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Pan-African gender governance: The politics of aspiration at the African Union

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Abstract

The African Union (AU) has developed an elaborate gender governance architecture, including gender machineries and women's desks, policy frameworks, path-breaking women's rights laws, and ongoing campaigns on women's rights–related issues. At the same time, the member states' engagement with this architecture is at best lukewarm, with a lack of domestication, compliance, and accountability. This paradox is addressed in this article by developing the theoretical thinking around aspirational politics (Martha Finnemore and Michelle Jurkovich, 'The politics of aspiration', *International Studies Quarterly*, 64:4 [2020], pp. 759–69) and political brokers (Stacie E. Goddard, 'Brokering change: Networks and entrepreneurs in international politics', *International Theory*, 1:2 [2009], pp. 249–81), showing the social and relational origins of pan-African gender governance. In doing so, the article examines how 'aspirational politics' can be operationalized to examine the sociocultural and political production of shared future imaginaries. The paper focuses on AU femocrats as the key actors for AU's aspirational gender agenda and argues for their importance as political brokers between AU member states, donors, UN agencies, and civil society organisations. By mobilizing actors and facilitating common ground and agreement, their institutionalized broker position allowed for various political entrepreneurs to emerge and thrive. At the same time, their pursuits are met with 'aspirational fatigue' or outright contestation by the member states. The case of the AU demonstrates how aspirational politics is not a 'phase' leading to norms governance but part and parcel of normative negotiation and engagement.

Keywords: African Union; aspirational politics; brokers; regional governance; women's rights

Introduction

> So many of us believe in the African Union, even though we don't have [any] reason to do it. It just disappoints us time and time again. But eventually, we are going to have to make the African Union work as a place that sets the standards that we can all uphold. In our own self-interest, really. If we were trying to look for an alternative … where is it?[1]

The African Union (AU) has codified its ambitions and aspirations regarding women's rights and gender equality into an elaborate gender architecture while facing gaps in ratification, compliance, and accountability reporting by its member states.[2] Due to lack of domestic engagement by member

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[1] Author's interview, former Akina Mama wa Afrika staff, 18 August 2021.

[2] Frans Viljoen, 'Human rights in Africa: Normative, institutional and functional complementarity and distinctiveness', *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 18:2 (2011), pp. 191–216; Tiyanjana Maluwa, 'Ratification of African Union treaties by the member states: Law, policy and practice', *Melbourne Journal of International Law*, 13:2 (2012), pp. 1–49; Cristiano

states, the AU is rarely considered a dominant normative actor to advance gender equality on the continent. The fact that member states are disengaged from the gender regime they themselves have signed off on does not mean that it is irrelevant – on the contrary, we should try to understand its reasons and ways of existing. This article explores this tension by developing theoretical thinking around aspirational politics[3] and applying it to the case of the AU's gender architecture. In doing so, the article takes up this emerging IR concept and asks who are the actors in aspirational politics and what do they do. The article identifies the actors that facilitate the AU's evolving liberal and ambitious gender architecture, regardless of the member states' disinterest.[4]

The existing literature addresses commitments to a progressive gender agenda through different, and at times intersecting, lenses. The agency of the actors advancing global or international norms on women's rights is theorized through transnational advocacy networks whereby non-governmental and civil society organizations enter the spaces of international organizations (like the United Nations) and collaborate with like-minded actors to socialize states into normative change.[5] Similarly, the AU's adoption of women's rights legislation has been theorized through regional advocacy networks.[6] The literature identifies norm entrepreneurs as part of transnational advocacy networks, and as collective or individual actors who strategically work towards normative change.[7] Conversely, the research investigates why countries commit to human rights treaties and agreements that are likely to limit their powers and institutional freedoms.[8] The studies show that repressive states may support normative ideas for reasons of self-interest, such as reputation and image management, belonging to the international community, and status-seeking.[9] This article builds on these insights while pointing to a complex dynamic between pan-African femocrats, state and non-state actors, and United Nations (UN) agencies and development partners.

The question of the AU's role in advancing human rights on the continent is a complicated one. The AU originates from the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), which was founded to counter

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d'Orsi, 'Are African states willing to ratify and commit to human rights treaties? The example of the Maputo Protocol', Special Issue of *Revue Québécoise de Droit International*, edited by Niki Siampakou and Gaetan Ferrara, (2021), pp. 159–82.

[3]Martha Finnemore and Michelle Jurkovich, 'The politics of aspiration', *International Studies Quarterly*, 64:4 (2020), pp. 759–69.

[4]Karmen Tornius, 'Regional gender governance in Africa: The African Union in perspective' (doctoral dissertation, Roskilde University, 2023), pp. 51–60.

[5]Sanjeev Khagram, James V. Riker, and Kathryn Sikkink (eds), *Restructuring World Politics: Transnational Social Movements, Networks, and Norms*, NED-New edition, vol. 14 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); Thomas Risse, Stephen C. Ropp, and Kathryn Sikkink (eds), *The Power of Human Rights: International Norms and Domestic Change*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[6]Melinda Adams and Alice Kang, 'Regional advocacy networks and the protocol on the rights of women in Africa', *Politics & Gender*, 3:4 (2007), pp. 451–74.

[7]Annika Björkdahl, 'From idea to norm: Promoting conflict prevention' (doctoral thesis (monograph), Lund University, 2002); Annika Björkdahl, 'Swedish norm entrepreneurship in the UN', *International Peacekeeping*, 14:4 (2007), pp. 538–52; Ian Johnstone, 'The secretary-general as norm entrepreneur', in Simon Chesterman (ed), *Secretary or General?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 123–38; Carmen Wunderlich, *Rogue States as Norm Entrepreneurs: Black Sheep or Sheep in Wolves' Clothing?* Norm Research in International Relations (Cham: Springer, 2020).

[8]Beth A. Simmons, *Mobilizing for Human Rights: International Law in Domestic Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Richard A. Nielsen and Beth A. Simmons, 'Rewards for ratification: Payoffs for participating in the international human rights regime?', *International Studies Quarterly*, 59:2 (2015), pp. 197–208; Christine Min Wotipka and Kiyoteru Tsutsui, 'Global human rights and state sovereignty: State ratification of international human rights treaties, 1965–2001', *Sociological Forum*, 23:4 (2008), pp. 724–54; Emilie M. Hafner-Burton, 'Sticks and stones: Naming and shaming the human rights enforcement problem', *International Organization*, 62:4 (2008), pp. 689–716.

[9]Jonathan Fisher, '"Image management" and African agency: Ugandan regional diplomacy and donor relations under Museveni', in William Brown and Sophie Harman (eds), *African Agency in International Politics* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2013), pp. 97–113; Emilie M. Hafner-Burton and Kiyoteru Tsutsui, 'Justice lost! The failure of international human rights law to matter where needed most', *Journal of Peace Research*, 44:4 (2007), pp. 407–25; Daniel Milton, Amira Jadoon, and Jason Warner, 'Needs or symbols? The logic of United Nations counterterrorism treaty ratification', *International Studies Quarterly*, 66:1 (2021), pp. 1–13.

imperialism and neo-colonialism and to support the sovereignty of African states.[10] The AU continues to commit to pan-Africanism and 'African solutions to African problems'. Yet, with the transformation from the OAU to the AU, the organization adopted liberal good governance norms, centred around human rights, development, and peace and security. The existing literature notes that the AU exercises normative agency[11] and informal authority[12] on peace and security issues. According to Viljoen, the implementation of human rights standards in the AU was designed to be weak.[13] Its premier body, the African Commission for Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), is perpetually underfunded, and the member states fail to report on their commitments. According to a former commissioner, the ACHPR is handicapped by the influence of the member states, and its interventions in human rights violations are regularly ignored.[14] Tieku argues that the member states have not internalized the human rights norms of the AU, which is why these are not 'integrated into national legislation of member states nor implemented at the level of the state, community and the individual'.[15] Some case studies indicate that member states contest the AU women's rights more readily and strongly than global frameworks.[16] Not least, the AU is 75 per cent donor-funded, raising questions of ownership and legitimacy. Considering the lack of peer pressure to adhere to the AU's human rights standards, as well as the material incentives to do so, the IR assumptions about human rights regimes are not explaining the developments inside the AU. In this complex institutional and normative context, what can we learn from analysing the AU's elaborate, yet somewhat symbolic, gender architecture?

If we consider that the brokers of the gender agenda have successfully set up aspirational goalposts, rather than a norms regime, the paradox of the AU and its gender architecture starts to unravel. Conceptually, 'aspirations' allow for imagining radically different, unlikely, futures. A politics of aspiration untangles the intentions behind goal-setting and how the articulation of shared values and identities can eventually lead to social change.[17] Examining the long-winded nature of negotiating meanings in international politics, this article challenges the view that aspirational politics precedes norm-making[18] but sees aspirational political work as part and parcel of normative politics where norms are 'acknowledged, but not necessarily accepted, understandings of collective ambitions'.[19] Yet for politics of aspiration to have analytical currency, the actors, practices, and spaces which constitute aspirational politics as a dynamic of transnational governance should be identified. This article does so by showing how pan-African femocrats became political brokers of diverse gender equality norms. Femocrats are officials, bureaucrats, and civil servants hired to advance women's issues internally and externally in an institution. By following their traces of institutionalizing gender equality at the AU, the article examines how they engage in aspirational

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[10]Tony Karbo and Tim Murithi, *The African Union: Autocracy, Diplomacy and Peacebuilding in Africa* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018).

