

CONFERENCE PAPER

NO.1

A REVIEW OF WOMEN INVOLVEMENT IN WARFARE

BEING TITTLE OF PAPER PRESENTED AT THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
WOMEN ACADEMICS SECOND (2ND) INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE HELD
FROM 5^T" -10TM SEPTEMBER,2000

AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ABUJA , GWAGWALADA,ABUJA

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ABSTRACT

Tradition has placed women in the home . it is the men who arc to dominate the public life of human societies. However, this paper gives examples of women who have been exceptional, and have actively participated in public life. Some of them have been involved in actual warfare. The Writer'has described the discrimination against women in Nigeria and other parts of the world .Then she pointed out that women should promote peace and be more active in fighting for their rights, and societal ills such as secret cults ,discase , sexual harassment than taking part in physical combat. The paper concludes by pointing out that efforts arc being made at national and international levels to enhance women participation in public life, and so women should not rest on their oars but fight the war of freedom from exploitation and discriminatory polieies.

INTRODUCTION:

Haselberth (1976:203) quotes late President Kennedy of United States of America as having said that 'Mankind must abolish wars , otherwise war abolishes mankind. For some reasons best known to him , man seems not to have learned from history. Man has become more and more violent . Nations spend incredible resources to mass weapons of destruction. It is ironical that man enjoys the contradiction of promoting both the arts of warfare and the cause of peaceful co-existence. This paper looks at the role of women in warfare . Then it point out alternatives to physical combat in which women ought to be involved.

Women Participation in War: A Historical Perspective

As a rule it is men who are often associated with war. Human societies , accident and modern have decided to place women in the home as the sphere of their major operations in society . The background role assigned to them by tradition notwithstanding , the records reveal that women , both ancient and modern have often proved that they could compete favourably with their men counterparts in public life . In fact , some of them have demonstrated practically the adage that says , " What a man can do a woman can do even better". Below are few examples of women who have played outstanding roles in the public life of their respective communities.

According to the writer of the Book of judges (4:4), there lived a woman in land of Isreal who was endowed with the rare virtue of courage The woman was Deborah , the wife of one Lapidth. It is reported that her heart burnt with enthusiasm when men's hearts were despondent in war time. Courage was sought from among the military commanders of her time but it was nowhere to be found . The Biblical writer described vividly the individual role Deborah played at that critical moment in the history of her nation.

Deborah , a prophetess ... Summoned
Barak and said.... Go , gather your
men ... I will draw the general of
Jabin's army and I will give him into
Your hand . Barak said to her , if you
will go with me , I will go ; but if
you will not go with me , I will not go.

The Nigerian society has produced the likes of the Biblical Deborah . The history of various local communities is replete with heroine who emerged as champions of their respective communities particularly at war time. One of such women was Queen Amina of Zazzau a ruler warrior.

Amina was one of those rare human species, for in her feminine and masculine qualities neatly blended together. As a woman she was charming and romantic; and as a man she displayed a great courage and prowess . It is said that she lacked neither suitors nor lovers and in the battle field she was a ferocious lion Kirk -Green (1966:218) said that she was often praised as " Amina , a woman as capable as a man.)" Infact the same writer pointed out that it was her

prowess in battle that earned her the throne of Zaria in 1576 following her father's death. Her military achievements are summarised in the following two quotations, from Kirk -Green (1966-217) First he quoted sultan Bello of Sokoto as having said ,

Strange things happened in the history of
the seven Hausa States, and the most strange
of these is the extent of the possessions which God
gave Aminatu, daughter of the ruler of Zazzau .
She waged war in Hausa lands and took them all,
So that the men of Katsina and the men of Kano
brought her tribute. She made war in Bauchi and
against the other towns of the south and of the west to the
shores of the sea(i.e the Niger).

Kirk - Green also pointed out that the affairs of state did not interfere with Amina 's love of war . Then he quoted this testimony from the Kano Chronicle:

At this time Zaria , under Queen Amina ,
conquered all the towns as far as Kurarrafa
and Nupe . Every town paid tribute to her.
The Sarkin Nupe sent forty eunuchs and ten thousand
kolanuts to her . She first had eunuchs and kolanuts
in Hausa land . In her time the whole products of
the west were brought to Hausa land . Her conquest
extended over thirty -four years .

