

Tribunals as Instruments for Peacemaking among Ekiti Women in Traditional Settings in Southwestern Nigeria

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Abstract The contributions of women to peacemaking and peacebuilding cannot be overemphasised. Most studies have focused on women as victims of conflict and discrimination without paying adequate attention to their contributions to peacemaking and peacebuilding as required by the United Nations Resolution 1325 especially in rural areas. This study, therefore, investigated the contributions of women to peacemaking in selected communities in Ekiti State, Nigeria with a view to identifying the causes of conflict and the basic methods employed in peacemaking. The study was guided by Cultural and adopted survey research design. Purposive sampling technique was used to select four communities in Ekiti State, Nigeria namely Ado-Ekiti, Aiyede-Ekiti, Awo-Ekiti and Ilawe-Ekiti where women's involvement in peacemaking was remarkably significant. Primary data were collected through key informants' interviews with women directly engaged in peacemaking practices, group interviews and focus group discussions. Also, archival search and non-participant observation of quarters' tribunals and *Imolẹ* ritual performances were carried out. Secondary data was derived from textbooks, journal articles, United Nations Resolution 1325 and documents obtained from Ekiti State Ministry of Women Affairs. Data were content analysed. The research findings involved the role of meetings and tribunals in peacemaking by women at various levels and venues, including family compounds (*Àjọ Obirin Ilẹ*), quarters (*Àjọ Obirin Ọgbón*), age-grade associations (*Iye, Ayilẹkọ* and *Omọ dudan*), palace meeting (*Àjọ Olori*), and market meeting (*Àjọ Qjà*). Any conflict not resolved at these lower levels were referred to the communities' women central tribunals (*Àjọ Obirin Ilẹ*) which consisted of traditional female chiefs representing women's interest at the council of women leader (*Èyè 'lóbirin Ilẹ*).

Keywords Tribunal, Peacemaking, Ekiti Women

1. Introduction

Peacemaking is a complicated concept because peace can be defined in so many ways. For the purpose of this paper, peacemaking is not a process of passive acceptance of maltreatment, a turning of the other cheek in the face of clear injustice or abuse, or other weak images of meekness or non-resistance. Instead, peacemaking is a vibrant, powerful process. At its best, peacemaking creates relational and structural justice that allows for social and personal well-being (Douglas, 1996: 1). This is an ideal objective, perhaps not attainable in all conflicts. In addition, Pankhurst and Ivo (2003: 2) define peacemaking as a practical conflict transformation focused upon establishing equitable power relationships robust enough to forestall future conflict, often including the establishment of means of agreeing on ethical decisions within a community, or among parties, that had previously engaged in inappropriate and violent responses to conflict.

Nonetheless, among women in traditional settings in the Yoruba Ekiti communities in southwestern Nigeria, peacemaking largely involves cooperative and constructive processes to resolve human conflicts while also restoring relationships. Peacemaking does not deny the essential need for adversary processes, but peacemaking places adversary processes into a larger perspective. Therefore, peacemaking concerns a deeper way of looking at conflicts than just winning or losing. It looks at conflicts as opportunities for people to grow, to accept responsibility for the relationships they are in, and for the potential of apology and forgiveness. Peacemaking, among Ekiti women therefore was viewed as a concept, process and procedure.

Peacemaking is a concept because the idea of peace is often characterised as general formulation of the people's mentality. Malek (2003: 1) defines the concept of peacemaking as an intervention in a violent conflict to attempt to negotiate a peace agreement. While this term was invented to apply to diplomatic negotiations of international conflicts, it is also applicable to anyone trying to negotiate peace between disputants within families, workplaces, or communities. The process of peacemaking among Ekiti women is distinct from the rationale of pacifism or the use of non-violent protest, though they are often practised by the

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women. Mayek (2013: 2) noted that peacemaking processes provide a unique opportunity for addressing issues of social justice cohesion, and equity in access to power and resources. Indeed, Ekiti women have mastered the use of non-violent techniques under extreme violent pressure, and led others to such resistance. They have usually demonstrated the capacity not to react to violent provocation in kind and thus have proven to be more highly skilled at working with people within their community. They have kept the society coordinated and in good order through the necessary, often difficult phases of rapprochement. For example, peacemaking among the traditional Ekiti women has always involved ritual. Peacemaking in the area of study can be classified as a procedure because it entails summoning to the tribunal, hearing the case from the parties to the conflict and giving of appropriate verdict. According to Westbury (2013: 3) being a peacemaker, sometimes means looking at complicated issues below the surface to understand a different point of view.

The concept of peace – *Àlááfà* – according to Aronson (1980: 156 -157), is a word for well-being that combines physical health, peace of mind, material prosperity, harmonious relationships, and a reputation for wisdom. The goal of achieving *Àlááfà* has implications for the lifestyle of the self-actualised individual and hence was considered very important in the Ekiti society. In traditional Ekiti, another field could influence the power of women in one, especially since the society was organised in such a way that one sphere of life was dependent on the other, peace was equated with freshness, health, well-being, harmony, calm and tranquillity. The absence of such qualities was seen as sign of conflicts, which could be either latent or overt. It was that harmony and freshness which provided farmers with good crops, and hunters with game. It was the general belief of the people that whenever there was enough food for everyone, peace would reign in the homes and families, as nobody would have any reason to be envious of anybody else. Neighbouring communities could live in peace, visit one another during the off-seasons and attend ceremonies and festivals. This notion is true to traditional Yoruba values presented by Babatunde (1992: 83-115) which include kindness, goodness and moral power for effecting good, bravery, and respect for seniority, truthfulness, reliability, diplomacy, and the art of dissembling for the greater good of the whole. Moreover, harmony, freshness and calm were seen as essentially female virtues, properties of nature which were marvellously embodied by the Ekiti women.

This paper, therefore, focused on the contributions of women towards peacemaking in Ekiti society among the Yoruba of south-western Nigeria through their various tribunals. The study considered the status of Ekiti women as heroines, the struggle to be in the frontline and the suggested way forward. The study was concerned to search for the creative potentialities of women in the light of the mythological and historical past and the social processes of today. The women's road through history and myth was placed in the context of the present day Ekiti state.

