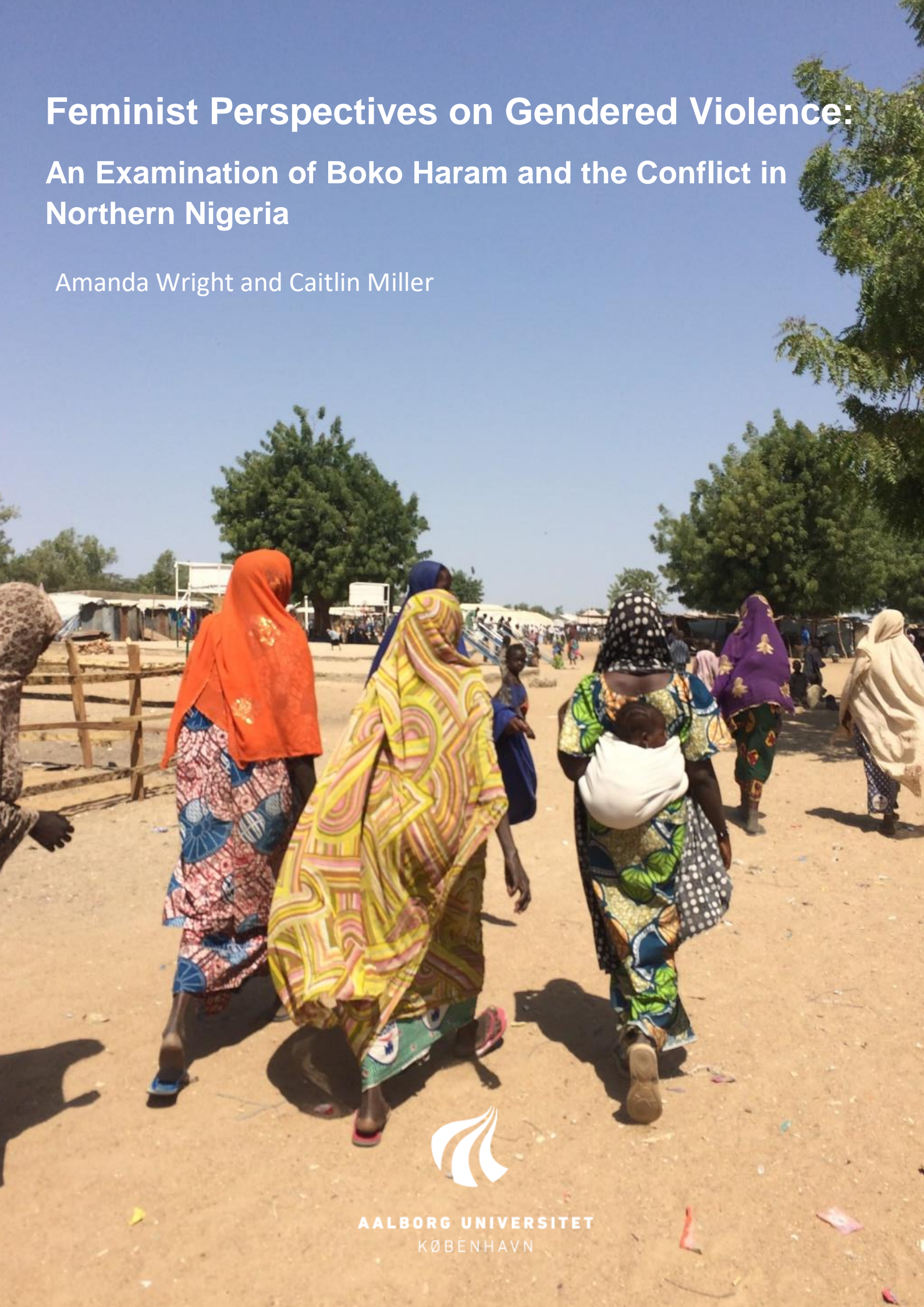


# Feminist Perspectives on Gendered Violence: An Examination of Boko Haram and the Conflict in Northern Nigeria

Amanda Wright and Caitlin Miller



AALBORG UNIVERSITET  
KØBENHAVN

Amanda Wright & Caitlin Miller  
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Supervisor: Steffen Bo Jensen

## **Feminist Perspectives on Gendered Violence: An Examination of Boko Haram and the Conflict in Northern Nigeria**

### **Abstract**

The ongoing insurgency in Northern Nigeria by the radical Islamist group Boko Haram has been characterised by extreme levels of violence towards women, including abductions, forced marriage, rape and the use of female suicide bombers. This study analyses and discusses this gendered violence and offers explanations for the possible causes through the application of three feminist theoretical frameworks. 'Rape as a weapon of war' posits Boko Haram's violence as a tactic purposefully adopted to meet military objectives. 'Feminist political economy' explains gendered violence as the extension of more invisible, structural forms of violence against women that characterised Northern Nigerian society in peacetime. 'Protest masculinity' examines the violence as a consequence of a crisis of masculinity, positioning it as an attempt by men to claim the power and status they feel entitled to, and rescue their masculinity from marginalisation.

Each of the three theories has its own focus and agenda and concentrates its analysis on different aspects of the conflict. Rape as a weapon of war distinguishes between the individual acts of violence and considers their impact on both victims and wider society. Feminist political economy looks to social structures and institutions and argues that patriarchy predisposes men to violence. Studying masculinities places focus on the individual male fighters and offers an explanation as to why violence might appeal to them. The aim of this study is not to test these theories against each other or establish which can offer the most 'correct' view of the conflict. Instead, the theories are taken in conversation with one another to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the situation. Explicating the different theoretical propositions also enables a discussion of their various strengths and weaknesses, both generally and in explaining the actions of Boko Haram.

**Key words:** gendered violence, sexual violence, rape, Boko Haram, terrorism, Nigeria, women and war, gender, conflict, feminism, masculinity, feminist political economy, rape as a weapon of war

**Cover photo:** Women living in Bama IDP camp, February 2017 (authors' own)

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## **Abbreviations**

<b>BOYES</b>	Borno Youth Empowerment Scheme
<b>CJTF</b>	Civilian Joint Task Force
<b>DRC</b>	Democratic Republic of Congo
<b>FPE</b>	Feminist Political Economy
<b>HRW</b>	Human Rights Watch
<b>IDP</b>	Internally Displaced Person
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>IR</b>	International Relations
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>US</b>	United States

## Introduction

Women and men are positioned differently in society and are therefore differently affected by conflict. While both undoubtedly suffer during war and are victims of violence, the different symbolic understandings of gender means that women and men are targeted in different ways. When considering the violence perpetrated in war, we commonly tend to think of soldiers wounded and killed on the battlefield. However, in recent years, focus has shifted to considering how women as civilians are also victims of wartime violence and how they have been increasingly targeted directly by soldiers and armed opposition groups. In particular, women are more likely than men to experience sexual violence. In recent conflicts in Bosnia Herzegovina, Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of Congo women faced brutal and intentional violence on a mass scale. Such violence against women in war is shocking not only because it targets civilians, but because the business of war is not meant for women. Traditional understandings of women's roles and femininity cast them as innocent keepers of the home that men go to war to protect.

The ongoing violent insurgency in Northern Nigeria by the radical Islamist group Boko Haram has similarly attracted global attention for the way that women seem so central to the group's modus operandi. Widespread reports of the brutal abuses of women committed by Boko Haram have shocked Nigerian society and the international community alike. Women and girls have been abducted, forced into marriage, raped, held prisoner in remote bush camps, used as domestic slaves and increasingly deployed as suicide bombers. If the group's goal is to overthrow the Nigerian government and establish a caliphate under its control, then how does targeting women serve this project? At first glance, Boko Haram's practices also seem at odds with its religious rhetoric. While the group extolls traditional Islamic values and emphasises female modesty, its kidnapping and rape of women destroys the sanctity of marriages, violates female honour and therefore seems un-Islamic. The use of female suicide bombers appears contradictory to the desire for female seclusion. If Boko Haram's actions towards women cannot adequately be explained by the ideology they espouse, then how can we understand them?

The previously dominant explanation of gendered violence in conflict positioned it as an unfortunate but natural side effect of war. This understanding was linked to the belief that gender was rooted in biology, that is to say that people were seen as either 'male' or 'female' based on their physiology. Biological differences produce behavioural differences and are the reason why men display masculine character traits and women feminine. Soldiers being biologically male possess an inescapable, heightened masculinity which manifests itself in their libido through strong sexual urges which must be fulfilled.

According to this narrative there are two related explanations for wartime sexual violence. First, the substitution argument posits that in times of war soldiers are unable to access the normal outlets for their strong sexual urges, namely through consensual sex with wives, girlfriends or prostitutes, and are thus driven to rape as a substitute outlet (Baaz & Stern, 2013). This explanation has been criticised, however, for if rape in wartime is only about sex, then how can one account for the fact that it is often accompanied by extreme violence or why some groups of women are targeted over others (Wood, 2009)? Second, rape during war occurs because of the conditions of war itself. Normal civilisation is suspended and there is a reversion to Hobbesian-like conditions where the usual rules of civilian life no longer apply. In this violent and brutish environment male soldiers are no longer restricted by social norms and so find themselves free to follow their natural inclination towards sexual aggression (Gottschall, 2004).

This narrative understands both men and women as subordinated to natural forces: "women appear as silent victims of the expression of men's biology, and men as subjected to the drives of their bodies" (Baaz & Stern, 2013, p. 19). Through extensive field research Baaz and Stern also found that this is often the dominant way that soldiers who have committed rape understand their own and other soldiers' behaviour (Baaz & Stern, 2013). Additionally, 'illegitimate' wartime violence such as rape is frequently explained this way in popular accounts – a perverted extension of the 'boys will be boys' argument. This sociobiological understanding of rape, however, has been heavily criticised by various academics for being overly deterministic and essentialising in its

treatment of men, reducing them to little more than a collection of animalistic drives and desires. It is argued to be a dangerous worldview which naturalises and depoliticises rape in war and thus hinders any action to stop it (Baaz & Stern, 2013).

The understanding of gender as biologically determined has now shifted in many academic circles. Towards the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, feminist philosophers and sociologists began to emphasise the socially- and culturally-constructed nature of gender (Sjoberg & Via, 2010); gender is not something that *is* but rather something that is *done*. In this school of thought gender identities are argued to be part of the social imaginary, fluid rather than fixed and stable categories. This re-conceptualisation of gender meant that men's violent behaviour was no longer natural and inevitable and instead could be made intelligible through other explanations. Violence committed against women in conflict was not just an unfortunate side effect produced when men go to war.

These alternative causal explanations for wartime gendered violence have predominantly arisen out of feminist scholarship, unsurprising not least because the feminist project is focused on drawing attention to and ending the widespread occurrences of male violence against women. Looking at conflict, feminist scholars challenged dominant military and state-centric approaches in international relations and security studies for their gender-blindness and neglect of female voices and the impact of wars on women (Weiner, 2017). Wartime violence against women was either insignificant to the arguments put forward or it was positioned as a by-product of war. For feminist scholars of various disciplines, however, gender is *the* lens through which they examine the world. When studying wartime gendered violence feminist analysis focuses on power relations between men and women, social constructions of masculinity and femininity, and how gender as a learned attribute is not only shaped by society but also structures social interactions and behaviours. These perspectives reject deterministic narratives and instead offer more nuanced understandings of the prevalence of gendered violence in conflict. Rather than developing new theoretical propositions, this research draws on this rich academic tradition.



The objective of this research is thus two-fold. It strives first to explicate Boko Haram's gendered violence: what form does it take and why it is so prevalent within this conflict? This question of causality is addressed by engaging with existing feminist theoretical propositions that offer explanations of gendered violence in conflict. The analysis of these feminist theories is the second aim of the research. We are interested in engaging with different theoretical frameworks to determine if their causal explanations hold true for the Nigerian context and have relevance in understanding Boko Haram, as well as their strengths and weaknesses more generally. This study therefore poses the following research question:

***How and to what extent are feminist theories able to explain the gendered violence committed by Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria?***

While the importance of feminist perspectives has already been discussed, it is pertinent to provide a brief introduction to the other key components of the research, namely Boko Haram and the term gendered violence. Boko Haram is an Islamic extremist group founded in the Northeastern Nigerian city of Maiduguri in 2002 by its then leader Mohammed Yusuf. The group's official name is "Jamā'atu Ahlis Sunnah Lādda'awatih wal-Jihad, or People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad" (Eden, 2014, p. 2). More commonly, however, they are referred to as Boko Haram, a Hausa name that denotes the group's rejection and prohibition (haram) of western education (boko) and more generally western values and civilisation (Eden, 2014). Initially non-violent, the group's activities were centred around a religious complex that offered a fundamentalist Sunni education which attracted poor students from the region. There and through public sermons, radio and local television appearances, Yusuf attracted followers by espousing a message that blamed the ills of the region on the imposition of western values since colonial days and offered hope through the creation of a new system based on traditional Islamic teaching and



Sharia law. In order to achieve such a vision the group sought to overthrow the Nigerian state which it saw as morally and socially corrupt.

In 2009 the group's violence escalated. They attacked police stations and other government buildings in Maiduguri and the violent outbreaks between Boko Haram and the Nigerian forces left between 900 and 1,100 people dead (BBC, 2016). Yusuf was taken prisoner, summarily executed whilst in police custody, and his dead body displayed on television along with claims by the Nigerian security forces that Boko Haram was defeated. This was not the case, however, and Boko Haram fighters regrouped with a new leader, Abubakar Shekau. Over the following years, they continued to engage in raids and increasingly violent attacks and in 2013 the US State Department declared them to be a terrorist organisation. The same year, the Nigerian government declared a state of emergency in response to the ongoing actions of Boko Haram in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states. In April 2014 the group attained international notoriety when 276 girls were abducted from their school in Chibok and taken to the group's stronghold in the Sambisa forest. During this time Boko Haram continued to spread throughout the region and in August 2014 declared a caliphate encompassing the town of Gwoza and the surrounding areas it controlled. "We are in an Islamic caliphate," stated Shekau, "we have nothing to do with Nigeria. We don't believe in this name" (BBC, 2016). However, the caliphate was short-lived and by mid-2015 Boko Haram had lost all the towns under its control and was beaten back into the Sambisa forest by a regional coalition of troops from Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger.

From their retreated position, Boko Haram continued to launch attacks and kidnap women, which continue to this day. The group's attacks led to it being declared the "world's deadliest terrorist organisation" in 2015 with 7,512 people killed by the group in the preceding year (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2015). In August 2016 the group split when it was claimed that Shekau had been replaced by the son of Yusuf, Abu Musab al-Barnawi. However Shekau publicly rejected this claim and instead they are leading separate factions of Boko Haram. While the two factions are broadly similar in terms of their goals and ideology, the pro-Shekau group tends to

deploy violence in a much more brutal and indiscriminate fashion, targeting Christians and Muslims alike (Onuoha, 2016).

Gendered violence is defined in this research as violence specifically directed towards individuals because of their gender, which includes “the normative role expectations associated with each gender, along with the unequal power relationships between the two genders, within the context of a specific society” (Bloom S. , 2008, p. 14). This can vary from one context to another but covers, for example, female infanticide, domestic violence, physical assault, sexual violence, trafficking, as well as threats of violence and coercion (Terry, 2007). The terms ‘gendered violence’, ‘gender-based violence’ and ‘violence against women’ are often used interchangeably. Violence against women, however, is not synonymous with the first two terms; rather, it is a subcategory under gendered violence as it focuses only on harm or suffering inflicted on women. While they are most commonly applied to look at violence that targets women, the terms ‘gender-based violence’ and ‘gendered violence’ also allow for consideration of violence directed towards men for failing to live up to society’s masculine ideal or gay men, for instance. Although this project does focus exclusively on the violence directed towards women by Boko Haram’s male fighters, we have opted to use the term ‘gendered violence’ as it draws attention to how violence is rooted in gendered norms and power relations – and this is one of the key considerations of the research. We further use the term ‘gendered violence’ rather than ‘gender-based violence’ as we find it more neutral; the latter has become institutionalised within humanitarian and development work to the extent that it has become a distinct sector of expertise in itself.

## **Research design**

This project privileges a qualitative approach and takes a single case study: the gendered violence occurring as part of the ongoing Boko Haram insurgency in Northern Nigeria. It is a challenging undertaking to offer an explanation of such a varied phenomenon unfolding in a complex conflict situation. It would be overly simplistic to assume that Boko Haram can be analysed as a

homogenous group driven to commit violence by a single motivation. Instead, there is likely a myriad of different factors which interact to produce this particular outcome. Thus from the outset, we expected that there would be multiple possible explanations and this shaped our methodological approach to the research. The research design was also influenced by the lack of first-hand access to the key actors in the conflict, namely, Boko Haram fighters and the Nigerian men and women impacted by their violence. This was necessary from a practical point of view: with the conflict still very much ongoing in Nigeria and the politically-sensitive nature of the crisis, access to informants was impractical and where Boko Haram was concerned, unsafe.

We therefore took an etic approach to our research. The starting point was not the primary, insider perspectives and self-understanding of the women and men living in Northern Nigeria. Rather, we looked to explanations within existing feminist theoretical frameworks that had been developed and applied outside of the Boko Haram conflict but that looked at similar contexts involving gendered violence. We identified preconceived theories about the causes of gendered violence in war and considered the extent to which they resonated with our empirical material. This was achieved through generating individual hypotheses from each theoretical framework, essentially asking if the theories were applied to Boko Haram what explanation they would provide. In order to be able to apply the hypotheses to our empirical material, we further developed a set of questions that would need to be answered in order to validate the theories' causal explanations. We also considered the strengths and weaknesses of each hypothesis: what does it allow us to observe in this context and what is it unable to see?

Importantly, it was not our goal to identify one theory that best explained our specific case and provided the most convincing 'answer'. Rather, our objective was to engage with multiple theories to see what understandings are brought to light through the application of these different perspectives. The theories are not necessarily competing and at times can be seen to be complementary, explaining different aspects of the violence and contributing to our deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

## Theory Selection

In seeking answers to the question of gendered violence in conflict, we chose to look within feminist scholarship. As has been discussed, many of the previous ways of thinking either ignored women and gender relations in their analyses or tended towards biological essentialism, seeing wartime violence towards women as an inevitable consequence borne out of the conditions of war. Feminist analyses of war instead place gender at the centre of their analysis. The violence committed by Boko Haram is after all violence by men against women. Their violence is not indiscriminate; men and women are not targeted in the same way. We therefore decided that understanding Boko Haram's violence required a gender analysis, focusing on gender relations and gender roles within Nigerian society. Within feminist scholarship there is a well-developed body of theoretical literature precisely on this subject, as feminism has long sought to better understand and ultimately end violence against women.

