Leadership Disposition in African Conflict Areas and Women Inclusion in Post-Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding: A Comparative Study of Nigeria, South Africa, Ethiopia, and Liberia

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Abstract

Persistent conflicts across Africa highlight the importance of effective leadership and inclusivity in peacebuilding efforts. This comparative study examines leadership disposition and women's inclusion in post-conflict resolution within four African nations: Nigeria, South Africa, Ethiopia, and Liberia. The paper draws on a comprehensive analysis of historical trends, gendered power dynamics, and the influence of prevailing masculinities on conflict and leadership. It investigates challenges and opportunities faced by women in mediation, peace negotiations, and post-conflict reconstruction processes. By shedding light on commonalities and nuances across these diverse settings, the study explores the barriers that hinder women's full participation and identifies the factors that empower women to become agents of positive change. The findings offer valuable insights for policymakers, advocates, and community leaders seeking to strengthen inclusive leadership models and leverage women's unique contributions to fostering sustainable peace and stability in conflict-affected regions throughout Africa.

Keywords: Africa, Conflict resolution, Leadership, Women's participation, Peacebuilding, Gender, Nigeria, South Africa, Ethiopia, Liberia

Introduction

Africa bears the wounds of war, with cycles of bloodshed, political unrest, and societal unrest undermining peace and development on the continent. It is critical to comprehend the leadership role and the possibilities for inclusive peacebuilding tactics in the face of these recurrent conflicts. Conventional leadership approaches in conflict-affected areas have frequently reinforced detrimental power dynamics and marginalised important social groups, particularly women (Meintjes-Van der Walt & Robinson, 2020). This study focuses on four varied yet conflict-ridden African countries: Nigeria, South Africa, Ethiopia, and Liberia. It then conducts a comparative examination of leadership temperament and women's inclusion in post-conflict resolution.

Recent research has demonstrated the close connection between militarization, dominating masculinities, and the continuation of conflict (Chatterjee & Mkandawire, 2021; McEvoy, 2020). The dynamics of conflict and the availability or absence of prospects for long-term peacebuilding are shaped by the interaction of power, gender, and historical legacies. Despite their distinct viewpoints and capacity to

provide creative solutions, women have frequently been excluded from official peace procedures in these circumstances (Baylies, 2020; Gizelis, 2021). This study looks at how conflict in the chosen case studies has been either made worse or made better by various leadership philosophies. It critically examines the obstacles women encounter in peace talks and post-conflict reconstruction, presenting instances of their achievements in fostering communication and harmony (O'Connell, 2022). The intention is to shed light on the nuanced interactions that exist between gender, conflict dynamics, and leadership to make recommendations for more inclusive and revolutionary peacebuilding strategies in Africa. Through examining the interactions between these factors, this study hopes to contribute to a future in which women and men, with their varied viewpoints, actively construct sustainable peace throughout the continent.

Objectives

- To investigate the similarities and subtle variations in women's involvement in peacebuilding, conflict dynamics, and leadership styles among Nigeria, South Africa, Ethiopia, and Liberia.
- To examine how societal norms and power dynamics in these societies affect women's involvement—or lack thereof—in efforts to resolve conflicts and promote peace.

Understanding Conflict

Miller and Ireland (2005) define conflict as a confrontation between parties with incompatible goals, the pursuit of interests by groups or individuals for various reasons that are unavoidable, and the process of social life and development (Lyons, 2009). It is also viewed as competition and claims over values, status, power, and resources that are typically scarce, with each party attempting to dominate and eliminate the other. Parties involved in this conflict typically devise a variety of strategies to seize resources for themselves, regardless of whether the rival is injured in the process, as long as their passive interest is met. It strains relationships, and that, in turn, evokes emotions that progress to conflict (Akpuru-Aja, 2009). Conflicts can occur in any society, no matter how sophisticated, if there is a misunderstanding, hostile utterances, or actions that appear to disadvantage the other party's interests (Akpuru-Aja, 2009).

Conflict, according to Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff (1997), is a situation in which one recognised group in a society, whether tribal, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious, socioeconomic, or political, engages another in a conscious and measured opposition because of competing and incompatible goals and pursuits. It is imperative, therefore, to understand that conflict is inevitable in any human society and has the capacity either for destruction or to cause positive social change (Kriesberg, 2007). To minimise destruction and maximise productive outcomes, it is critical to understand conflict in its most fundamental forms. Conflict changes human society and life, and its causes, sources, and processes can be transformed into life-building ends (Augsberger, 1992).

Conflicts are usually caused by competing parties over an interested environment that may have resources, and thus, the desire to exploit and control valuable resources leads to conflict (Onigu-Otite& Albert, 1999). A change in the social environment, as well as the discovery of some resources in that environment, often exacerbates the quest for physical control of that environment, resulting in conflict between individuals and groups who intend to use the resources to further their goals. Similarly, Coser (1967) defines conflict as a struggle over value or claims to status, power, and scarce resources, with each party attempting to neutralise, injure, or eliminate competitors. Conflict occurs when competing groups pursue their goals, objectives, needs, values, and cash in an aggressive manner, even if it is not a violent conflict (Zartman, 2018). He believes that conflict is an avoidable choice or decision that leads to the expression of human interdependence. Also, conflict is seen by Bizman and Hoffman (1993) as an attempt to reconcile opposing viewpoints and create some form of unity, albeit with the potential to take out one of the players.

