Traditional Roles of African Women in Peace Making and Peace Building: An Evaluation

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ABSTRACT

The study set out to scrutinize the scope of conflict in Africa and further evaluate the contribution of women to the peace process as well as the challenges such roles impose on them. The study affirms the important roles of women as an agent of peace in which they demonstrated an act of courage and love to end conflicts when men failed. The study shows that there is an overemphasis on women as victims of conflict or sometimes as combatants or agents. This largely conceals the invaluable contribution of women to the peace process. This position amounts to placing them in a position that they might be seen as weaklings or perpetrators of conflict. The study further concludes that most of the conflicts that became protracted and deeprooted reflect institutional failure and the refusal of those in the position of authority to act at the right time due to greed, poverty, and lack of inclusive arrangement in governance. The study, therefore, recommends that the root of the problem must first be attacked in that government must be proactive enough to monitor, act promptly to diffuse tension in explosive issues that could lead to direct violence. This is achievable if the government is sincere, honest, and adopts an inclusive approach in governance thereby ensuring fairness in the distribution of resources.

Keywords: Women, Peace Making, Peace Building

INTRODUCTION

`The notion of women as peacemaker presupposes the existence of conflict whether violent or otherwise. There is a unanimity of opinion among scholars that conflict is inevitable

except there is a seizure of relationship. Too much attention has however been focused on women as victims of war such as in the works of Udom (2001:1 &2), Pankhurst (2004:32), and Thompson (2006). Goldstein (2001) and Mckay and Mazurana (2004) addressed women involvement as combatants in war situation but Bouta et al (2005) argued that many of the women, (irregular armies) that took part in armed conflicts as combatants, largely did it against their wish.

Ogar (2018) observed that within the traditional African setting, at peacetime, women are more consigned to domestic duties such as her role as the mother of the home, provider of basic needs in some instances and even peacemaker within the family, and at the community level following the prevailing culture. There is, therefore, the need to examine their roles as peacemakers and peacebuilder within a traditional African setting. This position found expression in Nzomo (2002) that though conflict touches on all sectors of the society, women, however, represent a vital resource for the prevention of conflicts and the ability to sustain peace. Nwoye (2007) based her analysis of women and peace in traditional Africa on several case studies carried out between the mid-1990s - 2001 in six African countries. The countries were Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Namibia, Somali, and Tanzania, undertaken within the framework of the United Nations' Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Women and Culture of Peace Programme. The results revealed the invaluable contribution of women in traditional conflict resolution and peace-building practices in Africa south of the Sahara.

Conflict management practices are considered traditional if they have been in existence and practiced for an extended period and have evolved within African societies rather than being the product of external importation (Zartman, 2000; Akpan 2004; Akpan 2005; Akpan 2013;Akpuru-Aja, 2007; Akpanika 2017). Suffices therefore to observe that tradition is never static, it undergoes periods of transition to fit partly into the modern setting without significant erosion of its basic tenets. Akpuru-Aja (2007) therefore defined 'traditional' as the legacy of the past including the changes and transformations that this past may have gone through as this definition is considered suitable for this study.

This study, therefore, examined the scope of conflicts in Africa, evaluated the contribution of women to peacemaking and peacebuilding. Besides, it focused on the challenges confronting women in performing such roles and recommended measures to achieve a greater result. To achieve this objective, the study adopted the theory of womanism. In the first instance, the theory of feminism as rightly observed by Sotunsa (2008:19) largely concentrated on the experience of a black female, the family relationship, and well as the importance of motherhood in that relations as this might influence their role as peacemaker. The theory of womanism captures the scope of this study in that it invites attention that motherhood should be given prominence and acknowledged, which in turn calls that women should be treated with more respect, and the roles within the society should be celebrated by them and the society at large. This implies that motherhood should be valued rather than disregarded. The relevance of this theory to this study is that it is not sufficient to concentrate analysis on women as victims of conflict or at the other extreme as agents of conflict but to identify and acknowledge their roles as peacemakers and peacebuilder. The above finds expression in Nwoye (2007) that:

"*Feminist studies in Africa have several limitations. One is their onesided emphasis on the theme of woman subordination in Africa. By their omission to give an account of the positive aspects of women being in traditional Africa their writings overshadow and fail to draw out the immense contributions and the agentic role of women in peacebuilding and conflict resolutions in traditional African societies. Such omission creates the unnecessary impression of African women as victims rather than givers and builders of culture within the society. And the result is the prevailing opposition that now exists between women and men in contemporary Africa. Were the positive contributions of women in traditional African societies to be seriously reviewed and noted, both groups would have seen the indispensability of the other in the arduous task of nation-building and harmonious living in contemporary African societies* (54).

