Gendered Terrorism: Interrogating Women and Girls Participation in Insurgency in North-Eastern Nigeria 2010-2015

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Abstract

This study examines the participation of women and girls in the Boko Haram insurgency in North-Eastern Nigeria from 2010 to 2015, focusing on the gendered dimensions of their involvement and the implications for counterinsurgency efforts. Utilizing a feminist theoretical framework, the research explores the motivations and methods through which women and girls are recruited into insurgent activities, whether as coerced actors or voluntary participants. It investigates the specific roles women play within Boko Haram, including as suicide bombers, fighters, and supporters, and the socio-economic and patriarchal factors that drive their involvement. The study also assesses the Nigerian government's counterinsurgency strategies, particularly their effectiveness in addressing the unique needs of women and girls affected by the conflict. Through qualitative case study analysis, the research highlights the disproportionate impact of insurgency on women, who often face sexual violence, forced displacement, and economic hardship. It also underscores the critical yet underrecognized contributions of women in peacebuilding and counterinsurgency efforts, such as their roles in civilian defense forces and negotiation processes. The findings reveal that while women are frequently victimized by insurgency, they are also co-opted as perpetrators, complicating their dual roles as both victims and agents of violence. The study concludes that counterinsurgency strategies in Nigeria have largely failed to incorporate a gendered approach, exacerbating the vulnerabilities of women and girls. It calls for more inclusive and gender-sensitive policies to address the complex dynamics of women's participation in insurgency and to enhance their role in peacebuilding and conflict resolution. This research contributes to the broader discourse on gender, violence, and security, offering insights into

the intersection of patriarchal norms, socio-economic marginalization, and women's agency in conflict settings.

Keywords: Gender, Terrorism, Boko Haram, Conflict, Peace Building

1. Introduction

Conflicts, the pursuit of incompatible interests, are inextricable features of human societies. The need for conflict management is at the very roots of the existence of the state. From the social contract theories of Hobbes and Locke to history-based theories like Engels' Origins of family, private properties and the state, the origin of state institutions for managing inter-personal and intergroup relations, stem from the need to ensure that while persons (and groups) in society pursue their different, seemingly irreconcilable, goals, the discord that emerge does not degenerate into chaos and eventual anarchy. From the social contract thinking, especially the Hobbesian variant, the formation of the state itself arose as a result of reciprocal gestures between individuals and groups, and its sustenance is dependent on the states' capacity to ensure

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the role that women and girls play in the insurgencies in north Nigeria, specifically with regard to Boko Haram, as well as the gender implications of counterinsurgency operations. By doing this, the study hopes to provide answers to the following queries: What are the reasons and methods by which girls and women join the Boko Haram insurgency? Under what condition can this involvement, when not physically imposed, be considered a deliberate choice? What specific responsibilities do women play within the rebel group Boko Haram, and how do these roles affect them? In conclusion, do counterinsurgency operations in Nigeria consider the unique needs and roles of women, and how are efforts to establish gendered approaches and tactics developing in Nigeria? From this, the following specific objectives are drawn:

- Analyse the ways and reasons in which women and girls have taken part in the Boko Haram insurgency both as victims and active participants, such as suicide bombers and fighters

- investigate under what conditions and to what degree women's active participation in violent and extremist groups can be understood as a conscious and voluntary decision
- Examine the particular challenges and risks that women and girls face in areas affected by violence, such as forced migration, sexual assault, and loss of livelihoods
- Analyse the actions made by the Nigerian government to tackle the gendered facets of the insurgency, such as those aimed at rehabilitating and reintegrating female victims and former fighters
- Assess the contributions made by women to counterinsurgency efforts, including their work as peacekeepers, diplomats, and members of civilian defence forces.

2. Literature Review

Violence typically causes great harm to people, but because of their unique needs and vulnerabilities, as well as their important role in society, the effects on women, girls, and children are more complicated and catastrophic (O'Toole & Schiffman 1997; True 2012; Mesok 2023). Furthermore, women and girls are more often the victims of violence and insurgencies than they are the members and/or supporters of these groups. Around the globe, women have taken on a variety of roles in insurgencies, sometimes voluntarily and other times not (Achibong 2020; Giri 2020; Coady 2024). For example, Arcibong (2020) argues that women are confronted with circumstances that deny them the option of choosing not to participate in the violence committed by rebels. Giri (2020) focusses on the Maoist insurgency in Nepal and argues that women participated in the movement to protest against patriarchal society's marginalisation, neglect, and injustices. Women were fighting against the dominant patriarchal mentality and narratives within their group while participating in the insurgency.

