958 *Anlu* followed a period of intense British efforts at agrarian reform. In the 1950s male colonial administrators, supported by the *Fon*, the KNC and local teachers, sought to introduce modern farming techniques such as block farming, controlled cattle grazing, and mixed crop farming, gearing these programs to male farmers and bypassing women, a common pattern throughout Africa.⁶² *Anlu* began in July 1958 as a protest against an all-male council meeting in which a local

teacher garnered support for colonial efforts to institute unilaterally new farming and sanitation techniques, policies vehemently opposed by the women. According to Francis Nkwain, whose mother participated in the *Anlu*, the women's demands at this time were:

1. that the fines paid by the women regarding contour ridging regulations be returned;
2. that women be allowed to farm in the traditional method, which to them was more satisfactory;
3. that the four teachers [who supported colonial farming policies] be transferred.

This was no quickly crushed protest. Between July and November, more than 7,000 women transformed *Anlu* from an ephemeral disciplinary technique into a hierarchical organization that held regular meetings and had local branches around the region. At this point *Anlu* gained the support of 37 male KNDP members and leaders who were often asked for advice. During this period, Nkwain recounts, *Anlu* "...operated in a hushed atmosphere that was more frightening than the more overt demonstrations," boycotting and intimidating its opponents, generally KNC supporters, and rendering the *Fon* and his council ineffective.⁶³ This period also saw the broadening of demands, which, Ritzenthaler reports, now included:

1. that *Anlu* would control the Kom area;
2. that those not following *Anlu* would be exiled;
3. that women not following *Anlu* would be prevented from farming;
4. that there would be no more use of courts, schools, churches or hospitals;
5. that the *Fon* and *juju* men would no longer be in authority;
6. that strangers (Hausa, Fulani, and European) would not be allowed in the Kom area;
7. that the four mission teachers at Njinikom must leave the Kom area.⁶⁴

In November an all-woman procession marched on the regional center of Bamenda to voice their concerns to the British District Officer. The account of *Anlu*'s leader, Mamma Muana, evokes a fear that Kom society and culture was dying similar to that expressed in the Igbo/Ibibio revolt, and a sense of bewilderment over the rapid change of social values that seemingly led the school-educated younger generation to betray their mothers:

We did not know what was awaiting us in Bamenda. We were like people in a dying house. We ate but the food did not taste good. We laughed but there was no cheer in the laughter. But we had faith in the God of Kom and knew we were dying for our land.... And if I spoke at Bamenda and the District

Officer was not satisfied, we would gladly go to prison, all the women in Kom! Our own children, suckled at this breast, were handing us over to the police just because when they beat us, their mothers, we cried out in pain and sought help. That is why we sent you people to school, to learn to beat us and send us to prison!

The women's marching song poignantly expresses their female consciousness: the desire to defend both their community and their roles as nurturers.

We go in tears to fight for you,
 Oh Njingma, Yuhfoin, Ngam, Kuoh!
 Behold our tears, on Ndi Kuoh!
 The white man has come, has come,
 See how he walks on us, on our customs!
 Who has this land? Not we.
 We will die all to save the land!
 We will die all to feed our children!⁶⁵

The opposition KNDP undoubtedly benefitted from this grass-roots support, winning a local election in January 1959 and ousting the KNC at the national independence elections in 1961. Even after the KNDP won its first local victory, *Anlu* continued to intimidate non-supporters with the result that 35 *Anlu* women were brought to court and had to pay legal fees. According to Ritzenthaler, who observed the protest, this confused the women, "...who believed that since 'their' party had won the election, the government, police and the courts were theirs." Accounts suggest that *Anlu* gradually faded away, its influence subsiding after each election, even though its memory and influence was still strong in 1963.⁶⁶

While the Women's War was a response to a three-fold contradiction, Kom women were hit by a double decline that impeded their capacity to nurture. The differential impact of colonialism and capitalism on women speeded up the internal stratification and disintegration of the peasantry, undermining the household basis of peasant subsistence production. Because of the close ideological relationship between women's productive and reproductive roles, any economic threat to one side of the relationship appears to have had ramifications, in the women's perceptions, for the other. This placed women under particular stress.

The 1929 Women's War and the 1958 *Anlu* were anti-colonial protests which indicate the articulation of gender and class in a colonial capital-

ist framework. In one sense, these women responded as beleaguered peasants and petty commodity producers threatened by rapid economic changes that undermined their traditional access to land. In another, they acted as members of communities whose social structure and customs were threatened by colonial conquest. Yet women were not merely defending the community in the same manner as men; they were protesting the undermining of their own position, on which, they believed, the welfare of the community rested.