It is against this background that this paper study examines the role of women as peacemakers and peace builders within the traditional African society, the challenges imposed on them, and the efficacy of such in contemporary society.

THE NATURE OF CONFLICT IN TRADITIONAL AFRICAN SOCIETY

From time immemorial, the conflict has been part of human relations. The term 'conflict' emerges from 'confligere', which means 'Shocking together'. This meaning according to Galtung (2010) is compatible with the usual Anglo-American behavioural interpretation as parties 'shocking together' in violence; and what is 'shocking together' are goals or interest held by the parties when the realization of one excludes the realization of others. In an ordinary context, conflict means to argue, debate, fight, struggle or quarrel. Conflict usually occurs when there is a relationship. In effect, virtually all relationships contain characteristics or seeds of conflict depending on how such relationships are managed. This, therefore, makes conflict inevitable and endemic between individuals, organizations, communities, or nations. Conflict is much more than a physical clash between two or more individuals or groups with opposing goals or ideologies. Nicolaides (2008), Williams (2005), Akpan (2006), Zimako (2007) and Lussier and Achua, (2007) cited in Alao (2012) note that conflict must be understood as a divergence of values or the pursuit of real or perceived incompatible goals by different groups. Dokun (2005) notes that conflict "is the construction of a special type of reality". This involves a shift from the previous pattern of thinking and acting to a modified type. Boulding, (1962) cited in Bercoritch and Zartman (2009) observes that conflict is a ''Situation in which the parties are aware of the incompatibility of potential future position''. Miall (1992) suggests four criteria in describing a situation of conflict. These include that it exists only where the participants perceive it as such and there is a clear difference of opinions regarding values, interests, aims, or relations. Also, the parties may be States or significant elements of the population within the States and that they must consider the outcome of the conflict to be extremely important. The four criteria capture why conflicts that remain unresolved portend great danger and the need to evaluate the role of women as an agent of peace.

Conflict might be viewed from various perspectives. It manifests at the lowest level such as the interpersonal type that may involve members of the same family such as husband/wife, father or mother/children, and/ or within an enlarged family circle. Outside the family circle, conflict often manifests at the community level. In this particular case, it might be expressed as intra or inter-communal conflict. Intra communal conflicts are those within the same ethnic group such as Offa/Erinle, Igbo-Ora, Ife/Modakeke, Aguleri/Umuleri all in Nigeria. Intercommunal conflicts are those involving more than one ethnic group such as Saare/Tsaragi, Tiv/Jukun, Zango/Kataf in Nigeria and Hutus/Tutsi in Rwanda, Israeli/Palestine among others.

Bernard (1957) in Geertz (1994) distinguishes two kinds of conflicts. The first kind she calls "issue conflicts", like the American Civil War that was triggered by slavery and the Nigerian civil war of 1967-70 over power-sharing. The other she regards as "illusory", which is not really about anything but simply developed out of dynamic reactions or misunderstanding.

Other scholars classified conflicts as violent (civil, internal war, riots, coup d'état, terrorism, genocide) or non-violence (strikes, peaceful protest legal tussles, and various forms of civil disturbance). Non-violent conflicts tend to become violent if the regulatory or institutional mechanisms are ineffective and unable to act appropriately by resolving them. In this category, we have those in Liberia (1989-2003), Sierra Leone (1990-2001), Guinea Bissau (1997-1998), Cote D'Ivoire (2002-2004), Boko Haram crises among the multitude of others in Nigeria and of recent, the *winds of change* blowing across North Africa and other Arab nations. The conflict map revealed that 88% of the death-related conflicts worldwide from 1990 to 2007 were located in Africa; while Hawkins (2008) observes that the conflict or crisis-related death since the end of the Cold War in Africa was over 9 million. Therefore, Africa is more or less a theatre of conflict. This justifies the analysis by Shah (2009) that notes conservatively that at least 18 countries in Africa since 1980 have been at war or crisis, while Osaghae (2005) listed 47 of 53 nations.

According to Essien (2008), another popular classification of conflict is structural and non-structural conflicts. Structural conflict tends to be endemic, predisposed by the innate character of polity. It results from unjust, repressive, and oppressive socio-politicall structures, inadequate access to socio-economic benefits. This explains the consensus among scholars that most conflicts in Africa are endemic by definition to the extent that the predisposing factors are embedded in the political system. Such conflicts result from specific policies or actions by the State or group. Though Essien (2008) opines that such conflicts do not generally last for too long, recent experiences in Nigeria and other nations in Africa reflect that they form so many patterns and become protracted like the Niger Delta, Tiv-Jukun, Jos and many others, making them prolonged, deep-rooted and difficult to resolve.

