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Cultural Confrontations, Women Navigation into Peace Process and the Role Lessons for Africa First Ladies

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Abstract

Prejudiced gendered cultural arrangements have continued to either restrict or exclude contemporary Nigerian women in public space as in most Africa States. This is socially shaped by the dominant patriarchal authority across different Africa societies with Nigeria as no exception. Even with the Nigerian women's feminist strives, little break through from these cultural arrangements have been meaningfully attained. The changing gender relations experience of women varied across different African contexts, yet in Nigeria, with the emergence of the Nigeria First Lady in 1984 and with successive Nigeria First Ladies, some significant penetration of women through these cultural arrangements was achieved. This was due to several campaigns for and by Nigerian women re-perception of themselves, re-orientation about their feminine personality and their societal gender status in different sectors of Nigeria societies as the economic, politics, education, arts, media-journalism, and technology and science.

This increasing presence and participatory role-positions with power have however not extended significantly to formal peace processes. They have been left with little place in informal peace process. For the demanding need to expand the peace process for Nigerian women and Nigeria First Lady inclusion, this article present lessons of women from conflicts contexts such as Sudan, Somalia, Sierra Leone, Angola, Northern Ireland, where women were able to break through prejudiced gender cultural institutions and behaviors that had barred the women from peace processes. This was attained through their collective resilience to redefine the peace processes for women inclusion since they realized women were most victims of such violent conflict contexts. Such lessons can be capacity development strength for Nigeria women and other Africa women with which they can adopt manipulative persuasion to penetration prejudiced gendered cultural arrangements for women inclusion in formal peace process in Nigeria and they rest of Africa. With this background, this article is organized and presented in four sections with introduction as the first, successive Nigeria First Ladies: the tension between role idealism and realism as second politics of role struggle for public profile or role collaboration for peace action as third, and the lessons of women in mediation elsewhere for Nigeria and other Africa countries in security and peace approach as the fourth section.

Successive Nigeria First Ladies in Tension over Role Idealism and Realism

A formal Nigeria First Lady with a formal office emerged in 1984. This was not because of conflict related humanitarian crises affecting women and children in Nigeria but for women empowerment. In a sense, it was to facilitate gender mainstreaming and peaceful co-existence. As Wanger [1] argued elsewhere (forthcoming paper), the office was created to gain international legitimacy from democratic countries like the United States of America and other Western States. It creation was to be a mirror image and an example of what was obtainable in those countries and to give the political impression that the military government of Nigeria headed by General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida (IBB) which came to power by a coup d'état in 1984 was democratically inclined to and on the course of democratic transition to democratic civil government. Thus by entrenching similar governmental democratic structure as the presidential system to gain legitimacy, a similar governmental structural modification was made

to sustain the political impression already given to the global community. This was through creation of the office of the First Lady and General Babangida's wife Mrs. Mariam Babangida adoption of the status of Nigeria First Lady. Since then with each successive military head of State or President in leadership of Nigeria State and government it became traditional that the wife of such incumbent military head of State or President would assume the status of the Nigeria First Lady, with certain assumed evolving public roles, expected by the public to fit her gender status and as housewife.

The assuming public role-power of Nigeria First Lady had and continued to have no political or constitutional legitimacy and not even any acceptable equal gender relations in public space. Palliative interventions for women, emanating from the successive Nigeria First Ladies as women empowerment programmes were newly assumed public roles meant to gain public appeal and national acceptability. This however had the indirect effect of raising women and gender consciousness in families and the public space. Seeking international legitimacy was however a much strong force that influenced the emergence of the Nigeria First Lady than other associated global feminists forces related to women empowerment agendas from the Western and African feminism, which were attempts to penetrate

gender biased cultural arrangements. This was not unconnected to social forces facilitated by United Nations (UN) agendas for women through UN decade for women, Beijing conference, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), linked to movements and UN agenda for women in development, women and development and then gender and development. These international agendas were however compelling agendas that did contributed to women empowerment programmes, but at the time were subsequently adopted by successive Nigeria First Ladies. In contemporary times, the interest of Nigeria First Lady couched in the women programmes are expected to key into UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on 'women, peace and security' agenda.

Realism of this Role

Successive Nigeria First Ladies beginning with Mariam Babangida (wife of the military head of State, General IB Babangida), Mariam Abacha (wife of the military head of State, General Sani Abacha), Fatima Abubalkah (wife of the military head of State, General Abdulsalami Abubakar), Stella Obasanjo (wife of the civilian president, Chief (retired General) Olusegun Obasanjo), Turai Ya'ardua (wife of the civilian president, Alhaji Umaru Yar'a dua), Patience Jonathan (wife of the civilian president, Dr Goodluck Jonathan) and presently Aisha Buhari (wife of the civilian president, Muhammadu Buhari) have all in their periods as Nigeria First Lady grappled with their status, in terms of role-power in which to exercise in the public space. Their role-power which comes into confrontations with public perception, cynicism and rejection has not just to do with the alienating elements of democratic systematic institutions, but by the emerging failures to socially reconstruct gender roles of the women in a gendered cultured society termed gender-blindness in the roles of women in modern state public offices. The appropriateness of Nigeria First Lady role-power in public space like the cultural expected role-power of other Nigerian women's role in public space confronts public rejection because the office attempts to assume new roles and expand the women role-space, by assuming role-power previous never seen of any Nigeria First Lady including the new roles opening up for increasing numbers of Nigerian women in the public space of modern politics and economic production. The attempt to expand the First Lady role-power in public space by assuming new roles that will accompany legitimate authority which confronts public rejection constitute role in idealism.

