The London School of Economics and Political Science

Northern Nigerian women in and beyond the Boko Haram conflict:

Complexities of media, communications, and gendered agency

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Declaration

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Abstract

Examining neglected aspects of the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria's north-east region, this thesis opens with a discussion of the historical invisibility of northern Nigerian women. It traces the erasure or misunderstanding of their voice and agency in national and international public debate and in stereotypical tropes in the media coverage of the ongoing conflict. Then, substantively, through alternative theorisations of *agency* which centre the experiences and articulations of northern Nigerian women who have become victim-survivors of the insurgency, the work provides a culturally and historically grounded account of displaced women's struggles, negotiations, and mediated encounters. Employing a postcolonial lens, this thesis theorises the ways in which Northern Nigerian women engage with media representations and communications technologies as they navigate gendered structures and expectations, trauma, violence, and displacement. De-centring media representations, I come to investigate, how northern Nigerian women's lived experiences of gender, conflict, trauma, victimisation, and survival, coincide with or diverge from the ways they are constructed and imagined in scholarly and media coverage of the insurgency.

The conceptual framework of this study melds media practice theory, theories of representation and racism, concepts from Global South, African and transnational feminism, and nuanced discussions of agency that often elude or have been suppressed by the European liberal philosophical tradition. Notably, these include agency's fluidity and ephemerality, its embodiment, contingency and potential for contamination – to elucidate how the political and media logics of media coverage of the insurgency are received and contested by victim-survivors of the insurgency. Scaffolded by these conceptual areas, I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews and ethnographic participant observation in the north-east of Nigeria between 2021-2022 with sixty women displaced victim-survivors of the insurgency.

Analysis of findings reported in empirical chapters includes reflections on how the socially transformative impact of conflict complicates and extends scholarly conceptualisations of agency. Further, systematic thematic and discourse analysis of my data indicates that northern Nigerian women's responses to the conflict reflect and produce multiple subjectivities, ranging from those that conform with hegemonic representation and constructions of themselves as 'the other', to those in complete opposition; and a spectrum of other negotiated positions. Other unpredictable manifestations of these representations of themselves, men in their communities, their experiences, and, their agency are expressed through overlapping boundaries of identity, defined by factors such as ethnicity, class, age, religion etc. My conclusions argue for a rethinking of the role of violent conflict, displacement and the media in reconfiguring gendered practices, its norms and values; and a reconceptualisation of agency both materially and discursively, to give those who wish to intervene in extended violent conflict situations a more stable and holistic position from which to theorise and to act.

For Abba and Amma, for all your sacrifices.

Mi Yetti, Allah Barkidin.

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بِسْمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

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Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

Since 2009, north-eastern Nigeria has been the epicentre of an Islamist insurgency ostensibly driven by Boko Haram. The word 'Boko' in the local Hausa language means western education, while 'haram' is an Arabic word that refers to that which is forbidden. Therefore, some translate the group's name as meaning 'Western education is forbidden' (with an emphasis on forbidden for the girl child). However, through the videos Boko Haram have released, it appears that their goal is to eliminate in northern Nigeria things that are perceived and presented as 'western influences' and to establish an Islamic Caliphate that is to be governed in accordance with a puritanical interpretation of Islamic Shari'a law. In pursuit of this goal, the group has carried out violent attacks on schools, government institutions, places of worship, news outlets and markets, with its deadliest weapon being the use of women and girls as suicide bombers.

The media has been instrumental in Boko Haram's strategy. The group utilises the media (through video and audio messages) to spread their agenda, frighten citizens, intimidate the state, and security forces, and to recruit new members (Abubakar, 2016, 2017; Farwell, 2014). In March 2015, the group released an audio recording during which the then leader, Abubakar Shekau, informed listeners that Boko Haram had pledged allegiance to the Islamic State; he then called on all Muslims in Nigeria to do the same. The group's style of attack on government institutions and the use of women as weapons is very similar to the mediatised representations of the attacks carried out by other international terrorist organisations, such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda, in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. The Nigerian government and its security apparatuses' heavy-handed military tactics have failed to deal with the roots of the problem and have proven counterproductive (Meagher, 2014). This failure, and the heavy-handed approach by the state, has led to crisis and instability that has spread throughout the north. This instability, often dubbed 'the Boko Haram crisis' has elicited media attention in a manner similar yet different from other conflicts that included insurgency such as Israel-Palestine (Philo & Berry, 2011), Iraq (Hayes & Guardino, 2010) and Northern Ireland (Kingston, 1995). While the group has targeted everyone, their attacks on girls and women have garnered the most attention. A high-profile example remains the mass kidnapping of more than 250 girls from a secondary boarding school in Chibok in April 2014. This was *the* event that drew global media attention, and was further spectacularised through the viral #BringBackOurGirls campaign.

On 26 April 2018, following a day of fieldwork where I conducted needs assessments in the neighbouring towns of *Bama, Pulka, and Gwoza* in Borno state, alongside my co-workers from the

Presidential Committee on North East the Initiative[1] (PCNI), we returned to sounds of gunshots and bombs in Maiduguri, the Borno state capital. Boko Haram insurgents had infiltrated some parts of the city and attacked again. After hours of warfare between the insurgents and the Nigerian army, the army repelled the attack through air combat. Calm and silence (mostly fuelled by fear and anxiety) returned to Maiduguri. People in the north-east, the epicentre of the Boko Haram insurgency, have lived in these hair-trigger circumstances for more than a decade – in constant fear for their lives. Yet many – the women in particular – have never been asked, beyond a superficial level, about how the conflict is changing their relationships, communities, and sense of self. Media coverage by both Nigerian and international media outlets has failed these women.

This thesis examines the ways in which northern Nigerian women displaced due to the insurgency engage with media, gender, loss, and violence. The chapters that follow highlight how their lived experiences align with or contradict the ways they are constructed and imagined in scholarly and media coverage of the insurgency. Using elements of postcolonial theory, I intentionally bring theories of media practice, representation, and racism into dialogue with contrasting conceptualisations of feminism and agency that elude or have been suppressed by European liberal philosophical traditions. I do this to explain how the political and media logics of coverage of the insurgency inflect the reality of victim-survivors of the insurgency. I will centre the experiences and responses of northern Nigerian women within the specific context of the region's political and sociocultural history and women's everyday lives, which are currently mis-conceptualised or erased in the media coverage of Boko Haram. In attempting to understand and examine the everyday contexts, agency and collective identities of the northern Nigerian women and girls behind the headlines, as well as the histories and rationales that fuel those headlines, my thesis builds on theories of 'media practice theory', 'ephemeral agency' and 'African, Global South and transnational feminism'. It does so particularly in relation to the coverage of the Boko Haram insurgency and northern women and girls by Nigerian and International news media.

Given the brief introduction above, this chapter unfolds as follows: the first section discusses the politics behind the media coverage of Boko Haram, while the second section highlights the absence and misrepresentation of northern Nigerian women in the media. The third section problematises the representation (and misrepresentation) of northern Nigerian women in the media coverage of Boko Haram. Together, these discussions set the stage and explain the key issues at stake around the insurgency which make it a dynamic period for the study of women's agency. The fourth section

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[1] The PCNI was a government agency set up by the Buhari administration from 2015 – 2019 to serve as the apex coordination body for all humanitarian and development interventions in the north-east.

summarises this study's contribution to knowledge while the last section outlines the structure of the thesis.

1.1. Boko Haram Insurgency: the politics behind the coverage

Understanding the politics behind the lack of critical coverage of northern Nigerian women's lives and identities beyond the most superficial spectacle, requires at least a cursory understanding of the history and political situation in Nigeria, and the Nigerian media landscape. The ethnic and religious divisions between the northern and southern regions of the country since amalgamation by the British shapes Nigerian politics, and crucially manifests in the way that the media operates, exacerbated by the political ownership of prominent newspapers and media outlets.

It was during the regime of President Goodluck Jonathan (2010 – 2015), that Boko Haram gained prominence. President Jonathan is a Christian from the South and was accused by northern political elites such as the Borno Elders Forum, of lacking the political will to do anything about the insurgency, implying ethnic bias against northerners (Mustapha, 2014a, p. 213). On the other hand, southerners viewed Boko Haram as bringing an intentional agenda of northern political elites to taint the regime of President Jonathan, and an agenda for the Islamisation of Nigeria (Malachy 2013). Yusha'u (2015, p. 138) argued that in Nigeria, where the press is predominantly located in the southern region (the south-west to be specific), stories are framed from a north vs. south, Muslim vs. Christian perspective, with northerners and Muslims being more likely to be portrayed in a negative (orientalised) light, thus reflecting 'regional parallelism' (Yusha'u, 2010). A study of media representation of women in the Boko Haram conflict by Nigerian newspapers, found that the dominant themes and frames used in media coverage revolved around patriarchal sentiments and gender stereotypes, such as helplessness, powerlessness, submissiveness, victimhood, and vulnerability (Mbaya, 2010). The representational tropes employed in the media coverage of the insurgency actively lead to the erasure of northern Nigerian girls and women's visibility, complexity and agency. Stereotypes such as violence and patriarchy, are framed and represented as a *natural part* of Islam and northern culture (Islamophobia and tribalism).

During the 2015 elections, President Jonathan's main opponent, Muhammadu Buhari (a northern Muslim and retired general who was previously a head of state during the military regime), campaigned heavily on two main promises to Nigerians: to fight corruption in the government and to tackle insecurity, especially in the north-east. He eventually won based on the assumption that his military background would be useful in tackling the growing insecurity problems in the country. In 2018, President Buhari announced his intention to contest for a second term. With his declaration came pressure to show progress and adherence to previous campaign promises. The use of the Boko Haram

insurgency as an important political bargaining chip by different regimes has had major effects, including the deliberate under-reporting of insurgent attacks, and the forced return of internally displaced persons to unsafe regions[2] (MacLean, 2018; Reuters, 2018). Discouraging accountability and critical analysis of the crisis, the Nigerian military raided the headquarters and three state offices of one of Nigeria's largest newspapers, *The Daily Trust*, seizing computers and arresting journalists, ostensibly for a story printed by the newspaper criticising the military for the lack of progress in fighting Boko Haram. The military raid on the *Daily Trust* offices came about a month before the 2019 elections, a period that was also characterised by increasing insurgent attacks and losses for the Nigerian military[3].

This brief introduction presents an insight into the complex web of national politics, the Boko Haram insurgency, and the role of the media; but more importantly, it illustrates how such events do not happen in a vacuum: in order to understand them, it is important to place them in their historical, social, political, and economic contexts. Historians and academics of northern Nigeria such as Abdul Raufu Mustapha (2014a) and Muhammad Sani Umar (2006) have emphasised through their work that any profound analysis of a complex multi-dimensional social phenomenon requires the identification of *mechanisms* and *conditions* that connect the so-called radicalisation of members of such movements to the historical economic and political context. Although the aim of this thesis is not to investigate the mechanisms and conditions that gave rise to the Boko Haram insurgency, this will be discussed in more detail later in the history chapter (Chapter 4) for two reasons. First, historicised and situated knowledge and sociologically accurate context is crucial for understanding those whom the media makes visible and invisible, to fully make sense of the present. The theoretical (chapter 2) and methodological frameworks (chapter 3) employed in this thesis emphasise the need for analysis within historical specificity. Second, history is essential for this study to contextualise Nigeria's political imaginaries, the factors influencing the historical positioning of women in northern Nigerian society, and some of the key issues at stake around the insurgency which make it a dynamic period for the study of women's agency. This, history is crucial to my argument, as it traces how certain tensions have evolved and manifested over time. The next section discusses the absence and misrepresentation of northern Nigerian women in the media coverage of Boko Haram, highlighting why it is crucial to study women's agency in northern Nigeria.

1.2. Absence and misrepresentation of northern Nigerian women in the media

With the insurgency, the north-east has seen a proliferation of international organisations and global media attention, as well as the influx of development and humanitarian aid. Most interesting and least

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[2] https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/jul/27/nigerians-forced-out-by-boko-haram-return-to-ruins-and-continuing-risk
[3] https://cpj.org/2019/01/nigerias-military-raids-daily-trust-offices-arrest/

acknowledged, the conflict has presented an interesting case of the politics of visibility and invisibility in the gendered dynamics of Boko Haram's tactics and spectacles of violence (Pereira, 2018). This is particularly interesting since it has thrust into the limelight a group that had previously been largely invisible in and to the media (both Nigerian and international). The result of this gendered spectacle of violence is the skewed coverage of the insurgency by Nigerian and international media, which has overwhelmingly depicted northern Nigerian women and girls along binaries of victimhood and vulnerability, and iconic heroines. Boko Haram's use of northern Nigerian girls and women in their tactics, coupled with the sudden media attention that has descended upon the region, has elicited opinions and discussions from a feminist perspective, thereby forcing those of us who identify as feminist scholars of the Global South to ask questions about the ideas and values which shape the representation of northern Nigerian women and the ways in which these constructions are received, understood and incorporated into everyday lives, existing media, and hegemonic Western feminist frameworks. The one-dimensional representation, mapped onto existing hegemonic Western feminist frameworks, coupled with a lack of contextual specificity, fails to recognise the complex meanings of certain actions or account for the possibility of other forms of agency and thus ends up erasing the agency of northern Nigerian women and girls. This is consistent with recent studies on women in conflict which have shown that the predominant and default views of women in conflict are still gendered by tropes of victimhood and vulnerability (Chatterjee, 2016; Parashar, 2009; Spencer, 2016). This underlying assumption leads to women being essentialised as passive vulnerable victims of war, and as agency-less contrasts to male perpetrators of violence (Bloom, 2012; Del Villar, 2019; Sjoberg, 2009).

In one of the early sequences of *The Black Panther,* one of the biggest US hits of 2018, Nakia – a highly skilled Wakandan intelligence officer played by academy award-winning Kenyan actress, Lupita Nyong'o – is depicted rescuing a group of girls dressed in long black hijabs (precisely how girls are dressed in the hostage videos released by Boko Haram) in Sambisa forest, the home base of Boko Haram and where they are in reality reportedly keeping their kidnapped hostages (see Hillu's story in chapter 7). When the girls are rescued, they remove their hijabs, revealing colourful bandanas. This representation, while peripheral to the film's main plot, was a clear nod to the infamous kidnapping of the schoolgirls in Chibok. *Black Panther* was intended to celebrate Black and African people's agency, as the (fictional) nation of Wakanda is portrayed as the most technologically advanced nation in the world. However, the sequence described above highlights a major problem with the representation of northern Nigerian women. Even in an instance where the intention is to highlight an aspect of Black or African women's agency, the representational tropes employed frame most northern Nigerian women and girls as interchangeable 'victims' and 'vulnerable citizens' in need of rescue. Critiquing this, Nigerian journalist and activist Chitra Nagarajan (2018b) highlighted that when it comes to northern Nigerian women, all people know or care about are the abducted schoolgirls or female suicide bombers.

The significance of the removal of the hijabs begs the question of why the celebration of African pride stopped short of including Muslim women, in this case, northern Nigerian women. The #BringBackOurGirls campaign took off on the Internet during a period of globalised Islamophobia within the context of Jihadist militancy in places such as Syria, Iraq, and Pakistan, when the news was filled with stories of women being victims of terrorists (George, 2018, p. 310). Global South feminist scholar Khoja-Mooli (2015, p. 348) notes that the enthusiastic support for the campaign by the global north fits well with the narrative of abductions and 'the familiar trope of the threat of the Muslim terrorist towards women'.

Although Wakanda is a fictional African country, in that particular scene Wakanda can be read as a metaphor for the US or any other Western country, a technologically advanced global superpower. Despite the fact that the cast was made up of some of the most prominent African American actors and a few African actors (Lupita Nyong'o from Kenya and Danai Gurira who is American born of Zimbabwean descent) who have assimilated and built their careers in the US, that parallel between the 'Wakandan saviour' and the 'Western saviour' is evident. Thus, Wakanda is positioned as a Western saviour in that scene. It is northern Nigerian men and women themselves who have led rescue efforts for those kidnapped and come together to protect their communities. Some examples include the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) which is a local initiative where community members come together to create security initiatives that they employ themselves to protect their communities, and the Hunters Association, which utilises their hunting skills and knowledge of the local terrain to go into Sambisa to fight the insurgents. Women constitute a major part of these security and community protection initiatives. In addition, many women escaped abduction in Sambisa through their own efforts (see Chapter 7). However, all this is erased in the establishing sequence of a globally successful 'Black' film. In addition to the abducted young women, the broader population (northern Nigerians) was also framed as victims in need of external intervention.

Scholars such as Maxfield (2016, p. 886) have argued that the appropriation and eventual abandonment of the #BringBackOurGirls campaign relied heavily on a conceptual framework rooted in imperialist and racist histories, and it is precisely this framework that the representation of the Chibok girls was constructed upon. As such, colonial, racist, and imperial discourses provide a strong framework or foundation for analysing the representation of northern Nigerian women in the media coverage of #BringBackOurGirls. However, the destructive neoliberal and globalised media environment in which the campaign occurred was also a major factor in how the campaign played out. On one hand, the campaign was successful because it went viral and garnered global attention. However, the same virality and representational tropes employed by the campaign resulted in reproducing problematic narratives about northern Nigerian women and erasing the realities of the structural and material violence they experience, the spectrum of their trauma and the complexities of their agency. Thus, to gain a full

understanding of the representational frames, the campaign must be situated within an intersection of new media technologies and old imperial discourses (Maxfield, 2016, p. 889). The success of the #BringBackOurGirls campaign could also be attributed to the ease with which Western feminists could fit the Chibok Girls into the existing narrative of helpless African girls in need of saving by imperial powers against violent African men (Maxfield, 2016, p. 891). The post-colonial theorist Gayatri Spivak (1988) reminds us that this narrative of saving Black and brown women from Black and brown men is a colonial discourse which underlies Western feminist discourse (Maxfield, 2016, p. 891). This reinforces George's (2018, p. 310) argument that girl-saving projects and campaigns tend to reinforce a specific model of girlhood that constrains the full complexity of human girls and erases the complexity of their agency. Campaigns such as #BringBackOurGirls and the issues outlined above push us to ask questions about the possibilities of transnational feminist alliances in such campaigns. This will be explored in more detail in the conclusion.

1.3. Binary characterisations: Iconic heroines vs Idealised victims

Images, videos, and news items about girls in conflicts in the Global South are assumed to make the headlines and grab the attention of audiences in the Global North more easily than other types of news, particularly when sexual violence is implied. Some obvious examples are the kidnapping of the Chibok girls by Boko Haram in 2014 and the shooting of Malala Yousafzai in Pakistan in 2012. Through hashtags such as #BringBackOurGirls and #IAmMalala, both global campaigns – which went viral – aimed to raise awareness about the plight of girls in northern Nigeria and Pakistan, respectively. Scholars such as Helen Berents (2016, p. 514) have argued that such news about girls in conflict in the Global South which resulted in media campaigns, reproduced limited and consequently damaging the understandings of girlhood in the Global South through its reinforcement of ideas about girlhood in the Global North, eventually reproducing the unequal power relationship between the North and South. Headlines about the plight of the Chibok girls, for example, are dependent on powerful assumptions about girlhood in both the North and South, and these headlines which are gendered and racialised, shape the way conflict, violence, and expectations of girls in the Global South are perceived, understood, and reproduced globally (Berents, 2016, p. 524). Studies have shown that girls in conflict are typically framed as either victims who need saving or whose lives depend on intervention from the Global North or Western powers (Cornwall, Harrison, and Whitehead 2007; Switzer, 2013; Cobbett, 2014) or as idealised subjects or heroines who have the potential for empowerment, freedom, resilience, and agency (Koffman, Orgad and Gill, 2015, p. 159). However, in the case of what is seen as the solution doing more harm than good, many campaigns that claim to advocate for the empowerment or realisation of girls' agency end up producing a narrative 'that relies on false dichotomies of the durable sexual subject (embodied in the schoolgirl) and the disposable sexual subject (embodied in the pregnant child bride)' both of which 'empty girl subjects of agency' (Switzer, 2013, p. 347).

Typing 'Boko Haram' into the BBC online search tab yields results that speak clearly to the arguments above. For instance, headlines about girls could firmly be placed into one of the categories: iconic girl/heroine or idealised victim. The headlines with the framing of the iconic girl/heroine category were news reports about women who had escaped Boko Haram or defined their authority and expressed their desire to attend school. Some examples of these are: 'Schoolgirl escape from Boko Haram: "I said we better run"' (2014)[4], 'Girl who 'tricked' guard to escape from Boko Haram' (2016)[5], 'Escaping Boko Haram: How three Nigerian girls found safety' (2015)[6], 'Boko Haram: How three girls escaped Nigeria captors' (2014)[7], 'Nigerian girls defying Boko Haram' (2015)[8], 'The girl who escaped from Boko Haram' (2015)[9]. The BBC even made a short, animated video of some of the girls who escaped on their own. It is evident from these headlines that the girls are framed as icons by the BBC because they successfully escape or defy Boko Haram. Thus, they are held up on a pedestal as heroines who overcame tragedy and 'there is a reverence and symbolism of "icon" inscribed on to them' (Berents 2016, p. 517).

Boko Haram's increasingly brutal use of girls and women in their insurgency tactics, coupled with the sudden media attention brought by this upon the region, open a new set of debates about northern Nigerian women. As such, these debates spur me to examine far more closely the absence, misrepresentation, and representation of northern Nigeria and northern Nigerian women across the media, particularly in academic and news coverage of the Boko Haram insurgency by both Nigerian and international journalists and scholars. Against the background of this already existing research on the skewed media coverage of Boko Haram, I was interested in exploring how northern Nigerian women made sense of the way in which Boko Haram's exploits and their aftereffects were reported in national and international media. Also, given the dominant media representations of silent, passive northern Nigerian women and girls, I wanted to find out how they reflected upon their own agency within the context of the conflict.

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[4] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-africa-30602380
[5] https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03q84n2
[6] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-29762252
[7] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-africa-29758790
[8] https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02kv7k5
[9] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-33382516

1.4. Contribution to knowledge

To summarise the discussion above, this thesis is ultimately an attempt to address some of the gaps in the fields of African or non-Western media studies, media and conflict and gender studies (Global South, African and Transnational feminism) using the case of northern Nigerian women in and beyond of the Boko Haram insurgency. This thesis also contributes to literature on Islam, conflict and modernity. Specifically, this thesis explores the role that media plays during conflict in the representing, misrepresenting or enabling different forms of agency, and the meaning of communications in the lives and experiences of northern Nigerian women, in and beyond the Boko Haram conflict. Attending to this and answering the research questions (listed in section 3.2) helps to illuminate how northern Nigerian women who are victim-survivors of the insurgency express agency within the context of violent conflict and displacement, the different ways that the media enables or impedes expressions of agency and how the media coverage of the insurgency plays a role in further entrenching spirals of violence and discrimination. Theoretically, answering these research questions using this case study sheds light on the relationship between gender and agency within conditions of constraint, and structures of social inequality, one which is a gap in the literature and remains under theorised (Madhok 2013), the work that agency does and the role of that the media plays in facilitating or impeding these processes.

Through its data and its approach, this thesis is novel in at least two regards. First, the ethnographic approach taken in this study grounds the voice and perspective of 60 victim-survivors of the insurgency across three states, and located in government camps, informal camps and settlements and host communities. This enables me to interpret their responses within the context of their lives. I have argued that while the Boko Haram insurgency has been a media spectacle in many ways, the focus has mainly been on spectacularised aspects of their experiences, thereby ignoring its many social and political nuances, such as the ways through which victim-survivors negotiate and navigate trauma, loss, violent conflict and displacement within the context of their social, religious, and cultural specificities. This has been a deliberate attempt to address the historical invisibility of northern Nigerian women in research as discussed in section 4.3.2. Second, in its approach, this thesis is neither a production study nor is it a reception study, it also does not focus exclusively on the productions or reception of the media coverage of Boko Haram. Instead, it considers both aspects in addition to the different ways that victim-survivors interact with the coverage of the conflict, the factors that determine these interactions as well as their outcome. This approach then examines the tensions between what the media produces and how that is received and experienced by victim-survivors, either directly when they encounter media themselves, or indirectly, when they encounter the effects of the media coverage of the insurgency through their encounters with other audiences. This is a unique contribution of this study as it considers both direct and indirect encounters between media and audiences.

Through systematic thematic and discourse analysis of my interview and ethnographic participant observation data, the findings indicate that northern Nigerian women's responses to the conflict, displacement and media representations of themselves and their experiences reflect and produce multiple subjectivities which range along a spectrum of conformity with hegemonic norms and construction of themselves as 'the other' to those in complete opposition and a spectrum of other unpredictable and contradictory manifestations of those representations of themselves and their experiences. This indicates that northern Nigerian women are agentic in the ways through which they negotiate representations on themselves and their experiences in the media coverage of Boko Haram; and in the ways through which they negotiate and the constrains of violent conflict and displacement, both individually and collectively through complex nuanced actions which and through speech practices where they re-articulate their ideas of themselves when they encounter discourses about their experiences. The media, in its role as a site of contestation also plays a role in facilitating expressions of gendered agency. These findings will be illuminating for alternative theorisations of agency beyond its normative conceptions, theorisations of the relationship between gender and agency in conditions of constraint and inequality, the role that media plays in the expression of agency and the relationship between theories of media practices, media use and engagement and media representations. The next section outlines the structure of the thesis which takes the reader through the process of arriving at these findings.

1.5. The structure of this thesis

This thesis is divided into eight chapters. Through a systematic theoretical literature review, Chapter 2 engages with the theoretical traditions, conceptual frameworks, and relevant debates that this thesis employs to interrogate the complexities of media, technology, and gendered agency after violent displacement and narratives and histories of crisis in northern Nigeria. The theoretical framework engages with theories of media practice, media representation and racism, postcolonial, global south and transnational feminism, and audience and gendered agency. These theories, together with a detailed discussion of the limitations of liberal and enlightenment debates on freedom and how they inform naturalised assumptions about agency visible in White and bourgeois feminism. These theories inform my decision to adopt Banaji's (2017a) theorisation of 'ephemeral agency' to study and help us understand the lives and activities of northern Nigerian women within the context of their realities.

In Chapter 3, I outline in detail the methodological process of conducting this research. I discuss the methodological rationale, research design, process of data collection using a combination of ethnographic methods and semi-structured interviewing, and data analysis using thematic and discourse analysis. This chapter goes into detail explaining what it entails to conduct fieldwork research in a

protracted conflict during a pandemic and with interviewees traumatised by violent conflict and experiencing displacement. Since events such as the Boko Haram insurgency do not happen in a vacuum, Chapter 4 contextualises the history of Nigeria's political imaginaries, thus providing a historical, social, political, and economic context relevant for understanding such a complex phenomenon. This chapter also delineates the historical positioning of women in northern Nigerian society, the factors that have influenced this positioning over time, and key issues at stake around the insurgency which make it a dynamic period for the study of women's agency. This chapter provides the contextual foundation that is necessary for understanding the later chapters.

The discussion of my empirical data and findings begins in Chapter 5 and continues until Chapter 7. In Chapter 5, I analyse interview responses to examine the role of media and communication technologies in the lives of displaced women and the diverse ways that they interact and respond to media coverage and representations of their experiences. This chapter highlights the simultaneous yet contradictory presence and absence of the media in the coverage of the insurgency and teases out the reasons for the disconnect between the ubiquitous nature of media coverage of the insurgency and the absence of media and communication technologies in the lives of victim-survivors of the insurgency and their deliberate refusal to engage with media coverage of the insurgency. I argue that the deliberate refusal of victim-survivors of the insurgency to engage with media coverage of their experiences due to misrepresentation and lack of accurate reporting is evidence of agentic behaviour as active audience members.

Chapter 6 highlights the details ignored by mainstream media to argue that the lack of nuanced, in-depth, and critical coverage has led to a misconceptualisation of northern Nigerian women's agency and a lack of proper understanding of the socially transformative consequences of violent displacement. This chapter focuses on the consequences of the media and scholarly erasure and misrepresentation of the socially transformative consequences of the Boko Haram insurgency and the ways in which it fuels certain imaginaries of conflict as it relates to gender and agency. I argue that this lack of accurate and critical coverage of the insurgency has led to harmful underreporting of the plight and trauma of the majority of IDPs who reside in non-formal government camps, deliberate ignorance of sexual violence against adolescent boys and men, and the complexities of women's agency. Such misrepresentations also have deeply troubling material consequences.

By providing a detailed analysis of the testimonies of three victim-survivors of the insurgency and their efforts to rebuild their lives, Chapter 7 explores the complex and multifaceted realities of these women to highlight the different strategies that they employ to negotiate and navigate the different structures that govern their lives to exercise will and make agentic choices within those constraints. I also illustrate the complexities and contradictions embedded in static or binary notions of gendered agency. In Chapter 7 I analyse women's testimonies to give evidence for alternative theorisations of agency, arguing for a

reconceptualisation of agency as 'contaminated', 'ephemeral' and 'potential', rather than its normative narrow understanding as essential, free and always resistant, and for a different mode and site for locating agency; from actions to speech practices.

Chapter 2: Towards theoretical understandings of northern Nigerian women: media practices, representations and the complexities of feminism and gendered agency

2.1. Introduction

This chapter engages with the theoretical traditions, conceptual lenses, and significant debates that this thesis employs to approach the complexities of women's agency, narratives, and histories of crisis in northern Nigeria. At its most critical and alert, postcolonial theory promises to equip scholars with the language and intellectual tools needed to dissect the narratives of such a crisis (S. Kumar & Parameswaran, 2018; Loomba, 2015; Lousley, 2014; Ponzanesi, 2020; Shome & Hegde, 2002) as it considers issues related to discourse, representation, power, narrative, voice and agency. In today's highly globalised world, postcolonial theory entrenches a sense of international machination and historical accuracy, one that allows for analysis of coverage of conflict beyond just local and national media industries and publics.

For this reason, my research treads a fine line in using concepts from postcolonial theory to understand the ways in which political and media logics in the coverage of the Boko Haram insurgency are negotiated by the northern Nigerian women and girls who have experienced the insurgency. Arising from this, my specific focus becomes how northern Nigerian women's own understandings and lived experiences of trauma and victimization coincide with or diverge from the ways in which they are imagined and represented in scholarly and media coverage of the insurgency. Finally, building on these two aforementioned areas of interest, I demonstrate how the reflections of northern Nigerian women on the socially transformative impact of conflict complicates and extends scholarly conceptualizations of gender, feminism, and agency. The following sections provide an overview of concepts such as media practices, representation, Global South feminism, and agency as a framework to investigate the empirical data in chapters 5-7.

2.2. Media practices, conflict, and representation

Media attention to northern Nigeria places a spotlight on northern Nigerian women. Agbiboa (2022, p. 1011) describes the north-east as 'a predominantly Muslim region where women are seen but hardly heard'. Although this is an oversimplification, representations of northern Nigerian women in both Nigerian and Western media have typically been framed around victimhood, suffering and vulnerability, with little interest in the nuances and specifics of their lived experience of conflict and potential and/or actual agency. By exploring theories related to media habits and practices, and disparities between represented and felt identities within the context of conflict, this section

theorisations of displaced women's relationships with mainstream and social media and technologies. This section also discusses theories that can help us understand the relationship that ordinary women have with representations of their experiences in the media coverage of Boko Haram. To do so, we turn first to 2.2.1 which explores scholarship on displaced women's views about and interactions with the media, as well as theories which might help to understand what displaced women *do* with media and information and communication technologies (ICT) and how they interact with or integrate these in their everyday lives, especially regarding coverage of the insurgency.

2.2.1. Media habits and practices in conflict

If we are to understand what people do with media, we need to engage with media practice theory (Bräuchler & Postill, 2010, p. 6). It was initially through the study of media as a practice that media anthropologists began taking media studies beyond the affluent Global North into the media worlds of the subaltern people of the south (Bräuchler & Postill, 2010, p. 5). Nick Couldry (2004, p. 119) proposes a media practice paradigm which starts from the simple question: 'what are people doing in relation to media across a whole range of situations and contexts?'. In this vein, practice theory enables us to ask: 'what types of things do people do in relation to media? And what types of things do people say in relation to media?' (Couldry, 2004, p. 121). A strength of the practice approach for my thesis is that it allows me to ask open ended questions about what people are doing and how they categorise what they are doing without preconceptions (Couldry, 2004, p. 125).

To these questions, it is imperative, however, that we add the cautions arising from the work of Mark Hobart (2010) who forces us also to ask what a practice actually is when it comes to the media, reminding us both that initial theorisations of practice might have hidden assumptions about (European and American) practices as the unspoken norm when evaluation is involved; and that one must find ways of distinguishing between aspects of contingency and things that are habitual or 'usual' in context which are non-normative. So, for example, when it comes to media use amongst displaced persons, there has tended to be a focus on international refugees and migrants arriving in destinations outside the Global South and what and how they 'use' or need news media and/or mobile phones (Burke et al., 2022; Dekker et al., 2018; Jumbert et al., 2018; Wright, 2014), with far less attention paid to Internally Displaced Persons (IDP), who are usually displaced within the national borders of their country, and under the jurisdiction of their country (Dasuki & Effah, 2022, p. 532) but still subject to contingency and presuppositions of normality as measured by Eurocentric assumptions about the significance of media.

Broadly put then, while Couldry contributes to a now staunch tradition urging an attentiveness practice in the face of Critical Theory's scepticism about media framing, for instance, Hobart insists that we,

with our assumptions, prior training and biases are always doing the observing of practices and therefore need to be cognisant of our expectations and their cultural provenance. Our willingness to be curious and surprised by IDP media encounters must also be tempered by an awareness of the backdrop to our expectations and interpretations of what they tell us. So, stepping back, it is worth examining the context in which Internally Displaced Persons and their media habits are to be studied and theorised. Part of that requires an understanding of how mainstream media has covered the Boko Haram conflict and women's role therein, as well as how IDPs encounter these representations. In this vein, the next section provides a postcolonial framework for deconstructing and understanding media discourses.

2.2.2.   Towards postcolonial understandings of media discourses on conflict

Beyond its existence as a medium for keeping news consumers and the wider citizenry informed, news media plays a crucial role in times of conflict, serving as an avenue where ideological meaning-making takes place, where social, political and economic power relations are manifested and negotiated through representation, as well as a channel for understanding and constructing identities through narratives and discourses employed in representational practices and fed back into political choices. Narratives about a conflict in the news influence how people perceive the conflict, its causes and the people involved, both as victims/survivors and as perpetrators (Wolfsfeld, 2004). This could be as true for the different camps who voted for and against Brexit as it is of the conflict between Tamil separatists and the Sri Lankan state in the run up to the massacre of Tamils at Mullivaikkal in 2009. The politics of media coverage of conflict in postcolonial societies has been discussed by postcolonial scholars such as Mahmood Mamdani (2009), Dirk Moses and Lasse Heerten (2017). In the context of this study, media coverage about the Boko Haram insurgency – like that of America's "War on Terror" and its engendered narratives about Muslims and Islam – creates narratives about northern Nigerians, both men and women, the culture of the region as well as its dominant religion i.e., Islam and Muslims, that bear material consequences. This is especially true because the conflict is largely perceived as one which is religious in nature, with Western media aligning more closely with already circulating discourses around Islam and fundamentalism or terrorism (Adesoji, 2011; Thompson, 2012; Walker, 2021).

As my study is specifically interested in both the discourses about and representation of northern Nigerian women in media coverage of the insurgency, it is worth mentioning postcolonial concepts such as 'orientalism', 'othering', 'the subaltern', 'essentialism', and 'stereotypes', in relation to its local (in a country where the media landscape reflects its ethno-religious divide) and international (where the narratives of the conflict are framed with the context of the "War on Terror") dimensions. Such a discussion can help us understand how and why the lived realities and identities of northern Nigerian women have been co-opted, constructed, and/or erased in the media coverage of the insurgency. Further, using these concepts will allow me to theorise both northern Nigerian women's relationship to

invisibility in the media practice debate and the rationale for a critique of representation of subaltern women in conflict reporting more broadly.

According to Stuart Hall (1997, p. 3), 'we give things meaning by how we represent them, the words we use about them, the stories we tell about them, the images of them we produce, the emotions we associate with them, the ways we classify and conceptualize them and the values we place on them'. Discourse can be understood as that 'which provide(s) a language for talking about and representing knowledge about a particular topic' (Hall, 1997, p. 44), thus, inflecting the way in which things in the world are constructed, interpreted, and understood (McEwan, 2009). Michel Foucault's understanding of discourse as a social system (the rules and social practices) of representing knowledge, constructing topics, defining and producing objects is shared by Stuart Hall (1997, p. 44). In what has come to be known as the 'power/knowledge' binary, Foucault highlights the role of institutional power in naturalising and universalising elite and powerful discourses as objective truths, these discourses are further reinforced when they are produced and reproduced through representational media (Hall, 1997). The insightfulness of Foucault's theorisation of the interplay between discourse, power and representation is illustrated in Edward Said's (1978) '*Orientalism*'.

Inspired by Foucault's findings, Said demonstrates at length how orientalism, as a discourse and a set of practices, is a tool used by the West to construct and position the East/Orient (Asia, Middle East, Latin America, Africa) as inferior (Said, 1978), allowing it to be dominated or attacked based on that construction. Knowledge about the Orient is produced and disseminated through the lens of Western understanding, reproduced and naturalised through representative mediums (art, photography, film, textual descriptions), and maintained through institutional power. This then leads to 'othering' i.e., constructing them as different from an assumed norm which entails particular forms of racialised or gendered treatment, and fixing them as the enlightened West's 'other'. Banaji (2017b, p. 1) explains the ways in which theorisations of Orientalism and racism have exposed and helped to clarify the connection between media representation and geopolitics over time. For instance, Novo's (2003) scholarship on the representation of indigenous women street vendors in Tijuana, Mexico by non-Indigenous Mexicans, where they are represented on a spectrum of 'paternalistic love' and 'racist inhumanity', erasing their agency which is in stark contrast to how these indigenous women see themselves – as creative and agentic (Banaji, 2017a, p. 6). Novo's work highlights *self-Orientalism* where racist and orientalist tropes appropriated by local Global South citizens and internalised. This can help us understand how international media logics and discourses are regurgitated by local media.

Orientalism is thus a nexus of material and discursive practices which represents the orient as backward, barbaric, unchanging, and the other for military, economic and political gain (Banaji, 2017b). In his book '*The Invention of Africa*', Mudimbe (1988) shows how discourse was used as a tool to invent

'Africa', through the language used to talk about it and images used to represent it, he explains that the interpretation of Africa (epistemologically, historically, geographically) has been seen primarily through the colonial constructs, thus weakening the very notion of Africa. Another way that the power/knowledge binary manifests is through the dissemination of stereotyping, which occurs via the reduction of a group of people into a few imagined or partially imagined 'essential' characteristics which are then represented as absolutely different from an assumed but uninterrogated norm and are apparently fixed by nature (Hall, 1997, p. 259). Instantiating this, Jasmine Zine (2006, p. 27) highlights that in the post 9/11 era, Muslim women navigate between both racialised and gendered politics that define the ways in which their identities are constructed and regulated for the benefit of non-Muslim women (usually assumed to be white) and men. Thus, because of 'gendered Islamophobia' (Zine, 2004), Muslim women are imagined through Orientalist tropes and representations of backward, oppressed and politically immature beings in need of western imperialist interventions liberations as well as through puritanical discourses about Islamic womanhood (Zine, 2006, p. 27).

The USA's "War on Terror" promoted discourses about the need to 'liberate' oppressed Afghan women from Afghan men (Toynbee, 2021). The American media was filled with images of Afghan women that were pregnant, fleeing, starving and/or widowed, all of whom were voiceless victims, reduced to the sum of their most desperate parts (Peters, 2002, pp. 122–123). Zine (2006, p. 35) argues that 'the static and essentialised construction of the Muslim woman as the abject, oppressed "other" became an important tool in the arsenal of ideological warfare, designed to gain public support on the war on terror'. Gendered Islamophobia thus refers to forms of discrimination aimed at Muslim women, accompanying other historically contextualised negative stereotypes that inform and sustain the structural conditions of domination (Zine, 2006, p. 35). The scholarship of those such as Said, Hall, Mudimbe, Banaji and Novo provides a solid foundation upon which media representations in postcolonial societies can be studied. Orientalism as a set of practices and discourses can thus be used to understand the construction and representation of northern Nigerian women in the media coverage of Boko Haram, and, counterintuitively, to understand the construction of northern-Nigerian women by male members of Boko Haram.

Summing up, then, a major presumption of scholars of discourse is that discourses do not occur in a vacuum, and knowledge of the world is simply a social construction of discourse articulated under various dynamics of the interaction between episteme and power. Certain interpretations become naturalised and internalised (though they can also be resisted and contested (Dunn & Neumann, 2016, p. 14). Representation and discourse thus work together, maintained by and maintaining particular powerful interests, to construct knowledge about topics, regions and peoples. This, however, is far from the end of the story, since the question arises as to whether and populations thus consent and agree to, or are forced into accepting, their given social conditions and having their humanity framed in particular

ways. And, if they do not, to what can we attribute the differences between groups' acceptance or otherwise of their conditions and the imposed definitions that locate them there? To answer these questions, we must turn now to a discussion of subalterns and agency.

Antonio Gramsci (1975) describes a 'subaltern social group' as a subordinate group in terms of social class, some groups that fall under this definition include: slaves, peasants, certain religious groups, women, certain races and the proletariat (Green, 2011, p. 388). Subalterns are typically seen as lacking 'socio-political voice and self-representative agency' (Banaji, 2017a, p. 20). Gramsci recognised that constructed categories of identity provided the basis for relations of inequality and exclusion which in turn produced the subaltern as the marginalised 'other' (Green, 2011, pp. 395–396). As Banaji argues, subalternity could therefore be understood as a historical product of unequal structural relations rather than as an unchanging essence (Banaji, 2017a, p. 21). In either view, northern Nigerian women, especially those who have experienced violence from Boko Haram might justifiably be classified as subaltern. They do not have access to corporate or governmental power i.e., the media, or the state, to determine how their experiences are covered or represented. As a result, they are most often spoken for, about and over by groups with greater access to symbolic power. Discussing symbolic power, Bourdieu (1991, p. 61) describes it as 'a power of constructing social reality and the shaping of knowledge'. In the senses outlined above, control over knowledge production means control over ideology, in this case, ideology is used to establish and sustain relations of domination (J. B. Thompson, 1990, p. 56). Following these ideas, Castells (2009, p. 10) emphasises that 'power is exercised by the construction of meaning on the basis of the discourses through which social actors guide their action'.

But how does an exercise of power, symbolic or otherwise insinuate itself into human consciousness such that it becomes part and parcel of our subjectivity and personhood? Hall (1990, p. 222) has argued that 'we should think of identity as a "production", which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation'. Through representational tropes, the category of 'Muslim women' has become a malleable construct which has constantly been redefined to suit political or ideological agendas (Kahf, 1999; Zine, 2006). In her much-cited essay 'Can the subaltern speak?', Gayatri Spivak (1988) critiques the ways in which subaltern women's voices are silenced and traces of what she theorises as evidence of their agency erased through representational practices and epistemic violence. Spivak argues that when subalterns speak in a system that is not designed to hear them, whether this be embodied or silent, it is misconstrued. Thus, inequality is reinforced both discursively and materially. What interests me, here, is this: when members of an audience encounter representations of themselves-in-conflict-situations, what can one say about the ways in which subalterns such as northern-Nigerian women integrate or reject, negotiate or sidestep the positions and stereotypes designated for them, and is this simply a facet of their agency as audiences or a deeper expression of gendered agency as northern-Nigerian women?

2.2.3. Audience Agency: negotiating identity

The concept of 'agency' is essential to my understanding of what audiences do with media discourses and how they do it. The concept of 'agency' is also presumed in understanding media practices, which seeks to understand what people do with media and how. This study attempts to understand how northern Nigerian women express agency, some under complex conditions of subordination, and negotiate their identities, in comparison to how other audiences who consume representations of them imagine or represent them in media coverage of the Boko Haram crisis. Drawing on the work of media and cultural anthropologists such as Purnima Mankekar and Shakuntala Banaji, the following section highlights the complexities of identity negotiation by audiences in sites of contestation such as media representation, especially in a gendered subaltern political and social context. Departing from where David Morley (Morley, 1992) and Ian Ang (Ang, 1991) conclude, Banaji (2017a) and Mankekar (1999) theorise agency, feminism, resistance, subjectivity and identity to explore how different forms of agency manifest in the relationship between particular audiences and media. The media in question – Hindi films and nationalist serials – is less important than the relationships it is used to theorise and this is why it is worth looking at this scholarship more closely, especially as both scholars articulate versions of a critical postcolonial perspective.

Through the study of state-owned television in India (Doordarshan), Mankekar (1999) explores the role of television in the ideological construction of the ideals of what a nation entails: identity, citizenship and the postcolonial 'Indian womanhood'. Mankekar's argument conceives of audiences as highly active in the process of meaning negotiation, while at the same time acknowledging that their interpretations of television content are heavily informed by the discursive or ideological positions and interpretative communities to which they belong. This is a perspective which epistemologically grounds this project. So, when it comes to the way in which media narrations are received and interpreted, viewers have valuably been shown to be active rather than passive, with social factors such as race, class, sexual orientation, and past experiences influencing interpretations (Diawara, 1988). Rather than revisiting the well-worn debate about whether audiences are active or passive and vulnerable to influence, I rather take my cue from Banaji's work (2006, 2010, 2014) which suggests that they can be both active and vulnerable to influence, agentic and more or less open to hegemonic invitations.

In her ethnographic work on cinematic reception in public settings based on mainstream audiences, Srinivas (2002) too illustrates a version of audience agency. Through *participatory* and/or *selective* viewing, they reconstruct narratives to suit their own social circumstances and tastes (Srinivas, 2002). A different and perhaps more compelling instantiation of audience agency than Srinivas' is presented in 'the oppositional gaze', bell hooks' (1992) proposition that different strategies can be employed in

order for excluded (subaltern) viewers to engage with film narratives by developing an oppositional gaze to these mainstream films. These strategies are rooted in resistance to oppose the dominant social order and they include reading against the text, subverting the text, critiquing the text, and making alternative texts (e.g., fan fictions) (hooks, 1992). Hence, viewers who would be otherwise excluded as a result of being 'othered' on screen can engage with narratives from a position of ambivalence, anger or refusal. Banaji's findings and conclusions about film audiences in *Reading Bollywood* (2006) confirm the complexity and ubiquity of audience negotiations of textual meaning, leading her to highlight both the power of the texts as instruments of imagination, hegemony or co-option as well as the fractures which occur when textual invitations to identification or political critique are inflected through individual experience, generic knowledge and everyday use. What about other audiences from other parts of Nigeria who have never encountered a northern Nigerian woman? This invites us to pay close attention to how the relationship between mass media and women's understandings of themselves, their roles and identities is analysed and theorised. An analysis of this relationship requires a careful understanding of frameworks of Global South feminism which provides the tools and specificity required to understand the complexity of northern Nigerian women as agentic beings; agency in this context referring to a wide range of conscious actions, as a response to specific conditions (Alidou, 2005, p. 4). The next section explores approaches to gender and Global South feminism which can help us understand and theorise this relationship.

2.3. Gender and Global South feminism

Reviewing the role of women in violent jihadi groups in countries that have been plagued with these types of insurgencies such as Somalia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, Iraq and Nigeria amongst others, Sarah Ladbury (2015, p. 1) highlights that most research on women's and girls' experiences focuses almost exclusively on their roles as suicide bombers and/or victims of jihadi violence. While there is no doubt that Boko Haram's abduction of girls, their use of women as suicide bombers and child brides falls into this broad category, others such as Charmaine Pereira (2018, p. 252) argue that when there is an exclusive focus on '*spectacles of violence'* against women, other types of erasures occur because 'the diverse categories of women are rendered less visible ... selective recognition of women as victims obscures understanding of the ways in which gendered relations and processes are embedded in complex social relations, it does not address the broader political and socio-economic contexts within which this conflict is located' (Pereira, 2018, p. 259). A key question in contemporary feminist theory is how historical and cultural specificity should inform both the analytics and the politics of any feminist project (Mahmood, 2012, p. 1). Mohanty (1991b, p. 1), emphasizes that 'any discussion of the intellectual and political construction of third world feminisms must set out to address the critique of hegemonic "western" feminism and the formulation of autonomous, geographically, historically and culturally grounded feminist concerns and struggles'. In the vein of the preceding chapter and the

discussion above, this section will attempt to outline the theories of feminism and gender that will be used in this research in understanding northern Nigerian women.

2.3.1. Limitations of western feminist discourse

'Feminism' is relevant to this study because discourses around the status and agency of northern Nigerian women are often situated and steeped in feminist discourses. However, much of the scholarly or academic writing, media coverage and representation of women in Muslim societies from western and Southern Nigerian scholars and media organisations shows a bias, a lack of understanding (B. Callaway & Creevey, 1994) and an association of the oppression and subjugation of women situated with the context of Islamic laws (Bawa, 2016, p. 95). Just as elsewhere in the world, a combination of factors such as culture and religion shape the lives of women in the direction of patriarchal systems (Coles & Mack, 1991, p. 6). Due to the conservative nature of northern Nigerian society and the impact of Islam which will be outlined in the history chapter, there is a pervasive preconceived notion that northern Nigerian women exist entirely to be subjected to control by men and are largely powerless and lacking in any form of authority and agency (Coles & Mack, 1991, p. 12). This is nowhere more evident than in the news coverage of the Boko Haram insurgency which has thrust women of the region into the limelight, framing them exclusively along the same tropes mentioned above, along a spectrum of 'victims' and 'vulnerable citizens' whose roles and experiences are homogenous, and associated with subjugations from culture and religion.

In this context, the term 'Western feminist discourse' refers to the 'similar effects of various textual strategies used by feminist writers and scholars which codify "others" as non-Western and hence themselves as inherently Western' (Mohanty, 1991b, p. 52). This metaphorical colonisation – or *speaking over* and *speaking for* – is usually achieved by imposing an ethnocentric universality and discursively homogenising the oppression of women in the Global South (ibid). Mohanty's critique does not deny that multiple oppressive structures prevail in the lives of Global South women; it simply draws attention to the sometimes overt and sometimes subtle racism of much well-meaning western scholarship on the condition of women and girls in Global South communities – and to the affective consequences of such racism for the women in question.

The resurgence of debates about the status and agency of northern Nigerian women as the result of the insurgency has previously been situated primarily within the context of Islam and women's (dis)empowerment. Although the number of northern Nigeria women in the public sphere and in positions of public authority in government, politics and the private sector has increased significantly in the present day, the region still has the lowest literacy and education enrolment indices in the country, especially when it comes to girls. Thus, there is still an overall absence of northern Nigerian women, in

positions of public and as a result, the 'public-private' dichotomy which has been employed as an analytical framework to explain the subordination of northern Nigerian women due to their restriction to the private sphere is still present today in several forms, and is still being used to reinforce an image of acute gender asymmetry, especially when compared to the supposed liberation of women in Southern Nigeria (Coles & Mack, 1991, p. 12). This Western-centric 'public-private' framework, has repeatedly been critiqued. After Michelle Rosaldo (1974) introduced this framework study of gender roles, the framework was subjected to justified criticism for its parochial nature and was subsequently revised (Coles & Mack, 1991, p. 12; Rosaldo, 1980). A significant critique came from scholars who argued that the content and relations between the public and private spheres as defined in Rosaldo's study could not be applied in the same way in non-western societies where power was exercised in different ways and realms (within kin groups for example) and could have a significant impact on public affairs (Comaroff, 1987; Nelson, 1974; Nicholson, 1986; Yanagisako & Collier, 1987 cited in Coles & Mack, 1991, p. 12). As such, because of its implicit bias in considering non-Western contexts, western feminist discourse is not only insufficient but misleading when it comes to studying and theorising agency in the lives of northern Nigerian women either as audiences or as citizens.

Theorised within a matrix of critical Global South feminist theory, 'the northern Nigerian woman' can be seen to be essentialised both by patriarchal structures and by many Western feminist discourses to fit a discursive trope that erases differences in oppression and these women's right to respond differently from white western women to that oppression while still being named as feminists. While western hegemonic feminist frameworks on feminism and gender have essentialised one normative way of being women and feminists, Black feminists and queer theorists (Ahmed, 2017, 2023; hooks, 2015; Lorde, 1984; Tamale, 2020) have attempted to highlight complexities within feminist theory by attempting to define the complex intersections of race, class, gender and sexuality. We must thus de-centre notions of universal definitions and instead consider approaches such as that of Mahmood, who calls for the need for specific, context-based studies of women's lives and choices or constraints. Echoing her, (Gadzekpo, 2009) emphasises the dearth of feminist media scholarship in Africa and suggests that this needs to be addressed by feminist media scholars with perspectives from the Global South. African research is needed to contribute to the widening of these philosophies to include a more diverse range of voices that contribute to the global dialogue. Mahmood's work opens other dimensions of the studies on *subaltern gendered agency* and *subject construction*, considering multiple subaltern identities within a specific context of history and culture. As such, postcolonial theory provides us with the language and intellectual tools to deconstruct these universalised narratives of gender and feminism and expose the interconnections between power, culture and experience (Shome & Hegde, 2002, p. 263) that come to recognize certain realities as 'normal' while othering the rest.

