CURBING RADICALIZATION AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN AFRICA: INTERROGATING WOMEN INVOLVEMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This article interrogates women's involvement in extremism and how they can contribute to curbing radicalization and extremism through a study of the case of the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. Based on secondary data and some expert opinion interviews, the study observes that Women's involvement in contemporary Nigeria occurs at some five levels: (i) women's marginalization; (ii) women's physiological role in family and society; (iii) women's actual involvement in extremism; (iv) women as victims of extremism; and (v) women as role players in de-radicalization and curbing of extremism. Yet, women's involvement has been neglected in the search for remedies. The findings reveal that radicalization and violent extremism in Nigeria have festered despite efforts by the government through increased defence funding, police reforms, enacting and strengthening terrorism legislation, military option, community vigilantism, international support and cooperation, and dialogue with the insurgents. The article concludes that success has been minimal because the measures do not address the fundamental basis of the problem of extremism in Nigeria. The work suggests women's involvement as an alternative, if not a fresh perspective to curbing radicalism and extremism. Appropriate policy recommendations are made in this regard for the benefit of the government and women's actions.

Keywords: Radicalization, Violent Extremism, Women

Introduction

In the recent past, Africa has been witnessing the rapid emergence and spread of extremist ideas, activities, and networks, both local and transnational. Extremism at the level of ideas often turns into violent behavior. Extremists commit violent atrocities such as the bombing of government or civilian targets, arson, genocide, community/ religious cleansing, kidnappings, use of chemical weapons, and traumatizing society and creating a firmament of fear. Diverse shades of extremism in Africa are driven by different concerns such as social, economic, and political factors that are implicated in the causation of the threat posed by extremism. Such factors are often listed to include religion, ethnicity, politics, and even resource conflicts.

The 'root causes of radicalization, and by extension, extremism is sometimes identified to include issues such as unemployment, extreme poverty, social inequality, corruption, marginalization, exclusion, and struggle for scarce resources; political oppression, injustices, violation of human rights, illiteracy, misery, starvation, drugs, prejudices, complete hopelessness, and without the protection of any kind from the government among others. For instance, when young people are impoverished, with the feeling of despondent ad neglected by reason of injustice and corruption, the circumstances breed resentment with

the system which the terrorists can latch in to radicalize them. In some African countries, corrupt politicians, in their bid to capture power, form alliances with political thugs to whom they funnel arms and ammunitions and whose ranks are continuously swelled by the pauperized and dehumanized army of unemployed youths. It is also probable that years of bad governance and corruption and lack of accountability of the ruling class are responsible and social-economic injustice in Nigeria.

Local and international extremist organizations latch onto these causal issues to foment violent activities with sundry implications for national security. The increasing rate of insecurity and radicalization in Africa has resulted in death, destruction, and instability in the countries and regions where terrorist groups operate. In 2012, the Accord organization confirmed that about 33,300 fatalities in Africa between 2011 and 2012 are estimated to have been caused by extremism, with related displacement and economic devastation contributing to the worst humanitarian catastrophes ever seen on the continent. Situations seem to have deteriorated rather than improved since then. Some major extremist hotspots on the continent include Somalia (where al-Shabaab contributes to the destabilization of an already fragile state), the Maghreb (where Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb holds sway), and Nigeria (where Boko Haram continues to contest the territorial integrity of the state). These and other groups are thus prevalent in the north, east, west, and Horn of Africa; but they have created a continental challenge by threatening the larger African political, social, and economic security, (www.accord.org.za), and challenged national governments and regional bodies with hardly any sustainable solution in sight.

For Nigeria, Islamic extremism, emblematically represented by Boko Haram, is a clear and present security threat; but it is not the only one. Since the present democratic dispensation from May 29, 1999, Nigeria has witnessed unprecedented turbulence in the polity marked by various dimensions of insecurity. The expression of violent extremism and insecurity has been diverse, complex, and complicated. There has been destructive violence related to insurgency, militancy, sectarian, ethnic/communal clashes over land, border, chieftaincy; socio-economic (herdsmen/farming community clashes and kidnapping for ransom), and political (electoral) issues, with grave implications for the security of life and property and socio-economic development in the country. In addition to religious fundamentalism and insurgency, citizens' claims over access to resources such as land, minerals, and water have become very volatile and explosive in many states of Nigeria. In particular, installations of oil establishments and oil theft-related rascality and attacks on the facilities in the Niger Delta region appeared to be expanding with the specter of fire and a militant dimension (Roberts, 2013), while there has also been an upsurge in cattle rustling and attacks by migrant pastoralists on farming communities. Several states in Nigeria have witnessed violent conflicts between farmers and pastoralists, with attendant fatalities and huge losses in property almost daily. Gbadebo-Smith, (2018) argued that the widespread availability of modern automatic weapons and improved communications have increased the intensity of the conflicts, which are being increasingly seen as religious, and political as the underlying drivers which appear to be conflicts over access to economic resources (NISER, 2016; Gbadebo-Smith, 2018).