[11]Katharina P. Coleman and Thomas K. Tieku, *African Actors in International Security: Shaping Contemporary Norms* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2018).

[12]Antonia Witt, 'Beyond formal powers: Understanding the African Union's authority on the ground', *Review of International Studies*, 48:4 (2022), pp. 1–20.

[13]Viljoen, 'Human rights', pp. 199–202.

[14]Solomon Ayele Dersso, 'The future of human rights and the African human rights system', *Nordic Journal of Human Rights*, 40:1 (2022), pp. 28–43.

[15]Thomas Kwasi Tieku, *Governing Africa: 3D Analysis of the African Union's Performance* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), p. 195.

[16]For Niger, see Alice J. Kang, *Bargaining for Women's Rights: Activism in an Aspiring Muslim Democracy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

[17]Finnemore and Jurkovich, 'Politics of aspiration'.

[18]Finnemore and Jurkovich, 'Politics of aspiration', p. 763.

[19]Lars Engberg-Pedersen, Adam Fejerskov, and Signe Marie Cold-Ravnkilde (eds), *Rethinking Gender Equality in Global Governance: The Delusion of Norm Diffusion* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), p. 7; see also alternative conceptualizations of norms 'as processes' in Mona Lena Krook and Jacqui True, 'Rethinking the life cycles of international norms: The United Nations and the global promotion of gender equality', *European Journal of International Relations*, 18:1 (2012), pp. 103–27.

politics through mobilizing actors and facilitating agreement.[20] Seeing their work and achievements as aspirational politics helps to understand the 'toothlessness' of the AU gender desks and resistance by its member states. Consequently, the article contributes to constructivist discussions on normative agency in gender politics, theorizing of aspirational politics, and centreing regional governance in IR research.[21]

The article proceeds in five parts and a conclusion. After this introduction, the literature on aspirational politics and political brokerage in international relations is discussed. The third part discusses the methodology of the research, particularly the use of political ethnography. Thereafter, the fourth part explains the AU's gender architecture. The empirical sections trace the institutionalization of the broker position within the OAU/AU and the translation of cultural and technical knowledge for aspirational policy agreements. The article shows that femocrats mobilize actors and funds but face contestation and 'aspirational fatigue' among the member states. The conclusion discusses the article's contribution to theorizing aspirational politics and its actors.

Theoretical framework

What is the politics of aspiration?

The 'politics of aspiration' is theorized by Finnemore and Jurkovich as a novel way to understand the transformative effects of collectively negotiating lofty and difficult-to-reach goals, such as the Paris Agreement or the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and to make sense of their performance gaps.[22] Indeed, while political processes are sometimes described as aspirational by diverse scholars,[23] Finnemore and Jurkovich are pioneering in conceptualizing aspiration as part of international politics. In the following sections, I outline Finnemore and Jurkovich's arguments and relate aspirational politics to the existing literature. I propose that the 'politics of aspiration' can be further developed by qualifying the actors involved and examining how shared aspirations are facilitated in practice. Aspirational politics, this article suggests, has the potential to untangle the relational elements of setting international (regional or global) goals.[24]

Finnemore and Jurkovich's theoretical project has two explicit objectives: explaining the adoption of lofty and highly ambitious goals by state actors; and making sense of the state actors' and governance institutions' failure to achieve such goals beyond IR paradigms of cheap talk, credibility, reputation, points, and norms. Aspirational politics, they argue, can help us in differentiating between implementation gaps and 'simple incompetence, hypocrisy, and moral failure'.[25] They differentiate between norms and aspirations by arguing that, unlike norms, aspirations are not expectations towards specific actors and are vague about who should do what. Furthermore, aspirations are future-oriented and not expected to come into effect *today*.[26] Because aspirations come with different socio-political expectations, the consequence of not performing is nearly non-existent. Violating agreed norms, however, is expected to bear consequences. The authors concede that norms can be aspirational and that aspirations can have normative aims. A major aspect of

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[20] Finnemore and Jurkovich, 'Politics of aspiration', pp. 764–65.

[21] Amitav Acharya, *Constructing Global Order: Agency and Change in World Politics*, 1st ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

[22] Finnemore and Jurkovich, 'Politics of aspiration'.

[23] Brad Coombes, Jay T. Johnson, and Richard Howitt, 'Indigenous geographies II: The aspirational spaces in postcolonial politics – reconciliation, belonging and social provision', *Progress in Human Geography*, 37:5 (2013), pp. 691–700; Mark Goodale, 'Dark matter: Toward a political economy of Indigenous rights and aspirational politics', *Critique of Anthropology*, 36:4 (2016), pp. 439–57; Astrid Matejcek and Julia Verne, 'Restoration-as-Development? Contesting aspirational politics regarding the restoration of wildlife corridors in the Kilombero Valley, Tanzania', *The European Journal of Development Research*, 33:4 (2021), pp. 1022–43; Chaitanya Lakkimsetti, '"Home and beautiful things": Aspirational politics in dance bars in India', *Sexualities*, 20:4 (2017), pp. 463–8.

[24] For a discussion about relational and practice-focused approaches amounting to new constructivism, see David M. McCourt, *The New Constructivism in International Relations Theory* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2022).

[25] Finnemore and Jurkovich, 'Politics of aspiration', p. 759.

[26] Finnemore and Jurkovich, 'Politics of aspiration', p. 764.

the politics of aspiration is the element of agreeing on future imaginaries and mobilizing around them. According to Finnemore and Jurkovich, aspirational politics involve the political work of identifying and mobilizing like-minded actors, bringing actors into a dialogue about an issue, and collectively formulating shared goals.

The AU's gender architecture is therefore an appropriate institutional setting for studying the politics of aspiration. The AU's authority partly depends on its ability to 'establish, spread and sustain specific imaginaries of what order should look like'.[27] Additionally, aspirational politics relate to the emerging literature of governance by goal-setting, which considers goal-setting to be replacing rules-based governance.[28] While highly aspirational, institutionally weak, and difficult to measure, goal-based governance is considered to be less coercive and top-down, and therefore a positive step towards a more dynamic and locally relevant transnational governance.[29] Some legal anthropologists suggest that human rights as a whole can be understood *as* a politics of aspiration. They define politics of aspiration as 'a form of political action that is grounded in the normative ethics of "yet to come"'.[30] Goodale conceptualizes the various political adaptations of human rights principles as moral creativity. Both state and non-state actors adjust the language of rights to match their moral ideologies, integrating human rights into locally relevant political agendas.[31] Others consider the *universality* of human rights as inherently unrealistic while acknowledging that to claim they are possible has real-world consequences. The pursuit of universally applicable rights then amounts to 'transformative utopianism'[32] or 'institutionalized utopianism'.[33] Anthropological discussions on aspiring can help to operationalize 'politics of aspiration' and deepen its analytical potential. For instance, Appadurai's work discusses aspiration as one of the cultural practices which inform a politics of possibility instead of a politics of probability.[34] To him, the future is a cultural fact, constructed through imagination, aspiration, and anticipation as collective social practices.[35] Goal-setting and aspirational work may thus be transformative even when not achieved or implemented in full or when meanings are reconfigured along the road. Unlike the various norm diffusion theories that focus on the norm life cycle, aspirational politics can provide tools for analysing sustained efforts and the political work of envisioning a better future in a particular field or sector.

Finnemore and Jurkovich highlight that aspirational politics also has considerable shortcomings for social transformation, as the outcomes of this political work are difficult to measure or evaluate. Continuously failing to achieve aspirational goals may lead to aspirational fatigue, whereby actors begin to manipulate the progress made to sustain popular support or reputation rather than regroup and escalate efforts.[36] Pointedly, Appadurai links aspiration to the politics of hope, politics of patience, or politics of waiting.[37] The politics of hope can stagnate and undermine transformative goals and become a political strategy directed towards those 'whom the world is unable or unwilling to offer anything else'.[38] Regardless, making sense of the intentions and reasons why political

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[27]Witt, 'Beyond formal powers', p. 9.

[28]Frank Biermann, Norichika Kanie, and Rakhyun E. Kim, 'Global governance by goal-setting: The novel approach of the UN sustainable development goals', *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, open issue, part II, 26–7 (2017), pp. 26–31; Leslie-Anne Duvic-Paoli, 'From aspirational politics to soft law? Exploring the international legal effects of Sustainable Development Goal 7 on affordable and clean energy', *Melbourne Journal of International Law*, 22:1 (2021), pp. 1–23.

[29]Biermann, Kanie, and Kim, 'Global governance', p. 27.

[30]Mark Goodale, 'Human rights and the politics of aspiration', in Anthropology and aw: A critical introduction (New York: New York University Press, 2017), p. 103.

[31]Goodale (2017), p. 106.

[32]Samuel Moyn, J. Andrew, and A. M. Elizabeth, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (London: Harvard University Press, 2010).

[33]Annelise Riles, *The Network Inside Out* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), p. 3.

[34]Arjun Appadurai, *The Future as Cultural Fact: Essays on the Global Condition* (London: Verso, 2013).

[35]Appadurai, *Future*, pp. 286–7.

[36]Finnemore and Jurkovich, 'Politics of aspiration', p. 766.