The list of Yoruba heroes and heroines cannot be complete without mention being made of princess Moremi of Ife. Moremi ,according to Awolalu (1979 :150-1) She is regarded as a heroine in Ile-Ife . According to him, the people of Ile-Ife , suffered from incessant raids by Igbo people who claimed to be the original inhabitants of Ile -Ife until they were displaced by the newcomers under the leadership of a Oduduwa.

Awolalu (ibid.) Pointed out that people of Ile-Ife continued to suffer humiliation from their aggressors until Moremi intervene. She was said to be a courageous and cunning woman. In order to save the community from its enemies , she volunteered to risk being captured by the invaders to enable her discover the secrets of their successful raids . She was captured and taken to the court of Igbo king where she became his favourite's wife. Having learnt the secrets of the enemy . Moremi escaped and returned to Ife. Following her instruction, the Ife people inflicted heavy casualties on their enemies when they attempted to attack them. The community recognised and commended Moremi's wisdom and Bravery.

Women Participation in Non-Violent Pursuits

Under normal circumstances , observation has often shown that women constitute majority of the people that one would meet patronising the health centres , hospitals and dispensaries across the country . It gives the impression that women are not as healthy as their

men counterparts. But this is a false impression because women are almost always saddled with the responsibility of not only caring for their own health, they have the additional responsibility of looking after their aged parents, children and husbands. The problem is worse for women at war time when men are drafted to the battle field, leaving the care of the home entirely to them.

Given these responsibilities one feels that it is rather too much to expect women to actively and directly participate in war, the results of which always make the weight of their burden heavier as society has laid upon them. However, both at international and national levels women have been involved directly in war situation, carrying out duties that befit their gender. The example given below will help to make the point clearer. During the First World War women played many vital roles at home as well as in the battle fields.

First, the Russian army suffered several shocking and embarrassing set backs even at time when the German Forces were retreating, having suffered defeat. While preparing to take over a village from the retreating Germans, the Russians secretly and silently assembled huge anti-aircraft guns in a nearby forest. Unexpectedly, within half an hour later, the Germans wreaked havoc destroying all the guns. The Russians wondered how the enemy knew the correct position of the anti-aircraft guns to have struck with such accuracy. The commanding officer in charge of the operation was ordered to track down a thorough search the source of information leakage. The source was discovered. Gibbons and Morison (1965:104) report,

An insulated wire was found in a small creek.
It was traced to a nearby barn. Inside, the
Wire led straight to the carcass of a recently
slaughtered Calf. A telephone was concealed
by the dead body.

It was a woman, the wife of the farmer assisted by her husband that was behind the deal. She had been responsible for sending information to the retreating German soldiers. The spy and her husband were arrested and court marshalled in their house.

In war times, spies served as the eyes of their armies. The information transmitted to the headquarters by the secret agents would determine the military strategy. This is because information concerning the movement of troops and the whereabouts of armament dumps were very useful due to a new enemy offensive. Spying was a very risky venture. One would expect to find men only who would be involved. The spy had to go to the enemy camp. If caught, there would be no rescue. He was a loner. But historical examples have shown that women were deeply involved despite the risks involved.

Women proved to be very profitable spies. Many young innocent looking girls served as nurses and treated even enemy wounded soldiers. But at the same time they were able to pick up secret information while going about their normal nursing duties. It was often detected that even those nurses who had shown incredible devotion and hard work attending to wounded soldiers they had nursed back to health were spies.

Second, the departure of so many British men to the battle field during the First World War left a serious shortage in the labour. Women stepped into the gap that was created due to the absence of men and pledged their support and assistance in struggle. Gibbons and Morison (1965:919) report that,

This was really the beginning of an incredible change in the position of women . Before the war it had been considered beneath the dignity of a lady to have to work for a living . Indeed every obstacle had been put in a way. The woman's place was held to be very much in the home subject to the husband of the house , sheltered from the rough world of men,....

During the war , women were able to demonstrate practically their claims for equality with men. They took jobs as train conductors , railway porters , merchants and postwomen. They enrolled volunteers to work on the farms . Other joined the army in which many served as nurses and were found with the doctors near the trenches. Many women were found at the casualty clearing stations carrying out hard work which hitherto was unheard of in female circles. They spent long hours offering dangerous but valuable service of supplying armunitions to their male combatants. They risked being killed and contracting diseases in the factories It was the sacrifice that the British women made during World war I that earned them the right to vote . The woman became a force to be reckoned with in British public life.