The idealism ensues from the culturally fixed gender role-power in relations in society which is expected to remain so. Such that any new gender role-power once rejected remain idealized. The realism in this is the socially accepted fixed gender role-power in relations must be expanded base on the emergent social exigencies which demands the utilization of available human resources to meet emerging human needs or prevent or check any likelihood of social emergencies. Yet, the attempt to expand the Nigeria First Lady role-power is challenged by the public, thus, depicting the Nigerian public as a conservative civic public. The idealized role-power could however be possibly force to transform to reality by emergent social 'realism' by the compelling reasons to reconstruct gender role-power through creating new gender role-power that serves society's emergent societal needs as social emergences. The tension in moving beyond this idealism to realism similarly reflected in many of women's peace-negotiations declarations and situations in peace processes, as it relates to prejudiced gender-related practices and content of peace agreements as would be

discussed under the theme on lessons. As a subsisting challenge, it also reflects in the disparity in the goals of UN agenda on women, peace and security as captured in 2000 UNSC resolution 1325. This is particularly so in translating and to achieve this UN goal in terms of the levels reality of actual women's participation in peace processes [2,3].

A part of the criticism of the Nigeria First Lady role-power is the perception or reality that the role-power of successive Nigeria First Lady through their women programmes (NGOs), as 'pet project', has been rather selective in empowering a small section of the women. While the larger population of women who should be the right beneficiaries of their women programmes are often excluded exception pockets of gifts which do not change or improve the life chances of such women. The Mariam Babangida's Better Life Programme for Women, which pursued women's political participation, educational and economic empowerment was perceived as women elitists' porgamme. This was due to the circle of women operating its affairs and benefiting from the programmes' operational funds, while the Nigeria First Lady Mariam Babangida distanced herself from liberal feminism [4]. Hence, it was labeled Better Life for Urban women. Similar criticism followed Mariam Abacha's Family Economic Advancement Programme intended to 'cushion the harsh effect of economic situation of especially women and children' [5] which may have been unaware to her, were also exacerbated by (General Sani Abacha) her spouse military regime's economic environment. Also, the Stella Obasanjo Child Care Trust for child's safety and mother survival programme, Turai Binta Ya'ardua Women and Youth empowerment programme, and the Dame Patience Jonathan Women for Change and Development programme had selected impacts on selected women, with cliques of elite women benefiting more. Aisha Buhari role-power in public space has so far being confined to public acceptable gender role for women such as lesser grandeur and funfair. As she focuses attention on relevance social demands as humanitarian needs with which to contribute in addressing certain social problem of Nigeria.

Turai and Patience as Nigeria First Ladies were aggressively perceived as wielding role-power in public space beyond that which the culturally conserved Nigerian public would acknowledge and accords the person and office of the Nigeria First Lady by their attempts to exert political and constitutional power reserved for their spouse as President of Nigeria (which by Nigeria political history has been occupied and exercised by a male gender) through minimal control of the state, presidency function(narie)s and executive ministers of the Nigeria State[1]. Their actions further resuscitated within the public space the question of the legality of the office. With the heated questions and debates of the legality of the role-power of the office of the Nigeria First Lady persisting, it suggests that increasingly the office has found recognition except the kind and extent of role-power it should be playing within the civic-public space, which must be more acceptable to the public, and must be seem as an appropriate intervention roles on national issues.

The elitist style of their programmes or/and their gender politics which excludes most women has been described by Ugbede as being more or less 'funfarism', that moved away from feminism or even the strand of African feminism of women empowerment. Base on this, Amina Mama posed a substantive question that also remains a subsisting question here, which she asked if Africa First Lady actions of women empowerment were 'feminism or femocracy' of the wives of successive heads of State, in which they ruled over women? [4]. Mama's depictions of the First Lady role-power are that: they find it

expedient to exploit the gender questions to receive economic aid from international community which have become increasingly sympathetic towards women's demand for greater gender equality. Further, that they capitalize on international favorable climate and commitments and their positions as wives of heads of State to assume powerful new roles in which they arrogate themselves the right to represent and lead women. This questioned democratic character of this form of female gender mainstreaming, in which Mama described it as anti-democratic female structure (or office) which claim to exist to advance the interest of grassroots women (or vulnerable and poor group of women) but does not, instead dominates them by the 'small clique' of women whose authority is derived from being married to powerful men rather than from any action or idea of their own - undermining specific women's interests by clinging to patriarchal status quo - while they display feminine autocratic actions that are parallel to the patriarchal oligarchy of their spouses [4]. As they rely upon them for authority in which they complacently support [1].

The personalization of the First Lady Office by each successive Nigeria First Lady with their correspondent autocratic public dispositions and roles put them at conflicts with legalized public institutions, constitutional power of governors and roles of civil society groups, which they should be collaborating with on women related issues of empowerment. This placed and reinforced public perception that the office is an appendage to service self-aggrandizement and waste of public resources and through which other male politician muster political interests for political again. While Mama writing was making reference to this seemly autocracy character of African First Ladies whose spouses were military heads of State or dictators, the autocratic tendencies continued in civil democratic governance, in which Nigeria First Ladies whose spouses have been civilian president displayed similar autocratic tendencies yet without any given constitutional role-power to do so. Since military rule has lasted for must part of governing of Nigeria civil-public, the military social psychology and autocratic behavior of repressive exclusion of large section of the civil public (as civil society groups) were adopted by their wives who were First Lady and this has been learnt and adopted by Nigeria First Ladies in civil government by exclusion large section of women. This type of autocratic behavior in role-power continued to be displayed in Nigeria to the extent of directly or indirectly challenging constitutional authorities, when the office has no empowered legal authority to engage in the public space against constitutional authority.