By the close of 2017, the most prominent expressions of violent extremism in Nigeria were the Islamic insurgency represented by Boko Haram and the herdsmen and farmers clashes. As religious and socio-political groups campaign to defend themselves against extremist onslaught in the face of the obvious inept of the Nigerian state to provide security to the citizenry (sometimes accused of being complicit in the growing insecurity), there is the danger that other extremist groups will emerge and fester. We focus on the Boko Haram insurgency.

Nigeria is home to the terrorist group known as Boko Haram. The insurgency group blossomed fully in 2009. In March 2015, it pledged allegiance to ISIS and declared itself to be the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWA). Since 2009, this group has continued to carry out a string of attacks against Nigerian

security forces and suicide bombings against civilian targets. Operating from Nigeria, Boko Haram has also made neighbouring countries susceptible to bombings and kidnappings (www.counterextremism.com). The worsening situation has grave implications for political stability and socio-economic development in Nigeria and Africa at large.

Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, is an important country in Africa's peace and security landscape. To the extent that the conflict systems in Africa today are dynamic and interconnected, to that extent are they at the heart of the continent's enduring insecurity profile. An unstable Nigeria means less ability to engage in effective diplomacy, peacekeeping, and trade in West Africa and beyond. At a time when conflict and upheaval in Libya and Mali have had serious repercussions for the wider region (e.g. flow of small arms, refugees, ungoverned spaces that allow extremist groups to organize), with implications for Nigeria's already unstable neighbors Niger and Chad, violent extremism and escalation of instability must be checked (Gbadebo-Smith, 2018).

Understanding Nigeria's extremist conflicts has been tasking; curbing them is even more challenging. The government and stakeholders have continued to hold discussions on peace, security, terrorism, radicalization, and development in Nigeria and implement associated 'security measures' with negligible success. However, paradoxically, little attention has been devoted to involving women in understanding, responding, planning, and implementing these programs. This lack of attention is surprising considering that women suffer more and are also the key to managing the aftermaths of disasters, and are thus the risk bearers in most violence and terrorist attacks (Pardee 2010).

African women are involved in one way or the other in stemming violence and extremism. More recently women in Liberia and Sierra Leone played key roles in brokering and fostering peace in both countries (Isama 2013). As will be evident argued in this article, even in the case of Boko Haram, there are women, educated and uneducated, that are associated with the delinquents and social miscreants in the society that would later become extremists. Such women can be useful in understanding better ways of responding to radicalization and extremism.

Previous studies on understanding and quick response to terrorism and radicalization in Nigeria largely focused on government, religion, and inequality with negligible attention on the role of women in security challenges (Bhulai, Peters, & Nemr, 2016). Again, this is despite the emergent consciousness of the importance of involving women in the prevention and countering of violent extremism (P/CVE). This research intends to shed new light on the limitations of conventional approaches to curbing extremism and present the alternative perspective of women's involvement in a multi-stakeholder approach to addressing critical issues and providing concrete policy recommendations for governments, civil society, and other relevant stakeholders. The interest of the paper is to uncover the 'silences and gaps' as regards the involvement of women in threat violent extremism. The process of 're-presenting' the roles or involvement of women is closely bound up with the argument of feminists for "a study of violence that considers the gaps between how violence is 'lived', understood and theorized' (Morgan and Thapar Bjorkert, 2006; Hume, 2007c cited in Hume, 2009:110). In this context, we engage critically with the role representation and involvement of women not only to foreground their acts as essential to the theorization of violence generally but also to contextualize the reduction of some roles as normal, natural, and inevitable.

The article uses mainly qualitative data from secondary sources complemented with informed opinions derived from semi-structured interviews with experts on security from selected Nigerian universities and research institutions and some who also have primary experience of terrorism and radicalization in northeast Nigeria. Following this introduction, this paper presents an overview of challenges, issues, and

stylized facts about Boko Haram extremism in Nigeria, highlighting the emergence of the group and its activities, the response of the state, and the limitations of that response, and the scope of women's involvement. This is followed by a discussion of the case of women's involvement in the Boko Haram insurgency. Some theoretical insights are then drawn from the discussion. This is followed by the conclusion and recommendations.

