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Stereotype or Stratagem? The influence of gender norms on women in Boko Haram

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Stereotype or Stratagem?

The influence of gender norms on women in Boko Haram

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Introduction

It has been 13 years since Nigeria was alarmed by the uprising of the Boko Haram insurgency (Loimeier 2012, 138). Since then, Nigeria and neighbouring countries have suffered many violent acts, of which the abduction of the Chibok schoolgirls is one of the most notorious and internationally known. However, although almost all Boko Haram victims are female (Oluwaniyi 2021, 457), women also play an important active role in the insurgency. While conflicts are often studied in terms of male perpetrators and female victims, there are many conflicts which are strongly influenced by women, and in which they have much agency. Therefore, this study covers the role of women in Boko Haram and studies the way in which their role in the insurgency is influenced by gender norms in Nigeria. This is an important topic for research, since much research is conducted on, for instance, the role of men in the Boko Haram insurgency and the religious parts of the insurgency, but the topic of women in Boko Haram and how this is influenced by gender stereotypes has been understudied. However, in order to fully understand the insurgency and the motives for carrying out violent attacks, it is important to look at all actors involved. Therefore, this research will aim to answer the following research question: how do gender norms influence the role women play in the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria?

Firstly, the research will provide a critical literature review, in which existing literature on the topic of gender and war is discussed. For instance, it will study the way in which women in war are often studied and portrayed and study the discourse about gender in war studies. Furthermore, this chapter will analyse women's reasons for joining violent groups, and the roles they play within them.

Secondly, the research methodology will be discussed, in order to provide information on the methods that were chosen in order to answer the research question. This chapter will describe why these methods were suitable and cover the strengths and limitations of this research and explain how they shape the research.

Hereafter, the historical context of the Boko Haram insurgency will be discussed. The chapter will describe the start of Boko Haram, and how the group developed throughout the years up until its insurgency. It will also describe the religious motives of the group and study its purpose. Furthermore, the chapter will cover important parts of the insurgency and its effect on Nigerian society.

Moreover, the research will analyse the way in which gender influences Nigerian society. Firstly, this chapter will establish what gender is and how it shapes societies, and analyse (in)equality indices concerning gender in Nigeria. Secondly, it will discuss Nigerian laws and customs that either limit or strengthen gender inequality, and thus analyse the role that women play in Nigerian society, and how they are perceived by others.

Finally, the topics of the Boko Haram insurgency and gender norms in Nigeria will be connected, and the research will analyse this connection. The chapter will not only cover the way in which women are treated within Boko Haram, but also describe the roles that women are assigned, such as carrying out suicide attacks. It will analyse these roles in light of Nigerian customs and study how these customs affect the insurgency.

Lastly, the conclusion will summarise the research and aim to answer the research question.

1. Literature Review

1.1. Introduction

Wars and militaries are often connected to ideas about tough men fighting in battlefields, while the role of women is often either overlooked or considered weak, with women only being portrayed as victims of (sexual) violence (Moser and Clark 2001, 3-4). However, there have been many wars and conflicts in which women have played substantial roles in, for instance, killings and torture (Smeulers 2015, 211-216). It has only been recently that the study of gender and war has come to scholarly attention, and it is argued by many that this is very important because war shapes gender and gender shapes war (Woodward and Duncanson 2017, 4). This has also been the case in many conflicts in Africa in which women play a substantial role. It is argued that these women either join violent groups voluntarily or are forced to join (McKay 2005, 388). The reasons for joining, recruitment, and the roles women are assigned are heavily influenced by gender stereotypes that prevail, thus shaping warfare. Moreover, the tasks that are performed by women reflect ideas on the position of women in societies (Woodward and Duncanson 2017, 423). This chapter will critically examine existing literature on the topic of gender and war, and discuss, for instance, the discourse around gender and war and roles women play in conflicts.

1.2. Gender and war

Firstly, it is important to determine the meaning of the term gender. According to Butler, while sex is seen as the biological difference between male and female, gender is often explained as the socially constructed, normative difference between feminine and masculine (Butler 2007, 8-9). Nonetheless, it is dubious whether a clear distinction can be made between sex and gender, since gender is derived from and based on sex, resulting in a social interpretation of sex (Butler 2007, 8-9). Mazurana et al. argue that gender entails the socially constructed distinctions between men and women, involving social duties and how men and women ought to be. These distinctions vary over time and across cultures (Mazurana et al. 2002, 98). Woodward and Duncanson argue that according to global trends, our understanding of gender has not only shaped the military, but the military has also shaped gendered identities and ideas of masculinity and femininity. Nonetheless, while masculine behaviour was formerly associated with physical resilience and violence, this notion is changing, thus reshaping gender norms (Woodward and Duncanson 2017, 4).

1.3. Discourse of war and gender stereotypes

As mentioned, gender stereotypes shape war, and vice versa. An example of this is the idea that men are expected to engage in violence and go to war, while women are supposed to stay home (Sharoni et al. 2016, 2). Men decide to go to war and ensure peace as soldiers and nation builders, as opposed to women, who long for peace. The former are the perpetrators, while the latter are the victims of the atrocities that are committed (Jansen 2006, 135).

Nonetheless, it has been argued that, despite the fact that victim rates among women are statistically higher than among men, it is important to reshape our understanding of violence and war (Jansen 2006, 135). According to Sharoni et al., since the 1990s, a new discourse concerning gender and war has developed. More nuanced literature about stereotypes is written, with women being viewed as both victims and perpetrators (Sharoni et al. 2016, 1-2). Moser and Clark state that this change of discourse has gone through different phases. At first, political violence and armed conflict were considered male realms and women were not even considered. Thereafter, women were discussed, but only as victims. While male victims were portrayed as masculine heroes, women were seen as passive victims of mainly sexual abuse and abduction. Recently, the discourse has included, for instance, human rights violations by women and the experiences of women during war (Moser and Clark 2001, 3-4).

Cockburn argues that there are several phases of (upcoming) violence in which it is important to look at gender relations because in these situations, gender relations can change. These situations are pre-conflict, during which women suffer the decrease of welfare and the increase of domestic violence and the ‘cleansing’ of enemies from within; during conflict, having to stay behind, which increases vulnerability and increases the chance of falling victim to sexual violence; during peacebuilding, with women being expected to express care and oppose violence, which is often an enforcement of pre-existing patriarchal ideologies; and during the reconstruction of the country, many women having become widows or being faced with the expectation to swiftly return to pre-war gender roles (Cockburn 2001, 17-26).

Furthermore, Seifert argues that violence against women is often caused by misogynous ideologies that are often already apparent during peacetime. When order disappears during times of conflict, these ideologies are brought to the surface and fantasies are carried out (Seifert 1996, 37-38).

1.4. Reasons for joining

Denov argues that since armed groups cannot make use of state structures to ensure their forces, girls are recruited, either by choice or by force. Girls are deployed by violent groups for several reasons, for instance because they are considered to be submissive and easy to manipulate. Furthermore, they can ensure labour without having to be paid. Moreover, the presence of girls in an armed group can challenge enemies through morality (Denov 2008, 816). However, Mazurana et al. argue that, despite voluntary membership of some girls, most girls are kidnapped or seized by armed groups (Mazurana et al. 2002, 106-107). Similarly, McKay states that in Africa, most girls in violent groups were abducted and forced to join (McKay 2005, 388). This source reflects on the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Northern Uganda and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone (McKay 2005, 385). Nonetheless, it is still relevant to reflect on these former cases and rebel groups in order to fully understand present cases.