Both protests sought to give women political representation but in markedly different ways. Igbo women demanded representation, formulated in terms of the dual-sex framework, within the new system. Kom women, by contrast, put *Anlu* in charge, rejecting the colonial system and denying the KNC any credibility. They sought to reestablish control over their domain of subsistence production; their lack of demands for access to cash crops or other new economic avenues and their xenophobic demands to restrict strangers, notably Fulani cattle herders whose animals trespassed on their farms, suggest a desire to return to a pre-capitalist subsistence economy. *Anlu* seems to have envisioned a participatory, communal society. It took over a judicial role, running elections with women candidates, in which Mamma Muana was elected judge, and it initiated a number of communal labor construction projects.⁶⁷ While *Anlu* was concerned with reestablishing women's social role and giving them a social voice, this was not couched in terms of equality with men.

Why was the backward-looking protest able to sustain itself for three years while the protest with modern, incorporationist demands was squashed after a month? Wolf suggests that the differential capacity of peasants to sustain uprisings is due to access to particular resources, including mobility and freedom from direct supervision. Yet if anything, Igbo women's participation in the market would have given them more leverage than Kom women had.

The principal difference in resources between the two uprisings was the degree of external political support, which reflected the historical timing of the uprisings. While both protests were anti-colonial, the latter uprising was much more closely interwoven into the nationalist movement, both politically and organizationally, than the former. The Women's War occurred before the Nigerian nationalist movement had developed sufficiently to incorporate and sustain the many localized protests that fed into it. Thus, the Women's War set the stage for sub-

sequent nationalist protests; women were incorporated into Nigeria's national independence movement but in a subordinate position.⁶⁸ The 1958 *Anlu*, by contrast, took place towards the close of the colonial period and became intertwined with political party competition. Despite the KNDP's influence on *Anlu*, the uprising and its aftermath were not simply a result of male machination, as Ritzenthaler has suggested. Just as *Anlu* helped propel the KNDP to victory, it was also sustained by it. That *Anlu* declined once these two organizations were separated, suggests that the protest was by then a spent force.⁶⁹

Contrasting African cases

Two contrasting cases serve as a counterpoint to the above discussions of female consciousness by pointing to conditions where female consciousness was not a critical factor in women's collective mobilization. A strike in the 1970s by Hausa women in northern Nigeria indicates particular conditions in which wage labor rather than subsistence or petty commodity production provides a material base for women's collective protest. In Muslim Hausa society a sharp sexual division of labor co-exists with the atomization of women through marriage and seclusion, and women lack independent access to any means of production although they have some financial autonomy through the preparation of food inside the home which is sold on the streets by brokers. Here, as Sam Jackson suggests, rural Hausa women are on the borderline between rural proletarians and petty commodity producers. They are not fully proletarianized in that the marriage custom ensures that their husbands provide their basic household subsistence, an arrangement both similar yet dissimilar to that of Igbo and Kom women, whose subsistence was guaranteed upon marriage through access to land. Yet, Hausa women lack independent productive access to land, and while they do specific types of farm work at certain periods of their lives, their principal work is domestic labor and petty commodity production and trade. In this sense, these women are indeed peasants' wives.⁷⁰

To the extent that there is female consciousness in Hausaland, it lacks a material base in land. Along with women's atomization through seclusion, this militates against collective female protest. Despite legends of queens and female warriors dating from the period before the 1804 Islamic *jihad*, there is no apparent dual-sex tradition or other evidence of collective female protest against male infringement of their tradi-

tional rights and domain, as in the Igbo and Kom cases. Since the *jihad*, women have been excluded from public and political roles, a practice that converged with British colonial attitudes about women. Only recently have women in northern Nigeria begun to appear in political office.⁷¹

In such conditions, collective female solidarity surfaced in a workplace confrontation with foreign capital following the government's establishment, in 1971, of the Kano River Project (KRP), an irrigation project that aimed to increase agricultural production and meet the growing national demand for food. The project entailed the registration and reallocation of land based on independent peasant ownership and production for the market, and it accelerated the region's integration into the world economy, increasing peasant stratification and dependency on state support mechanisms. International capital made its appearance on the scheme in the form of a European-based holding company named BUD which leased KRP land to produce vegetables for the European market.⁷²

The economic growth stimulated by the KRP increased female seclusion and withdrawal from farmwork, despite some variation due to age and other factors. Nonetheless, the company was able to attract older women no longer in seclusion and younger women from isolated farmsteads. A few hundred women harvested beans for BUD; others worked in smaller groups on small-scale Hausa-owned wheat farms alongside males who got more than twice their wage. While all the women accepted the sexual division of labor that devalued their labor relative to the men's, women on the bean farm successfully struck for higher wages when they learned that a private contractor was willing to pay more to attract them. The Hausa strike suggests that while social atomization impedes both a female consciousness-based and feminist solidarity amongst women, it does not preclude the possibility of women's collective confrontation with capital when they perceive the possibility of equalizing their conditions vis-à-vis other women workers.