Stylized Facts on the Nigerian State and Origin of Boko Haram Extremism

Bhulai, Peters, & Nemr, (2016) stressed that the Boko Haram uprising which started in 2009 is traceable to a conflict between Boko Haram and Nigerian security forces, which led to the extra-judicial murder of the sect leader, Ustaz Muhammad Yusuf, by the police. Contending that violence across several states in north-eastern Nigeria resulted in more than 1,000 deaths and about 700 killed in the city of Maiduguri alone. It was revealed that there existed long-standing tensions existed between Boko Haram and the Nigerian security forces, the immediate cause of the violence stemmed from a confrontation between a group of sect members and police in the city of Maiduguri. The sect members had defied a 2009 state law requiring that motorcycle riders wear a crash helmet. The boys, not being properly educated, felt the law was not in tandem with their religious obligation to wear their turbans.

However, the most viable explanation for the insurgency is the failure of governance in Nigeria. Grievances over persistent government corruption and mismanagement, economic injustice, and poverty especially in the northern part of Nigeria have been one of the underlying causes of most sectarian violence in the country. The nexus between governance failure and socio-economic factors such as unemployment – especially among the youth, poverty, a deteriorating standard of living, etc. and its linkage to the violent extremism of Boko Haram is underlined by the fact that while endemic poverty and hopelessness might be general in Nigeria, it is more severe in northern Nigeria. According to the Nigerian Poverty Profile Report, 2010, the northwest and northeast geo-political zones of Nigeria, the home region and bastion of Boko Haram, are the areas with the highest poverty rates with 77.7% and 76.3% respectively. Evidence shows that the three northern geo-political zones have an average poverty incidence of 70.1% compared to 34.9% for the South. Boko Haram protagonists blame this situation on the influence of modernization and Western education on those who govern the states. This underlines the group's commitment to mobilize against modern state formation and government establishment, which are seen as the root cause of social ills, and to establish an Islamic state governed by the Sharia Law (NISER, 2016).

In northern Nigeria, there are many unengaged children, teenagers, and young adults. It is commonplace for indolent parents to dispatch their children into the streets to go out and beg for a living. Consequently, these free and vulnerable children become victims of recruitment for politicians who use them as tugs for election, arm them for election and set them free after winning elections. In an interview with, Sylvester, in 2018, he revealed to the authors that these youths who are without any kind of skill then become vulnerable, easy, and willing victims of militarization, extremism, and radicalization against the government, for ethnic cleansing, lynching, and vandalism of all sorts of government property and installations.

From its origins, the adherents have transformed from Yusufiyans (those who listen to Mohammed Yusuf's teachings into Jamā'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihād this refers to those who fight for Allah. The result of Boko Haram and other extremists is that contemporary Nigerian society has become increasingly divided and fragmented along the major fault lines of religion, ethnicity, and sectional

competition for economic resources. Political competition and mobilization tend to be framed along these lines. This has occasioned vanishing tolerance and interfaith cooperation and diminishing pluralistic and multi-cultural values. These have led to fundamental changes in existing social relations between communities and strident demands for political restructuring to accommodate the new realities. The rise of hardline religious, ethnic, and political movements and their violent activities have led to conclusions that Nigeria is now more divided than it has been in decades, the most prominent tendency of which is the separatist demand for the Republic of Biafra from Eastern Nigeria as championed by the Movement for the Actualization of Biafra (MASSOB) and Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB).

Theoretical Case for Women's Involvement

Alar, (2011) argued that radicalization and terrorism do not defile one single definition that can be universally accepted. At the same time, 'terrorism' can be seen at all levels – individual, group, society, nation, and global and the actors can culturally construct the environment for their enemies. Different kinds of extremism can be identified, including religious, ideological, political, cultural, racial, ideational, or behavioural. In real life, what seems extreme for some can appear normal for others (Alar, 2011). Extremism is relative.

