Gendering Political Power in Central African Republic: An Analysis of the Emergence and Challenges of 'Mother Courage'

Col. (Rtd.) Abiodun Joseph Oluwadare

Ph.D., Department of Peace & Conflict Studies
National Open University of Nigeria
Ahmadu Bello Way, Victoria Island
Lagos, Nigeria
omoijewi@yahoo.com

Abstract: *The causes/consequences and dimensions/dynamics mixes of the crisis of political power contestations among groups in Africa in the post cold-war era continue to generate robust debates among scholars. All over the continent, as evinced in the following examples; the Arab Spring of the Maghreb Region (Egypt, Libya and Tunisia), the challenges of ascension into and the retention of political office in the Frontline States (Zimbabwe), the political crisis of cataclysmic proportion in the Horn of Africa (Sudan and Somalia), the recurring imbroglio in the West-Coast (Mali and Liberia) and the never-ending commotion in the Great Lakes Region (Central African Republic) is a pointer to the fact that most African states are yet to device mechanisms through which political power contestations can be the true reflections of the wishes of the critical mass of the people.*

The ever-bumpy political terrain of the Central African Republic has faced renewed violence since 2012 as a result of the deep ethno/religious cleavages and class inequalities that have existed in the country since independence. The article interrogates the causes and consequences of the crisis that continues to afflict political power contestations in the country. In this effort, the 'unusual' solution of electing a woman as the Interim President of the country is our point of departure. This examination is undertaken through the framework of the Feminist Ideology. In the final analysis, the paper argues that the president's gender played a significant factor in being elected into office. However, the challenges of resolving the crisis in the country is massive, thus, the gender-status of the Interim President cannot be the only factor in the resolution of the conflict. As such, the Central African Republic can only be placed on the path of peace through the concerted efforts of the warring factions and the sincere, unbiased and collective support of the international community.

Keywords: *Anti-balaka; Feminism; Gender; Mother-Courage; Seleka*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Central African Republic is unarguably one of the most challenged states on the African continent, and indeed, in the modern world. With a GDP value of $2.184b and a Poverty Level of 62% of the population as at the 2012 (The World Bank), the country has been consistently listed as one of the least developed parts of the world since 1975. Since independence, the country has been bedevilled by the evil *troika* of seemingly intractable political instability, 'unrevampable' economic underdevelopment and deep-seated antagonisms among various groups across the economic/class and ethnic/religious divides. Most recently, the country shifted more towards the 'failed state' appellation.

In the last two years or so, the political challenges that had been left to fester for so long, came home to roost. In the ensuing stalemate among the contending political actors, the country suffers its greatest deterioration since independence. Thousands of human lives have been lost, properties worth billions of dollars have been destroyed, in addition to the collapse of state institutions and structures. The ensued catastrophe has led to the collapse of government in the C.A.R. However, with the assistance of the international community, a new political leadership has emerged, with the mandate to turn the fortunes of the country around, within approximately twelve months. It is however noteworthy to emphasise that the new political leadership is headed by a woman. The

gender-sensitive nature of this development is coming on the heels of the fact that this is the first time a woman would occupy the highest political office in C.A.R., and equally important is that the 'unusual' development is coming at an auspicious period in the development of a country that suffers great devastation from series of male-dominated armed groups. Thus, the question remains whether the woman can achieve what her male counterparts have been unable to achieve since independence- political stability.

The article begins with the framework of analysis, which focuses on the emergent roles of the womenfolk as a result of the agitation for gender-equilibrium by advocacy groups during the third-phase of feminism. Thereafter, the article presents an overview of the political trajectory of C.A.R, in order to draw insight from the fact of constant political instability, and furthermore, to highlight the absence of active involvement or participation of women at the highest level of political decision-making before now. Subsequently, the work presents the nature and character of the present crisis, which had led to the inauguration of three political leadership within a two-year period. In the final analysis, the paper deconstructs and reconstructs the experiences of 'Mother-Courage' within the context of the Feminist Ideology, against the challenges she confronts in taking the Central African Republic on the path of peace and harmony within a year at the helm of affairs.

2. FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS- THE FEMINIST IDEOLOGY

The Feminist Ideology has been commanding an authoritative part of literature in both the humanities and social-sciences since the early eighteenth century. The main thrust of the ideology though, has been the agitation for gender-equilibrium in the general perception of the roles, duties and obligations of both sexes either in public or private settings. Offen (2011) submits that: "It foregrounds women's concerns, perspectives, and efforts to be recognised as integral members of their respective societies". In contextualising the basis of the ideology, Offen (2011) contends that:

> "The history of feminism as political history necessarily embraces women's ongoing quests for educational equity, economic opportunity, civil rights, and political inclusion. It also includes controversies over women's claims to mobility, to control their own bodies and-very importantly- their fertility, and even their critiques of harmful patterns of male sexual behaviour".

