

ANALYSIS OF THE 'CONFLICT' BETWEEN WOMEN OF EASTERN NIGERIA AND THE COLONIAL AUTHORITIES: A PEACEBUILDERS' PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The year 2019 marks the 90th anniversary of the misunderstanding over bad governance, discrimination and marginalization between the women of Eastern Nigeria and the colonial authorities. History looks at the past with a view to understanding the present while preparing for the future. Unfortunately, as the world commemorates this epochal event, an aspect that has been missing is what lessons we can learn from the events especially as it relates to peacebuilding. This is more so that this event was never celebrated in Nigeria as a reminder of Nigeria's journey and evolution to nationhood. More disturbing is the proclivity towards the celebration of violence as a means of acknowledging the contributions of women to nation-building. This paper is aimed at revisiting and may be putting some of these into proper perspective with a view to learning lessons for peacebuilding. The paper examines the implications and lessons of the context and nomenclature of violence on response using "the conflict between Women of Eastern Nigeria and the colonial authorities" as a case study. This study employs the peacebuilding approach which emphasizes nonviolence as its over-arching framework. We concluded that using a peacebuilding approach in analysing the conflict would have produced enduring lessons for addressing such a disagreement in future while avoiding a resort to violence.

Keywords: peacebuilding, context, conflict, responses, violence and nonviolence.

Introduction

Many studies on violence worldwide focus mainly on causes, prevention and impacts. Most of these studies are from psychology and adopts a public health approach (*World Report on Violence and Health, 2016*). There is nothing wrong in this. However, this approach and focus have not provided the much needed succour from violence. As the venerable Nelson Mandela noted in the preface to the *World Report on Violence and Health (2002)*, "the twentieth century will be remembered as a century marked by violence. It burdens us with

its legacy of mass destruction, of violence inflicted on a scale never seen and never possible before in human history.” To reinforce the above view, Oscar Arias former president of Costa Rica and Nobel Laureate has this to say, “as long as humanity continues to rely on violence to resolve conflicts, the world will enjoy neither peace nor security, and our health will continue to suffer” (Krug, E.G. et al 2002). And as Arendt (1969, p.80) concurs; “the practice of violence, like all action, changes the world, but the most probable change is to a more violent world.” In fact, instead violence prevails on more rampant basis with even more devastating consequences for our collective well-being.

This paper examines the implications and lessons of the *context* and *nomenclature* of violence on *response* using “the conflict between Women of Eastern Nigeria and the colonial authorities” as a case study. It employs the peacebuilding approach which emphasizes nonviolence as its over-arching framework. Violence is not an isolated and stand-alone phenomenon. There is the context of violence which affects the nomenclature and this implicates the responses and even prevention. In Nigeria for instance, there is the geopolitical distribution of violence which has impacted the naming and identification of violence. In the north-west, it is called as banditry. In the northeast, it is named insurgency while in the northcentral it is either farmer/herder conflict or killer herdsmen. In the south-south, we have militants and in the southeast it is secessionist or agitators. And in the southwest, it is cultism.

Crimes that have element of violence are not left out in this naming. Those who steal cows are known and called cattle rustlers; we also have kidnappers, armed robbers, ritualists etc. A more discerning look at these appellations will reveal that they are focused on the “agents of violence.” This naming may be aimed at identifying perpetrators with a view to nailing them. But a closer look also reveals that some of the names are also contextualized. For instance, there is a distinction between “urban and rural violence.” Further, this naming is also applicable to security forces and at times law enforcement agents. For instance, Palestine by every definition is a nation state even though not recognized as such by the instruments of international politics. Palestinian army is referred to as “Palestinian Militants” while Israeli soldiers are ‘Israel Defence Forces.’ In Liberia and Sierra Leone the opposition was referred to as ‘rebels’ while the army was the ‘military’ even though there is very little variation in their levels of cruelty. All these have implications not only for prevention but also for law enforcement and response. Even in the law enforcement and judicial system people are either ‘suspects,’ ‘criminals,’ ‘convicts’ or ‘awaiting trial.’ And in order to really dehumanize them, they are given numbers instead of names so that they can be ‘dealt’ with without our conscience being pricked. This paper shall analyse the ‘conflict’ between the women of eastern region of Nigeria and the colonial authorities from a peacebuilders’ perspective. Disagreements between two or more entities or even within entities is a normal occurrence. Or as they say conflict is inevitable in human relations and interactions. Grievances against established or

constituted authorities is a normal existential phenomenon. What is not normal and usual however is when the parties express and respond to the disagreements in a violent manner. This paper focuses on analysing from a peacebuilders' perspective the disagreement between the women of eastern Nigeria and the colonial authorities.

One of the main objectives of peacebuilding is to prevent violent response to conflict. But as one can see in the conflict between the women of eastern Nigeria and the colonial authorities, the use of violence could be said to have been democratised. The challenge of this paper therefore include: could this violent response been avoided? Was there a Grievance Mechanism to seek redress? If it existed, were the women aware? Did the colonial authorities use it? If they used it, was it effective? These questions shall be addressed using the Peacebuilding and Conflict Analysis Framework adapted by the authors from the literature clarifying the concept of peacebuilding.

