

Nigeria's Gendered Security Harms: State Policy and the Counter-insurgency Against Boko Haram

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ABSTRACT

Scholars have critiqued the incorporation of gender into counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism: programmes have instrumentalised the Women Peace and Security (WPS) agenda towards state-centric goals and essentialised the women (and men) they encounter. Furthermore, as Huckerby outlines, the explicit inclusion of gender in security policy can produce specific gendered security harms: coercive and non-coercive practices; securitization of women's rights; and lack of attention to the gendered effects of seemingly gender-neutral policy. This article engages Huckerby's typology to explore the gendered security harms produced in Nigeria's counter-insurgency against 'Boko Haram'. It suggests first that a simplistic approach to women, not gendered power relations, leaves Nigeria unable to respond to the complex gendered dynamics of jihadist actors in the northeast. Second, a neglect of human rights and the role of state actors in abuses actively enable gendered security harms. The article concludes that Nigeria is therefore still failing to protect women.

KEYWORDS:

CVE, Nigeria, Boko Haram, Islamic State West Africa Province, Gender, Women, 1325, National Action Plan, violent extremism, WPS.

INTRODUCTION

There is an obligation to consider gender in counter-terrorism at the highest institutional levels. That obligation is legal, under international human rights law, and it is also rooted in the recognition of the importance of the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda instituted through United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 in 2000 and subsequent resolutions (Huckerby and Satterthwaite 2012; Scheinin 2009). This has contributed to the creation of what are now more than 100 National Action Plans (NAPs) on WPS worldwide. In 2015, UNSCR 2242 explicitly addressed how the WPS agenda should be incorporated into counter-terrorism and countering the violent extremism perpetrated by organised armed groups (OAGs). The merging of these agendas has not necessarily improved human rights including those of women. Feminist scholars have critiqued how countering violent extremism and counter-terrorism programmes have mobilised gender and highlighted their often pernicious effects (Nesiah 2012; Puar and Rai 2002). In particular, Huckerby has noted the possibilities for gender, national security, and human rights to collide to produce gendered security harms (see Huckerby 2020: 179).

Drawing on Huckerby and other critical feminist approaches to security studies, this paper analyses the production of gendered security harms in the Nigerian context, specifically considering interventions against the jihadist organised armed groups collectively termed 'Boko Haram'. It draws on research - interviews, conversations, and focus groups - carried out by Nagarajan between 2013 and 2020 in northeast Nigeria; also on discussions around Nigeria's NAP in which she participated during this time. This data reflects the lived gendered experiences of: conflict-affected communities; security agents including soldiers, police officers, and senior military and police commanders; members of community militias; people associated with organised armed groups; human rights activists engaged in

documentation of violations; people working for development, humanitarian, human rights and peacebuilding organisations; government officials; and politicians. These interactions were conducted in Burah, English, Fulfulde, Hausa and Kanuri languages. They took place in Adamawa (Gombi, Hong, Mubi, and Yola), Borno (Askira Uba, Baga, Bama, Biu, Chibok, Damasak, Damboa, Dikwa, Gubio, Jere, Gwoza, Hawul, Kaga, Konduga, Maiduguri, Monguno, Ngala, and Rann) and Yobe (BuniYadi, Damaturu, Dapchi, Gashua, Geidam, and Jakusko) states for research studies, community engagement, and workshops conducted for and funded by organisations including: adelphi, the British Council, Catholic Relief Services, Center for Civilians in Conflict, Equal Access and the Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme. Interviews were conducted according to ethical principles, bilaterally, in safe locations, prioritising respondents' safety, comfort and well-being, and with referral mechanisms in place if needed. Names used are pseudonyms, and specific locations of interviews are withheld for security reasons.

In this article, gender is understood as a “set of cultural institutions and practices that constitute the norms and standards of masculinity and femininity” (Steans 1999: 92). We acknowledge that gender has frequently been understood as women and indeed a critique of that approach is central to our argument. However, we do not engage with issues facing people with non-normative sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions due to a current lack of data in the northeast Nigerian context. Additionally, we discuss the effects of gender-based violence (GBV), defined as “an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will, and that is based on socially ascribed (gender) differences between males and females” (Inter-Agency Standing Committee 2005: 7). While people of all genders are subjected to GBV, it is most often directed against women and girls and is linked to women's subordinate status in society. The article uses the term organised armed groups to describe all jihadist groups operational in northeast Nigeria; it avoids the term

‘suicide bomber’, as the degree of agency of the people involved, many of whom are minors, is unclear.

The article has two key arguments: that the interpretation of gender as women in the narrowest sense in Nigeria’s security policy is insufficiently complex to challenge jihadist mobilisation on the ground; and that state engagement with gender and security policy, alongside a lack of prioritisation of human rights, has produced particular gendered security harms. The arguments proceed in two sections. The first is theoretical, considering gender, counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism programming and policy. The second section is empirical, drawing on the research noted above to assess the complex gendered challenges posed by jihadist mobilisation and then explore the gendered security harms produced by Nigeria’s gendered security policies.

GENDER AND RESPONSES TO TERRORISM: FROM THE GLOBAL TO NIGERIA

The United Nations Security Council’s first Resolution on WPS in 2000, UNSCR 1325, was ground-breaking. Following years of feminist activism, for the first time UN member states seriously considered the gendered effects of conflict on women focused on four pillars: protection, participation, prevention, and relief and recovery. It acknowledged women as victims of violence, but also their power to participate in conflict prevention. UNSCR 1325 and nine other subsequent resolutions recommend the active engagement of women in the planning and provision of security (George and Shepherd 2016; Kirby and Shepherd 2016b). By 2015, terrorism and violent extremism were also global security priorities. The prioritisation of military campaigns to undermine violence had often precluded a gendered approach (Olonisakin and Barnes 2010); but UNSCR 2242 explicitly set out how the WPS agenda should be incorporated into counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism

efforts, producing a new opportunity for gendered security (Huckerby 2020: 184). 2242 advocated the inclusion of the WPS agenda as a “cross-cutting subject in all relevant thematic areas of work... including threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts” (Pearson 2020; UNSC 2015: paras 11–13). It addresses a “changing global context of peace and security” and seeks to focus on both gender equality and women’s rights within “rising violent extremism, which can be conducive to terrorism” (UNSCR 2242: Preamble). It recommended changes in values and practices: consultation with women; gender-sensitive data-collection; and an emphasis on women’s participation, empowerment, and leadership as consistent with the WPS agenda (Pearson 2020; UNSC 2015: paras 11–13).