When girls join violent groups voluntarily, they can do so for a variety of reasons. For instance, out of religious or political ideology, to get access to food, shelter, medical help, or to get revenge (Denov 2008, 816). Another incentive of joining armed groups is the protection they offer from violence that is committed by, for instance, state forces or other armed groups. Lastly, in cultures that enforce strong gender roles, some girls join armed groups to feel empowered (Denov 2008, 816). Nonetheless, according to Termeer and Duyvesteyn, women often join violent groups for similar reasons as men. Therefore, they argue, the discourse about women joining violent groups does not represent them well, since it is often argued that their reasons for joining are solely individual because women are believed to be peaceful and unwilling to join groups with misogynistic ideals. This, according to Termeer and Duyvesteyn, deprives women of political commitment and agency (Termeer and Duyvesteyn 2022, 465). Therefore, they argue for a distinction between push and pull factors, meaning a difference between individual motivations that influence one's vulnerability to propaganda, such as victimisation, and external incentives, such as friendship (Termeer and Duyvesteyn 2022, 465). Alternatively, Bloom categorises reasons for joining terrorist groups into what she calls the four Rs: "revenge, redemption, relationship and respect" (Bloom 2012, 235). Additionally, she proposes another R: rape. Due to trauma or lacking awareness of whom to blame after falling victim to sexual violence, some women join the organisation that did it to them (Bloom 2012, 236-237). Notwithstanding arguments about voluntary membership, Mazurana et al. question this notion of freedom of choice because many girls have such

limited options of survival that implying that they have a choice is dubious (Mazurana et al. 2002, 106).

1.5. Women's roles in violent groups

Not only do reasons for joining rebel groups differ, but the tasks women are assigned can also vary. According to McKay, the benefit of recruiting women is the versatile role they can play, such as committing violent acts, providing medical care, cleaning, and cooking. Therefore, they can be at the frontline, but also be important in supporting the group in other ways. McKay argues that this is exactly where gender stereotypes are important. The tasks women are charged with are influenced by gender roles that are leading in society. For instance, the treatment of women in violent groups is influenced by whether they are equal in society or if they are seen as servants or slaves (McKay 2005, 387-389). Nonetheless, Mazurana et al. state that gender does not necessarily contribute to the division of roles in armed groups because despite the fact that girls often experience sexual violence and boys are often recruited as fighters, this is not strictly limited to gender (Mazurana et al. 2002, 109). However, Smeulers states that women are often given specific tasks such as administrative or supporting roles, and often fulfil the role of silent bystander and regime supporter during periods of violence. She also gives the example of the Rwandan Genocide, during which women took up a role as cheerleaders who sang songs while killings took place (Smeulers 2015, 211-226). Furthermore, women often carry out the task of traitors, spies, prison guards and torturers, or searching bodies to find valuables. They can also fulfil the role of sex offenders and as political leaders (Smeulers 2015, 211-226).

Another task that many women are increasingly performing is carrying out suicide attacks. It was in 2005 that Al-Qaeda started recruiting women as suicide terrorists, which has been adopted by other terrorist groups. Nonetheless, the role women play in terrorist organisations is not as big as it is in other armed groups (Smeulers 2015, 211-226). However, Adedokun argues that the role of women varies per group, because every group has different ideologies on which they base the division of tasks. She gives the example of leftist terrorist organisations that fight for liberation that often recruit women for operational roles in order to persuade other women that their lives will improve because of participation. On the contrary, in revolutionary armies, women participate as terrorists, for instance by participating in bombing operations. In right-wing groups, women's tasks are limited and less visible, because these groups aim to simply destruct societies as opposed to reconstructing them according to a certain ideology (Adedokun 2020, 145). Nonetheless, this generalisation does not hold true

for all violent groups, and structures also change and evolve. For instance, in the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), women formerly mainly took up the role of wives and mothers, but later also became involved in active fighting (Gan et al. 2019, 204).

1.6. Conclusion

This literature review shows that the discourse about gender and war is changing. However, many debates persist, such as why women join violent groups. Furthermore, the role of women in several conflicts has been studied, such as the Rwandan Genocide and the Sierra Leone civil war, but the role that gender stereotypes play in the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria is understudied. Most studies on Boko Haram either focus on, for instance, the religious part of the insurgency (for example Adesoji 2010, Akinola 2015, and Zenn 2021), or on the effect the insurgency has on women and how violence is used against them (e.g. Oriola 2017, Eappen et al. 2022). Therefore, this study will cover a different part of the insurgency and apply theories about gender and war to the case of Nigeria and examine how gender stereotypes influence the insurgency and vice versa. The next chapter will describe the methodology that was used to study this topic.

2. Methodology

2.1. Introduction

This chapter will cover the methodology that was used in this research and explain why certain methods have been chosen and why they were suitable for this type of research. Firstly, the chapter will analyse why qualitative methods were used and explain the relevance of the methods that were used, namely a case study and a critical discourse analysis. Then, the strengths and weaknesses of the research will be explained in order to give a full overview of the research. These strengths and limitations are described because despite the many strengths that this research possesses, several limitations remain. Therefore, the way in which they shape the research will be described.

2.2. Methods

In order to answer the research question, a qualitative research method was used. More specifically, a case study method was applied. Since the outcomes of this research, such as gender stereotypes and how they influence Nigerian society and Boko Haram cannot be expressed in figures or numbers and, instead, cover meaning and underlying patterns, qualitative research methods were most suitable in this type of research (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill 2007, 472). Furthermore, a case study method was applied to test theories about gender and war in the specific case of Boko Haram in Nigeria. In order to do so, a critical overview was given of theories and ways in which women in war are generally studied. Moreover, the way in which gender plays a role in Nigerian society was studied. The manner in which gender stereotypes are present in Nigeria was analysed, and whether these stereotypes and gendered expectations influence the role Nigerian women play in society and how they are displayed by others. This analysis was then applied to the specific case study of Boko Haram. A case study method was used in this research because in this way, general dynamics of gender in Nigeria could be applied to the Boko Haram case in order to study whether insurgencies are influenced by broad societal and cultural constructs (Ruffa 2020, 1133). In doing so, the research described the context of Nigeria and Boko Haram, after which it can be generalised in order for it to be applied to other cases (Ruffa 2020, 1133). Due to the limited nature and length of the study, a single case study was chosen, as opposed to a comparative design, to be able to analyse the case in an in-depth manner, instead of a brief overview of several cases (Ruffa 2020, 1137). Furthermore, the case study method was executed through literary research. The literature that was used was acquired in several ways. Google Scholar was used to access relevant literature on the topic. Furthermore, the Leiden

University catalogue was consulted, as was the Leiden University Africa Studies Centre library. These catalogues contain ample literature on the topic and were a useful source of information. The literature was selected based on the topics of the researches, in order to connect the more general and broad topics to the narrower case study of Boko Haram.

2.3. Strengths and limitations

An important strength of this research is its originality and relevance. As discussed in the literature review, gender is often either an overlooked topic in war, or only used to invigorate existing stereotypes by taking away women's agency. Through the critical analysis of these general trends in research on gender and war and applying a different lens to this specific case, new knowledge was built. Furthermore, since research that is conducted on Boko Haram in Nigeria often focuses on the role of men or the terrorist group in general, or its targeting of women, thus never focusing solely on the role of women (for example Elden 2014, Thurston 2018, Zenn, Barkindo, and Heras 2013), this research studied a unique part of the insurgency that has not been studied widely.

A limitation of the study is the way in which theories that originate in the West, such as feminism, were applied to this study. These theories were developed in a culture vacuum and were only based on Western ideas and phenomena (Oyěwùmí 1997, 21). Therefore, it can be debated whether feminist ideas and theories can be applied to other cultures. An example of the limitations that arise when Western scholars research African societies was explained by Oyěwùmí in her study about the role and portrayal of gender in the Nigerian Yorùbá-society. According to her, the social construct that is gender, is theorised in such a cultural vacuum, that it can barely be applied to other societies (Oyěwùmí 1997, 21). According to Oyěwùmí, due to language barriers and the biases of Western scholars, as well as their inability to openly search gender, the topic was wrongfully applied to the Yorùbá-society (Oyěwùmí 1997, 77-79). The wrongful portrayal of Western norms in other societies is an example of something that could be a limitation of this study, especially when studying and describing gender roles and stereotypes in several parts of Nigerian society. However, through awareness of this possible limitation, the author openly studied the topic and attempted not be led by biases and language barriers as much as possible. Furthermore, according to Amadiume, in order to study gender and women in other cultures and societies, it is important to firstly research the structure of this society, as well as its power structures, such as the way in which colonialism still influences the role of women and how politics affect gender roles (Amadiume 1987, 17).

Therefore, this research studied those power structures and how these influence current gender stereotypes and dynamics.

