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**Master's Thesis**

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**Gender-Based Violence as a Weapon of War: The Case  
of Boko Haram**

Master's thesis

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Year of the defence: 2023

## **Declaration**

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on May 3, 2023

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## References

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## **Abstract**

Gender-based violence during armed conflicts is not a new phenomenon; it has been present in society for many centuries. It had its greatest impact during the 20th century, when it was just beginning to receive considerable attention not only from scholars but also from the global public. However, attention has focused only on its most well-known and common form – sexual violence. However, it was mainly thanks to the work of feminist scholars that other forms of violence were exposed in the second half of the 20th century, including psychological and physical violence, forced marriages, forced pregnancies or abortions, female genital mutilation, and the use of women as instruments of war and suicide bombers. This thesis examines gender-based violence against women and girls in northeastern Nigeria by Boko Haram. It aims to find out how Boko Haram has affected the level of gender-based violence in the country, whether it has brought about new trends in the phenomenon and how it has affected the lives of women and girls. In doing so, the thesis draws on strategic rape theory and feminist theory, the combination of which provides a framework for explaining gender-based violence by Boko Haram, which both uses women and girls as strategic objects, but moreover is inherently based on a strongly patriarchal society.

## **Abstrakt**

Genderově podmíněné násilí během ozbrojených konfliktů není novým fenoménem, ve společnosti se vyskytuje již po mnoho staletí. Největší dopad však zaznamenal až během 20. století, kdy se mu teprve začalo dostávat také značné pozornosti nejen od vědeckých pracovníků, ale také celosvětové veřejnosti. Pozornost se však soustředila pouze na jeho nejznámější a nejběžnější formu – sexuální násilí. Především díky práci feministických vědkyň však byly v druhé polovině 20. století odhaleny i další formy násilí, včetně psychického a fyzického násilí, nucených sňatků, nucených těhotenství či potratů, mrzačení ženských pohlavních orgánů či použití žen jako sebevražedných atentátnic. Tato diplomová práce se věnuje genderově podmíněnému násilí na ženách a dívkách v severovýchodní Nigérii ze strany Boko Haram. Jejím cílem je zjistit, jak skupina Boko Haram ovlivnila míru genderově podmíněného násilí v zemi, zda přinesla nové trendy v tomto jevu a jak ovlivnila životy dotčených žen a dívek. Přitom se práce opírá o teorii

strategického znásilnění a feministickou teorii, jejichž kombinace dává prostor pro vysvětlení genderově podmíněného násilí ze strany Boko Haram, které jednak využívá ženy a dívky jako strategické objekty, ale navíc vychází ze silně patriarchální společnosti, kde jsou ženy brány jako podřadné pohlaví.

## **Keywords**

Gender-based violence, Sexual violence, Wartime rape, Armed conflict, Boko Haram, Nigeria

## **Klíčová slova**

Genderově podmíněné násilí, Sexuální násilí, Znásilnění v době války, Ozbrojený konflikt, Boko Haram, Nigérie

## **Title**

Gender-Based Violence as a Weapon of War: The Case of Boko Haram

## **Název práce**

Genderově podmíněné násilí jako válečná zbraň: Boko Haram

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## Introduction

Gender-based violence during armed conflict is not a new phenomenon; it has been present in society for centuries. However, it was not until the 20th century that it had its greatest impact during the conflicts that marked the entire world – World War II, the wars of decolonization, the Vietnam War and others. It was also only in the 20th century that it began to receive considerable attention not only from scientific researchers but also from the international community as a whole. However, attention was focused only on its most well-known and common form – sexual violence, including mass rape during armed conflict. However, thanks mainly to the work of feminist scholars, other forms of violence have been exposed in the second half of the 20th century, including psychological and physical violence, forced marriage, forced pregnancy and abortion, female genital mutilation, and the use of women and girls as instruments of war, such as decoys or suicide bombers.<sup>1 2</sup>

In Africa, and specifically in Nigeria, gender-based violence was already present in the last century when the country was reeling from civil wars and military coups after decolonization. The Nigerian army and several armed rebel groups were active in the country and also committed sexual violence against women and girls during the armed conflict. However, the emergence of Boko Haram and its specific targeting of women and girls from its inception brought a new phase to gender-based violence in Nigeria, including new tactics and practices.<sup>3</sup>

This diploma thesis examines gender-based violence against women and girls in northeastern Nigeria by Boko Haram, which has taken a specific approach to women and girls since its inception. The thesis aims to find out how Boko Haram has affected the level of gender-based violence in the country, whether it has brought about new trends in the phenomenon and how it has affected the lives of affected women and girls. Although gender-based violence can be biased against men, women and the LGBT+ community, this work focuses only on violence targeting women and young girls.

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995), 58–60, <https://frauenkultur.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Against-Our-Will.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> “Types of gender-based violence,” Council of Europe, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/gender-matters/types-of-gender-based-violence>.

<sup>3</sup> Zachary Elkaim, “Boko Haram: The Rise, Success, and Continued Efficacy of the Insurgency in Nigeria,” International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT), 2012, 5–7 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep09426>.

The reason for selecting the thesis topic was the need to spread awareness about the situation of young girls and women in African patriarchal societies, who, moreover, simply because of their gender, are often targeted by rebel groups during armed conflict and used for “higher purposes”. There are also still several research gaps within this phenomenon. The biggest one remains that gender-based violence during armed conflict has not yet been sufficiently subjected to scientific research, as it has been overshadowed until recently by the sexual violence that forms part of it. However, its other parts have long remained overlooked and outside the scope of research. For this reason, there is also currently and still a dearth of theories explaining gender-based violence during armed conflict, as the focus has been on sexual violence alone.<sup>4</sup> This thesis, therefore, aims to bring more attention to this phenomenon and stimulate further research on it.

As part of the research, the following research question was asked: “*To what extent has Boko Haram influenced the level of gender-based violence in Nigeria?*” This question prompts research focused primarily on Boko Haram itself and its tactics of gender-based violence – to determine whether there have been new trends in this phenomenon, how Boko Haram has affected violence against women and girls in scope, or whether new practices of such violence have emerged. However, as the thesis also aims to examine the impact of gender-based violence on women and their lives, this research question was supplemented by a second one: “*What are the implications of Boko Haram's tactics of gender-based violence for women and their status in Nigeria?*”

The thesis consists of an introduction, six chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter deals with the literature review and is divided into two parts – a review of the literature on sexual violence in combat conflicts and the literature on Boko Haram itself, its existence, strategy, objectives, etc. Due to the lack of data and sources on the issue of gender-based violence perpetrated by Boko Haram against women and girls itself, the empirical part of this thesis draws primarily on reports by humanitarian non-governmental organizations, which are not included in the literature review.

The second chapter deals with the theoretical framework of this thesis. It first introduces the relevant theoretical concepts (strategic rape theory and feminist theory) and justifies their selection for the purposes of this thesis. Then, it moves on to terminology and

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<sup>4</sup> Candice Garcia, “Gender-based violence in times of war and armed conflicts,” Gender in Geopolitics Institute, accessed May 25, 2022, <https://igg-geo.org/?p=7549&lang=en>.

explains the most important terms used in the thesis and how they are understood by the author, including the terms “gender-based violence” or “sexual violence” and the differences between them.

The third chapter covers the methodology and research design through which reliable and valid results were achieved. It describes the author's approach to the research, the conceptualisation, and how the data collection and subsequent analysis were conducted. It also includes the ethical considerations that needed to be incorporated due to the interview conducted as part of the data collection.

The fourth chapter provides an introduction to the whole issue and an insight into the different aspects from which it emerged. First, it focuses on the security situation in Nigeria, which has given rise to extremist movements such as Boko Haram. It then looks at the position of women in Nigerian society, their rights and their perception from a male perspective. This section is important because it also influences the perception of women from the perspective of Boko Haram and it should be noted that Boko Haram is not unique in this regard. The last part of the chapter focuses on Boko Haram itself, its origins, goals and strategy.

Chapter five presents the empirical part of this thesis and focuses on gender-based violence perpetrated by Boko Haram against women and girls in northeastern Nigeria. The first section focuses on Boko Haram as the direct perpetrator of this violence, through the abduction of women and girls and their captivity, including the practices it carries out on them. The second part similarly analyses Boko Haram as an indirect perpetrator of violence, in the form of the humanitarian crisis it has caused, which has resulted in the displacement of millions of women and girls to IDP camps, where they face sexual violence at the hands of those who are supposed to protect them (military, police, camp staff). The last part of the chapter analyses the impact of the Boko Haram insurgency on the lives of women and girls from several perspectives – their position in society, the health and mental health consequences, and then how the Nigerian authorities have approached the problem.

Chapter six analyses and discusses the empirical findings from chapter five and answers the research questions.

# 1 Literature Review

This chapter deals with the review of the literature used in this thesis, particularly professional literature and academic articles. It is divided into two parts – the first part discusses the academic literature and existing research on gender-based violence as a weapon of war. However, theories mapping this phenomenon are only in their infancy, as until this point, sexual violence during armed conflict has been the main focus of research, especially (mass) rape. Other forms of violence that fall under gender-based violence and their use as a weapon of war have only become the subject of study in recent times. For this reason, the mapping of existing research will focus on the phenomenon of sexual violence as a weapon of war, which is relevant since sexual violence is a direct subset of gender-based violence. This part of the chapter will present four theories and their main exponents by which this phenomenon can be examined and explained.

The second part of the chapter focuses on the literature dealing with the terrorist organization Boko Haram, which operates mainly in the northeast of Nigeria. In this regard, mention will be made of literature that deals directly with Boko Haram, its origins, characteristics and remarkable events in its existence and operation. There is a lack of data and resources on Boko Haram and its gender-based violence against women for various reasons (mainly lack of records and testimonies, distorted or insufficient data, or victims not reporting the acts committed). This is also the reason for the insufficient specialist or academic literature mapping this issue. The main actors working on this issue are mainly non-governmental organizations dealing with human rights and their observance. Their reports and papers will therefore be, among other things, the main source of data and information on this topic. However, these sources are not included in the literature review as it only deals with the specialist literature used in the thesis.

## 1.1 Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict

One of the most important researchers to address the phenomenon of sexual violence as a weapon of war was the American journalist Susan Brownmiller and her seminal book *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*,<sup>5</sup> which provided an important basis for a feminist theory explaining (wartime) sexual violence and rape. The author's view is that

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<sup>5</sup> Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995), <https://frauenkultur.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Against-Our-Will.pdf>.

sexual violence against women is a conscious tool used by men to intimidate women and keep them in a state of fear. Kylie Alexandra<sup>6</sup> further develops this theory, but according to her, sexual violence is not necessarily a conscious conspiracy of men against women. Rather, it is a systematic aim to oppress and show contempt for women, which comes primarily from patriarchal societies and the desire to maintain hierarchical gender arrangements. According to the author, it is these ingrained social norms that give rise to sexual violence against women. Turchik, Hebenstreit and Judson<sup>7</sup> add to the feminist theory that sexual violence and rape of women by men is not the result of biological urges or sexual desire but rather determined by social structures and the desire for power and the consolidation of gender power.

In addition to feminist theory, other theories began to emerge later to explain (wartime) sexual violence and rape, with more or less variation. One of them is cultural pathology theory, represented by, among others, the American anthropologist Peggy Reeves Sanday.<sup>8</sup> She argues that the incidence of rape varies across cultures and therefore aims to look into different societies, their structures, and customs in order to study the phenomenon of sexual violence. She also suggests that wartime sexual violence occurs in societies where harmony between men and women is disrupted. Catharine MacKinnon<sup>9</sup> explains this theory using the example of the mass rapes during the war in Yugoslavia as a consequence of the widespread availability of pornography before the war, which dehumanized women and transformed them into mere commodities for their consumers – soldiers.

Nevertheless, Jonathan Gottschall<sup>10</sup> argues that although the theory and its representatives analyse specific societies and specific cases of wartime rape across continents and provide

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<sup>6</sup> Kylie Alexandra, “War, Society, and Sexual Violence: A Feminist Analysis of the Origin and Prevention of War Rape,” *Hohonu* 8 (2010), <https://hilo.hawaii.edu/campuscenter/hohonu/volumes/documents/Vol08x04WarSocietyAndSexualViolence.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Jessica A. Turchik, Claire L. Hebenstreit and Stephanie S. Judson, “An Examination of the Gender Inclusiveness of Current Theories of Sexual Violence in Adulthood: Recognizing Male Victims, Female Perpetrators, and Same-Sex Violence,” *Trauma, Violence & Abuse* 17, no. 2 (April 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838014566721>.

<sup>8</sup> Peggy Reeves Sanday, “The Socio-Cultural Context of Rape: A Cross-Cultural Study,” *Journal of Social Issues* 37, no. 4 (October 1981), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1981.tb01068.x>.

<sup>9</sup> Catharine A. MacKinnon, “Crimes of War, Crimes of Peace,” *UCLA Women's Law Journal* 4, no. 1 (1993), <https://doi.org/10.5070/L341017587>.

<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Gottschall, “Explaining Wartime Rape,” *The Journal of Sex Research* 41, no. 2 (May 2004): 131, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3813647>.

explanations for the phenomenon under study, this theory cannot be applied universally to understanding the phenomenon as a whole.

The most widely accepted theory explaining the phenomenon of sexual violence and rape during armed conflict is the strategic rape theory. Nancy Farwell<sup>11</sup> describes that sexual violence is both a weapon of war and a strategy of war. Through rape and other forms of sexual violence against women, it attacks women's physical and emotional health as a weapon, and through possible unwanted pregnancies, it “disrupts” the bloodline in communities that are estranged from each other. As a strategy, sexual violence has the power to impose domination, terror, intimidation, torture, or humiliation on a population, making it easier to submit and less likely to resist.<sup>12</sup>

Jonathan Gottschall summarises the main reasons why sexual violence is used as a strategic objective in armed conflicts: i) it creates a sense of fear and restricts freedom of movement; ii) it demoralises the population; iii) it reduces the population's will to resist; iv) it divides families and communities by “disrupting” bloodlines.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, Carolyn Nordstrom points out, like the two previous theories, that sexual violence in wartime is a cultural phenomenon, not a biological one. Wars spread from one country and continent to another, bringing with them particular “dirty” practices and strategies, including sexual violence.<sup>14</sup>

In contrast to the three theories above, the main argument of the last – the biosocial theory is that biological motives and sociocultural factors should be equally considered in the research and analysis of wartime sexual violence and rape. According to Lee Ellis, in addition to the desire to possess and control, humans naturally have a sexual drive that is heightened during the emotional strain that war or armed conflict can present.<sup>15</sup> Roland Littlewood even assumes that the wartime rape of women and girls is in some sense natural to men, who, like soldiers, have sexual desire as a significant motive for rape.<sup>16</sup> Moreover,

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<sup>11</sup> Nancy Farwell, “War Rape: New Conceptualizations and Responses,” *Affilia* 19, no. 4 (Winter 2004), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886109904268868>.

<sup>12</sup> Farwell, “War Rape,” 393.

<sup>13</sup> Gottschall, “Explaining Wartime Rape,” 131–132.

<sup>14</sup> Carolyn Nordstrom, “Rape: Politics and Theory in War and Peace,” *Australian Feminist Studies* 11, no. 23 (1996): 150–151, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.1996.9994811>.

<sup>15</sup> Lee Ellis, “A Synthesized (Biosocial) Theory of Rape,” *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 59, no. 5 (November 1991): 631, <https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-006X.59.5.631>.

<sup>16</sup> Roland Littlewood, “Military Rape,” *Anthropology Today* 13, no. 2 (April 1997): 8–9, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2783037>.

the status of war or armed conflict places women in a position of exceptionally high vulnerability, which may account for the higher incidence of rape by sexually motivated men than in peacetime.<sup>17</sup>

However, Gottschall and Thornhill with Palmer point out that biosocial theory cannot be seen as the only explanation for wartime sexual violence, nor can it be seen as antagonistic to sociocultural theories. Rather, both approaches should be taken as complementary.<sup>18</sup>

## 1.2 Boko Haram

Bakary Sambe<sup>19</sup> provides the basic framework for this thesis as far as Boko Haram is concerned, whether in terms of history, ideology or strategy and tactics. He explains the beginning of the movement's formation along extremist lines and what reasons led it to do so, including the frustration of young Nigerians who were excluded from the state education system and began to listen to Boko Haram rhetoric that promised them a background in fighting the state and state services. He continues with the movement's ideology, which is characterised by a hatred of all things Western. Furthermore, Sambe also focuses on the specific targets of Boko Haram attacks, which include women and girls, Christians, as well as some Muslims who, according to members of the terrorist organization, do not practice their faith “properly”, and media institutions.

Zachary Elkaim<sup>20</sup> goes into more detail regarding the history of the movement and thoroughly analyses Nigeria's colonial past and the subsequent unstable situation associated with civil wars, poverty and famine, which was also one of the reasons for the emergence of Boko Haram. Among other things, he discusses the international implications and influence of Boko Haram on the whole of Africa because of the similarity of ideology and tactics that unite other jihadist groups on the continent. Thus, Elkaim warns of the possible emergence of an alliance between Boko Haram and other extremist groups, including Al-Qaeda affiliates. There is, therefore, he says, a need for extensive

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<sup>17</sup> Randy Thornhill and Craig T. Palmer, *A Natural History of Rape: Biological Bases of Sexual Coercion* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2000): 134, <http://site.ebrary.com/id/2001049>.

<sup>18</sup> Gottschall, “Explaining Wartime Rape,” 134.

<sup>19</sup> Bakary Sambe, “From Protest Movement to Terrorism: Origins and Goals of Boko Haram,” in *The Globalisation of Terrorism*, ed. Gerhard Wahlers (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2016).

<sup>20</sup> Zachary Elkaim, “Boko Haram: The Rise, Success, and Continued Efficacy of the Insurgency in Nigeria,” International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT), 2012, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep09426>.



cooperation between the Nigerian government and non-government organizations to protect the country and its people.

James Adewunmi Falode<sup>21</sup> complements previous authors with an extensive analysis of Boko Haram's fighting strategy and tactics. He also pays attention to the failure of the government and the state to fight Boko Haram for several reasons – the lack of motivation of the military, the high level of corruption in the country, and a poor understanding of the nature of war. Indeed, Boko Haram has changed its tactics several times. During its early days, the organization used so-called hit-and-run tactics, which have similar characteristics to guerrilla warfare. The most common targets were civilians or police officers. Eventually, it also began to use bombings and explosions against strategic targets. Boko Haram's latest strategy has become gender-based violence, most often against women and girls, as well as attacks on the elderly or disabled, enabling the organization to subjugate the population and make it impossible for them to resist.

Temitope Oriola<sup>22</sup> already focuses directly on Boko Haram's gender-based violence against women and girls, analysing both the causes and consequences of this strategy from multiple perspectives. The author mentions the common practice of Boko Haram members regarding the treatment of women, including sexual violence (rape, sexual slavery) or torture, forced marriages or the sacrifice of women as suicide bombers. The paradox, however, is that despite its brutality against women, Boko Haram considers them to be the bearers of its future. This violence stems from the perception of gender as an organizing principle in Nigerian society, where women have almost no rights and violence against them is the norm. At the same time, however, their sociobiological utility is disregarded.

This idea is supported in their article by Mia Bloom and Hilary Matfess,<sup>23</sup> who talk about the dual purpose of women and girls for Boko Haram – the organization uses women as symbols and swords – on the one hand, women are needed by the organization as wives of fighters and mothers of new members, while at the same time, they are used directly in the fight against the Nigerian government and state. The authors subsequently discuss the fate

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<sup>21</sup> James Adewunmi Falode, "The Nature of Nigeria's Boko Haram War, 2010-2015: A Strategic Analysis," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 10, no. 1 (February 2016), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26297518>.

<sup>22</sup> Temitope B. Oriola, "Unwilling Cocoons": Boko Haram's War Against Women," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 40, no. 2 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2016.1177998>.

<sup>23</sup> Mia Bloom and Hilary Matfess, "Women as Symbols and Swords in Boko Haram's Terror," *PRISM* 6, no. 1 (2016), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26470435>.

of women survivors or those who managed to escape from Boko Haram fighters. For these women and girls, subsequent reintegration back into society is very difficult because of the psychological trauma experienced or the rejection of their communities. In addition, for women who have become pregnant or given birth to a child while in captivity to a Boko Haram fighter, reintegration back into their communities is almost impossible.

Emeka Njoku and Joshua Akintayo,<sup>24</sup> on the other hand, focus on other perpetrators of violence against women and girls in northeastern Nigeria as an indirect result of Boko Haram – specifically, refugee camp guards and aid workers. According to the research, these authorities often abuse their position by offering women in refugee camps, where living conditions are poor, food, medicine, or money in exchange for sex. According to the authors, although the Nigerian government has been repeatedly informed and urged about these practices, there has been no reaction from the government, and it is tolerant of this.

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<sup>24</sup> Emeka Thaddues Njoku and Joshua Akintayo, “Sex for survival: Terrorism, poverty and sexual violence in north-eastern Nigeria,” *South African Journal of International Affairs* 28, no. 2 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1080/10220461.2021.1927166>.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

This chapter deals with the introduction of the theoretical framework of the thesis. It first outlines a brief introduction to the history of the phenomenon of gender-based violence as a weapon of war, before moving on to the key theories and theorists that are used in this thesis to explain the phenomenon under investigation. A combination of strategic rape theory and feminist theory is used for the research study on gender-based violence perpetrated by Boko Haram in northeastern Nigeria as will be explained and clarified in the following sub-sections. The chapter then discusses the terminology used in the thesis, particularly the terms “gender-based violence”, “sexual violence” and “gender-based violence in armed conflict”. Many scholars or theorists grasp these terms with several distinctions, giving them slightly different definitions. Therefore, it is necessary to state how these terms are defined in this thesis and what characteristics they have or what practices they involve.