To point to socioeconomic factors that facilitate or impede female or feminist consciousness and their translation into collective protest, is not to downplay the importance of political organization in the development of political consciousness. In the early 1960s, Kwilu women's political participation in the southwest region of the former Congo indicates that in an area with a tradition of millenarian and anti-

colonial protests but no evidence of independent women's mobilization, effective political organization can promote feminist consciousness and integrate women into a broader social movement.

This region was incorporated into the world economy with the establishment of palm oil trade in the early twentieth century facilitated by a brutal, highly centralized Belgian colonial domination. By the mid-twentieth century, three powerful firms dominated the industry, which supplied between one-quarter and one-third of total Congolese production and was the major source of local income, supplemented by subsistence production.⁷³ The speed of this caused serious social disruptions – disputes over rights to and loss of land and friction due to the influx of migrant labor – periodically erupting in millennial movements and uprisings.⁷⁴

Organized nationalist resistance in the form of political parties emerged in the 1950s, the major cleavage along the lines of unitarism, articulated by Patrice Lumumba and the Mouvement National Congolais, and federalism, advocated by the moderate Joseph Kasavubu and the Alliance des Bakongo. The Parti Solidaire Africain (PSA) was formed in Leopoldville in February 1959 by people of the Kwilu and Kwango regions and eventually aligned with Lumumba. Led by Antoine Gizenga and Pierre Mulele, the PSA called for African socialism and emancipation “...in all domains,” and it somewhat hesitantly began organizing in rural areas in May 1959. Not surprisingly, PSA leaders were in contact with other radical African nationalists, like Sekou Touré of Guinea.⁷⁵

Impressed by Touré's mobilization of women, Antoine Gizenga recruited Andrée Blouin from Guinea to organize Congolese women. Blouin was born in the Central African Republic and later moved to Guinea, where she was influenced by Sekou Touré's ideas about political mobilization and organization. She transmitted these ideas from Guinea to the Congo.⁷⁶ Arriving in Leopoldville in spring 1960, by May Blouin had enrolled forty-five thousand women from the Kwilu, Kwango, and Kasai regions in the Mouvement Feminin de la Solidarité Africaine (MFSA), the women's adjunct of the PSA. While working in conjunction with the PSA, the MFSA aimed specifically at improving women's social welfare and protecting their rights vis-à-vis men. Its goals were:

To make all women, no matter what age, literate;
 To promote an understanding of health and hygiene;
 To combat alcoholism;
 To work for women's rights;
 To work for the protection of the abandoned woman and child;
 To work for the social progress of the African.

The PSA's organ, *Solidarité Africaine*, argued for an independent, feminist women's organization:

Independence, according to one woman from Leopoldville, is for men and not for women. The proof is that women are kept from public functions and from voting.... We hope that MFSA, founded by our sister Madame Andrée Blouin, will save us, and we confide our deepest worries to her.⁷⁷

This work was aborted soon after independence. By 1961 the coalition government headed by Patrice Lumumba and Joseph Kasabuvu, and including Gizenga and Mulele of the PSA, collapsed. This was followed by Mobutu Sese Seko's coup, Lumumba's assassination, and the exile of PSA leaders. The short lifespan of the PSA and MFSA might suggest that Blouin's work was not able to take root. Yet by 1964 popular disillusionment with formal independence fueled a series of rural rebellions throughout Zaire. In the Kwilu region, the return of Pierre Mulele inspired a carefully planned guerilla struggle conceived as a rural-based class struggle with women partisans. As Benoit Verhaegen points out, the position of women in the Kwilu uprising contrasted sharply with the subordinate roles to which they were relegated in other regions of Zaire, no doubt reflecting the residual influence of the MFSA.⁷⁸

Conclusion

This article has examined the impact of socioeconomic transformation on women's social roles and consciousness using comparative and contrasting examples of women's collective protests in several African societies. It has been concerned with identifying, firstly, the conditions under which female consciousness becomes politically activated through collective protests and, secondly, the potential of female consciousness to articulate with feminist consciousness.

