WOMEN, REPRESENTATION, AND SOCIAL DYNAMICS IN GLOBAL SOCIETIES

EDITOR

Muhammad Adil

WOMEN, REPRESENTATION, AND SOCIAL DYNAMICS IN GLOBAL SOCIETIES - 2026

ISBN: 978-625-90132-5-1

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19150944

Edited By

Muhammad Adil

April / 2026

Ankara, Türkiye

Date: 09.04.2026

Farabi Publishing House
Ankara, Türkiye
www.farabiyayinevi.org

adopted by Esra KOÇAK
ISBN: 978-625-90132-5-1

WOMEN, REPRESENTATION, AND SOCIAL DYNAMICS IN GLOBAL SOCIETIES

EDITOR
Muhammad Adil

AUTHORS
Dr. Odirin OMIEGBE
Mihaela Laura TIHAN
Eusebiu Jean TIHAN
Shalom Success IBIRONKE
Divine Sheriff Uchenna JOE
Ananda MAJUMDAR

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

Women, Representation, and Social Dynamics in Global Societies brings together a collection of scholarly studies that explore the complex and evolving roles of women across diverse social, cultural, and global contexts. While significant progress has been made in advancing gender equality, issues of representation, identity, and inclusion continue to shape women's experiences in both public and private spheres.

The chapters in this volume address a range of critical themes, including transformations in family structures, the role of media and visual storytelling in shaping perceptions of women, and the intersection of identity, culture, and societal expectations. In addition, the book highlights important yet often underrepresented perspectives, such as the experiences of women with disabilities in conflict resolution processes, emphasizing the need for more inclusive and equitable frameworks.

By adopting an interdisciplinary perspective, this volume brings together insights from sociology, media studies, cultural studies, and gender studies. It not only contributes to academic discussions but also provides a broader understanding of how women's roles and representations are constructed, negotiated, and transformed within global societies.

It is hoped that this book will serve as a valuable resource for researchers, students, and practitioners interested in gender, representation, and social change, while encouraging further critical engagement with the dynamics shaping women's lives in contemporary contexts.

Editorial Team
April 2026, Türkiye

CHAPTER 1
THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE FAMILY INSTITUTION IN POST-COMMUNIST ROMANIAN SOCIETY: BETWEEN TRADITION, SOCIAL PRESSURE AND CULTURAL CHANGES

Mihaela Laura TIHAN[1]
Eusebiu Jean TIHAN[2]

[1]Tihan and Associates. Professional Civil Society of Psychology, Bucharest Romania, ORCID ID: 0009-0003-1820-1417.
[2]Tihan and Associates. Professional Civil Society of Psychology, Bucharest Romania, eusebiu.tihan@gmail.com, ORCID ID: 0009-0008-8316-3679.

INTRODUCTION

Preamble: An Institution between Dissolution and Resilience

In the Romanian social imaginary, the family occupies a paradoxical place. On the one hand, it is constantly invoked in public discourse as the 'fundamental cell of society', a bastion of stability and moral continuity in a world perceived as threatening and disoriented. On the other hand, this very insistent, almost ritualistic invocation betrays a profound anxiety: that of an institution that feels it is losing ground, that traditional models no longer correspond to the realities lived by millions of Romanians.

In the Romanian space, the family does not represent only a biological or juridical unit, but a symbolic ensemble that reflects the syncopes of modernisation, the contradictions between normative discourse and everyday practices, between the desire for belonging to Western values and the attachment to pre-modern archetypes. If during the communist period the family was often a space of resistance in the face of the omnipresent intrusion of the totalitarian state, a refuge of authenticity and unalienated relations (Verdery, 1996; Kligman, 1998), in post-communism it has become a barometer of instability — a thermometer that registers the tensions generated by economic transition, by mass emigration, by the sudden exposure to global cultural models and by the reconfiguration of the relations between public and private.

The present analysis proposes an interdisciplinary reading of these transformations, situating itself at the intersection of sociology of the family, cultural anthropology, social psychology and gender studies. We will argue that the post-communist Romanian family is not in a linear process of 'decline' or 'disintegration', as conservative rhetoric frequently suggests, but in a complex and often contradictory process of renegotiation and creative adaptation. It becomes a space of negotiation between the pre-modern heritage (with its emphasis on duty, hierarchy and the continuity of the lineage), the collectivist ethos inherited from the communist period (which transformed the family into a survival network) and the imperatives of globalised individualism (which prioritise self-realisation, emotional authenticity and personal satisfaction).

Chapter Objectives

The chapter pursues four main, interconnected objectives:

- The critical deconstruction of the concept of the 'traditional Romanian family', highlighting its ethnographic and historical roots (Marian, 1995; Cosma, 2015), but also the way in which this concept has been reinvented and instrumentalised in post-communist public discourse as a response to the anxieties generated by change.
- The systematic analysis of the forces of erosion and reconfiguration that have acted upon the institution of the family in the last three decades: transnational emigration and the emergence of 'families at a distance'; economic precarity and the state's incapacity to provide the necessary infrastructure for reconciling professional life with family life; the rise of expressive individualism and the lowering of the tolerance threshold towards marital unhappiness.
- The examination of the new ecologies of the family: the professionalisation of intimacy through the emergence of couple counselling and relational therapies; the diversification of forms of cohabitation (consensual union, single-parent family, reconstituted family); the postponement of the age of marriage and the redefinition of biological rhythms in favour of career rhythms and psychological maturation.
- The investigation of the agents of change and the cultural conflicts that structure the public debate about the family: the Romanian Orthodox Church as a political and cultural actor; the mass media as a disseminator of Western aspirational models and, simultaneously, as an exploiter of domestic sensationalism; the Romanian state, oscillating between deficient social policies and pronatalist rhetoric. A detailed case study of the 2018 Family Referendum will illustrate, in an exemplary manner, the tensions and fractures in contemporary Romanian society.

Theoretical Framework: Between Reflexive Modernisation and Cultural Conflict

In order to overcome unidisciplinary approaches and to offer a nuanced analysis of the transformations of the Romanian family, we adopt an integrative theoretical framework, constructed at the intersection of three major intellectual traditions.

The theory of reflexive modernisation and individualisation: The works of Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (2002) and of Anthony Giddens (1992) offer essential instruments for understanding the transformations of intimacy in contemporary societies. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim describe the process of individualisation as a 'societal category' which, in late modernity, compels individuals to conceive their own biographies as 'reflexive projects', forcibly liberated from traditional patterns. In this context, the family ceases to be a given institution (a destiny determined by birth, by community belonging and by economic imperatives) and becomes a chosen relationship (a negotiated project, conditioned by mutual satisfaction and by the communicative performance of the partners).

Giddens (1992) introduces the concept of the pure relationship, defined as a relationship that is no longer sustained by external criteria (social pressure, moral duty, economic dependence), but exclusively by the intrinsic gratification that the partners obtain from it. This transition from the 'family-destiny' to the 'family-project' has ambivalent consequences: on the one hand, it opens space for authenticity, democratic negotiation and personal development; on the other hand, it makes relationships fundamentally fragile, contingent and permanently exposed to reevaluation.

The theory of cultural conflict and culture wars: To understand the polarisation of Romanian public discourse around the family, we appeal to the concept of the culture war, developed initially by James Davison Hunter (1991) to describe the polarisation of American society and subsequently extended to other national contexts. Cultural conflict is not, in this perspective, a simple political disagreement, but a confrontation between rival systems of meaning — between an 'orthodox' vision of the moral order, which grounds authority in transcendence and tradition, and a 'progressive' vision, which grounds authority in individual autonomy and secular reason.

In post-communist Romania, this cultural conflict was delayed and compressed. Romanian society was thrown abruptly, after 1989, from the relatively stable universe of late communism directly into the maelstrom of bioethical debates and identity claims that had already marked the West for several decades. This temporal compression generated a deeply fragmented cultural landscape, in which the archaic and the postmodern coexist, often in the same family, in the same generation, even in the same individual.

The theory of transnationalism and circular migration: The phenomenon of mass emigration approximately five million Romanians live and work abroad, according to recent estimates has radically reconfigured the structure and functioning of the Romanian family. To analyse this phenomenon, we use concepts developed within transnational studies (Basch, Glick Schiller & Szanton Blanc, 1994; Faist, 2000), which emphasise that contemporary migrants do not 'break' ties with the country of origin, but construct transnational social fields that cross national borders.

In this framework, the transnational family is not an aberration or a form of disintegration, but a distinct familial configuration, with its own logics, resources and vulnerabilities. 'Home' becomes a multi-sited space, and physical presence once the incontestable foundation of parental authority and conjugal intimacy is replaced or supplemented by technologically mediated presence (video calls, instant messaging, social networks).

Methodology and Structure

The chapter adopts a qualitative, interdisciplinary methodology, based on:

- Critical analysis of specialist literature from the fields of ethnography, sociology, social psychology and cultural studies;
- Synthesis of empirical research on migration, social values and family policies in post-communist Romania;
- Analysis of public discourse (religious, political, media) around key events, with a focus on the 2018 Family Referendum;
- Illustrative case studies of new familial configurations (transnational family, reconstituted family, unmarried couple).

The structure follows a logical trajectory from the archeology of the traditional model, to the diagnosis of the forces of erosion, then to the cartography of new forms of cohabitation, and finally to the analysis of cultural conflicts and the formulation of conclusions about the hybrid and resilient nature of the contemporary Romanian family.

1. THE TRADITIONAL MODEL: 'THE PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE AMONG ROMANIANS' – AN ANCHOR IN SOCIAL DISCOURSE

To understand the amplitude of the transformations suffered by the familial institution in post-communist Romania, an archeology of the traditional model is indispensable. Not to celebrate it nostalgically or to condemn it anachronistically, but to dissect the way in which it continues to function as a symbolic reference and as a rhetorical resource in contemporary debates.

The Ethnographic Foundation: Marriage As an Ontological and Community Imperative

The incontrovertible point of reference for understanding the traditional Romanian imaginary remains the ethnographic work of Simion Florea Marian, particularly his monumental study *Nunta la români* [Marriage among Romanians] (1890/1995). What emerges from this meticulous documentation is not only a repertoire of picturesque customs, but a cosmology — an integrated vision of the place of man in the world, of the relation between the individual, the community and the divine.

In this cosmology, marriage was not a simple affective contract, negotiated by two individuals on the basis of reciprocal attraction and personal compatibility. It was, first of all, an ontological imperative: to remain unmarried meant to remain incomplete, not to fulfil one's fundamental human destiny. It was, secondly, a community imperative: marriage ensured the continuity of the lineage, the transmission of material and symbolic patrimony, the perpetuation of the name and the memory of the ancestors. It was, thirdly, a religious imperative: marriage was a sacrament, a mystery that sanctified the union and integrated it into the economy of salvation.

The ideal of sacrifice and duty occupies the central place in this marital ethic. Unlike the Western model of 'romantic love' which, as Denis de Rougemont (1939/1983) shows, has its roots in Cathar heresy and in the myth of Tristan and Isolde the traditional Romanian model emphasises the purpose of marriage: procreation, household order, the cohesion of the familial group. Love is not denied, but it is conceived as a result of cohabitation and of the fulfilment of reciprocal duties, not as a premise of the marital contract.

The Persistence of The Archetype in Late Modernity

What makes this traditional model relevant for our analysis is not only its past, but its persistence in the present. Of course, few contemporary Romanians still found their marriage respecting the entire ritual repertoire described by Marian. But the deep structure of this model the emphasis on duty, on social approval, on intergenerational continuity survives, often in secularised and implicit forms.

Vintilă Mihăilescu (2017) speaks about the invention of tradition as a continuous process through which modern societies construct symbolic anchors in an imaginary past, to cope with the anxiety of change. In the Romanian case, this 'invented tradition' manifests itself especially in the form of the pressure to be in step with the world that diffuse, but extremely powerful social constraint that pushes young people to marry, to have children, to build a home, to participate in the social rituals (wedding, baptism) that validate the status of adult and full member of the community.

This pressure generates a constant tension between two incompatible logics:

- On the one hand, the logic of individual autonomy, specific to late modernity, which defines biographical success in terms of self-realisation, financial independence and emotional authenticity;
- On the other hand, the logic of community belonging, inherited from the traditional model, which defines biographical success in terms of social integration, conformity with norms and intergenerational continuity.

It is precisely this tension and not an alleged 'decline of values' that explains the profound ambivalence of Romanians towards their own family life: the satisfaction felt when they succeed in reconciling both logics, and the anxiety, shame or resentment generated by the incapacity to do so.

2. FORCES OF EROSION: EMIGRATION, ECONOMIC PRECARITY AND INDIVIDUALISM

The transition from the planned economy to the market economy was not only a change in the mode of production and distribution of goods. It acted as a catalyst of structural fragmentation, dissolving life patterns that seemed eternal and exposing individuals to risks and constraints for which they were unprepared.

Transnationalism and 'Families at a Distance'

The most spectacular and, from a sociological point of view, the most significant phenomenon of post-communist Romania is mass emigration. According to Eurostat and National Institute of Statistics data, between 5 and 6 million Romanians have worked or lived abroad in the last three decades. This exodus has had not only economic consequences (remittances have sustained consumption and attenuated poverty), but also profoundly structural consequences on the family.

Dumitru Sandu (2010) has systematically documented the emergence of what we call transnational families — familial configurations in which one or both parents live and work abroad for long periods, while children are left in the care of relatives (usually grandparents) in Romania. These families are not 'disintegrated' in the simple sense of the term; they develop complex strategies for maintaining cohesion at a distance, using communication technologies to compensate for physical absence.

However, the psychological and relational costs of this configuration are immense. Research conducted on children left at home (Toth, Toth & Voicu, 2007; Bădescu & Sandu, 2018) reveals:

- Feelings of abandonment and affective insecurity, even in the presence of loving caregivers;
- Difficulties in school performance and social integration;

- Premature assumption of adult roles (care for younger siblings, management of the household budget);
- Difficult reunifications, often marked by tensions and by the reciprocal feeling of alienation.

Moreover, the phenomenon of circular migration produces a reconfiguration of parental authority. The absent parent (often the mother) exercises authority 'at a distance', by telephone and video, but this technologically mediated authority is fragile and easily contested. Grandparents, who effectively take over care and education tasks, find themselves in an ambiguous position: they have the responsibility, but not always the legitimate authority. Children learn to navigate between several normative systems — that of the absent parent, that of the grandparents, that of the school, that of the peer group — developing remarkable adaptive competencies, but also specific vulnerabilities.

'Home' becomes, in this context, a multi-sited space, a network of places and relations that transcend national borders and are actualised in the constant flows of persons, goods, money and symbols that circulate between Romania and the destination countries (Italy, Spain, Germany, Great Britain). This transnational domesticity undermines the very foundation of the traditional family model: authority founded on physical presence.

Economic Precarity and the Retreat of the Social State

The second major factor of erosion of the traditional family model is economic precarity and the state's incapacity to provide the necessary infrastructure for reconciling professional life with family life. The post-communist transition was accompanied by a dramatic retreat of the state from the sphere of social protection. The system of nurseries and kindergartens, relatively developed during the communist period to facilitate massive female participation in the labour market, collapsed under the combined effect of chronic underfunding and privatisation. Paternal leave, child-raising allowances and child benefits fluctuated according to budgetary constraints and political priorities, without a coherent long-term vision. This deficiency of care infrastructure has direct consequences on reproductive decisions and on the configuration of gender roles within the family.

In the absence of accessible and quality public services, the responsibility for childcare falls almost exclusively on the family — and, within the family, almost exclusively on the woman. This explains, in part, the low birth rate (around 1.5 children per woman, significantly below the generational replacement threshold), as well as the growing tensions in couples related to the unequal sharing of domestic work. Moreover, economic precarity and the lack of prospects for young people act as a powerful inhibitor of family formation. The average age at first marriage and at the birth of the first child has constantly increased in the last three decades (Rotariu, 2003; INS, 2022), not only as an effect of cultural preferences (the desire for professional self-realisation), but also as an effect of structural constraints: the lack of affordable housing, job instability, the need to accumulate resources before being able to face the costs of raising a child.