The historical content and context of the agitations are generally referred to as "waves"- each wave being a reflection of the focus of the struggle as inspired by extant socio-cultural, political and economic order of different epochs.

Coming on the heels of the challenges that the womenfolk faced both domestically and publicly during the Victorian era, the first wave of feminism took the centre stage in the late 1800s and 1900s. At this point, the focus of the agitations was the determination of women to be treated as members of the human community that deserve equal respect and dignity with their male counterparts. Accordingly, the first wave emerged "out of an environment of urban industrialism and liberal, socialist politics" (Rampton, 2008). The struggles focussed on gaining legal rights such as the right to own personal property and the right to participate in the political process, such as the right to vote (women suffrage). Rampton (2008) elaborates further:

> "The goal of this wave was to open up opportunities for women, with a focus on suffrage. The wave formally began at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 when 300 men and women rallied to the cause of equality for women".

The first wave however came to an end with resounding success in parts of North America. Specifically, women were granted legal rights to be involved in the development of their children, and also, the right to own and inherit property. Similarly, women won the fight against their exclusion in the political process (women suffrage) between 1917 and 1920.

The origin of the second wave has been traced to the 1960s anti-war and civil rights movements in the United States. The second wave lasted till the early 1990s. According to Rampton (2008):

> "This wave unfolded in the context of the anti-war and civil rights movements and the growing self-consciousness of a variety of minority groups around the world. The New Left was on the rise, and the voice of the second wave was increasingly radical. In this phase, sexuality and reproductive rights were dominant issues, and much of the movement's energy was focussed on passing the Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution guaranteeing social equality regardless of sex".

A significant aspect of the struggle was focussed on "affirmative action, pay equity, rape, domestic violence, pornography and sexism in the media, and reproductive choice". The emphasis here is that the womenfolk represents a social class that should refuse to be dominated or cowed by any other class. Thus, efforts were concentrated on ridding society of the ills of 'sexism'. Instructively, it was in the second wave that a significant number of women from all over the world (developing and developed nations) focussed on a single agenda as against the experience of the first wave in which the intellectual basis of the struggle was led by middle-class white women.

The third wave is traceable to the mid-1990s when the post-colonial and post-modern thinking became dominant discourses. It was at this period that African women found expression in the ideological standpoint of equal rights and opportunities for all. The civil-wars and other wars of attritions on the continent further outlined the fragility of women as part of the vulnerable groups in crisis situations. The new challenges provided the feminist ideologists with a new platform for which their agitation was focussed. This new focus centred on the place of active political participation for women, such that they could influence political conditions and invariably be in pole-positions to limit resorts to crisis, among other laudable possibilities. In this respect, it is observed that "a new emphasis on political participation and advocacy has emerged" (Tripp, 2013). Tripp (2013) further identifies the formation of women's organisations as a tool "to improve leadership skills, encourage women's political involvement, promote women's political leadership, press for legislative changes, and conduct civic education".

Africa, a continent in which the women had played the second fiddle for so long stood at the forefront of the third wave. The achievements recorded by feminist ideology groups in Africa were made possible through assistance from international organisations, such as the United Nations and the African Union. The activities of the advocacy groups and the international organisations paved the way for women in active participation in the political processes of the various African states. Indeed, the third wave of feminism may be regarded as the era of the African woman on the political front. Statistically, this is the best period of political participation and involvement by the womenfolk in Africa. Tripp (2012: 4) alludes to this much with the following statistics:

> "Rwanda has the highest female parliamentary representation in the world (56%). In Senegal, Seychelles and South Africa, more than 40% of parliamentary seats are held by women, while in Mozambique, Angola, Tanzania and Uganda more than 35% of the seats are occupied by women".

The giant strides achieved so far, have been ultimately reflected in the emergence of women as President in the three African nations of Liberia, Malawi and Central African Republic. Up until the emergence of 'Mother Courage' as the President of the Central African Republic, the country never provided the platform for the political visibility of the womenfolk. In retrospect, the struggle for active political participation of women had gone on for so long, and as the profile of the womenfolk begin to rise, it is expected that they may be able to tackle the issues of political challenges better than the male-counterparts, especially in a place like C.A.R where the men had superintended on the devastation of the country since independence. There are however signals to confirm that 'Mother Courage' represents the platform upon which the hope of a future C.A.R free of strife can be placed. Her experiences in both women advocacy and partisan politics should stand her in good-stead for the challenges ahead.

