

**WOMEN IN NATIONAL LIBERATION WARS IN THE SETTLER  
COLONIES  
OF KENYA AND ZIMBABWE:  
Pathways to Political Empowerment**

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**M.A. by Research**

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## ABSTRACT

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century African women have challenged their subordinate status both under European colonial rule and under their post-independence governments. Women have used protest action, membership in nationalist political parties, participation in national liberation wars, and the use of autonomous women's organizations to advance their political status. During anti-colonial liberation wars in Algeria, Kenya, Mozambique, Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Zimbabwe, Namibia, and South Africa, women were combatants, civilian activists and supporters providing non-combat services with the expectation of advancing their interests and acquiring new political rights after independence (Becker, 1995). Yet after playing such vital roles in the liberation of their countries women are still politically underrepresented in most post- liberation countries.

Using case studies of Kenya and Zimbabwe this research will evaluate whether or not women's military and non-combat roles during national liberation wars empowered them politically in their post-independence nations. I will use the empowerment framework to argue that during the wars of liberation in Kenya and Zimbabwe the nationalist parties did not articulate a clear ideology of women's liberation or empowerment, but that instead they incorporated ideologies which regenerated traditional culture and which negatively impacted women's political empowerment. I will show that due to colonial oppression women's political consciousness progressively deepened and motivated them to participate in the liberation wars. I will investigate what roles women's organizations have played both during the wars and in the post-liberation era in women's continued struggles for political advancement in their independent states.

This research is a text-based analysis of the ideas advanced above, using available scholarly materials from books, journal articles, and data from the Inter Parliamentary Union and from United Nations Women documents. I also use online material from specific women's organizations from Kenya and Zimbabwe.

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### Author's Declaration

I, Eudora Ebitimi Kombo, hereby declare that this dissertation, entitled *Women in National Liberation Wars in the Settler Colonies of Kenya and Zimbabwe: Pathways to Political Empowerment*, is my own work. I have not taken ideas from any author without citation, and the analysis of the text and data were done by myself.

------(Signed)

------(Date)



## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1. Context

African societies have come under numerous pressures over the past four centuries: the slave trade, colonial conquest, settler colonization resulting in land alienation, the loss of basic livelihoods and the erosion of cultural identities. In the post-WWII era global international organizations and predominantly western scholars propounded ideas and theories of development, on how to ameliorate Africans' conditions of poverty, food shortages, lack of economic infrastructures and ineffectual traditional and modern political institutions which have been traced to the crises that African countries have been subjected to as briefly stated above. Early approaches to development recommended western oriented models of development that emphasize industrialization and western parliamentary type governments. Several decades into the development experiments, Esther Boserup (1970) critiqued the western model arguing that although women in developing countries played a central role in the economies of their societies they have been neglected while development programmes were directed only at men (Boserup 1970: 161). She stated that new technologies which were made available only to men undermined women's economic autonomy and indirectly women's political power. Boserup recommended that new training opportunities should be made available to both men and women so that modernization would increase equality between the sexes (Boserup 1970: 222; Parpart et al 2000: 56).

The publication of Boserup's book coincided with the emergence of the second wave of western feminism and the United Nations Decade for Women. Feminists who worked in the development field used Boserup's book as a starting point to bring women into development. They refined Boserup's ideas and constructed new paradigms of development that would more directly address the key issues that constrain women's advancement. Feminists in development theory and practice identified two sets of problems that need to be resolved in order for women to benefit from development: the sexual division of labour and women's unequal access to economic resources and power. The first set of problems relates to the extensive responsibilities women have, 'for the care and education of children, the elderly and the sick, household maintenance (family well-being), and servicing kin and neighborhood (community well-being)' (Young 1997: 367). Women face a second set of

problems caused by their exclusion from political and economic power, and subordination within the family and society which result in their inability to control their lives, and to access societal resources (Young 1997: 367). To address these disadvantages feminists in development research recommend that an appropriate approach to development should: (1) enable women to fulfill their traditional nurturing responsibilities through provision of necessary infrastructures; and (2) enable them to gain paid employment and the right to political participation (Molyneux 1985; Young 1997: 367).

Throughout the United Nations Decade for Women, which culminated in Nairobi in 1985, and extending into the 4<sup>th</sup> World Conference in Beijing in 1995, to Beijing + 10, and other more recent global conferences on women, global institutions' commitment to the advancement of women intensified. Alongside these practical efforts scholars continued to refine their development paradigms, one of which was pursuing 'an agenda for women's empowerment,' as stated in the Mission Statement of the Beijing Platform for Action (UN Women 1995). Women's empowerment can be achieved if women participate in decision-making in all political settings on an equal footing with men. One way to fulfill this is by governments reserving 30% of seats in national parliaments for women. It is expected that women's political participation in decision-making bodies would improve the quality of governance at all levels of society, and would ensure that laws benefiting women, children and families are enacted, such as food production, domestic violence, sexual slavery and women's health (UN Millenium Project 2005:104-105). Additionally women's political progress should include: 'women chairing commissions and committees in Parliament; being appointed as: cabinet ministers including under-secretaries of state; women who are members of higher courts; women in local courts; directors and secretary generals in the various ministries; ambassadors; regional governors; directors of government institutions; senior positions of political parties, trade unions, and employers associations' (UN Millenium Project 2005).

Several reasons can be identified as to why women, especially of the global south, continue to fall short of achieving many of the political and developmental indicators enumerated above. Kate Young summarized the most common causes as follows:

Male control of women's labour, women's restricted access to valued social and economic resources and political power, and as a result a very unequal distribution of resources between the genders, male violence and control of sexuality (Young 1997: 368).

Goran Hyden (2006), addressing the specific condition of women in African countries also highlighted women's numerous socio-economic restrictions, including the heavy burden of cultivating the land for family sustenance, bearing many children, having disproportionate responsibility for their family care and well being, while lacking independent finances and suffering from high illiteracy rates (Hyden 2006: 167).

The question is how women can access political decision-making institutions in sufficiently large numbers at an accelerated pace to address the issues impeding their advancement. In this research I will investigate the effects of wars and conflicts on women's political advancement by looking at how women function during wars and see if wars provided women the opportunity to make accelerated entry into the political institutions of their countries. My concern is not to glorify wars and conflicts but to investigate how women's agency is put into effect during wars in such a way that it may result in their political empowerment. I take note that wars have a dual effect on women: on the one hand wars cause horrible suffering for women and children: they are raped, abducted, displaced in massive numbers, made sex slaves of warlords, victimised and killed in large numbers. On the other hand women and girls have exhibited agency in warfare as combatants, as part of the civilian armies, and as organizers of material support for combat troops. O'Connell (2011) notes that

the upheavals of conflict may bring about potentially positive shifts in gender roles which can outlast the conflict period. A new post-conflict political settlement, constitution and political regime, may provide opportunities to enshrine the principles and promote the practices of gender equality and women's rights and empowerment in social, economic and political arenas, and also to strengthen women's citizenship (456).

I shall explore how women manage this dual impact of war through their participation in wars of national liberation and how they have used this experience for their political empowerment. I have chosen Kenya and Zimbabwe as case studies because they were colonized by English-speaking settlers who came predominantly from Britain. Colonization was a very brutal experience for the indigenous peoples in these countries. British colonizers seized the land from Kenyans and Zimbabweans and the indigenous men became waged migrant labourers in white enterprises: farms, industries or mines. The women, children and the aged were confined to native reserves, where the women were burdened with sole responsibilities for family maintenance and agricultural production on very infertile land. The relations of exploitation between settlers and Africans in these two countries led to wars of national liberation. These two wars in question ended twenty five years apart: the Kenyan war took place in 1952-1954 with independence in 1963 and the liberation war in Zimbabwe ended in 1979 with independence in 1980. Did women's contributions in these wars of liberation enable them to use their war experiences to empower themselves politically, gain better status, or even technical skills? What lessons did women in Zimbabwe learn from the Mau Mau war in Kenya in terms of women's ability to negotiate for gender equality? And did the women in Zimbabwe actually experience better outcomes than the women of Kenya as a result of their participation in the war of liberation?

## **1.2. Theoretical Framework**

In this section I will review the debates on development as they apply to the advancement of women in post-colonial countries. I will critique why several of the approaches to development were not appropriate for the developmental and political advancement of women in poor countries. For the purposes of this research I will use the definition of development as: 'a transformation of institutions, structures and relations that perpetuate injustice, inequality and inequity – a transformation that can happen only through the exercise of a collective will' (Visvanathan 1997: 29). I will apply a theoretical framework to my research that reflects the aims and strategies of development as defined here.

Development in colonized societies used to aim at reproducing western type parliamentary

democracies to replace traditional authoritarian political and social systems, building of industrial economies, urbanization, western forms of literacy and exposure to western media. This was the modernization theory approach to development, yet this framework as envisioned here could only be applicable to and beneficial to urban and middle class people. Since the vast majority of the poor people in the world and especially those who had experienced colonial oppression, live in rural areas with agricultural occupations this approach to development could not improve their conditions of life. Due to the special discrimination that women suffer in traditional society women bore a more intense level of oppression than their male counterparts in these colonized societies. The modernization framework for development was a false and an unattainable path to development, especially for women who were largely confined to the rural areas of their colonized societies.

In the 1980s Marxist feminists under the Women and Development (WAD) paradigm emphasized that colonialism created a more intensive exploitation of men and women by capital. As will be demonstrated in the case studies of Kenya and Zimbabwe after the expropriation of Africans' land by the colonialists, men were forced into cheap waged labour in European enterprises in the cities and the women were left to reproduce the labour force in infertile land and to work sporadically for European commercial farms, also for very cheap wages. Capital's exploitation of women's labour forced them to be exploited as grossly underpaid rural waged labourers on white farms. This caused women to neglect the labour on their own farms resulting in their inability to perform their traditional productive and reproductive roles.

Marxist feminists believe that one solution to female exploitation under capitalism would be women's paid employment which would gain them status and freedom (Visvanathan 1997: 21). However, modern industrial capitalism is weakly developed in poor and formerly colonized nations. Where capitalism operates it is also an urban phenomenon which employed a small proportion of the populations, and women are the least employed in the formal economy in the developing nations. Women are mostly active in the informal sector of their nations' economies, therefore Marxist feminists and WAD efforts to regulate capital would have little effect on the lives of poor women. Also critics of the Marxist paradigm noted that the singular focus on the class dimension of women's oppression neglected an

analysis of the household as a location of oppression of women by men thus neglecting the reality of women who are employed in the formal sector who bore a double burden of public paid employment and private unpaid household work. In the rural areas women are subjected to traditional laws and practices that put them at a disadvantage in the household, and economically and politically in rural society. WAD analysis did not provide a method for women to access political power so that women would be able to address issues of economic exploitation in the wider society and subordination in the household.

An offshoot of the Women and Development approach is Gender and Development (GAD) which focuses on relations between men and women in the work-place and at home. This approach aims to ameliorate conditions in the home and in the workplace to facilitate the attainment of gender equality. GAD feminists call upon the state to support child care, and all forms of social reproduction. They also think that some men are willing to work for women's equality. GAD theorists give agency to the oppressed by recommending political activism, building coalitions, community organizing and action for transforming societal structures (Visvanathan 1997: 23). This approach is useful in bringing culture into gender analysis, and it separates the different issues that cause women's oppression, such as different forms of male dominated ideology, capitalism, ethnicity and racism all of which can be addressed separately to fit the situation and needs of particular women.

GAD paradigm as originally formulated could not benefit women in places like Kenya and Zimbabwe where the state has been controlled by men, and where state support for women-friendly policies has been minimal. Women are consistently under-represented in political institutions so that their issues are marginalized in national policies. We will also find under the case studies that in highly male-dominated societies like Kenya and Zimbabwe it is very difficult to form alliances with men on the basis of gender equality. What is needed is a framework through which to develop a strategy that would end oppressive colonialism and overcome male dominated ideologies, while also devising the means that will facilitate the entry of women into national decision-making institutions.

The empowerment framework developed out of GAD. Feminists from the global south formulated a development paradigm called Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN). They proposed that an analysis of the key issues confronting women

should be done from the perspective of poor and oppressed women whose position in their societies were also influenced by their race, class, colonial history and position in the economy (Snyder and Tadesse 1995:13; Visvanathan 1997: 26). According to DAWN ‘when we start from the perspective of poor Third World women, we give a much needed reorientation to development analysis’ (Sen and Grown 1987: 18). DAWN recommended that for development to be successful the framework within which it occurs should guarantee people’s basic needs, and that gender relations within the domestic sphere should be equal. DAWN’s scholars aimed to develop a framework which ensures the equitable distribution of material resources, and where social, political, and spiritual needs can be met by all, providing for the opening of options, enhancement of capacities and positive social relations. DAWN is committed to creating societies free of relations of domination whether based on race, religion, class, caste, gender, sexual orientation or any other which hinder the development and the expression of views and cultural values of subordinate groups (DAWN 1995: 202).

DAWN’s framework for achieving their vision of gender development is referred to as the empowerment of women.

### **1.3 The Empowerment Framework**

Empowerment means people’s ability to exercise power. For women who have been subordinated in many aspects of their lives it means women’s ability to exercise choices in their affairs and to participate in decisions affecting their lives. Under the empowerment analysis subordinated women can challenge oppression and inequality and be able to participate in the building of a world that is free of oppression and that would benefit both genders (Oxaal and Baden 1997: 2). However power manifests itself in different forms and different people exercise power in different ways. Power also impacts people’s lives differently. One type of power is ‘power over’ wherein other people are forced to act against their interest, usually because threats and intimidation are used against them (Oxaal and Baden 1997: 1). This is the power that colonized Kenyans and Zimbabweans experienced; they were oppressed and forced into a subordinate relationship with a white settler population. Women experienced this type of power more intensively than any other population group in colonial society (Rowlands 1995: 101).

Under DAWN analysis oppressed people could exercise multiple types of power such as: (1) ‘power to’, an enabling concept whereby people acquire and demonstrate their ability to solve problems and make decisions; (2) ‘power with’ where people with a common agenda organize to achieve their common goals; and (3) ‘power within’ where people individually analyze how power affects their lives and develop the self-confidence to mitigate and transform how domination operates over them (Oxaal and Baden 1997: 1). They can exercise these forms of power in combination. They can achieve power by organizing and discussing among themselves the effects of oppressive power in their lives. Powerless people become conscientized when they work collectively and use new information to question their subordination. They are able to conclude that they are not the cause of their powerlessness and poverty; and are able to explain the unjust political and economic systems causing their oppression. From questioning their subordination they begin to imagine an alternative world view and decide to take political action to change the constraints hindering their progress. Through collaboration and interaction with others who are in a similar predicament they transform their lives and acquire the power to control their own affairs (Veneklasen and Miller 2002: 56-57). The road to empowerment can involve conflicts. Those with ‘power over’ often fight back against the prospect of losing power over the exploited, dispossessed and poor, the majority of whom are usually women. Empowerment gives agency to women in their own development, and connotes their ability to solve their problems through mobilizing women’s grassroots organizations. Beyond engaging in consciousness-raising, poor women can acquire education and develop economic autonomy. Women’s success in these activities would upset power relations at whatever level they are functioning, and ultimately would bring about structural changes in power relations in their entire society (DAWN 1995: 202).

I will use Kenya and Zimbabwe to test to what extent women really achieved these goals as suggested by the empowerment framework. In using the empowerment framework in anti-colonial contexts we should bear in mind that women in Kenya and Zimbabwe were challenging both settler colonialism and male-dominated ideologies under which women suffered. Women who participated in wars of liberation expected to exercise choices in decisions affecting their lives and to occupy decision-making spaces in their independent countries. Women also expected that ideologies about women’s subordination would be



altered (Hughes 2009: 175).

#### **1.4 Women's responses to colonial 'power over'**

Scholarship on African women challenging colonial oppression by encroachments on their traditional resources notes that women's resistance action used elements of pre-existing formal and informal organizations for women's activism which can be found in many parts of Africa (Ifeka-Moller 1981; Wipper 1989; Drew 1995; Snyder and Tadesse 1995: 23; Parpart. et. al 2000:143). Examples of these organizations were: the *ngwatio* work groups among the Kikuyu in Kenya (Kanogo 1987b: 81); *ebere* among the Ibibio in Nigeria that had mystical associations with the land; the *umuada*, daughters married outside their homes in eastern Nigeria; and dance clubs from Eastern Nigeria and in the Swahili coast in Eastern Africa; in Cameroun these associations were called *Anlu*. (Ifeka-Moller 1981: 139, 141; Kabira and Nzioki 1993: 41; Drew 1995: 12, 18). Audrey Wipper's research on the Harry Thuku riots shows that women took political action even when they were not formally organized (Wipper 1989: 300). According to Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) women took collective action that originated in 'women's spaces and modes such as in ceremonies and worksongs... We must look for them in places such as kitchens, watering sites, kinship gatherings, women's political and commercial spaces where women speak, often in the absence of men' (11). Sometimes women used formal organizations to take resistance action but they could also take spontaneous action. Whether women's organizations were formal, informal or short-lived, women took political action as an expression of political discontent and consciousness.

Examples of anti-colonial resistance from Nigeria's Women's War of 1929, and Cameroon's *Anlu* uprising of 1959 (Wipper 1989, Drew 1995) show women gaining some limited political empowerment. Since many women's organizations such as production societies, market organizations, and wives' and daughters' organizations (Drew 1995:15) that mobilized for political resistance were not primarily set up for political purposes their movements disintegrated after the women gained some limited concessions from the ruling authorities. Although the women had a good understanding of national issues and the causes of their political problems they did not have the resources to sustain a long resistance movement and the burden of their sexual division of labour responsibilities also precluded

them from engaging in a long period of resistance. In order for the women's political activism to be transformed into political empowerment both at the local and at the national level the women needed a continuous activation of their organizations to discuss their grievances among themselves and pressure the authorities to meet their demands. In the Anlu alliance with the Kameruns National Democratic Party once the party gained power the male elite abandoned the women, and having lost their linkage with the national level party the women's organization fell apart.

While political consciousness helps to mobilize women to action, the continuation of women's organization is necessary to negotiate for the attainment of their goals. Although women in different parts of Africa developed political consciousness and activated their traditional organizations to struggle against colonial oppression, they gained few meaningful benefits that transformed their relations with the colonial state either because they did not have available a national political party to align with as in the case of the women's war of Nigeria; or if they allied with the national party the male political leaders abandoned the women once their own political ambitions were achieved. The lesson here is that forming coalitions does not always lead to empowerment especially if men merely use the women to fulfill their agenda and then abandon the women. Within the context of liberation wars my research investigates to what extent women's interests were attained as opposed to merely fulfilling the agenda of male politicians. I shall be guided by DAWN's empowerment processes in my analysis.

Another form of resistance against colonial 'power over' was women's participation in national liberation wars beginning in 1952. Just like in earlier resistance activities women's mobilization as part of the liberation armies did not always bring about their own liberation (White 2007: 863). In Kenya's Mau Mau army and the armies of liberation in Zimbabwe male combatants did not easily accept women as equals in the army. Gender discourses were discouraged making it more difficult for women to function in these armies (Geisler 2004: 13). Overall, participation in liberation armies did not result in political empowerment for women. In seeking to explain why, I will look at the ways women were mobilized into the liberation movements, and examine the ideologies guiding the wars and the promises liberation leaders made on the political empowerment of women.

Stephanie Urdang's (1979) study of the experiences of women in the liberation army of Guinea-Bissau indicates a mobilization process that was empowering for the women. Amilcar Cabral's ideology of the liberation war against colonial oppression incorporated ideas on the emancipation of women both from colonial oppression and women's oppression based on traditional practices. Amilcar Cabral directly addressed equality in gender relations as part of the transformation of the future society they were struggling to create. Amilcar Cabral and the Party for Independence for Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) expressed a clear policy to defend and respect the rights of women while also requiring that women must participate to liberate themselves. When the political mobilizers entered the villages they actually held discussions on women's liberation, about women's double oppressions from the Portuguese and from their own men. The mobilizers expressed the movement's commitment to women's education, their participation in the struggle, their engagement in combat and that they would be part of the administration of the liberated territory. Women were encouraged to attend and speak up in meetings, represent themselves on the village council and help organize the work of the party in the liberated areas. The responsibilities which women undertook were looked upon as equal to those of men. Women's work was given the value it merited. Sharing decision-making with men gave women status (Urdang 1979: 123, 126). According to Urdang (1979) women of Guinea-Bissau saw the war of liberation as a step toward their own liberation and for the creation of a society based on equality (125). Not only did the nationalist leaders promote the idea of the liberation of women, they also encouraged women to work for their freedom themselves. Cabral also said that

we are going to place women in high ranking posts and we want them at every level from the village committees up to the party leadership to take an equal share in production, and to go into combat against the Portuguese when necessary. We want the women of our country to have guns in their hands (125).

