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**“Daughters, Brides, and Supporters of the Jihad”:
Revisiting the Gender-Based Atrocities of Boko
Haram in Nigeria.**

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Abstract

This paper revisits Boko Haram's attacks on and use of women and girls in terrorist operations as part of its mission to establish an Islamic Caliphate in northeast Nigeria. Using the State Fragility thesis as framework of analysis, and the Chibok Abduction of 14 April, 2014, as an empirical case study, the paper examines how and why women and girls have become very central to Boko Haram's reign of terror in Nigeria. The paper further examines the consequences of these assaults, the governments' response, and how the attacks

have helped further Boko Haram's operations and strategic goals. We conclude by offering some suggestions that could help stem terrorist violence against women and girls in northeast Nigeria.

Keywords: Boko Haram; kidnapping; females;
Chibok abduction; Northeast Nigeria

Introduction

The very notion that women can be violent or become active members of terrorist organizations seems contradictory because most 'notions of what it means to be a 'woman' often emphasize peacefulness, mothering, care, and interdependence rather than violence' (Sjoberg et al, 2011: 3). However, women have played and, in fact, are still playing prominent roles in several extremist and terrorist organizations (Cunningham, 2003: 171). For instance, women were active and even ferocious members of such organizations as the Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA, Basque Homeland and Unity), the Irish Republican Army (IRA), the Italian Red Brigades (RD), and the Tamil Tigers (Cunningham, 2003:176). They also feature in the 'Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the Red Army Faction in Germany, and the Chechen separatist group' (The Strait Times, 19 September 2014). Women have also played various roles in the Palestinian struggle for liberation. Some Palestinian women were reported to have either participated or 'sent their sons to participate in jihad' (Davis, 2006: 2). Such active involvement of women in the aforementioned organizations seems to revise the age-old assumption that 'women are pacifists, moderate, and nonviolent' (Qazi, 2011: 30).

While we acknowledge that women do voluntarily participate in terrorist activities, our major concern in this paper is with their involuntary involvement, particularly of young females, through kidnapping, and forceful recruitment by groups like Boko Haram, which since 2009, has been on a campaign of terror to establish an Islamic Caliphate in northeast Nigeria. The group's abduction of 276 school girls in Chibok, Borno State, in April 2014, offers an interesting case study of this phenomenon. Given the foregoing, this paper seeks to examine why Boko Haram abduct, recruit, and utilize women and girls in terrorist operations. We argue that the group does this to innovate ways of sustaining its activities while furthering its strategic goals. We also argue that within the context of State fragility in Nigeria, the group's gender-based violence is most likely to persist with deleterious consequences for the continued education of girls and the human rights and psychosocial wellbeing of women in general in northern Nigeria.

The rest of the paper is divided into seven sections. The second section examines the motivations behind the abduction and recruitment of women and girls as foot soldiers by religious terrorist groups. The third section briefly examines the state fragility thesis and situates Boko Haram's gender-based violence within this framework. Informed by the findings in section two, and using the Chibok abduction as an empirical case study, the fourth section explains Boko Haram's tactic of kidnapping women and girls. This section also interrogates the response by the Nigerian government to the Chibok incident. The fifth revisits the increasing spate of violence against women in Nigeria's northeast by Boko Haram, and the emerging trend of the group's use of female suicide bombers. This section also draws insights from the

activities of other radical Islamist groups to highlight the trend and nature of gender-based violence as perpetrated by religious terrorist groups. The sixth section examines the consequences that the attacks have had on women and girls in northeast Nigeria. The final section concludes with some remedial suggestions toward preventing and protecting women and young girls against terrorists' violence in northern Nigeria.