Accurately comprehending the gendered dimension of insurgencies is crucial to properly mitigating this challenge, given the complexity of insurgency's impact on women and their role in insurgency and other violent situations. The impact of insurgency on women and girls, whether as members or supporters of insurgent groups or as innocent victims of the insurgency, has been the subject of scholarly

attention and several studies (e.g. Baksh-Soodeen 2005; Fung 2005; Garms, Wilkinson & Kapur, 2019; Kostivicova & Paskhalis 2021; Schneiker 2021). Multiple theories have been proposed in an attempt to explain this involvement. In general, research claims that women are either ideologically brainwashed or coopted in insurgency because to their relationships with male actors (Garms, Wilkinson & Kapur, 2019). The role of women in counterinsurgency and insurgency within the Nigerian setting has been researched broadely. Studies focussing on gender have made an effort to comprehend how conflict affects women's rights (Olugbenga & Emmanuel, 2017), how women are involved in terrorism and insurgency (Amusan et al., 2019), and how women are battling back against insurgency (Agbiboa 2022; Nasiru 2022). Women's unique aptitude for obtaining intelligence, for instance, has been emphasised by Nwangwu et al. (2021) in research on their role in counterinsurgency.

Additionally, initiatives to address the conflict between counterinsurgency and women's rights violations have been attempted (Ibukun 2020). According to Olugbenga and Emmanuel (2017), domestic relocation, the loss of a source of income, and violent crimes including rape, murder, and kidnapping all contribute to the diminution of women's rights. As agents of terror, women play a multifaceted role in insurgency, according to Amusan et al. (2019, p. 345). They serve as "combatants, (suicide) bombers, spies and bates, recruiters, mobilisers, motivators, strategists, camerawomen and media crew in operations, procurers and suppliers (including transporters and porters) of arms, ammunitions, foods and messages to insurgents among other domestic services like sex, cooking, cleaning, and property maintenance in camps." Ibukun (2020) makes the case that gendered considerations in counterinsurgency lead to human rights violations, particularly those of women, because of a presumed incongruence between counterinsurgency and human rights.

Research on the gender dimension of insurgency in Africa has gone beyond general trends and nation-specific patterns, offering in-depth understanding of other crucial facets of insurgency and counterinsurgency. In reference to violent extremism (VE), women can play a range of roles. They can also make major contributions to attempts to counter violent extremism (CVE), as stated by Idris

(2020) in Kenya, one of the nations where Al-Shabaab is active. Within the gang, women take on various roles: wives, victims, recruiters, intelligence gatherers, and even as violent offenders. Additionally, the study reveals that an increasing number of violent extremist groups deliberately target women and girls for a range of reasons, which suggests that women engage in diverse behaviours and experience a range of consequences. In order to threaten the target group, provide financial gain through forced labour, trafficking, sexual slavery, and incentives for male recruitment (by providing wives), and obtain information about potential victims, there are two main categories of victims: (a) vulnerable victims. Group differences exist in the roles that women play in combat; (c) Supporting Roles: these include radicalisation and recruitment, business ventures and fund-raising, the delivery of goods and weapons, medical care, household chores, and the group's survival through procreation. Along with a need for sisterhood and companionship, the study also showed that women are motivated to join extremist groups by systemic gender-based marginalisation and injustice.

In a similar vein, Ndung'u and Salifu (2017) investigate the role of women in violent extremism in Kenya in a similar manner. The findings revealed that women are significantly more involved in non-combative or indirect forms of violent extremism; they facilitate, assist, and encourage violent extremism, acting as a kind of "invisible infrastructure" for al-Shabaab. According to the research, women work for al-Shabaab as recruiters, pies for the organisation, and in operational roles that involve gathering intelligence and providing shelter to terrorists or family members associated with extremist organisations. They also cook meals for violent extremists or deliver meals to relatives who have been detained for terror-related offences, facilitate financial transactions to support organisations that promote violence and extremism, provide healthcare to wounded extremist fighters in Somalia at the Dadaab refugee camp, radicalise their own children, and provide "company" or "comfort" for terrorists, usually through marriages between the sympathisers' own networks of friends and family. The study by Ndung'u and Salifu (2017) went on to emphasise the contributing elements of women's engagement in violent extremism. As a result, reasons such as the influence of relationships, problems with the economy, problems with government, and

concerns with ideology and religion are mentioned as motivating women to engage in violent extremism.

In their analysis of the role played by Kosovar women in violent extremism, Speckhard and Shajkovci (2017) reported the stories of women who, defying cultural expectations, choose the dangerous route to violent extremism, taking advantage of the material and spiritual gains that are promised in Syria and Iraq. These women travel there knowing full well the types of groups they are joining; some even end up recruited by ISIS.

According to the survey, several of them strongly supported their husbands' enrolment, wanted to move their families to a traditional Islamic environment, and had a clear picture of the idealised ISIS "Caliphate" and chose to aid in its formation. Speckhard and Shajkovci (2017) suggest that their involvement may be a manifestation of their empowerment via a terrorist organisation that offered free housing and salaries to both sexes, as well as their discontentment with their unfulfilled aspirations for a positive identity, dignity, and purpose, and their wilful rejection of what the post-Soviet/post-Yugoslav state and society had to offer.

