Kenya at A Junction: Women, Violence and Peace

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Abstract
This paper explores the intersection of women and violence and peace in community in the context of the terror attack in Westgate shopping mall and peace efforts in Kenya. For over forty years, Kenya knew peace but suddenly Kenya is at a junction, at an intersection of global transnational conflict. The role of women both as perpetrators of violence and as harbingers of development and peace is examined. Cases shall be highlighted and possibilities analysed where women in ways that are unique from or similar to males, strive towards embracing peace and deliberately working towards environments where women and men and children feel safe and where children can grow and develop free from terror, rape, violence and loss of life.
Keywords: Women, Gender, Violence, Terror, Peace, Community Development

1. Introduction
According to the Global Peace Index, 'Peace' is a situation where violence or the fear of violence is absent and where the society feels safe and secure (IEP, 2014), signifying freedom from anxiety, from danger and from threats. Violence on the other hand has been defined by the World Health Organization as 'The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm... or deprivation, (WHO, 2002, p.5). Kameri-Mbote (2004) has argued that when a state lacks security, this impacts on the security of persons living in that region and even globally. The 2014 Global Peace Index report states that 500 million people, men, women and children are at a constant risk of instability and conflict hence potential violence and that the cost of stopping violence has increased globally by 3.8% (GPI, 2014, p.2).

The United Nations International Day of Peace is celebrated globally each year on 21st September. However, on the 21st of September 2013, as the world was celebrating peace, a terrible thing happened in Nairobi, Kenya. Men, women and children who had gone to Westgate Shopping Mall on a peaceful morning were subjected to untold horror as they were shot, maimed, crippled, trapped or killed including women in advanced stages of pregnancy. The photographs and recordings beamed on the media across the face of the earth, the internet and caught on CCVT surveillance cameras shows men and women including mothers with small children hiding in various places, struggling to save and protect their children. According to Moore-Bridger (2013), a man offered himself as a hostage to save a group of children in a competition on the roof of the shopping mall and he was killed. Over 67 persons died and 175 were injured.

In Kenya, many ordinary people were perplexed. For several years, Kenya considered herself and was considered by others as a peaceful nation in a region where several conflicts and wars had been taking place (Bouka & Sigsworth, 2016). Whereas the Kenyan nation experienced a violent election crisis in 2007/2008, there had followed a season of relative quiet and so people were left in disbelief as to what was being beamed over television including televisions in other shopping malls on that September 21st 2013 day. Children are central to the ethos of Africa (Steady, 2005), and as the siege continued, heroic individuals who included both local as well as foreign nationals risked their lives to rescue children, women and men**.**

2. Globalisation and Violence
In today's globalised world, the relations within and between states is no longer what it seems on the surface. On 7th August 1998, the United States Embassy was bombed in Nairobi, Kenya. Although sporadic bombings and explosions had taken place over the years, especially in Northern Kenya and the Coast Region, what happened at Westgate was unprecedented. After the Westgate Mall terror attack in Kenya, life suddenly changed. Months later, the Standard Newspaper describes scenes where mourners attending a funeral including children, the elderly and infirm are frisked for guns and grenades (Kareithi, 2014). CCTV surveillance cameras became a common occurrence and screening and frisking of shoppers in shops and malls became part of the shopping experience with schools and institutions of learning becoming heavily guarded by security personnel (Meso et al, 2014). In Kenya, female security personnel are now increasingly joining their male counterparts in guarding institutions. In addition, the Kenya police are being deployed to guard churches (Kulei, 2014).

3. Women and Violence
Gender as a concept of analysis in the search for solving insecurity in communities cannot be overemphasised (Kameri-Mbote, 2004). The tendency to view women as compassionate mothers and virtuous persons leads to the sympathising towards women who carry out violence, support or plan violence (McManus, 2013). This may

lead to such women not being labelled terrorist even though this label is used liberally on men with similar convictions. As the Westgate mall terror attack unfolded, the media beamed to the world images of women, and mothers caught up in the terror with their young children. As the siege continued the media beamed to the world images of a key suspect, a woman and a mother of young children bringing to the fore the changing gender perceptions of the role of women as nurturing and more peaceful than their male counterparts. As the siege continued in Nairobi, images began to appear in the media of key male suspects as well.

One key suspect who emerged as a possible member in the planning of the violence was referred to as a 'widow' and a woman who had experienced and undergone pregnancy and childbirth, a nurturing mother of young children. If women are considered vulnerable, then a widow is considered even more so. Thus sharply bringing into focus that the category of 'Women' as a variable implying sameness of experience is not a truism (Murunga, 2005). On discussing the Suku of present day DR Congo in the great lakes region, Kopytoff (2005) revealed that men explain separation from women in terms of the male occupation and especially the occupation of warfare referring to it as a male domain thus, 'there are certain roles in certain existential identities to the nature...of human identity itself ' (p. 132). Pala (2005) describes a male-female dichotomy arising from Kenyan male infantry soldiers being selected for colonial wars to the exclusion of women. This perceived difference between men and women's occupations creates a domain that is exceedingly male especially in terms of perceptions of violence towards the community.

