Mamas of Invention:
Popular Education, Gender and Development among
Women's Organizations in Kenya

A dissertation presented to
the faculty of
The Patton College of Education
of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Catherine D. Cutcher

May 2013

© 2013 Catherine D. Cutcher. All Rights Reserved.
This dissertation titled

Mamas of Invention:

Popular Education, Gender and Development among

Women's Organizations in Kenya

by

CATHERINE D. CUTCHER

has been approved for

the Department of Educational Studies

and The Patton College of Education by

Francis E. Godwyll

Associate Professor of Educational Studies

Renée A. Middleton

Dean, The Patton College of Education
Abstract

CUTCHER, CATHERINE D., Ph.D., May 2013, Cultural Studies

Mamas of Invention: Popular Education, Gender and Development among Women's Organizations in Kenya

Director of Dissertation: Francis E. Godwyll

The purpose of this research was to analyze popular education and leadership development among grassroots women’s organizations in Kenya. This study was based on ethnographic research among women’s organizations in the Nairobi, Taita and Lamu Districts of Kenya from 2007 to 2008. Data were collected through participant observation, focus groups, individual interviews, and document analysis (Cutcher, 2009).

Popular education is a field of growing concern among educators, activists, and others who call for non-formal education in the absence of effective schools. The formal education of women and girls has been neglected in Kenya and throughout Africa due to cultural, political, and economic barriers. Tensions have arisen between indigenous, Islamic, colonial, and contemporary educational systems. The Government of Kenya reports a 60% illiteracy rate among adult women. To respond to challenges facing their communities, Kenyan women must be educated and empowered to take action. Women’s organizations are uniquely placed to deliver popular education services.

This project analyzes how women’s organizations preserve indigenous knowledge systems and work to educate rural and urban populations. A review of the literature provides an overview of Kenyan women’s studies and the theoretical and practical concerns of popular education pedagogy. The study analyzes how differences of
economy, environment and culture affect how women organize in Nairobi and the Coast Province of Kenya. The study describes how women’s groups educate and organize their members to address both practical needs and strategic interests of women, their families and their communities. These projects include: economic development (including business and finance); literacy; agriculture, environment and sustainability; arts and culture; health; religion and spirituality; politics, law and civic education; and peace, justice and non-violence. Finally, the study analyzes how women’s organizations practice the eight core principles of feminist popular education (Walters & Manicom, 1996 & 2012) including: start from where women are; experience and expertise; silence and voice; empowerment; difference; facilitation and control; gender awareness and feminist politics; and space, time and place for learning. Women’s organizations build capacity in communities by raising the consciousness of ordinary citizens and enhancing their skills in problem-solving and collective action. By observing their processes of popular education, I analyzed the contributions of women’s groups to social, political, economic, and environmental change in Kenya.

This project was supported with funding from the Fulbright U.S. Student Fellowship Program, the American Association of University Women (AAUW) American Dissertation Fellowships Program and the Ohio University College of Education.
Dedication

“Work is Love Made Visible.”

-- Kahlil Gibran, The Prophet

For Mother Earth and all Mamas

who nurture life,

build community,

and educate themselves and others

And for Joe and Amani Rain

who made me a Mama
Acknowledgments

I would like to sincerely thank my professors and advisors at Ohio University. My advisor and committee chair, Dr. Francis Godwyll, provided unwavering support, faith, patience and encouragement. I also would like to thank the faculty of Cultural Studies in Education, including Dr. Godwyll, Dr. Jaylynne Hutchinson, Dr. Najee Muhammad and Dr. Rosalie Romano who also served as my advisors and professors throughout my course work. I also thank my doctoral dissertation committee, including Dr. Godwyll, Dr. Hutchinson, Dr. Risa Whitson and Dr. Elizabeth Edna Wangu. These four individuals have been incredible teachers, mentors, guides and friends at every step of the way. I am also grateful to Dr. Lisa Aubrey for her participation in my comprehensive exam and proposal committees, and her diligent mentoring, teaching, leadership, friendship and assistance in connecting me with her colleagues in Kenya. Dr. Adah Ward-Randolph, Dr. Steve Rubenstein, Dr. Diane Ciekawy, Dr. Katama Mkangi, Dr. Tom Wolf, and Dr. Kiran Cunningham taught me the art and science of qualitative research and ethnography. I am also grateful to Dr. Renee Middleton, Dean of the College of Education, for the enthusiasm and pride that she has expressed for my work. Thanks also to Dr. Aimee Howley, Associate Dean for Research in the College of Education, and Dr. Gordon Brooks, Chair of the Department of Educational Studies, for their support and assistance.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the assistance and support of many people. A full account of acknowledgments is listed in the Appendices.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Introduction</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Statement</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delimitations of the Study</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization of the Study</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Literature Review</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global Feminisms</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African Women’s Movements</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Wanjiku” and “The Woman Question”</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motherhood and “Maternal Thinking”</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Relations in Indigenous African Societies</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenyan Women’s Studies: A History of the Women’s Movement in Kenya</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonialism and the Struggle for Independence</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organization (MYW)</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in the Struggle for Independence</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Organizations in Independent Kenya</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The 1980s: Structural Adjustment Programs and Harambee</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemporary Women’s Organizations in Kenya</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Organizations and Democratization in Kenya</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Gender Inequality in Education in Kenya: The Gap Between Policy and Practice .......................... 95
Popular Education Pedagogy: Theory and Practice ..................................................................... 103
Feminist Popular Education ........................................................................................................ 115
Popular Education and Women’s Groups in Kenya ................................................................. 118
Chapter 3: Methodology .............................................................................................................. 134
Introduction ................................................................................................................................. 134
Research Design .......................................................................................................................... 136
Site Selection ............................................................................................................................... 137
Selection of Research Participants ............................................................................................ 140
Instruments of Data Collection ................................................................................................... 147
Methods of Data Collection ......................................................................................................... 151
Data Analysis ............................................................................................................................... 154
Methodological Approaches ......................................................................................................... 159
Critical Feminist Ethnography .................................................................................................... 160
Participatory Action Research (PAR) .......................................................................................... 164
Appreciative Inquiry (AI) ............................................................................................................. 170
Limitations of the Study ................................................................................................................ 174
Validity and Credibility ................................................................................................................ 174
Verification .................................................................................................................................... 175
Inquiry Community ....................................................................................................................... 176
Positionality .................................................................................................................................... 177
Critical Subjectivity and Cultural Relativism ................................................................................. 180
Voice ................................................................................................................................................ 183
Language ......................................................................................................................................... 184
Assumptions .................................................................................................................................... 185
Reciprocity ....................................................................................................................................... 186
Self As Researcher .......................................................................................................................... 188
Ethical Considerations and Further Questions ............................................................................. 198
Chapter 4: Geography and Context of Women’s Groups in Kenya ............................................. 206
The Kenyan Context: Trade, Immigration, and Globalization ..................................................... 210
Site Descriptions ........................................................................................................................... 214
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nairobi</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Organizations in Nairobi</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taita</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Organizations in Taita</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lamu</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Organizations in Lamu</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Differences and the Geography of Women’s Organizations</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5: Holistic Education: Practical Needs and Strategic Interests</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Development</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, Environment and Sustainability</td>
<td>271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts and Culture</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion and Spirituality</td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics, Law and Civic Education</td>
<td>294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace, Justice and Non-violence</td>
<td>302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6: The Eight Principles of Feminist Popular Education</td>
<td>308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start From Where Women Are</td>
<td>310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience and Expertise</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silence and Voice</td>
<td>337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>349</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitation and Control</td>
<td>364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Awareness and Feminist Politics</td>
<td>373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space, Time and Place for Learning</td>
<td>383</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 7: Conclusion</td>
<td>393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of the Study</td>
<td>393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Findings</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings Related to the Literature</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surprises</td>
<td>410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Action</td>
<td>419</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Further Research</td>
<td>422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concluding Remarks</td>
<td>433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A: Full Acknowledgments</td>
<td>465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B: Acronyms</td>
<td>476</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C: IRB Consent Form</td>
<td>478</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D: Questions for Individual Interviews (Kiswahili Version)</td>
<td>481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix E: Questions for Individual Interviews (English Version)</td>
<td>484</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix F: Questions for Focus Group Interviews (Kiswahili Version)</td>
<td>487</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix G: Questions for Focus Group Interviews (English Version)</td>
<td>489</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix H: Survey Instrument for Household Interviews</td>
<td>491</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix I: Sources of Data</td>
<td>493</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables

Page

Table 1: Estimated Population of *Maendeleo Ya Wanawake* (MYW) Women’s Groups in Kenya ................................................................. 85
## List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1.</td>
<td>“The Principles of Paulo Freire” flower diagram</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.</td>
<td>Kiswahili brochure for International Literacy Day</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3.</td>
<td>English and Kiswahili pamphlets by the Dept. of Adult Education</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4.</td>
<td>Percentage of adults who never attended school in Kenya</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5.</td>
<td>Cover page of conference proceedings of the “Women’s Empowerment through Literacy” workshop</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6.</td>
<td>Cover page of the <em>Training Curriculum for Women Groups in Kenya</em></td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7.</td>
<td>Diagram of Core/Periphery relationships between Kenyan research sites</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8.</td>
<td>Physical map of Kenya</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 9.</td>
<td>Map of Nairobi, Kenya</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 10.</td>
<td>Map of Taita District in Kenya</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 11.</td>
<td>Members of the Mwakitutu Women’s Group weaving <em>vidasi</em> baskets</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 12.</td>
<td>Co-wives and members of the Mwakitutu Women’s Group with the water tank they built at their farm in 1994</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 13.</td>
<td>Map of Lamu District of Kenya</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 14.</td>
<td>Lamu District Map with Administrative Boundaries</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 15.</td>
<td>Map of Lamu Town</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 16.</td>
<td>Maulidi celebration in the <em>Mkunguni</em> (town square) of Lamu town</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 17.</td>
<td>Welcome sign at main jetty of Lamu Town</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 18.</td>
<td>Swahili Muslim women covered with the <em>hijab</em> or <em>mtandio</em> (headscarf) and the <em>niqab</em> or “<em>ninja</em>” (face veil). Maulidi celebration, Lamu Town</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 19. The eight core themes of holistic popular education

Figure 20. Members of the Boilwa Farmers’ Field School discussing their monthly “merry-go-round” contributions

Figure 21. Example of a typical “passbook” or accounting system used by “merry-go-rounds” and savings and credit cooperatives (SACCOs) in Kenya

Figure 22. Cartoons demonstrating challenges of women street vendors in Kenya

Figure 23. Cartoon depicting the challenges of street vendors’ limited access to basic facilities

Figure 24. Cartoon depicting a woman street vendor being chased by a City Council authority for vending in public without a permit

Figure 25. Cartoon depicting the gender inequities between male and female street vendors

Figure 26. Women’s Enterprise Fund (WEF) meeting with Donald Ndau, Social Development Officer for Mwatate Division

Figure 27. Cover art and cartoons from the book How to Run a Successful Akiba na Mkopo Group

Figure 28. Cartoons on conflict resolution from the book How to Run a Successful Akiba na Mkopo Group

Figure 29. Photo of Kenya Adult Learners’ Association (KALA) booth at the International Literacy Day Festival held at Nyayo Stadium in Nairobi, Kenya

Figure 30. Chemistry class at the Lamu Girls Secondary School

Figure 31. Sign outside of the office of the Lamu Education Development Foundation Trust Fund (LEDFT)

Figure 32. Women farmers working together with the Shomoto Women’s Group

Figure 33. Members of the Boilwa Farmers’ Field School discussing their “merry-go-round” contributions

Figure 34. Vidasi sisal baskets woven by the Mwakitutu Women’s Group
Figure 35. Women working at the Kazuri Beads Workshop in Nairobi, Kenya. ........278

Figure 36. Henna artist decorating my feet for Idd in Kashmir, a neighborhood in southern Lamu town.................................................................279

Figure 37. Women drumming and dancing at a Swahili Muslim wedding in Roka Village near Kilifi, Kenya.................................................................280

Figure 38. Lisper Nyambu demonstrating medicinal herbs used by midwives to prepare women for childbirth.................................................................284

Figure 39. APHIA II workshop for women and children. Lamu, Kenya.............286

Figure 40. Young girls hold placards protesting HIV/AIDS and perform a play at the APHIA II Coast workshop for women and girls.............................286

Figure 41. Rukiya Lali addresses a crowd at the APHIA II Coast workshop on HIV/AIDS. .........................................................................................293

Figure 42. Lamu women meeting in the Mkunguni (town square) after voting at the Lamu Fort on election day. .................................................................294

Figure 43. The eight core principles of Feminist Popular Education...................309

Figure 44. Jerusha Machocho Amoni (far left) weaving baskets with other members of the Mwakitutu Women’s Group...............................................434

Figure 45. The Last Will and Testament of Jerusha Machocho Amoni..............436
Chapter 1: Introduction

"If there is no struggle there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation Are men who want crops without plowing up the ground, They want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will."

(Douglass, 1857, p. 437).

Problem Statement

A common English proverb states: “Necessity is the mother of invention.” This dissertation describes the “Mamas of Invention” of Kenya, women who create innovative solutions in spite of incredible odds. Facing adversity, poverty and oppression, women in Kenya are able to solve difficult problems through ingenuity and cooperation. They have created an alternative education system based on the principles of popular education and empowerment. Making use of local resources and local knowledge, they work to revitalize their communities, restore the environment and empower themselves.

A wise man once told me, “A writer should write what they know.” As a white American woman from Columbus, Ohio, I seem an unlikely candidate to tell this story of women’s groups in Africa. But thanks to the opportunities of study abroad, the generosity of foundations to support international education, and the openness of Kenyan women, I now know this story. I am grateful that I have been able to break the bonds of global apartheid to cross the lines of race, class, nation, culture, language, and religion - and to retrieve this story on the other side. As Steve Biko of South Africa declared, “I
write what I like.” Writing is an act of resistance and protest - a way to amplify silenced voices, to speak truth to power, and to dismantle oppression.

I have been an international student, researcher, and volunteer in Kenya on and off from 1994 to 2008. I have deep interests in feminist ethnography, community-based education, and organizing in the U.S. and Africa. From 2007 to 2008 I engaged in ethnographic research with women’s organizations based in Nairobi and the Coast Province of Kenya. The purpose of this research was to understand the barriers to women’s and girls’ education and how women’s organizations provide alternative education in literacy, life skills, and human rights.

I was drawn to this study because I wanted to learn more about women’s movements in other parts of the world, and how they differ from the women’s movement in my own country. I identify as a “Third Wave” feminist activist and scholar of women’s and gender studies in the United States. My interests and priorities may be radically different than those of my sisters in other nations. Transnational feminist organizing is only possible when we understand the different contexts that women are working in, and we respect the issues that are most important to local women.

All across the African continent, a revolution is brewing. The greatest progressive movement in Africa is not found in an armed struggle, waged on battlefields by generals and soldiers or guerrilla fighters of a civil war. It is not found in the halls of power of corporate boardrooms or Parliament or international financial institutions or NGOs. The leaders of this revolution do not have offices or titles or hold diplomas from
prestigious universities. They are not even usually recognized as leaders (although sometimes they are honored with a Nobel Peace Prize).

This revolution can be found in the slow and steady wheels of a posho mill, grinding maize grains into ugali flour. It can be seen in the methodical plunging of a line of jembes slicing away at the soil to prepare the ground for planting. It can be felt in the leathery hands of a farmer, carefully setting a seedling in the earth. It can be heard in the triumphant ululations of a mama at her child’s or grandchild’s graduation. It is nourished when a baby suckles at her mother’s breast. It is upheld by a strong spine, carrying a bucket of water on the head from the river to home, or the arch of a back loaded with a bundle of firewood. It can be found when a woman who has just two shillings casts her lot into the collective pot at her monthly “merry-go-round” meeting, to share and to get support for small loans to finance a business. This African revolution is found everywhere that women gather – at the well, in the kitchen, on the shamba, in church, at the mosque, at madrassa, in the marketplace.

This is a revolution built on cooperation, not competition. It is a revolution of education – not in classrooms, but in the direct sharing of information and wisdom that happens among peers. It is not a hierarchy, and cannot be cleverly illustrated by a flow chart, but can only be conceived as a circle.

One of the most common things found in Africa today is the women’s group. They may not call themselves feminists. They may not demand gender equality. In fact, many African women prefer to distance themselves from Western feminists, who they see as untethered from their families and communities and struggling with social anomie,
sexual promiscuity, material consumption and spiritual bankruptcy. Transnational feminist organizing has breathed some life into the African women’s movement since Nairobi hosted the 1985 UN World Conference on Women. This work is definitely empowering, and based on the “feminist” ethics of exposure, emancipation from oppression and self-determination. Nevertheless, African women’s groups are grounded in their indigenous knowledge systems and local responses to social change. The women’s groups may not be coherently organized with a common goal or strategy or blueprint for change. In fact, one of the unique things about this social movement is the fact that they do not have a single leader or agenda.

Women’s groups address both the practical needs and strategic interests of women. They focus on social welfare – the business of feeding, nursing, birthing, growing, and sustaining life. They are concerned with issues like food, water, shelter, medical care, health and safety. They also assist with school fees for children, start-up funds for small businesses, transportation, and community development. They provide for this work through *harambee* fundraising efforts, “merry-go-rounds,” rotating loans, and microfinance or small enterprise funds.

Women’s groups also work to address the strategic interests of women. They challenge the patriarchal structure of society, from the most intimate spaces of families and village councils to local governments, religious institutions, schools, universities, courts, Parliament, and international agencies. Women’s groups have organized to challenge and change unjust laws and to influence the constitutional review process. They have worked for the passage of the Children’s Act, the Sexual Offenses Bill and the
new Constitution of Kenya. They meticulously organized meetings throughout Kenya to analyze and evaluate customary laws, national laws, and Qur’anic laws to synchronize them in line with the needs of contemporary Kenyan women. Women’s groups have also worked tirelessly on behalf of female candidates, to ensure that the next generation of leaders are “gender mainstreamed” to attain the goal of 30% female representation in the national Parliament and in local governments.

Women’s organizations are everywhere in Kenya, and they work on a variety of different issues and projects. The majority of women’s organizations are local, small groups known as chama, “merry-go-rounds” and vikundi vya akina mama (women’s groups). The majority of Kenyan women’s groups operate on local resources and indigenous knowledge.

Women in Kenya organize for various reasons. As half of the population, they represent different communities, classes, languages, religions and cultures. Women live in rural and urban areas, and cope with different environments and climates. Throughout the country, women and girls have faced discrimination, harassment, violence, hardship and poverty. They have also helped each other through hard times by teaching, working and acting for social change.

This is a revolution led by and for women, but it benefits the whole society. An African proverb states: “When you educate a man, you educate an individual. When you educate a woman, you educate a whole family, community, and nation.” Women’s groups gather together to teach and learn from each other. Regardless of women’s formal education, whether they are illiterate or have advanced degrees, women seek fellowship
and sisterhood with each other. When women gather together in small groups, they share skills, support each other, counsel, listen, share, and learn. This is a valuable form of community-based education or “popular education.”

Popular education is a growing field of study among organizers and educators interested in international development. This term was developed by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire and developed through informal adult education networks in Africa, Latin America and Asia over the past four decades. Popular education is a “pedagogy of the oppressed,” when an “unschooled” or dominated group gathers together to empower themselves and to learn the skills they need to survive and thrive.

The educational work addressed in this dissertation represents “feminist popular education” since it is based upon transforming gendered power relations and builds upon indigenous knowledge systems to produce deep social change. Feminist popular education is explicitly “embedded within social activism and democratic organizations of civil society working for material and substantive transformation of women’s lives and conditions” (Walters and Manicom, 1996, p.3). The essence of feminist popular education is for women to gather together and to analyze their problems, finding solutions for collective and individual action.

Women throughout the world are organizing for change and redefining their identities and their roles through social movements. Studying the process of popular education within social movements helps us to understand how change is produced for individuals, institutions, and the larger cultural and political context in which they are situated. Social movements and civil society organizations are rapidly growing
throughout the world, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), faith-based organizations (FBOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs). These groups are vital for achieving global development objectives and national democratization efforts.

Women’s organizations have been an important part of the growth of civil society in Africa. African women’s organizations have dramatically shifted the power structure and increased women’s influence in politics, law, and public decision-making. On a grassroots level, women’s organizations have been fundamental to economic development and providing alternative education in gender awareness, life skills, literacy, health, business, and human rights. The effectiveness of women in development depends upon building their capacity through education and raising awareness. The ability of local and grassroots groups to solve local problems must be enhanced.

This study addresses the nexus between gender, education, and development in Kenya. This dissertation explores how Kenyan women’s grassroots organizations build capacity in diverse communities by raising the consciousness of ordinary citizens to reflect upon and solve their own problems through collective action (Cutcher, 2009). Within a patriarchal and male-dominated culture, women’s organizations are exerting their power and influence on local, national and international scales. The women’s movement in Kenya is diverse, heterogeneous, omnipresent and works on both practical and strategic needs. Through building solidarity and influence, women’s organizations are increasing access to resources, education, opportunities and rights for Kenyan women and girls. This research offers a window into the Kenyan women’s movement, revealing some of the significant achievements and challenges of women in urban, semi-urban and
rural communities of Nairobi and the Coast Province. This study seeks to illuminate the strength and resilience of everyday Kenyan women working in grassroots organizations to promote social, economic, political, environmental and educational change.

This study takes root as the world awakens to the power of women and the realization that “women hold up half the sky.” A number of authors and activists have recently been raising awareness about the power of women’s groups to educate, employ and empower women and girls throughout the world. Nicholas Kristoff and Sheryl WuDunn won a Pulitzer Prize for covering this story for *The New York Times*. The Omega Institute organizes annual conferences on “Women, Power and Peace.” Eve Ensler’s *The Vagina Monologues* has been performed in dozens of countries and cities around the globe, raising awareness and funds to end violence against women. The international women’s movement has grown exponentially since the 1995 UN World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China. The Nobel Women’s Initiative has recently organized the International Campaign to Stop Rape and Gender Violence in Conflict in Kenya, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burma, Cambodia and other regions of conflict throughout the world. It seems that the whole world is watching this new revolution and evolution of women.

**Literature Review**

This study adds to a growing literature that documents education, gender and development initiatives, and the role of African women’s movements in civil society. Some scholars have written excellent country studies (Alidou, 2005; Britton, 2005;
Fallon, forthcoming; Hassim, 2006; Muller, 2005; Steady, 2006; Tamale, 1999), while others focused on regional studies of African feminisms and women’s movements (Buskens & Webb, 2009; Geisler, 2004; Maloba, 2007; Mikell, 1997; Oyewumi, 1997 & 2003; Romero, 1988; Tripp, Casimiro, Kwesiga & Mungwa, 2009).


Many previous studies documented the historical neglect of gender equity in education. Gender equity was neglected in Kenya and throughout Africa due to cultural,
political, and economic barriers (Chege & Sifuna, 2008; Eshiwani, 1993; Kiluva-Ndunda, 2001; King, 1996; Mule, 2008; Odaga & Henevald, 1995; Reagan, 2000; Rodney, 1972; Sifuna, 1990; Women’s Bureau, 1993 & 2003). Officially, Kenya promotes Education for All (EFA) through international and national policy frameworks (KNBS, 2007; KNHCR, 2005; MoEST, 2001; MOE, 2007; Muteshi, 2006). However, tensions have arisen between various educational systems - indigenous, Islamic, colonial, and contemporary education (Cutcher, 2009). Despite progressive educational policies, Kenya has experienced persistent educational gender inequities and high rates of illiteracy among women and girls (Center for Study of Adolescence; Kenya League of Women Voters; KNBS, 2007; Mule, 2008; Mwiria et al, 2007).

Much research and activism concerning gender equity in education in Kenya has focused on the formal education of girls and young women (Akili Dada, 2008; Chege & Sifuna, 2006; FAWE, 2003; Fuglesang, 1994; Kibera & Kimokoti, 2007; Mule, 2008; Muteshi, 2006). However, little attention has been paid to how adult women continue their education through women’s groups and civil society. Moreover, many studies of gender and education focused on quantitative indicators of academic success. Educational access and achievement are often determined by parity in enrollment statistics, standardized national examination scores, retention, and graduation rates. But qualitative variables were often overlooked, including the quality and equality of educational opportunities, resources, instruction, school climate, safety, and other issues affecting girls’ and women’s education. Qualitative studies reveal a deeper analysis of
what is and is not working in the educational system, and how alternative solutions are achieved.

To respond to challenges facing their communities, Kenyan women must be educated and empowered to take action (Cutcher, 2009). This study represents an account of the agency, activism, and educational functions of the Kenyan women’s movement. Women’s organizations work to educate urban and rural populations using multiple layers or strategies of education, including indigenous knowledge systems, religious Islamic and Christian education, secular and modern schools, and through civil society. By tapping into “local knowledge” and women’s skills and experiences, they engage in dialogue, problem-solving and collective action (Chambers, 1983, 1997 & 2003; Horton, in Jacobs, 2003; Freire, 1970; Walters & Manicom, 1996; Williams, McDermott & Bonham, 2007).

To begin this study, we must consider some basic philosophical and theoretical questions: What is education? How does education transform people’s lives? What is the role of education in social change? How does education relate to democracy? Today we increasingly discuss the role of education as a means of liberation, mobility, exposure, modernization, and change. However, education is also used in the service of oppression, colonization, religious extremism or chauvinism. Education can create new opportunities, but also hierarchies and divisions between those who are “schooled” and “unschooled.”

I believe that Kenyan women’s groups are contemporary examples of the popular educational approach of “conscientization” or “critical pedagogy” developed by Paulo
Freire (1972). Freire advocated for building adult literacy skills and empowerment among peasants in the 1960s in Brazil. Freire’s theory and praxis was adapted and spread throughout social movements in Latin America, Africa and Asia. While not as widely recognized in the English-speaking world, it “tracks discursively through transnational networks of community-based and popular educators, particularly those directly influenced by its long-standing and significant Latin American tradition” (Walters & Manicom, 2012, p. 6). Popular education also extends to the critical pedagogy movement in North America – which emphasizes a critique of schooling and cultural politics (Walters & Manicom, 1996, p. 10).

Popular education is a field of growing interest among educators, activists, community organizers, development professionals, and others who recognize the necessity of informal education in the absence of effective schools (Barndt, 1995; Berry, 1992; Chambers, 1983, 1997, & 2003; Dewey, 1916 & 1938; Freire, 1970; Green, 1999; hooks, 1994; Hope & Timmel, 1999; Horton, as cited in Jacobs, 2003; Nadeau, 1996; Olds, 2007; Walters & Manicom, 1996; West, 2004). Popular education is also referred to as “education for social change,” or by a variety of names including: “holistic,” “informal,” “non-formal,” “alternative,” “democratic,” “development,” “civic,” “experiential,” “progressive,” “lifelong” or “continuing” education. Peer education, leadership development, empowerment, and community organizing characterize popular education. There are many forms of education that occur outside of schools, in community-based organizations, in the home, through media and popular culture. Freire referred to this as the “pedagogy of the oppressed” – a process where individuals come to
see what stands between them and becoming “fully human; that is, unexploited and whole” (Pritchard-Hughes, in Walters & Manicom, 1996, p. 103). As Freire (1972) noted: “Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it” (p. 79).

In the age of globalization, it is important to note that Freire warned that his ideas about pedagogical practices could not be easily packaged and transferred across different cultural and political contexts. “His methodology and practices were not to be frozen and fetishized, but rather adapted and renewed in relation to the political and cultural contexts of practice” (Walters & Manicom, 2012, p. 8). Today’s development and education agencies have tended to focus on a few participatory methodologies and “gender training” or “community development” packages that act like “trademarked brands” and “institutionalized quick-fix” solutions (p. 7). Walters and Manicom warn that these established forms of “training” tend to become “mechanistic and formulaic, applied to – rather than translated in – the context” (p. 7). However, they warn that “what is significant is the very process and the possibilities created, rather than the products that must be yielded” (p. 8). Indeed, popular education is not a methodology to be blindly or prescriptively followed, but a creative process of participatory development and community engagement fraught with uncertainty and challenges.

In the 1980s, feminist popular education evolved as a critique of social movements that seemed to be male-biased and male-dominated in their approaches. Freire’s work and the critical pedagogy movement have been analyzed by “feminist
scholars who pointed to its universalist, masculinist, and rationalist assumptions”
(Walters & Manicom, 2012, p. 6). “Feminist popular education” is defined as:

A participatory, democratic, non-hierarchical pedagogy that encourages creative thinking and breaks through embedded formats of learning. It valorizes local knowledge, working collectively towards producing knowledge, the principle of starting from where people are situated, and working to develop a broader understanding of structures and how these can be transformed. (Walters & Manicom, 1996, p. 7)

Feminist popular education focuses on gender relations and the conditions of women’s lives. It engages with the politics of inclusion, and an awareness of the multiple ways that gender and other social categories influence women’s experiences of oppression. It simultaneously considers “the ways in which the social categories of race, ethnicity, age, social class, sexually and physical ability are implicated in constructions of gender” (Walters & Manicom, 1996, p. 7). Feminist popular education is a “liberatory model” (Maher, 1987) of feminist educational theory and pedagogy. Pritchard Hughes insists: “This model does not take as its starting point the notion that women have inherent qualities which mark them out as distinctive thinkers, but rather sees women as part of the oppressed who share a particular way of seeing the world and acting within it” (as cited in Walters & Manicom, 1996, p. 102). A core commitment of feminist popular education is to engage people in a struggle against gender oppression and a validation of local or indigenous knowledge systems, particularly the lives and concerns of women and girls.

Feminist popular education also contributes a great deal to the growing literature of critical theory in gender and development studies. Feminist theory privileges the politics of location and the specificity of context in the construction of knowledge.
Grewal and Kaplan (1994) assert that “bodies of ideas, concepts, and practices are necessarily translated, sometimes fragmented or refashioned, as they cross borders and are recontextualized and resignified in new spaces” (as cited in Walters & Manicom, 2012, p. 8). Walters and Manicom (2012) note:

Feminist popular education, with its express political commitment to addressing relations of dominance, its signature reflexivity, and sensitivity to different ways of apprehending the world, is an important space for contesting and refining the politics of solidarity. The intention of the pedagogy is to draw critical attention, in the context of safe, exploratory, learning spaces, to the relations and practices of power that (re)produce colonialist hierarchies and racialized identities of marginality and exclusion. (p. 9)

Moreover, feminist popular educators and transnational feminist scholars and activists share a politics of solidarity and an ethos of “working across difference” and negotiating power and privilege within organizations.

Feminist popular education theory thus provides an important foundation to analyze how the Kenyan women’s movement provides education to women and girls within the larger context of transnational feminist organizing. Many women share a lack of self-confidence and self-esteem from a history of poverty, patriarchy, and colonialism. They internalize their marginality and the low value accorded to women from the mainstream culture. Kenyan women’s groups engage people who have been excluded from formal educational systems, and develop their leadership skills through consciousness-raising and problem-solving rooted in their lived experiences and “local knowledge.” Through alternative pedagogies and multiple forms of expression, they reflect and act upon those structures that have kept them silent. Women build their social capital and improve their lives, families and communities through engaging in
Why is it important to view education and organizing in Kenya from a gender perspective? Because women and girls comprise more than half of the population in Kenya, yet statistics indicate that they are disproportionately affected by poverty, disease and illiteracy (KNBS, 2007; Muteshi, 2006; Nzomo, 1992, 1993, & 1997; Thomas-Slayter & Rocheleau, 1995). Females face many obstacles that inhibit their growth and stifle their full potential, including patriarchy, poverty, colonialism, racism, and global capitalism. Women have been excluded from formal education, employment, and participation in decision-making (Aubrey, 1997; Chege & Sifuna, 2006; FIDA Kenya, 2008; Nzomo, 1997).

Yet women are also leaders functioning in roles such as mothers, wives, farmers, businesspeople, community organizers, and stewards of the environment. Indeed, many Kenyan women are de facto heads of households and communities and have become leaders in spite of the many barriers to continuing their education. In their various capacities, women have developed leadership skills, combined resources, and worked together to uplift themselves, their families, and their communities. Women’s groups in Kenya have a long tradition and comprise a broad-based, grassroots, indigenous movement for education and social change (Brownhill, 2009; Gatimu, 2007; Halperin, 2005; Khasiani & Njio, 1993; Tripp, Casimiro, Kwesiga & Mungwa, 2009).

Women’s knowledge of education and organizing also comprises a form of “indigenous knowledge systems” (Chambers, 1983 & 1997; Ngugi, 1986; Thomas-Slayter and Rocheleau, 1995). Local knowledge and skills are resources that have been
preserved partly due to Kenyan women’s marginalization and independence from formal education and the state (Aubrey, 1997; Fuglesang, 1994; Gatimu, 2007; Halperin, 2005; Khasiani & Njiru, 1993; Mirza & Strobel, 1989; Muller, 2005; Presley, 1992; Tripp, Casimiro, Kwesiga & Mungwa, 2009).

I hope that this study may illuminate the popular educational practices and leadership development strategies used by women’s grassroots organizations, and how Kenyan women are involved in their own education and transformation. The education and empowerment of African women is a necessity in the twenty-first century. As Kenya and other African nations face the increasing challenges of poverty, indebtedness, trade imbalances, climate change, disease, and other problems, African people must be prepared to face these challenges. To ensure that all people have equal access to the knowledge that is necessary for their survival, women’s organizations are preserving indigenous cultures and knowledge systems for future generations. When women gain knowledge, this tends to benefit not only themselves, but also their children, extended families and communities.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to understand how women’s organizations provide services and education in diverse Kenyan communities. Another purpose of this study was to discover which practical and strategic issues are most important to local women in Kenya. A third purpose was to analyze how women’s organizations utilize the eight principles of popular education to engage learners in finding solutions to their problems.
Research Questions

This study aims to answer the following three research questions:

1. How do differences of economy, environment, and culture affect how women organize in Nairobi and the Coast Province of Kenya?

2. How do women organize and educate their members to address practical and strategic needs in Kenya?

3. How are the eight core principles of feminist popular education practiced by Kenyan women’s organizations?

Significance of the Study

This study seeks to fill a number of gaps in the existing knowledge about education, African women’s movements, and the link between popular education and community organizing for development and democratization. This study weaves together some disparate strands of thought that have been overlooked or disconnected in previous studies on these topics. This study will demonstrate the role of grassroots women’s organizations in providing alternative education to women in Kenya. This study reveals how Kenyan women create alternative systems of education that embrace both indigenous/traditional methods of education as well as contemporary concerns of democratization and globalization.

What do we know from previous studies of Kenyan women’s organizations? Although there is a good deal of research on this topic, the findings of these studies are limited by region and scope. For the most part, Kenyan women’s studies have focused on women based in the rural Central, Nyanza, Western, or Rift Valley Provinces of
Kenya, or in the urban centers of Nairobi, Kisumu and Mombasa. But little attention has been paid to grassroots women’s groups in marginalized areas of the country, particularly in the Coast and Northeastern Provinces. While this study is certainly not comprehensive, it expands the scope of analysis to the districts of Taita and Lamu in the Coast Province.

The literature on Kenyan women’s organizations tends to focus on well-known, large organizations, especially those that are supported by government or with international connections and funding. Moreover, these studies of Kenyan women’s organizations have demonstrated women’s involvement in party politics, independence movements, pro-democracy movements, elite and professional associations, self-help initiatives, and economic development. Few authors have focused specifically upon how grassroots women’s organizations educate Kenyan citizens through a participatory process of development, popular education, and social change.

This study seeks to fill multiple gaps in the literature. First, this study describes the activities of diverse women’s organizations based in Nairobi and the Taita and Lamu districts of Coast Province. This region is important to Kenya’s economy and culture, and yet women at the Coast have historically faced numerous barriers to education, employment, and leadership. These sites of Nairobi, Taita and Lamu represent the complex core/periphery relations between the bara (upcountry mainland) and pwani (coast) and between the capital city and the rural and semi-urban communities of the upper and lower Coast Province. Unlike most ethnographies - which tend to focus on one culture or community - this study includes diverse women of various ethnic and religious
communities of Kenya. Solidarity by gender and nationality is not always implicit, as not all women or Kenyans are the same. It is important to explore regional differences and inequalities within Kenya to understand the diversity of women’s experiences, which vary by culture, ethnicity, region, language, religion and environment.

This study also examines the heterogeneous forms and functions of grassroots women’s groups in different contexts. By applying the theoretical frameworks of popular education and indigenous knowledge systems, I demonstrate how women’s organizations work to educate and conscientize their members. Through capacity building and training programs, Kenyan women’s groups mobilize and empower women by developing their skills, confidence, and leadership for community organizing. Women’s organizations lead women to analyze and solve their own problems, addressing both practical and strategic needs. They organize projects in literacy, business, finance, civic education, health, environmental restoration, sustainable development, peace, and gender equality. By observing their processes of popular education, I analyze the contributions of women’s groups to social, political, economic, and environmental change in Kenya (Cutcher, 2009).

This research also seeks to focus attention on the agency of everyday women working for change. I am well aware that much of the dominant discourse in mainstream media, as well as Africanist and feminist literature, tends to project negative images of African women as downtrodden, oppressed, marginalized and violated “beasts of burden” (Aubrey, 1997; Mikell, 1997; Mohanty, 1991 & 2003; Narayan, 1997; Oyewumi, 1997 & 2003). Global feminist studies have paid little attention to African women’s roles as
leaders of their communities and agents of change. The reality on the ground is quite different, and I have been impressed throughout my research at the strength, resilience, intelligence, humor, and faith of Kenyan women – and the vibrancy of the Kenyan women’s movement. I hope to shift the focus of this study away from an analysis of Kenyan women’s problems to an “appreciative inquiry” of their assets and capacities for education, organizing, leadership and social change.

The results of this study will add to a growing literature concerning the role of women’s movements in promoting education, development, and democracy in postcolonial Africa. The findings of this study can help to develop educational policies and programs to provide greater access to education and empowerment for other African women and their families.

**Delimitations of the Study**

This study observes and describes the processes of community-based popular education in women’s groups in Kenya. From November 2007 through November 2008, I conducted ethnographic research in cooperation with diverse women’s groups in Kenya. The research was situated in urban, semi-urban, and rural communities in Nairobi and the Coast Province districts of Taita and Lamu.

Data were collected through participant observation, focus groups, individual interviews, and document analysis. The sample population of research participants included members and leaders of women’s organizations (including NGOs, CBOs, and FBOs), government officials, social workers, adult educators, schoolteachers, lawyers,
religious leaders, and others. The groups that I observed included organizations that were formally registered with the Department of Social Services or locally recognized as significant advocates for gender rights, development and education. Interviewees and research participants were identified through snowball and purposive sampling, and included any individual or group that agreed to being interviewed and observed.

**Definition of Terms**

In this section, I define many of the terms that I will use frequently throughout the text of this proposal. The purpose of providing these definitions is to be clear about my intentions and philosophical perspectives in using these terms. The following terms are defined: popular education; gender; development; women’s organizations; empowerment; indigenous knowledge systems; grassroots; practical needs; and strategic interests.

*Popular Education.* A participatory process that begins with people’s experience and moves toward collective action. Facilitators and peer educators guide groups through a collective process of reflection, dialogue, analysis and developing strategies for action (Williams, McDermott, & Bonham, 2007, p. 2). Popular education is a form of capacity-building that aims to change people’s own minds and perceptions about themselves. It builds upon people’s experience and self-confidence so they can become more actively engaged in social change.

*Gender* is a term referring to the social and cultural construction of identity based on perceived sex differences. Society identifies particular roles, stereotypes, behavior,
attitudes and attributes deemed appropriate for males and females. *Sex* refers to the physical, biological differences between people, usually assigned at birth as male and female – including internal and external anatomy, chromosomes, genitalia, hormones, and reproductive organs and functions. *Gender* refers to the expectations people have of someone because of their perceived status as male or female. Gender is also the performance of masculinity, femininity or transgender identities based on expression, status, roles, behaviors, personal styles and communication strategies. Aspects of biological sex may be similar in different cultures, but aspects of gender may differ in different places and times. Both sex and gender must be understood not as a binary opposition of male/female or masculine/feminine, but as a spectrum or continuum of human experience and expression.

*Development* is defined in this study as a model of human resource development that is people-centered and capacity-building. Development is a process, not just a product; development is not simply a means to an end. Human resource development includes systems of training, education and consciousness-raising within grassroots organizations. Education is essential for equity, empowerment, and sustainable development. I acknowledge that development is a hotly contested term that has come under increasing scrutiny by practitioners, activists and scholars. In this dissertation, I critique dominant models of development that focus explicitly on neoliberal capitalist economic growth. This type of development and economic restructuring has exacerbated poverty, increased social and economic inequalities, created huge burdens on women’s
labor, and led to the overconsumption of natural resources and environmental
degradation.

*Women’s Organizations.* These include non-governmental organizations
(NGOs), faith-based organizations (FBOs), and/or community-based organizations
(CBOs) that are created and led by, for, and on behalf of women and girls.

*Empowerment* is a prevalent term in both feminist and popular education
discourses. In the context of Kenyan women’s organizations, empowerment is defined
on a personal or individual basis through a process of building confidence and self-
esteeem and addressing women’s practical needs to improve the conditions of their lives.
From the perspective of organized social movements, empowerment refers to the
achievement of social and political objectives or strategic interests. In the context of
women’s oppression, it is essential for women to develop their own voices, to have a say,
to gain the skills and resources necessary to support themselves and their families. The
process of empowerment is born through complex interactions between the individual
and the collective, and between local, national, and transnational organizing.

*Indigenous Knowledge Systems* is a phrase referring to knowledge that is locally-
constructed, place-based, and grounded in indigenous cultural practices and social
relationships.

*Grassroots.* This term refers to local, community-based, indigenous initiatives
and organizations created by ordinary people. Members of grassroots organizations work
locally to address needs and to solve problems affecting their own families and
communities.
Practical Needs. These refer to social and economic interests related to everyday survival, including food, water, shelter, land, employment, income, medicine, etc. Practical needs are also referred to as “social welfare” in the Kenyan context.

Strategic Interests. These refer to civil and political rights and interests, including issues such as elections, politics, law, justice, peace, freedom, security, and democracy.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into seven chapters, a bibliography, and appendices. The first three chapters were drafted as part of my research proposal, and were then amended and edited after returning from the field to correspond to changes during fieldwork. The remainder of the study is based upon an analysis of the research results from my fieldwork in Kenya.

In this introductory chapter, I have explored an overview of this dissertation research and the background in which it is situated. I begin with the problem statement and examine the multiple issues that this study seeks to address, including transnational and African feminisms, gender inequities, and the emergence of Kenyan women’s organizations that teach and empower women to meet their practical and strategic needs. I present the background to the study, examining the current literature on African feminisms, popular education and Kenyan women’s organizations. Following this, I explain the purpose of the research, or the intention and essence of the study. I outline the central research questions that are motivating this study. I explain the significance of the study and how it is useful for scholars, practitioners, and policy makers. I clarify the
delimitations and boundaries of the study. I also define the major terms that I will use and the organization of the study throughout the text.

The second chapter comprises the literature review, which situates this study in the philosophy and practice of popular education. I survey the specific theoretical and pedagogical issues related to the research, including feminist popular education and indigenous knowledge systems. I also present a history of educational and social change in Kenya. I conclude with an overview of Kenyan women’s studies, including a chronicle of transnational feminisms, gender and development, and women’s movements.

The third chapter includes an overview of the methodology, including a discussion of the research design, participants, research instruments, data collection procedures, data analysis, methodological approaches, limitations of the study, the personal biography of the researcher, and ethical issues.

The remaining chapters include the analysis and presentation of the results of the study. Ethnographic and descriptive data are presented to situate the reader in the fieldwork. The results are presented in order of the research questions, including themes such as the geographical context, activities organized by women’s groups to address practical needs and strategic interests, and how women’s organizations incorporate and practice the core principles of feminist popular education. Analyzing the results of the study involves weaving a narrative of diverse voices and settings. This is not an easy or straightforward task. To present these findings in a logical flow, I examine each research question and then present a number of themes that emerged from the data, including quotes from research participants and observation field notes. In Chapter Four, I describe
the “geography of women’s organizing” and analyze how the differences of environment, economy and culture determine the agenda of women’s organizations. In Chapter Five, I then examine the various types of women’s groups and the strategies they use to build upon assets and resources as well as address both practical and strategic needs. In Chapter Six, I analyze the eight principles of feminist popular education and demonstrate how these apply to Kenyan women’s grassroots organizations.

Chapter Seven of the dissertation includes a summary and discussion of the research results. This chapter includes a summary of the study, an overview of the problem, findings related to the literature, and surprises. The conclusions include implications for action, recommendations for further research, and concluding remarks.

The study ends with a bibliography of references and several appendices, including the full acknowledgments, a list of acronyms, IRB consent form, English and Kiswahili versions of the questionnaires used in the research, and sources of data.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Global Feminisms

This dissertation adds to the growing literature about international women’s movements and global feminisms. The educational aspects of women’s organizing are a key feature of gender and development programs. Walters and Manicom (1996) observed: “the boundaries between emancipatory education, feminist organizing and the political mobilization of women are not easily drawn” (p. 1). Feminist popular education is inextricably bound with social movements and gender and development projects throughout the world.

Women’s movements are a growing field of interest for activists, policy makers, and scholars of women’s and gender studies. Globalization is a key phenomenon to understand as we experience the rapid movement of people, capital, information, trade, technology, and identities beyond nation-states and boundaries. Women’s and gender studies is committed to plurality, multivocality, and difference, and is an important field for the study of globalization and international issues. Lay, Monk and Rosenfelt (2002) assert that the integration of international studies and women’s studies is essential:

More than ever, the world needs the voices and visions of a transnational community of feminist scholars, teachers, and activists, as they analyze the relations of power, privilege, and oppression that threaten the lives of so many; as they explore and model alternatives to violence; and as they envisage and work for social justice. (p. xi)

Despite the growing visibility of women’s movements worldwide, the perspectives of many women, particularly from the Global South, continue to be
excluded from mainstream U.S. feminist scholarship. Much of the literature on international women’s and gender studies has focused on American and European women’s movements, which leads to a Eurocentric assumption that feminism originated in these locations. Moreover, there has not been adequate documentation of the “lively methodology that is so closely linked with economic development for women” in Africa (Walters and Manicom, 1996, p. 4). McDermott (1998) asserted that women’s studies curricula “that remain exclusively oriented to U.S. content and Western feminist perspectives no longer meet the standards of scholarly rigor and political relevance that define our field” (p. 88).

Scholars from the Global South are organizing, writing, speaking, and giving voice to the struggles of women in their countries. Women’s studies scholars are presenting positive and celebratory stories of agency and empowerment through the lens of women’s organizations and movements. Mohanty (2003) called for a “feminism without borders” and acknowledged that the best feminist praxis must be committed to internationalism – to be “attentive to borders while learning to transcend them” (p. 2). “Feminism without borders” does not ignore or minimize the presence of borders, but “acknowledges the fault lines, conflicts, differences, fears, and containment that borders represent” (p. 2). At the same time, a truly inclusive and revolutionary feminism must “envision change and social justice work across these lines of demarcation and division” (p. 2). Mohanty warned of the dangers of “imperial feminism” or the domination of interests and issues as defined by Western feminists. Mohanty called for feminist
scholarship that embraces solidarity and that listens to the voices of women who have been previously silenced or ignored.

Enlarging our understanding of gender relations and women’s movements is possible through studying different histories and cultures around the world. Indeed, over half of the world’s population is female, and a popular proverb states that “women hold up half the sky.” Kristoff and WuDunn (2009) asserted:

In many poor countries, the greatest unexploited resources isn’t oil fields or veins of gold; it is the women and girls who aren’t educated and never become a major presence in the formal economy. With education and with help starting businesses, impoverished women can earn money and support their countries as well as their families. They represent perhaps the best hope for fighting global poverty. (p. 34)

Human relationships are affected by gender differences worldwide, and women are identified as a key partner in sustainable development and democratization. Hawken (2007) asserted, “recognizing women’s equality with men and working toward addressing existing inequalities is a basic requirement for the development of a sustainable and equitable world” (p. 297).

It is vitally important to examine the women’s organizations that have emerged around the world, and the historical and geographical origins of different types of feminist activism. Basu (1995) noted that women throughout the world have organized collectively against injustice and oppression. Since the 1970s, there has been a significant increase in regional and international networking among women’s organizations and feminist groups. The United Nations’ International Women’s Year was declared in 1975, and activities continued into the UN Decade for Women from 1975 to 1985. Since that time, the United Nations has organized four major World
Conferences on Women held in various cities around the world: Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985), and Beijing (1995). These gatherings brought together government representatives as well as tens of thousands of women activists from civil society to develop global and national level action plans to promote women’s rights in society (African Woman and Child Feature Service, 2007).

A striking feature of international women’s movements is their heterogeneity. International conferences have sparked rigorous debates and inspired global awareness of a variety of women’s issues including:

Health, housing, education, law reform, population, human rights, reproductive and genetic engineering, female sexual slavery and trafficking in women, violence against women, spirituality, peace and militarism, external debt, fundamentalism, environment, development, media, alternative technology, film, art and literature, publishing and women’s studies. (Miles, 1996, p. 142)

Scholars and activists of transnational feminist movements must include an appreciation for diversity:

Such mobilizations in diverse political, cultural and historical contexts have varied widely in their organizations, strategies, ideologies, and structures. Gender oppression for some Third World feminists cannot be divorced from issues and histories of colonization, immigration, racism, or imperialism, and thus feminist activism in some Third World contexts may be organized around a constellation of oppressions rather than specifically around gender oppression. (Taylor, Whittier & Pelak, 2009, p. 557)

Therefore, it is vitally important to remember that women’s movements throughout the world represent a wide variety of issues and agendas that cannot be reduced to a single sound bite.

Social movements, by their very nature, often do not generally have a centralized organizational structure or a single direction. Gerlach and Hine (1970) noted that the
structure of any social movement tends to be broad-based and diffuse, composed of a number of independent organizations that differ in their tactics, strategies, goals and ideologies. A social movement is also characterized by a decentralized leadership system and a widespread network of affiliations that may be based on friendship, kin, community or other relationships that may be multiple and overlapping. Women’s movements tend to feature two main types of organizational structures: “bureaucratically-structured movement organizations with hierarchical leadership and democratic decision-making procedures … and smaller, collectively structured groups that formed a more diffuse social movement community held together by a feminist political culture” (Taylor, Whittier & Pelak, 2009, p. 561). The diversity of international women’s organizations reflects this decentralized structure, variety of ideological differences and a diverse membership base.

Since the 1980s, shifts in global policy initiatives and development discourses alternately focused on “Women in Development” (WID), “Gender and Development” (GAD), and “Women’s Rights” (Kerr, 2002; Razavi & Miller, 1995). Clearly, these discourses advocated that women’s participation is essential for sustainable and equitable development. But women’s experiences are not all the same, and gender is not always an important identity. Women’s interests and priorities vary depending on the culture, economy, environment and political system in which they are situated.

In analyzing women’s movements, postcolonial feminist scholars from the Global South have developed nuanced critiques of the universality of human rights and democracy. They present a renewed commitment to deep democracy, sustainable
development and community-based popular education. These scholars have challenged traditional models of political and economic development that maintain power inequalities and preserve the privilege of elites. They interrogate the notion of individual human rights by pointing out that families, cultures, communities and other social groups must also be acknowledged as deserving rights and protections. They insist that the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights privileges civil and political rights over economic and social rights. These scholars assert that human rights must protect all people, especially those limited to the domestic or private sphere, including women, children, and elders. These groups occupy particularly vulnerable positions vis-à-vis the state and legal systems. They argue that human rights must include an emphasis on family and communal rights, including the rights of survival and welfare in terms of health care, nutritious food, clean water, shelter, education, natural resources, and environmental preservation. These issues were addressed by international agreements such as the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action (Molyneux, 1998; Moser, 1993; Narayan, 1997; Ndegwa, 1994; Okin, 2000).

One of the major outcomes of the globalization of women’s movements has been the expansion of “women’s rights” to include both “practical” and “strategic” interests, including the economic and social needs of women. These needs comprise what Molyneux (2001) referred to as “practical gender interests” which “arise from the concrete conditions of women’s positioning within the gender division of labor …. (and) are formulated by the women who are themselves within these positions rather than
through external interventions” (p. 44). Furthermore, Molyneux noted that practical interests “are usually a response to immediate perceived need, and they do not generally entail a strategic goal such as women’s emancipation or gender equality” (as cited in Kabeer, 1994, p. 90). Kabeer (1994) explained that

By virtue of their responsibility for family welfare within the domestic division of labor, women may be seen to have a practical gender interest in the provision of resources that meet basic welfare needs. (p. 90)

According to the Women’s Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), “Women’s poverty and marginalization results not only from structures of gender subordination but also from the macro-economic structures which often depend on the subordination of women for their implementation” (as cited in Stienstra, 2000, p. 219). As women’s groups from the Global South have participated in greater numbers at United Nations conferences, they have “argued that poverty is directly linked to overconsumption of resources and environmental degradation … (and) that the eradication of poverty is essential to the attainment of sustainable development” (Stienstra, 2000, p. 220).

**African Women’s Movements**

African women’s movements have been the focus of many contemporary studies of the intersection between social change, development and gender relations in Africa. A wide number of different interpretations have emerged from these studies, but all have recognized the critical role that women’s organizations play in identifying and solving the problems experienced by women. Staudt (1986) insisted, “Africa is the world region
with the most extensive female solidarity organizations, an indication of the importance among women of ties outside household boundaries” (p. 199). Women’s groups have enabled women to identify their own economic, cultural, psychological and educational needs, including “lightening their workload, increasing their access to income, recognizing their already considerable contribution to economic and social life, education as a liberating force, and health” (Nasimiyu, 1993, p. 90).

Contemporary women’s movements in Africa are derived from multiple historic traditions of protest, collective action and resistance (Tripp, Casimiro, Kwesiga & Mungwa, 2009, p. 25). Some tactics adopted by women today can be traced to indigenous African women’s strategies prior to and during the colonial period. Nasimiyu (1993) noted:

This collective response of women developed from a pre-colonial propensity to organize bands of women for labor. With the passage of time and the increasingly complex character of the colonial economy, women’s movement developed a broad collective approach to women’s issues, with great sophistication, skilled leadership and strong social awareness. (p. 87)

Women’s movements were strengthened and influenced by anti-colonial struggles and national liberation movements, which elevated women into new roles of leadership and public participation. Also, women’s movements developed in relation to the postcolonial state, and as a response to party-affiliated or state-directed women’s organizations introduced by authoritarian or military leaders. These historical factors were significant, particularly as they related to the development of civil society and education.

Increasing our knowledge of African feminisms and women’s movements is important for both activist and academic communities. African women have contributed
greatly to transnational organizing for gender equality at United Nations conferences and in developing policies such as the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The emerging visibility of women as political actors and social change agents has been one of the most significant developments in Africa since the 1990s (Tripp, Casimiro, Kwesiga & Mungwa, 2009, p. xi). African women’s movements are rooted in both indigenous knowledge systems and modernity.

At the same time, the relationship between African women and feminism is complex and problematic. Some critics have asserted that feminism is a Western or foreign concept that is alien to African cultures. For example, Oyewumi (2003) questioned the relationships between African women, feminism and the “politics of sisterhood.” She argued:

we cannot discount the growing presence of gender consciousness and the ongoing establishment of male superiority which has been unleashed by Africa’s encounter with Europe and the Arab world, and by the current gendered practices of institutions such as the World Bank, the United Nations, and various governmental and non-governmental institutions that promote the tenets of Western feminism to the rest of the world. (p. 2)

However, Oyewumi insisted that feminism is “entangled with the history and practice of European and North American imperialism and the worldwide European colonization of Africa, Asia and the Americas” (p. 3). Oyewumi asserted that Western feminists privilege gender as a social identity “inevitably at the expense of local categories such as ethnicity, seniority, race, and generation that may be more locally salient” (pp. 2-3). She warned that gender is an “essentialized ontology” that is “one of those pseudo-universals deriving from Western culture that is being exported worldwide” (p. 3). She asked,
“What are the implications for Africans to uncritically adopting Western social
categories, concerns, and interpretations of reality as their own?” (p. 3).

A key critique of feminism in Africa is the way in which African women have
been objectified and used by colonial regimes, Christian missionaries, development
agencies, feminists and other Westerners to justify their “civilizing” influence and
control. Women are often analyzed as a marginal and vulnerable group who were
previously socially “invisible” or “oppressed” (Chambers, 1983). Win (2007) warned:

For decades now, the development industry has thrived on the stereotypical image
of an African woman who is its ‘target’ or ‘beneficiary.’ Always poor, powerless
and invariably pregnant, burdened with lots of children, or carrying one load or
another on her back or her head, this is a favorite image, one which we have come
to associate with development…. Like the fly-infested and emaciated black child
that is so often used by international news agencies, the bare-footed African
woman sells. Without her uttering a word, this poor woman pulls in financial
resources. Any researchers worth their salt have to go to the ‘most remote’
village to find her for their statistics on issues like access to water to be valid. (p.
79)

Images of downtrodden and abused African women plague mainstream media accounts
of sexual and gender-based violence, mass rapes, “female genital mutilation” (FGM),
slavery, prostitution, adolescent marriage and pregnancy, wife inheritance and other
practices. These discourses have been repeated by feminist activists and gender and
development (GAD) advocates, and their interventions have not always been welcomed.

Many authors have insisted that transnational and postcolonial feminist scholars
and activists must come to terms with the legacy of imperialism and colonialism (Briggs,
2002; Kabeer, 1994; Majid, 2000; Mohanty, 1991 & 2003; Narayan, 1997; Oyewumi,
1997 & 2003; Stoler, 1995; Thomas, 2003). Advocating for women’s rights is complex
and sometimes associated with the colonial experience in Africa. Often this is depicted as
the conflict between human rights, gender rights, and the sovereignty of indigenous cultures or traditions.

Indeed, many women’s rights activists in Africa do not self-identify as feminists due to the loaded nature of this term and its association with Western cultures. “In Africa, the term ‘feminism’ has often had carried with it the baggage of being regarded a Western and foreign construct. However, this is rapidly changing, as feminism itself is being redefined through global and African dialogues that are no longer primarily Western” (Tripp, Casimiro, Kwesiga & Mungwa, 2009, p. 14). Since the 1960s, African politicians and the media have promoted a stereotypical image of radical feminism. Feminism has often been equated with women fighting against men or rejecting local traditions and cultures. African women may not always embrace the term “feminism” for complex reasons, including the quest for national development, independence, and solidarity.

Nevertheless, whether or not they call themselves “feminists,” women’s organizations are part and parcel of African societies and indigenous knowledge systems. Nzomo (1993) insisted that the “long history of women organizing themselves into groups dates back from pre-colonial times” and “this traditional type of group formation also stemmed from the realization by women that they share certain problems which can only be effectively tackled through collective effort” (pp. 131-132). Similarly, Halperin (2005) reflected upon the traditional nature of women’s organizations:

Throughout Africa, women have traditionally worked together: hoeing each other’s fields, helping each other harvest, cooking together for an important event. Women have always organized themselves into various types of groups: age grades, secret societies, work groups. These groups have a defined membership,
and some perform rituals that reinforce solidarity.

In recent years, women have responded to increasing poverty by modifying these traditional groups to meet new needs. Now, they form groups whose primary purpose is to give them greater economic security. Development agencies use these modern variants of traditional groups as vehicles for delivering social services or financial assistance. (p. 229)

Indeed, African women’s organizations are rooted in indigenous knowledge systems. These social solidarity networks have supported women and their families for centuries, and have helped to absorb the shocks of rapid social, political and economic transformations.

At the same time, we cannot deny that the effects of globalization, capitalism, colonialism, imperialism, climate change and population pressures negatively affect women in Africa. Patriarchy and male domination have been strengthened through both the invocation of indigenous “traditions” and the imposition of foreign cultural influences, including Christianity and Islam (Alidou, 2005; Fuglesang, 1994; Khasiani & Njiro, 1993). The Victorian ideals about women and men and the dichotomy of public and private spheres introduced binary and unequal gender relations in Africa. In some cultures, gender inequalities were introduced by colonialism that replaced earlier cultural traditions that were more egalitarian, complementary and even matriarchal or matrilineal. In the quest for gender equality and national independence, women joined with men to resist colonialism. Women participated in revolutionary armed and non-violent movements (Brownhill, 2009; Davison, 1996; Maloba, 2007; Presley, 1992; Tripp, Casimiro, Kwesiga & Mungwa, 2009). Often, the promises for gender equality by the revolutionary movements were not granted after the transition to self-governance.
Nevertheless, African women’s organizations have persevered throughout false promises and periods of rapid change and transformation. Following independence, African women’s organizations have grown, and so has the demand for greater education and rights of women and girls. Women’s grassroots organizations are uniquely placed to provide formal and informal education to women and girls and to lead social change and development. Women’s economic and cultural roles have expanded, including leadership in education, law, politics, media and business. Women have demanded greater access to education and training for their new economic roles brought about by commercial agriculture and industrialization. Education is also vitally important to training women for leadership and participation in emerging democracies. The struggle to educate women and girls is critical as Africa experiences the effects of globalization in governance, economic systems, and transnational issues such as climate change and population growth. Thus, women’s movements in Africa are working simultaneously to address both their practical and strategic needs, as “changes in the ways that women organize to address their everyday needs invariably produce changes in gender relations” (Walters & Manicom, 1996, p. 13).

Many previous studies do an excellent job of documenting women’s contributions to politics, economic development, or formal education. However, they do not address the multiple issues that this study seeks to answer. In this next section, I delineate the roots of the Kenyan women’s movement and share a snapshot of its history. I also review the growing body of literature in Kenyan women’s studies. Women’s organizations in Kenya are popularly referred to as “women’s groups,” and they have
achieved a considerable range of accomplishments and contributions to development and education. I will now turn to a discussion of the history of gender relations and the phenomenon of women’s organizations in Kenya.

“Wanjiku” and “The Woman Question”

The social and cultural construction of gendered identities and stereotypes must be unpacked in order to understand the roots of women’s oppression. In Kenya, a popular image of the unschooled, rural woman from the village is known as “Wanjiku.” After former President Daniel Arap Moi dismissed calls for a new constitution, he declared: “Do you think Wanjiku understands what is a constitution?” After that time, “Wanjiku” came to signify the ordinary woman citizen or mwananchi in Kenya. Owino (2010) described “Wanjiku”:

Using statistical data compiled by the Institute of Economic Affairs, it is clear Wanjiku lives in rural Kenya in a traditional house where she raises her four or five children on a monthly income of about Kshs. 2000/= (equal to $30.00). Her income comes from working her small-holder farm and she sells and barters the agricultural produce for what she needs. Wanjiku can read and write although she probably did not complete high school. Given the lack of health facilities and the incidence of HIV/AIDS she is likely to die by the time she is 55. Until then, she oscillates between the edge of survival and outright poverty. The search for firewood and water continue to consume many hours of her productive day.

As things stand all Wanjiku’s children are looking towards a life exactly the same as that which brought their mother to where she is. (p. 1)

This stereotypical image of Wanjiku appears throughout the popular literature of Kenya, from political cartoons to newspaper articles, editorials and online blogs. Wanjiku elicits an image of the downtrodden, poor, illiterate, pregnant and powerless rural Kenyan woman. Wanjiku is presumed to have nothing and know nothing, especially about
national politics. Wanjiku has no power, not even in her own home. Wanjiku almost never speaks in her own voice, but men and women of all sides of the political debate defend her interests. She is a voter who must be educated in order to cast the right vote. Without this intervention, Wanjiku will simply vote for the highest bidder. Wanjiku’s vote is essential for democracy, but is also dangerous.

Incidentally, these stereotypical fears of the uneducated women voters are not unique to Kenya. The image of Wanjiku recalls some similar gender stereotypes that were used in the anti-suffrage movement in the United States from the 1850s to the 1920s. Similar to Kenya, there was intense debate about whether or not women should vote in the United States, and opposition from women as well as men. Anti-suffragists called upon some of the basest fears about women’s empowerment, insisting that voting rights would lead to conflict between husbands and wives and the dismantling of traditional gender roles in families and society. They also insisted that women were uneducated and unprepared for the demands of political life, and were “naturally” too sensitive to endure the vagaries of politics. For example, the Nebraska Association Opposed to Women Suffrage published a pamphlet *Ten Reasons Why The Great Majority of Women Do Not Want The Ballot*. Among their claims included the following reasons:

BECAUSE in political activities there is constant strife, turmoil, contention and bitterness, producing conditions from which every normal woman naturally shrinks.

BECAUSE the primary object of government is to protect persons and property. This duty is imposed by nature upon man, the women being by nature absolved from assuming a task to them impossible.

BECAUSE when women noisily contest and scramble for public office – woman pitted against woman – they write an indictment of womankind against which all
right-minded women strenuously protest… (cited in TIME Learning Ventures, 2003, p. 3).

These claims about women’s “nature” or conceptions about “normal women” seem ludicrous by today’s standards. However, opponents of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) repeated similar claims in the 1970s and 1980s. Opposition to the ERA was based upon the argument that it would take away certain gender-specific privileges of women, including exemption from Selective Service registration and “dependent wife” benefits under Social Security. Phyllis Schlafly of the Eagle Forum specifically claimed that the ERA would lead to women being drafted into military service and the introduction of public unisex bathrooms (Eisler and Hixson, 1986).

Therefore, we can see that the opposition to women’s inclusion in democratization, political participation and voting rights is not unique to Kenya. Similar themes and dynamics of women’s struggles for equality can also be observed in the United States and other nations. This reveals a major challenge to democratization movements globally – the struggle for the inclusion of groups that have been marginalized due to their gender, ethnicity, race or other identities.

Indeed, the popular image of Wanjiku calls upon some basic stereotypes about Kenyan women. These stereotypes reveal the most deep-seated fears of authoritarian, masculine power structures in Kenya. Unlike Wanjiku, many Kenyan women are moving out of their place and challenging their oppression. Despite intimidation, harassment and marginalization, women are now voting in large numbers. They are learning to read and becoming highly educated. They are insisting on their rights. They are participating in civic education programs and changing laws that pertain to their lives.
They are organizing cooperatives and small businesses. They are creating employment and raising their standards of living. Indeed, Kenyan women are a force to be reckoned with.

This is a story about women like Wanjiku – including the voices of ordinary women doing extraordinary things. Approximately three million women in Kenya belong to grassroots women’s groups, including NGOs, CBOs, and FBOs. Women’s organizations are one of the largest sectors of growth within Kenyan civil society. They partner with adult education, agricultural extension, social services, and other programs. They create employment and income-generating activities (IGAs) to improve their members’ lives. They teach women skills and information when they have not had access to formal schooling. These lessons are directly relevant to women’s daily lives and grounded in their own experiences and local cultures.

In Kenya, issues of gender are often referred to as “the woman question.” Increasing attention has focused on gender inequalities and the barriers to access and opportunity faced by women and girls. In some ways, the women’s movement has been so effective in bringing these issues to the mainstream that there has been a significant backlash against women’s empowerment in Kenya, and increasing calls for men’s organizations or investment in boy child education. Nevertheless, women in Kenya continue to struggle for recognition and equal access to education, politics, employment, and other avenues of development and social mobility.
Motherhood and “Maternal Thinking”

Women’s traditional roles as mothers conjure a powerful image of leadership that resonates deeply in most African societies, and Kenya is no exception. Women’s fertility and ability to reproduce are traditionally regarded as great and mystical sources of women’s power, but are also used to justify women’s subordination and domesticity.

In Kenya, the language about women is tied to notions of motherhood. Although the Swahili term “wanawake” is used to denote women, this word is usually associated with wives or “wake.” “Akina Mama” is the more popular Swahili term referring to women as mothers, and many women are referred to as “Mama” or “Mami” in conversation, to address them with respect. Women who do not have children are referred to as “barren” and are generally regarded with suspicion, shame, or pity. In Kenya and throughout Africa, motherhood and womanhood are often regarded as synonymous, and women’s traditional roles as mothers are often called upon for alternative visions of leadership.

(I discovered this throughout my fieldwork, as many Kenyan women did not understand why I would be childless although I was married. They could not comprehend how my husband could “allow” me to leave home for so long when I had not yet produced a child. Many insisted that I should go home and have a baby. They only relented when I explained that I was still studying and promised that I would have a baby later!)

The “essentialized notion of motherhood” is a traditional frame for political action that is frequently drawn upon in contemporary protest movements for women’s
leadership and equality (Tibbets, 1994, as cited in Tripp et al., 2009, pp. 25-26). Tripp, Casimiro, Kwesiga & Mungwa (2009) observed:

Motherhood is generally the basis on which women often say they sacrifice for their families, love and rear their children, oppose violence, take selfless action, and carry out many other duties and obligations. In a variety of contemporary contexts, women have at times transformed the trope of “motherhood” into a political resource, while at other times it has served as an obstacle to women’s advancement … They have used it as a resource with which to demand changes in political culture, demanding that the values of nurturing, sacrifice, and justice be included in political practice and that corruption, violence, and sectarianism be rejected. (pp. 25-26)

This essentialized notion of motherhood in Africa might seem very controversial or problematic to outsiders, particularly feminists from the West. These ideologies of women’s traditional roles as mothers are not the only basis for women’s political authority, or the only resource used by women to gain leadership. There is some concern among African feminists about the use of motherhood as a basis for political authority, for it reinforces stereotypes about women, excludes those who are not mothers, and reduces or limits women’s participation to what may be considered as their “natural” role rather than opening up spaces for women’s agency. However, the invocation of mothering does not seem as problematic to African women, who often regard mothering as a source and extension of women’s power. For example, Van Allen (2000) showed that the public/private divide in Africa does not correspond to Western perceptions, which draw a sharp divide between domestic/household/child-rearing activities and work/politics/warfare. In Africa, women’s labor, whether it is in the fields, in a factory, or as a professional, is generally seen as an extension of her reproductive activities, as part of her caring for children and feeding and clothing them. In politics, as in other “public spaces,” women’s movements demand equality but they generally do not want to be considered the same as men. (cited in Tripp, Casimiro, Kwesiga and Mungwa, 2009, p. 27)
Van Allen (2000) further explained the positive role of mothering in African women’s movements:

Women’s rights discourse itself reflects the continuing construction of “woman” as “mother,” and the assertion of the nurturing, provisioning, suckling mother as a model of female leadership, both in its goals and in its language … In campaign slogans and campaign discourse in general, this assumption is carried into a positive statement about women: they are better fitted than men to be in government because it is in their “nature” to be caretakers. (p. 8)

Therefore, we can see that motherhood may be seen as a powerfully indigenous African cultural expression of women’s leadership and political authority.

In Kenya, the nurturing role of women as mothers cannot be understated. The motherhood trope was invoked during the 1992 elections, when one delegate at a meeting of the National Committee on the Status of Women argued that women have a special form of moral authority since they are responsible for the security and stability of the family and community. She asserted: “Let it be understood that women are already minister of culture in their own homes.” Since women are already serving as leaders in their homes and families, now they must be allowed to take charge of key positions of leadership in the government and society (Tripp, Casimiro, Kwesiga and Mungwa, 2009, p. 27).

Mothers of political prisoners also used their status as mothers to directly challenge the state in the early 1990s. When a number of young men were arrested and detained without trial, their mothers organized a hunger strike at Uhuru Park in downtown Nairobi. They set up a tent at “Freedom Corner” and began a civic education forum where other former political prisoners gathered to tell their stories of torture and
abuse. Hundreds more people joined the strike and began to garner national and international media attention. The police were called in to break up the strike, and they violently beat the women and men as they arrested them. Some of the women stripped naked in protest, which was a potent traditional curse on the police. In Kikuyu culture, if an older mother bares her breasts, it is a shame and a curse to the person who is confronting her. This event gained national and international media attention, and the women were set free. When they returned to Uhuru Park, they were given permission to continue their hunger strike at the All Saints’ Cathedral. The mothers camped out at the church and continued to gather with others for civic education seminars for the following year until all fifty-four of their sons were released from prison. The leadership of these mothers is often cited in contemporary accounts of the pro-democracy movement leading up to the multiparty elections of the 1990s and 2000s (Aubrey, 2007; Brownhill, 2009; Maathai, 2007; Tripp, Casimiro, Kwesiga & Mungwa, 2009).

Nevertheless, there is a brewing controversy about using motherhood as a symbol of leadership. This excludes women who are not mothers, and leads to an essentialized notion of women’s nurturing or care giving domestic roles that is very problematic. Mothers have been prevented from employment and faced pregnancy discrimination in education and the workplace. Motherhood is sometimes invoked in times of conflict and war, as women’s involvement in conflict can be curtailed or used against them. The resistance to using “motherhood” as an organizing principle must be understood for women’s organizations to be truly effective and representative of all women’s experiences.
Gender Relations in Indigenous African Societies

Although gender relations are often regarded in terms of “the woman question” in Kenya, gender is not just a woman’s concern. According to Thomas-Slayter and Rocheleau (1995), gender is “a social construct through which all human beings organize their work, rights, responsibilities, and relationships. Its meaning derives from specific historical and material conditions” (p. 20). It is vitally important to consider gender in the context of development, and how it influences relationships and processes related to social, economic, political, and environmental change.