The challenge of accepting what should be the appropriate role-power of the Nigeria First Lady as equally critique by Amina Mama [4] can be linked to the gender status of women with fixed sex-gender roles and power in societal public life, in which Okpeh [6] portrayed as: every community in Nigeria have fixed ideas about the female gender, who she is and what she hopes to become in future and to add what she is likely to become and do in the future (Emphasis mine). Therefore, in defining the social place of women and invariable the realm of their political space, the attempt by a Nigeria First Lady to exercise political authority in the public political space is first taken as portending an encroachment into culturally unauthorized defined public space and secondary an official illegality. Nigerians also have a fixed sex-role and gender power fixed ideas of what role-power she can play in certain sections of society. Without a culturally acceptable and constitutional empowerment to play any role, any attempt to deviate from the idealized yet her real fixed role-power authorized in order to take on emergent demanding role-power base on real social circumstances in the civic-public space, such attempt confronts cultural and constitutional resistant. This can also be attributed to failure of the Nigeria First Lady to focus on social related gender issues that the Nigerian civil-public percepts as more pressing. Their failure to do this is also constraint by their appendage status and unconstitutional status. Their attempt to focus on very limited related women and gender issues as women empowerment or gender mainstreaming have often taken more media dominance, with only public visibility of grandeur, glamours and funfarism with few selected and cliques of women who dominant such focused occasions, presented as women programme. As a clique affair that revolves around national and local women elites, other women are excluded while at the same the women elite borne huge organization costs from such grandeur of women programmes which the Nigeria public considers as waste of public funds. The public rather expects a de-grandeur and modesty from such First Lady's women programme, and fore with a genuine focus which Nigeria conservative public will find more acceptable.

This public expectation which gives a sense of direction to the new role-activities which Nigeria First Lady can take up depicts a civil-public that has not been only confronted by numerous harsh social emergencies but personality culture crisis embedded in crisis of consciousness overwhelmed by deterministic imperialism. The public expectations of focused programmes are to address humanitarian emergencies resulting from the impasse of development in Nigeria. As the impasse ensue from the failure of every incumbent government in a particular period to delivery on good and working governance services. The lead for women from this is to leverage on the gradual increases in political participation of women in Nigeria [7] as the public social space expands for more women, to not only campaign but make actual moral and material interventions. Within this, the Nigeria First Lady must start to take on or draw out new roles related to peace processes as humanitarian action. With hard lessons from previous Nigeria First Ladies intervention programmes, more particularly in the current period of crushing economies, and stringent hold on public fund by the current government which the current Nigeria First Lady Aisha Buhari's spouse engendered, Aisha Buhari tends to engage in public space with caution as she clearly focuses more on children and mothers for better education and health, to increase their functional ability for the future. The serves as measure of humanitarian intervention to reduce the humanitarian crisis generated from the

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1   On similar note, in 'Adeniyi, S. 2011. Politics, power and death: a front row account of Nigeria under the late president Yar'Adua'. He diplomatically or manipulatively attempt to dissuade the public from believing that the Nigeria First Turai Yar'Adua had not wielded political power in the government of her spouse Umaru Yar''Adua the Nigeria President as was perceived by the public especially at the impasse of political and power struggles when the president by illness became a shadow or absence president. However, who precisely govern the Nigeria state became questionable at the time- The First Lady was however at the centre of the manipulative politics and power to either possession or direct how state power must exercise, or who state power should be transferred to. In Adeniyi's attempt, he rather succeeded in convincing the Nigeria public to believe his argument as only evident to a fact they know, in which being a fact the public by their position outside the politics of the presidency in Aso Rock have no evidence, yet it was a fact. Without evidence does not take off the facts of display of political power by the Nigeria First Lady in the midst of male's dominant political space.

armed conflict between Nigeria government force and a religious group Boko Haram in North East Nigeria, while avoiding occasions which the public could consider as wastage of public. Without her direct involvement in peace process her role is seen by the public as sensible and amicable role that fits her expected female gender role and office.. In this way varying forms of public confrontations have been avoided.

In assuming this new public role in humanitarian development, when acceptable to the public the First Lady could benefit from the liberty of public consciousness with a consent which gives her office more democratic legitimacy even if unconstitutional. This will further accord the First Lady office more role-power in public space. Over time, her place in the political space will be found more legitimate, thus, leading to an increasing break off from the constraining cultural constructs of gender role in public space. This will facilitates the social reconstruction of culturally defined social space of women including a possible constitutional status and authority that opens to newer role-power for the office of Nigeria First Lady. The change from idealized role-power to realistic role-power is however attainable through enlightenment of public consciousness as a direct force of persuasion and aid actions as an indirect force of persuasion in social emergencies as peace process. Making comparison to this role-power of other former Nigeria First Ladies or United States and other Western States First Ladies will be socially irrelevant, as varying contexts shape what is socially acceptable and relevant.

