




Women's Participation in the AU's Peace and Security Architecture: A Look at Gender Relations in Conflict Management in Africa

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Abstract

60 years after the march towards unity, Africa is still driven by a multitude of conflicts, yet, the vision of the pan-African organization, which is the African Union (AU), through Agenda 2063, aspires to an “Africa living in peace and security”. The AU Peace and Security Council, which is the AU's decision-making body on security issues, has set up a key pillar: the African Peace and Security Architecture. Given the crucial importance of this architecture for the continent, women should be involved at all levels. This institution is therefore responsible for ensuring the full participation and representation of women in the peace process. The widespread of sexual violence committed against women during armed conflicts reflects a denial of their rights and reinforces their marginal position. The many contemporary misogynistic meanings expressed in social and political usage ignore the matriarchal basis of African societies. In line with the UN's vision, notably Resolution 1325, the AU peace and security architecture is exercising its mandate to involve women in peace and security strategies. From a feminist perspective, cleansed of the dross of what Pierre Bourdieu called “masculine domination”, this topic provides an opportunity to question and even deconstruct the positivist theories that are prevalent today. How can women's leadership contribute to sustainable peace and security in Africa? The ambition of this research is



therefore to explore social and power relations between men and women. In a context where women are the main victims of armed conflict, it would be crucial to get them more involved in peace-building mechanisms.

Drawing on post-positivist approaches, especially post-colonial feminism as the main theory, this research intends to examine the socio-cultural relationships involved in the quest for peace regarding a gender perspective in the pre-colonial African Society and analyse international and regional mechanisms for women's participation in the AU's security architecture.

Keywords: women, African Union, Peace and Security Architecture, social relations, gender.

Introduction

Securing the international scene requires the involvement of women yet the general perception in the international system perpetuates patriarchal norms that glorify 'male domination' (Bourdieu 1998). Fionnuala Aolain argues that the exclusion of women from the security field is not solely explained by the social and cultural norms of post-conflict countries, but by the importation of patriarchal values from international actors (Aolain 2013). The role of women in conflict prevention and even management is either barely visible, or not sufficiently highlighted and thus, women's key role in the political-institutional game in the construction of societies seems to be quickly forgotten. The situation of women should no longer be analysed as a static reality, but as a dynamic that evolves over time and space (Sadiki 2008). The marginalisation of women, generally due to social constructs, has given rise to gender issues. Against a backdrop of masculinization of security-related research topics, mechanisms have been set up to recognise the role of women. Resolution 1325 of the United Nations Security Council, which is a major international legal instrument on the involvement of women in conflict management, is essential for the implication of women in peace process. In fact, the Resolution is a convention that contributes to the protection and promotion of women's

rights and its scope is more precise, as its implementation mandate focuses specifically on the involvement of women in peace and security strategies, making it the cornerstone of women's participation in the peace mechanism.

There is a large number of women who suffer gender-based violence and oppression of many kinds during conflict and the major hotbeds of conflict are also places where violence against women is perpetrated. For instance, in Rwanda, between 250,000 and 500,000 women were raped during the genocide; in Sierra Leone, 53% of women and girls displaced by the war were sexual victims; in Burundi, around 19% of adolescent girls and women are said to have been victims of sexual violence (Amesty International 2004). In the Democratic Republic of Congo, for every one woman in three living in conflict zones, is said to have been a victim of rape and in Darfur, widespread and systematic rape is used as a means of ethnic cleansing (Nduwimana 2008:54). This structural violence, which is explained by the inability of women to access social resources, is the result of multiple social constructs and habits that have emerged over time. It is for this reason that the former Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, rightly asserts that: "Efforts to resolve conflicts and tackle their root causes will succeed only if we empower all those who have suffered the damaging effects, including and especially women" Anan (2003). Therefore, the empowerment of women will help to resolve conflicts and promote peace, not only because they are peaceful as we might believe from socio-biological outpourings, but because they know the cost of war (Onyejekwe 2005: 203) given the many atrocities of which they are victims.

