



**All the Men are Fighting for Freedom, All the  
Women are Mourning Their Men, But Some of Us  
Carried Guns: Fanon's Psychological Perspectives  
on War and African Women Combatants**

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## I. Introduction

Revolutionary war, as the Algerian people is waging it, is a total war in which the woman does not merely knit for or mourn the soldier. The Algerian woman is at the heart of the combat. Arrested, tortured, raped, shot down, she testifies to the violence of the occupier and to his inhumanity. Fanon (1967b: 66)

Violence alone, violence committed by the people, violence organized and educated by its leaders, makes it possible for the masses to understand social truths and gives the key to them. Fanon (1968: 147)

Frantz Fanon, the Black psychiatrist, is upheld as a primary anti-colonial revolutionary theorist because he articulated the underlying psychological justification for "just wars" (also referred to as "people's wars"), particularly among colonized peoples in Africa.<sup>1</sup> "Just war" advocates argue that under certain circumstances, when nonviolent political protests are met with repressive state violence, people have no choice but to resort to armed struggle for self-defense and basic human rights (de Waal 2002; Evans 2005; Walzer 1992). However, despite the seemingly historical and political effectiveness of revolutionary violence, to what degree does Fanon's rhetoric regarding the psychological effectiveness of violence match the realities of war and its aftermath among African women soldiers today? African and African American nationalists are inclined to canonize Frantz Fanon, while European and White American feminists and Marxist political theorists are more likely to vilify him (Arendt 1970; Jinadu 1986; Sharpley-Whiting 1998). However, it is possible to achieve balance in evaluating Fanon's analysis of the debilitating psychological effects of "colonized identity" and the role of revolutionary violence on its healthy transformation.

To his credit, Fanon acknowledged the important role women played in the Algerian revolutionary struggle as well as gender differences between African women and men (Fanon 1967b). However, his writings on "the colonized mentality" and its transformation through war fall short as guide to African women soldiers' experiences on two different grounds. First, his analysis of "the colonized mentality" seems implicitly to be based on and about colonized *males'* mentalities, and does not necessarily describe women's experiences of and reactions to colonization. Second, even as an analyst of men's mentalities, Fanon omits important raced-gendered psycho-political factors that shape men's experiences, and in turn exacerbate the negative effects of war and postwar reconstruction on African women combatants. Fanon emphasized the racialized psychological effects of colonial subjugation on the colonized, referring to the resultant inferiority complex as "the epidermalization of inferiority" (1967a: 13). Accordingly, liberation wars provide the colonized with a sense of agency, and transform a colonized identity into a revolutionary one. However, in addition to these racialized effects of colonial subjugation, I argue that gendered psychological effects and what I refer to as "the androcentricization of inferiority" among many colonized men must also be considered, and are exacerbated by war. African men's struggles over their own masculine identities are just as important during the revolutionary struggle and shape the efforts of women to achieve gender equity before, during and after such wars. Thus, the extremely patriarchal character of colonized

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<sup>1</sup> The first part of this paper's title is a paraphrase of Hull, Scott, and Smith's (1982) book titled "*All the Women are White, all the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us are Brave: Black Women's Studies*" and was also inspired by Cynthia Enloe's (2004) paraphrase of the title in her article "All the Men are in the Militias, All the Women are Victims: The Politics of Masculinity and Femininity in Nationalist Wars" in her book *The Curious Feminist*.

men's mentality—neglected by Fanon and reinforced by African “customary” law, nationalism, war, and militarism—has profound implications for women joining any military force, particularly in postcolonial societies. Furthermore, the “androcentricization of inferiority” among some colonized men results in a militarized, neo-colonized mentality after liberation wars despite different historical periods and regardless of the type of liberation war (e.g., liberation from Europe, widespread settler colonialism, an African dictator, or from federation [secessionist] wars, as with Eritrea and Ethiopia).

Four decades after Fanon's initial theorizing, this article examines the distinctively patriarchal aspects of armed struggles in African countries that intersect with racial and class factors affecting the possibilities of gender equity and justice that African women seek. Critical African feminist perspectives, a review of published first-hand accounts of the experiences of African women ex-combatants, and archival research of government documents and reports by various human rights organizations support my argument regarding colonized men's mentalities and modify, enhance, and challenge some of Fanon's earlier claims. The point is not to blame Fanon for what he did not know in the 1950s, but to update what he wrote based on what we have learned thus far about gender factors and war, given his ongoing popularity among revolutionaries and “just war” advocates today.

## **II. Fighting “Civil,” “Uncivil” and “Silent” Wars**

Women face far more difficulties in going underground...they have to contend with the traditionally strict attitudes in the society towards women--that we should stay at home and have children...even though that sort of thinking is challenged by the liberation army not all comrades have unlearned their previous conditioning...in becoming a guerrilla, there is a strong possibility that you will lose your family, your home, and all security...men are expected to be away from home earning the money or protecting our nation...they know that whatever happens to them, their wives will still look after the children. Thandi Modise, former Umkonto we Sizwe guerrilla soldier, South Africa (Curnow 2000)

Many contemporary African women war veterans served in African liberation armies that struggled for political independence from European colonial rule (Adugna 2001; Arthur 1998; Cock 1991; Lyons 2004; Musialela 1983; Helie-Lucas 1988; Kanogo 1987; Urdang 1979). African women have also served (voluntarily and by force) in government militia and counterinsurgent paramilitary forces (including “civilian” defense forces) during post-independence civil wars (Halim 1998; Hammond 1990; Houten 1998; Mugambe 2000; McKay and Mazurana 2004; Wilson 1991). However, their war stories are rarely read or heard. Why?

The existing literature on African women combatants is scattered across scholarly journals, government and human rights organizations' reports, newspaper and magazine articles, and isolated chapters in edited collections and anthologies. In addition to the obscurity of the literature, the bulk of it is: (1) disconnected from important national and international inequities that shape and reflect local realities; (2) policy-oriented, based on internationally donor-funded development initiatives that are well-intentioned but often limited in scope; and (3) a-theoretical, partly due to the misconception that African gender development initiatives do not require rigorous intellectual analysis and evaluation (see Lewis 2004). In addition, first-hand accounts of African women combatants are often collected by war journalists, humanitarian workers, and

other independent authors whose writings are largely descriptive. Although valuable in their own right, they often leave the complex effects of war on African women soldiers unaddressed. There is also an assumption that women, African and otherwise, are simply victims of war, not active agents in war. Scholars have now documented the degree to which women have been critical to the economy of armed forces, troop morale, and their survival (De Pauw 1998; Enloe 1983; Goldstein 2001; Moser and Clark 2001). Early writers assumed that any woman involved in guerrilla armies or political violence was not involved through her own initiative, but rather had followed her spouse, father, or brother. Current research, in contrast, reveals African women's strong sense of political agency (Hammond 1990; Mugambe 2000; West 2000; Wilson 1991).<sup>2</sup>

Silence surrounds the military participation of African women also because many are recruited or forced to join very young, in violation of the United Nations recommendation that enlisted soldiers be age 18 or higher (UNICEF 1997:1). Recent reports indicate that African girl soldiers served specifically as combat fighters in 11 African countries between 1990-2003 (McKay and Mazurana 2004: 25). Countries' efforts to conceal their breach of international law regarding the use of child soldiers results in many girls and women being unaccounted for after years of military service.

African women have been some of the most courageous and fierce fighters in armed struggles. However, we must be careful not to romanticize their lives (e.g., recall the posters that displayed "a liberated African woman with her baby in one hand and her rifle in the other"), lest we fail to remember where power really lies in military organizations. Missing from the literature are analytical approaches grounded explicitly in radical African feminist scholarship and the experience of cultural workers, who have played significant roles in shaping and challenging the postcolonial African state. Their perspectives are crucial in assessing the contemporary relevance of Fanon's theories regarding the therapeutic role of revolutionary violence and can help disentangle the rhetoric and assumptions about violence propagated by the state as well as by liberation armies (Enloe 2004a: 266). Finally, African feminist scholarship reflects the need as well as the potential for international feminist solidarity when addressing global militarization.

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<sup>2</sup> Specifically, women and girls enter fighting forces for a variety of reasons including but not limited to the need to: (1) actively demonstrate their support for the ideological beliefs of the freedom movement; (2) gain protection for self and/or family from local or state violence; (3) avoid abuse or problems in the home; (4) earn money; (5) fulfill compulsory service; (6) improve education options; (7) improve career options; and (8) remain with parents, siblings, or a spouse in the armed forces,. Some women and girls are abducted, some are taken as orphans, some are born into the force, and others are taken for some other debt the family owes (Keitetsi 2002; Lazreg 1994; Lyons 2004; Veale 2005).