Some young women—sometimes married, sometimes childless—fall victim to the romantic narrative skilfully portrayed by ISIS and often attempt to find love among the jihadis. Additionally, ISIS's assertions of moral certainty, purity, and the union of all people regardless of ethnicity, social class, or justice may have enticed them to the organization's offline and online recruitment networks (Speckhard & Shajkovci 2017, p 16). Furthermore, the analysis showed that nearly all 44 of the women who flew to Syria and Iraq were young married women in their 20s who had recently converted to more conservative forms of Islam and had experienced some kind of traumatic event. ISIS and al Nusra support traditional marriages and childbearing as means of advancing their causes, which limits women's roles. That being said, ISIS allows female foreign fighters to join the hisbah and employs them in a variety of roles, including teaching and healthcare, provided that they only work with women and children.

Going further, Gilbert (2020) provided evidence that many Syrian women were able to institutionalise places for women in local government, refuting the widely-held notion that women's political participation ends with the onset of armed conflict. They were significant contributors to organisations that provided law enforcement and basic public goods to populations caught in the conflict. However, there was an exception, since many Syrian women were not given the chance to hold positions of governmental authority. Consequently, the study came to the conclusion that women can rise to prominence in these new political organisations provided they are able to organise and exhibit the necessary ability to demand a seat at the table; additionally, if local armed groups either support liberal gender norms or are incapable of upholding conservative ones.

Although providing a wide range of viewpoints and insights, the body of literature on the gender aspect of violence, security, and peace provides is far from being conclusive. The majority of recent quantitative and qualitative research focusses on women-centric theories that address the issue by seeing women (and their motivations and roles) as either conscious perpetrators or passive victims. Nevertheless, more intricate theories are at play, and sometimes it is hard to tell which ones to draw. In an attempt to bridge this gap, I investigate women's involvement in violent and extremist groups in northeastern Nigeria in order to understand whether women are "volunteering perpetrators" in certain situations or if there are other underlying factors that "force" women to commit to violence. The other, typically hidden aspect of women's victimisation and subjection would then be revealed by this. Gender-centric research would be added to this study by looking into feminist perspectives on counterinsurgency activities in northeastern Nigeria. Focusing on the northeast region of Nigeria allows for examination of gender issues associated to insurgency and counter-insurgency in highly patriarchal cultures and setting. Contextually, studies on the gender aspect of counterinsurgency efforts could help develop counterinsurgency strategies that are more effective and have a longer-lasting effect on conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

3. Theoretical Framework

As its theoretical foundation, the study uses feminist theory. In particular, it incorporates feminist viewpoints on violence, security, and peace as presented by Sharoni (2010). Women's experiences, views, and perspectives were not only questioned at the negotiating tables but also often marginalised in textbooks. According to Sharoni (2020), feminists stood up against this. She also noted that the majority of feminist writing on conflict and conflict resolution starts with the idea that concepts like violence, power, security, and peace are gendered.

Current research on gendered consideration in Nigerian counterinsurgency is informed by feminist conceptualisations of violence, security, and the state's role as well as peace. According to Sharoni(2010), feminist conceptualisations of violence are primarily contextual, grounded in the unique struggles of women, and intended to address systematic violations of people's rights and dignity based on gender as well as other factors like race, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation, among others.

According to some scholars (e.g., Aoláin 2009, Oswald 2009, de Jonge Oudraat & Brown 2020), security is viewed as a primarily patriarchal concept that prioritises maintaining and controlling the status quo. As such, security and counterinsurgency efforts are seen as incomplete, illusive, and unimportant. The opinion is that governmental security initiatives frequently undermine security, particularly for women and other marginalised groups. According to de Jonge Oudraat and Brown (2020), peace is seen as the absence of all forms of physical, structural, and cultural violence, along with the existence of justice and equality for all. Peace is the third important problem under focus in this context. It entails creating an environment where women can take charge of their lives.

This theory has broad applicability to this research of the gendered aspects of insurgency and counterinsurgency in Nigeria. A broader feminist concern with institutional and societal marginalisation of women as well as the entrenched domination of women by patriarchal traditions meshes well with feminist emphasis on the detrimental effects of women's exclusion and marginalisation in conflict and peace concerns.

This would also provide an explanation for why women are involved in insurgency. Women involved in extreme insurgency might be viewed as "coerced actors" when they commit acts of violence because of the oppression and control that they experience from male counterparts, spouses, and other male figures. The notion is reinforced by the persistent practice of women being subjugated, which results in their lack of economic, political, and social power and increases their vulnerability to acting as violent, grievance-driven perpetrators. Furthermore, this study can benefit from a number of feminist interpretations of the state's function as well as conceptions of violence, security, and peace. In the first place, it highlights the complexity of violence and the necessity to take into consideration all of its components, including institutional and cultural elements, while attempting to handle insurgencies and other violent behaviours. Parallel to this, the idea that peace is the establishment of circumstances that grant women autonomy over their lives emphasises the necessity of peacebuilding initiatives that tackle the institutional, sociocultural, and traditional elements that sustain women's subjection. The last point that supports the need for a thorough evaluation of gender mainstreaming in counterinsurgency initiatives is feminist concerns regarding the state's involvement in security.