2.3.2.   Theorising Feminism: A case for Global South and transnational feminism

The questions pursued in this section are as follows: what theories of feminism can we employ in this context to accommodate and account for the types of activities northern Nigerian women perform and the forms of power that they hold in these environs? How can we think about feminism in northern Nigeria in a way that will offer a better understanding of agency in the contexts of the lives of the women who encounter Boko Haram and experience the conflicts resulting?

Eurocentric, white-centric histories and globally dominant histories of feminist thinking appear to divide feminism into three or even four waves, with each wave seeing itself as building on and improving on – or even surpassing – the goals and definitions of the preceding waves (Hewitt, 2010, p. 2). In some cases, these accounts may even be accurate in some particulars. The wave metaphor (which is used to describe the trajectory of modern feminism) has come under heavy critique. It is heavily centred around the activities of white women; exclusionary to only feminist activity mainly in the US and sometimes the UK; it does not capture the nuances and multifaceted developments in the history and thus development of feminism and it is unable to capture feminist activism in a global and multicultural setting (Hewitt, 2010; Snyder, 2008; Springer, 2002). Despite all of this, the model is still dominant in both academia and popular media as the dominant account of the history of feminism. Since we can also understand history by questioning what is left out of dominant narratives, and what is left invisible (see Chapter 4), (Rupp & Taylor (2005, p. xi) point out that the wave metaphor can still be useful 'as long as we understand that the lulls between the waves are still moving, that, from a transnational perspective, there may be choppy seas rather than even swells', and that 'waves do not rise and crash independently of each other' (cited in Molony & Nelson, 2017). Therefore, I take the wave metaphor to be productive in that what is present is used to question and tease out the diverse histories, politics and voices that have been left out of this dominant history, and explanations can be insightful of a diversity of feminist praxis.

So, how relevant is this retelling of the generally accepted chronology of Western feminisms when talking about postcolonial societies in the Global South? From the discussion above, it is evident that feminists from the Global South – as well as those who identified as Third World feminists during the Cold War, have been all but written out of dominant histories of feminism. The Indian women's movement (Kirmani, 2011; Kumar, 1995; Subramaniam, 2004), Latin American indigenous and Socialist feminist movements, African feminism, the general terms used to describe the myriad of heterogeneous experiences and discourses (Ahikire, 2014, p. 8) of non-Western women or women of colour, have largely been framed by essentialist definitions and constructed simply as a continuation of or responses to and reactions against western feminism. The truth is far from this. The concept of opposition to patriarchy dates back centuries in the Global South and existed independent of western

women and western feminism in non-western societies such as countries in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, sometimes under the umbrella term 'Third World feminism' or 'Global South Feminism'. I use these terms interchangeably as we move forward.

Examining Global South or Third World feminism highlights how the simple act of contextualising – considering a place, its culture and history – often challenges everything that we think we know about a historical narrative. Understanding this, but still not able to assimilate the local histories into her narrative, Herr argues that Global South feminism developed in 'opposition to white second-wave feminists' single-pronged analyses of gender oppression that elided Global South women's multiple and complex oppressions in their various social locations' (2014, p. 1) and focuses on women's voice and agency. Herr's argument is an example of the centring of western feminist discourse when in looking at feminism in the Global South, thus erasing the feminist consciousness in the Global South that existed and continues to exist independent of western feminism. Transnational feminist studies, which also emerged as a response to the white-washed, US-centric feminist discourses – focus on the relationship between colonialism, imperialism, transnationalism and feminism (Molony & Nelson, 2017, p. 5); due to its intersectional approach, it is also able to use 'transnational circuits of information, capital, and labour, [to] critique a system founded on inequality and exploitation' (Grewal & Kaplan, 2000, p. 1).

Both Global South and transnational approaches to feminism not only recognise power asymmetries because of gender, but also the role that global cross-border economic and political structures, and the effects that legacies of colonisation, imperialism and globalisation have on the lives of third world women. This approach, thus, will be useful in looking at the role of the media in case studies of how conflict is covered and constructed (C. Carter & Steiner, 2004; Gill, 2007; Grewal & Kaplan, 2000) across Nigeria and in the northern areas. Alidou's (2005, p. 8) use of the concept of '*brassage*' – literally translates to 'mixing' – which she defines as 'ethnic and cultural blending' is also a valuable trans-ethnic approach for looking at the blending of multiple overlapping identities, in regions such as northern Nigeria where there are many different ethnic groups that have merged as one. This is important because 'women have always been both products and agents in the configuration of *brassage* identities' through marriage (Alidou, 2005, p. 10). One of Chandra Mohanty's (1991b, p. 53) arguments against the wholesale deployment of one or the other wave of western feminism to interpret women's lives and cultures in specific regions of the Global South is that Western feminist discourse metaphorically colonises the lives of women in the Global South by representing them in a way that homogenises and constructs them under the singular category of 'Third World woman' who is always lacking agency in contrast to her white, First World counterpart. This, in turn alienates many (who would otherwise be inclined to critique their own conditions of existence) from feminism itself, and further diminishes the ideological possibilities for resistance and cross-national community building.

Despite the significant Christian population in the north-east, the culture of northern Nigeria is primarily based on Islam, for example, both Muslim and Christian women in the north-east adopt Islamic practices of modesty such as veiling. However, since religion is also used as a factor in the media framing of northern Nigerian women's experiences it might be expected that theories of 'Islamic feminism' by Muslim feminist scholars such as Fatima Mernissi and Amina Waddud who argue for feminism within the boundaries of Islam will be employed in this study. However, I believe that both Global South and transnational feminisms, with emphasis on class, intersectionality and contextualisation, while resisting essentialist definitions of feminism, encompass and enrich the specificities of what has come to be known as Islamic feminism. Concurrently, transnational feminism is necessary because we are looking at media coverage within an international media sphere, thus will complement approaches from Global South feminism – which African feminism falls under – equipping us with tools to focus on local and contextualised nuances within the context of northern Nigerian women's realities. Given this context, the next section outlines African feminist accounts and highlights what it offers for this study.

2.3.3. Feminism in Africa

In contemporary Africa, feminism can be traced back to women such as Adelaide Casey-Hayford who played a key role in feminist politics on the continent, the Sierra-Leonean women's rights activist often referred to as the 'African Victorian feminist' (Cromwell, 1986), Charlotte Maxeke, the founder of the Bantu Women's League in South Africa and Huda Sharaawi who established the Egyptian Feminist Union in 1923 (Deb, 2016, p. 180). In Nigeria, Margaret Ekpo, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti and Gambo Sawaba were instrumental in fighting against colonialism and advocating for women's rights, throughout their lives. Cognisance of these local histories only reinforces Narayan's (1997, p. 4) critique of the notion that feminism is necessarily a western import; as she argues: 'feminist perspectives are not foreign to Global South national contexts'. African authors such as Mariam Ba and Buchi Emecheta, in their seminal books *So Long a Letter* and *Joys of Motherhood*, respectively, both published in 1979, present accounts of the struggles that women go through in different spheres of African societies. African feminist scholars such as Amina Mama, Sylvia Tamale and Oyeronke Oyewumi, amongst others have written extensively about emphasising the need for localised approaches based on the experiences of African women. African feminism 'combines racial, sexual, class and cultural dimensions of oppressions to produce a more inclusive brand of feminism where women are viewed as human first, rather than sexual beings' (Steady, 1996, p. 4).

Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi (2000) further argues that in Africa, feminism is rooted in the reality of the continent's history; its marginalisation, oppression, and domination due to slavery, colonialism, racism,

neo-colonialism, and globalisation. As such, African feminism relies on the inter-connectedness of gender, women's oppression, race, ethnicity, poverty, and class. Most importantly, African feminism is contextual, it centres the lived realities of African women with an understanding of the factors that have shaped their lives, thus a type of Global South feminism. Paying attention to these contexts, African feminism, just like Black feminism in the US, is anti-racist, calling for context-based understandings of women's realities, as Third World or Global South feminism calls for. Racism does not look the same or have the same characteristics in different countries, and particularly in Black or Brown-majority countries, might be experienced quite differently than it is in the USA. An assumption that all racism will look and be experienced in similar ways globally and therefore that it needs to be addressed in the same way, is also, perversely, a form of racism. Intersectionality, as theorised by Kimberlee Crenshaw (1989), describes how gender, race, class, and other characteristics such as sexual orientation overlap and intersect with one another to create unique experiences of oppression and community. Intersectionality also lies at the centre of Global South feminism which seeks to centre the experiences of African women to reflect the specific ways in which factors unique to them dictate their lives as women.

Homogenisation and denial of individuality is a widespread characteristic of racist mediation and knowledge production (Novo, 2003, p. 55). It is sadly evident even in dominant Western/white feminist discourses. For one thing, many people from stigmatised racial or ethnic groups are addressed as representatives of their groups, rather than as individuals (Omi & Winant, 1994). Drawing on the distinction, Novo (Novo, 2003, p. 250) contrasts the representations of indigenous women vendors in Mexico to the ways in which indigenous women see themselves to analyse the articulations of ethnicity and gender in a particular political-economic context. She finds that indigenous women in Mexico are repeatedly positioned by the media and others including white Mexican women as *anonymous beings* via the use of a common name, 'María', for all of them. 'Marías' are thus perceived as *a type* that overlays elements of ethnicity, gender, class, and occupation (Novo, 2003, p. 254). This is the same way that the 'Chibok girls' of northern Nigeria have become typified: these representations serve to naturalise the exclusion of these women from gaining access to resources or opportunities and from the possibilities of self-liberation or agency.

Historically, however, women in northern Nigeria, especially aristocratic women of high status (by virtue of descent and kinship) hold power and have influenced public affairs through direct and indirect ability to influence and control others (Mack, 1988). For example, in pre-colonial Bornu (present day Borno and Yobe states), especially among the Kanuri, the Kotoko and Bagirmian, women occupied highly respected offices such as that of the Magira (the Mai's[10] mother) (Bawa, 2016, p. 98). The extent

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[10] Mai is the title for king in Kanuri

of the Magira's power was demonstrated when her son, Mai Biri (1151-1176) was imprisoned and Magira Aisa Kuli controlled Kanuri political life before the new Mai, Idris Alooma came into power in 1572 ((Bawa, 2016, p. 98; Crowder, 1978, p. 29) in (Bawa, 2016, p. 98)). In addition to kinship and class status, wealth has also historically been an inflector of a woman's position in northern Nigerian society as it brings power and prestige. Evidently, despite their physical absence in the realms of policy and politics, Northern Nigerian women are not all powerless and subordinate, and their lives and activities are not irrelevant to public affairs and politics (see chapter 4).

However, even in instances and spaces where northern Nigerian women hold significant power, this has never yet been captured adequately by the bourgeois Western feminist frameworks due to the inability of these frameworks to recognise and accommodate nuances and complexities that exist in such postcolonial non-western contexts. In the African context, research by scholars such as Coles & Mack (1991), Cooper (1997), Alidou (2005), Masquelier (2001, 2009), Reene (2012) and Mack (2022) has attempted to capture these complex nuances. It is necessary to develop this context-based understanding of women's lives in the way that African feminism (with its emphasis on context and intersectionality) calls for, as it both acknowledges the existence of patriarchy in northern Nigerian societies, and recognises the active participation of women and resistance (both formal and informal) against and within these patriarchal elements.

2.3.4. African feminist approaches: undoing monolithic constructions of gender and womanhood

One of the main analytical presumptions of Western feminist discourse is the way it defines 'women' as an already constituted, stable group with identical realities, regardless of race, class, ethnicity or contradictions, implying a notion of gender or sexual difference and even patriarchy which can be applied universally and cross-culturally (Mohanty, 1991b, p. 55). This has implications for how gender is theorised. Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí (1997) in *The Invention of Women* challenges this homogeneity of 'women' as a universal already constituted group, arguing that in most African societies, prior to colonialism, there was no category of 'women' in the way that it exists today i.e., defined in strictly gendered terms (Oyěwùmí, 1997, p. xiii). Oyěwùmí further argues that the concept and category of 'women' as it is used today is derived strictly from Western experience and history, one which is rooted in philosophical discourses based on biological determinism (*ibid*). Oyěwùmí cites that these Western gender discourses have come to infiltrate contemporary African societies since knowledge production

is dominated and monopolised by the West, a phenomenon that Mudimbe (1988, p. 15) has described as 'epistemological ethnocentrism'.

Oyěwùmí's (1997, p. xii) work challenges ideas fundamental to Western feminism thought such as the notion that gender categories are universal and have existed in the same way in every society, the notion that gender is and has always been a fundamental organising factor is every society, the universalisation of women's sexual and economic subordination, the social uniformity of this 'universal' category, and the category of 'women' as precultural, fixed and in contrast to the fixed category of 'man'. For example, in pre-colonial Yoruba society, society was not organised based on biological factors, but rather other factors such as age and social positioning were always changing depending on whom one was interacting with (Oyěwùmí, 1997, p. xiii). In Western feminist thought, 'Women' is discursively constructed on the basis of assumed shared oppression which problematically assumes an ahistorical, universal unity based on a generalised notion of their subordination (Mohanty, 1991b, p. 56). For example, in the coverage of the Boko Haram crisis, northern Nigerian women are homogenised and constructed into the 'girl in crisis' narrative, all differences of class or ethnicity are omitted, all northern Nigerian women are de-individualised, homogenised, and articulated as victims of backward cultures and an oppressive, aggressive religion (Khoja-Moolji, 2018, p. 3).

A major concern for poststructuralist feminists in Africa and elsewhere has been to unpack the discursive practices that bring subjects into being, as well as the historical and social conditions which construct certain subjects in certain positions (Khoja-Moolji, 2018, p. 8). Judith Butler whose work remains seminal in our field, explains that 'gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts…because gender interacts with racial, class, ethnic, sexual and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities... it is impossible to separate out 'gender' from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained' (1990, p. 3). Black feminists such as Crenshaw (1989) have provided the language for feminists to think about and understand how multiple layers of oppression intersect with structural systems, thus providing a framework for feminist scholars to build and produce work on intersectionality (Mohammed 2023, p. 107). Sylvia Tamale (2020) argues that decolonisation of African societies is also Afro-feminist work due to the fact that racial and economic hierarchies of colonialism are inextricably intertwined with systems of patriarchy. Tamale (2020, p. 67) further insists that Africa is 'positioned at the assemblage point of multiple structural inequalities and erasures' and subjugated 'via the overlapping hegemonies of race, civilisation, markets, nation, gender, White supremacy, sexuality, language, culture'. Based on this fact, Tamale (2020) then draws on the work of African feminist scholars such as Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí and proposes intersectionality as a crucial analytical tool which is also useful for nuancing the analysis on the matrix of oppression faced by northern Nigerian women. Women in Nigeria and across Africa in general, face gendered constraints imposed 'not only by patriarchy, but also by histories

of slavery, colonialism, structural adjustment, militarism and neoliberalism' (Pailey 2020, p. 1 in Dosekun 2023, p. 1431). As such it will be beneficial to incorporate an intersectional approach to this study, both epistemologically and methodologically. As a study which is grounded in African feminist scholarship, this approach is necessary to account for the interlocking oppressions and to examine the matrix of oppressions experienced by northern Nigeran women.

While adopting an intersectional framework is not new and is evident in the works of African feminist scholars such as Alidou (2013), Mohammed (2023) highlights that recently, there has been a notable increase in interests and research around intersectionality. However, despite this growing interest and adoption of intersectionality frameworks, both Mohammed (2022a) and Tamale (2020) have argued that much of feminist organising and scholarship have narrowly focused on gender while overlooking the multitude of ways in which women are simultaneously marginalised. Thus, highlighting that more work needs to be done in centering marginalised identities such as class, ethnicity, religion and disability, in order for African feminisms to be truly radical and most importantly, emancipatory (Mohammed 2023, p. 107). Speaking from a Ghanian perspective, Mohammed (2023, p. 107) specifically highlights that the category of ethnicity is often erased from discussions on intersectionality. This is particularly relevant to this study because ethnic identity is a major factor that shapes the lived realities of northern Nigerian women. Mohammed (2023, p. 108) further argues that 'ethnic identity is directly connected to ancestry and culture which produces and individual's lived reality by shaping their language and philosophies. Ethnicity has historically been organised around communities that share a common ancestor, histories, language and sociocultural rituals'. The ethnic identities of the victim-survivors of the insurgency is an important part of the analyses of this study when it comes to media representations, especially given the deep ethno-religious and geographic divide in Nigeria. The importance of intersectionality is further illustrated in Dosekun's (2023) study and analysis of the #BeingFemaleInNigeria campaign on Twitter in June 2015 where she demonstrated the exclusionary class politics of the Nigerian twitter campaign which overlooked the intersection between gender and class.

Highlighting the fact that the lived realities of women in Nigeria and even across Africa in general is marked by gendered constraints which are imposed 'not only by patriarchy, but also by histories of slavery, colonialism, structural adjustment, militarism and neoliberalism' (Pailey 2020, p. 1), Dosekun (2023, p. 1430) argued that the campaign only represented the experiences of heterosexual, educated, urban women of an upper socio-economic class i.e. 'the empowered Nigerian women' (Dosekun 2023 p. 1430). There is no singular or monolithic Nigerian female experience since women are a huge and diverse group whose experiences differ based on factors such as class, age, marital status, geographic region, religion etc. In addition to that, 'women's issues in Nigeria are myriad, complex and deeply structures, historicised and interlocking' (Dosekun 2023, p. 1430), thus necessitating an intersectional

analytical framework when talking about the experiences of Nigerian women. Dosekun (2020, p. 1430) thus concludes that the campaign was elitist, and lacking in intersectional consciousness as it was unrepresentative of the experiences of majority of Nigerian women who are marginalised in many different and simultaneous ways. The intersection between ethnicity, religion, gender and class is what marks my study. Since the group of women that this study is interested in all roughly belonged to the same class, my sampling focused on diversity between the three other markers. However, class differences still emerged between my expert and non-expert interviews as seen in section 5.6.5. The discussion how crucial it is that an intersectional analytical framework lies at the center of studies such as this one, both epistemologically and methodologically. As a study which is grounded in African feminist scholarship, an intersectional approach is necessary to account for the interlocking oppressions and to examine the matrix of oppressions experiences by northern Nigerian women.

Khoja-Moolji (2018, p. 3) uses the example of the widespread development discourse on educating the girl child to show how such discourses are used to erase issues which prove complex and/or contradictory, as well as certain victims who do not fit with the devised narratives, in order to create an abstract and homogenous collective of 'girls' who are demanding the right to be educated. To illustrate this homogenisation, she uses the example of the work of journalist, Nicholas Kristoff, who in an opinion piece for the *New York Times*, starts off by drawing a direct link between divergent events: the kidnapping of the Chibok girls in Nigeria and the subjugation of Muslim girls in Pakistan and Afghanistan, concluding that Islamic militants are targeting girl's education (Khoja-Moolji, 2018, p. 2). In the context of the Boko Haram insurgency, the discourse on northern Nigerian women serves as a site for the consolidation of identities based on race, gender, geography, class and religion reflect the dominant conceptions of the 'ideal' female subject, as this is used as the basis for comparison. So, questioning *discursive practices* in the space where audiences encounter texts and make meaning from them – that make certain subject positions possible – becomes paramount. If we are to do this, at least a brief discussion of masculinity is also warranted, especially because the dynamics and coverage of the Boko Haram insurgency is one which is heavily gendered in nature. Gender plays a role in the violence carried out by the insurgents and is a lens through which the insurgency is covered in the media, and the way it is perceived and understood by audiences. As such, deconstructing a monolithic view of masculinity is also important for this study because it allows us to understand how the social norms attributed to manhood produce relations of power between men and women, men and boys, men and other men, as well as other institutions that govern society i.e., the state and security agencies such as the military (Nath, 2022, p. 46).

2.3.5. Hegemonic and militarised masculinities: Boko Haram and the feminisation of victimhood

Sjoberg views gender as 'a social construct that creates social hierarchies based on perceived associations with masculine and feminine attributes, with strength seen as masculine and vulnerability seen as feminine' (cited in Nath, 2022, p. 45). Gender identities are thus constructed and produced through complex multidimensional social processes, usually through the interplay of physical sex, institutions and performative manifestations of gender itself (Hooper, 2001).Within this context, 'masculinity' refers to the social roles and behaviours prescribed for men in a society at a particular point in time (Nath, 2022). Thus, it changes according to social factors and interactions (Vojdik, 2014). Michael Kimmel (2011) highlights that masculinity is constructed, produced and reproduced through day-to-day interactions within the various institutions of society and then 'fixed', sustained through representative mediums such as the media and naturalized within society. Raewyn Connell (2005) has argued that the idea of masculinity depends on and is constructed in opposition to women and femininity, and is plural i.e., there are different types of masculinities constructed for different types of femininities (Nath, 2022, p. 46).

It is important to note that when Boko Haram invades a community, men of the community are their first targets: fathers, husbands, sons, brothers – men who are in roles of authority in the community. Women of the community are then kidnapped and carted away to be married off to the insurgents, or used as suicide bombers, while young boys are taken to be trained as insurgent fighters. Boko Haram's approach to gender that focuses a consideration on biological difference contradicts that of Oyěwùmí outlined above. Boko Haram's reliance on biological difference can partially be explained by an ultra-conservative religious ideology which reinforces this distinction. Pereira (2018, p. 255) describes these ostentatious displays of transgression or spectacles of violence by Boko Haram insurgents as an assertion of masculinity of its members over and above the masculinities of the men in authority in the communities they invade and in the state (security forces and the government in general). Boko Haram's use of girls and women as suicide bombers is a show of power to decide 'whether or not a woman's body becomes an instrument of death', taunting the state and security services as they continue to inflict brutality while escaping capture (Pereira, 2018, p. 255). Describing this show of power to security agencies and the state, Taylor (1997, p. 32), explains that both Boko Haram and the security agencies base their sense of superiority on subjugating the other:

> the struggle, as each group tried to humble, humiliate *and feminise* the other, was about gender. It was about claiming the position of power associated with *maleness* and forcing the other into the female position of surrender. (Taylor, 1997), Emphasis added).

What we have on view here, then, is an example of a contestation between similar hegemonic masculinities. Connell (2005) has defined 'hegemonic masculinity' in any given society as the most dominant type of masculinity that tends to dictate or control all other masculinities and femininities. Thus, hegemonic masculinities are not only constructed in opposition to femininities, but also to other competing masculinities (Nath, 2022, p. 47). Since the military plays an important role in constructing the image of 'the real man' (Hooper, 2001) by riding on the binary discourse where men serve the country to protect women, the military as an institution serves as a crucial site where the concept masculinity is constructed (Christensen & Kyed, 2022, p. 1).Thus, the intersection between the military as an institution, masculinities and warfare has caught the attention of feminist and critical masculinity scholars (Connell, 2005). This has resulted in theoretical discussions about the reproduction of patriarchal gender relations, hegemonic masculinities and the construction of military masculinities (Barrett, 1996; Christensen & Kyed, 2022; Do & Samuels, 2021).

For example, feminist scholar Cynthia Enloe (2000) argues that the image of the male soldier as a strong hero and warrior is one of the most fundamental representations of masculinity, reinforcing the argument that the military is a significant space where hegemonic masculinity is constructed and defined (Christensen & Kyed, 2022, p. 1; Connell, 2005). Building on this, the concept 'militarised masculinities' theorised from a gender lens and security perspective can help us to understand Boko Haram's gendered spectacles of violence. Nath (2022, p. 44) conceptualised how certain primarily masculine social norms have been normalised through militarism and militarised masculinity in international politics, and sustained within the discourses of security and violence, thus, problematising the essentialist gender-binary that underpin many discourses on these issues. Militarisation refers to the process through which people and societies become associated with and embody military characteristics (Shepherd, 2018). Thus, this is a social process through which identities are constructed, including the multiple ways that gendered subjectivities are produced/constructed, and how individuals lean into those subjectivities, performing a prescribed set of gendered roles (Belkin, 2012; Enloe, 2000; Higate, 2003).

Marsha Henry (2017, p. 186) highlights that 'militarised masculinity' has been useful to scholars in explaining gendered practices within militarised contexts. She identifies the works of Cynthia Enloe (1994) and Paul Higate (2003) as being significant in the development of this concept. However, its most recent conceptualisation – by scholars such as Amar (2011), Duncanson (2013, 2015) and Henry (Henry, 2015) – focuses on 'the ways in which military masculinities are formed based on challenging and colluding gender norms and expectations'. Enloe (1994) uses the notion of military masculinity as a means to examine the ways through which military institutions act as sites of production of culture more broadly as well as gender specifically, suggesting that gender roles are given space to manifest and produce extremes, an example being hyper military masculinity and the ways in which certain

forms of masculinity exclusively associated with men are glorified, thus encouraging men's participation in violence (Henry, 2017, p. 187). Enloe's (1994; 1988, 2014) emphasis is on the process of socialisation that happens in militarised settings.

Higate's (2003) work further theorises 'militarised masculinity' by engaging with the work of other 'masculinity' scholars such as Connell (2005), to expand and pluralise the concept to transcend military settings (Henry, 2017, p. 187). Highgate's (2003) collection highlights how men become 'manly' warriors through the dual processes of gender and military socialisation, thus opening another way of thinking about militarised masculinity in non-mainstream contexts (Henry, 2017, p. 187), such as masculinity amongst rebel groups, gangs, militias, terrorists and jihadis (Amar, 2013; Rommel, 2016), in other words, groups such as Boko Haram. Henry (2017) contends that the expansion of this concept is crucial, because the emphasis on the fluid nature of militarisation and masculine socialization allows scholars to look at masculinities in practice as well as discourse (Henry, 2017, p. 187). These concepts also impact the way that notions of victimhood are constructed (Nath, 2022, p. 44) such as who is seen as a victim in violent conflicts. This is important because although Boko Haram also killed many young boys, these instances never make the headlines in the ways that attacks on women do, because of the essentialised gender binaries within masculinity discourses that prevent us from viewing boys and men as victims of violent conflicts and sexual violence.

Although military rule in Nigeria ended in 1999, Pereira (2018, p. 257) argues that this withdrawal did not necessarily mean the withdrawal of the military from the public sphere and everyday life. As you drive through the streets of every state in Nigeria, there is a heavy presence of military men at check points. This has worsened with the recent rise of insecurity across the country, coupled with the lack of police capacity to tackle the day-to-day criminality ranging from petty theft to communal clashes, armed banditry, rampant kidnapping and murder. Thus, since 2014, the military has been deployed across the 36 states (Alli, 2014; Oyedele, 2017), and their responses have been brutal and heavy handed, often engaging in human rights abuses (Pereira, 2018, p. 258). As such, even though Nigeria is run by a civilian government, it is a militarised society – a phenomenon that can also be seen in other postcolonial African societies such as Uganda (Decker, 2014). Unfortunately, postcolonial post-conflict societies such as Sierra Leone and Liberia show us that the aftermath of long term violent conflict and military rule is often more violence in society (Mama & Okazawa-Rey, 2012). Pereira (2018, p. 258) emphasises the need for more attention to be paid to how pervasive hyper-masculinity is in militarised societies. Amina Mama (1998) also argues that one of the legacies of military rule is the construction of political leadership as masculine, while simultaneously pushing the expectation that men have to be married in order to be considered as 'responsible'. According to Enloe (1993) militarisation also entails the gendered construction of women as subjects who need to be protected by military men and men as the protectors. In his study of Uganda under military dictator Idi Amin, Decker (2014) highlights that

hyper-masculinity was prominent in shaping the dictators military power. Feminist scholars of security studies have attempted to reconceptualise security in a way that transcends gender stereotypes of men as the warriors and women as the peacemakers, as such discourses facilitate the ideas that underpin militarised masculinities (Pereira, 2018, p. 258; Tickner, 2004). The other side of a hegemonisation of militarised masculinities is victimised femininities and an ever dwindling possibility of imagining the full meaning and implications of women's agency, especially in contexts outside the Global North.

From the discussion above, it is evident that militarised masculinities are pervasive and reinforce stereotypical gender norms which naturalises essentialised gender binaries. As a result of this, discourses of militarised masculinities limit the way that gendered agency is understood, since it inadvertently assigns victimhood and vulnerability to girls and women. The next section discusses gendered agency in northern Nigeria.

2.4. Gendered agency in northern Nigeria

While section 2.2.3. outlined audience agency as the ability to actively participate in the process of meaning negotiation by negotiating and contesting discourses in their consumption or interaction of media discourses, this section theorises agency as *a capacity for action that is created and enabled by specific power relations*, rather than as strictly synonymous with *resistance in relation to domination* (Mahmood, 2012, p. 18). It also provides the framework to explore if the responses of northern Nigerians to media representations of their experiences are a facet of their agency as active audiences or an indication of a deeper expression of gendered agency. This is done in order to understand the nuances of northern Nigerian women's lived experiences of conflict, trauma and victimisation, as well as of overcoming, becoming and survival, and the ways through which they respond to representations of their experiences and negotiate their identities in the process.

The term 'agency' is one which is heavily contested. It has been defined and applied in various contexts, both across the social science and even in realms beyond academia (policy making, civil society, activism), becoming somewhat of a buzzword. Highlighting its contested nature, Evans (Evans, 2013) points out that assuming uniformity when it comes to defining agency means ignoring the many debates (on freedom and autonomy) of the post-enlightenment West. Agency has been used to refer to the ability or capacity to act out of one's own free will; it has also been used interchangeably with words such as 'empowerment' 'resistance', 'autonomy', and 'independence' as Banaji (2017a, p. 15) notes. Van Dijck (2009) articulates agency as 'a set of actions and processes which involve media products in relation to the political, civic, economic and social spheres'. The varying definitions of the term in the context of media and communications and its related fields points to the importance of 'agency' in the social sciences. According to Tudor (1995: 103), the centrality of agency in our field indicates the importance

of unpacking 'the mechanisms through which agency and structure interact in the process of structuration' (cited in Banaji, 2017a, p. 15).

Thus, normative definitions of agency take many different forms that include variations of an individual's capacity for free will, free action, or their own chosen and preferred desires (Oshana, 2005). Sumi Madhok (2013, p. 5) invites us to interrogate the sort of underlying ideas that are associated with these normative definitions of agency in these different realms. Answering this call means asking questions about what these underlying ideas do and what sorts of dispositions, actions and subjects are privileged. Also, who and what do they discount? And finally, what sorts of conditions and contexts do these ideas demand and uphold? Keeping these in mind, the main theoretical question that my study attempts to understand is how northern Nigerian women express agency (some under complex conditions of subordination) and negotiate their identities, in comparison to how others imagine or represent them. The primary aim of chapters 5, 6 and 7 is to understand northern Nigerian women's agency within the context of post-Boko Haram trauma and displacement. Mahmood (2012, p. 7) emphasises the importance of feminist scholarship on women's agency. This is even more pertinent now as the media coverage of the Boko Haram insurgency has put northern Nigerian women at centre stage where their lives are discussed, debated, misjudged and misrepresented without their input. So, theoretically, what conceptualisation of agency is robust enough to be sufficient grounds for exploring evidence of agency within this context?

I will draw on the works of feminist scholars who highlight the insufficiency of normative conceptualisations of agency and the conceptual issues associated with it, hence, arguing for conceptual 'elasticity and openness' (Madhok, 2013, p. 7) and offering modifications to these normative conceptualisations in order to account for the different ways of being in the world (Banaji, 2017a; Mahmood, 2012; Mankekar, 1999). I will argue for the need to apply Banaji's conceptualisation of agency as embodied, 'ephemeral' and potentially 'contaminated' or collusive, highlighting its suitability in offering a more robust understanding of nuances of gender, conflict and politics in northern Nigeria. In order to do this, it is vital to trace at least some of the ideas that underpin universalised normative definitions of freedom, autonomy, and agency.

2.4.1. How do we recognise agency?: enlightenment debates on freedom

Due to the dominance of the west in published knowledge production before the twentieth century, Western liberal assumptions about human nature and thereby concepts such as freedom, autonomy and agency have become fundamental and naturalised foundations of many humanist intellectual traditions (Mahmood, 2012, p. 5). We must therefore analyse the ways in which these naturalised assumptions

embedded in these western philosophical debates influence the dominant notions of agency and freedom in feminist approaches.

Theoretically, the concept of freedom or liberty is central to feminism, especially with regard to agency. For this reason, Saba Mahmood (2012, p. 12) describes feminism as a *politically prescriptive* project, which is based on the premise that society is structured in a way that serves male interests at the expense of women, ignoring or suppressing women's needs and concerns and oppressing them in the process. The goal of what we have come to consider feminism, is to prescribe appropriate conditions for women to have a particular form of gendered agency, and to advocate for a society with conditions where women are free from oppression and have the freedom to reach self-determined goals. Based on John Stuart Mill's (Mill, 1991, p. 472) argument that 'the burden of proof is supposed to be with those who are against liberty; who contend for any restriction ...', Mahmood (p. 10) concludes that 'freedom is normative to feminism, as it is to liberalism, and critical scrutiny is applied to those who want to limit women's freedom rather than those who want to extend it'. The implicit rebuke in Mahmood's words suggests that in any project where the main concerns centre on gendered agency, it is thus important to question the ways in which Eurocentric liberal notions of freedom/autonomy and their underlying assumptions have become naturalised, are read in the context of, and inform, scholarship and discourse on gender and feminism.

2.4.2. Defining freedom

Asserting that freedom or liberty is a fundamental human interest, Jean Jacques Rousseau argues that 'to renounce one's freedom is to renounce one's quality as a man' (Rousseau in *Social Contract*, 1.4) (Rousseau, 2018, p. 45). Similarly, according to Isaiah Berlin (1969, p. 168), both a philosopher and political theorist, 'to coerce a man is to deprive him of freedom – freedom from what? ... like happiness and goodness, like nature and reality, the meaning of this term is so porous that there is little interpretation that it seems able to resist'. Here, Berlin summarises the main debates surrounding the concept of freedom i.e., how should freedom or liberty be defined and what are the limits of freedom. How one defines freedom reflects a particular worldview which determines what it means for individuals to be free, the extent and conditions under which they should be free, and most importantly, what kinds of institutions and laws we build around these ideas (Manzi, 2013, p. 1). There was a consensus amongst political philosophers of the enlightenment period that all humans are at least entitled to a minimum level of freedom and also that individual freedom had to be curtailed to an extent, in the interest of values, including the freedom (of others) (Berlin, 1969, p. 171). They agreed that complete and unlimited freedom would lead to social chaos, inequality and injustice, as some members of society would use their liberties to oppress and suppress the liberties of the weak; thus, freedom for some has to be contained to ensure the freedom of others. However, they also disagreed on how much

freedom should be accorded to individuals as well as the limits. Libertarians such as John Locke, Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, Benjamin Constant and Tocqueville argued for a minimum area of personal freedom which must on no account be violated, while conservatives such as Thomas Hobbes argued for a larger area of control (Berlin, 1969, p. 173). Embedded within these debates on freedom are also debates on other related elements of freedom such as domination, coercion, autonomy, agency and choice. These debates often frame the ways in which contemporary feminists, at least in Global North settings, think about agency. Indeed, the terms freedom and autonomy are often used interchangeably and largely assumed to mean the same thing.

2.4.3. Freedom and Autonomy

In his influential book, *Social Contract*, Rousseau developed the idea of freedom as autonomy, which involved citizens of the state coming together collectively to make laws – that reflected their collective idea of 'common good' – for themselves. These laws embody a social contract between the state and the citizens. Rousseau's idea of freedom is conceived positively with its emphasis on self-mastery. He famously argued: 'liberty consists less in doing one's will than in not being subject to someone else's, it further consists in not subjecting someone else's will to ours' (Rousseau, 1990) in the 'Eighth Letter from the Mountain': 260-1) (Baynes, 2007, p. 2). According to Baynes (2007, p. 2), this quote highlights two important yet controversial ideas: that 'freedom is only possible under self-imposed laws rather than the absence of law', and 'the project of self-rule cannot be secured individually, but requires forms of mutual recognition in which no persons will is arbitrarily subjected to the will of another'. Autonomy is thus introduced as a higher, more valuable and holistic type of freedom which in addition to negative freedom (freedom from external influences or interferences), requires moral freedom as well, in order for an individual to achieve self-mastery. For Rousseau, moral freedom is what differentiates man as a rational being from other animals ((S.C, 1.8, p. 54) in (Baynes, 2007, p. 2; Rousseau, 1979)).

Rousseau criticizes the strictly negative view of freedom as narrow, arguing that autonomy is superior to negative freedom because it involves a higher, *more complex level of subjectivity*; one which goes beyond just choosing according to one's own desires, rather, it involves a substantial form of self-determination by individuals who are able to make wise and informed rational choices rather than being guided and ruled strictly by their desires (Neuhouser, 2011, p. 482). For example, in this view, women in highly patriarchal societies can hardly be considered 'free', even if technically, their negative liberty remains untouched, but there are invisible forces such as the culture of patriarchy that govern their lives, thus, a strictly negative conception of freedom lacks the ability to distinguish 'true from false needs or discern positive virtues from their opposites' (Baynes, 2007, p. 4). This view of freedom as autonomy gives liberalism the conceptual tools to understand the concept of freedom while being subjected to law and constrained by obligations to others i.e., one can still be free and obey oneself while being bound

by law. Especially since personal autonomy, given Rousseau's initial conception cannot be conceived individually or independently of other dimensions of autonomy (Cohen, 1986), it can only be achievable if citizens think of their social memberships as an essential part of who they are. In Rousseau's view, everything remaining equal, it is natural for human beings to follow their own wills. Hence, the 'ubiquity of domination' is an interesting phenomenon that deserves an explanation (Neuhouser, 2011, p. 486). In other words, if we are naturally inclined to follow our own wills and resist others, under what circumstances or what factors are individuals to be dominated i.e., follow the wills of others, rather than ours? According to Rousseau, there are three interrelated factors that explain this phenomenon namely: neediness, dependency (lack of self-sufficiency) and social inequality.

Despite the similarities in their philosophies (Cassirer, 1970), such as how central to both their philosophies is a conception of freedom as autonomy and the fact that they both believed that domination i.e., following the will of another, is directly *contrary to human nature*, Immanuel Kant and Rousseau developed their concepts of autonomy in very different ways (Baynes, 2007, p. 6). While Rousseau explores how autonomy can be reconciled with features of human nature that allow for domination i.e., social dependence, Kant's primary focus was on moral autonomy and the relation of the will to its ends (Baynes, 2007, p. 6). Freedom is the main and central theme of Kant's moral philosophy, evident from his early writings in 1750 that focus on moral freedom (Demenchonok, 2019, p. 192). In Kant's best-known discussion of autonomy *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), he makes the argument that "the 'supreme principle' of morality can be derived from the idea of practical reason or free agency" (Baynes, 2007, p. 6). Thus, Kant further arguing that rational action is only possible as far as we are free (Kant 1785, p. 448 in (Baynes, 2007, p. 6)). For Kant, individuals show evidence of their autonomy when they can accept or reject an obligation imposed on them with reason, thus transforming it as a law of their own behaviour. Thus, Kant sees autonomy as self-governance (Demenchonok, 2019, p. 200).

Existentialist philosophers such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Simone De Beauvoir conceive of personal freedom as something that is present regardless of the circumstances. This type of freedom exists in a prison as it does on the outside; in fact, while discussing the topic of freedom, existentialists have often discussed the subject of prisoners' freedom (Killinger, 1961, p. 303). For existentialists such as Sartre, man (sic) is always free, because his existence precedes essence, and that existence in itself is freedom. For Sartre, prior to existence, individuals have no essence, i.e., human nature is not defined, and thus, freedom is limitless. However, humans are born into a world that places limits, and where actions have consequences e.g., if a man jumps off a cliff, he will probably die. However, this does not mean that he is not free, that choice to jump off a cliff is still available to him. Sartre (Sartre, 1943, p. 483) writes that freedom means 'by oneself to determine oneself to wish. In other words, success is not important to freedom' (Manzi, 2013). So, for existentialists, freedom is not

the freedom to do something, rather, one is free because there is always a choice, 'therefore you choose' (Sartre, 1983, 2007). Introducing an ethical dimension in *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre further explains that we have a responsibility towards our freedom and the freedom of others. By responsibility, he means 'consciousness of being the incontestable author of an event or of an object' (Manzi, 2013; Sartre, 1943, p. 553). In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Simone de Beauvoir also introduces a new conception of freedom – moral freedom – into existentialism, which is different from the type of freedom that Sartre speaks about, and which all humans always possess regardless of circumstances (Arp, 2001, p. 2). De Beauvoir argues that attaining moral freedom depends on other beings' ability to attain it as well, highlighting that this is only attained by subjecting one's actions to moral scrutiny and interacting with other morally free agents (Arp, 2001, p. 3). So, to be free, one must also promote the freedom of others, a core tenet of much feminism worldwide. Section 2.4.4 discusses the ways in which these ideas drawn from western liberal and radical existentialist traditions have shaped feminist understandings of agency and its impact on an ability to perceive gendered agency in non-western contexts.

2.4.4.   From freedom and autonomy to feminist agency

Liberal ideas of freedom and autonomy have been at the centre of many debates in feminist theory, especially as these terms relate to women's agency. Important critiques of liberalism also highlight how its ideologies envision rights for some but not for others, thus justifying injustices such as slavery (Losurdo, 2011). According to Mahmood (2012, p. 10), the concept of freedom in the tradition discussed above is as much a normative aspect of twentieth century western feminism as it is for liberalism; and *individual autonomy* is central to both. Mahmood's intention is to draw attention to the ways in which these liberal presumptions of freedom and individual autonomy have become naturalised in the scholarship on gender and women's agency. Grewal and Kaplan (1994, p. 17) have critiqued global liberal feminism for employing universalising liberatory models of feminist agency which end up eclipsing the diversity of women and their agency, leading to the misreading and erasure of certain types of agency of those who are not privileged by these liberal assumptions. These tensions in feminist thought regarding the idea of freedom and autonomy reflect the questions posed by Madhok about the underlying individualist assumptions and the 'ideal' subject it encourages, recognises, and upholds (Madhok, 2013, p. 11; Madhok 2013, p. 6).

The liberal tradition's representation of autonomous persons as self-authoring and self-legislating in isolation from their environment and position in the world, a position through which life and politics assume meaning, ignores power relations, social context and the impact of global structures of power and inequality (Madhok 2013, p. 7). Even accounts of autonomy such as that of Rousseau which attempt to deal with freedom within the context of domination, dependency, and social inequality are not robust

enough to account for the overlapping ways that power works to limit certain groups and the subjectivities created by these power relations. These universalist ideals of the individualist and self-reliant notions of autonomy automatically dismiss those who do not fit these categories, most notably, those who have been historically denied 'autonomy' due to factors that they cannot control such as gender, race, class, and position in the social world. The 'autonomous subject' is thus raced, classed, gendered and conceptually ethnocentric, it does not travel well, and is barely recognisable in non-western contexts (Madhok 2013, p. 7). These concepts of freedom and autonomy were not conceived of with non-Western persons, cultures or contexts in mind. There is thus a disconnection between the 'ideal autonomous subject' — that is so dominant and upheld as the standard of enlightenment inspired political philosophy that forms the basis of western civilisation — and the lives and agencies of those in post-colonial territories. This disconnection is one that has preoccupied postcolonial feminists (Madhok 2013, p. 9).

This liberal notion of 'autonomy' – seen as an indicator of agency – has been criticised by some feminists for being masculinist (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982; Mahmood, 2012), and exclusively focusing on individualised characteristics of the self while completely ignoring that the 'self' is embedded and formed through social relations (Benhabib, 1992; Mahmood, 2012; Young, 1990). Attempts have even been made by theorists such as Friedman (Friedman, 1997, 2003) to redefine 'autonomy' in order to capture the socially embedded aspect of the self. The critique of autonomy by radical poststructuralist theorists such as Butler (1999), Gatens (1996) and Grosz (1994) challenges the rational, self-authorising subject presupposed by enlightenment thought, particularly the liberal tradition. According to these critics, rational thought and the idea of the rational subject becomes universal and authoritative through the exclusion of the emotional and non-rational (Mahmood, 2012, p. 13).

Mahmood pushes this criticism further to argue that:

> The normative political subject of poststructuralist feminist theory often remains a liberatory one, whose agency is conceptualized on the binary modern of subordination and subversion. In doing so, this scholarship elides dimension of human action whose ethical and political status does not map onto the logic of repression and resistance (Mahmood, 2012, p. 14)

Mahmood's argument relies on Butler (1997, p. 18) who questions the pre-discursive concept of the subject by inquiring into the power relations produced, asking: 'If power works not merely to dominate or oppress existing subjects, but also forms subjects, what is this formation?'. This inquiry sets Butler

apart from feminists whose idea of the individual relies on relative autonomy, excluding the social. Butler's analysis is based on Foucault's (1978, 1980) theory that power is productive of new discourses, subjects, relations and objects and his idea that the subject does not precede, rather, is produced through power relations, which in turn form the necessary conditions of its possibility (Foucault, 1980). Such an understanding of power and subjectivity opens up the conceptual space to view agency in the way that Mahmood (2012, p. 18) conceptualised it, not a synonym for resistance, but as '*a capacity for action that is created and enabled by specific power relations*', that takes place '*when conditions permit*'. So, from a postcolonial feminist perspective, it is important to advocate for 'an account of feminist agency as a mode of reflection' and a 'way of taking responsibility for one's location in the world', a location that is not only or fully knowable by the subject (Hemmings & Kabesh, 2013, p. 4). However, the problem of collective agency, as resistance and/or complicity are still not addressed in Butler's interpretation of Foucault's work.

The tension which emerges from this centring of the individual within matrices of power is illustrated in Mahmood's (2012) use of the contemporary Islamic women's piety movement in the mosques of Cairo, Egypt, as a case study. While Mahmood's work ostensibly unpacks the parochial, one-dimensional view of agency that dominates liberal feminist and western discourses by showing the different modalities of agency displayed by women of the piety movement, there is no question that she goes beyond Butler in her understanding of the collective construction and experience of agency. This collective understanding is important to this study because agency is also considered an attribute of groups, and can be expressed collectively based on group belonging (class, ethnicity, religion). In this vein, William Sewell (1992, p. 21) reminds us that although agency is indeed exercised by individuals, it is also 'collective, both in its sources and in the way it is exercised ... personal agency also occurs with collectively produced differences of power'.

By exploring the complicated nature of women's relationships to religious doctrine and practice, in this case, in Islam, and feminism, Mahmood (2012) critiques white/western hegemonic feminist theory. Mahmood does this to show how the assumptions of what is considered the 'normative subject' in Western poststructuralist feminist theory work to exclude certain groups of non-western, non-white women from the category of 'feminist' further 'othering' them. They are named via norms which cannot conceive of feminism as an empowered agentic participation in teaching or spreading doctrines that appear to set differential guidelines for women's and men's conduct and behaviour. In a society such as northern Nigeria, where religion is an important factor as evidenced by the historical recount in chapter 4, integration in women's lives, religion is an important element when studying gendered agency in northern Nigeria. According to Delaney (1990, p. 514), 'Islam set the widest stage for their actions'. Scholars such as Ousseina Alidou (2005), Adeline Masquelier (2009) and Elisha Renne (2012)

have explored Islamic reform movements in northern Nigeria and Niger, as well as the different manifestations of gendered agency as a result. Masquelier (2009, p. xviii) emphasises that:

> Whether they resist marriage reforms that threaten their social position, completely ignore certain injunctions from religious leaders or embody, through dress and public conduct, a particular form (or absence) of piety, they actively participate in an economy of representation and practices increasingly structured in Islamic terms.

Given the preceding discussion, the next section proposes a conceptualisation of agency which captures the nuanced activities of northern Nigerian women, and thus is selected for this study.

2.4.5. Forms of Agency: ephemeral, contaminated and embodied

The challenge at stake is, how we can think about women's agency in highly gendered subaltern postcolonial contexts, without reading agency only as resistance (Abu-Lughod, 1990) or as acts of agency as displays of free action? I propose the concept of 'ephemeral agency'– a term created by Banaji (2017a, p. 196) in her analysis of the ways in which children from different social classes in India use technologies, both communicative and otherwise, to respond to the attributes of their political and social class realities – to show that agency is not a stable attribute of human beings. Rather, it can be fleeting and intermittent, collective or individual, and expressed through a range of actions depending on specific contexts and factors. Banaji's theorisation of agency in children's lives highlights that ephemeral agency becomes visible only through careful observation over extended periods when considered from multiple perspectives and is overlooked when agency is conceived of as a fixed attribute of individuals, in the way that normative conceptions often do (2017a, p. 196). Banaji's study shows how ephemeral agency materialises in the ways that children deal with and navigate the structures around them, for example in the tensions between children and authority (such as parents, employers and teachers). Because, agency when considered from this perspective is both about temporality and sociality, 'in practice, it materialises in situations of relationality and social reproduction, thus, is expressed through a range of actions on a spectrum of conformity and resistance' (2017a, p. 194). Some agentic actions or choices carried out at the behest of those in power can be oppressive against other members of society. This type of agency might be considered 'contaminated' because, even though an agentic and autonomous choice was made, it is contaminated by being a manifestation of hegemonic power i.e., the will of the powerful who gave the instruction (Banaji, 2017a, p. 194). This type of agency is in contrast with its normative conceptions which imagine it as an expression of absolute free will, will free of all external influence.

Inspired by Merleau-Ponty's (1968) work on consciousness, perception and embodiment, Banaji (2017a, p. 196) uses the term 'embodied agency' as a type of agency which highlights the interconnectedness between 'thinking and doing, mind and body, individual and society', and manifests through actions that give an insight into one's feelings and perceptions about the world around them, thus concluding that embodied agency can also be ephemeral or sustained, resistant, contaminated or conformist. Looking towards chapters 5, 6 and 7, Banaji's conceptualisation of agency as potentially ephemeral acknowledges the subtle nuanced negotiations that go on in the everyday lives of northern Nigerian victim-survivors navigating violent displacement while dealing with the traumas and grief of exposure to violent conflict. This view of agency allows us to understand how they make *choices* and express *will* in ways that are simultaneously agentic yet constrained.

2.5. Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the theoretical traditions, conceptual lenses and debates that this study employs to understand the complexities of women's agency, narratives and histories in northern Nigeria. Grounded in a postcolonial conceptual lens, the theoretical framework presented, presented and engaged with theories of media practice, media representation, Global South and transnational feminism and audience and gendered agency; formulating a framework to investigate the empirical data in chapters 5-7. At the end of section 2.1.2, I highlighted that my interest lies in what can be said about the ways in which northern Nigerian women – as members of audiences who encounter representations of themselves and their experiences in the media coverage of Boko Haram – integrate or reject, negotiate or sidestep, the positions and narratives designated for them. I question if this is simply a facet of their agency as audiences or a deeper expression of their gendered agency as northern Nigerian women? This theoretical scaffold provides the tools required to answer this question.

On one hand, postcolonial concepts such as 'orientalism', 'othering', 'subaltern', 'essentialism' and 'stereotypes' provide the tools to analyse the construction and representations of northern Nigerian women, both by the media and by Boko Haram. On the other hand, media practice theory, which essentially allows us to question what people do with media, from a place of cultural and contextual specificity offers us a framework to understand the media habits and practices of victim-survivors and their relationship with media technologies, which in turn allows us to investigate the disparities or convergence between represented and felt identities. Discourses and narratives about northern Nigerian women as restricted vulnerable victims lacking agency, are often from a western feminist perspective. This thesis employs Global South feminist theory, which emphasises local and contextualised nuance, complemented by theories of transnational feminism which is necessary to account for the fact that media coverage is also being looked at within a global media sphere steeped in unequal power relations and inequalities. Both these approaches focus on intersectionality while resisting essentialist views of

feminism thus providing a unique framework for analysing the relationship between mass media and women's subjectivity in northern Nigeria and to understand the complexity of northern Nigerian women as agentic beings.

Given the normative underlying assumptions (free will, free action) associated with agency and the ideals/subjectivities that are privileged as a result, it becomes important to question how these assumptions hinder the exploration of gendered agency in postcolonial societies such as northern Nigeria. How can we then reconstitute our understanding of agency and theoretically shift instead, to an analysis of critical reflections, motivations, desires and aspects of our ethical activities, rather than just overt actions – a perspective that neither relies upon the ability to perform free acts as a proof of agency nor insists upon open resistance to the oppressor as a sign of truly agentic action?. I posit that an ephemeral understanding of agency – which conceives of agency as intermittent and exists as a potential, rather than an essence – is necessary to achieve this (Banaji, 2017a, p. 196). The preceding discussion has already established that standard accounts of agency, which are dominant in Global North feminist approaches are based on universalist and ahistorical (white, colonial, and masculinist) liberal ideas. Thus, as established in section 2.4.4, when applied to postcolonial societies, this narrow view of agency ends up being conceptualised in two entire opposing and mutually exclusive ways; either as resistance or interpreted through the universalised emancipatory politics paradigms i.e., given the chance and without any negative freedoms, everyone will automatically connect with their true liberal autonomous self, in the same way (Madhok 2013, p. 105). However, as the discussion above has also shown, this way of thinking only results in a failure to recognise the complex meanings of certain actions, and as such, may end up denying that agency exists, because this narrow definition does not allow for the possibility of other forms of agency. Consequently, thinking of agency in a gendered postcolonial context, especially in conditions of subordination requires and will entail contextual (social, historical, cultural) specificity, and will be based on a nuanced conceptualisation of agency that is not predicated on resistance or free action – a conceptualisation of agency as *ephemeral*. Media practices theories provide the tools to understand what northern Nigerian women experiencing violent displacement *do* with the media, and if this indicates a facet of their agency as audiences or even a deeper expression of gendered agency or both. The next chapter discusses the methodological implications of this theoretical framework.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1. Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the theoretical traditions, conceptual lenses, and significant debates that this thesis employs to interrogate the complexities of women's agency, narratives, and histories of crisis in northern Nigeria. These traditions and frameworks also have methodological implications which will be the focus of this chapter. As such, this chapter outlines the specific steps taken while conducting this study, as well as the research questions that this thesis is concerned with. Beginning by outlining the research questions addressed in the empirical chapters (5-7), I discuss the practical and theoretical justifications for studying women's lives during the Boko Haram insurgency in more detail; hence, I provide the context and landscape within which my fieldwork and data gathering took place. I do this to acquaint readers with the intricacies and complexities of conducting fieldwork in protracted conflict situations during the global pandemic. This chapter also details my approach to designing and operationalising the research, ethical considerations, and reflexivity, as well as the general process of gathering data between January and December 2021, where I conducted a total of seventy-nine interviews (sixty IDP women, five IDP men and fourteen experts). The first section opens with the research questions, followed by the method section which discusses my data collection and data analysis methods in detail. The latter part of the chapter discusses the fieldwork itself and includes discussions of the practicalities of carrying out fieldwork in a conflict zone during a global pandemic, and some of the epistemological considerations that shaped interactions on the field. The chapter ends with a discussion of the ethical considerations of this study to highlight the steps taken to ensure the well-being of all interviewees and participants involved in this study.