Typically, women's protests, like peasant protests, are held to be defensive and backward-looking, informed by inherent ideologies based on folklore and tradition; the ability of such protests to link up with forward-looking movements is held to depend on their contact

with externally-derived ideologies. Of the cases examined in this article, the Kwilu example conforms most closely to this hypothesis, and it indicates that political organizations can promote new forms of consciousness, including feminism, with more than a transitory effect.

But this discussion of female consciousness and feminism in Africa indicates that the processes by which consciousness is transformed are varied and complex. Such changes may result not only from exposure to outside ideologies, but from rapid socioeconomic transformations that expose the contradiction between pre-existing belief systems and new conditions, as well as from collective behavior which, albeit unintentionally, confronts gender stereotypes. The Igbo, Kom, and Hausa cases point to the significance of differential socioeconomic conditions and their articulation with pre-existing gender roles in the development of political consciousness. Yet they also highlight the resilience of ideologies reflecting varied sexual divisions of labor, and the potential for cultural symbols and elements of pre-existing ideologies to be restructured and incorporated into new belief systems.

Female consciousness develops out of gender roles that accord women primary responsibility for nurturing. As such, it is a global phenomenon, despite regional and local variations. Because it seeks to maintain or restore pre-existing gender relations it is potentially conflictual with feminist movements seeking to reform or transform gender relations. But like all types of social consciousness, female consciousness and feminism are neither undifferentiated nor unchanging and can be constructed or deconstructed along different lines. Under certain conditions female consciousness and feminism can develop in an articulated manner with each other.

In contrast to the highly proletarianized West, in many regions of Africa the persistence of subsistence production where women have independent access to land means that the public and private spheres have never been fully separated. Those conditions give female consciousness in Africa a particular intensity, facilitating collective female solidarity across class lines, as the Igbo/Ibibio and Kom cases illustrate. They also allow for women's withdrawal in the face of state indifference or antipathy to their social needs.

Where capitalist development articulates with pre-existing gender roles in a manner enabling women to envision new roles and opportunities, feminism develops in response to these new conditions in an articu-

lated manner with female consciousness. Thus, participants in the Igbo/Ibibio Women's War drew on the dual-sex political tradition, seeking political representation as women and equal economic opportunities with men. By contrast, where capitalism's articulation with pre-existing gender roles denies women new opportunities and prevents them from envisioning alternative social roles, as in the Kom case, female consciousness remains high and is, accordingly, susceptible to mobilization by nationalist movements claiming to defend an endangered community.

Women's protests in societies where women have public roles and organizations and where female consciousness is buttressed by access to land contrast sharply with those with a rigid sexual division of labor and where women lack independent access to any means of production, like the Hausa. In such conditions, if the Hausa case is indicative, not only does female consciousness lack the material base to propel women as a gender into collective peasant-based or cross-class resistance, it is accompanied by women's atomization through the sharp separation of public and private. But the absence of female consciousness-based collective protests does not preclude the possibility of other types of women's collective protests. Instead, collective protests appear as women are incorporated into socialized production as wage laborers. These protests do not arise from any perceived threat to women's nurturing roles but from their perception of unequal working conditions. In the Hausa case, international capital's use of women as cheap labor articulated with indigenous gender roles and precluded the development of a feminist consciousness. Hence, the strikers' frame of reference was inequality with other women, rather than with male workers.

A central thread of this argument has been the inadequacy of simple dichotomies when faced with complex social realities. At one level, the case studies indicate that female consciousness and feminism cannot be fully understood as polarized ideal-types but should be viewed as historically evolving and interpenetrating types of consciousness. More abstractly, they suggest that a simple contrast between inherent and derived ideologies offers an inadequate guide to understanding evolutions or ruptures in consciousness. Finally, the article challenges the implicit dichotomy between strategies of withdrawal and those of confrontation that underpins much recent literature.

Acknowledgments

An earlier version of this article was published in *Manchester Papers in Politics*, March 1992, and an abridged version was presented at the *Women, Colonialism and Commonwealth Postgraduate Seminar*, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London, December 1993. I wish to thank David Howell and three anonymous readers for their comments.

