

IMPACT OF WAR ON WOMEN: IYORWUESE HAGHER'S LAMP OF PEACE

*Jonathan Desen MBACHAGA, Ph.D.

Abstract

Africa as a continent has been ravaged by wars that have brought untold hardship and retardation to development. Militarization and war places various demands on both males and females. This study concentrates on how females have been used as sex slaves and have now become vulnerable to rape and outright fighting in the wars. Extenuating the effects of war with its irreparable losses and psychological trauma in recent times has been the focus of governments, nongovernmental organizations and philanthropists. The devastation caused by the conflicts, the destruction to communities and the suffering of women and girls cannot be over emphasized. Recent years have seen many regions of Africa involved in wars and internal or external conflicts. From Liberia to Sierra Leone; Angola, The Democratic Republic of Congo to Rwanda; Burundi, Mali, Côte d'Ivoire to Sudan, the story is a sad and saddening one. Therefore, this article discusses the effects of armed conflicts on women and girls, using Iyorwuese Hagher's Lamp of Peace as a textual reference. It employs the literary method to consider the response of Iyorwuese Hagher as a playwright regarding the outcry against war atrocities against women. The paper argues that glaring gaps still exist regarding the protection of women and girls during armed conflicts. As such, women and girls deserve special attention that focuses on protection as they are both victims of abuse and actors in reconstruction.

Keywords: War, Atrocities on women, Protection and rehabilitation, Lamp of Peace, Africa

Introduction

Several regions in Africa in recent years have witnessed one form of war and internal or external conflict. Some of these wars are still going on. From Liberia to Sierra Leone, Angola, The Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Zimbabwe, Sudan, and more recently conflicts sprung up in Cote D' Ivoire, Libya and Egypt. Women and

*Jonathan Desen MBACHAGA, Ph.D. is of the Department of Theatre and Media Arts, Federal University, Oye-Ekiti, Nigeria
Email: desenmbachaga@yahoo.com

children bear the brunt of these wars psychologically, physically, and economically. Women and young girls in these conflict torn regions are subjected to conflict - related situations, with extreme violence that puts women/girls in vulnerable situations where they suffer serious abuses evidenced in the jeopardized lives, lack of protection as they are exposed to forced marriages, sexual abuse, and often, outright death. The UNICEF report 2005 citing Machel Graca succinctly captures this trend and posits that:

Over the past decade, the West and Central Africa region has been subject to conflict-related dislocation and extreme violence. Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia and Sierra Leone are still embroiled in, or emerging from, extensive upheaval and destruction due to long-term warfare. (1)

In response to these happenings, writers across the continent have turned their searchlight towards this ugly trend projecting the consequences and violations of war and seeking peaceful coexistence and stability in their works. In Nigeria, Femi Osofisan blazes the trail with his plays *Fare well to a Cannibal Rage* (1986), *Women of Owu* (2006), Sunnie Ododo's *Hard Choice* (2012), Elechi Amadi's *The Road to Ibadan* and Ola Rotimi's *Kurunmi* (1971), which captures the *ijaye* wars in the old Oyo Empire, not left out is Iyowuese Hagher's *Lamp of Peace*, to mention a few.

An Overview of Factors that Influence Crisis in Africa

Two important quotes to open this segment: it is easy to comprehend why much of the rest of the world thinks of Africa as a disaster area. Pictures of starving, disease – ridden children come crashing onto our television sets with alarming regularity. Conflicts driven by competition over scarce resources, growing socio – economic deprivation and disparities, and eroding authoritarian structures create frightening visions of apparent anarchy and unending violence (Prendergast 1). The cold war has been declared over. But the hot wars and battles emanating from the cold war or exacerbated by it are still being waged in Africa ... the traditional values of love and brotherhood, hospitality, and communalism have been gradually eroded to the point of non – recognition or non existence in some communities. (Olusegun Obasanjo cited in Prendergast 4).

