



**Remembered or Dismembered, Deified or Defied? The Challenges of  
African Heroines in Contemporary History**

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**Abstract**

The development of any society depends on the overall contribution of its entire populace. These include: men, women, elderly and the youths, but specifically both genders, male and female. Unfortunately, while the African society have always honoured and subsequently immortalised the males after their demise as heroes, such gestures are scarcely extended to the females heroines. With focus on Nigeria, this paper traces the history of women who have contributed and even sacrificed their lives from the pre- colonial to contemporary period, and examined how the state has given back to them after their demise. The study relies on archival materials, extant literature and media reports. The study reveals that Nigeria has not done enough to dignify these heroines as compared to their male counterparts. Recommendations were made based on these findings. One of which was that, for the sake of posterity and equity, the Nigerian female heroines should enjoy similar honours, like their male counterparts.

**Keywords:** Women, Heroines, Honours, Gender, Aba Women Riot, Ebola

**Introduction**

*The histories written by men often hide women in dark folds, erase them, or are unaware of their presence.*

*This research is an attempt to give women their rightful place in History<sup>1</sup>.*

An individual is a product of the society and the nation he/ she lives in. There is no doubt that just as the males have been contributing in most aspects of societal development in the nation's space, their female counterpart have done likewise. After these great men and women pass on, it is ideal that they are honoured as a sign of prestige, gratitude and lessons for the future generations. It is noteworthy that, the male counterparts tend to gain more ground in terms of such celebrations which comes as post-humus celebration or national honours than the female counterparts. This can be substantiated through the naming and remaining of ministries, roads, parastatal, institutions, national symbols or public establishments after the demise of these great men<sup>2</sup> with little to show on the woman's part.<sup>3</sup> Though, some of these women were heroines or martyrs in their respective domains and the Nigerian society as a whole, the few honours given, are not commensurate with the accolades their male counterparts get.

One may wonder if such discrimination is as a result of the patriarchal nature of pre-literate and pre-scientific societies, sheer negligence, deliberate neglect or ascription of women's achievements as an unnecessary venture. This attitude seems not peculiar to Africa alone though. Examples are narratives about the French Revolution of the late eighteenth century, which portrayed the revolution as strictly a man's victory against the crown or autocracy. Whereas, a study revealed that on Monday 5 October 1789, between five to six thousand women marched on Versailles, with the women of *la Halle* leading the way and behind them came the men, with the youngest disguised as women (Bessieres & Niedzwiecki 1991:4).

A lot of studies have been done on the political and socio-economic roles of women to African development (Awe 1977; Mba

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<sup>1</sup> Fausta Deshormes la Valle, cited in Bessieres & Niedzwiecki 1991:n.p)

<sup>2</sup> Such honours are referred to as Juicy Honours in Local Parlance.

<sup>3</sup> Oppositely, this can be called 'unjuicy' honours.

1978; Johnson 1982; Faseke, 2001; Ikpe 2006). Some have examined these women as heroines in their domains (Mba 1992; Johnson 1982), yet, a few studies have discussed the way government and the societies have paid back these heroines by way of honours. Thus, despite the increase in articles in local history, the math seems not to favour the women (Ntwape 2016). It however appears as if very few numbers of local or indigenous people have spearheaded the campaign to correct these injustices in their respective domains, be it at: the local, State or Federal government levels. It should be of note, that, whether in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial states, these heroines' overwhelming roles cannot be overemphasised.

It is against this backdrop that this study is hinged. This study is historical and descriptive in nature as it gives an exposé of the exploits and sacrifices of these great women in their various societies and attempts by government at (dis)honouring them from enjoying similar fate with their male counterpart. The study is divided into two parts hereafter: Heroines in pre-colonial Nigerian Societies; Heroines as Nationalists: From Colonial to post- Colonial Struggles and beyond; and the Conclusion.

