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CONSEQUENCES OF BOKO HARAM TERRORISM ON WOMEN IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores a very crucial aspect of Boko haram terrorism in Nigeria- the consequence of Boko Haram terrorism on women in Northern Nigeria. This paper goes to memory lane to trace the origin of the insurgency and also the causes of Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria. Analysis and discussion of this paper predicated on secondary sources [mostly scholarly and empirical research findings] posits that Boko Haram terrorism has resulted in the abduction of women and girls, arbitrary arrest of women by government security agents, use of women as pawns by the terrorist group, infliction of collective terror on women, use of women as wartime labour force, demoralization of women education and livelihood crisis. For the policy recommendations, this paper recommends among other things that government should make education of youths a priority as this is one major tool to break the cycle of poverty in the region, government security agents should provide security in communities especially to vulnerable women and girls, the Nigeria government should collaborate with international communities especially with the Nigerian neighbours on a concerted fight against Boko Haram terrorism.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Terrorism is one of the frequently used words in contemporary national and international discourse. It is arguably the most serious threat to global peace and stability. During the early 20th century, terrorism was mostly restricted to regional and national boundaries. Most of the terrorist acts in that era were based on revolutionary nationalism (that is, the use of political violence by the colonized group(s) as a tool for fighting against western colonial power). The Irish republican army, the Zionist groups Hayannah Irgun and lehi, and Muslim brotherhood all used bombings and assassination to try to free their people from colonial control.[4],[7]

However, terrorism gained unprecedented global attention in September 11 2011, when Osama Bin Laden, the leader of the dreaded terrorist group Al Qaeda bombed the twin towers (world trade center) in New York, United States of America. This brazen attack on the world's most powerful nation has emboldened the resolve of other smaller terrorist groups to carry out attacks in other parts of the world. In Africa and most especially in Nigeria, a vicious and violent terrorist group-Boko Haram has emerged to wage a bloody asymmetrical war on the country.

Since the emergence of Boko Haram insurgency (2001 till date) in the Northeast states (Borno and Yobe) of Nigeria where it is running on the obnoxious philosophy - western education is evil, the group has been confronted by the Nigeria authorities. The ensuing conflict has claimed closed to 5000 lives and destroyed private and public property worth billions of naira [21].

This paper is particularly concerned with the consequences of Boko Haram terrorism on women. This is against the backdrop that the terror group has evolved a notorious tactics of kidnapping women and school girls since 2013 till date [2]. More recently the group abducted over 200 college girls from chibok in Borno state, on May 15th, 2014 as well as the use of female suicide bombers by the sect [22]. On the other hand, available evidence suggests that female relatives of the Boko Haram members have also been arrested by the government security operatives without any direct involvement by the sect (News, 30 November 2013). It appears that women are caught in spiral of conflict between the terror group and government.

Abducted women and girls have been subjected to rape, early marriage, and used as sex slaves. The implication is to inflict collective terror on women as a social group as well as dehumanize them [25]. Also fear of violence and sexual abuse traps women in their homes and prevent them from engaging in important economic activities.

The method of this paper is qualitative and explanatory. By way of descriptive analysis of secondary sources, relevant literature was reviewed as authoritative backup to the paper. The outcome of this forms the kernel of the analysis of the paper. For easy understanding and arrangement of thoughts, the paper is schematically presented fewer than five headings: the concept of terrorism, origin and causes of Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria, the consequences of Boko Haram terrorism on women, conclusion and policy recommendations.

2. THE CONCEPT OF TERRORISM

It will be a difficult task to fully appreciate the exact and stark consequences of terrorism on women without understanding what terrorism really stands for. A search for relevant literature reveals that there is no general consensus of any definition of terrorism. This in part derives from the fact that the term is politically and emotionally charged, "A word with intrinsically negative connotations that is generally applied to one's enemies and opponents" [9]. Terrorism is criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public; a group of persons for political purposes are in any circumstance unjustifiable, whatever the consideration of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or any other nature that may be invoked to justify them [26]. A similar definition sees terrorism as:

Political violence in an asymmetrical conflict that is designed to induce terror and psychic fear (sometimes indiscriminate) through the violent victimization and destruction of non-combatant targets (sometimes iconic symbols)[5].