The above quotes capture the exacerbated situation in modern Africa as a result of warfare which has reached a level that is better

described as a situation of 'complex emergencies' because of the humanitarian level which these conflicts have reached. Suffice to mention that the crisis or war situations in Africa leads to situations where economic and social interactions that lead to development are disrupted and young and able bodied men are recruited or out rightly forced into militia groups and women raped or left to fend for families as their husbands and children are either killed or drafted into these groups. The root cause of Wars in Africa have been traced to several factors that include insurgence against dictatorial governments or leaders as well as the disparity between extreme wealth by a select few in contrast to extreme poverty on the part of the masses. This chasm creates a situation of dependency and control but sooner or later the controlled want more and the controllers won't give more. As such, armed conflict to oust existing status quo becomes inevitable. This condition breeds local war lords and militias who often enjoy the aid of the so called super powers who have their own hidden agendas for supporting these groups but the resultant effect on the local population is only seen in the thousands and thousands of lives and property that are wasted and destroyed in the long run.

The above connects to issues of legitimacy crisis in leadership among African leaders. It is believed that elections in the region are designed to bring or breed leaders that represent and or serve the masses but situations of candidates usurping power and selecting themselves and or influencing endorsement from stakeholders or king makers either by coercion or by the gun. This situation is a clear case of the absence of democracy and respect for the rule of law among politicians and political parties. This situation can be seen or gleaned from the crisis in Angola, Liberia, Sudan, Somalia, Mozambique, Chad and more recently, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Libya, and Niger. In most of these countries, diamonds, oil, and or unequal distribution of wealth are strong reasons that fuel these crises. It is imperative to note that war situations in these countries breed situations whereby civilian populations were and continue to be subjected to massive human rights violations and horrendous atrocities, including rape, murder and torture. Millions have been displaced from their homes. These egregious violations also include sexual exploitation or sexual violence against girls and women.

According to UNICEF quoted in the Peace Agreement between the Government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone, "In conflicts in the West and Central Africa region, women and girls, particularly adolescents, have been specifically targeted with violence such as torture, rape, mass rape, forced prostitution, forced termination of pregnancy and mutilation. Rape as a tactic of war is a particularly egregious violation linked to the social

status of women and girls and their vulnerability. Girls who are abducted and given as 'wives' to soldiers are forced to serve as sexual slaves" (6–7). This shows that gender based violence continues to be a tool in conflict situations in Africa. Election periods are considered as potential times of unrest which often lead to serious conflicts because during these periods there is serious struggle for political positions and power by various individuals and groups because politics or political positions are seen as cheap means to getting wealth through embezzlement or diversion of government funds. As such politicians fight and kill opponents to get into offices as such these periods present a situation where by young unemployed people are recruited as political thugs to do the dirty bidding of the politicians. The recent crisis in Côte d'Ivoire, is a clear case that illustrates this submission. Other causes of war in Africa include:

1. The Legacy of European Colonialism

European colonialism had a devastating impact on Africa. The artificial boundaries created by colonial rulers as they ruled and finally left Africa had the effect of bringing together many different ethnic people within a nation that did not reflect, nor have (in such a short period of time) the ability to accommodate or provide for, the cultural and ethnic diversity. The freedom from imperial powers was, and is still, not a smooth transition. The natural struggle to rebuild is proving difficult. (Globalissues 5). Centuries of cultural adulteration with Eurocentric ideals, is another colonial legacy that the continent of Africa suffers. The core issue here is that indigenous values of the Africans over time have been replaced by European or western values which makes the average African confused and in a dilemma over his identity and breeds cultural disorientation among the African people. The Creative Associate's International believes that; the breakdown of values and traditions is another reason for conflicts in the region. The rate of rural-urban migration continues to escalate throughout Africa. One African government minister described the effects of urbanization thus: in the villages of Africa it is perfectly natural to feed at any table and lodge in any hut. But in the cities this communal existence no longer holds. You must pay for lodging and be invited for food. When young men find out that their relations cannot put them up, they become lost. They join other migrants and slip gradually into the criminal process. (Prendergast 8)

Simply put, the communal life of being 'your brother's keeper' where all stand for one and one for all is lost and with it the cultural values of cohesion and mutual community help. As such there is no sense of sharing rather it is survival of the fittest and smartest. No one cares for another as such the traditional sense of communal

responsibility of caring for each other is lost in the city. With this respect for constituted authority is thrown to the wind and survival antics are developed which lead to breakdown of order.