### **Heroines in Pre-colonial Nigerian Societies**

Women played notable roles in governance, economy, military and socio-cultural spheres during this period. Little wonder, Awe (1992:3-11) averred that some of the women were saviours of their societies. Lending credence to the roles women played during this period was Mazrui (2000), who advanced that, in most parts of Africa, traditional cultures, women were culturally supposed to have a triple role as custodian of fire, water and earth. As custodians of fire, the African women found herself in charge of rural Africa's most important source of domestic energy, firewood as she treks long distances to collect it. As Custodian of water, the African women ensured water-supply for the home and for the extended family. Again she often walks a mile or two to the lake or river. As Custodians of earth, she is the fertility of the womb (woman as mother) and the fertility of the soil (woman as cultivator). In southern Africa, Brink (1990) gave her

opinion about the Afrikaner woman within the Afrikaner society. She regarded the Afrikaner woman as a *volksmoeder*, a mother of the nation. She succinctly puts it thus, “the Afrikaner woman was depicted not only as the cornerstone of the households, but also as a central unifying force within Afrikanerdom and as such, was expected to fill a political role as well” (Brink, 1990: 273). Even in neighbouring Ghana, women such as Juaben Serwaa I, Juaben Serwaa II, Dodi Akai, Amenfiwaa, Akyaa Oyiakwan and Asantehemaa Nana Adoma Akosua of Asante were notable heroines to behold. Aside from the political roles they played in their kingdoms, they were also involved in military and diplomatic assistance to their generations which has helped to unify and sustain the present day Ghana.

Afisi (2010) further supports this position by averring that “in various traditional African societies, the African woman possessed the power that binds the society together” (pp229-231). For example in the pre-colonial Benin Empire, women were sacrificed as offerings to the “God of Rain” to avoid bad harvest or forestall heavy rainfall (Roth, 1968:52-54). In fact, the last *Ogiso* (Kingship) was ultimately banished from the throne for maladministration and especially for the commission of *kirikvua*, which was for ordering the execution of a pregnant woman (Egharevba, 2005). Undoubtedly, the name of this pregnant woman may have been forgotten by some of the people in this generation.

About AD1440, Ewuare (Oworuare) murdered Ekobe, the richest lady to the south of Bini, and carried off her treasure including slaves (Egharevba, 2005:15). Such injustice could only have gone unchallenged due to the supposed weak status of the woman as well as the patriarchal nature of that era. Another instance was, Emotan, who was believed to have offered *Oba* Ewuare (reigned from 1440-1473) some assistance. Although, Ewuare made efforts to have her deified by planting the popular *Uruhe* tree at the spot where late Emotan used to display her goods at the popular Oba Market and also made *Ekpate* to be her worshipper. Furthermore, a statute of Emotan was erected on the spot by the Benin Native Administration at the suggestion of Oba Akenzua II (reigned from 1933-1978) (Egharevba,

2005: 18). A few women that were also remembered during religious or traditional rites were Ewuare's wives, Ubi and Ewere at annual *Igue* festivals.

After the demise of Ewuare, a woman, Adeleyo was almost made the Oba, but owing to a feminine indisposition, she was denied the throne. Thereby, forfeiting the throne for a biological disposition. Another injustices and sacrifices made by women, was during the short rule of Ezoti (1473-1473 for only 14days), Prince Okpame, who was sent to *Esi* to bring home Ezoti's only son and heir, Owere. Okpame, not only killed the heir apparent, Owere, but also killed his mother. Subsequently, Prince Okpame became the King bearing the title, Oba Ozolua. At a battle between Oba Ozolua and General Elekidi of Ogbelaka kingdom, Ozolua killed Elekidi and married his wife, Eyowo. Though Ozolua won the battle because Eyowo betrayed her husband and she suffered same fate under Ozolua because he feared she may betray him some day, just like she did to her late husband. It should also be of note that Ozolua's daughter, Imagbogho did his father a great service as she sneaked into Elekidi's compound pretending to sell bean cake and so managed to bribe Eyowo. The intelligence she gathered may have also helped Ozolua to gather the Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of the enemy which may have also tilted the war outcome. Yet, very little attributes of Ozolua's victories are apportioned to the roles played by these women.