The use of gender-based violence as a strategic weapon is not only a phenomenon of the contemporary world and the recent past. The history of gender-based violence against women and girls is closely related to the persistent view of women as property and gender-subordinate persons. The most frequent and common form of this violence was sexual violence and (mass) rape. Existing evidence dates back to the times of ancient Rome and Greece when according to Homer's Iliad, Greek soldiers were tasked with raping Trojan women during the sack of Troy in revenge for the abduction of Helen: “*Let there be no scramble to get home, then, till every man of you has slept with a Trojan wife and been paid for the toil and groans that Helen caused him.*”<sup>25</sup>

The twentieth century provided numerous and valuable sources and testimonies of gender-based violence as a strategic weapon that evolved into the mass rapes recorded, for example, during World War II in China, Korea, and the Philippines, perpetrated by Japanese soldiers.<sup>26</sup> According to Jonathan Gottschall, mass rape by military and paramilitary forces was recorded in at least 30 countries throughout the rest of the 20th century, including Afghanistan, Algeria, Brazil, Congo, Croatia, Indonesia, Liberia,

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<sup>25</sup> Elisabeth Vickman, “Ancient origins: Sexual violence in warfare, Part I,” *Anthropology & Medicine* 12, no. 1 (April 2005): 24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13648470500049826>.

<sup>26</sup> Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, 58–60.

Pakistan, Rwanda, Turkey, and Zimbabwe.<sup>27</sup> However, research undertaken by scholars in the 20th century on gender-based violence uncovered evidence of other forms of violence and its practices than just sexual violence and rape, including physical and psychological violence, forced marriage, forced abortion, forced sterilisation, and female genital mutilation.<sup>28</sup>

Feminist movements and scholars were the first to become interested in gender-based and sexual violence during conflicts, raising awareness of the issue and causing its inclusion in the study of international relations and academia.<sup>29</sup> However, it was not until 1998 that the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) enshrined acts of gender-based violence and its forms in international law as a war crime.<sup>30</sup> According to Heidi Haddad, this was because until then, wartime gender-based violence was considered a lesser crime than, for instance, murder.<sup>31</sup>

## 2.1 Relevant Theoretical Concepts

Although the thesis addresses gender-based violence as a weapon of war, theories addressing sexual violence as a weapon of war have been used within the theoretical framework. This is primarily because it is only in recent years that scholars have begun to address gender-based violence as a political weapon and its various forms. Until then, the researched subject was strictly sexual violence and (mass) rape during armed conflict; other forms of violence against women were not the subject of research. Moreover, men were portrayed as perpetrators and no emphasis was placed on the fact that women could also be combatants and men victims of any type of violence during armed conflict. Thus, gaps that have long been unexplored are coming to the fore, such as gender as a social construct and its relevance during armed conflict.<sup>32</sup>

However, theories explaining gender-based violence as a weapon of war are still scarce or insufficiently tested. For this reason, this thesis makes use of already tested theories

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<sup>27</sup> Gottschall, "Explaining Wartime Rape," 130.

<sup>28</sup> Council of Europe, "Types of gender-based violence."

<sup>29</sup> Carina Minami Uchida, "Constraints On Rape As a Weapon of War: A Feminist and Post-Colonial Revision," E-International Relations, accessed November 20, 2018, <https://www.e-ir.info/2018/11/20/constraints-on-rape-as-a-weapon-of-war-a-feminist-and-post-colonial-revision/>.

<sup>30</sup> "Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court," International Criminal Court, 1998: 3, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/RS-Eng.pdf>.

<sup>31</sup> Heidi Nichols Haddad, "Mobilizing the Will to Prosecute: Crimes of Rape at the Yugoslav and Rwandan Tribunals," *Human Rights Review* 12 (2011): 112, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12142-010-0163-x>.

<sup>32</sup> Garcia, "Gender-based violence in times of war and armed conflicts."

dealing with sexual violence during war, but the principle remains the same, as sexual violence is a direct subset of gender-based violence, and the emerging theory of gender-based violence is precisely based on theories of sexual violence.

American scholar Jonathan Gottschall summarizes and analyses theories regarding mass rape and sexual violence during armed conflict. According to existing research, this phenomenon can be explained and investigated using four theories: i) the feminist theory; ii) the cultural pathology theory; iii) the strategic rape theory; iv) the biosocial theory.<sup>33</sup> Although the theories differ from each other, some of them have commonalities. The first three theories are built on the premise that sexual violence and mass rape during conflict is rooted in sociocultural factors and serves a larger purpose – the interests of the collective rather than just individuals. In contrast, the biosocial theory argues that biological drives in soldiers, among other things, may be the cause of mass rape, which it places on the same level as sociocultural factors.<sup>34</sup>

Of all the theoretical approaches considered, a combination of strategic rape theory and feminist theory was chosen for this thesis, with more emphasis placed on the former. The strategic rape theory better describes the strategy of Boko Haram, which during its operations has adopted violence against women and girls as its semi-official tactic to demoralize and break the Nigerian population and its communities and to break their resistance. At the same time, however, the motivation of Boko Haram members to assert their dominance over Nigerian women and maintain gender hierarchy cannot be ruled out, as the north and northeast of the country where Boko Haram operates are still heavily patriarchal societies and communities in which women's rights are severely restricted or almost non-existent.<sup>35</sup> For this reason, the strategic rape theory will be seconded by feminist theory.

### **2.1.1 Strategic Rape Theory**

The strategic rape theory is currently the most widely accepted and influential theory explaining the phenomenon of mass rape in times of conflict. Proponents of this theory argue that sexual violence (most often mass rape) is another effective means by which

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<sup>33</sup> Gottschall, "Explaining Wartime Rape," 129.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>35</sup> Godiya Allanana Makama, "Patriarchy and Gender Inequality in Nigeria: The Way Forward," *European Scientific Journal* 9, no. 17 (June 2013): 131, <https://core.ac.uk/download/236407158.pdf>.

military or paramilitary forces can achieve their strategic objectives. Although it can rarely be proven that soldiers were ordered to rape by their commanders, this phenomenon represents a logical and highly effective means of warfare. Moreover, there are some documents according to which some armies and military strategists in the recent past considered this way of waging war to be strategically very advantageous.<sup>36</sup>

The theory argues that sexual violence in armed conflicts is used to achieve strategic objectives for the following reasons: i) it creates a sense of fear and restricts freedom of movement and economic activity in the civilian population; ii) it demoralizes the population and reduces their will to resist; iii) it divides communities by breaking family and community ties and “polluting” the bloodline.<sup>37</sup> <sup>38</sup> Rape of women and girls and other types of sexual violence can cause serious physical or psychological injuries to victims, victims may become pregnant by the enemy and be abandoned or rejected by their husbands and families, thus disrupting the community and its togetherness.<sup>39</sup>

However, it is important to note that there are critics of this theory who argue that mass rape may also have the opposite of a strategic meaning, due to the antagonization or anger of the population, which, out of hatred and vindictiveness, may go on the “counter-attack” and organize reprisals and raids.<sup>40</sup>

### **2.1.2 Feminist Theory**

The main point of feminist theory on sexual violence during conflict is built on the belief that wartime rape is the result of a systematic, but not necessarily conscious, conspiracy by men to dominate and oppress women. In this way, war rapists vent their contempt for women that stems from patriarchal societies and the characteristic desire to maintain hierarchical gender arrangements.<sup>41</sup> According to Alexandra, it is these deeply rooted social norms (together with political, economic, and social structures) that create

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<sup>36</sup> Gottschall, “Explaining Wartime Rape,” 131–132.

<sup>37</sup> Farwell, “War Rape,” 393.

<sup>38</sup> Gottschall, “Explaining Wartime Rape,” 131–132.

<sup>39</sup> “Women’s human rights and gender-related concerns in situations of conflict and instability,” OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/women/womens-human-rights-and-gender-related-concerns-situations-conflict-and-instability>.

<sup>40</sup> Gottschall, “Explaining Wartime Rape,” 132.

<sup>41</sup> Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, 32.

a breeding ground for sexual violence. Thus, it is not biological motives that matter, but the social constructions of gender and sexuality.<sup>42</sup>

Although the feminist theory has multiple interpretations and perspectives, there are several commonalities across them: i) sexual violence is primarily motivated by power rather than sexual desire; ii) sexual violence is associated with gender disparities in social status; iii) gender egalitarianism should be associated with a decline in incidents of sexual violence; iv) men who perpetrate sexual violence hold less egalitarian views.<sup>43</sup>

For feminist scholars, rape is not an aggressive manifestation of sexuality, but a sexual manifestation of aggression. They also expect war rape to occur primarily in strictly patriarchal or Western societies, or in societies that are not in harmony with or have moved away from nature.<sup>44</sup> However, it has already been shown that sexual violence and mass rape during warfare is present across centuries and continents, so feminist theory cannot explain all the data available on this phenomenon.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, for the purposes of this thesis, feminist theory is appropriate and relevant because Nigerian society, especially in the northeast of the country where Boko Haram operates, is highly patriarchal and women have very limited rights. This fact thus meets the assumptions of the theory.<sup>46</sup>

## 2.2 Types of Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence, often confused with violence against women or sexual violence, is a type of psychological and physical violence that affects both women and men. However, the characteristics of violence vary by gender, with men more likely than women to be victims of homicide or violence perpetrated in wars or by gangs or youth. Besides, they are more likely to be perpetrators of (gender-based) violence, regardless of the gender of the victim.<sup>47</sup> Conversely, women are more likely to be physically assaulted by someone they know (often an intimate partner or family member). They are also particularly vulnerable

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<sup>42</sup> Alexandra, "War, Society, and Sexual Violence," 17, 19.

<sup>43</sup> Turchik, Hebenstreit and Judson, "An Examination of the Gender Inclusiveness of Current Theories of Sexual Violence in Adulthood," 137.

<sup>44</sup> Ruth Seifert, "War and Rape: A Preliminary Analysis," in *Mass Rape: The War Against Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, ed. Alexandra Stiglmayer (University of Nebraska Press: Lincoln and London, 1994): 55, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315086859-15>.

<sup>45</sup> Gottschall, "Explaining Wartime Rape," 131.

<sup>46</sup> Makama, "Patriarchy and Gender Inequality in Nigeria," 131.

<sup>47</sup> Mary Ellsberg and Lori Heise, "Researching Violence Against Women: Practical Guidelines for Researchers and Activists," World Health Organization, accessed 2005: 10, <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/42966>.

to sexual violence at different times in their lives, whether in childhood, adolescence, or adulthood.<sup>48</sup> Although gender-based violence refers to violence against men, women and the LGBTQ+ community, this thesis focuses only on violence against women and girls.

The Council of Europe defines gender-based violence as *“any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.”*<sup>49</sup>

According to the United Nations, violence against women occurs in both private and public life and includes, but is not limited to, the following: i) psychological, physical and sexual violence against women and girls occurring within the family, including beatings, sexual abuse, marital rape, violence outside marriage, female genital mutilation and other practices harmful to women; ii) psychological, physical and sexual violence against women and girls occurring in communities and society in general, including sexual harassment, sexual abuse, rape, intimidation in educational institutions, at work and elsewhere, forced prostitution or trafficking of women and girls; iii) psychological, physical and sexual violence against women and girls perpetrated or condoned by the state anywhere in the world, whether in terms of inadequate or unenforceable laws or through the reinforcement of unequal gender relations.<sup>50 51</sup> Forced abortion, forced sterilization, forced use of contraception, prenatal sex selection and infanticide are also forms of violence against women and girls.

Another concept that the thesis works with is sexual violence, which is the most common form of gender-based violence against women and girls. The United Nations defines it as *“any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, or other act directed against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting. It includes rape, defined as the physically forced or otherwise coerced*

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<sup>48</sup> Ellsberg and Heise, “Researching Violence Against Women,” 10.

<sup>49</sup> “What is gender-based violence?” Council of Europe, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/gender-matters/what-is-gender-based-violence>.

<sup>50</sup> Ellsberg and Heise, “Researching Violence Against Women,” 11.

<sup>51</sup> “Terminology,” Violence Against Women & Girls, The World Bank, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/violence-against-women-and-girls/terminology>.



*penetration of the vulva or anus with a penis, other body part or object, attempted rape, unwanted sexual touching, and other non-contact forms.”*<sup>52</sup>

Sexual violence against women and girls involves a large number of sexual acts and takes many forms, for instance, sexual assault or harassment, sexual abuse, intimate partner sexual violence, sex trafficking or digital abuse.<sup>53</sup> Sexual assault includes unwanted touching or fondling, forcing a victim to perform a sexual act, or rape itself, which is often used as a synonym for sexual violence. Sexual harassment is defined as any unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature towards the victim, whether it is a physical, verbal, or visual act. Harassment also includes sexual advances and requests for sexual favours. Sexual abuse refers to sexual activities with victims who are unable to give consent, whether they are children, minors, or the elderly.<sup>54</sup>

Sexual violence by an intimate partner occurs when one partner is forced to engage in sexual activity without their consent. This type of violence occurs in relationships regardless of gender or sexual orientation. Moreover, the term intimate partner sexual violence is commonly used to refer to domestic violence or marital/spousal rape. Sex trafficking is defined under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act as the “*recruitment, harbouring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act.*”<sup>55</sup> Some perpetrators may be involved in organised crime, while other times the perpetrators may just be family members or intimate partners of the victim. During digital abuse, perpetrators use social networking and online spaces, and forms of violence include cyberstalking, taking sexually explicit photos or videos of the victim and then threatening to distribute them, or sharing or sending unsolicited content to the victim.<sup>56</sup>

### **2.3 Gender-Based Violence in Armed Conflict**

Gender-based violence in times of war or armed conflict is often used as a tactic and weapon of war, with serious consequences for the mental, physical, sexual, and

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<sup>52</sup> “Violence against women,” World Health Organization, accessed March 9, 2021, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>.

<sup>53</sup> “Types Of Sexual Violence,” Abuse Lawsuit, <https://www.abuselawsuit.com/resources/types-of-sexual-violence/>.

<sup>54</sup> Abuse Lawsuit, “Types Of Sexual Violence.”

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

reproductive health of victims who survived the violence. Gender-based violence during conflict most often takes the form of sexual violence, with women and young girls being the most frequent victims. Among other things, the threat often persists not only during the conflict but also during migration and after arrival at the transit/destination location.<sup>57</sup> During the conflict, violence is perpetrated by members of the military, members of terrorist organizations or non-state armed groups, or civilians. Men are the most frequent perpetrators, but not the exclusive. In some countries (e.g., Rwanda), women have also played an active role in violence during armed conflict, including sexual violence.<sup>58</sup>

Gender-based violence, and especially its main part – sexual violence – is often used as a deliberate tactic to terrorize the population. The nature of violence and its strategy is manifested in the selective targeting of victims from hostile political, religious or groups. Armed groups perpetrating sexual violence seek to systematically destroy the essence, values, and norms of the population by crossing fragile social “boundaries”, thereby controlling victims and their communities. What is more, in the vast majority of cases, victims remain silent due to shame, fear of rejection by their communities and lack of trust in the institutions that are supposed to serve justice.<sup>59</sup> <sup>60</sup> It is the stigma and shame that victims suffer, as well as the brutality of sexual violence, that are integral to the logic of sexual violence as a weapon of war. It is precisely in recent years that this type of violence has become part of the combat strategy and ideology of extremist groups such as the Islamic State and Boko Haram. These extremist groups use many forms of gender-based violence, such as rape, sexual slavery, forced marriage, or forced abortion, to intimidate and subjugate the population, displace civilians from strategic areas or reinforce their ideology.<sup>61</sup>

Moreover, gender-based violence during armed conflict or war can take on additional dimensions than it has done in the past. In addition to its “classic forms” such as sexual violence, forced marriage, forced sterilization or contraceptive use, forced abortion and

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<sup>57</sup> Shirin Heidari and Claudia García Moreno, “Gender-based violence: a barrier to sexual and reproductive health and rights,” *Reproductive Health Matters* 24, no. 47 (May 2016): 1, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26495885>.

<sup>58</sup> Jamille Bigio and Rachel Vogelstein, “Countering Sexual Violence in Conflict,” Council on Foreign Relations, 2017: 3, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep05746>.

<sup>59</sup> Bigio and Vogelstein, “Countering Sexual Violence in Conflict,” 4.

<sup>60</sup> Innocent A. Daudu and Lukong S. Shulika, “Armed Conflicts in Africa: Examining Sexual Violence as an Instrument of War,” *Journal of African Union Studies* 8, no. 1 (2019): 53, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26890417>.

<sup>61</sup> Bigio and Vogelstein, “Countering Sexual Violence in Conflict,” 4.

infanticide, new forms of such violence emerge during the war, such as the use of women as decoys by the military or armed groups, suicide bombers, or forced conversions to other religions.<sup>62</sup>

Gender-based violence has many long-term, if not lifelong, psychological, physical, sexual, and social consequences for the victims who survive it. From a psychological point of view, victims experience severe trauma and depression. The physical consequences include chronic pain, infections, infertility, fractures, and mutilations. In addition, many victims have limited or no access to health care, counselling or therapy services. Women who have experienced violence by armed forces also face social exclusion from their communities. What is more, many victims continue to experience gender-based and sexual violence even after the end of the armed conflict. In several countries that have emerged from these conflicts, there has been an increase in the incidence of sexual and other forms of violence against women and girls.<sup>63</sup>

## **2.4 Application of the Theoretical Framework**

This thesis examines gender-based violence as a weapon of war in the case of Boko Haram, an extremist terrorist organization operating in northeastern Nigeria. Since scholars have only begun to focus on this phenomenon in recent years (until then, research has only focused on sexual violence, while other forms of gender-based violence have been overlooked), theories of gender-based violence are currently insufficient or still being tested. For this reason, theories of sexual violence as a weapon of war will be used, though the essence and principle remain the same, as sexual violence is part of the whole of gender-based violence.

A combination of two theories will be used in this thesis – strategic rape theory and feminist theory. The former argues that sexual violence in armed conflicts is used to achieve strategic objectives as it creates a climate of fear, demoralizes populations, reduces their will to resist, and divides societies and communities. The feminist theory, claiming that war rape is the result of men's desire to dominate women, seconds the first theory in

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<sup>62</sup> Vesna Markovic, "Suicide squad: Boko Haram's use of the female suicide bomber," *Women & Criminal Justice* 29 (2019): 283, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08974454.2019.1629153>.

<sup>63</sup> Megan Bastick, Karin Grimm, and Rahel Kunz, *Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict: Global Overview and Implications for the Security Sector* (Geneva: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2007): 15, [https://dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/sexualviolence\\_conflict\\_full.pdf](https://dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/sexualviolence_conflict_full.pdf).

that the northeast of Nigeria, where Boko Haram operates, is still very patriarchal and women have limited rights.<sup>64</sup>

Although gender-based violence refers to psychological, physical, and sexual violence against men, women and the LGBTQ+ community, this thesis focuses only on gender-based violence against women and girls, with the vast majority of perpetrators being men. The most common and widespread type of this violence is sexual violence, including sexual harassment, rape, and sexual abuse. This type of gender-based violence will receive the most attention in this thesis. In any case, the thesis will also look at other forms that occur mainly in times of conflict and war, such as sexual slavery, forced marriage, forced abortion, forced sterilization, infanticide, the use of women as decoys or suicide bombers, and forced conversions to other religions.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Makama, "Patriarchy and Gender Inequality in Nigeria," 131.

<sup>65</sup> Markovic, "Suicide squad," 283.

### 3 Methodology

This thesis uses an exploratory case study as the method, which combines elements of both qualitative and quantitative studies with an emphasis on the former. The essence of exploratory research is the extensive and systematic collection of data in order to maximize the discovery of generalizations based on a direct understanding and description of the phenomenon under study. The object of research is most often a situation, process, activity or group about which little or no scientific knowledge exists, but which researchers believe contains elements worth discovering. Most exploratory research is based primarily on qualitative data, but this can be supplemented with quantitative data, for example in the form of descriptive statistics. At the same time, this type of study uses a mixed type of inductive and deductive reasoning. The inductive method results in the eventual discovery of new insights and ideas, which is not possible with deduction. However, the deductive component serves as a tool for the researcher to test new findings and to create and test a new hypothesis.<sup>66</sup>

Thus, the combination of exploratory study and case study makes it possible to focus on the narrow topic of gender-based violence perpetrated by Boko Haram in northeastern Nigeria, which from a scientific point of view is still a new and understudied issue with numerous unanswered research gaps, including how the level of gender-based violence in Nigeria has changed under Boko Haram in the country.

The empirical part of the thesis, dealing with the terrorist organization Boko Haram as a perpetrator of gender-based violence, is divided chronologically according to temporal development. This method can most faithfully capture the evolution of Boko Haram's strategy regarding gender-based and sexual violence, how this strategy evolved and what practices were incorporated over time. This method is also the most appropriate to answer the research question and sub-questions afterwards. As part of this thesis, the following research question was posed: *“To what extent has Boko Haram influenced the level of gender-based violence in Nigeria?”* As a supplementary question, the following was asked: *“What are the implications of Boko Haram's tactics of gender-based violence for women and their status in Nigeria?”*

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<sup>66</sup> Lisa M. Given, *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2008): 325–329.

Although the vast majority of books and academic articles, including reports by human rights NGOs mapping this issue in Nigeria, divide their structure according to the type of gender-based violence in question, this type of structure would not be clear enough in this thesis and would make it difficult to explain how Boko Haram's tactics have changed and what impact it has had on the Nigerian population.

### **3.1 Conceptualization**

Although gender-based violence in the form of physical, sexual, and psychological violence affects both men and women, this thesis focuses only on gender-based violence against women and girls perpetrated by Boko Haram in northeastern Nigeria, where the terrorist organization operates. The thesis emphasizes primarily sexual violence but does not omit other forms of violence such as sexual slavery, forced marriage, forced abortion, forced sterilization, infanticide, the use of women as decoys or suicide bombers, and forced conversions to other religions.<sup>67</sup>

To understand the phenomenon of gender-based and sexual violence as a weapon of war, the thesis applies a combination of strategic rape theory and feminist theory as a conceptualization. These theories are able to cover the violence perpetrated by the terrorist organization Boko Haram against women and girls for both strategic reasons (to demoralise, subdue and subvert the population; moreover, it can serve as a moralizing effect on the military, where providing sexual intercourse to soldiers reduces the risk of their demoralization) and the natural masculine desire to dominate women in the still highly patriarchal society in northeastern Nigeria where Boko Haram operates.