Using DAWN's empowerment process it is evident that Guinea-Bissau's method of mobilizing women into the liberation movement provided a way towards their empowerment. Village mobilizers engaged in consciousness-raising discussions with village women on a clearly articulated ideology of women's liberation and respected women's

input on decisions at their level of operation. The party of liberation gave moral support to women to attain equality with men. The PAIGC's recruitment and mobilization of women showed its use of alternative forms of 'power to, power with and power within' that were different from the oppressive power they were fighting against. Women's agency was encouraged and in return the women gave their full support to the war. Women used their organization to procure and transport supplies to the troops. Although women were assigned their traditional duties to supply food, and this could be problematized as stereotypical women's work, the movement gave equal value to women's and men's work, declaring that women's work would get the credit it deserved.

In the following chapters as I discuss the mobilization of women into the liberation armies of Kenya and Zimbabwe I will evaluate whether mobilizers used the women's empowerment process in bringing women into the liberation armies as the mobilizers did in Guinea-Bissau. DAWN's empowerment framework also addresses the problem of cultural practices that oppress women. For example male-dominant ideologies in Kenya and Zimbabwe are so entrenched that in spite of women's contributions to the liberation of their countries women did not receive commensurate credit for their service.

### **1.5 Empowerment through women's organizations**

Another component of the empowerment framework is the formation of women's grassroots organizations and the building of coalitions before the war of liberation, during the war and in the post-independence period in Kenya and Zimbabwe. In Kenya the colonial government created the Maendaleo Ya Wanawake (MYWO) and in Zimbabwe the colonial government also created the women's clubs movement. I will investigate the role of these organizations in the empowerment of women. I will also investigate whether or not women's organizations in the post-independence era have been able to support the interests of women (Sen and Grown 1987: 81). In Kenya MYWO was coopted by the colonial government in the 1950s, and then it became semi-autonomous of the ruling party after independence, and was then coopted by the ruling party for several years. In Zimbabwe a Women's League was formed towards the end of the liberation war as a women's wing of the main liberation party, Zimbabwe African National Party-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF). The Women's League was coopted into the ruling party in the post-independence era. I will look at the

implications of these organizations' relationship with the state for women's political empowerment. In Zimbabwe women's organizations also allied with human rights organizations which had a predominantly male leadership and this had consequences for women's empowerment. I will look at what women achieved through autonomous organizations.

In summary I will apply the empowerment framework within the context of women's participation in the liberation wars by investigating the ideologies of the liberation movements and their implications for the mobilization of women into the wars of liberation; the effect of male- dominant ideologies on gender relations within the armies of liberation; and the special political or professional skills women acquired from their participation in the armies of liberation. I will determine if women's organizations contributed to a reconfiguration of power relations between the genders in public and personal relationships. I will conclude by evaluating the political gains women achieved by their participation in the liberation wars, focusing on women's representation in public institutions.

My research questions are:

1. In spite of the immense suffering caused by war, did women's participation in the liberation wars in Kenya and Zimbabwe give a special boost to women's political status in their post-independence countries? Jean O'Barr referred to this presumed advantage of women's participation in nationalist wars as the 'watershed' effect (O'Barr 1985: 23).
2. Where the ideology of the war of liberation aimed to regenerate aspects of traditional culture, was the "watershed" effect compromised during and after the liberation wars in Kenya and Zimbabwe?
3. Did women's autonomous organizations during the transition to independence and in the post-independence period support women's empowerment? For the purpose of this research I will measure women's empowerment by their political representation in parliament, executive appointments and the judiciary.

The structure of the dissertation is as follows: In chapter 2 I deal with the violence of colonial conquest and administration in Kenya and Zimbabwe showing a brutal type of 'power over' by use of violence, coercion and expropriation of land. The second part of chapter 2 highlights women's agency in resisting their oppression both under traditional male authorities and the colonial system. In chapter 3 I examine the ideology of the Mau Mau which aimed to regenerate some aspects of traditional Kikuyu culture and its impact on the roles that women played during the Mau Mau war. I also investigate if women's organizations contributed to empowering women in the post-independence Kenya. Chapter 4 deals with the liberation ideology and traditional gender ideology as they impact women's participation in the liberation war and in post-independence Zimbabwe politics. I will make a comparative analysis of the above variables between Kenya and Zimbabwe. I conclude in chapter 5 that men continue to dominate in national politics without giving credit to women's contributions to national liberation. I compare the strategies that women in Kenya and Zimbabwe are using to empower themselves politically.

## **Chapter 2: Colonialism and Resistance**

### **2.1. Introduction**

In this chapter I will analyse the power relationships between the Europeans as a conquering group and the subjugated and colonized populations in Kenya and Zimbabwe. Later in the chapter I will highlight the specific problems that women in Kenya and Zimbabwe faced under colonialism and how they responded to conditions of oppression. I will apply the empowerment framework in studying how these colonized peoples showed resilience, devised survival strategies and constructed armies to fight and win wars of liberation. While resisting domination militantly the colonized also employed alternative forms of ‘power to’, ‘power within’ and ‘power with’ for group mobilization, solidarity among the colonized, and to resist the colonial ‘power over’ them. Many similarities can be discerned in the colonialism in Kenya and Zimbabwe but in the following section I shall address the colonial experiences in each of these two countries separately to highlight that differences also existed in the impacts of colonial conquest in these countries and in the people’s responses to their oppression. In the second section of this chapter I will focus on the special impact of colonialism on women and the ways that women resisted their oppression.

### **2.2. Kenya: conquest and political consciousness**

The British conquered Kenya between 1888 and 1895 causing heavy casualties among the Kikuyu, Kamba and Masai. This was the age of the ‘scramble for Africa’ when similar conquests took place all over Africa with accompanying brutalities, economic exploitation and impoverishment of colonized peoples. There were no international fora for addressing imperial oppressions or to mediate the impact of colonial exploitation. Whenever Africans resisted they were met with violence and destruction until they were fully subjugated (Presley 1992: 42). After initial conquest the British government sponsored white farmers to settle in Kenya between 1903 and 1911, and the most fertile lands were seized for this purpose. The Kikuyu were the largest ethnic group who lost the largest proportion of their lands and who were forced into inhospitable and infertile reserves. The land allocated to the Kikuyu in the native reserves could not accommodate them so many returned to the land originally seized from them and entered into a squatter relationship with the new owners of

their land. Other Kikuyu sought out white landowning farmers with whom they also made squatter arrangements. According to Kanogo (1987a) a squatter was ‘an African permitted to reside on a European farmer’s land, usually on condition he worked for the European owner for a specified period. In return for his services, the African was entitled to use some of the settler’s land for the purposes of cultivation and grazing’ (10). The conditions under which Kenyans worked for European farmers were highly exploitative with low wages, bad housing and long working hours (9).

Although the European population was not very large, numbering 16,812 for the 1931 census, European farmers owned 5,000,648 acres, while they only cultivated 635,590 acres, thereby heightening the resentment of the Kenyan farmers and pastoralists who were working the farms for the Europeans (Tignor 1976: 25). During World War I Africans from British colonies were forcibly recruited into the military carrier corps for the East African campaign which the British waged against German forces. Rosberg and Nottingham (1966) calculated that 350,000 Africans were recruited out of which 150,000 men came from Kenya, of these 42,000 died largely from disease and starvation (29). Carrier service was another cause of resentment for the Kenyans.

At the end of WWI a second wave of British settlers, comprising former soldiers, settled in Kenya, leading to more expropriation of 4,560 square miles in the Kenya Highlands. With an expanded white population the colonial government gave preference to the interests of the white settlers over those of any other populations. In the Legislative Council of 31 members, European settlers were given 11 seats, and two Europeans became members of the Governor’s Executive Council (Rosberg and Nottingham 1966: 33). Indigenous Kenyans did not have representation.

The colonial government passed laws to ensure that cheap African labour continued to be available for the white farms: for example the 1918 Resident Native Labourers Ordinance (RNLO) required that a squatter must work at least 180 days annually on the white farm in return for living on and farming a portion of the land for his personal use (Kanogo 1987a: 37). Not only would the Kikuyu male work for the white commercial farmer, his wife and children too had to be available to work at harvest time when labour demand was highest. Accompanying these extra demands on Kenyans were other restrictive laws and ordinances.



In 1924 the Masters and Servants Ordinance stipulated that a squatter could be prosecuted for not showing up for work (Tignor 1976: 163).

Kenyan were forced to carry a personal identification booklet, the *kipande*, similar to the passbook of South Africa and this restricted squatters' mobility and ability to change employers (Tignor 1976: 159; Kanogo 1987a: 38). The colonial government also forced Kenyans to work for the state for 60 days each year doing 'government transport work, as well as the construction and maintenance of railways, roads and other works of a public nature' (Tignor 1976: 170-171). Overall Kenyans were putting in 240 days of work away from home, neglecting their farm, their stock and the welfare of their families. In the 1930s more labour days were required of the Kenyans and they were also no longer permitted to keep stock on the white farms.

I will now discuss how Kikuyu adapted their traditions to accommodate themselves to their new circumstances. Having lost their land to white settlers the Kikuyu used their customs to preserve their identities. Most Kikuyu had no other traditional home to go to so they recreated their customs on the land they were squatters on. Animal stock was necessary for most of their rites of passage ceremonies. Kanogo (1987a) referring to L.S.B. Leakey said that there were up to 172 occasions when an ordinary Kikuyu required the slaughtering of an animal and the eating of meat during his or her lifetime, such as birth, circumcision, payment of bride wealth, graduation through different life stages ranging from warriorhood, to traditional councilorship, to elder statesmen ranks and death ceremonies (22). When squatters were no longer permitted to keep stock on white farms in the 1930s it became impossible for them to sustain their Kikuyu traditional culture without cattle. The inability of the Kikuyu to perform the different forms of traditional social transactions led to resistance. In their attempts to preserve their traditions the Kikuyu regularly invoked traditional beliefs and symbols during their confrontations with the colonial system.

Missionaries also attacked traditional Kikuyu customs and ceremonies, and forbade their converts from celebrations dealing with departed spirits, prohibited alcohol consumption, taking oaths, practising divination and limited them to marry only one spouse. Most Kikuyu did not convert to Christianity and refused to send their children to mission schools under these restrictions. The few Kikuyu who went to school were children of refugees on the

mission estates. They were either landless Kikuyu seeking squatter arrangements on mission estates or outcasts from Kikuyu society, whose children were forced to go to mission schools as a condition for the protection they received from the missionaries (Tignor 1976: 128). After this first group of educated people obtained western jobs in the cities and appeared to have a good standard of living other Kikuyu began to appreciate modern education but traditionalists still resisted mission education because of the numerous cultural restrictions. Enterprising Kikuyu established the independent schools movement and provided the traditionalists with an option that combined modern education with a preservation of their cultural practices. Squatters on white farms were among the traditionalists who supported the independent schools movement.

Between 1921 and 1944 a small group of urban-based Kikuyu who had acquired western education organized political associations through which they demanded political rights for Africans, advocated for rural people's land grievances, demanded better educational opportunities for Africans, and very importantly the return of alienated lands (Presley 1992: 53, 114). These associations included firstly, the Kikuyu Association formed in 1920 by some educated but conservative chiefs who had been coopted into the colonial administration. They often used petitions in their relations with the colonial system (Rosberg and Nottingham 1966: 41, 42; Tignor 1976: 227). Second was the East African Association (EAA) formed by a mission educated Kenyan Harry Thuku and his friends in 1921. This was a more radical association, that campaigned against forced labour, taxes, the *kipande*, and the sexual molestation of girls who worked on European farms (Presley 1992: 53-55). The association was banned in 1922 and Thuku deported to Kismayu in the same year. The Kikuyu Central Association (KCA) was formed in 1925, which was similar to the EAA, and agitated for 'the return of alienated lands, the release of Harry Thuku and better educational opportunities' (Presley 1992: 114). The Kikuyu Central Association was banned in 1940 and when political activities were permitted again at the end of World War II, the KCA was revived as the Kenya African Union (KAU) in 1944 (Presley 1992: 114-120). Except for the KA these political associations agitated against the colonial administration and settler oppression of Africans, 'over the four issues of land, labour, taxation and education' (Presley 1992: 117).

The largest group of Kenyans who suffered from settler oppression were the squatters who were subjected to the new restrictions on their tenancy on white farms. Beginning in 1940 the squatters were refusing to sign new restrictive tenancy agreements and were evicted in large numbers from white farms. The government devised a new settlement scheme in Maasailand, in Olenguruone for ex-squatters who had been forced out of white farms and who could not be accommodated in the over-crowded Kikuyu reserves. However the Olenguruone solution was not satisfactory to the ex-squatters because the government placed conditions on their occupation of this land: such as terracing, crop rotations, and prohibition from growing corn so as not to compete with white farmers (Rosberg and Nottingham 1966: 252; Kanogo 1987a: 112). This large population of ex-squatters from Olenguruone became highly politicized and progressively radicalised as they joined the growing ranks of the landless peasants. They were supported by the radical political associations of the newly educated urban political activists, many of whom were impoverished urban workers. Since the largest number of the colonized peasantry in Kikuyuland were also women we should bear in mind that these political issues were of interest to women. In a later section of this chapter I shall analyse Kikuyu women's experience with colonialism and examine how women's interests were addressed within the alliance between the urban radicals and the peasantry.

In the post World War II period the ex-squatters, the radical educated Kikuyu and impoverished urban militants allied to form secret organizations (Anderson 2005: 42). These radicals began to administer goat oaths of solidarity and unity which they took outside of Nairobi from 1950 to a vast number of men, women and children in Olenguruone and the countryside. Oath taking was a traditional method of political education and consciousness-raising, and a symbol of political unity. The Kikuyu used the oath for political mobilization with a special focus on the land issue (Rosberg and Nottingham 1966: 258). As the oathing events became widespread the white settlers suspected that the squatters on their estates were engaging in secret political activities and expelled large numbers of Kikuyu from their farms. While the ex-squatters were struggling to find a place for themselves in the agricultural landscape, the militant Kikuyu were also pressuring these landless people to leave the farms and join the anti-colonial army being formed in the Kenya forests in preparation for an armed insurrection (Kanogo 1987a: 136-139). People who took the oaths

paid a nominal oath-taking fee as a way of fund-raising for the Mau Mau war, and some of the militants whom the leaders referred to as ‘a team of thieves,’ unscrupulously forced people to take the oaths to extort oath-taking fees for their own personal use (Anderson 2005: 42).

As the oath-taking and intimidation on settler farms accelerated, the settlers too responded to their own insecurity with immense brutality: killing, beating, intimidation, forced confessions from Kikuyu, and expulsion from white farms (Kanogo 1987a: 138). It is quite likely that the use of violence to force the oath on reluctant Kikuyu was due to the secret nature of the political mobilization taking place. Overseers on white farms were subjected to this coercion. Overseers were intimidated to take the oath which implicated them in the planned insurrection. Some Christians were also forced to take the oath, although many of them no longer believed in traditional rituals but since oath-taking was now being criminalized by the colonial system they too were forcibly implicated in the planned war against the settlers. As the foregoing statements indicate Kikuyu were not totally united in the militancy being propagated by the radicals using the oath-taking process for military mobilization. The resentment caused by forced oath-taking would surface in the form of betrayals of the Mau Mau during the war of liberation. In October 1952 a state of emergency was declared and about 100,000 Kikuyu were summarily expelled from white farms and these swelled up the numbers of the forest fighters. Since the newly unsettled Kikuyu could not go back to the reserves which themselves had become overcrowded, fighting back colonial subjugation militarily was the option most of them chose.

### **2.3. Zimbabwe: conquest and political consciousness**

Zimbabwe’s colonial experience was very similar to that of Kenya. Similar types of violence were used for the seizure of African lands, and the coercion of men into waged labour also occurred under very oppressive conditions. The colonization of the two countries occurred in the decade of the 1890s during the European ‘scramble for Africa’. In Zimbabwe the Shona and the Ndebele were the two main African populations that were affected. The Ndebele had migrated from the Zulu state in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Both of these peoples were conquered by British colonialists from South Africa. Cecil Rhodes who had made his fortune in gold and diamonds in South Africa raised a private army, the Pioneer Front, which was used to conquer the Shona (1889-90) and the Ndebele (1893-94). By this

conquest the British were able to stop the Afrikaners from expanding beyond the Transvaal and also stop the Portuguese in Mozambique from extending inland from the eastern coast (Ranger 1968: 132).

The men of the Pioneer Front army were promised mining opportunities for gold. However gold did not exist in commercial quantities and the Pioneer Front army attacked and conquered the African populations. They named their newly conquered territory Rhodesia. Similar to the experiences of Kenyans Rhodesians were also subjected to land seizures, forced labour, and expropriation of cattle (Sweetman 1984: 91). Also like in Kenya Africans were forced into reserves, or onto land that European settlers did not want. All land outside the reserves was designated as 'European Areas', and more whites were encouraged to set up commercial farms over the years. White settlement increased from 80,000 in 1945 to 220,000 in 1960, necessitating the expulsion of more Africans from arable land. Although whites made up about 5% of the total population, white commercial farms took up 15 million hectares, out of a total of 33.2 million hectares in the country. Black commercial farmers had only 1.6 million hectares (Moyo and Besada 2008: 3).

Since white settlers had allocated large expanses of land for themselves, they needed cheap labour to work their farms. The colonial administration, here the British South Africa Company (BSAC), accommodated their labour needs by imposing a Hut tax in 1895, thereby forcing Africans into waged labour on white farms (Stapleton 2006: 11). Beside suffering the economic oppression of land seizures and taxation, the BSAC administration and police were physically abusive (Sweetman 1984: 94). The Shona and Ndebele rose in rebellion in 1896-97, and up to 10 per cent of the white inhabitants were killed before the uprising was defeated with massacres of Africans. In the following years an all-white administration was established (Stapleton 2006: 13). The BSA Police that took care of security was part of the BSAC and was mostly white, except for a few indigenous police officers. Whites prohibited arms to Africans thus using their monopoly of force to preserve white supremacy. The defeat of the 1897 rebellion led to accelerated land alienation, taxation and evictions. Sporadic uprisings took place, for example, Maondera (1900-1903), and another Shona uprising of 1917 that protested against the conscription for carrier service (Ranger 1968: 215). Ndebele royalty and a few Africans with western education appealed directly to the British government to protest land alienation but were unsuccessful (221).

This contrasts with the successful appeal of the Kenya Association of Chiefs that more land not be alienated from Kabete in 1920. Also similar to the experiences in Kenya educated Africans in Southern Rhodesia formed political associations such as the Bantu Voters Association, to advocate for Africans to purchase freehold land, and for better education. They also attempted to appeal to a mass following. For example a rural organizer named Martha Ngano went into rural Matabeleland to raise mass and rural political consciousness (Ranger 1968: 225). Trade unions, political associations and break-away Christian churches also emerged in the 1930s to lead mass protests against the oppressive conditions in Southern Rhodesia.

From 1946 a new wave of European immigration numbering about 10,000 a year flooded into Southern Rhodesia and displaced Africans who lived in 'white areas'. As in Kenya, Africans had to move into already over-crowded reserves. African men who worked in the cities also felt insecure because the cities were designated as 'white areas'. Under these conditions urban workers became radicalized and were ready to be mobilized into more radical opposition politics.

When a repressive government came into office in 1959, Africans in Southern Rhodesia formed a mass party, the National Democratic Party (NDP) which attracted support from the trade unionists, landless young men, peasants, rural traders, educated elites, and young scholars. It used strikes, appeals for overseas support, and rural resistance strategies (Ranger 1968: 240). In 1963 the NDP split into the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), led by Joshua Nkomo and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), led by Ndabaningi Sithole. In 1964 another white supremacy government came into office and made a Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) in 1965 in the name of the whites in Rhodesia. This led to the war of national liberation between the whites and the Africans.

#### **2.4. Women's anti-colonial resistance in Kenya**

In Kenya both the colonial government and white farm owners made heavy demands on various construction and farming needs on white farms and road construction. Coffee was the main export from Kenya, but labour on coffee estates received the lowest pay, and usually Kikuyu men refused these jobs. Women and children were called upon to harvest the

coffee beans at the very time that the women needed to plant their own crops. This caused an unbearable oppression to the women (Wipper 1989: 307). Increased taxes were used to pressure Africans, including women and children, to work on the farms. Women were sometimes beaten or sexually assaulted by male labourers, and their wages withheld by their employers (309). The physical demands on work on the coffee plants resulted in bruises and swollen fingers and their daily allotment of work was very difficult to fulfill (Presley 1992: 61).

In the absence of their menfolk the women survived by relying on their traditional support system, the *ngwatio*. Kanogo (1987b) referred to the *ngwatio* as a support system whereby members' farms were worked in rotation. An *ngwatio* was a group of women married to men of the same clan (81). In Jean Davison's (1996) research in *Mutira* on Kikuyu women's life stories, Wanjiku who was the oldest interviewee also referred to the *ngwatio* as the support system which resulted from the bonding among the cohort of girls who were circumcised at the same time. According to Nwajiku:

We would help each other with work in the *shamba*, rotatating to each girl's place, and at the end of our work the girls whose *shamba* we cultivated fed the rest of us. Even after we got married we helped each other. If one gave birth, the rest would go to see her, carrying millet porridge, bananas, and even firewood (62).

Such a support system empowered women and contributed to their survival under the oppressive working conditions of colonialism.

