

# Historicizing Gender and Images: Women Visibility, Visuality and Gender Roles in Historical Perspectives in Africa

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**Abstract:** *The anti-colonial narratives in Africa tend to overshadow the contributions of the womenfolk. This paper takes a different approach to the history of the struggle against colonialism in Africa. The narratives from parts of the continent is replete with several roles played by women ranging from offering financial and moral support to freedom fighters, to taking part in the war front and also risking their lives to resupply and even hide freedom fighters from the colonial authorities seeking to arrest them. For these roles, those among them who were captured suffered the same fate as their male counterparts. After the attainment of independence however, the women were relegated to the background, with most of them winding into oblivion. The gendered roles of women which enabled them to part-take in the struggle to overthrow colonial rule in Africa need to be told.*

**Keywords:** Oblivion, matrilineage, regent and amazons

## 1. Introduction

In everyday parlance, the word gender refers to an individual's sex- i.e.; male or female. In this study, the term gender refers to the social concept regarding the role of males and females in society. Throughout the history of the human kind, gender roles have been socially constructed by men much to the disadvantage of the women. Holmes (2003)<sup>1</sup> says the term gender refers to the socially constructed system of classification that ascribes qualities of masculinity and femininity to people. Gender characteristics according to him can change over time and differs between cultures.

## 2. Women in Pre-colonial Africa

Historical narratives of women's contribution to society point to various roles played by them. From infancy, the female child performs the role of cleaning and tidying the household compound, washing dishes, participating in cooking the daily meals, fetching water as well as providing farm labour (sowing, threshing, carting and marketing of produce); all important services to the household. Even aged women are still vital for their invaluable service as nannies for children of younger women, whose services are needed on the farm or their daily household chores. The home-based ginneries of older women produce the yarns for the local textiles industries in the Northern parts of both Ghana and Nigeria<sup>2</sup> and indeed the Sahelian region.

African societies which practice the matrilineal system of inheritance have a status of a woman as an equal contributor to the family. A statement attributed to Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya's first Independence era President in

Lewis (2007)<sup>3</sup> has it that women had ruled Kenya's Kikuyu matrilineal society for generations. The women thus have a place of reverence in Kikuyu oral history of their origins. Division of labour in Africa was based on sex and age, with tasks of the woman mostly confined around the household vicinity. This complemented well with the child-bearing roles of women. The men's tasks required some amount of freedom of movement. When further division of labour leading to the production of surplus emerged, a form of tribal aristocracy arose from men's freedom of movement as a result of the nature of their tasks. Men thus began to subject women and other men to inferior status (UNESCO, 1983: 8)<sup>4</sup>

In pre-colonial African societies, women's importance was appreciated to the extent that some societies reserved certain chieftaincy titles and offices for women. Political structures of the period were gendered with women political elites representing the interests of other women. The Akan society in Ghana has the office of the Queen mother to complement the roles of the chief. Boahen I (1992: 91)<sup>5</sup> asserts that the queen is the female ruler whose role complemented that of the chief and directly in-charge of the female affairs. But Opong (2012:11)<sup>6</sup> says the queen mother's role goes beyond only women's affairs to include the entire matrilineage, and sometimes even occupy male stools. Perhaps one of the most celebrated among the Ashanti queen mothers is the queen mother of Ejisu near

<sup>3</sup>Lewis, A. E., 2007. "A Kenyan Revolution: Mau Mau, Land, Women, and Nation", M. A. Theses, East Tennessee State University.

<sup>4</sup>SWAPO Women's Council, 1983. "Namibian Women in the Struggle for National Liberation, Independence and Reconciliation: a Paper Presented to UNESCO", UNESCO.

<sup>5</sup>Boahen I, Nana A., 1992. "the Changing Role of the Queen mothers in the Akan Polity", *Research Review*, Vol. 8, #1&2

<sup>6</sup>Opong, A. K., 2012. *Rewriting Women into Ghanaian History*, MPhil Theses, Univ. of Ghana, Legon.

<sup>1</sup>Holmes, H. A., 2003. "Glossary of terms Relating to Sexuality and Gender", Columbia Foundation.

<sup>2</sup>For the smock (fugu) industry.

the Asante capital of Kumasi in the person of Nana Yaa Asantewa<sup>7</sup>. Asante clashed with the British on many occasions between 1826 and 1874 with all of the encounters resulting in British victory over Asante except for the battle of Nsamankow in 1824 when Asante defeated the British. During that battle, Sir Charles McCarthy, Governor of British colonies along the coast of West Africa had come down from Freetown in Sierra Leone to the Gold Coast to lead an expedition to deal with the Asante recalcitrants but they were tricked by the latter leading to the decapitation of the British governor (Boahen, 1966: 80)<sup>8</sup>.

