

CONCLUSION

How do you conclude a book with contributions that offer diverse accounts of very different contexts? The objective of this book was not to offer a set of policy propositions and my intention is not to summarise the conceptual pathways that each chapter may have opened up for a reader. However, a conclusion needed to be written so I have approached this task by identifying set of key themes explored by different chapters. Rather than treat each chapter in an isolated fashion, I draw out lessons based on what I consider shared analytical strands. These lessons are designed to speak to anyone interested in considering why gender disappears in discourses on youth-hood, protests and change or anyone who thinks about direct action as a critical tool for dissent.

In doing so, let me return to a moment that captures my approach to drawing out conclusions. In the summer of 2017, I travelled to Atlanta, Georgia where I visited the National Centre for Civil and Human Rights. In this well curated museum, visitors were taken through a visceral journey of the civil rights movement in the USA and the Jim Crow laws that shaped the resistance. One of the most well-known protest actions other than the bus boycotts were sit ins to protest segregated lunch counters in restaurants. In the museum, you listened to the preparation that protestors were given before embarking on the sit in. It was mental and physical preparation. Protestors were required to be mentally prepared for the racist abuse that would come their way and the physical harm that

you were likely to face. In the museum, there was a lunch counter that simulated the experiences that those who signed up for the sit-ins had to go through. It was an invitation to step into the shoes of the brave civil rights activists. I sat down and followed the instructions before me. I put the headphones on, placed my hands on the counter, and closed my eyes. I was not prepared for what would follow because I felt every breath and every kick to the chair. It felt as though it was happening in real time. I did not last five seconds on the chair. It was all too much. I eventually returned to the counter simulation forty minutes later if only to prove to myself that I was strong enough to withstand the experience. It was not easier the second time around but I stuck it out. After that visit the tradition of organising that contemporary movements such as *BlackLivesMatter* became clearer to me. I understood why *BlackLivesMatter* had developed Healing Justice Healing Action and Conflict Resolution toolkits (n.d.). The *Healing in Action* toolkit centres an awareness of the self in relation to the collective and the demands that come with direct action. Both of these resources go into some fair detail about how roles are assigned, to the importance of food and hydration, to managing conflicts within the group and how those can harm action and the community resources to support protestors when they are arrested.

I return to this experience and memory because it speaks directly to a theme raised in four chapters in this book and this is the notion of preparation, safety and care for protestors. In Maleby's chapter on South Africa, they raise the question of safety and care through an exploration of invisible labour and the militarised violence that protestors encountered as part of the *FeesMustFall* protests. The non-violent nude resistance by feminist dissenters as well as the insistence on acknowledging invisible labour was a conversation about whether movements account for the mental, physical and emotional costs that come with protesting. This is an issue that is also picked up by Felogene and Awuor in their chapter on Kenya. Granted a distinction needs to be made between large-scale protests that have different centres of organisational power and group-centred protests such as *FeesMustFall* where there are centralised sites of information dissemination and organisation. The key lesson articulated in both these chapters is not a question of better protest organisation but the fundamental silence about who protestors are and how the harms that are experienced on a physical and mental level are always shaped by gender, race and class. These chapters require us to think about the importance of factoring in a strategy for healing and support within political mobilisation

processes. The underlying argument is that patriarchal logics often shape political mobilisation even where it is designed to achieve social transformation. The absence of collective care as a strategy for political organising and an inattentiveness to the legacies of structural exclusion on women and non-binary people is a direct result of the patriarchal underpinnings of protest movements. The emphasis on collective care is based on a long-standing feminist position that positions the gendered body as a political site (see Enloe 1990; Kandiyoti 1991; Yuval Davis 1997). By acknowledging the body as a political site means recognising that different regimes deposit their patriarchal anxieties on it and this often happens through material and discursive debates on respectability, morality, nature and societal order. Social justice movements reproduce these patriarchal anxieties, which makes the insistence by feminists on care as an important part of organising a radical act that disrupts patriarchy.

A second important lesson that is picked up Zoneziwoh, Nugdallah, Saad and Abed in their respective chapters on Cameroon and Egypt is the tactical use of physical and other forms of sexual violence to remove women from spaces of resistance. The terms on which this exclusion occurs is based on an old patriarchal tactic of mobilising violence to both reproduce gender identity—by this I mean using violence to clarify the roles that a society decides women and men are meant to play. In disciplining women through violence for physically being present at protests there is a tacit message being sent about the public sphere as a masculine sphere. Violence also serves a disciplinary function by silencing women who dissent and constructing their actions as gender transgressions. The experiences of women protestors in Cameroon, Sudan and Egypt illustrate how violence used by state and non-state actors serves the purpose of driving women out of public spaces of dissent, marginalises their dissenting actions and leads to a self-perpetuating cycle where women default to traditional strategies of engagement. These traditional strategies tend to reinforce women's identities as mothers, sisters, wives. Women are constructed as vulnerable individuals who are left behind as sons, brothers and husbands are incarcerated or face the brunt of state violence. It erases the women who bear the brunt of state violence whether that occurs through incarceration, death or harassment. Zoneziwoh picks up on cyberviolence as a new avenue that is used to silence activists who have actively used social media to mobilised across borders. Autonomous online spaces (much like the existence of autonomous feminist spaces such as the African Feminist Forum), such as closed WhatsApp or Facebook groups serve the purpose of insulating feminist organisers from

online misogyny thus allowing them to regroup, re-strategise and replenish for broad-based engagement. The importance of these online spaces for the pursuit of healing justice (Black Lives Matter, n.d.) is conscious effort to not reproduce the very violence targeted at oppressed people on oppressed people. The lesson drawn from Egypt, Cameroon and Sudan is the need to be attentive to how historical violence is reproduced within social justice movements with little interrogation of how power is being exercised in non-transformative ways. The language of transformation is present in the demands and not in the actions and ways of working that drive these movements.

A third lesson that arises directly from the Sudan and Egypt chapters is the role of state surveillance in directly subverting feminist gains during and after the revolution moment. In the Sudan chapter, Nugdalla offers us an extensive view of the convergence of legal, extra-legal and transnational mechanisms deployed by the Bashir regime to run feminist activists and institutions to the ground. In the Sudanese case, the reach of the state can be seen in the fear that activists who fled the country still feel given the broader family networks who still navigate life in Sudan. We observe the carefully designed strategy by the Bashir government to decimate feminist activism through various surveillance technologies such as punitive laws targeting women's dressing and movement, legislation that curtailed organising and cancelling the registration of civil society groups. To understand what it means to reclaim space for progressive women's rights demands in a post-Bashir environment requires a recognition of the history of subversive action by radical feminist voices and the systematic effort by the state to silence these voices.

A fourth lesson illuminated in the chapters by Tofa, Rukato and Hajayandi is the absence of a political strategy. Hajayandi's chapter on Burundi asks us to consider whether election boycotts as a political strategy serve the purpose of enlarging democratic space or simply enable authoritarian regimes to run roughshod over the populace. The Burundian example mirrors similar examples across Africa such as opposition candidate Raila Odinga's refusal to participate in the re-run of the Kenyan presidential elections in 2017 and a similar action by Morgan Tsvangirai in the 2008 run-off in Zimbabwe leading to an unchanging status quo. Hajayandi invites us to consider whether a political strategy that does not achieve its objectives of delaying and/or rewriting the terms of political engagement is a sound strategy. The issue of ineffective strategies is also observed in citizen—largely youth—driven protests. Citizen led protests

as shown by this book are brought together by shared concerns such as high levels of corruption, unemployment, high cost of living and general economic impoverishment. However, the characterisation of people led movements as “leaderless” has left them open to being usurped by the military, incumbents when opposition parties boycott elections or the old guard embedded in the state. While youthful protestors have been clear about what is wrong, which is often epitomised by the type of leadership that characterised old regimes, these movements are not designed as vehicles for transforming and taking power. In the end, frustration, willingness to act and the numerical might of youth is exploited to get a recycled political class into power. From the coup not coup in Zimbabwe and Egypt to the opposition boycott in Burundi, the gains from the street or non-institutional sites of dissent are lost once there is a change of guard and the cycles of punitive violence continue. While it is important to know what one is against, the failure to build a clear political project around what one wants to see explains why citizen led protests do not turn the removal of a president into long term political transformation that centres their demands.

