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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Women and Security in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The biological basis for women's insecurity is their relative physical weakness and their major role as the gender responsible for the survival of the human race. These make them incapable of self defense in the face of stronger sex. This paper examined the role of women in National Security. It utilized secondary data from books, journals, write-ups by International Organizations to buttress the fact that women have always played significant roles in national security despite hindrances by culture and religion. Finally, the paper tries to outline the unique roles of women in national security which encompasses food security, economic security and political security and recommended the creation of a Ministry of Peace and Conflict Resolution which will be headed by a woman in order to reduce insecurity in the nation.

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INTRODUCTION

Women's leadership in national and international security is moving from the sidelines to center court but the bench is not deep enough and too many women are taking themselves out of the game (Broadwell, Choubey, Holdgate, 2008). This is as a result of their being relegated to the background when decisions of national security are taken. But it is worthy to note that women are at the heart of development as they control most of the non monetary economy (subsistence, agriculture, bearing children, domestic labour etc.) and play an important role in the monetary economy (trading, wage labour, employment, etc (Yawa, 1995). Everywhere in the world, women work both around the home and outside the home. The most topical issue in international developmental programme is women. Yet much of their work remains invisible, unremunerated and unrecognized. The woman as a person is an agent of reproduction of life itself. This places her in the position of the life blood of the entire humanity. She is the first teacher, the sustained and maintainer of the home, the peace maker, the symbol of beauty and major molder of the character of the child. She is a mother of the human race. As mothers and wives, women do exert considerable impact on the productivity of male workers. As workers in their own rights, they can conveniently be linked to the rejected stone in the Bible which has become the cornerstone of the house. By their sheer psychological, physiological and intellectual make up, they do perform more than mere complimentary roles in the production, distribution and security processes in a nation (Jeminiwa, 1995). Unfortunately, most of these contributions by women had not been recognized until recently when the United Nations declared the Decade for Women (1976-1985) making it mandatory on governments to focus on issue of women as an integral component of national development. In 1979, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. Consequently, subsequent conferences on women were held in Copenhagen, Denmark 1980,

Nairobi in Kenya 1985 and Beijing in China 1995. However, an international news magazine 'Africa Today' reported in July 1995 that the full implementation of all the strategies and recommendations of the various conferences on women issues had still not been achieved. According to the magazine, the UN itself reported that only six out of the 184 ambassadors to UN are women and only four out of the 32 UN specialized agencies and programmes are headed by women.

In Nigeria, the 1995 constitutional conference in Nigeria had only eight women out of a total of 369 delegates. The 2011 Federal House of Representatives, 13 out of the 352 members are women. This represents 3.69%. Worst still the 2011 senate has only 6 women (<http://www.nassing.org/nass2/memlist.pdf>).

As with other aspect of society, women's roles were primarily governed by regional and ethnic differences. In the north, Islamic practices were still common. This process meant generally less formal education, early teenage marriages and confinement to the house hold. For most part of the north women do not participate in the field of decision (<http://www.photius.com>). Urban women sold, cooked foods, usually by sending young girls out into the streets or operating small stands. Researches indicate that this practice was one of the main reasons city women give for opposing schooling for their daughters. Even in elite houses with educated wives women's presence at social gatherings was either nonexistent or very restricted. In the modern sector, a few women were appearing at all levels in offices, banks, social services radio, television and in the professions (teaching, engineering, environmental design, law, pharmacy, medicine and even agriculture) (Abubakar, 1992). Research in the 1980s indicate that for Muslim north, education beyond primary school was restricted to the daughters of the business and professional elites and in most cases courses and professions were chosen by the family, not the women themselves. In the south, women traditionally had economically important positions in interregional trade and the markets, worked on farms as major labour sources and occupied influential positions in the traditional systems of local organization. The south, like the north, however, had been