### **3.2 Data Collection**

This thesis uses document-based research as a specific method of data collection which is complemented by qualitative interviewing. The main part of the research is the study of primary and secondary sources, their subsequent analysis, and the interpretation of the results. As will be outlined below, the thesis uses both qualitative and quantitative sources, primarily to collect as much data as possible and to form an overall picture of the issue under study. This is complemented by qualitative interviewing, where the author of the thesis approached non-governmental organizations dealing with human rights

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<sup>67</sup> Markovic, "Suicide squad," 283.

for the purpose of online interviews in order to gain an up-close look at the interviewees on the phenomenon under study. While selecting and subsequently processing data, it must be ensured that sources come from as wide a range as possible in order, firstly, to create a rich collection of sources and data and, secondly, to maintain as much objectivity as possible.

The thesis draws on primary and secondary sources. The primary sources are represented by datasets, statistics and graphs related to gender-based violence in Nigeria for subsequent processing and analysis, as well as official documents, resolutions and declarations issued by the United Nations or non-governmental human rights organizations. As a part of data and information gathering process, non-governmental organizations working on human rights, specifically Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, were contacted. An online interview was subsequently conducted with staff of the Nigerian office of Amnesty International, the findings of which constitute another primary source. The interview was conducted as a semi-structured one, which allowed me to respond flexibly to the situation, change the order of questions according to developments and ask further questions if necessary. It was important to ensure adherence to the principles of the Charles University Code of Ethics during the interview, as will be described in the following subsection.

Secondary sources are represented by books and academic articles related to the topic of gender-based violence and are mainly used for the theoretical part of the thesis. Since gender-based violence perpetrated by Boko Haram against women and girls in northeastern Nigeria is a relatively young issue and there is a dearth of academic literature on the subject due to the lack of official and verified data and sources, the empirical part of the thesis also makes use of internet sources. These are mainly represented by the websites of think tanks and NGOs such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the Council on Foreign Relations, which publish extensive reports on gender-based violence in Nigeria. Secondary sources are also represented to a lesser extent by news websites, news reports and audio-visual documents providing testimonies from the Nigerian population about gender-based and sexual violence in the country.

### **3.3 Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. This form of analysis is currently one of the most common qualitative analytical methods as it allows a researcher to closely examine the data and identify patterns in meaning. Researchers describe thematic analysis

as “a search for themes that emerge as being important to the description of the phenomenon.”<sup>68</sup> It is the process or method by which the researcher seeks and then identifies and codes patterns of meaning within qualitative research. The researcher identifies and organizes codes and themes in the data that are, from his or her perspective, important to the exploration of the phenomenon and are associated with the research question.<sup>69</sup>

Although thematic analysis is known for its great flexibility, it was necessary to follow a certain procedure for data analysis within this thesis. First, it was necessary to properly familiarize myself with the sources and data used in this thesis and to gain a thorough understanding of them. The data was then coded, for instance, “Boko Haram”, “armed forces”, “rape”, “forced marriage”, “female genital mutilation”, “female combatants” or “decoy”. The data were then divided into categories (themes) based on the same or similar features, for example, “violence perpetrated by Boko Haram”, “violence perpetrated by armed forces”, “gender-based violence” or “sexual violence”. With this arrangement of data, it was then already possible to move from simply reading and studying it to discovering patterns and analysing a particular phenomenon, in this case, gender-based violence perpetrated against women and girls by Boko Haram, whether directly or indirectly.<sup>70</sup>

Both inductive and deductive approaches are common for thematic analysis and are used in this thesis. The inductive approach is used to discover new knowledge, while the deductive method is used to verify it and test new hypotheses.

### **3.4 Ethical Considerations**

Thorough adherence to the Charles University Code of Ethics in all aspects of the research was an important part of this thesis. It was most visibly applied when undertaking interviews with the non-governmental organization Amnesty International Nigeria as part of the data collection. Due to the fact that only one interview with a human participant was conducted as part of the data collection, I did not approach the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Social Sciences of Charles University.

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<sup>68</sup> Jon Swain, “A Hybrid Approach to Thematic Analysis in Qualitative Research: Using a Practical Example,” in *SAGE Research Methods Cases* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2018): 4, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526435477>.

<sup>69</sup> Swain, “A Hybrid Approach to Thematic Analysis in Qualitative Research,” 4.

<sup>70</sup> James W. Drisko and Tina Maschi, *Content Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016): 83.



The basis of the ethical research was the informed consent, which was sent to the respondent in advance and contained information about the research, what was required of the respondent, their rights during the interview and how the data would be handled. A signature of informed consent was not required from the respondent and was sent only for their information, primarily to maintain confidentiality and eliminate the respondent's concern for personal safety. In the case of signing, the respondent was informed that they could withdraw the consent at any time.

The respondent's participation and contribution to the interview were entirely voluntary. The respondent was informed that they could terminate participation in the study at any time or refuse to answer the question asked. In order to ensure confidentiality, the respondent's right to privacy and their safety, the identity of the respondent was withheld in the thesis and anonymised and quoted as per prior arrangement and according to their wishes.

## **4 Empirical Background to the Case**

This chapter discusses the background that is important to mention to understand the whole issue of gender-based violence against women and girls in Nigeria. First, the chapter looks at the security situation and its evolution in Nigeria. It was the colonial past, numerous coups, civil wars, and poverty that gave rise to the extremist terrorist organization Boko Haram. The focus then shifts to the situation of women and their position in Nigeria's patriarchal society. It is important to mention this background because women are generally seen as a secondary gender in Nigeria and Boko Haram's position is no different. The third subchapter looks at Boko Haram itself, its origins, objectives, and strategy. Familiarity with this body of work allows for a better understanding of the background against which Boko Haram's gender-based violence against women and girls takes place.

### **4.1 Security Situation in Nigeria**

The problematic security situation in contemporary Nigeria is directly linked to its history. As early as 1902, the territory was colonised by Great Britain, which in 1914 united it into a disparate entity made up of independent and sometimes hostile peoples with great cultural and linguistic differences. In addition, ethnic and religious minorities were scattered throughout the country.<sup>71</sup> In 1960, Nigeria gained independence from Great Britain, beginning a decades-long period of coups d'état or military coups, civil wars, fighting, and unrest. Indeed, for many residents, tribal loyalties were paramount, not nationality and belonging to Nigeria as a unified state. It was not until 1999 that the military dictatorship was ended and democratic rule returned. Although Nigeria is currently experiencing its longest period of civilian rule and arguably its “most peaceful” period, the security situation in the country remains highly problematic and deplorable.<sup>72</sup>

High levels of corruption, crime, terrorism, violence, poverty, and unemployment persist. According to Transparency International's 2022 survey, Nigeria ranks 154th out of 180 countries in terms of perceived corruption. It mostly affects high-ranking politicians, who receive minimal to almost no punishment if convicted. An estimated \$15 billion

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<sup>71</sup> Elkaim, “Boko Haram,” 3.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 5–7.

to \$18 billion is lost each year due to illicit financial outflows.<sup>73</sup> It is the high level of corruption that is one of the main causes of the country's volatile security situation, creating a breeding ground for the escalation of tension, criminality and conflict between the Nigerian government and the armed violent groups that emerged in the country at the end of the last century in response to corruption, poverty and unemployment. In addition to civilian targets, these groups also target strategic locations such as oil deposits and the subsequent illegal hydrocarbon trade. Although Nigeria is one of the world's largest oil producers and possesses some of the world's largest oil deposits, the country's unstable security situation has resulted in an outflow of foreign investors whose funds would be needed to modernize the country and make it more secure.<sup>74</sup>

Another consequence of the unstable security situation, stemming from history, and corruption in the country is the high level of poverty in the country. A 2022 report by the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in collaboration with the World Bank shows that 4 out of 10 Nigerians live below the national poverty line.<sup>75</sup> Only 17 per cent of the Nigerian population hold jobs with salaries that allow them to escape poverty. Many people, particularly in the north and northeast of the country, lack access to education and also lack basic infrastructure such as drinking water, improved sanitation, and electricity.<sup>76</sup> In 2021, 85 million Nigerians did not have access to electricity, representing about 43 per cent of Nigeria's population. In addition, the rest of the population faces frequent power outages and poor-quality electricity infrastructure and outdated technology.<sup>77</sup>

Unemployment in the country goes hand in hand with poverty. According to the report of the Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG), unemployment in Nigeria is expected to

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<sup>73</sup> Ebenezer Obadare, "Nigeria's All Too Familiar Corruption Ranking Begs Broader Questions Around Normative Collapse," Council on Foreign Relations, accessed February 24, 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/article/nigerias-all-too-familiar-corruption-ranking-begs-broader-questions-around-normative>.

<sup>74</sup> Maclean Monam Goodnews, "Energy Security And Stability In Nigeria," *International Journal of Innovative Development and Policy Studies* 9, no. 3 (2021): 19, <https://seahipaj.org/journals-ci/sept-2021/IJIDPS/full/IJIDPS-S-3-2021.pdf>.

<sup>75</sup> "Deep Structural Reforms Guided by Evidence Are Urgently Needed to Lift Millions of Nigerians Out of Poverty, says New World Bank Report," The World Bank, accessed March 22, 2022, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/03/21/afw-deep-structural-reforms-guided-by-evidence-are-urgently-needed-to-lift-millions-of-nigerians-out-of-poverty>.

<sup>76</sup> The World Bank, "Deep Structural Reforms Guided by Evidence Are Urgently Needed to Lift Millions of Nigerians Out of Poverty, says New World Bank Report."

<sup>77</sup> "Nigeria to Improve Electricity Access and Services to Citizens," The World Bank, accessed February 5, 2021, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/02/05/nigeria-to-improve-electricity-access-and-services-to-citizens>.

rise to 37 per cent by 2023. GDP growth is also expected to moderate, which will result in low productivity in important economic areas and sectors, and will not have sufficient strength to create new jobs.<sup>78</sup> It is the inability to provide for their families or communities that is leading to increasing frustration, especially among young Nigerians, which can result in listening to the appealing rhetoric of extremist and violent groups that have long been fighting against a corrupt government and the country's miserable economic situation.<sup>79</sup>

All the above-mentioned aspects contribute to the increase in crime, violence, armed attacks and terrorism in the country. Armed violent groups, separatist groups and gangs are recruiting new members, especially young Nigerians who cannot find work to lift themselves out of poverty and support their families and communities. Militants take advantage of their frustration and impose their ideology on them under the pretext of fighting an unjust and corrupt state system.<sup>80</sup> These groups, alongside the largest and most notorious Boko Haram, have posed security problems for Nigeria for many years. They include the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) operating in central Nigeria, and the Niger Delta Vigilante (NDA) in the Niger Delta region. Although the Nigerian government has undertaken several operations to prevent attacks on civilians by these groups, no effective solution has yet been found.<sup>81</sup>

For the civilian population, operating armed violent groups and gangs mean constant fear for their lives and loved ones, concern for property, and deteriorating security outside communities and villages, especially in farm fields or on roads. Militants attack civilian objects such as hospitals, shops, schools, police stations and churches. There have also been cases of looting. The Boko Haram and ISWAP operations alone have displaced nearly two million people from their homes in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states, and

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<sup>78</sup> Mary Izuaka, "Nigeria's unemployment rate projected to hit 37% – NESG," Premium Times, accessed January 19, 2023, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/business/business-news/576709-nigerias-unemployment-rate-projected-to-hit-37-nesg.html>.

<sup>79</sup> Sambe, "From Protest Movement to Terrorism," 35–36.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>81</sup> Adam Abu-bashal, "Nigeria grappling with security challenges for over a decade," AA, accessed June 22, 2022, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/nigeria-grappling-with-security-challenges-for-over-a-decade/2620036>.

displaced more than 300,000 Nigerians to neighbouring countries, notably Niger, Chad, and Cameroon.<sup>82</sup>

## 4.2 Role of Women in Nigerian Society

Nigeria is made up of 37 states and is home to more than 340 ethnic groups that speak more than 250 languages. There is great heterogeneity and huge differences in the country, including in the way women are treated and perceived. The biggest differences are between the north and the south of the country. In the south, people have benefited from great mineral wealth, urbanisation, greater employment opportunities and growing human capital. The north, and especially the northeast, where Boko Haram operates, has poor infrastructure, high levels of poverty due to conflict and instability, low levels of education and poor health.<sup>83</sup> The same differences between the North and the South also exist in the perception of women and their roles in society. In addition, some countries in the Muslim North, compared to the predominantly Christian South, are governed by Sharia law, which is all the more restrictive of women's rights.<sup>84</sup> However, despite the more progressive South, Nigeria ranked 139th out of 156 on the Gender Gap Index in 2021.<sup>85</sup>

However, it can generally be said that irrespective of region, women in Nigeria suffer from gender inequality and gender discrimination. This is largely the result of discriminatory laws, cultural and religious norms, gender stereotyping, the disproportionate impact of poverty on women, and low levels of education and access to education.<sup>86</sup> Although primary education is compulsory in the country, there are many barriers to girls' access to education. These include child marriage – 44 per cent of girls marry before the age of 18. In practice, it is also common for marriages to involve girls aged 7 to 10.<sup>87</sup> Another barrier to education is sexual violence or the potential risk of abduction, where parents are afraid

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<sup>82</sup> “Country Reports on Terrorism 2020: Nigeria,” U.S. Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2020/nigeria/>.

<sup>83</sup> “Huge disparities in women’s equality in Nigeria,” Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/index-story/nigeria/>.

<sup>84</sup> Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, “Huge disparities in women’s equality in Nigeria.”

<sup>85</sup> “Overall Global Gender Gap Index,” The World Bank, [https://todata360.worldbank.org/indicators/af52ebe9?country=NGA&indicator=27962&countries=BRA&viz=line\\_chart&years=2006,2021](https://todata360.worldbank.org/indicators/af52ebe9?country=NGA&indicator=27962&countries=BRA&viz=line_chart&years=2006,2021).

<sup>86</sup> Anietie Ewang, “Nigeria Risks Falling Further Behind on Women’s Equality,” Human Rights Watch, accessed March 8, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/03/08/nigeria-risks-falling-further-behind-womens-equality>.

<sup>87</sup> Selma Nawrozzada, “Girls’ Education in Nigeria,” Centre for African Justice, Peace and Human Rights, <http://centreforafricanjustice.org/girls-education-in-nigeria/>.

to send their children to school several kilometres away. The patriarchal system and traditional preferences in the country also play a role, with many parents having a negative attitude towards their daughters' education. Instead, they send their sons to school to succeed their fathers and provide for their families in the future.<sup>88</sup>

The participation of women in politics and high positions is also debatable. In 2022, protests in the capital Abuja sparked reports that the National Assembly had rejected bills that would have put more political power in the hands of women and sought parity for Nigerian women, who are currently treated as second-class citizens. The National Assembly's decision was partially reversed after protests. Currently, only 22 of the 360 members of the House of Representatives and 7 of the 109 senators in Nigeria are women. The promotion of women in politics will be particularly challenging in Nigeria as a large percentage of men support this patriarchal system. In 2016, President Muhammadu Buhari himself even stated: *"I don't know which party my wife belongs to, but she belongs to my kitchen and my living room and the other room."*<sup>89</sup>

That women are often seen as the inferior sex is also reflected within families and communities. The Nigerian Penal Code, for example, provides that a husband may use physical violence against his wife as a form of punishment, as long as it does not cause her "grievous harm" such as loss of hearing, sight, or life-threatening injuries. Where wives have accused their husbands of abuse, police, particularly in the northern part of the country, are reluctant to intervene.<sup>90</sup> According to a United Nations Women report, 48 per cent of women in Nigeria have experienced at least one form of domestic violence since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. The most common forms were denial of basic resources, verbal abuse, and to a lesser extent, sexual harassment, and physical violence.<sup>91</sup> However, the data may be underestimated, as many victims are afraid to report violence, either out of fear or distrust of the security forces, which often downplay domestic or

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<sup>88</sup> Nawrozzada, "Girls' Education in Nigeria."

<sup>89</sup> Ebenezer Obadare, "Nigeria's Struggle for Gender Equality Gathers Pace Amid Protests," Council on Foreign Relations, accessed March 8, 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/nigerias-struggle-gender-equality-gathers-pace-amid-protests>.

<sup>90</sup> Manisuli Ssenyonjo, "Culture and the Human Rights of Women in Africa: Between Light and Shadow," *Journal of African Law* 51, no. 1 (2007): 51–52. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27607978>.

<sup>91</sup> Chiamaka Okafor, "48% of Nigerian women experienced violence since COVID-19 pandemic – UN report," Premium Times, accessed November 24, 2021, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/497159-48-of-nigerian-women-experienced-violence-since-covid-19-pandemic-un-report.html?tztc=1>.

sexual violence and side with the male perpetrator.<sup>92</sup> Although women are considered inferior and secondary sex, on the other hand, as wives they enhance their husbands' social status and provide domestic or sexual services (often forced).<sup>93</sup>

Women are not only exposed to psychological, physical or sexual violence in the home but also in public life. The level of rape has remained at crisis levels in Nigeria for many years, with most victims denied justice. Perpetrators often evade prosecution, and a large number of cases go unreported due to stigma, victim blaming and corruption. In addition, women and girls face an outdated criminal code that discriminates against them and is lax in dealing with various forms of gender-based violence.<sup>94</sup> In addition to rape, Nigerian women and girls are trafficked into forced prostitution, primarily in Italy and the Middle East. It is estimated that hundreds of women and young girls are forced by their families to sacrifice themselves in prostitution for various reasons (poverty, desire to get rich quickly) every year. Victims have their travel documents and personal belongings confiscated at their destination. They are also subjected to physical abuse by traffickers, which can lead to death.<sup>95</sup>

Female circumcision and female genital mutilation (FGM) are still prevalent in Nigeria, especially in traditional communities. These practices are used as a control of female sexuality and are associated with the possibility of a marriage of young girls. Girls often undergo the procedure without informed consent, thus preventing them from making decisions about their own bodies and health. FGM is considered a violation of fundamental human rights worldwide and constitutes an extreme form of gender-based discrimination against women and girls.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Nosmot Gbadamosi, "Why Nigeria Is Losing Its Fight to Prosecute Rape," *Foreign Policy*, accessed January 18, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/01/18/nigeria-losing-fight-prosecute-rape-sexual-assault-defamation-metoo/>.

<sup>93</sup> International Crisis Group, "Nigeria," 6.

<sup>94</sup> "Nigeria: Failure to tackle rape crisis emboldens perpetrators and silences survivors," Amnesty International, accessed November 17, 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/11/nigeria-failure-to-tackle-rape-crisis-emboldens-perpetrators-and-silences-survivors/>.

<sup>95</sup> "Women Trafficking in Nigeria," Women's Consortium of Nigeria, <https://www.womenconsortiumofnigeria.org/?q=content/women-trafficking-nigeria>.

<sup>96</sup> T. Okeke, U. Anyachie, C. Ezenyeaku, "An Overview of Female Genital Mutilation in Nigeria," *Annals of Medical and Health Sciences Research* 2, no. 1 (2012): 71–72, <https://doi.org/10.4103/2141-9248.96942>.

### 4.3 Characteristics of Boko Haram

As mentioned above, since independence from Great Britain, Nigeria has faced and continues to face an unstable situation in the country, associated with civil wars, high levels of crime, violence, terrorism, ethnoreligious conflict, corruption, and poverty. In these circumstances, the initial Islamic sect Boko Haram was officially established in 2002, and its name can be translated as “Western education is forbidden”. However, according to some, the group existed at least as early as 1995 under a different name.<sup>97</sup> Boko Haram's origins are in the city of Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state in northeastern Nigeria, where the radical Islamists have declared their city morally corrupt and corrupt and want to create a “pure” Islamic state in Nigeria based on Sharia law. The radicals subscribed to the orthodox Wahhabi branch of Islam, which aimed to eradicate Western influence from Nigeria and establish a caliphate.<sup>98</sup>

At its inception, Boko Haram's influence was limited to the city of Maiduguri in northeastern Nigeria and the surrounding area. However, it soon spread to the whole of Borno State and the neighbouring states of Adamawa and Yobe. In addition, the organization spread from the cities to the countryside, further exacerbating poverty and the lack of basic needs (food, medicine) in the area. The reason why Boko Haram has established itself mainly in the north and northeast of the country is the predominantly Muslim population there. The south of Nigeria has a multi-ethnic population and a predominantly Christian religion, so Boko Haram has no base from which to operate.<sup>99</sup>

From the beginning, the group was led by Mohammed Yusuf, who managed to gain a large number of followers by 2009 and the number of members continued to grow. Young Nigerians joined the group mainly because of dissatisfaction with the state of the country, where corruption and poverty were high, and the Nigerian army and armed forces were involved in many atrocities against the civilian population. Thus, for many people, joining the group was an act of revenge and an expression of disapproval of the way the country was functioning rather than religious reasons. Subsequently, Boko Haram also began to

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<sup>97</sup> Elkaim, “Boko Haram,” 11.

<sup>98</sup> Andrew Walker, “What Is Boko Haram?” *United States Institute of Peace* (June 2012): 2–3, <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/resources/SR308.pdf>.

<sup>99</sup> Saskia Brechenmacher, “Stabilizing Northeast Nigeria After Boko Haram,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, accessed May 3, 2019, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/05/03/stabilizing-northeast-nigeria-after-boko-haram-pub-79042>.



receive weapons and military and combat expertise from other extremist groups such as al-Qaeda and Ansar al-Din.<sup>100 101</sup>

The original aim of Boko Haram was to fight for the establishment of Sharia law and the establishment of a caliphate in Borno State. To do this, the group has at times used a hit-and-run style of guerrilla warfare, with the fighters' weaponry being rudimentary – machetes, knives, or guns. Their activities initially oppressed and harassed the Nigerian population in their area of operation, and later included attacks on police officers and civilians.<sup>102</sup> The turning point came in 2009 when the Nigerian government cracked down on Boko Haram and imprisoned or killed more than 1,000 of its members. The Nigerian military also managed to capture its leader, Mohammed Yusuf, who was subsequently executed in an extrajudicial execution. It was this repression by the Nigerian army and government that caused the group to radicalise and adopt a strategy of terrorism under its new leader, Abubakar Shekau. Since then, there has also been an increase in the number and scale of attacks by Boko Haram, which has become the greatest security threat facing Nigeria and its population.<sup>103</sup>

Boko Haram has begun targeting strategic locations across Nigeria, using bombs and improvised explosive devices to launch attacks. The group also began using suicide bombers and suicide bombings. Its strategy and tactics of warfare have become more sophisticated, and Boko Haram has begun to use the internet to reach its followers and a wider audience or to intimidate Nigerian authorities, where it disseminates its ideology and publicises its clashes with the Nigerian military.<sup>104</sup>

From the time of its operation until 2018, the organization was responsible for 1,639 terrorist attacks, around 14,500 deaths, over 6,000 injured victims and over 2,000 hostages taken.<sup>105</sup> Boko Haram also began targeting Christians, religious communities, and media institutions during its attacks. Ironically, Muslims, who according to Boko Haram

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<sup>100</sup> Sambe, “From Protest Movement to Terrorism,” 30.

