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UMUADA AND PEACEMAKING IN ABAGANA AND EZIOWELLE COMMUNAL CLASH, 2011 – 2018.

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ABSTRACT

Umuada as a group have played a significant role of restoring peace to their different communities. This paper examines the role of this group of women in Abagana and Eziowelle communal conflict. The paper uses a qualitative research approach to explore how they have been able to create sustained peace and security in their communities. The findings show that the role of Umuada in peace making is highly significant. They have been instrumental in reducing the prevalence of communal conflicts by engaging in preventive and restorative measures. These include mediation, advocacy, and community mobilization. They have been able to provide a platform for dialogue and reconciliation between the combatants, villages, and communities. The paper offers key recommendations for Nigerian government and policy makers to promote umuada- led peace making initiatives in conflict- affected communities. It further stresses the need for increased research on the role of Umuada in peace making.

Keywords: Umuada; Peacemaking; Communal Clash

Introduction

The role of women in peace making cannot be underestimated. They play an important role to ensure peace in their vicinity. Women have been vanguards of peace in their respective communities. They have at various times courageously and creatively seek alternatives to war and violence. Women have wider opportunity of transmitting African values to their children as they are better placed to be nearer to the children than their male counterparts. Women are often seen as the transmitters of cultural values to their progeny and to future generations, including through the use of artistic expressions such as song, dance and folk tales. They act as intermediaries in conflict situations, undertaking reconnaissance missions to assess possibilities for peace and subsequently facilitating communication and peace negotiations. They are also used (or accept to be used) as 'bridge- building' blocks between hostile or fighting communities, notably through 'inter- community marriage' whereby a daughter of one community is given in marriage to a son of another community as a way of sealing alliance for peace and reconciliation (UNESCO, 2003).

The women folk have better opportunity to maintain peace and stability that are supposed to be exist in a given society. Women are stereotyped as peacemakers, thought of as being more pacific than men and often symbolized as paragons of goodness and tenderness, even where they have been known to be actively engaged in wars for independence and other types of struggles. This stereotyping is reinforced through socialization patterns that promote women primarily as child

bearers and good wives, caregivers, arbitrators of conflict and peace promoters in the family and community (UNESCO, 2003). Women are agents of peacemaking in their communities. As such, they are well- placed to ensure peaceful community. By their way of living, they help to enthrone peace both at their fatherland and at their husband's place. They help to advise their brothers and their husbands on the good conducts that will enhance peace in the community.

In Abagana and Eziowelle communal conflict, womenfolk especially *umuadas* has played roles at different points in time to ensure return of peace in their area. They have tried using different tactics that geared towards enhancing peace in their localities. This work seeks to investigate how the women folk (that is, those married out in both communities) has been at the fore- front of reestablishing peace in their communities. This will help future researchers to apply this method to help ensure peace in other communities with similar conflict situation so as to witness return of peace to their communities. It can also be used to do comparative studies on the same subject matters.

Research Methodology

The study will adopt multidisciplinary approach. It is a qualitative research. Data will be collected through the use of primary and secondary sources. Oral interview will be used to collect data. Archival records and works of other scholars will be consulted widely. Documentaries that are relevant to the work will also be consulted.

Findings and Discussions

Conflict

Any place that human beings are found, there exists peace or conflict. When there is peace, there is no conflict. The presence of conflict especially when it is not managed and well, breeds war. Each person has his or her mode of behavior or thinking. Conflict exists whenever incompatible activities occur…one party is interfering, disrupting, obstructing or in some other ways making another party's action less effective (Deutsh, M., 1973 as cited in Tasie, K., 2011). It can mean to be a particular relationship between states or rival factions within a state which implies subjective hostilities or tension manifested in subversive economic or military hostilities (Quincy, W ed, 1971 as cited in Ajayi, A. & Buhari, L., 2014) It is an interaction of interdependent people who perceive incompatible goal and interference from each other in achieving those goals (Hocker, J & Wilnot, 1985 as cited in Agbu, O., 2006).