Colonial legislation that applied to both men and women was often especially harsh on women. For example in 1910 every African aged 16 years and older had to pay the Hut and Poll Tax of 3 rupees per person, which increased over time to 5 and later to 8 rupees. Men in wage labour could earn cash to pay the taxes, but this was not easy for women (Presley 1992: 46). Women took the coffee harvesting jobs in order to pay for taxes. They also did forced road building work under conditions of intimidation, violence and sexual assault (Presley 1992: 52). When Harry Thuku founded the Young Kikuyu Association in 1921 he specifically protested against the forced labour of women and children (Wipper 1989: 302). Thuku campaigned against the sexual assault of young female workers who frequently got

pregnant. He sometimes personally stopped women doing forced labour work and sent them home declaring that it was illegal to force them to work (Wipper 1989: 302; Presley 1992: 54). For his political agitation Harry Thuku was arrested in March 1922. Kikuyu women were conscious that part of his anti-colonial advocacy campaigns was done on their behalf. Thuku's arrest provoked the women to participate in the resistance action to free him from jail (Rosberg and Nottingham 1966: 51; Presley 1992: 55). At a mass gathering of about 8000 protesters outside the Nairobi police station, the women took over the direction of the gathering and exhorted the crowd to force their way into the police station to free Thuku. In the ensuing confrontation the Kenyan policemen fired on the crowd, killing the leader of the women, Mary Muthoni Nyanjiru, three other women and seventeen men. Twenty-eight more persons were wounded.

The fact that Kikuyu women took a leading role in a public protest action was unusual yet both men and women at the protest accepted the leadership of Mary Nyanjiru as an acknowledgement that women had the capacity and right to play such roles. In pre-colonial settings women's public roles pertained to women's affairs only. Women's councils regulated appropriate behaviour for women, and provided a forum to express women's ideas on family matters, agricultural affairs and the scheduling of rituals such as female circumcision. There were a few women leaders such as healers, diviners, birthing specialists and female circumcisers. But the Thuku riots seemed to be the beginning of public activism by women in a mixed gender setting. Just like the young men in the city these women seemed to have freed themselves from the restrictions of traditional practices. The fact that women were working in settler farms also indicated that women's life horizons were expanding, even though the circumstances necessitating their wage labour were not always happy ones. The women involved in the Harry Thuku riots had taken even bolder steps outside of traditional life by living in Nairobi at a time when Kenyan women were prohibited from the cities. They were aware of the political ideas that Thuku and the East African Association expressed. The women must have concluded that it would benefit them if the EAA's advocacy work continued. Having developed a high sense of political consciousness the women took over the direction of the protest action from the men who wanted to disperse the demonstrators and leave Harry Thuku in jail.



At the government inquiry into the shootings the Commissioner of Police testified that ‘a large party of native women had arrived, probably 150’ (Wipper 1989: 314). The Vicar of All Saints Church of Nairobi estimated that there were 200 vocal women who took independent action by moving toward the prison fence (Rosberg and Nottingham 1966: 51). Although men were in the majority at this demonstration, another eye-witness, Job Muchuchu, indicated that Mary Nyanjiru’s challenge to the men, followed by the women’s *ngemi* (ululation), roused the crowd to action as the women confronted the police bayonets followed by the shootings (Rosberg and Nottingham 1966: 52, 55). We do not know if these women were members of an association in the city. Mutual aid associations were however frequently formed among first-generation city dwellers throughout Africa and these women were likely to have formed their own informal associations for economic support, social support or even a political forum to discuss their needs and interests. There was a suggestion that the leadership of the East African Association had administered traditional political oaths of solidarity to the women the night before the riots signifying the level of political consciousness that the women already had before the riots. (Wipper 1989: 317). If city dwelling Kikuyu women were being administered an oath this would further indicate the changing roles of women and an acknowledgement of their political capabilities as they began to enter the modern sphere of Kenyan society.

Although for analytical purposes the impact and response of men and women in Kenya to colonial oppression are here treated separately, in reality both men and women took combined action in the Thuku riots since they all suffered the oppression of settler colonial economic enterprises and political decisions. When concessions were gained from the colonial system both men and women benefitted, for example after the riots, the colonial government no longer increased taxes as a way to force Kenyans to work for wages. In fact the tax which had been increased previously was reduced from 16 to 12 shillings. Governor Northey under whose administration the riots had occurred was replaced that year. A specific benefit that women derived from the riot was the revision of the Master and Servants Ordinance under the heading: ‘Native Women’s Protection Act’

No woman worker was to remain on a farm at night unless accompanied by her father or husband, estate owners were to provide proper accommodation for single

women, and owners who failed to provide this accommodation were not to employ any woman who had to travel more than three miles from her home (Presley 1992: 56).

Following the Thuku riots women coffee pickers also organized numerous work stoppages leading Presley (1992) to conclude that 'women's protest reveals the beginning of a rural female proletariat collective consciousness' (69). The women planned demonstrations, demanded improved wages and engaged in 'stay-aways'. Although the women did not engage in long-term stay-aways due to their poverty, Kikuyu women's consciousness held on into the Mau Mau war, which they supported in large numbers.

Another form of women's oppression was around the issue of female circumcision. Christian missionaries and especially mission doctors opposed female circumcision on scientific grounds citing the dangers of female circumcision but Kikuyu male leaders steadfastly defended the practice as an important symbol of their tradition. From the perspective of the girls circumcision was very painful causing the mutilation of their sexual organs which formed a hard scar in their private parts. Many other physically adverse results included pain in urinating, extremely painful child birth and endangering the life of a newborn because circumcision scarred the birth canal. Davison's (1996) interviews on the lives of rural Kikuyu women elicited negative responses from older women who had undergone the circumcision operation. One of her informants, Wamutira, remembered that she fainted on the way home from the circumcision operation. As she looked back over many decades she said 'but now I would not want *Irua* (circumcision) to come back. Even the one who forbid it (Kenyan President Daniel arap Moi) did right' (Davison 1996: 89). Wanjiku who had undergone circumcision in 1925 also informed Jean Davison (1996) that circumcision was 'buying maturity with pain' (59). Talking about *Irua*, circumcision, Wanjiku said the cut with the knife 'was like being slaughtered'. Many Kikuyu women who went through the operation in their youth never understood what useful purpose the operation served. The literature does not specify if any Kikuyu women or their organizations supported or rejected female circumcision. Women who opposed circumcision were not able to speak up as Davison's informants only did so five or more decades after they had been circumcised. When missionaries demanded the abolition of female circumcision Kikuyu men staked their cultural consciousness on defending this operation even though women

were not consulted about their preferences.

Of the numerous prohibitions that missionaries demanded of new converts the traditionalists chose to stand firm on the control of women and their sexuality. It is surprising that the Kikuyu men who had received western education refused to be guided by scientific evidence when it came to an issue concerning the welfare of Kikuyu women. The men did not ask the women what they thought of 'buying maturity with pain' which was not a momentary experience of pain but pain that lasted the entire lifetime of the women. Supporters of female circumcision have never stated any physical benefits derived from the operation. The male attitude of not caring about the women's pain or consulting with them will become evident all through the nationalist struggles and into the post independence era in Kenyan political life.

Kikuyu women wanted to be an integral part of the nationalist associations but they experienced gender discrimination from their own men. In spite of their contributions of money to the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA), 'they were never allowed a voice in decision-making on the central committee; they were not allowed to be agents who disseminated information to rural populations' (Presley 1992: 117). Even in the rural areas when the Kikuyu Central Association met to recruit new members, 'the meetings were only open to men, although women prepared the food which was served. As soon as the meeting was opened for serious discussion of issues and tactics, women were told to leave. Many women believed they, too, should have a voice in politics and an acknowledged role in the association' (Presley 1992: 118). These women were politically more progressive than the men in recognizing that gender relations needed to change in order that the alliance between the men and women could successfully challenge colonial rule. In spite of the fact that in 1922 women had demonstrated their capacity for public action in the Harry Thuku riots, it is surprising that when the KCA was formed men still excluded women supporters from decision-making roles.

Despite their exclusion from political participation, the Kikuyu women demonstrated their political agency in various ways. For example, in 1930 they took independent action when the women broke away from KCA and formed their own organization, the Mumbi Central Association. Additionally, they took independent political action by doing political

consciousness-raising in the villages and giving oaths with the injunction, ‘We will not sell our soil. Don’t report a Kikuyu to a European’ (Presley 1992:118). These politically active women also advocated for women’s higher education and raised funds to establish a women’s wing of the Githunguri College which opened in 1939 as an independent Teachers College for men. In 1947 the women built a dormitory for girls in Githunguri, called *Kiriri*, enabling the girls to board in the school. Githunguri College combined regular western type of education with political topics such as land alienation and population pressure on the reserves (Kanogo 1987a: 80). The women who attended Githunguri also developed cultural and political consciousness that the founders of their school advocated. Some of these women from Githunguri went into the forest as Mau Mau combatants (Presley 1992: 102). The colonial administration suspected that the women leaders who built *Kiriri* became members of Mau Mau. These women were politically persecuted, ‘We were beaten, detained and jailed. We have never regretted. We feel we suffered for a worthy cause.’ (Kabira and Nzioki: 32-33)

In the late 1940’s rural radicalism intensified with the expulsion of over 100,000 squatters from white farms (Green, 1990: 72). Women were also involved in the ensuing radical activities. In 1948 they demonstrated against group terracing and in 1951 over 500 women were arrested for burning down cattle crushes and pens as they protested against the inoculation of animals to control rinderpest (Kanogo 1987b: 84). At about this time also a number of political assassinations, armed robberies against settler farmers and attacks on Kikuyu who worked for the colonial administration were occurring. In December 1952 the government declared a state of emergency. In the liberation war that followed rural women were readily mobilized since they had a strong interest in issues dealing with agriculture, land and population pressure on the land.

## **2.5 Women’s anti-colonial resistance in Zimbabwe**

Following conquest, Zimbabweans had experiences of dispossession of land, forced labour, and expropriation of cattle which caused the 1896 uprising of several ethnicities against the whites. Many religious leaders from the major Ndebele and Shona communities, and former Ndebele royalty mobilized against the white settlers (Ranger 1968: 210). A priestess of the Nehanda cult, Chagwe, was one of the leaders and she passed judgment in her shrine that the

Native Commissioner of the Mazoe district, Pollard be executed for his ill-treatment of the indigenous peoples (91). Chagwe herself was executed in 1898 for his murder. This early episode of political resistance to colonialism featured a woman medium who exercised political power in a society that was largely organized along a patriarchal ideology. Only a few women like Chagwe held positions of authority in rural society in Zimbabwe such as mid-wives, traditional healers and rural artists such as those in weaving, pottery, cloth making and painting (Stott 1990: 7; Ranchod-Nilsson 1992: 199). Even these few traditional power bases available to women were soon destroyed when modern skills and medicines were introduced under colonialism.

Following the defeat of the 1896 uprising African women's oppression was more intense than that of the men. Women were already suppressed as a subordinate class in traditional Zimbabwean society, and to this was added colonial oppression (Schmidt 1991: 733). With a few exceptions noted above, women did not express political opinions in public (Stott 1990: 4). Women were valued as food producers and reproducers of the future generation. But they could not own land, although they had customary rights to cultivate plots from their husband's land from which to feed their families. They sometimes controlled their surpluses, but women regularly complained that if they gained access to cash by selling 'crops, vegetables, or craft items they often were not entitled to keep the money or make decisions on how to spend it' (Ranchod-Nilsson 1992: 207). Another basis of women's subordination was that in marriage the husband paid *lobola* (bride price) to the wife's family, through which the man laid claims to the woman's labour and children. Husbands were accountable to their family elders for reasonable treatment of their wives, since their relatives contributed to the bride price and did not want to lose control of the women's labour due to cruelty of husbands. Young husbands heeded the advice of their elders not only in marital affairs but also because they received land allocations from the elders for their family sustenance (Jacobs 1989: 165). Except under extreme ill-treatment a woman remained with her marital family even through widowhood whereby she was inherited by a relative of her dead husband. Women did not have inheritance rights to marital property or from their patrilineage. Within the household women could gain status through bearing sons, being successful farmers, and on attaining elderhood.

As noted earlier most men were working away from their communities and the women led restricted lives in the countryside. The colonial government devised another method for controlling women by codifying the traditional laws with local elders and authorities providing biased information that served their own interests. The codified laws exaggerated the degree of women's subordination to men. Under these laws women were classified as perpetual minors who could not enter into contracts by themselves nor enter marital arrangement without the consent of a man. Married women were considered to be under the tutelage of their husbands (Jacobs 1989: 165).

From the perspective of general labour justice, men under colonial employment were grossly underpaid, yet in relation to their womenfolk they were economically better off. Husbands kept their wages which gave them more power over their wives and they made no contribution to family maintenance. They were even less responsive to their elders from whom they had freed themselves. Migrant waged workers often divorced their wives and married from the communities where they were employed (Seidmam 1984: 421). Since the African men and the colonial administrators saw women only as dependents of men, divorced women sometimes lost access to land. Women frequently became destitute, and the African family began to disintegrate.

Women responded to their double oppression in various ways. They resisted their oppression in both individual ways and by taking advantage of new institutions such as Christian missions, to escape from domestic violence. At times they even ran off to the cities, risking social ostracism. Women also made use of organizations like the Federation of African Women's Clubs that were formed under the auspices of the colonial system which aimed to coopt them into the colonial system but which the women used for their own survival and liberation ends. The women used the Catholic Women's Clubs for networking purposes. Some women followed their male migrant relatives to the cities although they were legally prohibited from going to cities. Colonial magistrates had little sympathy for African women's predicaments usually accusing them of 'immoral' and 'lascivious' tendencies, adultery, and spreading venereal disease and unhygienic conditions in the home therefore needing to be under the firm control of men (Schmidt 1991: 737).

Going to the city was a risky undertaking because chiefs and native commissioners were

determined to prevent 'escaped' women from taking the train. Women were required to carry travel passes showing their marital and guardianship status. Women who were judged to have escaped from the rural areas without proper authorization were returned home (Schmidt 1991: 755). Very few of them obtained any form of jobs in the cities even as domestic workers. Women's employment as domestics were rare because whites preferred men to do domestic labour. Women in the cities 'cooked food, home brewed beer, or cleaned laundry' by using their domestic skills. (Seidman 1984: 424). They also operated shebeens, illegal bars where they sold beer which they brewed. For them to be in the cities women were essentially being presented as criminals, performing illegal economic activities but this was the only way they could escape from rural oppression and survive in the cities. Other legal women's economic activities were in the informal sector which only provided a precarious survival. On the positive side women in the cities took control of their own sexuality, chose their own husbands or else chose to remain single (Wells 2003: 1-3).

Other women went to the missions and were well received by the Jesuits, Wesleyan Methodist Missionaries, and the Dominican sisters:

Life on the mission stations was not easy. Chishawasha women made and maintained mission roads. They weeded and harvested crops on the mission farm, as well as taking care of their own fields and families after they married. Nonetheless many women preferred such a life to the one they had abandoned. They could go to school, they would not be forced to marry against their will, and they could choose a husband without the consent of their guardians. (Schmidt 1991: 748)

Women's rebellions against patriarchy and colonialism sometimes took more subtle forms, where women remained in an oppressed situation in order to avoid ostracism, but sent their daughters to the missions to prevent future suffering for girls. Women also stayed in oppressive domestic situations to keep custody of their children. In Julia Wells' (2003) oral history study in Zimbabwe one interviewee indicated giving away her 5-year-old daughter to the mission in order to break the marriage pledge the father had made on the child's behalf in return for a few bags of grain in 1947 (109). The daughter received an education and got employment as a mission cook for the rest of her life. Women also formed alliances with mission educated and Christian men who believed in the education of girls. Male Christian

converts with salaried employment sometimes supported women's and their own daughters' education. Women who were abandoned by migrant husbands were sometimes allowed to stay on the land their husbands had initially allocated to them. If they were fortunate to have access to fertile land they could generate agricultural surpluses which they sold and paid for their daughters' education. Those with skills for producing embroidery and pottery generated incomes for the same purposes.

Many of the examples cited above pertain to women taking individual action for personal liberation, the impact of which was negligible in terms of the vast population of women in the rural areas. The women who left their oppressive circumstances lived a precarious existence and were probably not able to influence other relatives to follow their own footsteps to attain gender liberation. The fate of the children in the cities was also not auspicious, as educational services for black children were very rare. According to Fay Chung (2006) black children were not allowed to enrol in school until they were seven years old and only about 2% of children could find spaces in the few secondary schools built for black pupils (48). Even after enrolment black children were brutalized by white school heads for a series of punishable infringements like being late for school after a 12-mile trek, or not having shoes or clean socks for daily inspection (49). Escaping to the cities was not always an escape from white supremacy and limited opportunities for adults and children.

The vast majority of women lived in the rural areas, and with the end of the WWII palliative and reformist efforts were initiated to address women's poverty by the women's clubs movements that became prevalent throughout English-speaking colonial Africa. Wives of colonial administrators and field officers who came in contact with women in rural areas found them living in poverty and squalor, with high infant mortality and maternal ignorance, and wanted to show that white women cared for African women and would like to alleviate the conditions of rural women. The colonial women determined that Zimbabwean women needed domestic skills to solve these problems of poverty and disease, which they blamed on the women's 'backwardness' (Ranchod-Nilsson 1992: 207). The reality was that the rural women did not have fertile land to grow nutritious foods for their families and without cash remittances from their husbands rural women would also have to sell agricultural produce to pay for school fees, cooking oil, kerosene and medicines. The burden of work did not allow



the women to keep sanitary homes. On their part, the white women had homes with servants and with running water. It was therefore not possible to solve the structural problems which rural women faced in colonial Zimbabwe by the acquisition of domestic skills. White women went ahead and taught African women cookery, sewing, knitting, crocheting, hygiene, child care and nutrition (203). In Kenya the colonial administration supported the white women's voluntary work with funding from its community development allocation. While in Zimbabwe the underlying ideology of the women's club movement was to discourage rural women from identifying with the emerging nationalist movement, in Kenya it aimed to subvert the Mau Mau, which was already an on-going war of liberation. Although the white women and the colonial government of Rhodesia/Zimbabwe tried to use the women's club organizations to co-opt rural women into the colonial system the rural women responded instead by using the organizations for their own consciousness-raising. They put the skills they learned through the organization to support the Zimbabwe liberation movement when the guerrillas came to their areas.

Although white women determined what subjects and courses to teach at the clubs, rural women were developing multiple skills ranging from sewing, knitting to cookery. They produced clothing items and prepared special dishes learned from the cooking classes for their husbands, which they used to negotiate to leave the house to attend meetings (Rowlands 1998: 22). Once they had secured their time and were able to step out of the house, they began to expand on the agenda and direction of these meetings to suit their most urgent needs, which always involved the need for steady cash to pay for school fees and buy food they could not grow. Using examples from Wedza district, based on Ranchod- Nilsson's (1992) research, we learn that women organized a cooperative child care program that enabled them to pursue income-generating projects such as rotating credit schemes, brewing beer, selling needlecraft items, and cooperative cultivation of club gardens for sale of vegetables (208). The proceeds from these sales met their practical needs, while the women used the group setting to engage in consciousness- raising discussions about their personal and common problems such as low harvests from infertile soils and the structural causes of poverty (Young 1997: 370). The women wanted a broader curriculum that included adult education, literacy, agricultural methods, leadership training and communications skills (Ranchod-Nilsson 1992: 210). The women progressed beyond the practical application

of their homecraft and income-generation projects to discussing national problems such as complaints about destocking, not being allowed to grow rice in marshy areas, to the big issues of lack of land. When the liberation war started and the guerrillas arrived to mobilize for the war, they were supported by club women who put all the skills they learned from the clubs to advance the cause of the national liberation war.

The examples given above on Zimbabwe show how oppressed rural women survived on the margins of society and periodically challenged relations of patriarchal domination which had been imposed both by the traditional male dominant ideology and the colonial racist system. Some women made a dramatic break from traditional bases of women's subordination. Some of this was made possible by Christian missions bringing external ideologies into their communities. Unlike the circumcision controversy in Kenya which opposed a rite of passage for girls, here in Zimbabwe the women were conscious that traditional subordination of women, when added to the oppression of colonialism, was destructive of normal family life. The women in Zimbabwe obtained greater benefits from the missionaries than the women in Kenya. Many Kenyans believed that the missions were the ideological arm of the colonial government and were being used to destroy Kenyan traditional culture. In Zimbabwe the missions offered a wider variety of services. The women could leave their traditional setting and make new homes with the missions or they could send their daughters to be brought up in the missions. In Kenya the squatter system allowed families to stay together longer on white farms which made it more difficult for Kenyan wives to leave, especially in a context where the missions were looked upon with suspicion. Zimbabwean women could make independent choices because more men moved away to cities and even to foreign cities. Zimbabwean women were thus ready to take advantage of alternative opportunities provided by the missionaries. The Federation of African Women's Clubs founders wanted to use the club movement to tell women in Zimbabwe that colonial women cared for their well being, but the Zimbabweans used the space and time provided by the organization for consciousness-raising and used the skills they learned from the clubs for furthering the aims of the liberation war.