Building on the above theoretical framework, this study presents two primary arguments in relation to the central research questions:

First, feminist focus on women's struggles in the conceptualisation of violence would be supported by patterns in insurgent actions in northeastern Nigeria, such as the deliberate kidnappings of women and girls. The participation of female insurgents as coerced actors exposes women's increased vulnerability to violence as well as the multifaceted nature of that vulnerability. In this instance, I particularly contend that even in cases where they actively commit acts of violence, they may be acting as victims rather than voluntarily as offenders. Furthermore, because of their socio-political and economic oppression, women typically face a disproportionate amount of the weight of insurgency and violence, even when they are not specifically targeted by it.

The social and economic subordination of women suggests that they are heavily dependent on their husbands or other male group members for their livelihood and means of subsistence. In this way, women suffer from insurgencies and conflicts more broadly and systematically. For instance, women face extreme economic troubles when their husbands and male family members are killed by insurgents or during counterinsurgency operations. This vulnerability increases their susceptibility to other related issues including abuse and gender-based violence.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

To test the proposed arguments, this research uses a qualitative within case study methodology with an emphasis on the northeast region of Nigeria. The rationale to select this approach is that a thorough examination would make it possible to pinpoint what aspects of - and how - patriarchal systems and conventional gender norms play in explaining why women engage in insurgency and counterinsurgency.

In relation to the gendered aspects of insurgency and counterinsurgency in Nigeria, this would provide a more thorough response to the what, why, and how issues. This would allow to identify empirical relationships between variables and enabling inferences based on evidence of how mechanisms function within a specific case (Beach and Pedersen 2018). This study matches both the descriptive (Imtiaz's 2021) and explanatory (Beach and Pederson 2018) typologies of research design. It aims to provide descriptions and explanations of the phenomenon of interest and how events unfold.

There are more benefits associated with qualitative case study research. It would first enable an examination of the arguments' internal consistency. A qualitative research would also offer a comprehensive analysis that takes into consideration context-specific variables and traits. This would make easier to detect potential omitted variables that my reasoning might neglect.

4.2 Data gathered

Data for this study are gathered from a variety of primary and secondary sources, including: official publications from state and non-state entities engaged in insurgency and counter-insurgency in northeastern Nigeria. Data on women's participation in insurgency as perpetrators or victims (extracted from newspaper reports, relevant academic materials, and publications of non-governmental organisations operating in the northeast region); data on efforts, operations, and policies related to counter-insurgency and the existence or absence of gender-focused issues (extracted from policy documents, official releases of relevant ministries, departments, and agencies, as well as publications of rights groups and non-governmental organisations); and data on women's efforts to counter insurgency (extrapolated from relevant media reports and official publications of both governmental and non-governmental organisations).

5. Findings and Discussion

After carefully examining and analysing a variety of pertinent sources, this study concludes—referring to the research questions—that although women experience disproportionate effects from insurgencies, they are frequently coopted as offenders. Furthermore, efforts to counterinsurgency rarely include the unique role and requirements of women. Dissent, violence, and conflict are thus nothing new. Insurgencies have occurred in many nations around the world, with state and non-state actors utilising violence to further their own sociopolitical and economic objectives. According to scholarly arguments, states occasionally employ terrorists and insurgents to get rid of perceived enemies or political leaders and even to gain power. This can be seen in the trajectory of interstate relations from the immediate post-war period through the Cold War era and even in the present day (Schultz & Dew 2009; Stohl 2006).

Even while insurgencies are not new, they continue to pose one of the biggest risks to state security worldwide (Kilcullen 2008; Patrick 2011; Igbini 2020; Elemanya 2023). Beyond the level of interstate relations, modern security tasks have become more complex. One of the worst problems Nigeria has ever faced is the Boko Haram insurgency, which has shook the nation's northeastern states. The population is greatly impacted by this issue, particularly those who are more

susceptible, such as women, who are frequently both coerced into committing crimes and serving as their victims.

- *Women as Victims of Insurgency*

Girls and women always suffer more during insurgencies like the Boko-Haram (BH) situation, being often left helpless victims when Borno State's declaration of a state of emergency upended moral and social order. Women and girls were consequently frequently the targets of both physically and psychologically abuses. In addition to forced marriage, rape, human trafficking, and lack of access to resources essential to their physical and mental well-being, there are numerous other crimes against women that can be listed. They are frequently left on their own.

In northeastern Nigeria, the insurgency of terrorists from Boko Haram has caused hardship a different generational levels, with female children and young girls, in particular, to be frequently targeted for kidnapping in order to be used as sex slaves or female suicide terrorists (FSTs).