To input to context, the previous Nigeria First Lady, Dame Patience Jonathan had to confronted public criticism in her informal mediation approach (though perceived as a formal mediation) in the Federal and Borno State governments relationship crisis midst the abduction of over two hundred (200) school girls in Chibok, Borno State in North East Nigeria (well know among the Nigeria public as Chibok Girls) by Boko Haram insurgent (as part of the insurgent approaches to confront and weaken the Nigeria State and the state's military forces so as gain control of Nigeria). Her attempted mediation approach to establish the true circumstances of the abduction and possible trace of the abducted school girls as viewed on Television-media was frown at. The public had found her interactive expressions especially her poor usage of English language and variant of local Nigeria English with some Borno State women, victims' parents and representatives of civil society groups out of place and autocratic. This was in the midst of the political tension between the Federal and state as the formal denied the occurrence of abduction while latter asserts it to be so and further asserted that the formal failure in its sovereign protective responsibility. The formal argued it to be political to discredit it government and re-election bid.

The agitations from the public resuscitated the questions on the Nigeria First Lady constitutional status and the place of sex-gender role-power or relations in national public space. The dominant public condemnation which found space in media reflected the Nigeria public orientation, in which a Nigeria First Lady is expected to adopt and act in certain westernized fashion and in the image of their States' First Ladies and in another curtail her acts to traditional African women role. In the context of public criticism of Dame Patience Jonathan, though it is oriented towards any Nigeria First Lady, the public need to note that there have never been two people who are the same regardless of their similar traits or level of intelligence. Similar does not imply the same. Patience can't be Michel Obama the United States of American First Lady nor the First Lady of France. These two super

power's First Ladies can't be the other, in personality, carriage or disposition.

Nigerians must learn to take Patience Jonathan and any other Nigeria First Lady for what and who she is. This should be in spite of what a section of the public may see as her unrefined personality, spoken English, annoying carriage, local vernacular language as 'principal, na only you waka come ba', weak public interactive abilities and other dispositions at public functions or media. Instead the public must learn to see her as an African woman without comparison to American or European women, or any of the former Nigerian First Ladies, Mariam Babangida or Mariam Abacha, if not, the public shall loss the sense of her qualities. But then because of public expectations, in trying to act like an American and some European First Ladies, she slips, losing a unique self-personality and capability to engage publicly. The public should free her to find the Liberty to display her unique personality, carriage and disposition that functions to enlighten and change the fixed public image of how a Nigerian First Lady must be and act. This is because the office of Nigerian First Lady has been institutionalized by public recognition of the office regardless of the question of illegality around it. The Nigerian public should lend support to it to help it to function for the well-being of Nigerians. She too must learn, even if bit by bit, to balance her private disposition with public disposition. Thus, idealistic role can be transformed to realistic role acceptable to the public and be extended to peace process.

What the public had considered as international embarrassment with her fused of local English with global Standard English in peace consultation process with the Chibok girls' families and cohorts is not unique. It rather indicate the common Nigerian problem of 'speech communities' with competing social class (low, middle or upper) varieties of spoken English, associated with conflicting use of Nigerian/African English with American or British queen's English [8]. The criticism would become more de-criticized as new role-power assumes by Nigeria First Lady finds appropriate entrance in peace processes as intervention into humanitarian crises produced by raging violent conflicts across Nigeria. As observed by Accord [2] in 'Women Building Peace' analysis, 'public perceptions present the most obvious challenges to participation' of women and 'less to organization' of women'. 'As many of the case studies emphasized, women are often victims rather than active participants in decision-making processes. There is the perception that it is only men who engage in violence and it is they who should therefore determine the peace'. Yet, both public perception and the organization of women or how women are organized constitute a (female) gender problem to their role acceptability in public space and peace process. This tends to affects political willingness for expand their participation in peace processes.

Politics of Role Struggle for Public Profile or Role Collaboration for Peace Action

The violent conflict contexts with the absence of African First Ladies' participation in formal and sometimes informal peace processes to prevent or minimize humanitarian crisis in their respective countries is an indication to the obvious reality that their spouses are often directing involved in individual decisions and collective actions that shapes and aggravate humanitarian crises in African[2]. This hinders African First Ladies' possibility of taking an inclusive approach and decisive position on public issues. With this, they take non-partisan stance since to do so could be contrary to their spouse's the president policy stand or political interest on such public issues. They have also not been directing involved in collaborating with

civil society groups even when such groups are women focused or led by women in intervening in gender related issues in violent conflicts, or collaborating with women that have being involved in formal peace process soft mediation with United Nations or African Union or Economic Community of West Africa States. These African First Ladies have also not being involved in facilitating women groups to collaborate with these international and regional bodies that seem to pursue the course of actions for peace. Their visibility are rather on regional or national peace summit for peace making and building on multi-media platform and screens without connecting to grassroots people and without embarking on visible concentrate peace actions.

Successive Nigeria First Lady like other African First Ladies focused on mobilizing selected women outside the space of conflict related humanitarian crisis. The emphasis has been on filling participatory quotas in political party structure, elective positions, institutions of government, and appointive positions, without advocating for similar quotas in governmental or presidential conflict mediation/inquiry committees. This is not because in setting up such committees women are seen as conflict parties or that gender blindness in mediation or peace process is not obvious but as a consequent of African First Ladies' dearth of orientation in diplomatic engagement in public issues and with political actors to press for women inclusion. Except that their more concern with behind the public scene's scrabble for resources and political appendage to exercising political influence[3]. This contributes to why the inclusion of women in peace processes still remains marginal despite the UNSCR 1325 document [3]. It then seems more potent that quotas for women for presidential or technical committees on conflict mediation and humanitarian action will have greater significance for women and the public population, in helping to foster a gender balanced perspective and approach to peace process.