The fifth lesson is about claiming victories. It is easy in a book that problematises resistance to feminist visions of freedom and violence to end with a sense of despair. This despair is shaped in part by how deeply entrenched patriarchy is and its intransigence. However, to give in to despair would ignore the labour of feminist dissenters and the shifts in debates and public discourses that have emerged because feminists dared to organise. I return to the Black Lives Matter *Healing in Action* toolkit that asks how we can draw energy from naming and developing visions rather than our wounds, to illustrate that the contributions in this book tell us something about feminist dissent and emancipatory futures. The first vision of an emancipatory future is one in which women and non-binary people say that their presence and voice is not negotiable. It is easy to view visibility and direct action by women as a goal that should not be lauded in 2020 yet in a global environment characterised by an increase in anti-gender rhetoric (see Corredor 2019) this presence cannot be dismissed. The second emancipatory vision lies in the connections that are made across physical spaces within the country and across state borders to build transnational virtual communities of action. These virtual communities of action have been an essential lifeline for feminists that mobilise both intellectual and financial resources towards a time-bound campaign. The third and final emancipatory vision is connected to voice and discursive

space. If as is argued by Rane and Salem (2012) and Lumsden and Morgan (2017) that the digital sphere is a site of gender violence, then the insistence by feminists on taking back that space says something about the resilience of feminist activists and the fear that is generated by feminist discourses produced in that space. That “toxic feminist” has become a catch phrase is indicative of the expansion of feminist discourses in the public sphere and therefore a concerted challenge to patriarchy. Feminist action is challenging the status quo in ways that are destabilising for those who hold onto the little enclaves of patriarchal power. There is a generational claim that I want make in relation to this “success”. Younger feminists are leading the charge boldly by speaking up, stepping forward and claiming space. Fallist feminists in South Africa illustrate what happens when passionate activism is linked to conceptual analysis. Strategies become more complex and the analysis about the root causes of the problems become more robust and grounded in histories of knowledge production and activism. I end this book with an invitation to draw energy from our victories as a pathway to developing feminist visions if you end this book and ask what do we do?

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INDEX

A

Abdulmelik, Nebila, 28

Abine, Ayah Paul, 135

Activism

anti-regime struggles and, 3, 4, 14

citizen mobilisation, access to government and, 13

citizen's voices, diminished power of, 4, 5

civil society organisations, changing role of, 3–5

co-opted struggles, old guard/third forces and, 13

counter-discourses, emergence of, 2
democratisation of information and, 4

direct action and, 13

government accountability and, 4

hashtag protests and, 4

military-into-civilian actors and, 14

regime power networks, success of, 2–3, 13

state power, means to change in, 14

transnational mobilisation actions and, 4

underground situatedness of, 5

union activism, 4

See also African governance; Internet; Protest; Social media platforms; Student movements against autocracies; Women's rights movements; Youth activism

Addis Ababa Agreement, 49, 50

Adly, Magda, 92

African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, 88

African Feminist Forum, 3, 229

African governance

accountability demands and, 4

anti-government protests, incidence of, 4

anti-regime struggles, shift in, 1–4

British colonial pricing restrictions/regulations and, 6

citizen/youth activism and, 1, 3, 13

- civil society organisations, changing role of, 4
- communication laws, passage of, 4, 13
- communication legislation, dissent management and, 4
- constitutional procedures, abuse of, 4
- coup-not-coup phenomenon and, 5, 14
- economic concerns and, 3, 4
- external donors, indebtedness to, 38
- flag democracies and, 13
- gender struggles and, 6, 14–15
- global political landscape, changes in, 5
- governance/electoral deficits and, 3
- hashtag protests and, 4
- human rights defenders, crackdown on, 4
- inequalities, widening of, 4
- Internet access/public broadcasts, blocking of, 4–5
- “life presidents” and, 14
- lobbying/advocacy communications and, 13
- military-into-civilian actors and, 5, 14
- nationalist discourse/democracy, limitations of, 4
- patron client politics and, 13
- protests, reasons for, 3
- single-party political system and, 37
- social spending, disinvestments from, 38
- university administration and, 37
- university students, waning elite/privileged status of, 46–49
- women’s collective action, social movement development and, 6
- See also* Autocracies; Deep state; Democratic governments; Protest
- African National Congress (ANC), 2
- African Women’s Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), 24, 25, 28
- Ahidjo, Ahmadou, 133
- Al-Bashir, Omar, 48, 50, 51, 107–109, 120, 123, 126, 127
- Ali, N.M., 116
- Al-Sabbagh, Shaimaa, 95
- Ambazonia Governing Council (AGC), 133
- Ambazonia Movement (AM), 134
- Amnesty International (AI), 214
- Ansell, N., 52, 53
- Anti-Sexual Harassment movement and, 92
- Anyaoku, Emeka, 189
- Anzaldúa, G., 140
- Apell, R., 99
- Arab Spring, 54
- Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Accords, 152, 156–160, 163, 165
- Association des Étudiants Sénégalais en France* (AESF), 40
- Association for Progressive Communications (APC), 20
- Association Generale des Étudiants de Dakar* (AGED), 41–42
- Atteh, S., 38
- Authoritarianism, 36
- Autocracies, 3
- academic freedom/university administration and, 37
- authoritarianism and, 36
- civil society organisations, changing role of, 2
- corruption-laden political programmes and, 4
- definition of, 40

elections, manipulation of, 3
 governance/electoral deficits and, 3
 Internet access/public broadcasts,
 blocking of, 4–5
 “life presidents” and, 14
 popular protests, role of, 3, 4
 power-sharing agreements and, 3
 scale of severity of, 36
 single-party political system and, 37
 statist development models and, 37
 totalitarianism and, 36
 youth activism against, 3, 4
See also African governance;
 Deep state; Protest; Student
 movements against autocracies
 Azer, Margaret, 94

B

Badran, M., 83, 84, 86, 98
 Badri, B., 109, 112
 Bagaza, Jean-Baptiste, 154
 Bantu Education Act of 1953, 65, 68
 Baretta, M., 137
 Bathily, A., 39–43
 Benbow, R., 47, 48
 Benka-Coker, Hanna, 6
 Bernhard, M., 132
 Berridge, W., 51
 Bianchini, P., 54
 Bibixy, Mancho, 135
 Bishai, L., 48–50
 Biti, Tendai, 182
 Biya, Chantal, 138
 Biya, Paul, 133, 136
 Black Lives Matter Movement, 3, 215,
 230
 Black Wednesday incidents, 88
 Blumberg, R., 139
 Boahen, A., 38, 39
 Boler, M., 132
 Boyle, P., 53, 54

British Cameroon Independent Action
 Group (BRICAMIAG), 134
 Brooke-Smith, R., 45, 46
 Burkina Faso
 Balai Citoyen movement and, 54
 “life president” in, 14
 Burundi
 anti-government protests in, 4
 communication laws and, 31
 gender equity concerns and, 14–16
 #HalteauTroisiemeMandat and, 4
 Internet access/public broadcasts,
 blocking of, 4
 See also African governance;
 Burundian democratic reversals
 Burundian democratic reversals, 151
 anti-democratic practices and,
 149–152, 168–169
 Arusha Peace and Reconciliation
 Accords and, 152, 156–160,
 163, 165
 assassinations and, 154
 Burundi Constitution and, 163
 Burundi National Defence Forces,
 formation of, 158
 checks and balance system,
 destruction of, 151, 164, 169
 citizen groups/social classes,
 disconnections among, 160
 civil war and, 155–156, 158, 165
 Congress for National Freedom
 party, 169
 consociational/representative
 democracy system, creation of,
 156–160, 165, 167
 consolidation of democracy, analysis
 of, 152, 156–160, 165
 consolidation of democracy, road-
 blocks to, 149, 151, 153–154,
 158–160, 162–163
 Convention of Government, failure
 of, 155

- convulsed politics, reasons behind, 149, 152, 154
 - coup activities and, 155–156
 - defence/security reforms, demobilisation/reintegration process and, 157
 - democracy/stability, path toward, 152, 164–165
 - democratic reversals, theoretical aspects of, 159–160, 166–171
 - democratic values, eroding of, 149–150, 152, 169–170
 - economic conditions/employment prospects and, 164
 - electoral boycotts and, 149, 150, 152, 160–165, 169
 - electorate, priorities/needs of, 150–152, 168
 - “empty chair” politics and, 152, 165, 169
 - ethnic quotas, marginalized groups’ inclusion and, 157
 - external support, conditional nature of, 150
 - Forces for National Liberation movement and, 158
 - Front for Democracy in Burundi party, victory of, 155–156
 - genocide/massacres and, 154
 - Global Ceasefire Agreement, signing of, 157, 165–166
 - historic political crises/conflicts and, 154–156
 - Hutu-Tutsi ethnic antagonism and, 154, 155, 158, 166
 - inclusive political entities, institutionalisation of, 157–158
 - intra-ethnic group political adversaries and, 158
 - leadership, power/wealth focus of, 149, 152
 - military juntas, role of, 154
 - multiparty democracy, perilous transitions to, 153
 - National Council for the Defence of Democracy-Forces for the Defence of Democracy ruling party and, 150–152, 157, 158, 162–169
 - opposition leaders/civil society activists and, 150, 159
 - opposition leadership, non-participation/inefficiencies of, 153, 168
 - opposition political parties, constructive role of, 149, 151, 163
 - participatory/representative democracy and, 156, 160
 - peace initiatives and, 155, 166
 - political parties, role of, 149–151, 156, 158, 160, 163
 - post-independence institutions, failure of, 154
 - power sharing arrangements, status of, 152, 157, 164, 165–169
 - privatisation trend and, 154
 - protesting Nkurunziza’s re-election and, 151
 - radicalized armed movements and, 155
 - ruling party authoritarian tendencies and, 149, 152, 159, 161, 165
 - splinter groups, creation of, 151, 168
 - third-wave democratization process and, 153
 - viable alternatives, existence of, 150
 - violence/dirty tricks, use of, 166–167
- See also* Burundi
Buyoya, Pierre, 154, 155

