

Chapter 19

Beyond Wars and Conflicts: A Gendered Perspective of the State of Peace in Africa

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ABSTRACT

Many African countries have experienced wars and conflicts. Thus, for many Africans, their understanding of peace is limited to the absence of conflict and wars. Whilst there is no denial that wars and conflicts violate peace, many authors and well-known personalities have over the years affirmed that peace is much more than the absence of war and that it starts with understanding, fairness, acceptance, and tolerance between people. This is not the case however in Africa, as the majority of its women are subjected to unequal, unjust, and discriminatory treatment. Drawing from this, this chapter argues that there can be no real peace if African women are treated as such. This chapter aims to draw attention to the fact that beyond the ending of wars and conflicts in Africa, true peace can never be achieved until Africa's women are empowered, emancipated, and given equal rights and opportunities with men. Additionally, it provides recommendations on the way forward, motivates for a shift of thinking, and provides a gendered perspective of peace in Africa.

INTRODUCTION

Many African countries have experienced wars and conflicts. Thus, for many Africans, their understanding of peace is limited to the absence of conflict and wars. Whilst there is no denial that wars and conflicts violate peace, many authors and well-known personalities (see Zinn, 2002; Daila Lama XIV, 2009; Hanh, 1992) have over the years affirmed that peace is much more than the absence of war and that it starts with understanding, fairness, acceptance and tolerance between people. This is not the case however in Africa, as research has shown that the majority of its women are subjected to unequal, unjust and discriminatory treatment. Drawing from this, it is argued in this study that there can be no real peace if African Women are treated as such. The status of African women is therefore highlighted and is linked to how it contributes to an *un-peaceful* Africa. This study posits that there is a need to invest

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in women as it will lead to sustainable peace in the continent. More importantly, peace can never be achieved until Africa's women are empowered, emancipated and given equal rights and opportunities with men. It therefore explores peace through a gender lens, particularly on how it can be achieved and sustained. This in turn broadens understandings of peace. The study further provides recommendations on the way forward and motivates for a shift of thinking. A qualitative approach was utilised as it allows for an in- depth understanding of the research issue.

The term 'African woman' is loosely used in this chapter, taking into account that African women are not a strictly homogenous group as they differ in terms of age, education, class, religion, nationality, ethnicity and others. As an African (Sierra Leonean) woman living in Africa (South Africa), the researcher is aware of the challenges faced by African women and how this affects peace, placing her in good stead to contribute to the research. An interpretivist paradigm was therefore employed as it offers the researcher the opportunity to contribute to the research. Data for this research was elicited from sources such as journals, reports, books and online materials. This research is framed within a feminist standpoint epistemology as it serves as a platform to highlight the oppression and challenges faced by African women and to motivate for social change. According to Brooks (2007: p. 55), a feminist standpoint epistemology is,

a unique philosophy of knowledge building that challenges us to see and understand the world through the eyes and experiences of oppressed women and to apply the vision and knowledge of oppressed women to social activism and social change.

This standpoint provided the space for a gendered discourse of peace in Africa. Bearing in mind that Africa is deemed a continent in turmoil and in need of sustainable peace, this research is significant in that it aims to contribute to the improvement of social conditions within the continent and enhance efforts in peace sustainability.

BACKGROUND

According to Hansen (1987), peace is a universal desideratum and this position is not contestable. Similarly, Gultang (1967) states that peace seems to be an umbrella concept, as it is a general expression of human desires of that which is good and that which is ultimately to be pursued. Rummel (1981) concurs this when he states that peace has always been among humanity's highest and supreme values. Rummel (1981) supports this statement with a peace quote from classical scholar, Desiderius Erasmus, that the most disadvantageous peace is better than the most just war. Despite a universal acknowledgement of the desirability of peace, there is no agreement on what peace actually is. This in turn indicates that there are different perspectives or thoughts about the concept of peace. This study for instance is positioned to give a gendered perspective. Renowned scholars, philosophers and social leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi (see Geetha, 2004), Thich Nhat Hanh (1992) and His Holiness, the Daila Lama XIV (2009) have also engaged with the concept of peace, each coming up with their interpretation. McCandless and Karbo (2011) compiled a reader that illustrates a range of conceptual and practical thinking on peacebuilding and development linkages. This according to them was done to provide members of the academic community, civil society organisations, and policy makers in Africa with materials for furthering the debates on peace and conflict issues in the continent.

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