An article of UN Women [3] titled 'Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations: Connections between Presence and Influence' have equally observed that: 'The average numbers of women participation in peace negotiations in official roles as negotiators, mediators, signatories or witness…remain notably low'. In emphasize to the critical study of FISAS Vicenc [9] in the same UN Women's [3] article, it was re-emphasized that: A study undertaken in 2008 which scanned 33 peace negotiations found only 4 percent of women participants, and 11 out of 280 were women, and that the average participation of women on government negotiating delegation was 7 percent, which was higher than those on delegation of non-state groups. The article in its account also observed that: 'limited but reasonably representative sample of 31 major peace processes between 1992 and 2011… [in Croatia-1995, Bosia-1995, Guatemala-1996, Northern Ireland-1998, Kosovo-1999, Sierra Leone-1999, Burudi-2000, Papua New Guinea-2001, Mecedonia-2001, Afghanistan-2001, Somalia, 2002, Cote d' Ivoire-2003, DRC-2003, Liberia 2003, Sudan-2005, Darfur-2006, Nepal-2006, Philippines-2007, DRC-2008, DRC-2008, Uganda-2008, Kenya-2008, Central African Republic-2008, Zimbabwe-2008, Somalia-2008, Honduras-2009, Iraq-2010, Philippines-2011, Central African Republic-2011, and Yemen-2011] only 4 percent of signatories, 2.4 percent of chief mediators, 3.7 percent of witnesses and 9 percent of negotiators are women' [3].

The relatively low level of women's participation recorded can be attributed to UNSC resolution 1325 themed 'women, peace and security', since it is binding on UN member states and they are compelled by diplomatic persuasion to comply. These varied participation of women's groups in formal peace as officials in positions since the passage of resolution 1325 in 31 October, 2000 have not being 'significantly improving', but their representation in form of participation in formal peace process and informal consultation with mediation team have continue to increase -The contexts for formal peace action remains marginal and marginalizing for women [2,3] including the entry point for African First Ladies in peace process.

To effectively change these situations for women in conflict-peace processes, in which women will be placed in an inclusive and empowered position to participate in it, it is essential to re-emphasize the social reconstruction of gender image and role in public space. A gender balanced participatory space will recreates institutional patterns that will also recreate inclusive condition for political practices and then engender gender equitable participation. By the conservative nature of public/society towards social change, if the mainstreaming voice and policy for gender inclusion in public space is attained, women entrance into political participation will imply breaking through the glass wall of closed political participation. Any increase in women inclusion in conflict-peace processes with notable quality actions would also signify increases in women and women groups' political participation. This will have strong positive implications for UNSC Resolution 1325. The relevance of this point has been equally made in these words: 'gender equality advocates and government and civil society actors have highlighted peace processes as a strategic entry point for the implementation of resolution 1325 [3]. This means that women's meaningful participation in decision-making during and after negotiations require going beyond political inclusion by measures of tokens and quotas of appointment in governmental official positions, where women had gained increase inclusion.

In Nigeria however, increase quotas in women political participation by token of appointive positions, elective positions, and political party administration signifies mere inclusion in political processes thus constituting a rather fragile and tensed connection to peace processes. This political methodical approach to women inclusion in power relations remains bare inclusion that has no significant impact on most women. From classical example elsewhere as Northern Ireland however, Women Coalition did not only facilitate and secure women's participation in electoral politics but utilized the political conflict context in Northern Ireland to mobilize women across religio-political divides to directly engage in negotiations that helped to achieve the Belfast Agreement. This demonstrated and signified the influence of civil society participation in political negotiation [3]. While in Nigeria women groups, civil society organization and successive Nigeria First Ladies rather than collaborate or complement their roles in gender mainstreaming and inclusive development, they have since the emergence of the First Lady Office continued to engage in power relations of role-struggle for public profile in the public space, thus, impeding the implementation of women agendas.

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2   This is related to ethnic/class political power tussles among key ethnic political actors including those in government and their associates outside of government that escalated mere ethnic tension to violence across Africa, generating humanitarian emergencies (Nafziger and Vayrynen, 2000).

3   The Punch. 2014. Bayelsa Senators, Reps back Patience Jonathan against Dickson. 9. Thursday, Nov., 20, 2013.

This role-struggle, which was and are invariably struggle for funding and resources of international organizations and the Nigeria State government as Ministries, Departments, and Agencies was at the start traced to Mrs. Marian Babagandi periods as Nigeria First Lady [2,10]. Her stance against feminism underlies her soft advocacy on political participation for gender balancing or equality in every social institutions of the Nigerian State. In spite of her non-leaning to feminism, she scheming used the autocratic structures of military, as the wife of the ministry Head of State to facilitate and appreciably achieved women's political, economic and educational empowerment in Nigeria, but not without democratic practices.

