

**WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS AND COLLECTIVE ACTION IN AFRICA: LESSONS
FROM OUSMANE SEMBENE'S *GOD'S BITS OF WOOD*, ANLU OF CAMEROUN AND
THE WOMEN'S MARKET REBELLION IN LAGOS**

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UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI**

2020

DECLARATION

This research project is my own original work and has not been presented for any degree award in any other University.

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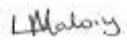
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the women who gave up their comfort for the sake of freedom, justice and prosperity throughout Africa's history. Their courage, resilience and determination led our countries to where they are now. May their legacy not be in vain; we stand on their shoulders.

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this thesis was to analyse women's collective action in colonial Africa with a goal of understanding and highlighting the roots, gains and opportunities of women's movements in Africa through an African feminism lens. I did this by assessing three examples of women's collective action namely the March to Dakar of 1947, The Anlu revolt of Cameroun in 1958 and the Lagos Market Women's Rebellion of 1929 in which women defied stereotypes and broke traditions to actively and successfully resist various aspects of colonization. As a historian, feminist, and scholar of African women studies, this thesis provided an opportunity to demonstrate that feminism is an important ideology for African men and women to understand and embrace, not as foreign idea that is for a certain calibre of women, but as an ideology that existed and that is useful, relevant and salient in Africa through history. To achieve this, I did a content analysis of secondary data seeking to understand how African feminism as an ideology informed, shaped and guided the women's actions during colonialization. Inspired by Ousmane Sembene's *God's Bits of Wood* which I had read as a literary text, I found the story compelling and with such strong feminist agenda that it motivated me to do more work on Anlu and the Lagos Market women as these took place in colonial era, they involved thousands of women across big area rallying around common issues, defying stereotypes, and had relatively successful outcomes. The key findings were three fold. Firstly, that women played an important role in resisting colonization, and not just a supportive role to men. Women organized and mobilized pushed by their own sense of agency, solidarity and commitment to affect change. Secondly, that feminism as a practice and theory is not a borrowed Western concept; the collective actions of the women in these three countries reflects African feminism which is characterized by self-determination, solidarity, strategic organization and encompassing of the various mountains besides colonialization such as patriarchy, culture, religion, and economic hurdles. The movements were informed and strengthened by pre-existing traditional practices that gave credence to the women's actions. Thirdly, women's movements were not just about bread and butter, they were strategic and succeeded at influencing systemic political, social and economic changes though not entirely as colonialism continued past the era discussed in this thesis. Further research would be good to interrogate how modern day women's movements can leverage more on African feminism as an ideology that is African-centred, practical, and strategic in leadership, work place, family, business, politics, social and economic aspects of African societies.

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Background and Introduction

Women's movements and collective action have been a significant part of Africa's socio-political history in different formats and contexts over history and though they may not have been branded as traditionally 'feminist', these movements contributed to the maintenance of law, justice and order and were in fact feminist. In particular, the role of women in the resistance movements during colonial times in Africa has historically been undermined, under-recorded, misconstrued and downplayed. This is due to two main reasons: - one is the misconception that women play a secondary role in society- secondary to their male counterparts which is partly a product of the patriarchal system forming most of African cultures. The second reason is that the work and efforts of women in these liberation struggles has not been recorded much especially in written history by Africans so therefore it is not as well known. The common belief is that women played a supportive role in most African societies while men played a more direct role in the forefront of social, political and economic issues. While it is true that men and women played a different role in colonial Africa, it is inaccurate that women *always* played a secondary or supportive role while the men 'fought' battles for them. It is for this reason that this paper highlights in detail the methods and strategies by at least three women's movements.

In many African countries, women organizations were more vocal and united during the colonial liberation struggle and immediate post-colonial period up to the 1990's but in present day Africa, especially in the 21st Century, the focus and form of women's organizations and movements has shifted and is less 'collective'. One of the challenges facing collective action in women's movements is that women have other competing interests and identities that are more salient than the identity of womanhood such as :- class, ethnicity, religion, rural, urban, age and profession/line of work. One of the gaps that this paper attempts to fill is to suggest that these differences actually presented an opportunity for multi-dimensional, multi-focal organizations that provided a platform to handle political, social, economic and legislative matters in the society. If women's movements become extinct or obsolete, there is a risk of regressing in terms of participation, representation and liberation yet so much progress has been gained in gender representation and gender equality through the relentless work of organizations over the years. Empowerment and liberation of women from subversive systems can be done better through continued collective action.

Colonization brought about changes such as urbanization, capitalism, nationalism and new religions which affected the judicial, political, economic and social systems. Africans underwent oppression, suppression, loss of land, loss of self-rule, and the production resources were now controlled by the colonizers. African women were in the forefront of ensuring that the systems and laws did not subvert their and their families' dignity, liberty and harmony, and so they rebelled, at their own expense which included in many cases imprisonment, injuries and even loss of life. This thesis found that in as much as the focus and methods of women's collective action have changed over the years since pre-colonial, colonial era, and to date; they played and continue to play a significant role in the social, economic and political.

An analysis of three examples of movements that took place in Africa in the colonial era shows that women's movements were a crucial part of the resistance against colonial rule. Ousmane Sembene's book '*God's Bits of Wood*' is a main text for this project, and provides the backdrop over which March to Dakar is analysed and then compared to other two movements in Cameroun and Nigeria. The three incidents in Senegal, Nigeria and Cameroun discussed herein are case studies that prove that women's collective action in Africa is and has been present, powerful, effective and strategic. Women's movements were practical in the sense that at times they were about survival, life and death; and also strategic in the sense that there were long term gains to be made such as preventing a change of culture or an erosion of beliefs and structures that formed a big part of communities' stability.

From the pre-colonial era to present day, women have coalesced around social, welfare, political and economic issues with varying degrees of impact. Colonization, in particular, was a huge disrupter in Africans' lives and livelihoods and it had adverse effects that were felt in different ways by women, men and children. By interrogating historical actions by women in Africa, women's movements had immediacy to them because the issues they addressed were very practical, but the movements were also strategic because the woman were protecting and advocating for changes that would have a long term impact. As seen in the *Anlu* practice of Cameroun, women had strong alliances in pre-colonial/traditional Africa and these alliances

became even more important with the advent of colonialism, women still came together in collective and non-collective action to resist, advocate, empower and protect each other and though their contributions may not be fully recorded in history, it is undeniable that they played an important role in preserving and later regaining liberation, dignity, unity and peace within their countries.

Ousmane Sembene's book *God's Bits of Wood* (1970) is about the 1947 railroad workers strike in Senegal which came about because the workers were disgruntled with lowly wages and poor working conditions. This strike was significant in many ways:- it changed the workers' perspective of themselves: - prior to this strike they had always feared that they would be fired, killed, starved to death with their families if they 'caused any trouble' - which some of them were- but they had never realized how powerful they were. The strike also changed women's perspective of themselves and vis-à-vis men's perspective of women. As the strike began, women were at first behind the men, then they were beside them and eventually they were the ones leading from the front. The march lasted four days from Thiès to Dakar and the French finally gave in to the willpower of the people. It is a significant historical event in Africa of women's involvement in strikes and the effectiveness of the strike because although the price of women's involvement was high such as lack of water and food for months, violence and even loss of life; the long-term gains were significant. The strike resulted in better working terms for the Africans as well as somewhat better treatment from the colonialists. The women in *God's Bits of Wood* were willing to risk their safety and comfort for the sake of change and they did not just do lip service, they marched for hundreds of miles to Dakar to hold a revolt in support of their husbands, brothers, sons and fathers who were being mistreated by the railroad company.

The second case study is of the Lagos Market Women Rebellion which took place in 1929 the time a new tax was introduced in Nigeria particularly in the Owerri and Calabar regions. A domestic tax was introduced by the colonizers that would specifically affect the market women, as opposed to the 1927 hat tax which only impacted men, and this was one of the major causes of the rebellion. In the Lagos Market Women rebellion, ten thousand women closed the Lagos Market and marched to the Commissioner of the Colony's offices. The government reported it as one hundred women in a bid to downplay the numbers and impact. The timing was significant because many of the men

were jobless at this time and women were the breadwinners hence the effect of the tax was hard-felt by the women. The Commissioner said that they would only tax the 'rich' women but the market women stood together and pushed against this. They got fingerprints as signatures against this rule and quoted that the tax was against Lagos custom. Eventually in January 1941 there was a concession made to only tax over 100 pounds which most of the market women could not get anyway. This was a gain made by the rebellion of the women and not only that but the warrant chiefs system was also done away with and women were now represented in the native courts.

The third case is the Anlu Revolt of 1958. Anlu was a sanctioning mechanism employed by Kom women in Cameroun to punish people who committed crimes that insulted women or crimes that were against "social and natural order". Prior to the 1958 uprising Anlu was used by women to punish men who had committed wrongs in society. The offended woman would let out a wail from where the offense had taken place which would inform other women that an offense had taken place. The call would be repeated across the area and women would gather around in a crowd. The women would dress like men and cover themselves with leaves. They would then march to the homestead of the man and publicly shame him, curse him and wail loudly as if in a funeral at his homestead. They would also defecate at his homestead which was considered a great taboo. This public shaming would be done by all the women in the village and it was very effective in punishing offenders and deterring would-be offenders. The head of compound or the woman leader would listen to the case and discuss with older women who served as the jury. They would then decide on the course of action e.g. fines which could include goats or fowl, or the offender would be banished from the community for some time. If the man asked for forgiveness, the women were the only ones who could release him from the curse by taking him to the river to 'wash off' the curse.

The Anlu Revolt of 1958 involved a militant group of 7,000 Kom women and was described as a tightly organized, well-disciplined movement. The women drew on their tradition of Anlu to lead an uprising where they protested taxes, laws regulating farming techniques and repression by the British colonial government. The uprising was a success and led to reforms within the colonial government. The reason why the Anlu Uprising was so successful was that the women were able

to galvanize together from town to town in big numbers to collectively protest, this involved between seven to ten thousand women in the North West region of Cameroun. When the uprising took place in 1958, the women marched to the homestead of the Colonial Commissioner and publicly shamed and cursed him as they did in their traditional Anlu. Later in post-colonial Cameroun, elections in 1992 were marred by post-election violence during which a secret cult of elderly women called *Takemberg* took guard at the entrance of the presidential candidate who had lost to Paul Biya in the rigged elections. There the women chanted and invoked their supernatural powers in support of Ni John Fru of the Social Democratic Party (SDF). They held peaceful marches in Bamenda during which they exposed their breast and brandished peace symbols. These women played a crucial role in the restoration of peace and order in Bamenda following their protests and it was believed that some officers even died from the ‘curses’ meted out by the women. Women’s powers in pre-colonial Africa were often grounded on their nature as life givers and were often laced with magical, spiritual or super-natural forces.