Within this broader field, the choice of relevant theoretical frameworks was then primarily driven by the empirical material. In the majority of articles written about Boko Haram and their gendered violence there is already a suggestion of causality, whether implicit or explicit. Alongside the presentation of the atrocities committed by Boko Haram, there were sometimes descriptions of the poverty in the north, for instance, or the gender inequality in Nigeria. We used these hints to guide our reading of different feminist theoretical perspectives that work with gender and conflict. At essence, we sought to link the implicit assumptions to the conceptual apparatus.

We strove to also consider different disciplines in order to attain a more well-rounded and nuanced understanding of the subject, acknowledging that different schools of thought have particular ways of seeing. Our reading of the empirical material ultimately led us to identify three theoretical frameworks as useful for our specific case: *rape as a weapon of war*, *feminist political economy* and *protest masculinity*. Each has a particular point of view and attributes causality to a certain set of factors and conditions – and there are quite substantial differences between the three. Taking these theories together enhanced our individual analysis of each one; the explanations

offered by one theory were often wholly absent from another, already giving us an early suggestion of where to look to consider its shortcomings. We will now briefly outline each approach and its subsequent hypothesis, while a more in-depth theoretical engagement is provided in the following chapter.

The rape as a weapon of war thesis is arguably the dominant explanatory framework for sexual violence that occurs in conflict settings. It posits that sexual violence during conflict is often a deliberate strategy that serves military aims. The centrality of this framework is evident in its enshrinement in international law and it has strong influence over international development and humanitarian efforts, institutions of global governance and states. It has been applied in similar situations elsewhere in Africa, such as the widespread sexual violence during the conflicts in Sierra Leone and Democratic Republic of Congo. While it actually offers less in the way of a gender analysis than the other theories, we chose to include it due to its widespread usage by the institutions and actors who work on the ground in conflict settings. This approach led to the following hypothesis: *The sexual violence committed by Boko Haram in North East Nigeria is not a side effect of conflict but instead a tactic adopted to achieve military aims.*

Feminist political economy (FPE) as a theoretical framework looks at the centrality of gender in understanding the distributions of power and political-economic processes in society. It has been applied as a mode of analysis within the field of IR theory as scholars strive to bring gender concerns into the understanding of international relations and global security. It has been taken up by feminist scholars to explore gendered violence in conflict as it considers how local and global political-economic processes inform and are informed by gender inequalities which lead to violence against women. Gendered violence in conflict is seen as a continuation of the violence, marginalisation and discrimination which women face during times of peace. Taking this approach enabled us consider causal factors beyond the conflict itself and look at issues of socio-economic and political marginalisation and structural inequalities. We arrived at the following hypothesis:

*The gendered violence of Boko Haram is caused by gendered political-economic inequalities in Nigerian society.*

The protest masculinity thesis originates from the schools of sociology and gender studies and is therefore from a very different academic tradition than the two previous approaches. It considers the symbolic power of gender in shaping men's beliefs and behaviour. It posits a crisis of masculinity as the source of male aggression generally, and violence towards women more specifically. Applying the concept of protest masculinity generated the following hypothesis: *Boko Haram's actions are a violent articulation of protest masculinity as a reaction to marginalisation and the impossibility of achieving hegemonic masculinity through other socially-accepted means.*

## **Empirical Material**

The empirical material studied by this project is the gendered violence perpetuated by Boko Haram as part of their insurgency in Northern Nigeria. With the focus firmly on gendered violence we were not interested in all of the reported actions and statements of Boko Haram but only those which were relevant to our analysis. This included the kidnapping of women, rape, forced marriage, sexual and domestic slavery, domestic violence, intimidation and the use of female suicide bombers. In limiting our scope we were able to bring greater specificity and focus to our research.

Our analysis relied on both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include news articles, online videos, and reports with direct access to and interviews with people who have lived through the Boko Haram insurgency in Northeast Nigeria, as well as online videos broadcast directly by Boko Haram. Secondary sources include academic journals and books which offer a more reflective analysis of the context and synthesise various primary sources. The selection of sources was largely informed by the theories themselves. As each theory offers an explanation of causality it also suggests where to look within the case for supporting 'evidence' and to the extent possible this guided our choice of data. For instance, rape as a weapon of war requires an examination of reports and articles that directly describe the specific acts of gendered violence

committed by Boko Haram. As FPE connects the prevalence of gendered violence to gendered material inequalities in society, engaging with its causal claims involves an analysis of national sources of socio-economic data on the conditions within Nigeria for men and women, including rates of employment, education and aspects of marriage. Engaging with the concept of protest masculinity draws on the sources used for the previous two approaches – socioeconomic data and reports of Boko Haram’s activities – but requires an additional look at constructions of masculinity in both academic sources and cultural products. Additionally, by proposing certain forms of data as central, each theory also opens up for an understanding of where to look for their shortcomings. In considering what data has been privileged at the expense of other types, we can reflect on what might be missing from the explanations proposed. For example, the overreliance on more quantitative socio-economic data leads us to question what more symbolic, identity-based considerations have been neglected.

Nigeria is a large country with many different languages and ethnic groups. There is naturally enormous diversity in society and the way in which people live their lives; one major division being between the Muslim North and the Christian South. This was borne in mind when selecting and engaging with the empirical material – particularly that regarding the wider social context – and thus we chose to restrict our analysis primarily to the northern region. When looking at quantitative data with a great level of detail at times we narrowed this down even further to look at the northeast and its six states, and in other cases focused exclusively on Borno State. This is the main area of activity for Boko Haram and the place where the group originated.

During the study period, one of the project’s authors spent eight weeks in Maiduguri in Borno State which allowed for direct observation of the living conditions of Nigerians both in the city and in military-run IDP camps. The other author completed a six-month internship working primarily with Nigerian women who had been trafficked to Copenhagen. While this does not form the primary basis of material analysed it provided inspiration and valuable insight into the context.



## **Limitations**

There are clear limitations to using pre-existing data collected by other researchers which we have not been able to independently verify. All sources have an inherent bias in their selection and presentation of information and it is important to be wary of particular agendas which they might be promoting. For example, we used various news reports from western media, which not only have a tendency to sensationalise to attract readers and simplify the situation into a good vs. evil narrative, but also reflect political opinions. Similarly, in looking at news articles and reports produced within Nigeria, it must be remembered that there is an ongoing conflict involving the government and they may want to influence the way stories are presented in order to sway public opinion. It is not within the government's interest to present Boko Haram as angry young men responding to their marginalisation, or the result of the massive disparity between the haves and have-nots in society, as this then would place the blame too close to the state's policies and corruption. Instead the insurgents are presented as an immoral and inherently evil phenomenon to be exterminated rather than understood and rehabilitated.

Similarly, it is necessary to consider the epistemic community from which sources are produced. Coined by Peter Haas, epistemic communities are networks of like-minded professionals that make an authoritative claim to knowledge within their particular field of expertise. Different epistemic communities share particular values and beliefs about causation, which justifies their actions and analytical reasoning. They also have common rules about what counts as valid knowledge, meaning that an entity or individual within one epistemic community is more likely to privilege the knowledge produced within their own community over others (Haas, 2016). Consequently, members of an epistemic community risk perpetuating the same understanding of a context, which may also serve the interests of their community. This issue is particularly relevant when using reports produced by NGOs and global governance agencies such as the UN who have the tendency uncritically reproduce each other's findings. Furthermore, given their role in advocating for particular goals they may be vulnerable to producing research that only supports their aims.

One relevant example of how knowledge is produced and reproduced within an epistemic community can be seen in the way that NGOs privilege the data from other NGOs and the UN over other sources. In Nigeria and other IDP contexts, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) is responsible for tracking and monitoring population movements through their Displacement Tracking Matrix.<sup>1</sup> The figures provided in this matrix are commonly used by NGOs to inform their programmes, rather than numbers from the Nigerian government, for example, which is often considered biased and less reliable. By contrast, IOM is regarded by NGOs as an institution that shares their core beliefs and reading of the Nigerian context, as well as their methods for collecting and validating information. Knowledge from this source is therefore believed to be inherently more reliable than that produced from outside the epistemic community.

Another issue affecting the reliability of the data more generally is the fact that women who have returned from Boko Haram's camps may be less likely to speak out on the violence they experienced due to the stigma of being associated with the group. It could also pose a very real security threat to their lives by both Boko Haram and the Nigerian state.

Our reliance on this data, however, was due to the realisation that it was neither feasible nor necessarily appropriate to access primary sources because of the security situation in Nigeria and the vulnerability of women who had suffered violence at the hands of Boko Haram (many of whom actually live in detention centres). We therefore designed our research in such a way that the focus is more on the overall meanings behind patterns of activity and not on the specific words being used in interviews. To the extent possible we also reviewed sources from different contexts and found consistencies among them which enhanced their reliability.

## **Chapter Overview**

This study is organised into four chapters, followed by a brief conclusion, and is structured so that each section draws and builds upon the work that precedes it. Chapter one introduces three

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<sup>1</sup> IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix for Nigeria is available at: <http://www.globaldtm.info/nigeria/>

feminist theories that propose explanations for the prevalence of gendered violence in conflict. First, we discuss rape as a weapon of war, followed by feminist political economy and ending with protest masculinity. Each section considers the theory's central propositions, briefly engages with some of its key texts or proponents, and provides examples of its application in other contexts. To aid our later analysis of Boko Haram we develop hypotheses, which give each theory's main claim adapted to the Nigerian context. There is also a consideration of the methodological implications of engaging with each theory, including sub-questions to be addressed.

The subsequent chapters then proceed to analyse Boko Haram through the theories explicated in the first chapter. In chapter two we engage with the rape as a weapon of war framework to analyse the different forms of sexual violence committed by Boko Haram. Looking at kidnapping, forced marriage and rape, and forced pregnancy we consider how they serve Boko Haram's interests in various ways and can therefore be seen as tactical.

Chapter three works with FPE and asks if Boko Haram's gendered violence can be understood as resulting from gendered political-economic inequalities in Nigerian society. We look at four thematic areas: marriage and household dynamics, access to education, economic opportunities and assets, and political participation. Within these areas we explore how women face marginalisation, discrimination and subordination to men. We then discuss how these structural features of Nigerian society manifest themselves in the conflict.

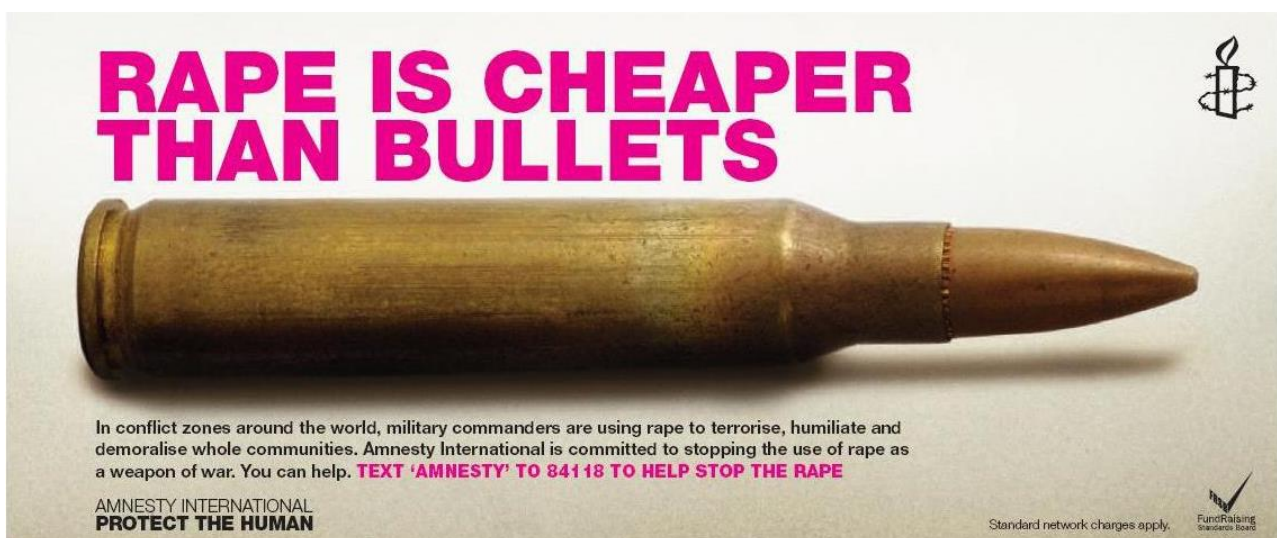
In the fourth chapter we consider how the group's gendered violence can be explained using the concept of protest masculinity. We discuss first the features of hegemonic masculinity in Northern Nigeria and how it is linked to marriage, domination of women and economic success. We consider how economic deprivation in the north means many young men fail to advance socially and gain the power and entitlement that they are socialised to expect, leading to a crisis of masculinity. This crisis leads them to violence as protest masculinity as a means of reasserting their masculinity. This violence is argued to be an exaggeration of many of the characteristics already associated with hegemonic masculinity in society and reflects the existing social gender hierarchy.

In addition to understanding Boko Haram's gendered violence, the aim of this research is also to explore the ability of different feminist theories to explain such violence. All three analysis chapters therefore include a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of each theory. We ask what each approach allows us to see or prevents us from seeing in this context, as well as considering how the causal explanations provided differ across the three theories.

# 1. Feminist Approaches to Gendered Violence

This chapter gives an overview of the three feminist theoretical frameworks that will be applied in the subsequent analysis chapters as a means of explaining the gendered violence committed by Boko Haram. Each theory is taken individually and discussed in detail: starting with rape as a weapon of war, moving onto feminist political economy, and ending with protest masculinity. Each discussion offers a brief look at the theory's origins in order to better understand the context from which it arose – and thus the potential motivations of its proponents – followed by an overview of its primary theoretical assumptions and causal explanations for wartime gendered violence. Ending each section is a consideration of the methodological approach required to interrogate each position, both the questions that will guide the analysis and the sources to be used. A more critical reflection on each approach's strengths and weaknesses is found in the later analysis chapters.

## Rape as a Weapon of War



*A 2009 Amnesty International poster campaign<sup>2</sup>*

The rape of women by soldiers during war has taken place throughout history and continues in conflicts today. While it was previously considered to be outside of the war as a strictly tangential

<sup>2</sup> Available at: <https://politicaladvertising.co.uk/2009/02/27/amnesty-rape-is-cheaper-than-a-bullet/>

side effect of warring, in contrast today rape is understood by many as an integral part of war itself and one amongst multiple tactics deployed “in the service of larger strategic objectives” (Gottschall, 2004, p. 131). This understanding of wartime sexual violence has also shifted within international legal frameworks. The notion of rape as a weapon of war was applied in the criminal tribunals that took place following the Bosnia-Herzegovina conflict where it was ruled that the sexual violence committed against Bosnian Muslim women constituted a crime against humanity. In Rwanda, the extensive rape of Tutsi women was declared to be a form of genocide (Wood, 2006). In 2008, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1820 noting that, “rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity or a constitutive act with respect to genocide” (UN Security Council, 2008). These rulings broke new ground as they “transformed the act of raping civilian women and girls from an ignored, tolerated or trivialised crime into a real and punishable crime” (Bergoffen, 2009, p. 307).

Rape as a weapon of war – occasionally referred to as strategic rape theory (Gottschall, 2004) – has thus emerged as an internationally recognised framework for understanding wartime sexual violence. Former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon echoed this stating that “systematic sexual violence, without a doubt, can be every bit as destructive to communities as more conventional weapons” (United Nations, 2009). The transformation in the understanding of rape during war follows the wider feminist discourse on both gender and rape which created new possibilities for understanding wartime sexual violence; “Sexual violence under feminist inquiry is thus politicised, and forced into the public sphere” (Kirkby, 2012). Instead of being merely a ‘natural’ side effect of warring, rape and other forms of sexual violence are analysed as a strategic tactic or weapon of war by the proponents of the hypothesis.

Importantly, the claim is not that all sexual violence during conflict is tactical but rather that in certain cases it has been found to be so. According to the UN’s definition, sexual violence includes “rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization and any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity, which may include indecent assault, trafficking,

inappropriate medical examinations and strip searches” (Stop Rape Now, 2011, p. 1). This definition of sexual violence was developed through the tribunals and courts for the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Cambodia and therefore encompasses the many forms of sexual violence that might take place during conflict.

According to this reading, sexual violence constitutes a tactic of war when:

...linked with military/political objectives and that serve (or intend to serve) a strategic aim related to the conflict. This will rarely be reflected in overt orders, but may be evidenced by the fact that an armed group has a functioning chain of command and is able to restrain other offenses (like mutiny or desertion), while sexual violence is neither condemned nor punished by military hierarchy. It may also be apparent that sexual violence is in line with the overall objectives of the group (Stop Rape Now, 2011, p. 2).

Sexual violence therefore needs not to have been explicitly ordered to be considered a tactic. It can be understood as having tacit consent where it remains unpunished while command is able to effectively punish other offences. There will be cases where sexual violence takes place during conflict and it is evidently not tactical. In such cases one might expect to find either a complete breakdown in military command structures or conversely the clear and firm punishment of those committing acts of sexual violence. The possibility for wartime sexual violence to be considered tactical, even in the absence of explicit evidence of commands, means that the framework can encompass more situations of sexual violence and better reflects the reality of modern conflict. Worldwide, sexual violence is grievously under-reported and under-punished. This is both due to rape’s continued social stigma but also because of problems with proof; given its personal nature, witnesses and physical injury can be lacking. If the framework required a paper trail of orders in order to prosecute, it would likely preclude much of the sexual violence perpetrated during conflict.

The rape as a weapon of war thesis has become institutionalised in the structures of global governance. This is evidenced by its inclusion in UN Security Council resolutions, the UN’s Stop Rape Now consortium, various International Criminal Court rulings and NGO policy, including the International Committee of the Red Cross (UN Security Council, 2008; Stop Rape Now, 2011;



Prosecutor vs Akayesu, 1998; Prosecutor vs Marti, 1996; ICRC, 2009). The framework's institutionalisation and prevalence indicates that it has become the dominant way seeing wartime sexual violence.

Having discussed the definition of sexual violence and when it can be considered tactical, the question remains why exactly and to what ends it is used. One factor that may make the use of sexual violence a preferable tactic is that it is more cost effective. Unlike actual weapons which can require huge sums of money and resources to produce, sexual violence is very low cost - as the Amnesty International campaign declared "rape is cheaper than bullets" (Amnesty International, 2009). The campaign points out that not only is rape low cost financially, it is also low cost in terms of consequences as such acts largely remain unpunished even after a conflict has ended.

Sexual violence can also be used as a form of reward or payment to combatants who may receive very little in terms of material remuneration for their soldiering. This occurs both actively and passively. Where passive, it is seen through a permissive attitude towards sexual violence with no punishment for such acts. It is more actively used as a form of payment where combatants are rewarded with access to women held captive as sex slaves or through being 'given' captured women to take as wives - women who will be later subjected to sexual and domestic slavery.