Scholars had critiqued the integration of both gender and the WPS agenda into security practices prior to UNSCR 2242 (see Brown 2013; OSCE 2011; Steans 2008; Hunt 2007; Enloe 2001; Parpart and Zalewski 2008). In counter-terrorism, one key critique focused on essentialism and the theme of women’s *protection* - from ‘risky’ securitised men - above the other three pillars (2016a). Feminists critiqued this emphasis as often reinforcing stereotypes of women as victims in need of protection by men. In the decade following the 9/11 al-Qaida attacks on the United States, national security policy in the global north focused on the harms caused by organised armed groups rather than by state institutions and decision-making processes, with gender not an explicit consideration in policy (Huckerby 2020: 182). Security policy instead incorporated a series of gendered assumptions, such as that Muslim men constituted a risk and Muslim women required liberation and empowerment. For instance, the liberation of Afghan Muslim women from the Taliban was produced as an explicit rationale to the United States invasion of Afghanistan (Shepherd 2006; Bush Center 2001; von der Lippe and Väyrynen 2011). For many scholars the instrumentalisation and racialisation of women’s rights enabling this military action undermined later attempts to integrate the WPS agenda into counter-terrorism and countering

violent extremism practices and programming (Ní Aoláin 2016; Rashid 2014; von der Lippe and Väyrynen 2011). This protection narrative persisted in subsequent years in counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism - so-called soft communities-based programming – and is racialised through state Orientalism (Rashid 2014; Brown 2013; Nesiah 2012; Huckerby 2020). One outcome of this is the enabling of human rights abuses, justified on the grounds of state security (Huckerby 2020; Ní Aoláin 2016).

Huckerby (2020) notes that UNSCR 2242 presented a new opportunity to move towards a greater and explicit recognition of gender in security and particularly counter-terrorism; however, in practice, she observes that it has often only further entrenched existing challenges and produced new ones. Specific challenges to 2242’s implementation were, in part, due to its relationship to the values and practices of the so-called ‘war on terror’. As military interventions by western states wound down, countering violent extremism programmes relating to these conflicts evolved, focused on communities-based responses to tackling jihadist actors in the global north, including al-Qaida, Daesh, and those inspired by them. This enabled some of the same logics of the war on terror. Orientalism was evident in interventions with mainly Muslim communities, invoking what Brown terms a “maternalist logic”, and engaging particularly Muslim women according to assumptions of “their expected gender and racialized role as mothers” (Brown 2013: 41). This logic also framed Muslim men as the key risk within this ‘suspect community’ (Awan 2012; Abbas 2004; Kundnani 2014; Huckerby 2011). Such countering violent extremism programming also de-centred local struggles against Muslim fundamentalism (Bennoune, 2014).

While the gendered dangers of security policy have long been recognised, Huckerby (2020) has proposed a move towards categorisation through a new typology centred on the concept of gendered security harms. Gendered security harms are harms explicitly enabled through changes to gendered state security practices as well as the “gendered assumptions,

gendered labels, and gendered hierarchies” of those practices, whether states explicitly recognise these or not (Sjoberg 2018). Huckerby suggests the period post-UNSCR 2242 has not produced change in two key areas: state recognition of human rights as valuable in-and-of-themselves and an engagement with gender as a social construct, rather than a narrow focus on women (Huckerby 2020). Gender is about power and hierarchies and, as Scott (1986) asserts, “a way of referring to the social organization of the relationship between the sexes” (p. 1053). Rarely, however, have governments set out to look beyond the gender binary, to counter norms around militarised masculinities, examine the gendered harms men face in violent conflict, or consider sexuality in the security space. Huckerby suggests the narrow emphasis on women rather than gender as a social construct, decoupled from human rights, except for when these benefit states has enabled four types of harms. First, gendered policies that are overtly coercive such as ‘disappearing’ men or attacks on women human rights defenders. Second, non-coercive gendered practices such as the targeting of ‘suspect men’ as a specific threat or engaging Muslim mothers in countering violent extremism. Third is the securitization of women’s rights as a means to a state end. Fourth is lack of attention the gendered harms of apparently ‘gender-neutral’ policy (Huckerby 2020). While Huckerby notes this is not a complete typology, it nonetheless goes some way to providing a means to identify how even gendered policy can produce gendered harms.

Counter-terrorism, Countering Violent Extremism, and Gender in Nigeria

The pernicious logics and gendered security harms outlined above have been evident in the global south, in both policy and practice. Indeed, western governments are frequently “outward-oriented”, providing technical assistance and funding for countries to develop their own NAPs to implement particular forms of gender equality prevalent in the global north

(Basu, Kirby, and Shepherd 2020). This is evident to local communities experiencing counter-terrorism or countering violent extremism programmes where “externally imposed notions become the standard points of reference” and are resisted (Olonisakin and Barnes 2010: 7). This section explores the gendered approach to security evident in Nigeria, contextualizing this in the wider context of global attempts to incorporate the WPS agenda into counter-terrorism, outlined above. There have by now been two Nigerian manifestations of a National Action Plan (NAP) on the implementation of the WPS agenda (2013 and 2017). Nigeria’s first NAP ran from 2013 to 2016 and had five pillars: prevention, participation, protection, prosecution, and promotion (Nigeria Government 2017a: 2). This NAP adopted a narrow focus on gender as women, rather than as relational, and did not fully reflect the local gender dynamics of Nigerian conflict (Hudson 2017: 17), despite a relative freedom of space for their inclusion (Olonisakin, Barnes, and Ikpe 2010). Nor did it address issues of religious fundamentalism, radicalisation or violent extremism, focusing rather on women’s protection, participation, and inclusion in Nigeria’s security forces (Olonisakin, Barnes, and Ikpe 2010).

The 2017 NAP was instituted as the first expired, to address the ‘non-inclusion of violent extremism’ in 2013. The new NAP explained the former lack of reference to violent extremism, specifically jihadist conflict in the northeast, stating “around the time it [the NAP] was developed this was not a contemporary national issue as it has now become” (Nigeria Government 2017a: viii). However, the violence was in its fourth year in 2013 and human rights organisations had already documented the gendered human rights abuses produced within the conflict in northeast Nigeria, both by jihadist and state actors. However, the 2013 NAP did not represent a deep contextual understanding of the northeast, or any other regional context. Some of the events that were to come would highlight this neglect: abduction of women and girls, most famously from Chibok in April 2014, and in June 2014, the first person-borne improvised explosive devices (PBIED) attacks by women (Pearson, 2015;

Matfess & Warner, 2017). In spite of a focus on women's protection in the 2013 NAP, the federal government had failed: in the prioritisation of safeguarding women (Atim 2017); in the recognition of violent extremism as an issue affecting women; and in the protection of civilians from the direct and indirect harms of its own military operations (Dietrich, 2015).