Expressive Individualism and the Lowering of the Tolerance Threshold

The third major factor of transformation is of a cultural-valorial order. Post-communist Romania experienced a sudden and massive exposure to Western cultural models, conveyed through mass media, through return migration and through new communication technologies. Mălina Voicu (2007) has documented, on the basis of World Values Survey and European Values Study data, the particularities of the Romanian value system in the European context. Romania is still characterised by relatively high levels of social conservatism (attachment to traditional values, accentuated religiosity, scepticism towards sexual and familial diversity). At the same time, however, a significant increase in self-expression values is recorded among younger generations and the urban population. This combination declarative conservatism and expressive individualism in practice generates a specific tension. Young Romanians simultaneously desire to fulfil traditional expectations (marriage, children, community integration) and to live their lives in accordance with their own desires and aspirations (career, travel, experimentation). Under the influence of consumer culture and therapeutic discourse, the domestic partnership is increasingly evaluated through the prism of personal satisfaction and self-realisation.

If in the traditional model marital unhappiness was a cross to bear, a test of patience and submission to destiny, in the modern model it becomes an alarm signal, an indicator that the relationship no longer functions and that it must either be repaired or abandoned. This decline in the tolerance threshold towards marital unhappiness largely explains the increase in the divorce rate. According to Eurostat data, Romania has one of the highest divorce rates in the European Union (approximately 30-35% of marriages end in divorce), a phenomenon that contrasts sharply with the dominant public rhetoric, deeply attached to the ideal of the indissolubility of marriage.

3. THE NEW ECOLOGY OF THE FAMILY: COUNSELLING, MARITAL TYPOLOGIES AND THE RECOGNITION OF CRISES

Beyond the diagnosis of the forces of erosion, it is essential to map the emergence of new forms of cohabitation and new practices of relationship management. What is taking shape in post-communist Romania is not so much a 'crisis of the family', but a radical diversification of familial typologies and a professionalisation of intimacy.

The Professionalisation of Intimacy: Counselling and Couple Therapy

One of the most significant cultural changes of recent decades is the emergence and legitimation of therapeutic discourse in the relational space. If during the communist period psychology was viewed with suspicion (as a 'bourgeois' science), and conjugal crises were managed within the extended family or informal networks, today we are witnessing a professionalisation and externalisation of these crises. The appearance of marital counselling practices, premarital education programmes and relational self-help resources indicates a major paradigm shift: crisis is no longer seen as a curse, a fatality or a shame to be hidden, but as a technical problem, manageable through communication and through the acquisition of psychological competencies. This medicalisation of conjugal unhappiness (Illouz, 2008) has ambivalent effects. On the one hand, it reduces the stigma associated with marital failure and offers couples concrete instruments to improve their relationship.

On the other hand, it can generate additional pressure on individuals, who are invited to conceive their affective life as a managerial project, subject to constant evaluation and continuous optimisation.

The Diversification of Forms of Cohabitation

The second major phenomenon is the diversification of familial typologies. If the traditional model consecrated a single legitimate form of cohabitation monogamous, indissoluble marriage, religiously sanctified and civilly consecrated contemporary Romania knows a plurality of configurations:

Consensual union (cohabitation): The significant increase in the number of couples who choose to cohabit without marrying reflects a double change: on the one hand, secularisation (religious marriage loses its centrality); on the other hand, the desire to test compatibility before assuming an official commitment. Cohabitation is no longer, in contemporary Romania, a deviant or marginal form, but a normal stage of the relational trajectory, especially in the urban environment and among young people with higher education.

Postponement of the age of marriage and procreation: The average age at first marriage has increased in Romania from approximately 22 years in 1990 to over 30 years in 2020 for men and to approximately 28 years for women. This phenomenon does not reflect a 'couple crisis', but a reconfiguration of biographical priorities: young people postpone family formation to complete their studies, to build a career and to reach a threshold of economic stability perceived as necessary to face parental responsibilities.

The single-parent family: The increase in the number of single-parent families (predominantly, single mothers with children) is the direct consequence of the high divorce rate, but also of the increase in the number of births outside marriage. This familial typology faces specific risks of poverty and social exclusion, in the absence of adequate public support policies.

The reconstituted (reorganised) family: Divorce and remarriage generate complex familial configurations, in which children from previous relationships cohabit with their parents' new partners and with step-siblings.

These 'patchwork' families require specific relational and negotiation competencies, for which there are no pre-established models in the traditional cultural repertoire.

Crisis as Opportunity: The Resignification of Marital Failure

A subtle, but profound cultural change concerns the resignification of marital failure. In the traditional model, divorce was a stain a stigma that marked not only the individual, but their entire family of origin. The divorced woman was, in the collective imaginary, a 'compromised' woman, and children from a dissolved marriage carried, in turn, the burden of this failure. In contemporary Romania, divorce tends to become, for significant segments of the population, a biographical experience often painful, but not necessarily stigmatising. It is reinterpreted in terms of personal autonomy and authenticity: better a dissolved family than an unhappy family artificially maintained. This resignification is neither uniform nor free of contradictions. It coexists with a public discourse that continues to celebrate the traditional family and to condemn divorce as a symptom of moral degradation. This coexistence of two contradictory narratives generates, at the individual level, ambivalence and cognitive dissonance. The woman who chooses to divorce may feel, simultaneously, liberated and guilty; proud of her courage and ashamed of her failure to preserve her family. What we observe, therefore, is not a linear replacement of the old model with a new one, but the stratification and coexistence of multiple interpretative repertoires. Individuals navigate between these repertoires according to context, interlocutors and their momentary identity needs.

4. AGENTS OF CHANGE: MEDIA, RELIGION AND THE STATE IN THE (RE)DEFINITION OF THE FAMILY

The institution of the family does not transform in a social vacuum. It is disputed, negotiated and (re)defined by institutional and discursive agents who hold the power to impose certain visions of what is 'natural', 'normal' and 'desirable' in matters of intimate relations. In post-communist Romania, three major actors are in competition for the monopoly of the legitimate definition of the family: the Romanian Orthodox Church, the mass media and the state.

The Church: Conservatism and Re-Inscription in the Public Space

One of the most notable phenomena of the post-communist period has been the massive re-entry of the Romanian Orthodox Church into the public space. After decades of marginalisation and surveillance by the communist regime, the Church rapidly reconstructed its social and political influence, capitalising both on the need for symbolic reparation and on the ideological vacuum left by the collapse of communism.

Regarding the family, the ROC promotes a consistently conservative discourse, theologically and canonically grounded. Its central points are:

- The sacramental character of marriage: the union between man and woman is a mystery, not a civil contract; it reflects the union between Christ and the Church and is, therefore, indissoluble.
- Sexual complementarity: the biological difference between man and woman is not accidental, but essential and normative; it grounds both personal identity and social order.
- Procreative finality: marriage is intrinsically oriented towards the birth and raising of children; the separation between sexuality and procreation (through contraception or abortion) is viewed as a deviation from the natural and divine order.
- Opposition to the diversification of family forms: the ROC systematically opposes the juridical recognition of homosexual couples, cohabitation and other forms of cohabitation that do not conform to the model of sacramental marriage.

What makes this discourse particularly significant is not only its content, but its capacity to mobilise emotions and loyalties. In a society marked by the uncertainty of transition, the Church offers certainties — a set of clear, unequivocal answers to the existential and moral questions of contemporaneity. It also offers a sense of belonging and historical continuity, in a world perceived as fragmented and threatening.

Mass Media: Dissemination of Western Models and Domestic Sensationalism

The second major actor in the (re)definition of the family is the mass media. The post-communist transition was accompanied by an explosion of media offer: from state television to dozens of private channels, from censored written press to a plethora of newspapers and magazines, from the total absence of the internet to the almost universal penetration of social networks.

The role of mass media in the transformation of the family is profoundly ambivalent. On the one hand, mass media disseminates Western aspirational models. Soap operas, films, lifestyle shows and, more recently, content generated by influencers on social networks present to the Romanian public images of intimate relations fundamentally different from the traditional model: based on equality, on negotiation, on emotional authenticity and on personal satisfaction. They normalise divorce, single parenthood, couple life before marriage, female independence and, to a lesser extent, sexual diversity.

On the other hand, mass media exploits the sensationalism of domestic dramas. Reality TV shows, afternoon talk-shows and sensationalist publications transform conjugal conflicts into spectacle, into merchandise sold to audiences. They construct an image of the family as a space of pathology — of violence, of deception, of abandonment, of incest. This sensationalist representation, although formally different from the conservative discourse of the Church, can have similar effects: moral anxiety and nostalgia for an imaginary past when families were 'healthy' and 'stable'.

The State: Oscillations Between Pronatalist Rhetoric and Deficient Policies

The third major actor is the state, through its social, fiscal and legislative policies. Unlike the Church (whose discourse is remarkably coherent and stable) and the mass media (whose discourse is fragmented and contradictory), the discourse and practice of the Romanian state in the field of the family are marked by oscillation and inconsistency.

This inconsistency manifests itself on several levels: Oscillation between pronatalist rhetoric and the reality of underfunding.

Successive governments have adopted, especially in the last decade, an alarmist pronatalist discourse, invoking demographic decline and the necessity to encourage births. This discourse has materialised in policies such as the 'First Home' programme (which facilitates the acquisition of a dwelling for young families), the child-raising allowance (which has undergone several modifications) and the governmental in vitro fertilisation programme. However, there is a significant gap between rhetoric and the resources effectively allocated. The childcare infrastructure (nurseries, kindergartens, after-school programmes) remains chronically underfunded, and access to these services is geographically and socially unequal. Paternal leave is still very short and poorly remunerated, discouraging the equal involvement of fathers in childcare.

Oscillation between social protection and individual responsibilisation: Romanian social policies oscillate between two contradictory models: on the one hand, a paternalist model, inherited from the communist period, which conceives the state as the principal guarantor of welfare; on the other hand, a neoliberal model, imported after 1990, which transfers responsibility onto the individual and the family. This oscillation is visible in the field of child allowances, social benefits and support policies for single-parent families. The result is an incoherent system, difficult for beneficiaries to navigate and ineffective in achieving declared objectives.

Oscillation between secularism and concessions to the Church: Although formally the Romanian state is secular, its relationship with the ROC is marked by ambiguity and constant concessions. The strategic partnership between the state and the Church (legislatively consecrated), the financing of religious cults from public funds, the presence of priests in schools and in the army, the consultation of the Church in the legislative process on matters of family morality all these indicate an incomplete secularisation and a difficulty in clearly delimiting the spheres of competence.

Case study: The Family Referendum (2018) between the politicisation of intimacy and the failure of traditionalist mobilisation: The referendum for the revision of Article 48 of the Constitution, held in October 2018, represents the densest moment of collision between pre-modern values and progressive aspirations in the recent history of Romania.

It was not only a juridical consultation, but a veritable 'culture war' that tested the limits of the Church's influence in the political sphere and highlighted the profound fractures of contemporary Romanian society.

The origin and objectives of the initiative: The initiative to revise the Constitution originated from the Coalition for the Family, a civic platform close to the Romanian Orthodox Church and supported by numerous conservative organisations. Its declared objective was the modification of the text of Article 48, which defines the family as 'founded on the freely consented marriage between spouses'. The Coalition for the Family proposed replacing the neutral term 'spouses' with the explicit formula 'man and woman'. From a strictly juridical point of view, this modification was unnecessary and redundant. The Romanian Civil Code already defined marriage as the union between a man and a woman, and same-sex marriages were not recognised. What was actually being pursued was blocking any future possibility of extending rights to homosexual couples, by freezing the definition of the family at the constitutional level.

The pro-referendum discourse: Defence of the 'traditional family': The discourse of referendum supporters was constructed around several powerful rhetorical nuclei:

- The traditional family as the foundation of society: The ethnographic model described by Marian and other folklorists was invoked, presented as the essence of Romanian national identity.
- The external threat: The danger of 'gender ideology' and the 'homosexual lobby' was invoked, presented as Western imports destined to destroy autochthonous values.
- Children as symbolic victim: The central argument of the campaign was that the 'traditional family' is the optimal environment for raising children and that any deviation from this model endangers their harmonious development.
- Sacrality and naturalness: Marriage between man and woman was presented simultaneously as divine sacrament (religious discourse) and as natural fact (biologising discourse).

The anti-referendum discourse: Between secularism and pragmatism: The discourse of referendum opponents was less homogeneous, covering a broad spectrum of positions:

- The secularism argument: Civil society organisations (ACCEPT Association, the Foundation for the Development of Civil Society) invoked the principle of separation between state and Church and the inadequacy of a religious definition inscribed in the fundamental law of a secular state.
- The discrimination argument: The proposed modification would have explicitly excluded homosexual couples from access to marriage, constituting a form of constitutionalised discrimination.
- The pragmatic argument: Many of those who did not turn out to vote or voted 'NO' invoked different priorities: Romanians' real problems (poverty, corruption, the health system) are much more pressing than a constitutional modification with no immediate practical impact.

The paradox of the result and the fracture between discourse and practice: The result of the referendum was, apparently, a crushing victory for the conservative camp: over 90% of those present at the vote answered 'YES' to the question 'Do you agree with the modification of the Constitution in the sense of defining marriage as the union between man and woman?' However, the ballot was invalidated due to insufficient voter turnout approximately 21%, well below the 30% threshold required for validation. This failure of mobilisation reveals a major fracture in Romanian society: the fracture between normative discourse and social practice. Romanians declare, in overwhelming proportion, that they support the 'traditional family' and conservative values. When they are called to translate this support into political action to go to the polls, to sacrifice an hour of their time for an ideological cause the vast majority do not do so.

Interpretations of this phenomenon are multiple:

- Competing priorities: Everyday life, with its constraints and urgencies, takes priority over ideological commitment.
- Tacit disagreement: Many of those who publicly declare support for the traditional family have, in reality, reservations and ambivalences that they do not express in surveys.

- Delegitimisation of politics: Profound scepticism towards the political class and towards the act of voting itself discourages participation, regardless of the cause.

Long-term consequences and significances: The Family Referendum was, without doubt, a victory for progressive civil society not because it won the vote, but because it succeeded in invalidating the ballot and blocking the constitutional modification.

But its significance far exceeds the immediate result. The referendum demonstrated, for the first time in post-communist Romania, the emergence of a critical mass which, although it may not explicitly reject the traditional family and may not actively militate for LGBTQ+ rights, refuses the transformation of the family into an instrument of social exclusion. This critical mass prefers, in its overwhelming majority, a pragmatic and tolerant approach instead of a dogmatic one. It is not 'progressive' in the militant sense of the term; it is, rather, indifferent to ideological stakes and focused on its own problems of survival and welfare. This indifference, paradoxically, functioned as a defensive barrier against the conservative wave.

CONCLUSIONS: THE HYBRID FAMILY – A FRAGILE BALANCE BETWEEN NORM AND ADAPTATION

One Institution, Multiple Configurations

What we call, in everyday language, 'the Romanian family' is no longer, in fact, a single institution, but an extremely diversified semantic and social field, encompassing configurations radically different from each other:

- The traditionalist rural family, still anchored in the patterns described by Marian, but already eroded by migration and media exposure;
- The transnational family, geographically dispersed, but maintained coherent through constant flows of money, goods and digital communication;
- The liberal urban family, characterised by democratic negotiation, sharing of responsibilities and constant evaluation of relational satisfaction;
- The single-parent family, confronted with economic risks and the overburdening of the single parent;

- The reconstituted family, navigating the complexity of relations between children, biological parents and new partners;
- The unmarried couple, testing compatibility before assuming a formal commitment;
- The single person, postponing or refusing marriage and procreation, directly challenging the traditional imperative of pairing.

This plurality of configurations is not a sign of the 'dissolution' of the family, but of its creative adaptation to the radically new conditions of post-communism and globalisation.

Hybridity as a Distinctive Trait

If we were to characterise the contemporary Romanian family by a single concept, it would be hybridity. The current Romanian family is a hybrid institution in several senses:

Temporal hybridity: It preserves traditional rituals and symbols the wedding as a spectacle of social status, baptism as integration into the religious community, family celebrations as moments of cohesion but fills them with modern content, based on negotiation, on individual autonomy and on emotional authenticity.

Spatial hybridity: It is simultaneously local and global, anchored in the specific geography of the village or neighbourhood, but permanently connected through technology to diasporas spread across all continents.

Valorial hybridity: It simultaneously embraces incompatible values attachment to tradition and the desire for modernity, respect for authority and the aspiration to equality, the spirit of sacrifice and the pursuit of personal happiness.