For instance, on April 14, 2014, about 270 female students were kidnapped from a Government Secondary School located in Chibok. In addition to snatching and abducting over 1000 women between 2013 and 2017, BH also abducted over 5000 widows who had lost their husbands and male family members (Sani, 2017). Even though the Nigerian government was successful in getting 103 of these women released (21 on October 14, 2016, and 82 on May 7, 2017, respectively), 116 of these women remain in captivity. Numerous women and girls have been selected for instrumental purposes; they have been used as sex slaves, targets of abuse, and hypnotised bearers of improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

Because Boko Haram rebels have feminised violence in a variety of ways, women have been disproportionately affected by insurgencies. In addition to the physical violence, victims also faced the risk of being divided by their spouses, which would exacerbate their vulnerability in public. The information that is now available also indicates extrajudicial killings of women and children, destruction of female-owned businesses, and acts of violence against different religious comunities,

including the kidnapping and sexual assault of Christian girls in schools (Mallam 2019; Olugbenga & Emmanuel 2017).

Women's experiences with insurgencies also have an economic component. The northeast's economic activity was generally negatively impacted by the BH insurgency, particularly in the BAY states. Farming and economic activity in the north have been disrupted by the uprising. Up to 53% of the women in the camps for internally displaced people (IDPs) were engaged in farming and other commercial activities prior to their relocation (Salisu et al. 2015). This has made it harder for women to care for their families when the family "head" is not there.

Furthermore, women are frequently coerced into actively participating in violent acts, in addition to making up the majority of victims in these cases. Frequently, they work as suicide mission agents. FST targets public spaces and cities frequented by women, including markets, bus stops, fuel surface tank vendors, and camps where women make up 53% of the internally displaced population. The gender distribution of the victims is not disclosed in the official death and damage tolls following bombings. It is stated that because more women use most public spaces, there are more attacks that result in deaths of this type. Even worse, the BH uses the Islamic tradition in Nigeria, which forbids men, to inspect women for carrying weapons on their bodies in addition to suicide bomb attacks (Ania, 2015). This arguably became a great incentive for the extremist group to recruit women for violent activities.

- *Women in the Perpetration of Violence*

Evidence reveals that women were frequently employed as suicide bombers' tools against government and civilian targets in order to further insurgency activities in the northeast. According to the record of suicide bombs, BH has carried out 434 suicide bombings since 2011, with women doing 244 of the 339 attacks in which the gender of the bomber was known (Kriel 2017). This would demonstrate how they are used as leverage and a source of fear in the counterterrorism and counterinsurgency (CT-COIN) efforts in northeastern Nigeria, and it also highlights the influence that women has in improving the perception of BH globally. The attack on the 301 Battalion Barracks of the Nigerian Army in Gombe

on June 8, 2014, resulted in the death of a soldier and the explosion of an explosive device hidden beneath a woman's "hijab." The woman was middle-aged.

The phone market attack on January 11, 2015, in Maidugiri, was executed by two FST. Two females carried out bomb assaults at the Madagali market place on June 22, 2015, and on September 11, 2015, in a tent at the Yola South IDP Camp in Adamawa State. Three persons were slain in the Yola South IDP Camps, while around forty-five individuals were killed in Madagali.

There is a lot of attention in the presence of women and girls in the BH ranks. Human Rights Watch (HRW) was informed by former abductees that hundreds of women and children were housed in BH camps; however, it was not evident if these individuals had voluntarily joined their family members engaged in BH or had been abducted themselves. Nonetheless, there is some indication of force being used against women into FST based on many testimonies from women and girls who have refused to detonate explosives (Daily Trust, 2017). Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) such UN Women (2019, 2020) and Conciliation Resources (2024) have confirmed this in their reports. However, the combined joint task force (CJTF) and officials from Operation Lafiya Dole contend that drugs and hypnosis drove women to become suicide bombers (Lawal 2021).

When BH head Abubakar Shekau declared his allegiance to Islamic State's self-declared Caliph Al-Baghdadi in March 2015, things altered for both terrorist organisations. Because of BH's perseverance, the cult was able to christen themselves Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) in March 2015. However, starting in June 2014, BH started using a tactic known as Female Suicide Terrorism (FST), which was distinct from the beliefs and actions of the leadership of the Islamic State and al-Qaeda. Late in 2015, there was an unprecedented global upsurge in the number of BH female suicide attempts (Pearson, 2018).

The first FST strike by BH against a military camp in Gombe State took place in June 2014. According to Jason and Matfess (2017), as of February 28, 2018, 469 FST had been sent out or arrested in 240 incidents, which resulted in the deaths of over 1,200 persons in Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. Nigeria had the greatest

number of FST attacks (197, or 75%) throughout the BH insurgency, with Borno State having the highest number (133, or 55%) (Guardian, 2017). However, their fundamental biodata is unknown to us, and it's difficult to find any information about the FST in the media, and internal research on the causes of FST acquisition in women is scarce. Many accounts from women and girls who refused to detonate explosives indicate, however, that the majority were forced (Guardian, 2017).

In light of the severity of the problem, official studies on female group interaction are increasingly growing. A report claims that by attacking and abusing Muslim and Christian women in northeastern Nigeria, BH has gradually taken part in GBV. Guns were hired, given out, and transferred by BH through women and young girls in a methodical manner prior to the establishment of the FST (Barkindo, Gudaku, and Wesley, 2013).

