Gender, Conflict and Peace-Building in Africa: A Comparative Historical Review of Zulu and Igbo Women in Crisis Management

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Abstract: The male gender has often dominated the quest for societal security. Analysis and studies on security management and peace-building tend to advance the role of the male folk more than their female counterparts. This study traced the role of historic Zulu women in societal security management and compared it to the Aba Women's War that is popularly referred to as the Aba women riot. The study used the African developmental feminism theory to anchor its analysis. It maintained that these women rose at critical times to challenge the forces that planted insecurity in their societies. It found that they engaged in both strategic and reactive peace-building. The study also reveals the similarities and differences in Zulu and Igbo women intervention in conflict and security management. Finally, the researchers recommended considering the widespread nature of insecurity in many remote parts of Africa that have consistently led to the death of women and children. There should be a re-awakening of female security regiments in many African societies, and they should be trained to secure their lives and properties through community policing efforts.

Keywords: Gender, women, peace, conflict, Igbo & Zulu.

INTRODUCTION

Different forms of violent conflicts have characterized the history of the world. These conflicts differ in conditions, scope, and nature of their manifestation. A conflict that threatens people's peace in one environment may have the exact cause as another conflict in a different or similar setting. Still, their impact and resolution process will differ. Again, how the male and female gender responds to a given conflict also vary concerning how gender-sensitive the conflict was. Over the years, it has been generally stated that conflict starts from the minds of men. The implication is that men tend to incubate conflict when their goals and ambitions clash with those of other men and groups. To ensure that there are less conflicts in the global village, men and women are often encouraged to increase their appetite for peace.

However, the historical problem of man remains that the male gender dominates the conflict and peace-building processes of many African societies. Therefore, this position neglects the role of the female gender in peace-building, notwithstanding that they lose a lot during conflict as they are rapped their sons and their husbands killed, and that gendered nature of violence undermines both their role in the conflict management and the peace-building processes as they are fundamentally dehumanized in the effect of conflict escalation.

However, it should be noted that peace is "not an abstract concept, nor a mere sentiment. It is an urgent matter of life or death. It is to be sought, pursued, achieved, attained and maintained" (Ekwue, 2006:43). The researchers agree with the position of Ekwue (2006) that peace must be sought, pursued, attained, and maintained at all costs. This is because peace is fundamental for the sustenance of life in any part of the globe. All human initiatives would be threatened or undermined when there is no peace.

However, the dual nature of the word peace (*Udo* in Igbo, *Shalom* in Hebrew, and *Eirene* in Greek) is no doubt a determinant of the quality of life that men and women will live in a given place. There is widespread demand for world peace, but at the same time, men try to ensure that the immediate environment is peaceful at all times to guarantee the safety of lives and properties in any given environment. St. Augustine spoke of peace as "the tranquility of order" (Nash, 1994:130). It is a tranquility that drives development. One can see that this is no less true in many societies than what is going on inside each person or group that makes up a society.

Peace, both inner personal peace and world peace, demands that the "desire for justice be tampered with love, mercy, and forgiveness, even though it may sometimes seem 'unjust' to forgive the oppressors" (Nash; 1994:131). Peace is a condition that guarantees maximal tranquility that creates the necessary situation for other acts of men that can lead to a societal building; to be carried out correctly. In a firm agreement with the above position, Mbiti (2010:2) states that peace means "tranquility, good fortune, good health, with the freedom to live and work. Where there is no

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peace, there is no fortune, happiness, freedom, and motivation to live there. Absence of peace means suffering for people and nature".

In traditional African societies, women are socially constructed to be peacebuilders. This is found in the historical culture of calmness, which prevents the escalation of domestic conflicts, especially when the male-folk flares up. They are also known to be relatively excellent in resource prudence, which helps in sustaining family economy and peace by extension. Furthermore, the culture of love and tolerance, which they exhibit, helps in societal transformations. The absence of peace could force men and women to take arms and confront things that have undermined their environmental stability. This is because lack of peace threatens both man and nature. When men take arms to face whatever threatens their peace, they pursue peace through confrontation. Traditionally, studies on conflict confrontation focus on men's roles in peacekeeping, peace enforcement, and armed confrontations. But this study will document how Zulu and Igbo women have confronted the factors that undermined their peace at different times in history. They took up arms to save their husbands and children. The study showed their proactive stance in encouraging men to fight what undermines good life here on earth.