Furthermore, a limitation is the scope of this research. Since it is a master's dissertation, it was not possible, nor safe, to travel to Nigeria in order to fully study and understand Nigerian society. Due to safety reasons, it was also not possible to conduct research among Boko Haram, which would provide the possibility of gathering first-hand information. However, through the in-depth manner in which the study was conducted, this research has attempted to, in an utmost manner, study and understand the way in which and how gender roles are apparent in Nigerian society. In order to do so, the research was partially based on data that was gathered by other researchers who were able to conduct field research.

2.4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the research has faced several strengths and limitations. Firstly, its strengths concern its relevance and different lens that was applied to a topic that has been studied much, but not through this lens and focus. Therefore, it shows women's agency and the way in which actions that are carried out by rebel groups are influenced by broad societal patterns and social conducts. However, a limitation could be the language and culture barriers that can arise when studying other societies. Furthermore, the scope and possibilities of this research were limited. However, through the suitable methodology and strengths, the research question was answered in a sufficient manner. The following chapter will cover the historical context of Boko Haram and describe the development of its insurgency.

3. Historical context

3.1. Introduction

This chapter will cover the historical context of the research topic, due to the importance of understanding the initial motives of Boko Haram in order to study the current state of the group. It will describe the founding of Boko Haram and how the group developed and grew. For instance, it will cover the religious ideologies that the group bases its founding and actions on. Afterwards, the group's insurgency will be described, covering the start of the insurgency and the important parts of it, including their attacks, and how their tactics are used to develop and grow the insurgency.

3.2. The rise of Boko Haram

Conflicting accounts exist as to when Boko Haram was founded, with some stating that the group was already founded in 1999 (Elden 2014, 414), whereas most scholars argue that it was founded in 2002 (Thurston 2018, 81). However, others state that Boko Haram's first leader, Salafi preacher Muhammad Yusuf, was already a public figure in 2001 (Thurston 2018, 81), while other scholars date the founding of Boko Haram to the period in which its insurgency started which was, according to them, in 2010 (Zenn, Barkindo, and Heras 2013, 47).

The different Islamic movements within Nigeria are important to consider when studying Boko Haram, because Boko Haram was able to benefit from the fracturing of Islam in Nigeria. Due to this fracturing, the power that the Sufi Brotherhoods held in the country diminished, which facilitated an opportunity for Boko Haram to fill the resulting gap (Elden 2014, 414). In order to understand the motives that drive Boko Haram, it is important to understand the religious context in which it operates. Boko Haram is described as a Salafist, literalist movement (Elden 2014, 414). The Arabic word 'salaf' means 'predecessors' (Thurston 2018, 23). In Sunni Muslim communities, the first Muslims are considered pure, and Salafist Muslims aim to become equal to their predecessors (Thurston 2018, 23). Salafism is a movement within the Sunna movement, which emphasises the importance of tradition. Within this movement, Salafis highlight the importance of a literalist understanding of the Qur'an and aim to convert other Muslims to this movement (Thurston 2018, 23). Salafists argue for the repudiation of religious innovations and instead advocate for a return to the Sunni orthodoxy, which includes devotion to injunctions as written in the Qur'an, the pursue

of the Sunnah (the prophet Muhammed's traditions), and the veneration of predecessors (Kassim 2015, 175-176).

Furthermore, not only is Boko Haram a Salafist movement, but it is also a Jihadist movement. Salafi-Jihadist groups can be explained as Salafist groups which have adopted a revolutionary, programme which aims to overthrow un-Islamic regimes and non-Muslim military presence and influences (Nesser 2013, 417). The word Jihadism is derived from the word 'jihad' which is translated to 'to strive'. Jihadism is an ideological extremist movement that uses military action (Thurston 2018, 23) and strives to eliminate the U.S., other parts of the West and Israel because they are believed to threaten Islam (Kielsgard and Orina 2020, 162). Salafi-Jihadists adhere to the belief that people's unbelief can be classified in major and minor unbelief. Furthermore, there is a difference between unbelief on account of your heart, and unbelief on account of your actions (Kassim 2015, 177). Major unbelief is deemed unacceptable and leads to the exclusion from the boundaries of Islam, whereas minor unbelief is considered less offensive. Nonetheless, this is a classification that has caused much polarisation within Salafi communities (Kassim 2015, 177). For instance, Jihadi-Salafists hold the view that any way of living that includes ruling in another way than Allah's law, for instance using secular laws, is major unbelief and can therefore be punished. This includes the actions of political leaders who use other laws than the Shariah. On the other hand, quietist Salafists argue that the usage of secular laws is minor unbelief, and that political leaders cannot be punished for using those laws, provided that Islamic scholars have investigated the case and have determined that the leader believes Shariah is superior to secular laws (Kassim 2015, 178).

While the group is known worldwide under the name Boko Haram, this is not its initial name, and it was in fact a name that was given to the group by outsiders (Thurston 2018, 18). The group officially goes by the name of "*Jamā'at Ahl al-Sunnah Lidda'awat wa-l-Jihād*" [which means] 'people committed to the propagation of the Prophet's teachings and jihād'" (Kassim 2015, 173). The name Boko Haram is often translated as "Western education is forbidden" (Thurston 2018, 20). However, it is debatable whether this is an objective and correct translation. Firstly, Haram is used to describe anything that is forbidden (Thurston 2018, 20). Secondly, however, the word 'boko' is difficult to translate. It is believed that it derives from a Hausa word meaning 'fraud' or 'inauthentic' (Thurston 2018, 20). The idea of Western schooling being fraudulent comes from the ideology that anything coming from the West is used to distract and mislead Muslims (Thurston 2018, 20). However, the word Boko can also be translated with more nuance and context than solely education. For instance, it is also used

to describe people who have received Western education, or anyone who lives in a Western culture, or simply to people from the West (Thurston 2018, 20). Therefore, the name Boko Haram can be translated to “Western culture is forbidden by Islam”, which is related to not only Western education but also other institutions, such as politics (Thurston 2018, 20).

3.3. Boko Haram’s insurgency

While Boko Haram was arguably founded in 1999 (Elden 2014, 414), it was only in 2009 that the group became widely known (Loimeier 2012, 138). Between its founding and uprising, Boko Haram (however, not being named Boko Haram yet) was known for its theological disputes, which were expressed through public sermons and spread via pamphlets and CDs (Loimeier 2012, 148-149). However, although its uprising is dated back to 2009, the group began to use violence in 2003. It engaged in conflict with followers of Ja’far Mahmud Adam, of whom Boko Haram leader Muhammad Yusuf was a former student, alongside fighting Nigerian security forces. This led to the naming of the group as the ‘Nigerian Taliban’ (Loimeier 2012, 148-150). The group continued to attack police stations, after which Muhammad Yusuf fled the country (Loimeier 2012, 148, 150). Nonetheless, he returned in 2005, continuing to attract much attention and many followers, of which many young men received military training in 2009, after which tensions increased and the insurgency started (Thurston 2018, 88-111). However, the exact cause of the conflict is debated, for instance with some stating that a special police programme was launched to target and attack Boko Haram. This was interpreted as anti-Muslim violence, leading to the starting point of the Boko Haram insurgency (Thurston 2012, 111-112). Another starting point which is mentioned by some is that policemen stopped members of the group for not wearing motorcycle helmets, after which the Boko Haram members attacked several police stations, whereafter Yusuf lost his life in police custody and others were imprisoned, executed or passed away in firefights. These incidents were named the ‘Boko Haram Riots’ (Elden 2014, 416). Other scholars state that it was the sacking of the group’s refuge, during which nine group members were arrested and many materials were seized, that started the insurgency (Adesoji 2010, 98).

Despite debates about the exact cause of the insurgency, it is clear that tensions arose in 2009, leading to the killing of Yusuf and the start of the insurgency. After the riots, the group carried out diverse actions in several areas in Nigeria and gained support in the form of materials and training from other violent groups, such as Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) (Elden 2014, 416). Yusuf’s leadership was taken over by his former deputy, Abubakar Shekau, who announced that attacks would now not only be directed to Nigerian

targets, but also to Western targets (Elden 2014, 416). Actions carried out by Boko Haram after this were, amongst others, freeing prisoners, attacks on cities, the bombing of a police quarter (which was a new method of violence, since suicide bombing had not been a previous *modus operandi*, but was frequently used afterwards), the bombing of a United Nations (UN) building, and other ‘smaller’ actions, such as car hijackings and robberies (Elden 2014, 416). Furthermore many small operations are still launched that specifically target people who are considered *haram*. These people are, for instance, shot or bombed (Elden 2014, 416). An important incident that turned international attention to Boko Haram was the abduction of 276 schoolgirls in 2014, later becoming known as the Chibok girls, after which more abductions followed (Peters 2014, 186).