[37]Appadurai, *Future*, p. 126.

[38]Marjo Lindroth and Heidi Sinevaara-Niskanen, 'Politics of hope', *Globalizations*, 16:5 (2019), pp. 644–648, (p. 645).

actors fall behind and do not prioritize the goals they subscribe to can be complicated. For instance, Htun and Jensenius argue that gender equality legislation is institutionally weak 'aspirational rights' because of non-compliance by officials, decision-makers, and wider society.[39] As such, the limited progress can be a manifestation of resistance and contestation instead of a lack of capacity or adequate policy.[40] Not only, as the human rights scholarship notes, because of limited accountability mechanisms, oppressive regimes can performatively indicate shared aspirations without any true intentions for action.[41] Here, however, aspirational fatigue is understood as fading political and normative commitment in the face of competing political priorities and limited or shifting collective buy-in.

Whose aspirations?

So what can aspirational politics help us to understand and analyse? Finnemore and Jurkovich point out that not only does aspirational politics form different and unexplored dynamics of goal-setting, but it is also constituted by particular political work: mobilizing actors and facilitating agreements. Finnemore and Jurkovich propose that aspiration may 'help political actors broker agreements among diverse or disagreeing parties',[42] but they refrain from discussing the political actors further. Building on their argument and considering it through a political anthropology lens, aspirational politics, therefore, carries the potential of exploring (a) who are the actors in aspirational politics; (b) what are their practices; and (c) where do they operate. While the case of the AU offers opportunities for exploring all these directions, the article takes up this line of inquiry by focusing on actors.

Goddard's notion of political brokers is beyond useful for making sense of high-level and long-standing political processes.[43] While human rights norms literature has analysed how normative ideas are translated or vernacularized by intermediaries,[44] Goddard's network approach focuses on brokers as strategic actors who occupy structural holes between disconnected political actors. Situated at the intersections of networks, brokers access diverse sets of norms, ideas, symbols, histories, and rhetoric, which they can manipulate for mediation and cultural invention.[45] Therefore, a broker's capacity to initiate structural change is not embedded in their individual traits but depends on their position within a network.[46] They facilitate political entrepreneurship in contexts where 'norms and rules are disputed, and actors attach different meanings to symbols and events'.[47] Similarly, for Appadurai, the capacity to aspire is a cultural one and draws from actor's social resources.[48]

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[39] Mala Htun and Francesca R. Jensenius, 'Aspirational laws as weak institutions: Legislation to combat violence against women in Mexico', in Daniel M. Brinks, Steven Levitsky, and María Victoria Murillo (eds), *The Politics of Institutional Weakness in Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 141–60.

[40] Htun and Jensenius, 'Aspirational laws', p. 147.

[41] Emilie M. Hafner-Burton, Kiyoteru Tsutsui, and John W. Meyer, 'International human rights law and the politics of legitimation: Repressive states and human rights treaties', *International Sociology*, 23:1 (2008), pp. 115–41.

[42] Finnemore and Jurkovich, 'Politics of aspiration', p. 760.

[43] Stacie E. Goddard, 'Brokering change: Networks and entrepreneurs in international politics', *International Theory*, 1:2 (2009), pp. 249–81; Stacie E. Goddard, 'Brokering peace: Networks, legitimacy, and the Northern Ireland peace process', *International Studies Quarterly*, 56:3 (2012), pp. 501–15.

[44] Sally Engle Merry and Peggy Levitt, 'Remaking women's human rights in the vernacular: The resonance dilemma', in Lars Engberg-Pedersen, Adam Fejerskov, and Signe Marie Cold-Ravnkilde (eds), *Rethinking Gender Equality in Global Governance* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 145–67; Sally Engle Merry, 'Transnational human rights and local activism: Mapping the middle', *American Anthropologist*, 108:1 (2006), pp. 38–51; Aaron P. Boesenecker and Leslie Vinjamuri, 'Lost in translation? Civil society, faith-based organizations and the negotiation of international norms', *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 5:3 (2011), pp. 345–65.

[45] Goddard, 'Brokering change', p. 263.

[46] Goddard, 'Brokering change', p. 257.

[47] Goddard, 'Brokering change', p. 259.

[48] Appadurai, *Future*, p. 290.

Table 1. Three dimensions of intergovernmental organizations.

Dimension	Actors	Practices
Intergovernmental	States, government representatives, diplomats	Formal decision-making and negotiation, agenda-setting, policy and strategy adoption
Supranational	International bureaucracy, public administrators, civil servants, technocrats, and in-house experts	Technical expertise, agenda-setting, drafting and policy formulation, partnership building, in-house decision-making, monitoring, implementing, functional and operational activities
Outsiders	Researchers, consultants, experts, civil society, NGOs, interest, and lobby groups	Advocacy, lobbying, information sharing, relationship building, access carving

Femocrats, or gender bureaucrats, are uniquely positioned as potential brokers because of their mandate to work on women's or gender issues in sectoral ministries, councils, commissions, directorates, or other government offices.[49] According to Tieku, the bureaucrats in AU institutions proactively shape the organizations' political agenda and institutional practices,[50] including the low-ranking bureaucratic staff.[51] In the three-dimensional analysis of intergovernmental organizations, bureaucrats are positioned in the supranational layer, connecting and mediating between the intergovernmental and outsider dimensions (see Table 1).[52]

The AU bureaucrats (including femocrats) hold specialized knowledge and rely on formal and informal networks to assert influence within the different organs and institutions.[53] Many are educated abroad or in African elite universities and move fluidly between multilateral, donor, government, and non-governmental posts. Consequently, 'professional feminism' or 'gender expertise' in transnational spaces has become a field of practice, drawing from social movements and state structures.[54] Femocrats are hired into a 'challenge position' within their institution and are expected to deliver institutional transformation in reluctant environments.[55] While femocrats can broker access and internal insights about advocacy opportunities, gender machineries themselves are usually located at the fringes of the state, underfunded and poorly mandated. Therefore, femocrats benefit from practical and strategic alliances with civil society groups.[56] Not least, femocrats also function as gatekeepers, and indeed, they are regularly distrusted by the activists in civil society.

Method: Political ethnography

The research methods I used to open up the 'black box' of subjectivities, relationships, and situated decision-making in a highly political context are informed by global political ethnography.[57]

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[49]Amanda Gouws, 'The rise of the femocrat?', *Agenda*, 30 (1996), pp. 31–43. (p. 31).

[50]Thomas Kwasi Tieku, 'Punching above weight: How the African Union Commission exercises agency in politics', *Africa Spectrum*, 56:3 (2021), pp. 254–73.

[51]Thomas Kwasi Tieku, Stefan Gänzle, and Jarle Trondal, 'People who run African affairs: Staffing and recruitment in the African Union Commission', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 58:3 (2020), pp. 461–81.

[52]Table 1 is based on Tatiana Carayannis and Thomas G. Weiss, *The 'Third' United Nations: How a Knowledge Ecology Helps the UN Think*, 1st ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021) and Tieku, *Governing Africa*.

[53]Tieku, *Governing Africa*, pp. 47–50.

[54]Freya Johnson Ross, 'Professional feminists: Challenging local government inside out', *Gender, Work & Organization*, 26:4 (2019), pp. 520–40; Rahel Kunz, Elisabeth Prügl, and Hayley Thompson, 'Gender expertise in global governance: Contesting the boundaries of a field', *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, 2:1 (2019), pp. 23–40.

[55]Ross, 'Professional feminists'.

[56]Laure Bereni and Anne Revillard, 'Un mouvement social paradigmatique? Ce que le mouvement des femmes fait à la sociologie des mouvements sociaux', *Sociétés Contemporaines*, 85:1 (2012), pp. 17–41.

[57]Edward Schatz, *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Finn Stepputat and Jessica Larsen, 'Global political ethnography: A methodological approach to studying global policy regimes' (Danish Institute for International Studies, *DIIS Working Paper*, 2015).

Table 2. A list of documents that frame the AU gender agenda.

Year	Policy or Legal Framework	Analysed
1990	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child	
2000	AU Constitutive Act	
2003	Protocol of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa	x
2004	Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa	x
2006	Continental Policy Framework on Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights	x
	Maputo Plan of Action 2007–2015	x
2009	Gender Policy	x
2012	General Comments on Article 14 (1) (d) and (e) of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa	x
2014	General Comment No. 2 on Article 14.1 (a), (b), (c), and (f) and Article 14. 2 (a) and (c) of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa	x
2015	African Gender Score Card Agenda 2063	
2016	Revised Maputo Plan of Action	x
2017	Joint General Comment of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) and the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) on Ending Child Marriage	
2018	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy	x
Forthcoming	Joint General Comment of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) on Female Genital Mutilation	

Grappling with access, scripted accounts and documents, and 'scales' of global governance, political ethnography invites researchers to collect data 'sporadically', across sites and by combining methods.[58] The research was conducted over two-and-a-half years online, in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), and to a limited extent in Pretoria (South Africa). I conducted interpretive document analysis, observations, and semi-structured interviews. The interpretive document analysis[59] included nine women's rights–focused frameworks with provisions on gender-based violence (see Table 2). The analysis excluded documents that mentioned women's (or girls') rights but had a different focus.