Furthermore, at the Idah war of 1515, Oliha in retributory justice strangled his wife Imaguero. Queen Idia also led soldiers against her son's enemies and helped to conquer more territories. In AD1770, Iden the wife of Ewuakpe offered herself as a sacrifice when Benin was in a dismal situation to reverse the fortunes of the empire (Egharevba, 1971:71-72; Nzemeka, 2009:35). Though a few honours is made for Idia, these are only an initiative forced on local administration through naming of a secondary school and subsequently used as a symbol of the Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) in 1977.

Among the Yorubas, *Oya*, the most favoured of Sango's wives was believed to have accompanied him against the Tapa (Nupe) Kingdom and when she heard of her husband's suicide, she did same. However, she was deified after the river Niger, *Odo Oya*. The Oyo Empire witnessed female ruler, *Iyayun* after the demise of her husband, Aganju in the fifteenth century. Johnson (1921) wrote that she wore the royal robes, invested with the *ejigba*, the *opa ileke* and other royal insignia and ruled the kingdom as a man until her son was of age. One of Alafin Ajaka's wives who gave birth to twins and decided to evade infanticide formed what is today known as Ondo (Johnson, 1921:25). There has been no attempt to find out her name and honour her. Subsequently, in *Ado-Ekiti*, in *Ekiti* State, one female ruler Yeyenirewu, ruled between 1511 and 1552. Also, in Ile-Ife, Luwe was a female Ooni (ruler of Ife) and in Egba land, Tenilade, Erelu and Latoni respectively reigned as the traditional rulers (Afonja, 1986). However, modern literature and studies especially on historiography hardly mention these heroines and their contributions.

Moremi of *Ile Ife* sacrificed herself and her only child *Ela* or Olurogbo for her victory over the Igbo invaders (Johnson, 1921:147-148) and Queen Owari of Ilesa was undoubtedly, an exceptional statesman. Efunsetan Aniwura who with her immense wealth had assisted many Kings was executed by Oba Latosisa (Johnson, 1921:391-394), a woman who turned tyrannical by the society she had played a god to. It was reported that she owned some 2000 slaves in her farms alone exclusive of those at home; captains of war and war boys (1921: 393). Although, some narratives have portrayed her as childless, infertile and unaccomplished since a woman without a child is akin to failure in Yoruba land. It was such narratives of infertility, which necessitated Barlow (2014) to assert some of such descriptions as one of the complications created in narratives expressing feminine sexuality. Other women with immense wealth like Efunsetan were Madam Efunroye Tinubu and Miniya Jojolola in Abeokuta, Yade, Efundunke and Olojo (Ilesanmi, 2010:37). In fact, Tinubu was so powerful that she provided an immense amount of munitions for the persecution of the *Dahomey* Wars and also helped in the installation of Alake Oyekan on the throne in Abeokuta (Blair, 1938).

In the Hausa-Fulani city states of Zaria, Queen Aminat fought for her people against their enemies. She is believed to be an empire builder, who ruled from the Jukun area to Nupe and subjugated Bauchi and exerted tribute from Kano and Katsina (Bovill, 1933). It was also accounted that she received eunuchs and kola nuts as tributes from the Western part of the western Sudan in Hausa land (Bovill, 1933:222; Decker, 2009:86), these tributes must have been used to further develop the city-state. The imperialist and growth of Zaria over other Afno cities is also attributed to the exploits, efficiency and popularity of Queen Aminat (Woodson 1944: 51). Even among the Kanuri of Kanem Bornu, Magira Aisa Kuli not only acted as regent in Borno between 1562 and 1569 but must have influenced Mai Idris Alooma on state affairs and agricultural policies (Ikpe 1997:249; Nzemeka, 2009: 40). Another woman was Nana Asma'u Uwar-daje, who contributed immensely to the educational development and liberation of women in the Sokoto Caliphate and by extension, Hausaland. More so, it was observed that she was also a source of experience to her brother, Muhammed Bello when he took over the affairs of the Caliphate (Bivins 2007; Boyd 1989). Little wonder, some scholars asserted that the social, political and economic contributions of northern women are monumental with lack of historical accounts of these heroines to the development of Northern society or Nigerian as a whole (Yerima & Aliyu, 2011).