Women also provide "unofficial" and thus unacknowledged military support to wars as domestic servants, porters, messengers, intelligence officers, disseminators of propaganda, combat trainers, sex workers, and recruiters of other women and children military personnel (Adugna 2001; Goldman 1982; Kanogo 1987; Turshen and Twagiramariya 1998). Moreover, the number of girls and women in all fighting forces is routinely underestimated given the stereotypical emphasis on their roles as "sexual slaves," "wives of commanders," "prostitutes," and "camp followers"; in particular, use of the term "camp follower" obscures more than it reveals regarding the roles women play during war (see McKay and Mazurana 2004). Furthermore, when actual sex workers are involved in the struggle their multiple roles and contributions are often denigrated by men (and some women) who emphasize their sexual behavior, thereby grossly understating their political commitments as spies, assassins, decoys, and in some instances combat fighters (McKay and Mazurana 2004; Kanogo 1987; Kesby 1996).

### III. Foregrounding the Works of Radically Critical African Feminists

We must reject the argument that Africa is not ready for radical feminism...It is important for us to understand that our sexuality has a whole lot to do with women's oppression. We can see it in ideologies such as 'heteronormativity,' 'marriagenormativity,' and 'mothenormativity.' Sylvia Tamale, Ugandan feminist (Tamale 2006: 40)

Radical feminists in the Movement are not going to go away, and no one can tell me that the African Women's Movement is only for moderate and conservative women; not when I work 25 hours a day in that Movement. So, the ideological differences have to be confronted. Patricia McFadden, Zimbabwean feminist (McFadden 1997: 5).

Not all feminists, whether they describe themselves as “Western,” “Third World” or “African,” share a commitment to *radical* critiques of society. Like North American feminisms, African feminist thought is heterogeneous (Karam 1998; Mikell 1997; Nnaemeka 2004; Salo 2001). This article selectively highlights the works of *radical* (also referred to as *critical*) African feminists while simultaneously including the works of relevant Western feminist scholars. The term “radical/critical African feminist” is used here in the historical sense, not as a biological (essentialist) description and not to promote divisiveness. Rather, it refers to feminists whose theorizing grew primarily out of their experiences with independent and postcolonial movements in Africa, and who dispel myths regarding the inevitability of African women's oppression, consider diversity among African women across various ethnic, national and sexual locations, and challenge the Western misconception of “one essential” African culture (Lewis 2004; Mama 2001; McFadden 2005; Meena 1992; Potgieter 1997; Tamale 2003; Thiam 1995). Their perspectives fit squarely within a history of international “Black” radicalism characterized by an opposition to “all forms of oppression, including class exploitation, racism, patriarchy, homophobia, anti-immigration prejudice, and imperialism” (Black Radical Congress, 1998).

Most important, critical African feminists challenge binary formulations and dichotomous thinking that oversimplify postcolonial African realities and the messiness of war. They underscore frequently neglected interconnections, contesting either/or conceptualizations such as “traditional” versus “modern” African societies, soldiers/civilians, freedom fighters/terrorists, rebels/murderers, victims/perpetrators, “just wars”/“dirty wars,” and “state” versus “individual” violence (El Saadawi 2004; Halim 1998; Honwana 2000; Mama 2001; Ochieng 2002).

Together, radical African feminists and some Western feminist scholars argue that we must move away from an exclusive focus on women's disadvantage, and examine power relations between women and men, how the gender identities among both are socially constructed and manipulated. Thus, in order to understand how “femininity” is socially constructed such that women become disempowered, we must also understand how “masculinity” is constructed and inscribed in structures of power.

Finally, radical African feminist perspectives on war connect the realities of local African women to the realities facing women globally—particularly those women who join military forces and who, while not officially enlisted, are affected by the spread of militaristic ideology and the expansion of the power of military institutions. Their views are uniquely relevant today

for analyzing and contextualizing Frantz Fanon's psychological perspectives on political violence.

#### **IV. Frantz Fanon: Psychiatrist, Revolutionary Theorist, and Anti-Colonial Activist**

Although writing on Fanon emphasizes his social and political thought, he was first and foremost a psychiatrist. His psychological works were published in psychiatric, medical, and political journals, and his books incorporated psychological dimensions to complement, illustrate, and concretize the macro-social experiences he sought to explain and transform (Bulhan 1985). Thus, placing Fanon in his professional context enhances our understanding of the questions he asked and the psychological theorizing that runs through his better-known works (Fanon 1967a, 1967b, 1967c, 1968).

Frantz Fanon, grandson of a former slave, was born in 1925 in the former French colony of Martinique.<sup>3</sup> After specializing in psychiatry at the University of Lyon in France, he became clinical director of the largest psychiatric hospital in Algeria in 1953. During this period, the Algerian struggle for national independence from France was gaining mass support. By the time Fanon wrote his final and most popular book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, he had witnessed the ravages of war while working officially in the Algerian psychiatric hospital and secretly for the health centers of the Algerian liberation movement, *Front de Liberation Nationale* (FLN).

Fanon argued that the French used violence to usurp Algerian land, deny Algerians full citizenship, and denounce their religious and cultural practices; this violence had profound psychological implications. Lacking the economic and military power necessary to institutionalize their own cultural values and beliefs, many indigenous Algerians—after generations of colonial oppression—accepted what the French colonizers described as their “racial inferiority” and repressed any revolutionary counterviolent urges. Fanon calls this debilitating psychological capitulation the “epidermalization of inferiority” (1967a: 13), characterized by fear and the adoption of a variety of behaviors to avoid direct confrontation with the source of their fear, the colonizer. Rather than strike out directly, the colonized repress their counterviolent desires for justice and grapple with fear of the colonizer by identifying with and thus imitating him. The cumulative impact of prolonged oppression and repressed urges results in the colonized turning their anger, fear and frustration inward in ways that result in a high incidence of alcoholism, psychiatric disorders, stress-induced physical ailments, and native-against-native homicides (1968: 54).

Conversely, Fanon also observed how Algerians who developed a political consciousness were able to use violence to transform their colonized identity into a revolutionary, nationalist one.

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<sup>3</sup> Fanon voluntarily fought against Nazi Germany for the French Army; however he experienced racism during his military service and during his student days in France after the war. These experiences led him to question his identity as “French” and to become active in political debates, left-wing gatherings, and workers’ strikes that challenged unjust French labor policies (Bulhan 1985). While working at the Algerian psychiatric hospital, Fanon grew to sympathize with the Algerians and began to work secretly for the FLN. He eventually resigned from the hospital in 1956 and became a spokesperson for the Algerian liberation movement, editor of its major paper *El Moudjahid*, and a doctor in FLN health centers, despite attempts on his life, ongoing “Arab prejudice against his color,” and “African discomfort in the presence of his White [French] wife” (Bulhan 1985: 34).

By redirecting repressed urges outward and toward the appropriate target (the colonizer), the power of the colonizer is demystified and self-confidence is restored, promoting a strong collective (nationalist) identity among the colonized. Fanon notes that when the colonized begin to fully identify themselves with their “wretchedness”—realizing they have nothing to lose, given the daily erosion of their lives under colonial conditions—revolutionary violence becomes pivotal in transforming their previously self-destructive identity (1968: 35-106). Fanon argues that the colonized regain their sense of agency and dignity and become creators of history, rather than remaining victims of historical conquest. They learn that dignity and equality are more important than life itself, and hence become willing to risk their lives for these values. Finally, revolutionary counterviolence forces their colonizers to respect them—or at least to contend with them as major players in the struggle for basic human rights. Counterviolence ultimately purges the colonized of their fear of the colonizer and, paradoxically, restores their humanity after experiencing the dehumanizing conditions of colonial subjugation. Fanon boldly states, “Violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect” (1968: 94). Furthermore, Fanon views the violence of the colonized as “humanistic,” given its ability to restore balance in everyone’s perceptions (e.g., the colonized overcome inferiority complexes and the colonizers overcome superiority complexes). Accordingly, Fanon argues, this balance cannot be “granted” by the colonizer; it must be fought for by the colonized.

Did Fanon use psychological jargon merely to romanticize violence and glorify it for its own sake, as his critics suggest? A series of clinical cases in the last section of *The Wretched of the Earth* casts serious doubt on what may be an unfair and oversimplified reading of his work by critics like Hannah Arendt (1970) and others (see Bulhan 1985 for an overview of Fanon’s major critics).<sup>4</sup> Series A deals with reactive psychosis, e.g., a traumatized Algerian fighter whose wife was tortured and raped by French authorities following the discovery of his guerrilla activities, and a French police interrogator and torturer who ended up torturing his wife and children (Fanon 1968: 254-270). Series B cases have forensic and clinical implications, e.g., children murdering children during the war, and how children on both sides cope with the murder of their parents (see Bulhan 1985: 203 and Fanon 1968: 270-279). Series C describes the psychological reactions of torture victims, and the various techniques of torture, 1968: 280-289). Series D includes psychosomatic disorders experienced by war veterans (1968: 289-310).