It was in 2015 that then Boko Haram leader, Abubakar Shekau, expressed his loyalty to ISIS, whereafter turmoil started due to the fractionalisation of the group between Boko Haram and the newly announced Islamic State in West Africa (ISWA) (Ojo 2020, 88-89). ISIS recognised ISWA but appointed a different leader than Shekau for the group, after which Shekau remained Boko Haram’s leader. Shekau mainly targeted Muslims, Christians, and crowded places, whereas ISWA did not target Muslims, and targeted military formations (Ojo 2020, 88-89). Furthermore, several Boko Haram factions exist, but these factions cooperate when planning and executing larger attacks (Ojo 2020, 89).

Despite the fact that the downfall of Boko Haram has been proclaimed several times by Nigerian government officials, such as in 2015 (Pham 2016, 1) and in 2020, Boko Haram has continued to perform several types of violent attacks in Nigeria, proving the group has not been overthrown (Ojo 2020, 90).

3.4. Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the way in which Boko Haram was founded and started its insurgency. While debates exist about the exact founding of the group, it is clear that it started throughout the beginning of the 2000s. However, its insurgency did not start until 2009, although debates also persist about what the exact cause for it was. Nonetheless, Boko Haram has since carried out many violent actions in Nigeria, such as the bombing of cities and the abduction of the Chibok girls. It is a group that is driven by extremist Islamic and anti-Western views which they aim to spread worldwide. In the following chapter, the topic of gender in Nigeria will be analysed, and the way in which gender stereotypes and biases

influence Nigerian society, by, for instance, looking at (in)equality indices, laws, and customs.

4. Gender relations in Nigeria

4.1. Introduction

This chapter will cover gender in Nigeria, and the way in which gender stereotypes and biases influence Nigerian society. Nigeria has signed several UN-treaties that aim to eliminate gender inequality. Nonetheless, gender discrimination and inequality are still widespread in the country (Agbalajobi 2021, 61). This is enforced through factors such as traditions, customs, and cultural practices. (Agbalajobi 2021, 61). Furthermore, religion and culture are important factors in the shaping and enforcing of inequality (Ogharanduku, Jackson, and Paterson 2021, 5).

The chapter will cover indices that measure gender (in)equality and explain how these are used to study gender inequality in Nigeria. Thereafter, the chapter will analyse laws that are apparent in Nigeria that cover gender, and how they enable or limit gender (in)equality. Lastly, traditions and customs concerning gender will be described, as well as the position of Nigerian women in society and the economy. Thus, it will study the organisation of Nigeria's society and how this is influenced by gender biases.

4.2. Inequality indices

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Nigeria's Gender Development Index (GDI) scored a 0,881 in 2019 (UNDP 2020a). The GDI is based on the difference between men and women in the Human Development Index (HDI), which is based on the estimated number of years people go to school, the number of years they have received education, life expectancy, and the "estimated gross national income per capita" (UNDP 2020a). A country that scores close to 1 is estimated to have high levels of equality, whereas either going above (inequality in favour of women) or below (inequality in favour of men) 1 indicates higher inequality (UNDP 2020a). Major differences between men and women are visible in the number of years that they receive education and the income they receive (UNDP 2020a). In short, this means that Nigeria is still considered one of the countries with the biggest gender inequality levels worldwide (UNDP 2020a). Since there has not been a GDI-report since 2019, it is unclear to see whether the situation has changed in the past years. However, it is probable that the situation has even worsened due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Not only has the pandemic negatively affected human development and caused a crisis in human security and development, but it has also worsened situations concerning gender inequality, such as increased levels of gendered violence (UNDP 2022, 13).

Nonetheless, the UNDP's indices have been criticised by many scholars. While the HDI is generally an accepted index of measuring development, the GDI is often critiqued, mainly on the basis of ideas that the GDI is a direct measure of gender (in)equality, and conceptual and empirical problems (Klasen and Schüler 2011, 2). Still, according to Klasen and Schüler, even though the GDI cannot be used as a sole indicator for gender inequality, it can be understood as a tool to indicate the loss of human development as a result of gender inequality. This is because the GDI does not strictly measure gender inequality, but a gap between men and women in human development (Klasen and Schüler 2011, 4). Nonetheless, the GDI still has limitations, such as its calculation of income gaps, since resources are often shared at the household level, raising questions about its ability to truly measure inequality according to this measure (Klasen and Schüler 2011, 4). Furthermore, its calculation of income is thoroughly based on labour force participation in the formal, non-agricultural sector, while women are often involved in the informal and agricultural sector (Klasen and Schüler 2011, 4). However, although recommendations have been made for several adjustments and alternative indices, a consensus has not been reached about the best way to measure gender inequality (Klasen and Schüler 2011, 4). Therefore, it is important to study the situation on the ground, and not solely rely on indices.

4.3. Laws

While Nigeria's 1999 constitution recognises the female gender and appoints rights to women, many practices that contradict these rights are still widespread in the country (Ako-Nai 2013, 15). Furthermore, while the constitution forbids any discrimination based on gender, many women are uninformed of either the law or of the way in which they can report violations, which leads to a lack of penalisation (Ako-Nai 2013, 17). Moreover, although rape is illegal according to the constitution, no protection has been offered to women, thus women have not gained much from the laws (Ako-Nai 2013, 18). The lack of knowledge of laws also applies to the rights women have concerning labour. An example of those rights is the law about maternity protection. However, many women do not know their rights, resulting in widespread violations (Ako-Nai 2013, 18).

Furthermore, due to stigmas and taboos in Nigerian culture, many women find it difficult to report violations and abuse (Oluwatoyin et al. 2019, 768). It is only when cases of rape and other assault were life-threatening, that they have caught much attention of the police and the media (Oluwatoyin et al. 2019, 768). Furthermore, due to the widespread idea that a woman becomes the property of her husband when they marry, and the subsequent belief that her

husband can decide what to do with her body, many women find it difficult to report violations that happen within the household (Oluwatoyin et al. 2019, 768).

Due to persistent inequality in the country, the National Policy on Women was implemented in 2000. However, because it only focused on women and did not include men or address the system in which inequalities arose and were strengthened, it was perceived to be counterproductive (Agbalajobi 2021, 61). Therefore, the 2006 National Gender Policy was drafted, which was adjusted to several other development programmes; adopted an approach aimed to achieve sustainable development through gender equality policies; was drafted through dialogue with stakeholders; used an efficient management system; and was based on much research in accordance with many diverse actors (Agbalajobi 2021, 61-62).

Nonetheless, taking concrete action was difficult, and the National Policy on Women faced hardship due to a lack of legal backing, and despite the efforts, Nigerian women are still not equal to men, proving that the policy has not met its objectives (Agbalajobi 2021, 61-62).

4.4. Customs

However, as opposed to the constitution, Nigeria's customary law – a country's unwritten law concerning things such as traditions – neglects women's rights in several ways (Ako-Nai 2013, 21). These customs, however, do differ per Nigerian state. An example of this is the differences that are seen concerning the regulations for women in agriculture between the Kogi state and the Benue state. In the Kogi state, women are not allowed to engage in agriculture, whereas in the Benue state, women are allowed to engage in agriculture, as long as they are married since they cannot own land themselves (Ako-Nai 2013, 23).

Furthermore, many scholars argue that the position of women in Nigerian society was and still is influenced by colonialism and the sexist ideologies that were held by many religious missionaries in the colonial administration (Ogharanduku, Jackson, and Paterson 2021, 5). Before Nigeria was colonised, women held different positions in society. For instance, they were engaged in political matters and held high economic statuses, but this changed due to, for instance, education during colonial times (Ogharanduku, Jackson, and Paterson 2021, 5).