Sexual violence is used to demoralise enemy forces as soldiers can be seen as failing in their duty to protect when civilian women are raped. This can be deeply demoralising because the protection of women and the homeland are of central symbolic and actual significance during conflict and so "by undermining the authority of existing dominant males it denies them the myth of male protector" (Duriesmith, 2017, p. 53).

Sexual violence can also cause lasting damage, destroying the social fabric of communities and undermining peace-building. People who have been raped suffer severe physiological and psychological effects. Rape, gang rape and rape with objects such as weapons are prevalent during war leaving women with severe and lasting injuries. Physiological injuries include traumatic gynaecologic fistulas, mutilation, sterility and the contraction of sexually transmitted diseases

including HIV. Psychologically, rape survivors frequently suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety disorders, sexual dysfunction and social phobia (Benshoof, 2014). Public acts of sexual violence are characteristic of strategic rape meaning that the trauma is often not limited only to the immediate victim of the rape but can include family members and the wider community who have been observers to the attack (Benshoof, 2014). Victims of sexual violence can face further harm through social stigmatisation and rejection by their partners and where they become pregnant as a result of rape even greater stigmatisation can occur. Depending on local belief concerning the inheritance of psychological traits, the children born of rape may also be rejected by communities who believe they will follow in the footsteps of their enemy fathers.

Lastly, sexual violence has been used to facilitate ethnic cleansing. This may occur when the broad threat of sexual violence is used to terrorise populations pushing unwanted ethnic groups to flee from the territory. Public acts of sexual violence are often used in such cases intensifying both the humiliation of the act and the public fear of further violence.

Ethnic cleansing through rape also occurred in the Bosnian War and is a key example of where the rape as a weapon of war framework has been applied. During the war that took place in Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1992 and 1995, an estimated 30,000 to 50,000 women and girls were raped (Hughes, 2014). Sexual violence was perpetrated on a huge scale by one ethnic group towards another: Bosnian Muslims made up the majority of the victims while the perpetrators were mostly Serbs. Whereas some instances of rape being used as a military tactic can only be inferred, in the Bosnian War it was clearly articulated as can be seen in a Serbian document stating that “[Muslim] morale, desire for battle, and will could be crushed more easily by raping women, especially minors and even children” (cited in Kirkby, 2012). Sexual violence was thus used as tactic to demoralise Muslim Bosnian soldiers.

Another way that rape was used took place in so-called ‘rape camps’ where women and their children were held prisoners in hotels and disused public buildings and repeatedly raped. The women held captive were made to understand that they were being raped with the intention of

being impregnated with “little Chetniks” (Fisk, 1993). Women were raped until they became pregnant and then held in custody until enough time had passed to make an abortion impossible (Lausten, 2005). Bosnian society believed nationality was only passed through the father, therefore a Bosnian woman raped by a Serbian soldier would be seen as giving birth to a Serbian child rather than a half Serbian, half Bosnian child. When heredity is understood in this way, the forced impregnation of women works towards genocidal aims. Rape was used as a tool to ‘wipe out’ the Bosnian population.

Rape as a weapon of war is a relevant framework to apply to the conflict in Nigeria, not least because of its high level of institutionalisation within the field of global governance and international security. Its conceptual terms are already being used by key actors on the ground. For instance, the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Zainab Hawa Bangura, stated that Boko Haram’s sexual violence was a “tactic of terrorism, integral to their strategy of domination and self-perpetuation” and that they had “institutionalized the brutalization of women and girls, destroying their communities, and waging war on their physical, sexual and reproductive autonomy and rights” (UNFPA, 2015).

Following this approach requires first and foremost an analysis of the specific actions of Boko Haram within the context of the conflict to consider how they fit within the logic of warring. If we apply this conceptual apparatus to understand the gendered violence being committed, it leads to the following hypothesis:

***The sexual violence committed by Boko Haram in North East Nigeria is not a side effect of conflict but a tactic adopted to achieve military aims***

In order to assess whether the rape as a weapon of war framework is a relevant explanation for the conflict in Nigeria, we address the following sub-questions in our analysis:

- What acts of sexual violence have been committed by Boko Haram as part of their insurgency?

- In what ways can these acts be seen to serve a military objective?
- Is there evidence that sexual violence is a deliberate tactic endorsed by the group?

The literature on rape as a weapon of war lists numerous military objectives that sexual violence has achieved in similar contexts. These are used to frame our analysis of the empirical material to determine whether the acts of sexual violence are indeed a tactic. As the focus is on the specific actions within the conflict and their potential purpose, the material analysed is predominantly qualitative, first-hand sources. This includes news articles, videos, NGO reports, and some academic articles where local people and particularly women who experienced violence at the hands of Boko Haram have been interviewed. With the above questions in mind, this material is analysed to consider the extent to which it confirms the framework's causal explanations.

### **Feminist Political Economy**

Feminist political economy (FPE) is an analytical framework that takes a feminist or gender perspective to the study of the political economy, that is, the interaction between political and economic processes in society. FPE as a mode of analysis originated both out of a Marxist-feminist tradition emerging from the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and in response to perceived shortcomings in Political Economy, namely the failure to adequately address gender and women's experiences in existing economic theories (Mutari, Boushey, & Fraher, 1997). FPE focuses on the material basis of power relations and emphasises the centrality of gender in understanding these distributions of power and productive resources in society. Gender goes beyond being an individual trait and is conceived of as a social structure; an organising principle in society that shapes cultural expectations, social interactions and institutions (Risman & Davis, 2013).

This situates FPE quite differently than the previous theory discussed. Rape as a weapon of war is the dominant way of understanding sexual violence in the fields of humanitarian action and international law, where the focus is on punishing war crimes and addressing humanitarian needs during and after crises. FPE instead has been developed and taken up primarily by liberal feminists

of different disciplines. It therefore originates from within an emancipatory project that strives for global gender equality, and this also affects the types of explanations put forward. One of the early aims of FPE was to make women's experiences visible and to recognise the economic contributions of domestic and unpaid labour towards the perpetuation of capitalism, which had largely been ignored in previous economic models (Mutari, Boushey, & Fraher, 1997). Another contribution, further illuminating the interconnection between gender relations and material conditions, is Hartmann's writing on patriarchy. Hartmann brings together the radical feminist concept of patriarchy with an economic analysis, arguing that patriarchy has a material basis where "controlling women's access to resources and their sexuality... allows men to control women's labor power, both for the purpose of serving men in many personal and sexual ways and for the purpose of rearing children" (Hartmann, 2003, p. 212). The FPE approach has subsequently been applied to a diverse range of contexts, including looking at the linkages between gender and international peace and security, which draws also on international political economy and feminist IR theory (True & Tanyag, 2017). One area within this has been the analysis of the prevalence of gendered violence in conflict and post-conflict settings, which is the focus of this project.

True (2010; 2012; 2017) and Meger (2015; 2016) are two key academics who in recent years have argued for the application of an FPE approach in order to understand the sexual violence perpetrated against women in conflict. Their arguments rest on the contention that women's physical security and vulnerability to violence is fundamentally linked to "the political-economic structures that underpin gender inequality" and "the material basis of relationships that govern the distribution and use of resources, entitlements and authority within the home, the community and the transnational realm" (True, 2010, pp. 40-41). Global political-economic processes, such as globalisation, structural readjustment and armed conflict, often serve to reaffirm gender inequalities leading to further marginalisation and violence against women (True, 2010).

The argument is in part a response to official approaches in recent years, for example, by the UN Security Council, which regard wartime gendered violence as an issue of international security.

A clear example of this is the rape as a weapon of war framework discussed in the previous chapter, where sexual violence is analysed in terms of its practical military value. This securitisation, FPE scholars argue, loses sight of the political-economic factors that lead to violence against women. Although importantly it has made ending such violence in conflict a global priority and emphasised the need for women's participation in the post-conflict peacebuilding process, it does not sufficiently address why gendered violence takes place in some conflicts and not others (True, 2010). Sexual violence is analysed only within the context of the conflict and as something removed from the ongoing, more invisible forms of gendered violence that exist during peacetime. This focus on gendered violence within the context of war and security means that violence is not contextualised within "the gendered structures of economic impoverishment and lack of opportunity that are not addressed by political settlements or by peacekeeping missions" (True, 2010, p. 40). FPE instead understands the prevalence of gendered violence in conflict as stemming from gendered political and economic inequalities in society (Meger, 2015).

To better illustrate this approach, we can take the example of the violence experienced by women IDPs in Somalia. In the first six months of 2013, the UN reported close to 800 cases of gender-based violence in Mogadishu alone, although the figure is likely to be much higher as such occurrences frequently go unreported (United Nations, 2013). Somali women and children were repeatedly victims of violent sexual assault whilst living in temporary shelters in informal and formal IDP camps. A report by Human Rights Watch (HRW) on the issue provided a list of advocacy points with the explicit goal of exposing these all-too common violations and supporting the government, donor countries and others not only in remedying their effects but also to "reduce sexual violence... and develop a long-term approach to end these abuses" (Human Rights Watch, 2014, p. 2). For the most part, however, HRW's recommendations do not seek to address the underlying causes of the sexual violence occurring in Mogadishu. Instead, the emphasis (until the last section) is on providing women with better access to post-rape medical treatment, legal remedy and better security in IDP camps as a means of prevention. A FPE approach instead would consider why sexual violence is occurring at such a high rate by looking at the gendered inequalities

in political-economic processes. Somali women experience inequality in terms of their housing and land rights. Land tenure documents are often in only husbands' names which leave women with no legal claim on housing if their husbands evict them. They are frequently denied inheritance and women-headed households face a much higher risk of eviction in rented accommodation (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2016). Compared to men, women also have lower levels of education, less access to livelihood opportunities and higher unemployment rates (UNDP, 2014). These gendered structural inequalities result in women being confined to insecure and makeshift shelters in camps with inadequate protection, and with limited economic opportunities to get themselves out of this situation. Another aspect which can be analysed through an FPE lens is that women are frequently raped when leaving IDP camps to go and collect firewood and other household necessities. The gendered division of labour, which makes domestic work the sole responsibility of women, again contributes to their vulnerability and increases their risk of experiencing violence. This example highlights how the way in which a problem is framed shapes the solutions that are proposed to it. FPE scholarship would argue that the approach taken by HRW and other humanitarian practitioners fails to adequately understand the causes of the violence faced by Somali women as falling outside of the immediate, more short-term humanitarian crisis. This leads them to disproportionately focus on certain activities whilst neglecting to address the gendered structural inequalities in the wider society.

An FPE approach can also be applied to understand the actions of Boko Haram and prevalence of gendered violence within the conflict in Nigeria. Gender in FPE is conceptualised as a structuring force in society that determines the distribution of power and material resources. The central argument is that where women face gendered inequalities in terms of political and economic participation and legal rights, so too will they be more likely to suffer violence. This is because violence in conflict is understood to be a continuum (True & Tanyag, 2017). Violence in war is a continuation of the structural violence that exists in society in peacetime, which manifests itself in women's experiences of "violence, marginalisation and discrimination" and their "unequal power and life choices" (True & Tanyag, 2017, p. 45). This perspective entails a move beyond



individual motivations to consider the impact of macro-level processes such as globalisation, as well as structural features of societies, for example, household-level power dynamics and the gendered division of labour. It allows us to consider whether the violent acts performed by Boko Haram towards women, such as kidnapping, rape and forced marriage, can be conceptualised as a symptom of the wider structural gendered inequalities which pre-date the Boko Haram insurgency, not just a temporary aberration.

Applying this approach to understanding Boko Haram's gendered violence produces the following hypothesis:

***The gendered violence of Boko Haram is caused by gendered political-economic inequalities in Nigerian society***

In order to engage with this claim, it is necessary to look at the political-economic order within Nigeria, with specific attention to the ways in which gender structures unequal distributions of power and productive resources. To assess this, we worked with the following questions:

- Do women face structural inequalities and marginalisation in society in terms of their economic opportunities and political participation?
- How is power distributed between men and women within marriage and the household?
- Do women face officially-sanctioned gendered discrimination in law?

The sources required in order to engage with these questions are statistical reports and surveys undertaken in Nigeria which provide data on social trends differentiated by men and women, for example, employment and education rates. Additionally, relevant legal documents are analysed to consider how they may be discriminatory towards women. Qualitative sources are also used where Nigerian men or women directly express their experiences and opinions pertaining to gender relations in society, either from reports or news articles.

## **Protest Masculinity**

The growth of feminist theory in the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century served to highlight the relationship between gender and power. Feminist scholars argued that in patriarchal societies there is an inherent imbalance of power between men and women, which manifests itself in both domestic and external spheres through the unequal distribution of material resources, access to opportunities and social status, for example. In exposing these issues, feminist theory also informed a new area of research, the study of masculinity, which seeks to examine the social construction of masculinity, the practices and position of men in society, and understand their relation to femininity and power (Whitehead & Barrett, 2001, p. 3).

In 1995 one of the early and widely celebrated writers in this field, Raewyn Connell, developed the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Central to her argument is the existence of a hierarchical model of multiple masculinities and power relations. The claim for plural masculinities was an argument against normative definitions that held that there was an ideal type of masculinity which all men were measured against this. Instead, Connell emphasised that masculinity and power are relational constructions. She drew attention to the hierarchy between different masculinities and how they exist in a relationship of dominance and subordination with some more socially central and powerful than others (and especially in relation to femininity) (Connell, 1995). She writes, “[i]f we spoke only of the differences between men as a bloc and women as a bloc we would not need the terms masculine and feminine at all. We could just speak of men’s, women’s or male and female. The terms masculine and feminine point beyond categorical sex difference to *the ways men differ among themselves* and women differ among themselves, in matters of gender” (emphasis added) (Connell, 1995, p. 69). Moreover, as masculinities are understood to be socially constructed, they vary across locations and shift over time.

Her model consists of four broad categories of masculinity: hegemonic, complicit, subordinate, and marginalised. Borrowing from Gramsci’s concept of cultural hegemony, at the top of the hierarchy is hegemonic masculinity, which Connell defines as the form of masculinity that at

a given time is “culturally exalted” at the expense of others (Connell, 1995, p. 77). It is the set of culturally-accepted gender practices which legitimate the dominant position of certain men over women and other marginalised masculinities (Connell, 1995). In our western patriarchal society this is typically associated with characteristics such as whiteness, heterosexuality, affluence, strength and heroism. Importantly, however, hegemonic masculinity does not actually refer to a fixed character type but rather is the most culturally valued form of masculinity in a given context, and indeed can change at different times and locations (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Just as power is concentrated in the hands of a few elites in society, few men are able to embody the ideal of hegemonic masculinity. Most espouse a form of masculinity instead that Connell refers to as complicit masculinity. This masculinity does not seek to challenge the dominance of the “hegemonic project” or the patriarchal order in society and in doing so is able to benefit from its hegemony and reap its share of the “patriarchal dividend” (Connell, 1995, p. 78). In our society there are many men who do not achieve the idealised image of masculinity, but who are able to enjoy a position of privilege, relative to others, largely through the very fact of their maleness. However, their behaviour and practices are influenced by and work to support hegemonic masculinity, thereby maintaining its cultural dominance.

Subordinate masculinity exists in opposition to hegemonic masculinity in a relationship of subordination and dominance. This form of masculinity is afforded a lower status in the hierarchy as it fundamentally lacks or opposes the key characteristics which are valued in society and integral to the hegemonic masculinity. It is considered a “wrong” type of male performance and hence is “expelled from the circle of legitimacy” (Connell, 1995, p. 79). A clear example of this given by Connell is that of the openly homosexual man but it can also be applied to those considered to be effeminate, physically weak, overly emotional, for instance.

With the concept of marginalised masculinity, Connell takes into account how class, race or ethnicity affects power and social positioning. Marginalisation exists in relation to the authority bestowed upon hegemonic masculinity. Certain masculinities may be marginalised and

subordinated to the power of hegemonic masculinity not because of their deviance from the culturally valued gender performance, but rather because of other social power structures. Connell here gives the example of black masculinities in the United States (Connell, 1995).

Hegemonic masculinity does not necessarily correspond to the lived experiences of the majority of men and indeed hegemonic masculinities may be constructed that simply do not reflect the reality of any men. Additionally, those in positions of power in society are not a wholly homogenous group. However, hegemonic masculinity does not point to a “fixed character type” (Connell, 2005, p. 76). The idea has value not in looking at societies and mapping the four categories onto groups of people, but rather in understanding the power of hegemonic masculinity in shaping behaviours and patterns of gender relations. Hegemonic masculinity is an expression of “widespread ideals, fantasies, and desires” and provides “models of relations with women and solutions to problems of gender relations” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 838).

Connell further argues that some men who feel marginalised and unable to cash in on their share of the patriarchal dividend to which they feel entitled turn to what she terms “protest masculinity”. As Walker writes, “[t]hose unable to approach the level of expectations held out to them own no structure to fall back upon. Everyone in their reference loop is held to the same standard that is created and maintained from outside themselves” (Walker, 2006, p. 8). Hegemonic masculinity continues to be a guiding force shaping the expectations for and of marginalised men and yet they are neither able to attain it nor evade its power. The concept of protest masculinity has been largely applied in situations of poverty or ethnic marginalisation and involves “making a claim to power where there are no real resources for power” (Connell, 1995, p. 111). It is a pattern of masculinity whereby men seek to claim the power associated with hegemonic masculinity, however, are unable to do so through conventional means, lacking “economic resources and institutional authority” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 848). The result is often a hyper-masculinity or an aggressive display of masculine behaviour, acting in a manner which is

characteristic of hegemonic masculinity but which far exceeds socially-accepted practices (Duriesmith, 2017, p. 95).

Bourgois (1996) uses Connell's understanding of marginalised and hegemonic masculinities to understand the violent and predatory behaviour among inner-city Puerto Rican men living in East Harlem, New York. He argues that the community's working-class patriarchy has been thrown into crisis as many men fail to live up to the standards of hegemonic masculinity. Traditionally a very patriarchal culture, a man's power was built upon his ability to provide materially for his family. However, as men fail to secure stable employment, they lose the "material legitimation for demanding autocratic 'respect' and domineering control over their wives and children" (Bourgois, 1996, p. 413). Bourgois argues that this change in domestic power relations has led to men seeking to assert their declining patriarchal control through other means, mainly violence. They "reconstruct their notions of masculine dignity" by engaging in domestic violence, economic parasitism and sexual domination, including general promiscuity and rape (Bourgois, 1996, p. 414).