Contrary to the negative portrayal by colonial officers of Zimbabwe's women as ignorant and downtrodden beasts of burden, the women were in fact highly conscious of their

oppression and displayed the capacity to change their fate through many avenues. Even when they were not formally organized, the women took advantage of different opportunities for their personal liberation. The FAWC attracted a very large number of women. When the new message of national liberation came the women who were already disposed to act for their personal freedom were able to form an alliance with the freedom fighters for national liberation.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

The colonial histories of the two case studies of Kenya and Zimbabwe highlight the similarity of violent conquest experienced by the indigenous African peoples and the manner of pauperization of the African populations. As the men were forced into an urban waged labour, the women became the most oppressed members of their societies, being subjugated under the rural patriarchies and treated mercilessly by the colonial officers. In the two case studies African women took personal and political initiatives to liberate themselves by seizing opportunities which were offered mostly by Christian missions providing refuge and education for women. Women empowered themselves by taking advantage of new opportunities rather than accepting the abject status which colonialism assigned to them. Women joined political parties, trade unions, church women's groups and national women's clubs movement to demand an end to polygamy, bride price, domestic violence, improved education and the franchise.(Stott 1989: 11). Despite these similarities women in Zimbabwe were more aware of and concerned to eliminate customary forms of female subordination than their Kenyan counterparts.

## **Chapter 3: Kenyan Women in Mau Mau War**

### **3.1 Introduction**

In chapter 2 I discussed several examples of Kikuyu women's political activism in reaction to colonial exploitation. This chapter analyzes the roles women played during the Mau Mau war for independence and how their participation empowered them politically. I argue that Mau Mau ideology not only aimed at national liberation and land restoration, but also to regenerate aspects of traditional Kikuyu culture. Kikuyu traditional culture embodies ideas of male dominance over women and restricts opportunities for women's political empowerment. I also discuss the role of women's organizations both during the war and after independence. By using the example of Maendeleo ya Wanawake (MYWO) which the colonial government created to undermine women's support of the liberation war I also argue that women did not have an autonomous women's organization to advocate for their interests or to consolidate any political gains (if any) they made during the war. Even after independence MYWO continued to be allied and controlled by the state for significant periods of its history. I use the Green Belt Movement as an example of an autonomous organization which functioned within the framework of women's empowerment which its leader Wangari Maathai used for entry into the national political arena. I conclude that women's role in the Mau Mau war did not in fact elevate their political status in the post-independence history of Kenya. I will use women's representation in Kenya's parliament, appointments to executive offices and judiciary positions as indicators of political empowerment.

### **3.2. Kenyan women in the Mau Mau war and the political outcomes**

In the following section I will discuss how women functioned in the context of the Mau Mau ideology and discuss if they were politically empowered by any of the roles they played during the war. Kikuyu women who joined the Mau Mau war were mainly rural women who also wanted access to land as a source of economic security. Several of the women who became prominent in the movement had a highly developed political consciousness and a high sense of commitment to the ideology of Mau Mau. Their life histories sometimes indicated personal losses and tragic encounters by their ancestors or relatives with the

colonial conquerors or settlers. For example some of the women warriors had ancestors who were killed during the colonial conquest of Kenya, others had relatives who had been evicted from settler farms and had been part of the dispossessed that went to Olenguruone but had to leave again in perpetual search for land. These women knew why they were fighting.

Mau Mau supporters began the political process by taking a series of oaths of loyalty as they rose through the ranks of the movement. The highest oaths required the greatest level of commitment to the cause with the expectation of exceptional sacrifices for the movement (Rosberg and Nottingham 1966: 248). Oaths served to build solidarity and intensify the political consciousness among movement members. Wambui Otieno was an example of a committed supporter of the Mau Mau who took her first oath at age sixteen. As part of her initiation she ingested a brew of goat blood and soil after which she recited the Mau Mau pledge:

I swore to: 1) Fight for the soil of Gikuyu and Mumbi's children, which had been stolen from them by the whites. 2) If possible get a gun from a white or a black collaborator and any other valuables or money to help strengthen the movement. 3) Kill anyone who was against the movement, even if that person was my brother. 4) Never reveal what had just happened or any other information disclosed to me as a member of the movement, but always to do my utmost to strengthen the movement; and if I didn't keep my words, may the oath kill me (Otieno 1998: 33).

Wambui Otieno took her second oath at the age of eighteen, while her third oath took place at the home of a revered woman militant Wairimu wa Wagaca whose praise name was 'mother of the people'. Most Mau Mau members took the 'batuni' or 'warrior oath' as their third oath, which proclaimed that violence was the only avenue to redress the people's grievances, and the oath takers must commit to fight to regain Kikuyu land, obtain political independence and expel Europeans from Kenya (Rosberg and Nottingham 1966: 248; Presley, 1992: 129; and Otieno 1998: 35). Otieno took nine oaths.

A few women played leadership roles during these oathing ceremonies by recruiting new members, hosting the oathing ceremonies in their gardens, and actually administering the

oaths. Women who had been leaders of the Mumbi Central Association of the 1930s continued to be recognized as political leaders in the rural areas and they administered the Mau Mau oaths (Presley, 1992: 126-127). Women went into battle and worked in the military camps in the forests. Some of the activities women engaged in during oathing were not uplifting to the women. The higher levels of oathing ‘incorporated features relating to female sexuality, and women were required for the performance of these rites. Menstrual blood was an ingredient in some oath concoctions and various higher oaths included sexual acts’ (Kanogo 1987b: 86). Overall women were integral to the Mau Mau movement; they were in it in their own right, ‘they gained new responsibilities which made them available for the struggle against colonial power’ (Santoru, 1996: 256).

Ideally consciousness raising among the oppressed and poor is a democratic process to free the people from domination, exploitation and deprivation. In the Mau Mau war oaths were supposed to raise the people’s consciousness but only male leaders seem to have devised the oaths and the accompanying initiation acts. As Otieno narrated about her oathing ceremony she inexplicably received a hard slap before commencing the oathing process. Kanogo (1987a) also noted that force was used to initiate the overseers in the white settler farms (134). At the higher levels of oathing, beside the ingredients of goat meat, goat blood and soil, were added menstrual blood and even sexual acts. For these latter ceremonies a group of young women were available to perform sexual acts during their menstruation. Despite individual women’s leadership roles it appears that the young women were mere components for the oaths; they appear to be instruments without agency and not active subjects in the proceedings that required their presence. The following description of a ceremony for the fourth Mau Mau oath which involved the participation of young girls would advance the initiate’s political and military status in Mau Mau hierarchy, but does not tell us that the young woman would also benefit politically from her participation:

The whole front of the ram had been cut off including the penis; I (male informant) was made to squat on the ground in the circle. The meat was placed on my penis and chest, I held it in place and ate one end of the meat. The girl stood on one side, the meat and the penis of the ram were then placed in her vagina, who was at that time having her ‘monthlies’. It was given back to me and I was made to eat parts of it,

including the penis and the testicles... The girl's name was Waithera. I heard she has taken five oaths. She was not a whore... There are ten girls, and they are used when they have their 'monthlies' if the fourth oath is given. This is part of their job (Rhodes House Manuscript Afr. S.424, 1954, quoted in Kanogo 1987b: 86).

We do not know why this particular oath was constructed in this manner or if women participated in the construction of the oath. The male initiate commented that the woman was not a prostitute, but was there any stigma attached to the young women participating in these sexual acts? Were there any limitations on how often the women were called upon to engage in these acts? While the oaths were used to raise the people's consciousness some of the methods appear to be exploitative of women. I have not conducted research to find out how these processes were perceived by the women, or what their understanding of them was.

Ideally an empowerment process would involve participants in dialogue and discussion within the community of the oppressed. However the Mau Mau did not control any liberated zones in the settled areas of Kikuyu land. They had no base from which their political organizers could engage its civilian supporters in dialogue or enable the guerrillas to blend into the civilian population. The Mau Mau could only operate in secret and therefore could not establish a stable relationship with their civilian supporters in general or with women. Forest fighters frequently operated through stealth or surprise encounters with civilians who had to make quick decisions of assistance and who were also afraid of the guerrillas because they had not had the opportunity for dialogue with them. As will be discussed later the colonial government had a huge propaganda advantage over the Mau Mau to the extent that a significant number of Kikuyu did not support the liberation army, and most of the other ethnic groups in Kenya also isolated the guerrillas.

In spite of the above critique it is believed that one-quarter of all Kikuyu women actively supported the rebellion. Women played various roles in the Mau Mau as oath administrators, combatants, organizers of weapons procurement from enemy soldiers, judges, and procurers of food and supplies for the forest fighters. In many instances they also played gender stereotypical roles as mothers, homemakers and care givers of their communities both in the combat zones and in civilian settings during the emergency years. Overall women performed

both traditional and non traditional gender roles, some of which were politically empowering for a few of them.

Some women lived in the forests as guerrillas and in various other capacities. In many instances traditional male dominant ideologies intervened and prevented women's political empowerment. Women who played warrior roles had to convince the male warriors that they too were good fighters. According to Kanogo (1987b), 'Kikuyu men resented and strongly opposed the presence of women in the forest and initially relegated them to familiar domestic chores. The forest women objected to this assignment and proved capable of executing male (military) tasks' (89). In order to attain a leadership and military position a woman had to take the '*batuni*' the third oath which indicated her total dedication to the cause, and from this stage gender differentiation did not matter within the Inner Secret Council of Mau Mau (Kanogo 1987a : 146). A former female warrior testified that the 'Mau Mau would not oppose what a female said. A brave woman would have a rifle and fight like the men' (147). Elizabeth Gachika was representative of a female combatant who engaged in military operations with male warriors from 1953 to 1955. Gachika said: 'I shot many ... I went with the men on raids. The man with me refused to shoot. I took the gun and shot and then we ran away' (Presley 1992: 136). The women's military abilities impressed the men sufficiently so that women became members of dual-sex political councils where they participated in decision-making. Some of the names of other women who assumed political and military roles have been recorded in the history books: Muthoni Ngatha who was designated Field Marshal, while Wagiri Njoroge was crowned Queen of Mau Mau which occurred at about the time that Queen Elizabeth II was being crowned (Kanogo 1987a: 89). In August 1953 the Aberdare forest leaders decided that a woman could attain the rank up to 'Colonel' if she merited it (88).

More stories of bravery by individual women that have been recorded in the historiography of Mau Mau include: Wamuyu Gakuru, nicknamed 'Cinda Reri' who led 200 women combatants under General China and Field Marshal Kimathi in the Nyandarua forest (Kabira and Nzioki 1993: 37-38). Wanjiru Nyamarutu was General-in-Charge of Food in the Ndothua, Nessuit, Gichobo and Menegai hill forests in Njoro and Nakuru areas. Her work was of utmost importance for the survival of the forest forces. Other women like Rebecca



Njeri Kairi, Wambui Wagara, Priscilla Wambaki, Mary Wanjiko, Nduta wa Kore, Virginia Gachege, Margo wa Mimi and Mary Nyarurui, Elizabeth Wanjiko and Elizabeth Gachika were notable in administering the oaths, organizing food and materials for the forest fighters, providing safe houses and even transiting fighters into the forests (Kanogo 1987a: 143-144; Presley 1992: 127).

However, women in the forest camps mostly did domestic work: getting firewood, cooking, washing, cleaning and providing sexual services for male guerrillas, the latter being considered a contribution for the cause. There is no indication that women's domestic tasks were given equal value to other roles men performed in the forest. The Mau Mau did not develop an ideology that expressed equality in gender relationships. As discussed earlier combat women had to fight for equality before they obtained the status they deserved but not all women had the capacity or skills to negotiate for recognition of their contributions, regardless of what their tasks were. It was necessary to have an ideology that recognised women's contributions and gave high status to women's domestic work as was later developed in Guinea-Bissau during their liberation war (Urdang 1979: 127). Performing sexual services to male fighters was certainly an expression of women's subordination to the male fighters. The Mau Mau leadership recognized the dangers of women's sexual exploitation in these relationships by declaring at the end of 1953 that any sexual liaisons were effectively marriages (Kanogo 1987b: 88). It is not clear to what extent the women had a right to choose their partners. Those women who attained high status from the war were not numerous enough to empower all the other women who also made diverse contributions to the war.

Some women left their children behind with grand-parents to go the forest. On behalf of such women others in the civilian army assisted the family, while the husband was also expected to take full care of his family. Men who were left at home were apprehensive about opposing their wives' political action for fear of reprisals from the Mau Mau movement. The idea that a man would be motivated by fear not by conviction to assist in family care during the liberation war indicates that the Mau Mau's consciousness-raising efforts had not gained the loyalty of all Kikuyu. This made it possible for the counter-insurgency message of the colonial government to reach other Kikuyu and undermine the work of the Mau Mau war.

The issue of having to convince men to support the liberation actions of their wives is a recurrent one in other liberation movements such as in Mozambique and Zimbabwe (Arnfred 1988: 6; Kriger 1992: 194).

A few women raised their children in the forest camps. In some cases if the Mau Mau realised that a woman in the forest had young children at home she would be persuaded to return home from the forest and to function as a civilian supporter of the war; the same obtained for a breast-feeding mother. Most of the women in the forest were single women and widows. If a woman among these became pregnant in the forest, in theory she would be escorted out of the combat zone and dropped off near a government station with the expectation that a government agency would send her to a hospital. However due to the government's strict control of movement during the emergency it was more likely that such a woman would be arrested and have her baby in a detention centre while all forms of pressure would be put on her to give evidence about Mau Mau activity in the vicinity of her capture. Such women gave birth in prison and their children often died due to malnutrition. If a pregnant woman stayed in the forest an older woman would help her during delivery of the baby. Pregnancy was not looked upon favourably in the forest military camp. If a woman warrior became pregnant her rifle would be taken away from her as punishment and her partner was also punished (Kanogo 1987a: 146-147). However when a pregnant combatant was dismissed from the forest, her lover was not sent out along with her, also an indication of the unequal treatment of women and men under the same circumstances.

Generally the forest military camps formed a base for different categories of women and men who helped to prosecute the Mau Mau war. For many women combatants gender roles were upset; also for some women who left their families behind to go to the forest to help the guerrillas they too upset gender roles. But a larger category of women performed stereotypical gender tasks. Although their contributions might not have been very dramatic they too provided essential services for the war. It was not clear if the Mau Mau movement gave equal recognition and status to all women who contributed to Mau Mau war.

Other women worked in the cities of Nairobi and Nakuru to support the Mau Mau. Because women had easier mobility than men during the war, their urban-based subversive work gave them the opportunity to play leadership roles and they acquired extra power in their

communities (Presley 1992:129; Kanogo 1987a: 147). For example Nwajiru Nyamarutu was a Judge in Nakuru's Mau Mau Court. She also organized the preparation and distribution of food in an assigned area, with a staff of oathed assistants. She raised funds which were used to buy clothes, medicines, scrap metal and bottles for making ammunition. She liaised with sympathetic hospital staff for medical supplies for the fighters (Kanogo 1987a: 144). She accomplished a lot in sustaining the guerrilla warriors and earned the rank of General-in-Charge of Food. Although on the surface women in charge of procurement and distribution were performing gender stereotypical roles, in the type of guerrilla war where the Mau Mau were isolated by the colonial military and its technical superiority and the uncompromising stance of white settlers, Nyamarutu exhibited great management skills for coordinating the work of urban and rural women who were able to transmit supplies to the forest fighters. Nyamarutu was deservedly recognized as a General by the Mau Mau army.

Wambui Otieno exemplified another category of Mau Mau civilian warriors who worked as scouts. She had taken her fifth oath by the time she became a scout and spy for the movement. She organized a network of contacts comprising government secretaries, house servants, and taxi drivers. They obtained government documents on the government's plans on the war which she copied for transmission to the fighters. As a scout Otieno visited police stations and home guard stations to reconnoitre the best approaches and exit for attacks. On several occasions she was caught in the wrong place and was arrested but was able to extricate herself from difficult situations. Any mistakes could have caused her death. For example she was at a road bloc with a gun in her bag but managed to avoid being searched. During the emergency a person caught with a gun was subject to a mandatory death sentence (Otieno 1998: 39). She also worked with a staff of other women who posed as prostitutes to get arms and money off soldiers while taxi drivers were on standby to transport their catches to their forest destinations. Her female accomplices went to barracks with soldiers and reported on troop movements.

The use of the female body for political purposes during war situations is controversial. What might be the consequences for other Kikuyu women that these soldiers encounter after they discovered that Kikuyu 'prostitutes' had stolen their arms and money? Would they be especially harsh to other Kikuyu women who came under their custody? Would they

consider all Kikuyu women as prostitutes? Toward the end of the emergency period in Kenya Wambui Otieno herself was in detention and was repeatedly raped by her interrogator, Rudolph Speed, while incarcerated in Lamu Island. Her rape resulted in the birth of her daughter Jane. Rape has been labelled as a crime of war. On the other hand how far should militaries encourage female soldiers to endanger their lives by using the female body to get weapons or information?

In concluding this section of Kikuyu women's participation in the Mau Mau war I have highlighted how many women broke traditional gender roles especially those who engaged in combat. Women's support for the war sustained the liberation struggle. The ideology of the Mau Mau was however very narrow. According to Green (1990) 'Mau Mau ideology was not revolutionary but oppositional in its relation to the colonial state' (82). The Kenyan nationalists and Mau Mau male warriors wanted to replace the colonial powers with their own leaders and used the oathing rituals to bind the population to their cause. Their consciousness-raising strategies exposed the grievances of the people but they did not continue the dialogue of political change into how the new society they were fighting for would benefit all categories of people including the women. Women did not have the opportunity to raise gender-specific issues during the war but they acquired 'greater political responsibilities, yet they were not able to develop political discourse on those specific issues which in earlier years, had characterized their "nationalist" experiences' (Santoru, 1996: 260). Some women were empowered by the roles they played in the war, but because the ideology of the Mau Mau was not transformative, many of the empowering roles were not carried forward into the post-colonial political life of Kenya.

### **3.3 The colonial government's counter-insurgency**

During the emergency many of the emerging western educated male elite in Kenya were incarcerated on suspicion of being Mau Mau members. The colonial administration eventually identified the different branches of the nationalist movement and isolated them from each other. First the government arrested 106 western educated elite who remained in prison throughout the period of the emergency (Anderson 2005: 63). The peasant radicals with a few educated leaders comprised the fighting forces in the forests. The civilian wing of the Mau Mau army was mostly women.

The colonial administration realised the powerful role that women played in the Mau Mau and was determined to cut off the support women provided through a number of strategies: a) arresting large numbers of women; (b) a villagization program; (c) government control of Maendeleo ya Wanawake (MYWO), a women's organization used for indoctrinating village women on the benefits of colonialism.

(a) The administration arrested leaders of the 'passive wing' (the civilian army) of the Mau Mau that supplied the necessities for the survival of the forest fighters. The colonial authorities knew that women made up the majority of this group and launched a major propaganda campaign denying the agency of the women as conscious and willing adherents of the ideology of the Mau Mau. Instead the authorities characterized women's role in the Mau Mau as forced upon them and used the prisons and detention camps for the psychological cleansing and political indoctrination of the women detainees. The women were forced to renounce all allegiance to the Mau Mau. The figures in Table 1 shows that the number of women in prison increased from 347 in 1952 to 13, 265 in 1955 as the Mau Mau war progressed. With the massive arrests and imprisonment of women the forest fighters were starved of supplies and Mau Mau declined as a fighting force.

**Table 3.1:**

**Women Admitted to Prisons in Kenya during Mau Mau war, 1952-1958**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>No Sentenced</b>	<b>Recidivists</b>	<b>!st Offenders</b>
<b>1952</b>	<b>347</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>n/a</b>
<b>1953</b>	<b>4,415</b>	<b>3,132</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>3,077</b>
<b>1954</b>	<b>9,609</b>	<b>8,494</b>	<b>290</b>	<b>8,204</b>
<b>1955</b>	<b>13,265</b>	<b>11,467</b>	<b>1,506</b>	<b>9,961</b>
<b>1956</b>	<b>8,900</b>	<b>7,906</b>	<b>1,627</b>	<b>6,279</b>
<b>1957</b>	<b>8,854</b>	<b>7,472</b>	<b>2,068</b>	<b>5,404</b>
<b>1958</b>	<b>7,295</b>	<b>5,976</b>	<b>1,873</b>	<b>4,103</b>

**Source:** Presley 1992: 137.

The prison facilities that existed prior to the emergency proved to be inadequate for housing the large number of women who were arrested during the Mau Mau war. The government had to extend Kamiti prison in Nairobi to house the women prisoners. By the end of 1954 Kamiti prison had 1335 women prisoners and 1010 women detainees (Presley 1992:137; Santoru 1996: 261).