In Kenya, men are perceived as the carriers of guns even though the armed forces have a considerable number of female staff. The Kenya Constitution mandates that at least 30% of the government workforce including in the military and disciplined forces should be women. Bouka & Sigsworth (2016) state that since 1999, women in Kenya were allowed to join the Military and 233 females as opposed to 999 males made up the 2016 Kenya contribution to the UN peacekeeping missions and female officers in the Kenya Military stands at eight percent. Firearms are readily available to both men and women and reports reveal that in Nairobi, Kenya, guns can be hired for a fee (Wanga & Achuka, 2014). In Nigeria, a militant group *Boko Haram* comprising mainly of men has perpetuated violence by abducting women and girls leading to massive internal displacement (Starkley, 2015). The report however does not indicate the gender of all the planners and perpetuators of the violence. From the photographs they are men. However, the possibility of women being involved is unclear but quite possible.

Harmon and Holmes-Eber (2014) have argued that modern militancy can be misunderstood unless the possibility that women are fighting in the ranks is addressed. The sense that women are nurturers and gentle enables the violent potential of women to be overlooked to some extent. The study by Harmon and Holmes-Eber enumerates various females involved in planning and executing violence in several countries putting to rest the assumption that women are homogenous and or necessarily nurturing. Bloom (2010) states that over forty women in Iraq killed hundreds of men, women and children and led to thousands being crippled, and blinded.

On Thursday 2nd April 2015, al-Shabaab militia entered a University in Garissa, North Eastern Kenya and took the lives of 148 females and males mostly students in addition to holding over 700 students hostage. A female student was made to call her parents on her cell phone and then shot dead in the hearing of her parent. After the Garissa University massacre, there emerged reports that a woman was involved in the planning of the killing of university students. The suspect, a mother of children herself (Whittingham, 2015; Patel, 2013). The aforementioned mother of children has been suspected of masterminding, funding and recruiting other women and teenage children to help destroy women, children and men.

4. Intensified Security Measures

Garissa University reopened on Monday January 4th 2016 for all students both female and male, but this time with a permanent police post inside the university. In addition, plans are underway at Garissa University to erect a perimeter fence worth 230 million Kenya shillings and equipped with a closed circuit TV (CCTV) surveillance monitoring unit (Hajir, 2016). The days are ending in Kenya when campuses across the land had porous boundaries and merged into the cities, towns and village centres where they are located. After the Garissa University attack, Egerton University in rural Njoro Sub-County in the Rift Valley of Kenya also invested heavily in perimeter electric fencing with tightened security to protect the academic community mostly female and male students and staff members of all ages. Kenya is at a junction, caught up in the increasing insecurity of globalised terror networks.

It is telling that after the post election violence in Kenya in 2007/8 the security situation in shops and churches was not tightened to the level that the Westgate attack precipitated, yet during PEV, people perished in businesses and churches as well as in their homes and workplaces and the destruction to property and the lives of children, women and men was immense (ACCORD, 2011; Lindenmayer & Kaye, 2009; Otieno & Nzia, 2014).

This paper posits that it is a misconceived assumption that women are more nurturing, more gentle, more caring about children and other members of the community. In the post election violence in Kenya, during inquiry commissions and truth and conciliation sittings, women confessed to supporting the males perpetuating

violence in the community. Women also followed close behind during the violence and looted properties as the owners fled or were killed (Asman, 2014). Violence was used as a political instrument (IPTI, 2016). In Eritrea, during the war of liberation between the early 1960s to 1991, women fought side by side with men and were reported to be more ferocious than male fighters (Cawo, 2011; Kibreab, 2011).

In September 2016, a middle aged Kenyan woman and mother faced charges of possessing weapons and recruiting female militants to violate community members. The woman under suspicion had been housing three young females who went to a local police station and attacked a police officer and they were killed. According to Newspaper reports, one of the young females was wearing a suicide bomb vest that did not detonate (Onsarigo, 2016; Mudi, 2016). It is therefore imperative that women be involved to a much greater extent than is current, in the search for solutions towards peace and security in communities.

5. Women and Peace Initiatives

Although for over forty years, Kenya knew mostly peace, suddenly Kenya is at a junction, at an intersection and increasingly involved in global transnational conflict. The role of women both as perpetrators of violence and as harbingers of peace is increasingly evident. Oftentimes, women are viewed from the periphery of the public domain hence with limited roles in peace negotiations as key actors. Patriarchy which can be defined as a male dominated social system is a complex phenomena and includes Public Patriarchy which impacts on women at economic levels and in the workplace (Habiba et al, 2016). The effects and practices of patriarchy change over space and time. Culture determines to an extent the practices and manifestations of patriarchy in the Kenya context (Maseno & Kilonzo, 2011; Pala, 2005).