<sup>101</sup> “Boko Haram,” Encyclopaedia of Migration, <https://www.encyclopediaofmigration.org/boko-haram/>.

<sup>102</sup> Falode, “The Nature of Nigeria’s Boko Haram War, 2010-2015,” 43–44.

<sup>103</sup> Judit Barna, “Insecurity in context: The rise of Boko Haram in Nigeria,” Policy Department, European Parliament, accessed July 24, 2014, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2014/536393/EXPO-AFET\\_NT\(2014\)536393\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2014/536393/EXPO-AFET_NT(2014)536393_EN.pdf).

<sup>104</sup> Falode, “The Nature of Nigeria’s Boko Haram War, 2010-2015,” 43–44.

<sup>105</sup> “Anatomy of Boko Haram: The Rise and Decline of a Violent Group in Nigeria,” Aljazeera Centre for Studies, accessed April 22, 2018, <https://studies.aljazeera.net/en/reports/2018/04/anatomy-boko-haram-rise-decline-violent-group-nigeria-180422110920231.html>.

supporters do not strictly follow the teachings of Allah and the Koran, have also been targeted.<sup>106</sup> Physical and sexual violence against women and girls has become a major target and a kind of semi-official tactic of Boko Haram, through which the group aims to break the resistance of the population and at the same time to use the captured women for its “higher goals”.<sup>107</sup>

A major turning point in the unity of Boko Haram and its leadership occurred between 2015 and 2016. In 2015, Abubakar Shekau, who still led Boko Haram, pledged allegiance to Islamic State leaders in Syria and Iraq. In return, the Islamic State has called Boko Haram members its “jihadist brothers” and designated the organization as the Islamic State's West Africa Province.<sup>108</sup> However, a split in Boko Haram's leadership became apparent in 2016, when part of the group accused Shekau of not following instructions given by the Islamic State and split from it. That same year, the Islamic State even appointed Abu Musab al-Barnawi as the new leader of Boko Haram. Abubakar Shekau, however, denied that he was no longer the leader, thus beginning the conflict between the two branches of the terrorist organization. Shekau branded al-Barnawi and his followers as infidels, who in turn criticized Shekau for torturing and killing Muslims, which is contrary to the Qur'an and Allah's teachings.<sup>109</sup> The conflict between the two factions has also meant a worsening of the already tense security situation in Nigeria and increased civilian casualties. While the Islamic State-backed faction controls the northern territory of Borno State along the borders with Cameroon, Niger and Chad, Shekau's faction operates in the centre and south.<sup>110</sup>

In June 2021, Boko Haram confirmed the death of its leader Abubakar Shekau, who committed suicide. Supposedly, followers of the Islamic State's West Africa Province were

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<sup>106</sup> Benjamin Maiangwa and Ufo Okeke Uzodike, “The Changing Dynamics of Boko Haram Terrorism,” Aljazeera Centre for Studies, accessed July 31, 2012, <https://studies.aljazeera.net/en/reports/2012/07/20127316859987337.html>.

<sup>107</sup> “Nigeria: Boko Haram brutality against women and girls needs urgent response – new research,” Amnesty International, accessed March 24, 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/03/nigeria-boko-haram-brutality-against-women-and-girls-needs-urgent-response-new-research/>.

<sup>108</sup> “Split in ISIS-Aligned Boko Haram Group,” Aljazeera Centre for Studies, accessed October 27, 2016, <https://studies.aljazeera.net/en/reports/2016/10/split-isis-aligned-boko-haram-group-161027113247008.html>.

<sup>109</sup> Aljazeera Centre for Studies, “Split in ISIS-Aligned Boko Haram Group.”

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

supposed to have discovered his hideout and Shekau detonated a suicide vest on himself. His successor is believed to have been Bakura Doro.<sup>111</sup>

#### 4.3.1 Strategy of Violence Against Women

As mentioned above, Boko Haram's strategy and tactics have evolved and developed over time. At first, the group focused on easier attacks or sabotage, most often on the Nigerian population in the northeast of the country or police officers, using more primitive weapons – knives, machetes, swords, or improvised homemade firearms. Over time, and mostly after 2009, Boko Haram radicalized with a new leader, and with it the war strategy towards Nigeria.<sup>112</sup> Its members began using modern firearms, grenades, or surface-to-air missiles. The strategy evolved to include the use of suicide bombers, which they also used their captives to do. Boko Haram's new attacks began to target strategic targets, the Nigerian military, media institutions, and religious communities, including Muslim ones.<sup>113</sup>

Attacks and violence against women and young girls have become an important target of Boko Haram and a kind of semi-official strategy and the group's main tactic. In the early stages of the insurgency, the organization targeted mainly men, who were also suspected of aiding the Nigerian security forces in their crackdown on Boko Haram. Since 2013, however, the organization has focused on the abduction of women and girls, a sensitive target and a vulnerability for both Nigeria's individual communities or villages and the state. The motive for the first abductions of women and girls was to exchange captives for Boko Haram members and their wives and children who had been arrested in previous years by Nigerian security forces. Although a deal was negotiated and a prisoner exchange took place, the abduction of women and girls continued to be a major tactic.<sup>114</sup>

The biggest kidnapping so far happened on 14 April 2014 at the Federal Government College in Chibok, Borno State, when 276 mostly Christian female students were abducted by Boko Haram militants. This abduction has attracted global attention and an international campaign, “Bring back our girls”, has been launched to free the abducted girls and demand

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<sup>111</sup> “Boko Haram Confirms Death Of Terror Leader Abubakar Shekau,” Counter Extremism Project, accessed June 25, 2021, <https://www.counterextremism.com/press/boko-haram-confirms-death-terror-leader-abubakar-shekau>.

<sup>112</sup> Falode, “The Nature of Nigeria’s Boko Haram War, 2010-2015,” 43–44.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> International Crisis Group, “Boko Haram and Women’s Changing Roles,” in *Nigeria: Women and the Boko Haram Insurgency* (International Crisis Group, 2016): 6, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep31747.7>.

greater government action.<sup>115</sup> Between 19 January and 28 October 2015 alone, the Nigerian government managed to free over 2,000 people, overwhelmingly women and young girls, from the Sambisa Forest in Borno State, which is a Boko Haram sanctuary due to its large reservoir of fresh water and minerals and, in addition, provides good conditions for waging guerrilla warfare. This number, however, represents only a fraction of the total number of abductees.<sup>116</sup>

The Chibok kidnapping became the first internationally visible symbol of Boko Haram's violence against women and girls and demonstrated the group's ideology and strength. Violence against women is in most cases aimed at humiliating the families and communities in which women and girls live and represent “bearers of honour”, while their male family members are shamed for failing to protect their wives and daughters.<sup>117</sup>

In captivity, women and girls are subjected to sexual violence by Boko Haram fighters, including rape, sexual slavery, and prostitution. Women are often forced into forced marriages or pregnancies. Those who do not submit are used for forced labour or deployed to the front line in the fighting against the Nigerian army, including female suicide bombers. There are also recorded cases of girls as young as seven being used for bombings.<sup>118</sup> This reflects Boko Haram's perception of the female gender. On the one hand, women are seen as the property of men and as the “inferior sex”, used by Boko Haram either as a bounty for fighters or perhaps as suicide bombers. On the other hand, women are the bearers of life. For captured women and girls, their religion often determines whether they become wives or slaves. Christian women and girls are often forced to convert to Islam. If they refuse, they become sex slaves or are used in suicide attacks.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Oriola, “Unwilling Cocoons,” 103.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>117</sup> Bloom and Matfess, “Women as Symbols and Swords in Boko Haram’s Terror,” 113.

<sup>118</sup> Markovic, “Suicide squad,” 283.

<sup>119</sup> International Crisis Group, “Boko Haram and Women’s Changing Roles,” 8.

## **5 Boko Haram as a Perpetrator of Gender-Based Violence**

This chapter presents the empirical part of this thesis. It looks at the gender-based violence against women and girls in northeastern Nigeria perpetrated by Boko Haram and how this violence has affected the lives of the women and girls concerned from several perspectives. The chapter is divided into three parts. The first sub-chapter, which deals with the Boko Haram insurgent group as the direct perpetrator of gender-based violence against women and girls, is divided into two parts. The first section briefly summarises the turn in Boko Haram's tactics to gender-based violence against women and then examines the first type of gender-based violence that Boko Haram began to practice – the abduction of women and girls and their subsequent capture. Included is an analysis of how the abductions were important to the insurgents, where the major milestones were, and what they hoped to achieve by doing so.

The second section examines the practices of gender-based violence that Boko Haram fighters used against captured women and young girls (many still in their infancy) in captivity. Boko Haram's abductions and practices of gender-based violence are arranged chronologically to best show the evolution of this type of violence. Since part of this thesis is to answer the question of how gender-based violence has affected the lives of women and girls and their social status in Nigeria, some personal stories have been included to add authenticity to the work.

The second subchapter focuses on Boko Haram as an indirect perpetrator of gender-based violence against women and girls. The insurgents' activities have caused a humanitarian crisis in the country, with millions of people forced to flee their homes. Another group of people are those who have been kidnapped and held captive by Boko Haram and subsequently managed to escape, were released or freed by the armed forces. Populations whose lives have been affected in this way by Boko Haram insurgents are subsequently placed (depending on the level of culpability and suspicion) either in military detention camps, camps for internally displaced persons (IDP camps) or host communities.

In all cases, however, women and girls in particular face renewed gender-based violence, most often in the form of sexual coercion and abuse, at the hands of soldiers, police officers, camp staff and aid workers. Boko Haram thus figures as an indirect perpetrator of this violence, as it has caused these people to be placed in camps where they have to face

these inconveniences. This section thus looks at the situation in each facility and the type of gender-based violence that women and girls have to face.

The third sub-chapter looks at the impact of the Boko Haram insurgency on the lives of women and girls from several perspectives – social status in society; physical and mental health. In terms of social status in society, the chapter itself is about the violation and denial of all human rights by Boko Haram. Moreover, women who have been captured by Boko Haram and released or freed have to face a strong social stigma in their communities, which shun these women and girls and consider them “polluted”, especially if they have become pregnant while in captivity. They also have to deal with health problems, including mental health. Some women suffer from pain, infections and illnesses for months after attacks or captivity, in addition to showing signs of trauma and other mental illnesses that prevent them from returning to a normal life.

In addition, the sub-chapter also mentions the response of the Nigerian authorities, especially the government, to the impact of Boko Haram on the lives of the civilian population (especially the female population). By analysing these three aspects, it is possible to better document not only the gender-based violence perpetrated by Boko Haram (either directly or indirectly) but also the problems that female victims have to face after their release from captivity and the impact Boko Haram has therefore had on their lives afterwards.

## **5.1 Boko Haram as a Direct Perpetrator of Gender-Based Violence**

This subchapter focuses on the terrorist organization Boko Haram as a direct perpetrator of gender-based violence against women and girls in northeastern Nigeria. The subchapter is divided into two parts – first, the abductions of women and girls that marked the beginning of Boko Haram's use of the female gender as a strategic weapon in the armed conflict, and their specific cases; and second, the practices Boko Haram uses against the female gender. The two sections are arranged chronologically, as this is the best way to analyse the evolution of Boko Haram's gender-based violence against the female gender and the changes these tactics have undergone.

Thus, the first section arranges the abductions by date; then analyses which abductions were the most serious and what they entailed. Additionally, the personal stories of Boko Haram victims are mentioned to better understand how their lives have changed under the

influence of the terrorist group, thus better answering the second research question. The second section on Boko Haram's practices against women and girls is also arranged chronologically, charting how each practice evolved, how they followed one another, and their significance to Boko Haram. It is thus possible to note the ever-increasing brutality on the part of Boko Haram and to better answer both research questions.

Most of the sources analysed for this thesis have broken down their work on gender-based violence by Boko Haram according to each type of violence. However, I additionally divided them chronologically to make the evolution of this strategy as clear as possible.

Boko Haram has had a particular attitude and intention toward women and girls since its inception in 2002, both in its rhetoric and in its actions. On the one hand, under the influence of the Muslim faith and the enforcement of Sharia law, the group has demanded stricter rules and restrictions for women in certain areas of life, while on the other hand, it has been willing to provide them with financial advancement and, in many cases, a rise up the social ladder.<sup>120</sup> Nevertheless, emerging from a strongly patriarchal Nigerian society, Boko Haram sees women as the inferior sex and primarily as the property of men. Hence Boko Haram's treatment of women, including physical, sexual, or psychological violence. One male respondent from Nigeria noted for research organized by the University of Alberta: "*Women according to their ideology (...) are meant for men, women are regarded as our property, they can use it for sex. So when they see women, they can do whatsoever sexually to them.*"<sup>121</sup>

But not all women are perceived equally by Boko Haram. The primary difference is their religion and then their age. Women and girls who refused to convert to Islam while in Boko Haram captivity and who are not submissive to the group's practices and intentions have to endure considerably more brutal treatment than women who (some gladly) accepted their fate, converted to Islam and eventually agreed to marry one of Boko Haram's fighters. These women are then protected from physical or sexual violence from other members of the group. Moreover, as wives of the fighters, they enhance the social

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<sup>120</sup> International Crisis Group, "Nigeria: Women and the Boko Haram Insurgency," *Africa Report N°242* (December 2016): 1, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/nigeria-women-and-boko-haram-insurgency>.

<sup>121</sup> Oriola, "Unwilling Cocoons," 107.

status of their husbands.<sup>122</sup> Women and girls who have “proved themselves” and submitted to Boko Haram are, like in Nigerian society (especially in the patriarchal Northeast), used to bear children and take care of the household. Sometimes, however, they have also become willing fighters, spies or willing suicide bombers. Other women are mainly subjected to physical and sexual violence, prostitution, or used as pitfalls in combat or forced suicide bombers.<sup>123</sup>

As mentioned above, Boko Haram became quite radicalised after the pivotal year of 2009, and with it its fighting strategy and tactics. Its war strategy became more sophisticated and the group began to target strategic locations and targets that could hurt the Nigerian government, military and population the most. Boko Haram also improved the tools of its attacks, moving from primitive weapons to bombings and improvised explosive devices.<sup>124</sup> <sup>125</sup> However, although cases of abduction of women and girls have been recorded as far back as 2009, these have been only isolated incidents, and the main purpose of these abductions has been to exchange captured women for Boko Haram members and wives of militants detained by the government. Thus, Boko Haram's attacks tended to target politicians, civil servants, members of the security forces, and other authority figures it considered part of Nigeria's corrupt and unjust system.<sup>126</sup>

It was not until the turn of 2012 and 2013, according to Human Rights Watch research and monitoring, that Boko Haram began to focus on the kidnapping and subsequent capture of women and young girls on a larger scale. Initially, there were three key motives for targeting the abduction of women and girls (mostly students), as even Boko Haram leaders themselves have justified in videos posted online: i) retaliation against the Nigerian government for detaining Boko Haram members and the wives of the group's leaders; ii) punishing Nigerian students for studying in Western schools; and iii) forced conversion of Christian women and girls to Islam.<sup>127</sup> The abduction of women and girls may also have been driven by economic motives. Boko Haram uses them, among other things, as bounties

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<sup>122</sup> Respondent no. 1 from Amnesty International Nigeria, “Gender-Based Violence as a Weapon of War: The Case of Boko Haram,” interview by Lucie Veiglová, January 13, 2023.

<sup>123</sup> International Crisis Group, “Nigeria,” 6.

<sup>124</sup> Barna, “Insecurity in context,” 7.

<sup>125</sup> Falode, “The Nature of Nigeria’s Boko Haram War, 2010-2015,” 43–44.

<sup>126</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Those Terrible Weeks in Their Camp” – Boko Haram Violence against Women and Girls in Northeast Nigeria,” *Human Rights Watch* (October 2014): 3, <https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/nigeria1014web.pdf>.

<sup>127</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Those Terrible Weeks in Their Camp,” 4.



or potential wives for its fighters. For example, if the group was struggling with low food supplies for itself and its captives, it primarily released older women, demonstrating the value of younger women and their potential for marriage.<sup>128</sup>

The primary motive for the shift to violent extremism, including the abduction of women and young girls, was also the realisation by Boko Haram leaders that they would not be able to change the then system in the country and establish their own rules and order using the existing (not so extremist) tools.<sup>129</sup>

### **5.1.1 Abductions of Women and Girls**

Although kidnappings of women and young girls by Boko Haram have been ongoing since the breakthrough year 2009, it has not been with such intensity. These were isolated cases with units or at most dozens of abductees.<sup>130</sup> The abduction of young female students in Chibok marked a major turning point in Boko Haram's strategy and subsequent waging of war against the Nigerian government and system. The region has long struggled with school closures due to Boko Haram terror. The Government Secondary School in Chibok, Borno State, the home state of Boko Haram, reopened in April 2014, but on the night of 14 April, the school was attacked by Boko Haram fighters, who abducted 276 young female students. They were forced to leave their dormitories under threats and physical punishment and get into trucks that took them to Sambisa Forest, where Boko Haram has a refuge.<sup>131</sup>

The abduction sparked a global response that turned into the international Bring Back Our Girls campaign. The state's response was inadequate and became the target of much criticism. It took three weeks before Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan even made a statement. Moreover, his wife speculated whether the abduction of the students had even occurred. Some of the president's allies even spoke of the kidnapping as a conspiracy by the opposition to undermine his government.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> International Crisis Group, "Nigeria," 8.

<sup>129</sup> Respondent no. 1, interview.

<sup>130</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Those Terrible Weeks in Their Camp," 3.

<sup>131</sup> Nina Storchlic, "Six years ago, Boko Haram kidnapped 276 schoolgirls. Where are they now?" National Geography, accessed March 2020, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/article/six-years-ago-boko-haram-kidnapped-276-schoolgirls-where-are-they-now>.

<sup>132</sup> International Crisis Group, "Nigeria," 7.

As of 11 September 2022, a total of 178 girls abducted from a school in Chibok had escaped Boko Haram captivity. Colonel Obinna Ezuipke, the head of the Intelligence Unit of Operation Hadin Kai, said: “*Out of the 276 abducted Chibok girls, 57 girls escaped in 2014 while 107 girls were released in 2018. (...) Three girls were recovered in 2019, two in 2021 and 9 were rescued in 2022, bringing the total of 178 girls out of captivity and 98 remaining in Boko Haram captivity.*”<sup>133</sup> According to the Nigerian military, two more female students from Chibok were freed in October 2022, along with 99 abductees, bringing the number of freed students to 180.<sup>134</sup> However, according to available sources, at least 16 female students were killed.<sup>135</sup>

The kidnapping of the Chibok students was unusual and exceptional in several ways. First, it was the first time that the kidnapping of civilians had been carried out in such numbers and with such intensity. Until then, kidnappings had been rather sporadic, with the number of abductees ranging in units, at most, of tens. Boko Haram fighters abducted 276 female students from a school in Chibok and did so with relative ease. Furthermore, the students testified that on the day of the abduction, no teachers or administrative staff were present in the school. The guard who was guarding the entrance to the school compound escaped just before the Boko Haram fighters arrived.<sup>136</sup>

Second, unlike most previous abductions, Boko Haram did not discriminate on the basis of religion in this case. Previously, it was mainly Christian civilians who were kidnapped. In this case, the abductees included Muslim female students who, according to testimonies of victims freed from Boko Haram captivity, were threatened with death.<sup>137</sup>

Boko Haram's success in the course of this operation and the ease with which it carried out the operation may have encouraged the group to begin implementing this tactic on a larger scale. It is important to note, however, that this success for Boko Haram was more a matter

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<sup>133</sup> “98 Kidnapped Chibok Girls Still In Boko Haram Captivity After 8 Years – Nigerian Military,” Sahara Reporters, accessed September 11, 2022, <https://saharareporters.com/2022/09/11/98-kidnapped-chibok-girls-still-boko-haram-captivity-after-8-years-nigerian-military>.

<sup>134</sup> “Nigerian Army Rescues Two Chibok Girls, 99 Others From Boko Haram Camps In Borno,” Sahara Reporters, accessed October 2, 2022, [https://saharareporters.com/2022/10/22/nigerian-army-rescues-two-chibok-girls-99-others-boko-haram-camps-borno?utm\\_source=iterable&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=5368079](https://saharareporters.com/2022/10/22/nigerian-army-rescues-two-chibok-girls-99-others-boko-haram-camps-borno?utm_source=iterable&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=5368079).

<sup>135</sup> “Nigeria: Eight years after Chibok more than 1,500 children abducted by armed groups,” Amnesty International UK Press Releases, accessed April 13, 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/nigeria-eight-years-after-chibok-more-1500-children-abducted-armed-groups>.