3. THE POLITICAL TRAJECTORY OF C.A.R

The Central African Republic is one of the relatively least-influential among the former French colonies on the continent of Africa. The country's influence and political clout on the global stage is remarkably weak when compared to that of its central Africa counterparts, like Cameroon and Gabon. The weakness is even more glaring when Central African Republic is compared with its counterparts in Franco-phone West Africa, such as, Cote d'Ivoire, and Senegal. Bordered by Cameroon, Chad and Congo, the country possesses some of the worst socio-economic indicators on the African continent. The depressing state of the country's socio-economic conditions is not unconnected with the political instability that has been her defining character since independence.

The Central African Republic was granted political independence by France on the 13th August, 1960, and ever since, the country has been challenged by severe political turmoil that has been detrimental to the chances of socio-economic growth and development, and the possibilities of achieving socio-cultural peace and harmony. The political landscape has always been defined by various forms of authoritarian regimes, such as, civil dictatorships, military despotism, and an empire rule. The contestations for acquisition and retention of political power have usually been fierce and destructive (Kalck, 2005).

The first signals that a perpetual political turmoil would be the lot of the country came to the fore when the cronies of the late, first Prime-Minister of the country, Barthelemy Boganda engaged in a fierce power tussle for the office upon his death in 1959. The damning consequences of the tussle was averted through the intervention of the French government, which supported the organisation of a multi-party election. It was on the basis of the election that David Dacko initially held forth as both the Prime Minister and President, before jettisoning the former and placing all executive powers in the latter. Acting on a plot that would ensure his perpetuation in office, President Dacko manipulated the parliament into amending the constitution, so that the country became a one-party state in 1962. Predictably, this development caused much misgivings against the government and further entrenched the animosity in the political space that had begun with Dacko's power tussle with Abel Goumba (his former ally during Prime Minister Boganda's tenure in office), and the subsequent arrest of the latter.

It was not unexpected that various other political elements would make efforts to unseat the government of President Dacko, even if through undemocratic means. Subsequently, the first military coup, known as the Saint-Sylvester coup d'état was planned and executed by Col. Jean-Bedel Bokassa in December 1965. Bokassa had a weird and warped idea of running the government and the political process. Besides the dictatorial tendencies, which is the hallmark of every military regime, Bokassa in 1972 proclaimed the country an Empire, and declared himself, President for Life, and officially renamed himself and the country in 1976, Emperor Bokassa I of the Central African Empire. The Emperor's eccentricity was pushed a notch further in a ludicrous and flamboyant ceremony organised to celebrate his inauguration in a 'Napoleonic' fashion. The resources expended on the celebrations greatly accounted for the further impoverishment of the citizens (Titley, 1997). In addition to the extravagant lifestyle, the other various atrocities of the regime further deepened the discontent that always existed against the government. Under Bokassa's watch, the country was on the verge of total collapse. The regime was characterised by flagrant disregard for human rights, high-level corruption, extra-judicial murders, collapse of governmental institutions, among others.

France, as the former colonial masters equally felt disgusted by not a few of the actions of government, and thus, never hid its intentions to assist in reforming the country's political space. It is on record that France supported the coup d'état that ousted the Bokassa regime and reinstated Dacko. The new Dacko government attempted to revert to the former order of constitutional rule, but the regime was toppled barely two years after taking over power, in yet, another military coup d'état led by Gen Andre Kolingba.

By 1986, Kolingba bowed under pressure to engineer a democratic process, which led to the adoption of a new constitution. Expectedly, Kolingba systematically transmuted from being a military Head-of-State to a civilian President through globally condemnable processes. However, as the democratic wind of change blew throughout the world in the late 1990s, pressure was

mounted on the Kolingba administration to democratise. Bowing to pressures from both local and international sources, a relatively free and fair democratic elections were conducted in 1993.

The dawn of a new era of democratic politics appeared in the horizon when Ange-Felix Patasse under the auspices of the Movement for the Liberation of the Central African People emerged winners in the presidential elections after a long-drawn process that ensured a second-round of voting. The Patasse government was confronted with the challenges of governing a fractured state, one in which, even the leadership had become part of the polarisation by showing clear favouritism towards people of certain ethnic groups, and bias against some others. Various attempts were made to topple the government, and even the civil society and disgruntled citizens reacted against the policies of government. In fact, ethnic tensions were heightened during the Patasse era. The consequent agitations and confrontations led to a total breakdown of law and order that involved mediation by the international community. The outcome of the mediation was the Bangui Agreement of 1997, which was signed and accepted by all the warring factions. The agreement led to the creation of the inter-African Force in the Central African Republic, called MISAB, which was later replaced by the UN's United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic (MINURCA) to oversee the next stage of political developments in the country.