Conceptual Clarification: Violence

The word violence is derived from the verb – violate. To violate means “to fail to observe duly, to abuse, to rape or submit to sexual abuse of any kind, to profane” (The Chambers Dictionary). Violent is an adjective which also helps us to understand the meaning of violence. Violent means intensely forcible, impetuous and unrestrained in action, domineeringly vehement, due to violence, perverting or distorting the meaning and expressing violence. Still on it, violence is described as the state or quality of being violent, excessive, unrestrained or unjustifiable force, outrage, profanation, injury, distortion of the meaning and rape.

To violate is also, to break, infringe or transgress (a law, rule, agreement, promise or instructions). It may also mean to break in upon or disturb rudely, interfere thoughtlessly with, to break through or pass by force or without right, to treat irreverently or disrespectfully, desecrate or profane, to molest sexually, especially to rape. But for the purposes of this paper we shall describe violence as “any behaviour of individuals that attempt, threaten, or actually inflict physical or any other type of injury” (Reiss & Ross 1993, p.2). It could also mean “the use of force with the intent to inflict injury or death upon oneself or another individual or group(s) and includes the threat of force to control another individual or group or aggressive behaviour involving the use of physical, psychological or emotional force with the intent to cause harm to oneself or others” (*National Committee for Injury Prevention and Control*).

From the above, a few insights could be gleaned. First, violence is a power-induced and power-directed phenomenon. Second, violence is a response to conflict (even though a bad one at that). Third, violence involves a perpetrator and a victim. Fourth, violence involves coercion. Fifth, violence involves destruction. Sixth, any individual or group could perpetrate violence. Seventh, any individual or group could be victims of violence. Eighth, the use of violence is usually intentional and a deliberate, rational choice.

Going through some of the definitions, one can also glean what may be referred to as 'myths of violence,' and they include; violence is inevitable, that human beings are helpless, violence may at times be justifiable, violence brings quick results, governance is all about managing violence, violence is natural, and violence equals power. As we analyse the conflict between the women of eastern Nigeria and the colonial authorities, these myths shall be demystified. However, the above still leaves many questions unanswered namely; is violence learned or innate? Second, does a group or an individual specialize in violence? Is violence intuitive, voluntary or involuntary? Are there alternatives to violence? Is violence the monopoly of any group or individual? Could the use of violence be justified? Further, it leaves pending the issue of the naming of violence and the context of violence and implications for response.

Broadly there are two types of violence. First is physical violence and the other is structural violence. Some others refer to the two as visible and invisible violence respectively. These two categorizations are universal and generic. Further, there are mass killings, wars, pogrom, genocide. They also added to the mix such concepts as collective violence, community violence, violent conflict, armed conflict and many others.

Breunlin, Cimmarusti, Byrant-Edwards and Hetherington (2002), identified four categories of violence namely psychopathological, predatory, situational and relational. As Cohen and others have observed, violence is not inevitable. In distress situations or when provoked people have a wide range of responses to choose from. What determines the choice individuals or groups make could be subject to context and the personality traits of the individual. The Seville Statement of about 20 prominent psychologists dispelled the widespread belief that human beings are inevitably disposed to war as a result of innate, biologically determined aggressive traits. Gerald Berold (1999) agreed with this. In other words, human beings are not helpless robots programmed for violence. We must take responsibility for our actions.

Some kinds of violence are perpetrated by individuals, while others are by groups. Some are perpetrated by individuals on individuals while others are perpetrated by individuals against groups. There is also the violence perpetrated by the state on individuals such as public executions, genocide, mass atrocities etc (Human Rights Watch 1993, Kimenyi & Scott, 2001; Anthony, 2002; Rittner et al 2002, Leatherman et al, 1999 and Staub, 2003). On his part, Bishop M.H. Kukah aptly describes Nigeria as a "nation of the walking wounded" (2011, p.3). A closer look at this description implies that Nigeria has been violated or has been a victim of violence. Who and what violated Nigeria? There are many typologies of violence in Nigeria. They include political violence, religious violence, election violence, domestic violence, sexual violence. More importantly, the import of Kukah's intervention is that Nigeria has had a long history of violence including that between the women of eastern Nigeria and the colonialists. The wounds of that encounter

are yet to be healed that is why another analyst described the story of Nigeria 1914 to 2014 as “The One Hundred Years Conflict” (Onuoha forthcoming).

In this paper, we concentrate on the violent expressions of the parties in the conflict between the women of eastern Nigeria and the colonial authorities. And violence in this context is how the parties responded to the disagreements between them. However, we shall be guided by Charles Tilly’s ‘Contention of Power Theory’ (Lake & Rothchild 1996). He argues that the contestation for power and the collective claims people make within a system impact how they relate to each other. Continuing he argued that when groups are excluded from participation in political and other decision-making processes it may lead to conflict and in responding parties may resort to violence. Human beings will always contend for power especially political power. But that should not necessarily lead to violence. It is obvious that when the mechanisms, processes, and structures that regulate and manage the contention for power among groups lacks credibility and legitimacy, that exercise will definitely be a recipe for violent conflict. More relevant to this study is the issue of exclusion from the polity which Tilly raised. We shall explore this more in this paper.