<sup>136</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Those Terrible Weeks in Their Camp,” 22–23.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

of chance than a well-considered strategic decision. As mentioned earlier, at the time of the kidnapping, there was no staff present in the school, which the militants most likely could not have known. The young girls themselves were thus more vulnerable and presented an easy target, which the militants realized and exploited in future abductions.<sup>138 139</sup>

The Chibok abduction has also had another negative impact on the population in northeastern Nigeria. This case has attracted strong international attention and has raised general concern about what is happening in Nigeria. The world began to take more notice of the hitherto “unremarkable” group Boko Haram and its practices. Many actors, including the United Nations, recognised Boko Haram as a terrorist organization on the basis of the kidnapping of the Chibok students. However, this overshadowed other attacks and kidnappings committed by the group. Meanwhile, hundreds of other civilians, mostly children, have gone missing, receiving little external attention compared to Chibok.<sup>140 141</sup>

As already mentioned, the intensity of attacks on civilians, particularly through kidnapping, increased after the 2014 kidnapping. Women and girls were the most frequent and easiest targets, abducted either directly from villages or the surrounding area (while working in the fields outside villages) or from schools and dormitories. Boko Haram fighters were emboldened by previous success.<sup>142</sup> On the other hand, it cannot be said unequivocally that the abductions of women and girls were specifically planned in advance. Boko Haram cannot have mapped and know every village. Rather, it has been about looting villages in search of food and raw materials, and local women have been abducted on that occasion. By doing so, Boko Haram demoralised the population, made it less likely to resist and, above all, spread fear. However, the abduction of girls was primarily about securing wives for Boko Haram soldiers, and in some cases compensating or rewarding those fighters who were loyal or successful in combat.<sup>143</sup>

Boko Haram reached its highest peak in terms of the intensity of abductions of women and girls between 2014 and 2016.<sup>144</sup> The group experienced its greatest growth during that time

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<sup>138</sup> Respondent no. 1, interview.

<sup>139</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Those Terrible Weeks in Their Camp,” 22.

<sup>140</sup> Oriola, “Unwilling Cocoons,” 111–112.

<sup>141</sup> Mausi Segun, “Hundreds of Abducted Children Still Missing in Nigeria,” Human Rights Watch, accessed March 30, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/03/30/hundreds-abducted-children-still-missing-nigeria>.

<sup>142</sup> Respondent no. 1, interview.

<sup>143</sup> Respondent no. 1, interview.

<sup>144</sup> Bloom and Matfess, “Women as Symbols and Swords in Boko Haram’s Terror,” 109.

and also controlled the largest territory to date since its inception. Between 2015 and 2016 came a reversal, for several reasons. First, as then Nigerian President Jonathan himself admitted, his government had not paid significant and sufficient attention to Boko Haram until then. Significantly more expenditure was spent on fighting the terrorist group, and the Nigerian military (presumably with the help of foreign armies and mercenaries) succeeded in driving Boko Haram out of most of its territory between 2015 and 2016.<sup>145</sup>

Another reason for Boko Haram's weakening was its split within the group over the future direction of the group and its activities. This disagreement subsequently led to its split into two factions – one led by its current leader, Abubakar Shekau, and the other, which pledged allegiance to the Islamic State and morphed into the Islamic State's West Africa Province.<sup>146</sup> Moreover, the two factions have been fighting each other ever since, except for a few periods of mutual cooperation, and Boko Haram has added another rival. Moreover, the clashes between the two groups have made security in northeastern Nigeria all the more dangerous. Both factions are attacking each other's positions and killing opposition fighters, including their wives and families, as an act of revenge for previous attacks.<sup>147</sup>

For a time, the target of Boko Haram's attacks thus became again military targets and clashes with the Nigerian army, plus fighting with the opposition faction.<sup>148</sup> However, recent data published by the non-governmental organization Amnesty International suggests that the abductions of women and girls have not stopped and are, on the contrary, gaining momentum again.<sup>149</sup> Since 2019 alone, there have been several repeated raids on villages in the northeast of the country in Borno State, during which Boko Haram fighters have looted food, livestock, and money, physically attacked or killed residents and raped women and young girls, some of whom they have abducted. One witness described: “*In the*

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<sup>145</sup> John Campbell, “Nigeria Retakes Territory from Boko Haram,” Council on Foreign Relations, accessed March 24, 2015, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/nigeria-retakes-territory-boko-haram>.

<sup>146</sup> Aljazeera Centre for Studies, “Split in ISIS-Aligned Boko Haram Group.”

<sup>147</sup> “Boko Haram Fighters Slaughter 33 Wives Of ISWAP Terrorists In Deadly Clashes In Borno State,” Sahara Reporters, accessed December 6, 2022, [https://saharareporters.com/2022/12/06/boko-haram-fighters-slaughter-33-wives-iswap-terrorists-deadly-clashes-orno-state?utm\\_source=iterable&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=5695961](https://saharareporters.com/2022/12/06/boko-haram-fighters-slaughter-33-wives-iswap-terrorists-deadly-clashes-orno-state?utm_source=iterable&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=5695961).

<sup>148</sup> All Armed Conflict Location & Event Data-Jan 1 - Dec 31 2015\_Nigeria, Dataset, Data World, accessed January 28, 2018, [https://data.world/orodata/all-armed-conflict-location-event-data-jan-1-dec-31-2015/workspace/file?filename=All+Armed+Conflict+Location+%26+Event+Data-Jan+1+-+Dec+31+2015\\_Nigeria.csv](https://data.world/orodata/all-armed-conflict-location-event-data-jan-1-dec-31-2015/workspace/file?filename=All+Armed+Conflict+Location+%26+Event+Data-Jan+1+-+Dec+31+2015_Nigeria.csv).

<sup>149</sup> Respondent no. 1, interview.

*next house, I started hearing some women shouting and screaming and crying. I was very afraid. After some minutes, maybe 30 minutes, I saw the men come out of the house. There were five or six of them with their guns. Then afterwards, the women were confused. Their dresses were not normal.*<sup>150</sup>

Witnesses described the attacks as taking place mostly at night. Some of the fighters were disguised as members of the Nigerian army, but their language indicated that they belonged to Boko Haram. Some of the fighters kidnapped women on motorbikes or killed residents trying to flee. Others broke into houses and looted property, valuables, jewellery, money, food or livestock. They also physically assaulted the homeowners or raped or committed other sexual violence against women and girls. Abducted women returned to the village after several days with visible signs of physical and sexual assault and showed signs of trauma.<sup>151</sup>

In addition to abducting women and young girls from villages and their surroundings, Boko Haram has also focused on attacks on educational institutions and abducting students from schools and dormitories. These attacks are motivated firstly by the group's hatred of all things Western, including Western-style learning, and secondly by a passion for attacking the security forces that patrol the campuses (and are often under-armed).<sup>152</sup> The most notorious and one of the most extensive cases of abduction of female students since Chibok is from 2018 when 101 girls were abducted from a school in Dapchi, Yobe State.<sup>153</sup>

Between December 2020 and March 2021 alone, at least 5 abductions of schoolgirls from schools and dormitories have been documented, resulting in the closure of about 600 schools in northern Nigeria (in Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Jigawa and Zamfara states). The female students were held captive for several days before being released. In the wake of the abductions, parents in northern and northeastern Nigeria are refusing to allow their children to attend school due to the lack of protection and security of schools by the

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<sup>150</sup> Amnesty International, "Nigeria: Boko Haram brutality against women and girls needs urgent response."

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Philip Obaji Jr., "Boko Haram Won't Stop Targeting Schools in Nigeria," Foreign Policy, accessed March 23, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/03/23/boko-haram-nigeria-kidnappings-school-children/>.

<sup>153</sup> Al Chukwuma Okoli, "Gender and Terror: Boko Haram and the Abuse of Women in Nigeria," Georgetown Journal of International Affairs, accessed April 5, 2022, <https://gija.georgetown.edu/2022/04/05/gender-and-terror-boko-haram-and-the-abuse-of-women-in-nigeria%E2%80%9C%E2%80%9C/>.

government. Some of the parents said: *“The schools are not safe. The government is not trustworthy, and we do not believe them when they say that they would protect our children.”*<sup>154</sup>

Whether it is the kidnapping and abduction of women and young girls from villages and their surroundings or directly from schools and colleges, in both cases, cases are reported minimally due to stigma and fear of repercussions. Many women and girls who have been in Boko Haram captivity face persecution from the local community upon their return. In an interview with International Alert, one of the abducted girls said she faces many challenges after returning to her community, including discrimination and segregation: *“For a girl, it is even worse as getting married becomes a problem. It is as you have become some plague that everyone should avoid. No one wants to associate with you, it is as if your life has become useless.”*<sup>155</sup>

In addition, survivors are also afraid to seek medical help (or do not have access to it), which can result in victims suffering health complications for months. If any of the women have been impregnated in captivity, they do not have access to legal and safe abortion, as abortion is illegal in Nigeria except in cases where a woman's life is at risk.<sup>156 157</sup> In addition, any survivor who escapes or is released from Boko Haram captivity is automatically viewed as a suspect (including children) and is subject to military police interrogation, which often includes torture.<sup>158</sup>

### **5.1.2 Practices of Gender-Based Violence by Boko Haram**

As already mentioned, women have played a significant role in the Boko Haram insurgency since its inception. They have essentially two meanings for the group – as symbols and as swords. In terms of symbols, women have been used by Boko Haram as a demonstration of the group's strength and ideology, such as in the kidnapping of the

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<sup>154</sup> “Nigeria: Seven years since Chibok, the government fails to protect children,” Amnesty International, accessed April 14, 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2021/04/nigeria-seven-years-since-chibok-the-government-fails-to-protect-children/>.

<sup>155</sup> “Abducted, Raped and then Shunned: Life after Boko Haram,” International Alert, YouTube, video, 2:20, accessed July 29, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nDHOHIASXqI>.

<sup>156</sup> Amnesty International UK Press Releases, “Nigeria.”

<sup>157</sup> Amnesty International, “Nigeria: Boko Haram brutality against women and girls needs urgent response.”

<sup>158</sup> “Nigeria: children brutally targeted in military-Boko Haram conflict becoming 'lost generation' - new report,” Amnesty International UK Press releases, accessed May 27, 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/nigeria-children-brutally-targeted-military-boko-haram-conflict-becoming-lost>.

Chibok students. In propaganda videos published on the Internet, Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau stated that all the girls abducted from Chibok who professed Christianity had already converted to Islam and recognised it as the only true religion. They had also allegedly already become wives of Boko Haram fighters.<sup>159</sup>

According to Shekau, the abduction was necessary because these girls violated Sharia law in several ways – first, the students should not have attended school at all, as it is a violation of their social role as women. Second, school attendance, according to Shekau, prevented the girls from marrying, even though they were already “old enough” to marry. Finally, the female students additionally violated Islamic teachings by attending a school of Western teachings that directly contradicted the Islamic faith.<sup>160</sup>

Moreover, women have another meaning for Boko Haram in terms of symbolism. Although the female gender is considered secondary and inferior (not only by Boko Haram but also in Nigeria), on the other hand, abducted women as wives of Boko Haram fighters enhance the social status of their husbands and at the same time represent “tools” for reproduction.<sup>161</sup> Women are thus instrumentalised, gender discriminated against and sexually objectified by Boko Haram. They are perceived as the property of men and also as tools in four main areas: i) reproduction and childbearing to maintain the organization's continuity strategy; ii) domestic purposes, such as taking care of the household or satisfying the sexual urges and desires of their husbands – Boko Haram warriors; iii) as a bargaining tool or human shield; iv) part of murderous attacks.<sup>162</sup>

However, this “usefulness” of women could also be seen as women as swords. Women, through the aforementioned tools, contribute to the functioning of the group, through (unwanted and forced) pregnancies they guarantee the continuation of Boko Haram, and bolster its operational effectiveness.<sup>163</sup> Another way in which women have meant swords to Boko Haram is through their (overwhelmingly involuntary) involvement in organising attacks. They have mostly been deployed on softer targets (markets, railway stations). Moreover, women arouse less suspicion than men and are less likely to be searched by the

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<sup>159</sup> Bloom and Matfess, “Women as Symbols and Swords in Boko Haram’s Terror,” 113–115.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 114–115.

<sup>161</sup> International Crisis Group, “Nigeria,” 6.

<sup>162</sup> Oriola, “Unwilling Cocoons,” 107.

<sup>163</sup> Bloom and Matfess, “Women as Symbols and Swords in Boko Haram’s Terror,” 114.

police or the army. The use of women as suicide bombers, which first emerged in Nigeria with Boko Haram, is also a chapter in itself.<sup>164 165</sup>

Women who fall into Boko Haram captivity are subsequently treated by commanders and fighters according to three criteria: age, religion, and willingness to cooperate. Boko Haram divides women by age into three groups – children under 14; young girls and women of reproductive age (14 to 45 years); and women over 45 years. The greatest emphasis is placed on girls and women of reproductive age who are also unmarried and without children. They then become the “most suitable material” for marriage to Boko Haram fighters and the conception of a child.<sup>166</sup>

The youngest girls are also very often targeted for sexual assault, including rape or sexual slavery. What is more, it has been documented that young children have even been used in the fight against the Nigerian army. A girl as young as seven years old was allegedly used as a suicide bomber in the 2017 attack on a university in Maiduguri, Borno State.<sup>167</sup> In contrast, the oldest women in Boko Haram captivity represent the least appealing targets. They are also the most likely to be released as soon as possible – it has been noted that when Boko Haram has struggled to provide captives with basic necessities, older women have most often been released from captivity.<sup>168</sup>

From a religious perspective, Muslim women were treated better. Christian women, who also predominated among the captives, were forced to convert to Islam. If they refused, they were subjected to psychological and physical abuse, forced to take part in combat operations, and rape or other sexual abuse was no exception.<sup>169</sup> In terms of willingness to cooperate and participate in the running of the group or to take part in military operations, as with religion, girls and women who submitted and did not resist their captors were better off. Girls who agreed to marry a Boko Haram fighter were even often protected from rape and sexual violence by other Boko Haram members (unless they were raped directly by

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<sup>164</sup> International Crisis Group, “Nigeria,” 1.

<sup>165</sup> Bloom and Matfess, “Women as Symbols and Swords in Boko Haram’s Terror,” 111.

<sup>166</sup> Oriola, “Unwilling Cocoons,” 108.

<sup>167</sup> Reference: Elizabeth Pearson, “Wilayat Shahidat: Boko Haram, the Islamic State, and the Question of the Female Suicide Bomber,” edited by Jacob Zenn, *Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines: Analyses of Africa’s Enduring Insurgency* (Combatting Terrorism Center at West Point: 2018): 45, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep21483.6>.

<sup>168</sup> International Crisis Group, “Nigeria,” 8.

<sup>169</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Those Terrible Weeks in Their Camp,” 2.



their own husbands).<sup>170</sup> Some women submitted out of fear of the consequences that would come if they resisted – physical and sexual violence, torture, or death threats.<sup>171</sup>

However, there were also women who voluntarily joined Boko Haram while in captivity. They gained socio-economic benefits by doing so – in exchange for sexual relations with the fighters, they were exclusively treated better and were provided with basic necessities such as food. Nevertheless, some women joined Boko Haram not for the sake of profitable cooperation, but out of their own conviction.<sup>172</sup>

Conditions in the Boko Haram camps were very harsh for the abducted women and girls, who often had to face inhumane treatment at the hands of commanders or fighters. The captured women were kept under constant surveillance, had to be completely veiled and wear a niqab. Both Muslim and Christian women had to attend Koranic lessons and listen to sermons.<sup>173</sup> In case of disobedience to orders or rebellion (such as refusing to convert to Islam), women were threatened with death, beaten, or whipped.<sup>174</sup>

Boko Haram has also brought about a “revolution” in terms of practices and treatment of prisoners. Armed rebel groups were already active in Nigeria in the 1990s, and violence against women and girls during armed conflict was not a new phenomenon. Rape was the most widespread type of gender-based, and especially sexual, violence at that time. However, in contrast to previous violent groups, Boko Haram began to use other practices in the context of violence against women and girls that were not common in Nigeria until then. These include sexual slavery and even sexual torture.<sup>175</sup> The use of women and girls as suicide bombers is also a chapter in itself – this was not practised in Nigeria until then, only with the advent of Boko Haram. The first female suicide bomber was deployed by Boko Haram in 2014 and since then it has become a common practice.<sup>176</sup> The following section examines the practices of gender-based violence practised by Boko Haram against captured women and girls after their abduction.

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<sup>170</sup> “Conflict-related sexual violence – Report of the Secretary-General,” United Nations Security Council, 24, accessed March 23, 2015, [http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s\\_2015\\_203.pdf](http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2015_203.pdf).

<sup>171</sup> Respondent no. 1, interview.

<sup>172</sup> Oriola, “Unwilling Cocoons,” 106.

<sup>173</sup> International Crisis Group, “Nigeria,” 8.

<sup>174</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Those Terrible Weeks in Their Camp,” 2.

<sup>175</sup> Dara Kay Cohen, Ragnhild Nordås and Robert Ulrich Nagel, “The Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict (SVAC) dataset,” Sexual Violence Data, <http://www.sexualviolencedata.org/dataset/>.

<sup>176</sup> Okoli, “Gender and Terror.”

***Forced conversion to Islam*** Apart from kidnappings, one of the first practices of gender-based violence against women and young girls by Boko Haram was the forced conversion of Christian women to Islam. As the group sought to spread its version of Islam and its system based on Sharia law as widely as possible, the first attacks and abductions of women were primarily targeted at Christian communities.<sup>177</sup> While Muslim girls were allowed to leave shortly after being abducted, Christian women had to face death threats or being sold as slaves in the market if they refused to convert to Islam.<sup>178 179</sup> One of the abducted girls told Human Rights Watch: “*We did not really agree [to convert] and were uncomfortable but the insurgents said, “If you don't stop misbehaving, we'll shoot you and throw your corpses into the river.”*”<sup>180</sup>

After agreeing to convert to Islam, women and girls had to follow dress codes such as completely covering their bodies and wearing the niqab, were given new Muslim names by Boko Haram fighters or sympathizers and had to regularly attend Quranic classes. In several cases, even forced conversion to Islam did not lead to the release of the captured girls, who were subsequently forced to marry Boko Haram fighters.<sup>181</sup>

***Forced marriage and pregnancy*** In captivity, women underwent a certain selection process to single out the “most suitable material” for marriage to Boko Haram fighters. Most often, women and girls between the ages of 14 and 45, preferably unmarried and without children, were selected. Women and girls as wives of fighters increased the social status of their husbands and also, at the same time, guaranteed the continuation of the organization through forced pregnancies.<sup>182</sup> If a Boko Haram member's husband died or was killed in combat, women were immediately forced to remarry and bear a child with their new husband. One woman who conceived a child with a Boko Haram fighter and was subsequently widowed testified: “*They said after my first menstruation [after the son's*

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<sup>177</sup> International Crisis Group, “Nigeria,” 7.

<sup>178</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Those Terrible Weeks in Their Camp,” 28.

<sup>179</sup> Atta Barkindo, Benjamin Gudaku and Caroline Wesley, “Our Bodies, Their Battle Ground Boko Haram and Gender Based Violence Against Christian Women and Children in North-Eastern Nigeria Since 1999,” *Open Doors International* (November 2013): 19, <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.1.3930.3847>.

<sup>180</sup> “Nigerian Women Describe Boko Haram Abductions,” Human Rights Watch, YouTube, video, 2:15, accessed October 27, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0WsA0JAistA>.

<sup>181</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Those Terrible Weeks in Their Camp,” 30–31.

<sup>182</sup> Oriola, “Unwilling Cocoons,” 108.

birth], I'd have to remarry. They kept coming to ask if I'd started menstruation and I said no.”<sup>183</sup>

There have even been cases where, after a woman has consented to marry a Boko Haram member, commanders have made efforts to protect these women from sexual violence by other members. Even the marriage itself was intended to serve as a form of protection from rape in captivity.<sup>184 185</sup> However, in marriage, women faced many restrictions and prohibitions, such as not being allowed to move freely or associate with others outside the prisons or houses where they were held. In addition, the vast majority of women experienced physical or sexual violence at the hands of their husbands, including whipping, beating or rape.<sup>186</sup>

**Sexual violence** Sexual violence, most often in the form of rape, is not only faced by women and girls in captivity but also during Boko Haram attacks on villages and communities in northeastern Nigeria. In these cases, rape serves to demoralise the population and reduce their ability to resist. By raping women, the militants break down community cohesion, with victims often ostracised by the community and male family members blamed for failing to protect their families. In addition, biological considerations may also play a role, where satisfying the sexual urges of insurgents helps to maintain loyalty and serves as a reward for their actions on behalf of the group.<sup>187 188</sup>

Sexual violence against women and girls in captivity became more frequent around 2013 when the number of abductions also increased. Rape was experienced both by women immediately after arriving in a Boko Haram camp and by women married to insurgents. A then 15-year-old girl who managed to escape said: “*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.*”<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> “Nigeria: “We dried our tears”: Addressing the toll on children of Northeast Nigeria’s conflict,” Amnesty International, 25, accessed May 27, 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr44/2322/2020/en/>.

<sup>184</sup> United Nations Security Council, “Conflict-related sexual violence – Report of the Secretary-General,” 24.

<sup>185</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Those Terrible Weeks in Their Camp,” 33.

<sup>186</sup> Amnesty International, “Nigeria: “We dried our tears,” 24.

<sup>187</sup> Respondent no. 1, interview.

<sup>188</sup> Amnesty International, “Nigeria: Boko Haram brutality against women and girls needs urgent response.”

<sup>189</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Those Terrible Weeks in Their Camp,” 33.

Christians and women who refused to obey the orders of commanders were also more likely to be subjected to sexual violence.<sup>190</sup>

***Sexual torture, slavery, and prostitution*** The first mention of sexual slavery by Boko Haram dates back to 2010 and is the first time in Nigeria's modern history that such a practice has been used during an armed conflict. A similar example is the sexual torture recorded in 2013 by Boko Haram. Until then, by no other armed group, including the Nigerian military.<sup>191</sup>

Sex slavery and prostitution function primarily as a morale booster for militants, with the offering of abducted women and girls as sex slaves helping Boko Haram to grow its base, retain existing members, and attract more. Moreover, the trafficking of sex and sex slaves can help fund their combat operations and the overall insurgency. According to reports, girls abducted from a school in Chibok in 2014 were also used as sex slaves.<sup>192</sup> Radicalisation specialist Nikita Malik of the Henry Jackson Society think tank said extremist groups most often resort to this decision when they experience military defeats and losses.<sup>193</sup>

***Female fighters and suicide bombers*** Although the phenomenon of using women and young girls as suicide bombers is not new (they were first used in the 1980s in Syria, followed by Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Russia), Boko Haram was the first to do so in Nigeria. And it is not only women but also young girls, often still children.<sup>194</sup> This tactic allows them to maintain the numbers of their trained fighters and not sacrifice them in suicide attacks. Moreover, the use of women and possibly even children as suicide bombers serves a psychological effect and increases media and global attention.<sup>195</sup> The use of women in suicide attacks is also advantageous to Boko Haram because women attract

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<sup>190</sup> Bigio and Vogelstein, "Countering Sexual Violence in Conflict," 4.