This hybridity is not a transitional stage on the way to being overcome. It is the normal state of the family in late modernity, and the capacity to manage it to navigate between contradictory logics, to reconcile incompatible demands constitutes the principal relational competency required of its members.

Resilience as a Distinctive Mark

Contrary to the apocalyptic narrative of the 'decline of the family', empirical data rather indicate a surprisingly resilient institution.

Despite mass emigration, economic precarity, the retreat of the social state and the pressures of individualism, Romanians continue to marry, to have children and to invest significant emotional and material resources in their family relationships.

This resilience is not mysterious. It rests on several specific resources:

- Intergenerational networks of mutual support: Grandparents play a crucial role in childcare, compensating for the absence of emigrant parents and the deficit of public services.
- The capacity for adaptation and improvisation: Romanian families have developed creative strategies to cope with constraints — from 'old communism' to 'shock capitalism' — and this historical competency remains operational.
- Symbolic anchoring: Even when everyday practices radically depart from the traditional model, the latter remains a powerful symbolic reference, an imaginary 'home' to which individuals can mentally return in moments of crisis.

The Fragile Balance and the Uncertain Future

This resilience must not, however, be overestimated or romanticised. The balance that the Romanian family maintains between tradition and modernity, between collectivism and individualism, between duty and self-realisation is profoundly fragile.

It is threatened from multiple directions:

- The exhaustion of support networks: Grandparents, the central pillars of this informal care system, are ageing and will not be replaceable on the same scale.
- The persistence of the public policy deficit: Without a massive investment in care infrastructure, the reconciliation between professional and family life remains impossible for millions of Romanians.
- The intensification of cultural conflicts: The culture war between the conservative camp and the progressive camp is far from concluded; it will almost certainly return to the public agenda in different forms.

Epilogue: The Family as a Space of Permanent Negotiation

What we have attempted to demonstrate in this chapter is that the post-communist Romanian family cannot be understood either through the prism of the triumphalist narrative of modernisation (which salutes the emancipation of the individual from the tyranny of tradition), nor through the prism of the nostalgic narrative of decline (which laments the loss of an imaginary patriarchal paradise).

It can be understood, more productively, as a space of permanent negotiation between generations, between genders, between inherited values and acquired aspirations, between structural constraints and subjective desires.

This negotiation is often unequal (power resources are asymmetrically distributed), difficult (the logic of tradition and the logic of modernity are partially untranslatable) and without guarantees of success (any compromise can be at any time contested and renegotiated).

But it is, at the same time, the only way in which the family can survive in a society that no longer offers the certainties of yesteryear. Permanent negotiation is not a symptom of weakness, but proof of the vitality and adaptive capacity of an institution that, for thousands of years, has demonstrated a remarkable capacity to reinvent itself without completely losing its identity.

The post-communist Romanian family does not seek to return to an irretrievable past. It seeks, rather, a liveable future a way to reconcile the need for security with the aspiration to freedom, attachment to roots with openness to the world, loyalty to one's own with respect for individual autonomy.

This future is written nowhere. It is written, every day, in millions of domestic negotiations, in thousands of reproductive decisions, in hundreds of thousands of video calls linking children left at home with parents who have gone to work abroad. And, regardless of what it will look like, it will, certainly, be hybrid.

REFERENCES

Basch, L., Glick Schiller, N., & Szanton Blanc, C. (1994). *Nations unbound: Transnational projects, postcolonial predicaments, and deterritorialized nation-states*. Gordon and Breach.

Bauman, Z. (2003). *Liquid love: On the frailty of human bonds*. Polity Press.

Bădescu, G., & Sandu, D. (2018). Coping with absence: Romanian children left behind by migrant parents. In M. Voicu & K. M. M. (Eds.), *Social change in Romania* (pp. 145-168). Editura Institutului de Cercetare a Calității Vieții.

Beck, U., & Beck-Gernsheim, E. (2002). *Individualization: Institutionalized individualism and its social and political consequences*. SAGE Publications.

Cosma, V. (2015). *De la dragostea bunicilor la dragostea noastră: O istorie a intimității în România* [From our grandparents' love to our love: A history of intimacy in Romania]. Humanitas.

De Rougemont, D. (1983). *Love in the Western world* (M. Belgion, Trans.). Princeton University Press. (Original work published 1939)

Eurostat. (2023). *Marriage and divorce statistics*. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-xplained/index.php?title=Marriage_and_divorce_statistics Faist, T. (2000). *The volume and dynamics of international migration and transnational social spaces*. Oxford University Press.

Giddens, A. (1992). *The transformation of intimacy: Sexuality, love, and eroticism in modern societies*. Stanford University Press.

Hunter, J. D. (1991). *Culture wars: The struggle to define America*. Basic Books.

Illouz, E. (2008). *Saving the modern soul: Therapy, emotions, and the culture of self-help*. University of California Press.

Institutul Național de Statistică [National Institute of Statistics]. (2022). *Raport statistic privind evoluția căsătoriilor și divorțurilor în România 1990-2020* [Statistical report on the evolution of marriages and divorces in Romania 1990-2020]. INS.

Kligman, G. (1998). *The politics of duplicity: Controlling reproduction in Ceaușescu's Romania*. University of California Press.

Marian, S. F. (1995). *Nunta la români: Studiu istorico-etnografic comparativ* [Marriage among Romanians: Comparative historical-ethnographic study]. Editura Grai și Suflet. (Original work published 1890)

Mihăilescu, V. (2017). *Fascinația diferenței* [The fascination of difference]. Editura Trei.

Rotariu, T. (2003). *Demografie* [Demography]. Editura Polirom.

Sandu, D. (2010). *Lumea socială a migrației românești în străinătate* [The social world of Romanian migration abroad]. Editura Polirom.

Toth, A., Toth, G., & Voicu, M. (2007). *Efectele migrației asupra copiilor rămași acasă* [The effects of migration on children left at home]. Fundația Soros România.

Verdery, K. (1996). *What was socialism, and what comes next?* Princeton University Press.

Voicu, M. (2007). România valorilor balkanice? [Romania of Balkan values?]. *Sociologie Românească* [Romanian Sociology], 5(1), 45-68.

CHAPTER 2
WOMEN HEALING WOMEN THROUGH DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKING: MANAGING COLOURISM AND SELF-HATE IN BEVERLY NAYA'S SKIN

Shalom Success IBIRONKE[1]
Divine Sheriff Uchenna JOE[2]

[1]Theatre Arts Programme, College of Liberal Studies, Bowen University Iwo, Nigeria, shalom.ibironke@bowen.edu.ng, ORCID ID: 0000-0002-1111-4324
[2]Department of Theatre and Film Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Federal University, Otuoke, Bayelsa State, Nigeria, joeds@fuotuoke.edu.ng, ORCID ID: 0000-0003-2036-2749

INTRODUCTION

It is common to see people associate looking good or having an interest in one's appearance with a particular generation, especially when the generation is young. Results from history suggest otherwise. Records from ancient Egypt and Ancient Rome reveal that they also had their kinds of cosmetics in the form of perfume and oil (Mohiuddin, 2019). While they may have not had fancy ring lights and mirrors, they had their own way of caring for their appearance. The word cosmetics was derived from Ancient Rome where some slaves called 'cosmetae' used some products to dye their hair, make up their face, they applied manicures to their nails and ointment to their skin (Watson, 2007). Our modern word 'cosmetic' appears to be derived from the Greek word 'cosmetikos' which means to arrange or put in order (Yildaz, 2019). The current meaning of the word in English is not far from its root meaning. Essentially, we use cosmetics to beautify the body and enhance how we look. This is a good use of cosmetics as even the mind needs sharpening from time to time in order to reach the heights it can reach.

In recent times, there has been a problematic use of cosmetics - bleaching. This time, it is not used to enhance beauty, but to replace one's identity. Human identity is initially built around the most noticeable part of the human body - the skin. The skin is also the largest organ in the human body as it covers the entire body. The skin gets its colour through the pigment called 'melanin'. It determines the various shades and colours of the hair, eyes, and skin. The more the melanin, the darker the person. Fair people produce lesser melanin while darker people produce more (Das 2022). Skin Bleaching is then all practices leading to the depigmentation of the skin (Toure et al 2023: 1). It is also euphemistically referred to as skin lightening or toning, and in academic circles as voluntary depigmentation. However, they all mean the same thing at their core - to make a person with dark skin appear lighter. Different African countries also have different ways of referring to skin bleaching.

Different African countries also have different ways of referring to skin bleaching, in Senegal, it's called "xessal", "tcha-tcho" in Mali, "ambi" in Gabon, "maquillage" in Congo, "kwitukuza" in Rwanda and interestingly, this means "making one's skin red" (Kamagaju et al., 2013), and in the Yorùbá part of Nigeria, it's referred to as "Ibora" which means "the peeling of one's skin.

It has been reported that about 77% of women in Nigeria use skin-lightening products (WHO, 2018; Atadokpédé et al., 2015). This makes the country rank number one in its usage, not only in Africa but in the world. And it is such a harmful practice. Its users are liable to getting undesired effects like hypercorticism, or even an overall change in the state of health with symptoms like skin atrophy, arterial hypertension, osteoporosis, diabetes, etc., and children of its users may even become poisoned by proxy (Flori and Andrisano, 2014).

This work seeks to find out what the documentary has achieved, how it has achieved this, and what other filmmakers, especially documentary filmmakers and more specifically female documentary filmmakers can do to achieve results beyond projecting problems. To do this, the work analyses the documentary, identifies what was done that has already been done before, and its contribution to knowledge on voluntary depigmentation in Nigeria, the work identifies how the documentary attempts to initiate a healing process for this problem, the work then analyses its reception using social media analysis and its effects on public policy in Nigeria.

1. THE HEALING PROCESS

Very often the body gets injured and when injuries occur, the body stops functioning properly and is therefore in need of healing. The wound-healing process is then the restoration of the body to its normal function. Gosain and DiPietro (2004) assert that this process consists of four main phases which are integrated and overlapping, they are; hemostasis, inflammation, proliferation, and tissue remodelling or resolution.

Hemostasis is the first phase and it begins immediately after the injury occurs. It involves vascular constriction and fibrin clot formation, which basically means it stops the flow of blood to the spot of the injury and then builds a mass to form a blood clot and delicately seal up the spot of the wound. This controls the bleeding. Next is the inflammation phase. On the outside, this stage is characterised by swelling, redness, and pain sometimes. However, it is a vital part of the healing process as it is where the injured blood vessels leak transudate fluid thereby causing the swelling that is seen on the outside.

The fluid in the swelling then allows healing and repair cells to move to the site of the wound and commence the repair process. Very often during the inflammatory phase, the proliferative phase follows closely and even overlaps it. In this phase, the wound is rebuilt. The rebuilding is done with a new tissue made up of collagen and extracellular matrix. Next, a contraction occurs where the wound margins contract towards the centre of the wound, and the final part of this phase involves the covering of the wound surface by the epithelium - re-epithelialisation. The final phase of the healing process is the tissue remodelling or resolution phase. Here, everything that was done in extra bits slowly returns to normal to allow the body to function normally. This last phase could last for years (Gosain and DiPietro, 2004; DiPietro and Guo, 2010).

It was important to touch on the constitutions of the healing process because voluntary depigmentation is an injury that causes more injuries. It is an injury of the mind. From Beverly Naya's documentary, we hear Teni Cocu say so many people said to her in the most derogatory manner "Oh, you're so Black. You're so Black". Bobrisky also shares the same experience, when Bob still had dark skin, people often said to Bob "Look at you, you are Black, you are ugly". Beverly Naya also shares her experience of being bullied because of the way she looked. Muyinat, the lady that was interviewed at the brothel says she had to bleach because her husband likes light-skinned women. When Beverly asks if she would return to dark skin if her husband wanted it, she says yes. A similar experience is shared by Bobrisky who sells cosmetics and lightening products. Bob says that women come to buy lightening creams because they want to attract men at the same rate as their light-skinned counterparts. Below is a conversation with a young schoolgirl (with dark skin) in the documentary:

School Girl: I like light skin because it makes me more… special. (Interviewer expresses disapproval, then she says…) But not really light. I also want it to be mixed with black too. So it can be like light brown.

Interviewer: Let me ask you this question. Where does that come from? Do you understand what I'm asking you? What has made you feel this way? That lighter is finer?

School girl: Nothing.

Interviewer: But there is something. Is it because when you look at people…

School Girl: No… I just want to be lighter, but i don't want to be like very fair.

Interviewer: And you don't know why?

School Girl: Yes. I just don't like Black skin.

Interviewer: Why? But you're Black.

School Girl: I'm Black but I'm not black black. (Naya 2019)

Later in the documentary, Beverly interviews Mudi Yahaya, a photographer who explained that historically, photography was not made to be inclusive of black skin. The most commonly used film stock at older times was Kodak and Kodak set up the basis by which colour film was developed. The reference cards for films were called the Shirley card, named after Shirley, a white lady who was used as the base metric by which people filmed skin. Mudi's theory is that due to Shirley's kind of skin being the metric, when Black women took photographs, they looked unappealing. Meanwhile, when light-skinned women took photographs, they looked really appealing as the Shirley card was designed to enhance their own features and not enhance that of the dark-skinned women. Consequently, when male suitors who were not physically present were sent a group of photographs from which to select potential marital partners, they often selected light-skinned women.

Tablo 1. This Inspired the Song, *Omo Pupa*, A Most-Popular Song in Its Time. Some of Its Lyrics were

Lyrics	**Meaning**
Omo pupa o	Dear light-skinned lady
Omo pupa l'emi nfe	A light-skinned lady is who i want
Omo pupa o	Dear light-skinned lady
Jowo ko feran mı o	Please love me
Ti mba de London	When I reach London
Mawa f'owo oko ranse	I will send you transport fare
Omo pupa o	Dear light skinned lady
Jowo ko b'oko de	Please ensure you come
(Olaiya 1963)	

The song became an instant hit because it mirrored what was happening in society. Unfortunately, it also became like an instruction to the men telling them what to do rather than merely telling them about what they were doing.

To this day, men are often heard in bars in Nigeria singing 'Omo Pupa' while reiterating their preference for light-skinned women over dark-skinned ones. Interestingly, as Mudi Yahaya also mentions in the documentary, men's attraction for light-skin women has made light skin, especially unnatural light skin, a source of status symbol. Women with bleached skin now place a higher premium on themselves and utilize it as a parameter for assessing potential suitors with the generalized view, that anyone who cannot afford their cosmetics is not fit for them as partners. It now becomes a symbol of elite status or absence of it, just like expensive cars and watches.

2. PURGATION OF EMOTIONS AND THE HEMOSTASIS PHASE OF HEALING

When Aristotle defined tragedy in the widely popularised *Poetics*, he insisted that the tragedy must elicit through pity and fear, the purgation of emotions. People are to pity the character on stage. The pity here means to emotionally connect with the character, then grow a sense of fear of the consequences that they face with the thinking that if you do what they did, you might face the same kind of consequences. In *Skin,* it is a bit different. The documentary takes on the story of the everyday dark-skinned Nigerian woman, so it is relatable. Its relatability makes viewing women connect with it, even on an emotional level then rethink their stand on skin bleaching. This is similar to the hemostasis stage of healing where the body stops bleeding and prepares the stage for the body to heal itself. The following are comments on Twitter from viewers of Beverly Naya's *Skin*:

Wèmímó (@Wems_). 2020. "You need to watch Beverly Naya Skin Documentary on Netflix!!! I am so proud of that documentary, I want to hug her. 😢💝 It's black, it's gold and beautiful. I didn't know when I started crying. The documentary brought back a lot of memories on being a dark skin child." (Twitter, June 29, 2020, 10:26 p.m. https://twitter.com/Wems_/status/1277715174753959937)

IBIFUBARA (@IB_DAVIES). 2020. Beverly "Naya deserves that AMVCA. Skin is such a good documentary. It made me remember so many things and how people made me feel about my dark skin.