This definition has brought to the fore the centrality of power and influence by those involved in the use of terror to achieve their means at all cost. In contemporary social discourse, terrorism has been used to denote forms of unconventional, illegitimate violence targeted by a group at the state or society, or any section of the population thereof. Terrorist most times operate under collateral damage principle. This to say that anybody or group of persons can be victims of a terror attack [15]. Terrorism equally has a sectarian cloak. Usually a sect or sub-group with obnoxious political, religious or ideological philosophy uses terror to convey such misguided views. In line with this notion, it is affirmed that "it is a fanatical war waged by a puritan few against the massive army of innocent people of different religions, class and gender"[18].

Terrorist the world over have adopted the following strategies for realization of their nefarious activities: kidnapping, suicide bombing, massacre (mass killing) by gunfire or beheading, arson, cyber-attack, aggressive media propaganda, hijack of aircraft, trains, ships etc., use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), forced enlistment/recruitment of combatants, destruction of the population's means of livelihood among others.

Virtually, all the definitions above encapsulated the key terms and information needed for the understanding of the meaning of terrorism. It thrives on brutality, intimidation and wonton destruction of lives and property. For the purpose of this paper, in the context of Boko Haram insurgency, terrorism is defined as the unlawful use of force or violence by a person (at the behest of a group) or organized group (with misguided religious and political ideologies) against the government and its citizens to achieve its desired objectives.

3. ORIGIN AND CAUSES OF BOKO HARAM

The Islamist terrorist sect known as Boko Haram but whose formal name in Arabic is Jama'a Al-Sunnah li-da'wa wa al-jihad (Sunni Group for preaching and Jihad) was founded by Mallam Lawal when in

1995 he started the muslim youth organization under the name shabaab. Later the leadership of the group was taken over by Mohamed Yusuf in 2002 when Lawal left to continue his education. It was under Yusuf's leadership that the organization gained political influence and relevance in Nigeria [14],[23].

Scholars and analysts have maintained that prior to the use of violence and terror by the group, Yusuf was an itinerant preacher that established an Islamic school free of charge to propagate its ideology. He equally started a farm, provided welfare and employment for its member. It was in the school that Yusuf recruited unsuspecting and innocent almajari (literally translated as children of the air) to its cause [15],[14]. However, with time, the organization became increasingly militant and also engaged in the abduction of women and girls as wives and sex-slaves. The Nigerian government launched a violent attack on the group to stop its spread across north-eastern Nigeria in 2009. The uprising led to the death of 800 Boko Haram members, including Yusuf [1]. There have been controversies surrounding the death of Yusuf as many believed he was extra- judicially killed by the police. This notion thus increased his "martyrdom" status in the eyes of his followers [12]. With the death of Yusuf, his second in command, Abubakar Shekau in 2010 emerged with one of the most radical and destructive terror campaign against Nigeria and its people. He announced in this chilling words to journalists that: "jihad has begun"[28]. The Boko- Haram terrorist sect is motivated by the obnoxious philosophy-western education is evil and the groups' adherents appear to be thoroughly indoctrinated in the incomprehensible doctrine of the absurd. The terror group has embarked on heinous human rights abuses and war crimes: forced conversion of people of other faith to Islam; murder, torture and persecution of members of other religions; wanton attacks on churches and mosques and killing of women, children and civilian (noncombatant) populations [11]. At this point, one may likely ask "what are the root causes of Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria". They include poverty, unemployment, absence of good governance and growing wave of radical jihadists in the world.

3.1. Poverty

The growing poverty in Nigeria is one of the root causes of Boko Haram insurgency. This is in spite of the fact that Nigeria is blessed with abundant human and material resources. When there exist wide gap between the rich and poor, there comes a breaking-point where there is bound to be a class conflict that materializes in various forms of revolution.

Similarly, one time president of America-Bill Clinton has noted that the truth about Boko Haram insurgency is the poverty rate in the North, which is three times of what it is in Lagos [16].Furthermore, when poverty and ignorance are garbed with religious, ethnic or other partisan sentiments, then the embers of violence and senseless destruction of lives and property becomes a norm.