Conflict should, however, not be seen as only a negative or dysfunctional process laden with communication breakdown among conflict parties, as argued by some scholars.Though it differs from competition, contest, or struggle, it shares similarities in the process of human interaction, particularly in complex societies with a scarcity of essential resources. However, it believes that interdependence means that people will always express their differences in their attempts to achieve their goals, resulting in conflict when no party is willing to shift ground and make some adjustments to their position. Various scholars' definitions of conflict range from positive to negative (Chidi, 2018), so it is determined by how one thinks and understands it, as well as the nature of the conflict. Some see conflict as a natural phenomenon, while others

see it as abnormal in the evolution of human life, and some others see it as critical for the growth and development of individuals and societies (Haynes, 2009). Young and old people face various types of conflicts in the context of development, ranging from intrapersonal to interpersonal and even international levels. They must deal with domestic conflicts at home, in schools, and at work; they must deal with them as they arise in their social lives (Rousseau, Gelpi, Reiter, & Huth, 1996). As a result, the strategy used to resolve the conflict is determined by the perception of the conflict's causes. However, in most cases, the promoters and participants of these conflicts are mostly men. This paper argues that conflict is a situation where unacceptable differences of interest, values, expectations, and even opinions arise between individuals or groups, but many times, these situations are driven by men with uncompromising egos.Miller & Ireland (2005) and Lyon (2009) agree that conflict is a confrontation between parties with incompatible goals that could be varied as they pursue social development within society, when properly managed through the theory of conflict transformation, which transforms the system, structures, and relationship, removes unnecessary triggers of confrontation, and promotes violence and injustice in society (Abideen, 2020).

The goal of this study is to examine the nuanced relationship between conflict and masculinity rather than to assign blame. The paper reviews how dominant masculinity shows up in these situations, how conflicts are caused by it, and what programmes are supporting more positive options. The paper also seeks to explore how the involvement of the female gender in conflict situations can be less stressful and easier to resolve. It is an exploration of the minds, hearts, and societies where the seeds of conflict are sown as well as those that can be grown to produce peace. In order to create a future in which empathy, cooperation, and a dedication to an equitable and peaceful Africa are the true measures of strength instead of violence, we must untangle the knot, dismantle damaging masculinities, and clear the path for that future.

Disguises of manhood in the typical African society of Nigeria and South Africa

Conventional ideas of masculinity frequently highlight aggression and violence, which are associated with being physically strong and in a position of dominance, as well as being willing to use violence, which can result in domestic abuse, political instability, and conflicts between

communities (Falola& Mkandawire, 2016; Hendricks & Matshediso, 2022). Patriarchy and control are another construct, and it is a preference for male leadership and decision-making that results in the marginalisation of women, minorities, and dissident voices, which in turn exacerbates social tensions and impedes the resolution of conflicts (Ojo & Ajayi, 2020; Mogalakwe& Moodley, 2021).

In their work, Aderinto and Adebanwi (2022) and Leong and Mulaudzi (2020) argue that toxic competition arises from the pressure to uphold rigid standards of masculinity, which in turn creates a zero-sum mentality, jealousy, and rivalry that fuel competition for resources and power and can lead to conflict at different levels in Nigeria and South Africa.

Sources of disagreement that lead to conflict in Nigeria and South Africa

Conflicts between different ethnic and religious groups and ideas of warrior-like masculinity are common in Nigeria, where they are exacerbated by political scheming and resource control (Egwuatu& Okafor, 2023). The militancy of the Niger Delta and the violent extremism of Boko Haram serve as examples of how these manifestations can exacerbate conflict. In South Africa, the legacy of apartheid, rooted in white male supremacy, continues to cast a shadow. The continuation of toxic masculinity is reflected in gang culture, xenophobia, and gender-based violence (Leong & Mulaudzi, 2020).

To reinforce the initiatives that will disapprovingly influence their dispositions, critical education is necessary. It involves programmes that encourage non-violent masculinity expressions and highlight damaging stereotypes, which are essential for bringing about societal change (Olukotun & Ademowo, 2020; Hendricks &Matshediso, 2022). It will also include men and boys if long-lasting change is anticipated to occur and actively deconstruct toxic masculinity (Mogalakwe& Moodley, 2021). This method is best illustrated by initiatives such as the Men4Gender campaign in South Africa.

Another initiative is to empower women and marginalised groups to end the cycle of violence and to engage in inclusive peacebuilding processes that tackle the underlying causes of gender inequality and guarantee equal participation of all voices (Edewor & Inegbedion, 2020; Hendricks & Matshediso, 2022). It is important to acknowledge how masculinity shapes societal norms and behaviors rather than demonizing

men when examining masculinity. We can clear the path for a time when empathy, teamwork, and a dedication to justice and peace for all will be the defining characteristics of strength by advocating for better options and tackling the primary causes of conflict. Similarly, prioritising ethical and inclusive approaches, encouraging open communication between all genders and groups, and acknowledging the complex realities of diverse cultures and contexts are all necessary on this journey. Through collaboration, African societies can be re-shaped into a tapestry that celebrates diversity and gradually replaces conflict with vivid hues of understanding and peace.