Earlier on during the the Crimean war, a woman made an indelible mark in the history of mankind. She was Florence Nightingale , an English woman in Florence , Italy. According to the Encyclopedia Americana (1963:195) and the New Universal Library (1968: 78), Florence Nightingale was the founder of the modern nursing Despite the non- cooperative attitude of the government of her day , She revolutionised the nursing and hospital services. The reforms She introduced in the military hospital and nursing services have been described as the best out of the good that came out of the horrors of the war. It is significant to note that historians of the Crimean War refer to her as " the real hero of the war".

American women organised the women's Relief Corp in 1883. The organisation was created by the mothers, wives , daughters and sisters of the soldiers who fought during the American Civil war (1861- 1865). According to the Encyclopedia Americana(1964 :97) the organisation was established to meet the following aims and objectives, among others to aid and assist the army and to perpetuate the memory of their heroic dead; to extend needful aid to widows and orphans; to find them homes and employment and assure them of sympathy and friends to cherish and emulate the deeds of the army nurses.

During the Nigerian Civil war, according to Jorre (1972:224) , women and girls played a very important role to boost the morale of the Biafran 'boys in the fronts' The women organised and maintained a very efficient Biafran Red Cross known as Women Voluntary Service. The school girls were not left behind . They were actively involved in helping to promote the cause of the secessionist fighters by knitting , sewing and cooking for the soldiers some of whom had been their former classmates.

THE PLIGHT OF NIGERIAN WOMAN

The Nigerian woman's search for equal rights with her male counterpart seems to be a mirage and the harder the fight the further the target seems to be. The nation is yet to do anything substantial to facilitate the political and economic rights of women. The little that has been done so far has benefited urban women only. Rural women who constitute a larger percentage of the female population, hardly know what is happening, talk less of their sharing in the benefits.

There is a felt need to seriously look into the Nigerian woman's plight with a view to usher her into full participation, in public life along with her male counterpart. The need to do so has become very obvious in the light of the additional burdens they have taken upon themselves and the new challenges which women face in the new millennium. Most women are not only "directors and managers of home affairs," but are bread winners as well with others contributing significantly in the sustenance of their families. The plight of the rural woman is worse because she is forced to shuttle between the farm and the home on daily basis and is compelled to contribute financially from her meagre resources to help implement decisions in her community she has never been party of. Worse still, rural women are easy preys of exploitation by men because most of them are non-literate and ignorant.

The Nigerian society generally discriminates and exclude women from running the society they are part of. Contributing factors which encourage this discrimination against women include traditional and misinterpretation of religious and legal principles by men to their own advantage and disadvantage of women. After all, men have almost an exclusive monopoly of these areas and so they workout policies which will not allow women the freedom to effectively participate in national development programmes like police, traffic warden, journalism and the army. Those who summon courage and take up such jobs are often intimidated and frustrated.

Progress has been made to involve women in the development of various sectors of the Nigerian economy. In politics for instance we have the veteran woman politician Hajiya Gambo Sawaba who has managed to survive men's intimidation, harassment and victimisation. Mrs Sarah Jibril, a one time presidential aspirant is another example of women who have ventured into the field of politics. But she could not go all the way because like many women she did not

posses the economic resources to support her electioneering campaign in a society where the naira power is almost all that matters to succeed in politics . I am very proud to note that there are today women senators in the National assembly , like Mrs. Folrenee Aya , Stella Omu and Khairat Razaq Gwadabe. There are also six women who have been appointed as ministers . But it is still not easy for many to climb up the ladder of social and economic mobility. The myth of the superiority of men over women has continued to rear it's ugly head in our society despite the fact that it is fast becoming an archaic idea. No known research has proved that women are inferior to men in terms of scientific and technological know - how , given the opportunity . But there is a limit to how far women can go in participation of the development in the society because they work in a hostile environment that is dominated by men who do not always encourage women participation.

Ramatu Ali (2000) has pointed out that there is need for the Nigerian society to be gender sensitive and to realise that it will be difficult to attain sustainable development if the knowledge perspectives and priority of half of the population are ignored in tackling societal problems. Then she made reference to a 1994 Human development report which she quoted as saying,

Sustainable human development is development that
not only generates economic growth but distributes its
benefits equitably , that empowers rather than marginalizes.
It is development that gives priority to the poor ,
enlarging their choices and opportunities and providing
for their participation in decisions that affect their lives .
It is development that is pro-people and pro-women.