3.2. Unemployment

Unemployment is another precipitating factor to Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. The unemployment rate especially among the youths is quite alarming. The Nigeria's unemployment rate rose to 23.9 percent compared to 2.1 percent in 2010 [13]. The jihadist terror group finds the unemployed youths as fertile ground to indoctrinate their misguided ideology. It should be noted that Mohammed Yusuf's radical ideology gained a following among disaffected young men and the unemployed youths, who are forced to make a living between the twin divide of creativity and criminality [15].

3.3. Absence of good governance

The absence of good governance also contributed to emergency of insurgency terror group in Nigeria. Good governance as expressed by the World Bank entails the following:

Efforts to create an enabling environment and to build capacities Ultimately, better governance requires political renewal. This means attack on corruption from the highest to lowest level [8].

Absence of good governance therefore suggests that the socio-political environment is infested with administrative injustice, human rights abuse, inequality and endemic corruption. A natural response to this unjust social formation is for the down-trodden to seek for redemption through membership of terror group. This is a sort of pay-back to the government that have failed to take care of them.

3.4. Growing wave of radical jihadists in the world

The growing wave of radical jihadist fundamentalist groups around the world contributed to Boko Haram insurgency. The in-roads made by such terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda, Al-shabaab, Taliban, Islamic

State of Iraq and Syria (Isis) among others have promoted the course of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. For instance, Boko Haram leadership recently swore allegiance to Islamic State (IS) [6]. Most times it is the allure and glamorization of terrorism in the media that pushes many people to the radical jihadists.

4. CONSEQUENCES OF BOKO HARAM TERRORISM ON WOMEN

This section forms the crux of the discussion of this paper. Literature on conflict has not adequately considered the gender dimension of conflict. This hugely owes to the patriarchal nature of the society especially in Africa where women issues are underrepresented and underreported [17]. They are as follows: abduction of women and girls, arbitrary arrest of women by government security agents, use of women as pawns in their activities, inflicting collective terror on women, demoralizes women education and livelihood crisis.

4.1. Abduction of women and girls

The activity of Boko Haram insurgency has various implications on women and girls [27]. The authors have observed that 2013 marked the time Boko Haram began to use women and girls as pawns in their activities by abducting them. The group on May 15, 2014 stormed government college, Chibok in Borno state and kidnapped without resistance over 200 college girls [21]. In a related account, the terror group on May 2013 carried out a mass assault on a police barrack in Bama, Borno state in which they captured 12 Christian women and children [2]. Most of these women and girls abducted by Boko Haram in the northern areas of Nigeria experienced sexual violence including rape, torture and also murder. A recent study for Nigeria's Political Violence Research Network suggests that more than 45% of those killed by the Boko Haram are Christian women and children [3].

4.2. Arbitrary arrest of women by government security agents

Boko Haram is not the only culprit in the abuse of women in the conflict. From the government side, women have been arbitrarily arrested by government security agents for the simple reason that their relatives are suspected members of Boko Haram. A critical examination of this situation shows that women are caught in the middle of the conflict. It is affirmed that all the women targeted by government security agents are for instrumental purposes mostly to extract information from them. This is an outright infringement of women's fundamental human right [27].

4.3. Use of women as pawns in their activities

Scholars and researchers have documented that Boko Haram's cycle of abduction, detention and increased violence against women and girls are for tactical reasons. In June 2013, an Ak-47, a pistol and improvised explosive devices (IEDS) were found in the garments of two 'shivering' veiled women in Maiduguri. It is inhuman and quite disgusting that women are regarded as a mere pawn in the chess game of social conflicts. This tactics is similar to the one used in Iraq by al-Qaeda owing to women's superior ability to evade security checks [19].

4.4. Inflicting collective terror on women

Virtually all conflicts around the world are caused by the men and yet women and girls suffer the major consequences. The use of violence and intimidation as well as kidnap, forced marriage and compulsory conversion to Islam is one tactical way Boko Haram plays on the psychology of women. The rape of Christian women for example is a means of ethnic cleansing, serving not only to terrorize individual victims but also to inflict collective terror on the ethnic (Christian) group [25]. Such attacks on Christian women by Boko Haram can be regarded as an extension of other institutionalized and long-term discriminatory practice against them in northern regions

4.5. Use of woman as wartime labour force

Women and girls are also used by Boko Haram as wartime labour force. They are targeted both for their assets and as "assets" in themselves [24]. Their value as further affirmed by the author was reproductive and productive. Women and girls in captivity are used for cooking, cleaning and other duties that may be assigned to them by their captors. Many may also be forced to bear children that will grow to further the course of the insurgency.