2. Problem

Women in Ekiti societies have made contributions to peacemaking in matters concerning them. However, this role has been largely under-reported. Recent reports of abuse of women in armed conflict are noted in a global culture of discrimination that denies women equal status with men. The present day social, political and religious norms generally violate the rights and responsibilities of women as peace envoys, competent personalities and respectable peace facilitators. Despite the fact that the strategic role of women in intra-women peacemaking in Ekiti has been largely ignored in literature over the years, their positive contributions in this area, especially through the existence of various women tribunals, have never been in doubt. Even in broader contexts, it was indeed the women who led the way in many instances in peacemaking processes dating back to the pre-colonial Ekiti societies but their achievements in these areas have been largely visited by selective silence in historical accounts.

Moreover, while too often the reporting of women in conflict situations portray them as powerless victims, the reality, often glossed over, is that in conflict and post-conflict situations, women are usually in the forefront when it comes to negotiating and building peace. The women studied in this paper have been known to be facilitators of peace pacts between two or more conflicting communities. These women continue to work along this line from one generation to the other; often guaranteeing continual peace among themselves and their communities. Their achievements, however, have neither been articulated nor documented appropriately. The unrelenting effort of women to maintain peace among their peers in the selected communities focused upon in this paper has remained unrecognised.

The focus in this paper on women's issues and interests does not imply that women are a monolithic group; instead, the experiences and opinions of women are multidimensional, depending also on factors such as ethnicity, class and religion. The conditions of conflict and peace, however, do affect women differently than men, and those differences are rarely taken into account during the peacemaking processes. Women are also universally disadvantaged in Ekiti patriarchal society, although in different ways and to different degrees, contributing to a pattern of experiences and concerns. Thus, women should be viewed as a diverse group of social actors with differentiated backgrounds and capacities that inform their own agendas, which often articulate the needs of society as a whole in addition to the specific interests of the female population. In this way, women are capable of substantive contributions to lasting peace and should not be relegated to mere victims or simply the targets of interventions.

3. Literature Review

Recent studies of women and peacemaking have pointed

out that there has been little documentation or analysis of women's peacemaking activities, especially within the context of traditional institutions established specifically for that purpose. Besides, traditional conflict and peace studies have focused on inter-state relations and nation-states as actors in the making of war and peace. The experiences of ordinary people at the grassroots and community levels have been largely omitted in the analysis of peacemaking. This is partly owing to the prevailing concepts of peacemaking which have neglected the psychosocial and spiritual dimensions and processes in the reconciliation of human relationships. Related to this omission are narrow concepts of peacemaking, which focus on structural reconstruction in a post-conflict situation. Moreover, structural reconstruction often means simply the construction of state structures but neglects elements as much needed in order to build lasting peace. The premise of women's contribution to sustainable peace agreements has not been tested and has not been sufficiently backed by empirical evidence. The meanings and practices of peace are culturally specific and any investigation of best practices, therefore, requires a careful analysis of local approaches. This includes, among others, the study of traditional African conflict management practices.

The United Nations Resolution 1325 and International Action Network on Small Arms (2003) were enacted to reaffirm the importance of bringing in a gender perspective to peacemaking by seeking to increase women's participation in official peacemaking efforts, supporting women's initiatives to create a culture of peace, and by underscoring women's unique contributions to peacemaking. The extent to which the UN Resolution has been implemented varies across different parts of the world. The enactment of 1325 notwithstanding, women continue to make up a small percentage of professional positions in most official peacemaking bodies in various parts of the world. Drawing on the themes of a grounded theory, study of women in conflict-affected areas and on current literature in gender and peacemaking, this study built a set of criteria for peacemaking in the selected Ekiti communities. It gauged the level of women's involvement in both official peacemaking processes and alternative peacemaking initiatives, the degree to which political space has been broadened and the degree to which peace constituencies have been created and strengthened because of their contributions. A gender perspective to peacemaking promotes what Norwegian peace scholar Galtung (1969: 167-191) referred to as positive peace (the elimination of social injustice) and negative peace (the mere cessation of hostilities). It also addresses the minimal participation, and at times total exclusion, of women in peace processes by calling for the broadening of political space for women's involvement in official peacemaking efforts. This study is thus part of a larger study developing grounded theory on women's participation in peacemaking.

In order to understand better the role that gender equality plays in the process of peacemaking. Amartya Sen (1999:

54), Igwebuike (2007: 7) and Ikeajini Clarke (2009:11) argue for understanding peace as freedom. They suggest that peace in itself is not the ultimate goal but rather the freedoms associated with it: freedom to exchange goods and labour, freedom to make choices and influence one's life, freedom to live longer and freedom to choose to get education. Lagerlöf (2003:103) suggests that the reason why peace has spurred in the world had to do with changes in gender equality over the past 2000 years. The focus of this review is on the channels through which the lower relative status of women might be a hindrance to their role in peacemaking to the extent that women's status is lower relative to men. Some restrictions on freedoms are directly counterproductive for peace. Women continue to be at the margins of official peacemaking processes, from the initial phase of decommissioning to the later phases of post-conflict reconstruction. Women still make up a small percentage of professional positions in most official peacemaking bodies in various parts of the world (Anderlini, 2007:1). The Beijing World Conference on Women (1995) recognised the importance of gender as a relevant dimension of peacemaking and articulated it in its Platform for Action:

“...while entire communities suffer the consequences of armed conflict and terrorism, women and girls are particularly affected because of their status in society as well as their sex...”

Both women and men also have a fundamental stake in peace. Much of the atrocities taking place in the world today are functions of the dominance of masculine principles prevailing in most societies. Just as a healthy balance of masculine and feminine principles are necessary for the proper functioning of society, so must there be a balance between men and women's participation in formal peace negotiations and in the entire post-conflict reconstruction process Socialist International Women, (2005). Thus Omotayo (2006: 322-325) maintains that masculine principles of competition, dominance, and aggression can be balanced by feminine principles of cooperation, nurturance, and compromise in order to achieve successful peacemaking.