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polygynous including some households professing Christianity. Women in the south, especially among the Yoruba's had received western-style education since the nineteenth century, so they occupied in the professions and to an extent in politics. In addition, women headed households, something not seriously considered in Nigeria's development plan (Ekejiuba, 1992). Generally, Nigerian development planning referred to adult male, households or families. Women were included in such units but not as separate category. Up until the 1980s, the term "farmer" was assumed to be exclusively male even though in some areas of the south women did most of the farm work. In Nigerian terms, a woman was almost always defined as someone's daughter, wife, mother or widow. But women are now challenging the status quo. Mechanisms to right the so called "Cultures wrong" are being put in place. Women's voices are now being heard clamoring for an improvement in their socio-economic status and for the recognition of their immense contributions to national development (Amah, 1995). Despite social, cultural and biological restrictions, women are playing an increasing role in international and national security. Inspiring examples abound. In the US army for instance General Ann Dunwoody became the first female four-star general in US history; Governor Janet Napolitano of Arizona was recently designated by President Barack Obama to defend the homeland, others include Susan Rice, the second youngest US Ambassador-designate to the United Nations and Senator Hillary Clinton a historic Presidential Contender and current secretary of state-designate. These women followed in the footsteps of leaders such presidential counter terrorism adviser Frances Townsend and secretaries Condoleezza Rice and Madeleine Albright below has exemplified the eloquent, formidable and credible force that women can bring to the arena of international security (Broadwell Choubey and Holgate, 2008).

At the national scene, a look at the history of Nigeria revealed that women had made remarkable security impact even before the advent of western education. Some of them include: Inkpi, the Princess of Igala royal family who buried herself alive to save the Igalas from the stronghold of the Junkuns, Moremi of Ile Ife who allowed herself to be captured by the Igbos during a clash with the Yorubas. This action made her to discover the secrets of the Igbos which she revealed to her people when she escaped. Queen Amina who became the Queen of Zazzau in 1576 not because there was no strong contenders but she emerged as the most suitable successor to the office. She proved herself a capable leader both on the home front and on the battle field. Similarly, Omu Okwei of Osomari made great impact in the land of Onitsha in her time she abolished slave trade in Onitsha and provided alternative trade on palm oil, alcoholic drinks, tobacco, textiles and other imported manufactured goods for the people (Mathias, 2008). Nigerian women played a vital role in politics during the pre-colonial African social system and in the form of division of labour which existed. Nigerian women participated in politics and government through the institution of women chiefs, the authority of first born daughters and the age grades. According to Afonja (1996), the advent of colonialism disturbed the functioning of these traditional institutions, suppressing them and imposing alien systems through education, religion and other socio-cultural institutions. In pre-colonial Nigeria, women played prominent roles in politics and security. And also held important positions among the majority of ethnic groups, particularly among the Hausa, the Yoruba and the Igbo. In the Hausa society, the dominant people culturally belong to a civilization characterized by matrilineal succession in the ruling class, women held high political offices. The Yoruba and Edo, were geographically grouped together from 1954-1963. Politics in these societies centered on the Oba with his capital and his palace. In the Oyo Empire, women were political activists in the Alafin's palace. His many wives acted as his eyes and ears and as his secret service in the course of their trading activity. Women who were title holders like the Iyalagbo, Iyalode, Iya kere contributed to the smooth functioning of the political machinery. They were responsible for the spiritual well being of the Oba in some parts of the capital city, being in charge of market places,

taking custody of the palace treasures respectively. These group of women according to Afonja (1996), formed an effective group of spokes women for political stability and humane rule as well as for the interest of women at the highest political level in the kingdom. Their lives were bound with that of the ruling monarch and so, they were expected to depart to the land of the spirits in the event of his death. The Edos also have a high socio-political system where the women were active. Among them was the Iyeoba (Queen mother). After the Oba's ascension to the throne, she took part in the running of the affairs of the Benin Kingdom. Unfortunately, the traditional phase in Yoruba and Edo political evolution ushered in by the imposition of the pax Britannica and British colonial rule, eliminated women from their exalted institutional position in traditional politics replacing the traditional political system with a western oriented system in which women had no place. The basic question in this paper is why are women not involved in security issues in the country? Women have contributed so much to national security that if they are given more opportunity, they will secure a free and safe environment for the nation.

Theoretical Orientation

LIBERAL FEMINISM: This theory tries to explain gender inequalities in social and cultural attitudes. The theory attributes several factors as strengthening inequalities between men and women rather than blaming the social system and structure. They are concerned with sexism, health, violence, poverty, discrimination against in the work place, educational institutions family and media. They tend to concentrate on establishing and protecting equal opportunities for women through legislation and other democratic means. The liberal feminists seek to work through existing systems to bring about reforms in a gradual way.

The concept of national security

The dominant view on natural security in international relations theory is the primacy of the security of the state and its sovereignty and territorial integrity and not so much about the lives, liberties and property of the citizens (Jervis, 1982). A maximalist state is what the realist seems to favour rather than a minimalist state where the rights and liberties of the citizens are subservient to the national interest. Security study according to Watt is the study of the threat, use and control of military force (Watt, 1991). In the same vein Kumaraswamy (2003) discounts the broadening of security study and prefers to excluded environment, climate change, food security, aids, as that would turn security study intellectually incoherent. In a Hobbesian note, Realists argue that security is assured by self-help through power maximization and increased in military capability in an essentially anarchic system through ones' superiority of the military power over the perceived opponent. However, the realists seem to have undermined the security threat coming from the non-state actors.