It is not a hidden fact that both men and women make up the society. It implies , therefore , that they are both facilitators of sustainable development . Nigeria is currently nursing a two year old baby, "Democracy" . This baby will survive and stand the test of time if Nigerians take positive steps towards encouraging women participation in all walks of life and ensure the elimination of discriminatory policies against them.

SURVEY OF THE WORLD SCENE

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Discrimination against women appears to be a world-wide phenomenon. Having looked at the situation in Nigeria it is only fair to find out what obtains beyond Nigeria's borders. A few examples may be enough to illustrate the point.

Dyer, G. (1985:2) a New Nigerian World Affairs correspondent reported that in a conscious effort to reduce the population growth in China, Women became the target of brutal killings. He further reported that there had been high incidences of female infanticide in Chinese country side because of the greater value that the peasant society places on male children. The correspondent submitted that in a survey carried out in Anhui Province, it was found that there were three and half million more men than women between the age of 25 and 35.

He cited that researchers discovered one village where 40 female babies had been drowned. Yet in another village, eight babies (3 boys, 5 girls) were born during the period of the study. The three boys survived. Three girls were drowned, the remaining two were abandoned. In fact on conservative estimates, it was feared that as many as one million or more little girls were being killed in China, yearly.

The long term implications of such inhuman policies are fore boding. Many young people may be doomed to life long celibacy because of the sex imbalance. This may in turn increase the rate of sexual assaults on the diminishing female population. The prospects of population collapse cannot be ruled out since the numbers of the next generation in a given society depend solely on the number of girls born in this generation. If such a trend is allowed to continue unabated there would likely going to be an abrupt and drastic drop in the number of young people who would feed and take care of the teeming millions of older people.

Like what obtains in Nigeria and China similar discriminatory policies have been reported in certain parts of Pakistan. According to Sunday Gaudian (1999:5), reports by a human rights organisation revealed that in Pakistan, at least three hundred women are burned to death. And who were responsible for this awesome death? It had been the families of their husbands. The same paper quoted the progressive Women's Association of that Country as reporting that the problem was growing worse and only very few of the cases had been picked up by the police. Even though the Pakistani legal system permit divorce, some families decide instead to murder

unwanted wives.

It is appreciated that concerted efforts have and are being made to overcome the anti Social activities against women at the national and international levels despite stiff and sometimes violent oppositions. Olagbegi ; (2000:35) pointed out that at the last United nation General Assembly Special Session, 178 governments reviewed their commitments to the goals of gender equality and women empowerment. This was a follow up of the resolutions arrived at the 4th world Conference on Women in Beijing, China 5 years ago . She further said that government pledged to take effective action to overcome obstacles that may hinder full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. Areas of concern include education, health , armed conflict, economic power , decision making and violence against women.

It is encouraging to know that the Nigerian government was one of the government who re-affirmed their commitments to the implementation of the Beijing Platform. Nigerian major areas of concern in the new millenium include violence against women, Poverty , health , economics and trafficking in women. These encouraging development notwithstanding, The Nigerian women must not rest on her oars but fight on.

The Wars Women Ought to Fight

a) SECRET CULT ACTIVITIES

It is still fresh in our memories that last year the Federal Government gave stern orders to University Vice- Chancellors ,Rectors of Polytechnics and Provost of College of Educations to stamp out cultism. They were given three months within which to carry out the assignment or quit . The necessity for the stern orders is not hidden. The menace of secret cult activities has and is threatening to destroy human lives and property in the various communities of the country. Student cult group have often held sway on campuses of tertiary institutions across the country , leaving corpses and trails of blood after their nefarious operations.

The in human activities of the cult groups are not limited to campuses of tertiary institutions only ,but they have also penetrated into primary and post primary schools and colleges. Reports and stories from many parts of the country show that many young boys and girls are being initiated into secret cult groups .Again it affects our children . Can mothers afford to continue to sit back and fold their arms and watch their children get destroyed ? Mothers must educate their children at home on the evils of secret cults. Other wise before you know it, the child you have laboured and suffered to

bring up has been snatched from you and destroyed . We must muster all available forces to wage war against cultism. A staff of one of our Universities was quoted by the Guardian News paper as saying,