METHODOLOGY

This study used primary and secondary data to develop its content. The preliminary data were sourced from key informant interviews and telephonic interviews. The key informant interviews (KII) were carried out in Igbo land, while the telephonic interviews (TI) were done in Zulu land. Sixteen respondents were purposively selected out of Zulu and Igbo female scholars. The respondents were chosen randomly across both study areas, and they cut across the male and female gender. The questions administered to them were open-ended, which allowed them to express themselves wholly in line with their thought patterns on the role of women in conflict and peace-building within Zulu society and Igboland. The secondary data were sourced from already published books and journal articles to strongly enrich the content of the study and identify existing literature gaps. The analyzed literature revealed no current study that compared Zulu and Igbo women concerning conflict analysis and peace-building. The materials gathered from primary and secondary sources were thematically analyzed and presented in different study parts.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is hinged on the idea of African feminism. Feminism is a popular contemporary gender-based theory. The general perception of feminism is that it champions the quest for the freedom of the female human. It is a theory that challenges the traditional forms of male domination. Feminism is a struggle between husband and wife, brothers and sisters, and that of fathers and mothers (Graves & Davies, 1986:8; Shamase, 2017). The above idea of feminism by Graves and Davies (1986) captures a Euro-American perception of feminism. This is because the Euro-American conception of feminism preaches competition and even the domination of the male gender by the female. However, the African perspective to feminism promotes gender complementarity. For many women, feminism is the freedom to decide her destiny, freedom from sex-determined roles, freedom from oppressive restrictions, freedom to express her thoughts entirely and convert them freely into action (Philips, 1987: Shamase, 2017).

Nevertheless, scholars within and outside the African continent believe that feminism can be adopted and applied to develop and interpret gender-based issues in the continent. Ongundipe-Leslie (1994:207) maintained that "black men and black women cannot unite around conflicting interests and cross antagonistic classes. To think that this is possible is to be either romantic, hypocritical or dishonest or just unintelligent". Ongundipe-Leslie's (1994) position is not valid for many African women, especially in the pre-colonial era. From the pre-colonial to the colonial period, most African women supported the male folk in advancing different forms of gender-based interest, class interests, and roles. Achifusi (1987:40) further argued that feminism is "politics directed at changing existing power relations between women and men in every society." Feminism is expected to change the power structure at home, school, church, mosque, market, workplace, and all areas of life, thereby determining what each gender gets in a given place and time.

The idea of feminism in Africa has proved problematic because African women need terminology to relate to (Shamase, 2017). The idea of accumulation of wealth or economic equality that some gender activists often champion does not in a real sense promote the emancipation of the female gender as it rather promotes female self-aggrandizement. This is because the fundamental mission of feminism is "to free all women" (Kolawole, 1997: 21).

African developmental feminism is expected to fee women of colour from the racist abuse of the dominant culture group in the African geospatial environment. African feminism is expected to emancipate the working class women from the bourgeoisie men. It is expected to deliver the disabled from the tyranny of those that are not physically challenged. It is a theory that would emancipate women and ladies from their current positions of gender-based dependency and institutional segregations to a sustainable level of gender parity in every field of life within the African continent.

Traditional African developmental feminism is aimed at women operating at the same level as men to preserve the lives of their husbands, brothers, and sons and not working in antagonism or even competition with the male gender. It should be noted that African developmental feminism, especially in the pre-colonial era, was highly supportive and developmental and not selfish and competitive (KII-V, 2021; KII-VIII, 2021). In Africa, wives consciously support husbands, sisters support brothers, and mothers support fathers (TI-I 2021; TI-II, 2021). By so doing, both gender compliments each other and thereby promotes progressive development. These attributes were extensively exhibited by the Zulu and Igbo women.

