

237

"Changing the Narrative"

# WOMEN ON THE MOVE

N°01|2023

MAGAZINE

Queenzees  
designs &  
Amans  
beauty hub

Honouring  
The  
**DAHOMEY**  
Amazons



*Sylvie Njobati*  
**THE WARRIOR RECLAIMING  
OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE**

WOMEN ON THE MOVE

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There are several fascinating stories of young women doing incredible things in their communities and bringing about significant changes and we hope that at least one if not all of these stories will inspire you to DO MORE AND BE MORE. Relish the content with delight and let us know what you think.

[www.237womenonthemove.org](http://www.237womenonthemove.org)

# Editor's Note

The media is so intertwined in our lives that sometimes we can barely comprehend how much influence it has over us. Many years ago, the portrayal of women in the media was blatantly stereotypical with most content on radio television and magazines painting an image of women as sex symbols, weak politicians, unsuccessful business persons, weak housewives and sometimes as gold diggers. The media set this limit for audiences to perceive women in a certain way and it was very common for any human being to think of them as nothing but these. This historical disadvantage of how women were perceived in media has of course affected the way they are viewed in society today. However, thanks to the effort of several Government's, international and civil society organisations across the world, there has been a slight positive shift in how women are portrayed in media, and several media organisations have taken up the challenge to serve their audiences more positive content on the incredible actions that women and girls across the globe are taking to contribute to growth and development.



"237 women on the move" is joining the moving train, poised to train women and girls to be media savvy by sharing the stories of these trailblazers one at a time. We are set to create a dynamic culture that will embrace the incredible potential of women and promote democratic deliberation's which give women the chance to contribute to growth and development without prejudice. In this edition you will share the experience of one of Cameroon's most powerful young female activist who has recorded a fascinating win, leading a team of young people in a successful restitution campaign. After reading one of the articles DON'T YOU DARE on Our column Woman to Woman I bet you will send us a mail to share your own experiences or why not share with us how this article gave you the audacity to challenge the status quo and break the conspiracy of silence..

**Linda Neh Ngobesing**

Editor-in-chief



Chiangeh Amandine Dwin is a contemporary make-up artists and decorist from Kom, a locality in the North west Region of Cameroon. She was born and raised in Yaoundé Cameroon where she now runs a small make up business and trains young women and girls who are passionate about the art. She founded AMAN'S BEAUTY Hub in 2019 to provide top class makeup services and beauty tips, but over the last 4 years her business has evolved and she now offers make up lessons and event planning services. Although she started with no experience at all, Amandine's clients always appreciated her art and this gave her more confidence in what she was doing.

# AMAN'S BEAUTY HUB

## "Glow uniquely"

By Victorine Manjong

*"My business has really empowered me and given me a lot of self-confidence., it has taught me to manage my time and finances properly and to be more confident in my ability to be the best in what I do"*



Amandine dreams of owning a beauty school where she will be able to train girls in make-up artistry. She also plans on setting up a multipurpose vocational training centre for widows and vulnerable women where she hopes they can acquire skills to empower themselves financially. She holds a Master's of Science in International Money Banking and finance from the International relations institute of Cameroon IRIC.



# QUEENZEE'S DESIGNS



**By Sylvia Waindim**

After Meghan and Prince Harry's wedding there was a global redefinition of beauty and class during weddings and who can forget those head pieces? Before now, fascinators, pill box hats and you name it were such a "white man" thing that we could only admire from afar but there is a gifted lady in the town of Yaoundé, Cameroon, that is making the ladies' accessory dreams come true.

Meet Afuh Queenet better known as Queenzee designs. The lady behind the modern Ankara/Kente bags and the lady behind these beautiful head pieces. She started out as a bag maker. She took lessons from her cousin who is also into fashion design (CEO of LK le Stylist, Nanjo Fabrice) and then one day a client orders a fascinator. She had no previous knowledge of how to make them, she confesses "I didn't even know it was called a fascinator" but she took up the challenge, went online, took lessons through videos and pictures in one day.

She perfected the skill through constant practice and was able to satisfy her first client. (Nice ending to a beautiful risk right?) After that, orders kept coming and her adventurous spirit in trying new designs in bags, hats, decor and craft stayed alive. Then it came time for her to name her craft. She recalls her neighbor calling her and her junior sister "Queen" and "Zee" back when they were little, it was also her pick for a nickname in secondary school because it made her feel close to her sister, Zinita so when choosing a name for her business Queenzee felt like a natural choice. For now she operates a small business with no employees-you know like a one man squad, but she organizes trainings from time to time to enable women gain a skill and eventually uses this skills to generate income.