In Igbo land and Niger-river protectorate, their case is no different. Ikpe (1997) gave account of Omu Nwagboka of Onitsha, a prominent woman of the nineteenth century who wielded political and commercial fame and also advised the Obi of Onitsha from time to time. A similar role was believed to have been played by Queen Kambasa of Bonny Kingdom (Nzemeka, 2009:27). The role played by Princess Inikpi of Igala land cannot also be over emphasised. Also from Onitsha were Madams Izedi Ughoma and Helena. The latter whose name was immortalized by the famous lyrics "Helena Nwa mama" was indeed very rich and her wealth used for humanity (Faseke, 2001: 16). In the Delta area, there was Madam Ajalorugin (alias Ojojo of Warri); madam Obahor also became wealthy from her commerce with John Holt Company. Despite their contributions to the development of

their lands, little or nothing has been done to celebrate these heroines.

While some societies remember and deify some of their heroines, some others have not only defied or buried theirs in the sands of time but have neglected these heroines and also assigned their achievements and activities to their male counterparts. Interestingly, some societies deliberately or unintentionally accentuated the achievements of the heroines to the male counterparts. Thus, Darrow (2008) averred that, despite the contributions of some French women in nursing the injured, especially the role played by Coralic Cahen during the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871) and the emergent of the French Red Cross Society, literature on the organisation has not given her the deserved attention in history. Although, France lost the war, Cahen was able to establish the humanitarian aspect of France and herself even to the enemies which she treated amidst the French defeat. She puts her motivating factor for such gesture thus, "at first from strict humanitarianism and then, I must also say, from a sense of national dignity; I wanted to oblige people to regard us as generous even if we could not be victorious." (Darrow, p.171).

### **Heroines as Nationalists: From Colonial to post- Colonial Struggles and beyond**

The Colonial conquest swept the whole of Africa except Liberia and Ethiopia but that does not mean that the people of other African countries gave a free entry to the invaders. Rather it was a show of resistance and resilience against an invader, who came in the name of civilisation. The resistance was not left for the men alone, rather, it was a battle of both sexes; physically, economically, politically, physiologically and otherwise. In fact, there were some activities of these women against a world power such as the United States interest in Puertorico, South America between 1930s and 1950s (De Wagenheim 2016).

Indeed, the anti-colonial role of the *Mau Mau* revolts in Kenya is well known to some Africanists and historians. However, Gathogo (n.d)



revealed some persons who were believed to have been instrumental to the struggle through their contributions, one way or the other. His mention of Tabitha Karingo, who defied all odds, including cultural practices that were inimical to the dignity of women, was also worth noted. The role of another heroine, Mekatilili wa Menza, from the coastal area was also revealed. In fact, her exploit in the Giriama resistance of 1913 has today in Kenya become a rallying point for political unification and regional goals (Carrier & Nyamweru 2016). These revelations are only but a few instances where women's anti-colonial roles have been neglected in contemporary history.

Some scholars, (Mba 1978; Johnson 1982) believe that women's movements were particularly important in anticolonial activity especially the southwestern Nigeria where women possessed a long and rich history of collective organization through which they articulated and protected their interests from pre-colonial times. This study further attests to these roles played by Igbo women of southeastern region as not only overwhelming but that the movements became the basis and strengths of subsequent agitations.