Tied in Time: The Persistent Impact of Women on South African and Nigerian Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding is more than just putting a stop to hostilities. In the wake of conflict or violence, it is the deliberate, protracted process of establishing and maintaining peace. This multimodal strategy includes several initiatives, according to a United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) report from 2021.

- Determining and resolving the social, political, and economic issues that first sparked the conflict. This could have to do with problems like resource competitiveness, human rights violations, poverty, or inequality.
- Constructing robust, inclusive institutions that are able to fairly provide security, justice, and other necessities. This includes making sure governmental, judicial, and law enforcement institutions are reflective of the populace and run efficiently.
- Promoting communication, reconciliation, and forgiveness amongst split communities. Truth commissions, community-based programmes for reconciliation, or intergroup discussion initiatives could all be part of this.
- Aiding those harmed by war and former fighters in their reintegration into society. This could entail offering training in skills, psychosocial support, and economic prospects.

The seeds of women's activism in South Africa were planted long before the official apartheid government. Women continually opposed colonial and patriarchal oppression, from the Bambatha Rebellion of 1906, when Inkosi Zulu kaNdondondwane played critical roles in organising resistance, to the anti-pass protests of the 1920s, where leaders like

Charlotte Maxeke led the charge. During the apartheid era, this resistance culture blossomed, and renowned figures such as Helen Joseph, Amina Cachalia, and Winnie Mandela gained widespread recognition by spearheading boycotts, coordinating demonstrations, and opposing the harshness of the government. In addition to providing vital support and elevating the voices of the oppressed, grassroots movements like the Black Sash and the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) mobilised communities. The Mothers of the Nation, an organisation headed by Albertina Sisulu, were instrumental in negotiating the end of apartheid and securing the release of political prisoners in South Africa (Mogalakwe & Moodley, 2021).

In Nigeria, on the other hand, women have been contributing to peacebuilding since before colonialism. Notably, Queen Amina of Zaria (1533–1610) laid the foundation for a strong, prosperous, and peaceful kingdom, and her leadership opened doors for later generations of women leaders. During the colonial period, women like Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti and Margaret Ekpo emerged as formidable figures, challenging British rule and advocating for social justice. This spirit persisted into the post-independence era, when activists and scholars like Amina Mama, a renowned scholar, and Flora Azikiwe, Nigeria's first female senator, tirelessly promoted gender equality and peace. Also, women's peace organisations such as the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) in Nigeria actively supported efforts at reconciliation and served as conflict mediators.

Weaved Threads of Peace: The Unavoidable Contribution of Women to Nigeria's Conflict Resolution

Conflict is intricately woven throughout Nigeria's history, with political unrest, resource conflicts, and ethnic tensions all playing major roles.Nigerian women have been dubbed "peacemakers" for millennia, but their role in conflict resolution after it has ended transcends customs and has developed into a complex web of advocacy, leadership, and community healing. There are strong strands of female leadership in conflict resolution throughout Nigeria's diverse cultural fabric. In small towns, the "mother of the market" is frequently the dependable mediator who promotes harmony and resolves conflicts. Village women create discourse circles that bridge racial and religious divides by fostering understanding. These conventional roles continue to be the cornerstones

of peacebuilding, providing the groundwork for more contemporary endeavours.

Going Above and Beyond Tradition: Taking the Lead

Women were frequently marginalised by patriarchal norms, but contemporary efforts to resolve conflicts in Nigeria are seeing a radical change. These days, women are taking back the front seats, and their influence is pervasive throughout the formal peacebuilding process.

Advocacy groups like Women's Situation Room (WOSCAM), one of the leading women's rights organisations, challenge systemic inequalities and advocate for policies that address root causes such as gender discrimination and resource disparities (Ojo& Ajayi, 2020). These groups lead the charge for inclusive solutions. There are also government and civil society groups, and women in powerful positions, such as United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed, shape national programmes on peacebuilding and reconstruction and influence policy (Onuoha, 2022). Grassroots movements are also, through interfaith dialogue programmes organised by the Muslim Women's Trust Fund and trauma counselling programmes like Women for Peace and Development (WPD), promoting reconciliation and reestablishing trust at the local level (Onyinye & Chikwendu, 2021).

Taking on the Unravelled Threads

Nigerian women who work towards peace maintain a dangerous and difficult path despite their vital contributions; there are still some barriers, like patriarchal barriers. Women are frequently prevented from participating in formal processes by ingrained societal norms and resource limitations, which muffle their voices and reduce their ability to make decisions (Abdul-Wasi Babatunde Moshood Sup, 2020). There are other barriers, such as security concerns, when working in conflict areas. This area exposes women to ongoing violence and harassment, which discourages them from participating (Egwuatu & Okafor, 2023).

However, the long-term efficacy of women's peacebuilding programmes is contingent upon the acquisition of sufficient funding, training, and infrastructure, as noted by Omeje (2023). To this end, women must work together to overcome these obstacles. Ways of addressing these challenges range from investing in education and training to truly participate in the peacebuilding process and give women

17

a voice, they must have the knowledge and abilities necessary to negotiate complicated peace processes. Safety and security are paramount so that the resources allocated to awareness campaigns and security measures can make it safer for women peacebuilders to work in conflict areas. Also, there must be empowerment via economic possibilities, which is the ability to make ends meet without excessive pressure or limitations, which is essential to allowing women to take part in peacebuilding.