By including these clinical cases, Fanon revealed his “doubts about violence even when practiced in self-defense” and how “perpetrators, as well as victims, continue to bear tragic wounds and the legacy [of violence] in their own person and also through their loved ones” (Bulhan 1985: 204). The cases reveal Fanon’s sensitivity to the brutality of violence, its debilitating long-term effects, and his pained awareness that violence can never be glorified for its own sake (Bulhan 1985).

Yet, the cases also show the degree to which Fanon believed that politically conscious and goal-directed violent confrontation by the colonized against their colonizers was unavoidable and--*despite* the risks--could have profoundly rehabilitative psychological effects. Fanon’s professional and political work allowed him to witness how FLN combatants began to take

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<sup>4</sup> Hussein Bulhan (1985), a clinical psychologist, biographer of Fanon, is the only scholar who has provided a thorough analysis of all of Fanon’s psychological publications.



control of their lives and of their country's destiny with renewed respect for themselves and their nation. Aware of the potentially corrosive effects of violence, he concluded that colonial violence was so great and so impervious to reason that only violence in return would transform the oppressive order. The colonizer understands and depends on violence, therefore, "Violence alone, violence committed by the people, violence organized and educated by its leaders, makes it possible for the masses to understand social truths and gives the key to them" (1968: 147). Regardless of current evidence suggesting the possible historical and political effectiveness of violence under various circumstances, this article asks, to what degree do Fanon's psychological views regarding the effectiveness of revolutionary violence hold today?

## V. Raced-Gendered Aspects of Africa's Anti-Imperial Wars

Fanon died from leukemia less than a year before Algeria won its independence from France and did not witness the challenges that faced Algeria after the war.<sup>5</sup> However, he witnessed the psychological transformation of Algerian women during the war and wrote about their right to exist as autonomous human beings in *A Dying Colonialism* (1967b). Unlike French archival records and the Algerian Ministry of Veterans official accounts of the war, Fanon resisted the patriarchal tendency to exclude women from history. His writings acknowledge every role Algerian women played during the national war of independence--including the revolutionary role of the sex worker ("prostitute") as a political actor (1967b: 60). Fanon also acknowledged gender differences within the Algerian family and noted how Algerian women's participation in the armed struggle altered their "feminine" colonized identities and family relationships in positive ways that challenged feudal, and thus, patriarchal traditions (1967b: 99-120).

In Algerian societies stories we're told of women who in ever greater number suffered death and imprisonment in order that an independent Algeria might be born. It was these militant women who constituted the points of reference around which the imagination of Algerian feminine society was to be stirred to the boiling point. The woman-for-marriage progressively disappeared, and gave way to the women-for-action. The young girl was replaced by the militant...The woman ceased to be a complement for man. She literally forged a new place for herself by her sheer strength. Fanon (1967b: 108-109).

However, today, Algerian feminists criticize Fanon for overstating the relationship between national liberation and women's liberation, overestimating Algerian women's military roles as combatants, assuming their military status was totally equal to men, misinterpreting the role of the veil and Algerian women's bodily integrity, and underestimating Algerian women's political agency before the war of independence (Helie-Lucas 1988; Lazreg 1994). Fanon's biggest flaw in this regard appears to be his overly optimistic view of the degree to which women were liberated during the war and how long their liberated status would last (Sharpley-Whiting 1998). I believe he was overly optimistic because he underestimated the strength of patriarchy as a component of the colonized mentality of men; its relationship to nationalism, violence and militarism; and its fierce continuity across pre-colonial, colonial, revolutionary, and postwar periods.

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<sup>5</sup> Fanon loathed the United States, a place he referred to as "the nation of lynchers" (Bulhan 1985: 34). However, he reluctantly sought medical treatment here for leukemia. Shortly after his arrival he died at the age of 36 on December 6, 1961. On July 3, 1962, less than a year after his death, Algeria was declared an independent country.

In regard to Fanon's analysis of African men, it must be noted that we read his work now through the lens of more recent theoretical and empirical work on racial and gender identities which demonstrates that such social identities are more multidimensional than Fanon's writing reflects (Fisher et al. 2000; Jackson and Smith 1999; Sellers et al. 1997). We know that not all African men internalize the mentality described by Fanon, and some have actively resisted it. However, an empirical exploration of the diversity among African men in this regard is beyond the scope of this article. Here, my intent is to explore the ways that his analysis, taken on its own terms, would benefit from a gendered analysis. The emasculation of African men's psyches that Fanon describes in racialized psychological terms as the "epidermalization of inferiority" appears to work in confluence with a gendered psycho-political process I refer to as the "androcentricization of inferiority." In my opinion, the "pre-war colonized mentalities" of many African men under European rule, their behavioral inconsistencies regarding gender during the war, and the continuity of their postwar "militarized, neo-colonized mentalities" can best be described by a combined approach, taking both race and gender into account.

The following sections address Fanon's underestimation of (1) the extreme distortion of gender relations during the colonial period, which relied on violence, European versions of patriarchy, and manipulated versions of pre-colonial African patriarchal customs that produced "African customary law"; (2) patriarchal nationalisms due to the nature of wars, militarism, and military forces, which mobilize and sustain gendered relations during revolutions; and (3) many African men's resistances to transforming the entrenched mentalities and self-interests that support the militarization of postcolonial African states as a part of global militarization.

## **VI. Pre-War Realities: The Differential Worth of the Wretched**

A government that calls itself a national government ought to take responsibility for the totality of a nation. . . it must guard against the danger of perpetuating the feudal tradition which holds sacred the masculine element over the feminine. Fanon (1968: 201-202)

The decision to become a guerrilla is not one that a woman can take lightly. She has so much more to lose than a man. FRELIMO woman soldier, Mozambique (Arthur 1998)

Two phenomena that shape the pre-war colonized mentality of many African men, but to which Fanon gave insufficient weight, are the colonial invention of African "customary law," and the gendered, patriarchal underpinnings of most nationalisms. Pre-colonial social divisions among African peoples (often a complex mix of generation, genealogy, gender, and geography) were exploited, racialized, and gendered in extreme ways by Europeans during colonization (Lazreg 1994; Meena 1992; Tamale 1999). Thus, despite geopolitical, ethnic, and national differences, "being conquered by the colonizing powers; being culturally and materially subjected to a 19<sup>th</sup> century European racial hierarchy and its gender politics; being indoctrinated into all-male European administrative systems and the insidious paternalism of their new religious and educational systems; and facing the continuous flow of material and human resources from Africa to Europe" reflect the shared experiences of most African peoples (Mama 1997: 47).

As products of Victorian social mores, most European men did not view women of any race as equal to men; thus, their racial bigotry only compounded their low opinion of African women as they quickly replaced African versions of patriarchy with their own (Kabira and Nzioki 1993; Mama 1996; Schmidt 1991; Tamale 1999). Colonists generally sought to subordinate African

men under European rule in order to exploit their cheap labor; however, facilitating their own economic interests also required appeasing chiefs, headmen (e.g., heads of wards, villages, and lineages), and other important elder men (Mama 1996; Schmidt 1991; Tamale 1999). These African men experienced loss of status and material resources as a result of forced resettlement, imposed taxation, and the disruption of traditional territorial lineages linked to land ownership, which led to deep resentments. Rather than destroying pre-colonial African male authority entirely, the colonizers strategically maintained some semblance of law and order by allowing African men to retain varying degrees of authority in their homes and villages (Banda 2005; Mama 1996; Schmidt 1991).

African “customary law,” the result of this strategic compromise, was constructed by colonialists in consultation with chiefly elite and elder African men of importance (Chanock 1989; Cock 1991; Schmidt 1991). It represented written versions of pre-colonial African customary practices, revised African practices based upon newly-imposed European colonial policies, and created entirely new practices that resulted from the clash of European and African cultures (Bourdillon 1975; Chanock 1989; Mbilinyi 1988). These invented rules were: (1) less flexible than the original pre-colonial customs; (2) invariably favoring fathers, husbands and sons over mothers, wives, and daughters; (3) designed to bolster old bases of power and establish new ones among African men; and, (4) a collaborative means of promoting European interests, appeasing an otherwise antagonistic group of powerful African men by allowing them some degree of control over African women (Bourdillon 1975; Chanock 1989; Schmidt 1991).