C

- Caffentzis, G., 38, 39
- Cambridge Analytica debacle, 3
- Cameroon
- communication laws and, 31
 - Internet access/public broadcasts, blocking of, 4
 - See also* African governance;
 - Cameroonian Anglophone women's struggle
- Cameroon Anglophone Civil Society Consortium (CACSC), 135
- Cameroonian Anglophone women's struggle, 133–134
- acceptable women's protest action and, 143
 - Anglophone consciousness, secessionist agenda and, 133
 - Anglophone crisis, development of, 137
 - Anlu women, role of, 135
 - arrests/fines for activists and, 136–137
 - backlash to, 141–143, 145
 - Cameroon Anglophone Civil Society Consortium, banning of, 135
 - Cameroon Women Peace Movement and, 137
 - Collectif des Femmes pour Le Renouveau, banning of, 134
 - cultural integration, lack of, 133
 - cyberbullying/online violence and, 141–143
 - Emergency Humanitarian Assistance initiative and, 138
 - exiled protesters, extradition/trials of, 136
 - Federal Republic of Cameroon, formation of, 133
 - female militant groups, political consciousness/activity of, 134
 - Francophone Cameroonians, hegemonic dominance of, 133
 - French Cameroon, secession from, 131
 - gendered leadership expectations, division of labour and, 134, 135
 - gender inequity concerns and, 135, 141
 - intergenerational transgression and, 143
 - International Women's Day, boycott of, 138
 - Internet in English-speaking regions, shutdown of, 136
 - lawyers/teachers strikes and, 135–137
 - marginalized Anglophone Cameroonians and, 133, 138
 - media coverage/public conversations, political consciousness and, 134, 138
 - oppressive contextual factors, utilized alternatives to, 132
 - peacemaking processes, women's leadership in, 138, 140
 - political representation/freedom of speech/democratic practices, goals of, 134, 144
 - public space, male guardians of, 143
 - radicalisation of Southern Cameroonians and, 136
 - sacred/spiritual forces, political strength and, 135
 - secessionist struggle, government abuse/intimidation and, 134
 - separatists/secessionist groups in, 133
 - Social Democratic Front and, 135
 - societal transformation, challenged stereotypes and, 144

- Southwest and Northwest Women's Task Force and, 137
- Takembeng female cult, role of, 134
- technology/social media resources and, 144, 145
- transnational intellectual communities, absence of, 144
- violence online/cyberbullying and, 141–143
- women, protest action and, 139, 142, 143, 145
- women's frontline leadership and, 134–135
- women's participation/contributions, borderline presence and, 140
- See also* Cameroon
- Cameroon Women Peace Movement (COWPEM), 137
- Cekeshe, Kanya, 63
- Centre for Rights Education and Awareness (CREAW), 24
- Chad
- communication laws and, 31
- Internet access/public broadcasts, blocking of, 4
- See also* African governance
- Chamisa, Nelson, 182, 184, 186, 188
- Chigumba, Priscilla, 183
- Chinamasa, Patrick, 181
- Chitiyo, K., 179
- Chiwenga, Constantino, 179, 180, 191
- Chung, F., 175
- Cierume, 205, 206
- CIVICUS, 5
- Civil rights movement (US), 1, 227
- Civil society organisations (CSOs)
- anti-regime struggles and, 3
- changing role of, 4, 5
- citizen's voices, diminished power of, 4, 5
- co-optation of, regime propaganda and, 6
- global political landscape and, 5
- mobilisation, changing nature of, 3
- neoliberal development agendas and, 5
- violence against women and, 2, 3
- Coalition of Freedom and Change, 107, 125
- Coalition on Violence Against Women (COVAW), 23, 25, 27, 29
- Cock, J., 71
- Collectif des Femmes pour Le Renouveau (CFR), 134
- Colonialism
- assimilation pressures and, 40
- decolonisation/independence movements and, 37, 39
- market pricing restrictions/regulations and, 6
- modern African universities, emergence of, 37, 39, 52
- post-colonial single-party political system and, 37
- Senegalese higher education system and, 39–41
- statist development models, adoption of, 37
- student movements, demands of, 36, 38–40
- student movements, rarity of, 39
- Conflict Resolution toolkit, 2, 228
- Congo
- See* Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)
- Congress for National Freedom party, 169
- Coup d'état, 1, 14, 155, 180
- Coup-not-coup phenomenon, 5, 14
- Curtis, D., 155, 157, 159, 165, 166

D

Danquah, Mabel Dove, 6
 Dar es Salaam University Students' Organisation (DUSO), 47
 Davis, Angela, 218
 Dawson, M., 52
 Deep state, 5
 coup-not-coup phenomenon and, 5, 14
 military-into-civilian actors and, 5
 ousted political elites, alternates to, 5–6
 protest, ineffectiveness of, 3
 regime power networks, success of, 1–4
 See also African governance; Autocracies
 Democratic governments
 changing governments, means to, 1
 civil society actions and, 2
 counter-discourses, emergence of, 2
 democracies, types of, 153
 democratic reversals, theoretical aspects of, 153–154
 dissent/citizen uprisings and, 3
 elections, relinquished power and, 1
 electoral autocracy and, 153
 electoral democracy and, 153
 flag democracies and, 13
 liberal democracy and, 153
 Lomé Declaration and, 1
 regimes, legitimacy of, 1
 representatives, abusive treatment of, 1
 third-wave democratization and, 153
 unconstitutional acts against and, 1
 violence against women, debate about, 2
 women's status in, 2
 youth activism and, 3

See also Autocracies; Burundian democratic reversals
 Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)
 communication laws and, 31
 international actors, political interference by, 41
 Internet access/public broadcasts, blocking of, 4
 student protests/strikes and, 38
 See also African governance
 Derayah, M., 140
 Dinka, Fon Gorji, 134
 Diouf, M., 39, 40
 Direct action, 4, 14
 Dissent *See* Civil society organisations (CSOs); Feminist dissent; Protest; Student movements against autocracies
 Dixon, Rodney, 189
 Djibouti
 anti-government protests in, 4
 See also African governance
 Dlakavu, Simamkele, 73, 75, 216
 Dramaturgical action, 202, 203, 211–212
 Durham, D., 16

E

Eagleton, M., 88
 Egypt
 Arab Spring and, 54
 co-opted struggles, old guard power and, 13
 coup-not-coup phenomenon and, 5, 14
 formal political decision process, youth under-representation in, 18
 gender equity concerns and, 14–16
 “life president” in, 14
 military-into-civilian actors and, 14

- Mubarak's fall, protests around, 21
 youth activism and, 14
See also African governance;
 Egyptian women's activism
- Egyptian women's activism, 84
 accountability, elusive nature of, 88, 91
 anti-sexual violence movement and, 97–100
 autonomous activism, Sisi's curtailment of, 94
 Black Wednesday incidents and, 88
 “circle of hell” behavior pattern and, 92
 civil society crackdown/protest ban and, 94–96
 egalitarian atmosphere, nascent uprisings and, 83, 87, 89, 98
 El Nadeem Center for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence and, 92
 feminine nation, safeguarding of, 84
 feminist consciousness, pre-existence of, 87
 feminist mobilization, state endorsement of, 94, 100
 feminist movements and, 83, 96, 98
 4th wave feminism and, 99
 gender-centric agenda, advancement of, 82, 87, 96–100
 gender inequalities, deep-rooted nature of, 82
 gender roles, women's exploitation of, 86
 ideological rivalries, opposition protest movement and, 89
 masculine interests in revolutions and, 84–86
 Morsi, coup against, 91–93
 Mubarak, ousting of, 87–91, 93, 99
 Muslim Brotherhood, role of, 90–95
- National Council for Women and, 98
 nationalist revolution, women's temporary emancipation and, 84, 100
 “nationhood”, gendered conceptualization of, 84
 ongoing revolution, discontinuities in, 83
 Operation Anti-Sexual Harassment and, 92
 patriarchal society, norm of sexual violence and, 82, 85, 96
 phase one revolution, regime change/bread, freedom, justice issues and, 87–89
 phase two revolution, transition/military guardianship role and, 89–91
 phase three revolution, initial democracy/societal factional conflicts and, 91–92
 phase four revolution, top-down nationalism/state-society alliances and, 93–96
 phases in revolutionary process and, 85, 87–96
 power reallocation, women's exclusion from, 84–86, 99
 private sphere, women's relegation into, 86
 public sphere, women's activism in, 84
 Rab'a massacre and, 94
 rape in war, national affront of, 84
 repressive security apparatuses/governance and, 85–86, 89
 revolution, dismantled systems/power redistribution and, 84