Gender is a fundamental concept for understanding systems of asymmetrical relations and hierarchies based on a gendered social order. From a more analytical perspective, understanding the concept of women means "being attentive to the many meanings expressed in the social and political uses of this category of perception and action" (Sindjoun & Owona Nguini 2000). Therefore, it follows that all the elements relating to male domination stem from social constructs and societal habits. In the context of masculinisation of research

subjects, relating to the place of women in conflict resolution mechanisms, it is important to examine the position of women in times of conflict, to explore the implementation of their protection and to examine the dynamics of their inclusion in the peace process. The sex-specific distinction, which refers to the fact that women are discriminated against because of their sex, reinforces their marginalisation in conflict resolution. The patriarchal structure in which men generally hold privileged positions reflects the social reality in Africa. Male domination stems from social perceptions and representations relating to the sexual division of roles within society, which are at the root of men's omnipotence.

From this perspective, social configuration makes it possible to highlight the mechanisms for promoting women in peace management within the peace and security architecture and given the crucial importance of this architecture for the continent, it is important to reconsider the place of women in this mechanism. The under-representation of women in conflict resolution mechanisms raises the question: how can women's participation contribute more to building peace and security in Africa? This study is based on post-positivist approaches, in particular post-colonial feminism. This paradigm offers the possibility to analyse the specific characteristics of African women, while other feminisms such as liberal and radical feminism, see women as members of a homogenous group (Balzacq 2016). There is a hegemonic desire for universalisation (Sow 2011:52) on the part of other Western feminisms, which establish an ethnocentric universalism with the white Western woman as the reference figure. In so doing, these feminisms obliterate the particularity of women belonging to other races, from other less privileged regions of the globe. In the name of cultural difference, the historicity of gender relations and the multiplication of forms of domination, post-colonial feminists have demanded that analyses of their right to define the terms of their own struggle should be put into perspective. That is why they reject the inherent desire for universalization of other feminisms perceived as hegemonic (Sow 2011). This study aims

to analyse the position of women in the architecture of peace and security, considering the African dimension of women.

The interest of such a study lies in its analytical reinvestment in the role of women in conflict resolution by looking at the deconstruction of 'male domination'. The question of peace and security is concerning for "politicians", who traditionally, are the leading players in security issues however, the heuristic contribution of this study requires us to focus on women in order to explain gender dynamics that at first glance, appears discriminatory. By focusing on women as victims of violence during armed conflicts, the main aim of this study is to provide an account of the long-term power relations that exist in the construction of peace in Africa. In order to better support the argument, we will examine the social relations observed in the dynamics of peace in Africa and examine mechanisms for the promotion and participation of women in conflict management.

Social and power relations of gender in peace dynamics in Africa

The universalization of Western specificities does not always seem to fit in with the experience of African societies and thus it is imperative for African women to state and differentiate their theoretical and other positions (Salami 2024). Patriarchy is defined as a culture based on the binarity and hierarchy of the sexes (Brugère 2020). From then on, the universalisation of patriarchy, which is the main motive for male domination, emerged and was accentuated in Africa through contact with other civilizations and religions (Emeka 2023:1). On the basis of these definitions, it is appropriate to examine the organisational structure of matriarchal societies in pre-colonial Africa before considering the transformation of this structure driven by the rise of patriarchy.

Retrospective views on the place of women in African civilization

The observation that Africa has always been modulated by the patriarchal system seems erroneous, however, to better understand how these societies function, it is important to place them in the context of a long history. This study explores gender issues by considering matriarchy as a structural element of African civilisation. Matriarchy etymologically, refers to mater in Latin, meaning mother and arché in Greek, meaning command and the matriarchal system, which is a system where old women have authority over the population, gave women a place of honour and implied gender equality. The matriarchal system is marked by collaboration and harmonious development of both sexes as well as by a certain level of female superiority in society due to socio-economic conditions. Moreover, in the neolithic religions, there were female divinities, including earlier and relative examples such as the mother goddess of the Igbos called Ani or Ana Waresa (Aouaa 2017). In Ancient Egypt, women took part in the running of public affairs through a women's assembly, which sat separately but enjoyed prerogatives similar to those of the men's assembly (Anta Diop 1974:74). This explains the dominant and important role played by women in the management of society's political, military and even religious affairs including traditional Africa.