Patasse was re-elected in what was generally regarded as a free and fair election in 1999. However, in a bid to unseat the democratically elected President Patasse, insurgents within the military organised and executed an unsuccessful coup d'état attempt in 2001. In retaliation against the failed coup attempt, government forces instituted a clampdown on the suspected perpetrators, leading to a revenge mission that saw the destruction of homes and the killing of many opponents of the government.

A new attempt at unseating the government was organised in March 2003, and this time, the Francois Bozize-led attacks successfully toppled the Patasse government. The Bozize government pretended to have emerged to clean the Aegean stable, by firstly, creating a National Transition Council that was mandated to draft a new constitution. Furthermore, a national conference was organised to address the grievances of the various contending groups and stakeholders in the country. The conference was presumably aimed at fashioning a way to achieving mutual coexistence. Later that year, Francois Bozize won a generally confirmed fair election that made him the President of the Central African Republic. However, the beginning of the end of Bozize's administration came with the fraudulent elections of 2011. With the unwillingness of Bozize to relinquish power when it was apparent that he did not win the elections 'fair and square', a most dangerous pattern of struggle for power in the Central African Republic was instituted. By November, 2012, there was no denying the fact that the Central African Republic was heading for catastrophic political, cum armed confrontations. Up until the present, it is apparent that "the Central African Republic has never had a chance to develop itself due to its colonial past, coups, endemic corruption, and the looting of resources" (Krumova, 2014).

4. THE CONTENT OF C.A.R'S SUBSISTING POLITICAL CONUNDRUM

Former President Francois Bozize's strong hold on power precipitated the events that led to the complete breakdown of law and order in present day C.A.R. It began with the deadly attacks on civilians by the insurgent Seleka Coalition Group. The rebel group is a coalition of insurgents formed by die-hard anti-government forces, which includes the Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace (CPJP) and the Patriotic Convention for Saving the Country (CPSK). The forceful manner in which the Seleka Group announced its presence was enough to frighten the Bozize administration about an impending overthrow of government. In order to ensure the continued hold on power, President Bozize agreed to a truce with the rebels. The truce was sustained on the basis of a power-sharing deal that involved compromises from the government. However, the strange bedfellows were driven by myopic rather than national interests, thereby making the power-sharing deal unworkable. The rebels returned to the trenches in order to advance another assault on the government. This time, President Bozize fled the country in the face of imminent danger to his life, thereby, paving way for the enthronement of the rebel leader, Michel Djotodia.

Michel Djotodia's assumption of office in a highly divided and fragmented C.A.R meant that there was the need for the Government of National Unity to reform the political, economic and

socio-cultural landscape of the country. According to the International Crisis Group (Africa Report NO 203):

> "... uncertainty remains due to the absence of the State, Seleka's fragility and tensions between Christians and Muslims. To avoid having an ungovernable territory in the heart of Africa, the new government of national unity must quickly adopt emergency security, humanitarian, political and economic measures to restore security and revive the economy. For their part, international partners must replace their "wait-and-see" policy with more robust political and financial engagement to supervise and support the transition".

In effect, the GNU had the onerous tasks of securing the country, organising elections, restoring public services and implementing, judicial, economic and social reforms. Quite unfortunately though, it became impossible to tame the Seleka Group. With Djotodia in power, the Group acted with impunity- committing atrocities all over the country, and indeed, with reckless abandon. The Group's acts of insolence for the laws of the land took a dangerous turn when attacks were directed at Christians in the country. After entrenching murderous rampage in the north-east of the country, the Seleka moved into every other part of the country, including the relatively cosmopolitan Bangui. Amnesty International (2014) reports that "... Seleka forces killed countless civilians, burned numerous villages, and looted thousands of homes".