Why Religious Terrorist Groups Abduct and Recruit Women

There are a number of reasons why religious terrorist organizations might choose to kidnap, recruit, and operationalize women and young females. To begin with, religious terrorist organizations may kidnap women and girls for the purpose of revenge. This could broadly be seen as part of Al-Qaeda's strategy after 9/11 when U.S-led coalition forces targeted Al-Qaeda and its affiliates in various regions of the world (Yun, 2007: 23). By way of response, radical Islamist groups 'adopted alternative ways [including kidnapping of males and females] to continue their fight and exact revenge based on the understanding that their conventional fighting capabilities are no match for the combined coalition forces' (Yun, 2007: 23). As well, terrorists adopt kidnapping as a 'form of coercive bargaining' (Crenshaw, 1998: 20), and because their demands may likely appeal to popular grievances against the government (Crenshaw, 1998: 20-22). Hence, when Boko Haram kidnapped about 276 school girls from Chibok, Borno State, in April 2014, the group claims that it was avenging the Nigerian government's 'alleged arrest and detention in 2011 and early 2012 of family members of Boko Haram members, including the wives of Boko Haram prominent leaders'

(Human Rights Watch, 2014: 18-19). Prior to the abductions, the Boko Haram leader, Abubakar Shekau, had appeared in a video footage warning the Nigerian government that ‘since you are now holding our women, just wait and see what will happen to your own women ... to your own wives according to Sharia law’ (Zenn and Pearson, Guardian, 6 May 2014). Boko Haram had asked the Nigerian authorities to release its members in detention in exchange for the kidnapped school girls. The group may have thought that it could coerce the Nigerian government into releasing its members by adopting the school girls.

Another reason why religious terrorist organizations might kidnap and utilize women, stems from the perception that women suicide bombers can easily escape the scrutiny of security forces. This is because it is believed that women’s ‘non-threatening nature may prevent in-depth scrutiny by security forces because they are not considered important enough to warrant investigation’ (Cunningham, 2003: 172). More so, ‘sensitivities regarding more thorough searches, particularly of women’s bodies, may hamper stricter scrutiny’...and besides, ‘a woman’s ability to get pregnant and the attendant changes to her body can facilitate concealment of weapons and bombs using maternity clothing’ (Cunningham, 2003: 172). Additionally, ‘the societies in which female suicide bombing attacks take place tend to regard invasive physical searches as threatening a woman’s honour, making females less likely to be thoroughly searched than males’ (O’Rourke, 2009: 690).

Furthermore, Cunningham (2003: 173) argues that under heavy government pressure or simply as a way of seeking publicity, religious terrorist organizations often innovate by changing their tactic to include new members or perpetrators

such as women and girls. This is because, as Davis (2006: 3) argues, ‘attacks by women garner significantly more attention at home and abroad’. And because such attacks are viewed as a rarity, a shock on global conscience, and an act of desperation by the terrorist groups, they serve to generate greater attention to the cause of the terrorist groups. Conceived in this way, groups like Boko Haram may have resorted to kidnapping women and girls in order to engender emotional response from the rest of the world while at the same time gain intensive media coverage and instil fear among populations (Bradford and Wilson, 2013: 128).

Writing about how and why children participate in armed conflict(s), Dallaire (2010: 2) argues that ‘desperate children, boys and girls, are cheap to sustain, have no real sense of fear, and are limitless in the perverse directions they can be manipulated through drugs and indoctrination’. Nonetheless, Bloom and Horgan (2015) maintain that the use of children by terrorist groups may be a sign of their inability to recruit adults: ‘the fact that Boko Haram has kidnapped children to use them as suicide bombers may be an indication of the group’s weakness, not its strength’ (Bloom and Horgan, 2015). Religious terrorist organizations and combatants often use women and girls for sexual gratification through sex slavery or as wives and, thus, create a new generation of terrorists. For instance, Joseph Kony, the leader of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda, is reported to have swelled the membership of his organization by fathering about 200 children with his abducted wives (Dallaire, 2010: 178). Still in Uganda, ‘girls who are abducted by the LRA are married off to rebel leaders, and if the man dies, the girl is put aside for ritual cleansing and then married off to another rebel’ (Graça Machel Report, 1996: 13). This ‘wife recycling’ system is

perpetuated until the girl or woman dies or escapes. Before it morphed into what is now known as ISIL, Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) allegedly abducted women 'to serve as the womb of its jihad, giving birth to future fighters and ensuring that the next generation will be able to carry on the jihad' (Stone and Pattillo, 2011: 170). The Graça Machel Report on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children contends that girls and women can also provide certain services to terrorist groups such as cooking, laundry, running errands, and attending to the wounded (1996: 13). In some extreme cases, like among the Mai Mai militia in Congo, Dallaire (2010: 118-119) reports that 'girls are preferred because they are believed to share protective traits to militias through sex'.