1.3 Motivation – Why this work Matters

This work is important because an understanding of history from a feminism perspective can inform future and current prospects and opportunities for more women’s collective action to contend with contemporary issues such as inequality, patriarchy, lack of representation and oppression which remain relevant and salient to date. Many of the writings and accounts of women’s collective action in colonial Africa do not specifically identify the feminist nature of the movements and this is what this thesis hopes to do. It is of great interest to study the women’s collective action under the African feminism framework in order to understand the relevance of African feminism not just historically but in contemporary times as well.

One of the background inspirations for this research was Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s essay, *We Should All Be Feminists* where she argues that being ‘feminist’ is not an insult, but rather a label that should be embraced by all. (Adichie, 2012). “Feminism advocates for equity and equality between men and women in all aspects of life but many opposers of women’s liberation [wrongly] believe that feminism is a social movement that focuses on reversing gender roles and making men inferior.” Like Chimamanda’s essay, one of the goals of this thesis is to encourage African men and women from all walks of life, not just academia, human rights and NGO work fields, to

understand and embrace feminism as an ideology that champions the rights of women, making the world a better place for all. Adichie explains in her essay, “Feminism does not challenge the biological roles of each gender; it only intends to revolutionize sexism by creating equal chances and opportunities for women and men. It views people as human beings and aims to tackle the social injustices that silence women’s will and power to exceed social expectations.” Feminism normalizes women's success and allows men to strive to achieve even more in life. Participating in the contemporary feminism paves the way for a prosperous and all-inclusive future society. She further asserts that empowering women is not equivalent to taking away opportunities from men. In essence, feminism tunes people’s minds away from cultural and social constructs that limit their understanding of gender roles and allows them instead to embrace equality and equity.

Further motivation for this thesis was to engage in discourse that helps to deconstruct the ‘public’ and ‘private’ divide as part of feminist work. The divide of public and private is a dichotomy that has been historically used to relegate women to the ‘private’ space so as to limit their input and contribution to the public sphere. In reality, however, there is a strong interconnection between the two and in fact for women, the private often is the public and the public is the private. Decisions made in private by and for women directly impact their public lives and those of men, children and indeed whole nations. This was indicated by the fact that the decisions made by the colonial governments had obvious impact on the private lives of both women and men, and conversely, women participated in the ‘public’ by virtue of their ‘private’ roles.

1.2 Problem Statement

The reason for studying this topic is to understand women’s movement and collective action historically in a way that has not been studied before to make comparisons and derive lessons that can be taken for modern day feminism in present-day Africa.

The gap that this project seeks to fill is the knowledge gap on the strategies and framework that African women used to respond to colonization and how their actions led to short term and long-term changes. It is also the gap in knowledge that is recorded and written by Africans, African women and also contemporary information as most of the data is by male authors, western/non-African authors and researchers and is published in the seventies, eighties and nineties.

1.3 Objective of the study

The objective of this study is:-

- a) To examine the ways in which the African women resisted colonization in Africa.
- b) To demonstrate that feminism as an ideology and practice is organic to Africa and was not 'brought' to Africa
- c) To examine the importance of feminism in the African context particularly in influencing social, political and economic change
- d) To demonstrate the unique nature of feminism in Africa. It is strategic, political and encompasses the social, economic. African feminism is not about fighting patriarchy only nor is it reactionary or temporary; it is strategic, political and encompasses the social, economic and political

1.4 Research Questions

Some key issues that this project intends to address are: -

- a) How did women resist colonization in Africa, and what actions did their resistance comprise of? Focusing on the three case studies - Senegal, Nigeria and Cameroun, what were the issues that brought women together and how did they coalesce their actions? Were there nationwide women movements in colonial Africa or were the movements mostly local within certain geographical locations? Important to note of course is that even the concept of 'nation' and 'country' was a construction of colonization.
- b) How were the women's actions, feminist, 'organic' and uniquely African? Were the women's actions reactionary, situational and temporary, based on issues that needed to be dealt with only at a particular time, or were they also strategic, philosophical and long-term dealing with systemic issues pertaining to patriarchy and inequality? Lastly, were the inroads and successes of the three movements in Senegal, Nigeria and Cameroun - sustainable or short-lived and how so?
- c) What was the role of feminism as an ideology and practice in informing, guiding and shaping the women's collective action? In what ways did feminism play a role and if not, what were the other factors, ideologies and bases of the resistance strategies? How do the observations and lessons from the movements fit in the continental and global feminist agenda? What are some important ways in which feminism impacted change, freedom, liberation, stability, social and economic reforms in Africa in the face of colonization?

- d) What was the nature of feminism in these three case studies and how does it differ from other feminisms? How was African feminism as an ideology and practice demonstrated in the women's movements and what essential lessons do these examples present regarding political and social agency and overall importance of feminism in Africa?

1.5 Literature Review

The literature review covers that information written by various authors and scholars whose work is covers women's movements and theorizing of the same, such as Paul Nkwi, Josephine Ahikire, Auddrey Wipper, Maria Nzomo, Gwendolyn Mikell, among others, as well as the knowledge gaps which this project aims to fill. African feminism, by definition, is a type of feminism innovated by African women that specifically addresses the conditions and needs of continental African women. Here are some of the definitions, extrapolations and limitations of African feminism literature particularly as related to colonization.

The first article in reference is one titled '*Women and Democratization Struggles in Africa*', by Kenyan activist and scholar Maria Nzomo (1992), whose argument is that the women's movement was based on unity around the same agenda of equal representation and participation in democracy. The article covers African and Kenyan women's new democratic agenda in the 1990's and this agenda was participation in democracy on equal footing with men. Nzomo asserts that 'the struggle against gender discrimination is linked to struggles against oppression based on national, class and other identities.' She critiques post-modernist discourse in that it emphasizes difference and diversity among women. Nzomo posits that African feminist discourse prefers not to focus on the differences but instead on unity in diversity among the African women. It is not because African women do not have divergent and sometimes even competing ideas as individuals and as groups; but rather, that despite their class, ethnic, religious and other differences, they agree to converge around their common subordination and to work together for their collective political empowerment (Nzomo, 1992).

This is seen in *God's Bits of Wood* where the women were all very different :- a prostitute, a blind woman, some young, some old, some educated and others illiterate, some were mothers and others

had no children, yet they all put their differences aside and focused their energies on the common course of the strike. This solidarity gave them strength and the ability to make the gains and impact that they made. According to Maria Nzomo, the issues and demands that composed the democratization discourse included that ‘laws and practices that discriminate and oppress women be changed as they deny women their basic human rights on matters affecting family life, property ownership, employment terms and conditions. Also, that development strategies be fundamentally restructured to redress the existing feminization of poverty and the unfair division of labour that places increasingly heavier burdens of production and reproduction of society on women.’” (Nzomo, 1992, p132). Ultimately, there is a direct connection between African feminism and development.

Maria Nzomo mentions how for a long time African women were relegated to the private domestic spheres of marriage, household production and reproduction and many scholars romanticized, underestimated and ignored a wide spectrum of vital roles played by women in the public and private sphere of their societies, but the reality is that women were and are engaged in economic development, and cannot be sidelined. The women’s involvement in the strike in Senegal was proof the fact that in as much as women were seen as ‘just’ supporters of their husbands and male relatives, they actually wielded power in the economic and political sphere as the instability or oppression in these two spheres affected them directly just as much, if not more, than the men and their action was necessary and required, and impactful. The ideals of universalist feminism are “manifested in the growing political consciousness among African women, which is leading to a strong sense of self-awareness, self-esteem, female solidarity and the questioning and challenging inequalities in the existing social systems and institutions.” (Nzomo, 1992, p141)

Ugandan scholar Josephine Ahikire is also very clear in on the definition of feminism from an African perspective. In her article *African feminism in context: Reflections on the legitimization battles, victories and reversals* (Ahikire, 2014), Josephine defines African feminism as “a myriad of various theoretical perspectives emanating from the complexities and specifics of the different material conditions and identities of women, and informed by the many diverse and creative ways in which we contest power in our private and public lives.” (Ahikire, 2014, p8). Ahikire calls for

a re-ignition of the term *feminism* citing that its inclusion in the Gender and Development discourse has made it less effective. She critiques Gwendolyn Mikell's assertion that African feminism was largely shaped by African women's resistance to Western hegemony and its legacy within African culture and that it is "distinctively heterosexual, pro-natal, and concerned with many 'bread, butter, culture and power' issues" (Mikell, 1997). Ahikire's explanation is that feminism in African contexts "is at once *philosophical, experiential* and *practical*. It informs women's movement political strategy and practice on the continent, making it a very complex phenomenon to conceptualize. As a movement, African feminism is made up of multiple currents and undercurrents that defy simple, homegenic descriptions." (Ahikire, 2014, p9). Going by this explanation, it is necessary to reconceptualise African feminism "as an ideological force that poses fundamental challenges to patriarchal orthodoxies of all kinds". That means that African feminism concerns itself with systemic change and not just bread and butter.

Although phrases such as 'gender and development' which became popular in the eighties and nineties may seemingly appear to take away from some of the gains and specific political goals of feminism, the visibility of gender in the development arena in fields such as education, agriculture and health can be attributed to the ability of women to organize their numbers to highlight their issues and advocate for them, this means that GAD (gender and development) has its benefits too as a framework. Even in places, spaces and arguments where there is resistance to the question of gender equality and feminism, 'it still means that women have succeeded in making their issues part and parcel of public debate: they can no longer be dismissed or relegated to the privacy of the home. Indeed resistance means that society is being forced to engage and in this way, moments for greater transformation could as well be nurtured.' (Ahikire, 2014, p14). This argument by Ahikire leads to the assertion that African feminism as an ideology, relates closely to gender and development and gender in development, and though they are different ideologies, combined they resulted in the participation and inclusion of women in the development agenda in Africa.

The *Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists* which was developed at the African Feminist Forum hosted by African Women's Development Fund (AWDF) in Accra, Ghana in November 2006 highlights the principles, characteristics, goals and guidelines of African feminism

as agreed upon by the attendees of the forum. The forum brought together over one hundred feminist activists from the continent and the diaspora. The purpose of the forum was for the African feminists to reflect on the collective basis and chart ways to strengthen and grow the feminist movement on the continent. The Charter of Feminist Principles was therefore one of the major outcomes of the forum. It was recommended that the charter be used as an accountability mechanism for feminist organizing and as a tool that could be used by women organizations to peer review. The charter does a good job to explain why the activist used the name feminists. “By naming ourselves as Feminists we politicize the struggle for women’s rights, we question the legitimacy of the structures that keep women subjugated, and we develop tools for transformation analysis and action.” The activists also make it very clear that the focus of African feminism is strictly on the lives of African women on the African continent, so it is very specific as to whom the actions are targeted to liberate. Lastly, the women make it clear in the charter that feminist identity is not qualified by conditions of ‘if’, ‘but’ and ‘however’, they state: - ‘we are feminists. Full stop.’ This description contradicts the idea that African feminism concerns itself with particular issues and challenges on the continent so it is not just a general feminism because in fact there are various feminisms.