Like most startups Queenet faces challenges with limited capital, scarcity of fabric but she is determined to sail through all storms to make Queenzee designs a worldwide brand by setting up shops in various towns and cities. She has a showroom/workshop in Yaoundé which also acts as the headquarters of her business from where she sends her hats, crowns, clutches across the world to her ever growing global clientèle.

# Taking over art..



# MUYUKA'S SUPER WOMAN

By Sylvia Waindim

Imagine a kid not knowing who the great Shakespeare is, or be able to recite the famous multiplication table. A kid learning math from sharing guavas after a "raid" on trees in the community. It's not that hard to imagine. We are surrounded by them



Many schools have shut down due to the crisis in English speaking part of Cameroon. So a typical day in every community there has children playing on the roadside, climbing trees, fetching water, hawking fried snails, toothbrushes, groundnuts and whatever affordable commodity is in season. Where many people saw "freedom", rebellion, extra hands for work and a break in routine, Chia Blessing saw a gap, a need for education, it broke her heart to see a child, aged 3 who didn't know the alphabet and rather than just feel bad she decided to do something about it.

Blessing studied Law in the University of Yaoundé, Soa. She never set out to be a teacher though it's a passion she has been exercising since secondary School. After a visit back home in September 2018, she found a stronger purpose in an old passion of hers- to teach children. Muyuka is a really dangerous

part of Cameroon now with constant battles between the armed group fighters and the military. Amidst threats on her life to stop teaching the children she stayed true to her selfless choice. She started her lessons under a tree with 2 kids. As time passed she grew anxious about stray bullets so she used her own money to build 2 rooms in their family compound which served as classrooms for the ever growing number of children.

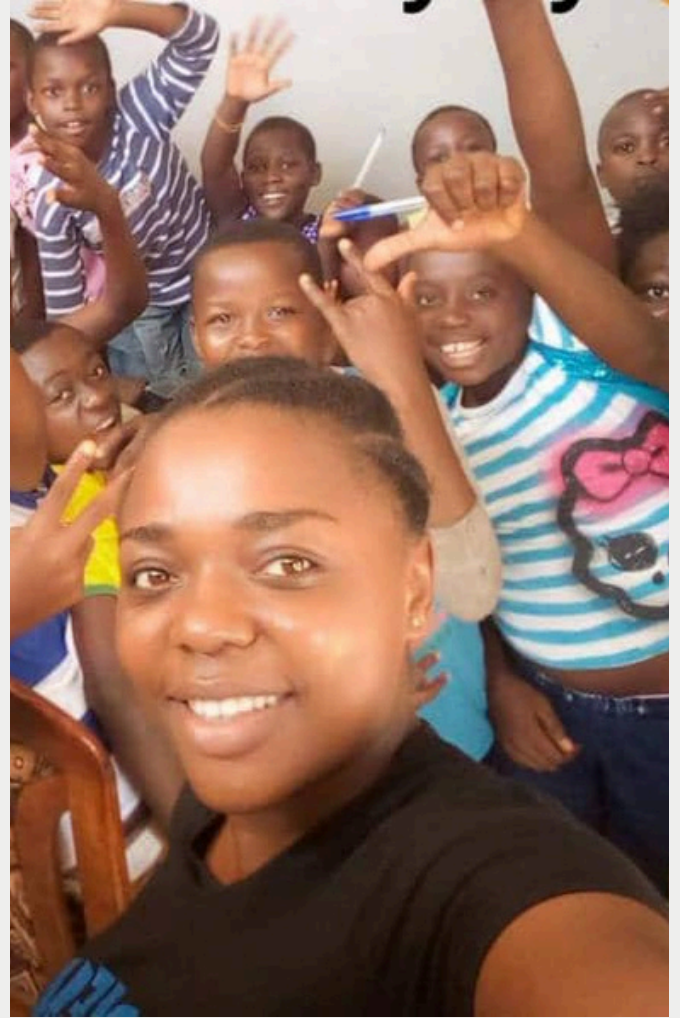
Today she teaches 47 kids who range from 3-16 years from her locality and from as far as Kumba and Mbonge. She offers her services to elderly people who want to be literate and her pay? The simple feeling of hearing a child move from no knowledge of "ABC" to saying "Madam I can write it, Madam I can read it" in her words "it's priceless "Blessing started teaching while pregnant and was back in the classroom barely 24 hours after giving birth! (Speechless)