Conflicts can also be classified based on the character of the parties in conflict. Such include ethnic, religious, racial, etc. Ethnic conflicts can be either intra or inter-ethnic in nature. Intra ethnic conflicts are the type occurring within the same ethnic group while interethnic types involve two or more ethnic groups. Religious conflicts also can be intra or inter. There is the preponderance of shreds of evidence to support the fact that ethnic and religious conflicts are more prevalent in Africa as out of 47 nations in conflict listed by Osaghae (2005), 27 were ethno-communal related conflicts. While nearly all the conflict often manifests ethnoreligious nature.

This is based on the fact that ethnicity and religion are the most important sources of identity for most individuals and attract strong loyalties to the group.

On the contrary, Kriesberg, (1998) and Foster (2000) cited in Alao (2012) note that conflict has the potential as a positive agent of social change. To a large extent, without moral consideration, conflict employs the militants as found in the Niger Delta, jobless youth in the Northern part of Nigeria who aligned with Boko Haram and other wars or conflict zones.
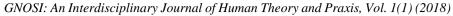
Besides, it encourages the growth of industries specialized in the production of arms and ammunition, thereby further generating income and employment.

Deutsch and Coleman, (2000) however note that how conflict is handled determines whether it will be constructive or destructive. Jeanty (2011) therefore observes that the way the participants in a disagreement perceive this threat determines to a great extent how heated the conflict becomes. When conflicts are carefully and skilfully handled, Deutsh (1973) among others notes that opportunities might be opened for personal growth, and create the change needed to improve interpersonal relations. The inability of most African leaders to skilfully and honestly handle issues of conflict makes them to be protracted, prolonged, and deep-rooted thereby occasioning death, destruction of properties, psychological strains, and the belief the governments were incapable of handling them.

PEACEBUILDING AND PEACEMAKING

In the literature of peace, though there might not be a consensus concerning the precise meaning of peace, it is not the absence of conflict or war. Ibeanu (2007:3) opines that such a conclusion that peace is not the absence of war or conflict is "tautological and circular in logic in that there is peace because there is no war and there is war because there is no peace". This position informs Goodhand and Hulme (1999) in a Biblical sense to note that it is "the beating of swords into ploughshare". By this, he means a situation devoid of physical or direct violence. It is therefore essential to note that a situation devoid of excessive structural and cultural violence will curb the propensity of direct violence, and all other factors remaining positive will enhance peaceful coexistence and encourage speedy socio-economic development. This study, therefore, identifies with Galtung (2000) that peace could be seen as the absence of direct violence. Direct violence is the Conflicts involving physical attack, destruction of property, killing, and through employing all forms of destructive action to fight the opponents, or their interests (Alao, 2012 cited in Galtung 2010). This position also agrees with the general Jewish disposition to the notion of peace that is translated to mean *shalom* that is often used to connote well-being, wholeness abundance, and harmony within oneself and in social relationships. The usage of peace in this respect does not mean that there is no conflict between the Jews and the Palestinians.

Peace-building, therefore, is a process of creating the tangible and intangible conditions to enable a conflict-habituated system to become a peace system. Reychler (2001) notes that peacebuilding goes beyond problem-solving or conflict management but it attempts to fix the core problems that underlie the conflict and change the pattern of interaction of the parties involved. Hence, Maiese (2003) observes that to achieve this, parties must replace the spiral of violence and destruction with a spiral of peace and development, and create an environment conducive to self-sustaining and durable peace.

According to Galtung (2000), it revolves around erecting structural and cultural peace. Cultural peace describes as a set of rules and norms which a group within a society or the society at large, adheres to that encourage love, understanding, and neighbourliness. From a situation of conflict, a new set of attitudes is developed that instead of evil, it now reveals goodness, and moving from unacceptable to acceptable behavior though it might not be physically seen. Structural peace implies the removal of oppression, repression, exploitation, and marginalization that often occasioned conflict. In this sense, the structures of society are geared in a certain manner which allows flexibility of ideas as this is often regarded as an invisible element of peace.

Peace making consists of a positive move from the past dominated by hatred, direct violence cultural or structural violence, and desire to revenge to a future that is expected to be dominated by love, understanding, sympathy and genuine concern for the feeling of those that were previously regarded as enemies. The goal includes the determination to overcome previous negative perception about others even if it could not bring back the relationship to the preconflict era.

