The Effects of Terrorism on Women in Northern Nigeria: An Interrogation of Islamic Feminism

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Abstract

In any area where wars and conflicts ensue, women and children are often at receiving ends. Nigeria has been experiencing myriad security challenges from terrorists, bandits, kidnappers, and ethnic bigots. Both the north and south of the country experience all forms of insecurity. However, the level of insecurity in the North calls for serious concern as the terrorists and bandits kill, maim, kidnap, rape, and impregnate both girls and women alike. Though the northern part of the country is known for Islam and that Boko Haram is known for establishing sharia in Northern Nigeria at all costs. The conditions of women in the Sharia-adopted states are pathetic and disheartening. How do terrorists treat the girls and women in the North? What does Islam say about the sanctity of women even in a war situation? To what extent have the terrorists molested the female gender in the North? This paper aims at providing answers to these questions. The paper adopts a qualitative approach and sources its information from the secondary data. The paper also employs content analysis as its method of data analysis. Adopting Islamic feminism theory, the paper argues that the way women are subjected into peculiar mess by the terrorists and bandits is mutually exclusive to the teachings of Islam that the groups are acclaimed to be fighting for.

Keywords: Terrorism, Women, Islam, Islamic feminism, Northern Nigeria

Introduction

Women are generally assumed to be soft beings who are so fragile and needed to be taken care of. In any area where wars and conflicts ensue, women and children are often at receiving ends (The Editorial Board, 2022). History has confirmed this assertion that women and children majorly suffer during and after the wars and violent conflicts, especially terrorism. In the First World War (WW1), for instance, women and children were killed en masse (Bruno, 2020). Besides those that were killed, it posed social challenges to both women and children. Due to the war, women became unmarried because they had lost their husbands during the war. They were also employed in munitions manufacturing in large numbers. This employment also led some children out of care, which eventually led to the creation of nursery centers (Ella, 2024). Similarly, in the Second World War (WWII), at least seven million Soviet women died premature deaths in WWII, and the lives of many more were ruined or permanently impaired (John, 2013). In recent time, in 2003, the United States war on terrorism in Iraq witnessed the same thing. Women suffered untold hardship from the war. It was reported that not less than 14,000 women were killed in the war, while many were raped, maimed, and molested (John, 2013).

The case is not different in Africa. Most of the wars experienced in Africa have put women in danger. The emergence of terrorism in the Horn of Africa does not only affect women's sanctity but also reduces them into victims of wars (Margaret, 2022) The case in Nigeria is not different because, since the period of independence, Nigeria has been experiencing myriad security challenges (Anthony, Uwa, Goddy and Omolara, 2024). Political violence and civil war (1967–1970)

exacerbated this pathetic situation. One could argue that military regimes controlled most criminal activities (Erica, 2019). However, Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999 exposed the nation to myriad security challenges, ranging from Niger Delta militants' frequent attacks, armed robberies, terrorists, bandits, kidnappers, and ethnic bigots (Hilary, 2024 and Daily Trust, 2016). Both the north and south of the country experience all forms of insecurity. However, the level of insecurity in the North calls for serious concern as the terrorists and bandits kill, maim, kidnap, rape, and impregnate both girls and women alike. These criminal elements do not spear fragile beings in society.

The northern part of Nigeria is populated by Muslims. Islamic rules had been enshrined before the arrival of colonial masters. Even before the Usmanu Danfodiyo jihad of 1803, Islam has been thriving in the north, especially the north-eastern part, which consists of Borno and Yobe. Danfodiyo jihad really served as a catalyst in bringing forth Islam from the level of social life to the socio-political and economic life of northern people (Arshad, 2014). Of importance to note is that colonialism decimated the influence of Islam on politics. Similarly, after independence, the new political system launched by the British continued to exit, but occasionally, some groups intend to bring back Islamic influence on politics, whether in a peaceful manner or violently (Eyene, 2012). The peaceful one was witnessed in early 2000, when most of the northern states established sharia (Brandon, 2013). But Maitatsine and Boko Haram are known for agitating and violently fighting for the establishment of an independent Islamic state in the North (Abimbola, 2011).

Though the northern part of the country is known for Islam and that Boko Haram is known for establishing Islamic state in Northern Nigeria at all costs, the conditions of women in this part of the country pathetic and disheartening. What Islam says about the sanctity of women even in a war situation is clean and clear, but the way the terrorists treat the girls and women in the North calls for attention. To what extent have the terrorists molested the female gender in the North? This paper aims at providing answers to this question. The paper adopts a qualitative approach, sources its information from the secondary data, and adopts Islamic feminism theory.

After this introduction, the next discourse is on the theoretical framework, while methodology follows. The next segment is a discussion about Islamic rules on treating women during the war. While analysis of Boko Haram and Bandits' molestation of female gender in the north follows, conclusion and recommendations end the discourse.