4. Methods used in Collecting and Analysing Data

A highly interactive approach was devised and used in data collection. The methods were triangulated to bolster the data collection process. Triangulation is a marriage of the methods of data collection which reinforce each other and which finally yield rich data analysis. This is done through primary and secondary sources. These methods were preferred because of their potential to elicit information and for bringing out the voices of the interviewees. Also, four focus group discussions (FGDs), four group discussions were organised among the women to obtain valid information for this study. Each FGD consisted of, at least, nine women and each group discussion consisted of ten women.

Group discussions proved less threatening to individuals

and allowed easier flow of information. Group discussions were not only an appropriate way of targeting the community but also enhanced the opportunity of an overview of or collective wisdom on the subject matter and collecting data on the assumption and goals informing people's values, beliefs and actions. Besides, it enabled the researcher to verify the information received from the respondents and where anyone seemed to forget, she was reminded by other participants. Some of the sessions appeared similar to dramatic sketches because before or in-between the discussions, there were songs and dances and the researcher participated in the songs and dances to identify with the groups. The focus groups were organised by liaising with the authorities such as kings, quarter chiefs, assistant chiefs, spiritual leaders and leaders of different women groups in the selected communities for the study. The data collected were content analysed.

5. Findings

SOURCES OF CONFLICT AMONG EKITI WOMEN

Against the backdrop of general considerations of the findings of the study reported in this paper in regard of sources of conflict among Ekiti women in traditional settings as well as the women's role in general peacemaking, the findings of this paper are reported below along the lines of the various tribunals they used as instruments for peacemaking; namely, domestic tribunals, quarters tribunals, general women's tribunals, market square tribunals, and palace tribunals. Before this is done, it is important at this stage to indicate that the sources of conflict for traditional Ekiti women as obtained from data and insights collected for this study include envy, competition over land and properties, theft, greed, adultery, betrayal and power related matters. The contemporary sources of conflict in these communities are identified as quests for power, lack of respect and clash between traditional and modern values especially in the homes, religious intolerance, sexual immoralities, political struggles and several other vices erupting with the ongoing exposure to western civilisation. While some sources of conflict are recent to the community, it is, however, discovered, that most of the ancient sources of conflict have remained with the people of Ekiti.

Even though the traditional Ekiti communities are organised and structured in a way that encouraged cohesiveness and peaceful co-existence, from time to time, like any other human society, they experience conflicts. Conflicts can arise between individuals, within a family, between families, within the community or inhabitants of different territories (Nwolise 2003. 3-4). To manage such conflicts, the traditional Ekiti society has well-organised regulatory machinery in which women generally played a major part. Women of Ekiti have been contributing immensely to ensure peace through the ages. Their contributions, which ranged from the home to the community at large, cannot be overlooked. There are

hierarchical organisations of women figures responsible for peacemaking among the traditional Ekiti women. The presences of hierarchy, notwithstanding, these women were reported to work towards the communal peace of their communities, hence the women participate actively in community affairs. This is why in every Yoruba community there are female chiefs who are deeply involved in traditional governance. Familusi (2009: 308). Also, their indispensability in the act of peacemaking across the ages was confirmed. It became obvious that in traditional Ekiti household, peace cannot be traded for anything and, therefore, there are pillars of morality constructed in order to maintain peace. These pillars of morality are built on and around mothers, wives, age-grade societies, elderly women in the compounds and priestesses in the lineage. Furthermore, there exist different forms of tribunals where women have been active peacemakers in Ekiti societies. These include:

- A. The palace tribunal- headed by the regent and head queen
- B. The women central tribunal- headed by the head chief
- C. The quarters women tribunal- headed by the quarter's chiefs
- D. The market women tribunal- headed by the *Èyè'Lójà*
- E. The domestic tribunal-headed by an elder (usually the first wife married into a compound).

PALACE WOMEN TRIBUNAL – *ÀJO OBÌRIN ÀÀFIN*

There are women expected to serve the communities in both political and religious capacity in Ekiti palaces. Within the category of these women falls the Regent (*Adelé Qba*), the king's wives (*Olori*) and the Princess (*qjà*).

The Regent- *Adelé Qba*

It is the duty of a Regent to occupy the royal throne during interregnum. She will be in charge of the affairs of the town pending the selection of a new king (Raji, 1999:1). Her role was similar to that of the king in all its ramifications. She would be made to appear in her father's robes with crown on her head. The status of a Regent was discovered to have transcended what Olaoba (1999: 34) refers to as a figurehead. Rather, it was a description of the significance of the crown to the Yoruba female monarchs as a symbol of authority, royal identity and emblem of sacred power. Therefore, since a Regent's appearance is almost like that of a king, she cannot be classified as a mere figurehead but as an authority. In fact, Olajubu (2012: 92) maintains that the institution of Regency can also be indicative of a matriarchal society prior to the establishment of patriarchy as the prevailing system in Yoruba land. Even so, the initiation process of a Regent in Ekiti land was described as similar if not exactly like the initiation of a king. Germane to this paper is the power conferred on *Adelé Qba* to make peace at several levels. Conflicts among her people be it men or women, (especially controversial issues that are beyond the power of quarters' chiefs) would be brought before her. During the period of her reign, it is her duty to preside over the council of the town. The men

respect her judgments and her verdict is considered as final. She took on the burden of running the affairs of the entire community and it is her responsibility to ensure peace and tranquility. This is particularly remarkable as the peak of political power in any traditional Ekiti community. It is regarded as the position of an *Qba* and the women have their own part to play in this aspect, hence an avenue for them to contribute to the peace of the community. The peak of the status of women in the traditional Ekiti palaces, therefore, is the position of a Regent known as *Adelé Qba*. The period of an interregnum is significant because that is the period a selected Ekiti princess bears on her shoulder the responsibility of making peace in the society and at the highest cadre just like a king. The position of *Adelé Qba* in the Ekiti communities, gives women prominent and visible political authority in running the affairs of their people. In addition, there were given instances when women ruled throughout as the substantive monarchs. It was discovered in Ado-Ekiti that one female ruler, *Yèyénirèwú*, ruled between 1511 and 1552. This again, brought to the fore, the effectiveness of the hidden powers of women as leaders and peacemakers.