The history of Africa is punctuated by women's struggles, both individually and collectively. This demonstrates their long-standing commitment to the struggles of society resulting in the emergence of women warriors, rulers of kingdoms and women of great influence in the religious sphere proving that the exercise of political power by women in ancient Africa was a reality. In North Africa, for example, Queen Saba of Ethiopia was one of the most powerful women in Africa (Adamu 2009). Queen Shaba had the qualities that made her a charismatic ruler and an empress of great stature. Descended from the Abyssinian kin of Yemen, the queen ruled a territory whose reign extended as far as Yemen (Nanjira 2010). Also in Ethiopia, Empress Menetewab (1720-1770) assumed the regency in favour of her son on the death of her husband in 1730. Thereafter, the king left the governance of the empire to her even after he reached ruling

age. When her son died, she continued to hold the authority on the basis of family rights but was ousted from power by another bid for the throne. It was during this period that she met a European traveller by the name of James Bruce, who encouraged her to write her memoirs (Vidrovitch 1997).

Moreover, ancient Egypt has the gold medal when it comes to promoting the rights and respect of women. The most relevant explanation for this, relates not only to the matrilineal system in force in their political formation, but also to the strict rules of the *Mâat* (Nanjira, 2010). One of the most famous figures was Queen Cleopatra who ruled Egypt from 69 to 30 BC, for 39 years and was then succeeded by Pharaoh Meritneith (2952-2932 BC) (Nanjira, 2010). This powerful queen came to power during the period when it had been established in Egypt that women could rule and had inalienable inheritance rights. She succeeded Pharaoh Zoser and became the third ruler of Egypt's first dynasty by first acting as regent for her son and then later exercised power on her own behalf. The same applies to Queen Ni-Maat-Hepi, who, as an Egyptian princess, was regent to her son Pharaoh Djoser (Nanjira, 2010). From the above, it is clear women received political training and they wielded power in North Africa, evidenced through them being empresses and queens.

Central and West Africa also had women with proven political power. In Ghana, the activism of Queen Yaa Asantewaa (1840-1921) was evident in her resistance to British colonisation. With the help of a well-executed strategy, the Asantewaa queen secretly prepared physical and spiritual training through a call to battle and this heroic act enabled her to win the battle against the British in the early 1900s. The Amazons of Dahomey and their warrior army were also valiant women soldiers in pre-colonial Africa. In Angola, they have witnessed the fierce fighting spirit of a woman called Anne Njinga. This woman went down in history for having resisted Portugal's colonisation of Angola in the 17th century for some forty years (Cavazzi de Montecuccolo 2010). From 1624 to 1663, she fought, arms in hand, against the Portuguese conquest of the Ndongo kingdom, which had been ruled for generations by her family. A warrior

queen, she defended her sovereignty until her death at the age of 82. This queen became a symbol of resistance celebrated not only in her own country, but also in the black communities of Brazil and the United States. Since the 17th century, her memory has been perpetuated by documentary and fictional works, websites, music, theatre and various cultural productions (Cavazzi de Montecuccolo 2010).

In Southern Africa, women also played an important political and military role in the Zulu kingdom. It has been recorded that King Shaka, who is considered the great warrior of Africa, had as many men as women in his army by the time the colonisers arrived. The first Zulu princess to play a political role was Princess Mkabayi, the elder sister of King Senzangakhona (Shamase 2014), who was the father of three Zulu chiefs. In 1780, she took over her brother's regency during his childhood and became the confidante of one of his sisters, Nandi (Vidrovitch 1997:37). In East Africa also, precisely in Kenya, many women contributed to the Mau-Mau revolt in the 1950s (Wanjiru 2022).