To guarantee that women's involvement remains strong and that their colourful representation of peace becomes a vivid symbol of a better future for Nigeria, every woman must continue to be dedicated to this cause. The enduring power of resilience and determination is exemplified by the stories of Nigerian women who have built peace. Nigerian women in the 21st century are creating a new narrative of peace, from local conflict resolution through grassroots interventions like in the marketplaces to national policy formation and international forums like Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and Dr Amina Mohammed of the United Nations. Women can continue to be active contributors to the development of a better future for Nigeria if we recognise their vital role, offer them unwavering support, and tear down the obstacles standing in their way. Consider that Nigeria's patchwork of peace is not yet complete.

Women Weaving Peace in South Africa: From the Scars of Apartheid to Seeds of Hope

The people of South Africa bear the scars of their turbulent past, a history interwoven with stories of adversity, resiliency, and a steadfast quest for justice. South African women have traditionally played a primarily homely role for centuries. However, the struggle against apartheid broke these social constraints, catapulting women into the vanguard of the liberation movement. Women have challenged oppressive structures, mobilised communities, and laid the foundation for a more equitable future. Notable examples of this include Winnie Mandela and Ruth First, as well as countless other unsung heroes. Apartheid's legacy loomed large as South Africa made the shift to democracy. Social unrest, economic inequality, and gender-based violence all remained serious threats. However, women once again rose to the occasion, their contribution to peacebuilding going beyond simple activism to include a broad range of activities such as community healing.

Women like those at Ilitha Labantu, which means "the healing of humanity," work tirelessly to mend the emotional and social fabric of communities damaged by violence and discrimination through an array of programmes, including trauma counselling initiatives and interfaith dialogue groups (Hendricks & Matshediso, 2022).

Grassroots advocacy groups like the Gender Democracy Initiative are leading the charge in promoting laws that address the underlying issues that cause social unrest, such as economic disparity and restricted educational opportunities, especially for women and other marginalised groups (Maseko, 2023). Also, in political leadership, women like Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, former Deputy President of the UN General Assembly, and Lindiwe Sisulu, former Minister of Tourism, held key positions shaping legislation and policies that promote gender equality and social justice (Onuoha, 2022).

Even with their priceless contributions, South African women peacebuilders face challenging circumstances like patriarchal attitudes. Persistent gender discrimination and deeply ingrained societal norms frequently deny women access to money, resources, and decision-making authority, which lessens their influence (Mogalakwe & Moodley, 2021). In terms of security concerns, women's participation in public spaces and peacebuilding initiatives is restricted by violence against women, especially gender-based violence, which continues to be a critical threat and fosters an atmosphere of fear (Leong & Mulaudzi, 2020).Long-Term Effects: For women-led peacebuilding initiatives to be effective over the long term and avoid becoming meaningless gestures, it is imperative that they have access to sufficient funding, infrastructure, and training (Hendricks & Matshediso, 2022).

A paradigm change is required for long-term peace in Africa, dominance-focused leadership traits must give way to transformational and inclusive leadership traits. Women, who have been marginalised for a long time, need to be seen as important change agents rather than victims, with their voices heard and their agency acknowledged, and this has the capacity to shake off the shadows of violence and embrace a future based on common goals, justice, and enduring peace. The path ahead is lengthy, but hope is emerging from the rubble of war, and these women's voices are a strong and resolute chorus, declaring that the time for inclusive peacebuilding has come either within the family, local communities, or even the regional sphere.

By examining this complex tapestry, we have come to the profound realisation that justice and resilience alone cannot bring about peace in

Africa. It necessitates a tapestry in which these strands weave together, in which men and women collaborate to reframe masculinity, question damaging conventions, and cultivate a future in which empathy, teamwork, and a dedication to world peace are the true measures of strength. This is a call to action, not an idealistic vision. It is necessary to work to undermine the systems that support harmful masculinities, elevate women as essential peace architects in classrooms, community dialogues, and grassroots efforts, untangle the knots of conflict, and weave a future in which the vivid tales of a peaceful Africa reverberate across its sun-drenched plains, resonate with the strength of its women, with the wisdom of its men, and with the hope of a continent freed from the chains of the past.

The Liberian Experience

Liberia's transition of power has been marked by fourteen years of war, and peace agreements were negotiated in 2003 (Persson, 2012). There has historically been a dominance of men in leadership positions in Liberia. History indicates that tensions between American settlers and Liberians were the root cause (Herbet, 2014). A smooth transition within the country was ensured by Charles Taylor's resignation (Harris, 2005). Poor governance was responsible for the conflicts that occurred in Liberia (Gariba, 2011). Taylor's governance was fuelled by war in spite of the fact that there had not been any signed peace agreements in 1996. Liberia's first female president, Sirleaf Johnson, was inaugurated in January 2007, and in 2012, President Sirleaf unveiled the "National Roadmap for Healing and Peacebuilding" (Herbet, 2014). Sirleaf would bring new hope and a restoration of peace to Liberia.