- revolution, women's place in, 83–87, 99
 sexual harassment, criminalization of, 99
 sexual violence by mobs and, 91–92, 95, 100
 sexual violence, definition of, 83
 sexual violence, obstacle/opportunity of, 82–83, 96–100
 sexual violence, political weapon of, 82, 88, 90
 Sisi, heroic nationalist icon role of, 92–93
 Sisi's Women, "restored" public sphere presence and, 94
 Supreme Council of Armed Forces and, 89
 Tahrir Bodyguards and, 92
 Tahrir Square protestors and, 81, 87–90, 95, 98
 Tamarod grassroots movement and, 93
 terrorism, fight against, 94–95
 transformative power of revolution and, 86
 2011 Revolution and, 81–83, 87–96
 victim-blaming response and, 92
 virginity tests, patriarchal conceptions of purity and, 90, 100
See also Egypt; Feminist dissent; Women's rights movements
- Eileraas, K., 21
 El-Baramawy, Yasmine, 92
 Electronic and Postal Communications Regulations of 2017, 5
 El-Kenz, A., 16
 Elkhalfifa, N., 113, 116, 119, 120
 Elmahdy, Aliaa Magda, 21
 El Nadeem Center for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence, 92
 Elsawi, Zeinab, 120, 122
 El-Sisi, Abdel Fattah, 83, 90
 Empty chair politics, 152, 165, 169
 End Outsourcing protest, 62
 Equality Now, 28
 Ethiopia
 communication laws and, 31
 Internet access/public broadcasts, blocking of, 4
 student movements in, 38
 See also African governance
 Extension of Universities Act of 1959, 65
 Ezz, Ahmad, 95
- F**
 Facebook, 3, 19, 20, 24, 132, 138, 143, 229
 Fadlalla, A., 116
 #FallThatIsAll uprisings, 107, 127–128
 Fallism *See* South Africa; South African
 Fallist feminism
 Federici, S., 39
 #FeesMustFall movement, 2, 21, 64, 66, 73, 228
 Feko, Nkwutio, 134
 Femicide
 social capital, mobilization of, 19
 South Africa and, 3
 Feminist dissent
 acceptable dissent, tools of, 21
 digital spaces, movement building and, 20–21
 digital technology-related rights, gender/sexual rights lens and, 19–22
 embodied protests, societal transgression and, 22
 feminist gains, subverting of, 15

Feminist Principles of the Internet and, 20
 gender roles, re-construction of, 14, 19
 hetero-patriarchy, processes of, 27
 #JusticeforLiz campaign and, 15, 23, 27, 29, 30
 Kenyan case studies and, 22
 #KideroMustGo campaign and, 14–17, 23, 25–27, 29, 30
 mainstream media, harnessing of, 22–23
 masculinisation of youth-hood and, 19–22, 30
 momentum, development of, 27
 nude protests and, 21, 71–74, 76
 patriarchal tactics, use of, 21
 patriarchy-decided respectability and, 20, 31
 patriarchy, intransigence of, 14, 32
 #ProtectOurPanties campaign and, 28–29
 resistance movements, sexualised topography of, 21
 social media, broadened public discourse and, 15
 societal structural power, challenges to, 22
 state power, punishing dissent and, 21
 systematic violence, reframing of, 25
 Take Back the Tech campaign and, 20–21
 violence against women and, 2, 3, 14, 20, 23–26
 women's freedom, closure of, 15
 women's rights, reversals in, 14–15
 youth-hood status, gendered nature of, 19
See also Cameroonian Anglophone women's struggle; Egyptian women's activism; Gender;

Kenyan feminist protest embodiment; South African Fallist feminism; Sudanese women's activism; Youth-hood
 Feminist Principles of the Internet, 20
 Fifth Brigade atroc, 174
 Forces for National Liberation movement, 158, 161
 Foucault, M., 72, 109
 #FreeDecolonisedEducation!movement, 69
 Freedom Corner protest, 218–220
 Free West Cameroon Movement (FWCM), 134
 French Constitutive Assembly, 40
 Front for Democracy in Burundi (FRODEBU), 150, 155, 158, 161, 166, 167
 'Funmi, O., 16

G

Gabon
 communication laws and, 31
 Internet access/public broadcasts, blocking of, 4
See also African governance
 Garang, John, 47
 Gaye, Balla, 43
 Gbowee, Leymah, 208
 Gender, 6
 apartheid spatial planning/Cape Town and, 61
 conservative gendered norms and, 14
 digital sphere, mediating tool of, 30–31
 digital technology-related rights, gender/sexual rights lens and, 20–21
 gender-based violence, digital technology and, 20–21

- gender equity concerns, citizen protests and, 14–15
- gender power relations, changing nature of, 15
- gender roles, re-construction of, 14
- male youth, linkage to violence and, 22
- misogynistic digital culture and, 20
- “nationhood”, gendered conceptualization of, 84
- violence against women and, 2, 3, 14, 20, 23–30
- women’s rights, reversals in, 14–15
- youth-hood ascriptions, gendered nature of, 19
- youth-hood, masculinisation of, 19–22
- See also* Feminist dissent; Youth activism; Youth-hood
- Gendered identities, 6
- Gender non-conforming people, 3, 63, 64, 67, 70–71
- Ghana
- international actors, political interference by, 41
- single-party political system and, 37
- See also* African governance
- Ghozlan, E., 88
- Global Ceasefire Agreement, 157, 165–166
- Global Nonviolent Action Database, 50, 51
- Gluch, T., 83
- Governance *See* African governance; Autocracies; Deep state; Democratic governments
- Gqola, P.D., 122
- Green Bomber youth militias, 175, 178
- H**
- Habermas, J., 202
- Hale, S., 112, 117, 121, 122
- Hall, S., 203
- Hanna, W., 37, 52, 53
- Harmony, Bobga, 136
- Haroun, Lana, 126
- Harris, G.H., 174
- Hassim, S., 73
- Hawkesworth, M., 115, 120
- Healing Justice Healing Action toolkit, 2, 228
- Higher education *See* Student movements against autocracies
- Honour politics, 20
- Honwana, A., 15
- Hotz, A., 66, 70
- Howa, R., 3
- Human rights activism, 4, 24, 90
- Human Rights Watch (HRW), 182, 208–211
- Huntington, S., 153, 169
- Hussein, Lubna, 115–116
- I**
- Ibrahim, J., 113, 117
- Ihonvbere, J.O., 37
- International Monetary Fund (IMF), 38
- Internet
- anonymity aspect of, 20
- archive function and, 5
- corporate-government collusion, shutdown strategy and, 4
- democratisation of information and, 4
- discursive space on, 5
- double-edged nature of, 20
- Electronic and Postal Communications Regulations/Tanzania and, 5
- feminist activists, movement building and, 20

- Feminist Principles of the Internet and, 20
- gender-based violence and, 20–21
- misogynistic cultures, contribution to, 20
- netizens, diminished power of, 4
- predators on, 20
- protest movements and, 216–218
- public access, blocking of, 4–6
- rape sites and, 20
- social media platforms, punitive charges on, 4
- state/non-state surveillance of, 31
- Take Back the Tech campaign and, 20–21
- transnational mobilisation actions and, 4, 5
- violence against women and, 20–21
- Internet without Borders, 136
- Islamization experiment, 108–111
- Ismail, O., 16–18
- Ivaska, A., 46
- J**
- Jabrallah, Nahed, 125
- Jacobs, C.A., 74
- Jim Crow laws, 1, 227
- Jimlongo, G., 72
- Jones, A.M., 221
- #JusticeforLiz campaign, 15, 23, 29
- K**
- Kadoda, G., 112, 122
- Kadry, A., 88
- Kalla, Shacera, 62
- Kanyinga, K., 153
- Karakoç, E., 132
- Katrak, Ketu, 203
- Keita, Modibo, 37
- Kenya
- Cambridge Analytica debacle and, 3
 - communication laws and, 24
 - formal political decision process, youth under-representation in, 18
 - Internet access/public broadcasts, blocking of, 4
 - #JusticeforLiz campaign and, 15, 23, 28–31
 - #KideroMustGo campaign and, 15, 23–25, 27
 - leader ethics/integrity, questions about, 2
 - patriarchy, evidence of, 2, 21
 - post-election violence and, 24
 - proper femininity and, 25
 - student protests/strikes and, 42
 - technologies of violence and, 2
 - United African Student's Revolutionary Front and, 46
 - university student protests and, 8
 - university system, repressive state rule and, 37
 - violence against women, perpetrators of, 25
 - violence against women, tolerance for, 2, 24
 - women government agents, abuse of, 2, 19
 - See also* African governance; Kenyan feminist protest embodiment
- Kenya Demographic Health Survey (KDHS), 25
- Kenyan feminist protest embodiment, 201
- Black liberatory movement spaces, building of, 216
 - bodies in protest, care for, 202, 215, 218–220
 - Cierume/headman and, 206, 208
 - contentious actions of individuals and, 202, 203