Although most African men remained antagonistic toward other aspects of colonial rule, many welcomed and grew accustomed to the colonial state’s interventions to legally restrict the independence of women (Kabira and Nzioki 1993; McFadden 2000; Schmidt 1991). The status of African women under colonial subjugation was particularly diminished under newly evolved fusions of European and African authority (Kabira and Nzioki 1991; Mama 1996; Tamale 1999).<sup>6</sup> Colonial efforts to keep African women in rural areas and the private, domestic domain by allowing many African men the opportunity to remain “petty chiefs” in their homes contributed greatly to an androcentric colonized mentality and patriarchal practices among most African men. However, despite the opportunity to reassert their masculinity in the private sphere, African men were rendered politically powerless under colonialism by the exploitation of their labor. This raced, gendered and economically-related subordination, in turn, shaped African men’s revolutionary nationalism and its largely patriarchal underpinnings.<sup>7</sup>

Nationalism can be a powerful, politically mobilizing and identity-shaping tool for people whose way of life has been demeaned and controlled by others (West 1997). It has the potential to unify people across ethnicities, class and gender, and can take a variety of forms (West 1997). However, nationalism has often enabled African men, regardless of status, to reclaim both

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<sup>6</sup> African women resisted these laws through protests, creative entrepreneurship (e.g., beer brewing), militia activity, relocation to urban areas, and even religious conversion and commitment to convent life (Adugna 2001; El Saadawi 2004; Kanogo 1987; Lazreg 1994; Schmidt 1991). Despite these efforts, it became increasingly difficult for African women to gain any substantial leverage given their newly legalized status as minors and their lack of independent access to land, housing, or wage employment.

<sup>7</sup> Some feminists believe that nationalism and feminism can be reconciled if progressive discussions of gender and sexuality are included in the ideological platform and policies (see West, 1997).

“imaginary” and “real” status they had prior to colonization, and induces nostalgia for a romanticized past “when they controlled the land and the women” without any interference from European men (Lazreg 1994; Meena 1992; Maitse 2000). Fanon, the FLN, and many other revolutionary movements mobilized African women to join armed struggles with rhetoric equating national liberation with their liberation as women:

An article in the FLN newspaper claims, “The Algerian woman does not need emancipation. She is already free because she takes part in the liberation of her country of which she is the soul, the heart, and the glory” (Lazreg 1994: 130).

Samora Machel, President of FRELIMO, the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique, emphasized “The liberation of women is a fundamental necessity for the Revolution, the guarantee of its continuity and the precondition for its victory” (Isaacman and Isaacman 1984: 174).

Amilcar Cabral, President of PAIGC, the Party for the Independence Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde, insisted that party mobilizers understand and accept the need for the liberation of women and stood behind a PAIGC directive of the early 1960s which stated, “Defend the rights of women, respect and make others respect them (whether as children, young girls, or adults) Urdang 1979: 124).

The African National Congress’s (ANC) most famous 1955 South African document—The Freedom Charter—states, “Every man and woman shall have the right to vote and stand as a candidate for all bodies which make the laws” (Cock 1991: 47-48).

The 1977 National Democratic Programme of the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF) assured “women full rights of equality with men in politics, economy, and social life as well as equal pay for equal work” (Wilson 1991: 161).

The South West Africa’s People Organization (SWAPO) of Namibia’s political programme of 1976 aimed “to combat all reactionary tendencies of individualism, tribalism, nepotism, racism, sexism, chauvinism, and regionalism (Becker 1995: 44).

Robert Mugabe, current President of Zimbabwe and former leader of the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) argued that “the national struggle, therefore, especially at its highest level, when it became the armed national struggle, became as much a process towards the liberation of the nation as towards the emancipation of the woman” (Lyons 2004: 47).

Revolutionary rhetoric regarding women’s equality was similar across various African liberation movements due to socialist influences that shaped political objectives during the early days of the movement and the close proximity of their clandestine military training camps that influenced their ideologies about revolutionary war [e.g., the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front and the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (see Wilson 1990); the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO), and the African Party for the Liberation of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde (PAIGC) (see Urdang 1979); Uganda’s National Resistance Movement and the Rwandan Patriotic Front (see Longman 2006); and Namibia’s, Zimbabwe’s, and South Africa’s military wings, (see Cock 1991 and Lyons 2004). Thus, despite different historical periods and the type of liberation war, most revolutionary rhetoric in African wars regarded women’s emancipation as a part of national liberation.

African national liberation and African women’s liberation movements are related, but they are not identical social processes. The assumption Fanon and other African revolutionaries also

make is that women's identities are at the heart of any gender struggles during anti-imperial revolutions. However, recent scholarship suggests that African men's struggles over their own masculine identities are just as important during liberation wars and shape the efforts of women to achieve gender equity before, during and after such wars (Campbell 2003; Mama 2000; Meena 1992; McFadden 2005).

Unlike many African men, African women's opportunities to express—and act on—their gender-specific grievances are drastically hampered by their isolation from public spaces as legal minors and their related absence from early meetings and decisions regarding the leadership of revolutionary organizations (particularly their absence from the circle of intellectuals drafting position papers and advising the organization on policies; see Lazreg 1994: 139). Thus, sociocultural and political processes during colonization are intimately tied to how nationalisms are constructed. They shape the degree of commitment to gender equity and gender-specific political education during pre-war mobilization, the liberation war itself, and gender relations after it (Arthur 1998; Halim 1998; Kesby 1996; Lazreg 1994; Mugambe 2000). As a result, nationalism is gendered and often harbors a distinctly patriarchal thrust and corresponding agenda.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the historical period in which he wrote, Fanon did not totally ignore the gendered aspects of nationalism. However, they were sorely understated. Fanon attributed any narrowness within nationalism mainly to class issues, particularly the myopia of the national bourgeoisie (1968: 148-205). Nevertheless, he warned the colonized not to perpetuate “the feudal tradition which holds sacred the superiority of the masculine over the feminine” in their efforts to create the new government (1968: 202). Despite this warning, Fanon's failure to address the gendered struggles of African men under colonial subjugation as thoroughly as their race and class struggles contributed to his overly optimistic expectations regarding gender relations during and after the Algerian war. The androcentric aspects of African men's colonized mentality may also explain why active roles African women played during the war did not culminate in gender parity after it. Androcentric mentalities are further entrenched by the intricate relationships among patriarchy, war, and militarism.

## **VII. Active War Realities: Shooting Democracy in the Foot**

When I got to the camps, I was asked who I was, to surrender what little, whatever I had, and choose a name for myself, a pseudonym...From here, I am cutting the story short. I am not

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<sup>8</sup> Western feminists have occasionally opined that African women should have refused to participate in various liberation wars, given African men's patriarchal nationalist attitudes and practices; or that African women should have created separate feminist organizations as an alternative to the male-led revolutionary organizations. Algerian feminist Marnia Lazreg's response regarding Algerian women can be generalized to the situation of most African women during independence struggles, “Looking at the past from the vantage point of the present is easier than reexperiencing it as it was lived. It is difficult to imagine a feminist movement, by which is meant a movement focused on the promotion of women's rights exclusively, emerging during the war. Who would have been its leaders? Who would have been its adversaries? French men? French women? Algerian men? All of these? Apart from a history of manipulation of women by colonial authorities that made any feminist activity suspect in the eyes of Algerians, native associations were only tolerated and often subjected to harassment, if not banned. An Algerian feminist association that would have inevitably questioned the active complicity of the colonial order in women's exclusion from high school education, training, health care, housing, jobs and so on would have found it difficult to survive” (1994: 139).

talking about the experience I got in those days. It was very nasty...And then I went to the barracks-shelter--thinking I would have somewhere nice to sleep, only to find someone say, "Well there is your grass...so you get this grass to make your mattress...and you can make your bed...I had to learn to live with it. Nobody forced me to come. ..I had to adjust, and I did adjust... We could stay for two weeks without enough food, feeding on water or skimmed milk.

-- Margaret Dongo, first female and independent member of Parliament (for Harare South), former ZANLA guerrilla soldier, Zimbabwe (Lyons 2004: 115-116).

We had no time to cry... Everything seemed cruel and ugly...My thirst and hunger were replaced with silent tears as I saw silent flashes of our comrades dead on the ground...I finally realized that the terror I had seen could also happen to me...I stood there with my Uzi in front of an unarmed enemy, ready to pee in my pants... We walked through the rooms stepping over dead bodies, some of which had been there for days. We couldn't count all of the bodies because of the smell.

-- China Keitetsi, National Resistance Army guerrilla soldier, Uganda (Keitetsi 2002: 102, 105, 113)

In addition to justifying violence as a means of physical self-defense for the colonized, Fanon attributed a therapeutic, psychological role to revolutionary war. The question today becomes, therapeutic for whom and in what way? The patriarchal nature of war, militarism, and military training appear to perpetuate violent injustices and entrench the colonized mentalities Fanon predicted they would eradicate (Campbell 2003; Mama 1997; de Waal 2002; Ochieng 2002). An androcentric, colonized mentality among many African men, shaped sharply during the colonial period, is further reinforced during the revolutionary war period as the nationalist consciousness becomes "militarized" through values imparted by the armed forces (Cock 1991; Enloe 2004b; de Waal 2002).

Understanding war involves understanding militarism and how it shapes military forces.