Then the honest conversations with Bob and the sulfur/coconut oil woman too. Phew. …So, if you are in need of a psychologist, I'm here." (Twitter, June 28, 2020 9:38 p.m. https://twitter.com/IB_DAVIES/status/1277340693338480640)

💝LaShara Gilkes💝 (@RedandWhiteAP). 2020. This was everything!!! Thank you. You reached the depths of my soul with this one. So much raw emotion. I was in tears at the end. From a fan in the States. (Twitter, Jul 3, 2020, 9:53 p.m. https://twitter.com/RedandWhiteAP/status/1279156455061565441)

A. Y✨□ #ENDSARSNG (@AyoAyogirl) 2020. "I'm 7mins into the Skin Documentary on Netflix by Beverly Naya and I'm saying every single black person needs to give it a watch. So far so good! How I'm I already shedding a tear or two?!👀👀

After finishing the documentary, I must say it's a 10/10. I highly recommend this. There is not just one lesson learnt but various other life lessons. @BeverlyNaya did her thing and I just love how relatable she made it. I feel like I know soo much about her👏🏾👏🏾" (June 28, 2020, 7:12 p.m. https://twitter.com/AyoAyogirl/status/1277324442939596801)

Olere O. (@Olodora). 2020. "I have (watched the documentary) and honestly, I related with a lot of things she said. I always felt I had to be lighter to be prettier. I was called ugly a lot of times growing up and I remember one particular afternoon when I just kept crying in my living room asking God why he made me so dark". (Twitter, July 8, 2020, 11:07 a.m. https://twitter.com/Olodora/status/1280805575882878976)

From the following comments which are a pick from many others on social media, it is seen that the documentary indeed resulted in a purgation of emotions from its viewers. It reminded them of the issue and made them conscious that discrimination on the basis of skin tone, or passing negative comments on one's skin tone is bad and problematic. Consequently, this launches the first stage of healing by getting them to not only see that colourism is bad, but to feel it. And by reminding them of the beauty in Blackness, it also attempts to stop the bleeding in the self-hate problem.

3. THE INFLAMMATORY PHASE OF HEALING

The inflammatory phase is the ground-preparing phase. It is like setting up the theatre for the surgeons to operate. This is what Beverly Naya did through her means of distributing *Skin*. It was placed on Netflix, a video-streaming platform with a global reach. She also shared it on her different social media accounts where she has over a million followers. This produced the right results. *Skin* was in the top 5 trends on Netflix England. It was a top ten trend on Netflix Nigeria, becoming the first documentary to enter the top 10 trend list on Netflix Nigeria. In 2020, a year after the release of *Skin*, she was featured in a piece by Vogue Magazine which has a following of over 15 million people on Twitter alone and more than twice that amount on Instagram. In the piece by Martha Sundec (2020), *Skin* was said to be growing momentum which is necessary to enact impactful change. Naya said thanks to the work, "people have gone from barely knowing what colourism is or not even noticing that there's a problem to speaking up against it" (Sundec 2020).

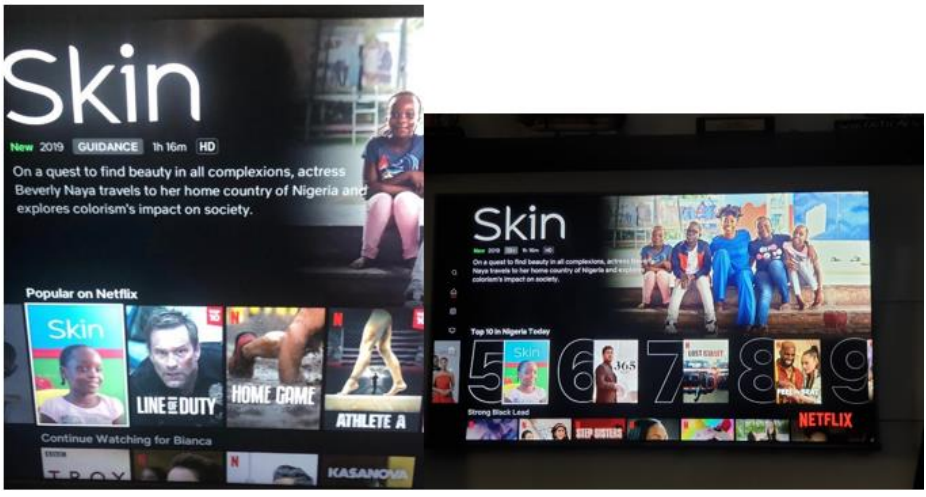

Figure 1. Beverly Naya (@BeverlyNaya). 2020. [a direct message received by Beverly Naya]

"I know you might never see this message however, I am still going to send it. Thank you so much for your documentary, *Skin* it came just went I needed it. I never had a problem with my skin until a few years ago when I noticed guys preferred light skin.

I remember when I lost my confidence, it was after my friend told me that because she was light skin, she was better than her ex's new girlfriend. Since then, I wanted to change my skin colour. I started using this face cream which lightens my face by like 3 shades every one told me I became better looking and I started getting more male attraction. I felt that I was on the right track. I was literally going to order a full skin whitening kit tomorrow. Before I watched your documentary. I am definitely not going to buy it anymore. I need to learn to love my skin. The guy that is for me would come. I do not need to change my skin to seek validation or attention. Thanks so much" (Twitter, June 28, 2020, 3:05 p.m, https://twitter.com/BeverlyNaya/status/1277241746611634176)

4. THE PROLIFERATIVE PHASE OF HEALING

In the proliferative phase, there is an attempt to rebuild what was lost. In the context of the skin whitening problem, this is where policy comes into place. The Senator representing Lagos Central Senatorial District at the Nigerian National Assembly, Senator Oluremi Tinubu, a woman, pushed for the regulation of the formulation and distribution of cosmetics, especially bleaching cream and it was passed by Nigerian senators on Tuesday, February 16, 2021 (Toromade 2021). By September 2022, the Director General of the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) started a campaign to hunt down sellers of Skin Whitening products. This was a step to reduce the supply of the products and contribute to the rebuilding process. Also in 2022, the Federal Government of Nigeria, through the Advertisement Regulatory Council of Nigeria (ARCON) issued a ban on the use of foreign models and voice artists in Nigeria. This was prompted by this same idea of 'white means better or superior'. White hair was often chosen over black hair, and white skin was preferred in music videos and advertisements. The Advertising regulators said "All advertisements, advertising and marketing communications materials are to make use of only Nigerian models and voice-over artists" (Aro, 2022).

On Twitter, a viewer was even inspired to further the conversation by producing an acne-centred documentary. She said:

Mistress of Lagos (@xxlafleur). 2020. "Beverly Naya's Skin documentary makes me badly want to produce an acne-centred documentary. The similarities between fair/dark skin and clear/acne skin are enormous. I WILL DO IT!" (Twitter, June 28, 2020, 8:16 p.m. https://twitter.com/xxlafleur/status/1277319858338910212)

5. THE MATURATION AND RESOLUTION PHASE

This is the longest phase in the healing process. It is thought to sometimes take as long as two years! This phase is concerned with resolving the issues that went wrong during the injury. And fully restoring the body to its original, peak functional state. Although this was not done in Beverly Naya's *Skin*, its seeds have been sown, a conversation has been sparked. More people are now aware of the issue of colourism than before the documentary was done. More groups are now advocating against colourism in Nigeria. With the ARCON policy on Nigerian Models being used, it is becoming normal to be Black and aspire for the highest heights in the Beauty industry.

CONCLUSION

People are influenced by what they watch and what they see constantly. Nelson Mandela said, "No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite" (Mandela, 1994). Just as Mandela observed, no one is born hating themselves. Life experiences like bullying, slavery, and colonialism, taught them to do that. If they can learn to hate themselves or think of Blackness as inferior to Whiteness, then they can unlearn it and learn to love themselves. It is however even more important and impressive that women are at the forefront of this healing process. Although the work is not yet completely done, Beverly Naya has ignited a conversation that has undoubtedly made an impact. When women try to heal women, it works.

REFERENCES

Abas, M., Kassang P., Foma, W., Akakpo, S., Teclessou, J. N., Tcheumagam, K., Amana, E., Doh, K., Nouhoumon, G., Darre, T., Kombate, K., Pitche, P. & Bayaki Saka. (2023). "Case Report Multiple Squamous Cell Carcinoma in a Patient Using Skin Bleaching Products in Togo." *Hindawi Case qReports in Dermatological Medicine* Volume 2023, (pp. 1-4).

Aro, B. (2022, August 22). FG bans use of foreign models, voice-over artists in Nigerian adverts. *The Cable*.

Atadokpédé, F., Adégbidi, H., Koudoukpo, C., Téclessou, J., Aholoukpé, C., Degboé, B., Ango-Padonou, F., & Yedomon, H. (2015). Epidemiological and Clinical Aspects of Skin Bleaching in Secondary School in Bohicon, Benin. *Journal of Cosmetics, Dermatological Sciences and Applications*, 5, 1-6.

Das, S. (2022). *Overview of Skin Pigment*. Retreived from https://www.msdmanuals.com/home/skin-disorders/pigment-disorders/overview-of-skin-pigment

Fiori, F. & Andrisano, V. (2014). LC–MS Method for the Simultaneous Determination of Six Glucocorticoids in Pharmaceutical Formulations and Counterfeit Cosmetic Products. *J. Pharm. Biomed. Anal.*, 91, 185–192.

Kamagaju, L., Bizuru, E., Minani, V., Morandini, R., Stévigny, C., Ghanem, G., & Duez, P. (2013). An ethnobotanical survey of medicinal plants used in Rwanda for voluntary depigmentation. *J. Ethnopharmacol*, 150, 708–717.

Mandela, N. (1994). *Long Walk to Freedom.* New York: Little Brown and CompanyS.

Mohiuddin, A. K. (2019). Cosmetics in Use: A Pharmacological Review. *European Journal of Biology and Medical Science Research*. 7, No.4, 22-64.

Olaiya, V. (1963). *Omo Pupa*. (Track 1 on *In the Sixties*). Polydor: Vinyl.

Toromade, S. (2021, February 16). Senate moves to regulate distribution, marketing of bleaching cream. *Pulse Nigeria*, Retrieved from

https://www.pulse.ng/business/senate-moves-to-regulate-bleaching-cream-cosmetics/g0pmvqw

Sundec, M. (2020, September 10). Everything you need to know about the Movement Against Skin whitening. *Vogue Magazine*. Retrieved from https://www.vogue.in/beauty/content/the-movement-against-skin-whitening-products-what-you-need-to-know

Guo, S. & DiPietro, L.A. (2010). Factors Affecting Wound Healing. *Critical Reviews in Oral Biology & Medicine. J Dent Res*, 89, 3, 219-229.

Watson, P. (2007). A Matrona Makes Up: Fantasy and Reality in Juvenal, Sat. 6,457–507. *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie*, 150, 375–95 .

World Health Organisation (2018). *An Assessment of Public Health: Mercury*. Retrieved from https://www.who.int/ipcs/assessment/public_health/mercury_flyer.pdf

Yildiz, S. (2019). *Development of a Skin Cream with Coenzyme Q and Milled Rice Basis. An Invesitigation of its Certain Chemical, Physical and Microbiological Properties* (Thesis). Bolu Abant Izzet Baysal Universty Graduate School of Natural and Applied Sciences, Bolu, Turkey.

CHAPTER 3
DRESSING EMPOWERMENT: THE INTERSECTION OF WOMEN, IDENTITY, AND SOCIETAL NORMS

Ananda MAJUMDAR[1]

[1]Harvard Graduate School of (Professional) Education, North Central Theological Seminary, anandamajumdar2@gmail.com, ORCID ID: 0000-0003-3045-0056

INTRODUCTION

Fashion and identity are inextricably linked, with women's clothing functioning as both a means for self-expression and a site of social negotiation (Azeem et al., 2025, pp. 603-617). The purpose of this study is to explore how women's fashion choices shape their identities and influence others' perceptions, while also reflecting on and questioning prevailing social norms. This investigation is propelled by the need to better understand the empowering potential of clothing and the complex dynamics women navigate as they use Fashion to assert individuality and autonomy. The existing literature emphasizes the diverse role of Fashion in society. Scholars have documented how clothing choices communicate personal values, emotions, and social status (Kaiser, 2012; Entwistle, 2015). Historical analyses, such as those of Dior's 'New Look' and Chanel's minimalist ethos, illustrate how fashion trends often mirror changes in cultural attitudes and gender expectations (Victorian Fashion, 2024). Research reveals the psychological effects of attire, noting that garments can influence confidence, self-perception, and how others treat individuals (Adam & Galinsky, 2012). However, while Fashion can empower, it can also expose women to judgment and reinforce stereotypes, a tension noted across societies and eras. Despite rising recognition of Fashion's significance, gaps remain in understanding how women actively use clothing to navigate identity and power in current contexts. This study builds on existing research by focusing on personal accounts and cross-cultural perspectives, providing a nuanced view of how clothing can simultaneously reinforce and subvert societal expectations. This paper aims to illuminate how women harness Fashion as a tool for self-definition and social change. Through analyzing stories and viewpoints from diverse backgrounds, the research shows how clothing functions as both armour and amplifier—protecting individuality, signalling aspiration, and resisting norms (Butler, 1990; hooks, 1984; Boloti & Scotti, 2024). The rationale for this approach resides in its potential to deepen our appreciation of Fashion's function in shaping women's experiences and to advocate for a broader understanding of femininity and empowerment. Ultimately, this research seeks to answer why women's fashion matters: it is not only about aesthetics but also about agency, identity, and the ongoing negotiation of place within society.

Literature Review: Clothing is crucial for how people express their identities and navigate social norms. For women, this connection is particularly complex, intertwining self-expression with societal expectations and cultural narratives (Azeem et al., 2025; Kaiser, 2012; Entwistle, 2015). This essay explores how clothing influences women's experiences and identities, showcasing broader cultural and social issues. Historically, women's Fashion has evolved significantly, often mirroring changes in social values. In earlier eras, like the Victorian period, clothing reflected strict norms of modesty, symbolizing limited roles for women and reinforcing conformity (Victorian Fashion, 2024). As society began to emphasize autonomy and self-expression, women used Fashion as a means of liberation (Butler, 1990; hooks, 1984). Today, women have more freedom to choose clothing that reflects their identities and challenge traditional definitions of femininity (Azeem et al., 2025; Kaiser & Green, 2018). Clothing also conveys ethnic identity and a sense of belonging (Boloti & Scotti, 2024). Different cultures assign varying meanings to clothing. For instance, the hijab serves as a powerful symbol for many Muslim women, representing both faith and cultural identity while navigating Western perceptions (Azeem et al., 2025). In a globalized world, clothing can indicate whether someone feels part of a community or isolated, especially among women in diaspora. Those who experience cultural displacement often use clothing to maintain their heritage or adapt to new environments, highlighting the role of clothing in migration and empowerment (The impact of paid employment on women's empowerment: A case study of female garment workers in Bangladesh, 2022). Fashion today empowers women and allows for self-expression (Azeem et al., 2025). Movements promoting body positivity and inclusivity showcase a growing acceptance of diverse representations of femininity (The thousand faces of beauty: How credible storytelling unlocks disability representation in inclusive luxury fashion branding, 2024). These efforts challenge traditional beauty standards by celebrating diverse body types and ethnicities. This shift helps redefine what it means to be a woman today (Azeem et al., 2025; Kaiser & Green, 2018). By embracing these changes, women are encouraged to assert their identities confidently, moving beyond restrictive norms (Butler, 1990; hooks, 1984).

Clothing carries cultural significance and relates to global issues such as gender inequality and social justice (Boloti & Scotti, 2024). Analyzing how clothing impacts women's roles reveals its potential as a form of resistance and a reflection of social dynamics (Philosophy of clothing. Fashion as a social vector: Unravelling the influence of digital times, 2025). The narratives behind clothing highlight important topics such as gender equity and empowerment, thereby improving our understanding of women's experiences across different contexts (The impact of paid employment on women's empowerment: A case study of female garment workers in Bangladesh, 2022). Clothing is not just fabric; it is a powerful tool for shaping and expressing women's identities (Azeem et al., 2025). By examining the balance between personal expression and societal expectations, clothing reveals the complexities of women's lives and provides pathways to empowerment (Azeem et al., 2025). Understanding the significance of clothing is vital for grasping women's roles and their ongoing journey toward self-expression and social change (Azeem et al., 2025).