Conflict can also be described as a condition in which identifiable group of human beings whether tribal, ethnic, linguistic, religious, socio-political, economic, and cultural or otherwise is in conscious opposition to one or more other identifiable human groups because these groups are pursuing what to be incompatible goals (Quincy, W. ed, 1971). Conflict means perceived divergence of interest or a belief that the party's current aspirations cannot be achieved simultaneously. It is a communicative interaction among people who are interdependent and who perceived that their interests are incompatible, inconsistent or in tension (Agbu, O., 2006). It is an interaction of people that are interdependent with incompatible goals and interference from each other in attaining

these goals. Conflict is described as any form of confrontation between two or more parties resulting from a situation where (these) two or more interdependent groups or systems of action have incompatible goals (Diller, M., 1997 as cited in Agbu, O., 2006) Conflict arises from the interaction of individuals, who have partly incompatible ends in which the ability of one actor to gain his ends, depends to an important degrees on the choice or the decisions that other parties will take (Okoro, K., 2010). Conflict could be violent on uncontrollable dominant or recessive, resolvable or insolvable under various sets or circumstances (Omotosho, M., 2004)

Chinese adage has it that conflict creates an opportunity change. This varies at each time. It can be positive or negative depending on how it is managed. In conflict, each of the parties mobilizes energy to obtain a goal as a desired object. Though each party sees the others as a barrier or a threat to its goal, conflict is not all that bad in its nature because it helps in attaining a highly desired goal of change. This word 'conflict' as defined by Maoz thus:

> A state of incompatibility among values, where the achievement of one value can be realized only at the expense of some other values. It can arise within a group which has before it multiple goals as well as between some groups struggling for incompatible goals. Conflict is inevitable in any relationship between two or more parties (Maoz Z., 1982 as cited in Agbu, O., 2006).

Five types of conflict are - Relationship conflict, Data conflict, Interest conflict, Structural conflict, and Value conflict (Agbu, O., 2006). For Cook, other types of conflict, include: Pseudo conflict, Ego conflict, and Simple conflict. Scholars have varied opinions as regards conflict (Cook J., 1975 as cited in Agbu, O., 2006).

Peace: One needs to be friendly with one's environment. The harmony that is supposed to exist between man and his environment supposed to be cordial. When it is cordial, that is, when there is harmony, peace exists. Peace is ensured when one is friendly with one's environment; when there is order in one's environment. It is seen as a relationship among the various visible and invisible beings and forces in nature in which man is also involved in a special manner (Metuh E., 1981). Peace is seen as a utopia or at best as an inseparable social variable with war and conflict (Okoro, K., 2009). This is generally the view of most modern literatures.

It is as old as man. It is seen as an absence of war. Peace is a state where one is in a conducive atmosphere. Man is peace-loving in nature. He loves to be at home with his environment. It is one of the deepest, most sublime and most universal aspirations of man in whatever era of human history (King M. & Miller, C., 2006). The word "Peace" is a household name in the world. Peace is divided into two; Positive and Negative peace (Okoro, K., 2010).

Negative peace ensues in the absence of war or violence. For example, when there is ceasefire; when violence has stopped; when oppression has ended. Johan Gultang, a professor and father of Peace studies, sees positive peace as a condition in which exploitation has been eliminated and overt violence has ceased, including structural violence (King M. & Miller, C., 2006). Positive peace is filled with positive content such as restoration of relationship, the creation of social system that will be

beneficial to the masses and the constructive resolution of conflict. Peace ensues in a place where social conflict is well managed.

In some cultures, peace has to do with man in the totality of his being. It embraces all facets of human existence. Here, it has to do with security. It does not just mean absence of war but social security, well-being, solidarity, order, prosperity and so on. The Irene (in Greek culture) sees it as a state of order and coherence and not merely the absence of war (Bainton, R., 1982)

Peacemaking: Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God (Matt. 5: 9)

The word "Peace" is a household name in the world. It is also scriptural. Peace is before us every day of our lives. As the name implies, it means all the activities that are geared toward arriving at peace. It includes the range of diplomatic actions aimed at establishing a peaceful settlement once conflict is in progress or has resumed (Aderibigbe N. et al., 2010).

For some scholars, it is a diplomatic initiative at bringing to an end any violent attitude that may be dominating the conflict relationship between parties. This is with the view of making the parties in conflict to see reasons on why they should seek for diplomatic means and nonviolent dialogue in the resolution of their conflict resulting ultimately into signing of an agreement for peace (Aderibigbe N. et al., 2010).

Peace is a treasure that all should try to do everything possible to acquire. No sacrifice made to arrive at peace is in vain. It is not in the world of utopia. It is a task that one can successfully carry out by adhering to the rules of the game. It is realizable. It can be done through third party intervention (mediation) or negotiation between two parties.