Military forces as social institutions are not gender neutral; together, the ideology of militarism and the military organizations they produce, interact, mobilize and construct gender identities in ways that promote patriarchal ideology and practices (Cock 1991; de Waal 2002; Enloe 2004b). Militarized patriarchal ideology and practices work against democratic values associated with revolutionary transformation; thus, revolutionary parties that engage in armed struggle often end up "shooting democracy in the foot" (Mama 2000: 3).

As an ideology, militarism accepts: (1) violence as the ultimate resolver of conflict; (2) enemies as natural to the human condition; and (3) violence as virtuous and characteristic of courage, virility, chivalry, superiority, and thus, ideal masculinity (Enloe 2004b; de Waal 2002; Mama 2000, 2001). Therefore, authoritarianism (power based on absolute authority, hierarchy, and obedience) characterizes military forces of any kind (de Waal 2002). Authoritarianism, and thus any effective military organization, works against democratic values associated with civil society, such as free expression, consensus, egalitarianism, and transparency in decision-making (de Waal 2002). Such authoritarian values are important to military organizations because war is about gaining and exercising power, and combat is the manifestation of power at its most brutal and uncompromising form (de Waal 2002). Authoritarianism molds a soldier who will obey orders without thinking and will internalize unquestioning loyalty to his superiors in ways that minimize the chance that he will flinch in combat (de Waal 2002). South African feminist sociologist Jacklyn Cock (1991) elaborates: "War does not challenge women to prove that they are women, whereas wars have been historically symbolized as the touchstone of 'manliness.' The concept of war as this proving ground of manliness has centered on the notion of combat.

Combat is understood to be the ultimate test of masculinity, and thus crucial to the ideological structure of patriarchy. But modern military technology has transformed the nature of war. Warfare has become distant and impersonal; 'combat' has become increasingly ambiguous and difficult to define. It does not provide the same unproblematic validation of masculinity" (1991: 235-236).

Furthermore, guerrilla warfare tactics in most of Africa's revolutionary wars do not rely on hand-to-hand combat. They often rely on ambushing patrols, sabotaging communication and transportation lines, and making hit-and-run attacks against enemy posts--tasks women are fully capable of carrying out (Cock 1991; Goldman 1982; Goldstein 2001). Yet, the myth of combat as "men's work" dies hard; even with today's technologically sophisticated war weaponry, the "presumption that a man is unproven in his manhood until he has engaged in collective, violent, and physical struggle against someone categorized as the enemy" is widespread (Enloe 1983: 13). Notions of masculinity serve as a powerful tool for making men into soldiers because military forces encourage aggressiveness, competitiveness, the censure of emotional expression, and images of weak soldiers as effeminate (Cock 1991; Enloe 1983; Goldstein 2001). Combat readiness, male bonding and social cohesion are achieved through military training by emphasizing the "otherness" of both women and the enemy: women represent the weaker sex, home and hearth, and the need to be protected, while the enemy represents the weaker force to be dominated and conquered (Cock 1991; Enloe 1983; Goldstein 2001). Given the interactive relationship among militarism, military forces as social institutions, and combat as the test of a man's masculinity, women are almost always excluded from combat, whether in conventional or guerrilla armies (Cock 1991; Goldstein 2001; Goldman 1982).<sup>9</sup>

African women who were trained to engage in combat testify to this reality; most armies that trained them as combatants did so out of desperation and necessity, not enlightenment or feminist consciousness:

When the women first joined [the Eritrean Patriotic Liberation Front, EPLF], the men thought, "What can they do, these women?" Then the men saw what women could do--in the clinics and as dressers and at the front line. They saw them fight, take prisoners, capture tanks; they saw them when they lost their legs, their eyes....  
-- Chu Chu, EPLF guerrilla soldier, Eritrea (Wilson 1991: 98-99).

There was strong opposition to our participation in combat because that was against our tradition. We started a campaign explaining why we also had to fight. . . we as women were even more oppressed than men and therefore had the right as well as the will and the strength to fight. We insisted on our military training and being given weapons.  
-- FRELIMO woman guerrilla soldier, Mozambique (Issacman and Issacman 1984: 158)

When I joined TPLF [Tigrayan's People Liberation Front] women were not welcome as fighters, but only as underground workers in the towns. The TPLF felt they didn't have the facilities to accommodate female fighters. They told me to go back where I came from. I refused. I said the Derg [Ethiopian enemy forces] knew I had left and if I went back I would be in trouble. They

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<sup>9</sup> "Women's physical strength, while less than men's on average, has been adequate to many combat situations--from piloting to sniping to firing machine guns. One recurring argument of those opposed to women in combat--that the women would be unable to drag wounded comrades from the battlefield under fire--is refuted by the record of women nurses' doing so. Women's supposedly lower levels of aggressiveness, and their nurturing nature, have been, historically, no obstacle to many women's participation in combat" (Goldstein 2001: 127).

wouldn't accept me so for a while I was roaming about on the fringe of the urban area. After a while, they came to understand...The TPLF had a clear policy that if a woman told the medical officer that she was menstruating then she didn't have to fight. This meant we never told him until later because we didn't want to be excluded.

-- Lemlem, TPLF, Ethiopia (Hammond 1990: 45-46).

Although wars have produced some powerful new identities for women, and military forces internationally are enlisting more women, military organizations remain distinctively patriarchal institutions by maintaining a sexual division of labor. Most women occupy subordinate positions resembling stereotypical female employment in the civilian sector (e.g., clerks, nurses, social workers, cooks). By keeping women out of the top levels of policy- and decision-making roles and most forms of combat, military forces simply reinscribe and expand traditionally gendered roles, instead of fundamentally challenging patriarchy (Cock 1991; Enloe 1983; Goldstein 2001).

Women who are channeled into "masculine" military roles, including combat, are seen as exceptions, and their activities in these capacities are often interpreted as temporary and as "helping the men" (Isaacman and Isaacman 1984; Lazreg 1994; Lyons 2004). Therefore, even though African women in many revolutionary armies were taught to use weapons, they were often deployed in supportive roles, were ordered to fight only when necessary, and often were assigned secondary roles as cooks, child-care providers, laundry workers, and porters. Algerian feminist Marie-Amiee Helie-Lucas notes,

Since 'there is no humble task in the revolution' we did not dispute the roles we had...what makes me angry, in retrospect, is not the mere fact of confining women to their place, but the brain-washing which did not allow us, young women, to even think in terms of questioning the women's place. And what makes me even more angry is to witness the replication of this situation in various places in the world where national liberation struggles are still taking place--to witness women engaged in liberation fronts covering the misbehaviors of their fellow men, hiding, in the name of national solidarity and identity, crime which will be perpetuated after the liberation (1988:175-176).

The sexual division of labor and the secondary roles of African women combatants have been documented across various countries and armies in Africa including Algeria (Lazreg 1994), Ethiopia (Adugna 2001), Guinea-Bissau (Urdang 1979), Kenya (Kanogo 1987); Mozambique, Sierra Leone and Northern Uganda (McKay and Mazurana 2004), Somalila (van Houten 1998), Southern Sudan (Halim 1998), Zimbabwe (Lyons 2004), and South Africa (Cock 1991). Thus, although revolutionary rhetoric suggests that every role in the revolution is *valued*, every role is certainly not *equally* valued.

African feminist historian Tabitha Kanogo explains how the roles of women who took part in the Mau Mau liberation war in Kenya shifted as women struggled to counter men's stereotypes of them and to create new roles and sources of pride for themselves:

Since traditionally women did not participate in warfare, their status and roles were initially "highly ambiguous" and tended to shift as the battle lengthened. At the beginning, they were allocated domestic chores, including fetching firewood, cooking, washing, and cleaning. In certain camps, male leaders were each allowed to choose a woman...who as well as seeing to the other needs of the leader was also expected to meet his sexual needs. Women were induced to fulfill such 'tasks' for 'the good of the cause.' As one Mau Mau woman stated, "Generally, I would think of sleeping with a man as an individual concern. Here, it seems to me that the leaders



consider this as part of the woman's duty in the [Mau Mau] society. I believe that since I could not do any other better service to my people, I would then willingly accept it as my contribution to society." These war-time liaisons were contrary to Kikuyu custom, and by the end of 1953 it was ruled that they should be declared and publicized as marriages. (1987: 87-88).

Although pre-war gender norms of behavior instructed most African women to be demure, congenial, faithful, and to resist men's overtures, life in the military camps in combat zones created different mores for women as well as men. In some instances, communal living patterns in the military camps and the stress of war led to relaxing some traditional gender norms. This, in turn, served as a catalyst for more egalitarian relationships between men and women comrades and the creation of marriage codes that challenged African customary law (Hammond 1990; Lazreg 1994; Wilson 1991). However, marriages among comrades also highlighted how practices lagged behind revolutionary rhetoric. As one FRELIMO woman combatant commented:

While many of the male guerrillas accept the fact that women had the right to fight, within the household our husbands continued to treat us as if they were still 'petty chiefs'...we women were still expected to fetch water, clean house, prepare dinner and take care of the children as well as fight for the nation...in general, they didn't do anything in the home and we did not demand that they do anything (Isaacman and Isaacman 1984: 168).