Methodology: This study examined how women's clothing choices relate to their identities across different cultures. The researchers set clear goals and timelines for collecting data. They gathered information in three cities: Kigali, Paris, and New York, each chosen for its unique culture and views on women's Fashion. A careful method was used to collect and compare data from all three locations. The research used only existing materials, such as stories and cultural analyses of women's Fashion and identity. No participants were interviewed directly; researchers used publicly available information to ensure everyone's safety and confidentiality. They organized the collected materials by themes, context, and cultural importance. To find patterns in how clothing reflects women's identities, the researchers performed thematic analysis. They created a coding framework in advance to ensure reliability throughout the study. To maintain quality, the research team reviewed and validated coding decisions. They also used qualitative data management software to promote transparency and accountability in the analysis. All sources were properly credited, and sensitive content was handled in accordance with ethical guidelines for the use of secondary data. The Institutional Research Ethics Board at the lead investigator's university approved the study protocol.

Throughout the research, privacy and respect for cultural diversity were important. This thorough approach allows future researchers to replicate the study using the same methods. No results are presented or discussed in this section.

Theoretical Framework: This study focuses on two main ideas: symbolic interactionism and feminist theory. Symbolic interactionism, as explained by Blumer (1969), suggests that people create meaning through social interactions and the symbols they use. In this context, clothing represents identity, belonging, and social status. Women use their clothing choices to express and negotiate their roles in different social situations. Fashion helps them communicate their values, connections, and goals. Thus, clothing becomes a way to shape and show identity (Azeem et al., 2025; Kaiser, 2012; Entwistle, 2015). Feminist theory enhances this research by explaining how women's bodies and clothing can both oppress and empower them (Butler, 1990; hooks, 1984). This theory examines the social and cultural rules that shape expectations of women's appearance. It also acknowledges the power women have to challenge and change these rules. Analyzing Fashion through this perspective helps us see how clothing can support or challenge gender stereotypes and promote empowerment and social change (Azeem et al., 2025; Kaiser & Green, 2018). Together, these ideas help us understand the stories and cultural contexts discussed in this study (Boloti & Scotti, 2024; Victorian Fashion, 2024). They illustrate that women's clothing choices are not just personal decisions; they are also part of broader conversations about gender, identity, and power. This approach allows us to examine the complex relationships between self-expression, social expectations, and how women navigate their roles in society (Azeem et al., 2025).

Results and Findings: This study examined how women's clothing choices relate to their identity and societal expectations across three cities: Kigali, Paris, and New York (Azeem et al., 2025; Kaiser, 2012; Entwistle, 2015). The research included personal stories and cultural views, showing that clothing is a keyway for women to express who they are (Azeem et al., 2025). Women saw their outfits as a way to show their individuality, values, and social goals (Kaiser, 2012).

Many felt that their clothes helped them feel confident and creative, whether they embraced or challenged cultural norms (Adam & Galinsky, 2012; Butler, 1990; hooks, 1984). The study also found that reactions to women's Fashion vary. In Kinshasa, women are taking creative control of their Fashion, using unique styles to express their identity and empowerment (The impact of paid employment on women's empowerment: A case study of female garment workers in Bangladesh, 2022). However, responses can differ: some women feel confident in their choices, while others face judgment, especially if their styles contradict traditional modesty norms (Azeem et al., 2025). Cultural differences were clear. In Kigali, traditional dress represented community respect and belonging (Boloti & Scotti, 2024). In Paris, Fashion expressed both personal and social identity (Kaiser & Green, 2018). In New York, women enjoyed a wide variety of clothing options and felt free to express themselves (Azeem et al., 2025). However, women in all cities struggled to balance being true to themselves with social approval (Philosophy of clothing. Fashion as a social vector: Unravelling the influence of digital times, 2025). Another important finding was the influence of age and peer pressure on clothing choices (Azeem et al., 2025). Younger women often felt pressured to follow trends, while older women chose outfits that increased their confidence and showed maturity (Kaiser, 2012). Preferences for colours and styles were linked to mood and context, supporting previous research on the psychological effects of Fashion (Adam & Galinsky, 2012; The thousand faces of beauty: How credible storytelling unlocks disability representation in inclusive luxury fashion branding, 2024). Overall, this study found that women's clothing choices are complex. They help women define themselves, navigate social norms, and experience both empowerment and restrictions (Butler, 1990; hooks, 1984; Azeem et al., 2025). The results highlight the ongoing struggles women face when using Fashion to express identity and meet societal expectations across cultures (Kaiser, 2012; Boloti & Scotti, 2024).

Discussion: Fashion acts as a compelling form of self-expression, revealing who we are, how we feel, and what we seek in life (Kaiser, 2012; Entwistle, 2015). As a designer with an interest in psychology, I recognize the strong connection between clothing, self-image, and interpersonal relationships (Adam & Galinsky, 2012).

Our garments do more than cover us; they convey our emotions and motives. The value of Fashion extends far past aesthetics. Icons such as Coco Chanel, Yves Saint Laurent, and Audrey Hepburn understood the transformational power of clothing and its influence on society. Their individual styles captivated admirers not only by their beauty but also by the poise and grace they embodied, stimulating reflection on their effect and what Fashion can teach us about identity (Kaiser & Green, 2018). Grasping the influence of Fashion is helpful for women trying to improve their style, especially since first impressions carry weight. Clothing provides protection and promotes feelings of confidence and empowerment (Adam & Galinsky, 2012). The colours and designs we select mirror our emotions and can even alter them. Research indicates that attire affects our mindset—wearing a fitted blazer might bring about a sense of power, whereas a loose dress could inspire a sense of freedom (Azeem et al., 2025, pp. 603-617).

Christian Dior's 'New Look' in 1947 marked a crucial shift in fashion history, moving from wartime austerity to an optimistic femininity that enabled women to express their identities through their attire (Victorian Fashion, 2024). Today, modern women continue to use Fashion to assert themselves and share their stories (Azeem et al., 2025, pp. 603-617). Many experience the empowering sensation of wearing clothes that spark creativity and confidence, while outfits that fail to reflect their true selves can cause discomfort or diminished confidence (Azeem et al., 2025, pp. 603-617). My design philosophy strives to bridge this gap, creating clothing that allows women to reveal their authenticity, feel beautiful, and radiate strength. Fashion is not simply a mode of expression; it reflects and challenges public morals (Butler, 1990; hooks, 1984). Historically, it has served both as an emblem of rebellion and as a status indicator. Prominent individuals such as Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis and Michelle Obama have communicated powerful messages through their wardrobe choices: Kennedy's understated sophistication shaped American style, while Obama's combination of high-end and accessible brands projected tolerance and leadership. These sartorial decisions correspond to evolving social expectations. For women balancing careers and self-improvement, fashion signals both identity and aspiration (Kaiser, 2012). Much like art, Fashion connects on an emotional and creative level.

Artists such as Frida Kahlo used vibrant, heritage clothing to affirm cultural identity and question beauty norms. At the same time, designers like Alexander McQueen challenged limits, using Fashion to probe industry conventions (Philosophy of clothing, Fashion as a social vector: Unravelling the influence of digital times, 2025, pp. 103-120). McQueen's work explored concepts of power, vulnerability, and identity, demonstrating Fashion's dual capacity for protection and provocation (Azeem et al., 2025, pp. 603-617). My goal is to combine genuineness and strength in my designs, empowering women to confront societal constraints and remain true to themselves. What we wear represents so much more than fabric; it articulates who we are. Fashion shape's identity, increases confidence, and influences perceptions (Azeem et al., 2025, pp. 603-617).

Our clothing choices link to our feelings and feelings of belonging, helping us express ourselves while fitting into society (Boloti & Scotti, 2024). Changing styles continually redefine our relationships and self-concept. Attire communicates personality, values, and objectives without a single word (Azeem et al., 2025, pp. 603-617). Olivier Niyitanga, known as Tanga, operates the acclaimed label Tanga Designs and speaks about how Fashion defines individuals and shapes external perceptions. According to the Salar Bil Foundation, clothing serves as a medium that can convey both authenticity and misperceptions, much like any language that can be used sincerely or deceptively.

Sometimes we unintentionally send misleading signals; other times, our outfits reveal emotions we did not realize we had. Trends such as old money, streetwear, minimalism, casual, sporty, and classic styles often define us before conversation begins. According to Oscar de la Renta, there is always an emotional element to anything that you make. This insight suggests that Fashion carries emotional significance and can communicate aspects of identity and personal state, sometimes revealing or concealing true character. Outfits may prompt assumptions about a person's confidence, well-being, or success before any words are spoken (Azeem et al., 2025, pp. 603-617). Tanga pointed out that clothing can signal the nature of events: "Seeing someone in traditional dress implies attendance at a wedding or funeral, and a man in a suit likely has a meeting unless his job demands formal wear.

Dressing suitably for occasions is vital, as mismatched attire can damage confidence. According to KT PRESS, fashion choices in Kigali reflect generational and cultural influences, with younger women often choosing not to wear long dresses commonly associated with older generations, which, in turn, can affect their sense of identity and self-confidence (Omiren Styles). According to Ms. Mitali Nevtia, fashion trends such as miniskirts can help young people feel more connected with their peers by influencing social expectations. Peer pressure drives us, and witnessing others wear popular items can prompt imitation. Nonetheless, dressing too youthfully may negatively affect self-worth," she says. According to research by Asobayire and colleagues, embracing culturally inspired Fashion in professional settings can empower women and help preserve cultural identity, highlighting the importance of attire that aligns with both personal and societal values at each stage of life (The impact of paid employment on women's empowerment: A case study of female garment workers in Bangladesh, 2022).

Colours also have a role—red is associated with zest. At the same time, cooler shades evoke tranquillity (The thousand faces of beauty: How credible storytelling unlocks disability representation in inclusive luxury fashion branding, 2024). Fashion serves as a tool for managing social environments and expressing oneself. Kelia Umunyana, a university student passionate about Fashion, shares how her mood guides her daily outfit choices. When feeling upbeat, she selects bold, expressive ensembles; when reflective or downcast, she opts for simplicity and comfort. "My clothing mirrors my feelings, and others pick up on my mood based on how I dress. It is a nuanced yet powerful way to communicate without words," she says (Azeem et al., 2025, pp. 603-617).

Conclusion: This study shows that the clothing choices women make are important for how they define themselves, feel empowered, and respond to societal expectations (Azeem et al., 2025; Kaiser, 2012; Butler, 1990). Women use Fashion to express their identities, challenge stereotypes, manage cultural differences, and maintain control over their personal and public lives (Boloti & Scotti, 2024; The impact of paid employment on women's empowerment: A case study of female garment workers in Bangladesh, 2022).

The findings support earlier research that views clothing as a means both to fit in and to resist (Kaiser, 2012; Butler, 1990; hooks, 1984). Using a cross-cultural approach, the study uncovers how women balance belonging and individuality across contexts (Azeem et al., 2025; Boloti & Scotti, 2024). Unlike earlier studies that focused only on Western cultures or specific groups, these results show how tradition, modernity, and self-expression interact in global cities (Kaiser & Green, 2018; Victorian Fashion, 2024). Understanding Fashion as more than just a surface issue can help readers build empathy, reduce stigma, and encourage inclusive attitudes about how women express themselves (The thousand faces of beauty: How credible storytelling unlocks disability representation in inclusive luxury fashion branding, 2024). The research emphasizes the need for society to accept diverse clothing choices and support women's rights to express themselves (Azeem et al., 2025, Philosophy of clothing. Fashion as a social vector: Unravelling the influence of digital times, 2025).

This study connects understanding women's fashion choices to the conclusion that clothing can empower women and promote social change (Azeem et al., 2025). What women wear influences their self-perception and shapes how society discusses femininity, identity, and power (Kaiser, 2012; Butler, 1990). However, the study has some limitations. It mainly relies on existing sources and does not include direct interviews, which might limit the depth of individual experiences (Azeem et al., 2025). The focus on urban areas may also overlook the views of rural or less mainstream communities (Boloti & Scotti, 2024). Addressing these gaps in future research could improve our understanding of clothing's role in women's lives. Overall, the study reveals that women's Fashion can significantly influence personal agency and cultural discussions (Azeem et al., 2025; hooks, 1984). It is essential to recognize and respect the stories behind women's clothing choices to promote fairness and genuine self-expression (Kaiser, 2012; The impact of paid employment on women's empowerment: A case study of female garment workers in Bangladesh, 2022). Future steps should include collaboration among educators, designers, and policymakers to create spaces where all women can freely express their identities through Fashion (Azeem et al., 2025; Kaiser & Green, 2018).

REFERENCES

Azeem, I., Nasreen, S. & Ali, A. (2025). *Fashion and Feminism: Role of Clothing in Shaping Feminist Discourses and Identities*. Wah Academia Journal of Social Sciences 4(1), pp. 603–617. https://doi.org/10.63954/WAJSS.4.1.31.2025

Azeem, I., Nasreen, S. & Ali, A. (2025). *Fashion and Feminism: Role of Clothing in Shaping Feminist Discourses and Identities*. Wah Academia Journal of Social Sciences 4(1), pp. 603–617. https://doi.org/10.63954/WAJSS.4.1.31.2025

Azeem, I., Nasreen, S. & Ali, A. (2025). *Fashion and Feminism: Role of Clothing in Shaping Feminist Discourses and Identities*. Wah Academia Journal of Social Sciences 4(1), pp. 603–617. https://doi.org/10.63954/WAJSS.4.1.31.2025

Boloti, T. & Scotti, F. (2024). *Clothing in Transition: Social, Symbolic, and Legal Aspects of Garment*. Digital Commons 13. https://doi.org/10.32873/unl.dc.zea.1812

Kaiser, S. B. & Green, D. N. (2018). *Fashion and Cultural Studies*. Bloomsbury Visual Arts. https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/fashion-and-cultural-studies-9781350104686/

Mwiza, S. (n.d.). Power of Fashion: How our clothes shape our identity, influence society. *MSN*. https://www.msn.com/en-xl/fashion-and-style/fashion-trends/power-of-fashion-how-our-clothes-shape-our-identity-influence-society/ar-AA1ANHGQ

CHAPTER 4
THE PLACE OF WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH: THE NIGERIAN CONTEXT

Dr. Odirin OMIEGBE[1]

[1]University of Delta, Agbor, Nigeria, odirin.omiegbe@unidel.edu.ng, ORCID ID: 0009-0008-8355-7678.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, a country situated in West Africa with a current population of 240,436,149 (World Meter, 2026), became a member of the United Nations on 7th October 1960. “In conflict zones, women are active participants in the conflicts that affect their countries” (Norville, 2011). They may become the sole providers for their families, more active in the informal or formal sectors of the economy, or more involved in peace-making groups as a result of conflict (Moser & Clark, 2001). They also suffer disproportionately from sexual violence and displacement. Yet during war and its aftermath, women too often are excluded from activities aimed at resolving the violent conflicts that so deeply affect them.

These conflicts cannot be brought to a lasting end without making women’s lives more secure, and women are best positioned to determine how that security is achieved (Norville, 2011). The United Nations passed Security Council Resolution 1325 in October 2000 when it decided that sustainable security was not possible without the involvement of women. The resolution calls for increased representation of women at peace negotiations and at levels of decision-making regarding security; inclusion of women in post-conflict reconstruction efforts and in disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration efforts; increased protection from sexual violence; and an end to impunity for crimes affecting women.

Follow-on United Nations resolution—particularly 1820, 1888, and 1889, the United Nations created an office of a special representative for eliminating sexual violence against women, mandated measures of accountability, authorized United Nations sanctions in these cases, and defined widespread sexual violence itself as a threat to international peace and security (Steinberg, 2009).ÖHowever, in October 2010, the United Nations adopted a plan to monitor progress on implementing Security Council Resolution 1325. According to Lene Espersen, Denmark’s minister of foreign affairs as of 2011, “we are fortunate that the unique role of women as key contributors to peace and security is fast growing and we already possess substantial knowledge about the importance of women in the prevention of conflicts, in post-reconciliation and reintegration”.

Despite these advances, women in zones of conflict and in reconstruction efforts, and those working on their behalf, emphasize that they often have little or no voice in negotiating peace or planning reconstruction, lack economic opportunities, and continue to be the primary targets of ongoing sexual violence. Women are typically excluded from formal peace processes. They tend to be absent at the peace table and underrepresented in peacekeeping forces. Moreover, Melanne Verveer, who heads the State Department's Office of Global Women's Issues as of 2011, noted that thirty-nine peace settlements were concluded. In all thirty-one cases, women were excluded from the peace process (Norville, 2011), including women with disabilities. The United Nations stipulates that fewer than 3 percent of signatories to peace agreements have been women and that women's participation in peace negotiations averaged less than 8 percent for the eleven peace processes for which such information is available (UNIFEM, 2010), and building lasting peace and security requires women's participation as half of the world's population of men cannot make a whole peace (Norville, 2011).