In 2017, the new NAP therefore constituted an explicit response to issues not included in the 2013 NAP: mass abductions of women, PBIED attacks by women and girls, and violent extremism. However, having finally recognized the gendered risks posed by organised armed groups in the northeast, the focus remained on these actors alone. The NAP did not recognise the damaging gendered effects of state security policies or how the conflict was changing gender norms. For instance, although there is a requirement for police and security training in the 2017 NAP in relation to GBV in camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs), there is no explicit acknowledgment that police and security actors often constitute a threat to women themselves (Nigeria Government 2017a: 25). This second NAP had five pillars – prevention and disaster preparedness; participation and representation; protection and prosecution; crises management, early recovery and post-conflict reconstruction; and partnerships coordination and management – and it engaged with them as cross-cutting themes, as recommended in UNSCR 2242. The NAP separated issues affecting women into Nigeria's six geopolitical zones, with the gendered effects of conflict with jihadist organised armed groups explicitly acknowledged in the zonal action plan for the northeast. Human rights are mentioned in relation to Pillar 1: Prevention and Disaster Preparedness, with increased reports of violations against women and girls serving as an indicator of success (Nigeria Government 2017a: 16).

Although the 2017 NAP mentions UNSCR 2242 only twice, it is consistent with 2242's requirement that countering violent extremism efforts engage with the women, peace and security agenda. As with the 2013 NAP, however, the emphasis remains on women

narrowly understood, rather than as a social construct. The NAP repeatedly focuses on quantifiable increases of numbers of women and girls included, trained, and/or rehabilitated as success indicators, an ‘add-women-and-stir’ approach that does not engage with gendered power structures (Cohn, Kinsella, and Gibbings 2004: 137). Clearly this approach will not succeed if state institutions do not understand their own roles in committing and preventing human rights violations and have no knowledge of gender as a set of power relations, as well as violations against women and girls. Nor do frequent references to ‘gender mainstreaming’ outline how this concerns men or the roles of militarised masculinities in driving conflict.

The 2017 NAP does demonstrate some complexity in recognition of women’s roles, “not only as victims, but also as powerful agents for peace and security” (Nigeria Government 2017a: 4). It addresses the problems of trauma for women post-conflict and it considers women perpetrators of violence while acknowledging the possibilities of coercion (Nigeria Government 2017a: 4). Nonetheless, the emphasis remains on women victims and their protection, an emphasis also echoed in Nigeria’s 2017 Policy Framework and National Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism. In a section on ‘Women and Girls’, this policy emphasises women as victims, whether in PBIED attacks or as targets of abductions, forced marriage and sexual enslavement, but it also notes “instances when women have played the role of perpetrators and recruiters” (Nigeria Government 2017b: 18). The document briefly outlines the role of the Nigerian state in rescuing women from captivity and the role of women and women’s organisations in policy making and law enforcement. In common with countering violent extremism initiatives in the global north, there is an emphasis on women’s, girls’ and youth empowerment, strategic alliances, and trust-building between state and civil society organisations (Nigeria Government 2017b: 21).

All of this is presented within the language of human rights (Nigeria Government 2017b: 21). However, consistent with Huckerby’s (2020) observations, neither policy

document seeks to address how insecurity can be caused by state actors. Only organised armed groups are represented as a security risk to women and girls in the northeast in spite of military human rights abuses against women and girls having been well documented by 2017 (Human Rights Watch 2016). This conforms with a pattern of Nigerian government intolerance towards allegations of human rights violations (Adebayo 2018). Moreover, neither the policy document focused on countering violent extremism nor that on WPS understands gender as a social construct. Gendered impacts on men and boys, LGBTIQI issues, and the role of masculinities in perpetuating violence are therefore absent (Rees in Onyesoh, Rees, and Confortini 2020: 232). Additionally, while women perpetrators are acknowledged, the emphasis on women as victims suggests a lack of knowledge of the complexity of women's roles in JASDJ and ISWAP. It also neglects women's agency, engagement and leadership in Nigeria's own history more broadly: at least one woman, Aissa Koli, ruled the Kanem-Borno Empire (Jackson 2009: 26); women preachers were instrumental in spreading the message of the Sokoto Caliphate (Boyd and Last 1985); and women mobilised successfully in the south against colonial limits to their power (Johnson 1982).

Additionally, the NAPs do not constitute a full commitment to women's rights as human rights in and of themselves. Firstly, the 2013 NAP constituted a top-down approach to counter-terrorism and counter-radicalisation practices (Onyesoh, Rees, and Confortini 2020), failing to recognise where the real security challenges lie (Kirby and Shepherd 2016a; Cook 2019; Onyesoh, Rees, and Confortini 2020; Basu, Kirby, and Shepherd 2020; Olonisakin and Barnes 2010). The participation of women was more apparent in Nigeria's second NAP on 1325, which followed a consultation process, in part to address this gap (Nigeria Government 2013; Ministry of Women Affairs 2017; Adefisoye and Adefisoye 2019; Peace Women 2017). Yet the NAP continued to focus only on 'adding women', without prioritisation of

women's rights or examining the inherent patriarchy of state systems (Rees in Onyesoh, Rees, and Confortini 2020: 233, Onyesoh in Onyesoh, Rees and Confortini 2020: 228). Nor did it support women and girls to transform unequal gendered power relations. Indeed, building on the work of international donors, it has been up to individuals to personally ensure Nigeria's WPS agenda is not lost in institutional patriarchy (Jacevic 2019: 284). The lack of commitment to either women's rights or gender across state institutions is evident in the gendered security harms discussed below.

In short, Nigeria's NAPs reveal a gendered security policy consistent with Huckerby's analysis. The 2013 NAP was not based on an in-depth gendered analysis of Nigeria's violent conflict. It did not sufficiently engage gendered power relations or consider the gendered impacts of jihadist mobilisations. From 2017, Nigeria effected a more explicitly gendered approach to security, based on zonal contextual analysis. However, this remained focused on organised armed groups and on women rather than on gender more broadly. It additionally retained an emphasis on women's protection, despite noting the varied roles (victim, perpetrator, security actor) women can take. This paper now moves on to examining how these failings produce gendered security harms according to Huckerby's tentative typology, namely: coercive actions against particular men (and others); non-coercive gendered practices in counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism; securitization of women's rights as a means to an end; and lack of attention to the gendered effects of seemingly gender-neutral policy. It also examines how Nigerian gendered security policy fails in its core aim to protect women – even though women's protection remains a core part of government rhetoric.