Although Liberia was exempted from the scramble for Africa, the Americo-Liberians who settled there enslaved the indigenous population (Longley, 2021). Rather than having an African culture, the Americo-Liberians had a minority-ruled one-party state that preserved the American culture (Longley. 2021). As a result of an uprising, the American-Liberian leadership was removed because the leadership was characterised by corruption (Hurst, 2009).

Norman (2012) conducted a study unpacking the perceptions of Liberian public school principals about their leadership development needs in post-conflict Liberia. It is noted that it is imperative to provide career development opportunities and support for sustainable leadership development. From an early age, Liberia should be developing leadership

abilities. Liberian Civil War history supports Norman's (2012) study. An individual's leadership disposition should be innate and can be demonstrated through behaviours that can be taught at an early age. In Liberian history, men have dominated the country through self-centred leadership, as opposed to the leadership that they could learn from.

Considering Master Sergeant Samuel Doe was an indigenous leader, one would expect that he would perform better immediately following the overthrow of the American-Liberian government led by William R. Tolbert. In his ten years, Liberians continued to live under unreliable governance (The New Dawn, 2019). In the face of international sanctions, Charles McArthur Taylor did not fare any better. As a result of Taylor's leadership, rebel groups emerged, and chaos ensued in Liberia, resulting in authoritarian rule (The New Dawn, 2019). In 1983-2003 the wars in Liberia devastasted the economy, displaced citizens, and killed citizens (Herbet, 2014). The first war was caused by a variety of different factors, such as underdevelopment, religious anarchy, and political culture, to mention a few (Herbet, 2014). Unfortunately, this resulted in the continuous wars that lasted over fourteen years in Liberia.

Sirleaf Johnson inherited a broken system that needed a comprehensive overhaul to restore stability and order. During the majority of the chaos and war, Liberia was often ruled by competing warlords. However, women played a significant role in peacebuilding, and as part of a peace movement in Liberia in 2003, women wearing white dresses organised strikes and forced Charles Taylor to attend peace talks in Ghana (Ford, 2018). It was through this rallying of the country that Sir Leaf was elected (Ford, 2018). To address corruption and ethnic tensions, Sirleaf Johnson established a Truth and Reconciliation Committee. As a result of opposition to patriarchal rule, Liberians experienced a Renaissance era of peace and prosperity. Sirleaf has been praised for maintaining peace in Liberia without compromising human rights (Jideonwo, 2018). During her time in the Liberian parliament, SirLeaf advocated for women's rights and livelihoods for the people. Although SirLeaf Johnson has been praised, she has also been criticised. There is a serious issue of poverty in Liberia, and the country remains underdeveloped (Nyambura, 2017).

The Ethiopian Experience

Ethiopia, like Liberia, was not pursued during the scramble for Africa; however, it still faces several challenges (Taye, 2017). Conflicts within

Ethiopia are a result of ethnic federalism. The term 'Ethnic Federalism' refers to the self-government of national groups (Taye, 2017). This is a form of marginalisation that has contributed to structural violence (Belay, 2022). According to Bayu (2020), the role women play in peacebuilding depends on their status and role in society. Bayu (2020) provides historical background on the role played by women in polygamous marriages in tribes. Women were the mediators of conflicts in polygamy and were skilled negotiators. Somali women, for example, are encouraged to marry into different clans to achieve unity. It was Tewodros's grand idea to modernise Ethiopian politics that led to ethnic federalism in Ethiopia (Taye, 2017). It is important to note that Emperor Menelik copied the idea and gave the impression that it was solely his without acknowledging Tewodros' contribution. Menelik the Second, therefore, used dictatorship during his reign to gain more territory by forcing others to submit to him. This further created ethnic federalism.

It was young students who challenged the growing class system in Ethiopia that sparked the uprisings. Tigray speakers believed that the Amhara rulers were responsible for their social problems. Regardless of the background of the rulers, they opposed oppressive systems. During the uprisings, there was a long debate on whether ethnicity was fueling the conflicts or whether it was a struggle against black imperialism. In the wake of the uprisings, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) was successful in overthrowing the military regime (BBC News, 2021). McCabe (2007) examines how Ethiopian women have rediscovered their role as peacebuilders. Ethiopian women have used a bottom-up approach to mediate conflicts (McCabe, 2007). Additionally, the women participate in local events as a means of promoting peace. They use negotiation skills to reach an agreement between the groups in conflict and ensure consistency in interacting with them. This is very significant, as Ethiopian women within their spaces have demonstrated the importance of unity. In the late 90s, there was a strong women's movement to resolve conflicts within communities.

In 2018, Ethiopia elected its first female president, Sahle-Work Zewd (Wamsley, 2018). As with Liberia, Ethiopia was a patriarchal society. In the past, leadership positions were largely held by men. In addition to being elected president, Sahle-Work Zewd also served as the first woman representative to the African Union and as the Director General of the United Nations office. As she has experience in leadership, this has the potential to positively impact her leadership disposition for Ethiopia. In addition to promising to be a voice for women, Sahle-Work Zwede

stressed the importance of unity (Gebreselassie, 2018). For the longest time, female empowerment has not been a priority (Gebreselassie, 2018), as rural areas in Ethiopia are dominant and account for 78 per cent of the population. Sahle-Work Zwede had reviewed the policy to empower rural women (African Union, 2021). Ethiopia has been engaged in conflict since 2020, which has left many of its citizens dead, displaced, or suffering from famine (BBC News, 2021). The roots of the current conflicts can be traced back to federalist governance. Sahle-Work Zwede took the initiative to visit conflict areas and stated that the people of Amhara require assistance (United Nations Sustainable Development Group, 2022). Her role was to encourage and provide advice on peacebuilding. A growing number of women entrepreneurs have been able to compete within the international marketplace in one of the regions (United Nations Sustainable Development Group, 2022).