The assumption of women being more nurturing and hence not as destructive to lives as men can be challenged, yet at the same time, a contradiction arises when the perceived role of women as nurturers of life comes into play. For instance, the presence of Graca Machel, a woman member on the team of male mediators headed by Kofi Anan during the Kenya Post Election Violence in 2007/8 was perceived as an indicator of caring and nurturing. This happened at a time when violence towards children, women and men raged on. Indeed Graca Machel advocated for a shared peace agenda and encouraged solidarity and agency between women from various ethnic, socio-economic and political groups (Kut & Kut, 2014; Scott, 2008). When the Kenya mediation process appeared to stall as violence escalated on January 29th 2008, Graca Machel urged,

"Your country is bleeding," … "You need to act." (cited in Scott, August 5th 2008).

Several years earlier, right after the 1992 Kenya general elections, in Wajir County in North Eastern Kenya, violent tensions had arisen and 1200 persons who included children, women and men were killed. In an interview, a woman from Wajir named Dekha was quoted as saying, "The problem had become explicitly ours. We women had no choice. If your house is on fire, what do you do? Sit and wait for someone else to extinguish it? No. You find a way to put out the fire out." (Fallonn, 2009, p.3). Dheka and a group of women had organized a peace initiative that became the 'Wajir Women Association for Peace' (Juma, 2000). Resolution 1325 of 2000 by the United Nations Security Council seeks the involvement of women as decision makers in matters of security and peace at governance levels (ACCORD, 2011).

Tegla Lorupe, a Kenyan woman runner formed the 'Tegla Lorupe Peace run' which is an annual race. In this race, communities in conflict and war come together and run as a way to bring unity. The race attracts both male and females and prizes are won by the winners. Tegla Lorupe Peace runs are often organized in areas in the country that are experiencing war and conflict such as the race in Garsen, Tana Delta for peace in December 2012. Tegla Lorupe uses sports in efforts to unite people as a way of forming a platform for leaders to engage their communities towards peaceful coexistence (Capital Sport, 2012).

The ways in which the attitudes and beliefs that persons hold towards each other affects the manner in which they *react* towards each other when there is a dispute is examined by Kimani et al (2011). Community attitudes held by both women and men, may determine whether disputes are resolved peacefully or violently. In Somalia, a country bordering Kenya, Gardner and El-Bushra interviewed males in order to examine the enduring effects of over 20 years of violent conflict on Somalia's men and male youth. The male respondents stated that the study was the first time males had been asked to tell their side of the story. Among the findings was that the lack of Security and the lack of the rule of Law was partly responsible for the high levels of violence. The violence included both male to female violence as well as male to male violence especially in recruitment of boy soldiers, in revenge killings and violence towards women and children (Gardner and El-Bushra, 2017).

6. New Directions for Research and Study

In Kenya, there is emerging a new initiative that warrants research. It is a peace effort that is unique where people on their own volition have returned truckloads of illegal arms, some of which were used during the 2008 post election violence and or stockpiled for a possible election violence during the Kenya 2013 elections that were to follow. After the post election violence in Kenya, Prophet Dr Owuor of the Ministry of Repentance and Holiness led Kenyan communities to repent to one another and reconcile in Christ Jesus. At the Naivasha

meeting in the Rift Valley when Prophet Dr Owuor ministered, community members from different parts of the country voluntarily surrendered items looted from shops and homes during the post election violence (Naivasha Meeting, 2009). High calibre firearms that had been hidden in homes were voluntarily surrendered. One of the deadliest firearms was surrendered by a woman and a mother (Weapons Returned, 2013).

On the twenty fourth day of February 2013, Prophet Dr Owuor ministered at a massive Peace Rally in Uhuru Park in Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya (see Peace prayers in pictures, 2013). Kenyan Presidential aspirants for the general election that was forthcoming and who included one woman aspirant, attended the meeting. They publicly vowed to forsake violence and uphold peace (Njau, 2013). The Presidential aspirants also stated that they would not engage in violence if they and their political parties lost the elections (Mosoku & Otieno, 2013; Opiyo, 2013). On the fourth of March 2013, the General elections were held in Kenya and against all odds, the aftermath was peaceful.

7. Conclusion

Without peace sustained by both women and men, there can be no meaningful community development. The contribution of the Ministry of Repentance and Holiness to Peace in Kenyan communities merits study and documentation, especially as it is happening in Africa where communities face challenges of violence and the increasing absence of peace. It is indeed possible in Kenya and Africa for communities to develop peaceful environments where children can grow free from terror, rape, violence and the loss of life. Westgate should not happen again.

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