Women and Peacemaking: In the world, women have been at the fore- front of peacemaking. Their nature is in made in such a way that they are taken to be a peace-loving creatures. They are seen as being weak. Being weak gives them an edge over men in seeking peace. Some of them may not resolve to go for a fight because of the weakness that is shown in their nature. Women do put in anything demands of them to make sure peace is got. Having passed through the herculean task of child bearing, they are in a better position to sue for peace no matter what it takes to know that life has to be preserved. During conflict, the relationship between brothers and sisters is severed. At a point of conflict, the parties can go to the level of even trying to shed blood. Women have been instrumental to peacemaking in many parts of the world.

According to Hyacinth Iwu et. al., conflicts resolution in Africa has largely focused on the role of men to the neglect of the contributions by the women. Yet, there are historical cases of women peacemakers in Africa (Iwu H. et al., 2018). One of such instances is *Umuada* Women Association in Igboland, southeastern Nigeria, which has come a long way as a veritable means of conflict resolution both in the ancient and contemporary times. Formed as a complex network of women married outside their kindred, *umuada* has been known historically as woman association successfully nipping conflicts in the bud or reining in on warring factions when conflicts become intractable. Contrary to previous studies on conflict in Africa that largely present women as endangered species, this study shows *Umuada* as a

powerful instrument of conflict resolution (Iwu, H. et al., 2018).

As Africa is a continent that has many factors which weaken the peace and stability that is supposed to exist in a given society, women play an important role to see that peace is realized. According to Michael Chiege, Africa has remained little more than an unfailing source of bad news; famine; dictatorship and economic collapse; blatant violations of human rights and gross carnage of merciless warlords; a region where unashamed autocrats still tightened the screws of their despotism while their counterparts around the globe were being hounded out of presidential palaces by popular revolts (Chiege, M., 1992). Africans are normally at home with bad news because of bad governance in the continent. Bad governance rears its ugly head in different facets of life in the continent. This ranges from armed banditry, kidnapping, terrorism, hunger, sickness, and so on. These have retarded development and security in the region. In quest for one's survival, one does anything possible to have a better future. Africa has all it takes to resolve conflicts in the society. She has tales, stories, proverbs that promote African sense of communalism.

According to Lederach, people practicing conflict resolution must draw upon must draw upon participants' tradition and symbols, their way of being and doing and their natural knowledge which are often available in the form of metaphors, stories and proverbs (Lederach J.,1997 as cited in Iwu, H. et al., 2018). Women play an important role to see to the peace and security of their community. Men play a major role in this regard as they are regarded in the most part of Africa as superior because of their sex. Where they fail in this regard, women take over.

Kirkpatrick argues thus on this;

> Like men, women gain status for effective responsible performance of culturally sanctioned roles. Any effort to perform roles assigned by the culture to the opposite sex is likely to result in a loss of status on the sex specific status ladder. The values on which women are expected to concentrate are those of affection, rectitude, well- being; the skills relevant to the pursuit of these values are those associated with nurturing, serving and pleasing a family and community; homemaking, personal adornment, preparing and serving food, nursing the ill, comforting the down cast, aiding and pleasing a husband, caring for and educating the young. It is assumed furthermore that these activities will consume all a woman's that to perform them well is both a full time and a life time job (Kirkpatrick J., 1974).

The work of women is no more that of domestic but they can be relevant in other spheres of life. They have their God-given talents to help in the restoration of peace and harmony of the society. Regardless of gender, women can be helpful in the area of sustenance of peace and serenity of our society. According to African tradition, women are confined to the domestic affairs of the family but with recently the mentality has changed. Women are now in different spheres of life- political, religious, economical and social. Our fore-fathers held that women are not supposed to be educated as they are to be married out. This mentality has changed in some places. The world was seen as man's world but this has changed as women have also the power to contribute positively to the world.

In his book *Anatomy of Female Power*, Chinweizu argues thus;

> Female powers exist; it hangs over every man like ubiquitous shadow. Indeed the life cycle of man, from cradle to grave may be divided into three phases each of which is defined by form of female power which dominates him: mother power, bride power, or wife power. From birth to puberty, he is ruled by mother power as exercised over him by his one and only 'mummy dearest'. Then he passes into the territory of bride power as exercised over him by his bride-to-be, that cuddlesome and tender wench he feels he cannot live without. This phase lasts from puberty to that wedding day when the last of his potential bride finally makes herself his wife. He then passes into the domain of wife power as exercised over him by his own resident matriarch, alias his darling wife. This phase lasts till he is divorced or widowed or dead. In each phase female is established over him through peculiar weakness in that stage of life (Chinweizu A., 1990).