Furthermore, women and girls are believed to be more adept than men at information gathering. Dallaire (2010: 119) argues that 'whereas adults and men hanging around a military establishment or forward line will generate suspicion, girls are considered more skilful and effective in spying an enemy camp, they can listen in a market, they can give warning – they can see without being seen or noticed and provide valuable information to their force'. This tactic, however, is now familiar to security forces in countries where suicide bombings are rife. But considering the issue of State fragility in such countries – given their lack of equipment or intelligence, porous borders, and low morale among security forces – women and young female suicide bombers have often escaped the 'watchful gaze' of State security forces.

Radical Islamist groups also consider it a point of duty to convert non-Muslim women and girls to Islam and prevent them from attending Western or modern schools. Groups like ISIL and Boko Haram believe that young females should not attend schools but, instead, should consign themselves to

domestic duties (CNN, 2 May 2014). Boko Haram's abduction of 276 school girls and ISIL attacks on school girls in its controlled territories in Iraq are illustrative of both groups' aversion to girls' education and Western civilization in general. Both groups are notorious for kidnapping and forcefully converting Christian and, in the case of ISIL, ethnic minority women and girls, to Islam. It is conceivable that if they are allowed to flourish, they will continue to use women and girls to further their strategic, operational, and logistical goals. This is more so if the States within which they operate are confronting issues of fragility.

The State Fragility Framework

According to Cilliers and Sisks (2014: 7), a State is said to be fragile when it is incapable of providing the basic human needs or create the necessary public (economic, social, political) goods and conditions crucial to the improvement in the standard of living of the citizens and the development of the State. This phenomenon limits such States' capacity to carry out core functions, therefore unable to provide basic services to their citizens, particularly the protection of their lives and properties. Characteristic of a fragile or weak State, as Siegle (2011: 19-34) argues are, issues such as poor governance, conflict, inequality in income and opportunities, lack of civil rights and political freedoms and systematic corruption, as well as ethno-religious fractionalisations. As further argued by Rotberg (2003: 21), there are basically three markers for identifying a fragile or weak State: Political; economic and death in combat (political violence).

Nigeria is arguably a prime example of this phenomenon given the sub-system failure which has enabled the Boko

Haram group to unleash unimaginable terror on the people of Northern Nigeria in general and the northeast in particular. Perhaps, a more apt confirmation of Nigeria's place in this 'unenviable league' is the summary of the country's socio-economic realities in the 2014 Mo Ibrahim Index of African governance, where the country was ranked at number 37 out of 52 countries in the overall governance scale. Nigeria has also been rated 45.8 per cent lower than the African average (51.5 per cent), and scored lower than the regional average for West Africa which stands at 52.2 per cent. This development epitomizes Nigeria as one of the worst governed countries in Africa (Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG), 2014; Premium Times 1 October 2014).

Moreover, in the 2014 Fragile State Index published by the Fund for Peace Magazine, Nigeria was ranked at number 17; two points ahead of Syria. At 17th position, Nigeria is situated in the 'alert category' of the Index. It bears mentioning that between year 2010 to 2012, Nigeria was at the 'high alert' category of the Fragile State Index, ranking at 14th position. In countries where these socio-economic and political indices are constant, such States or its leadership lack the capacity to protect its people and territories from the atrocities of non-state violent groups, thus losing its legal sovereignty both within its territorial confines and in the comity of nations.