In southern societies, everything to do with the mother is sacred; her authority is virtually unlimited (Anta Diop 1960) and the hypothesis that matriarchy is a structural element of African civilization contributes to social solidarity and, in turn, to the empowerment of women. Suivant la thèse de Cheick Anta Diop, les sociétés africaines étaient essentiellement matriarcales. C'est l'arrivée des religions monothéistes d'une part et du colonialisme européen d'autre part qui a perturbé une organisation sociale dans laquelle la femme détenait une place centrale sinon plus importante que celle de l'homme (Anta Diop 1960). As a result of the matriarchal system, Africans, prior to any foreign influence, had accorded women a place of choice. This leads us to understand that the sexist ideology is not universal, a fact that tends to challenge the dominant theses of Western-based types of feminism such as radical feminism. While relations between the sexes in Africa used to enjoy a positive complementarity, the changes that have occurred in the political formations of African States, particularly regarding

their contact with the outside world, have changed the perception of women.

Colonisation and the advent of Christianity as factors favouring the rise of the patriarchy in Africa

Cultural differences and the historical nature of gender relations are factors that have led to a multiple forms of domination. Africa's contact with the outside world has led to an upheaval in gender relations that has gradually resulted in the subordination of women. The typical Indo-European history reveals a patriarchal form of family life. The economic role of women was reduced to the strict minimum, as their main function was to procreate (Anta Diop 1960:29) and they were reduced to a burden that the man had to carry.. These considerations, revealed by Anta Diop (1960:29), explain the fate of women in Indo-European society . Women were isolated in a separate part of the house, to keep out of sight of men and, above all, strangers which reflects that their position was similar to that of slaves.

Indeed, the factors that contributed to the rise of patriarchy in Africa had to do with the capitalist system which includes religion. As Eliade (1976) noted, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam were themselves developed on soil rich in beliefs, spirituality, mysticism and piety. As an important factor in structuring social life, religion creates norms that tend to redefine masculine and feminine, in response to the need for "normativity, reassurance of identity and certainty of otherness" (Rochefort 2007:29). In this way, religious fundamentalism perpetuates a structuring of power and, as a result, an unequal hierarchy based on gender, keeping women in a subordinate position. The exclusion of women from the labour market also contributes to reducing the place of women in society which is the reason why the capitalist mining industry was dependent on the marginal position of women (Mokoena 2020).

Firstly, Africa's contact with other civilizations has led it to believe in and accommodate religions such as Islam that were not initially its own. Muslim law was modelled on the tribal and patriarchal model that was dominant at the time, based

on the pre-eminence of the agnatic lineage group and on male kinship and the privilege of masculinity. This law originated in Islam for the needs of the nascent community, included pre-Islamic customs, those of Semitic groups and the Talmudic group (Mbow 2005). Thus, monotheistic religions attribute a minor place to women in their sacred texts and generally in the sacred imagination of these religions as well. As a result, rights and duties are based on a sexual division of roles, giving pre-eminence to fathers, husbands, brothers and sons thus subjecting women to male control. Despite this rigid vision, this model has been preserved and solidified over time. Today, this model still persists in its traditional institutions and values: polygamy, repudiation, matrimonial guardianship, unequal inheritance and the duty to obey the societies in which it is practiced. Despite changes of all kinds, women's issues have remained a reserved domain where no one can enter without authorization (Mbow 2005).

Secondly, colonization brought large waves of Christianity to Africa. Although Portuguese Catholic evangelization took its first steps in the Kingdom of Congo at the end of the XV century, the Christianization of Africa really got underway at the end of the XVIII century (Zorn 2014). The rise of patriarchy in Africa was therefore visible during colonization, because this was the social system that prevailed in the West (Resta 2012) which is why the West has never accorded women an enviable status in society. The primacy of men meant that the fate of women was comparable to that of animals, and they were obliged or even restricted to performing only domestic and household tasks. It was this system that was extended to the whole of Europe and the United States and through colonization to the whole world. This is why Marèma Touré considers patriarchy as one of the prominent sources of disadvantage of women on the African continent (Touré 2017).