One of the other merits of the African Feminist Charter is its definition of patriarchy as it pertains to feminist work. Patriarchy, as defined in the charter, is ‘inter-related with class, race, ethnic, religious and global imperialism; thus to challenge patriarchy effectively requires challenging other systems of oppression and exploitation.’ For purposes of this paper, colonization was one of the imperialist systems which increased the burden of oppression for African women. The charter makes it clear that the focus of African feminist action is ‘fighting against patriarchy as a system rather than fighting individual men or women.’ (African Feminist Charter, 2006, p6). This distinction is an important one because it reflects that fact that African feminism concerns itself with systemic change and not just an overhaul of individuals or periodic governments.

On contextualizing African feminism, the charter locates African feminism within the global feminist movement. “As African feminists, we are also part of a global feminist movement against patriarchal oppression in all its manifestations. Our experiences are linked to those of women in

other parts of the world with whom we have shared solidarity and support over the years.” Lastly, the charter highlights one of the inspirations of doing this project which is that the actions of women have not been documented enough and that feminism has long been perceived as a Western notion. These two matters are clearly stated in the charter’s identity segment where it says, ‘as we invoke the memory of those women whose names are hardly ever recorded in any history books, we at the same time insist that it is a profound insult to claim that feminism was imported into Africa from the West. We reclaim and assert the long and rich tradition of African women’s resistance to patriarchy in Africa.’ (Feminist Charter, 2006, p 9)

Audrey Wipper’s paper titled *Riot and Rebellion among African Women: Three Examples of Women’s Political Clout* (1985) is another source studies for this project and very helpful in that it gives insights into female militancy, its origins, characteristics and outcomes. Wipper looks at the Harry Thuku Disturbances in Kenya in 1922, the Anlu Uprising in Cameroun in 1958 - 1959 the Aba Riots in Nigeria, 1929. She highlights three similarities in the examples: - the use of traditional methods and myths to push for sanctions, the solidarity of the women which made collective action successful, and then the outcomes which were either short-lived or unrecorded. Audrey Wipper is a Professor at the University of Waterloo in Canada but has done extensive research and writing on African women especially. The paper gives details of the Harry Thuku protests led by women in Kenya in 1922 which for the purpose of this project this author will not go too much into.

Wipper highlights the use of traditional cursing methods to sanction colonial governments. In the case of the Anlu Uprisings in Cameroun, seven thousand women staged a series of mass demonstrations and seized control of tribal affairs in Bamenda Province of the then British Cameroun. Anlu was the name of the women’s council that oversaw the affairs in Kom. They used traditional methods to punish people who committed crimes that insulted women or crimes that were against the social and natural order. An offended woman would sound a high pitched call, upon hearing the call other women would echo it and head to the aid of the woman who had initiated the call. Wipper narrates how the Kom women used this method to actually halt the actions of the local chief who was being too lenient to the Fulanis and Ibos and also the government party, the Kameroun National Congress (KNC) which had modernizing policies that had caused

destruction of crops in some parts. The women came from all over the region, making use of the Anlu method and brought things to a standstill by spitting on the chief, cursing him, dressing like men and covering themselves with twigs. Similarly in the Nigerian Aba Riots, the women protested and demonstrated while scantily dressed 'some women were naked only wearing wreaths of grass round their head, waist and knees and some were wearing trails made of grass perhaps symbolizing the vultures of a male Ibibio dance.' (Wipper, 1985, p28). The women seized chiefs' caps as a symbol of taking down the insignia of leadership.

Audrey Wipper's paper is helpful also in highlighting the solidarity that existed among the women and that played a role in the success of the women's movements. All it took was one woman being aggrieved and thousands would join in the course. In the case of the Anlu Uprisings, Wipper writes: - 'Two thousand vine decked women set out on a thirty-eight mile march to Bamenda to protest summoning for interrogation of four of their leaders. After they spoke with the authorities at the government station, they came back home accompanied by police tracks. Four thousand women including the elderly and nursing mothers waited at Njinikom market for their return. This show of solidarity impressed the authorities.' (Wipper, 1985, p22) The sheer numbers and diversity of the women who participated in the protests speaks to the importance and impact of solidarity in the women movement.

The theme of solidarity was also exhibited in the Aba Riots of 1929 where tens of thousands of women rebelled against colonial authority by demonstrating, destroying government buildings and harassing and assaulting government agents. (Wipper, 1985, p27) When one woman's story spread, that women were soon to be taxed, women converged from all over Warri Province to 'make war' on Chief Okugo. Stories of their success spread and thousands of women in other regions such as Calabar and Owerri Provinces tried to get rid of their warrant chiefs and native administration. (Wipper, 1985, p28)

Lastly, the text by Wipper is a helpful one in that she also discusses the characteristics of women's collective action as well as the limitations. There was the use of traditional practices and beliefs, there was the solidarity and also a sacrificial element in that women were killed and wounded.

There's also agency in that the women do not wait for men to help them, in all the three cases given, there are a handful men who play a supportive role but by and large the women do it alone. The limitations or challenges presented by Wipper are in that the gains made by women were often short-lived and did not result in them getting permanent long-term positions in their governments. The administrative systems still favoured men. Wipper mentions in her analysis, "Another characteristic of female militancy is the lack of rewards for its leadership. Instead of securing women formal or public positions, as so often happened with men, they remained largely anonymous." (Wipper, 1985, p37). This carries on to modern day feminism and the opportunities still untapped, "as has been said many times before, if there is to be any lessening of the gap between male and female status, women must move into public roles and hold formal positions , and there must be an end to the bias that sees women's activities as inconsequential. Otherwise they will continue to be the nameless doers of history." (Wipper, 1985, p38)

An additional angle on female militancy is presented by Paul Nchoji Nkwi in the chapter titled *Traditional Female Militancy in a Modern Context (1985)*. The chapter starts by explaining the fact that women in most societies are under the rule of men but then goes on to cover how and when women can take over the power in a society, or replace men and rule in their own way. He cites the practice of Anlu as an example of women taking charge to address abuse to their rights. Paul Nkwi also shows how the traditional Anlu was applied in a modern context in the Kom people. Among the Kom, women had very specific clear cut roles and statuses and any breach of this would lead to punishment by ostracism, otherwise known as Anlu.

Nkwi's text was particularly helpful in this project as he shares a historical origin of the practice on Anlu which was also highlighted by Audrey Wipper. The story goes that there was a chiefdom called Mejang which was a tributary chiefdom of Kom and which therefore the Kom people had to pay tribute to by building a house every year in the house of the Mejang chief. At one point, the Kom people refused to perform this duty and this was considered an act of rebellion by the Mejang. So one day while the *foyn* (king) of Kom and most of the men were away hunting, the Mejang warriors invaded Laikom and captured the women. The women had gotten wind of the planned attack from their village scouts, so they were ready for the attack. 'Under the direction of the *nafoyn*

(mother of the king), they bedecked themselves in men's clothes and vines, carrying sticks and weapons and went out to meet the approaching Mejang with force.' (Nkwi, 1985, p 183) On seeing the women, the Mejang warriors fled as the women chased them down the hills. Only a physically disabled man was captured. 'The women stripped themselves of their war garments to reveal their true identity much to the shock of the captured man.' (Nkwi, 1985) He was then instructed to tell the people of Mejang that they were to henceforth pay tribute to Kom and that is how the Mejang became a tributary chiefdom of Kom. This saw the beginning of Anlu as an effective way of dealing with men or punishing those who had committed crime against womanhood.' (Nkwi, 1985, p184)

An analysis of the practice of anlu shows that it has three distinct characteristics. Firstly that it was purely a women's affair, men are not involved and they are not even allowed to get involved. This shows the agency of women; they do not need men to fight their battles for them. During anlu the social and political life is under women. Secondly, it involves women donning men's clothes which saliently suggests the reversal or takeover of roles owing to the unwritten patriarchal assumption that power is synonymous with male-hood. Thirdly, anlu involves taboo things like exposing private parts of the body, and using another person's compound as a latrine. All the above characteristics made anlu particularly powerful and that is why it was effectively used politically in the 1958 uprising.

Going back to the discourse on the dichotomy of the 'public' and 'private', the three case studies in this thesis are evidence that the division is not as clear cut; there is not such a consistent clear line between the private and the public. The 'normalized' version of public and private idea was borne mostly of Western notions of the African experience. African women though provisionally limited to the private space, have had and continue to have great influence and impact on what takes place socially, politically and economically in the 'public'. The dichotomization creates an inaccurate understanding of women's contributions, participation and control of the public. Western (and male) writers especially find it necessary to make the demarcation clear for women and not so much for men, and the impact of this demarcation is that the contribution of women is minimalized and ignored. The concept of the private and public existed in a different way in Africa

than it did in Europe or the West and is used to relegate and minimize the contribution of women to society. Patricia Stamp in her paper, *Technology, Gender and Power in Africa*, asserts that the divide between public and private is not a necessity. 'It does not speak to the African past when women controlled and distributed resources and state structures did not 'privatize' women.' (Stamp, 2013). This is again illustrated by women's active participation in both the private and public sphere in the Cameroun, Senegal and Nigeria examples studied.

The conception of the public sphere does not include the Plebian rioting women and the monumental actions of women like The Anlu of Cameroun, Mekatilili wa Menza and Nehanda of Chimurenga which changed the course of history of their people. The place of women in African history was not entirely 'private' as is purported. In Surdakasa's article, women in the Middle East though seen to be covered away from the public eye greatly influenced the decisions that men made with regards to war, the economy and social choices. The mother of the bride had the say of whether a bride would get married or not. Politicians too, if you gave a speech and women did not like it, they would break out in a specific song from wherever they were even if they were seated outside the actual space where the speech was made and their disapproval could bring down a politician's career. In times of trouble, women could agree to withhold sexual intercourse and this would force men to come together to find a solution. This is a clear example where the private not only influences the public but indeed 'is' the public. This shows that the Middle Eastern woman was not as repressed as the west would want to think. Ethnographic studies would be more useful in understanding the notion of private and public in Africa – through the eyes and voices of Africans and women.

Patricia Stamp in her paper on *Technology, Gender and Power in Africa* argues that the concept of the 'muted group' – women in some societies being silent with regards to their own interests is a misguided concept. One must ask, who are they mute to? Whose ears are they silent to? Women are neither silent to each other nor to men in their communities. Women in most African societies were actually active agents of political efficacy as in the example of the Muslim Hausa women in the Kano River Irrigation Project who mounted a successful strike against the colonizers for higher wages in 1977. The colonial system created formal judicial and political institutions that were

imposed and weak. Informal structures actually have local legitimacy that sanctions decision making in society. Just because women's organizations are not considered part of the 'legitimate political structure', this does not make their actions 'private'.

