

The Lack that Carries Lacks: The Paradox of Women Amidst the Boko Haram Insurgency

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Abstract

Boko Haram insurgency in Adamawa, Yobe, and Borno states has affected the socio political and economic landscapes of the states. People have been displaced from their homes and now reside at different Internally Displaced People (IDP) Camps across Nigeria. This humanitarian catastrophe has become an intractable social problem. While counting the losses from the activities of the insurgents, little has been done to assess the plight of the women who have been the victims of the insurgency challenge. Many were raped, kidnapped and forcefully married out to the sect members. Ironically, the women who have never been fully involved in the making of governmental decision of these states are the major carriers of insurgency burden. Arguing from this background the paper critically examines the plights of women amidst the Boko Haram insurgency using the secondary data sought from literatures. Hence, the paper concludes that women suffered in the hand of Boko Haram insurgents and also the various IDP camps

Keywords: Insurgency; Boko Haram; Socio-political economic.

1. Introduction

The outbreak of the Boko Haram insurgency in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states poses challenges to the Nigeria state. These insurgents have carried out several attacks that have claimed many lives and maimed several others. Not only have the insurgents' attacks affected individuals directly but also, it has also affected the socio-political and economic landscape of the affected states. According to Awojobi (2014, 144), "the activities of Boko Haram sect have led to economic, social and psychological implications in the North-East Nigeria where the sect has a strong presence." Though the impacts of the insurgents' attacks spread across the generality of the society but the degree of the consequences varies across the victims. These victims who ranged from different ages and sex have suffered various degrees of depressions. However, the women who are politically underrepresented in governance processes of the Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states have been at the receiving ends of the insurgency aftermath.

While the population figure from National Bureau of statistics (NBS) shows that the women population is almost half of the total population of the three states of Adamawa, Yobe and Borno, the population of women in the corridor of power is very slim when compared with the men counterpart. A few women have held political offices in these three states either as House of Assembly members or Commissioners in the executive. According to NBS (2014) only two women have been elected into the Adamawa state House of Assembly between 1999-2011 while only one and none for Borno and Yobe respectively between 1999- 2011. Furthermore, a few women have been appointed in the executive arm of government of these three states as commissioners. For example, Adamawa had five female commissioners out of 27 appointed commissioners in 2010 and seven female commissioners by 2013 (NBS, 2014). Also, Borno and Yobe had four female commissioners out of 22 appointed commissioners and one commissioner out of 20 appointed commissioners respectively in 2013 (NBC, 2014). These statistics point to the fact that women have not really involved the decisions making process of governmental machinery of these states

Despite this deprivation, the women have been the subject of sexual violence and assault emanating as result of Boko Haram insurgency that grew out of the political decision made by the male dominated government. Arguing from this background, the paper seeks to explore the plights of women at the centre of the Boko Haram insurgency by given expository analysis of secondary data from newspaper, journals, reports and textbooks.

The paper is therefore schemed into five sections; the first section being this introduction followed by conceptualization of insurgency. Boko Haram evolution is examined in the third section of the paper while the fourth section deals with women at the centre of Boko Haram insurgency. The conclusion of the work makes the last section.

2. Conceptualizing Insurgency

The long existence of insurgency in man's history may have been the reason behind its definition from many scholars. Bard O'Neill (1990: 1) argues that "insurgency has probably been the most prevalent type of armed conflict since the creation of organized political communities." For him, insurgency is a general overarching concept that refers to as a "struggle between a non-ruling group and the ruling authorities in which the non-ruling group consciously uses political resources and violence to destroy, reformulate, or sustain the basis of one

or more aspects of politics” (O’Neill, 1990: 13). This definition underlines the fact that insurgency is usually a conflict between the government of a state and a group within the state.

For Kilcullen (2006), insurgency is a struggle to control a contested political space, within a state (or a group of states or occupying powers), and one or more popularly based, non-state challengers. Kilcullen’s definition goes in line with Bard O’ Neil’s definition. He further distinguishes between classical and contemporary insurgencies. He explains that contemporary insurgencies seek to replace the existing order, while the classical insurgencies aimed at the expulsion of foreign invaders from their territory or seek to fill up existing power vacuum.

Furthermore, Powell and Abraham (2006) also define insurgency as a violent move by a person or group of persons to resist or oppose the enforcement of law or running of government or revolt against constituted authority of the state or of taking part in uprising. Here the definition encompasses the fact that insurgency is a violent way of revolting against an existing political authority or a system of government in a particular state. Similarly, Gompert and Gordon (2008) posit that insurgencies seek to overthrow an existing order and replace it with one that is equal with their political, economic, ideological or religious goals.