The King's Wives- *Olori*

There are women in the palaces known as the *Èyè 'lori*. The *Olori* comprise of the wives of the reigning king, the wives of the demised kings and the wives of the princes. They all used to live in the palace in the olden days of Ekiti. They are royal queens whose responsibilities are to take care of the palace, prepare meals, take care of the king, settle disputes among themselves and in case of any ceremony or festival; the *Olori* are responsible for adding glamour by singing songs and dancing in a royal manner. It was discovered that the role of the *Olori* transcended singing and dancing in traditional occasions. Although, the glamorous identity of *Olori* can not be overlooked, another aspect discovered and worthy of documentation in this paper is their contributions to peacemaking in their various communities. Johnson's (2010: 3) opinion that the role of *Qba's* wife is to coordinate the activities of women in the town, is in accordance with this paper. According to Johnson, the *Olori* is the only one who can quietly correct the king (*kabiyesi*). As his wife, all the domestic responsibilities expected of her, she will do them. She is the domestic head of the palace.

There is a tribunal of peacemaking among the king's wives in Ekiti. The king's wives known as *Olori* operated within a system called *Àjọ Olori* (the queens' tribunal). Olaoba (1992: 6-9) described *Àjọ Olori* as a tribunal where the *Olori* meet to deliberate on issues pertaining to their affairs even as those issues affect the peace of the entire community. He maintains there are observable rules with respect to the order in which adjudicators were allowed to express their views on a given matter. He also points to the significance of the head queen as the governor of peace in the palace courtyard. The existence of the *Àjọ Olori* and its dynamic prerogatives in peacemaking is very important

among the Ekiti people. It entails the wives of a reigning king as well as the wives of the demised kings to be a member of this tribunal. During the pre-colonial times, The *Àjọ Olori* used to exist solely in the palace. The modern *Àjọ Olori*, however, now functioned beyond the four walls of the palace as the contemporary *Olori* in Ekiti now foster *Àjọ Olori* at the state level. The focus of the *Àjọ Olori* is to mediate and promote peace and orderliness as well as deliberate on their contributions towards the peace of the entire people. The *Olori* also made peace among themselves in case of any conflict. This is germane to the fact that the palace women formed part of the *Qba's* government and played various and different functions that are considered important and indispensable. In this light *Àjọ Olori* exists as a medium of maintaining law and order among the *Olori*. It is a place to deliberate on the involvement of the *Olori* in the development of the town, in support of their husbands.

It is forbidden for an *Olori* to fight her co-*Olori*. In case of any physical quarrel in the palace stead, the *Olori* involved will be immediately stripped naked and ashes will be poured around her - '*Wọ́n á ka léérú*'- (this is a form of disgrace in Ekitiland). The eldest of the remaining *Olori* would ask the others to fetch water in a mortar (this process is known as *pon omi sodo gun*) and the defaulted *Olori* will be asked to pound the water until it becomes solid. In addition to this punishment while pounding, the water must not splash on the floor, otherwise the offending *Olori* would be profoundly whipped. This punishment is perceived as a very disgraceful one for the defaulted *Olori*. The researcher discovered the essence of the punishment is to discourage fighting among the *Olori* in the palace. The *Àjọ Olori* stands to discourage grudge and quarrel among the *Olori* and in case of any, the *Àjọ* would sanction the perpetrators according to the gravity of their offence. It was revealed that punishments in the *Àjọ Olori* take the same form like the one meted out by the *Qba*. Also, It is a taboo for any *Olori* to commit adultery. Such an *Olori*, will be ex-communicated. Noteworthy is that the same offence committed by an ordinary woman in the community does not attract the same punishment. It is an abomination for an *Olori* to commit adultery. It usually signals bad omen for the entire community. It is also the duty of the *Olori* to offer prayers and sacrifices to the ancestors of the land in order to invoke peace. It thus become evident that the *Olori*, do not only mediate for peace among the people alone but also, mediate between the human and unseen forces.

The Princesses- *Ọjà*

The *Ọjà* are the daughters of both the demised and the reigning kings; they stand out by putting beads on their necks, hands and legs as a sign of royalty. They are highly respected individuals who are expected to follow the footsteps of the *Olori* in manner and attitude. A married *Ọjà*, (even if not married to a royal personality) will continue to enjoy the prestige of a princess in her lifetime. An *Ọjà*, therefore, is more than a title holder given by Oguntuyi (1979:52). Indeed, the *Ọjà* also have their peacemaking

mechanisms within and outside the palace. *Ọjà*, in the traditional Ekiti societies have the power to stop conflict on the street and she will be obeyed even by people older than her in age. It was reported that going by the virtue of her status as a royal princess and with the respect accorded her in the town; she possesses the power to make peace, even in an impromptu circumstance. Cases like theft, cheating, street fight and abuse can be handled by an *Ọjà*. Moreso, it was stated that she might preside over a case in the presence of an *Omọdẹ Owá* (palace guard) who on such occasion will have to carry her father's staff as a sign of authority for her. An *Ọjà* was discovered, however, not to be able to handle grievous issues like murder, spiritual imbalances and adultery. Similar to the rules guiding the *Olori*, fightings among the *Ọjà* is also forbidden. The name *Ọjà* is described as someone who must not quarrel.

*‘Ọjàá gbudọ a jà
Ọjà tùmọ sí
Ọni gbudọ jà’*

Meaning:

*‘Ọjà must not quarrel
Her name signifies
Someone who must not fight’*

An *Ọjà* is not expected to be involved in any form of disgraceful acts. There is hierarchical orderliness in the operatives of the *Ọjà* which correlates with the notion of Bascom that the Yoruba tradition recognises respect for seniority (1969: 21). A defaulted *Ọjà* will usually be asked by her seniors to fetch water into basket until she filled it up. This is of course, an impossible task meant to discipline her and also serve as a lesson to the others. It is noteworthy, therefore, that an *Ọjà* is not only a peacemaker but also, a peacekeeper within the palace stead and outside of it. It is thus evident that these three mentioned categories of women are responsible for peacemaking in the traditional Ekiti palaces.