The Akans are not the only ethnic group in Ghana with political roles for women in the pre-colonial era. The Dagomba of Northern Ghana has the Gundonaa as the highest and most powerful chieftaincy title reserved for the eldest daughter of the Yaa Naa controlling the Gundogu quarters of Yendi, capital of the Dagbon kingdom in Ghana. Mahama (2004: 20)<sup>9</sup> asserts that the Dagomba women chiefs are not merely title holders, they are chiefs of substance. The women chiefs have towns and subjects under their control. Again, the small Dagomba settlement of Katariga near Tamale, the Northern Regional capital, also has a woman as chief of the community with the title *Tindaanpaga*.<sup>10</sup> The Gundonaa and the Tindaanpaga both have male sub-chiefs who serve them in the daily discharge of their duties. Mahama (ibid) states that the Dagomba constitution reserves certain chieftainships for the princesses of Yaa Nas or *Nabipuginsi*. He mentions Yiwogu, Warigbani, Fuyaa, Gundogu, Kpatuya, Kugulogu, Shilung, Yimahagu, Saasegili, Didoge, and Nakpanzoo as the townships and villages occupied by daughters of Yaa Nas. Ancient Dagombas recognized the importance of women to the extent that every member of the group prays for a balanced sex among their children. During the funeral of a deceased, the *gbang-zilibu*:- i.e.; the installation of a regent is not complete without the 'female regent'. In this case, the first male son becomes the *gbanglana* or the regent while the first female daughter of the deceased is the *pakpang* or the 'female regent'. In the outdoor process of the regent, the *pakpang* sits on the right hand side of the *gbanglana*. Thus, the *gbanglana* and the *Pakpang* should not be of the same mother.

Opong (ibid) states that women's associations of the pre-colonial era were organized around kinship ties, lineage membership and age. Not only do these provide the avenues for social development, but they also formed the bases for the development of a feminist group consciousness. Anytime the security of the community is under threat, the women group could easily be called upon for support. Opong concedes that the African woman has always responded to the call to defend the society.

<sup>7</sup>Nana Yaa Asantewaa fought against the British in 1899 until she was captured and exile in the Seychelles Island

<sup>8</sup>Boahen, A. A., 1966. *Topics in West African History*. U. K: Longman Group Ltd.

<sup>9</sup>Mahama, I., 2004. *History and Traditions of Dagbon*. Tamale, Ghana: GILLBT Printing Press.

<sup>10</sup>Tendana is a male term for custodian of the land among the Dagombas. Its female counterpart is the Tendanpaya.

The pre-colonial West African empire of Dahomey's King Agaja who reigned between 1708 and 1732 reorganized the Dahomean army into a well disciplined and well organized army akin to any modern army. Boahen (1966: 87) says many European observers of the nineteenth century believed Dahomey had the strongest and well organized army on the west coast of Africa. What was most striking and unique, according to Boahen (ibid), was that, the army consisted of both men and women, otherwise referred to as the famous amazons, who were 'devoted to the person of the king and valorous in war'. This goes to show the position of women in the pre-colonial West African empire of Dahomey which was a contemporary of Ashanti.

Though limited opportunities existed for women's participation in decision-making in chieftaincy, communities differ in terms of the opportunities for women's participation. Nupe and Yoruba societies maintain autonomous roles for women traders to organize trade guilds to protect their common interests. This allows them an opportunity to participate in political activities. Among the Ibo, according to Uwaizu (1994) cited in ECA (2007) disputes that family elders are not able to resolve are referred to "married daughters" or the *umuada* (Uwaize, 1994)<sup>11</sup> cited in ECA 2007. Regarding the chieftaincy roles of women in Africa, Sierra Leone has the Sande secret society where women are said to be politically equal to their male counterparts in the Poro associations. In these Mande societies, political control alternates between the two sex groups, where women could rise to become chiefs (ECA, 2007). Thus, pre-colonial African women wielded some political autonomy. However, with the coming of European colonization, this autonomy and influence withered away.

The recognitions for women in pre-colonial Africa were to change with the advent of colonial rule in the Africa. Indeed, the inception of colonial rule in Africa is noted to have diminished these political powers of the women on the Continent (Geiger, 1987<sup>12</sup>; Azuike, 2009<sup>13</sup>; Kamkah, 2011<sup>14</sup>; and Opong, 2012). The gendered hierarchical socio-political structures in Africa had been altered greatly by the colonial establishment. The colonial educational system promoted mainly boys' education and not the girls'. The missionaries for instance, preferred educating boys, and where girls were given education, it was often on home maintenance to make them good housewives. Geiger (ibid) states that curricula for girls' education included subjects such as basic literacy, mathematical

<sup>11</sup>ECA 2007. "Relevance of African Traditional Institutions of Governance", Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

<sup>12</sup>Geiger, S., 1987. "Women in Nationalist Struggle: TANU Activists in Dar es Salam" the *International Journal of Historical Studies*, 20 (1): 1-26.