A formulation that would combat an ideology that sees itself as a quasi-state without border or traditional rules of sovereignty will need to invoke a new thought process, namely, that of involving women. Around the world, women have serious traditional and present-day roles to the government and stakeholders of peace that can leverage in blunting the impact of extremism in Nigeria and Africa as a continent. The reason for this is not farfetched. First and foremost, women are the first line of defense against recruitment and radicalization. Women often have power within the family, and this gives them a huge ability to hinder recruitment and radicalization. Because they often uphold families under siege, women can also help de-radicalize and allow effective reintegration of former extremist group members (www.foreignpolicy.com)

Women are uniquely positioned to be effective partners in curbing violent extremism (CVE) and to be positive agents of change in their families, communities, and public spaces. For example, women can play a strategic role in building trust and partnerships between communities and the security sector because women can guide current and past grievances within the community. Including women in the security sector, particularly as police officers, provides a competitive advantage to help reduce violence in local communities (Helpdesk Research Report, 2017).

Calfas, (2016) and report of Helpdesk Research Report, (2017) maintained that women are shown as frequent victims of terrorist attacks, on the contrary, women can be veritable tools for counter-terrorism measures and have an innate capacity to point out when preventive practices are counterproductive and can cause a backlash in their communities. This type of information can be decisive to avoid creating or sustaining conditions conducive to terrorism

Women also have innate intelligence collection. They are often not seen as threatening to authority figures and are therefore more approachable to sources with information to share (Calfas, 2016). Women are strategically positioned in the family and the society to inform CVE strategies and programs to make these more effective. Women are sometimes enablers of the insurgent's actions.

Women can also play vital roles in addressing the consequences of extremism which also includes being actively involved in the challenging task of reintegration of extremist youth who have been transformed.

They can also encourage reconciliation through community networks by building connections and sharing information. (unwomen.org). Involving the women can have a game-changing impact on policies and actions which, in the long run, will help dowse extremism and strengthen local ownership of security and make security sustainable. When women are well engaged in the pursuit of peace and security in Nigeria and Africa, violence and terrorism are likely to be mitigated and curbed.

In concluding this discourse, we must note that the role of women in curing violent extremism ad radicalization cannot be over-emphasized. One of the reasons is that women in communities, know and relate to the 'bad boys' well and can, therefore, be counted upon, in principle in understanding and responding to extremism and radicalization, women, in general, are often marginal by tradition and in the worst-case scenario, outrightly excluded in handling and responding to extremism, and so this vital contribution can be lost.

The Nigerian State and Extremism

All geo-political zones in Nigeria experience extremist violence in one form or the other. Violence also festers in large swathes of ungoverned spaces. Policing is non-existent in large sections of the country. In many parts outside of urban centres, law enforcement is unknown, allowing militias and insurgents to thrive. Violence in Nigeria is, therefore, a complex phenomenon that is open to becoming highly politicized (Gbadebo-Smith, 2018). But perhaps the most prominent source of violent extremism in Nigeria today is Islamic terrorism prevalent in some northern states of Nigeria. Terrorism has been defined as the premeditated use or threat use of violence to cause fear, death, or destruction of property or infrastructure in a state, intended to compel state authorities to respond to the demands and expectations of those behind such violent acts (Sampson & Onuoha, 2011).

Boko Haram, a terrorist organization with a fundamentalist ideology of jihad has served as a recurring threat to the political stability and development in Nigeria and the neighbouring countries of Chad, Niger, and Cameroon. The group operates through mass abductions, assassinations, and bombing campaigns (Sahara Reporters, 2018). In the Northeast, the terrorist group openly challenged the sovereignty and continued existence of the Nigerian state, killing, maiming, and abducting people, and causing the displacement of the largest number of Nigerian citizens in recent history. Beyond the Northeast, they extended their mindless killings to Abuja, Kano, and Kaduna (Gbadebo-Smith, 2018).

Historiography of Involvement of Nigerian Women in Violent Activities

Nigerian history is replete with narratives of gallant activities of women both in the pre-and colonial eras. Nigerian women employed their colossal intuitive power and strength in defending their community and people, leading them in the war against their enemies, dousing the eruption of conflicts, detecting changes in their children and husbands' behaviour, and demanding positive reform and changes to engender peace.

Falola and Fwatshak (2003) documented the 'legendary' place of women in politics across Nigeria during the pre-colonial period. This includes the exploits of women like Queen Amina of Zazau in Zaria, Iyalode Efunsetan Aniwura of Ibadan, Princess Moremi of Ife, Princess Inikpi of Igala, and Emotan of Benin, to name a few. Awe (1992) and Ityavyar (2002) also traced the historical participation of Nigerian women in the social and political spheres today to the pre-colonial era. Uvwie Emotan of the Benin Kingdom was a politician and diplomat. Oba Orompo, a female Oba, was an influential figure who restored dignity, peace, and stability in the Oyo Kingdom. Madubuike and Solomon (2007) document the case of Madam Tinubu

of Lagos, who rose to become a prominent and commercial elite of her community in Lagos and who later settled in Abeokuta where she organized its defence against the Dahomeian invasion in 1863. According to Sani (2001), Tinubu was rewarded with the title of Iyalode (First Lady), earning her constitutional right to influence the affairs of their communities.