- disposable female bodies and, 215, 217–219
- dominant patriarchal constructions, repurposing of, 202, 203, 212–214
- dramaturgical actions, political effect and, 202, 203, 211
- embodied resistance action and, 206–208, 210, 214, 216–217
- female bodies, public space/power and, 210, 215–217
- female body, feminist activism and, 202, 217
- female “headmen” and, 204–205
- female sexuality, oppressive patriarchal/political interpretations of, 203, 213
- femme corporeal, ownership of, 202, 203
- Freedom Corner protests and, 219, 220
- gender-based sexual violence and, 209
- gender category, personal/cultural/political identities and, 202
- gender/social categories, challenging/invalidating of, 207–208
- genital curse/naked protest, significance of, 205, 208, 217–219
- institutional culture/power and, 213
- Internet/social media resources and, 216–217, 219
- Maathai, Wangari and, 206, 207, 218, 219
- matriarchal rule, supposed illegitimacy/perversion of, 206
- Mau Mau revolution/Kenyan independence and, 206
- media misrepresentation of protesters and, 216–218
- Mothers of Political Prisoners and, 206
- Nyanjiru, Mary Muthoni and, 205–208, 213
- Party of National Unity vs. Orange Democratic Movement, post-election violence and, 208–210
- police/state violence, embodied protest and, 207–208, 214–215
- pre-colonial women’s roles, complementary nature of, 205, 213
- protest, definition of, 202
- Release Political Prisoners movement and, 203, 207–208
- sex boycotts and, 203, 208–210
- socially sanctioned/acceptable patriarchal norms and, 203, 207, 213
- state-sanctioned terror and, 214–215
- student protests/riots, 210–214
- vaginas, dramaturgical action of, 203, 205, 208–210
- Wakaba wa Thungu, Ruth Wangari, 207–208, 217
- Wangu wa Makeri/headman and, 205–206
- Women Students’ Welfare Association, student protest movements and, 210–211, 213
- women’s councils, function of, 205
- women’s marginalisation/erasure from history and, 204, 215–216, 217
- See also* Feminist dissent; Kenya
Kenyatta, Jomo, 212

Kenyatta, Uhuru, 24, 214, 219
 Khan, K., 65, 66, 72, 73
 Khidir, N., 111
 Kibaki, Mwai, 208, 209
 Kidero, Evans, 2, 3, 22, 24
 #KideroMustGo campaign, 14–26,
 27, 29, 30
 Klopp, J.M., 3, 37
 Konnings, P., 133, 134

L

Lagos Market Women Association
 (LMWA), 6
 Leiby, M.L., 83
 Lesotho
 anti-government protests in, 4
See also African governance
 Levitsky, S., 177
 Lewis, D., 22
 Life presidents, 14, 178–181
 Lindberg, I.S., 153, 160, 162
 Lobbying communications, 13
 Logan, Lara, 88, 89
 Lomé Declaration, 1
 Lulat, Y. G-M., 37
 Lumsden, K., 20
 Lunch counter sit-ins, 1, 227

M

Maathai, Wangari, 207, 218, 219
 Madhuku, Lovemore, 189, 190
 Mafeje, Monwabisi Archibald, 66
 Magufuli, John, 48
 Mali
 single-party political system and, 37
 student protests/strikes and, 39
 Y'en a Marre Movement and, 4,
 44–45
See also African governance
 Malik, N., 108, 126, 127
 Mandela, Nelson, 156

Manyeruke, Charity, 189, 190
 Marroushi, N., 88, 92, 95
 Masunungure, E.V., 177
 Matandela, M., 75
 Mathema, Cain, 187
 Maubane, B., 69, 70
 Mauritania
 anti-government protests in, 4
 women's activist alliance and,
 113–114
See also African governance
 Mazini, N., 69
 Mbaku, J.M., 37
 Mbodi, M., 40
 McFaul, M., 153
 MDC Alliance, 182, 184, 186–188,
 191
 Mercenary activities, 1
 Micombero, Michel, 154
 Mitchell, N.J., 83
 Mnangagwa, Emmerson, 179–184,
 186, 188–193
 Moi, Daniel Arap, 212
 Mokwebo, Sarah, 21, 71
 Montgomery bus boycotts, 1, 227
 Morgan, H., 20
 Morocco
 women's activist alliance and,
 113–114
See also African governance
 Morsi, Mohamed, 91, 93, 95
 Mostafa, D., 94
 Motaung, Lerato, 21, 71
 Motlanthe, Kgalema, 189
 Movement for Democratic Change
 (MDC), 175, 178–180, 194, 195
 Movement for Solidarity and
 Development (MSD), 150
 Movement for the Restoration of
 the Independence of Southern
 Camaroons (MoRISC), 133, 134
 Moyo, Simon, 176

Mubarak, Hosni, 21, 87–91, 93, 96, 99
 Mugabe, Grace, 179
 Mugabe, Robert Gabriel, 180, 181, 184, 185, 187
 Mujuru, Joice, 179
 Museveni, Yoweri, 47
 Muslim Brotherhood, 90–95
 Mutembei, Faith, 218, 219
 Mwamunyange, Davis, 189
 Mwollo-Ntallima, A., 47
 #MyDressMyChoice protest and, 217
 Myikayaramba, Douglas, 179

N

Nageeb, S.A., 109, 110
 Nash, J., 61
 National Centre for Civil and Human Rights, 1, 227
 National Council for the Defence of Democracy-Forces for the Defence of Democracy (CNDD-FDD), 150–152, 157, 158, 170
 National Council for Women, 98
 National Education Policy Act of 1967, 65
 National Resistance Movement (NRM), 215, 218
 National Student Financial Aid Scheme, 62
 Ncube, W., 174
 Ndadaye, Melchior, 155
 Ndayizeye, Domitien, 166
 Ndelu, S., 69, 75
 Ndi, John Fru, 134, 135
 Ndlovu, Hlengiwe, 21, 69, 71–73
 Netizens' voices, 4
 New communities, 5
 New dispensation *See* Zimbabwean new dispensation's demise
 Ngendandumwe, Pierre, 154

Ngwenya, D., 174
 Niger
 anti-government protests in, 4
 See also African governance
 Nigeria
 anti-government protests in, 4
 Cambridge Analytica debacle and, 3
 Lagos Market Women Association protests, 6
 student protests/strikes and, 39
 women's activist alliance and, 113–114
 See also African governance
 Nimeiry, Jaafar, 49–51
 Nkongho, Agbor Balla, 135
 Nkrumah, Kwame, 37
 Nkurunziza, Pierre, 151, 158, 159, 163, 166–168
 Non-governmental organisations (NGOs), 4, 20, 92, 221
 Noon Movement, 125
 Nyamnjoh, F., 133, 134
 Nyanjiru, Mary Muthoni, 205–206, 213, 219
 Nyanzi, Stella, 21
 Nyemba, Vimbai, 189
 Nyerere, Julius, 37, 46, 155
 Nyong'o, Anyang', 32

O

Obibi, Iheoma, 32
 Obi, C., 17
 Odinga, Ida, 209
 Odinga, Raila Amolo, 208, 209, 214
 Okech, A., 21
 Okello, D., 153
 One Billion Rising events, 121, 122
 Operation Anti-Sexual Harassment (OpAntish), 92
 Orina, J.R., 3, 37
 Osman, A., 109–111

Othim, Carline, 213

Owino, Charles, 215

P

Patriarchy

- conservative gendered norms and, 31
- gender power relations, changing nature of, 15
- hetero-patriarchal processes and, 27
- honour politics/pillars of respectability and, 20–22, 93
- intransigence of, 14, 32
- patriarchal gerontocracy and, 18
- #ProtectOurPanties campaign and, 28, 29
- related women, protection of, 30
- systematic violence, reframing of, 25
- tactics of, feminist use of, 21
- technologies of violence and, 2
- violence against women and, 2, 24–27, 30