Government Community Development Department staff and Christian missionaries participated in socializing Mau Mau women away from their adherence to the movement. The women began their prison experience by enduring difficult treatment such as physical punishment, sexual assault, frequent use of solitary confinement, reduced diet, and penal diet as methods of discipline. The women were put to work on road building, terracing, quarrying stone, raising vegetables and fruits for the prison. Their food and clothing were inadequate and they were constantly asked to confess and repent their allegiance to the Mau Mau. Some women who gave birth in prison lost their babies due to inadequate care (Presley 1992: 140). These types of treatment were intended to punish the women for their association with the Mau Mau and were part of the process of expunging the 'evil' ideology of Mau Mau from them. In place of Mau Mau ideology "good values" were instilled into the women, who would then be re-integrated into their communities (Santoru 1996: 262-263).

Women prisoners were graded according to their willingness to cooperate and accept re-education. The most recalcitrant prisoners were assigned the hard manual labour of road building, quarrying, making bricks and thatching houses in the camp compounds (Santoru 1996: 263). They graduated to doing home crafts, sewing and modern method of growing vegetables. The most cooperative prisoners received benefits in the form of locating their children and husbands, and very importantly they were encouraged to write letters to persuade their incarcerated husbands to also renounce Mau Mau. The effect of the colonial administration's programme of cleansing and reindoctrination of Mau Mau women was to disempower them and make them reluctant to claim credit for contributing to the nationalist cause. It is noteworthy that the so-called new skills being taught to the women did not address the issue of land sufficient and fertile enough to support female agriculture with which the women could feed their children.

(b) The villagization programmed involved putting the Kikuyu into guarded villages overlooked by forts built on the surrounding hilltops. People in the villages were under 23-hour curfew, and could only get food for one hour under guard. The population ‘was set to work digging a wide, deep ditch along more than a hundred miles of forest boundary,’ to isolate the forest fighters (Rosberg and Nottingham 1966: 294). Village women were prevented from giving food to guerrillas in their farms, so villagers were forced to build roads (the road of suicide) from their villages to the forest to make it easy for government vehicles to pursue the forest fighters and catch any women passing food to them (Likimani 1985: 74). The Kikuyu had to burn their old homesteads and build new villages. They had to dig terraces and plant trees on hill sides for soil conservation so that their gardens would yield better crops. But done within the context of forced labour the work only provoked cynicism from the villagers who knew they would not benefit since they did not have time to cultivate their gardens (79). Considering that this same type of labour demands provoked a militant response from Kikuyu women in 1947 and 1948 it is remarkable that the colonial administration continued its dictatorial imposition of forced labour on projects that did not address the fundamental issues of the war, which were the injustices of land alienation. The colonial government made no demands on the settler populations on negotiating a fair land access policy to accommodate the farming communities of Kenya.

In order to survive the harsh work and curfew conditions of forced communal labour the Kikuyu women revived their traditional mutual aid system of helping each other by shared responsibility for all the chores needed for family sustenance: ‘The one with food readily fed her neighbours and the children, the one with water gave to her neighbour, firewood was shared; milking was done for everyone’ (Likimani 1985: 73). In spite of their heroic efforts the villagers suffered horribly as their children died of malnutrition, women had miscarriages, and milking cows dried up due to neglect.

(c) The administration also created a women’s organization Maendeleo ya Wanawake (MYWO) through which to disseminate a new ideology of domesticity to the women. The government established a well-funded Community Development Department through which the authorities distributed material benefits to those who claimed they had been rehabilitated and were willing to accept British colonialism as a good thing for Kenyans. Whenever

Kikuyu women were released from prison they were sent to the tightly controlled villages. The Department of Community Development and Rehabilitation worked closely together with the European colonial women who ran Maendeleo ya Wanawake (MYWO) and provided social services for rural populations in the form of education, health care, water supply and childcare facilities (Presley 1992: 157). Kikuyu women who lived in the villages and those processed out of prison were taught domestic crafts – ‘sewing, cooking, child welfare, hygiene, singing, dancing and outdoor games’ at training centres and in the villages (Aubrey 1997: 47). After training, the women formed local clubs of MYWO and with funding from the Ministry of Community Development and Rehabilitation the clubs provided services such as running day nurseries, making and distributing soup, distributing milk to hungry children, and caring for orphans. In 1955/56 when Kikuyuland suffered famine the clubs increased the distribution of food and membership also increased. The children of people suspected of being Mau Mau were denied milk, and this further increased the number of people who pledged allegiance to the colonial system (51). The women used their declaration of allegiance to avoid stigmatizing their children and to ensure that their children had access to free milk during the famine. The clubs taught citizenship courses, ran local libraries, distributed newspapers, books, films, and organized fairs. The overall themes of these activities ‘stressed the positive benefits of colonialism for Kenya and the evils of Mau Mau’ (Presley 1992: 165). Local MYWOs were even credited with betraying and capturing Mau Mau.

The club members have been of value to the Security forces giving information freely and persuading others to give up Mau Mau. In at least one case they played an important part in the capture of a Mau Mau general (165).

The Mau Mau movement did not articulate a revolutionary ideology and it did not raise a political discourse on women’s liberation or equality. Upon the military defeat of the Mau Mau in 1956, the centre of Kenyan nationalism shifted to the urban male elite nationalists who had been incarcerated at the beginning of the emergency, but with whom the colonial government now negotiated a six-year transition to independence. During the transition to independence Kenyan women realized that they would not be able to access political power on the strength of their military contributions to the nationalist cause since the military route



to liberation had been destroyed and discredited, and the Kenyan women associated with the Mau Mau had been re-subjugated.

### **3.4 Women's search for empowerment in Kenya**

At independence Kenyan women had to reconfigure how to engage in politics to protect their socio-political interests not only in the rural areas but also in the national decision-making arenas. The new government of the Kenya African National Union (KANU) came out with a manifesto called *African Socialism*, rejecting traditional male-female relationships of gender domination. It also claimed that 'women's part in nation-building was equal to men's in every respect' (Wipper 1971: 431). But the reality was that 'independence did not bring any noticeable changes in their [women's] lot. It failed to involve them equally with men in the functioning of the country's economic, political and social institutions' (431). Wipper continued her critique by saying that educational opportunities were unequal for boys and girls in a country with as many females as men and that the government appeared to be building institutions that catered to men while treating women as adjuncts to the modernising process (431). Not having reaped any rewards for fighting along with men for national liberation women felt they had to act in their own interest and they chose to act through voluntary organizations (432).

From the early 1960s Kenyan women formed hundreds of organisations in response to President Kenyatta's exhortation for self-help and community development at the local level. The movement was called *Harambee*, a Swahili word meaning 'let us all pull together'. In 1970 the Government of Kenya established the Special Rural Development Programme to provide financial support to women and train their leaders. The funds provided seed money for agricultural projects in the rural areas. In Kiambu district between 40% and 50% of adult women belonged to groups. In Embu and Machakos about 20% of women were in groups. On average 10% of Kenyan women belonged to groups. Messages on family planning, health, nutrition, and general development were communicated to rural women through their groups. Politicians saw the significance of women's groups as sources of votes, while a wide range of government agents worked through them (Kabira and Nzioki 1993: 42-43). By far the largest number of women's groups at the local level focused on agricultural enterprises, while the groups also engaged in other types of economic and social

welfare activities such as credit granting, handicraft production, light manufacturing, sales, labour and construction, social welfare, real estate, education such as nursery schools, transport, mills and water projects (48). Many of these projects earn incomes for their members to cover expenses for their daily economic and welfare needs.

The governing elite also exploited women's labour by shifting the responsibility of rural development upon the shoulders of already overworked rural women. Many of these organizations were used to mobilize women to build schools, hospitals and roads that were reminiscent of colonial forced labour. The combined economic and community development projects that women's organizations engaged in did not alleviate the poverty of ordinary Kenyan women. Women's organizations also needed to address the structural conditions retarding Kenyan women through advocacy at the national level that would provide leadership and put political pressure to achieve women's political empowerment. Kenyan women's groups and organizations were strongly discouraged from playing 'political' roles, and organizations that attempted to advocate for women in political decision-making positions, rights to land, parity in education, protection from violence and domestic abuse were met with strong opposition from the male dominated political system.

Although by the time of independence in 1963 MYWO was the only women's organization with a national base, several other women's organizations were quickly established at the national level in the first post-independence decade. These were the Girl Guides Kenya (1963), the National Council of Women of Kenya (NCWK 1964), the Red Cross Kenya (1965), the Young Women's Christian Association, the Pathfinder International (1969), the Green Belt Movement (1977) which began as a project of the NCWK, and numerous church groups. Most of these organizations limited their work to catering to the welfare needs of Kenyan women. As noted above women's groups were discouraged from engaging in transformatory agendas on behalf of women. I will compare two of these early national level organizations, MYWO and the Green Belt Movement and examine to what extent they were able to advocate for women's empowerment in the context of the male dominated politics of Kenya.

### **3.5 Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organization (MYWO)**

The MYWO is the oldest and biggest national women's organization in Kenya with a strong resource base. In the 1950's the MYWO had been used very effectively for transmitting the colonial government's concept of development to a vast rural population. Still functioning with a high sense of political consciousness, Kenyan women captured the leadership of the MYWO in 1961 with the intention of using the organization for a liberatory agenda. At about this time Zimbabwean women too were using the Federation of African Women's Clubs which had a similar historical background as the MYWO, to redirect their colonial government's community development agenda to serve their needs (Rancho-Nilsson 1992). Since these two countries were both settler colonies it is possible that the colonial ideas on the development of African peoples were similar and that the African women in these two countries were aware of the ways their two organizations were set up and functioned. It is possible that the women in these two countries inspired each other in using these organizations to serve their liberatory aspirations.

At independence the MYWO had the highest profile among Kenyan women's national organizations and its new leaders intended to reorient it as an autonomous organization for women's empowerment. In the first decade of independence the MYWO leaders challenged the male images of African women as subservient citizens. In 1964 President of the MYWO stated, 'Women will no longer be subservient to men. May I remind you all that women need recognition, respect, privileges, participation, and their voices to be heard in all walks of life' (Wipper 1971: 433). Under Ruth Habwe (1968-71) the MYWO tried to exert political pressure over women's rights and equal employment conditions in the private and public sector. She advocated for an increase in places for women students at the University of Nairobi (Aubrey 1997: 56).

Even under pressure male politicians were adamantly ignoring the representation of women in political positions. There was no woman in the Kenyan parliament until 1969 when only one woman was elected into parliament (Nzomo 1997: 235). Although Kenyatta as President had the power to nominate up to 12 special seats to parliament he did not nominate any woman. During a 1966 by-election a woman candidate was sponsored by the Kenya African National Union (KANU) but she was pitted against a strong male candidate and she lost the

election. The party had not made any special effort to ensure that the woman candidate ran in a safe district (Wipper 1971: 437). In 1969 the parliament which had only men abolished the Affiliation Act which the colonial government had enacted in 1959 stipulating that an unmarried woman had the right to demand maintenance for her out-of-wedlock child from the father of her child. The all-male independence parliament removed this protection for women stating that under the Act a woman would unscrupulously claim support from several men for the same child (437). None of the parliamentarians produced any evidence that women had made such claims from more than one man. Many powerful men bear children with women who are powerless to make demands from them. Men usually do not pay child support for their children born out of wedlock. Some men in leadership positions have children with different women without taking responsibility for any of the children. The men gave no consideration to women who did not have the power to seek child support from the men. The MYWO was not able to advocate for the protection of women in this instance.

By the mid-1960s the MYWO wanted the government to recognise it as the main interest group working on behalf of women. The government ignored the MYWO's advocacy work on behalf of women (Aubrey 1997: 55). Aubrey notes that President Kenyatta 'concentrated power at the top in patriarchal institutions' that ensured Kikuyu political control of Kenya. He was surrounded by all-male advisers, and 'state policies were much more male and urban-focused rather than rural and female-focused' (55). It is noteworthy that Kenyatta and the new political class were heirs to the Kenya African Union which was also a male dominated political association of the 1940's. In their long history of association with women supporters the male political elite never made any promises or concessions of gender equality.

Under the presidency of Jane Kiano (1971-1984) the MYWO began to have a high public profile and became urban-oriented. Mrs Kiano invested heavily to construct expensive headquarters for the MYWO in Nairobi. Because Mrs Kiano's husband was a Minister in the Kenyatta administration, she got access to the President, while her husband lobbied for her within the KANU, the ruling party. The MYWO became strongly identified with the state and no longer advocated for gender equality. Mrs Kiano did not lobby for women's

representation in political positions. She conveyed a conservative ideology ‘which did not challenge Kenya’s patriarchy’. At a women’s group event, Mrs Kiano urged the women:

to co-operate with their husbands in order to build firm homes and condemned those women who because of their education thought they had to disobey their husbands. Earlier she publicly stated that Maendeleo's role was not to usurp the responsibilities or challenge the authority of men as the heads of homes but to build the country in co-operation with them. She explained why MYWO had embarked on enrolling men into its membership: ‘The simple reason is that we want men to acquaint themselves with our activities so that when we ask permission from our husbands to attend meetings far from our homes they should know what we are going to do’ (Wipper 1975: 107).

Aubrey believes that Mrs Kiano got access to President Kenyatta because she did not make radical demands for women’s rights. She was non-aggressive, non-challenging, and adhered to the protocol of subservient womanhood (Aubrey 1997: 59). She publicly opposed women’s liberation and equality and was not prepared to fight for women’s rights directly. Such behaviour was reminiscent of the colonial women’s attitude to the rural women in Kenya when they ran MYWO. Urban-based upper class women like Mrs Kiano already had all of their life’s necessities and did not see any reason to change the status quo. But the women in the rural areas needed land, cash incomes, and relief from the oppressive burdens of the gender division of labour. Both the urban male and female elite got the benefits of independence while they neglected the uneducated rural women who actually bore the burden of the nationalist struggle. Concerns like this are not limited to Kenya; rural women in Mozambique have also complained about the urban orientation of their country after independence while their government neglected the rural people who fought the liberation wars (Arnfred 1988: 7). The MYWO’s leaders should have instituted programmes for adult education, and even appropriate technology to ease women’s work burdens and free rural women to participate in decision-making on issues directly affecting their lives.

By neglecting the rich historic infrastructure of women’s groups in the rural areas the MYWO lost membership while other organizations grew in numbers. When the MYWO terminated its homecraft, literacy and nutrition classes which were inexpensive to run but

very useful to the ordinary grassroots members, the MYWO's decline was inevitable. Several headquarters leaders were on record blaming poor women for their misfortunes and the absenteeism of their husbands:

Chairman of MyW in Uasin Gishu district Mrs. Kathleen Kibiego told a large gathering of women. . . that no husband would like a dirty and lazy wife not prepared to contribute to the betterment of the home. Urging women to redouble their efforts in building Kenya she said while women in other countries helped to develop their countries, it was shameful to note that in Kenya there were still women who preferred to gossip instead of doing something useful (EAS, 26 March 1970).

Miss Grace John, Community Development Officer in Mombasa [and a former MyW leader] told women that they must not sit idle and depend on their husbands for every help 'as this makes some husbands desert their wives'. She warned them that the government would be watching them and if they did not fully use the things given them [she had just given them a sewing machine], it could withdraw them (EAS, May 1970) (Wipper 1975: 110).

Some of these MYWO leaders sounded very much like the colonial women who did not understand the hardships of the rural women. Since the MYWO leadership had stopped making liberatory demands from the state on behalf of rural women, they lost their mass base and were vulnerable for cooptation and takeover by the ruling party, which actually happened in 1987. In 1992 MYWO regained its autonomy as a regular civil society organization as part of the democratization and multi-party arrangement in Kenya.

In conclusion it is appropriate to remark that MYWO had the opportunity early in the post-independence period to use the organization as an instrument of advocacy on issues like gender equality, political representation, polygamy, land security, and discrimination in educational opportunities against women. Just as the men claimed political office because of their role in the nationalist war, the MYWO should have advocated on behalf of the women to push for similar recognition that ordinary women also contributed to the national liberation war and deserved to be at the decision-making arenas of the state. The MYWO should have sustained its pressure on the political elite on the issues listed above. However,

in order to achieve an empowerment agenda for women the MYWO should have continued to mobilize its women's base in the rural areas by a sustained consciousness-raising programme of combined income-generating activities with political education and discussion sessions, while using this base to put pressure on the political elite to enact transformatory policies. Also the MYWO did not form an urban alliance with other political associations. Instead it identified with the state and the ruling party and was not successful in changing the male dominant culture of national politics. It should however be acknowledged that the MYWO functioned in a hostile atmosphere for women in politics. The MYWO became a powerless client of the state with no bargaining power. Other groups emerged that were autonomous of the state and worked more effectively with grassroots women.

### **3.6 Green Belt Movement (GBM)**

Wangari Maathai founded the organization in 1977 to work with peasant women in grassroots environmental conservation, especially soil conservation and fuel wood needs of women. In this section I argue that Maathai linked her environmental agenda with the struggle for democracy, made alliances with the opposition groups, challenged male monopoly in Kenyan politics and together toppled the KANU regime's 40-year hegemony. Women's representation in parliament increased in the last two elections of 2002 and 2007. Maathai herself was elected to parliament.

In Kenya, like in many parts of Africa, women are responsible for food production, firewood gathering, cooking, and fetching water. When the environment is degraded women are unable to perform any of these family responsibilities. Erosion in Kenya was depleting the soil causing poor harvests, women were cooking less due to lack of wood and children were given less nutritious foods causing malnutrition in children, and health concerns for the elderly (Maathai 2007: 123). Rural Kenyan women revealed during a survey conducted by the National Council of Women of Kenya (NCWK) that they did not have sufficient wood for fuel, fencing, fodder for their animals or water to cook or drink. Most rural women were poor and so they could not switch to metal fences or cooking stoves (124). Maathai was the president of the NCWK (1980–1987); she was a trained biologist and trained in veterinary sciences. She understood the symptoms of environmental degradation: 'deforestation,

devegetation, unsustainable agriculture, and soil loss' (125). She wanted a local solution for these problems which she thought could be addressed by planting trees. Maathai compared the loss of soil to loss of national territory which should be reclaimed with a sense of urgency. It required mobilizing people to solve the problem. Trees were important not only for the daily material needs of the people; trees would also offer shade for people and animals, protect watersheds, conserve the soil, while fruit trees would provide food.

Maathai started a tree planting project under the auspices of the NCWK called *Save the Land Harambee*. This project was formed in the spirit of *Harambee*, President Kenyatta's self-help philosophy and of community mobilization which many Kenyans could identify with. Rather than wait for the government to provide solutions for local problems communities mobilized their energies and solved their own problems. By this time thousands of Kenyan women were participating in *harambee* projects. However, as I critiqued earlier, many of the *harambee* groups were focused on welfarist projects that did not address fundamental issues of poverty and powerlessness. Women in these self-help groups were mobilized but they did not engage in consciousness-raising. On the other hand Maathai planned to organize *Save the Land Harambee* as a transformatory organization. One of the first activities of *Save the Land Harambee* took place in August 1977 when NCWK planted trees on a farm in Naivasha owned by a cooperative of 800 women (Maathai 2007: 132). The concept of the 'green belt' is for women and communities to 'plant seedlings in rows of at least a thousand trees to form 'green belts' that would restore to the earth its cloth of green' (137). Green Belt women's groups were organized in rural areas to grow tree seedlings which they sold to cooperatives, schools, churches, civil societies, and individual farmers or landowners that planted these seedlings on their own lands. The women monitor the growth of the trees and were paid from funds from international agencies supporting the movement. The GBM initially fulfilled an income-generating need for rural women through the cash the women earned from their seedlings. Up to 6000 GBM groups of women were formed and Kenyans planted 30 million trees by 2004. The movement also incorporated consciousness-raising seminars during group meetings where political questions were posed:



Why we were losing firewood, why there was malnutrition, scarcity of clean water, topsoil loss and erratic rains, why people could not pay school fees, and why the infrastructure was falling apart (173).

Through group discussions the Green Belt members understood not only the science of environmental degradation, but also the various ways that the government corruptly favoured a few people with public lands which contributed to the destruction of watersheds and biodiversity, very similar to what happened under colonialism. Seminar members were encouraged to be politically aware and hold their political leaders accountable for the better management of all national resources. The process of conscientization took place from 1977 until Maathai began to make political alliances with young urbanites, especially university students in the late 1980s, when Maathai shifted some of the group's operation to the national level and began to address environmental issues which were caused by controversial political decisions which impacted poor people and women.

By seeking political solutions to the fundamental issues that poor Kenyans faced in their daily lives, Maathai was going to be subjected to retaliation from the male political elite of Kenya. The political landscape was always bleak for women in Kenya. In the first 25 years of independence (1963-1988) women's representation in parliament was negligible. As noted earlier the MYWO was discouraged from demanding positions for women in public institutions. Women who tried to run for office were not supported by the male-dominated KANU. For example, when Ruth Habwe, a former president of the MYWO, wanted to run for parliament in 1964 KANU refused her candidacy. When she ran as an independent she was suspended from the party. The government claimed that women were not yet ready for political office (Nzomo 1997: 235). Between 1963 and 1992 there were never more than 4 women in parliament after each election, which meant that such few members were not able to sponsor gender equity legislation in parliament. In order to empower women and address women's issues Maathai determined to become more overtly political and to begin to work toward increasing women's representation in parliament. In 1982 when Maathai registered to run for a by-election for a seat in parliament both the electoral office and the judiciary disqualified her candidacy (Maathai 2007:160).