The use of violence to coerce women to become FSTs is compellingly confirmed also by reports from NGOs and women rescued from BH camps, government officials' testimonies, and interviews with women who refuse to self-detonate (Imam, Biu & Yahi 2020; Unaegbu, Kimiri & Agada 2020; Westminster Foundation for Democracy 2021; Lawal 2021; Nwankpa 2024; Conciliation Resources 2024; UN Women 2019; British Council 2024). According to the CJTF and the aforementioned Operation Lafiya Dole, women were coerced into becoming suicide bombers through the use of narcotics and hypnosis.

A comprehensive analysis of FST from multiple perspectives indicates that BH's female activities are more closely associated with other terrorist organisations in Africa than with the tactics of the Islamic State. Under Boko Haram and other African terrorist groups, women's roles in insurgency are typically restricted to support roles like recruitment, logistics, and occasionally direct attacks; however, under the IS strategy, women play more active roles as active agents for the promotion of the Islamic State's propaganda, with active media units for recruitment and propaganda (Garms, Wilkinson & Kapur, 2019; Cochrane & Smith, 2021).

When it comes to insurgency, women under BH play comparatively secondary (support) roles compared to those under IS methodology, and their participation is primarily based on their relationships with male group members, such as spouses or family members, whereas under IS methodology, individual agency and ideological commitment are influenced (Garms, Wilkinson & Kapur, 2019).

These kinds of abuses against women are probably the product of the northeast's long-standing patriarchal legal and social structures, which marginalised women in society even though women felt they gained from other aspects of Islam, like the radical Salafi interpretation of the Shari'ah (Inge 2017), which permits the use of women as weapons of war. Religious precepts, cultural norms, and cultural behaviours all encourage gender-based violence (GBV) in northeastern Nigeria and other African countries. As BH spread, there was an increase in GBV against women and children in every northeastern state.

Importantly, the Sunni Salafi doctrine, which views women—especially Christian women—as legitimate targets or collaterals of jihad, frequently served as the motivation for these violent actions, which were either carried out directly by BH members or indirectly as a result of the struggle (de Montclos 2014). According to Zenn and Pearson (2014), there is proof of forced marriages, kidnappings, and coerced conversions of abductees to Islam.

It is important to note that the awful confluence of social concerns, politics, religion, and education affects the kind of GBV that takes place. The majority of structurally driven GBV, according to the British Council's Nigerian office, stems from cultural standards that define what counts as abuse of women in both public and private settings (British Council Report 2012). Consequently, GBV happens in both public and private settings due to a lack of legislation, its improper application, or the actions of state authorities like the military, police, or other organisations.

Beyond the deliberate attacks on women by insurgents, women's incomes were more severely impacted by terrorism and CT-COIN than those of males. Due to societal and economical constraints, "independent" women are less inclined to

assert their independence and are instead more publicly viewed as spouses and dependents.

In addition to the loss of breadwinners for their families as a result of the actions of insurgents as well as counter-insurgency measures like extrajudicial killings or legal action, hundreds of women have experienced economic loss from 2009 to 2017.

It is also difficult, if not impossible, for women and young girls who have been raped, become pregnant, and suffer from trauma to return to their regular lives, get married, or participate in significant activities. Importantly, reports on security and health personnel, revealed that as of 2018, more over 400 pregnant women and girls had been rescued from BH and placed in secure military facilities between November 2014 and June 2015. Fifteen ladies were grieving over their husbands' deaths due to brutal crimes committed by BH. Hauwa, a 40-year-old widow who was among the victims, described her "double tragedy" as the murder of her child while leaving Chibok two months after her husband was killed in a BH attack on her town. She currently survives on handouts from the government and charitable organisations and lives in poverty. In addition,—three women from Shindufu and Shafah, Adamawa and Borno State—lost their spouses and primary providers. The majority of these sufferers are left to take care of crippled children and elderly folks. The above analysis would support my first expectation. Women are victims of the Boko Haram's recruitment mechanism not only as direct result of physical violence and coercion, but their active participation – as combatants, suicide bombers, and supporters – should to be understood as also the result of a complex set of systemic factors (i.e., traditional and patriarchal norms, subjugation, socio-political and economic inequality) that create the sufficient conditions of deprivation to trigger women incentives to engage into extremists group. Despite the detrimental effects of insurgency on women and young girls lives, the militants were able to achieve significant advances by involving women in their actions. For instance, in several northern east states, the Boko-Haam rebels were able to seize and keep control of more than fifteen local government districts through the use of FSTs and targeted kidnappings (Bama, Shani, Abadam, Buni Yadi, Bunibok, Dambow, Gwoza, Konduga, Mobba, Kukawa, Uba, Madagali, Michika, and Mubi North and Mubi

South). This resulted in national censure and the beginning of the global social media movement #Bring Back Our Girls (BBOG).

Women in Counterinsurgency Efforts

A significant turning point in Nigeria's counterinsurgency tactics occurred in 2012. In 2013, the Nigerian federal government adopted a firm stance against insurgency, following years of nonstop insurgent activity and a modest uptick in militant activity in the northeastern BAY states.