<sup>13</sup>Azuike, M. A., 2009. "Women's Struggles and Independence in Adichei's Purple Hibiscus and Half of Yellow Sun", *African Research Review*, 3 (4): 79-91.

<sup>14</sup>Kamkah, H., 2011. "Women's Resistance in Cameroon's Western Grassfields: the Power of Symbols, Organization, and Leadership, 1957-1961", *African Studies Quarterly*, 12 (31).

skills for efficient marketing and household budget management, the dissemination of information on health, hygiene, and child care. She says there was a popular response to this colonial initiative by the women of Tanganyika to learn to read and write, knit and sew for personal family use, which indicated their desire to overcome the barriers to their development which had been brought about by colonial rule. Against this background, the women readily embraced the anti-colonial struggle.

### 3. Women in the Struggle against Colonial Rule in Africa

Writing about women's contributions to the anti-colonial struggle in Africa, Opong (2012: 14) asserts that in parts of Africa such as Eastern Nigeria, Cameroon and Tanzania, women's traditional societies and institutions were transformed into political protest groups. These protest groups formed out of the women's groups became the vehicles of resistance to certain unfavourable colonial policies. Citing in particular the Anlu custom among the Kom in British Cameroon, she says it was used by women of that part of the country to demonstrate their unhappiness towards rumours of land sales by British colonial authorities. In the wake of the Aba riots of 1929 in South-eastern Nigeria, Ibo women also used similar organizations against the introduction of the poll tax.

Ghana, then the Gold Coast, was the first sub-Saharan African country to attain Independence from the British in 1959. Women were visible in the struggle for independence of the Gold Coast from Britain. Allman (2009: 17)<sup>15</sup> notes that Hannah Kudjoe for example, played a pivotal role in Nkrumah's Convention People's Party's (CPP) struggle for Independence in the Gold Coast, as organizer and propaganda secretary. Having been invited into the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) by Nkrumah, she led a petition for the release of the members of the "Big Six"<sup>16</sup> who were arrested for their involvement in the 1948 boycott of European stores in the colony. Hannah Kudjoe was also actively involved in the founding of the Committee on Youth Organization (CYO), a youth wing within the UGCC. Allman (ibid) adds that she, in the wake of the "Positive Action"; a civil disobedience to compel the British colonial authorities to negotiate Independence, moved around the colony at the peril of her life, organizing campaigns and also entertaining party members during the campaigns with songs in praise of Kwame Nkrumah. From 1951 onwards, Hannah's focus was propaganda secretary and mobilizing the party's grassroots support. Other equally courageous women were Mabel Dove who won the Ga Rural constituency for the CPP in the 1954 elections, Akua Asaabea who earned her

nickname "James Fort Prison Graduate", from her imprisonment for being actively involved in the 'Positive Action' in 1950, Alice Appiah, Leticia Quaye, Ama Nkrumah and Sophia Doku, who all followed Nkrumah throughout his tours of the country, singing praises to him and urging people to vote for him. Memuna Karaga was the Northern Regional women's leader who also entreated people of Tamale on August 24<sup>th</sup>, 1954 in a party rally to poll massively for Nkrumah and the party for there was none that could deliver the country from the yoke of colonialism than Nkrumah. In fact, these women were the vehicle on which Nkrumah rode to Independence. Many of them were very wealthy traders in the market associations who financed the activities of the CPP<sup>17</sup>. Baah-Ennumh et al (2005: 98)<sup>18</sup> assert that Nkrumah in his autobiography notes the contribution of these women in the independence struggle thus,

"Much of the success of the C. P. P has been due to the efforts of women members. From the very beginning women have been field organizers. They have travelled through innumerable towns and villages in the role as propaganda secretaries and have been responsible for the most parts in bringing about the solidarity and cohesion of the party".

Nkrumah also recognized the roles of other women party supporters who hid him when they heard rumours of the impending arrest of the "Big Six" leaders of the UGCC following the 1948 riots. Baah-Ennumh et al (ibid) say Nkrumah conceded that it was during this period that he conceived of most of the plans for Ghana's Independence. They thus concluded that but for the courage of these brave women, Ghana's independence could have been delayed a bit longer than 1957.

Upon attaining Independence, the CPP set out to address the gender inequality through Affirmative Action in the socio-political realm, by appointing ten women to the National Assembly. Nkrumah again got some Ghanaian women to be trained as Air Force pilots in the newly established Ghana Air Force at about the same time. However, the CPP which rode on the back of women like Hanna Kudjoe to power found her difficult to coexist with as an independently of the Party. Nkrumah through the Ministry of Interior wanted to rein her into the ruling government when all indications pointed to her desire to work independently of the government. Within a few years after the attainment of Ghana's independence, Hanna Kudjoe simply vanished from the public scene. She was viewed as a threat should she be allowed to organize and control women without the ruling government's involvement.

<sup>15</sup>Allman, J., 2009. "the Disappearing of Hanna Kudjoe: Nationalism, Feminism, and the Tyrannies of History", *Journal of Women's History*, 21 (3): 13-35.

<sup>16</sup>Refers to the six members who included J. B. Danquah, Obetseby Lamptey, William Ofori Atta, Ako Adjei, Edward Akufo Addo and Kwame Nkrumah who started the independence movement under United Gold Convention.

<sup>17</sup>Opong, ibid

<sup>18</sup> Baah-Ennumh, Y. T., Owusu S. E. and Kokor J. Y., 2005. "Participation of Women in Local Governance in Ghana: a Case Study of Ashante Region", *Journal of Science and Technology*, 25 (1), KNUST, Kumasi, Ghana.

Azuike (2009)<sup>19</sup> writes about similar contributions of women in Nigeria's struggle for self-determination from the British colonialists. She says women are not historically new to the struggles in Nigeria as the annals of the country are awash with the amazons who fought tirelessly with their male counterparts for Independence in the 1950s and 1960s. Of special mention are such illustrious women as the likes of Margaret Ekpo, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, Yinka Abayome, Hajia Sawaba Gambo and Janet Mukelu who were among the fearless women who fought relentlessly to reshape the country's history. Yinka Abayomi joined the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) since its formation in the late 1930s and rose to become head of its ladies wing. She later on formed the Nigerian Women's Party (NWP) in 1944 whose membership was limited to only women of African descent. Perhaps a more militant women's association was the Abeokuta Women's Union (AWU) founded by Funmilayo Anikulapo-Kuti (formerly Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti)<sup>20</sup>. In the north was Hajia Sawaba Gambo who was also a key member of the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU), who was incarcerated on numerous occasions by the British colonial authorities for her political activities. These and many more of their kind became the vehicles on which elites like Chief Awolowo Obafemi, Herbert Macaulay and Abubakar Tafawa Balewa were able to mobilize the Nigerian grassroots for the struggle leading to the country's Independence from Britain in 1960. Accusing the colonial authorities, who had no regard for women, Azuike (ibid) said when the missionaries who were supported by the colonialists to set up institutions of learning; they infused some patriarchal ideologies into the educational system in Africa. One of these was the belief that only boys would benefit the most from western education. This for several years confined women to a life of "docility and sheer domesticity".

In British Southern Cameroon within the last decade of the freedom movement, women were more militant in their quest for freedom than their male counterparts. The women were more organized in provinces like Kom, Kedjum-keku, Baisso, Mughun, Teitengom, etc. Kamkah (2011; 4) observes that the women's groups in the Cameroon just like other voluntary associations during the colonial era were avenues for disseminating new ideas as well as training grounds for new political leaders. He concedes that this debunks the assertion that relegates women to the periphery of African history. A case in point according to Kamkah (ibid) is the 1929 women's uprising in South Eastern Nigeria against the introduction of poll tax by the British colonial authorities which emboldened the nationalists' push for self rule. The riot in Eastern Nigeria generally aroused the awareness of the people of Nigeria to the Independence struggle.

Symbolism was also employed by women to organize and tactfully pursue the Independence struggle in the Bamenda

Western Grassfields of Cameroon. Laimbwe women and those of other ethnic groups of the country used symbols as powerful instruments of protest and change. Body configurations are known to defy criminal acts, and were employed by women in equatorial Africa to harass overzealous colonial officials into compliance Kamkah (ibid: 6). This was by the use of male clothing in protestation to certain harsh colonial policies.

Dress and other textile images were powerful tools employed by women, who are mostly skillful orators, and compelling propagandists. Kamkah (ibid) says it has the potential to unify, differentiate, challenge, contest and dominate. Conscious of this fact, the women of the western Grassfields used dress as a powerful weapon against the colonial system with its limitations of women's political ambitions by putting on men's dresses in a particular dreadful way to frighten. This compelled the colonialists to change some of their policies that did not favour rural women (i.e.; the Agricultural Law of 1955). These pushed the British to hasten the decolonization process of the country.

In French West Africa, the interterritorial political party, the Rassemblement Democratique Afri-caine (RDA) realized the importance of women to the anti-colonial struggles, and employed them. Opong (2012: 17) cites Elizabeth Schmidt who argues that whereas many political parties in the West African country of Guinea had ignored women, the RDA drew a large proportion of their support from women. This was because the party recognized the power of women's social relations and the relevance of their cultural associations.

African women were visible in the Tanzanian African Nationals Union's (TANU) struggle for freedom from Great Britain. Geiger (1987)<sup>21</sup> says the TANU constitution stressed on the equality of men and women in the anti-colonial struggle. Men and women should team-up to fight for the liquidation of colonial rule in Tanzania, an idea embraced by all sexes. In pursuance of this call for gender equality among the TANU activists, the first female member to be recruited was Binti Titi Mohammed. Binti was rather astonished and disappointed when her queries about the Women's Wing for TANU were replied with evasive answers of men's objections. Geiger (ibid) attributes the eventual establishment of the women's wing of TANU to the queries by John Hatch of the British Labour Party when he visited Tanzania to learn the facts about TANU for the Fabian Colonial Bureau's assistance. The women, since their joining of TANU's struggle to free Tanzania from the colonial yoke performed vibrant roles through to the end. From their dance groups, the women mobilized effectively through the effective dissemination of information and also mobilization of resources. Geiger says most of the women involved in the anti-colonial struggle were born between World War I and the 1930's and were in their mid-twenties to late thirties at the time of the nationalists struggle in the 1950's. Asha Ali and Binti Kipara were the oldest amongst them and they were born

<sup>19</sup>Azuike, ibid

<sup>20</sup>Johnson, C., 1982. "Grassroot Organization: Women in Anti-colonial Activity in South West Nigeria", *African Studies Review*, 25(2/3): 137-157.

<sup>21</sup>Geiger, ibid.

when the Maji Maji<sup>22</sup> rebellion was going on. Asha Ali's father fought against the Germans in the war.

Lewis (2007: 51)<sup>23</sup> reports that women very instrumental in the Kenyan Liberation War fought by the Mau Mau Union organized by Deedan Kimathy in 1953, to free their lands from British colonial authorities' appropriation. She says both the colonial reports and African narratives on the Mau Mau revolutionary struggle for Independence are replete with women contributions, without mentioning any African woman by name. District officers in the Central Province believed the Mau Mau fighters relied heavily on women swearing oaths because they knew the women would not question the belief that death follows any breach of an oath. It was observed that women had a huge presence in a crowd that protested the arrest of a Kenyan political figure by name Harry Thuku, reported by Carl Rosberg and John Nottingham (Lewis, *ibid*: 53). While the police ordered the crowd to disperse, the women cried out in ululation intended to spur the men to action. These women maintained a keen interest in the nationalist struggle as bread winners of the families who had lost their farmlands to the European settler farmers. Hard core female Mau Mau forest fighters like Wanjiru Nyamarutu were inducted into the Inner Secret Council. She distributed food to Mau Mau forest fighters and through that, also gathered intelligence on British positions for the fighters. Perhaps, as a woman, Wanjiru might have had access to food as a result of her closeness to other women who were actively producing food. Women prisoners suffered the same punishment as their male counterparts. Other notable female forest fighters according to Kombo (2012: 49)<sup>24</sup> include Muthoni Ngatha (who was designated Field Marshall), Wagiri Njoroge (Queen of the Mau Mau), Rebecca Njeri Kairi, Wambui Wagara, Priscilla Wambaki, Mary Wanjiko, Nduta wa Kore, and Mary Nyarurui. Elizabeth Wanjiko and Elizabeth Gachika were noted to be administering oaths, organizing food and other logistics for the forest fighters. But unlike their male counterparts, they had a dual task of having to cater for their babies, sometimes born out of rape while in captivity, and having to work. Lewis states that Ngugi Kabiru, a Mau Mau gun smuggler, says women suffered just as much as their male counterparts in the detention camps. They experienced the same physical, sexual, verbal and emotional abuse. In the attempt to break them, the women imprisoned at Kimathi Camp were deliberately starved and subjected to rape and all forms of abuses. This was to get the women to renounce their Mau Mau oaths which they never did but rather remained loyal to the revolution.

The narrative of the Southern Rhodesian struggle for independence from Ian Smith's Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) from Britain in 1965 is replete with the roles played by the women combatants. In the 1890s,

according to Patricia Chogugudza, the Shona and Ndebele people rose up in arms to repulse the invasion of their lands by the British South Africa Company (BSAC). In what became known in the annals of Zimbabwean history as the First Chimuranga War, Nehanda Nyasikana, a woman, took up arms to fight off the British. When she was eventually arrested and sentenced to death by hanging, she prophesied that her bones will rise up to fight against the British conquerors. Chogugudza<sup>25</sup> argues that women played active roles in the Zimbabwean guerrilla armies who fought for the country's independence, from 1964-1980.

When in 1960 the Rhodesian government decided to allocate only fifteen seats out of the sixty-five parliamentary seats to blacks, women organized a demonstration against this move. Then the National Democratic Party (NDP) was banned in 1961 leading to the women teaming up with their male counterparts to make the struggle more militant. Among the women combatants were Margaret Dongo, Catherine Nyamandwe, Teurai Ropa Nyango, and Freedom Nyambuya. The women according to Kombo (2012) first joined the armed struggle through acts of sabotage cutting farm crops on chosen fields of White commercial farmers at nights. The women also prepared food which they sent to the fighters in the bush. Susan Rutanhire's first task was to carry weapons for the male fighters but was finally given military training for combat duties when there was shortage of male recruits from 1974. These gallant women were recognized by the post revolutionary leader, Prime Minister Robert Mugabe in the following words:

"Without women's full participation, the struggle for social, economic and cultural independence of a country may not be achieved".

However, despite this acknowledgement by Prime Minister Mugabe, these gallant women were to be disappointed after the attainment of independence in 1980. Patricia Chogugudza says Zimbabweans saw these women not fit to be wives and mothers in spite of the vital roles they played in the nation's liberation wars. They were constantly being subjected to various degrees of abuses such as rape and used as sex slaves.

In Apartheid South Africa, women were not left out in the bitter struggle against White minority rule and its discriminatory policies against the Black majority. Women like Sophie Mashaba, Brigalia Ntombemhlope Bam, Amina Cachalia, Helen Joseph, Lilian Ngoyi and Sophia William-De Bruyn organized and took part in demonstrating against passes in 1956. These demonstrations were organized by the Federation of South African Women (FSAW)<sup>26</sup>.

<sup>22</sup>The local people's rebellion against German colonial rule in 1904-'07 was labeled Maji Maji rebellion.

<sup>23</sup>Lewis, *ibid*

<sup>24</sup>Kombo, E. E., 2012. "Women in National Liberation Wars in Settler Colonies of Kenya and Zimbabwe: Pathways to Political Empowerment", M. A Theses, York University.

<sup>25</sup>Chogugudza, Patricia, n. d., Gender and War: Zimbabwean Women and the Liberation Struggle.

<sup>26</sup>Malibongwe Dialogue 2007, "Remembering the Role of Women in South African History through Dialogue", Nelson Mandela Foundation (Dialogu for Justice).

One outstanding woman of the struggle against Apartheid, according to Brigalia, was Sophie Mozibuko, a social worker with the South African Council of Churches (SACC). She kept accurate records of the families of political detainees in hidden files (from police raids). The families of such detainees were denied jobs in the labour market. During these times when most organizations were banned in South Africa except the SACC, Sophie Mozibuko offered support by sending grants to such families at the risk of her own life. In the women's wing of the African National Congress (ANC), we had women like Winnie Mandela, estrange wife of the late Nelson M. Mandela who was serving life in prison at Roben Island. Rica Hodgkson was a White South African woman member of the Communist Party who collaborated with Black women. Amina Cachalia was a South African-Indian, former member of the Indian Youth Congress (IYC). She dared the white minority regime by distributing leaflets, putting-up posters, organizing meetings with the aim of changing South Africa for the better. She spent some time in jail after the Sharpeville massacre in 1960 for her role in organizing demonstrations against the white minority regime.

Historical accounts of the South West African People's Organization's (SWAPO) anti-colonial struggles against Apartheid South Africa also saw a heavy presence of women in the struggle (UNESCO, 1983)<sup>27</sup>. Namibia was a German colony before World War I, but was transferred to Great Britain after the defeat of Germany in War in 1918 and later on entrusted to Apartheid South Africa, which administered it till its independence in 1990. Germany's initial bid to occupy the colony in the first decade of the twentieth century was met with resistance from the Herero and the Nama ethnic groups of Namibia. Men and Women teamed-up to purge the German colonial invaders from their land. Women who could not bear arms assisted their male counterparts in the preparation for the war. Some of them were even captured and transported to the other German colonies of Cameroon and Togo as war captives. Others in protestation to the ruthless German scorch-earth tactics of mowing down of their husbands refused to give birth to children to repopulate the country while the Germans continued to occupy their lands.

Namibian Independence struggle against Apartheid South Africa in the 1950s owed its success to women who initiated the protest movement themselves (UNESCO, 1983). The women were again behind the 1955 Herero revolt against the Apartheid Lutheran Church leading to the formation of the Oruuano Independent Community Church. When the Windhoek Advisory Board gave their backing to the use of corporal punishment against women who flouted the Pass Laws by the Apartheid regime, they rose up and routed the Board. Of special mention is a woman by name Kakulukaze Mungunda who single-handedly burned the official car of the administrator in protest against police killing of innocent Namibians. It was observed that after 19<sup>th</sup> April 1960, SWAPO membership grew astronomically with women constituting the majority of its entire membership. From then on, girls were in the

majority during SWAPO youth activists' meetings and demonstrations against the Apartheid South African colonial rule while colonial jails also began to record girl convicts.

Rahman (2012: 2)<sup>28</sup> argues that in Arab countries including Algeria and Morocco, the unequal social and political status of women is basically due to patriarchal kinship traditions and shari'a family law enshrined in the social and political order. As a result, women contributions in these societies have been overlooked by men. These societies relegate women to the background, claiming their proper place is in the household vicinity. Women in these countries undoubtedly contributed tremendously to the sustenance of these societies. Meredith (2006)<sup>29</sup> reports of teaming numbers of Algerian women who defied threats and intimidation during the war of Independence in 1962, and queued to vote 'yes' in a referendum of that year for their nation's Independence from France.

Although many of these women suffered in their struggle against French occupation of their country, their contributions to the struggle for Algerian Independence never brought them equal rights upon the attainment of Independence in 1962. However, the French colonial authorities were reported to have been alarmed by reports of women's involvement in the war front for Algeria's Independence (Leonhard, n. d.)<sup>30</sup>. They instituted a divide and rule policy to break the morale of women on the war front, by instituting what they deemed to liberate the women from the clutches of "ignorance and the crushing weight of patriarchal domination". But, this was assimilation in disguise. The women remained resolute and teamed-up with their male counterparts in their quest to resist French colonialism within the National Liberation Front (NFL). Leonhard asserts that the visibility of these women on the war front caught the eye of the global media who saw them as heroines of the Algerian revolution, defying the stereotypes that saw Muslim women as passive victims of Muslim male oppression.

There was some symbolism here too. The image of the young female fighters on the war front of the Algerian Independence struggle was also highlighted by the FNL's mouth piece, the El- Mudjahid. Stories that depicted their sacrifices were publicized to win public sympathy for their cause, and to pressurize the French authorities for their Independence. In fact, this became a propaganda tool to portray them as innocent victims of French aggression, and not people with pan-Arab agenda terrorizing peaceful European settlers. Most notable was the battle for Algiers on 30<sup>th</sup> September 1956 when Zohra Drif and Djamilia

<sup>28</sup>Rahman, Fatima Z., 2012. "Gender Equality in Muslim-Majority States and Shari'a Family Law: Is There a Link?", *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 47 (3): 347-362.

<sup>29</sup>Meredith, M., 2006. *the State of Africa: a History of Fifty Years of Independence*, F. P: London.

<sup>30</sup> Leonhard, Adrienne, (n. d.). "Between Two Jailers": Women's Experiences during Colonialism, War and Independence in Algeria'.

<sup>27</sup>UNESCO, ibid

Bouhired detonated their bombs at the office of Air France.

The story of a 17 year old Baya Hocine is worth highlighting here (Vince, n. d.)<sup>31</sup>. She was condemned to death for planting a bomb for the FLN in 1957, but later on got her sentence commuted to life in prison, and later set free upon the attainment of Algerian independence in 1962. As a deputy in the Algerian National Assembly in 1982, Baya Hocine argued strongly against the passage of the Family Code which intended to institutionalize gender inequality but was booed by her male colleagues. By 1984 when the Law was eventually passed, she had resigned from both the FLN and the National Assembly. When she died abroad in May 2000, no state official delegation awaited her body's arrival at the airport except for her former cell mates or what they called "sisters-in-arms". However, the government later on had to redeem its own image by naming a university hall of residence after her, in Algiers.

There were massive contributions of Algerian women in the civilian domain who hid, fed and cared for male urban guerrillas and rural undergrounds or maquisards. The FLN circulated propaganda to urge the women on by promoting a message that women emancipation would come with Algerian liberation.

The Algerian Ministry for Veteran Affairs in 1974 gave the estimates of women who fought in the war to be some 11,000, constituting 3% of the entire fighter population. Out of this number, 2,200 women were captured and tortured by the Algerian French police and military.