For some women, regardless of the incongruence between rhetoric and reality, marriage, especially to a commanding officer, was one way to survive military camp life:

I met the father of my first two children during the war. He was a commander, and I got with him because he was single and so was I, and I thought, I had better get hooked with someone so the other men wouldn't put pressure on me.... (Lyons 2004: 195).

Although some comrades created stable unions, the emphasis on nationalism and newly militarized masculine identities, coupled with revolutionary militancy and an absolute commitment to the struggle, provided many male combatants with a convenient excuse for irresponsibility toward the mothers of their children and the children themselves (Kesby 1996; Lyons 2004; Shikola 1998). Some commanders had as many as fifteen or eighteen kids (Shikola, 1998: 143).<sup>10</sup> Although some women combatants used contraceptives, access to contraceptives was unreliable and expensive. Also, many African armies did not promote contraception as a matter of policy because they associated it with prostitution, and in some cases, with an attempt by colonizers to reduce the number of Africans (Lyons 2004). Pregnant women were often sent to special camps and viewed their transfer as "punishment" because such camps were stigmatized as a place for prostitutes and other "wicked women" who were burdens, given their inability to fight (Lyons 2004: 205). Also, if the camp was attacked, mothers had to keep children quiet by desperate means—sometimes stuffing their children's mouths so as not to alert the enemy (Lyons 2004: 206). Many men denied paternity; when a pregnant woman was sent to the camp, this created "a vacuum for the guy," he would "get involved with some other

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<sup>10</sup> Some guerrilla armies prohibited sexual relationships between guerrillas (however, high ranking officers were usually the exception), while other armies did not enforce disciplinary codes, given the protracted nature of the war and the inevitability of such liaisons. Some camps encouraged comrades to marry, while others forced comrades to marry if a woman became pregnant. Women were often blamed for problems that arose regarding paternity issues, domestic disputes, and pregnancies even though contraception was inconsistently used and often unavailable (Lyons 2004).

new recruit," and end up with "maybe three or four babies" in the women's camp (Lyons 2004: 201).

The official policy of most African armies not to promote contraception or abortion placed tremendous weight on women soldiers regarding sex, contraceptives, pregnancy, birth and parenting. Girl soldiers were particularly at risk for pregnancy, especially girls who had been abducted and raped in order to facilitate their submission. Rufaro, abducted from her school by guerrilla soldiers of the Zimbabwe People Revolutionary Army seeking recruits, became committed to the armed struggle after being "politically educated"; she eventually insisted on being trained for combat:

I was born in Bulawayo. I went to the Botswana/Zimbabwe border and crossed the river with over 200 children from the school. The guerrillas took us....Then, after that they said all our group must go to Zambia for training. We were taken by plane. When we reached Zambia we were taken to Victory Camp. This camp was used by the MPLA [Movement for the Popular Liberation of Angola] freedom fighters. We found other children from the Manama Mission, who were captured by the same guerrillas who captured us...We used to cry saying, "Why are you discriminating us from men. Men are training in the camps, you just keep us here in Victory Camp...Please we want to train as soldiers (Lyons 2004: 122).

Most abducted students were kept against their will. Abductions occur on both sides as the war escalates and human resources are needed (Halim 1998; Kanogo 1987; Lyons 2004; Keitetsi 2002). After Mozambique's independence from the Portuguese, FRELIMO, the former revolutionary army, officially became Mozambique's government army. Interviews with former girl soldiers who fought in the civil war that erupted after independence confirmed the following report:

Throughout the civil war in Mozambique (1976-1992), young women and girls were involved in fighting for the government forces of FRELIMO and the rebel group RENAMO. Although RENAMO made considerably greater use of children in its forces than FRELIMO, in 1975, FRELIMO began recruiting and abducting girls into their forces. FRELIMO recruiters with buses arrived at schools and asked girls to volunteer for the military; when few volunteered, a number of girls were rounded up and forced onto the buses, despite protests from the teachers and the girls. This process was repeated at a number of schools until the buses were full. The girls were then brought to and held at the Mowamba military base (107).

African women who fought on the front lines were often the poorest, youngest, most illiterate, and thus most vulnerable to human rights abuses by enemy forces as well as by their own "comrades" (Curnow 2000; Lyons 2004; McKay and Mazurana 2004).

Other practices of military organizations associated with human rights abuses that reinforce the patriarchal nature of military forces and war itself include torture, abuse of military rank, and disciplinary practices. Some torture techniques are also used against men; however, the same technique can have different meanings for women and men. Moreover, specific techniques target women's sexuality. Male interrogators rely on deep-rooted cultural concepts of shame and honor to break women combatants. Thus, most women are raped when taken as prisoners.

I don't know what was the worst in jail, the constant threat of being raped or the actual incident itself! Women were made to stand the whole day with blood [from their menstrual cycles and the

rapes] flowing down and drying on their legs. Did they gain strength from looking at our blood? From asking us to drink our own blood? (South African woman fighter, Krog 2001: 204-205).

In addition to sleep deprivation, physical beatings, and electric shocks to genitals, male guards have engaged in humiliating body searches and vaginal examinations, inserted foreign objects including rats in women's vaginas, repeatedly raped women prisoners and forced women to have intercourse with other prisoners for the 'entertainment' of prison personnel (Krog 2001; Goldblatt and Meintjes 1998; Ochieng 2002). Women's fallopian tubes have been flooded with gushing water, often resulting in their inability to bear children (Goldblatt and Meintjes 1998). Most women combatants are ashamed to speak about these incidents, so first-person accounts are few, often kept brief, and confidential.

The sexual vulnerability of women combatants is not confined to the activities of enemy forces. Revolutionary armies too have engaged in human rights abuses including—but not limited to—rape, torture, and brutal abductions (Lyons 2004; McKay and Mazurana 2004; Ochieng 2002). Among their own comrades, women combatants have been subjected to rape and forced marriage, combat duty as well as sexual duty, and sexual politics that require marrying a commanding officer in order to rise through the ranks (Halim 1998; Kanogo 1987; Lyons 2004; McKay and Mazurana 2004). These double standards make clear that regardless of their training and status as fighters, women are primarily expected to care for, serve, and comfort men (Halim 1998).

Despite their high-minded rhetoric and training of women combatants, some African revolutionaries subjected even young girls to sexual violence. "China," a former soldier of the Ugandan National Resistance Army, recalls painful experiences as a 13-year-old:

We had many brutal officers. I remember one whose name was Suicide. He was a war hero, a mad one. Suicide had the power to do anything. He could rape civilian and army girls and nothing would happen to him because he was a good soldier... We female soldiers had to offer sex to more than five officers in one unit. Nearly every evening an officer would come and order you to report to his place, usually 9 pm. It would have been a little easier on us if it had been one or two *afandes* (officers) but every day in the week we had to sleep with different *afandes* against our will! If we refused our *afandes*' orders, we would have to say goodbye to visiting our families. On top of that, the abuse would turn violent and we would get extra duties... We lived in fear all day thinking about 9 pm... Our male comrades knew about the abuse. They called us *masala ya wakubwa and guduria*, the "food of the *afandes*," the big pot from which all the soldiers ate their fill. (Keitetsi 2002: 127-128).

Feminist Sudanese lawyer Asma Abdel Halim notes, "The [sexual] violation of the woman by friends [comrades] seems to be a part of her duties" (1998; 97). She is expected to give her body willingly to men in her fighting unit, but to protect her body with her life when it comes to the men of the enemy forces (Halim 1998). Aroghu, of the Sudanese People's Liberation Army, reported her grievances to a human rights agency:

Lack of promotion was not the only problem faced by women rebels... I remember during our training in 1986 in the bushes of the Equatoria, some of us were sexually abused not only by the Sudanese trainers, but also by Ugandan soldiers who were training us." (Halim 1998: 96).

Other women have to negotiate their survival by acquiescing. One woman fighter for the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army noted:

Women were given equal treatment...going through military training. We were just being mixed up with the men and if we show that military commander we can command and everybody will be saluting you and everything...But [what] was disappointing was that they would try to fall in love with [you] or to make you love the guys and...when you're in the hardships promising you that you can have soap, you can have...luxury...even sugar...where you could go for four days without food...so they started kind of buying women (Lyons 2004: 191).

Teckla, formerly of the People's Liberation Army of Namibia, avoided being raped. However, her testimony highlights how abuses can occur because the training and discipline required to fight wars allow little room for dissent and insubordination:

....Sometimes, when you are coming from home, you are new, and they train you in the army to say 'yes.' Whenever someone in charge calls you, you shouldn't refuse, you don't say no, you have to go. You feel scared of saying no, you cannot talk directly to a commander. Sometimes the chiefs would call out these poor young girls fresh from home. The chiefs made love to them and the women became pregnant without knowing the person who impregnated them, sometimes they didn't even know his name (Shikola 1998: 143).