There is no doubt that women played a significant role in the development of Liberia and Ethiopia. According to the literature on Liberia and Ethiopia, the basis for leadership was largely established by men. In both countries, men have used military systems that have resulted in violence, greed, and self-centred governance, which has made it very difficult to end wars. In this respect, women assumed an invaluable position as leaders. They have introduced an alternative method for ensuring that women are at the centre of society when it comes to negotiating peace. Compared to men, women are more bottom-up-oriented and strive for unity, whereas in both countries, men often used war to exert dominion over others with whom they disagreed. In Norman's (2012) study, the importance of leaders being cultivated at the onset of schooling and continuing throughout their careers is unpacked by illustrating the importance of leadership dispositions.

The histories of both countries illustrate how leadership disposition plays an instrumental role. The narrative of the women of Liberia and Ethiopia is consistent with the development of democratic capacity. By building democratic capacity, participatory leadership can be achieved (Warfield and Sentongo, 2011). Women then opposed the military dictatorship, which was the foundation of the country's government. Consequently, this demonstrates that conflict can also influence leadership disposition in the sense that a leader should first be able to respond effectively to conflict (Warfield and Sentongo, 2011). It is unfortunate to note that the evidence in the literature indicates that this is not an inherent characteristic. According to Oginni and Moitui (2016), 60.6% of respondents agreed that African leaders have applied pan-

Africanism to their governance. Pan-Africanism is an ideology and term used to describe different movements whose goal is to unite Africa and dismantle colonialism and white supremacy on the African continent (Oginni and Moitui, 2016).

It can be seen from this that, despite the history of turmoil, things have gradually improved over time. However, this does not eliminate current issues such as poverty, unemployment, displacement, etc. Ford (2018) and Jideonwo (2018) unfortunately raised issues regarding Sirleaf Johnson. It appears that Sirleaf Johnson participated in nepotism by appointing family members to government positions in Liberia.Furthermore, Sirleaf's support for anti-gay laws caused disappointment. Sirleaf justified her stance by stating, "We like ourselves just the way we are" (Ford & Allen, 2012).

The development of leadership dispositions in Africa is in progress. Movements and leaders in Ethiopia and Liberia demonstrate how women leaders have done their part to accomplish peacebuilding initiatives that have somewhat changed the lives of their citizens. Even though not all were effective, it was a positive start for many people who had lost hope in the leadership that had traditionally come from men. Currently, even in Ethiopia, the federal government is trying to ensure that the ongoing violence ends in peace (Belay, 2021). Having said that, more humanitarian aid is desperately needed. One of the most positive aspects of women's agency is that it will forever be acknowledged in history books. This is a remarkable accomplishment that will never be erased. Future women in leadership who wish to contribute to peacebuilding in post-conflict Africa can certainly benefit from their leadership dispositions and perhaps achieve even broader success.

Conflict and Masculinity

Conventional ideas of masculinity, which frequently place an emphasis on dominance, violence, and control over resources and women, can have a variety of negative effects on conflict dynamics (Chatterjee & Mkandawire, 2021; Mukhopadhyay & Sengupta, 2023). This can take the form of hegemonic masculinities, which frequently target particular groups as "weak" or "feminine" and use violence and war as justifications for acts of strength and power (McEvoy, 2020). Strict adherence to archaic male standards might deepen already-existing social and political rifts, impeding attempts at communication and reconciliation (Chatterjee & Mkandawire, 2021). These masculinities can exacerbate cycles of

violence and obstruct amicable conflict resolution when they are connected to retribution stories and honour codes (McEvoy, 2020).

Leadership and Masculinity in Conflict Zones

Masculine stereotypes frequently influence leadership approaches in conflict zones, which may impede inclusive and long-lasting peacebuilding initiatives (Meintjes-Van der Walt & Robinson, 2020). This is demonstrated by the power dynamics that accompany hegemonic masculinities, which can potentially exclude women from positions of leadership and peace talks, hence maintaining gender disparities that impede the establishment of lasting peace (Meintjes-Van der Walt & Robinson, 2020). Militarised settings frequently promote hypermasculine ideas, elevating aggression and impeding the pursuit of peaceful resolutions (Chatterjee & Mkandawire, 2021). Rigidly patriarchal leaders may oppose changes to the status quo, impeding revolutionary methods of peacebuilding that deal with the underlying causes of conflict (McEvoy, 2020).