Some authors explain that the inequality between the sexes in Kenya is derived from pre-colonial or “traditional” African societies that were presumably chauvinistic and sexist. Kameri-Mbote and Kiai (1993) noted that the relatively lower status of women in contemporary Kenyan society could be influenced by traditional views and images about women. Oral traditions, in the form of myths, stories, and songs, represent demeaning and discriminatory images of women. Mythology and oral traditions are a manifestation of societies’ outlooks, opinions, attitudes, and cultures. Traditional cultural beliefs and attitudes about male dominance and female inferiority continue to influence contemporary life, as men have continued to put women down in the defense of sovereignty and tradition. Kameri-Mbote and Kiai (1993) insisted that “no level of modernization, scientific or technological advancement will elevate the status of women as long as cultural attitudes continue to degrade and demean them, and as long as men
present, perpetuate and reinforce the existing status quo of the stereotypical inferior image of women” (pp. 11-12).

During the pre-colonial period, the functions of patriarchy and male dominance were common in many communities in the region now known as Kenya. Gatimu (2007) noted that, “despite the fact that many Kenyan societies, organized in age sets, did not have a strong centralized political autonomy and a fixed social status structure, the position of women in the household was subordinated to the patriarchal authority of males” (p. 42). For example, in pre-colonial times, land belonged to the entire community, but males were privileged in access to land use and inheritance of land from older generations. Although women were heavily involved in agriculture and food production, they were often alienated from the means of that production through their inability to own or inherit land.

However, a thorough study of African history and gender relations reveals a more complex story. Many writers have noted that sexism and male chauvinism were not just functions of traditional African cultures, but also the product of colonialism, capitalism, Christianity, Islam, and other diverse processes of social contact and change. According to Anta Diop (1978):

A study of our past can give us a lesson in government. Thanks to the matriarchal system, our ancestors prior to any foreign influence had given women a choice place. They see her not as a sex object but as a mother. This has been true from the Egypt of our pharaohs until our time. Women participated in running public affairs within the framework of a feminine assembly, sitting separately but having the same prerogatives as the male assembly.

These facts remained unchanged until colonial conquest … interfering with national life by pitting men against women; it guaranteed the flowering of both. (p. 33)
Nevertheless, it is difficult to generalize about gender relations in Africa, as there exists a great diversity of cultures with different modes of social and political organization, including matriarchal and matrilineal societies.

Many gender theorists have noted that the division of labor in many African societies was based on sex differences, but that women’s roles were recognized and celebrated. There was some complementarity between the sexes based on the division of labor, with both men and women sharing domestic work, such as children’s education and agricultural labor. For example, among the Kikuyu people in pre-colonial Kenya, women were responsible for food production and subsistence farming, while men tended livestock. Gatimu (2007) asserted that “each set of responsibilities was essential to the survival of the group and valued for its contribution to the community welfare, whereby women’s and men’s roles were complementary and not competitive” (p. 7).

In many indigenous African societies, there was also shared involvement in public life, as women were also involved in community leadership through elder councils and women’s secret societies. Ong (1998) insisted that neither male nor female elders were permitted to interfere with the other’s sphere of influence. Men and women could not undermine each other’s authority. Again, among the Kikuyu people, women could make autonomous decisions about resources and on matters of initiation and religion. Gatimu noted, “even though the overall decisions of the community were made by an all male council of elders, men needed to negotiate with women through kinship relations” (Kenyatta, 1938; Muriuki, 1974). Lambert (1965) noted that women were consulted over
community decisions in judicial matters and “had the authority to chastise both men and women who failed to adhere to the prescribed norms of behavior” (as cited in Gatimu, 2007, p. 43). Gatimu (2007) further asserted: “women in many communities were able to retain some autonomy over their households, especially within the setup of polygamous marriages where each wife had her own home and allocation of land. Women had moreover substantial authority over domestic food production, processing and distribution” (p. 43). Therefore, an historical analysis of gender relations reveals complex influences on social and economic life emanating from both indigenous and foreign cultures.

**Kenyan Women’s Studies: A History of the Women’s Movement in Kenya**

The history of women’s organizations and collective action in Kenya dates back to pre-colonial times. Some traditions of organizing and collective resistance predated colonialism, and revealed a great deal about indigenous African societies and gender relations. Indigenous modes of women’s organizing in Africa included women’s work parties, secret societies, trade and marketing associations, artisan guilds, women’s elder councils, initiation and religious groups. These diverse modes of organizing demonstrated the roots of African women’s interests in local self-reliance, self-help associations, mutual aid, and indigenous knowledge systems.

In “traditional” Kenyan societies in pre-colonial times, women came together in groups to assist one another and to perform specific work related to farming, family life, or community development projects. Many authors have noted that the main economic
resource available to women was their own labor, and the earliest women’s associations were based upon this resource in the form of rotating labor work groups. The International Labor Organization (1986) demonstrated:

Kenya has a long history of women’s mutual-aid groups. Indeed, across most of the cultural groupings in Kenya such groups have always existed, normally along kinship lines for the purpose of sharing or celebrating occasions such as births, deaths, marriages and so forth in addition to providing each other with communal labor, be it in tilling land, planting, or such like. Their activities were thus mostly confined to those then considered feminine ones within the familial framework. (p. 130)

Women cooperated in times of need, and “a common feature of the traditional economic system was the grouping and mobilization among women to assist each other during cultivation, weeding, harvesting, and occasions such as births” (Kameri-Mbote & Kiai, 1993, pp. 9-10). Kenyan women organized work parties in response to their communities’ gendered division of labor to make their work less tedious and monotonous, and to build a sense of mutuality and reciprocity.

Throughout Kenya, diverse women traditionally worked together in small groups known by various names and serving different socio-cultural, economic and political functions. Njuguna (1993) noted “traditional groups took the form of Ngwatio among the Agikuyu, Mwethya among the Akamba, and Bulala or Buhasio among the Luhya, to mention a few” (p. 1). In Western Province, Nasimiyu (1993) observed that “women were engaged in a variety of extensive organizational activities including mutual-aid groups (Bulala or Obuhambani) and communal rotating work groups (Kikanda) for agricultural functions like planting, wedding, harvesting and transporting the crops to the appropriate place for storage” (p. 93). In Mombasa and throughout the Coast Province of
Kenya, traditional *lelemama* dance societies were popular among Muslim women up to the 1950s. Strobel (1993) argued that *lelemama* associations organized dance parties that provided women with “an alternative set of status distinctions and rewards apart from descent. Dance groups offered prestige to women who had few other sources of dignity and honor” (as cited in Nasimiyu, 1993, p. 93). And in Nairobi’s Mathare Valley, Nelson (1979) revealed that women beer brewers relied on their networks for the buying and selling of *busaa* (locally brewed beer using maize and yeast) wholesale and obtaining extended credit, exchanging information concerning the reliability of credit customers (male and female), putting up bail and collecting money for fines, and extended help in serious emergencies. (pp. 77-98)

Therefore, we can see that women in Kenya organized for various reasons and purposes based on differences in their economic roles, labor needs, and environmental constraints.

In many communities throughout Kenya, historical strategies for survival have included both informal networks and formal membership in groups and organizations. Thomas-Slayter and Rocheleau (1995) noted that informal networks were comprised of “kin, friends, and colleagues or patrons and clients” and that these networks were based on “reciprocal exchange of goods, services, and information” (p. 14). There was no expectation of a direct return of gifts, but “such reciprocal exchange is part of a relationship that maintains social ties and identity and provides security or support in times of need, as well as new opportunities and benefits” (pp. 14-15). This form of “social capital” is comprised of social relationships in which households invest in return for access to resources, including “fodder, fuel wood, food, water, building materials, and raw material for crafts, as well as economic resources such as informal credit” (p. 15).
Another similar strategy for survival in rural households is membership in formal groups and organizations. Thomas-Slayter and Rocheleau (1995) noted that this is different from networks, which seek to solve individual problems, as “organized solidarity – a group – is needed to bring about significant changes in any system” (p. 15). They observed, “In many parts of Kenya, strong and viable women’s associations have emerged from traditional group activity originally focused on sharing agricultural labor and helping one another to meet critical domestic needs. Today, participation in these associations can be a key household strategy for meeting the challenges of increased involvement in the market and a cash economy” (p. 15). Women may especially meet their goals for “maintenance, accumulation, or mobility” through their involvement in women’s organizations. Women and their households can gain improved access to the assets of land, labor, capital (cash), water, and information – which are five areas in which most African farmers face critical constraints. Therefore,

Women may, in fact, use long-standing and time-honored ways of organizing the factors of production. Drawing on roots in traditional labor exchange mechanisms, both women and the state have formalized and expanded these relationships. (Thomas-Slayter and Rocheleau, 1995, p. 16)

Colonialism and the Struggle for Independence

Contrary to popular notions that sexism is rooted in African “traditional cultures,” many writers note that gender inequalities were exacerbated by colonialism throughout Africa. Patriarchy and male domination are traced not just to traditional societies, but rather to the processes of colonialism, capitalism, resource extraction, labor exploitation, and the introduction of Christianity and Islam. We also cannot underestimate the cultural
influence of European colonizers, who carried with them the Victorian notions of male dominance and female subservience and the separation of public and private spheres of work.

Colonialism in Africa occurred at the same time that the Industrial Revolution was transforming Europe and the global economic system. The colonial powers came to Africa seeking natural resources for their industries back in Europe. This led to the establishment of a cash crop production system to replace the traditional subsistence system of agriculture. The growing of cash crops for export and the development of urban capitalist enterprises demanded the introduction of wage labor and forced labor. Taxes were imposed by the colonial government onto the indigenous people, including the Hut Tax and the Head Tax, which introduced the notion of working for cash. The imposition of taxes led to the need for cash money, which could only be obtained through growing and selling cash crops, getting jobs on settler farms, or becoming employed in the cities’ industrial areas.

The colonial government in Kenya reinforced the pre-colonial gender privileges of males in terms of land rights and patriarchal household authority. Women’s rights to communal land were taken away through a series of colonial land reform policies, including the Committee on Native Land Tenure in Kikuyu Province of 1929, the Kenya Land Commission of 1932-34, and the Swynnerton Land Reform Plan of 1954 (McKenzie, 1966). African men and colonial authorities worked in collusion to limit and deny women’s rights to land. Rural women were confined to the realm of subsistence food production, while men’s roles were expanded with the transition to cash crop
production of tea, coffee, pyrethrum, and other export commodities. Bulow (1992) revealed “men’s strategic infringement of their wives’ household authority altered spousal relations from relative mutual autonomy to asymmetrical dependence … thereby devaluing the mutual respect, complementarity and reciprocity between genders” (p. 535).

Moreover, the transition to a capitalist economic system was based on the separation of the public and private spheres. Capitalism was based on gendered spaces, with men involved in public life, including education, government, and wage labor employment, and women engaged in private and domestic responsibilities. Male labor migration to the cities and plantations led to an even greater burden for women in rural areas. As Ngugi wa Thiong’o (1987) described in his novel *Devil on the Cross*, the able-bodied men fled “in search of the golden fleece in cities of metallic promises and no hope” (p. 49). As men moved out to look for jobs, women had to take on a heavier workload. They were forced to add the men’s tasks to maintain their homesteads, farms, and rural communities. Kameri-Mbote and Kiai (1993) noted, “this generated conflict between the genders because when men returned to their homes they found their wives managing without them” (p. 10).

In the colonial era, women also started to migrate to the urban centers to escape their oppression, poverty, and lowered status in the rural areas. Between 1900 and 1946, women who migrated to urban areas were employed in various occupations in the informal sector, largely catering for the needs of migrant male laborers through small trade, food production, beer brewing, prostitution, and domestic service jobs (Gatimu,
2007; Kanogo, 1993; Presley, 1986; Likimani, 1974). The colonial government and African chiefs saw women’s migration to urban areas as problematic, as it undermined traditional notions of authority and established notions of family and social reproduction. Strict controls were imposed on women’s mobility and employment, and the police forcefully removed women from urban areas and deported them back to rural areas (White, 1988). For example, women were routinely accused of prostitution, even when they were engaged in legitimate employment. When they returned to their rural communities, male elders also publicly shamed women. White (1988) noted that the control of women’s movements also served to disable their economic power base, as women’s subsistence farming took labor and land away from cash crop production which was sustained by African male labor and controlled by colonial farmers and landowners. Women’s emerging political consciousness thus emerged from their experiences in urban areas, their mobilization around land issues, and their participation in the Mau Mau movement for independence.

Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organization (MYW)

Throughout the colonial period, women continued to participate in women’s group activities and work parties in addition to their individual responsibilities for subsistence and cash crop production. Women’s groups thus provided some collective labor for women, although they did not necessarily reduce their workload. However, women’s groups facilitated development in the rural areas and assisted women to gain knowledge, skills and economic independence. March and Tuqqu noted that “the various
features of all these forms of rotating labor associations constitute a creative model for development planning” (as cited in Nasimiyu, 1993, p. 94).

In 1952, women’s groups became formalized under the umbrella of the Maendeleo ya Wanawake organization, which means “Development of Women” in Kiswahili. As women’s traditional work groups also began to engage in income-generating activities, women began to acquire money through trade, and they desired to establish some control over their money in a society where women did not have access to credit, land, and other financial resources. Maendeleo ya Wanawake (MYW) focused on organizing women in rural community development projects in Kenya.

Nasimiyu (1993) insisted that the origins of MYW were influenced by the colonial government, which were consistent with post- World War II colonial social development policies. At the Cambridge Conference of 1948 on “The Encouragement of Initiative in African Society”, the British colonial government emphasized a new concept of community development, which was defined as “a movement designed to promote better living for the whole community with the active participation and, if possible, on the initiative of the community” (Nasimiyu, 1993, p. 95). A sub-committee on Work among Women was formed by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, which was given the mandate:

To keep under review the special needs of women and girls and the contribution they make in the field of social development in the colonial territories, and to recommend ways in which contact with and between voluntary organizations and other relevant resources in the United Kingdom and overseas could be established and sustained to stimulate progress in work among women in the colonial territories. (CO 859/578, 1953, p. 5)
Thus, the origins of the MYW organization should be placed within the broader context of changing colonial policies after World War II.

White European women, especially the wives of prominent local officials, colonial administrators, and merchants, were increasingly seen as agents of improving social progress in the colonies. It was believed that the most difficult problem in the colonies was in helping the local people to adjust to the changing conditions, “to cushion the effect of progress and wherever possible to take steps to ensure that development schemes do not unduly aggravate the social disruption already apparent” (CO 859/578, 1953, p. 5). It was noted that:

One of the great contributions women in the colonies are making to social progress is to demonstrate the fundamental fact that we are all, irrespective of race or creed, vitally concerned in improving social conditions wherever we may be living. European women who can help to produce that attitude of mind in colonial territories are doing most valuable voluntary service. (CO 859/578, 1953, p. 5)

European women in the colonies of Kenya, Malaysia, the Gold Coast, Uganda, and Jamaica were thus engaged in training courses to start women’s organizations in line with the “Women’s Institutes” movement in the United Kingdom. European women in Kenya thus formed the Women’s Corona Society and Maendeleo ya Wanawake.

Maendeleo ya Wanawake became the largest women’s voluntary association in Kenya. It was set up during the colonial period by a small group of European women, including the wives of colonial administrators, missionaries, and settlers. Their goals included raising the African standard of living and the advancement of African women. MYW was based on the activities of rural women’s groups and was consolidated under the Ministry of Community Development and Rehabilitation. The first chairperson was
Nancy Shepherd, Assistant Commissioner for Women and Girls in the Department of Community Development. MYW was registered with the Federation of Social Services in October 1954.

Thus, the origins of the MYW movement are problematic, particularly concerning the role of European women who represented the interests of the colonial government.

Nasimiyu (1993) argued:

The stereotypical picture of the white woman which emerges from the historiography of places such as Kenya is that of the *memsahib*, aloof, arrogant and determined to preserve husband and children from the pollution of contact with native society. Indeed, the coming of European wives in India and Africa, it is often suggested, marked the arrival of rigid racism and segregation. If the stereotype of the white colonial woman was ever accurate, it was clearly breaking down in the 1950s with the emergence of a significant number of settler, missionary and officials’ wives who appeared to be concerned enough to place gender solidarity above racial exclusivity to the extent of donating considerable voluntary time and effort in working for the advancement of African women. (p. 104)

Nasimiyu noted that a cynical interpretation would suggest that the involvement of European women in women’s movements in Africa could simply represent a racial “survival strategy” or a response to new conditions of colonialism that “replaced racial exclusivity by a new ‘colonial maternalism’ designed to manipulate emerging African female consciousness in the interest of the white ruling class” (p. 104). However, Nasimiyu asserted that the growth of the MYW organization disproved this allegation, as their activities stressed on self-help, not the need for white leadership … indeed from the first the white women successfully promoted the training of African women to assume leadership of their movements. … In fact, the smooth, almost casual, transition from white to black leadership was in marked contrast to most other such transitions during decolonization that involved males. (pp. 104-105)
Initially, the clubs were headed by twelve European and two African home crafts officers, but the ultimate goal was to prepare African women leaders to take up leadership positions. In 1959, Phoebe Asiyo was elected as the first African chairperson of MYW. Many of the African women leaders worked without pay, and T.G. Askwith, the Commissioner for Community Development, noted, “there was a great spirit among women to expand the movement, which enabled African women to raise their standard of living” (Nasimiyu, 1993, p. 98).

A key goal of the MYW organization was the education of African women in practical and domestic skills. Women from all over Kenya were sent to Jeanes School in Kabete where they were trained as club leaders. Nasimiyu (1993) noted that MYW was “a self-help organization concerned with change at the most fundamental level, the home. It aims to improve domestic standards by educating women in home making, child care, nutrition and hygiene. The activities of MYW organization included sewing, cookery, child welfare, games, singing and dancing.” (p. 99).

The growth of the MYW movement and the rapid registration of women’s groups were remarkable. In 1954, Nancy Shepherd observed:

Tremendous expansion has taken place during the past two years and the number of African women’s clubs now established is 508 with a membership of 36,970. It has its own newspaper produced in Luo, Kikamba, Kiswahili and Kikuyu that have a circulation of 18,000. (as cited in Nasimiyu, 1993, p. 99-100)

Also, T.G. Askwith explained at a conference of the Ministry for Community Development:

The success of the movement depended primarily on the training of African leaders. In the early stages, this was all the government could provide in the way of assistance. Little by little, limited funds became available for the temporary
employment of home crafts officers, but the expansion of the movement continued. The growth was so rapid that it became extremely difficult to provide all the supervision, guidance and attention required. (CO 822/1139, 1955)

Nevertheless, Nasimiyu (1993) maintained that the growth of the MYW movement was based upon the indigenous women’s informal work groups, which had existed since pre-colonial times but were merely formalized in the colonial period. Also, the women’s organizations gained increasing support from the chiefs, local headmen, and African district councilors – as well as assistance and supervision from European women.

Despite the rapid growth of the MYW movement in the 1950s, class and racial stratification undermined women’s solidarity (Aubrey, 1997; Bujra, 1979; Monsted, 1978; Nasimiyu, 1993; Thomas, 1988). Membership in the MYW groups required a yearly club subscription fee of two shillings. When they paid, the women received a membership card, and upon proving themselves capable and loyal to the movement, they were given a badge. However, the subscription fees presented a barrier for a great deal of poor rural women, and exacerbated the class distinctions between women. Monsted (1978) argued, “the poorest families, the landless laborers and the single women are under-represented in the women’s groups” (as cited in Nasimiyu, 1993, p. 89).

MYW was thus established as a social welfare organization whose initial focus was to strengthen women’s income-generating activities and to create a better environment and quality of life. Kiragu (2006) insisted “MYWO at its inception did not concern itself with challenging the patriarchy, rather it sought to find ways and means through which women would weave around the imbalance of power to improve the quality of their lives and that of their households. Today, it still remains the largest
grassroots organization in Kenya. If one wishes to mobilize Kenyan women, this still remains the strongest mobilization unit for women” (p. 18).

**Women in the Struggle for Independence**

Despite the efforts of organizations like MYW to reach out and to neutralize African women, they reacted against the colonial government. Local women perceived colonial policies to be a form of domination over their bodies, labor, and land – and a violation of their basic human rights. Kameri-Mbote and Kiai (1993) noted that, during the colonial period, “when patriarchy and male domination set in later, the woman’s position was significantly changed. Women struggled for equality within the system” (p. 9). One of the ways that they did this was through the independence struggle. Through their experiences with labor organizations and struggles against class exploitation, women developed a political consciousness that was opposed to the interventions of the colonial state in their everyday lives. Women were involved as leaders of the independence struggle throughout Kenya, from the Nairobi street protests to release political prisoners such as Harry Thuku (Mwangola, 2006), to Mekatilili’s brave leadership of coastal Mijikenda people in resisting British Colonialism, to the Mau Mau Movement in Central Province in the 1950s (Presley, 1992).

Kikuyu women organized their resistance against the colonial state around two critical issues: forced communal labor and Christian missionaries’ attempts to stop female circumcision. First, women expressed their anger over forced labor in 1947 through the Fort Hall Labor Strike by refusing to dig trenches for soil conservation in the
coffee farms. This managed to stop forced communal labor by women in the Fort Hall district of Central Kenya until 1948 (Presley, 1988). Secondly, circumcision is a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood, and both men and women practiced it. Christian missionaries considered the practice barbaric and attempted to stop the practice by barring circumcised girls from attending mission schools. Women’s protests of this policy gained male support, and led to women’s involvement in the Independent Schools Movement and the establishment of schools for women and girls (Brownhill, 2009; Bulow, 1992; Gatimu, 2007; White, 1988).

Women continued to come into conflict with the colonial state, and they began to engage with political parties, such as the East African Association (EAA), the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA), and civil society and welfare organizations, like the Independent Schools Movement. For example, the EAA was a party formed to resist rural land expropriation by the colonial state and settlers. When their leader, Harry Thuku, was arrested in 1922, the first victim of the violence in the protest was a female member, Mary Nyanjiru. A mass demonstration was organized on March 16, 1922 for the purpose of freeing Thuku from prison. Njoya (2007) recalled, “Mary Muthoni Nyanjiru entered the local Kenyan legends in the 1920’s after she challenged the men in the crowds outside a colonial prison to exchange their trousers for skirts if they were afraid to protest the arrest of Harry Thuku” (p. 1). James and Etim (1999) recounted:

As the agitated Kikuyu women demonstrators anxiously waited for the men to take the initiative to “get their leader free,” and nothing seemed to happen, the women then seized the initiative. According to an eyewitness account, Mary Nyanjiru leaped to her feet, pulled her dress right up over her shoulders and shouted to the men: “you take my dress and give me your trousers. You men are cowards. What are you waiting for? Our leader is in there. Let’s get him (out).”
The hundreds of women (thereupon) thrilled their *ngemi* (Kikuyu ululation) in approbation.

From here on, the crisis escalated, as Mary and the others felt compelled to “disengage,” as it were, “from the politics of (male) dominance.” … Under Mary’s leadership, therefore, the women “made a rush for the prison door” and thereby confronted the fully armed police. Undaunted, the women “pushed on until the bayonets of the (police) rifles were pricking at their throats.” Suddenly, the police began to fire at the unarmed crowd, killing about twenty-eight people, including Mary. (p. 105)

James and Etim noted that the sacrifice and bravery of Mary Nyanjiru lived on in the growing political consciousness of the Kenyan people. Her legend became part of the political education of new generations through the famous political song, the *Kanyegenuri*, which “commemorates the deeds of the Nairobi women on that day and in particular the bravery of Mary Muthoni Nyanjiru, who had taunted the men present with cowardice” (p. 105).

During World War II, many Kenyans took part in the war as soldiers with high expectations that the colonial state would then return control of the Kikuyu Highlands to the Kikuyu people. After the war, the colonial government reneged on its promises, while increased resentment and grievances among the Kikuyu people. African soldiers had received military training during the war, and they were also exposed to the ideas of other African leaders through the Negritude and Pan-Africanism movements. In 1944, the Kenya African Union (KAU) was formed, and by 1946 a group of Kikuyu men who were of the warrior age set status declared that their lost lands could only be recaptured through war. This led to the formation of the Kenya Land Freedom Army, also known as the Mau Mau Movement, in which members of the Gikuyu-Embu-Meru (GEM)
communities united to fight against the colonial government and white settlers (Atieno-Odhiambo, 1991; Brownhill, 2009; Likimani, 1974; Lonsdale, 1991).

As in many anticolonial struggles throughout Africa, women in Kenya fought alongside men and supported the struggle through providing food, shelter, logistics, ammunition, weapons, clothing, and communications or spying (Kanogo, 1993; Presley, 1988 & 1992). Throughout the Mau Mau Movement, Kikuyu women were heavily involved in the independence struggle and transcended some of their gender roles. For example, Gatimu (2007) noted:

To become a member of the Mau Mau, one had to take an oath that was meant to ensure an individual’s loyalty to the group. Before the emergence of the Mau Mau Movement, it was taboo for women to take the oath. Some women members of the Mau Mau were part of the military wing, which was also against most elders’ interpretation of Kikuyu traditions. (p. 47)

Some women held leadership positions, such as Field Marshall Muthoni Kirima, who led an army in the Nyandarua Forest, and Njeri Iyego and Njoki Kariara. Women identified themselves with the oppressed and the colonized, as the colonial encounter had significantly changed gender roles and limited women’s power. Through the politics of protest in the later colonial period, women developed their political consciousness and negotiated their status in the struggle for nationalism (Brownhill, 2009; Gatimu, 2007; Presley, 1988).

The colonial state assumed that women’s involvement in the Mau Mau Movement was passive, as they believed women were coerced by men to join the rebellion, or that they joined by proxy as members of the GEM communities (Anderson, 1983; Gatimu, 2007; Presley, 1988 & 1992). Presley (1988) noted that the colonial administration
denied women’s leadership in the resistance movement. Because the British regarded women’s roles as weak and passive, the colonial state underestimated Kikuyu women’s contributions to the process of nationalism. However, women had their own agenda for joining the Mau Mau, and they were actively involved in leading the movement due to their grievances with the colonial state over land, labor, and social change.

Gatimu (2007) notes that the colonial state employed two different strategies for controlling women’s political activism in Mau Mau: detention and the creation of women’s clubs through *Maendeleo ya Wanawake* (MYW). The colonial state declared a State of Emergency in October 1952, and thousands of women were arrested and detained for their Mau Mau related activities. Women were also required to join the MYW clubs led by female colonialists. Women were lured into the clubs’ activities with promises that they would be taught skills and given training for marketing, trade, health, and homemaking activities. Those women who did not join the clubs were required to do forced labor (Kabira & Nzioki, 1993). Gatimu (2007) noted that this “led to the development of two distinct groups within the women’s movement: one was supportive of the colonial agenda and was the beneficiary of colonial patronage while the other, which was not organized into formal groups, coalesced around the women who were actively engaged in the Mau Mau movement” (p. 48). Women in Mau Mau resisted forced labor, colonial land use policies, and capitalist agricultural production (Kanogo, 1987). Many women insisted that MYW did not meet the expectations of women, co-opted their indigenous women’s work groups, and collaborated with the colonial state
Although the colonial state militarily defeated the Mau Mau by 1956, Kenya’s independence was already set into motion. Male members of the African elite, including Jomo Kenyatta, Daniel Arap Moi, and Ochieng Oneko, engaged in negotiations in London for Kenya’s independence from British colonial rule. Although women had actively contributed to the struggle for independence through the Mau Mau movement, they were not represented or included in this process.

**Women’s Organizations in Independent Kenya**

In 1963, Kenya was granted independence from the British government and Jomo Kenyatta was named as the first president of Kenya. The Mau Mau fighters were encouraged to come out of the forests and some men were given small pieces of land, but most of the Mau Mau fighters’ interests were not included in the new political dispensation. Many of the Mau Mau members joined the new ruling party, the Kenya African National Union (KANU). The women members of Mau Mau became part of the female wing of the party known as *Nyakinyua*, which provided support and entertainment during political functions but were not included in the high ranking leadership (Brownhill, 2009; Gatimu, 2007).

Because of their involvement in the independence struggle, it was expected that women would share a part in the decision-making and governance structures after independence. However, this was not the case, as men came to control every aspect of
governance and political power in the country, as well as business, education, and formal employment. Women have continued to champion their cause in spite of these obstacles to equality, and women’s groups have continued to organize to uplift the status and livelihoods of their members.

In the post-independence period in Kenya, women’s organizations proliferated and became much more interested in development projects and income-generating activities geared towards gaining some economic independence. Nasimiyu (1993) noted that when Kenya gained independence in 1963, “women were quicker (than men) to realize that political independence would not necessarily translate into economic gains for them” as they knew that the “political process would be a male preserve” (p. 102). This may explain the rapid growth of women’s groups after 1963 in Kenya, which was largely coordinated by the MYW organization. Wipper (1971) commented: “The movement has weathered the change from colonial to independent status with the Africanization of its leadership. Now African women speak out audibly for themselves” (as cited in Nasimiyu, 1993, p. 103).

After independence, grassroots women members of Mau Mau returned to rural communal production, while urban employment for women continued to be largely centered around informal activities and petty trade in support of male migrant laborers. Thousands of women’s groups organized in the rural areas, and the government supported MYW groups that provided a source of labor and support for nation building (Aubrey, 1997; Brownhill, 2009; Gatimu, 2007; Nzomo, 1993).
However, the numbers of women’s groups were under-estimated and unrecognized, outside of those coordinated by the MYW organization headquarters. MYW merely estimated their numbers and did not have a systematic method of determining the exact number of women’s groups in the country. Nevertheless, MYW continued to be the largest women’s organization in the country, as it served as an umbrella for thousands of grassroots groups. Table 1 demonstrates the rapid expansion of the membership in MYW groups throughout Kenya from the colonial to the postcolonial period.

Table 1

*Estimated Population of Maendeleo Ya Wanawake (MYW) Women’s Groups in Kenya*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Groups</th>
<th>Number of Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>508</td>
<td>36,970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>42,447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>80,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>90,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>2,805</td>
<td>126,150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>4,300</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>16,200</td>
<td>636,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>3,000,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* (Nasimiyu, 1993, pp. 103-104; Cutcher, field notes, December 2007).
In 1964, the Kenyan government formed the National Council of Women of Kenya (NCWK) in an attempt to dissociate with the MYW’s colonial heritage. Grassroots rural women continued to join MYW women’s groups, which focused on welfare roles and “practical needs,” while elite and middle class women became associated with the NCWK, which focused on “strategic interests” such as political power and legal reforms (Gatimu, 2007; Molyneux, 1998). The NCWK was established as a national umbrella membership organization, and its purpose was to strengthen and unite women’s organizations in Kenya and to serve as a coordinating agency for women’s organizing at the local, national, regional and international levels. After 1964, the NCWK gained prominence over MYWO, which became an extension of the KANU ruling party and tied to its patronage and support.

This separation of women’s groups by class stratification led to decreased gender solidarity among women. Bujra (1979) explained: “the form taken by women’s oppression is not only historically specific, but also class specific. Within any stratified society, it is clear that some women are more oppressed than others, and indeed, some women may themselves be engaged in oppression” (p. 27). Class differentiation affected women and women’s groups as it created an elite leadership. By 1964, Fred Kubai, a Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Labor, stated that

Our women are too ‘high.’ They have lost touch with the ordinary women in the street and they cannot truthfully say they represent them. It is difficult for a sophisticated woman to really remain in touch with the more simple one, and in fact ordinary women do not recognize the claims of those who say they are representing them. (as cited in the *Sunday Post*, August 23, 1964)
Elite African women, who exploited the labor of poorer women for domestic service and nation building, replaced the elite colonial European women.

In the 1970s, the NCWK challenged the Kenyan state over a number of issues that affected women’s economic and political well-being, including customary laws regarding marriage and property inheritance. They continued their protests in the 1980s based on election irregularities. The state then withdrew their financial support, neglected the organization, and actively thwarted their efforts (Maathai, 2006). Under the leadership of Professor Wangari Maathai, the NCWK was able to assert some autonomy from the KANU government. However, the government then shifted their support to the MYW, encouraged them to dissociate from the NCWK members, and asserted authoritarian control over women’s organizations. Several authors indicate that the state support of women’s organizations was a strategy to control them through donor funding and patronage (Aubrey, 1997; Gatimu, 2007; Khasiani, 1983; Nzomo, 1993).

In 1976, the official registration and census of women’s groups began through the sub-department of the Women’s Bureau in the Ministry of Culture and Social Services. The Women’s Bureau had the responsibility of registering all of the women’s groups throughout Kenya. They also were charged with coordinating their activities through outreach, and providing minimal funding (Gatimu, 2007; Kabira and Nzioki, 1993; Khasiani, 1983). This represented another attempt by the Kenyan government to control and contain women’s organizations.
The 1980s: Structural Adjustment Programs and Harambee

The late 1970s and the 1980s were marked by a severe economic crisis in Kenya. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund imposed Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs). The SAPs led to a drastic decline in Kenya’s economy and the state’s inability to provide social services and subsidies on basic needs such as food, health and education. Middle class people lost their jobs and the civil service sector was reduced. The one-party state entered a deep political crisis and was threatened by the processes of macroeconomic adjustment (Brownhill, 2009; Gatimu, 2007).

In the mid-1980s economic crisis, the prices for Kenyan cash crops, including coffee and tea, plummeted in international markets. The government promoted the unsustainable extraction of Kenya’s cash crops and the exploitation of cheap labor. This led thousands of women to seek other sources of employment and production outside of cash cropping and subsistence farming. Women formed self-help groups, cooperatives, and other economic associations – including “merry-go-rounds” and microfinance groups – to facilitate their access to loans and capital to finance alternative economic activities. Since public funding for social services was limited, women’s self-help and development activities gained prominence and were seen as highly important to national development. Nevertheless, the lives and social status of most women were endangered by the SAPs, which created greater burdens for women in terms of their care giving roles in both productive and reproductive labor (Mikell, 1995; Nzomo, 1989).

During the 1980s, women in Kenya sought increased participation in the informal employment sector (known popularly as jua kali, or “hot sun”) as well as self-help
development projects known as *Harambee*. *Harambee* is a Kiswahili term that means “Let’s all pull together.” It was the rallying cry of Jomo Kenyatta, the first president of Kenya, and became a popular method of community development based on mobilizing local resources for self-reliance. Gatimu (2007) noted that the majority of people involved in *Harambee* activities have historically been women, especially in rural areas. However, “men as well as the state take great interest in providing support for *Harambee* initiatives” (p. 9). The government or male political leaders may provide resources, technology, and facilitate organization, but they may also “marginalize women’s leadership and control, as these projects become further avenues for positions of power ensured through patronage” (p. 24).

The United Nations Decade for Women from 1975-1985 also breathed wind into the sails of the Kenyan women’s movement. This era led to widespread recognition of the role of Women in Development (WID). In 1985, the Third United Nations Conference on Women was held in Nairobi. An estimated 1,500 official delegates from 150 countries participated in the meeting, and about 15,000 women attended the NGO Forum. Participants at the Nairobi conference drafted the “Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women,” which included practical strategies to promote global gender equality. According to Kiragu (2006), the theme of the conference challenged the simplistic “welfare” approach and expressed goals for equality and development. Kiragu asserted that it was this conference that “inspired Kenyan women to establish organizations that would challenge the power structural arrangements of society, by empowering women to know their rights and seek effective ways and means of protecting
and promoting them and their realization for the women’s constituency” (p. 19). Several organizations were born at the Nairobi conference, including the International Federation of Women Lawyers – Kenya (FIDA-Kenya) and the League of Kenyan Women Voters. (African Woman and Child Feature Service, 2007; Mwangola, 2006). This conference not only strengthened the Kenyan women’s movement but also connected Kenyan women with complex networks of the transnational feminist movement.

**Contemporary Women’s Organizations in Kenya**

Women in contemporary Kenya continue to come together in self-help activities and to improve the welfare of their families and communities. Kameri-Mbote and Kiai (1993) maintained that “women have always mobilized themselves in groups for social welfare activities and in recent times some of these groups have identified the need for women to be integrated into the political and decision making processes” (pp. 7-8). Tripp, Casimiro, Kwesiga and Mungwa (2009) indicated that the resources gained from informal economic associations and self-help projects may enable women to become independent of state patrons. Gatimu (2007) noted that, although there is always the danger that “harambee could become prey to the state’s patronage networks, they could also potentially pool resources which they used to engage in the informal employment sectors as small scale business owners in the food, transportation, and clothing related enterprises” (pp. 24-25). Indeed, women in contemporary Kenya often form their own groups and associations in their attempts to influence and shape the processes of socio-economic development, and to ensure that they benefit from it.
Part of the reason for rural women’s involvement in women’s groups and associations has been their new positions as leaders and managers at the household level. As male outmigration to urban areas has continued in contemporary Kenya, women have remained behind in the rural areas. The numbers of women-headed and women-managed households have grown significantly in contemporary Kenya, and throughout Africa. Thomas-Slayter and Rocheleau (1995) noted that women in Kenya headed 27% of rural households by 1995, and an additional 47% were managed by women (p. 14). Surely, these numbers have risen in recent years.

It is in fact commonplace for young men to be flooding into towns and cities seeking jobs. Older men may have spent a working life in the city, returning for visits several times a year; they retire back to the countryside when their days of employment are over. It is equally common for women to manage the farm and care for large families under difficult circumstances without a partner present. (Thomas-Slayter and Rocheleau, 1995, p. 14)

In response to the stress of raising their families and managing their homesteads alone, many women seek support through informal networks and formal organizations, including women’s groups.

According to the Women’s Bureau (2002), the contemporary women’s movement in Kenya is comprised of thousands of women’s groups, agencies and organizations with approximately three million members. The women’s movement has largely evolved from welfare-based activities into income-generating groups, and has succeeded in taking women out of the domestic sphere into informal employment through self-help activities (Khasiani and Njiro, 1993). The Women’s Bureau and the Central Bureau of Statistics note that women now make up sixty percent of the labor force in Kenya.
The lack of access to capital has been a major barrier to women’s economic activities (Gatimu, 2007, p. 25). Kenya is largely an agricultural society, and land is often used as collateral for loans or credit. However, land ownership has traditionally been reserved for men and descent traced through patrilineal lines (with a few exceptions). Since women have not had easy access to land, they work collectively through women’s groups and organizations to pool resources.

**Women’s Organizations and Democratization in Kenya**

The Kenyan women’s movement is a social movement that comprises an essential part of the larger civil society and democratization process. According to Muller (2005), social movements are carriers and catalysts of social change, which have the ability for further mobilization, and the establishment of a public sphere. By taking up and politicizing private topics or social contradictions towards the public sphere, the women’s movement is not only restricted to a pushing through of women’s issues as isolated topics, but to further transforming social relations and challenging power relations. (p. 24)

Gatimu (2007) revealed that social movements, notably the women’s movement in Kenya, lead people to “question existing socioeconomic and political arrangements that are based on gender differences” (p. 4). Social movements reveal the tensions between disadvantaged groups and the state, and may determine the amount of influence or power that the state may share with citizens in forming policies and addressing popular concerns. Social movements also lead to greater agency, visibility, group identity and consciousness (Gatimu, 2007, p. 4).

Kenyan women have been organizing for change for many years, and have become increasingly visible as they occupied the space opened up by the democratization
movement for multiparty elections since the 1990s (Tripp, Casimiro, Kwesiga and Mungwa, 2009). Kiragu (2006) observed that the events leading to political pluralism in the 1990s contributed to the “emergence of women’s organizations that specifically identified that there was a direct causal relationship with respect to the conditions of women’s lives and the manner in which societal relations are structured and organized” through patriarchy or male dominance (p. 19). Democratization allowed women to access spheres of social, economic, and political influence in which Kenyan women previously were denied. Key concepts have been introduced including the respect for transparency and accountability, participation of people at the grassroots, inclusion of multiple voices and perspectives, and respect for the rule of law. Women have been seen as part and parcel of democratic culture, and gender issues have been “mainstreamed” throughout all levels of the society. Furthermore, “the women’s movement was gradually utilizing human rights frameworks as well as demanding that normative standards set out in international declarations and conventions ... Should be translated at the domestic scene,” including the 1948 United Declaration of Human and Peoples’ Rights (UDHR) and the 1981 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (Kiragu, 2006, p. 19).

Kenyan women’s participation in international women’s conferences, such as the Beijing Conference in 1995, has also “breathed life” into the movement. Since 1995, the movement has grown in depth and scale, and significant improvements have been made to policies, and in the everyday lives of women in Kenya. Kenyan women have seen a change and diversification of approaches in confronting patriarchy and male dominance,
and their “activism work has ranged from advocacy and lobbying activities, community mobilization and awareness of women’s rights, public interest litigation, engaging government ministries particularly with respect to national budgeting and resource allocations” (Kiragu, 2006, pp. 19-20).

However, Gatimu (2007) noted that women’s visibility in the public domain through the women’s movement has not necessarily translated to increase women’s participation in formal politics. Many studies have focused on the role of women in national party politics and public decision making in Kenya (Aubrey, 1997; Gatimu, 2007; Kabira, Oduol & Nzomo, 1993; Khasiani & Njiro, 1993; Nzomo, 1997; Tripp, Casimiro, Kwesiga, Mungwa, 2009). In a recent study of African women’s movements, Tripp, Casimiro, Kwesiga and Mungwa (2009) noted a key paradox:

What made it possible for some countries to expand rights without tremendous pressure from women’s movements while other countries, such as Cameroon, Kenya, and Mali have had active women’s movements with slower legislative and other outcomes? (p. 218)

This study reveals that, despite an active and persistent women’s movement in Kenya, political and legislative changes have not been receptive to recognizing the legal and political rights of women. Moreover, Kiragu (2006) noted that the Kenyan women’s movement has not “sufficiently devised a coherent and all encompassing strategy to anchor activism on women’s rights on a continuous basis” (p. 20). She insists that opportunities to consolidate the Kenyan women’s movement have been lost through women’s frustrated efforts to organize for political recognition and representation through coalitions.
Gender Inequality in Education in Kenya: The Gap Between Policy and Practice

The Government of Kenya is clearly committed to the goals of Education for All (EFA) through national and international policies. Policy studies may illuminate the official plans of the government. But quantitative and qualitative research studies may reveal a fuller picture of the reality on the ground, and can illuminate some “best practices” to improve government policies and services.

Indeed, there is a wide gap between government policies and practices in Kenya, particularly regarding gender equity in education. While official policies now promote “gender mainstreaming” and support gender equity and parity, the focus is on quantity rather than quality. Quantitative and statistical studies such as the *Kenya National Adult Literacy Survey* (2007) provide important data that have profound implications on policy and resource allocation. Despite policy initiatives, gender inequalities persist throughout Kenyan society and educational systems.

Kenya has signed a number of international agreements and policies to promote development and to support the goals of Education for All (EFA). Kenya has ratified global policy frameworks such as the 1990 World Conference on Education for All (Jomtien, Thailand) and the 2000 Dakar Framework for Action (Dakar, Senegal). These forums expressed 164 national governments’ commitment to the goals of EFA for all children, youth and adults. According to Maina Kamanda, former Minister of Gender, Sports, Culture and Social Services, “Kenya is committed to achieving all six EFA goals, including that of reducing adult illiteracy by 50 per cent by the year 2015” (KNBS, 2007, ix).
Kenya is also committed to the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), with clear goals for gender equity and empowerment in education. Kenya has also ratified major human rights treaties, including the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the Beijing Platform for Action. This indicates that the Government of Kenya officially affirms gender equality in all spheres of development, including rights in education.

In addition to ratifying international agreements to promote Education for All, Kenya’s national policies also support the goals of educational gender equity. After achieving independence from British colonialism in 1964, the Government of Kenya identified three vices that prevented development: poverty, ignorance (or illiteracy), and disease. The Kenya Education Commission provided a policy framework in 1964 called “The Ominde Report,” which identified the following goals of education for the new nation:

- Foster national unity;
- Serve the needs of national development;
- Promote social justice and morality, social obligations and responsibilities;
- Foster positive attitudes and consciousness towards other nations;
- Provide for full development of talents and personality;
- Provide and equip the youth with knowledge, skills and expertise to enable them to play an effective role in the life of the nation; and

The Government of Kenya thus engaged in a campaign to promote the expansion of schooling throughout the country with an explicit focus on establishing an independent and unified Kenyan nation.

The Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR) released the State of Human Rights Report in 2005. According to the KNCHR (2005), “more than anything else, education has proved to be the most reliable human development undertaking capable of moving the poor away from the myriad debilitating circumstances that poverty reproduces” (p. 58). They charged that the “key state obligations arising out of the international instruments and domestic legislation and policies that relate to the Right to Education” included:

• Ensuring non-discrimination in terms of access to Education;

• Ensuring that it “takes deliberate, concrete and targeted steps” towards full realization of the Right to Education;

• Doing everything possible to guard against any retrogressive measures (measures likely to undermine current levels of achievement) taken in relation to the Right to Education;

• Prioritizing the introduction of compulsory, Free Primary Education, and

• Establishing “minimum educational standards” to which all educational institutions are require to conform and also maintain a transparent and effective system to monitor such standards. (KNHCR, 2005, p. 62)

Education is clearly linked to Kenya’s goals for national development. In 2007, the Government of Kenya published a strategic plan for development entitled Kenya Vision 2030. In Section 3.8, the policy stated:
Kenya intends to create a globally competitive and adaptive human resource base to meet the requirements of a rapidly industrializing economy. This will be done through life-long training and education. As a priority, a human resource database will be established to facilitate better planning of human resources requirements in the country. Furthermore, steps will be taken to raise labor productivity to international levels. Other steps will include the establishment of new technical training institutions, as well as the enhancement of closer collaboration between industry and training institutions. (p. 9)

Therefore, we can see that Kenya has explicitly stated policy support for “lifelong training and education” and “human resource development.”

In 2007, the Ministry of Education formulated the Gender Policy in Education. According to former Education Minister George Saitoti, Kenya has engaged in a number of “strategies that aim to reduce existing gender disparities in access, retention, transition, and achievement in education and training” (p. ix). These included:

- provision of school boarding facilities in ASAL areas
- affirmative action in admission into public universities
- bursary allocations (scholarships)
- provision of resources for science laboratories especially in girls’ schools
- community sensitization and mobilization
- continuous curriculum review
- assessment and improvement of pedagogy to address gender responsiveness, and
- the formulation of policy guidelines, such as a re-admission of school age girls who get pregnant while in school. (p. ix)

Policy provisions were given for multiple levels and areas of education, including Early Childhood Development and Education, Primary Education, Secondary Education, Special Needs Education, Teacher Education; Technical, Industrial, Vocational, and
Entrepreneurship Training, Engineering and Technology (TIVET); University Education, Non Formal, Adult and Continuing Education (p. 11).

Since 2003, Kenya has implemented a policy of free primary education, but there are still barriers, especially for adult women and girl children of poor families. Free primary education may result in gender parity in primary schools, but it does not address the needs of the millions of adult women who need continuing education and training. Muteshi (2006) insisted, “a quantitative increase of women and the girl child in education does not necessarily translate into gender equality or the end of gender discrimination in education” (p. 39). At the same time, Muteshi admitted that some policy strategies to implement education for all have been effective. For example, the Ministry of Education created a “gender-dis-segregated database” for women and girls’ education. Grace Maina, the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) Gender Officer, reported that she works with her team to ensure that curriculum and textbooks are becoming more gender-sensitive. While previous policies mandated that young women who become pregnant had to leave school, now they are being re-admitted. Laws have been changed to support gender equity goals. For example, the marriage of school-going girls is now punishable by law. Resources are being provided for the education of the poor and marginalized groups through bursary and scholarship schemes in every constituency. Muteshi (2006) declared that “women’s organizations with a focus on education such as FAWE or the girl child find a policy environment that sustains their activities” (p. 39).

In Kenya, girls and women have long been denied their rights to equal access and opportunity in education. Historians have documented the impact of pre-colonial and
colonial educational systems on gender relations in Africa. A review of the literature revealed that the formal education of female learners has been neglected in Africa and Kenya (Rodney, 1974; Sifuna, 1990; Eshiwani, 1993; King, 1996; Chege & Sifuna, 2008; Mule, 2008; Cutcher, 2009). Gender inequity in education has a long history in Kenya that can be traced back to the creation of the formal education system by Christian missionaries and British colonialists (Kiluva-Ndunda, 2001; Mule, 2008, p. 68).

According to Mule (2008), “the patriarchal ideology embedded within the colonial system, combined with deeply entrenched beliefs about the role of the woman in traditional African societies, served to privilege the education of males over females” (p. 68).

Prof. George Saitoti, former Minister for Education in Kenya, noted that “there is consensus that girls’ and women’s empowerment in general has been seriously impeded by several factors, such as cultural and religious practices, inadequate policy guidelines, poverty, and lack of community awareness. These have impacted negatively on women’s access, participation and performance in education” (KNBS, 2007, p. ix). Muteshi (2006) listed the following constraints to access and success in education among girls and women in Kenya:

- barriers of access
- inadequate facilities
- the institutional culture of schooling
- the pervasiveness of sexual harassment
- the reproductive roles on the girl child and women. (p. 39)
Moreover, when families had constrained access to resources, they tended to invest in boys’ education since sons were expected to become breadwinners of the family, and to inherit property in the future.

Even after 45 years of independence, the majority of those affected by poverty, illiteracy and disease are women. Poor economic growth has led to persistent poverty among Kenyans, with an estimated 50% of Kenyans living below the poverty line on less than two dollars per day. Without being able to access basic services like food, education, shelter, and health care, households and communities have been unable to invest and support the development of basic education, especially in rural areas, arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs), and slums in urban areas. The Government has indicated that development planning needs accurate research data and appropriate policy and legal frameworks to be effective.

However, Mule (2008) insisted that official “educational policy and practice in Kenya, like in many postcolonial African states, often fail to address educational gender inequity” (p. 67). The Government of Kenya and the Ministry of Education have promoted policies for the expansion of schools, educational facilities, and formal education. Although expanding education has been an explicit goal of the government since independence, women and girls have continued to face multiple barriers to access, achievement, quality, and performance in education. Affirmative action policies, government bursary schemes, and curriculum changes have intended to raise the parity of girls’ and boys’ enrollment in schools, but have ignored the root causes of male dominance and female subordination.
Due to persistent economic and socio-cultural barriers, girls and women have largely been excluded from and marginalized within the formal educational system. Men and boys outnumber and outperform women and girls at every level of the formal system, including primary, secondary and university education (Mule, 2008). Although some gender parity exists at the primary level of education, males continue to outperform females in secondary and university education. Males tend to perform better in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) examinations, which guarantee their placement in national high schools where they can receive high quality instruction and facilities. Female students tend to have lower scores on the KCPE exams, and are then enrolled in private or harambee, community-based high schools in rural areas. These schools tend to have fewer facilities such as chemistry labs and libraries and teachers are not as highly trained as those who teach at the national high schools. This results in the persistence of gender inequalities and lower achievement among girls on the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examinations, which determine access to university education (Mule, 2008).

Research since the 1970s has revealed some other obvious and subtle causes of female subordination in education that are largely ignored by educational policies. Socio-cultural issues prevent many girls and women from continuing their education beyond the primary level, including menstruation and sexual maturation, traditional attitudes about gender roles, domestic responsibilities, and parents’ fears of girls’ “exposure” to new ideas or corrupting influences. A further barrier is presented by sexual harassment, gender-based and sexual violence, and male dominance in higher
levels of education and employment. These issues reveal that educational practice must move beyond policy and seek to create “gender responsive schools” that transform the training of teachers, curriculum, textbooks, and the elimination of sexist roles and stereotypes in the classroom and throughout the society (Mule, 2008; Mutunga, 2003; SID, 2006).

**Popular Education Pedagogy: Theory and Practice**

Many theorists have contributed to the vision and practice of popular education. In contrast to traditional practices of formal education, which may preserve the status quo, many progressive educational theorists have articulated a broader vision of education for social change. Popular education is characterized under an umbrella of different terms, also referred to as “development,” “progressive,” “informal,” “non-formal,” “alternative,” “experiential,” “democratic” and “civic” education. To convey the notion that this type of education is “of, by and for the people,” I prefer to use the term “popular education.” However, all of these terms are used to express a concern about the aim of education leading to social change.

Popular education is defined as “conscientization,” or raising the consciousness and awareness of oppressed people to facilitate their action for social change (Freire, 1970). Championed by Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, popular education helps communities to identify their problems, to enhance their expectations, and to facilitate change. Advocates of popular education believe that those most affected by injustice are the ones who should lead the work for creating change. Popular education is designed to
reach people who may be excluded from traditional venues of education or decision
making bodies. Popular education is empowering and it may lead to emancipation and
change for both educators and learners, as well as their larger communities. Popular
education builds understanding by connecting personal experiences to larger social
problems, which often leads to a collective framework for action. In the process,
“everyone is a teacher, everyone is a learner, and everyone has within them the seed to
make change” (Williams, McDermott, & Bonham, 2007, p.2).

A highly influential thinker in the field of popular education was Paulo Freire of
Brazil. Freire is perhaps best known for his book Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970), in
which he described a literacy program that he helped to create for peasant farmers near
Recife, Brazil. Through this program, peasant farmers acquired skills in literacy, which
was a requirement for voting as well as creating cooperative marketing projects and
defending themselves from predatory buyers. Because of his work in this program,
Freire was imprisoned and exiled after a military coup in Brazil for his revolutionary
approach to educating poor people. He lived in exile for the remainder of his adult life,
where he worked in Africa, Asia and throughout Latin America to facilitate adult literacy
and anti-poverty programs. He also became a leading educator in the U.S. at Harvard
University, where he taught in the College of Education.

Freire was highly critical of traditional educational practices, based on a
“banking” concept in which teachers deposited knowledge and information into students
with the expectation that it would be regurgitated back to them. He believed that this
method treated students as empty vessels lacking their own knowledge and experience,
and put all of the authority, expertise, and knowledge in the hands of the teacher. He insisted that many educators treated students as objects instead of subjects, and that this disrespect for students’ humanity was the basis of their oppression. Indeed, the “culture of silence” among oppressed peoples indicates that the “ignorance and lethargy of the oppressed are the direct products of the economic, social and political domination they are victims of” (Freire, 1996, p. 12). Freire analyzed the relationships between teachers and students as the oppressors and the oppressed.

Freire believed that education should be democratic and practiced through a process of “conscientization” or “critical pedagogy” which allows students and teachers to learn together in a mutual process. Freire thus advocated for a method of interactive problem posing and dialogue that engages both students and teachers in critical thinking to seek cooperative solutions to their problems. This process broke down the traditional hierarchical relationship between teachers and students, as everyone could become a learner and a teacher. Freire also explored the possibility of using dialogue as a liberatory practice in education. He explained that, in order for liberation to take place, the oppressed must be aware of the necessity to work for unity and knowledge in order to break the cycle of oppression.

Freire insisted that literacy could be a powerful tool of liberation among the poor, if it was used to raise consciousness for greater liberation and self-determination. As the oppressed became literate, they would be able to apprehend and challenge the structures of authority that dominated them, and the oppressed would therefore act upon and transform their world. Freire emphasized that there is no neutral educational process, and
that education can either facilitate conformity or promote transformation. Freire (1973) advocated for education to be used by ordinary citizens as a political tool of empowerment. He imagined a society that viewed democracy, education and the practice of freedom together in a continuous loop.

Another prominent thinker and pioneer in the field of democratic, popular education was John Dewey. Dewey is known as perhaps the most influential thinker in the democratic education movement at the turn of the 20th century in the United States. According to Green (1999) Dewey claimed that truly democratic education demanded “tradition-transforming schools” emphasizing social change and social justice. Dewey asserted that “schools are to be agencies of cultural as well as individual change toward new and better ways of living that seek to build on, but go beyond, the achievements of the past” (pp. 66-67). Schools should not just teach young people to fit into the existing system imposed by adults, but the youth should be prepared to become “equal co-participants in shaping a more democratic future” (p. 67).

Dewey was a prolific writer who published dozens of books throughout his lifetime, in which he developed theories of experience and reflection in education, democracy and community, and holistic environments for learning. Dewey was highly critical of the prevailing approach to schooling in his time, which he argued was too arid, pedantic, authoritarian, and detached from the real lives of children and youths. He took issue with the “banking” method and the prevailing assumption that children are “blank slates” or empty vessels to be filled by the knowledge of adult teachers. Dewey (1938) critiqued traditional education, which is
one of imposition from above and from outside. It imposes adult standards, subject matter, and methods upon those who are only growing slowly toward maturity. The gap is so great that the required subject matter, the methods of learning and behaving are … beyond the reach of the experience the … learners already possess. (pp. 18-19)

Therefore, Dewey (1938) opposed the traditional teaching methods and instead advocated for the institution of “progressive schools.” This “new education” system would promote the following principles: individual expression, free activity, learning through experience, acquisition of skills and techniques, making the most of the opportunities of the present life, and acquaintance with a changing world (pp. 19-20). Dewey (1916) argued passionately for experiential education:

> The development within the young of the attitudes and dispositions necessary to the continuous and progressive life of a society cannot take place by direct conveyance of beliefs, emotions, and knowledge. It takes place through the intermediary of the environment … The social environment consists of all the activities of fellow beings that are bound up in the carrying on of the activities of any one of its members. It is truly educative in its effect in the degree in which an individual participates or shares in some conjoint activity. (p. 26)

Thus, the “new education” would create a special social environment that would provide learners with experiential activities enabling them to participate more fully in the life of their society, and to learn skills and dispositions to work cooperatively with others.

In his own theories on education, Dewey was ahead of his time. He insisted that education should be experiential and hands-on, and that people learn best by doing things on their own. He believed that educators must engage with and enlarge learners’ experiences and environments, and should encourage the exploration of free thinking and reflection through problem-solving. He was particularly concerned with providing opportunities for community interaction and creating situations where learners would
develop a passion for working together democratically. Education must be used not just to preserve the status quo, but rather to foster cooperation, participation, and the search for the common good. Dewey’s ideas have been picked up and extended by multiple educational theorists since his time.

A contemporary colleague of Paulo Freire was Myles Horton, the founder of the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee. Horton was born and raised in Appalachia by two teachers, and he was a very successful and bright student. As he grew older, he became very interested in the establishment of a rural folk school for adult education, which he deduced was more likely to lead to long-lasting social change than working with children. He felt that children had very little power in society, but adults could gain power through organized action. As he explored educational theory in college, he reflected:

I came to realize that things had to be done through organizations. I knew that people as individuals would remain powerless, but if they could get together in organizations, they could have power, provided they used their organizations instead of being used by them. (as cited in Jacobs, 2003, p. xix)

He first developed the idea for creating an adult education center while he was visiting Copenhagen, Denmark and studying the role of Danish folk high schools. While in Copenhagen, he wrote of his dream of beginning a school in the Tennessee mountains:

I can’t sleep, but there are dreams. What you must do is go back, get a simple place, move in and you are there. You start with this and you let it grow. You know your goal. It will build its own structure and take its own form. You can go to school all your life, you’ll never figure it out because you are trying to get an answer that can only come from the people in the life situation. (as cited in Bell, Gaventa & Peters, 1990, p. xxi-xxii)
In 1932 Horton founded the Highlander Folk School, which has served as an incubator for multiple social justice movements over the past 75 years. Like Dewey, Horton was also very critical of traditional education of the young. Rather than reforming the school system, he believed that the most effective way to affect change was through working with adults in organizations. If oppressed people could become literate and empowered, they could create change through organizing unions, cooperatives and other social movements to address the problems that they faced. Horton resisted the idea of education being led by authorities or “experts.” He believed that “the best teachers of the poor are the poor themselves,” and advocated for peer education programs that were participatory and revolutionary. He claims that teachers must move beyond authoritarian practices in education and create a truly democratic process:

You don’t have to know the answers. The answers come from the people, and when they don’t have any answers, then you have another role and you find resources. (as cited in Jacobs, 2003, p. xvii)

Since 1932, the Highlander Folk School, which was later renamed the Highlander Research and Education Center, has been a training ground for many different social justice movements. Highlander trained labor organizers and trade unionists in the 1930s and 40s, Civil Rights activists in the 1950s and 60s, Appalachian community workers since the 1960s and environmental justice advocates from the 1970s to the present. The Highlander Center continues to be at the forefront of adapting its agenda and programs to the urgent needs for social justice in today’s world. Currently they are organizing a “Seeds of Fire” camp for young Southern activists of color, facilitating Hip Hop and anti-racism workshops for young people, advocating for immigrants’ rights in the
southeastern U.S., and providing support for the struggle for equal rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people. One of the things that allowed Highlander to sustain its work over the long haul has been its ability to adapt and respond to the issues of each new generation of activists.

Highlander is perhaps most notorious for its role in training some of the most influential leaders of the Civil Rights Movement, including Rosa Parks and the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In the 1950’s and 1960’s Highlander organized a program called “Citizenship Schools” which involved teaching literacy to African American people so that they could vote in elections throughout the South. The right to vote was revolutionary for African Americans during that time, and led to a tremendous change in the leadership of many communities throughout the South. Literacy programs prepared disenfranchised, Southern Black people for voting and participation in democracy. The Citizenship Schools program was eventually picked up and continued by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference led by the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

In 2007 I attended a popular education workshop at the 75th Anniversary Celebration of the Highlander Center in Tennessee. I met Larry Olds, the Editor of Pop Ed News, an online newsletter and website devoted to principles and practices of popular education throughout the world. Olds has been involved in popular education since the 1960s, when he volunteered as a teacher in East Africa, prior to the Peace Corps. He has been involved with the East African Development Education Network and the African Association for Literacy and Adult Education (AALAE), organizations that promote lifelong learning through popular education practices. As the need for adult education
Olds insists that these networks of popular education practitioners will be most instrumental in providing guidance to organizations.

In an informal interview, I asked Olds what he considers to be the guiding principles or foundations of popular education. He explained that there are eight principles of popular education, including:

1. Start with experience
2. Deepen analysis and add new information and theory
3. Including the whole person and expressing the artistic voice
4. Becoming more fully human
5. Confronting oppression and privilege
6. Working with, not for, people
7. Applying to action
8. Respecting people’s knowledge. (Olds, 2007, p. 1)

Olds also shared a diagram of a flower that illustrates the core principles of Paulo Freire’s popular education theory and practice. This diagram may be viewed in the figure below.
Figure 1. “The Principles of Paulo Freire” flower diagram. Created by Larry Olds of Popular Education News (2007).

Popular education pedagogy is widely used throughout Africa, and is perhaps best articulated in the series Training for Transformation: A Handbook for Community Workers (Hope & Timmel, 1984). This set of popular education manuals was published in 1984 in Zimbabwe and has been used widely in communities throughout Africa. The first part presents the theory of Paulo Freire on developing critical awareness and putting theory into practice. The second part of the series focuses on building skills to facilitate active learning, participatory development and community organizing. An emphasis is placed on breaking the culture of silence and building the self-confidence of people to express what they already know. Part three analyzes the process of developing critical
awareness about injustice and oppression, how to develop long term planning of programs, and how to build solidarity in people’s movements.

A later edition of *Training for Transformation* was published later in 1999, and includes hands-on activities for workshops on the environment, gender and development, racism, culture and transforming governance. In Book Four, Hope and Timmel (1999) noted that “there has been a radical shift in thinking about development” since the 1980s, with a greater emphasis on sustainability and social justice. However, the training programs on which these books were based are still relevant since they were not based on the dominant Western model of development. “This Western model focused primarily on economic growth, increased production of commodities, capital accumulation and growth of GNP. Development education programmes concentrated primarily on enabling communities and individuals to identify their own needs and find ways of satisfying them together” (Hope and Timmel, 1999, p. vii). Indeed, development education is a “process of involving local people actively in the transformation of their own reality.” This involves helping local people to develop the skills necessary for building “People’s Movements.”

The term “development” itself has come under attack in the past few decades, and many question whether this term should even continue to be used. Vandana Shiva claimed that the movement to involve women in development, promoted during the UN Decade for Women from 1975 to 1985, was “based on the assumption that the improvement of women’s economic position would automatically flow from an expansion and diffusion of the development process” (as cited in Hope and Timmel,
However, it became clear by the 1980s that development itself was the problem:

Insufficient and inadequate “participation” in ‘development’ was not the cause for women’s increasing underdevelopment: it was rather their enforced, but asymmetrical participation in it, by which they bore the costs but were excluded from the benefits, that was responsible. Development exclusivity and dispossession aggravated and deepened the colonial processes of ecological degradation and the loss of political control over nature’s sustenance base. Economic growth was a new colonialism, draining resources away from those who needed them most. The discontinuity lay in the fact that it was now new national elites, not colonial powers, that master-minded the exploitation on grounds of national interest and growing GNPs, and it was accomplished with more powerful technologies of appropriation and destruction. (p. vii)

New visions and critiques of development are thus emerging at the grassroots level.

There is now a sense of urgency about sustainable development that balances economic prosperity with the survival of the planet and the protection of the environment and natural resources. Hope and Timmel (1999) insisted: “environmental issues are of crucial importance to the poor because they are the ones suffering most intensely from the violation of the Earth” (p. viii). Therefore, popular education practices and pedagogies have been amended to adapt to the needs of a changing world. Popular educators now incorporate broad environmental analyses, gender awareness and the values of social justice into all of their plans and programs.

In *Blessed Unrest*, Hawken (2007) described the proliferation of community-based organizations throughout the world. He claimed that “the largest movement in the world” is working to connect the goals of sustainability, ecological restoration, economic development, and social justice. Hawken asserted that a key part of this global movement of activism involves popular education to build civic responsibility and
democratic principles. He defined “democracy education” as “the activity of educating, teaching, training and imparting knowledge and ideas to people about the concepts of democracy, including ideas about civic participation and people’s rights within a democratic state” (p. 229). Democratic or popular education is a “practice of freedom” of inquiry and problem-solving rooted in people’s lived experiences. Democratic education theorists believe that schooling should expand the social, mental and emotional growth of learners. Learners are actively and intimately engaged with the subject matter, learning through a process of discovery that is functionally related to their own experience. The goal of democratic education is to inspire students with a love of learning that extends throughout their lives and ensures their growth as individuals and engaged citizens.

**Feminist Popular Education**

Popular education theory and practice has been enriched significantly by the expansion of transnational feminism and the insights of feminist educators. Shirley Walters and Linzi Manicom (1996) collected a series of reflections that outline the major principles of feminist popular education. They documented the history of the Women’s Program of the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE), an international network of feminist popular educators that share the following objectives: “to build solidarity between women around the world struggling with similar issues; to support those challenging masculine dominance and the exclusion of women in their fields; and to facilitate the exchange and sharing of ideas and resources” (p. 1). Walters and Manicom were South African activists and educators who documented a wide range of
“innovative educational work being developed with women and around gender issues in social movements, development projects, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations in different regions” (p. 2). Their collection of essays documented the insights of feminist popular educators working in South Africa, India, Australia, the Philippines, Canada, Malaysia, and the Appalachian United States.

Walters and Manicom revealed that “popular education” is a practice used in different places or time periods, but is known by many different names. These non-formal educational practices are characterized by similar practices that explicitly challenge injustice and oppression. However, these practices are known by a variety of names depending on the context, including: “community education,” “radical adult education,” “education for change,” “people’s education,” “liberatory education,” “emancipatory education,” “transformative education” and “education for empowerment.” (p. 2). The term “popular education” is widely recognized in international circles of educators and organizers who are influenced by the work of Paulo Freire.

Walters and Manicom thus used the term “feminist popular education” to describe educational work that is “oriented towards transforming gendered power relations and shares the basic methodological principle of valorizing, and building analytically and practically upon, the experiential knowledge of learners themselves” (p. 2). Feminist popular education developed as a “critique of male-biased popular education that was dominant in social movements in different parts of the world” (p. 6). Moreover, this movement was enriched by the focus on empowerment through gender and development
work (Sen and Grown, 1987). There is a growing focus on training and education in development work, and the involvement and inclusion of women in the design and implementation of development projects. These projects include a strong focus on “poverty alleviation strategies such as micro-enterprises, income-generating and credit schemes, all of which necessarily have central training and capacity-building components oriented towards sustainable development” (p. 11).

While it is difficult to transpose feminist popular education practices from one context to another, there are some general themes or operating principles that characterize feminist popular education. Walters and Manicom distilled these eight principles from the reflections of practitioners of feminist popular education in various contexts. These themes often overlap with each other, but they resonate with complex issues in feminist and educational theory. These eight principles include:

1. Start from where women are
2. Experience and expertise
3. Silence and voice
4. Empowerment
5. Difference
6. Facilitation and Control
7. Gender awareness and feminist politics
8. Space, time and place for learning. (Walters & Manicom, 1996, pp. 11-21)

These eight principles may be complex and contested, but they have emerged as the unifying themes that unite programs and processes of feminist popular education around
the world. Therefore, I will use these eight principles in my analysis of Kenyan women’s groups in Chapter Six.

**Popular Education and Women’s Groups in Kenya**

Now I would like to turn our attention to the context of Kenya to investigate the history and applications of popular education theory and practice with women’s groups. Popular education is known as “development education” or “adult education” in Kenya, and is organized formally by the Government of Kenya. The curriculum for adult education was initially developed in the late 1970s during the administration of President Daniel Arap Moi. The Department of Adult Education was founded to address the needs of learners that could not be met in the formal curriculum of schools and universities. The goals of adult education in Kenya include the following:

1. National Unity
2. National Development
3. Individual Development and Self-Fulfillment
4. Social Equality
5. Respect and Development of Cultural Heritage

Adult education classes utilize some Freirean methods of education. Through adult education programs, adult learners are trained through a basic literacy program or post-literacy curriculum. They learn the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic. They are also trained with modules of comic books or role-plays that are focused on current
events and cultural issues, such as inheritance, land ownership, domestic violence, health care, parenting, and other issues. The focus of development education is on self-reliance and sustainable development.

Adult educators also encourage members of adult literacy classes to engage in small business development. A core feature of these programs includes *mradi*, or projects and income-generating activities (IGAs) that are developed by the learners in the adult classes. These IGAs include projects such as tree nurseries, farming, beekeeping, poultry and goat keeping. The participants are trained in all aspects of business, including fundraising, bookkeeping, marketing, management, and investment. They are also instructed in the creation of women’s groups, as they learn to register with social services, to create a constitution, to elect officers, to facilitate meetings, to mediate conflicts, to manage accounts, and to operate as an organization.

Every September, the Department of Adult Education organizes festivals throughout the country to celebrate International Literacy Day. These festivals include dramatic presentations, songs, plays, and demonstrations of income-generating activities by adult learners.
Figure 2. Kiswahili brochure for International Literacy Day. “Together let us promote literacy.” Department of Adult Education of Kenya.

One of the innovative strategies of adult education services is the use of comic books, pamphlets, and cartoons to encourage literacy and provoke discussion on topics of interest to adult learners. For example, the Department of Adult Education publishes the following pamphlets in both English and Kiswahili:
Figure 3. English and Kiswahili pamphlets published by the Department of Adult Education of Kenya. Clockwise from upper left: “Start and Manage Your Business”; “Selecting successful projects”; “Women, Wealth and Inheritance”, and; “Stop this fighting!”

Despite these progressive strategies, a thorough study of adult education policies in Kenya revealed a wide gap between policy and practice. The Kenya National Adult Literacy Survey was conducted in 2006 by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics with the cooperation of the Department of Adult Education and the UNESCO Nairobi Office,
among other partners. This survey was conducted to assess and generate accurate data on the status of literacy in Kenya.

The survey demonstrated the vital need for adult education services for adult women. The following graph revealed the wide gender disparities among adults who never attended school. The gender gap is widest among men and women who are older than 30 years, as 16.7% of men and 31.7% of women over 30 reported that they had never attended school (KNBS, 2007, p. 10).

![Fig. 3.1 Percentage of adults who never attended school](image)

**Figure 4.** Percentage of adults who never attended school in Kenya (KNBS, 2007, p. 10).

The *Kenya National Adult Literacy Survey* reported the following findings:

1. Low adult literacy levels
2. Regional variations in literacy levels
3. Gender disparities

4. Low enrollment and participation in literacy programs

5. Low awareness of literacy programs. (KNBS, 2007, pp. 40-41)

The study found that Kenyan citizens demonstrated a low mastery of literacy and numeracy competency throughout the country. The study found that adult education services have been spotty, and there is great regional variation throughout the provinces. Enrollment was high in the 1970s and 1980s, with the majority of learners being women. However, the enrollments of learners have dwindled over the years. Adult and Continuing Education programs were considered to be of low quality and irrelevant among adult learners. Teachers also reported poor rates of remuneration and lack of training and professional development opportunities. Moreover, according to a report by the Ministry of Education (2007):

Kenya has achieved a literacy level of 61.5 per cent. However, according to the recent National Adult Literacy Survey, 7.8 million adults are still illiterate. Enrolment in adult education programs declined sharply, from 415,074 in 1979 to 100,029 in 2005. Enrolment rates for women have, however, remained above 70 per cent of the total enrolment. In addition, women constitute the majority (58 per cent) of illiterate adult Kenyans. (p. 21)

All of these findings demonstrated a great need to improve and expand adult education services throughout Kenya. These statistics are shocking and reveal some of the major causes of the low access and participation in adult education programs. Although statistical data can give us a snapshot of the problem, not everything that counts can be counted. Qualitative, ethnographic, and participatory action research reveals a deeper
and nuanced understanding of the causes of educational gender inequity in Kenya, an examination of best practices, and a source of ideas for solutions.