NIGERIAN SECURITY RESPONSES: MISUNDERSTANDING ORGANISED ARMED GROUPS AND GENDERED SECURITY HARMS

There are two key jihadist factions: Boko Haram is a colloquialism meaning ‘western education is sinful’, and the name commonly used for organised armed jihadist groups in northeast Nigeria. There are two main groups: *Jama’atuAhl al-Sunna li-l-Da’wa wa-l-Jihad* (JASDJ) and *Wilayat al Islamiyya Gharb Afriqiuuah* (Islamic State West African Province or ISWAP). Both groups believe in the use of violence to institute Shariah according to a strict Salafist interpretation (Kassim and Nwankpa 2018; Walker 2016; Bukarti 2018; Barkindo 2013; Montclos 2016; Mohamed 2015). Nigeria’s gendered approach to these groups produces particular gendered security harms due to its focus on women and the violence of organised armed groups, instead of gender and the actions of state security bodies. These correspond to Huckerby’s proto-typology: coercive actions against particular men (and women); non-coercive gendered harms in counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism; securitization of women’s rights as a means to an end; and neglect of the gendered effects of seemingly gender-neutral policy. These harms are not entirely distinct; failing to tackle one type of harm impacts them all. Moreover, these harms may prolong the conflict itself. The article now turns to examine each of these harms in turn but first starts with arguing that the understanding of women’s roles in conflict in the northeast – victim, or

security actor, or perpetrator - does not correspond with the complexities on the ground, in which boundaries between these categories are blurred.

Women's Complex Roles in Armed Jihadist Groups

Both the 2017 NAP on countering violent extremism and the 2017 NAP on 1325 understand women as victims, perpetrators, or security agents. However, they fail to recognise possibilities for blurred boundaries between these categories and how and where essentialist roles break down. Nor do they take account of the complexity of women's – and men's – agency - the ability to act as an informed active participant in one's own life - within organised armed groups. The question of women's agency in organised armed groups, has long been a focus of feminist security studies (Margolin 2018), with a 'gender lens' needed to reframe terrorism studies with awareness of how women's agency has been de-emphasised (Poloni-Staudinger and Ortals 2012; Sjoberg and Gentry 2011; Cook 2019).

It is certainly true that women have been victims of JASDJ and ISWAP and explicitly targeted as such. Barkindo, Wesley and Gudaku (2013) have outlined how Christian women were explicitly targeted with physical attack and seizures of land and businesses. As the conflict developed, human rights activists documented abductions of Christian and Muslim women (UNICEF and International Alert 2016; ICG 2016). Women were instrumentalised by organised armed groups. From 2012 the wives of security actors were explicitly targeted in retaliation for the capture of wives of jihadist leaders (Barkindo, Wesley, and Gudaku 2013; Zenn and Pearson 2014). On 10 April 2014, in the most infamous abduction case, trucks of fighters entered Chibok and abducted 276 girls from a government school. While some immediately escaped, 253 remained in captivity (Nti 2014; Pearson and Zenn 2016). In May 2014, Shekau featured some of the young women in a propaganda video, now wearing

hijab and reciting from the Quran. He later threatened to “sell them in the market”, a threat upon which he apparently made good (Nti 2014; Kassim and Nwankpa 2018). From June 2014, Shekau implemented PBIED attacks by women and also children (Pearson 2015; Warner and Matfess 2017; Pearson 2018).

Women have however also expressed agency in support for organised armed groups. Even as neither JASDJ nor ISWAP actively endow women with leadership roles, or engage them in the leading Shura council, women are capable of seizing for themselves the opportunities groups give them: power, religious education, security and/or a husband. Women supported jihad to establish a Shariah state in Nigeria from the early days (Luchetta 2016; Walker 2016). The writer Ahmad Salkida observed that JASDJ both benefitted from, but also needed women’s support as a core foundation of the movement, given so many men had died.ⁱ There have also been many reports of women actively seeking out the group, spying for JASDJ, and taking part in violence in limited ways (BBC News 2014; Interview: Air Commodore Dele Alonge, 2016; Nagarajan 2018). Ladbury, Allamin, Nagarajan, Francis and Ukiwo (2016) assert that, given the numbers of abductions of women and girls, most women and girls actively engaged in violence are likely coerced. However, the presence of others who chose the group should not be neglected. Indeed, Nagarajan interviewed twelve young women in 2018 who actively decided to join, some as children. A number expressed a sense of purpose and possibility for change through group membership, Fatima recalling, “At that time, the world was in our hands”.ⁱⁱ

However, the bounded roles of victim, perpetrator, and security actor that are relied on in Nigeria’s security policies lose meaning on further analysis of how gender operates in organised armed group dynamics and the lived realities of women and girls. Women’s agency is not clear-cut. This was underscored when some of the ‘Chibok girls’ appeared in a 2017 video carrying weapons and announcing they had no intention of return as they were

happy within JASDJ, where they had husbands and children (Bolashodun 2017). They requested their parents convert to Islam and expressed “Thanks to our father, Abubakar Shekau, for marrying us to our husbands” (Sahara TV News 2017; Jihadology 2017). Their position mirrors the complexity of women and girls similarly abducted by militant groups in other locations who, over time, develop affinity for the group and its members through processes of trauma and crisis bonding; fear and gratitude for being allowed to live produce a desire to stay (Reid et al. 2013; Turshen 2001). For women in an organised armed group who have new relationships and social networks, a degree of security, children, food and some Islamic education, the choice of returning to a distant past life is not clear-cut (Moaveni 2019). Indeed, there have been cases where women and girls chose to disassociate themselves and return to communities, only later to go back to join organised armed groups as a result of their ill-treatment, poor living conditions, and frustration with diversion of humanitarian assistance (Nagarajan, 2019; Nwaubani 2018; Crisis Group 2019).

The complexity of women’s agency is also evident in narratives of women’s recruitment to JASDJ and ISWAP. Women and girls have described how they joined organised armed groups in order to escape from families where they are seen as more expendable, and from abusive mainstream patriarchal norms. For example, Hauwa described how, as a woman in Borno, “You are supposed to dress well and do everything your parents tell you to do. If you do not, it’s defiance and it is bad [...] They would abuse her and say she has deviated and left the straight path, castigate her, and curse her”.ⁱⁱⁱ Women and girls have given accounts of their belief in JASDJ or ISWAP as providing access to Islamic education and the chance to be involved in something they regard as meaningful or ‘empowering’ (Mercy Corps, 2016). These are powerful pulls considering such opportunities are often denied to women and girls in the northeast (Nagarajan 2018).