I observed and recorded 19 online events between late 2020 and early 2022 organized by the AU and its partners. These observations and 'lurking'[60] on Twitter and other social media pages were crucial for identifying pertinent themes, individuals, organizations, and actors. This involved following press releases, Facebook posts, speeches, and statements among other publicly available data. As policy spaces like the AU, the European Union, and even the United Nations are notoriously difficult to obtain formal access to, the online presence proved a useful strategy for immersion. Former OAU/AU femocrat Yetunde Teriba's autobiography was another excellent resource. The interviewees in Addis Ababa and online included permanent and temporary AU staff, various AU liaison offices, member state representatives, donor and development partners, and staff from various civil society organisations (CSO)s. The analysis focuses on interviews with thirty individuals. The verbatim quotes have been edited for readability and clarity in this article

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[58]Hugh Gusterson, 'Studying up revisited', *Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, 20:1 (1997), pp. 114–19.

[59]Carol Bacchi, 'The turn to problematization: Political implications of contrasting interpretive and poststructural adaptations', *Open Journal of Political Science*, 5:1 (2015), pp. 1–12, see also Tornius, 'Regional gender governance', pp. 91–2.

[60]For a discussion on collecting data from public online spaces, see Francesca Uberti, 'Navigating internet-mediated ethnography for socio-legal researchers', *Journal of Law and Society*, 48:S1 (2021), pp. S88–103.
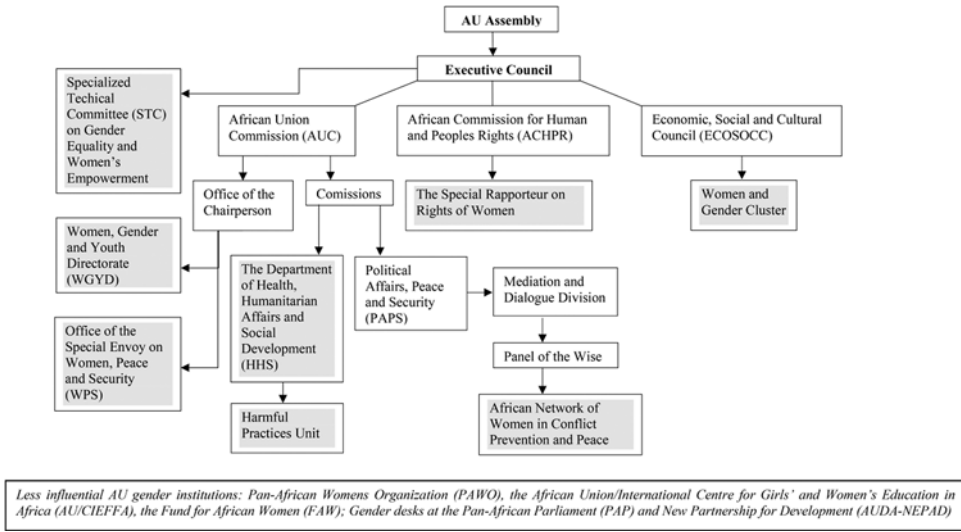
Figure 1. Dominant gender equality institutions within the AU gender architecture.
Source: Author's own compilation. **Note**: Specific gender desks are highlighted in grey, their location within the AUC structure is indicated through arrows, and hierarchical positioning based on observations. Further information about the AU structure can be found in the African Union Handbook 2021, available at: {https://au.int/en/handbook}.

and the interviewees' institutional affiliations are referenced only when they cannot be traced back to the individual.

The setting: The African Union's gender governance

The African Union (AU) replaced the OAU (founded in 1963) in 2002 and is an intergovernmental organization currently comprising 55 member states. The AU Commission (AUC) is located in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, where a majority of member states have official representation. Gender discussions within the AU/OAU go back to the regional conferences between 1977 and 1995, where African common positions for the UN World Conferences on Women were articulated.[61] The OAU's Women's Unit was created in 1992 and transformed into the Women, Gender and Development Directorate with the launch of the AU in 2002, when it was also moved to the office of the chairperson.[62] The majority of AU's normative frameworks on gender equality were adopted after 2002 (see Table 2 above). Additionally, the new AUC adopted a gender parity principle among the commissioners and deputy-commissioners. The AUC is mandated by the Assembly of Heads of States and the Executive Council, which represents foreign affairs ministries and is responsible for implementing the AU's policy agenda (see Figure 1). The Women's Directorate facilitates and coordinates efforts to achieve gender equality as per the policies and decisions adopted by the AU member states.

The AU decision-making process is multilevel: a variety of actors may propose agenda items, which must pass the committee of permanent representatives, ambassadors, or alternatively the Specialised Technical Committee (STC). As follows, the proposals are adopted at ministerial meetings before being presented to the heads of state. In STCs, representatives of the relevant sector ministries and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) review proposals and present their country

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[61] Karmen Tornius, 'Staying with the culture struggle: The African Union and eliminating violence against women', *African Studies Review*, 65:3 (2022), pp. 615–41 (p. X).

[62] Women, Gender and Youth Directorate since 2021.

positions.[63] Ideally, matters of contestation are ironed out before they reach the ministerial level.[64] Once approved by the ministers, the final decisions are made by the heads of state. The standard procedure is to seek consensus rather than to vote. As one femocrat revealingly commented: 'Even if you smuggle something by [past] the ministers, they can still crush it through the heads of states [meeting] once they realise [what you have done].'[65]

The AU gender governance and actors in aspirational politics

Inside actors: Femocrats as agents of change?

The preparatory meetings organized by the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and the OAU (in 1977, 1970, 1985, 1989, and 1994) ahead of the UN World Conferences on Women generated some early ties between the OAU, UN agencies, and civil organizations. However, in those years of economic crises and postcolonial disappointment, the political elites and activists in Africa held diverse views on the role of culture, the private sphere, and marriage as well as discrimination and violence against women. The networks and coalitions on women's issues were highly disjointed and the primary space for transnational gender discourse was the UN. The following sections examine how the establishment of the Women's Unit at the OAU in 1992 initiated a shift, in the sense that the OAU/AU became a space where a pan-African gender agenda could be negotiated. By following the institutionalization of the gender agenda, the sections identify femocrats as the actors who brokered a highly aspirational agenda on women's rights and facilitated the political entrepreneurship of other actors in the network.

The idea of a Women's Unit at the OAU was first promoted by the First Ladies of Egypt and Nigeria, Susan Mubarak and Maryam Babangida, with the view of coordinating African countries' participation at the 4th UN World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. While the heads of state gave the green light, funding for the unit came from the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). The Women's Unit was launched in 1992 within the Labour and Social Affairs Division. Creating bureaucracies in political institutions had become a global trend that was articulated by UN resolutions on women's rights.[66] African countries oversaw the establishment of 51 gender machineries between 1975 and 1985.[67] The role of gender bureaucracies was developing policies, strategies, and action plans and creating accountability within institutions, while they remained underfunded, understaffed, and undermandated.[68] They were:

> sometimes set up to fail, especially when mired in an ongoing struggle for minimal authority and budgets, with organisational leaders and donors claiming that influence requires strategic thinking and practice rather than resources.[69]

At the OAU, the Women's Unit was expected to act as a public relations office, marketing and communicating African participation in Beijing.[70] Hirut Befekadu, the first director, was transferred from the information and communications division and was assisted by Yetunde Teriba, an experienced administrator with no expertise in women's rights. The office was supported by UN-funded

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[63]The AU has 13 STCs covering different sectors and policy areas.

[64]Informal conversation, Member State representative, 25 May 2021.

[65]Author's interview, former AUC staff, 6 July 2022.

[66]Bereni and Revillard, 'Un mouvement'.

[67]Amina Mama, 'Feminism or femocracy? State feminism and democratization in Nigeria', *Africa Development/Afrique et Développement*, 20:1 (1995), pp. 37–58 (p. 40).

[68]Mama, 'Feminism or femocracy?', p. 30.

[69]Joanne Sandler, 'The "warriors within": How feminists change bureaucracies and bureaucracies change feminists', in Rawwida Baksh and Wendy Harcourt (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Transnational Feminist Movements* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 188–214 (p. 196).

[70]Author's interview, former AUC staff, 6 July 2022.

consultant Ambassador Fama Joka Bangura from Sierra Leone. As such, the first years in the office were about learning the job and proving oneself and the office as a reliable and committed actor, whilst sensitizing the AUC staff and permanent representatives of the member states regarding 'women's issues'.[71]

From early on, the aspirational gender agenda promoted at the pan-African level was shaped by the networks of actors around the Women's Unit. The establishment of the African Women's Committee for Peace and Development (AWCPD) and the drafting of the Protocol to the African Charter on the Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women (the Maputo Protocol) are examples of aspirational politics through which actor constellations can be examined. After the end of the Cold War and in the context of multiple conflicts on the continent, diverse women took up advocating for women's participation and representation in peace processes.[72] At a regional level, the Ugandan government, OAU, and UNECA co-hosted a Regional Conference on Women, Peace and Development in 1993. The outcome was a recommendation to establish the AWCPD. Affirmed by the 1994 regional conference in Senegal and the Women Leadership Forum on Peace in Johannesburg in 1996, AWCPD officially launched in 1997. This was the first time women's organizations had formalized, albeit limited, access to the OAU.[73] The AWCPD included six nominated individuals, five country representatives, and five women's NGO representatives. It was an advisory body working closely with the OAU Women's Unit. Consequently, it increased the Women's Unit's mandate of promoting the inclusion of women in the OAU, in member state policies, and in peace-building initiatives.[74] The committee involved an OAU focal point from the unit and UN agencies who provided expertise and most of the funding.[75] The member states did not approve funding for the AWCPD, and its secretariat was located in UNECA rather than at the OAU. Yet its association with the OAU brought the Women's Unit to the centre of the emerging pan-African policy networks.