Women were equally visible in the Egyptian revolution of 1919, which eventually led to the partial withdrawal of Britain from that North African country. There was a radical call for change by some elite women groups, which reinforced the nationalist cause. Aisha al-Taymuriyya and Huda Sha'arawi were among the early women activists (Ramdani, 2013: 41)<sup>32</sup>. Closing ranks with Sa'ad Zaghlul, the leader of the Wafd movement, Huda Sha'arawi in 1919 led veiled women demonstrators in the quest for Egyptian Independence from Britain. Ramdani (ibid) asserts that the women engaged in dual struggle for both Egyptian independence as well as gender equality. Safiyya Zaghlul, who happened to have been the wife of Sa'ad Zaghlul was very active in the struggle leading to the success of the 1919 revolution. These women demonstrators petitioned foreign consulates including the American consul-General in Cairo. Notable among these women were Safiyya Zaghlul, Sharifa Riyad, Esther Fahmi Wisa, and Labiba Ahmad. Their aim was to create a female Egyptian voice that would attract international audience to be sympathetic to the Independence cause. Indeed, the visibility of these

women actually added impetus to the Egyptian nationalists' cause as it led to foreign embassies exerting pressure on the British government, which finally brought her partial withdrawal.

Women from the rural peasantry were also featured in the Egyptian struggle for self-determination. They assisted the revolution tremendously by their numerous acts of sabotage throughout the countryside, blowing up railway lines to cut British supplies to their troops on the frontline. In fact, many of them died carrying out this patriotic duty which has been duly acknowledged in some Egyptian literature. Ramdani (ibid) concedes that following nominal independence in 1922, the male Egyptian nationalists abandoned the feminists' campaigners who were very much loyal to the nationalists struggle.

#### 4. Lessons from the Women's Struggles

One important lesson we learn from all these deafening silence on the invaluable contributions of these illustrious African women in the arduous struggle for decolonization as identified by Allman (2009)<sup>33</sup> is that women need to take the courage in writing personal memoirs. These could be relied upon by scholars and biographers to keep their contributions to society known to the public in a deeply patriarchal society such as that of Africa.

#### 5. TVET for the Liberation of Women in Africa

In the contemporary world, Technical/Vocational Education and Training (TVET) offer a way out of the gender inequality in Africa. The question is, how do we make women visible in TVET education which is a male dominated realm? There is the need to design and develop a gender balanced TVET curriculum that would cater for the training environment to accommodate women. The curriculum should be tailored to address some of the dominant patriarchal mindset of the African society that militates against women's effort towards achieving gender equality. That is, the feeling that certain jobs being the domain of men and not women, women's place in the kitchen, etc. Industrial attachment should be incorporated into the curriculum to assist women transit from the training to the world of work.

Another way women could be made visible in TVET according to Foster (2011)<sup>34</sup> is to develop a women friendly training facilities. The training environment should contain support facilities such as counseling services, maternity or day care services, job placement services, separate wash rooms for the sexes, additional transportation and female trainers and teachers<sup>35</sup>. Women look out for respect, safety, and equality in the learning

<sup>31</sup>Vince, N., n. d., "Colonial and Post-colonial Identities: Women Veterans of the Battle for Algiers". U. K: Univ. of London.

<sup>32</sup>Ramdani, Nabila, 2013. "Women in the 1919 Egyptian Revolution: From Feminist Awakening to National Political Activism", *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 14 (2): 39-52.

<sup>33</sup>Allman, ibid

<sup>34</sup>Foster, H., 2011. "Women and TVET: Report of the UNESCO-UNEVOC online Conference". 5-15 December

<sup>35</sup>ILO, 2012. "Resource Guide into Gender Mainstreaming into TVET in Bangladesh".

institutions or environment without which could be enough reason for the women to quit.

Guidance and support for job placement is deemed to be very crucial as its absence in TVET institutions portends failure in job placements of women. This is because many women are not familiar with the job requirements thereby making it difficult for them to get employed in the labour market (Foster, *ibid*).

## **6. Conclusion**

It is obvious from the foregoing discussions, that African women in the pre-colonial era wielded some level of political autonomy and were treated as an equal partner in society. The gendered social and political structures afforded women a platform to address women's issues as well as serve as avenues for social mobilization in their traditional societies, as could be seen in various parts of the Continent. The changing social status of the women, following the inception of European colonial rule in the early twentieth century saw the women using their traditional associations as a bastion against colonialism through various means: demonstrations, boycotts, dress, financing political parties from their little contributions from their associations as well as teaming up with their male counterparts on battle fronts from Algeria, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Angola; to fight for the eventual overthrow of colonial rule in their respective countries. Their associations provided grassroots support to the early political parties in countries that did not use armed struggle for independence. Fifty years later, today, the women's struggle for equal opportunities is still raging. In spite of the promise of seeking first the 'political kingdom and all things shall be added' (including gender equality), the women's cause was completely abandoned by their male counterparts, once Independence was achieved. To stem this, women need to be given priority in twenty-first century Africa by offering skills training. The non-formal sector of the African economy still has women small-scale entrepreneurs dominating. God bless all the women and their gallantry, and the course of gender equality.