Additionally, a focus on women as victims neglects how men have also been victimized by organised armed groups (Huckerby 2020; Onyesoh, Rees, and Confortini 2020; Cohn, Kinsella, and Gibbings 2004). Men's agency in JASDJ and ISWAP is also complex. Their stories too can defy easy categorisation as victim or perpetrator. Organised armed groups have engaged in abductions of all genders for years (Hinshaw and Parkinson 2016). While women were forced into what fighters claimed as "marriage" or were frequently gang-raped by fighters if "unmarried," men and boys were abducted to fight or told they had the "choice" between joining the group or being killed. In February 2014, one such case made headlines when dozens of boys were killed in their college dormitories in Buni Yadi, Yobe State, and women present were abducted (Vanguard News 2020). In this way, men in organised armed groups have demonstrated power through violence over other men and boys and forced recruitment. Once complicit in violence, they are fearful of state and community reactions if they were to defect.

Furthermore, Nigerian security policy has not recognised that gendered norms differ between organised armed groups in the northeast. JASDJ, led by Abubaker Shekau, and ISWAP, subject to a succession of leadership changes, were originally the same group, driven by a salafi-jihadist rhetoric that was inherently gendered – men as fighters, women as supporters. Yet since the split between ISWAP and Shekau in 2016, when he was deposed as wali, gendered norms have been a point of tension between the factions (Pearson 2018; Bukarti and Bryson 2019). Humanitarian workers working with communities in neighbouring Niger told Nagarajan of at least three instances in 2019 where ISWAP fighters chased down JASDJ fighters who had abducted women and girls, and brought them back unharmed to their families, insisting they target only security agencies and those working with them. Indeed, arguments over the validity of practices such as the use of women and girls carrying out PBIEDs or the abduction of Muslim civilian women contributed to the 2016 split in the

movement (see for one example the open letter to Shekau from Mamman Nur in Kassim and Nwankpa 2018). Gendered differences in JASDJ and ISWAP activities remain. In 2018, ISWAP carried out a mass abduction of girls from a school in Dapchi in Yobe State. In a deliberate contrast to Shekau's Chibok abduction, they released all but the Christian captive, warning the girls to stay away from western education. ISWAP has often attempted to provide theological justifications for their targeting of women, while JASDJ has not (Kelly 2019). ISWAP for instance has executed Muslim women humanitarian workers, accusing them of apostasy due to their alleged support of the Nigerian state; meanwhile they enslave Christian women workers, stating this was permissible in Islam (Sahara Reporters 2018).

Gendered roles in ISWAP and JASDJ are dynamic, changing over time, another issue not recognised in Nigeria's NAPS. Women interviewed by Nagarajan however, reported changes in roles over their association with organised armed groups. They played more active roles in recruitment, particularly of other women and girls, during times of JASDJ expansion. They were engaged in policing behaviour as JASDJ gained control over areas. They enjoyed this power, especially over (older) men, experiencing this for the first time in their lives given societal age and gender hierarchies. Aisha said:

“People are not allowed to go out to fetch water during the day. No matter how big you are or if you're even a man, if I see you outside at that time, I will follow you. I don't fear... We don't beat them, but we will warn them if they don't [comply] that we will report them to those men who will do the beatings... We are very powerful. We can do everything that we want.”^{iv}

However, some women's hopes for significant participation in activities such as recruitment were frequently dashed as JASDJ gained territorial control. Restrictions became even harsher

than those in mainstream society, although they could ease during military attack. For example, Falmata said, “If I am allowed to come out, I can teach people as I was taught. But these boys do not allow you to go out and reach the communities. I wasn’t allowed to go out or given the chance. That even frustrates us”.^v Eight out of twelve women interviewed by Nagarajan (2018) spoke of increased restrictions on behaviour and movement and the use of male violence to enforce compliance of wives seen as ‘defiant.’

The complexity of gender within organised armed groups outlined in this section means security approaches that regard roles as clear-cut, or are predicated on gender binaries – men as violent, women as peaceful – are unlikely to work. Yet, these gendered assumptions are evident in Nigerian policy, and do not correspond to the lived realities of those associated with organised armed groups or of group tactics and strategies over time.

Gendered Security Harms

This section now considers how Nigeria’s gendered security approach not only misunderstands the situation on the ground, but produces particular gendered security harms. This is due to its focus on women and the violence of organised armed groups, instead of gender as a social construct and the actions of state security bodies. The harms outlined here correspond to Huckerby’s proto-typology: coercive actions against particular men (and women); non-coercive gendered harms in CT and CVE; securitization of women’s rights as a means to an end; and neglect of the gendered effects of seemingly gender-neutral policy. These harms may prolong the conflict itself.

Coercive Gendered Practices

Gendered assumptions within Nigerian policy on countering organised armed groups have enabled coercive practices and do not engage with the effects of state violence. Security agencies, particularly the military and police, in addition to community militias with whom they work, especially the *yan gora* or Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) have contributed to gendered insecurity (Amnesty 2020; Amnesty 2018; Amnesty 2016; Amnesty 2015; Nagarajan, 2020). GBV is particularly prevalent around military barracks and during military operations. Fear of sexual violence limits participation in public spaces with women and girls avoiding crossing security checkpoints where they are likely to face verbal and sexual harassment. Soldiers have engaged in sexual violence during operations, entering women's homes to rape or engage in other forms of sexual exploitation (Amnesty, 2018). Women and girls have entered coercive and exploitative relations with soldiers, bartering sex for money, food, or protection, or entering into short-lived 'marriages' with soldiers who leave them when they are transferred (Nagarajan, 2019). One man working for a UN agency in Madagali and Michika in Adamawa state, where incidents are high, said, "There is such a power imbalance. These soldiers have money and power and the girls are starving without money to eat and so are lured with food and the basic necessities of life".^{vi} Some government officials, for example those who run IDP camps, are also engaged in similar practices (HRW 2016).