Pre-colonial women of prominence in the eastern part of Nigeria include Archibong (1852-1863) of Calabar, Omu Nwagboko of Onitsha, who signed a treaty with Queen Victoria of England in 1884, and Ojedi Umodie of the 1860 Igala (Ityavyar and Ityavyar, 2002). According to Awe (1992), in pre-colonial Hausa of Northern Nigeria and pre-Islamic society, women held political offices and titles like the Magajiya (Queen), and Iya (Queen Mother) before the Jihad. In addition to Queen Amina, there were notable women such as Bazoa Turunku, and Daurama of Daura. In Borno, powerful female politicians included the Magira (Queen Mother), who was one of the principal field-holders in the state and possessed a full complement of administrative staff including men-at-arms whom she used to impose her political authority. Through the Magiram and Dogoma, she decided and judged cases among the Harem and also extended her political control to other territories (Olojede, 1990).

However, in post-colonial Nigeria, Resttituta (2007) opined that there is a consensus among academics, political practitioners, and feminists that the colonial era had a very negative impact on Nigerian women's participation in governance and politics and greatly reversed the historical social and political gains by women. The British administration introduced Victorian standards which relegated the woman to domestic production (Resttituta 2007). Nigerian women also played very prominent roles in the struggle for independence and freedom from their colonial masters. These include Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, Mrs. Margret Ekpo, Hajia Gambo Sabawa, etc. (Obbo, 1980; Madubuike and Solomon, 2007). These women laid the foundation for contemporary struggles by Nigerian women to reduce the gender gap.

Contemporary State of Play of Women's Involvement

Women's involvement in contemporary Nigeria occurs at some five levels: (i) women's marginalization; (ii) women's physiological role in family and society; (iii) women's actual involvement in extremism; (iv) women as victims of extremism; and (v) women as role players in de-radicalization and curbing of extremism.

Women are not involved

Women in Nigeria are hardly equal to men in governance, peace, and security development.

Women are marginalized or even excluded in the security sector because the policy guiding this sector is quite closed; it does not give space for the recruitment of females, especially as combatants and front-liners in crises and conflict situations (Aiyede 2014). Secondly, when it comes to peace and conflict management women are also argued to be more inclined to peaceful resolution than men (Medecins 1997; Nwolise 2014). Both are reasons for their marginalization as well as a case for their engagement. According to Adejimi, (2018), in the past, northern elders did not recognize women in political positions but now seeing their counterparts from the south, they are now projecting their women in politics.

Physiological role

The nature and physiology of women position them to play a role in the family and society. Women play a vital role in educating children and providing them with values, identity, and purpose. Naturally, children tend to ingratiate more to their mothers than fathers. This provides a good channel for mothers to impact virtues to their children and wards from childhood (www. Nigerian commentaries, blogspot.com,). This way, they shape the weltanschauung of children and youths in their formative years. Also, mothers are the ones who can notice worrying signs like anger, anxiety, and withdrawal in children, and therefore, the ones who can help build resilience in childhood. Mothers possess a special capacity to both pre-empt and detect possible radicalization; which means expertise and strategic position as key actors in the prevention of terrorism (www.reliefweb.int, 2018).

Women are by nature caregivers and this draws them close to people, friends, children, husbands, and relatives. Apart from performing their biological and social activities of caring, giving birth, and bringing up humans as mothers, women also have the potential to partake in communal activities, including those geared toward a peaceful resolution of conflict as well as peacebuilding (Adeniyi, 2015). As community leaders and as mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters in family settings and professionals, they shape the value of community members (www.UNwomen.org). Women are physiologically stronger than men and also have ingenious ways of solving problems in their societies and homes (Oyekanmi 2014). Their intuitiveness goes beyond the surface level and logic of men. They are more peaceful. Dandibo (2014) thus maintains that in conflict and war situations women do play vital and unquantifiable roles. They have also proved to be a stabilizing force and the backbone of reconstruction and rehabilitation in post-conflict settings (Adeniyi, 2015).