Peace-making is often confused with peace-building and peace keeping. Peacekeeping consists of actions directed at controlling the actors (conflicting parties) so that they stop destruction and causing psychological trauma. Peace-making is a progressive move revolving around the search for creative, acceptable, and sustainable outcomes of the conflict. It reject a single shot attempt at peace, exclusive peace arrangement but opt for a visible flow of peace ideas from everywhere in society including women and youth that in some traditional African culture ordinarily could have been excluded from peace deals. The understanding is that issues of complex communal conflicts require mass participation in the peace process and therefore must be inclusive. Though African setting is patrilineal in nature, if the same arrangement permits women combatants, serving as cannon folders or spies, it is essential to examine their role as peace-maker and peace-builder.

WOMEN ROLES IN PEACE MAKING AND PEACE BUILDING

The role of women in peace-making and peace-building in traditional African societies will to a large extent assist in portraying their unique contribution to the society rather than viewing them largely as victims of wars or narrowly as agents of war. Kumar (2001) observes that the increase of hostility particularly in Africa draws attention to the issue of the role of women in times of armed conflict. She notes that the role of women as mothers of the soldier and then as mothers of the soldiers for the nation leads many to ignore their contribution as peace maker. Indeed, the roles mentioned above need not obscure other roles of women as peacemaker but could be integrated in them. This explains why Helsinki (2009) opines that investing in women and promoting gender equality are necessary both for maintaining peace and achieving sustainable development (Obot et al. 2012; Edet 2012; Obot 2014; Edet 2017). However, as George-Williams (2009:59-72) cited in George (2012) rightly observed, this could best be studied based on societally acceptable tradition and custom in different communities that this study explores.

a. Peace Making and Peace Keeping Through Motherhood

The role of women in peace-building and peace-making with specific reference to motherhood is yet to be given sufficient attention as it often assumed to be the nature and/or a general societal imposed responsibility without isolating its implication on societal peace process. Of specific interest is the role of woman as a mother, guardian, and educator. In effect, the mother's love for the child starts from the period of pregnancy particularly for wanted child. This same love is made manifest right through birth to child upbringing. The psychologists note that the role of mother as an educator as the child grows up is so essential and has a positive impact on the way a child views life in general. The transmission of value of peace to children from cradle to adulthood is lessons that cannot be easily erased. While the men may largely be strict in a disciplinary matter, women while not compromising standard often do it by demonstrating the combination of discipline with love. This constitutes an important lesson for the children on how to approach life to achieve a relatively conflict free society.

This lesson of life could also be understood from the perspective that peace is not born but made and this study agrees with Nwoye (2007) that the culture of peace in African tradition was implanted in a child through responsible upbringing and socialization undertaken and supervised by mother. This goes with the popular saying in Yoruba culture that "the mother is gold, and father is the mirror". Bassey and Pimaro Jr observed that in traditional African culture, this training partly manifests in songs, stories, proverbs that often take place at meal time or night after dinner, while moon season added additional glamour to storytelling. This relationship illustrates consensus and oneness, love and understanding as core values in African society while such a gathering may span beyond a single household.   To illustrate this Ntahobari and Ndayiziga (2003:18) cited in Nwoye (2007) note that the people of Burundi in respect of women and mothers as peace educators in traditional Africa, observe that:

> *It was primarily the mother that had responsibility for the upbringing of the children. Children, especially when very young, remained with their mother, who would look after both boys and girls until they reached a given age (for boys, until the time when their father took over the responsibility). There were strict rules to be complied with on how to dress, speak, eat and even walk and sit (especially for girls).*

Lihamba, (2003:115) particularly reveals that:

> *"Tanzanian women have always played a critical part in maintaining equilibrium in their society by bringing up their children as responsible members of the community. Women taught their daughters and sons, proper behaviour and the ethos of society, and impressed on them the importance of such values as honesty, uprightness and the necessity to compromise. As such, women have always been active promoters of harmony in the community, which can be referred to as a culture of peace"*.

In Igbo land, "*Nneka*" means "mother is supreme". This largely refers to the role they play as sustainer and healer of human relationship. In Somalia, there is a saying that "*the mother is the first and most valuable school in life"*, according to the report by Mohammed (2003).This is equally true of African societies in general.

Among the values cherished and taught by mother in African tradition are patience, tolerance, honesty, respect for elders, communality, and mutuality, compassion, regard for due discretion, gentleness, modesty, self-control, moderation, flexibility, and open-mindedness. Mohammed (2003) observes that these values were incorporated into Somali customary law and other African communities as these constitute the basic pillars underpinning the culture of peace.

This same view is echoed in the words of the famous Somali poet, AraysIsse Karshe cited in Nwoye (2007) who is celebrating the contributions of Somali mother in peace building points out that they extoll the value of women as an educator, as a child to grows into adulthood with her or his mind fix on peaceful co-existence and love for humanity.