However, this reality is not acknowledged in Nigeria's policies. A lack of engagement with gendered power relations means security harms produced by coercive practices are overlooked by and invisibilised by state actors. Indeed, sexual violence against women and girls, in addition to constituting human rights violations, becomes part of the dynamic of security actors. For instance, access to women and militarised power produce masculine status and form part of recruitment and retention dynamics in community militias. These

dynamics mean women's bodies become a battleground over which men fight for status, creating competition between yan gora men and others. For example, in one location in Borno state, civilians told Nagarajan that, when soldiers responsible for access to an IDP camp handed over control to yan gora men at night, some of these men would go to the shelters of women and girls whose husbands and fathers had been killed or detained and offer access to food distribution in return for sex. This abuse only ended after the Center for Civilians in Conflict, an NGO for which she was working, supported people to report what was happening to military and CJTF leadership for action.

Perhaps due to the formulation of who commits gendered abuse of women in the 2017 NAP on 1325 (organised armed groups only), there is little concerted effort to prevent coercive gendered security harms perpetrated by state agents, including GBV. Indeed one response to allegations has been denial, as exemplified in a statement by Brigadier General John Agim, the Director of Defence Information, who said after a visit to IDP camps in Borno, "In the Armed Forces, we maintain that we do not condone rape and do not have rapists among us" (Tunoh 2018). Yet, the military has taken some action in response to reports of human rights violations, setting up a human rights desk to investigate reports of abuse, including for sexual violence. Some cases have been brought to court martial. However, there is no coherent approach. While some Brigade Commanders with whom Nagarajan spoke between October 2016 and March 2019 said that they warn men they command that GBV will not be tolerated and investigate suspected cases, other senior military commanders either blamed the women and girls involved or did not see sexual exploitation as a serious issue. Alternatively, in some locations, soldiers have been instructed not to engage at all with local women as commanders try to minimise scope for abuses. This, and a lack of women soldiers deployed to these areas, further restricts the ability of women and girls to report threats to their human security. Moreover, the military places the onus on

survivors and their families to report, which does not recognise the risks and barriers to doing so. Indeed, in at least one instance, women who spoke about sexual violence were subsequently beaten by soldiers according to representatives from humanitarian agencies interviewed in February 2017. Civil society, women's rights activists, and conflict-affected communities alike find high levels of impunity for military human rights violations difficult to challenge (Nagarajan, 2020c).

There are also coercive security harms to men. Nigeria's 2017 NAP on 1325 and WPS reproduces essentialist notions of men as perpetrators and women as victims; it notes women as potential perpetrators, but repeatedly frames them as victims and does not engage with men as victims at all (Nigeria Government 2017a: 4–5 and the detailed Zonal Action Plans). In a global north context, this logic entailed an engagement with Muslim women as potential allies and Muslim men as a 'suspect community' (Rashid 2014; Amar 2011; Awan 2012; Winterbotham and Pearson 2016). A parallel dynamic exists in Nigeria where state security agencies, particularly in the early days, constructed 'suspect communities' of 'risk' men. This has ethnic connotations, given men from Kanuri or Fulani backgrounds have been treated with most suspicion and targeted during operations. In Maiduguri in 2013, the military arrested hundreds of men in 'suspect' areas and the *yan gora* identified those suspected of involvement in JASDJ (Mohammed, 2021). There are widespread stereotypes of Kanuri people being more sympathetic to organised armed groups from people belonging to other ethnolinguistic groups, and security actors. As one Shuwa Arab woman in Jere said when talking about religious and ethnic tensions, "The Shuwa say the Kanuri are Boko Haram and that it is their children.. causing the trouble".^{vii} Fulani women in Ngala and Monguno in Borno state also recounted the everyday risks faced by male family members from soldiers who assumed they were financing OAG members when they were simply grazing cattle.^{viii}

Such gendered assumptions around who constitutes the ‘suspect community’ (men and boys) can have coercive outcomes and impact children. The military often understands ‘men of fighting age’ to include boys from 15 years old onwards, and they are frequently targeted for detention and arrest (Amnesty, 2020). In the early days of JASDJ, the military operated from a position that everyone in Borno state was a potential member, resulting in excessive force and high numbers of civilians killed (Mohammed, 2021). As the conflict evolved, the military focused on men in particular areas, such as around Maiduguri, and spaces lacking full governmental control, where soldiers assume everyone is linked to an organised armed group: whether as fighters or providing food and other material assistance. Gendered assumptions mean military actors demonstrate greater sympathy for women, the elderly and young boy children in these areas and are more likely to see them as victims. As a result, teenage boys and adult men are more vulnerable to being targeted in military operations and for arbitrary arrest and extrajudicial killing. They are more likely than women to be identified as suspicious during screening processes and face prolonged detention without trial. Gendered assumptions however can be challenged: soldiers participating in workshops on human rights, international humanitarian law, and civilian protection and harm mitigation facilitated by Nagarajan and colleagues in Borno state between 2016 and 2018 openly and frankly discussed their dilemmas with regards to children associated with armed groups.

Non-Coercive Gendered Practices

One of the key Nigerian state tasks as set out in the 2017 NAP on WPS was to engage in “post-conflict and re-integration issues such as psychosocial and trauma issues” (Nigeria Government 2017a: 4). However, rather than engage with the range of actors disengaging

from organised armed groups, leaving prison, or being removed from jihadist camps, this care was intended “particularly for women and children” (Nigeria Government 2017a: 4). Men meanwhile are more likely to go through formal disarmament, demobilisation, rehabilitation, and reintegration mechanisms. Support is provided through Operation Safe Corridor, run through a facility in Gombe state where deradicalisation, counselling, and vocational training takes place (Vanguard 2019). ‘Graduates’ are subsequently handed over to state governments and supported to reintegrate into communities. Meanwhile, women, more often seen as victims, are returned to communities with little support (Nagarajan, 2019). Approaches which prioritise ideological deradicalisation and support into work for men and not for women betray essentialist assumptions – not evidence – about different reasons for radicalisation: political and religious commitment for men; and lack of agency for women. Such assumptions adhere to post 9/11 logics evident in counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism strategies globally in which particular groups of men are regarded as suspect while women are not (Huckerby and Satterthwaite 2012; Brown 2013).

Here the issue of complex agency is key. Even men known to have been forced to join JASDJ or ISWAP are frequently regarded as violent active agents needing ‘deradicalisation.’ Women, meanwhile, including those who follow jihadist ideology and engaged in activities such as recruitment, providing food, and passing on intelligence, are seen as indoctrinated victims. As one Borno state government official said, as, “women’s minds are weaker, they are easily indoctrinated, but also this indoctrination goes quickly”.^{ix} As a result, women who *chose* to join organised armed groups are either excluded from post-conflict rehabilitation interventions or incentivised to lie about their complicity and present themselves as ‘innocent victims’ to access state benefits (Nagarajan, 2018).