During the colonial period, the colonizers were administrators who worked to transform the African continent and unfortunately, the enviable place that African women had in society was not adequately appreciated. The position of women in society since ancient times, as political leaders, was

misinterpreted by colonial administrators. Women who ruled during the colonial period, particularly in classical antiquity, were women of strong character, powerful, efficient, competent and highly influential as queens and empresses (Nanjira 2010). Colonial governance mechanisms did more to impose male control over women's sexuality and labour. In this way, colonial power nipped in the bud the few avenues open for women to escape male domination, its concern being to create a public space managed by men (Mouiche 2005). The post-colonial period is grappling with this mixed legacy of both Western misogynies induced by colonization as well as matriarchal practices encouraging or giving women a place of choice in society. Since men are superior to women in Western society, women were demoted to servile positions in Africa (Nanjira 2010). Colonization was fundamentally patriarchal in nature, subverting relations of pre-colonial Africa, which gave women an important place through matriarchy and the matrilineal system of transmission of rights (Mbow 2005).

The complementarity they once enjoyed, enabling them to play a political role, seems to have been destroyed by colonization through a gender division.. Similarly, her role became increasingly marginal in the economic sphere and because of these practices, which gradually became habits, a complex developed concerning the place of women in society. Women thus became nothing more than sex objects for men and domestic workers. In terms of gender relations on the continent, women once had great political power and security, however, the Islamization of Africa, as well as contact with the West and Christianization of Africa, meant that most of the fundamental decisions relating to their security and access to material resources were taken by men (Haeri & Puechguirbal 2010). To understand the changes, continuities and renewals at work in contemporary African societies, it is essential to re-examine women's participation in conflict management mechanisms.

African mechanisms for the promotion and participation of women in conflict management

The general observation that women are not involved in political affairs has led some authors, like Ann Tickner, to argue that the international scene or the international system is a domain reserved for men. It is a world of diplomats, military officers and international civil servants that are all men (Ticker 1992). Ticker's comments were made more than three decades ago and some progress has been made, however, women's involvement in security management is still minimal. Although women are the most affected by conflicts, they often find themselves excluded from decisions relating to peace and security. It was against this backdrop that the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 of 31 October 2000 on the participation of women in conflict management and similarly the AU has produced standards for the involvement of women in conflict management. Therefore,, the first aim of this section is to examine the mechanisms for women's participation in conflict management at an international and regional level. Secondly, it aims at analysing the fundamentals of African civilization by drawing on African resources and knowledge to boost the inclusion of women in conflict management.

Institutional and normative frameworks towards the participation of women in peacebuilding process at the international and regional level

The global picture shows that women are regularly under-represented in peace processes. According to UN Women statistics, 28% of peace agreements contained stipulations on the role of women and over the last 25 years, only 2% of mediators and 8% of negotiators have been women. Endowed with the intrinsic values of peace, women are a resource that is insufficiently used. They should not just be at the negotiating table to fill quotas but must effectively represent their communities (UN 2024). It therefore appears that the role of women in conflict management is recognized but rarely visible.