According to Rotberg, Nigeria's issues with fragility are informed by: (1) decades of military dictatorship and widespread elite corruption, (2) the backwardness of much of Nigeria's social and physical infrastructure, and (3) its deficient electoral and participatory practices, a development which further explains its low governance ranking (Rotberg, 2014). Although Nigeria can be considered a stable State (taken as a whole), it suffers -- nevertheless -- from severe problems of

sub-state fragility (Cilliers and Sisk, 2014: 10), particularly in the north where there are high rates of poverty, illiteracy and unemployment, and decrepit infrastructures. It is within such environment that the ideology and activities of Boko Haram, including its tactic of kidnapping women and young girls, thrive. The inability to secure the release of the girls more than one year after their abduction and the manner in which the situation has been handled further cast negative light on the credibility and sincerity of the Nigerian government under President Goodluck Jonathan.

The Chibok Abduction and the Response of the Nigerian government

Boko Haram adheres to and promotes a version of Sharia law that stipulates harsh gender constrictions and roles for women including 'strict rules on women's dress and sexual conduct and instituting other discriminatory and abusive practices against women. These ranged from the enforced segregation of school children, to the public flogging and stoning of women for fornication and adultery' (Zenn and Pearson, 2014: 51). However, as Lohmeier (2012) argues, Boko Haram's norms and attitude towards women are not shared by other Islamic groups in Nigeria. Some earlier Islamist groups in the country such as the Yan Izala, which was established in 1978, 'had promoted an emancipatory programme of rights for women, when compared with some other Salafist movements' (Loimeier, 2012: 141 cited in Zenn and Pearson, 2014: 51).

Boko Haram kidnapped the Chibok school girls on the night of 14-15 April 2014. The girls were about to sit for their final year exam and are believed to be aged between 16 and 18 years (BBC News, 21 April 2014). Initially, there were

conflicting reports as to the exact number of school girls abducted. While some parents from the school where the girls were abducted claimed that 234 girls had been abducted, officials of the Borno State government put the figures at 130 girls (BBC News, 21 April 2014).

The Presidential Fact Finding Committee on Chibok School girls issued a report stating that a total of 276 girls were abducted, of which 57 escaped; 219 remained in captivity as at the time of writing (Premium Times, 20 June 2014). Although Boko Haram claimed in a video released on May 2014 that the reason for the Chibok abductions was in retaliation against similar tactics deployed by the Nigerian government, the group evinces another possible motive for the kidnapping of young girls and women: its aversion to Western education. In the video, the group's leader, Abubakar Shekau, says they kidnapped Christian girls to convert them to Islam and punish them for attending Western/modern schools (Human Rights Watch, 2014: 20). The group released another video showing the girls in captivity wearing full-length Islamic cloaks and reciting verses from the Quran. In the video, the group leader said the girls would only be released if its detained members were freed (BBC, 12 May 2014). The release of this video, which engendered intense anxiety among the girls' parents and the Nigerian officials regarding the safety and whereabouts of the girls, seemed to support Crenshaw's (1998: 23) claim that terrorists are often inclined to publish communications from their kidnapped victims in order to maintain interest and suspense.

A major twist was introduced to the abduction saga when Nigeria's military authorities claimed that it had rescued most of the girls. This claim was later refuted by distraught parents and the Principal of the school where the girls had been

abducted, describing it as a ‘blatant propaganda and lie’ (Will, 2014). Faced with the threat of an embarrassing blow to its image from an increasingly sceptical Nigerian public, the Nigerian Army retracted its initial claim of the rescue of a sizeable number of the girls, and blamed this error on the information it allegedly received from the leadership of the school where the abduction took place (Will, 2014). Such expression of doubts by the Nigerian public about the veracity of the claims credited to the Nigerian Military is not without antecedents. One of such was the purported claim(s) that the leader of Boko Haram had been killed in combat (Aljazeera, 20 August 2013).

It is also imperative to note that the Nigerian government, particularly, its former leadership, was reported to have doubted the fact that school girls were abducted in Chibok. It took the Goodluck Jonathan administration nearly three weeks after the abduction of the girls to issue an official statement regarding the incident. When it eventually did, it asked Nigerians to direct their angst toward Abubakar Shekau and his sponsors (Ugonna, 2014). The government through the then FCT Minister of State, Jumoke Akinjide, chose to provide excuses for its shortcomings by admonishing its citizens to be careful not to politicise the campaign against terrorism (Ugonna, 2014).