Peraira, C., 113, 117

Picciotto, B., 16

Prince, Mona, 88, 89

#ProtectOurPanties campaign and, 28–29

Protest

- accountability demands and, 4
- anti-government activism, 4
- citizen's voices, diminished power of, 4
- civil society organisations, changing role of, 4
- colonial market price fixing and, 6
- communication legislation, dissent management and, 4
- constituency-specific demands and, 3
- counter-discourses, emergence of, 2

democratisation of information and, 4

digital sphere, mediating tool of, 30–31

discontent, government responsiveness to, 3, 6

diverse constituencies, interests of, 5

food price increases and, 6

funeral protests and, 51

hashtag protests and, 4, 23, 29

leadership, devolved organising clusters and, 5

momentum, growth of, 3

outcomes, beyond-ballot definition of, 5

people-driven movements, constituents of, 5

regime power networks, success of, 3–5

sites for political action, shift in, 4

state power, delegitimisation of, 7

strongmen in office, banishment of, 3

transnational mobilisation actions and, 4

wide-scale mobilisation and, 4

youth activism and, 3, 4. *See*

also Activism; Cameroonian Anglophone women's struggle; Civil society organisations (CSOs); Deep state; Egyptian women's activism; Feminist dissent; Kenyan feminist protest embodiment; South African Fallist feminism; Student movements against autocracies; Sudanese women's activism; Women's rights movements; Zimbabwean new dispensation's demise

R

Race

- apartheid spatial planning/Cape Town and, 61
- Fallism, evolution of, 3, 62–66
- police brutality, threat of, 2
- resources/benefits/power, distribution inequities and, 64–66
- white bodies, shield function of, 2
- Rainbow Nation myth, 63, 64
- Ramaphosa, Cyril, 63
- Ramaru, K., 74
- Rane, H., 5, 232
- Ranger, T., 175
- Rebel movements, 1
- Release Political Prisoners movement, 207–208
- Revolution of Consciousness, 122–123
- Rhodes, Cecil John, 61, 66
- #RhodesMustFall movement, 8, 54, 61, 66, 67, 74
- Rugene, N., 23, 27, 29
- Ruto, William, 24
- Rwagasore, Louis, 154
- Rwasa, Agathon, 158, 161, 169

S

- Salah, Alaa, 126–128
- Salem, S., 5, 232
- Salmah Women's Resource Centre, 113–122
- Schraeder, P.J., 38
- Sebambo, K., 67
- Senegal
 - anti-government protests in, 8, 43
 - anti-imperialist student movement and, 39–41
 - assimilation pressures and, 39–41
 - Association des Étudiants Sénégalais en France* and, 40

- Association Generale des Étudiants de Dakar* and, 41–43
- broader societal concerns, student alignment with, 43–44
- civic youth movement in, 44
- corporatist setback, proletarianization of students and, 43
- École Normale William Ponty*, establishment of, 39–41
- election results, student involvement in, 43–44
- formal political decision process, youth under-representation in, 18
- fragmented student movement and, 43
- “life president” in, 14
- nationalisation, socio-political context and, 40
- New Type of Senegalese and, 45
- post-independence period, higher education expansion and, 41
- Rassemblement Democratique Africain*, infiltrated student movement and, 41
- student movements in, 38, 39, 55
- student power, meaningful political engagement and, 36
- student/teacher strikes, collective action and, 44
- unemployment in, 43
- Union Democratique des Étudiants Sénégalais* and, 42
- Union Des Étudiants de Dakar* and, 42
- University of Dakar, establishment of, 40, 42
- university reforms and, 43
- women's activist alliance and, 113–114

- working class disaffection, government repression and, 42
- Y'en a Marre movement and, 4, 44–46
 - See also* African governance
- Senghor, Leopold, 40, 42
- Sex boycotts, 203, 208–210
- Shange, N., 74
- Sharia law, 50, 115
- Shebesh, Rachel, 2, 22, 24, 25, 27–29, 32
- Sholkamy, H., 96
- Sierra Leone
 - Freetown food price protests and, 6
 - See also* African governance
- Sierra Leone Women's Movement, 6
- Sifuna, D.N., 37
- Social contract, 4
- Social media platforms
 - Cameroonian Anglophone women's struggle and, 133, 135, 136, 143
 - communication legislation, dissent management and, 4
 - digital sphere, mediating tool of, 30–31
 - discursive space on, 5
 - female body, sexualisation of, 21
 - feminist activists, movement building and, 20
 - hashtag protests and, 4, 23–27
 - hashtags, hijacking of, 25
 - Internet access, blocking of, 4–5
 - Kenyan female protest actions and, 217–219
 - Mini-skirt bill, fight against, 32
 - misogyny-based curtailment of campaigns and, 31
 - punitive charges on, 4
 - social media campaigns, cross-influencing of, 29
 - transnational mobilisation actions and, 4, 5
 - violence against women, broadened public discourse on, 15
 - See also* Feminist dissent; Internet
- Social movement development, 6, 194–197
- Sonko, Mike, 27
- South Africa
 - black bodies, relative value of, 2, 3
 - Fallism, evolution of, 3
 - #FeesMustFall nude protests and, 21, 72–75
 - femicide in, 3
 - free education, demand for, 3
 - gender non-conforming citizens and, 3
 - international actors, political interference by, 41
 - liberation movement in, 5
 - police violence, student protests and, 21
 - #RhodesMustFall movement and, 54, 61
 - Soweto Youth Uprisings and, 68
 - white bodies, value of, 2
 - women as political actors and, 4, 6
 - women's labour, withdrawing of, 3
 - Women's Month shutdowns and, 2
 - WomensNet non-governmental organization and, 20
 - See also* African governance; South African Fallist feminism
- South African Fallist feminism
 - apartheid spatial planning/Cape Town and, 61
 - apartheid, legacy of violence and, 67–71
- Azania House, decolonial education/praxis and, 67
- Bantu Education Act/Extension of Universities Act and, 65

- Black women/gender non-conforming people, inheritance of traumas and, 64
- Black women/gender non-conforming people, liberation movement labour by, 72–74
- colonial/apartheid histories, education system “knowledge” and, 64
- decolonisation discourse, new wave of, 62, 64, 66, 69
- decolonising the university and, 66–69
- embodied resistance, nude protests and, 22, 71–74
- End Outsourcing protest and, 62
- epistemic violence, legacies of, 62–65
- Fallist feminist epistemological premise and, 64, 70–71
- Fallist feminists, actions by, 70–72
- #FeeMustFall movement and, 66, 68–71
- #FreeDecolonisedEducation!movement and, 69
- freedom, illusion of, 63
- gender-based violence and, 63
- hierarchal identity construction, resource distribution systems and, 65–67
- historic university role, current environment and, 64
- historically Black universities and, 65–66
- historically silenced voices, embodiment of, 64, 74
- inequity, persistence of, 65
- institutional resistance and, 62–68
- liberation movement background labour, disregarding/ridiculing of, 72–74
- masculinised violence and, 67–68, 71
- National Education Policy Act and, 65
- National Student Financial Aid Scheme, role of, 62
- protest action, state-endorsed violence against, 69
- racial/gender diversity, importance of, 67
- Rainbow Nation, post-apartheid coherence myth and, 63, 64
- #RhodesMustFall movement and, 61, 66, 67, 74
- segregated education system and, 64–65
- social movement building, co-option of labour in, 73
- structural transformation, systematic resistance to, 66–67
- structural violence, legitimised injustices and, 67–70
- student housing concerns and, 63
- The Trans Collective and, 74–75
- violence convergences, systems of oppression and, 67–69
- white supremacist capitalist heteropatriarchal practices and, 67, 69
- See also* Feminist dissent; South Africa
- Southern Cameroon National Council (SCNC), 134
- Southern Cameroons Ambazonia Consortium United Front (SCACUF), 133, 134
- Southern Cameroons European Women (SCEW), 133
- Southern Cameroons Peoples Organisation (SCAPO), 134
- Southwest and Northwest Women’s Task Force (SNWOT), 137

- Soweto Youth Uprising, 68
- Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), 16, 38, 53
- Student movements against autocracies
- academic freedom/university administration, autocratic rule and, 37
 - activist students/anti-government intellectuals and, 41–43, 51
 - African students, waning elite/privileged status of, 48–50
 - anti-imperialist focus and, 39–41
 - assimilation pressures and, 40
 - autocracy, working definition of, 35
 - broader societal concerns, alignment with, 43–45
 - civic youth movement/Y'en a Marre Movement and, 44–45
 - civil society demands, liberalised political/economic systems and, 38
 - civil wars and, 48–49
 - colonialism, educational divides and, 48
 - corporatist setback, proletarianisation of students and, 43
 - counter-hegemonic student group, establishment of, 46
 - coups and, 49–51
 - democratisation of education, demand for, 38
 - economic stressors and, 44–45, 47
 - education spending/student subsidies, cutting of, 38
 - election results, student involvement in, 43–44
 - European bases, study-abroad students and, 38
 - funeral protests and, 51
 - general strikes/student demonstrations and, 50–52
 - market forces, educational opportunities and, 48
 - modern African universities, emergence of, 37
 - multiple student organisations, lack of unifying goal and, 42
 - national debt crises, institutional decline and, 38
 - nationalisation, socio-political context and, 40, 41
 - National Services Law, national service demonstrations and, 46
 - pocketbook issues and, 48
 - political elite vs. educated elite, explicit opposition between, 46, 52
 - political parties, infiltration push and, 41–43
 - post-independence Africa, higher education in, 36, 41, 45, 49–50
 - professionals/opposition parties, buy-in of, 45, 51
 - protest, student activism/strikes and, 38
 - publication activity and, 47
 - radicalisation of student movements and, 40
 - repressive state rule, university systems and, 37, 50
 - ruling party ideology, higher education orientation and, 42, 46, 47, 55
 - Senegalese student movements and, 39–45
 - social reproduction vs. economic reproduction, involvement in, 52–53