An example of a custom that is influenced by gender biases, is marriage. Many women do not consent to marriage and are forced by their father to marry (Orisaremi 2017, 1002-1003). The candidates for marriage are mostly chosen based on factors such as the jobs they perform, the relationship between a girl's parents and the man, and poverty in the family of the girl (Orisaremi 2017, 1002-1003). Another tradition that is tied to marriage is that when women

become widows, they are expected to bear children for their deceased husband's patrilineage (Orisaremi 2017, 1006). A widow can do this by marrying (one of) her deceased husband's brother(s). This way of life is often considered good and beneficial for women, since it is a way in which a widow can still have social security (Orisaremi 2017, 1006). However, these women do not have other opportunities, since if they choose otherwise, they are forbidden from engaging in relationships with other men. Due to the responsibility they still hold for (the care for) their children and the lack of income they generate, many widows do not have any other choice (Orisaremi 2017, 1006-1007).

Furthermore, the practice of paying a dowry is often connected to ideas that because a man pays the dowry, he gains the possession of his wife's sexuality. Therefore, women do not hold ownership over their sexuality, meaning they cannot decide when/whether to have (safe) sex with their spouse (Orisaremi 2017, 1007). Nonetheless, these practices and ideologies are changing in newer generations. However, this is still based on education, financial situations and whether someone lives in a rural or urban region (Orisaremi 2017, 1007-1008).

According to Oluyemo, the following practices influence gender inequality in Nigeria: "Male preference, property inheritance, widowhood practices, economic alienation, political participation, male domination, work discrimination, relegation to home front" (Oluyemo 2014, 330). With male preference is meant the preference that many people hold to have a son instead of a daughter. This sometimes even results in families falling apart simply because a woman has not given birth to a son, or in girls not being able to go to school because the money is used to send boys to school (Oleyumo 2014, 331). Furthermore, due to the nature of the inheritance system, only men can inherit their family's property, resulting in a spiral in which women always start behind men because they do not own anything on which they can build and gain more economic power (Oleyumo 2014, 330). This also applies to the inequality that is apparent on Nigeria's labour market, since many women do not have the opportunity to join the labour market and thus are unable to gain an income (Oleyumo 2014, 330-331).

Moreover, education is important to consider. Especially in rural areas, many children do not have the opportunity to go to school. They often have to work on their families' farms in order to provide an income, and there often is not enough money to pay for education (Babatunde, Omoniwa, and Ukemenam 2018, 663). However, opportunities to receive education are even more scarce for girls. For instance, many girls drop out of primary school due to child marriage, economic hardship, or because they have to work (Babatunde, Omoniwa, and Ukemenam 2018, 663). This leads to inequalities in the workspace and a lack

of opportunities to get jobs. Moreover, if they are employed, women often find themselves in junior positions, instead of being employed for senior positions (Oluwatoyin et al. 2019, 767). This shows a certain hierarchy that is apparent in the workplace. Furthermore, most women work in the informal sector and are involved in small-scale trading businesses and farming, and many women do not have paid jobs, while twice the number of men is employed for paid labour (Oluwatoyin et al. 2019, 767).

Furthermore, women are barely represented in Nigeria's political sector (Oleyumo 2014, 331). This is also visible in the factors that influence Nigeria's Gender Inequality Index (GII). In 2019, only 4.1% of the seats in the Nigerian parliament was held by women (UNDP 2020b). According to Agbalajobi, the lack of female representation in Nigerian politics and decision-making processes is influenced by many factors, such as finance, culture orientation, religion, violence against women, and the nature of Nigerian politics (Agbalajobi 2021, 78). This low representation threatens aims of equality and development, and impairs peace and political transparency (Agbalajobi 2021, 78).

Lastly, religion is an important factor to consider when studying gendered customs and traditions. The major religions in Nigeria are Islam and Christianity (Ogharanduku, Jackson, and Paterson 2021, 5). These are religions in which men are presented as the head of the family, with wives whose job it is to serve them (Okongwu 2021, 27-28). Due to the importance of religion in Nigerian society and culture, these beliefs influence many aspects of life (Okongwu 2021, 27-28). Nevertheless, there is a difference between the religions concerning the roles of women. For instance, Muslim women generally do not participate in the labour market, whereas Christian women are more likely to have jobs (Adeyem, Odusina, and Akintoye 2016, 80). The system of *Purdah*, which is the system that keeps women in seclusion and is adopted in Islamic parts of Nigeria (Zakaria 2001, 110), influences this, as it prevents women from working and from performing noticeable social functions in general (Adeyem, Odusina, and Akintoye 2016, 80-81). Furthermore, Sharia is often used to strengthen inequality and discriminate against female Nigerians (Adeyem, Odusina, and Akintoye 2016, 81).

4.5. Conclusion

This chapter studied gender in Nigeria, and the position women hold in society. Several factors influence and strengthen gender inequality in Nigeria, such as culture and religion. Subsequently, many customs and the way in which society is structured are influenced by

these gender biases. For instance, they influence thoughts about husband's possession of their wife's body, female consent in marriage, opportunities to receive education, etc. Furthermore, due to male domination on the labour market and the relatively small number of women that are employed for paid labour, many women are not financially stable and therefore are dependent of their husbands. Moreover, the structure of the labour market is influenced by gender norms, with many women working in the informal sector, whereas many men work in the formal sector and hold political functions. This shows that gender biases are deeply entrenched in Nigerian society. The next chapter will combine the topics of gender in Nigeria and Boko Haram and focus on women within Boko Haram.

5. Women in Boko Haram

5.1. Introduction

Since the role of women in peaceful societies influences the way in which they are treated if those societies become involved in conflict, it is important to study the role of women within Boko Haram in light of their position in Nigerian society (Oriola 2017, 113). It has been stated that the way in which Boko Haram treats women, for instance when Boko Haram fighters marry girls, is similar to the way in which these women and girls would be treated in non-violent circumstances (Oriola 2017, 113). The abuse women suffer within Boko Haram is generally an extension of the neglect and abuse women throughout the country have suffered for years, and the forced marriage and domestic abuse that many women suffer within Boko Haram is generally no different from the situation they would have been in outside of Boko Haram (Matfess 2017, 45).

Therefore, this chapter will study the role that women play within Boko Haram and how this is influenced by the gender norms that were described in the previous chapter. Firstly, the chapter will focus on the conscription of women into Boko Haram, for instance through abduction and voluntary membership. Secondly, the chapter will research the tasks that women are assigned, and how they are connected to the previously studied gender norms. Thirdly, the role of female suicide terrorists within Boko Haram will be studied.

5.2. Conscription

Women are of great significance in the Boko Haram insurgency. Not only are they recruited into the group, but they also take up 99% of the group's victims (Oluwaniyi 2021, 457). There seems to be a lack of requirements or categorisations for the recruitment or victimisation of these women, since all girls and women above the age of 10 can, for instance, be abducted (Oluwaniyi 2021, 457). The treatment and position of women in society strongly influence the way in which Boko Haram considers women (Oriola 2017, 104-105). As discussed in the literature review, there are several ways in which women are deployed to violent groups, as well as several reasons why women join voluntarily. Boko Haram has adopted three ways in which it deploys women.

Firstly, they abduct girls and women, of which the kidnapping of the Chibok girls is the most important, although not the only, example (Oriola 2017, 105). Nonetheless, the kidnapping does not always involve major actions and big groups of girls, since there are also many instances in which the group randomly abducted girls. For example, in the state Maiduguri,

which was the first state in which women fell victim to Boko Haram's insurgency (Oluwaniyi 2021, 455), Boko Haram was notorious for the abduction of girls. However, the group gave money to the women's male relatives afterwards in return for the protection of the abductors. Due to the high levels of poverty in the state, people were desperate for this money (Oriola 2017, 105). Moreover, although resentment for the imprisonment of Boko Haram members was a motive for the abduction of the Chibok girls, this is not the only motivation for abduction (Matfess 2017, 82). For instance, abductions are a relatively easy act to disrupt society through cultivating and gaining international attention, which gives Boko Haram bargaining power against the state (Matfess 2017, 87).

In 2017, it was estimated that 117 children, of whom were mostly girls, fell victim to abduction, after which they were drugged and recruited for suicide missions. The same type of recruitment was applied to the aforementioned Chibok girls who, after they were abducted, were housed in camps and followed training on war and other functions within Boko Haram (Matfess 2017, 87-92).