4.6. Demoralizes women education

Boko Haram's misguided ideology that "western education" is sinful has significant negative consequences on the education of women and the girl child in the northern part of Nigeria. For fear of attack by the group, most secondary schools in the affected regions (northeast) have closed. A staggering 10 million Nigerian youngsters are not in school out of a total population of 160million [20]. The source further maintained that instead of learning, young women are married off in their teens thereby perpetuating a cycle of poverty in the region. Women's education is very crucial for sustainable development because it links them to other areas of live-supporting opportunities like access to quality health, economic freedom, legal and political rights among others.

4.7. Livelihood crisis

The implication of the Boko Haram's insurgency and the consequent response from the government has serious negative effects on the livelihood of population most especially the women. It is observed that public security volatility in the north eastern states has hampered normal productive agricultural and commercial activities [15]. It is instructive to note that women play active role in agriculture and rural livelihood, but the fear of attacks by the insurgents has often driven them into hiding.

Equally the imposition of correctives and emergency rule has restricted movement and communications in a way that hampered economic pursuits. Boko Haram insurgents have also resorted to looting of property and outright destruction of farm crops. The dire consequence of this situation is the deepening of the livelihood crisis on women who must cater for themselves and their dependent little ones.

5. CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper focused on the consequences of Boko Haram terrorism on women in northern Nigeria. Terrorism was variously defined by scholars and analysts based on their vantage point. In all the definitions provided, three key ideas were recurrent and they explained the points that terrorism thrives on brutality, intimidation and wanton destruction of lives and property. Thus this paper in the context of Boko Haram insurgency defined terrorism as the unlawful use of force or violence by a person (at the behest of a group) or organized group (with misguided religions and political ideologies) against the government and its citizens to achieve its desired objectives.

Boko Haram terrorism originated from the north-eastern part of Nigeria. Before it metamorphosed into a violent terrorist group, it was started as a muslim youth organization by Mallam Lawal in 1995. It was under the leadership of Yusuf and Sheakau that it adopted terror against Nigeria. Causes of Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria are: poverty, unemployment, absence on good governance and increasing radicalization of jihadist group in the world.

The paper observed that Boko Haram terrorism has serious consequences on the women. These consequences include: abduction of women and girls, arbitrary arrest of women by government security agents, use of women as pawns in their activities, inflicting collective terror on women, use of women as wartime labour force, demoralizes women education and livelihood crisis. The gender based violence of Boko Haram terrorism as posted in this paper, has affected women and girls socio-economically and psychologically. In the light of this, the paper made the following policy recommendations:

- The government should make education of youths a priority as this is the major tool to break the cycle of poverty in the northern region of Nigeria. Education equips the youths with prerequisite skill whether in agriculture, entrepreneurship and other fields of human endeavor.
- The government security agents should be properly equipped to provide security in communities especially to vulnerable women and girls.
- There should be round-the-clock security in schools to protect school girls from abduction, rape and forced marriage by Boko Haram terrorist group.
- Community policing strategy should be strengthened to provide public safety and the needed intelligence to government security apparatus involved in the fight against Boko Haram. This owes to the fact that community members know their own people and can easily identify "strangers" in their midst.
- There shall be collaboration between the Nigeria government and the international communities especially Nigerian neighbouring countries (Chad, Cameroon and Niger) in the fight against Boko Haram.

- There should be strong political will by the government to fight corruption which has impeded the fight against Boko Haram.
- The Imams (Islamic clerics) should propagate the message of peace and respect for women's right in their communities. Also, there should be sanctions against religious cleric that incites violence against women or any minority religious group in the communities.
- The government (state and national) should collaborate with international donor agency to provide cash transfer grants to assist mothers and their kids (girls) stay in school. This will go a long way in building confidence and encouragement on indigent mothers to send back their children to schools.

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