On the other hand, it is not in all cases that the role of women as peace educator is seriously emphasized. Extant literature reveals that in the Northern part of Nigeria attention is largely given to the female children at the expense of the male. This could have accounted to some extent, the ease of recruiting militants to prosecute most of the conflicts in the region. Also, the working mothers of today because of high rate of poverty have been unable to give adequate attention to child rearing. This is not, however, sufficient to rush to a conclusion that these roles are no longer part of the contribution of women to peace process.

b. Women As A Source Of Peace Information

One of the basic innate qualities of women is patience and listening ability than men. This could lead them to have sufficient time to embark on a critical and sympathetic analysis of issues of conflict and communicate such to men with a view of averting conflict or war. The mobility of women in their economic pursue from the community to community assisted in no small way to gather information. This explains why women have used their enviable position and skill to stabilize post- conflict societies. This was made possible since women are position to gauge the mood of the community and can gather information that could aid peace process. This was clearly demonstrated among Luo women in Kenya as they engage in preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping and post conflict peace building. Male elders also consult the female elders concerning the points of agreement on conflict issues or declaration of war. In addition, Mohammed (2003) observes that married women, capitalizing on their neutrality and the privileges bestowed on them by Somali culture, shuttled between the warring clans, theirs and that of their husbands. They carried messages of peace and reconciliation, and they mobilized and encouraged the forces that can be supportive of the peace process from both sides. When the real cause or causes of the war were figured out, the aggressors acknowledged their mistake, submitted themselves to mediation and accepted the verdict.

Moreover, among the Guidar of Cameroon, Ngongo-Mbede (2003) study revealed that the Mazake or old women played the role of keeping watch over the community. They were on the alert, and reacted immediately at the least sign of destructive conflict between the members of the community. If they noticed signs of conflict, they promptly summoned the protagonists in order to question and calm them. After this discussion, the *mamas* (old women) kept a watchful eye on them for an appreciable length of time, until they were satisfied that the conflict had been well and truly settled and forgotten. When it is believed that the conflict is over, they then

summon the two parties and asked them to drink some *bil-bil* together to consummate the peace deal and a kiss. This is similar to Achilo tradition in which the resolution of conflict ends with a great ceremony called "*MatoOput*" which is the traditional drinking of a bitter herb of Oput tree (Lanek (1999).

Having acknowledged the above as positive contribution of women to peace making and peace building in Africa, but extant literature confirms that apart from the role of women as combatants, they engaged in espionage activities like in Liberia, Ethiopia as rightly observed by Terefa (2005:115). This explains George (2012) citing Kumar and Baldwin (2001), Newsbury and Baldwin (2001) among others observe that women are more or less engaged in armed conflict while their role was not limited to peacemaking or peacebuilding. The multiple roles of women might have informed the GSDRS (2009) to observe that they assume varied roles during armed conflict, as victims, but also as perpetrators, as well as peace activists. Nonetheless, the role of women as peace activists with respect to information gathering is considered by this study to be of greater importance.

WOMEN'S ROLE AS PEACEMAKER ON ACCOUNT OF INTERMARRIAGE

The bond in marriage is often difficult to explain beyond what an individual has personally experienced or observed. Marriage and intermarriage in African tradition have significantly served a source or agent of peace among warring factions. Women's role in marriage as peace-maker and peace-builder among others in traditional African society is based on their position as mothers and wives of the combatants. It is not in their best interest to be childless or widow or a fugitive or refugee or captives of war. This largely informs their commitment to peace.

Marriage and inter marriages encouraged cultural diffusion and sense of oneness that assisted in no small ways to achieve harmony in the system. African tradition respect the position of an in-law and it is unimaginable to start waging war against your in-law realizing that such action may consume your grandchildren. This explains when a conflict degenerated into armed violence, an appeal would usually be made to a third party of mature years to calm the tension and reconcile the combatants. Such an appeal for mediation was usually made to a woman who enjoyed the consideration and respect of all who knew her.

In Central African societies Ntahobari and Ndayiziga (2003: 16) study reveal that if war broke out among the Zande:

"*the oldest women of the clan would go to meet opposing clan, and to interpose themselves between the fighters in order to make them see reason. When words proved fruitless, the women would threaten to expose their nakedness or to go down on their knees. In either case, the gesture signified a curse for those who bore the responsibility for such grave acts. Because of the respect that the enemy soldiers had for the women, they would usually put down their weapons before the fateful acts were accomplished.*" Among the Bamileke of Cameroon, according to Ngongo-Mbede (2003), the *Magne,* or mothers of twins, were considered to be of special blessing from God who are sent to make peace. It was reported that the arrival of a *Magne* in a place of conflict must stop the hostility.