A good example of such social resistance movement was the Nwaobiala Movement of 1925 or Dancing Women's Movement. Though the Nwaobiala dance movement of 1925 was a forerunner, the Women's riot of 1929 became the 'Arab' spring of its time, changing the political stance of women henceforth. In consonance with this apparition, was, Afigbo's (1980) submission that, it was the riot organised by the women that shattered the complacent British belief that their rule was welcome by an overwhelming majority of Nigerians. This was a call against the Igbo elites or warrant chiefs as it were. Bastian (2002) posits that the focus of the Nwaobiala was on the Warrant Chiefs and *Ndi Ezeala* or *Ezeani* over the exploitation of the land, unchecked colonial monetization, rising price of imported commodities and bride wealth, coupled with the falling value of produce.

These exploitative policies were further magnified by the Aba Women Riot of 1929. It is believed to have started off when a warrant chief,

Okugo Okezie confronted madam Nwanyeruwa who took his questions as an affront and a scuffle ensued (Faseke, 2001:25; Matera, Bastian, & Kent, 2012) ). The movement as Isichie (1983) puts it became a rejection of colonialism in general and of administrative oppression and economic injustice in particular. Though studies on taxation and revolts emphasise the revolt as a local peculiarities, Atanda and Tamuno's works on Oyo case and Niger Delta show that the incidence was much more complex than have often imagined. Asiwaju (1980) observed that rather than the issue of direct taxation narratives in older texts, the upheaval was one of the protests against the sum total of grievances associated with contemporary British administrative practices and the allied inroads of Western civilization.

Although thirty-two of these women were killed, while thirty one were wounded, it remained the only women's war that transcended ethnic boundaries (Faseke, 2001:25). This number is though contested as Bastian (2002:274-275) gave a table ranging from one single male, Alimi Aromashodun to an unidentified Ngwa (Owerri area) woman. In her table, the number of death accounted was fifty-two together with the only man, origin from Lagos state but resides in the region must have been a passer-by (Bastian, 2002:275). Aside the number of deaths, the injuries, destroyed properties and aborted future were recorded. As one woman named Enyidie recounted how she miscarried from the blow from a stick while at Chief Okugo's house (Matera *et al*, Chapter 5)

Subsequently, the roles played by three movements under the auspices of great women cannot be downplayed. The Lagos Market Women's Association led by Madam Alimotu Pelewura, the Nigerian Women's Party led by Lady Oyinkan Abayomi and the Abeokuta Women's Union led by Mrs. Funmilayo Anikulapo Kuti (formerly Ransome-Kuti) (Johnson, 1982: 138-141). Kuti through her women's movement, made sure that the Alake of Egba land, Oba Ladapo Ademola II was forced into exile (Davies 2014:87), as a result of his exploitative policies in on 3 January 1949. Madam Kuti's movement became a rallying point for other women's movement not just because it confronted and resisted British colonial policies, but

because it defied every common sense. This was a period when women could hardly challenge the patriarchal society, let alone, the authority of the Oba. Johnson (1982) highlighted the importance of the women movements in southwestern Nigeria thus:

1. Women were acutely aware of the threat which colonial policies posed to their social status;
2. Women could organize through their own ethnic political organization, utilizing mechanism to preserve and protect their economic rights; and
3. Yoruba women recognized the utility of modern western style techniques in fighting colonial authorities [sic] (Johnson: 1982:155).

Consequently, Charlotte Obasa of the Lagos Women's League (defunct by the 1940s) fought a long battle for the right of women to employment in government (Johnson, 1982:146). Women activists like: Wuraola Esan, Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, Margaret Ekpo and Hajia Gambo Sawaba played immense roles in forcing the British to revise some obnoxious policies. It should be noted that these were the administrative roles they added to their multiple roles during the Second World War in defeating the Axis bloc. In appreciating these salient roles, Kalaora had to stage a performance to honour these heroines. To her,