This position was demonstrated by a number of government actions, such as the enactment of the Anti-Terrorism Act, the creation of the Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF), the proclamation of a state of emergency, and the stationing of the Nigerian Army's seventh division in Maiduguri. The CJTF was made up of local hunters, vigilante groups, and youth to support the security forces. In an effort to achieve enduring peace, the administration also made space for strategic talks with terrorist organisations.

Motorbikes were also outlawed since militants frequently utilised them to travel in groups and carry out violent acts. The counter-insurgency campaign was implemented concurrently with the CJTF's operations to assist in driving the militants out of Borno State's capital, Maidugiri. But the insurgency didn't stop there; it scattered its armed units throughout the state and its bordering states of Yobe and Adamawa. Their primary operating base was the Sambisa Forest, whose hazardous topography gave them cover as they continued to plot and carry out lethal operations that disproportionately affected women in the states where they were active.

Since the economy of northeastern Nigeria almost collapsed, the majority of women have become internally displaced. When women are murdered, the impact on the bereaved and society as a whole may be equally severe. From October 29, 2014, to January 1, 2015, numerous female students at Adamawa State University lost their lives as BH invaded and seized Mubi town. In addition to the impact on surviving family members, the state's medical system is overburdened by the sheer number of wounded soldiers. Research typically demonstrates that girls and

women in the impacted areas are disproportionately more negatively impacted by CT-COIN and rebellion than their male counterparts (b). The widespread fear, anxiety, and apprehension that this has caused among women and girls in the impacted areas has further harmed the social, health, and educational sectors of the economy.

According to official reports, HRW has documented rampant mistreatment by security forces sent in to try and quell insurgencies in the northeast (HRW, 2013). Since 2009, BH supporters have been extrajudicially slain by security personnel and the CJTF, homes have been demolished, needless force has been used, and others have been physically and sexually harassed. In addition, rape, physical threat from bombings, and sexual abuse of women and children are recorded in all areas of displacement and return, according to the 2016 Participatory Protection Assessment Report (PPAR) on the northeastern state of Adamawa (PPAR July 9–15, 2016:3).

In the northeast of Nigeria, there is a strong patriarchal culture in both the predominantly Christian and Muslim communities. Despite their actual participation in agricultural tasks, women's status in the community has been defined by reproduction and is mainly restricted to domestic work according to religious and cultural norms. Women, who are relegated to the role of carers, have less access to formal employment and education then men, who are viewed as the breadwinners instead. Women in the Northeast are particularly vulnerable to divorce and widowhood because they frequently lack access to land or dwellings. Women from the north are also marginalised politically and under-represented in legislative state assemblies.

Due to high rates of child marriage, low school attendance, and widespread female illiteracy, poverty has contributed to further marginalisation along with cultural, religious, and legal divides. The insurgency operates against this backdrop, restricting the mobility of women and subverting orthodox gender norms in the process. In particular, this makes it more difficult for women to actively engage in prevention, protection, mediation, and peacebuilding efforts like reconstruction.

Thousands of women and girls whose lives have been drastically impacted by the northeastern insurgency and counter-insurgency have been forced, willingly, or out of desperation to take on new, different roles outside the home. Importantly, in this effort to survive, insurgency and engagement into violent and extremist groups is not the options women opt for. Some women rather fight Boko Haram as members of local vigilante groups like the hunters' association Kungiyar Marhaba and the Borno state-based Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF). Others are essential to relief and recovery efforts, while those who have been displaced by war have new responsibilities as heads of households.

And yet, even while their positions are changing, women are still mostly excluded from political decision-making. In the face of violent terrorism, women are assuming new roles that are producing counter-narratives wherein they display agency through unofficial peacebuilding actions, despite the stereotype that portrays Muslim and Christian women in northern Nigeria as marginalised and victims. Some women valiantly buy time for men and youngsters to escape as Boko Haram attacks their town. In addition, they disguise potential targets to bring them to safety, and conceal them. Local women have worked with Boko Haram to secure the release of kidnappees and have even offered themselves in exchange for their children, despite the risks they face and the fact that they have largely been excluded from peacebuilding negotiations. Others, such as Hamsatu Al Amin and Aisha Wakil (Imam, Biu & Yahi 2020), wanted to negotiate with representatives of the government and Boko Haram.

The evidence reported here would support my second and third expectations: While Counterinsurgency operations in Nigeria do not take cognisance of the essential role and peculiar needs of women due to the presence of systemic factors that overlook the need for gendered approach, women promote counterinsurgency efforts by partaking as members of civilian defense forces, negotiators, and peacebuilders to create conditions that allow them the control of their lives.

In order to bring attention to the mistreatment, demand involvement, and encourage peace, women in Borno have organised and participated in a number of marches, rallies, campaigns, and demonstrations. Among the things they did most

frequently was the Bring Back Our Girls (BBOG) campaign. In addition to advocating for the return of all girls and women home, the movement was originally planned as a one-day march in 2014 to rescue the Chibok schoolgirls (Lawal 2021). In addition to its efforts in the North East, BBOG has been arranging a global virtual campaign and hosting weekly sit-ins in Abuja, as well as other events in Lagos, Ibadan, Kaduna, and other Nigerian towns. In addition, women's organisations are mediating and promoting community support for abducted women and children who have been returned home but whose fathers were members of Boko Haram.