Kimmel utilises the concept of protest masculinity to analyse the discourses of right-wing extremist groups in the United States and Scandinavia, as well as the terrorists responsible for the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks in New York. He argues that globalisation has negatively affected the lives of some middle-class men and led to their downward mobility. In response, their protest has been the attempt to "remasculinise" men to recover "manhood from the devastatingly emasculating politics of globalization" (Kimmel, 2003). Kimmel argues that this has been achieved first through looking back nostalgically to a time where men had the power and privilege that today's men feel themselves entitled to. Second, the reassertion of masculinity tends to be along the lines of ethnic nationalism or religious fundamentalism as men deploy a form of masculinity which overtly stands in opposition to that which they identify as its threat. In the case of the Islamic terrorists, this involves looking back to a traditional form of Islam and manifests itself through a "virulent resurgence of domestic patriarchy" (Kimmel, 2003, p. 604). This religious expression of masculinity

serves to re-affirm male dominance whilst at the same time 're-feminising' women by limiting the scope of their influence.

The concepts of hegemonic and protest masculinity have also been applied to situations of armed conflict. Meger (2015), for instance, has argued that the mass rapes committed in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) are partly the result of a crisis of masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity in DRC is closely tied to the ability to earn money and the failure of some men to achieve this leads to a loss in social status. Unable to attain this economic masculinity these men instead deploy a militarised form of masculinity embodied through the idealised norm of the "sexually potent male fighter". Sexual violence becomes a way for them to both "reclaim the expected entitlements" and to reconstitute their masculinity by "forcibly dominating a weaker subject" (Meger, 2015, p. 425).

Applying the concept of protest masculinity to Boko Haram offers an interesting angle on the gendered violence taking place as it shifts the focus entirely to the male perpetrators of violence. The experiences of the women who suffer at their hands are largely inconsequential to its analysis. Very much opposed to the rape as a weapon of war framework, this approach does not see the gendered violence as a deliberate tactic but more as an inevitable outcome or consequence – not because of male biology but because of struggles within masculinity. It becomes a way for men to reassert their dominance and 're-masculinise' their identity against their perceived loss of status and entitlement; the violence is almost secondary to this project. Using the concepts of hegemonic and protest masculinity involves engaging with the symbolic power of gender in shaping behaviours and relations between groups of men and between men and women, rather than only its material manifestations as with FPE. This is in line with Whitworth's arguments as she writes that gender "depends on more than the actual material conditions of people's lives, for it is not merely reality but *the meaning given to that reality* that constitutes gender. Gender also, then, clearly refers to the ideas women and men have about their relationships to each other" (emphasis added) (Whitworth, 1994, p. 69). The study of masculinities engages with the symbolic power of

gender in identity formation and in shaping behaviours, as well as how masculinities are constructed in society (against femininity).

Using this conceptual framework lead to the following hypothesis:

***Boko Haram's actions are a violent articulation of protest masculinity as a reaction to marginalisation and the impossibility of achieving hegemonic masculinity through other socially-accepted means.***

To engage with this hypothesis we considered the following sub-questions:

- How is hegemonic masculinity defined in Northern Nigeria?
- To what extent are men able to attain the patriarchal dividend promised to them and is there evidence of their marginalisation?
- How does Boko Haram express their manhood – what type of masculinity is deployed and can it be seen as a form of protest masculinity?
- How is their violence a way to reassert their masculinity and reclaim the power which is not available to them through conventional means?

In addressing these questions we turn to various types of empirical material. First, considering constructions of masculinity in Nigeria involves an analysis of academic sources that contain interviews or other primary data on gender roles and masculinity in Nigeria. Moving on from this, we analyse more quantitative socio-economic data and qualitative reports to consider the experiences of men in Northern Nigeria and the extent to which their lives are able to fulfil the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity. As we turn more specifically to Boko Haram, we draw on the findings in the rape as a weapon of war section but consider how their actions can be understood through a masculinities framework.

In considering what dominant images of masculinity circulate in society, we also look at different cultural products. Although not an account of actual events, cultural products such as literature can nonetheless articulate a truth of the world. The author or artist creates their work through their subjective experience of society – indeed there is only ever subjective experience – and what they say has the power to tell us about the world as it is understood by members of a

particular society. “The literary creator has the ability to identify with wide ranges of experience, and he has the trained capacity to articulate through his fantasy the essential problems of his contemporaries” (Cosser, cited in Longo, 2015). That is to say that literature can do much more than merely express the opinion of a particular person but instead can embody something vital of the culture of which they are part. This is also especially relevant when it comes to hegemonic masculinity as it is precisely an ideal that is culturally-exalted but which does not necessarily have to represent the real lived experience of the majority of men.

In this chapter we have explored the three theoretical frameworks that will subsequently be used to examine Boko Haram’s gendered violence, outlining their key theoretical assumptions and the methodological implications of applying such theories. Examining them together in this manner revealed how while they ultimately all originate out of a broader feminist tradition, they in fact posit very different answers to the question of gendered violence in war. Rape as a weapon of war analyses violence for its functional value in achieving military goals. FPE considers how gendered violence in war is a reflection of more hidden forms of violence against women in patriarchal societies. Protest masculinity sees violence as a symptom of a crisis of masculinity and violence towards women allows men to recover their gendered identities from emasculation. As the three explanations provided rest upon very different sets of factors and conditions, engaging with the theories also require us to look at different types of empirical material. Where rape as a weapon of war confines its explanations and analysis to the conflict itself, FPE and protest masculinity look at more structural factors within society that pre-date the outbreak of violence. These differences will become even clearer as the theories are applied to the case of Boko Haram in the following three chapters.



## **2. The sexual violence committed by Boko Haram in North East Nigeria is not a side effect of conflict but a tactic adopted to achieve military aims**

In this chapter the sexual violence committed by Boko Haram is analysed through the rape as a weapon of war framework. First, we consider the extent to which there is empirical evidence to support the theory's proposition that sexual violence in war is tactical and works towards military aims. This is achieved through an analysis of the different types of sexual violence perpetrated against women by Boko Haram – kidnapping, forced marriage and rape, and forced pregnancy – with a discussion of the possible military objectives they serve. We then reflect upon this analysis to consider the strength of the hypothesis in specifically understanding the conflict in Nigeria: in what ways does our case study support the theory and where do its explanations fall short? This is followed by a more general discussion of the rape as a weapon of war approach.

### **Kidnapping**

Boko Haram's kidnapping of women and girls can be considered tactical from many angles. It was originally deployed in direct response to and in imitation of the Nigerian Army's similar tactics. Although Boko Haram is now infamous for kidnapping the Chibok girls, the group's targeting of women for abduction is a relatively new strategy which only began in 2013. In 2012 the wives and children of Boko Haram's leader Shekau and other high commanders were arrested and detained by the Nigerian Army, despite there being no evidence to suggest they were involved with Boko Haram's activities or even aware of their partners' involvement with the group (Zenn & Pearson, 2014). In total over one hundred Boko Haram family members were arrested as a way of targeting the group by proxy (Zenn & Pearson, 2014). In the year of their families' arrest and detention, Boko Haram released videos lamenting the abductions and warning that they would retaliate with the abduction of women if their families were not freed. In 2013 they made good on their threats abducting a family of seven in Cameroon in February and in May twelve Christian women and

children. Boko Haram released video statements confirming that the women were being held in retaliation for the Nigerian army's actions and threatening the women they held captive: "Since you are now holding our women, (laughs) just wait and see what will happen to your own women... to your own wives according to Sharia law" (Zenn & Pearson, 2014a, p. 14). Later many of Boko Haram's family members were released in exchange for the women kidnapped in 2013. The effectiveness of the tactic of abducting women and girls as collateral in order to gain bargaining power was thus established.

Since 2013 Boko Haram has continued to kidnap women and girls and in 2014 caused international uproar with the abduction of 276 girls from Chibok. The Christian students were taken from their dormitory at a government-run secondary school and held in Boko Haram's camp in the Sambisa Forest. Boko Haram reportedly objected to the girls' participation in school and had previously threatened them calling them infidels for attending school where western education was taught (Zenn & Pearson, 2014). Reports suggest that the kidnapping and other violence against students was so severe that schools in Borno state were closed because of safety concerns (The Guardian, 2014). The kidnapping sparked the globally-promoted #bringbackourgirls campaign and briefly turned the world's attention to Northern Nigeria, dramatically raising Boko Haram's profile. At first Shekau released video footage claiming he would sell the girls and marry them to fighters but as international concern grew they became even more valuable in terms of bargaining power. As one Boko Haram member reportedly told the negotiator Aisha Wakil, known as Mama Boko Haram, following the international attention: "Chibok girls have become diamonds, we are no more releasing them" (Wakil, 2016).

The kidnapping of women and girls has remained an ongoing tactic with reports continuing to emerge. Following a raid on a village in Borno in 2015, in which Boko Haram abducted a number of civilians, the group were again able to successfully negotiate for the release of prisoners held by the Nigerian state having threatened if they "do not release our wives and children, we will not release theirs" (Bloom & Matfess, 2016, p. 113). In a recent case in April 2017, 22 women and girls

were abducted in raids in Northeast Nigeria. It is reported that Boko Haram fighters arrived in the early morning in pickup vans and took 14 girls under 18, while residents fled into the bush; a further four people were abducted while running away (Agence France-Presse, 2017).

The Chibok girls and other abductees serve as a powerful propaganda tool for Boko Haram, massively increasing interest in the organisation globally and emphasising the Nigerian government's inefficacy through its inability to rescue them. Keeping the Chibok girls hostage serves Boko Haram's interests because it publicly demonstrates their power in opposition to the Nigeria army's weakness. Boko Haram's interests are served through the use of some abductees as bargaining chips in exchanges of prisoners. More generally, the kidnapping, forced marriage and rape of women strikes a symbolic blow against the Nigerian army and the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF). This demoralisation of enemy forces is another way that violence towards women can be used tactically to serve military aims. Armies and vigilante groups value strength, bravery and protection of the homeland; women in this way of seeing the world become that which the soldier protects as symbols of the home, community and family honour. When Boko Haram kidnaps and rapes women the Nigerian army and CJTF are rendered failures in their duty of protection – failing both as soldiers and more generally as men.

### **Forced Marriage and Rape**

Kidnapped women are taken away to rural bush camps, most famously in the Sambisa forest in Borno State (Motlagh, 2016). Here women are held prisoner and subjected to repeated physical and sexual abuse in a form of sexual slavery (Bloom & Matfess, 2016). In interviews with women who escaped from Boko Haram, women and girls as young as twelve report being “locked in houses by the dozen at the beck and call of fighters who forced them to have sex” (Nossiter, 2015) with rapes occurring on a near daily basis (Sieff, 2016). Another woman reports being the servant of a group of teenage boys who would taunt her with machine guns and gang rape her when they returned to camp after days spent out killing and pillaging (Motlagh, 2016).

Rape of captive women often takes place under the guise of marriage. Women are forced to marry through threats of physical violence and murder (Nossiter, 2015). However, these marriages are not always the ceremony traditional to Nigerian society. One woman reported that only days after being kidnapped a Boko Haram fighter came into her tiny hut – barely big enough to lie down in – then “said a prayer in what sounded to her like Arabic. Now they were married, he told her” (Sieff, 2016). Women and girls are handed out to Boko Haram fighters by its leaders and can be “re-assigned” to other men when their husbands are killed in battle (Oriola, 2017). With deaths of fighters frequently occurring this means that some women have been forced into marriage more than five times (Ross, 2015).

The sanctity of these marriages is questionable, however, as the interviewed woman mentioned above also reported how every evening different men would come into her hut and rape her – not only the man who was supposed to be her husband (Sieff, 2016). In this sense the link between the acts of rape and the legitimacy of marriage seems more tenuous. Instead, it can be argued that they serve the purpose of what Cohen (2013) refers to as combat socialization. Her argument is that armed groups often use rape as a tool to socialise new members and to create and maintain cohesion among fighters. Rape, and particularly gang rapes, she writes, “enables groups... to create bonds of loyalty and esteem”. It is less of a sex act and more an act of camaraderie or performance where the audience is the group and the women’s body the “vehicle” with which to achieve this (Cohen, 2013, p. 461). By jointly partaking in acts of violence, individual members of Boko Haram are also able to signal to their peers that they are committed to the group and are willing to take risks to ensure its continuance (Cohen, 2013). This can result from fighters’ anxiety over their status in the group. As Cohen writes, “when trapped in a group of hostile strangers, individuals are likely to choose participation in costly group behaviour over continued estrangement from their new peers” (Cohen, 2013, p. 465). Following this argument somewhat refutes the idea that rape is an articulated tactic originating from Boko Haram’s leadership but rather suggests that it is a phenomenon arising from among the rank and file combatants. However, as the framework acknowledges, even where sexual violence is not a deliberate strategy the fact

that it is condoned or at least goes unpunished by Boko Haram's leadership means it can still be regarded as a weapon of war.

While women and girls are raped in Boko Haram camps there is limited evidence of the group raping civilians outside of the camps. There is only one article that reports women living in Boko Haram controlled territory being taken away and raped by fighters but then returned to their communities: "These men have taken control of the young women in the town. They rape and abuse our daughters. In the evening they choose ones who are neither pregnant nor nursing mothers and take them away. They don't bring them back until the morning. If it is not rape what are they doing to them?" (BBC, 2015).

Boko Haram's violent abuse of women was initially only targeted towards Christian women. In a 2013 attack at a Maiduguri university it was reported that all the men were killed while the women were divided into Muslim and non-Muslims; the Christian women were then systematically raped (Zenn & Pearson, 2014). In another incident, six Christian women were abducted and raped in Maiduguri by fighters who claimed to be collecting a sexual form of 'jizya' – a tax that Christians pay under Islamic law (Zenn & Pearson, 2014). This suggests that there may be different motives behind Boko Haram's rape of Muslim women and Christian women. Particularly when the abduction of Christian women has been accompanied by forced conversion, their rape can be seen as punishment for being 'infidels' or to intimidate Christian communities, inciting them to flee the area or convert.

One of the ways that forced marriage works as a tactic of war is by using women to reward fighters. This is both through granting them easy access to women for the purposes of sexual gratification and through facilitating their marriages. Raising the funds needed for marriage can be difficult in the impoverished north of Nigeria and the promise of a wife by joining Boko Haram may be a convincing incentive (International Crisis Group, 2016). Abducted women become 'gifts' to fighters which not only encourages recruitment but also helps to build their loyalty. It is also reported that before the outbreak of violence Yusuf used to help men raise the necessary bride-

price in order to get married (Bloom & Matfess, 2016). One former Boko Haram captive described how with marriages conducted in the camp “[t]hey even paid the bride price for the women. Everything went through the Amir in the base” (Amnesty International, 2015, p. 64).

A report by Amnesty International, however, states that all the respondents who had lived for extended periods in Boko Haram controlled territory or camps had told them that “[s]exual violence and rape of abducted women is strictly forbidden under Boko Haram’s version of Sharia law” (Amnesty International, 2015, p. 64). The women interviewed instead said they were raped secretly at night. If the claim that the rape of women was forbidden by the version of Sharia law espoused by Boko Haram is true, it would undermine the case that sexual violence is one of the group’s deliberate tactics. Rather, the rape of women outside of marriage would appear to be the criminal activities of individual men.

### **Forced Pregnancy**

It is widely reported that high numbers of former Boko Haram captives are found to be pregnant. For instance, of the 234 women and children rescued by the Nigerian army in May 2015 it was remarked that a “sizeable number” were visibly pregnant (Vanguard, 2014). This has led many to suggest that the group has adopted a deliberate strategy of impregnation. Various sources have reported how this serves the goal of ensuring a new generation of fighters who can continue the jihad started by Boko Haram (Bloom & Matfess, 2016). Some Nigerian communities also believe that it is the father’s blood that determines a child’s character, thus children born of Boko Haram fathers will be genetically programmed to carry on their fight (UNICEF, 2016). As a consequence of this belief, impregnated women who have managed to free themselves from Boko Haram often face marginalisation and discrimination in their communities. Their children are considered to be tainted with ‘bad blood’ and along with their mothers may be stigmatised their whole lives (UNICEF, 2016). While this may not be the primary aim of Boko Haram, it nonetheless serves the purpose of destroying the social fabric of those communities who chose not to join the insurgency.

Further evidence in support of this assertion is that Boko Haram does not appear to be raping indiscriminately but instead target certain groups of women and not others. For example, there are reports that older women are spared from sexual violence (Motlagh, 2016) or that they have been released in times of food shortages, while the younger women are kept as they are of a higher value (International Crisis Group, 2016). Married women are also considered to be less desirable. In a 2013 attack it was reported that married and single women were separated and Boko Haram then “left the old ones there, didn’t even look at them, took these fertile-looking women and left” (Oriola, 2017, p. 108). These actions suggest not only that Boko Haram’s rape of women is a deliberate tactic but also that it impregnation may be a primary goal.

However, Boko Haram has not publicly stated that forced pregnancy is part of a wider campaign, nor have they justified it as a necessary tactic in their establishment of a caliphate (Bloom & Matfess, 2016). Interestingly, the suggestion that impregnation is a deliberate tactic seems to have been suggested by the UN, NGO representatives and Nigerian government officials. It was the Governor of Borno State, Kashim Shettima, who claimed that “the sect leaders made a conscious effort to impregnate the women... Some... even pray before mating, offering supplications for God to make the products of what they are doing become children that will inherit their ideology” (cited in Nossiter, 2015). This is supported by a state official from Maiduguri who explained, “[i]t’s like they wanted to have their own siblings [sic] to take over from them,” suggesting again that Boko Haram is trying to create the next generation of insurgents to succeed them (Nossiter, 2015). Other reports have described the mass rapes of captive women as “a fundamental aspect of the organization’s strategy for continuity... [with] women as the bearers of its future despite their brutality to them” (Oriola, 2017, p. 107). One aid worker interviewed describes it as “a deliberate strategy to dominate rural residents and create a new generation of Islamist militants” (Nossiter, 2015). Interestingly, the same article then acknowledges, that despite these claims, “to their prisoners, the fighters’ campaign didn’t seem driven by ideology so much as a wild appetite for sex and violence” (Nossiter, 2015). There is a discrepancy therefore between the

way that secondary sources have presented forced pregnancy as a deliberate military objective and the (missing) accounts of Boko Haram fighters and the statements of women abducted.

## **Discussion**

The analysis of Boko Haram's activities suggests that in various ways their violence against women serves a tactical purpose. Abducting women has given Boko Haram collateral that they can use to their advantage in negotiations with the Nigerian government. Kidnapping has significantly raised the profile of Boko Haram and brought them international media attention. The rape and forced marriage of women is arguably a way to recruit and reward fighters, particularly in a context where impoverishment makes it difficult for men to marry through conventional means. Rape and kidnapping also work more generally to undermine and humiliate the Nigerian state, as well as other males in the community, demonstrating that they are unable to protect their women and children from harm.

The sexual violence perpetrated by Boko Haram since 2013 has been widespread and more or less consistent. This implies that it has been adopted as a matter of practice; it does not just occur in isolated incidents which could be attributed to individual volition. Women have been kidnapped and forced into marriage from across the north of Nigeria over a period of several years. This further supports the claim that violence against women is a specific tactic adopted by the group to achieve their aims, weakening the image of the Nigerian state and fostering the establishment and growth of their Islamic caliphate.