The outcomes of such assumptions can also enable *coercive* gendered security harms. Some defendants in 2018 trials had been detained since 2009 and trial monitors raised fair

trial and due process concerns, including that many people were being held unlawfully (Human Rights Watch 2018). If men – and older boys - are seen as a threat and placed in custody rather than IDP camps, they may be subject to human rights violations (Human Rights Watch 2020; Danjuma, Nordin, and Muhamad 2018). Meanwhile, women who are sent to IDP camps can suffer sexual violence and other human rights violations perpetrated by soldiers, government officials, and CJTF members (Amnesty International 2018; Human Rights Watch 2019), as well as stigma and lack of livelihood options (Nagarajan 2019). Moreover, essentialism in DDR practices can further contribute to the longevity of the conflict and recruitment by organised armed groups. Sceptical communities continue to regard with suspicion women who return from organised armed groups without undergoing deradicalisation programmes, particularly as some women have returned to JASDJ in the past (Moaveni 2019).

Additionally, women members of organised armed groups who do not receive state support find it more difficult to leave groups and start life elsewhere than men. Many women and girls have therefore re-joined JASDJ or ISWAP; this produces the further risk that they will share negative experiences of attempts to ‘return’ and discourage other women members of armed groups from trying to leave (International Crisis Group 2019). Given many women and girls are sent out of organised armed groups by male relatives to ‘test the conditions’ before they too try to leave, unsuccessful rehabilitation of women impacts the chances of men’s surrender (International Crisis Group 2019). Organised armed groups are aware of these dynamics and capitalise on them. Members of Maiduguri-based civil society groups said women ISWAP members were exploiting the military’s essentialist assumptions about the lesser risks they posed, to move between military and ISWAP-controlled areas and recruit (Nagarajan, 2019). As one woman active in civil society said when interviewed in July 2019, “As the delineation of JASDJ and ISWAP becomes more distinct in people’s eyes and

ISWAP has an economic strategy to fund themselves, women are active participants in movement of people between Maiduguri and the *Dawlah* [Islamic State territory], strengthening ISWAP's economic position".^x Here essentialist assumptions in DDDR actively serve to sustain armed jihadist groups.

Securitisation of Women's Rights

States instrumentalise gender for securitisation agendas rather than ensuring and respecting women's human rights (Dhaliwal 2019). This instrumentalisation often focuses on a state's ability to liberate and protect women. In Nigeria this protection narrative centres on state 'rescue' of women from organised armed groups. Emphasis in the 2017 NAP on WPS on women as victims of abduction has enabled the instrumentalisation of women's rights by Nigeria's Federal Government, and the production of a gendered security harm. This is enabled through policy which neglects harms caused by state actors. and engages with a narrow understanding of gender as women (victims primarily) rather than a social construct. For instance, Muhammadu Buhari, then a challenger for the Presidency, used the 2014 Chibok abductions in campaigning to highlight the incompetence of President Goodluck Jonathan (Borger 2015). In his inaugural speech, now President Buhari staked his Presidency on the return of the Chibok girls, saying "We cannot claim to have defeated Boko Haram without rescuing the Chibok girls and all other innocent persons held hostage by insurgents" (Vanguard News 2015). By December that year, this focus had dissipated in the face of the realities. President Buhari said he had "technically defeated" the group, despite ongoing violence and fresh abductions (Staff Writer 2015).

Nonetheless, women's protection and 'rescue' in particular has been repeatedly used to justify interventions. The military continues to report 'rescues' of women and girls, largely

in the Sambisa Forest area, where JASDJ is most active. In 2018, the military claimed 30,000 people, mainly women and girls, had been rescued within two years (The Nation 2018). The reality is, many people had been cleared from homes in contested territories and taken to nearby towns to live as IDPs. However, women's 'rescue' from JASDJ is an important strand of Buhari's 'winning' narrative. This dynamic echoes the rhetoric of the war on terror in the period post-9/11 in the global north (Huckerby 2020: 184). It is often a distraction from the fact that 'rescue' to an IDP camp can end in further violence, with sexual abuses now enacted by men in positions of authority and trust (Read 2017; International Rescue Committee 2017). One young woman who chose to surrender to the military remembered:

“What I went through in the hands of Nigerian military, I did not go through with [JASDJ]. The soldiers laid me down, stepped on me, beat me... Nigerian soldiers, God will not forgive them. If you say you have repented, even God the Almighty Creator will forgive you. I am a young girl. I became sick. Some people with whom I was staying were even killed. I will never forget Nigerian soldiers, what they did to me. They tied my hands to my back and placed me on the sand and every soldier passing has to hit me and kick me. When I vomited, I vomited blood”.^{xi}

Amnesty International (2018) has documented multiple cases where women and girls 'rescued' by the military were subjected to sexual violence by soldiers as coercive punishment for participation in armed groups. Moreover, in the absence of adequate

humanitarian provision and family reunification, such women and girls struggle to access food, water, shelter, protection and other needs.

Gendered effects of seemingly gender-neutral policy

The final gendered security harm according to Huckerby's typology is failure to consider the adverse gendered outcomes of apparently gender-neutral policies. There are numerous such examples in northeast Nigerian. Fishing and farming have been banned in some areas, ostensibly to prevent the provision of produce to organised armed group fighters (Intriligator 2010). The types and heights of crops grown are restricted and trees cut down to prevent fighters hiding. Markets, particularly cattle markets, have been closed down. These actions produce particular harms for women and girls, who tend to have less access to resources and savings due to patriarchal gender norms. Another example is the military's removal of people from rural areas into towns under their control without any means to provide for their basic needs, leading to more sexual exploitation and abuse (Read 2017). Over time, women and girls have been forced to find ways to survive, earn incomes (including in ways not related to sex work), and benefit from humanitarian distribution. In some cases, men have been unwilling or unable to pursue livelihoods, affecting household and community gender relations (Nagarajan, 2017). As household incomes shift, some men's sense of status and masculinity can be threatened, contributing to higher reports of intimate partner violence. Failed and protest masculinities linked to changes in status are also recognised as a driver of recruitment to organised armed groups, as men use violence to seek status and power (Mercy Corps 2016; Ewi and Salifu 2017; Turner 2009; Kimmel 2003).