The Peacebuilding Approach

The word peacebuilding was first used in an article – *Three Approaches to Peace* by Johan Galtung in 1956. It was popularised by Boutros Ghali – the Egypt-born Secretary General of the United Nations in his *Agenda for Peace* in 1992. It must be emphasised that Galtung’s conception of peacebuilding is built around the prevention of a nuclear war between the then super powers. Wars have been part and parcel of human civilisation and most efforts at social and political engineering have been aimed at preventing wars. The concept of peacebuilding was therefore a product of that era. That explains why in Ghali’s conceptualisation, peacebuilding is mainly applicable as part of post-conflict concept. It is with this that Ghali defined post-conflict peacebuilding as, “action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid relapse into conflict.”

However, a more relevant conception of peacebuilding to our case study is this, “peacebuilding is a holistic approach that addressed the root causes of conflict and includes the processes, interventions, strategies and methods to promote just peace” (CRS 2002). Further, Peck (1996 pp. 74-75), describes peacebuilding as:

a long term preventive strategy aimed at tackling the root causes of conflict...peacebuilding can only be achieved by the establishment of local, state, regional and international systems of procedural and distributive justice which are responsive to basic human needs and which give adequate decision-making voice to individuals and identity groups – thus providing constructive ways for needs

and grievances to be expressed and addressed. Peacebuilding thus necessarily involves the institutionalization of participatory democratic processes at all levels of society, in order to provide basic civil and political rights to all peoples....it also requires the establishment of fora for constructive means of dialogue among groups and mechanism for constructive dispute resolution at all levels. Further, peacebuilding involves equitable economic development and opportunities so that the economic and social rights of all peoples can be respected. Finally, it entails the development of pluralistic norms and practices which respect the unique cultures and identities of all peoples. Peacebuilding will thus also require education of dominant groups to convince them that their own long term security interests lie in the development of a just society.

In other words, the peacebuilding approach is holistic, addresses root causes and includes processes, strategies and methods to promote just peace. Just peace is equivalent of Galtung's positive peace. Therefore, to understand the root causes of the conflict between the women of eastern Nigeria and the colonial authorities we must understand the context of the conflict. And context analysis is one of the key steps in a peacebuilding approach.

A close examination of the word peacebuilding would point to the metaphor of construction and cooperation. Before one can build a foundation must be laid. And at the heart of successful building is cooperation of all the workers. It is therefore imperative to state from the on-start that peacebuilding approach is built around three key elements namely – cooperation, participation and nonviolence. It needs emphasising that for two disputing parties to resolve their differences they must cooperate. By agreeing to cooperate to address their differences they have made one successful step towards resolution - peacebuilding.

The Concept of Context

In basic peace and conflict studies, context simply means the geographical location where the conflict is playing out. It also incorporates the time milieu when the conflict is taking place. In other words, context means the environment in which conflict is expressed and responded to. But in peacebuilding approach to conflict analysis the concept of context is a little deeper and wider. For instance, because peacebuilding is holistic and looks at the root causes of conflict, it is important to look at what the context was before the conflict broke out. Second, what is the context in which the conflict is presently playing out. That is to say, what changed in the context that gave rise to the conflict. Because peacebuilding aims at just peace and relationships, the context of conflict includes how the relationship is organized before the conflict and how the conflict is transforming the relationships. And what kind of relationship will emerge if and when the conflict is resolved or transformed.

And finally, what kind of context will be needed to sustain the peace that have been achieved.

In this instance, context implies the perception of the people (especially the women) of colonial administration, the relationship between the people (again women in particular) and the colonial administration and the role of women in decision-making, before the advent of colonialism and their role during colonial rule. Finally, the way the various communities are organized and the recognition accorded to all segments of eastern society is also important. The relationship between the women, their husbands and children are also part of the context of this conflict. The whole of these are important because they remove the 'sole' cause of the conflict from the tax narrative into a more nuanced understanding of the society at this period.

The Story¹ of the 'Conflict' Between the Women of Eastern Nigeria and the Colonial Authorities.

The table below is a graphic representation of the timeline of events especially responses to the conflict between the women of eastern Nigeria and the colonial authorities. It is from this timeline that we reconstructed and sequenced the story with a view to injecting some sense of order into the story to help with the analysis. What follows is the story of the conflict as pieced together from different secondary sources especially the report of the first and second commissions of inquiry.

Timeline of Events in the Conflict between the Women of Eastern Nigeria and the Colonial Authorities			
Date	Event	Location	Remark
October 14, 1929	Census of women's property ordered	Bende Division of Owerri Province	Mistrust was at the base of the tension generated.
November 23, 1929	Confrontation between Nwanyeruwa and Emeruwa	Oloko	This could be said to be the 'trigger' for the conflict.
November 24, 1929	Women march to Okugo's to begin demonstration	Oloko	This was the first public outing by the women

¹ In reconstructing this story, we have relied on many sources. This has been a difficult enterprise because authors chose details of the story which supports that interpretive paradigm. For instance, an author with a gender lens focused more on what the women did while others sought other forms of evidence. However, we have tried to be as detailed as possible to enable our analysis from a peacebuilding perspective by consulting the following: Aba Commission of Inquiry 1930, Afigbo 1966, 1972 & 1981, Gailey 1970, Ifeka-Moller 1975, Leith-Ross 1939, Matera 2012, Mba 1982, Perham 1937 & 1970, and Van Allen 1972 & 1975.

November 29, 1929	Okugo arrested for assaulting women	Oloko	This was one of the demands of the women
December 1, 1929	Counting of women's property begins	Ukam in Calabar Province	This event shows that it was not restricted to Aba
December 2, 1929	Demonstrators approach Captain Hill's wife to voice their demands	It was not specified where this took place	Feminist and scholars use this as evidence that it was a woman's affair
December 3, 1929	Chief Okugo is tried and convicted	This probably took place in Oloko but was not specified.	This signaled the first 'positive' that should have been built upon
December 4, 1929	Colonial officials meet to refute rumors of taxation of women	Opobo	It was a good opportunity to engage the women but it was not utilized.
December 5, 1929	Police reinforcements to counter women	Calabar	Another evidence that it was not restricted to Aba
December 6, 1929	Large demonstrations begin	Aba	Aba is a large commercial centre which gave the conflict its name.
December 9, 1929	Demonstrations continue, Native Courts occupied and attacked	Okpala, Nguru and Ayaba	This shows the spread of the action of the women
December 11, 1929	2-3 women killed by a British Doctor in an accident	Aba	This was the first instance of attack on white people
December 13, 1929	Widespread rioting and destruction of courts	Aba	The targeting of courts was as representing colonial authority
December 15, 1929	About 18 women protesters shot dead	Utu Etim Ekpo	The death toll begins and anger spreads.
December 16, 1929	About 33 protesters shot dead	Opobo	The above and this one shows that most of the killings took place outside Aba and in fact Igbo land.
December 17, 1929	Last massive protest	Okigwe	The conflict is suppressed not resolved

December 20, 1929	Report of situation under control	Across several towns	We are not sure who reported the situation under control but likely the colonial authorities
December 27, 1929	Colonial troops withdraw	Across several towns	The pacification is over
January 9, 1930	Protests brought to an end	All over Eastern Nigeria	But the impact was not brought to an end.

Source: Developed by the authors using different sources

On October 14, 1929, the Assistant District Officer for Owerri province summoned all the Warrant Chiefs and told them that they have to update the tax information they gathered from the men in 1926 and 1927. He was of the view that the information gathered was not detailed enough and that there was the need to include women and children and property owned by women. After this Captain Floyd of Calabar Province gave a similar directive. This order was carried out at Ikpan Clan in Essene area of Calabar at the instance of Captain Falk – who wanted to update the tax records of the area targeting the inclusion of women in particular.

Earlier in 1926, there was a census of men after which they were taxed. So for the people and particularly women of the region, the present head count is prelude to their being taxed. However, the colonial administration has assured the people of Oloko in Bende Division that the census has nothing to do with taxation. The District Officer has assured the people that there were no plans to increase taxes or to tax the women. But the census raised a red flag in the women because the district officer had made such assurances when the men were counted that the men would not be taxed. This was not to for the men were later taxed. Therefore, the women did not trust the assurances seriously that they would not be taxed. So the news spread throughout the area among the women that the head count was a prelude to taxing the women.

In the Oloko area, the women leaders namely; Ikonnia, Nwannedie and Nwugo summoned the entire women to a meeting at the Orie Market square. It was resolved at the meeting that “as long as only men were approached in a compound and asked for information, the women would do nothing. But if any woman was approached, she was to raise alarm and the rest would meet to decide what to do. They wanted clear evidence that the women were to be taxed.”

In October 1929, the District Officer for Bende Division directed the Warrant Chiefs to embark on a more detailed head count including women (wives), children and livestock. Somehow, one of the Warrant Chiefs informed the elders of one of the villages that the colonial administration has instructed him to count women and domestic animals so that they would be taxed.

Some of the Warrant Chiefs were reluctant to carry out this directive. One of them was Chief Okugo of Oloko who was said to be unpopular and notorious. Reports had it that his reluctance was the rumoured opposition from the women. When the colonial authorities noticed Chief Okugo's hesitation to carry out the assignment, they mounted pressure on him. When Chief Okugo could no longer stand the pressure from his employers, he recruited a school teacher – Emeruwa to help him with the head count.

On November 23rd, 1929, Emeruwa visited Nwanyeruwa at Oloko for the head count, and asked her to count her goats and sheep. A sharp exchange ensued. In anger Nwanyeruwa confronted Emeruwa, *“Are you still counting? Last year my son's wife who was pregnant died. I am still mourning the death of that women. Was your mother counted?”* With this exchange there erupted a fight between Nwanyeruwa and Emeruwa. So it was in keeping with the resolution of the women that Nwanyeruwa reported what transpired with Emeruwa to the women's meeting. This convinced them that they would be taxed. They sent messages to the surrounding areas. The women were mobilized and they assembled at the District Office. They got written assurances from the authorities that women would not be taxed. They were also able to pressure the colonial authorities to arrest, try and convict Chief Okugo for *“spreading news likely to cause alarm and of physical assault on the women.”* Chief Okugo was sentenced to two years' imprisonment.

For the women protesters this was sweet victory. The news spread all over eastern Nigeria. The women used the opportunity to demand for the removal of Warrant Chiefs and the Native Administration. Nwanyeruwa became a heroine and donations poured in from all over the Eastern Region. However, the women continued to meet, to strategize and to mobilize.

On December 11, 1929, the women were heading in their large numbers to a meeting in Aba. A car driven by a white man who was later identified as a medical doctor who had a nurse as passenger, ran into the crowd of women. The medical doctor driver tried to manoeuvre his way out of the crowd. In the process he hit two women causing injuries. Some reports claimed that two or three women were killed. In anger the crowd chased the cars into a business premises in Aba. This led to the looting of banks, factories, post office and stores in Aba. It also heralded attacks on white properties in the area.

In the midst of this chaos, the burning of government buildings and the looting of factories by the women commenced. December 14, 1929 some women assembled at Utu Etim-Ekpo in Calabar province and staged a solidarity rally in the compound of one of the Warrant Chiefs that supported them – Chief Akpan Umo. On December 15, 1929, the women advanced towards a government station dressed in their war regalia and stripped to the waist. On nearing the government station, Captain James ordered his troops to open fire. When they ceased fire, eighteen women lay dead. On December 14 at Abak police has killed three women demonstrators. And on December 16, thirty women were mowed down at Opobo. All these targeted at Ibibio women in Calabar province.

The colonial authorities responded by deploying large numbers of soldiers, policemen and at times Boy Scouts. This large deployment of troops led the women to scale down the demonstrations but it continued till 1930. In response the colonial administration occupied the areas with their troops. They embarked on punitive expeditions to pacify the restiveness. They carried out mass destruction of compounds and villages and forcefully extracted damages and provisions for the troops. There were sundry and arbitrary levies to punish the communities. At the end about fifty-three women lay dead and many others were wounded while others simply fled or disappeared. The whole incident covered a total land area of about 6,000 square miles with a population of about two million people. The colonial administration did not negotiate with the women. But it did set up a Commission of Inquiry to look into the remote and immediate causes of the disturbances. During the inquiry the women demanded the following: (1) Removal of Warrant Chiefs (2) They did not want Native Courts to try cases any more (3) All white men should return to their own country (4) Non-taxation of women

Analysis of the Conflict

Like most conflicts, the focus of research starts with understanding the 'causes.' Then the second aspect is to try and name and shame by focusing on who is wrong and who was right. This has been the issue with the conflict between women of eastern Nigeria and colonial authorities. The research and literature on the conflict has been over-romanticized with the over-riding consideration of being politically correct. This does disservice to our learning lessons from the conflict. In this regard, the literature and studies on the conflict have been focused on the following: (1) Nomenclature (2) Context (3) The parties involved in the conflict (4) Response of the colonial authorities. In the following section we shall try to analyse the above situating their relevance to this study especially with a view to building peace in Nigeria.

Nomenclature: Many analysts and scholars have quarrelled with the nomenclature – "Aba Women Riot" (Van Allen 1975, Falola & Paddock 2011, Mba 1982, Leith-Ross 1939 etc). This was the name given to the conflict between the women and the colonial authorities. There are two basic arguments about the name. First, they argue that 'Aba' circumscribes the reach and extent of the conflict. It is argued also that the conflict extends to Calabar and Owerri Provinces of Eastern Region. That the attempt to restrict it to Aba is to convey the impression that it was an unplanned and an isolated incident by some disgruntled elements.

The analysts prefer either Igbo Women's War or Aba Women's War. The idea of a war is to give credit to the organizational capability and ingenuity of women in organizing and prosecuting a war. The issue of Aba has been explained. The use of "Igbo" is to expand the scope of the conflict so that its impact and analysis could be far-reaching. That still begs the question since, most of the casualties were from outside of Igbo land.

Language is very powerful in social science and other human endeavour. But it is important to underscore what we intend to achieve by the use of a particular terminology. The other argument is that by a generalizing concept as Aba Riots, Igbo Uprising, it denies the women the credit to being able to organize and prosecute social movements. This is an unending argument between feminist scholars and others. And to make it look like they were mere pawns in the hands of men or other forces.