Motherhood is established over him while he is a helpless infant. Bride power holds sway over him through his great need for a womb in which to procreate; if he didn't feel this need he wouldn't put himself into the power of any owner of a womb. There are five conditions that enable women to get what they want from men. Women's control of the womb , women's control of kitchen, women's control of the cradle, the psychological immaturity of man relative to woman, and man's tendency to be deranged by his own excited penis (Chinweizu, A. 1990).

Women have the gifts bestowed on them by nature that make men to be under their dominance at certain point in their lives. According to Hyacinth Iwu et al., these characteristics as observed by Chinweizu is largely universal and most dominate within local communities (Iwu, H. et al., 2018).Women were seen as passive whereby men are seen as active in every sphere of human endavours. In the area of peacemaking and wars, men are seen as active players. "Account of war (through news reporting, government propaganda, novels, the cinema etc) tended to cast men as the 'doers' and women as passive, innocent, victims. In poor countries wars were not portrayed in quite the same way, but stories of the courage of men as fighters has tended to eclipse the active roles women have played (Madu, C., 2015). According to Ferris, women's account of wars; their experiences, the ways in which they live through wars- as fighters, community leaders, social organizers, workers, farmers, traders and welfare workers has become more clear (Ferris E., 1993 as cited in Madu C., 2015).

Women constitute a greater number of the world's population when compared with men. In most societies, women assume five key roles: mother, producer, home-manager, community organizer and socio-cultural and political activist. Women have utilized their particular roles to minimize the effects of violence; both by actively trying to end wars and acting as peacemakers (Ferris E., 1993). The roles of women in making men not to lose courage in the course of fighting their rights cannot be underestimated. As women in most societies have the active role in passing cultural identities to children, they have also been involved in supporting exclusive and aggressive ideologies about nationalism (Madu C., 2015).The issues of conflicts and peace- building cannot be handled without mainstreaming gender since both men and women have the

potential for peacemaking and the responsibility to build and keep peace. Most approaches to peace building have either ignored or marginalized issues of gender. Women consistently remain a minority of participants in peace building projects; they receive less attention than men in peace building policies…it is important to consider the experiences of both men and women in times of conflicts and address them (Madu C., 2015). Because gender classifies expected roles for females and males, the sexes are expected to conform in the interest of the maintenance of law and order in the society.

However, because the rules governing gender roles is determined by sole male members in most societies, it is hardly neutral as the laws are made to favour the gender of the makers, the men. Gender is also conditioned by culture and history, in which case, the rules tend to conform to demands of the time and needs of the given society. In this sense, current gender rules at work in contemporary society could be said to be the result of an ongoing cultural change. A study of pre-colonial African society reveals that the gender rules in operation under colonialism did not reflect the norms of indigenous society (Maduagwu E., 2012). Both male and female have a task to play in order to see to the smooth running of events in the society thereby creating room for peace and stability in the community.

In Nigeria, women have been helpful in the area of peacemaking in the country. They have been of help especially where men could not achieve a better result. According to Obasi, C. O. & Nnamani, R. G., the Nigerian woman is bold and industrious. She is a mother and leader in the family and the community. Before the advent of colonial rule and the amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914, many women have made history in the political and socio- economic levels of their environment at a time not known (Obasi C.& Nnamani R., 2015). Nnamani and Okpara hold that the gallantry efforts of Queen Amina of Zaria, Moremi of Yorubaland, Queen Kambasa of Ijawland and Queen Owari of Ilesha were recorded in history. In Igboland, many priestesses intervened to avert family and communal conflicts. The advent and influence of colonialism eroded the traditional autonomy of Nigerian women. It affected and reduced their peace efforts in the early days to their charging. It was against this background that the Aba women riot of 1929 took place. It was staged against the British high-handedness, policies against women and taxations (Obasi C. & Nnamani R.., 2015).

In Yoruba land, there is the *Egbasu* women group from Yoruba nationality staged another protest in 1941 and 1947 against injustice melted against women and the exploitations by the colonial administration. The Nigerian women have come of age since independence. They are now more organized than ever. They fight against abuse of women, trafficking of girls, marginalization, exploitation and disempowerment. In the mid-1970s, the women of Umueleke staged a protest against sexual child abuse and for some days left their homes for their men who did not do so much to punish the culprit. The women took refuge at the St. Patrick Catholic Church, Umuezeala, Ehime Mbano, Imo State. Their action attracted attention and the men were forced to act immediately (Obasi C. & Nnamani R., 2015).