Child soldiers are especially prone to internalizing violence given their immaturity:

Many of the officers like to have children as their bodyguards because they acted without asking questions. And they were loyal to their Afandes (Officers). We were involved in everything--killing and torture was the most exciting job for many of us. We thought it was the way to please our commanding officers. We would increase our brutality towards our prisoners just to get rank, which meant more recognition and authority. But we were too young to realize what we did to the enemy would haunt our dreams and thoughts forever, no matter where we were. We committed terrible acts to please our leaders...I guess they never thought of us as getting older, or of what would become of us...Our memories were filled up so quickly with horrors that only human beings are capable of doing and old people grew inside of us...(Keitetsi 2002: 104).

Despite Fanon's rhetoric characterizing revolutionary violence as a "cleansing force," war is a dirty business and learning to kill exacts a high psychological price on soldiers, their families, and society at large (discussed in detail in the next section; Grossman 1995; Honwana 2000; Mama 2000). Rather than becoming a psychologically transformative force, violence often becomes a degenerative one. Moreover, contrary to Fanon's major theoretical premise, "revolutionary warfare" may be a contradiction in terms. The values needed for effective warfare (violence, authoritarianism, elitism, secrecy and tight control of information for fear of spies and leaks) contradict the values needed for effective revolutionary social transformation (egalitarianism, freedom of expression, consensus, dissent, transparency in government decisions and policies). Thus, the progressive ideological goals of a revolution are diametrically opposed to the tactics taught to achieve victory in warfare. Such contradictions may explain why some of the most visionary revolutionary organizations and their leaders begin, over time, to mimic the authoritarian, elitist, and violent characteristics of the regimes they strove to overthrow--despite their sloganeering, best intentions, and just causes for going to war initially (Campbell 2003; de Waal 2002; Mengisteab and Yohannes 2005).

Although "just wars" of the revolutionary/liberation type are motivated by the desire to right perceived wrongs and are often driven by an agenda of progressive social transformation, they still encourage violence and militaristic values (de Waal 2002).

We had a lot of problems from all the fighting forces here; both the rebels and the NRA (National Resistance Army) kept us moving up and down and running for dear life. They [both groups] robbed people of their goats, cows, and sheep (Rose, Uganda, in Bennet, Bexley, and Warnock 1995: 107).

After one serious fight between the rebels and the NRA in our village, the NRA started questioning [civilians] how these rebels could move through the villages to come and attack them. In retaliation, most civilians in the village were victimized. The NRA started burning houses, robbing property, and killing indiscriminately. Even the very old, the blind, and disabled, who could not run, were killed. The government was convinced that the rebels were our sons, so all of us were assumed to be rebels. (Olga, Uganda, in Bennet, Bexley, and Warnock 1995: 107-108).

Contemporary postcolonial civil wars in Africa are more complex and difficult to identify as “just wars.” The initial “just causes” of the civil wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and the Ethiopian-Eritrean 1998-2000 conflict often disappear; former allies are fighting one another, and economic motives interwoven with political ambitions have created an entirely new generation of warlords (de Waal 2002; Mama 2000; van Houten 1998). Rather than “a cleansing force” that frees the colonized from their inferiority complexes, it appears that violence in the name of revolution has become little more than a business venture for “wannabe” male dictators and a psychological act of “overcompensation” for patriarchal and socioeconomic inadequacies.

When violence becomes internalized, a code of silence and other aspects of the “warrior ethos” manifest in unexpected and sometimes twisted ways (Grossman 1995). Rita Mazibuko, military-trained cadre of the armed wing of the African National Congress of South Africa, was detained by her own people after nine comrades close to her had been shot. Accused of being a spy, she was tortured and raped:

They pushed a pipe with a condom in and out of my vagina. While they did it, they asked how it felt...someone called Desmond raped me nine times...Comrade Mashego...raped me until I approached the authorities. And then, Tebogo, who was also very young, he raped me and cut my genitals--he cut me from number one to number two. And then he put me in a certain room, he tied my legs apart...then poured Dettol [an antiseptic] over my genitals.” (Krog 1998: 207-208).

While I agree “just *causes*” exist for going to war, I believe it is difficult to fight a “just *war*” given the authoritarianism, brutal tactics (e.g., torture to get information, civilian atrocities to instill fear), and secrecy associated with military effectiveness. Differences of opinion and the discussion of potentially divisive issues such as gender relations and ethnic differences are discouraged during active war under the pretext of safeguarding national unity (Kabira and Nzioki 1993; Lazreg 1994; McFadden 2000). Thus, most revolutionary organizations lack clear active policies regarding gender-specific political education and transformation. “Equal rights for women” is often a revolutionary call asserting “women’s equal right with men to take up arms against repression” (Cock 1991: 197). This narrow, militaristic interpretation of equal rights paves the way for the marginalization of women and the perpetuation of an androcentric, militarized neo-colonized mentality among many men after the war.

## VIII. Post-War Realities: Motherhood, Wifhood, and Otherhood

I freed myself from the dictatorship, but I am not free yet...I identify myself as a mother, a youth, and a gunwoman. I believe in justice and peace, but until I get them, I will continue to fight for them. Marka, United Somali Congress guerrilla fighter, Somalia (van Houten 1998: 46-47).

When it comes to men, it's heroism. When it comes to women it's almost like you should be ashamed. Why otherwise do we not accept that women played a part in the [armed] struggle? Thandi Modise, African National Congress member of Parliament and former Umkhonto we Sizwe guerrilla commander, South Africa (Curnow 2000: 36)

Contrary to Fanon's prediction that revolutionary violence would create "a new man," the idealization of ultra-masculine, rebellious, and violent attitudes has created successive generations of African male leaders who justify militarism and dictatorship as the only appropriate defense against imperialism (Campbell 2003; Kebede 2001; Longman 2006; Mengesteb and Yohannes 2005). Although war dynamics have evolved in complex ways since the end of colonial rule, most wars today "are neither liberatory nor civil, despite being referred to as such" by their leaders (Mama 2001:1). In addition to violent confrontation, economic regeneration and technological sophistication work together as the great equalizers among nations today, a combination many African countries lack (Keddebe 2001). Powerful governments such as the United States and Britain are also deeply implicated in this market-driven global militarization (Cockburn 2001; Mama 2001; Volman 1998). The proliferation of arms trade, arms production, and the expansion of military organizations makes militarization global. The ultimate "purpose of military forces is destruction—destruction of human lives, the man-made environment, and the environment in general; it drains resources and once in a while has to prove its destructive capability in order to remain credible" (Galtung 1985: 1).

Fanon understood that African independence alone was not enough to create a revolution; however, he appears to have overestimated the psychological significance of violence for psychological transformation, thereby unwittingly contributing to the postcolonial evolution of the militarized, masculine mentality. Its patriarchal underpinnings have never adequately been addressed via any gender-specific political education campaign during pre-war or active phases of those revolutions. Shaped by the invention of African "customary" law during colonial subjugation, patriarchal underpinnings of most African nationalisms, and the patriarchal nature of war, militarism, and military forces, postcolonial masculinity paves the way for the ongoing militarization of African states, in the context of global militarization. These trends negatively affect the interests of most women and less powerful men because countries have prioritized their military budgets at the expense of funding for badly needed civilian development.

"Militarization, as a social process, involves the spread of militarism as an ideology and the expansion of the power and influence of the military as a social institution" (Cock 1991: 25). Many African governments that have emerged from war are threatened by insurgency or destabilization, and have heads of states who are current or former military officers/liberation fighters who have a proclivity towards militaristic governance (Campbell 2003; Longman 2006; Mengesteb and Yohannes 2005). Rulers of African countries are not very powerful economically; their budgets are constrained by debt and the demands of international donors and creditors, making their campaign promises of reform increasingly unattainable (de Waal 2002; Mama 2001; Volman 1998). Military-focused budgets have been disastrous for genuine

development projects that would facilitate the goals of the revolution. "Militarism clearly propagated masculine ideals that were based on the capacity to kill as much as on the capacity to commandeer national resources, and which excluded the vast majority of men as well as women from this monopoly" (Mama 2001: 1). Thus, when postcolonial African states are militarized, the likelihood that women will achieve gender equity decreases, regardless of the roles they played during the revolution.