THE WOMEN CENTRAL TRIBUNAL – *ÀJỌ OBÌRIN ILÈ*

The existence of general tribunal peculiar to women in Ekiti is referred to as women central tribunal (*Àjọ Obirin ilẹ*). The tribunal comprised of the quarters women chiefs and market leaders and is presided over by the head of all the women in a town popularly referred to as *Èyè’Lóbirin Ilẹ*. The *Èyè’Lóbirin Ilẹ* was described to have the final say on any form of conflict among the women in her community. It is her sole duty to make peace in the town. Noteworthy is the fact that the position of *Èyè’Lóbirin Ilẹ* is usually awarded to versatile women of valour. She must be strong, wise and vast in the law of the land. This is in accordance with the position of Bascom (1969: 33) that these women chiefs are to resolve conflicts among the women. She is also described as *Ọba Obirin* (Female king).

Her responsibilities are similar to that of *Ìyálóde* title in some other Yoruba towns. *Èyè’Lóbirin Ilẹ* is usually selected within a lineage unlike the position of *Ìyálóde* that can be conferred on a woman for her leadership qualities and integrity. Traditionally, *Iyalode* signifies the “Queen of women” and is given to the most prominent and distinguished lady in the town. (Denzer, 1994:1-31). In many traditional Yoruba cities and towns, the *Ìyálóde* commands the respect of a group of warriors and she is also the major representative of women in the traditional council where the voice of women are heard (Awe, 2001: 63). In the ancient Oyo, the *Ìyálóde* was the most senior female in the hierarchy of chiefs. However, in Ondo, it is the *Lobùn* and in Ilesa, the *Aríṣe*. She is described by Falola (1984: 108-109) as a chief to whom all the women’s palavers are brought before they are taken to the king. She is in fact a sort of queen, a person of much influence, who is looked up to with much respect. In a bid to fill in the existing gaps on the role of *Ìyálóde* in yorubaland, this paper explored the role of her equivalence in Ekiti. This study builds on the foundation layed by scholars like Denzer (1994), Mba (1982), Peel (1977: 139-165), Smith (1969) and Awe (1992) who had worked extensively on women’s status in Yoruba land. The contribution, however, lied solely on their roles in peacemaking and to occupy part of the vacuum left by Awe who mentioned that women’s role in Ekiti and Owo were yet to be studied.

Èyè’Lóbirin Ilẹ are discovered, therefore, to be women who made their most significant contributions to facilitating peace within the female community in the traditional Ekiti society. They are, in fact, the head of all the women in the community. Their roles in all its ramifications likened to that of the *Ìyálóde*. It was discovered that they have their own mechanisms aimed at the peace of their communities. The women set up their own council, similar to that of the male chiefs (*Àbálóyè*) among Ekiti men. The memberships of their council comprise of groups of wise and respected women of experience known as *Eyeloje*. The *Èyè’Lóyè* are usually selected from each quarters of a town. A quarters of a town known as *Ọgbón* would be represented by a woman at the general *Èyè’Lóbirin Ilẹ* council. The age long traditional practice discovered to be peculiar to these women in Ekiti was that they meet at five days interval to deliberate on issues pertaining to women. This practice is commonly referred to as *Ìpàdẹ Ororún* or *Àjọororún*. The responsibility of the *Èyè’Lóbirin Ilẹ* was described to be multi-farious in nature. She usually intervene whenever women are in conflict. She also makes peace within the society at large. It was discovered that whenever disputes arose, the council of women would hold a hearing of the parties in an isolated spot known as the tribunal (*Àjọ*) and after deliberation, they passed judgements. They mediated between both sides and would lay down a course of behaviour, in particular, for the party in the wrong. Furthermore, it was discovered that these women chiefs take on a similar role, when any woman behave badly in wider society. In cases of insolence, drunkenness,

delinquency, adultery and betrayal and the like, the women will handle the cases accordingly. What also becomes obvious is that their role as peacemakers goes beyond women's groups. They are also adjudged as peacemakers among the male chiefs and the *Oba*. The *Èyè 'Lóbirin Ilẹ'* have a peculiar manner of tabling the issues bordering on women and on the general well-being of the town. For instance, if she wants to convey an excited message from women to the king she may sing a song like:

'*Uré wólé dé (2x)*
Ònlyàn kọ bá fẹre
Kẹ díde ò
Ké kọhọ rẹ sókè kòbìrìn
Uré wólé déò e'

Meaning:

'Goodness has come (2x)
Whoever loves goodness
Should stand on their feet
Raising their two hands for the women
Because goodness has come'

A more critical message can inspire a dirge thus:

'*í un Ojúún rí*
Í i kun mómò jẹ
í un Ojúún rí
í kun mómò mu
í Aiyédé ní mò yìò e'

Meaning:

She said what she saw
Asked her not to eat
She said what she saw
Asked her not drink
She said Aiyede town has turned upside down.

A song like the above will arrest the attention of the *Oba* and his chiefs because it denotes a crisis that must be quickly dealt with in order to avoid escalation. The status and power of women in Ekiti in antiquity and the pre-colonial period was thus significantly reported, healthy and productive in the area of peacemaking.