From all these definitions, the paper defines insurgency as an organized movement that adopts violent means to overthrow an existing government or orders with the aim to creating a new order that goes in line with the movement political, economic, ideological or religious goals.

3. Historical Evolution of Boko Haram

The emergence of Boko Haram can be traced to the radicalization of Islamic movements that were inspired by Wahhabism and Salafism in the Northern region of Nigeria in the 1980s (Umar, 2012). Boko Haram, whose real name is Jama’atul Ahlus Sunnah Lidda’Awati wal Jihad (Brethren united in the pursuit of Holy war) started off its activism in 2002 under the leadership of Mallam Mohammed Yusuf (Shuaibu, Salleh and Shehu, 2015). He eventually radicalized the group and connected it to foreign radicalized groups, especially the Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) formerly known as the Algerian Salafist group (Akinbi, 2015).

The sect was created at Maiduguri in Borno state with the major aim to overthrow the existing governmental system and replace it with another guided by the sharia law throughout Nigeria (Chothia, 2012). Yusuf, the leader of the sect believed that the Western oriented system of government encouraged corruption, poverty aggravation and oppression of Islamic doctrines. Similarly, Bartolotta (2011) asserts that Yusuf believed that the system of government based on ‘Western values’ has resulted in the increase in corruption, poverty, unemployment and continued suppression of true Islam. He began peacefully mostly preaching and quickly gained a following among disaffected young men in the northeast.

However, the organisation activities took another dimension in its relationship with the Nigeria state after July 28, 2009 attack by Nigerian Army in which the sect leader Mohammed Yusuf was killed (Shuaibu and Salleh, 2015). Afterwards, the sect went underground and re-emerged in 2010 under a new leadership, Abubakar Biri Muhammed Shekau, a former deputy of late Mohammed Yusuf. With the emergence of Shekau as the new leader, the sect became a deadly violent movement in its approach. The violent reprisal of the sect started in 2010 with a prison breaks in September 2010 in Bauchi resulting in the escape of more than 700 inmates including its members (VOA Hausa 2010 cited by Shuaibu and Salleh, 2015). Subsequently, the sect continued in its violent attacks on the Nigerian state targeting churches, mosques, government agencies, security apparatuses, financial and international institutions (Olafioye, 2013).

From 2010, the sect has carried out a series of deadly attacks against Nigeria state using methods ranging from the development of armed gunmen on motorcycles, suicide bombers, vehicles- borne improvised explosives (VBIEDS), kidnapping etc. Sampson (2015, 27) argues that Nigeria has been locked in a vicious circle of violence, Boko Haram and Nigeria’s security forces have engaged in violence and counter-violence, with devastating consequences on human and national security.

4. The Victims: Women at the Centre of Boko Haram Insurgency.

Boko Haram insurgency in the Northeast states of Adamawa, Borno and Yobe of Nigeria has affected socio political and economic landscape of the states. Though the effects spread across the sexes living in the three states, the females are the major carriers of the insurgency outcomes as many have been subjected to rape, early marriage, and used as sex slaves while others are facing stigmatization from the family, and society at large after escaping from the den of the sect. Nagarajan (2015: 2) emphasises this that women’s rights, their bodies and freedoms in north-east Nigeria have become “the battleground on which the war is being fought.” In this vein the paper seeks to examine women at the centre of the insurgency and the effects on the female gender who are regarded as the weaker sex by the society.

The insurgents have engaged in series of activities which have direct impacts on the lives of female living in the three states of Adamawa, Borno and Yobe plus other states in the North. The kidnapping of over 200 college girls of Government College, Chibok in Borno state by the sect on May 15, 2014 is an example of the

insurgent action directed at the female gender. Prior this incidence, the sect had kidnapped girls and women at a police barrack in Bama, Brono state in May 2013 where 12 Christian women and children were captured. At the end, many of these women and girls abducted by the insurgent went through sexual violence including rape, forceful marriage, torture, and murder. In Human Right Watch report (2014, 26) some of the women and girls interviewed claimed they were subjected to force labour such as participating in military operations to support the group. One of the escapees reported her experience as thus:

At first, my job in the camp was to cook for the 14-man group until a month later when I was taken along for an operation. I was told to hold the bullets and lie in the grass while they fought. They came to me for extra bullets as the fight continued during the day. When security forces arrived at the scene and began to shoot at us, I fell down in fright. The insurgents dragged me along on the ground as they fled back to camp.