Theoretical framework

This theory adopts Islamic feminist theory as its theoretical guide. The theory is an offshoot of general feminist theory. In general, feminist philosophy recognizes and challenges oppression and power in order to promote knowledge and change. According to feminist philosophy, awareness, advocacy, and change can result from recognizing and opposing oppression and power (Marianna, 2023). Islamic feminism's central claim is that all Muslims, male and female, should be treated equally in both public and private settings. Secular feminism, which advocated for complementary rights in the private realm but equal rights in the public domain, is less extreme than Islamic feminism (Marianna, 2023). Moroccan sociologist Fatema Mernissi is well-known for being one of the pioneers of Islamic feminism. Her work includes a book based on her early experiences in a household and studies of the sexual politics of Islamic Scripture (Raja, 2017). Some have divided feminism into four categories: liberal feminism, cultural feminism, Marxist feminism, and radical feminism. Radical feminism includes Islamic feminist ideology. The theory is relevant to this work because the theory emphasizes equal sanctity for women just as it is accorded to men.

Methods and Materials

The paper adopts a secondary source of data gathering. It relies on information from textbooks, journals, and internet sources and achieves. The secondary source of data provided bibliographic and contextual information that provide reliable sources of information. It also employs content analysis for data analysis. It also utilizes thematic coding to identify key patterns and trends within the collected materials. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter, ensuring that the findings are both relevant and insightful.

Islamic rules of war

Armed conflicts have existed since the beginning of human civilization. They are not only deadly but also cause destruction of property and lead to chaos and insecurity. With the emergence of Islam on the world stage, a different concept of understanding armed conflict emerges, which over time will offer a recognizable moral code of war in Islam. As per Islamic teachings, wars have a moral character, and the morality of the goals and means are equally important (Adibah, 2013). That means both means and goals must be Islamic. The idea of ends justifying the means does not stand in Islamic principle. In other words, Muslims believe that the most honorable, and not the strongest, have the right to survive.

Islamic rules of war prohibit Muslims from engaging fellow Muslims in combat. And if it happens, on no condition is a fellow Muslim allowed to be enslaved or killed. The Prophet of Islam was reported to have said that when two Muslims engage in a fight, both of them are dwellers of hell (Riyad Salihein, 2024). The reason is well understood since Muslims are only permitted to engage in fights or wars for spiritual reasons. Another reason that could make a Muslim fight is when a transgressor wants to rob him off of his property, be it material property or immaterial like dignity (Niaz, 2013). Besides these two reasons mentioned above and some other conditions, Muslims are duty-bound to abstain from war.

Islamic rule of war allows Muslims to fight and engage an infidel in a just war in the case of self-defense. However, it dictates that destruction of farm sites where crops and flora are planted is strictly forbidden to Muslims during armed conflict (Maryam, 2023). Similarly, domestic animals and fauna are not allowed to be attacked. These objects should not be targeted or used as a strategy of war. The reason being that it would cause mass killing since lives of humans and animals rely on those objects (Maryam, 2023). The point is that only the combatants are permissible to be killed during the war, while non-combatants are killed only if it becomes inevitable. This situation is referred to as collateral damage. Sources of water should not be attacked or contaminated. Infrastructure and religious sites are not also permitted to be attacked. Muslims are commanded to skew churches, synagogues, temples, and other religious sites (the Dawah Institute, 2024 and Al-Azhar, 2019).

Islam explicitly calls for humane treatment of prisoners and the bodies of fallen combatants and terms the use of a human shield "shameful." Islamic law does not permit intentional attacks on innocent people, particularly women and children. (Zuhdija, 2020) According to the authentication of Muslim scholars, women and children's prisoners of war cannot be killed under any circumstances, regardless of their faith. Even when women, children, and elderly persons are enslaved, they are expected to be treated with care. They should not be engaged with what they do not have capacity to bear. Prisoners of wars could also be freed instantly or later, depending on the circumstances; they could be exchanged for their own people as well. They could also be freed based on collecting ransom from them or their family. The Quran says, “After the battle, either *release them as a* favor or *by taking* ransom, until the war lays down its burdens, Q4 vs. 5”. Similarly, Farhan (Farhan, 2024) put forward five options provided by Islam for women prisoners of war to gain freedom. They are:

1. Prisoners should only be freed by ransom;
2. Prisoners may only be obtained during

times of conflict.

3. As a show of goodwill, the Muslim government ought to set free the prisoner if they are unable to pay the ransom or if their people or their nation are unable to do so.
4. If the government is unable to do so, the release should be made using Zakāt (alms giving) funds.
5. If that is also not feasible, the prisoner should be offered the option of mukaatabat, which is a contract of manumission between a slave and his master in which the slave must pay a specific amount in order to be freed.