WOMEN QUARTERS TRIBUNAL- *ÀJO OBÌRÌN* *ÒGBỌN*

Furthermore, the essence of the existence of quarters tribunal among Ekiti women is to deal with conflicts bothering the entire quarters. A quarter is referred to as *Ògbón* in Ekiti land. This was similar to what Llyod (1962:55) regards as hamlets (*abúlé* or *Ìletò*) while describing typical settlement patterns in Ekiti in comparison with those from Ijebu and Ondo country. An *Ògbón*

comprised of a number of family compounds and if examined carefully, were related to each other in a way. What is implied therefore is that *Ògbón* is a larger form of *Agbo Ilẹ*. The quarter's tribunal is prevailed upon by the quarter's chiefs, namely *Èyè' Ẹmòḗ*, *Èyè gún*, *Èyè 'dòfin*, *Èyè'lùléoré*, *Èyè 'ràngún*, *Èyè'gbá*. These are women title holders responsible to the quarters in Ekiti. These women are expected to be morally upright and be women of integrity. Honesty and impartiality must be their watchwords. Violent quarrel, adultery, theft and cheating are the forms of conflict usually brought to the quarter chiefs. In case of any aforementioned occurrence a witness usually serves as a crier (*Akigbe*). She will make a loud noise mentioning the name of the quarters where the conflict has occurred. For example:

"*Ìdòfin òòòòòò*"

Meaning:

The women of *Ìdòfin*!
The women will reply:
"*Órùù rùùù rùùù*"

Signifies:

"Something unpleasant has happened"

Meanwhile, the mode of summoning the women in some Ekiti towns is through the use of *Aigo* (bell). The *Aláigo* (bell ringer) will ring her bell as a signal to other women to come out and make peace. Another medium employed by some other Ekiti women is the combination of both methods whereby a female crier known as *Akigbe* or a bell ringer *Aláigo* will go round the quarters from one house to another informing them of a need to assemble and douse the tension of a conflict. For example:

'*Àjiké búrìn búrìn ó pẹmọ olúrìn ìi ké a yá bun hún lórò*
jẹ, ìi èrẹwà rere jẹ o'

Meaning;

'Ajike, out of insolence, summoned me to call upon the women of Erewa quarters'

The above example was given about Ajike, who was reputed for aggression and adultery in the *Èrẹwà* neighbourhood in Awo Ekiti. After several reports of her abuse to *Èyè'dòfin*, the *Akigbe* was employed to inform the women of the peacemaking session that would be held concerning her insolence. Peacemaking at the quarter's level was discovered to deal with more serious types of conflict as mentioned earlier. The quarter's chief is normally supported by the elderly women in the quarters in handling such cases. It is her prerogatives to moderate the peacemaking process and she also has the final judgment at the quarter's level. It became evident that she gave her judgment based on the gravity of the offence and according to the tradition of the communal system. For instance, Ajike was made to undergo indebtedness (*Elẹsinrin*). She bought

several items and livestock to appeal the elders and all the other women she had abused. Theft was also described as a punishable offence at the quarters' level thus: A woman found guilty of theft in an Ekiti quarters' court will be publicly disgraced. She will be ripped naked, she will carry what she had stolen on her head and her peers would beat her with *Lálarà* leaves (*Triumfetta cordifolia*: belongs to the *Tiliaceae*'s family). She will make sacrifices and thereafter pay back what she has stolen".

A punishment like the above was aimed towards achieving peace in the community. Theft is thus considered an offence capable of distorting the peace of the people. An offender, therefore, should not be spared but serve as scape-goat for the people. In addition, it usually serves as lessons for generations unborn as the name of a perpetrator would be sung from one generation to the other. The quarters' chiefs reportedly had the mandate to make peace among the women in their various quarters. These women known as *Obirin Ọgbón* (quarters' women) would meet on an appointed day in a week to discuss about the crucial issues in the community. In case of any quarrel among them, the women would summon the people involved and settle the case amicably sometimes without such case reaching the *Ẹyẹ 'Lóbirin Ilẹ* or the general municipal. Whatever decision the women make within their own group, however, must complement the total ethics of the whole community. They have the authority to make peace and contribute to the harmony of their community without the influence of their head. However, they must bring the reports of their activities to the general women's council at five days interval. Also, conflicts beyond the power of the quarters chiefs, would be brought to the tribunal of the *Ẹyẹ 'Lóbirin Ilẹ*. Noteworthy is that peacemaking at the quarters' level is limited to issues bothering the neighbourhood while peacemaking at the general level had to do with issues concerning the society at large.

MARKET WOMEN TRIBUNAL

There are traditional chieftains among the Ekiti women known as *Ẹyẹ' Lójà* or *Ẹyẹ'Lájé* (the head of market women). This traditional chieftain is important to the maintenance of peace in Ekiti land. In fact, there is virtually no Ekiti community without the title holder of *Ẹyẹ' Lójà*. The *Ẹyẹ' Lójà* of Ekiti, is in charge of the market square and all its activities. It is her sole duty to resolve conflicts among market women. She is also responsible for regulation of market norms and prices of goods. Noteworthy is her spiritual responsibility in the market square in order to invoke peace. *Ẹyẹ' Lójà* must be vast in the knowledge of the town. She must be very tolerant and have the capacity to lead a large number of people. She must also be vigilant and wise.

'Akoniṣiyan nít jẹ 'yé'lojà'

Meaning:

'It is only a brave woman that can become *Eyẹ 'Loja*'

Ẹyẹ' Lójà have the prerogative of maintaining law and order in the market square. She is the one to regulate the measures and prices of goods. It is her duty to manage any conflict among the traders or between the traders and the buyers. She is also reported to be working hand in hand with the palace guards.

One of the sanctions within her power is the imposition of fine as reported thus:

*'Kóbá lóni ko rúfín ọjà
Hàn a da lélésinrin
ó yóó jépo, iyò, aṣo, áádùn àbẹran'*

Meaning:

If anybody goes against the market rule
She will be fined with palm oil, salt,
clothing materials, corn cake or goat

It is discovered that such a fine is usually in material things depending on the gravity of the offence. For instance, in a case of someone selling in an inappropriate manner by cheating the people of the right quantity or by selling at a very high price, the *Ẹyẹ' Lójà* might visit the defaulter's market post unannounced and scattered all her goods as a warning to her. In essence, it was the duty of the *Ẹyẹ' Lójà* to make peace in the market place and make traders conform to market rules and etiquettes.