Eventually and in the face of global condemnation of the atrocities, President Michel Djotodia officially announced the dissolution of the Seleka Group. However, not done with the atrocities, the group was splintered, and they dispersed in smaller units to different parts of the country in the continued expression of the orgy of deadly violence. Specifically, executions, acts of rape and lootings became their weapons against their perceived enemies, the Christians. The Djotodia government's inability to stem the tide of the orgy of violence, lawlessness and sectarian attacks informed the re-emergence of the anti-balaka militants. The anti-balaka militias had operated in the 1990s as vigilante forces within the villages, with the main task of protecting the people against robbery and other such anti-social activities. The regrouping of the members of the group was informed by the need to fight back against the Muslim-dominated Seleka group. The reformed anti-balaka group emerged as the custodian and protector of the rights of Christians. However, the mission of the group, and its mode of operation leaves much to be desired. According to Vircoulon & Lesueur (2014):

> "The anti-balaka fighters come from rural areas, carry traditional weapons and home-made guns, and wear grigri (magical charms) to make themselves invincible and bullet- and rocket-proof. Most are illiterate teenagers whose families have been killed and villages burned by Seleka fighters. They basically lost everything and came to Bangui for revenge. They want the Seleka to be disarmed and leave Bangui and the neighbouring provinces, they call the rebels "Arabs" and consider them foreigners".

The consequence of the confrontation between the two groups is the cycle of unprecedented violence that was hitherto unknown to the Central African Republic. Being the majority population, the retaliatory attacks of the anti-balaka was even more daring and impactful. The March 2013 coup brought a mostly Muslim rebel coalition to power in a country with a majority of Christians, thereby turning a hitherto political instability to the more dangerous and ferocious religious war that has threatened to become genocide. In the intervening period of the crisis,

> "... the crisis has moved rapidly from Bangui to the provinces. Most worryingly, what was primarily a political conflict- driven by poverty, bad governance, corruption, underdevelopment and inequality- has taken on ugly religious overtones, making conflict resolution and recovery all the more difficult".

It is on record that anti-balaka unrepentantly "carried out horrific attacks on Muslim communities, particularly in C.A.R's northwest, including on many villages around the town of Bossangoa". One of the most chilling examples of the horrific conditions in C.A.R is described in this manner:

> "A daring 5 December 2013 anti-balaka attack on Bangui led to an explosion of violence, tearing whatever was left of the country's social fabric. After the Seleka forces managed to repel the anti-balaka offensive they carried out an extensive series of reprisal attacks against Christians in the city. Although the Seleka in some cases claimed to be pursuing anti-balaka militants, they did not make a meaningful effort to distinguish between militants and non-militants, killing between 800 to 1,200 people, primarily civilian men" (Amnesty International, 2014).

Furthermore, a report by the International Crisis Group (2014) summarises the situation thus:

> "Civilians are being targeted along religious lines, but not because of their religious beliefs or practises. Although different religious communities lived peacefully together for generations, intermarrying and living in mixed neighbourhoods, mistrust and even hatred now separates many members of different religious communities. Religion is viewed as a critical indicator of one's loyalties to the country's different armed groups".

The constant violence ensured that the Djotodia administration could no longer govern, especially with the collapse of State institutions. This is put in clearer perspective thus:

> "In 2013, the CAR collapsed: the wages of civil servants were paid by foreign donors (notably the government of the Republic of Congo); security disappeared and efforts to reinstate it could only be conducted by international forces; there is no government in place and all the state services have dissolved" (Vircoulon & Lesueur, 2014).

In a similar tone, Amnesty International argues:

> "The Central African Republic is gripped by a human rights and humanitarian crisis of historic proportions. By failing to respond more robustly and urgently, the international community has shown a callous disregard for the country's embattled civilians, abandoning them in their moments of need".

With this state of affairs, it became apparent that the Djotodia administration did not possess the wherewithal to lead the country out of the crisis, thus, the calls for the international community to wade in to stop the reckless carnage and help with the rebuild of state institutions. In this regard, Pickering (2013) urges:

> "The international community needs to keep CAR at the top of their agendas and to support this fragile country. the humanitarian community must also maintain its commitment to CAR, in spite of the current political and security situation and allocate adequate resources to the medical and humanitarian crisis gripping the country".

In the face of the harsh realities and in response to the global call for a coordinated international action, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN) began to work assiduously to ensure a return to normalcy in Central African Republic. Equally, France (the former colonial master) and neighbouring states, such as, Chad, Cameroun, among others, have also been engaged in the process of solving the problems in C.A.R. The AU initiated the formation of the International Support Mission to the Central African Republic (MISCA), and on the strength of a UN Security Council Resolution 2127, MISCA was established in December, 2013 solely to help in the political stabilisation process of the country. Specifically, the UN mandates MISCA to contribute:

    a. To the protection of civilians and the restoration of security and public order, through the use of appropriate measures;

    b. The stabilisation of the country and the restoration of State authority over the whole territory of the country;

   c. The creation of conditions conducive to the provision of humanitarian assistance to the populations in need;

   d. The DDR or DDDR process led by the Transitional Authorities and coordinated by BINUCA;

   e. National and international efforts to restore and restructure the defence and security sectors led by the Transitional Authorities and coordinated by BINUCA.