National security according to the liberals is secured when there is co-operation and interdependence amongst states in the international system, international organizations and international law, collective security, common security, cooperative security is some of the methods through which the liberals hope to ensure national security (US National Security, 2012). A close look at the concept of national security reveals that there is nothing in the definition which makes it strictly a man's affair. But in Nigeria gender roles are evident not only in our work and behavior but in how we socialize our children. Male babies get blue blankets and wears while female babies get pink ones. Boys are expected to play with trucks, blocks, balls guns and toy soldiers while the girls are given dolls and kitchen utensil. Boys must be masculine-active, aggressive, tough, daring and dominant. Whereas girls must be feminine-soft, emotional, sweet and submissive. A baby girl who behaves contrary to the presumed feminine behavior is remanded that she is a woman and this makes her revert to the expected behavior. This traditionally is to prepare the

girl children for their sacred role of caring for her husband, home, and children (Mathias, 2008).

The Role of Women in the Society

Women are managers of the home. They take care of the house as well as their husbands and children. Nyamongo (2006) reported that women are estimated to head one-fourth of all households worldwide and many other households are dependent on their income even where men are present. Stoevska (2004) also stated that in urban areas, evidence suggests that only a few women have access to formal employment and that most of them are dependent mainly on the informal economy for their own and their family's survival. An interview with a female farmer in Owerri North Local Government Area in Imo State showed that women make every effort to feed and train their children so that they might become useful in the society in the future. According to the woman, "if I don't train them, and they become useless, the society will blame me, not their father" (Mathias, 2008). Another example was cited by Onu (2002) where a rural woman in Aba, Abia State said that she has to train their children so that they do not become a "liability" to her in future. Thus, most women make effort to take care and train their children not because of economic gains but because they want them "to be useful to themselves and the society". Studies have also shown that generally there are high unemployment levels among women compared to men and that even when women are employed, they are much more likely to work in low-productivity jobs status (often insecure, unsafe and poorly paid) or in agricultural production for family subsistence and in informal employment activities which do not provide security or social benefits. This is because women were exposed to education later than their male counterparts. Yet women are more involved in caring for the family than the men (Stoevska, 2004).

Even when they don't support the family financially they make visible contributions to the welfare of the children. Women are also actively involved in community development and peace keeping. This is observed in their activities in most rural areas all over the country. In Akwete Ndoki community in Abia State, the women built a public library and rehabilitated the maternity home in the town (George, 1992). An interview with women from Aguata in Anambra State revealed that the major issue in their last "August meeting" (an Annual General Meeting held by women in the Eastern part of the country) was on how to maintain a lasting peace in the community. Women from Isiala Mbano in Imo State also stated that they go home during the meeting to settle dispute and re-establish communal relationship. All over the world, women had participated in the struggle to eradicate colonialism neo-colonialism, imperialism, totalitarianism including fascism and similar ideologies such as alien occupation, foreign domination, aggression, racism, racial discrimination, apartheid and other violation of human rights (UN *Dacude for Women*, 1985). But all these activities have often gone unnoticed. This is because ours is a patriarchal society, where the male are the head in everything.

Recommendation

This paper therefore recommends that a Ministry of Peace and Conflict Resolution should be created at the Federal level and Commissions in every state Capital including the Federal Capital Territory. This Ministry should be headed by a woman who will also coordinate the affairs of the Ministry in the 36 states. Sixty percent (60%) of the staff of this ministry will be women. This paper recognizes the existence of the Ministry of Women Affairs which is encumbered with so many activities. It also recognizes the office of the first ladies which is also involved provision of social welfare and other consolidatry services to administrations. The ministry of Peace and Conflict Resolution is not a center where researches are carried out and suggestions made to Government. And very often these suggestions are not implemented. Rather it is a Department in Government where researches, deliberations and other relevant activities that are related to security are conducted and conclusion reached are implemented because it is an arm of the government.

Conclusion

Women are the bedrock of every society. They are involved in food security, economic security and political security. During times of crisis, the women and children are the most affected. Women are the mothers of the boys used to cause disorder in the society as well as the wives of the men who instigate the boys to cause disorder. The creation of a ministry headed and coordinated by a woman will go a long way in solving the insecurity problem faced by the nation.

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