Boko Haram's approach has changed and evolved over time, often in response to particular events. The kidnapping of women first began in retaliation for the abduction of their own families. This practice then grew as the effectiveness of it became clear. One local militia member also stated that once the security forces made Maiduguri "too hot" Boko Haram was forced to flee without their urban wives. This then meant they had to resort to "picking up women anywhere and using them to satisfy themselves" (Human Rights Watch, 2013). Furthermore, they have not treated all groups of



women in the same manner; there are reports that older women are often spared from sexual violence. This suggests that Boko Haram's actions are deliberate and formulated to serve a specific purpose – not just aimless violence or an inevitable consequence of warring.

There is mixed evidence, however, to support the oft-reported claim that Boko Haram has adopted a tactic of mass impregnation to produce the next generation of fighters. While it is an obvious outcome where there is widespread rape, it is unclear if it is Boko Haram's ultimate objective and the majority of articles naming it a campaign of impregnation refer back to the statements of the Borno State Governor. The understanding of forced pregnancy as a weapon of war – in a similar way to that which took place in Bosnia – has also led to the misrepresentation of facts. One well-cited statistic is that 16,000 babies were delivered by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Northeastern Nigeria in 2014 with either the suggestion, or direct assertion that this is a significant increase because of Boko Haram's brutality (Vanguard, 2014; Oriola, 2017). However, going directly to the source, UNFPA actually state that “16,350 women had safe deliveries in UNFPA-supported facilities across the six states”, not necessarily as a result of rape (UNFPA, 2015). UNFPA also describe how there are 214 pregnant women and girls across the IDP camps in Borno State (UNFPA, 2015) with the qualification that it is not known if they are the result of Boko Haram's violence. A US online newspaper, however, reported that 214 of the 234 women rescued in a recent raid on the Sambisa forest, were pregnant (Windsor, 2015). Drawing attention to this is not to downplay the suffering of women made to endure rape and forced pregnancy, but rather to highlight that the claims of impregnation being a military strategy may be unfounded.

While there are indications that the Boko Haram's deployment of sexual violence might be tactical, the empirical material can also be read in other ways. The way that the rape as a weapon of war framework analyses sexual violence and how it so far been applied to Boko Haram perhaps credits the perpetrators with more foresight and awareness of the impact of their violence than they really have. Looking at the effect of the sexual violence on women and their communities, for example, it is evident that it damages the social fabric in a variety of ways such as demoralising men

as protectors, putting strain on resources through the physical and psychological damage to women and undermining relationships through the stigmatisation of victims. What is not established, however, is whether Boko Haram meant for these consequences to occur and was thus motivated by them or if they are unintended side effects of their actions. In a sense there is a danger of 'putting the cart before the horse' and saying that because the sexual violence had these impacts (which are tactically beneficial) it is therefore evidence of it having been tactical. For indeed, would sexual violence that was committed by undisciplined and criminal soldiers not have the same impact?

It is also worth noting the distinction between the words weapon and tactic as *prima facie* they require very different levels of proof. On one level the words have a shared meaning in that they both convey the instrumentality of sexual violence during conflict: indicating that sexual violence serves as a means to an end. However, they in fact have quite different definitions. Tactics are short-term decisions that implement a military strategy including those decisions about the deployment of weapons. The term weapon has a two-fold meaning: on the one hand referring to an actual thing or tool designed to inflict bodily harm and on the other it can denote a "means of gaining an advantage or defending oneself in conflict or contest" (OED, n.d.). Thus the burden of proof required to demonstrate that something is a weapon is less than that of a tactic. It is evident that the group's sexual violence inflicts harm on its victims and so is indeed a weapon. It is however more difficult to prove that sexual violence is a deliberate military tactic of Boko Haram where clearly articulated orders are neither present nor available. The tactical use of sexual violence must instead be inferred as we have endeavoured to do in this analysis.

Thinking Boko Haram's actions through a rape as a weapon of war lens poses further problems when it comes to the considering its effectiveness as a tactic. Sexual violence does not necessarily work towards achieving all of Boko Haram's stated objectives and may even have an adverse effect on them. The group's overall aim can be taken as the establishment of a caliphate in Nigeria, rejecting the Nigerian state and its imposition of western rule on the Muslim people. In order to achieve this aim, Boko Haram has engaged in conflict to win territory - declaring areas they

capture to be under their control and part of the caliphate. Both during conflict and state- (or caliphate-) building civilian support is of high importance. As a rebel group Boko Haram does not enjoy the same access to centralised resources as a state army. They must source food and shelter locally, relying on civilians to supply them. Civilians can also provide intelligence either to rebel or state actors depending on their loyalty. In other words, civilian support would be a strategic advantage to Boko Haram during the conflict. Yet Boko Haram's widespread sexual violence has led to them being feared and despised by many local populations, who far from staying to live under the newly established caliphate flee in huge numbers. There are also reports of Boko Haram fighters close to starvation from lack of access to supplies (Reuters, 2017). It would be more in line with their goals of state creation to win the hearts and minds of civilians whose support is vital rather than alienating and terrorising them. The idea that rebel groups rely on civilian support and so commit less sexual violence is supported by the wider empirical material. In her study of civil wars between 1980 and 2009, Cohen found that at least some sexual violence took place in 83% of conflicts (Cohen, 2013). While it was most common that both state and non-state actors committed sexual violence (62%), in 31% of conflicts only state actors committed rape compared with the much lower occurrence of insurgents being the sole perpetrators (7%) (Cohen, 2013). The fact that more often than not sexual violence occurs on both sides of a conflict also suggests that it may have less to do with wartime tactics and more to do with cultural or social practices which are shared between actors.

In a similar context, Duriesmith has written how the practice of cattle raids by armed groups in South Sudan does not appear to serve any clear war logic and further alienates the local populations from which they require support. He describes these actions as indicative of the "new" forms of low-intensity conflict that have come to prominence in recent decades" (Duriesmith, 2017, p. 1). These conflicts do not seem to follow what is perceived as the traditional logic of war. Instead, they are "foreign and unintelligible" and "characterised by their perceived brutality, longevity and irrationality... [where] the established logics of military behaviour no longer apply" (Duriesmith, 2017, pp. 1-2). Herein lies a central criticism of the rape as a weapon of war framework: precisely

that it tries to impose a traditional, military-centric approach to the acts of sexual violence in conflict. In assuming that there must be war logic to sexual violence, it tries to impose a degree of order onto situations that appear morally abhorrent and barbaric.

Applying the rape as a weapon of war framework to the situation in Nigeria does not offer an adequate analysis of the gendered violence. First, the approach deals only with sexual violence, not other forms of violence committed against women. While this approach has strived to bring attention and resources to the issue of rape by elevating it to the global security agenda, it risks having an adverse effect by still treating sexual violence as something distinct to be analysed. Why should sexual violence be regarded as something removed from other forms of violence? Feminist theorists have long emphasised that the goal of rape is not really sex but about power and violence – dominating and controlling the victim of their aggression (Muehlenhard, Danoff-Burg, & Powch, 1996).

Second, its limited scope means that the approach does not allow us to consider other aspects of gendered violence committed by Boko Haram, for example, the women that are kept as slaves for domestic labour in camps. The discussion of kidnapping even falls outside of the framework; we have included it, however, as it more often than not leads to forced marriage and rape – but not always. Similarly, the practice of using women and girls as suicide bombers has been completely ignored in this analysis, and this is one of the more distinctive features of the conflict which also distinguishes it from other wars that took place in the region. As the conflict in Northern Nigeria progressed, Boko Haram has increasingly made use of female bombers at a much higher rate than has been seen in other conflicts (Bloom & Matfess, 2016). In various ways their use can even be seen as having tactical advantages. Female suicide bombers can move more easily around the city without attracting attention from security forces, suicide vests can be more easily hidden under their veils and loose-fitting garments and they attract greater media attention (Oriola, 2017). However, such practices fall outside of the framework as they do not relate to sexual violence.

Lastly, in analysing and explaining sexual violence only through the language of war and within the boundaries of the conflict, the framework fails to adequately consider how the prevalence of sexual violence in war is tied to specific social and cultural factors such as historical patterns of behaviour and gender relations or domestic violence in marriage – as will be analysed in the FPE chapter. This also seems particularly relevant given Cohen’s findings that more often than not wartime sexual violence has been perpetrated by actors on both sides of the conflict (Cohen, 2013).

While it is evident that in some contexts sexual violence is tactical – such as in the Bosnian rape camps – it is not necessarily tactical in all cases. The ‘success’ of the weapon of war framework has seen it institutionalised in the structures of global governance and it is now the dominant way of understanding by actors on the ground. The assumption that any sexual violence during conflict is inherently tactical can be seen in the language of UN and NGO reporting on sexual violence. While undoubtedly a powerful explanatory framework that has finally seen sexual violence prosecuted alongside other grave war crimes, imposing the framework onto all cases of sexual violence in conflict is deeply problematic. It is hazardous because it blinds us from seeing other causes of sexual violence during war, hindering attempts to stop such violence.

The framework’s centrality shapes aid responses in a way that may focus too heavily on support for damage caused by sexual violence at the expense of other sometimes more-pressing needs. The ongoing warring in the DRC illustrates this: the focus of publicity and funding has become centred around rape survivors to the extent where women find themselves compelled to lie about being rape victims as the only way to access vital services such as fistula repair surgery (Baaz & Stern, 2013). Likewise, the “one-sided focus on sexual violence” means that support and services offered to rape survivors fail to address the other forms of violence experienced and its causes such as women’s widespread rights violations, domestic violence and flawed inheritance and property rights (Baaz & Stern, 2013, p. 98).

The shortcomings of this conceptual framework may also stem from the fact that its primary use is not to better serve the victims of sexual violence. It strives to prevent violence from occurring not necessarily through understanding its origins but rather by significantly increasing the punishments for those who engage in it: making it a war crime and crime against humanity. Proponents of this framework, largely NGOs and the UN, that strive to explain sexual violence occurring in a conflict as a weapon of war are largely doing so for advocacy purposes, to raise awareness and bring global attention to the situation. Sexual violence therefore cannot have multifaceted, contextually-nuanced explanations which are only reached following pages of analysis. The explanations provided are thus less a matter of academic rigour and more about providing a clear, powerful message that can easily be digested by a broad audience and move them to action. This is more than apparent in the “Rape is cheaper than bullets” poster from Amnesty International (see page 17).

This chapter explored whether the sexual violence of Boko Haram is a tactic adopted to achieve military aims rather than merely a side effect of the conflict, as was the conventional understanding. We considered how women had been kidnapped, forced into marriage, raped and impregnated and arguing with the framework we looked at how these acts might serve military aims and therefore be seen as tactical. Despite being able to identify ways in which sexual violence has tactical advantages for the group, we found various flaws in the framework’s explanations. Forced marriage and rape had potential tactical advantage in terms of recruitment and boosting morale, however, we were unable to find clear evidence that the sexual violence taking place towards abductees was endorsed by the group. What is more, it appeared to run counter to many of the group’s wider aims. The kidnapping of women was clearly a deliberate tactic that had evolved over time and brought military advantages to the group, yet it technically falls outside of the framework as it is not a form of sexual violence. This restricted scope limits the value of the framework as it is unable to explain the other forms of gendered violence taking place. The rape as

a weapon of war framework has been strongly institutionalised and as such has become the way of seeing wartime sexual violence by the key actors on the ground in conflict situations. Indeed, we argued that this pre-understanding had led to the claims of forced pregnancy being misrepresented. Overall, while allowing for a fruitful exposition of the case, the rape as a weapon of war framework provides an incomplete explanation of the gendered violence of Boko Haram. While there are definitely ways in which sexual violence serves tactical aims, there is no clear evidence to show that meeting those aims was the reason the violence occurred in the first place. Ultimately, the framework does not offer a comprehensive answer as to why gendered violence is a feature of some conflicts and not others. As its explanations are based upon war logic and take only the conflict itself into account, it does not adequately bring gender issues into its analysis. It is significant in the Nigerian context that the sexual violence taking place is by men against women. Yet the framework leaves no space to consider how gender roles within society or power relations between men and women might be an important contributing factor to the type of violence taking place.

### **3. The gendered violence of Boko Haram is caused by gendered political-economic inequalities in Nigerian society**

This section applies a feminist political economy approach to explain the gendered violence committed by Boko Haram in Nigeria. Engaging with the hypothesis that the violence against women is the result of gendered political-economic inequalities in society, it looks beyond the conflict itself to the wider Nigerian society. We consider whether women face inequality relative to men by looking at gender relations within marriage, power dynamics within the household, women's experiences of education, employment and politics, and lastly how the law treats women differently from men. These thematic categories have been selected to enable us to conduct a broad analysis of the extent to which gendered inequalities cut across the social, economic, political and legal realms of Nigerian society. The importance of focusing on household dynamics is in recognition of the fact that as almost all women in Northern Nigeria are married, many are secluded and few work, it is an extremely relevant area to understand gender relations between men and women and therefore the material manifestations of power inequalities at the social level. Additionally, its relevance as an analytical category is echoed by True who argues that understanding the "gender division of labor within the family and household economy" is central to an FPE analysis of violence against women (True, 2013, p. 20). This analysis of wider society is then brought back to Boko Haram as we consider how these gendered political-economic inequalities play out in the conflict and how Boko Haram's actions can be seen as a continuation of society's structural violence against women. The chapter ends with a consideration of some of the shortcomings of FPE in explaining the group's gendered violence.

#### **Marriage and household dynamics**

Northern Nigerian society is generally divided into household compounds headed by a male owner and consists of his wife or wives and any adult sons who cannot yet afford their own property. Within the home there is a clear gendered division of labour and certain tasks are considered to be



male or female. Men generally perform the work outside the home such as farming or collecting water while women are expected to work within the home preparing food, caring for children and doing other domestic chores (Tipilda, Alene, & Manyong, 2011). These attitudes are deeply entrenched; in a survey on male behaviour and masculinity 97% of northern participants said it would be unacceptable for a man to do a woman's job (Olawoye et al, 2004). The gendered division of labour is further reinforced by the practice of seclusion or purdah in many northern communities where women are confined to the home and so unable to participate in life and work in the public sphere (Sada, Adamu, & Ahmad, 2005). Given that 99% of women in Northern Nigeria have been married at some point, looking at life within these compounds and household dynamics is crucial to understanding the situation of women.

Polygynous marriages are a common family form in the north where 33% of women are married in a polygynous union and 17% men are married to more than one woman (National Population Commission, 2014). The widespread practice of polygyny logically results in a disproportionate amount of unmarried men compared to women and it would further be reasonable to assume that this creates a shortage of brides. Polygyny is endorsed by Islam, providing that a man can provide for them and treat them equally (Al-Islam, n.d). That being said, life in polygynous unions can pose economic difficulties as the earnings and resources of one male provider are divided between more dependants. One married girl describes the difficulty she faces as a co-wife:

[The co-wives] give me very little food and warn me not to tell our husband. Whatever I want, I have to ask for it from home [parent's house] and even right now I am sick with headaches and if I ask for money or medicine they will say they don't have any - Married girl, age 14, married at 13, 2 pregnancies, 1st child died, 3 years education (in Erulkar & Bello, 2007, p. 8).

The tradition of bride-prices is also practiced throughout Nigeria. The bride-price is a payment by the groom, of items as well as money, to the family of the woman whom he wishes to marry. In the Hausa community of Northern Nigeria bride-price payments tend to be lower than the

rest of the country, with the minimum payment referred to as “rubu dinar”, which translates as a quarter kilo piece of gold, and the maximum as high as the man can afford (Efagene, 2015). The tradition of bride-prices has been criticised by Western feminist scholars for creating a culture in which the woman becomes a commodity that can be ‘bought’. It “reinforces the notion that women are chattel that can be passed on from one male to another” – women are moved from under the control of their father to the control of their husbands in exchange for this payment (Deller Ross, 2008, p. 406). This sentiment is echoed in a Nigerian article, which outlines some men’s way of thinking around bride-prices: “She now “belongs” to the groom and becomes his wife. Some would interpret this to mean that she becomes his “property”... After all he has paid for her... After all she is his property and by virtue of the bride price” (Vanguard, 2016). If a man feels he has purchased a wife for a high price, he may also feel entitled to control her behaviour, with force if needed. This perspective has been criticised, however, by some African scholars as a misunderstanding of cultural difference. For them, bride-price is an important ritual and a mark of respect to the bride and her family; the money paid shows the groom’s ability to provide for her, prevents him from easily picking up a woman on the street and thus means he is less likely to divorce her (Ogunyemi, 1996).

When married, girls move from their family’s compound into either the husband’s own compound or that of her in-laws. Women report that this transition results in a significant loss of freedom: “With your husband, you have to ask permission before you do anything at all” (Erulkar & Bello, 2007, p. 8). This sentiment is reflected in a larger population study, which found that husbands do not generally consult their wives on decisions even when they directly concern them or their children. Husbands in Northeast Nigeria make the decisions about their wives’ healthcare in 86.8% of households surveyed and for major household purchases in 85.4% (National Population Commission, 2014).

In Northeast Nigeria, women are married at a significantly younger age than men and wives tend to be much younger than their husbands. The 2013 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey

reported that the average age of first marriage for women in the Northeast is 16.6 years while the first age for men is 25.2 years (National Population Commission, 2014). The majority of women were married while still adolescents and almost half as young girls: 41% of women report having been married by age 15 or younger and 72.3% were married by age 18 (Erulkar & Bello, 2007). Early marriage can be the result of poverty – where a family lacks adequate financial resources, young girls are more likely to be regarded as an economic burden and their marriage to an older man is a means of survival (Adebowal et al, 2012). Likewise, financial reasons may lead men to marry later because a man in Nigeria must be able to provide for his wife and family. Poverty, men's lack of financial security and ability to provide for a family is thus a central reason in delaying marriage. Another factor leading to the very early marriage age of girls is that it is seen as a way to protect them from promiscuity and premarital sex, and therefore avoiding its associated dishonour and shame (Braithwaite, 2014).

Every parent would like to see the daughter married. It's normal practice among the Hausa that at the age of 15 or so, one should get married. This reduces the burden on the family and brings peace to the family - Married young woman, aged 22, married at 15, polygamous, completed Junior Secondary School 3 (Erulkar & Bello, 2007, p. 6).

Early marriage puts girls at a disadvantage compared to those who are married later in life. Girls who marry early begin having children earlier, have a longer childbearing period, and consequently higher fertility rates (Adebowal et al, 2012). Over her lifetime the average woman in Northern Nigeria will have more than 7 babies (Fick, 2016). Women with low levels of income have poor access to healthcare and cannot afford to give birth in hospitals. As a result, Nigeria has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world with 814 deaths per 100,000 live births; in a country whose population makes up 2% of the world's population, it has 10% of the world's maternal deaths (Fick, 2016).