Comparative Analysis of Case Studies

Analysing the particular settings of South Africa, Ethiopia, Liberia, and Nigeria reveals subtle differences in the ways that conflict, masculinity, and leadership interact:

- Nigeria: The government's militarised strategy frequently encourages hypermasculine values, and Boko Haram's insurgency takes advantage of narratives of masculinity and religious extremism to attract and radicalise young men (Meintjes-Van der Walt & Robinson, 2020).
- South Africa: Although the country has made progress towards gender equality after the end of apartheid, efforts to completely confront the legacy of conflict are hampered by the persistence of patriarchal structures and "warrior masculinity" narratives in leadership styles and societal attitudes (Cock, 2022).
- Ethiopia: The current conflict in Tigray serves as a stark reminder of the intricate ways in which gendered and ethnic power dynamics interact, with dominant masculinities both stoking cycles of violence and excluding women from efforts aimed at promoting peace (Markussen, 2023).
- Liberia: Women's participation in post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding processes faces major obstacles due to the country's protracted civil war, which has ingrained patriarchal norms and weaponized masculinity (Baylies, 2020).

In Africa, the connection between leadership, conflict, and masculinity is complex and situational. Although historically dominant masculinities have contributed to the continuation of conflict, there is a growing awareness of the need to question these conventions and support alternative leadership styles. A route towards more lasting peace and societal transformation is made feasible by actively involving women in peacebuilding initiatives, challenging damaging masculinity narratives, and addressing the underlying causes of violence. The case studies of Ethiopia, Liberia, Nigeria, and South Africa demonstrate the difficulties and complexities of bringing about this change. But they also demonstrate the possibility of advancement. There is hope for the future of Africa, where peace and prosperity can coexist with conflict, thanks to initiatives that empower men to redefine masculinity, provide opportunities for women to lead at all levels, and address underlying societal imbalances.

Communities, government institutions, and civil society organisations must all continue to be committed to this change-making process. African societies have the potential to create a more inclusive and peaceful future, free from the limitations of destructive and inflexible masculinities, by encouraging critical reflection, dialogue, and acceptance of other viewpoints.

Recognising the Causes of African Conflict

As stated, conflict is inevitable in any society or relationship. Akpan & Mkhize (2023), in their work, said this much and agreed with Miller & Ireland (2005) that conflict is a confrontation between parties with incompatible goals. These goals can usually come into conflict because of space and resources, and conflict ensues. The nature of this conflict according to Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff (1997), can either be tribal, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious, socioeconomic, or political, and this causes tension.

Tension stems from divisions, exploitation, and arbitrary borders left over from the colonial era (Ake, 2020). Instability was seeded by the exploitation of resources, ethnic favouritism, and the destruction of indigenous governing structures. Conflict is sometimes fueled by scarcity of precious minerals, water, or land, which is frequently made worse by climate change (Uexkull et al., 2021). Ethnic or sectarian tensions are exploited by elites fighting for political power. Marginalised communities' frustrations are exacerbated by insufficient governance structures,

widespread corruption, and a lack of transparency, all of which damage public confidence in institutions (Arowolo& Aluko, 2022). As a result of the growth of religious and ethnic extremism, which frequently takes advantage of social and economic injustices, violence can be justified and recruits can be attracted (Dowd & Raleigh, 2023).

Armed groups are financed, foreign powers vie for influence within African countries, and these acts all lead to instability (Zounmenou, 2020). These efforts are motivated by geopolitical or economic goals. Historical, economic, social, and political variables are intertwined and lead to African conflicts. Autocratic leadership and discriminatory policies drive poor governance, which intensifies disputes and erodes the likelihood of peace. African states may use the potential of new insights, community ties, and a dedication to enduring stability that serves all inhabitants by deliberately involving women in leadership positions and peacebuilding endeavours.

Conflict Transformation Theory as a mechanism for leadership disposition in African conflict areas and women's inclusion in post-conflict resolution and peacebuilding

In his doctoral thesis, Abideen (2020) postulates that conflict transformation is transforming the systems, structures, and relationships that encourage violence and injustice in the society, his argument agrees with Lederach (2012).Constructive conflict is a critical agent and catalyst for change, and actors within the conflict parties, Outsiders with relevant human and material resources, as well as the affected society or region, all play important roles in the long-term peacebuilding process. This suggests a comprehensive and broad approach, emphasizing support for groups within society in conflict rather than mediation by outsiders (Jeong, 2009). It also acknowledges that conflicts evolve gradually, through a series of smaller or larger changes, and certain actions that a range of actors can play important roles.

According to (Lederach, 2012) conflict transformation must actively envision, include, respect, and promote the human and cultural resources of the society. This involves a new approach where the members of the society are not seen as the problem, while outsiders are the solution, rather, understanding that the long-term goal of transformation is to validate and develop the members of society (Lederach, 1995). Conflict transformation is a complex process that constructively changes relationships, attitudes, and behaviours, as well as interest, and discourses

in a violent environment. It addresses the underlying structures, cultures, and institutions that encourage violent political and social conflict.

Several leading scholars, including Galtung, Fischer, and Fischer (2013) and Wallensteen (2018), have used the term conflict transformation in their work on peace and conflict studies. This has been elaborated on particularly in the works of Lederach (2012) and Willett (2010). According to Björkdahl, Höglund, Millar, Van Der Lijn, &Verkoren (2016), the transition from latent and overt violence to structural and cultural peace is a multifaceted, nonlinear, and unpredictable process involving numerous actors. It is particularly applicable in situations of protracted and asymmetric conflict involving social justice issues, especially in such settings; it is an approach that calls for long-term engagement and political skill.