Naturally, women are good investigators. The complex 'wiring' of their brain means that they can take in details often ignored by men. There is an account to the effect that during the Nigerian civil war (1967-1970), the decision by a newly arrived Commander to get rid of the many women he saw with his soldiers on the thought that they were 'lasciviously fooling around' cost the Nigerian Army about five thousand men within two weeks. In reality, the women were functional spy agents, being able to move and penetrate society and provide information on enemy combatants. Their forceful eviction cut off this source of information and thus the strategic role that the women played in the war situation (Isama 2013).

Emordi (2019) thus concludes that the world without women in conflict situations will be like the Hobbesian state of nature. As such, any efforts to manage situations of radicalization and extremism without women could mean effort in futility. (Albert 2019) makes similar claims in the larger development discourse. It is, therefore, imperative that women's involvement is tapped as a fresh perspective for responding to and handling terrorism and insurgency because of the position and nature of their roles in the family and society at large. However, there is a need to caution that prevailing assumptions about women's appropriate roles in society, particularly concerning decision-making and conventional assumptions about their areas of expertise, have been and can continue to be used to exclude them from informal or formal and all other peace processes (Adeniyi, 2015).

Women are complicit in extremism

Women have had a long history of participating in terrorist activity. Women have been seen in various capacities playing different roles in aiding and abetting and also participating in terrorist groups for a variety of reasons, which have little or nothing to do with their gender. The implication of this is that most of the same influences that encourage men to become terrorists also account for women's involvement. In

addition to the factors listed at the beginning of this article, these may also include complaints about sociopolitical situations; anguish about the death of a loved one, real or apparent dishonour on a bodily, mental, or political level; or a longing to influence radical societal change. Like some of their male counterparts, women can also be swayed or pressured to partake in terrorism by male family members (Fink, et al, 2016).

Deriving from their physiological and social roles, women know the 'bad boys' and know them well. In many communities, some women protect and sell drugs and food to delinquents and social miscreants. Emordi (2016) speculates on the possibility that amid the Boko Haram community, there may have been women who help them to achieve their goals in one way or the other. Deep down is likely to be women in the background providing domestic and social services to them, including the provision of intelligence by way of situation reports on the cities, and advice on strategies and tactics.

The irony is that a woman plays the role of mother, wife, nurse, acquaintance or beloved sister, lover, or spy to an extremist sect; yet the state marginalizes women in peace, and security challenges the nations are facing today (Oyelude 2019). Women may be the brains behind the series of insurgencies prevalent in our time.

Besides their support role, women have been operative perpetrators of violence in armed conflict. When women are seen as mothers, wives, nurturers, and peacemakers, they are not seen as credible or likely agents of terrorism and therefore can carry out attacks more easily (Cunningham, 2003: 171). Female terrorists frequently do not receive the same inspection by opposition forces, or at security checkpoints and can hide suicide vests or bombs beneath traditional clothing, obviously giving them a strategic benefit to their male counterparts (Sutten, 2007: 18). Women can use their gender stereotypes to evade recognition as their 'non-threatening nature may prevent in-depth scrutiny'; they are not alleged as able to be guilty of terrorist acts (Cunningham, 2003: 172). In addition, drafting both males and females from a young age allows them to be trained, influenced, and brainwashed to support the cause (Sutten, 2009: 17). Engaging women as active partners in the fight against violent extremism posed be an innovative ad sharp departure from the previous patriarchal security strategies.

Circumventing the natural role of women nurturers and using women as active agents of terrorism undoubtedly plays upon recognized preconceptions and expectations about the role of women in patriarchal societies. An example of how females have used their gender specifically to commit a terrorist act includes a suicide bomber appearing to be pregnant to gain entrance to a hospital, successfully killing and injuring numerous people including the commander of the Sri Lankan Army (Melissa, 2014). In the case of Boko Haram, during the early establishment of the group, females in the local community gave noteworthy backing to their activities. Reports designated that women were involved in covering female family members and in some cases, offered up their daughters to serve as martyrs. Nigerians have been quite alarmed by the increasing involvement of young females as suicide bombers.

Women are victims of extremism

Women and girls are impacted by rising extremism differently than men and boys. They are often the first victims of violent attacks, and their rights and mobility, as well as economic capacities, are compromised even more than their male counterparts (www.UNwomen.org). They are victims and bearers of the ensemble of effects of violent extremism. In most violence and terrorist attacks, women suffer more (Frederick S. Pardee 2010). If there is a crisis today, naturally, women will lose their loved ones, their husbands, sons, and possibly their daughters. This situation is not peculiar to Nigeria (Aiyede 2014). In

conflict situations, women suffer more loss than men and are exposed to being raped, and are at high risk of partaking in the sufferings of men and also being widowed (Medecins 1997).