World War Women is a suspenseful reliving of the triumphs of some of our greatest heroines. From organizing the Resistance, to blowing up rail tracks, rescuing downed RAF pilots, and flying dangerous missions, these stories are not for the faint of heart and may very well be the most influential and often forgotten victories of the war (Kalaora 2018)

These roles of women in warfare were also replicated in the Greek Civil War (1946-1949). Some of the Greek women fought, not just to add to numbers, but fearlessly that they were tagged, 'blood thirsty hyenas' (Anagnostopoulou, 2001). Such women had also been involved in the anti-colonial struggles in the Gold Coast. Some of

which were, Theodosia Okoh, Sophia Oboshie Doku, and Hannah Kudjoe. Unfortunately, some of these women are usually not recognised. Allman (2009) confirmed that in Ghana's 2007 celebration of her Heroes and Heroines, Hannah Kudjoe's name was conspicuously omitted.

In 1949 during the Iva Valley shooting at the coal mines or the Enugu Colliery Massacre, Eastern Nigeria, Margaret Ekpo along with others like Jaja Nwachukwu, S.O Masi, Iwuna, and Bell-Gam organised a rally at Aba where they succeeded in exposing the injustices of British colonialism and its agents against the indigenes. They were subsequently arrested and detained, though later released but ordered to report at the United Africa Company every hour for security screening (Effah-Attoe and Jaja, 1993).

### **Post- Colonial Struggles and Beyond**

At independence more women were already in politics as active player or otherwise and political party formers, public policy and decision making bodies, administrative and other sphere of lives doing what is best for the development of the country and even during and after the Nigerian civil war, they still continued to contribute to the propagation of peaceful co-existence, directly or indirectly. The attainment of independence and attainment of post –civil war tranquility did not stop these women from perusing for a better Nigeria where equity, fairness and justice reigns. They fought against oppression, injustice and tyranny especially during the military imbroglio, while some sacrificed their strength, some the ultimate prize, lives. Madam Sawaba in a program on Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) recalled that it was in one of her frequent trips to the prison that she had a miscarriage which denied her of a second child (Faseke, 2001:26-27).

After various agitations against the colonialist and military junta, especially in the pre-independence constitutional negotiation of 1946, Mrs. Anikulapo Kuti, defender of women's rights (UNESCO, 2014) was brutally killed by Unknown Soldiers as the elderly woman was thrown

from a balcony in the 1970s. Before her demise, she had earlier given an interview where she averred that “All our bigmen and women now travel to China and Russia. I suffered for their freedoms” (cited from, Johnson-Odim and Mba, 1997: xii; Johnson-Odim, 2009:51). Thus, after her death in April 1978 a major Nigerian newspaper hailed her as, “...a progressive revolutionary whose immense contribution to the continued crusade for the educational emancipation of the country will ‘never be forgotten’ and another as an ‘anti-imperialist’ and a Pan-African visionary.” (Johnson-Odim and Mba, 1997: 170; Johnson-Odim, 2009:51).

More so, women participated actively against Military rule and corrupt officials such as the popular “Alli Must Go” of the 1980s, and “IBB Must Go” in the 1990s. Eventually when an election was conducted to usher in a democratically elected president under a free and fair atmosphere in 1993, the process was not only hijacked and truncated, but the supposed winner Chief M.K.O Abiola and his wife, Kudirat Abiola paid the great prize in July 1998 and June 1996 respectively (HRW, 2000, 58; Kaufman 1998). Kudirat had set up a pirate radio from unknown locations so as to prevent being arrested or seizure of publications by coercive state agents (Ngara & Esebonu 2012, 193). In fact she contributed to the nascent democracy we enjoy presently through the mass mobilization of market women, labour leaders, students and other activist during the struggles. Unfortunately, the democratically elected governments have not been able to arrest and prosecute her killers even after two decades. Thus, Onumah asked in a punch editorial, “so, who killed Kudirat Abiola?” (Onumah, 2013). Although, the State government did all within its power to prosecute the case, the patriarchal state dominated by men in power, truncated this process, that most of the alleged suspects are not only free, but also planning to seek political positions.