One additional evidence of such denial over the Chibok abductions was scripted by Mrs Patience Jonathan, the wife of the former president (Goodluck Jonathan), who declared quite surprisingly and emphatically that ‘no girl was missing’, and that the abduction saga was a calculated attempt to embarrass the Presidency (Idahi, 2014). It needs to be noted that the setting up of the fact finding committee on the abduction by the government may not have been unconnected to the public

fury which greeted Patience Jonathan's dismissal of the Chibok abductions. Added to this, and perhaps more significantly, were the growing local and international protests over the imperviousness of the Nigerian government towards initiating a rescue mission, and its potential to degenerate to an anarchic situation.

The Chibok abduction has since generated widespread local and international condemnation from Nigerians and members of the international community, creating in the process a carnival-like, but sincere protests with the hash tag '#BringBackOurGirls' dominating major headlines globally. As at May 2014, the #BringBackOurGirls hash tag had reportedly received 1.5 billion impressions and reached over 440 million people worldwide, spreading over several countries and over 50 cities across the world (Okoro 2014). These developments were perhaps what fired up a 57-minute video where Abubakar Shekau threatened to sell the girls as sex slaves for about 2000 Naira (approximately \$12USD) at local markets or dispatch them as wives to his fighters in Nigeria and affiliates abroad. In Shekau's words:

I abducted your girls. I will sell them in the market, by Allah. I will sell and marry them off. I will marry off a woman at the age of 12. I will marry off a girl at the age of nine. There is a market for selling humans. Women are slaves. I want to reassure my Muslim brothers that Allah says slaves are permitted in Islam (cited in Mark, 2014).

Following this, a number of efforts have been made by the international community, with the governments of the United States of America, France, Britain, Canada, and China promising to provide intelligence and logistics to support Nigeria's security agencies in rescuing the missing girls (Okoro, 2014). The French government, in particular, met

with the Heads of State of Nigeria and its four contiguous countries (Benin, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon), along with representatives of the United States, and Britain, urging them to set up a regional action plan that will focus on intelligence coordination, information sharing, centralisation of means, and border surveillance (Baume and Rubin, 2014).

As at April 2015, the Nigerian military is said to have rescued about 300 girls from the camps of Boko Haram but could not ascertain whether some of the girls were part of the Chibok girls (Al Jazeera, 29 April 2015). Some other rescue attempts between 30 of April and 6 of May 2015 by the Nigerian military also saw 359 women and 60 children regaining freedom from Boko Haram's den in Sambisa forest (The Guardian, 2 May 2015; Premium Times, 6 May 2015). These are laudable achievements. But given the lacklustre attitude of the government toward the Chibok tragedy, it must be stated that the Nigerian State has failed to fulfil its responsibility as explicitly stated in Chapter 2, Section 14, (Sub-section 2b) of Nigeria's 1999 constitution—'the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government'.

Further to this is the fact that all apparatus of State security in Nigeria falls within what Nigeria's (1999) constitution describes as an 'Exclusive List', a list which by constitutional design remains the exclusive preserve of the Federal government of Nigeria. The connotative interpretation of this constitutional provision is that it is the duty and responsibility of the Nigerian government to provide adequate security for its citizens. Any attempt to place such a burden on its citizenry clearly stands opposed to the dictates of Nigeria's constitution, and also by extension, a major abdication of responsibility by the government. It is apt to also add that the précis of the

causal factors which probably created the convivial and enabling environment that led to the Chibok incident and subsequent abductions in northeast Nigeria is (arguably) the net consequence of the culture of denial, poor intelligence gathering, and the lack of foresight and preparedness, which defined much of the Goodluck Jonathan administration (Amao, 2014).