Moreover, some other abductees were forced into cooking and washing for the sect or help the insurgent to carry ammunitions. According to the Human Right Watch (2014, 27) a girl of fifteen years shared her experience in the den of the sect as thus:

They added more and more piles of clothing and other items stolen from homes and shops they looted before setting on fire each village they passed until I thought I would collapse from the weight of the load. I was relieved when two more girls were abducted in another village. They took over some of the goods I was carrying.

In another vein, some abductees were forcefully married, raped and sexually assaulted by the sect members. While some are lucky to be used as forced labours, some of the abductees are constantly raped by the sect “husband” after a forceful marriage of the female abductees. An ex abductee interviewed by Human Right Watch (2014, 34) shared her experience in the hand of her insurgent husband. She explained that she was constantly raped by the supposed husband every night after being threatened with gun by her insurgent husband. Her experience goes thus:

After we were declared married I was ordered to live in his cave but I always managed to avoid him. He soon began to threaten me with a knife to have sex with him, and when I still refused he brought out his gun, warning that he would kill me if I shouted. Then he began to rape me every night. He was a huge man in his mid-30s and I had never had sex before. It was very painful and I cried bitterly because I was bleeding afterwards.

4.1. The Use of Female as Suicide Bombers

Among the insurgents are women who are used as suicide bombers to carry out the instructions and aims of the sect. In this respect, Nagarajan (2015) argues that there is women’s wing of Boko Haram consisting women and girls who either chose to join or were coerced to join after being abducted. This induction is achieved through the use of drugs, indoctrination and fear; at least some of these women are active agents who have chosen to join the sect. These women are mostly used as suicide bombers to denote bombs in the sect’s targeted areas. According to Omilusi (2015) the first female suicide attacker by Boko Haram was dispatched on 8th June, 2014 to the 301 Battalion barracks of Nigerian Army in Gombe, Gombe State. Since 2014 till 2015 there have been 22 female suicide bombers in the northern region of Nigeria. Table below shows the different incidences of Boko Haram female bombers:

8 June, 2014	A middle-aged woman arrives on a motorcycle at a military barracks in Gombe, detonating an explosive killing herself and a soldier.
27 July, 2014	A teenager with an explosive device concealed under her veil blows herself up at a university campus in Kano, injuring five police officers.
28 July, 2014	A young woman joins a kerosene queue at a filling station in Kano before her bomb detonates, killing three people and wounding 16 others.
30 July, 2014	A teenager within a crowd of students at a college campus in Kano blows herself up, killing six people.
12 November, 2014	A woman blew herself up at a teacher training college in Nigeria's central Niger state, killing at least one other person.
25November, 2014	Suicide bombing in the Maiduguri market by two women killed at least 45 people.
1 December, 2014	In Damaturu, during a Boko Haram attack, two female suicide bombers detonated bombs at the central Maiduguri market, killing dozens.
1 January, 2015	A suicide bomber detonates his explosive belt at a church during a New Year's mass in Gombe killing only the bomber but hurting eight people.
January 10, 2015	A female suicide bomber, believed to be aged around 10 years old, kills herself and 19 others, possibly against her will, at a market in the northeastern city of Maidiguri.

January 11, 2015	Two female suicide bombers, each believed to be around 10 years old, killed themselves and three others at a market in the north eastern city of Potiskum.
February 2, 2015	A female suicide bomber attacked minutes after the President left an election rally in the city of Gombe resulting in at least one death and 18 people injured.
February 15, 2015	A female suicide bomber blew herself up at a crowded bus station in the northeast Nigerian city of Damaturu.
February 28, 2015	A woman suicide bomber killed two passers-by and her accomplice in an attack in Borno state, northeast Nigeria.
March 1, 2015	Two women apparently on a suicide bombing mission got killed by their own devices after failing to get a vehicle to take them to Damaturu, Yobe state capital. The incident, which happened at Ngamdu village, however, led to the death of two travelers, who were standing in close proximity to the suspected bombers as they waited for a bus to convey them to Damaturu, some 35km away.
March 10, 2015	A suspected female suicide bomber killed at least 25 people in Maiduguri, Borno state.
June 4, 2015	A female suicide bomber killed two people and injured three others at a checkpoint in the north eastern Nigerian city of Maiduguri. The female bomber, who wore a veil and concealed explosives on her body, detonated the bomb beside a checkpoint on the outskirts of the city.
June 11, 2015	Three women wearing explosive vests blew up near Maiduguri in an apparent failed suicide bombing attack on Nigeria's beleaguered north eastern city. Police commissioner John Opadokun confirmed that the three women bombers died near Auno village, 15 kilometers (nine miles) from Maiduguri. He said they intended to attack the city.
June 22, 2015	At least 30 people died in Maiduguri, capital of Nigeria's restive Borno state, after two female suicide bombers detonated the explosives they were wearing. One of the bombers, a teenage girl, waited until vendors started the late afternoon Muslim prayers before carrying out the attack.
July 6, 2015	A girl aged about 13 was killed when explosives strapped to her body went off near a major mosque in northern Nigeria's largest city Kano.
July 17, 2015	A bombing attack targeting Muslim prayer grounds in Nigeria's north eastern Yobe state killed nine people and injured 18 people. An elderly woman and a 10-year-old girl carried the explosives used in the attack. They detonated their devices at screening areas set up by security forces outside two sites where worshippers were gathering for prayers in the town of Damaturu.
July 31, 2015	A woman suicide bomber killed many people at a crowded market early Friday in a blast that thundered across the north eastern Nigerian city of Maiduguri.
August 25, 2015	A girl, who appeared to be between 12 and 14 years old, blew herself up at the crowded entrance to the main bus station in Damaturu, killing six other people and wounding 41 others.