Indeed, the normative frameworks on issues of peace and security can be traced back to 1969, when the Commission on the Status of Women examined the question of protecting women and children in emergency and conflict situations. One of the great moments in the history of women's normative frameworks was the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979. It was at the Beijing Conference in 1995, however, that the development of a UN policy on women, peace and security took shape. Five years later, resolution 1325, which was adopted unanimously by the Security Council, formed the cornerstone of what is now known as the "women, peace and security agenda" (Doucy 2022:2). Following Resolution 1325, a myriad of international norms relating to women, peace and security were adopted like the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1820 of June 2008 on sexual violence and international crimes which was followed by the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1888 of September 2009 which aimed to strengthen Resolution 1820 against conflict-related sexual violence. Resolution 1889 of October 2009 was also adopted which focused on strengthening the implementation and monitoring of Resolution 1325. As of 2010, the following resolutions have been adopted; i) United Nations Security Council Resolution 1960 of December 2010 which relates to the creation of an accountability system to end conflict-related sexual violence. The United Nations Security Council Resolution 2106 of June 2013 focused on the accountability of UN bodies in the fight against impunity for sexual crimes and Resolution 2242 of October 2015 focused on the role of women, peace and security issues.

The AU's normative framework for promoting women's rights is part of the general framework of conventions established by the universal organization which is the United Nations organization (UN). As an international organization, the African Union (AU) stands "for equality between men and women and the empowerment of women, and more specifically for the right of women to participate in political and public life" (Nze Bekale 2023:2). As far as the normative and institutional

frameworks relating to women, peace and security are concerned, the continental organization had already begun to normalize the role of women when its fundamental texts were drawn up and has continued to do so since then through the introduction of legal provisions.

Based on the history of social relations between the sexes, normative mechanisms help to highlight the heavy weight of the gender variable in the conduct of conflicts on an international scale. The issue of peace and security in Africa became normative with the advent of the AU. Under the OAU (Organization of African Unity), security arrangements were ad hoc mechanisms. The AU Peace and Security Council which was set up in 2003, is responsible for setting security standards on the continent. Accordingly, the Maputo Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women was adopted in 2003 and is in line with the spirit of Resolution 1325 which is intended to be the "mother resolution" on accountability in peace and security. Nicola Pratt and Sophie Richter-Devroe argue that Resolution 1325 has become the Security Council's main instrument for defending and promoting the status of women (Pratt & Richter-Devroe, 2011) and thus is the cornerstone of the international normative framework on women, peace and security.

In its Constitutive Act, the AU paid particular attention to empowering women in the continent (AU 2000). By proclaiming its commitment to the principle of gender equality and equity, the AU gives women opportunities for greater participation in decision-making at national, sub-regional and regional levels. According to the Constitutive Act, this organization is committed to respect the principle of gender equality in the composition of its organs and institutions. The implementation of this policy orientation also concerns the area of peace and security in relation to women. Thus, conflict prevention inevitably requires greater participation of women (Hill 2003). It is obvious, however, that the articles of the Protocol Relating to the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the AU, considered by Delphine Lecoutre as 'the keystones of the AU' (Lecoutre, 2004), are presented as 'gender-neutral' bodies. The legal provisions

of this instrument, mark the institutionalization of collective security by the AU and, does not take into account the gender dimension in the composition of the PSC as well as its role in the conflict management process (Nze Bekale, 2023:5). For example, the Protocol establishing the PSC makes no mention of the need for female representation and participation in the performance of the body's duties (Jorge 2013), however, the PSC states that women are not institutionally involved in civil society which limits their leadership role. This text minimizes the status of women and, by extension, makes women's place in this security mechanism incidental. Contrary to the provisions of its Constitutive Act, the AU, through the PSC, is raising ambiguity about its principle of parity between men and women.

Moreover, the Protocol to the African Union Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism also appears to be a gender-insensitive text. No reference is made to women and the ways in which they are affected by violent phenomena (Nze Bekale 2023). Support for women in political processes in post-conflict countries needs to be strengthened so that they can have an influence on conflict prevention, peace-making and reconstruction (UNECA 2022). This has led some analysts to argue that the existence of legal frameworks, policies and institutions, as well as the presence of women in the security sector, are not enough (Hendricks 2020:4).