3.2. Research Questions

In the previous chapter, and using a postcolonial lens, I outlined my theoretical and conceptual frameworks which meld media practice theory, representation and racism, Global South and African feminism, and nuances of agency that have been suppressed by European liberal philosophical theorising. Based on this, through alternative theorisations of agency which centre the experiences and articulations of northern Nigerian women who have become victim-survivors of the insurgency but are always so much more than this, my work provides a culturally and historically grounded account of displaced women's struggles, negotiations, and mediated encounters. I theorise how northern Nigerian women engage with media, gender, loss, violence and displacement. By decentring existing media representations except in so far as I contrast their simplistic and essentialist lens to the lived complexity, I systematically investigate how northern Nigerian women's lived experiences of conflict, trauma, and

victimisation, as well as of overcoming, becoming, and survival, contrast with the ways they are constructed and imagined in much scholarly and media coverage of the Boko Haram insurgency. Building on the two aforementioned areas of interest, I demonstrate how the reflections of northern Nigerian women on trauma and the socially transformative impact of conflict complicate and extend contemporary academic conceptualisations of gender, African feminism, and agency.

Three research questions emerge, which are answered by my empirical analysis in chapters 5-7.

Research question 1: In what ways are the media logics in international and Nigerian coverage of the Boko Haram insurgency received and contested by northern Nigerians displaced by the insurgency?

Research question 2: In what ways do northern Nigerian women's own understandings and lived experiences of trauma and victimisation coincide with or diverge from how they are imagined and represented in the scholarly and media coverage of Boko Haram?

Research question 3: How do the reflections of northern Nigerian women on the socially transformative impact of conflict and their own role therein complicate and/or extend scholarly conceptualisations of 'agency'?

3.3. Method

This section discusses in detail the methods used to collect and analyse data. Starting by outlining the processes through which data collection took place in more detail i.e., interviewing, and ethnographic methods, I then discuss my approach to organising and analysing my data which involved a combination of thematic analysis and discourse analysis. Thematic analysis was useful as the first step of data analysis because it was also an efficient means of organising both my fieldnotes and interview transcripts as they related to my research questions. My methodology is informed by and grounded in African feminist epistemologies and methods (Tamale 2020; Mohammed 2022) and feminist ethnography frameworks (Visweswaran 1994). Just as in other fields, western epistemology has come to shape the process of knowledge production as well as the knowledge produced. Mohammed (2021) argues that decolonizing knowledge is an attempt to undo the harm of colonisation in the academy, as such also extends to the process of knowledge production. In *Decolonizing Methodologies,* Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2021) breaks down the violence done by research and data collection in Indigenous communities, and emphasises the urgency of dismantling the dominant knowledge production methods of the West and advocating for methodologies rooted in the Indigenous knowledge systems. This is further discussed in section 3.4.

Mohammed (2022) examined decolonisation within the context of data gathering and knowledge production in Ghana, presenting indigenous philosophies (such as *Bilchiinshi*) and methodologies to guide African researchers in the pursuit of decolonising knowledge production and centering the voices and experiences of their interlocutors.

Despite having a detailed and flexible fieldwork plan, I was nevertheless confronted on multiple occasions by the precarious nature of conducting fieldwork. Initially, I intended semi-structured interviews to be my only method of data collection. I quickly learned that I had to spend more time than I initially planned to build relationships and gain the trust of the communities before interviewing. Days and even weeks saw me sitting with communities in courtyards of IDP camps, playing with or looking after children alongside the other women, watching them cook, and prepare their scanty meals. Ultimately, I decided that participant ethnographic methods were more fruitful as it was only during my seemingly normal interactions with my interviewees that they could be open, whereas usual interview settings following the detached question and answer format made them tense and anxious to the point where they controlled all their answers or shrugged off their own pain. This issue is discussed in more detail in Section 3.3.2.

3.3.1. Data collection

I used a combination of qualitative semi-structured in-depth interviews and participant ethnographic methods in Nigeria. Boesten and Henry (2018, p. 570) point out that qualitative research is especially important and beneficial because it centres and emphasises perspectives from the source, in this instance, victim-survivors who have encountered multiple types of violence in their daily lives. Interviews were collected with sixty displaced women and five men across IDP camps – both formal government camps and informal camps and settlements – and host communities. I did this across three states, FCT (Federal Capital Territory) Abuja, Borno, and Adamawa, and interviewed fourteen 'experts' ranging from government officials and policymakers, journalists and communication experts, camp managers and coordinators, and development and humanitarian experts who have all been working in proximity to the insurgency as well as its victim-survivors. Although I intended to start my fieldwork in January of 2021, I could not start until May 2021 because COVID numbers were high throughout the country and vaccines were not yet available. There was also a cholera outbreak in some camps. I lived, interacted and collected data between May and January 2022 across three states: the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) of Abuja, Borno, and Adamawa states across the following sites:

1. Wassa informal IDP camp, FCT Abuja (16 interviews)
2. Durumi Area 1 informal IDP camp, FCT Abuja (26 interviews)
3. Gudu informal IDP settlement, FCT Abuja (6 interviews)

4. Malkohi formal camp, Yola, Adamawa state (4 interviews)

5. Bakassi formal IDP camp, Maiduguri, Borno state (4 interviews and 1 focus group)

6. Host communities across Maiduguri, Borno state (8 interviews)

7. Expert interviews, FCT, Abuja (8 interviews)

8. Expert interviews, Maiduguri, Borno state (2 interviews)

9. Expert interviews, Yola, Adamawa state (4 interviews)

In all three states, expert interviews were conducted with key parties in those locations. Borno State is the epicentre of the insurgency, with neighbouring Adamawa State not far behind it. These are the locations where insurgency had the most impact. Apart from the fact that there is a large population of IDPs who live in informal camps and settlements across the FCT, I selected FCT as a location is because Abuja is my home city, I was born and bred there, and my social network enabled me to access it with a degree of insider knowledge.

The first few months of fieldwork I conducted were in Abuja. Because of my familiarity with the city, it made sense for me to start my fieldwork there and use it as a testing ground because I knew I would have limited time and resources in Maiduguri and Yola. Going into the field, my primary method of data collection was 'active' semi-structured interviews (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003). I started with the IDP settlement in Wassa, which is 35-40 minutes outside the main city of Abuja. My family connected me to a government official who was the lead architect for a government project which had to do with finding alternative solutions to rehousing the IDPs who had settled in Wassa, as the original owners wanted their land back. So, I would tag along with the project team, who were familiar with the IDPs there. This is how I was introduced to the IDPs in Wassa. I could not go alone because it was an isolated area with high security risks.

After around a month of going to Wassa three times a week with the project team, I was connected by the camp manager in Wassa to the women's leader in the Durumi Area 1 camp. This camp was inside the city and much more convenient for me to visit alone. Therefore, I conducted the majority of my interviews here. I also got to know the community in Durumi because I spent the most time hanging out with them. The residents frequently invited me to their social functions (usually weddings and naming ceremonies) and I could easily drop in. The last interview location in Abuja was Gudu Camp, which was also an informal settlement. I was introduced to the camp leader in Gudu by an expert interviewee who had worked with the community there. Despite already having conducted enough interviews for Abuja between Wassa and Durumi, I chose to conduct some interviews in Gudu because an overwhelming majority of the residents in Wassa and Durumi were from Gwoza local government in Borno state, hence, to reflect the diversity of Borno state, I wanted to talk to other people from other local governments. Between the three locations, the Durumi camps were much more enclosed, and there

was more of a feeling of community, compared to the other two locations where residents were more dispersed. Thus, I spent more than six months in the field and on days when I was not in IDP camps, I conducted expert interviews.

Semi-structured interviewing

It is now somewhat trite to assert that through interviews, researchers seek to understand the world from the subject's point of view. Yet, in my reading I have encountered multiple interview-based studies which not only *do not do this*, but even do a kind of violence to the subjectivities of interviewees via their interpretations and choices of framing. I initially chose semi-structured interviewing since it provided a combination of structure, consistency, and flexibility, and I used this as one of my main methods. I was able to explore specific themes as informed by my topic guide, while also allowing room for other themes to emerge. Alvesson (2003, pp. 15–17), highlights three main theoretical perspectives on interviewing as a method: neo-positivism, romanticism, and localism. Neo-positivism and romanticism view interview respondents as 'epistemologically passive and as mere vessels of answers' (Qu & Dumay, 2011, p. 240). On the other hand, localism views the interviewing process itself as a social encounter where the interview is 'not merely a neutral conduit or source of bias but rather the productive site of reportable knowledge itself' (Gubrium & Holstein, 1995, p. 3). Rather, the interview is also a site and a process of knowledge production within a specific setting and context. Thus, the presence of the interviewer and the interaction between both parties also contribute to the construction of meaning. This approach views the interview process as an opportunity to explore the research topic from the response point of view and 'a site to be examined for the construction of a situated account' (Qu & Dumay, 2011, p. 241). The analytical impact is that the interview process itself is treated as part of the data to be analysed. Following this line of thinking, my Nigerian Muslim identity and how I revealed or concealed aspects of myself played a vital role in my interaction with my interviewees as well as in my data analysis, and this is expanded upon in the discussion on reflexivity in Section 3.5.3.

I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews by applying the idea of 'active interviewing' (Gubrium & Holstein, 1995, 2003), as used by Banaji (2006). This is explained in more detail below. Qu and Dumay (2011) argue that semi-structured interviews are more reflective of the localist perspective, while neopositivist and romanticist views correspond more to structured and unstructured interviews, respectively. I developed a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix 2) to ensure that key themes were addressed (Wengraf, 2001). However, as I went through my interviews, based on feedback and my experience in the field, my interview guide continued to evolve in the structure, flow, and order of the questions, but the themes remained the same. By the time I completed my fieldwork, I had three versions of the interview guide (see Appendix 2). I kept on tweaking and improving my own delivery

and interaction, asking questions in ways that were open-ended to encourage and all, w flexibility and possibly diverging from an intended pathway if other more interesting, affectively deep conversations were in progress (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003; Wengraf, 2001) while also ensuring that the interviewees felt respected and in charge in an attempt to be emotionally respectful. Here I follow my sense that sensitive interviews, especially because of the emotional and traumatic nature of the subject matter of this study, are intense emotional experiences in and of themselves; thus, it is the responsibility of the researcher to manage this responsibly and ethically (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007).

As mentioned above, I conducted semi-structured interviews, due to this method's flexibility and suitability for my topic. However, I considered other options such as narrative interviews, commonly in the form of respondents narrating their life experiences to the researcher. The researcher analyses these stories as related to the research topic of interest to understand how discourse is constructed through storytelling, to understand subjects through their experiences, and how they narrate them (Allen, 2017). The main advantage of semi-structured interviews over narrative interviews is the fact that the topic of this research is the amalgamation of a myriad of factors such as culture, religion, ethnicity, gender, and social class, against the backdrop of Nigeria's history and socio-political and economic history. Therefore, through a narrative interview, my respondents would have simply gone off on painful tangents without necessarily reflecting on the issues at the core of my research; there was also no guarantee that these lengthy narratives would have moved any of them closer to issues of on-going trauma in comparison to my carefully directed questions. As such, some structures is needed to guide the interviews.

Active interviewing

'Active interviewing', is a semi-structured interviewing technique, employed by Banaji in her 2006 ethnographic study of young Hindi film audiences. It is described as 'a form of interpretive practice involving respondents and interviewers, as they articulate ongoing interpretive structures, resources, and orientations' with what (Garfinkel, 1967) calls 'practical reasoning' (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003, p. 74). This implies that meaning is not constant, but rather, changes. A distinctive feature of this form of interviewing is that it conceives of the interview process as a social encounter and unavoidable collaboration of meaning construction (between the interviewer and the interviewee) (Garfinkel, 1967); hence, this too can be said to fall under the localist approach. According to Holstein and Gubrium:

> Treating the interview as active allows the interviewer to encourage the respondent to shift positions in the interview to explore alternate perspectives and stocks of knowledge. Rather than searching for the best or most authentic answer, the aim is to systematically activate applicable ways of knowing—the possible answers—that respondents can reveal as diverse and

contradictory as they might be. The active interviewer sets the general parameters for responses, constraining as well as provoking answers that are germane to the researcher's interest (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003, p. 77)

What makes an active interview different from a regular interview? (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003, p. 78) argue that some discussion topics, no matter how significant, are rare, even as topics for interviews, due to factors such as sensitivity. They further argue that taking an active approach to interviewing 'may provoke interpretive development that might emerge too rarely to be effectively captured in their natural habitat'. The drawbacks of this method lie in the complex nature of its analysis which requires a rigorous level of discipline to process and analyse (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003, p. 78).

The active method of interviewing was employed in this study because the topic at hand is an amalgamation of a myriad of factors such as culture, religion, ethnicity, gender, and social class, against the backdrop of Nigeria's history, socio-political, and economic history, and what I sought to explore is something so nuanced that it may not necessarily be captured even when overtly speaking about these things. Banaji (Banaji, 2017a, p. 196), whose conceptualisation of 'ephemeral agency' I also employ throughout this study – insists that 'this type of agency is observable only if one is looking over extended periods, from multiple perspectives'. This view forms the foundation of my data collection method in the field. For me, active interviewing meant spending a lot of time with interviewees over a long period, embedding myself in their lives, hanging out with them in their homes, helping them with chores, going to the market with them, and so on. Although this method of interviewing is deeply rewarding, some of its limitations include its laboriousness and the strain it constantly puts on the interviewer to engage at every moment; it requires a certain level of nuance and forethought; and many factors during the design, process, analysis, and interpretation processes may affect outcomes (Arksey & Knight, 1999).

Ethnographic methods

In addition to collecting data through semi-structured interviews, I also conducted participant observation (Banaji et al., 2018). Although my aim was not to conduct a full ethnography, the participant observation aspect of my ethnographic research involved spending hours and even days with my participants, immersing myself in their social lives, and getting to know them outside of a 'structured' one-on-one interview format. At the end of each day in the field, I would note down my reflections and observations in a field notebook, which always gave me a better understanding of my interviewees and how they navigate the different elements of their lives.

While I was experienced in trauma-informed interviews and discussions and had anticipated and prepared, given that the topic is extremely sensitive for women whose lives had been upended by conflict, on the first day of fieldwork, I learned that there was still room for much improvement in that aspect. For example, although many women approached me by asking to be interviewed, even as I read the informed consent statement and obtained their consent, some of them flinched physically and recoiled at any subsequent mention of Boko Haram to the point where I was disgusted with myself and reluctant to bring up the main topic of my thesis for fear of impeding their recovery from trauma or causing re-traumatisation (Section 3.4.2 expands on this in more detail). The excerpt below from my field notes captures this:

> It is my first day in Wassa; I am not sure what to expect; I am both nervous and excited. The camp chairman takes me to meet the women. 26-year-old Aissa's home is the first stop, and she is sitting outside with her daughter. As we sit down to make small talk, a large group of women begin to gather. Aissa is initially shy, and she thinks that my recorder is a camera, so I assured her that it was just a voice recorder. We talk about everyday media use and the women all start to chip in. Gradually, the conversation naturally moves to Boko Haram as the women explain how difficult it is to keep in touch with relatives back home. At the mention of Boko Haram, Aissa visibly starts to flinch, she does not want to continue the conversation, she says that she is scared, and the conversation is making the hair on her body stand on end. I end the interview with Aissa.

From this experience, I learned that I could not bring up Boko Haram or even directly ask sensitive questions. I had to allow them to be the ones to bring up these topics and naturally open up, then ask follow-up questions that I was interested in. So, I had to take a different approach than I had initially intended, a more ethnographic one. I decided to spend more time with my interviewees so that they would get comfortable with my presence, trust me, and be open to me. I decided to invest more time in relationship building; this included going to the camp every day and spending time with the community, doing chores with them, and just getting to know them as they went on their daily activities. Eventually, this strategy paid off significantly. I was invited to community events, such as weddings and naming ceremonies, and women who had seen me frequently around the camp would invite me into their homes, and interviewees would open up to me without me asking and continue speaking even after I reminded them that I would use what they told me in my research. However, as Yacob-Haliso (2019, p. 169) highlights based on her own experience in the field, the identities of the researchers matter in conflict research, there are many ways that my identity as a young woman from the north-east (same as my interviewees) played a role in how easily I was embraced by the communities I interviewed, section 3.4.3 expands on this.

This ethnographic approach provides two major contributions to the research questions. First, these methods supplement interview accounts and are useful in helping understand the lived experiences and reflections of northern Nigerians displaced by the Boko Haram insurgency. These first-hand observations of their daily lives can then be contrasted with representations or narratives of their experiences to determine how they coincide with or diverge from how they are imagined and represented in Boko Haram's scholarly and media coverage. Second, observing interviewees in their homes and daily lives provided me with a deeper understanding of the context in which they operated and were speaking about, the often-erased backdrop to the media stories from journalists who parachute in and out of conflict zones, as well as a contextualised interpretation and analysis of interview accounts.

Sampling: selection of interviewees

The sample population plays an important theoretical role both in the analysis and interpretation process; thus, it is essential to specify what a sample consists of, as this defines exactly who and what the study in question is about (Robinson, 2014, p. 28). My approach to sampling for this study was theoretical (Warren, 2001) and purposive (Robinson, 2014, p. 32). My rationale for employing this purposeful strategy was to give a sense of the actual diversity, even within the clearly defined group of northern Nigerian women. While I was interested in speaking to those who had been displaced as a result of the insurgency, I also wanted my sample to reflect the diversity of the north-east in terms of religion, age, ethnic groups, location (formal camps, informal camps, or host communities), marital status, and so on, a diversity that is usually erased in binary discussions of the 'Muslim north' and the 'Christian south', thereby leaving out northern Christians who make up a large population of the north-east. These factors provide a unique perspective on the phenomena in question (Mason, 2002; Trost, 1986).

I deployed a purposive sampling approach according to Robinson's (2014, p. 26) four-point approach which includes the following steps: defining a sample universe by setting inclusion and exclusion criteria, deciding on a sample size based on what is ideal and practical, devising a purposive sampling strategy to specify the categories of people who will be included in the sample, and sourcing the sample from the targeted population and categories defined. Although this was the general approach that I employed, the specifics differed depending on the particular circumstances in the specific location. For example, in Wassa Camp, which was my first fieldwork location, the camp manager took me to Aissa's home and introduced me to a group of women who lived there. As I sat there talking to the residents, other women from all around the camp would come and sit around, waiting for their turn to be interviewed. Many of the interviewees in Wassa were from this crowd. However, I specifically requested that I interview the women's leaders, the district head, and two unmarried women, because

most of the women who came to me were married and I was interested in the different positionalities and power relations.

I was introduced to the women's leader in the Durumi camp by the chairman of the Wassa camp. In Durumi, the women's leader helped me recruit interviewees as every formality had to go through her. I provided her with a list of the demographics I was looking for and the number I wanted, and she helped me recruit accordingly. However, Durumi was the location where I spent the most time due to the proximity and convenience of visiting the camp, so I got to know and interview many other women who were not recruited by the women's leader. The architecture of the camp was also more clustered, so women around the camp were familiar with me due to my frequent presence, so it was a friendlier environment to find interviewees. For example, one of my most interesting conversations occurred with a woman, Fandi 27, who is an IDP but does not reside in the Durumi camp. Instead, she lives in a host community in Lugbe but often comes to Durumi to visit relatives. Fandi was curious about me and approached me to ask what kind of work I was doing; when I explained it to her, she expressed strong interest in being interviewed as well. In Gudu, the camp leader, an elderly man, helped me recruit interviewees based on the demographics I was looking for. In this case, it was women from local government areas other than the Gwoza. Gudu camp was not a cluster, the residents were dispersed around the neighbourhood and unless you resided around there, it would have been impossible to recruit on your own. In addition, an intermediary was necessary because intermediaries, especially those from the community, helped build trust.

In Maiduguri, a local tour guide, Gambo, who I was introduced to through one of my expert interviewees who had worked on projects with him, helped me recruit interviewees. Gambo is from Maiduguri, born and bred there, and is also actively involved in local community humanitarian and development efforts at the grassroots level. Gambo often works with international development and humanitarian organisations, acting as a bridge between them and the local community. Given that I was conducting interviews in host communities across the city and a formal government camp (Bakassi camp), I needed a local who knew about IDPs living in host communities and had connections to easily access the Bakassi camp.

In Yola, my home state and where my family is originally from, I relied mainly on my own networks. I interviewed the Executive Secretary of the State Emergency Management Authority (SEMA), which is the organisation responsible for the management and day-to-day running of the camps. The Executive Secretary put me in contact with the camp coordinator at the Malkohi camp, who then took me to the camp and put me in touch with the camp manager who helped me recruit my interviewees. However, because that was my last interview location, I only interviewed three people in Malkohi, in addition to

the four expert interviews in Yola, because I had already begun to find recurring themes which signalled data/interview saturation (Guest et al., 2006).

3.3.2. Data Analysis

Upon my return from the field, I had over 76 interviews, most of which were over an hour long, notebooks full of field notes, and almost one thousand photographs and videos, all of which were permitted through either informed consent with my interviewees, or were of neighbourhoods rather than people. To prepare for data analysis, I simultaneously translated (into English) and transcribed each interview verbatim. Although this was tedious and time-consuming, it was rewarding because it allowed me to familiarise myself with the data, and match my fieldnotes to chunks of the interview transcript. I used a combination of thematic and discourse analyses to analyse the data.

Thematic Analysis

For the first round of analysis, I conducted thematic analysis (Aronson, 1995). This method was mainly useful for organising my data and highlighting dominant themes, codes, and patterns. Since I became familiar with the data, I simultaneously organised them according to themes, as I was translating and transcribing. Following this, using tropes and codes drawn from my literature review, each theme was further sub-classified under the broader themes generated by my research questions and literature review. Thematic analysis can be used to categorise data and identify commonalities and discrepancies in narratives and discourses (Gibson & Brown, 2009, p. 127); however, it does not provide explanations for similarities or differences (Gibson & Brown, 2009, p. 128). As such, thematic analysis, as opposed to discourse analysis, is a weaker method for analysing lived experiences and meaning production (van Manen 1998 in (Gibson & Brown, 2009)). In my view, thematic analysis alone was not sufficient to answer the research questions of this study in the depth I hoped to achieve.

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis was employed as the main method of analysis in examining the transcripts in this study because of its suitability to answer the question 'why' of reason from lived experience, as such, this method will be used to answer all three research questions. Discourse analysis is the process of interrogating meaning as a part of the social world in which it is constructed (Dunn & Neumann, 2016, p. 45). A major presumption of scholars of discourse is that it does not occur in a vacuum, and knowledge of the world is simply a social construction of discourse articulated under the various dynamics of the interaction between episteme and power. Certain interpretations become naturalised and internalised (but can also be resisted and contested) (Dunn & Neumann, 2016, p. 14). The main

goal of discourse analysis is to unpack how these social dynamics work to construct meanings through the social practices surrounding meaning making. Discourse analysts are interested in what goes on in the process of meaning construction, how social realities and identities are produced, and ultimately, the consequences of the choices involved in this process to reveal how the elements of the social world interact (Dunn & Neumann, 2016, p. 16; Wetherell et al., 2012, p. 14). The employment of 'discourse' in this study will be largely Foucauldian due to the strong focus on the role of the interaction between representation, knowledge, and power in normalising certain discourses and subjugating others. Foucault argued that 'discourse forces us into subject positions when we talk or listen, not only providing modes of thought but the very senses of self from which those modes of thoughts are sayable'(Matheson, 2005, p. 61), to show that discourse produces and constructs the very individual it describes and talks about.

Discourse analysis felt like the right approach for the traumatic and intimate conversations generated with my interviewees, as my main interest lay and continues to lie in understanding the continuity or discontinuity within discourses of women in northern Nigeria, how northern Nigerian women understand and make meanings from their own experiences, in contrast to how they are being represented and theorised about through the coverage of the Boko Haram crisis. Here I drew on Banaji (2006), where discourse analysis was used to analyse young audience's narratives and construction of selves and 'social worlds' that emerge from subjective accounts of media and cultural experiences. The next section discussed the fieldwork itself (Miller & Glassner, 1997).

3.4. The Fieldwork

This section details my experience conducting fieldwork in a risky context, highlighting the key reflections, considerations, nuances, and complexities of conducting sensitive interviews and interacting with trauma victims whom I wished to engage as co-constructors of the research and the narratives about them, against the backdrop of a protracted conflict and the COVID-19 pandemic. I explain how I managed and navigated that process amidst anxiety, sickness and grief, the complexities and nuances of consent, the role played by my identity, and the ethical considerations involved in my interactions with fellow Nigerian women displaced by the conflict. In many ways while the method is not unique, the time and positionality I inhabited to engage with and respect the voices of these northern Nigerian communities and the women in particular is a unique contribution of this study.

Before starting my PhD, I worked with the Presidential Committee on North-east Initiatives (PCNI) (between 2016 – 2018), a government agency established by the Buhari administration to serve as the apex coordination body of all humanitarian and development efforts in the north-east, for two years. In my first year at PCNI, I worked there under the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme. In the

second year, I worked as a researcher on the economic development team. This role involved frequent fieldwork trips to Maiduguri. As such, I was already familiar with Maiduguri and had a good idea of what fieldwork in that conflict zone would entail. I am also from the north-east, Adamawa State (Yola), to be more specific through both my parents. As such, I capitalised on my family and professional networks to gain access, as explained in the sampling section. I found this helpful because I would usually be introduced to interviewees by someone they already knew and trusted, which made it easier for people to be receptive to me. Although I still had to put in the work to gain their trust so that they would open up to me naturally, these introductions gave me an advantage and made this process shorter. However, often, the similarities (gender, ethnic group, religion, state of origin, language) and differences (class, education, marital status, language) between my interviewees and I were glaring and manifested in comments made during interviews which impacted interview responses. This is explored further in section 3.4.3.

In chapter 2 (section 2.1), I highlighted that scholars such as Agbiboa (2022, p. 1011) have described north-eastern Nigeria as a predominantly Muslim region where women are seen, but hardly heard. And in chapter 1, I explain that some of the journalists I interviewed as experts cited the fact that since northern women will only talk to men who are their husbands or relatives for religious reasons, it was difficult to interview them. However, this is clearly also because of the lack of female journalists, leading to a lack of access to victim-survivors of the insurgency and an absence of their complex political perspectives on the conflict and reconstruction. I consider it an untold privilege to have been able to spend such extended swathes of time with my interviewees, and I am grateful that they let me into their lives, giving me a chance to communicate their perspectives on the violence and loss that they continue to experience because of the conflict and their own identities through my doctoral work. The next sections discuss some of the epistemological considerations that shaped fieldwork interactions.

3.4.1. Epistemological considerations: From whose centres are we operating?

The methodological framework that informs this research closely aligns with some Black and Indigenous American feminist methods, as well as South Asian feminist epistemologies which call for feminist research to be grounded in cultural and historical specificity, thus resisting the universalisation of European and North American concepts and ideas and white feminist ideals as the norm in which gender in African societies is compared. These frameworks argue that hegemonic Western feminist frameworks are not sufficient to study or address gender issues in non-Western cultures (Blay, 2008, p. 59). African feminist scholars such as Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie and Ama Ata Aidoo through their works argue that African feminism is an African-centred methodology which provides a suitable investigative framework that addresses issues related to gender in African communities (Blay, 2008, p. 58). In line with this, I take a culturally and historically methodological approach grounded in their

specific locale to study my interviewees' lives and experiences (Carroll, 2005, p. 71). According to Molefi Kete Asante (Asante, 1992), this means that the specific norms, cultures, and histories of the locale are used as the frame of reference. Scholars of African feminism argue for the pluralistic conceptualisation, 'African feminisms', to capture the 'fluidity and dynamism of the different cultural imperatives, historical forces, and localised realities conditioning women's activism/movements in Africa ...' (Nnaemeka, 1988, p. 5). This contextual approach is crucial especially since few African scholars ground their work in indigenous African epistemologies, due to the dominance of the West in knowledge production (Mohammed, 2021, p. 3).

This contextual approach to the study of gender in Africa is 'based on an understanding of African sociocultural realities, feminist traditions and philosophies, and ... aims to develop gender-focused frameworks of analysis that can bring out the multiple and varied social locations of African women while maintaining their specific identities and priorities' (Steady, 2005, p. 314). As such, my interactions with my interviewees were largely shaped by Global South and African feminist research methods and ethics. In section 2.3.4, I highlight that it is crucial that intersectionality is incorporated in studies such as this one, both epistemologically and methodologically. On a more practical level, this was implemented by intentionally asking victim-survivors direct questions around their cultural and religious norms, values, and the different ways that different aspects of their ethnic and religious identities and their class shapes their decisions and choices in their day to day lives. This is detailed in the interview guide in appendix 2. The next sub-sections discuss some of these considerations in more detail.

Language

Ousseina Alidou (2005, p. 89) points out that methodologically, the research subjects or in this case, interviewees and co-constructors have the power to determine not only their location in the interview process but also the linguistic location of the researcher through the language chose to carry out the interview in. Language has always been political, and metaphorically illustrative of power relations and the global hegemony between the Global North or western scholarship and the Global South. My interviewees were fluent in at least to 2-3 languages: Hausa which is widely spoken in northern Nigeria, their local ethnic languages which varied depending on where they were from; and some could speak Pidgin English. All my expert interviews were conducted in English. Out of my non-expert interviews, five were conducted in Fulfulde (these conversations were had in a mix of Hausa and Fulfulde, although Fulfulde was the dominant language of the interviews), ten interviews were conducted in a mix of Hausa and Pidgin English, and the rest of them were conducted in purely Hausa.

Hausa is the most spoken language in northern Nigeria and serves as a common language in the region. However, Hausa is a north-western language, so it is not uncommon to encounter people from the north-east, particularly those living in rural areas who do not speak Hausa. Residents of cities in the North-east are more likely to be conversant in Hausa because of its status as a language of commerce and the city's diverse population. The majority of my interviewees were from rural areas; therefore, for some of them, their proficiency in Hausa was limited. Given that my Hausa language skills were also quite limited, some of my interviewees and I had this in common. My family is entirely of Fulani ethnicity on both sides, and my native language is Fulfulde (also known as Fula or Peul in French). I was brought up in Abuja, where I conversed in Fulfulde with my family at home and in English at school. Therefore, like my interviewees, even though I am from the north, I am not as proficient in Hausa as most northerners are assumed to be. However, Hausa was the only language that most of my interviewees and I had in common (except for a few who could speak Fulfulde and/or Pidgin English). At the start of all my interviews, I gave interviewees the choice to speak whatever language they were most comfortable in. I also pleaded to those who spoke in Hausa to be patient with my own Hausa as I was not as fluent, to which most laughed and reassured me 'we are also not fluent in Hausa, it is not our language, so we are the same, we will both manage'.

In cases of polyglossia, such as this one, Alidou (Alidou, 2005, p. 70) emphasised that methodological questions that arise due to language issues focus on the limits of mediating interviewees' expression of their subjectivities through translation, particularly when translators or interpreters are involved and modify meanings, or when the research question is delicate, as it is in my research. Another issue that arises is whether the meanings that emerge from such interviews are adequately captured and synthesised in the research. To mitigate this, during the Abuja leg of my fieldwork, I had a research assistant who was also a young woman (around my age) from the north-east, who was very fluent in Hausa as well as Fulfulde. Her role was essentially to fill any linguistic gap where I fell short during conversations. I was never completely lost in conversations, but there were some words or proverbs with which I would not be familiar, and my research assistant would then explain the meaning within that context. By the time I finished the Abuja leg of my fieldwork, where I spent the most time, I found that since I was asking similar questions, my Hausa had improved significantly, and I did not need a language facilitator.

The interviewees' choice in determining the language of the interview was also an attempt to balance power relations between myself and my interviewees as much as possible to create or enable an atmosphere where they could be their most authentic selves and express themselves in the language in which they felt most comfortable (Mohammed 2022, p. 20). Rather than insisting that all interviews be conducted in English, the language I am most comfortable speaking and using a local translator or interpreter, this linguistic choice given to interviewees was also a conscious attempt to acknowledge

'subaltern' agency (Banaji, 2017a; Spivak, 1988) and hear the voices they choose to use. Similar to Mohammed (2022, p. 20), one of the challenges of this choice was trying to preserve the essence of what was being said in these local languages, while translating my interviews to English. I sometimes encountered words, concepts, phrases and proverbs that did not exist or have an equivalent in English. In this case, I tried my best to find the closest meaning or I wrote it in the indigenous language, hence the use of some Hausa and Fula phrases in my data chapters. Another strategy I implemented was also to *"write with"* my co-creators of knowledge or interlocutors; this includes sharing direct quotes from our conversation, many of which I used as sub-headings in my data chapters (Mohammed 2022, p. 19). Rather than paraphrasing, this is done to ensure that the victim-survivors "self-represent", in their own words, rather than being "spoken for" in a language inaccessible to them (Mohammed 2022, p. 19).

Language and naming: 'victim-survivor'

I refer to many of my interviewees as 'victim-survivors'. Given the histories of trauma and loss, as well as the strength and efficacy of the ordinary women I interviewed, neither 'victim' nor 'survivor' on its own is, in an absolute sense, accurate to describe my interviewees. The view and understanding of **discourse as social action** rejects the notion that language is simply a passive, 'do-nothing' domain (Edwards, 1997). Instead, this view of discourse sees language as an active, productive, constructive, and constitutive of social life (Wetherell et al., 2012). Saussure (1986:114) in (Dunn & Neumann, 2016) highlights the fact that language is not neutral, writing: "The content of a word is determined in the final analysis not by what it contains but by what exists outside of it". That is, words are only meaningless sounds until humans attach meaning to them. This shows that language is both constructive and constitutive of social life, as it is inextricable from people (who use it to create meaning) and the social world (which is created by language). One can conclude that because many words are used to describe the world, they also form the world as they represent it in specific ways; reality, as we know it, only emerges through human meaning-making (Wetherell et al., 2012, p. 14). Therefore, it is important to explore the connotations of each word used to refer to interviewees.

Studies have shown that perceptions of sexual assault are influenced by many factors, one of which is the label used to refer to the person who was assaulted (Papendick & Bohner, 2017). While the term 'victim' is commonly used, 'survivor' is another popular term. The research confirms that the term 'survivor' has positive connotations, such as strength, bravery, optimism, and activity, both for women who were raped and outside observers. On the other hand, the label 'victim' was associated with negative connotations, such as weakness, passivity, and helplessness, thus concluding that the survivor was generally perceived as more elegant and the victim was more casual (Papendick & Bohner, 2017, p. 16). Padendick and Bohner (2017, p. 18) encourage researchers working on sexual violence to be conscious of the labels applied, as these labels can have a significant impact on women who have

experienced sexual violence, the public's perception of them, and determine the support they receive. In the case of my interviewees, their experiences with violence are complex; in most cases, both labels were applied simultaneously. While all of them are collectively subject to violence and hence are victims and survivors of war violence, others have been raped or might have suffered other gender-based violence; thus, the compound dichotomous label 'victim-survivors'[11]. The next sub-section discusses the problems that arise when researching a conflict that has received a lot of media attention and conducting fieldwork with a population of victim-survivors who feel exploited by researchers and journalists.

3.4.2. Feelings of exploitation: 'over-research' or research fatigue, re-traumatization, strategic essentialism on the field

Writing from an Indigenous context, Tuhiwai Smith (2021) highlights how 'extractivism' – i.e. the extractive and exploitative nature of research – has historically been an inextricable part of data collection methods in indigenous and global south communities. Tuhiwai Smith (2021, p. 1) explains that in indigenous communities, even the mere mention of the word 'research' 'stirs up silence and conjures up bad memories, it raises a smile that is knowing and distrustful' for Indigenous people. This points to the colonial roots of research practices, which leaves researched communities feeling exploited and de-humanised. The effects of extractivism were very evident quite early on in my fieldwork in the responses and reactions of the communities leaders in the camps. The first day, I visited Durumi to meet on of the women's leaders, Aunty Laraba. She told me very early on in our conversation that she must protect the women in the camp; I would have to give them [my interviewees] something small in exchange for their time. Aunty Laraba explained that she did this because, the proximity and easy access to the Durumi camp – which is within the main city of Abuja, as opposed to other camps like Wassa that are in the outskirts – means that a lot of people; such as journalists, researchers, local NGOs and anyone, come to the camp to interview IDPs, take photos and videos of them, take up a lot of their time and give them nothing in return. Completely understandably, residents of the camp felt exploited by these extractive interactions (this is expanded upon in more detail in Chapter 6). Aunty Laraba explained that this has led to resentment and animosity towards those who come to camp for data collection, especially because they usually take up the women's precious time, without giving them anything in return. This phenomenon is referred to as 'research fatigue', which occurs as a result of extractive over-research. Over-research is the result of continuous and repetitive research on particular communities or populations (Boesten & Henry, 2018, p. 571); while extraction is a colonial-capitalist metaphor for those who profit from their work with communities without giving back. Research fatigue is 'most

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[11] It is also important to note that some women might also be or have been perpetrators of violence against other women or against their children. Stories of violence and brutalization can sometimes ignore the violent aftereffects. Hence, my thesis draws attention to the possibility that women are at times victim-survivor-perpetrators.

prevalent in communities that are poor, marginalized, othered; have experienced some form of crisis' (war, natural disaster etc.) and communities that are accessible to outside researchers (Boesten & Henry, 2018, p. 571; Clark, 2008; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2013, p. 496) Thus, there is a correlation between research fatigue, extractivism, over-research, and vulnerable populations (Boesten & Henry, 2018, p. 572).

These terms research fatigue, extractivism, over-research and vulnerable populations are all terms that can be applied to the IDP populations that I interviewed, especially in camps such as Durumi in Abuja and Bakassi in Maiduguri. As I explained, the Durumi camp is located within the city of Abuja and is thus very accessible, especially given that it is an informal settlement; thus, there are no security barriers to entry. As a result, this camp has received considerable attention. In fact, during my time in the field, it was normal to see other journalists and researchers talking to camp residents and asking them to fill out surveys, etc. Most journalists and researchers I met in the field did not speak the local language and often used a translator. My interviewees, especially Durumi, often complained to me that this process was tedious, and that they received or gained nothing in return.

According to Tuhiwai Smith (2021, p. 1), the term 'research' is so powerful that Indigenous people write poetry about it. This is evident in the works of Kurdish scholar and poet, Choman Hardi, who perfectly captures the sentiments described above while reflecting on research which was carried out with women survivors of the Anfal genocide in Iraqi Kurdistan, highlighting that her interviewees felt exploited by those who constantly came to ask them questions, without giving them anything in return (Boesten & Henry, 2018, p. 569):

> I am fed up with documentations of my grief –
> Journalists asked me to sing a lullaby for my
> dead children, to broadcast during commemorations,
> Government officials using my story as propaganda
> during elections, women activists forcing me to talk
> about rape only to prove that women are oppressed,
> researchers claiming to record history
> when all they do is pick my wounds
> Choman Hardi (2015)

In the first part of the poem (excerpt above) titled *The Angry Survivor*, Hardi (2015) makes a powerful statement by boldly calling out the role of interviewers – such as journalists, government officials, women's rights activists, and researchers who interview women (victims-survivors) on their experience with violence. I found that a common strategy employed by victim-survivors in my study to navigate

research fatigue is 'strategic essentialism'. Strategic essentialism is a term used to refer to the 'political tactic in which minority groups, nationalities, or ethnic groups mobilise based on shared gendered, cultural, or political identity to represent themselves' (Spivak, 1988).

For example, during one of my casual days in the field, when I was invited to a naming ceremony, it was a particularly hot day. I was with Hajjo, 33, when I noticed interviewers along with their translators who were assisting some women from the camps to fill out the surveys. I then asked Hajjo how often they were approached for interviews, and what that experience was like. Hajjo, clearly frustrated, went on a rant about the interviewers, explaining that they took so much of their time, gave them nothing in return, and left them sad because they had to talk about their trauma. She then told me, 'What we do now is that we just tell them what they want to hear, because we know that they only want to hear about how we are sad and suffering, how Boko Haram has taken everything from us and killed our families, and how we are struggling, they only want to hear of our suffering so we emphasise that, so that maybe they will help us'.

At least three important points stood out for me in Hajjo's rant. The first is the issue of re-traumatisation from interviews because interviewees often have to recount stories of their trauma in interviews. For example, one of my interviewees, Sholi, 26, who had a particularly tragic experience expresses that she feels relieved that she can share her story with me because, in her own words 'you are my sister'. She also tells me that there are people who come to interview them in the camps and the interviews are so traumatic to the point where they cry and are miserable for days. As Hardi (2015) writes, 'this is my story, not yours. Long after you turn off your recorder I stay indoors and weep'. Thus, while professionals who interview victim-survivors for data gain professionally, victim-survivors are often left re-traumatised (Ybarra, 2014).

Second, over-research and research fatigue can result in the emergence of certain types of subjectivities. Interviewees in areas that have been excessively studied often felt that they were inaccurately portrayed, due to the pressure of having to comply with the researchers' agendas instead of their own needs or actual life experiences, for example, poverty and abuse might be strategically 'exaggerated' for specific purposes (Boesten & Henry, 2018, p. 573). This is in line with Boesten and Henry (2018, p. 570), who argue that research fatigue and (re)traumatisation are research problems that not only affect interviewees but also impact the research findings and the nature of possible interventions (Houge & Lohne, 2017).

Third, Hajjo's rant, and more specifically Sholi, referring to me as her sister, highlights the very important role of my identity and the way I was perceived by my interviewees. Although I was an outsider in the sense that I was not a part of their community, Hajjo and Sholi did not consider me part

of the problem when talking about the people who came to interview them. My identity meant that I was simultaneously an insider and an outsider. Boesten and Henry (2018, p. 574) highlight that the problem goes beyond "over-researching" certain communities, or even research fatigue, rather, the problem has more to do with the 'deeply embedded political geographies of power and inequality between researcher and researched, between those studies and those who temporarily focus their gaze'. African feminist methodologies are constructivist i.e. they see interviews as a constructive between the interviewer and interviewee, thus these concerns about language, agency, power relations, the role of one's identity and positionality are all concerns of African feminist methodologies. African feminist methodologies inform the strategies which I have deployed in this study in an attempt to counteract this kind of extractive relationship with interviewees. The next subsection expands on how my identity and positionality played out in the field.

3.4.3. Positionality, Identity and Reflexivity

Earlier on in the section on ethnographic methods, I briefly highlighted the important role that the intersection of the researcher's identities plays in research, especially in the field while interacting with interviewees. This section addresses how this played out in the context of my fieldwork. Though there is a lot of feminist research on conflict, literature on conflict and post-conflict fieldwork issues has mostly been written from the perspective of outsiders/expatriates conducting research in foreign contexts (Yacob-Haliso, 2019, p. 169), which is a gap that this research aims to address by documenting and analysing the experience of a Nigerian female scholar from the north-east, conducting field research with women in the north-east, within the context of a protracted conflict. In my case, my interactions in the field were mediated by my multiple identities: a young, unmarried, Fulani, privileged, English-speaking northern Nigerian, Muslim woman from an elite and recognisable university in the UK. Conducting research at 'home' afforded me certain privileges, such as access to the field and the ability to recognise hidden connotations due to shared affective, cultural and linguistic backgrounds with my interviewees (Sultana, 2015).

For example, interviewees, depending on how close they were to me in age, would often refer to me as either 'my sister' or 'my daughter'. Interviewees such as Zayna, 35, told me that they were only able to open up to me about the intimate details of their lives and struggles and let me into their homes because she takes me as her sister, given that we are both Muslim women and are from the same area (north-east). My older interviewees would often refer to me as their daughter and behave maternally towards me; for example, they would often give me motherly' advice about things like marriage and life as a woman, and they would often say to me 'This is what I teach my daughters'. The fact that my interviews were carried out in Hausa and Fulfulde, that I had previously carried out fieldwork in the north-east and had visited local governments such as Gwoza and Bama, where an overwhelming number of my

interviewees were from and I am also from the north-east made me more trusted. At the end of my interview with Jessica, 42, she expressed how happy she was when 'people like me, a woman from the north-east like myself' came and talked to them with respect and had a genuine interest in their lives. She expressed appreciation for the work I was doing and told me that we northerners have to help ourselves because we have nowhere else to go as southerners do not like us. Jessica's statement showed that she read me as one of them because of shared regional, cultural and gender identity, despite a difference in religion.

However, social class was also a significant factor in how interviewees perceived me. For example, in talking about the concept of home, Fannah, 33, points out that she wants to go back home, as Abuja is not for people like her. When I ask her what she means, she laughs and tells me that Abuja is for rich people, like me. She goes on to tell me and my research assistant that she is sure that the only reason we are not married is that we are probably waiting and looking for rich men who will provide us with a lifestyle where we sit at the back of the car and are driven around by a driver. Although we said nothing about our marital status, Fannah insists that she could tell us that we are not married because we were not fully covered with long veils, in the way that married women in the north are supposed to be covered. At some point during this conversation, Fannah seemed upset at my research assistant and me. Aunty Laraba, when we went to the market to buy some items for the interviewees introduced me to people as 'her daughter from America', even though I never mentioned coming from abroad, my accent probably gave it away. Yacob-Haliso (2019, p. 179) insists that during fieldwork, the researchers' intersecting identities inevitably become part of the process of 'extracting honest and useful information'. Marie Smyth (2005, p. 12) aptly put it, 'perhaps labels "insider" and "outsider" experience is multiple and layered, rather than singular and one dimensional'.

Drawing upon her own experiences while conducting interviews with women ex-combatants and civilians in Angola and building on the works of several African feminist scholars, Black feminists and women of colour ethnographers such as Abu-Lughod (1990), Bennett (2008), Davis & Craven (2016), McClaurin (2001) and Tamale (2011). Selina Makana (2018) argues that it is important that African feminist researchers "fashion research practices that embody creativity, that foster empathy with partners and that destabilise relations of power (2018, p. 3) as she discusses how crucial the researchers' identity is, during fieldwork. Different markers of our (researchers) identity, such as gender, age, class, ethnicity, language, and religion, shape the way people interact and respond to us (Banaji, 2017a; Mahmood, 2012; Makana, 2018; Mankekar, 1999). Yacob-Haliso (2019, p. 181) suggests that 'the idea of betweenness might be more useful to describe these spaces where identities overlap' in fieldwork for qualitative, feminist or post-conflict research, these intersections can affect the quality of data accessed. Researchers who ignore these dynamics risk overlooking important factors which could harm the research participants or the research itself.

My life and reality as a young northern Nigerian Muslim Fulani woman researcher studying in an elite UK university are to a large extent determined by the fact that I had the privilege of attending private primary and secondary schools in Nigeria; and universities abroad, i.e. the fact that I 'made it' through the British and North American educational systems (Alidou, 2005, p. 52). As such, despite the many similarities, there is a gap between me and my interviewees, which illustrates the differences and inequalities among northern Nigerian women. This divide or gap thus requires negotiation of the power relation between my interviewees – the subjects of my research whose subjectivity I am exploring, and me, in my capacity as a researcher who is 'native-other' or an 'insider-outsider' (Alidou, 2005, p. 94). As such, my experiences conducting fieldwork at 'home' highlight some of the complexities related to the interplay between my identities (privileged native-other) and fieldwork and feminist theorising and praxis, as discussed by Jayati Lal (1999) (Alidou, 2005, p. 94).

Reflexivity

'Reflexivity' is a practice that feminist qualitative researchers have encouraged, this entails paying greater attention to the qualitative process, holding qualitative researchers accountable both when it comes to the ethics of the work they are doing and the way they interact with research participants (De Langis, 2018; England, 1994). According to Davies, 'reflexivity, broadly defined, refers to turning back on oneself, a process of self-reference. In the context of social research, reflexivity refers to how the products of research are affected by personnel and the process of conducting research'. Humans interpret the world through the lens of their own experiences and intersectional identities, which are shaped by myriad factors that differ from one individual to another. Reflexivity is thus an exercise in being aware of how these factors impact research; thus, an ongoing process of self-awareness (H. Callaway, 1992), which 'aids in making visible the practice and construction of knowledge' to produce less distorted, more accurate research (Hertz, 1997).

When Patai (1994, p. 69) questions the tangible impact of this 'new methodological self-absorption' on the quality of the research by asking 'Does all this self-reflexivity produce better research?', Makana provides us with a succinct answer that captures how reflexivity produces better research.

> ...reflexivity does provide us with strategies to deal with the inevitable power relations involved in representing others' experiences and voices. Thus, African feminist ethnographers face the challenge of creating knowledge that emerges from the diverse and complex contexts in which we live and work. African feminist researchers must take questions of identity seriously to create non-hierarchical relationships with our research partners. This awareness may also enable us to

> appreciate the fact that our positions within the research process are not static, but contingent and always shifting (Makana, 2018, p. 3)

For me, there were two approaches to self-reflexivity. The first was in relation to the data collection process during fieldwork, while the second was in relation to the writing process in order to offer a sense of transparency to the reader. Being reflexive during fieldwork involved being conscious of the power relations between me and the interviewees. At the beginning of all interviews, I explained to my interviewees that I am a university student who is conducting research on the lives of women from the north-east who are displaced as a result of Boko Haram, and though I made it clear that I was only a student thus did not have the power to change their immediate realities, I explained that my work could potentially lead to a better understanding of their plight and experiences. My interviewees understood what I was doing as documenting their experiences with conflict and violent displacement. During most interactions, I let my interviewees lead the conversations. Rather than making them constantly feel under the microscope, I also made it known from the get-go that they could also interview me and ask me questions. I tried as much as possible to open up to them, so that it would not feel one-sided. I also ensured that the communities I worked in benefited from my research. For example, I connected my interviewees with individuals and organisations who were assisting vulnerable people with specific needs. Aunty Laraba and I went to the market close to the camp on a motorcycle bike, it was my first time riding one (because I always lived in areas of town where those bikes are banned, and my parents always deemed it unsafe – this indicates something class related). She gave me a list of items (detergent, bathing soap, salt, sugar, sesame seeds, and cooking spices) that would be most useful for the women in the camp, which we purchased in the market, and then made a care package for each interviewee. We also included local snacks sold by some women in the camps to support their small businesses. Employing reflexivity, as explained in this sub-section ensures accountability on the part of the researcher. Being conscious of the different ways that different factors shape the encounter between researcher and interviewee and taking intentional steps to counter the effects of these in the knowledge creation process, ensures a more ethical knowledge creation process which matters as much as the outcome, which the process also determines.

3.4.4. Ethical considerations and the nuances of consent

Researcher Tushita Bagga (Bagga, 2021) asks, 'how does one begin to research one of the most researched places and how does one ensure that your research benefits the community being studied, treating them with dignity, rather than reducing them to subjects for professional gain?'. Interviewers, such as scholars and journalists, benefit professionally from women's accounts of violence, while those very women's lives may continue as they are, or worse yet, with no improvement (Ybarra, 2014). During my fieldwork, I interviewed very vulnerable people: women and communities who have

experienced violence and loss in one form or another are displaced and still living with the trauma. Talking to them about these traumatic experiences is challenging, emotional, and triggering in many ways. My ethical conduct in the field was guided by scholars such as Tuhiwai Smith (2021, p. 9) who emphasise that research should be more 'respectful, ethical, sympathetic and useful' encouraging researchers to build good and strong relationships with the communities they are researching, and facilitate the expression of their voice. So, what did that look like practically in my fieldwork? Given the shared cultural background between me and the communities I was researching, I knew the importance of adhering to social and cultural norms while interacting with community members. For example, I would always start by telling them about myself, where I am from and explain the type of work I am doing, why I am doing it and what I hope the outcome will be. After this, they will then let me know if they are interested in speaking to me or not. I would also follow cultural greeting norms by addressing older significantly older women as 'Aunty' or 'Maman', and squat while greeting them. Similar strategies were also used by Mohammed (2022) in her fieldwork in Ghana. This is done to show respect to the communities and also as an attempt to address any power imbalance between the researcher and the researched.