Botes (2003) argues that conflict transformation is the process of transitioning from conflict-habituated systems to peace systems. This process differs from the more commonly used term for conflict resolution in that it focuses on systemic change. Deep-rooted or intractable social conflicts are given these names because they have resulted in patterns that have become ingrained in society. The term "resolution" used to analyse the social system is less appropriate. Transforming deep-rooted conflicts entails more than just "resolving" the issues at hand; the central issue is systemic change or transformation. Systems cannot be "resolved," but they can be transformed; hence, we use the term conflict transformation (Notter& Diamond, 1996).

From the conflict resolution and peacebuilding mechanisms, it can be argued that a peaceful disposition is required. From the disposition of women in Liberia and Ethiopia, Nigeria, and South Africa, it is plausible to conclude that the female gender can mobilise the necessary mechanisms that are required to push through conflict resolution processes using the conflict transformation theory. The female gender would require stability in society so that their families, especially their children, could thrive.

Theoretical Framework

The analysis of leadership, conflict, and peacebuilding in the context of Nigeria, South Africa, Ethiopia, and Liberia is greatly aided by feminist perspectives. Several of this framework's main ideas and arguments are:

An idea of conflict and security that is centred on men is challenged by feminist viewpoints. They make clear how women are impacted

differently and disproportionately by social upheavals, political unrest, and militarisation. According to Enloe (2000), women in conflict zones are not just passive victims but also active actors with unique experiences, resistance, and survival tactics. In contexts of conflict, the lines separating the "private" and "public" domains become less clear. Power dynamics, aggression, and control are shown by feminist viewpoints as resulting in a continuum of violence that is evident in the home, in the community, and in national politics (Reardon, 1985). The way that militarised masculinities and patriarchal hierarchies are frequently reinforced by leadership in war settings is criticised by feminist theory. It investigates the potential for different leadership philosophies based on communication, collaboration, and an awareness of the underlying causes of conflict (Cockburn, 2007). Despite their varied viewpoints derived from their positions in families and communities, women are not naturally calm. They frequently have close ties to the grassroots and a propensity to focus on problems about social justice, human security, and reconciliation (Gizelis, 2021). To break cycles of violence, feminist approaches to peacebuilding aim to challenge restrictive gender norms, address structural disparities, and alter underlying power structures (Charlesworth, 2008).

Applying feminist theories to this study

Feminist viewpoints are utilised in this comparative study to examine:

In each case study, consider how gender and leadership interact. How are decision-making processes influenced, how are women's access to power restricted, and how is conflict narratives framed by patriarchal norms? Examine how women have experienced violence, displacement, and the dissolution of social institutions in each location, paying particular attention to how they have managed these challenges. In what ways do they oppose, organise, and support the resilience of their community? Examine how beliefs about "masculine" strength, militarization, and resolving conflicts are perpetuated or maybe altered by dominant leadership styles. Evaluate women's involvement in peacebuilding and conflict resolution during various stages. When negotiating, are their opinions heard? What societal and institutional hurdles prevent them from taking part? In assuming leadership jobs, what are the key success factors?

According to the work of Chekrouni and El Mquirmi (2023) titled *Morocco and the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda: Goals, Opportunities, and Challenges*, the United Nations Security Council's (UNSC) adoption of Resolution 1325 on October 31, 2000 was one of its most pathbreaking decisions, as for the first time, it was recognised that women's participation was key to resolving conflicts and securing peace. Since then, UNSCR 1325 has often been described as one of the crowning achievements of the global women's movement, and this is also corroborated by Fitzpatrick (2016). Other research has also shown that the participation of women in peace processes and peacebuilding activities can increase the chances of democratisation as they are less violent and more caring, i.e., more suitable for peace activities. Scholars like Simonsson and Anderson (2023) underscore Liberian women's pivotal role in shaping peacebuilding strategies and advocating for gender-inclusive measures. They noted that it was the advocacy efforts of women that led to a recognition of the interrelation between gender equality and sustainable peace (Gondwe and Nakanga, 2022; Simonsson and Andersson, 2023). As it is now, international law and international institutions are beginning to take gender into account in planning for peace. Efforts are developing in parallel with the international women's movement towards political and legal equality; thus, international organisations are paying increased attention to women's participation in peace processes and to the role of women in constructing post-conflict institutions (McGuinness, 2007). This study is a reinforcement of this effort.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Conflict is inevitable in any human society. It leads to tension and confrontation because of socioeconomic and spatial reasons. More often than not, especially in African societies, the male gender is a major participant in these conflicts. More often than not, masculinity plays a dominant factor in prolonging these conflicts. To that extent, this paper argues that given the antecedents of women in leadership in Africa, either in politics like in Liberia and Ethiopia or in the socio-economic sphere like in Nigeria and South Africa, the disposition of the female gender is to build peace and promote harmonious living among people since women and their children prosper in conflict-free societies. The female gender is more disposed to the application of Ubuntu in their approach to conflict process management.

To this end, this paper recommends that women be encouraged to participate in politics in their respective countries and be deliberately included in all peacebuilding efforts in their countries through an affirmation agenda and quota policy in leadership.

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