<sup>191</sup> Cohen, Nordås and Nagel, "The Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict (SVAC) dataset."

<sup>192</sup> Lin Taylor, "From Boko Haram to Islamic State, sex slavery and trafficking fund extremism: report," Reuters, accessed October 9, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-global-slavery-extremists-idUSKBN1CE1I3>.

<sup>193</sup> Taylor, "From Boko Haram to Islamic State, sex slavery and trafficking fund extremism: report."

<sup>194</sup> Markovic, "Suicide squad," 286.

<sup>195</sup> Kathleen Turner, "The Rise of Female Suicide Bombers," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 8, no. 3 (2016): 16, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26351404>.

less attention than men and their perceived harmlessness arouses less suspicion from the police or military.<sup>196</sup>

The first female suicide bomber was used in 2014 in an attack in Gombe State. Since then, it has been a common tactic for Boko Haram, and it is estimated that up to 60 per cent of Boko Haram suicide bombers are women and young girls.<sup>197</sup> By the end of 2015, the scale of Boko Haram's use of women as suicide bombers was globally unprecedented.<sup>198</sup> A former Boko Haram captive said the group trained about 100 selected girls in its camps to carry out armed attacks, including training in shooting and how to use bombs. Those women and girls who refused to participate in the training were executed and buried in mass graves.<sup>199</sup>

The general conclusion is that Boko Haram has become increasingly brutal in its practices over time. Unlike earlier conflicts in Africa (for example, in Mozambique or Eritrea), where women's rights were part of the ideology of insurgencies, women are now objectified and exploited on the basis of their gender, which is treated as inferior.<sup>200</sup>

## **5.2 Boko Haram as an Indirect Perpetrator of Gender-Based Violence**

This subchapter examines the terrorist organization Boko Haram as an indirect perpetrator of gender-based violence against women and girls. Boko Haram's activities have caused a humanitarian crisis in the country, with over three million Nigerians forced to flee their homes and find temporary homes in camps for internally displaced persons. Another section of the affected people are survivors of Boko Haram captivity who managed to escape from captivity, were released or freed by the Nigerian army and subsequently placed in camps for internally displaced persons. However, here women and girls in particular have to face gender-based violence from those who are paradoxically supposed to protect them and ensure their safety – camp staff, police, the Nigerian army and also aid workers. This chapter examines gender-based violence against women and girls in two main settings – i) camps for internally displaced persons; ii) military detention centres and

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<sup>196</sup> Oluwatoyin O. Oluwaniyi, “Why are women victims or perpetrators in Nigeria’s Boko Haram? Recruitment, roles and implications,” *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 39, no. 3 (2021): 463, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02589001.2020.1849580>.

<sup>197</sup> Okoli, “Gender and Terror.”

<sup>198</sup> Pearson, “Wilayat Shahidat,” 33.

<sup>199</sup> Oriola, “Unwilling Cocoons,” 108–109.

<sup>200</sup> Jacob Zenn and Elizabeth Pearson, “Women, Gender and the evolving tactics of Boko Haram,” *Journal of Terrorism Research* 5, no. 1 (February 2014): 50, <https://doi.org/10.15664/jtr.828>.

satellite camps administered by the Nigerian military and armed forces. This will, among other things, provide the thesis with answers to one of the questions posed as to how Boko Haram activity has directly or indirectly affected the situation of women and girls in Nigeria and what the consequences have been for them.

Boko Haram's activities since its inception and especially its adoption of gender-based violence tactics against women and girls have caused two major problems where the group also figures as an indirect perpetrator of gender-based violence – firstly, the placement of liberated people and refugees from Boko Haram in camps for internally displaced persons, where women and girls also face gender-based and especially sexual violence, not only from soldiers and camp staff but also from aid workers. The second problem is the detention of not only women and girls in military detention centres where a large number of people are placed after their liberation by the Nigerian army from Boko Haram captivity and where they face physical, psychological, and sexual violence.<sup>201</sup>

The fate of people who have been affected by the conflict between Boko Haram and the Nigerian army takes several forms. The first group is made up of people who have been forced to leave their homes because of the conflict. It is estimated that from its beginning until June 2022, approximately 3.1 million people have been forced to flee from the northeast of Nigeria to safer parts of the country.<sup>202</sup> Several hundred thousand Nigerians have fled abroad, but most have found a new “home” in the city of Maiduguri in Borno State, where numerous camps for internally displaced persons have been established.<sup>203</sup>

The second group is made up of populations who have escaped Boko Haram captivity or have been liberated by the Nigerian army, either directly from captivity or in cases where the Nigerian army has managed to recapture territory from Boko Haram, including villages and communities where the population lives. These persons subsequently face strong suspicion of collaboration or sympathy with Boko Haram and are treated very harshly by the Nigerian army. Those who are acquitted of the charges go to satellite camps or IDP camps (the difference between the two is that satellite camps were makeshift camps run

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<sup>201</sup> Njoku and Akintayo, “Sex for survival,” 293.

<sup>202</sup> “Nigeria,” UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency, <https://www.unhcr.org/nigeria.html>.

<sup>203</sup> International Crisis Group, “Nigeria,” 12.

mainly by the military, while IDP camps are firmly under government control).<sup>204</sup> Most IDPs are subsequently moved from the camps to informal camps or host communities. Host communities serve as replacements for original communities that have been completely destroyed by conflict and violent fighting, or in the case of exclusion (mainly of women and girls) from their communities. Social stigma prevails for women and girls who have been held captive by Boko Haram, especially if they have become pregnant while in captivity and have given birth to a child by a Boko Haram member. These victims subsequently face exclusion from mainstream society, by which they are perceived as a security risk and their children as “bad blood.”<sup>205</sup>

Populations suspected of collaborating with Boko Haram are taken to military detention facilities (the most notorious is in Giwa, Kaduna State) where they face very harsh to inhumane treatment and several deaths have been reported or are placed in deradicalisation programmes.<sup>206</sup>

### **5.2.1 Gender-Based Violence in Camps for Internally Displaced People**

As mentioned above, women and young girls enter IDP camps in several ways – either they are screened by the Nigerian military and cleared of collaborating with Boko Haram (after escaping or being freed from captivity), or they are forced to flee their homes due to the advancing and ever-approaching Boko Haram, which brings with it violence and abductions of the local population. Approximately 80 per cent of those freed or displaced end up in host communities (for women and girls freed from captivity, primarily due to social stigma and exclusion from their own communities, where they are considered “tainted” by Boko Haram), with the remainder placed in government-run camps, located primarily throughout Borno State.<sup>207</sup>

Internally displaced persons or survivors of Boko Haram captivity who are placed in satellite or IDP camps face exceedingly difficult living conditions in their new refuge. In most camps, extremely poor sanitation conditions prevail, including a lack of drinking water, hygiene and sanitary supplies (soap, disinfectant, menstrual supplies) or sanitary

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<sup>204</sup> “Nigeria: ‘They took our husbands and forced us to be their girlfriends’ – Women in north-east Nigeria starved and raped by those claiming to rescue them,” Amnesty International, 3, accessed November 23, 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr44/9122/2018/en/>.

<sup>205</sup> International Crisis Group, “Nigeria,” 15.

<sup>206</sup> Amnesty International, “Nigeria: ‘They took our husbands and forced us to be their girlfriends,’” 4.

<sup>207</sup> International Crisis Group, “Nigeria,” 13.

facilities. This is the reason for the outbreak and rapid spread of diseases and infections (malaria, chicken pox, dysentery), often leading to the death of camp residents (most often children). Health facilities, including medical care and medicines or medical supplies, are also often lacking in camps, all of which contribute to the increased death rate of camp residents. Pregnant women often give birth without any medical supervision. Living conditions in the camps are often compared to a prison, with people living and sleeping in makeshift shelters in all weathers, without mattresses or blankets or the ability to keep warm.<sup>208 209</sup>

Moreover, IDP camps expose people to increased vulnerability in many ways. As noted, compared to the general population, they lack the basic necessities of life, including food, drinking water, hygiene and sanitation, medical care, medication, or adequate facilities/shelter. They also suffer significantly higher mortality rates. However, the treatment of these populations by soldiers, superior officers, camp staff or aid workers is another chapter. Women and children in particular, who make up the vast majority of those in the camps, are at risk of having their fundamental rights abused, not only for the reasons already mentioned, but are also often subjected to physical and, above all, sexual violence in many forms.<sup>210</sup>

Women and young girls in the camps are in many cases victims of gender-based violence. In addition to its “classic forms”, such as physical violence, sexual harassment, and rape, cases of the sex trade have been reported, where women and girls have been extorted and forced by camp staff, soldiers, police officers, as well as aid workers to have sex or provide sexual practices in exchange for scarce commodities such as food or medicine.<sup>211</sup> The following section analyses and discusses the most common and frequent practices of gender-based violence against women and girls in IDP camps in northeastern Nigeria, with

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<sup>208</sup> “Rapid Protection Assessment Report,” Protection Cluster and UNHCR, 24, accessed May 25, 2016, <https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/rapid-protection-assessment-report-borno-state-nigeria-may-2016>.

<sup>209</sup> Bitiyong Zemo J. Amina and Sheriff Ghali Ibrahim, “The Plight of Internally Displaced Persons in Unofficial Camps in the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria, Abuja,” *African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research* 2, no. 3 (2019): 33, [https://abjournals.org/african-journal-of-social-sciences-and-humanities-research-ajsshr/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/journal/published\\_paper/volume-2/issue-3/AJSSHR\\_jzxr2al0.pdf](https://abjournals.org/african-journal-of-social-sciences-and-humanities-research-ajsshr/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/journal/published_paper/volume-2/issue-3/AJSSHR_jzxr2al0.pdf).

<sup>210</sup> “About internally displaced persons. Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons,” OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-internally-displaced-persons/about-internally-displaced-persons>.

<sup>211</sup> Protection Cluster and UNHCR, “Rapid Protection Assessment Report,” 11.



Boko Haram as the indirect perpetrator, which has caused this through its insurgent and violent activities in the country.

***Sexual exploitation*** The most common type of gender-based violence in IDP camps is the sexual exploitation of women and girls. According to a report by the UNHCR, sexual exploitation was reported in 14 of the 26 camps monitored in Borno State in northeastern Nigeria.<sup>212</sup> Sexual exploitation occurs by soldiers, police officers, camp officials, as well as aid workers and male camp residents. It most often takes the form of barter, where women and girls are forced to have sex in exchange for food, medicine, or money. Men use their authority and access to scarce goods in the camp to obtain sex with women and young girls who are already in a vulnerable situation.<sup>213</sup>

The most common tradable commodity for sex is food, which is very scarce in the camps and many residents receive rations only once a day. At Farm Centre Camp in Borno State, it is estimated that up to half of the girls and women there have had to consent to sexual intercourse with camp staff in exchange for food aid for their entire family.<sup>214</sup> Some also became pregnant as a result. Another “benefit” of having sexual intercourse with their superiors is freedom of movement – there is a curfew in the camps at specific times of the day. Thus, women and girls are routinely refused permission to leave the camp unless they submit to sexual intercourse, even though, for example, they urgently need to leave the camp to replenish drinking water, which is also scarce in the camps. Many women and girls (often under the age of 15) are also offered marriage in exchange for needed commodities. Parents of these girls fear sexual abuse and subsequent exploitation of their daughters in the camps and therefore prefer to marry them off to other men in the camp while still minors. Some also benefit from the fact that by promising to marry, their living situation improves, and they receive, for example, larger food rations.<sup>215 216</sup>

***Sexual abuse/rape*** Women and girls are also victims of sexual abuse and rape in IDP camps, most often at night in remote or poorly lit locations. The non-governmental organization Human Rights Watch has documented dozens of cases of rape of women and

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<sup>212</sup> Protection Cluster and UNHCR, “Rapid Protection Assessment Report,” 5.

<sup>213</sup> “Nigeria: Officials Abusing Displaced Women, Girls,” Human Rights Watch, accessed October 31, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/10/31/nigeria-officials-abusing-displaced-women-girls>.

<sup>214</sup> Protection Cluster and UNHCR, “Rapid Protection Assessment Report,” 5.

<sup>215</sup> OHCHR, “About internally displaced persons.”

<sup>216</sup> Protection Cluster and UNHCR, “Rapid Protection Assessment Report,” 11–12.

girls in camps in the Borno state capital, Maiduguri, by camp leaders, soldiers and police officers who were supposed to protect them. Some girls were drugged and then taken to remote places where they were raped. In addition, they were threatened with death if they reported these acts. Some girls became pregnant as a result of the rape and were subsequently subjected to stigma, discrimination, and abuse from other camp residents.<sup>217</sup>

A then 17-year-old girl who managed to escape from Boko Haram captivity and subsequently ended up in a camp for internally displaced persons testified about being raped by a police officer: *“One day he demanded to have sex with me. I refused but he forced me. It happened just that one time, but soon I realized I was pregnant. When I informed him about my condition, he threatened to shoot and kill me if I told anyone else. So I was too afraid to report him.”*<sup>218</sup>

In April 2019, a Nigerian army officer was convicted of raping a 14-year-old girl in an IDP camp, the first conviction of military personnel committing sexual crimes against displaced women and girls in northern Nigeria. However, this case is only the tip of the iceberg, as women are afraid to talk about rape, let alone report it, for fear of stigma or the wrath of the rapist. Moreover, the Nigerian army itself and other authorities try to downplay or cover up these acts. For example, the medical records confirming the rape of the 14-year-old girl were initially confiscated by the army so that there would be no evidence of the act.<sup>219</sup>

***Sexual harassment*** Along with the two types of violence against women and girls in the camps mentioned above, sexual harassment also occurs in the host communities where women are placed after their release from Boko Haram captivity. The harassment occurs during the performance of daily activities such as water collection and housework and does not avoid girls as young as childhood (8–12 years old). Women are harassed not only by camp staff or police and military officers but also by male IDPs. They also reported that many men in the camps use drugs and narcotics, under the influence of which sexual harassment increases and women do not feel safe in the camps or host communities.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> OHCHR, “About internally displaced persons.”

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> “Northeast Nigeria: addressing impunity for sexual violence amidst a decade-long conflict,” OHCHR, accessed November 5, 2019, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2019/11/northeast-nigeria-addressing-impunity-sexual-violence-amidst-decade-long-conflict>.

<sup>220</sup> Protection Cluster and UNHCR, “Rapid Protection Assessment Report,” 9, 13.

What is more, towards the end of 2022, testimonies emerged and with them the subsequent suspicion of the Nigerian army that for several years it had been performing illegal abortions on women and girls who became pregnant while in Boko Haram captivity. According to Reuters, the army has performed abortions on 10,000 women and girls (using abortion injections or pills), many times without their consent or even their knowledge. Some members of the Nigerian Army testified that they received this order from their superiors to prevent the birth of future insurgent fighters who would one day take up arms against the Nigerian Army.<sup>221</sup> Moreover, abortion is illegal in Nigeria, except in cases where the pregnant woman's life is in danger. The Nigerian military has refuted the report, saying it is “*a body of insults on the Nigerian peoples and culture. Nigerian military personnel have been raised, bred and further trained to protect lives.*”<sup>222</sup>

The Borno State government announced in October 2021 that all government-run IDP camps would be closed by the end of that year. The aim of this move was to improve the living conditions, dignity, and resilience of these people, as well as to reduce dependence on humanitarian aid (as no humanitarian organization is allowed to provide food or any other assistance to these people).<sup>223</sup> As the camps have been closed, the violent treatment of women and girls, including gender-based and sexual violence, has been eliminated (or at least made much more difficult to map), but other pressing issues have emerged. Some 200,000 people have been plunged into greater poverty and suffering, becoming essentially homeless from one day to the next, in precarious conditions and still unable to return to their homes, which may at any moment become the target of a Boko Haram attack.<sup>224</sup>

## **5.2.2 Gender-Based Violence in Military Detention Centre**

The second instance of gender-based violence as a result of Boko Haram's activities is the suspicion of women and girls of collaborating with or sympathising with Boko Haram and

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<sup>221</sup> Andrew Mark Miller, “Nigerian human rights officials to investigate report the military forced abortions on thousands of women,” Fox News, accessed December 16, 2022, [https://www.foxnews.com/world/nigerian-human-rights-official-investigate-report-the-military-forced-abortion-thousands-women?utm\\_source=iterable&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=5773103](https://www.foxnews.com/world/nigerian-human-rights-official-investigate-report-the-military-forced-abortion-thousands-women?utm_source=iterable&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=5773103).

<sup>222</sup> “Nigeria denies mass ‘abortion programme’ of Boko Haram victims,” Aljazeera, accessed December 8, 2022, [https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/12/8/nigeria-denies-mass-abortion-programme-among-victims-of-jihadists?utm\\_source=iterable&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=5713346](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/12/8/nigeria-denies-mass-abortion-programme-among-victims-of-jihadists?utm_source=iterable&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=5713346).

<sup>223</sup> “Nigeria, thousands of displaced people are unable to return to their homes,” Intersos, accessed January 13, 2022, <https://www.intersos.org/en/nigeria-thousands-of-displaced-people-are-unable-to-return-to-their-homes/>.

<sup>224</sup> “Nigeria: Displacement Camp Closures Worsen Suffering,” Human Rights Watch, accessed November 2, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/11/02/nigeria-displacement-camp-closures-worsen-suffering>.

their detention in military detention centres where they are screened and vetted. Here, women and girls often face not only gender-based violence but also brutality by the Nigerian army. Since the early millennium, the Nigerian armed forces have struggled with the problem of how to conduct operations without committing international crimes and human rights violations. The Nigerian army has a record of countless brutal crackdowns on the civilian population, which has often equalled the activities and brutality of insurgent armed groups.<sup>225 226</sup>

Although there have been efforts to reform the armed forces in this regard, including training and mentoring with an emphasis on discipline, there are still abuses of civilians by the Nigerian army as it will take time for this training to fully penetrate the inner workings of the army. For the time being, it is difficult for the military to confront a shadow enemy in the form of Boko Haram, which can have influence and followers in any community.<sup>227</sup> This is also one of the reasons for the brutal behaviour of the armed forces towards civilians – virtually anyone can be a member or sympathiser of Boko Haram and therefore a sworn enemy. The Nigerian military is thus driven by mistrust and doubt about civilians and their affiliations.<sup>228</sup>

In practice, it is common that after the liberation of (not only) women and girls from Boko Haram captivity, they are detained in military detention centres in very harsh to inhumane conditions, often for exceptionally long periods (even several years) without charge – according to the Nigerian security forces, this long period is allegedly necessary for proper vetting of individuals and their possible links to Boko Haram and rehabilitation.<sup>229</sup>

In addition, vetting individuals can be exceedingly difficult because, in the various areas and communities under Boko Haram control, most residents may be affiliated with the insurgents, especially for their own safety. This makes it difficult to determine who is an active member of Boko Haram and who is not. Ultimately, women who have actively supported Boko Haram may be trapped together with those women and girls who have been abducted or captured by the insurgents. Moreover, all screening of suspects is the sole

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<sup>225</sup> Respondent no. 1, interview.

<sup>226</sup> Cohen, Nordås and Nagel, “The Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict (SVAC) dataset.”

<sup>227</sup> John Campbell, “Nigerian Army Abuse of Civilians,” Council on Foreign Relations, accessed March 15, 2017, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/nigerian-army-abuse-civilians>.

<sup>228</sup> Respondent no. 1, interview.

<sup>229</sup> “Boko Haram,” OHCHR, accessed July 1, 2015, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2015/07/boko-haram>.

responsibility of the Nigerian security forces, with no external control, so there is no intervention from above against the brutal conditions in which women and girls, as well as men and young boys, are being held.<sup>230</sup>

As villages and communities were liberated from Boko Haram influence, selection occurred, with residents often forcibly ordered by soldiers to relocate to satellite camps run by the Nigerian army. Suspect populations were directed to military detention centres (mostly men, but a significant proportion were women and children), while the rest were placed in satellite camps. Families and communities were thus forcibly separated.<sup>231</sup> Women and girls who find themselves in detention centres are suspected for several reasons – as wives of Boko Haram fighters; if they have been freed from captivity pregnant, they have additionally been “defiled” and are raising a child of the enemy; and as insurgent sympathisers or direct combatants.<sup>232</sup>

The conditions and treatment in the military detention centres have been brutal since the arrival of the residents. During their screening and vetting, which lasted for several days, civilians were often physically assaulted and even tortured into confessing their collaboration with Boko Haram. Those who survived the screening and were acquitted of the charges were subsequently placed in satellite camps, but conditions were not much different for women and young girls compared to military detention centres.<sup>233</sup>

In addition to the brutal behaviour of Nigerian security forces towards civilians, including women and girls, living conditions in detention centres and satellite camps have been appalling, resulting in the deaths of thousands of civilians. Shortages of drinking water, food, medicine, and medical services were common conditions. According to testimonies, famine prevailed in the camps between 2015 and 2016, with around 15–30 people dying daily from malnutrition or disease, which spread through the camps due to the lack of nutrients.<sup>234</sup> According to some former prisoners, the conditions in the military camps even constitute a crime against humanity. Tens of thousands of people, including children, were held in a small space; there was excrement and urine on the floor of the accommodation

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<sup>230</sup> International Crisis Group, “Nigeria,” 12–13.

<sup>231</sup> “Nigeria: “They betrayed us”: Women who survived boko haram raped, starved and detained in Nigeria,” Amnesty International, 9, accessed May 24, 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr44/8415/2018/en/>.

<sup>232</sup> Amnesty International, “Nigeria: “We dried our tears,” 7.

<sup>233</sup> Amnesty International, “Nigeria: ‘They took our husbands and forced us to be their girlfriends,’” 3.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 4–5.

due to the lack of toilets; people had to survive in confined spaces in stifling heat due to lack of ventilation.<sup>235</sup>

Women and young girls have been subjected to gender-based violence, including physical and sexual violence, in detention centres and satellite camps controlled by the Nigerian military and security forces. Below are the most common types of violence that were commonplace.