Because the inherent nature of social science research threatens to privacy as the focus is on personal information derived from respondents (Stempel et al., 2003, p. 303), a starting point to mitigate was to obtain ethics clearance from the Research Ethics Committee at The London School of Economics (LSE), to ensure that fieldwork would be conducted in line with the ethical standards of the LSE. I envisaged two main categories of concern: the effects of data collection and the possible effects of the disclosure of data, especially when dealing with sensitive topics (Stempel et al., 2003, p. 311). To mitigate this, I ensured that a clear explanation of the project was provided to and informed verbal consent was obtained from all participants. Since, informed consent involves the capacity to make rational decisions, information about the project and what to expect during the interview process, and the right to withdraw consent at any point in time was made explicit (Robinson, 2014). In order to safeguard the identities of victim-survivors, aliases or pseudonyms have been used throughout this study and any specific description that will make any individual recognisable or easy to trace has also been carefully and intentionally omitted[12].

However, there were also some complex nuances when it came to ongoing consent. Despite their consent, there were some intense moments in which interviewees changed their minds halfway through the interviews. Sometimes, they would return on their own and ask to continue the interview. This was

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[12] One of the women's leaders in the Durumi camp, Aunty Laraba (pseudonym) who is mentioned frequently in this thesis is a well-known public figure who is very vocal about the struggles of IDPs in the FCT. She has appeared in various news interviews and is known as the face of IDPs in the FCT. Although I have removed any specific descriptions that will make her recognizable, those who are in tune with the IDP community in Abuja may recognize who Aunty Laraba is. Although I have concealed her identity as much as possible, in this thesis, Aunty Laraba has given me the permission to use her real name, and her photo in my work, in her words "everything I am telling you, is the truth and I will say it anywhere, I am not afraid, people need to hear these things".

demonstrated in a conversation with Aminata, 40. I obtained verbal consent from Aminata, and she was initially very talkative and bubbly. However, about 30 minutes into the conversation, when the conversation shifted to Aminata's journey of escaping from her village when Boko Haram attacked, she started crying and did not want to continue the interview. Despite her tears and my insistence that we could stop entirely, discount her earlier testimony, and speak of everyday matters, Aminata still wanted to have a conversation with me and my research assistant but did not want to talk about Boko Haram or her previous life. Therefore, we changed the topic and Aminata became bubbly again. Later in the day, Aminata approached me on her own and started talking about her experience with Boko Haram and her life before displacement, even though I reiterated that she did not have to talk about it since it made her sad, she insisted, stating that 'no, you are my sister, if I don't tell you these things, who will I tell?'. My interview with Aminata reflected on the nuanced nature of consent and what was involved in navigating trauma in the field.

3.5. Conclusion

This chapter has so far provided a detailed account of the methodological steps of this study. By sketching out the context and landscape within which my data collection took place, this chapter offers a nuanced understanding and a glimpse of what it entails to conduct fieldwork in complex situations of conflict and a global pandemic. In addition, a unique contribution of this study is the first-hand account of conducting fieldwork in northern Nigeria, with northern Nigerian women, by a northern Nigerian academic and the unique ways in which one's identity plays a role in research. A point that I have emphasised throughout his study is that although there is a lot of coverage and scholarly work on the Boko Haram insurgency, most are from a historical, economic, political, or security perspective. This research fills a unique gap by studying the lives of women and their agency within the context of insurgency and grounding their voices and perspectives within their cultural and historical locale. This chapter also provides a solid foundation for empirical chapters (5-7) which answer the research questions outlined in Section 3.2. While the second empirical chapter considers the larger context of the coverage of the insurgency, it is important to keep in mind that this is not a comparative study, thus, a systematic comparative approach will not be carried out. While previous chapter outlined the theoretical frameworks that this thesis employs, this chapter has discussed the methodological implication of these frameworks, specifically African feminist methodologies which provided the epistemological guidelines which shaped not only my fieldwork interactions with interviewees, but also my research design, interview guide and data analysis. African feminist methodologies view of interviewees as co-constructors sets the stage for navigating unequal power relations, shifting positionalities, in addition to holding me accountable by insisting on self-reflexivity in both data collection and writing. In the previous chapters, I argued and concluded that historical specificity is important in order to fully make sense of the present. A historical approach is also crucial to theoretical

approaches such as Global South, African and transnational feminism, which this study employs. Following this, the next chapter entails a detailed discussion of the historical background of the topic of this study, which will provide the context necessary for understanding the empirical chapters which answer the research questions.

Chapter 4: Historicising northern Nigeria: religious reform, doctrinal fragmentation and women's positioning in northern Nigerian society

4.1. Introduction

This history chapter outlines both the historical realities and discourses about northern Nigeria, northern Nigerian women, and their positions within northern Nigerian societies, to provide the building blocks that can be used as tools to verify contemporary discourses on northern Nigeria. The theoretical framework that this thesis employs emphasises on the importance of historical contexts, as such, this chapter presents and summarises the historical context relevant to the content of this research, focusing on two main aspects. The first being the complexity of the northern Nigerian religious and political landscape (religion, ethnicity, conflict) and the second being the historical positioning of women in Northern Nigerian society and the factors that have influenced this over time. Scholars and historians on northern Nigeria such as Murray Last, Muhammad Sani Umar and Abdul Raufu Mustapha emphasise the importance of locating the Boko Haram insurgency in the history of northern Nigeria. The discussion in this chapter highlights the importance of Nigeria's history in the understanding of Boko Haram but also signals the importance of a historicised narrative for understanding those whom its media spectacle makes visible and invisible. Although a basic understanding of Boko Haram and the historical and socio-political factors that birthed it is important for this thesis, unpacking the root causes of the insurgency are not the primary focus here. Rather, my primary interest lies in the ways in which northern Nigerian women's understanding, negotiations and expression of their agency can help us to further understand the concept of 'agency'.

Thus, the first section of this chapter looks at a brief history of the insurgency within the broader context of the region's history and politics, specifically the political role of Islam and the history of doctrinal difference in northern Nigeria. A historical discussion of the political, social, and economic factors which gave birth to the insurgency gives an insight into Nigeria's historical and political imaginaries. This also entails looking at current research on Boko Haram to determine how it informs this project and how this project in turn, advances this existing research. Since a major part of reform movements entails discourses about women, the second part that this chapter is concerned with is the historical positioning of women in northern Nigerian societies and the factors that determine this. By focusing on the impact that the histories recounted in the earlier section have on the lives and position of women in northern Nigerian societies, and by providing a historical overview of the roles and positions of women in northern Nigerian societies, how these roles have changed over the course of history and the factors and conditions that play a role and shape these changes, this section will explore how have northern Nigerian women been historically positioned in society and what factors determine this. This discussion

is situated within the wider context of representation of northern Nigerian women in the media coverage of the Boko Haram insurgency specifically as it relates to questions about their agency, feminism in the Global South and Western hegemonic discourses on feminism.

This chapter concludes by drawing a direct link between this history and the present. The discussion in this chapter outlines and summarises some of the key issues at stake around the insurgency which make it a dynamic period for the study of women's agency in northern Nigeria. By applying nuance and historical depth with critical analysis to understandings of northern Nigeria's contemporary religious landscape, this chapter aims to capture the 'discursive texture' (Bowen, 1993, p. 11) of doctrinal difference in northern Nigeria and highlight the 'space of dissention' (Foucault, 1972, p. 152) that divergent doctrinal ideologies have given birth to, one of which is the Boko Haram insurgency.

4.2. Mechanisms and conditions of the Boko Haram insurgency

Signalling forward to the latter part of this chapter in which I take up the history of northern Nigeria and women's historical positioning in northern society therein with greater finesse and depth, this section attempts to outline some of the key issues at stake around the insurgency which make it a dynamic period for the study of women's agency. Scholars researching the Boko Haram insurgency agree that writing about the group is an incredibly difficult task since the insurgency is still ongoing and because access to first-hand information is still very limited. Writing in (2014, p. viii), Pérouse de Montclos emphasised the difficulty that researchers face in conducting fieldwork in the north-east due to insecurity in the region, 'the result of which is repetitive and shallow academic production on the Boko Haram crisis, which lacks in-depth critical analysis'. Pérouse de Montclos (2014, p. 2,7) argues further that most writings on Boko Haram are merely speculations from analysts with little to no familiarity with the local context. One of the leading scholars and historians on northern Nigeria and Boko Haram, Muhammad Sani Umar (2012), has argued that 'much of the commentaries and analyses have been largely conjectural and obliviously lack familiarity with the substantial materials produced by both the proponents and opponents of Boko Haram'.

Expressing similar sentiments, Abdul Raufu Mustapha (2014b, p. 157) laments on the level of misinformation, biased and politically motivated coverage of the insurgency. Mustapha (2014b, p. 157) highlights that international narratives on the insurgency are steeped in western policy concerns within discourses on the war on terror that can be found in sensationalist coverage such as that of journalist Jacob Zenn (2014) who approaches the insurgency from a strictly Western security point of view. This is further complicated by domestic coverage of the insurgency within Nigeria, where coverage of the insurgency is filled with conspiracy theories, reflecting Nigeria's politics which is inherently shaped by its ethnic, regional, and religious divide (Mustapha, 2014b, p. 156). This divide also manifests in the

media coverage of the insurgent as most of the media houses are based in the south, therefore, reporting on the insurgency is filled with narratives that feed on the fear of a 'jihad' and a Muslim invasion of the south with an 'Islamization agenda' (Adibe, 2012). Mustapha (2014b, p. 157) categorises the domestic conspiracy theories into three: religious, political, and military. These factors make it difficult to research Boko Haram.

As of 2021-2022 when I conducted my fieldwork in the north-east, it had become even more difficult as the conflict has diffused away from north-east and Borno state where it originated. The conflict has spread to other parts of Nigeria, the shores of Lake Chad and bordering countries such as Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. Insecurity has also spread throughout northern Nigeria with armed bandits in the north-west and kidnappings becoming frequent in most of the northern region, making travel through the north a high-risk ordeal. Although it is important to note that the state capitals, Maiduguri, and Yola, are relatively safe due to the presence of security forces and international organisations and there is a sizeable population of internally displaced people (IDPs) in other states who can share first-hand accounts of the conflict.

4.2.1. The Fulani jihad and the legacy of dissent: a history of dissidence

The early history of the Boko Haram is best understood within the context of the history of contemporary Islamic sects and doctrinal fragmentation within the Muslim population in northern Nigeria, specifically the conflict between the two Muslim (Sunni) sects; the Sufi's and the Salafists. Mustapha (Mustapha, 2014a) recounts the religious history of northern Nigeria, from the jihad of Sheikh Uthman dan Fodio in 1804 to the present, highlighting three themes that characterise this history: religious fragmentation, struggles over texts and changing attitudes towards the state. These themes are present throughout the discussion in this chapter.

In the pre-colonial era, the region known as northern Nigeria today was a part of Central Sudan, it was known as the Hausa land (because that was the dominant ethnic group in the region) and was divided into two groups, Muslim, and non-Muslim, based on differing socio-political values (Gajere, 2012; Turaki, 1993, pp. 5–6). The beginning of Islam in Nigeria is divided into many periods, dating back to the 11th century (Gajere, 2012, p. 106). However, I will focus on the most significant period of Islamic development which happened in the 19th century through the Jihad of the Fulani cleric Shehu Uthman dan Fodio (The Shehu) between 1804-1808 (Last, 2014, p. 18). This jihad marked the height of Muslim influence in Nigeria and led to the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate (Falola, 1998, p. 25). It is important to note that Boko Haram is not the first Islamic movement in northern Nigeria that has advocated for some sort of jihad, as a strategy to implement its vision of reform. According to Murray Last (Last, 2014, p. 9), 'today's dissidents in northern Nigeria, such as the notorious Boko

Haram, are part of a tradition of dissidence, they are neither a new phenomenon nor will they be the last of their kind'. What is known as the Fulani jihad, led by The Shehu, which led to the removal of the *Habe* rulers in Hausa-land (northern Nigeria) and the establishment of the rule of religious scholars who legitimised their authority through theological argumentation, set a precedence for theological argumentation as a precondition for political action among Muslims in northern Nigeria (Loimeier, 2012, p. 139). The Shehu, with the aid of his Fulani clan, conquered the leaders of the Hausa states one by one and installed Fulani Emirs (Yeld, 1960, p. 13). This jihad marked the height of Muslim influence in Nigeria and led to the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate (Falola, 1998, p. 25). By 1812, the old Hausa dynasties had become part of the Islamic state known as the Sokoto Caliphate which extended from northern Nigeria to the north-east Yorubaland in the southwest (Korieh & Nwokeji, 2005, p. 13). In pre-colonial northern Nigeria, the southernmost part of the region, known as the Middle Belt, included many smaller predominantly pagan societies, today, most of the Christian population in northern Nigeria are in the Middle Belt (Kane, 2002, p. 30). The establishment of the caliphate was achieved by replacing basis of indigenous political authority in Hausaland with religious leaders such as emirs. Thus, from the start, politics and religion were intertwined as Islamic law was the basis for the institutions that governed the state. This process continued, however, with the European intervention at the beginning of the 20th century, it assumed a new dimension (Korieh & Nwokeji, 2005, p. 113). The aim of Dan Fodio's movement was to reform Muslims who were 'lax', rather than convert 'pagans' (Last, 1979, p. 197).
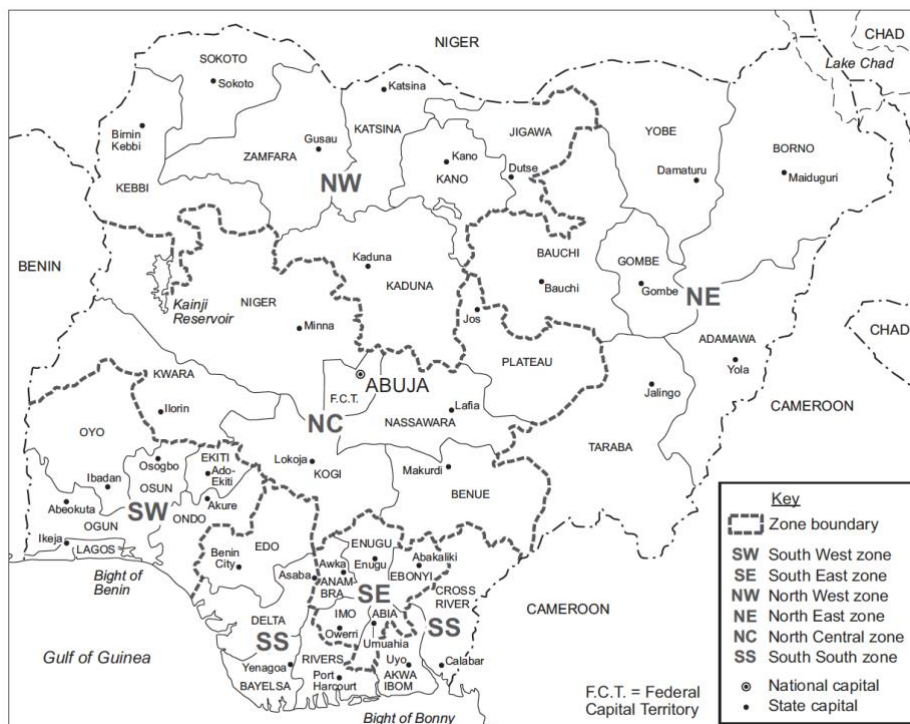
Map 4.1(Mustapha, 2014a, p. 3)

Nigeria Zones (courtesy of Chatham House, The Royal Institute of International Affairs, London)

Map 4.2 (Mustapha & Bunza, 2014, p. 55)

Nigeria, showing various boundaries, and percentages of Muslims by current state per 1963 census

(courtesy of University of Wisconsin-Madison African Studies Program and Cartographic Laboratory; percentages of

Muslims by current state from Ostien 2012)

This encounter between Hausaland and Islam because of the jihad was one of the most productive state building and religious expansion in pre-colonial Nigeria, the caliphate became economic and political system in that part of Africa (Brenner, 1992). Kane (2002, p. 30) highlights that the caliphate profoundly contributed to Islamising northern Nigeria, and that legacy remains today. There was a political element of state formation and the establishment of theocratic states (Korieh & Nwokeji, 2005, p. 112). Last (Last, 2014, p. 18) even goes on to argue that the jihad and the Caliphate that arose out of it was one of the most remarkable achievements in the history of Nigeria, if not Africa. Aside from being a religious movement, there was a strong political element of state formation and the establishment of theocratic states, according to Islamic law. When the British proclaimed most of the territories of this Islamic polity to be the protectorate of northern Nigeria, with Fredrick Lugard as the High Commissioner, colonialism, and the introduction of Christianity to the southern parts of Nigerian reinforced the connection between politics and religion in northern Nigeria (Korieh & Nwokeji, 2005, p. 113) the following section expands on this.

Nigeria is made up of more than 250 distinctive ethnic groups and split almost equally along religious lines of Islam and Christianity with a small percentage of the population practicing different African traditional religions. Ethnic and religious tensions have been a constant reoccurrence in Nigeria since the two protectorates were merged. An infamous example of this is the Biafra civil war in the 1960s. These geographic, ethnic, and religious divides and lack of integration serve as fertile grounds and catalysts for difference to manifest in various violent ways (Falola, 1998). These historical tensions between ethnic groups, still exist and manifest in several forms (mostly violent outbursts) up until today, a present-day example is the ongoing farmer-herder conflict in the middle belt region. This 'difference' between the regions, is further constructed and reinforced through representational mediums such as the media, as well as in Nigeria's political sphere, attributing religious violence in northern Nigeria to be a product of both contemporary religious media and the religious history of northern Nigeria (Gajere, 2012, p. 20). Although Gajere's work focuses on northern Nigeria, I argue that this conclusion can be generalised to apply to Nigeria as a whole. Although the British colonisers merged these diverse groups of people into one territory, they failed to achieve an integrated country as allegiances to cultures, ethnicities and religions survived and difference thrived, hindering a shared sense of history and national identity (Falola & Williams, 1995). The instability brought about by such conflicts and perceptions of difference is perhaps the most significant legacy of the British invaders.

In addition to ethnicity, social and economic class is also a crucial determining factor in one's 'Nigerian identity'. Nigeria is an interesting paradox: a country constantly at the bottom of most human development and poverty indices, yet home to some of the wealthiest people in the world. Inequality is rife and social mobility is almost non-existent. It is a classic case of the adage 'the rich get richer, and the poor get poorer'. Therefore, I argue that what it means to be 'Nigerian' is not fixed, rather, it is in flux and differs as a function of one's historical and political imaginary i.e., one's gender, cultural identity, religion, and social class, because it is through these lenses that groups of citizens make sense of experience, represent and encounter representations. For example, a young Igbo Christian man who grew up in the south of Nigeria, hearing tales about the Biafra war from his older relatives is likely to hold deeply negative views of northerners because of the historical tensions between the two regions.

4.2.2. A history of difference and dissent

> I do not consent that any one of you should ever dwell with us. Between us and you, there are no dealings except as between Muslims and unbelievers: war as Almighty enjoined on us. There is no power or strength save in God on High.
> (Backwell, 1969, pp. 13–14)

This was the response of Abdurrahman d̃an Atiku, the then Sultan of the Sokoto Caliphate to Lord Lugard's letter, explaining the intentions of the British to merge the northern and southern protectorates into one country (Umar, 2006, p. 1). Muslim leaders rejected colonial administration as they saw it as an extension of Christianity (Korieh & Nwokeji, 2005, p. 113). However, the British eventually ended up taking over the Sokoto Caliphate, but in a different more subtle way, through indirect rule. To understand the history of northern Nigeria, one must understand the system of indirect rule, which was the method of administration adopted by the British colonial masters in northern Nigeria (Gajere, 2012, p. 99). And to understand northern Nigeria, one must understand the culture of the north with a sense of history and the religiousness of ordinary northern cultures.

When the British arrived in northern Nigeria, they met a highly organised system of government with strong institutions that were already in place by the Sokoto Caliphate. Despite their obvious military superiority, the British did not have the resources or the personnel to completely do away with these institutions or replace the Muslims at the helms of these institutions, therefore they decided to appropriate both (Umar, 2006, p. 6). Umar categorises British policies under Islam in northern Nigeria under three categories namely, appropriation, containment, and surveillance (Umar 2006). Their inheritance of the centralized Islamic administration is an example of appropriation. According to Falola and Williams (Falola & Williams, 1995, p. 16), "Lord Lugard, realising the suzerainty of Sokoto over other emirates, sought the approval of the Caliph before implementing policies … they were cautious not to threaten the legitimacy of the Islamic leaders over their people and to ensure that non-Muslims were not enthroned in traditional offices". Though the British eventually took over the Caliphate, their appropriation of the legal and governance structures and co-operation with Muslim leaders was strategic to avoid resistance, they encouraged Islamic institutions while simultaneously limiting the extent of what they could do (Korieh & Nwokeji, 2005, p. 113), this is an example of containment according to (Umar, 2006). It is often argued that the British straightened and widened the application of Islamic law in northern Nigeria, for example, Ubah (1982, p. 73) concludes that "in spite of the establishment of British administration and subsequent innovation, Islamic law still regulated the lives of people in very important particulars" (Umar, 2006, p. 9).

However, Islam also had problems under colonial rule. For example, Sharia law was curtailed and could only be applied moderately; although Emirs had power, they were subordinates of the White Christian officers (Falola & Williams, 1995, p. 29). In many ways, Islam was contained. Despite the support of the Islamic system of government, Umar (2006, pp. 6–10) maintains that Islamic law was and is still affected by colonialism, and Islamic doctrines such as fatwas are still being applied today to deal with the challenges and legacy of colonialism. On one hand, colonial policies through indirect rule in the north maintained the Islamic political-religious order eventually strengthening the Islamic identity of the region and the integration of Islam in national politics and further suppressing the identities of non-

Muslim northerners, colonial policies in the south also increased and expanded Christianity in the region (Korieh & Nwokeji, 2005, p. 113). The outcome of this varied approach towards religion was the construction of distinct identities in these regions: a strong Muslim identity in the North, a strong Christian identity south, and another which is often not discussed, a suppressed non-Muslim northern identity (Falola & Williams, 1995, p. 16; Korieh & Nwokeji, 2005, p. 114). Even after the amalgamation in 1914, the British continued to prevent any foreign influence in the north, especially meaningful social transformation projects by Christian missionaries such as education. The outcome of this 'dual process of pacification, along with the conservatism of the northern ruling elite and Muslim intellectual perspectives are instrumental in understanding the political outcome of the colonial encounter' (Korieh & Nwokeji, 2005, p. 114). Its effects are evident today in the low levels of education and literacy; and can be seen throughout northern Nigerian history.

Islam, more than a religion, is described as a complete way of life and therefore concerned with all moral aspects of human life, the social, religious, political, economic etc. Prophet Muhammad (S.W.T) was both a religious leader and the head of the nation, his roles both religious and political, therefore, one can argue that in Islam, there is no discrimination between religious and secular matters (Gajere, 2012, p. 72). However, the Christianity that was promoted by the missionaries and colonial regimes made a distinction between the church and the state, this differs from the position of Islam where no separation between the two is made (Falola & Williams, 1995, p. 2). Despite the victory and the successful spread of Islam in northern Nigeria, the death of the Shehu in 1817 saw the gradual return of many of the un-Islamic pre-jihad practices which were banned with the spread of Islam. Mustapha (Mustapha, 2014a, p. 2) explains that 'this erosion of morals formed the basis of subsequent calls for reform and revivalism, especially after the imposition of colonial rule and the formal transfer of power to the Christian invaders'. Therefore, from mid-19th century, dissent became a defining feature in northern Nigeria.

Within this brief historical context discussed above, since the jihad, Muslims in northern Nigeria who advocate for Islamic reform place the 1804 jihad on a pedestal and look to it for inspiration. This history, coupled with poverty, lack of education, economic hardship, politics, and the further fragmentation of the Muslim community into different sects, has created a hostile environment where conflicts thrive. According to Loimeier (2012, p. 139), colonial rule, the establishment of British education, British law and economic dynamics of the colonial and post-colonial period have led to a deep crisis in northern Nigeria that can be classified as 'modernization shock'. While Muslims reformers such as The Sardauna of Sokoto, Sir Ahmadu Bello (the first premier of the northern region) and Aminu Kano (the leader of the oppositional northern Elements Progressive Union – NEPU) and later on in the 1950s and 60s, Sheikh Abubakar Gumi, who inspired the Izala movement (which is discussed in detail below) attempted to develop programs of reform in order to Islamise modernity (ibid.), there was a lot of

backlash from radical groups who opposed them and argued that these reforms were un-Islamic and equivalent to westernisation (Loimeier, 2012, p. 140). An example of this this is the Maitatsine uprising in 1980 in Kano (Hiskett, 1987).

Muhammadu Marwa, the leader of the Maitatsine sect moved to Kano, Nigeria from neighbouring Cameroon and proclaimed himself to be a prophet, preaching against modernity and advocating for a return to pre-colonial civilisation, while rejecting 'innovations' such as wrist watches, cars, motorcycles, bicycles. Marwa condemned anything that was perceived as western and non-Quranic innovation to the point that he was nicknamed 'the master of rejection' (ibid.). He became known by the epithet, *Maitatsine* (the one who curses), because he often invoked God to curse those who disagree with him; '*Wanda bai yarda da Allah ta tsine mishi'* (Allah will punish whosoever refuses to accept what I teach) (Albert, 1994, p. 94). The '*yan tatsine* (his followers) believed that only they were genuine Muslims and set out to kill all Muslims who disagreed with them. Frequent clashes between the group and the sect eventually boiled over and led to a violent conflict which was finally put down by the Nigerian army, leading to the death of thousands including Muhammadu Marwa himself (Hiskett, 1987, p. 209). The Maitatsine movement shares some characteristics with Boko Haram, for example, both groups were rejected what they perceived to be aspects of 'westernisation' in everyday life in northern Nigeria, they were also headquartered in the run-down quarter of a major city (Last, 2009, p. 8). The discussion above highlights the fact that historically, in northern Nigeria, processes of change or social reform have often led to violent conflicts which are expressed in religious terms (Loimeier, 2012, p. 141).

4.2.3.   Doctrinal fragmentation within the Muslim community in northern Nigeria

As I stated earlier in this chapter, the history of Boko Haram is best understood more specifically within the context of the conflict between the two Sunni sects; the Sufi's and the Salafists. Loimeier highlights that looking at Boko Haram from a historical perspective allows us to view the movement as a result of social and political dynamics within the larger field of northern Nigerian radical Islam as represented prominently by the 'yan Izala movement (2012, p. 139). During the Sokoto jihad, majority of Muslims in the northern Nigeria subscribed to Sunni Islam (of the Maliki school), with most of the elites belonging to the Qadariyya *tariqa* (brotherhood), by 1830, the Tijaniyya *tariqa,* was introduced as a rival group to the Qadiriyya (Mustapha & Bunza, 2014, p. 54) .The Tijaniyya *tariqa* appealed to the masses, especially males of all ages, regardless of economic status, this was in contrast to the Qadiriyya which appealed to the elites (Mustapha & Bunza, 2014, p. 61). The Tijaniyya are said to be stricter on religious rituals but more radical in orientation while the Qadiriyya are more relaxed on religious rituals but more conservative and pro-establishment in their politics, which makes sense given that the Tijaniyya followers are proletariat while the Qadiriyya are the elites (ibid.). However, class and

economic differences in northern Nigerian do not correlate with these different groups today. This can be attributed to the prolific Senegalese scholar, Sufi saint and reviver of the Tijaniyya, Sheikh Ibrahim Niasse. Niasse was well respected, having authored many books, he established contact with the then Emir of Kano, Alhaji Abdullahi Bayero (1926 – 1953) while performing Hajj in 1937 (Isa, 2022). Sheikh Niasse then visited northern Nigeria in 1945. He was accepted in Kano and most of the Tijani scholarly families submitted to his authority. Today, outside Senegal, Kano in particular has been the main area of support for Niasse (Paden, 1973). The Emir of Kano – which is the second most important Muslim position after the Sultan of Sokoto – and his Emirates are members of the Tijaniyya *tariqa*. The 14th Emir of Kano and former Central Bank Governor, Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, is the current leader or *Khalifa* of the Tijaniyya in Nigeria. Since then, there has been an emergence of different competing sects and groups within the Islamic doctrinal landscape, some of which include different groups of Sufi's, Salafists, Shi'ites, Islamic Women's organisations amongst others, resulting in religious politics, and competition for followership in a contentious 'prayer economy' (Mustapha & Bunza, 2014, pp. 54–55). However, the dynamics of the conflict within the two main Sufi sects changed in the 1970's with the emergence of reformist Salafists who were also Sunni but vehemently opposed to Sufism. This is of great importance because Sufism has been central to Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa since the 15th century (Kane, 2002, p. 59). Mustapha and Bunza emphasise that 'the nature of this Salafists challenge to established Sufi order is key to understanding the nature of doctrinal fragmentation and social disorder in contemporary northern Nigeria' (2014, p. 64). The emergence of Salafiyya ideas in Nigeria is best understood within the context of struggles against colonization and decolonization and the rise of Islamic activism following the success of the Iranian revolution (Ben Amara, 2020, p. 89). Through public sermons, the key figure in the Salafists movement, Sheikh Abubakar Gumi, condemned the established Sufi order and their ideals as he preached his agenda to transform the society which he believed was riddled with ignorance (ibid). Sheikh Gumi's disciples established the *Jama'atu Izalatil Bid'a wa iqamat as-Sunna* (Society for the Eradication of Innovation and the Reinstatement of Tradition) popularly known as *Izala* or JIBWIS. *Izala* set out to destroy age old established Sufi systems of thought and implement new doctrines according to their own interpretation of Islam, however, these new doctrines had consequences for society at the micro level (for individual behaviour and family) and at the macro level (for society as a whole) and for social order in the region (Mustapha, 2014a, p. 202).

A major aspect of this new revolution was the *Izala's* unwillingness to compromise, leading to intolerance on both sides and incitement of violence through language that evolved into physical violent conflicts (Loimeier, 2012, p. 257). The language of this doctrinal dispute was intentionally aggressive and intolerant, creating a climate where violence was used against opposing sects as was seen in the waves of violence that swept across northern Nigeria in the 1970s and 1980s in the clashes between Izala's and Sufi's (Mustapha, 2014a, p. 203). The violent modes employed in this conflict between the

Salafists and the Sufi's set a precedence for doctrinal conflicts in northern Nigeria. It is within this context and environment that Boko Haram emerged. According to Muhammad Sani Umar (2012), the genealogy of the group emerged partly out of the further development of the Salafi-Wahabi doctrine associated with Sheikh Gumi and *Izala* and partly from the long-standing negative attitudes towards Western education among Muslims in northern Nigeria (Umar, 2002, 2003). The narrative surrounding the insurgency has been reduced to one of Muslims vs Christians, or 'the Muslim north' vs 'the Christian South'. However, the preceding discussion challenges this narrative and shows there is no single unified Muslim identity in northern Nigeria, instead, history shows that fragmentation within the Muslim community based on different interpretations of Islamic text and opposing conception of what it means to lead life as a virtuous Muslim, these tensions have led to division within Muslims in northern Nigeria (Mustapha & Bunza, 2014, pp. 92–93). Loimeier (2012, p. 152) agrees and argues that the development of the Boko Haram movement proves yet again that Muslims in Nigeria do not form a homogenous unit, rather, they are divided into a myriad of larger and smaller movements that differ based on social, political, and religious beliefs and divisions.

4.2.4. The social, political, and economic angle

According to Loimeier 'as long as the basic social and economic context does not change, specifically, Nigeria's inability to achieve sustained economic growth as well as some degree of social justice, militant movements such as Boko Haram will rise again' (2012, p. 152). Majority of Boko Haram members are young men from impoverished backgrounds who have no access to the basic amenities of life, with no hope for the future. They are victims of bad governance and corruption that has plagued the region since the 1970s. The northern region had (and still has) a demographic advantage due to having a higher population than all the southern regions combined, thus having control of the political power while the south controlled the economy and bureaucracy due to being more economically and educationally developed (Mustapha & Bunza, 2014, p. 83). There has been a failure in governance and leadership in the north. Northern political elites and leaders with access to the centre have abandoned ambitions or visions of developing their states and have instead focused on personal wealth and capital accumulation (ibid.). This is indicated by the fact that northern states are found at the bottom of every human development index (ibid). This failure in leadership and corruption has been compounded by wider economic and political developments, most notably the neoliberal structural adjustment policies of the 1980s and 1990s which facilitated de-industrialization in the north (this saw the demise of key industries in the region such as the textile industries) and privatization (ibid).

For the ordinary northerner, these changes have meant more poverty, inequality, and lack of access to basic amenities, all while they watch the northern elite continue to live large and exploit their access to the centre, using political offices to enhance their personal wealth at the expense of developing their

regions. Recently, the daughter of President Muhammadu Buhari (2015-2023), gave birth to a baby and the first family along with their extended family and friends held a lavish naming ceremony in Istanbul, Turkey. This triggered a substantial backlash, as the country is currently plagued with unprecedented insecurity, and a cost-of-living crisis where 70% of the population cannot afford to eat three meals in a day. Harnischfeger captures this by stating that 'as in other parts of Nigeria, poverty continues to increase while the ruling elites, behind a façade of Muslim piety, have continued to enjoy the way of life to which they are accustomed' (2014, p. 35). According to Nigeria's first High Commissioner to Pretoria and the holder of the high Sokoto Caliphate aristocratic title of *Sarkin Sudan* of Wurno, Alhaji Shehu Malami, Nigeria should expect more *Boko Haram*s because the social contract between the ruling class and the citizens in Nigeria has been breached (Mustapha & Bunza, 2014, p. 84). He further argued that there 'is a permanent binding social contract between the nation and its citizens; the nation is to look after the welfare of the citizens and they, in return, are expected to behave like responsible citizens; and that contract has been broken woefully' (ibid.). However, ordinary citizen face 'criminal neglect' characterized by general infrastructural decay, and the lack of basic social amenities like water, medicine, power supply, security and education while the political class are busy stealing and further corrupting the system to serve them (Malami, 2009 in Mustapha & Bunza 2014: 84).

Izala appealed to many Muslims in the urban areas because they were deeply uncomfortable with how stratified the society was and their status within it. So, for subalterns in a deeply stratified society rife with inequality, the Izala ideology was very appealing as they preached that everyone was equal regardless of status and only piety can dictate difference in individuals, rather than status and material things (Kane, 2002, p. 238). It is important to keep in mind that Mohammed Yusuf, the founder of Boko Haram had a solid social protection program, offering youth a better alternative to their reality, he had a youth empowerment scheme, provided members with loans to start small businesses and arranged marriages for them, enabling even the poorest of them to get married (Abdallah, 2012). Ahmed Salkida (2013a, 2013b), a key witness to the emergence and rise of the sect insists that Yusuf took advantage of the poor quality of Nigeria's educational system and poor leadership at all levels of government, which had allowed poverty, corruption, and insecurity to become the norm. According to Last, for young men and women with an education (or lack off) so poor that they are not able to get a job in the modern sector, joining such a group offers them a sense of community with real solutions (2009, p. 9). These conditions coupled with what Yusuf offered made it easy for him to recruit young men. Religion has become the tool for articulating the unaddressed griefs and grievances caused by the economic and political changes from the 1960s, in fact, Pérouse de Montclos argues that despite Boko haram's religious background, the group is more political in nature because it opposes and challenges Western values, challenges the concept of the secular state and critiques the corruptions of the ruling class (2014, p. 5).

4.2.5. The rise of the reform movement: Sheikh Abubakar Gumi's ideology and the role of the media

In order to understand northern Nigeria's religious landscape, the historical, political and economic context that has given rise to reform movements such as Boko Haram, and the central role of the media in all of this, it is important to go back in history to discuss Sheikh Abubakar Gumi (1924-1922). Usually referred to as the most prominent Nigerian reformer of the 20th century, Sheikh Gumi is central to understanding religious debates in northern Nigerian society, specifically the doctrinal fragmentation that groups such as Boko Haram have relied upon to advocate for their cause. Therefore, this sections gives a detailed overview of Sheikh Gumi's role religious reform, how the media became an important political tool in doctoral fragmentation in northern Nigerian and how this all plays out in the rise of Boko Haram and consequently, the positioning of women in northern Nigeria.

Sheikh Gumi and the anti-Sufi ideology

Sheikh Abubakar Gumi is a central figure in the postcolonial history of Islam in Nigeria (Ben Amara, 2020, p. 68). As such, it is inevitable that any discussion about the rise of Izala in that region begins with Gumi's role in that process, as he was one of the most charismatic anti-Sufi reformists in 20th century West Africa, whose role in the reform movement in northern Nigeria remains unprecedented (Kane, 2002, p. 82). Gumi was one of the most influential Islamic scholars from the 1960s until his death in 1992, more than a religious authority, Gumi was also a political figure in northern Nigeria (Ben Amara, 2020, pp. 67–68). He had close ties to the government, was fluent in Arabic due to his training at the School for Arabic Studies (SAS) and was also one of the first students to be sent outside Nigeria to study in Sudan (Larkin, 2009, p. 25). Upon returning, Gumi joined the colonial civil service as a teacher, then later as an Islamic judge. This gave him access to Ahmadu Bello, The Sardauna of Sokoto and the Premier of the North post-independence (ibid.). Gumi served as a religious advisor to The Sardauna, Ahmadu Bello, and accompanied him on several trips to Muslim countries (Ben Amara, 2020, p. 67). According to Paden (1986), this gave Gumi access to international Muslim politics and strengthened his connections with the international Muslim community. In 1962, Gumi become the Grand Qadi of northern Nigeria, this was one of the most prestigious (religious) positions in the region (Larkin, 2009, p. 25). The Sardauna created a religious organisation *Jama'at Nasr al-Islam* (JNI) (Society for the victory of Islam) as part of his campaign to unite and unify all Muslims in Nigeria, regardless of their social backgrounds and religious orientation (Ben Amara, 2020, p. 67). Gumi was the head of this organisation which was financially backed by Saudi and Kuwait (Kane, 2002, p. 83).

From this position of authority, Gumi launched attacked on the Sufi brotherhoods (Qadiriyya and Tijjaniya) and criticized the mystic abilities associated with Sufi sheikhs and opposed the idea that Sufi sheikhs were intermediaries who were able to communicate with God and had privileged access to God ((Gumi & Tsiga, 1992, pp. 138–142) in (Ben Amara, 2020, p. 68)). Gumi was also based in Kaduna, which was the then capital of the northern region. When the Sultan Bello Mosque in Kaduna was opened in 1963, Gumi got the opportunity to preach in tafsir's at the mosque which was attended by both ordinary citizens and prominent politicians including the Sardauna (Ben Amara, 2020, p. 71). Gumi's *tasfsir* evolved gradually to from moderate anti-Sufi tones to explicit attacks that accused Sufi's of being *Kufrs* (non-believers) (Brigaglia, 2005, p. 429). This coincides with the assassination of the Sardauna in 1966, Kane (Kane, 2002, p. 83) highlights that the constraints holding Gumi in check relaxed, and he resumed his campaign for reform by attacking traditional Islam and its Sufi leadership. As a result of all these factors discussed above, it was not difficult for Gumi to use his access to the media to further disseminate his ideology (Ben Amara, 2020, p. 72). The next section entails a more detailed discussion on the role of the media in the rise and spread of the reform movement in northern Nigeria.

The role of the media in the reform movement

Gumi was colonially educated, cosmopolitan and a pioneer in using new media technology to preach. Thus, he redefined religious practice in Nigeria, for both Muslims and non-Muslims (Larkin, 2009, p. 117). Gumi and the movement he inspired (Izala) advocated for a version of Islam where Muslims had access to religious text themselves, through individual reading and comprehension of the Quran and Hadith, rather than relying on access to religious knowledge through Sheikhs as was the norm in the Sufi tradition, 'the extension of those religious texts over space and time, drawing followers into a religious community based around access to mediated texts, as well as communal practices is part of what defines his movement as different and modern' (Larkin, 2009, p. 119). As one of the first clerics to have his tafsir broadcasted over the radio in 1967, Gumi changed the nature of what tafsir is (Ben Amara, 2020, p. 71; Larkin, 2009, pp. 212–123). The success of Gumi's tafsir radio broadcasts led to demands by the Sufi's to be allowed to broadcast a Sufi interpretation of Islam. Since then, tafsir from mallams representing different sects are aired in radio stations in northern Nigeria, changing the nature of what tafsir's used to be; from something that was strictly face-face, to a mediated event broadcast over TV and the radio (Larkin, 2009, p. 121). Gumi's movement was a precedent to what is now known as public Islam, the movement emphasised debate, and open access to religious knowledge while critiquing the use of secret knowledge that the Sufi's were known for (Larkin, 2009, p. 123). Sufism is organised around the idea of mysticism where Sufi saints at the highest-level claim to receive special revelations and have access to powerful prayers which they keep within their order and reveal to certain disciples who progress in training (ibid.), all which Gumi criticized and preached against.

By contrast, Gumi had a different pedagogic philosophy shaped by his educational background and training at the School for Arabic Studies (SAS), which was established to teach Islamic subjects by employing Western pedagogic methods. Auwalu Anwar (1989), argues that this educational style defined modern Islam in northern Nigeria as it divided liberal and traditional clerics, inducting a new administrative and religious class whose power was derived from bureaucracy and the military, rather than traditional trading and royal titles. Umar (2001) refers to this class as scholars as 'Islamic modernists', as they came to be known as 'Yan Boko (the western education elites) and Gumi was a representative of this new group. Gumi was deeply inspired by the style of learning at SAS which encouraged debates between students and the teachers, according to him:

> The Law school had an intellectual tradition that made it unique ... very often we were encouraged to assert our own independence and initiative rather than the blind obedience to the views of our teachers. We challenged them frequently ... and I never saw them get upset ... The whole experience left a deep impression on my mind and today, there is nothing I love better than to be challenged about my views (Gumi & Tsiga, 1992, p. 33) in (Larkin, 2009; Umar, 2001, p. 124)

This was a direct critique to the hierarchies in Sufi learning (Larkin, 2009, p. 124). Gumi's philosophy of openness to debate was evident in his tafsir sessions which would end in a question-and-answer session, and he would engage with everyone and anyone regardless of their background (Ibid.). Even as grand Qadi, Gumi had a passion for teaching which he exercised through his *tafsir's* at Sultan Bello Mosque and would interact with everyone regardless of their background (Ben Amara, 2020, p. 71). Symbolically, Gumi also dressed in plain clothes as opposed to the extravagant, elaborate robes worn by Sufi Sheikhs (Larkin, 2009, p. 124). Thus, Gumi appealed to the masses as he was seen as accessible and egalitarian both in his preaching and his appearance.

Larkin (2009) expanded on the role of the media in the rise of the Izala and why Gumi and the Izala movement was seen as modern by both his supporters as well as his opponents. Drawing on media theories of scholars such as Marshall McLuhan (1994, p. 20), Heidegger (1982) and Kittler (1990) (in (Larkin, 2009, p. 118)) argued that when looking at a figure like Gumi, one should not only examine at his theological beliefs, the significant shift in communication systems that took place during his life should seriously be considered as well. Larkin (2009, p. 20) goes on to emphasise that 'the modernity of Gumi and the movement he inspired lies in the articulation of religious renewal through the forms of public'. Thus, this involves analysing changes in education and considering the 'lineage of thought and practice' within religious traditions that produce new religious subjects and governs their interaction

with different forms of technologies (ibid.) as Charles Hirschkind (2006) explores in his study of cassettes use within the piety movements in Egypt.

Based on his ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Cairo, Egypt, Hirschkind (2006) explores the practice of listening to tape-recorded sermons on cassettes, a practice which has been a key element in the piety movement in Egypt. His central argument is that the influence of this practice of listening to sermons on cassettes upon listeners "lies not simple in tits capacity to disseminate ideas or instil religious ideologies, but in its effect on the human sensorium, on the affects, sensibilities and perceptual habits of its audiences" (Hirschkind, 2006, p. 2). Thus, an important feature of the oration is to move the listener in a way that enacts certain ethical religious dispositions i.e., fear and humility, the sermon is thus an essential disciplinary technique for the cultivation of religious virtues, the very nature of the sermons through oratory techniques enables the listeners to act in a specific way (Kubala, 2008). Hirschkind explores how listeners re-construct their own knowledge, emotion, and sensibilities in accordance with models of Islamic personhood, so how this practice of listening produces new religious subjects (Hirschkind, 2001). Thus, Larkin (2009, p. 120) seeks to use the figure of Gumi as an example to illustrate both a new religious public in northern Nigerian and to interrogate how the shape of that public is created by the materiality of media and communications technology that he used.

As previously stated, religious conflict in Nigeria had largely been between and within the two Sufi orders, Tijaniyya and Qadiriyya but the dynamics of religious conflict in Nigeria changed in 1972 when Gumi published his piece *Al Aqidah Al-Shahih Bi Muwafiqah Al-Sharia* (The right Belief is based on the Shari'a, 1972), a summary of his ideas which was a direct theological assault on Sufism (Anwar, 1989; Paden, 1973). Gumi articulated and summarised his anti-Sufi ideologies through the media: articles, books, radio, TV, his use of the media was also an act of critiquing the system of religious learning organised around restrictions to knowledge and access to certain spaces (Larkin, 2009, p. 127). Gumi was the first cleric in Nigeria to translate the Quran from Arabic to the local Hausa language (the dominant spoken language in northern Nigeria), Brenner and Last (1985) highlight that these acts of translation, recording and preaching in Hausa shifted the language of religious debate from Arabic to Hausa, which was spoken by the local population. The act of broadcasting tafsir over the radio placed *tafsir* under the purview of the institutional guidelines of the public service broadcaster which – to maintain peace – emphasised balance between competing ideas, clarity and comprehensibility, familiarity with professional guidelines and civil service bureaucracy, all which Gumi was well trained in due to his educational background (Larkin, 2009, p. 125). Traditional Sufi clerics on the other hand were not educated in these Western colonial ways, thus it made it more difficult for them to make use of the media to spread their ideas in the way that Gumi was able to.

Naturally, Gumi's religious and bureaucratic connections eventually led to him being chosen to broadcast his Ramadan *tafsir* on Radio Kaduna, the largest radio station in West Africa at that point, Gumi was already known for the religious columns he wrote in the Hausa newspaper *Gaskiya Ta fi Kwabo* (Truth is worth more than a Penny) and his regular media appearances on TV and radio gave him exposure (Larkin, 2009, p. 26). Thus, Gumi had already established a platform and was a strong media personality, which he utilized to preach and circulate his anti-Sufi Salafists ideology. The choice of Gumi to preach on the radio reflects the rise of a new group of colonially educated government elites, this group of northern Muslims were fluent in English and educated and dismissive of traditional backward nature of the northern Nigerian society (Larkin, 2009, p. 128). Brenner and Last (Brenner & Last, 1985, p. 443) highlight that Gumi was 'down to earth and simplistic', and 'he was fluent in Hausa, Arabic and English which allowed him to move freely between the worlds of Islamic clerics and colonial and postcolonial bureaucrats, he was also easy to understand and spoke simply in contrast to his colleagues' (Larkin, 2009, p. 129). Prior to the rise of Gumi, Muslims in the north saw the radio as a new colonial medium which was at best, irrelevant and at worst, part of a colonial project which was opposed to Islam, however, Gumi's use and success using the media changed this (Ibid.). The next sub-section discusses how this history shapes the present i.e. the significance of Islam on contemporary Nigerian radio.

The Radio Kaduna controversy

In 1977, leaders of the Sufi sects; Tijaniyya and Qadiriyya in all the states in the north signed a joint letter to Dahiru Modibbo, the managing Director of Radio Kaduna, criticizing what they perceived to be the radio station's support for Gumi, thus accusing the station of being complicit in Gumi's attacks against them (Larkin, 2009, p. 130). The conflict between the sects had taken a violent turn with assassination attempts on Gumi's life (Kane, 2002). Dahiru Modibbo assured the Sufi leaders that the station had no intention of picking sides, and he recommended that the different sects choose one preacher to alternate with Gumi. Due to the intense nature of the controversy, its potential to lead to violent outbreaks and attacks on the radio station, Dahiru Modibbo implemented a new policy for tafsir which is still in place today; each tafsir has to be recorded ahead of time and sent to the manager of programs who is then responsible for listening and editing out any controversial comments or any reference to the opposition group (Larkin, 2009, p. 131). Up until today, the media serves as a contested space for religious ideologies, thus policies remain for TV such as the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and Africa Independent Television (AIT) and radio stations such as Radio Kaduna, in Nigeria maintain balance between different religious sects in their broadcasting. The media has become crucial to the articulation and dissemination of religious knowledge, rather than passing down secret teachings in the way the Sufi's used to do it due to the structure of institutions in colonial and post-colonial Nigeria which were shaped by the norms of a public broadcast medium (Larkin, 2009, p. 133). With this detailed

history, the next section focuses on the historical positioning of women in northern Nigeria and how the factors discussed above informs the changes in these positions over time.

4.3. Historical Positioning of Women in northern Nigerian Society

So, what does this history of religious reform and doctrinal fragmentation have to do with women's agency in northern Nigeria? Masquelier (2009, p. xvii) in her study on the effects of the Izala movement in the women in Dogondoutchi (the Republic of Niger) argues that as new gender dynamics and authority, wealth management, and sociality have emerged out of ongoing debates over what *is* and *is not* part of Islam, women have lost some autonomy and value. Ongoing contentions over what an Islamic modernity entails have led to concerns and debates about women's visibility, sexuality, and propriety. The regulation of women's visibility and their autonomy is also a crucial aspect of the moralising discourse of Muslim reformists who perceive the spread of immorality to be linked to society's failure to contain female sexuality (Masquelier, 2009, p. xviii). This begs the question, how do women in northern Nigeria negotiate their place in such a complex and diverse religious economy? This history is important because this study is interested in the interplay between northern Nigerian women and agency as shaped by religion, ethnicity, class, and other social factors. In this vein, and bearing the history above in mind, the next section looks at the historical positioning of women in northern Nigeria and the factors that have shaped and determined this over time. Women's roles, representations and identities have always been the subject of contested control in reform discourses such as colonial, nationalist reformist and neo-colonial forces of control (Alidou, 2005, p. 10).

4.3.1. Historical positioning of women in Northern Nigerian society

Just as in the western historiographical tradition, African history has mostly been written by men, from their own perspectives. Nigerian Historian, Bolanle Awe (1991, pp. 211–212, 1992) argues that this slant in African history writing in general has had many significant material and psychic effects on perceptions of women and on women's historical realities. This has been particularly the case in the way gender has come to be viewed across Africa. Awe goes on to highlight that women's history has always been sidelined in the mainstream scholarship of African history. In fact, one of the first major readings about African history, the 8th volume UNESCO general *History of Africa* completely ignores women and their contribution to African history (Awe, 1991, pp. 211–212; Falola & Aderinto, 2010, p. 82). The same can be said about most of the books on Nigerian history prior to the 1980s. Bolanle Awe's project *Nigerian Women in Historical Perspective,* was not published until 1992 as publishers declined the manuscripts since such a book would have no market value due to the subject matter (sic) (Falola & Aderinto, 2010, p. 82).

During the colonial period, there was substantial work done and documented on the lives of women in Nigeria which can be used as sources of women's history. However, these sources are problematic and essentialist as they were produced under a Western colonial gaze and filled with racist tropes. An example of this is *African Women* by Sylvia Leith-Ross (1939), an anthropological research study on Nigerian women written during the colonial period which described the Igbo people as 'the most numerous, the most adaptable, the most go-ahead, the most virile and at the same time the most primitive' people (Falola & Aderinto, 2010, p. 82). The experiences and thus history of Nigerian women have been misunderstood and misrepresented, because they have been interpreted though the lenses of patriarchy and colonialism.

Another example where the effects of both patriarchy and colonialism are evident is the Women's War of 1929 (better known as the 'Aba women's riot'). Women in the areas of Owerri and Calabar reacted to and rejected British colonial policies which eroded the socio-political and economic status of women in that region. The women's war, *Ogu Umunwanyi* (in Igbo*)* and *Ekong Iban* (in Ibibio) literally translates to 'making a war or 'sitting on a man', which in Igbo and Ibibio cultures is a cultural institutionalised form of protest by women to collectively communicate their vehement disapproval and rejection of the actions of husbands or community leaders in general (Van Allen, 1975, pp. 65–85). However, the translation of this to English by British colonial officers resulted in it being called the Aba women's riots, and the war being described as a riot was not only a case of mistranslation as the cultural context was completely erased, but the use of 'riots' also delegitimised the actions of these women as violently irrational and uncalled for (Falola & Aderinto, 2010, p. 95), further silencing their anger by naming and tagging the event with a name that contradicts its essence.

There was already a valid process and means through which women in these cultures came together to communicate their disapproval. The British colonial administration, however, represented this act of citizenship as a riot, and that is mostly how it is referred to in historical documents since the colonisers were largely responsible for curating Nigerian History at that point in time. It is important to note that the women's war or Aba women's riot was neither a war in the literal sense nor a riot. Continued misreading, misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the experiences of Nigerian women and more generally, African women, is as a result of the combination of two things: the fact that for a long time, primarily male but also female white and non-African scholars had a monopoly on documenting and interpreting the experiences of African women and white/western feminist discourse which projects a colonial gaze upon the experiences of African women, generalising them and erasing any nuance as seen in the case of the Aba women's movements (Awe, 1977, pp. 314–316). According to Falola and Aderinto (2010, p. 96), women's history in Nigeria emerged as a counter discourse which challenges

the false idea of a common shared experience based on gender, to reject the interpretation and examination of the experiences of African women through a western lens.

Although there have been African women at the forefront of documenting these histories, my argument is that these same problems have transferred themselves with relation to the representation of northern Nigerian women in academic scholarship. I argue that the experiences of women in northern Nigeria have been excluded and erased on several front: work on Nigerian women and Nigeria feminists that do not take Islamic identity into account, work on Muslim women in Africa that does not consider sub-Saharan African women and the global hegemonic discourses on feminism that discount the experiences of black and brown women. My work aims to serve as a further nuance to this counter discourse by gathering evidence to argue against the depiction of northern Nigerian women as mere passive victims and vulnerable citizens to be rescued.

4.3.2. Historical invisibility of northern Nigerian women in research

Although there is a considerable body of research and literature on Muslim women, Alidou (2005, pp. 5–6) highlights that there is a scarcity of scholarly publication on Muslim women in regions of Africa that are not 'ethnically' Arab dominated. Essentially, Muslim women in sub-Saharan Africa have largely been ignored in research about Muslim women, even though most of the population of the western Sudanic Belt (Niger, Mali, Senegal, and Burkina Faso) is Muslim. Scholars such as Nawal El-Saadawi (1991, p. 171) attributes this to factors such as colour complex and political factors such as the hegemony of Arab nationalism that emerged as a by-product of the European colonial legacy. This exclusion of black African Muslim women's experiences crucial and a major gap in the literature, when you think about the fact that the number of Muslims in Nigeria alone surpasses the number of Muslims in Egypt, the largest Arab nation (Alidou, 2005, p. 7). It is important to reiterate that northern Nigeria is made up both Muslims and Christians, although Muslims are the majority in the north, there is a sizeable Christian population especially in regions such as the Middle Belt and the north-east (refer to the map which shows the Muslim-Christian population in each region). However, the culture of the north is largely based on Islamic culture, thus Islam shapes the identities of not only Muslim women but non-Muslim women in predominantly Muslim societies (Alidou, 2005, p. 7).

Mack (2022, p. 14) highlights that until the 20th century, attention of Muslim women's roles in northern Nigerian was limited to anecdotal observation, similarly, Boyd and Last (1985, p. 283) lament about how very little is on record after so many years of Islamic research in West Africa about Muslim women, women Sheikhs or about organisation of women's Islam in the history of any community. However, there are some pioneering works on African Muslim women, though very few. Some of include: M.G Michael Garfield Smith's detailed histories of Kano (1997), Daura (1078) and Zazzau

(1960) which include insightful descriptions of women's socio-political roles in the region. Historian, Mary Bivins researched and published on rural Hausa women; anthropologist Catherine Coles published research on urban Hausa Muslim women, Heidi Nast researched and wrote on concubinage in the royal Kano palace, Bilkisu Yusuf, a Nigerian reporter has covered and written on women's issues for decades, the work of these scholars appears in the volume Hausa Women in the 20th Century (Mack, 2022, p. 13). In neighbouring Niger, Ousseina Alidou's (2005) work on Muslim Women's Agency in Postcolonial Niger, Barbara Cooper's (1997) Study titled *Marriage in Maradi: Gender and Culture in a Hausa Society in Niger 1900-1989,* and Adeline Masquelier's (2001) *Prayer Has Spoiled Everything* and *Women and Islamic Revival in a West African Town (Masquelier, 2009)* provide valuable insight into the experiences, roles, and histories of women in the region. Although set in Niger, these works are important to the study and understanding of women in northern Nigeria as the ethnic groups in these regions are the same and were only separated by colonial borders, the only difference is that Nigeria was colonised by the British while Niger was colonised by the French (Mack, 2022, p. 13).

This study builds on the studies listed above, for example, in the same vein as Alidou (2005, p. 8), this study is multidimensional, it links women's experiences across several domains at the same time and considers variables such as class into account. However, this study also departs from these earlier works in two fundamental ways; first, this study is set within the context of a complex religious-political conflict (the Boko Haram insurgency). Second, this study considers the role that the media's coverage of the insurgency plays when it comes to women's identity and agency. In addition to providing a holistic insight to those who seek to understand the lives of contemporary northern Nigerian women, how they engage with the feminist discourse, navigate and position themselves within the feminist discourse within the context of their socio-religious conditions, contemporary Nigerian society and a globalised world, the analytical utility of such a study allows us to build theory on women in postcolonial, conflict societies with intersectional identities within as it relates to their agency and feminism. Given this, the next sections discuss the positions of women in northern Nigerian societies and how that has evolved over time.

4.3.3.   The position of women in northern Nigeria Before the 1804 Jihad

In northern Nigeria, women's roles have been largely shaped by pre-Islamic traditions as well as Islamic customs dating back to the earliest introduction to Islam into the region around the 11th century (Mack, 2022, p. 1). The coming of Islam to the region is perhaps the major factor that has impacted the lives of women. Islam first came to and was spread in West Africa mainly through trade, patronage, and conversion by elites. As early as the 11th century, rulers of the Kanem Bornu Empire converted, with the rulers of the Hausa kingdom following suit from the 14th or 15th century onwards (Ubah, 2001, p. 200). However, many Hausa states in northern Nigeria only saw the rise of Islam in the 18th century,

and Muhammadu Rumfa of Kano (1463-1499) played a critical role in its emergence ((Bawa, 2016, p. 97; Bergstrom, 2002, p. 2). Callaway and Creevey (1994) stress that by the end of King Rumfa's reign a very orthodox version of Islam had been established and implemented, and as a result, women were prevented from directly participating in government and even women of high social status were secluded, setting a precedence that marked the beginning of changes in the status and role of women in northern Nigeria (Bawa, 2016, p. 98).

Northern Nigerian history includes powerful women leaders such as Nana Asma'u (the daughter of Shehu Uthman Dan Fodio) and her sisters, the eight queens of Daura who were a part of a matrilineal and matriarchal tradition, and Queen Amina, the warrior Queen and military strategist in Zazzau (present day Zaria) whose exploits are still widely revered today (Nagarajan, 2018a, p. 126). Numerous studies such as that of Heidi Nast (2005) on the role of women in the royal palace of Kano have shown that northern women had what would be considered even by western standards a great deal of freedom and actively participated in the public sphere, holding important and highly respected positions and offices as tax collectors, market administrators and religious leaders through the Bori spirit cult (Bawa, 2016, p. 98). In pre-colonial Bornu, women occupied highly respected offices of the Magira (Mai's mother), Magara (Mai's senior sister) and Gumsu (Mai's first wife) (Crowder, 1978, p. 29). Until today, contemporary Muslim women in northern Nigeria draw their identities from an illustrious legacy of 19th century Muslim women who were teachers, scholars, activists, and authorities who acknowledged the historic legacy of titles and positions of pre-Islamic women in the region (Mack, 2022, p. 1). This legacy will be discussed in the subsequent section on the legacy of Nana Asma'u later in this chapter.

In *Concubines and Power* Heidi Nast (2005) explores the role that women concubines played in the development of the state, in the Kano Emirate. For instance, royal concubines played a key role in fostering relations between and among empires. They ad a monopoly on indigo cloth dying which was a main source of income for the emirate. They were the primary collectors of grain and collectors of taxes (Falola & Aderinto, 2010, p. 92). Thus, there is ample evidence to support the claim that northern women were *as free as men* in the pre-jihad period. Colleen Kriger also highlights the important role of women's textile production in the Sokoto Caliphate (Kriger, 1993, pp. 361–401). It is important to note that the history of women in precolonial Nigeria is not solely the history of so-called great concubines, queens, queen mothers, warriors, merchants, and priestesses or women with proximity to the royal houses (Falola & Aderinto, 2010, p. 91). Many ordinary women who were illiterate also recorded achievements in different fields. An example is Alimotou Pelewura, an illiterate Muslim Yoruba woman – whose remarkable achievements as the leader of the Lagos market women, a position which she held for over half a century until her death in 1952 – is still spoken about today (Ibid.). In a further example of her agentic participation in the politics, Pelewura was responsible for organising resistance to British policies which threatened the trade of her and her colleagues. She organised

demonstrations related to the monopoly in the distribution of foodstuff during World War II. In December 1940, she led about 7,000 women in a march to Glover Memorial Hall to register their grievances against having to pay taxes owed by unemployed husbands and male relatives (Falola & Aderinto, 2010, p. 94). Although Pelewura was not a northern Nigerian woman, she was Muslim and illiterate. This also raises important questions about the role of culture in how one's religion shapes their live. These questions are even more important because southern Nigerian women were allowed to vote in the 1950s while northern Nigerian women had to wait several further years to be granted the same rights (Falola & Aderinto, 2010, p. 87).

However, returning to a more chronological account, the 17th – 18th century was characterized by a rise in moral decline in all aspects of social life which affected women and their rights. Just like the Jahiliya period, women had no rights). It is within this context that the cleric, Sheikh Uthman Ibn Fodio (Also known as Shehu Usman Dan Fodio in Hausa) emerged at the beginning of the 19th century, as a revolutionary leader. Capitalising on the grievances of the masses against corrupt and unjust leaders and decadent elites, his aims was to reinvigorate the Islamic values that had been eroded, eliminate other syncretic version of Islam that has emerged over the past two centuries, and to establish a socio-political system based on Islamic laws (Bawa, 2016; Nagarajan, 2018a, p. 116). As earlier stated, Dan Fodio's movement intended to reform 'lax' Muslims, rather than to convert 'pagans' (Last, 1979), making it a reformist rather than a proselytising movement; the caliphate also worked to increase its version of social morality in accordance with Islamic ideals by implementing policies that focused on education reform, development of markets and economic reforms (A. Smith, 1971). However, according to scholars such as Hiskett (1973, 1984); Smith (1981) and Boyd and Last (1985), a careful investigation of gender roles and the position of women in northern Nigerian society before and after the adoption of Islam shows quite clearly that the spread of Islam, and particularly the Fulani jihad early in the 19th century, profoundly altered the social, political and cultural conditions for women in northern Nigeria (Coles & Mack, 1991, p. 7).

4.3.4.   Women's position after the Jihad 1804-1960

Beverly Mack (2022) emphasises that any study that seeks to understand Muslim women in northern Nigeria must pay close attention to pre-19th century women's titles and authority, the 19th century reformation period, and the post-independence period because both 20th and 21st century and even present-day Muslim women define their identities within the historical legacies of the women who came before them. Shehu Uthman Dan Fodio's jihad resulted in the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate which had a major impact on women's lives. One of such women is Nana Asma'u Dan Fodio, the daughter of the Shehu.

The role and position of women became an active area of interest and contestation among the Jihadists (Adamu, 2006, p. 2). According to Cooper (1998, p. 24), 'the identity of those following Shehu Usman Dan Fodio came increasingly to coalesce around issues and conflicts related to gender and dress'. While Dan Fodio himself was an advocate for women's education and emphasised the need for and importance of women leaders and women's rights within Islamic frameworks, he also banned women from certain things that according to him were not in accordance with Islam: for instance, he tried to stop his wives from going to the market, thereby setting a precedent for *purdah* (seclusion) (Nagarajan, 2018a, p. 117). Although seclusion was said to have been practiced in the royal courts of Kano during the reign of King Muhammadu Rumfa in the fifteenth century even prior to the Jihad, seclusion was practiced almost exclusively among the ruling elites until sometime after the Shehu's nineteenth century jihad (Mack, 1991, p. 114; Palmer, 1928). Traveller's accounts from the nineteenth century indicate that only royal women and the wives of devout scholars were secluded while other women were free to move about (Barth, 1857; Clapperton, 1966; Robinson, 1896).

Although some argue that the practice of seclusion in the royal courts i.e. the highest social stratum of society, was an expression of religious devotion and showed allegiance to the new ruling elites (Mack, 1991, p. 114), I think that there is a more important factor at play here – I am of the opinion that more than an indication of religious devotion or allegiance to the new elite, this was an indication and signalling of social class – a matter of distinction in its purest Bourduisian sense (Bourdieu, 1979). Even today, there is some aspect of this type of seclusion that is practiced where men do not want their wives or daughters to work or run errands by themselves, this is usually used to signify that the women are adequately being taken care of to the extent that they do not have to engage in basic chores which others have to, not just anybody is able to see and have access to them. This is also seen in the younger generation; a newly married friend of mine said to me 'my wife will never work in a bank, because anyone and everyone can just walk in, see her and talk to her, that is just too much access to my wife'. Regardless of seclusion, Dan Fodio's daughters played important literary and political roles: Nana Asma'u was a leading scholar, teacher, historian, and advisor to her brother when he succeeded the caliphate and remained committed to educating other women and harnessing their skills and talents in the political and theological spheres. As Nana Asma'u was a woman who belonged to the aristocratic class, her life cannot be used as a simple reflection of all women's rights or their freedoms at that time. However, Colleen Kriger (1993) argues that even though women were largely in purdah (secluded) after the jihad, they largely worked as spinners and commentators in the textile industry and the pre-eminence of that industry to the economy of the Sokoto Caliphate should be attributed to the role that women played in all stages of textile production. Thus, the lack of representation of northern Nigerian women in public spaces should not be interpreted as an absolute lack of power or to mean that they did nothing to contribute to the economic and political development of their states (Falola & Aderinto, 2010, p. 97).

While the role of Nana Asma'u is remembered by historians, the role of northern Nigerian women more broadly in governance and expansion is all but written out of mainstream feminist histories (Nagarajan, 2018a, p. 118). Mack (1991, p. 113) highlights the disappearance of the overt power which was once associated with the titles that women held as another impact that Islam had on the lives of women in the region, even before the jihad. The positions of power and control were available for women, eventually leading to the gradual disappearance of women from the public sphere and eventually, also from historical accounts. This was further reinforced by British colonialism and its narrow Victorian ideals of womanhood which were based on the idea that a woman's place is in the home, as a mother and a wife (Falola & Aderinto, 2010). The next sections discuss some of the significant roles and positions of women in northern Nigeria, and how these continue to serve as blueprints for women's organisations today. These have mostly been left out of mainstream historical discourses about women in the region. In chapters 2 and 3, I highlight that both Global South and African feminism lays emphasis on contextualising within local realities. As such, an understanding of the legacy of Nana Asma'u and her sisters is necessary for understanding feminism within contemporary women's organisations in northern Nigeria. The legacy of women like Nana Asma'u cannot be seen as separate from the feminist consciousness that is manifested is the formation of organisations such as FOMWAN. Muslim women in northern Nigerian look to these histories as a blueprint for organising and advocating for women within the context of Islam.

4.3.5. The legacy of Nana Asma'u Dan Fodio: From 'Yan Taru to FOMWAN

In their study of the role of women as 'agents of religieux', Boyd and Last (1985)outline some of the work of learned women in nineteenth century Sokoto and put in context the Shehu's policies on women's education and their legacies i.e., the formal women's organisations that have developed from them. The Yan Taru movement and its impact forces us to re-examine the broad generalisations about women and Islam in Africa, they plead that more attention needs to be paid to Muslim women, what they did and thought (Boyd & Last, 1985, p. 292). The Fodiyo family advocated for women's education, according to Mack (2022, p. 6), the Shehu was born into a family in which there had been educated women for at least two generations before he was born. His mother, Hauwa'u and his grandmother were both educated, in fact, he was educated by his mother and grandmother in his early years and in turn taught his daughter himself (Boyd & Last, 1985, p. 286; Mack, 2022, p. 6). Boyd and Last (1985, p. 286) emphasise that the Fodio family were not unusual in this regard at that time, thus it is unsurprising that he had an egalitarian approach towards women's education.

Nana Asma'u, was passionate about women's education, she started teaching women in her room, and these classes eventually developed to what is known as the *'Yan Taru* program for women's education

(The Associates). The *'Yan Taru* was a grassroots educational program led by Nana Asma'u, assisted by her sisters, they taught women from all over Sokoto (Boyd & Last, 1985). *'Yan Taru* lasted throughout the life of Nana Asma'u, she taught generations of women and children, it carried on after her death in 1864 through her sister Mariamu and later through her niece Ta Modi. When the 'Yan Taru was established, Nana Asma'u included and appropriated pre-Islamic titles used in cities such as Gobir (*Inna – queen mother*, *Uwargida – mother of the house* and *Uwardeji – guardian of the royal children*) to give historical credibility to the program (Mack, 2022, p. 7). These titles came to be central to the 'Yan Taru program in the Sokoto Caliphate. Although the Muslim girls and women were neglected by the British education systems during its colonial rule from in the twentieth century, the '*Yan Taru* continued to serve Muslim women in women throughout northern Nigeria, through Islamic cultural literacy programs in a society that was largely oral, by the end of the twentieth century, there was a rise of women's social activism and new organisations that advocated for women were founded based on the template of the 'Yan Taru program (Mack, 2022, p. 7). The legacy of the movement started by Nana Asma'u and her sister are not only the 'Yan Taru, but also the influential organisations of Muslim women across the north such as The Federation of Muslim Women's Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN) (discussed in detail in the next section) that are dedicated to the education of Muslim women around the country which still exist today and look to the work of Nana Asma'u and her sisters as a source of inspiration (Boyd & Last, 1985, p. 296).

4.3.6. Post-Independence: The rise of women's activists' organisations

Scholars such as Abubakar Sa'ad (1980, p. 474) point out that due to British colonial policy that discouraged Western education in the North to maintain northern development along nativist lines, there was neglect in the enrolment of northern girls in western-style education that contributed significantly to entrenching disparities between the North and the South. It was only in 1950, ten years prior to independence, that any attention was paid to the education of northern women (Bawa, 2016, p. 103). In the late 1950s, the political parties, Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) and later the People's Redemption Party (PRP) under the leadership of the late socialist leader Mallam Aminu Kano, made commitments to raise the status of all northern Nigerian women by promoting women's education (Yusuf, 1991, p. 94). Hajiya Gambo Sawaba a notable and respected figure in the emancipation of northern Nigerian women from male dominance played a significant role in promoting women's education in northern Nigeria (Yusuf, 1991, p. 103). Paden (2002) highlights that the impact of the greater spread of Western education began to be felt among Muslim women in the region as more Muslim women became more active in different parts of society and in positions in the public sphere, they started to come together to advocate for themselves.

From the preceding discussion, it is evident that women working together to improve their lives and position in society has always existed (Mack, 2022, p. 10). One of the earliest women's organisations in Nigeria, the National Council of Women's Societies (NCWS) was established in 1958, towards the end of the colonial period, in Ibadan, Southwest Nigeria (Yusuf, 1991, p. 96). NCWS was avowedly a non-political, non-religious and non-governmental organisation that was established with the stated intention of bringing together all voluntary women's groups with similar aims of promoting welfare and economic and social progress of women in the country under one umbrella (Yusuf, 1991, p. 94). Under the NCWS, there were many different groups with a variety of aims, amongst these included the *Jamiyyar Matan Arewa* (Northern Women's community Work Group). Women in Nigeria (WIN) was launched in May 1982 at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (ABU) – one of the most prestigious universities in the country – at a meeting that included academics and activists from all around the country to discuss and propose initiatives to improve the social condition of women in contemporary Nigeria at that time (Mack, 2022, p. 96; Yusuf, 1991, p. 10). WIN's goal was to come up with solutions to a wide range of topics that affected Nigerian women, such as 'women and the Family' which focused on the domestic oppression of women, and the condemnation of child marriage, women's double workload (unpaid housework and childcare in addition to wage labour), need to improve women's legal status by enforcing equal rights for both (Yusuf, 1991, p. 96).

The emergence of WIN was also out of criticism of previous women's organisations in Nigeria such as the NCWS, which had been elitist, exclusive, and dominated by women in the upper classes who supported the status quo and were not representative of the average Nigerian woman, hence, they were unable to recognise, let alone, address the issues of anyone else other than the elite (Yusuf, 1991, p. 96). According to Yusuf, all WIN conferences have been attended by men and women from a diverse spectrum of careers and have advocated for change for Nigerian women. However, the issue of social class in the Nigerian women's movement persists, and this leads to me question if rural women and those who are not educated had access to these spaces or were represented in any way.

Another instrumental women's organisation that emerged in 1983 was the Muslim Sisters Organisation (MSO) in Kano, which was established by a group of secondary school and university Muslim women activists with a background in the Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria who still wanted to continue this activism after graduating (Mustapha & Bunza, 2014, p. 90). MSO eventually led to the formation of the formation of Muslim Women's Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN) in 1985, which is still active today. FOMWAN has been instrumental in unifying Muslim women from the north and the south and in promoting the rights of Muslim women within the context of Islam, especially because the concerns of Muslim women were often overlooked or in conflict with the views expressed by women in other women's organisations and in conflict with the Quran (Mustapha & Bunza, 2014, p. 90; Yusuf, 1991, p. 99). The divergent religious views in the country and the urgent need for an organisation like

FOMWAN was brought to the fore when the NCWS put forth a proposal aimed at reducing the divorce rates in the country and protecting divorced women, the proposal based on the presumption that the wife must have contributed to this wealth as well during the marriage, stated that any man who intended to divorce his wife in a marriage that lasted more than ten years should be ready to give up half of his wealth and assets to the wife whom he intended to divorce (Yusuf, 1991, p. 99).

For Muslim women, this proposal did not make sense because it assumed that a man only had one wife; and failed to consider situations of polygamy. What would then happen to the other wives and children if the man had to give up half of his wealth to one – presumably his first, and oldest – wife? With this proposal, the NCWS alienated Muslim women, since the proposal did not consider the multiple cultures within Nigeria itself (Yusuf, 1991, p. 100). This is just one example, but such generalisations about s*olutions to women's problems* are often irrelevant to Muslim women because they do not take their cultures, everyday experiences, and beliefs into account. Thus, Muslim women felt that certain issues such as Shari'a legal rights could only be addressed accordingly within the Muslim community and with the cooperation of Muslim men. As a result, Muslim women united under FOMWAN to demand for their rights in accordance with their religious beliefs, they were also able to use this organisation to influence national policy and decision which they felt infringed on their religious rights (Yusuf, 1991, p. 99). FOMWAN's mission statement highlights dedication to education and social welfare with of women and children (Mack, 2022, p. 11). They see themselves as 'the contemporary equivalent of the 'Yan Taru, with wider geographic spread, broader mission and cultural diversity and the same sense of commitment to voluntary service' (Mack, 2022, p. 11; Yusuf, 2008).

Although Nigeria is nominally a secular state, the majority of those living in northern Nigeria are Muslims who live in accordance with their interpretation of Islamic law. It is important to note that many Muslim Nigerians view Islam not just as a religion but as a complete way of life. Therefore, gender issues are religious as much as they are political and any attempt to reform gender without considering religion is likely to fail (Adamu, 1999, p. 56; Hale, 1997; Mernissi, 1996). FOMWAN also provides a safe space for Muslim women to discuss sensitive social issues related to family planning, marital counselling, contraception etc, while soothing the fear that the identity of Muslim women will be 'eroded' or compromised under the guise of feminism or women's liberation, thus, FOMWAN has managed to advocate for Muslim women within an Islamic framework and without being tagged as another 'Western liberation movement' (Yusuf, 1991, p. 102). The discourses around feminism and women's liberation movements in the west is laced with anti-Muslim rhetoric (e.g., the hijab ban in France and Quebec, more examples in footnotes). As such, FOMWAN came to be viewed as a way through which Muslim women in Nigeria who had been viewed as backways and oppressed for being Muslim. According to Basu (Basu, 1995, p. 7), one way through which women's movements have attempted to challenge the view of feminism being a western import is 'by finding symbols of women's

power within the precolonial context'. FOMWAN has done this with the 'Yan Taru, as the 'Yan Taru did with the titles of Gobir queens. FOMWAN, based on the belief that Islam makes adequate and fair provision for women, recognises the need to enforce the rights of Muslim women through Shari'a courts and step in in situations where scholars mix culture and religion to interpreted Quranic verses to legitimise the oppression of women.

4.3.7. Muslim women's organisations as a response to Western feminism

There are suspicious attitudes to feminism (which is usually associated with the west) and Western style liberation movements funded by international Western organisations such as the United Nations (UN) within the Muslim community in Nigeria, and an increasing delegitimisation of women and girls' concerns of these are seen to overlap with discourses that are perceived as Western agenda (Afolayan, 2019, p. 54). Citing the fact that certain UN documents on dealing with the rights of women, on topics such as inheritance, moral values and practice, the role and nature of the family etc., are incompatible with Islamic ideals and rulings on these issues, Adamu (Adamu, 1999, p. 57) highlights that these suspicions are not unfounded. She goes on to argue that a lot of the homogenising Western feminist discourses that inform these women's liberation programs do not recognise the abuse of women's economic rights inherent within the current Western development model, where, women are 'empowered' without dismantling and revising gender roles or structures, resulting an increase in the responsibility of the woman (Adamu, 1999, p. 58). Therefore, the universalisation of one type of feminism and image of what a liberated woman looks like is deeply problematic. Especially in the northern Nigerian context where a certain type of religious conviction and practice is central to the way of life, the exclusion of religion from feminist development discourse results in its failure in places like northern Nigeria.

The importance of Muslim women's involvement in building organisations that centre Muslim women and advocate for women's rights and progress, within the context of Islam cannot be overstated. Yet, many, especially critics who see Islam as an exceptionally patriarchal religion have criticised this as hypocritical because they see it as Muslim women actively fighting against inequality and discrimination, yet, accepting and being complicit in their subordination under Islam (Duval, 1998, p. 39). On the other hand, since many development programs focused on women are funded by international organisations based in Western countries, Adamu (1999, p. 57) argues that Muslim women activists who are working in northern Nigeria face a challenge because these organisations are hesitant to sponsor organisations with religious affiliations. Therefore, these activists must meet the requirements of the donors and balance this with justifying their goals to those in their own societies who see feminism as a threat, branding them 'Western agents', thus highlighting how Muslim feminists have found themselves facing double stigma and delegitimisation within their societies and outside it.

Since independence, the Nigerian state has failed to ensure social protection for a wide swathe of citizens, especially with the difficulties of economic recession and with the quality and availability of state infrastructure and services having declined in recent decades, religious institutions have come to fill this gap, so religious leaders and institutions provide needed services and are most accessible and available, with women in particular able to go to imams and pastors, so religious leaders are the actors that most people trust (Mustapha & Ehrhardt, 2018; Nagarajan, 2018a, p. 123). In fact, one of the main strategies of recruitment used by Boko Haram was that they had a comprehensive social protection model for their members, this attracted a lot of young poor men who needed means of livelihood. As a result of this, there is an increasing push from donors to work with religious and 'traditional' leaders who are seen as the power holders necessary to bring about change, since people trust them, however, the problem arises when a lot of these leaders are not feminist allies (Nagarajan, 2018a, p. 124). Thus, for the people to be receptive to these changes, it must be packaged within the framework of religion, rather than women empowerment/liberation or human rights. According to Mustapha and Ehrhardt (2018), 'Shari'a institutions in northern Nigeria appear to facilitate access to justice, to enhance law enforcement and even improve the socio-economic position of the poorest group of women and widows.

Nagarajan (2018a, p. 132) highlights that another important issue with this power that religious leaders hold is the fact that it is difficult to hold them accountable when they are the perpetuators of sexual violence against girls and women and even young boys, this is illustrated in the culture of silence that has now present regarding this issue. The ethno-religious divide in the country also makes it difficult to tackle specific issues such as abortion for example. While FOMWAN has released a legal opinion which supports abortion within Islam and speaks against stigmatising those who choose this route, the issue of abortion remains a fraught one for Christian activists as it is seen as a very sensitive issue so there is no strong push by Christian activists to change for the stringent anti-abortion laws (Nagarajan, 2018a, p. 132). Similarly, while Nigerian Christians are flexible and open about raising the legal age of consent and marriage to 18 years, Nigerian Muslims argue that this would conflict with Islamic law as interpreted in the North which currently allows a girl to get married as soon as she has reached the age of 'maturity' usually when she starts her menstruation.

4.4. Conclusion

This chapter set out to provide the historical context relevant to the content of this research by outlining the historical realities and discourses about northern Nigeria and the positioning of women in northern Nigerian society. Drawing a link between the past and the present, the discussion above unpacked the historical and socio-political factors that gave birth to the Boko Haram insurgency, situating the

insurgency within the context of the political role of Islam and the history of doctrinal fragmentation in northern Nigeria. From the discussion above, we can see that there is no single homogenous Muslim block or identity in northern Nigeria. These challenges the narratives put forward by the media in the coverage of the Boko Haram insurgency which are usually framed in terms of 'Muslims vs the rest', history shows that fragmentation within the Muslim community has been a long-standing part of Islam in the region since the death of the Shehu. The discussion above also highlights the fact that historically, processes of social reform in northern Nigeria have often led to violent conflicts which are expressed in religious terms as religion is often used as a mode of expressing unaddressed griefs and grievances which are often because of socio-economic factors and made worse by a lack failure of government and lack of adequate leadership. All these factors make the Boko Haram insurgency a dynamic period for the study of women's agency as debates about women position in society is usually a large part of these reformist movements discourse. The discussion above highlights the dynamic experiences of women in northern Nigeria, the limitations of western based ideas of feminism and the challenges that Muslim feminist activists face in such post-colonial societies. This reaffirms the need for a context based (historically and culturally sensitive) feminism which enables a better theoretical understanding of the lives and experiences of women in northern Nigeria and allows a more robust and sustainable practical engagement with their voices, needs and concerns.

Apart from Bowen (1993) and Marsden (2005), anthropological studies of Islamic reformist movements have focused largely on Muslims in urban areas where the population is largely urban and educated, ignoring the rural population, however, studying these movements in the rural areas is important in a well-rounded understanding on the lives of contemporary Muslims (Masquelier, 2009, p. xxiii). This is a gap that his research aims to address to advance existing research on the north-east. The north-eastern part of Nigeria, which is the epicentre of the insurgency is in the periphery of the country, far from the centre, the Boko insurgency has brought an unprecedented level of attention to this region. Marsden (2005, p. 255) through her work in the Chitral region of northern Pakistan, makes a case for studying "rural" Muslims as an essential part of reformist or revivalist movements because these Muslims are also "capable of critical intellectual exchange, and it is through such complex processes that their opinions and, importantly, attitudes have an impact on the societies and networks of which they form an integral part". So, Marsden's work highlights the importance for studying the lives and activities of northern Nigerian women, especially as studies on sub-Saharan Muslims tends to exclude them. The detailed historical context provided in this chapter serves as a guide for understanding the empirical chapters (5-7) that follow.

Chapter 5: Mediated Encounters: Media and communications habits and responses to coverage of the insurgency

5.1. Introduction

On my first day of fieldwork in Maiduguri, in a dilapidated compound in Sulumri, a poor urban neighbourhood and also a host community where many Internally Displaced Peoples (IDPs) now reside, I was conducting a group interview with three displaced women from Gwoza – a woman in her mid-thirties (who had been abandoned by her husband), her mother, and her step-mother – when a call came in for one of the mothers. The caller was a relative of the interviewees, from Gwoza (the town they were forced to leave due to the insurgency). This was a relative whom they had been trying to reach to no avail for the past few days to confirm details about a Boko Haram attack that happened in the town a few days prior, which they had heard about on the radio. My interviewees enquired about the attack in detail; asking questions to clarify the specifics of what they had previously heard on the radio; "Where exactly did they attack? What was the damage? We heard that x number of people were killed, is that so? How many people did they take with them?". My interviewees explained that although they rarely listen to news about Boko Haram, in the off chance that they did listen, they never believed what they heard, because news about the insurgency was usually inaccurate.

This brief interaction highlights one of the most profound revelations that emerged from my interviews and ethnographic field observations, which is the crux of this empirical chapter, the simultaneous yet contradictory presence and absence of the media in the coverage of the Boko Haram insurgency. On the one hand, the insurgency has been a media spectacle, both nationally and globally, as the earlier discussion in the introduction explains. On the other hand, my interviews and field observations revealed lack of media presence in the lives of the victim-survivors of the insurgency. More than that, my fieldwork data revealed an almost deliberate refusal by the victim-survivors to interact with media coverage of the insurgency. Within this context, this chapter explores and discusses this disconnect and tension. Relying on extensive ethnographic descriptions and interview excerpts, this empirical chapter gives an insight into research questions 1 and 2 which explore how media logics in international and Nigerian coverage of the Boko Haram insurgency are received and contested by northern Nigerians displaced by the insurgency and how northern Nigerian women's understandings and lived experiences of trauma and victimisation, coincide with, or diverge from how they are imagined and represented in scholarly and media coverage of Boko Haram. In order to do this, this chapter will speak to the following: the first being theories about media use and practices of women who have been displaced because of the conflict, to explore their media habits i.e., what they do with media, and what these habits enable in terms of community and women's agency. I take this approach to determine how class-linked environments and circumstances structure everyday media use and provide opportunities for agentic

behaviour (Banaji, 2017a, p. 124). Secondly, based on theories that conceive of audiences as highly active and the media as a site of contestation (Banaji, 2006; Mankekar, 1999), this chapter will use postcolonial theories of representation such as orientalism, stereotypes and othering to explore how these northern Nigerian women receive, respond to, and negotiate representations of themselves and their lived experiences in the media coverage of the Boko Haram insurgency.

By recounting the complex history and the social, political, and economic factors which gave birth to the Boko Haram insurgency as well as giving an overview of the historical positioning of women in northern Nigeria and the factors that determined that, chapter 4 provided the building blocks that can be used as tools to verify the contemporary discourses on northern Nigeria. Chapter 1 also discussed some of the media coverage of Boko Haram. Within this context, I asked what this meant for northern Nigerian women whose experiences are presented through a stereotypical and one-dimensional representation of their realities by those who are looking from the outside. This chapter attempts to answer this by articulating northern Nigerian women's responses to representations of their experiences, in comparison to how other audiences imagine or represent them, based on media coverage of the Boko Haram crisis. This chapter in divided into five main sections. The first section discusses the media habits and practices of displaced women, the second section discusses the material factors that impede their access to media and technology, the third sections looks at news engagement amongst IDP women and the different factors that determine how their engagement with the news. The fourth section examines the types of media and communications technologies that IDPs use and what they use it for, while the penultimate section explores news reception of IDP women, their perception and attitudes towards the media. This chapter ends with a discussion on of the role that social class plays in concerns about how northern Nigerian women are represented and challenges that Nigerian journalists face in covering the insurgency.

5.2. Media habits and practices of displaced women

I conducted my interviews in three informal IDP camps on the outskirts of Abuja (the capital city) in the districts of Wassa, Durumi, Gudu. In Maiduguri (the capital of Borno state and the largest city in the north-east), I conducted interviews in Bakassi camp which is the largest IDP camp in the nation, and my other interviews in the interviewees' homes, in the host communities which are in the poorer parts of the city. In Yola, I conducted all my interviews for this group in the Malkohi IDP camp, a formal government camp, about a 30-minute drive outside Yola town, the capital of Adamawa state. Both Maiduguri and Yola are big towns with populations of less than a million. These camps and host communities are all located in underdeveloped slums outside the main city characterised by a lack of roads and basic amenities and infrastructure and surrounded by markets and other informal settlements. The informal IDP camps do not have any form of security, it is open to all and access is free and

unrestricted. Formal government camps on the other hand are well-secured, with military men at the entrance; one cannot access these government camps without written permission and clearance. Whereas Abuja is a city with a population of about 2.5 million, Maiduguri and Yola are smaller towns with populations of about one million. In the camps, the IDPs live in tents made of nylon, with zinc sheets for roofs – 'structures' made with cheap building materials. A family of up to eight can live in a tent. These tents are usually put up by the IDPs themselves and are very shabby structures which are easily destroyed by harsh weather. Most of these camps are informal settlements which means that the government does not recognise them, hence it doesn't take responsibility for providing even the most amenities or services. There is usually a well, borehole or tap where the IDPs can fetch water, there is no formal access to electricity except for the small shops close by that either use small generators or illegally connect to the electricity poles. These areas are usually located on the outskirts of less developed parts of the cities or main towns, thus, there is less security and infrastructure such as roads, streetlights, etc. Bakassi camp in Maiduguri – the biggest camp with about 35,000 individuals – is the only formal camp out of the camps I worked in, a government-recognised camp, as such, under international humanitarian law, the federal government is responsible for the well-being of those in the camps; they get regular food supplies and amenities.

5.2.1.   Media and communications technologies in the lives of IDPs: access, use, and engagement

I began most interviews by asking interviewees about their media habits. I took a general approach to this question, without pre-empting or pre-determining the types of media technology that my interviewees engaged with, in line with Larkin (2008, p. 3) who argues that what counts as 'media' needs to be interrogated and not presumed. I started most interviews by asking if interviewees listened to the news and how they did that, I sometimes asked if they owned any devices in order to get a sense of their media habits. Across my data, the three types of media and communications technologies that my interviewees mentioned most are mobile phones, radios, and televisions (TVs). However, the issue of access to these devices and the connections enabling them became apparent from early on. Although 95% of my interviewees own mobile phones, the phones they own are not smartphones, they are considered 'small phones' or 'brick phones' due to their limited capacity, they can only be used to make and receive calls. Out of the sixty women I interviewed, only five of them owned TV sets, seven of them owned radios, and eight of them reported listening to the radio on their phones. Only two respondents mentioned making use of social media such as WhatsApp. However, it is important to note that an individual lack of ownership of media and communications technologies is not synonymous with access. Banaji (2017a, p. 125) argues that the picture of mobile phone connections is complicated especially in rural areas due to complex patterns of ownership and use. For example, although only five out of my sixty interviewees owned TV's, eleven out of the fifty-five women who did not own TVs explained that they do watch TV occasionally through neighbours. Because of communal living,

collective media like TV can be viewed and radio can be listened to even as a group activity. This is consistent with studies which show that this is a fairly common practice even amongst people who are not internally displaced in rural areas (Ida, 2006; Joshi, 1986; Reis, 1998). This also applies to mobile phones where one can insert their SIM card into another person's phone. Sometimes, I would go to the field and observe women gathered in a room watching TV or listening to a small radio. Rufaida 22, explained to me that she does not own a TV, radio, or mobile phone, however, she listens to the radio and watches TV through her neighbours and when she needs to make a call, she puts her sim in other people's phones to make calls. Similarly, Asiaa, 15 and Hannah, 16, the children of my interviewees tell me that they do not watch TV because they don't have one in their homes, however, they both use their dad's phones; Asiaa to play games and listen to music and Quranic recitation and Hannah to check the meaning of words in the dictionary to help her with her homework. Analysis of my data suggests that access to media and communications technology is seen as a luxury amongst my interviewees, and the factors that further impede access give a better understanding as to why.

5.2.2. Media Poverty: 'I don't even have a home, talk less of watching TV'

For most displaced women, access to media technology is seen as a luxury, one that most of them can barely afford. When I ask Halimatou, a forty two year-old widow and mother of four children (three girls and one boy) if she watches TV or listens to the radio, she initially tells me that she does, when I ask her what she watches, she laughs and responds that she lied and she tells to me "the truth is that, I don't even have a home or place to stay, talk less of watching TV". Halimatou explains that she sometimes listens to the radio through others because her phone is a small phone which barely has any memory, let alone a radio. Halimatou, initially from the village of Kumshe in Bama (Borno state), has been displaced and moving around for the past three years since Boko Haram insurgents came to her house in the village where she lived with her family and killed her husband. He was a Quranic teacher who preached against their actions. Before this, the insurgents had 'paid them a visit' and assured them that they were safe and nothing would happen to them, so there was no need for them to leave. After her husband was killed, she feared that she would be kidnapped along with her children. Her fears were compounded because she worried that she and her young daughters would be forced to marry insurgents. This phrase includes and covers a plethora of sexual violence from rape as a first encounter to unwanted pregnancy. Due to this fear, along with encouragement from one of her relatives who especially feared for the fate of her daughters, she found a way to flee to Abuja, undertaking a long and dangerous journey, even though she did not know anyone in the capital city.

In Abuja, Halimatou and her children took refuge with a community of internally displaced persons from Borno, and they lived together for some time on the outskirts of the city until the owner of the land decided that he wanted to build on his land. The landowner took pity on her as she had four young

children with nowhere to go, so he gave her N200,000 ($463) to find another place. Someone ended up helping her find a place on Kaduna Road, about an hour outside the city, though this person ended up swindling her by taking her to a very low-quality dwelling, especially for that amount; she was in a difficult situation, so she moved into that one-bedroom house with her children. At the time of this interview, her rent for the year was about to lapse and she had nowhere else to go.

Halimatou sells local fried street food and snacks (Kosai and Waina i.e., bean cake and rice cake) to make a living but was forced to stop because the rising cost of food items meant that she could not afford to buy the foodstuff necessary (this is due to the insecurity and banditry in the northwest where most of the food production in the country comes from). At the time of the interview, she had come into town to look for a job, even if she had to sweep the streets, she was willing to do so that she could have the income to restart her business and raise some money to find a place to live. In the mornings, she drops off her fourteen year old son at the mechanic so that he can learn the trade and help in providing for the family. Halimatou also describes symptoms that she had been experiencing which sound like a combination of posttraumatic stress disorder and high blood pressure due to stress. She had visited a pharmacy when she almost fainted while house hunting, she went to the pharmacy and was told that her blood pressure was high. They suggested that she should be put on an intravenous (IV) drip to give her energy, but she felt that she didn't have the money or time for this with more urgent matters of family survival to attend to, illustrating the precarity of the lives of my northern Nigerian women interviewees from displaced communities. A few days later, I woke up to a series of urgent text messages from Halimatou informing me that she was sick, scared and in need of help. I tried to call her back for weeks after that, but her phone was always off. I never heard from Halimatou again, despite my best efforts.

Analysis of my interview and observation data confirms that IDPs in northern Nigeria are living in acute poverty, with precarious living conditions as highlighted by the plight of Halimatou, with no help from the government, especially because most of them are not in government-recognised camps. Most of them do not have jobs and rely on petty trading to earn enough to eat; their daily wages are usually what they use to buy food for that day, with no cushion in case of illness or other mishaps. There are a few who are marginally better off than others but dire poverty is the general situation to different degrees. They were forced to flee from their homes, leaving everything they own behind and running for their lives, to start over in unknown lands. Within the context of their lives, it is understandable that media technologies will be seen as a luxury. They are, as Banaji (2017a, p. 151) puts it, not just the urban or rural poor, but 'the media poor'. The scarcity of access to media is a common circumstance that was expressed in most of my interviews. Notwithstanding, I found that most interviewees had at least a small brick phone and saw these as a necessity, especially for communication with relatives back home (section 5.5 expands on this). Eide (2020, p. 60) in her studies on the importance of cell phones

among refugees underway to Europe found that cell phones play a very important role in the lives of those displaced and fleeing. Whereas for middle-class Nigerians, there is a clear distinction between necessities and luxuries, for IDPs many necessities, in particular, communicative or media-related ones are usually seen as luxuries.

5.3. Material factors that impede media access

Other factors that impede access to media and communications technologies are also environmental, the result of conditions IDPs are forced to live in: poverty, lack of electricity and insecurity. Below is an excerpt from my ethnographic fieldnotes which captures these:

> It is the week after Eid, and I have been calling the women's leader (Aunty Laraba, 51) to arrange my visit to her camp. I haven't gone to the camp for a week because of the Eid break. The items I give to interviewees after interviews are in her house so I need to tell her when I will be coming so she can leave some out for me in case she is not at home. I haven't been able to get hold of her for the past two days. I eventually call Aunty Hadiya, 40, who is her deputy, and she tells me that Aunty Laraba's home and all the tents in her compound were robbed and all their phones were stolen two nights ago. When I go to camp, Aunty Laraba recounts how a group of boys stormed their compound in the middle of the night with cutlasses and demanded that they hand over their phones and all their money. According to her, this is not the first time this has happened, and their phones are usually the first thing that thieves or robbers target because that is usually the only thing of value or the most valuable thing, they own which the thieves can sell easily for money.

A few of my interviewees, such as Awa, 37, also answered that she had a phone but that this was stolen in a recent robbery attack. This lack of physical security from robbers and other forms of predation is even more distressing because the main reason why they are displaced and must live in camps is because of violence and insecurity. However, they reflected on this with me, explaining that insecurity is still a very prominent feature in their present lives, albeit not in the same way as it was back home. Hannah, 16, the daughter of one of my interviewees whose house I frequented expressed to me that she loves her new home in the camp in Wassa because she can go to school and live in peace. According to Hannah, back home in Gwoza, there was no peace because of Boko Haram and people were killed every day, whereas, here in Wassa, the *only problem* is thieves and kidnappers who sometimes come at night. Hannah seemed grateful that the level of threat and harm she experienced had drastically reduced, however, this illustrated that my interviewees have exchanged extreme and life-threatening conditions in what is effectively a war zone for potentially life-threatening conditions in camps.

Another common issue raised by camp residents with their phones is that they might own brick phones but haven't been able to charge their phones for days and have dead batteries. I asked the women's leader, Aunty Laraba, who also works as a midwife in the camp, about this and she explained that they do not have access to electricity at all. As such, they must take their phones to nearby kiosks to charge them as these kiosks usually have small generators where you can pay a fee of N100 ($0.23) for a full phone charge. To put how terrible things are in context, Aunty Laraba laments that few of them can afford N100 for food, let alone to charge their phones. Because Aunty Laraba also works as a midwife, she tells me that she was assisting a woman to give birth a few days prior, there was no electricity and it had gotten dark, she and Hadiya were using the torchlight on their phones, but their batteries eventually died, and they had no money to charge their phones at the kiosks. They had to beg someone to go and find them a torchlight so they could safely deliver the baby. Most IDPs are not able to afford to eat, let alone buy batteries to use in portable radios, this could explain why radio use is not as popular amongst displaced people, despite the fact that radio use is the most popular form of media in northern Nigeria (Abubakar, 2011; Kukah, 1993; Larkin, 2009). Since out of the thirteen interviewees (out of sixty) who answered yes to listening to the radio, six of them mentioned that they use their phones to listen to the radio. However, if they do not have access to electricity and must pay to charge their phones, that means they must conserve their batteries and listening to the radio is not a priority. At the same time, carrying physical radios while fleeing from conflict is not an option.

From the discussion above, there is already a picture starting to form that shows and highlights the patchy presence and largescale absence of media and communications technologies in the everyday lives of IDPs and the economic and material constraints that lead to this, they are simply not able to access these technologies in the same ways that middle-class people are due to the material or infrastructural factors mentioned above. However, we also see the role that community support can play, even with all the constraints, in giving some of these women a modicum of access. Although media and communications technologies are an inextricable part of day-to-day life such that even when people cannot afford to own them individually and many factors impede access, these technologies are still necessary (Ytre-Arne, 2019). The next section looks at how my interviewees engage with media when they use it, the factors that determine their engagement and what they use media for.

5.4. News engagement among IDPs

The preceding discussion has established that physical access due to environmental factors is a major impediment to IDP women's use of media and communications technologies, this section discusses their engagement with the news and their view of the news; specifically, about Boko Haram and the factors that determine said level of engagement. *Engagement* in this case is specific to how IDP women

use media and communications technologies when they can access them and the factors that determine the extent and level of their use, reflection on what that use entails and on news garnered through this process. Later sections will also examine what other functions internally displaced northern Nigerian women use media and communications technologies for. For instance, one of my findings was that even now when interviewees had access to media and communications technologies, they did not necessarily engage with media coverage of the insurgency, and some even avoided it completely. According to several interviewees, some of the factors that contribute to this are: trauma, language barriers and focus on survival, which are discussed below.

Very early on in the field, I asked Aissata, 24 about the kidnapping of the Chibok girls and she told me that she barely knew anything about it and that she has not heard much about the incident. Even though the Chibok girls' kidnapping was the event that launched Boko Haram into an international media spectacle and fuelled the #BringBackOurGirls movement, Aissata, a displaced north-eastern Nigerian woman originally from Gwoza and growing up in Bama – which is about a three and a half hours drive from Chibok – had heard barely anything about the kidnappings and seemed to be almost completely uninterested in them. Before the kidnapping of the girls, Boko Haram had been active since at least 2009, but even within Nigeria, even though they had bombed the UN headquarters in Abuja in 2011, many people outside of the north-east did not know about the group. This made me even more curious about the interviewees' sense of military and political events unfolding and their engagement with media coverage of the insurgency. Conversations such as the one with Aissata were quite common on the field: enquiries about something about the insurgency that made news headlines would often leave interviewees with very little to say, due to simply not having heard about it. Perhaps betraying my alignment as a researcher steeped in global news coverage, I initially found this surprising because for most people those kidnappings are the very reason that they even knew anything about Boko Haram, it being the story that has shaped the insurgency narrative for nearly a decade. Aissata fled from Gwoza in 2015 the year after the kidnapping happened in a clear historical link to the Boko Haram instability. I started to enquire about their relationship with news, specifically coverage of the insurgency. So, what is the extent of their engagement with the news? And what are the factors that determine their level of engagement with the news? In the previous section, I outlined the different ways that access to media and communications technologies is hindered due to environmental and economic factors such as poverty, insecurity i.e., high levels of theft and lack of electricity, this section discusses other immaterial factors which determine the extent of interviewees engagement with the news coverage of the insurgency.

5.4.1. 'My only focus is survival; I don't have time to listen to the news'

Nothing captures the irony of asking internally displaced northern Nigerian women if they engage with the news more than my interaction with Sarah, 34. Sarah was the first person I interviewed in Maiduguri. I interviewed her at her place of work, the side of the infamous Damboa road where she sells fried food (yam, puff-puff, local pancakes). She has a constant stream of customers from early morning until late evening. In between frying food and attending to customers, she explained to me that her day starts at 4am and does not end until it is dark. When I asked her if she listened to the news, she found it funny, she repeated the question to me in confusion to clarify what I meant, then laughed hysterically at the thought and told me 'sister, my only focus is survival, I don't have time to listen to the news'. Even though she has a phone, she does not even have time to use it to answer calls during the day because she is busy attending to her customers. She is the primary breadwinner since her husband does not have a stable job and the family relies on her earnings with three children to care for. Sarah owns both a phone and a TV but explained that she does not have time to watch or listen to the news, she is so busy that it is difficult for her to pick up any calls coming in when she is working. During our interview, a constant stream of customers left her with no moment to even look at her phone. This was the case every time I went back to visit her or passed by her work spot. Similarly, when I asked Lilia, 45, one of the women's leader in the Wassa camp – who farms and sells foodstuff in the market for a living – if she listened to the news she laughed and told me 'I don't listen to the news my dear, I don't have time for that, if I am not in the market, I am in the farm, where do I have time to listen to the news now?'. Even when interviewees have access to these technologies and the skills to navigate them, it is all but impossible for them to engage with the news because their day-to-day existence preoccupies them with doing everything to survive.

5.4.2. Language Barriers

News is broadcast in either English or Hausa. This is another factor that impacts and impedes wider engagement with media. Several interviewees identified language barriers as a hindrance to their engagement with the news. During a conversation with Shatu, 31, Kultumi 26, and Falmata, 40, I asked them if they kept up with the efforts of the governments to curb insecurity and they told me that they do not listen to the news at all because it was mostly in languages that they do not understand i.e. English or Hausa. The north-east is the most diverse part of Nigeria. As discussed in chapter 3, although Hausa is the most widely spoken language in the north, many people in the north-east, especially those who live outside of the state capitals, neither speak nor understand English or Hausa. For example, I

held a group interview in the Bakassi camp in Maiduguri with the women leaders of the camp, all four of them came from different parts of Borno state (Marte, Monguno, Gwoza and Guzamala) and all four of them spoke four different languages (Kanuri, Shuwa, Mandara and Hausa). Even though the northern media which is targeted towards a northern audience is usually in Hausa, it is not surprising that the average north-easterner from Nigeria would be unable to understand it. Most IDPs were displaced from their villages, not the state capitals, so their knowledge of Hausa is likely limited. Being from the north-east myself, most interviews were conducted in Hausa, a language in which I am not fluent in speaking; at the start of the interviews, I always apologised for my broken Hausa and asked them to be patient with my inability to speak properly and the response I would get is 'even us, we don't know how to speak Hausa, we are just managing'. This can also lead to the feeling of being ignored and neglected if they are not even able to access or understand news coverage of their experiences.

5.4.3. Trauma and PTSD

In an attempt to answer the second research question which seeks to understand northern Nigerian women's understandings and lived experiences of trauma and victimisation and how they coincide or diverge from how they are imagined and represented in both scholarly and media coverage of Boko Haram, it is necessary to understand how they reflect on the collective and individual trauma that they have endured and continue to endure, and how that plays a role in the ways through which they imagine themselves. One of the ways through which this became apparent is through their relationship with media coverage of Boko Haram, specifically. The American Psychiatric Association considers a stressor to be traumatic when it poses a threat to one's life, physically or mentally, eliciting a subjective response that ranges on the spectrum of fear to helplessness, and manifests in various ways. War or conflict trauma can thus be understood as the traumatic consequences (physical and mental) because of proximity and exposure to conflict, usually leaving them with long-term physical and psychological damage with a higher chance of disorders such as depression post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety etc. (Charlson et al., 2019; Howard et al., 2022; Hunt, 2010).

For example, a recent study of 1,247 Ukrainians who were exposed to the current Russia-Ukraine war experienced a significantly higher level of PTSD when compared to those who were not directly exposed to the war (Johnson et al., 2022). American sociologist, Kai T. Erikson (1995) defined collective trauma as a violent disruption to the basic fabric of social life which causes permanent damage to the bonds that people attach and impairs the prevailing sense of community; collective trauma thus is a brutal blow to the psyche of a community and alters the way a community existed. The idea of trauma and collective trauma has been employed as a framework to study the effect of conflict in communities in conflict zones such as Kashmir (Hanif & Ullah, 2018), former child soldiers in Uganda (Klasen et al., 2010), the war in Ukraine (Zhaohui et al., 2022) and even amongst those who

have been victim-survivors of the Boko Haram insurgency (Amusan & Ejoke, 2017). Collective trauma is further theorised in more detail in chapter 3. This study employs the concept of collective trauma to understand how conflict and its effects transform the social relations and dynamics that determine the social fabric of society.

Most of my interviewees cited trauma or described symptoms related to PTSD as one of the reasons why they do not engage with news coverage of Boko Haram. When I ask Elizabeth, 38, if she listens to news about Boko Haram, shaking her head to express her displeasure, she explained that news about Boko Haram is too unsettling for her to listen to. Similarly, Fadimatu, 38, and Fannah, 33, complained that they simply do not like hearing news about Boko Haram because it is too traumatising, and they do not want to be reminded about the horrors that they endured. One of my very first interviewees, Asiya, 26, explained to me that hearing about Boko Haram alone makes the hair on her arms stand on end. These responses were not surprising, given the severity of the conflict. The experience of Hajjo, 33, was particularly sad. Her brothers and her husband's brothers are active members of Boko Haram. Her husband and son had been kidnapped by the brothers to force them to join the group, however, they managed to escape, but her parents were not so lucky. Hajjo's aged parents were taken captive by their sons who are members of Boko Haram and then taken into Sambisa Forest (the forest where Boko Haram keeps their hostages). Hajjo's parents were warned that if they attempted to flee, they would be slaughtered. Hajjo's mother managed to escape in the middle of the night after being encouraged and persuaded by her husband (Hajjo's father). Her husband could not escape with her because a previous injury meant that he could not undertake the strenuous journey. His wife begged him to leave with her and even promised to carry him on her back no matter how difficult the journey got. However, he declined because he did not want to risk her chances of escaping.

Hajjo's father has never been heard from or about again following his wife's escape. Hajjo explains that there are people such as journalists, researchers and humanitarian workers, who come to interview them in the camp and the interviews are so traumatic that she cries to the point where she is miserable for days. She also cannot sit alone by herself because her thoughts start to wonder and she remembers everything she has been through, so she stays away from everything that reminds her of Boko Haram. So she does not listen to the news, especially about Boko Haram. Hajjo explains that even now that she has opened up to me about her father, she is probably going to spend the next few days miserable and thinking about him non-stop. Hajjo also narrates experiences that sound like symptoms of PTSD. She insists that there are members of the media who she has seen, and she is sure they are part of Boko Haram. Apparently, an individual approached her one day in camp and told her that he could connect her to her father. This individual told her to come back to the same spot the next day at 5pm and he would place a call so that she could talk to her father. Hajjo went to that spot as agreed the next day and the man was nowhere to be found. Hajjo, due to disappointment and heartbreak spent the next few days

crying. I asked one of the women's leaders at Hajjo's camp in Durumi, about this and she insisted that no such thing happened and Hajjo was hallucinating as a lot of the women in the camp often do.

Media coverage of the insurgency can thus be very triggering for some of the victim-survivors, it reminds them of their family members, friends and neighbours who have either been killed or kidnapped, and it is a reminder of what was and all they have lost. Most of these women have also not received any psychosocial support. As such, they are forced to come up with strategies to avoid re-traumatisation, one such strategy is avoiding news about Boko Haram.

5.5. Use of media and communications technologies among IDPs

How displaced people and refugees use cell phones has become important in media research (Gillespie et al., 2016, 2018). Victim-survivors of the insurgency, especially IDPs, despite the economic, material, and immaterial factors that hinder their access to media and communications technologies, rely heavily on these technologies to build and maintain familial, platonic, and romantic social relations as well as to engage with media content that allows them to escape briefly from their often-difficult everyday circumstances. Given that classed, regional and gendered realities limit their access to media and communications skills, hardware, and connections, it is important to interrogate what role these technologies serve in their lives and how they make use of them in the different contexts of their everyday struggles. Larkin (2008, p. 3) argues that:

> Technologies are unstable things ... The meanings attached to technologies, their technical functions, and the social uses to which they are put are not an inevitable consequence, but something worked out over time in the context of considerable cultural debate. And even then, these meanings and uses are often unstable, vulnerable to changing political orders and subject to the contingencies of objects' physical life.

In line with this nuanced view of the use and function of technology, this sub-section examines what media and communication technologies are and their functions and social uses within the context of the lives of north-eastern IDP women. A major effect of the insurgency is that communities have been destroyed. Families have been separated and scattered everywhere across the country, and some even to neighbouring countries such as Cameroon, Niger, and Chad. As in other studies, for many of my interviewees, mobile phones are seen as necessary to maintain social relations that are sources of emotional and psychological support (Altheide, 2013; Diminescu, 2008; Eide, 2020; Madianou, 2019). At the peak of the insurgency, mobile phones were also used by those who had been displaced to locate their families and loved ones. Mobile phones were also crucial to Boko Haram in organising operations,

as a result, the Nigerian government shut down mobile networks in the north-east for months, as part of their counter-insurgency strategy (Jacob & Akpan, 2015). To understand and grasp how dire the consequences of internal violent displacement are and the importance of social relations to this community (and in turn, the necessity of mobile phones in their lives), it is important to understand that these communities are historically collectivist: community, familial and social relations are an integral part of their well-being. Chapter 6 on the ethnography of conflict: socially transformative aspects of conflict and displacement discusses this issue in more detail.

Elizabeth, 38, used to reside in her hometown, Michika, Adamawa state, with her husband and seven children, before being forced to flee as violence engulfed her town. She now lives in the Durumi camp, in Abuja, with her seven children after being abandoned by her husband who could not care for or provide for them. She describes how she was only able to reconnect with her mother a year after she fled. Boko Haram attacked her town on a Sunday morning when she and her family were in church and started shooting sporadically. She ran away from the church to Lassa (a town in neighbouring Taraba state), however, the insurgents followed them there and attacked again that night, she narrowly escaped to another town, Uvu, dodging bullets. Luckily, a Good Samaritan helped her gather her children together when the attacks started. Others were not so lucky. From Uvu, she begged for money from strangers and got enough to charter two motorcycles to transport her and her children to Yola. Her home, with all their belongings, was burned to the ground, and one of her brothers is still missing, her family has no idea if he is dead or alive, and this is a major cause of the high blood pressure that her aged mother suffers. Elizabeth laments that it would have been better if they were able to see her brother's corpse, rather than having to live with the torture of the present uncertainty. When she left Yola for Abuja, Elizabeth did not have a phone, she was only able to communicate with her mother (who stayed back home as she was too old to make the strenuous journey) after a year of being in Abuja when she ran into someone who was also from her hometown who happened to know someone back home in Michika, who lived in the same area as her mother. He then gave her the phone number of the person back home who could take the phone to her mother so that they could speak. This was how Elizabeth eventually got back in contact with her mother a year after escaping. Other interviewees expressed similar uses of communication technologies i.e., to maintain social relations with family who they rely on for emotional support (Harney, 2013; Madianou, 2014). This is especially important because the way of life where these women come from is communal, where families live in the same compound. Being physically uprooted from that space also means being uprooted from your source of emotional support. Aissata, for example, fled to Abuja with her husband, while her mother and sister, who used to live five minutes away from her, fled to Yola. She speaks to them as often as she can and confides in them about her struggles. Awa, 37 also explains that in the camp where she lives, she does not have friends, she does not consider the people she lives with as friends because she believes that friends are people who know you very well and who you can trust, she considers friends to be one's

community whose values you know and share, as such, she only relies on her husband and calls to the community back home for emotional support.

Some family members, such as Elizabeth's aged mother, were not able to flee when Boko Haram attacked for reasons such as old age, and ailments etc., mobile phones then become important as they allow them to keep in touch and track and reunite with relatives who they lost contact while fleeing from conflict. Dasuki and Effah (2022) employed Sen's Capability Approach as a theoretical lens to examine how IDPs from the North-east use mobile phones to enhance their social inclusion. They found that mobile phones serve to overcome disconnection from communities and to enhance individual and collective capabilities which in turn foster social inclusion, however, these capabilities depend on the person, social and environmental experiences of IDP. This discussion situates media within the context of conflict where instability is the only constant, those fleeing for their lives have no way to carry TVs or radios or even mobile phones as phones are usually the first things taken away when insurgents attack. This challenges the view that mobile phones are easy to carry and transport especially in dangerous conflicts where lives are at risk.

In the case of Aunty Hadiya who fled Gwoza with her children after her husband was killed, they only left with the clothes on their backs, she was not even able to grab her phone as she was heavily pregnant, carrying two children on either hand while carrying another on her back. Her oldest daughter was able to take her phone with her by hiding it in her underwear, so even when stopped by the insurgents, they would not see it. However, they could not make use of the phone on the run as they could not charge it due to lack of electricity on the road (they were sleeping in bushes and caves) or afford to buy phone credit and they escaped through Cameroon, so there was no network coverage. IDPs who have been plucked away from everything they know, make a conscious effort to hold on to every aspect of their community that they can and one of the ways through which they do this is by maintaining social relationships and community and mobile phones facilitate these relationships. Those escaping conflict lack any resources, they have no access to money, connections or their communities that provide them with physical and emotional support.

5.5.1. 'My marriage to my second husband is auren waya' (marriage by phone)

Mobile phones also play a major role in facilitating romantic relationships that lead to marriage and marriages that are forced to be long distance for several reasons. It is important to remember that these are tight-knit communities that marry within themselves. Now that they are dispersed, they use mobile phones to facilitate those marriages. Lilia, 45, is from Chinene, in Gwoza, she has been in Wassa camp in Abuja for nine years after fleeing from Gwoza. Lilia has two daughters who are both married to men from Gwoza. I asked her how she manages to raise her children with their cultural values and identity

in a foreign place and she gave me the example of her two eldest daughters who she encouraged and ensured married men from Gwoza, to ensure they do not lose their culture. I asked how they found men from Gwoza in Abuja, and she explained that one of them was introduced to her daughter via phone, while the other met him in camp. She explained that people from Gwoza do not marry outside of their culture because of cultural differences. Even things as little as a difference in diet, there are some things that others eat that people from Gwoza do not eat, 'how can you marry someone who eats Frogs? Even within Borno state itself, it is not common to marry outside one's culture, but people do it only if they know the family well'. Lilia explained that this is even more important now that they have been forced out of their communities.

Similarly, Fadimatu, 38, described her marriage to her second husband as '*auren waya*' (marriage by phone). When the insurgency broke out, her now husband fled to Lagos and she to Abuja, they were introduced and set up over the phone by their mothers (who are related) and the entire courtship was over the phone until they got married and he moved to Abuja to be with her. Kalthum, 21, also had a similar story. She and her husband met when they were young as they lived in the same village, their relationship eventually got serious as they got older, however, the insurgency broke out, forcing her partner to flee to Lagos as men were being killed, she stayed behind in Gwoza. Their relationship/courtship continued over the phone until he proposed over the phone then took her bride price/dowry to her father who was also in Lagos and the Islamic marital rites were performed there and then.

IDPs who have been plucked away from everything they know, make a conscious effort to hold on to every aspect of their community that they can and one of the ways through which they do this is by maintaining social and community relations and making sure that their children marry within their culture and community and mobile phones facilitate these relationships. Mobile phones, more than a device used for communication are also used by those separated from their communities during the conflict to overcome this disconnection and enhance social inclusion. This also drives home the point that mobile phones, despite being seen as a luxury are also a necessity and thus vital to the emotional well-being of displaced women (Gillespie et al., 2016).

5.6. News reception of IDP women: perceptions and attitudes towards the media

Although it can be difficult to reach some of their relatives back home because of the poor network service (Boko Haram destroyed and continues to destroy telecommunication infrastructure in places where they attack) especially those located in remote rural areas, talking to relatives back home, and word of mouth is the main source of news for IDPs. Even when they hear news about Boko Haram attacks on the news, they do not believe it. Every single respondent I interviewed responded that even

when they encountered news about the insurgency, they never believed what was being reported, for several reasons, and they always had to call their relatives back home to confirm the authenticity of what they heard. They all informed me that their source of news about Boko Haram is 'word of mouth' from relatives back home, but they never believed anything that was said in the media. My interviewees were very sceptical and untrusting of the media. The following subsections deconstruct this.

5.6.1. Lack of Trust: Misinformation and lack of accurate reporting

Beyond the environmental and psychological factors which shape interviewees' engagement with or estrangement from media coverage of the insurgency, there also appears to be a general lack of trust in the media as an institution due to a lack of accurate reporting and misinformation (Banaji & Moreno-Almeida, 2019). As a result of this, interviewees reported that even when they heard coverage about Boko Haram on the news through the radio, they never believe it, they always call home to ask and verify its authenticity. When I asked what radio station they mostly encountered, the answer was simply 'FM radio'. Following this, I asked directly; 'when you hear news about Boko Haram, do you believe it?' and 'what is your source of news about what is going on back home?'. For the latter question, forty out of the forty-four interviewees who answered that question reported that word of mouth is their main source of news, seven of them mentioned the radio, while all but six interviewees answered no when asked if they believed what they heard on the news, and all six of them said they still had to call home to confirm the validity of the news from their relatives.

Lilia for example got passionate when I asked her about the media coverage of the insurgency. Raising her voice, she told me that she can never believe the news about Boko Haram, because she knows the truth and has seen it live, so she knows that the media underreports the number of casualties. She goes on to narrate her experience of jumping over dead bodies in her village as she was fleeing and says that the government hides the real number of casualties to make the situation seem better than it is. She contends that some soldiers even kill civilians and blame it on Boko Haram, giving an example of her neighbour, Mr Joshua who was killed by soldiers during her father's funeral, whose death was later reported on the radio (though she could not recall which station) to be because of Boko Haram. Lilia's statement shows that there is a general mistrust of not just the media but also institutions such as the government and the security operatives such as the military. Such instances forces one to question if this is a case of deliberate or casual misreporting, or is it a case of journalists doing what governments ask or journalists just not caring enough to carry out the research and report accurately. Ali, 52, a district head in the Wassa camp was one of the few men I interviewed, he expressed that a lot of the killings and the realities of their struggles are no longer reported at all or spoken about in the news, and he attributes this to a general disrespect and discrimination for northerners stating that other cultures look down on northerners, perceiving northerners as ignorant. While, the reason for misreporting on

incidences such as the ones discussed above can depend on the type of media institution and its relation to the government, there are other factors – such as challenges related to lack of resources and access to conflict zone that local Nigerian journalists face – which hinders accurate reporting of the conflict. I discuss this further in section 5.6.6.

Jessica, 42, also insists that there are still attacks happening in Gwoza, but they are not being reported anymore, a few of her neighbours in the camps went home to visit a few weeks ago and were attacked, barely escaping. Jessica and Ali's accounts are particularly interesting because the Boko Haram insurgency has been a media spectacle by every standard, yet they feel that the killings and realities of their struggles are no longer reported or spoken about in the news. Although this feeling can be explained by the fact that media spectacles are often short-lived, and media moves on to other issues quickly. Ali's reasoning that neglect is because of discrimination against northerners could likely be due to the structural weaknesses of the Nigerian media landscape such as lack of funding and adequate capacity, which hinder in-depth, professional ethical reporting (Demarest et al., 2020). It is important to note that the media Ali refers to here is the local radio. Being an IDP in Abuja, the radio stations that Ali has access to are likely local stations that may not constantly cover news from the north-east in the same way that radio stations in the north-east would. Another possible factor is also that Nigeria's media landscape reflects the ethnoreligious tensions and divides in the country, with most news outlets headquartered in the south (Demarest et al., 2020, pp. 549–550; Yusha'u, 2010, 2015).

Scholars have argued that the Nigerian media shows ethno-regional bias when reporting conflict, as was in the case of the religious conflicts which led to the deadly riots in Jos in 2008 (Musa & Ferguson, 2013) and the 2009 Niger Delta and Boko Haram crisis (Yusha'u, 2015). This ethnoreligious divide, and how it plays out in the media was briefly discussed in the chapters 1 and 4. Although some scholars have argued that Nigerian media newspapers do not necessarily use explicitly divisive language when reporting conflict, and they generally did not associate Boko haram with Islam and Muslims (Demarest et al., 2020), others such as Ette (2018) find that Boko Haram is usually framed and interpreted within the context of Islam Views by newspapers from the south. Yusha'u (2010, p. 363) calls this 'regional parallelism', which he defines as the 'influence of regional, ethnic, sectional, political and religious considerations in the practice of journalism, which is rooted in the historical, economic, geographical, and political realities of a given country'. Views as strong as those of Ali and Jessica – despite the media coverage the insurgency has received – can only come from feeling like one's experiences are heavily misrepresented by the media to the point where one does not recognise what is being reported. Excerpts from my field notes further illustrate this lack of capacity and expertise in the media space in Nigeria,

Fatou, 47, tells me that the persecution and oppression of Fulani people in particular is not reported at all in the media. According to her, Boko Haram targets herders in the region and steals their cows and kills them but no one talks about this, Fatou says this is particularly sad because a Fulani herder without their cows is nothing and their existence has become pitiful as they now have nothing and are forced to sell firewood for a living.

Fatou's account highlights the fact that different types of nuanced political analysis are missing, especially those which pick up on nuances of class and ethnic overlaps in terms of how the conflict is unfolding. Scholars such as Demarest and Langer (2021, p. 685) have argued that this dearth of in-depth, nuanced analysis in the media is because of capacity constraints worsened by a lack of journalistic training and expertise. Lack of capacity, a dearth of expertise and financial constraints in the mediascape of Nigeria is one of the factors which several journalists and experts I interviewed cited as one of the major hindrances to good news coverage in Nigeria. I discuss this in more detail in section 5.6.6.

Some interviewees got visibly angry when talking about their perception of the news about the insurgency. Fadimatu, 38 reiterated throughout our interactions that she does not believe what she hears on the news or radio, she always must call home to confirm, in fact, she even went as far as to warn me, 'for my good', not to believe anything in the news, because 'they are all usually lies'. Hafsah, 33, also echoes the same sentiments, screaming 'they do not tell the truth on the news, the news is filled with nothing but lies!'. Even interviewees, such as Nabou, 53, who seek out the news are sceptical of its accuracy. Nabou, whom I interviewed in Maiduguri, was one of the few women who actively engaged with news on Boko Haram. She explained that life has changed significantly with the emergence of mobile phones as phones have made life easier and made people less ignorant because they can keep up with what is happening around the world. However, Nabou still maintains that she does not believe what she hears on the news/radio, she always must confirm with a source on the ground because news outlets do not always report accurately. In the context of Boko Haram attacks, Nabou is confident that the news deliberately dilutes the reality of the situation and does not report the exact number of casualties. She suspects that this is done so that people would not be scared. One of the reasons why such sceptical and negative views of the media are so popular is because of conflicting evidence from the lived experiences of my interviewees and what is reported in the news, thus leading to distrust about news narratives.

Lack of accurate reporting, and misrepresentation, also lead to victim-survivors of the conflict feeling a sense of isolation due to public ignorance about the conflict in addition to their sense of being forgotten and ignored by the government. Maro 33, visibly frustrated, explained that people do not know the

extent of what victim-survivors of the insurgency have been through and are still going through. Most are barely able to eat and most of their children cannot go to school: they say they have no hope for the future.

Interviewees also highlighted what they think fellow citizens and global news audiences need to know about their experiences that are not covered or spoken about and what they think is essential for people to know or what they think is missing or not captured in the discourse surrounding their experience which will help towards making their lives better. For example, Zayna, 35, believes that there is not a lot of coverage about the struggles they go through as IDPs who have lost everything, and people do not recognise how hard they must work just to survive or that they do not want to live on handouts. She insists that living on charity is not part of their culture. These widespread accusations of misinformation, disinformation and propaganda in the news are accompanied by credible evidence, and show a failure of the media and is further proof that violently displaced communities are further marginalised through a lack of accurate reporting and representation.

Confirming what might be viewed as naïve or biased perceptions, Lawan, a civilian joint task force (CJTF) officer openly names censorship and political power plays as the rationale behind the lack of reporting/inaccurate reporting. According to Lawan, most news stations tend to favour the government and government authorities must censor the so that people have no option but to believe whatever is being aired. Lawan also reiterates that if he hears the news on the radio, he will have to call his sources and verify from the people on the ground. Lawan alluded to the fact that there are dangers in correcting government-sponsored disinformation when he told me that "sometimes when you listen to the news, you just have to smile knowing well that what is being aired is not true, but you also cannot come out to deny what the government says". These views are supported by Hutchinson (2008, p. 35) who argues that during the conflict, it is the responsibility of the media to keep the public informed in ways that allow them to make rational judgements about judgements actions, however, 'most of the rhetoric at these times tends to be propaganda and combative in nature'.

Media coverage of Boko Haram has always been steeped in politics. When the Chibok girls were kidnapped in 2014, during the regime of President Goodluck Jonathan, who is from the south-south, the government initially denied that any such thing happened. Theories were circulating in the media that this was an attempt by northern political elites to tarnish the president's reputation and political image, especially with northerners to prevent him from being re-elected. Hajiya Mairo, one of the founders of the BBOG movement explained during our interview that:

> The main goal of the BBOG movement was to force the government to take
> accountability because they were saying that the kidnapping did not happen and was
> a hoax, they wanted to sweep it under the rug, and we weren't going to allow that.

Similarly, during the first term of President Muhammadu Buhari (2015-2019), there was the use of military force to suppress news about Boko Haram and only report successful missions by the military. For example, the head office of Daily Trust, one of the most widely read newspapers in Nigeria was attacked and their equipment was seized due their coverage of the insurgency. According to the military, this coverage was a threat to national security. At the end of President Buhari's first term, he was seeking a second term and campaigned heavily on tackling security in the north-east. As such, his administration was eager to close all camps and return IDPs to their towns and villages, although there was no security infrastructure for them to return. So, there was an active effort to report the conflict and the effort of the military in a certain way that worked to enhance the agenda of the government, consequently betraying and devaluing the victim-survivors of the insurgency who continue to live in precarious conditions. However, some have argued that regardless of the claim of objectivity, when it comes to coverage of politically sensitive issues, reporting is always slanted to favour one side (usually the government in this case), leading to something being intentionally omitted, underreported or even over reported by the media (Ayoola, 2008, pp. 161–163).

In his work on media ethics, Roger Silverstone (2007, p. 7) argues that the media are an increasingly significant site for the construction of moral order, defining the morality of the media as "the generality of orientation and procedure within which the world is constructed by the media and within which the other appears". Silverstone maintains that the media has a moral and ethical responsibility to their viewers, listeners, and audiences. However, the response from my interviewees suggests that the media has lost its role as guardians of the public good, their current practices are being pursued without regard to basic ethics or their responsibilities and duties to citizens or states. This is evident given the very low level of trust between the victim-survivors of the insurgency and the media due to misinformation and lack of accurate reporting has forced victim-survivors to only rely on word of mouth and completely dismiss the media as an authentic source of news.

In a further case of *lack of ethics* in media coverage of the insurgency, Aminata, 40, explains that what a lot of people do not know is that the radio played a role in the murders of many people in her village. When the king/chief in their village managed to escape, he gave a radio interview where he narrated how he escaped through the Mandara mountains in the middle of the night, when it was raining, and explained in detail the exact plan, mentioning that before then, he hid in the ceiling of his home for weeks and that is how a lot of men were being hidden. Boko Haram started checking ceilings and patrolling that route and killing those who were trying to escape. Aminata explained that Boko Haram

always listens to the radios and plans their attacks accordingly. It was also through the radio that they found out that families were hiding men in the ceilings of their homes. Studies such as that of Des Forges (1999), have shown the radio's potentially negative role in contributing to violence in the case of the Rwandan genocide in 1994.

Although this case is slightly different than the Rwandan case where fake news was intentionally used to sow seeds of discord and fear between the Tutsis and Hutus, this is equally terrible and suggests a complete lack of planning and ethics in terms of how breaking news reports in a conflict situation do not take into consideration that a situation is ongoing with any ethics or sensitivity. Silverstone (2007, p. 7) defined media ethics as the practice and procedure in the way journalists go about their business when it comes to and how the relationship between media producers and their audiences is constructed or assumed. In this case, there were no ethical considerations as this news coverage ended up leading to the death of many citizens. By highlighting the complex interrelated factors which lead to failures of media in the coverage of Boko Haram i.e., lack of accurate reporting and misinformation, this section sheds light on the second research question which seeks to understand how northern Nigerian women's understandings and lived experiences of trauma and victimisation coincide with or diverge from how they are imagined and represented in the media coverage of Boko Haram.

5.6.2. Media representations of 'distant others' and responses

The preceding discussion has established interviewees' media habits and some of the complex interplay of factors that mitigate and inflect their levels of engagement with or distance from media (specifically factual news programmes covering the insurgency) and from communication technologies. In this chapter, I argue that despite limited access to media and communications technologies being one factor preventing engagement with news of the insurgency, what emerges as a far more prominent reason for a general and deliberate lack of engagement with news is because interviewees often repeated bad experiences of news and media reporting about their communities. Many still encounter the effects of the media coverage of the insurgency and the ways that they are represented, through their interactions with people in their day-to-day lives. I used the term 'mediated encounters' to refer to the ways through which media coverage of Boko Haram shapes interactions that people from other parts of Nigeria have with northern Nigerians from the north-east. A plethora of my data supports the claim that media coverage of the conflict shapes the way that people perceive and interact with northerners in general, but more specifically, those from the north-east. This section highlights the latter part of the argument by looking at how interviewees reflect on and respond to representations of themselves (as victim-survivors of the insurgency) and of the north-east and its people (Borno, Adamawa and Yobe, and by extension in the north in general) as a site of perpetual and irrational conflict. Interviewees theorise this in their ways by reflecting on cultural norms and differences between the north and south; and how

these differences are perceived and manifest materially as discriminatory and problematic representation.

5.6.3. Stereotypes and contestations: 'They have this stereotype that all Borno people are Boko Haram'

Interviewees who engage with the news (even those who do not engage with the news or media, encounter the effects of representation in the media coverage of the insurgency based on their interaction with people in their day-to-day lives), reflect on the way that the north-east, and by extension, the culture of the north in general, has been constructed as a 'terrorist haven' and all northerners as 'terrorists'. They do this by reflecting on the assumptions that people express about IDPs, specifically the women, and cultural norms and differences between the north and south; and how these differences are perceived and manifest materially. Lawan, the CJTF officer narrated his experience of attending a workshop in the north-western state of Katsina. At the beginning of the workshop, during introductions, he introduced himself and told the room that he is from Gwoza, Borno state. The workshop attendees became scared to the point that the person next to him changed his seat and moved elsewhere. According to Lawan:

> They have this stereotype that all Borno people are Boko Haram. I told them that it is not so, the media portrays Maiduguri as a place where everyone has been killed and people fear coming to Maiduguri

This stereotype especially seemed hurtful to Lawan, a CJTF officer who in his own words, would willingly give his life to protect his people from Boko Haram. Similarly, Fatou, 47, tells me that there is a lot of discrimination against IDPs, especially those of them from Borno. According to Fatou, some people insult them and call them Boko Haram, their children also receive a lot of insults and other parents stop their children from interacting with their children once they find out that they are IDPs from Borno. She contends that people do not have a proper understanding of their experiences and see them as part of the problem rather than victim-survivors. Mairama, 33, an IDP in the Gudu camp, narrates her experience of discrimination in the market in Durumi, where she usually buys her food items. The palm oil seller who she usually buys from accused her of being part of the people who brought Boko Haram, just because she is from Borno. According to Mairama, 'once people find out that you are from Borno, they become scared of you'. She specifically highlights that Igbo and Yoruba people mostly insult and call them 'Boko Haram'. However, Lawan's experience in Katsina highlights that even within the core north, there is still the stereotyping of north-easterners, especially those from Borno state as being part of Boko Haram. In the recently concluded 2023 presidential elections, the Vice-President-elect, Kashim Shettima, who is Kanuri and was the Governor of Borno state for eight

years during the height of Boko Haram – since he was announced as the running mate of the APC presidential flag bearer – has faced and continues to face a lot of backlash. He is stereotyped and labelled as a supporter, founder, and sympathiser of Boko Haram by discourses across social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook without any substantial proof or evidence.

The prejudice against victim-survivors of the insurgency detailed in the previous two sections highlights the material consequences that media representations can have. As explained in the section on the historical and political imaginaries of Nigeria, it is a country of about 200 million people, with a history of ethnic and religious tensions that go as far as the colonial project that birthed the Nigerian nation. For someone who is from the far south region, for example, they could have spent their whole lives without having met or encountered a northerner. For them, northerners are the 'distant other' in every way, physically, geographically, in terms of religion, culture and values (Carter & Dodds, 2014). Thus, for some people, the media is their primary encounter with northerners. This is crucial because as Hall (Hall, 1997, p. 3) reminds us, meaning is produced and identity is constructed in a variety of different media, the means of communication by complex technologies circulates meanings between different cultures on a scale and speed that is unprecedented. The experience of north-easterners is reminiscent of how Adivasi (tribal) women in central India and their families get doubly targeted by Maoist (Naxalite) militants fighting the government and by the government and the military police while also being depicted as Naxal fighters and targeted by other populations of other states and by the media, where victim-survivors are treated as perpetrators (Sundar, 2011). Despite being victim-survivors, they are further victimised and othered through stereotypes.

5.6.4. 'They see me as ignorant; I would rather be called ignorant than live the way they do'

Sarah, whom I interviewed in Maiduguri reflected on her observations on others' perceptions of northern women from the time she spent in Lagos. Sarah explained that when she was in Lagos, she realised that because of Boko Haram, non-northerners view northerners, especially women as ignorant, oppressed, backward and uneducated. She attributes this to a misunderstanding of northern cultures, insisting that one cannot compare northerners and non-northerners because they have completely different cultures and values. While this misunderstanding has a longer history and is rooted in the ethnic and religious divide in Nigeria, it is my contention that the Boko Haram insurgency has become a new frame to express difference and such stereotypes. Even though Sarah is Christian, she explained that she relates more with northern Muslims than southern Christians, because of shared core values amongst northerners. She insisted that in the north, both Muslims and Christians are religious, but in the south, one cannot even tell when the holy days are because people do not go to church. Sarah maintained that northerners have a better upbringing, using the example of decent dressing, she highlights that a married woman in the south can dress scantily, in her own words, 'she can even wear

a vest or just tie a wrapper across her chest and go out, but that cannot happen in the north, it is not respectable for both Muslims and Christians'.

Sarah goes on to say that southerners see this as freedom and a sign of modernity, however, to her, it is a sign of backwardness. Sarah insisted that their lifestyle in the south does not appeal to her, because they have no values, as such, she does not mind if they see her as ignorant through their lens. She also went on to state that in the south, women are not respected or valued, she uses the example of women engaging in strenuous manual labour such as construction or butchering (which is common in the South but not common in the north). Sarah ended by contesting the stereotype that northern Nigerian women are not hardworking, she insists that this is far from the truth and explains that just because northern women do not engage in manual labour does not mean they are not hardworking, and most women in the north, including those who live in seclusion, have a means of earning an income, the only ones who do not work are those whose husbands have explicitly stopped them from working. However, she contended that this happens everywhere not just in the north.

In Sarah's attempt to correct stereotypes about the north and women in the north, she also engages in a further set of stereotypes about the south and women in the south. This critical gaze and/or reverse stereotyping was also evident in other accounts amongst my interviewees. Zayna, who is half Hausa-Fulani and half Igbo (half northern and half southern) believes that Boko Haram has made the view of northerners worse, as others now view northerners as ignorant and uneducated, however, she disagrees with these stereotypes and insists like Sarah, that southerners just do not understand northerners and have a disdain for northerners. Lilia particularly contests the view from others that northern Nigerian women are oppressed and completely dependent on their husbands.

One of my expert interviews with Umma, the founder of a non-profit, non-governmental initiative for participatory communication for gender development, mentioned the Chibok kidnapping and the BBOG movement for the role it played in further perpetuating the stereotypes about northern Nigerian women. According to Ms Umma, even at the best of times and without the media attention, northern Nigerian women have either been completely eased or represented in a stereotypical one-dimensional way, but the Chibok girls' kidnapping made everything worse, everyone now sees northern Nigerian women as only victim-survivors who are raped, kidnapped and weapons of war. She insisted that the attention from the media coverage of the insurgency, especially the BBOG campaign, hardly brought about improvement in the visibility of northern women, although northern women are now more visible, 'it is as victim-survivors and properties'. However, Ms Umma also acknowledged that she does not think there is anything that the BBOG founders could have done at that time because the campaign was an organic response to the first-ever case of the mass abduction of its time, so there was no strategic planning prior. However, she contended that the publicity could have also been an opportunity to show

different facets of northern Nigerian women because although women in the north-east are being abducted, there are also many ways that they are affected by the conflict, there are many ways that the conflict has changed their lives, women in the region are also active in fighting the insurgency and protecting their communities, women are also rebuilding their lives in very impressive ways, but only one story is being told in the media.

In response to the single narrative representation of northern Nigerian women, Ms Umma made a film, which she describes as:

> Bottom-up research and filmmaking project that sheds light on changing gender norms and cultural practices in the conflict-ridden Borno state. The project captured the untold stories of women and girls who – like countless peers in the region – have shown exceptional courage and resourcefulness in safeguarding their families and helping them to survive amid the Boko Haram crisis. In the process, they found opportunities, like access to livelihoods and decision-making power that would have been hard to acquire before the regional conflict. The project leveraged the silver linings of an otherwise terrible situation.

One such woman is Sarah, who is discussed above (and also featured in the film), who found a unique opportunity amid the conflict to create a successful business and fend for her family. Another is Diya, 27 a biology student at the local polytechnic, and has been able to work as a project officer with several local and international organisations – such as Save the Children – who seek to implement education, health, and nutrition-related projects within her local community. In perhaps one of the strongest refutations on the idea of the 'distant suffering', Diya explained to me that she does not like the fact that women who have been victim-survivors of the insurgency are always only asked about their trauma, she insists that this constant reminder of their trauma prevents them from moving forward. Diya believes that instead of only focusing on the past and what has happened, they should be encouraged and supported to rebuild their lives, she thinks that it is important that people stop pitying women in the north-east as it will only keep them in a constant state of victimhood. Diya thinks that people need to know and understand that they, the victim-survivors of the insurgency are just like everyone else, the only difference is that the insurgency happened to them, and they work hard every day to change their lives for the better, so when people talk to them, they should discuss ways to help, as they are tired of always talking about their trauma. Diya's plea can be read as her begging to be humanised and treated with dignity and solidarity, rather than pity and fear.

Apart from the short film on Aisha Gombi – dubbed the 'Boko Haram Huntress' by Al-Jazeera – a hunter who leads a group of hunters into the forest to hunt Boko Haram insurgents, stories on women

are framed through the lens of victimhood and vulnerability. However, Aisha's story was also framed as an outlier whose story is different from the norm, rather than one whose actions are part of a wider tradition of women in the region actively fighting the insurgency. By focusing on the contributions of women in the CJTF and '*Yan gora* (youth with sticks), the anti-Boko Haram vigilante groups formed in 2013 – intending to protect their communities and assist the Nigeria security forces – in Borno and Adamawa states, Agbiboa (2022, p. 1013) challenges the binary focus on women as strictly victims or vulnerable citizens and highlights the versatile role of women in countering insurgency in the north-east as front line fighters, local knowledge brokers, friskers, investigators and producers of vigilante technologies. The theoretical conception of media audiences as 'active' and agentic citizens who engage in the negotiation of meanings, allows for the understanding of how northern Nigerian women receive and contest media logics in the media coverage of Boko Haram, thus answering the second research question of this study. In the next subsection of this chapter, I reflect on an oft-ignored aspect of vulnerability amongst the women I interviewed, the intersecting influence of social class.

5.6.5. The salience of social class: challenging the category 'women'

Social class is also a salient determinant in the lives of women across Nigeria, both in the north and south. I asked Mariya, 20, if she thought there were any differences between the lives of women in the north and in the south, Mariya answered that the lives of women in the north are not that different from the lives of women elsewhere in Nigeria; some women enjoy while some women suffer, she goes on to explain that if a woman has children but neither she nor her husband has the means and money to live comfortably, life will be difficult for them, hence, that woman will suffer. Mariya insisted that this is both in the north and south, highlighting the fact that the quality of a woman's life depends on the amount of money she and her husband have. Saliently, class plays a role in how women respond to stereotypical representation. While many of my non-elite interviewees encountered the effects of the media coverage of the Boko Haram insurgency through their encounters with others who perceive them through the lens of opinions formed from this media coverage, leading to assumptions, stereotypes and othering, the experts I interviewed (except for Ms. Umma) seem to dismiss representations, based on the view that it has no real-life consequences. Hajiya Mairo who is one of the founders of the BBOG movement and a highly ranked government official working in the Presidency, has been at the forefront of women's activism for a long time and is one of the most prominent and visible northern women in the country. When I asked her about her thoughts on how northern Nigerian women have come to be defined in very specific ways; mainly as victim-survivors and vulnerable citizens, she asked me what was wrong with being seen as a vulnerable person. She further explained that she did not see anything wrong with those representations, neither did she think that it was negative because it is the "truth", and it is "only natural" for women to be seen as the face of poverty since that is what grabs attention for publicity and communication. She went on to argue that the story of Aisha Gombi, the Boko Haram

huntress went viral, highlighting the variety of representations of northern women in the coverage of the insurgency. She concluded that these representational methods are just something the media always does, they look for the most gripping story to attract attention and should not be a cause for concern.

Similarly, Mr Sarki, a high-ranking government official who works on security policy and has covered the north-east for the past decade acknowledged that women in the north-east have been represented in a stereotypical one-dimensional way, stripping away their voice and agency, he also acknowledged the many roles that women have played in countering the insurgency and rebuilding their communities which are hardly shown, however, he maintained that these stereotypical, one-dimensional representations did not have material real-world consequences. He argues that although it has effects on how the conflict is perceived in terms of how recipients of aid are perceived, it is not a primary issue in the scale of priorities. In his words:

> The primary aim here is ending the conflict. Does this [problematic representations] get in the way of that? If the answer is no, then I'll see this is a minor problem. We'll come to this later. This is the problem that we are trying to solve, so one tries to not get into a situation where you are more interested in how the conflict is rendered than in solving the conflict itself. I have come across a study that proposes this, there is a problem with gender, rendering and all of that. And it doesn't show the full range of female agency. That's unfortunate, but it's not an argument about representation. There is a conflict; people are dying. We need to solve that problem. So, this doesn't necessarily strike me as the first problem, second problem or even the third problem.

Despite the dismissal of representation from experts as seen in the last two quotes above, as unimportant and having no real-life consequences, these stereotypes have real-life effects as people from the north-east are discriminated against repeatedly and harassed in real-life based on these stereotypes. The penultimate subsection discusses responses from journalist highlighting the challenges that they face in their work, which hinder critical in-depth coverage and reporting of the conflict.

5.6.6.   The Nigerian media space: challenges in covering the insurgency

In addition to the division along ethnic and religious lines which has had significant implications for how the coverage of the insurgency has played out and how it has been received by diverse audiences across the country, the media coverage of the insurgency has largely been shaped by the political and economic climate of Nigeria as a nation-state. Compared to my own childhood and youth in Abuja, where I have vivid memories of the house being filled with newspapers and hawkers selling the day's newspapers at every traffic stop, there has been a gradual disappearance of the everyday presence of

newspapers, and responses from journalists indicate that this is emblematic of the landscape of economics of the media business in Nigeria. Below, I discuss three main challenges that emerged in my interview with journalists covering the insurgency.

Lack of resources

When I discussed the challenges that media faces – in relation to the coverage of the insurgency – with Sarki, a journalist who has been covering the north-east for the past decade, he explained that the problem is one of economics as print had already become a problem even before the 'online revolution' started. Sarki explains that in a country of two hundred million, there is no newspaper that currently has a circulation even of a hundred thousand. Echoing Sarki's thoughts, Ayo, a journalist who has covered the insurgency for the past five years, told me that nowadays, newspapers do not sell as most media businesses have gone online, and the online business is one of traffic; with that, 'people tend to sacrifice the truth, accuracy, and objectivity on the altar of viewership'. This desperation leads to sensationalism, as that is what catches people's attention and brings traffic. For these journalists, the standard of ethical reporting is compromised in favour of traffic that brings in the money (Ette, 2018). Violent extremism such as Boko Haram supplies the media with many key elements that grasp audiences' attention: conflict, unusualness, negativity and sensationalism (Abubakar, 2020; Shoemaker & Cohen, 2005)

Lack of resources coupled with geographical factors presents a unique challenge. The epicentre of the insurgency is on the north-eastern fringe of the country, far from the centres (Abuja and Lagos), an area that is on the periphery of most Nigerians' consciousness, a periphery both geographically and psychologically. Vast areas lie outside Borno's capital city, Maiduguri, and its second largest city, Bama, sparsely populated with villages in small clusters in rural areas. This is the case for the states in the north-east. In many of these remote areas, there is no state presence or even terrestrial broadcast service. It is difficult to access these areas physically, let alone to accurately report on them. For communities in this region that are on the border of Nigeria and other countries, such as Cameroon, there is free movement back and forth because of porous borders. Due to a lack of resources, most media houses are not able to have and maintain bureaus in every part of the country. As such, they tend to focus on geographical 'centres. Headquartered in Lagos or Abuja, without any local reporters on the ground in these areas, most media houses lack in-depth coverage and analysis of the conflict and can't syndicate thoroughly researched stories to international venues.

Lack of access to women

Paid a pittance, journalists are susceptible to bribery. Likewise, a dearth of ethical and investigative training leads to a dearth of specialists, and to the lack of women in the profession. This is very evident

in the way women's stories are recounted in the coverage of the insurgency. Due to the conservative culture of the north, and when you are looking at the IDP's in particular, many women will not talk to a man who is not their husband or relative. Thus, it can be difficult for male journalists to get good material from women in the region. There is a significant absence of (northern) women in the journalism space due to cultural factors; hence, it can be difficult to get the voices of victim-survivors. Hala, a northern female journalist, tells me that women who work in journalism, especially northern women, face a lot of discrimination in their work, making it difficult for other female journalists to enter into the field. Hala complains, 'how do we tell women-centred stories when we do not have more women?'. This leads to a very 'masculinist' media, which is feeble and misleading when it comes to writing about women. Although this varied based on social class, during my fieldwork, most of my interviews were conducted while women carried out their household chores in a domestic space – where male journalists would rarely be welcomed. All these factors contribute to gender biased, surface level reporting, and the invisibility of northern Nigerian women in the media.

The role of international media

Journalists I interviewed also complained about the unequal power dynamics when it comes to the involvement of international media. Ayo tells me that in many situations, local media is not able to access conflict zones because of lack the of insurance or adequate security arrangements whereas, international journalists with stable resources but with little knowledge of the region are able to very easily access conflict zones and report directly from there. As such, some Nigerian journalists are forced into armchair journalism, sourcing stories from foreign media, Ayo tells me. This poor infrastructure of Nigerian journalism leads to a general lack of motivation for investigative reporting (Ojo & Adebayo, 2013). Research has shed light on the safety concerns associated with media coverage of Boko Haram (Abubakar, 2016, 2017; Pate & Idris, 2017). Not only have Boko Haram insurgents use the media to 'address the nation' and advance their agenda (Abubakar, 2016), they have also targeted and terrorised journalists and news organisations (Pate & Idris, 2017).

When I ask about the relationship with international media, Ahmad, a journalist, and the head of an independent media house, tells me that racism and discrimination characterise the international media landscape when it comes to Nigeria. As he explains it, 'colonialism still exists, they do not see us as equals':

> They come here to Nigeria and see me like a local journalist. They prefer that I work as a fixer, where they throw $200 to me, and then I go and help them with all the research and stories. Then they will write the stories that will win the Pulitzer and send a message or letter of commending me for helping them win that Pulitzer. We do not get that international recognition or that commission to write the stories. They

tend to see us as locals who are part of the problem, so would they rather send

somebody who will come here with no context or history, and then he writes what

he picks up.

The excerpt above highlights the discrimination faced by local journalists where they are patronised by international journalists as fixers, mere resources to provide the local 'flavour' that will give depth to the stories of the international journalists. Nigerian journalists are not seen as equals and are not given the platforms where their voices can be heard. International media organisations in the Global North tend to be the ones with the platforms and access to the international space; thus, they have the power to call the shots on who speaks and whose voice is heard. Keen (2008, p. 164) highlights that when the media covers a conflict or humanitarian emergency, it is important to ask what has taken place beneath the surface. In the same light, when the media covers a humanitarian crisis, especially one in the Global South, it is pertinent to question the media politics at play: Who are the local journalists who provide the details of these stories and why do we not hear directly from them? What power relations and inequalities are reproduced and reinforced? Who is speaking and who is not being heard?

5.7. Conclusion

This chapter set out to discuss and tease out the disconnect and tension between the ubiquitous nature of the media coverage of the insurgency, the simultaneous absence of media and communication technologies in the lives of victim-survivors of the insurgency and their deliberate refusal to engage with media coverage of the insurgency. The discussion above highlights that media and communication technologies in the lives of displaced people is both a luxury and necessity. On one hand these technologies are seen as a luxury due to extreme levels of poverty and the precarious nature of their lives, on the other hand, they are vital for keeping in touch with family who they left behind and for occasionally escaping their realities, thus, necessary for their emotional well-being. This paradox and tension is captured in plight of Halimatou, whom I never heard from again, after a series of disturbing messages, highlighting the precarity of IDPs living conditions and the necessity of mobile phones; in Halimatou's time of desperation, she relied on her phone to reach out for help. Just as the case of Halimatou and other interviewees discussed in this chapter illustrate, precarity is the only constant in the lives of displaced people, and thus this throughout this research as well. It is a condition that allows for manifestation of a specific types of agency, one that is ephemeral in nature. Chapters 6 and 7 discuss this in more detail.

Interview excerpts reveal that media coverage of the insurgency has resulted in stereotypes and Orientalist views about the north and its culture, especially those from the north-east as ignorant, oppressed, and uneducated and they are associated with terrorism. The north and its culture are also

viewed as backward and oppressive, northern women are viewed as lazy and dependent on their husbands or others. Despite the dismissal of representation from experts as unimportant and having no real-life consequences, these stereotypes have real-life effects as people from the north-east are discriminated against again and harassed in real life based on these stereotypes. As chapter 4 discussed, these stereotypes have existed since the amalgamation of the northern and southern regions; and have been sedimented over a long period by political rhetoric. The media coverage of the Boko Haram insurgency is thus a further way that these stereotypes are reinforced. The prejudice and discrimination against victim-survivors of the insurgency highlight the material implications that media representations can have. Evidence from my analysis of the data collected shows that despite the unprecedented level of media coverage and global attention on the lives of victim-survivors of the insurgency, my data analysis uncovered a deliberate refusal by IDP women to seek out or engage deeply with news coverage of the insurgency in a way that is quite at odds with, for instance, displaced citizen behaviour reported during the war in Ukraine (Shklovski & Wulf 2018, Burke et al 2022, Horbyk 2022). Due to this complex web of related factors, including economic and environmental ones (lack of access due to poverty, lack of electricity, insecurity, lack of time), psychological ones such as trauma and PTSD and language barriers. Even when they do encounter the news, there is a lot of mistrust of what is being reported due to their perception of a lack of accurate reporting and the misinformation that contradicts or does not accurately reflect their experiences. However, interviews and ethnographic observation also reveal that IDP women still encounter and respond to the media coverage of their experiences and the representations of them, indirectly i.e., through their encounters, interactions and experiences with people, whose perceptions of them are largely shaped by the media coverage of the insurgency. The idea that the encounters and interactions of displaced victim-survivors with people is shaped by perceptions from the media coverage of Boko Haram, which they view as a source of influence in how they are treated and encountered by others then suggests that mediated encounters as an analytical concept can further our understanding of displaced peoples relationship with the media or more broadly, the relationship between media representations and peoples engagement with news about their experiences. The idea of 'mediated encounters' challenges existing audience studies work which does not consider indirect encounters between media and audiences.

As explained, in chapter 2, Nigeria is a country of roughly 200 million people, ethnically and religiously divided with a history of ethnic and religious tensions that go as far as the colonial project that birthed the Nigerian nation. For someone who is from the south-south region, for example, they could have spent their whole lives without having met or encountered a northerner. For them, northerners are the 'distant other' in every way, physically, geographically, in terms of religion, culture and values. Thus, for some people, the media is their primary encounter with northerners. The deliberate refusal – of victim-survivors – to engage with media coverage of their experiences due to misrepresentation of, and the stereotypical construction of their identities indicate their agentic behaviour as active audiences and

the media as a site of contestation where northern women receive, negotiate and respond to representations of themselves and their experiences. Although victim-survivors of the insurgency agree that their experiences have been traumatic, their contestation and refusal to engage with media coverage of the insurgency and the way that they have been represented, highlights that their own understandings and lived experiences of trauma and victimisation diverge from how they are imagined and represented in scholarly and media coverage of the insurgency. A discussion of the media habits of these displaced women, especially concerning the coverage of the insurgency and their responses to the ways through which people encounter and regard them, is important for understanding the following: the way that they interact with the media representations of themselves and their experiences as both an expression of their agency as audiences as well as a deeper expression of gendered agency as northern Nigerian women. The next chapter examines the nuances which are missing in the coverage of Boko Haram to highlight the ways in which this has led to an erasure of women's agency and a lack of understanding of the socially transformative consequences of violent displacement.

Chapter 6: The socially transformative consequences of misrepresentation and violent displacement in northern Nigeria

6.1. Introduction

'Everything we had known changed overnight, our way of life has changed, our society has changed – forever.' These were the words of Mama Inna, a 68 year old woman from Gwoza who I met in a host community in Maiduguri. I interviewed Mama Inna's stepdaughter, Gambo, while Mama Inna sat close by listening to our conversation. As Gambo and I spoke, in my peripheral vision I could see Mama Inna sighing and shaking her head. I looked directly at Mama Inna, and she uttered the words above and continued to shake her head. This brief interaction shook me, and I think about it often, particularly the tone with which she spoke and the appearance of the pain and loss which accompanied the words. During my time in the field – a field which is also, in a sense, my home – I listened to many accounts and experiences of violence. A group of junior secondary school students who slit the throat of another student; a young girl who committed suicide after being sexually assaulted by an NGO worker. The common theme or thread of these experiences is atrocity, extreme violence, trauma, and the normalisation of violent responses thereafter, which comes for some in the wake of untreated trauma.

The Boko Haram Insurgency has been in full swing since 2009. Communities in the north-east have been exposed to extreme levels and types of violence from an incredibly young age. Children born when the insurgency started in 2009 are now fourteen years old. They do not know any life other than this one of extreme violence, displacement, and trauma, thus normalising violence and its aftermath. These patterns of violence, just like those defining the conflict that caused it, have permeated every level, nook and cranny of society, and imbue its very fabric. The literature on past conflicts suggests that these patterns of violence – and the consequential trauma responses – are likely to endure even after the conflict has ended, unless an understanding of transformation can be utilised to provide relief from trauma and to prevent ongoing cycles and patterns of misrepresentation and fuelling of conflict imaginaries (Bunting et al., 2013; Fargas-Malet & Dillenburger, 2016; O'Neill et al., 2014).

This chapter highlights what happens in the gaps which are not reported by any mainstream media to argue that the lack of nuanced, in-depth, and critical coverage has led not only to a manifest erasure of northern Nigerian women's agency, but equally dangerous, to a lack of proper understanding of the socially transformative consequences of violent displacement. For example, IDPs living outside formal government-recognised camps – the majority of IDPs who find shelter in host communities or informal settlements – face a higher level of exclusion and are denied basic human rights and protection, as they are not considered under the purview of the government. Therefore, their experiences are ignored by international media, which prioritise compelling and spectacular images of conflict that fit stereotypes

(Fielden 2008). This chapter highlights the ways in which IDPs in informal government camps are doubly subaltern.

By nature, conflict is transformative. Widespread and multilevel violent conflicts result in changes which affect different parts of a population in various ways. Describing the nuanced nature of these changes, Lawan, a Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) officer whom I spoke to in Borno, told me:

> The insurgency has upgraded and downgraded the status of people at the same time. It has uplifted the status of those who have never seen road networks before the insurgency. Because of the insurgency, someone who has never had the chance to visit Maiduguri now lives here with his children schooling in the city. There is an advantage for some, but there is a bad side to it: there are some people who were big businessmen in their rural areas, and today they have to join queues to get food to eat.

Forced displacement due to the insurgency left over 3 million people displaced within Nigeria, with an additional 1 million in neighbouring countries such as Cameroon, Niger, and Chad. These significant demographic movements are also taking place against the backdrop of extreme poverty, shrinking economic opportunities, and increasing multidimensional vulnerability. Displacement alone, regardless of the violence that preceded and travels in its wake, affects everything, both material and immaterial: people of the north-east have lost their homes, jobs, and sources of livelihood. Many have lost all of their loved ones, and some have become disabled, thus losing other versions of themselves. Beauty, 23, who has been in the Durumi camp for five years, tells me that 'there are no humans in my village; it is gone, there is no home. Talatu, 35, frantically asserts:

> I have no home; my village has been destroyed by Boko Haram. It was burnt down. Not even animals are there now.

People in the north-east have essentially been plucked out of their everyday lives and their communities and thrown into grief and unfamiliarity. Consequently, the dynamics of social relationships have shifted. In the concluding section of Chapter 5, I highlighted that precarity is the only constant in the lives of displaced people, and this condition allows for the manifestation of agency which is ephemeral in nature. Despite the fact that the Boko Haram insurgency has received attention, it has still been neglected in many ways; most notably, it has not been covered and reported beyond the surface level and focuses on aspects of it which are spectacles. Many important aspects of the conflict have been ignored. Answering the first part of the third research question which seeks to understand the reflections of northern Nigerian women on the socially transformative impact of conflict, this chapter focuses on the consequences of the erasure and misrepresentation of the socially transformative consequences of

the Boko Haram insurgency. Attending to these conceptual interests, this chapter is divided into three sections: with particular attention to aspects that are often overlooked or only addressed on a surface level in media reporting, the first section discusses ways through which IDPs in non-formal government camps are made invisible; the second discusses how governance and citizenship play a role in the experiences of IDPs and how this differs depending on their location; and the third focuses on changes related to mediation and community.

6.2. Neglect and invisibility of IDPs in non-formal camps

Less attention has been paid to IDPs in informal camps and host communities compared to those in formal government camps, which has led to the invisibility of IDPs living in informal camps, some of which are remote and those in host communities (Olanrewaju et al., 2019, p. 2). This is reflected in the general media coverage of the insurgency which does not show this nuance. Interviewees in the field were very conscious of this neglect and its real-world consequences: IDPs who are not in government-registered formal camps (a majority of the IDP population) are left out of aid, humanitarian interventions, and livelihood support, and are forced to fend for themselves or rely on well-meaning private citizens, thus accentuating vulnerability and structural inequality. One such example is Hassana, whom I spoke to in Maiduguri.

The photographs above, used with permission, depict the 'home' of thirty-year-old Hassana. Hassana lives in the room pictured with her seven children (the oldest being fifteen years old) in a host community in Maiduguri. Hassana and I sat on the green rug, as pictured above, for our interview.

Before the insurgency, Hassana lived in Sabon Gari with her husband and children. In 2017, she was forced to flee when Boko Haram attacked and brutally killed her husband. After this traumatic series of events, Hassana went to an IDP camp in Maiduguri for a short while but was unable to stay there because 'things in the camp were really difficult, especially with seven children, I was not given a place where we could all stay', she tells me. Due to overcrowding, she was forced to leave and decided to take her chance to find shelter in a host community. Her annual rent amounts to N30,000 ($40); she finds it difficult to pay this, as she barely has a source of income. She tries to get by selling fried food on the roadside; however, because of the recent inflation in Nigeria, she has been unable to afford the required raw food items.

When I worked with Hassana, her rent was due in two weeks, and she could not afford to pay it; she was being threatened with eviction by the landlord. In the middle of our interview, we were interrupted by Adamu, Hassana's eldest son, who whispered something to her and her countenance fell. I could tell that she was holding back tears. I ask her what the problem was, and she proceeded to tell me that she had sent her son to the kiosk close by to purchase food items on credit so that she could cook their meal for the day. Unfortunately, the kiosk owner had refused, as she had already owed him too much and had not started to pay him back. Hassana went on to explain that since being displaced, her life had been beset by difficulties. With no substantive source of income and no state assistance, she cannot afford to feed her children. The roof leaks when it rains, and they hear rats in the roof. Although she has enrolled all her children in a public school, they are hardly able to attend because she cannot afford the required transport fees. Hassana tells me that she has never received any assistance from the government or humanitarian organisation; only well-meaning individuals have helped her out here and there.

All my internally displaced interviewees lived in variations of conditions, such as that of Hassana, with some being marginally better off and some even worse off. Neglected by the government and international organisations, the lack of food, shelter, means of livelihood, and healthcare are only some of the material changes to everyday life that my interviewees have faced and continue to face since being displaced. Although formal government IDP camps are by no means safe havens, those residing there are at least provided with food, shelter, and livelihood support; they have security and some sort of protection; and are often recipients of skills acquisition training programs.

Mohammed (2022) found that IDPs in camps had more resources than those in host communities; however, this does not mean that they realised more of their capabilities due to factors such as a lack of freedom of movement. As of 2022, there were about 32 official IDP camps in Borno State, with 16 of them in the state capital, Maiduguri. Out of the over 3.9 million people who have been displaced due to Boko Haram, about 2.1 million are displaced Nigeria, spread across formal government plans, informal

camps and host communities across the country[13]. Approximately 120,000 IDPs reside in these official camps within Maiduguri, while over 400,000 IDP are spread across other communities in the state[14]. This has put additional strain on the resources in host communities and has frequently led to conflicts between IDPs and the indigenes of the host communities (Kamta & Scheffran, 2022; UNHCR & World Bank, 2016). Despite Nigeria pledging to the Global Refugees Forum in 2019 to include and prioritise refugees, IDPs, and host communities in the national development plans[15], this does not seem to have materialised. Section 6.3 discusses this in more detail, while the next few subsections discuss the changes to material conditions of everyday life: food, shelter, well-being, and livelihood for IDPs in non-formal camps and host communities, how this differs from IDPs in government camps, while highlighting their invisibility in the media.

6.2.1. Food insecurity in host communities: 'I sell my sanitary pads so that my children can eat'

IDPs in informal camps and host communities are forced to choose between necessities. Food insecurity and adequate shelter were the top two concerns expressed as the major impacts of displacement. Studies have shown that the IDP influx also negatively impacts household-level food security conditions in host communities due to pressure on already scarce resources (George & Adelaja, 2022). According to the World Food Programme (WFP)[16], due to the conflict, as of 2022, 8.4 million people in the north-east are food insecure, 4.4 million people are facing acute hunger and 320,000 children are suffering from acute malnutrition. The WFP has a significant presence in the north-east, especially in Maiduguri, and provides food vouchers for IDPs in camps. However, those in host communities and informal camps do not benefit from this. Mallam Ali, the State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) coordinator, who is responsible for the day-day management of the camp on the state level, tells me that there are a lot of organisations that provide food in camps in addition to the WFP, some of these include the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), the Borno state government and the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA). Mallam Ali also explains that because women are prioritised in food distributions, this makes some women more eligible for marriage; 'the men, once they know that you have this food voucher, you have livelihood support, they will marry you as long as they know that you collect these things easily, you will get a husband'.

Farming was a major source of livelihood in the north-east, and most interviewees came from farming communities. Interview responses indicate that the indigenes of most displaced communities hardly

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[13] https://dtm.iom.int/nigeria

[14] https://www.premiumtimesng.com/regional/nnorth-east/214179-borno-still-32-idp-camps-despite-return-displaced-persons-nema.html?tztc=1

[15] https://www.unhcr.org/ng/wp-content/uploads/sites/121/2021/12/GCR-in-Nigeria-Booklet-10.12.2021_for-web.pdf

[16] https://www.wfp.org/emergencies/nigeria-emergency

ever had to purchase food because they harvested everything that they consumed and sold the excess. Interviewees in host communities and informal camps explained that one of the major shocks of being displaced was the realisation that they had to buy all the food they consumed. Although their lives pre-insurgency was not perfect, they had never experienced hunger because of a lack of food. Like Hassana, most interviewees reported going to sleep hungry and not knowing where their next meal would come from. Even for those who managed to find positive opportunities during the insurgency to build successful businesses, like Sara Steven, 34, who makes an income selling local fried snacks on the side of a busy road, food is still a luxury. For Sara:

> Life has changed significantly since the arrival of Boko Haram. Many people travel from villages to cities. In the village, life is straightforward, and people rarely buy food; they grow the food they consume and sell the rest for income. Now they have to rely on money which they do not have to buy food.

Sara explains that although for her life has changed because she now has a successful business she might not have had without the insurgency, she could only do this because she has received exceptional financial help from well-meaning private citizens and NGOs. Sara is a self-settled IDP who initially settled in camp, but chose to leave because their movements were constrained. Sara chose to move to a host community and started what is now a successful business. Sara's trajectory is not the norm. I interviewed Hapsy, a 26 year old mother of three children, at the Durumi IDP camp. She had been in the camp for seven years since Boko Haram attacked her village in Gwoza. She stayed in a camp in Uba, Adamawa, before finally coming to Abuja to live with her husband in the Durumi camp because he believed that Abuja would have more economic opportunities. Hapsy's husband found work as an Okada driver, but this was short-lived, as he was shot during a misunderstanding. They were unable to pay his medical bills and only managed to do so with the help of the camp chairman, who sought donations from private citizens who visited the camp. However, since this incident, Hapsy's husband has been disabled, unable to work, and has been beset by constant pain. Hapsy now has to fend for her entire family, handle all domestic work, and take care of her children. When I asked her how she has been coping, she told me that she has resorted to selling sanitary pads that people donate to them in order to be able to buy food for her children.

This illustrates in detail the difficult situations northern Nigerian IDPs in host communities and informal camps have to navigate, sacrificing necessities for other necessities, with women shouldering both social, reproductive, and economic burdens. The amount of food distributed in camps is insufficient. This is reflected by headlines such as 'Displaced in north-east Nigeria 'knocking on door of starvation':

WFP[17] (2021) and 'IDPs face water, food scarcity despite intervention'[18] by Human Angle (2022). However, IDPs in informal camps and host communities, such as Hassana and Hapsy, do not have access to WFP vouchers. Some scholars attribute this to the *misinterpretation of displacement* by state actors who argue that the 'choice' people make to settle outside government camps or with family elsewhere disqualifies them from being classified as IDPs, rather, they are seen as 'dwellers' (Olanrewaju et al., 2019, p. 4). This political policy language leads to deliberate undercounting and higher levels of suffering.

The National Commission for Refugees, Migrants, and IDP's launched a program in December 2021 called 'Project Zero Hunger', which it describes as 'a project conceived to address the growing challenge of food insecurity among all persons of concern ... and increased level of accessibility to food and non-food items'[19]. Despite the media coverage which this project received, Aunty Laraba, the women's leader at the Durumi camp, informed me that the commission only distributed food items to them *once*. As the leader of all IDP camps in Abuja, she insists that no other camp in Abuja has recently received food distribution. The invisibility of IDPs in host and informal camps violates their basic rights to food and shelter. As a result of their invisibility or, more accurately, their neglect by state actors, their suffering increases (Harild & Christensen, 2010; Solomon, 2009). However, these nuances are hardly obvious in headlines about the insurgency.

6.2.2. Displaced minor girls and transactional sex: 'women have to sell themselves to fulfil their basic needs'

The issue of 'sex for food' emerged frequently during the interviews. I ask Fandi, a 27 year old mother of four (two boys and two girls) who has been displaced for seven years, about the most significant changes in her community over the past few years. She recounted how Boko Haram has sent northern Nigeria backwards in time, explaining that before the insurgency, there were thriving businesses and farming was lucrative. All have been destroyed, and villagers have had to depend on others for help, often going to bed hungry. She added: 'things are so bad that women have to sell themselves to men for their basic needs to be fulfilled'. Within the context of Boko Haram, Gendered sexual violence, has been extensively covered by the media[20] (Nwaubani, 2016). (See, for instance, 'Officials Abusing Displaced Women, Girls: Displaced by Boko Haram and Victims Twice Over' by Human Right Watch[21]: 2016; 'Sexual violence and the Boko Haram crisis in north-east Nigeria[22] by Humanitarian

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[17] https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/10/1103252
[18] https://humanglemedia.com/idps-face-water-food-scarcity-despite-intervention/.
[19] https://ncfrmi.com/#cls1
[20] https://news.trust.org/item/20160927171504-7tpb5/
[21] https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/10/31/nigeria-officials-abusing-displaced-women-girls
[22] https://odihpn.org/publication/sexual-violence-and-the-boko-haram-crisis-in-north-east-nigeria/

Practice Network: 2017; 'Abuse of women IDPs[23]' in the Guardian Nigeria: 2021, 'Sex for survival: How official use underage IDP girls as objects of pleasure'[24] by Adebajo (2020) in the Premium Times), as well as academic scholarship (Matfess 2017; Oke-Chinda 2021; Njoku and Akintayo 2021: Agbaje 2020 and international organisations[25]). While media coverage is likely to report sexual abuse which goes on in camps, especially by camp officials, analysis of my interview data indicates that sexual violence against those in host communities as well as informal camps is less likely to be reported, and that these groups tend to be extremely vulnerable, as they have no one to report to and live in open camps with no security (Njoku et al., 2022). Ali, the SEMA coordinator confirmed that the agency has no way to keep track of the well-being of those who do not reside in formal camps.

In another interview, Aunty Laraba, 54, explained that because of how rampant such situations are, the camp's chairman encourages girls to get married as soon as they reach the age of sixteen. Some of the girls even want to get married as young as fourteen. Although she tries to discourage them, she feels that there is not much that she can do if the parents' consent, which they often do. Owing to a lack of food and resources to care for their children, parents pressure their daughters to marry as early as possible. Asta, 28, who also resides in the Durumi camp, reiterates that because of how difficult things are, many women are forced to have sex with men for money just to survive. Hapsy, 26, explains that moral values hold no water in the face of survival, so she understands why women essentially *pimp* out their daughters and encourages them to go after men for money. What remains unspoken in most of these accounts of transactional sex pushed onto minor girls in the name of daily survival are the many instances of rape and other sexual violence that they endure as a result.

Despite the amount of humanitarian aid that has been poured in during the conflict and the presence of humanitarian and development actors in the region, Ali argues that all of these issues are linked to poverty, hunger, lack of food, and means rather than to some specific cultural predilection. According to a report by Humanitarian Outcomes[26] (2020), there were seventy-four identified organisations working in the north-east by the end of 2019. According to Ali and illustrating how dire the situation is, 'even when we talk about humanitarian assistance and empowering IDPs, it is only about 1% that get this livelihood support and those are the ones in camps, we are not talking about those who are not in our camps'. Ali's main concern is 'the high level of exposure to sexual violence most women have to endure, just to survive'. Ali explains that over the past six years, NEMA provided food to those in

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[23] https://guardian.ng/opinion/abuse-of-women-in-idps/

[24] https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/415976-sex-for-survival-how-officials-use-underage-idp-girls-as-objects-of-pleasure.html?tztc=1

[25] https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/report/s-2019-280/Annual-report-2018.pdf

[26] https://www.humanitarianoutcomes.org/sites/default/files/publications/score_ne_nigeria_01_2020.pdf

(formally recognised) camps, while the state government provides condiments, which were then distributed according to the number of people in a household.

While academic and media attention has focused heavily on sexual violence against women and girls, there is an emerging focus on the sexual violence that boys and men face in conflict (Barron & Frost, 2018). In both conflict and post-conflict situations, men are key targets of violence; they are usually the first targets and are forced to join armed groups (Onyango & Hampanda, 2011).As discussed in Chapter 2 (section 2.3.5), men and boys are also victims of sexual violence (Schulz, 2018); thus, a tactic that armed groups use is weaponising sexual violence to undermine the masculinity of other men is through feminisation, stigmatisation of other men as homosexual, and rape of men in the opposing group (Njoku et al., 2022, p. 80). This tactic is grounded in militarised and hegemonic masculinity. An interview with staff of the NGO 'Sexual Assault Referral Centre' revealed that the organisation receives between twenty to thirty cases of conflict-related sexual violence (CSRV), including sex trafficking and sex for food of men and boys in the Lake Chad region every month (Njoku et al., 2022, p. 83). These traumatic narratives are drowned by the dominant framing of men as perpetrators of violence and women as victims in both local and international media. Homosexuality in Nigeria is taboo and illegal, with a hefty prison sentence of fourteen years, so men who have been raped fear coming forward in case the violence they suffered carries with it stigma, and these cases are not reported or addressed, which further silences and victimises them.

Javaid (2015) and Hlavka (2017) have argued for a sophisticated conceptualisation of the relationship between toxic-hegemonic notions of manhood and the construction of male victimisation and rape myths (Njoku et al., 2022). Drawing on bell hooks (2000), who argues that those who view feminism as a project for women alone, and thus anti-male, is a deep misunderstanding of feminist politics, Banaji (2012) highlights the ways through which a narrow understanding of gender, violence, and feminism as informed by mass media and even academia further encourages the view that speaking out or advocating against violence which affects only women and girls can be defined as feminist. If the goal of feminism is gender equality, all forms of sexism must be addressed. This will be expanded upon in the chapter 7, which discusses the ways that men react and respond to the rising socio-economic profile of women as a result of economic opportunities that opened up to them during the insurgency.

Neglect of self-settled IDPs: lack of access to healthcare

As one of the women's leaders in the Durumi camp, Aunty Laraba, 51, leads sanitation exercises every Saturday in the camp. She explains that even though their tents are made of weak nylon, they do not have adequate ventilation, and people are always falling sick. This becomes far worse during the rainy season, when there is little they can do to protect themselves. Many internally displaced individuals, particularly children, suffer from tapeworm infections and die. Aunty Laraba maintains that they have

pleaded with the government for at least the past seven years, to at least help them with proper housing but this has fallen on deaf ears. Again, it is important to note that such stories about the plight of non-formal IDPs do not make headlines and are instead drowned out by sensational headlines. Their camp is not recognised as formal and does not fall under the jurisdiction of the government, so Nigerian media inattention is perhaps understandable for political reasons, but the lack of international interest is notable.

Aunty Laraba, self-taught, works as a midwife in the camp. She started delivering babies in the camp because of the challenges faced by IDP women in the hospital. She told me that in 2014, an IDP who had just returned from a camp in Cameroon came to Durumi. She was seven months pregnant and experiencing some complications, so she was taken to the hospital. The hospital asked them to pay N150,000 ($326) before a doctor would attend to the heavily pregnant woman. Their pleas were dismissed even after they informed the hospital staff that the woman was an IDP who had no money. The heavily pregnant woman eventually went into labour early and died. The baby was born prematurely and died a few hours later. After witnessing this, Aunty Laraba said that she had decided that this would never happen on her watch. She saw women as her responsibility, particularly when it came to childbirth. At the time of this interview, Aunty Laraba had successfully delivered 125 babies with no deaths; both mothers and children surviving. Although she has no medical training or proper facilities, all the women give birth in a small room with only a small bed. Aunty Laraba was eventually sponsored by an organisation for a personal hygiene training course which she teaches to other women in the camp to prevent sickness. Aunty Laraba's determination can be seen as a form of embodied agency wrought in the context of a specific set of adverse circumstances. I also read Aunty Laraba's actions as an account of feminist activity and agency, as she advocates for women who have been neglected by state actors. This illustrates that even under these dire conditions, people still make choices and find innovative ways to serve and cater to their communities and support and advocate for the needs of other women (Banaji, 2017a; Ekezie, 2022).

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), Nigeria accounts for approximately 20% of all maternal deaths globally[27], making it the second-largest contributor to maternal mortality worldwide. This is even without considering the insurgency and its effects on maternal life expectancy. Nevertheless, research indicates that the presence of local and international humanitarian actors due to conflict has resulted in an improvement in maternal health in the north-east (Tyndall et al., 2020). In this context, it is also important to note that Boko Haram specifically targets health aid workers. In 2018, Hauwa Liman, 24, a midwife working with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), was kidnapped and killed by Boko Haram in Rann, a town in Borno, adjacent to the border of

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[27] https://www.who.int/news/item/25-06-2019-maternal-health-in-nigeria-generating-information-for-action

Cameroon. This incident was widely covered by the media (both locally and internationally), including the BBC[28]. The Boko Haram insurgency has worsened maternal mortality, especially for women living in informal camps and host communities outside of Borno state, such as my interviewees in Durumi and Wassa camps in Abuja. This is because the majority lack any form of documentation which further restricts their ability to access vital services (LeVan et al., 2019, p. 7).

While IDPs living in formal camps have greater access to government and NGO services and humanitarian assistance than those living in informal settlements or host communities pregnant women have experienced harrowing conditions throughout the insurgency (Birchall, 2019, p. 10). For example, in Fandi's escape from Gwoza with her sister, mother, and other female relatives during the rainy season, they went through the forest with no food and shelter for days on end; some women were bitten by snakes, pregnant women went into labour while on the run, and when they gave birth, rusted zinc was used to cut the umbilical cord, which was the only sharp item available. Fandi explains that some women who had just given birth had blood dripping down their legs as they were walking through the forest but were forced to go on.

Maman Jafar, 30, drives home the point by sharing her experience giving birth to her first child. According to her, none of the women around her knew how to do anything; she only survived by the grace of God, but she attributes these positive changes to Aunty Laraba and Hadiya, who have some experience. Habsatou, 37, one of the women's leaders in the Wassa camp, echoes other interviewees' concerns about the lack of access to healthcare. She tells me that the IDPs cannot afford the money for complicated medical issues, as the hospitals in Abuja, even government hospitals, are too expensive, and they get turned away because they cannot afford the registration fee. Habsatou tells me that sometimes the IDPs have to travel back to Maiduguri (about 10 – 12 hours by road), where they are indigenes to access hospitals.

While there does not seem to be a government presence for those in IDP camps in Abuja, those in Borno State report benefitting from NGOs and the government. For example, Mubina 22 went back home to Gwoza to give birth because there were NGOs there, and they performed a caesarean section on her for free. Thus, it seems as if those in Maiduguri, the epicentre of the insurgency, benefit from the presence of NGOs. My interviewees acknowledged that NGOs and the government are doing a lot to help those back home in Borno, especially in formal camps. Every month, those in camps such as Bakassi are given food and distribute relief items, although this does not occur in Durumi or Wassa. Despite this,

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[28] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-45871361

respondents are not willing to return to Borno because most of their towns and villages remain unsafe, sporadic attacks occur, and government camps in Maiduguri are overcrowded.

6.3. Governance and citizenship

My fieldwork was conducted in formal and informal camps and host communities. Bakassi camp in Maiduguri is the largest IDP camp in Nigeria, it is formally recognised by the government, therefore the residents of Bakassi receive frequent humanitarian assistance and relief items as well as health and education services. Those in informal camps such as the Wassa, Durumi and Gudu camps in Abuja are not formally recognised and thus are not entitled to state protection. As a result, there is limited humanitarian assistance and the presence of government agencies or humanitarian interventions in these camps, and they are left to fend for themselves. Most of my fieldwork was conducted in these camps. Bakassi camp is subject to heavy security with military personnel around the camp, every visitor coming into the camp has get permission from official, then sign in and out, and every organisation that wants to carry out any program in the camps needs to get permission from the government and is supervised by the camp officials. IDPs in Bakassi camp also have to sign out when they are leaving camps premises, thus their movement is monitored. However, this is not the case in informal settlements; there is no monitoring, and they are on their own in every literal sense.

Despite the influx of humanitarian actors across the north-east, my observations during my time in the field and responses from interviewees indicate that IDPs live in inhumane conditions, both in government-recognised camps and in informal settlements and host communities. Most IDPs experience multiple episodes of displacement (UNHCR & World Bank, 2016, p. 36). They initially flee to the nearest town where they can find safety, this can also be across the border to neighbouring countries such as Cameroon for many such as Hadiya and her eight children, who initially fled to Cameroon when her husband was killed, where they found refuge in a stranger's home. With the help of Nigerian soldiers, they crossed the border back into Nigeria and were taken to the Arabic Teachers' College camp in Maiduguri. At the camp, they were given relief items, such as stoves, buckets, detergent, mattresses, and pots. Hadiya and her eight children were placed in a hall with almost a hundred people divided into sections - that was the room dedicated to women with children. In Hadiya's section, there was one woman with eight children, another with ten children, and another with seven children. There was no ventilation and they all slept on thin mattresses on the floor. Although Hadiya credits the government for helping and providing them with food and relief items while at the camp, she could not stay there after a few months because the conditions were so bad that her children were falling sick and there were no opportunities for her to earn money. So, displaced yet again, she left to come to Abuja.

Aminata, a 40-year-old mother of five, stayed in camps in Madagali, Uba (both in Adamawa state), and Maiduguri before she came to the Durumi camp in Abuja, assisted by the chairman of the camp, who is her stepson. She explains that camp life is grim. There was a Cholera outbreak in the Madagali camp which killed many people, especially children. She left this camp because of fear of cholera and went to Uba before going to the camp in Maiduguri. According to Aminata, the camp in Madagali was especially vile; the buckets they used to bathe were the same ones from which they would be expected to eat.

6.3.1. Exploitation and harassment by camp management and authorities: 'no safety anywhere'

Formal camps, such as Bakassi, have a process and system for the distribution of relief materials. For example, the World Food Program (WFP) provides a card to everyone which they use to collect food and relief items. According to the WFP 2020 report,[29] beneficiaries receive cash or vouchers worth approximately N17,000 ($37). I was told of the theft, diversion, and embezzlement of relief materials by security operatives in camps. This has been covered by some Nigerian media, such as The Guardian[30] (2022), the Daily Post[31] (2022), and the Institute for War and Peace Reporting[32] (2020). Even in Wassa, an informal camp, interviewees complained about the hoarding and diversion of relief materials donated to them by well-meaning individuals. When I ask Amatullah, 35, if they receive any assistance with relief materials, she tells me that sometimes individuals or organisations donate relief items to them, but even when they do, it is usually embezzled by the men who are in charge of the camp, such as the camp chairman. She explained that sometimes they may release clothes and food to women, but they never release the money; they always keep it for themselves.

Even the police cannot be trusted as they help the men in charge of the camp to hide the relief items and get their cut, I was told. However, Amatullah highlights that the chairman in the Durumi camp does not do that; he is very helpful, and this was confirmed by other interviewees. In Bakassi camp, during my focus group with the four women leaders who are all over 50 years, Hajiya Fanta, Hajiya Hadi, Hajiya Awa and Hajiya Gummus, they complained that women are disrespected in camps, as they are never involved in the decision-making process, they have to fight to be involved. They further express that when someone wants to give support, camp management does not call women to seek their opinion. As such, women often feel neglected and exploited by the men in charge of camps.

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[29] https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000125399/download/
[30] https://guardian.ng/news/idps-allege-diversion-of-food-vouchers-in-borno/
[31] https://dailypost.ng/2022/03/15/idps-allege-diversion-of-wfp-food-vouchers-in-borno-demand-probe/
[32] https://iwpr.net/global-voices/nigeria-when-aid-goes-missing

While the sexual exploitation of women and girls in formal camps has been reported by organisations such as the Human Rights Watch[33], President Buhari ordered a probe into sexual abuse in camps, which was reported in the Nigerian newspaper ThisDay[34]. The sexual exploitation of women and girls in informal camps does not make the news because no one considers them to be their responsibility. Hajjo, 33, narrates her experience of being solicited by a camp security official at the Gubio camp in Borno. Although Hajjo initially fled to Karawa in Cameroon, when she and her family were brought back to Nigeria, they were taken to the Fufore camp in Adamawa and eventually to the Gubio camp in Borno. In Gubio, her husband was arrested and locked up on suspicion of being a Boko Haram member (because his brothers were active members). Hajjo's husband was tortured for weeks and released only when other IDPs from his village, came together to vouch for his innocence. As a result of this torture, Hajjo's husband was bedridden for months. When Hajjo heard that there was a camp in Maiduguri (Government College camp), she decided to go there in the hope of finding her relatives. However, they were not allowed to leave the camp. She pleaded with the head of security, but he asked her to pay, which she could not afford. One of the soldiers offered her money if she agreed to have sex with him. Hajjo was shocked and said no, and was consequently refused leave from the camp.

One week later, Hajjo ran into a policeman from her village, Ibrahim, who had come to the camp to visit relatives. According to Hajjo, Ibrahim was a close family friend back home, but he could not recognise her because everything she had gone through changed her physical appearance. When she told Ibrahim, who her father was, he burst into tears and promised to help her plead with the security operatives to let him take her and her family to the camp in Maiduguri, where he confirmed that some of her relatives were residing. When Hajjo and Ibrahim approached the soldier who asked Hajjo to sleep with him, he threatened to shoot her if she took another step towards him, assuming that Hajjo had told Ibrahim about his offer. However, when Ibrahim approached the soldier to plead with him on Hajjo and her family's behalf, the soldier realised that Hajjo had not told Ibrahim what happened. The soldier then calmed down, called Hajjo, thanked her for not exposing him, gave her N1000, and allowed her and her family to leave with Ibrahim. Hajjo explains that now that she is in the informal camp in Durumi Abuja, although she has peace of mind being away from the epicentre of the insurgency, she admits that it is a lot scarier for women and girls. After 5pm, Hajjo does not allow her daughter to step out because of how dangerous it is for girls around the camp area. Therefore, although both groups of women are exploited by men, one group mainly faces exploitation by camp officials, while the other is vulnerable to exploitation by anyone who can access their camp (which is very easy) because people come and go as they please.

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[33] https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/10/31/nigeria-officials-abusing-displaced-women-girls
[34] https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2016/11/01/buhari-orders-probe-of-sexual-abuse-at-idp-camps/

6.3.2. Exploitation of IDPs in informal settlements by NGOs

IDPs, especially those in informal camps, such as the camps in Wassa, Durumi, and Gudu, are exposed to exploitation by local NGOs. As they are not under the jurisdiction of the government, there is no monitoring of who comes and goes. When I ask if they receive assistance from NGOs and other interventions aimed at skills acquisition, they tell me that they are very wary because many of these organisations have exploited them in the past, promising to teach skills and give jobs but never following through. Aunty Laraba narrates her experience with a Nigerian woman who runs a local NGO. The woman came to the camp and taught about twenty of them how to make hand wash, liquid soap, hand sanitisers, and perfumes. The woman then held a marketplace in a park in town and marketed it as an initiative to help IDPs, claiming that all proceeds from sales would go to the IDP women who made the products. Aunty Laraba and the other women spent about two weeks making the products and there was a huge turnout at the marketplace, and their products sold out. The woman took all the money, and they never saw her again. She left without arranging for transport back to the camp for the IDPs. Aunty Laraba was disappointed, but also grateful for the knowledge she gained as she has used that to make soap to use in the clinic and the camp.

Hadiya, who works alongside Aunty Laraba as a midwife, also narrates an experience in which she was hired by a local Nigerian woman who claimed to run a women's health NGO to train other women in midwifery. She did this for two months. The woman was supposed to pay her N120,000 ($250), but only gave her a deposit of N30,000, and is still yet to pay her the balance. The woman no longer answers her phone. When I ask Hadiya what she will do if the woman never pays, she simply smiles and tells me, 'I will leave her matter to God, I have lost everything and a lot of loved ones, I had a lot of money and I lost it, so I know that money is nothing'. I consider both Aunty Laraba and Hadiya's efforts to use the skills they were taught to regain their livelihood by starting small businesses that teach other women in their communities the skills they learned to be an expression of agency. Despite the unique circumstances that impose constraints upon them and the exploitation they face, Aunty Laraba and Hadiya choose to navigate these by making the choice to use these skills to start small businesses and teach other women in their community, a choice that will impact their economic agency. This agency which is ephemeral in nature, is produced by a specific set of circumstances. It is fleeting, existing just at that moment, but has a lasting effect. Some agentic choices, such as this, serve to build communities (Banaji, 2017a, p. 194). However, the exploitation that these women face during this process and their struggle to regain their livelihoods are often drowned out by other sensational headlines in the insurgency. The fact that these stories of exploitation faced by IDPs in informal settlements are not as visible in the media as well-documented stories of exploitation faced by IDPs in formal government camps highlights the neglect of IDPs in informal settlements, a nuance which is not captured by the media, which further makes them invisible. My interviewees in non-formal camps were well aware of

this and often acknowledged and commented on it. Some even admitted to occasionally going to formal camps where they have relatives in an attempt to have access to certain services.

6.3.3. Traumatic memories and enduring psychological damage: 'The time for happiness has passed, only patience/endurance is left'

Getting closer to the women in the camps brought with it narratives of extreme violence and trauma that left me agonised. Habsatou, 37, one of the women's leaders in the Wassa camp, has been there for seven years and has four children. When I asked Habsatou about how she got to camp and what life in the camp is like, she started by narrating the events that led up to her escape from Gwoza. Habsatou's husband was slaughtered by Boko Haram. She managed to flee with the help of her older brother who escaped through the Mandara Mountains, where he hid in caves for days before finally finding his way to the neighbouring town, Madagali. He managed to gather enough money to pay for transport to Abuja and then sent some money to her and the children to come and join him in the camp where he found refuge. When Habsatou arrived at the Wassa camp seven years ago, she was one of the first IDPs to settle there. According to her, 'The camp you see now was mainly just grass, weeds, and many snakes, but we made it our home because we had no option'. Back home in Gwoza, Habsatou worked as a tailor. Therefore, when she arrived at Wassa, she tried to make a living by sewing. Another woman from Gwoza (not an IDP) gave her a small sewing machine, so she would sit under a tree close to the local primary school and repair torn clothing. She used to earn between N30-N50 ($0.065-$0.11) a day and used it to feed her family. She later managed to find a piece of land close by to start farming. In Wassa, Habsatou remarried and gave birth to her last two children (she had two children each with the first husband and two with her second husband).

Habsatou is solely responsible for her two children by her first husband, although her current husband is good to her and helps her care for her children, who are not biologically his own. For example, he has paid her older child's school fees over his own since her son is older. Habsatou laments that they cannot afford to send all their children to school and must decide who goes and who stays at home. Habsatou further explains to me, 'it is hard and sad, the children want to go to school, but it is very difficult because of the lack of money'. There are no secondary schools close to the camp, and there is no money to pay transport fares to the school at N200 ($0.43) to go back and forth. The only secondary school close to the camp is an unaffordable private school.

In addition to their desperation for a better life, these vulnerabilities make them easy targets for exploitation. Maman Jafar, 30, told me that the fact that her older child, Jafar is not in school makes her very sad, because he is nine years old and has never been to school. She then recounted how her hopes were raised when an individual came to the camp and said that he had opened a school specifically for IDP children. He gathered children under the age of ten and 'registered' them at his school. After the

children had attended school for a few days, all the IDP children were sent away. The man apparently used the children to show that the school had the number of registered students required to qualify for funding for those who helped IDPs. Although there have been a few stories in the media about fake NGOs and CSOs and how they exploit IDPs by The Cable (2016)[35] and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC)[36] (2019), these stories are rarely covered by mainstream media, either locally or internationally. While IDPs in government camps are at least protected by bureaucracy which requires that all organisations seeking to perform interventions or programs in camps have government permission, IDPs in informal settlements do not have this sort of protection and are more frequently preyed upon. When stories of IDPs are not sensational, when they pertain to the very subaltern-most of all – children of IDPs – these issues do not dominate local and international headlines. This could be because of several factors, such as the challenges and constraints that local journalists face in covering the insurgency, some of which are discussed in more detail in chapter 5. Despite the fact that informal camps are more accessible, it may be more difficult for journalists to verify these stories.

6.3.4. Breakdown of the social contract between the government and citizens

The rise and success of Boko Haram have been directly linked to state failure (Afoaku, 2017). Across most interviewees, there seemed to be a general appreciation and acknowledgement of the government's military effort against Boko Haram, especially the governor of Borno State, Governor Babagana Zulum. For example, Falmata, 40, told me that she voted for President Buhari in 2015 and 2019 because she believed that she was voting for justice. Falmata believes that President Buhari has helped IDPs a lot because there is relative peace in the region, and the Borno state governor, Governor Zulum, has done very well for them. Falmata explained that the last time she travelled home to Borno, there were soldiers who escorted them from Maiduguri to her village in Banki, whereas the journey was literally impossible two years before due to the Boko Haram attacks and mines that they planted on the roads. Similarly, Halimatou, 42 tells me, 'for those of us who fled to Cameroon, President Buhari found a way to bring us back to Nigeria and that is commendable, both he and our governors have done well in providing food and shelter to IDPs in Borno'. This is interesting given that in the eight years of the Buhari administration, there has been a significant rise in insecurity across the country. Mairama, 33, in the Gudu camp also told me that she and a group of IDPs go to the house of the senator representing their local government, Gwoza, Senator Ali Ndume, every Friday and he gives them money on his way to the mosque. She mentioned that she voted for President Buhari because she thought he would take

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[35] https://www.thecable.ng/alert-40-fake-ngos-exploiting-idps-borno
[36] https://www.efcc.gov.ng/efcc/news-and-information/news-release/4534-magu-warns-fake-ngos-csos-against-exploiting-idps

pity on the poor, but now things are difficult. However, she commends him for his efforts in the fight against Boko Haram.

Simultaneously, however, was an acknowledgement of an almost complete breakdown of the social contract between the government and citizens and widespread mistrust, which mirrored the mistrust of the media discussed in Section 5.6.1. This was already indicated in Chapter 5 which highlighted that victims of the insurgency do not believe the news about the insurgency because of a lack of trust in the government, which they see as complicit in the insurgency. Some people such as Haroon, 50, directly attribute the rise of Boko Haram to former Borno state governor, Ali Modu Sheriff (2003-2011). According to Haroon, Governor Sheriff tried to appease the group and did nothing to stop them. Many conspiracy theories about the origins of Boko Haram link the group directly to the Nigerian government and the northern political elites. Abdul Raufu Mustapha (2014b, p. 157) has highlighted that these theories 'reflect the ethnic, religious and regional divisions within the Nigerian society ... the conspiracy theories of a domestic natures can be divided into three categories: religious, political and military', which usually link the rise of Boko Haram to northern leaders. Journalists and political opponents have peddled these theories. This is discussed in more detail in chapter 4. One of Boko Haram's most prominent financiers, Alhaji Buji Foi, was appointed commissioner for religious affairs under Sheriff's regime, which was the governor's attempt to contain the group by appeasing them.

In the same vein, Fandi, 27, believes that the government is not interested in stopping Boko Haram because they are involved and benefit from the insecurity and her justification is that 'there is no way that a group of small boys have access to such sophisticated weapons without help from the government' (Chiluwa & Adegoke, 2013, p. 100). These sentiments are further fuelled by feelings of abandonment, illustrated in my conversation with Jessica, 42, who said: 'the government should take pity on us and help us so that we can also feel like we are part of this country'. She explained that just like the leaders and their families are living in nice houses, poor people want that as well, 'it doesn't even have to be the same level, but poor people also want to live decently and have a dignified life'. She insisted that she did not vote for President Buhari because she heard through word of mouth from the lived experiences of older family members that during his regime as the military head of state, people suffered a lot. She has not seen any positive change from Buhari's administration, only suffering, everything is more expensive, and people can barely eat. These views highlight the mistrust citizens have for the government, reflecting a breakdown in the social contract.

Under international law and its constitution, Nigeria is a signatory of treaties such as the African Union's (2009) Kampala Convention, which mandates that states must ensure that adequate security is provided to IDPs; thus, Nigeria has a duty and responsibility. This agreement also mandates governments to offer sufficient support to IDPs and their host communities, emphasising the needs of

pregnant women, children, the elderly, and disabled people. Under the Kampala Convention, the government is supposed to protect IDPs from harmful environments that make them vulnerable. Under the Kampala Convention, IDPs are entitled to full state protection and adequate humanitarian assistance with basic amenities, such as food, water, shelter, medical, and health services, which should also be extended to host communities (Adewale, 2016; African Union, 2009). One of the responsibilities of the media is to hold the government accountable; however, the media has largely failed in this regard. As Spivak (1988) reminds us, the subaltern indeed speaks, but the system does not listen. Organisations such as the African Union have also failed to hold the Nigerian government accountable for failing to comply with the Kampala Convention Treaty. The next and final subsection rounds up the discussion in this section by discussing the material consequence of the breakdown of this social contract and its socially transformative impact and highlighting the link between social exclusion and mistrust of the state within the context of the rise of Boko Haram.

6.3.5. A cycle of retaliatory violence: 'most insurgents joined Boko Haram because of the desire to exact revenge on security forces'

Scholars such as Alex Thurston (2016, p. 5) have argued that a combination of exclusivism and grievance has provided an ideological framework for Boko Haram's violence toward the Nigerian state and its citizens. Similarly, Kate Meagher (2014) also highlights that the heavy-handed approach of Nigerian security operatives in dealing with the Boko Haram problem has been counterproductive, as it has resulted in the extra-judicial execution of young men in the north. This is also the case with Al-Shabaab in Kenya (Zitzmann, 2023, pp. 24–26). At the peak of the insurgency across the north-east, young men were indiscriminately rounded up and accused of being part of Boko Haram with no evidence or judicial recourse. Families of suspected Boko haram members are arrested, and their homes are destroyed. Meagher (2014) maintains that this tactic undermines cooperation between security operatives and the community and facilitates bitterness against the state, proposing human rights training for security operatives to enhance civilian cooperation. In fact, extrajudicial killings set off the most violent phase of Boko Haram's activities when in 2009, soldiers rounded up about two hundred or more suspected members of Boko Haram, including their leader, Muhammad Yusuf, and killed them without trial. For many, this also provided evidence of what Muhammad Yusuf was preaching, which is that 'the state is a cruel, evil, and inhumane infidel contraction'.

Extrajudicial justice and killings are, thus, prominent factors highlighting the lack of justice and the breakdown of the social contract between the Nigerian government and its citizens. Many interviewees narrated accounts of injustices that had been carried out against their family members. For example, when I asked Maro, 33, about her family, she listed all of them and told me about the fate of Aliyu, her husband's fourteen year old younger brother, whom she was raising. Aliyu was returning home from

Islamiyyah when he was stopped by soldiers who, without evidence, accused him of being a member of Boko Haram. He was taken and has not been heard from since. This happened six years ago.

The potent and largely silent heartbreak of such destruction by the armed forces seethes beneath the surface of the accounts by many interviewees. When I asked Hafsah, 38, for her opinion on the progress made by security forces in securing the north-east, she told me that she did not trust them, as they also inflict harm on innocent people. She narrated how her younger brother and his wife went to another village to farm, facing a Boko Haram attack in the village while they were at the farm. They managed to hide and eventually escaped. When they returned home, they were arrested by soldiers who again, with no evidence, accused them of being part of the group that planned the attack. Hafsa's brother and his wife were also taken and have been held in Giwa Barracks prison, in Maiduguri for the past six years. There has been no justice for them, and they have not been granted a hearing. In stark contrast to mediated accounts in Western news and substantiating the narratives of my interviewees, according to one of my expert interviewees, Sarki, a security and policy expert with a focus on the north-east, based on a UNDP[37] study conducted on repentant insurgents, the foremost reason why young men join Boko Haram is not religion but rather:

> The desire to exact revenge on security forces. The second reason was protection from everybody, including the security forces, as there was no law or order, and everything descended into chaos, so for some, Boko Haram is the only place where members are afforded some kind of safety. [Expert Interview].

Such accounts of official wrong-doing and provocation are intertwined with widespread corruption and the settling of scores with political and economic undertones. The Western framing of Boko Haram in terms of religion is suitable and convenient to Western media because it fits the narrative of the War on Terror, or Islam vs. the West (Mustapha, 2014b, p. 147). This is discussed in detail in chapter 4. Sarki explained to me that once on an official mission to Maiduguri, he was told of the fate of a young man, Saleh, whose father had been relatively well off in the community. The narrative is chilling.

> When Saleh's father was alive, another man in that town offered to buy his father's property, an offer Saleh's father refused. Saleh's father died not too long after this exchange. This same man approached Saleh and said, 'Your father is dead now, I can pay a lot for this, give me the property'. Saleh, like his father refused. The next day, the man, upset at Saleh's refusal comes with soldiers and accuses Saleh of being a member of Boko Haram and the soldiers picked Saleh. Sarki tells me that, this

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[37] https://journey-to-extremism.undp.org/v2/en

used to happen so frequently that there is a slang term for it in Kanuri called '*Chunne'*. The soldiers took Saleh to Giwa Barracks, where he was held without evidence. In the interim, the man moved into Saleh's father's property. While Saleh is in Giwa Barracks, he met actual Boko Haram members, who asked him "What are you doing here? You are not one of us." Saleh narrated the circumstances that led to him being in prison. One of the Boko Haram members then told him that if he is ever released, he should go and meet someone called Zargina and tell him what transpired, and Zargina will help him out. Saleh was eventually let out after a few years when the prison became too full and he was considered to be a "low threat". When Saleh returns to find that his father's property has been taken over by the same man who framed him, he goes to meet Zargina, introduces himself, and tells him about the person who sent him and what his problem is. It turns out that Zargina was the local Boko Haram Commander. Zargina mobilises people, goes to Saleh's father's house, kills the man who took over, and flushes out every other person there. Saleh is reinstalled there, and now become a member of Boko Haram; a high-ranking member.

This story stayed with me as I continued my fieldwork. Sarki (a pseudonym, like that of my other interviewees) concluded his narrative by asserting, in my view accurately, that:

> If you keep thinking that religion is the problem, you might be appropriating inadequate ways to something or too much weight to something, and that skews policy, religion is a factor, but not necessarily THE factor, we have religious extremists, but there is the prevailing condition they can exploit.

Weary of unseen problems with no solutions, and desperate for some justice for my stranded interviewees and their communities, I interviewed Ahmad – a journalist who has close ties to Boko Haram (he grew up in Maiduguri with many Boko Haram members and is childhood friends with Muhammad Yusuf, the founder of Boko Haram) – about the possibility of transitional justice. He maintained that 'a lot of the time, we tend to only see Boko Haram as the only entity committing these crimes, but the Nigerian state is also guilty of some of these atrocities, which is a cycle of violence, and the biggest mistake we make is to think that some lives are more important than others'. When soldiers sent for 'peace-keeping' arbitrarily arrest or execute whoever they suspect of being a member of Boko Haram, it is as wrong as when Boko Haram kills innocent people. Families of Boko Haram members are killed and burned to death, just by association, even though they are not members, and even when they are actively against Boko Haram. This caused further mistrust between state agencies, especially between security agencies and their citizens. The portrayal of Boko Haram as "the enemy" in the media,

without any nuance, has "legitimised the use of violence against the group" and anyone perceived to be associated with them (Uwazuruike, 2018, p. 243).Following the investigation and publication of a report on the abuse of civilians by security forces by both Human Rights Watch[38] (2012) and Amnesty International[39] (2014), the International Criminal Court (ICC) launched an investigation into the situation and announced in 2020 that the court had concluded that both Boko Haram and Nigerian Security forces had committed crimes against humanity and war crimes against civilians (International Criminal Court, 2020).

With the exception of these articles in Al-Jazeera[40] (2014) and Forbes[41] (2020) and the publication of reports on these human rights abuses by the US[42] and UK[43] governments, these allegations have not made headlines in either local or international media. A casual consumer of the news is aware of the violence of Boko Haram, such as the kidnapping of the Chibok girls; however, the same casual consumer is far less likely to be aware of extra-judicial killings carried out by the state against civilians, despite the fact that this is something that a majority of my interviewees mentioned as a problem. This is another way in which the Nigerian government is not held accountable. The discussion above highlights extra-judicial killings as a material consequence of the breakdown of social contracts between citizens and the state, and the ways through which social exclusion and feelings of abandonment or feeling that one party is not upholding their end of the agreement can contribute to this mistrust. The final sections focus on how community and social relations have been altered by violent displacement, and the different manifestations of feminism and gendered agency.

6.4. Mediation, atrocity and loss of community

In Chapter 5, I discussed how mobile phones come to serve as extensions of family and community for those separated from their community and social networks as a result of the conflict, helping them to hold on to everyday aspects of their community and enhance social inclusion. The preceding discussion outlined the ways in which a lack of adequate reporting about the experiences of IDPs who live in informal settlements and host communities further encourages their social exclusion and the consequences of social exclusion. This penultimate section unpacks the dire consequences of internal violent displacement, the ways in which this has impacted social relations in this community.

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[38] https://www.hrw.org/report/2012/10/11/spiraling-violence/boko-haram-attacks-and-security-force-abuses-nigeria
[39] https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2014/08/nigeria-gruesome-footage-implicates-military-war-crimes/
[40] https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2014/11/6/nigerian-army-suspected-of-killing-civilians
[41] https://www.forbes.com/sites/ewelinaochab/2020/12/11/nigeria-to-be-investigated-by-the-international-criminal-court/
[42] https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/nigeria
[43] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1032173/NGA_CPIN_Actors_of_Protection.pdf

6.4.1. Loss of community: 'ko wa da yar gida, gida ya bar shi'

One of the themes that was constant in the responses from my interviewees was a deep sense of loss and loneliness, specifically regarding the loss of their communities. Although interviewees would become emotional when narrating the horror, trauma, grief, and suffering they experienced while they were on the run and escaping from Boko Haram, I found that they were most emotional when talking about the loss of community. Displaced victim-survivors of violent conflict suffer from several types of intrinsic risk associated with the trauma of violence: marginalisation, social exclusion, and loss of community (Shehu & Abba, 2020). The emotion associated with this loss was a mixture of loneliness and a longing for a past that once was, and a sense of deep frustration that constant displacement made the building of new communities almost impossible. These three accounts reveal the vast chasms between what international news agencies report about the conflict and the actual atrocities and repercussions within families and communities.

Asabe, 20, was thirteen, when she had to flee her village in Gwoza. She gave birth to two children at the camp, one of whom died. Her husband works in Lagos while she is in a camp in Abuja. Her family escaped in a trailer belonging to her father, who was a trader. After they left Gwoza, they went to the nearest town, Madagali, in Adamawa. After some time, Madagali was also under attack so they moved to another town, Maiha, where they spent six months before Boko Haram attacked again, forcing them to flee to Mubi. Boko Haram attacked again in Mubi, so they went to the state capital, Yola. From Yola, they went to Kano state in the northwest to stay with their extended families. After a year, they returned to Mubi (in Adamawa), where she married at the age of fifteen. Afterwards, she moved to the Wassa camp in Abuja with her husband. Matter-of-factly, for someone whose story contains such chaos and trauma, she tells me that the conditions in the camp are terrible, but at least she has peace of mind now. Asabe explained to me that from her perspective, the worst thing Boko Haram has done is that they have separated families forever. She explained that she had given birth to twins, one of whom had died. She went through that alone because her husband works in Lagos, while her family is scattered across the north-east, some in camps, and some in host communities. Asabe's mother is old and sick, and Asabe constantly worries about her. Boko Haram killed a lot of her family members. Asabe tells me that one of her older brothers was slaughtered by Boko Haram at the entrance to their home, that she, a little girl at the time, saw his corpse, that her mother and aunts had to bury him because at that time all the men had fled Gwoza, and that there were no men left to bury bodies despite the fact that culturally and religiously, men are the ones who bury dead bodies. She then looked at me and asked rhetorically, "if not for Boko Haram, what would bring me to Abuja?'. Often, after hearing such accounts, I was so shaken that it took me days to parse out the issues that the women most wanted to highlight, as I found myself stuck in the repeated narratives of violence and displacement, grief, and trauma.

In explaining the impact of violent internal displacement, Aunty Laraba used the Hausa proverb '*Ko wa da ya bar gida, gida ya bar shi'* which directly translates to 'anyone who has left home, home leaves them'. This is used to describe people who have lost their cultural, familial, and community ties. Aunty Laraba explained that before the insurgency, they all used to live in peace, both Muslims and Christians, as a lot of families in the north-east are mixed religiously. However, now, people do not trust one another; Boko Haram has brought division among families and between husband and wife, as the husband cannot fulfil their duties as there are no jobs or means of making money. She proceeded to narrate a harrowing tale that she witnessed, one of her neighbour's daughters, Jane, who was kidnapped by Boko Haram along with Aunty Laraba's niece and managed to escape after a year. When Jane returns home, she kills her younger sister, Agnes, to drink her blood which is what she apparently saw constantly while in captivity. When Jane and Agnes' father returned home to the horror and chaos, he did not speak but took a cutlass and slaughtered Jane, as according to him it was 'better to lose two daughters than lose one and know she killed the other and she will be a danger to the community'. When state soldiers came to the village to examine the murders, they considered the case to be closed, and justice served. I found myself shaken time and time again by these accounts, due to the harshness and lack of any facility for caring for those traumatised by witnessing and experiencing violence. Jane's actions are likely a result of trauma due to the extreme violence she witnessed while in captivity. Did she deserve to be murdered? Like most of these victims or survivors who return from captivity, Jane was offered no psychosocial support, and her murder was treated as a form of justice rather than as the further brutalisation of a victim.

Zayna is a 35 year old mother of seven children raised by her brother in Bama, Borno state. Her brother, who raised her, was a soldier in Bama. When the insurgency began, he was killed along with one of her younger brothers. Zayna does not know where most of her relatives are. Boko Haram killed her first husband by striking him down with a hammer. Zayna re-married, however, her second husband was also killed by Boko Haram. After losing two brothers and two husbands to Boko Haram's atrocities, she lived with her older brother. Boko Haram came to their house and when they found her brother, they instructed Zayna and her children to close their eyes and chopped him up into pieces. Zayna cries copiously as she tells me that she has lost everyone and has no one in this world. She explained that she lives in fear every day that something will happen to her and that her children will have no one, as she is the one who does everything for them. While most research on Boko Haram focuses on its origins or the economic, political, and/or religious nature of the conflict, the majority of media coverage on insurgency focuses on the atrocities committed by the group and their links to Islam or terrorism, and there is a lack of analysis of the psychological trauma and violence that victim-survivors endure and experience (Amusan & Ejoke, 2017). During my time working with the PCNI, one of the biggest gaps was the lack of psychosocial or mental health support for IDPs. During my fieldwork, I discovered that

this problem persisted. This is another important plight of IDPs that is drowned out by more sensational headlines.