More than ten years after the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1325 on increasing women's participation in matters of global security, the number of women's participation in matters of peace settlements remains marginal. While improvements have been made, women are underrepresented in public office, at the negotiating table, and in peacekeeping missions. The needs and perspectives of women are often overlooked in post-conflict disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR), as well as in security sector reform, rehabilitation of justice, and the rule of law" (Norville, 2011). Women were not included in decision-making before the conflict. It is usually extremely difficult for them to become involved in decisions during the conflict itself, the peace process, and the post-conflict period. Women are sometimes involved in the peace process but are often ignored. They may occupy higher positions of power in post-conflict situations, but this depends on many factors, notably their position of power before when the conflict began ((Mazurana, 2019) However, women with disabilities are the most marginalized in peace process.

Because most countries that have implemented the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1325 on increasing women's participation in matters of global security did not include them. This research, therefore, seeks to address this issue.

Theoretical Framework

The social model of disability guides this study. The social model of disability is a way of understanding disability that focuses on how society creates barriers that limit the participation of persons with impairments, rather than seeing disability only as a medical or biological problem. It emerged from disability rights movements in the 1960s–1970s and was later developed by scholars such as Mike Oliver (Oliver, 1990). Briefly, the social model argues that people are not disabled primarily by their physical, sensory, intellectual, or mental impairments, but by social barriers such as inaccessible buildings, discriminatory attitudes, lack of inclusive policies, and exclusion from education or employment opportunities (Historic England, 2024). For example, a wheelchair user is disabled not because he cannot walk, but because buildings may lack ramps or elevators. A key idea in the social model is the distinction between impairment (the physical or functional condition) and disability (the social restrictions imposed by society). The model therefore emphasizes removing environmental, institutional, and attitudinal barriers to ensure equality, participation, and human rights for persons with disabilities (Open University, 2026).

The social model of disability provides a theoretical lens for understanding these barriers, arguing that disability exclusion is primarily driven by social, institutional, and environmental barriers rather than individual impairments. Applying this framework to peacebuilding highlights the need to reform institutional structures and policy frameworks to support inclusive participation. Existing literature demonstrates that women's participation improves peace durability and governance outcomes. However, research focusing specifically on women with disabilities, particularly in Nigeria and the Global South, remains limited.

This gap underscores the need for empirical studies that can identify the experiences, challenges, and opportunities for women with disabilities in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, which this study seeks to achieve.

Research Methodology

The following research questions were drawn up to guide the study: What is the contribution of women with disabilities' role as agents of peace in the United Nations system? How do women with disabilities function as mediators in transitional justice processes? How can women with disabilities promote or create a more gender equal post-conflict society? What challenges and opportunities do they face in doing so? What innovations exist that can help quantitatively and qualitatively improve the participation of women with disabilities in the process of peace? How can the United Nations sensitize nations to improve gender equality in their contributions to peace processes? Also, to guide the study to arrive at meaningful findings, data were got from primary and secondary sources. The primary source data which were subjected to split half technique of reliability to ensure reliability were got through the design and administration of a set of key information questionnaire (KIQ) to the 500 respondents which consist of academics in history, political science, sociology, and special education disciplines and women, including women with special needs who were selected through: (1) cluster sampling technique, where respondents were clustered in institutions (2) simple random sampling technique where the respondents were finally selected from those clustered in institutions in Edo and Delta States, Southern Nigeria after a pilot study consisting of 20 respondents who were different from the ones in the main study. The secondary source data were got from the review of related literature and research on women, including women with disabilities and peace building. The primary data were subjected to statistical analysis by the use of simple percentage after which inferences were drawn and recommendations made.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Conflict remains a persistent global challenge, particularly in the Global South, where weak institutions, socio-economic inequality, and political instability often intensify violence.

Women and girls are disproportionately affected by armed conflict, yet their participation in peace processes remains limited. The United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 (2000) marked a global policy shift by recognizing the importance of women's participation in peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and post-conflict reconstruction. Evidence shows that women's participation significantly improves peace outcomes. For instance, women's involvement increases the probability of peace agreements lasting at least two years by 20% and 15 years by 35% (UN Women, 2024a). Despite these gains, women remain underrepresented, constituting only about 7% of negotiators and 14% of mediators globally in formal peace processes (UN Women, 2024b).

Studies consistently demonstrate that women contribute to peacebuilding through grassroots mediation, advocacy, and community mobilization. They often possess access to social networks and local information critical for sustainable peace negotiations. Historical examples include the Liberian women's peace movement of 2003, where women mobilized mass protests, strikes, and advocacy campaigns that pressured conflict parties into negotiations and supported post-conflict disarmament processes (Council on Foreign Relations, 2024). Similarly, women's organizations in Africa have contributed to long-term peace and gender equality through networks such as the Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) and the Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET) (Masitoh, 2020).

Although the literature acknowledges women as key peace actors, women with disabilities remain largely invisible in peace and security discourse. Disability-inclusive peacebuilding literature emphasizes that sustainable peace requires the participation of all affected populations. However, women with disabilities are often excluded from formal peace processes, both structurally and institutionally, despite global policy commitments (Ortoleva, 2011). Intersectional discrimination based on gender and disability further limits access to decision-making spaces, resources, and leadership opportunities in post-conflict settings. Institutional and socio-cultural barriers significantly influence the participation of women with disabilities. Negative societal attitudes, religious and cultural norms, and weak disability-inclusive policies contribute to their marginalization.

In many peace processes, decision-making remains concentrated among male elites, limiting the representation of marginalized groups (UN Women, 2024a). Furthermore, only a small proportion of peace agreements include gender-specific provisions, indicating limited structural commitment to inclusive peacebuilding (United Nations, 2023). In the Global South, structural inequalities further compound these challenges. Women in African peace processes, for example, historically represent less than 10% of negotiators and less than 5% of signatories to peace agreements, highlighting persistent gender gaps in formal conflict resolution structures (Journal of African Development, 2020). While grassroots participation remains relatively stronger, formal institutional inclusion remains limited.

Women and girls are not merely victims of armed conflict. They are active agents. They make choices, possess critical perspectives on their situations, and organize collectively in response to those situations. Women and girls can perpetrate violence and can support violence perpetrated by others. They become active members of conflict because they are committed to the political, religious, or economic goals of those involved in violence. This can mean, and has meant, taking up arms in liberation struggles, resistance to occupation, or participation in struggles against inequality on race, ethnic, religious, or class/caste lines (Mazurana, 2019). Women and girls are also often active in peace processes before, during, and after conflicts. Many women know the importance of peace processes and join a variety of grass-roots peace-building efforts aimed at rebuilding the economic, political, social, and cultural fabric of their societies. In 1991, as the war in the Balkans was gaining momentum, Women in Black launched an antiwar campaign in the Balkans. In Fiji, as the tensions between Indo-Fijians and indigenous peoples were getting worse, leading to the coup d'état that occurred in 2000, women from both ethnic groups created the Blue-Ribbon Campaign peace movement (Anderlini, 2007).

Given the extent and significance of women's peace activism, it is surprising how uniformly women have been excluded from formal peace processes. UN Women's 2012 report *Women's participation in peace negotiations,* provides countless examples of women being excluded from the peace table by national leaders and the international community alike.

International, as well as national organizations, employ minimal numbers of women as mediators and at times, none in total disregard of the international and regional legal frameworks in the name of protocols and resolutions. Today, though women have not been fully engaged in the peace-making initiatives in their societies, due to cultural stereotypes, and political favoritism, and hegemony, in some aspects of conflicts, women have played vital and selfless roles. For example, during the 1994 peace talks between the Ugandan Government and the Joseph Kony Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebels, Betty Bigombe, then Minister for Pacification of Northern Uganda, was the lead negotiator on behalf of the Government of Uganda and later became an independent mediator in the peace process. Henceforth, she received recognition from Uganda Government and the international community for her role as a mediator (Atuhaire, 2019).

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, although women have been marginalized in the recent peace talks held in Kampala between the M23 rebels and the Government of Congo, the past peace talks involved women at the negotiating table. For instance, much as women were not initially invited to the Sun City talks in 2002 in South Africa, Women Partners for Peace in Africa (WOPPA), in partnership with female members of the *Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS*) and United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) brought together a coalition of women to Nairobi, Kenya before the peace talks, to enhance their negotiation skills and then to develop a common agenda on peace negotiation.

The Nairobi conference led to the formation of the Congolese Women's Caucus, which effectively lobbied for the inclusion of women at the peace table. Their lobbying efforts resulted in the inclusion of twenty-five women in the talks, not as delegates, but as experts (FAS ACCORD report, 2006). Also, the Goma Peace Conference, held between 6 and 17 January 2008, brought together various Congolese armed groups operating in North Kivu and South Kivu provinces in the eastern DRC (Democratic Republic of Congo), government representatives, and members of churches and civil society to form an agenda for peace, security, and development in the two conflict-ridden provinces. The conference included women's participation.

However, compared to the scale of violence against women in North and South Kivu, issues of violence against women, sexual violence, women's rights, and gender equality were not sufficiently addressed (Atuhaire, 2019). In Rwanda, after the 1994 genocide, women's active contribution in post-conflict reconstruction became a positive regional and continental example of the role of women in peacebuilding because they played a critical role. When the genocide ended in 1994, women made up over 70% of the population of Rwanda. The Rwanda Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, as well as several women cabinet members, a woman head of the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission, and a woman deputy police chief. Furthermore, women make up 64% of the national legislature, the highest percentage in the world (Inter Parliamentary Union, 2013).

Today, the Government of Rwanda adopted a gender policy and signed and ratified the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa. Rwanda leads the world in gender equality within government, with women constituting approximately 61%–64% of the lower house of parliament as of 2025–2026, the highest percentage globally (Inter Parliamentary Union, 2026). It is not easy to translate women's activism into a presence at the peace table. Certainly, not all women's groups want to be at the table if it involves negotiating with the warlords or tyrants who helped create the conflict, but some peace activists believe that women's presence is essential. Women are rarely included in formal negotiations, whether as members of political parties, civil society, or special interest groups.

According to Inonge Mbikusita Lewanika, President of FERFAP (Federation of African Women's Peace Networks), "Women establish their credibility as peacemakers at the grassroots level but are marginalized from official negotiations. Making it from the grass mat to the peace table has nothing to do with their qualifications as peacemakers. Once the foreign mediators arrive at the negotiation and the official discussions start, you have to sit at the table and speak their language. Often, women are not trained or given the chance." Women's concerns do not emanate from their own experiences, but from their readiness in their communities.

In Liberia, Leymah Roberta Gbowee, a women's Rights Peace activist and a Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, 2011, has spoken publicly on some issues of women in conflict situations. She was a panelist at several regional and international conferences, including UNIFEM's (United Nations Development Fund for Women) "Women and the Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Repatriation (DDRR) Process," and the United Nations Security Council's African Forum Meeting on Women, Peace, and Security. Similarly, the former Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, a peace activist and a Nobel Peace Prize winner, has contributed to advocacy, for example, through the book she wrote entitled "Women, War and Peace" (Atuhaire, 2019).

Women activists also promote a vision of peace that goes beyond the negotiating table. Women have contributed to stopping violence and alleviating its consequences in a range of ways: providing humanitarian relief, creating and facilitating the space for negotiations through advocacy, and exerting influence through cultural or social means. They have also spearheaded civil society and reconciliation activities. For example, women in northern Uganda worked to revive cultural institutions and prepare the community for reconciliation and the reintegration of armed groups through prayer meetings, peace education, songs, and storytelling. In June 2011, Kenyan women in Garissa were trained by Eastern African Sub-Regional Support for the Advancement of Women (EASSI) in peacebuilding and conflict management.

This dialogue and training were aimed at reconciling women from different clans that have been fighting each other for more than two decades. The training equipped them with skills in conflict analysis, conflict mapping, mediation and reconciliation, conflict early warning and response, and understanding United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on the role of women and peacebuilding. The outcome was the formation of the “Garissa Women Ambassadors of Peace”, a group dedicated to championing peace initiatives in the Garissa area of Kenya (Atuhaire, 2019). The following are notable cases of women’s participation in the peace process: the Philippines peace process [March, 2011] (Bachelet, 2011); the Columbia peace process (2012) (Bouvier, 2017); the Mali peace process (O’Relly, O Suilleabhain & Paffenholz, 2015).

Kenya-led 2001-2005 the Somali Peace process; the Nepal women's participation in the Constituent Assembly (CA); the Northern Ireland Good Friday Agreement (1998) (Government of Ireland, 1998); the Sudan peace process; the Yemen national dialogue (Hassan, 2014); and the Women for Peace and Dialogue, Burundi (United Nations, 2014). Rosalba Oywa, executive director of the People's Voice for Peace in Gulu, Uganda, a nongovernmental organization (2011), makes clear that exclusion of women is not due to a lack of women's desire or ability to be active in negotiations. She cites her experience in Uganda, where the Ugandan Government and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) engaged in a brutal conflict characterized by the abduction of thousands of girls and boys by the LRA, displacement, and widespread rape and other atrocities.

She said, "Women activists and women-led organizations mobilized to lead not only peace building at the community level but to play a direct role in finding a negotiated settlement." During peace talks to end the war in northern Uganda, women marched hundreds of miles, from Uganda to the site of talks in Juba, Sudan, to press for observer status at talks, but played no direct role in the negotiations (Nieuwoudt, 2011; Oywa, 2011). Likewise, women in Liberia were not invited to peace negotiations with the rebel groups in 2003. But Liberia's Minister of Gender in 2010, Vabah Gayflor, remarked, "women made their voices heard by sheer will by marching, praying, and singing at the site of negotiations.

Women subsequently mobilized to give support to the national elections that led to Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf becoming president of Liberia on January 16, 2006. The momentum built during these efforts continues as rural women take leadership in farm cooperatives and manage microcredit groups to help reduce rural poverty". Even in the difficult circumstances of refugee camps, women have demonstrated an ability to organize, lead, and communicate the needs of women to other women in the camps, according to Maria Otero, Undersecretary for Democracy and Global Affairs of the United States Department, as of 2010. Betty Amongi, a member of Uganda's parliament, ran for office in 2001 as an independent candidate determined to help bring peace to northern Uganda, an area where she grew up and one that had seen continuous war throughout her life.

She worked to build a network of women parliamentarians to advocate for an agenda that takes gender into account in Uganda's ongoing reconstruction and reconciliation efforts (Norville, 2011). There have been signs of progress in inclusive peacemaking, but a long way to go. In 2010, during the tenth anniversary commemoration of the adoption of Resolution 1325, the alarming lack of progress on women's inclusion—arguably one of the most emblematic of the whole agenda—was highlighted. Member states and regional and international organizations were poised for stronger action. In 2010, the Secretary General, in response to a specific request from the Security Council, submitted a report on women's participation in peacebuilding. The report affirmed that women are "crucial partners in sharing up three pillars of lasting peace, economic recovery, social cohesion, and political legitimacy" and laid out an ambitious plan to support, reinforce, and capitalize on women's participation in peace-building. Evidence collected indicates that while some progress has been made in the area of processes, impact has yet to be felt in the daily lives of women in the post-conflict context. However, five years later, there have been some notable improvements (UN Women, 2015). Assessments of Resolution 1325 include annual Secretary-General reports in 2013 and 2014, a ten-year review of Resolution 1325 implementation conducted by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, and the twelve UN peacekeeping missions reported outcomes across the components of the resolution (United Nations, 2010). Findings include:

- Women's political participation has had largely positive outcomes, with host countries seeing higher rates of female voters and politicians, as well as increased legal provisions to support gender equality.
- There continued to be low levels of women in peace negotiations, with women comprising less than 10% of those formally involved across all missions.
- Academic research found that women were significantly more likely to be mentioned in peace processes and agreements after Resolution 1325 (Bell & O'Rourke, 2010).
- Furthermore, women peace-builders and activists are regularly victims of violence and lack protection (Dharmapuri, 2012).