Furthermore, Boko Haram differentiates women according to religion. For instance, the abductions mostly take place in predominantly Christian areas. The girls and women who are abducted are then converted to Islam and threatened if they refuse to do so (Segun and Muscati 2014, 26-27). Moreover, Islamic abductees are often allowed to leave soon, whereas Christian girls and women are secluded and held captive for long periods of time. This especially holds true for unmarried Christian girls and women who are forced to, alongside converting to Islam, marry Boko Haram members, whereas married women are sometimes allowed to leave the camp when they declare that they have converted to Islam (Segun and Muscati 2014, 27-30).

A second, similar, way in which the group deploys women, is by buying them from their male relatives, who sell them not only to earn money, but also because they sympathise with the group (Oriola 2017, 105). This method of deployment shows the patriarchal system in Nigeria's society, as it shows that men have power over women, especially within the household. Furthermore, it demonstrates how women are considered disposable burdens (Oriola 2017, 105).

Lastly, there are women who, voluntarily and consensually, have sexual relationships with members of the group and join the group through these relationships (Oriola 2017, 105). Motives for this, as was also discussed in the literature review, are often that these women

gain something out of these relationships, such as food or other basic needs. This is the result of poverty in many parts of the country and the lack of income that many women have, especially in the north of the country, in which Boko Haram is very active (Oriola 2017, 105). Furthermore, another positive outcome of these relationships for women is that in return, they are offered protection from other resistance movements or acts of violence that arise due to the insecure environment in the country, but also from Boko Haram itself (Oriola 2017, 105). Moreover, some women join the group voluntarily because they are brainwashed into thinking they will earn money and/or that the martyrdom will guarantee them a place in paradise (Oluwaniyi 2021, 458). Nonetheless, it is still questionable whether this act can be deemed voluntary (Mazurana et al. 2002, 106). For instance, when asked about marriage into Boko Haram, a 16-year-old girl from Maiduguri stated that: “some girls married the fighters willingly, some married for food, and some refused and were killed or beaten” (Matfess 2017, 106).

Thus, many women who are victims of, for instance, Boko Haram, poverty, or violence from other groups, later become perpetrators (Oriola 2017, 107). According to Oluwaniyi, it is the victimisation of women that often motivates them to take back their agency and voluntarily join violent groups. Taking matters into their own hands provides them with a sense of self-determination and agency (Oluwaniyi 2021, 455).

5.3. Tasks and treatment of women

According to Oriola, women are deployed into Boko Haram for four main tasks, namely procreation, domestic tasks, to kill others, as a form of human shield, or to be used during bargaining processes (Oriola 2017, 107). The first category is as much based on beliefs as it is practical, namely the belief that insurgents may seize the wives of men who do not properly interpret Islam (Oriola 2017, 107). This is tied to the belief that it is wrong to kill a woman, but since they are also not allowed to be educated and thus become of importance, they can be used for sex, since men need sex (Oriola 2017, 107). The effect of these actions is that women who are able to return from camps are often pregnant. When the offspring grows older, they can be abducted again, and used in the insurgency. In 2014-2015, over 16.000 children were born as a result of systemic rape in the North-East of Nigeria, where Boko Haram had a large presence (Oriola 2017, 108).

While rape and other types of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) have been widespread practices in wars throughout history, Boko Haram’s motives seem to be different

(Oriola 2017, 108). SGBV is often an opportunistic act that is used to terrorise the enemy and civilians belonging to them, to strengthen and draw on power relations, and as a means of ethnic cleansing and genocide (Denov and Lakor 2017, 255). These motives seem to differ from the way in which Boko Haram adopts SGBV as part of its insurgency, as this is a more long-term motive. While degrading women and using their bodies as properties, Boko Haram still places major importance on these women because they are the bearers of the group's future (Oriola 2017, 108). Nonetheless, the use of SGBV in its insurgency still portrays the way in which women's bodies have become part of conflict and terrorism, and are used as a battlefield (Oriola 2017, 108).

Furthermore, the term intersectionality can be applied to all forms of SGBV. The term, developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, is used to describe the connection between discrimination and oppression as a consequence of class, sex, and race, in which a combination of these bases of oppression leads to an increase of the oppression (Henry 2016, 51). The usage of this theory when studying SGBV leads to a better understanding of the causes of the violence, for instance by looking at victim's class, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity (Henry 2016, 51). Thus, it provides a way of looking at the complex power relations that are part of SGBV and the way in which it is adopted in war (Henry 2016, 51). Therefore, it is important to look at Nigeria's social structures and society in order to understand Boko Haram's use of SGBV. As described in the previous chapter about gender relations and customs in Nigeria, a widespread customary law is women becoming property of their spouse when they marry (Oluwatoyin et al. 2019, 768). This is also visible in the way in which members of Boko Haram marry girls, after which they consider them their property (Oriola 2017, 107).

Moreover, many Nigerian girls cannot make decisions about their own marriages, and are instead sold by their male relatives, in return for a dowry (Orisaremi 2017, 1002-1003). This can be connected to the abduction of girls and giving family members money for it in return for protection.

Furthermore, the number of wives an insurgent has, marks his position within the group, as does the dowry that he paid for these wives (Matfess 2017, 136-137). This, too, can be connected to Nigerian customs, since polygamy, especially polygyny, in which a man has several wives, is a widespread custom in the country (Munro et al. 2019, 833). While Nigeria's Marriage Act states that married men should be monogamous, polygynous relationships are common both within Christian and Muslim communities, with 17% of Christian women being engaged in polygynous relationships, and 44% of Muslim women

(Owoo, Agadjanian and Chama-Chiliba 2021, 1314). Polygynous relationships are associated with high social status, mostly due to the large offspring that can be given to a man in these relationships. Furthermore, women can contribute to agriculture, meaning that having multiple wives can provide men with higher incomes (Behrman 2019, 906-907).

Notwithstanding changes in views about polygyny among urbanised and higher educated populations, the practice remains widespread among mostly lower educated, rural, and Muslim populations, specifically in the north, in which Boko Haram is mainly present (Behrman 2019, 907). Lastly, an insurgent's position within the group influences his wife's privileges. For instance, the wives of soldiers who are lower in rank are often responsible for carrying weapons, whereas wives of higher-ranked soldiers do not have to take up such tasks (Matfess 2017, 138-139).

The wives of Boko Haram members are obliged to engage in sexual relationships with them in order to provide them with sexual pleasure and offspring, which is connected to the way in which many Nigerian women do not hold ownership over their sexuality when they are married (Orisaremi 2017, 1007). While girls are generally said to, to some extent, be protected from sexual assault before they are married, many married women fall victim to marital sexual violence, sometimes even being violently threatened in order to have sex with their husband (Segun and Muscati 2014, 33). In May 2014, shortly after the abduction of the Chibok girls, Shekau published a video, stating that: "We would also give their hands in marriage because they are our slaves. We would marry them out at the age of nine. We would marry them out at the age of 12" (Segun and Muscati 2014, 31). Thus, SGBV is a tactic that is used by Boko Haram to exert power over women and the communities they originate from. Not only are many women subjected to rape and forced marriage, but they also suffer mutilations and sexual slavery (Oluwaniyi 2021, 458). Some women do not become members' wives, but instead are made slaves and given tasks such as cooking food and cleaning. These women are also often sexually assaulted and raped by different men (Matfess 2017, 92).

Lastly, the, although questionable, voluntary choice of women to join Boko Haram or engage in (sexual) relationships with members often is a result of poor socioeconomic status. This poor socioeconomic status is an effect of the place Nigerian women take up in society, since they often do not have the chance or are not allowed to receive education, which results in difficulty in finding jobs and thus economic hardship and poverty (Babatunde, Omoniwa, and Ukemenam 2018, 663; Oluwatoyin et al. 2019, 767). This is connected to the lack of women

in the work field, as many women are expected to stay home and take care of the house and their children (Oluwatoyin et al. 2019, 767). Within Boko Haram, this is also visible in the tasks that women are prescribed, since many of them are expected to work in the domestic realm. For instance, many women are responsible for cooking and cleaning, or for washing (blood-stained) clothes (Segun and Muscati 2014, 25-26). The responsibility that women are given over household tasks (such as cooking and cleaning) is clearly influenced by gender stereotypes. Still, it is a relatively beneficial task for these women, because it provides them with more chances of surviving (since they are not involved in active fighting), as well as chances of fleeing the camps (Oriola 2017, 110).