- statist development models/single-party political system and, 37
 Structural Adjustment Programs and, 38, 39, 53
 student associations, banning of, 43, 45
 student movements, decline in, 39
 student movements, phases of, 39–41
 student power, meaningful political engagement and, 36, 42, 54–56
 student/teacher strikes, collective action and, 44
 students vs. youths, social identities of, 36, 43
 Sudanese student movements and, 35, 48–50
 suspend/expel/blacklist policy and, 48
 Tanzanian student movements and, 36, 45–46
 working class disaffection, mutuality with, 42
 youth, new political power of, 48–59
See also African governance; Autocracies; Youth activism; Youth-hood
 Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), 218
 Sudan
 Abboud regime and, 51
 Addis Ababa Agreement and, 49
 anti-government protests in, 4
 Anyā Nya southern insurgents and, 49
 civil service candidates and, 49
 civil wars in, 49–50
 coup-not-coup phenomenon and, 5
 coups in, 49, 50
 dictator Al-Bashir, deposition of, 48
 economic stressors and, 50–51
 education, North-South divide and, 48
 election charade in, 44
 gender equity concerns and, 14–15
 Khartoum Students' Union and, 51
 North/South unification efforts, civil war and, 49
 oil revenue flows, austerity measures and, 50
 peace agreement, signing of, 50
 secular vs. Islamist state, question of, 49–50
 Sharia law, imposition of, 50
 South Sudan, secession of, 48, 50
 South Sudan, Sudanization of, 49
 student movements in, 35, 43–45
 Sudanese identity, development of, 49
 Sudan People Liberation Movement/Army and, 50
 Sudan Uprising and, 50, 51
 transnational government, establishment of, 51
 United African Student's Revolutionary Front and, 46
 United National Front strike and, 51
 University of Khartoum, political impact of, 49–51
 See also African governance; Sudanese women's activism
 Sudan Criminal Act of 1991, 110, 114
 Sudanese women's activism, 108
 activism goals/process, transformation of, 108, 111–112, 120–128
 Al-Bashir, fall of, 107, 123, 127
 alliance of women activists and, 113–114

- Arabization of identities,
erased/silenced groups
and, 111
- Article 149/rape reform and,
113–114
- Article 151/gross indecency
prohibition and, 110, 114
- Article 152/indecent/immoral
dress and, 109, 115
- authenticity discourse, foreign ideals
pollution and, 120
- biopower, manifestation of, 109
- Christian population and, 111
- civic space restrictions, gender-based
processes and, 117–120
- Coalition of Freedom and Change
and, 107, 125
- Coptic population and, 111
- cultural homogeneity, imposition of,
109
- erasure pressures, new modes of
resistance and, 120–122
- #FallThatIsAll uprisings, Revolution
of Consciousness and, 107,
127–1284
- feminine state-regulated correctness
and, 109, 111
- feminist movement building and,
119, 127
- foreign agent status, Western ideals
influence and, 119
- gender relations/personal conduct,
state regulation of, 109
- government surveil-
lance/restrictions, gendered
nature of, 117–120, 121–122
- Humanitarian Affairs Commission
and, 112, 120
- indecent/immoral dress in public
and, 110, 115
- Islamic regime’s misogynistic
practices and, 108, 115, 115
- Islamised public conduct, public
order laws and, 109, 110, 115
- Islamization experiment, “civiliza-
tion” of the population and,
108–111
- issue-driven women’s movement
and, 111–113, 119, 120, 125,
127–128
- local-level activist spaces and, 116,
118, 119
- Lubna’s trousers case and, 115–117
- masculine social/religious protector
role and, 109
- Maydanik*/safe zone, formation of,
123–124
- minority groups, marginalization of,
111, 119, 126
- moral vs. deviant citizens and, 109,
118, 120
- non-Muslim Sudanese women,
public order regime/Islamic
hegemony and, 110
- One Billion Rising events, 121, 122
- patriarchal order, threat to,
119–120, 124–128
- patriarchal systems of knowledge
production and, 122
- political activities/parties, con-
straints on, 111–112
- public appearance, Islamic outlook
regulation and, 109
- public order laws, gendered analysis
of, 108–111
- rape/adultery, penal code treatment
of, 113–114
- rape/sexual assault amendment and,
114
- Salah, anti-regime protest icon and,
126–127
- Salmamah Women’s Resource Centre
action and, 113–114, 121
- Sharia law and, 115

- spaces occupied by activists,
transition of, 111–112
- Sudan Criminal Act and, 110, 114
- Sudanese citizenship, gen-
dered/classist provisions for,
111
- Sudan Women for Change collective
and, 125
- transitional civilian government,
sidelined women activists and,
124
- upper class vs. working class women,
state-perpetrated violence and,
109–111
- violent lived realities, women
activists and, 107–108, 125
- Western rescue narratives and, 116
- within-political party activism,
limitations on, 111–112
- Women Living Under Muslim Laws
and, 113, 116
- women-oriented NGOs and, 111,
112
- women's disenfranchisement,
shared experience of, 111–112,
115–117
- women's social/moral judgement,
state policies about, 109–110
- women's/youth groups, mutual
solidarity/self-help organiza-
tions and, 111, 115, 116,
123
- youth-led Revolution of Conscious-
ness, technology tools/art
revolution and, 122–127
- See also* Feminist dissent; Sudan;
Women's rights movements
- Sudan People Liberation Move-
ment/Army (SPLM/A), 50
- Sudan Women for Change collective,
125
- Suneri, L., 85
- Swift, J., 134, 135
- T**
- Tadros, M., 85, 87
- Tahrir Bodyguards, 92
- Take Back the Tech (TBTT)
campaign, 20–21
- Tamale, S., 72
- Tandja, Mamadou, 4
- Tanui, N., 25
- Tanzania
communication legislation, dissent
management and, 4
- Dar es Salaam University Students'
Organisation and, 45
- educated elite vs. political elite,
explicit opposition between,
46, 52
- educated youth, bureaucratic/social
elite and, 45
- Electronic and Postal Commu-
nications Regulations and,
5
- left activist effort, blow to, 47
- national development policies and,
45, 46
- National Services Law, national
service demonstrations and, 46
- neoclassical economic policy and,
47
- pocketbook issues, protests over, 48
- privatisation of higher education
and, 47
- ruling party ideology, university
orientation and, 46
- Second Five Year Plan*, job
requirements-curricula
alignment and, 46
- single-party political system and, 37
- student associations, banning of, 40
- student movements in, 35, 42–43

- suspend/expel/blacklist policy and, 48
- United African Student's Revolutionary Front/counter-hegemonic group and, 46
- University of Dar es Salaam and, 45
- Technologies of violence
continuum of, 2, 3
data, public availability of, 3. *See also* Internet; Social media platforms
- Tekere, Edgar, 174
- #ThisFlag movement, 4, 196
- Thuku, Harry, 206
- Tofa, M., 178
- Togo
anti-government protests in, 4
#FaureMustGo and, 4
#Togodebout and, 4
Y'en a Marre Movement and, 44
See also African governance
- Totalitarianism, 36
- Toth, G.A., 36
- The Trans Collective, 74–75
- Transformation agenda, 6
- Tripp, A.M., 134
- Tsvangirai, Morgan, 175, 177–179, 184, 185, 194, 195
- Tunisia
co-opted struggles, old guard power and, 13
coup-not-coup phenomenon and, 5
formal political decision process, youth under-representation in, 18
gender equity concerns and, 14–15
ineffective/unresponsive regime in, 3
“life president” in, 14
student protests/strikes and, 39
youth activism and, 14
- See also* African governance
- Tutu, Desmond, 63
- Twitter, 2, 5, 19, 23, 24, 29, 125, 126, 132, 138, 143
- U
- Uganda
#AgeLimitBill protest and, 4
anti-government protests and, 4
communication laws and, 31
Internet access/public broadcasts, blocking of, 4
#Kogikuteko protest and, 4
See also African governance, 4
- Uhuru leaders, 13
- Unconstitutional Change of Government (UCG) framework, 1
- Union activism, 4, 194, 196
- Union for National Progress (UPRONA), 150
- Union for Progress and Development (UPD), 150
- United African Student's Revolutionary Front, 46
- Urdal, H., 14, 17
- V
- Vandeginste, S., 157, 159, 164, 165
- Violence
gender-based violence and, 20, 21
Internet platforms, double-edged nature of, 20
patriarchal society, norm of sexual violence and, 82, 85, 90, 96–98
rape, power over women and, 23, 83, 90–92, 95, 99
rape sites, digital platforms and, 20
technologies of violence and, 2
victim-blaming response and, 92