**EDUCATION IS THE PASSPORT TO THE FUTURE, FOR TOMORROW BELONGS TO THOSE WHO PREPARE FOR IT TODAY.” —MALCOLM X**



She teaches the children literature, Math, English and other subjects relevant to their cognitive growth. She faces difficulty in acquiring teaching material due to limited finances, (this is a self-financed initiative with help from her brother), she has to juggle between caring for her new born and teaching, some of the text books she uses are obsolete and above all she fears for the safety of the children given that she has been threatened to stop teaching numerous times. With all these shortcomings, Blessing's kindness is still shining through. Many people see a woman, a rebel, a risk, but the 47 kids see a hero in no cape, a savior from an ignorance that would have left them permanently limited, they see a hope they had lost and a future that doesn't guarantee them wondering what if they were educated. In a world where it's logical to paddle your canoe in order to move it's truly moving to see a blessing like Blessing.





# WOMAN OF THE MONTH





# OVER 30 YEARS OF RESTITUTION REQUEST, MEET THE WARRIOR BRINGING NGONNSO HOME.

*In 2018 when the campaign to bring back Ngonso started again it was an inquest from my end, it was about unravelling the mystery surrounding my identity...*

According to oral History Ngonnso is one of the most powerful Cameroonian Queen mothers, described by many as an incredible diplomat. She is also known as the founder of Nso; a locality in the North West region of Cameroon. She is said to have defeated her two brothers Nchare Yen and Mfoomban after a brutal conflict wherein they disagreed over leadership issues. Years later, the sculpture of "Ngonnso" covered in rich nso beads depicting a naturally endowed beautiful woman with a bowl in front of her (ntara), which was guarded over the years in the Nso' Fòn's palace was looted, amongst many other artifacts, by German colonial adventurers, during the opening years of the 20th century. After 30 years of restitution request for the return of Ngonnso to the Nso palace by several individuals and collectively by organisations and groups, the precious sculpture of NGONNSO is finally coming home, thanks to a team of young people lead by an incredibly powerful young activist Sylvie Njobati. 237 Women on the move caught up with her to learn more about her journey throughout the campaign.





# NJOBATI SYLVIE

***Women on the move is delighted to hear that your campaign to bring back Ngonnso was successful, Congratulations on reaching this milestone.***

Thank you very much Linda for having me on women on the move I am very delighted as well to be a part of this wonderful ground-breaking magazine and thank you also for your kind words on the success of the restitution request for ngonnsso.

***What was your reaction when you heard that Ngonnso was finally coming home?***

When I moved into that big public library to receive the decision on the restitution request for NGONNSO I had mixed feelings. I knew that my team and I had done a good job in ensuring that everybody understands the implications of the devastating effects of colonialism on Nso people and the implications of the absence of NGONNSO for Nso people, as well as the importance of the return of NGONNSO for Nso Cameroon and Africa as a whole. However, you are never sure, despite the fact that the president of the foundation gave me his word. I was quite optimistic but then I was also worried that it could go sour. When he walked in I was seated in a corner with my head down because I was really worried and then he walked to me and we met half way in the hall. And then I asked him "should I be worried" and he said "no no no don't be worried". He then handed me 2 documents and said the foundation has authorized him to restitute Ngonnso, and then he showed me



the letter which was addressed to me and I requested that he reads the letter. My God I was so full of emotions, I was so overwhelmed I was so happy that I had to cry ,tears of joy. I thank God that I had Valerie Viban who was there with me. I felt like hugging my production crew that was there with me. A lot of things were running through my head. I wished my grandfather was still there alive to be able to celebrate with me. But then again I quickly thought that wherever he is, he is dining with Ngonnso, he is communing with Ngonnso, he is now my ancestor and he is watching, I also imagined ngonnsso in that cage, coming back home. A lot of things ran through my mind in fact my mind was racing with the whole project process. I was really happy. The first person I called was of course the Fon of Nso who is the paramount leader and the legal custodian of this object. He was so happy and we both celebrated. Some people said we should not be happy and he has been returned but I said it doesn't mean we cannot celebrate. I was actually celebrating the journey, the triumph in spite of the challenges.