Overall, state actors are failing to maximise opportunities to transform existing gender power hierarchies, currently in flux. That so many men have been detained, killed, forced to

fight, or have migrated in search of work elsewhere has forced women to take on decision-making roles. As families see the income-generating value of adolescent girls, their education becomes seen as important. Women are also more active in community decision-making and, to some extent, being taken more seriously as security actors. Nagarajan notes a common comment in interviews, particularly in Adamawa state, that women's earlier increased agency and participation in decision-making may have helped avert conflict: women may have been better able to counter recruitment rhetoric, interviewees report. However, several Borno state officials demonstrate hostility towards UN agency and NGO interventions, partly due to a perception they are challenging patriarchal gender norms (Haruna 2017).^{xii} A Borno state official interviewed said all humanitarian assistance should go to men not women with widows or divorced women and girls receiving aid via their closest male relative.^{xiii} However, when aid has been distributed to men as heads of households, women and children often see no benefit. Women in communities Nagarajan visited from 2016 to 2019 where such modalities were practiced bitterly complained. Women's rights activists criticise these statements and actions as favouring patriarchal power and typifying a backlash against changes in gender realities due to the conflict.

CONCLUSION

As Basu, Kirby and Shepherd note of the function of gender in the security policies of states worldwide, "The nature of their engagement so far lends credence to feminist apprehensions regarding the state as an agent for positive transformations in global politics" (Basu, Kirby, and Shepherd 2020: 8). This article explored how this is apparent in Nigeria where state security policy, including that explicitly incorporating 'gender' has enabled human rights abuses and gendered security harms. This is due to a continued lack of recognition – and at

times denial – of the harms engendered by security actors, and essentialist, and discrete notions of women’s roles. Government actors tend to take an uneven approach, not following through on commitments they themselves have made in national and state policies. The WPS agenda is often not prioritised or is included only at the instigation of women’s rights activists, government officials, or development, humanitarian and peacebuilding agencies. Additionally, an – essentialist - emphasis on the protection of women has not resulted in their actual protections on the ground. Here, there are parallels with gendered security harms in the global north but the specific context and attitudes of Nigeria’s security actors to organised armed groups in the northeast produces specific harms, as outlined in this article.

This article does not argue that women cannot be victims; clearly at times they are. It instead suggests that without emphasis on human rights and with state practices that only enable box-ticking relating to UNSC resolutions on gender without real concern for gendered human rights, gendered security harms are inevitable. In particular, resulting harms mirror those of the global north and imply that imported security priorities bring fresh challenges. This article also suggests that Huckerby’s proto-typology provides an important means of delineating the types of harms produced in Nigeria and how they are produced. However, some of the boundaries between harms produced are not clear: considering non-coercive harms, for instance, essentialist policies putting men formerly associated with organised armed groups in detention while freeing women without rehabilitation can have coercive impacts, given the human rights violations faced. One of the key issues Huckerby identified is that security policies tend not to engage with gender holistically, except as a synonym for women. This is not unique to Nigeria. Change can produce backlash, sometimes from feminist actors. This was evident in opposition to the attempts of Martin Scheinin, the former UN Special Rapporteur for Terrorism, to include ‘masculinities’ within the scope of the term gender in 2009 (Scheinin 2012, xi). Nonetheless, an end to violence is more difficult without

attempts to at least consider harms done to men, the complexity of gender dynamics in societies and state institutions, and the role masculinities play in driving conflict. As Felicity Hill notes, “Perpetually problematizing women, placing women, their absence or their ‘victimhood’, at the centre of ‘the problem’ of women, peace and security fails to notice the problematic role of masculine identities in security discourse and actual wars, or the systematic over-representation of men” (Hill in Cohn, Kinsella, and Gibbings 2004: 137). A shift to a definition of gender in Nigerian policy which moves from women towards understanding how gendered hierarchies are socially constructed is required, as is emphasis on women’s human rights rather than their instrumentalisation in securitised responses.

It is now time for Nigeria’s third NAP on the implementation of the WPS agenda. However, the way ahead is complex. At present, kinetic counter-terrorism is more prevalent than communities-based countering violent extremism, given insecurity on the ground. Indeed, security agents – whatever the critiques of the military - are under immense constraints, often ill-equipped, without pay, and put at risk (Munshi 2018; Parkinson 2019); yet they often try to protect civilians, including women and girls. There is also some positive change, for instance, that some police stations have set up Family Support Units to provide a welcoming space for women and girls to report violence, supported by NGOs. However, much of the work of responding to gendered conflict dynamics has lain, not with the state, but with individual women activists and groups. Maiduguri has seen multiple protests of women demanding the release of their fathers, sons, and husbands who have been in detention for prolonged periods, women supporting survivors of gender-based violence, and women sparking community conversations around changing masculinities. It is also clear that gender norms are changing, to some extent to create more space and freedom for women and girls. Yet this is not supported by Nigerian government policy, which tends to reinstitute patriarchy, including in ways that did not previously exist. In the words of a woman

peacebuilder, “Women are taking decisions about their lives after conflict because they’ve realised that government has failed them, families failed them, husbands failed them”.^{xiv}

Patriarchal state structures in Nigeria – as elsewhere – do not adequately focus on gender in tackling violence, as that would mean challenging their own powers. Ultimately, this is the task of real gender reform: to challenge not just violent actors but the gender norms that produce violence, in organised armed groups and in the state.

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Chitra Nagarajan is a conflict and human rights researcher who integrates feminist methodologies and social inclusion throughout her work. Since 2013, she has been working across northeast Nigeria and the wider Lake Chad Basin for NGOs including adelphi, British Council, Catholic Relief Services, Center for Civilians in Conflict, Equal Access International, and Mercy Corps. She has interviewed over 600 people affected by violence, civil society activists, security agents, and government officials and participated in discussions around Nigerian peace and security policy and practice. She is a co-editor of *She Called Me Woman: Nigeria's Queer Women Speak*.

ⁱ Interview: Salkida, 2016

ⁱⁱ Interview: 'Fatima', 2018.

ⁱⁱⁱ Interview: 'Hauwa', 2018.

^{iv} Interview: 'Aisha', 2018.

^v Interview: 'Falmata', 2018.

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- vi Interview: UN worker, Adamawa, 2019.
- vii Interview: Shuwa Arab woman, 2017.
- viii Interviews: Fulani women, Borno State, 2018.
- ix Interview: Borno State official, Borno State, 2017.
- x Interview: Woman, 2019.
- xi Interview: Young woman, 2018.
- xii Interviews: Borno State officials, 2016-9.
- xiii Interview: Borno State official, 2019.
- xiv Interview: Woman peacebuilder, 2018.