Nonetheless, the tasks are not mutually exclusive, meaning that women can be responsible for many types of tasks. Furthermore, many women in Boko Haram are prescribed tasks that involve military action. For instance, many women have to carry armament for soldiers, or, when insurgents go looting, have to carry the acquired loot back to the camp, because using vehicles is impossible in areas with many hills (Segun and Muscati 2014, 26-27). Moreover, some women have to approach enemies, and lead them to another place where insurgents are hiding so they can be killed, either by male or female insurgents (Segun and Muscati 2014, 26). Nonetheless, the deployment of women for violent tasks other than suicide attacks is rare, and women are not a defining feature in this part of the Boko Haram insurgency (Matfess 2017, 130). The four Rs, as previously stated in the literature review (revenge, redemption, relationships, and rape) that classify motives for female violence can be applied to these instances in which female members of Boko Haram take up violent tasks within the insurgency (Matfess 2017, 131). For instance, many women seek revenge against the violent security representatives of the Nigerian state, for instance because they, or their family members, have fallen victim to their (sexual) violence (Matfess 2017, 131).

5.4. Female suicide terrorists

Moreover, as mentioned in the literature review, although Al-Qaeda began deploying women as suicide terrorists as early as 2005, for Boko Haram this turning point seems to have taken place in 2014 (Smeulers 2015, 211-226; Segun and Muscati 2014, 36). In June 2014, the first case of a female suicide terrorist was reported, which took place three years after the group's first act of suicide terrorism (Matfess and Warner 2017, 30). She was killed before reaching her target (Segun and Muscati 2014, 36). A month afterwards, a 10-year-old girl was arrested after the authorities were informed that she was carrying explosives. Furthermore, young girls from the age of 12 were engaged in several attacks during this period (Segun and Muscati

2014, 36). The turning point of deploying female suicide terrorists instead of solely deploying men for the act seems to have been motivated by the abduction of the Chibok girls and the effect it had on Nigeria's society. The immense shock of the abduction of the girls was strengthened by the fact that only (young) girls were abducted (Matfess and Warner 2017, 30). The rapid deployment of women for suicide attacks led to the fact that in 2014, women amounted to half of Boko Haram's suicide terrorists. The threat of female suicide terrorists had grown so significantly that several unofficial measures were implemented in certain areas, such as curfews for women (Matfess and Warner 2017, 30). Nevertheless, the effect of these measures was limited, as attacks mostly take place during the day in crowded places. This has, for instance, led to bus drivers becoming hesitant to allow women on busses (Matfess and Warner 2017, 30).

The deployment of female suicide terrorists increasingly grew, and it was by 2017 that Boko Haram had deployed over 400 women as suicide terrorists and that the average suicide bomber had actually become female. This is a unique trait, since the average suicide bomber in many other terrorist groups is a single male in his 20s, and the global rate of female suicide terrorists in violent groups is 15%. Therefore, Boko Haram, with 64,5% of its suicide terrorists being female, is the group that has deployed more female suicide terrorists than any other violent group in history (Matfess and Warner 2017, 30; Osasona 2022,). Furthermore, Boko Haram is not only unique in its deployment of female suicide bombers, but also in the deployment of young children for the act (Matfess and Warner 2017, 28-29). According to Oluwaniyi, since 2014, women have been responsible for 83% of the fatalities that were caused by Boko Haram (Oluwaniyi 2021, 457-458).

While the motives that underlie the acts of female suicide terrorists are heterogenous and individual, gender still seems to influence many of them. Much literature has stated that women generally become suicide terrorists out of "despair, mental illness, religiously mandated subordination to men, and a host of other factors specific to their gender" (O'Rourke 2009, 682). This, however, does not necessarily hold true for all female suicide terrorists, since, according to O'Rourke, scholars are more likely to make assumptions about motives for women, since they are often more personal than men's. Furthermore, women's personal motives are often generalised and applied to all instances, despite differences in, for instance, culture and demographics (O'Rourke 2009, 701). While motives for suicide terrorism are based on individual motives and group incentives, it is not entirely clear which are the most prevalent motives for women in Boko Haram who choose to be suicide bombers

(O'Rourke 2009, 682; Matfess and Warner 2017, 28). Terrorist groups often make use of the loyalty of their members to the community, and they can use a variety of arguments to persuade members to carry out such acts. For instance, O'Rourke identifies several arguments: "Feminist appeals for equal participation, the offer of redemption for a woman who has violated the gender roles of her community, revenge, nationalism and religion" (O'Rourke 2009, 701). Nonetheless, many girls and women are also, after abduction, drugged and manipulated into carrying out these actions (Oluwaniyi 2021, 457). Thus, these differentiating motives for deploying female suicide bombers and for women to become suicide bombers confirm the way in which gender still influences the act and deployment, although it does not necessarily mean that gender always influences motives for this type of terrorism.

Thus, willingness to become a suicide terrorist is both dependent on the group and on the individual. However, despite the clear benefits that Boko Haram has derived from the deployment of female suicide bombers and thus has encouraged it, it is unclear what motivates female members of Boko Haram to engage in these suicide attacks (Matfess and Warner 2017, 28). Nonetheless, something that could motivate women is the money that is offered to them in case they volunteer to engage in a suicide attack. These women can use the money to buy food before they engage in the attack. Furthermore, it is unclear but possible that the families of these women are also paid when they have executed a suicide attack (Matfess and Warner 2017, 29). This is connected to the aforementioned poverty and hardship that many Nigerian women face, and the despair that motivates them to carry out violent attacks (Matfess and Warner 2017, 29). Therefore, again, it can be debated whether the choice to engage in such an attack can truly be deemed voluntary, because it is dubious whether these women have any other choice, since this choice is often between executing a suicide attack or continuing living in a camp in which they structurally fall victim to sexual, physical and psychological harassment, or they are threatened that their family will be killed if they do not choose to be a suicide bomber (Matfess and Warner 2017, 29). Notwithstanding this dubious voluntary choice, many women do not have a say in whether they will be deployed as suicide terrorists (Matfess and Warner 2017, 29).

Not only are female suicide terrorists influenced by gender in their motivations, but the types of suicide attacks and their effects also differ based on whether they are executed by men or women. Firstly, female suicide attacks are often deemed more shocking because they violate existing gender norms (O'Rourke 2009, 682). Furthermore, female suicide terrorists are

generally more successful than male suicide terrorists (O'Rourke 2009, 682). One of the reasons that women more successfully execute these suicide attacks is because they are seen as innocent and not as possible threats. This even more strongly applies to young girls and pregnant women, who are widely deployed for the attacks by Boko Haram due to this advantage (Matfess and Warner 2017, 28-29). Moreover, because it is deemed unacceptable for men (the number of women in Nigeria's security sector is limited) to search women's bodies, it is more difficult to find ammunition on them (Matfess and Warner 2017, 28-29). Another fact which makes this more difficult is the conservative dress code that female members of Boko Haram conform to, namely wearing loose clothing under which explosive belts can easily be hidden. This has occasionally even led to men wearing women's clothes, as well as carrying handbags and children, in order to be able to enjoy these benefits (Matfess and Warner 2017, 29). Furthermore, not only is the rate of success of the suicide attacks an incentive for deploying women, but women also generally do not fill significant positions in the group, making them worth less compared to men, who more often fill senior positions. Therefore, women are put at stake in order to save more men (Matfess and Warner 2017, 29).

Aside from the fact that women are generally more successful in their suicide attacks due to several reasons such as clothing, there are also differences between the attacks that are carried out by men and women. For instance, male suicide bombers more often attack Christian institutions, whereas women are more likely to target international education facilities. Furthermore, female suicide terrorists are more often deployed to target civilians, for instance attacking markets and bus stations, whereas men are more likely to target Islamic institutions (Matfess and Warner 2017, 32). These differences between male and female attacks can be exemplified by, for instance, ideologies about the role of women in Islam (Matfess and Warner 2017, 32). Furthermore, since women can easily blend into landscapes such as schools and markets, it is relatively easy to disrupt these places with an attack (Osasona 2022, 5). Moreover, the use of girls for suicide attacks (Boko Haram has deployed four times more girls than boys for its attacks) is used as a tactic to confuse the public and change perceptions of what a terrorist is (Osasona 2022, 5-6).