Furthermore, peacemaking is associated with the market sphere in Ekiti communities hence there is usually a market tribunal (*Ájọ ọjà*), presided over by the *Eyẹ' Loja* of each community. The existence of a market in Ekiti land is far beyond commercial purpose, the market is seen as a symbol of power for the reigning king, especially the king's market (*Ọjà Ọba*). The market is a meeting space for both human and the spirits. It is also important to note that peacemaking activities that bothers on an entire community usually starts from the market square. This is because the market space is likened to a stadium where everybody meets. In Ekiti performance traditions, the *Ẹyẹ' Lófi* of Ilawe Ekiti, Chief Mrs Elizabeth Odeyemi, (oral interview, 2013) who had been the *Ọba Obirin* of Ilawe since 1974, revealed the market domain was an amphitheater that also serves as the breeding ground for the simmering of local rage, and the organisation of articulate activism to speak truth to power. According to her, whenever wrath and outrage stewed among women in the market, they organised themselves into fluid conduits of information, strategies, and tactics for absorbing the pain and healing the injury by proactively engaging in strategic subversion. Before matters degenerated to the point of confusion and conflict, the women would send representatives led by the head of women to the king to address the problem and negotiate compromise. However, if the authority ignore them or refuse to negotiate, while the injury remained untreated and the situation continued to degenerate, the women would raise their activism to the second level. This involved a march by respected and elderly women, in full ceremonial

regalia (mostly in white robe) to the king's palace. At this point, wise monarchs would always find the means to assuage the matter, soothe the angry women with cool words, and take effective actions to address their injuries. At various times, some ill-advised monarchs had proved difficult, and, at their own peril, refused to meet with the representatives of the women, or declined to care for their concerns. Such careless acts precipitated disaster. Once the threats were not handled with appropriate caution, the women would move to the final stage of the peacemaking creative drama with a body art performance. Such a performance in the nude may start from the central market, a shrine, dedicated to a female divinity, or any designated meeting point announced by the head of the women. Depending on their decision, they may be fully naked, or tie a white wrapper around their waists to expose their breasts. Whenever women were fully naked, they would paint their bodies white with kaolin, or limit the body painting to only a few leaders, usually the priestesses of prominent Ekiti female divinities, such as *Ọṣun*, *Ọgbèsè*, *Yemoja* and *Ọrinláṣe*. On special occasions, a virgin might lead the procession, with a load filled with curses, incantations, herbs, and other semi-logical items concealed in pot, gourd, or wooden tray, balanced on her head. As the procession would head towards the king's palace, the women usually chanted a few songs and incantations in the pattern of lead chanter and chorus. In essence, market women leader have numerous important roles and functions to carry out concerning peacemaking in Ekiti. This goes beyond her already made known responsibilities by various scholars as a commercial leader among women. She was discovered to also play the role of peacemaker between her subjects. Many of her peacemaking roles conferred a great deal of power and respect to her in the traditional Ekiti communities.

WOMEN DOMESTIC TRIBUNAL- *ÀJỌ OBÌRÌN ILÉ*

There are women reported to be responsible for peacemaking at the homestead. These women are usually the eldest in the compound, the mothers-in-law, the first wife in a family and the first daughter in a compound. Old age among Ekiti women is an indication of wisdom and experience, both of which are considered crucial elements for peaceful living. Also embedded within the notion of old age is the assumption of integrity and responsibility, which explained why the women are in charge of peacemaking in the traditional Ekiti compounds. The instruments employed for peacemaking by these women are cross-examination, maxims and proverbs, praise poems, stories and songs. Also more serious instruments such as oath-taking, ordeal placements, the invocation of the spirits of truth-telling (*òtító ọmọ odùdurwà*), the ancestors (*alálẹ̀, àbá, yẹyẹ*) and the ties that bind a lineage (*alájobí*) may be applied to cases of witchcraft and murder. In the domestic sphere, the sight of a wife is a sign of peace because a wife is not expected to be adulterous, greedy, dirty, or possess bad manners since all these attributes are believed to trigger crisis in the domestic

arena. It was noted that issues like envy and discontentment might breed conflict between co-wives living in a compound. A wife, however, is forbidden to fight her co-wives. Since conflict is inevitable, a wife is expected to facilitate the quick reconciliation through dialogue and sometimes by reporting the matter to the senior wife in order for peace to reign in the compound. It is forbidden for a wife to publicly fight with her husband. Abusive songs in the homestead (as noted in some traditional Yoruba societies) are not acceptable in traditional Ekiti family. It is the role of mothers to maintain peace and orderliness between the children. These attributes of women are germane to Mba's identification of pre-colonial women as pacifiers and purifiers whose concerns are their moral characters and economic well-being of their families and communities (1982:299). Women are participants in and contributors to peacemaking in their towns by reinforcing peace in their various homes. This discovery is thus contradictory to Ardener's (1977: 22-27) opinion that the perception of women as inferior is traditional in African continent.

What defines a 'domestic tribunal' is a family compound – *Agbo Ilé*. This is what Llyod (1962:191) described as (*idilé* or *ẹbí*) – the main patrilineage corporate group. Falola (1984: 19) described this tribunal as the lowest, informal type of court where no fines are charged. This study, however, discovered another form of domestic tribunal in Ekiti, peculiar to the women known as the *Àjọ Obirin Ilé*. The findings of this study also harmonised with the idea of kinship solidarity as mentioned by Lloyd (1970: 75-108). What was discovered, however, was that there could be charging of fines if need be, in the process of making peace. The first identified key factor of a domestic tribunal is the *Akodi*. This is the space used for the purpose of litigation in a compound. The second key factor is the presence of an ancestral tomb to serve as witness to the case. The third key factor was the concept of *Alájobí* (family ties) as noted by (Akinsola 2013: 19). The eldest among the women usually serve as the judge. The qualifications to be a judge over a domestic conflict was given thus: "She must be an elderly person, experienced and vast in knowledge and wisdom".