The international community has graciously intervened in the crisis. However, whilst the confrontations may have reduced, the consequences of the almost two-years of armed confrontation remains far-reaching.

5. CONSEQUENCES OF C.A.R'S INCESSANT POLITICAL CONUNDRUM

As expected, the after effect of the crisis in the C.A.R is similar to the Rwandan, Sierra-Leone and Liberian experiences. Such crises are characterised by social dislocation and humanitarian crisis-refugee problems and problems associated with internally displaced persons. Furthermore, the effects of such crises are never limited to the states concerned, but also have implications for regional peace and harmony. Vircoulon & Lesueur (2014), contextualises the effects of the crisis on both the state and her neighbours.

> "In the provinces, militias are establishing territorial control: most of western CAR has fallen to anti-balaka militia who are pushing away Muslim communities, while Seleka fighters control the northeast. There is an exodus of Muslims to safe areas, including Chad, Cameroon and the eastern part of the country. all this risks a de-facto division of the country along religious lines and between armed groups, with new groups likely to emerge soon".

The International Crisis Group (2013) also reports that, "the state collapse has triggered a serious humanitarian crisis, with 400,000 displaced and nearly half the population in need of assistance". The International Committee of the Red Cross reports explains that by early 2014, about 2.2m people needed assistance in Central African Republic. Furthermore, about half the population of Bangui, about 513,000 people had left their home, and about 100,000 people had relocated and made shelter at the airport under the protection and watchful eyes of the French contingent. In the face of the harsh realities of the crisis, the UN Secretary General appealed to all concerned in the following words:

> "Too many people are scared and the country is on the brink of ruin, I appeal to everyone to follow the path of peace. The bloodshed must stop. I have a clear message to all who will commit atrocities and crimes against humanity. The world is watching. You will be held to account".

The International Committee of the Red Cross further laments:

> "The armed conflict raging in the Central African Republic has caused large number of people to lose contact with their relatives, or have often fled to other parts of the country, or into neighbouring countries. Many families have been split off and don't know whether their loved ones are alive or dead. This emotional burden is then added to the sheer struggle to survive".

In response to these atrocities and devastation, the international community responded through the regional organisation- Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). Vircoulon & Lesuerer (2014) describes the content of ECCAS' intervention thus:

> "ECCAS sanctioned the president and prime minister for the failure of the political transition they were meant to oversee after the March 2013 coup, led by the Seleka rebels. They were summoned to the ECCAS summit in N'Djamena, Chad, which began on 9 January. That same day, members of the CAR's National Transitional Council (CNT), which has 135 members from across the political spectrum and was set up after the

> coup as a temporary parliament, were hastily brought to summit in order to validate the resignations".

With the resignation of President Michel Djotodia and Prime-Minister Nicolas Tiangaye, the citizens and the international community became hopeful about the possibilities of an end to the deadly conflict. The AU spokesperson portrayed the feeling thus:

> "We are encouraged to see that with the departure of the ex-president and prime-minister, the Central African Republic has now got quite an excellent opportunity to reorganise their government- to put in place a more proactive government that can work with the international community to help them secure their country politically and also economically".

6. MOTHER COURAGE- A FEMALE ACTIVIST TO THE RESCUE

The Interim President of Central African Republic, Catherine Samba-Panza is the third female president in Africa, coming after Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia and Joyce Banda, the former President of Malawi. President Samba-Panza was elected to oversee the affairs of the war-torn state, and possibly bring back the state from the brink of total collapse within one year. Her election into office is by no means a fluke, 'Mother Courage' (named after Betolt Brecht's character in the 1939 stage production- *Mother Courage and Her Children*) worked her way through the rigours of public office. Although, she cut her political teeth first as the Governor of the relatively cosmopolitan and highly volatile capital city of Central African Republic- Bangui. Prior to her involvement in partisan politics, she was deeply involved in issues relating to the public good, especially in the area of advocacy. In effect, she is well-grounded in civil-society advocacy. This is combined with her experience and warm interaction with the business community in the Central African Republic. The president's long commitment to the development of C.A.R is never doubt, having also served meritoriously as a member of C.A.R's female lawyers association and the National Council for Mediation. She commenced her political activities during the National Dialogue of 2003. Without doubt therefore, "she embodies the need for new thinking and the widespread rejection of the political establishment, who 'ruined the country'" (Vircoulon & Lesueur, 2014). Strictly speaking, her election raises hopes for the return of the country to peace and harmony. In reaction to the president's public service experience pedigree, Wolters (2014) submits:

> "Her election is certainly something new. There's never been a woman at the head of the CAR. That, together with the fact that she is a civil-society activist with no clear links to any party, will probably help her to be seen as more neutral and working for the good of the country, and not for furthering her own political career. Perhaps people have more confidence in a woman".