Overall, the literature review shows that a lot has been written about women's collective action in the colonial era but the three case studies have never been compared before from an African feminist perspective. The three have similarities in the use of pre-existing traditional beliefs and practices to inform and guide the actions. Most of the work and records are done by Western authors, historians and not enough by Africans and in particularly African women. African feminism as a theoretical framework has been discussed by many authors and researchers but not as a tool of analysing the women's collective action across the three countries together. The sources on women's collective action as highlighted herein this thesis with regards to the colonial era, are written by historians often by Europeans. There is need for these stories to be analysed and told from an African feminist perspective and by African women. Moreover most of the sources are from the seventies, eighties, nineties and early two thousands, which means there is a knowledge gap in terms of contemporary research on women's movements as viewed through the lens of African feminism. This is the gap that this project aims to fill and share knowledge of.

The Anlu Revolt, Lagos Market Women Rebellion and the March to Dakar provide a new way of understanding the pivotal role of women in colonial resistance long before the beginning of nationalist movements from a feminist perspective. The lessons are relevant today as they were in colonial era as they provide a foundation for collective action guided by feminist strategy.

1.6 Theoretical Framework

African Feminism

This research uses African feminism as the guiding framework. African feminism as defined by Filomina Steady in her work, *African Feminism: A Worldwide Perspective* is feminism that originates from Africa and is relevant to the African context. It has similarities with Western feminism in that it 'demands for equality and equal opportunities for men and women', but is

unique to the realities and context of Africa including colonial and post-colonial states, new democracies and varying social, economic and cultural contexts.

Molara Ogundipe-Leslie in her work on *Recreating Ourselves* (1994) describes six mountains that an African woman carries on her back and that she (an African woman) must climb over or get rid of in order to attain social, political and economic emancipation. She describes these mountains as tradition, backwardness that is to do with colonization, race, the global order, patriarchy and the last mountain is herself – the woman. The last mountain of the woman herself means that the woman has to overcome her own notions and ideas that limit her - that is overcoming the self. African feminism, is an ideology that enables African women to contend with these mountains.

Another reason why African feminism is relevant as a framework for studying women's resistance to colonization is because as an ideology, it concerns itself with practicability and not just the abstract. As Maria Nzomo states, 'the relevance of any theoretical approach or perspective hinges upon its practical utility in providing answers to practical problems of human existence and development. The concepts and arguments advanced must then have practical applicability to actual rather than abstract situations.' (Maria Nzomo, 132). Nzomo juxtaposes the needs and aspirations of African women against the postmodernist approach and explains that postmodernism would not be very helpful in the African context because in as much as it insists that the democracy gained in Kenya for example, must be a Kenyan-grown, Kenyan-specific democracy, this would be unrealistic because Kenyans can actually borrow from existing democracies from other parts of the world and just adjust them to the Kenyan reality. Further to that, women need to appeal to universal ideals on human rights, social justice and democracy to give their aspiration credence and international support. 'Post-modernism would argue that it is wrong to assume that women will, for example, vote as a bloc for other women. The assumption of solidarity and unity among women, postmodernism would argue, contains the danger of suppressing voices of those women who may have different views from those spearheading the dominant feminist democratization movement.' (Nzomo, 1985, p135) But as proven by the women's conventions held in Kenya during February and March of 1992, which brought women together from grassroots to the national level, majority of the women spoke in one voice. Despite their class, ethnic, religious and other

differences, women agreed to converge around their common subordination as women and to work together for their political empowerment.’ Specifically in the Kenyan context of the 1990s, political empowerment was a crucial means to achieving other goals associated with the advancement of the status of women hence the capacity-building efforts to get women to vote for women and also the building of capacity and confidence for women to vie for political positions. As Maria asserts, ‘While bringing more women into politics would not ensure such woman-centered policies, legislatures without women will surely never bring about such changes.’ Therefore African feminists emphasize unity in diversity rather than the postmodernist discourse of ‘difference and diversity’. (Nzomo, 1985, p136)

Maria gives an example of Kenyan mothers, sisters and relatives of political prisoners who went on a prolonged hunger strike in 1992 illustrating the importance of solidarity in challenging oppression. The women went on a strike ‘led by elderly, illiterate, rural women and received support from all Kenyan women and men regardless of age, ethnic and class identities.’ Despite the police brutality and repression, the women’s defiance and determination to have their relatives released and their demands met helped to strengthen women’s movement and its sense of empowerment. This Kenyan political mothers strike is similar to what was witnessed in Dakar during the rail workers strike where women came together from all walks and cadres and rallied around the issue of better pay, better working conditions and better living conditions for their husbands, sons and male relatives who worked for the railway company.

African feminism has close relation and comparison to Southern feminism and Third Wave Feminism both of which encompass contexts within which women in the global south exist. They contend with issues like colonialism, racism, patriarchal cultures, religion in some cases, and hegemonic globalization that places women at the bottom of the pyramid socially and economically. Scholars like Chandra Mohanty insist that ‘southern feminism’ is impacted by the fact that women in the [global] ‘south’ are faced not only with issues of gender inequality but also race, class, ethnicity and religion. This idea aligns with Ogunjipe’s six mountains, which sets the women in and from the global south apart from their northern and western counterparts.

The other ideology or concept that arises in this thesis is that of *motherhood*. African feminist writers have critiqued the notion of motherhood in positive and negative light; on one hand it is viewed as preventing women from participating in political on equal basis with men if the focus is on their role as mothers who should be nurturing, peace-loving, good, and domestic. (Tripp et. al., 2009). It also associates women's action with a 'natural' role rather than agency and choice (Tripp et. al., 2009). In this regard, motherhood may be considered as not empowering and it also excludes women who are not mothers. That notwithstanding, motherism and motherhood have a positive side for example in the case of the March to Dakar, most of the women got involved because their families were starving which made it impossible for them to be passive observers of the strike. Nzomo also likens the Kenyan resistance political mothers' resistance to the action of the Argentinian mothers of the Plaza de Mayo; both groups invoked the 'traditional' images of mothering to oppose authoritarian rule. In *God's Bits of Wood*, the mothers could not watch as their families starved and were thus willing to sacrifice their own safety and security to oppose the authoritarian rule of the French *toubabs*.

In problematizing African feminism, it is often that the term *feminism* gets compared to or overshadowed by the 'less political' ideologies like gender. Josephine Ahikire explains the danger of this in that it takes away the agency of feminism.

'Specifically gender mainstreaming has brought a bureaucratic discourse in which development actors can hide without necessarily being accountable to women. In many of the cases gender mainstreaming has been translated to mean that gender is a 'cross-cutting' issue. What this has meant in reality is that gender remains at the rhetorical level, hanging on that one sentence usually appended onto policy statements (Kwesiga, 2003). On the ideological front, there is increasing depoliticization arising out of the false popularity of the term gender, as a result, feminism is demonized. Hence as many scholars have argued, the concept of gender has been taken on in a way that is emptied of its political impetus and is atheoretical – and therefore divorced from feminism. (Ahikire, 2014, p17).

Ahikire insist that the terms gender, empowerment, gender mainstreaming are some of the terms in dire need of liberation as they have now been reduced to a mere game of numbers. That vagueness in naming largely animates minimalist agendas. (Ahikire, 2014, p18). African feminism

as an ideological force must as a necessity be repositioned effectively to deploy African Feminist principles as highlighted in the African Feminist Forum Charter drafted at the African Feminist Forum that took place from 15th to 19th November 2006 in Accra, Ghana. It brought together over one hundred feminists from all over Africa and the diaspora and was crafted as a space where African feminists would come together to define the meaning and parameters of African feminism. It was agreed that African feminism is a movement that concerns itself with issues affecting African women on the continent.

African feminism as a framework is thus pertinent to the Anlu of Cameroun, for example. In British Cameroun during the colonial era, Kom women had drawn on their tradition of Anlu to lead an uprising in 1958 where they protested taxes, laws regulating farming techniques and repression by the colonial government. The uprising was a success and led to reforms within the colonial government. The reason why the Anlu Uprising was so successful was that the women were able to galvanize together from town to town in big numbers to collectively protest, this involved between seven to ten thousand women in the North West region of Cameroun. So a big factor within African feminism is this idea of solidarity and sisterhood which is seen in all the three cases examined herein.

Prior to the 1958 uprising Anlu was used by women to punish men who had committed wrongs in society. The women would dress like men and cover themselves with leaves. They would then march to the homestead of the man in question and publicly shame him, curse him and wail loudly as if in a funeral. They would also defecate at his homestead which was considered a great taboo. This public shaming would be done collectively by all the women in the village and it was very effective in punishing offenders and deterring would-be offenders. If and when the man asked for forgiveness, the women were the only ones who could release him from the curse by taking him to the river to 'wash off' the curse. When the uprising took place in 1958, the women marched to the homestead of the Colonial Commissioner and publicly shamed and cursed him as they did in their traditional Anlu.

African feminism was present and relevant in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Africa. In post-colonial Cameroun, elections in 1992 were marred by post-election violence during which a

secret cult of elderly women called *Takemberg* took guard at the entrance of the home of the presidential candidate who had lost to Paul Biya in the rigged elections. There the women chanted and invoked their supernatural powers in support of Ni John Fru of the Social Democratic Party (SDF). They held peaceful marches in Bamenda during which they exposed their breasts and brandished peace symbols. These women played a crucial role in the restoration of peace and order in Bamenda following their protests and it was believed that some officers even died from the ‘curses’ meted out by the women. Women’s powers in pre-colonial Africa were often grounded on their nature as life givers and were often laced with magical, spiritual or super-natural forces. Later in colonial times, these movements still played a significant role in defending social, economic and political order or in some cases pushing against the status quo that colonizers had tried to create.

1.7 Methodology

The methodology used in this project is content analysis of secondary data, using African feminism theoretical framework for analysis. A comparison is made of three movements in African history to examine the cross-cutting themes that inform the understanding of the role that African feminism played in how women resisted colonization in Africa. Feminist theories such as African feminism assist in contextualizing, framing, analyzing and interpreting the experiences that women face.

The main text used is Ousmane Sembene’s *God’s Bits of Wood* which I read as a literary text first, and then again with the approach of African feminist analysis. The novel provides a story line of what took place in Senegal’s March to Dakar from a literary perspective of Sembene. Through this text, I examine women’s voices, strategies used, lessons learned and the author’s voice in the story. It provides a backdrop with which to examine the role of motherhood, sisterhood and feminism in as far as women’s collective action is involved.

In addition to this, information is gathered and analysed from other books, journals, stories, articles that covered the period of the three movements in Cameroun, Nigeria and Senegal. This is what then led to determining the gap information and why the focus on the three: - Senegal, Cameroun and Nigeria. One of the questions that guided this analysis is who is writing about the women’s

movements, is it men or women, and is it Africans or non-Africans? The gender and origin of the authors and scholars does impact the narrative. Furthermore, I also examine whether there are African feminists who write about the women's collective action in colonial era from an African feminist approach.