It the mother of the twins' responsibility to reconcile the belligerents by dividing the '*tree of peace*' into two and offered a piece to each to the two parties as a token of reconciliation. Mohammed (2003) reports that in Somali, when clans fight and there is death, steps are taken to organize the 'collection and payment of blood money'. This she said is done by a marriage or marriages involving the two parties. This kind of marriage she observes occurs between a man who lost a brother or close relative and a girl from the opposing side. The goal of the marriage is to mitigate the wounds and to cement the agreement/settlement reached by the two parties. This explains the practice in Somali that *'Where blood is shed, it must be soaked with birth fluids*'. The tradition is that the sons born into that relationship will fill the gap of the men who perished in the battle. The marriage is also designed to bond the two groups, and to minimize the possibility of another round of hostility.

In addition, the tradition in Somali reveals that in periods of conflict, often a group of young, unmarried women called *Heerin* from one of the warring clans visit the opposing clan without the knowledge or consent of their families. The ladies in turn offer themselves to be married by the opposing side. The marriages are conducted as this is an acceptable practice that sets in motion a peace process to eventually resolve the conflict. Achebe (1958) reports a similar cultural practice among the Igbo of Nigeria where a young female is given in marriage as reparation to end conflict.

The issue that can be worrisome is that with this good traditional means of making peace in Somali and Africa in general, it is unexplainable why most nations are in crises. It has been observed that there is low rate of crises and conflict in Western world that is presumably, rightly or wrongly not to be culturally rich as Africa. This explains that richness in a particular tradition of managing conflict is not sufficient, as the willingness to embrace peace culture is more important.

In addition, in a deep-rooted and protracted conflict be it intra or inter in nature, the respect for marriage or intermarriage were often jettisoned. The study conducted by the researcher in Saare/Tsaragi conflict (2007-2011) revealed that many marriages were temporarily or permanently broken on account of inter-ethno communal conflict. The root cause was based on mistrust as wives might serve as informants for their tribe. Even in intra communal conflict like Offa/Erinle and Ife/Modakeke among others, women who were involved in intermarriages largely ended of being one of the victims instead as serving as reconcilers. Ethnic or religious considerations may supersede marital connection. However, this might be explained as the outcome of gradual erosion of traditional values.

C. Women Direct Involvement In Peace Making And Peace- Building

All across Africa, women according to tradition have been directly involved in peacemaking and peace-building. This, observed by Galligan (1985) cited in George (2012) has to do with the women having a different view of morality than the male counterparts. It is based on their belief regarding the universality of the need for compensation and care. Among the Igbo of Nigeria, like in Bakassi of Cameroon, it is paternal aunts or lineage daughters that are largely charged responsibility of resolving or reconciling the individuals involved in a conflict among other groups. Nwolise (2005) captures the role of women in successfully resolving conflict.

This was manifested in the resolution of Umunebo/Umuokuzu land dispute in Imo State Nigeria that had defied every other resolution efforts. The success was achieved through *Umuada* and the disputed land was shared in ratio 4:6 after a series of oath taking and the attendant repercussions.

In Cameron, Ngongo-Mbede (2003) observes that the first wife was sometimes invited to join men in Assemblies to resolve conflicts. Her role consists of given less offensive translation to statement that the opposing side might consider too offensive. In Somali, (Mohamed, 2003: 103) study reveals that women engaged in direct dangerous action to stop inter-and intra-clan wars by forming a human chain, lined themselves up between the warring parties, and refused to leave until the two groups stop hostility. The same is true of the Luo women in Kenya as they engage in preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping and post conflict - peace building. Male elders also consult the female elders concerning the points of agreement on conflict issues or declaration of war. In addition, when in ordinary conflict between two men, it takes a woman standing between them to resolve it, and the same is generated into inter community conflict (Alao (2012). Their immediate objective was to see to it that the two armies did not shoot each other. If a woman stepped in front of a man about to be killed in a battle, that man's life was spared. This act often created an environment that enabled the warring parties to settle their differences peacefully and to establish good relations. Among the Yorubas of Western part of Nigeria, the title *Iya lode* is often given to the leader of the women within the community and the title confers on her the right to be one of the Council of the Oba and participate in resolution of conflicts. Also, there is the title of *Iya Laje* translated to mean head of the market women who is charged with the responsibility of resolving conflict among the women marketers. At the other extreme, Moremi in Ife played a significant role as peace maker by giving up her only son to be sacrifice for the peace of Ife. Bataye (2002) also refer to Ile-Oluji, the kingdom ruled simultaneously along gender lines with each having its own governing and ruling council, while at times, male serve as the ceremonial king and female serve as the regent upon the death of male leader. The history of Queen Amina of Zaria, Nigeria in ensuring peace within her community testifies to the role of women as peace maker.