Moreover, it is preferred that armed conflict ends peacefully so that lives and property can be saved. Therefore, Muslims are enjoined by the holy Quran to embrace peace whenever it is proposed by the adversary. The holy Quran says, "And if they incline to peace, then incline to it [also] and rely upon Allah. Indeed, it is He who is the Hearing, the Knowing." However, if the enemy wants to take advantage of the peace treaty to harm the Islamic state, it could sever the peace accord. This is in line with the explanation of Ibn Kathir in the quoted verse above; he says, the directive to promote peace is that when the adversary wants a peaceful conclusion, according to Allah, you should break the peace bond with a clan of people if you fear betrayal from them so that you are on equal footing (Wahiduddin, 2024)

In general, regardless of any circumstances, Islamic teachings command Muslims to be just and compassionate, and never should a Muslim create the conditions for oppression or cruelty, as witnessed in the case of Boko Haram.

The impact of terrorism on women

Though some scholars have identified the way women are now being used as a strategy of war rather than victims of war. Such scholars believe that women are not supposed to be over pitied because of the role some of them are now playing in armed combat. They identify the way some women are used to traffic weapons and supply terrorist food and other logistics (Mahmud and Oluwole, 2023). The case of Fatima Lawali, who was arrested on October 25, 2024, is just one out of many (Maiharaji, 2021). Some even believed that the world has changed from the masculinity of war, which restricts the art of war to the circuit of men. They argue that women today are bona fide members of state armed forces, both military and paramilitary alike. Despite these facts, women could still be argued to be at the receiving end in any armed conflicts, especially where terrorism triumphed. Islamic etiquette of war regards women as fragile people in society and, thus, preserves their dignity even during armed conflicts (Nesma, 2019).

Activities of Bolo Haram have been reported to have been shrouded with violations of women's rights and a gross commission of crime against feminine gender. As against Islamic rules as discussed above, Boko Haram has forcefully kidnapped women, both married and spinsters. For instance, Boko Haram kidnapped 276 Chibok girls (Karoline and Ope, 2024). The Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) estimates that approximately 600 women and girls have been abducted from their schools (Jerome and Marika, 2022). These girls are not combatants, and they were not on the war front before they were kidnapped. The picture below is good example of Muslim women kidnapped in a Muslim dominated region by so called Muslim terrorists (figure 1). This is against Islamic law about how to deal with women. Perhaps we accept that there is war already between the Nigerian government and Boko Haram, which could permit Boko Haram to use kidnapping as a strategy of war, yet Islam says those ladies should be treated with honor. What was reported was that Boko Haram did not observe these rules; rather, they sold and killed some of them, forced some of them to marriage, and used some for suicide attacks (Crisis Group, 2016). This raises questions about the genuineness of the claims of Boko Haram, which claims to be fighting for the establishment of Islamic state. The Shari'a implementation is

supposed to start from the warfront by observing its rules as they have capacity to do so. However, what was seen was different from what Islam dictates.



Suspected Boko Haram terrorists abducted students and teachers during an attack on Government Day Secondary School in Lassa, Askira/Uba LGA of Borno State, while candidates were writing NECO examinations. Source: Instagram(2026)https://www.instagram.com/reel/DaKz5qoIgXU/

Secondly, many women were raped by the terrorists, whether in their homes or in the terrorists' den (Sahara Reporter, 2022). This is also antithetical to Shari'a rules. Having extramarital and forceful intercourse with a strange woman is not only unislamic, but it is abomination (*haram*) even at the warfront (*Farooq, 2013)*. Women could be held hostage at the warfront, and they could be enslaved, but those slaves still deserve some honor, as explained above. Part of it is that they should not be married without their consent. Occasions of forceful intercourse with women by Boko Haram have been revealed by the victims of the terrorists (Sahara Reporter, 2022). This is otherwise known as sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Others reported being held in prison-like conditions, where they were repeatedly raped. Some ultimately became pregnant as a result of rape (Anna, 2008). In 2022, more than ten thousand women secretly aborted their pregnancies resorted to Boko Haram rapes (Sahara, Reporters, 2022). Islam vehemently abhors engagement in intercourse without having a legal relationship with such a person. We should note that prisoners of war are different from slaves. Slaves are generally and worldwide widely venerable to inhuman attacks, but yet Quran chapter 4 verses 24 and 25 explain how a slave woman can become a wife. It has to be with her consent and must be paid dowry like any other woman, and once she gives birth to a child, she is automatically free (Farhan, 2024). Thus, Shari'a encourages Muslims to move away from inhuman acts against women; it really wants to showcase leniency towards the feminine gender. Women enslaved by Boko Haram are not slaves but prisoners of war, and they were not treated as Islamic laws dictate.