The institutional framework for the protection of women in Africa is the Protocol on the Rights of Women which was adopted on 11 July 2003 in Maputo. It urges the organization's Member States to take "all appropriate measures to ensure increased participation of women: in peace education programs and in the culture of peace; in mechanisms and processes for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts " (Maputo Protocol 2003). This act reiterates the desire to make the issue of women and security an essential part of its agenda and this provision rectifies the shortcomings of the PSC protocol in terms of women's participation. The implementation of these texts, however, does not always follow as the voice of women in conflict prevention and peace-making is often barely heard and they hardly participate in the peace process. This is proven by

how, only 4% of parliamentary seats were reserved for women in conflict and post-conflict zones in 2015 (Nze Bekale 2022). Moving towards full and meaningful participation of women is crucial to the adoption of lasting and sustainable solutions in peace processes.

The AU's strategies for the advancement of women can also be seen in the normative and institutional framework known as Agenda 2063. Indeed, the AU emphasizes the fully participatory and collective nature of Agenda 2063 and insists on its full ownership by all actors in society, foremost being the youth and women (Gambotti 2015). Aspiration 6 of this agenda, entitled 'an Africa whose development is centred on its citizens', is based on the potential of its people, in particular its women and young people. The aim is to ensure parity between men and women in the distribution of roles and the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against women. Reform of the security sector in Africa must be guided towards the inclusion and full participation of men and women by emphasizing gender parity. It is to this end that the Office of the Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security has formulated a continental results framework to monitor the implementation of African and international instruments on women, peace and security by AU Member States" (AU 2019:2).

With this in mind, the Women, Peace and Security Programme was launched in 2015, with a view to develop effective strategies to advance the Agenda and mainstream gender in Africa's peace and security architecture. In addition, the institutional framework annexed to the AU's peace and security architecture relating to women, peace and security led to the creation of the Pan-African Women's Network for Conflict Prevention and Mediation in 2017 (AU 2018) whose aim is to mainstream gender into the continental peace and security agenda by protecting women in times of conflict and involving women in peace-making negotiations. This ambitious and innovative network, also known as 'FemWise-Africa', is an auxiliary mechanism of the Panel of the Wise and the Pan-African Network of the Wise (PanWise). This is a part of a strategy to promote policies aimed at reducing the gap

in the implementation of commitments to include women in peace processes and proves that the AU is committed to placing women at the forefront of conflict resolution.

From the above, the prevalence of norms and institutional frameworks about women, peace and security is a new configuration of the AU. Gender equality, which is a question of power, reflects a stated desire to involve women in peace processes and increasing their participation in peace is an expression of their growing power. The institutionalization and standardization of promotion frameworks, however, should be based more on endogenous practices. By giving women remarkable political power, as it was the case in ancient Africa, we could capitalize more on women's participation in peacekeeping.

Integration of African knowledge for a more efficient inclusion of women in the quest for peace

The role of women in conflict prevention and resolution in ancient societies was governed by codes of conduct based on well-structured regulatory mechanisms in which women played a key role. In African societies, we find women (queen-mothers) who ascended to high-reigning positions when the king was still too young to rule, when there was no king to rule or ruled by themselves (Ogbomo & Ogbomo 1993). In the current? circumstances, it is important to return to the earlier resources and endogenous conflict resolution mechanisms such as the "Takumbeng" which is a peaceful conflict resolution method used by old women in the North-West region of Cameroon that put women at the centre of any negotiation (ICG 2022:16). This would not only about women reaching the quotas within international bodies, but about them actually participating in decision-making.

Africa has a rich cultural heritage, with texts that already provided for the organization of political life. The Charter of Mandé, adopted in 1236 by Emperor Soundjata Keita of Mandé of Mali, is thought to be one of the oldest constitutional texts in Africa (Fofana & Cissé 2003). It was adopted a few years after the Magna Carta of 1215 and is often presented as the first

declaration of human rights (Fofana & Cissé 2003). This charter which established the rules governing life in the Mandé Empire, has the merit of promoting the values of equality, respect for rights, democracy and women's rights. Articles 14 and 16 of the Mandé Charter clearly set out certain rights for women that make them equal to men in various areas of life. Article 14 stated: "Never offend women, our mothers" and article 16 says: "Women, in addition to their daily occupations, must be associated with all our governments"(Fofana & Cissé 2003). While women face social inequalities in the contemporary world, it is clear from this Charter that Africa had already established structured living conditions that gave women a place of choice.