***Rape and sexual exploitation*** According to testimonies, the Nigerian army and members of the CJTF (Civilian Joint Task Force – a militant group helping in the fight against Boko Haram) have routinely committed sexual violence against women and young girls (often as children), most often in the form of rape. Both soldiers and CJTF members used threats and force to rape women, and in addition, took advantage of the precarious situation in the camps, including the inhumane living conditions, to coerce women and girls into becoming their “girlfriends”. Again, there were cases of women being forced to have sex with camp guards in exchange for food and water to feed their families and keep them alive.<sup>236</sup> In addition, they were forced to become girlfriends and wives of soldiers to provide for themselves and their families. Fears of physical violence or detention were other reasons why women and girls agreed to the proposals.<sup>237</sup>

*“We need support to get what we need to live. And the soldiers and CJTF know this. So when they see you, if the lady is very young and beautiful, the soldiers and the CJTF will start helping you. So then when they give you help, you know you have to pay for it, so you will go and sleep with them. If you didn’t say ok to them, you wouldn’t get anything. Any benefit available in the camp would be denied to you. They will say you are a Boko Haram woman, a Boko Haram wife. You may be in trouble. They will harass you.”<sup>238</sup>*

Women were all the more vulnerable to sexual violence as a result of being separated from their male family members (husbands, fathers, brothers) who remained in detention centres and could not protect women and girls from abusive situations.<sup>239</sup> <sup>240</sup> The perpetrators of rape and other sexual violence were not only soldiers but also, in the case of military

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<sup>235</sup> Amnesty International UK Press releases, “Nigeria: children brutally targeted in military-Boko Haram conflict becoming 'lost generation' - new report.”

<sup>236</sup> Amnesty International, “Nigeria: ‘They took our husbands and forced us to be their girlfriends’,” 4.

<sup>237</sup> Amnesty International, “Nigeria: “They betrayed us,” 55.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>239</sup> Amnesty International, “Nigeria: ‘They took our husbands and forced us to be their girlfriends’,” 4.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*

detention centres, men who were held there and suspected of collaboration and sympathy with Boko Haram.<sup>241</sup>

***Physical violence and torture*** Several women reported that their stay in military detention centres included physical violence and torture during the screening of individuals and the investigation of their links to Boko Haram. Although these were women and girls who had been abducted and held captive against their will by Boko Haram, they were still tied up and subsequently physically assaulted and beaten by the Nigerian military.<sup>242</sup>

Although physical violence was practised against men and boys, there were also cases where it was directed against women and girls. Screening and vetting of persons violated all basic human rights. Victims were beaten until unconscious and tortured to confess to collaborating with Boko Haram, even though they were innocent. Common torture practices practised by the Nigerian army included beating, shooting, hanging from metal bars, beating with electric batons, and nail and teeth extractions. Many detainees have died as a result of these practices.<sup>243</sup> Moreover, the Nigerian army, which ran the detention facilities, prided itself on its lack of transparency and it was long unknown what was happening in the barracks and what practices the army was using.<sup>244</sup>

*“The soldiers started beating us saying we are Boko Haram wives. When it [the beating] started, one [soldier] will come and beat us and then leave, then another will beat us and leave. We were beaten with a stick and a cane. All parts of our bodies were hit including our heads.”*<sup>245</sup>

### **5.3 Implications for Women in Nigeria**

This subchapter examines the effects that the Boko Haram insurgency and its gender-based violence have had on women and girls in northeastern Nigeria from several perspectives, both directly and indirectly. The first section analyses how Boko Haram has affected the social status of women and girls, including their basic human rights and their respect or violation, or whether and, if so, how the overall attitude of Nigerian society towards

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<sup>241</sup> Amnesty International, “Nigeria: “We dried our tears,” 50.

<sup>242</sup> Amnesty International, “Nigeria: “They betrayed us,” 70.

<sup>243</sup> “Nigeria: Stars on their shoulders: Blood on their hands: War crimes committed by the Nigerian military,” Amnesty International, 89–90, accessed June 3, 2015, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr44/1657/2015/en/>.

<sup>244</sup> Amnesty International, “Nigeria: “We dried our tears,” 39.

<sup>245</sup> Amnesty International, “Nigeria: “They betrayed us,” 70.

women affected by Boko Haram has changed. The second part looks at their physical and mental health, both of which have suffered as a result of insurgent attacks on villages and civilian communities, the abduction of women and girls and their eventual capture. However, women and girls who have not come into direct contact with Boko Haram, but have been placed in IDP camps, for example, where they have been victims of violence by armed forces or guards, also suffer from health problems.

The third part then discusses the approach of the Nigerian authorities to this issue and whether any progress or improvement has been made in this area. By analysing these aspects of the lives of women and girls in northeastern Nigeria, it is possible to better map and understand not only how gender-based violence has changed in the country under Boko Haram (as in the previous two sections of this chapter), but also what impact these changes have had and how they have affected the lives of the population.

### **5.3.1 Status of Women in Society**

Boko Haram and its insurgent activities have affected the lives of millions of women and young girls in Nigeria, whether in terms of basic human rights, social status or health. The fate of these women and girls varies depending on whether they have been abducted and captured by Boko Haram, or, for example, forced to leave their homes for security reasons and placed in host communities or camps for internally displaced persons. One of the main and most visible areas in which women have been affected is their position in Nigerian society, in many ways.

***Consolidation of patriarchy*** In terms of the very position of women in society, Boko Haram's activities have strengthened and helped to maintain patriarchy in the country. Women lack political power, and Boko Haram has also helped to perceive women as the inferior sex and to undervalue the gender component by objectifying women themselves as sexual targets or warriors. A woman has meaning to Boko Haram only as a child-bearer, a child-raiser or as a home-maker (in better cases). In worse cases (for example, if a woman refuses to submit and convert to Islam or marry a Boko Haram member),



she serves as a sex slave or is deployed as a suicide bomber. Women thus continue to be the greatest sufferers of armed conflict, whether before, during or after it.<sup>246 247</sup>

**Increased vulnerability** Another consequence of the Boko Haram insurgency is the increased vulnerability of women and young girls, which is linked, for example, to an increase in gender-based violence, particularly sexual violence. Women in general represent a vulnerable target during the conflict, whose impact will further cripple entire communities and society.<sup>248</sup> Through the abduction of women and girls, Boko Haram has tested and proven this tactic to be highly advantageous for several reasons – i) women's vulnerability increases with conflict, and abductions and attacks on women have not been a greater effort for the group; ii) by targeting their attacks on women, the combatants were able to disrupt entire communities, including families themselves, with men often blamed for failing to protect female members of their families; iii) kidnapping spread fear among the population and reduced the risk of resistance.<sup>249 250</sup>

Moreover, the increased gender-based violence was not just an issue of women and girls who were abducted and captured by Boko Haram. The increased vulnerability was exploited by those who were instead supposed to protect the affected women and girls – members of the Nigerian military, police officers, commanders and staff of camps for internally displaced persons, and aid workers. In addition, some of the women and girls are once again held captive by the Nigerian army after being freed from Boko Haram captivity, this time facing brutal interrogations and being forced to confess their collaboration or sympathy for the insurgents under torture or death threats.<sup>251</sup>

**Human rights violations** During the armed conflict in Nigeria, a number of fundamental human rights violations have been committed against women, including the most important one – the right to life. Many women and young girls have lost their lives, firstly, in Boko Haram attacks on their communities or villages and, secondly, in Boko Haram captivity, for example, when women and girls resisted and refused to convert to Islam or to marry

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<sup>246</sup> Olugbenga Oke-Samuel and Simon Ayooluwa St. Emmanuel, “Boko Haram Insurgency and its Implications on the Rights of the Female Gender in Nigeria,” *Agora International Journal of Juridical Sciences* 11, no. 1 (October 2017): 43, <https://doi.org/10.15837/aijjs.v11i1.3035>.

<sup>247</sup> Oluwaniyi, “Why are women victims or perpetrators in Nigeria’s Boko Haram?” 463–464.

<sup>248</sup> Respondent no. 1, interview.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

<sup>250</sup> Amnesty International, “Nigeria: Boko Haram brutality against women and girls needs urgent response.”

<sup>251</sup> OHCHR, “Boko Haram.”

a Boko Haram fighter. Moreover, as a result of the increasing feminisation of Boko Haram terror, young girls, often in their childhood, have lost their lives when used as suicide bombers. Other violations of the rights of women and girls by Boko Haram have occurred through abduction, sexual violence and rape, forced marriage, forced pregnancy, sexual slavery and prostitution, violating, for example, the right to the inviolability of the person and his or her privacy or the right to the dignity of the person. The forced conversion of Christian girls to Islam also violated the right to thought and religion.<sup>252</sup>

Boko Haram's insurgent activities have also had an impact on the human rights of women and girls in the economic, social and cultural spheres. In the affected areas, social services, including hospitals, schools and government buildings, have been disrupted due to the conflict. Most young girls in northeastern Nigeria do not attend educational institutions due to fear of potential abduction, rape or the ban on Western education imposed by Boko Haram. Moreover, most schools have been destroyed or closed.<sup>253</sup>

In addition to education, women have been denied the right to work. Many women in the affected areas in the northeast of the country, which is predominantly agrarian, made a living from farming. However, hundreds of thousands of women were forced to leave their homes to escape attack, abduction or rape, losing their livelihoods and income and quickly deepening poverty among the population. In turn, the shops of women who made their living by trading were looted and destroyed.<sup>254</sup>

***Social stigma*** Social stigma prevails for women and girls who have been captured by Boko Haram and subsequently released or freed. For these girls, there is often no distinction between whether they were abducted or joined the insurgents voluntarily, whether they were a wife or a slave, a victim or a supporter. This stigma is compounded if women in captivity have become pregnant or have already given birth to a child by a Boko Haram fighter, and there is nothing they can do to conceal this fact. Upon return, they and their children are perceived by their families and communities as “polluted” and spreading “bad blood.”<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> Oke-Samuel and St. Emmanuel, “Boko Haram Insurgency and its Implications on the Rights of the Female Gender in Nigeria,” 44, 46.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>255</sup> International Crisis Group, “Nigeria,” 15.

A then 19-year-old girl became pregnant while in captivity by a Boko Haram member, whom she was forced to marry. At an advanced stage of her pregnancy, she managed to escape from captivity and return to her village, which was reluctant to accept her. She said: *“People in this village are rejecting me because of this pregnancy. I know some will be happy to have me dead. Many people are even saying I should still go for an abortion. They have threatened to kill me and the baby.”*<sup>256</sup>

This in turn leads to a strong sense of alienation and social isolation among women who have survived Boko Haram captivity and returned to their homes.<sup>257</sup> These women may be temporarily placed in camps for internally displaced persons or host communities, but even here they are discriminated against and segregated. In these facilities, they are labelled as Boko Haram wives and socially isolated.<sup>258</sup> Moreover, in the case of women who have worked in Boko Haram out of their own conviction, this rejection by the surrounding population makes rehabilitation and reintegration processes difficult or impossible and may in turn contribute to re-radicalisation and recidivism.<sup>259</sup> It is for this reason that (mainly non-governmental) organizations are trying to reintegrate former wives and their children into society. Community centres are being set up where wives of captured insurgents or widows of Boko Haram fighters learn new skills to earn money and provide a new life for themselves and their children.<sup>260</sup>

### 5.3.2 Health Problems

***Gynaecological problems*** Many women and girls who were either attacked and raped by Boko Haram fighters in their communities, or those who were abducted and sexually abused in captivity, have admitted that even months or years later they still suffer from gynaecological problems as a result of sexual violence. They have likely been infected by Boko Haram members with sexually transmitted diseases or other deadly sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS. Most of these women and girls do not report these

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<sup>256</sup> “Freedom brings stigma and fresh fears for Boko Haram 'wives',” UNHCR, accessed September 1, 2015, <https://data.unhcr.org/fr/news/11545>.

<sup>257</sup> Oluwaniyi, “Why are women victims or perpetrators in Nigeria’s Boko Haram?” 464.

<sup>258</sup> International Crisis Group, “Nigeria,” 15.

<sup>259</sup> Oluwaniyi, “Why are women victims or perpetrators in Nigeria’s Boko Haram?” 464.

<sup>260</sup> Chika Oduah, “Boko Haram Wives Seek New Start as They Struggle with Stigma,” Voa News, accessed July 26, 2018, <https://www.voanews.com/a/boko-haram-wives/4500572.html>.

health problems due to inadequate medical care and, above all, out of fear and stigma, or only at a very advanced stage of the disease.<sup>261</sup>

Rape victims have reported that they prefer to suffer in silence with health difficulties, partly because of fear of stigmatization, but also because they do not know who to turn to with difficulties. In addition, they lack the finances to secure adequate medical care. In the case of the Chibok abducted students, which was a highly publicized abduction and received worldwide attention, the girls were examined by a doctor and given medical tests, but no one informed them what tests were being done and what their health status was, or how to access care after the rape or treatment of sexually transmitted diseases.<sup>262</sup>

Some of the women and girls have become pregnant as a result of insurgent attacks or captivity, but often suffer from health problems and lack access to medical care. One girl testified: *“Then, as a virgin – I had never had anything to do with a man before – these people took me and just used me. I was raped over and over during that time. I had so much pain, that I did not know when I was pregnant. By then, I had gotten used to the pain.”*<sup>263</sup>

Moreover, in 2022, there was testimony that since at least 2013, the Nigerian military had been conducting a systematic abortion programme in northeastern Nigeria, terminating at least 10,000 pregnancies of girls who became pregnant as a result of rape by Boko Haram insurgents. According to testimonies, the girls were forced to have abortions and, if they refused, were beaten or drugged to comply. Many of the abortions were allegedly carried out without the women's consent, where they were given abortion pills masquerading as disease-fighting drugs. The Nigerian military has denied all allegations, but the case will be investigated by the United Nations and other human rights commissions.<sup>264</sup>

***Mental Disorders*** To the same extent as gynaecological problems, affected women and girls manifest mental disorders. Most Boko Haram victims suffer from shock, anxiety, depression, disorders or denial, which can lead to suicide.<sup>265</sup> Many girls and women

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<sup>261</sup> Oluwaniyi, “Why are women victims or perpetrators in Nigeria’s Boko Haram?” 464.

<sup>262</sup> “I Will Never Go Back to School”: The Impact of Attacks on Education for Nigerian Women and Girls – Summary,” Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, 53, accessed October 11, 2018, <https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/i-will-never-go-back-school-impact-attacks-education-nigerian-women-and-girls-summary>.

<sup>263</sup> Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, “I Will Never Go Back to School,” 53.

<sup>264</sup> Aljazeera, “Nigeria denies mass ‘abortion programme’ of Boko Haram victims.”

<sup>265</sup> Oluwaniyi, “Why are women victims or perpetrators in Nigeria’s Boko Haram?” 464.

described that psychological problems stemming from their experience in Boko Haram captivity continue to prevent them from living normal lives and impact all areas of their lives. In the case of female students who have been attacked at school and eventually abducted, there is nervousness and fear of continuing to attend school, with some choosing not to return to school. Many continue to experience nightmares, anxiety, inability to concentrate and other symptoms associated with trauma for several years after the abduction.<sup>266</sup>

As in the previous case, women and girls with mental health problems often have no one to turn to and there is a lack of medical facilities or trained personnel in the country, even in a normal situation without Boko Haram victims with mental health problems. The effects of trauma and mental illness in survivors thus remain untreated, exacerbating the effects of Boko Haram not only on women and girls but on society as a whole.<sup>267</sup> Some of the few victims who received at least some help were freed female students from Chibok. The help, however, was only in the form of counselling received through preaching from the Bible, which had little or no effect. Most victims, however, do not receive any psychological support, nor do they know where to turn to with their problems.<sup>268</sup>

The United Nations and non-governmental humanitarian organizations are playing a particularly important role in this issue and are trying to facilitate access to medical care and psychosocial support by opening new medical centres in northeastern Nigeria and providing training for medical personnel. Even so, the situation in the country is dire and in need of intervention and cooperation, especially from the Nigerian government.<sup>269</sup>

### **5.3.3 Reaction of the authorities**

The issue of gender-based violence and sexual violence against Nigerian women and girls, both by the Boko Haram insurgency as well as by the armed forces and police officers, appears to have long been overlooked and inadequately addressed by the Nigerian authorities and especially the government. Sexual violence related to the conflict appears to have been normalised by government security agencies and thus has a convenient space

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<sup>266</sup> Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, “I Will Never Go Back to School,” 51.

<sup>267</sup> Adewale Olusola Adeboye, “Addressing the Boko Haram-Induced Mental Health Burden in Nigeria,” *Health and Human Rights* 23, no. 1 (2021): 72, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8233029/>.

<sup>268</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Those Terrible Weeks in Their Camp,” 43–44.

<sup>269</sup> “Sexual Violence in Conflict – Nigeria,” United Nations, <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/countries/nigeria/>.

to continue to proliferate due to the Nigerian government's inaction and lack of political will.<sup>270</sup>

Moreover, the Nigerian government is often accused of neglecting the basic human rights of women and girls and of being tolerant of violations and abuses of these rights. Moreover, it is indifferent to the socio-economic conditions of women and girls in the northeast of Nigeria who, as a result of Boko Haram insurgent activities, have lost their homes and livelihoods or have been abducted and held captive. These women are consequently vulnerable and susceptible to extortion and sexual coercion, where they are forced to have sexual intercourse in exchange for essential commodities such as food.<sup>271</sup>

The Nigerian government has also received several reports on the situation in the country and related recommendations from non-governmental humanitarian organizations, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, which have long been working in the country to map gender-based violence against women and girls in the country during the conflict. Amnesty International Nigeria submitted a comprehensive report in 2018 on the situation in IDP camps, where women and girls face sexual abuse by those who are supposed to protect them, as well as appalling living conditions. Although the Nigerian government has promised to carry out its own investigation, the NGOs have received no further response.<sup>272 273</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> Njoku and Akintayo, "Sex for survival," 296–297.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, 298.

<sup>272</sup> Respondent no. 1, interview.

<sup>273</sup> "Violence against Women Pervasive in Nigeria," Human Rights Watch, accessed March 14, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/03/14/violence-against-women-pervasive-nigeria>.

## **6 Discussion of Empirical Findings**

The previous chapter provided empirical evidence on gender-based violence during the armed conflict by the Boko Haram insurgent group against women and girls in northeastern Nigeria, whether as direct or indirect perpetrators. An important part of this was to analyse the impact of this war tactic on the lives of the affected women and girls from several perspectives, thereby answering both research questions posed and interpreted in this chapter. It aims to summarise the given findings and provide an interpretation and explanation of them. Where unexpected results are found, this chapter aims to provide a reasonable explanation for their occurrence.

### **6.1 Summary and Interpretation of Findings**

Gender-based violence against women and girls during a war is a global phenomenon that has been present for hundreds of years. One of its current representatives is the Nigerian insurgent group Boko Haram, which has adopted a specific attitude towards women in its rhetoric and actions since its inception in 2002.<sup>274</sup> Whether, for example, by attempting to recruit future female fighters or potential wives for its members, through promises of better living and social conditions, which are denied to them by Nigeria's patriarchal society.

A change came in 2009 when Boko Haram, in response to the capture and execution of its leader Muhammad Yusuf, became radicalised and adopted terrorist attacks as its tactic. It also began to target civilian targets and gradually turned to kidnap women and girls, both from communities and villages in northeastern Nigeria and educational institutions.<sup>275</sup> This tactic was initially motivated by the exchange of captured girls for Boko Haram members and their families who had been captured by the Nigerian army. Gradually, however, the insurgents became more aware of the “usefulness” of women in their resistance activities and gradually began to broaden the range of attacks and their motives.

The motive for abducting women and girls gradually began to morph into the spread of Islam and the eradication of Western-style living, with attacks beginning to target predominantly Christian educational institutions and the capture of Christian female students attending Western-style government schools (Muslim female students were also abducted, but these were subsequently largely released or given far more rights and

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<sup>274</sup> International Crisis Group, “Nigeria,” 1.

<sup>275</sup> Falode, “The Nature of Nigeria’s Boko Haram War, 2010-2015,” 43–44.

opportunities in captivity than Christian women).<sup>276</sup> The largest abduction to date was the kidnapping of 276 predominantly Christian female students from a school in Chibok in northeastern Nigeria, dozens of whom are still held captive to this day.<sup>277</sup> This abduction was exceptional not only in its scale (until then it had been more like units, at most dozens, abducted in single attacks), but also that Muslim students were abducted – almost for the first time there was no discrimination against religion and the abducted girls were not so much concerned about their faith.<sup>278</sup> It is also likely that the relative ease with which the kidnapping was carried out gave Boko Haram fighters the motivation for future attacks, which have since multiplied in intensity.

However, it cannot be said with certainty that gender-based violence as a weapon of war has become the main tactic of Boko Haram. The insurgents were aware of the benefits of abducting women and girls and the impact on communities and Nigerian society as a whole, but it cannot be said with certainty that attacks on individual villages and communities to abduct women and girls were planned. Rather, they were raids to loot and obtain food or essential resources, and women and young girls were abducted on that occasion. However, Boko Haram could not have mapped every village and planned what and how many girls would be abducted.<sup>279</sup>

In addition to spreading Islam, the abducted women and girls also began to serve the “higher values” of Boko Haram and became useful to the group. Those girls who submitted to Boko Haram (for example, by being obedient and converting to Islam) were subsequently married off to Boko Haram members in order to ensure the continuation of the group by conceiving a child. Moreover, by marrying a Boko Haram fighter, they increased their husband's social status and gained protection for themselves from sexual violence from other Boko Haram members (unless they were abused by their own husbands).<sup>280</sup> Those girls who refused to comply most often became sex slaves and were regularly raped and physically assaulted. The youngest girls, often still in their teens, who

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<sup>276</sup> Maiangwa and Uzodike, “The Changing Dynamics of Boko Haram Terrorism.”

<sup>277</sup> Oriola, “Unwilling Cocoons,” 103.

<sup>278</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Those Terrible Weeks in Their Camp,” 22–23.

<sup>279</sup> Respondent no. 1, interview.