Kolawole (1997) maintained that all through ages, African women had written their names in the sand of times and made history through their traditional institutional roles. African women have been found to have attained exceptional political, economic, military, and other forms of glorious existential heights from the pre-colonial era while maintaining the traditional institutional frameworks of their societies. Some scholars have used the term African womanism (Kolawole, 1997; Shamase, 2017) to conceptualize the place of African women in the feminist debate. What is central is that the traditional conception of African feminism promotes the empowerment of the female gender by transforming the existing African traditional roles and institutional frameworks. The male folks highly praised those who broke gender roles in their quest to attain great heights, and they lived as the heroine, while many others later died and made it part of the legendary souls of their societies (KII-IX, 2021; TI-Xvi, 2021). This study clearly shows how the Zulu and Igbo women and ladies supported their male counterparts in attaining their manifest destiny while competing in the military and security fields that were traditionally seen as male-dominated military regiments. The study presents how the Zulu women and Igbo women were active in the act of warfare for years in the quest to protect their society and enhance the peace and security of their societies.

Zulu Women in Conflict and Peace Enforcement

In many African societies, what is popular knowledge is that women get pregnant, give birth, and take care of the domestic needs of the home. The emphasis remains on the role of women in managing the kitchen and child upbringing as a central role in societal building (KII-VII, 2021; KII-IX, 2021; TI, XI, 2021). In the area of peace and conflict, there is widespread negligence and historical negligence of the role played by women in managing the critical security and peace-building needs of the society.

However, it should be noted that across Africa, women play different forms of roles in maintaining peace while responding to conflict. Amongst the Zulu people, women took part in armed conflict and did take care of the wounded. Zulu history records that a number of very strong married women and single ladies were utilized in the Zulu military formation. Ngobese (2016) documented the female regiment in Zulu history since the reign of King Shaka to include *Umcekeceke, Untshuku, Icenyane, Ikwani, iSihlabati, Ingcoshe, Isitimana, Ingcugce, uTiyane, Imbabazane, iMvuthwamini and iNkehleni.* These regiments that were made up of women and ladies served in the military formations of King Shaka of Zululand. The married women in the regiments, who were generally called *Amakhosikazi*, were said to be very brave and courageous (Carton *et al*., 2008: 113). The young girls that were selected into the military regiments were said to be more brave and courageous as they had little or no worries over the situation of their husbands or children like the *Amakhosikazi* (Fuze, 1979: 29; Webb & Wright, 1987:7). These women are not denied their right to marriage. However, they are restricted from the excessive social influence of love life from men that would distract their military career (TIs-VIII, 2020). It should be noted that the female warriors that were part of the regiments can only marry one of the male soldiers. That marriage will only hold if the King approves of their conjugal union (Ngobese, 2016). Before the King approves the marriage, he would investigate both warriors' genuine disposition to love and live like man and wife (TIs-IV, 2020). It is only when he is satisfied that they are committed to their marriage vision and would not in any severe way constitute a threat to Zulu security that the King will approve of the marriage (TIs-III, 2020).

The Zulu male regiments (Amabutho) will not go to war without the blessings of their female counterparts. This is necessary as the Zulu women had to ululate (Ukukikiza) before the male folks go to war. This is because it is widely believed that such an act of ululation brings good luck and victory to the male regiments (Ngobese, 2016: 7420). Magwaza (2006: 103) maintains that the ululation that women often carried out before the Zulu regiments leave for war aims to increase their courage. The act of ululation heightens the morale of the male folk (TIs-II, 2020; TIs-XIII, 2020). During ululation, the women carry brooms, which were often waved to the air as they danced. These brooms were believed to carry magical charms or medicinal powers that destroy the enemy folks' charms on the battlefield (TIs-XVI, 2020). This act of ululation and waving the magical brooms also attracted the spirit of dead Zulu warriors and ancestors, who would be active in supplication and protection (TIs-IX, 2020).

Sometimes, the Zulu women would smear their bodies with different forms of adornments (*umlotha*) and mud as a way of fasting and praying for the safety of their husbands, sons, and fellow female colleagues on the battlefield. Those who had lost their husbands and sons also smears the same *umlotha* and mud as physical evidence that they are mourning a dead hero or heroine. It was also widely believed that such an act of mourning would attract peaceful repose to the soul of the deceased (TIs-III, 2020; TIs-X, 2020). The ritual prayers offered to them will also grant the dead warrior quick access to the world of the Zulu ancestors. The women who had lost their sons and husbands or breadwinners in any battle between the Zulu and an enemy group would wear skin skirts (Isidwaba) in an upside-down position as a way of informing other women as well as members of her family that they need to make more supplications to the Almighty God as well as the ancestor. The act of wearing isdwaba upside-down signals to available townsmen that the war is brutal and the dynamics of the armed conflict between the Zulu regiments and their enemies is not a complete workover (TIs-II, 2020; TIs-XVIII, 2020). Thus, more supplications are needed from members of the warriors' households and beyond to the Almighty God and the ancestors to ensure strategic turn-around in armed conflicts to the advantage of the Zulu warriors.