5.5. Conclusion

In conclusion, women play an important role within Boko Haram, although the experiences and motives for, for instance, committing violent acts, are relatively heterogeneous and differ amongst the women within Boko Haram. This also applies to the way in which women become part of Boko Haram. Firstly, many girls and women are abducted and then forced to

stay within the camps. Furthermore, Boko Haram buys girls and women from male relatives in order to take them with them. Lastly, there are several women who join Boko Haram voluntarily, for instance by marrying into the group. However, this choice can be deemed dubious, because it is questionable whether these women truly have an alternative, since alternatives are often, for example, extreme poverty or death (Matfess 2017, 106). These women are included into Boko Haram for several reasons. For instance, they are married off to soldiers and used to provide them with offspring who, in the future, can become Boko Haram members (Oriola 2017, 108). Furthermore, many women are assigned tasks that lie within the household, such as cooking and cleaning for the soldiers (Segun and Muscati 2014, 27). These tasks and practices are all clearly influenced by the way in which women are viewed in Nigerian society, for instance the lack of agency that women hold over their bodies within marriage, or the tasks that women are assigned to in Nigerian society, since many women are responsible for the household (Babatunde, Omoniwa, and Ukemenam 2018, 663; Oluwatoyin et al. 2019, 767). Lastly, Boko Haram is unique compared to many other violent groups in the number of female suicide terrorists the group deploys. Over half of the suicide terrorists within Boko Haram is female, and women are generally more successful in carrying out suicide attacks than men (O'Rourke 2009, 682). The deployment of female suicide terrorists also seems to be influenced by gender, since women carry out different types of attacks than men (Matfess and Warner 2017, 32). Furthermore, since women are deemed of less worth than men, it costs Boko Haram less to deploy women as suicide terrorists (Matfess and Warner 2017, 29). Therefore, this chapter has shown that gender norms in Nigeria strongly influence the way in which Boko Haram perceives women and how the group deploys women in its insurgency.

Conclusion

This research, *Stereotype or Stratagem? The effect of gender norms on women in Boko Haram*, has aimed to identify how gender norms in Nigeria influence the role of women in the Boko Haram insurgency. While women in war are often only considered victims and are researched accordingly, they often play important roles in many wars and conflicts. This is also the case in the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria, in which women play an important and active role. However, despite this active role and their importance in the insurgency, such as in their role of carrying out suicide attacks, women's roles have been understudied. Therefore, this research has aimed to identify how gender norms in Nigeria influence the role of women in the Boko Haram insurgency. In order to answer this question, this research analysed the way in which Boko Haram was set up and is organised. It is a violent Salafist-Jihadist movement, which strives to be like the first Muslims, and adheres to the Qur'an strictly. The group rejects the West and Western education and aims to eliminate this, and has carried out this mission since the start of its insurgency in 2009.

Furthermore, the role of women and the prevalence of gender stereotypes within Nigerian society was studied, which showed that the position of women in Nigerian society is heavily influenced by gender stereotypes. For instance, gender inequality in Nigeria is high, which is affected by widespread customs concerning the role of men and women. For example, although discrimination based on gender is prohibited by law, practices such as forced marriage are persistent, as well as the forcing of widows to bear children for their deceased husband's patrilineage. Moreover, women often do not hold ownership over their sexuality within marriage, and marital rape is a widespread problem. Since men are expected to pay dowries when they marry, it is a widespread belief that they buy their wife's sexuality and therefore gain ownership over it. This, and customs such as the inheritance system in which women cannot inherit their families' property, lead to women's dependency on their husbands, strengthening inequality.

These gendered customs and stereotypes were then connected and compared to the way in which Boko Haram treats women. For instance, the research studied the way in which women are deployed into Boko Haram, such as through abduction, buying girls and voluntary membership. Many women are abducted and forced to stay in camps, of which the abduction of the Chibok girls is an important example. However, some women also marry into Boko Haram. While this can be considered a voluntary choice, it can be questioned whether these women truly have a choice, since other factors such as poverty influence these women.

Furthermore, notwithstanding voluntary siding with the group, most female members of Boko Haram are forced to become part of the group. These women are often married off to insurgents, and then assigned different tasks. Many of these women fall victim to sexual violence, especially marital rape. These sexual relationships with women are often used as a strategy to produce offspring who can later become members of Boko Haram. Moreover, it is connected to the aforementioned beliefs that when a woman becomes someone's wife, she becomes his property and loses ownership over her own sexuality. This indicates a connection between the way in which women in Nigerian society are treated and the way in which Boko Haram members treat women. Furthermore, the act of men selling their wives and daughters to Boko Haram and to be married to insurgents seems to be connected to the Nigerian custom of dowry-paying and the lack of decisions that girls and women are allowed to make about their marriages. Additionally, the motives of the women who, arguably, voluntarily join Boko Haram are also, sometimes indirectly, influenced by Nigerian gender norms. For instance, the choice to join Boko Haram is often a result of poor socioeconomic status, which is an effect of the lack of education that women receive and the difficulty to find jobs and gain an income.

Moreover, many women in Boko Haram are responsible for tasks that are connected to the household, such as cooking and cleaning, which is also a result of the widespread notion in Nigeria that women should not work and should instead be at home and take care of the household. Additionally, although women are rarely deployed for violent acts other than suicide attacks, the motives for the women who do commit violent acts can also be explained through gender. For instance, many of these women are motivated by resentment and want to seek revenge against people who committed violent acts against them or their families, for instance who raped them or committed other types of sexual violence. Since sexual violence is a gendered type of violence, these acts are indirectly motivated by gender.

Finally, the research studied female suicide terrorists. Suicide terrorism is a big part of the Boko Haram insurgency, and more than half of its suicide terrorists are female. This is a unique trait, since this deviates from patterns in other violent groups. This indicates a certain stance towards the deployment of women in Boko Haram's insurgency. While women's motives to become suicide terrorists are not entirely clear and are very personal, Boko Haram seems to widely make use of their loyalty to the group. Furthermore, several of these women seem to be influenced by factors such as revenge, nationalism, and religion. However, many are also forced to carry out these acts in different ways, such as being drugged and manipulated into doing it, but also by being threatened. Moreover, some women (and/or their

families) are paid before carrying out suicide attacks, which connects to the poor conditions many women live in. Nonetheless, although these motives seem to strongly differentiate and might not necessarily be of a gendered nature, suicide terrorism seems to be influenced by gender, and women are a very important part of this war tactic due to different reasons, such as them being more able to blend into landscapes and through the clothes women are expected to wear that enable them to carry weaponry. Lastly, women are also considered to be of less worth because they do not fill significant positions in the group. Therefore, it is more profitable to deploy women for these attacks instead of men.

Thus, this research has aimed to show the influence of gender norms on women within Boko Haram. There are many factors that indicate the correlation between the position of women within Nigerian society and the treatment of women within Boko Haram, such as the freedom they have within marriage. Therefore, this shows that the position of women within Boko Haram is strongly influenced by how their position in Nigerian society, which is strongly affected by gender roles and stereotypes. Nonetheless, the important active role that women play within Boko Haram, such as their roles as suicide terrorists does not provide the women with a more equal position within the group, since many of these women still fall victim to physical and psychological violence. Therefore, it seems that gender norms heavily influence the Boko Haram insurgency, both influencing the position that men hold within the group and the tasks they perform, and the position of women, influencing their treatment and the tasks they are expected to perform. Thus, there is an importance of studying women within violent groups such as Boko Haram and how their role is influenced by patterns and customs in society. Therefore, further research is needed to broaden the knowledge of the correlation between gender norms in societies and the position and roles of women within violent groups. Nonetheless, it can be concluded that despite the unequal relationship between men and women in Nigerian society and within Boko Haram, women play an active role in the insurgency, and these roles and positions are strongly influenced by gender norms and stereotypes.

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