The establishment of AWCPD and its connection to the Women's Unit facilitated the emergence of a new network actor and a normative entrepreneur, the founder of Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS) Bineta Diop. Alongside the AUC femocrats, Diop facilitated the institutionalization of the OAU/AU gender agenda and brought specific CSOs and donors to the pan-African organization. To an officer at the Women's Unit, 'the story of the development of the OAU/AU gender programme can never be told without looking at its relationship with FAS'.[76] While Diop's primary focus was always on women in peace processes, and from the late 1990s the women, peace, and security agenda (WPS), she and FAS worked closely with the AWCPD and the Women's Unit to campaign for the adoption of gender mainstreaming in the new AU Constitutive Act of 2002.[77] They succeeded in that, and in achieving the adoption of the gender parity principle among the AUC commissioners. What is less well known is that a coalition of the Women's Unit, FAS, and other allies pushed for the creation of a position of Women's Commissioner at the reformed AU.[78] They recruited a champion for the cause, the Senegalese president Abdoulaye Wade.[79] The proposal

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[71]Yetunde Teriba, *An Enriched Life*, Self-published (2020), chapter 5.

[72]Funmi Olonisakin, Cheryl Hendricks, and Awino Okech, 'The convergence and divergence of three pillars of influence in gender and security', *Africa Security Review*, 24:4 (2015), pp. 376–89; Tripp, Aili Mari, Isabel Casimiro, Joy Kwesiga, and Alice Mungwa. 'Women's Movements Negotiating Peace'. Chapter 8, in African Women's Movements: Transforming Political Landscapes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp.195–216.

[73]Rachel Murray, *Human Rights in Africa: From the OAU to the African Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 158.

[74]Melinda Adams, 'Regional women's activism: African women's networks and the African Union', in Myra Marx Ferree and Aili Mari Tripp (eds), *Global Feminism: Transnational Women's Activism, Organizing, and Human Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), pp.294–345 (pp. 309–310); Teriba, *Enriched Life*, p. 10.

[75]Teriba, *Enriched Life*, p.122.

[76]Teriba, *Enriched Life*, p. 142.

[77]Adams, 'Regional women's activism', p. 197.

[78]Author's interview, former AUC staff, 6 July 2022.

[79]Teriba, *Enriched Life*, p. 144; additionally, Madame Bineta Diop is from Senegal, which may have enabled access to President Wade.

for a Women's Affairs Commissioner was supported by South Africa's President Thabo Mbeki but faced strong opposition among the member states and was eventually voted down. Instead, the Women's Unit attained considerable independence when it became the Women, Gender and Development Directorate at the Office of the Chairperson. Diop provides an example of how the emergence of brokers, like the femocrats at the Women's Unit, within fragmented and contradictory networks enables the entrepreneurial behaviour of other actors. Not least, in 2014 the AUC Chairperson appointed Diop as the Special Envoy of Women, Peace and Security, making her advocacy part of the AUC institutional structures.

The Maputo Protocol provides another example of how networks form around certain aspirational agendas and are brokered by actors who straddle the institutional context and activist policy agenda.[80] The interviewees agreed that the purpose of the Protocol was to address the shortcomings of the African Charter of Human and Peoples' Rights and to create a legitimate, explicitly African, and contextually appropriate women's rights framework.[81] The idea gained traction at the 1995 meeting between the ACHPR and NGOs. Subsequently, the ACHPR submitted a draft protocol on women's rights to the OAU.[82] In parallel, the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children (henceforth IAC) was working closely with the OAU Women's Unit on developing a Convention on Harmful Traditional Practices. The OAU Secretariat asked for the documents to be combined.[83] Similarly to AWCPD, the IAC benefited from a close relationship with OAU and UNECA and became located in the UNECA compound in Addis Ababa. IAC became an observer at the OAU and built a strong relationship with the Women's Unit:

> And Mrs Teriba was one of the very active person[s], who we were working [with] to bring all of our ideas together: to write, to review, to correct and to submit [them] to the governments, to negotiate everything. But all of this was under the umbrella of this Directorate of the AU.[84]

The Women's Unit and IAC jointly organized high-level sensitization programmes over the years, addressing female genital mutilation (FGM) and more.[85] The alliance between IAC and the OAU Women's Unit combined expertise, transnational ties, locally embedded knowledge, and shared identities around women's rights. Indeed, they had established shared aspirations to work towards.

The African Women's Development and Communication Network (known as FEMNET) got involved in the Maputo Protocol drafting in 2000 after UNIFEM (now UN Women) sponsored their presence at an OAU meeting in Addis Ababa. FEMNET ended up sharing the protocol draft with its networks, which demanded a more inclusive process.[86] When organizations such as FEMNET, Equality Now, and Akina Mama wa Afrika, among others, entered the picture, their demands for a 'stronger' document were initially resisted by the initiators, who worried about losing the momentum and the gains made so far. A pioneer feminist communication network in Africa since 1988, FEMNET was up to the task of getting involved:

> It seemed like it was not open to women. Basically, anticipation was that the civil society who were part of that process would consult [or] organise consultations with other women outside

[80] Jan Olsson and Erik Hysing, 'Theorizing inside activism: Understanding policymaking and policy change from below', *Planning Theory & Practice*, 13:2 (2012), pp. 257–73.

[81] Author's interviews with IAC, FEMNET, Equality Now, and Akina Mama wa Afrika.

[82] Melinda Adams, 'African women's movements and the African Union', in Olajumoke Yacob-Haliso and Toyin Falola (eds), *The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), pp. 1–14 (p. 7).

[83] Adams, 'African women's movements', p. 7; Murray, *Human Rights*; Mary Wandia, 'Tracing SOAWR's birth and advocacy for ratification and implementation of the protocol', in Brenda Kombo, Rainatou Sow, and Faiza Jama Mohamed (eds), *Journey to Equality: 10 Years of the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa* (Published by Equality Now on behalf of SOAWR, ACHPR and MEWC, 2013), pp. 35–40.

[84] Author's interview, IAC staff, 22 June 2021.

[85] Teriba, *Enriched Life*, pp. 160–1.

[86] Author's interview, former FEMNET staff, 27 May 2021.

their respective organisations. And broaden the [discourse], so that women can [provide] input. That was clearly not happening at the time.[87]

The CSOs ended up going above the Women's Unit to an engaged Algerian diplomat Said Djinnit from AU Political Affairs Division:

We explained to him [that] this is our concern, and that African Union will bring embarrassment to the continent if you pass this [protocol] like this.[88]

The draft was reopened for negotiation in 2003, and women's organizations mobilized to give comments and propose amendments.[89] Equality Now and FEMNET convened the permanent representatives to the AU and provided them with leaflets and booklets explaining the choice of wording and how relevant articles appear in global agreements. Here, transnational CSO networks mobilized as 'knowledge brokers' for international human rights into pan-African realities.[90] In 2003, the AU adoption of the Maputo Protocol was a landmark moment for a pan-African approach to women's rights. This protocol is a legally binding international treaty addressing controversial issues such as FGM, abortion, economic rights, polygamy, and rights in marriage, which are rarely found in other women's rights treaties. With 30 per cent of the member states adopting the protocol between 2003 and 2005,[91] it is currently ratified by 43 states (78 per cent of the member states).

Now, how do these empirical cases help better understand the actors that drive aspirational politics? It is worthwhile starting with why we should consider the development of the gender agenda within the OAU and AU as aspirational politics. The aspirational nature of the norms on eliminating discrimination and violence against women is embedded in their 'depiction of a reality with a different set of social norms and practices. Such rights are goal posts, stakes in future developments, and guides to the process of social change.'[92] The establishment of AWCPD for one was an expression of a shared vision in which women's participation in peace processes was desirable, but pathways to achieve that were unclear. The AWCPD, as a symbol of this shared future imagination, created opportunities for dialogue, cooperation, and indeed norm entrepreneurship. Yet while the position of the Special Envoy on WPS is now institutionalized, the political work of Diop still very much involves mobilizing actors around the WPS agenda. The Maputo Protocol challenges the argument that aspirational work graduates to more binding norms once institutionalized.[93] It is a legally binding normative framework, yet there is no evidence that violating the Maputo Protocol has consequences for AU institutions, CSOs, or the member states. The protocol has attracted more reservations in Africa than the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and it is scarcely used for litigation.[94] Rather, it symbolizes a moment in which African states signed off on a shared future vision of pursuing gender equality in Africa – something yet to come. The protocol thereby embodies an imagination of African states that can provide adequate healthcare, housing, social protection, and access to justice and transform social norms, which indeed would enable the protection of women. The case of

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[87] Author's interview, Equality Now staff, 24 May 2021.
[88] Author's interview, Equality Now staff, 24 May 2021.
[89] African Center for Democracy and Human Rights Studies (ACDHRS), Akina Mama Wa Africa, the Association of Malian Women Lawyers (AJM), the Association of Senegalese Lawyers (AJS), Equality Now, Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association, Femmes Africa Solidarité, FEMNET, Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF), and Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA).
[90] Merry, 'Transnational human rights'.
[91] Author's own compilation.
[92] Htun and Jensenius, 'Aspirational laws'.
[93] Finnemore and Jurkovich, 'Politics of aspiration', p. 764.
[94] Scholastica Omondi, Esther Waweru, and Divya Srinivasan, *Breathing Life into the Maputo Protocol: Jurisprudence on the Rights of Women and Girls in Africa* (Equality Now: Nairobi, Kenya, 2018).

the Maputo Protocol also demonstrates the crossover between political entrepreneurs and brokers and shows how expertise and symbolic resources can form a basis for shared aspirations, which the new network actors could elevate by drawing on international human rights standards and feminist strategies.