African civilization, with its wealth of endogenous knowledge and traditions, is a foundation likely to enhance women's values of peace.

Reactivating the African mechanisms and values that were previously in place would enable women to fulfil their mission of peace once again. Perceiving women as mediators is intended to encourage African women to take-on decision-making roles in security matters as the patriarchal perception that relegates women to second place has not always been the case. Women's participation in women's secret societies in Cameroon, for example, bears witness to their exercise of power. In the North-West region, the practice of Takumbeng empowered older women to publicly humiliate male leaders considered responsible for injustices (ICG 2022:16). Additionally, this traditional practice was popularized in the 1990s during the pre-election riots and demonstrations calling for a national conference in 1991 (ICG 2022). The tools of activism specific to women in African traditions thus contribute to the effective mobilization of their communities.

In the Bamiléké society, which is an ethnic group in Cameroon, there are certain specificities and privileges granted to women who exercise political power in traditional spheres. In the Western region, among the Grass Fields in Bamiléké country, the Queen Mothers, who are the mothers of the Chief, are very powerful and respected, as are the mothers of twins

known as 'Magni'. As a result, they have direct access to the status of mother of peace (Toukam 2016) and in times of crisis, the mothers of twins are called upon to act as mediators, using the tree of peace (Toukam 2016). It is certain that in many other societies in Africa, we can find examples of situations and statuses that are favourable to women (Batchom 2019) and thus peace and security are resources that must be sought by all in a society, regardless of gender. The mobilization of women for peace in traditional African societies is rooted in endogenous governance and by enhancing the value of African cultural and ancestral heritage in the institutions of deliberation and decision-making, establishing new gender-based power relations will be possible.

The power of women in pre-colonial Africa has long been a feature of the continent's history, with women being represented in the highest political bodies. Analysis shows that the AU, has made efforts to integrate African knowledge by setting up institutions such as the Panel of Wise within its peace and security mechanism, which are similar to groups of notables found in traditional societies. The creation of this body in the AU's peace architecture stems from the recognition of the importance of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms and their relevance to the prevention and mediation of disputes in contemporary Africa (AU 2015). Gender equality is thus promoted through these Panels as they incorporate women, as it was the case in pre-colonial times. Specifically, for the 2018–2020 mandate, the Panel of the Wise included three women out of the five members of the Council, namely; the former president of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the former vice-president of Uganda, Speciosa Wandira Kazibwe, and a former minister from Gabon, Honorine Nzet Bitéghé (Nze Bekale 2023). It is therefore important to increase the number of ways of transforming institutional frameworks so that these mechanisms correspond to African realities, particularly in view of the new threats to peace and security on the continent.

Conclusion

In short, in the context of this analysis, the tripartite of ‘women, peace and security’ of the AU is part of the long-standing history of Africa. An examination of the gender relations that have prevailed on the continent since the pre-colonial period reveals that Africa has a wealth of endogenous resources and knowledge, particularly regarding the status of women in its society?. Women’s position of power has been gradually eroded with the introduction of new religions and the continent’s contact with the outside world and this is the reason why postcolonial feminism was used in this study, as it makes an analysis based on the specific characteristics of African women. The rise of misogyny and ‘male domination’ over time has considerably diminished the position of women and women are now seen as the first victims of conflict as they are mostly subjected to violence in times of war. In view of this situation, international organisations have established standards that not only protect women in situations of conflict, but above all provide them with the opportunity to be at the centre of conflict resolution. This approach, also taken up by the African Union, has led to the establishment of several normative and institutional frameworks for the participation of women in peace processes. Hence, it is important to refer to endogenous and traditional African mechanisms to maximize the participation of women in conflict prevention and resolution.

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