The Igbo culture is both patriarchal and matriarchic. In some parts of Igbo land, women are in control as far as inheritance rights of landed and other immovable

properties are concerned (Obasi C. & Nnamani R., 2015). With this, women have say in the society. They come in to settle disputes in their communities among their brothers; between their brothers and their wives. They can proffer solution to conflicts even those that are still fresh or those that have lingered for quite a long time. They come in to settle disputes especially those proven to be difficult for men to settle.

Cecilia Madu describes *umuada* thus;

> The *Umuada* is an association of daughters of a given community in Igboland. It is an association to which all daughters of a particular village, clan, or town, old and young; single or married; divorced or separated is a member. *Umuada* simply means the daughters of a common male ancestor or "daughters of the soil". It is an absolute right of every daughter of a particular place, without exception whatsoever to belong to *Otu Umuada* , an association of the native daughters. As a group, *Otu Umuada* is a powerful sociopolitical setup in Igbo culture and a functional forum for females that work for the resolving of conflicts and maintaining peace in Igbo communities. Hence, women in the Igbo communities exert enormous powers by the virtue of their position as daughters of the lineage. They are therefore, recognized in all Igbo culture as judges, peace brokers and enforcers. When they rule on an issue the decision is final and must be obeyed by all (Madu C., 2015).

In Igbo culture, two aspects can be established regarding women association. The first is based on the area the women are married to. Here women form associations almost running parallel with the men or their husbands associations starting from kindred to village and town level. However, the parallel association does not depict antagonistic relations between the male and female group rather both are mutually complementary and often decisions from the male group have influenced outcome in the female's group (Iwu H. et al., 2018). It is assumed that women work together with their male counter parts.

On the bases of culture and tradition, male folk is taken to be superior to female folk. H. Iwu et al. further identify the second type of women association as *Umuada*. For them, fundamentally *Umuada* association is formed to sustain the patrilineal lineage of the women (daughters) married outside. The husbands of the women to a large extent do not have influence on decisions reached by *Umuada* (Iwu H. et al., 2018). *Umuada* associations have distinguished themselves to be very effective for management and resolution of conflict in Igbo land. They take decisions especially with regard to the realm of good ethics of wives of their siblings at their father's home (Iwu H. et al., 2018).

The roles of *Umuada* are many. They are the highest group uniting all other women in the community. They take the center stage in conflict resolution and management at every level, concerning women in the community. The various groups like the market women associations, social clubs, dance groups, etc., serve as watch dogs of public morality and conviviality. *Umuada* transverses all these various women Igbo groups, old and new. There is no hard fact that men dominate in socio- political matters in Igbo land, but women in complex conflicts of conjugal character intervene. The men take the back seats in such matters (Obasi C. & Nnamani

R., 2015). The role of *Umuada* in handling conflicts cannot be underscored.

According to Cecilia Madu, she opines that the Igbo society though a patriarchal society, there are still accounts of women's associations that are strong and contribute to the maintenance of law and order in the communities. The Umuada in Igbo land play lots of role in the society as leaders, peace builders, developers, economists and mothers. However their role as peace builders is so prominent that every family, community or clan that has any irresolvable conflict invites the umuada to intervene and in most cases they help to bring about peace. The role of umuada could be seen…in the communities (Madu C., 2015). She mentions the roles thus; - the settlement of disputes among fellow women and the community; Infidelity issues involving offending wives; Conflicts involving physical fighting between parties; Assault or physical attack of a wife on her mother- in- law; Assault on a wife by a husband; Plays a husband to all sisters- in-laws; Rites of passages especially marriage and burial (Madu C., 2015).

On another note, Njaka claims that the *Umuadas* intrude in the affairs of state and can impose sanctions which may include heavy fines, and other measures. Certainly, the elders will go to great lengths to avoid confrontations with the Umuada and in this way the women indirectly exert a strong influence on affairs of the state (Njaka N., 1987 as cited in Madu C., 2015). *Umuada* group is known to be at the fore-front of making peace in our communities. They form the basis of uniting all the women in the community. They are the highest of all groups in bringing women together. They take the center stage in conflict resolution and management at every level, concerning women in the community. The various groups like the market women associations, social clubs, dance groups etc. serve as watch dogs of public morality and conviviality. *Umuada* transverses all these various women groups, old and new. There is no hard fact that men dominate in socio- political matters in Igbo land, but women in complex conflicts of conjugal character intervene. The men take the back seat in such matters (Obasi C. & Nnamani R., 2015). The impact of *umuadas* in the resolution of conflict in most places of Igbo land can never be underestimated.