Looking at the actors who mobilize for and facilitate agreement around shared aspirations, we can identify a few: there are activists, norms entrepreneurs, donors and funders, reluctant member states, performative champions, and of course the AUC bureaucrats and femocrats. Indeed, the actors of aspirational politics are not radically different from those in transnational advocacy networks who socialize and internalize global norms in national settings.[95] However, considering aspirational politics as a sustained normative effort and political work centres the 'middlemen' of shared future visions. The above examples show that the OAU/AU femocrats became brokers of knowledge, information, institutional access, and symbolic capital.[96] The formation of the Women's Unit created a focal point through which activists, norm entrepreneurs, donors, and member state representatives could be connected into a network of stakeholders for the future of women's rights in Africa. Interestingly, and as the literature affirms, 'co-operative constellations'[97] or 'strategic partnerships'[98] between femocrats and activist and civil society allies emerged out of need above all.[99] The femocrats relied on donors and women's organizations for funding, knowledge, and technical expertise because the member states were reluctant to provide those things. Civil society and UN agencies were interested in advancing women's rights at a pan-African level and needed access to OAU/AU. The member states, however, were perhaps the most disconnected actors within the network. The role of brokers in aspirational politics is to capitalize on the fragmentation:

> in fragmented networks, actors face friction, contradictions between different sets of social relations, institutions, and discursive elements. This friction creates room for strategic action, and even the invention of new ideas.[100]

As such, the development of the gender agenda at the OAU/AU has been heavily relational and negotiated through leveraging human relationships, partnerships, and allegiances.

Outside actors: Brokering knowledge, culture and agreements

The brokers are central to aspirational politics because of their ability to mobilize diverse ideas, norms, and sociocultural resources strategically. Their position within a network depends on their ability to galvanize relations with other actors towards a shared purpose. The social embeddedness of this position and reliance on mobilizing rhetoric, histories, and other symbolic resources relate to Appadurai's anthropological perspective on aspiration as a cultural practice.[101] Therefore, the capacity to aspire 'takes its force within local systems of value, meaning, communication and dissent', embedded in 'language, social values, histories and institutional norms'.[102] This aligns with Finnemore and Jurkovich's argument that the value of aspirational politics is primarily in mobilizing actors and facilitating agreement.[103] Since the brokers in general, and OAU/AU femocrats in particular, depend on their networks for both their position and their success in facilitating change, their partnerships and alliances are explored further in the sections below.

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[95] Khagram et al., 'Restructuring World Politics'.

[96] Goddard, 'Brokering peace', p. 505.

[97] Anne Maria Holli, 'Feminist triangles: A conceptual analysis', *Representation*, 44:2 (2008), pp. 169–85.

[98] Amy G. Mazur, *Theorizing Feminist Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[99] See also an example from Southern African Development Community in Anna van der Vleuten, Conny Roggeband, and Anouka van Eerdewijk, 'Polycentricity and framing battles in the creation of regional norms on violence against women', *International Relations*, 35:1 (2021), pp. 126–46 (p. 140).

[100] Goddard, 'Brokering change', p. 262.

[101] Appadurai, *Future*.

[102] Appadurai, *Future*, p. 290.

[103] Finnemore and Jurkovich, 'Politics of aspiration', pp. 764–5.

Returning to one of the network actors from above, it is worth considering how the Maputo Protocol became possible and adopted by the heads of state. The IAC was led by Berhane Ras-Work and Morissanda Kouyate, both trained by the World Health Organization in Geneva to advocate for the elimination of female circumcision/genital mutilation.[104] This objective was central to IAC's work, later expanding to harmful tradition-based practices:

> But what kind of things will attract the community? The most important thing for communities is their health. So we said, okay, now, let's link health to harmful traditional practices … affecting the health of women and children. So that was very, very, easy to sell to the population, to the leaders.[105]

The IAC *translated* the notion that some sociocultural practices harm the integrity of women into a discourse of health that resonates differently than 'women's rights', 'gender equality', or 'patriarchy'. In the 1990s, the OAU Women's Unit and IAC collaborated to sensitize and inform the member states regarding the negative effects of FGM. OAU femocrats communicated the eradication of FGM as an OAU policy in presentations, and various high-level events were organized by the Women's Unit and IAC.[106] This work bore fruit, considering that the first drafts of the Maputo Protocol focused explicitly on harmful traditional practices. 'Cultural' brokering was implied among interviewees who participated in the Maputo Protocol negotiations, especially regarding polygamy.[107] Furthermore, the Catholic lobby was strongly advocating against abortion rights, and religious and traditional views were used to debate inheritance rights. That said, 'harmful traditional practices' like FGM and child marriage were not vehemently contested:

> You couldn't defend child marriage, although some did. There were ambassadors, in Addis, who themselves had married young children, and they were sitting there talking about this protocol. But they, on the whole, had been neutralised.[108]

These normative contestations set the stage for aspirational politics to come. Ending FGM and child marriage, alongside the WPS agenda, have become central goals within a larger aspirational agenda of gender equality towards which the AUC femocrats strategically mobilize actors. Indeed, the fact that African political leaders largely agree on the elimination of FGM, child marriage, and the inclusion of women in peace negotiations means that strategic activities, such as events, conferences, and campaigns, can be used for more general discussions about gender equality.

While organizations like IAC and FAS have been allies of the Women's Unit from early on, the Maputo Protocol alongside general shifts towards a good governance discourse at the AU signalled a need for integration and inclusion of civil society actors. AUC femocrats, FAS, and the African Center for Democracy and Human Rights combined efforts between 2002 and 2005 to create a civil society platform for gender issues. The outcome was the Gender Is My Agenda Campaign (GIMAC), which today has 55 members. Its offices are located at FAS Secretariat, housed by UNECA.[109] GIMAC holds biannual pre-summit events ahead of the AU Assembly, coordinated with the Women's Directorate and UN partners. The Women's Directorate reaches out to GIMAC with policy drafts for CSO consultations and participates in its events. Whether these result in any amendments to the document is unknown among the GIMAC members.[110] Smaller organizations

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[104]Claude E. Welch, Jr, *Protecting Human Rights in Africa: Roles and Strategies of Non-Governmental Organizations* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), p. 94.

[105]Author's interview, IAC staff, 22 June 2021.

[106]'Female genital mutilation as a violation of human rights: The policy of the African Union'; 'Harmonization of legal instruments prohibiting FGM: Sharing successes – consolidating achievements – pursuing advances towards UN ban on FGM', and others in Teriba, *Enriched Life*, pp. 162–3.

[107]Author's interviews with former and current staff of UNIFEM, Akina Mama wa Afrika, IAC, Femnet, Equality Now.

[108]Author's interview, former Akina Mama wa Afrika staff, 18 August 2021.

[109]Author's interview, GIMAC representatives, 7 September 2020.

[110]Author's interview, religious pan-African CSO staff, 15 September 2021.

also struggle to meet the requirements of GIMAC membership, not to mention observer status at the AU.[111] Notably, the gender machineries' and CSO relationships are not always collaborative but are often riddled with tensions over resources and mandates:[112]

> we were able to access that space [GIMAC] because we were collaborating on a project with Oxfam. And Oxfam has access to that space. When we went there we actually were part of one of the panels at the GIMAC [meeting]. And that's the only time [we had access].[113]

In that sense, political brokers function as gatekeepers, and not everyone can participate in negotiating shared aspirations.[114] The OAU/AU femocrats also secured their strategic broker position by facilitating dialogue and agreements. Event observations indicate that the same representatives of international and pan-African organizations are more likely to be given a platform than smaller national organizations. The speakers tend to be chosen based on existing relationships, availability, and good public-speaking skills.[115] The femocrats in the AUC, therefore, hold considerable power regarding which ideas will find an audience in the organization:[116]

> I know, to be able to access some of the [formal] meetings, you need to have a rapport with the organiser. So normally, it's, you know, trying [to] kind of get your foot in that door.[117]

Events are at the heart of the femocrats' mobilizing strategy. Issue-focused events are a common way of facilitating agreement within the organization, and identifying common ground through events can provide a low-level aspirational agreement and move the conversation forward.[118] Regardless of reinforcing power asymmetries through access and visibility, events can spark new social processes and therefore be generative.[119] The role of the brokers in exerting agency over which actors are included and platformed in spaces of normative negotiation and aspirational goal-setting is therefore an important one.