Another example was the late Professor Dora Akunyili, who in a bid to tackle the threat to lives through fake and counterfeited drugs while at the helms of affair at the National Agency for Foods and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) became a target of two assassination attempts; the first in August 2001 and the second in

2003 (*The Sun Newspaper*, 2014). She was on a national duty at the national conference, Abuja held in 2014, when she was flown to a hospital abroad for an undisclosed ailment. She eventually died on 7 June 2014. Be that as it may, she served and died while on active duty for her dear country.

A Liberian Ambassador, Patrick Sawyer on July 20, 2014 came to the country to attend a conference when he was diagnosed with the Ebola Virus Disease. As at October 1, 2014 the World Health Organisation put the number of people affected with the EVD in West Africa up to 28 September, at 7178, with 3338 deaths (WHO, 2014a), while up to the end of 12 October, there were 8997 confirmed, probable and suspected cases in seven affected countries (Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Spain and the United States of America) with 4493 deaths (WHO, 2014b). At the hospital where Sawyer was diagnosed of having contacted the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD), it was reported that even when he was informed of the nature and consequences of his illness if discharged, he insisted on leaving the hospital and threatened to infect the patients there. It was reported that the Medical personnel, Stella Adadevoh who attended to Sawyer single-handedly forced him to the bed after much plea. The Chief Medical Director of the hospital where the index case was identified explained that it was the refusal and strong will of Dr Adadevoh not to release Mr Sawyer that made Mr Sawyer to unleash his bio terror on the staff of the hospital including the four deceased. He puts it succinctly,

We lost four of our key staff who included, Dr. Adadevoh, she worked here for 21 years, Dr. Amos Abaniwo, our Chief consultant Anesthesiology and Director of clinical service, had been with us for 16 years. Dr. Adadevoh died leaving the husband and a son, Dr. Abaniwo died leaving his wife and three kids, the third person that died was a nurse Ejeleonu, she just started working with us that day. Unknown to us she was two months pregnant and she died with the pregnancy. The fourth person that died was Nurse

Evelyn Uko who had been working with us for the past 31 years. She was a widow, a single parent raising four children, she died living those children with us, multiple tragedy because the four children were kicked out of the home because of the stigma (Obinna and Olawale, 2014)

Among the four deceased, three were women. The National Assembly deliberated to honour Stella for her gallant battle against a disease the country was ill-prepared to deal with at that period. However, this honorary award was scuttled at the legislative house in contrary to the National Honours Act of 1963, which stipulated that any conferment of such award was not supposed to be given posthumously but the living. The National Honours Committee then released a statement in that regards. Indeed, if she could not be awarded with the nation's honours, then one will anticipate naming a national monument or institution after this heroine. Yet, we can only earnestly hope this will be actualised and not another mere rhetoric. The questions raised were: what if Sawyer had succeeded in leaving the hospital or what if he succeeded in attending the conference he was meant to and was Nigeria ready for such epidemic had Sawyer achieved his aims?

Paradoxically, the administration of President Buhari honoured some people believed to be the 12 June Pro-Democracy Heroes. Of the three awardees, late Chief M.K.O. Abiola, Ambassador Babagana Kingibe and late Chief Gani Fawehinmi, none was a woman. Chief Abiola was awarded the highest honours, Grand Commander of the Federal Republic (GCFR), which inadvertently places him in the position of an erstwhile head of state, the presidential running mate to Chief Abiola, Ambassador Kingibe was honoured with the prestigious and second highest award of the, Grand Commander of the Order of the Niger (GCON) and the late Human Right lawyer, Chief Fawehinmi was honoured with the GCON as well. It should be noted that while the award given to Chief Abiola was met with public outcry in some quarters as not deserved of a dead man and non- Nigerian Citizen, the presidency went ahead. Similarly, such contending issues

as to what constitutes a hero or heroines and who designates such awards have been raised in Zimbabwe. This was as a result of the politicisation of the issue whereby wives and associates of the erstwhile president, Robert Mugabe and members of his party were designated such awards (Goredema and Chigora 2009). They then warned that,