CHAPTER TWO

STRATEGIES AND METHODS OF WOMENS' MOVEMENTS IN RESISTANCE TO COLONIALISM AND COLONIAL POLICIES IN AFRICA

This chapter examines the methods and strategies that African women used to resist colonization by examining the three case studies in Senegal, Cameroun and Nigeria. The question that this chapter seeks to answer is: - What resistance methods did women use to resist colonization in Africa, and what informed their actions? The resistance methods used are an important part of the discussion because they are what led to the success or failure of resistance. Equally important, is the understanding of the underlying factors that led to and encouraged women to resist, such as policies that directly affected women's ability to provide for their families, or to participate in leadership, as well as policies that threatened to subvert the social structures in their communities.

God's Bits of Wood which is a work of fiction written by prolific author and film-maker, Ousmane Sembeme which narrates the story of the March to Dakar and it serves as a literary text through which the railroad workers strike comes to life. The methods used by women to resist were marching, sanctions, bans on buying from colonizers' shops, demonstrations, negotiation and eventually violence was part of it as the colonizers often responded by violence. The numbers of men and women involved – tens of thousands- and the scope of the regions that they came from were both very important in bringing things to a standstill and making an impact that forced the French colonial government to act. Courage, charismatic leadership and unity made it possible for the women to push back against the repressive colonial system. This is a unique story in that it brings out a unique aspect of the colonial revolts and that is: - the important and central role that women played in resistance. Through the various characters, the author shows how women united against a system that was oppressing them and their men, and how their resilience and unity led to positive results for the strike. Moreover, the author demonstrates that women had a sense of agency that led them to fight for something they strongly believed in, and they were ready to do so with or without the support of the men. While it is a story of heroism and courage, it is notable that in the process, there were men and women who lost their lives, and they also in some cases lost property. The rebellions did not come without a price, and women just as men, paid the price.

One of the aspects of ‘how’ the women resisted is that they did do in a unified manner which did not stratify them by status or age or any other social definers. The characters in *God’s Bits of Wood* were each very different in terms of personality, age, social background, education level and so on, but the unifying factor was that their reality was connected to that of the railroad workers through their sons, husbands, brothers and father. There was Ramataoulaye who slaughtered the rich shopkeeper El Hadji Mabigue’s ram named Vendredi because the ram had destroyed the only food the family had. There was also N’deye Touti the educated young woman who was well read and liked both Beaugosse and the legendary Bakayoko; then there was Houdia M’baye and Maimouna the blind woman who did not let blindness serve as an excuse for inaction. There was also Mame Sofi who bought water on credit by force to give to the thirsty children and women; and Penda the courageous revolutionary whose ‘weakness’ was that she was a prostitute but as far as loyalty and strength of resolve went, she was an outstanding leader. The daring actions of these women, brought about by a refusal to stand by and starve to death, led to a successful strike and not only were they effective as individuals but they inspired other women and men in the country too to surge forward without fear of retribution.

Various factors made the women’s action effective in the rail workers’ strike as depicted in ‘*God’s Bits of Wood*’. For one, men protesting could easily have been killed but it was considered distasteful by the French to kill a woman or child so that was an advantage. Women were not allowed to participate in union meetings so they had to find other ways of organizing themselves which they did informally yet very effectively. They were tired of scavenging food without success and watching each other waste away as a result of colonizers withholding food to deter the striking workers. The French viewed the women as ignorant, and primarily worthy just for sexual pleasure and were therefore taken by surprise by the bravery, unity and willpower shown by the women. In this case therefore the stereotype and societal norms were an advantage because the women leveraged on that and went ahead to protest, to the surprise and chagrin of the colonial government.

What stands out in resistance was the role of motherhood in informing and motivating the women. The climax of the story of the railroad strike was the March from Thies to Dakar which involved

thousands of women walking thousands of days across hundreds of kilometres. Motherhood was one of the inspirations for the women's actions as they could not bear to see their children go hungry. "During the final demonstration, women carried children in their arms or slung across their backs and as they walked they gathered up weapons – heavy pestles, iron bars and pick handles and waved them at the sky like the standards of an army. On their faces, hunger, sleeplessness, pain and fear had been graven into the single image of anger." (P161)

Within motherhood, there was also wifedom. One of the characters Assitan is described as the perfect wife by African standards of the time. 'By the ancient standards of Africa, Assitan was a perfect wife: docile, submissive, and hard-working, she never spoke one word louder than another. She knew nothing whatever of her husband's activities or if she did, she gave no appearance of knowing.' (p106) She had actually been married in an arranged marriage to Sadibou Bakayaoko who died eleven months later leaving her pregnant with his child. After his death, Assitan was married off to Sadibou's younger brother, Ibrahim Bakayoko who willingly adopted the child and named her Ad'jibid'ji. She was loyal, calm and hard-working and kept the family stable even when her husband was away. But we see that even this 'docile' wife actually took part in the resistance which leads to the conclusion that indeed wifedom and motherhood were empowering, not limiting factors.

Mame Sofi is another character in God's Bits of Wood. She was brave, militant, courageous and unfazed by little threats. After the fight where Ramatoulaye killed Vendredi the ram, Mame Sofi led the other women across town to Mabigue's home where she told off the guards for being loyal to the (*toubabs*). She warned Mabigue not to touch her and then led the women into the compound. In a style very similar to Anlu of Cameroun, the women carried bottles filled with sand, one of which they hit the servant squarely on the forehead. 'He clasped his hands to his face and fell back against the wall shouting for help while the women raced through the courtyard...' (p110) Mame Sofi dared Mabigue to come out if he wanted, "Come out if you're a man! You only have courage when you're hiding behind the *toubabs*. You made them close the fountains; now come out here and see if you are man enough to make me close my mouth!" Meanwhile as the women went through the shop, they hesitated to carry the millet as it was the only food there, Mame Sofi told

them to take it and everything that could be eaten. Her bravado was unshaken, and sure enough, Mabigue not did come out to confront the women. When the police had come to arrest Ramatoulaye, Mame Sofi asked one of the women to piss in his mouth though the woman did not have the guts to do it but she had to knock Mame Sofi out of the way to go and she remained with the policeman's hat which they used as a trophy to celebrate how for the first time they had stood up to the police. This question of pissing in the mouth is a demonstration of the use of traditional methods to intimidate. Though N'deye Touti had scared the women about the law being able to punish them, Mame Sofi insisted that the police had no right or power over the women. "I don't know how to read myself, and it is true that she is the only one here who can tell us what the white men write in their language, but I am sure it is not written in the mother of all books of the law that honest people should be deprived of water and starved and killed." (p112)

When they returned from raiding Mabigue's home, Mame Sofi dissuaded Ramatoulaye from going to turn herself in to the police. When they were told that police were coming on horseback, she got the women to light torches of fire which would scare the horses. She was very quick on her feet and behaved like an army general, exuding confidence, and direction to her fellow women. Once some horses had caught fire and there was pandemonium, 'Mame Sofi and the group of women had pulled the leader of the platoon from his horse, and when they had him on the ground they dragged him by his boots to a little ditch where the people of the neighbourhood relieved themselves at night and thrust his head in the accumulated filth.' (p113)

Throughout the book, courage and fearlessness run through as themes. Ramatoulaye was another courageous, brave and unafraid character. She had many children, who are what the book refers to as 'God's bits of wood'. She stood up to her cousin Mabigue and was a de facto leader. During the strike, Mabigue asked Ramatoulaye to tell the women to ask their men to go back to work and she candidly responded, "The men have not consulted their women and it is not the task of women to urge them to go back. They are men and they know what they are doing. But the women must still eat, and the children too." This was such a powerful response showing that in as much as the women could influence their husbands, sons and children, the women were acting on their own accord and each group, both men and women, had issues that were motivating them to support the strike. Ramatoulaye was not one to just give up or wait to be helped or acted on behalf of. Her

killing of Vendredi was an abomination, unheard of and unimaginable, but she saw it as a matter of necessity or else they were going to sleep hungry. The goat had come into the courtyard and destroyed the rice and earthnut cakes which the women had struggled so hard to find.

At this moment, from somewhere near at hand, they heard the animal bleating. Ramatoulaye, who rarely hurried, raced into the courtyard like an avenging fury. From the veranda of the main house she saw the ram coming out. [...] Ramatoulaye tightened her waistcloth around her hips and knotted the handkerchief on her head firmly in place. ‘Stay right where you are, all of you!’ she called to the women and children who had gathered around her. ‘Abdou, bring me the big knife! And hurry! No one in this house will go to bed hungry tonight – if you don’t have ram’s meat to eat, there will be at least mine!’ (p66) Her action represented the women’s choice to literally take the ram by the horns by doing the walk from Thies to Dakar. Ramatoulaye’s justification for killing Vendredi symbolically summarizes the reason for the collective action in that they did not actually have the luxury of fearing or sitting back:-

‘It was because we were hungry – we were all too hungry for it to go on. The men know it too, but they go away in the morning and don’t come back until the night has come and they do not see. [...] When you know that the life and the spirit of others depend on your life and your spirit, you have no right to be afraid – even when you are terribly afraid. In the cruel times we are living through we must find our strength, somehow, and force ourselves to be hard.’ (p69)

Similarly, N’deye Touti was the daughter of Houdia M’baye. She was educated and loved films and books from Europe, she looked down upon African culture, the author says it made her nauseous and shameful “a kind of nausea, a mixture of rage and shame” (p57). Her mother Houdia M’baye had a son called Strike who was born after Badiane, their father died in the first workers strike. N’deye Touti was in love with Bakayoko who was like the messiah and leader that everyone was waiting for while Beaugosse was in love with her.

Feminism is about agency, power and self-respect. Despite being a prostitute, Penda did not allow just anyone to smack her behind. She kept the women in check and got the men to respect her (P142). She went to the union office to help with the work and one day when one of the workmen had stupidly smacked her on the behind, she gave him a resounding smack. A woman slapping a man in public was something no one had ever seen before. Penda, like Ramaotoulaye with the ram, and many of the women in God's Bits of Wood, was a trendsetter.

Ultimately the women's march was a game-changer for the strike because of the sheer numbers that it involved and how it brought everything to a standstill in the capital- Dakar. The bosses could no longer ignore or subdue the workers. Further, it was also the first time there was such union among workers of an industry and because it had gone on for long, the railroad bosses realized that it was going to harm their economy so it was in their interest to end it.

Unity was key to the success of the women's actions. They met regularly and encouraged each other. This is characteristic of the political action of women in colonial and post-colonial women movements where sometimes all that the women had was each other. Several of the wives of the strikers had the habit of meeting at Dieynaba's house. Dieynaba herself had nothing left of the supplies she had accumulated for her stall in the market place but the other women were encouraged by the strength of her presence (p136). They sang together and ate together whatever they found, cassava, dead vulture.