Fuze (1979) maintains that the wailing and mourning of Zulu women reaches its peak when the conflict ends and the warriors start returning. As the Zulu regiments progressively returned to the community square, where the women are already stationed and waiting anxiously in their numbers; the women who cannot find their husbands, sons and female warrior relatives tunes their crying and weeping to the highest level as they do not need the soothsayer to be informed that they had lost their loved one(s).

Igbo Women and Conflict Management

The Aba women riot, which took place during the era of colonial rule in Nigeria, remains a central theme in analyzing women's activities in relations conflict. It reveals powerfully how several women rose to challenge the excesses of British imperialism. Uchendu (1993) has maintained that the Aba Women Riot of 1929 was Women's War. The riot was the first time in imperial colonial history that women courageously marched, challenged, and pulled down the existing colonial structure (Ross, 1965). It was recorded that trouble started when Mark Emeruwa, a colonial census master, went to Umuobasi to gather the statistics of wives, children, and livestock that will be used to determine how every family would be taxed.

It would be recalled that during the colonial era, the wealth of a man can easily be measured by his ability to marry more wives and increase the number of his children as well as livestock and yam ban. It was stated that at that time, the Colonial Census master, Mark entered the house of one Ojim and demanded the tax determinant information. The women around replied to him by pouring oil on him. It was even stated that they quickly gathered and descended on him physically (KII-IV, 2020). Akaogu, the Warrant Officer that sent Mark, heard of how the people responded to Mark and threatened to report the family to the District Officer for proper punishment. When the women got wind of the information that the colonial administration was planning to punish them, they decided to be proactive. The women sent a delegation to the District Officer. Unfortunately, they were violently manhandled and injured. The manhandling and injuring of these women infuriated them, and they mobilized women from nearby areas to join their quest to stop the impending excesses of the colonial administration.

Gradually, the women of Oloko were supported by women from Ahaba, Umuahia, Aba, Owerri, and Ikot Ekpene, who spoke in one voice against British colonialism. They dressed scantly, with green leave and palm fronds, carrying sticks, cutlasses and any form of light weapons that they could lay hands on and

besieged as well as damaged European trading shops, Barclay's Bank, colonial offices as well as attacked prisons, where they released the incarcerated (Uchendu, 1993).

As the situation escalated and the violent crowd could not be controlled, the District Officer came to calm the nerves of the women, and he addressed them. The women demanded that the Akaogu, the Warrant Officer, be brought out. After trying to calm the nerves of the women, Akaogu was brought before the women. Unfortunately, considering that the women were already provoked and their violent disposition was already charged, they assaulted Akaogu before the District Officer. The women proceeded to Akaogu's house and destroyed it while demanding that he should be tried. He was tried and sentenced to two years imprisonment for assaulting women (Uchendu, 1993). These women moved further to destroy more buildings across the region, especially those buildings that inhabited the native courts as well as those where the warrant chiefs lived. Aba was the center of their attacks because the then colonial government had many of their investments there. It was also the center of imperial business administration.

While the Aba women riot was going on, the Resident Officer of Calabar, who was ignorant of the Aba women protest in the Owerri Province, demanded that women and livestock shock also be counted (Uchendu, 1993). The Opobo Chiefs that were already aware of the situation in Aba refused, but the Resident Officer insisted. The tax agent that the Resident Officer sent was assaulted and his register taken as well as destroyed. Etim Ekpo women quickly assembled in their thousands, having heard of the success made by Aba women in the Owerri Province, and began to attack European stores, factories, shops, as well as the residential building of those connected directly to the colonial government. The situation was worsened when police "opened fire on them, killing eighteen women and wounded nineteen" (Uchendu, 1993). The women attacked the District Officer and his lieutenants. In retaliation, the soldiers unleashed their anger on them, firing into the crowd and leaving thirty-two dead and thirty-one persons wounded" (Uchendu, 1993:42). About sixteen Native Administrative Centres were burnt or largely broken.