- violence against women and, 2, 3, 14, 20, 23–26, 30, 89, 95, 99
 violence, disciplining women with, 25, 31, 83
 youth-hood discourses, grievance/conflict perspective and, 14
 youth-hood discourses, violence associations/women's exclusion and, 19–20
- W**
- Wade, Abdoulaye, 43, 44
 Wakaba wa Thungu, Ruth Wangari, 207–208
 Wallace, M., 217, 218
 Walla, Kah, 138
 Wangu wa Makeri, 206
 Wanyoike, M.W., 205
 War
 civil wars and, 49–50, 155–156, 158–170
 youth involvement in, 17, 178, 179
 youth militias and, 175, 178, 190
 West African Student Union (WASU), 39
 West, G., 139
 WhatsApp, 3–5, 31, 70, 126, 132, 143, 229
 Wilfred, Tassang, 136
 Women's lives
 gender equity concerns, citizen protests and, 14–15
 gender roles, re-construction of, 14, 19
 technologies of violence in, 2, 3
 violence against women and, 14, 20, 24–30
 women as political actors and, 6, 14
 women's rights, reversals in, 14–15
 youth bracket, premature exit from, 19
 youth-hood masculinisation and, 19
 See also Feminist dissent; Patriarchy; Women's rights movements
 Women's rights movements, 3
 collective action, social movement development and, 6, 192–196
 colonial market price fixing and, 6
 decentralised political power, insistence on, 6
 digital spaces, movement building and, 20
 electoral/legislative spaces, representation in, 3
 food price increases, protest against, 6
 Lagos Market Women Association and, 6
 Sierra Leone Women's Movement and, 6
 trade items, regained monopoly on, 6
 See also Cameroonian Anglophone women's struggle; Egyptian women's activism; Feminist dissent; Kenyan feminist protest embodiment; South African Fallist feminism; Sudanese women's activism; Women's lives
 WomensNet.org, 20
 Women Students' Welfare Association (WOSWA), 210–214, 218
 World Bank (WB), 38, 164
 Wybrow, D., 16
- X**
- Xaba, W., 65, 66, 71
- Y**
- Y'en a Marre Movement and, 4, 44–46

- Youth activism, 3, 4, 14
 Arab Spring and, 54
Baloi Citoye movement and, 54
 co-opted struggles, old guard/third forces and, 13
 direct action, citizen mobilisation and, 14
 gender equity concerns, citizen protests and, 14–15
 “life presidents”, ouster of, 14
 military-into-civilian actors and, 14
 privatization trend, education opportunities/public services and, 17
 protest action, angry youth actors and, 14
 safety net programs, limited access to, 17
Uburu leaders, desire for freedom and, 13
 youth agency, reconceptualisation of, 14
 youth exclusion/de-legitimised leadership, emergence of, 13, 16, 19
 youth policies, state normative frameworks and, 16
See also Activism; Feminist dissent; Gender; Protest; Student movements against autocracies; Youth-hood
- Youth-hood
 age criterion, access to decision process and, 18
 ascriptions of, gendered nature of, 19
 conceptualizations of, Structural Adjustment Programs and, 16
 conflict/war situations, involvement in, 17
 digital sphere, mediating tool of, 30–32
 formal decision process, under-representation/inactive participation in, 17–18
 freedom, notion of, 19
 identity category of, 15–16, 19
 informal political involvement and, 17
 masculinisation of, 19
 men, prolonged youth-hood of, 19
 national youth councils, politicized initiatives and, 18
 political economy concerns/vulnerabilities and, 16
 power relations/dominance, elite power interests and, 19
 public expenditure decreases, disproportionate effects of, 16
 secondary societal status and, 16
 social exclusion/marginalisation and, 16, 17, 19
 social/political capital, prerequisite of, 18, 19
 survival economy, factors in, 17
 violence-focused discourses and, 19
 women, exclusion of, 17, 19
 youth-hood discourses, grievance/conflict perspective and, 14, 21
 youth initiatives, mismanagement/politicization of, 18
 youth vulnerability/exclusion and, 16–17, 18
 YOVEX study conclusions and, 16
See also Student movements against autocracies; Youth activism
- YouTube, 4, 31
- Z**
 Zambia

- United African Student's Revolutionary Front and, 46
See also African governance
- Zeillig, L., 43, 52, 53
- Zezeza, P.T., 73
- Zibblatt, Z., 177
- Zimbabwe
- communication laws and, 31
 - coup-not-coup phenomenon and, 4, 14
 - Internet access/public broadcasts, blocking of, 4
 - military-into-civilian actors and, 14
 - student protests/strikes and, 39
 - #ThisFlag protest and, 4, 196
 - United African Student's Revolutionary Front and, 46
 - See also* African governance; Zimbabwean new dispensation's demise
- Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), 175–181, 183–186, 188, 190, 195, 196
- Zimbabwe African People's Union-Patriotic Front (PF-ZAPU), 173, 174
- Zimbabwean new dispensation's demise, 181
- August 1st/2018 protests and, 183–191
 - Beit Bridge protest and, 197
 - brutality/harassment, perpetration of, 174, 177–179, 186, 187, 193–195
 - Chipangano* youth group, 190
 - Commission of Inquiry responsibilities/report and, 188–191
 - consent to be governed, opposition withdrawal of, 176
 - contemporary Zimbabwean violence/polarisation and, 184, 190
 - counter-revolutionaries, infiltration by, 179
 - coup, Zimbabwe National Army's staging of, 180–183, 189, 196
 - democratic mutual toleration, absence of, 177
 - dissident insurgency/early 1980s and, 174
 - economic crises, protracted life of, 176, 187
 - economic sanctions, imposition of, 176, 182
 - electoral malpractice tactics and, 185
 - factionalism in the ruling party and, 173, 194
 - Fifth Brigade atrocities and, 174
 - Government of National Unity, formation of, 179
 - “Green Bomber” youth militias and, 175, 178
 - Gukurahundi*/Machiavellian-style counter-insurgency campaign and, 174, 191
 - high-stakes electoral system, zero-sum game of, 176–178
 - impeachment process, stages in, 180–182
 - January 2019 #shutdown protests and, 192–194
 - Joint Operation Command declaration and, 177–178
 - liberation war credentials, credibility and, 177
 - “life president”, argument for, 178–180
 - Makavhotera Papa* campaign of terror and, 177–179

Marxist-Leninist principles,
 one-party state and, 174–177
 MDC Alliance and, 182, 186,
 187–191
 military-civil relations, state politics
 and, 177–178, 179, 182, 191,
 192–193, 197
 Mhangagwa regime, opposition
 support of, 181
 National Constitutional Assembly
 opposition party and, 190,
 194, 195
 “new dispensation” mantra,
 Zimbabwean new era and,
 182–184, 186
 November 2017 coup and,
 177–181, 189, 191
 one-party state agenda and, 173
 opposition as enemy of the state
 and, 176, 177–178, 193, 197
 opposition voters, brutal punish-
 ment of, 185
 run-off election, one-man-race
 reality of, 177
 social movements/civil society
 dissent, citizens’ issues and,
 188–194
 #ThisFlag movement and, 196
 2018 elections, dashed hope and,
 183

Western imperialism, fight against,
 175
 white population, parliamentary
 seats for, 173
 youth militia and, 175, 178, 190
 Zimbabwe African National Union-
 Patriotic Front and, 175–181,
 183–186, 188, 190, 195, 196
 Zimbabwe African People’s Union-
 Patriotic Front opposition
 government and, 173
 Zimbabwe Congress of Trade
 Unions and, 194, 195
 Zimbabwe Electoral Commission,
 August 1st/2018 protests and,
 182–184
 Zimbabwe Electoral Commission,
 prejudice/partiality of, 182,
 183–185
 Zimbabwe Human Rights Commis-
 sion and, 193
 Zimbabwe National Students Union
 and, 195
 Zimbabwe Unity Movement
 opposition party, formation of,
 174–177
 #ZimShutDown2016 mass
 stay-away protest, 196–197
 Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM),
 174–178
 Zuma, Jacob, 219