2. Cold War by Proxy; Supporting and Arming Dictatorships in Africa

Throughout the Cold War, major powers such as the U.S.A, the Soviet Union and others supported various regimes and dictatorships. Some possibly promising leaders in the early days of the independence movements throughout the Third World were overthrown. There was disregard from the major powers as to how this would affect the people of these countries. (\$1.5 billion worth of weapons to Africa has come from the U.S. alone, according to a report from the World Policy Institute, while Europe for example, was able to “exploit Africa’s resources” to help rebuild after World War II). The proliferation of small arms in the region when the Cold War ended has helped fuel many conflicts. Africa has become an attractive and profitable dumping ground for nations and arm manufacturers eager to get rid of weapon stocks made superfluous by the end of the Cold War or by technological developments (Center for Defense Information weekly update, November 4, 1999 cited in global issues 10).

3. Wealth and Power Scramble

African rulers serve one interest when pursuing power or when in power – the wealth they can amass for themselves and not the service they will render to the people in the capacity for which they are elected if at all they are elected. The lack of true democracy and economic gains that will breed development in Africa is largely connected to scrambling for wealth by kleptomaniac political leaders or elites in African states since independence. These political class, view their political positions and the state as a means of gaining and accumulating wealth with impunity. The struggle to control state is not really to foster development but it is a fast way to gain access to wealth. As such, those who seek power and those who wield power use all means possible to loot the treasury and keep the power. To this end ethnic sectarianism and political repression becomes the order of the day. This generates an unhealthy tussle in order to gain control of the state, among the military and civilian classes or between civilian political parties, is invariably ferocious and generates instability. This invariably leads to the apparently senseless civil conflicts in Africa that have serious consequences on the civilian populations.

Summary of Iyorwuese Hagher's *Lamp of Peace*

The play *Lamp of Peace* by Iyorwuese Hagher tells the story of war crimes against women and children. Madam Alafia and General Ado are central characters on opposite ends. The play opens with a 'gun dance' which indicates a war situation in which child soldiers and women are seen as victims of armed conflict as children are seen in happening one as victims of the war because they are child soldiers and women are grossly abused in the world of the play through sexual slavery, enforced prostitution and the attendant problems it breeds are treated by the playwright. It is indeed a telescopic depiction of gruesome acts of warfare and the socio economic implications on the people – masses, especially women.

War Crimes in Haghers *Lamp of Peace*

The impact of war on social, physical and economic livelihoods of affected people cannot be ignored. Suffice to mention that Wars displace whole populations and make millions homeless. Again, war hinders affected people from meeting their basic needs because crops are destroyed alongside with land and the environment. The impact of these on Civilians, mostly women and children is enormous as they bear the brunt of war, often than not war crimes are perpetrated against these groups with far reaching consequences. Haghers *lamp of peace* is replete with images of war crimes against women and children. In the world of the play, the character of Madam Alafia is used by the playwright to drive home the impact of war on women. She is brought to the war hospital on the suspicion that she is mentally deranged. Nurse Simpa gives a report on her,

Nurse Simpa: Doctor, I was told that her two sons went to war and never returned. Her only daughter was raped by eleven soldiers at a go until she fainted, and they slit her neck and dumped the body in the village well ... her husband had been missing for three days. Then they found his body tied to the stakes riddled with gunshots... (*Lamp of Peace* 7)

The above captures a situation where, torture, rape, conscription and indiscriminate killing is the order of the day, a situation that destroys a society's social fabric and coping mechanisms when civilians are direct targets. Suffice it to say that it explicitly captures the situation where, Sexual violence is flagrantly used as a weapon of War by most of the contenders or fighters involved in the conflict. As stated in the dialogue, soldiers and combatants kill strong men and rape and abuse women and girls as part of their efforts to establish and maintain control over civilians and the territory they capture. The exchange between

madam Alafia and Dr Ndu capture the suffering and despair of women in war situations, in her words; “Na so we an di pikin dem dey suffer pass. Una man pikin dey kill una sef like bush meat an na we dey carry dis old people dem wey no get house” (*Lamp of Peace* 9). Here, the issue of destitution is highlighted as the women are left to fend for people who have become homeless due to conflict situations. The issue of rape and abuse of girls and women is highlighted in the world of the play as the war lord forcefully takes Madams daughter. In his words;

War Lord: we are waring and you are wedding! Where the husband?

Madam: E no dey. Di man go since two years now.