The male political leaders who had silenced and co-opted MYWO were not ready to tolerate Maathai's entry into politics at the national level. In 1989 Maathai campaigned against President Daniel Arap Moi's plan to build a sixty-two storey skyscraper and a four-storey statue of himself next to it in Uhuru Park in Nairobi. The response of the government and male politicians to Maathai's opposition was to abuse and humiliate her personally, again indicating that they did not permit a woman's rights to question the decisions made by men. Kenyan President Arap Moi pressured the MYWO women to attack her, which they did. The women claimed she had belittled the President and should seek guidance from other women on proper feminine behaviour. The government also intimidated other Kenyan women's organizations by requiring that all foreign donations to Kenyan women's organizations must be channelled through the government. The GBM was evicted from their government office. The reaction to Maathai was an effective deterrence against female presence in Kenyan politics regardless of a woman's political and leadership qualifications. The tradition of male monopoly of politics which was evident from the nationalist times continued for three decades after independence. In December 1998 Maathai and GBM women again challenged the government's sale of more than a third of the 1,000-hectare Karura forest to land developers for a luxury housing project. She was successful in this campaign (Maathai, 2007: 262).

I have demonstrated that the GBM operates within a framework of the empowerment paradigm whereby this women-oriented national organization engaged in consciousness-raising, income generation, popular education and political action to confront powerful politicians who imposed authoritarian domination over women. The movement contrasts favourably with the MYWO which was not able to stand up to male politicians. Contrary to the MYWO, the Green Belt Movement never neglected its rural base for urban politics but continued to involve all its members in all its campaigns at all levels of national life. Maathai's work gave confidence to ordinary people to stand up for their environment, for their human rights, for women's rights and environmental rights. According to her, 'women have been able to demonstrate their creativity and leadership skills. Many men have been positively influenced by the women and have followed their example through the initiation of their own tree nurseries' (Maathai 2004: 72).

In December 2002, Maathai was elected to Kenya's parliament with 98 percent of the vote, to represent the Tetu constituency, Nyeri district in Central Kenya. The longstanding post-independence regime of KANU was overthrown by a coalition of pro-democracy and human rights groups which formed new political parties after 1992. Part of the credit for this must be given to the GBM a women's organization led by a woman in alliance with pro-democracy groups.

In the new parliament of January 2003, President Mwai Kibaki appointed Maathai Assistant Minister for Environment and Natural Resources in Kenya's ninth parliament. As Member of Parliament Maathai was able to pass legislation to benefit the lives of poor rural women. Maathai participated in making the laws on forestry, mining, and wildlife conservation. One such law is the Forests Act of 2005. Government resources are already benefiting people in the form of better health care, improved education, and free primary education. The new constitution has provision for a Bill of Rights, reduction of presidential powers, and devolution of powers to local governments. Kibaki's government has ordered the introduction of Environmental Studies in schools and teacher training colleges. The government has also introduced a Bill in Parliament for the protection of the environment and forests (Mathai 2004: 64-67).

Due to the political campaigns of Maathai and the GBM the representation of women in the Kenyan parliament has taken a gradual upward trend from 2002 when 16 women (7%) were elected into parliament as demonstrated Table 2 below. In 2007 the number of women increased to 22 parliamentarians making up 9.8% of the parliament. It is up to these women to continue to build a parliamentary alliance with sympathetic men who will sponsor legislation for the liberation and empowerment of women in Kenya.

**Table3.2: Women in Kenya's Parliament**

Year	Men	Women	% women
1969	169	1	0.17
1974	166	4	2.40
1979	170	3	1.76
1983	157	1	0.64
1988	186	2	0.93
1992	196	6	3.26
1997	216	8	3.57
2002	208	16	7.14
2007	203	22	9.82

Source: Compiled from the Archives of InterParliamentary Union at <http://www.ipu.org/english/parline/reports/2167.htm>, accessed March 18, 2012.

### 3.7 Conclusion

Part of the problem of evaluating the impact of the Kikuyu women's contribution to national politics go back to the ambivalence of Kenyans and the international community toward the Mau Mau war and its place in the history of national liberation in Kenya. In more recent times a new generation of Kenyan women now view the Mau Mau experience as a positive contribution of women to national liberation. This younger generation of Kenyan women are inspired to assume decision-making roles in both the political and economical arenas. Particularly in rural communities, the Mau Mau women are eulogized in songs and continue to be an inspiration to village women and the urban poor. Women's cooperatives, self-help groups, and economic projects all get inspiration from the Mau Mau women of an earlier era

(Kanogo 1987b: 96). The skills women learned in organizing both in the forest war and in the non-combat roles during the Mau Mau war were put to organizing numerous developmental associations. Most of these associations are rural based. Contrary to the MYWO's neglect of its rural constituency, the GBM saw the rural areas as the base to mobilize women, in this case for environmental conservation. In the process peasant women became politically empowered; they gained new knowledge about conservation but also how to make government accountable to the people. Although the male dominant culture of Kenya did not credit women for their contribution to the Mau Mau war and national liberation, the GBM and many other new women's organizations have worked to empower women politically. Many of these organizations are now able to operate with agendas for social and political transformation due to the new enabling political climate which the struggles of Maathai and the GBM have created the space for.

## **Chapter 4: Women and Guerrilla Warfare in Zimbabwe**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In the first part of this chapter I shall discuss African women's participation both in the nationalist party politics of the immediate post-World War II era (1940s to 1965) and in the guerrilla war of liberation (1966 to 1980) in Zimbabwe. Here I will highlight the issues that radicalized different social groups, including women, who supported the two stages of the anti-colonial struggles in Zimbabwe. For the military phase I will focus on the motives of women to join the war efforts with special emphasis on aspects of women's life stories that elucidate their process of political consciousness. Young women went to training camps for diverse reasons to join the liberation army, while adult women who remained in their homes, especially in the rural areas, also became incorporated into the war efforts. I will also discuss women's induction, training, deployment, and assignments in the military camps. Within these contexts I will examine women's agency in negotiating for gender equality. In the second part of the chapter I argue that the government neglected women's aspirations for gender equality. The state machinery to promote gender issues was ineffective and this necessitated the development of autonomous women's organizations to promote female equality. These experiences are similar to those of Kenyan women in the post-Mau Mau period. I will evaluate how such women's groups and movements have contributed to promoting gender equality.

### **4.2 Zimbabwean women in the liberation war**

Western-educated, emerging African elite formed political parties in Zimbabwe that articulated the grievances of the urban poor and got a mass following among women, workers, traders, students and trade unions. These parties were: Southern Rhodesia African National Congress (SRANC) under the leadership of Joshua Nkomo (1957 to 1959); and the National Democratic Party (NDP, 1960 to 1963), also with Joshua Nkomo as president. The NDP had both a mass following made up of its original SRANC base, and prominent intellectuals (Ranger 1968: 240). However the NDP comprised multiple constituencies: there were diverse ethnicities, liberal democratic intellectuals, poor unemployed urban youths and students who wanted the party to take a more radical stance, urban trade

unionists, rural radicals, peasant women and women in the cities. It was difficult for the party to develop a coherent ideology. Some members espoused liberal democratic values and a desire for individual land ownership while some wanted complete dispossession of white land owners. This led to the disintegration of the NDP (240-242). Nkomo led a new party, the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU, banned in 1964) and Sithole led the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) which attracted the more radical constituencies. The Zimbabwe African National Union was also banned in 1964.

Women were part of the urban political scene. Weiss (1986) estimated that 20% of African women lived in the cities. Some of them lived with their husbands but most lived independently (47). Husbands strongly discouraged their wives from coming to live with them in the cities since they expected them to carry on the cultivation of family plots. African women who lived with their husbands were therefore under pressure to find scarce employment in the city. Women in cities were conscious of their generally impoverished and precarious existence and were available for mobilization into mass political parties. Independent women ran their own businesses though often subjected to police extortions. Brewing beer and running a shebeen (illegal beer house) landed them in jail (49). Just like the women of the Harry Thuku riots in Nairobi, such women in Harare would also be actively involved in party politics if they thought parties would address their concerns and challenge laws that criminalized the brewing of beer by African women. Men were not always responsive to the needs of the women in the cities. For example bus boycotts made life for those who worked as domestics very difficult so that sometimes women crossed picket lines to keep their jobs and be able to continue living in the city. Losing a city job meant going back to the Tribal Trust Lands (TTLs) where life was quite impossible for unmarried women and their daughters (Lyons 2004: 84; Chung 2006: 31).

Many women also joined protest action. When the SRANC was banned, women were among the protesters against its banning (Stott 1990: 14). In 1961 the women of the National Democratic Party protested the allocation of only 15 seats to Africans out of 65 seats in the new parliament formed under the new constitution in Southern Rhodesia. They went to prison for a sentence of six weeks, refused to pay their fine and refused to clean their quarters (Lyons 2004: 87). Following the women's action of December 6, 1961, the

government banned the NDP on December 8, 1961. It took the action of the women for the authorities to realise the strength of the NDP and this led to its banning. The women showed that nationalist politics was part of their struggle and that they had the competence to decide on the direction such politics took.

On December 17, 1961 the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) was formed as a new incarnation of the NDP, with the same leadership and membership, but it too was banned in August 1962. In August 1963 the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) was formed. In 1964 both ZAPU and ZANU were banned forcing them to operate from exile in Zambia. The two nationalist organizations began to prepare for a war of national liberation in 1964 by establishing military bases in Zambia.

From their military bases in Zambia both ZAPU and ZANU began infiltrating trained militants into Zimbabwe to carry out sabotage, such as crop-slashing and animal mutilations on white farms, and on industrial enterprises using explosives. Rural women participated in cutting crops on chosen fields at night. They also refused to have their cattle dipped or counted (Stotts 1990: 15). The nationalists aimed to create insecurity, disrupt law and order, and instigate a mass uprising by the African populace. These efforts failed (Kriger 1992: 88). In April 1966 the nationalist armies moved from the sabotage phase into a conventional war mode and began fighting the Rhodesian forces in Sinoia. Small bands of ZAPU and the South African ANC forces engaged the Rhodesian military inside the country but the Zimbabweans were at a disadvantage and they lost their best trained fighters because they had not developed local support (Stotts 1990: 16). These early fighters lacked food and supplies, and could not blend easily into the population. The physical terrain in Rhodesia was tall grassland, unlike Kenya where Mau Mau fighters could hide in the dense forests in large numbers. The Zimbabwean nationalist armies realized that they needed to operate in small groups and adopt aspects of the Maoist guerrilla strategy of a mobile army who also gained the support of villagers (Kriger 1992: 114).

From 1969 the two nationalist parties and their armies began to send in small groups among the rural populace to organize, recruit, train and arm their forces to prepare for an insurrection. In order to blend in with the people ZAPU, with a large Ndebele membership, concentrated on the Ndebele regions and located their external military camps along their



common borders with Botswana and Zambia. On the other hand ZANU accepted an offer from the FRELIMO in Mozambique and opened bases in that country. With a dominant Shona membership ZANU was able to benefit from cross-border infiltration on Zimbabwe's eastern boundary. During the military phase women were incorporated into the liberation war firstly, in the rural communities, and secondly at the military camps in neighbouring countries of Mozambique, Botswana and Zambia.

### **4.3 Women's roles in the rural areas**

In the 1980s 57% of the population lived in the Communal Areas of Zimbabwe. During the liberation war I estimate that at least 60% of the population lived in the rural areas since the colonial government restricted women from going to the cities. According to Jacobs (1989) 82% of this rural based population consisted of women and children under the age of fourteen (164). In 1975 women made up 51.31% of the whole population (UN ECOSOC 2005: 418). As guerrillas infiltrated the villages they encountered and depended on this large female population to whom they communicated the purpose of the liberation war. They encouraged the peasants to join them in taking political control of the rural areas and to establish liberated zones. From the rural areas they intended to surround and take control of the cities and eventually liberate the whole country (Kriger 1992: 90).

Many women had engaged in anti-colonial protests against cattle culling, dipping and counting and were politically conscious of the source of their hard lives under colonialism (Stott 1990: 16). The most fundamental reasons for the women's participation in the liberation war were poverty, disintegration of family caused by poverty, landlessness and poor quality of available land, and the burden of farming their family plots with their children. Rhoda Khumalo's husband worked in Bulawayo, while she lived in Glassblock raising their ten children. She and her husband started their life together with no cattle, hence his need to get paid employment. They bought cattle with his income to plough their land. Their poverty drove her eldest son to seek work in the South African mines in 1969. When he returned in 1971 he was harassed to join the Rhodesian security forces, so he left the country again to join the liberation army. In the course of the war her husband, four sons and two daughters all joined the liberation army (Staunton 1990: 6). Rural women like Khumalo could identify with the guerrillas because many of their own sons and daughters had left home for the nationalist armies. They saw the guerrillas as their own children

fighting to make life better for the poor. The adult women who stayed in the countryside and young women who left Zimbabwe to join the guerrilla forces in their training camps were also motivated to support the guerrillas by the daily abuses and oppressions of the government forces: the burning of villages, killing of a Zimbabwean in the vicinity of their village, beating, arrest or murder of a relative (Stott 1990: 22).

As the guerrillas entered the countryside they adopted traditional protocol in their relations with the people in the rural areas. For example the guerrillas first introduced themselves to local spirit mediums, 'who then endorsed their presence so that the guerrillas were given the support of the people' (Stott 1990: 38). In return the mediums also required discipline from the ranks of the guerrillas to ensure the security of the local people. In relating to adult women the guerrillas also used traditional gestures as the following statement by Seri Jeni demonstrates:

They said that they were our children and that they were fighting for our country. They said they were not fighting for their own freedom, but for the freedom of everyone in the country. Then they said, 'Please make us some food: we, your children are very hungry', and they left and went into the bush. I prepared the food and carried it into the bush. We did this for a number of days (Staunton 1990: 5).

The guerrillas, referred to adult women as 'mothers'. Their perception of women was rooted in the traditionally stereotypical roles: mothers cooked, washed the guerrillas' clothes, and protected them from the government soldiers. On their part the women saw the guerrillas and the liberation war both as an avenue to free themselves from colonial oppression, and also as a stepping stone to effect changes in the traditional set up of rural life (Urdang 1979: 125). When women raised issues of changing gender relations in the home, such as stopping domestic violence, the guerrillas addressed them only sporadically, just to ensure that they could continue to count on the support of the women. The guerrillas were not educated to challenge traditional structures that worked to the disadvantage of women.

After establishing themselves at a base near a rural community and hiding among the people, the guerrillas embarked upon their so-called 'consciousness-raising' work in the

nightly *pungwes*, which were the meetings they held with the local people on planning the liberation war (Stott 1990: 17). These meetings were also referred to as *mararis* (Kriger 1992:118). At its most basic level people engaged in liberation struggles need to be in continuous dialogue with the oppressed as they seek emancipatory goals. The guerrillas in Zimbabwe, similar to the Mau Mau in Kenya, did not really dialogue with the people, nor did they convey a new world view to the rural populations. The nightly *pungwes* did not meet the standards for consciousness-raising dialogue with the oppressed. The guerrillas rarely encouraged democratic discussions. The *pungwes* took place some distance from the villages to avoid detection by the security forces. The guerrillas put most of their energies on survival in an environment where they were often apprehensive about betrayal. They were not really trained to develop mutually trusting relationships with the local people.

After many sessions with the villagers the guerrillas set up administrative organizations that created a parallel underground government for the area. They set up People's Councils with Village, District and Tribal Trust Land Committees. Each of these units had a Chairman, Treasurer, Secretary, and members for Health, Agriculture, Women, Youth, Mobilization and Transport (Stott 1990: 18). They recruited people for these positions from teachers and older youths in the schools and the villages of the Tribal Trust Lands (TTLs). Rhoda Khumalo lived in the Ndebele community of Glassblock and worked with ZAPU guerrillas who chose her to be a branch chairperson. She later served in the district and then became an official at the provincial level. Her task was to formulate plans to develop the community within the structure of the liberated zone. The people who served in these councils felt coerced; there was no election and people did not appear to have volunteered for the positions.

Rural women who assumed the bulk of the responsibilities of the underground government felt overwhelmed by the demands of provisioning the guerrillas: food, clothes, blankets, cigarettes, money, meat and information about the Rhodesian soldiers. In some communities the demands came from both liberation armies: ZANLA for Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and ZIPRA for the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU). The women thought the demands were unreasonable. Contrary to the injunction of

the local mediums to the guerrillas that the villagers should feel safe, instead the guerrillas caused feelings of insecurity, fear and discomfort on the part of the village women. Rhoda Khumalo commented on how one group of ZANLAs broke their rules of conduct:

They only asked for money to buy beer and cigarettes and this we contributed. We never actually bought them clothes; they just took what they wanted from civilians. If for instance we were at a meeting and they saw somebody wearing something they liked, one just had to take the garment off and give it to them (Staunton 1990: 70).

Some guerrillas had affairs with local women and were long gone by the time the babies were born. In Wedza, Loice Mushore's husband was falsely accused of being a 'sell-out', that is a traitor to the liberation movement and was summarily executed by a group of ZANLA guerrillas. They also burnt down their homestead, but later the guerrillas admitted his innocence but 'they did not quite apologize for the death of my husband, they just put the issue aside' (Staunton 1990: 90). Some of these injustices reflected underlying communal struggles whereby people settled personal scores by falsely accusing their rivals of being sell-outs. Families that were economically successful were also targets of such revenge acts (Kriger 1992: 190).

In general the guerrillas showed little grounding in any ideological guideline for the war except the objective of securing territory from the Rhodesian government. The guerrillas did not articulate a specific gender policy. During the community meetings the women did not articulate their own desire to liberate themselves from systemic oppressions such as inadequate farm plots, low prices for their agricultural produce and possibly freedom from oppressive family relations. The guerrillas spoke down to the people and instructed them on what was expected of them. Sessions often ended with someone being accused of being a sell-out and beaten or humiliated. The women made themselves inconspicuous and felt embarrassed at not being able to stand up for their neighbours or come to their defence. The meetings were not democratic venues to raise topics of gender relations. However in places where the relationship between the guerrillas and the local women had stabilized and the women realized that their help was important to the guerrillas' survival, the women saw that they had a strong bargaining power in the rural areas. Then they tried to get the guerrillas to

help them change gender relations within the families. They wanted the guerrillas to stop their husbands from beating them, stop excessive drinking or engaging in polygamy (Kriger 1992: 194). The women generally did not get a satisfactory response from the guerrillas. Usually the guerrillas appealed for family unity and discouraged divorce. They wanted to contrast African culture as good compared to that of the white colonial settlers whom they were fighting to remove from power. Rather than challenge traditional gender relations, the guerrillas focused on the “struggle for African control of the state” (Ranchod-Nilsson 2006: 171).

The Zimbabwean nationalist ideology on the rights of women contrasts with the directives in Guinea-Bissau where the guerrillas were specifically directed to ‘Defend the rights of women, respect and make others respect them (whether as children, young girls or adults)’ (Urdang 1979: 124). Although the gender stereotypical services which the women provided in Zimbabwe were highly valued, no ideological interpretations were attached to them and no qualitative changes occurred in women’s lives. The Zimbabwean nationalist army’s position was rather similar to that of the Mau Mau where women’s contributions were not given special credit nor their oppression specially addressed. Although the women did not feel that their work was appreciated they went ahead and ran many of the underground committees where they assumed new political roles for their gender and got a feeling of agency in the liberation movement. Rhoda Khumalo said,

This war would not have been won without the women. They (the women) did a great job during the war. The comrades would not have been able to shoot a gun if they hadn’t been fed. We cooked for them, washed their clothes and even protected them, because it was we who gave them information about the security forces.

Women worked hard (Staunton 1990:70).

Other very important contributors to the guerrilla war were local youths. The males were called *mujibas* and the females were *chimbwidos*. They acted as security for the ZANU controlled Tribal Trust Land (TTLs) which were the African reserves, and provided the guerrillas with information about the political setup of the rural communities. They provided the guerrillas ‘with the key point of entry to go deep into the local community’ (Cliffe et.al.

1980: 53). They collected contributions for the guerrillas and organized and coordinated the *pungwes*, the nightly political meetings. The chimbwidos probably did the hardest and the most dangerous work in the rural areas. They carried messages, bought and transported supplies, cooked and washed for the guerrillas (Davies 1983: 107). Their work was very dangerous especially when transporting large amounts of supplies. They were also spies on the movement of security forces. They were expected to be the constant companions of the guerrillas who wanted them for sexual services in contravention of the codes of conduct required by the mediums and their own rules. The girls also tried to avoid being sexually exploited by the guerrillas but were afraid to refuse their advances. Some tried to flee to other communities but their relatives were threatened so they had to come back to the base villages (Staunton 1990: 49). Many young women left for Mozambique to join the liberation armies in order to leave such uncomfortable relationships. It is interesting to note that these youths made their greatest contributions to the war in the countryside because the Rhodesian government had a weak hold on the rural areas, while similar tasks were performed in the urban areas by young people in Nairobi during the Mau Mau war in Kenya. Wambui Otieno led such a group in Nairobi.