Moreover, some victims, especially those who refused to "marry" a fighter, also reported being forced to work long hours for the wives and families of insurgents and being threatened and beaten when they were too exhausted to continue (Amnesty International, 2021). Some girls and women were forced to participate in or aid Boko Haram attacks. It was also reported that Boko Haram has used abducted girls as suicide bombers (Mia and Hilary, 2016). The United Nations (UN) reported that during 2017, "115 children (38 boys and 77 girls) had been used as human bombs" (United Nations, 2017). This is also unislamic.

Similarly, like terrorists, bandits have also caused a lot of havoc on women in the northwestern part of Nigeria, which consists of Sokoto, Zamfara, Niger, Kano, and Kaduna (Amnesty International, 2021). Zamfara in particular happened to be the center of bandits in Nigeria. Sexual abuse, rape, molestation, and degrading treatment by the bandits have become the new normal and order of the day against women in Zamfara State and other northern states (Ahmed, Yusuf and Geno 2022). It is also noted that, as far as Islam is concerned, bandits have committed crimes and infringed upon women's rights in Zamfara state. The bandits tortured, molested, displaced, killed, and injured women in their communities. Many women are sexually abused, brutalized, and exposed to Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS. Many have been killed, injured, and displaced from their communities by the armed bandits (Ahmed, Yusuf and Geno 2022).

Both terrorists and bandits have caused many

women to become widows. It was reported that bandits have turned about 4,983 women into widowed and 25,050 orphaned (Olasupo, Phoebe, Modupe, Olugbenga, Kehinde and Bamidele). Assuming Boko Haram is conscious of Islamic rules of war, it should have been taking care of windows caused by the war in the area where they occupy. However, the opposite is witnessed. Similarly, some women are internally displaced. It was also reported that internally displaced persons between June, 2011 and May, 2019 in Zamfara State are humongous numbers (Olasupo, Phoebe, Modupe, Olugbenga, Kehinde and Bamidele). Those Women displaced are equally suffering from hunger, health challenges, shelter, human right violation and insecurity. Terrorism causes these pathetic situations to women and children and it cannot rescue they from twin menace. Terrorism equally affected women economically because most of them are displaced and those that are in their homes could not go out to work for the fear of terrorists (Arshad, 2014). These Women are facing various Socioeconomic activities. They are finding it difficult to sustain their livelihood in most of the affected communities in Zamfara State and other northern states where bandits and terrorists are thriving.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Women and children are frequently the victims of war and violence in any region. Terrorists, bandits, kidnappers, and ethnic bigots have been posing several security threats to Nigeria (Margaret, 2022). All types of insecurity are present in both the country's north and south. However, given that the terrorists and bandits murder, maim, abduct, rape, and impregnate women and girls alike, the level of insecurity in the North is cause for grave worry. Boko Haram is notorious for imposing sharia in Northern Nigeria at any cost, despite the fact that the country's northern region is known for Islam (Abimbola, 2011). In the states that have embraced Sharia, the status of women is depressing and pitiful.

The paper adopts a qualitative approach and sources its information from the secondary data. The paper also employs content analysis as its method of data analysis. It is discovered that women and girls in the North are maltreated by terrorists. They are raped, murdered, impregnated, and turned into widows. Those that are not killed are turned into living misery lives. All these are abhorred by Islam. It has been discussed the position of Islam on how to deal with prisoners of war, especially women. Islam prescribed that prisoners of war should be treated with kindness and honor. Humanity is a common denomination between Muslims and non-Muslims, and communality must be respected even during the war. It is quite pathetic that Boko Haram preaches Islam and claims to know Islam more than anybody. They claimed working for Islam and the establishment of Sharia, the Islamic Law of Jurisprudence. However, in the real sense, the case is different as discussed above.

Just like the argument of Islamic feminism theory, women are given preference and are mostly honored than other genders (Margot B. (2000). The paper argues that the way women are treated by the Boko Haram and their splinters is antithetic and mutually exclusive to the teachings of Islam that the groups are acclaimed to be fighting for. It also argues that adulterated believes rather than orthodox doctrines is the driver of insecurity in Nigeria in particular and Africa in Nigeria. Of importance to note is that Boko Haram has denigrated women and feminine gender in their heinous actions. It is now recommended that the government should do more in their efforts to combat terrorism. Irrespective of the name they call themselves, the government should know that a terrorist is a terrorist, and they should be dealt with as such. Secondly, Islamic leaders should rise up over these challenges. As it is done in Saudi Arabia, no one can just be teaching in the name of Islam without moderating the syllabus used and methodology of teaching. This is very important to fix out at the initial stage anyone that wants to radicalize the youths. It is better done by Islamic leaders than forcing the government to take up this responsibility; it might not bring a good result. Moreover, women themselves should be wary of being used for terrorist acts. They should also stop serving as informants for the terrorist because of fear or favor. They should

know that their dignity is better protected in a peaceful environment rather than in a warlike condition.

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