How much of influence the Nigeria First Lady and women in official position have on attempts to reconstruct institutions that disempowered women economically and politically or being as empowered voice for real women's rights (for citizenship and human rights), protection and security is barely discernible by the public, considering that their programmers' have non-qualitative and non-quantitative impacts on women. So, in Nigeria, as elsewhere across the world, in the diplomacy of achieving political agendas or utilizing political schemes, which is similarly observed in the efforts to engage in conflict-peace negotiation politics, women are noted to 'lacked the confidence to confront experienced political actors [often male political actors] and have felt comfortable influencing situation indirectly' [2], rather than through direct diplomatic engagements, or both as a rare situation may demand. With a marginalized influence in the politics of changing society in which fresh ideas and initiatives can emerge to propel new direction and approaches for rebuilding functional institutions requisite for security and peace, Nigeria women have been continuously marginal and marginalized in conflict-peace processes and the political agenda around the conflict mediation, management and peace.

The direct political participation and the political support for participation are crucial for gender role reconstruction in collective human engagement to address life issues. As against the politics in absence of violent conflict (peace time), in time of conflict, and post-conflict contexts which is often configured in certain schemes to excludes the voices and interest of the larger others/public yet dominated by interests of certain elites. Thus, in a society where the politics of selection of a few or exclusion of women is in the mainstream of that society, it is then doubtful that a few selected women's support and inclusion in political participation through appointed governmental official position will be for the interests of women or benefit most women. This makes it 'difficult to assert with confidence the specific conditions under which women's participation in peace agreement can result in better outcomes for the sustainability of peace or for the representation of women's interests' - Therefore, in participatory process for peace, 'one must carefully distinguish between individual women filling an official role in the peace talks and those who participate on behalf of women as a social group, that is, speaking as part of a coalition of representatives of women's civil society or community groups [3]. However, with the exclusionary tendency of a dominant few elites in related conflict-peace processes, which also have different consequences for women and men in conflict and peace outcomes, it will be more important to advocate and facilitate women groups' inclusion in conflict-peace processes. This is in order to increase insightful gender approach to the dimensions of violent conflicts and security for an inclusive sustainable peace. This can also be achieve through closing the loose links between women civil society and women political actors, and by establishing a collaborative relationship which will result to the adoption of viable

methodological approach to peace via conflict mediation and peace building engrained in the emergent peace culture.

Lessons of Women in Mediation Elsewhere for Nigeria Security and Peace Approach

Women participation in mediation for peace has rather been more informally, with insignificant voices and weak presence in formal mediation as part of peace processes. In Africa, similar cases of engagements in informal peace process through mediation is start for possible entry point in formal mediation are many as case examples, with which subsequent actors in peace process can learn from including women groups elsewhere. This is particularly so when preventive measures failed to halt social crisis and/or conflict parties through violence creates humanitarian crisis for human population. Examples of women groups' activism and their achievements recorded are not essentially about women as natural peace makers which 'is difficult to sustain given their multiple role in conflict contexts' rather it is about the gender balanced perspectives, political neutrality, non-partisan and non-confrontational approaches that women have been able to bring to peace processes [2]. Their engagement in informal negotiations have shown that (women) civil society groups have been instrumental in peace deals, and can be found 'indispensible' in informal and formal peace process. Their achievements are noted in UN Women [3] in these words: there are 'evidences that peace negotiations characterized by high civil society involvement [secular and faith based civil society groups] are less likely to result to resumed warfare'. But this is especially when there is collaborative role rather than role struggle.

In addition, Oluyemi-Kusa [11] had extensively observed that: in Rwanda, the collectivity in the networking of women groups as Pro-Femmes/Twese Hamwe Collective, facilitated in opening dialogue between Tutsis and Hutus and as the also participated in adding voice to post conflict reconciliation in Rwanda; Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET) (worked in Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Liberia) led peace process of reconciliation by promoting dialogue and confidence building, coordinating women's peace activities and pressurized the state to pursue peaceful and sustainable processes of conflict resolution-as empowered in Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Art. The network also gained participatory entrance into ECOWAS Moratorium of small arms and UN programme for Coordination and Development [12]; Liberia Women Initiative and Association of Female Lawyers in Liberia made demands for their involvement in peace process and meaningful peace negotiations by reaching out to rebels, the then incumbent military government and the international community; West Africa Network for Peace Building (WANEP) activism outside official peace process at the grassroots of West Africa supports peace initiatives in Liberia, Senegal (Casamance), Northern Ghana, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Mali and Cote d' Ivories) through training and mobilization of women groups and other NGOs to effectively engaged in peace processes as conflict prevention and peace building. WANEP's memorandum of understanding with ECOWAS in capacity building of Civil Society in conflict prevention including early warning system was very critical to the group peace building engagement. This is because ECOWAS has an instrument that promotes women in peace process in West Africa.

Similarly, the demeaning humanitarian crisis experienced by victims of Liberia armed violent conflict through peaceful campaigns of Women in Peace Building Programme (WIPNET) attracted international public attention for the urgent need for mediation and

peaceful resolution of the armed conflict; the women in Sierra Leone spoke against the war as criminal acts and also spoke to power when they confronted leaders of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) with the 'enough was enough' peaceful campaign phrase which eventually de-escalated the armed conflicts in Sierra Leone; the women of Mano River Union Peace Network (MARWOPNET) made possible the conflict resolution and the peace achieved between the president of Liberia and Guinea; women mobilization and their collective activism into local groups in Somalia across clans' lines and interests made possible the reduction of violence through peace talk and the eventual attainment of peace after about 15 peace talks; the Sudan women under the aegis of Sudan Women for Peace (SUWEP) worked across political affiliation to advocate for peace in spite of the gender power relations against women in the highly Islamic Sudan State (now North Sudan and Southern Sudan) as Sudanese women were alienated and caged out of public space [13]; African Refugees Foundation (AREF) range of support to violent conflict areas as in Rwanda in 1994, to fire disaster victims in Jesse Delta in 1998 through relief materials, provision of relief medicines in Ife-Modekeke conflict ridden humanitarian crisis, support to Warri crisis through the group's appeals for peace between warring parties, and also the extension of relief material to Ethiopian children, women and men subjected to hunger famine and drought conditions including working with Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission of Ethiopia.

The West Africa Civil Society Forum (WACSOF) in which Mano River Union Peace Network is affiliated to have also worked in Northern Nigeria on inter-religious dialogue and community based peace building in Niger Delta [14]. On mediation peace process which often precedes conflict resolution, in African, women led mediation in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Kenya. And increasing women were involved in mediation teams in Burundi, DRC, Darfur, Uganda and Kenya. Women in Islamic countries and sections and regions of such countries tend to have narrow participation in peace process. Meaning, Islamic and cultural practices have continued to exclude or in some cases slow the extent of acceptance and participation of women in peace mediation process like Sudan (Darfur) violent conflict [2,3]. Civil society organizations including grassroots Islamic associations in Northern Nigeria are very important to de-escalation of violence, humanitarian crisis management produced from insurgency and conflict resolution, through peace education. Peace education is vital at this complex time of violent insurgency, ethnic, religious and ethnic class conflicts and economic crises in Nigeria, in which all intersect to make peace an illusion.

What is however significant to take from these women groups endearing participation in mediation and other peace seeking programmes are these: their contexts of conflicts varies including the gender dimensions (in terms demographic characteristics as location, class, population, age, education, ethnic and religious community, and opportunities) to conflict, with which their experiences are based. This had and can still shape the approach deploy to foster negotiations and peaceful resolution and peace building. Thus, some approaches were and could be local, some national, some political and some non-political, all which have had varying degrees of successes. This suggests that by the different contextual experience of women they have 'different views on what peace should be mean, how to approach it and how it should be built' [3]. In addition, 'they show how women's priorities and actions can vary depending on the phase of the conflict, and how they are influenced by social and cultural factors, such as class and rural or urban settings, and by their political orientations'. This explains why UN Women [3] stressed that:

It is impossible to prescribe which approach works best for each situation. Every peace process is unique, and opportunities and methods of women's engagement are shaped by the political culture, the strength and coherence of the women's peace movement, the duration of the war and the extent to which it has exhausted or dissipated the women's movement, the type of international support and resources supplied, and so on and consulting with difference women's groups and women of influence as cultural given and not by elitism.

This is critical since violent by the armed groups (Boko Haram and Nigeria Military and to some extent communities) and other communal violence across Nigeria, as intra-state conflicts has produced a complex humanitarian emergences along two fronts: the refugee status and internally displaced persons status. This demands appropriate humanitarian need assessment and assistance through humanitarian action, as the situation may require for inclusive peace process. However, the tendency is to exclude non-literate grassroots women who may though have the local recognition and power to influence and coordinate mediation structures are left out of peace process or not consulted. Also, whereas the elites and other privileged persons dominate the space of negotiation for de-escalation of violence and for peace, due to their privileged political access to power elites, their views are likely to be divided in favour of women or against certain issues of concern to women in favour of government or elite interest, or against government approach to conflict resolution and peace and security.

Where peace process and actions are not in favour of victims they give opportunities to humanitarian agencies, political and military entrepreneurs to expropriate the contexts and peace process at the social cost of victims and refugees and internally displacement persons [15]. This further suggests that the women groups would have to move beyond seeking for quotas or mere representation as 'representative of women civil society with an observer role' that is most commonly solicited by women groups, which 'yields the most uneven results' [3] or holding peace summits or conferences that are isolated from local communities, conflict parties, or government peace representatives. Such peace summits are often perceived as peace jolly voices with no further connecting actions to broad base peace processes. This was noted of the Peace Summit organized by the Nigeria First Lady Dame Patience Jonathan in Nigeria in 2013 title 'Nigerian Women Rally for Peace and Empowerment'. But as suggested in UN Women [3] empirical report such representation as inclusion of women and women leaders can engage them as 'gender advisers to mediators, facilitators, or delegate…. member of technical committee or presidential committee and national or sub-national/state Security Council meetings' (Emphasis mine). These have been confirmed to be an 'effective strategies' for gender perspectives in conflict mediation and post-conflict recovery policies. Thus, women in groups would have to devise persuasive and manipulative strategies to penetrate prejudiced gender cultural arrangements in order to open out the public space and extend similar device strategies into informal peace initiatives to find entry points into formal peace processes. This will help to strengthen the implementation of resolution 1325 which Accord Insight [2] stressed has only been 'more effective' in mobilization of women outside the peace process than in securing women participation within formal peace process'.

In addition, non-partisanship of women and the political neutrality of the Nigeria First Lady are vital to an effective peace talk engagement with relevant parties in conflict and security, and in mobilization to

gain the support of the public in peace process base on humanitarian action's principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and operational independence. These principles however pose a challenge to this kind of role for her especially that of non-partisanship and political neutrality since the policies of the spouse who is the president may contradict her (intended) actions. The Nigeria First Lady must then be able to balance her office's actions in relation to the political, military and economic objectives of the state-government, since the office has no legal status, except political recognition which limits her role-power in public function. Interestingly, however, women 'practical difficulties of sustaining a non-partisan position based on broad based consultation' has been observed in the cases of women engagements in peace processes. Their failure to remain non-partisan has been one of the key factors responsible for their exclusion in negotiations.