Further Attacks and the Trend of Female Suicide Bombers in Nigeria

As argued earlier, terrorists flourish where States are weak, particularly if the security apparatus of the State is not fortified and prepared to contain massive security threats like terrorism. Nigeria is said to have the strongest army in West Africa. But the intensity of the Boko Haram crisis has exposed the failings of the Nigerian army, which has been battling poor equipment, low morale, corruption of its commanders, and lack of counterterrorism training. It is no surprise, then, that after the Chibok abductions, Boko Haram continued its orgy of violence against women and girls. From April 16 to May 5 2014, Boko Haram kidnapped about 41 women and girls from the villages of Garkin Fulani, Gujba, Wala, and Warabe in northeast Nigeria (Hinshaw, 2014). In June 2014, suspected Boko Haram gunmen reportedly kidnapped 60 women from Kummabza, in Damboa, Borno State (Human Rights Watch, 2014: 24).

Furthermore, on October 20, 2014, Boko Haram kidnapped about 45 girls from Wagga, Adamawa State, and reportedly married them off (Zenn, 2014: 6). In March 2015, the group conducted another massive abduction when it kidnapped about 400 people, mostly women and girls in

Damasak, Borno State. Boko Haram's mass abductions of women and girls following the Chibok incident testify to the declining capacity of the Nigerian State to contain the group and protect its populations against mass atrocities.

There is ample evidence that lends weight to the concern that Boko Haram has been operationalizing the abducted girls and women in suicide operations. The first recorded manifestation of female suicide bombing in Nigeria took place on 8 June, 2014 in the north-eastern State of Gombe, where a female suicide bomber reportedly blew herself and a soldier up close to the Quarter-guard of the 301 Battalion of Nigerian Army in Gombe (Odebode *et al.* 2014). This was soon to be followed by four other female-initiated suicide attacks: The first was the case of a teenager who had an explosive device concealed under her veil, and blew herself up at a university campus in Kano, injuring five police officers on July 7, 2014. This was followed by another incident on July 28 when a young woman detonated a bomb at a gas station where people were queuing to buy kerosene. The bomb killed three people and wounded 16 others. On the same day, another teenager reportedly injured six persons when she blew herself up at a shopping centre in Kano. On July 30, 2014, a teenager (in a crowd of students at a college campus in Kano) blew herself up, killing six people (Chothia, 2014).

Other cases of female suicide bombings in Nigeria include the incident on November 7, 2014, where a female suicide bomber, dressed in long flowing garments, detonated a bomb at a branch of a bank in Azare town, Bauchi State. Survivors revealed that the blast killed about 20 people and injured over 37 others who had queued up in front of the Bank's Automated Teller Machine (ATM) to make cash withdrawals (Leadership, 8 November 2014). On November 25, 2014, two

female suicide bombers at different intervals detonated explosives at the central Maiduguri market in Borno State, claiming the lives of at least 45 people, and injuring dozens more (Ashkenas *et al*, 2014). Again on December 1, 2014, in Damaturu, Yobe State, two female suicide bombers also detonated bombs at the city's main market and killed an unspecified number of civilians in the process (Nossiter, 2014). Despite stepping up the military offensive on Boko Haram on 14 February, 2015, incidences of female suicide bombings are still widespread. As evidenced for example when four women suicide bombers, detonated their explosive devices, killing 9 people near Giwa barracks in Maiduguri on 13 May, 2015 (*The Punch*, 15 May, 2015). And again on 15 May, 2015, when a young female suicide bomber blew herself up at a crowded market near a bus station in Damaturu, Yobe State, killing at least seven people and injuring 27 others (Reuters, 16 May 2015).

On the whole, the use of women and girls as terrorists in Nigeria raises the anxiety of a section of Nigerians, particularly members of the #BringBackOurGirls campaign, with some analysts expressing fears that the continued incarceration of the abducted girls by Boko Haram could as well facilitate their indoctrination or possible coercion into active participation as suicide bombers (Famutimi, 2014). Some observers have argued that the use of female suicide bombers by the Boko Haram militants should be seen as a most dramatic strategy that an organisation can use. As terrorism expert, Martin Ewi, argues:

It is relatively easier to penetrate targets because we are less suspicious about women. When you have female suicide bombers, the security challenge becomes bigger - it means you need female officers at every check-point to search women. It

also shows desperation - and tends to be the last card that an organisation plays. But we don't know whether Boko Haram has reached that stage, or whether it has decided to play the card early (cited in Chothia, 2014).