#### **4.4. Women's roles in the military camps**

The guerrillas also recruited young fighters for the war. Many of these recruits and volunteers were teenage girls and boys, and young adults under the age of 25 (Stott 1990: 21). It is estimated that the women in the military bases comprised about one-quarter or one-third of the volunteers of the Zimbabwean liberation armies (Ranchod-Nilsson 2000:172). Such a large exodus of young people was a commentary on the grievous conditions and hopelessness among young people inside Zimbabwe. Some of the young women wanted to escape from the guerrillas. Following are young people's narratives on why they left their homes to join the fighting. A young woman, Nyasha, who went to Mozambique for military training explained her motivations for joining: at the age of seventeen Nyasha realized that she would not have access to professional training to be an air hostess due to her race. Her friend wanted to train to be a nurse but was also denied training on racial grounds. Nyasha also resented the 6 pm curfew which only Zimbabweans were subjected to. Her teachers

contributed to her political consciousness: both teachers and missionaries conscientized the students in her school by teaching historical lessons on the origins of white colonialism. The political consciousness the students gained made them determined to take action to change the situation, ‘And really I knew that I had to do something about this’ (Davies 1983: 99-100).

What followed was an exodus of 200 students from Nyasha’s school alone, led by their geography teacher, who all took the 100 kilometre trek to Mozambique in 1975 (Davies 1983: 100; Weiss 1986: 80). By the age of eighteen Nyasha had become a trained combat soldier and was sent back into Zimbabwe for guerrilla action. When the young guerrillas went into the villages the presence of women fighters proved to be useful in mobilizing and recruiting men. The men felt that if women were in the army they could do better than just remain at home. From the narrative of Nyasha’s political journey it appears that political consciousness raising was taking place in schools and when the guerrillas came to the countryside they had a population that was ready to be recruited. At the liberation camps all physically fit recruits of both genders had equivalent duties: carrying military equipment, engaging in combat, cooking, washing, and building barracks during the training phase (Davies 1983: 100; Weiss 1986: 90).

#### **4.5. Costs and benefits for women in the Zimbabwean military**

Zimbabwean women in the guerrilla camps recalled performing many heroic deeds. They took advantage of the war context to assume roles that were traditionally not open to women. However women did not assume these new roles simply by their presence in the military camps. They had to struggle to transcend the stereotypical assignments that were initially given to them. For example the first women who arrived at military camps in the 1960s and early 1970s performed women’s traditional tasks, ‘such as carrying water, washing clothes, food preparation and collecting firewood’ (Stott 1990: 27). Later the women advanced to cleaning and carrying weapons to the front lines. Susan Rutanhire recalled that ‘she was asked to carry weapons from Chifombo to the Zambezi, escorted by ZANLA men but marching for up to a week at a time with bazookas, mortar shells, bullets and guns and carrying a bucket of mealie-meal on her head to feed the soldiers with’ (Martin

and Johnson 1981: 82 as quoted in Stott 1990: 27). In 1974 Susan Rutanhire finally received combat training mostly due to the shortage of male recruits at that time but not because the movement's leadership had a policy of female equality. Women had to demonstrate that they deserved to be given military training and appointments, but male recruits did not have such obstacles before becoming warriors. Although at the end of the war President Mugabe claimed that women later received equal training and assignments the liberation movement did not have a genuine commitment to gender equality in the movement itself or in its military establishment. Tanie Mundondo complained that men received better military training than women and that they were issued with more weapons (Weiss 1986: 94). Another interviewee said,

Life was hard for the women. Most women comrades, like myself, were political commissars. I could have done nursing, but I did not like that so I became a political commissar. Women were not given the same chances as men to train outside the country, so I spent the war period in Mozambique (28).

Women did receive military training in technical skills such as being able to handle all kinds of weapons: rifles, automatic guns, bazookas, mortars, and the laying of land and anti-personnel mines, but their skills were not diversified sufficiently to open up more job opportunities for them at the end of the war. For example more women could have opted for military careers in addition to traditional women's roles if they had been sent abroad for more formal training. Even after receiving some military training in the camps in Mozambique women were assigned to duties as teachers, commissars, ambulance drivers and military nurses.

The Zimbabwe liberation army was operating in a more modern time frame so the soldiers had the opportunity for international training both militarily and in technical fields. On the other hand, the Mau Mau were singularly rural fighters who were not even recognized by any foreign country so the fighters in Kenya did not have any opportunity to plan for a more modern future, as soldiers in Zimbabwe could.



Zimbabwean women in the guerrilla camps also faced problems with pregnancy whereby expectant mothers were removed from the guerrilla camp to a special camp which was considered to be more comfortable for birthing. The policy was justified on the grounds that this was for the benefit of the baby and mother. But the women interpreted this as punishment. They were not given a choice of alternative assignments especially considering that most of them did not have combat duties anyway. Upon their return from child birth a few months later some of these new mothers were then given lighter duties 'in the security department, or manpower and planning, education, social welfare or transport' (Davies 1983:105). Such consideration could have been given to the women during their pregnancy to avoid separating them from their familiar bases and network of supporters among their fellow soldiers.

The reluctance of ZANLA and ZIPRA to accommodate the needs of women in their militaries indicate a weak commitment to women's equality. Zimbabwean nationalist policy on women was reminiscent of the policy among the Mau Mau fighters. In the Zimbabwe military the men with whom the pregnancies occurred were not even mentioned, while in Kenya the men were punished with an assignment to unpleasant duties. Considering that the public pronouncements of the Zimbabwean liberation movements presented themselves as examples of women's liberation, the actual practices do not support this claim.

Other examples illustrate the lack of commitment to women's liberation by the Zimbabwean nationalist armies: in sexual relations the men refused to use contraceptives even though these devices were usually available in the camps, leaving the women unprotected from unwanted pregnancies (Davies 1983: 105). Another issue that spoke to the unequal relationships between the genders was that higher level military men demanded sexual services from the women, who often felt obliged through traditional rules of deference to comply with the demands of senior men. The women felt sexually exploited and went to great lengths to avoid contact with senior officers (Chung 2006: 126).

Marriage considerations also favoured traditional practices, hence sustaining the ideology of the subordination of women. Although couples obtained the permission of their superior

officers before getting married, these couples were told that at the end of the war, they would have to get formal approval from their families. This put the women back into a position they were trying to escape when they joined the liberation movement. The army was sending out the message of conformity to traditional marriage practices which would entail the observance of *lobola* (bride price) and assigning the woman to a subordinate status in her marital home (Kriger 1992: 193).

Further evidence of discrimination against women in the liberation army shows that

Only 5 per cent of cadres sent for special courses by ZANLA were women; all ZANU representatives abroad were men; leadership selection was biased in favour of men even though women often did much more work (Kriger 1992: 193).

Although women in the combat zones operated under difficult constraints, they also gained benefits from participation in the liberation armies. Women in the liberation movement wanted better educational and economic opportunities as well as mobility, which they could not get under colonialism, and if they lived in the rural areas the male dominant ideology restricted their life horizons. By joining the liberation army women received military training at the camps in Mozambique and Zambia, and they usually became instructors for the new recruits, mainly teaching them how to handle weapons. Many also became political commissars and taught political education on the aims of the liberation movement to new recruits. Women's success stories in the military included people like Sabina Mabuza who trained as a military nurse in North Korea; Memory Masango went to Yugoslavia in 1978 on an Intelligence and Counter-Intelligence Course; and Gladys Moyo went to Cuba for nurse training (Stott 1990: 29). These women probably represented the 5 percent of the army that were sent abroad for further education.

Rural women also saw some benefits in their participation in the liberation movements.

Flora Sibanda thought that the liberation movement had brought a better organized society to her community:

I don't think there are as many *tsotsis* as there were before because children are attending clubs. Young boys no longer go from village to village in search of beer, they would rather spend their time in church. This is not the only good thing brought

about by independence. For instance, women are involved in development projects. Most women are making things –sewing for example –and men are also engaged in carpentry and are managing to sell a lot of things. I realise the liberation struggle did us good (Staunton ed.1990: 41).

Interestingly women who were happy with the outcome of the liberation movement and those who were unhappy framed their comments within the context of the colonial system they lived through. They generally did not comment on the topic of gender relations because many of them had lived without their spouses for long periods and some of them were widows. Some had even acquired better political status in local affairs from their participation in the war (Kriger 1992: 77). These rural women focused their priority concern on access to land. They wanted the end of colonial oppressions like the low prices they received for their commodities and the barren land they had to cultivate due to land expropriation by whites. Seri Jeni had high expectations of life in general after the war but she was disappointed:

Those years were very hard years. The war was serious. The problem now is that we are still behind, even after all that suffering. We have no strong representative in this area. We have heard that in other districts, dams have been built, and many development projects have begun, but we have seen nothing here. The people who were strong and could have been good leaders were killed during the war. Our lives have improved in that we can sell our crops at reasonable prices but, on the other hand, everything else is now very expensive. (Staunton ed.1990: 9).

The two comments above show that the women expected that the war would make life better for them. The women could handle gender inequalities at the personal level especially since the dominant male was mostly away in the cities as migrant workers. If the men were around then physical domestic abuse was a concern.

#### **4.6 Colonial response to women during the liberation war**

State response to the guerrilla insurgency in Zimbabwe created tremendous hardships for women in the rural areas. Security forces regularly attacked villagers whom they accused of sheltering the guerrillas. In Kenya the colonial authorities tried to develop a counter

ideology about the benefits of colonialism and created incentives for the Kenyans to be loyal to the government, but in Zimbabwe the authorities did not acknowledge the legitimate grievances of the rural people and developed a policy of exterminating the guerrillas. One method the government used was to capture civilians since they could not distinguish the guerrillas from the ordinary citizenry. The government forces seized and tortured any adolescent girls thinking they were *chimbwidos* who carried food to the guerrillas, 'These young girls were tied by their ankles and hung in a tree upside down over a barrel of water. They would be dipped from time to time until they were prepared to talk' (Chung 2006: 140). Electric shock treatment was used on captives' sexual organs. Bodies of dead guerrillas were displayed in public to warn any of their supporters. These cruelties were counter-productive because large numbers of civilians streamed across the borders to Mozambique and Zambia and swelled the ranks of the guerrillas (Chung 2006: 141). Some went to refugee camps. One of the largest refugee camps was Nyadzonia located 40 kilometers from the Zimbabwean border.

Upon arrival in a village the security forces pulled out everyone, made old women lie prostrate on the ground and ransacked their homes. An attack on Centenary farm resulted in the all night rape-murder of four young women. The soldiers came back and moved the villagers to the *keep* which were the protected villages which they forced the rural people to live in to prevent their support for the guerrillas (Weiss 1986: 75). In the protected villages people had to walk miles to their farms. Sometimes the villagers were confined to these villages for many days. The cattle would have roamed and destroyed villagers' crops and the people became malnourished because they could not grow vegetables within the villages and some were too old or weak to get to their farms (Kriger 1992: 145; Preston 2004: 73).

The Selous Scouts were especially cruel bands of government forces made up mostly of Africans created by the government of Rhodesia to infiltrate the villages, the guerrilla units and the training camps across the borders. Once inside the insurgency locations they would then direct the government troops to make precision air strikes against civilian refugee centres that had no defences. One of the most notorious atrocities committed by the Selous Scouts was their massacre of refugees at the Nyadzonia camp in August 1976. They killed more than 600 refugees and injured more than 500. In November 1977 the Rhodesians again

attacked a refugee and military camp in Chimoio, killing 85 people including 55 children. The government planes at that attack dropped napalm on the people and then parachuted soldiers who killed the refugees.

The hard line the government took made it easy for the guerrillas in the countryside to recruit soldiers for their army. Masses of young people left school to join the revolutionary armies. The international sanctions on Rhodesia created economic decline especially among the rural population and also led young people to join the liberation army (Preston 2004: 70). As far as women were concerned, there were no government programmes that helped to mitigate their economic problems. Compared to the Mau Mau counter-insurgency in Kenya where the colonial administration instituted the women's organization MYWO to win the support of rural women, in Zimbabwe the government mercilessly victimised all population groups. A possible explanation for this difference in response could be that in Kenya the squatter system, though highly exploitative, created a more personal and longer term relationship between the settlers and their Kenyan tenants. In Zimbabwe the squatter/tenancy option did not exist. Instead Africans were waged-labourers with whom the white settlers did not develop personal and caring relationships.

#### **4.7 Women's empowerment in post-liberation Zimbabwe**

Some women had acquired new skills during the war in the military camps. They developed self confidence and also had professional ambitions which they expected the independent state of Zimbabwe to help them fulfill. They were no longer confining their lives to relationships of deference to men, but wanted to participate in the modern aspects of their society (Stott 1990: 54). In the early years after independence the government appeared to support women's advancement by the appointment of prominent women to high office. For example Joyce Mujuru, who is now the Vice-President of Zimbabwe and who was the most famous female war hero, was appointed as the Cabinet Minister for the Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs (MCDWA). The first governing cabinet of independent Zimbabwe had nine women. Mujuru's ministry made an assessment of the needs of women in the areas of health and education and urged women to participate in the new structures of government to address their concerns. Social welfare legislation also promised improvements in education, as free and compulsory education for low income

families saw a dramatic rise in the education of girls (Stott 1990: 55). Physical infrastructures in the rural areas commenced and as part of land reform cooperatives were formed with female membership. Since women are the majority inhabitants of the rural areas any improvement in that sector benefitted them.

Legislation was also passed for women's advancement. The Legal Age of Majority Act (LAMA) of December 1982 granted all Zimbabweans adulthood at age 18. Women could vote and enter into contract. Women would be legal adults and would no longer need the consent of male relatives to contract a marriage. Surprisingly *lobola* was still in effect, putting to question the degree of freedom women gained from male control. LAMA also gave women the right to own property in their name. A 1981 law, the Customary and Private Courts Act, awarded the mother custody of children when there was divorce. The mother would also be entitled to maintenance payments (Stott 1990: 55). In December 1985 the Matrimonial Causes Act allowed for a no-fault divorce and the division of marital assets, while custody of children was awarded to the spouse best able to care for them (Weiss 1986: 113; Jacobs 1989: 167). In 1991 the Deeds Registry Amendment Act allowed women to register immovable property with title deeds in their own names (Chung 2006: 291).

These forms of initial legislation appeared to be a progressive stride in favour of women's advancement, but their significance became diluted as the years passed because they were soon challenged by men who accused the government of interfering with old customs; contributing to the corruption of young women; and encouraging unwanted pregnancies (Weiss 1986: 116). Under pressure from conservative men the government promised to review the legislative acts, thus putting women in a position of uncertainty. The MCDWA, which was the official instrument for improving the condition of women, was marginalized due to poor funding. It too began to develop a conservative ideology and created only welfarist programmes such as handicraft productions and sewing projects which generated insignificant incomes without getting women out of poverty (Seidman 1984: 434). Both MCDWA in Zimbabwe and Kenya's MYWO were not able to advocate for fundamental changes in women's status.

The MCDWA was also not successful at job creation for well-trained ex-combatant women. Seidman (1984) gives one such example:

Female ex-combatants who sought employment in areas not traditionally open to women – as did a group of ZANU women who trained as electricians in Denmark during the war – have had a difficult time finding jobs. Although Zimbabwe has a shortage of electricians, the twelve women returned to find themselves unemployable. Today the women complain that typing courses might have been more useful (433).

Although the MCDWA made surveys to determine women's needs there is no evidence that ordinary women's voices guided them on what projects to carry out. The ministry's hesitancy in taking bold steps to help women fulfil their dreams of liberation and equality made it clear that they did not have an ally in the government. The ministry's contradictory stances reflected the regime's decision not to engage in a transformation of traditional gender relations. The ministry did not take into account the new identities that women had gained as a result of their participation in the liberation war. Large numbers of women had developed a high level of political consciousness, which they had articulated from the time of the liberation war. Rather than give up their dreams of liberation women began to look to alternative institutions and new organizations that were not anchored in the state apparatus to help them fulfill their aspirations in the liberated Zimbabwe.

#### **4.8 Non - governmental organizations in post-liberation Zimbabwe**

Based on the challenges to the new pro-women legislation which the government made little effort to defend, the women realised that the new regime's commitment to their liberation and equality was not deep-rooted. As noted earlier in this chapter, nationalist leaders were not working toward a revolution but toward a regime change from white minority rule to majority African male rule. Also during the rural mobilization phase the guerrillas invoked references to cultural nationalism with an emphasis on family life and motherhood. In the post liberation period women were being pressured to revert to an unaltered traditional role. The new government began to make gestures to traditional authorities and men in general that were reminiscent of the pact between traditional male authorities and the colonial administration. The new independence regime wanted to appease rural male constituencies with ambiguous interpretations of the laws that had earlier favoured women. The new

government wanted an alliance with traditional rulers in their land redistribution policy which was the bedrock of what men wanted from the liberation war.

The government launched a dramatic backlash against women in a vicious attack in October 1983 when soldiers and police launched 'operation clean-up' and swept through the major cities of Zimbabwe demanding marriage certificates from women who were found in the streets of Harare at night. These women had to prove that they were legally married (Campbell 2003: 284). The authorities arbitrarily arrested unaccompanied women and charged them with 'prostitution.' Many of the women caught in the arrests were women returning home from work. Some were even accompanied by men, while others had babies on their backs (Jacobs 1989: 168). Many women were taken to police stations and only released when they produced a marriage certificate. Others were sent to a resettlement camp in the Zambezi valley under very difficult working conditions.

Such campaigns were reminders of colonial practices which had occurred during the Mau Mau war in Kenya, when African women in Nairobi were forced to register their marital status or were sent off to the rural areas. In the case of Zimbabwe, while the targets were women as a gender, the police were also specifically focusing on younger better-dressed women with a modern outlook. The message of the attacks was government disapproval of women who were not under the control of men. Considering that this attack on women occurred a full year after the passage of LAMA it became evident that the regime was backtracking on the women-oriented reforms it had begun in the post-liberation era. Even the Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs was powerless to intervene on behalf of women in this specific crisis (Jacobs 1989: 168). Both the Women's Ministry and the Zimbabwe Women's League, which functioned as an arm of the ruling party, ZANU-PF, were unwilling to protect women's interests.

Women concluded that they needed to form their own autonomous organizations outside the control of government to address their concerns. Many organizations emerged addressing different needs of women. Some worked to raise the consciousness of the general public on issues facing vulnerable citizens including women. Some organizations were affiliated to trade unions, and some were cooperative societies for income-generation. Many of these



organizations also decided on coalition-building to create large mass bases for effective action in their relations with the state.

#### **4.9. Civil Society Organizations that work for access to state power and resources in Zimbabwe**

In the following section I will analyse three types of alliance-based organisations, the Women's Action Group (WAG), the Zimbabwe Women's Resource Centre and Network (ZWRCN), and the Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCoZ) with special emphasis on the last and its relationship with the Select Committee of Parliament on the new Constitution (COPAC).

The Women's Action Group (WAG) was an early challenger of state authoritarianism and was formed in November 1983 in direct response to 'operation clean-up'. It is a grassroots organization that works directly with the poor and working women. WAG members wanted to lobby on behalf of the women who were arrested in October 1983 and to advocate for their release. Many professional women saw that the government's conservative direction would eventually also target them and so they joined WAG or other similar associations (Sen and Grown 1987: 90; Geisler 2004: 124). The founding members of WAG were about 50 Harare-based women, but their ranks soon included trade unions, students' movements, churches, human rights organisations, media and others representing all races (Essof 2010: 87). WAG became a national community-based organization fighting for the rights of women and they were all ready to challenge the male dominant ideology which tolerated the abuse and discrimination against women (Win 2004: 20; Essof 2010: 66). WAG's decisive stand in defence of women's rights was so strong that it provoked the MCDWA to declare that 'WAG must be discredited and destroyed' (Ranchod-Nilsson 2006: 65). In spite of government's antagonism against WAG, the group brought prominence to women's issues on land rights, maintenance, guardianship and custody, inheritance, *lobola*, and sexual harrassment (Ranchod-Nilsson 2006: 65). WAG also educated parliamentarians about women's issues. For example WAG spoke out against virginity testing in rural areas (Ranchod-Nilsson 2006: 65). It fights against gender-based violence against women and to

reduce infection and the spread of HIV among women. WAG goes beyond treating the symptoms of violence against women but demands access to policy making institutions at the national level where the resources are controlled and disbursed. (Parpart. et.al. 2002:14; WAG: [www.wagzim.org](http://www.wagzim.org)). Due to the insecurities caused by state sponsored violence many organizations in Zimbabwe have adopted the strategy of working through alliances to benefit from the different perspectives that organizations in coalitions provide. WAG is allied with the Zimbabwe Women's Resource Centre and Network (ZWRCN) and the Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCoZ), to name a few.