On the contrary, women participation as agent of conflict or peace maker or builder does not largely translate to positive outcomes commensurate with the role. This role is often quickly forgotten as peace emerges and it is at that point that men remember the traditional role of women that the culture constrains them to obey. Another aspect of the issue is that there no universality of interest among women while such factors as ethnicity, religion, age and envy can further converge to produce a situation whereby consensus might not be reached concerning their core interest and the propensity to effectively serve as agents of peace in contemporary societies.

D.   Women's Poets as Agent of Peace

In African tradition, music plays a significant role in reflecting the mood of the society. Music is often composed to reflect acceptable and unacceptable practices while nonconformists are portrayed as outcast. The study acknowledges the fact that this role is not limited to women but also men but to isolate that of the women. According to Mohammed (2003:100) reports

from his Somali study, some Somali women poets use their art to search for peace in their country. Among these poets are FadumaQasimHilowle and ZeinabHagi Ali. In Nigeria, there are many female musicians that invite the attention of the community to peaceful co-existence. Even within traditional setting, songs and poets composed by women and render in ceremony contain elements of peaceful co-existence and fun.

The greatest challenge to music or poem as a mean that women adopt for peaceful coexistence is that if they absorb the flow of conflict at a high level and instead of using the poem or music as means of bringing about peace, derogatory terms, and insulting languages might be the order of the day and such has the tendency to complicate the peace process. It has been observed that whenever women absorb conflict, it is often made protracted and difficult to easily resolve.

E. Women's Role in Peace Making through Rituals

Sacrifices and rituals are part and parcel of socio-religious life of traditional African society. There are rituals for nearly every aspect of African life to appease the gods. In a situation of conflict leading to death, depending on the tradition, there must always the ritual to appease the spirit of the departed soul as women play a crucial role.

In Namibia, Becker's (2003) findings show among other things that women play a strategic role in the spiritual healing of the wounds of war. The healing rituals they engage in are intended to purify and cleanse the war returnees of blood-guilt. The killer had to be purified with magic rites; otherwise, his desire to kill would spread to other people, disturbing the communal peace. The killer was considered intoxicated with blood (*A kolwaombinzi*). It was believed that the blood he had spilled made him unable to control himself, losing part of his body, heart, and speech. This, it was believed, made him speak in a confused manner (Hiltunen 1993: 218-9). The same tradition is true of Owamboland of Northern Namibia and also among the people of the southern part of Nigeria why Islam has nearly paralyzed such practices in the North.

In Cameroon, Ngongo-Mbede (2003) revealed that in the land of the Beti, the Mangissa and the Eton, there was ritual practice known as the *Mbabi*. This was a purification rite aimed at restoring peace. This initiative could come from the women themselves when: "*they realized that peace did not exist in the community, people were ill, the drought was continuing, the land no longer produced good crops, there were many deaths in the community, there were epidemics, a member of the community was suffering from*

> *or died of a serious disease, some members were experiencing difficulties linked to community life, a member of the community had been poisoned, another was unsuccessful in finding work, etc".*

On the contrary, Dennis (2010) writing on*Women and State in Nigeria,* having observed that:

> "*The religions of many Nigerian societies recognised the social importance of women by emphasising the place of female gods of fertility and social peace, but women were also associated with witchcraft which appeared to symbolise the potential social danger of women exercising power uncontrolled by men".*

However, it is not only women that engage in witchcraft but men equally find themselves belonging to other dangerous or cults that impact negative on peace and stability in Nigeria like the Ogboni fraternity, others the notorious Okija Shrine among.

THE CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES FACING WOMEN'S ROLE AS PEACE MAKER AND BUILDER

The study acknowledged the position of women as victims of conflict by being subjected to rape, frustration, dislocation of the socio-economic life and becoming refugees within and outside their nations. The number of internally displaced people in Africa as at 2008 was 6.4 million, while the number of refugees was 2.8 million. The figure for returned refuges was 400,000 while returned internally displaced people were 2 million (UNHCR Statistical Database, (2009). The statistics will be scaring if those of 2009 to 2012 were added particularly with the current crises in Africa such as Sudan, Egypt, Somalia, Chad, Nigeria and Algeria among others. Though the is no accurate gender distribution of those involved in all the issues raised, but evidences based on news reported through mass media point in the direction that women and children are in the majority. It is therefore not surprising that humanitarian crisis and poverty are highest in Africa while the continents records the lowest human development index (UNDP 2008). The effect of these increasing cases of civil wars, crises and civil disturbances in Africa is that it places additional heavy burden on women to take care of the home front and think of ways of getting the children and aged within their family secured. Under intense burden, the primary consideration is safety before any consideration could be given to acting as peace agent.