But women are also direct victims of violent extremism. In Nigeria, as elsewhere, they are victims of assassinations and bombing campaigns, kidnapping, and mass abductions. Boko Haram has deliberately targeted females. About 276 female students were kidnapped on 14/15 April 2014, from the Government Secondary School in Chibok, Bornu State. On   21 March 2018, there was another episode of the kidnapping of 104 female students from Girls Technical Secondary School, Dapchi. In the two cases (Chibok and Dapchi), the girl-child became a 'bargaining instrument' in negotiations between terrorist groups and the Nigerian government. The girl child was also a pawn in the political chess game in which the major political parties, the ruling All Progressives Party (APC) in power during the kidnap of the Dapchi girls, and the opposition Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), in power during the kidnap of the Chibok girls, aim to score political points.

Women as Role Players in De-Radicalisation and Curbing of Extremism

Despite their fabled marginalization in decision-making and conflict resolution, Nigerian women have and can still play a role in deradicalization and curbing of violent extremism. Sylvester (op. cit.) reports the experience of women's involvement in violent ethnic conflicts in Kaduna State where they have been seen to lead 'wars' by using bees and darkness to confound their enemies and consequently bringing the conflict to an end! Okenyodo (in Fink, et al, 2016: 13) draws on the Nigerian context and women's participation in law enforcement and military agencies to argue that 'women are effective at CVE efforts in circumstances where men may not be able to intervene due to gender differences and cultural expectations. As we conclude with this theme, let us first consider the specific case of one woman's involvement in the Boko Haram insurgency.

The Case of 'Mama Boko Haram'

Long before the upsurge of the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria in 2009, there was a woman, nicknamed 'Mama Boko Haram'. As far back as 1989, she was the Yan-jun ma (meaning beloved mother) who accommodated, cooked for and nursed many of the boys who grew to be hardened members of the sect. She circumcised them when they reached circumcision age and was also their confidant as they grew. She had the ears and minds of the Boko Haram boys; she was their 'godmother'. Under this relationship, she knew them inside out, as she watched them grow under her tutelage. This woman is Aisha Wakil.

Aisha Wakil, was native to Enugu State in southeast Nigeria but got married to Wakil a Muslim from Borno State in North East. She was converted to Islam by marriage. Aisha exploited the dual citizenship Nigerian women should but do not ordinarily enjoy under the indigeneity provisions of the 1979 Nigerian Constitution to become a godmother to the radicalized Boko Haram boys.

Confirming the speculation (Emordi, 2014) that amid the insurgents there is likely to be a woman, Adaoyiche (2017; 2018) chronicled the activities of 'Mama Boko Haram' based on an interview with her. Adaoyiche (2018) reports Aisha's involvement with the terrorists in the northeast as follows. She has been involved with them as far back as 1989. On her arrival to the north, she discovered that some of the boys had reached circumcision age.

I helped in circumcising them. In the morning, the tradition here is that after circumcision, you're

expected to kill a chicken for them and then use fire or hot water on their penis. So I did all that for them. So that relationship grew and they began to call me 'mama.' Their parents told them that I helped in circumcising them and they would cover their eyes because they were always shy. So I became their mother in the area. She maintained that from then on she has maintained the relationship with the boys even when she relocated to a different street she still goes to see them every Saturday and Sunday to cook, eat, dance, and sing and they will recite the Quran for her. Some will follow me to this house. When there were so many, she had to put up all these structures in the compound to accommodate them. After some time, they started calling me "Yan jun ma" (meaning beloved mother). All these happened long before Mohammed Yusuf the founder and leader of the insurgents' group came. She equally extended the relationship between him and his father-in-law. As it is my tradition, every evening, I cook for people within and outside my home. So every evening, they all troop in here to eat. From "Yan jun ma," they started calling me "Amira" and later on they came up with the name "Mama Boko Haram."