A 2003 survey of over 7,000 women in Northern Nigeria also found that the majority of marriages were arranged by family members. While some girls accepted this as the will of Allah, many others tried to resist. This resistance, however, was met with threats of violence: "There is

nothing I could have done because my father said if I refused, he will throw my mother out of the house unless I agree to marry” (Erulkar & Bello, 2007, p. 6).

Domestic violence is also prevalent in Nigerian households and cuts across all locations, as well as socio-economic and cultural backgrounds (National Population Commission, 2014). In the northeast, 29.5% of participants in a national survey reported experiencing physical violence and 15.7% sexual violence since age 15, with a current husband as the most common perpetrator. 20% of women living in the Northeast also reported that their husband engages in controlling behaviour, predominantly jealousy or anger because they talk to other men, and insists on knowing her whereabouts at all times (National Population Commission, 2014). A separate report claimed that one in four Nigerian women experience domestic violence during their lifetime (Hart, 2016).

### **Access to Education**

The girl-child is less valued than the boy-child in Northern Nigerian culture, an attitude that is reflected in the Hausa phrase ‘ba ayi komai ba, macce ta haifi mace’, which translates as “nothing is gained by a female giving birth to a female” (Sada, Adamu, & Ahmad, 2005, p. 12). One of the areas where Nigeria’s north/south divide is made starkly visible is in the education of girls, with literacy rates as low as 11% in some northern states and high as 90% in the south (National Population Commission, 2014). Girls’ rates of literacy in the north are also lower (72% illiterate) than their male counterparts who are 48.3% illiterate (National Population Commission, 2014). These literacy rates reflect very low levels of school enrolment for girls with 75% of rural northern girls never attending school (Erulkar & Bello, 2007).

There are some more practical explanations for the disproportionately low levels of school attendance among girls. Parents may be unable to afford costs associated with sending all of their children to school and opt to send their sons over their daughters. Girls are also seen as more vulnerable to sexual harassment and danger both while in the school itself and while traveling to and from (British Council, 2012). However, much more significant are the entrenched gender roles in

Northern Nigeria which dictate that women are expected to become wives and mothers and carry out domestic labour. A formal education may therefore be seen as unnecessary to fulfil this role and instead the only responsibility of parents is the preparation of their daughters for marriage (Oriola, 2017). Because of the structure of society parents know that their daughter will go to live with another family once she is married and so may be less inclined to send her to school as investment in her education would ultimately only benefit another family. This way of thinking creates what Oriola describes as a “cultural climate in which women and young girls are perceived as expendable material and burdens to be rid of” (Oriola, 2017, p. 105).

### **Economic Opportunities and Assets**

Nigeria’s labour market is clearly gendered and women are constrained in achieving financial independence in various ways. On a national level, women earn less than men at every educational level (British Council, 2012). In Borno State - the heart of Boko Haram territory - 88.5% of men are in employment compared to 28.5% of women, according to 2013 statistics (National Population Commission, 2014). In addition to their low employment rates, women also tend to work more frequently in the informal sector. This can be seen as disadvantageous as they are denied numerous benefits that formal employment brings such as access to bank credit, the ability to accumulate a pension and access to social security (British Council, 2012). This is no doubt largely due to the fact that women are responsible for child-rearing and the upkeep of the home and so may lean towards sources of income that can be flexibly arranged around their other commitments. These trends follow the society’s strict gender roles where the man is primarily responsible for supporting his family economically and women are dependent on their husbands for survival.

When women are in employment, they may still face further obstacles that prevent their success. For example, one study of agricultural practices in Northern Nigeria found that female-managed land had 28% lower crop yields than that managed by men. As the study’s authors write, “women are not worse farmers, but just face certain constraints that limit their productivity”

(Gbemisola et al, 2015, pp. 285-6). These constraints include the fact women possess less land than men, have weaker tenure security, have more limited access to technology and information, have lower education levels, and face obstacles in their access to agricultural inputs and assets such as fertilizer, machinery and credit. Muslim women may also be disadvantaged as custom prohibits women from accessing male labour and markets without a male companion (Gbemisola et al, 2015).

Married Muslim women in the north are not entirely without their own income. Many women engage in informal economic activities, even when in seclusion, and are not obliged to hand these earnings over to their husbands. These activities mainly consist of trade between other secluded compounds in what has been referred to as the “honeycomb trade”, and can actually grow to a relatively wide network of relations (Tipilda, Alene, & Manyong, 2011). However, while this income may provide women with a little more economic independence it nonetheless reinforces the idea that men and women inhabit separate worlds, and the woman’s place is firmly within the private, domestic sphere.

Land ownership is also divided along gender lines. While female land ownership is generally low in Nigeria, the proportion of women who do not own a house or land is highest in Northeast Nigeria at 95% (National Population Commission, 2014). Even where women do legally possess land it is seldom recognised according to the customary law of many communities and their use of it is dependent on their relations with men (Aluko & Amidu, 2006).

### **Political Participation**

Since Nigeria’s return to democratic rule in 1999, women have sought access to elected political positions with decision-making power but have only made marginal gains. The political landscape remains very much male-dominated. In the last general election in 2015 women only achieved 7 seats of 109 in the Senate and 19 of 360 in the House of Representatives – 6.4% and 5.2% respectively – a decrease since the last election (Quadri, 2015). Despite the fact that women are

well-represented in terms of voter registration and turnout, they have failed to enter mainstream politics in a significant way (Banko, 2016). The situation is even more pronounced in the north of the country with even lower levels of representation of women (Eniola, 2016). Women who have run for office express facing discrimination and resistance at all stages of the electoral process; as one female senator explained: “It was the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) elite... who felt a woman shouldn’t dare contest for governorship. So it’s the elite who arrange things such that however you come out, they tie you and shut the door against you” (Anyanwu in Quadri, 2015, p. 11).

Banko suggests that women are deterred from running for elected politics due to “high levels of competition, the often violent nature of Nigerian politics and deeply held prejudices against female politicians... with some women reporting pressure to withdraw their candidacies, harassment and physical attacks” (Banko, 2016, p. 238). This claim is supported in an interview with three Northern female politicians who report facing opposition from Islamic leaders and male politicians to their campaigns and being regarded as prostitutes merely for running: “In the North, it is very difficult for a female to come out and contest for positions. The men are not ready to support a woman... They said a Muslim woman was not supposed to lead” (Eniola, 2016). The strength of traditional gender roles is apparent as resistance is often articulated in terms of women’s transgression of their ‘natural’ place in the home: “They said, what are you (women) doing among men? You are supposed to be at home waiting for your suitors or cooking for your husbands... Male politicians see women as their property” (Eniola, 2016). Besides this prejudice, these women also faced very real threats of violence and physical attacks. As one woman revealed: “I have been threatened. I have escaped death by a whisker on few occasions. I have been beaten up at the conference centre; they tore my dress and left me only with my underwear” (Eniola, 2016).

There is also an economic dimension to women’s struggles to gain access to political positions. Large sums of money are required in fees to contest an election and run on a political party’s ticket. While this no doubt is also an obstacle for low-income men, it presents an even greater deterrent to women due to their reduced income, lower participation in the labour market

and the general feminisation of poverty in Nigeria. While parties have reduced their 'expression of interest' fees specifically for women, there are still high costs associated with running a political campaign which poses a significant barrier (Banko, 2016; Eniola, 2016). Women's lower levels of education in Northeast Nigeria also prevent their participation in politics.

### **Legal Protections and Rights**

Nigerian women's marginalisation is enshrined in law as well as everyday practice. Women have scant legal protection from domestic violence. The Penal Code of Northern Nigeria states that "[n]othing is an offence, which does not amount to the infliction of grievous harm upon any person and which is done by a husband for the purpose of correcting his wife" (McGarvey, 2009, p. 116). Additionally, marital rape is not legally conceivable in Nigeria and is not a punishable offence under section 282 of the Penal Code for Northern Nigeria, which stipulates that once a woman has reached the age of puberty, any sexual intercourse within the confines of marriage will not be considered rape (Banda, 2008). Additionally, the burden of proof for cases of rape under Sharia law is high: victims must present four witnesses otherwise they could be liable for defamation – a near impossible ask. The existence of such laws may help to explain why rape is one of the most underreported crimes in Nigeria (Ekhator, 2015). This is supported by a 2012 household survey where only 0.1% of participants said that they reported the crime to the police or soldier when a victim of sexual or physical violence (National Population Commission, 2014).

Child marriage is prohibited under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Nigeria has ratified, and the domestic 2003 Child Rights Act. However, this law has not been enacted by the eleven northern states where child marriage is a common practice, particularly among the Hausa-Fulani tribes. The practise of early marriage is not prohibited in Islam and the prophet Muhammed, whose example Muslims are encouraged to follow, married his wife A'isha when she was twelve years old. The majority of Muslims in northern Nigeria are Sunni and there is unanimous agreement between the four Sunni schools that there is no lower limit on a girl's age for marriage though it is



forbidden to consummate the marriage until she is mentally and physically capable (Sada, Adamu, & Ahmad, 2005). The northern states' Penal Code – which is based upon Sharia law – follows Islam in not defining childhood through a specific age but rather marks a child's maturity by the physical signs of puberty (Braithwaite, 2014).

In marriage, wives are not granted the same rights and privileges as their husbands. Women, for example, cannot confer their Nigerian citizenship on a foreign husband, whereas a Nigerian man can pass his onto a foreign wife (Williams, 2004). Inheritance laws can also be discriminatory towards women. Nigeria has a plural legal system, which derives its laws from English, customary and Islamic law, and it can be problematic to determine which laws apply in a given context, often coming down to individual discretion. Although women's inheritance rights are protected under civil marriage, the practices differ for marriages celebrated under customary or Islamic law. Customary law dictates that a man's property is automatically inherited by his sons or another male family member; his wives and daughters cannot succeed him (Williams, 2004).

## **Discussion**

The analysis of the inequalities faced by Nigerian women through an FPE lens depicts a society that fundamentally devalues women and that works to affirm male superiority in numerous ways. Women are systematically marginalised and discriminated against both in law and in practice. They receive less education, they are less often in formal employment, rarely own property and do not experience equal treatment under the law. In marriage, there are unequal power relations between husbands and wives. Men are permitted to have multiple – and often much younger – wives where the same is not allowed for women. The practice of polygyny also creates a culture whereby male success is measured by the accumulation of wives and the tradition of bride-prices further reinforces the husband's position as 'owner', or at least at the top of the hierarchy. In the majority of households it is the man who has the power to make decisions, including over his wife's body.

These conditions can be understood as a form of structural violence. First developed by Johan Galtung, the concept of structural violence refers to the indirect violence or harm faced by groups of people because of social injustice and structural inequality. As an example he cites the lower life expectancy of the working class in many societies; they are not subject to physical attacks but victims of structural violence in a system whose inequalities needlessly shorten their lifespans (Galtung, 1969). He writes, “conflict is much more than what meets the naked eye as ‘trouble’, direct violence. There is also the violence frozen into structures, and the culture that legitimizes violence” (Galtung, 1996, p. viii). In Nigeria there is violence in the structures that uphold patriarchal relations, reinforce women’s dependence and subservience to men, and facilitate women’s political and economic marginalisation. This is in addition to the very real physical and sexual violence experienced by women and the culture of impunity and laws that legitimise it.

FPE argues that the systematic marginalisation of women increases their insecurity as it perpetuates a culture of unequal gender relations where women are regarded as inferior to men, making them more expendable than their male counterparts. The gendered violence committed during conflict is argued to be a continuation of the actual and structural violence that exists within societies during peacetime. Long before the outbreak of war, the foundations that lead to violence against women have been laid by the patriarchal structures that devalue and subjugate women. In addition to Boko Haram’s abductions of women, there are also reports of fathers selling their daughters for money or ‘gifting’ them in support of the cause. The fact that women can be traded or given as a reward – just like a commodity – also demonstrates the power and superiority of the male giver and receiver vis-à-vis the female gift (Oriola, 2017). As Duriesmith writes, “wartime violence and interpersonal violence are unified by patterns of gender relations in which society is male-dominated and characterised by men’s systematic exploitation of women” (Duriesmith, 2017, p. 75).

Boko Haram’s gendered violence can be conceived of as part of a “continuum of violence” that spans social, economic and political aspects of Nigerian life and that existed before the conflict

began (Cockburn, 2004, p. 43). The violent acts committed, though certainly more extreme, are not of a radically different order to those taking place in society. Just as Boko Haram takes young girls and forces them to become bush wives, many other men in Nigerian society also marry young girls through arranged or even forced marriages. Boko Haram's rape of women under the guise of marriage is not drastically different from the domestic violence and rape which is permissible in marriage in normal society. The social understanding of women's value as being tied up only in their ability to serve as wives and mothers helps to explain the practice that when one fighter dies his wife is simply married off to another man (and this can happen multiple times). While most Nigerians would likely not support Boko Haram's kidnappings, the act is conceivable in a culture where women and girls are seen as objects that can be 'accumulated' to serve men's needs. One witness to a Boko Haram attack stated that they even had been "tossing 5,000 Naira [about \$25] on the floor as a bride price" for the girls they take (Matfess, 2016). This observation of the continuation of violence was similarly found by Duriesmith in his analysis of the conflict in Sierra Leone: "The shift from treating women and girls as chattels within the context of marriage to their treatment as sexual slaves within bush marriage was a shift in the extremity of patriarchal abuse, but not a fundamental change in its nature" (Duriesmith, 2017, p. 55).

The gendered violence in conflict can therefore be understood as an extension or exaggeration of the mundane violence that exists in everyday life in Nigerian society – it is not some unique aberration caused by the inherent evil of Boko Haram. Further supporting this claim is the fact that women IDPs living in camps in supposed safe zones – no longer under the tyranny of Boko Haram – are still facing sexual abuse at the hands of soldiers and the local militia, the Civilian Joint Task Force (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

Unlike the previous theory, an FPE analysis allows us to explain the kidnapping of women and girls to be used as domestic servants. Women's and men's roles are clearly defined in society and it is considered humiliating for a man to have to do women's work. Because of this fixed gendered division of labour, at a very practical level it can be argued that Boko Haram feel they

'need' to abduct women and hold them as domestic slaves to perform certain gendered tasks such as cooking - tasks which men consider beneath them. FPE's causal explanation is also broad enough to cover the practice of using female suicide bombers. Here, FPE differs significantly from the last chapter, which suggested that women and girls are less easily detected and therefore more useful weapons. Instead, FPE regards the use of female suicide bombers as again proof of a culture that fundamentally devalues women. The role of women within Boko Haram means that they are expendable material and much less valuable than their male counterparts. This is particularly supported by the fact that female suicide bombers are often young girls rather than boys, who presumably could be trained into fighters instead. This explanation, however, is rather problematic as it ignores the fact that there are still many male suicide bombers. It also rests upon the assumption that all women and girls have been coerced into carrying out the attacks.

The preceding analysis has provided ample evidence to confirm the relevance of applying an FPE approach to the case of Boko Haram. It claims that gendered violence in war builds upon the pre-existing structural violence in society, and this claim is supported through the many examples of gendered inequalities women face in Nigeria. Further, many of Boko Haram's acts of violence are similar in their nature - although not in their severity - to accepted practices in society. This framework has strengths in that it has allowed us to consider how the wider social context surrounding Boko Haram informs their behaviour, rather than only conceiving of the acts within the boundaries of war and military strategy.

However, as FPE offers structural explanations to the question of gendered violence, it does not leave adequate room to explain the motivations of individual members of Boko Haram, for indeed not all men are fighters. If their actions are the consequence of a society which is structured by gendered inequalities, they are positioned as though the inevitable result of patriarchy. But how can FPE scholars then account for the fact that other deeply patriarchal societies with ongoing conflicts do not seem to have widespread cases of gendered violence committed by fighters - such as with the Houthi rebels in Yemen?

Further, unlike the rape as a weapon of war framework, FPE does not allow us to differentiate between different forms of violence to consider how they might serve different objectives. Is the infamous kidnapping of the Chibok girls and one and the same as rape and forced marriages of Muslim women? Viewing the violence as a continuum while providing valuable insights does also not allow us to adequately address the ways in which some of Boko Haram's acts are very disruptive and radically different for Nigerian society – for example in their use of female suicide bombers.

FPE, and feminism more generally, analyses society through a gender lens meaning that men and women become the parameters for a comparative analysis. Viewed in this way, Nigerian society and family life is one where men have power and women do not. This allows us to then see Boko Haram's gendered violence as a continuation of the structural violence and inequality in society. However, it can be argued that this approach is premised on a universal and normative vision of gender equality and fails to take into account local cultural difference. Instead, Nigerian society could be viewed as one where male and female roles are dictated by religious beliefs and that female seclusion and subordination to men is not oppression but both natural and desired. Similarly, one can argue that the family is the defining unit of pre-conflict society and that men and women each perform their roles in order to support its healthy development. With this way of seeing Boko Haram is not a continuation but rather a perversion of social values.

The more general criticism of western liberal feminism as dismissive of local cultures, particularly Islamic culture, has also been put forward by Mahmood (2004). She argues that the problem arises from the fact that feminism is on one hand a mode of analysis, a way of seeing the world, and on the other, an emancipatory political project. Feminist theory, she argues, posits that where there is a system that works to maintain the dominance of men and serve male interests, it will by nature neglect and be inadequate for female interests (Mahmood, 2004). It is this way of thinking that leads to the belief that gender inequality is the cause of widespread suffering and harm towards women. While it may be true that feminism fails to take into account the possibility

that women's interests can also be met within patriarchal structures, there is nonetheless evidence to support their arguments regarding the prevalence of violence. Studies have shown that there is a direct correlation between the status of women in society and their likelihood of experiencing sexual violence (Yodanis, 2004). That being said, FPE's arguments do not offer a detailed explanation of the process by which individual men come to commit acts of violence against women and specifically why this structural violence takes place in more extreme forms in conflict.

As has been discussed with the first theoretical approach, the way that a problem is framed ultimately shapes the solutions that are proposed. FPE contends that the gendered violence in Nigeria is the result of structural gendered inequalities in society which devalue and disempower women. This leads to the conclusion that ending violence means addressing this inequality. Women's social status needs to be raised by interventions in society that ensure their legislative equality, participation in the labour market and political representation. This way of thinking can be clearly seen in many development contexts that place female empowerment at the centre of the agenda. As Thayer and Hudson write, "when society's male members develop ways of relating to women other than through physical dominance and violence, and when women begin to take coordinated action to dampen the most oppressive features of their society, positive change will spread to broader social realms, and even affect interstate relations" (Thayer & Hudson, 2010, p. 57). Therefore to combat the gendered violence in Northern Nigeria committed by Boko Haram the focus must be on changing society, making it more egalitarian in both the private and public spheres.