President Samba-Panza's rise to prominence is made possible majorly through her educational qualifications. In a country where 70% of women are illiterate, the president falls within the lowest percentile of the class of educated women. By virtue of lack of formal education, the women are denied the opportunities to compete with the male folks for positions of political authority. Unfortunately, in addition to the deprivations and lack of opportunities, the African woman is among the most vulnerable groups in every conflict situation. Aside of the social-dislocation that come with violent crises, women are also susceptible to rape, maltreatment and various forms of abuses. Needless to argue therefore, that the relatively defenceless women know exactly 'where the shoe pinches' in crisis situations. It is however soothing that the Feminist Ideologists have laid the foundation through which gender disequilibrium can be redressed.

7. CONCLUSIONS- ENGENDERING ENDURING PEACE IN CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

There is no gain reiterating the fact of the devastation that has become the lot of C.A.R as a result of the social conflict that engulfed the country. The conflict "has been fuelled by extreme poverty, a lack of access to resources, and a lack of redistribution of revenue from minerals" (Krumova,

2014). It took a dangerous turn with the emergence of the Us/Them dichotomy inherent in the religious dimension which the conflict degenerated into. President Samba-Panza's government would have to figure out ways of, firstly, "leading the transformation process in the country", secondly, "disarm renegade militias, calm ethnic and sectarian tensions", and lastly, "address the humanitarian crisis which has touched nearly every one of her 4.5 million new subjects" (Ndukong, 2014). One of the fundamental steps towards achieving the onerous tasks is to restructure the power arrangement such that it accommodates the diverse groups in the country without discriminating against certain members of society, either on the basis of ethnicity or religion" (Krumova, 2014).

Though confronted with an arduous task, President Samba-Panza however has some factors working in her favour, which could make it possible to achieve the responsibility the government is saddled with. In this respect, there is the fact that her enviable record as the Mayor of Bangui stand her in good stead. As the former Mayor of Bangui, she is perceived positively as a seasoned politician by the critical mass of the people. She is not known to be directly involved in the activities of the warring factions, neither is she connected with the former regime of Francois Bozize. In the past, she had played noble roles in resolving C.A.R's political logjam thus enjoying reputable goodwill. It is noteworthy that her former position as head of a reconciliation process aimed at unifying series of C.A.R's political groupings are essential for the present task before her. In addition, she developed a reputation as 'incorruptible' in a country where every political office-holder is expected to be corrupt.

Furthermore, the religious dynamics in the crisis has ensured that only a Christian leader could soothe frayed nerves, thus, this adds to the possibilities of a majority acceptance of the Samba-Panza administration. As envisaged, "Samba-Panza's religion will calm and reassure the Christian majority" (Allison, 2014). However, the Muslim minority would equally need some reassurance about their well-being in the post-conflict C.A.R.

Perhaps, the most important advantage is the one pointed out by Rampton (2014). The author argues:

> "Women, due to their long 'subjugation' or to their biology, were thought by some to be more humane, collaborative, inclusive, peaceful, nurturing, democratic, and holistic in their approach to problem solving than men".

If the President has the luxury of cooperation from the major armed factions in the country, being a woman, she has the capacity to provide solutions for the major problems confronting C.A.R. However, being a woman or not, the solution to the problems cannot be found within a year. This explains the reasons for the clamour for a longer time for President Samba-Panza. It is in this respect that Vircoulon & Lesueur (2014) argues:

> "This is the third transitional government in a year. The timeline of a year to the next planned elections is unrealistic and dangerous. There are obvious risks in rushing to a vote in a country with as troubled and electoral history as the CAR, particularly now in the light of recent intercommunal divisions, armed groups' territorial control and massive population displacement. Regional and international actors should be prepared to support a longer transition and the transitional government should focus on reconciliation, improving security and making state services effective. These are the foundations for a decent electoral process".