However, Nigeria has experienced multiple forms of conflict, including ethno-religious violence, insurgency in the Northeast, communal clashes, and electoral violence. These conflicts have disproportionately affected women while simultaneously creating spaces for their involvement in peacebuilding. Research findings indicate that Nigerian women have played critical roles in grassroots mediation, advocacy, and reconciliation processes despite structural barriers limiting their formal participation in peace negotiations (Abe & Agbalajobi, 2024).

Women's contributions often occur in informal spaces where they mobilize communities, facilitate dialogue, and support post-conflict recovery efforts (Adelabu & Duyile, 2025). Moreover, formal peace processes in Nigeria remain largely male-dominated, limiting women's representation in decision-making and policy formulation (Akingbade & Odebiyi, 2021). The implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 in Nigeria has been operationalized through the National Action Plans (NAPs). Nigeria developed its first NAP (2013–2017) and second NAP (2017–2020) to localize the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. Nevertheless, studies indicate that implementation has been slow and often fails to address the lived realities of women at community levels, particularly those in rural areas (Durueke, 2025). Although progress has been recorded in improving women's visibility in peace and security discourse, structural inequalities and socio-cultural norms continue to hinder effective participation (Rustad et al., 2025).

Nonetheless, historical evidence from Nigeria's civil war and subsequent conflicts shows that war-induced disabilities often result in long-term poverty, stigma, and inadequate rehabilitation support, disproportionately affecting women due to gendered caregiving expectations and social marginalization (Effiong et al., 2018). Contemporary conflict dynamics, particularly insurgency in Northern Nigeria, have increased displacement and deepened social inequalities. Women and children dominate internally displaced populations, and vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities face heightened barriers to humanitarian support, healthcare, and protection (Dumbili & Nnanwube, 2019). Gender-based violence literature further reinforces intersectional vulnerability.

Recent Nigerian reports show that over half of women with disabilities have experienced gender-based violence, driven by stigma, economic dependence, and social isolation factors that also reduce their visibility and participation in peacebuilding and community decision-making (Naija Feminist Media, 2025; CDI, 2024, BONEWS, 2025). Beyond conflict settings, broader Nigerian disability research shows persistent structural, social, and attitudinal barriers to inclusion, including inaccessible infrastructure, negative social perceptions, and internalized stigma, all of which limit civic engagement and leadership opportunities for women with disabilities (Iwuagwu et al., 2023).

Nonetheless, within Nigeria, socio-cultural and institutional barriers significantly shape women's participation in peacebuilding. Patriarchal norms, limited access to education, political marginalization, and economic exclusion restrict women's entry into formal peace structures. In conflict-affected regions such as Northeast Nigeria, women have served as community negotiators, security informants, and mediators, yet they continue to face threats, gender-based violence, and social exclusion (Wilson et al., 2024). Similarly, studies on women's experiences in Northern Nigeria reveal that insecurity, domestic violence, and cultural restrictions often limit women's leadership roles in peace processes (Onyegbula, 2018). Scholarly literature also highlights the importance of gender mainstreaming in Nigerian peacebuilding. Gender-sensitive peacebuilding approaches recognize that men and women experience conflict differently and therefore require tailored policy responses (Omilusi, 2015). However, policy implementation gaps remain. For example, Nigeria's WPS (Women, Peace and Security) policy frameworks have historically made limited reference to disability inclusion, suggesting a need for more intersectional policy design that integrates gender and disability perspectives (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Overall, existing Nigerian literature increasingly recognizes disability as a critical dimension of social exclusion, yet the intersection of disability, gender, and conflict remains underexplored. Disability prevalence studies indicate that persons with disabilities constitute a significant but marginalized population in Nigeria, with women experiencing slightly higher disability prevalence and deeper socio-economic vulnerability due to structural inequalities, poverty, and limited access to services (Ishola, Kuye, Bakare, & Oyedarin, 2025).

Despite growing attention to gender inclusion, women with disabilities remain largely invisible in Nigerian peacebuilding literature and policy frameworks. Evidence suggests that women with disabilities are frequently excluded from community peace forums and decision-making spaces, even when present (Human Rights Watch, 2021). This exclusion reflects broader systemic discrimination based on both gender and disability. Post-conflict disability experiences in Nigeria further reveal long-term marginalization, poverty, and inadequate institutional support for persons with disabilities, including women (Effiong et al., 2018). Intersectionality theory is useful for understanding the compounded marginalization faced by women with disabilities. Nigerian studies show that women with disabilities face systemic discrimination in political participation, representation, and decision-making processes. For example, research on socio-political inclusion highlights discrimination, inaccessibility, and limited institutional support as key barriers preventing women with disabilities from meaningful participation in governance and civic processes despite the 2019 Disability Act (Ezenwajiobi & Sada, 2024).

However, Nigeria-specific literature confirms that women contribute significantly to peacebuilding and remain underrepresented in formal peace processes. Moreover, conflict contexts further intensify disability-based exclusion. Nigerian scholarship suggests that while gender inclusion in peace and governance is improving, disability inclusion remains peripheral. The literature suggests the need for disability-inclusive peacebuilding frameworks that center lived experiences, address socio-cultural stigma, and policy implementation. Nevertheless, there remains a major gap in empirical research specifically examining women with disabilities as active agents in Nigerian peacebuilding and conflict resolution processes. Simply put, research on peacebuilding, focusing specifically on women with disabilities, particularly in Nigeria, the Global South, remains limited. This gap highlights the need for targeted research to understand their roles, challenges, and opportunities in conflict resolution and peacebuilding within Nigeria. The social model of disability provides a theoretical lens for understanding these barriers, arguing that disability exclusion is primarily driven by social, institutional, and environmental barriers rather than individual impairments.

Applying this framework to peacebuilding highlights the need to reform institutional structures and policy frameworks to support inclusive participation.

2. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Women with disabilities consist of persons with physical and health impairments, visual impairment, hearing impairment, speech impairment, emotional disorders, and intellectual impairments. The Report showed that 29 percent of 84 million persons with disabilities in Africa are in Nigeria alone, of which more than half of the 25 million Nigerians live with one form of disability or another, while 36 percent of these experience difficulties in going about their business due to their chronic conditions (Biriowo, 2022). However, the literature reviewed in this study shows that there is no mention of women with disabilities' participation in formal peace processes in the Global South since the passing of the United Nations Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security in 2000. It is therefore pertinent to postulate that women with disabilities are not included in the peacebuilding process. Simply put, they are excluded from post-conflict decision-making. However, analysis from the response subjects in the study reveals the following:

- 420 persons representing 84% of the 500 respondents agree with the statement "women with disabilities have the capacity to contribute effectively to conflict resolution and peace building," and 80 persons representing 16% of the 520 respondents disagree. Therefore, the findings show that the majority of the respondents believe women with disabilities have the capacity to contribute effectively to conflict resolution and peacebuilding.
- 480 persons representing 96% of the 500 respondents agree with the statement "women with disabilities are not engaged as role agents of peace in the United Nations Peace Programme in Nigeria," and 20 persons representing 4% of the 500 respondents disagree. Therefore, the findings show that the majority of the respondents believe that women with disabilities are not engaged as role agents of peace in the United Nations Peace Programme in Nigeria.

- 20 persons representing 4% of the 500 respondents agree with the statement "women with disabilities function as mediators in transitional justice processes in Nigeria," while 480 persons representing 96% of the 500 respondents disagree. Therefore, the findings show that the majority of the respondents believe that women with disabilities do not function as mediators in transitional justice processes in Nigeria.
- 480 persons representing 96% of the 500 respondents agree with the statement "women with disabilities do not participate in the resolution of conflicts in Nigeria," while 20 persons representing 4% of the 500 respondents disagree. Therefore, the findings show that the majority of the respondents believe that women with disabilities do not participate in the resolution of conflicts in Nigeria.
- 480 persons representing 96% of the 500 respondents agree with the statement "women with disabilities do not adopt any strategy in the process of conflict resolution in Nigeria," and 20 persons representing 4% of the 500 respondents disagree. Therefore, the findings show that the majority of the respondents believe that women with disabilities do not adopt any strategy in the process of conflict resolution in Nigeria.
- 20 persons representing 4% of the 500 respondents agree with the statement "women with disabilities are integrated in decision making process in line with the United Nations Resolution 1325 of the year 2000," while 480 persons representing 96% of the 500 respondents disagree. The findings correspond with some of the extant literature and research findings with regard to women with disabilities' participation in public life, governance, and decision-making process. In a research conducted by Inclusive Friends (2015) in Jos, Northern Nigeria, the following are their findings on societal attitudes to women and girls living with disabilities in Nigeria:

  Women and girls with disabilities are disadvantaged in terms of participation in politics and the decision-making process because of their disabilities. "Women and girls with disabilities face double discrimination. People with disabilities face exclusion and widespread stigma while women are excluded from decision-making" (British Council, 2012).

*Thus, women and girls with disabilities face intersecting and interlocking forms of discrimination: marginalized because they are female and because they have a disability (*Groce, 2005). *Due to their perceived low intellect, it is often thought that women with disabilities cannot play roles in the decision-making process in the household and community. As a result, women with disabilities are viewed as irrelevant, as being without contributions to make, and so are marginalized from society. In the political arena, women with disabilities are underrepresented and most times are never represented at all as voters and as candidates in the history of elections in Nigeria. This is saddening because in most of the public places and utilities, including election materials and election environments, the interest and accessibilities by women with disabilities are not taken into consideration, for instance, blind women cannot read and use Nigerian voter's cards, nor can a wheelchair user access polling booths during elections. Indirectly, this group of women with disabilities is officially prevented from casting ballots or standing as candidates. Women with disabilities are excluded from formal peacebuilding processes after a violent crisis. Women with disabilities spoke of not usually being invited to community peace forums. When they did, they were not given a role and were unable to contribute their perspectives, skills, and talents. Exclusion from peace building is symptomatic of exclusion from communal decision-making in general, and the majority of the respondents (59.8 per cent) indicate that women with disabilities were not involved.*

- 375 persons representing 75% of the 500 respondents agree with the statement "societal negative attitude towards women with disabilities' ability in resolving conflict militates against their participation in conflict resolution in Nigeria while 125 persons representing 25% of the 500 respondents disagree. Therefore, the findings show that the majority of the respondents believe that societal negative attitudes towards women with disabilities' ability in conflict resolution militate against their participation in conflict resolution in Nigeria. The findings correspond with some of the extant literature and research findings about societal negative attitudes towards women with disabilities in societal affairs, which thus acts as a barrier to their participation in public life, governance, and the decision-making process, which are discussed as follows:

> *The social order in Nigeria is that of a patriarchal structure where women are generally perceived as second-class human beings. In such a structure, there are stereotypes or mindset relations, perceptions of ability, performance, and the use of the intellect, based on one's sex. In the said context, a woman is therefore accorded the second-class status as compared to a man within Nigerian society. A woman is looked down upon and addressed with derogatory language. The perceptions manifest in the forms of marginalization and discrimination on the streets, on the buses, in the churches, mosques, in schools, in offices, and even in homes among parents and in the way they relate with the male and female children. In Nigeria, there are social stigmas associated with disability. Generally speaking, persons with disabilities are seen as 'good for nothing' and viewed as objects of charity. The situation is worse for women with disabilities. Women with disabilities face double marginalization. They are discriminated against and marginalized based on their sex, that is, being a woman, and at the same time, they are marginalized based on their disabilities. Persons with disabilities, including women and girls, are hidden away by their families or placed in institutions due to social stigmatization* (Osukwu, 2010).

Moreover, in research conducted by Inclusive Friends (2015) in Jos, Northern Nigeria, the following are their findings on societal attitudes to women and girls living with disabilities in Nigeria:

> *-"They (non-disabled) don't view us in the first place as human beings. They see the disability first before the person, says Nacin, a woman with physical disabilities.*
>
> *-There are many pervasive social stereotypes and misconceptions about persons living with disabilities. They are seen as less human, faulty, witches, less productive, illiterate, and repulsive. They are also arrogant and quick-tempered. Many social myths in Nigeria worsen the lives of people, especially women with disabilities.*
>
> *-Women with disabilities are often viewed as unhelpful in largely agrarian areas because they are seen as being unable to farm. As a result, when violence occurs and they are affected, their loss is often not felt heavily by the community. Further, as some people with disabilities are sometimes perceived as witches, they are sometimes blamed for larger misfortunes, including when violence and conflict affect the community. As many live alone and are isolated, this—together with stigma, exclusion, and poverty—can lead to their becoming scapegoats.*

-Women and girls with disabilities may not be treated well by family members and caregivers, who may become tired and frustrated with providing long-term care in a context where the burden of care falls on families due to a lack of a social welfare system.

-Girls with disabilities are likely to be withdrawn as a result of these misconceptions and treatment. This persists into womanhood. Boys with disabilities also face discrimination and abuse, but respondents felt they were less likely to experience this to the same extent. Despite their disabilities, boys are still valued by their families and communities and seen as superior to the girl child because of their ability to inherit property and land, carry the family name, and contribute to decision-making.

- 18 persons representing 3.6% of the 500 respondents agree with the statement that "cultural beliefs and practices do not prevent women with disabilities from participating in the peace process," and 482 persons representing 96.4% of the 500 respondents disagree. Therefore, the findings show that the majority of the respondents believe that cultural beliefs and practices prevent women with disabilities from participating in the peace process.
- 390 persons representing 78% of the 500 respondents agree with the statement that "religious beliefs and practices prevent women with disabilities from participating in the peace building in Nigeria," and 110 persons representing 22% of the 500 respondents disagree. Therefore, the findings show that the majority of the respondents believe that religious beliefs and practices prevent women with disabilities from participating in peacebuilding in Nigeria.
- 262 persons representing 52.4% of the 500 respondents agree with the statement that "lackadaisical attitude of women with disabilities participation in peace process is a barrier to peace building in Nigeria." In comparison, 238 persons representing 47.6% of the 500 respondents disagree. Therefore, the findings show that the majority of the respondents believe that the lackadaisical attitude of women with disabilities' participation in the peace process is a barrier to peacebuilding in Nigeria.

- 490 persons representing 98% of the 500 respondents agree with the statement "religious beliefs and practices which hinder women with disabilities' participation in peace building should be discouraged." In comparison, 10 persons representing 2% of the 500 respondents disagree. Therefore, the findings show that the majority of the respondents believe that religious beliefs and practices that hinder women with disabilities' participation in peacebuilding should be discouraged.
- 490 persons representing 98% of the 500 respondents agree with the statement "cultural beliefs and practices which militate against women with disabilities' participation in post-conflict resolution should be discouraged." In comparison, 10 persons representing 2% of the 500 respondents disagree. Therefore, the findings show that the majority of the respondents believe that cultural beliefs and practices that militate against women with disabilities' participation in post-conflict resolution should be discouraged.
- 480 persons representing 96% of the 500 respondents agree with the statement "societal attitude which doubts the ability of women with disabilities in resolving conflicts should be discouraged." In comparison, 20 persons representing 4% of the 500 respondents disagree. Therefore, the findings show that the majority of the respondents believe that society's attitude that doubts the ability of women with disabilities in resolving conflicts should be discouraged.
- 290 persons representing 58% of the 500 respondents agree with the statement that "lackadaisical attitude of women with disabilities towards their effective participation in peace process should be discouraged." In comparison, 210 persons representing 42% of the 500 respondents disagree. Therefore, the findings show that the majority of the respondents believe that the lackadaisical attitude of women with disabilities towards their effective participation in the peace process should be discouraged.
- 420 persons representing 84% of the 500 respondents agree with the statement "United Nations should be condemned for excluding women with disabilities from the peace and security committee." In comparison, 80 persons representing 16% of the 500 respondents disagree.

Therefore, the findings show that the majority of the respondents affirm that the United Nations should be condemned for excluding women with disabilities from the peace and security committee.

- 434 persons representing 86.6% of the 500 respondents agree with the statement "United Nations should include women with disabilities in the peace and security committee while 66 persons representing 13.2% of the 500 respondents disagree. Therefore, the findings show that the majority of the respondents believe the United Nations should include women with disabilities in the peace and security committee.
- 461 persons representing 92.2% of the 500 respondents agree with the statement "a gender lens for women with disabilities should be introduced into the Security Council." In comparison, 39 persons representing 7.8% of the 500 respondents disagree. Therefore, the findings show that the majority of respondents believe a gender lens for women with disabilities should be introduced into the Security Council.
- 480 persons representing 96% of the 500 respondents agree with the statement "supporting women with disabilities as peace builders is one way to counter extremism and ensure effective peace in the society." In comparison, 20 persons representing 4% of the 500 respondents disagree. Therefore, the findings show that the majority of the respondents believe that supporting women with disabilities as peace builders is one way to counter extremism and ensure effective peace in society.
- 490 persons representing 98% of the 500 respondents agree with the statement "countries should allocate several seats in peace building to women with disabilities."