Adult education services have not been adequately funded or equitably administered throughout the whole country. Although the government continues to support adult education, it has been marginalized in the Ministry of Culture, Gender, Sports and Social Services. In 2008, the Department of Adult Education was finally incorporated into the Ministry of Education. Few resources have been devoted for training of adult educators and development of curriculum materials that are relevant to the learners’ experiences and practical needs. Educational policies in Kenya have not adequately addressed the large numbers of adult women and female youth who remain illiterate and who have limited access to formal education systems. Future policy recommendations must acknowledge the educational gender inequities in Kenyan formal education, and propose methods to close the gap through affirmative action and resource provision.

Since independence, the development plans of the Government of Kenya have been focused upon uplifting the standard of living of all Kenyans. The government has focused on providing services and mobilizing resources to meet socio-economic needs. Activities and projects have focused on developing self-reliance through individual, family, group and community efforts. Women in particular have organized themselves into groups and organizations to improve their lives and to develop their communities. The Women’s Bureau was established by the Government of Kenya to coordinate the
activities of these groups and organizations. One of the main roles of the Women’s Bureau has been to provide education and training to women’s groups.

The African Association for Literacy and Adult Education (AALAE) was founded in 1969 and is based in Nairobi, Kenya. They recognize that adult education in Africa must deal with the pressures of population growth, agriculture, industrialization, urbanization, national independence, the status of women, and community development. A key focus of the AALAE has been to increase female participation in education. In 1993, AALAE and the Kenya Adult Learners Association (KALA) organized a workshop on “Women’s Empowerment through Literacy.” They brought together educators, community organizers, and participants of adult education classes and women’s groups to discuss the best practices and goals for improvement of women’s empowerment (Houghton, 1993).
This conference revealed that women’s groups play a critical role in the social and economic development of Kenya. Women’s groups have been organized traditionally to address women’s basic needs and for social welfare projects. However, “the repeal of section 2A (of the Kenyan constitution) in December 1990 unleashed a wave of democratic expression and association. Alongside other concerns, the political and economic status of women was a rallying point for a number of associations” (Houghton, 1993, p. 7). This process thus led to a greater focus of activism on addressing the strategic needs of women. This has led to a shift in focus among women’s groups from
social welfare projects addressing basic survival needs to greater advocacy for women’s empowerment and opposition to violence against women.

It is imperative to note that this activism has been taking place at a time when literacy rates have been decreasing dramatically, due to the economic burden of structural adjustment programs and decreasing investments in education. This decline in enrollments in literacy programs is ironic, as Houghton (1993) concluded: “literacy agencies are missing a great opportunity to intervene when the consciousness of women is fairly high. If the thirst for information accelerates the desire to learn, then in the Kenyan case this thirst is not being adequately matched by development agencies” (p. 8). Although multiple agencies are working to engage in civic education, income generating activities, and functional literacy, their work has not been adequately coordinated or shared.

Women’s groups empower their members to develop a deeper awareness of gender relations and to confront gender oppression. Terry Kantai of the Women’s Bureau insisted that women’s oppression occurs as a system, and exists at both a personal and a group level (as cited in Houghton, 1993, p. 17). Kenya is a patriarchal society, where men control land and all valuable resources, and make most of the important decisions. Women’s oppression must be addressed within this context, understanding that the system of patriarchy is deeply entrenched and heavily protected. An individual woman confronting a husband could be dangerous and ineffective, especially in the isolation of the home. Therefore, women’s groups “give space to women to learn from others, to ventilate needs and to work out collective responses and develop self confidence.
Women’s groups are also important as they provide support for reproductive activities and for development work through community action” (Houghton, 1993, p. 17). This analysis reveals one of the core features of popular education: analyzing problems and developing solutions through a cooperative process of consciousness-raising.

In interviews with officials in the Departments of Social Services and adult education, I learned that the majority of adult learners in these programs are women. In both rural and urban contexts, the members of women’s groups are largely illiterate or semi-literate. Kenyan women faced numerous barriers to formal education in their youth – social, economic, and cultural. Therefore, the majority of adults enrolled in basic literacy programs today are women. Women’s groups have either come as an existing group to enroll in these adult literacy classes, or individual learners have organized themselves into groups as a result of their participation in literacy classes. Therefore, the adult education programs in Kenya exhibit a unique partnership with women’s organizations at the grassroots level.

The *Training Curriculum for Women Groups in Kenya* was developed by the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) in cooperation with the Women’s Bureau. This curriculum was developed to address all of the goals of adult education, with a particular emphasis on adapting to the needs identified by women’s groups at the grassroots level. According to Prof. J.M Waithaka, the Director of the Education in the Ministry of Education of Kenya, this curriculum enables participants to learn not just the basics of adult literacy, but also provides “knowledge, skills and attitudes in line with the recommended forward-looking strategies in the development of women groups activities”
(KIE, 1989, p. 1). They enable women to work cooperatively to develop businesses and employment that will continue to support them when they graduate from the program.

Figure 6. Cover page of the *Training Curriculum for Women Groups in Kenya*. Third draft report published by the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) and Women’s Bureau in May 1989.

The *Training Curriculum for Women Groups in Kenya* includes modules in the following six subject areas:

- Community Development
- Human Relations
- Project Development and Management
- Book-keeping and Accounting
- Marketing
- Vocational Education.
Each section of this curriculum includes lesson plans and suggestions for learning and instructional methodology. Each topic outlines specific objectives for the lesson and identifies an outline for discussing the topic with the group. Practical activities are given special emphasis throughout the course, including activities such as lectures, discussions, field visits, role plays, films, and other projects. Suggestions are also given to instructors for assessment, including questions and answers for tests, discussions, interviews, demonstrations and presentations. Throughout the program, participants have opportunities to share their personal experiences with leadership, accessing services, identifying assets and resources, and solving community problems.

Some teachers of adult literacy programs have been trained in the REFLECT methodology, or pedagogical practices modeled after Paulo Freire’s popular education principles. REFLECT stands for “Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques.” REFLECT is used in over 350 organizations in over 65 countries throughout the world.

The REFLECT pedagogy was developed in Kenya in the 1990s by ACTIONAID through a research project exploring the possible uses of participatory rural appraisal (PRA) in adult literacy programs. According to Fordham, Holland and Millican (1995):

In a REFLECT program there are no primers, and no pre-printed materials, aside from the facilitator’s guide. Each literacy class develops its own learning materials, by constructing maps, matrices, calendars, and diagrams, representing different aspects of community experience … This process pools and organizes learners’ existing knowledge, promoting detailed analysis of local issues. It helps the literacy worker to structure the dialogue, by handing over the process to the participants, and not being forced to lead the group to a prescribed conclusion. It is, in addition, an enjoyable activity for adult learners. (p. 69)
For example, groups can construct a gender-workload calendar or a crop-planting schedule using local materials such as sticks, flowers, stones, etc. The literacy worker then replaces the objects with visual cards, including pictures of the concepts discussed. This is the first stage of literacy. This diagram is then transferred to a larger piece of paper, and the class uses the visual symbols to create a more detailed map or chart.

Literacy and numeracy activities then begin from there. “Learners label and number the diagram, use words and phrases from their discussion for practice in reading and writing, and are soon able to write independently, experimenting with various combinations of the syllables and words covered ... The vocabulary is easy to retain because it occurs in a meaningful context” (Fordham, Holland and Millican, 1995, p. 69).

ACTIONAID Kenya notes that the REFLECT circles are seen as a place to share personal problems and to discuss issues that affect individuals, families and communities. They are also a space where people can meet and interact on a regular basis within their village, and a place where participants enjoy fellowship with others through singing, dancing, and games. 70% of the participants in these adult education programs are women. Groups are engaged in training in the management of community based savings and credit cooperatives (SACCOs) and income-generating activities (IGAs) such as farming, livestock keeping, tree planting, carpentry, brick making and embroidery.

ACTIONAID notes that women have achieved great strides through the REFLECT program. As women diversify their sources of income, they become economically empowered. They are also able to assert their roles within the household and negotiate responsibilities with their husbands. This has led to higher enrollment and retention rates.
in the schools, and even literate members of the community are joining the groups for participation in these development activities.

Feminist popular education processes have been used to generate discussion and dialogue about a variety of issues in adult education classes and women’s groups in Kenya. For example, gender awareness has been a key issue addressed by adult educators and community organizers. The organization World Neighbors developed a pamphlet titled *Participatory Gender Sensitization and Analysis for Grassroots: Manual for Community Workers*. This manual seeks to assist community workers in simplifying the concept of gender among grassroots groups. Kilalo (1998) explained:

> Gender is a concept that argues that equity (fairness) of impact in development on women and men, (and) is influenced by social relations that are implemented through structures and institutions. Active involvement of women and men in these institutions is dictated by roles and responsibilities of women and men as socially ascribed. Ascribing of these roles varies from one context to another. In most of the world, it has emerged that the male gender manages and control public institutions and by default determine how resources (natural or otherwise) are allocated and used. This has happened at the expense of the world’s other half: the female gender. Although the practical implications for development such as provision for labor is by the female gender, yet it is not considered important to listen or solicit their views on the development process itself. This has cost the women and the world dearly. (p. 1)

To simplify these concepts, the manual includes a variety of workshop ideas to engage learners in analyzing gender inequalities in their families, villages, and the nation. Participants in community groups are engaged in contributing ideas from their own experience and knowledge to generate discussion and debate. Hands-on activities and participatory workshops guide participants in analyzing gender issues in the household, including the division of labor, ownership and disposal of assets, decision-making, child-
bearing, education, nutrition, employment, leadership and other responsibilities for
meeting basic family needs. Rather than being directed to a set conclusion, participants
tend to internalize the concept of gender equality as they examine social relations in their
own families and communities. They become more empowered and confident to address
issues that directly affect them in their own lives.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

Now I will turn to a discussion of my methodology and research design. I will narrate the chronology of the research schedule, including brief descriptions of the sites of my fieldwork in Kenya. I will then describe the process of data collection. I will explain how I selected research participants and subjects for observation, interviews and surveys. I will define the research instruments that I used, including participant observation, informal and formal interviews, and focus group interviews. I will then describe the procedures and tools that I used to collect, organize, code, analyze, and “make sense of” the data. I will discuss the methodological approaches and theories associated with feminist ethnography, participatory action research, and appreciative inquiry. Finally, I will engage in a discussion of the potential limitations of the study. I will examine myself as a researcher, the tensions around insider/outsider identities, and the ethical issues that arose throughout this project. I am deeply interested in grappling with the methodological process and the ethics of qualitative inquiry. Throughout this chapter, I will evaluate what worked, what didn’t work, and what I would do differently the next time.

During the final interview of my fieldwork in Kenya, I was given some sage advice from Professor Sheikh Ahmed Nabhany, the Director of the Swahili Cultural Centre in Mombasa:

CC: Do you have any question about this research?
NAB: My issue is that you should write what you have found. There are those who research and then they find there is a gap somewhere and fill the gap
I will work hard in writing the truth.

CC: I will work hard in writing the truth.

NAB: If you write the way things are... because there are people who write the opposite of what they found because they want to please someone. But if you write what you exactly found, everyone will be happy with your work. (Sheikh Ahmed Nabhany, personal communication, October 17, 2008)

I begin with this dialogue as an introduction to the issues at stake in cross-cultural research, or presenting the stories of other people. Nabhany revealed that “truth” is contested, particularly when an outsider comes into a community that is foreign to them, and attempts to tell a partial or incomplete story based on their own impressions and observations. Nabhany’s concern about representation and authorship echoes the voices of many colonized people who have been “researched” or “objectified” by cultural outsiders. I will make every attempt to follow his advice.

Similarly, Kotey (1994) narrated an encounter from his own fieldwork:

After several minutes, Ralph abruptly changed his tack, speaking candidly about his work with me. "I'm always willing to give out information like this. But... I don't want anything else said above this. Some people who write books, I've read their stories where they build things up that are not there. When people don't know [any better], any time they hear these things, they believe what you say or write. (p. 57)

These stories and admonitions are a humbling wake-up call for me to stay as close to the data as possible, and to try to present a story that accurately represents the lives and concerns of people and organizations in Kenya, as they were shared with me. I hope to move beyond the outsider’s stance of “reading over the shoulder of natives” to a more collaborative and reciprocal style of ethnography. Indeed, research is a deeply political and a spiritual experience – people trust you with the stories of their lives, and trust that
they will be represented fairly and truthfully. I hope to address these issues in this section on methods and process.

**Research Design**

From November 2007 to November 2008, I spent one year conducting ethnographic, participatory action research with dozens of grassroots women’s organizations and their larger communities in Kenya. Ethnographic and qualitative research methodology was used to explore the breadth and depth of the cultural milieu in which women’s organizations are situated in Kenya. This method was selected because it is a means to explore the local cultures and to describe the phenomenon of the Kenyan women’s movement in a systematic, holistic, and accurate way.

Many ethnographers contend that the key to research is “being there.” Identifying and selecting different sites, and connecting with individuals and organizations in the communities, was a process of discovery, networking, and building relationships. Spending an entire year visiting, observing, and participating in the activities of women’s grassroots organizations in Kenya was essential for getting involved, and gaining the breadth and depth of data that I collected. Participant observation was conducted in the field in order to build trusting relationships and the depth of understanding needed for “thick, rich description.” The members of women’s organizations were directly involved in the study as research participants, informants and co-researchers. Throughout the process, we reflected and acted together, analyzing the issues as the study progressed, revisiting ideas and assumptions, and shifting focus as needed.
Site Selection

The research schedule was intense and varied as I divided my time between three different communities – Nairobi, Taita, and Lamu. Nairobi is the capital city, a cosmopolitan urban center located in the southern central region of Kenya. Taita is located in a rural, agricultural zone in the “Upper Coast” region of the Coast Province. Lamu is a coastal, island town located in an archipelago at the northeastern “Lower Coast,” near the border with Somalia. I spent a total of four months in Nairobi, five months in Taita, and three months in Lamu. I moved around often, and stayed in different places and with different families to get a deeper, nuanced understanding of these communities.

I had lived in Nairobi in previous visits to Kenya, and had conducted research with street children in the center city. I was very familiar with Nairobi and knew that this was a base for many national and international NGOs, foreign embassies, Kenyan government ministries, universities, libraries, bookstores, and other organizations. I had received research clearance from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and visited their library on several occasions to do research. I also visited the libraries of the Ministry of Gender, the Department of Adult Education, the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights, and the Forum of African Women Educationalists. I established a research affiliation with the Department of History, Archaeology and Political Studies at Kenyatta University, and had regular contact with my Kenyan advisor there, Dr. Godwin
Murunga. I also had a number of friends who lived in Nairobi, and I knew that I could easily access assistance and support for my research in the city.

In Taita, I had a number of local contacts where I knew that I could stay and make connections for my research. My friends, Leonard Majalia Mjomba and Mary Majalia, had studied with me at Ohio University for a number of years. Leonard had lived with my husband and me at our farm in Ohio, and we are very close friends. As I was making plans for my research, Leonard and Mary invited us to stay with them at the Taita International School, a small private school that they had founded in Mwatate. Leonard also introduced us to his mother, Mrs. Joan Mjomba, who would become one of my most interesting research participants and the subject of a separate life history project. Mama Mjomba was gracious to host us in Voi, as she had previously hosted a number of interns from Ohio University and my professor, Lisa Aubrey. Another connection to Taita was through Dr. Tom Wolf, the former director of the Kalamazoo College study abroad program in Kenya, who had worked in Taita for many years as a Peace Corps volunteer and researcher, and who introduced me to Mama Agneta and Julius Mwakio Katuu in Mwatate. Finally, I also stayed connected with the Nyambu family in Wundanyi, who had been my host family in 1994, and who introduced me to a number of women’s groups and relatives in the area. For research materials on Taita, I visited the Taita District Commissioner’s Office, the Adult Education Community Learning and Resource Center, the Wundanyi Library, and the Department of Social Services.

Lamu was an unexpected research site, but proved to be a very useful and rewarding place to do research. I had visited Lamu previously in 1994 and remembered
the place fondly, but had not maintained any connections there. My husband and I decided to travel there for a vacation during the Christmas and New Year’s holidays. We did not anticipate, however, the escalation of violence and chaos that would follow the national elections on December 27, 2007. We decided to stay in Lamu to wait for the violence to calm down, as this was a peaceful place. We ended up staying for several weeks, and made a number of connections with local people and organizations while we were there. I reconnected with my former Kiswahili teacher and some old friends from Nairobi who were living there. As I started to learn more about the local culture and women’s organizations, I decided to return for additional research trips later in the year during Maulidi, Ramadan and Eid. Because Lamu is such a small town, and perhaps because the local people are so used to visiting students and tourists, it was relatively easy to meet people and to build a network of contacts for research. I had access to information and books about Lamu through the District Education Office, the National Museums of Kenya, the Lamu Fort Museum Library, *Lamu Chonjo* magazine, and Ustad “Mao,” a local Imam and head of the Pwani Mosque, who generously gave me copies of the Qur’an and other books about Islamic education. Although this was an unexpected turn of events, I embraced this third research site for its potential to teach me more about the Swahili coastal cultures and the challenges and opportunities for Muslim women in Kenya.

Many Kenyans asked me why I chose to work in these places, and suggested that I should have visited their home areas in the Central, Rift Valley, Nyanza, Western, Eastern, or Northeastern Provinces. Indeed, almost everyone insisted that I could have
conducted this research in other communities with different results. However, I chose these communities because of my connections with local people and my previous experiences in these places. As an outsider, I knew that gaining entrée and building rapport with people would be more easily achieved if local people who were respected and trusted introduced me. Another advantage of working in these sites is they represent various cultures, economies, and environments – which helped me to explore the diversity of women’s experiences within Kenya. I also investigated rural and urban dynamics as well as the relationships between the core (Nairobi) and the periphery (Coast Province). In the future, I would like to extend this study to other communities around Kenya to explore the relationship between women’s organizations and the cultures, economies and environments in which they are situated.

**Selection of Research Participants**

Research participants were selected from a variety of backgrounds, including voluntary members of women’s grassroots organizations in Kenya – both non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) - government officials, educators, parents, and others. Research participants were adult women and men (over the age of 18). Care was taken to include a diversity of people from different age groups, genders, ethnic and linguistic groups, religious communities, marital status, socioeconomic status, and occupations. Participation was voluntary and no undue burdens were placed upon people who are already overburdened with economic or educational disadvantages.
Participants were identified and recruited based upon a combination of snowball and purposive sampling of members of women’s organizations and other related fields. The recruitment of participants was by word-of-mouth, and was announced orally at organizational meetings and activities, or through networking with and asking for recommendations from other people whom I interviewed. The research participants were selected based on their willingness to speak with me, to be observed in their meetings and activities, and to discuss how the educational process has influenced their movement. If research participants were chosen from records of group membership, such as that provided by national or local government offices, permission was requested from the local leaders of the organizations and from the women themselves. Gaining informed consent of the individual members was a condition of their participation in interviews and focus groups.

According to the academic standards of the Belmont Report and the Ohio University Institutional Review Board (IRB), it is vitally important to design research that will ensure the protection of interests of human subjects through the three core principles of “respect for persons, beneficence, and justice.” Therefore, I will describe the “informed consent” process that I used. Informed consent was necessary to ensure that the research participants were well-informed of the purposes, risks and benefits of this research prior to gaining their consent to participate in this study. I will also describe measures that I took to protect the anonymity or confidentiality of the research participants.
As I introduced myself to the leaders and members of grassroots women’s organizations in Kenya, I explained the purposes of my research. Research participants were selected on a voluntary basis and were not subjected to pressure or coercion. I requested permission to observe the interactions and activities of the groups and sought volunteers to participate in formal and informal interviews and focus groups. I also asked permission to attend, participate in, or observe activities of the group. I translated the informed consent form into Kiswahili and verified that the language is understandable with native Swahili speakers. If the participants did not read or speak English, or if they were not literate in Kiswahili, I read the form to them in Kiswahili and made sure that I answered all of their questions before they signed the form. A copy of the informed consent form may be found in the appendices.

There were no anticipated risks or discomforts associated with participation in this study. There was no pressure or coercion placed upon participants. All participants were observed or interviewed on a voluntary basis and were given the option of confidentiality (i.e. to remain anonymous and quoted by a pseudonym). If the research participants felt uncomfortable at any time, they had the option to refuse to answer questions, to leave the interview, or to stop participating in the study. Great care was taken to minimize all risks or discomforts associated with this research.

Participants were not paid and did not receive any physical benefits from participation in the study. However, sometimes I would give donations to groups when I was asked to do so – but I did this sparingly and only when I was sure that they had also invested some of their own resources in the project. I would not typically give money to
a group when I was meeting them for the first time. However, I made exceptions to this rule and gave gifts or donations to groups that I worked with over a sustained period of time. For example, at the urging of my research assistant, Mama Agneta, I would bring “gifts” to the Mwakitutu Women’s Group such as tea leaves, sugar, and bread to meetings, to ensure that the group could make *chai* for themselves and their visitors. This is a large part of local culture; when visiting someone, it is considered polite to bring a small offering of food or tea for your host, and to ensure that you are not burdening them with your visit. Also, after several meetings with the Mwakitutu Women’s Group, I decided to give them thank-you gifts of matching blue *kikoi* – a popular wrap that they could wear when going for meetings or dances as a group. I also gave money to the group members when I bought many of their *vidasi*, or woven sisal baskets, which I brought home as gifts. I also donated funds for a building that they were constructing – the building was almost complete, and I contributed six bags of concrete to help them to finish the floors and walls. I also gave a donation for my condolences to the family of Jerusha Machocho Amoni, one of the members who died during the course of my research. We gathered the group at her family’s house for a prayer meeting, and brought cakes, tea leaves, and bread for the meeting. In exchange for these gifts and in honor of our friendship, the group also gave me a number of gifts – *lesos*, baskets, special foods like cakes and *kimanga* – and a live rooster was given to my husband when he visited the group. My participation in giving helped to create a sense of togetherness and belonging, and I felt that it was a good way for me to show reciprocity with the group.
There were also a number of intangible benefits to participation in this study. Participants may have received psychological and social benefits through their involvement in the organizations themselves. Their sense of pride and empowerment may have been increased through their participation in this study. Some of the research participants expressed that they enjoyed meeting me, and appreciated the opportunity to learn more about the United States and to make a friend from another culture. They also expressed that they felt I was like a “bridge” for them – another voice for their struggles that could connect them to resources or potential support beyond their immediate communities - to the government, to donors, and even outside of Kenya. Many also stated that they gained information, resources and ideas about popular education and other women’s organizations through the process of our interviews.

As much as possible, all identifiable data were kept confidential according to the wishes of the research participants. In the process of gaining informed consent, the research participants were able to request that their names be kept confidential. The research participants are identified by name only if they gave expressed consent by signing the informed consent form. If they did not give consent to be identified and expressed that they would like to remain anonymous, they were given pseudonyms that were used when their responses were quoted in the dissertation. Their interviews were recorded digitally and were filed in my personal computer for transcription, coding, and analysis. These digital audio files and their transcriptions were only accessible to me (the primary investigator). My research assistants were also given access to selected audio
files as they helped with translation and transcription. The consent forms were kept in a separate location as hard copies, and remained locked in my private room.

The majority of research participants were adult women and a few men. Although I interacted with some young people in schools, youth groups, or families, I limited these interactions to participant observation and sought parental consent, teachers’ consent, or assent from the minors. If minors were mentioned in the final research reports, I used pseudonyms to identify them. I limited my informal and formal interviews to adult women members of organizations, educators, government officials, parents, and others who were involved with women’s organizations and adult education.

If I were to change anything about the process of informed consent, I would reconsider asking all of the participants to sign a form. Many of the people I worked with, particularly older women, were barely literate in their own language, let alone English. Asking them to read, and then sign a form, seemed forced and insensitive. It introduced a feeling of awkwardness, tension, or barriers when I would begin an interview by asking people to sign the form. My identity as a White, American woman was already a barrier, but when I would ask someone to sign a form, this created even more distance and suspicion. Many people associated signing a document with institutions that ruled them, including government bureaucracies, the colonial system, or electoral commissions. Some people in Kenya tended to be hesitant or suspicious when I would ask them to give me permission to use their name. Two respondents even asked that they remain anonymous and did not want me to record the interview. Some of the respondents indicated that their faith or beliefs were a factor. One said that a woman’s
voice is sacred and should not be captured – according the rules of modesty in Islam – and she refused to be recorded. Another researcher from the University of Michigan told me that asking people in Lamu to sign a document for informed consent seemed ludicrous, that many researchers had worked here without doing this, and that many people would feel uncomfortable. She insisted that it was sufficient to gain verbal consent in the recording, and to acknowledge that the interview could be quoted.

In the future, I would request permission from the IRB for verbal rather than signed consent. I believe this is important to minimize discomfort for the respondents, particularly people who are not literate, or who associate signing a document with the British colonial system or the post-independence Government of Kenya.

On the other hand, I wish that I had used a survey form to collect specific data about each respondent as I was interviewing them. This would make it easier to draw comparisons among the respondents, to track them down in the future for further interviews, and to sustain a relationship from a distance. I was inspired to do this after reading Halperin’s (2005) ambitious study of two hundred and fifty women in *I Laugh So I Won’t Cry: Kenya’s Women Tell the Stories of Their Lives*. In the future, I would take notes during each interview or record information to later fill out a form. I would seek the following information: the full name of the interviewee, contact information including mailing address and mobile phone number, location of home or workplace, birthplace, age, highest level of education achieved, occupation, ethnicity, religion, marital status, and number of children. I would also list the names of the women’s group(s) to which each respondent belonged, keeping in mind that many people belong to multiple groups.
This would also help me to analyze the relationships and shared affiliations between different respondents.

For future studies, I would also request permission from the IRB to interview children and adolescents, or to conduct focus groups in school classrooms. I spent a great deal of time with families and schools, and interacted with thousands of children. Although I had ample opportunities to observe and talk to children informally, and to visit schools for guest teaching and tutoring, I did not feel comfortable doing formal interviews or focus groups because I did not have IRB clearance. To expand the focus of the study -- and to allow young people to speak in their own voices, rather than having adults speak on their behalf -- it will be essential to interview young people in the future.

**Instruments of Data Collection**

To elicit and present the participant’s stories, I triangulated my data collection with multiple instruments. I used a combination of methods, including: participant observation; formal and informal interviews; focus groups; and document analysis. All of these methods are standard forms of data collection and inquiry within qualitative methodology.

Participant observation was conducted throughout my year in Kenya. In many ways, I felt like I was constantly doing research, as all five senses were attuned to my new environment. It was a holistic experience of immersion into Kenyan life, society, and politics. Every day, I watched people, rode public transportation, went to the market, interacted with my neighbors and friends, had conversations, attended meetings, watched
television, read the newspaper, listened to the radio, and lived alongside people, participating as much as possible in community life. I met women in their homes, and spent time drinking *chai*, cooking, playing with children, or assisted with housework, gardening, or food preparation. I kept a notebook with me in my handbag, and jotted down ideas as they came. When I went home at the end of the day, I would write down my thoughts in my notebook or in my field notes on the computer. I wrote over one thousand pages of observational field notes throughout the year.

I used a combination of formal and informal interviews to engage the individual participants in this research. I conducted interviews using a combination of languages, including English (the official language), Kiswahili (the national language), Kidawida (the local, vernacular language of Taita), and Arabic (spoken by Muslims in Lamu). The interviews were semi-structured around a set of questions, but often would be specific to the issues that were of concern to them. Sometimes before an interview, I would sketch out a list of questions that were more specific to the information I wanted to get from that respondent, based on the little knowledge I had about his or her background, education, occupation, position, organization, or experiences. The interviews were a process of conversation and storytelling -- the uncovering of narratives that spoke to their personal and organizational life histories.

I developed an interview guide that I previously used in interviews with Kenyan students at Ohio University for a prior research project on the Green Belt Movement. Based upon the feedback I received from these research participants, I refined this interview guide to make the questions more relevant for this more comprehensive study.
of popular education among women’s grassroots organizations in Kenya. I also hoped to illuminate the productive and reproductive activities of women, and to demonstrate the impact of the women’s organizations on family and household livelihoods. I included questions that investigated women’s labor, economic activities, family income, educational achievement, health, nutrition, agricultural production, childbearing, family planning, and other measures of household livelihoods. I also hoped to discover how the women’s participation in organizations has influenced the dynamics of their family life, or how their participation has affected the lives of other members of their household, including husbands, children, siblings, parents, and other relatives. I also adapted questions for the interviews from Olds’ (2007) guide for recognizing the “eight interlocking and overlapping principles of popular education”. All of these questions were drawn up into an interview guide. When I began my research in Kenya, I translated the questions into Kiswahili with the help of two local research assistants. The Kiswahili and English versions of the questionnaires for individual interviews may be found in the appendices.

Most of the interviews were informal, semi-structured conversations. The interview questionnaire was loosely followed as a guide for the interviews. Typically I would also write up a list of questions that were directed to the person I was meeting with, based upon previous knowledge or encounters I had with that person or their organization. In the interview, I basically asked open-ended questions that invited the person to talk, to tell stories, and to share their opinions. As Glesne (2006) reveals, interviewing is a “process of getting words to fly … You toss questions that you want
your respondents to ‘hit’ and hit well in every corner of your data park, if not clear out of it” (p. 79). I tried to keep the tone of the interview very informal and conversational, to put the person at ease and to allow their stories, ideas, and interests to guide the conversation. When they would pause in telling their story, I would look at my list of questions and select questions to explore and dig deeper.

While I tried to anticipate the questions I would tentatively ask before entering the field in Kenya, many other questions emerged throughout the course of interviewing and doing research. Glesne (2006) reveals that “the opportunity to learn about what you cannot see and to explore alternative explanations of what you do see is the special strength of interviewing in qualitative inquiry …. In the process of listening to your respondents, you learn what questions to ask” (p. 81). Indeed, although I drafted a list of questions before I started the research, the interview guide changed significantly according to the context and the individuals who were participating.

I also conducted focus group interviews, in which I interviewed small groups of women who are voluntary members of grassroots, community-based organizations. Focus groups were not always initiated by me, as they also included community meetings and barazas, information sessions held by NGOs, roundtable discussions at universities, and activities or workshops organized by the women’s groups. The goal of these focus groups was to engage or observe women in group discussions about the impact of the educational practices and leadership development strategies of the organizations in the members’ lives. Since popular education tends to happen in a collective setting, and since Kenyan women tend to communicate cooperatively, these focus group interviews
helped me to replicate and observe the conditions and behaviors that facilitate collective reflection and action. I based the focus group interview process loosely around Olds’ (2007) document from *Popular Education News*. This questionnaire describes the eight principles of popular education and provides questions for guided reflection and planning of popular education programs. I wanted to learn more about the group’s dynamics and ideas by guiding the research participants into a discussion about how these principles apply, or do not apply, to the activities, trainings and workshops in which they have participated with their organizations. A copy of this document and the questionnaires for focus group interviews may be found in the appendices.

**Methods of Data Collection**

Collecting and analyzing the data from these interviews and observations was an ongoing process. I collected documents throughout the year, including books, pamphlets, newspaper articles, journals, and annual reports of women’s organizations and other civil society groups. The majority of the original data from this research were collected through field notes, transcriptions of formal and informal interviews, and transcriptions of focus group interviews. Descriptive data was recorded in observation field notes and interview transcripts. During each day of fieldwork, I jotted down notes and ideas in a notebook, which I expanded when I went home at night to compose more detailed field notes on the computer. The field notes served as a journal to record my observations, analysis, and my own experience. This data was preserved in narrative form and quotations in order to stay as close to the data as originally recorded. As much as
possible, I tried to develop coding for analysis throughout the process, paying attention to themes that emerged from the research.

The interviews of individuals and focus groups were recorded with a digital voice recorder, which were then downloaded, stored, and transcribed on my personal computer. The participants were also photographed or videotaped if they consented to being filmed. These tapes were stored in my office and my personal computer. After finishing the dissertation, I hope to edit the video, audio and photos into a short film for use in conference presentations and other scholarly activities.

In November 2008, I returned to the United States to continue with the analysis and writing of the dissertation at Ohio University. I received funding to support the writing of my dissertation from the American Association of University Women (AAUW) American Fellowships Program from 2008-2009. I continued to work closely with my committee members at Ohio University throughout the research, writing, analysis, and editing process.

Transcription and translation of the interviews was a key aspect of the analysis, and a step that required a lot of time and attention. Converting the audio recordings to text was necessary for deeper analysis, and made it possible to quote from the interviews and focus groups. I transcribed some of the Kiswahili interviews and all of the English interviews myself, starting while in the field and continuing through December 2009. I received assistance with translation and transcription from three colleagues in Kenya – Agnes Mulewa (MA, Kiswahili Language and Literature, Kenyatta University); Eliud Lubanda (MA, History, Kenyatta University); and Jessy Mwangola (a woman from Taita
who assisted with the translation and transcription of interviews from Taita where women spoke in Kidawida). I also found support from two Kenyan students at Ohio University, George Gathigi and Solomon Maingi, who helped with translation and transcription of fifteen hours of Kiswahili interviews from Lamu and Taita. These files were only accessible to me and my research assistants. I explained to the research participants in the informed consent process that their responses would be used as ethnographic data for research and analysis. The original recorded files will be preserved for at least three years after the date that the dissertation research is completed.

In the spirit of community-based, participatory action research, I strived to keep the scope of these research questions open so that new questions and themes could emerge from the data and the interests of the participants. Due to concerns about issues of representation and voice, I aimed to collaborate with group members as research partners in developing and posing additional questions that were meaningful and useful for their own goals and purposes. Nevertheless, despite my commitment to participatory research, the goal of this project is the completion of my dissertation, so some of my action-oriented goals had to be postponed for later research. I hope that the process of research and reflection helped to guide the participants toward a deeper sense of the unique educational practices of their organizations and a desire to improve their community-based education and organizing.
Data Analysis

While this research project is qualitative and the analyses emerged throughout the process, I had a few hypotheses or *a priori* assumptions that guided my research. The central hypothesis for this research was that women’s organizations practice the principles of feminist popular education, or promote critical thinking skills and empowerment among women to engage in leadership and collective action. These hypotheses were tested and confirmed through analysis of the qualitative data generated in the research. The organizations’ educational interventions were evaluated based upon observations and interviews with members. In order to understand the position of the women who are involved in women’s grassroots organizations, I took a critical feminist theoretical approach in both my questioning and my analysis. I placed the perspectives and experiences of diverse Kenyan women at the center of my study and our shared analyses.

This project follows the seven phases for analytic procedures outlined by Marshall and Rossman (2006), including:

a. organizing the data;
b. immersion in the data;
c. generating categories and themes;
d. coding the data;
e. offering interpretation through analytic memos;
f. searching for alternative understanding; and
g. writing the report or other format for presenting the study. (p. 156)

In this section, I will explicate the process and strategies that I used to analyze and “make sense of” the data.
As stated earlier, the majority of the data from this research were collected through field notes and interviews. During the year, I took copious notes -- I filled six notebooks with handwritten notes and typed over one thousand pages of field notes on my laptop computer. I also conducted over one hundred individual interviews and over thirty-five focus groups. More than half of these interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed – the others were informal and recorded in my observational field notes. This data was qualitative in nature and was transformed to the text through a process of description, analysis, transcription, interpretation, evaluation, and theory (Glesne, 2006, p. 164-166).

First, descriptive data was recorded in observation field notes and interview transcripts. This data was written in narrative form and quotations in order to stay close to the data as originally recorded. I hired several research assistants from Kenyatta University in Nairobi and at Ohio University to assist with the translation and transcription of interviews that were recorded in Kiswahili and Kidawida. I also transcribed all of the interviews that were conducted in English, and some of the interviews in Kiswahili. Careful and detailed translation and transcription was important to the process, as quotations from field notes and interviews are used in the final analysis. Quotations and excerpts were selected in order to place the reader in the context of the study sites and to allow multivocality -- including the many voices of the research participants.

Secondly, analysis of the data extended the descriptive data by identifying essential features, patterns, and themes for further exploration. Detailed coding schemes
were developed in an inductive process throughout the transcription and analysis process, in order to identify the relationships between different participants and phenomena in the study. Computer software programs, including Express Scribe and Switch, assisted me with the transcription of digitally-recorded interviews. I also used N-Vivo 8, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) program. N-Vivo assists with systematic analysis of qualitative data through multi-layered coding and retrieval of keywords or themes in the text of my interview transcriptions and field notes. Throughout the analytical process, trends and patterns were identified in the data (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 244). These patterns were coded with “tree nodes” in which major themes emerged with sub-themes branching out. This process helped me to organize my data into a more simplified structure of analysis and to narrow down my focus to two core research questions.

Thirdly, interpretation occurred through the probing of deeper concepts and theories. This entailed moving from description to analysis -- transcending the “factual” or descriptive data, using theory to provide a structure for analysis, connecting to personal experiences, and exploring alternative or interpretive means of presenting or “making sense of” the data. The analysis took the longest amount of time of the entire dissertation process, as I was challenged to weave a narrative of the disparate strands and multiple themes that emerged from the data.

Finally, the analysis was evaluated and connected to the theoretical framework of popular education and African feminisms. New “grounded” theories emerged from the final analysis and interpretation, tying the theoretical framework to the Kenyan context.
The research intends to produce and enhance knowledge about popular and informal education in Africa, and the role of civil society groups and grassroots women’s organizations in providing alternative education and empowerment.

From the ethnographic analysis, I demonstrate and analyze the role of grassroots women’s organizations in facilitating popular education for women’s empowerment and sustainable development in Kenya. I compare the strategies and approaches that I witnessed to those described in the literature on feminist popular education. I hope to extend this analysis beyond Kenya’s borders, and will attempt to demonstrate how this model could be adapted to suit local contexts and cultures in similar circumstances throughout the world.

I must admit that the data analysis and writing process took longer than I previously planned, which was partly due to the overwhelming amount of data I collected and the complicated nature of ethnographic research. I also confess a severe lack of planning for how to analyze the data with the N-Vivo program, which was more complex to navigate than I anticipated. I joked that analyzing the data for this project was like herding cats.

However, I was also interrupted and distracted frequently throughout this final stage by the demands of my personal and professional life. Since returning from the field in 2008, I have traveled and presented at numerous conferences, taught forty to eighty students per quarter in Women’s and Gender Studies classes, pursued other research interests, published papers, engaged in activism and community organizing, gave birth to and nursed a baby girl, and managed life as a wife and mother on a farm in rural Ohio.
I also did not anticipate the depression I would experience or the alienation I would feel with my culture shock upon re-entry to life in Ohio. I deeply missed my Kenyan friends and colleagues and the freedom and solitude I had to devote to my work in Kenya. I missed the slow and deliberate pace of life, the entire days when I would be immersed in interviewing, visiting, and observing, and had hours to spend writing at night. Back in Ohio, time was scarce and I was scrambling to keep up with the pace of life around me. I was constantly asked, “Have you finished your paper yet?” and reminded: “The best dissertation is a done dissertation!” I was also scolded and discouraged by some who warned that the majority of female Ph.D. candidates drop out before defending their dissertations.

As my patience waned and defensiveness grew, I reflected on and often resented the many demands placed upon my time. I realized that my struggle to balance work and life is shared by so many professional women. Walters and Manicom (1996) reflect that all of the authors of *Gender in Popular Education* are simultaneously activists, educators, and academics:

Activists’ lives are, by nature of the work, over-subscribed. The time and space needed for standing back from a process, reflecting upon and analyzing it, engaging with bodies of literature and then undertaking the slow, extractive process of writing, is not easy to come by, particularly when it is not released time or time that is paid for …. Their contributions still involved stolen moments, stops and starts, and many hours that they could ill afford. (pp. 5-6)

The challenges I faced in the writing process also helped me to deeply and personally understand the challenges of adult education. I recalled numerous interviews in Kenya and conversations with colleagues in the U.S., where equity, access and retention are key
problems facing adult women learners. I am grateful to my committee, colleagues, friends and family for pushing me to finish.

In the future, I will give a great deal more attention to the analytical process from the very beginning of my research design. I will take care to focus my research questions more succinctly from the beginning of a project. I will also try to begin the analytical process earlier, taking care to transcribe the interviews, perform member checks and follow-up questions, and start the coding process while still immersed in the field. I have learned the hard way that the analytical process is a slow, grueling struggle without proper planning and a more thorough research design.

**Methodological Approaches**

The methodology for this research combines the multiple approaches of critical feminist ethnography, participatory action research, and appreciative inquiry. Using a mixed methodological approach allows me to take the best strategies from each field of inquiry, and to practice the methods that are consistent with the spirit and the approach of popular education. My combined perspectives and approaches to research will ensure sensitivity to cultural, socioeconomic, gender, and power differences, a desire for empowerment of and respect for Kenyan people, and an appreciation for women’s grassroots organizations as a source of hope for Africa and the world.

In all of these approaches, my role as the researcher is defined in partnership with the research participants, informants, or subjects. As an action researcher, my goal is to work alongside the research participants, engaging with them to analyze their problems
and find solutions that are grounded in their own experiences. Research participants are not only seen as sources of data or information, but are intimately engaged in shaping the research questions, in directing the flow of research, in identifying other stakeholders, and in analyzing the issues.

Critical Feminist Ethnography

Critical feminist ethnography seeks to examine how women experience and resist oppression, and seeks to uncover and understand issues of justice and power. According to Patton (2002), principles of feminist inquiry include the following considerations:

- a sense of connectedness and equality between researcher and researched;
- explicitly acknowledging and valuing ‘women’s ways of knowing’ including integrating reason, emotion, intuition, experience, and analytic thought;
- participatory processes that support consciousness-raising and researcher reflexivity; and
- going beyond knowledge generation, beyond ‘knowledge for its own sake,’ to engage in using knowledge for change, especially ‘knowledge about women that will contribute to women’s liberation and emancipation.’ (p. 129)

This project incorporates key elements of feminist theory, pedagogy, activism, and methodological concerns. Feminist inquiry is action-oriented, complex, and brings a deep awareness to issues of power and authority.

Critical feminist ethnography is a field of study that is hotly contested and explicitly political. It is helping us to rethink the role and purpose of anthropology in the twenty-first century, as well as the dynamics of power and identity inherent in cross-cultural feminist research and activism. Behar (1995) claims that critical feminist
ethnography “was born of a double crisis – the crisis in anthropology and the crisis in feminism” (p. 3). The crisis in anthropology emerged from feminist critiques of the text *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (1986), edited by James Clifford and George Marcus. *Writing Culture* explored “new ethnography” and experimental ethnographies, but excluded women as contributors and women’s issues from ethnographic concerns. Then, the crisis in feminism refers to the 1980s critiques of White, middle-class feminism by lesbians and women of color. This critique largely grew outside of the academy but was embodied by the publication of *This Bridge Called My Back* (1983), an anthology edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua. In response to these publications -- and the crises they signified for both anthropology and the women’s movement -- grew the inspiration for inclusive perspectives on the contributions and challenges of feminist ethnography.

This led to the publication of a groundbreaking anthology of feminist ethnographies, *Women Writing Culture* (1995). Behar and Gordon list the following questions that guide their research:

What does it mean to be a woman writer in anthropology, a discipline deeply rooted in the narrative of the male quest? How does it change the history of anthropology to truly take seriously the writing of women anthropologists? Is there an ethnographic practice that is uniquely feminist? If there is, how is this feminist ethnography distinct from both the “anthropology of women” of the 1970s and the analysis of gender of the 1980s? (p. xi)

In the introduction, “Out of Exile,” Behar sets the stage with a historical overview of the emergence of feminist ethnography and women working in the field of anthropology. Behar analyzes the assumptions inherent in Clifford’s *Writing Culture,*
which sought to explore “new ethnography” but which relegated women writers to the background. She reflects

In an act of sanctioned ignorance, the category of the new ethnography failed to take into account that throughout the twentieth century women had crossed the border between anthropology and literature – but usually ‘illegally,’ as aliens who produced works that tended to be viewed in the profession as ‘confessional’ and ‘popular’ or, in the words of Virginia Woolf, as ‘little notes.’ (p. 4)

By surveying the history of feminist ethnography, literature, and cultural criticism, Behar reveals that women have always been interested in pushing the boundaries of writing and thinking about “the Other.” However, male leaders within the field of anthropology have often been privileged over women by research grants and funding, positions as faculty members and chairs of departments, and preferential treatment by publishers. Throughout the introduction, Behar acknowledges the struggle of feminist ethnographers to move “out of exile” and to gain recognition for their research and writing.

At the same time, Behar reveals that the effect of Moraga and Anzaldúa’s book, This Bridge Called My Back (1983), was to humble White feminist ethnographers and to make them conscious of the ways in which women of color had been neglected and distorted. Behar reflects that the book:

made us rethink the ways in which First World women had unself-consciously created a cultural other in their images of “Third World” or “minority” women. And it forced feminist anthropology to come home. This Bridge not only called attention to white feminist oversights but also signaled the importance of creating new coalitions among women that would acknowledge differences of race, class, sexual orientation, educational privilege, and nationality. That the divisions between women could be as strong as the ties binding them was a sobering, and necessary, lesson for feminism. (Behar & Gordon, 1995, p. 7)
Another deep concern expressed in *This Bridge* was the politics of authorship. The contributors were Native American, African American, Latin American and Asian American. They “wrote in full consciousness of the fact that they were once the colonized, the native informants, the objects of the ethnographic gaze, and they pondered the question of who has the right to write culture for whom” (p. 7). The contributors also questioned “anthropology’s often static, unpolticized, comfortably-somewhere-else concept of culture, they challenged anthropologists to take into account the discriminations of racism, homophobia, sexism, and classism in the America to which we continually returned after pursuing our research in faraway places” (p. 7).

In the 1990s and 2000s, women researchers and writers from the Global South extended these critiques to the imposition of Western feminist agendas and ideologies on women’s movements and issues in other parts of the world (Narayan, 1997; Mohanty, 1991 & 2003; Oyewumi, 1997 & 2003; Trask, 1999). They question the efficacy and possibility of a “global politics of sisterhood” and call into question the salience of gender as the most important identity in women’s lives. They explore the limits to feminist analyses as conceived by Western women and explore women’s multiple identities in the Global South – including attention to race, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status (class or caste), language, and other differences. They examine the differences between strategic and practical needs, and explore the ways that indigenous women have organized to meet these needs. They reveal that transnational feminist organizing and research may only be possible through a recognition of the history of
colonization, capitalism, racism, globalization – and how these have circumscribed women’s lives in the Global South.

A key aspect of critical feminist ethnography is the preoccupation with intersubjectivity and positionality, or the relationship that develops between the researcher and those who are being researched. Many feminist researchers are keenly aware of power differences, particularly in cross-cultural research, and have taken steps to redress this imbalance. Bobasi et al. (2005) reflects, “Although there is acknowledgement that the relationship between researcher and participant inherently involves power differentials, feminist researchers adopt strategies to minimize power inequities as far as possible” (p. 495). These strategies include attention to how to structure interview situations and focus groups as an exchange of information and ideas as a two-way movement, rather than an exercise in collecting data. Also, the researcher gives ample opportunities for participants to direct the conversation, to ask questions, and to raise their own concerns (Reed, 2007, pp. 86-87). The researcher is cognizant of her role in the field and how her positionality affects the relationships as well as the flow of information, what is shared and what is withheld from the conversation. When power differences threaten the legitimacy of research, it is important to use these strategies to ensure that imbalances are evened out.

**Participatory Action Research (PAR)**

An analysis of the history of ethnographic and feminist research in Africa has revealed complicated issues of power and authority between outsiders and insiders.
Researchers today share a deep sensitivity to the legacy of colonialism and the collusion of anthropologists with colonial regimes. This analysis has influenced and restructured the process of research design and implementation. A field of “participant-oriented” research has emerged through the work of critical, feminist, and action researchers. Contrary to traditional modes of inquiry in which the authority for research decisions rests solely with the researcher, these “participant-oriented” researchers raise important questions and concerns about the research purposes, researchers’ responsibilities, and relationships with the people who are being studied.

One of the major issues I confront is related to concerns about service learning and volunteerism. In short, how do I engage in action-oriented research with a focus on service without falling into the “missionary position”? Is it possible for me to approach this from the lens of service learning, or is that too complicated in this situation of my dissertation research? What can be gained from taking an action-oriented and critical ethnographic approach in my research?

Action researchers adopt an explicit set of values and do not claim a position of objectivity. Thomas (1993) claims “traditional ethnography strives to describe what is, while critical ethnography looks at what ‘could be’ and moves towards action” (as cited in Glesne, 2006, p. 15). Additionally, Glesne claims that action research “has at its essence the intent to change something, to solve some sort of problem, to take action, but the focus is not necessarily emancipatory or political” (p. 15). In some of the places where she has conducted research, some activist groups have wanted Glesne to use her abilities to “help their organization in its efforts, not to do research on them for use
elsewhere. And I wanted to be of use to the people with whom I was living and from whom I was learning” (p. 15). She describes her role as that of a “volunteer researcher,” in which she worked under the group’s direction, but retained some control over her participation by nature of her volunteer status.

I believe that “volunteer researcher” describes the role that I fulfilled in my research in Kenya. In this research project, I attempted to assist the women’s organizations with their projects, while members are involved with my project as “co-researchers … who combine investigation, education, and action” (Glesne, 2006, p. 15). As a cultural outsider in Kenya, and as a White American woman, I believe it was important for me to immerse myself in the Kenyan culture, and to become involved in the lives of people and their organizations. Glesne (2006) reveals that “for anthropologists, fieldwork – being present in others’ lives – is the way to learn about another culture” (p. 1).

To avoid the positivist stance, which presumes detachment and objectivity, I believe it was necessary for me to become engaged and involved in the communities where I was studying. This engaged method of involvement in the field placement is referred to as “participant observation.” According to Panini (1991), participant observation may be defined as:

more than a mere technique of data collection in the hands of skilled and sensitive sociologists and anthropologists …. (it is) an apperceptive practice which allows them to see the macrocosm in the social microcosm. They regard participant observation as an experience that transforms the fieldworker’s consciousness. The fieldworker, by immersing himself or herself in the life of the people gradually learns to see and understand the world in their terms. In the process, the fieldworker becomes aware of his
or her own prejudice which itself is a step forward in gaining a disinterested view of society. (p. 2)

Participant observation has been challenged as a legitimate method of research by some critics who believe that it is “useful only in exploratory, qualitative micro studies, that it is inefficient in eliminating the observer’s biases, in generating quantitative data and in drawing generalizations” (p. 2). Such scientists often look upon participant observation as a “crude, clumsy, and capricious method of doing research … (and) they also ridicule the idea of going to the field with an ‘open mind’” (p. 2). However, these vulnerabilities of the method are only relevant if one is adopting a positivist approach, and many critical theorists and qualitative researchers see these as benefits rather than limitations of the method. Indeed, participant observation is an essential and useful tool in gaining empathy for conversational partners and attempting to understand the world from their perspective while also recognizing the relationship between the researcher and the communities being researched.

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of participant observation is its painful history as a method associated with colonial-era anthropological studies in which “the other” became objectified and represented by the outside observer. Indeed, we have numerous examples of how early anthropological methods evolved out of the colonial encounter between Europeans and the people whom they colonized. However, Panini reveals that, while participant observation evolved as “the ideal method for studying ‘other’ societies, it has now been successfully adopted by sociologists and anthropologists in studying their ‘own’ societies” (p. 1). Moreover, Panini has revealed
that all people, even indigenous researchers, must engage in some kind of border-crossing in qualitative research.

Similarly, Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a “bottom-up” approach to qualitative research that intends to help communities and organizations in their efforts to solve problems and to facilitate social change (Glesne, 2006, p. 15). PAR is practiced by a few “activist academics” in the U.S., but it has not been well developed or embraced by an academic community that often prefers objectivity and distance. However, PAR includes a proud tradition of scholars and scientists throughout Africa and other countries of the Global South. The PAR field of research was born from social movements of oppressed and colonized people. Not interested in “research for research’s sake,” PAR researchers are interested in working in collaboration with local people and organizations to address issues of concern to their communities. Local people are viewed not as “subjects” or “informants,” but rather are included as full partners in the process of inquiry and knowledge production. After all, local people are strongly invested in developing solutions for their own communities, and they know what information is needed and how to get it (Williams, McDermott, & Bonham, 2007, p. 2).

Although PAR takes many forms, it always “has at its center the need for people to gain access to information, to learn research skills, and to recognize their own knowledge in order to support organizing for better workplaces, communities and regions” (Highlander Center, 2007, p. 2). A central feature of this methodology involves mutual aid and cooperation between outside researchers and community members. According to Gwynne,
PAR is based on the premise that sustained behavioral change is unlikely to occur unless those who would benefit from it develop a sense of self-determination and empowerment, as well as the belief that they can exert control over their own lives and destinies … potential beneficiaries help to educate each other and to develop a joint plan of action. (Gwynne, 2003, pp. 36-37)

PAR was popularized through Paulo Freire’s work on popular education in Latin America. PAR has been widely practiced by members of grassroots organizations and development agencies throughout the world. The Highlander Center claims “this people-powered research counters the belief that only trained professionals can supply accurate information” (Williams, McDermott, & Bonham, 2007, p. 2). Because the subject of my research is focused on popular education strategies, I sought to conduct my research in the same spirit of cooperation, participation, and respect. In this case, I assisted the women’s groups with service through cooking, gardening, grant-writing, fundraising, and other projects, as well as through small donations of gifts and cash contributions. The members of the groups were similarly involved in my project as “co-researchers … who combine investigation, education, and action” (Glesne, 2006, p. 15). They were key partners throughout the process of designing the research, identifying questions and themes to explore, analyzing the issues, making connections, and finding solutions.

A major issue that I explored throughout this project is how to combine research with advocacy and activism for social change. Many authors reveal that their research concerns are connected to larger struggles for social justice, and discuss the challenges and risks of doing advocacy research in different settings. Some authors reflect that doing advocacy work in different countries and cultures can be fraught with dangers and complications, including deportation, imprisonment, or death. There were times in
Kenya where I realized that I was living outside of my comfort zone, and facing risks for which I was not prepared – especially during the elections and the post-election violence in late 2007 and early 2008. I discovered that doing cross-cultural, participatory action research requires seriousness, sincerity, and commitment – and a willingness to face the same risks and discomforts as the people who were hosting me in Kenya.

**Appreciative Inquiry (AI)**

Another research methodology that I used is Appreciative Inquiry (AI), an assets-based approach to organizational development research that frames questions to emphasize success and the positive aspects of collective action for change. This research design innovatively combines different methodologies that are consistent with the spirit and the approach of popular education. Conceived at Case Western Reserve University’s School of Organizational Behavior, AI is used widely by development agencies such as the Peace Corps and as a “popular consulting tool for organizational development” (Reed, 2007, p. ix). According to Watkins and Cooperrider (2000), AI is described as a worldview, a paradigm of thought and understanding that holds organizations to be affirmative systems created by humankind as solutions to problems. It is a theory, a mind-set, and an approach to analysis that leads to organizational learning and creativity. (cited in Patton, 2002, p. 181)

Again, like popular education, Appreciative Inquiry is grounded in the practice of dialogue and participation. Reed (2007) asserts that this interest in achievement has been advocated in AI as a useful way of moving practice on, starting from a process of building on ‘what works’ rather than what is going wrong or failing …. If people are supported in exploring success, these stories can empower them and they can carry
forward ideas about achievement into their plans for the future. (p. 74)

The focus is on investigating assets, developing solutions, and appreciating the peak experiences of the past. This process involves facilitating people to recognize their own power and how to use that power for the benefit of all.

According to Reed (2007), AI is a form of “social construction in action” (p. viii). She explains:

> Emphasis is placed on language practices. This means that knowledge, what we “discover” as researchers, has less to do with any sense of matching observations with “factual evidence” and has more to do with what questions we ask, how we ask them, and who is involved …. AI proposes that if we ask questions about problems, we create a reality of problems. On the other hand, if we ask questions about what works or what gives life to a community, group, or person, we participate in the construction of a reality of potential …. We have choices to make concerning what questions we ask, who we ask them of, and how we engage others. (pp. viii–ix)

Likewise, in my study with members of grassroots women’s groups in Kenya, participants were engaged in a reflective process in which they communicated with and interviewed each other, asking questions that “elicit the creative and life-giving events experienced in the workplace” (Patton, 2002, p. 181). The questions aim to generate examples and stories about the positive aspects of their organization. I hope that the participants not only reflected upon what has worked well in the past, but also searched for themes and topics that could become the basis for organizational change in the future.

Some critics of Appreciative Inquiry question the positive focus of researchers. It may be useful to encourage participants to talk about their experiences in a nonthreatening atmosphere, but some theoretical concerns might arise, such as “the idea of a partial account that ignores or neglects negative stories. A focus on the positive, then
can be seen as offering only a limited understanding of a phenomenon” (Reed, 2007, p. 75). Is it possible to focus only on the positive aspects of organizations, and does this lead to a “Pollyanna” approach of avoiding problems, or telling only a partial story?

Indeed, many academics and social scientists are trained to see only problems and barriers. Action research in particular seems focused on identifying and solving social problems. It is important to recognize the problems, but it is irresponsible and incomplete to only focus on them. Particularly in the field of African Studies, many writers focus on a myriad of challenges facing the continent, ostensibly to make a case for funding or intervention from external donors or governments that seek to change conditions in Africa to follow the developments of the West. This Eurocentrism and “Afro-pessimism” has come to dominate knowledge and thinking about the continent, even among Africans themselves. Too much research, reporting, and writing about Africa is dominated by a discourse focused on disease, war, poverty, corruption, and other negative issues. Gender research in Africa, particularly by Westerners, is too often focused on representing African women’s problems and pressures, casting them as powerless “beasts of burden” who are in need of external intervention. This discourse is problematic as it recasts Africa’s problems and processes of social change in a myopic, colonizing lens.

Learning to embrace an Appreciative Inquiry approach was important to me in order to overcome these barriers in my own training as an Africanist, a feminist, and a social scientist. I had to relearn and redirect my thinking to focus on the positive aspects, strengths, and outcomes of indigenous, grassroots women’s organizations. As I learned
to focus my questions and analysis on what was working, I felt inspired by the people and organizations that I was meeting. I also became annoyed with other Western researchers I met in the field, who seemed overly critical, negative, and condescending towards the people and organizations they were affiliated with. I met several outsider researchers who dismissed my observations about the strength of the women’s movement in Kenya, and did not believe that Kenyan women – particularly Muslim women - were indeed empowering and educating themselves through their own resources and organizations.

However, many local people appreciated my positive outlook and respect for local people’s abilities to solve their own problems. Some people, particularly in Lamu, shared “horror stories” about other researchers who had come to their community to live among them and to learn their “dirty secrets,” which they then published. Some Kenyans talked about the anger they felt at the way that they were represented against their wishes and without their consent – even citing Fuglesang’s book *Veils and Videos* as an example. The head teacher of Swafaa Academy, Ustadh Idarus, declared that much research about Kenya is only focused on “Maasai and poor people” and that many outsiders do not recognize the amazing history and civilization of Swahili culture at the coast. Therefore, I believe that using the process of AI helped me to listen more carefully to the stories that Kenyans were telling me about their own society, and to understand the resilience, pride, and faith inherent in developing their own solutions to their problems. I learned that AI can be a powerful research methodology to redirect this energy and reveal a more holistic view of possibility and solutions that are emerging from the people themselves.
Limitations of the Study

It is vitally important to admit and confront the limitations of this study in order to face them with consciousness and confidence. Some limitations of my study are derived mainly from the limited amount of time that I spent in the research field. During my year in Kenya, I observed many different women’s grassroots organizations in action, and interviewed individuals and focus groups to delve deeper into the issues. However, I realize that this is certainly not the ideal amount of time to get the depth and breadth necessary for an intensive ethnographic experience, or to have confidence in my ability to claim expertise on the wider context of the Kenyan women’s movement or African feminisms in general. I augmented this limited research time with additional research in libraries, archives, and newspaper articles as well as in interviews with participants and leaders from various women’s organizations.

Validity and Credibility

A major critique of qualitative research and engaged, participatory action research is the potential for bias or distortion of the data analysis. I ensure validity and credibility of my data analysis through the processes described by Creswell (1998):

1. prolonged engagement in the field;
2. triangulation of data;
3. peer debriefing;
4. negative case analysis;
5. clarifying researcher bias;
6. member checks;
7. rich thick description; and
8. external audits. (pp. 201-203)
To ensure that the data and analysis are trustworthy, I sought support from local research partners and translators who helped me to translate and make sense of the data gained from interviews and observations. To ensure accuracy, research participants had the opportunity to clarify any confusing questions or to request that particular issues remain confidential. I also asked other researchers and “insiders” to meet with me, to read and edit the research reports, and give input and feedback in the final stages of analysis. I tried to be as transparent and inclusive as possible throughout the research process, and welcomed the input of my research partners through the process of participatory action research. I engaged in “peer debriefing” with others in my “inquiry community” as I presented the findings at conferences, invited lectures, classes and other venues.

**Verification**

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) maintain that verification is a key factor in qualitative research:

> Verification is a process that occurs throughout the data collection, analysis, and report writing of a study and standards as criteria imposed by the researcher and others after a study is completed. (cited in Creswell, 1998, p. 194)

One of the ways that I can ensure that I am practicing verification is by being true to the language and the standards of data analysis in my multiple fields of postcolonial women’s studies, cultural studies, and education. Through the process of framing the research questions and in my analysis and conclusions, I allude to popular education by
lacing the language associated with this field throughout my dissertation. This should be done so that anyone reading the document will be able to verify and recognize what disciplinary perspectives I am coming from. I view the situation through the eyes of postcolonial studies and women’s studies, noting when and where Kenyan women are being empowered or disempowered.

According to Creswell (1998), there are eight standards of quality and verification which must be observed throughout the qualitative research process, including:

A. inquiry community  
B. positionality  
C. community  
D. voice  
E. critical subjectivity  
F. reciprocity  
G. sacred relationships  
H. sharing of the privileges.

I will explore a few of these issues that I feel are the most critical from a postcolonial, feminist perspective. I will also detail how I incorporated these considerations throughout my research design and practice.

**Inquiry Community**

Developing an *inquiry community* has been vital to me as I embarked on my research in Kenya, and when I returned to analyze and write the findings in the U.S. I partnered with the members of grassroots women’s organizations in a spirit of reciprocity and shared, appreciative inquiry and collaborative research. Most importantly, I developed connections with those who understand the impact of grassroots women’s movements on providing alternative, popular education, especially with the women who
are intimately involved in these organizations. I found support from local researchers at Kenyatta University, Daystar University, the University of Nairobi, the School for International Training, and the archives of the *Daily Nation* newspaper. I also consulted other American researchers based in Kenya, including Tom Wolf, Sarah Heddon, Sarah Hillewaert, Megan Hershey, and Valerie Harder. When I returned to the U.S., I continued to present my research at various conferences and meetings where I could get feedback on the theoretical frameworks and the findings of my study. It was especially important for me to connect with the inquiry community of the Kenyan diaspora in the U.S. To do this, I shared my findings with Kenyan faculty and students at meetings of the Kenya Scholars and Studies Association (KESSA), the African Studies Association (ASA), the *Women, Gender and Sexualities in Africa* conference at the University of Texas at Austin, and the African Studies Program at Ohio University. I also presented my research to colleagues in the College of Education, the Women’s and Gender Studies Program, and the American Association of University Women (AAUW) Chapter at Ohio University. These relationships were vital for me to gain support and to share insights throughout the data analysis and writing process.

**Positionality**

An awareness of my *positionality* as an outsider/researcher has been essential to my ability to do this research well. My position undoubtedly created both barriers and opportunities that made it difficult for me to be fully aware of my limitations. I sought to develop a “decolonizing methodology” to recognize that as an outsider in the
communities where I work, I have a limited ability to truly understand and/or speak on behalf of those communities. I am deeply aware of how the history of colonialism has shaped research in Africa. Research has been used for political purposes that have undermined African communities. Anthropologists, linguists, development workers, CIA agents, missionaries, and colonial administrators have been complicit in these processes.

According to Smith (1999):

> From the vantage point of the colonized … the term ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, ‘research,’ is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary. When mentioned in many indigenous contexts, it stirs up silence, it conjures up bad memories, it raises a smile that is knowing and distrustful … The ways in which scientific research is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism remains a powerful remembered history for many of the world’s colonized peoples. (p. 1)

I know that research by Westerners has historically exploited people at the margins and “Others.” I am clear about the ways in which I may be adopting a Western scientific framework and worldview about gender relations, education and development, which may not be appropriate to the local context or culture. I must be honest about how my position may be connected structures of power and colonialism that have historically been used to oppress indigenous African people and their communities.

I have lived in Kenya previously and have studied the legacy of colonialism and neo-colonialism, particularly surrounding development issues. Although my Whiteness or status as a foreign *mzungu* sometimes worked against me, I also recognize the opportunities and privileges that are granted to me because of this status. My “White Privilege” created openings, mobility and access that many Kenyans would not have.

Conquergood (2004) asks: “For whom is the border a friction-free zone of entitled
access, a frontier of possibility? Who travels confidently across borders, and who gets questioned, detained, interrogated, and strip-searched at the border?” (p. 311). I recognize that my privileged position as a White American woman in Kenya has sometimes served as an “invisible weightless backpack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear, and blank checks” (McIntosh, 1988, p. 12). Indeed, many doors were opened to me in Kenya due to the spirit of hospitality to foreign visitors. I am painfully aware that this warm welcome would not likely be reciprocated by my American neighbors to a Kenyan visitor in the United States.

At the same time, I am acutely aware of the barriers posed by my race, class, language, educational status, gender, and nationality. Because I am not a Kenyan citizen and I am a White American woman, it was sometimes difficult for me to gain the trust and rapport necessary to conduct research with Kenyan women. I had to cultivate a deep awareness of myself as the researcher and the instrument of analysis, and to be conscious of how my identity as a relatively privileged, White, American woman affects the research process. My identity and appearance may have created distance, and I acknowledge that I often needed to change my mind, behavior, language, dress, and other aspects of my identity in order to adapt and conform to the local culture. For example, I tried to speak Kiswahili or other languages as much as possible, using local idioms or telling jokes to disarm people and help them to trust me as an outsider. I also tried to dress conservatively and to adopt local dress as much as possible. In Nairobi, I dressed “smartly” in professional business attire to meet with people in NGOs, universities, or
government offices. In Taita, I wore t-shirts, long skirts, *kitenge* outfits, and wrapped my lower body with colorful *lesos* to dress like the local women. In Lamu and Mombasa, I covered myself completely with a black *buibui* (robe) and *mtandio* (headscarf) to respect the local rules of modesty. By adopting local dress, I was able to more easily communicate my respect for local traditions and customs. Many people remarked that they appreciated my willingness to dress like the local people, and they said that it would have been more difficult for me to meet with certain people, such as the *Ustads* and *Imams* at the mosques, if I had continued to dress as a Western tourist or researcher.

At the same time, I use my difference as a lens through which to interpret the relationship between “western” and “non-western” women and the emergence or possibility of “global feminisms” that recognize differences and border-crossings as an asset to be explored rather than a thing to be transcended. In my personal journals, I engaged in critical self-reflection on my own power and how it changes in different contexts. I sought to do research *with* the people rather than research *on* the people that are involved in various grassroots organizations.

**Critical Subjectivity and Cultural Relativism**

A related issue is that of *critical subjectivity* and *cultural relativism*. Obviously, a key limitation of this study is related to my identity, my feminist and progressive political ideologies, and my language skills. I cannot change the fact that my identity and background created barriers for my full inclusion in the research site. However, I also utilized these identities as assets as I notice the importance of *intersubjectivity*. I believe
that a good ethnography is mindful and clear of the relationship between the researcher and the researched, and takes the reader on a journey into the field, where they too could imagine being placed as an outsider. Rather than naively trying to “fit in” to the scene, I tried to be cognizant of how my positionality and identity can help to tell the story of postcolonial feminist research in Africa, and about popular education among Kenyan women’s organizations. I locate this experience in a larger story about the importance of doing cross-cultural ethnographic work that is aware of these dynamics.

A critical contradiction that I confronted in the field was my critical subjectivity as both a feminist researcher and an anthropologist. My training in anthropology and postcolonial studies has made me very aware of cultural relativism. Anthropology is “the discipline whose charge has been to understand and manage cultural difference” but it has also been complicit in the “reification of cultural difference” (Abu-Lughod, 2002, p. 527). Because of my academic training, my awareness, and previous experiences with ethnographic research, I was sometimes hesitant to pass judgment or to take a stand on certain local issues. I have been trained to remain detached and nonjudgmental while respectful of local customs and traditions. However, this position of cultural relativism is deeply problematic in feminist research and activism.

As I spent more time in the field, and become more entangled and aware of local issues, I started to realize that doing feminist research is explicitly political and aimed at social and cultural change. Many gender rights advocates do not believe in cultural relativism but support the transformation of cultural practices and social structures to create more equitable and just relationships. Western feminists who also work as
ethnographic researchers face a particular quandary – should we maintain the anthropological position of cultural relativism, with detached inquiry and respect for the local culture, or should we engage with and contribute to processes of social and cultural change?

Abu-Lughod (2002) provides a compelling alternative for Western women who write about the Muslim world. She warns, “As anthropologists, feminists, or concerned citizens, we should be wary of taking on the mantles of those 19th century Christian missionary women who devoted their lives to saving their Muslim sisters” (p. 533). She insists that feminist researchers and activists must move beyond the “rhetoric of salvation” that so often characterizes outsiders’ accounts of Muslim women. She notes:

Could we not leave veils and vocations of saving others behind and instead train our sights on ways to make the world a more just place? The reason respect for difference should not be confused with cultural relativism is that it does not preclude asking how we, living in this privileged and powerful part of the world, might examine our own responsibilities for the situations in which others in distant places have found themselves. We do not stand outside the world, looking out over this sea of poor benighted people, living under the shadow – or veil – of oppressive cultures; we are part of that world …

Where we seek to be active in the affairs of distant places, can we do so in the spirit of support for those within those communities whose goals are to make women’s (and men’s) lives better? … Can we use a more egalitarian language of alliances, coalitions, and solidarity, instead of salvation? (Abu-Lughod, 2002, pp. 533-534)

A related limitation of this study is identity and entrée. I tried to overcome these barriers with an open, affirming, and appreciative attitude as well as a spirit of solidarity and cooperation. I conducted my research through a participatory process of action research. This approach of appreciative inquiry and questioning allowed me to focus on the positive aspects of these organizations, and emphasize that I am interested in studying
their approaches and methods as a model for other community organizations, including my own community in Appalachian Ohio. In participatory action research, the goals and agenda of the project are emergent and are largely directed by the interests of my research partners – the members of the organizations. As the participants gained a sense of ownership and meaning in the research process, they became more willing to share information and to be reflective throughout the project.

**Voice**

Another issue to consider is that of voice. Postmodern and postcolonial perspectives reveal that representation and voice are critical to creating multivocal stories. I ensure that I am not only writing from my own voice or perspective, but that I am including multiple voices and perspectives in the research. For example, I recorded interviews with local people and used their quotations and narrative stories as the basis of the story and the analysis. I sought out players from all different sides, considering the balance of the whole community and including both recognized “leaders” as well as participants and observers, including men, women and children. In order to ensure a high degree of saturation, I invited some of the research participants to give me feedback on where the holes in my story might be, and to suggest areas for improvement and further research. I take full responsibility for any mistakes in translation or representation of other’s voices in this text.
Language

Another obvious issue related to voice is language. Because I worked with grassroots, rural members of these organizations rather than the “elite” organizers in the urban areas, I was not always able to conduct research in English. Although I am proficient in speaking and listening to Kiswahili, I know that my language skills may be limited in some instances. I also am not conversant in Arabic or Kidawida, the local ethnic languages that are used by many of the women in these communities. In order to conduct research that is sensitive to cultural differences and accurate to the voices and perspectives of the grassroots members of women’s groups, I needed to work on my language skills. One way that I remedied this situation was by partnering with local researchers or translators who worked with me to ensure that my questions were culturally sensitive and appropriate and that I achieved an accurate understanding of the research sites and participants.

I continued my studies of these languages through cultural immersion during my stay in Kenya. I lived in a local school, stayed with local families, and interacted mainly with Kenyans, which encouraged me to learn and use the language in my everyday life. My language training was greatly improved throughout the course of the year I was doing research. I used Kiswahili in my daily life with friends and neighbors, watched Kiswahili TV programs, listened to radio, and studied books and dictionaries. I also learned bits of Kidawida, Kikuyu, and Arabic, which were useful to me while working with women in the field. Speaking the local languages was essential to my research, and my experience would have been much different if I did not have these language skills. I was able to
interact and work with many people who did not speak English, and I made friends easily, traveled well, and interviewed people in Kiswahili. Because of the full immersion of the experience, I have attained more fluency and have learned more of the vocabulary of everyday life and domestic work – especially related to the work of women. I also developed more language skills related to issues of culture, religion, and education. I have learned more about the different dialects of Kiswahili and can identify and speak a bit of other languages in Kenya. My skills greatly improved in listening and responding. My vocabulary is much wider and my accent is more pronounced and authentic. Many Kenyans told me they were impressed that I spoke like a Kenyan and that I could participate in and understand most conversations. I cannot stress enough how essential it was for me to use the local language in my research, and how limiting it would have been if I did not strive to attain fluency.