## **Take us back to 2018 when the campaign to bring back ngonso kicked off what sparked your activism?**

In 2018 when the campaign to bring back Ngonnso started again it was an inquest from my end, it was about unravelling the mystery surrounding my identity. At some point I felt like if all the colonial legacies ;the French system of education and the English system of law for example were stripped off me, I wouldn't recognise this person. When I looked at myself in the mirror I did not recognise this person. I knew almost nothing about my culture and I felt like I needed to go back and connect to these things and so when I went home to my grandfather in 2018 for a project that I was selected for, he told me about the looting of ngonnso and also about the need to connect to my history in order to be able to find answers to this identity crises that I was facing at that point. He also mentioned that he would like to see ngonnso before he dies, that was the moment I knew I had to out there and find Ngonnso. So I started with research, it was important to try and understand who she was, where she is what she means for nso people ,how she is perceived and the central role this object played in the spirituality of nso people and also to understand where she was at the moment and what the conversations are about restitution and the possibilities of having her back home. So I presented in a couple of international conferences alongside professor Verjikika Fanzo who is a historian and has done marvellous things for nso people especially when it comes to ensuring that we are not cheated of our history as Nso people .At that point in time I had also just founded my organisation SYSY HOUSE OF FAME and so we decided to have social dialogue and reconciliation as a key part of the work we do, so that became one of our programs and the idea behind it was to contribute in helping the so many people in Cameroon and in Africa as a whole who are suffering from identity crises. We started working with Artist and children to create this awareness.



In 2021 again there was this reflection on what has been going on with the past restitution request and what needs to be done, how we can build on the successes and the weaknesses of the past requests because for 30 years different requests had been going on and nothing had happened and for me it was basically about the 3 things that I realised that were not happening in the past 30 years. The first thing is that the Nso people who had been sending letters did not even know who they were addressing these letters to and I applaud this courage, it shows their desperation to have Ngonnso back. They were writing letters to whom it may concern over and over without giving up. This to me was one of the weaknesses of this approach. Again the Nso people and other people in Cameroon making requests were having these conversations behind closed doors, and when you have conversations behind closed doors no one is under pressure, Germany was not under any pressure of anything at all. The third thing we realised is that this conversations had been having the academic approach which was so powerful but we had not harnessed the potential of new media in having this conversation.



**Tell us about some of the challenges you encountered throughout this journey.**

One of the biggest challenges I faced was having people to understand the importance of confronting the colonial past, having them understand the importance of identity, especially young people. When I started the campaign very few people knew about Ngonnso even not being in Nso, in the early stages of my research I think just 3% of the people that I talked to knew that the original statue of Ngonnso was in Germany, only about 2% of the young people I spoke who come from Nso knew that Ngonnso was their founder. It was a lot of work to create that awareness, to sensitise people and to create a full blown movement of people talking about the return of Ngonnso.

Another challenge that I faced was being a woman who is also tiny and unmarried and a young person at the same time especially in Cameroon. I had several conversations on the phone with people but when I appeared in front of them the conversation always took a different dynamic especially those who were expecting a huge woman in her 50s, they didn't lose respect for me thanks to the work that I have done in the past and what I have been able to achieve, but then being a woman and taking the lead in traditional matters doesn't resonate well with some people. There was also the question whose child are you... where did you come from.

**What is your biggest fear as an activist?**

Sometimes we work so hard and then some people or a group of people just wake up and hijack the work we have done and politicise it and they make it lose meaning and value. It is something I worry about, like what if the return of Ngonnso is politicised at some point and instead of it becoming a unifying and a peaceful return it becomes a dividing factor. I worry about the work that we do as activist being politicized and being used as a weapon that can destroy communities and people.



**« As an activist I build on the intention I build on the purpose I build on the potential of the good I can do as person and the change I can bring to the world and I strategically also transform the things I see as weaknesses to power points. »**



Another fear would be how the world is unable to comprehend the interconnectedness of the different social issues plaguing the world. How people who hold power to make change still don't understand that colonial reparations and restitution of artifacts in colonial contexts is a form of social justice and this affects global peace, intercultural relations and diplomatic relations. I am worried that they don't see restitution as a main concern for global change and social change and so in the nearest future the way the momentum is building powerfully if restitution doesn't become a key part of a global agenda, if confronting colonial past doesn't become a key part of the global agenda we might plunge ourselves into a situation that might be worse than the colonialism we faced hundreds of years back.