  In comparison, 10 persons representing 2% of the 500 respondents disagree. Therefore, the findings show that the majority of respondents believe countries should allocate several seats in peacebuilding to women with disabilities.
- 477 persons representing 95.4% of the 500 respondents agree with the statement "United Nations Resolution 1325 should be seen as a human right mandate, and women with disabilities should be seen as key partners to sustainable development." In comparison, 23 persons representing 4.6% of the 500 respondents disagree.

Therefore, the findings show that the majority of respondents believe United Nations Resolution 1325 should be a human rights mandate and women with disabilities should be key partners to sustainable peace.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study has shown that since the United Nations Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security in 2000, women have been playing a major role in peace resolution. It became more prominent after the passage of the resolution despite obstacles being encountered by them due to gender stereotyping, cultural and legal barriers, and discrimination. However, women with disabilities are worse off as they have been excluded from the peace process, as shown in this study. In any disability, there is always an ability, and for women with disabilities, there is always an innate ability. Moreover, when such an ability is properly harnessed and given the enabling environment, women with disabilities can perform effectively in any worthwhile task. History is replete with women with disabilities who have excelled in numerous fields of human endeavour. They should therefore be included in the peacebuilding process. When women are included in the peace process, they will surely excel in ensuring lasting peace in their community. In crisis, they are worse off, and during post-conflict rehabilitation is usually difficult for them due to their disabilities and the societal attitude of neglect towards them. Women and girls with disabilities do try to escape during violent scenes, but they face immense difficulties. They are often reliant on others to carry them to safety or have to try to escape regardless of their limited mobility or impairment.

In research in 2015 on women with disabilities in Northern Nigeria conducted by Ajuyah (2016), the following findings highlight difficulties faced by women and girls while fleeing violent scenes:

- When mechanisms used to warn communities of risk and danger do exist, they do not reach out to women with disabilities. As a result, they are at a significantly higher risk of injury, the acquisition of another disability, and death. They also experience conflict-related gender-based violence. For example, women with hearing impairments cannot hear gunshots or shouts that warn of immediate danger. Attempts are seldom made to reach them and their families.

For example, in Mbar in Bokkos Local Government Area, Northern Nigeria, in September 2014, a hearing-impaired woman and her hearing-impaired son slept through gunshots and screams while the rest of the community fled away from the armed group's advance. When the gunmen arrived, the mother was shot and killed in her sleep. Her son, who ran towards the attackers as he was unable to hear the direction of the gunshots, was also shot and killed. They made up two of the five people in the community who were killed, showing that people with disabilities can be more likely to be injured and killed during violent conflict.

- Women with disabilities are often abandoned when others are fleeing violence scenes. This may not be deliberate, but they are left behind because they are inconvenient during periods of crisis when everyone is running for safety. Those with disabilities are often left alone, and they suffer the trauma of not knowing when or where the danger is coming from. For example, in Riyom village, Northern Nigeria, the community had received a warning that a raid was imminent. The community members placed the people with disabilities and the elderly in a room, which they locked before escaping themselves. When the attackers came, they set the room alight and everyone in the room was burnt alive. This is just one of the many cases that came to light during the research.
- "During one of the conflicts in my village, people were running in different directions out of confusion. My family ran away for safety, but left me behind. It was a passerby who advised me to run to the military barracks for safety.

  He did not stop to carry me out of fear for his own safety; so I had to crawl on the ground with my hands all the way to the military barracks. In an attempt to cross the river into a neighbouring community, I fell into it and almost drowned. My saving grace was a man who saw me and quickly helped me out of the river. He eventually took me to the village for safety. But I have not stopped wondering what would have happened to me had he not shown up"—Godiya, a woman with physical disabilities from Bokkos Local Government Area, Northern Nigeria.

- "The story that really touched me was that of a visually impaired lady. She was cooking when everyone started shouting as the attackers were approaching the community. There was no one to assist her to escape to safety. Instead of running towards safety, she ran into the enemy's hands and was raped until she passed out. Then they thought she was dead. She woke up and found herself in the hospital, pregnant. Up to now, whenever she finds herself alone, she fidgets,"—Researcher in Riyom village, Northern Nigeria.
- "Women with disabilities in crises suffer the most. I can run from danger, but they (the visually impaired) cannot see. Their caregivers tend to leave them, and some also violate them"—Researcher in Riyom village, Northern Nigeria.

These are just a tip of the iceberg of harrowing experiences encountered by women with disabilities in Nigeria during conflicts. In most cases, they are traumatized. The conflicts also make some women disabled, which makes it difficult for them to adjust to living a normal life with their disabilities. Therefore, for them to be properly rehabilitated, they should be engaged in the peace process as they are familiar with the problems affecting them. When they are fully represented, effective decisions concerning their welfare can be made. Nonetheless, to enable women with disabilities benefit from United Nations Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security of the year 2000, the following specific recommendations are made:

- Religious beliefs and practices that hinder women with disabilities' participation in peacebuilding should be discouraged.
- Cultural beliefs and practices that militate against women with disabilities' participation in post-conflict resolution should be discouraged.
- Societal negative attitude towards the ability of women with disabilities in resolving conflicts should be discouraged.
- The lackadaisical attitude of women with disabilities towards their effective participation in the peace process should be discouraged.
- The United Nations non-inclusion of women with disabilities in the peace and security committee should be condemned.

- The United Nations should include women with disabilities in the peace and security committee.
- A gender lens for women with disabilities should be introduced into all aspects of the work of the United Nations Security Council.
- Countries should allocate several seats in peacebuilding to women with disabilities.
- United Nations Resolution 1325 should be seen as a human rights mandate, and women with disabilities should be seen as key partners to sustainable peace.
- Awareness should be created on United Nations Resolution 1325 on the role of women with disabilities in the peace process through seminars and symposiums.
- Adequate support for effective supervision and funding of women with disabilities' participation in peacebuilding should be a priority of the United Nations Security Council and the governments of member nations of the United Nations.
- Various women with disabilities associations should be recognized and encouraged by the United Nations and member states.
- The United Nations and member states should encourage disability associations to sensitize their members to participate in the peace process.

The United Nations global study on the implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 of 2000 came up with the following general guidelines and recommendations, which can be modified for women with disabilities to enable them have effective participation in the peace process (UN Women, 2015):

- In the prevention of conflict, the focus of all stakeholders should be on short-term and long-term measures. Strategic planning should be a priority at the international, regional, and national levels, and adequate resources should be provided to achieve this objective.
- Women, peace, and security must be respected as a human rights mandate. Women peacebuilders in the field should be empowered to choose their priorities and determine their own strategies.

- Mediators of peace processes and leadership of UN field missions must be protective of women's participation. The presence of women makes peace sustainable. International mediators and leaders at the field level must make every effort to ensure the participation of women in the peace process and sector. There should be an inclusive manner involving extensive consultation with women's groups participating in peace activities, as well as civil society as a whole.
- Localization of peacebuilding programmes must involve the participation of women at every level and be supplemented by a comprehensive security plan to protect women and girls in the aftermath of conflict. Peacebuilding after conflict must respect the specifics of the local context, and the 'localization' should be a major policy directive of international actors going to the field. To be truly sustainable, any strategy for peacebuilding must be inclusive, and women must participate in the design, formulation, and implementation of relevant programmes.
- Significantly, more funding and resources should be given to these women peacebuilders, with their better understanding of local realities and expectations, so that they can fight for their rights and their communities. Only networks of women peacebuilders and mediators at local, national, regional, and international levels will help stem the tide of violence.
- All key actors must play their role-

Member States: All member states should be encouraged to prepare national plans on women, peace, and security.

Regional Organizations: All regional organizations should have strategic planning on women, peace, and security, and where possible, regional envoys should be appointed who will advocate for and promote strategies on women, peace, and security.

Media: Media Organizations, both public and private, should be encouraged to advocate for and give visibility to issues relating to women, peace, and security. In addition, they should respect a code of ethics that proscribes hate speech and the stereotyping of women and their communities.

Civil Societies: Civil societies must receive adequate funding and support. Their voices should be heard by the international community through setting up advisory boards at headquarters and in the field to ensure that the world peace and security agenda retains its dynamism and impact.

Youth: Young people must be involved in women, peace, and security issues at the national, regional, and global levels. They are our future, and we must listen to their voices and involve them in stopping war and healing communities.

- Member states, regional organizations, and the United Nations should commit to earmarking a minimum of 15 percent of all funding relating to peace and security for programmes whose principal objective is to address women's specific needs and advance gender equality, including peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding in post-conflict societies.
- Mediators and special envoys should recognize that women's participation does not mean that they are solely responsible for women's issues, but that they are allowed to participate and be decision-makers on the full range of issues involved in the peace process.

CONCLUSION

Be that is may, it is pertinent to note that United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) has played a significant role in emphasizing member states' responsibility for women. It *reaffirms* the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building, and *stresses* the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution. It also *reaffirms* the need to implement fully international humanitarian and human rights law that protects the rights of women and girls during and after conflicts. Sections in this resolution advocate for the inclusiveness of women in conflict resolution by member states and their representation. Consequently, women should never be simply guests at the negotiating table.

The roles they play as combatants, supporters of fighting forces, and peacemakers qualify them to sit at the negotiating table and to assume an active role in implementation (Atuhaire, 2019). Research confirms that women's participation has a direct and positive impact on negotiations and the sustainability of peace processes (UN Women, 2015). It is high time society started to treat women as change agents in the peace process and not merely as vulnerable victims. Women are not merely passive victims, but also are important agents and actors in the peace-building processes in Africa. As agents or actors, women have played significant roles as mothers, educators, mediators, peace activists, and community leaders, coping and surviving, breadwinners, and decision makers. As peace activists and community leaders, women have played several roles in society. They have been engaged in various activities, yet their role and participation tend to be 'invisible' in the context of the formal peace-building processes. Most peace-building activities conducted and initiated by women peace activists and community leaders have been carried out outside of the official and formal peace-building processes. It is against this backdrop that there should be a change in attitudes and behaviour, and individuals should learn that women are effective and should be included fully and equally in participation at every level of decision-making in peace and security issues (Atuhaire, 2019).

We should therefore incorporate the voices of women with disabilities into the decision-making process during peace negotiations and peacebuilding. An adage has it that "he who wears the shoe knows where it pinches". Disabilities advocate James Charlton asserts that "it is crucial to better incorporate the voices of individuals with disabilities into the decision-making process". Charlton's literature on disability rights, with the slogan "Nothing about Us without Us," portrays the need to ensure that individuals most affected by policy have an equitable hand in its creation. This need for urgency is an issue particularly salient for those with special needs who are often negatively stereotyped as dependent upon others (Charlton, 2000). Therefore, the United Nations, governments, and non-governmental organizations involved in the care and welfare of persons with disabilities must involve them in the decision-making process affecting them because they know what it is to be disabled and what can be done to assist them.

Their contributions will, in a large measure, help to remove the challenges being encountered by women and girls with disabilities during and after violent crises and contribute meaningfully to peacebuilding and the peace process. It is therefore hoped that women with disabilities would be given ample opportunity to participate in peacebuilding processes and contribute meaningfully to ensuring a peaceful world.

REFERENCES

Adelabu, N. S. G., & Duyile, P. F. (2025). Gender and peacebuilding in Nigeria: Exploring women's engagement, contributions, and risks. *Nnamdi Azikiwe Journal of Political Science, 10*(1), 1–22. https://najops.org.ng/index.php/najops/article/view/290

Ajuyah, E. (2016). Challenges of living with disabilities in Nigeria. *World Pulse*. https://www.worldpulse.com/en/community/users/ese-ajuyah/posts/69215

Akingbade, R. E., & Odebiyi, A. I. (2021). Women and peacebuilding: Can Nigeria learn from other countries? *People: International Journal of Social Sciences, 7*(3), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.20319/pijss.2021.73.0117

Anderlini, S. N. (2007). *Women building peace: What they do, why it matters*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Atuhaire, P. K. (2019). The role of women in the peace and security processes in Africa. Academia.edu.

Bachelet, M. (2011, March). Women's participation in the peace process in the Philippines. UN Women.

Bell, C., & O'Rourke, C. (2010). Peace agreements or pieces of paper? The impact of UNSC Resolution 1325 on peace processes and their agreements. *International and Comparative Law Quarterly, 59*(4), 941–980. https://doi.org/10.1017/S002058931000062X

Biriowo, K. (2022, December 3). 64 percent of women with disabilities at risk of sexual abuse in Nigeria—Report. *Nigerian Tribune*.

Bouvier, V. M. (2017). Gender and the role of women in Colombia's peace process. UN Women.

British Council. (2012). *Gender in Nigeria report 2012: Improving the lives of girls and women in Nigeria*. British Council.

Charlton, J. I. (2000). *Nothing about us without us: Disability oppression and empowerment*. University of California Press.

Dharmapuri, S. (2012). Implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325: Putting the responsibility to protect into practice. *Global Responsibility to Protect, 4*(2), 241–272. https://doi.org/10.1163/187598412X639728

Dumbili, E. W., & Nnanwube, E. F. (2019). Boko Haram violence and social inequalities: A sociological exploration of internally displaced persons

in North-Eastern Nigeria. *Covenant International Journal of Psychology, 4*(1).

Durueke, O. (2025). Contextualizing universal norms: Evaluating Nigeria's national action plans on UNSCR 1325 and women lived realities in rural areas. *Women's Studies International Forum, 109*, 103045. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2024.103045

Effiong, U. U., Mboho, K., & Wordu, S. (2018). Post-civil war experience and women with disabilities in Nigeria. *Journal of Research in Education and Society, 9*(2), 104–126.

Ezenwajiobi, C. C., & Maryam, M. S. (2024). Inclusion and women representation in socio-political activities in Nigeria: Making a case for women with disabilities. *Journal of Economics and Allied Research, 9*(1), 250–264.

Groce, N. (2005). Thematic group on violence against disabled children: Findings and recommendations. UNICEF.

Iwuagwu, A., Okah, P., Nnama-Okechukwu, C., Chukwu, N., Agha, A., Anazonwu, N., & Onalu, C. (2023). Barriers to social inclusion among older adults with disabilities in Imo State, Nigeria. *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research, 25*(1), 132–146. https://doi.org/10.16993/sjdr.997

Masitoh. (2020). The success of women's participation in resolving conflicts in Liberia. *Journal of Governance*.

Moser, C. O. N., & Clark, F. (Eds.). (2001). *Victims, perpetrators or actors? Gender, armed conflict and political violence*. Zed Books.

Oliver, M. (1990). *The politics of disablement*. Macmillan.

Omilusi, M. (2015). Engendering peacebuilding in an endangered country: Strategic interventions for women peace activism in Nigeria. *Àgídìgbo: ABUAD Journal of the Humanities, 3*(1), 20–32. https://doi.org/10.53982/agidigbo.2015.0301.02-j

Onyegbula, R. I. (2018). *Women's experiences in peace building processes: A phenomenological study of undeterred female leaders in Northern Nigeria* (Doctoral dissertation). Nova Southeastern University.

Ortoleva, S. (2011). Women with disabilities build peace post-conflict. PeaceWomen.

Rustad, S. A., Idowu, E., & Adeyi, A. A. (2025). *Women, peace and security in Nigeria* (GPS Policy Brief No. 5). PRIO.

Steinberg, D. J. (2009). Women and war: An agenda for action. In K. Kuehnast, C. de Jonge Oudraat, & H. Hernes (Eds.), *Women and war: Power and protection in the twenty-first century* (pp. 121–140). United States Institute of Peace Press.

UN Women. (2015). *Preventing conflict, transforming justice, securing the peace: A global study on the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325*.

UN Women. (2024a). Facts and figures: Women, peace and security.

UN Women. (2024b). Women's participation and a better understanding of the political.

United Nations. (2014). *Report of the Secretary-General on women and peace and security* (S/2014/693).

Worldometer. (2026). Nigeria population. https://www.worldometers.info

ISBN: 978-625-90132-5-1