This chapter asked whether we could understand Boko Haram's gendered violence as resulting from gendered political-economic inequalities in Nigerian society. Our analysis demonstrated how there was extensive evidence of women facing marginalisation and discrimination in society, as well as subordination to men. The power dynamics between men and women in marriage were found to be unequal and the strict gendered division of labour means

women are confined to the home and prevented from significant participation in the public sphere. Consequently, women are underrepresented in education, the labour market and in politics, and this is particularly pronounced in the north of the country. Inheritance and citizenship laws discriminate against women and the Penal Code even permits domestic violence and rape within marriage. As well as the actual violence experienced, these conditions were argued to be a form of structural violence against women. Arguing with an FPE approach, we posited that Boko Haram's actions were part of a continuum of violence that started before the outbreak of conflict in Nigeria. It is within a society that fundamentally devalues women that violence against them in war becomes possible. Interestingly, and unlike rape as a weapon of war, Boko Haram's violence in this understanding seems to serve no real purpose. It is rather an unconscious reflection of patriarchal dynamics, exaggerated due to the conditions of war. Our analysis also considered what we were unable to see with FPE's explanations. As all aspects of society are filtered through a gender lens, we considered whether this could lead to cultural misunderstanding as everything is read only in terms of the differences between men and women. Nonetheless, the theoretical approach applied in this chapter presents a strong argument in understanding why women are vulnerable to violence in some conflicts. In looking only at the wider society, however, it offers less explanation for what leads individual fighters to carry out extreme violence against women.

## **4. Boko Haram's actions are a violent articulation of protest masculinity as a reaction to marginalisation and the impossibility of achieving hegemonic masculinity through other socially-accepted means**

This chapter analyses the gendered violence committed by Boko Haram from a masculinities perspective. Drawing heavily on Connell's seminal work, it argues that Boko Haram's violence is a form of protest masculinity, a way for marginalised men to make a claim to the power and privilege to which they feel entitled, but that they cannot achieve through conventional routes. In order to unpack this claim the initial analysis is broken down into three parts. First, we consider how hegemonic masculinity is defined in Northern Nigeria. Second, we look at the socio-economic situation of men living in Nigeria to assess whether the claim that their violence arises from a context of disempowerment and marginalisation can be supported. These two sections are then brought together as we consider the extent to which Boko Haram's actions and rhetoric can be seen as a form of protest masculinity. Finally, as with the previous two analysis sections, there is a general discussion of the findings plus the merits of applying the approach to this context.

### **Hegemonic masculinity in Northern Nigeria**

The achievement of hegemonic masculinity in Northern Nigeria is conditional upon a man's marriage and is built around his role within the family. Marriage is considered essential in order to attain manhood and adult males who have not taken a wife are regarded with suspicion, considered to be irresponsible or even homosexuals (Uchendu, 2007; Olawoye et al, 2004). An unmarried status will undermine a man's social standing in his community and preclude him from gaining political and social power. For instance, in a study of Nigerian youths, most participants felt that an unmarried man would be "not man enough" to be president of the country (Uchendu, 2007, p. 286). This is due to the belief that men reveal their leadership abilities and competence through the extent to which they can control their wives and successfully run their households. One study's



author also related an anecdote from his own experience about a university professor who failed to progress in his career as he was unmarried: “let him get married first. When he has ruled his family he can then rule us” it was said (Uchendu, 2007, p. 286). A related aspect of masculinity in Nigeria is also virility and sexual prowess. In the conservative north this is evidenced through a man’s ability to impregnate his wife – just being married is often insufficient. Indeed the masculinity of non-virile males is suspect (Uchendu, 2007). Children of course also serve as a proof of a man’s heterosexuality.

Family life in the Muslim north takes place in compounds with a single male head with his wife – or wives – and their children. As discussed earlier, within the family husbands exercise decision-making power and control over their dependents, through the use of force if required. Man is considered to be the “complete master of his home” among the Hausa, a status which is further reinforced by the practice of female seclusion (Salamone, 2005, p. 82). Being successful in marriage is defined specifically through a man’s ability to “exercise authority over the children and their mother” and “maintain discipline, provide leadership, settle disputes and ensure that his family is well behaved”; this in turn attracts respect from the wider community as well as power within society (Uchendu, 2007, p. 290; Olawoye et al, 2004, p. 16). Idealised masculinity is understood as being expressed through the ability to lead, control and dominate others, particularly women, and is primarily defined through the context of the family.

This dominant understanding of masculinity is instilled in boys from a young age through a process of socialisation by family members, peers, teachers and religious leaders. Boys are explicitly taught male superiority and shown repeatedly through their father’s example the role and responsibilities expected of them (Olawoye et al, 2004). For instance, sons are told from a very early age that they are the leader of the household when their father is absent. Male children begin early on to accompany their fathers when performing certain key tasks and they will be shown the assets and land that belongs to the family as part of a process of showing the child “that he will someday become a family head” (Olawoye et al, 2004, p. 11).

Dominant masculinity is also associated with certain physical features and character traits. A survey of Nigerian youths from across the north, west and east of the country revealed an understanding of masculinity as synonymous with “physical strength, firmness, fearlessness, decisiveness, an ability to protect the weak... bravery, sobriety [and] unemotionality” (Uchendu, 2007, p. 283). Additionally, aggression is regarded as a marker of masculinity. Olawoye et al describe how it is expected that male children will become difficult and rebellious as they grow older and this is a sign of their move into manhood. As they age, male children are expected to reject female tasks and instructions that are considered to be demeaning to a man. Failure to do so may call into question the masculinity of the adolescent boy (Olawoye et al, 2004).

A classic literary example of this dominant form of masculinity can be seen in Chinua Achebe’s famous novel, *Things Fall Apart*. Although written in 1958, the description of the novel’s main male characters are still relevant to understanding masculinity today. The book’s protagonist, Okonkwo, is described as a powerful man in village life which is based upon his abilities as a great wrestler, his unemotional, fierce character and his unwavering work ethic. He rules his household with an iron fist and is cold and unemotional towards his wives and children. His success is depicted in stark opposition to the failures of his father, Unoka, who is coded as feminine through his laziness, gentleness and improvidence, and whose only skill is his musical talent – something that does not require physical strength. Unoka’s life is described as a failure as he owes money to everyone around the village and lives in poverty, which can also be seen in the condition of his wife and children. He is referred to an “agbala”, a word that describes both a man who has not taken any tribal titles or a woman (Achebe, 2010, p. 13).

Throughout the novel Okonkwo expresses repeated concern for his eldest son, Nwoye, who he believes is lazy and inadequate and therefore as failing to live up to the dominant image of masculinity. In one incident Okonkwo chastises him by saying, “Do you think you are cutting up yams for cooking? ...If you split another yam of this size I shall break your jaw” (Achebe, 2010, p. 31). Cutting yams for cooking of course is a women’s job; the difficult tasks of preparing seed-yams

and planting them is task reserved for men. Nwoye however begins to learn the revered masculine behaviours and consciously adopt them to the delight of his father. For instance, when receiving a message from a younger sibling that his father requires assistance for an important job he would “feign annoyance and grumble aloud about women and their troubles” (Achebe, 2010, p. 49). This behaviour showed his father that he would one day be able to control women which is essential to being a successful man; “no matter how prosperous a man was, if he was unable to rule his women and his children (and especially his women) he was not really a man” (Achebe, 2010, p. 50). Nwoye also pretends that he no longer enjoys the stories his mother told of animals as he “now knew that they were for women” and instead feigns preference for the violent tales of bloodshed that he father proudly boasts of (Achebe, 2010, p. 51).

Hegemonic masculinity in Nigeria is also founded on economic success. Power and status are achieved through the accumulation of wives and the successful control of the household. This, however, requires money. Significant funds are needed to pay bride-prices and men are only permitted to take multiple wives if they have sufficient income to ensure their equal treatment. There is a very strong sense of male obligation towards his dependents. It is considered a man’s responsibility to financially and materially provide for his wife and children with his primary responsibilities being to feed, clothe and house them – meeting emotional needs and providing companionship are of a much lower significance, if important at all (Olawoye et al, 2004). The aforementioned study of Nigerian youths further found that while men’s success in the past was measured by social respect and political power, today the primary marker is the ability to amass material goods and thereby ensure the comfortable existence of one’s family (Uchendu, 2007). The failure of men to live up to their obligations towards their wives and families is often then attributed to a lack of money (Olawoye et al, 2004).

To take a more contemporary example, such sentiments can be seen in popular Nigerian music. Like most pop music, Nigerian songs are often about love and relationships. However, in many songs the ability to be a good boyfriend or husband is measured though a man’s wealth. The

central refrain in “My Woman, My Everything”, a popular 2015 song by rapper Patoranking, is “My woman, my everything/I go fit buy you everything/My woman, my everything/I go fit give you everything”. In another song “Chop My Money” the duo P-Square sings “Even though I make real dough, you’re the reason there’ll be more/Even though I got much more, I don’t mind if you chop my money, chop my money.”<sup>3</sup> The song’s video shows a man buying a series of expensive gifts for the object of his affection. Both songs celebrate wealth and emphasise the importance of money and economic success in taking care of women.

### **A Crisis of Masculinity?**

In the years leading up to the Boko Haram insurgency men across Nigeria were underemployed and unemployment rates were particularly high in the northeast of the country. Rates of unemployment especially increased dramatically from 2002 to 2011. In Borno state, for example, unemployment in 2002 was 6.4% rising steadily until a sharp rise to 27.7% in 2008 and continuing to 29.1% in 2011. Likewise in Yobe state unemployment grew from 15% in 2002 to 27.3% in 2008 and 35.6% in 2011 (Ailyedogbon & Ohwofasa, 2012). This period is significant because it is the time when many of the young men who joined Boko Haram were growing up and coming of age. Huge numbers of young men during this period thus found themselves unable to enter the labour market and gain paid employment where previous generations had been able to do so. As one book on the socio-economic drivers of the conflict in Northern Nigeria laments, “an alarming number of employable Nigerians roam the streets daily searching for jobs that never come” (David, Asuelime, & Onapajo, 2015, p. 84).

There is a deep economic imbalance between the agriculturally-dependent north and the oil-rich south of Nigeria. There is also a significant regional disparity in levels of poverty with the south much wealthier and with higher levels of development than the north. In 2008, eight of the ten states with the highest levels of poverty were located in the north where some states had

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<sup>3</sup> “Chop my money” meaning spend my money

poverty rates as high as 95% (Onapajo & Uzodike, 2012). Looking at food poverty rates in 2010 the contrast is also starkly illustrated with 51% of people living in food poverty in the northeast compared with 25.4% in the southwest (National Bureau of Statistics, 2010). Child mortality rates were 90 per 1000 in the northeast and 105 in the northwest versus 31 per 1000 in the more prosperous southwest (National Population Commission, 2014). Whereas investors are attracted to the south which is experiencing a building boom, the lack of skilled labour, unreliable electricity and security risks have meant the north has been overlooked by foreign investment; “When we advise investors coming to Nigeria, they don’t even talk about the north,” noted a South African banker, “It simply isn’t a consideration. It’s the sad truth and it isn’t about to change” (The Economist, 2013). Poverty and the lack of livelihood options are only made worse by the ‘youth bulge’ phenomenon which has been observed across Africa. Nigeria in fact has one of the world’s youngest populations, with three-quarters of its population under thirty (Olojo, 2013).

As well as the unequal distribution of resources between the north and south, there are a handful of businessmen who have been able to accumulate extreme wealth in the last few decades, thanks largely to oil revenues. This disparity in society has arguably created a sense of frustration and marginalisation among northern men, who feel that economic success and power is being denied to them predominantly by a Southern (read Christian) elite.<sup>4</sup>

These sentiments were no doubt made only worse by political events in 2010. The Nigerian presidency alternates between the mostly Muslim north and the Christian south through an informal power-sharing agreement. Under this provision, where the president comes from the south the vice president must come from the north, as was the case in from 1999 to 2007 when the southern Olusegun Obasanjo was in office. After this period it was meant to be the north’s turn until 2015 however when the northern President Umaru Musa Yar’Adua died in 2010, three years into

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<sup>4</sup> This argument is also in line with the classical, and now somewhat out-of-date, theory of relative deprivation first proposed by Gurr. Gurr argued that collective violence was the result of frustrated expectations, when there is a gap between what members of society feel they ought to have and what they actually have. This feeling of discontent is in relation to other groups in society or even historically compared to what an individual once had. While it is an important factor, the theory was ultimately deemed over simplistic and various other factors were acknowledged by different scholars, such as the degree of trust in political leaders or indeed gender. See Brush (1996), p. 526-29.

his term, his southern Vice President Goodluck Jonathan succeeded him. This was perceived by many northerners as illegitimate (Adenrele, 2012). As well as economic marginalisation then, northern Nigerian men have experienced an increasing sense of political disenfranchisement in recent years.

This north-south divide is significant because on one hand it illustrates the relative deprivation of the north that contributes to northern men's sense of marginalisation within the wider country. On the other hand, the Nigerian State's seemingly unjust distribution of wealth also plays precisely into the anti-government sentiment which fuels Boko Haram's recruitment by making the state appear corrupt and biased. Boko Haram after all claims to be fighting for an alternative way of administering society in the form of an Islamic caliphate. Thus, the north-south divide is important for understanding the way that the crisis of masculinity is perceived in the north and the form that the protest masculinity takes. However, while it is true that there is a stark difference in living standards between the two regions it would be erroneous to infer that these economic discrepancies mean that northern masculinity is in crisis while southern masculinity is harmonious or uninterrupted. Indeed there is also a crisis of masculinity in the south which, while better off than its poor northern neighbour, still has high levels of poverty and many of the same expectations for men. Disaffected young southern men also often join violent groups where they are able to reassert their masculinity. Pratten has identified three primary categories of organisations that young men in the south participate in: gangs, cults and secret societies. While these groups are violent and have amassed a considerable death toll they do not constitute an armed insurgency of anywhere near the scale of Boko Haram (Pratten, 2007).

The need for money in order to be able to marry means that in difficult economic times men are prevented from taking a wife. As achieving full manhood and ideal masculinity is predicated on a man's marriage, ability to sire children and successfully rule a compound, delays to marriage also mean delays to social progression. This is no doubt further exacerbated by the practice of polygyny which creates a shortage of available women to marry. National statistics on marriage levels across

Nigeria support this assumption: in 2013 71.5 % of women were currently married compared to only 50.2% of men. Additionally within the age bracket 25-29, 53.3% of men had never been married (National Population Commission, 2014). Unable to marry, young men are prevented from advancing socially and attaining political power and respect.

Men in Nigeria are raised with a strong sense of male superiority and entitlement. From a young age they expect to one day become the head of a household which grants them power and control over numerous dependents and ultimately brings respect and status within their communities. Conditions in Northern Nigeria outside of their control, however, have to a large extent denied many men the possibility of realising these expectations. That Boko Haram have 'rewarded' their fighters with women, paying bride-prices and arranging marriages also suggests this is an important concern for Boko Haram's recruits. Economic incentives are also often cited a motivating factor (Onapajo & Uzodike, 2012). To use Connell's terminology, men in Northern Nigeria have been unable to fulfil the requirements of hegemonic masculinity and thus cash in on the patriarchal dividend, enjoying the power and privilege which it affords. It is as Bourgois writes in an entirely different context, "[men] lose the material legitimation for demanding autocratic 'respect' and domineering control over their wives and children" (Bourgois, 1996, p. 413). This can be extended to equally cover other men in society; they are unable to progress in the gendered social hierarchy and demand respect from and control "lesser" masculinities. The result is a form of emasculation – marginalised masculinity.

### **Boko Haram and Protest Masculinity**

The hegemonic masculinity hypothesis posits that Boko Haram's acts of violence towards women are a form of protest masculinity. Disenfranchised, disempowered and unable to become 'real men' in the eyes of society, men engage in exaggerated masculine 'protest' behaviours. Through this protest masculinity, marginalised groups of men are able to make a claim to the power and entitlement associated with hegemonic masculinity outside of conventional, socially-sanctioned routes, which are unavailable to them. It is about reasserting their masculinity and rescuing their

gendered identity which has become threatened. Importantly, it is usually not a subversion of hegemonic masculinity but draws on the key characteristics already associated with masculinity in an extreme version (Duriesmith, 2017).

Boko Haram's insurgency can be understood as a challenge to the existing social hierarchy which concentrated power and privilege in the hands of a group of wealthy men. Interpreting this through a masculinities analysis, Boko Haram's acts are a form of protest masculinity aimed at destabilising the existing gender order and its understanding of hegemonic masculinity, which works to maintain the dominance of those men who are able to accumulate money, wives, children and material possessions over others. By creating an armed opposition group Boko Haram make a claim to masculine power and entitlement. Men who join the group are no longer marginalised but empowered. Not only are they given weapons with which they are able to terrorise and bring suffering to other men in society, but their status is also elevated through their group membership. They are no longer marginalised and emasculated individuals but can take on the group's identity. This confers on them the status of feared warrior which is associated with aggression, strength and bravery. To use Jensen's words, group membership provides a "mode of identification" where they are able to shed their weakened social status and instead reconstruct their identity through Boko Haram as a "site for heroic identification and order" (Jensen, 2008, p. 71).

Boko Haram deploy a form of a (hyper)masculinity that is militarised, violent and sexually aggressive. Their expression of masculinity can be analysed through their actions and self-representation in videos and photographs released to the public where they are depicted not as ordinary civilians but as fighters wearing military uniforms and carrying weapons. These images reveal to the audience many traits that Boko Haram seeks to embody and portray. They stand tall and appear large indicating their physical strength. Their faces are covered in a style not native to Nigeria, emulating Islamic State and other fighters in the Middle East. This implies their allegiance or at least similarity to a global movement and thus suggests power by association. Fighters stand side-by-side and on the same level with only the leader differentiated and brought forward



displaying discipline, fraternity and strong leadership. Poised, with weapons in hand and ready to fight, their bodies are active and capable of enacting violence on the world. They succeed in embodying the trope of the rebel warrior and project a formidable image capable of instilling fear in the audience.



*Boko Haram, date unknown (BBC, 2016)*

Duriesmith has similarly analysed the actions of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) during the Sierra Leone Civil War as a form of protest masculinity. He argues that while the group's actions were intended to challenge the position of dominant men in society, they did “not fundamentally challenge the pre-existing hierarchical arrangements but merely elaborated them in a more toxic form” (Duriesmith, 2017, p. 98). Indeed, Connell has written that protest masculinity “picks up themes of hegemonic masculinity in the society at large but reworks them in a context of poverty” (Connell R. W., 1995, p. 114). The same can be said for Boko Haram. While they are vehemently opposed to the Nigerian state and all its institutions (and particularly the perceived dominance of Christians), they do not seek to radically redefine or subvert the pre-conflict gender hierarchy and its normative construction of masculinity.