***If you were to give one piece of advice to your 10 old self what would that be?***

I wouldn't say anything different to my 10-year-old self, I like things to go well but I don't like to be a perfectionist. At 10 I had not come to the understanding of who I was, my culture my tradition and my history and that's okay because I was just 10 years old. That disconnection is what has made me to become the person I am and to do the things I do so I wouldn't say anything different ...I would just say yes Sylvie you are doing good. Love well and be yourself.

***Thank you Very much Sylvie it was a pleasure to speak with you,we wish you all the best in all your current and future projects, thank You also for being an inspiration to the next Generation of women and girls in Cameroon and across the Globe.***

I was delighted to have this conversation, thank you 237 Women on the Move





# THIS PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED JOURNALIST BUILT HER FOUNDATION WITH THE STONES THROWN AT HER.



## CHANCELINE NANZE

### ***Tell us a bit about yourself. Who is Chaneline Nanze ?***

I am a young lady living with disabilities precisely mobility impairment. I have been living with my impairment from birth. I am a journalist who has an interest in culture, tourism, and health but I major in sports reporting. I love singing, reading, and travelling. My love for adventure pushed me to choose journalism. I am always eager to learn about something new.

### ***How did you come about the decision to be a sports reporter?***

Becoming a sports reporter stemmed from the fact that I loved Journalism in the first place, when I succeeded in my

advanced level, I wrote the entrance to the higher teacher training college that is commonly known as ENS and I passed. I equally wrote the entrance into the advanced school of mass communication known as ASMAC and I passed as well but I decided to go in for journalism and mass communication in spite of the fact that teaching would have given me a direct job into the public service. In 2017 when Cameroon won the Africa Cup of Nations for the 5th time that was organised by Gabon, I was in ASMAC at the time and somewhere around the CRADAT neighbourhood the convoy of the indomitable lions was parading the streets of Yaoundé with the trophy and I was trying to cross the road when one of the military vehicles that was escorting the lions almost crushed me. A passerby, a lady asked the military officer why he could not be gentle considering that I had a mobility impairment and the man responded,

"elle est handicapé et puis quoi". That annoyed me but at the same time it became a motivation for me because I told myself that I almost lost my life because you are escorting the lions, one day you will escort me as well. It was after this particular incident that I started paying particular interest in sports. I started with soccer because it is quite easy to understand the rules of the game. One person who actually encouraged me to get into sports reporting is Afeseh Apong who is the current team press officer of PWD Bamenda while I was still a student journalist in CRTV West in Bafoussam. Helen Ngoh as well who was an iconic sports reporter during her days at the National radio encouraged me to develop my skills in sports reporting. I decided to start going to the stadium every Sunday to watch local league games, my first big opportunity came in 2018 when I covered the National games, I later covered the university games in Dschang in 2019, and in 2022 I covered the Africa Cup of Nations hosted by Cameroon and the most recent competition that I have covered is the just ended Women's Africa Cup of Nations that took place in Morocco.

### ***Tell us about a challenge you faced on the Job and how you overcame this challenge ?***

Journalism is very swift and things happen very fast. Practicing as a person with disability is never an easy task, it's even more complicated when you are a sports reporter because you always have to be on the run. Imagine someone with a mobility impairment who has to be on the run all the time, but I have to find a way.

Another major challenge that I face is that of access to the work environment. Infrastructure in public places even in my work place doesn't take into account persons living with disabilities.

Well I succeed to overcome several of these challenges because somehow I always get support from colleagues and friends and living with a physical challenge doesn't make one unable to do the things that they want to do, I can do whatever I want to do and sometimes even better than those who don't have physical challenges, that's one of the reasons I choose sports reporting, I wanted to dare to do be different

### ***If you had the opportunity to make a change about something what would it be?***

I would tell parents who have children living with disabilities not to feel ashamed of their children but to empower them, to give them the necessary education that they need to excel in whatever they want to do. If my parents were ashamed of me I am not sure I would have been where I am today. I would have probably been in the village abandoned and having nothing to offer to my society, parents have to go beyond looking at their children with disabilities as witches or wizards and make them know that they are capable of contributing to the development of their various communities.





# LET'S TALK WOMAN TO WOMAN: **THE FEMALE LIFE JUGGLE. PRIDE OR PREJUDICE?**

Woman, Daughter, Staff, Student, Partner, Mother. One question we get asked the most is how are we doing it all.