The women demanded that the colonial government no longer tax women and that their men should not be taxed in areas affected by the crisis to stop their violent attacks. They also demanded that all known prostitutes who had survived under cover of the colonial government must be arrested and that the local chiefs and warrant officers must all be removed from their territory. Ironically, all their prayers were granted by the colonial administration (Uchendu, 1993). The women also sought local chiefs who directly or indirectly collaborated with the colonial masters in the exploitation of the people and destroyed their properties.

Historic Challenges

Throughout ages, gender-based challenges manifest in different African societies. First is the problem of cultural and religious demands. Certain African cultures, especially those of the Islamic background, are often demanded to stay in Pudah in line with Islamic tenets, reducing their peace-building advocacy and influence to only their immediate nuclear family. Therefore, it allows the male folk to do what they like outside and that undermines family peace.

Furthermore, through their cultural norms, some cultures undermine the future of a female child by preferring to offer sustainable vocational and other forms of formal peace education to the male child that would inherit the father's compound as against the female child that would be married outside the family. The implication is that many of these young girls grow into women who will not think smartly and speedily in the face of any conflict and challenge. It also undermines the ability of these women to document their peace-building activities as well as strategies.

The fact that the pre-colonial and colonial African societies were characterized by continuous warfare, these women also faced multiple challenges of abduction. They forced marriages, which undermined their willingness to happily contribute to the transformation of the settler or new societies that they found themselves.

There is also the problem of patriarchy. The history of all hitherto African societies underscores the inherent challenge of managing patriarchy and feminist demands. The communities across Africa are widely dominated by the male folk, which primarily take decisions on many issues that affects their societies, with little reference and regard to the female folk.

A Comparative Analysis

Over time, the Zulu and Igbo women have exhibited strong courage and a high disposition to fight and save

their land. They could take arms and challenge their societies' colonial administration at one time or another means that they could be regarded as the saviors of their communities and heroines. Another fundamental denominator amongst these women is that they both rose to the challenge of their social security when it was largely believed that security management was the sole responsibility of the male folk in Africa (KII-XII, 2021).

However, it is also essential to document differences like the women's intervention in peace and conflict management within the two societies. First, in Zululand, their women were formally recruited into female regiments that King Shaka has established to fight and defend their land. In Igboland, there was no known form of the formal regiment that women were recruited into. In Zulu land, the men instead teamed up with their women to confront the colonial injustice from the British administration. Again, the Zulu women needed the King's approval for a lady in the regiments to marry. Still, in the Igbo situation, many of the women who started the war were already married and were fighting to protect their family name and economy from colonial exploitation. The Igbo women took arms spontaneously to fight a perceived colonial injustice that their husbands have unwillingly surrendered to or are helpless in its face.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study investigates the nature of the female gender's contribution to managing conflict, insecurity and ensuring that their society was peaceful in the colonial era. It would be recalled that all over Africa, gender roles tend to be decided from one culture group to another. The culture and civilization within a given environment prescribe acceptable behavioral patterns for the male and female folks. Consequently, when the culture of a given environment defines the patterns of gender norms, it would be reinforced over time through the progressive observance, adoption, and channeling of attitudes to suit such normative behaviors.

All over history, men and women are ambassadors of peace and drivers of conflict and armed behavior. This study documents the role of past African women in promoting peace within different African societies. It showed very clearly how the Zulu women from the reign of King Shaka established female regiments in their military formations and how these women became very instrumental in defense of the Zulu societies for many years. It also presents the place of Aba women in challenging the British colonial administration that had become exploitative. In both societies, the women exhibited exceptional brevity in their quest to promote the peace and security of their environment.

Finally, there is the need to revive women's security regiments as part of community policing strategies across different African societies. This will enable them to be trained and armed adequately to defend themselves and their children in the time of crisis and emergencies in their societies. For instance, in Nigeria, the Fulani herdsmen killing often leads to high death tolls on women and children, especially those living in remote areas.

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