The AU Women's Directorate also relies on its partnerships with donors and UN agencies. The UN needs the AU to legitimize its presence and work on gender on the continent, and the AU needs funding and technical assistance to function.[120] The alliance between the AU and the UN agencies was central to the founding of the Women's Unit in 1992, as the member states expected the budget for the unit's activities and any additional staff to be funded by the UN agencies.[121] Some institutions, like Bineta Diop's office on WPS, have been particularly resourceful in collaborating with donors to ensure enough staff at her office.[122] This has created a dynamic whereby AU femocrats'

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[111] Author's interview, Ethiopian NGO staff, 12 January 2021.

[112] Tripp, Aili Mari, Isabel Casimiro, Joy Kwesiga, and Alice Mungwa, '7 - Engendering the State Bureaucracy', in African Women's Movements: Transforming Political Landscapes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) pp. 166–194. Dzodzi Tsikata, 'National machineries for the advancement of women in Africa: Are they transforming gender relations?', Social Watch, report from Third World Network-Africa (2001), available at: {http://old.socialwatch.org/en/informesTematicos/29.html} (accessed on 13 June 2023).

[113] Author's interview, sub-regional CSO staff, 10 February 2021.

[114] Jana Hönke and Markus-Michael Müller, 'Intermediation, brokerage and translation', in Thomas Risse, Anke Draude, and Tanja Börzel (eds), Oxford Handbook of Governance in Areas of Limited Statehood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 1–18 (p. 5).

[115] Author's informal conversation with Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) staff, 14 May 2021.

[116] Tieku, Gänzle, and Trondal, 'People who run African affairs'.

[117] Author's interview, sub-regional CSO staff, 10 February 2021.

[118] Finnemore and Jurkovich, 'Politics of aspiration', p. 764.

[119] Lotte Meinert and Bruce Kapferer (eds), In the Event: Toward an Anthropology of Generic Moments (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015).

[120] Thomas Kwasi Tieku and Tanzeel F. Hakak, 'A curious case of hybrid paternalism: Conceptualizing the relationship between the UN and AU on peace and security', African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review, 4:2 (2014), pp. 129–56 (pp. 177–8).

[121] Teriba, Enriched Life, pp. 120–4.

[122] Author's interview, AUC staff, 13 May 2021.

and UN agencies' aspirations around gender equality are more likely to align than those of the Women's Directorate and the member states. The member states, who refuse to foot the bill for the activities they have approved, cite donor involvement as an imposition and interference with AU policies.[123] The AU Gender Policy, adopted in 2009, is a good example. It was initiated concurrently with the Maputo Protocol negotiations in the early 2000s and was met with fierce opposition on the grounds of disrupting the lives of African families.[124] When finally approved, the Women's Directorate and UNIFEM were working side by side in developing the policy text:

> The director who was at the time leading this had been really engaging. I would say, [she] really relied a lot on UN Women and [UN]ECA. We have that tripartite even to the extent that we are approaching the donors together.[125]

As Döring et al. have pointed out, the UN and the AU are 'institutions with entangled histories and overlapping groups of actors', and their institutional practices are as much intertwined as they are comparable.[126]

On the other hand, development partners (both bilateral and multilateral) admit that their access to AU offices is sporadic, and getting meetings can take months.[127] The liaison officers lamented the lack of access and diverging delivery timelines. One admitted that she was treated with disdain until relationships were formed during common missions abroad. Others suggested that it helps to appoint a member state national, rather than a Westerner, to work with the AU. Limited access is explained differently by actors. While donors and partners see limited access as protectionism and an ownership issue, the CSOs see it more as elitism. The interviews, however, clearly indicated limited human resources and a need to demonstrate loyalty and service to member states through impartiality as primary reasons.

A case in point is the Spotlight Initiative launched by the EU and the UN in 2017 as the largest global effort to eliminate violence against women. After lengthy talks, the AU become a regional partner in 2019. The AU is the regional lead, but the programme is primarily implemented by UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN Women, focusing on child marriage and FGM. Here, the AU's role is that of an 'interlocutor', or a broker, whose buy-in legitimizes the programme in Africa.[128] Two UN employees working on this initiative have long-term experiences with the AU as seconded staff or heading a liaison office.[129] With the understaffed AU gender offices, the partners prefer employees who have a robust understanding of the AUC's internal workings and can mobilize existing networks. 'At the AU, relationships, the networks you have, play a great role', one of the initiative staffers said.[130]

The diverse networks centred around the AU femocrats ultimately have produced campaigns on ending child marriage, eliminating FGM, reducing maternal mortality, and recently a campaign to popularize the AU Strategy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment.[131] The Child Marriage Campaign includes a technical working group comprising UN agencies, international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), and relevant AU divisions. Adjacent to the campaign, the Human Rights Centre at the University of Pretoria and the Committee of Experts on the Rights

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[123]Author's interview, European Union staff, 17 March 2021.

[124]Teriba, *Enriched Life*, p. 124.

[125]Author's interview, UN Women staff, 20 January 2021.

[126]Katharina P.W. Döring, Ulf Engel, Linnéa Gelot and Jens Herpolsheimer, *Researching the Inner Life of the African Peace and Security Architecture: APSA Inside-Out* (Boston: Brill, 2021), p. 14.

[127]This observation was repeated by bilateral development cooperation partners and multilateral partners, as well as UN agencies' staff.

[128]Author's interview, European Union staff, 17 March 2021.

[129]The structuring UN regional Spotlight Initiative team was still in process at the time of interviews, and each UN partner agency was in process of hiring their own coordinator. There was some talk of seconding additional staff to the AU to ensure access.

[130]Author's interview, Spotlight Initiative, UN Agency staff, 15 February 2021.

[131]'What the African Women Want' campaign.

and Welfare of the Child drafted a Joint General Comment on Ending Child Marriage, funded largely by INGO Plan International.[132] The AU femocrats' networks generated another political entrepreneur, Dr Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda. A pioneer in the UN and INGO sector and a participant in the Maputo Protocol negotiations, she is the AU's Goodwill Ambassador on Ending Child Marriage. The networks also recruit 'continental champions' from member states, whereby Zambia stands for eliminating child marriage and Burkina Faso for eliminating FGM. By drawing from diverse symbolic resources, the AU femocrats then legitimize the shared aspirations of the AUC and its partners by putting an 'African stamp' on the gender agenda through policies, legal frameworks, campaigns, and high-level meetings. Yet the AU member states are possibly the most reluctant participants in the pan-African gender network.

Member states and aspirational fatigue

> The AUC is not always considered a 'representative body' but more like another actor to negotiate with.[133]

An AU researcher Tieku too observed that the AUC is sometimes like a 'tail wagging a dog'.[134] AUC femocrats bring the member states in for deliberations, advocacy, sensitizing, and capacity-building events, which are largely produced by the actors discussed above. As the ultimate decision-makers and implementers, however, the member states require further attention. The following sections examine the contestations and 'aspirational fatigue' towards the pan-African gender agenda promoted by AUC femocrats and their networks and show that there are multiple reasons why facilitating agreement or mobilizing actors are long-winded and taxing processes.

According to Tieku, the AUC bureaucrats are expected to transcend regional rivalries and political rifts, making the Secretariat somewhat independent from the member states.[135] In parallel, accentuating the member states' agency might be necessary to legitimize AU policies.[136] The national experts and ministers meet annually in sectoral Specialised Technical Committees (STCs). First, the national government experts review agenda items and provide feedback. They then brief their ministers, who have the decision-making power at STCs. The heads of state at the General Assembly have the final word on whether the AU adopts proposals under discussion. The STCs are then a formal space for normative contestation. A case to consider is the debate at the 2020 STCs, where several member states disagreed with the language of 'sexual rights' in the continental Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy (henceforth the Gender Strategy) and the need for the African convention on violence against women.

The Gender Strategy was a joint programme with Canada, the United States, Australia, and Sweden aimed at replacing the Gender Policy of 2009. The strategy became contested in 2018. In 2020, the member state experts decried the sections on sexual and reproductive rights and disagreed on the French and Arabic translations.[137] That surprised donors, as the principles in question had already been adopted in previous AU documents. The AU Women's Directorate reminded the member states exactly of this point, at which point they were accused of pushing their own agenda. Indeed, many country representatives have no expertise in gender and are advisors on a range of issues at their Foreign Affairs Ministries.[138] One interviewee even suggested that the former director of the Women's Directorate nearly got fired for tabling a Strategy which the member

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[132] Author's interview, INGO staff, 20 April 2021.

[133] Author's informal conversation with OHCHR staff, 14 May 2021.

[134] Tieku, *Enriched Life*.

[135] Tieku, *Enriched Life*.

[136] Karen M. Booth, 'National mother, global whore, and transnational femocrats: The politics of AIDS and the Construction of Women at the World Health Organization', *Feminist Studies*, 24:1 (1998), pp. 115–139 (p. 115).

[137] Observation from the meeting.