By staying politically neutral, the Nigeria First Lady can leverage on instruments of peace, her political status, uniqueness as a woman and her symbolic status as the mother of the Nigerian nation, and with an extensive network with women groups and other civil societies, build a broad base consensus to facilitate the expansion of the space of negotiations and reconciliation for women. This needs to take into consideration the contexts of violent insurgency and communal violence across states in Nigeria. Nigeria First Lady can extend humanitarian action as related to peace by supporting research and documentation of data on gender dimensions, which can provide relevant information to address gender dimensions to violence and humanitarian crises management, security and peace, and in additional, support the capacity building of women for peace processes. She can engage the technical committees or mediation teams of government, and parties on negotiation table and peace talk lead by international organization as UN or other regional organization as Africa Union (AU) and ECOWAS, rather than mere political participation which seems to be the only area of focus of successive Nigeria First Lady. Yet, the aim of women activism and the Nigeria First Lady should not be only during conflict and post conflict but also preventive action to social crisis once the warning signal are manifest.

Just like there are difficulties in having resolutions or treaties binding on state actors, it is expected that the Nigeria First Lady relying on these instruments could also be legally fragile and societally rejected considering unconstitutional and gender statuses. She can however pursue the enforcement of such treaties as a human right. What is also important should be the insistence that states and parties in conflict for the good of humanity which lie in minimally accepted cross cultural value of social justice of peace adhere to international and regional resolutions, laws and treaties. The neutral collaborative relationship in peace actions as prevention action between the Nigeria First Lady, African First Ladies and civil society groups and other meaningful partners can purge ethnic related gender based violence, ethnic and religious related displacements and ethnic related patterns of humanitarian actions.

Nigerian First Lady can however leverage on international trends, some agendas, and lessons of conflicted related humanitarian crises management with incidences of gender related issues for peace building, even though women participation in peace processes is still marginal to advance the significant interests of Nigerian women's in peace process. As this makes it seem more difficult for women as well as the Nigeria First Lady to contribute to addressing the disparity between the goals of resolution 1325 [16] and the reality of women's participation in peace processes. This is because 'women's participation

in peace processes still remains one of the most unfulfilled aspects of the women, peace and security agenda' [3].

Conclusion

Across the conflict worlds however, there were some noteworthy examples of women's participation in peace negotiations before the Security Council resolution was adopted on 31 October 2000. The women participated on negotiation table as beneficiaries of land redistribution and reintegration packages in the following countries: Northern Ireland cross political party grouping in peace talks and election wins in 1997; Republic of South Africa women's multiparty negotiation process for representation in mid 1990s; In the Republic of El Salvador in the 1990s, women were present at nearly all the post-accord negotiating tables; In the Republic of Guatemala, women significantly influenced the talks that led to the 1996 peace accord, Several months before the adoption of resolution 1325 [16], Asha Hagi Elmi formed the women's Sixth Clan in the Somali and with the public they lobbied for women participation in peace talks in Arta, Djibouti, because the five main Somali clans were all given a seat at the table except women. Meanwhile in Burundi the 2000 Arusha peace and reconciliation agreement achieved prior to the passage of resolution 1325 was through women participation, in which 19 parties to the conflict were in the midst of another round of negotiations in Arusha (Tanzania), United Nations Development Fund for Women, UNIFEM (now UN WOMEN) convened the All-Party Women's Peace Conference attended by two women representing each of the parties to the conflict and the seven women who had access to the plenary sessions of the peace talks as observers. These women presented their list of recommendations to the facilitator of the negotiations and Nelson Mandela and more than half of these recommendations were incorporated into the peace agreement [3].

The collaborative actions of these women networks and with peace at the centre of their interest for involvement in conflict negotiation and resolution, they become empowered with greater acceptable voices and steps to break through and overcome cultural barriers as patriarchy, religion, ethnic and masculine political interests of particularly conflicts parties. This shows that in order to give greater voice to women in peace talks, particularly to women civil society groups, provisions to address women's human rights needed to be incorporated into every level of peace process and agreements to give force to compliance. Women inclusion in peace talks and post conflict peace building are to continue to change what the Norwegian Institute of International Affair described as the marginalization of women in post conflict peace building in societies emerging from conflict. It is an inclusive directed change which Sheila Meintjes [17] observed as: 'women do gain from the shifts in gender relations during the war [but without it sustainability] they may lose their wartime gains in the cusp, in the period between war and peace. Thus, the transition from war to peace emerges is a critical moment in the shifting terrain of gender power'. And just like political transitions are opportunities that women tap into to negotiate for gender power relations in public space, even though not necessary changing all domestic relations, women's participation is key to a holistic gender approach to garner support for inclusive peaceful campaigns and for entrenching the culture of peace across societal levels. This suggests that Nigeria First Lady can directly or indirectly engage in the peace process at every level while balancing women interests to that of the mainstream politics. With this, she can overcome cultural barriers. Persuasively, she can contribute to improve and expand the peace process for the involvement of women and the

larger society, through strategic collaboration and concrete actions with varying conflict resolution and peace stakeholders. As UN Women [2] emphasized, 'women's absence in peace processes cannot be explained by their alleged lack of experience in conflict resolution or negotiations. Instead, there has been a lack of effort to integrate them in peace processes'.

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