Notes

1. See, *inter alia*, Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, editors, *Woman, Culture and Society* (Stanford: CA: Stanford University Press, 1974); Shirley Ardener, editor, *Perceiving Women* (New York: John Wiley, 1975); Patricia Caplan and Janet M. Bujra, editors, *Women United, Women Divided: Comparative Studies of Ten Contemporary Cultures* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1979); Nancy J. Hafkin and Edna G. Bay, editors, *Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976).
2. Jane L. Parpart and Kathleen Staudt, "Women and the state in Africa," in Jane L. Parpart and Kathleen Staudt, editors, *Women and the State in Africa* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner, 1989), 1–19, point out that women have limited access to and leverage in male-dominated state structures and political institutions; thus, they act as an "uncaptured peasantry" and maintain their autonomy by avoiding state authority and participating in the unofficial economic sector. See, *inter alia*, Robert Fatton, Jr. "Gender, class and state in Africa," in Parpart and Staudt, editors, *Women and the State in Africa*, 47–66; Claire Robertson and Iris Berger, editors, *Women and Class in Africa* (New York: Africana, 1986); Sharon B. Stichter and Jane L. Parpart, "Introduction: Towards a materialist perspective on African women," in Sharon B. Stichter and Jane L. Parpart, editors, *Patriarchy and Class: African Women in the Home and the Workforce* (Boulder: Westview, 1988); Kathleen Staudt, "The state and gender in colonial Africa," in Sue Ellen M. Charlton, Jana Everett, and Kathleen Staudt, editors, *Women, the State and Development* (Albany: State University of New York, 1989), 66–85.
3. Janet Bujra, "'Urging women to redouble their efforts....' Class, gender and capitalist transformation in Africa," in Robertson and Berger, editors, *Women and Class*, 117–140; Shireen Hassim, "Gender, social location and feminist politics in South Africa," *Transformation* 15 (1991): 65–71. See Florence Abena Dolphyne, *The Emancipation of Women: An African Perspective* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1991) for a contrasting view of women's organizations.
4. Bujra, "Urging women," 121–122; Ester Boserup, *Woman's Role in Economic Development* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970), 190.
5. *African Development Indicators* (New York: United Nations Development Programme and Washington, DC: World Bank, 1992), 282–286. Statistics for Africa are often incomplete and definitions of economic categories may vary from one country to another. There are slight variations between published sources.
6. *African Socio-Economic Indicators, 1990/91* (Addis Ababa: United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 1991), 12–15; see also *African Development Report 1993* (Abidjan: African Development Bank) A44–A46.

7. Bujra, "Urging women," 137–138.
8. Cf. James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University, 1985), 29.
9. Annie M. D. Lebeuf, "The role of women in the political organization of African societies," in Denise Paulme, editor, *Women of Tropical Africa* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1971), 93–119.
10. See, *inter alia*, Ifi Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands* (London: Zed, 1987); Hassim, "Gender, social location and feminist politics."
11. In this article, I am specifically concerned with what Marx calls consciousness **for itself**, that is, activated forms of female and feminist consciousness that posit some connection between social conditions and social relations and that use political activity to influence or change these conditions. Methodologically, I infer the existence of particular types of consciousness – female and feminist consciousness – by reference to established gender relations and structures, religious and other customary practices and collectively voiced demands. I argue that changes in consciousness can be seen in response to changed gender relations and structures and are indicated by changes in customary practices and in new collective demands. My concern with the relationship between the gendered impact of capitalist development and women's collective protests is similar to that of Louise A. Tilly, "Paths of proletarianization: Organization of production, sexual division of labor, and women's collective action," *Signs* 7/2 (1981): 400–417. Unlike Tilly, I examine consciousness as a mediating factor between material conditions and protests. My concern with specific forms of activated consciousness differs from the more generalized usage of consciousness as individual awareness of their daily activities and social conditions or consciousness **in itself**. That more generalized type of consciousness is the focus of the study by Belinda Bozzoli with Mmantho Nkotsoe, *Women of Phokeng* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann and London: James Currey, 1991). Bozzoli argues, pp. 3–7, that structures and concepts obscure or distort consciousness but that detailing women's daily activities and their perceptions of those activities allow us to understand their "hidden" consciousness. Nonetheless, Bozzoli does not explain the economic or ideological purposes of the sexual division of labor she describes, pp. 44 ff., either in her own terms or those of her informants, nor does she offer an explanation of changes in consciousness. Thus, the women's "hidden" consciousness remains elusive.
12. A significant literature exists on these two protests, especially the 1929 Women's War. For background on the Women's War see, *inter alia*, Sylvia Leith-Ross, *African Women* (London: Faber and Faber, 1939); M. M. Green, *Igbo Village Affairs* (London: Frank Cass, 1964); V. C. Onwuteaka, "The Aba Riot of 1929 and its relation to the system of 'Indirect Rule'," *Nigerian Journal of Economic and Social Studies* 7 (1965): 273–282; H. Gailey, *The Road to Aba* (London: University of London, 1971); Judith Van Allen, "'Aba Riots' or Igbo 'Women's War'? Ideology, stratification, and the invisibility of women," in Hafkin and Bay, editors, *Women in Africa*, 59–86; and Caroline Ifeka-Moller, "Female militancy and colonial revolt: The Women's War of 1929, Eastern Nigeria," in Ardener, editor, *Perceiving Women*, 127–157. Buchi Emecheta, *Slave Girl* (London: Allison and Busby, 1977) offers a very realistic fictional account. On the 1958 *Anlu* see Robert Ritzenthaler, "Anlu: A Woman's uprising in the British Cameroons," *African Studies* 19/3 (1960): 151–156; Francis Nkwain, "Some reflections on the 'Anlu' organised by the Kom women in 1958," (unpublished manuscript, British Library of Political and Economic Science, London School of Economics and Political Science, 1975);

- Shirley Ardener, "Sexual insult and female militancy," in Ardener, editor, *Perceiving Women*; and Eugenia Shanklin, "Anlu remembered: The Kom women's rebellion of 1958–61," *Dialectical Anthropology* 15/2–3 (1990): 159–181.
13. In contrast to the above cases, literature on these two cases is limited. Accounts of the Kwilu case are found in Benoit Verhaegen, *Rebellions au Congo*, Tome I (Bruxelles: CRISP, 1966); Herbert F. Weiss, *Political Protest in the Congo* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1967); Allison Drew, "Andrée Blouin and pan-African nationalism in Guinea and the Congo," in Robert A. Hill, editor, *Pan-African Biography* (Los Angeles: UCLA African Studies Center and Crossroads Press, 1987), 209–217. On the Hausa strike see Sam Jackson, "Hausa women on strike," *Review of African Political Economy* 13 (May–August 1978): 21–36.
 14. Eric Wolf, one of the most influential theorists of peasant movements, does not consider the possible salience of gender in peasant societies. He mentions five peasant production systems, including sectorial fallowing systems, which use the hoe or digging stick and are common in African female farming regions, but states that he does not discuss this type because of its apparently restricted influence. See Wolf, *Peasants* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966), 20–21; cf. Hermann Baumann, "The division of work according to sex in African hoe culture," *Africa* 13 (July 1928): 291–319.
 15. F. Edholm, O. Harris, and K. Young, "Conceptualising women," *Critique of Anthropology* 3/9–10 (1977): 101–130; Boserup, *Woman's Role*, 15–16; Karen Sacks, *Sisters and Wives: The Past and Future of Sexual Equality* (Westport, CT and London: Greenwood, 1979), 65–95; Simi Afonja, "Changing modes of production and the sexual division of labor among the Yoruba," *Signs* 7/2 (Winter 1981): 299–313.
 16. Cf. Wolf, *Peasants*, 3–4 on a definition of peasantry. On diverse forms of peasantries see Martin A. Klein, editor, *Peasants in Africa: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Beverly Hills and London: Sage, 1980), 9–10 and Alan Isaacman, "Peasants and rural social protest in Africa," *African Studies Review* 33/2 (September 1990): 1–120, 1–2.
 17. Rodney Hilton, "Introduction," in Rodney Hilton, editor, *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1978), 9–30, 14–16; Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume I (New York: International, 1967), 717–723.
 18. Wolf and Lenin emphasize these two seemingly irreconcilable tendencies: Wolf stresses the peasantry's endurance, and Lenin, its tendency to fragment into other classes. See Eric R. Wolf "On peasant rebellions," *Peasants and Peasant Societies* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 367–374; V. I. Lenin, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* (Moscow: Progress, 1974); Tom Brass, "Moral economists, subalterns, new social movements, and the (re-)emergence of a (post-)modernised (middle) peasant," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 18/2 (January 1991): 173–205, 174–175.
 19. James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven and London: Yale University, 1976), 10–11.
 20. Bujra, "Introductory: Female solidarity," 39; Jackson, "Hausa women," 25–31.
 21. Belinda Bozzoli, "Marxism, feminism and South African studies," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 9/2 (April 1983): 139–171, 147–148, emphasis in original.
 22. Wolf, *Peasants*, 61; Anthony Oberschall, *Social Conflict and Social Movements* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973), 198; Jackson, "Hausa women," 25–31.

23. Bujra, "Introductory: Female solidarity," 35; Boserup, *Woman's Role*, 15–16.
24. Temma Kaplan, "Female consciousness and collective action: The case of Barcelona," *Signs* 7/3 (Spring 1982): 545–566; Temma Kaplan, *Red City, Blue Period: Social Movements in Picasso's Barcelona* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford: University of California, 1992), 106–125.
25. Scott, *Moral Economy*, 165–192.
26. George Rudé, *Ideology and Popular Protest* (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 7–10, 28–35; cf. Scott, *Moral Economy*, 10–11.
27. Shireen Hassim, "Conservative politics and the construction of gender in South Africa," (McGill University Centre for Developing-Area Studies Discussion Paper no. 67, August 1991).
28. Kaplan, "Female consciousness," 545–547; Kaplan, *Red City*, 124–125. Similarly, during the 1984–85 British miners' strike, miners' wives justified their support activities in terms of the need to defend their husbands and sustain their families. Yet their own militancy frequently challenged existing gender roles, with long-term consequences for gender relations in mining communities. Personal communication from David Howell.
29. Bujra, "Introductory: Female solidarity;" Wolf, "On peasant rebellions," 371–372.
30. Karen Offen, "Defining feminism: A comparative historical approach," *Signs* 14/1 (Autumn 1988): 119–157, esp. 141–142, 152; Bujra, "Introductory: Female solidarity," 26–27; Sheila Rowbotham, *Women's Consciousness, Man's World* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 118–119; Stichter and Parpart, "Introduction: Towards a materialist perspective," 7; Marx, *Capital*, 459–480, esp. 461–462, 473.
31. Offen, "Defining feminism," 155–156.
32. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo, "Woman, culture and society: A theoretical overview," in Rosaldo and Lamphere, editors, *Woman, Culture and Society*, 17–42, 40–42.
33. Boserup, *Woman's role*, 16–35.
34. Sacks, *Sisters and Wives*, 72; Phillis Kaberry, *Women of the Grassfields* (London: HMSO, 1952), 150–151.
35. Lebeuf, "The role of women," 97–104; Sacks, *Sisters and Wives*, 81, 214–219; Kaberry, *Women of the Grassfields*, 151–152.
36. Elsabe Brink, "Man-made women: Gender, class and the ideology of the *volksmoeder*," in Cheryl Walker, editor, *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945* (Cape Town: David Philip and London: James Currey, 1990), 273–292; cf. Bozzoli, *Women of Phokeng*, 182.
37. Hassim, "Gender, social location and feminist politics." The relatively large proportion of women elected to South Africa's first democratic Parliament – approximately 24 percent – may well influence popular perceptions about women's political role.
38. Shanklin, "*Anlu* remembered," 168; Nkwain, "Some reflections," 2, 6; Ifeka-Moller, "Female militancy," 132–133.
39. Shanklin, "*Anlu* remembered," 159; Nkwain, "Some reflections," 2; Ardener, "Sexual insult," 40–42; Sacks, *Sisters and Wives*, 81–82; Susan E. Diduk, "Women's agricultural production and political action in the Northwest province of Cameroon," (Twenty-Seventh Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association, Los Angeles, October 1984), paper 84: 29.
40. Nkwain, "Some reflections," 8. See James Scott, "Protest and profanity: Agrarian revolt and the little tradition," *Theory and Society* 4 (1977): 1–38, esp. 29–33 and Ardener, "Sexual insult," 42–49 on the symbolic use of profanity in protests of peasants or subordinate groups.