**Assumptions**

I also realize that a major limitation of the study was the *a priori* assumptions that I had going into the research. It was important to remain flexible enough that I could pay attention to emergent themes. I also need to allow the research questions to be guided, in part, by the interests of the research participants. I believe that the methods of Participatory Action Research and Appreciative Inquiry were helpful in this regard, as they seek to uncover the solutions and concerns proposed by active participants in organizations. Qualitative research should recognize the importance of having a clearly proposed plan, but to be flexible enough to allow change and growth in the field. If it
does not change, then nothing has emerged, and there can be no inductive analysis of the research results.

**Reciprocity**

Finally, an important aspect of critical ethnography, particularly focused on postcolonial women’s movements, is a concern with *reciprocity*, or *sharing of the privileges* associated with the research process. By offering my services as a volunteer, I engaged in service learning, participant observation, and reciprocity with the research participants. Since this is my dissertation research, I was a bit limited in terms of what I can offer regarding “service,” since my ultimate objective was to produce a dissertation. However, I do hope that my research results will bear fruit and will assist the members to both appreciate what they have accomplished and to find inspiration for new directions in their activism. Many of the people I interviewed expressed interest in reading the final report and asked me to help them to influence policy at a national and international level. As a critical ethnographer, I sought to engage the participants in checking my data and in including them in the process of verification of accuracy of their interviews and translations of the transcripts. I realize that doing research in another language and in another cultural context is complicated, and the potential for misunderstanding and miscommunication is significant. With this in mind, I developed a role for a few of the participants as research assistants who can participate more fully in the analysis of the results.
In the processes of analyzing and writing, which involved the translation and interpretation of research conversations and interviews, it was important to check my results with my interviewees and other local people, and to include them in the process of interpreting and analyzing the results. Viewing this research through the lens of postcolonial critiques of feminism assisted me in being honest and transparent about my limited ability to know the environment, but also made me aware of the dangers of essentialism and assumptions. In the process of writing, I was careful not to make assumptions about women’s desires or to assume that they are necessarily in a vulnerable position. I focus upon how women at the grassroots have become social change agents and activists in Kenya, and center my analysis around the issues and campaigns that their organizations have chosen for themselves. I include analytical critiques about the ways in which women have resisted the hegemony of racism, colonialism, modernity, democratization, development, globalization, and structural adjustment programs. Similarly, I try not to reflect a critique solely based upon traditional culture or patriarchal social structures. While these are limiting factors in women’s lives, they are not the sole causes of women’s concerns in Kenya, and an emphasis on these issues may actually alienate me from some of my research participants and create even more distance and tension. Ultimately, this research has enabled me to really interrogate my language and expand my understanding of “gender” and “women’s issues.”

Considering postcolonial and feminist critiques of qualitative research has been vitally important in the process of designing my research methodology for this project. The philosophical perspectives included here have informed my interests in examining
issues of power, representation, authority, and reciprocity. I am particularly drawn to exploring research methods which enable me to explore the differences between myself and the women I am working with as a lens through which to examine the relationship between Western and non-Western feminism. In the post-colonial world, activists and academics can learn a great deal from listening to the perspectives of critics from former colonies in their quest for justice and self-determination. While some of these critiques have made me wary or cautious about the possibilities of doing cross-cultural work, I believe that I am up for the challenge. Moreover, I believe strongly in coalition-building across cultures, and I know that I will be able to learn a great deal from the research setting if I approach it as a novice rather than an expert. Ultimately, we all have a great deal to learn from each other, in spite of and because of our differences.

**Self As Researcher**

In qualitative research, “the researcher becomes the main research instrument as he or she observes, asks questions, and interacts with research participants” (Glesne, 2006, p. 5). Paying attention to the position of the researcher, and insider/outsider dynamics, is especially important in participatory action research. Reed (2007) asserts that the “researcher position is a reflection of membership, alliance, and interest and shapes a number of ways in which the study takes place” (p. 82). Bobasi, Jackson, and Wilkes (2005) argue:

Clearly, the theoretical position that underpins the use of self as instrument for data collection has implications for how one might represent a world or adapt a methodology. This is so because the position adopted by a researcher in the field affects every phase of the research process, from the
way the research question / problem is initially constructed, designed and conducted to the ways in which reports and publications arising from the study are presented. (p. 495)

In this section, I will attempt to transparently explore my own identity as the researcher, and memberships, alliances, experiences, and interests that led to my investment in this project.

Often when I speak about my work in Kenya, people ask me how I became interested in this topic, and whether I consider myself an “insider” or an “outsider.” Implicit in these questions are a number of assumptions about my cultural distance from Kenyans as a White, American, middle-class, educated woman. Being an “outsider” or a mzungu (foreigner; white person) in Kenya has shaped my research and my experiences there in profound ways -- as it has for generations of missionaries, explorers, anthropologists, colonial administrators, volunteers, development workers, diplomats, businesspeople, students, tourists, and other outsiders. Confronting my Whiteness, my privilege, my socioeconomic status, my nationality, and other aspects of my identity is critical to understanding how these things have shaped this research project.

The “outsider” researcher position needs to be explored and interrogated. For far too long, “research” has been conducted in collusion with capitalism, colonialism, imperialism, ethnocentrism, racism, and proselytizing Christianity. In Decolonizing Methodologies, Smith (1999) asserts that there are a number of “critical questions that communities and indigenous activists often ask” of outsiders, including:

- Whose research is it? Who owns it?
- Whose interests does it serve?
- Who will benefit from it?
- Who has designed its questions and framed its scope?
- Who will carry it out?
- Who will write it up?
- How will its results be disseminated?

… These questions are simply part of a larger set of
judgments on criteria that a researcher cannot prepare for, such as: Is her spirit clear? Does he have a good heart? What other baggage are they carrying? Are they useful to us? Can they fix up our generator? Can they actually do anything? (p. 10)

A cultural outsider may have to work extra hard to be taken seriously or to gain trust in a different context, which may make advocacy work or research much more difficult. Reed (2007) notes that:

If the researcher is an outsider … he or she may approach the setting as a ‘strange’ world, and this unfamiliarity may entail a process of learning, which may be complex and lengthy. On the other hand, this ‘naïveté’ may allow the outsider researcher to ask questions and propose views that would not be voiced by someone who was accustomed to the world being studied. (p. 83)

Being an outsider, then, is fraught with complicated issues, and can lead to distance and suspicion, or increased opportunities and access.

While I had initially assumed that an “insider” would have an easier time doing this research project, I have learned that this is not always the case. My experiences doing research in my own society, and my conversations with Kenyan researchers studying Kenya, have revealed that indigenous researchers face another set of issues that are equally as complicated. I understand now that being an “insider” is no guarantee of rapport or gaining entrée. Smith (1999) reveals that indigenous researchers “are frequently judged on insider criteria; their family background, status, politics, age, gender, religion, as well as on their perceived technical ability” (p. 10). Reed (2007) maintains that the insider researcher position is a “relatively new phenomenon and has been regarded with suspicion as having too many interests tied up with the researched world, such as working relationships, promotion prospects, or workplace facilities, to be
able to stand back from the data” (p. 83). If the researcher is seen as an insider, they may benefit from familiarity with the context and the process of negotiating collaboration, but they may “require reexamination to avoid ‘taking the world for granted,’ or not being critically aware of what seems everyday and unremarkable” (Reed, 2007, p. 83).

Sometimes communities even express preference for non-indigenous researchers due to feelings of internalized inferiority, fears that indigenous researchers may divulge information within the community, or suspicion of the researchers’ hidden agendas (Smith, 1999, p. 10). Reed (2007) notes that “the outsider’s distance is seen as advantageous in many ways, not least because they are viewed as being unaffected by local interests and therefore more able to be objective about what they observe. They may be affected by the politics of the academic world, but not by the researched world” (p. 83). Although my identity as an outsider could be seen as a barrier, some of my Kenyan friends expressed that I had a greater mobility and access within Kenya due to my outsider status, particularly at a time of intense political and ethnic conflict. Sometimes we joked about my “White privilege” or “international visitor privilege,” which seemed to open doors for me where some Kenyans would not be permitted to enter.

Is it possible, then, for an outsider researcher to represent another culture, or to speak on behalf of others’ experiences? Wolf (1992) warns:

Some postmodern critics question the very possibility of ethnographers representing the experience of another culture, and others question the ethics of even attempting to do so, seeing the process itself as an exercise in colonialism (domination). The questioning is important, the answers less so. Obviously …. Anthropologists can only convey their own
understandings of their observations in another culture in their ethnographies. (p. 5)

Wolf describes the role of the anthropologist in selecting and telling stories as a process of creating “Others.” She reveals that “anthropologists are particularly vulnerable to charges that we assume our superiority over those we study because we typically study the rural, the poor, and the uneducated and, according to Chandra Mohanty (1984: 337), cast them as deviations from a white, educated, middle-class norm” (p. 12). She reflects that “we as anthropologists can only try to be sensitive to the implications of our perceived status, implications that may be even more troubling for the fieldworker who works in her own society” (p. 13). She asserts that we must reject the apartheid that keeps us separate and isolated from each other. She also counsels that all researchers “must be prepared to be the resented Other to the ‘objects’ of our study” and that the way that “resentment is expressed varies across cultures, within cultures, and even within villages, but it usually involves a desire for a redistribution of wealth.” She reflects:

> Intellectuals of the culture with which we are engaged are most likely to accuse us of misappropriating power, of using powerless women in Taiwan, India, or Africa to make careers for ourselves. They ask what we give in exchange, and we are hard put to give them answers, or at least answers that do not sound defensive or self-serving. (p. 13-14)

Wolf maintains that we must strive beyond political correctness or fears about our objectives, and to strive for greater inclusion of various perspectives. In fact, regardless of insider or outsider status, all researchers must confront complex issues regarding identity, representation, voice, acting appropriately, and confronting issues of power and privilege within the society in which they do fieldwork.
So, why am I interested? I am particularly drawn to this topic due to my passion for Kenya and the processes of popular education and community organizing. I have first-hand knowledge of the dynamics of gender, poverty, and the lack of access to education in Kenya. My previous ethnographic research focused upon the struggle for survival and identity among street children in Nairobi. I interviewed many young people who claimed that they moved to the city’s streets from rural areas because their families were poor and could not afford to pay their school fees or to support their basic needs. As poverty increases, young people face incredible obstacles to gaining access to education that could lead to their future employment and self-sufficiency. Impoverished families sometimes become dependent upon children’s wages to help them to survive; many young people must drop out of school to work to support their families. The longer they stay in the streets, the more marginalized they become, both in the urban setting and in their rural communities. Many families thus become locked in an intergenerational cycle of poverty that is difficult to overcome.

I have come to understand that the problem of street children in Kenya is a symptom of the much larger structural problems of poverty, landlessness, unemployment, lack of educational access, food insecurity, environmental degradation, and other factors associated with rural-to-urban migration and a struggling economy. Moreover, many NGOs that work with street children in Nairobi, including the Undugu Society, have noted that a key strategy to prevent the growing population of street children is to strengthen the families and communities from which they come. Many NGOs have programs to provide education, employment, and training to mothers, which will
empower them to gain an income and to support their families. Increasingly, families’ abilities to support themselves must be strengthened through formal and informal educational interventions for women and mothers.

Coming out of this background, my personal goal for this current research project is to observe and learn from women’s organizations so as to enhance my own skills as an educator and an activist. I plan to use this study’s findings in my doctoral dissertation and hope to publish them widely in academic and activist journals. I also intend to bring the knowledge and skills that I learn back to my own community in rural Appalachian Ohio. I hope to come away from this project with a renewed commitment to connecting my activism with my academic life and with tools and strategies for organizing communities in the Appalachian region of the United States, which has similar characteristics to the communities where I worked in Kenya. I believe that, in spite of the distance and the differences that separate us, Kenyan women’s organizations have developed strategies for education which may be adaptable to many more communities, both local and global, that seek sustainable alternatives for development in the twenty-first century.

I was well prepared for the rigors of doing research in Kenya. One of my Fulbright interviewers remarked, “It seems you have been preparing to do this research since you were 12 years old!” Indeed, this research project is of particular interest and relevance to the multiple disciplines and experiences which have seeded my education and consciousness thus far.
My academic background includes a BA in Sociology and Anthropology from Kalamazoo College, a MA in International Affairs and African Studies at Ohio University, and Ph.D. coursework in Cultural Studies in Education at Ohio University. My current field of cultural studies in education is interdisciplinary by nature, and encourages the cross-pollination of ideas and research methodologies drawn from sociology, anthropology, linguistics, political science, African studies, cultural studies, women’s studies, environmental studies, and international development. I have also gained a strong foundation in democratic and popular educational pedagogy through teaching and research. I have firsthand experience doing ethnographic, participatory action research and have taken multiple courses in qualitative research methodology, applied anthropology, and research design.


I also have previous experience traveling and studying in East and Southern Africa. I have traveled to Kenya and Tanzania four times in 1994, 1995, 1998, and 2007, when I participated in study abroad and language programs, lived with local families, engaged in research, and volunteered at local schools and NGOs. The challenges of independent research in Kenya are not new to me, as I conducted ethnographic research with street children in Nairobi for my undergraduate and master’s thesis research from
1994-1998. I also served as the Resident Director of a study abroad program for Ohio University students in Swaziland and South Africa in 2000 and 2001.

My interest and proficiency in African Languages is also a large asset to this project. Over fifteen years of intensive study and practical use of Swahili make me confident that my language skills are sufficient for this project. I also have some experience studying Sudanese Arabic at Ohio University, which is closely related to Swahili. While studying and living in Kenya, I became familiar with greetings in several of the local languages.

Another significant aspect of my personal biography is my activism in environmental and social justice organizations. I have been involved in community service and activism since I was 15, when I was active with my local youth group and other organizations. As an Americorps VISTA volunteer, I educated young people in the public schools of Philadelphia from 1996-97 and organized a farmers marketing cooperative with Rural Action in Appalachian Ohio in 1999-2000. I have served as a board member of the Buckeye Forest Council and the Appalachian Peace and Justice Network, and have been involved in many community and campus organizations. I have deep personal interests in community-based forestry and sustainable agriculture, as my academic work is balanced with life on an organic farm in rural Ohio with my husband, where we raise fruits, vegetables, and animals. As an activist-academic, I ensure that my work has practical applications and creates sustainable solutions. My experiences with community-based organizations and local politics were a huge asset to my work in
Kenya, as they prepared me with transferable skills and knowledge to understand and to serve with Kenyan women’s organizations.

My dissertation research and writing has been deepened through my own practice as an educator in the classroom. From 2005 to 2007, I also taught courses on “Education and Cultural Diversity,” raising critical consciousness among pre-service teachers about multicultural and international education. From 2009 to 2012, I taught “Introduction to Women’s and Gender Studies” to interdisciplinary undergraduate students. In the future, I plan to continue educating undergraduate and graduate students at a university, while also working with organizations to facilitate popular education in the wider community.

My research schedule for this project was intense, as I spent over five years engaged in this project. I wrote several research papers documenting different aspects of the GBM and women’s organizations for courses in the Cultural Context of Leadership, Global Feminisms, New Feminist Scholarship, the Political Philosophy of Citizenship Education, and Qualitative Research Design. I completed my comprehensive exams in June 2007 and defended my dissertation proposal in November 2007. I received a Fulbright Scholarship from the U.S. Department of State to support my dissertation research in Kenya. I obtained official research clearance from the Ministry of Science and Technology of the Republic of Kenya, which granted me a research affiliation with Kenyatta University and permission to conduct research in Kenya for three years. I spent one year in the field, and an additional four years transcribing, analyzing, and writing up the dissertation. This research project has enabled me to deeply explore strategies for
popular education, participatory action research, women’s empowerment and sustainable development.

**Ethical Considerations and Further Questions**

As the writer of this research, I must ask myself the following difficult ethical questions: How might I see things that local people do not? How might my vision be obstructed by my own identity as an American cultural outsider? How much will be available to me? What will be hidden? How might I be interpreted as part of the imperial establishment or the U.S. government, particularly as a Fulbright scholar? How can I negotiate barriers of race, class, gender, language, etc? How might my interests in “democracy” and sustainable development be intertwined with, or confused by, American hegemonic interests in democracy related to the war on terror and globalization? How can I ensure that I understand and can articulate where the people I work with are coming from, and what choices they have? How do I overcome these divisive notions of “us” and “them”? How can I speak WITH rather than FOR others? In what ways can I develop relationships of reciprocity in which I too can contribute to the welfare of the communities in which I work, without falling into the trap of assuming the “missionary position”? More importantly, how can I ask myself these questions without being distracted into the dangerous, self-absorbed world of “navel-gazing” for which qualitative and reflexive ethnographers are so often critiqued? And, as I draw lessons from this work, how can I acknowledge the integrity and specificity of the Kenyan situation while also drawing connections to similar situations in other communities, including my own
rural community in Appalachian Ohio? These questions reflect a vexing set of issues that I grappled with throughout the process of my research in Kenya and beyond.

In my dissertation research, I have realized that there are many issues that I need to confront as a “modern” American woman who has the privilege of being one of the world’s “social minorities” (Esteva & Prakash, 1998). I recognize that I, like many modern men and women, am finding myself “increasingly discouraged or pessimistic with the modern prospect … who finds the prison of the modern self to be an unbearable restriction” (Esteva & Prakash, 1998, p. 5). I have tried to steer my interests and my lifestyle in a direction not of being a mere “armchair intellectual,” but of being engaged as a social activist in my “own niches, personal and professional, participating in a multiplicity of ways in the daily dramas affecting the livelihood of the ‘social majorities’ or the threats posed to them (and all of us) by the current trends” (p. 8). Through my research and activism, I hope to become one of those “allies inside the modern world which grassroots postmodernists badly need for realizing their endeavors more successfully” (p. 5). I also want to avoid the trap that so many scholars, activists, and missionaries of the Global North have pursued, that of seeking to “help” or “develop” peoples at the grassroots, particularly those “social majorities” in so-called “developing countries.” Rather, I hope to understand and support indigenous knowledge systems and social movements in order to “learn from them the knowledge and skills required to survive and flourish beyond modernity” (p. 6). While respecting the integrity and independence of local communities, I also believe that our struggles are all interconnected, and that we in the Global North have much to learn from the world’s
“social majorities” if we hope to survive the massive global shifts of economic depression, political power and climate change that we will experience throughout the remainder of our lives.

One of the major lessons I have learned through my dissertation research is how to recognize and listen for language that speaks to themes of democratic and popular education theory and practice. I have discovered incredible examples and guides for how to recognize what is truly and deeply democratic about popular education movements. I have studied examples of experiential, alternative, popular and democratic education from a variety of places and cultures. Through exploring theories and practices of popular education and “deep democracy,” I have learned how to critically assess how institutions and organizations can or can not be deeply democratic. I used these insights throughout my research to assess: What does democratic education consist of? How is it practiced in classrooms and schools? How is it practiced in community-based organizations and social movements? How “local” or “grassroots” are the social movements that I am observing? How are leadership and decision-making processes controlled, and are they democratic?

These ideas have also pointed to some concerns that I faced throughout my fieldwork process. Notably, the presidential elections were held in Kenya in December 2007. I expected this to be a critical time for me to witness the process of voter registration and electoral politics, and to observe how women participate in civic education, voter registration, and other functions of elections. I did not anticipate the chaos that would ensue when the election results were contested, and the extent to which
the post-election violence would impact the security of everyone in Kenya. After the elections, over 1,200 people were killed and over 350,000 people were displaced from their homes. The election violence disrupted everyone’s lives. Because of the timing of my visit, I became keenly aware that the presidential elections would take primacy in people’s minds when we discussed issues of democratic reforms and practices. Many Kenyans are intensely political people who love to discuss these aspects of the system. While I was interested in learning about the electoral process, I also had to be clear that I was not just interested in these formal practices of “democracy” such as elections and multiparty politics. I became aware that much of the discussion of democratization in Kenya may be broadly understood in these terms. I sought to understand how “deep democracy” is understood or practiced, and to note the differences that I observed between urban and rural communities and across divisions of ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, language and religion.

Another issue that arose for me in writing about these issues is the need to deconstruct the false dichotomies of “traditional” vs. “modern” and “indigenous” vs. “Western” or “foreign.” I have noticed that in much of the literature on colonized societies, “traditional” life tends to be portrayed as either romantic and deeply democratic or as backward and parochial. I need to be aware that my interests in voluntary simplicity and my perspective as a “refugee” from modern American culture may color my interpretations of rural life in the villages. I cannot escape the pervasive consciousness of being a White American woman with international visitor privilege. Although I may be a minority, I am a privileged and desired minority, and was unable to
truly assimilate into the field setting or the surrounding community. I must also be aware that I may tend to romanticize village life in Kenya in a way that indigenous Kenyans do not. While I may want to reject some of the underpinnings and false promises of modernity, I should also be aware that I am someone who has the luxury to choose “simplicity” and “resistance,” while others who do not have such privilege may have completely different desires.

At the same time, I must also be careful about how I define and privilege the “indigenous” voice. Indeed, I must even be aware of recognizing what is truly “grassroots” about organizations, especially those that work on a national or international scale such as the Green Belt Movement. According to the Indigenous Peoples Forum held in Thailand in 1988, different people may prefer to be called either “ethnic nationalities” or “indigenous” peoples. Indigenous peoples are defined as having

A common heritage, language and culture, are generally indigenous to the land (but not necessarily), or at least inhabit and identify with some territory, are only partly integrated into the dominant nation-state, are usually discriminated against or put at a distinct disadvantage with respect to the national majority population, and share a common desire to affirm their identity and self-determination. (Kampe, 1997, p. 4)

While I will seek to understand these issues from an indigenous perspective, I must be careful not to essentialize a “purely indigenous” identity. Brooten (2007) reveals that, while indigenous media (and organizations) have been “important vehicles for the expression of identity and self-determination … questions have been raised over their authenticity, especially those in which indigenous peoples collaborate with ‘Whites’” (p. 245). At the same time, cultural outsiders, particularly from the Global North, may often face scrutiny and mistrust, and may often adopt a romantic, ethnocentric, or essentialist
view of the “indigenous.” In order not to fall into a trap of cultural relativism or an “essentialism that ignores the hybrid cultural formations inevitable in a globally interconnected world,” we all must be aware that essentialism of the “indigenous” actually ignores the complexity of cultural contact and change (Brooten, 2007, p. 245). Indeed, as Pack (2000) points out, we must be careful not to treat everything and everyone that is “indigenous” as some kind of cultural artifact or “authentic” commodity, for such an “authenticity” is not demanded of other groups (p. 274).

Similarly, in my writing, I must be careful to critically assess my authority as an outsider and must seek to include and represent perspectives of local people without trying to speak on their behalf or “give voice to the voiceless.” I have come to understand that “no one is silent, though many are not heard” (Syracuse Cultural Workers). Indeed, while an indigenous standpoint is vitally important, there are always multiple viewpoints, identities, voices and realities within every community. Indeed, in Kenya there are a multiplicity of ethnic and linguistic groups, religious communities, ecological zones, occupations and lifestyles that manifest a great diversity of “indigenous” perspectives that cannot be oversimplified. Ultimately, I must seek to provide through my work a forum for the inclusion of multiple perspectives, and to recognize the importance of coalition building and learning across cultures and spaces.

These concerns with representation and differences are particularly important for me to be aware of in terms of my understanding of gender issues, as my concerns and interests as a White, middle-class, American feminist may be quite different from those concerns of Kenyan women. Similarly, my life experiences have been rather different
from theirs, and I must be careful not to either romanticize, essentialize, or demean their choices and lifestyles. I am aware that many women’s movements around the world may not be explicitly feminist and may even reject the term “feminism.” Women around the world are organizing around a multiplicity of issues and have rejected the trappings of “feminism” to align themselves with broader agendas and social movements. In Africa, in particular, there has been a widespread concern about the ways in which feminism has been used to denigrate traditional cultures and to unwittingly serve the interests of the imperial powers of Christianity, colonialism, and the global economy. Therefore, I must be aware that to call myself a feminist may be problematic, and I usually avoid use of the term altogether while doing fieldwork in Kenya.

I also have learned to remain open to what Kenyan women define for themselves as empowering, not what I impose from my value system. For example, while I might believe that family planning and reproductive rights are essential for women’s liberation, many Kenyan women articulate that they desire to have as many children as possible due to cultural norms that privilege motherhood and concerns about child mortality and disease. In a society where children are highly valued as a form of social security and comfort, and where child and infant mortality is very high, it could be problematic and even insulting for me to promote a family planning agenda. Moreover, many women in Kenya may see their gender concerns as low on the totem pole of priorities, and they may be more interested in working on issues of more immediate concern such as agriculture, animal husbandry, land preservation, and ensuring the survival of their children and their communities. Indeed, women’s issues are being defined in broader terms than just
reproductive concerns, and global feminists must learn to recognize that women’s issues will look different in every community depending upon the local conditions.

I will now conclude the methodology section and turn to a presentation of the results of the study. In the next chapter, I will address the first research question and situate this study within the local context in Kenya. I will consider how geographical differences and local concerns determine the type of projects, agendas, and issues selected by women’s organizations.
Chapter 4: Geography and Context of Women’s Groups in Kenya

In the following section, I describe the geography of women’s organizing. I address the first research question: How do differences of economy, environment, and culture affect how women organize in Nairobi and the Coast Province of Kenya? I examine how these differences determine the direction and issues that Kenyan women’s groups choose for their work. I provide an overview of the Kenyan context and each of the research sites. I then describe the types of women’s groups I found operating in these three regions.

Throughout this research, I made connections with women in local community-based organizations in three different communities of Nairobi, Taita and Lamu. As I traveled in and out of these three communities, I observed the differences and similarities between women’s organizations in Kenya. I observed the dynamics of culture, religion, economy, environment, politics, and other factors. I realized that geographical differences also shaped women’s access to education and resources and determined their ability to form organizations and businesses. I learned that there are many barriers erected to prohibit women’s and girls’ advancement, but women are also building bridges and ladders to transcend them. I realized that the Kenyan women’s movement is diverse and takes on a variety of issues, including many that Western women might not consider, such as the preservation of the environment, agriculture, or water projects. Indeed, much of the agenda of women’s groups is determined by the geographical, cultural, economic, environmental or climatic conditions of local communities.
To understand the geography of women’s organizing in Kenya, I employed a model of World Systems Theory and analysis to decipher the complex core/periphery relations at play (Wallerstein, 1974 & 1986). This theoretical model is based in neo-Marxist dependency theory and analysis of the international political economy. Wallerstein (1974) rejects the notion of the “Third World” and insists that there is just one world in which economic control is maintained by a system of domination and exploitation. According to World Systems analysis, capitalist centers have complex economic and political relationships with peripheral areas. This perspective highlights the dependent relationship between the “core” or “metropoles” - advanced capitalist or imperialist countries - and the “periphery” - lesser developed countries (LDCs) that produce raw materials and export labor (Crane and Amawi, 1997, pp. 14-15). After World War II, the assumption that imperialism would bring capitalist growth and economic development to LDCs was critically examined and refuted. Industrialization and capitalism does not automatically expand in LDCs, but surplus and labor is extracted and exported back to the advanced capitalist countries. This process leads to underdevelopment and exploitation in Africa, Asia and Latin America (Crane and Amawi, 1997). This pattern is repeated internally within countries in which the urban centers or capital cities serve as the “core” and rural or semi-urban areas are the “periphery.” The relationships between the capital and the provinces replicate the dependent relationships between industrialized or colonizing nations and their colonies as sources of raw materials and labor.
In the Kenyan context, Nairobi serves as the “core” and Taita and Lamu serve as the “periphery.” The core/periphery relationship between these three sites is illustrated in Figure 7. We can see clear patterns of industrialization and growth centered in Nairobi, while the outlying areas of Taita and Lamu are neglected or marginalized in the national development agenda. This creates uneven and inequitable development as resources and power are increasingly concentrated in the capital. In the election campaigns of 2007, the increasing critiques of this unequal system led to calls for decentralization or devolution of resources known as “Majimbo” or federalism. This movement reveals the growing concern for equity and social justice in Kenya. To situate this study, a map of Kenya is included on the next page, followed by a description of the Kenyan context.
Figure 8. Physical map of Kenya. Reprinted from Ezilon Maps at

http://www.ezilon.com/maps/africa/kenya-physical-maps.html
The Kenyan Context: Trade, Immigration, and Globalization

Kenya is a country of contrasts, a diverse blend of global cultures, languages, cuisines, religions, dress, music, and trade. Kenya’s location on the equatorial coast of East Africa has been at the center of Indian Ocean trade between Africa, Asia, Arabia, and Europe. The winds run in a clockwork pattern, making it easy to predict when the winds can blow the sailing ships through the water. The Indian Ocean basin is an ideal place for trade and the cross-fertilization of cultures. Kenya lies at the crossroads of globalization.

During the summer months, the kusi or southern winds carry wooden sailboats called dhows from Asia and Arabia to the African continent. They traveled along the coast from the Red Sea to Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, Tanganyika and Zanzibar (now Tanzania), Mozambique, the Comoros, Mauritius, and Madagascar. The slave trade developed along the coast in port cities like Lamu, Malindi, Mombasa, Tanga, Zanzibar and Bagamoyo. The traders bought slaves, spices, timber, minerals, and food. During the winter months, the northern kaskazi winds blew the ships back to Asia and Arabia. Arabs, Persians, Indians, and others traded in wooden carved doors, fine furniture, spices, textiles, jewelry, beads, carpets, boats, and other goods.

The indigenous Bantu-speaking peoples of mainland Africa mixed with Arabs from Yemen, Oman, and Persia. Thus, the Kiswahili language evolved as a language of trade and intermarriage. Kiswahili is a blend of Bantu languages and Arabic and is one of Africa’s first written indigenous languages. Kiswahili was written with the Arabic
script along the coast of Kenya and Tanzania from the 1300s up to the 1960s. Headstones of graves in Lamu bear Arabic script, and some street signs are still written in Arabic. The British colonists changed the language by writing with the Roman alphabet when English was introduced to Kenya.

The British declared Kenya a colony in 1885 at the Berlin Conference. British settlers moved into the highlands around Nairobi, Mt. Kenya and the Rift Valley. They imposed a colonial government and martial law with an English Common Law government system. They established huge plantations to grow coffee, tea, sisal, cotton, and other crops. They also raised cattle and other livestock on huge ranches. They forced the locals to work for them through imposing the Hut Tax and the Head Tax. The British colonizers also brought Indian workers to build the railroad from Mombasa to Kampala, which would facilitate the importation of goods from other continents and move raw materials from the interior quickly to the ships heading to Europe, Asia and Arabia.

The British colonial government divided and conquered the locals by elevating the status and privileges of certain “tribes” while marginalizing and isolating others. Local people had to carry passbooks listing their tribal identification. The British established a “ten mile strip” along the Coast, which set apart the coastal area as a separate region that remained under the control of the Sultan of Oman and was treated mainly as a port to bring in goods. The pwani or coastal region experienced uneven development as compared to the bara or the mainland, as they did not benefit from the establishment of schools, government offices or other infrastructure. The legacy of these
inequalities and tensions continue today, with deep differences persisting along racial, ethnic, gender, class, and religious lines.

The majority of Kenyans today are Christian – approximately eighty-five per cent. Christian churches include the Catholic Church, Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK), Methodists, Presbyterians, Quakers, and Pentecostal and charismatic churches. Ten per cent of Kenyan people are Muslim. Most Kenyan Muslims live at the Coast, with a few in the Northeastern Province and Nairobi. The remaining five percent are Hindus, pagans, animists, and other religious minorities. Indigenous religions feature ancestor worship, belief in *jinns* (spirits), the use of herbal medicines, and prayer through meditation, dancing, drumming, singing, trance, and magic.

Syncretism is seen in both Christianity and Islam. These monotheistic religions are blended with indigenous religious beliefs about the supernatural and styles of worship. In many Christian churches in Kenya, people sing, clap, dance, play drums and other musical instruments. Among Muslims of the Coast, annual *Maulidi* celebrations herald the birth of the Prophet Muhammad. Sufi Islam, brought to Lamu by Habib Swaleh from the Comoros, blends with indigenous cultural and religious traditions of worship. People gather in their neighborhoods, mosques, and family homes to read the *Maulidi*, sing, recite poetry, and go into rapturous trances. Men dance in the mosques while singing, chanting, and playing drums. People are out all night long, listening and playing music, visiting friends, eating, shopping, and socializing.

Within Kenya today, the citizens speak forty-two different ethnic languages of the Bantu, Nilotic, and Semitic language families. Kiswahili is the national language, and
English is the official language of business. Local ethnic communities include the Kikuyu, Luo, Luhya, Kamba, Taita, Kalenjin, Maasai, Kipsigis, Somali, Boran, Kisii, Pokot, Samburu, Swahili, Mijikenda, Digo, Bajuni, Kore, Tana, etc. Immigrant communities in Kenya also speak the languages of Arabic, Hindi, Mandarin Chinese, and Italian.

Kenya continues to welcome visitors, tourists and immigrants. Seen as a “haven” in the volatile Great Lakes Region of East Africa, refugees and immigrants have settled from Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and Tanzania. Tourists also flock to Kenya for its pristine beaches and wildlife safaris. Tourists come from England, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Norway, Greece, Israel, Australia, Japan, China, the United States, and Canada. They bring foreign exchange, films, fashion, cameras, computers, telephones, etc.

Tourism also is a mixed bag, and brings many social problems. Tourism has also sustained a thriving sex industry and drug trade, with both male and female prostitution in the cities and at the coast. “Beach boys” are popular at the coast, offering fishing trips, sailing trips in their dhows, drugs, alcohol, and sex to female and male tourists. Sex workers are referred to as malaya, and they work at dance clubs and bars to meet foreign men and women who will pay for sex. “Sugar daddies” are older men who will offer money, clothing and school fees in exchange for sex. Although many condemn it for moral and ethical reasons, the sex industry and drug trade also provides employment and income to many women in “the oldest profession.”
Therefore, Kenya is a complex society at the crossroads of globalization, modernity and cultural change. While contact with outsiders has created a multicultural and cosmopolitan society, it has also introduced a myriad of social problems. Social change has brought development and economic growth, but has also eroded some aspects of tradition and culture that has led to disruption. Women’s organizations operate within this context, and they provide education to assist women to cope with these rapid social, economic and environmental changes.

I will now turn to a description of the research sites, and describe the geographical context of women’s organizing in each of these locations.

**Site Descriptions**

The three communities where this research is based are Nairobi, Taita and Lamu. These three communities are a good example of the cultural diversity and other contrasts existing within Kenyan society. They also exhibit some of the core-periphery relations between the urban centers and marginalized areas, including rural and island communities of the Coast Province. These regional differences create diverse communities within Kenya in terms of culture, economy, environment, religion, and contact with outsiders.

Regional and geographical differences featured prominently during my research from 2007 to 2008. *Majimbo* or federalism became a popular rallying cry during the elections and post-election crisis. This cry for regional politics was particularly popular among supporters of the Orange Democratic Movement Party (ODM) at the Coast and
throughout the country. The issue of decentralization and devolution of resources has become a contentious political issue. Kenyans struggle to maintain a unified nation as competing regional, provincial, ethnic and local issues have revealed deep rifts between various factions within the country.

Despite these political divisions and inequalities, women’s organizations are ubiquitous throughout Kenya. Regardless of ethnic community or economic issues, women’s groups are organizing in nearly every city, town, and village of the nation. Women’s groups are varied and diverse in form and function. They work to address both the practical and strategic needs of women and their families and communities.

I will now provide a section describing each of the research sites. Maps of each district are provided to illustrate the various geographical features of each location. I also provide descriptive data to situate each community in its geographical and cultural context, including an analysis of socio-economic differences in each space. Finally, I present an overview of the types of women’s groups I found operating in each of these communities. I analyze the types of projects that they were involved in and relate this to the opportunities and constraints found within the context of each community.

**Nairobi**

Nairobi is a cosmopolitan city located in the south-central part of the country. Nairobi is the capital city, a center for urban development, including bases for the government, diplomatic corps, foreign embassies, military, international business, tourism, and non-governmental organizations. The downtown area is filled with
government offices, stores, restaurants, markets, universities, libraries, railroad and bus stations, and parks. A map of Nairobi is included in the following figure:

Figure 9. Map of Nairobi, Kenya. Reprinted from http://hqweb.unep.org/roa/Nairobi_River_Basin/About_Nairobi_River_basin/cityProfile.asp

The city is home to over ten million people, from all ethnic groups and with stark contrasts in socio-economic status. The majority of urban residents live crowded into the one hundred “estates” or slums located around the city, including Kibera, Mathare Valley, Dandora, Dagoretti, Kangemi, Eastlands, Eastleigh, Buruburu, Kawangware, Korogocho, and others. The conditions in the slums are characteristic of urban poverty in the developing world, including open sewage, polluted water, garbage dumps, and houses built with cardboard, wood, corrugated iron sheets, plastic, tires, and stones. Trade is done *jua kali* style in the “hot sun,” with open-air kiosks, secondhand clothing markets,
shops and butcheries. All transportation is by foot, bicycle, private car, taxi, or public transport on buses or *matatu* minivans.

Nairobi also includes neighborhoods for the middle and upper class, including the upscale suburbs of South C, South B, Langata, Westlands, Parklands, Kileleshwa, Loresho, Gigiri and the areas around the Karura forest. In the suburbs one feels like they are in Europe or the U.S., with embassies, high-rise skyscrapers, office buildings, malls, restaurants, grocery stores, hotels, and gated communities with palatial mansions, sweeping lawns, swimming pools, malls, tree-lined streets, and fancy cars. This affluence is striking in relation to the extreme poverty found in other parts of the city. However, these communities are also a testament to the rising middle class and the successful growth of business and economic development in Kenya. They are also evidence of the increasing class stratification that has evolved with unequal access to education.

*Women’s Organizations in Nairobi*

Nairobi women are diverse and live in every ethnic community. They belong to all social classes. Many middle class people did not believe it when I told them the statistics on women’s illiteracy in Kenya. Most women in the city have access to education, as Nairobi is home to hundreds of schools and dozens of universities and colleges. Women dwelling in the slums continue to struggle for educational access, as poverty was a barrier to paying school fees until Free Primary Education was declared in 2003. Still, secondary and tertiary education is expensive and competitive.
Hundreds, or perhaps thousands, of women’s organizations have proliferated in Nairobi. Women’s groups in Nairobi organize around a diverse set of issues and agendas. Some groups focus on the practical needs of food, water, shelter and health care, as well as anti-poverty initiatives and small business development. Other groups are focused on developing the strategic interests of women by working on issues such as electoral politics, civic education, legal reforms, peace and security, and sexual and gender-based violence.

Women have built upon their local *chamas* and associations, taking advantage of the space opened up by foreign funding and the pro-democracy movement within Kenyan civil society. During the election year of 2007, campaigns traveled around the country for civic education. During and after the post-election violence, women’s organizations galvanized around peace-building, assisting internally-displaced persons, and ending violence against women.

I started in Nairobi by attending a workshop for women activists and political leaders during the 16 Days for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. After making these contacts, I visited the women in their offices, schools, universities, and communities. Many professional activists in Nairobi are well-educated, English-speaking, cosmopolitan women. I found it easy to relate to these women, to interview them in English, and to gather documents about their organizations. They were very open and welcoming to me, and interested in the implications of my research. One contact led to another, and I began to penetrate into the network of professional women’s associations and NGOs. Almost all of these groups are formally registered with the
Kenyan government and receive some support from foreign donors and international organizations.

In Nairobi, I interviewed members of the government organizations such as the U.S. Embassy, Ministry of Gender, Kenya Law Reports, Kenya Judges Association, and the Women’s Caucus of Members of Parliament. I also interviewed educators associated with the Forum of African Women Educationalists (FAWE), Kenya Institute of Education (KIE), Kenyatta University, the University of Nairobi, Daystar University, Aga Khan University, the Department of Adult Education, Nairobi Muslim Academy, the Kenya Adult Learners Association, Pamoja Kenya, and the Elimu Yetu Coalition. I met with health care workers and educators of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), Nairobi Women’s Hospital, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Cherish Others, and the Matibabu Foundation. I also met with members of faith-based organizations (FBOs) such as the Catholic Church Committee for Peace and Justice, the National Council of Churches of Kenya, and the Anglican Church of Kenya Mothers’ Union. I also interviewed members of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) such as: 

Maendeleo ya Wanawake (MYWO); Action Aid International Kenya; Young Women’s Leadership Institute; Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR); Green Belt Movement; Association of Media Women of Kenya (AMWK); Federation of International Women Lawyers (FIDA-Kenya); International Committee of Jurists; the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission; and the Kenya Domestic Workers Association.
Throughout the year, I also tapped into the informal networks of women in Nairobi. These types of grassroots women’s groups are the most prolific and the most “traditional.” I met street traders and *jua kali* businesspeople, and interviewed diverse women at the markets, salons, shops, prayer groups, and other informal businesses. I also met members of smaller, community-based women’s organizations. These included *chamas*, “merry-go-rounds,” table banking groups, microfinance groups, savings and credit cooperatives, and *kamiriithu* societies.

The *kamiriithu* tradition is building among Kikuyu urban women in Nairobi as a way to encourage women to return to their “roots” and to visit their parents in the rural areas. *Kamiriithu* literally means “traditional” or “indigenous” in the Kikuyu language, and is literally a celebration of local knowledge. The contemporary *kamiriithu* societies represent a revival of the popular community theater groups described by Ngugi wa Thiong’o in the 1950s and 1960s. Urban women’s groups take turns raising money and donating funds to purchase gifts for rural parents. The groups return to the homes of their members, bringing money, clothing, household goods, food, cell phones, tractors, farm implements, and other goods from the city. They shower the parents with gifts, cook huge feasts of food, and sing and dance traditional Kikuyu songs to honor the elders.

The *kamiriithu* tradition is changing the notion that it is not worthwhile to invest in daughters’ education. Daughters stay involved in their parents’ lives, showing concern for their health care and well-being. Daughters continue to stay connected and send remittances from the city to support their parents into old age. Male children tend to
become educated and then move to find fortune in the cities, while daughters continue to visit the rural areas to care for their parents.

Therefore, women’s groups in Nairobi are very diverse and serve multiple purposes. Nairobi women are urbanized, with work ranging by socioeconomic status and location. Many women in the slums of Nairobi work in petty trade, or hawking on the streets and markets. Some girls and young women work as domestic servants or “house girls” where they are paid meager wages and work long hours. Some women engage in illegal but profitable businesses such as brewing beer or chang’aa or engaging in sex work and prostitution. Middle and upper class women tend to have professional or managerial jobs such as office workers, secretaries, teachers, and civil servants. Women of all socioeconomic classes and ethnicities share one thing in common – the burden of balancing housework, child care, and management of the home and family with wage labor in a rapidly changing urban society. Also, women in Nairobi all were motivated to pursue their education and to become self-sufficient.

**Taita**

Taita District is located in the “Upper Coast” area of the Coast Province of Kenya, about one hundred and twenty kilometers upcountry from the largest coastal city of Mombasa. The main town is Voi, located in the valley at the crossroads of the Nairobi-Mombasa Highway and the railroad. The Taita Hills loom in the distance, in Sagalla, Wundanyi, Wongonyi, and Mrare. The Taita Hills are a range of mountains and
foothills located to the north of Mt. Kilimanjaro, along the southeastern border of Kenya and Tanzania. A map of Taita District is included in the figure below:

![Map of Taita District](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AKenya_taita-taveta-district.svg)

*Figure 10. Map of Taita District in Kenya. Reprinted from open source at [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AKenya_taita-taveta-district.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AKenya_taita-taveta-district.svg)*

This is the home of the Taita people, who are united by the Kidawida language. However, Bravman (1998) reveals that the Taita ethnicity and language are more complex and contested, as there are four distinct dialects in the region that are not necessarily mutually intelligible – these are in Sagalla, Kasigau, Taveta and Taita sublocations. The majority of this research study was situated in the Taita sublocation, which includes the areas of Mbololo, Wundanyi, and Mwatate.
Many accounts of the Taita people reveal that they are Bantu speakers who migrated to the Kenyan coastal hill country from Central Africa. Some claim that they are related to the Kikuyu, who settled further upcountry in the Central Province and Rift Valley. Some also claim that the Taita intermarried with Indian laborers who were brought to Kenya by the British to build the East African railway. Some observers claim that this is why some Taitas are fair-skinned or “brown” with long, wavy hair. The Taita region is also famed for the “man-eaters of Tsavo,” vicious lions which were fabled to have killed many Indian laborers while they were working in what is now known as the Tsavo National Park.

The initial headquarters of the Taita district (also known as Taita-Taveta) was located in Voi, but later British colonial administrators decided to move the headquarters up into the hills in Wundanyi. (Presumably, a colonial District Commissioner’s wife preferred the cool climate of Wundanyi to the hot, arid land of Voi.) In 2008, the Taita-Taveta District was split into two distinct districts, with the new headquarters for Taveta District based in the border town of Taveta. The administrative headquarters of Taita District continue to be based in Wundanyi.

During my fieldwork in Taita, I was based in Mwatate. This is a dry area in the valley along the Voi-Taveta Highway, located just 20 miles from the Tanzania border, located at the junction to Wundanyi. The town’s residents include many ethnic groups with the majority being Taita, as well as a small minority of Kikuyu, Luo, Kamba, Swahili, Somali and others. Mwatate is located in a valley between several hills, and is the home to a variety of shops, bars, restaurants, marketplaces and other small businesses.
There is a large marketplace with informal traders selling secondhand clothes and various household goods, a fruit and vegetable market at Peleleza that has Market days on Wednesdays and Saturdays, and a large marketplace at the junction where people sell *miwa* (sugar cane), *ndizi* (bananas), *nduma* (arrowroots), avocados, peanuts, cashew nuts, medicinal herbs and other items to travelers and passersby. There is one petrol station in the town, several hardware stores, a post office, several churches, *fundi* (carpenters’ shops), doctors’ offices, barber shops, and numerous kiosks. Several nursery, primary and secondary schools are located in the area, including public and private institutions. It is also home to the Taita-Taveta Beekeepers Association, the Mwatate Jua Kali Association, and other business support systems.

The Divisional Officer has a headquarters in Mwatate, with departments of Social Services, Adult Education, Forestry, Agricultural Extension, and other local government services. The Division Education Office is located next to the DO office. The local chief also has a small office nearby, with a large yard where occasional *baraza* (community meetings) are held. A large community center was recently constructed, with plans to house a library, classrooms, meeting spaces, and health education seminars.

The climate in Mwatate is transitional from subhumid to semi-arid. Rainfall is extremely unpredictable and agriculture here is dependent upon rain, which means that farmers are subjected to famine and poor harvest yields in times of drought. Ecological conditions can vary dramatically throughout the transect of Taita from the highlands to the lowlands. For example, Wundanyi and Wongonyi benefit from intensive agriculture, with terraced farming fed by springs and rivers, as well as forests and rich loamy soils.
However, Mwatate, Voi, Kasigau and Ghazi have drier, less fertile soils, as they are located in the lowlands and are entirely dependent on rainfall.

As mentioned previously, the climate varies greatly from place to place within the district, and particularly from Wundanyi to Mwatate to Voi. Nevertheless, farmers in the region continue to cultivate the same crops, such as maize, beans, cowpeas, pigeon peas, and vegetables, with little diversity in farming techniques. This is leading to greater desertification and deforestation and decreased soil fertility in the dry lands.

In Taita, livestock are raised throughout the region, including cattle, goats, sheep, and chickens. Wild animals are also hunted in the forests and plains. Bees are kept in boxes hung from the trees for honey. Fruit grows prolifically throughout the region, including bananas, coconuts, mangoes, papaya, avocados, watermelon, passion fruit, pineapple, oranges, lemons, and limes. Grains are a staple food, including maize, millet, wheat, and sorghum. Vegetable gardens include *sukuma wiki* (kale, spinach, or collard greens), cassava, potatoes, onions, pumpkins, tomatoes, carrots, squash, and yams. Cash crops include coffee, tea, sisal, fruit, vegetables, beans, and grains. Women also sell eggs, milk, honey, and meat to their neighbors.

Population pressure is intense in Wundanyi, with high population density leading to family tracts of land being subdivided into tiny plots. There is very little land available in the fertile hills surrounding Wundanyi, causing people to move down the gradient toward Mwatate. Many farmers have plots in and around Mwatate, where land is still available for purchase, but the farming is not as productive. Voi is a large town but there
are also small farms located around the edges of Voi. This is a very dry area and crop yields are very low.

One of the largest plantation farms in the area is located outside of Mwatate at the Teita Sisal Estate. This is a huge tract of land, planted intensively in sisal for cash crop production. Sisal is used locally to weave baskets and to make rope for cash income. Sisal is grown, harvested, spun into fiber, and dyed. A Greek family who has become Kenyan citizens owns the Teita Estate. The sisal industry has been operating since colonial times and was one of the major sources of forced labor by the British. Today, over 30,000 workers are employed at the estate for plantation wage labor, and the conditions are said to be harsh, brutal, and almost like slavery. The workers are not permitted to organize or to attend public rallies or to listen to political candidates who come to campaign at the estate. Workers are also said to suffer often from snakebites, heatstroke, and other illnesses associated with working in the hot sun and heavy labor of cutting sisal, with little access to medical care.

Another feature of the physical landscape of the district is the Tsavo East and Tsavo West National Parks. These are the largest national parks in Kenya, providing habitat for wildlife such as elephants, water buffalo, rhinoceros, baboons, lions, hyena, wild dogs, zebras, giraffe, etc. This creates considerable pressure on the land and conflict with local farmers, who complain of elephants roaming outside of the boundaries of the park and destroying their farms and gardens.

Mining is another major economic activity of the area. Minerals are abundant in the region, including sapphires, rubies, emeralds, tanzanite, and other valuable
gemstones. The mines attract enterprising young men from throughout the country. Some of these people are legitimately engaged in mining and dealing of gemstones, while others are engaged in more nefarious and shady activities. Mwatate has a reputation as a dangerous hub for criminal activities associated with the gemstone and mineral trade.

Water is a big issue in Mwatate and other dry lowland areas in Taita. During the rainy season, water is abundant, with occasional flooding even destroying crops and homes or claiming people’s lives. However, during the dry seasons, it is difficult to gather water, and people must sometimes travel great distances to carry water.

The sisal estate also has a large dam located near the railway and Mwatate town. The dam is reportedly off-limits as it is to be used for irrigation and for processing sisal in the factory, which uses a lot of water. They do not want people to use their water. Nevertheless, the local people regularly visit the dam to collect water in buckets and jerricans. It is not uncommon to find large numbers of children collecting water there after school and until dusk.

The community has several taps that are accessible to the public, but they are supposed to pay a fee. Some businesses are also connected to this tap through a piping system, such as the dispensary and the Taita International School. However, the water system often encounters problems and is even shut down from time to time – when probed, the local officials claim that they turned off the service because some of the customers were not paying their bills or user fees – thus the whole community is punished.
There are some enterprising people in the community who have installed water tanks in their compounds, which they fill from a tap and then sell by the bucket or jerrican to people who collect it. For example, Agneta and Julius Mwakio Katuu have a large water tank in their compound, from which they sell water to their neighbors for five shillings per bucket. This can be a lucrative business, but they also must ensure that the water tanks are kept clean, purified, and bleached to protect the water supply of their customers.

**Women’s Organizations in Taita**

My network in Taita grew out of my affiliation with the Mjomba and Nyambu families, as well as contacts I made through my former professor, Dr. Tom Wolf, who has done extensive research and volunteer work in Taita since the 1970s. My friends and colleagues, Leonard Majalia Mjomba and Mary Majalia, hosted me at the Taita International School (TIS), a small private school in Mwatate where I was based. They introduced me to many people in Mwatate, including Alex Mwandawa, the Director of Vidasico. Leonard’s mother, Mama Joan Mjomba, is the former mayor of Voi and a leader in the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK) Mothers’ Union and the National Council of Churches of Kenya. Mama Mjomba introduced me to others in her extended family and church networks in the community, as well as the local government officials in Wundanyi, where she had worked in the District Education Office. Dr. Tom Wolf introduced me to my host family in Wundanyi, the Nyambus, in 1994, and I have continued to keep in touch and would stay with them when visiting Wundanyi. Dr. Wolf
also introduced me to Agneta and Julius Mwakio Katuu in Mwatate. Agneta is a “free range” member of multiple women’s groups, and her husband, Julius, is an adult educator and the teacher of the Mwakitutu Women’s Group. From these contacts, my network grew like a snowball effect. I ventured to several different places in rural Taita throughout my fieldwork, such as Voi, Mwatate, Kasigau, Mrangi, Ghazi, Taveta, Bura, Wongonyi, Wusi, and Wundanyi.

The sheer number and diverse activities of women’s groups in Taita amazed me. Mr. Katembo, the Social Development Director of Taita District, told me that there are over one thousand two hundred women’s groups operating in the area that are registered with the Department of Social Services. In just the small town of Mwatate, over seventy women’s groups are registered. Mr. Katembo listed the following projects undertaken by Taita women’s groups:

- Mainly horticulture, dairy, and small scale income-generating activities like selling water, making water pots, poultry-keeping, bee-keeping, merry-go-rounds, growing and cooking traditional foods (e.g. kimanga and traditional vegetables), quarrying stones and kokoto (ballast), baking building bricks (blocks), planting tree seedlings, fishponds, burning charcoal. Some are involved in handicrafts like embroidery, basketry, tie-and-dye and batik. Others attend adult education classes while others operate orphanages (mostly for HIV/AIDS orphans).

These activities depend on environmental conditions. For example, in dry areas we have goat-keeping, water selling, etc. In fertile regions we have horticulture. (M. Katembo, personal communication, June 4, 2008)

Over the five months that I spent in Taita, I interviewed members of dozens of women’s groups in the area. I made connections with eighteen different women’s basket-weaving groups involved with Vidasico, a cooperative business specializing in “fair trade” exporting to Denmark. I then met with officials from the District Education Office, the Department of Social Services, and the District Commissioner. I attended the
Women’s Enterprise Fund meetings and assisted in the writing of grant proposals. I interviewed members of *Maendeleo ya Wanawake*, the Green Belt Movement, the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK) Mothers’ Union, the Mwakitutu Women’s Group, the Nguraru Women’s Group, the Shomoto Women’s Group, MVOSA (Mwatate-Voi-Sagalla) Women’s Group, Peleleza Muslim Women’s Group, Star Women’s Group, the Boilwa and Sere Farmers’ Field Schools, the Shirikisho Political Party, and World Neighbors. I also interviewed reproductive health educators, traditional birth attendants and midwives. I met with educators of the Department of Adult Education, the Community Learning Resource Centre, the Taita International School, Taita Academy, Bura Girls’ Secondary School, and Allan Mjomba Secondary School. Finally, I also attended meetings of the Taita Leaders’ Meeting for Peace and Justice and an assembly of head teachers to discuss student achievement and girl child education in the district.

Girls and women in Taita have unequal access to education as compared to boys and men, but this is improving. In the past, it was believed that girls will just get married, and they will move to the home of their husbands’ families. Therefore, they said that there was no need to educate girls. A local proverb states: “Educating a girl is like watering another family’s *shamba*” or investing in the wealth of another family. But now, things are changing somewhat as far as education is concerned. Many families see the benefit of educating both boys and girls, and free primary education is available now, which lifts the burden of school fees from the shoulders of parents.

For older women who have not had access to formal education in the past, adult education services are active in Taita. Classes meet in all of the major towns of the
district. Women’s groups are closely connected to adult education programs. In addition to literacy classes, they are engaged in a number of income-generating activities. Groups are also trained in accounting, financial management, small business development, and other business skills. In order to register formally with Social Services, they are required to write a constitution, and open a group bank account.

Some gender discrimination still exists, as women in Taita still do not have the right to inherit or own anything since the customary law determines land ownership. Although women are the majority of farmers, they do not own the land in their names and they really depend on their husbands and in-laws. Many men have attained higher education, and they have gone to the cities to work. Taita women often complained that their men were away working in the cities and towns, leaving the women at home to fend for themselves and their children. They also complained that Taita men are notorious drunks, and would use all of their salary and their family’s money on alcohol. Sometimes the men were also abusive and would come home drunk and beat their families. Women struggle to feed their families, to survive such crushing poverty, and to deal with their feelings of loneliness, isolation, and abandonment. They often turn to women’s groups for assistance and support.

Taita women’s work consists of activities such as farming, collecting water, building houses, herding livestock, planting, and other chores. Women are expected to do heavy labor and survive with few resources. Taita women therefore are keenly interested in becoming more self-sufficient and building systems for sustainable livelihoods to support their families.
Many of the local women’s groups engage in agricultural projects. They grow food together in communal projects. They also raise poultry, goats, cattle, and bees. They build housing and water tanks and grain storage or milling facilities called *posho* mills. They teach women how to build *jiko* or clay ovens in their kitchens, which are a fuel-efficient wood-burning stove for cooking. They develop plant and tree nurseries and sell the seedlings to schools and local farmers. They weave sisal baskets known as *vidasi*. The sisal is twisted into twine and dyed with local plants, flowers, and mud. The women tightly weave complex geometric designs into pliable baskets, and attach leather strapping for beautiful bags.


*Kuweka maji* (water collection) is a major priority for women, who are primarily responsible for carrying water, or who send their children to do this task. As they must walk far distances to collect water, and it is a very heavy job, women are interested and
committed to developing water-saving and water collection technologies so that they can store water at their homes. The Mwakitutu women’s group, for example, built large cement water tanks and gutter systems outside of their homes, as well as smaller ceramic or cement jugs for placing inside their homes.


Taita women’s groups also meet for fellowship and counseling associated with Christian churches. Many of the local churches are charismatic or Pentecostal. Women meet to pray, sing, read the Bible, and discuss issues in their families. Sometimes women counsel each other, giving advice or sharing problems related to family life, marriage, raising their children, getting along with in-laws, or settling disputes with neighbors. They support each other and help to raise consciousness about their problems,
empowering members to find solutions. They also teach each other about domestic skills, such as sewing, cooking, first aid, and hygiene.

Many women’s groups in Taita also teach women about health issues, including reproductive health care. Midwives and traditional birth attendants assist with pregnancy, labor, childbirth, and post-natal care for mothers and babies. Women meet to discuss parenting, childhood nutrition, disease prevention, and other skills practiced and passed on from mother to mother. Family planning groups have promoted education, prevention and awareness about HIV/AIDS and other sexually-transmitted infections (STIs). Family planning groups also work to provide contraceptives and birth control throughout the region.

**Lamu**

During my fieldwork I also traveled to Lamu, a small coastal island town in the “Lower Coast” of Kenya’s Coast Province. The geography, history and culture of Lamu are striking, and UNESCO named the town a World Heritage Site in 2003. Lamu District includes an archipelago located on the Indian Ocean and the mainland area east of the Tana River, just south of Somalia. Lamu Island hosts a calm harbor off the ocean, opening up to an old port city. Lamu town is located in the Amu Division, which is the administrative center of the district. Two maps depicting Lamu District are included in the figures below:
Figure 13. Map of Lamu District of Kenya. Reprinted from open source at
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AKenya_lamu-district.svg

Figure 14. Lamu District Map with Administrative Boundaries. Government of Kenya.
Lamu is an historic Swahili settlement dating back to the thirteenth century. The Sultan of Oman once settled here, trading in slaves, spices, grains, and other goods. Swahili traders for centuries have flourished in the islands of the East African coast, from Lamu and Zanzibar to Madagascar, Comoros and Mauritius. Lamu has been the site of over one thousand years of trade between East Africa, Oman, Yemen, Seychelles, Mauritius, Persia, India, China, Portugal, Germany, Great Britain, and other nations. Today, Lamu is still a site of tourism and Islamic pilgrimages. The town is deeply steeped in tradition and conservative values but also the site of global/local transformations.

It is hard to describe Lamu without resorting to clichés. The place has a mystical appeal and is known by many as the “Kathmandu of Africa” or a “travelers’ paradise.” Lamu has long been a popular tourist destination for Europeans, Americans, and other foreigners. I was first introduced to Lamu as a student and a tourist in 1994, and initially thought of the place as a “timeless” and “unchanging” society that has preserved traditional Swahili culture and Muslim traditions. However, after spending more time in Lamu, and experiencing more of the local culture through the eyes of women leaders, I discovered a complex and dynamic society that is facing many of the same issues that are present throughout Kenya today.

The architecture in Lamu is unique in Kenya. The homes are built in the Arabic design, with thick stone and plaster walls, mangrove pole ceilings, and ornately carved wooden arches and doorways reminiscent of Oman, Yemen and India. The houses are
arranged to allow women privacy in the interior courtyards and upstairs rooms, which are connected from house to house by a series of walkways overhead the streets. The “streets” of the town are a maze of narrow alleyways and labyrinthine corridors winding around ancient stone, sand and coral homes, with open sewers filtering underneath (sanitation and waste management is a major problem). There are only a few motor vehicles on the island, and most transportation is limited to boats, donkeys, mkokoteni carts, or by foot. Travel away from the island is entirely dependent on boats, and must be timed during the high tides. A map of Lamu Town is included in the next figure:

![Figure 15. Map of Lamu Town. (Ernst, 2007, pp. 13-17).](image)

Lamu town is clearly divided by lines of socio-economic status and class. The northern Mkomani neighborhood is for the most prominent, vijoho (upper-class) families. Many of the women of Mkomani cling strongly to their status as proud daughters of Arab families, descendents of Omani, Yemeni, and Persian immigrants. Many are devout
Muslims who follow a strict code of respectability and purdah. The houses of Mkomani are in the center of the Old Town, with huge stone houses built in the old Arabic style. Mkomani is quiet, orderly and respectable.

By contrast, poor and working-class people live beyond the old town, in new settlements such as Langoni, Wiyoni, Kandahar, Kashmir, Bosnia, Bombay, and other outlying areas or “slums” on the edges of Lamu Town. These communities are growing, and their names reflect the globalized sensibilities of modern Lamu. The southern Langoni neighborhood is full of newer immigrants and minority ethnic groups. Langoni is loud, brash, and full of nightlife until the wee hours of the morning. The housing tends to include cement block houses with thatch or mabati (iron sheet) roofs. These communities are more crowded, with open sewage, dump sites, and lots of garbage.

Beyond Lamu’s neighborhoods, the island flattens out into an immense expanse of mashamba (farms). Families in town travel to the mashamba by foot, by donkey, or by pushcart. They grow food for subsistence or to take to the market, including palm, coconut, mango, cashew, pomegranate and guava trees. There are also large areas for grazing cattle, goats, and sheep. Palm and mangrove trees are cut and used for building boats, houses, docks, and buildings. Timber, fruits and nuts are harvested. Palm leaves and fronds are used for weaving vikapu (baskets), kofia (hats), mkeka (floor mats), beds, furniture, and roofing thatch.

On the far side of the island facing the open ocean, the landscape rises into large sand dunes, which dips down to a six-kilometer long, crescent-shaped beach. I am sure that Lamu’s beaches are the most beautiful in the world – white sands, a long stretch of
sand dunes, large waves, and the great Indian Ocean on the horizon. The equatorial ocean climate is hot, wet, and fertile year-round. Fish is an abundant resource at the coast, with local fishermen catching snapper, rock cod, barracuda, lobster, crabs, shrimp, and oysters. Women are also involved in the fishing trade by making ice and storing and selling fish from their homes.

Much of the food sold in Lamu is imported, as the soil on Lamu island is sandy and not fertile for agriculture. Food is brought in boats from small farmers on Manda Island. Other foods are bussed to Mokowe on the mainland, where buses carry food from Mpeketoni, Malindi, Mombasa, and Taita. The people of Lamu are dependent on food that is shipped from elsewhere. And of course, both locals and tourists in Lamu demand consumer goods from Europe, Asia, and the Arabian peninsula. The Lamu economy is very much oriented to trade in imported goods from Dubai, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, India, China, Europe, and the United States.

The Lamu population is ninety-five percent Muslim and is characterized as a Swahili trading town where ethnicity and race tend to be fairly fluid categories, and intermarriage is common. The population of twenty thousand or more people is a creolized mixture of Swahili, Bajuni, Omani Arab, Persian/Shirazi, Kore, Kikuyu, Luo, Indian, and European people.

One of the largest celebrations in Lamu is Maulidi, an annual Islamic festival celebrating the birth of the Prophet Mohammed. This is a revered event throughout East Africa, and Lamu hosts what is considered to be the best Maulidi Festival in the Indian Ocean region. The tradition started when Habib Swaleh traveled here from the Comoros
Islands in the mid-1800s and founded the Riyadha Mosque. It is said that he is a direct descendent from the Prophet Mohammed, and that he brought the Maulidi tradition to Lamu which has survived to this day through his hundreds of descendents. An estimated fifty thousand Muslim pilgrims travel to Lamu every year from throughout the world to celebrate the revered holiday, which is a month of activities culminating in a three-day festival. Some people even say that “two trips to Lamu are equal to one trip to the Hajj” at Mecca in Saudi Arabia. I met many new friends from Kenya, Tanzania & Zanzibar, Somalia, Ethiopia, Libya, Egypt, Iran, the UK and elsewhere. We spent a lot of time watching the singing, drumming and dancing at the Riyadha Mosque, which was the center of the religious festivities. Weddings are commonplace during the month of Maulidi. There were also nightly performances of Taarab music in the town square, with men singing religious songs with a band playing flutes, drums, synthesizers and stringed instruments. A photo of the audience at a Maulidi performance is included in the next figure. The groups of men and women are clearly segregated on two sides of the crowd, with the women in black in the foreground and the men in white on the other side.
The National Museums of Kenya also organizes a number of secular events during Maulidi as well, which made it feel like a county fair with donkey races, *dhow* (sailboat) races, a football (soccer) tournament, a children’s Arabic calligraphy competition, and henna painting. Daily gaming competitions also take place in the town square with men and children playing strategic games such as dominoes, *Bao* (like *Mancala*), *Dumna* (like chess), and *Carrom* (a tabletop board game of Sri Lankan origin that resembles billiards).
A sign at the Lamu jetty greets visitors with this message:

Figure 17. Welcome sign at main jetty of Lamu Town. April 9, 2008.

This conservative attitude puts off many visitors to Lamu. The *Rough Guide to Kenya* explains an interesting aspect of Swahili modesty:

> Outsiders have tended to get the wrong end of the stick about Swahili seclusion. While women are undoubtedly heavily restricted in their public lives, in private they have considerable freedom. The notion of romantic love runs deep in Swahili culture. Love affairs, divorces and remarriage are the norm, and the *buibui* is perhaps as useful to women in disguising their liaisons as it is to their husbands in preventing them. (Trillo, 2006, p. 537)

For the majority of the Muslim Swahili residents, modesty and chastity are the hallmarks of this conservative culture, but there is also a hidden element of romance and allure.

Men are covered with a full-length white *kanzu* robe, which is worn over other clothing, and a *kofia* (embroidered cap) worn on their heads. While outdoors, women are often covered modestly by the black *buibui*, (full-length black robe), with a black *mtandio* or
hijab (headscarf), and sometimes even the ninja or niqab (face veil), which covers all but their eyes. Older Swahili women wear the shuga, a black dress that ties around the head like a scarf, opens loosely around the shoulders and chest, and then closes around the front of the body. One woman described this as a “tent with flaps.” Indoors, women can remove these outer coverings to reveal their regular clothes. Older women wear loose-fitting dresses while younger women and girls prefer imported secondhand clothes, colorful dresses, salwar kameez, or t-shirts and blue jeans. Inside their homes, women are often elaborately adorned with beautiful clothing, henna designs on their hands and feet, makeup, perfume, and ornate golden jewelry.

I found that a little modesty goes a long way. When I covered myself with the buibui and hijab, both men and women greeted me warmly. I spent time with many Muslim women indoors, where the codes of purdah demand modesty and confinement in the home, away from the leering gaze of unrelated men. The veiling of Muslim women and the practice of purdah was a topic of conversation throughout my interviews and observations in Lamu.
Figure 18. Swahili Muslim women covered with the hijab or mtandio (headscarf) and the niqab or “ninja” (face veil). Maulidi celebration, Lamu Town. April 3, 2008.

Women’s Organizations in Lamu

Women’s social and economic activities are highly dependent on social stratification, age, and level of education. “Upcountry” women of other ethnic groups are permitted to sell food in the market or on the streets, or to work in shops around the town. On the other hand, upper-class Swahili Muslim women are expected to stay home and to avoid contact with other men than their husbands and family members. The principle of purdah requires modesty and respectability of women from high-class families of Arab descent. Swahili Muslim women focus largely on home-based businesses for townspeople like cooking, sewing, embroidery, henna painting, and petty trade. They also cook local delicacies and snacks that are sold by children and men as street foods throughout kiosks and markets in town, especially during the festival times of Ramadan, Idd, Maulidi, and the Lamu Cultural Festival. However, younger and more educated
women are now permitted to work outside the home in offices, schools, and organizations.

Women’s groups also address major social problems that disrupt family and community life. Some Lamu women complained about men’s polygamous affairs and relationships, as well as domestic violence. Many men and some women also abuse *miraa* (khat), *bhangi* (marijuana), “brown sugar” (heroin), alcohol, and other drugs. These social problems are radically changing Lamu women’s roles in their families and in the wider community.

Although much is made of Swahili Muslim women’s seclusion in their homes and “behind the veil,” the women of Lamu are movers and shakers. Women in Lamu are highly organized, with women running *madrassa* (Islamic schools), day care centers, public and private schools, microfinance projects, offices, small businesses and organizations. Women have run for office and been elected to political positions such as Member of Parliament, County Council, and School Boards.

While I was in Lamu for three months, I met with several government officials in Lamu, including the Social Development Officer, the Police Commissioner, the District Education Officer, the Adult Education District Officer, the District Commissioner, and the Immigration Officer. I met with leaders and members of dozens of community-based organizations and NGOs, including *Maendeleo ya Wanawake*, *Sauti ya Wanawake*, Al-Nasiha Women’s Group, Mkomani women’s group, Amani women’s group, Jitegemee women’s group, Tuungane Wiyoni Women’s Group, the Lamu Women’s Poverty Eradication and Education Group, Kikozi, the Lamu Education Development Foundation
Trust (LEDFT), APHIA II, Lamu Safi, the Red Cross, the Lamu Cultural Festival, Council of Imams and Preachers of Kenya (CIPK), Lamu Museum, Tawasal Youth Group, Tushauriane Youth Group, and Lamu Chonjo. I also interviewed educators at Lamu Girls’ Secondary School, Mkomani Girls’ Primary School, Lamu Primary School, the School for International Training, Swafaa Academy, Pwani Mosque, Fort Jesus Museum, Lamu Museum, and the Swahili Cultural Centre.

I also met with many women informally throughout my time in Lamu. I interacted with friends, mothers, daughters, schoolgirls, office workers, henna painters, cooks, house girls, seamstresses, bakers, embroiderers, market vendors, sex workers, barmaids, hotel clerks, and waitresses.

The Social Development Officer, Dora Chovu, informed me that there are over four hundred women’s groups registered in Lamu District. Most of these groups are based in Mpeketoni, on the mainland, but a core group of women’s groups are based in Lamu Town. *Maendeleo ya Wanawake* is an umbrella organization that oversees the activities of many different women’s groups, and is led locally by Fatma Salim. Chovu reveals that different women’s groups are engaged in different activities. She said that women come together as a group to put themselves in a position to achieve more. She said that women’s groups empower women socially and economically by increasing women’s participation in decision making. Most women’s groups in Lamu are undertaking “social welfare projects” but they are also engaged in the following income-generating activities: small scale business, merry-go-rounds, table banking, construction of social halls, *posho* mills, farming activities, poultry keeping and goat keeping.
Regional Differences and the Geography of Women’s Organizations

In retrospect, we can clearly see a vast heterogeneity and diversity of women’s groups in Kenya. The differences in the structures, issues, and agendas of women’s organizations are largely dictated by differences in geography, climate, environment, economy, religion, class and culture. Grassroots women’s groups are operating as a vehicle for education and training throughout the country. They emerge particularly in underserved areas and peripheral communities, where women must create alternative systems of education, business, and income-generating activities as a survival strategy.

Next I will turn to a deeper examination of the different issues or themes that women’s groups address. I will examine how women’s organizations engage women in dialogue and problem-solving to address both their practical needs and strategic interests. These groups facilitate women’s dialogue and a holistic analysis of their situation to develop a curriculum that is both relevant and necessary to their daily lives.
Chapter 5: Holistic Education: Practical Needs and Strategic Interests

In this chapter I address the second research question: How do women organize and educate their members to address practical and strategic needs in Kenya? Analyzing the contributions and strategies of women’s groups in Kenya is important to understand how social movements work as a vehicle for education and capacity-building. This analysis examines the actual issues, skills, and information delivered by women’s organizations and adult education programs. An important feature of feminist popular education is its explicit focus on a holistic curriculum that addresses the diverse needs and interests of adult learners.

In the following chapter, I analyze the diverse forms and functions of women’s groups. Women’s organizations use participatory methods of popular education to encourage lifelong learning by doing. The eight core themes of this curriculum include:

1. Economic Development
2. Literacy
3. Agriculture, Environment and Sustainability
4. Arts and Culture
5. Health
6. Religion and Spirituality
7. Politics, Law and Civic Education
8. Peace, Justice and Non-violence
In Kenya, the women’s movement is ubiquitous and heterogeneous. Women’s organizations are located throughout the country with millions of members. Women’s groups emphasize a holistic approach that addresses both practical skills and strategic interests simultaneously. Often, their focus depends upon regional differences of culture, economy, environment, religion, contact with outsiders, and other issues. Women’s groups tend to select practical projects that will benefit their whole families and develop their communities, such as health care delivery, sanitation, water, agriculture, schools,
and small business development. Therefore, they can gain support from men and other powerful elites as they organize for improvements that benefit the whole society. This allows them to gain the respect, space and confidence necessary to work on strategic interests, including civic education, politics, human rights, legal reforms, security, and ending violence.

**Economic Development**

Economic issues address the “bread and butter” practical needs of women, such as food, agriculture, trade and business. Poverty and unemployment severely constrict women’s lives throughout Kenya, in both rural villages and urban slums. In an informal economy like Kenya’s, employment is created and expanded through entrepreneurship. Women in Kenya place high value on economic independence, income-generating activities, and microenterprise or small business development.

Economic growth has been slow and women face particular barriers to education and employment. Women also do not have equal access to credit, loans, land, or income. Banks often require men to co-sign when a woman applies for a bank account, and Kenyan law prohibited female land ownership and inheritance until very recently. Much of women’s work is uncounted and unpaid, and their care-giving roles place a heavy physical and economic burden on them. Women are largely engaged in household production, domestic labor, child care, subsistence agriculture, and petty trading.

Many women I interviewed in Kenya did not consider their labor to be *kazi* or work since it was seen as their duty to stay home and raise the children. They
complained that men controlled the purse strings, did not share income with their wives, or squandered family resources for personal consumption of drugs or alcohol. Many interviewees declared that women’s economic empowerment was the key to their self-sufficiency and independence. As women gain access to their own income, they experience a radical shift in their marriages, families, and communities.

Finance and business is perhaps the most common theme that I found throughout Kenyan women’s organizations. I discovered that the vast majority of women’s organizations arise out of the interests in small business development and microfinance. Women create alternative financial and banking systems through savings and credit cooperatives (SACCOs), “merry-go-rounds” (MGRs), “table banking groups,” kikozi, and other forms of income-generating activities (IGAs).

There are several different levels of support for women’s economic development in Kenya. These include:

- Social Capital: Kin, friends, family, neighbors, churches, mosques, community, informal networks, dance groups, Harambee fundraisers
- Local institutions: “Merry-Go-Rounds,” Chamas, table banking, women’s groups, Kamiriithu, Farmers’ Field Schools, artisan’s groups, guilds
- Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs): MYWO, GROOTS, Kikozi, LEDFT, cooperatives
- Governmental Organizations (GOs): Women’s Enterprise Fund, Agricultural Extension Services, Department of Adult Education, Department of Social Services
• Private institutions: Savings and Credit Cooperatives (SACCOs)
  Kenya Women’s Finance Trust (KWFT), Equity Bank

• International Donors: USAID, SIDA, GTZ, DANIDA, Peace Corps, Plan
  International, Embassies, KIVA, FINCA, Heifer Project

As seen from the above list, levels of support for women’s economic development ranges from small, personal connections to international institutions in Kenya. Some of these organizations are very informal and based on grassroots social networks known as *chama* or “merry-go-rounds” (MGRs). Often, a group of friends, kin, or neighbors will gather together as a group to pool resources into a collective pot, which will be loaned out to various members. The members are expected to use the funds to start up a small business or income-generating activity, and then to repay the loan plus interest within an allotted time period. MGR groups exhibit the Kenyan cultural practice of *harambee* or “let’s all pull together,” popularized by former Kenyan President Jomo Kenyatta. They demonstrate the potential for citizens to create wealth through cooperation. They collective pool local resources to meet social and economic needs in their families and communities. This system depends upon a great deal of goodwill and the mobilization of social capital, as well as a deep trust in fellow members to repay the loans in good time. Several groups acknowledge that the “merry-go-round” system is the most popular form of economic growth and small business development. I have also found that this system is not unique to Kenya, but is practiced by informal women’s groups throughout Africa and even in the African diaspora.
Figure 20. Members of the Boilwa Farmers’ Field School discussing their monthly “merry-go-round” contributions. Mwatate, Kenya, May 8, 2008.

Figure 21. Example of a typical “passbook” or accounting system used by “merry-go-rounds” and savings and credit cooperatives (SACCOs) in Kenya (Sorenson, Jaja, Amimo, Ingutia, Gituma & Waigua, 2005, p. 31).

Other women’s groups are more formalized organizations, and may be registered through the Department of Social Services. These groups have a Constitution, elected executive board (President/Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer), a bank account, minutes
of meetings, and a formal certificate of registration. Another type of formal organization is savings and credit cooperatives (SACCOs). These are formal, alternative banking organizations. Examples of these SACCOs that I encountered are the Mwatate-Voi-Sagalla (MVOSA) Group, Kikozi in Lamu, and teachers’ SACCOs found throughout Kenya.

Some women’s groups work to create employment and promote economic self-reliance through adult education programs or small development projects. These groups encourage women to develop miradi such as tree nurseries, poultry keeping, goat keeping, bee keeping, food sales, and informal marketing associations. A number of women work as entrepreneurs in the informal sector, known as jua kali or “hot sun.” Jua kali associations work throughout the nation, and include hawking or street vendor associations or marketing cooperatives. These cooperatives help hawkers or market women to organize and advocate for fair wages, good prices for their produce, legal rights and spaces to sell publicly without harassment from the police or taxation by the government (King, 1996; Alila, Mitullah & Kamau, 2002; Kinyanjui, 2006).

In Nairobi, the Gikomba Market boasts some of the largest and most savvy groups of women vendors. This is a wholesale market that was started by a group of women in the 1980s that organized through a harambee to purchase goods and pay rent for space in the market (Ndambuki & Robertson, 2000). Women street vendors are a major part of the informal sector in Nairobi. They engage in small-scale trading activities that are “comparatively less lucrative such as sale of foods, vegetables, fruits, grains, dress making, knitting and embroidery, sale of clothes and hair care products among others”
Women street vendors are noted to be more disadvantaged than their male counterparts. Their businesses are small, have minimal capital, and grow slowly. Women earn less income than men and trade in limited commodities. Women also work for less hours, as they have to attend to children, domestic chores and other household needs. It is estimated that 9.5% of women street vendors operate their businesses with children on their backs, laps or by their side (Alila, Mitullah and Kamau, 2002, p. 4-5). Women street vendors are known as “hawkers” locally in Nairobi, and they are subject to regular harassment, abuse, and arrest by police and the Nairobi City Council. The following cartoons demonstrate the issues faced by women street vendors and jua kali businesspeople in Kenya:

*Figure 22.* Cartoons demonstrating the challenges of women street vendors in Kenya. (Alila, Mitullah and Kamau, 2002, p. 1-4).
Figure 23. Cartoon depicting the challenges of street vendors’ limited access to basic facilities (Alila, Mitullah and Kamau, 2002, p. 2).

Figure 24. Cartoon depicting a woman street vendor being chased by a City Council authority for vending in public without a permit. (Alila, Mitullah and Kamau, 2002, p. 3).
Figure 25. Cartoon depicting the gender inequities between male and female street vendors (Alila, Mitullah and Kamau, 2002, p. 5).

In Taita, market women also organize into cooperatives through the Mwatate Farmers’ Market, the Voi Market Women’s Group, and the Peleleza Muslim Women’s Group. In Lamu, women traders sell vegetables, fruits, fish, coconuts, and woven palm products in the Lamu Market near the Lamu Fort. Women also cook prepared foods that they sell on the streets, especially during festival times such as Maulidi, Ramadan, and the Lamu Cultural Festival.

Finally, there are large public and private institutions that partner with individual women entrepreneurs and/or women’s groups through microfinance programs. The structures of these organizations are similar to the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh led by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Mohammed Yunus or the Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) and Woman-to-Woman organization in India. Some examples of
private lending institutions are the Kenya Women Finance Trust (KWFT), Equity Bank (whose motto is “Because We Are Kenyan”), FINCA, and KIVA. Some examples of public or government-managed lending programs include the Women’s Enterprise Fund (WEF), Youth Enterprise Fund (YEF), and Constituency Development Fund (CDF). Other institutional partners include foreign donors and international development agencies that provide funding and support to women’s organizations. These include DANIDA, USAID, SIDA, and various United Nations programs (UNDP, UNIFEM, UNFPA, UNESCO, etc.).


The issue of donor dependency is a major problem for women’s groups to become truly self-reliant and able to develop their own capacity and local resources. Several
interviewees noted that often groups spring up in response to available funds rather than any sustained organizing. For example, the Tujiunge Wiyoni group in Lamu approached me looking for funds, but I discovered in meeting with them that the group had not yet organized a single project. They met in a palm wine bar and a man asked and answered all questions on behalf of the group. This focus group interview revealed that this group was not yet organized or prepared to engage in development work. When I shared this experience with Dora Chovu, the Social Services Officer in Lamu, she noted that many groups had tried to apply for the Women’s Enterprise Fund (WEF) but did not have the necessary bank accounts, constitutions, and track record needed to borrow money from the government. This experience reveals that there are some groups that exist in name only, seeking access to available funding opportunities without a clear business plan or strategy for success.

I noticed that the U.S. government seems to invest heavily in women’s organizations and activism in Kenya. I attended several functions at the U.S. Ambassador Michael Ranneberger’s residence in which I was able to meet a variety of influential women leaders and activists in Nairobi. An interview with Kevin Greene, a U.S. embassy official, revealed that the embassy has taken a keen interest in investing in women’s organizations and businesses. He admitted: “we invest in women because there is a higher return than loaning to men. Women tend to be more accountable and responsible when handling money from foreign donors. Women use the funds for their intended purposes and they tend to pay it off more quickly.”
Women also tend to use their profits for the entire family, using their funds to pay children’s school fees, improve the family homestead, or to start a small project or income-generating activity. Other lenders confirmed this. As one woman from Equity Bank admitted, women are seen as a safer investment than men, as men are likely to be more corrupt with the funds, to spend money on personal things or drinking, or expected to share it with their dependents in ways that were not intended by the donor.

A major critique addressed by several research participants was the need for financial literacy. Some members of women’s groups in Taita were skeptical and hesitant to apply for loans from the Women’s Enterprise Fund or the Kenya Women’s Finance Trust. They reported that these organizations often require collateral from recipients. They feared that if they did not repay the loan in time, then the financial institutions would come to their homes to repossess the collateral items. Many members of women’s groups simply did not trust the lending process, and they felt it was too risky to consider applying for loans from banks or government programs.

Indeed, it is one thing for donors to give money to women, but without proper education it is difficult for women to have the skills necessary to plan and manage the money wisely. To improve, strengthen, and expand their effective services, it is vitally important that microfinance and micro lending institutions develop educational programs to inform potential borrowers of the risks and benefits of applying for loans. They should also provide training to borrowers in issues such as accounting, bookkeeping, strategic planning, business development, budgeting, marketing, and other issues. It is recommended that these organizations work in tandem with grassroots women’s
organizations, the Department of Adult Education, the Ministry of Gender, the Ministry of Social Services, and the Kenya Institute for Education (KIE) to incorporate these lessons into a training curriculum for women’s groups.

One powerful tool for educating women’s groups about the value of savings and credit cooperatives is through comic books and pamphlets that are easy to read and comprehend. For example, the Micro Enterprise Development Project and Legacy Books Press published a set of comic books in English and Kiswahili titled *How to Run a Successful Akiba na Mkopo Group* (Savings and Loan Group). This booklet demonstrates the entire process of organizing savings and credit cooperatives. I have included some of these cartoons below:
Figure 27. Cover art and cartoons from the book *How to Run a Successful Akiba na Mkopo Group* (Sorenson, Jaja, Amimo, Ingutia, Gituma & Waigua, 2005, covers and pp. 2-3).
Grace Maina of the KIE revealed in an interview that the Ministry of Gender had worked with KIE in the 1980s to develop the *Training Curriculum for Women’s Groups*. They identified key areas for development in the adult education program that would focus on helping women to develop skills in financial literacy, business development, and self-employment. They also examined core issues in group dynamics, management, and organizational communication that would help women’s groups to run more efficiently.
However, this training curriculum has not been completed and has been shelved due to internal conflicts and disagreements between the members of the curriculum committee. Maina insisted that this project should be updated to correspond to current needs and concerns of Kenyan women, including health issues such as HIV/AIDS. She believes that once the training curriculum is completed it should be incorporated into the adult education programs working with women’s groups throughout the country.

**Literacy**

Women’s literacy is another common theme found among women’s groups in Kenya. Adult education programs offer training in basic literacy and the “post-literacy curriculum.” Adult learners not only learn to read and write, but they also learn valuable skills in self-reliance such as basic accounting, business planning, organizational development, and management. Income-generating activities are also promoted through adult education, giving adult learners the practical experience to engage in development projects and small businesses. Adult learners are motivated when their education is relevant and connected to their practical needs.

The Kenya Department of Adult Education works with Social Services to promote literacy throughout the country. Founded in 1979 by President Moi, adult education services were intended to address the intersecting problems of “poverty, ignorance, and disease.” They organize annual festivals for International Literacy Day in the district capitals. They also organized the recent Kenya National Adult Literacy Survey with the support of UNESCO and the Kenya Bureau of Statistics. This survey
was conducted in 2006 to assess adult literacy in the country. This study estimates that over 60% of adult women in Kenya are illiterate, and recommends that women’s groups and other community-based organizations are valuable partners to the government in delivering non-formal education for women in Kenya.

The Department of Adult Education recognizes women as an important constituency for development in Kenya. The majority of adult learners are women, as previous generations of girls had numerous barriers to pursuing formal education in Kenya. Some women’s groups have even developed through literacy programs, such as the Mwakitutu Women’s Group in Mwatate and the Nguraru Women’s Group in Wundanyi. The Mwakitutu women’s group initially started as an adult literacy class led by teacher Julius Mwakio Katuu in the 1980s. They began by learning basic literacy, as many of the women did not know how to read and write, and some said they had never even held a pencil before joining the program. Later, they developed income-generating activities to raise funds and create employment. They worked with PLAN International and DANIDA to build water tanks and housing at their homesteads. They also built rental housing for teachers and stores to rent to small business owners in their community, which has continued to build income for the group. They weave beautiful sisal baskets that they sell through the Vidasi Cooperative and they attend competitions in Nairobi for their unique basket weaving. They also own a small property together where they cultivate maize, beans and sorghum for food and cash crops. Similarly, the Nguraru Women’s Group started as a basic literacy program in Wundanyi, but later developed a tree nursery project to sell plants for landscapers and small farmers in the area. These
grassroots women’s groups are excellent examples of the natural partnerships that have developed through Adult Education programs.

Another literacy advocacy group is the Kenya Adult Learners Association (KALA). This organization is based in Nairobi and works to support adult learners. I met Magdalene Gathoni, the founder of the organization, at the National Literacy Day Festival in Nairobi in September 2008. Gathoni is a grandmother who did not know how to read and write, but enrolled in the Adult Basic Literacy program. In the 1990s, she was selected by the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE) to attend a conference in Bangkok, Thailand. She spoke in front of a large audience about her experiences in literacy activities in Kenya. She resolved to return home and start an association for adult learners. In her experience, who had worked with many associations that claimed to support grassroots organizations but would later dump the learners. She felt that learners must start their own organization. KALA has worked with grassroots organizations like the Kaminjuki Women’s Group. The members cooperate with income-generating activities such as agriculture and building houses. They started to build a shop, but the project stalled as inflation increased the cost of construction (AALAE, 1993, p. 14). Meanwhile, Gathoni has since completed the post-literacy curriculum, passed the equivalent of her Form Four or KCSE examinations, and is now enrolled in a college. She has aspirations to travel abroad to Europe or the United States for her Master’s studies.
Many women’s organizations promote the expansion of formal education for girls. The Forum of African Women Educationists (FAWE) has its regional headquarters in Nairobi, addressing the educational needs of girls throughout the African continent. The FAWE Kenya country office provides scholarships for over 3,000 bright girls to attend national high schools. FAWE connects successful women mentors with schoolgirls to provide guidance and protection. All scholarship recipients are also provided with uniforms and personal items like menstrual pads to keep them in school beyond puberty. FAWE also organizes *Tuseme* Clubs and girls’ forums in schools, which promote girls to speak out about the issues affecting their lives. FAWE also trains educators in gender-sensitivity and promotes reforms of textbooks, curriculum, and teaching practices.
FAWE works closely with women educators and administrators at schools and universities to change policies to promote girl child education and gender equity. They also partner with African national governments and Ministries of Education to create policies to promote gender mainstreaming on national and international scales.

I met with Hendrina Doroba, a woman who works with the Forum of African Women Educationalists (FAWE), a regional organization that works for gender equity for women and girls in education in thirty-three different Sub-Saharan African countries. She gave me some valuable insights into their work with governments, universities, and teacher training programs in various countries. She also told me that there is a FAWE office for Kenya in Nairobi, and that I should contact them to get more insight into how they are working in schools and universities to promote gender equity in Kenya. They are really involved in training teachers in gender-responsive and non-sexist teaching methodologies. They also work to sensitize Ministers of Education and university administrators about the importance of gender mainstreaming, or ensuring that the leadership of schools includes at least thirty per cent (30%) females, to work toward gender equity. They also work with adolescent girls to teach them about puberty, or how to practice good hygiene and to make their own sanitary napkins. She said this is important since menstruation is one of the major causes of teenage girls’ absences and dropping out from school, and can become a major barrier of shame if the girl cannot afford to buy menstrual pads.

Grace Maina works at the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) as the gender officer. She works closely with FAWE to revise the textbooks to make them more
gender sensitive and to remove gender-biased or stereotypical roles and language. She trains teachers in continuing education workshops on how to start *Tuseme* girls clubs and girls’ forums. She promotes menstruation education and provides sanitary napkins to girls. She also works with the Ministry of Gender to create a Training Curriculum for Women’s Groups, which will be promoted through adult education programs and social services officers.

*Maendeleo ya Wanawake* Organization (MYWO) leads a Girl Child campaign promoting girls’ rights to education. Women’s organizations also work on the community-based level to promote girl child education. Public girls’ schools and independent *Harambee* schools have been created in communities where girls did not previously have access to education. Women’s groups have been instrumental in founding the Bura Girls’ School in Taita, Coast Girls’ School in Mombasa, and Mkomani Primary and Lamu Girls’ Secondary Schools in Lamu.

The Lamu Educational Development Foundation Trust (LEDFT) grew out of mothers’ and teachers’ desires to send more girls to school in the Lamu Archipelago. Mothers started small savings clubs to assist each other to pay their daughters’ school fees. Teachers pooled their resources to assist needy students with uniforms and to purchase textbooks and supplies for the schools. LEDFT has assisted with the fees needed to construct or renovate fifteen schools throughout Lamu District. LEDFT has also provided bursaries (scholarships) of 100,000 Kenyan shillings each to twelve young women from Lamu to pursue their university studies elsewhere. One young woman from Shanga traveled all the way to China to study medicine, while Amina Hussein Soud received a scholarship when she became a Fulbright Scholar in the Yale University Environmental Studies Program.
Therefore, women’s organizations are a powerful force for educational change. They recognize that girls and women are being left behind economically without the tools, skills and knowledge needed to work in the global economy. Women today advocate for the necessity of education for all of their children - both boys and girls - to survive in the twenty-first century. Because many women did not have access to this education in the past, they feel a deep bitterness and drive to provide this to their daughters.

**Agriculture, Environment and Sustainability**

Women’s groups in Kenya are also largely involved in agricultural development and environmental protection. As many rural women are dependent on natural resources
for their livelihood, they are key partners in sustainable development in Kenya (Rocheleau & Thomas-Slayter). Women’s groups are heavily involved in agriculture, agroforestry, water conservation, the preservation and use of medicinal herbs, and the protection of arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs).

Agriculture is a major arena where women’s position as an oppressed majority is starkly apparent. Agriculture is primarily the domain of women in Kenya, with over 80% of food production achieved by women. Women are involved in cultivating subsistence food crops, selling food at markets, and preparing food at home. Men are also involved in growing food crops and cash crops such as tea, coffee, pyrethrum, and flowers for export. However, a major challenge for female farmers is land ownership. Until recently, women in Kenya could not purchase, inherit, or own land without having a male relative or husband as a co-signer. Therefore, most women do not own the means of production or the land that they are cultivating.

In some communities, a woman herself may even referred to metaphorically as a *shamba*, or a piece of land that men can use to plant their seeds and grow their crops. Parents in the past may have referred to their daughters as a *shamba* as an excuse not to educate them; they believed that since girls would get married and move away to their husband’s home, then it was not worth the investment in her education since it would only profit her in-laws. Some women recalled their elders stating: “educating a girl is like watering another family’s *shamba*. ”
Figure 32. Women farmers working together with the Shomoto Women’s Group. Wundanyi, Kenya. June 5, 2008.

Women’s groups working in agriculture often focus their efforts on rotating labor groups, farmers’ cooperatives, marketing associations, and processing value-added products. The Farmers’ Field Schools (FFS) are one type of organization where women are heavily involved in agricultural production. I encountered several women’s groups operating under the auspices of the FFS in Taita. Agricultural extension officers employed by the government train the groups in sustainable methods of cultivation. They involve the farmers in research field trials using organic manure fertilizers and mulching, building swales for irrigation, and growing drought-resistant food crops and biofuels such as Jatropha (an oilseed from Brazil that is being heavily promoted in Africa). The groups meet weekly to work collectively on their land, which is typically rented from churches
or schools for a small fee. The groups also loan funds to members through a rotating credit scheme of a merry-go-round.

![Image](image.jpg)

*Figure 33.* Members of the Boilwa Farmers’ Field School discussing their “merry-go-round” contributions. Mwatate, Kenya. May 8, 2008.

The Kenya Agricultural Productivity Project (KAPP) is another group that is actively working with women’s groups to promote sustainable agriculture. This group partners with the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) to encourage farmers and citizens to develop small businesses around value-added products such as dried fruits and vegetables, aloe vera, and medicinal herbs.

Agroforestry is another area where women’s groups are making a difference. The Green Belt Movement (GBM) is perhaps the most famous of environmental organizations in Kenya. Rural women are involved in planting indigenous tree species through nurseries established in their own communities. They are motivated to plant
trees for cooking fuel, building materials, fodder for livestock, and sale to other farmers and landapers. Since 1977, they have planted over forty million trees throughout Kenya. They are also involved in civic education and training of members that closely resembles Freirean methods of popular education. Wangari Maathai refers to members of the Green Belt Movement as “foresters without diplomas.”

Water conservation projects are also a priority for women’s groups. Women are heavily involved in gathering and carrying water from rivers and streams to their homesteads. Water is a precious resource for agricultural production and household use, and it is becoming more scarce in Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASALs) such as the Coast Province. It is vital for women to develop systems for water collection, such as wells, tanks, and catchment systems that will enable them to save time and labor in carrying water. International donors and development agencies such as DANIDA, USAID, the Peace Corps and Plan International have partnered with women’s groups to develop water systems in rural communities.

**Arts and Culture**

Women’s groups are heavily involved in the arts and cultural heritage in Kenya. As Ngugi wa Thiong’o asserts, the arts are perhaps the most important repository of indigenous knowledge systems and expression in African life. Women’s knowledge and creativity is displayed through the production arts and crafts and the performing arts. Visitors to Kenya are often awed by Kenyan creativity displayed in the vast and diverse
curio markets on the streets of Nairobi, Mombasa, Lamu and other towns. Women produce many of these crafts such as baskets, clothing, jewelry, tapestries, carvings, etc.

Basket weaving is a particularly intricate and special art form of Kenyan women. *Vikapu* or *vidasi* are intricately woven sisal baskets that are made by women throughout Kenya. Sisal is grown in huge plantations at the coast, and is known as a particularly hardy and drought-resistant crop. The fibers are extracted from the plant, twisted into twine, dyed with local plants or flowers, and woven into baskets with beautiful geometric patterns. They are then finished with leather straps, zippers, and flaps. Within Kenya, these baskets are used by local people as shopping bags, purses, and for the harvest and transport of agricultural goods. In curio markets, they are primarily sold to tourists. Baskets are also sold for export through fair trade organizations and other retailers. Vidasico is a cooperative business developed in Mwatate to assist women’s groups to sell their baskets for the export market. Eighteen women’s groups throughout Taita are registered with Vidasico, which serves as a broker to export baskets to Denmark.
Figure 34. *Vidasi* sisal baskets woven by the Mwakitutu Women’s Group. Mwatate, Kenya, January 28, 2008.

Jewelry is another art form that is predominantly created by women in Kenya. Maasai women’s groups are particularly well-known for creating intricate, colorfully beaded necklaces, earrings, bangles, etc. Kazuri Beads is an example of a business built around employing women to create ceramic beads and other items for export sales and the high-end market within Kenya. This business employs over one hundred women from the slums of Nairobi in their factory in Karen. The employees are provided with a living wage, transportation to and from work, and school fees and health care for their children. They collect clay from the slopes of Mt. Kenya, which is then refined and shaped into beads, dishes, vases, and other collectibles. They are then glazed, fired, and assembled into beautiful jewelry designs. These items are sold at stores in shopping malls around Nairobi, such as Yaya Centre, Central City, and the Village Market at
Gigiri. The beads are also sold for export through fair trade organizations and are available via a website.

Figure 35. Women working at the Kazuri Beads Workshop in Nairobi, Kenya. June 11, 2008.

Another popular art form is cooking and culinary arts. Women’s groups cook and sell special foods such as chapati, samosas, mandazi, jalabi, and other treats for a small profit as street vendors or “hawkers.” Women’s groups also cater for weddings, funerals, religious holidays, and special occasions.

Sewing and tailoring clothing is another popular art form among women’s groups, and an excellent income-generating activity. In Lamu, the Swahili Cultural Centre trains women how to use sewing machines to make kanzus and buibuis for the local market. Tailors are also trained how to make kitenge and kanga clothing for both local people and the tourist market. Women also are involved in embroidering kofias for men.
Seamstresses work independently throughout Kenya and are able to create viable home-based businesses.

Henna painting is also another popular art form among Swahili Muslim women at the coast, and can be a lucrative business. Henna and *piko* (black hair dye) are used to decorate the hands and feet of women and girls for weddings, festivals, Maulidi and Ramadan. Women spend hours painting each other’s hands and feet in elaborate designs. Henna artists compete during the Maulidi celebrations through a contest sponsored by the National Museums of Kenya.

*Figure 36.* Henna artist decorating my feet for Idd in Kashmir, a neighborhood in southern Lamu town. October 10, 2008.

The performing arts are also popular among women’s groups in Kenya. Theater is often used as a way to entertain and educate the public about various issues that affect women, including HIV/AIDS, politics, domestic violence, and other social problems.
Music is also very popular, as women often sing songs at their meetings to raise their spirits, share fellowship, and to express themselves. And dance is a traditional pastime for women’s groups, including *Lelemama* dance troupes at the coast. Some dances are known to teach women and girls about sexuality, such as the *Chakacha* dance performed at weddings among Swahili coastal people.

*Figure 37.* Women drumming and dancing at a Swahili Muslim wedding in Roka Village near Kilifi, Kenya. June 21, 2008.

The arts are thus a potent form of cultural expression and education for empowerment. Learning skills in arts and handicrafts can lead to self-employment and fair trade for members of women’s groups in Kenya. The arts are also a way to preserve indigenous knowledge systems and to make use of natural resources.
Health

Women’s organizations also work to promote public health and awareness in Kenya. Sexual and reproductive health care is a priority for women. Women’s groups educate their members about issues such as sexual assault, HIV/AIDS and other sexually-transmitted infections, female genital cutting or mutilation (FGM), pregnancy and childbirth. Women’s groups also teach their members about hygiene, sanitation, nutrition, and other issues related to their care-giving roles and household needs.

Several interviewees spoke about the importance of rites of passage and the traditional sexuality education of young girls by older women. In several cultures at the coast, older women known as somo instructed girls in sexual and reproductive health. The somo would typically be an older aunt, relative, or friend of the family who would serve as a guide and counselor for the young girl during her transition to puberty. In other cultures throughout Kenya, girls would receive instruction during a liminal period of seclusion, sometimes also going through a process of initiation or circumcision that could include female genital cutting. With the process of modernization and the disintegration of traditional cultures and communities, these practices are being interrupted and even eradicated. As a result, many girls and young women are not provided with adequate information and preparation for sexual health. Women’s groups throughout Kenya are seeking to bridge this gap and to create new forms of communication and education to replace the somo or initiation rites.

The United Nations headquarters in Nairobi houses the offices of UNIFEM and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). These organizations work with
grassroots women’s groups to promote sexuality education and reproductive health. They are primarily concerned with eradicating the practice of female circumcision, also known as female genital mutilation (FGM) or female genital cutting (FGC). They also work with Maasai, Samburu, Somali, and other ethnic communities to stop the practice. They work to educate the community on the physical and emotional harm of circumcision. They promote alternative rites of passage and recognize that girls still need a time of initiation and instruction to enter womanhood.

I also had an interview one day at the United Nations Population Fund. I learned more about their educational outreach programs to teach Kenyans about reproductive health, HIV/AIDS prevention, family planning, gender-based violence, and alternatives to female circumcision or female genital mutilation (FGM). I learned that thirty-eight of the forty-two ethnic groups in Kenya practiced female circumcision at some point in their history, and that this practice continues in some communities and is often strongly defended. Recognizing the cultural importance of having a rite of passage to help teach girls about the transition of adolescence, the UN Population Fund assists women’s groups in various communities to develop alternative rites of passage programs that teach information about adolescence, puberty and reproductive health, but do not practice genital cutting. These programs are gaining wider support in their communities, and demonstrate the importance of informal education among women’s groups in Kenya.

Cherish Others is a small, community-based organization working in Nairobi. Ruth Konchellah is their dynamic director who hails from the Kipsigis community in Rift Valley Province. She works to educate community elders, including mothers and elder
women, to promote health and sexuality education for girls. She organizes annual walks to raise awareness and funds to end the practice of FGM. Cherish Others also promotes alternative rites of passage and culturally-appropriate initiation ceremonies for girls to enter womanhood. They recognize the importance of these rituals for girls to be marriageable and deemed suitable for motherhood.

I also interviewed a number of women who have worked with midwives and traditional birth attendants (TBAs). Before the advent of hospitals and clinics using Western medicine in Kenya, most rural women gave birth at home in the company of midwives. Although maternal and child mortality rates are high, the majority of births continue to be attended by midwives who continue their practice. Concerted efforts have been taken by the government to provide prenatal care and birth centers in clinics. However, some people have argued that a more effective strategy for rural health care delivery would be to provide training to the midwives.

Christine Kilalo is a certified nurse-midwife who has worked to educate midwives throughout the Coast Province. She started working on a small scale as a nurse, but then discovered that many midwives in the rural areas had little training in basic first aid. She started a campaign to provide basic emergency medical training, hygiene and sanitation education, and childbirth education classes to midwives and TBAs, and the mortality rates dramatically dropped in her area. For example, she discovered that some midwives did not understand the natural process of labor and delivery. They often would instruct mothers to push during earlier stages of labor, which would exhaust the mother and sometimes lead to severe complications or even the death of the mother or child. She
reveals that the provision of supplies and training to midwives and traditional birth attendants (TBAs) can be a simple and cost-effective way to promote maternal and child health, particularly in rural areas where hospitals and clinics are inaccessible.

Figure 38. Lisper Nyambu demonstrating medicinal herbs used by midwives to prepare women for childbirth. Wundanyi, Kenya. June 6, 2008.

The Kenya Ministry of Health has also engaged in a health education campaign by training women through the Farmers’ Field Schools (FFS) program. While these groups started out as agricultural extension education groups, the members are also given training in basic first aid, nutrition, family planning, and parenting classes. I interviewed the members of the Boilwa and Sere Farmers’ Field Schools in Mwatate. Both of these groups proudly discussed the certificates they received through the Ministry of Health. They were all tested for HIV/AIDS and other common diseases. They engaged in discussions about sexual violence and rape, and were told how to report these crimes.
through the police and to receive medical examinations. The mothers insisted that their training in basic nutrition and first aid has helped them to better care for their children before seeking medical attention.

Another powerful example of community-based public health education is the APHIA II Coast program. This is a project funded by USAID and includes training of peer educators to lead workshops on a variety of health issues. The APHIA II program in Lamu has trained fifteen women’s groups, ten youth groups, and six men’s groups. The women’s groups meet on the edge of town in the late afternoon, a time when women have time to rest from their chores. They socialize with each other and teach each other about sexual and reproductive health. The groups provide free and confidential HIV/AIDS testing at the workshops. Children are also involved in educating each other and performing through theater, music, and poetry. Men’s groups also discuss health issues when they meet in the mosques and on the seafront. APHIA II promotes health education and awareness among all people in the community.
Figure 39. APHIA II workshop for women and children. Lamu, Kenya. October 10, 2008.

Figure 40. Young girls hold placards protesting HIV/AIDS and perform a play at the APHIA II Coast workshop for women and girls. Lamu, Kenya. October 10, 2008.
Another important health issue is sexual and gender-based violence. Women’s groups throughout the country are involved in educating their members about self-defense and raising awareness about their rights to be protected from domestic violence and sexual assault. Much of this training involves confronting traditional gender roles, which position men as powerful and dominant and women as passive and submissive. This dynamic results in a great deal of sexual and gender-based violence. Women’s organizations have been proactive in working for legal support and changes to the legislation about sexual assault in Kenya. This has involved a massive advocacy campaign led by human rights activists, attorneys, judges, and Members of Parliament with the support of international agencies and donors.

Rape and sexual assault became a potent political weapon during the period of post-election violence (PEV) from 2007 to 2008. Political unrest intensified existing gender inequalities, and an astounding number of rapes and sexual assaults were reported in the cities, rural areas, and in the camps for internally-displaced persons (IDPs). The Nairobi Women’s Hospital was outstanding in its efforts to provide medical care and post-traumatic counseling for survivors of sexual violence. The Kibera Rape Survivors’ Support Group is an organization that was founded after the skirmishes in Nairobi. Two of the survivors I interviewed claimed that the support group had helped them to get counseling after their rapes, to seek medical attention, to file reports at the police station, and to seek financial support for their children’s food and school fees. Some women’s groups have also provided training in self-defense and martial arts, including the Young Women’s Leadership Institute (YWLI) in Nairobi.
Therefore, health education is a primary objective of many women’s groups in Kenya. Although health is a vast and diverse area, women’s organizations are proactive in providing training, education and support for their members about a variety of concerns, particularly related to sexual and reproductive health.

**Religion and Spirituality**

Religion and spirituality is a powerful force of identity, culture, and morality. Islam is at the center of Swahili life at the Coast. Christianity is the faith of the majority of people in Nairobi and Taita. Foreigners through trade, colonialism, and missionaries seeking converts introduced these two monotheistic religions to Kenya. However, both Islam and Christianity have been indigenized and blended with traditional worship practices through a process of syncretism. Some examples of religious syncretism include praying at shrines in the *kaya* (coastal sacred groves or forests), pouring libations at the Cave of Skulls in Wundanyi, trance dancing and drumming at Maulidi in Lamu.

Literacy and education is also promoted through religious and faith-based organizations. For many women in Kenya, learning to read and write is closely linked to reading the scriptures. When women can read the scriptures for themselves, they often discover progressive religious imperatives for women’s empowerment and equality that are not taught by the male preachers or imams. Both Christianity and Islam are associated with positive, progressive values associated with modernity, equality, and women’s rights.
Churches are the center of many Christian communities. Women’s groups often organize for both religious occasions such as weddings, baptisms, funerals and holidays as well as secular purposes such as child care, education and *harambee* fundraisings. The National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK) acknowledges that women are the most active participants and the majority of members in Kenyan churches. Ministers of mainstream churches such as the Anglican, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches report that their most active members are predominantly female. Anabaptist churches such as the Quakers, Mennonites and *Wakorino* also have a large population of female members. The Pentecostal and charismatic churches are particularly popular among rural women in Kenya, as a large population of “born-again” and “saved” Christians is emerging.

Throughout my research, I noted that many Taita women introduced themselves by stating: “*Nimeokoka na Yesu*” (I have been saved by Jesus) or “*Bwana Yesu Asifiwe*” (Praise Lord Jesus). “Being saved” is important to women, and many of the women I interviewed in Taita asked me if I had been saved or tried to convert me to their religion. Among women’s groups in Taita, prayers are recited and hymns are sung at the beginning and end of every meeting and before every meal. Bible study groups are formed for fellowship and to learn to read the Bible in various indigenous languages. Fellowship groups meet for counseling, prayer, and psychological and spiritual support of members. The Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK) Mothers’ Union is a large organization that teaches women about their roles as good Christian wives and mothers. Women’s groups such as Shomoto in Wundanyi often do the work of building churches and
maintaining the grounds. Sisters and nuns in the Catholic Church are actively involved in religious life and education through parochial girls’ schools.

Another important religion in Kenya is Islam, particularly at the coast. The Swahili Muslim community has been a center for Islamic education and pilgrimages, as well as trade and tourism, since the tenth century. *Madrassa* or Qur’anic schools were established in Lamu in the 1700’s to promote literacy in Arabic. Muslim scholars created a vibrant literature in Arabic and Kiswahili. A thriving global trade also flourished along the coast, opening up East Africa to trade with Arabia, Persia, and India.

Islam is deeply integral to the agenda of women’s groups in Lamu. Although the majority of people attending prayers and services at the mosques are male, women are also very active in religious life. Muslim women organize family and community activities during important religious occasions such as weddings, funerals, Maulidi, Ramadan and Eid. Qur’anic study groups are also formed in Islamic communities, where women gather in *madrassa* to pray and read the Qur’an. Women’s groups such as Al-Nasiha and Khairat Women’s Groups in Lamu also gather to learn to read Arabic and to discuss and interpret the Qur’an. They insisted that literacy of the scriptures helped them to develop a reformist perspective of Islam and to challenge the conservative or fundamentalist ideas of Islam that are embraced by men. When women learn to interpret the scriptures on their own, they can assert women’s rights according to the Qur’an and challenge patriarchal interpretations of local imams. They also seek a more active voice and role in male-dominated religious organizations such as the Council of Imams and Preachers of Kenya (CIPK) and the Supreme Council of Kenyan Muslims (SUPKEM).
Like the Taita Christian women, many Muslim women I interviewed in Lamu were interested in my religious conversion and would often ask me “Umesilimu?” (Have you submitted to Allah?). Amina Kale said that she felt sorry for Western women who struggle with body image, sexual violence, media stereotypes, and disrespect. She insisted that she gained more respect as a Muslim woman in her community as a mother, teacher, wife, and leader. These interactions led me into a deeper investigation of women’s rights in Islam and dialogue with Muslims in Lamu. Our conversations challenged many of the stereotypes of Islamic gender oppression that I had received from the Western media and helped me to develop a more nuanced understanding of the role of religious faith among Muslim women in Kenya.

For example, I assumed that Islam was a barrier to modern education for women and girls in Islamic communities in Kenya, since the lowest literacy rates among females are found in Northeastern and Coast Provinces. However, I learned through interviews that Islam itself provides support for education and protection of women and girls, and today’s families place equal importance on educating girls and boys. Islamic schools or madrassa were not always open to girls, but now women are very involved. Similarly, initially many families sent boys to the missionary or government schools and kept their daughters at home. Some argued that girls should stay at home in purdah and that they needed to help with cooking, cleaning, child care, and other domestic chores. They also insisted that girls would later marry their husbands and stay home, while boys would run businesses or do manual labor that would help to support the family. But even more importantly, many parents did not want their girls to be exposed to the corrupting foreign
influences of Christianity and colonialism in the *skuli* or missionary schools. They felt that their daughters needed to be protected from foreign influence and the potential for sexual impropriety or interactions with males. They also argued that both the colonial and post-colonial Kenyan government marginalized Islamic communities by not investing equal resources in education and development in these regions. Therefore, the low literacy rates in these areas cannot be blamed on Islam itself, but on the complex interactions of core-periphery relations, colonialism, and uneven economic development.

Muslim women in Kenya advocate for gender equity based on Qur’anic scriptures, as well as the *Hadith* and the *Sunna*. They argue that there is an entire Sura (chapter) dedicated to women, with consideration for women’s social, economic, legal, and political rights as well as the practical concerns of daily life. The Prophet Muhammad is upheld as a staunch advocate for women’s rights. Women’s leadership is respected in business and politics, and the Prophet’s wives Hadija and Aisha are upheld as examples of female leadership in Muslim life. The first revelation of Allah to the Prophet Muhammad was “*Iqra*” or “Read.” Allah insisted that all good Muslims should be able to read and write. Also, a verse in the Qur’an states that followers should learn as much as possible, even if they have to go all the way to China. There is no gender discrimination in these requirements. It is also believed that if a man educates three girls, he will go to heaven. Women are also protected from violence through the maxim “Do no harm.” Pregnant and childbearing women are revered for their divine power in creating new life. Women are entitled to financial support from their husbands, fathers, brothers, uncles, and other male relatives. Women are also encouraged to gain
employment and to keep their own earnings for themselves, while men are obligated to use their income to support their dependents, including female relatives and their children. Women are permitted to own and inherit property, which is even more progressive than Kenyan customary law. Women are also entitled to certain rights and benefits in marriage, divorce, and child custody according to the Qur’an.

Figure 41. Rukiya Lali addresses a crowd at the APHIA II Coast workshop on HIV/AIDS. Lamu, Kenya. October 10, 2008.

Therefore, religion and spirituality play a powerful role in women’s lives in Kenya. Both Christianity and Islam are integral to the educational practices of women’s groups. Women call upon their religious faith and their progressive interpretation of the scriptures to support the cause of women’s rights and gender equality. Religion has also been a vehicle for education and empowerment of women through the churches, mosques and madrassa.
Politics, Law and Civic Education

Kenyan women are a force to be reckoned with, and women’s groups are also seeking access to power in public decision-making in Kenya. Women’s groups are active members of civil society, and are involved in reforming politics and law as well as civic education efforts. Women have risen to political offices as county council members, mayors, judges, Members of Parliament and heads of various ministries. Women have also contended with men as political candidates. Party politics has not always included the interests of women in their agendas. Since politics is often a game of money, many women candidates have struggled for equal funding to truly contend with the big boys, but they have persisted. Women voters have also grown in numbers and influence through voter registration drives and civic education campaigns.

Figure 42. Lamu women meeting in the Mkunguni (town square) after voting at the Lamu Fort on election day. December 27, 2007.
The government of Kenya has tried to govern and co-opt civil society organizations such as women’s groups, but their efforts are meaningless without providing resources. Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) have taken resources away from the provision of social services and education. This has placed a heavy burden on voluntary groups, faith-based organizations, and civil society organizations. Most interviewees insisted that women’s organizations need resources, as they are providing alternative education and social services with very little support from the government. Their efforts depend largely on local initiatives and investment and voluntary labor.

Women’s groups are largely uncoordinated, with various government agencies attending to their needs. For example, the Department of Adult Education has historically been administered through the Department of Social Services, but then was transferred to the Ministry of Education in 2008. Adult education programs continue to be underfunded and teachers are inadequately trained to meet the needs of their learners.

Women’s issues have also been addressed by a cornucopia of government agencies. Initially women’s concerns were under the domain of the Women’s Bureau, then the Ministry of Gender, Culture, Sports and Social Services, and then in 2008 they were transferred to the Ministry of Gender and Children’s Affairs.

Women’s groups have historically emerged in response to political crises and the opening up of new spaces. Women joined men in the struggle for independence against British colonialism, including the Kenya Land Freedom Army and Mau Mau. Women fought in the guerrilla army alongside men as soldiers. They carried food, medicine,
weapons, clothing, and other supplies to other freedom fighters in the forests. Mekatilili led the Giriama people in battle against the British at the Coast. When Harry Thuku was imprisoned in the 1920s, a woman led the street riot outside of the police station in Nairobi (Mwangola, 2007). Women also protested Kenyatta’s policies at Kamiti Prison and the Kamae ghetto (Brownhill, 2009).

Women’s groups grew in number and intensity through the democratization movement of the 1980s and 1990s. Women protested land grabbing, the detention of political prisoners, and corruption during the Moi regime. The mothers of over fifty political prisoners led a hunger strike at the All Saints’ Cathedral for over a year in the early 1990s. The women organized protests and teach-ins at Uhuru Park, where university students and journalists joined them. The police beat and arrested the activists, including Wangari Maathai of the Green Belt Movement (GBM). Women bared their breasts to curse the police for their brutality. The photographs of the incident were published widely to raise awareness of police brutality. The GBM also fought the destruction of Kenya’s forests and protested land-grabbing at Uhuru Park and the Karura Forest.

Contemporary Kenyan women have risen to political office and ministry positions. After being chastised and jailed as a political dissident in the 1980s, Wangari Maathai later won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004 and was elected Member of Parliament for Tetu Constituency and Assistant Minister for the Environment and Natural Resources. Charity Ngilu ran twice as a Presidential Candidate and was a key leader of the NARC-Kenya coalition in 2002 and the ODM Pentagon in the 2007 elections.
Women are also active in reforming the legal and criminal justice system in Kenya. Martha Karua has served as the Minister for Justice in Kibaki’s Presidential Cabinet and has led the process of constitutional reform. Njoki Ndungu was educated at Oxford University Law School in the U.K. She then moved from being a prominent lawyer in Kenya to becoming a nominated Member of Parliament in 2002. She worked tirelessly to pass the Children’s Rights Act in 2003 and the Sexual Offenses Bill in 2006 and to move the amendments to protect maternity and paternity leave in Parliament. The Children’s Rights Act and Sexual Offenses Bill recognize rape and sexual assault as criminal offenses, but they faced huge resistance by the old guard of male politicians, some who nicknamed the legislation “The Sex Act.” Much of their resistance hinged on issues such as paternity, child support, alimony, female circumcision, and rape. An ongoing debate raged in the press about whether forced sex of a husband and wife could really be considered “marital rape.” Marital rape and domestic violence are also now recognized as crimes punishable by law. Police officers are now being trained in gender sensitivity and learning how to effectively assist victims and survivors and to bring perpetrators to justice. Women’s organizations such as the Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA-Kenya) and the Kenya Women Judges Association have also been active in educating judges and attorneys about gender sensitivity and legal rights for victims and survivors of sexual violence.

The Kenya Women Judges Association (KWJA) is also comprised of female judges throughout the nation. This organization is also an elite group, based in Nairobi, but its members are some of the most influential women in Kenya’s history. Honorable
Lady Justices Joyce Aluoch and Effie Awuor, J.A. are the first two women to serve as judges on the bench of the Kenyan High Court. These women bravely broke through the glass ceiling and joined the bench, donning the white wigs and black robes of Kenya’s highest legal office. According to their Strategic Plan, the KWJA was founded in 1993 as an affiliate of the International Association of Women Judges. Since then, many more women have been able to serve as judges and to join the association. The Association’s members also now include women magistrates, commissioners, and lawyers from the Attorney General’s Office and the judiciary. They spearheaded the formation of the Family Division of the High Court, have organized workshops on sexual offenses against women and children, and hosted the 2nd African Regional Conference for Women Judges in 2001. They also have implemented the “Jurisprudence on Equality Programme (JEP) which is designed to train Judges and Magistrates to apply International, Regional, and National Human Rights norms to cases before them” in court (KWJA, 2007, pp. 9-10).

Gladys Boss Shollei is a member of both FIDA-Kenya and the Kenya Women Judges Association. She is the CEO of the Kenya Law Reports and a Professor of Law at the University of Nairobi. She has worked with her team to digitize and document all of the legal precedents set in Kenya’s courts since Independence. She is also a wife and mother, and her family owns a large farm in the Rift Valley Province where she grew up. She is one of the only girls from her village that graduated from school and went on to a university education. She feels compelled to mentor other young girls from her community and extended family to ensure that they stay in school and pursue their goals.
The Kenya Law Reports is based at the National Council on Law Reporting. This government agency was created through an act of Parliament in 2000, and Judge Shollei has led the organization from its inception through the past six years. She said that the law reports were not documented for over twenty years from 1980 to 2000, and it had become difficult to work in the judiciary since the Kenyan legal system is a Common Law system and decisions are supposed to be made based on precedents. She had been a law professor at the University of Nairobi and was determined to document the legal history of Kenya. In the past six years, they have increased their staff to forty-two people and have had fifteen law students as interns each year. They have successfully documented and printed fifteen of the twenty years of precedents and have collected and printed all of the legal cases since 2000. All of this information is also digitized and available online.

Shollei explained that women’s rights are really limited in Kenya, and that it has been difficult to pass laws supporting women and girls such as the Children’s Act of 2001 and the Sexual Offenses Bill of 2006. However, the judiciary has been successful in creating a Family Division, which specializes in cases of domestic violence, divorce, child custody and support. She said that this division is the one that most women deal with, and that they are getting more support and training for gender-responsiveness among judges and lawyers. She argued that women have difficulty accessing the legal system in Kenya since they often are not educated about their legal rights nor do they have the resources to pay for legal representation. However, there are women’s organizations that support civic and legal education, and that also offer pro-bono services
to represent the women. She is a member of two of these women’s professional organizations - the Kenyan Women Judges Association, as well as FIDA, the Federation of Women Lawyers of Kenya. She has also been involved in trying to promote women to become more involved and more prominent in the Kenyan judicial system in order to promote more gender sensitivity and gender responsiveness from within the system. She offered to introduce me to three of the leading women judges in Kenya, including the first woman to be a judge in the High Court.

Civic education is truly a practice of popular education in Kenya. A great deal of emphasis and investment has gone into democratic education and voter registration campaigns. During both the constitutional referendums of 2005 and 2010, campaigners traveled around the nation to inform voters of the benefits and disadvantages of the new laws. These grassroots initiatives played a key role in the process of constitutional reform.

The civic education process is led by probably the most prominent and elite women’s organization in Kenya, the Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) – Kenya. This group is based in Nairobi but has chapters and members located throughout the whole nation. They empower women to access justice and advocate for their rights through self-representation. They provide pro bono legal assistance and mediation services to women involved in domestic disputes, sexual or gender-based violence, children’s affairs, and other issues. They work to “reform the law through public interest litigation,” establishing laws and legal precedents to promote women’s rights and to support families. They monitor the government’s actions and track human rights
violations such as sexual violence. They also “engage with communities to increase women’s participation in the electoral process and public awareness of women’s rights” (FIDA Kenya, 2008, p. 3). FIDA-Kenya has been instrumental in engaging grassroots women in discussions about women’s rights, legal representation, and the positions of various candidates on the issues. FIDA-Kenya published the “Women’s Agenda for the Draft Constitution” which they circulated to promote women’s rights in the reforms process.

The Department of Adult Education is also involved in civic education efforts. DAE teachers and social service offices register adult learners to vote and inform them of the electoral process. They educate women about their rights to inheritance, property, and business. They encourage women to participate in public life and to take part in community development and leadership. However, adult educators are also limited in their advocacy and political work. As government employees, they are not permitted to discuss party politics or candidates.

Another strategy for civic education is training people through interactive performances and debates. Some groups also use Theater for Development (TFD) approaches to present role-play scenarios in which people can interact and solve problems together. For example, Theatre Workshop Productions (TWP) is an organization that has experimented successfully with role-plays as a way of prompting discussion about development needs and issues. TWP develops theater for a purpose – to entertain and to educate. They note that entertainment is memorable, it breaks down reluctance and resistance, and people learn willingly. Education also takes place as the
role-plays illustrate difficult problems, provoke independent thought, enable the voicing of suggestions and promote collective understanding. Theater is effective in the Kenyan context since it builds on rich traditions of indigenous knowledge systems and oral communication styles. Theater is also inexpensive, able to reach a wide audience, and allows rapid feedback and quick analysis. Role-plays focus around specific problems, such as religion, gender inequality, family planning, substance abuse, and democratization. Guided discussion follows the plays, which isolates the problem, discusses pros and cons, and provokes solutions from the audience (Mwangola, cited in Houghton, 1993, Appendix 4, pp. 1-2). This is a powerful example of popular civic education.

**Peace, Justice and Non-violence**

Women’s groups in Kenya are heavily involved in promoting peace and justice and ending violence. One of the first meetings I attended in Nairobi was a gathering of women leaders for the Sixteen Days for the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women. The group included lawyers, judges, Members of Parliament, educators, activists, and other leaders. They discussed the rampant sexual and gender-based violence occurring throughout Kenya. Gladys Boss Shollei insisted that boys and young men must be channeled into positive work, or else the women and girls would continue to suffer. The members also revealed that female political candidates had been harassed, abused, and shot throughout the nominations and electoral process.
Shortly after that meeting, the elections were held on December 27, 2007. Violence erupted throughout Nairobi, Mombasa, and the Rift Valley. Over 1,300 people were killed and around 650,000 people were internally displaced. Churches, homes, businesses, shops, and farms were looted, burned and destroyed. Thousands of women were raped. Some women reported that security personnel, such as the police and military, had sexually assaulted them.

After the post-election violence, a coalition of women’s groups gathered to protest the violation of women’s rights and bodies. Women sought to raise awareness about sexual violence and to seek justice for the victims and survivors. Survivors reported their rapes to police and were often not counseled or checked thoroughly. Some survivors formed support groups in which they could meet and co-counsel each other through the process of post-traumatic stress disorder and depression. I met two women from Kibera at a Gender Forum of the International Committee of Jurists to discuss the Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation Commission. These two women, Scholastina Kilonzo and Purity, described enduring gang rapes by the GSU (General Service Unit) Police in horrific detail. Although they received medical treatment at the Nairobi Women’s Hospital, they struggled to bring their perpetrators to justice or to gain support for themselves and their children.

Other women’s groups gathered regularly in Nairobi in the months after the violence to bring women together across class and ethnic lines to promote unity. Wambui Mwangi (2008) beautifully describes their meetings in a story entitled “Sisters at Heart” in her blog, Diary of a Mad Kenyan Woman. Although it is long, I will quote the entire
excerpt since it eloquently portrays the ways that women are united in spite of differences of class, culture, ethnicity, and education:

On Saturday the 23rd of February, 2008, I went to a meeting of women in Kibera, Nairobi. It was in the open, in the field next to the Kibera D.O.’s office. Under a tree, next to a dusty soccer pitch on which a few energetic children were playing, sat some women listening to the meeting’s moderator, Ms. Jane Anyango. They looked like birds of paradise, in the shade of the tree, all bright colours and wraps and headscarves and skirts—laughing faces upturned as they listened. These women are amongst the hardest-hit victims of the recent post-election violence in Kenya; some of their houses have been burned, their small businesses have been disrupted, their sons endangered and their husbands missing. They live where police bullets sometimes fly through walls and strike women dead as they stand ironing clothes, where a police presence might mean a son shot in running battles. These women meet under a tree, out in the open, because they have nowhere else to gather, no shelter in case it rains. They did not even have chairs: they sat on the hard, red-earth ground.

The ladies in Kibera meet anyway, because they are extremely tired of having their lives dictated to, by and for people who do not care about them and do not even know that they exist. Across the street, dusty matatus picked up passengers and scrambled for space, jostling and nudging their way to faster speeds and more passengers. The women didn’t seem to notice: they were so wrapped up in their own affairs, and so determined to succeed that they could ignore the outside world a few feet away from them. They are going to change their lives by themselves, by telling their own stories and managing their own fates. They are tired of being talked for and being talked about, even if they do live in “Africa’s largest slum.” They are tired of being talked about as if they do not have wills, or ideals, or ambitions, or successes. One woman said to us, “People are always saying what poverty-stricken circumstances we live in, and how terrible everything is here. Do they not realise that I worked hard to have that tablecloth on my table, that it is the best that I can afford? I like my things—I worked for them. We don’t want pity, we want work. We want our own things.” They were singing: as we walked up to them, they broke into a song of welcome and made space for us, under their tree. When we left, they invited us back for next week.

A few hours later and a whole world away, we walked up to another group of women, in Nairobi’s green and manicured suburb of Loresho. These women were gathered on a friend’s porch, and gleaming cars lined the driveway and the courtyard beyond, like a praise-poem to Nairobi’s middle class. This group of women have everything the Kibera women want, but they met anyway, too. They met because they are tired of being told what their identities are, whom they should love and hate and want to meet with or date, because of ethnic differences. Some of them went to high school together, some met just the other day, some are
friends of friends, or colleagues, or neighbours. Their children play and grow up together. They meet to re-affirm their friendships and to laugh away the silly barriers that the politicians want to erect between them.

These are professional women, highly accomplished and authoritative about it—someone started to say “parting is such sweet sorrow.....” and they all chimed in with the rest of the quote, in fact, with the rest of the whole bit from Shakespeare, as if it was a perfectly normal thing to know. That’s the kind of thing they do, chortling madly all the time, screaming with laughter at the absurdity of thinking of each other as Kikuyus or Kalenjins or Luos, when they had been together a-a-a-al that time, all those years ago and all the long years since. When they were young and mischievous, they had been on a school trip to the Nairobi Show, and they had all abandoned their teacher and turned their watches back an hour so they could argue her down when they came back late.....ati stop talking to my best friend because she’s a Luo? Don’t be stupid, please.

They are having none of it, none of it at all: and as they sniggered and laughed and recalled their old nicknames for each other, the air around them lightened, and relaxed, and made space for everybody. In Loresho, it was a different kind of tree, and a different kind of world, but when we left, they invited us back for next week.

Sisters at heart, these women are: from Kibera to Loresho. Our country would be safe in their hands. (p. 1)

Mwangi reveals that, regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnicity, or level of education, Kenyan women gathered together in the aftermath of the violence to work for peace and justice. This is an important reminder of the contributions that women made to end the post-election violence in Kenya.

Another dramatic action for peace was when women’s groups threatened a “sex boycott” such as the Greek comedy *Lysistrata*. They insisted that men could not have sex until they stopped the violence and worked to address the needs of ordinary citizens and displaced persons. Activists worked to solicit Ida Odinga, the wife of Prime Minister Raila Odinga, and Lucy Kibaki, the wife of President Mwai Kibaki, to bring the coalition government together by refusing sex with their husbands.
The political crisis after the 2007 elections again brought women together in activism for their common cause against sexual and gender-based violence. A coalition of women’s organizations was formed called the “Gender 10” (G10). According to Biomndo, this coalition was “newly-formed to confront President Kibaki and Prime Minister Raila Odinga to call for change in political leadership and recognition that their failure to lead has resulted in death, rape, hunger, and chaos especially for women and children” (Biomndo, *Daily Nation*, April 29, 2009). The ten organizations represented include:

1. *Maendeleo ya Wanawake* Organization (MYWO)
2. Federation of Women Lawyers of Kenya (FIDA-Kenya),
3. Center for Rights Education and Awareness (CREAW),
4. National Council of Women of Kenya,
5. Young Women Leadership Institute,
6. Coalition on Violence Against Women,
7. Caucus for Women Political Leadership,
8. Tomorrow’s Child Initiative,
9. Women in Law and Development,

The coalition of these different organizations demonstrates that women’s activism in Kenya shows great capacity for centralized leadership and coordinated action (Biomndo, *Daily Nation*, April 29, 2009).

Women’s organizations have also worked tirelessly for justice since 2007. They have been engaged in the Constitutional Review and Referendum process. Reports have been compiled through interviews with survivors. They demand reforms of legal and political systems to protect women’s rights and bring perpetrators to justice. Gender issues have been central to the analysis and reporting of the violence. Some key organizations in these studies have been the Kenya National Human Rights Commission,
the Waki Commission, the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission, the
International Commission of Jurists, and the National Council of Churches of Kenya
(NCCK). Women are demanding a voice in the conversation for peace and justice.

Conclusion

This chapter illuminates the various strategies and themes that emerged from the
data regarding the holistic nature of popular education among women’s organizations.
Women’s activities and interests are categorized into eight core themes that address the
practical needs and strategic interests of Kenyan women. These themes include:
- economic development;
- agriculture and environment;
- literacy;
- arts and culture;
- health;
- religion and spirituality;
- politics, law and civic education;
- and peace, justice and non-violence.

Next I will examine the third and final research question to examine how
women’s organizations implement the eight core principles of feminist popular
education. I will draw from interview transcripts to illuminate how Kenyan women think
about their pedagogical practices and strategies for organizing. I will also provide critical
reflections on each principle in light of the reality of the Kenyan context.
Chapter 6: The Eight Principles of Feminist Popular Education

In this chapter, I address the third research question: How are the eight core principles of feminist popular education practiced by Kenyan women’s organizations? According to Walters and Manicom (1996), there are eight core themes and principles related to feminist popular education practice. These eight themes have emerged from practitioners of contemporary feminist popular education in various countries, and they “resonate with complex, contested issues in feminist and educational theory” (p. 11). The eight themes include:

1. Start from where women are
2. Experience and expertise
3. Silence and Voice
4. Empowerment
5. Difference
6. Facilitation and control
7. Gender awareness and feminist politics
8. Space, time and place for learning.
Women’s organizations in Kenya exhibit all of these characteristics, practices, and core principles of feminist popular education. In the next section I address each of these themes in more depth with quotations from the research participants. These selections from the interviews demonstrate different aspects of the popular education philosophy and pedagogy practiced by women’s organizations.
Start From Where Women Are

A central principle of feminist popular education is “starting from the lives and preoccupations of women themselves” (p. 12). However, identifying “where women are” can be complex and contested. According to Walters and Manicom (1996):

Some draw on the geographic location of women’s activities: the domestic setting, the workplace, the neighborhood; others draw on more metaphorical locations: the place of feelings and emotion, the ‘private’ sphere with which women tend to be associated, and women’s subjectivity as it is culturally shaped. (p. 12)

In contemporary feminist popular education, the practice of “consciousness-raising” is central and is explicitly associated with emotion and feelings. In earlier models of popular education, feelings and emotions were often overlooked, and more emphasis was placed on rational or analytical thinking and problem-solving. However, women’s “consciousness-raising” groups work to create conditions “in which women can open up about their feelings of oppression before working together to analyze the dimensions and relations of that oppression” (p. 12). Often these groups work to “elicit the expression of suppressed feelings and emotions,” addressing issues such as the trauma of domestic violence, sexual oppression, and gender-based violence. “Domestic violence and sexual oppression are often starting-points of work with women because they are aspects of women’s lives that are often dangerously hidden and, at the same time, provide a basis for understanding the relations of patriarchy” (p. 12).

Another aspect of “where women are” is spirituality, as women strive to make sense of their world and to get in touch with a higher power. Walters and Manicom reveal that the theme of spirituality is “significant within popular education practice as
culturally distinct groups, such as indigenous peoples, women recovering ‘womanist’ traditions and ethnic collectives, draw on cultural and spiritual symbols in healing and transformative education” (pp. 12-13).

Another aspect of “where women are” is relevance to the practical concerns and daily activities of women “that revolve around family, domestic work and community” (p. 13). Walters and Manicom insist that popular education can only be effective for women if it starts with concrete reference to the practical needs of women and their families, rather than abstracted notions of capitalism, patriarchy, or distant power structures.

Some practitioners and activists of popular education pose difficult questions about how to “move from the starting-points of women’s immediate concerns to a broader analysis and to political action aimed at transforming oppressive relations” (p. 13). Some authors raise the question of relating the micro- to the macro-level of analysis, or connecting women’s poverty or sense of despair to an understanding of global economic systems, free trade policies, or other broad political and macroeconomic structures.

Paying attention to “where women are” introduces a key debate about “practical needs” vs. “strategic interests” of women, a construct that has been proposed by Molyneux and others. This construct originated to describe the different foci of organizing work among women. However, in creating a hierarchy of needs, this contrast of practical vs. strategic needs has been questioned. First, by creating a dichotomy of practical vs. strategic needs, we may not realize that these interests are interconnected.
For example, “changes in the ways that women organize to address their everyday needs invariably produce changes in gender relations” (p. 13). Kenyan women’s income-generating activities may not only help the women to gain cash needed for daily household needs, but they could also produce empowerment and to lessen dependency for women relative to the men within their families and communities.

In the literature on Kenyan women’s organizations, many authors insist that women’s grassroots groups and community-based organizations have been too focused on “social welfare” or “development” projects meeting the practical needs of rural communities. They insist that true equality and empowerment will not be achieved without larger political or economic changes. This reveals that these authors place a higher value on “strategic interests” such as women’s entry into the “male-dominated” spheres of formal education, employment, and participation in politics and public decision-making. This bias resonates with “another critique of the practical/strategic couplet …. that it implies a hierarchy of women’s issues, that strategic interests show more evidence of a ‘feminist consciousness’ and therefore are more politically advanced” (p. 13). To “start where women are” demands that women’s issues and struggles are defined by women themselves, and must include practical concerns that are related to women’s daily lives, including food, water, housing, work, health, sexuality, reproduction, emotions, and spirituality.

However, many of the “strategic interests” of women have largely been critiqued for pertaining more to the interests of middle-class, urban, “Westernized” women, and are highly problematic in the Kenyan context. An important issue for Kenyan women is
whether urban-based, bureaucratic women’s organizations are working for the benefit of women “at the grassroots” and the rural areas. Some “feminist” organizations have insisted on working for change at the national level, by focusing on women gaining legal or constitutional reforms and getting lucrative and prestigious jobs as educators, doctors, lawyers, professors, businesswomen, civil servants, and administrators. For their rural sisters, however, this appears as elitism, and urban or professional women are sometimes chastised or mistrusted for seeking their own personal gain. Urban women are caught between leaving their villages behind and embracing the “modernization” of the city and the foreign values it introduces.

Rural women also fight for their work to be recognized for their essential roles in developing the nation as farmers, mothers, builders, artisans, and managers of natural resources. It is important to recognize that women’s everyday lives in the village are “intrinsically political, and are integrated with broader social relations and hierarchies of oppression” (Walters & Manicom, 1996, p. 14). However, Walters and Manicom (1996) warn:

There is a tension here for popular educators between validating and celebrating the daily concerns of women as significant, on the one hand, and challenging the gender relations and constructions of the “domestic sphere”, of “women’s work” and of emotional responses that confine women to ways of being in the world that are limiting, disempowering and rob women of choice and agency, on the other. (p. 14)

The struggle for daily survival is just as much about power as the struggle for parliamentary seats or legal reforms. The dynamics of domestic and sexual violence are the origins of male dominance and female subordination in the private sphere. These
patterns are enacted publicly in law, government, politics, education, economics, and elsewhere in “formal” institutions of power.

I addressed this tension between practical and strategic needs in my observational field notes:

I also thought today a lot about how women’s groups in rural areas focus mainly on practical needs of women (i.e. water, agriculture, child care, health), while urban groups seem to be more focused on strategic needs (i.e. legislation, legal support, ending violence against women, financial assistance, political battles for equality). I thought about how often “feminism” is rejected because of its focus on political equality of men and women, or because it focuses on sexualities or reproductive rights or other heady policy issues. I also have heard critiques that “feminist” analyses of African societies have not included a complex enough understanding of African culture, or appreciation for the reality in which many women actually live. However, the “feminism” of the grassroots rural woman looks radically different – it is about increasing access to markets, to growing food, collecting water, and other issues that are more connected to daily needs, to the relationship of people to the land, etc. These may not even be considered “feminist” issues because they do not address the issues of “equality between men and women” per se, but they do address needs that are essential to women’s livelihoods and well-being, so I contend that these must also be considered as “feminist” issues.

I have also been reading Paul Hawken and bell hooks this week, who also affirm that the majority of people in the “two-thirds world” are focused on basic issues of land and environment and livelihood than on the more obtuse and heady issues that are often embraced by intellectual activists, or legal experts or politicians. Perhaps we still need both types of activism, but what I see here on the ground reveals that the “average” or “ordinary” rural woman (if such a mythic figure actually even exists) will benefit more, and be more apt to get involved, if organizations focused more on how she can change her livelihood to have a better way of life, more food, education and health care for herself and her family. At the same time, we must recognize that the fight for “human rights” must include the rights to air, water, food, security, health, and other basic necessary preconditions for life. (Cutcher, field notes, May 2008)

In Kenya, women’s organizations do “start where women are”; they are largely indigenous or local in origin. Most women’s groups are grassroots, regional, community-based organizations operating on a small scale. These groups work within their
bioregions and use local resources. Women’s groups address both the practical and strategic needs of local women and girls. They are relevant to women’s daily lives and respect the knowledge that local women have. They operate within the parameters of local knowledge, utilize local languages, and respect local traditions and customs (*mila na desturi*). Kenyan women use local resources to meet their needs and to make a profit. For example, the land and ocean are vital resources for gathering and growing food. By building on the knowledge that women already have, they change the culture from within. As Wangari Maathai, the leader of the Green Belt Movement states, “civic education is not about learning about distant power structures, it is about gaining confidence in oneself and the ability to stand up for one’s rights and one’s community” (Maathai in Lappe & Lappe, 2003).

Women’s groups address practical needs of women and their families, including food, water, agriculture, forestry, reproductive and sexual health, medicine, and other everyday needs. They also help women to create income-generating activities and small enterprises, which fosters entrepreneurship, employment, and economic development. Women’s groups also assist women and children to gain access to formal and informal education, through building schools, raising funds for school fees, collecting funds for bursaries and scholarships, and promoting literacy and numeracy for children and adults. Women’s organizations simultaneously address the strategic interests of women, including civil and legal rights, human rights, cultural sovereignty, religious freedom, land and property inheritance and ownership, representation in government, voting, elections, and peace and security initiatives. These practical and strategic interests are
inextricably linked, and should not be seen as a hierarchy of needs in which one is more important than the other.

Amina Hussein Soud, the Director of the Red Cross in Lamu District, explained how women’s organizations address local needs differently depending on their local environment and cultural context:

So, they will have their own constitution that is specifically for that village. And then, with their own board, their own treasurer and everything. And they will have some little rules that are specifically for that place. Because of course, the way that Faza operates is different from, say Kiunga, or Mpeketoni is different from Faza or Makueni. And even their incomes are different, times to collect money is different. Others are fishermen, others are agriculturalists, others are kofia-makers, others, you know? So, they will go specifically to what they do. (A.H. Soud, personal communication, April 11, 2008)

Fatma Salim Al-Busaidy, the Lamu director of Maendeleo ya Wanawake, also insisted that women’s groups choose their projects based on local needs and interests:

So we try in each area to teach people depending on what challenges they face. In Lamu East for instance, the challenge is water. The other day, we wrote a proposal and the forms have arrived so that they can be help. You look at every area and what challenges they face. (F.S. Al-Busaidy, personal communication, September 27, 2008)

Soud also explained that each women’s organization governs itself with local staff and resources. They may look to larger organizations for capacity building and training, but they insist upon self-reliance and self-governance at the local level.

They will have their board, their staff, and they decide how many staff they will need. And even their office, they staff it themselves. It is not for us to work for them. For us, it is just to go and train the board members … train their staff. So, we give more of capacity building. (A.H. Soud, Personal communication, April 11, 2008)

Athman Lali Omar, the Director of the Kenya Coastal Cultures Program of the School for International Training, also spoke to the unique attributes of Swahili culture
and how this influences women’s organizing in this community. He described the unique issue of *purdah*, or the seclusion of women that is practiced in the Swahili culture. While some might see this as a real obstacle to women’s organizing, he explained that *purdah* both circumscribed women’s lives but also presented a unique opportunity for the development of home-based businesses and reliance on local resources and indigenous knowledge:

He had a lot of great ideas and analysis about women’s organizations in Mombasa, especially in the Swahili community. He said that Swahili women’s groups are distinct because they are organizing from within the community, and are not necessarily seeking support from others such as outside donor agencies. He said that the cultural aspect is important, as women do not tend to go out and are kept in the private domain of home and family, as well as within their communities. They work within their homes and thus do not get exposed to many new ideas from outside. He said that many of them will develop home-based businesses, such as sewing of *kanzus* and dresses, or making *udi* (incense) that they use and sell amongst themselves.

He said that he had a student who wanted to learn about markets, and who found that Swahili women were not to be found anywhere at the markets in Zanzibar. He said that this is because of Swahili culture – that women are “inside,” and that women tend to engage in businesses or creating products that they would use themselves and that they can sell among themselves, among other Swahili women. (Cutcher, field notes, April 18, 2008)

Similarly, Hadija Bwanaadi Ernst, the editor of Lamu Chonjo magazine, insisted that “there is a value of privacy … in Swahili cultures. So, to be out in the public and doing those things, is not necessarily good … because your husband does not want you to be seen” (H.B. Ernst, personal communication, April 7, 2008). She suggested that madrassa or Qur’anic schools are a more socially acceptable place for women to meet, since they are associated with Islam and are seen as a respectable, private, and safe activity for women. Therefore, madrassa have become a proxy for local women to meet in Lamu. She insisted that it is essential to examine how these madrassa function as women’s
groups in Lamu since they “start where women are” and respect the rules of the local culture.

Dora Chovu, the Social Services officer for Lamu District, also revealed that women are engaged in various economic activities which are sometimes unrecognized, since they operate “behind the scenes” in the privacy of their own homes. For example, women are involved in the fishing industry, even though they are not seen as fishermen:

Even if women do not go fishing, they are involved in the fishing economy by selling ice, preparing cooked or dried fish to sell to customers. Thus, they too actively participate in fishing, even if they are not working out in the boats or the water. (Dora Chovu, personal communication, April 14, 2008)

Therefore, she explained that women want to participate in everything and to be involved in all types of projects, not just “women’s issues” or businesses that are typically associated with women. Indeed, women are involved in all aspects of the society - politically, economically and socially.

Hababa Noor is a schoolteacher, politician, and leader of Maendeleo ya Wanawake based in Lamu. She recalled that women’s groups were initiated in Lamu as a few local women, including herself, were able to move outside of Lamu and become exposed to the idea of women’s organizations in other Kenyan communities. Women’s groups grow out of the needs of local people, and develop through their own efforts to solve their own problems. Noor reflected:

Why don’t we have women’s groups where women could get to know each other in the streets, and to discuss why these certain problems were happening. Therefore, I saw an opportunity to organize groups and to know our problems, and to look for ways to solve them, to arbitrate and reconcile differences, and to help people to solve their own problems. So I saw how groups could start to help each other, to save money, to share money, and if one of the people had a problem, we could help them. And I thought this was a good thing. This will
give us an opportunity to be gathered. Like I said, this will give women a chance to gather, because whatever projects they like to do, it also gives us an opportunity to meet and join together and discuss anything. Also, there are many different groups of women, whatever you like. If you join together, you get more opportunities to awaken the movement. (Hababa Noor, personal communication, September 27, 2008)

Noor explained how local women’s groups have organized at the grassroots level, but have also been coordinated with other groups under the umbrella of leadership of the

Maendeleo ya Wanawake national network:

Maendeleo ya Wanawake (MYWO) is a committee of women. They could help to start any groups. But MYWO is related, because your group is a member of the organization, and as a participant you can vote for the leaders of MYWO. Maendeleo are helping women with all things … now you can watch and see which organization is really helping people. Like you can see which groups are helping with that project, and go to work on that program. Like in things of business, education, or the constitution. Also, in their constitution, they show them those who are doing certain programs. Therefore, MYWO has a base to know which groups are doing certain things. So, if a person wants to be a partner, or if a cooperative wants to partner, they can look for those other groups that they want to work with. For example, like those who are working with HIV/AIDS. Therefore, this is a way that they can help with the community, to find programs in this way. Meaning, it helps women a lot if it is used … if we link our groups with programs/projects. (H. Noor, personal communication, September 27, 2008)

In Taita, women’s groups also “start where women are” and function on local resources and knowledge. The local leaders of Maendeleo ya Wanawake explained how the groups determine their activities and projects based on local needs. Janet Kadari, the Chairwoman of MYW in Mwatate, reflected:

As leaders of these organizations, our job is to talk to the women, educate them; sometimes it’s not their mistake, but it’s the lack of knowledge. We sit and talk to them about the importance of standing for our children. It is hard to meet these women organizations separately on a daily basis. It’s also tiring. If we have a good program like if today we say we will be in Mwakitutu talking to women … About projects, loans, how they can develop themselves, education for their children and other issues about women.
If we decide to go to Mwakitutu, we will organize with the Chief of Mwakitutu location so that he mobilizes the women and then we can meet them. If we want to go to Bura, we will do the same. Then we will be able to meet many women from different groups rather than meeting separate groups form the different locations. If we talk to the assistant chief of Mwachabo, he can blow the whistle and we will be able to meet many women groups in the Manoa center. So we will find many women, you will speak to them and ask them questions about the challenges that they face and their problems. (J. Kadari, personal communication, June 9, 2008)

Similarly, Victoria Dali Mwamburi asserted that MYW groups are part of a national network, but function on a local level:

I am a member of *Maendeleo ya Wanawake* and at the same time its chairlady in Mwachabo location. Janet is the chairlady of Mwatate division. Every sub-location has its chairlady and then they are all under the leadership of the locational chairlady. The chairlady of Mwaganga Mvuru sub-location is Mrs. Jenifer Mwasiwa, the chairlady of Mwachabo sub-location is Prudence Makenga and finally Nelly Mwambi is the chairlady of Marisechu sub-location. The chairlady of Taita district is Joyce Mongochi. Her home is in Kidangereny but her office is in Wundanyi quite near to that of the District Commissioner and the Social Services Office.

As chairlady of the location my work is to educate and to inform fellow women. Informing them of how they can benefit after forming groups for example how they can access loans from Non-Governmental organizations, educating them on their rights and the rights of the child. (V.D. Mwamburi, personal communication, May 30, 2008)

Christine Kilalo is the former Director of World Neighbors and a nurse from Taita. She has led workshops to educate midwives and traditional birth attendants for better birth outcomes. She has also organized workshops on community health education and the improvement of housing and water resources. She ran for Parliament in 2007 with the Shirikisho political party, and claims she lost the seat to an outsider due to gender discrimination and a lack of campaign financing. During her interview, Kilalo explained the principles of community organizing and popular education:
Because the principle that we believe in is, you start with people, from what they know, and then you move with them, stage by stage, towards what they don’t know. Rather than always, they are clamoring, for what they are seeing, they are admiring, but to get there – they don’t even know how! So, you move them from where they are first, and then move them towards there.

So, they need to appreciate what they have. And then you build with what you have. You don’t want to build with what you don’t have. Because you will never build, in that case. You will always be craving for something you don’t have. You want concrete blocks to build a house, but you have no ability to get a concrete block. So, why don’t you start off, you have your thatched house, how do you improve on that one? So, you move towards the concrete. If that is what you want…

So, that was the biggest emphasis, to make use of local knowledge and resources… Start with people, start small, start with what they have, start using what they have. And then slowly, you grow together. (C. Kilalo, personal communication, February 6, 2008)

Experience and Expertise

Another core principle of feminist popular education is the notion that experience is the center of women’s knowledge. For popular educators, experiential education is an effective tool for learners to name their world and to internalize and make meaning through the educational process. Experiential and local knowledge is privileged over knowledge that comes from formal education, which is based upon “banking” of foreign values or knowledge and is often dependent on funding or external intervention by “experts.”

A central feature of women’s organizations is how they embrace the experience, knowledge, and expertise of local women. Women’s organizations also create experiences in their meetings and workshops, “setting up situations which allow the learners to feel, experience, and identify with different ways of seeing” (Walters & Manicom, p. 16) other than the usual authoritarian and mediated structures of formal
education. Kenyan women’s groups build upon women’s experience and knowledge of agriculture, food, health, the arts, music, language, clothing, and other local traditions. Women’s organizations build strength from women’s experiences in their homes, families, communities, and religious organizations.

Women’s organizations in Kenya are built on indigenous knowledge systems about and traditions of community organizing. They have their roots in other historical types of women’s associations, including rotating labor groups, farming cooperatives, merry-go-rounds, savings and credit cooperatives, traditional birth attendants, mothers’ unions and support groups, harambee self-help groups, lelemama dance groups, kinship groups, age grades, and women’s secret societies.

Dora Chovu contrasted the phenomenon of “makeshift groups” with what she called “indigenous groups.” Indigenous women’s groups “have stood through any wave.” She said that they have their own clear visions and objectives and have been active with or without money from outside donors. Many of these groups have been operating for a long time. They have diverse income streams and activities and projects that are multifaceted. This diversification helps the groups to be sustainable and strong (D. Chovu, personal communication, April 14, 2008).

Because women in Kenya have an older tradition of organizing in their communities, this shows that women’s organizations are not necessarily “feminist” or “Western” in origin. That is, some popular beliefs hold that “feminism” is a foreign or Western construct, and that women’s organizations in Kenya are a product of modernization, colonialism, Christianity, or Westernization. However, by understanding
the history of indigenous forms of organizing in pre-colonial times, we see that women’s
groups emerge from a long and proud history of an indigenous women’s movement
grounded in local customs and traditions (*mila na desturi*). Nevertheless, indigenous
women’s groups have developed through a complex and interdependent relationship with
global and transnational feminist organizations, foreign donors, and other external
agencies.

A good example of the integration of experience and expertise is the APHIA II
Workshop that I witnessed in Lamu to educate women about HIV/AIDS. The APHIA II
program uses a number of indigenous modes of communication to tap into women’s
experience. These programs utilize theater, music, poetry, proverbs, storytelling,
speeches, prayer, sermons and other communication techniques to teach women and girls
about HIV/AIDS. They gather women and girls together to teach about how the disease
is transmitted through sex, and to prevent mother-to-child transmission through
pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding. One of the presenters used an allegory about
common sense and safety:

When a mother is cooking with her pot, it cooks and it gets to a point where she
has to remove it. When you want to remove it from fire, you do not say that God
has wished, if I am going to burn it’s going to happen. I will use my hands. You
don’t do that… you pick a paper or rag that will protect you from burning. Isn’t
that the way it is? You cannot say it’s an accident. If you hold it you will burn.

In the same way, let us not say that God has wished that I will be infected
with HIV/AIDS; I will get it no matter what. So I will behave carelessly, dying is
given. That is dangerous. Also, when you are sick, you are bed ridden, your
family or your neighbor will be sympathetic but there is nothing they can do.
Where do they get the medicine to cure you? (APHIA II Workshop, personal
communication, October 10, 2008)
Calling upon women’s experience of cooking, she used this metaphor to insist upon mothers protecting themselves and getting tested to ensure their own survival and the survival of their children. These workshops motivate community members to take preventive measures to avoid being infected with HIV/AIDS. They also encourage people to get tested with stories about afflicted people and by offering free testing at the site of the workshop, or by announcing free and anonymous testing at health centers. By making use of local knowledge and experience, they connect people with the information they need to save lives and prevent the spread of disease.

Another powerful example of experiential education is the Farmers’ Field Schools in Taita. This program partners women’s groups with rural agricultural extension officers for hands-on training workshops to teach skills in sustainable agriculture. After meeting with the Boiwa and Sere Farmer’s Field Schools in Mwatate, I noted the following in my field notes:

The members have access to new knowledge and sustainable farming techniques from the teachers who visit them. However, when the teachers were no longer available, when the funds dried up from the Constituency Development Authority (CDA), they continued to teach in their own community. They became the teachers themselves. This is a powerful role reversal and gives them great confidence in their ability to teach skills to others in the community.

The farmers also talked about their “research.” Through their experiences, field trials, experimentation, they discovered that some crops were very abundant and productive, even in dry times, when other crops did not fare as well. They said that they learned that the PH1 variety of maize is especially productive and grows fast, which is good for shortening rainy seasons and unpredictable weather. They also said that they had learned that pojo and peanuts were great crops in a dry place – they were very productive – but then difficult to harvest and preserve since they had to be shelled by hand. They also learned basic skills i.e. record keeping, evaluating and analyzing results, keeping books, writing a constitution, keeping attendance and financial records. These are all basic skills for community organizing and business management. (Cutcher, field notes, May 2008)
Another way that women’s organizations build experience and expertise is through educating members about small business development and management skills. “Mama Naomi” is also known as Beth Wanjiku of the Lamu Women’s Education and Poverty Eradication Group. Wanjiku was born in upcountry Kenya but migrated to Mpeketoni as a young girl with her family. She then moved to Lamu as an adult with her husband. She belongs to the Kikuyu ethnic group, which is regarded as a minority group in Lamu. Although she attended some primary schooling as a girl, Wanjiku explains that her experience has grown a great deal from her involvement in women’s groups. She has built upon her previous experience and knowledge of practical skills such as catering, agriculture, and sewing. She started a small business where she tailors clothing from a small kiosk on the main street of Lamu. She sells new kitenge and kikoi clothing to tourists and also does sewing and alterations for local people. With this business, she supports her family and sends her two children to private school. She claimed that her involvement in women’s groups has provided her with practical skills to run a business: “Now I know something about accounting and book keeping. I know when am getting a loss or making profit. So it also helps me with my business” (B. Wanjiku, personal communication, April 14, 2008).

Dora Chovu, the Social Services officer for Lamu District, mused about the difference between women’s groups in Mpeketoni and Lamu. She believes that Mpeketoni has the most active women’s groups because it is comprised of mixed communities, including Kikuyus, Bajunis, Pokomos, Taitas, and others. She said “the environment itself makes people aggressive – there is competition which is positive” and
motivates more action among women’s groups. It is an agricultural area with rich soil and abundant water reserves. They have a lot of farm inputs, tractors, and other tools and assets that are conducive for farming activities. She said that the “real competition” in Mpeketoni leads to innovation and business development.

“Exposure” was a common theme throughout my research in Kenyan communities. Women talked repeatedly of the desire to be “exposed” to the world beyond their homes and their families and local communities. Because many women are secluded and isolated in the private realm, there is a real desire to become “exposed” and to expand their base of experience and expertise. Women who are “exposed” are seen as more educated and more able to direct their families and communities toward progress and development. I found this to be true in both Christian and Muslim communities.

Gender norms in different ethnic and cultural communities may have a large influence on the experience and exposure of women in public life and in organizing through women’s groups. I have also heard theories that Mpeketoni is most active because of the culture and the experiences of women in that community are more broad and open than the Swahili Muslim society. Some interviewees claimed that women from “upcountry” – especially Kikuyus – have been encouraged to go to school and to create their own businesses. There is a culture of women being exposed and active in public life and in the economy. Thaddeus Mogute, the Deputy Principal of the Lamu Girls Secondary School, reflected upon the differences of experience and exposure among different ethnic groups in Lamu:

Some women do not feel that they can trust themselves. They are part and parcel of that system that is supposed to develop. That they are not in the mainstream.
They see that the men are superior. Whatever the man says, that is what she is supposed to do. But they are not open, they have not been offered that opportunity to be exposed, to be able to decide their potential. For others, that is why, even if you look at the treatment …. They are complaining in the Swahili community. Basically, you can be able to learn from other communities that do not complain….. So that tells you that, for them, they have more opportunity. They have been exposed. They have realized that they can also realize their full potential. (T. Mogute, personal communication, October 8, 2008)

Among the Swahili Muslims, it is less likely to find women who are encouraged to go to school, or even to go out. Gender norms in Swahili society demand that men are the ones who are involved in public life and in the marketplace, while women remain in purdah, stay home in seclusion, and take care of the private life of the family. Even social events such as dances are heavily guarded, private, and secretive events among women. Traditional dance societies such as Lelemama and Chakacha teach women knowledge about sexuality. These dances frequently are performed at weddings and private parties among women. Fatma Ali Busaidy explained the importance of privacy among the Lelemama dance groups:

In the old days, we could dance in the houses, in the boma (courtyard), and there were many viwanja (fields and open places). But now, there are no private places for women to gather. Therefore, these days there are no places for us to dance these cultural dances, because we cannot be exposed. You cannot be exposed, like if you danced in Mkunguni (the public square). But in our religion, we are not allowed to do this.

Yes, we have to look for a place, a hidden place. Even me, if I wear the buibui, I cannot go to a place where I am exposed. I am unable. That is why we must find a hidden place, a big house also, where we can dance, where we can watch others dancing, where we could be happy to watch. You know, we would like a place where some could dance, and others could watch, and you know, we could relax. We want to find a good place to dance, and to know its goodness. We want to ask for money to build a big community hall, a place where women are able to gather, and to celebrate their culture. (F. Ali Busaidy, personal communication, September 24, 2008)

Athman Lali Omar explained that this cultural aspect of gender segregation is
important, as women do not tend to go out and are kept in the private domain of home and family, as well as within their communities. They work within their homes and thus do not get exposed to many new ideas from outside. He said that many of them will develop home-based businesses, such as sewing of kanzu (men’s robes) and dresses, or making udi (incense) which they use and sell amongst themselves (Cutch, field notes, April 18, 2008).

Hadija Bwanaadi Ernst is an American woman who has lived in Kenya for at least twenty years, and has married a local man in Lamu. She publishes a local magazine called Lamu Chonjo that addresses social and environmental issues affecting the Lamu community. She also runs a small coffee shop and guest house in the Mkomani neighborhood that caters to tourists. She reflected upon the limitations that the values of privacy and seclusion pose among members of women’s groups in Lamu:

If they say I’m going to the seafront to pick up trash with my women’s group, well, there is a big problem with that. Because there is a value of privacy in Swahili cultures. So, to be out in the public and doing those things, is not necessarily good. Your husband does not want you to be seen. (H.B. Ernst, personal communication, April 7, 2008)

Therefore, men dominate the public space. The Lamu Market is also considered a “male space,” but the flavor of it is changing as more upcountry women are selling foods and other goods there. Ernst mused:

The market has always been a male space. If you think about the kind of trading that the Swahili did, there must have been big markets here, but the traders were all men. So, it wasn’t a space that was really a female space, like upcountry women did. But the Kikuyus have made it a more female space. But traditionally it’s not, so Swahili women wouldn’t be there as easily. (H.B. Ernst, April 7, 2008)

However, there are a few designated acceptable spaces for women to work in public.
Ernst noted that Swahili women in Lamu have had the tradition of selling cooked foods to the public:

You can be on the street, selling bhajia or sambusa. That is acceptable, I think. Because there has been a tradition of it. I think when there is a tradition, it is easier. There have always been women who have been making street foods. I do think and believe it has something to do with, if there is a tradition of it or not. (H.B. Ernst, April 7, 2008)

She also observed that some women are pushing the boundaries of what is deemed acceptable as they are venturing out to work in public spaces, such as shops and offices:

It has opened up a space for them to work. Men traditionally have been either traders, or fishermen, and so with those basically, you are your own boss. And so, the idea of being employed is a really difficult concept to them, even to introduce. But with women, it is a different story. Because they don’t have the traditions, so you can do something. (H.B. Ernst, April 7, 2008)

Therefore, it is vitally important to follow the local cultural dictates of propriety and limitations on exposure in order to be successful, both socially and economically.

The boundaries between men’s and women’s relationships are also governed by the rules of propriety and control of daily life and public interactions. Ernst noted that there are some women who have become public figures in Lamu, and who interact with men, but who still follow these rules:

There are women leaders who interact with men, and it’s perfectly okay. However, it’s so conservative that it pulls you in ways. You know, it reins you in. You’re not free to just go and have a coffee with another, somebody of the opposite sex, as easily as you would if you were from here. So, that wouldn’t be done. But you might, if you are away from home. If you are outside of the community, you would probably do it much more freely. It’s a small place. It’s an island! Everyone knows everybody.

I mean, today, I was walking around with a man who is quite well known in the community. And it was purely business, but I had the sense that this is probably quite strange. Being with a man who I am not related to, and that we are walking around together. That was weird. Perhaps I don’t think that I would be doing that in another circumstance. But this is an island! And it’s a town on the
island! Which makes people more averse. (H.B. Ernst, personal communication, April 7, 2008).

Joseph Waruhi also observed that the division of male and female spaces in Lamu creates clear boundaries and rules of propriety that must be followed. He noted that women leaders have better access than men to visiting women in their homes, and getting to know the problems facing women in Lamu:

If it was a man, he would not be allowed in women’s homes. Maybe you want to talk to other women, but if it was a man with a woman, it would not be allowed. Because according to the culture, it won’t allow that interaction. These women, they find it is good, it is good for them. Because they are leaders, and they can very much challenge the problems that are there. They can pull the women with their votes. Where they are, where they are at home. It won’t bring any suspicion upon them. But if they were male leaders, they were just there. And the women would not come to follow you, because of this separation of men and women. (J. Waruhi, personal communication, October 8, 2008).

Exposure and experience are beginning to change people’s minds, especially among those who have been fortunate to travel and live outside of Lamu. Ernst explained:

Exposure will start changing those things. Education will start changing those things. Because really, people want to be true to Islam, so they are doing it in ways that they think are the right way. But it is mixed up with the whole culture and traditions. So, I think people need to learn that, yes, modesty is a virtue, but also, a lot of the sense of purity is in your heart, not necessarily what is worn on your body. And I think exposure can help bring the idea … because it is not. People go to the States, and Swahilis go to the States, and they continue to live their lives in the value system that they were brought up with, but they change their dress, they change their this and that. Because it’s not necessary. It is not necessary. I mean, I wear a buibui in Lamu for cultural reasons, not for religious reasons. Cultural reasons. Now, most women here would say that they wear it for religious reasons, but then you have to ask, well then, why don’t the Indonesians wear it? And why don’t the Tunisians wear it? And why don’t they, you know, you go through a whole list of different people who are Muslims, but are from different cultures. (H.B. Ernst, personal communication, April 7, 2008).

She also discussed the politics of wearing the buibui and hijab and ninja face veil. Ernst
insisted that veiling is not inherently oppressive, for it also provides some benefits of
greater freedom and anonymity to women:

For young women, the ninja gives them the freedom to walk down the street, and
their uncle won’t know who they are! They can pass by. They won’t be seen.
They can do, they have more freedom to go and do what the men are doing. And
in an island, that’s important for people to not be noticed, you know?

I believe the West is so hung up on physical body appearance. And we
have so many different mental illnesses and physical illnesses because of eating
disorder, because of weight, because of body image. And this is freeing! I can
wear rags underneath the buibui! And get away with it! And still be out in the
public. Not that women do that, they don’t. But, there is, it can bring a sense of
freedom from this all-consuming thinking: “What am I wearing, how am I
wearing it, how are the bulges here and the bulges there?” You know, you just,
you are more able to get out and do what needs to be done, and not even think
about what you have on underneath.

Some Swahili women have been able to challenge the traditional gender roles of
Swahili society and to enter public life. Most of these women have had some extensive
experience outside of Lamu, either in the cities of Mombasa, Malindi or Nairobi or even
through studying or working overseas. Dora Chovu noted that:

Women in Lamu are not very free to venture into “aggressive ventures” like
business. Few women have gone outside of Lamu or received higher education,
which would break the cycle of poverty and isolation. She said that the few
women who have ventured out of Lamu are more “exposed” and “different” and
that they serve as a model to others. (Cutcher, Field notes, April 14, 2008)

Women such as Amina Hussein Soud are admired for their education and exposure.
Hadija Bwanaadi Ernst explained: “Amina Soud is very dynamic. And she is kind of the
ultimate public woman here. She is energetic, and she is working with other young
women. She works a lot with other women” (H.B. Ernst, personal communication, April
7, 2008). Soud received a Fulbright scholarship to study at Yale University in the United
States, where she earned a Master’s Degree in Environmental Studies. After September
11, 2001, the U.S. government sought to include more coastal Muslims in the Fulbright Program, and Lamu sent even more scholars to the United States than Mombasa. Soud had some problems at Yale when a professor told her he thought she was affiliated with *Al-Qaeda*, and some Americans regarded her as suspicious for wearing the *hijab* and *buibui*. However, she was able to continue her education, to travel extensively throughout the United States, and to return home with a great deal of respect and notoriety. She demonstrated the value of educating women when she returned home to her family and took up leadership positions at the Red Cross and a local school and orphanage.

Joseph Waruhi also discussed the value of exposure and education to women entering public life in Lamu. He noted several women who are respected for being active leaders because:

They have been exposed to many grounds. They have had education. And they have been exposed to a lot of different life, outside of Lamu. So they know the importance of being women, and being leaders, because they are the ones that know of the problems of the women in Lamu. They know exactly what the women need and want, and it’s easy to interact with them, because they are born here, and they know, because it is easy to go to their homes. (J. Waruhi, personal communication, October 8, 2008)

Waruhi also revealed that having “exposure” and education is largely dependent on socioeconomic status. Therefore, social class also dictates women’s experience and expertise, as well as their exposure to the world beyond their borders and the respect they command from other people. He explained:

In Langoni, there is the auntie, she is called Auntie Zainab. She is influential because, first she is well-off. She is economically well, through the family. Because her husband works in Saudi Arabia. So, she has all this ability to bring the women together. She helps them, regardless of whether they are doing
anything. Any time any woman goes there with a problem, she helps them financially, but also talks with them. So, it is like the community, they see her as a good woman. Also Fatma Salim, Hababa Noor. Those are like the leaders of the women, because they are financially fine, economically well. (J. Waruhi, personal communication, October 8, 2008)

Similarly, in Taita, women who have been “exposed” are admired and viewed as leaders in the community. Mrs. Joan Mjomba was the first mayor of Voi, a large town in Taita Taveta district. She has represented Kenya at the United Nations in New York and at the 1995 UN World Conference on Women in Beijing, China. She is currently on the Board of Directors of the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK). Her relative, Eileen Mwaita, reflected on Mama Mjomba’s legacy:

I can say, she is a lucky woman, because in our line, she is one of the most exposed. There are very few people, for example, in our home, who have been out of Kenya. But she has been to several countries. So I can say that, we look upon her as a leader, a resource woman.

What I like about her is that she has strong Christian faith. And you know, that is very important. You know, she was widowed quite a number of years back, but she has managed to keep the family together. And also, do a number of things for the community. So, she is a leader, not just here in Taita Taveta, but her big experience covers the whole of Coast Province, and Kenya at large. As I say it, that she is very much exposed. She knows much more than many people. They look upon her with a bit of awe, you know? She is almost venerated, you know! There are some people who look at her, and they don’t want to just become like that.

But what I like about her is that she can reach the grassroots. She does not isolate herself. She can mix, and be reached by that route. And this is a very important quality. The others might be near here, and wonder what they can come through to tell her, but she goes down there, and she reaches the people.

And also, one good quality that she has, is that she is courageous. And that is a very big virtue, you know? To be courageous. She can be able to say what she thinks about issues, without that fear of the repercussions. Yeah, you know, for example, here in Africa, you know, women are largely expected to keep quiet, to be subservient, to listen rather than talk, and to speak their minds. But I think that she is one of the few in our community, when I talk about a community, I mean Taita Taveta, one of the few women who can dare even men and say, “I think it should be like this!” That is good. And also, we can’t ignore that, even at
her age, she finds time to do greater works. (E. Mwaita, personal communication, February 6, 2008)

Mwaita reflected that the true value of Mjomba’s leadership was not just in her elite status, but the fact that she was still able to interact with people at the grassroots and to humble herself. This is seen as one of the great qualities of women leaders that differentiate them from men – their ability to remain humble, in touch with their roots, and responsive to the needs of people in their home communities.

The Mwakitutu Women’s Group is another example of the power of exposure and experience that is gained through membership in women’s organizations. This grassroots group includes fifteen women who started meeting in 1983 in an adult literacy class in the rural Taita hills around Mwatate. None of them could read or write. Some had never even held a pencil. Over the course of a few years, they learned basic math and literacy and started income-generating projects. With the guidance of their teacher, they also started to organize – to analyze their own problems and to find collective solutions. They registered as a community-based organization and are now known as the Mwakitutu Women’s Group.

They are a generation who faced major barriers to education. Their parents could not afford school fees, or refused to send them to school. One member explained: “In those days, our fathers used to say: ‘It is useless to educate girls. A girl will just get married and go to live with another family. Why should we invest in a girl’s education, just to make another family rich?’ ” Another member remembered that their parents would say that “educating a girl is like watering another family’s shamba” or farm. They
decided it did not make economic sense to invest in a child who would move away someday. Now these women are committed to educating themselves and their own children. One woman declared: “I do not want my children to suffer as I have.”

Twenty-five years later, the Mwakitutu women no longer attend adult literacy classes. But they still meet weekly to garden, weave, drink *chai*, laugh, pray, dance and sing together. They also counsel each other, share their problems, and find solutions. To earn income, they grow food, weave baskets, build water tanks, sell charcoal, build and manage rental houses. They share all of their profits, and help to raise each other’s children and grandchildren. When an elderly member dies, the other members gather to mourn her passing, to support her family, and to inherit a younger relative to take her place in the group. This ensures that the group stays alive, and that their knowledge and resources are passed from generation to generation. One younger member explained:

> You know if you sit with mature women, you also become mature. In addition to that I have learnt how to earn money. Being with women, I learn the deep issues like those concerning family life. Instead of sitting with women of my age chatting about things that are not necessarily important I have opted to implement the projects that I conceive and think about. (A. Mwakio, personal communication, February 12, 2008)

Over the years, these women have gained confidence and attained skills in literacy, accounting, leadership, practical development projects, and small business management.

Some members of the Mwakitutu women’s group comically recalled the “exposure” they experienced when they traveled to Nairobi for a basket weaving demonstration. They laughed as they remembered their initial reactions to life outside of rural Taita. Dorothy talked about how she was surprised to sleep on a bed which, when she turned, would spring back and she would bounce. She had never before slept on such
a mattress. She also talked about being given a fork and knife and she almost threw them out because she did not know what to do with them. Another member laughed hysterically as she recalled her first impression of a porcelain toilet seat; she thought it was a plate for eating, and was shocked to discover this was a commode. Prior to this trip, she had only used pit latrines or outhouses as toilets.

Another way women’s groups help to build upon women’s experience and expertise is through a collective process of problem-solving. Philistance Konde, an adult educator in Wundanyi, recalled how the women’s groups work to solve problems such as drought or internal conflicts:

Say there is a women’s group with a tree nursery, and there is no water. Then they will make a schedule. They have intervals for sharing the work of watering. And then they just water their plants, until they harvest. So, let’s say that the groups have good cohesion.

And also, groups go according to the resolution. Or there is a conflict in between them. They have the ideas, through the leadership skills, through the constitution, they can be able to summarize, and even to come together again. Unless it is so serious that they cannot resolve it. They just resolve it by, through maybe sitting with the group, then they read their katiba, or the constitution, and then they follow the constitution. (P. Konde, personal communication, February 7, 2008)

Having a set of common goals and a constitution for organizing themselves helps the groups to establish a sense of collective ownership, responsibility and accountability. It also builds the members’ confidence in themselves and the group process, which expands their experience and expertise.

Therefore, one of the core themes of feminist popular education practiced by women’s organizations is about engaging women’s experience and expertise. Women analyze their own situations and develop organizations to address their needs out of their
own space. However, women’s groups not only emerge from their local context, but are also dependent on complex interactions with transnational and global feminist networks, foreign donors, and other development agencies. Women can gain “exposure” through their education and involvement in these networks of association. By validating their own experience and expertise, they gain self-confidence and change their perceptions about themselves. The capacity-building work of women’s organizations empowers women to see themselves as national and global citizens.

**Silence and Voice**

Another core theme of feminism and popular education is the issue of silence and voice. Audre Lorde, a prominent African-American feminist, asserted: “Your silence will not protect you.” Freire discussed the “culture of silence” that surrounds illiterate people. Popular education, especially literacy training, is explicitly designed to “break the silence” and to “give voice” to people through reading and writing, but also through helping people to identify and solve their own problems.

Women’s groups seek to end women’s silence and provide a voice through literacy and education. Adult education programs offer lessons in reading, writing, and basic literacy and numeracy. They also develop leadership skills, training women in managing group dynamics, facilitation, conflict resolution, communication, and small enterprise development. By helping women to develop these skills, they build confidence and give women the ability to speak out in their own voices.
A core strategy for addressing silence and assisting women to raise their voices is taking place in the schools. The Forum of African Women Educationalists (FAWE) introduced a program called Tuseme (“Let’s Talk”) girls’ clubs. This program encourages setting aside time during school for girls to meet and discuss their problems and to seek advice from teachers. Hafswa Diffin, the headmaster of the Mkomani Girls’ Primary School in Lamu, recounted:

We have another club that is called “Girls Forum.” Whereby the girls meet, share ideas, discuss problems, and they forward the problem to me. And in every assembly, I normally give them words of advice. I give them, each day, I have got one thing I normally talk to them about. I have a book in which I normally note down what type of advice I would like to give them. So I insist them to talk, write, to speak up about their mind. They should never be forced. You see? They should speak out. Because of any problem.

Yes, it was just yesterday where a Class 8 group of them came to me, and explained to me: “Madam, there is one topic that is geometry. We are really in need. We want to be taught. Because we did not learn it when we were in Class 6. At the same time, the teacher skipped when we were in Class 7. And now it is Class 8.” So I had to call the teacher, and I told him the truth.

You see, these children now, they have learned their rights. They have come to know their rights. So now, they want a grade. So, they have come to defend their right – they want to be taught this too. And they said it clearly that, this is the same teacher, he did not teach us when we were in Class 7, at the same time in Class 6, and now we are in Class 8, and it is just that. And it has a lot of marks. There must be a question in that geometry on the exam.

So, the fact that I had to call the teacher, and the teacher agreed, said that it is true, because I did not teach them, because they did not have the geometrical set. So, I told him, “You did not come to inform me. I still have the geometrical sets at the store.” And I have lent them to him, and he is teaching them now.

So now, at least, they can talk, they can express themselves. But, a girl is really weak, you see? Girls are a very weak gender. (H. Diffin, personal communication, October 7, 2008)

Providing a venue and a time for girls to speak up and discuss their problems has been very effective in the schools that have implemented Tuseme girls clubs. School teachers and headmasters report that they have been able to tune in to girls’ concerns early and to
address some of the root causes of poor achievement, retention, and drop out rates. In this way, these schools are eliminating some of the barriers that kept girls from continuing their education in the past.

The cultural context is very important in feminist popular education, and educators must be very careful and sensitive about this. Silence can be strategic as well – used to resist or to hold on to power. Walters & Manicom (1996) asserted that women have different languages and discourses available to them:

> It is often the case that women have vibrant voices within a non-official, more private, community space, whereas they are silent/silenced in more public situations. Women may also be silent in the dominant forms of communication, such as official or more formal language. (p. 16)

Indeed, Kenyan women are often highly outspoken and involved at the local level of the family, community, and town. Women may use alternative forms of media or “voice” to express themselves than what is recognized or validated by the dominant culture. Women express their critical cultural analysis through magazines, radio talk shows, barazas, gossip, parties, films, and other forms of expressive culture. Many women also speak the so-called “mother tongues” or local and ethnic languages in their daily lives, while the “official” languages are Kiswahili and English. This inhibits rural and unschooled women’s participation in national debates and political culture, which tends to be dominated by formally educated, English-speaking elites. However, women’s influence at the local level, and in their families and communities, should not be overlooked.

Another way that women’s organizations “give voice” to women and girls is through multiple forms of holistic expression, including art, music, prayer, dance,
storytelling, and counseling. I noticed during my fieldwork that women’s groups often utilize multiple forms of cultural expression that moves beyond just reading, writing, talking about and analyzing problems. This reminded me a great deal of what I witnessed and studied about the Highlander Center in Tennessee:

I learned that a large aspect of popular education as practiced at Highlander is the inclusion of cultural expression, especially song and prayer, as a part of the fellowship of activism and organizing and education. They articulate a vision of experiential, informal and popular education that allows the full expression of the self, through non-verbal expressive means i.e. song, dance, poetry, prayer, and other forms of artistic expression. They also talked about how Southern culture (no doubt from African influences) includes a reverence for song and prayer in community, welcoming and feeding of visitors, and including children and people of all ages in the activities of the community and the organization. They spoke of the holistic community – not just creating activities that feed our political or economic needs, but which create a sense of connectedness, community, spirit, and purpose that is the glue that binds us. This was a hallmark of the civil rights movement as well. (Cutcher, field notes, May 2008)

Women’s organizations in Kenya also work to raise awareness and “give voice” to Kenyan women and girls who have been denied a space by male elites. In some communities of Kenya, such as Luo, Maasai, and Somali cultures, women’s voices are equal to that of a child. Women are expected to be “seen and not heard” while men have all the say in public decision-making. Many communities are patriarchal in structure, with matters of governance, leadership, inheritance, and other issues dominated by men. Men’s voices speak in loud contrast to women’s silence.

Patriarchal political systems of local cultures were buttressed by British colonialism in Kenya. Local cultures tended to be gender-complementary, in which men and women occupied separate but complementary spaces and roles. For example, governance in pre-colonial times included both a men’s council and a women’s council.
Older women in particular were highly valued and given a place of honor and influence in community life. External rule by Britain and the influence of Christianity and Islam worked to create gendered binaries in which men occupied public and political spheres while women were relegated to private and domestic life.

After colonialism, the independent Kenyan state continued the colonial tactics of governance, including repressive and controlling relations with citizens. State repression led to resistance, and in the 1980s and 1990s many women raised their voices for change. They called for an end to corruption, repression, political prisoners, extra-judicial killings, dictatorship of the presidency, and other injustices of the Kenyan state. Women joined the pro-democracy movement, pushing for multiparty elections and a repeal of Section 2A of the Kenyan constitution which declared Kenya a one-party state. Women worked with other activists to demand equality of genders, classes, races, religions, and regions of the country. In 1992 the country held their first multiparty elections, and in 2002 the voters elected the NARC government into power after KANU had dominated the country’s leadership since independence.

In 2007, pro-democracy activists also called for majimbo, or a federal system that would maintain national unity but also share power with local county councils and provincial governments. This movement pushes for decentralization, deregulation, and the devolution of resources. The movement for change led to sweeping support for ODM, and violence erupted into chaos following the elections, which were assumed to be rigged. Women and girls were targeted with rape and sexual violence. Over 2,000 men,
women and children were killed during the chaos, and over 650,000 people were
displaced internally.

After the period of post-election violence, women’s groups gathered for
peacemaking, prayer, and counseling. They raised the important question: In the pro-
democracy movement, and in the context of widespread violence, who speaks for women
and girls? Some groups formed with the explicit focus of providing support to survivors
of rape and sexual violence. For example, a women’s group formed in Kibera, one of the
largest slums outside of Nairobi, where women were raped and sexually assaulted during
the post-election violence. I met some of these survivors at a hearing of the International
Committee of Jurists, where they insisted on being included in the Truth, Justice and
Reconciliation Commission process. Two of these women spoke to me at great length
about experiencing gang rapes by the General Service Unit (GSU) and police officers.
They explained that they had reported their rapes but were not taken seriously since they
were implicating public officials. They had also gone for medical treatment at the
Nairobi Women’s Hospital. However, there was no counseling or support offered to
these survivors by the courts, police or hospitals. Therefore, these women created
support groups to counsel each other through the crisis and to attempt to cope with the
trauma. They revealed the great lack of mental health care systems available, but also
showed that many Kenyans rely upon their social networks or churches to provide
psychological support and mental health counseling.

Indeed, many women’s organizations fulfill the function of counseling women
and providing a space to be heard. They provide opportunities for deep sharing and
listening in support groups. Women meet to talk, laugh, cry, pray, struggle, share problems, tell stories, analyze problems, give and receive advice, and find solutions. For example, the Mwakitutu Women’s Group in Taita would meet regularly for their projects, but they inevitably also spent time discussing family problems, sharing financial concerns, praying for sick friends or children, giving advice, and assisting each other in times of need.

I became very conscious of the dynamics of silence and voice among women through my observations of the Mwakitutu Women’s Group. I noticed that certain members of the group seemed very open, talkative, outspoken, and dominant, while other members, usually younger women, were very shy. I wrote in my field notes:

Like the Sere group, where the chairman (a man) was the most talkative and was like the spokesman for the group, I also noticed that Mwakitutu has a few individuals who are really outspoken, while others are very quiet. Margaret, the two Agnetas, and Dorothy are obviously the most active and outspoken members, and Agneta Mwakio is also very outspoken and lively. The others tend to be very quiet and almost timid – they spend a lot of time listening quietly. I have noticed that whenever decisions or official business is being made – the people who are most involved are the “officers” – Dorothy, Margaret and Agneta. The others are active members but not as involved in telling the story or making decisions.

The young women are especially quiet, almost like they are apprentices or daughters-in-law. They are primarily responsible for cooking, making chai, collecting firewood and washing dishes. One young woman was actually “inherited” by the group when her mother-in-law died. I worry about her – she seems timid, shy, fragile, and unhappy. I have been told that her husband was a guard for the school but he was fired because he is mlevi (a drunkard). Today she had a large sore on her mouth – I wonder if she is unhealthy, has a disease, or if she was beaten. I wonder how the group will act or intervene if they realize that one of their members is in an abusive relationship – or if this is kawaida (normal) or something they would not interfere with. (Cutcher, field notes, May 2008)

Similarly in Lamu, I observed these dynamics between older and younger women, and women of different socio-economic classes. I was surprised to witness the
oppressive relationships that some elite women leaders had with their house help. It seemed odd and even hypocritical to listen to elite women discussing the importance of girl child education and female empowerment in interviews, and then to witness their abusive treatment of the girls who worked for them as domestic servants. I realized that the house girls were being exploited when I spent one day during Ramadan cooking *sambusa* and *chapatti* with two of them in the sweltering heat. Their employer was a respected woman leader in the community, well-known for her advocacy for girls’ education, but her behavior to her “help” was abysmal. She yelled, complained, reprimanded and scolded the girls incessantly. She even kept checking on them to ensure that they were not eating or drinking anything, or even tasting the food, since they were supposed to be fasting for Ramadan. Indeed, who truly speaks for girls if the leaders of the women’s movement have such negative and patronizing attitudes toward their own domestic help?

Among the Swahili Muslim community in Lamu, women also struggle to overcome the cultural and religious expectations that they should be indoors and remain in the private space of the home and family. Athman Lali Omar explained:

> Swahili women are not to be found anywhere at the markets in Zanzibar or Lamu. This is because of Swahili culture. Women are “inside,” and women tend to engage in businesses or creating products that they would use themselves and that they can sell among themselves, among other Swahili women. (Cutcher, field notes, April 18, 2008)

Therefore, it is very important for Swahili women to meet together among their peers in order to break their isolation and seclusion. For example, the Al-Nasiha Women’s Group in Lamu works to give advice and support for Muslim women through their faith. They
meet almost every day of the week to read and discuss the Qur’an, and pray with the other members. It is vitally important for women to have a community outside of their homes and families, and they can find this support in an acceptable way through their faith.

One of the most impressive examples of popular and informal education that I witnessed in Lamu is the APHIA II project, which is supported with funds from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). This project is a community education program for HIV/AIDS prevention and awareness that is cooperatively organized by 15 women’s groups, 6 men’s groups, and 11 youth groups. Peer educators have been trained from all of these groups to conduct workshops and to perform community-based theater in villages, towns, and mosques throughout Lamu district. I attended one of the workshops that were organized by women, for women. The presenters included a local poet and singer, a group of young girls singing and performing a play about HIV/AIDS, a local Imam (religious leader), a number of women activists and educators, a hospital nurse, the head of the community AIDS control council, and others. The workshop was held on the edge of town on a holiday, and attracted over 100 girls and women to come and listen to the presentations. At the end of the workshop, there was an opportunity for people to get tested at a voluntary counseling and testing center. I was very impressed with the level of organization and the quality of facilitation of the discussions at this event. This is a powerful example of popular peer education to teach about an important and life-saving issue that is too often shrouded in secrecy, silence and shame.
This issue of silence and voice was addressed directly at the APHIA II workshop I observed in Lamu. One speaker observed that the secrecy and silence that surround HIV/AIDS is partly responsible for the spread of the disease in Kenya:

> For example, you will find that someone is infected and continue to spread it. It is saddening that here in Kenya, everything is secret. For example, Tanzania and Uganda they came and said that in their country everything is open. The other day my in-law who works with trailers got into a vehicle headed to Uganda. A girl asked him for a lift (ride). He spoke with her, a beautiful girl. The girl told her that I am infected and you have to be careful because the disease is very prevalent. She gave him a box of condoms. (APHIA II workshop, personal communication, October 10, 2008)

Another community member suggested that the spread of the disease in Lamu is partly due to the stigma of HIV/AIDS and the unwillingness to discuss it:

> I am happy to see today we are seated here talking and we are not talking about anything else but HIV/AIDS. My sisters and brothers in Lamu it was that when we are told, we do not speak. Today when they said A for abstinence, B for Be faithful, C for Condom use, D for discuss. It was discussed in other places but not here in Lamu. (APHIA II workshop, personal communication, October 10, 2008)

Similarly, I observed the dynamics of silence about issues of reproductive health in Taita. When interviewing members of the Sere Farmers’ Field School in Mwatate, I learned that the members had attended trainings on *Afya Uzazi* (family planning):

> One of the outspoken women, Vellis, is the teacher. She explained that they got funding and teachers to teach about reproductive health and family planning to their members. When I probed about this, they did not share much information – perhaps because it was a mixed group of men and women. (C. Cutcher, field notes, May 2008)

By observing this dynamic, I came to the conclusion that it will be difficult to break the silence, secrecy, stigma and shame associated with sexuality and reproductive health.

Perhaps more groups could follow the example of the APHIA II program by separating
men, women, and youth so that they can discuss these issues more openly among their peers.

Finally, another way that women’s groups end the silence and give voice to women’s struggles is by using the media. Through radio, television, the internet, newspapers, and other media, women’s organizations are raising awareness and educating the public about the struggles in women’s lives. They are also building consciousness about gender roles and relations between men and women. They engage in public information campaigns to address controversial issues, to end female genital cutting, encourage girls to stay in school, or to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. The Association of Media Women in Kenya (AMWIK) is a group of female journalists who meet regularly to share ideas and strategies to get women’s issues to be covered more by the media. They are integrating women’s issues into public life and blowing the whistle on a number of problems facing women. However, some activists have also critiqued their tendency to solely focus on stories depicting women as victims: rape survivors, internally-displaced persons, battered wives, or subjects of female genital mutilation (FGM). Indeed, a common critique of journalism is: “If it bleeds, it reads.” Nevertheless, media is a tool for women to raise awareness about issues that affect them.

The Sauti ya Wanawake (Voice of Women) group in Lamu organizes activities explicitly to amplify women’s voices in the public discourse. They organize events to raise awareness during October or “pink month” about cancer prevention, and create space for women to speak out about HIV/AIDS, drug abuse, female genital mutilation, domestic violence, land grabbing, environmental problems, and other issues facing the
Lamu community. Hababa Noor, a former schoolteacher, politician, and community organizer, helped to found the group *Sauti ya Wanawake*. She explained the struggle that women endure to have a voice in Kenyan politics and media:

> We are looking for ways and certain abilities in which we can empower our people, so that they can make a lot of noise, they will blow a whistle. If they see their problems, they can make sure that women can get involved in this way. If they have fear, like I said, if the police are put inside, the police cannot bar you, and if they want to fight with certain people, the policeman is not above the law. You have the right to move ahead to push for changes. If women are informed, and when they are empowered, they will be able to change things.

... The women’s movement has tried to raise women’s voices. Women can make a lot of noise. But our noise that we women have made has not gone very far, like we do not even have the tools of media here who can highlight our problems. It is not like Mombasa – I listen to those FM stations, like Radio Salaam, Radio Rahma – if you listen, you can hear people calling on the phone, “Ah! Kisauni has come out this way. Likoni is resulting like this.” All people are getting the news. Here, if we make news, if it gets to the Provincial Administration, it is compromised. But the judiciary is compromised. If you are at the police, you are compromised. If we raise our voices, where will they go?

... Because we do not have journalists, we have no media. So me, I was told that we would be beaten as women. Even if we make noise, things do not go far, because there is no person to highlight the issue. Because we do not have the support from outside.

... The women’s movement ... women are shouting out. Like everyone is destroying the environment. This one is molesting children. All of these issues, women are protesting. But we women, we are at this stage where we have been robbed/stripped of our power. But, let’s hope a person will get a woman who has come to live close to people, and to hear their thoughts, and to be helped by them.

(H. Noor, personal communication, September 27, 2008)

International exposure through media has also encouraged and expanded women’s ideas and experience, and given women a voice to speak out about issues affecting them. Amina Hussein Soud explains the impact of globalization through tourism and media on the Lamu community:

> Exposure is there. Not only locally, but women even have international exposure now. One, they get every kind of visitors. Two, they like entertainment, so there are TVs, internationally. They watch soap operas from all over the world. So,
they know how Arabs are thinking, how Indians, how Filipinos, how Mexicans, how Americans…

So, all of them, they have all of these ideas, and these fashions. Even the way they have put up their houses now is different. They are all thinking like the world! They are no longer, like, excluded. They have been opened up.

Through media… it has its negatives. Everything has its negatives. But, I see it politically. It has opened them up. Like, they have had role models in their own houses. Because they see somebody who started very cheaper, or somebody who was like a maid, and somehow she went and opened up, somehow she became a woman of substance. And so, she always feels like, “I cannot do something.” You see, like if Maria did this, and she became this and this, then I can do it! You see?

Their trend really is to motivate the women. And I have seen there is a big change. They are all trying to do something. They are no longer those women who have accepted to stay home. (A.H. Soud, personal communication, April 11, 2008)

Indeed, as women’s silence is broken and their voices are heard, they are becoming a force to be reckoned with. The women’s movement has an explicit goal to raise consciousness among women so that their voices can be amplified.

**Empowerment**

“Empowerment” is a term that is widely used in feminist and popular education theory. Walters & Manicom (1996) explained that empowerment ranges from individual to collective actions, “from self-validation and the building of self-esteem to working actively and concretely to change social conditions” (pp. 16-17). They also reflect:

“Popular education that is located historically and politically within defined and organized social movements … tends implicitly to support a notion of empowerment that involves the achievement of social and political objectives” (p. 17). However, empowerment may also be less explicitly political, and could also “refer to gaining more decision-making capacity, to deepening an understanding of the relations configuring
one’s life and to controlling conditions affecting one’s life” (p. 17). They explain that the strength of women’s movements depends upon the context in which popular educators work and the “extent to which small, local instances of empowering education contribute to broader political and social changes” (p. 17).

The women’s movement in Kenya has worked hard to expand the rights of women and girls at the grassroots to the national level. However, many scholars have asked how the women’s movement in Kenya can be so large while the formal policies remain so patriarchal? (Tripp, Casimiro, Kwesiga and Mungwa, 2009). Kenya is a highly patriarchal society in which men dominate the institutions of family, community, and nation. Power and privilege are concentrated in the hands of men. These gender inequalities continue to be upheld by many of the laws of Kenya today.

Women in Kenya have an explicit interest in gaining empowerment through education. In general, Kenyan women are seeking greater self-sufficiency and economic independence. Many women seek this for their own survival, or the livelihood of their family and community. Also, power dynamics are changing in families, as many men have left for jobs in urban towns and cities, while women remain home in the villages and farms to manage the homesteads. Locally and nationally, women are moving into positions of authority and leadership in politics, education, law, finance, media, professional associations, and other social institutions.

Even while interviewing in Kiswahili, women would often repeat the English word “empowerment” in describing their desired change in the power dynamics. Empowerment is linked to education, wealth, and economic independence. Economic
empowerment also brings about fundamental changes in women’s positions as leaders and breadwinners in their families, communities, and towns. Amina Kale, the director of Kikozi and the Lamu Education Development Fund Trust (LEDFT), explained:

Because to *empower* women is to *empower* them with knowledge. To *empower* them with money. You see? Education and all that! You see, this is *empowerment*. Unless you are a person with a lot of wealth, indeed then you have a voice, you can stand to be voted for. Now you yourself are a person without anything, if everything is written in the name of your husband, then what do you have? Nothing!! Therefore, this is what we are telling women in their groups, to have everything written in their own names. (A. Kale, personal communication, September 22, 2008)

Many women insisted that participation in organizations is vital to women’s empowerment. Dora Chovu, the Social Services officer in Lamu, explained that women must come together as a group to put themselves in a position to achieve more. She said that women’s groups serve to empower women socially and economically by increasing women’s participation in decision-making (D. Chovu, personal communication, April 14, 2008). Beth Wanjiku believed that women must come together because “it makes the organization to have power. As you know one hand alone is powerless but two hands are much strong. So we become strong either financially or educationally” (B. Wanjiku, personal communication, April 14, 2008).

Hababa Noor was introduced to the idea of women’s groups when she was studying at a Teacher Training College in Thika. She returned to Lamu to found a local chapter of *Maendeleo ya Wanawake* and to initiate women’s grassroots organizing in their communities. She recalled:

We started to stay with women in *Maendeleo ya Wanawake*. Because me, when I went to study, I studied there in Thika, I was close to the primary schools. Now, if I see at night, I would see many women going to meet with that group, and I
would go close to see what they were doing. Why are they sitting here? Ai! Women’s groups?! Why don’t we have women’s groups where women could get to know each other in the streets, and to discuss why these certain problems were happening? Therefore, I saw an opportunity to organize groups and to know our problems, and to look for ways to solve them, and to help people to solve their own problems. So I saw how groups could start to help each other, to save money, to share money, and if one of the people had a problem, we could help them. And I thought this was a good thing.

Therefore, when I returned to Lamu, I started to converse with people who could help to start the first women’s group, Faidika Women’s Group. We started with that group. And also, after we started the women’s groups, we supported youth groups. Like we would do our projects, and we would start our work, then we would see the problems of our children. Like, some are not studying, and so we would do work to support them, like sewing, to help people. Like how and where do we get what we need? Therefore, we then started with this. So this is what I started with, and then I got an opportunity with the MYWO to be elected. So, I saw a way for women to get empowered.

Because all of the programs that we wanted to do, we wanted to advance women forward. Now, the women we would get development for women. LEDFT was doing any kind of projects, apart from elimu (education), you will see, like microfinance, kikozi, girl child education, and you will see resource information scholarship for girl child education, and other projects of LEDFT. Therefore, there were many different projects, like “Know your Rights,” like “Sauti ya Wanawake” (the Voice of Women), and we had many different projects in which we wanted women to be informed.

You will see, we could do anything that would benefit women. For example, we educated women about their rights in the constitution, and discussed with them the kinds of laws that they wanted. Now, MYWO was an organization only doing certain things, but our organization could have many different projects. We could mainstream women. Therefore, MYWO was just working with women’s groups. (H. Noor, personal communication, September 27, 2008)

Noor also explained that women’s groups not only assist women with their individual needs and problems. She believes that women’s groups also empower women to influence decision-making and politics on a wider scale. She maintained that women must be empowered to participate more directly in the political process:

A long time ago, those people were being led. But there is no political leader today who is fighting for them. Now, what I want to say is that politics is very important. Many people are afraid of politicians. Provincial Administrators are with the politicians, police are with the politicians, all the offices in government
people of the lands office are also with the politicians. They will send them to the Parliament, and he will look for another organization to speak with about these problems, to make a partnership. And other cooperatives are advocates for such things. Like, these things would be known.

Therefore, we are looking for ways and certain abilities in which we can empower our people, so that they can make a lot of noise, they will blow a whistle ... If women are informed, and when they are empowered, they will be able to change things.

Yes, and also if we do any workshops on women’s empowerment, I will also call them. I will call them and ask, how can we teach girls to work hard, like you have, and where they can get scholarships to help them when they come from a poor community? 

(H. Noor, personal communication, September 27, 2008)

Education and work has radically shifted the balance of power between men and women, and has enabled women to participate more in decision-making in the family and in community life. Christine Kilalo recalled how her mother’s participation in Maendeleo ya Wanawake helped her to earn income and gain skills, which changed her relationship with her husband:

She got involved in the women’s movement. Maendeleo ya Wanawake. So, she learned a lot of skills, interactions, getting new skills in the farm, handicrafts, and all that. And she exploited all that to the full. So, she made some extra money, to back up my father, who was the one in full time employment. 

(C. Kilalo, personal communication, February 6, 2008)

Victoria Dali Mwamburi also explained how Maendeleo ya Wanawake groups are working to empower women in Taita through education. She insisted that women should become self-reliant and independent from men. She recalled:

Recently we trained them about business. The aim is to make the women self-reliant rather than depend on their husbands. This will uplift their lives and those of their families. 

(V.D. Mwamburi, personal communication, May 30, 2008)

Joseph Waruhi of Lamu similarly explained how women’s education is empowering them and changing the relationships between men and women:
Women, now, they have a voice. Men, they cannot just, they don’t command them. It’s a discussion that they make, if they want to make any sort of decision. It’s not like, “Do this! Do that! Go over there! Take the kids!” No, it’s something that they sit down and talk about. They discuss it. They come with a conclusion. So, it’s a voice. They have a voice. They can make decisions, you know, themselves. Rather than depending on men to make the decisions.

C: So, do you think that, as women are working more outside of the home, that men are helping more with the work in the home? Like with raising the children, or doing housework, or those kinds of things?

J: Yeah, because of some economic pressure. There are some, also other men that are not employed. Of which there is some example here in Lamu. The husband doesn’t have a stable job, so it is the woman, she is the one who is working now. She is employed. She is a teacher. So, the husband takes care of the kids. He goes to the market. He buys the stuff. If the wife hasn’t arrived, he is making food for the kids. And then, on other days, when she is off, then the husband is out.

C: So, you think that men and women are sharing the work more? The housework?

J: Yeah, sharing. Because now, like women, they have …. They have a SAY. She is running the family. Yeah. So, it’s basically about the economy. So, if the husband is not working, he has a wife, that she is working. And that’s how they change. Or if both are working, then they have somebody who is at home. They have a maid who is at home to take care of the kids while they are at work. (J. Waruhi, personal communication, October 8, 2008)

Waruhi also explained that women’s participation in education and economic life has increased their ability to participate in community development in Lamu:

Before it was, they could not carry on with their education, because of marriage. So, some of them, they are pursuing education to high levels. So, they come back in the same community, like they are nurses in the hospitals. They are working in other organizations. So they have a contribution in development. Of which, before it was one-sided. It was only men. You see? But now, women now are pursuing their goals of education. They get sponsored. They go out. To study more. They have found that education, now, it’s becoming more important. It’s a tool for them to contribute to the community. (J. Waruhi, personal communication, October 8, 2008)

Waruhi also sees a connection between mothers’ education and the increasing numbers of children being enrolled in schools in Lamu:
Most of the kids, they are being now taken to school. Of which, a lot of them, before, they were taken to madrassa. And even the others, these government schools, they were not even going. So, because of the education the women have had, and they find the sweetness of that education, so they are encouraging their kids to go to school, to get an education. Although they are also getting this … a lot of pressure is put into going to government schools. For their future. You know, it’s like they are giving, it’s like a future insurance for their kids. Like they are investing into their kids. (J. Waruhi, personal communication, October 8, 2008)

Christine Kilalo, the former director of World Neighbors, also witnessed the empowerment that comes with education about reproductive health when she taught workshops among midwives in Coast Province. Although the majority of midwives, or traditional birth attendants, are beyond childbearing age, they felt empowered by gaining knowledge about childbirth. She claimed:

> It is so empowering to women to understand their own reproductive cycle, and what happens to their bodies. What happens, and then you are carrying a baby, how does this baby grow, until it is ready to come out. And how does it come out naturally, you know? Without interference. Just to understand that normal cycle. It was so exciting.

> And I remember so many of them saying, “Now, where have you been? Although you are a baby to us, we are the ones who gave birth to you?” You know, those were the age mates of my mother – that is what they would say. So, “where have you been all these years that we have been suffering, and now you are coming? And now you are coming when I stopped giving birth a long time ago. This is knowledge I should have had a long time ago. But anyway, we will assist your sister-in-laws to give birth the way you are saying!”

> But, just to emphasize how empowering I discovered knowledge is to people, you know, learning something especially which is relevant to your life. And I found it did just wonders among women. (C. Kilalo, personal communication, February 6, 2008)

Kilalo also explained her involvement in grassroots efforts for local development and political change. She claimed that sometimes people in power don’t want the local people to know or analyze what’s happening, because they want to protect their own power. Through her work as a community organizer, she has witnessed how the balance
of power shifts as local people become more educated and involved in the process of community development and the devolution of power. She claimed:

I am believing, because of the levels of suffering at the ground, people can easily be manipulated. They can easily be manipulated. People are just comfortable. They complain! They are too poor. Prices of things are too high, blah blah blah. There is no water. Or their wildlife is bothering us in our farms. But that is up to where they can articulate.

... But when people are just seated ... And everything they are brought, they are solving, everything they are brought... Nobody is questioning anything? Ah! Nothing is going to change. Because they are not dissatisfied with anything. They are comfortable. So, it doesn’t matter. The status quo can continue. So, even, this is why I am saying, even in politics, until we reach a level when people start questioning the political situation, it will not change. It may not change. No...

In terms of why, that is too complicated an issue. To start addressing why. Because if they moved beyond: “Why are we poor?” And they start digging, then they would start learning the lessons I have seen, which are empowering. And once you discover those things, you will not accept to be bribed during the voting time. You will not! Because you know it is beyond. (C. Kilalo, personal communication, February 6, 2008)

Kilalo defined empowerment as breaking the cycle of poverty and enabling people to analyze and solve their own problems:

Just getting people out of their routine, and their drudgery, to do some analysis, is very empowering! I have seen it! In all these communities I have worked. But then, it’s a self-empowering process. Where you just provide the opportunity.

This is why we have always had debates with scholars, and I say, but “Ah! You see, empowerment is not like a basket of fruit, you go to the market, buy and come and give a woman. It is not!” Empowerment is, I believe in that school of thought which says, it is opportunity created, and a person uses that opportunity. And in the process, they start empowering themselves.

Empowerment, you can’t give. It is self-given. And then, you get more excited about what happens around you. You start asking questions. And you look for solutions. And in that process, you are hastening change and transformation. (C. Kilalo, personal communication, February 6, 2008)

Kilalo echoes the sentiments of Freire and Horton, as she insists that empowerment has to “come from the people” themselves. Indeed, an outsider or an authority figure cannot
give empowerment to someone else, but it must be seized and created by the oppressed people themselves.

Nevertheless, the Government of Kenya is also involved in this process of empowerment through their interest in promoting self-reliance among citizens. Mr. Katembo, the Social Development Officer for Taita District, explained that the government has a vested interest in supporting women’s groups. He explained that the Department of Social Services is closely involved in the process of registration, giving certificates to undertake certain activities, training members of women’s groups, sensitizing them on available opportunities or funds, and providing professional services such as agricultural extension, livestock development, and assisting with savings and credit cooperatives. He claimed:

We seek to see that the citizens become self-sufficient and productive towards developing the nation … Women have a big ability to contribute to development in Kenya. Women all over the country constitute 56% of the population. They have great potential. The problem is that most of the work done by the women is not measurable. They are engaged mostly in household chores. If the women’s group can go on well and be supported, then women do very well. (M. Katembo, personal communication, June 4, 2008)

Philistance Konde, an adult educator and librarian of the Community Resource Centre in Taita District, also emphasized the importance of adult education and community development for the empowerment of women’s groups:

I love my job because I like people knowing what we mean by community development. Because once one is illiterate, then there is no progress. And then, I feel that I should work more on community development, because I want to give some life to the mothers, to the mamas.

That is why I am planning to do a women’s studies diploma course. Because I have seen in the women’s groups, there is a lot of suffering of the women in society. And once you educate a woman, then the whole nation is
educated. But if you educate only the man, then only one person is educated. (P. Konde, personal communication, February 7, 2008)

These officials articulated the essence of empowerment through education. They revealed that women’s groups serve as a form of community-based popular education that works to raise the consciousness of their members for empowerment and self-reliance.

**Difference**

Difference is another core principle of feminist popular education. Difference is used to refer to the different identities of women in terms of their race, class, ethnicity, language, religion, age, sexuality, and other salient characteristics. Kenyan women are not a monolithic group, and great diversity exists among and between women that determines differences in power, privilege, oppression, life conditions, access to resources, opportunities, and experiences. These differences can also lead to conflict, leading to different priorities for women in different social and geographical locations. Therefore, intersectionality and difference are key elements that must be explored in feminist popular education, and must be considered in both the design and conduct of women’s organizations. Walters and Manicom (1996) maintained that “various popular education practices work to equalize power within the education process, deploying fairly mechanical devices to redress power imbalances, or drawing attention to the social weighting of different attributes to diminish their authority” (p. 18). Therefore, popular educators have an explicit interest in addressing inequalities and pointing out the intersectionality of gender with other identities.
The construction of “gender” is a social and cultural process, and local notions of masculinity and femininity vary greatly. Walters and Manicom (1996) explained:

Underlying this meaning of difference is the understanding of gender as not referring merely to sexual difference, but also to the cultural, social, and often racialized constructions of masculinity and femininity. Unpacking these different constructions of gender through popular education offers learners an understanding of the possibility of being women in less fixed, less oppressive ways. (p. 18)

Gender inequalities are embedded within institutions of the Kenyan state and cultural and religious practices that reinforce sexist notions of difference. Chesoni (2006) asserted that “gender-based exclusion prevents women and girls from enjoying and enforcing their human rights on an equal basis with their male counterparts” (p. 195). Chesoni maintained that “gender inequality is entrenched in Kenya’s policy and legal framework, and gender inequality intersects, drives and exacerbates other forms of inequality such as poverty, ageism, disability, ethnic chauvinism and racism” (p. 195). Therefore, gender cannot and should not be addressed in isolation, but should be considered in relation to other identities and systems of oppression.

Indeed, the intersectionality of differences is important in the Kenyan context. Women often align themselves not only as “women” but also with their statuses as members of ethnic, racial or religious communities. Moreover, socio-economic class differences emerge within organizations, where the leaders and educators tend to be formally educated, middle class women, while learners and “grassroots” members tend to be mainly working-class, unschooled, or poor women and men. Thus, power differences emerge between members of different social groups. Popular educators must be self-
conscious and reflexive about this dynamic in order to address and transform these power differences.

One of the core values on which this dissertation is based is the diversity of women’s organizations and experiences in Kenya. The sites range from the rural villages and towns of Taita, the coastal islands of Lamu, to the capital city or “metropole” of Nairobi. These diverse geographical sites display dynamics of “core/periphery relations” as described by World Systems Theory, in which local and global scales operate simultaneously. Within Coast Province, we can also see some great diversity, from the “Upper Coast” of Taita – a rural, agricultural, Christian community in the highlands - to the “Lower Coast” of Lamu – an old Swahili island town that is both steeped in conservative Muslim culture and progressive in its embrace of outsiders and tourists who come with exposure to the Indian Ocean. Within each of these research sites, I also observed the politics of difference at play.

For example, within Lamu District coexist several different racial, ethnic, linguistic and religious communities. Athman Lali Omar believed that the diversity of women’s groups in Lamu may be based on ethnic and regional differences in Lamu District.

He pointed out that although there are four hundred or so reportedly active women’s groups in Lamu District, he would bet that ninety per cent of them are based in Mpeketoni, which is a largely Kikuyu settlement. He said that the local Swahilis have been marginalized in Lamu district by a government that has tended to focus on the Mpeketoni people and on giving opportunities and resources to upcountry “outsiders” who are settling there. (A.L. Omar, personal communication, April 18, 2008)
Dora Chovu also believes that Mpeketoni has the most active women’s groups because it is comprised of mixed ethnic communities, including Kikuyus, Bajunis, Pokomo, and Taitas. She said: “The environment itself makes people aggressive. There is competition which is positive” and motivates more action among women’s groups (D. Chovu, personal communication, April 14, 2008). It is an agricultural area with rich soil and abundant water reserves. They have a lot of farm inputs, tractors, and other tools and assets that are conducive for farming activities. She said that the “real competition” in Mpeketoni leads to innovation and business development.

I also heard theories that Mpeketoni is most active because of the culture. Some interviewees responded that women from “upcountry” – especially Kikuyus – have been encouraged to go to school, to create their own businesses, and that there is a culture of women being active in public life and in the economy. Among the Muslim Swahilis, it is less likely to find women who are encouraged to go to school or to go out – as the culture idealizes women in *purdah*, women who stay home, and men are the ones who are involved in public life and in the marketplace.

I asked Dora Chovu if she could comment on the differences and similarities she has seen between women’s groups in Taita and Lamu, since she has lived in both districts. She said that the main similarity between the two districts is that women’s groups are all looking for financial empowerment. However, the issue of illiteracy is different, as she believes that Lamu has higher illiteracy among women than in Taita. The religion and culture are also different. She observed: “In other areas, women are free,” but that women in Lamu are “molded in their activities; their decision making is
bound.” She postulated that women in Lamu are not very free to venture into “aggressive ventures” like business, and that few women have gone outside of Lamu or received higher education, which would break the cycle of poverty and “ignorance.” She said that women who have ventured out of Lamu are more “exposed” and “different” and that they serve as a model to others. She commented on the religious differences as well. In Taita, churches are mixed with both men and women, while in Lamu, men and women do not pray in one mosque, and many mosques are only for men and boys. Women have specific mosques and madrassa they can attend separately from men. For example, during Maulidi, women watched most of the events and religious activities as spectators (even the secular events), while the men and boys actively participated. She said that in Lamu, women are not “in the forefront” and their “religion and culture keep them behind.”

Beth Wanjiku is a Kikuyu migrant to Lamu who has started a sewing business. She also discussed the ethnic and religious differences between Lamu District and her home area of Muranga:

Oh yes, it is different because the two places are of different tribes. In Lamu we have a different tribe and in Muranga we have a different one too.

Again it also depends on culture and religion. In terms of religion, most of people here are Muslims where in Muranga we have more Christians.

In Muranga, there is intimidation of women too but the level is very low. In Lamu, you will also find that women did not have right to education in the past. It’s not only here; you will find that too in other tribes here in Kenya.

Today we can say that things are different, women are going to school ... Now it’s all the same. Girls are being educated everywhere. (B. Wanjiku, personal communication, April 14, 2008)
Popular educators and community organizers must therefore be aware of these differences in their work. Fatma Ali Busaidy works for the Education Office at the Lamu Fort Museum. She explained:

I work with different people. I answer to women, to students, with youths, and with groups, and with nursery schools. We work within their curriculum to offer different programs, and different activities. We are arranging alternately our work to compare with short targets, and it depends what things they want to teach them.

If you enter into this program, you are not able to discriminate. When you go to schools, you will find that all tribes have their children enrolled in school. Therefore, when you are teaching, all of the children would like to get involved. They have been mixed. Even when they play, they are playing together. Now, even when you meet a child of a Pokomo or a Kikuyu, you will hear that they have taken the accent of Kiamu, because they are talking with their peers, and they have adopted the culture, the customs and traditions of the place. Even others are wearing the hijab and praying like the others, because they have become Muslims, and they want to dress and become like the others. Therefore, we consider them to be with us, to be our children. People are very mixed here.

Even if you go to a wedding, you will see that they invite all of their friends. Your neighbors might be Kikuyu, or Indian, and you invite everyone. Some like to come to the weddings, and others don’t like to come. (F.A. Busaidy, personal communication, September 24, 2008)

However, Busaidy also admitted that this acceptance of different ethnic groups is conditional on the acceptance of the Islamic religion.

Except, if you have not accepted Islam, then you will not be invited. They will only come if they feel free. Like, how will they feel when they start reading the Qur’an? But they might not come to a school to read the Qur’an. If it is a wedding, they will be invited. And this, they will want to come to a wedding to celebrate, because it is free. Women, and everyone, and visitors, many people will come to celebrate and they are happy. This they like to come and watch. Like when we do the henna celebrations, we feel proud, and we want people to see our traditions. We are feeling very happy when people see our traditions. They are feeling very good about themselves and their culture. And if they feel shy, they will say it. (F.A. Busaidy, personal communication, September 24, 2008)
Finally, the heterogeneity of forms and functions of grassroots women’s groups helps us to understand how women are organizing beyond “social welfare” to meet the diverse needs of women in different contexts. Women’s organizations emerge from local needs and priorities that are identified by women in their communities. Because of differences of geography, culture, religion, language, class, and education, women’s projects change in different times and places. Different programs and projects evolve in different communities that are cognizant and responsive of regional differences in environment, economy, and culture.

**Facilitation and Control**

Another core principle of feminist popular education is attention to power dynamics in facilitation and control of the learning process. Popular education programs vary in the degree of direction given to learners. This can range in a “continuum between a free or open-ended process and goal orientation” (Walters and Manicom, 1996, p. 18). In general, feminist popular education is concerned with raising awareness about gender issues and improving the conditions of women’s lives. However, the process may vary from a radically democratic one, where participants have full control over the process and the analysis and objectives that emerge from it, to “working educationally with women in order to impart a political analysis and realize a plan for action” (p. 18). Popular education processes may be open-ended and spontaneous, or they could include workshop-based experiences with specific objectives and clear goals to be achieved.
The formal education system in Kenya has largely been shaped by the colonial British system, which tended to be authoritarian and punitive. This pedagogical process may be characterized as a “banking system” where learners are treated like empty vessels that must be filled with the knowledge of the teacher. Popular education must counter this top-down process, explicitly adopting alternative, learner-centered methods.

Feminist popular educators must be reflective of the dynamics between educators and learners, and must seek to equalize the power dynamics to create a peer education process. One of the core values is working with, not for, women. Peer education is vital to learners feeling valued and included in the process. Their experience and knowledge must be the basis upon which the curriculum is structured – not the authority and expertise of the teacher.

There is a tension between eliciting and directing popular education, particularly in groups where some members may be antagonistic to each other or to a feminist or anti-oppression orientation, as in mixed-gender groups. Also, in all-women groups, complex dynamics may emerge around race, class or ethnic identities. I was very conscious throughout my research about the power dynamics of group meetings, and the ways that I could observe hierarchy and control. In some groups, I noticed that some members tended to dominate the meetings, particularly those who had attained a higher status through education or income. Some members were just particularly outgoing, outspoken, assertive or directive. I observed several instances where leaders would approach the other members of the group as subordinates, or where some voices would speak in a monologue while others would remain silent.
When men were present, they were almost always serving in leadership roles and would dominate the group meetings and the conversation during my focus group interviews. I became very concerned about this when I witnessed several instances of male dominance and corruption happening in so-called “women’s groups” that had become co-opted and controlled by powerful male elites. For example, I heard many complaints from the women involved with the Vidasico basket-weaving cooperative about the alleged corruption of the leader of the organization. They claimed that he was profiting from selling their baskets while charging them high fees for participating in this “fair trade” marketing project. He had collected thousands of shillings from the eighteen women’s groups in the cooperative, which he then used to purchase a motorcycle for himself. He would demand payment from them for his services as their “broker” but then would delay payment for the baskets that they had made, claiming that he had not found a good market for them in Denmark. Some women claimed that he refused to pay them a good price because their baskets were not of a high enough quality. Although he weaved a great story about the “fair trade” practices of Vidasico, I witnessed several instances of women complaining and protesting at group meetings about his shady business practices. Luckily, I knew enough Kiswahili to figure out what they were angry about, and I realized that I needed to go directly to the groups and listen to the women, rather than relying on this “middle-man” for information.

These observations led me to think about how to change my own practices in the interview process, to encourage women to participate and speak up more. I started to explore the issue of participation, and how to deal with people who dominate as well as
those who remain silent. Walters and Manicom (1996) posited some questions that popular educators must confront:

How much does one intervene to establish a putative ‘equality’ in participation in the education context? Or should those with more socially conferred power be given less opportunity to dominate proceedings? Should hierarchies and roles be allowed to emerge within a learning group? (p. 19)

Similarly, after a meeting with the Sere Farmers’ Field School in Mwatate, I observed in my field notes:

I did notice that the chairman was rather dominant – he spoke for much of the meeting. A few times he would interrupt others when they would start talking and I would stay focused on them and ignore him. This strategy tended to work. I tried to make it clear that I was there to focus on women’s education and women’s groups. But I wonder how this makes the men feel?

I also worried that I should try to facilitate these meetings differently. It takes skilful facilitation to ensure that everyone will talk. I need to ask for more than their names when we introduce ourselves. Maybe I could ask why they joined or to share one positive experience or thing they have learned from their involvement in the group – an icebreaker to get people feeling comfortable with talking. (Cutcher, field notes, May 2008)

Feminist popular educators require a set of “particular skills, knowledge and understanding and these must often be acquired ‘on the job’” (Walters and Manicom, 1996, p. 19). Many women’s groups use a participatory process of feminist popular education based on peers teaching each other about particular issues. Fatma Salim Al-Busaidy explained how Maendeleo ya Wanawake groups in Lamu are facilitated through a process of peer education:

We are teaching women how to write proposals so that they can get money and educate each other in the villages. Then the traditional beliefs, we should take them away. We are trying as women. When they are in groups, they teach each other. We teach Training of Trainers through seminars and workshops… We teach people in madrassa. We teach things to do with peace and how to live with other people. The rules of living with other people, mothers’ responsibility to children, children’s responsibility to parents because children
have expectations from parents and children have responsibilities to their parents. We also teach about the responsibility of a wife toward your husband. So it’s a form of education on life, religion and culture. If there is a child who is needy, or there is a neighbor’s child who cannot afford to get clothing. Mostly it’s education. *Empowerment.* (F.S. Al-Busaidy, personal communication, September 27, 2008)

Facilitators must have the respect and trust of the people they work with in order to be effective. Fatma Ali Busaidy of the Education Office of the Lamu Fort Museum explained that she has worked with a number of groups to identify facilitators for workshops.

If there is a certain thing that they want to know about, they will tell us themselves. And sometimes we will find a facilitator for them. It depends. Very often times, they do not want to invite a facilitator who does not know them, who does not understand. Therefore, we have to plan, to invite, and to plan well to get someone to speak with them. (F. Ali Busaidy, personal communication, September 24, 2008)

Therefore, it is vitally important to select a facilitator who understands the context of the community and respects their needs and values. These peer facilitators need training programs that prepare them with the training and support they need to reach their communities effectively.

Peer facilitation is also used by a variety of programs sponsored by women’s groups, including microfinance projects and reproductive health workshops. Amina Kale of Kikozi explained how her training and experience as a schoolteacher helps her in her work as a peer facilitator:

Because you know, even in this work, often I am the facilitator for these workshops that we lead. And many times, if we sit, with the groups, I teach about how to open accounts, how to work as women’s groups, how to do projects, and other issues. These things we are often teaching to them. (A. Kale, personal communication, September 22, 2008)
Kale is also a peer facilitator with the APHIA II project in Lamu. This program is funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and is based on a peer education model, where peer educators are trained to lead workshops among their own groups for awareness and prevention of HIV/AIDS. These peer educators represent different “clusters” of women’s groups, men’s groups, and youth groups. In Amu Division, thirteen women’s groups came together to implement the workshops, including: Kikozi, Amani, Al-Nasiha, Tunu, Mkomani, Mwangaza, Muungano, Hiraki, Mada, Riadha, Jitahidi, Pajero, and Wastara women’s groups. The men’s groups were led by the Council of Imams and Preachers of Kenya (CIPK) and facilitated by Abubakar Shakure, the chairman of CIPK. Tawasal and Tushauriane Youth Groups facilitate the youth cluster, among others.

To participate in the APHIA II program, peer educators are trained over a period of six days, and then they disperse the information to their fellow community members. Kikozi is the organization leading the project, and they distribute the information to members of the clusters, or the representatives of women’s groups, men’s groups, and youth groups. Sauda Kassim is a member of the Al-Nasiha Women’s Group, a teacher at Mkomani Girls’ Primary School, and the wife of Ustadh Mau, a prominent Imam of the Pwani Mosque. She explained:

Me, I am a member of the steering committee and also a peer educator of APHIA II. The steering committee is different. You are a leader and you administer your group. It is very good. It is very good to teach people, and to discuss with people. You get a lot of feelings, and you change their minds, immediately. You change, because when you see the situation, it is when you change. Then, you know, because you have been taught.

We got it a while ago, and we started planning. We are beginning to teach now. This Ramadan, we were going for the reciting, the reading of the Qur’an,
there are weeks of reading of the Qur’an. Yes, the time of, at night, we go for prayers. After prayers, for ten minutes you talk to them, about behavior change, and other things. If they have any questions, you can discuss with them.

After Ramadan, we are still going on. Even in schools, we are teaching about APHIA II. Because I am a peer educator, also I am a teacher. So if I get time, I am also teaching the girls, because I am the one to make the work plan. I straddle time, from this time to this time, we are staying behind.

Being a peer educator is very good. Me, if I go there, I sit there, every day, we are talking about trainings, to add our intelligence and knowledge, to know how those sick people are. And we learn how to help others. (S. Kassim, personal communication, September 29, 2008)

Kassim revealed that she can share the knowledge she has gained through her multiple roles in the community – as a peer educator, a schoolteacher, and the wife of a religious leader. This demonstrates the immense value of training peer facilitators who are intimately engaged in their communities and can disperse knowledge in a variety of settings.

I attended an APHIA II meeting for women in October. Over one hundred women and children attended the event, which was held in the afternoon in an open space on the edge of Lamu Town near Kashmir. The meeting included prayer, songs, poetry, theater, and speeches by several community leaders. One of the conveners announced the following message:

Women peer educators organized this event. Educators, you have shown us your job and we, women, want to take the lead and go beyond men and also do more than the youth who are queuing in the VCTs.

We are going to call you Bi Amina to come and test us with our families. We want to know our status at home. Our boys, our girls and our men. Isn’t that true? Because that is the way we will know about our health. I want to thank everyone, the groups, women groups, doctors, and everyone who is here.

There are other two people who I would like to introduce so that you can cooperate with them to promote these activities. There is Amina Bunu, and Halima, who work with Community Health Department at the General District hospital. These two, if you want to talk to them in private, they will give you advice on HIV/AIDS. If you know someone who needs more advice, you can
direct them. Also if there is someone who needs testing, you can also direct them to Madam Amina who is your neighbor here or Halima at the hospital. Even on the road, if you see her, tell her I am ready I want to know my status, she is going to help you. (APHIA II Workshop, October 10, 2008)

Therefore, women are encouraged to get tested for HIV at the local hospital or Voluntary Counseling and Testing Centre (VCT) to know their status. This process is demystified as the women are introduced to familiar friends and people from their community who could assist them. They are encouraged to be proactive about their health care and to recognize that there is help available from their peers.

Hababa Noor explained how this unique process of peer education was developed through the men’s, women’s and youth clusters in the APHIA II program:

Yes, I have discussed with a few people who are working on the project, APHIA II. And CIPK are helping to teach men, and Kikozi are teaching women, and Tawasal are teaching youths. It is like they have really joined hands. But they are specialized, like peer educators.

Therefore, there are men clusters, women clusters, youth clusters. That idea came with the APHIA II project. They say that when they discuss health matters, especially HIV/AIDS, often it is better for women to be by themselves, so that they feel more open and free. If the men are alone, they will feel more open. If the youths are alone, they will feel more open. Therefore, to put them together, maybe there is something you want to say which would help, but they will be afraid to say it, because they will be afraid that, “If I say this, others would think bad things about me.” (H. Noor, personal communication, September 27, 2008)

Noor reflects that secrecy, silence, stigma and shame usually get in the way of open and honest dialogues about HIV/AIDS in Kenyan communities. She asserts that peer facilitators can put learners at ease, as people tend to feel more comfortable to discuss sex when surrounded by their peers.

Christine Kilalo also described a process of peer facilitation and training of trainers in groups. Reflecting on her work at World Neighbors, she explained how peer
education workshops can be done in a variety of formats. First, she described an informal situation:

The systems and methods that are in place to help people analyze their situation … is a time consuming thing. You know, the way we have stayed here, it is for over one hour, for example. We are just talking informally, maybe one of us is more informed. For me and you, we are doing it in a very informal manner, because of our level of exposure, and education. So I can talk and talk for hours, and you are capturing everything. But you will ask a question or two, and I explain. That is in an informal setting.

You can do that also with women’s groups, but touching on an issue of their own. But then you start listening to them, and you ask them questions, and as they answer those questions, they are learning. So, at the end of the session, you will hear one or two, “Ai! You know today, I have really learned something!” You know, something like that. That is the informal one. (C. Kilalo, personal communication, February 6, 2008)

She then described the types of activities she would include in a more structured, formal workshop setting:

But when you want it very structured, it is good to be in a workshop setting. Usually, in my experiences, I have done like a maximum of 40 participants, where you are having a facilitator for ten. And then you structure what is it that you want to take people through. What is it you are helping them to discover for themselves?

Because you take a situation, and you have a process of doing it. Either it is role plays, or if it is pictures, and then you have a systematic way of asking questions. And as you ask these questions, they are describing different scenarios, until they make the discovery. At the end of it, if it is something you want them to change, in terms of behavior, then they come up with an actual plan.

If it is gathering information with their farms, then you have taken them through this whole process. It is raining on their land, for example. If that process does not lead them to discover, so that they are coming with an action plan at the end, which they are going to implement. Not just an action in the air, but an action they are committing to themselves. And they are doing something about it, because they have discovered it is really something on their own. Then that is leading to transformation. (C. Kilalo, personal communication, February 6, 2008)

Regardless of the format, these workshops take a great deal of time, which can be the most precious resource for many participants. Kilalo insisted that it was a valuable
investment to give people a space to brainstorm and to come up with their own solutions to community problems:

But then, all you have done, is sit with them, you have invested time to help them, to learn from their own experiences. So, you can do it in an informal setting, or in a more formal way. But you see, it needs to be structured. It is expensive – expensive in terms of time. And then, as we have said, time is a key resource for a lot of these people. And I see some of them invested a lot of time. If it is a year of farming, they are investing time to go for casual work, so that they can get cash. If it is that dollar, or less than a dollar, go get some food for their lives. So, even when you structure those kinds of things, if you want it to succeed, you can’t do it in a very big setting. It’s got to be in smaller units. And it takes time! (C. Kilalo, personal communication, February 6, 2008)

Therefore, women’s organizations in Kenya work as a vehicle for education and training. Through unique processes of peer facilitation, they provide training, capacity-building, and development of the skills of their members. Women’s organizations embrace all forms of education, from formal, informal, and non-formal education. They promote business development, financial management, and entrepreneurship. They influence a cultural revival of indigenous knowledge systems and local ways of knowing that are inclusive of women and girls. They utilize local languages, media, and resources to remain relevant to the ideas of the learners.

**Gender Awareness and Feminist Politics**

Another core principle of feminist popular education is to build awareness of gender dynamics and roles, and to sensitize both women and men about gender relations. Popular educators differ in their approaches, from allowing gender awareness to “emerge in an undirected process, or to work with a more explicit feminist analysis and the
objective of promoting critical reflection and transformation of oppressive gender relations” (Walters and Manicom, 1996, p. 20).

“Gender training” has become a key field of popular education, with a clear agenda to raise sensitivity about how gender structures social life and economic development. Hope and Timmel (1999) reflect that popular education programs now incorporate a “feminist gender analysis, which recognizes how central women are in the creation and maintenance of a culture” (p. viii). Gender and development has been a core feature of training in popular education programs throughout Africa. Moreover, there is a new understanding about the effects of gender discrimination and the importance of greater equality and power-sharing between men and women. Again, popular educators do not address gender in isolation, but they are also “concerned about the re-emergence of overt and covert racism in many western countries, and of deep and ancient ethnic hostilities in situations of extreme scarcity” (p. viii). Hope and Timmel note that in the context of poverty, different systems of oppression tend to overlap, and it is necessary to draw connections between racism, sexism, classism, and political and cultural conflicts. This is particularly important as movements for democratization sweep across the world, and new questions and challenges are arising about whether democracy really works in different contexts. Current popular education programs must incorporate these issues into their work to be relevant to meeting the needs of contemporary adult learners.

Some organizations engage learners in dialogues about the gendered division of labor or the social construction of gender roles. Others examine religious scriptures or cultural traditions that oppress females while enabling male dominance. Part of this
process includes consciousness-raising and an attention to spiritual growth and religious fellowship. I really struggled with this issue in Lamu, as I observed strict demarcations between male and female spaces and the rules of appropriate behavior that circumscribed men’s and women’s lives. I heard women articulating their rights primarily in the context of their roles as wives and mothers. As a “Third Wave” American feminist, I bristled at what seemed like a docile acceptance of oppression and second-class status among women, and a revival of the “Feminine Mystique” ideas of the U.S. in the 1950s (Friedan, 1963).

However, I realized that my position as a feminist was also tempered by my training as an anthropologist who is taught to reserve judgment, maintain objectivity, and to practice cultural relativism. Rather than assuming their seclusion and domestic orientation was inherently oppressive, I learned to listen to women and to respect their beliefs in the primacy of their roles as wives and mothers. I learned that women in Lamu are very conscious about their gender roles and they work around these expectations to get what they need and want. I also learned that Islam is not inherently oppressive to women, and I heard many women assert their rights in the context of the Qur’an, Hadith, and the Sunna. I learned that religion can be used in the context of liberation theology, and that women could cite the scriptures to support their goals for gender equality and women’s rights. This was a valuable lesson for me, and allowed me to understand the value of allowing gender awareness to emerge in an undirected process in its own context.
For example, the Al-Nasiha Women’s Group started as a religious group of six women who would meet in a house weekly to read the Qur’an. Now the group has expanded to forty members and includes peer educators who teach in the APHIA II program and teachers who have initiated a “Girls Forum” in the schools. This group is engaged in consciousness-raising by bringing women and girls together to discuss problems and issues important to them. Sauda Kassim reflected on the positive benefits of her involvement in Al-Nasiha:

We started with six people. We were teachers, and others, and we would meet to read the Qur’an. We would meet and read here, then after reading, we would call others, and we would advertise, and others would come. We sit there, and then we would give advice. Outside, we would call people, then, they would come. When we were small, we would just meet in a house. And we would come and we would discuss things about the behavior of people. Like neighbors. And others in this way. We would enter there, and we would discuss how neighbors should live, if they do this, what should you do to live well together? We would show them different things about life.

Then we would call girls, and we would call them to Lamu Fort, and we would do a forum for girls. For girls from different areas – like two from Shela, and two from Mokowe, and two from different places – then we would invite around twenty. Then we would call them and we would do trainings at Lamu Fort, in this way. We would call all of them for gathering, and we would train them. We would discuss things about social development also. Peer educators would be trained, like with APHIA II. It moved from there.

We do many things. Like we help orphans. We do business. We help people. We do trainings, seminars. We teach women and girls about behavior change, and others about diseases. For example, about disease, from before, mwenyezimi (the elders) said “It is not good for a woman to welcome her husband during her monthly period. It will have bad results. Because the woman is dirty, and it is dirty when you do that thing, and he can get a disease.” Like if you did not clean yourself, you are getting a certain disease. Therefore, if you don’t wash yourself well, this way. We also teach them about different infections, and others about malaria, and about HIV/AIDS. I am also a peer educator, and I am trained about counseling. I am able to counsel women. (S. Kassim, personal communication, September 29, 2008)
Kassim revealed that this group works within the doctrines and teachings of Islam to influence women’s involvement in the community, service to others, and empowerment.

Similarly, Christian women in Kenya are also engaged in examining the sexist ideas that place women at a subordinate status to men. They are revealing that these ideas have their roots in traditional cultural practices, and they are raising questions about the sexism that is embedded in the religious teachings of Christian churches. Janet Kadari, the leader of *Maendeleo ya Wanawake* in Mwatate, asserted: “I think we should find ways and means of getting women out of the shackles of traditional custom. I think the best solution is to speak to them. If women leaders and I can go round Mwatate talking to women about their problems and listening to them, then it would help” (J. Kadari, personal communication, June 9, 2008).

Beth Wanjiku of Lamu reflected on the critical consciousness that she has gained from involvement in her women’s group:

> When women come together they are able to offload themselves of stress and they share their problems and come up with solutions and that has really helped. In the past, a woman was not even able to leave the house; they were stuck with the responsibility of bringing up their children. You could not see them on the streets; they were not supposed to talk even in the house. They even responded when their husband just coughed to know what the problem was.

> Nowadays, I thank God that culture is not static. It changes with time. The Bible says that a wise son is a pride to his father, but a stupid one is a burden to the mother. Why should he be a burden to the mother and not to the father? So the woman was intimidated long time ago. God created us as equal but man corrupted everything. A woman was not born. A man was created and a woman too. A woman was created from the rib of the man.

> Intimidation was brought just by the people. That’s what we are teaching women; they should not kneel down and let themselves to be overburdened. We have to work hard and free ourselves. (B. Wanjiku, personal communication, April 14, 2008)
Constance Kilalo also works with Christian women through her involvement with *Maendeleo ya Wanawake* in Wongonyi. She reflected that MYWO groups used to focus solely on practical concerns such as domestic skills and social welfare projects. Many of these skills focused on how to be a good housewife and mother:

> We used to teach women how to communicate, how to take care of the family, a good woman disciplines her children and takes care of her husband … I taught women how to wash their children, take them to the clinic, plant vegetables in their vegetable gardens, they would plant tomatoes and other vegetables so that they could make a balanced diet for their children, they would mix the vegetables with meat, beans etc. We taught them not to sell their eggs and buy sugar, which has no nutrients, but they should instead feed the eggs to their children. We taught women how to bring up their children. We also taught them how to cook. (C. Kilalo, personal communication, February 10, 2008)

However, as time went on, Kilalo has noticed significant changes in the lives and positions of women in Taita. She reflected on how women’s groups have helped women to raise awareness about sexist programming and have changed the nature of gender relations in Taita:

> That is what we taught the women because as Taitas, we belong to a lower social strata but God brought us a bit higher. Only men used to talk in gatherings and the women would not talk before men. We taught them that that was not the case, and when their time to speak came they should take it and speak. We taught them how to get involved in politics and how to welcome people …

> Women now have assumed positions of leadership. They can speak in front of men. They can speak in the office. They can get paid employment without a problem. They do not have to depend on men now, women can be independent. If a woman has her own vegetable plot or a beans plot she can help bring up the family with the husband. There has been tremendous change since those days. (C. Kilalo, personal communication, February 10, 2008)

Civic education is also a key part of this process. In Lamu and Taita districts, popular educators working with the Federation of Women Lawyers of Kenya (FIDA-Kenya) held seminars and workshops that explained the constitutional referendum
process. In Lamu, some educators assisted local women to analyze the draft constitution in light of Islamic Sharia laws and women’s rights according to the Qur’an. Women learned that some rights protected by the Islamic kadhi courts - such as divorce, inheritance, property ownership, and child support – were not protected by current Kenyan laws or the proposed revised constitution. Groups such as URAIA traveled throughout the country to educate citizens about the proposed legal changes so that they would be informed to vote accordingly. As more women got involved in these debates, key legal reforms were introduced such as the Sexual Offenses Act, the Children’s Act, and other laws pertaining to marriage, divorce, customary law, wife inheritance, and other rights of women and children. This civic education process led to a more informed electorate that galvanized around the constitutional referendum processes in 2005 and 2010 and the national elections in 2007. As a result, women have started voting in record numbers and have become increasingly involved in political life. Women have also been able to access popular media such as radio, TV, cell phones, internet, newspapers, magazines, and other outlets to bring their concerns to the larger public and to influence the national debate about gender issues and policies.

Women have also started to learn about the contributions of their foremothers to Kenya’s history. While the dominant discourse celebrates the roles of men in the independence struggle, for example, history is now being rewritten and retold to reveal women’s important roles. Eileen Mwaita of the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK) Mothers’ Union recalled:

For women in Kenya, I think our history has given us encouragement. Because, for example, in the struggle for independence, it is not only the men who were
involved. The women too! Women were great supporters of the men. They would make sure that the men got food supplies. They would also risk their lives, to make sure that life continued for the men in the forest. Yes. And so, that is part of our history. And also, when the missionaries came, they encouraged women to also join formal education. I think I am a product of the missionaries’ efforts, because my mother was the first-born. And she went to school with her father! And my late grandfather was a clergy man. (E. Mwaita, personal communication, February 6, 2008)

The women’s movement has sparked a greater awareness in many women about their rights and abilities to affect social, political, and economic changes. Hababa Noor mused about how women’s groups in Lamu have awakened women’s consciousness about their strength:

The women’s movement is one thing in which I feel I have succeeded. I would be sure that I started these women’s groups. There are many things that women have started, like themselves, when they woke up, they did not know their abilities. Like, if you start to organize women, they will know this is their ability, their strength.

There were many tools that were destroying women. And women especially had a lot of fear. But from the beginning, we awoke women in that movement. Like, our rights are this, and the law says this, and the constitution says this. If you do this, you will make a mistake, or break the law. Therefore, run … so that you can get your rights. Meaning, if you know your rights, you will be able to fight for yourself in this way. You are certain that the life in Lamu would be changed. This enlightenment needs political ability and strength. (H. Noor, personal communication, September 27, 2008)

This dialogue about gender and politics has also filtered down into a greater awareness of gender issues at the level of family and community life. Women and girls have been engaged in a critique of the educational system, examining the barriers to formal education. By analyzing their problems, they have been able to find solutions and meet needs through organizing different projects.

For example, this process has contributed to a growing debate about the controversial tensions between gender rights and cultural rights, such as the issue of
female circumcision and alternative rites of passage, or the growing awareness about the rights of marriage and divorce. At the APHIA II workshop in Lamu, one speaker raised awareness about the dangers of HIV/AIDS to young men and women who are entering marriage. She warned that families should be insistent upon testing of potential suitors and disclosure of their HIV status before accepting marriage proposals for their daughters:

Also, this is not the old world we knew where you heard one is married, tomorrow you are divorced, there next day you inside a different place. What do we say about you when you are being married and left all the times? Those things have come to an end. We need to have different approaches, it’s a new world.

If your daughter is being married by any man, don’t just accept it. You have to go for testing before marriage. Don’t just say a blessing has come. You may take it as a blessing and take it quickly but you will realize it’s not a blessing anymore but ill luck. When a husband is in your family and has infected your daughter with what he got elsewhere, you will realize it is not a blessing anymore but ill luck. We want the luck… want the husband but we want good health. It’s better not to have a husband and be disease free. It is better for your daughter to not have a husband but her body is safe instead of saying… there is no need of taking back the one who has been sent because if you tell him to go and get tested he will change and want to go to another place. But, know whether the one who wants you is healthy or not healthy. This is the big issue. Are you going to bring disease to your hands and bring it in to your house? You must get tested. Don’t just take the husband, neither should you just be tested alone. You should all be tested, both couples before getting marriage and ensure the safety of their bodies. It might be that the husband is not infected, but the wife is. (APHIA II workshop, personal communication, October 10, 2008)

Sauda Kassim also explained that she and other peer educators teach women about sexuality and reproductive health. Women and girls have many questions about how to get pregnant, and about sex, but they do not feel free to discuss this in most settings. Traditionally, women would learn about sex from an aunt or another female relative known as a somo, but this culture is changing today. Therefore, women’s groups have
replaced this traditional system of sex education and are advising women about their sexual and reproductive health.

One issue that is consistently overlooked in gender and development programs, and in gender awareness trainings, is an analysis of masculinity and how men might influence social change. Godwin Murunga of Kenyatta University really challenged me to examine this issue in my research. He maintains that too much emphasis is placed on the role of women in development, with not enough attention to the impact of men and masculinities. Similarly, women cannot be considered in isolation, but must be seen in the larger context of their families and communities. I struggled with this tension and growing awareness in my field notes:

I thought about what I had observed in this group – the dynamics of gender and the different vibe when a man leads a group, but the majority of members are women. I also thought about how my view of women’s groups may be a bit narrow, and I could be jaded about men’s participation based on what I “expect” to see from women’s groups.

Glesne (2006) discusses a group of researchers in Latin America who were solely focused on children, but their hosts kept responding that they were focused on the whole family. Because these people were so focused on children, they could not see that the notion of community development, and even child welfare, in that culture was very centered around empowering and including the whole family – not separating one part of it into a discrete entity. Indeed, you cannot deal with children without dealing also with parents, with the lives of adults.

Similarly, I cannot expect to always deal with women as a separate category within Kenyan culture. Women are part and parcel of their families and communities – their identity is inextricably tied to husbands, children, relatives, churches, neighbors, etc. Women cannot be dealt with as a separate category but recognized for their integral roles and multiple identities within communities and families. (C. Cutcher, field notes, May 2008)
Finally, it is important to recognize that women’s roles are changing as providers and breadwinners for their families. Janet Kadari, the chairperson of *Maendeleo ya Wanawake* in Mwatate, reflected:

> So the problems that cause poverty among women are so many. We should cooperate and see if we can help women. Although there are many problems, women cooperate very well. Women are more willing to participate than men. Have ever attended parents’ days in schools? You will find out that more women will turn up. (J. Kadari, personal communication, June 9, 2008)

Indeed, women’s contributions to education and community development are becoming recognized widely in Kenyan society. This is changing the perceptions of gender relations and leadership. Victoria Dali Mwamburi, the chairperson of *Maendeleo ya Wanawake* for Mwacha sublocation in Taita, asserted:

> Women have great capacity to bring about development. This is especially so if they are educated and are not oppressed by their husbands. With education and freedom, then women are the best agents of development. If a woman is given freedom to for example run her business, she is even able to cater or the needs of the family. This is especially so if there is love in the house and the woman is at peace. Women are more hardworking than men are and through Non-Governmental organizations, they have an avenue through which they can rise. Women have that motherly instinct and would want their children to dress well, eat well and have good education and good health. I think that if it was women who were given the responsibility to take care of men and head their households, then Kenya would be a very good place. (V.D. Mwamburi, personal communication, May 30, 2008)

**Space, Time and Place for Learning**

The final core principle of feminist popular education is a concern about finding appropriate spaces, times and places for learning and organizing. The importance of a particular space and place for popular education with women should not be underestimated. “Given the responsibilities of most women for family care and
household management, a place away from the ‘everyday’ and from home is often a catalyst in an empowering education process” (Walters and Manicom, 1996, p. 20). Having a separate space, away from home, where women can meet independently to work together and share their stories can have a very transformative effect. This can “prompt shifts in the confidence of women and in their understandings of themselves” (p. 20). Reproducing a sense of ‘home’ or a sanctuary to meet in a neutral place can help to build trust with other women, which is important in situations where women feel “massively silenced and undermined” (p. 21).

Meetings of women’s groups in Kenya are often held in private homes or in more public spaces such as local schools, churches, mosques, or baraza. Hadija Bwanaadi Ernst asserted that madrassa or Qur’anic schools provide a special and appropriate place for women to gather for informal education in Lamu:

It’s an education, it’s a way of getting information out, because it is a group of women from the community. So, the mosque, or the madrassa, forms the venue for these women to come. They might be doing prayers, whatever, but it’s always the place where announcements are made, and educational forums are happening. Madrassa form a time and a place for information and education, so for women, that’s also the case. And these were older women. These are not youths. Because there are madrassa for youths as well, but this was a women’s thing. So if you want information to be heard through the households, you kind of reach into the households, then you can talk to the women in the madrassa. So, I think probably, madrassa might be a place where you could see kind of informal education occurring. Because it’s a place where women can go. They will not be questioned for going to the madrassa. (H.B. Ernst, personal communication, April 7, 2008)

Sauda Kassim also discussed the role of the madrassa in women’s lives and education in Lamu. She recounted the activities of the Al-Nasiha Women’s Group, which meets every day at the madrassa where her husband teaches:
We are meeting every day, from 4:00 until 6:00. After their work, every person comes out. Saturday we are teaching, we are teaching them about behavior change, anything he is planning with the patrons, the teachers there. Sunday, we are going for Arabic classes plus Qur’an reading, the citation of the Qur’an. Sunday is the day of reading the Qur’an. Then Monday, we are praying. Tuesday, we are praying. Wednesday, we are going for library lessons. Like, at this hour we are reading, because other people don’t know how to read. Those are watching a cassette. Or we are watching about issues of AIDS, or issues of behavior change, or somebody is talking about something. Thursday, we do prep work. Friday is Ijumaa, and we pray and rest.

Like if they are not able to read, on Saturday, they are given lectures. This is bad, this is wrong, this is right. And they can ask questions. It is mixed – girls, women, old, it is a mixture. But on Sunday, most of the Sundays we do our own meeting. Women’s group meeting. We are sitting, and we are discussing. This Sunday we are doing a meeting. Next Sunday we are going out for lecturing. (S. Kassim, personal communication, September 29, 2008)

Therefore, the madrassa is seen as an appropriate place for women to meet and to discuss issues affecting their lives, to seek advice and counseling, to engage in religious study and prayer, and to work on projects and income-generating activities.

Some women’s groups meet in more public spaces, such as schools and outdoor areas. Amina Kale of Kikozi revealed that the APHIA II meetings and workshops are often held in the schools, which are considered to be a neutral, public space. Even imams and preachers will conduct workshops in the schools, which is the regular place for workshops to be held. Some workshops are also held outdoors in good weather, such as the APHIA II workshop that I observed:

It was a long, hot day, and the end of Idd after a long month of fasting. Everyone was still celebrating and taking it easy. The workshop took place in the gadeni (garden) area, the edge of town where the trash is dumped and where mango and coconut trees sway in the breeze. The sandy ground was covered with large mkeka mats made of woven palms, where women and children sat in clustered groups, chatting and laughing and playing and breastfeeding and watching each other. Another group of women in black buibuis sat in plastic chairs in a cluster by the “head table”, where the microphone was placed. Another circle of people,
including a loud and rowdy group of mashoga (gay men), crowded around the edges of the gathering. (C. Cutcher, field notes, October 10, 2008)

“Women’s space” becomes more defined in Muslim communities, where men and women are segregated into public and private spaces by the dictates of purdah, demanding respectability and modesty. In Lamu, women’s groups often meet privately in homes, madrassa, at the Lamu Fort, or on the edge of town under the trees. The privacy and seclusion of women and girls is required by local customs, and this makes it difficult for some women to find an appropriate place for large meetings. Because men are also occupying the outdoors, many women have not been allowed to gather in public, because they fear that unrelated men would see them. For example, women are often excluded from religious and cultural activities at the mosques because they are done publicly. Fatma Ali Busaidy recalled:

At Riyadh Mosque, we went in the sixth month, and they did many different things. They had a ngoma (drumming and dancing ritual) ... and they did this on the side of the women. They said it is not good for the women to mix with the men. We missed the celebrations. (F. Ali Busaidy, personal communication, September 24, 2008)

The Lamu Fort and town square is one public place that is seen as an appropriate gathering space for both public and private occasions. Fatma Ali Busaidy explained:

With school children, we meet here inside of the Fort at 2:00 p.m. There is a big auditorium, where we meet inside. If we want to do an open, public presentation, we meet outside in the town square at night, every Friday.

This is not a program of Ramadan. We have closed during Ramadan. Because during Ramadan at night, people are going to pray, and we would be outcast. We have also to respect the culture of the community, and their religion.

Yes, here at Lamu Fort, this is a house where we do a lot of community activities. Here we have workshops, seminars, weddings, many things are done in a place like this. This is a big house in the center of the city, and many generous people want to do their parties and celebrations here. Because we are part and parcel of the community, and we are happy that many people want to have their
parties in a place like this. (F. Ali Busaidy, personal communication, September 24, 2008)

She then discussed the custom of hosting weddings at the Lamu Fort. The official ceremony takes place in the *kadhi* courts, but the celebrations for the men and women are segregated. Often, women will have private wedding celebrations at the Lamu Fort. She explained the tradition of privacy and seclusion during weddings:

Many weddings are done here. Not one, not two. Perhaps in August, we had about twenty or more weddings. Nearly every day. It was fully booked. And there are many types of weddings. There are weddings for reading Maulidi, there are weddings for playing drums, and there are *Taarab* weddings. Every person does that type of wedding that they like. Others are doing lunch, others are doing weddings at night.

They do the wedding celebrations here, for women. Meaning, women are very close, very private. Even when they are dancing, they cannot see a man present. There are only women who are inside. Outside, they are able to wear the *buibui*, they are able to wear the *hijab*. Then they take off the *buibui*, they take off the *hijab*. Then we can wear our nicest clothes, we can wear whatever we like. We are free. We dance.

We can dance whatever we like. You see, it depends on what the wedding people want to dance. We can dance *Chakacha*, we can dance to *Taarab*, we can dance to Zanzibar songs, we can play *Kishuri*, we can sing the songs of Maulidi – you know, we can read the stories of the birth of the Prophet. These days, if you read the Maulidi, we cover ourselves with the *hijab*. Like the time of Maulidi, we cover ourselves with the *hijab*. So, there are many types of weddings. It depends on what you want to do, whatever the bride likes.

... But, here (at the Fort) it is not enough. It is hot. There is sun. Here, we have weddings during the night, when there is no sun and it is cooler. Also, the rain could come. See, there are many difficulties here in Lamu. (F. Ali Busaidy, personal communication, September 24, 2008)

Because of these restrictions on women’s space and activities, Ali Busaidy demonstrated the need to construct a large social hall for women to hold private gatherings, weddings, and other celebrations in Lamu. She wistfully recalled the old days and the types of dances that women could do privately. She was concerned that this
culture will be lost if women cannot find a space to continue these dancing traditions and to teach younger people:

Here in Lamu we need to find another place for women, where we can dance. There are many dances for women that we can do. There is Taarabu, and there are many different games and types of dancing from the old days that we can dance with women, but there is no privacy. In the old days, we could dance in the houses, in the boma (courtyard), and there were many viwanja (fields and open places). But now, there are no private places for women to gather. Therefore, these days there are no places for us to dance these cultural dances, because we cannot be exposed. You cannot be exposed, like if you danced in Mkunguni (the town square). But in our religion, we are not allowed to do this.

Yes, we have to look for a place, a hidden place. Even me, if I wear the buibui, I cannot go to a place where I am exposed. I am unable. That is why we must find a hidden place, a big house also, where we can dance, where we can watch others dancing, where we could be happy to watch. You know, we would like a place where some could dance, and others could watch, and you know, we could relax. We want to find a good place to dance, and to know its goodness.

We want to ask for money to build a big community hall, a place where women are able to gather, and to celebrate our culture. Because we cannot continue our culture - our customs and traditions and dances. We cannot dance when a man could be there and could see us. We cannot find a place here in Lamu that is appropriate for us to do that privately. (F. Ali Busaidy, personal communication, September 24, 2008)

Therefore, women in Lamu often insisted that they need a social hall or community building where they can hold dances, weddings, workshops, and other public events for women that will also meet the local needs for privacy, seclusion, and purdah.

Dora Chovu, the Social Development Officer in Lamu, recalled that many women’s groups have requested funding for the construction of social halls as public meeting or celebration spaces. Groups could charge a fee for rental of the space for weddings, funerals, parties, and meetings. Perhaps this is a project that many women’s groups will pool their resources and energy to accomplish in the future.
Similarly, adult education programs have a difficult time accessing appropriate places for learning. I interviewed two adult education teachers in Mwatate, Richard Mwakichwa and Julius Mwakio Katuu. They revealed that adult learners struggle without proper facilities for their classes:

We don’t have classrooms, desks, and these are adults who cannot learn with similar facilities used by pupils. They need to sit somewhere comfortable, classrooms where they cannot be interfered with other people. Some are shy and wouldn’t like to be known or seen as illiterate people. Hence we are calling upon the government to construct even at least one classroom for the village. We have full time teachers and can be rotating among the schools from morning to evening. We are depending on classrooms of the formal schools and sometimes we miss to get free classrooms and hence we are forced to send the adult learners back home. Therefore, they miss classes. At the chief’s office there is a building that can only be used as a library but not a classroom. (R. Mwakichwa and J.M. Katuu, personal communication, February 5, 2008)

Indeed, the Kenya National Adult Literacy Survey confirmed that the lack of facilities and resources for learning presents a huge barrier for adult literacy programs throughout Kenya. This reinforces the vital importance of an appropriate space and place for popular education to be effective.

Aside from space and place, the timing of meetings is also essential to women’s participation. Walters and Manicom explain: “Time away from everyday rhythms creates space for reflection and for coming to understand social relations from a broader perspective” (p. 21). To be effective and to reach the most women, organizations must be careful to schedule meetings during times when women’s domestic chores are finished. Many meetings are held in the late afternoons, after women have cooked, cleaned, gathered water, washed clothes, and fed their families. The ideal time is from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m., when many women have a brief respite before they start cooking the evening
meal, and they can leave home for an hour or two to drink tea, meet with friends, and attend literacy classes, fellowship groups, or women’s groups. In Muslim communities, attention must also be given to the schedule for worship, as Muslims are obligated to pray five times per day.

It is also important to recognize the seasonality of women’s labor and variations in household responsibilities throughout the year. For example, during the rainy seasons, women are more engaged in agricultural production. Members of women’s groups may not be available for meetings, or perhaps they need more help with collective work, such as rotating labor associations or harvesting parties during these times. The seasons also dictate how much energy women can devote to learning or other women’s group activities.

Finally, it should be recognized that the amount of time devoted to an education project or women’s group may vary considerably, which allows for very different depths of work and transformation. Many popular education workshops are very limited in scope and duration. “Participants can experience transformations in their understandings, feel empowered, and even carry away very concrete skills, but on returning to their home or work situations, get weighed down by unchanging relations of oppression. Where popular education workshops are linked to an ongoing process or social movement, their effect can be cumulative and supported” (Walters and Manicom, 1996, p. 21). One way that some people overcome this is by sharing what they have learned with others when they return home to their groups. For example, Victoria Dali Mwamburi mused:

For example, after I return from Mombasa – as I will after my trip that begins tomorrow - I will gather them and tell them this is the education that I received
when I was in Mombasa. Sometimes I educate them one by one and other times we bring them together as groups. I will then invite them to participate in any way they think they can benefit from my new knowledge and offer them my help in the way they want to exploit new knowledge.

We are offering them education. We talk to them and we even involve ourselves in practical demonstrations. We give them the education free and our desire is to see them rise from the economic situation that they are in to better economic levels. (V.D. Mwamburi, personal communication, May 30, 2008)

Therefore, in the spirit of popular education, it is vital to members to share what they have learned with others. This keeps the information fresh and helps participants and leaders to connect their new knowledge by building skills and developing hands-on projects with others in their own communities.

Feminist popular education, as demonstrated by these eight themes, is a complex and contested process. The goal is always to design learning activities, strategies and opportunities for deep personal transformation and social change. Kenyan women's organizations accomplish this by implementing the eight principles of feminist popular education:

1. Start where women are
2. Experience and Expertise
3. Silence and Voice
4. Empowerment
5. Difference
6. Facilitation and control
7. Gender awareness and feminist politics
Throughout this section I have called upon the voices of research participants to explain in their own words how women’s organizations practice these principles of feminist popular education. Their analysis of this process provides an invaluable insight into the revolutionary aspects of women’s organizations, and shows that these groups reach far beyond “social welfare” and “income generating” activities to creating space for women’s empowerment, leadership and transformation.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

Introduction

This final chapter presents a summary of the problem statement, purpose, research questions, and methodology of the study. The major findings and important conclusions are drawn from the data presented in Chapters Four, Five and Six. These findings are related back to the literature on popular education and transnational feminisms. The findings are followed by a discussion of major surprises and conclusions. This final chapter also reflects upon the implications for action and recommendations for further research.

Summary of the Study

This study examines the theory and practice of popular education among women’s grassroots organizations in Kenya. The purpose of this research is to analyze popular education and leadership development among grassroots women’s organizations in Kenya (Cutcher, 2009). Women’s organizations educate through a grassroots network of local communities gathering to address their most pressing needs. To respond to challenges facing their communities, Kenyan women must be educated and empowered to take action. Women’s organizations are uniquely placed to deliver popular education services. Women’s organizations assist women by building their skills and capacities to manage multiple responsibilities, create employment, and generate income. Development is redefined not as a material gain, or a means to an end. Development is about building
capacity so that people can be empowered, to gain confidence, and to solve their own problems.


Kenya’s history reveals a long struggle for gender equality. Many authors have documented the historical neglect of gender equity in education in Africa (Chege & Sifuna, 2008; Eshiwani, 1993; Kiluva-Ndunda, 2001; King, 1996; Mule, 2008; Reagan, 2000; Rodney, 1974). The educational system is based upon the British colonial system, a ranked hierarchy of performance and prestige. Advancement is determined by high-stakes, standardized testing. Schooling is expensive and many families sent their sons to school at the expense of their daughters. The schools have neglected to provide a relevant or accessible curriculum for many learners. Textbooks and course content reveal widespread gender stereotypes and sexist roles.
Officially, Kenya promotes Education for All (EFA) through international and national policy frameworks (KNBS, 2007; KNCHR, 2005; MoEST, 2001; MOE, 2007; Muteshi, 2006). Since independence in 1963, Kenya has promoted the expansion of formal education. Kenya is among the nations with the highest literacy rates in Africa. Despite the growing numbers of schools, the goals of gender equality, achievement and access have largely been neglected.

Patterns of male dominance & female subordination persist at all levels of formal education. Girls’ and women’s access to education is limited. Since Kenya passed a law to provide free primary education in 2003, the male to female ratio of students is balancing. In 2008, 48% of primary school students were female and 52% were male. However, gender inequalities returned in secondary schools and universities, where just 30% of students were female while 70% were male. Male students continue to achieve higher scores than females in both the KCPE and KCSE examinations. This demonstrates the barriers to retention and graduation for female students at all levels of education.

Adult Kenyan women have survived persistent educational gender inequities. High rates of illiteracy are reported among adult Kenyan women (Mule, 2008; Mwiria et al., 2007). In the Kenya National Adult Literacy Survey (2007), 7.8 million adults were reported illiterate, which is about 20% of the total population of Kenya. 58% of illiterate adults are women. Regional disparities also contributed to educational inequality, with high rates of equity and literacy in urban areas and lower rates in rural and peripheral communities. Adult education programs lack adequate resources & competent, trained
teachers to meet the needs of adult learners. Adult education classes are popular among women, but these classes are failing to meet the needs of men or younger adults. Adult classes suffer from declining enrollments and interest (KNBS, 2007).

However, government-led adult education programs are not the only institution offering adult education services in Kenya. Community-based, grassroots organizations are also rising as a major player in training and capacity building. The literature, observations, and interviews provide evidence of popular education practices used by diverse, community-based women’s organizations in Kenya. The Department of Adult Education works with women’s groups to promote adult literacy and income-generating activities. However, the statistics revealed a wide gap between policy and practice in government-sponsored programs, and a great need to create space for alternative delivery of adult education services (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2007). Organizations such as the African Association for Literacy and Adult Education (AALAE), the Kenya Adult Learners Association (KALA), the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE), ACTIONAID Kenya, FIDA-Kenya, and World Neighbors are some organizations that are coordinating efforts to train women’s groups. These organizations have published reports on alternative popular education programs operating in Kenya (Fordham, Holland & Millican, 1995; Houghton, 1993; KIE, 1989; Kilalo, 1998). Nevertheless, these studies were difficult to access and demonstrated the great need for additional research in the field of popular education in Kenya. This study aims to fill this gap by contributing a deep qualitative analysis of feminist popular education among women’s organizations in Nairobi and the Coast Province of Kenya.
Women’s groups have a long history in Kenya and are a popular means for the transmission of knowledge, experience and expertise from one generation to the next. Moreover, women’s organizations have grown as a major force in civil society and democratization. Supported by funding from foreign donors, government, and development agencies, women’s groups have also incorporated many of the themes and approaches of transnational feminist organizing. Therefore, women’s organizations are shaped by both local and global agendas and initiatives.

Women’s groups have not been primarily studied as a vehicle of education. However, they provide alternative, community-based popular education and training to women and girls. Education and training is the core aspect of development activities among women’s organizations. Individual and social transformation is essential to changing power relations and creating a sustainable movement.

This study analyzed how women’s organizations preserve indigenous knowledge systems and work to educate rural and urban populations. Women’s groups organize projects to address: economic development; literacy; agriculture, environment and sustainability; arts and culture; health; religion and spirituality; politics, law and civic education; and peace, justice and non-violence. I sought to understand how women’s organizations build capacity in communities through raising the consciousness of ordinary citizens, enhancing their skills in problem-solving, and collective action. By observing their processes of popular education, I analyze the contributions of women’s groups to social, political, economic, and environmental change in Kenya (Cutcher, 2009).
The purpose of this study was to understand how women’s organizations provide services and education in diverse Kenyan communities in Nairobi and the Coast Province districts of Taita and Lamu. Another purpose of this study was to discover which practical and strategic issues are most important to local women in Kenya, and how women’s organizations educate their members to face these challenges. A third purpose was to analyze how women’s organizations utilize the eight principles of popular education to engage learners in finding solutions to their problems.

The study sought to answer the following three research questions:

1. How do differences of economy, environment, and culture affect how women organize in Nairobi and the Coast Province of Kenya?

2. How do women organize and educate their members to address practical and strategic needs in Kenya?

3. How are the eight core principles of feminist popular education practiced by Kenyan women’s organizations?

The methodology of the study was ethnographic, participatory action research among dozens of women’s organizations in the Nairobi, Taita and Lamu Districts of Kenya. From 2007 to 2008, I spent approximately four months in Nairobi, five months in Taita, and three months in Lamu. I utilized my previous connections and relationships with local people to explore the women’s movement in each place.

Research participants were selected with a combination of snowball and purposive sampling of members of women’s organizations and other related fields. Participants came from a variety of backgrounds and communities, and all were adult women and men. Care was taken to include a diversity of people of different ages, ethnic and linguistic groups, genders, religious communities, marital status, socioeconomic
status, and occupations. Participation was voluntary and informed consent was a condition of their participation in interviews.

Data were collected through various methods of participant observation, formal and informal interviews, focus groups, and document analysis. Participant observation was recorded daily in my field notes. Over the course of the year, I wrote over 1,000 pages of field notes to document my observations, descriptions of the research sites, and analytical insights. I also interviewed approximately 100 individuals in formal and informal interviews. I used an interview guide to elicit questions in both English and Kiswahili, but conducted interviews in an open, semi-structured, conversational process. I also conducted 35 focus group interviews with small groups of various women’s organizations, schools, and other groups. Finally, I engaged in a process of document analysis by collecting and reading research documents generated in Kenya, such as books, pamphlets, newspaper articles, journals and annual reports of women’s organizations and other civil society groups.

Data were meticulously recorded through processes of ethnographic research methodology. I wrote descriptive field notes in my journal and throughout the process of transcribing interviews. Interviews were recorded with a digital voice recorder. Photography and video also helped to capture data in the field. The recordings of interviews and focus group sessions were translated and transcribed through a long and laborious process, with the assistance of five research assistants.

The data were then analyzed through another long process. I organized the data into notebooks and electronic files by place and in chronological order. I immersed
myself in the data throughout the process of writing field notes, transcribing and translating interviews, and reading and re-reading the text. I loaded all of the files into the NVIVO qualitative data analysis software. This helped me to start to generate categories and themes, and to organize the data into specific coding sets or “tree nodes.” I also started to catalogue my overall impressions and conclusions by writing outlines and creating interpretation and analysis. I searched for evidence of the eight principles of popular education being put into practice among Kenyan women’s groups. I also coded the data based on the themes and issues that were most important to the participants. I presented my research at various classes and conferences, distilling my most salient insights into categories and sets. I sought input and feedback from my committee members and other researchers who were interested in similar issues. This helped me to narrow down my ideas to a manageable set of data that I could present in the format of a dissertation. I refined my research by writing, rewriting, and editing the study over a period of several years.

**Major Findings**

The major findings of this study were presented in Chapters Four, Five, and Six. The presentation of the data was done in a logical flow as each research question is considered individually in separate chapters. Descriptive field notes, impressions, and excerpts from documents, focus groups, and research participants’ interviews were woven throughout the narrative.
Chapter Four addresses the first research question: How do differences of economy, environment, and culture affect how women organize in Nairobi and the Coast Province of Kenya? This chapter discusses the geography of women’s organizing and reflects the correlation between the agenda of women’s groups with regional differences within Kenya. I describe and appraise each of the research sites of Nairobi, Taita, and Lamu and the women’s organizations that I found operating in each location. These three communities are a good example of the cultural diversity and other contrasts existing within Kenyan society. Regional differences were found in the environment, economy, culture, politics, religion, language, and level of development in each place. Clear distinctions and core-periphery relations were observed between the pwani (coastal region) and bara (upcountry), and between the “Lower Coast” and “Upper Coast.” I refer to the theory of World-System Analysis to analyze core/periphery relations among different communities in Kenya (Wallerstein, 1974 & 1986). I also explore how Kenyan women’s groups are influenced by transnational feminisms and the complex relationship of local/global intersections.

From this study I have concluded that the Kenyan women’s movement is very diverse and takes on a variety of issues, including many that Western feminists might not even consider as women’s issues, such as the preservation of the environment, agriculture, or water projects. We can also see vast heterogeneity and diversity in the range of women’s group activities in urban and rural areas. Christian and Muslim communities have different issues to face in terms of gender roles and the expectations and values placed on women vis-à-vis the home and family.
Throughout Kenya, grassroots women’s groups operate as a vehicle for education and development, especially in underserved and peripheral areas. Livelihood strategies emerge through alternative systems of education, business, and income-generating activities developed at the local level. Therefore, the agenda of women’s organizations is largely determined by their sense of place, or the local conditions where they are operating.

Chapter Five deals with the second research question: How do women’s groups organize and educate their members to address practical and strategic needs in Kenya? This section analyzes the themes generated by women’s groups about the issues and activities that are most important to them. I also survey the diverse forms and functions of women’s groups operating in the three research sites of Nairobi, Taita and Lamu. The study describes how women’s groups organize educational programs and projects to address both the practical needs and strategic interests of women, their families and their communities. By analyzing the data, I identified eight core themes that describe the most salient issues identified by women’s organizations. These eight themes include:

1. economic development (including business and finance);
2. literacy;
3. agriculture, environment and sustainability;
4. arts and culture;
5. health;
6. religion and spirituality;
7. politics, law and civic education; and
8. peace, justice and non-violence.

Within each of these themes, women’s organizations organize a vast and impressive strategy for social change. Contrary to the belief that grassroots groups only focus on “social welfare” activities, this study reveals that most women’s groups simultaneously work on practical needs and strategic interests. Indeed, this practical vs. strategic couplet is not an easy binary system, and the two are inextricably tied. For example, creating employment and income-generating activities for women can have profound effects on their overall ability to negotiate with their families and manage resources in their households and communities. Small business development and microfinance are revealed as a key strategy for female empowerment and a major priority of women’s groups throughout Kenya. Women’s access to food, water, shelter, land, and other “practical needs” is no less or more important than their access to the “strategic interests” of capital, politics, law, or positions of power and decision-making. Indeed, Kenyan women consistently articulate the need for women’s organizations’ activities to be relevant and representative of the interests of women at the “grassroots.” They call on activists to practice humility and solidarity to break down the barriers of class stratification that keep urban, elite, formally educated women separated from rural, grassroots women. Women’s grassroots organizations are sometimes the main vehicle for education and development in Kenyan communities, as they seek solutions to problems that affect not only individual women, but also their families and wider communities.
Chapter Six addresses the third research question: How are the eight core principles of feminist popular education practiced by Kenyan women’s organizations?

These principles include:

1. starting from where women are;
2. experience and expertise;
3. silence and voice;
4. empowerment;
5. difference;
6. facilitation and control;
7. gender awareness and feminist politics; and
8. space, time and place for learning (Walters & Manicom, 1996).

The study draws out quotes from the research participants that illustrate how organizers practice each of these principles in their work with women’s groups. Alternative education and training programs are based on empowerment and engagement of learners’ knowledge and experience. These practices are grounded in local knowledge, or indigenous knowledge systems of community organizing and collective work. These groups address women’s daily concerns and practical needs as mothers, farmers, household managers, and workers. Nevertheless, women’s organizations also address women’s strategic interests by challenging the gender relations and constructions of feminine spaces and roles that serve to disempower women and rob them of choice and agency. Women’s organizations are explicitly sensitive to the issues of “silence and voice” and “facilitation and control,” as they seek an alternative to the top-down,
authoritarian approach of formal education and governance. They practice what they preach through their emphasis on peer education, training of trainers, and empowerment. They also raise awareness about gender relations and politics through civic education programs and discussions about sexual and gender-based violence and reproductive health. Finally, women’s organizations are deeply aware of the importance of creating a “space, time and place for learning” that makes participation and access available to women who have many competing demands for their labor, attention, and time. This section confirms that women’s groups indeed serve as a vehicle for feminist popular education as they explicitly practice each of these eight principles in their work.

**Findings Related to the Literature**

A review of the literature confirms that women’s groups are prominent in Kenya and throughout Africa, particularly in the era of democratization and development for social change. The most exciting studies I found that analyze the women’s movement in Kenya are: *African Women’s Movements* (Tripp, Casimiro, Kwesiga and Mungwa, 2009); *Land, Food, Freedom: Struggles for the Gendered Commons in Kenya, 1870 to 2007* (Brownhill, 2009); *Veils and Videos: Female Youth Culture on the Kenyan Coast* (Fuglesang, 1994); *The Politics of Development Cooperation* (Aubrey, 1997); *The Women’s Movement in Kenya* (Khasiani and Njiro, 1993); *The Women’s Movement in Kenya: A Challenge of Patronage Politics* (Gatimu, 2007); and *I Laugh So I Won’t Cry: Kenya’s Women Tell the Stories of Their Lives* (Halperin, 2005). These studies represent a feminist tradition of scholarship in Africa. They also demonstrate the growing
cooperation across perceived borders between academic researchers in transnational feminism, popular education, and social movements.

I am eager to find other scholars who analyze similar issues and to develop collaborative research. I was particularly grateful to attend several conferences after my return to the U.S. where I shared my research and developed more contacts with colleagues in this field, including: the Kenya Scholars and Studies Association at Bowling Green State University (2009 and 2010); sessions on gender, education and development in Africa at the African Studies Association conferences in Chicago (2008) and New Orleans (2009); a session on African women and agriculture chaired by Leigh Brownhill at the African Studies Association conference in San Francisco (2010); and the Women, Gender and Sexualities conference at the University of Texas in Austin (2010).

I came to this research with the assumption that feminism is widely believed in Africa to be a modern Western construct or an imposition of globalization. However, the idea of gender equality did not originate in Europe or the United States, but is an expression of the human condition and a reaction to sexism and stereotypical gender roles in almost every society. Women have organized for centuries based on traditional practices such as collective work parties, rotating labor associations, savings and credit cooperatives, assisting with childbirth and postpartum care, catering weddings and funerals, age grade societies, secret societies and councils of elders. The indigenous knowledge systems and traditional practices of women’s groups have been documented in numerous reports (Brownhill, 2009; Gatimu, 2007; Halperin, 2005; Khasiani and Njiro, 1993; Presley, 1992).
At the same time, this study reveals a complicated relationship between local grassroots initiatives, global feminist organizing, and foreign aid and development. This research supports the idea that women’s groups are an indigenous form of organizing in Kenya, and yet are simultaneously influenced by transnational feminist organizations and foreign aid agencies. This study complicates the relationship between local and global women’s initiatives. While local groups struggle to be seen as indigenous and autonomous, they are also often dependent on funds, resources, and ideas or agendas of foreign donors or the Kenyan government. Women’s organizations are also influenced by the values of various world religions – such as Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism – that may differ from indigenous African cultural values. Linguistic challenges also persist as the language of “empowerment” and “development” continues to be dominated by a transnational feminist discourse. And finally, the interests of donors may privilege certain issues over others – for example, HIV/AIDS attracts more donor support than other important issues such as water or domestic violence.

Nevertheless, this study is unique in relation to most prior research and the body of literature related to women’s organizations in Kenya. The majority of the literature on African women’s movements tends to focus on political participation and economic development more than non-formal educational programs. The literature on education tends to focus primarily on formal adult education programs rather than the grassroots, community-based education that happens through women’s groups. This study weaves together many disparate theories and strands of data.
While I found some important evidence of popular education among women’s groups, this literature was difficult to access and required a great deal of legwork in remote locations and obscure libraries. Organizations such as the African Association for Literacy and Adult Education (AALAE), the Kenya Adult Learners Association (KALA), the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE), ACTIONAID Kenya, FIDA-Kenya, and World Neighbors have published reports on alternative popular education programs operating in Kenya (Fordham, Holland & Millican, 1995; Houghton, 1993; KIE, 1989; Kilalo, 1998). However, the difficulty in accessing these studies demonstrated the great need for additional research in the field of popular education in Kenya. There is not often an explicit connection drawn between gender and development work with popular education in Africa. Walters and Manicom (1996) indicated that they strove to include articles from other parts of Africa in their study, “hoping to have examples of the lively methodology that is so closely linked with economic development for women,” but they had no success in soliciting contributions from scholars or activists outside of South Africa (p. 4). I hope to continue developing these ideas about popular education among women’s organizations and publishing these connections through my future research.

Popular education theory and praxis is traced back to Paulo Freire’s manifesto *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. This work is grounded in the notion of dialogue – critical conversation and problem-solving between peers in the quest for greater knowledge. Feminist popular education is also about consciousness-raising through a process of holistic and experiential education. Popular education must be transformative
and emancipatory, as the focus is upon building self-confidence to advocate, negotiate, and assert control over one’s own life and community.

Popular education is a very useful tool in the context of transnational organizing. Freire himself was very clear that popular education methods and practices must not be rigidly or prescriptively followed, but should be transferable and malleable. Walters and Manicom (2012) reflect that Freire’s “methodology and practices were not to be frozen and fetishized, but rather adapted and renewed in relation to the political and cultural contexts of practice … Another long-standing issue for popular education, accentuated by globalization, is the viability and validity of transferring pedagogical practices across different cultural and political contexts” (p. 8).

In the Kenyan context, the theme of “empowerment” emerges as a salient issue. “Empowerment” comes from education and “exposure” – as women learn from other women, they gain confidence in themselves. Many women felt bitterness that their parents did not educate them when they were young, and they are determined to provide education for their own children. Moreover, women seek literacy training and ongoing adult education through involvement in groups, churches, madrassa, etc. Education as “empowerment” was also defined by research participants as: exposure, experience, having a say, having a voice, being able to read and write, being able to represent oneself, to make money, to own property, to do business, to support yourself, to care for your family, to thrive, and to be healthy.

Through strategies and practices of popular education, women’s organizations assist women to build social capital and support through collective action. Women work
together to find common solutions to social problems, to express a commitment to justice and equality, and to analyze and comprehend a deeper awareness of gender and feminist politics. Education is thus redefined not as instilling knowledge into learners, but as drawing forth people’s own knowledge and strength for self-defense and self-efficacy. Education is key to women gaining access to the public sphere and to find a voice in society. Feminist popular education is therefore equated with empowerment, capacity building, and development.

**Surprises**

This study confirmed some of my assumptions about women’s organizations, but I was also pleasantly surprised or even dismayed to discover some new insights. I entered this study with an *a priori* assumption or theory that women’s groups would be practicing the eight principles of feminist popular education. I confirmed that this was indeed happening on the ground, and this was a very useful theoretical framework to appraise and analyze the educational functions of women’s organizations.

This theoretical framework also assisted me in the tedious process of coding, organizing, reporting, and making sense of the data by themes. However, I also felt a bit constrained by this approach. Luckily, I knew enough from my training in qualitative research methods to enter the field with an open mind, a keen eye for observation, and sensitivity to the local communities where I was working. My analysis in the field began to extend as I considered other possibilities of theoretical frameworks that would have been equally useful in understanding the women’s movement in Kenya. I discovered that
the theoretical framework of feminist popular education was a useful guiding tool, but not the only lens through which grassroots organizations should be assessed. This theory helped me to connect to the literature on popular education in women’s organizations and global feminisms, but it did not always allow me to describe what is unique about the Kenyan context.

In the process of analysis, I immersed myself in the data and developed entire sets of tree nodes and coding structures that I had to set aside as they did not fit into the structure of this dissertation. All of these themes could be explored in future research studies. For example, I did not anticipate the rich data I would collect about the democratization process in light of the post-election violence and the political reforms that resulted from the crisis in 2007 and 2008. I could have extended this study to apply insights from democratic and civic education theory. I also did not anticipate the incredible contributions of religious and faith-based organizations to education and community development in Kenya. I could have examined this further through an analysis of the theories of liberation theology and Islamic feminisms. Finally, my methodological approach of appreciative inquiry helped me to focus on the positive outcomes of women’s organizations, but it also shielded me from directly confronting some of the major barriers, challenges, and contradictions that became clearer to me through interviews and observations of women’s groups. These insights have revealed the value of a grounded theory approach in ethnographic research. Indeed, it is vitally important for foreign development workers and ethnographic researchers to respond to the situation on the ground, rather than myopically entering the field with a set agenda.
Because I entered the field steeped in the literature of popular education and committed to the approach of appreciative inquiry, it was often difficult to be critical of what I witnessed on the ground. I was committed to the notion that empowerment is defined as the process of raising consciousness and giving a voice to people who have been silenced and oppressed. However, the local conception of “empowerment” and self-help must also be critically examined. Adult education programs are not always what they seem. The explicit focus on income generating activities and literacy tends to dilute the transformative potential of adult education. Indeed, although they encourage voter registration and discuss the processes and mechanisms of democracy, they often act in very undemocratic ways. Adult educators are often explicitly trained not to engage in critiquing the government or to allow political discussions to enter the classroom. This seemed extremely odd in the Kenyan context, as most people discuss politics with great passion on a regular basis. This avoidance of politics in the government adult education classes leads to the domestication and cooptation of women’s groups to serve anti-political agendas.

Moreover, I noticed clear contradictions between the adult educators’ words in interviews and their actions in the classroom. Rather than being sensitive to the dynamics of facilitation and control, some adult educators engaged in top-down, hierarchical, and patronizing behavior. As a result, I witnessed a great deal of silence in meetings and classes, with teachers, organizers and facilitators talking down to or on behalf of the participants. Instead of trying to create a safe space and to minimize silence, learners’ voices and perspectives were often excluded and the strongest voices
dominated the space. Rather than privileging the experience and expertise of adult learners, they are sometimes treated like children. When urban teachers come to work in rural communities, they often denigrate rural and traditional ways of life as being “backward” or “primitive.” This effectively mimics and embraces the British style of authoritarian education and continues the colonial project of controlling women and disrupting or disrespecting African communities. I was shocked to witness these behaviors and attitudes among adult educators who seemed in interviews to espouse the values of Freirean popular education, but did not practice what they preached.

Another assumption with which I entered the field was the hierarchy of practical vs. strategic needs, as articulated by Molyneux (1998 & 2001). This distinction sometimes creates a hierarchy similar to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs in the field of psychology. This hierarchy privileges political reform and decision-making power as truly important “strategic interests” while practical needs are dismissed as mere “social welfare” activities or “basic needs.” This couplet reinforces sexism and minimizes women’s practical needs as “domestic” or “feminine.” Indeed, women’s organizations have been sometimes discredited as being too focused on “social welfare.” To the contrary, I found that this practical focus helps women to feel that their group activities are relevant to their daily lives. When women in rural areas see a direct benefit to their lives, this motivates participation in women’s groups. “Empowerment” is largely defined not just in terms of political power, but also on the practical concerns of women’s self-sufficiency, economic independence, education, and decision-making ability in the family. Women cannot change their situation on a national scale unless they are freed
from the drudgery of work at home and the power of their husbands. For example, women’s “merry-go-rounds” help members to raise money for practical needs and to start small businesses. Their increased economic independence can lead to greater power for women in their families and communities as business people. Women also gain confidence, see their value, and assert their voices when they join together for collective action. This reveals a more nuanced, dialectical relationship between practical needs and strategic interests among women’s organizations.

I was also surprised to learn that the major focus of the majority of women’s groups in Kenya is on economic development, including business and finance. I had entered the field with the assumption that the majority of Kenyan women would be engaged in agricultural or environmental projects. However, I soon realized that the most common form of women’s organizing was the “merry-go-round,” or *akiba na mkopo* groups (savings and credit cooperatives) that promote income-generating activities.

I was also surprised to discover that, in spite of the estimated three million registered members of women’s groups and the sheer popularity of the women’s movement, the advancement of women in the legal and political system is lagging. Women have entered politics, but they cannot compete if they do not have access to campaign finances. Donors, foreign governments, and international organizations are more likely to support “social welfare” projects than to support female candidates for politics. When female candidates ask for help from the U.S. embassy, they are told they have moral support but the U.S. government cannot give money to foreign political campaigns. Women are involved in organizations, but the legal and political system still
favors men. *Maendeleo ya Wanawake* has been accused of being beholden and supportive of KANU and PNU and is thus unable to confront the “old boys’ network.” In fact, MYW leaders are seen to be enabling a sexist system that keeps women in subordinate positions and does not challenge the status quo or seek legal changes for women’s empowerment. Tripp, Casimiro, Kwesiga and Mungwa (2009) point out that the women’s movement is strong in Kenya, but this has not translated to changes in power on a wide scale. This needs to be addressed for gender and development to result in sustainable and meaningful changes.

Another major surprise of this study was the impact of the political situation and the crisis of post-election violence on the activities of women’s groups. I did not anticipate how disruptive the elections would be, or the scale of violence that was to follow. Women’s groups were galvanized throughout the election process, both in terms of supporting candidates amenable to women’s issues and in answering the call for assistance for the victims and survivors of violence, including sexual assault and rape. This points to the importance of women’s participation in democratization efforts and the impact of electoral change even in grassroots Kenyan communities.

A major shift in my research also happened as a result of not being able to access the Green Belt Movement (GBM). I entered this study with the intention of focusing my research on the grassroots activities and popular education workshops organized by the GBM. However, I tried repeatedly to reach out to the GBM through letters, emails and phone calls to the Nairobi office and the U.S. office in New York, but with no response. I even hand-delivered a letter to Wangari Maathai herself when she spoke at the Ohio
State University in 2006. I was surprised to discover that it was easier to meet Wangari Maathai in Ohio than in Kenya. I often heard Kenyans complain that she was more involved in international networking than grassroots development work within Kenya. I also was shocked to learn that the GBM does not want foreign researchers involved in their work, due to some negative case studies that have been published. I definitely experienced the intense barriers of access and participation that are erected to outsiders. I was finally offered access if I would agree to pay a fee of $500 for a “Green Belt Safari” experience with a woman on her farm in Central Province. I knew that I could have this experience for free at any time with women in Taita, who would gladly host me on their farms and include me in their work. Later I was also surprised when a GBM employee contacted me to offer to set up a wildlife safari for me at one of Kenya’s national parks. I became hesitant and skeptical of the Green Belt Movement for taking advantage of foreign visitors.

Ultimately, I am glad that I was able to open up my study to examine other grassroots women’s groups in Kenya. I realized that the GBM and Wangari Maathai are just the tip of the iceberg, and thus are inaccessible. They represent a much larger grassroots movement of women’s organizations in Kenya that is based in indigenous knowledge systems. The GBM attracts the most attention and notoriety, and there is a saturation of literature on their work. Indeed, Wangari Maathai wrote about the group extensively in her own memoirs and books on the movement. Her tragic death from breast cancer on September 25, 2011 led to a period of national mourning. This signaled her heroic stature in Kenya and the importance of passing on her legacy to others.
I feel immensely grateful that I was able to tap into a network of Kenyan women’s groups that is heterogeneous and extensive. I learned more by stepping back and seeing the big picture, and allowing the story to unfold as a phenomenological case study of the wider Kenyan women’s movement. This has been a good lesson in being able to open up and adapt to conditions on the ground. As a foreign researcher, this has been a good skill to learn, and has allowed me to become more culturally competent by placing myself at the margins, rather than the center, of the research.

I also realized that a major critique of women’s organizations is their dependency on external funding and support. As a mzungu or white foreigner, I was regularly asked for money, ideas, and advice by the research participants and members of organizations. While I would continually assert that I was there to learn from them, and that they knew the solutions to their own problems better than any outsider ever could, I realized that women’s groups are constantly searching for foreign funding. This realization also forced me to examine the complicated relationship between local and global women’s organizations. Despite the equitable language of “partnerships,” it is undeniable that the dependency on foreign donors and government leads to the domestication and cooptation of women’s issues. Since local resources are limited, foreign governments and NGOs offer large grants or loans for community development projects. Sometimes this external funding dictates the focus of projects and introduces a different agenda. For example, the U.S. and Kenyan governments’ interests in fighting terrorism dominate the security agenda in Kenya. However, security for local people translates to the provision of basic needs and protection from crime and assault, but fewer resources are available to address
these economic or social issues. Also, some women’s groups noted that the availability of funding dictates the focus on HIV/AIDS education and prevention initiatives, but there is not enough funding to address equally compelling or even more widespread problems such as domestic violence, sexual assault and rape, drug abuse, alcoholism, or water and sanitation projects. These issues affect many more families and reveal the extent of women’s oppression and male dominance in Kenya, but there is not adequate funding or interest from foreign donors to address them.

A similar surprise was my changing understanding of gender and development work. When I first went to the field, I was primarily interested in just focusing on women. However, the longer I stayed there, the more I heard about the need to include men and boys in development and education work. At first I was resistant to this, as I believed that men and boys represented a powerful and privileged group according to the facts of male dominance and the national statistical data on gender inequalities. Indeed, I still believe it is important to defend the position that women have faced historical oppression and marginalization in Kenya. However, I repeatedly heard women articulate that the most dangerous force in the country is the rising number of unemployed, idle, desperate young men who are likely to engage in crime, drugs and violence. Many women leaders called for the inclusion of men and emphasized a more holistic approach to Gender and Development. Many research participants insisted that young men must be given greater opportunities for education and employment. While women have been given chances to develop their own businesses or offered loans from microfinance projects, they worried that men are being left behind without capital or the reputation
necessary to succeed. Moreover, as girls have been given bursary scholarships and greater opportunities for education, some communities are witnessing boys now being left behind, dropping out, or not performing well in school. Many men called for “boy child education” and a “Men’s Enterprise Fund” to equalize the playing field with women! This is a drastically different attitude than the past, and I believe that it speaks to the power and strength of the women’s movement in Kenya, as well as the controversial nature of Affirmative Action and gender quotas. While it is clear that there is evidence supporting the value of investing in women and girls, it should not be done at the expense or detriment of men and boys.

Moreover, the feminist popular education commitment to gender awareness and feminist politics means paying attention to power dynamics and sexual differences. The dominance and privilege of men and masculinity must itself be challenged if the goals of gender equality are to be achieved. If women are to be expected to take up leadership in the public sphere, men must also share the responsibilities at home and in the family. A more nuanced and holistic approach to the engagement of all genders in development work could lead to more equitable and sustainable results. Popular educators are challenged to be more inclusive while acknowledging inequalities of power and privilege.

**Implications for Action**

The results of this study reveal a number of recommendations for reform in Kenya. Adult education providers employed by the government and private organizations should be supported with additional training in popular education pedagogy
and principles such as REFLECT. Teacher training and continuing education must be required for adult educators, just as primary and secondary teachers are required to be licensed and accredited. Adult educators must learn to use more engaging methods and respectful relations with their adult learners, since the typical authoritarian methods of schoolteachers do not work with adults. Adult education curricula must move beyond basic numeracy and literacy, and should provide adult learners with technical and practical training, including opportunities to develop critical thinking skills to analyze and solve their own problems.

The Kenya Institute of Education and the Ministry of Gender should work to complete and disseminate the *Training Curriculum for Women’s Groups* throughout Kenya. According to Grace Maina of KIE, this popular education curriculum manual was written in the late 1980s but it was never completed. The curriculum must be updated to include information about new economic opportunities for women, legal reforms, and other contemporary issues. Health issues should also be addressed, including sexual and reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, nutrition and “home science.” Additional research should focus on the popular pedagogy of women’s groups in the field.

A key insight for future education research in Kenya is the necessity to admit that formal education systems have been limiting, hierarchical and inequitable. European colonizers imposed formal structures of education and curriculum goals that are often irrelevant for the needs and interests of Kenyan learners. Kenyans should work to reform educational systems to embrace the goals of gender equity, achievement and access. This means promoting girls’ and boys’ education and providing adequate resources and
support for schools and teachers. Teachers should be trained in methods that promote critical thinking, consciousness-raising and popular education pedagogy. The goals of education must be redefined not as “banking” to pass exams, but rather problem-posing and dialogue focused on transformation.