Another aspect of this nomenclature is that of adding 'women.' Those who insist on adding it also believe that attempts have been made to make women invisible in the social and political space. Second, there have been attempts to discountenance the role of women in the conflict. Available evidence point to the fact that women planned and executed the conflict from start to finish. To single it out as an all-women initiative is a credit to the power and resourcefulness of women in building a better and just society. It also reinforces the view that women are not mere bystanders and recipients of society's handouts. That they have all it takes to claim their right and place in the public space. One of the principles of peacebuilding is gender and cultural sensitivity.

In peacebuilding and conflict resolution, labels and nomenclature could be judgmental and carry a lot of meaning. That is why in peacebuilding approach we employ such neutral and non-threatening terms as parties or conflict. This enables parties to come to the negotiating table and minimizing stereotyping and humanizing the parties in the conflict. Therefore, for us as peacebuilders, in studying and analysing this conflict, we settled for this: *The Conflict Between the Women of Eastern Region and the Colonial Authorities (1929)*. We deliberately down played the issue of tax because it was just one of the triggers. Before this time, resentment against colonial administration was at its peak.

By any known international and academic standard what happened between the women of eastern region and the colonial authorities does not qualify as war. Singer and Small (1972) and Deutsch and Senghaas (1973) developed three criteria which any violent situation may meet before being qualified as war. First, it must have resulted in at least 1000 battle related deaths in a year. Second, " it has been prepared in advance , and/or is being maintained, by large-scale social organizations through such means as the recruitment, training and deployment of troops the acquisition, storage and distribution of arms and ammunition, the making of specific war plans and the like, and (3) Legitimation: it is being legitimized by an established governmental or quasi-governmental organization, so that large-scale killing is viewed not as a crime but as a duty" (Johan M.G. van der Dennen 1980). Moreover, names, labels and nomenclature must not be applied for its own sake. They shall be used to educate in order to enable understanding with a view to preventing a recurrence of violence. If we use war to describe what transpired between the women and the colonial authorities, we are simply celebrating violence just to have it back on the colonialists. This is not only unnecessary but unhelpful, unproductive and indeed counter-productive.

The Context: The context of this conflict is the entire southeast region of Nigeria. This includes the present-day southeast and some parts of south-south of Nigeria. However, the heart of the conflict is mainly the Igbo land. This is not unconnected with the fact that the Igbo constitute the major ethnic group in the region. It is also possible that out of anthropological ignorance, the colonialists thought that every ethnic group in the area is Igbo. Even in present-day Nigeria, everyone from the southeast and south-south is seen in the north as Igbo just as everyone from the north is seen as Hausa/Fulani and Muslim.

The Igbos are on record as having resisted colonial rule especially its indirect rule version. This is why Perham described the Igbos as, "one of the least disciplined and least intelligible of African peoples' (Perham 1937, quoted in Power 1992). If this is the impression of the British of the Igbos, it is obvious that it would be very easy to get into conflict in this kind of mind set. Evidence available point to the fact that most Africans resented colonial regimes because they were exploitative, high-handed and, discriminatory. The taxation of the women provided the trigger for pent up anger to explode.

The Cause(s) of the Conflict: In social science, causality or the relationship between cause and effect is one of the driving forces of the scientific method. It is like the aphorism of the witch cried last night and the baby died this morning. In peacebuilding and conflict resolution, the causes of conflict could be categorized into remote, intermediate and immediate (trigger), Even with this clustering, there is no one cause of any conflict. Within the clusters there are many causes. Other scholars like Fisher (2000) clustered the causes of conflict around resources (economic), values and beliefs, psychological needs, identity, and (mis)communication. Looking at the clusters one would notice that some are easily negotiable while others are not. For instance, if the issue is over land (resources), it could be shared but if it is about say love (psychological need), that is another matter.

In our case study there is a general tendency to attribute the cause of the conflict to the rumoured taxation of women. Others, like Ukeje (2002), are more general and attribute the cause of the conflict to economics. Afigbo (1966 & 1972) situates the cause of the conflict in and around the issue of Indirect Rule and the arbitrary appointment of Warrant Chiefs. Van Allen (1972 & 1975), Mba (1982), Ifeka-Moller (1975) and many others situate the conflict around gender and the invisibility and marginalization of women in the colonial administration. For instance, they argue that women were not consulted when Warrant Chiefs are appointed etc. Others argue that Igbo culture and socio-political organization does not allow one person alone representing an entire community.

In peacebuilding and conflict resolution, the attention is not on generic causes of conflict. For instance, causes of conflict may also be clustered around economic, psychological needs, values and beliefs, identity. These are helpful categories no doubt. But the issue is why analyse conflict especially why focus on causes? The reason is that we want to know which cause(s) has the potential when tweaked to reduce tension and bring

the parties to the table with a view to fostering a quick, early and sustainable solution. So the analysis of causes of conflict is not an esoteric, whimsical and academic exercise meant to luxuriate our appetite for knowledge but it is meant to aid resolution and transformation of conflict.