‘After the evening meal they would gather in a circle around the elders and then their talk would go far into the night. Someone would begin to sing. First one woman would sing a verse or two, then another would take up the theme, and soon everyone was adding a stanza of her own thoughts and feelings, and the song echoed through the darkness and it was always a song which was a kind of vow by the women to their men.’ (P136)

According to African feminism scholar Leslie Ogunjipe, one of the mountains that African women have to conquer aside from patriarchy is racism. The colonizers such as Isnard blatantly looked down upon the Africans and this was the basis of the mistreatment of the rail-workers which led to the strike. The author mentions that Isnard thought of Africans as children who could easily be managed and manipulated. (P148) In the same breadth, Isnard's wife, Beatrice, did not feel any

pity or solidarity for the African women despite them losing their children. The difference between their African identity and her European identity was of more significance to her than the shared factor of being women.

The rail-workers strike, which took place in the 1947, involved the whole community: - men, women, children and youth. The apprentices were a group of youths aged between fourteen and seventeen. During the strike in Dakar, twelve of them went to search for inner tube rubber at Aziz's shop in a very risky operation where they succeeded to get what they went for and used it to make slingshots. Working together with Penda, she distracted Aziza by talking to him while the young men went to steal from his office. Unfortunately, they got shot by Isnard. One of the ones shot was Dieynaba's son who got shot in the leg while two of the apprentices, Ka and Sere died on the spot, paying the highest price – that of their lives. The Africans marched and laid out the bodies in front of the European's offices, sang dirges with the women in the lead.

“When the last mournful notes of the dirge no longer hang in the air, the entire crowd simply stood there silently. But the silence was heavier with meaning than the oaths or the clamor: it was a witness to the unlit fires, the empty cooking pots, the decaying mortars, and to the machines in the shops where the spiders were spinning their webs. For more than an hour they stood there, and the soldiers themselves remained silent before these silent people.” (P161)

The author describes the numbers of people on the streets as hundreds of men, women and children (P160). In the end, the directors of the company notified the strikers that their representatives would be received and their grievances would be heard. This was a success which was a direct effect of unity between men and women but especially the courage, determination, resilience and persistence of the women who showed solidarity and courage beyond what had ever been seen before on a national scope in Senegal.

In the case of the Lagos Market Women's Rebellion of 1929, the women similarly took to the streets, held demonstrations and also camped at the colonial officers' premises. They carried palm

fronds which were a sign of emergency and similarly united across tribes and socio-economic strata leading to an impactful rebellion in the south eastern regions of Calabar and Owerri. According to Adu Boahen in *African Perspectives on Colonialism* (1987), one of the reasons why women were averse to the domestic tax was because the animals and food production were a preserve of the women as a source of food. So when it was rumoured that women, children and animals would also be counted as part of the items to be taxed, the women resisted this. The revolt began when one Warrant Chief Okugo sent an officer to go and count animals in the home of a woman called Nywanyeruwa. She dared the officer to count her and her animals and raised an alarm which brought other women to her compound who then marched the officer out and led him to Chief Okugo who had issued the orders. According to Margery Perham, who was a colonial historian who wrote at the time, from a European perspective, the women followed the officer in Opobo District wailing and cursing with palm branches reinforced with 'magic' and they tied the palm branches across the paths and doorways too. They eventually took the officer's tax register. They later also went to meet the district officer wearing only loin cloth and carrying palm leaves. (Perham, 1987). From these narrations, it is evident that the women made use of traditional methods like the cursing, wearing loin cloths and carrying symbolic palm leaves to deal with a modern problem of colonialism. This was similarly the case in Anlu where the women donned branches and cursed and shouted at the colonial officers and local chiefs who were acting on behalf of the colonizers. The use of traditional methods as well as newer methods like strikes, were used and this is one of the aspects that made the rebellions successful.

Uduvady's paper on *Theorizing Women's Movements* (1998) suggests that in pre-colonial Africa, women did not have a philosophical agenda that brought them together and they only came together when need arose. She gives the example of Anlu in Cameroun and how it was formed out of necessity but yet how their action of the Anlu Uprising in 1992 was successful in bringing about change. Some of the issues raised in Uduvady's paper in reference to women organizations are that women movements in Africa were reactionary as opposed to proactive initiatives, that they lacked a national agenda and that they focused on colonial issues as opposed to 'women' issues. This assertion by Uduvady has some truths but it is not fully representative of what women movements were in pre-colonial and colonial Africa were, for example it is not correct to say that

they were only reactionary. Women acted to preserve and protect social order and to ensure that peace and harmony existed. Their role as advisors, producers, leaders, and also intercessors were not reactionary and it is these roles that led them to participate fully in resistance against colonization as it shook the core of the systems. It is not possible to separate 'colonial issues' and 'women issues' because the colonial issues were women issues and vice versa. Issues of workers' rights, taxation, better pay, better livelihoods, family, justice, safety, health and harmony were as much colonial issues as they were men and women and children issues.

Women's resistance of colonization in the period covered herein was marked by a use of traditions and backed by an understanding of the women's role as producers, leaders, as well as upholders of the traditional systems which in fact were not as individualistic as the colonial system which gave power and authority to individuals. The resistance comprised of marches, strikes, use of palm leaves or branches, wailing and cursing, and a solidarity of camping at the colonial offices until a solution was reached. Their actions were courageous and full of charisma and even in the face of danger like violence and death, they did not relent until they got what they had wanted.

CHAPTER THREE

HOW AFRICAN FEMINISM AS AN IDEOLOGY INFORMED, GUIDED AND SHAPED WOMEN'S COLECTIVE ACTION IN COLONIAL AFRICA

This chapter explores feminism as an ideology and practice that was organic to Africa and seeks to demonstrate how the actions of the women in the three examples discussed were feminist. The example of Anlu in colonial and post-colonial Cameroun demonstrates that the idea of equality and agency existed long before the coining of the term 'feminism'. This chapter also interrogates two important aspects: - the *nature* of feminism in the African context, and secondly the *significance* of feminism in the African context particularly as seen in the colonial era. The three case studies show that women's collective action was solidified by solidarity, inclusivity and unity. In terms of the nature of the collective action, there was what one could call *feminine masculinity*-where women had to take on the role of men and behave like men in order to achieve what they were trying to achieve. This was seen both in the Senegal rail workers strike and in Anlu where women actually donned men's clothes. Of importance to note was that women's actions were not just reactionary or temporary, they were in fact strategic and political and concerned not just with patriarchy but all systems that oppressed women. It was also not just about the women, but about the whole society which suffered and was being denied rights under the colonial systems.

Anlu is a unique tradition where women would discipline wrong-doers in society in particular men who would disrespect women. Anlu was a traditional form of discipline among the Kom people of Cameroun. The Kom were a matrilineal society and though power was still held primarily by men, there were very clear rules about respecting womanhood. In 1958, Anlu was used politically by one political party over another. This chapter looks at how that happened and why the women were successful in over-hauling and unsettling the status quo. This is from a narration by Paul Nchoji Nkwi who experienced the revolution first-hand in the small kingdom of Kom in Cameroun. In pre-colonial Cameroun among the Kom, the highest woman in status was the *nafoyn*; this was the mother of the *foyn* (king). The *nafoyn*'s sister and her mother's sister could also be considered high status. She would advise the *foyn* on political, domestic and religious matters. She was allowed to

have lovers as she was unmarried, and she moved with an entourage of women and servants. She was very respected and recognized as a very influential person in the kingdom. There were very clear rules about respecting womanhood: - pregnant women and nursing mothers were especially protected. One was also not allowed to insult their mother or father nor to commit incest. (Nkwi, 1985).

Anlu means to drive away; hence if a person mistreated a woman, he was ostracized or chased away. According to Paul Nkwi, it is believed that Anlu came about when some enemies once tricked the community and slaughtered all the men and the women had to wear vines in order to conceal their identity as women to protect themselves. The women kept guard and repelled the enemy's attacks while the few remaining men built the houses and hunted for food (Ardner, 1975: 36). A Mejang warrior came to attack the Kom. The Kom were required to build a place every year in the palace of the Mejang chief and to plaster it with mud mixed with castor oil and not with water. 'One time, the Kom people rebelled and refused to perform this duty. Mejang warriors invaded Laikom when their leader and most men were away on a hunting expedition. The women had gotten wind of the attack through spies and scouts. 'Under the direction of the *nafoyn*, the women bedecked themselves in their men's clothes and vines, carrying sticks and weapons and went out to meet the Mejang warriors. The warriors fled upon seeing them, not knowing that they were women. The women chased them down the hills and many warriors died as they escaped. The women captured one man, then stripped themselves of their war garments and the captured man was astonished to discover it was women. The instructed him to tell the chief and the people of Mejang that they were to pay tribute to Kom. Then the Mejang became a tributary chiefdom of Kom. This, it is said, saw the beginning of anlu, an effective instrument of dealing with people who had committed crimes against womanhood" (Nkwi, 1985, p184). It is not said though, what happened to women who committed crimes against the community and how they were punished or admonished for their wrongs; it appears anlu was specifically used to punish men.

Anlu was organized like a village military club under a head called *na-anlu* (the mother of anlu). She was usually the oldest woman in the village and she coordinate all the actions taken to punish the individual concerned. She would be assisted by spies (*ugwesu*) who were led by the *na-ngwesu*, mother of spies.

The Kamerun Democratic Party (KNDP) made use of Anlu in 1958 to make gains against their opposing party Kamerun Natiobal Congress (KNC). The KNDP used the grievances that the Kom people had against the colonial government regarding contour farming and the purported sale of Kom land to get the women involved. These were issues that were close to the hearts of the women so it was not difficult for them to rally together in opposition to these issues. The women used anlu on KNC officials and eventually marched 55 kilometers to Bamenda from Njinikom. When the government threatened to arrest one of their leaders- the women presented themselves and said they were all ready to be arrested so the government was unable to take action against all the women who had trekked in thousands to Bamenda. Following this incident, for a short period of time, about three years from 1958, KNDP remained in power and women had gained positions in the male dominated courts (Paul Nkwi). However it seems that this was short-lived and also it was only among the Kom peoples and not all of Cameroun.

Some scholars, such as Molyneux (Molyneux, 1985) have suggested that in Africa, women's groups 'emerged from the immediate perceived needs of the women in a locality'. She suggests that women only came together for 'practical gender interests' and not 'strategic gender interests' that sought to change gender relations in the long-term (Molyneux, 1985). But this is not entirely accurate as is evident in the three movements considered in this paper; it is evident that women came together for both practical and strategic gender interests. The movements have been perceived to be reactionary, but they were also proactive initiatives to create and restore order where disorder had been created. Women were more involved in socio-political mass action than has been recorded in history which is characterized by omission of facts and incomplete narratives where women are involved.