This study found out the existence of a mini-tribunal in the traditional domestic arena of the Ekiti communities, where the affairs of women are undertaken. As mentioned earlier, the court precedence is handled by an *Ìyálẹ̀* who, by her status in the community could also be referred to as the eldest (*Iye*) in the family compound. She would make the conflicting parties express their grievances while on their knees. She awards blames if there is any, and emphasises on the importance of peace, using her past experiences as tools. It was discovered that, most times, cases like this are usually resolved easily due to what is referred to as *Ìbòwòfágà* (respect for the elders). The word 'elders' in this context, is not limited to the presence of the elderly women. It also referred to the family ancestors. The outcome of this method of peacemaking have been adjudged successful due to the awe and respect given to the

elders in a family. In addition, it was noted that the celebration of peace usually accompany the success of litigation. The litigants would prepare fowls for the entire family members accompanied with pounded yam and Palm wine. It was reported that in the olden days if any woman was found guilty of an offence in a compound, the eldest woman in the compound would climb a platform and ring a bell while calling upon other women in the quarters thus:

The woman: *Òkè bédó òdòò*. (calling on the women of Oke bedo)

Other women: *Ó rìììì*. (Meaning: we can hear the call and are ready to answer)

The above slogan was meant to signal to the women that something unworthy had happened in the neighbourhood. The women would then gather and accord a disciplinary measure against the alleged women based on the gravity of their offence. The peacemaking process is usually carried out at the *Aède* except if there are underlying issues which are beyond the power of the gathering women. The common sanction for co-wives fighting on trivial matters is for them to be fined. This is popularly referred to as *Elésinrin* among the Ekiti people. The women would be fined a list of edible and material things to be brought before the other women before the dawn of the day. The list could include among other things, palm oil, corn meal, fowl, goat, a keg of palm oil and piece of cloth. All the materials brought would be shared among other women. This punitive measure was traditionally used to serve as a warning to other women in the town to maintain domestic peace. Furthermore, it was found out that a woman found stealing in pre-colonial Ekiti might be ripped naked by her peers while they beat her with leaves stalk. Derogatory songs would accompany her to the market square where she would be publicly apprehended for her misdeeds. The same went for any woman found in the act of committing adultery. This was the practice in almost all the Ekiti towns. An example of such derogatory songs was presented below:

*‘Ké róni bawí
È ra dójú tégbé rẹ
Kó róni bawí
Sìò’*

Meaning:

If she has a good mentor
She would not have disgraced her peers
If she has a good mentor
What a shame

The above song denotes the fact that a woman who had committed a grievous offence such as adultery and stealing had not only disgraced herself. She had also disgraced her peer group, her mother and her family as a whole. The word ‘mentor’ in the song referred to her family members and her mother in particular. This is germane to Johnson’s (2010: 115) description of a mother in Yoruba land as a mentor.

6. Conclusions

It is thus evident that the role of a woman goes beyond the domestic sphere in the traditional Ekiti society. Indeed, the vital role of men does not lead to an imposition of the male on the female, It rather served to enhance the principle of duality evident in creation. Men and women in Ekiti were said to have played complementary roles during pre-colonial era. In traditional Ekiti, a conflict between a man and a woman is given an unsentimental judgement since gender has nothing to do with being right or wrong. It becomes evident, however, that the women have their own political groups where they deliberate on issues pertaining to the peace of the community. This justifies Sudarkasa’s (2005:29) point of view that women of old were outside the home as well as in it. In essence, the role of women in peacemaking in the traditional settings is such that encompass all the spheres of life. The acceptability of the traditional women at the table of diplomatic, economic, and political leadership - who take with them their natural feminine strengths of compassion, empathy, and unconditional love of old times – is marked with peace taking place. This means that women are generous, hospitable, friendly, caring and compassionate and they shared what they have. Women maintain the peacemaking and reconciliation mechanisms which also serve as institutions for maintaining law and order within the society. These mechanisms pre-dated colonialism and some of them continue to exist and function till today. The women undoubtedly place a high value on communal life, maintaining positive relations within the society. What is observable is that women perceive peacemaking as a collective task in which everyone should be involved. A dispute between fellow members of a society is thus perceived not merely as a matter of curiosity with regards to the affairs of one’s neighbour; in a very real sense, an emerging conflict that affects the whole community. It thus becomes evident that authentic Ekiti matriarchy have a very clear message about social justice as it is couched in a very powerful goddess-based religion, a strong ideology of motherhood, a hard-core concept of womanhood and a general moral principle of love. This is opposed to imperialist patriarchy which has a basic masculinise ideology that celebrates violence, valour, conquest and power in varying degrees, and which denied women their rights, subjugating and properticising them in a strict hierarchical system of family. On the other hand, the traditional Ekiti matriarchy and patriarchy co-existed in harmony. In other words, gender in Ekiti societies is not only a means of dividing, but also a means of integrating and co-opting in dynamic ways that enabled stability and order based on justice, equity and fairness. This enables a system where women’s power becomes based on the centrality of their social role in relation to men, and men’s general belief in the sacredness of women as mothers. The status of women in peacemaking is significant because it is connected to the concern for human lives, especially of the

children, but also for themselves and their male counterparts. The women use a varied set of non-violent techniques, acts and strategies which are trans-political, often trans-communities and are aimed at reaching other women in the neighbourhood. The positions of authority as traditional chiefs which exist for the women are indicative of the cultural values, norms and beliefs which, when combined, give a pride of place to gender identity and social cohesion needed for the peaceful and crisis-free existence of the people while reducing social exclusion or ostracism. The crux of opinion here is that women's existence in Ekiti communities and their contributions to peacemaking are based on ethics of care and concern that is rooted in their nature, which are tolerant of difference, collaborative, non-violent and, as such, peaceful. Their peaceful activism and agency are rooted in a broader communal ideology, which operated on the basis of the mutuality of human interests through a web of relationships where everyone play their parts for the good of the collective and the validation of the personal. Nonetheless, Ekiti women never see or place themselves in a dichotomous relationship with men, rather, gender relations are fluid, dynamic and complementary in difference as espoused. Therefore, it is seen as prudent and wise to ensure the well-being of both men and women if the successful survival of humans was to continue.

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