The Zimbabwe Women's Resource Centre and Network (ZWRCN) was founded in 1990 by women who had left the Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs (MCDWA) to provide information on women and development and literature on feminism for public policy use (Chigudu 1997: 35). It provides documentation on the experiences of Zimbabwean women; it works with grassroots women; and provides gender training for NGOs, the media, communities, and other institutions that work on development (Ranchod-Nilsson 2006: 64). Just like WAG, ZWRCN also gives training to the police to enable it deal with victims of abuse sensitively. The organization has trained personnel in the Ministries of Health and of Justice on the laws affecting domestic violence and how to treat such victims when they get to the hospitals. Just like with WAG, ZWRCN also creates strategic partnerships with government agencies while being critical of the Mugabe regime's neglect of women's oppression and powerlessness. In 1995 as a contribution to the global conference on women in Beijing, the organization produced the book *Zimbabwe Women's Voices* (1995), giving voice to rural women's expressed needs such as lack of literacy, female education, marginalization in families and land ownership. Another useful research publication of ZWRCN is the 'Gender Analysis of the 2009 Budget Statement' which critiques how the government of Zimbabwe engages in gender budgeting. The report criticised the underfunding of the Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs with only 0.28% of the national budget of 2009. Such inadequate funding makes it difficult for the ministry to monitor the mandate that ministries should mainstream gender into all their programmes and budgets. These reports by ZWRCN serve as a basis for policy-making by government and other private organizations to address issues important to women's well-being and advancement.

The Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCoZ) was formed within a political climate of state-sponsored violence against women and other activists who critiqued the economic and political deterioration of Zimbabwe's polity. Political analysts in Zimbabwe concluded that the very structure of governance required redirection and that a new constitution would be a starting point for such restructuring. In 1996 a new civil society coalition of 200 organizations was created, the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA), to challenge the Lancaster constitution of 1979 which had been the basis of Zimbabwean independence and its government. The Lancaster constitution was so inadequate that it had been amended up to fifteen times and one of the amendments created an executive president with unlimited terms of office. This had led to an authoritarian presidency that marginalized parliament and was unaccountable to the people. The NCA began a national discourse on the need for a new constitution and many women's organizations joined the Assembly. The Mugabe government responded to this challenge by creating a parallel Constitutional Commission of 400 commissioners to do the same review. Although both of these bodies had women representatives neither was committed to addressing gender concerns.

In 1999 the Supreme Court ruled in the Magaya case that women were subordinate to men in customary law and did not have inheritance rights even outside the traditional domain. Women activists in Zimbabwe determined that they had a very high stake in a new constitution and 'turned to the constitutional review process as the ultimate forum for enshrining gender equality and entrenching Zimbabwean women's rights' (Essof 2010: 70). In June 1999 the Women's Coalition on the Constitution was formed by sixty-six women activists and representatives from 30 organizations representing women's interests and human rights organizations. The coalition has been lobbying for and providing information on the constitution review process to the general public in order to protect women's political, social, cultural and economic rights (Essof 2010: 70). It organized workshops and conferences in rural and urban areas and documented the views of the poor in the country (McFadden 2005: 13). Although the Women's Coalition had contributed much of the educational work of the review process that was initiated by the NCA and the government's Constitutional Commission, they realised that in the final draft of the constitution of 2000, women's interests were overlooked. The Women's Coalition therefore campaigned for the rejection of the constitution as it was presented for a referendum in February 2000.

Upon the defeat of the 2000 constitution Zimbabwean women's organizations had to evaluate the outcomes of their participation in the constitutional review process. Both the government's Constitution Commission and the civil society NCA were male dominated and made little accommodation for women's concerns about tradition-based oppression. Overall women's networks concluded that the alliances they formed for major national and regional causes were 'male driven and deeply reactionary on crucial issues that affect women in their public and private lives' (McFadden 2005:16). Women thought that the collaborations they made exploited their expertise but gave little in return.

In the aftermath of the defeat of the 2000 draft constitution referendum the government unleashed brutal repression against women. Women received no protection from their male allies from the assaults they were subjected to by the regime's rampaging thugs after the referendum in 2000. The women concluded that they needed to fight their own battles. There were already in Zimbabwe several women's networks that did advocacy work for the transformation of gender relations but in the face of the violence of 2000 some of them were silenced and were on the defensive about doing political work. Examples of such organizations were the Women in Law and Development in Africa (1990) which was a network of organizations and individuals who helped women increase their capacity to claim their human rights and enjoy a higher standard of life. The Women and Land Lobby Group (1995) worked to advance women's land rights (Essof 2010: 69). Since they depended on foreign donors, the foreign funders were afraid of being accused of doing subversive political work in Zimbabwe. They also wanted to protect their staff from the violence against women who were identified as doing political work.

Fortunately the Women's Coalition regrouped and re-engaged in the political arena by supporting all 55 women candidates for the 2000 parliamentary elections, out of whom 14 won (Essof 2010: 69). The Women's Coalition spent the rest of the year 2000 on the mobilization of women and doing civic education campaigns on how constitutional reforms would impact women. Their educational campaign involved the women at the grassroots in the struggle to reform the Lancaster Constitution of 1979. At the end of this consciousness-raising educational campaign the Women's Coalition produced the Women's Rights Charter in 2001 (*Appendix*). During the decade of 2000 the Women's Coalition worked on diverse

transformative projects, such as the Peacebuilding Project to end politically motivated violence and which also aims to make it safe for women to participate in the political process. If women are afraid to vote, it would follow that women candidates too would be discouraged from entering the political arena. If women are elected into office they would be able to participate in political decision-making. They encouraged women to participate in the electoral process and contributed to breaking the hold of the single party ZANU-PF. For the first time since independence, in the elections of March 2008 a new party, the Movement for Democratic Change -T, controlled more seats in the House of Assembly with 100 seats compared to ZANU-PF holding 99 seats. A minor party also called Movement for Democratic Change - AM won 10 seats in parliament. Women won 32 seats. I was not able to disaggregate the women's seats by party affiliation. Women held the largest number of seats in 2008 than they have ever won in parliament in Zimbabwe. In the 100 seat senate women won 23 seats also an impressive achievement which can be attributed to the work of the women's organizations that have been sponsoring women candidates for electoral office since 2000. Tables 1 and 2 below illustrate the increased number of seats women hold in the parliament of Zimbabwe since the Women's Coalition encouraged women to engage in the political process.

**Table 4.1:**

**Distribution of Seats in the House of Assembly in Zimbabwe by Sex**

Year	Men	Women	% of Women
2008	209	32	14.95
2005	125	25	16.67
2000	136	14	9.33
1995	128	22	5.8
1990	119	0	0
1985	91	9	10
1980	91	9	10

Compiled from InterParliamentary Union Archives Accessed March 19, 2012

<http://www.ipu.org/english/parline/reports/2167.htm>

**Table 4.2: Zimbabwe Senate Seats distributed by sex**

Year	Total	Men	Women	% women
2008	99	70	23	24.73
2005	50	39	21	31.82
1985	40	37	3	9
1980	40	40	0	0

Compiled from InterParliamentary Union Archives. Accessed March 19, 2012

Women and other marginalized groups are beginning to benefit from the atmosphere of choice in selecting their representatives to parliament. This upward climb in the numbers also shows the result of the work of autonomous women's organizations which are demanding government and regime accountability, although in many instances their members continue to risk physical threats and death from the ruling party ZANU-PF.

Between 2008 and 2012 the Women's Coalition refocused its primary work on constitutional reform. Following the 2008 national elections in Zimbabwe that were violently contested between the ZANU-PF and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), a peace agreement, the Global Political Agreement (GPA), was signed on September 15, 2008. The GPA mandated the writing of a new constitution in a democratic and inclusive process and established a parliamentary body, the Committee of Parliament on the Constitution (COPAC), which was set up in April 2009 with 25 members of parliament. Since the inception of COPAC in 2009 the Women's Coalition has produced periodic bulletins updating its members on the expert presentations that affiliated organisations have made to COPAC, to ensure that women's rights issues are included in the constitution drafting phase. In 2012 the Women's Coalition made five minimum demands from the constitution: a quota system for women's political representation, socio-economic rights, non-discrimination (including all forms of disability), customary law should be subject to the Bill of Rights, and that women should have access to and control of resources (Women's Coalition, [www.wcoz.org](http://www.wcoz.org)). Affiliates like the Women in Politics Support Unit (WIPSU), the Women in Law in Southern Africa (WILSA), and the Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association

(ZIWLA) all hold regular consultations with the chairpersons of COPAC. Such meetings pressure COPAC to give equal representation to women and men in all the ongoing constitutional processes. The Women's Coalition has learned that political alliances such as that with the National Constitutional Assembly that do not have a clear commitment to gender equity detracted from the main focus of seeking women's empowerment. In the current constitutional process the Women's Coalition has 'created a forum where women come together and reach a common understanding of issues around the Constitutional Reform Process' (WCoZ: [www.wcoz.org](http://www.wcoz.org)).

In anticipation of the debates that would take place in parliament on the draft constitution the Women's Coalition also provided workshops for the women's Parliamentary Caucus to prepare the members with necessary information on gender and the constitution-making process to give them expertise to participate competently in the constitutional deliberations. Women's Coalition's monthly meetings in 2012 attract up to 35 affiliates (right now WCoZ has 65 affiliates) which indicate sustained interests on the part of the membership in the work of protecting women's interest in the final constitution.

#### **4.10 Conclusion**

Zimbabwean women's aspirations for personal liberation and political empowerment in the public domain remained unfulfilled in spite of a hundred years of resistance against domination by white settler rule and the government of independent Zimbabwe rule. Women contributed to Zimbabwe's nationalist struggles but they still could not breach the entrenched male dominated traditional culture which continues to deprive them of equal political rights, personal freedom and protection from public violence. Women's alliances with constitutional and human rights organizations were also problematic since the men who controlled these organisations were not responsive to the special needs of women. The Women's Coalition has since 2008 formed its own autonomous coalition which is focusing on the constitutional review process.

As in Kenya the ideology of independence in Zimbabwe was not framed in the concepts of political empowerment of all the oppressed peoples. Zimbabwe's nationalist neglect of women's liberation was in fact hidden by the successful international representation of

Zimbabwe's liberation war which was created by liberal intellectuals who acted as spokespersons on behalf of Zimbabwe's liberation movement. Feminist scholarship in the post-liberation era is now gradually studying the lack of commitment to gender equality in Zimbabwe's war against settler colonialism. Whereas in Kenya, the educated elite of the nationalist movement were in prison and the Mau Mau fighters had no international advocates, the liberation leaders in Zimbabwe were highly educated and were themselves also sophisticated spokespersons on behalf of their cause. These leaders represented themselves in international fora and gave the impression that they were fighting people's liberation wars which are assumed to be democratic, and committed to gender equality. The international community itself did not question the nationalists on the comprehensiveness of their agenda in protecting the interests of all the citizens, including women.

With independence the new Zimbabwean government became urban focused, but when rural policies such as land redistribution needed to be implemented the regime allied with the traditional authorities in the countryside and sacrificed the interests of women to do so. By withdrawing its support for LAMA and making the judicial ruling in *Magaya v. Magaya* possible women realised they needed to create autonomous organizations to challenge male hegemony.



## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

### **5.1 Did liberation wars empower women in Kenya and Zimbabwe?**

In this research I have used the empowerment framework as a method for evaluating women's access to national political decision-making positions. I applied this framework to women's experiences in the wars of liberation in Kenya and Zimbabwe to find out if women's agency in these wars gained them gender liberation and transformation of gender relations. I concluded that many decades into the history of post-independent Kenya and Zimbabwe, men continue to dominate national politics and have not been responsive to the aspirations for women's liberation nor have gender relations changed. Women were not politically empowered by their participation in the wars of liberation. The ideologies of these wars did not incorporate ideas of gender equality, changes in gender relations or women's emancipation from traditional gender subordination.

In Kenya I used the method of induction into the Mau Mau movement to demonstrate that although a few women recruited and administered the oath to inductees, most of the women were not empowered by the oathing process. I think that the use of menstruating women and their performing sexual acts during the induction of men into the higher hierarchies of the Mau Mau disempowered the women. Among the Mau Mau forest fighters, since women needed to prove themselves worthy of becoming warriors I also think that fewer women got the opportunity to become combatants than were available to fight. This probably meant that there were fewer women in decision-making positions in the war councils of the Mau Mau. The largest number of Mau Mau women were assigned to do gender stereotypical work. The combination of women's lack of status in the combat zones and the colonial government's forcing women into domesticity through MYWO set the Kenyan women's political aspirations back by more than a generation after the attainment of independence.

In Zimbabwe too the guerrillas in the countryside viewed both mature women and younger women in traditional light. The guerrillas did not have an ideology of social transformation hence they did not help to empower the women although they expected and received a high level of support from these rural women. In both Kenya and Zimbabwe women did not have a forum to discuss their concerns on gender relations or to expand the aims of the liberation movement beyond regime change and incorporate the transformation of social relations

within the African communities. With the attainment of independence women continued to be disadvantaged politically

In Kenya the negative portrayal of Mau Mau before national and world public opinion caused both men and women to hide their roles in the war. In the immediate aftermath of the war Kenyan women were unable to make claims for recognition and credit. Even after independence the stigma of the war continued against participants until many decades later, when scholars began to retrieve from ageing women participants their recollections of what they did in the war. As information became more accessible younger Kenyan women have expressed appreciation and pride about what women contributed to the Mau Mau war (Kanogo 1987b: 96). According to O'Barr, individual women played empowering roles as the nationalist war was being waged. But the impact was not all-encompassing enough 'to resolve many of the issues faced by Kenyan women today' (O'Barr 1985: 35). Individual women like Wambui Waiyaki Otieno gained recognition for her Mau Mau work and was rewarded with numerous state-level positions that made her internationally famous and financially successful (Otieno 1998). In Zimbabwe individual women also were empowered, like Joyce Mujuru who is now the vice President of Zimbabwe, and Fay Chung who was the Director of Education in the Ministry of Education. Fay Chung is now an internationally renowned scholar who also held high level posts in the United Nations. Nevertheless from the perspective of the largely female rural population the nationalist movements in Kenya and Zimbabwe did not empower them as a group. In spite of the neglect of their interests women indeed had developed political consciousness both from colonial oppression and from their participation in the wars of liberations. Women's political activism has remained high in both of these countries and women continue to seek ways to empower themselves through participation in women's organizations.

## **5.2 Women's organizations for political empowerment**

The colonial governments in both Kenya and Zimbabwe formed national women's organizations which they used to undermine the nationalist struggles. In spite of their initial negative connotations women in both countries understood the powerful potential of these organisations for mobilizing women to protect their interests. Although white settler women wanted to use MYWO in Kenya and FAWC in Zimbabwe to teach western values to African

women, the women in both countries diverted the agendas of these organization to serve their own nation-building needs, such as learning innovative agricultural practices, practical skills to enable women earn incomes and to use the organizational skills to advance the national liberation movements.

The governing regimes of the newly independent states of Kenya and Zimbabwe also recognized the mobilizing potential of national women's organisations and captured MYWO in Kenya for political purposes. Such was also the case with and the Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs in Zimbabwe. Once these organizations were weakened the regimes were able to control and oppress women as part of the male deal to get the support of traditional elements in the society. Activist women broke free from state control to form their own autonomous women's organizations and to use them to challenge the male monopoly over the institutions of power in their countries.

My focus on autonomous women's organizations in Kenya and Zimbabwe showed that, these organizations needed to mobilize grassroots women over a very long time-frame through consciousness-raising processes. In the case of the GBM Maathai used a politically conscious mass base to embark upon the building of alliances with pro-democracy groups to challenge the hegemony of the male control of political power in Kenya. This strategy enabled Maathai to be voted into parliament and to sponsor pro-women legislation. The mobilization of a vast mass of organized women also opened up the political process for other women to contest representative electoral positions.

In the present political atmosphere where politics have become more competitive the government of national unity in Kenya is becoming more responsive to the interests of women. A new Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Development was established in 2003. There is a gender bureau within this ministry with the status of a full department. The functioning of this ministry is highly problematic though, since it is very dependent on foreign funding to accomplish its programmes. In 2009 the government adopted a Gender Policy which will obligate it to be more responsive to the financial needs of the ministry. In 2004 an act of parliament that created the National Commission on Gender and Development came into effect and its mandate is to promote gender mainstreaming in all government ministries and state corporations. A Women's Enterprise Fund was launched in

2007 to offer credit facilities to women to help with women's economic empowerment. Gender desks and gender officers are now in every ministry, state corporations and at the police stations. All these policies and initiatives can only work effectively if there are autonomous women's organizations that take on the responsibility for monitoring how well these agencies and bureaus are fulfilling their mandates. Such organizations should provide information to women so that they can be knowledgeable political participants in democratic processes. If women use their votes effectively their government will be more responsive to their interests.

In Zimbabwe WAG is also mobilizing vulnerable women against state-sponsored violence. However the wider based Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCoZ) provides us with valuable lesson on the type of alliances that autonomous women's organizations may be able to embark on in order to gain strength to challenge male dominated politics. In a society with a pervasive male dominated ideology, leaders of women's organizations in Zimbabwe found that even human rights and pro-democracy organizations did not easily accommodate gender equality agendas. In the constitutional reform process currently taking place in 2012 in Zimbabwe WCoZ, which comprises about 65 women's organization in its coalition, is working directly with the COPAC, rather than form alliances with mixed gender organizations. It is focused on mobilizing and educating Zimbabwean women to monitor the work of the constitution review process and to ensure that women's key demands for the protection of their rights are actually included in the final draft of the constitution that is produced in Zimbabwe in 2012.

This discussion of the major women's organizations from the two countries shows that the grassroots mobilization of women is important. It is also important to form appropriate alliances with men to enter the political arena and to challenge the autocratic male dominant politics of the post-independence era.

The two case studies demonstrate the need for women's participation at the beginning of conflict situations and be part of the decision-making on crucial aspects of the conflict, including the reasons, the objectives and the protection of the interests of all social groups, including women. Women's organizations should pressure their militaries during the

conflict phase to ensure that women get equal opportunities for training, use of equipment, assignments according to merit, promotion in ranks and access to military resources. They should ensure that women are protected from sexual exploitation and cared for sympathetically during pregnancy and provided child care facilities.

In setting up the post-conflict government women's organizations should also facilitate carrying forward any advances that women gained during the conflict, ensure women's participation in the negotiations for a post-conflict regime in which society is restructured on the basis of gender equality. In the peace-building environment women's organizations should continue to monitor the gender equitable distribution of cabinet assignments, the establishment of a Women's Affairs Ministry that will in its turn monitor the gender mainstreaming of all government agencies. The political empowerment of women contributes to the democratization of states and curtails the pervasive incidence of conflicts that many African countries presently suffer from.

## **APPENDIX**

### **The Women's Charter - Shortened Version** *Published by the Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe* 2001

#### **PREAMBLE**

We, the women of Zimbabwe, as full citizens making up over half the Zimbabwean people;

Claiming the birth right of every human being to have freedom and equality;

Having contributed equally to the development of the nation throughout its history;

Having contributed equally to the struggle for the independence of our nation;

Having suffered oppression through patriarchy, custom and tradition, colonialism, racism, male-dominated dictatorship and capitalism;

Finding ourselves still discriminated against in law, politics, business, society, culture and religion;

As workers in every sphere of national life;

As the mothers of the people and of future generations –

#### **DEMAND . . .**

- A constitution, laws and policies that make women and men equal;
- To be recognised for our role in founding and developing the country;
- To take part fully and equally in our nation;
- No more oppression;
- No more discrimination against women in public life, at work and at home;
- The extra opportunities for women to put right the imbalances of the past and build equality in the future;
- Personal safety, protection for our property and no more violence against women;
- A plan of action, a time frame and the resources to make these demands possible.

#### **EQUALTY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION**

Women claim full equality with men. Women must be equal under the constitution, under the law, in politics, business, public life and in homes. The nation must recognise the wrongs of the past and give women extra opportunities. Discrimination must be forbidden.

Women must have equal rights within the family and to custody of children. They must play an equal role in making decisions in all aspects of family life.

Women must have equal rights to earn their living. Brothers and sisters must have equal rights to inherit, equal rights to land and housing and equal access to other natural resources and funds. Laws must support this.

Women must have the right to support from the state and the right to education.

The state must encourage positive images of women in the newspapers and on television and discourage stereotypes.

Culture and religion are important but they must never be used to justify discrimination against women.

## **LAW AND ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE**

Laws must support, protect and promote equality of rights and opportunities for women and girls. Both men and women, boys and girls, must be able to use the law to protect their rights.

Women must be part of the country's justice system, including the customary system. They must have extra opportunities to take their place as equal decision makers in how the laws are made and put into practice and how all the courts are run.

The law must support women's right to make decisions about their own lives. Women and men must have equal rights and duties as parents.

The justice system must be friendly to those who use it and victim friendly, especially for victims of rape, domestic violence and child abuse.

Mentally or physically disabled people must be helped and protected whenever they have to deal with the law or the courts.

People who run the courts must not be influenced by anything except fair judgement and women must be equally represented at all levels of the justice system.

Anyone working in the courts must be gender sensitive and make decisions that protect the rights and interests of women.

Any citizens who want to protect their rights but cannot afford a lawyer must be given free help and advice. There must be a special budget set aside for this.

Police officers must treat everyone equally; they must treat women with respect and as equal to men. The police must protect women against all forms of violence.

All citizens must have free and full access to information about their legal and constitutional rights provided by the state.



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