Source: Omilusi (2015)

4.2 Women in Internally Displayed Camp

With the persistent increment in number of attacks by the sect, many people have fled their homes to different Internally Displaced Camps created to accommodate them. The 2016 report of United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) points out a steady rise in the population of internally displaced people from Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states. This report puts the figure of Nigerian Displacement Population as 2.4 Million with Borno having 1,600,000 population followed by Adamawa with 151,000 and Yobe with 134,000 persons (UN OCHA, 2016). In this similar vein, the IOM's report of February, 2016 puts the population of IDP camps as 2,241,484 individuals residing in 12 states and Abuja; Adamawa, Bauchi, Benue, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, Yobe, Nasarawa, Plateau, Kaduna, Kano, Zamfara, states and Abuja. Also, the report argues that 85.70% of total IDP camp population are displaced by insurgency from Adamawa, Borno and Yobe. With this rise in IDPs camps population, these various IDP camps poor facilities are overstressed by the persistent increment of population which have resulted into the emergence of various diseases in the camps. Reports from agencies show that these camps lacked adequate facilities in addition to their poor sanitation and increase in the rise of diseases such as Malaria, acute watery diarrhoea, measles and pregnancy related issues. Among the problems identified are the problems of shelters, Food and Nutrition, health, education, protection, communication and livelihood. These problems in return have adverse effects on the IDPs especially the women who are 53% of the IDPs population (IOM, 2016).

Apart from the aforementioned healthy challenges females in IDP camps or host communities face various social vices from stigmatization to gender and sexual based violence. The International Displacement Monitoring Centre (2014) avers that there is a widespread of Gender and sexual based violence phenomenon among females living at internally displaced persons (IDP's) camps and also in host communities.

In addition, International Medical Corps carried out a safety audit in the seven host communities where they implement programs, and the three top concerns women expressed, in order of priority, were domestic violence, rape, and denial of resources. The report also posits that domestic violence among women has become a serious issue resulting from the problem of food insecurity. Therefore, the challenge of food insecurity at the IDP camps serves as gateway for the atrocities committed against the women in IDP camps. Walsh (2016) in Refugees International (RI) Report argues that "both IDPs and civil society organizations told RI that the situation is so dire that some female IDPs jump camp barriers at night to prostitute themselves for food, or money for food." In another report, a 13 year old IDP camp girl was raped by a 40 year old man after he employed her as cleaner and took her hostage for two days (Vanguard newspaper of August 25, 2016).

From these Reports, it is evident there is a synergy between food insecurity in IDPs and Gender Based Violence. The inability of government to provide enough food and monitored the food distribution creates the food scarcity which propelled some women to seek for alternative means of providing food for their children and themselves and some women suffer from beatings when they cannot provide food.

5. Conclusion

Women at the centre of Boko Haram is a grave issue that government has paid little attention to it. The women who are at the back seat of governmental decision making process have turned out to be the major victims of the outcome of this process dominated by men. Boko Haram, a product of bad political decision, has caused much havoc on the females of the Adamawa, Borno and Yobe making them to carry the effects of the lack caused by the decision makers. This paper after exploring the challenges of women amidst the Boko Haram insurgency concludes that women have suffered both in the hands of Boko Haram and in the various IDPs settlements, and, recommend that more should be done to cater for the women as they dominate the various IDP camps.

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