Besides suicide bombing, the abducted girls and women have been used in various other military operations. For instance, Human Rights Watch documents a case in which a 19 year old girl who was held in several camps in the Gwoza hills for three months in 2013 was forcefully converted to Islam and made to participate in attacks and to carry ammunition for Boko Haram (Human Rights Watch, 2014: 26). In other instances, the abducted girls have acted as undercover for Boko Haram by notifying the group of the whereabouts of potential targets such as the security forces and the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF). The girls have also been used to lure some of these men into Boko Haram's camp (Human Rights Watch, 2014: 26).

Elsewhere in Africa and the Middle East, women and girls are known to have played key roles as members of terrorist organisations. A close examination of 'the role of 'veiled' and 'unveiled' women during the Algerian resistance against the French in the 1950s provides an insight into the process by which women were consciously mobilised into 'terrorist' roles' (Cunningham 2003: 173-4). In Sierra Leone, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebel forces kidnapped and recruited many females into their camp to serve either as domestic workers, sex slaves or simply as members of the organization. As noted earlier, the LRA in Uganda has equally abducted many women and young girls into its camp, using them as child soldiers, wives, and slaves.

And in Iraq, ISIL 'cited the 'Nigerian mujahidin' in the October 2014 edition of its magazine *Dabiq* as precedent for

its own kidnapping of several hundred non-Muslim Yazidi women in northern Iraq, who were turned into sex slaves' (Zenn, 2014:7). Boko Haram and ISIL feed off each other in terms of their methods of operation and ideology. In early March 2015, Boko Haram pledged allegiance to ISIL, and the latter accepted. It is likely that this allegiance may enable both groups to start sharing weapons, fighters, wives, and slaves.

Ultimately, the involvement of women and girls in Boko Haram operations apparently adds to the changing trend of violent conflicts and insecurity in Nigeria, and elsewhere around the world. The danger of failing to curtail these grievous atrocities, particularly, if women and girls are not offered protection, is that Boko Haram will continue to further its evil gospel through the continuous kidnap and recruitment of women and girls as supporters, wives, and mothers of its jihad (Stone and Pattillo, 2011: 172). Next is a brief discussion on the repercussions of Boko Haram gender-based atrocities for the survivors.

The Plights of the Survivors

Some of the women and girls kidnapped by Boko Haram have managed to escape. But for many, escaping is the beginning of another ordeal given their acutely dire situation of emotional and behavioural stress and trauma (Amnesty International, 2014: 13). In addition to coping with their own trauma, some of the girls and women have to grieve their family members who have been killed while they were in captivity. Aside from the physical and psychological suffering, 'survivors also find themselves forcibly displaced from their homes and having to live as unwelcomed guests or refugees in the shelters of relatives and neighbours' (Amnesty International, 2014: 13). In

the Nigerian case, for example, it has been argued that most of the girls rescued from the Boko Haram group, due to the long period they have spent in captivity, would require intensive and personal counselling if they are to be re-integrated into society (Vanguard, 4 May 2015).

More worrisome is the allegation and disclosure that some of the rescued women and girls, have been raped and impregnated, as evidenced in the discovery that 214 out of the 534 girls initially rescued from Boko Haram were pregnant, and may perhaps be eternally confined to the horror of carrying their rapists' babies (*MailOnline*, 7 May 2015). Therefore, increasing the societal stigma associated with women and girls who get pregnant out of wedlock, particularly in an extremely and religiously conservative North-eastern Nigeria. As a result, some of them, depending on their level of resilience, become trapped in a vicious cycle, joining forces with the terrorists and becoming perpetrators. There are also women and girls who were not directly victimized by Boko Haram but who, nonetheless, are easy targets of sexual and domestic trafficking. These are women and girls who have fled their countries or homes and have become refugees in such places as Niger, Chad, or Cameroon.