The power of *umuadas* is felt heavily in conflict management and reconciliation in virtually everything except land issues. They can offer their opinions on this issue but the final decision lie with the male. However, in Ohafia and some parts of Afikpo are exceptions to this as a result of their matrilineal life. In chieftaincy matters, they have limited role to play. It must be observed however that some communities are thinking of changing this cultural policy in order to appoint women into the cabinet of the *Igwe* or *Eze*. In conflicts concerning marital infidelity, mothers- in- law and fathers- in- law, *umuada* come in whether invited or not. Their role is to bring lasting peace, eliminate subjugation and infuse in them, the spirit of *metanoia,* forgiveness and justice. In any of these cases, the *Umuada* takes a neutral stand as the conflicting parties are called to resolve issues. The *Umuada* will extract the facts, analyze them and decide appropriate measures of penalty to be apportioned on the guilty party. Their decision is final on the matter. The *Umuada* can act as a "court of arbitration" (though not with legal force) and as a mediator in conflicts. They can ask the guilty to pay fine, or cook a certain portion of meal, or to bring a cock, or ram, in addition to kola nuts for reconciliation. Before this is done, guilt and pardon have been obtained and

forgiveness accepted by the parties in the case. The person offended is expected to grant forgiveness to the offender and where recalcitrance from any of the parties, the *Umuada* will weigh the big stick on the latest offender (0basi C. & Nnamani R., 2015).

The *Umuada* and *Ndinyom* collectively wade in matters concerning issues of the market, cleanliness of village squares and shrines. Members hold regular meetings and those living in urban areas make their contributions through mothers-in- law or a neighbour's wife. They keep watch at dress codes of their daughters and direct their conducts. Pre- marital sex is abhorred in Igbo land. Young girls who got pregnant are fined and ostracized; their mothers in some places are punished at the same time. This cultural law was very strong before the advent of Christianity. Unmarried pregnant girls were then given out to widowers in marriage after they have performed purification rites. Today, pre-marital sex and pregnancy are still frowned at though rampant. Some parents give out their pregnant girls into marriage, forcefully at times, to avoid "shame" brought about by their girl. Some girls who would not like to face the 'music' run away into "pregnant homes" to deliver and give out the child into adoption. One of the duties of women is to educate and advice their girls against unwanted pregnancies and anti social behaviours in the society (Obasi C. & Nnamani R. 2015). Women have a lot to do see to the development of their communities. Women play a significant role to ensure a peaceful society. This quickens the development of the society. They ensure that their society is a crime- free society. Agbasiere opines that apart from their general roles as advisers, women have their council of female elders, parallel to the council of male elders. In critical situations both councils could meet together for deliberation and consultation…Igbo women in general are expected to perform the role of "watch dogs" of public morality…Women may demonstrate their political pressure through their meetings, which may be inter- or intra-lineage in structure and usually operative under the aegis of the most senior married women (Agbasiere J., 2000).

He goes further to say that the powers of *umuada* are as extensive as they are ambivalent. They include the right of arbitration (we have pointed out earlier) within their natal lineage, settling of quarrels concerning political, economic and ritual matters which are beyond their male relative's power to settle. The task of disciplining obstreperous or disobedient relatives' wives also falls within their domain… the *umuada* have (also) the power to ostracize any proven incorrigible (male) lineage relative. In consequence, the funeral of such a person would be boycotted, which would initiate a ritual crisis, since the services of the *umuada* in the funeral of a relative are regarded as indispensable (Agbasiere J., 2000). Their role in Igbo cannot be swept under the carpet. They exert a huge influence in peace and development of any Igbo community.

Every Igbo woman belongs to these village based groups irrespective of creed or social status. In many Igbo areas, the Umuada make contributions for the development of their lineage through building of town halls, maternity or school. Through these efforts, they impact on the lives of the people of village and towns. Umuada at times convulses the *Ndinyom,* especially at the funeral of one of their brothers. If it happens that the widow of the dead man had maltreated the husband when he was still alive, it will not be easy for the widow (Obasi C. & Nnamani R. 2015).