War Lord: Niether wives nor daughters do we men of war have. And my eyes have not seen a real beauty for two years. I sojourn among frogs, snakes, lizards and slimy, creeping things.

Madam: Make una comot for this place,soja.

War Lord: Old mama, shut up! How dare you order me to leave? This is my territory; I captured it with my gun. And you, my queen, put on your wedding dress. We are going on a long wedding trip. We are eleven in the team.

Madam: Make una no take that dirty hand touch my pikin.

War Lord: (slaps her) Shut up witch. We will have for breakfast, and then slit her neck to avoid emotional problems. (*Lamp of Peace* 44 – 45)

This exchange is indicative of sexual and physical abuse of girls and women in war situations and shows conditions where single girls and young women find themselves in rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, because if a group of sexually starved soldiers numbering eleven take a young girl hostage in the context of the above exchange then one can only imagine the damage both physically and psychological that will occur. The language in this context depicts the bestial nature of man and the brutality and violent actions that run through the play are stark images of consequences and or losses of war. The character of the ‘daughter’ represents the girls who are targeted in war situations and forced to become wives or sex slaves to the combatants. It is imperative to note here that the phenomenon of child soldiers is also strongly projected in the play. In the world of the play Hagher uses the character of the ‘boy soldier’ to throw hints on teenagers who are conscripted into militia and the psychological trauma that follows. The exchange between Nurse Simpa and the boy soldier is quite revealing.

Nurse Simpa: Now give me the gun.

Boy Soldier: No

Nurse Simpa: Give it, give it up!

Boy Soldier: Over my Dead body! I won't surrender.

Nurse Simpa: you are in hospital, shot in the head.

Right now, the bullet lodges in your skull, is slowly burning its fatal course through your brain.

(Lamp of Peace 3)

The pain and consequences of war on children is captured graphically here as the risk of loss of life as faced by child soldiers as well as the effects of fire arms on child soldiers is presented here. Graça Machel, the former Minister of Education in Mozambique, in her report to the UN General Assembly on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children succinctly sums this up and submits that “millions of children are caught up in conflicts in which they are not merely bystanders, but targets. Some fall victim to a general onslaught against civilians; others die as part of a calculated genocide. Still other children suffer the effects of sexual violence or the multiple deprivations of armed conflict that expose them to hunger or disease...thousands of young people are cynically exploited as combatants.... Boys serve as porters or as messengers. Girls may prepare food or attend to the wounded, though they also may be forced to provide sexual services to soldiers. Both boys and girls are soon forced onto the battlefield, where their youth and inexperience leave them particularly vulnerable. In some cases children are deliberately exposed to horrific scenes to harden them to violence. Some are forced to commit atrocities against their own families as a way of severing all ties with their communities”(2). Suffice to mention that War and militarization inflicts serious burdens on children where children are forcefully drafted into armies. This situation breeds a number of orphans and homeless children. Again, War impairs physical and mental development, destroys schools, and immerses children in a culture of violence, fueling the desperation that forces children to pick up a gun before they reach adulthood. This situation denies them of the joy of childhood which they never fully enjoy as a result of war.

Conclusion

This article has discussed the impact of war on women and girls focusing on the physical and psychological trauma, torture and various atrocities that women and girls undergo during war situations. Several atrocities such as use of children as child soldiers, sexual exploitation

and trafficking as well as rape of women and girls in war situations are common place in such situations. In Africa and elsewhere today, conflicts arise as a result of struggles for power, status, and resources. In such situations, women and girls deserve special attention that focuses on protection as they are both victims of abuse and actors in reconstruction. Hagher's play speaks to the need for peace in war torn regions across the globe. His play reveals that, war is caused by selfishness and greed of people who desire to usurp power for self-aggrandizement. Hagher writes with a vision for peace and examines the impact of war on women, girls and children. This author believes education is a principle key in helping women and children in war torn countries reintegrate and move on with their lives. As such, creating avenues where victims will have access to free education should be a paramount priority by concerned bodies. Again, efforts must be made to bring to justice those responsible for war crimes against girls and women. More so, strong and constant pressure needs to be applied to all government and non-state actors involved in the conflict to observe their obligations with respect to the rules of armed engagement under human rights and humanitarian law and from the beginning of armed conflict, a properly coordinated approach to advocacy, monitoring and reporting on protection of women and girls is required.

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