<sup>280</sup> International Crisis Group, “Nigeria,” 6.



were too young to marry or conceive a child and thus not of sufficient value to Boko Haram, were often used as decoys in battles or as suicide bombers.<sup>281</sup>

By abducting women and girls, Boko Haram not only achieved the gains just described, but also resulted in the decline of a society in which fear began to spread, further attacks reduced its ability to resist, and men were held accountable for failing to protect the women in their families. In addition, distrust in the state authorities and security forces, which were unable to confront the terrorist organization and ensure the safety of the Nigerian population, also spread through society.<sup>282</sup>

Boko Haram is not only the direct perpetrator, but through its insurgent activities and attacks on the civilian population, it has caused the displacement of millions of people who have been temporarily placed in IDP camps, where women and girls have had to face further gender-based violence from those who were supposed to protect them (military, police officers, camp staff, aid workers). Boko Haram has thus managed to increase the level of this type of violence in the country through no fault of its own.<sup>283</sup>

Women and girls who have been affected in any way by Boko Haram insurgent activities (whether they have been abducted and held captive or forced to leave their homes and placed in host communities or IDP camps due to the imminent danger and potential attacks) continue to suffer health and mental health problems for years afterwards. The health problems otherwise stem from brutal physical treatment, whether by Boko Haram or, for example, the Nigerian army in military detention centres<sup>284</sup> (where women and girls were placed after their release from captivity on suspicion of collaboration with Boko Haram), but above all from sexual violence, where women and young girls were subjected to repeated rape, sexual torture and slavery, and, in the case of IDP camps, the exchange of sex for essential commodities.<sup>285</sup> Many of them also did not seek medical care, due to fear, social stigma, lack of medical care or not knowing where to turn for health problems. The same is the case with suffocation problems, where girls show signs of

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<sup>281</sup> Pearson, "Wilayat Shahidat," 45.

<sup>282</sup> Amnesty International, "Nigeria: Boko Haram brutality against women and girls needs urgent response."

<sup>283</sup> UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency, "Nigeria."

<sup>284</sup> Amnesty International, "Nigeria: 'They took our husbands and forced us to be their girlfriends'," 3.

<sup>285</sup> Protection Cluster and UNHCR, "Rapid Protection Assessment Report," 11.

having experienced trauma, including depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, fear and insomnia.<sup>286</sup>

## 6.2 Answering Research Questions

The first research question in this thesis on gender-based violence as a weapon of war against women and girls in Nigeria was “*To what extent has Boko Haram influenced the level of gender-based violence in Nigeria?*” Although gender-based violence was already occurring before the emergence of Boko Haram in the second half of the 20th century, when the country was plagued by civil wars and military coups, the significance of Boko Haram and its contribution to this type of violence is significant.<sup>287</sup> Firstly, Boko Haram's activities have clearly increased the frequency of gender-based violence in the country, particularly in northeastern Nigeria, most often in the form of abductions of women and girls in order to weaken society while securing their own future (through forced marriages to Boko Haram members and the conception of children) and establishing their own order (through the forced conversion of abducted girls to Islam and the practice of Sharia law in Boko Haram-controlled areas).<sup>288</sup>

Thousands of women and girls have been captured and millions have had to flee their homes from Boko Haram and have been placed in host communities or IDP camps, where they also face additional gender-based violence from armed forces and camp staff that would not have been on such a scale without Boko Haram.<sup>289</sup> All this has further led to a deterioration in the security situation in the country and the status and safety of women and girls (moreover, in a country where the female gender is seen as inferior and its rights and safety are not a priority for the ruling elite).

Moreover, since its radicalisation in 2009, Boko Haram has begun to draw inspiration and inclination from the jihadism seen in Al-Qaeda or the Islamic State and has adopted their practices against women and girls, which it has begun to apply in Nigeria. Boko Haram was the first in Nigeria to use female suicide bombers, often Christian girls of child-bearing age who were too young to marry or become pregnant and therefore of no “use” to

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<sup>286</sup> Oluwaniyi, “Why are women victims or perpetrators in Nigeria’s Boko Haram?” 464.

<sup>287</sup> Elkaim, “Boko Haram,” 3.

<sup>288</sup> Cohen, Nordås and Nagel, “The Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict (SVAC) dataset.”

<sup>289</sup> UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency, “Nigeria.”

Boko Haram.<sup>290</sup> Other practices introduced by Boko Haram included sexual torture, by which time rape was most commonly committed by insurgent groups or the Nigerian army. The second research question in this thesis was “*What are the implications of Boko Haram's tactics of gender-based violence for women and their status in Nigeria?*” Boko Haram's activities in the country supported even more patriarchy, although it initially opposed it, and Boko Haram's recruitment of female members was precisely based on opposition to patriarchy.<sup>291</sup> The group has helped to perceive women as the inferior sex and objectified women as mere combatants or sexual targets. Women and girls in Nigeria have also become more vulnerable as a result of the increase in gender-based violence directed against them. The conflict in the country has had an impact on their education, with many parents reluctant to send their daughters to school for fear of being targeted by Boko Haram. Many educational institutions have also been destroyed or closed and are out of operation.<sup>292</sup> This has resulted in an increase in early marriages, as girls are not “held back” by schooling and parents marry them off at a young age.

In conclusion, the tactic of gender-based violence against women and girls and its use as a weapon of war has been successful for Boko Haram. The group has succeeded in gradually disintegrating the population morally, reducing its ability to resist and spreading fear. At the same time, this conflict has highlighted the government and military forces that, with exceptions (such as between 2015–2017),<sup>293</sup> are unable to effectively counter Boko Haram and protect the Nigerian population. The overall security situation in the country, particularly in the northeast where Boko Haram operates, has deteriorated, including for women and girls, who are targeted by Boko Haram. However, it is impossible to say objectively whether this was the intention from the outset. Rather, the insurgents have had success in kidnapping female students from Chibok, and this has proven to be an effective approach.<sup>294</sup>

However, it cannot be said that Boko Haram has a monopoly on violence against women and girls in Nigeria. Other armed insurgent groups are operating in the country and perpetrating gender-based violence. In addition, the Nigerian army and armed forces have

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<sup>290</sup> Pearson, “Wilayat Shahidat,” 45.

<sup>291</sup> Oluwaniyi, “Why are women victims or perpetrators in Nigeria’s Boko Haram?” 463–464.

<sup>292</sup> Amnesty International, “Nigeria: Seven years since Chibok, the government fails to protect children.”

<sup>293</sup> Campbell, “Nigeria Retakes Territory from Boko Haram.”

<sup>294</sup> Respondent no. 1, interview.

long been significant perpetrators of violence and have been trying to reform the state, but these efforts have not yet yielded the desired results.<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>295</sup> Respondent no. 1, interview.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis focused on gender-based violence as a weapon of war, targeting women and girls in northeastern Nigeria by Boko Haram. Using a combination of strategic rape theory and feminist theory, it demonstrated that gender-based violence perpetrated by Boko Haram in the ongoing conflict in the northeast of Nigeria has both a strategic objective but is also subject to male supremacy in Nigerian society. In terms of the strategic objective, women and girls have many meanings for Boko Haram.

First, the group uses them to fight against the Nigerian army and armed forces, for example, as naval or suicide bombers, as women and young girls arouse less suspicion among the military than men and are therefore easier to evade security checks and attack civilian targets. Second, for Boko Haram, women mean ensuring the continuation of the organization, through forced marriages to Boko Haram members and subsequent pregnancies, where the continuation of the line is ensured. Thirdly, through the abduction of women and girls and their holding in captivity, these tactics have a major moral impact on the population, spreading fear among them, reducing their ability to resist and, moreover, encouraging distrust of state institutions, which are mostly ineffective in the fight against the insurgency and do little to protect their populations.

However, Boko Haram's gender-based violence cannot be explained by the strategic rape theory alone. It is also due to the militants' natural desire to dominate women (as feminist theory suggests), which stems from Nigeria's patriarchal society where the female gender is treated as secondary and is often the target of discrimination or segregation. Boko Haram also often objectifies women as mere sex objects or combatants.

The thesis first focused on Boko Haram as a direct perpetrator of gender-based violence and sexual violence against women and girls. Boko Haram most visibly resorted to these tactics after its radicalisation in 2009, initially targeting the abduction and subsequent capture of women and girls. Encouraged by the surprising successes of these tactics (particularly after the abduction of 276 female students from a government school in Chibok), the group made room for these tactics and began to focus on abducting women and girls during attacks on civilian targets and civilians, which had many benefits for them (as discussed above). This thesis has treated each attack chronologically to best and most faithfully capture the evolution of this tactic. The same was used to examine the practice of

gender-based violence against captive girls, capturing Boko Haram's increasing brutality towards captives. From forced conversions to Islam, it gradually progressed to forced marriages and pregnancies, to sexual slavery and the use of girls (often in their childhood) as combatants or suicide bombers.

The thesis then moved on to an analysis of Boko Haram as an indirect perpetrator of gender-based violence, through the insurgents having caused a humanitarian crisis in the country that has forced up to three million to flee their homes and find new refuge in host communities or camps for internally displaced persons. Here, however, women and girls have most often had to face sexual violence at the hands of police officers, military personnel, aid workers and camp staff, who have forced them through blackmail to have sexual intercourse in exchange for food or medicine, which was scarce in the miserable living conditions. In doing so, Boko Haram caused a further increase in violence against women and girls in northeastern Nigeria, although it was not the direct perpetrator.

The last part of the thesis looked at the impact of gender-based violence on women and girls and their lives from several perspectives – status in society, physical and mental health, plus how the Nigerian authorities, led by the Nigerian government, approach the whole issue. In terms of the status of women and girls in society, a patriarchal set-up has been entrenched, whereby Boko Haram objectifies women as combatants or sex objects and treats them only as an inferior and secondary gender. Girls face a social stigma of being labelled as “Boko Haram wives” after release from captivity or liberation and are ostracised from their communities because of their “taint”.

Women and girls also experience violations and denial of all their human rights, including the right to life, education, the integrity of their person and others. Many girls' schooling has also been affected due to the closure or destruction of schools, and their parents are afraid to allow their daughters to attend school for fear of potential abduction by Boko Haram. Health and mental health problems are also integral, with many girls afraid to report them for fear of stigma or medical care being unavailable in the area. Women who have experienced sexual violence in captivity or during attacks often have gynaecological problems for months afterwards, may have contracted sexually transmitted diseases or become pregnant as a result of rape. Many also experience mental health problems related to the trauma they have experienced, including anxiety, depression, nightmares and sleep deprivation, or suicidal thoughts.

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# **Master's Thesis Summary**

## **Motivation**

The master's thesis will examine the status and role of women and girls during armed conflicts. This issue will be specifically demonstrated in the case of the terrorist organization Boko Haram, operating mainly in northeastern Nigeria. The author chose this topic for her master's thesis because of her feminist beliefs and also because of the need to spread awareness about the role of women and girls in patriarchal societies, which are on top of everything else torn by armed conflicts or wars, where women and girls are often used and abused for “higher purposes” just because of their gender.

The master's thesis will deal with the topic of sexual violence in Nigeria, specifically focusing on the terrorist organization Boko Haram that in recent years has adopted (sexual) violence against women and girls as its semi-official tactic. The task of the thesis will be to find out what part Boko Haram plays in sexual violence against women and girls and to what extent it contributes to the overall level of sexual violence in Nigeria. Moreover, this topic still remains a research gap that has received little academic research attention. The thesis, therefore, aims to draw attention to this issue and encourage further studies.

The thesis will first examine the status of women in patriarchal Nigeria before the emergence and operation of Boko Haram, particularly concerning the status of women in Nigerian society, and men's behaviour towards women, including sexual and domestic violence. The thesis will then focus on the level of sexual violence after the emergence of Boko Haram, considering two aspects: Boko Haram as a direct perpetrator and as an indirect perpetrator. This is because the terrorist organization's operations have caused an economic crisis throughout the country and a shortage of food and basic necessities in areas where Boko Haram operates. This is often exploited by the guards in the refugee camps or even by aid workers, who force women and girls to have sex in exchange for supplies of food and medical supplies. As part of this thesis, the following research question was posed: To what extent has the terrorist organization Boko Haram influenced the level of sexual violence in Nigeria?

## **Literature Review**

The most frequently cited literature used in the thesis will include Bastick, Grimm, and Kunz (2007), who provide an introduction to sexual violence during armed conflict,

introduce basic terminology, and present conflicts involving sexual violence around the world. The authors are followed by Isikozlu and Millard (2010), who also focus on specific cases of sexual violence during the armed conflict but focus more on particular aspects of it (rape, sexual slavery, forced marriage). In contrast, in the case of sexual violence during armed conflict, Bigio and Vogelstein (2017) focus on perpetrators' motives and what they want to achieve through violence against women and girls. The publications mentioned allow the thesis to look into the issue from a theoretical level while understanding the motives of the perpetrators (in this case, terrorist and insurgent organizations and groups).

From a practical perspective, Ssenyonjo (2007) looks at the rights and status of women and girls in Africa, often in patriarchal societies, and provides an opportunity to compare the treatment of women across African states, among which Nigeria is mentioned. It thus provides the thesis with a background for the theoretical part focusing on the status of and access to women in Nigeria. Subsequent authors, including Elkaim (2012), have already looked specifically at Boko Haram, its emergence, and its objectives. In addition, Sambe (2016) also focuses on the specific targets of Boko Haram attacks, which include women and girls, Christians, as well as some Muslims who, according to members of the terrorist organization, do not practice their faith “properly”, and media institutions.

Oriola (2017) then focuses directly on Boko Haram's treatment of women and girls, which covers a range of aspects, from sexual violence (rape, torture, sexual slavery, forced marriages to Boko Haram members) to the sacrifice of women as suicide bombers. Bloom and Matfess (2016) then refer to Boko Haram's use of women as symbols and swords – on the one hand, women are needed by the organization as wives of fighters and mothers of new members, while at the same time, they are used directly in the struggles against the Nigerian government. These authors and their publications allow the thesis to explore the side effects of Boko Haram's treatment of women beyond sexual violence. Njoku and Akintayo (2021), like the previous authors, focus on northeastern Nigeria, where Boko Haram operates, but in turn focus on other perpetrators of sexual violence against women and girls – namely, the guards in refugee camps and aid workers who are in the area because of Nigeria's war with Boko Haram, but they abuse their position and also commit sexual violence in exchange for aid and supplies of food and medical supplies. The authors from the International Crisis Group (2016) then look at how the lives of women and young

girls in Nigeria have changed since the terrorist organization Boko Haram has been operating in the country and thus provide a valuable comparison.

### **Theoretical Framework**

As a theoretical approach was chosen the strategic rape theory representing a theoretical concept based on Feminist Security Studies and the liberal feminist theory. The theory was first described by an American literary scholar Jonathan Gottschall in 2004, its current exponents include Jennifer Leaning, Tara Gingerich and Marion Pratt. The theory argues that sexual violence in armed conflicts is used to achieve strategic objectives for the following reasons: i) it creates a sense of fear and restricts freedom of movement and economic activity in the civilian population; ii) it demoralizes the population and reduces their will to resist; iii) it divides communities by breaking family and community ties and “polluting” the bloodline. In addition, Jonathan Gottschall also provides the perspective of perpetrators for whom rape may represent a reward or spoils of war, boost morale (through the provision of sexual intercourse to soldiers) or serve as punishment for a “rebellious” population.

Of all the theoretical approaches considered, this one best captured the situation in Nigeria where women and girls are subjected to sexual violence primarily because of their gender and also serves as a tool to demoralize the Nigerian population and break their resistance.

### **Methodology**

The method chosen for authoring the thesis was an exploratory case study, which combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research. This method is characterized by the ability to study the phenomenon in greater levels of depth, which is made possible by the collection and analysis of data within the context of the phenomenon, the ability to capture the complexities of real-life situations, and the integration of qualitative and quantitative data within data analysis. The focus of the exploratory case study is on qualitative data, which is complemented by quantitative data, which are used to test or confirm qualitative findings. Thus, the exploratory case study allows to focus on the narrow topic of sexual violence in Nigeria, which is not currently a prolific target of scholarly research and there are still unanswered research gaps, including how the level of sexual violence in Nigeria has changed under Boko Haram in the country. Therefore, a combination of qualitative and quantitative research that allows for the analysis of larger amounts of data is appropriate to answer the research question.

The thesis will draw on primary and secondary sources. Primary sources will be represented mainly by datasets on sexual violence in Nigeria, for further analysis and elaboration by the author of the thesis, including the dataset Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict Data Project, statistics and charts published by Statista, or resolutions and declarations issued by the United Nations. Secondary sources will be represented by books and academic articles related to the topic. Internet resources will also be used to a lesser extent, especially the websites of think tanks and NGOs, as well as news websites, including Council on Foreign Relations, Aljazeera Centre for Studies and Amnesty International. Audio-visual documentaries and news reports will also be used as sources, providing testimonies from the Nigerian population about sexual violence in the country.

The specific methods of data collection that will be used in the thesis are observation and study of both primary and secondary sources. In addition, a part of the research will be to try to connect with staff from the United Nations and Amnesty International via an e-mail conversation and thus obtain additional valuable data and testimonies about sexual violence in Nigeria. While selecting and subsequent processing data, it will be ensured that sources come from as wide a range as possible in order, firstly, to create a rich collection of sources and data and, secondly, to ensure that the sources come from different sources to maintain as much objectivity as possible.

For the data analysis, a thematic analysis will be used. This form of analysis represents the most common method when using an exploratory case study as a methodological approach since it allows a researcher to closely examine the data and identify patterns in meaning. Both approaches are common for thematic analysis – inductive and deductive, but the thesis will follow the inductive approach to derive themes and generate hypotheses.

The strategic rape theory, which is based on Feminist Security Studies and liberal feminist theory, was chosen as the conceptualization of the master's thesis. The theory provides an explanation of why sexual violence occurs, which can also be applied to the case of Nigeria and the terrorist organization Boko Haram operating in the country. Violence against women and girls breaks up traditional communities and families there and tends to break the resistance of the population. In addition, however, it can serve as a moralizing effect on the military, where providing sexual intercourse to soldiers reduces the risk of their demoralization.

## **Suggested Thesis Structure**

### **1. Introduction**

This chapter will introduce the issue of sexual violence as a strategic weapon in armed conflict. The issue will be introduced from a broader perspective, then the focus will shift to the situation in Nigeria in the context of the terrorist organization Boko Haram. The chapter will present the research for the master's thesis including the research gap, which the thesis will try to address, the research question and briefly summarise the content of the following chapters.

### **2. Literature Review**

This chapter will briefly introduce the main primary and secondary sources from which the author will draw during the writing of the thesis. It will briefly introduce the authors and main ideas of the books or academic articles.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

#### **3.1 Conceptualization**

#### **3.2 Terminology**

#### **3.3 Types of Sexual Violence**

#### **3.4 Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict**

This chapter introduces the most important theories and concepts related to sexual violence during armed conflict. The main focus will be on the strategic rape theory underlying the thesis. The chapter will discuss basic terminology, introduce types of sexual violence, and specifically address sexual violence as a weapon of war during armed conflict.

### **4. Methodology**

This chapter will present the methodological approach taken to author the thesis. It will introduce the data that was used and how it was collected, processed, and subsequently analysed.

### **5. Empirical Background to the Case**

#### **5.1 Characteristics of Boko Haram**

#### **5.2 The Role of Women in Nigerian Society**



Before studying the actual sexual violence in Nigeria under the influence of Boko Haram, this chapter will introduce the terrorist organization Boko Haram and outline the role of women and girls in Nigerian society.

## **6. Boko Haram as a Direct Perpetrator of Sexual Violence**

This chapter briefly introduces the terrorist organization Boko Haram, the reasons for its creation, its goals, and how it seeks to achieve them. It will then focus on a particular aspect of Boko Haram, namely the sexual violence against women and girls that has become a semi-official tactic of the group over the past decade. It will focus on the causes, motives, and consequences of sexual violence, comparing its frequency and methods against previous insurgent groups in Nigeria or the Nigerian military.

## **7. Boko Haram as an Indirect Perpetrator of Sexual Violence**

This chapter introduces the implications of Boko Haram's operations in Nigeria, in which the organization acts as an indirect perpetrator of sexual violence. This is primarily due to the economic and humanitarian crisis that the organization has created in the country, which is exploited by aid workers and guards in refugee camps who often force sexual intercourse on affected people in exchange for food or medical supplies. Again, the frequency will be analysed in relation to the period before the emergence of Boko Haram.

## **8. Findings**

This chapter will summarise the previous information and findings and answer the research question.

## **9. Discussion**

This chapter will proceed with the analysis of the main findings, the thesis will then establish possible explanations and outline further study.

## **10. Conclusion**

The final chapter will summarize the main findings of this thesis.

## List of Appendices

Appendix no. 1: Informed consent

### **Informed consent to participate in the research and the processing of personal data**

#### **Research information**

This research, led by Lucie Veiglova from the Faculty of Social Sciences at Charles University, focuses on gender-based violence perpetrated by Boko Haram in Nigeria. The aim of the research is to analyse to what extent Boko Haram has influenced the level of gender-based violence in the country and for what purpose. I am inviting you to participate in this research project in the form of an online interview given your knowledge of this issue and authorship of extensive reports on the subject. The interview is expected to take about 45 to 60 minutes to complete.

#### **Declaration**

I, the undersigned, certify that:

- I have been informed about the purpose of the interview, which is to collect data for the purpose of research for Lucie Veiglová's diploma thesis entitled *Gender-Based Violence as a Weapon of War: The Case of Boko Haram*.
- I was told approximately how long the interview would take and how it would proceed. I know that I can refuse to answer any question at any time.
- I agree to the making of an audio recording of the interview and its subsequent processing. The transcript of the interview will be stored securely and will be accessible for research purposes only.
- I give my permission for the researcher to use the interview for the purposes of the Faculty of Social Sciences of Charles University and to quote from it freely. Upon request, I can view the transcript of the interview and can contact the researcher by email (91660408@fsv.cuni.cz).

- I know how the interview will be handled and how anonymity will be ensured even after the interview has ended, which will make it impossible to identify me. If I wish, the quotations will not include my name or any other personal information that could identify me. Only information that I agree to in advance will be included.
- I am aware that I can withdraw my consent at any time.

By signing, I agree to the following points.

Date:

Signature of the respondent: