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Bachelor in International Relations / Grado en Relaciones Internacionales

Final Degree Project

ANALYSIS OF THE USE OF BOMB GIRLS BY BOKO HARAM: IS IT AN EFFECTIVE WEAPON?

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"A woman's choice is not about between suicide bombing and life, but rather between suicide bombing and violence and harassment."

Warner & Matfess

ABSTRACT

Boko Haram, the African Jihadist Movement, kidnapped 276 Nigerian schoolgirls in Chibok, Borno in 2014 while those girls were taking an exam and it is estimated that in 2015 over 2000 young girls and women were kidnapped by the terrorist group. Those kidnappings drew the attention of the international community and provoked a strongest reaction of the Nigerian authorities, but it also showed Boko Haram's massive use of girls. In this regard, Boko Haram is the terrorist group that uses the most females to achieve its objectives and goals. But is it really effective to use women to detonate those bombs? Are they used only as bomb girls or could they have the possibility to gain control and get to command some groups? Can women be willingly signed up to fight the jihad or are they kidnapped in order to be abused, coerced or forced to marry? What is clear is that Boko Haram, one of the deadliest worldwide terrorist groups, uses women to strategically achieve its objectives and most of them blow themselves up, not because they are willing to do so but because they are forced to do so.

Key words: terrorist group, Boko Haram, Nigeria, women, suicide bombing, kidnappings, female suicide bombing, Africa, jihadist movement.

RESUMEN

Boko Haram, el movimiento yihadista africano, secuestró a 276 alumnas nigerianas en Chibok, Borno, en 2014, mientras esas niñas realizaban un examen, y en 2015 se calcula que más de 2.000 jóvenes y mujeres fueron secuestradas por el grupo terrorista. Esos secuestros llamaron la atención de la comunidad internacional y provocaron una reacción más firme de las autoridades nigerianas, pero también mostraron la utilización masiva de niñas por parte de Boko Haram. En este sentido, Boko Haram es el grupo terrorista que más mujeres utiliza para conseguir sus objetivos y metas. Pero ¿es realmente eficaz utilizar a mujeres para detonar esas bombas? ¿Se las utiliza sólo como chicas bomba o pueden tener la posibilidad de obtener el control y el mando de algunos grupos? ¿Las mujeres pueden ser reclutadas voluntariamente para luchar en la yihad o son secuestradas para ser abusadas, coaccionadas u obligadas a casarse? Lo que está claro es que Boko Haram, uno de los grupos terroristas más mortíferos del mundo, utiliza a las mujeres para conseguir sus objetivos de forma estratégica y la mayoría de ellas se inmolan, no porque estén dispuestas a hacerlo, sino porque son obligadas a ello.

Palabras clave: grupo terrorista, Boko Haram, Nigeria, mujeres, atentados suicidas, secuestros, atentados suicidas femeninos, África, movimiento yihadista.

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INTRODUCTION

Boko Haram became internationally known when politicians such as Barack and Michelle Obama echoed the Chibok kidnapping through the "Bringbackbourgirls" campaign in 2014. However, the organization had been created in 2002 under the leadership of Mohammed Yusuf in Maiduguri, Borno State in Northern Nigeria in order to implement sharia and the Islamic Caliphate in all of Nigeria's states. Nevertheless, it was not until 2009, when Abubakar Shekau took over from Yusuf, that the organization became more militarized and more violent.

The organization has not only committed attacks in Nigeria, but the group has also spread its influence and violence to countries around the Lake Chad Basin and has attacked countries such as Cameroon, Chad, Niger, etc. Moreover, Boko Haram differentiates itself from other terrorist groups because of its massive use of girls and women in order achieve their goals.

This final degree project will focus on the organization's massive use of girls and women that are used mainly to commit suicide bombing not only in Nigeria but also in countries around the Lake Chad Basin and his tactics. In this sense, I will not only focus on the organization but also using the lenses of realism as an international relations theory, how Nigeria's political, economic and social situation since its independence has contributed to the spread of Boko Haram's power and the accomplishment of the group's goals.

In this sense, my interest in International security and Terrorism in Africa has led me to investigate not only about Boko Haram as a terrorist group but also their strategies and the group's decision to use bomb girls to achieve their different goals and objectives. Therefore, as an International Relations student, I chose this subject with the aim of giving more visibility to this issue as well as to raise a voice for all the girls that are forced to commit those atrocities. Personally, it has been a matter of great concern over the years not only for the obvious political reasons but also for the painful consequences it brings to innocent teenage girls, their families and the society as a whole.

In this regard, the aim of this work is to analyze Boko Haram's motivation to use girls and women as weapons and its effectivity as well as to analyze Boko Haram's violent transformation from a religious group into a terrorist one in Nigeria as well as its origin, the change in leadership, etc.

For these reasons, first I will analyze concepts such as Islamic terrorism, female suicide bomber, kidnappings, Salafism as well as International Relations Realism theory in order to understand Boko Haram's actions followed by an introductory explanation about Boko Haram's insurgence and the political, economic and social factors that took place Nigeria during Boko Haram's emergence. Finally, all these explanations will help us to analyze the real motivations of the African Jihadist movement, how these girls are recruited and the effectivity of using women as weapons in order to carry out terrorist attacks.

CHAPTER 1: THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

1.1THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this part several matters will be analyzed, suicide bombing, Islamic terrorism, attacks and kidnappings as well as Realism as a theory in international relations as a mean to understand in depth both Boko Haram as an organization and its motivations to use bomb girls.

REALISM

Many scholars have tried to conceptualize and understand the dynamics and evolution of Boko Haram as a terrorist group and to explain Boko Haram's phenomenon through different perspectives. In this sense, my work will be explained through the lenses of realism as an International Relations theory in order to understand the massive use of bomb girls in Boko Haram's organization, its history and modus operandi.

Realism can be applied to Boko Haram's modus operandi and history due to the security threats that it poses to the Nigerian state. In this regard, Boko Haram's emergence illustrates the political, social and economic environment of Nigeria after its

independence as well as individuals' decisions that shaped Boko Haram's trajectory (Thurston, 2019).

Moreover, Realism has been described as the oldest philosophical method to politically analyze the aims of states and individuals and their relations. In this sense, scholars such as Michael Doyle, Walt or Keohane not only portray realism as the oldest political theory but also as the most prevalent one in International Relations (Walt, 2010).

By definition, realism considers states as the key players in the international security scheme, trying to prevent threats to their national safety as the world is always an unsafe and unstable environment.

From this perspective, states must guarantee their territorial integrity and their inhabitants' security in order to survive as there is not a superior agency or organization that preserves the state's security (Walt, 2010). Consequently, state's security is at the base of realism and "the presence of multiple states in anarchy renders the security if each of them problematic and encourages them to compete with each other for power and/ or security." (Walt, 2003). For instance, the prisoner's dilemma portrays how states are immersed on a spiral of insecurity and consequently they launch attacks in order to prevent the other states from doing so. In this sense, the scholar Hornby "defines realism as a way of seeing, accepting and dealing with situations as they really are without being influenced by your emotions or false hope." (Mbaegbu, 2016).

Additionally, it is important to mention that realism has its roots in the idea that violence, conflict and struggle are part of the human nature. Men can create a peaceful society, but they are also the ones who can destroy purposely. Thus, this idea of violence inborn in the human nature is also illustrated by political philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes and the idea of domination, Machiavelli and his work *The Prince*, etc. (Mbaegbu, 2016).

Finally, these individual interests that drive states to act because of our violent human nature can explain Boko Haram's aims and actions as well as Nigeria's history. According to the article *Realism vs. Liberalism in the developing of counterterrorism strategy* by Randi L. Buros, scholars analyze terrorism in the liberal theory spectrum because realism does not usually take into account other agents such as international organizations, terrorist organizations, NGO's as part of the international sphere but on the other hand, many realist scholars perceive terrorism as a real threat that can only be eradicated by an

state-launched attack as states and international organizations mobilize themselves depending on their interests (Buros, 2011).

Lastly, realism as an international relations theory helps us contextualize Boko Haram in the Nigerian political, economic and social sphere as its history has been shaped both by the insecurity and by the interests of individuals, the military and the police.

TERRORISM

First of all, we must state that defining the concept of terrorism is a hard task as many authors and analysts have tried to describe it, making it difficult to fix a common and internationally accepted definition of the concept. What it is clear, is that terrorism is not a modern- XXI century- concept even if due to the spread and increase of terrorist attacks many international actors as well as the media have become increasingly concerned about this matter. According to Brian Michael Jenkins, "terrorism may properly refer to a specific set of actions the primary intent of which is to produce fear and alarm that may server a variety of purposes." (Jenkins, 1980). In this regard, terrorists' attacks are political and ideologically motivated as the organizations are usually seeking for territorial control, a shift in governmental power, control of the societies, etc. As a consequence, organizations use terrorism because it works as a tool to create fear and achieve goals. Furthermore, many scholars have characterized terrorism because of the use of violence that is primarily focused against civilians in order to gain the maximum of publicity worldwide.

Moreover, according to Kydd and Walter in *The Strategies of Terrorism*, "There are five principal strategic logics of costly signaling at work in terrorist campaigns: attrition, intimidation, provocation, spoiling, and outbidding." (Kydd & Walter, 2006). The first one, attrition, refers to all the actions of persuasion committed by the organization to show the enemy or opponent all the group's capabilities if the enemy maintains a certain policy. Moreover, intimidation is used in order to persuade the public about the power of the organization and demonstrate that the government or a political institution does not have the capabilities to stop the organization's actions. Thirdly, provocation refers to the actions that make the opponents respond with the objective of gaining more support of

the population. Spoiler's attacks represent an attempt to convince the enemy of the actions of the organization and thus weaken the efforts of reaching a peace agreement. Finally, outbidding refers to show the public that the organization is worth of support because they are more determined to defeat the enemy (Kydd & Walter, 2006).

Finally, it is also important to mention, that according to the academic and honorary professor, David C. Rapoport, founder of *Terrorism and Political Violence* journal, modern political terrorism can be illustrated in four waves. In this sense, contrary to scholars such as Lacquer, Schmid, Crenshaw, Rapoport stated that terrorism is not only political motivated, but religion can play a crucial role in terrorism. In this sense, the first wave corresponds to the period between 1878 and 1919 and is called the "Anarchist Wave" that began in Russia and later spread to Western Europe and it is characterized with the assassination of politicians, military officers, government officials, etc. Secondly, between 1920 and 1960, Rapoport defines the "Anti-Colonial Wave", marked by the attacks against colonizers especially in Africa and Asia looking for freedom and self-determination. Moreover, during the 1960's and influenced by the Vietnam War, the "New Left Wave" terrorism is illustrated by organizations such as the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, ETA in Spain or the Red Brigades in Italy and uses methods such as political kidnappings or hijackings in order to achieve their political objectives. Finally, the fourth wave corresponds to the "Religious wave" terrorism from 1979 and until today in which these attacks are religiously and ideologically motivated as for example the jihad and organizations such as Al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, etc. (Kaplan, 2016).

Finally, terrorism has many different definitions and features, but it is a phenomenon that shapes our daily lives and whose consequences and damages are not only physical but also psychological and organizations use terrorism in order to gain the attention of the media and gain more support from the audiences.

SALAFISM

Salafism has also shaped the religious and political landscape of Nigeria for many years. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Salafism arose from the Islamic movements that developed in the Arab World and South Asia "largely as a response to the Muslim world's decline and the simultaneous ascendance of the non-Muslim world, especially the West." (Meservey, 2021).

Specifically, in Nigeria, Salafism emerged in the Northern part of the country with the influence of the preacher and radio speaker Abubakar Gami in the 1960's and 1970's, who opposed Sufism and later on, after his death, his followers preached Salafism by creating an anti-Sufi organization, Jamaʾat Izalat al Bid'a wa Iqamat al Sunnah (The Society for the Removal of Heresy and the Establishment of the Tradition of the Prophet), known also as Izala, which in part will help us understand the ethical conflicts arising in Nigeria due in part to disagreements between Sufis and Salafis. Years after the death of Gami, Ja'far Adam a political and religious preacher would become the most prominent Salafi preacher in Nigeria, as will be explained later on (Campbell, 2017).

First of all, Salafism is defined by Wagemakers as "a branch of Sunni Islam, whose modern-day adherents claim to emulate the "pious predecessors" as closely in many spheres of life as possible." (Wagemakers, 2016). Therefore, Salafis regard their theological and religious principles as the sole method of being a true Muslim and this fundamentalist movement differs from others in the way they think about Islam and interpret the Quran from other especially, Sufism. Hence, Salafism considers that the only way of living as a true Muslim is based on the literal interpretation of the Quran and the Sunnah, Mohamed' s recompilation of anecdotes and sayings collected by his followers, as well as taking as example the actions and statements of the first three generations known as the "pious predecessors." (Campbell, 2017).

Consequently, for the Salafis, all other Islamic movements are sinners, as they do not fully live as a true Muslim. Additionally, it is also important to mention that, in practice, Salafism can be divided into three different branches. On the one hand, political Salafism where the adherents fight for including religion in the political sphere by participating in political debates, creating political parties, etc. On the other hand, another branch of Salafism is what is called "quietists Salafism" whose aim is advocating and preaching religion in order to convey the right way of being a True Muslim through the teachings of Islam. And finally, the third branch of Salafism and the most radicalized one is Salafi jihadism whose objective is to violently overthrow the current political regimes as "it is duty of every true Muslim to use force to reestablish a caliphate as it existed in the early years if Islam." (Zimmerman, 2017).

Therefore, the concept of Salafism is of vital importance to better understand the emergence of Boko Haram in Nigeria and its relationship with this religious doctrine, as they will be strongly connected in the first stages.

ISLAMIC TERRORISM

Even if nowadays, some scholars have argued that the concept of "Islamic terrorism" is incorrect because of the negative connotation that it can entails, it is clear that Islamic terrorism contextualizes and helps to better understand Boko Haram and other terrorist groups.

Even if terrorism, by definition, is not specifically linked with religious motivations, most terrorist attacks have been claimed in the name of Islam.

In this regard, Radical Islamic terrorism specifically applies to a type of terrorism associated directly with the Islamic religion. Terrorist organizations and groups find an Islamic religious motivation worthily fighting for and those groups justify their actions by an extreme interpretation of the Qur'an and by wanting to establish the sharia law universally.

Originally, some scholars argue that Radical Islamic terrorism initially emerged as a consequence of the colonial domination, western superiority, the imposition of the western culture, social injustice and the eradication of Muslim traditions. In this regard, the only solution that those groups sought was the imposition of Islam in order to reestablish their traditions. Moreover, it is also important to mention that Islam not only envisions the establishment of a religious community, but it also plays a crucial role in politics in which religious authorities are also political ones. In this regard, the moral justification of establishing an Islamic religious community is completely linked with the idea of reestablishing a political community. In this sense, the solution is the re-Islamization of those communities in order to eliminate completely any sign of Western culture (Serafim, 2005).

Therefore, the re-islamization and restoration of an Islamic government became a moral duty for many Muslims that joined the jihad. Radical Islamic terrorism differs from other

kinds of terrorism because martyrdom is rewarded, fighters are willing to die and kill unbelievers.

Finally, it is also important to mention that Islamic terrorism has caused more than 210,138 deaths between 1979 and 2021 and Islamist terrorist groups have cause more that 48,053 attacks mainly in Muslim countries especially in Nigeria, Somalia, Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq (Reynié, 2021).

SUICIDE BOMBING

Since the 80's, suicide bombing has been spread, popularized and normalized in many parts of the world as for instance in the Middle East and South East Asia. Scholars have analyzed suicide bombing especially since the 9/11 attacks as this kind of attacks have grown exponentially and terrorist groups have begun to use suicide bombing periodically due to its effectiveness. The first contemporary suicide bombing occurred in December 1981, when al-Dawa, the Iraqi Islamist group attacked the Iraqi Embassy in Beirut, killing 61 people, and later in 1983, the Hezbollah's attack against the United States and France Marine Corps in Lebanon, killing 307 people. Those two events represent a turning point in the study of suicide bombing especially by non-state actors as Hezbollah principally began to commit suicide bombings because of the media interaction and coverage that those strikes entailed.

Moreover, suicide bombing terrorism has been mainly performed by religious groups especially by Islamists and in this case by fundamentalists. According to Horowitz, "a suicide bombing is most often defined as an attack where the death of the bomber is the means which the attack is accomplished", however, most of these attacks do not end up happening because their perpetrators are arrested, or the bomb sometimes just does not go off (Horowitz, 2015).

Even if modern suicide attacks started during the 80's, it was not until the beginning of the XXI century that we witnessed an increase of suicide bombing, becoming one of the most widely used strategies by non-state actors. In this regard, "between 2014 and 2021, 3,803 attacks occurred resulting in 37, 562 deaths and 96, 644 injuries." (Harmon, 2015). Additionally, many scholars have studied the motivations and have tried to find the reasons behind suicide tactics. First of all, suicide bombing conveys strategically the idea

of determination and fearlessness, it shows the group's will to fight until death, its commitment to increase the power of attacks and thus weaken the enemy, spreading a sense of insecurity and powerlessness. Moreover, when suicide bombers succeed, the results are devastatingly deadly. Suicide bombing is effective because it can attain a wide spectrum of targets while the cost of the bomb is minimal, it is made with few materials and the group only uses one or two martyr's lives. In this sense, the suicide bomber can strategically decide the perfect location, the timing and even the targets. It is also essential to mention, the concept of martyrdom and the link of religion with suicide bombing as it is extremely difficult to deter someone who is willingly decided to die. In this regard, the culture of death plays an important role for suicide bombers.

Finally, even if in the majority of cases the bomb does not usually explode and even if the lethality is still low, these tactical attacks effectively send a powerful message and the media impact and publicity that these attacks provide, make these strikes a useful tactic. In this regard, in most of these attacks, terrorists are not only seeking for revenge, but they use "violence to convince the public that the terrorists have greater resolve to fight the enemy than rival groups, and therefore are worthy of support", a strategy known as outbidding (Kydd & Walter, 2006). The concept of outbidding can be illustrated with the case of Hamas in Palestine, in which one of the organization main objectives is to compete with the enemy and according to Mia Bloom in its paper *Palestinian Suicide Bombing: Public Support, Market Share, and Outbidding,* "multiple organizations are engaged in this competition and use violence to increase their prestige. With every major attack sin November 2000, support for suicide bombings has increased and support for the Palestinian Authority has decreased." (Bloom, 2013).

FEMALE SUICIDE BOMBER

Even if women have always been involved in activities during war periods it is not until 1985 that a Syrian woman detonated herself for the first time. Sana'a Mehaydali, a seventeen-year-old girl from the Syrian Socialist National Party, blew herself up in Lebanon provoking the death of five Israeli soldiers (Bloom, 2007). In this regard, the first female suicide bomber did not commit a religious motivated attack, as she was not an Islamist fundamentalist but a political motivated attack.

A female suicide bomber can be defined as the female activity of committing a suicide attack and to detonate an explosive device, usually a tight-fastened belt fitted with bombs in order to blow herself up and cause deaths. Female suicide bombers differ from male suicide bombers and many scholars have argued that women's justifications and motivations to commit suicide attacks differ enormously from men. While men are usually more engaged both ideologically and religiously, according to Female Suicide Bombers: a global trend, women become suicide bombers due to different reasons (Bloom, 2007). They commit suicide bombing commonly because they are seeking revenge for a personal loss, they are victims of abuse and rape or they think that the only way to become functional in society and to find a place in it is by killing themselves. Some women even become suicide bombers in order to achieve fame and fight the patriarchal oppression in which they live even if research states that women's empowerment constitute the lowest motivation for female suicide bombers (Preesman, 2021). In this regard, contrary to male suicide bombing, female suicide bombers are usually regarded by society as failed women.

Consequently, terrorist groups recruit women because of the greater outputs that they achieve for the organization. First of all, the use of women as suicide bombers is completely strategical from a tactical point of view. Their clothes and their appearance make it easier for women to sneak into a market and detonate the bomb specifically in an Islamic society in which women are fully covered with a hijab and as mentioned, they are culturally seen as weaker than men. In this sense, women are not the primary target of the police because of the overall assumption by their societies that women are naïve, fragile, non-violent, etc. and they are seen by the organization as easily replaceable. Moreover, women are strategically powerful for terrorist groups because, with a majority of the police being men, it is not appropriate to examine the body of a woman, so it is easier to cover and camouflage the detonator and sneak in ignored. In this regard, women usually attack civilian and public spaces such as public transportation stations, markets, etc. while men do usually target government agencies and institutions. This shows the strategic use of covered women in public spaces but also the distinction of men and women in a terrorist organization (Warner & Matfess, 2018). For instance, the organization Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) operating in Sri Lanka, also known as Tamil Tigers, is known for being one of the main organizations that uses women as suicide

bombers with the ultimate goal of forming and independent state in the Northeastern part of Sri Lanka, as illustrated for example in the 1991 assassination of the Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi during the electoral campaign in Tamil Nadu by a woman who self-detonated a belt bomb while greeting him (Mitra, 2018). Therefore, the LTTE was the first group to officially involve women in the conflict as "the organization defended that by joining the struggle, women were not only helping their homeland to achieve liberation but also, they were liberating themselves in the process." (Ginés Fenoll, 2021).

 Finally, female suicide bombing is strategically used by terrorist organizations due to the minor financial cost of the attacks as well as the media exposure that suicide attacks entail. In this sense, "attacks by women receive eight times the media coverage as attacks by men" (Bloom, 2007), so terrorist groups find female suicide bombing a tactical practice to kill a high number of people by sacrifying just one or two members of the group with at a minimal cost, to gain national and international coverage and to convey a message of fear and power.

KIDNAPPINGS

Even if kidnappings were not a tactic commonly used by terrorist groups in the past, we are currently witnessing an increase in kidnappings mainly by Islamic extremists (Forest, 2012).
 Boko Haram is especially known for its massive kidnappings especially the Chibok schoolgirls kidnapping and the use of these captured girls to achieve its goals and objectives. Kidnappings are not just a tactic employed by terrorist organizations, but individuals, governments and other types of organizations have also committed kidnappings. Uzorma & Nwanegbo-Ben define kidnapping as the action of detaining and capturing someone against his or her will, by forcing them and transporting them as a hostage (Emanemua & Akinlosotu, 2016). In this regard, kidnapping can also be defined as a criminal act, as the abductor coerces and employs violence and fear to capture the kidnapped.

Moreover, Turner analyzes four main reasons for kidnapping. First, to receive an economic ransom, for political motives, for economic and political incentives and finally kidnappings that do not have a political nor an economic objective (Emanemua & Akinlosotu, 2016).

However, most of these kidnappings are usually strategic as the aim is to obtain something in return and to achieve the goals and purposes of the organization.

Additionally, according *to Global trends in kidnapping by terrorist groups*, most of those kidnappings are seeking a financial or a political compensation and even if kidnappings are considered usually as a terrorist attack because of the organization's use of kidnappings, it differs from other attacks, especially from suicide bombing, because normally the victim of a kidnapping has been previously selected while in suicide bombing the targets are usually chosen indiscriminately (Forest, 2012). Furthermore, kidnappings are also distinguished from other types of terrorist attacks due to the human relations that capturing someone implies. In this sense, as terrorist groups strategically select the person or group of people kidnapped and the organization wants something in return, such as for instance money, kidnapping involves socialization and human attachments between the parties implied such as the negotiator, the payer, the hostage, etc. In this regard, usually a large number of people are involved during kidnappings (Forest, 2012).

As explained, the main motivations behind kidnappings are usually political or economic reasons but many terrorist organizations use kidnappings advantageously in order to gain media attention and coverage as well as publicity. Media attention shows how the group is powerful and how it uses civilians as an effective tool to achieve its objective. As Phil Williams explains, "kidnapping provides a sense of affirmation and importance: I kidnap, therefore I exist- and you need to acknowledge me" meaning that kidnappings not only draw attention to the group, but it demands this attention and the group benefits from it, using attention as a weapon to create a climate of fear and terror (Williams, 2009).

Regarding Boko Haram's kidnappings, it is also important to mention that in Africa, kidnappings, especially children abductions are a usual tactic used by many violent groups in order to recruit soldiers, trade them, etc. According to the Vanguard, Nigeria, "has witnessed staggering 111 kidnapping incidents in the last eight months, that is, from January to mid-August 2021." (Ojiego, 2021).

Finally, the outcome of kidnappings differs tremendously depending on the objective that the organization wants to achieve. Sometimes, the people kidnapped are killed whereas

sometimes they can be released free. Lastly, Boko Haram's kidnappings usually imply women and girls in order to use them to accomplish the group purposes such as coercing them to become suicide bombers, sexual slaves, etc. which I will analyze later on.

1.2 STATE OF THE QUESTION: BOKO HARAM'S INSURGENCE

NIGERIAN CONTEXT

First of all, in order to understand the emergence of Boko Haram in Nigeria, it is essential to analyze the events that happened during the 70's-80's-90's in Nigeria. According to Alexander Thurston in his book, *Boko Haram, the history of an African Jihadist Movement,* "Nigeria's contentious politics, economic inequality, endemic corruption, and counterproductive conflict management strategies are part of the environment that contributed to Boko Haram's rise." (Thurston, 2019).

In this sense, I will first analyze the Nigerian political background since colonization, secondly Nigerian religious and social context and finally the economic environment in order to help us understand the rise and emergence of the Jihadist terrorist group.

POLITICAL BACKGROUND

In an effort to study Boko Haram and Nigeria's politics it is important to analyze all the events that happened since the colonization. First of all, many authors such as Alexander Thurston believe that Nigeria nowadays is still "a prisoner of the legacy of colonialism." (Thurston, 2019).

In this regard, the British colonial rule established in 1886 the Royal Niger Companies in order to gain territorial control and to create years later the Protectorate of the Southern Nigeria and the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria. In this sense, the British could keep control over their territory via an indirect rule and benefit economically from all of Nigeria's productions that include primarily the export of cash crops such as peanuts, cocoa, oil, etc. Consequently, the British advantageously profited trough the colonial administration from Nigeria's economy without controlling directly the territory and

escaping from social and ethnic tensions (Alme, 2016). In this regard, the North/ South division created a wider separation in the region as the North experienced a protectorate ruled by traditional authorities, the emirs, that imposed Muslim religion over non-religious populations which consequently lead to religious tensions in the North, while the South adopted a political hierarchy and a more vibrant economy with better infrastructures and access to education that led to better economic opportunities (Udo et al., 2020).

Consequently, the British rule brought many changes to Nigeria such as a Western-style educational system, the English language, new forms of transportation and even the spread of Christianity, especially in the Southern Protectorate (Udo et al., 2020).

These disparities between the North and the South during the British rule caused tensions and inequalities between those regions that helps us understand post-colonial Nigeria's background and conflicts (Thurston, 2019).

Nigeria became an independent State in October 1960 establishing a federal system with a constitution and a Prime Minister; however, it is not until 1963 that Nigeria became a democracy ruled by Azikiwe as the President and Balewa as Nigeria's Prime Minister (Udo et al., 2020). Since its independence, Nigeria has witnessed enormous political changes such a coups d'état, a civil war, failed parliamentary systems, unstable democratic transitions, etc. In this regard, the rise of Boko Haram can also partly be explained, as the author Alexander Thurston states, because of Nigeria's incapacity to rule politically the country as illustrated by the changes in regimes that the country has witnessed. The idea of Nigeria's political failure is crucial to understand the rise of Boko Haram but also the strength and support that the organization has gained in the last years.

However, in 1962-1963 Nigeria's political situation worsened due to the ethnic conflicts and competitions that arose between the regions as well as rivalry between the North and the South influenced also by the discriminatory policies and inequal administration of those areas. The violence between Christians and Muslims has shaped Nigeria's political landscape for many years and has provoked several riots as for instance, the Kaduna crisis that also illustrates the inter-communal violence between Muslims and Christians in 2002 that killed at least 2.000 people because of the implementation of the Sharia in this region, and other ethnical conflicts that will be explained later on (2003). Consequently, after its independence, Nigeria was divided into geographical areas mainly controlled by three

majoritarian ethnic groups, "the Hausa Fulani in the North, the Yoruba in the West and the Ibo in the Eastern Region." (Smith & Dent, 2014).

In 1966, the First Republic was overthrown by a coup d'état mainly by Igbos officers with the aim of centralizing and unifying Nigeria's government under the leadership of General Ironsi. It is also important to mention, that since Nigeria's independence, the country has undergone 24 years of military rule (Lewis, 1994).

The policies implemented were extremely unpopular especially in the Northern Region as they believed that the military government was interfering in internal affairs and their autonomy. In this regard, Northern officers eventually killed General Ironsi and Igbos officers and established another military government in July 1966 under the leadership of General Gowon. In this sense, the government re-established federalism in order to keep Nigeria's unity (Smith & Dent, 2014).

However, the Eastern region was seeking independence as the territory's profits from oil reserves, were being controlled by a majority of Igbos lead by Colonel Ojukwu, who didn't accept the re-establishment of federalism and believed that Nigeria's government was incapable of protecting the ethnic group's security. In this regard, General Gowon speeded ahead Colonel Ojukwu, who was going to declare the Biafran state and its independence from Nigeria and reformed the regions' division in order to prevent the independence. In this sense, General Gowon "made his own constitutional coup and divided the four Nigerian regions into twelve states: six in the North, three in the East; Lagos; the Mid-West, which have already been created and the Western State." (Smith & Dent, 2014). In this regard, this regional enlargement is crucial to understand Nigeria's history because the largest ethnic group lost its power and tribal minorities groups began holding more and more control over the territory.

Additionally, the Igbos ethnic group, located in the Easter Region declared the Republic of Biafra and claimed the region's independence in May 1967 led by Ojukwu (Thurston, 2019). Consequently, civil war in Nigeria broke out in 1967 and lasted until 1970. It is essential to mention, that the Biafra War did not only caused casualties, but during the conflict, the public opinion was internationally mobilized due to famine, starvation and diseases that caused around a million casualties during Nigeria's blockade of Biafra, cutting food supplies (Moses & Heerten, 2020). Finally, the war ended in 1970, 30 months

later, when Umuahia, Biafra's capital fell in Nigerians hand and Ojukwu fled the country (Nwaubani, 2020). After the civil war, Nigeria returned to federal government, and successfully tried to appease ethnic rivalries and tensions and avoid a second civil war. In this sense, Gowon's government was able to consolidate the tensions between regions and develop financial programs due to the post-war oil boom that made the federal government stronger (Kirk-Greene et al., 2020). However, in 1975 Gowon was overthrown by a military coup directed by General Murtala Ramat Mohammed. Mohammed introduced many changes into the government such as creating a committee in order to produce a new constitution, he appointed Abuja's as the new capital and most importantly he initiated the civilian rule process in order to establish a Republic (University of Central Arkansas). Nevertheless, General Murtala Ramat Mohammed was murdered in 1976 during a coup d'état's attempt and was consequently replaced by General Olusegun Obasanjo, that became head of state and made Nigeria's return to a civilian rule by creating the Second Republic (Kirk-Greene et al., 2020).

During the Second Republic, a presidential parliamentary system was established, and five new political parties were created and subsequently in 1979, the right-wing political party, the NPN (National Party of Nigeria) led by Shehu Shagari won the elections. During NPN's control, Shagari only benefited his allies and government companions and did not ameliorate Nigeria's economic crisis. Even if Shagari was re-elected in 1983, the economic slowdown and political crisis caused another military intervention in December 1983 conducted by General Muhammad Buhari. In this sense, Buhari legitimated his military intervention due to the economic and political crisis that Nigeria was experiencing and established a regime that arrested a wide number of politicians under the "War against Disciple" policy (Kirk-Greene et al., 2020). Buhari was replaced by another military intervention led by Ibrahim Babangida in 1985.

Babangida established a regime well different to Buhari's' as he first released all the political prisoners, adopted changes in the political, economic and social spectrum such as accepting the International Monetary Fund money and establishing a market economy as well as appointing Muslims, especially northern Muslims for ministerial jobs which damaged Muslims-Christians relations as the Christians also wanted more political representation (Chapin Metz, 1991). In this regard, it is crucial to mention that under Babangida's regime, the tensions between Christians and Muslims worsened as a

majority of Muslims wanted to implement the sharia in Nigeria and especially some Muslims radicals from the North demanded an Islamization of the country under Babangida's regime. In this regard, Babangida favored some Muslims by providing them some governmental authority and in 1986 Nigeria entered the Organization of the Islamic Conference, which soured the relations between Christians and Muslims (Chapin Metz, 1991).

Moreover, in 1986, Babangida, even if he wanted to retain power, declared a transition to a civilian rule controlled by his government and consequently created two legal political groups, the National Republican Convention and the Social Democratic Party. Whilst Babangida initiated this democratic transition, he believed however that free and fair elections would never take place and the tensions between the North and the South would never allow a democratic government. However, contrary to the military government's expectations, Abiola the president of the Social Democratic Party, and a southerner won the elections but Babangida annulled the results. In 1993, Babangida was forced to leave power and Shonekan, a Yoruba, created an Interim National Government in order to establish a civilian rule. However, General Sani Abacha, a member of Babangida's government, took power and established another military government that started by legitimizing its power with a justification similar to Babaginda's, to help establishing a democratic transition (Kirk-Greene et al., 2020).

Abacha's regime (1993-1998) can be illustrated by its massive use of violence as well as its conflict with the civilians and the international community that were demanding for a return to a civilian rule. During his dictatorship, Abacha the 10th Nigerian head of State, imprisoned Abiola, the winner of the elections, who died in jail in 1998, as well as Obasanjo (Sanni, 2018). In this regard, Abacha's regime lasted 5 years while civilians were asking for democratic policies, because of the use of force against the regime's opponents and a reward technique for the regime's supporters (Amuwo, 2001).

Moreover, during Abacha's dictatorship, freedom of press, personal freedom, trade unions and other liberties were completely prohibited, and the government used violence in order to gain power and impose its authority (Kirk-Greene et al., 2020). Finally, besides the regime's brutality, Abacha's dictatorship can also be illustrated by its corruption especially from the oil business, Nigeria's support of the Economic Community of West

African States (ECOWAS) and activists' executions (2021). Abacha died suddenly due to a heart attack at the age of 54 (Rupert, 1998).

Additionally, General Abdulsalam Abubakar provisionally took power and replaced Abacha's regime by guaranteeing a democratic transition, transferring power to civilians, releasing prisoners and restoring basic freedoms and liberties. Consequently, Nigeria's democratic transition was started with the 1999 elections in which three major political parties emerged: The Alliance for Democracy (AD), the All-People's Party (APP) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP). After 16 years without any democratic elections, Nigeria's population held both parliamentary and presidential elections. In this regard, Olusegun Obasanjo, who had been Nigeria's head of state between 1976 and 1979, was elected President under the Fourth Republic (Kirk-Greene et al., 2020). Moreover, it is also important to mention for understanding Boko Haram's emergence, than during the 1999's election Mala Kachalla won the election as governor in Borno as many of the Northern Muslims advocated an Islamization and a sharia implementation (Thurston, 2019). In this regard, in 1999, Sharia was implemented, first in the Zamfara state and then in other eleven Northern regions which provoked different national as well as international debates about the compatibility of the Sharia law with the Nigerian Constitution (Baderin, 2008).

According to Alexander Thurston, "Nigeria's 1999 constitution established a strong presidency, a bicameral legislature, and a federal system comprising thirsty-six states." (Thurston, 2019). Furthermore, Nigeria's elections and democratic transition improved the country's international image even if the economy continued to struggle with governmental oil policies manifestations such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) as well as the continued tensions between Muslims, who wanted to establish the sharia law and Christians and ethnic rivalries (Kirk-Greene et al., 2020). Moreover, during Obasanjo's presidency many controversies and disputes arose such as the territorial conflict between Nigeria and Cameroon in the Bakassi Peninsula in 2006 when Nigeria signed the Greentree Agreement and was forced to withdraw, two years later, its troops. In this sense, Obasanjo was negatively criticized internationally and domestically (Sunday, 2019).

Additionally, according to Human Rights Watch, the 2007 legislative and presidential elections were characterized by several irregularities and even some fraud that didn't prevent Umary Musa Yar'Adua, from the People's Democratic Party (PDP) to become Nigeria's president (2007).

Yar'Adua's administration lasted 3 years and was marked by an illness that eventually would provoke his death, a heart and membrane inflammation and his numerous travels to Saudi Arabia for recovery (Rahman Alfa Shaban, 2019). In this regard, due to his medical condition in 2010, Nigerian's National Assembly decided by vote that Yar'Adua could not anymore exercise as a President and appointed Yar'Adua's vice-president, Goodluck Jonathan as a candidate (Kirk-Greene et al., 2020).

Goodluck Jonathan reformed the electoral process, organizing clear and transparent elections and became Nigeria's president in 2011 defeating his opponent Muhammadu Buhari (McKenna, 2020). His administration was marked by the violent presence of Boko Haram, initiated in 2009 and Jonathan's measures to contain Boko Haram's power, especially in the Northeastern and Central Nigeria. For instance, Goodluck Jonathan's administration tried to countermeasure the violence of Boko Haram by declaring it as a terrorist group in 2013 and banning it from the law as well as in January 2012, he declared a state of emergency for six months in sixteen local areas located in Borno, Yobe, Plateau and Niger States (Thurston, 2019). Nevertheless, even if Nigeria's administration tried to defeat Boko Haram, these attempts failed. Finally, under Jonatan's presidency, Nigeria's economy grew steadily, however, Nigeria was still facing poverty, unemployment and violence (Kirk-Greene et al., 2020).

Additionally, according to Alexander Thurston, "Boko Haram became a major issue in Nigeria's 2014-2015 electoral campaign" (Thurston, 2019). In this sense, the internationalized Chibok kidnapping of more than one hundred schoolgirls and Jonathan government's inability to eradicate Boko Haram and preserve Nigeria's territorial integrity marked the 2015 elections disputed mainly between Goodluck Jonathan and Buhari (Kirk-Greene et al., 2020). In this regard, Nigerian voters were concerned about the economic situation of their country, in which unemployment was still rising but also about matters of security due to Boko Haram's violence. Given the weak social structure of the country, Nigerians considered taking up arms and the use of violence as the sole solution to tackle these issues. Moreover, these elections were also characterized by the

North-South tensions, Christians and Muslims rivalries as well as the economic marginalization that suffered some regions, especially the North (Kimenyi, 2016).

Consequently, the elections were postponed due to Boko Haram's threats and violence from February to March and Goodluck Jonathan in order to gain more support in the last minute and improve his reputation domestically, tried an improvised tactic to defeat Boko Haram. In this sense, Goodluck Jonathan successfully managed to restrain Boko Haram's power from February to March as the government was able to re-acquire territories in Borno and Bama that had been previously controlled by Boko Haram. It is also important to mention that in 2015, Boko Haram pledged a strategic alliance to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISWA), as the terrorist group was losing territorial control and was seeking for global recognition (Thurston, 2019).

 Moreover, Jonathan also demanded effective international help in order to defeat Boko Haram and neighboring countries such as Niger, Benin, Chad and Cameroon provided military assistance. Despite Jonathan's efforts to content Boko Haram, his opponent, Buhari, from the All-Progressive Congress party won the elections in May 2015 as Nigeria's registered 68 million voters (Sweeney, 2015).

Muhammadu Buhari's administration was characterized by 3 main factors: an economic recession and extreme impoverishment in Nigeria, anti-corruption policies, and finally efforts to fight Boko Haram (Kirk-Greene et al., 2020). In this regard, concerning Boko Haram's strategy, Buhari moved the military headquarters to Maiduguri, appointed different key security advisors and created an especial military operation under the name of "Operation Lafiya Dole" which can be translated as "Peace by Force" in order to fight territorially Boko Haram (Thurston, 2019). Nevertheless, Boko Haram continued attack especially using bomb girls and to kept regionalizing and internationalizing the conflict.

Finally, Buhari won the 2019 elections against Abubakar, from the PDP again marked by political violence, Boko Haram's attacks and human rights abuses from soldiers and the police (2020). In this regard, according to Human Rights Watch, during the 2019 electoral campaign, Nigeria's experienced 626 death casualties (2020). Nowadays, Nigeria's political situation, under Buhari's leadership continues to fight insecurity

especially against Boko Haram under Buhari's administration and attempts to stabilize the economic recession as well as combat corruption and political violence (2021).

To sum up, Nigeria's political landscape since its independence until today has been characterized by regional tensions along with rivalries between Christians and Muslims and the constant presence of religion in politics. In this regard, the Islamic influence, especially in Northern Nigeria has shaped the country's political outcome as religion has been instrumentalized for political purposes such as the despise of western education the colonialist legacy as well as the Salafi movement. In this sense, Nigeria has witnessed inequality, intercommunal violence, political instability, religious fragmentations, corruption, insecurity, poverty and social tensions that have shaped the idea that Nigeria was incapable of being governed as the country has tried all forms of political governance, from a military rule to a civilian one as shown in the graphic below. Finally, according to Alexander Thurston, "for understanding Boko Haram, four aspects of Nigerian politics are relevant: cutthroat elections, pervasive corruption, severe inequality and the violence and impunity that surround approaches to conflict management and Boko Haram arose partly because of the Nigerian government's failure to effectively resolve past incidents of inter-religious violence and the prolongation of the Boko Haram conflict owes much to widespread human right abuses committed by the security forces against actual and suspected sect members." (Thurston, 2019).

In this sense, it is important to understand that the only option that Nigerians have had to solve these issues over the years has been by using violence, which in part can explain Boko Haram's insurgency.

<div align="center">Nigeria's political timeline</div>

Period of Rule	Head of State	Type of Government	How Rule Started	How Rule Ended
1960-66	Balewa	Civilian	Election	Attempted Coup/Assassination
1966	Ironsi	Military	Coup/Assassination	Coup/Assassination
1966-75	Gowon	Military	Coup/Assassination	Coup
1975-76	Mohammad	Military	Coup/Assassination	Attempted Coup/Assassination
1976-79	Obasanjo	Military	Coup/Assassination	Elections
1979-83	Shagari	Civilian	Election	Coup
1984-85	Buhari	Military	Coup	Coup
1985-93	Babaginda	Military	Coup/Assassination	Annulling of Election Results & Stepping Down
1993	Shonekan	Civilian	Handover	Palace Coup
1993-98	Abacha	Military	Coup/Assassination	Death
1998-99	Abubakar	Military	Handover	Elections
1999-2007	Obasanjo (Second Time)	Civilian	Elections	Elections with Reported Attempt to Change Constitution for Three-Term Tenure
2007-10	Yar'Adua	Civilian	Elections	Death
Feb 2010-May 2010	Jonathan	Civilian	Handover	Elections
2010-Present	Jonathan	Civilian	Elections	Ongoing

<div align="center">Source: Nwagbara & Ugwoji, 2015</div>

ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

Unemployment and corruption are the two main features that best describe Nigeria's economy. Even if the country is portrayed as Africa's largest economy and a growing nation, Nigeria is still facing poverty and joblessness. Since its independence, Nigeria's economy has been based on petroleum and agricultural production mainly of cash crops. However, the most populated country in Africa has experienced hard economic recessions accompanied by a poor governmental management. In this sense, Nigeria has witnessed an economic shift from being a nation dependent on agriculture to an oil producing one. These natural resources make Nigeria a potential and strong nation both regionally and internationally but economic inequalities between the political elites and

the Nigerian population impede the country from growing exponentially (Oluwadamilola Kemi, 2019).

According to Transparency International, Nigeria is ranked in the 154th position out of 180 on the 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index (Transparency International, 2021). In this sense, corruption is perhaps Nigeria's biggest economic problem as Alexander Thurston explains: "in 2006, the head of Nigeria's Economic and Financial Crimes Commission estimated that some $380 billion had been "stolen or wasted" since independence." (Thurston, 2019). In this sense, corruption highlights once again the government's inability to successfully manage Nigeria's resources.

Moreover, the Boko Haram crisis has also economically shaped the country as explained by the author Alexander Thurston, "the resulting crisis economy has been a key factor in perpetuating violence. Boko Haram has been one major beneficiary, deriving revenues from bank robberies, extortion, kidnapping and control of urban and rural areas." (Thurston, 2019).

Additionally, Nigeria's massive oil production shows two main problems. First of all, even if petroleum represents 90% of Nigeria's total exports revenue, world's oil volatility prices and international fluctuations have caused massive economic recessions, population displacements, agricultural unemployment and Nigeria's economic instability (Oluwadamilola Kemi, 2019). For instance, during the 70's and 90's economic crisis due to petroleum and oil trade, many Nigerians became jobless or economically strugglers, which fostered violence in some regions.

Furthermore, it is also important to mention that the majority of children in Nigeria still suffer from poverty as they lack basic needs such as a clean water resources, sanitary infrastructures, good access to education, etc. According to "the Harmonized Nigeria Living Standard Survey (HNLSS) in 2010, 70,3% of Nigerian children lived in poverty while 23.2% lived in extreme poverty." (Philipp, 2021).

Finally, nowadays Nigeria is experiencing a harsh economic recession as the country has been vulnerable due to the COVID-19 crisis as well as the decline of oil prices (2021). According to The Economist, "more than half of Nigerians are underemployed or

unemployed. Before covid-19 about 80m of Nigeria's 200m people lived on less than the equivalent of $1.90 a day. The pandemic and population growth could see that figure rise to almost 100m by 2023." (The Economist, 2021).

Consequently, Nigeria's economic crisis, instability and inequality have contributed to foster violence and unemployment, especially among younger Nigerians, which represent a key factor in Boko Haram's members recruitment. In this regard, Nigeria should undertake major economic changes, as for instance reducing the country's oil dependency, improving governmental infrastructures and policies, eradicating corruption and benefiting the citizens in order for Nigeria to become a powerful nation both internationally and regionally (Okonjo-Iweala & Osafo-Kwaako, 2008).

Finally, it is also important to mention that Nigeria's population is growing at a very fast rate, showing the government's inability to successfully manage resources for all the population. According to World Population review, "The United Nations project that the overall population of Nigeria will reach about 401.31 million by the end of the year 2050." (2021), and the Human Development Index demonstrates Nigeria's powerlessness to cope with its population. According to the Human Development Report 2020, "Nigeria's HDI value for 2019 is 0.539— which puts the country in the low human development category— positioning it at 161 out of 189 countries and territories." (2020).

In this regard, Nigeria's future looks dire and hopeless. Unemployment, corruption and poverty will undoubtedly shape the country for many years, coupled by the unsustainable growth of the population and the lack of coverage of basic needs. All these factors, in part, can help understand the emergence and widespread popularity of Boko Haram.

SOCIAL BACKGROUND

In order to understand Boko Haram's emergence, it is crucial to analyze Nigeria's social background mainly since its independence especially in the Northern Region. First of all, concerning education, it is not a coincidence that Boko Haram arose in cities where public education recorded its lowest literacy rates. For instance, "the 2006 census showed that out of a population of nearly 4.2 million, 71 percent of Borno residents aged six and older had never attended school." (Thurston, 2019). In this sense, Nigeria's educational failures

not only have contributed to poverty and unemployment but also can explain Boko Haram's origins, youth criminality and even anti-Western feelings among Northern Muslims. Furthermore, Nigeria's social landscape can also be illustrated by the political instability and violence exerted by security forces that provoked rebellions as the government was incapable of efficiently solve regional tensions and inter-religious conflicts. (Thurston, 2019). In this sense, it is crucial to point out that Boko Haram partially emerged because of the fragility and weakness of the Nigerian government, unable to successfully manage the country politically, economic and socially.

Additionally, religion has always played a key role in the country's political and social background such as religious tensions between Muslims and Christians have shaped the country's panorama, as previously explained. Firstly, the presence of Sufi orders with the purpose of influencing spiritually some Muslim's lives, the existence of emirs and hereditary Muslim leaders especially in Northern Nigeria and the Salafi movement, have shaped Muslims ideals and political ideologies. For instance, Muhammad Yusuf, Boko Haram's first leader became a Salafist preacher when he was young even if today modern Nigerian Salafists do not support the terrorist group. Moreover, many Muslims do not respect the emirs anymore and they have even challenged their jurisdiction and independence (Thurston, 2019).

Nigeria and Africa religions maps

Source: Station4C and Santana & Henriquez, 2015
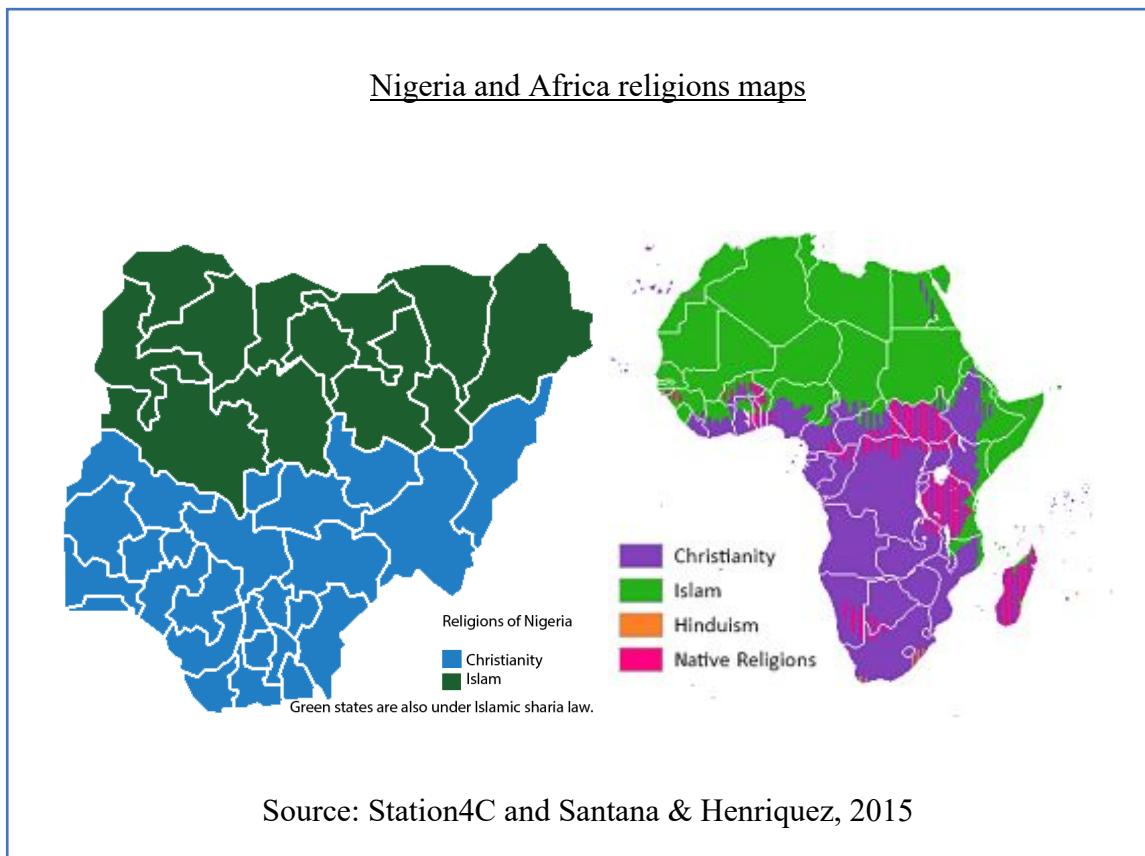
In this regard, Salafism originated in Northern Nigeria under the leadership of Abubakar Gumi and after his death, his followers continued to spread its influence and oppose Sufism through an organization known as Izala, originally named "The Society for the Removal of Heretical Innovation and the Establishment of the Prophet's Model", in which Boko Haram originated as Yusuf and his mentor Adam were preachers of the organization. However, Yusuf took distance from Izala but still took advantage of the intra-Salafi competition, especially during the 1990's (Thurston, 2016).

Therefore, it is important to highlight that Boko Haram is featured as a "fringe of Northern Nigeria's Salafi community" and "is not an extension of Izala, but rather a result of fierce intra-Salafi competition for audiences." (Thurston, 2016).

Finally, concerning Nigeria's religious background as previously mentioned, the Christian/ Muslim conflict can be shown through different violent episodes as for example, the Kaduna crash which started when a Christian publicly underestimated the Qur'an at the Kafanchan College (Çancı & Odukoya, 2020), or the crisis that occurred in February 1992 in Zangon-Kataf between the predominantly ethnical Christian group, the Kataf and Muslims Hausas because the Hausa refused to change the market town or the clashes in the Bauchi States and the confrontations between Hausa and Fulani Muslims in the Plateau State, etc. (2003).
In this sense, it is also important to mention that these conflicts in the majority of the cases are not only religiously motivated, but they reflect also ethnic conflicts, domestic differences and even religious inspired political ideologies as for instance Nigeria's Islamization, international Pan-Islamic influence etc.

To sum up, Nigeria's political, economic and social background helps us analyze Boko Haram's roots. In this regard, Muslim political ideologies shift, post 1999 policies, religious and ethnic conflicts, the use of violence by the government and its failure to efficiently secure the nation, together with poverty, corruption and unemployment especially among young Muslims Nigerians, have triggered Boko Haram's chances to achieve its objectives (Thurston, 2019).

BOKO HARAM'S HISTORY AND MODUS OPERANDI: "WESTERN CIVILIZATION IS FORBIDDEN"

As we have seen, Nigeria's political, economic and social tremendous and dramatic changes have fostered Boko Haram's insurgency and power. First of all, even if many scholars mark the birth of Boko Haram in 2002; its leader, Muhammad Yusuf, a Salafi preacher, was already known in Maiduguri, the capital city of Borno State in 2001. In this sense, Boko Haram began more as a religious community than an organized movement in Northeast Nigeria in the 2000's (Thurston, 2019). According to The Guardian, "Yusuf had been travelling around the north-east, preaching, making contacts and winning a following since the mid-1990's." (Walker, 2016). He preached, in those years, religious exclusivism -defined as the contrary of pluralism, religious exclusivism as a doctrine defends, from an intolerant point of view that there is only one true religion- and he used his charisma to connect with his audience in populated cities but also debating on the radio and television about how Muslims were being infidel by participating in democratic procedures and how Nigeria was also a sinner nation because of the influence of Christianity in the education system. In this sense, he began to acquire many followers, distancing himself from Ja`far Mahmud Adam his mentor, and shifting into a more Salafist-oriented radicalism, and to stand out around young Salafist, and later on he began drawing the attention of the Nigerian elites (Walker, 2016).

Muhammed Yusuf's messages soon "hardened over time in response to three forces: pressures from hardliners around him, quarrels with mainstream Salafis and conflict with political allies." (Thurston, 2019). In fact, Mohammed Yusuf began to differentiate himself from his partners. First, as previously explained, Yusuf, who for years had been represented as Adam's "key protegé" and heir, and who had preached on several occasions on his behalf, took distance from his mentor and also from young Salafis while gaining more notoriety through the radicalization of his messages that drew the attention of certain political elites. Even if firstly, Adam was featured as a key actor in the lifetime of Mohammed Yusuf as Adam taught him everything, "by 2006, the conflict was in the open, with Adam preaching against Yusuf", which partially explains the exclusivism of Boko Haram 's principles and ideals as his followers believe "that they could no longer

trust Salafis [represented by Yusuf as unbelievers] who defended Western-style education or government service." (Thurston, 2019).

Moreover, as Alexander Thurston states, Yusuf at that time had also a stormy relationship with hardliners, who defended jihad and wanted to establish a religious community, such as Aminu Tashen-Ilimi and Muhammad Ali who "accused Yusuf of being too liberal with the ideology and, considering him to be comprised, moved out of his enclave." (Thurston, 2019).

Therefore, in the context of Yusuf's detachment from hardliners and mainstream Salafis, the movement did not become violent until 2009, when group members initiated a rebellion against the police and the federal authorities after policemen shot several members claiming that they were not wearing helmets while riding motorbikes. The conflict eventually escalated and concluded with the death of about 800 Boko Haram's members, one of them Muhammed Yusuf himself, killed while being in police custody (Adibe, 2018).

Moreover, in the same year, before his death, Muhammed Yusuf published a book called "This is our creed and the methodology of our propagation" (Hadhihi *Aqidatuna wa Minhaju Da'awatuna*) in which he explained the core doctrines and principles of the organization that his successor, Abubakar Shekau, would promote later. In this sense, Atta Barkindo states in Africa Research Institute that "the text rejects democracy, secular constitutions, and seeks the gradual establishment of an Islamic state." (Barkindo, 2007).

In this regard, Boko Haram distinguishes itself from other organizations because of the political and religious doctrines that the group follows. First of all, the group is commonly referred to as, *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad,* the official name in Arabic which translates as "People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad". However, the organization is commonly known as Boko Haram in Hausa dialect which is interpreted as "Western civilization is forbidden." (Adibe, 2018).

Consequently, 2009 marked the beginning of total war against Westernization and the Nigerian State and in August 2009, Mallam Sanni released a declaration of Boko Haram's key doctrines and principles and states the following: (2009):

"*We speak as Boko Haram. For the first time since the Killing of Mallam Mohammed Yusuf, our leader, we hereby make the following statements.*

1) *First of all that Boko Haram does not in any way mean "Western Education is A sin" as the infidel media continue to portray us. Boko Haram actually means "Western Civilization is forbidden". The difference is that while the first gives the impression that we are opposed to formal education coming from the West, that is Europe, which is not true, the second affirms our believe in the supremacy of Islamic culture (not Education), for culture is broader, it includes education but not determined by Western Education. In this case we are talking of Western Ways of life which include: constitutional provision as if relates to – for instance the rights and privileges of Women –, the idea of homosexualism, lesbianism, sanctions in cases of terrible crimes like drug trafficking, rape of infants, multi-party democracy in an overwhelmingly Islamic country like Nigeria, blue films, prostitution, drinking beer and alcohol and many others that are opposed to Islamic civilization.*

2) *That the Boko Haram is an Islamic Revolution which impact is not limited to Northern Nigeria, in fact, we are spread across all the 36 states in Nigeria, and Boko Haram is just a version of the Al Qaeda which we align with and respect. We support Osama bin Laden, we shall carry out his command in Nigeria until the country is totally Islamized which is according to the wish of Allah.*

3) *That Mallam Yusuf has not died in vain and he is a martyr. His ideas will live forever.*

4) *That Boko Haram lost over 1000 of our Marty members killed by the wicked Nigerian army and police mostly of Southern Nigeria extraction. That the Southern states, especially the infidel Yoruba, Igbon and Ijaw infidels will be our immediate target.*

5) *That the killing of our leaders in a callous, wicked and malicious manner will not in any way deter us. They have lost their lives in the struggle for Allah.*

Having made the following statement, we hereby reinstate our demands:

1) *That we have started a Jihad in Nigeria which no force on earth can stop. The aim is to Islamize Nigeria and ensure the rule of the majority Muslims in the country. We will teach Nigeria a lesson, a very bitter one.*

2) *That from the Month of August, we shall carry out series of bombing in Southern and Northern Nigerian cities, beginning with Lagos, Ibadan, Enugu and Port*

Harcourt. The bombing will not stop until Sharia and Western Civilization is wiped off from Nigeria. We will not stop until these evil cities are tuned into ashes.

3) *That we shall make the country ungovernable, kill and eliminate irresponsible political leaders of all leanings, hunt and gun down those who oppose the rule of Sharia in Nigeria and ensure that the infidel does not go unpunished.*

4) *We promise the West and Southern Nigeria, a horrible pastime. We shall focus on these areas which is the devil empire and has been the one encouraging and sponsoring Western Civilization into the shores of Nigeria.*

5) *We call on all Northerners in the Islamic States to quit the follower ship of the wicked political parties leading the country, the corrupt, irresponsible, criminal, murderous political leadership, and join the struggle for Islamic Society that will be corruption free, Sodom free, where security will be guaranteed and there will be peace under Islam.*

6) *That very soon, we shall stir Lagos, the evil city and Nigeria's South West and South East, in a way no one has ever done before. Al Hakubarah.*

IT IS EITHER YOU ARE FOR US OR AGAINST US." (Vanguard, 2009).

Consequently, Boko Haram's principles and key doctrines can be summarized in pursuing armed revenge against the police and military forces and establishing a new Islamic rule by overthrowing the Nigerian democratic state through the jihad, as well as suppressing the western-style education system and way of life (Campbell, 2014). Additionally, other objectives of the group include spreading their revolution to countries around the Lake Chad Basin and also worldwide as illustrated for instance with the affiliation of the group to the Islamic State in 2015. In their manifesto, the group encourages Nigerians to join the organization and fight against the "*corrupt, irresponsible, criminal*" government. Since the death of Yusuf, Boko Haram re-emerged as a terrorist group and the group's new direction focused on new violent strategies.

 Boko Haram modus operandi can be divided in different phases. During the 2009-2010's resurfacing, Boko Haram's tactics seemed improvised and "appear self-generated, such as assassinating targets using motorbike teams, attacking cell phone towers, and kidnapping local women en masse" (Thurston, 2019). However, throughout the years, as the group was spreading its influence and gaining more financial support and also more

members, its tactics became better organized and planned and started focusing on the Nigerian government as well as on neighboring countries.

Finally, Abubakar Shekau, reinforced the core messages and principles of Yusuf increasing violence and "intensified two themes: the sect's conviction that the state systematically victimized Nigerian Muslims, and the sect's demand that other Muslims choose sides in Boko Haram's war with the state." (Thurston, 2019).

Consequently, Boko Haram's transformation into a violent and terrorist organization has provoked "the deaths of more than 20,000 people and the displacement of 5.5. million in the Lake Chad Basin." (Barkindo, 2007).

BOKO HARAM'S KIDNAPPINGS

Kidnappings are one of the most widely used strategies by Boko Haram for many reasons. First of all, as we have seen in the key doctrines and principles of the organization, the educational system ranks as one of Boko Haram's top priorities. In this sense, schools and other educational institutions are commonly one of the main targets of the group's attacks, as through hijacking girls and young women at schools, Boko Haram finds a way of denouncing the Western style education and promoting the Islamic teachings and educational system, in which women are left behind (Agbiboa, 2014). As Foreign Policy explains, "according to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, Boko Haram fighters have slaughtered at least 2,295 teachers and destroyed around 1,400 schools mostly in Northeastern Nigeria since the uprising began." (Obaji Jr., 2021).

Moreover, Boko Haram strategically abducts young girls and women to weaken and destabilize both the Nigerian Government and the security forces and consequently by showing off its power, the group is also spreading fear, as children and young women are especially seen as vulnerable civilians. In this regard, by illustrating how powerful they are, the group is also spreading its influence through publicity. Therefore, after the Chibok kidnapping, many Nigerians began to doubt about the effectivity of the government's countermeasures and began realizing that the Nigerian State was unable to defeat Boko Haram (Thurston, 2019). Consequently, kidnappings are used by Boko Haram's members as a public relations strategy.

It is also important to mention, that Boko Haram initially began hijacking women as a form of reaction against the security forces that started to kidnap group members' wives as an attempt to negotiate with the organization. According to the paper *Why Boko Haram kidnaps women and young girls in Northeastern Nigeria* written by Daniel Egiegba Agbiboa, "in January 2021, the Boko Haram leader warned that his group would begin to kidnap the wives of government officials in response to the government clampdown and arrest of the wives of group members: "Since you are now holding our women, just wait and see what will happen to your own women… to your own wives according to Sharia law." (Agbiboa, 2014).

Furthermore, the organization strategically uses hijackings in order to get a ransom, be it in economic terms or to release Boko Haram's militants that were imprisoned in different parts of Nigeria. In this sense, the organization began consequently forcing the government to start a negotiation scheme to exchange prisoners for hostages. For instance, "the total ransom money received and prisoners exchanged as a result of these kidnappings in Cameroon as well as the kidnappings of 12 women in Bama in May 2013- who were exchanged for the release of 90 Boko Haram members, their wives and children, and possibly ransom money-likely incentivized Boko Haram to carry out more kidnappings, such as the one in Chibok, to pressure the Nigeran and Cameroonian governments to cede to Boko Haram's demands for the exchange of more ransom money and prisoners." (Zenn, 2014).

Finally, the Chibok kidnapping of 276 schoolgirls became a "national trauma" and an internationally known episode which increased the pressure on the Nigerian government even more and gave more publicity to the atrocities made by Boko Haram in 2014. As Alexander Thurston states in his book, the Chibok kidnapping illustrates the total war landscape in Nigeria as while the young girls were taking an exam at the Government Secondary School in Chibok "Boko Haram loaded the girls onto trucks … and were driven to Boko Haram's hideouts, where they became sexual slaves and propaganda objects for the group." (Thurston, 2019). Some of these girls were forced to marry young fighters of the group or used strategically as bomb girls. Consequently, Boko Haram tried again to negotiate a with the Nigerian government with the objective to exchange hostages or receive a monetary ransom and published a video in May declaring that "he would sell the schoolgirls in market" as slaves and wives (Zenn, 2014).

To sum up, Boko Haram's kidnappings illustrate the strategies used in order to achieve the group's different objectives: to destabilize the government, for propaganda purposes or in order to receive a ransom or an exchange of prisoners. According to UNICEF, "since 2013, more than 1,000 children have been abducted by Boko Haram in northeastern Nigeria" and shows how women in Nigeria are vulnerable and oppressed (2018).

1.3 OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESIS

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In the following pages, I will explain, after introducing the Nigerian context in which Boko Haram emerged, why the organization uses young girls and women to achieve its objectives by understanding its main reasons and strategies. In this sense, the aim of this case study is to understand the effectivity of using these girls and women as bomb girls and forcing them to detonate themselves. Consequently, the following analysis will focus on trying to answer the following questions:

> Why does Boko Haram use bomb girls to achieve its objectives? Is it a successful strategy?

In order to broaden the subjects of this study, this analysis will also focus on the following research in order to better understand Boko Haram's main motivations:

I. Boko Haram's main motivations to use bomb girls are religious or strategic?
II. Are those girls forced or do they participate voluntarily in the attacks?
III. Where do these girls come from? Are they re-educated?
IV. How do they become suicide bombers?
V. Is there a reason behind the group's strategy?
VI. Why girls and women and not men?

Consequently, the following questions aim to track down Boko Haram's real reasons to use women and especially young girls as suicide bombers as well as to find out if there is a rationale reason behind this strategy. In this regard, by answering to the following

questions, this analysis will scrutinize the different data and information gathered about the young girls such as, where do they come from, how they are recruited, if they are forced to commit suicide attacks or if they are voluntarily willing to commit those strikes, etc. to understand why Boko Haram uses young girls to carry out those atrocities.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

As explained, the main objective of this final degree project is to analyze if there is a rational argument or justification behind the use of the bomb girls' strategy by Boko Haram and assess if this strategy is actually fulfilling the group's objectives.

With the aim of answering to the previous research questions, the analysis will consequently:

A. Analyze and enumerate different Boko Haram's suicide attacks in the Lake Chad Basin.

B. Find the rationality and strategy of the suicide attacks especially by using teenagers as human weapons.

C. Assess the processes of recruitment, the individual or collective motivations of those young girls, as well as the treatment given by the organization.

D. Establish the reasons and effectiveness of young girls' suicide bombing strategies.

E. Discover a rational argument or justification for carrying out these attacks.

Finally, this research will also take into account the domestic and international response to Boko Haram's actions and the treatment given to these young girls and women.

HYPOTHESIS

This case study will analyze the use and effectiveness of bomb girls by establishing two different hypotheses. On the one hand, this analysis will initially argue that the use of girls in suicide attacks is effective for the organization because it conveys fear and insecurity, which strengthens the group's capabilities and shows Boko Haram's power through publicity. Young bomb girls magnify the effect of suicide attacks and gather great public attention which weakens the security forces' efforts to eradicate Boko Haram's violence.

Furthermore, the transformation of girls and women into human bombs is effective because it is an opportunistic and tactical strategy for the group, as it is cost-effective, women can be easily coerced and manipulated and they can sneak in unnoticed into markets, churches, educational institutions, etc.

On the other hand, this case study also argues that female suicide bombers are also a strategy used by Boko Haram because it can be easily justified in the name of religion. Therefore, by promoting the virtue of jihad, the justification is based on religions rather than on rationale. As seen, one of Boko Haram's top priorities is to establish an Islamic State through the use of violence and through the spread of fear and anger. In this sense, the religious motivations illustrate why Boko Haram uses girls which can also partially be explained by the role of women and their position in society in an Islamic country.

TIME SCOPE

In order to analyze the effectiveness of Boko Haram's tactics, the study will focus approximately on the period from 2011 to 2017. Even if Boko Haram initially started its activities in a peaceful way in 2002 and then turned more violent since the death of Muhammed Yusuf in 2009, I have chosen the particular period from 2011 to 2017 because during those years, "Boko Haram deployed 434 bombers to 247 different targets during 238 suicide-bombing attacks. At least 56% of these bombers were women, and at least 81 bombers were specifically identified as children or teenagers." (Warner & Matfess, 2018).

In this regard, by focusing my study on those years, I will examine in-depth the gender and demographical profiles of the suicide bombers such as their origins, motivations, and modus operandi as well as the characteristics of those suicide attacks such as location, type of explosive devices, etc. Finally, this period is also chosen because suicide bombing can be related to the period where kidnappings were also a typical strategy used by the organization which highlights the correlation between kidnapping girls and using them as weapons.

GEOGRAPHICAL SCOPE

As previously analyzed, Boko Haram emerged in Northeastern Nigeria, but its power rapidly spread through the whole country and eventually to neighboring countries located in the Lake Chad Basin Area. Between 2014 and 2015, Boko Haram began to strategically attack Cameroon, especially by hijacking foreigners, and consequently extended its violence to other neighboring countries such as Niger and Chad. In this sense, in "2015, Boko Haram's violence became systematically regional." (Thurston, 2019). This expansion of its influence and power illustrates Boko Haram's priority to spread the use of violence and promote the establishment of an Islamic State by weakening other Nations.

In this sense, this study will focus on countries located around the Lake Chad Basin. Even if the mentioned area covers seven countries, Nigeria, Niger, Algeria, Sudan, Central Africa, Chad and Cameroon, the analysis will focus on four of these countries: Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon and Chad, as they have been the most targeted and attacked countries by Boko Haram (FAO).

The Lake Chad Basin

Source: Ibrahim, 2021
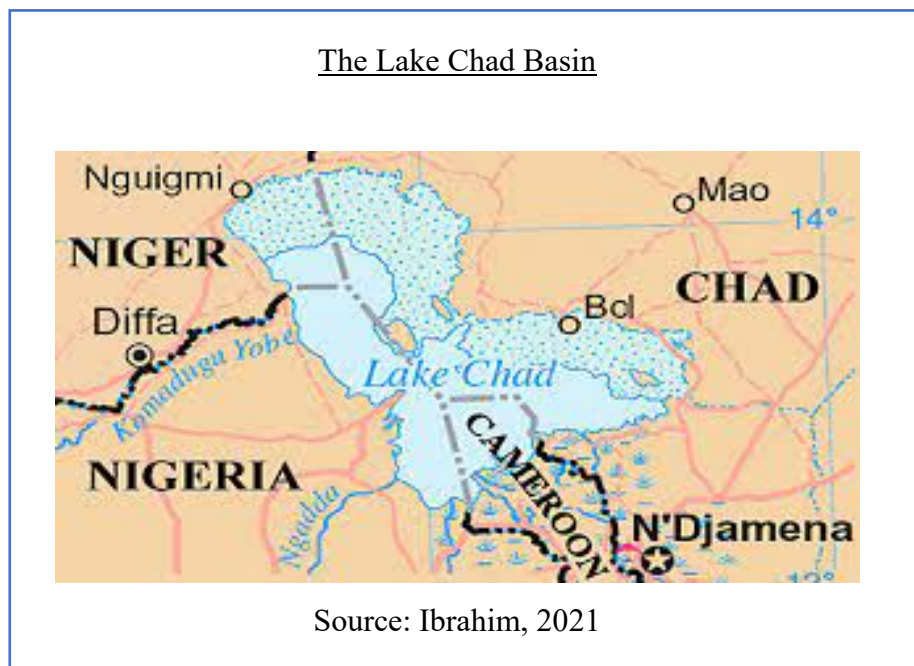
METHODOLOGY

This case study is aimed at analyzing Boko Haram's main motivations for using girls and women as suicide bombers and examining its effectiveness, by collecting data and primary and secondary sources, I will try to determine the different reasons behind the group strategies.

In this respect, by studying all the data and sources, I will first analyze Boko Haram's typical suicide attacks and examine if there is a common pattern between profiles, locations and targets. Moreover, it will also be essential to establish the effectiveness of those attacks along with the outcome reached by the organization.

Furthermore, the analysis will, in an exhaustive way, assess the suicide bombing attacks carried out by young girls and women and the efficacy of this strategy in order to accomplish the groups' goals. In this sense, to understand extensively the use of bomb girls, this study aims to determine where do the girls come from and especially how they are recruited, by establishing a relationship between the kidnapping of girls and with their activities in the organization.

Moreover, as previously explained in the research objectives, it will be crucial to determine the group's motivation for using girls and young women as suicide bombers and if those objectives are accomplished. In this regard, by defining how the group implements its methods of operation -modus operandi-, and the targets and location, the study aims to comprehensively determine the reasons behind those attacks.

Additionally, by taking into account different individual cases and personal stories, the purpose of the analysis is also to determine the reasons and motivations of those girls and study if they are religiously or politically motivated or if they are forced and coerced to become suicide bombers as well as how they are treated inside Boko Haram's organization.

Finally, by trying to understand the rationale behind the use of young girls' suicide bombers, this project will try to determine a strategical, political or religiously motivated justification in order to obtain a coherent explanation of those attacks.

CHAPTER 2: ANALYSIS OF BOKO HARAM'S MASIVE USE OF BOMB GIRLS

BOKO HARAM'S SUICIDE ATTACKS

As previously explained, suicide bombing represents an effective and strategical tool for Boko Haram to create fear and gain power. However, according to *Exploding Stereotypes: The Unexpected Operational and Demographic Characteristics of Boko Haram's suicide Bombers* by Jason Warner and Hilary Matfess, Boko Haram's suicide bombers usually do not detonate correctly the explosive device and consequently fail. Furthermore, it is also important to mention that when these devices actually go off, the ratio of killings is lower in comparison with other terrorists' groups (Warner & Matfess, 2018). In that sense, Boko Haram's effectiveness of using suicide bombing is more oriented towards symbolically showing their power and creating and spreading fear rather than actually causing deaths. Furthermore, even if those attacks often fail, according to *Fondation pour l'Innovation Politique* (Fondapol), "between 2019 and May 2021, Boko Haram remained the most active and deadliest Islamist group in the region", as shown in the figure below, in which the group perpetuated 3,961 attacks resulting in 25,719 deaths. (Reynié, 2021).

Boko Haram's terrorist attacks (2009-2021)

Year	Number of attacks	Number of deaths	Average number of deaths per attack
2009	12	382	31.8
2010	17	72	4.2
2011	125	327	2.6
2012	424	1,256	3.0
2013	234	1,729	7.4
2014	495	7,118	14.4
2015	540	6,510	12.1
2016	241	1,470	6.1
2017	333	1,544	4.6
2018	242	1,327	5.5
2019	345	1,929	5.6
2020	495	1,809	3.7
2021	188	246	1.3
Total	**3,691**	**25,719**	**7.0**

Source: Fondapol

Moreover, regarding Boko Haram's strategies, the group has deployed from 2011 to 2017 "434 bombers to 247 different targets during 238 suicide-bombing attacks." (Warner & Matfess, 2018). In this sense, in order to exhaustively understand the massive use of suicide bombers, Warner and Matfess have chronologically divided all of these suicide attacks into four waves from 2011 to 2017: the "learning phase, "dormant phase", unexpected bomber phase and incremental innovation phase" in which the group shows some distinctions in their strategical modus operandi especially in targets, martyrs, etc. (Warner & Matfess, 2018).

The first phase begins in 2011 because, even if the group started to spread violence since 2009, it is not until June 2011 that the first man, Mohammed Manga detonated himself driving a car in front of Abuja's Police Headquarters causing the death of more than 5 people (Temilola, 2015). In this regard, the first stage is exemplified by the declaration of the State of Emergency by the Nigerian Government as between 2011 and 2013, Boko Haram carried out 23 suicide bombings mainly in Northeastern Nigeria, especially Borno State, though causing minimal losses.

Additionally, in this phase the group relied primarily on male detonators in individual strikes and Boko Haram mainly focused on targeting government and military institutions representing 39% of the actions, but also attacked religious organizations, specifically targeting churches and also mosques. Finally, this period is known as the training phase because during these years the group began to effectively use its capabilities and then started to realize that group suicide bombing could cause more significant damage, not only by the lethality of the attack itself but also symbolically as seen in the double suicide bombing committed in November 2011 in the city of Damaturu (Warner & Matfess ,2018).

On the other hand, the second phase of Boko Haram's suicide bombings corresponds to the period between 2013 and 2014 and is denominated the 'dormant phase' as the group did not commit many suicide attacks and is characterized by the efforts made by the Nigerian security forces to eradicate Boko Haram's violence with the Joint Task Force operating in the region, as well as the declaration of the State of emergency by President Goodluck Jonathan. (Warner & Matfess, 2018). In this sense, the group attacked

indistinctly civilians in rural areas avoiding cities that were better controlled by security forces, generally in Northeast Nigeria and the dominant locations were civilian areas such as bus stops and governmental institutions. (Warner & Matfess, 2018).

Thirdly, the "unexpected bomber phase" became the most lethal period of Boko Haram's suicide bombing activity as the group established a new tactic, by using women and children as suicide unexpected bombers. In this sense, during this period from 2014 to 2015, the group began to gain notoriety and become worldwide known especially by the kidnapping of 276 schools' girls in Chibok, Nigeria in April 2014. In this regard, the group consequently began to strategically use women and children as suicide bombers with the objective of gaining more global publicity and more notoriety. As previously analyzed, female bombers are usually more effective not only because of the casualties of the attack but also because of the media coverage that they attract. Consequently, during those years, Boko Haram seeked to obtain power by creating an atmosphere of fear and insecurity not only in Nigeria but also in the countries around the Lake Chad Basin.

 Moreover, we can also state that those attacks differ from previous strikes in earlier phases because of the shift from an unplanned use of individual male suicide bombers to a more coordinated strategical use of women and children suicide bombers attacking in groups rather than individually. Additionally, during this period, men suicide attacks targeted governmental, educational and religious institutions, while women and children predominantly attacked civilian spaces and public transportations facilities such as markets, bus stops, etc., mainly because of their ability to sneak unnoticed into these public spaces. According to Warner and Matfess, "of the 35 attempted bombings (involving women) in markets, 27 of them occurred during this time period". (Warner & Matfess, 2018). As a result, there was no differences between civilians and Boko Haram combatants which made it difficult for the Join Task Force and the anti Boko Haram civilians to countermeasure the group's violent actions. Finally, this phase is also characterized by the group's expansion to the countries around the Lake Chad Basin, Boko Haram's affiliation into the Islamic State and the countermeasures introduced by President Buhari in order to completely defeat the terrorist group which resulted into a decrease in suicide bombings. (Warner & Matfess, 2018).

Finally, the last phase, "the incremental improvement phase", corresponds from 2016 until today and is represented by innovation. Even if in 2016 Nigeria witnessed a decrease in suicide bombings, during 2017, Boko Haram reappeared committing 54 suicide bombing attacks and more lethal than in previous phases. The group continues to target civilian and public spaces by using massively women and children into coordinated suicide attacks in civilian areas including even Internally Displaced Person camps. (Mbiyozo, 2017).


Boko Haram's suicide bombing attacks by month

Source: Warner & Matfess, 2018
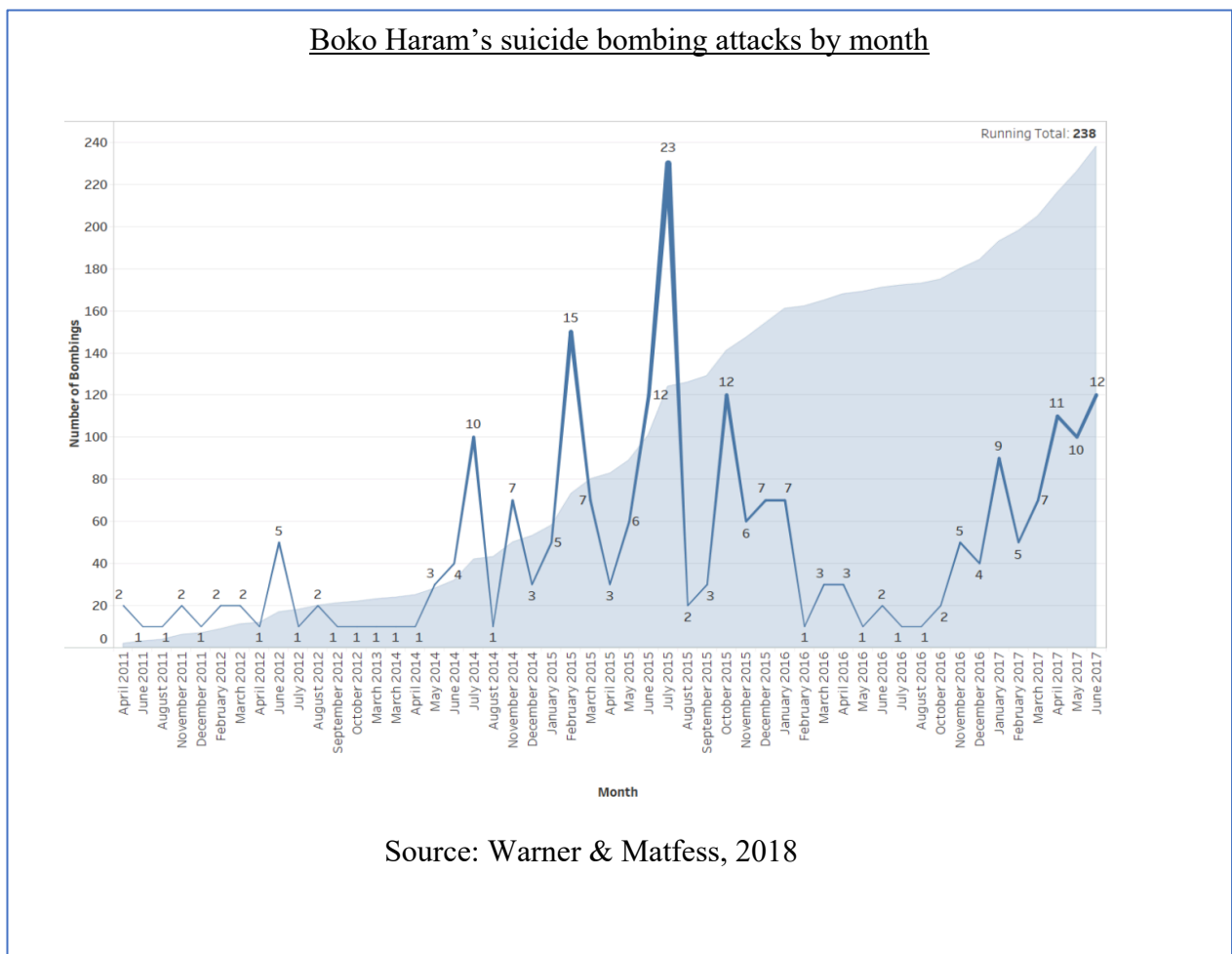
Consequently, what it is clear regarding Boko Haram's suicide bombings trend is the shift in demographics, from using men to start using women and children; this has been a turning point in Boko Haram's strategy. Moreover, as explained in the four phases, it is clear that Boko Haram has not had a clear and well-structured and coordinated strategy, but the group's suicide attacks have been mainly oriented towards civilian's contexts,

especially markets and a few Christian educational spaces as well as government establishments. It is also important to mention, that self-immolation attacks often fail to detonate and that the causalities are usually low, putting the efficacy of Boko Haram's suicide bombing in question. In that regard, the massive use of women and children represents the main feature of those suicide bombings as "it is the first terrorist group in history to use more women suicide bombers than men and is at the vanguard of using children as suicide bombers." (Kriel, 2017).

Therefore, Boko Haram deployed its first female suicide bomber attack in June 2014 in a military complex in Gombe State detonating an explosive device under her hijab and killing only one soldier and consequently, kept using women and children uninterruptedly (Temilola, 2015). In this sense, according to *Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines: Analyses of Africa's Enduring Insurgency*, "the data shows that Boko Haram deployed 469 female suicide bombers un 240 total incidents from June 2014 to the end of February 2018, killing an estimated 1,259 people (bombers excluded), 1,673 (bombers included), and injuring 2,967 more people." (Zenn et al., 2018).

Moreover, as shown in the figure below, it is interesting to stress the fact that the terrorist group began to employ women and especially children as suicide bombers after the Chibok kidnapping, realizing that the group gained more media attention and coverage with the use of young girls as explained in the CNN article, *Boko Haram favor women, children as suicide bombers, study reveals,* by Robyn Kriel in which states that "Boko Haram started using women suicide bombers after it realized the potency that gender and youth offer in raising its global profile after the Chibok kidnappings." (Kriel, 2017).

Boko Haram's attacks by gender (2011-2017)
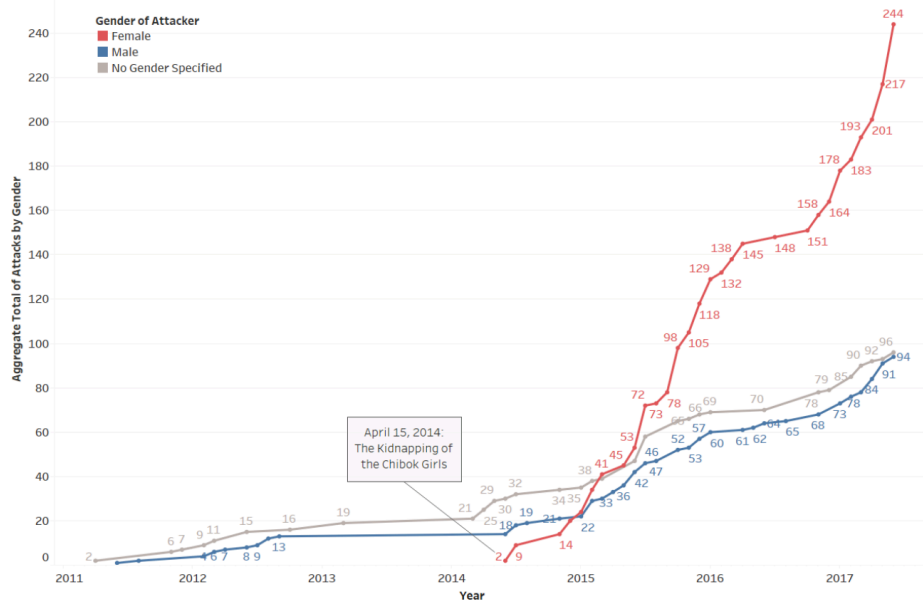
Source: Warner & Matfess, 2018

In this sense, two months after the Chibok kidnappings and the media coverage that the event produced worldwide, Boko Haram has never stopped attacking and using women and children for different strategical reasons. As previously analyzed Sri Lanka's Tamil Tigers was the first terrorist group to use women as weapons and according to Mia Bloom, Boko Haram is also one of the first terrorist groups to use massively women as suicide bombers and other groups will do so in the future because "this tactic also makes the terrorist appear more threatening by erasing the imagined barriers between combatants and noncombatants, terrorists and innocents' civilians. This is the underlying message conveyed by female bombers: terrorism has moved beyond a fringe phenomenon: insurgents are all around you." (Bloom, 2007).

Additionally, concerning female suicide attacks, Jacob Zenn and other scholars have divided Boko Haram's timeline into five different waves in order to explain Boko Haram's dynamics: "publicity, innovation, resistance, retrenchment and factionalization." (Zenn et al., 2018).

In the first place, wave one corresponds to the period of April- June 2014, in which the terrorist group began to use female bombers as a way of capitalizing the opportunistic worldwide attention that the Chibok kidnapping entailed. Subsequently, this wave saw six attacks by female suicide bombers, especially in civilian areas and one arrest in Katsina State of a young girl carrying a belt explosive (Zenn et al., 2018).

Secondly, the subsequent wave, "innovation", saw 38 suicide attacks of which ten of them failed. This wave is correlated to the "unexpected bomber phase" in which the group suffered the countermeasures established by the Nigerian authorities, the group's affiliation to the Islamic State and the postponement of the elections because of violence. Therefore, this wave is characterized by the group's improvements on explosives that tripled the number of casualties compared to the previous waves. In this sense, during this wave, Nigeria experienced female group suicide bombing and a geographical expansion to other Nigerian States as well as other countries in the river Niger area, especially attacking borders.

Consequently, "this wave represented a highly effective response to the security checkpoints instituted in Nigeria late in 2014 because child female suicide bombers were able to subvert military expectations and gain access to soft targets, such as markets, which accounted for 62% of targets in this wave." (Zenn et al., 2018).

Moreover, the third wave was launched from May to July 2015 as a response to the military offensive against Boko Haram. During this wave, just 2 of 32 suicide bombing attacks failed, which can be partially explained because of the technological innovations that the group incorporated, as well as many scholars believe that the group managed to improve the construction of bombs due to links with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant in 2015 that meant more technical information about how to strengthen their capabilities. During this wave, they targeted mainly security establishments as well as religious institutions. Finally, for the first time, this wave witnessed female attacking in teams with men even though the casualties per attacks decreased. (Zenn et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the fourth wave is called "retrenchment" because even if between July 2015 and May 2016, 167 attacks were committed, Boko Haram has reduced the geographical expansion of the attacks, concentrated in Borno States and the neighboring borders areas

especially in Cameroon, Chad and Niger. The retrenchment wave is characterized by the use of multiple females attacking public spaces such as markets, bus stops, restaurants but also Internally Displaced Person camps in which it was easier for women and children to sneak into and hide. During this wave, men suicide bombers also detonated their belt explosives dressed as women, showing how the group considerably knew the strategical advantages of wearing a woman's hijab. Last but not least, the fifth wave is called "factionalization" as there were since 2016, 174 attacks in Borno State specially in the capital, Maiduguri and the group still continued to target civilians in public spaces and IDP's camps. (Zenn et al., 2018).

In this sense, what it is clear is that since the Chibok kidnapping, Boko Haram launched female suicide bombers to sneak in more easily into civilian areas, to gain more media attention and to spread their power by creating fear. Additionally, it is also important to mention that the terrorist group continues to standardize the use young girls and children as bombers, the youngest one being just seven years old. According to the CNN, "of the 134 suicide bombers whose age could be determined, 60% were teenagers or children." (Kriel, 2017).

Finally, Boko Haram throughout these years, has turned young boy and girls into fighters and martyrs suicide bombers in order to achieve its objectives. Even if young girls and boys were initially kidnapped in exchange for ransom, or to be sold in the slave market, or to work for the group or in case of the girls to marry Boko Haram's combatants, those children have also been converted into fighters and into human bombs. In this regard, "children are now the prime target and victim of Boko Haram bullets and explosives." (Babatunde, 2016).

Consequently, women and young girls are mainly used by the terrorist group in a tactical and strategical way because of the low-price cost of the operation, the impact that these anonymous attacks provoke, the accuracy of the attack and the use of cheap belt explosives as a replacement of more expensive weapons and machinery. In this sense, according to Jacob Zenn and other scholars, "female suicide bombing has been effective in hugely amplifying the key effects of terrorism as a tactic: creating fear, sending a symbolic message to diverse audiences, killing civilians, and asserting power over governments and communities." (Zenn et al., 2018).

WHERE DO THE GIRLS COME FROM? HOW ARE THEY RECRUITED?

First of all, before analyzing where these young girls and female human bombs come from and how they are recruited it is important first to examine the profile of the group's fighters. Even if many scholars tend to think that the group is composed by teenagers and young adults, as it is believed that the lack of education and welfare as well as the ideological conviction made them join the terrorist group, according to Botha and Mahdi Abdile, the majority of Boko Haram's members are between 40 and 50 years old. (Botha & Abdile, 2017). Additionally, it is also a misconception to think that female and young girls have been recruited forcibly or willingly only to become fighters. As the report *Understanding Boko Haram in Nigeria- Reality and Perceptions* explains the number of women involved in the group is high and states that "the perception according to the majority of Boko Haram respondents was that although women were largely responsible for domestic services (estimated at 57,0%); a further 26,9% of women are thought to serve as foot soldiers; 5% are providing spiritual guidance and 1,7% are regarded as serving in leadership roles." (Botha & Abdile, 2017). Therefore, women are not used just for a strategical purpose, but they also strongly take part in the group's activities, not only domestically, but by recruiting new members, assisting them, training them, etc.

Moreover, the reasons for radicalization and joining willingly the terrorist group sometimes differ but the most common ones are ideology and religion, in order to improve their conditions and status and end a life of poverty or because of a personal motivation such as revenge.

Firstly, many members decided to join the group because they followed and believed in Boko Haram's ideology and its objectives, aiming to Islamize Nigeria. As previously mentioned, the violent ethnic clashes between Muslims and Christians that have shaped Nigeria's landscape for years, are undoubtedly one of the reasons why many Muslims especially from the North of Nigeria have turned to a more radicalized and extremist interpretation of the Islam and have joined Boko Haram. In this sense, religion, politics and ideology constitute one of the main reasons for affiliating in the organization (Botha & Abdile, 2017). Hence, as stated by Shekau in 2014, "we don't just fight Biafra or Cross

River. We fight the whole world, especially all those who don't practice Islam. We are against all non-Muslims, all non-practicing people. You'll never be at peace again because we will fight you, and we will fight the whole world." (Apard, 2015).

Secondly, many members also decided to join the group for economic reasons. As we have previously analyzed, Nigeria is currently experiencing high unemployment rates as well as a lack of education that sometimes makes the only solution for young people to join the terrorist group in order to end poverty and find a better life. In this regard, when a man joins the group, he finds a purpose to continue with his life and to fight for, a paid salary, a home to live in and food as well as the psychological motivation of belonging to a group. According to Botha and Abdile in their report, "in a study conducted by USIP amongst civil society in Borno and Kaduna states in 2013, a high incidence of unemployment and poverty was highlighted as the second most important reason why youth engaged in religious-based violence; In Kaduna state, 83,0% of respondents reported that unemployment and poverty are important factors." (Botha & Abdile, 2017). Moreover, the lack of education among Nigerians also represents an important factor as most members of the Islamist group have not completed high school, others have never had access to education and only a little minority have university degrees (Afzal, 2022).

Additionally, another reason for joining Boko Haram is the personal and psychological need of belonging to a group and feeling respected as well as personal political motivations. In this regard, many members have joined mainly in order to change the political landscape of Nigeria and they believe that Boko Haram is the only group that can find a solution as well as to become a respected member of a terrorist group and to gain notoriety (2014).

As a conclusion, there are several factors that have convinced and persuaded many Nigerians to join the terrorist group. The political, economic, educational and social landscape that Nigeria has witnessed in the last few years is undoubtedly one of the main factors of decision to join Boko Haram as we have seen. As stated in a 2016 Report by the International Crisis Group, "with patriarchy, poverty, corruption, early marriage and illiteracy long thwarting their life chances, some women saw an opportunity in Boko Haram to advance their freedoms or reduce their hardship. Many valued the religious and moral anchoring." (International Crisis Group, 2016).

However, even if some members have voluntarily joined the group, many others have been recruited by the group trough violent coercion or through others means such as kidnappings.

On the one hand, Boko Haram recruits voluntarily its members among religious institutions, especially mosques, religious educational centers or meetings. By preaching Islam, the organization conveys radical messages about the enemy and about what true Muslims should do in order to fight the government and Western principles as stated by Shekau, "We fight the whole world, especially all those who don't practice Islam. We are against all non-Muslims, all non-practicing people. You'll never be at peace again because we will fight you, and we will fight the whole world. That's why we can't put down our arms. Allah said: 'You should always carry your weapons with you.' Hide them!" (Apard, 2015).

Therefore, schools are the most common institutions from which the group recruits its members. In this sense, "individual 'firebrand' Imams, preaching on the side of Boko Haram, might play a role in facilitating recruitment, although their identity and examples are seldom available." (Botha & Abdile, 2017). Moreover, another way of entering the group is by the social circle in which Boko Haram operates. Many members of the group, especially women and children, decided to join because they knew a friend, a neighbor or a family member that had become a Boko Haram soldier. For instance, as a member of the group stated, "When I was in Bama town, I did not have any intention of joining this sect… There are few children that have decided to join, but for me I am not, until when my cousin brother invited me for a serious lecture one day, then from there I developed the interest of being a member of the group." (Botha & Abdile, 2017).

Finally, other ways in which Boko Haram members could have been recruited are through online social platforms such as Facebook. According to Vanguard News, "Usman [Artillary Commander of Operation Lafiya Dole] said that insurgents from the Boko Haram group were recruiting new members of social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, SnapChat, Instagram and the Youtube." (Vanguard News, 2018).
Hence, the strategical recruitment procedure on social media shows how the group makes use of technological platforms to reach younger and larger audiences through the broadcasting of radical messages, by teaching the Islam as well as by manifesting power

and firmness by showing the instability and weakness of the Nigerian State. Therefore, the terrorist group coerces women through social media by individually showing them the advantages of joining the organization or the moral duty of fighting against Western ideals to overthrow the Nigerian State. Additionally, in a majority of cases, young girls are also recruited online trough manipulation as for instance, "in November 2015, the niece of a community leader in Jos decided to personally encounter her boyfriend- whom she allegedly been in contact with him via Facebook- in Maiduguri, Borno State. Sadly, despite extensive searches, she had not been seen or heard since then, apart from the only piece of information according to which she had been married to one of Boko Haram's unit commander." (Sinko, 2021). Consequently, this exemplifies how the group is strategically and carefully using social media and communication tools to recruit new women by conveying and transmitting well-studied and analyzed messages. These tactics also show a deep incoherence, as a traditional, conservative and fundamentalist terrorist group ironically uses avant-garde Western technologies to achieve its goals. Therefore, we might say they are using their hated enemies 'own tools.

On the other hand, Boko Haram also recruits through violent coercion, especially women in order to force them to join the group. Thus, it is interesting to analyze Boko Haram's need of including women into their group in order to accomplish their objectives, becoming domestic workers, soldiers, trainers, etc. In this sense, as it is stated, "it was interesting to note that female Boko Haram members were far more likely to be introduced by force (17,0%) than males (5,0%)." (Botha & Abdile, 2017). In this regard, the majority of women and children do not enter the organization because of a free will. Consequently, according to Al Jazeera Center for Studies, there are different ways in which Boko Haram may recruited women and children for suicide missions. (Temilola, 2015).

First of all, women and children are likely to become human bombs because in the majority of the cases, they are widows or orphans looking for revenge. In this sense, they are being brainwashed and forced to commit a suicide attack under the argument of martyrdom, in order to reach a better life in heaven, as well as vengeance by killing the infidels responsible for the killing of their loved ones. As Amina, an adolescent girl from Nigeria who escaped the group and reported to the Nigerian police authorities explained in the report *Exploding Stereotypes,* "Amina acknowledged the fear she felt about setting

off the bomb that would take her life, but she said that, "I was scared so I told them that I could not detonate mine. So, they said if Zainab (the other young girl committing the attack detonates her own, it will serve the purpose. They said if we press the button, the bomb would explode and we will automatically go to heaven." (Warner & Matfess,2018).

Additionally, the group also convinces the teenagers and women to commit suicide attacks by lying to them, telling and promising them that the explosive will not harm them, or kill them. In this sense, many young girls that escaped from Boko Haram reported that the members told them "there are soldiers at a checkpoint over there. When you get there, see what you'll press, when you press it-nothing will happen to you. The belt will disengage from your body- [so] go and harm the soldiers, don't have any fear, just press it when you get there." (Zenn et al., 2018).

Consequently, Boko Haram convinces and persuades young girls and women to become human bombs by promising them to reach heaven, trough martyrdom or by making false promises, lying to them by saying that they will not be harmed or killed.

Moreover, another way in which Boko Haram obtains women and children is by an engaging recruiting network, where female operatives, members of the group's intelligence team, travel around Nigeria in order to find new soldiers and deport them to training camps as well as to gather information through espionage. Thus, in 2014, the Nigerian authorities captured three women suspected of recruiting young women, one of them being married to a Boko Haram member. According to Vanguard News, "the arrested trio suspects [Hafsat Usman Bako, Zainab Idris and Aisha Abubakar] were luring ladies especially widows and young girls by enticing them with male suitor who are mainly members of their terror group for marriage. Before their arrest, they were on a mission to take additional briefing from the leadership of the terror group." (Ujah, 2014). Finally, it is also, important to mention than in August 2014, the Joint Task Force also arrested the "mastermind" of Boko Haram's female suicide bombing Ibrahim Ibrahim in Kano State (Naija, 2014).

Furthermore, many scholars also believe that many of the young girls converted into bombs are the ones who were kidnapped in the Chibok's school attack. In this sense,

Boko Haram strategically kidnaps young girls in order to train them in camps and force them to become suicide bombers.

Besides, it is also argued that many children who actively participate in Boko Haram's activities come from human trafficking cartels, in which the group buys and sells children. (Temilola, 2015).

Finally, the last way used by the terrorist group to recruit females is through marriage networking, especially turning widows into suicide bombers and actively participating in the group as most of the widows share the same values and convictions of their husbands.

To sum up, there are many reasons for which some Nigerians have decided to affiliate to Boko Haram voluntarily. However, as we have seen, actually the majority of the females and children that participate in the suicide attacks have been forced to do so. In this regard, "UNICEF suggests child attackers are 20% of the total bombers, and 75% of these are females." (Zenn et al., 2018).
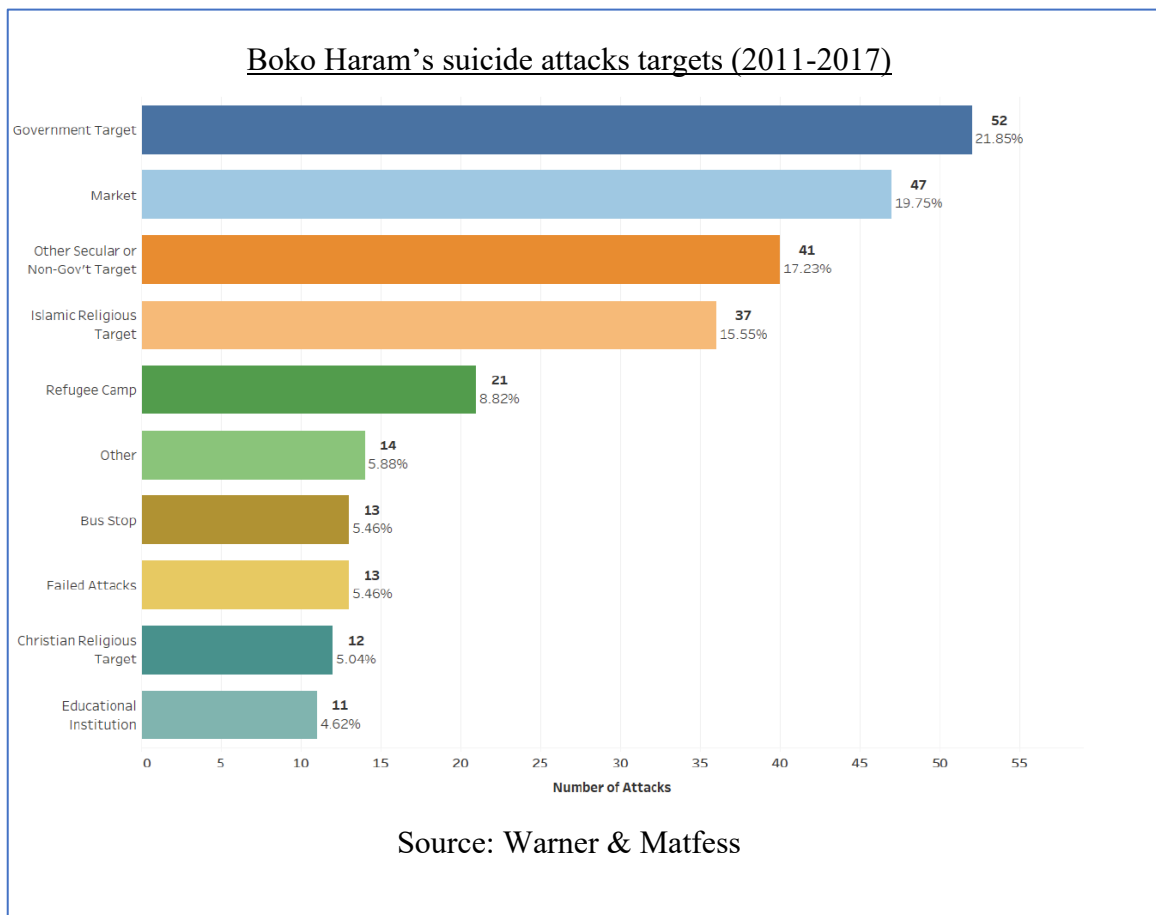
Consequently, "to carry out its suicide attacks, Boko Haram indoctrinates manipulates, recruits or coerces women, teenagers and very young children in particular". (Reynié, 2021).

BOMB GIRLS: MODUS OPERANDI AND TARGETS

Concerning the modus operandi and targets, it is clear that Boko Haram has always acted with a strategy as we have illustrated in the previous phases and waves explained and depending on these years, targets for Boko Haram have changed. The initial idea is that Boko Haram in the first place has targeted politicians and military members, government institutions and educational places in order to achieve the objective of establishing an Islamic State and spread the anti-western education sentiment. However, the group in the last few years, has started to target indiscriminately civilian places such as markets and bus stops and to massively use children as human bombs after realizing the publicity and the fear that those suicide bombings have created. In this regard, as we have seen, "Boko Haram's suicide attacks tend to place little focus on these entities, instead predominantly targeting innocent soft- civilian targets with no clear religious or political affiliation". (Warner & Matfess, 2018).

Consequently, the group initially differentiated clearly between who was the enemy and who were the allies and throughout the years, with Shekau in power, the terrorist group began to target softer civilians' areas especially bus stops, markets and Internally Displaced People camps. In this sense, as we can see in the graph below, even if government institutions represent Boko Haram's primary target (21,85%), the combination of all the attacks committed towards soft nonmilitary targets are Boko Haram's majority of suicide attacks targets.

Boko Haram's suicide attacks targets (2011-2017)

Target	Number of Attacks	%
Government Target	52	21.85%
Market	47	19.75%
Other Secular or Non-Gov't Target	41	17.23%
Islamic Religious Target	37	15.55%
Refugee Camp	21	8.82%
Other	14	5.88%
Bus Stop	13	5.46%
Failed Attacks	13	5.46%
Christian Religious Target	12	5.04%
Educational Institution	11	4.62%

Source: Warner & Matfess

Moreover, as we can see in the graph, the terrorist group does not differentiate between Muslim and Christian targets and Boko Haram has periodically attacked Islamic religious institutions which also illustrates the group's strategy to discriminate all the Muslims who are not recognized as true and authentic Muslims and thus are rejected and vulnerable to the attacks. (Warner & Matfess,2018). Therefore, Boko Haram's suicide attacks do not show a common targeting pattern, they may differ over time, but the organization coordinates those major attacks, combining them in order to increase the casualties.

Furthermore, it is also interesting to mention, that the organization, as we can also observe in the graph, has also targeted Internally Displaced People camps. As explained in the newspaper VoaNews, "according to the U.N., 11 years of Boko Haram violence has displaced more than 2.7 million people, including some 210,000 Nigerians, into neighboring countries." (Kindzeka, 2021). In this sense, as Aimée-Noël Mbiyozo explains in the policy brief: *How Boko Haram specifically targets displaced people,* the group has attacked 29 refugees' camps causing more than 250 deaths (Mbiyozo, 2017). By attacking refugees and displaced person camps, Boko Haram creates regionally fear and the suicide attacks, mainly committed by women, show the government's incapability and struggle to secure those areas, which leaves an opportunity for the terrorist group to force the governments to fulfill Boko Haram's demands. Finally, "the practice of posing as refugees not only makes Boko Haram more elusive but also has the unique effect of turning Boko Haram victims into suspects." (Mbiyozo, 2017).

Additionally, concerning the modus operandi, once the girls and women are recruited, the group adopts different strategies in order to force them commit the suicide attacks. In this sense, similar to how they are recruited, the organization typically employs religious arguments, coercing them by saying that they will reach heaven as martyrs if they commit the attacks. As explained in an CNN article written by Robyn Kriel, the group brainwashes women and children and makes use of false promises and violence to force them to detonate the explosive (Kriel, 2017). The group also pledges that once these girls achieve the objective and detonate the bomb they will be reunited with their families and even in most of the cases, Boko Haram threatens those girls and women "with being killed or having their family members killed if they refuse to be a suicide bomber." (Warner & Matfess, 2018).

Moreover, the Civilian Joint Task Force and counterterrorism operations have also argued that the organization usually persuades girls and women through hypnotism and the use of drugs. As *Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines: Analyses of Africa's Enduring Insurgency,* "In 2016, a woman abducted in Maiduguri described how she and two other women were injected with a tranquilizer before being strapped with bombs." (Zenn et al., 2018).

Furthermore, Boko Haram bomb girls and women are habitually accompanied by men with the objective of ensuring that they blow themselves up and by having next to them a superior authority which forces them to do so even more.

Finally, another strategy that the group usually employs, and that mirrors Nigeria's economic and social atmosphere is by paying the girls and women a little sum of money if they blow themselves. According to *Exploding Stereotypes,* "the girls were given 200 naira ($0.64) and "were directed by Boko Haram to detonate our explosive anywhere we say any form of gathering." (Warner & Matfess,2018). In this sense, the organization persuades the little girls by buying them lunch before the explosion or by lying to them as they are finally going to get killed. Finally, this concept is also important as it shows how cheap is for the group to commit suicide attacks and how women and children are willing to participate in those attacks for as little as US$ 60 cents.

As a conclusion, Boko Haram has massively used girls and women in order to turn them into human bombs massively and commit attacks especially in civilian areas such as markets, refugees and displaced people camps and create an atmosphere of violence and fear at a regional scale and to show the government's incapability to successfully eradicate Boko Haram's violence. Finally, once recruited, these girls are brainwashed, drugged and coerced in order to blow themselves up and to generate a maximum of casualties.

WILLINGNESS OR FORCED?

As we have seen, even if there are some cases in which girls and women are actually willing to become suicide bombers, the vast majority of them are coerced and forced to convert into suicide bombers. In fact, most of the strategies in the recruitment and modus operandi phase are done through the use of manipulation, coercion, extorsion, threatening, etc. In this regard, most of them are converted into human bombs because they do not have any other option as stated by Warner and Matfess "a woman's choice is not about between suicide bombing and life, but rather between suicide bombing and violence and harassment." (Warner & Matfess,2018). In this regard, after joining the terrorist group, we could say that their lives end as if they are not sent into suicide missions, they will stay in the camps as human slaves and normally experience sexual

violence as illustrated in the personal cases of Hauwa and Ya Kaka who escaped the terrorist group and moved to the United States to share their stories. In this sense, as explained in National Geographic, "both Hauwa and Ya Kaka were eventually brought to camps inside Nigeria's dense Sambisa Forest, where they were forced to marry insurgents, raped repeatedly by their husbands and other men in the camps, and treated, as Ya Kaka says, "like ordinary slaves". (Petri, 2021).

Consequently, through abduction and kidnappings and by using violence Boko Haram employs women and children unwillingly in order to achieve their objectives by weaponizing them or by violently treating them as sexual slaves or as objects as illustrated in the testimony of Zaharau Babangida who states,

> *I was not moved by the soul-searching preaching of bounties in the heaven and it was at this point, the leader resorted to threat and intimidation to obtain my consent. We were shown a deep hole where the leader of the group threatened to burry us alive at a point if any of us refused to play along, and at another time he picked a big gun and threatened to shoot anyone who fails to obey his command.* (Temilola, 2015).

Therefore, Boko Haram accomplishes its goals by violently forcing women and young teenagers to join the terrorist organization and through abduction they are forced to convert to Islam, to get married or to become fighters or martyrs. In this regard, the group indiscriminately uses them for different purposes. However, it is also important to mention that if those girls do not comply with the orders they get killed as stated by Aisha, a Nigerian abducted girl, "some of them refused to convert. Some refused to learn how to kill others. They were buried in a mass grave in the bush. They'll just pack the dead bodies and dump them in a big hole, but not deep enough. I didn't see the hole, but we used to get smell from the dead bodies when they start getting rotten (Amnesty International, 2015).

BOKO HARAM'S MOTIVATION TO USE GIRLS

Boko Haram's main reasons for using little girls and women as suicide bombers are tactical as well as strategical (Bigio, 2018). On the one hand, women and little girls are seen "expandable" and they are financially cheaper than men, as we have previously

analyzed, with only US$ 60 cents, girls and women will accept to detonate the suicide belt. Moreover, it is also cost- effective because those girls and women have been compelled to join the group trough kidnappings and abduction and not trough recruitment which minimalize the cost. In this sense, the economic price of those girls is undoubtedly one of Boko Haram's main reasons.

Additionally, as previously analyzed, on a practical level, women can sneak in more easily into civilian institutions and crowed areas such as markets, bus stops without being noticed and consequently making it more difficult for policemen to examine the bodies of the young women wearing a hijab as well as not being inspected or questioned in the checkpoints. In this regard, pregnant women represent also one of Boko Haram's main targets when recruiting by force those young women as they can enter virtually anywhere inconspicuously (Gupta, 2021).

Furthermore, one of the main strategical reasons for the terrorist group to use girls and women is "the element surprise which is vital for carrying out suicide attacks increased with the use of girls and women as bombers. Exploiting the stereotype of women being less assertive, thereby potentially less dangerous, made them the ideal weapon in the hands of Boko Haram." (Gupta, 2021). Publicity and the media coverage are, without any doubt, one of the first goals of the terrorist group when committing those strikes, and when Boko Haram used for the first time a woman in a suicide attack, they realized those girls were the perfect weapon to gain media attention, spread fear to the population and consequently to show the group's power.

Finally, women represent a low-risk option for the group as they require little training, through coercion and violence, explosives are very cheap and easy to assemble and at minimum loss for the group. In this sense, when they are recruited, those girls and women are given three options, to become a fighter through training, to marry a young fighter or to become suicide bombs. Moreover, it is also important to mention that "Boko Haram also exploited the social stigma attached to abducted women and the near impossibility of being back in a conservative society." (Gupta, 2021). In this regard, there are many cases in which women and young girls that have managed to escape or that have been rescued by the security forces, usually decide to return to Boko Haram's camps because of the difficulty of coming back to the society as well as the psychological and physical

damage that the group has caused them. Consequently, Boko Haram "undermines social cohesion and will make the process of post-conflict reconciliation and redevelopment all the more difficult." (Kriel, 2017).

Thus, we can conclude that Boko Haram uses women and girls because it is a "tactically opportunistic act": they are humanly and financially cost-effective, they require little training, they are recruited trough abductions and kidnappings, they can sneak in inconspicuously in civilian areas, they bring more media coverage and attention and they "have been accorded no symbolic value by the group." (Zenn et al., 2018).

EFFECTIVITY OF USING GIRLS AND TEENAGERS AS WEAPONS

Concerning the effectivity of using girls and women, we need to distinguish first between the effectivity at a practical level, regarding the casualties and on the other hand, the effectiveness regarding the impact and effects of those suicide attacks. In this sense, as we have previously mentioned, symbolism is undoubtedly one of the main reasons that explain the effectivity of using girls as human weapons. By using these tactics, Boko Haram symbolizes the position of women in society, Nigeria's political, economic and social situation as well as the cost-benefit of these women while giving the group a more aggressive and authoritarian position.

First of all, it is important to mention that Boko Haram has used more female suicide-bombers than any other terrorist group in history (The Economist, 2017). However, Boko Haram's strategical tactic of employing suicide attacks is less effective compared to other terrorist groups as "when it comes to number injured, Boko Haram's suicide bombing have left a total of 2,998 injured, or an average of 12.6 injured per attack and 6,9 injured per bomber, again putting Boko Haram below global averages for injuries per suicide bombing attack." (Warner & Matfess,2018). In this sense, on a tactical level, Boko Haram's suicide bombings are not effective regarding the casualties compared to the other terrorist groups. In this regard, we can explain this infectiveness and low lethality of the attacks because many bombers, especially women and girls, often fail to detonate those bombs because of fear and because they usually do not know well the location in which they are blowing themselves up or due the poor coordination between double suicide strikes.

Moreover, it is also interesting to mention the existing correlation between the social and economic landscape of Nigeria and especially how poverty and the lack of education can contribute to a lower suicide bombing outcome. In this regard, as stated in the report *Human Capital and the Productivity of Suicide Bombers,* written by Efraim Benmelech and Claude Berrebi, "we also find that older and more-educated suicide bombers kill more people in their suicide attacks when assigned to important targets. Furthermore, we also find that older and more-educated suicide bombers are less likely to fail or to be caught when the attack." (Benmelech & Berrebi, 2007). This can be one of the reasons that explains why Boko Haram's use of children and women often fails. Finally, another explanation can be that Boko Haram sometimes sends human bombs to provoke the death of a particular group of individuals rather than kill unspecified civilians in crowed locations (Warner & Matfess, 2018).

However, on the other hand, Boko Haram's has effectively used those girls and women on a strategical level because of the power through publicity that the terrorist group has achieved over the time. Therefore, especially by using little girls as human bombs-contrary to the Geneva Conventions, according to which it is prohibited to involve children in conflicts and use them as weapons in terrorist attacks- Boko Haram successfully creates a reign of terror, highlighting the group's inhuman actions, not only in Nigeria and its neighboring countries but also on a global scale. In this regard, by weaponizing children aged from 7 to 13 years old, the "surprise" effect and the attention that the attack gets, the group appears more powerful. Consequently, the effectiveness of those strikes is measured by the "ability to enhance group morale, its capacity to engender an outstripped sense of fear in target populations, its ability to serve as a signaling mechanism to states and populations, its high precision, and the anonymity that it provides to non-bombing members of the group." (Warner & Matfess, 2018). Thus, as studied by Pablo José Molina Serrano, "in conflict areas, children become a more easily available resource, being cheaper to use because they consume less food, no high salary is needed to keep them, and their immaturity makes them easier to use in riskier operations" and they are also easily indoctrinated as they have fewer pre-established beliefs (Molina Serrano, 2022).

As a conclusion, the efficacy of the suicide attacks differs both at a practical level and a strategical one. However, what is it clear is that since the Chibok kidnappings, Boko Haram has realized the opportunistic potential that those girls and women could bring to the group in terms of media coverage and consequently has never stopped to weaponize them.

THE RATIONALE BEHIND ITS USE: JUSTIFICATION

Boko Haram's justification of the use of women and girls constitutes a controversy. On the one hand, "Boko Haram concept of women is based on this Sunni ultra-salafi radicalism" which means that women are categorized as useless and are given a second place in society (Barkindo et al., 2013).

In this sense, radical Salafists portray women as fragile and inferior human beings which need to be protected and they are also perceived as "a powerful and dangerous force, a predatory threat to male spirituality and family honor." (Gilbert). Therefore, women in Nigeria are used just for domestic purposes and are expected to get married and have children.

However, the massive use of females by the terrorist group is paradoxical as women are not supposed to take part into the group's actions and objectives -Islamizing Nigeria- according to the Islamic laws. In this regard, how does Boko Haram justify the role of women and their actions within the group?

First of all, the main argument that underlies the strategical and opportunistic purpose of using females is that those actions are ideologically and religiously motivated. As Shekau stated "they said, it is not permissible for me to capture women participating in democracy, to fight them or to handle them as slaves. I replied to them that I will continue to capture and sell them just as our predecessors did. This is my creed." (Zenn et al., 2018). In this sense, Boko Haram repeatedly legitimizes the group's actions by the use of ideological and religious connotations such as "creed" and also by establishing a division between "them" and "us".

In this regard, by opposing to Western principles and education, the organization conveys radical messages to justify their violent actions. Furthermore, regarding the use of females

as human bombs, the group justifies itself by arguing that they are acting under a mission that God has given them as Shekau declared in 2017 after a seven year-old girl detonated an explosive in Maiduguri, "this is my message to you, we carried out the bombings and you saw a female detonate the bombs and this is done for a reason; but it is not in pour creed for women to go to war but we know the reason God gave to us in his Book, when it warrants for a women to do so; we know because you are not our tutors, the Quran is our teacher… a women can do it when the need arises and it is there in the book of God". (Zenn et al., 2018). Therefore, this statement is crucial because firstly, it justifies the use of little girls and females used as weapons under the religious argument stating that females are employed as a necessity in order to achieve the final objectives. Moreover, the statement undercovers the idea that women voluntarily and with their consent take part in those suicide attacks. However, as we have previously analyzed the majority of them are recruited through kidnappings and abductions and are coerced and brainwashed in order to carry out those inhuman activities.

Finally, as a conclusion, Boko Haram legitimizes those attacks by using the group's ideology and by supposedly accomplishing God's mission that is written in the Qur'an. Therefore, Boko Haram tries to disguise the opportunistic use of women that empowers the group's actions by legitimizing it under the idea of martyrdom under God's plan. In this regard, all these violent actions are justified by the moral and spiritual superiority of God and by the mission that He has given to them.

Conclusion

As a conclusion, we can finally argue that the rise of Boko Haram as well as their actions and strategies are based on purely opportunistic situations. If we take a look into the Nigerian political, economic and social background before Boko Haram's insurgence, we can perfectly argue that the national landscape has favored not only the creation of the group but also the spread of its popularity.

Therefore, the political instability illustrated with the constant regime changes that have never seemed to work for Nigeria, the permanent and chronic economic troubles exemplified by wide-spread corruption, the lack of basic need coverages and

infrastructures, the unleashed and continuous growth of the population etc., that the country has faced for many years, hinder the future of Nigeria. The social and religious landscape shaped by the ethnical conflicts and the religious tensions also add to the country's sense of hopelessness and lack of future.

Hence, many Nigerians believe that the only solution to their troubles is to join the organization and to take up arms. Additionally, the examination of the group's rise, their main objectives and motivations and their grass-root principles linked with the Salafi doctrine help us to better understand why Boko Haram has gained popularity over the years and how their actions -justified in the name of Allah- contribute to reach their goals. As a consequence, many Nigerians have joined Boko Haram with the aim of violently overthrowing the Nigerian government in order to implement an Islamic Caliphate and to expand its influence in countries around the Lake Chad Basin as well as opposing every Western type of lifestyle and education. Consequently, in order to achieve their objectives, the group exerts violence through different actions, one of them being the use of female suicide bombers.

Thus, as previously analyzed, the use of females by the group illustrates the strategical opportunistic tactic that Boko Haram's leaders discovered trough kidnappings and abductions.

Therefore, the initial research question of this case study was: Why Boko Haram uses bomb girls to achieve its objectives? Is it a successful strategy? And the aim of this final research work was to establish the terrorist group's real motivations, to measure the effectiveness of the attacks and to find out a rational reason behind this strategy. In this regard, the original researcher's double hypothesis was that the terrorist group employs females because it is a low-risk, cost-effective and low-tech option for destabilizing government and the military forces and creating an atmosphere of fear and terror with the objective of Islamizing Nigeria through jihad and secondly, that the use of women is purely and solely justified in the name of religion.

By analyzing the different tactics employed by the terrorist group over the time, including its different waves and phases, it is clear that Boko Haram has gradually over the years realized about the potential of converting young women into human bombs. Therefore,

the initial hypothesis can be confirmed: female suicide bombings are a cheap and strategically useful weapon for the terrorist group in order to achieve its goals and objectives. Nevertheless, this paper also comes to the conclusion that the effectiveness of employing females in suicide attacks must not be only measured in death casualties -as the majority of them tend to fail- but also in the media coverage and attention that those suicide attacks get thus weakening the State's security.

Therefore, through kidnappings and abductions, the group strategically uses female suicide bombers as they create a surprise effect and are easily managed, controlled and manipulated. Hence, this case study also has come to the conclusion that Boko Haram justifies the transformation of girls and women into human bombs under the religious moral duty of true Muslims of fighting for jihad, as Yusuf stated "For this reason, when Allah orders us to fight the jihad, we must do it. If you hesitate, Allah will see it, and you'll be done for." (Apard, 2015). As seen, these tactics are firmly based in the subordinated, second-class citizen role of women in all the fields of the Nigerian society. Consequently, by conveying radicalized and well-studied and analyzed messages and speeches, the use of women in suicide bombing attacks seem fully justified by religion.

Finally, this final paper project suggests that even if the Nigerian government has attempted over time to countermeasure Boko Haram's violence through, for instance the Multinational Joint Task Force and international and regional institutions such as the African Union, the United Nations as well as non-governmental institutions such as Médecins Sans Frontières, UNICEF, etc.; harder counterterrorism measures on a global scale need to be taken in order to eradicate Boko Haram's reign of terror and protect those girls and women as it is estimated that "The conflict in north-east could lead to the loss of 1.1 million lives in Nigeria alone by 2030." (Ibrahim, 2021).

Nigeria will only gain stability and peace if its governments succeed in promoting strong development policies to ensure economic and social progress for the country and its people. The only way to successfully fight Boko Haram relies on assuring a prosperous and stable future for the country.

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