In addition, modern civilization has significantly eroded the relevance of adhering to traditional norms and culture in a situation of conflict or direct violence. This agreed with the position of Zartman, (2000) and Akpuru-Aja (2007) that there is no culture and tradition that was static and the effect is that every society one way or the other respond and adapt to the effect of civilization. To a large extent, the direct training of children by mother is gradually diminishing as women are burdened with economic challenges thereby leaving the early training in the hand of maids in enlightened communities and later in life to school. Within the local communities, the women in the course of their economic activities particularly with increasing rate of poverty, to some extent abdicate their traditional roles at home. The few time with the children at home are often devoted largely to watching film thereby taking the primary love of children from the family to what the polluted society offers.

According to Bassey and Mendie (2019) culture of independent individualism that was strange to African communal life has created social orphans without any identity, accountability, love for fellow human being and commitment to peace. The implication therefore is that the right attitudes that should be cultivated from home and help to nurture the young ones into becoming a responsible and loving member of the society at large is lost. The Western culture largely emphasized individualism, while African culture is rooted in collectivism. The emergence of Western civilization and of Western governmental system particularly since colonial era eroded significantly the authority of the traditional institutions for conflict management. The idea of women participating in ritual on account of war is

dwindling on account of religion while traces of such could still be found within traditional society. The failure of alternate mechanism for conflict management like the police, court system, church, and mosque, local and state governments added to the challenges of relying solely on traditional models of conflict resolution. Like in many modern day churches, Warren (2002) observes that "*membership is often reduced to simply adding your name to a roll, with no requirements or expectation*". Prosperity is idolized at the expense of righteousness while leaders and members failed to acknowledge that the church *is not an organization but an organism*. Sad enough, religious bodies cannot solve their internal dispute but relied on a court that is losing its glory. Also, the Western approach to conflict management did not consider reintegration of the offender back to the society and the interest of the society or family to which the offender belonged as noted by Bob Manuel (2001).

This, however, limits the role of women as peace agents.

The nature of modern-day conflict that could develop from the dynamics of the society revolving ethnic nationalism, economic deprivation, politics of exclusion and religious fundamentalism among others are usually deep-rooted and protracted. The excessive deployment of force by the conflicting parties to neutralize or eliminate the opponents does not give sufficient room for reasons to prevail like in the traditional societies. Also, the government approach to conflict management is largely suppressive and does not allow for inclusive arrangement. The proliferation of light arms of light arms and irrational deployment of such by youth serving as activists or militants leave huge casualties that the urge for vengeance even among women overshadow involvement in peace process.

However in spite of all these challenges, women in the face of danger in contemporary society still play active role as agents of peace. For instance in the Jos crises, Nigeria, women demonstrated outside the zone of conflict calling for cessation of hostilities. Also, in the Igbo community, the *Umuada* played significant roles in conflict resolution. This implies that in contemporary societies these challenges could still be overcome.

CONCLUSION

Besides, the relatively lost glory of the role of women as educator charged with the responsibility of inculcating societal approved values on children through which the children could grow into responsible citizens and embrace the culture of peace and communal living as against individualism should be given adequate attention. If a nation is to enjoy peace, it has to start from home as the home is the reflection of the society as a whole. Time and energy must be invested to ensure that the training of the children is not left to house-maid and schools alone. The study, therefore, invites the attention of the government to the school curriculum to include enviable traditional values that have been lost to modernization, as no serious nation can jettison its positive cultural values.

The study recommends that Women should stop seeing themselves from the position of weakness and should engage in activities that will tend to emphasize their positive contribution to the society particularly in their role as peace agents.

The study finally recommends the re-invention of our rich traditional values the helped to sustain peace in the past. This is based on the fact that most of traditional values have either collapsed

or been abandoned and led to deterioration and breakdown of positive values. This in turn leads to the growing lack of restraint, intolerance and violence in African societies.

This position agrees with Otumfuo (2004) with specific reference to women's role that: *If Africa wants peace, truth and justice; if Africa wants to restore its traditional values of being each other's keeper; if Africa genuinely recognizes deep weaknesses in its developmental agenda, then I can only say that it is not too late to critically look for convergences between the modem state and the traditional state.*

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