The proliferation of nonconventional fighting forces across Africa contributes to high levels of community violence, and violent societies are associated with increased violence against women (Cockburn 2001; Maitse 2000; Mama 2000). "Inequality is a catalyst for violence; whether between strong and weak nations, between wealthy and destitute classes, or between men and women, inequality weakens inhibitions against aggression" (Cockburn 2001: 29). Thus, the militarization of Africa, through the arms trade in particular, coupled with poverty and other inequities, "plays a major role in promoting and prolonging conflicts, increasing their intensity and destructiveness, and making them more intractable and more difficult to solve" (Volman 1998: 161). As a result, it has become increasingly easy for opportunistic leaders and organizations to mobilize popular support for the use of violence as a means to acquire and control political power and economic resources (de Waal 2002; Mama 2001; Volman 1998).

Androcentric, militarized men also require feminine embodiments of womanhood that complement them; thus, women combatants are expected to make the necessary practical and emotional adjustments and go back to their traditional roles as mothers and wives. Their visions of social change and gender equity must compete with popular patriarchal yearnings to return to "normal," usually defined as putting down their weapons, returning to the domestic sphere, and bearing children for the new, postrevolutionary society (Enloe 2004b; Lazreg 1994; McFadden 2005). Destruction of extended family networks through revolutionary struggles and civil wars (migrant labor, forced removals, detention) make family life a practical and empowering choice for many African women ex-combatants. However, motherhood and wifehood are not presented as options, but as mandates linked to respectability (McFadden 2005). Herein lies the problem and the source of postwar censorship of women's roles as soldiers and their identities as "equal" contributors.

While African men often return as "heroes" and use their roles as fighters to fortify their evolving masculine identities, the evolution of female ex-fighters' identities as women is thwarted (Curnow 2001; Gaba 1997; Shikola 1998). After the war, they are usually viewed with contempt by civilians and even their fellow comrades, as "women with declined status or loose morals," "women associated with the spread of AIDS," "prostitutes," "too feisty and difficult" for marriage, barren if they don't have children and bad mothers if they do but left them with family members in order to fight (Cock 1991; Halim 1998; Isaacman and Isaacman 1984; Lyons 2004; West 2000). Many end up concealing their roles as former combatants (Bennet, Bexley, and Warnock 1995; Lyons 2004; McKay and Mazurana 2004). Moreover, the psychology of honor and shame, which is used to control women and to further establish masculine privilege in most African societies, is experienced beyond the individual; shame is "something that happens to the community and the family and tends to flow reciprocally between individual, community, and family" (McKay and Mazurana 2004: 44). Former "creators of history," as described by Fanon, are pressured to disappear from history (Gaba 1997).

With militarized masculinities intact—and in public office—most states sideline women’s issues after the revolution, retain discriminatory African customary law as a part of their legal systems, support cosmetic legislative reforms that are not enforced, facilitate changes in the electoral system that increase only a token number of female parliamentarians, reward a few high-ranking women combatants with government positions, and engage in other symbolic gestures that do not essentially change structural gender inequities (Banda 2005; McFadden 2005; Mama 2000). Often revolutionary parties turned political parties do not willingly create space for women’s organizations to emerge as autonomous political entities; instead, they “highjack” the women’s movement by creating “women’s political wings” of the ruling party as the only legitimate political forum for women (Mama 2000, 2001; McFadden 2000, 2005). Such “women’s wings” must function within the limited mandate provided by their ruling parties, and when women challenge this arrangement their concerns are dismissed as “signs of a corrupting ‘Western’ influence” (Mama 2000: 2). African women are pressured to uphold “tradition” while African men “plunge into modernity, embracing Western technological and economic development” (Mama 2000: 2).

We can see how revolutionary violence empowers a certain group of African men, however, their “empowerment” is less of a revolutionary psychological transformation and more of a psychological overcompensation from a “colonized mentality” to a “militarized, neo-colonized masculinity.” To what degree, then, does participation in revolutionary military action empower women? Was Fanon right about *anything* regarding how revolutionary violence can transform the colonized mentalities of African women? First, the diversity among African women ex-combatants must be acknowledged.

African women ex-combatants vary in age, educational level, social class, rural or urban background, marketable skills, physical ability, and both personal and political aspirations (Cock 1994). Hardships they may have endured include physical illnesses like malaria, poor health services, hunger, imprisonment, sexual abuse, and ongoing fear of death at the hands of the enemy and some comrades (Cock 1994; McKay and Mazurana 2004; Veal 2005). Some suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, while others face permanent physical disabilities. Substantial disparity exists between the actual number of girls and women within the various fighting forces and those entering disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs; such disparity calls into question the design, implementation and success of these programs (Lyons 2004; McKay and Mazurana 2004; Veale 2005). Therefore, the diversity among women combatants and the related complexities of their postwar needs must be considered.

Fanon correctly emphasized that political education must accompany the armed struggle, and despite overwhelming challenges, women do sometimes emerge empowered from that struggle. Individual women have reported feeling personally empowered by performing support roles they felt were politically important. A few were able to benefit from leadership positions during the armed struggle, while others have participated in electoral politics successfully. Some have created nongovernmental organizations for women. However, their testimonies make clear that violence was not integral to the empowerment they describe. Thus, Fanon overstated the role of violence in their psychological transformation.



We suffered hunger and thirst and heat as the men did, and we learned to handle all kinds of arms . . . sometimes we even surpassed the men . . . so, I no longer feel that differences exist between men and myself since we fought side by side. We marched together, organized ambushes together, we suffered defeats together as well as the joys of victory. Paulina Mateos, FRELIMO guerrilla commander, Mozambique (Isaacman and Isaacman 1984: 161, 164, 165)

Ellen Musialela, who first became involved in Namibia's liberation struggle in 1964 when she was 14 years old, spent seven years as a nurse in the military wing and later was assigned to work in the political field after a debilitating snake bite:

Some women have sacrificed their lives on the battlefield; some are very good at communications, reconnaissance and in the medical field. Of course, you also find that women in the camps are taking a very active role in our kindergartens, in our medical centres, as nurses, as teachers, and in other productive work...Our women in the battlefield especially, are faced with a lot of problems...I saw with my own eyes when I went to the battlefield in May, how women were forced to use grass during their periods and had to go without panties...We feel proud that despite the traditional barriers between men and women, women have started to understand that we have to fight together to fight the system, because we are oppressed as women, and we are oppressed as blacks...(1983: 85-56).

Women's participation in revolution had an impact on their lives in more than one way. Paraphrasing Algerian-born feminist Marnia Lazreg's description of Algerian women fighters, it can be reasonably generalized to most African women combatants: "First, women forged bonds with one another that transcended the usual episodic solidarity that characterized their relationships during peacetime. Second, they gained a sense of responsibility and purpose as well as another perspective on their lives. Third, confidence in themselves and a sense of partaking in history is evident. Fourth, they were exposed to the similarities between men and women, despite differences" (Lazreg 1994: 140). As one Tigrayan woman ex-combatant said:

One of the things you learn from this long experience of struggle is that you're ready for anything. I never thought I would survive this long. I have seen so many battles, so many comrades have died...You learn courage and that your life has meaning" (Hammond 1990: 48).

## **IX. Conclusion**

Frantz Fanon could not have known how encouraging colonized people to redirect their "counterviolent urges" would spin out of control after wars of independence. He could not imagine political education in the midst of debt repayment and structural adjustment, the AIDS pandemic, ongoing military activities of the former colonial powers, the economic interest of global superpowers, the end of the Cold War, the conflicting interests of other African governments, the plethora of private arms dealers and their connection to the illegal drug trade, and the growth of mercenaries and private 'security firms' (de Waal 2002; Singer 2004; Volman 1998). His analysis, perceptive for its time, has limited application to the situations of contemporary African women.

African women combatants, for all the progress some have made as individuals, represent a fraction of the total female population of their countries. Most women in their societies have not experienced the kind of transformation they described. Thus, they struggle to create ways of

describing their experiences that expand the horizons of all women, not only the few who fought in the revolutionary wars.

Most important, when any woman fights in a military force, we are forced to examine the complexities and interrelationships of gender and war. Merely becoming involved in a military force does not automatically liberate African women or any woman from exploitive relationships. Rather, women who choose to join military forces have to combat both the external enemy and the patriarchal attitudes and actions within the military force itself. Perhaps it is in our interests to explore the utility of nonviolent forms of struggle for dealing with conflict and efforts at social change given the current tide of global militarization. In addition, budding research on how African men resist androcentric militarized neo-colonial masculinities and develop truly revolutionary identities with radical feminist consciousness must be expanded (see Adu-Poku 2001; Haysom 1998; Sweetman 2001). As African feminist Patricia McFadden boldly states, African [women] do not want to be pitied; they do not want to be studied and interrogated as victimized subjects whose agency is rarely acknowledged, let alone politically supported, at the global level. What African [women] have wanted for the past half-century since independence is the opportunity to craft their own futures and to define their own destinies...Cleaning up the mess of the past three hundred years of supremacist rule...cannot be an easy or pleasant task...[however] It is an opportunity that women are making the most of, a moment that is changing their lives forever" (McFadden 2005: 17).

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