Alternative education programs, including informal and non-formal education, are being developed throughout the nation. These programs can be managed locally by community-based women’s groups, and should gain the support of the national government and the international community. Income-generating activities and entrepreneurship are an essential part of adult education programs. These activities should be expanded to assist adult learners and members of women’s groups to create employment that will sustain them beyond their participation in adult literacy classes. Income-generating activities are a key motivator for adult learners, who want to see a direct benefit from literacy programs to improve their employment and income.

Moreover, a great deal of effort is being made to uplift women’s participation in economic development through microfinance and savings and credit cooperatives. These efforts are vitally important, but they should be coupled with education that is relevant to women’s needs. Many women need support in developing skills to be successful business people, including business planning, budgeting, accounting, management, conflict resolution, etc. Financial literacy is a key area of adult education that must be developed in Kenya. Similarly, women’s organizations must be able to negotiate and relate with government and foreign donors, but still operate within an open and independent civil society. While women’s organizations need to have access to financial
support, this should not be tied to the control, domestication, and co-optation of their agendas or activities.

Finally, women’s voices must be amplified in positions of leadership and influence throughout Kenyan society. Women are entering politics in greater numbers, but their efforts will be diminished unless they have financial support to compete with male candidates or are guaranteed positions through Affirmative Action or quota programs. Women must be included in decision-making at all levels of government and community life, and women vying for leadership positions must be supported by voters. Affirmative Action works for women, but they also need access to financial support for election campaigns and moral support from their constituents and the major political parties.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

This study could be expanded in a number of ways, and I have collected enough data to explore a variety of different issues in greater depth. I have identified several potential areas of future research and publication, including: global feminisms, gender equity in education, agriculture, food, microfinance and microenterprise development, regional disparities and inequalities, religious education, public health, and the role of women in democratization, peace-building and conflict resolution.

I continue to be intrigued by the growing field of global and transnational feminisms. In the future, I hope to explore how popular education theory and practice can contribute to new insights and strategies for transnational feminist organizing. An
exciting direction to follow is comparative research with women’s organizations in other parts of the world. The women’s movement in Kenya could be compared to other women’s movements in Africa, Latin America, and Asia, such as the Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) in India, the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, and women’s groups in China. This is a fertile field for research in comparative and international education and transnational women’s and gender studies.

Another key avenue for future research could focus on women’s leadership in education. Which women have been successful and upwardly mobile through education, and what factors helped them to succeed? How is the influence of mothers shaping their children’s access and desire for education? More needs to be known about the “unsung heroines” who have worked and sacrificed to educate the next generation. Women have built girls’ schools, raised money for bursary scholarships and school fees, broken the “glass ceiling” at universities and government offices, and worked as schoolteachers, administrators, and community leaders. These role models inspire their peers and future generations to support girls’ and women’s formal education.

More research should also be done on agricultural extension education. Practical skills in sustainable agriculture are developed through programs like the Farmers’ Field Schools, the Green Belt Movement, and other programs supported by local foresters and farmers. The Kenya Agricultural Productivity Project (KAPP) supports value-added processing of foods and herbal medicines. On the other hand, some agricultural extension workers are promoting the introduction of genetically modified foods (GMOs), biofuels and oilseeds such as Ethanol and Jatropha, and farm implements such as
pesticides and herbicides. Some advocates have embraced these new technologies as part of a new “Green Revolution” in Africa and for their potential promise to bring “modernization,” better crop yields, or income to African farmers. However, others have anticipated some disastrous and shocking results of this “Green Revolution,” as we have seen previously in India, Europe and the United States. Greater attention should be given to engaging local farmers in a critical awareness and dialogue about these new technologies. Farmers are intimately aware of the devastating effects of drought, famine and climate change in their communities, and they should be involved in the conversation about survival strategies and new techniques for sustainable agriculture. Indeed, many African farmers have been practicing indigenous modes of organic agriculture that have yielded consistent harvests for generations, even in the face of great adversity, climate change, droughts, floods, and other natural disasters. Their knowledge must be tapped before it is lost.

Women’s knowledge of traditional methods of agriculture, and preparing indigenous foods and medicines, is another area of exciting discovery. A great deal of women’s energy and experience is involved in the process of growing, harvesting, storing, cooking, and eating food. I was amazed at the amount of indigenous knowledge and language I could access about food and medicine through working with women in their gardens and kitchens, and this should be explored and catalogued in future research studies. For example, Khifa Soud has taken a huge step toward this pursuit in her publication of the cookbook, *Swahili Cuisines*, in which she details the ingredients and process of preparing traditional Swahili dishes from her memory of cooking with her
mother and aunts. As a self-avowed “foodie,” cook, and amateur gardener, I would love to become a “food anthropologist” and devote my future research to this pursuit.

Microfinance and microenterprise development is also an important area of research. African women’s organizations throughout the continent have developed complex independent banking and savings and loan associations that should be better understood and replicated. Women should receive more training in literacy and numeracy, with a focus on relevant organizational and business skills like record-keeping, accounting, financial management, and business planning. Workshops could be delivered through the public sector of the Women’s Enterprise Fund, Adult Education, Social Services, and private sector partners like Equity Bank and Kenya Women’s Finance Trust.

More research must also be done on the inequitable patterns of development seen at the regional and provincial levels in Kenya. Abundant statistical data shows that regional and ethnic disparities must be acknowledged. More needs to be discovered about the quest for local control and empowerment and how Kenyans articulate their vision of governance that responds to local needs. Government policies have served to centralize power in the hands of a few elites in Nairobi and other urban areas, while many citizens in the periphery or marginalized areas continue to suffer. For Kenya to survive as a peaceful nation, resources must be distributed and decentralized in a more equitable way. The move to a federal or Majimbo system in the new Kenyan constitution points to the importance of fresh research on this topic.
Another interesting field of future research is related to religious education and women’s rights. I was fascinated to learn more about religious values regarding gender roles and the ways that women utilize the scriptures and teachings of Christianity and Islam to advocate for gender equality and greater educational opportunities. These conversations challenged my assumptions about the religious sources of women’s oppression and revealed a more nuanced understanding and skillful feminist analysis of religious doctrines. The field of “Islamic feminisms” is gaining greater prominence and attention in academic and political circles, and is an important contribution to countering stereotypes about the Muslim world.

Another exciting opportunity for research and publishing is how women’s organizations use feminist popular education strategies in grassroots public health campaigns. Data analysis revealed a broad spectrum of activities related to sexual and reproductive health education. Women’s groups create a safe space for women and girls to ask questions and learn from their peers and elders. Often these groups educate women about culturally taboo topics usually shrouded in secrecy, silence and shame. Young women and girls are educated for sexual and reproductive health through “Girls’ Forums” in schools. Women and girls teach each other about menstruation, sexuality, and reproduction. Peer educators teach workshops about family planning, contraception, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV/AIDS. Some groups educate women about the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS. Other groups work to change the practice of female circumcision and create alternative rites of passage. Women’s groups also advocate for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.
through legislation, activism, and peer counseling. Midwives and traditional birth attendants also educate and support women throughout pregnancy, childbirth, and motherhood. Midwives are especially active in rural areas and urban slums with limited access to hospitals and clinics. Midwives are trained in prenatal care, nutrition, labor support, birth, and emergency medicine. Women’s groups and female kinship networks nurse, feed, and care for postpartum mothers and newborn babies. Childcare is provided by a web of family and community members including aunties, grandmothers, and neighbors. Indeed, women’s organizations play an essential role for sexual and reproductive health and education in Kenya.

Finally, the role of women in democratization and peace-building is a key area of future research. Women’s organizations have proliferated through the growth of civil society and the democratization movement. Women’s groups were galvanized around the elections of 2007, in which more women voted than any previous election in Kenya. After the results were contested, violence and chaos broke out in Nairobi, Mombasa, Kisumu, and throughout the Rift Valley. Women’s organizations spoke out about the violence, insisting that human rights investigations and the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC) recognize the victims of sexual and gender-based violence. Women and children were internally displaced in camps for up to five years after the elections. Violence and ethnic tension spread to schools and was reenacted by young people throughout the country. Militia groups continue to organize, and it was widely feared that violence could break out again during the 2013 elections. Women’s voices must continue to be heard as justice is sought, and women must be represented in
leadership and decision-making. This is an important area that deserves the attention of researchers in the future.

Conclusions

What does this study reveal about popular education, gender and development in a global context? What can we take away? What does the Kenyan case contribute to our knowledge base about global feminisms? What have we learned about feminist popular education in a transnational world?

Women’s organizations in Kenya teach us a valuable lesson about the evolution of gender and development through the lens of education. This study has examined how women’s organizations operate within a framework of popular education. We can see that the process of organizing and educating empowers women. Like midwives, peer educators and development workers draw forth the spirit and consciousness of women to transform themselves, their families and their communities. As women become involved in organizations, they learn valuable skills in business, health care, arts, agriculture, and other practical lessons that improve the quality of their lives and their earning potential. They also gain the confidence they need to speak out, to confront injustice, to advocate for themselves and their communities, and to engage in the political life of the nation. This in turn transforms the legal and political systems to move towards a more democratic system. Capacity-building is a primary feature and outcome of popular education programs. The goals of popular education are accomplished when people come together in dialogue to transform their societies.
I have also observed that women’s issues cannot be reduced to one facet of life, but must address the holistic needs of the whole community. Water, food, and shelter are basic human needs. Popular education involves a process of dialogue that reflects upon the assets of the community and focuses on areas that are necessary to improve. This includes economic development, but also addresses culture, arts, health, literacy, civil and political rights, peace and justice, etc. Addressing the root causes of poverty is a key to uplifting women. Women’s rights are not just political or strategic interests, but must include economic and social needs.

We can also see that local women’s movements do not exist within a vacuum. The web of transnational feminist organizations has spread throughout the world, from the most remote villages to the largest cities. Women’s organizations emerge out of a long indigenous tradition of female solidarity groups – from rotating labor associations to kinship networks to secret societies. However, they also gain momentum and are transformed through contact with national and transnational networks. They gain resources, ideas, and training through their relationships with foreign donors, multinational corporations, and the Kenyan state. Local women’s groups also become “exposed” to foreign ideas about gender roles and women’s rights through interactions at United Nations Conferences for Women and other spaces of transnational feminist organizing. However, women’s movements can also be co-opted by these “partners.” Government or political party patronage demands that women adopt either a pro-government agenda or that they do not directly engage in politics. The support of foreign donors can provide necessary resources but can also change the agenda of women’s
groups to suit external demands and priorities. These tensions are complicated and must not be overlooked.

Including men in gender and development work continues to pose a challenge. “Gender” is too often understood to be a women’s issue. Male privilege and dominance is protected and unquestioned. And yet, some men also face oppression as members of marginalized groups: the poor, the unemployed, or ethnic, religious, and/or sexual minorities. It cannot be assumed that all men are dominant in the same ways – just as not all women face the same issues dependent on their class or racial or ethnic background. And yet, male dominance persists from the family to business to government. For true gender equality to be achieved, men also need to be included in initiatives to raise consciousness about gender relations. Men also must change their notions of masculinity and participate equally in the family responsibilities if women are changing their status and roles. Gender roles must change simultaneously, which requires the participation of all genders.

Women’s groups in Kenya embody an alternative system of education and leadership for democracy and development. The women’s movement is strong and diverse, addressing multiple issues simultaneously and giving voice to many marginalized groups. Women’s groups work on different issues depending upon regional differences of environment, economy, and culture. The different activities of women in different regions reveals the complex relationships between the core and periphery, and the uneven educational and development opportunities that have evolved in different communities of Kenya.
Women mobilize themselves and their communities through their involvement in addressing practical needs through social welfare activities and strategic interests through political and legal reform activities. They mobilize resources through the tradition of *harambee* and through their indigenous knowledge systems embedded in rotating labor and credit associations. Women’s rights are articulated in the context of indigenous cultural traditions, religious values, colonial interference, the postcolonial dispensation, and modernity.

Analyzing women’s organizations through the lens of feminist popular education reveals the revolutionary potential of education and development work. The principles of feminist popular education are deeply embedded in the practices of women’s groups in Kenya. Popular education is holistic, and it moves beyond the limitations of literacy, schooling, “scriptocentrism” and “textualism” (Conquergood, 2004). Popular education builds a culture of resistance to the “banking system” of education that is inherently oppressive and hierarchical. Popular education empowers women with the knowledge they need to survive and thrive in the context of rapid change. Advocating for women’s and girls’ education is revolutionary, as it changes gender roles, improves household and community resilience, expands employment and income-generating activities, and dismantles hierarchical systems to create a more level playing field. This type of “development education” or “capacity building” leads to empowerment, exposure, confidence, self-reliance and greater skills in advocacy and problem solving.

“Women’s knowledge” is valued not as “old wives’ tales” but as the reassertion of indigenous knowledge systems and a challenge to sexist gender stereotypes. Indeed, it
is vitally important to recognize local ways of knowing that have not been privileged, and to recognize how these are anchored in the practices, agency and resistance of women’s organizations. Alidou (2008) insists that women’s agency is especially found in their “embodied experience, orality and local contingencies.” Indeed, women’s organizations tap into local traditions, customs, and religious and spiritual life. Their practices emanate from the indigenous knowledge systems of communal work exchange, rotating labor associations, secret societies, cooperatives, and other organizations. Their style of education is grounded in tradition and yet also works to achieve a complete transformation of social relations. Nevertheless, women’s groups are widely accepted in Kenyan society because they work for sustainable development, the continuation of community life and the improvement of the standard of living for everyone.

This study affirms the importance of diversity that is so essential to feminist dialogue, discourse, and activism. In our age of globalization, it is essential to consider how to meaningfully include the voices and struggles of marginalized groups. The transnational or global feminist movement has to allow for differences of regional diversity, and to allow space for different priorities to be determined. The stage must be opened up for diverse women to have a voice and to articulate their own interests depending upon their local conditions and cultural milieu. Feminists must not buy into the hierarchy of practical vs. strategic needs by implying that the issues of legal and political rights are more complicated or important than the basic and practical concerns that are essential to daily survival, such as food, water, shelter, land and other issues. While some of these basic needs may have been achieved 50 or 100 years ago in parts of
the industrialized world, they are ongoing challenges for women in the developing world. We cannot assume that these women’s concerns are any less modern or sophisticated than the issues that take precedence in the West, such as reproductive rights, the “glass ceiling,” or the pay gap. Indeed, women around the world are striving for decency and respect, and this varies contextually. To ensure female solidarity across the planet, we must allow for diversity in our unity, and open the sphere for all voices and priorities to be heard in the feminist discourse.

**Concluding Remarks**

The truly profound value of the sustainability of women’s organizations was demonstrated to me through the life and death of Jerusha Machocho Amoni. This story ends with a death, but the legacy continues with a “resurrection.”

Jerusha was born in 1933 in Taita. She grew up in a time period when girls were not sent to school, so she learned to farm and do domestic chores. She married young and gave birth to seven children. Only one child survived, Dezi Nyange. After several miscarriages and stillbirths, Jerusha’s husband Amoni married his second wife because he feared Jerusha would not produce a son. The second wife gave birth to several children, but she abandoned Amoni and the children since he was cruel and violent. Jerusha stayed with him and raised all of the children as if they were her own.

Jerusha started attending adult education classes in 1983 at the Mwakitutu Primary School. Her teacher was Julius Mwakio Katuu, a young man employed by the Department of Adult Education in Mwatate. She had never held a pencil before, and
remembered starting class by learning to chant the ABCs. The fifteen members of the class were all women, and Julius encouraged them to start income-generating activities. They built water tanks, wove *vidasi* sisal baskets, grew and harvested maize and sorghum, made mud bricks for buildings, and sold charcoal. They soon registered as a women’s group with the Department of Social Services, opened a bank account, wrote a constitution, and elected leaders. After the basic literacy program had ended, they all could read and write in Kiswahili. They continued to meet and work together as the Mwakitutu Women’s Group for the next 25 years.

Jerusha benefited a great deal from the group’s activities. They helped her to build her house and a small kiosk next to the primary school, where she sold candy and groceries to schoolchildren and their families. She continued farming and called upon the other group members to help her during harvest time. She managed to send all of her children to school by paying school fees from her meager income. The other women also counseled her, helping her to cope with an abusive, alcoholic husband and to endure the grief of losing so many of her children. They prayed together, sang hymns, read the Bible, and met for fellowship. They helped each other to develop their homesteads, harvest food, build water tanks, and become more sustainable and secure.
Figure 44. Jerusha Machocho Amoni (far left) weaving baskets with other members of the Mwakitutu Women’s Group. Mwatate, Kenya. January 28, 2008.

Jerusha attended a meeting of the Mwakitutu Women’s Group when we discussed the tradition of inheritance. They explained to me that the original members of the Mwakitutu group had started to age considerably, and several women had died over the years. They had developed a plan of “inheritance,” when a new member would join the group from the deceased woman’s family. Typically this would be a daughter or daughter-in-law. That explained why there were women of several generations and age grades in one group.

The last time I saw Jerusha in June of 2008, we met at the kiosk in Mwatate that the Mwakitutu Women’s Group was building as a rental property. I had helped them to write a proposal to the Women’s Enterprise Fund for the costs of finishing the project. I agreed to donate a token amount of money for the cement needed to finish the walls.
After the women sang, danced, and prayed together, we all hugged goodbye. I was preparing to go home to the U.S. for a brief visit. Jerusha held me close, then leaned back and looked deeply into my eyes. She said “Tutaonana tena, Mungu akipenda.” This translates to “We’ll see each other again if God is willing.” I never saw her again.

A few days later, I heard that Jerusha had died. She was working in her *shamba* alone. Her adult children said that she did not come home after dark, and they started to get worried. They sent a search party with flashlights, and found her dead on the ground in the garden. They were not sure what happened; perhaps it was a snakebite, or a heart attack, or a more serious condition that was undiagnosed. She had been complaining of a painful swelling in her abdomen, but did not have money to see the doctor. They brought her body home and buried her in a wooden casket right there on the farm, next to her late husband Amoni. The members of the Mwakitutu group were all there at the funeral, bringing food, cash donations, and support to help her family through the grieving process.

A week after the burial, her daughter Dezi came to the teacher Julius’ house. She carried a handwritten note that she found in Jerusha’s bureau. The note read:

“Mimi nikifa mtoto wangu dezi achuke nafasi yangu ya gurupu. Mimi Jerusha.”

(“When I die, my child Dezi takes my place in the group. Me Jerusha.”) The note was dated May 5, 2008. The note is pictured below:
It was striking to me that literacy made it possible for Jerusha to write this last will and testament. After she heard the other members discussing the tradition of “inheritance,” she decided to write her wishes down. She did not tell anyone about the note, but her daughter found it among her things after her death. This note effectively became her last will and testament.

This is a profound allegory about the value of social capital in women’s groups. Jerusha was a woman who owned very little, and who could not pass on any material possessions or wealth to her children. However, her most prized possessions were her daughter and her membership in the Mwakitutu Women’s Group. She wanted her daughter to inherit her place in the group, and she wanted the group to inherit her daughter. This would ensure that her daughter could carry on her legacy, and that Dezi
would have the support of other Mamas to carry her through hard times. The group agreed to honor Jerusha’s will and welcomed Dezi to join them. A contingency plan was made, and Jerusha’s daughter-in-law was also invited to join in case Dezi married and moved away. This tradition of inheritance is a model for sustainability, ensuring that the group survives beyond the lives of the individual members. The circle is unbroken and the legacy continues.
References


Department of Adult Education. (2000). *Post-literacy curriculum.* Nairobi: Department of Adult Education.


Fallon, K. (Forthcoming). *Big men, small girls, and the transition to democracy: Ghanaian women mobilizing within gendered and political terrains*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.


Appendix A: Full Acknowledgments

“Ubuntu is very difficult to render into a Western language. It speaks of the very essence of being human...You share what you have. It is to say, ‘My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours.’ We belong in a bundle of life. We say, ‘A person is a person through other persons.’ It is not, ‘I think therefore I am.’ It says rather, ‘I am human because I belong. I participate. I share.’”

Archbishop Desmond Tutu (2000)

This project would not have been possible without help, support and guidance from a vast network of many different people and organizations. My gratitude for this assistance is immeasurable. I have learned throughout my travels and studies in Africa that it is essential to “pour libations” and to give thanks at the beginning of any endeavor. In that spirit, I must first give thanks to God for the gifts of life, liberty, and security - all of which are the foundations of this research. Alhamdulillah.

I would like to sincerely thank my professors and advisors at Ohio University. My advisor, Dr. Francis Godwyll, provided unwavering support, faith, patience and encouragement. I also would like to thank the faculty of Cultural Studies in Education, including Dr. Godwyll, Dr. Jaylynne Hutchinson, Dr. Najee Muhammad, and Dr. Rosalie Romano, who also served as my advisors and professors throughout my coursework. I also thank my doctoral dissertation committee, including Dr. Godwyll, Dr. Hutchinson, Dr. Risa Whitson, and Dr. Elizabeth Edna Wangui. These four individuals have been incredible teachers, mentors, guides, and friends at every step of the way. I am also grateful to Dr. Lisa Aubrey for her participation in my comprehensive exam and proposal
committees, and her diligent mentoring, teaching, leadership, friendship, and assistance in connecting me with her colleagues in Kenya. Dr. Adah Ward-Randolph, Dr. Steve Rubenstein, Dr. Diane Ciekawy, Dr. Katama Mkangi, and Dr. Kiran Cunningham taught me the art and science of qualitative research and ethnography. I am also grateful to Dr. Renee Middleton, Dean of the College of Education, for the enthusiasm and pride that she has expressed for my work. Thanks also to Dr. Aimee Howley, Associate Dean for Research in the College of Education, and Dr. Gordon Brooks, Chair of the Department of Educational Studies, for their support and assistance.

I would also like to express my appreciation to the African Studies Program and the Center for International Studies at Ohio University. My experiences in African Studies have been invaluable to me as a student, administrator, and fellowship recipient. Dr. Steve Howard, Dr. Diane Ciekawy, Dr. Bob Walter, Dr. Ghirmai Negash, Acacia Nikoi, Dr. Ismail Elmahdi, Bose Maposa, Gerard Akindes and other members of the staff and faculty of International Studies have been supportive throughout my studies at Ohio University.

Many thanks also to the Women’s Studies Program at Ohio University, including Judith Grant, Lynette Peck, Susanne Dietzel, Risa Whitson, Susan Burgess, Kim Little, Patricia Richard, Julie White, Lydya McDermott, Patricia Stokes, Nicole Shippen, Nicole Reynolds, Melissa Wales, Lana Oweidat, Loran Marsan, and affiliated faculty and staff.

Thanks also to all of my Kiswahili teachers over the years: Kayla Chepyator, Alwiya Omar, Nasiombe Mutonyi, Anne Biersteker, Deb Amory, Almasi Omar, Yunus Rubanza, Mama Ramadhani, Vida Mutasa, Leonce Rushubirwa, Peter Otiato Odhiambo,
John Mugane, Peter Githinji, Kiarie wa Njogu, and all the thousands of Kiswahili speakers, young and old, who have conversed and laughed with me, correcting and forgiving my mistakes, and teaching me along the way. I owe a huge debt of gratitude to the five research assistants who helped me with the translation and transcription of interviews: Agnes Mulewa, Eliud Lubanda, Jessy Mwangola, George Gathigi and Solomon Maingi. Thanks also to the SCALI program at Ohio University and the STARTALK program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison for training me in the teaching and administration of Kiswahili and other African languages.

I must express my gratitude to the hundreds of people in Kenya who assisted me along every step of my journey in the spirit of Harambee! (Kiswahili term for “Let’s all pull together.”) This story would not be possible without the cooperation of members and teachers of women’s groups, churches, mosques, schools, madrassa, adult education classes, government offices, non-governmental organizations and community-based groups. Thanks also to the many families and friends who sheltered me and assisted me along the way – your compassion and hospitality overwhelms and humbles me.

Thanks to the staff of the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi, including Ambassador Michael Rannenberger and staff members of the Public Affairs Office, Aruna Amirthanayagam, Ellen Bienstock, Dr. Justus Mbae, Halima Gichuki, and Monica Munyori. Thanks also to embassy staffs Kevin Green and Kareen Thorpe. And special thanks to my fellow Fulbrighters Opolot Okia, Valerie Harder, and Sarah Heddon and fellow researchers Megan Hershey and Sarah Hillewaert for all of their support.
Special thanks to members of the Government of Kenya who assisted me along the way: Mr. Opiyo at the Ministry of Education Research Authorization Office in Nairobi; William Keng’ethe Thuku, District Commissioner of Taita District; Benjamin Wambua Nzuki, District Officer of Taita; Patrick Mukuria, District Officer of Lamu District; and Justus Kucha, Commissioner of the Administration Police of Lamu District. I also wish to thank the District Education Officers and for sharing the development statistics from Taita and Lamu Districts. Thanks to Grace Maina of the Kenya Institute for Education, Angelo Gitonga of the Department of Adult Education, and Mary Lovi of the Ministry of Gender in Nairobi. Special thanks to Franklin Karanja, Philistance Konde, Richard Mwakichwa and Julius Mwakio Katuu of the Taita District Adult Education Office, and Ombuya Amele of the Lamu District Adult Education Office. I also wish to give thanks to the Social Development officers of Taita and Lamu Districts, including Mr. Ndau (Mwatate), Mr. Katembo (Wundanyi) and Ms. Dora Chovu (Lamu).

Special thanks to my academic advisors in Kenya: Dr. Godwin Murunga, Dr. Pius Kakai, Dr. Tom Wolf, and Dr. Athman Lali Omar. Thanks to the students, teachers and administrators of the following schools who I met and shared ideas with: Daystar University, Kenyatta University, University of Nairobi, Catholic University, Sheikh Khalifa Secondary School, Coast Girls’ High School, Lamu Girls’ Secondary School, Mkomani Girls’ Primary School, Swafaa Academy, Taita International School, Mwatate Junior Academy and the School for International Training Kenya Coastal Cultures Program. Special thanks to Dr. Leonard Mjomba and his students at Daystar University for lively debates about development, communication, health, and research methods.
I would also like to thank the following individuals who were gracious enough to sit with me and to share their ideas in formal and informal interviews, focus group meetings, and lectures:

NAIROBI: Gladys Boss Shollei (Kenya Law Reports); Grace Maina (Kenya Institute of Education), Mary Getui (Kenyatta University), Lucy Minayo (Kenya National Commission on Human Rights), Mshai Mwangola (URAIA and Aga Khan University), Judith Kunyiha-Karogo and Florence Gachanja (United Nations Population Fund - UNFPA), Hendrina Doroba (FAWE Regional Office), Tabitha Kinyanjui (FAWE Kenya); Claire Gatheru, Lilian Lelei, Emily Okello and Rose Achiego (Association of Women Journalists), Mary Mjomba (UNICEF), Lillian Otieno (Maendeleo ya Wanawake), Mary Lovi (Ministry of Gender), Dan and Edwinah Ogola and Esther (Helping Hands and Matibabu Foundation). For sheltering me in Nairobi, thanks to Mary Mjomba, Leonard Mjomba, Allan Mjomba, Paul Njore, Judy Nyambu, Nicholas Mzera Nyambu, Paul Nyambu, Simpson, Rhoda, Dan and Edwinah Ogola, and Valerie Harder.

TAITA: Mrs. Joan Mjomba (former Mayor of Voi, NCCK Board member, MYWO treasurer, VMCS director, and member of ACK Mothers’ Union), Agneta Mwakio, Julius Mwakio Katuu (Adult Education office), Dr. Leonard Majalia Mjomba and Mary Majalia (Taita International School), Fredah Chovu, Richard Mwakichwa, Franklin Karanja, Philistance Konde, Agnes Mwashigadi Onyango, Clarice Mwashigadi, Lisper Nyambu, Christina Saru, Catherine Njore, Christine Kilalo, Constance Kilalo,
Eileen Mwaita, Janet Kadari (MYWO), Victoria Dali Mwamburi (MYWO), Boilwa Farmers Field School, Sere Farmers Field School, Nguraru Women’s Group, Mwakitutu Women’s Group, Alex and Catherine of Vidasico. Thanks to Taita International School, the Nyambu family, the Mwakio family, Mrs. Joan Mjomba and the Mjomba family, and Dorcas Mbogho for sheltering me in Taita.

Special appreciation must be given to Dr. Elizabeth Edna Wangui and Dr. Tom Smucker for inviting me to work as their research assistant in Tanzania in July 2007. I was fortunate to become involved in their project on local knowledge and coping capacity regarding climate change on Mount Kilimanjaro, and they provided me with the invaluable opportunity to visit East Africa for preliminary research. I would also like to thank our colleagues Adolfo Mascarenhas, Ben Wisner, Phil O’Keefe, Hubert Meena, Stephen Mwakifwamba, Pantaleo Munishi, Jennifer Olson, and Salome Misana, who were our partners in this research. I learned a great deal from them about the process of participatory action research and the importance of “local knowledge” from our fieldwork. Thanks to the National Science Foundation for supporting this research.

I am deeply grateful for the support of the U.S. Department of State’s Institute for International Education for providing me with the Fulbright U.S. Student Fellowship. This fellowship provided me with the necessary financial support necessary to successfully complete this research project. I am particularly indebted to Ohio University’s Fulbright Advisor, Ms. Beth Clodfelter, and to Mr. Jermaine Jones, the Director of African and Middle Eastern Programs at IIE. I also would like to thank those Ohio University faculty members who participated in my campus interview and recommended me for the Fulbright Scholarship, including Sandra Turner, Marc Cutright, and Margaret Manoogian. I would also like to thank the faculty members who wrote recommendation letters and/or assisted me with editing throughout the proposal process, including Francis Godwyll, Peter Githinji, Risa Whitson, Lisa Aubrey, Jaylynne Hutchinson, Alyssa Bernstein, Diane Ciekawy, and Gene Ammarell. Many thanks to the...
Kenyan colleagues who provided letters of support, including Dr. Godwin Murunga of Kenyatta University, William Karanja of the *Daily Nation* newspaper, and Mrs. Joan Mjomba and Dr. Leonard Mjomba Majalia of the Vindo Multipurpose Cooperative Society. Finally, Prof. Wangari Maathai and Magdalena Bariki of the Green Belt Movement inspired and assisted with this project.

I am also grateful to the American Association of University Women for the American Fellowship that supported me through the final stages of writing the dissertation. Thanks to Dr. Mary Anne Flournoy and Ann Brown of the Office of Nationally Competitive Awards (ONCA) for assisting with the application, and the local Ohio University AAUW chapter for supporting me. Thanks to Amanda Peterson, AAUW Program Officer, for assisting with the fellowship process.

I also appreciate the other sources of funding that have supported my doctoral studies and Swahili language studies at Ohio University, including the College of Education Graduate Study and Educational Research Fund and travel grants, the Graduate Student Senate, the National Resource Centers for African Studies, the Summer Cooperative African Language Institute, the Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowship, the Fulbright-Hays Group Projects Abroad program, and the Department of Educational Studies Teaching Assistantship from 2005-2007. I also thank Rural Action, Casa Nueva and the Appalachian Peace and Justice Network for providing additional support and employment throughout my graduate studies.

In the spirit of solidarity and popular education, I thank my fellow colleagues, students, activists, organizers, and community members of Ohio University and
Southeast Ohio. To my peer cohort in the “Cultural Studies Mafia” – I send a great vote of appreciation to Peter Ojiambo Otiato, Agya Boakye-Boaten, Agreement Jotia, Abdullahi Abdinoor, Winsome Chunnu, Akil Houston, Travis Boyce, Cort Schneider, Janecece Henes, Jim Addington, Mike Hess, Pittaya Paladroi, Mito Takeuchi, Melissa Cardenas, Mohira Kurbanova, Fanta Diamanka, Collins Annin, Daniel Rogers, Dominic Dadzie, Lisa Watkins, Christa Preston Agiro, Abdalla Babikr, Elizabeth Ngumbi, Abdi Gure, Kaia De Matteo, Shariff Osman, Sumiko Miyafusa, Ngan Nguyen, Cynthia Tindongan, Lara Wallace, and others. We have supported each other through coursework, teaching, research projects, and have stood by each other through the inevitable ups and downs of any graduate program. My relationships in these networks of colleagues have seeded the ground for the reflection and action necessary to do this research.

I am also grateful to a number of organizations that have taught me about popular education and activism, and that have provided venues for networking and development of my research. Thanks to the Great Lakes Bioneers Conference in Michigan in 2006 for giving me a scholarship and introducing me to Paul Hawken and other progressive activists for social justice and ecological restoration. Thanks to the Highlander Research and Education Center in Tennessee for an amazing workshop on popular education at their seventy-fifth anniversary celebration in 2007. It was there that I met Larry Olds, the editor of Popular Education News, who gave me excellent ideas about the eight principles of popular education and Training for Transformation modules that connected my research to the literature. Thanks also to the Omega Institute for providing me a
scholarship to attend the “Women, Power and Peace” conference in 2007, where I met a number of female Nobel Peace Prize laureates and other feminist activists from around the world. Thanks to the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi for inviting me to various functions where I could network with well-known Kenyan women leaders and activists. I am also grateful to the African Studies Association (ASA), the Kenya Scholars and Studies Association (KESSA), and the University of Texas at Austin for providing opportunities for me to present my research and connect with colleagues doing similar work in women’s and gender studies in Africa.

This research has influenced me in profound ways. As I entered the journey to motherhood, I realized that despite my advanced education, I knew very little about pregnancy, childbirth, and caring for a newborn baby. Like the women in Kenya, I also need to be educated and nurtured by other women. I turned to the network of women’s groups in my own community in Ohio to teach me the practical skills and information I needed to become a mother. Thanks to the Athens Birth Circle, La Leche League, Lamaze, Prenatal Yoga, Mama and Baby Yoga, Sister Circle, and the Rutland Women’s Group. And thanks to the birth workers – midwives, doulas, doctors and nurses - who assisted me in the process of giving birth and accessing my inner strength and wisdom. (Throughout the years, many babies have been born to people involved in this project – Jenelle, Aviva, Chester, Theo, Nadia, Martha, Ben, Lisper, and Amani.)

Last but not least, I would like to thank my family and community for their support. To my husband, Joe Beres, I appreciate your encouragement, faith, and humor, which has been necessary to sustaining my commitment to my work and the balance in
our lives. To my daughter, Amani Rain Beres, you have provided much joy, peace and inspiration to my work and life. I also express my appreciation and respect to my grandparents (Ben and Marian Cutcher, Frank and Marge Smith, Paul and Jeanne Hopkins, James and Sylvia Schnaars), parents (Dan and Judy Cutcher, Jan and Tom Veit, and Syd and Jasey Schnaars), my sisters and brother (Debra Tilford, Leah Davidson, David Schnaars, Jessica Schnaars, and Charity Kirkbride). I was especially motivated by the graduation of my sister Debby from Ohio State University and my brother David from University of California in Santa Barbara. And I thank all of the rest of my family members – related through blood, adoption, or choice - of the Cutcher, Weaver, Smith, Howe, Veit, Allaire, Kirkbride, Schnaars, Hopkins, Huston, Maclean, Davidson, Beres, Green, Herbstreit, McCarty, Esoldo, Nardone, Natale, Neumaier, Mjomba, Nyambu, and Mwakio clans and extended families. To all the good folks of Appalachian Ohio and East Africa, I thank you for teaching me the value and process of friendship, community, citizenship, activism, and stewarding the land. As a popular African proverb says: “I am because you are. You are because we are.” I stand on the shoulders of giants, and this project is for all of you.
**Appendix B: Acronyms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAWORD</td>
<td>Association of African Women for Research and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACK</td>
<td>Anglican Church of Kenya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMWIK</td>
<td>Association of Media Women in Kenya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APHIA II</td>
<td>HIV/AIDS prevention education program in Lamu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AU</td>
<td>African Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAQDAS</td>
<td>Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBO</td>
<td>Community-based organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDF</td>
<td>Constituency Development Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEDAW</td>
<td>Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIPK</td>
<td>Council of Imams and Preachers of Kenya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAWN</td>
<td>Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC</td>
<td>District Commissioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEO</td>
<td>District Education Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFA</td>
<td>Education For All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAWE</td>
<td>Forum of African Women Educationalists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FBO</td>
<td>Faith-based organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMNET</td>
<td>African Women’s Communication and Development Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FFS</td>
<td>Farmers’ Field Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FGM</td>
<td>Female genital mutilation (a.k.a. female circumcision, female genital cutting, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIDA</td>
<td>International Federation of Women Lawyers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPE</td>
<td>Free Primary Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FSE</td>
<td>Free Secondary Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAD</td>
<td>Gender and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GBM</td>
<td>Green Belt Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRO</td>
<td>Grassroots Organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV/AIDS</td>
<td>Human Immunodeficiency Virus/ Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFI</td>
<td>International Financial Institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IGA</td>
<td>Income-generating activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KALA</td>
<td>Kenya Adult Learners Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KANU</td>
<td>Kenya African National Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KBC</td>
<td>Kenya Broadcasting Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KCPE</td>
<td>Kenya Certificate of Primary Examinations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KCSE</td>
<td>Kenya Certificate of Secondary Examinations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KIE</td>
<td>Kenya Institute of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KHRC</td>
<td>Kenya Human Rights Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KNBS</td>
<td>Kenya National Bureau of Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KNCHR</td>
<td>Kenya National Commission for Human Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KTN</td>
<td>Kenya Television Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEDFT</td>
<td>Lamu Education Development Foundation Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MGR</td>
<td>Merry-Go-Round</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoEST</td>
<td>Ministry of Education, Science and Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOE</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MP</td>
<td>Member of Parliament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MVOSA</td>
<td>Mwatate-Voi-Sagalla Women’s Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MYW</td>
<td><em>Maendeleo ya Wanawake</em> Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NARC</td>
<td>National Alliance Rainbow Coalition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCCCK</td>
<td>National Council of Churches of Kenya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCWK</td>
<td>National Council of Women of Kenya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N-Vivo</td>
<td>Data Analysis software system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODM</td>
<td>Orange Democratic Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODM-Kenya</td>
<td>Orange Democratic Movement – Kenya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PC</td>
<td>Provincial Commissioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PNU</td>
<td>Party of National Unity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAP</td>
<td>Structural Adjustment Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUPKEM</td>
<td>Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIS</td>
<td>Taita International School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TJRC</td>
<td>Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNFPA</td>
<td>United Nations Population Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNIFEM</td>
<td>United Nations Development Fund for Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USAID</td>
<td>United States Agency for International Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VMCS</td>
<td>Vindo Multipurpose Cooperative Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WB</td>
<td>World Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEDO</td>
<td>Women’s Environment and Development Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEF</td>
<td>Women’s Enterprise Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAD</td>
<td>Woman and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WID</td>
<td>Women in Development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C: IRB Consent Form

Ohio University Consent Form

Title of Research: Popular Education Among Women’s Grassroots Organizations in Kenya
Researcher: Catherine Cutcher
Department: Cultural Studies in Education

You are being asked to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your participation in this study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you.

Explanation of Study
I am conducting a study about how women’s organizations provide informal education to their members and their families in rural Kenya. I will spend eight months in Kenya observing the activities of women involved in the Green Belt Movement and the Vindo Multipurpose Cooperative Society. I will observe these groups and will conduct focus groups and informal and formal interviews with members. With permission of individual members, I will also conduct household surveys. These interviews should last no longer than one to two hours.

Risks and Discomforts
No risks or discomforts are anticipated for participants in this study. However, if you feel that answering a question might compromise your confidentiality, you may at anytime decline to answer, or you may leave the interview at any time. Unless you give me your expressed consent to use your name in my dissertation for quotations by checking the first box below, your responses to the interview questions will be treated confidentially. If you do NOT want your name to be linked to your responses in resulting publications, please check the second box.

Yes, I hereby authorize the investigator to use my name along with my responses in any publication that may result from this interview.

No, I DO NOT authorize the investigator to use my name along with my responses in any publication that may result from this interview.
I would like to record the interviews for this study using both an audio (voice) recorder and a videorecorder. I would also like to take photographs of research participants. Please confirm here whether or not you give me your expressed consent to use these devices to record your responses or images.

Yes, I hereby authorize the investigator to record me during interviews with the following devices:

Audio recorder  Video camera  Photographic camera

No, I DO NOT authorize the investigator to record me during interviews with the following devices:

Audio recorder  Video camera  Photographic camera

Benefits
Your participation in this study will help to demonstrate the role of women’s organizations in providing education to rural women in Kenya. The results of this study will add to a growing literature concerning the role of women’s movements in Africa. Your insight can help to develop educational policies and programs to provide greater access to education and empowerment for other women and their families.

Confidentiality and Records
My dissertation advisor, Dr. Francis Godwyll, and I will be the only people with full access to the responses given in the interviews. Data from this study will be published as part of my Doctoral Dissertation at Ohio University. It may also be submitted for journal publication. Your signing of this consent form will allow me to do so. Be reminded – you do not have to participate. You can withdraw from this study at anytime for any reason. There is no consequence to you for withdrawing.

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

* Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
* Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU;
* Representatives of the Institute for International Education and the U.S. Department of State, who are sponsoring this research, as well as the Kenyan Government.

Contact Information
If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact

Catherine Cutcher  Dr. Francis Godwyll
33520 Beech Grove Road  McCracken Hall
Rutland, OH  45775  USA  College of Education
Email: cutcher@ohio.edu  Ohio University
If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664.

**By signing below, you are agreeing that:**

- you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions.
- known risks to you have been explained to your satisfaction.
- you understand Ohio University has no policy or plan to pay for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this research protocol.
- you are 18 years of age or older.
- your participation in this research is given voluntarily.
- you may change your mind and stop participation at any time without penalty or loss of any benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled.

Signature __________________________________________ Date __________

Printed Name __________________________________________
Appendix D: Questions for Individual Interviews (Kiswahili Version)

Maswali ya mtu binafsi

1. Jina lako ni nani?
2. Una umri gani?
3. Ulizaliwa wapi?
4. Unaishi wapi?
5. Umesoma mpaka wapi?
6. Ni elimu gani wazazi wako walipata? Hasa mama?
7. Ulienda shule wapi?
8. Ni shule ya aina gani ulienda? (shule ya mashambani, ya mjini, ya serikali, ya mtu binafsi, ya dini, ya mseto/mchanganyiko, ya wasichana pekee yao)
9. Kulikuwa na tofauti yoyote katika elimu ya wasichana au wavulana katika jamii yako au shule?
10. Ulipenda ujuzi gani shuleni?
11. Ni ujuzi gani ulichukia sana shuleni?
13. Una watoto wangapi?
14. Mko wasichana wangapi? Na wavulana wangapi?
15. Ni wangapi wasichana? Na ni wangapi shuleni? 
16. Mnalipa karo ya shule kivipí?
17. Na ni nani analipa? Mama ama Baba?
18. Ni wangapi wamemaliza kusoma? Na ni wangapi wako shuleni?
19. Waliomaliza wanafanya nini? Kazi gani?
20. Wanasaidia familia kivipi?
21. Ni tofauti gani ya shule uliendra na ile watoto wanaoenda sasa?
22. Uhusiano wako na kikundi umesaidia watoto wako kielimu?
23. Umeolewa?
24. Bwanako anafanya kazi gani?
25. Je, bwanako anaishi na wewe au anaishi kwingineko?
26. Je, bwanako anafikiri nini kuhusu uhusiano wako na kikundi?
27. Nieleze kazi zako za kila siku.
28. Ni kazi aina gani unafanya?
29. Ulijifunzaje kazi hii?
30. Kazi yako ni ya kulipwa ama kutolipwa?
31. Mapato yako unatumiaje?
32. Ni rasilimali gani na vifaa vinavyopatikana katika kijiji?
33. Ni shida gani wako nazo katika kijiji?
34. Ni shida gani zinazokumba kia kina mama?
35. Nitajia majina ya vikundi vya akina mama. Na ni kazi gani wanafanya?
36. Wako na uhusiano gani na serikali, mashule, makanisa, mashirika ya sio serikali (NGOs)?
37. Je, wewe ni mwanachama wa kikundi chochote?
38. Ulijunga vipi?
39. Uliandikwa? Ulirithi?
40. Kikundi hiki kinawezaje kuwafikia akina mama wengine nje?

41. Niambie kuhusu ujuana wako au mafunzo au masomo ambao ambao umewahi kwenda katika kikundi hiki.

42. Je, wamama wanafundishana vipi katika kikundi hiki au katika mradi zao?

43. Ni nani huongoza mafundishi?

44. Ni mafundisho gani yalikamilishwa katika warsha hio?

45. Kuna manufaa yoyote ambayo umepata kutokana na kikundi hiki?

46. Mafundisho haya yatakusaidiaje kuchunguza ujuana wako?

47. Ni kitu gani umepata kupitia kikundi hiki?

48. Kuna mtu yeyote ambaye nueza kuuliza maswali haya?

49. Ama kuna kikundi chochote cha akinamama nueza kujua habari yake?

50. Kuna kitu unachotaka kuongea?
Appendix E: Questions for Individual Interviews (English Version)

1. Tell me a bit about yourself. Where are you from? Where do you live now?

2. What level of education have you completed? Where did you go to school? What type of schools did you attend (public, private, religious, single-sex, coed)? What were your best experiences at school? What were your worst experiences?

3. Describe your family life in the past. How many siblings did you have? What kind of education did they receive?

4. How many children do you have now? Do they go to school? How are their schools different from the schools you attended as a child?

5. Are you married? What does your husband do? Does he live with you or is he living/working elsewhere? What does he think about your participation in your organization?

6. Describe your typical work day. What kind of work do you do? Is it paid or unpaid?

7. What are the major problems facing people in your community? What are the major problems facing women in particular?

8. What are the major assets and resources of your community?

9. Tell me about the (GBM or VMCS). What kind of work do they do in your community?

10. How did you become involved in this organization? Were you recruited? How does this organization reach out to other rural women?

11. Describe any trainings or workshops you have attended with this organization. What are some highlights of those experiences?

12. Who led the trainings? How were the women involved in the process?

13. What issues were covered in your trainings?

14. How do the activities of the organization help people to name and analyze their personal experiences?
15. How do discussions and activities help people to connect their own experiences to larger social, environmental and political issues?

16. What activities are used which help people to use art, theater, music, dance, and other forms of creative expression?

17. What activities are used to help people to express their full selves and to develop consciousness about the world?

18. How does the organization confront oppression and social privilege based on gender, race, class, ethnic, and religious differences?

19. Does the organization have clear roles for teachers and learners, or are all people able to serve as both teachers and learners?

20. How does the organization put its teachings into action?

21. How does the organization respect the knowledge and experiences of its members?

22. What else have you learned through your experiences with this organization?

23. Does this organization address women’s practical needs (i.e. issues affecting survival, health, livelihoods)? Why or why not?

24. Does this organization address women’s strategic interests (i.e. issues related to political power, changing gender roles, etc)? Why or why not?

25. How are men included or excluded in the activities of this organization? Is this an asset or a problem? What is the relationship between men and women in the organization?

26. Describe the women’s movement in Kenya. What are the main issues that Kenyan women address through organizations?

27. Which organizations do you think are the most effective? The least effective?

28. Who do you credit for the overall development of Kenya? Why?

29. What do you think must be done to provide education for adult women in Kenya?

30. Is there anything else you would like to add in conclusion?
31. What other questions should I have asked? What issues would you like to explore further?

32. Do you know anyone else whom I should interview about this topic?
Appendix F: Questions for Focus Group Interviews (Kiswahili Version)

Vikundi Vya Akina Mama

1. Niambie jina la kikundi chenu cha akina mama.
2. Mlianza kikundi hicho lini?
3. Mko na wanachama wangapi?
4. Tafadhali, mjulishe kwa majina yenu.
5. Mnafanya kazi katika wilaya na sehemu gani?
6. Mnafanya kazi gani?
7. Mbona mliungana pamoja?
8. Niambie hadithi ya kuanzia ushirika wa kikundi chenu.
9. Mnafanya mradi au biashara gani? Kwa nini?
   - Kilimo – mboga, matunda, alizeti (sunflower), njugu, maharagwe, mahindi, nazi, mkonge
   - Kufuga – ngombe, kuku, mbuzi
   - Biashara – matatu, lorry, kusaga mahindi (posho mill), kufua nguo, hoteli, kujenga nyumba, kununua/kuuza ardhi, maduka
   - Sanaa – vidasi, kutengeneza vipuli au ushanga, kushona nguo, etc.
   - Mazingira - Kupanda miti, kusafisha mji, kufanya momonyoko (terraces)
   - Elimu/Ujuzi – elimu ya watu wazima, malipo za shule
   - Maji – kuweka maji masafi, usafi (kufua nguo, kuosha vyombo, kuosha nyumba), kuza maji, kubeba maji
   - Pesa – banki, mikopo, merry-go-round, kuweka postbank
10. Mnafaidi nini kupitia kwa mradi huu?
11. Je, mmefanya uzuri upi na mradi huu?
12. Mmepata shida yoyote na mradi huu?
14. Mmepata ujuzi kivipi? Nani amewafundisha ujuzi huu?

15. Nani anaongoza mradi huu? Mnafanya uchaguzi au mmechagua viongozi vipi?

16. Nani anaongoza mikutano yenu? Ni mwalimu au ni yeyote?


18. Je, mmepata ujuzi wenu kupitia kwa serikali ama mwalimu yeyote kutoka nje?

19. Je, mnafanya mradi na masomo gani ya kuongeza ujuzi wenu?

20. Mnajifunza nini na mnafundishwa nini kupitia kwa mradi huu? Mnajifunza namna gani?

21. Mbona mnatumia usanii, muziki, michezo na kadhalika ili kushirikiana na kuwasiliana kuhusu utalamu wenu?

22. Je, mnafanya nini kuwasiliana na kupunguza ubaguzi wa kike, dini, ukabila, umaskini na kadhalika?

23. Mnafikiri nini kuhusu uwezo wa akina mama kuondoa umaskini na ubaguzi?

24. Wanawake wana uwezo gani wa kufanya maendeleo ya jamii?
Appendix G: Questions for Focus Group Interviews (English Version)

Planning Educational Activities with Eight Overlapping and Interlocking Popular Education Principles
By Larry Olds

This process privileges discussion of what to do over discussion of purposes and goals as the starting point in planning. Some of you who have been trained in the hegemonic practices of education may resist getting away from the common practice of defining goals first and may find yourself wanting to begin with a discussion of purposes. There is a full critique of that practice. Purposes, we argue, cannot be known separate from concrete action contexts, and are much harder to reach agreement about, than actions.

**Questions based in principles defining popular education:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Principle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do the activities help people name their world, tell the stories of their experience, speak and find their voice at the educational event?</td>
<td>Start with experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are tools of social analysis used to help people connect their experience to a broader understanding of it, to understanding political and other social connections?</td>
<td>Deepen Analysis and Add New Information and Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What activities will be used that use art, music, theater, dance, and other such ways to use people’s non-verbal capacities?</td>
<td>The whole person – the artistic voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What activities will be used to develop consciousness about becoming more fully human as well as to develop consciousness about the world</td>
<td>Becoming more fully human</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How will you address race, class, gender, sexual orientation and gender expression, culture and other issues of privilege and oppression?</td>
<td>Confronting Oppression and privilege</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How will you address the teacher/learner – learner/teacher issues?</td>
<td>Working with, not for, people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What will be the links of the education and action?

How does the activity advocate a people/community centered versus a banking approach to knowledge?

Apply to Action

Respecting people’s knowledge
Appendix H: Survey Instrument for Household Interviews

1. Who lives in this household?

2. How are people related in this household?

3. How many children live in this household? Are they attending school? Who pays their school fees? What is the cost of school fees?

4. What is the level of education of the adults in this household? Are any adults involved in continuing education or adult education programs?

5. What are the major sources of income for your household?

6. Who owns the land/house/farm? Do you rent or own your house/land? Was the land purchased or inherited? From whom?

7. Describe your typical work day. How does this change over time or with the seasons? Is your work paid or unpaid?

8. What economic activities are your household members engaged in? How does this change throughout the year?

9. What crops do you produce in your gardens? Do you raise any animals? Are these produced for your household use or do you sell them at the market?

10. How much of your food do you produce yourself? How much do you purchase at the market or grocery store? Does your family have enough to eat?

11. Have any members of your household had any contact with agricultural extension officers or other services from the government?

12. Are members of your household also members of a church, a cooperative, or any other community organization? Describe your involvement with this group.

13. Have you received any financial assistance from any organization to support your household? Have you received any other type of assistance? Describe.

14. Have you received any training from any organization? Describe.

15. What kind of health care does your family receive? Do you visit a clinic? Do you participate in family planning services? Who assisted you with childbirth and prenatal care? How were you educated about reproductive issues?
16. How has your education from these organizations affected your family life?

17. Is there anything else you would like to add in conclusion?

18. Do you know anyone else whom I should interview about this topic?
Appendix I: Sources of Data

A. SOURCES OF DATA

The sources of data for this dissertation include four sources:

1. Document Analysis
2. Participant Observation (field notes)
3. Individual Interviews
4. Focus Group Interviews.

1. Document Analysis

The document analysis includes a review of all relevant documents that I collected in the field while doing research in Kenya. I was a voracious collector while in Kenya, and I shipped boxes of books and papers home for my collection. I tried to collect all materials that were relevant to this project, including books and pamphlets from local bookstores, government publications, training curricula for adult education and religious education, annual reports and publications of women’s organizations, and newspaper articles. This data is cited in the literature review and in the analysis of the findings. This data will be listed in my references as well. Here is a summary of the documents that I collected and analyzed:

• Department of Adult Education curriculum materials – *Kenya Post-Literacy Curriculum; Kenya Post-Literacy Curriculum: Handbook for trainers and facilitators; Wanawake, Mali na Urithi; Elections in Kenya; Acha, Huu Ugomvi!; Start and Manage Your Business; Kuchagua Mradi Utakaofaulu; Kuanzisha na Kuendeleza Biashara Ndogo Ndogo.*

• Kenya Institute of Education (KIE), Ministry of Gender & Ministry of Education. *Training Curriculum for Women’s Groups (draft).*

• World Neighbors. *Participatory Gender Sensitization and Analysis for Grassroots Manual for Community Workers.*

• Ministry of Health. *A parent’s guide to growing up and STD/HIV/AIDS*

• Ministry of Education. *Gender Policy in Education.*

• *Women’s Literacy and Empowerment* (conference proceedings)

• Government of Kenya statistics on gender and education enrollment (national, district and divisional data)

• Africa Muslims Agency (Kuwait). *Curriculum of the Quranic Schools; Ada-Iyah and Teacher’s Guide; Fiqhi ya Mwanamke Katika Tohara; Juzu ‘Amma; Tafsiri ya Taal‘iyumus Salat: Mafunzo ya Sala.*

• National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK) manuals


• Maendeleo ya Wanawake. MYWO constitution and website.
• Federation of Women Lawyers Kenya (FIDA Kenya). *Draft agenda for constitutional review.*


• UNAIDS: The Global Coalition on Women and AIDS. *Access and barriers to HIV information and services for girls and young women in Kenya; Organizations working in Kenya to address HIV and AIDS in women.*


• Soud, K. *Swahili dishes: Bringing smiles to your home.* Mombasa: Kenlees Graphics.

• Daily Nation. Articles clipped from papers and saved digital copies on flash drive.

• Post election violence reports: Waki report, women’s memorandum, Penninah Ogada article on women’s participation in elections, articles from Nation, Human Rights Watch, KNCHR.

• Photographs (taken by me, posted online, clipped from newspapers, or included in pamphlets and reports).
2. Participant Observation Field Notes

As is typical with ethnographic fieldwork, I felt like I was constantly doing research for the full year. This project required my complete immersion in the Kenyan communities where I was living and working, and often I would observe things that revealed aspects of my research for further investigation. At the market, on the buses and matatus, on television and radio programs, in the newspapers, in conversations with friends and strangers – I was constantly discovering new information that illuminated the gender dynamics of Kenyan society and the challenges of education for women and girls.

I kept field notes throughout my year in Kenya, describing and documenting all of my meetings and observations of women’s groups, government offices, non-governmental organizations, schools, and community events. I have six notebooks filled with handwritten notes, and over 500 pages of typed field notes. I also have contact information for the research participants listed on business cards and notes, phone numbers saved in an Excel spreadsheet, and written on my informed consent forms. I will use all of this observational data to interpret and include descriptive and analytical data in my final report.

I also have over fifteen hours of digital video and thousands of digital photographs that I captured. These audio/visual forms of observational data will be valuable for poster presentations, power point presentations, or descriptive film. I plan to use the film and photos during my dissertation defense and at conference presentations. The photographs will also be included and printed in the dissertation itself. In the future,
I would like to compile this audio/visual data to create a documentary film – an alternative way of telling the stories.

3. Interviews

I interviewed a total of 99 individual research participants from various communities in Kenya. Fifty interviews were informal and unrecorded, with notes taken either during the interview or expanded later in field notes. 49 interviews were more formal, recorded conversations following a semi-structured interview guide.

The interviewees were all selected based on a combination of snowball and purposive sampling. I was looking particularly for people involved in education and/or women’s organizations. Often I would ask the interviewees to help me identify other colleagues or friends whom I should interview as well. I interviewed both men and women. I also interviewed people who worked in various capacities as government employees, educators, health workers, religious leaders, community organizers, or members of non-governmental, community-based, or faith-based organizations.

Most of these interviews were with people who gave informed consent, signed forms, and who agreed to be named in the study. All interviews lasted anywhere from 15 minutes to 4 hours in length (the longest recording was two hours in length). Some interviews were followed-up and extended over many days or months for more complex data (i.e. for the life history of Mama Joan Mjomba, and multiple meetings with the Mwakitutu women’s group).

Some interviews were done in English, while others were completely conducted in Kiswahili, with bits of Kidawida (the local language of Taita, spoken as a “mother
tongue” by most women who had not attended formal school) and Arabic (used by Muslims at the Coast for greetings and references to Islamic education and religious issues). The interviews were transcribed and/or translated by me with assistance from 3 research assistants in Nairobi: Agnes Mulewa, Eliud Lubanda and Jessy Mwangola.

When I returned to Ohio University, I was also helped with translations by 2 research assistants who are graduate students from Kenya: George Gathigi and Solomon Maingi. These research assistants were paid for the time and labor that they spent in translation and transcription.

The biographical information of interviewees and dates of interviews are listed in the following charts:

**Unrecorded, Informal Interviews:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Halima Gichuki</td>
<td>US Embassy</td>
<td>3/08</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Mary Lovi</td>
<td>Ministry of Gender, GOK</td>
<td>8/08</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Justus Kucha</td>
<td>Police Commissioner</td>
<td>9/08</td>
<td>Lamu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Dora Chovu</td>
<td>District Social Devt. Officer</td>
<td>4/08 – 9/08</td>
<td>Lamu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Godwin Murunga</td>
<td>Kenyatta University</td>
<td>11/07-10/08</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Tom Wolf</td>
<td>Steadman Consulting</td>
<td>12/07 – 10/08</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Agnes Mulewa</td>
<td>Kenyatta University</td>
<td>6/08 – 8/08</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Jessy Mwangola</td>
<td>Kenyatta University</td>
<td>8/08-10/08</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Eliud Lubanda</td>
<td>Kenyatta University</td>
<td>6/08 – 10/08</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Helen Anyiso-Oduk</td>
<td>Kenyatta University</td>
<td>3/08</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Organization/Role</td>
<td>Dates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Hendrina Doroba</td>
<td>FAWE – regional office</td>
<td>8/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Tabitha Kinyanjui</td>
<td>FAWE – Kenya office</td>
<td>8/08 – 9/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Dr. Mary Mjomba</td>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>11/07 – 10/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Dr. Sam Thenya</td>
<td>Nairobi Women’s Hospital</td>
<td>11/07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Judith</td>
<td>UNFPA</td>
<td>11/07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Ruth Konchellah</td>
<td>Cherish Others</td>
<td>11/07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Scholastica Kilonzo Purity</td>
<td>Survivors of PEV, Kibera</td>
<td>9/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Purity Mwendwa</td>
<td>Journalist, Catholic Church Committee for Peace &amp; Justice</td>
<td>9/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Lillian Otieno</td>
<td>Maendeleo ya Wanawake</td>
<td>8/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Dan &amp; Edwinah Ogola Esther</td>
<td>Matibabu Foundation</td>
<td>8/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Dr. Leonard Mjomba</td>
<td>Daystar University</td>
<td>11/07 – 10/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Fredah Chovu</td>
<td>Taita International School</td>
<td>7/07 – 10/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Lisper Nyambu</td>
<td></td>
<td>3/08 – 10/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Catherine Njore</td>
<td></td>
<td>3/08 – 10/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Judith Nyambu</td>
<td></td>
<td>3/08 – 10/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Maryam Mwidadi (bride)</td>
<td></td>
<td>6/21/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Dorcas Mbogho</td>
<td></td>
<td>2/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Sarah Heddon</td>
<td>Fulbright, Z-bar, Lamu</td>
<td>1/08 – 8/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Sarah Hillewaert</td>
<td>Researcher, Linguist</td>
<td>4/08 – 10/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Julie Deakin</td>
<td>Lamu Safi</td>
<td>12/07 – 10/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Ignatio “Nacho”</td>
<td>ANIDAN</td>
<td>4/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32.</td>
<td>Mary Mwakuwa</td>
<td>Lamu Girls’ Sec. School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.</td>
<td>Abdulswamad T.</td>
<td>Lamu Cultural Festival</td>
<td>Lamu Girls’ S.S. Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Basheikh “Soro”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34.</td>
<td>Swaleh Rubea</td>
<td>Mkomani Girls’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35.</td>
<td>Abdalla Kombo</td>
<td>Mkomani Girls’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36.</td>
<td>Tima</td>
<td>Kikozi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37.</td>
<td>Faizal Mkimina</td>
<td>Volunteer, Kikozi</td>
<td>Member, Tushauriane Youth Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38.</td>
<td>Mohammed Mwalim</td>
<td>Council of Imams &amp; Preachers of Kenya</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39.</td>
<td>Maryam Omar</td>
<td>Lamu Museum</td>
<td>American Corner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40.</td>
<td>Nahida Omar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41.</td>
<td>Khadija Omar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42.</td>
<td>Rose Omela Ochieng</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43.</td>
<td>Omari Hassan</td>
<td>Tawasal Youth Group, SIT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44.</td>
<td>Walid Ahmed Ali</td>
<td>Member, Tushauriane YG</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45.</td>
<td>Rosemary Atieno</td>
<td>University of Nairobi</td>
<td>Institute of Development Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46.</td>
<td>Faith Queen Katembe</td>
<td>Action Aid International Kenya</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47.</td>
<td>Margaret Muchunu</td>
<td>Maendeleo ya Wanawake</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48.</td>
<td>Saida Ali</td>
<td>Young Women’s Leadership Institute</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
50. Magdalene Bariki  Green Belt Movement  Nairobi

**Recorded, formal interviews:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organization/Role</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Mama Joan Mjomba</td>
<td>NCCK, MYWO, ACK</td>
<td>1/23/08, 1/27/08, 1/28/08, 1/30/08, 2/6/08, 2/11/08, 2/15/08, 6/23/08, 8/23/08, 8/26/08</td>
<td>Voi/Mwatate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Alex Mwandawa</td>
<td>Vidasico</td>
<td>1/22/08</td>
<td>Mwatate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Donald Ndau</td>
<td>Social Services Officer</td>
<td>1/29/08</td>
<td>Mwatate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Maria Majalia</td>
<td>Principal, Taita Int'l School</td>
<td>2/2/08</td>
<td>Mwatate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Member, MVOSA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Richard Mwakichwa &amp;</td>
<td>Mwatate Adult Education</td>
<td>2/5/08</td>
<td>Mwatate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julius Mwakio Katuu</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Mama Agneta Mwakio</td>
<td>Mwakitutu Women’s Group</td>
<td>2/5/08, 2/12/08</td>
<td>Mwatate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seamstress/designer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Eileen Mwaita</td>
<td>ACK Mothers’ Union</td>
<td>2/6/08</td>
<td>Voi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Christine Kilalo</td>
<td>MP Candidate, Shirikisho</td>
<td>2/6/08</td>
<td>Voi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>World Neighbors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Midwife</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Philistance Konde</td>
<td>Taita Adult Ed</td>
<td>2/7/08</td>
<td>Wundanyi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community Resource Centre</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Constance Kilalo</td>
<td>MYWO</td>
<td>2/10/08</td>
<td>Wongonyi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Organization/Membership</td>
<td>City/Region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Florence W. Gachanja</td>
<td>United Nations Population Fund</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Michael Ranneberger</td>
<td>U.S. Ambassador to Kenya</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Hadija Bwanaadi Ernst</td>
<td>Lamu Chonjo</td>
<td>Lamu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Amina Hussein Soud</td>
<td>Red Cross/Anidan</td>
<td>Lamu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Ombuya Amele</td>
<td>Lamu District Adult Ed.</td>
<td>Lamu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Rukiya Lali</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lamu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Amina Kale</td>
<td>Kikozi</td>
<td>Lamu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Beth Wanjiku</td>
<td>Lamu Women’s Poverty Eradication &amp; Education</td>
<td>Lamu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Athman Lali Omar</td>
<td>SIT-Kenya Coastal Cultures</td>
<td>Mombasa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Victoria Dali Mwamburi</td>
<td>MYWO – Mwatate</td>
<td>Mwatate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Franklin Karanja</td>
<td>Taita Adult Education</td>
<td>Wundanyi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Mr. Katembo</td>
<td>Taita District Social Development Officer</td>
<td>Wundanyi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Christina Saru</td>
<td>Midwifery/Childbirth</td>
<td>Wundanyi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Janet Kadari</td>
<td>MYWO – Mwatate</td>
<td>Mwatate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Daizy Nyange</td>
<td>Mwakitutu</td>
<td>Mwatate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Agnes Onyango Mwashigadi</td>
<td>ACK Mothers’ Union</td>
<td>Nakuru/Voi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Mary Getui</td>
<td>Kenyatta University Gender Roundtable</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Grace Maina</td>
<td>Kenya Institute of Education</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Mshai Mwangola</td>
<td>Aga Khan University Theater for Development URAIA</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Lucy Minayo</td>
<td>Kenya National Commission On Human Rights (KNCHR)</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Institution/Group</td>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.</td>
<td>Angelo Gitonga</td>
<td>Dept. of Adult Education</td>
<td>9/10/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34.</td>
<td>Amina Kale</td>
<td>Kikozi</td>
<td>9/22/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35.</td>
<td>Fatma Ali Busaidy</td>
<td>Lamu Museum</td>
<td>9/24/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36.</td>
<td>Fatma Salim Al-Busaidy</td>
<td>MYWO</td>
<td>9/27/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37.</td>
<td>Hababa Noor</td>
<td>Sauti ya Wanawake</td>
<td>9/27/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38.</td>
<td>Sauda Kassim</td>
<td>Mkomani Girls’ School</td>
<td>9/29/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39.</td>
<td>Hafswa Diffin</td>
<td>Mkomani Girls’ School</td>
<td>10/7/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40.</td>
<td>Ustadh Idarus Shariff Ali</td>
<td>Swafaa Academy</td>
<td>10/7/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41.</td>
<td>Ustadh Mahmoud</td>
<td>Pwani Mosque</td>
<td>10/7/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42.</td>
<td>Aboud Bahero Aboud</td>
<td>Swafaa Academy</td>
<td>10/8/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43.</td>
<td>Thaddeus Mogute</td>
<td>Lamu Girls’ High School</td>
<td>10/8/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44.</td>
<td>Joseph Warui</td>
<td>Café Nyumbani</td>
<td>10/8/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45.</td>
<td>Kamlesh Rawal</td>
<td></td>
<td>10/16/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46.</td>
<td>Khifa Soud</td>
<td>Fort Jesus Museum</td>
<td>10/16/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47.</td>
<td>Sheikh Ahmed Nabhany</td>
<td>Swahili Cultural Centre</td>
<td>10/17/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48.</td>
<td>Clarice Mwashigadi</td>
<td>ACK Mothers’ Union</td>
<td>10/22/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49.</td>
<td>Hon. Fred Outa</td>
<td>MP, Nyando Constituency</td>
<td>1/31/08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL: 99 interviews**
4. **Focus Group Interviews**

I also conducted and observed 37 groups in focus group interviews throughout the year in Kenya. These were valuable opportunities to observe group dynamics of women’s organizations and to see them “in action.” In focus groups, I was able to ask questions to which many women could respond, or which generated debate amongst themselves. I was also able to observe how they employed popular education principles and practices in their meetings and activities. I spent time with a number of groups in their own meetings and in meetings that were called intentionally for me to interview them. Some groups were affiliated with adult education & literacy classes, while others were more ad-hoc, community-based organizations. Some groups were specifically for income-generating activities or cooperative business or investment ventures. Some were farmers’ organizations and “field schools” demonstrating research skills, problem solving and agricultural extension education. Some groups were also specifically organized around issues, such as violence against women, health education or to discuss the post-election violence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Activists</td>
<td>U.S. Embassy Roundtable</td>
<td>11/07</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judges</td>
<td>16 Days for the Elimination of Violence Against Women</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MPs &amp; candidates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educators</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Students</td>
<td>Daystar University</td>
<td>11/07-10/08</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Members</td>
<td>Star Women’s Group</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mwatate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Members
Green Belt Movement
Wundanyi

5. Staff
Green Belt Movement
Nairobi

6. Members
Shomoto church women’s group (with Mama Lisper Nyambu)
Wundanyi

7. Members
MVOSA Women’s Group
Voi

8. Members
Mwakitutu Women’s Group
1/25/08 Mwatate
Jerusha Machocho Amoni
1/28/08
Difence Mgambi Mwawingwa
2/4/08
Josephine Mawondo Mshimba
2/8/08
Fidlia Shanyi Mombo
2/12/08
Betty Wandoe Mwambi
5/7/08
Agnetah Marura Mganga
6/9/08
Carorina Mbulo Mwamburi
8/16/08
Margaret Wawuda Mwadime
Dorothy Wandolo Mwawasi
Jennifer Malembo Mwasigwa
Agneta Mghambi Mwakisagu
Domtila Mgoi Mwashigadi
Peninah Mghambi Kimori

9. Members
Tuungane Wiyoni
Women’s Group
1/08 Lamu
Simon Mwangi Mburu
Nancy Njeri Kamau
Katana Yaa Baya
Dama Mweni
Kadzo Katanya
Halima Mohammed
Diana Wanjeru
Tabitha Waithera
Magdalene Wanjeru
Paul Mwangi
Cecelia Wanjiku
Pauline Wambui

10. Henna painters
Zeinab Bin Haji
Muna Bin Haji
Lamu
Lamu
Asma Han
Hawenka Salon, South C, NBI
Asma Yayu
Kashmir, Lamu
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Event Details</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Vidasico – Taita Baskets</td>
<td>1/24/08</td>
<td>Mwatate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1/31/08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Mwatate Women’s Enterprise Fund Meeting</td>
<td>1/29/08</td>
<td>Mwatate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Nguraru Women’s Group</td>
<td>2/7/08</td>
<td>Wundanyi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Allan Mjomba Sec. School</td>
<td>2/8/08</td>
<td>Wongonyi, Taita</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Mwatate Adult Ed. Meeting</td>
<td>2/12/08</td>
<td>Mwatate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Association of Women Journalists of Kenya</td>
<td>3/8/08</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lilian Lelei</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rose Achiego</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Claire Gatheru</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emily Okello</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>U.S. Embassy International Women’s Day</td>
<td>3/8/08</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Sere Farmers Field School</td>
<td>5/7/08</td>
<td>Mwatate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Boilwa Farmers Field School</td>
<td>5/8/08</td>
<td>Mwatate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Bura Zone Education Mtg.</td>
<td>5/31/08</td>
<td>Mwatate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Goethe Institute Conference: Ethnicity &amp; Identity &amp; Elections Violence in Kenya</td>
<td>6/18/08</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Muslim Wedding</td>
<td>6/21/08</td>
<td>Roka Village</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Kwani Litfest</td>
<td>8/7/08</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>NCCK</td>
<td>8/20/08</td>
<td>Nakuru</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8/21/08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8/22/08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8/23/08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission Gender workshop</td>
<td>8/28/08</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>Speakers</td>
<td>Gender Roundtable, KU</td>
<td>8/29/08</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>Speakers</td>
<td>Literacy Day Festival</td>
<td>9/8/08</td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>Students/Staff</td>
<td>SIT- Kenya Coastal Cultures</td>
<td>9/22/08</td>
<td>Lamu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>Housegirls</td>
<td>Fatma Salim</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lamu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Baraza la Eid-Ul-Fitr</td>
<td>10/2/08</td>
<td>Lamu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>Students/Teachers</td>
<td>Mkomani Girls’ School</td>
<td>10/3/08</td>
<td>Lamu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32.</td>
<td>Speakers</td>
<td>Aphia II Workshop</td>
<td>10/10/08</td>
<td>Lamu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.</td>
<td>Speakers</td>
<td>Lamu Girls’ High School</td>
<td>10/11/08</td>
<td>Lamu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34.</td>
<td>Members</td>
<td>Sauti ya Wanawake Women’s Group</td>
<td>10/08</td>
<td>Lamu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35.</td>
<td>Members</td>
<td>Tushauriane Youth Group</td>
<td>10/08</td>
<td>Lamu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36.</td>
<td>Members/performers</td>
<td>TNT Youth Group</td>
<td>10/08</td>
<td>Mwatate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Theater Nurtures Talent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37.</td>
<td>Members</td>
<td>Education for Marginalized Area Children of Kenya (EMACK) workshop</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lamu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL:** 37 focus groups