The role of women in peace making cannot be underestimated. They play an important role to ensure peace in their vicinity. Women have been vanguards of peace in their respective communities. They have at various times courageously and creatively seek alternatives to war and violence. Women have wider opportunity of transmitting African values to their children as they are better placed to be nearer to the children than their male counterparts. Women are often seen as the transmitters of cultural values to their progeny and to future generations, including through the use of artistic expressions such as song, dance and folk tales. They act as intermediaries in conflict situations, undertaking reconnaissance missions to assess possibilities for peace and subsequently facilitating communication and peace negotiations. They are also used (or accept to be used) as 'bridge- building' blocks between hostile or fighting communities, notably through 'inter- community marriage' whereby a daughter of one community is given in marriage to a son of another community as a way of sealing alliance for peace and reconciliation (UNESCO, 2003).

The women folk have better opportunity to maintain peace and stability that are supposed to be exist in a given society. Women are stereotyped as peacemakers, thought of as being more pacific than men and often symbolized as paragons of goodness and tenderness, even where they have been known to be actively engaged in wars for independence and other types of struggles. This stereotyping is reinforced through socialization patterns that promote women primarily as child bearers and good wives, caregivers, arbitrators of conflict and peace promoters in the family and community (UNESCO, 2003). Women are agents of peacemaking in their communities. As such, they are well- placed to ensure peaceful community. By their way of living, they help to enthrone peace both at their fatherland and at their husband's place. They help to advise their brothers and their husbands on the good conducts that will enhance peace in the community.

The case of Abagana and Eziowelle communal conflict was not different. Right from time, women have been agents of peace and conflict resolution in their areas. It has not been an easy task. It is too demanding. At various point in time, women have been vanguards of peace in their areas. People from the two towns have benefited from the services of women- folk in order to resolve the long existing conflict in the area. Women- folk that have been born in the two towns were involved to see to the return of peace in the area. Some of them were born there and married within their towns while others are married out. In all these, they contributed a lot to see to the return of peaceful co-existence that did exist among brothers and close neighbours. The elderly ones among them were longing for the good olden days when they were a more peaceful relationship between the two communities. Just as I mentioned elsewhere, the struggle for land did not deter their relationship with each other in other spheres of communities' life. The women married from outside the communities did help too.

Umuadas helped a lot to see that their brothers did everything possible to achieve peace. They did this by making a gentle persuasion to the members of traditional institution in the area. They include- Traditional rulers, *Ichies*, *Nze na Ozo*, and so on. Some top members of the age grades in the communities were equally visited. The stakeholders in the communities were approached. All these

helped though eventually, they were not the people the resolved the conflict. Most of them lost their dear ones- brothers and husbands- in the course of the conflict. This made them to go from individual to individual; from groups to groups in order to achieve their motive. Each community was working within her confines. Some of them were married out to these communities as inter- marriage was customary as at this time. A typical example was that the mother of Francis Cardinal Arinze (a Catholic Prelate) who is a native of Eziowelle was from Abagana. One can multiply the list.

The conflict between the two communities brought untold hardship to people living there. This conflict retarded the progress in the area. The development of the area was hampered. Farming was brought to halt in the farm at the borderline. Certain families that had the opportunity of farming in the said- piece of land were deprived of the opportunity. This increased the rate of poverty and hunger in the area especially for the peasant farmers that hoped to get their sustenance from farming. Some of their members that were married in both communities suffered the effect as some of them were peasant farmers. They earned their livelihood from land cultivation. They supported their families- husbands, children and wards- from the proceeds. On the other hand, some of them had their brothers and sisters suffering from the effect of this conflict. There were also destruction of crops, farmland and lives. Properties worth millions of naira were destroyed in the course of the sad event. There were fears everywhere as a result of this ugly incidence. Though this did not touch other areas of their lives, they were challenges posed by it like properties were lost and lives were lost too (Okeke P., Personal Comm., February 24, 2022).

The female- folk from both communities were coming together according to their various communities. They were seeking ways of restoring peace to the troubled zone. Most of them remembered with nostalgia the olden days when they had no borderline conflict. The farmlands were visited without fear. They cohabited well with each other. They believed also that they are from the same ancestor. In everything, they were seeing themselves as brothers and sisters. The advent of the conflict had wanted to break the relationship that had existed in these two communities but it did not succeed. They wanted themselves to go back to the good olden days when they had enough farmlands to cultivate without fear (Okeke, P., Personal Comm., February 24, 2022). They had no problem with each other. Many of them had lost their husbands, brothers, sisters, sons and daughters in the course of the conflict.