[138] Author's informal conversations, member state representative, March 2021.

states perceived to include LGBTQIA+ rights.[139] While the Gender Strategy was not adopted by the end of 2020, the AUC femocrats confirmed to funders that the Directorate's work will be guided by it regardless.[140] A UN femocrat commented:

> Sometimes I feel like the AU is a reflection of the member states … when we are not addressing issues at the member states level, why would we want them to be addressed [in a] highly political organisation or policy process context?[141]

As such, the AUC femocrats are like 'missionaries' who continue to 'convert' their colleagues and the member states regarding the diverse elements of the gender equality agenda.[142] Some member states resent the polarizing discussions created by these progressive ideas.[143] Indeed, 'sexual rights' that could imply the protection of gender nonconforming groups were pointed out as one of the only 'no go' issues when working with the AU. The LGBTQIA+ rights have been a cause of contestation between the member states and the ACHPR, leading to the revocation of the Coalition of African Lesbians' observer status at the latter.[144] This type of conservative 'backsliding' is not unique to the AU.[145] Concepts like 'gender' or 'equality' (as opposed to equity) have been contested at the UN level since the early 1990s.[146] The increasing conservative mobilization has led to five-year reviews of the Beijing Platform of Action (1995), rather than a new policy framework, as feminist actors are afraid to lose the gains made. Abrahamsen proposes that nativist pan-African thought can be vulnerable to conservative neo-traditionalism which rejects cosmopolitan identities.[147] International civil servants and femocrats would fit the brief. Indeed, queer identities are often cited as 'un-African' regardless of historical evidence to the contrary.[148] Additionally, African states hold varying positions on the issue and the contestations are not universal.

The issue of the African convention on violence against women is different from that of LGBTQIA+ rights. Member states question the femocrats' appetite for new initiatives and frameworks. One of the main opponents to the convention was Egypt, whose delegation argued that the focus should be on the implementation of existing frameworks.[149] Notably, Egypt itself is one of the three AU member states that has not signed the Maputo Protocol. Yet the sufficiency of existing frameworks vis-a-vis the lack of implementation was also noted by both UN agencies and CSOs. The development partners know that the aspirations of the AU are at odds with the socio-political realities in the member states.[150] Htun and Jensensius argue that laws are aspirational not because of their lack of implementation, or guidance to do so, but their distance from the sociocultural realities of the target audience.[151]

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[139]Following up on this rumour has not been fruitful; however, in Spring 2019 Director Mahawa disappeared from the public eye and the AU.

[140]Author's interview, donor agency staff, 19 March 2021.

[141]Author's interview, UN Women staff, 20 January 2021.

[142]Carol Miller and Shahra Razavi, *Missionaries and Mandarins: Feminist Engagement with Development Institutions* (London: Intermediate Technology, 1998).

[143]Author's informal conversation, member state representative, 25 May 2021.

[144]Dersso, 'Future of human rights', p. 41.

[145]See, for example, Jelena Cupać and Irem Ebetürk, 'Backlash advocacy and NGO polarization over women's rights in the United Nations', *International Affairs*, 97:4 (2021), pp. 1183–1201.

[146]Carolyn Hannan, 'Feminist strategies in international organizations: The United Nations context', in Gülay Caglar, Elisabeth Prügl, and Susanne Zwingel (eds), *Feminist Strategies in International Governance* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 74–91 (pp. 83–4).

[147]Rita Abrahamsen, 'Internationalists, sovereigntists, nativists: Contending visions of world order in Pan-Africanism', *Review of International Studies*, 46:1 (2020), pp. 56–74 (p. 71).

[148]Abadir M. Ibrahim, 'LGBT rights in Africa and the discursive role of international human rights law', *African Human Rights Law Journal*, 15:2 (2015), pp. 263–81.

[149]Author's informal conversation, member state representative, 25 May 2021.

[150]Author's interview, European Union staff, 17 March 2021.

[151]Htun and Jensensius, 'Aspirational laws'.

Observing the AU public meetings, funding regularly comes up as a source of 'fatigue' among actors. For instance, the Office of the Special Envoy on WPS advocacy has led the AU member states to adopt national action plans on women, peace, and security. Yet the Office admits to a huge implementation gap and little influence on transforming the national action plans into action.[152] As Madame Diop pointed out:

> The AU is not a financing mechanism, who[ever] tells you that I will fund you is not right. What we do is policy and accountability! That's what we know![153]

The donors' strong rhetorical support for women, peace, and security is not matched with financing either, meaning that funding is the responsibility of state governments.[154] There is a stark difference between access to funding and the expertise the UN agencies can provide and what the member states can expect from the AU. Most African countries have strong UN country programmes on diverse issues, including women's rights, and access to seconded staff by the UN and donors. The AU cannot offer that, but rather, is on the receiving end itself. This makes the role of the AU's gender governance largely symbolic.

While STCs, ministerial meetings, and the ACHPR are useful for 'moving the normative space' and doing the sociocultural work of engendering shared understandings about gender issues, they lack more tangible results.[155] According to the former junior staff at the AUC, the general public in the member states is largely unaware of the AU's gender agenda.[156] The activities of the Women's Directorate are perceived to not entail follow-ups, and their primary role is to facilitate conversations. The networks centred around the AUC gender agenda are producing shadow reports and accountability mechanisms and recently launched the Maputo Protocol Scorecard and Index.[157] Yet the member states regularly ignore their reporting duties. Additionally, research on the UN human rights system has shown that indicators and benchmarking have only marginal effects on closing the 'compliance gap'.[158] Instead, the states use them for signalling engagement or acknowledging shared aspirations. What is clear is that the political work of constructing shared aspirations is non-linear and involves disagreement, debate, and institutional constraints.

Conclusion

The analysis of the AU gender architecture affirms that regardless of the dysfunctionalities and pathologies that undermine international organizations, they hold power and influence by creating actors and becoming agents in their own right.[159] This article has made two contributions to the theoretical and empirical analysis of transnational governance structures. First, the article applied a recently developed theoretical concept in a particular political context and demonstrated how aspirational politics can be operationalized by studying the mobilization of actors and how agreements on shared aspirations are achieved in governance contexts.[160] Secondly, the article developed conceptual thinking around aspirational politics by focusing on the actors central to facilitating

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[152]Author's interview, AUC staff, 13 May 2021.

[153]Public performance, Bineta Diop, International Peace Day Event, 21 September 2020.

[154]Sara E. Davies and Jacqui True, 'Follow the money: Assessing women, peace, and security through financing for gender-inclusive peace', *Review of International Studies*, 48:4 (2022), pp. 668–688.

[155]Author's interview, UN Women staff, 20 January 2021.

[156]Author's interview, AU temporary staff, 25 September 2020.

[157]African Union Official Website 'Maputo Protocol Scorecard & Index: A Stepping Stone Towards Achieving Women's Rights'.

[158]James Harrison and Sharifah Sekalala, 'Addressing the compliance gap? UN initiatives to benchmark the human rights performance of states and corporations', *Review of International Studies*, 41:5 (2015), pp. 925–45.

[159]Michael N. Barnett and Martha Finnemore, 'The politics, power, and pathologies of international organizations', *International Organization*, 53:4 (1999), pp. 699–732.

[160]Finnemore and Jurkovich, 'Politics of aspiration'.

shared aspirations. By focusing on the AU femocrats as 'brokers', the article has shown how they connected networks, mobilized actors, and built common ground that led to the establishment of different building blocks of the AU's gender architecture. In doing so, the article has affirmed the agency of both femocrats and their networks in regional gender governance.

The empirical case presented in this article shows that aspirational politics can offer more analytical insight when understood as part of normative governance, not as an alternative to it. Somewhat diverging from Finnemore and Jurkovich's original contribution, the article has argued that 'aspirational politics' can help us unpack the continuous political work that goes into creating, enabling, and sustaining shared aspirations around a possible and desirable future. This political work can be analysed through the examination of actors, practices, and spaces which facilitate the creation of shared aspirations. When this article focused primarily on actors as they 'facilitate agreement' and 'mobilize actors', it shows how they engage in concrete practices and the everyday political work of information sharing, capacity building, training, organizing events, putting together campaigns, creating thematic coalitions or networks, and others. As several IR scholars have pointed out, these political practices of future-making require further interrogation and analysis.[161] Through this political work, femocrats broker normative ideas, resources, and information for political objectives. The case of the AU shows that while norms on eliminating child marriage or FGM have been crystallized into legal frameworks, the aspirational politics continue through campaigning, events, and producing new policy texts. Additionally, while the AUC is central to agreeing on shared aspirations, much of the political work takes place beyond its walls, particularly in the ACHPR and the UN agencies. A further examination of the institutional spaces where aspirational politics take place will clarify the concepts' analytical aims.

That said, a focus on brokered networks as the driving force behind aspirational politics allows us to think about transnational governance differently, highlighting the work of 'secondary characters' rather than high-level or grassroots heroes and complicating the artificial dichotomy of successes and failures. A relational approach to global and regional governance networks can help to better understand the 'the social origins of interests and preferences'.[162] The article has demonstrated that the networks among the AU femocrats, their civil society allies, and donors have rallied on numerous occasions to bring the reluctant member states into the fold. The femocrats' relationship with member states is somewhat characterized by 'aspirational fatigue' regarding the continuous expansion of the gender equality agenda. Even governments sympathetic to women's rights struggle to live up to the expectations of the ambitions put forth by the pan-African gender networks and face contestation at home. Aspirational politics should therefore not be interpreted as a social movement within governance structures; rather, it is a political struggle over the future. As such, the conceptual development of 'aspirational politics' holds the potential to examine the sociocultural and political production of the future in transnational governance structures.

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[161] See the discussion in Jorg Kustermans, 'Parsing the practice turn: Practice, practical knowledge, practices', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 44:2 (2016), pp. 175–96.

[162] David M. McCourt, 'Practice theory and relationalism as the new constructivism', *International Studies Quarterly*, 60:3 (2016), pp. 475–85 (p. 479).

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