Today Zimbabwe has got man made heroines. This is the unfortunate part of our history, which perhaps will remain unwritten purposefully because the state shuns mentioning out who was a hero whilst alive. When we make our man- made heroes, histories records them as heroines (p.082)

Meanwhile, the late wife of Chief Abiola also laid down her life for the struggle, and Dr Adadevoh also did likewise for the nation, the presidency has not deemed it fit to reward these heroines. While the society now feasts on the works and sacrifices of these heroines, they may have been forgotten, dismembered and even defied, one way or the other. More so, such sacrifices made by these heroines may have been condemned, it is of note that they did whatever they did as a result of the realities and situations of the period (Amusa & Ofuafor 2012:409).

### **Conclusion**

As far back as the early twentieth century, the British had to honour Pandita Ramabai, one of the highest honours of India, the Kaiser-e-Hind award in 1919 for her contributions to humanity and translating the bible to the native language which made the religion of Christianity spread to most of Indians. In fact, an author, A.B. Shah, described her as the greatest woman produced by modern India and one of the greatest Indians in all history (cited from Babli 2015:89). Another scholar corroborated her contribution thus, “the distinction of Pandita Ramabai Saraswati lies as much in her status as a solitary woman leader of the women’s cause whose equal in stature is yet to emerge in Maharashtra” (Kosambi1998; Babli, 2015: 89). The United



States has done same for most of her heroines especially on postage stamps and other national symbols. Why is Africa and Nigeria in particular different?

Although the principle of equality of men and women was recognized in both the United Nations Charter in 1945 and the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the majority of development planners and executioners did not fully address the women's position in the process of development. The traditional pre-colonial states in alluring the fact that these women were part of the society deified some of them, but the post-independence state tend to pay little attention to these saviours and pillars of the society. They have not only been defied and denied equal rights but sidelined even in and after death.

In the nation's symbol of unity such as, national currencies, no female face appears and the only one, Madam Ladi Kwali is relegated to the back of the twenty naira note; among the first, second, third...generation Federal and state Universities named after the state's/country's nationalists and politicians, none is named after a woman; among other injustice done to these group. The closest any successive government has done is to have their (heroines) statutes built at roundabouts, named after female hostels, trunk A or B roads, sub-institutions, and some other unimportant effigies named after them while their male counterparts get more accolades. A few of these national symbols are: The Murtala International Airport, Tafawa Balewa Square, Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), Amina Hall in the University of Lagos, Zik, Belllo, Balewa, and Kuti halls in University of Ibadan (Edewor, 1993), Moremi hall in OAU, Tinubu hall in Federal University of Agriculture Abeokuta etc. Undoubtedly, while the heroines get national symbols, the heroines get sub-national or only hall of residents attached to these symbols. Meanwhile, more is expected and can be done at all levels; local, state and federal.

Borrowing from Effah-Attoe and Jaja's conclusion in biography of Margaret Ekpo, that Mattew Arnold in classifying the human society

of his time into three main categories: a group consisting of men and women who chatter, love and hate, and in the end, die and are forgotten; a group comprising men and women who, like the ocean waves, bubble and foam in the moonlight solitude, and disappear at dawn when faced by the stark realities of nation-building; and another group, comprising men and women, who accept the challenges of nation-building, strive earnestly, and eventually record impressive successes for their own generation and for posterity (Effah-Attoe and Jaja, 1993:164). Indeed, our heroines belong to the third category and deserve not only to be honoured, remembered but also immortalized and even deified just like their male counterparts. Indeed, for the sake of posterity and equity, there is no doubt that what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the geese. Simply put, they also need to be remembered (Leal 2017).

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