The effect of the borderline dispute was not good to them at all. Because of this, they tried every possible means to restore peace to the area. They even exchanged visits with their neighbours. They even visited the male- folk during their meetings in view of seeking for ways to restore peace to the area. Due to long years of litigation for the both communities, the two communities depleted their resources in the law- court seeking for justices. This had lingered for years. They were not happy with this ugly development (Mgbe J., Personal Comm., February 28, 2022). They believed that the money that would have been used to develop the area was lavished and wasted in the law –courts. The stakeholders in the communities were visited. They tried convincing them on the need of using non- violence means to get at the peace in the area. In order to achieve this great task, they spent their time, energy

and money to do so. Some of them living outside the two communities took various risks in order to work for peace in the area. In fact, the two communities had exhibited some tiredness of continuing with the case but the problem was who would act as the intervener.

It was not easy for them to achieve this great feat but they watered ground towards achieving a peaceful co- existence in the place. It was also an opportunity for them to remind the on- coming generation of their common ancestorship. They had contributed a lot to achieve peace in both communities. It was not easy for them. Not minding their efforts, some members of the communities derive joy in the ongoing conflict. They wanted the conflict to continue. Maybe, they were profiting from the conflict as the saying in Igbo goes this- *Ala adighi mma bu uru ndi nze* which means literally "the land is not good is a gain for titled men" (Okolo G., Personal Comm. February 29, 2022). They met obstacles as regards the non- compliance of some members of the communities to join in the race for peaceful cohabitation in the area. In all these, women can be seen as being one of agents of peaceful resolution in the society. As such, they do not joke with life. They passed through untold difficulties during child- birth. Therefore, they know what it costs to lose a life. Some women have become widows and childless as a result conflict in their areas. Some of them have lost their families' breadwinners in the course of conflict. They have been victims of warring communities by losing their loved ones. So, this makes them to always seek possible means to achieve peace in an area.

Conclusion

Women have played a very important role in the peace and development of communities in Igbo land. They have continued to play this role till date in Igbo communities. They are occupying important place in cultural, political, religious and religious life of the community. Their place in the society is not negotiable. Women assist men in making decisions especially those known as *umuada*. They work hand- in- hand with men to see to a peaceful atmosphere in the society. Women gender group has fought for equality of rights and opportunity with men in Igbo society (Obasi C. & Nnamani R., 2015). In all, men take the upper hand in decision making among the Igbos. Women have made a considerable effort towards resolution and management of conflict. "*Umuada* as a conflict resolution agency in both pre and post- modern Igbo society in Nigeria are the pride and honor of the Igbo ethnic stock that make up the three major tribes in Nigeria. Their organization is strong, active and supportive of the global and regional struggle for women's empowerment and gender equality. *Umuada* weigh much power and they use this power positively in the churches, towns and villages to empower the less privileged in the society. They use their power to touch the lives of men and women as bridge builders in development programming to calm tensions, bring down walls of hatred and foster peace in the homes, community and nation. Operating within the structures of modernity, the Umuada respects tradition, but does not, as a feminine power group, seek to compete with the men as heads of the family. While every other women group in other tribes seeks to push the boundaries by attacking distributed family roles under the guise of modernity, the Umuada

remains unaffected by modern developments that seek to misinterpret women's basic functions as bridge builders, mediators and conflict managers in family and communal issues (Obasi C. & Nnamani R., 2015).

Umuadas have been remarkable for the role they play in their respective societies. They see to the maintenance of peace in their fathers' lands. *Umuadas* from both communities of Abagana and Eziowelle tried a lot to restore peace to an area that has been without peace for many decades. Development in the area was retarded as a result of this. Through the instrumentality of the women group known as *umuada* with other groups in both communities, peace was restored. This was greatly achieved as they inter- married. Some women from Abagana were married at the neighbouring Eziowelle community while some women from Eziowelle were given to men from Abagana. This healed the wound that has been created by the crisis as some people left the community for their safety, some were imprisoned, some lost their good names among the members of the community, division in the community, and so on. Using the principle of mediation, they were able to reach a consensus thereby reconciling both communities. They were very much instrumental to the return of peace to the area. They lobbied also for peace. At intervals, they were consulted. When other communities follow their method, they can restore peace to their communities though it requires patience on the part of the women group. No price to pay for peace is too big. They paid a big price to gain peace to their communities as it was time- consuming, it created a big financial burden on them, and they also met some difficulties as regard some town members that refused their advancement for peace. At last, they realized their dream. Any ambassador of peace has to remove sentiments when seeking for peace just as these women did. They have to swallow their pride in order to arrive at the desired goal. Peace is an asset that any good member of the society has acquired.

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