Instead, Boko Haram's actions draw on the pre-existing understanding of hegemonic masculinity, but are a more exaggerated and violent articulation of it, manifesting many of its central characteristics in extreme and distorted ways. The establishment of a camp in the Sambisa Forest together with its clearly defined gender roles for men and women mirrors the compound life of everyday society; fighters are even granted their "bush wives". Where a man's masculinity in wider society was understood through his control of his wife and rule over his household, Boko Haram members also reassert their masculinity through the control and domination of female bodies. The sexual violence committed is an extreme version of the virility which was integral to hegemonic masculinity. Rape of women is an aggressive display of heterosexuality and proof of sexual prowess. Unable to subordinate women through marriage in the pre-conflict society, in joining Boko Haram men are thus able to dominate women through kidnapping, rape, forced bush marriages and domestic slavery. Sexual violence, Jensen argues, is "a way to reassert or recuperate masculinity when it [is] most precarious, and where it [is] increasingly difficult for men to assert their gender roles as prescribed by a dominant gender discourse" (Jensen, 2008, p. 93).

Boko Haram's fighters also assert and prove their masculinity by undermining the masculinity of other men. Kidnapping married women emasculates not only their own husbands but also the Nigerian state that is shown as failing in its role as protector of its female citizens. As discussed previously the abduction of women and girls has afforded Boko Haram great bargaining power and has forced those in power to the negotiating table. The government is made to deal with the group for prisoner exchange in an interaction where the state confronts Boko Haram on the same level, 'man-to-man'. Boko Haram's actions therefore can be seen as a way to claim the power associated with hegemonic masculinity (the power over women and other men) but lacking the conventional means to do so, they eschew the socially-sanctioned routes.

The above analysis demonstrates how Boko Haram's masculine identity is constructed in opposition to femininity; the way that they are able to assert their masculinity is by reaffirming the subordination of women. Boko Haram's fighters re-masculinise themselves through simultaneously

re-feminising women. This is not only through proving their physical superiority vis-à-vis women but is also present in their rhetoric. Yusuf's strong opposition to western influence and education was partly due to the mixing of genders in secular schools. He also claimed that girls had been allowed to wear forbidden revealing attire. These two aspects were an affront to Islam and Yusuf instead called for female seclusion (Peters, 2014). Girls and boys should not be mixing on equal terms and a woman's place was in the home; the outside world was the man's domain.

It would be remiss to not mention that Islam is a crucial aspect of the masculine identity mobilised by Boko Haram. Following Kimmel's arguments, Boko Haram can be seen as looking back to a time when they felt Muslim men were powerful, prosperous and not subordinated to western and Christian values and governance. It is a nostalgic turn to a pre-colonial time where men "were able to assume the places in society to which they believed themselves entitled... both in the domestic sphere and in the public sphere" (Kimmel, 2003, p. 605). Before the region fell under British colonial rule in 1903, Northern Nigeria had been ruled by a series of powerful Islamic caliphates which "constituted the apex for high Muslim civilization" (Thomson, 2012, p. 47). The most recent Sokoto Caliphate continues to be an important reference point for northern Muslims and Boko Haram, and is an example of the power of Sharia law and jihad "in uniting the region, rejecting corruption and creating prosperity under Islam" (Thomson, 2012, p. 48). As Boko Haram calls for a more radical interpretation of Islam, they also celebrate a particular form of religious masculinity. As Kimmel argues, they specifically construct and deploy a masculine identity that stands in opposition to that which is identified as the current threat to their masculinity (Kimmel, 2003). In this case, Boko Haram deploys a traditional religious masculinity as symbolic capital in their protest in contrast to modern/secular/Christian/westernised/southern masculinity.

## **Discussion**

The preceding analysis has explored how Boko Haram's gendered violence can be seen as resulting from a crisis of masculinity. Indeed there is much within the empirical material to support this hypothesis. Underdevelopment and poverty in Northern Nigeria has meant that many men are

unable to reap the share of the patriarchal dividend promised to them by the existing gender order. They are prevented from social advancement by a society where dominant constructions of masculinity are built upon a man's ability to rule over a prosperous household. According to this argument, such men become disenfranchised and frustrated, leading them towards violent behaviours as an attempt to claim the power which they feel owed. Boko Haram's violent insurgency is a manifestation of this protest masculinity.

While Connell's concept of protest masculinity explains the reasons behind male violence, alone it does not tell us what form that violence will take. Indeed we might ask why northern Muslim men are drawn to a religious insurgency rather than gang violence. Violence is a way for men to reassert their masculinity and claim power by dominating others in society. Yet why is this in Nigeria violence directed towards women and not only other men? It is because the form that the protest will take is contextually-determined. Other scholars have drawn on Connell's work and further developed this explanation. As Duriesmith (2017) argues, violence in conflict reflects the existing gender hierarchy and configurations of power in society. Protest masculinity draws on the characteristics already associated with hegemonic masculinity in an exaggerated and socially-unacceptable manner. Following this explanation, we can argue that women are targeted by Boko Haram because Nigeria has a strongly patriarchal culture that emphasises male superiority and domination of women. Kimmel (2003) further writes how marginalised groups of men deploy a form of masculinity as symbolic capital, specifically emphasising the characteristics which set them apart and stand opposition to the perceived threat to their manhood. For Boko Haram this is Christians and even Muslims who they feel are corrupt and thus not devout enough. Their assertion of masculinity is therefore along religious lines. As Boko Haram mobilises a radical Islamist form of masculinity, they also can be seen to model themselves and their actions on Islamic State and other Islamist movements.

Protest masculinity in its original formulation is often associated with risk-tasking and destructive behaviours that do not serve a productive aim (Duriesmith, 2017; Walker, 2006). As has

been discussed, it has more to do with reasserting masculinity rather than trying to forge a new political order. For these reasons it has frequently been applied to instances of male violence which seem pointless or illegitimate in society's eyes or to patterns of behaviour that appear dangerous and detrimental to the men engaging in them. Think, for example, of the use of hard drugs, drunken bar brawls, street racing, or gang membership which do not help marginalised groups gain recognition from wider society but rather seem to bring further insecurity, violence and death to their communities. Can the same be said for Boko Haram's insurgency and particularly their acts of gendered violence?

As raised previously, Boko Haram's violent tactics are alienating for local populations. In order to sustain their existence, it would be much more effective to win the hearts and minds of local communities who could support them materially, provide new members and shield them from army offensives. Instead, Boko Haram's approach has caused people to flee the area or in other cases start new paramilitary groups to fight back. In this way, Boko Haram's violence follows the dominant understanding of protest masculinity as unproductive and self-destructive.

That being said, Boko Haram's protest masculinity has in many ways been 'successful'. The group has established itself as a powerful force domestically and gained international recognition. To date the group retains control of areas of Northern Nigeria. Their insurgency has completely destabilised the region and in doing so they have been able to challenge the local social hierarchy. It can also be argued that the form of masculinity they espouse has become hegemonic within the region. This is in line with Jensen's work on the violent practices of gangs in a South African township. He argued that gangsterism and criminality was part of coloured men's struggle for recognition and a way to challenge dominant stereotypes held about them. Within the townships, however, this particular brand of masculinity eventually became hegemonic (Jensen, 2008).

The same can be argued for Boko Haram. The conflict in the north of the country has led to the complete militarisation of the area. Regardless of whether people remain in Boko Haram controlled areas or those 'liberated' by government forces, their daily lives are controlled by a

(para)military authority. Police or army officers, military bases, tanks and weapons are visibly present in Maiduguri. Leaving the city, one faces a series of military or CJTF checkpoints, and indeed access to some areas is completely forbidden or only permissible with a military escort. Within Maiduguri there is a 10PM curfew. Many IDPs have been collected together in army-run camps and prevented from living in the surrounding villages. They live under military rule with a complete restriction of movement. Violent vigilantism has also become an increasingly attractive option for young men across the region. The Civilian Joint Task Force which was formed (with state encouragement and training) to defeat Boko Haram now has around 23,000 members and is increasingly regarded as a security risk. There have been reports of CJTF committing widespread abuse, such as extrajudicial executions and savage beatings of civilians, including women and children (Matfess, 2017). It is clear that power in Northern Nigeria at the moment lies with these different militarised groups. Looking at images of Boko Haram, the army and the CJTF there is very little to distinguish one group from another. The militarised and violent masculinity deployed by Boko Haram has in fact achieved dominance in the region. It would be a step too far to suggest that this is a radical inversion of the pre-existing gendered hierarchy, for Boko Haram build their identity on the previously dominant definitions of masculinity and in no way seek to challenge the entrenched patriarchy in society. Nonetheless, in various ways their unconventional claim to power has succeeded.

Connell's model of multiple masculinities has been criticised by some scholars as offering a "static typology" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 837). However, the above analysis has clearly demonstrated how hegemonic and marginalised masculinity are not fixed character types. Rather they are fluid, shifting categories. An understanding of hegemonic masculinity has value precisely because it draws attention to the power relations between groups of men and how they exist in a relationship of dominance and subordination. Indeed, the fluidity of the categories can be seen in the way that that hegemonic masculinity has been redefined, at least locally, following the Boko Haram insurgency.

The explanation proposed by this theoretical framework sees Boko Haram's insurgency only as a function of a wider crisis of masculinity. The concept of protest masculinity suggests that the men are not really acting out of their own volition but are propelled towards violence by forces outside of their control as an attempt to redeem their gendered identity from marginalisation. This argument also completely downplays the role that ideology might play in driving men to action. It does not allow for the explanation that individual men might be moved to violence because of a genuine belief in the jihad. Indeed, looking at Boko Haram's public statements religious rhetoric is at the forefront. Dismissing the notion of protest masculinity, however, and conceptualising of the violence as ideology-driven becomes problematic when we return to the role of gendered violence. Are we therefore to argue that rape of women is the result of an orthodox interpretation of Islam? Many Muslims around the world would no doubt challenge such arguments. We could consider, however, that it is not Islam *per se* but Boko Haram's radical interpretation of it that legitimises such violent practices. In support of such arguments are reports that similar groups such as Islamic State have also been committing sexual violence against women on a mass scale (Peritz & Maller, 2014). That being said, it is difficult to find any clear religious justification for such acts. Ideology is no doubt important to understanding the Boko Haram conflict and should not be disregarded entirely. Perhaps, it is more useful in explaining the founding of the movement, the rhetoric of its leaders and what might motivate individual men to join. When it comes to explaining the violent practices of individual rank and file fighters it falls somewhat short.

Applying this conceptual framework to explain Boko Haram's gendered violence has numerous strengths. Contrary to the previous two theories, it allows us to consider how identity issues and symbolic constructions of gender may move men towards violence. Additionally, it can account much more for the psychology of the individual Boko Haram fighter who commits violence. As FPE posits the group's violence as a continuation of the structural violence in society, it does not leave room to explain what motivates some men to join Boko Haram and not others. The rape as a weapon of war framework fails to adequately account for the widespread usage of sexual violence. If it is not an explicitly ordered tactic, how and why do the ordinary rank and file members decide

to deploy it? This explanation is not sufficiently developed. The kidnappings may well be part of a bigger strategy as they require a degree of preparation and organisation beforehand. However, the repeated rapes of women living under Boko Haram's control are more difficult to explain through this approach. Indeed once women are abducted the rapes too easily become seen again as a way to satisfy male libidos. Adopting a masculinities lens, however, allows us to consider how violence serves to empower the individual fighter. Furthermore, as it looks at the gendered social hierarchy and dominant constructions of masculinity, it simultaneously integrates this individual level with a structural analysis. It also offers an explanation as to why violence against women occurred and continues to occur outside of the Boko Haram insurgency.

As is to be expected from its name alone, an analysis of masculinities focuses predominantly on men. Interpreting male violence against women in this way logically also locates the answer to preventing such violence with men. On one hand, to end gendered violence it is necessary to address the crisis of masculinity experienced by many men. This involves creating more opportunities for men to ensure their full economic and political participation in society. Rather than empowering women as with FPE, the focus is on empowering marginalised groups of men. The importance of this as a way of minimising the appeal of Boko Haram is already ongoing in Nigeria. The Governor of Borno State, for instance, launched the Borno Youth Empowerment Scheme (BOYES) which provides job opportunities to youths and gives them a more active role in enhancing security in the region and restoring peace and order (Idris, 2013). Equally important is working to change dominant understandings of masculinity, male superiority and entitlement, as well as the socialisation process that teaches men to respond to threats with violence. This approach is slowly being recognised by humanitarian actors. Specialised gender-based violence prevention training programmes known as 'Engaging Men in Accountable Practice' have been developed where trainers work with local men to try and overturn various deep-seated patriarchal beliefs. They strive to enact "transformative individual behaviour change" by engaging the men in discussions about how violence towards women is a learned behaviour and how it is damaging to both its female victims and society at large (International Rescue Committee, 2013, p. 7).



In this chapter we considered how Boko Haram's gendered violence could be explained using the concept of protest masculinity. As hegemonic masculinity relies on marriage and wealth, poverty and unemployment in Northern Nigeria means many young men fail to gain the power and entitlement which they are socialised to expect. Frustration at their marginalisation propels them to violence as a way to reassert their masculinity and reclaim their gendered identity from emasculation. Violence against women is a consequence of this crisis of masculinity. It also explored how the specific form that Boko Haram's 'protest' violence takes is an exaggeration of the characteristics already associated with hegemonic masculinity in society, and is similarly determined by the pre-existing gender hierarchy. Masculinity in Nigeria was already defined through men's domination of women and this is just played out in a more extreme form in the conflict. Similar to FPE then, this approach points to the ways that Boko Haram's violence is less of a rupture but in many ways a continuum of pre-conflict dynamics or at least driven by factors that pre-date the conflict. The protest masculinity argument is particularly strong in explaining how violence might serve the individual Boko Haram fighter and hence why it might have become so prevalent in the conflict. Applying the concept of multiple masculinities also draws attention to the fact that Boko Haram's violence may not only be about the relations between men and women in society, as FPE argued, but also be about the power dynamics between groups of men.

## Conclusion

This study set out to examine and understand the prevalence of gendered violence in the Boko Haram insurgency in Northern Nigeria through three different feminist theoretical frameworks. Each theory proposed a different causal explanation for violence committed by male fighters against civilian women in conflict, which resonated with the empirical material to varying degrees. The goal of this study was not to test the theories against each other, establishing which is able to offer the 'correct' view of the world. Instead, we used the theories in conversation with one another and in combining them we gained a more comprehensive understanding of the situation.

With the rape as a weapon of war thesis we posited that the sexual violence committed by Boko Haram was not a side effect of conflict but a tactic adopted by the group to achieve military aims. Applying this framework allowed us to differentiate between the types of violence occurring and understand the purpose and impact of such violence. Kidnapping women gives Boko Haram leverage in their negotiations; the rape and forced marriage of women is a recruitment incentive or reward for fighters, and also a way to demoralise and intimidate local communities. However, there were clear flaws in the framework's explanatory capability. If sexual violence is a tactic, then it is ultimately an ineffective one in this case as 1.8 million people have fled the area leaving Boko Haram starving in the forest without a strong base of support. While the wide-ranging outcomes of sexual violence are indisputable, it is difficult to establish whether they are the primary objective of Boko Haram or an unintended consequence. Challenging the framework's explanations is not to suggest that Boko Haram is committing senseless violence that has no bearing on the conflict, but rather that their actions cannot only be understood through a military logic. While rape has definitely been deployed as a weapon of war in some cases, this understanding has perhaps been institutionalised to such a degree so that it has become the dominant way of seeing and consequently over-applied.

Engaging with feminist political economy, we considered whether the gendered violence of Boko Haram was caused by gendered political-economic inequalities in Nigerian society. Through

this perspective we could explain how gendered violence becomes an option in some conflicts and not others; it occurs in societies where structural violence already exists against women, where power relations between genders have already been established as unequal, and where women's rights are neglected. There is ample evidence to support the theory's claim in Northern Nigeria: women experience clear inequality relative to men and face discrimination in marriage, employment, education and law. FPE offers structural explanations to gendered violence and suggests why once the conflict in Northern Nigeria began, women were vulnerable to violence. However, it is unable to explain the process by which an individual fighter commits violence, for not all men join Boko Haram despite their patriarchal upbringing. Additionally, in contrast to the other two explanations, FPE positions the violence as somewhat without purpose. Boko Haram's violence does not achieve anything in this argument; it is only understood as a seemingly unconscious exaggeration of the violence already existing in society, not a deliberate choice that achieves a goal.

The final explanation proposed that Boko Haram's actions were a violent articulation of protest masculinity as a reaction to marginalisation and the impossibility of achieving hegemonic masculinity through other socially-accepted means. Protest masculinity offers a strong explanation as to why men in Nigeria join Boko Haram and commit violence against women. Violence is argued to be a way for them to reassert their masculinity and make a claim to power in the face of marginalisation and disenfranchisement. What is interesting about this perspective is that gendered violence is seen as a consequence of a crisis of masculinity. It is not senseless violence or an inevitable outcome of natural male urges, but it is neither a deliberate tactic in itself, as is argued by the rape as a weapon of war thesis. Rather, it is only relevant in the extent to which it allows men to re-establish their masculinity and make a claim to power; that is the 'purpose' of the violence. Although arguing from a different angle, it supports FPE's arguments that Boko Haram's violence specifically arises out of a context of patriarchy, as protest masculinity draws on the pre-existing configurations of gender in society.

The three theories each take different objects of analysis and therefore offer different answers to the question of gendered violence. Protest masculinity looks at individual male fighters and tells us why violence might appeal to them. FPE looks to society and explains how these men are predisposed to violence towards women as they are raised in a patriarchal culture that subordinates and devalues women. Rape as a weapon of war takes the conflict itself as its object of analysis. While its explanations are more problematic we cannot claim that the fighters' decisions and actions completely disregard the impact they might have on the ongoing war. Much was gained through this research by comparing these three theoretical frameworks to each other. In seeing what explanations were privileged in one theory, we could consider what might be missing from the others.

While applying a feminist perspective has told us much about Boko Haram, we can also reflect on what our analysis of Boko Haram reveals about feminist explanations. It is interesting to note that despite the feminist agenda, all three approaches actually reduce women only to objects against which violence occurs. The female victims of Boko Haram's violence are abstract victims of war, structure or male crisis. Across the explanations provided, female agency is downplayed and a developed analysis of female subjectivity is lacking so that women are presented as a homogenous group. Certainly many women are victims, but there are also women who have joined Boko Haram voluntarily. This is particularly interesting when it comes to female suicide bombers, where our analysis has only been able to regard them as being coerced into their violent acts. However, as this research has focussed on why Boko Haram commits acts of violence against women, it has been less relevant to consider. Nonetheless, it is an interesting omission and is a clear area for future research.

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