The three examples of women's collective action; the railroad workers strike in Senegal, the Anlu of Cameroun and the Lagos market women rebellion are case studies that show the agency that women had in colonial Africa. They played a central role in resistance and in shaping the course of their nations at the cusp of independence. The Aba Women's riots of 1929 and the Lagos women rebellion of 1940s in Nigeria where women refused to pay a tax that was imposed on wealthy women also show the impact of solidarity and unity in diversity which is discussed extensively by Maria Nzomo in her discussion on African feminism in opposition to post-modernist discourse.

These examples of women's collective action also show that feminism as a practice existed and was powerful in bringing about change for women and whole communities. Using African feminism as a framework for considering these examples, it is evident that the feminism unique to Africa is less individualistic and more communal, that it is practical and strategic as much as it is philosophical. It also shows that as an ideology, it is concerned with political, social and economic development and emancipation.

Given the examples of Senegal rail workers strike and the Anlu of Cameroun, it is important to note that although colonization affected both men and women in Africa, it was experienced differently by men and women because of the social norms and power dynamics that already existed between men and women in society. Often when history of colonization is written, there is a presumption that the 'colonizer' and the 'colonized' are men. Oyeronke Oyewumi in the chapter titled *Colonizing Bodies and Minds: Gender and Colonialism* in her book, 'The Invention of Women Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourse' explains that in most colonial literature, both the colonizers and colonized are presumed male. Colonial rule itself is described as a 'manly or husbandly or lordly prerogative. As a process it is often described as the taking away of the manhood of the colonized. The histories of both the colonized and the colonizer have been written from the male point of view – women are peripheral if they appear at all.' She goes on to make a very important observation, that colonization impacted males and females in similar and dissimilar ways. Colonial custom stemmed from a world view which believes in the absolute superiority of the human over the nonhuman and the subhuman, the masculine over the feminine..., the modern or progressive over the traditional.' (Oyewumi, 121) Men were the primary target of policy and as such were the natives and so were visible. Oyewumi's argument supports the point that colonization was experienced and responded to differently by men and women.

'From the foregoing it is clear that any discussion of hierarchy in the colonial situation, in addition to employing race as the basis of distinctions, should take into account its strong gender component. The two racially distinct and hierarchical categories of the colonizer and the native should be expanded to four, incorporating the gender factor... Thus in the colonial situation, there was hierarchy of four, not two categories. Beginning at the top

these were: men (European), women (European), native (African men) and Other (African women [and children])' (Oyewumi, p122)

To advance this differentiation, African females were not 'colonized twice' as had been postulated by some scholars, but rather, the forms of oppression manifested themselves twice. 'African women were colonized by Europeans as Africans and as African women. They were dominated, exploited and inferiorized as Africans together with African men and then separately inferiorized and marginalized as African women.' This emphasis is important because African women did not occupy the same position as European women. That been said, the impact of colonization on specific categories of people, ultimately its impact on women cannot be separated from its impact on men because gender relations are not zero-sum – men and women in any society are inextricably bound. (Oyewumi, p123)

In line with this, as women lost legitimacy that they had in some of the traditional set ups, like land became commercialized, accessed only through inheritance or marriage, the position of women became more inferior. The policies on taxes also forced men to work and earn money and as the economy became more commercial, the value of domestic labour like working on the farms and at home was seen as less because it did not bring in direct monetary income. However, the impact of the oppression of colonization was felt by both men and women and they responded differently based on the uniqueness of their experiences.

The women in *God's Bits of Wood* portrayed what could be termed as 'female masculinity', that is, unconventional female behaviour. First they became breadwinners, taking up the role that was considered typically male, looking for food for their families and ensuring the families stayed alive. Another demonstration of the female masculinity is the assertiveness; they demanded an increase in pay, family allowance, and pension. The ability to work is an important area of the performance of masculinity but with the strike this was encumbered. The women's courage was 'born beside a cold fireplace, in an empty kitchen.' When Ramatoulaye was denied rice on credit, she took it by force. When Penda spoke in public and rallied everyone, that was unheard of, women were not supposed to speak up in public. She also went ahead to beat anyone who slackened and told the women not to accept any sexual abuse. When Mabigue came to get Ramatoulaye for killing his

goat, the women hurled sand-filled bottles at him. These examples show how the women portrayed what could be referred to as 'female masculinity' going by stereotypical notions that courage, bravado and militancy are male attributes.

Ab'jibid'ji wanted to learn to be a man, to read and understand things because she had been told by her uncle Bakayoko that one day men and women would be equal (p102) and in her understanding this equality could only be gained by knowing the same things that men knew. She was curious and philosophical and was not afraid of asking questions. One of the tough questions she asked was 'what is it that washes water', a question that baffled Tiemoko. Her mother, Assitan, later told her that she was not to ask older people questions to which Ad'jibid'ji responded that she just wanted to know because her grandmother had asked her the same question (p108). She would go to men's meetings and did not know how to make couscous. Her grandmother Niakoro worried that she spent too much time with men.

Meanwhile Tiemoko also sought knowledge from books having realized that the strike could not be successful through physical strength only. '...For four days now he had closed himself up at home, surrounded by piles of books, while his wife, like all the wives of the strikers, roamed the countryside in search of food' (p102) Women were the ones fending for the family as the men could not go to work due to the strike. Even at the time when Niakoro was killed by the police who had come to arrest her husband, the women of her home - Assitan and Fatoumata - were away in Gourme and only came back later to find people already crowded in the compound mourning Niakoro and massaging Adjibidji on her bruised body (p104).

'On the following morning there was a mass exodus from Bamako. Men, women and children departed for the surrounding fields and the brush; the men because there was nothing for them to do in the city and they ran a constant risk of being rounded up by the police, the women in the hope of finding food in some of the near-by villages.' (p105)

Examples of women's courage throughout the book are many and profound. When Tiemoko was at risk of being beaten by the police for leading the strike, it was a woman who saved him. She

boldly spoke out, “He’s not the only one who has stopped working and he can’t make the trains run again all by himself.” (p84). In another incident, one man named Diara was in front of a people’s tribunal where he faced the wrath of his people for being a traitor brainwashed by the *toubabs* (whites) and mistreating his fellow Africans, women were the first to speak up when everyone was too tense and afraid to say anything (p92).

When Tiemoko sat down, the silence was so profound that it seemed almost as if the big meeting hall had suddenly emptied. Suddenly a woman’s voice was heard, ‘I would like to say...’

Several irritated voices called “Quiet!”

“Who spoke down there at the back?” Konate demanded.

“It’s one of these silly women!” someone said.

“But I told the women to come,” Tiemoko said. “They have important things to say. Come forward Hadi Dia.” The woman narrated how Tiemoko had taken their return tickets on the train and didn’t give the women back their money (P92).

The accused remained motionless and silent, while the woman went back to her own place. It was the first time she had ever spoken at a meeting of men, and she was filled with pride. Another, older woman went up to speak, going this time directly to the stage. Her name was Sira and she spoke rapidly and confidently.

“With us, it was on the way to Koulikoro – you all know the place where the train goes up a little rise between her and Koulikoro – he stopped the train and made us get off. Eight women alone, right in the middle of the bush! I tell you, he is nothing but a slave of the *toubabs*! Tiemoko is right- he should be crucified in the market place! ”

Two more women came forward and told of happenings that were more or less similar to the first ones, and after that there was heavy silence in the hall. The idea of women addressing a meeting as important as this was still unfamiliar and disturbing. The men gazed absently at the stage, waiting for something to happen, their glances wandering from Konate to Diara, and then to the unhappy figure of Sadio [Diara’s son].

Suddenly a masculine voice said, “I would like to speak,” and a towering muscular workman got to his feet. (p92)

From the above excerpt, Sadi Dia, Sira and two other women took part in an unusual tribunal where they defied the norm by speaking out in public because they knew that their voices were important. Their voice made Diara's transgressions worse because not only had he mistreated fellow African men, he had also spied on the women who were supporting the men in the strike, betraying them too, as was clearly narrated by the man who had been the first to down his tools when the strike was called. It is evident throughout the novel that women were playing their 'normal' roles of motherhood, wifehood, daughterhood and so on; they were also taking on roles and traits that would be deemed 'male'.

Further on in the story, when policemen came to arrest Mamadou Fa Keita at home, his wife Niakoro old though she was put up a spirited fight to defend her husband despite the fact that she was an old woman and the police were armed. Their granddaughter Ad'jibid'ji was also so brave as to attack the police when they attacked her grandmother Niakoro. It would seem ironic that the woman was the one defending her husband and then a granddaughter would stand up against male officers but this only points further to the feminist action whereby these women were not limited by binary roles that imply men as protectors and women as the protected.

“Miserable dogs!” Niakoro raged. “Have you no shame?” The policeman, one hand on his revolver, his legs spread wide, barred the door while the others searched. In just a few moments they reappeared, dragging Fa Keita. He was wearing only a waistcloth, and his arms were held behind him, apparently causing pain in his back and shoulders, since he was moaning feebly, but he made no attempt to struggle. He opened his mouth to speak to Niakoro, but one of the militiamen slapped him across the back of his neck.

“Be silent!” he ordered.

Old Niakoro hurled herself at the man, but a violent blow of his elbow directed over her heart left her stunned and breathless. She fell again against the wall gasping; her eyes wide open in terror. Ad'jibid'ji then threw herself at the policeman, her little hands stretched out like a cat's ready to scratch, but before she had moved more than a few steps his heavy boot caught her in the pit of the stomach. She turned slowly around, clutching at her middle,

doubled over with pain, and fell at her grandmother's feet. Mamadou Keita tried to free himself to help them, but he was rapidly subdued and carried off.

As mentioned, the women's actions were not without dire consequences. Niakoro died from the injuries inflicted on her by the police but she and her granddaughter were not afraid to protect the honour of their home. The 'private' had become 'public' and the 'public' had become 'private' in that; the strike was a public affair but its effects and battles were felt and fought in homes, by and on individuals and there was no longer the luxury of separating the private and the public. Although the actions of Niakoro and Ad'jibid'ji in hitting back at the police were reactionary and defensive, these were part of a long-standing feud between the brutal colonial police and the locals and these two women did not believe that it was a man's duty to protect the home or their honours, they could do that themselves or at least die trying – as Niakoro did.