Mama Boko Haram explained that due to her closeness with the boys at the time, she was able to notice changes in their behaviour. She argued that as children grow up with you, you must notice changes in their behaviour. Mothers possess a special capacity to both pre-empt and detect possible radicalization. As a mother to them, she first, noticed a group of three that always exempted themselves from the others. At a point, they were 'scarce' for three months, during which period none of the others knew where they were, except that 'they had gone somewhere to come back soon. When the three boys returned, they had become even more reserved. And so she knew that something was wrong. According to the report:

When I questioned their whereabouts, they told me that they went for training on how to kill and shoot humans. Initially, she laughed over it because she thought it was a joke. After all, a typical Kanuri person does not know how to kill a chicken. They call people to help them slaughter their animals during Sallah. Sometimes I find it difficult to believe that such a person can slaughter a human being.

It is instructive that bearing in mind her intimate connection with 'the boys' growing up, the terrorists who abducted the Dapchi girls in 2018 contacted Mama Boko Haram to confirm that the girls were in their possession. Mama Boko Haram was also one of the delegates that the federal government chose to negotiate the release of the Dapchi girls with Boko Haram.

Conclusions

Women's involvement in curbing radicalization in Nigeria occurs at some five levels: (i) their non-involvement; (ii) their physiological role in family and society where they shape the worldview of children and youths in their formative years; (iii) their actual involvement in extremism; (iv) as victims of extremism; and (iv) as role players in deradicalization and curbing of extremism. It will be difficult to stop insurgency, militarization, and radicalization without the involvement of women. The sluggish and near futile efforts of government and other stakeholders in curbing radicalization, insurgency, and terrorism may not be far from the exclusion of women from such efforts. To better understand and address symptoms and root causes of radicalization and extremism in Africa and to achieve rapid progress in curbing them the alternative, if not fresh, the perspective of engaging women actively in the whole process of planning and execution of countervailing measures.

On average, women represent 50% of the Nigerian population across all age groups. This 50% refers to unique intelligence analysis and gathering mechanism that gives a perspective through a different lens; the eyes of women. Through this lens, we can look at new ways to dowse the tension arising from the Boko Haram insurgency. The role of women in the management of violence and terrorism in Nigeria is

expedient and equally urgent. When women are well engaged in the pursuit of peace and security in Nigeria and Africa, violence and terrorism are likely to be mitigated and curbed.

Recommendations

To effectively prevent, counter, and eventually overcome radicalization and extremism in Africa will require a multi-stakeholder effort, where government, civil society, the private sector, and communities work together to address both the symptoms and root causes. To better understand and address symptoms and root causes of radicalization and extremism and to achieve rapid response, the stakeholders in the fight against terrorism need to actively engage in the whole process of planning and execution of understanding and responding to radicalization in Africa. Disarming the process of radicalization must begin with dialogue across all boundary lines, by empowering all young women, and by starting as early as possible, on the benches of schools. When women are empowered economically and are part of decision-making in their communities, societies are more cohesive and more peaceful and the causes of extremism are cut short. (www.unwomen.org). To achieve this, the following measures are recommended.

Government Action

There is a need to federalize Nigerian democracy and democratize Nigerian federalism to emphasize women's participation. Intergovernmental tensions between the federal and state governments and ethnic peripheries currently expressed in the form of a crisis of fiscal federalism need to be resolved through the devolution of powers not just vertically but also horizontally. This will require a constitutional amendment to ensure that women's socioeconomic rights are justifiable. Addressing violence requires more than simply resolving grievances at a local level. A wider set of state and non-state leaders need to be engaged to ensure that they do not perpetrate violent conflict or exploit it for their political ends (Gbadebo-Smith, 2018).

The Nigerian government should develop the political will to hold to account, religious institutions which advocate divisive ideological narratives, but also shield women from enlightenment.

Engaging women in understanding and managing extremism in Nigeria to give security advice would benefit society more than their exclusion. Women should be seen in both formal and informal military sectors. They are to be used as intelligent security advisers, monitors, and surveillance agents. There is no doubt that women would have some ingenious way of providing solutions and recommendations to the problem of insecurity (Oyekanmi 2014).

Women, especially at the grassroots where the majority of Boko Haram members are recruited, should not only be incorporated as participants in decision-making processes but also be included as beneficiaries of counter-terrorism laws. Policies inspiring a greater elevation of women's contribution to security-related issues should be put in place. In particular, women in power should strive to create open spaces and networks for dialogue that involve women.

Primary and secondary schools should be developed as platforms to promote civic education directed at countering radicalization and extremism as part of efforts to reach out to the youths with a message of hope. Ministries of Youths at federal and state levels in collaboration with the National Orientation Agency (NOA) should mobilize youths, beginning from the grassroots, to counter messages that

radicalize, including hate speeches and sermons, through the media of posters, handbills, and radio and television and social media outreaches.

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