Further, some causes require long term intervention. For instance, the reform of indirect rule or the departure of the white man are all long term issues. I So what are some of the immediate interventions that could address some of the causes? For instance, the stoppage of the head count would have gone a long way in reducing tension and fostering communication. Second, the establishment of a Grievance Mechanism that is accessible and effective would have provided avenues for aggrieved citizens both male and female to seek redress. In addition, increased and respectful engagement of the women would also have been an important step in the resolution process.

Finally, it is important to note that not all conflicts shall be resolved. Some die off with changes in the environment, some fade away, for some the parties just evaporate or the issues are overtaken by events. For instance, some of the issues which the women were protesting about would have gone with decolonization and democratization. But we should also not forget that with decolonization and democratization, new conflicts arise. For instance, the new normal in contemporary Nigeria is that of representation and participation of marginalized and vulnerable groups in the political process.

The parties involved in the conflict Many studies of the conflict between the women of southeast region and the colonial authorities struggle hard to privilege and give prominence to the participation of women. There is nothing wrong with this. The point is this: how has that helped in preventing violent response to conflict? How did it help in resolving, managing and transforming the conflict? How did it help to bring the parties to the negotiating table? What values will it add if we privilege one group either in the insurgency, militancy or separatist agitations?

When we analyse parties in a conflict situation, the aim is to identify the party(ies) that have the leverage and potential to affect and effect a positive outcome of the conflict. That is why more discerning peace and conflict scholars are moving away from parties and are now using the more nuanced 'stakeholders.' The concept of stakeholder is adapted from business and development studies. According to Edward Freeman (1984, p. 46), "a stakeholder is any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives."

There is different categorization of stakeholders in peace and conflict studies. There is the primary, secondary, incidental and delegated stakeholders. For instance, in our case study, the women have children. A sick, hungry or physically challenged child might affect a mother's participation in conflict. On the other hand, a husband could either prevent or support a woman in the present instance.

In the literature we did not see any analysis that factored in this stakeholder dynamics. In fact, in spite of the attempt to side line other stakeholders, the District Officer who conducted the assessment in Opobo Division among the Ogoni and Ibibio reported that:

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there was passive opposition of every kind. There was no case of natives pressing forward to give information as to the number of wives, sheep etc they had and how much land they farmed. In some towns the people had even removed the livestock; in others they stood apart in suddenly (sic) hostile groups. The chiefs were generally reluctant to give any open assistance even in cases where they were not themselves hostile to the tax; none of them would show me round more than their own compounds and they were obviously afraid of their own people (Murphy, 1927).

From the evidence above, there was widespread disaffection with not just some of the policies of the colonial regime but the colonial regime itself. Further, According to a Government Report,

the ring leaders were arrested, but the women persisted in their intransigent attitude and, aided by a few men, attempted to storm the Kpor Native Court Lock Up in which the ring leaders had been confined. Armed police from Port Harcourt were hurried to the spot, further arrests were made and the riot quelled before any serious damage was done. Thirty one persons, 30 men and one woman, were tried by the magistrate.....found guilty, and sentenced to 14 days imprisonment ([www.http://alscon.net/ikot-abasi-in-socio-political/60-anti-tax-wars-the-womens-war-of](http://alscon.net/ikot-abasi-in-socio-political/60-anti-tax-wars-the-womens-war-of) 1929.) retrieved April 25, 2020.

From the above, there are two instances of the involvement of other stakeholders like men and chiefs. The report alleged that the women were “aided by a few men.” Second, it was also reported that 30 men and one woman were tried and jailed for 14 days. The stakeholders were many and diverse. But the point from a peacebuilding perspective is this: which stakeholder(s) have the wherewithal to affect the course of the conflict to a positive outcome? This is where we look at the primary stakeholders. In this instance one can say the colonial regime and the communities (if one wants to be generic). But if one wants to be more specific, it would be the women.

In order for us to learn lessons from our historical experience as a nation, it is important to look deeper into issues with an eye for solution, not romanticization. The challenges that face human civilization are enormous to be left to one individual or a group. As stated earlier, one of the cardinal principles and values of peacebuilding is participation.

Response of the stakeholders Theoretically responses to conflict remains one of the most enduring and disturbing mysteries in peace and conflict studies because they come in different modes, style and disguise. For instance, a party or stakeholder in a conflict may decide to do nothing and that is a very heavy response. One of the issues that complicates our understanding of responses is the creative ingenuity of the human mind. For instance, a party in a conflict situation may decide to negotiate to buy time while another may negotiate genuinely to find solution.

The Bible in Matthew Chapter 18 verses 15-18, maps out some steps for responding to conflict and they include: (1) Face to face between the disputing parties. (2) Take one or two more persons and engage (3) Tell it to the Church (4) Avoidance. The first and most important step here is that disputing parties need to directly engage each other before bringing in third parties. In our case study it was once that this happened, and it was aimed at dispelling the rumour of the taxation of women. There was no negotiation or even respectful and active communication.