It is therefore surmised that:

> "Saving the CAR is one of the most difficult tasks in world politics today ... In choosing Catherine Samba-Panza to lead it, the CAR has made at least one small step in the right direction" (Allison, 2014).

REFERENCES

[1] Allison, S. (2014, 27 January). Catherine Samba-Panza : Meet the woman tasked with saving the Central African Republic. Daily Maverick. Retrieved from http://allafrica.com/stories/201401280638.html

[2] Africa Report, (2013). Central African Republic: Priorities of the Transition. (No. 203. 11 June). Brussels, Belgium: International Crisis Group. Retrieved from http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/africa/central-africa/central-african-republic/203-central-african-republic-priorities-of-the-transition.aspx

[3] Africa Briefing, (2013). Central African Republic: Better Late than Never. (N0 96. 2 December). Brussels, Belgium: International Crisis Group. Retrieved from .http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/africa/central-africa/central-african-republic/b096-central-african-republic-better-late-than-never.aspx

[4] Amnesty International (2013). Central African Republic: Human Rights Crisis Spiralling Out of Control. (Index NO. AFR/19/003/2013). London: Amnesty International Publications. Retrieved from http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AFR19/003/2013/en/7cb18014-e52a-4ab6-a879-4ac73d98c8af/afr190032013en.pdf

[5] International Committee of the Red Cross (2014). Central African Republic: Conflict taking heavy toll. (Operational Update 05/2014). Retrieved from http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/update/2014/05-02-central-african-

[6] Kalck, P. (2005). Historical Dictionary of Central African Republic. Lanham: The Scarecrow Press. Krumova, K. (2014, February 10). Ending Central African Republic's Ethnic Violence. Epoch Times. Retrieved from http://www.theepochtimes.com/n3/498256-ending-central-african-republics-ethnic-violence/?photo=2 N

[7] dukong, K. (2014). No Easy Ride Ahead For Catherine Samba-Panza. International Politique. https://www.cameroon-tribune.cm/index2.php/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=79033:no-easy-ride-ahead-for-catherine-samba-panza&catid=39:politique&Itemid=5

[8] News (2014, 2 April). EU and African leaders must not fail the people of Central African Republic. Amnesty International. Retrieved from http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/eu-and-african-leaders-must-not-fail-people-central-african-republic-2014-04-02republic-bangui-health-care-access.htm News (2014, 9 April). The Central African Republic's Human Rights Crisis. Retrieved from http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/qa-central-african-republic-s-human-rights-crisis-2014-04-09

[9] Offen, K. (2011). The History of Feminism is Political History. Perspectives on History. Retrieved from http://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/may-2011/political-history-today/the-history-of-feminism-is-political-history.

[10] Pickering, J. (2013). The Children in Need: Humanitarian Crisis in the Central African Republic. Think Africa Press. Retrieved from http://thinkafricapress.com/central-african-republic/children-need-humanitarian-crisis

[11] Rampton, M. (2008). The Three Waves of Feminism. Retrieved from http://www.pacificu.edu/magazine_archives/2008/fall/echoes/feminism.cfm The World Bank (2014). Retrieved from http://data.worldbank.org/country/central-african republic.

[12] Titley, B. (1997). Dark Ages: The Political Odyssey of Emperor Bokassa. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press. Tripp, A. (2013). How African Feminism Changed the World. Think Africa Press. Retrieved from http://thinkafricapress.com/gender/how-african-feminism-changed-world Tripp, A. (2012). New Directions in Scholarship on Gender and Politics in Africa. In G.

[13] Bauer & A. Tripp (Ed.) Symposium: New Directions in Gender and Politics Scholarship: Transforming the Study of African Politics. APCG. Vol. 8, Issue 2. September. Retrieved from http://africanpoliticsgroup.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/APCG-Newsletter-30s.pdf

[14] Vircoulon, T. & Lesueur, T. (2014). Central African Republic: The third Government in Thirteen Months Gets Under Way. The African Peacebuilding Agenda. Retrieved from

http://www.crisisgroupblogs.org/africanpeacebuilding/2014/01/21/central-african-republic-the-third-government-in-thirteen-months-gets-under-way/

[15] Vircoulon, T. & Lesueur, T. (2014). Central African Republic- Making the Mission Work. (25, Feb.) http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/africa/central-africa/central-african-republic/op-eds/2014/vircoulon-lesueur-car-making-the-mission-work.aspx

[16] Wolters, S. (2014). "Central African Republic's new president 'a fresh start'". Institute for Security Studies. Retrieved fromhttp://www.issafrica.org/iss-today/central-african-republics-new-president-a-fresh-start. 24, January.