41. Van Allen, "'Aba Riots,'" 62, 74; Shanklin, "Anlu remembered;" Ifeka-Moller, "Female militancy," 134; Bujra, "Introductory: Female solidarity," 36, 43, n.9 & 10.
42. Green, *Igbo Village Affairs*, 170–177.
43. S. N. Nwabara, *Iboland: A Century of Contact with Britain, 1860–1960* (London: Hodden and Stoughton, 1977), 23, 26; Kamene Okonjo, "The dual-sex political system in operation: Igbo women and community politics in Midwestern Nigeria," in Hafkin and Bay, editors, *Women in Africa*, 45–59.
44. Green, *Igbo Village Affairs*, 169, 178–232; Ifeka-Moller, "Female militancy," 134. Amadiume, *Male Daughters*, 27–68, discusses the flexible gender system in the Igbo town of Nobi; Sacks, *Sisters and Wives*, 77–79, notes similar practices in the Igbo town of Onitsha and in other African societies.
45. Van Allen, "'Aba Riots,'" 61–62; Ifeka-Moller, "Female militancy," 133; D. Amaury Talbot, *Woman's Mysteries of a Primitive People* (London: Cassell, 1915), 189–190.
46. Mwabara, *Iboland*, 38. Amadiume, *Male Daughters*, 31–35.
47. Both quotes from Amadiume, *Male Daughters*, 79; Sacks, *Sisters and Wives*, 226.
48. Ifeka-Moller, "Female militancy," 136, 139; Green, *Igbo Village Affairs*, 172, 187; Amadiume, *Male Daughters* 64, 72–79.
49. Nwabara, *Iboland*, 20–22.
50. Leith Mullings, "Women and economic change in Africa," in Hafkin and Bay, editors, *Women in Africa*, 239–264, 247–250; A. G. Hopkins, *Economic History of West Africa* (London: Longman, 1973), 143, 205, 252; Ifeka-Moller, "Female militancy," 136–140; Emecheta, *Slave Girl*, 76–77, 118, 141, 161.
51. Philip Terdoo Ahire, *Imperial Policing: The Emergence and Role of the Police in Colonial Nigeria 1860–1960* (Milton Keynes and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1991).
52. Ifeka-Moller, "Female militancy," 141; Amadiume, *Male Daughters*, 119–143.
53. Leith-Ross, *African Women*, 22; Ifeka-Moller, "Female militancy," 141.
54. Leith-Ross, *African Women*, 22–39; Gailey, *Road to Aba*, 92–95; Ifeka-Moller, "Female militancy," 151 n. 42, 155 n. 68; Van Allen, "'Aba Riots,'" 60–61; Amadiume, *Male Daughters*, 60–61.
55. Leith-Ross, *African Women*, 38; Ifeka-Moller, "Female militancy," 141–143.
56. Ifeka-Moller, "Female militancy," 135–141; Amadiume, *Male Daughters*, 154–159, 183.
57. This differentiation of economic and political sources of oppression shows more sophistication than, for instance, the Luddites' destruction of the machinery that put them out of work and lacked a conscious political content. See E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1968), 249–252.
58. Mark W. DeLancy, *Cameroon: Dependence and Independence* (Boulder and San Francisco: Westview; London: Dartmouth, 1989), 33–43. The male franchise was introduced in 1955; women got the vote in January 1959.
59. Ritzenthaler, "Anlu," 153; Shanklin, "Anlu Remembered," 161, 164–5.
60. Kaberry, *Women of the Grassfields*, 34, 150–151.
61. Kaberry, *Women of the grassfields*, 148; C. K. Meek, *Land Tenure and Administration in Nigeria and the Cameroons* (London: HMSO, 1957), 388–389.
62. Meek, *Land Tenure*, 360; Boserup, *Woman's Role*, 53–57.
63. Nkwain, "Some reflections," 14–15.
64. Ritzenthaler, "Anlu," 154.
65. Nkwain, "Some reflections," 16–17.

66. Ritzenthaler, "Anlu," 155; Shanklin, "Anlu Remembered," 160, 174–175.
67. Nkwain, "Some reflections," 20–21.
68. Van Allen, "'Aba Riots,'" 82–85; Amadiume, *Male Daughters*, 119–161.
69. Ritzenthaler, "Anlu," 151; Nkwain, "Some reflections," 15; Shanklin, "Anlu remembered," 174–175; cf. Scott, *Moral Economy*, 219–225.
70. Jackson, "Hausa women," 25–31; Polly Hill, *Rural Hausa: A Village and a Setting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1972), 24–25, 193, 334–335.
71. Beverly B. Mack, "Harem domesticity in Kano, Nigeria," in Karen Tranberg Hansen, editor, *African Encounters with Domesticity* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University, 1992), 75–97, 76–79; Barbara Calloway, *Muslim Hausa Women in Nigeria* (Syracuse: Syracuse University, 1987), 3–6, 11–20, 187–206.
72. Jackson, "Hausa women," 22.
73. There are no readily available data on the Kwilu sexual division of labor: females probably played a substantial role in subsistence production; by the 1970s statistics indicate a significant differential in male and female income in nearby rural areas. See Crawford Young and Thomas Turner, *The Rise and Decline of the Zairian State* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1985), 97.
74. Weiss, *Political Protest*, 186–187.
75. Young and Turner, *Rise and Decline*, 40–41; Renée Fox, Willy De Craemer, and Jean-Marie Ribeaucourt, "La deuxième indépendance: étude d'un cas: la rébellion au Kwilu," *Études Congolaises* 1 (Janvier-Février 1965): 1–35, 9; Weiss, *Political Protest*, 192 ff.
76. Margarita Dobert, "Liberation and the women of Guinea," *Africa Report* 15/7 (1970): 26–28; Weiss, *Political Protest*, 178; Drew, "Andrée Blouin," 209–212.
77. "A woman's voice," *Solidarité Africaine* [Kinshasa] 14, May (1960): 3; translated from the French.
78. Fox, "La deuxième indépendance," 19–24; Young and Turner, *Rise and Decline*, 103–104; Verhaegen, *Rebellions au Congo*, 109.