The contributions of women have also been substantial at the formal level, within the ranks of the military undertaking counterinsurgency operations. Women are employed by the Nigerian military forces as CT-COIN agents in both "formal" and "informal" capacities, although being clearly restricted to support roles like intelligence, education, and catering corps: Formally speaking, a sizable percentage of the armed forces' members are female. During operation "Lafiya Dole," female soldiers and staff members of the Nigerian armed services were dispatched to the northeast for non-combatant purposes and to engage in combat.

But the decision to deploy female soldiers for a combat mission was questioned, particularly since it was revealed that BH had been using female targets for rape and kidnapping. As a result, their employment was mostly restricted to non-combat roles (medical team and management). This role was filled for four years by a female Lieutenant Colonel in the Nigerian Army Medical Corps, with around fifteen other female staff members serving in administrative roles. Over fourteen female employees were employed in non-combat positions at the time. In addition, women from the civilian world have participated in the CJTF. According to reports from January 25, 2019, Elder Abba, the CJTF Coordinator for Borno State, asserted that 350 women are among the 26000 CJTF personnel dispersed throughout the northeastern area (Lawal 2021). They look for probable BH members and actively gather information. Females are informally droughted into the CJTF to serve as auxiliary support for the male-dominated units during combat operations and in the routine setting up of checkpoints to track people moving through vehicles. This has been helpful in identifying insurgent incursions into population centres and

camps for internally displaced people. At the moment, the CJTF has 25,000–36,000 men and women, with 50–100 female soldiers (Peace Direct, 2017).

While women in the northeast of Nigeria growingly become aware of their possibilities and promote counterinsurgency efforts to empower, the Nigerian counterinsurgency strategy still has a long way to go to fully recognise and value the role and needs of women and implement a comprehensive gender-oriented approach.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The Boko-haram insurgency in the Northeast offers profound insights into the understanding of the complexities of insurgency in the region, the role of women (as both victims and coopted perpetrators), and counterinsurgency efforts, particularly the crucial role played by women in putting peace plans into action. The patterns of insurgent activity analyse above is consistent with and supports Sharoni's (2010) feminist emphasis on the challenges faced by women in the conceptualisation of violence. The comprehension of the gendered dimension of insurgency in Northeast Nigeria is further enhanced by their engagement in the conflict as coerced players, such as female suicide bombers or FSTs, who are frequently viewed as disposable.

It exposes women's increased vulnerability to violence as well as the nuanced aspect of that vulnerability. This intricacy arises from the possibility that, even in cases where they commit violent acts, they may be acting as victims rather than as willing offenders. Moreover, because of their subordination to society, politics, and economy, women often face a disproportionate share of the weight of insurrection and violence, even when they are not specifically targeted. Their economic enslavement suggests that they rely heavily on their spouses for their livelihood and means of subsistence. Due to relationships with male equivalents who are insurgents' allies—whether they be spouses or family members—this facilitates the recruitment of violent individuals. In addition, women suffer great economic troubles as a result of the rebels' deaths of their spouses (as well as the counterinsurgency attempts), which increases their susceptibility to other related problems including abuse and gender-based violence.

Given the intricacy of women's roles in insurgency within the region, it is reasonable to assume that counterinsurgency initiatives would take into consideration their unique requirements. Counterinsurgency initiatives should, at the absolute least, include steps that facilitate the full healing of victims (instead of exacerbating their suffering). The rights of women should be protected, and policies aimed at putting an end to violence through counterinsurgency should take into consideration the unfairness and inequality that women experience in addition to all types of physical, structural, and cultural violence. Contrary to popular belief, rights groups' worries about rights violations are rarely supported by these important elements. This has serious implications for women and is detrimental to counterinsurgency efforts because it fosters an environment where women are constantly exposed to violence and may even be used as props for violent purposes.

The information base on gender's role in peacekeeping, security, and counterinsurgency is expanded by the findings presented here. It broadens feminist viewpoints on insurgency and conflict. Because it highlights the complex gender-related difficulties connected to insurgency and counter-insurgency in strongly patriarchal environments, the study's focus on northeastern Nigeria enhances its already significant contributions to knowledge. The gender component of counter-insurgency research offers insights that can be used to enhance and develop more focused and successful counter-insurgency tactics that will have a longer-lasting effect on peacebuilding and conflict resolution.

Besides to adding to the corpus of existing information, this study offers a foundation for future investigation. Researchers looking to expand on our knowledge of gender roles in violence and conflict can look at a variety of topics, including cooptation tactics, lived experiences (from women's perspectives), the function and efficacy of particular formal or traditional institutions in ensuring a gendered approach to counterinsurgency, and constraints on engendering counterinsurgency efforts.

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