"In anger, with rage" that we can't talk about, we can't complain about, because you are supposed to be happy to be all of that especially at once. You are supposed to feel lucky that life is happening to you Instead of u happening to it. Who will understand that you are still a little girl who would also like to be smothered? Would you understand that even though I don't look it I could be going through hell and the reason I cannot look it is because I can't go about crying or I'm "daring" enough to think that "I got this" and as an addition I deserve the love that cuts through smoke screens of whatever you see first". I ask the question too out of empathy because I get overwhelmed.

***Sylvia W: Bilola, how is school fitting into your existing plate of work and life and everything***

Bilola: Hmmm let's see. In the day I work and I go to school, when I return home I have to look for something to cook against the next day, I have to check if my daughter has homework and help her do it, then I have to do my assignment from school and my assignment from work. For the last 5 years or more I have only done hairstyles that "don't take time". I don't want to have negative sentiments against my partner but sometimes I don't even need him to do physical work I just want him to listen, or at least talk to me but supersport and chelsea have all



attention I thought I was saying "I do" in church for. When he is angry or sad I'm the one begging to hear what e problem is. "chaii" there should be a planet for just women to take a break in and drink water.

There's a lot to explore in the world of working women. Allow The Woman To Woman Column to take you around.

# DONT YOU DARE NOT REPORT HIM, DONT YOU DARE!

We are always expected to be gossiping in hair Salons and like clockwork we always are. (In my country we call it a womans bar)The last time I was in to see my friend (she owns the hair salon) so we could coordinate cooking for another friends birthday barbecue. (It's really an excuse to sit around). So in the middle of choosing pork or chicken we stray to talking about a friend who broke off her engagement because her fiance cheated on her. Anna quickly retorted. Nooo that was the story they were telling everyone. The real reason was because he raped her but they were obviously not going to go about telling everyone that because it's going to bring shame to her and extra stress. And the minute she said this a woman came in from the makeup section of the salon, in fact she was charging in like a soldier falling in line. she had that look in her eyes. The look of take no prisoners n she said "Don't you dare hide that man, don't u try it. . For me, that's where the story really began. She held us all spell bound for about 10 mins. She told us her story with tears streaming down her face over her half baked make up, there was a tremble in her voice that we as woman know so well. It's the good old sound of a scorned woman. My sister, my only sister died of depression. Depression from rape. Then she looked up at the ceiling and pointed with her finger"oh mum may your soul rest in peace". Then she looked at us again. A member of her husband's family raped her and threatened her that if she said something he was going to hurt her family. That's us. She got married into a powerful family and u know how powerful



people have the means to make anybody disappear. She kept that secret until it ate into her body and finally killed her. Her husband is married today to another woman and my sister is forgotten like last year's fashion. My sister practically sacrificed her life for us because she stayed silent. That's a good woman wasted to the ground because a wicked man could not keep it in his trousers. I wish I knew who that person was to tell e world and face e consequences. So these young ladies don't u dare hide that man because if that lady dies of pain it will be on u and on all of us. Men rape women, we the women still tell her to keep quiet about it thereby giving him e go ahead to keep raping women n we hurt and die for free? Don't u dare let that ur friend hide that man. U must report him.Society has told us to shut up but we have to seize our day in court. This nonsense must stop. And just like that the spell was over. This rape issue can't be too loud. Too many females are losing their lives and sanity in silence. Get help,get healed,talk about it.



# HONOURING THE DAHOMEY AMAZONS (THE ALL-FEMALE FIERCE WARRIORS OF BENIN)



## *The all-female fierce warriors of Benin*

The economic capital of Benin Cotonou has been graced with an imposing 30m metal statue enveloped in bronze, Baptised statue de l'amazone. The Statue was erected in July 2022 to honour the all-female fierce Army of Benin created by Queen Tassi Hangbe, the only women to rule the kingdom from 1708 to 1711 In the 1850s the over 6000 women army conquered Benin and part of Nigeria due to their superior fighting skills and their ferocity. Although the DAHOMEY AMAZONS were defeated by the French troops in the 1890s, they proved a formidable opponent to the dismay of the French. During the Inauguration ceremony of the Amazone statue in Cotonou on the 31st of July 2022, The statue was described by president Patrice Talon as a symbol of the Beninese's woman whom he described as Brave, Courageous and Honourable. The motto of the DAHOMEY AMAZONS was conquer or die.



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