In the literature on our chosen case study there were attempts to demonize the response of the colonial authorities while celebrating that of the women. Critically, whatever the colonialists were guilty of in the context of the conflict, the women may also be said of being guilty of as well. This may sound uncharitable but there is a tendency to sound politically correct or sympathetic to groups that one feels are less powerful, vulnerable or marginalized. The truth is that a less powerful party in a conflict could be more vicious in responding to the conflict. A good example is guerrilla movements or terrorists generally that maim, kill and destroy in order to draw attention to either their cause or themselves or their leaders. A summary of the responses is presented below just to illustrate.

TABLE: SHOWING VARIOUS RESPONSES BY THE PARTIES

Responses		
Party	Responses	Remarks
Women	Held meetings among themselves and with government Laid siege on government establishments Attacked prisons and released inmates Mobilized, Marched, fought and threatened Sat on Okugo and Emeruwa Ensured Okugo was tried and sentenced Burnt 16 Native Courts Sang, danced and ridiculed authority Looted banks, factories etc Made demands that the colonialists must return to their Country	
Responses		

Party	Responses	Remarks
Colonial Government	Killed about 50 women Injured more than 50 women Set up 2 Commissions of Inquiry Tried and jailed Okugo Government forces occupied communities. Punitive expeditions burned or demolished compounds Confiscated property to enforce fines levied arbitrarily against villages to pay for damages from the disturbances Took provisions from the villages for troops. Had meetings with the women	

Source: Developed by the authors from the story

One theme that runs through the responses of both parties is violence. Some of the violence is physical and therefore visible and others are psychological and therefore invisible but they all seem to have the same long term effects. Two issues arise from the above table. First, could these responses especially the violent ones have been prevented before the parties deployed them? Second, since the responses have been used, what are the available mechanisms to managing the aftermath? Third, if a similar situation arises in future what are some of the lessons that could be learned to deal with it better?

Probably, the only response that could be recommended is that of meetings. But meetings could as well be mismanaged or used to intimidate. For instance, if the number of members of a party attending the meeting is overwhelming compared to the other party, it may be disempowering. Even the selection of a venue for a meeting has implications for peacebuilding. So why was it that none of the responses could amicably and in a nonviolent manner address the conflict? Second, what makes a party to a conflict to deploy a particular response instead of the other?

Interestingly, there was never a time that a third party helped the parties except for the Warrant Chief who decided to show sympathy to the women. Third, except on one or two occasions, the parties hardly communicated directly and when they managed to communicate, it was to fire-fight not to negotiate substantive issues that caused the conflict. Finally, responses may be used to resolve a conflict or suppress it. In fact, most violent responses end up suppressing the conflict. This is also what we saw in our case study. The conflict was never resolved and we did not see increased participation of women in political activities. Even in independent and democratic Nigeria, women participation in decision-making is still a contested territory. So if more than 50 women died, more than another 50 were injured, several properties were destroyed, and people were psychologically wounded and not one of the demands of the women were met, what then is the justification for all the trouble so to speak?

Conclusion

This paper examined the implications of the *context* and *nomenclature* of violence on *response* using “the conflict between Women of Eastern Nigeria and the colonial authorities” as case study. This study employed the peacebuilding approach which emphasizes nonviolence as its over-arching framework. As we have shown the context and circumstance of a conflict play a role in the nomenclature of the response especially if it is violent. Authorities label violent response to conflicts with a view to allowing them deal with it without too many questions. In fact, a review of the violent activities that we see in the environment have been taken care of by the law. For instance, the trademark of cultism is violence and drug. And in the law books provision has already been made for dealing with it, why then have say an anti-cultism squad? There is a relationship between the context and nomenclature of violence which implicates response. In our case study, it was convenient to label the conflict a ‘riot’ in order to deal with the ‘rioters.’ It is also convenient to minimize the spread and reach in order to make it seem as an isolated incident within a given area.

Further, there have not been any love lost between the colonialists and the people of the southeast right from the advent of colonialism. In fact, as history has it, the people of the southeast have proved a very difficult group to deal with from the slave trade era. So to subjugate them became a challenge for the colonial authorities. This is also what played out in the conflict between the women of eastern region and colonial authorities.

As they say, if one has a hammer, every problem looks like a nail. The colonialists did not have the patience and presence of mind to invent options for managing the resistance to colonial rule. They therefore resorted to suppressing the people. Unfortunately, many academics who studied some of these events fell into the trap of being politically correct or being blinded by sympathy. In peacebuilding, the over-riding consideration is to prevent violence response to conflict. This is the main reason why peacebuilders are referred to as idealists and peacebuilding utopian. And in analysing any conflict situation, if it is current and ongoing, the aim is to understand it in such a way as to prevent violent response and to resolve, transform or manage it. But if the conflict has played out, the aim of peacebuilding analysis is to learn lessons to prevent violent response and to understand the context, causes, parties and responses in order to prevent a recurrence and where this is not possible to ensure early, cost-effective and sustainable resolution.

Recommendation

The paper recommends more inclusive governance, gender sensitive approach on policies. Advocacy and sensitisation on new policies to avert negative reaction.

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