Conclusion

We have examined some of the motivations behind Boko Haram's gender-based violence. We argued that such activities thrive within a convivial environment of State fragility in Nigeria, particularly the inability of the Nigerian State to provide security and safeguard its populace against mass atrocities, as well as the sub-standard livelihood of many Nigerians in the northeast and the infrastructural decay in the region. Therefore, we argue that Boko Haram relies on the

despair and tragedy of this regional failure to perpetuate violence against women and girls in Nigeria’s north-east, to ‘oil’ its wheel of terror, and further instil fear on the psyche of the populace and a Nigerian State whose response had been poor until February 28, 2015 when a sub-regional offensive was launched against the group. Indeed, the group’s tactics -- including the kidnappings and employment of women and girls as suicide bombers -- need to be understood from this perspective.

What remains to be highlighted are the issues the Nigerian government needs to engage with in order to offer more protection to women and girls against the violence of groups like Boko Haram. The following questions hinge at the heart of these issues:

- 1) How should women and girls be fully protected against the atrocities of Boko Haram?
- 2) How can the Nigerian government secure the release of the remaining kidnapped women and girls?
- 3) How should the state ensure that girls’ education is continued despite Boko Haram attacks on schools?
- 4) Finally, what do survivors need to recover and reintegrate into their societies without being stigmatized or re-traumatized? It is beyond the scope of this paper to critically offer comprehensive responses to these questions. However, attempts will be made on some possible ways forward.

Regarding the first question, the State, regional and international coalition forces fighting Boko Haram should pay closer attention to the vulnerable populations caught in the middle of the mayhem, particularly the women and children. Any military action undertaken against Boko Haram should

adhere to international humanitarian law and to international human rights law in order to avoid the risk of incurring civilian casualties (Puttick, 2015: 35).

Furthermore, Boko Haram had asked the Nigerian authorities to release its detained members in exchange for the kidnapped schoolgirls. The government has, however, chosen to intensify its firepower against the group in collaboration with regional forces from Chad, Cameroon, and Niger. Some of the girls may have either been subjected to suicide operations or sold to other terrorists outside Nigeria as brides and slaves. The net effect of this is that even if the government eventually decides to negotiate the release of the girls through the prisoner-swap arrangement or through the military – its preferred strategy – it is unlikely that all the girls will be saved.

It is equally important for the Nigerian authorities to ensure that more priority is placed on girl-child education, (including the survivors of terrorism) particularly in the North, given its susceptibility to religious and cultural sentiments often adduced as reasons why many girls are not formally educated. This much has become necessary in view of the all-important role which education plays in times of armed conflict. ‘While all around may be in chaos, schooling can represent a state of normalcy’ (Graça Machel Report, 1996: 43). But considering the likelihood of schools in northeast Nigeria being under the threat of groups like Boko Haram, other alternative means of educating the survivors and girls in the affected areas should be devised. These could be through personalized study at homes or at some other safe places. Parents should be provided with educational materials and private teachers should also be employed to teach survivors at their homes or community centres.

Regarding the issue of reintegrating survivors into their communities, it may be necessary to first sensitize the communities to the plights of the survivors. They should be taught to accept and treat survivors with care and compassion and not regard them as immoral. Such understanding (and compassion) is important in ensuring the smooth transition and acceptance of the girls and women into their homes and communities. Religious clerics and local leaders within such communities should use their positions to call for sympathy, solidarity, and support for the survivors. After the girls and women might have been accepted by their families and communities, the Nigerian government and international agencies should, in collaboration with community leaders and local women, offer them the necessary psychosocial, health, resilience-building, and counselling services.

There are other questions and issues that research in this area could investigate. For instance, what should be done not only to assist/educate communities to ensure that education for children (girls and boys) is seen as a basic human right but also to encourage state authorities to require this to happen? It would also be interesting to undertake more research on what is being done in other areas to strengthen effectively the human rights of women and girls in order to challenge patriarchy and other cultural or religious arrangements that make systemic violence against women possible.

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