An important aspect that is clear from the three case studies is that the women's collective action often came as surprise to colonizers who thought that they only needed to contend with men but instead found themselves contending with women not just in hundreds but thousands of numbers. The recording of the events attempted to take away the agency of the women, for example the fact that for the Igbo the events of November and December 1929 are known as the Igbo Women's War but the British called them 'Aba Women's Riots'. The term 'riot' suggests something disorganized, chaotic and random. Whereas in reality the women were well organized and did much more than just 'rioting'. They marched and had leaders to speak on their behalf who made their grievances and demands very clear to the colonialists. They organised attacks on colonial buildings and property and also ensured that they were represented politically and legally. The women's actions were meant to address political, social and economic injustices and these actions were strategically executed. Their action resulted in the abolition of the warrant chief system of indirect rule in south-eastern Nigeria. Furthermore, their actions also went beyond the local context. According to Allen Judith in "Aba Riots' or 'Igbo Women's War'?" in *Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change (1976)*, the revolts covered an area of over 15,000 square kilometres and involved over two million people among the Igbo and Ibibio of Calabar and Owerri Provinces. (Allen, 1976). Prior to this, women had their own socio-political organization whereby

they held weekly meetings on the market day of their community and during these meetings they would handle matters that affected them. So the rebellion was also made strong by the fact that women's groups existed and they had platforms and methods of handling issues that affected them. It was therefore not too difficult to organize and mobilize as the foundation of collective action, self-determination and agency already existed.

In summing up this part, it is clear that the women's movements of the time - the colonial era of the twenties, thirties and forties – were characterized by solidarity in attaining community goals as opposed to individuality as in other feminisms like radical feminism. The movements were also characterized by inclusivity, strategy, courage to defy stereotypes, and coordinated organization which are part and parcel of African feminism. In the case of Nigeria, the colonizers thought that if they only taxed the wealthy market women, the other women who were making less would not resist the taxation laws. But to their surprise, the women stuck together and fought the cause together regardless of socio-economic status. Solidarity strengthened the women's movements and is part of African feminism ideology – the belief in togetherness and that one does not exist in isolation. This is also known as Ubuntu- 'we are, therefore I am.' In the case of the March to Dakar, the women all took part and did not leave anyone behind, whether one was old or young, married, widowed or single, a mother or not, educated or not, those living with a disabilities and those married to educated men - the women did not leave anyone out and they acted in one accord. Women's movements in the colonial resistance were thus impactful and successful because the women stuck together as sisters instead of allowing social, religious, tribal and other divisions divide them and because they built on already pre-existing socio-political agency that meant women had self-determination. In *God's Bits of Wood*, women encouraged each other and motivated each other especially when the physical conditions got very difficult and they were able to stay the course because of this. To characterize women's movements in colonial Africa as seen in three case studies; they were strategic, political, and characterized by solidarity, sisterhood, courage and inclusivity.

CHAPTER FOUR

KEY FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Key Findings

This work shows lessons from the three women's movements in Senegal, Nigeria and Cameroun which reveal the agency of women in colonial Africa as well as the existence and relevance of African feminism as autonomous, historically, culturally and geographically contextualized for and by African women and men. Women engaged with the state, political, social and economic issues at a group level and at individual levels too and they were successful in impacting change because of their solidarity and commitment to the course. Motherhood and wifehood were not an excuse to not participate, or to exclude others, but in fact, they were some of the motivators for engaging in resistance. In the end, it is evident that African feminism is authentically and organically African, and though it came with losses such as loss of life, property and even violence in some cases; African feminism is a useful ideology for dealing with African issues. Patriarchy is only one part of the systems that pose a threat to women. Their liberation from gender oppression is fused with liberation from slavery, colonialism, racism and hegemonic globalization which puts them at the bottom of the human pyramid socially and economically.

Pertinent to understanding and contextualizing women's action is the deconstruction of the divide between 'private' and 'public'. African feminism explains the notion of public and private space as being artificial and believes that women actually consistently negotiate between the two spaces. The dichotomy whether real or imagined, natural or forced, has made it difficult for women's voices to be heard and their contributions to be acknowledged. The solution lies in debunking the idea that women exist in the private space only and men exist/belong in the public space only; and in accepting that the two spaces are mutually interconnected and significantly influential of each other. The division is not wholly indicative of the reality of Africa's history and in fact women played very public roles in the African society even though the Western notion and understanding of this division is different.

In Andrade and Stamp's articles referred to earlier, the question of public and private is problematized as being more complex than just a matter of inside and outside, home versus public,

covert versus overt, and written versus not written. The two authors argue against a fixed, mostly Western, mostly male notion of what public and private mean. They argue that the dichotomy is not as black and white and therefore it is inaccurate to relegate and limit women's existence, participation and contribution to society to the private space. Some of what is considered as private space actually has great bearing on what takes place in the public realm. There is, therefore, more than one 'legitimate' definition/understanding of private and public in the African context historically, politically, socially, economically and realistically. The division of private and public is not a necessity and it is not clear cut, the lines are very blurred. It is incorrect therefore to assume that women's place always was, is and will be in the private sphere when indeed it is evident that even in traditional Africa, women negotiated their place between the private and public. The private/public division is used to negate, minimize and to a great extent subvert women's efforts.

The project comes up with four conclusions. Firstly that women resisted colonization by using a mixture of traditional methods like Anlu where they ostracized the offender and used curses, and other actions to get their voices heard. Women also used modern methods like strikes, marches and protests. The methods and strategies involved huge numbers, bans, and sanctions and in some cases violence and above all they defied stereotypes that women were not to be violent or to engage in conflict. Throughout the stories of the three revolts, it is clear that women like Penda and Ramatoulaye defied 'societal expectations' by not subscribing to the set notions of what was feminine and legitimate or not. Penda was a prostitute but she was also a leader and much as one would imagine that she would be 'open' to engage with any man, she was not easy to seduce and was very strong character who would not be touched unnecessarily. Even more importantly, she was one of the women leaders who dared to stand and speak in public against both the colonial men and the fellow Africans who tried to subvert the women's efforts.

The women organized and mobilized in very strategic ways and even used representatives in the case where they sent emissaries and leaders to speak on behalf of the group. There was clear line of command almost army-like. Solidarity and unity were key in these rebellions and were part of the strategy- whereby once an action was agreed upon, they aligned to it regardless of the class or social status. Furthermore, women debunked and defied some stereotypes like not speaking in public or being able to show leadership like Penda was able to do yet she was a prostitute. In this

way women were able to go against some of the assumptions set by society and their patriarchal communities as well the colonialists who had assumptions about the place of [African and other] women as being 'private' space and not 'public'.

Secondly, feminism as an ideology, even though it may not have been named as such, was organic to Africa and is not an idea 'borrowed' from the West. Colonization brought changes that changed, and in some cases, eliminated women's roles in leadership and socio-economic status, but women did not just sit back and allow the changes to happen to them. Because of this pre-existing knowledge and status, women mobilized themselves without needing to be organized neither by men nor by the government or external people from outside Africa. Their notions of self-determination and agency were neither 'borrowed' nor temporary or fleeting.

Thirdly, feminism unique to Africa concerns itself with communal issues and not the individual only; and in as much as it about bread and butter it is also about long term overhaul of systems such as patriarchy and colonialization that affect the society as a whole. African feminism advocates more for societal goals than individual goals. Women's resistance movements were characterized by solidarity and inclusivity which are important components of African feminism. African feminism, as seen through the three case studies of Senegal, Cameroun and Nigeria, concerned itself not just with patriarchy but it involved other mountains like racism, poverty, repressive religious and cultural norms, as well as political and economic emancipation.

Fourthly and lastly, that feminism was very important in Africa and it is relevant today just as it was in pre-colonial and colonial Africa. Women understood their roles as important and central to the survival and well-being of their communities. The women's fearlessness and courage were thus a result of two things: - solidarity and agency. The notion of women being constrained only at home or playing second fiddle to men when it comes to self-determination was debunked by these three case studies. Their actions resulted in systemic changes for example the abolition of the warrant chief system and reorganization of the native courts to include women members in south-eastern Nigeria, and the representation of women in the Native Council in Bamenda,

Cameroun. However there were sacrifices to be made. Women were willing to make these sacrifices not as victims but as legitimate, self-determined members of their communities.

4.2 Conclusion and Recommendations

Until now, it has been presumed and projected that women played a secondary or supportive role in rebellion and resistance against colonization because their story has not been told; but the reality is that women played a central role in rebellion and resistance, and their invaluable contribution is pivotal to where Africa is today. Women have a right and responsibility to participate in the democratization process of their countries, to lead and to be in the centre and not peripheries of political, social and economic action. Throughout the changing tides of African women's collective action through the colonial era, women were able to articulate and rally around issues affecting society as a whole such as taxes, work, land, labour, education, housing, healthcare, cultural rights and leadership. This thesis makes this contribution to add to the knowledge that women have power, the right and capacity to change things that matter to them and to nations, not despite being female, but precisely because they are female and form half of the population.

Not only do women have the obligation - just as men do - to bring about change through collective action, they also have the power and capacity to resist corruption, injustice, extortion, violence and exploitation in their communities, countries, homes and work places. African feminism is a powerful framework for examining the role of women in Africa's history of resistance to colonization, and in inspiring women today to take up agency and self-determination. Backed by solidarity and inclusivity, even if women are not homogenous, the unity in purpose in overcoming the social, political, legal and economic hurdles which will yield results that will go even beyond local contexts and present times. It is not the place of women to play second fiddle nor to accept situations that do not favour them, their children, families, communities and countries. Men's collective action and women's collective actions are both important and needed; and can be informed and guided by the unifying and empowering tenets of African feminism.

Further research would be useful in examining how feminism as a framework can strengthen, guide and inform collective action in post-colonial and present day African countries. Issues like political

tyranny, cultural sexism, patriarchy, poverty, unequal access to education, leadership and work opportunities, and insecurity are still mountains that women contend with in their private and public life in Africa. It would be useful to examine these matters through the African feminist perspective. Through the shape and format of women's movements and organizations has inevitably changed through the years, there is no doubt that women's movements have played a very important role in bringing about stability, unity, change and peace in Africa. Other forces such a political tyranny, cultural sexism, economic strife among others have been present and have threatened the unity of women, but these very challenges such as poor economies, poor political structures, discriminatory legislation, weak structures of government, courts of law, education and security have also presented opportunities for women to come together and work from a united front. Cultural norms that encourage patriarchy, essentialism and sexism still pose a big challenge to the transformation of gender relations. That is why a united women's movement is still crucial in Africa to bring about sustainable and universal change in gender relations.

The question is not *if* women's collective action is needed but rather *what and how* it needs to be actioned. A further question to consider, revolves around the strength which African feminism brings to the women's movement in order to lead to long-term systemic changes that will benefit present and future generations of women to come. The narrative needs not be stuck in history, it is relevant in contemporary times and there is great opportunity for both men and women to re-write this story and re-shape the course of the future by embracing African feminism. African feminism is neither borrowed, nor foreign, western, or for a certain type of women and not others. The three case studies have shown that African feminism can be a unifying factor for women from all walks whether they are mothers or daughters, urban or rural, educated or not, and that it is not just a philosophical ideology but a practical and strategic one as well. African feminism is rooted in Africa, and African women have agency and they always have.

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