You don't even know how much this matter(Cultism) has permeated into the system The man you are talking to who looks gentle and quiet, who will easily draw the admiration of people for his perceived fine qualities , could be a cult member

The only step to eradicate the menace of cultism is to ensure that all the groups initiations in schools because members will continue to deplete when there are no fresh students to join the old ones.

b) TABACCO SMOKING

The caption "The Best Cancer Money Can Buy" appeared on page 15 of the Sunday Guardian of 29th August, 1999. Out of curiosity , I read the article and discover that the reporters Feluge and Adebisi had reported on the health hazards of smoking . The report revealed that as many as four million people die yearly from Tobacco related diseases around the world . The report further pointed out that one prof . Umar Shehu of Maiduguri Teaching Hospital had pointed out that each stick of cigarette reduces the smokers life-span by 5^{1/2} days.

According to the report, smoking causes blindness , impotency and damages the health of the unborn babies of female smokers, pointing out that babies born to women who smoke during pregnancy as well as those expected to tobacco smoke have a great risk of dying of sudden infant Death Syndrome.

The reporters pointed out that the war against smoking of Tobacco was global . But further pointed out that while the anti- smoking campaigners were winning the battles in Europe and the United State of America , the reverse seems to be the case in Nigeria. This is because according to the reporters , tobacco companies in Nigeria do not obey the laws of the land about smoking. Rather they usually sound warning on the economic toll that could result from smoking . Said the reporters for example ,they (tobacco companies) have refused to carry on their packs the warning stipulated by the Federal Ministry of Health that's 'Smokers are liable to die young, Since this die- hard problem largely affects ^{us} Nigerian women must muster all their resources to fight the war against this deadly enemy that is threatening to render us widows and childless.

c) SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Over the years, women have often complained of suffering from emotional (torture as a result of their being sexual harassed by men . Although men also are sexually

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harassed by women ,it is very rare to come across such complaints on the dailies probably because they are very few in number. It is felt that it is enough just to mention it in passing since it is not the issue at stake. Cases of Sexual harassment against women have reached such an alarming proportion in the society that urgent attention is needed to deal with it decisively. Says Ummah (1988:7).

Some female Contractors are not often awarded contracts no matter how low their quotations until they have slept with the 'Ogas' involved . Which ever group you belong to whether an office worker , a student or house wife , women are daily subjected to all sorts of sexual harassment by most men in our society.

Sexual harassment is a common phenomenon in Universities and other tertiary institutions. Lecturers often eye their female students and threaten to fail them unless they make love with them. Some of those who do not succumb are often made to carry over courses they have "failed". But those who submit are given high marks . Many of these happenings are tackled in secret. No reports are made for fear of victimisation . The story is not different in the labour market .A female applicant may not get a job until she has gone to bed with the male employer.

One is forced to asked "For how long can women allow this to continue ? Shall women continue to fold their arms and allow the ugly situation to continue unabated ? Sexual harassment is an assault on the integrity of women. Women worth more than what men think. This is the war women must fight with all their strength and resources.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The paper has pointed out that women have over the years participated in war at various levels . Their participation has ranged from active participation in physical combats to spying and taking care of the wounded and bereaved . The paper has described the exploitation ,discrimination , and denial of fundamental human rights that women have suffered from their men counterparts in various societies of the world. The paper has further pointed out that women's fight for their rights and equality with their male counterparts is far from being accomplished . Rather than actively participate in physical combat during war, it is felt that women should pull together their human and material resources to fight their war of freedom from men's exploitative and discriminatory policies , social ills , like secret societies , killer diseases such as aids , poverty , non-literacy and prostitution . However, where armed conflicts break out , women can be gainfully engaged in the service of humanity as nurses and in offering other humanitarian services like provision and distribution of relief materials in order to help alleviate human suffering.

There appears to be the feeling among well meaning people that war no longer solves problems and where it solves one it has created new ones. The indiscriminate mass destruction of combatants and civilians alike has made war absurd , not to mention the exorbitant financial costs which are badly needed elsewhere for development. Unfortunately

women and children are right in the front line .It is strongly felt that women ought to be impressed more than ever before by the need to preserve peace. They ought to be in front line of those who promote the cause of peaceful co-existence among local, national and international communities. The increase of bloodshed , violence and brutality in the world today has become so alarming that women must fight it at all cost . This is imperative because the victims of war are always our children, and husbands whose burden we would have to bear.

THANK YOU FOR LISTENING.

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