Studies have shown that exposure to extreme violence has a greater psychosocial effect on children, resulting in a cycle of trauma, self-harm and/or aggression, and violence (Landau et al., 2015). This is evident in the case of Jane, who murdered her sister after being rescued from captivity. A study conducted to determine the prevalence and risk factors for depression and PTSD among IDPs exposed to Boko Haram terrorism in Yobe state revealed extremely high levels of psychiatric morbidity among the IDP participants: 94% of the respondents met the criteria for PTSD, while 98% met the criteria for depression, with women being at greater risk of mental health issues than men (Ibrahim et al., 2023). This is consistent with studies in other African countries which have faced violent conflict, such as Uganda, Somalia, and Sudan. In addition to marked experiences of horror, loss of community enhances social exclusion and leads to further mental health issues, leading to a vicious cycle of suffering and destruction of community ties. These terribly painful and instructive stories as a result the loss of social ties that are used to bind the local people together before the conflict do not make news headlines, perhaps due to the facts that they are not sensational or due to other constraints faced by journalists which are discussed in chapter 5.

6.4.2.   Losing a way of life: 'Babu Hadin Kai'

Another prominent theme that emerged from my data analysis on the impact of violent displacement is the transformation of society from collectivist to individualistic. Binta, 38, a mother of nine whose husband left her ostensibly because he could not provide for them, says that nowadays, society is a lot more individualistic, 'it is now every man for himself', whereas before, it was a community effort to raise a child and look out for one another. She misses home and the community she had. The shift from collectivism to individualism resonated through the accounts of the majority of interviewees. Many of them used the concept of 'it takes a village to raise a child', both literally and figuratively, to highlight this shift. Maman Jafar, 30, told me that before the insurgency, she was always surrounded by relatives and friends, her mother and her neighbours used to help her take care of her baby while she was carrying out her chores and attending to her business and she would return the favour, but she has no help anymore. Others, such as Habsatou, 37, explained this shift through the fact that people no longer come together as a community in the way they used to, mainly because they no longer have the means. I kept silent about my feelings that repeated and untreated trauma erodes trust and contributes to this situation.

According to Habsatou, apart from the fact that both her older brothers and husband were killed by Boko Haram, her mother was traumatised and died from high blood pressure. She lost many family members in quick succession and was full of grief. She also *lost a way of life*. She told me that *'yanzu, babu hadin kai'* (coming together or uniting) had gone. Habsatou explained that back home, according

to culture and religion, there was a lot of '*zumumci*' (honouring the ties of kinship' and '*hadin kai*' (coming together), especially among women. She believes that, as a Muslim, the importance of community is emphasised in Islam; Muslims are encouraged to come together to support one another as a community, and that was very much the case prior to the insurgency. However, this does not happen here in camps because, in camps, they have no means, everyone is struggling and miserable, 'you cannot even eat or help yourself, how do you even help others?'. Habsatou assured me that, at least when they were back home, even for women who did not work, their husbands would give them money, and there would be some leftovers for them to help others. However, Boko Haram and the security forces' responses ruined and affected how they were able to mobilise as a community. They still try, but it is hard: Islamiyya, naming ceremonies and weddings, and the market brings women together. They try and come together and contribute whatever they can afford to buy pots, food flasks, coolers, and cutlery which are then used in naming ceremonies and weddings.

Despite the impediments preventing community mobilisation, which many of my interviewees complained about, my analysis of field observations and transcripts also revealed numerous attempts by groups of women coming together to transcend and overcome this, as in the example that Habsatou gave above (Ekezie, 2022). Without wishing to overstate the case, I argue that these moments can be read as an expression of collective agency which exists despite trauma and violence. This expression of agency reflects some of the ways in which women choose to navigate and respond to the constraints that are forced upon them to make their lives bearable. Such actions are nuanced and cannot just be celebrated as explicit acts of resistance or resilience, or any other buzz word of the day, because these concepts fail to capture the complexity of such actions within the context of these women's realities. Another expression of collective economic agency revealed by my data analysis is that women partake in *adashe*. *Adashe* is a small local contributory savings scheme in which a group of people come together and contribute a certain amount either every day or every week (depending on what they decide), and they take turns collecting the total amount of money contributed. This scheme has a long history and has always existed informally in various forms in communities across Nigeria. These group-saving schemes are based on trust amongst participants and serve as a source of raising a large sum of money over a short period of time; interviewees who are able to take part in this expressed that *adashe* saved them in times of emergency and serves as a means to achieve a communal goal. *Adashe* is a means through which IDPs ensure their own social protection with their neighbours and close communities. Apart from the story[44] Radio Nigeria, there is hardly any coverage of such instances, further highlighting the neglect of stories that are not spectacular. This theme, by now, must be so familiar that it is almost boring. Yet, in answering my research questions, I cannot but return to it.

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[44] https://radionigeria.gov.ng/2022/09/18/how-adashe-is-transforming-lives-of-idps-in-fct/

6.5. Conclusion

The discussion in this chapter has highlighted the neglected, erased, and misrepresented aspects of the Boko Haram insurgency in its media coverage. This was done in order to highlight the socially transformative consequences of this misrepresentation and erasure, the ways through which it fuels certain imaginaries of conflict, especially as it relates to gender and agency in northern Nigeria. The lack of sophisticated, critical, and in-depth coverage of the insurgency which highlights the nuances, has led to the erasure and invisibility of the plight of the majority of IDPs, most of who reside in non-formal government camps, the sexual violence weaponised against adolescent boys and men, and the complexities of women's agency. This contributes to a lack of understanding of the socially transformative consequences of violent displacement. Since patterns of violence and the consequences of trauma are likely to endure even after the conflict has ended, a careful understanding of the nuances and complexities of these transformations is necessary to prevent the cycles of violence and erasure that is common in post-conflict societies. Adequate media representations are necessary to hold governments accountable to uphold their end of the social contract that mandates protection and human rights for citizens. In the midst of these varying levels of violence experienced by victims and survivors of the insurgency, there are glimpses of hope and gratitude, flexibility, and imagination. For example, a pattern I picked up in interviewees' responses is the fact that after they narrated their harrowing experiences escaping from Boko Haram and listed their losses, at some point during our conversation, all interviewees expressed gratitude, gratitude that they were still alive, and hope for a better life.

As the preceding discussion has emphasised, violent and mass displacement is taking place within the context of extreme poverty, economic downturn, food insecurity due to insecurity in the north-west, and COVID-19 (at the time of my fieldwork), resulting in deep vulnerability. These factors also have an impact on gender and social relationships in the affected communities. Following this, chapter 7 discusses how violent contexts alter the dynamics of gender and social relations. In addition to material changes in the everyday conditions of their lives, such as lack of food, shelter, healthcare, or community, one of the biggest changes identified by interviewees were factors related to the dynamics of gender and social relations, especially in family structures and marriages. As a result, manifestations of gendered agency and feminist action can also be seen as changing, thus requiring further investigation. This is explored in chapter 7.

Chapter 7: Women's agency in times of conflict: Beyond western media heroes and victims

7.1.   Introduction

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that the lives of northern Nigerian women have not been adequately researched, recorded, analysed, and theorised in media and academic literature and, where they have been, that they have been subsumed under media-centric and/or orientalist and sexist dichotomies and binary oppositions. This neglect, coupled with the failure of feminist philosophical accounts of agency and oppression to conceptualise agency in oppressive conditions, has led to the misdescription of gendered agency in these contexts, leading to the erasure of the agency of northern Nigerian women (Madhok 2013, p. 104). To remedy aspects of this neglect and erasure, this chapter unfolds as follows: In the first section, I delve into the lives of three displaced northern Nigerian women in Abuja and Maiduguri: Hillu, Sarah, and Diya. By applying, Banaji's (2017a, p. 196) re-conceptualisation of agency as 'contaminated', 'ephemeral', and 'potential' rather than essential and narrowly resistant, and Madhok et. al's (2013, p. 108) argument for a different mode and site of agency i.e. from free action to speech practices, I highlight the different strategies these women employ to negotiate the different structures that impinge on and govern their lives and to make agentic choices within unbearable constraints. Through a critical post-colonial reading of complicity in patriarchal systems, I shall then proceed to examine women's responses to changes in gender roles and marriage as a result of the conflict and the practice of purdah (this refers to the practice of partial or complete female seclusion from the public).

The second section highlights the complexities and inherent contradictions embedded in notions of gendered agency. This complexity highlights Mahmood's (2012, p. 31) question, where she draws on Foucault to ask how we can think about gendered agency in contexts where the distinction between individuals' desires and hegemonic social authority is not clear. The discussion in this section also problematises some of the binaries that may have arisen in my own analysis which may essentialise northern Nigerian women, thereby contributing to the same problem it seeks to counter: the further marginalisation of northern Nigerian women. This chapter contributes to the argument for alternative theorisations of agency by expanding upon its normative understandings and conceptualisations. Given that all social beings are constrained in one way or another, what are the possibilities for agency within these social structures that constrain the lives of northern Nigerian women, especially those experiencing conflict and violent displacement? How do northern Nigerian women negotiate and navigate these structures?

7.2.   Complexities of gendered agency after violent displacement: Three narratives

The three narratives in this section illuminate the diversity of women's experiences within the Boko Haram conflict and, consequently, after displacement. These in-depth testimonies of women's experiences allow me to trace the similarities, differences, and factors that contribute to the different strategies these women employ to navigate and negotiate the constraints governing their lives. Insights arising from my analysis of these testimonies leads me to highlight instances of agentic action that pre-date the conflict, as well as agency facilitated by events contingent on the conflict; the role that the media has played in the facilitation of these instances of agentic action; and the role of academic scholarship in obscuring or detailing this complexity. My ethnographic fieldwork, which provided intimate knowledge and details about the lives of these women, allows me to contextualise their experiences.

7.2.1.   Profile 1 – Hillu

I interviewed 34 year old Hillu, a mother of three, in the Durumi IDP camp in Abuja. Prior to arriving at the Durumi camp two years ago, Hillu was held captive in Sambisa forest after being abducted by Boko Haram in her hometown, Madagali, Adamawa state. Hillu spent five years in captivity with her two children before escaping while pregnant with her third child. When she was abducted, she was living with her mother, as she had just been divorced a year earlier. A trader who sold food, Hillu had never had any form of Western education but attended Islamiyyah[45] as a child. Initially, when Boko Haram came to Madagali and started attacking lives and property, Hillu wanted to run away as all her siblings had fled the town for safety after their oldest brother was killed by Boko Haram. However, she stayed to be with her aged mother. One day, Boko Haram arrived. They went through the town, rounded up all young women, including Hillu, and took them to Sambisa. Hillu's mother was left behind as she was older.

Life in captivity

According to Hillu, Sambisa is like a normal town in the depths of the forest; there were normal houses, although many of them lived in tents, there were neighbourhoods, markets, etc. She estimated that Sambisa's population was more than a million. Hillu tells me that, in the beginning, life in Sambisa was bearable: there was food in abundance, and the abductees who cooperated never lacked anything. Almost immediately upon her kidnap, Hillu was married off to a Boko Haram soldier. Although it was a forced marriage, she tells me, her Boko Haram husband was 'good' to her; they lived peacefully

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[45] Islamiyyah refers to an Islamic school where people go to learn about Islam

together. Although her first marriage at eighteen had been a love marriage, it had lasted only two years, and she had asked for a divorce because her husband was 'not good' to her. Hillu tells me that her Boko Haram husband was 'a good man', and he was also forced to join the insurgents or his family would have been killed. In captivity, Hillu gave birth to her first child, a girl, before the end of her first year (her daughter is now five years old).

Eventually, life in captivity became far more difficult; a few months after her arrival, soldiers started to attack. Food became scarce because the insurgents could not go out and raid villages; residents started dying from military air strikes. When government soldiers attacked the insurgent outpost, the women were rounded up and hidden deep in the forest. Hillu explains that Sambisa is like a maze, and only those with indigenous knowledge of the land can navigate their way through, so soldiers never made it deep into where they actually lived and hid. As the air strikes increased in frequency, daily life was unpredictable: they never knew if they would make it through the night or last another day; they were constantly hunted and haunted, in her words "*hijrah* [46] never ended". This fear for her and her children's lives sparked a desire to escape. Hillu knew that she could not escape alone and needed allies; however, this was difficult because they were always watched and because women were strictly forbidden from meeting in groups.

In any case, life in Sambisa was highly regimented, leaving little time for social interaction and no access to any type of media or communication devices, so they were effectively cut off for years from the outside world. In the mornings, women were expected to carry out household chores and then go to Islamiyyah until 1pm. They would then go 'home' from 1pm to 3pm to pray and prepare lunch, and then back to Islamiyyah at 5pm until it was time for the maghrib prayer. The women who were in charge of and taught in Islamiyyah were usually wives of the top Boko Haram commanders who would preach to women about Boko Haram's just cause.

Hillu tells me that some women willingly join Boko Haram and spread their messages to other women to help with recruitment. Some women she met had been in Sambisa for more than two decades, since the time of Muhammad Yusuf (the Boko Haram founder). The women married to top commanders never lacked clothes, jewellery, or food; all the items stolen and pillaged from villages during the war were bestowed on them by their men. These women also help to keep captives in order; they are not overtly cruel or violent toward other women, but they do not necessarily help them out. Although women did not have the time to interact extensively, Hillu made friends through Islamiyyah, and her

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[46] Hijrah in Arabic means "a severing of ties of kinship", is a term used to describe the Prophet's journey from Mecca to Madinah. In this context, it is used to describe the migration that IDPs undergo, in search of safety

husband allowed her to visit them occasionally when their husbands were not around. This was how she met the two women with whom she eventually escaped.

Surviving in captivity

When I asked Hillu how she survived for five years in Sambisa, she told me that she obeyed all the rules set for them and did not step out of line. Most importantly, she obeyed her husband and did everything possible to live peacefully with him. Because of this, he would let her visit her friends in other neighbourhoods, although this was against the rules, since women were supposed to be practising purdah. Hillu's driving force for survival was her children. Her will to protect them kept her alive. Between chores and attending Islamiyyah, Hillu would play with her children, and she would speak to them in her native language (Mafa) so that they would learn to at least understand it. Hillu was also determined for her children to not imbibe Boko Haram's ideological belief that it was okay to kill people. In her own words: "every day, I spoke and sang rhymes to them in Mafa, I taught them to love people and to be kind to them, so they would not grow up harming people". Hillu's children were her solace and strength. While many women had secret businesses in Sambisa to earn a living, Hillu found such ventures too risky. Her survival tactic was simpler: to follow rules, obey her husband, go unnoticed, and escape when she got a chance.

Escape

When escaping from Sambisa, Hillu was five months pregnant and ended up giving birth to a son who is now two years and nine months old. She explains to me that talking about escaping was something that could get you killed in Sambisa. She was fearful of confiding in other women about her desire to escape because some women served as watch-keepers for their insurgent husbands and would snitch to them if they knew your plans. The women with whom Hillu ultimately escaped had previously expressed to her that they would leave if they could find a way. Hillu slowly became friends with them, visiting them when she could to see if she could trust them. When Hillu decided that enough was enough, she told the women that she was ready to escape, and they anxiously agreed. In secret, all three women meticulously planned and waited for a perfect moment. The night they escaped, their husbands had travelled to fight. The women and their children crept away in the middle of that stormy night and trekked for two days until they encountered soldiers in a town called Goshe, from where they were taken to a camp in Pulka. Hillu stayed there until she gave birth, and her son was six months old. Life in the Pulka camp was especially difficult because of water scarcity and lack of food. Hillu eventually decided to join her relatives at the Durumi camp in Abuja.

Present

Today, Hillu cooks and sells food for a living. Her children are safe, and she makes enough money from her small business to provide for them and can send money to her mother. Still traumatised by her experience, Hillu had mixed feelings regarding her decision to escape. Towards the end of our interview, Hillu bursts into tears, opening up to me about her guilt of escaping because she often wonders what she will tell her children when they grow up and ask her where their father is and why he is not with them.

While her foregoing divorce from her first husband shows what might be thought of as conventional resistant agency that is not often accorded to northern Nigerian women, a careful examination of the details of Hillu's account of life in captivity also shows that moments of agentic action begin to emerge. For example, Hillu's survival tactic in Sambisa which entailed following the rules, obeying her husband, going unnoticed and tactically forming alliances is an example of what Honwana (2006, p. 96) refers to as 'tactical agency', which is 'sporadic and constrained' but 'helps people with immediate circumstances of their lives', a type of agency which in Banaji's words is 'ephemeral' in nature, but is nevertheless crucial. This type of agency that Hillu expresses is ephemeral in nature because it is not constant; it is fleeting, depending on the circumstance. Coutler (2009, p. 110), in her book on women's lives through the Sierra Leone civil war, notes that one way girls and women survived abduction was to marry a senior commander in the rebel formation to ensure some form of safety from sexual violence and increase their powers in camps. While Hillu's case is a bit different in that she is intentional in obeying her husband and doing 'everything possible to live in peace with him, to make her new reality easier', this paid off as he would allow Hillu to go and visit friends which was not allowed in Sambisa. Agency, as seen in Hillu's obeying of her husband, can also be expressed through non-action or patience, which can be interpreted incorrectly as a lack of autonomy or complete passivity (Banaji, 2017a, p. 185) or, as Spivak (1988) argued, disempowerment or an absence of agency. In fact it is for this very reason that, when thinking about agency in oppressive contexts or in this case, conflict, we must resist associating or relying on 'actions' as the principal site of recognition and analysis of gendered agency (Madhok 2013, p. 113).

Akin to Coutler's example above, it is also worth noting the repeated expression of Banaji's formulation of 'contaminated agency' by the wives of the top Boko Haram commanders, who helped them keep the other women in check. Even though some of these women may have also been victims of Boko Haram, in their quest for survival, they also act on behalf of their captors to maintain the status quo and victimise others, thus blurring the line between being victims and perpetrators. Agentic actions can also occur under coercion and be deployed against weaker members of society on behalf of those who are more powerful (Banaji, 2017a, p. 194). While European normative accounts of agency might only highlight

Hillu's eventual escape as resistance, thus the only instance of agency, and argue that otherwise, Hillu lacked agency throughout her time in captivity, scholars such as Banaji (2017a), who argue for a wider conceptualisation of agency outside these narrow normative confines, will recognise instances such as Hillu carefully making friends and forming alliances despite the structures that hinder it. Agency then begins to emerge as something that allows or enables individuals (or groups) to negotiate and navigate the conditions within which they operate (Hemmings & Kabesh, 2013, p. 30). Even within the strict regimented and heavily surveilled routines in Sambisa, there are still hidden moments – when Hillu sings rhymes in Bura to her children, when she plays with them and teaches them love and kindness – when Hillu negotiates these routines to make them bearable and survive them. When Hillu says, 'My children kept me alive', this is an indication that despite all the constraints, she constantly made existential choices that increased her and her children's chances of staying alive and to make their lives in captivity bearable. A shift away from overt actions allows us to analyse the critical reflections, motivations, and desires that fuel what goes on in these hidden, private moments, as expressions of agency (Madhok 2013, p. 106). By employing a wider view of agency beyond its (implicitly normative Enlightenment) confines, it thus becomes clear, as Banaji (2017a, p. 153) highlights, that even though women like Hillu do not control the wider structures and routines they are subjected to in captivity, they are able to navigate and negotiate those constraints, thus, simultaneously agentic and constrained.

7.2.2. Profile 2 – Diya

I met 27 years old Diya at her home in Bulabulin Bolibe, a rural neighbourhood in Maiduguri. It was about a forty-five minutes' drive to get to Diya's house from the city centre. Diya was warm and friendly, welcoming me to a small compound in the home that her husband had built. Diya introduces herself to me as a student (at Ramat Polytechnic, Maiduguri) and as a food and nutrition volunteer for Save the Children, so she has a busy life balancing work and study. She works in her local community, going from house to house to screen children for malnutrition. Diya is originally from Baga, a town known for fishing, but has been in Maiduguri for the past seven years since escaping from Boko Haram. Diya's husband, Bako, also works with an NGO as a chlorinator.

Diya was attending a wedding in a village in Baga when Boko Haram attacked; she had to hide. Diya and a group of women had to escape to Baga town in the middle of the night. By the time she returned to town, her husband had fled, as men were being slaughtered indiscriminately. When news reached them that Boko Haram had started abducting women in town, Diya and her mother in-law left in the middle of the night and trekked to a nearby town between Baga and Maiduguri before eventually getting to Maiduguri where her parents and other relatives were living in a camp.

I ask Diya how she and her husband met, and she tells me to buckle up for a long story. Diya married Bako when she was seventeen. They met each other when they were younger, as they lived in the same neighbourhood. When Diya was in nursery school, Bako was in Primary Six, so he walked Diya and her siblings to school every morning. After Bako graduated from primary school, she never saw him again, until she was in senior secondary school. She ran into Bako when he returned to town and opened a phone charging station. Before she and Bako entered into a relationship, her grandfather tried to force her to marry an older man, one of Diya's relatives, who was thirty years older than her. This man went to meet her grandfather without informing Diya (whose father was already dead) and asked that they be married before she finished school. Her grandfather married her off without her or her mother's consent, and only informed them afterwards. All protests from Diya and her mother fell on deaf ears. After Diya finished secondary school, her grandfather demanded full custody of Diya and her brother from her mother so that he could enforce the marriage. This was the point at which Diya began to fight him. Diya eventually reported the case to the district head and the *Alkali*[47]. This was quite audacious and controversial for a young woman. Many elders tried to talk to her out of it, but she refused. After a lengthy hearing, Diya won her case, and her grandfather and forced husband were instructed to dissolve the 'marriage' agreement. Diya was free to marry Bako, her current husband.

When I ask Diya how she views herself, given everything she has been through, she tells me that, as a Muslim, she believes in fate and pre-destination. Therefore, although she suffered a lot before she got to where she is now, she never lost faith. At some point, she and her family did not have a place to live, and food was a problem. Eventually, when Save the Children came to her neighbourhood and were looking to recruit locals with a basic level of education, both she and Bako signed up and were each paid N24, 000 (£20/$31) per month, which is about N48,000 (£42/$62) collectively. This was life-changing. Diya explains that she does not dwell in self-pity over what is lost; instead, she always looks for opportunities to improve herself. She believes that there is too much narrative focus on the generalised trauma of the victims of the insurgency, and she wishes instead that people would focus on encouraging them and finding ways to help individuals and communities to rebuild their lives. In her view, constantly asking them about their trauma keeps them in the mentality of victimhood. Diya tells me that when interviewers ask her about her trauma, she instead tells them how she has been able to rebuild her life, as she does not want to focus on her trauma. Diya tells me that she is proud of herself and what she has achieved thus far. Diya's father died when she was very young, so she is proud of the fact that she can earn enough to provide for her mother and siblings. Diya believes that the insurgency unexpectedly gave her so many opportunities that she would not have had otherwise. She is glad that she left Baga. Diya currently makes about N50,000 (£45/$65) monthly while studying to be a lab

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[47] An Alkali is a judge who dispenses rulings according to Islamic law.

technician. Although she rarely has any, during her free time, Diya listens to the radio or visits her relatives.

Diya's husband, Bako, is the other breadwinner, and he built the house in which they live, so they do not have to pay rent. Diya is responsible for all household chores and childcare activities. I ask Diya if her husband helps her with the chores, since she is balancing so much. Diya tells me that he does not help her with domestic chores because this is not in line with Kanuri culture which has clear gender roles of the man being the provider and the woman taking care of everything in the home. Complicating any simplistic picture of Diya as a 'feminist' by European or American measures, Diya explains that when she is sick, Bako might help bathe the children, but would never cook or clean up. I ask her thoughts on this, and she says it is not fair, but it is culture, and one cannot change culture.

From Diya's account of her life, it is easy to see expressions of agency that are comprehensible to and would appeal to first and second wave feminist thinkers in Europe and the US – through her resisting a forced marriage and taking her grandfather to court both actions that predate her displacement by the conflict. In this case, Diya's religion played a role in her being able to resist this forced marriage, since there are provisions for Muslim women to challenge non-consensual marriages (although these are not always upheld). Diya's escape from her hometown, Baga, to Maiduguri was life-changing. The media coverage of the insurgency and the humanitarian crisis it has given birth to has created unique opportunities that have allowed women, like Diya, access to opportunities they otherwise would not have had. I also find Diya's idea that culture cannot be changed to be interesting and contradictory for someone who took her grandfather to court to fight a forced marriage. Yet, she also displays conformist agency in her outwards adherence to discriminatory hegemonic gender roles that assign domestic labour almost solely to women.

Another instance of agentic action that stands out is Diya's choice not to focus on trauma as the defining aspect of her story, a subject that displaced women are constantly being asked to rehearse for audiences of NGOs and news. Diya's insistence on not being defined by her trauma shows a kind of agency that is subtle, as she asserts herself and rejects representational victimhood. In this case, the framing and discourse on victim-survivors of the insurgency through the media coverage of Boko Haram through the lens of victimhood and vulnerability has opened up space for agency evidence through her speech practices. This is reflected in Diya's articulation and negotiation of ideas about herself as she rejects the label of 'victim', choosing to focus instead of the ways she is rebuilding her life. It is important to clarify that I am not arguing that Diya is displaying agency by 'resisting' this label through her subversion of language; rather, I am arguing that when she encounters representations of herself through the media coverage of her experiences, she undertakes a creative thinking that should be read as some of the ways in which persons make sense of news ideas and ways of being that they encounter; therefore,

speech practices do not only constitute acts of resistance (Madhok 2013, p. 116). This agentic action would not be visible through the evaluation of her actions alone. This leads us to conclude that the speech practices of northern Nigerian women provide an alternative site from within which to think about agency and the nature of victimhood-enabled subjectivities (Madhok 2013, p. 114).

This is another way that the media coverage of Boko Haram in this instance has enabled agency, as it provides a new set of ideas through which northern Nigerian women can negotiate and articulate their sense of selves. From this, we start to get a sense of the answer to the questions that Hemmings and Kabesh (2013, p. 29) ask, about the work that agency does, a question which this thesis is interested in.

7.2.3. Profile 3 – Sarah

Sarah, a 34 year old mother of four, was the first person I interviewed in Maiduguri. Sarah tells me that it was on Christmas Eve in 2011– she was in her village in Gwoza with her family – when one of her relatives received a call to inform them that Boko Haram had attacked her neighbourhood in Maiduguri and slaughtered people, including four of her neighbours. She never returned to that neighbourhood. After Christmas, Sarah and her family moved to another place on in Maiduguri. Sarah tells me that she met her current husband, Steven when she was much younger. She had had many suitors but had not yet decided on who she would marry. In 2009, during the first Boko Haram attack, when churches were burned and people were killed, Sarah and her family escaped to a camp near the Maimalori barracks. Sarah and her family had nothing and would spread their clothes to sleep on the floor at night. Steven (who was one of her suitors then) would bring Sarah and her family tea, bread, and sardines twice a day. This won Sarah over, and she decided to marry Steven. Sarah and Steven got married the following year after she finished secondary school. Before the insurgency, Sarah was in school but also used to sell bread and other food items to make money on the side.

Present

Before they got married, Steven worked as a logistics officer for an organisation, but lost this job not long after. He tried to get another job, but things did not work out, as the political and economic situation deteriorated with the rise of Boko Haram attacks. Steven has been out of a job for the past few years, only getting occasional odd jobs here and there. She, on the other hand, started a small successful business where she sells fried food on the side of a busy road. Sarah always has a stream of customers from when she starts working at 5am until she stops around 7pm. She takes breaks to take food home and check in on her children. Sarah tells me that if she could, she would make sure than all women learn trades to make them self-sufficient because having a business has literally saved her life. She explains

that that she would only stop her business if she could get into school to study nursing or midwifery. Although Sarah graduated as the best Chemistry and Biology student in her class, it has been difficult to gain admission to university or polytechnic because she only got a pass in English. She can re-sit the exam, but it costs N20,000 (£18/$26) which takes time for her to put aside. Sarah has sat for the exam twice, but did not pass because she does not have time to study as she spends all day working and taking care of her children. Yet Sarah expresses nothing but pride in how far she has come, 'even the way I look at myself now is different from how I used to see myself before, I can now provide for my children and provide them with their basic needs, I am so proud of myself' she tells me, enthusiastically.

I ask her how she grew her business, and she tells me that so many people helped her along the way. The first person to help her was an older woman who had a big business in her neighbourhood, by giving Sarah pots, pans, a small local stove, and a loan. Sarah also explains that she has received assistance from organisations who help IDPs. For example, Sarah was part of a documentary that, ironically enough, explored the ways in which the insurgency was changing the lives of women. Some of the people who watched the documentary were drawn to Sarah because of her bubbly personality and perseverance and reached out to help her. I myself came to know about Sarah after watching this film. Sarah tells me that she is grateful to have found an opportunity in the midst of the insurgency, to make something of herself.

Early on in our conversations, Sarah told me that Steven is the main provider, paying their rent, their children's school fees, and proving their basic needs, while she takes care of minor expenses. However, Sarah opens up to me during subsequent conversations. She tells me that her marriage is presently much more difficult than it was in the past. Sarah laments that in the past, everything was provided for her and her husband took good care of her but when he lost his job, he could not provide for them in the same way. Now that he sees that she is working and making money, he has stopped even making an effort to provide, although she believes that it is the responsibility of the man to provide according to their culture. Sarah explains that she pities herself in that regard, but she also acknowledges her effort because her husband cannot provide for the family, and she would rather work on the road side than beg, in order to protect her and her family from shame. I ask Sarah for her account details to give some money to put towards her business, but she begs me to please transfer the money to her sister's account. When I ask her why, she opens up, telling me that her husband will take the money if he sees it in her account, as he goes through her phone and can see text messages from her bank about her account balance, which she sometimes forgets to delete. Therefore, she must hide money from Steven. Sarah is also part of an *adashe* savings scheme with other women where she puts in N1,000 (£1/$1.3) a day, she explains that this comes in very handy for rainy days. Most perturbing and definitely not something explored in the documentary that starred her, Sarah also tells me that her husband takes out his frustrations on her and beats her. I ask her if she has told anyone about this, and she tells me that she

confides in her mother, who advises her to be patient and pray about the situation. Throughout my interviews with Sarah, there was a constant stream of customers, and she was multitasking between serving her customers and begging neighbours to check in on her children at home.

Sarah's effort to rebuild her life makes for a remarkable story that highlights her ingenuity and resilience. In fact, this was the focus and highlight of Sarah's narrative in the documentary. Without nuance, Sarah, a displaced woman, and a victim of domestic violence, might be conceived of as having no agency – the 'third world woman' of so much development literature; at most, her resilience in building a successful business might be acknowledged or viewed as resistance, since this is more visible than other fleeting or intermittent actions. However, a deeper analysis of Sarah's life reveals instances of complex agentic actions, which highlight the capacity for fleeting actions that take place under very specific conditions. As a victim of domestic violence who works all day to provide for her family while also being responsible for all the household chores and childcare, Sarah makes choices which can be considered agentic, yet are constrained. Sarah's choice to protect her family from shame and destitution by earning despite her belief that men should provide cannot be interpreted through the universalised paradigms of emancipatory politics, nor can it straightforwardly be seen as resistance, while might even see it as passive or submissive. Her actions cannot be denied as agentic, despite being in contrast with normative notions of agency as exclusive expressions of free will in an absolute sense (Banaji, 2017a, p. 194).

Protecting aspects of her own autonomy, Sarah deletes text messages from her bank that show her account balance because her husband goes through her phone and hides her money from her husband by depositing things in her siblings' bank accounts. In both these momentary externalisations of ephemeral agency, Sarah makes choices that are also a result of traumatic external factors that she has to navigate (Banaji, 2017a, p. 197). Sarah's choice to remain in the marriage with the support of her mother who encourages her to be patient and prayerful could also be argued to be evidence of contaminated and conformist agency. Sarah's freedom is constrained by pressure from her mother, and she is conformist in that her choice to stay in an abusive marriage is one that consents to and accepts the wider hegemonic patterns of thinking in a society which frowns upon divorce, punishes single mothers, and emphasises 'covering up the shame' of one's family. Evans (2013, p. 56) argues that the idea of 'a sense of responsibility' to others is important in discussions of agency, especially since we want to resist downplaying the impact of social structures, and we argue that the self is embedded and formed through social relations. In this case, Sarah, who is part of a conservative Christian community which frowns upon divorce, has a responsibility to uphold the values of her community; hence, Sarah's agency is directed towards the articulation of her duty through the endorsement and the visible manifestation of the rules of her community. This highlights the fact that agency is neither a constant

nor a straightforward attribute; 'it is always mediated by the values and practices of the particular community' (Evans, 2013, p. 56).

While media and communication technologies are not prominent in Sarah's life, since she is usually too busy to even glance at her phone, Sarah is another woman whose agentic choices have at times been facilitated by these media. Being located in Maiduguri, the epicentre of the insurgency, where many NGOs are located, and starring in a documentary has been a huge advantage for Sarah, as she has received a lot of assistance for small businesses and victims of the insurgency. This specific scenario places Sarah in a position where she can earn a living and provide for her family, thereby facilitating economic independence. Although the role of media in the lives of northern Nigerian women, as discussed in this chapter, may appear more positive in contrast to previous chapters, the important thing to note here is that the has been skewed attention given to women, as this has resulted in varying outcomes, both positive and negative. This highlights the urgency for not just any type of attention but more nuanced and critical attention to capture these complexities in order to avoid binary dichotomies of victimhood and vulnerability and erasure of gendered agency.

7.2.4. Gendered subaltern agency

From the diverse accounts of these three women, a picture has already started to form that shows the different strategies that northern women employ to adapt, negotiate, and resist the different structures that govern their lives while struggling to survive through the precarity wrought by conflict and violent displacement. Examples from the lives of these three women show that these strategies often play out through contradictory processes, highlighting the complexity of gendered agency. Considering the fact that no one really lives under conditions of complete freedom, as most people's lives are constrained in several different ways, it is not realistic – as certain Western feminist discourse and liberal notions of freedom do – to presume that this is the norm, and to only judge people's expressions of agency strictly through their ability to act freely and free from external forces (Madhok, 2013, p. 116). The accounts of the women discussed above illustrate the nuance required to 'look for' agency in a gendered subaltern context and also demonstrate how the failure of some (primarily White and Euro-American) feminists to adequately theorise agency has resulted in the dominance of free-action biased accounts of agency and the misreading and erasure of certain types of agency of those who are not privileged by liberal assumptions of freedom. Such a narrow conception of agency 'makes it difficult to engage simultaneously with women's systematic subordination and the ways in which they negotiate constraints even determining social conditions' (Mani, 1998, p. 10). In other words, thinking about agency in conditions of conflict mandates one to delink the idea of agency to specific conditions, that is, negative freedoms in this case and expanding the sites of recognition of agentic activity to include more than just 'action' (Banaji, 2017a; Madhok, 2013; Mani, 1998). Although feminist scholars such

as Kalpana Wilson (Wilson et al., 2013) and Sumi Madhok (2013) have criticised such free-will action-biased conceptualisations of agency, there remains a naturalisation of the notion of agency as the ability and freedom to act according to one's chosen desires in both feminist and non-feminist conceptualisations and in media accounts.

While Rousseau's conceptualisation of autonomy provides liberalism with the tools to understand freedom while being subject to constraints, the liberal conception of the autonomous person has often been theorised in isolation from their social environment, thus ignoring how the self is embedded and formed through social and power relations. Thus, ignoring the impact of social structures and inequality in shaping lives. To advance our understanding of agency, it is important to think about agency as existing simultaneously with constraints. My work, alongside that of postcolonial feminist scholars such as Banaji, Madhok, and Mahmood, opens up other dimensions of the studies on *subaltern gendered agency* and *subject construction*, taking into account multiple subaltern identities within a specific context of history and culture. This is also in line with Global South and African feminist theorists, who emphasise the importance of history and context in such approaches. Such reasoning is the backbone of my study– through alternative theorisations of agency which centre the experiences of victim-survivors of the insurgency – providing a culturally and historically grounded account of these struggles, negotiations, and mediated encounters. However, this emphasis on context should not be mistaken to mean that the Global South is an enigma that is radically different and can only be understood in context; instead, the point here is that context is crucial for proper understanding in all settings, Global North or Global South (Willems, 2014, p. 16). The discussion and analysis above highlight that in order to think about agency in a subaltern context, we must also expand the sites where we 'look' for agency. The analysis in this section has provided insights into the different ways in which northern Nigerian women express agency within the psycho-social and economic structures that surround them. The next section focuses on the different ways in which women are complicit in hegemonic systems to further highlight the complexity of gendered agency.

7.3.   Complexities of gendered agency in times of conflict

While the previous section has meticulously highlighted some of the means by which women actively resist the constraints placed upon them, both before and after violent displacement, even in captivity, I am also aware of the complexities and contradictions inherent in women's agency and the ways in which women themselves may contribute to the same structures that confine them (Cooper, 1997, p. xviii). The purpose of this final section is to complicate some of the potential binaries that might emerge from my work, which is a difficulty to which any analysis of agency is vulnerable. Thus, in an attempt to resist my own potential Orientalist impulses, I wish to problematise binaries that may essentialise

northern Nigerian women (in ways long criticised by Chandra Mohanty) to avoid doing or contributing to the problems that my work criticises.

Through discussions on how contexts of violence have altered the dynamics of gender relations in the lives of IDPs and the ways in which women have responded to this change, this section highlights how they are often complicit in systems that are seen as not being in their favour. This will be done by specifically examining the institution of marriage. Although I did not go into my interviews asking specifically about this subject, marriage emerged as a central theme of interest to my interviewees. The things my interviewees chose to highlight indicated that marriage was a primary aspect of social life where relations between men and women play out; thus, in speaking about changes in social life as a result of the insurgency, most interviewees cited examples that had to do with marriage. Since both men and women experience social and economic tensions, marriage and discourses on marriage turned out to be sites of tremendously complex negotiations, competing interests, contradictions, and compromises (Cooper, 1997, p. xviii), particularly in light of the conflict.

7.3.1. Changes in gender and social relations: 'The dynamics of marriage have changed, men cannot provide'

Harders (2011, p. 132) argues that since conflict and peace involve both men and women in very specific ways, it is vital to broaden our understanding of the state, peace, war, and security in order to tackle the nature of gendered inclusion and exclusion which involves both material and discursive understandings of power relations, gendered practices of the state, and the construction of masculinities and femininities. Unless these are considered, the root causes of violent conflict and its consequences can neither be understood nor tackled in a transformative manner. The following section discusses how the context of violence has altered the dynamics of gender relations in the lives of IDPs. The latter two sections explain how women have adapted to these changes in a way that complicates hegemonic gender dynamics.

Lilia, 45, tells me that the biggest change in the lives of women since the arrival of Boko Haram has been related to divisions that have emerged due to changes in their way of life, specifically the division between husbands and wives. Lilia highlights a point that was reiterated by a majority of my interviewees 'marriage is not the same as it was before because husbands and wives cannot live in peace, since men cannot provide and fulfil their duties because there are no jobs and there are no means for them to make money.' For context, the majority of IDPs work in the informal sector (mainly trading and farming) which is very specific to their regions and how men used to provide for their families. Those who used to farm back home and are now in urban areas such as Abuja and Maiduguri do not have access to farmlands as they do in the village in the north-east, nor do they have the capital to start

businesses. On the other hand, women may sell food or sew local caps worn by men in Borno to provide a source of income. Unfortunately, in the IDP camps in Abuja, there is no market for those caps since they are not worn by men in Abuja and they do not have the capital to sustain food businesses on the same scale. Some interviewees have even tried to send the caps they sew back home to sell them.

Zulai, 23, echoes the same sentiments as Lilia, highlighting that even women who are lucky enough to have their husbands still alive find that their husbands cannot provide in the ways they used to, causing tension in marriages. Bintu, 38, told me 'women are suffering, the dynamics of marriage have changed to the point where are as woman, you would wish you were on your own'. It is crucially important to understand how dire this situation is in the minds of interviewees. They lived and continue to live in a society where the man is viewed as the sole provider and patriarch. Even if a woman works and earns an income, it remains the man's duty to provide for his household, with significant value attached to that role of the 'provider' and accruing also to the women being provided for. Being a provider, I was told, makes one masculine, and thus, is *what makes a man a man*.

Indeed, I found that some men do not allow their wives to work even when this would significantly ease family circumstances because they see this as a sign that he, as the man of the house, does not adequately fulfil his role as a provider. This is why many respondents, such as Fatima 43, explain that purdah 'is for those who can afford it, not the poor', and women like Mariya, 20, express that although she has never lived in seclusion because her husband was not well to do, she wishes that she could, as she thinks that 'it is very nice, everything is done for you and you are seen as respectable and well taken care of'. In an acknowledgement of intersectional concerns as central to ideological approaches, Cooper (1997, p. 134) notes that women in general have come to associate seclusion with prosperity, especially with the growth of the merchant class. Lawan, a CJTF officer I spoke to in Maiduguri, put this into context:

> In our culture here (Borno), *no matter what*, the man is responsible for feeding the family. The wife should not be the one feeding you; how can you talk in the group if you allow this to happen in your home? How dare you open your mouth while other men are talking, while *you depend on your woman for food?* [Speaker's emphasis]

Lawan's statement highlights that masculinity – and men's right to participate as an equal in civil society–is tied directly to his ability to provide for his family and is a determinant of men's value and identity as a man. This identity is now doubly threatened by violent displacement and long-term trauma or illness, thus changing the dynamics of marriage. Streicher (2011, p. 26) argues that 'the experience of violence, for example, in violent conflict, can cause the incorporation and habituation of violent

practices'. This can then result in the normalisation of violence i.e. 'violence becomes an integral part of an individual and collective habitus of certain men' (Harders, 2011, p. 143). These connections between being a provider and the normalisation of men's violence are illustrated by the experiences of Amatlullah and Elizabeth.

Amatullah, 35, a mother of 8 children from Pulka whom I interviewed in Wassa tells me that her husband has been sick and bedbound for a while now, so she is the breadwinner of her home. She mainly farms, working from dusk to dawn, to provide for her family. She was able to find a small piece of land on the outskirts of the town, where she grows most of the food that her family eats and sells any leftovers. In addition to all her responsibilities, one of her children suffers from sickle cell and is always sick, but they have no access to healthcare, and she does all the household chores and childcare in the family without any help from her husband. Through tears, Amatullah explained that since she became the breadwinner, her husband has become resentful and physically abuses her. He accuses her of not respecting him anymore because she is now the one who provides. According to Amatullah, 'A man with no job or money is like a madman next to a woman'. Before the insurgency, Amatullah's husband owned a fuel station in Pulka and was doing well financially; they had no marriage issues. Amatullah constantly asks herself what the point of marriage is.

According to her, she does 'everything that a man is supposed to do, married life is supposed to be happy, your husband is supposed to provide for and take care of you, you are supposed to look good and smell nice not look rugged like I do now, am I even a wife?'. Sometimes, Amatullah's husband goes through phases during which he stops her from going to the farm and forces her to make do with what he can provide (which is next to nothing). She explains that the drawback of living in a camp in such proximity to other people is that you have no privacy, and strangers know everything that is going on in your family, which can lead to external disrespect for both men who fail to provide and women who work. When Amatullah shared a 3-bedroom house with three other families, she tells me that the other women would mock her and ask, 'Are you a woman? What woman has to provide for her family when she has a husband?'. In a Nigerian context, with Black women asking another Black woman this question, I was forcefully reminded of bell hooks' book, 'Ain't I a Woman?' and its push to uncover the ways in which labour and race overlap in the construction of American femininity. Here, in northern Nigeria, to cover her shame as a woman who labours and supports her family and whose husband cannot provide, Amatullah goes to extremes, such as placing a pot of water on the fire to make it look as if she is cooking to avoid nosy neighbours noticing and gossiping about the lack of food in their home and comments about her husband being useless, although she herself acknowledges that he is. This seemingly petty act of disguise by Amatullah can be seen as an expression of contaminated agency in which she accepts local patriarchal strictures and acts according to wider hegemonic patterns of gender norms to signal that her husband indeed provides and is therefore a real man. Due to this experience,

Amatullah questions her status as a wife, and her neighbours question her status as a woman, thus highlighting evidence of agency via speech practices. In those instances and in light of Amatullah's experience, her neighbours articulate certain specific ways of relating to Amatullah as someone who is not treated as a wife and as a woman ought to be, while Amatullah herself negotiates and re-articulates her sense of self.

Similarly, Elizabeth, 38, a mother of six, was abandoned by her husband after fleeing their hometown, Michika, to the IDP camp in Abuja. She told me that before the insurgency, they had a happy marriage. Both she and her husband used to farm and had several businesses in Michika. When she and her family fled to the Durumi camp, they had never lived in a place where one had to buy food, and there was no farming space available. Her husband tried to get a job to no avail, so he gave up, and she was doing all the work to provide for the family. He then stopped trying to provide for them or to help around the house; instead, he made her life more difficult, quite suddenly turning physically abusive towards her when she was able to find a job as a cook at a nearby school. He then took off when she warned him never to hit her again, accusing her of being disrespectful because she was able to provide for the family, while he could not. He left Elizabeth and his six children without saying goodbye. At the time of the interview, she had not seen or spoken to him for more than a year. From both Amatullah and Elizabeth's accounts, it becomes evident that the men not being able to provide for their families due to the conflict transformed not only family and gender relations but also communities through a loss of men's sense of identity and value in their own and others' eyes, something which further manifested in abuse and resentment against their wives.

7.3.2. Rising socio-economic profile of women and the threat to masculinity

This subsection discusses the implications – for gender relations – of a supposed empowerment of women by NGOs, which is also perceived as 'discrimination towards men' and has led to resentment by men. I argue that the agency women are able to express as a result of these changes, and new economic opportunities are not necessarily craved and internalised by women, who frequently express a preference to return to the heteronormative division of labour and status even at the cost of their own gendered social and economic gain. The backlash against the increased socio-economic profile of women rises as a threat to the traditional concept of masculinity–in this case, the idea of the man as the sole breadwinner escalates. The eruption of masculine rage and male resentment, as we saw in the cases of Amatullah and Elizabeth, further highlights the link between this type of masculine rage and resentment that has emerged as a response to the rising socioeconomic profile of women and the type of toxic and militarised masculinity expressed by Boko Haram, which are both types of misogynistic extremism that asserts itself by dominating women psychologically, socially, economically, and physically. All societies are patriarchal, but in ones that have never had social revolutions to challenge

even some of the patriarchal norms, masculinity is indexed against certain things: how rich a man is, how he is able to provide, the chastity of his daughters, and fidelity of his wife or wives. However, in instances where these things are not achievable, violence repeatedly appears to fill the void: violence against women and children, if not against other men. This is not unique; research has shown that in times of conflict, women often gain access to new economic opportunities that enhance them socially (Harders, 2011, p. 149), however, these gains are mostly limited in duration (Meintjes et al., 2001, p. 9):

> The historical records confirm that societies neither defend the spaces men create during struggle nor acknowledge the indigenous way in which women bear new and additional responsibilities. [...W]omen's activism in managing survival and community level agency is predictably devalued as accidental activism and marginalised post-conflict, as politics become more structured and hierarchical.

In other words, the status women gain from these new opportunities is neither constant nor permanent enough to translate into structural or systemic change. This highlights that the agency that women are able to express as a result of these new opportunities, be it economic or social, in terms of making decisions in the family or being able to earn a living, is ephemeral. Through an analysis of interview excerpts, the discussion in the next subsection shows that women themselves do not necessarily internalise these changes, that is, the new status they gain as a result of this economic empowerment; rather, most men and women claim that they would prefer to return to 'normalcy' – which is associated with 're-establishing the status quo of gender relations' (Harders, 2011, p. 149), even at the cost of the social and economic loss for women (Meintjes et al., 2001, p. 12). The following discussions emphasise this point.

7.3.3. The burden of care and the burden of earning: Changes in women's roles and responsibilities in post-conflict societies

Even where gender-based violence in the domestic space is not the outcome, displacement and conflict have wrought a change in the traditional roles women take up in society in northern Nigeria. Many women have lost their husbands, fathers, and male relatives, and even if they are alive, they cannot provide in the way they used to before the insurgency, as the discussion above has established. This means that women have been forced to take on roles and responsibilities that have been historically associated with men. This is a major change highlighted by the majority of my interviewees. Zayna, 48, and Bafa, 40, explain that many husbands were killed or kidnapped by Boko Haram, and women have had to become breadwinners overnight. Eesha, 35, asserts that the lives of women have changed a lot since the insurgency their husbands; now, more often than not, women are the backbone of the family. Maman Jafar, 37, who practised purdah before being displaced narrates that previously everything was

done for her, she did not even have to go to the market; she and her co-wife never had to go out to fetch water or go to the farm; everything was brought to them at home and they never engaged in manual labour of any kind. However, with the insurgency, Maman Jafar says that 'women are now suffering to the extent that even a newly married bride will have to go to the market or fetch water, there is no honeymoon period, just suffering'. Adamu, 45 – who I spoke to in the Malkohi camp in Yola – has three wives. Before being displaced, he and his family lived in Gwoza. His wives all had small businesses that they used to run, from selling food and clothes to tailoring, while he was the main provider and used to farm. Nevertheless, now that they are in the camp and things are hard, his wives also come to the farm with him; they only started helping him out on the farm because things were so difficult. Adamu tells me that: 'this is not by choice and it is not something that I am proud of as a man, I should be able to provide for my family, my wives should not be forced to do manual work on the farm under the sun, this is something I am ashamed of, but it is what the circumstances have forced upon us'.

In the context of such narratives, it is also important to note the strong class component of the changes: even before the insurgency, there were women who had to go to the farm simply because extra labour was needed for productivity and their husbands were not as well off. Religion also seems to be a factor, as all my interviewees mentioned that they farm are Christians, whereas only a few Muslim interviewees mentioned that they engaged in farming. In fact, according to Mariya (20), who is a Muslim, 'religion dictates that married women should not engage in strenuous work such as farming and fetching water and firewood, the man is supposed to take care of the women, the woman's work is limited to household chores'. Similarly, Talatu, 35, tells me that 'when the husband cannot provide for the family, forcing a woman to work on the farm, this is not proper because farming is stressful manual labour which is very difficult and a woman is not supposed to do that, but these circumstances force women to farm in addition to all the household chores'. Asabe (20) also highlights that there are some types of manual labour, such as fetching water, which she and other women never engaged in before the insurgency, but are now forced to do.

While this shift in the roles and responsibilities of women has impacted what has been seen as traditional masculine and feminine roles, it has also empowered some women, bringing them closer to the pre-colonial and pre-Islamic gender traditions in the region (cf. Chapter 4). In the narratives of the women above, there seems to be a longing for a return to a time when women did not have to engage in manual labour or be the breadwinners of their families, even though that will mean they do not have the economic opportunities and the agency they have now, thus highlighting the complexities of gendered agency. This is further emphasised in my interviews with the four women leaders in Bakassi camp, who are all over 50 years: Hajiya Fanta, Hajiya Hadi, Hajiya Awa and Hajiya Gumus. Yet, in contrast, these Hajiyas tell me that the new responsibility that they have now makes them feel more powerful because

some of them have been able to take advantage of opportunities and do things they would otherwise not have been able to do in their previous lives; that is, they now have some form of social and economic agency due to the specific circumstances wrought by the conflict. The Hajiyas also reported that being able to provide for themselves and their families makes them respect themselves more, which makes them happy. Nevertheless, they tell me that although they are happy that they can provide for themselves, they would still prefer the pre-conflict lifestyle. It is important to note that they *felt freer* in those settings and that they feel bad that they are no longer able to hold the roles that women held when they were in those traditional settings. Mostly, they do not feel respected in the same way now because they have to go out and hustle with men.

7.3.4. Purdah and the complexity of women's complicity

Purdah (known as *zaman kulle* in Hausa) refers to the practice of living in seclusion, a practice usually associated with religious piety. The extent of *zaman kulle* usually varies from person to person, but the common thread is that married women, especially younger ones, adopt a lifestyle in which they live in partial or complete seclusion from the public. Some women are only allowed to go out when absolutely necessary, for example, to visit a sick relative, only with permission from the husband, or with a trusted companion appointed by the husband; some can only go out at night with their husbands, to avoid being seen by other men; and some women can go out on their own but only with permission from their husband or for absolutely necessary reasons, that is, to visit family. From many feminist perspectives, including those of Black, Asian, and Indigenous feminists, this practice seems very restrictive and oppressive to women. However, responses from my interviewees reveal that the psychological backdrop and reality is much more complicated than that. Displacement has also changed the way *zaman kulle* is practiced, and some respondents have mixed feelings about these changes. This prompts us to ask how to think about gendered agency in such a context, where there seems to be a convergence between women's desire for seclusion and the hegemonic patriarchal authority (usually the husband) who mandates it. The discussion below explores this point.

Many of my interviewees, such as Amne, 32, and Shatu, 31, who practiced *zaman kulle* prior to being displaced, tell me that they enjoyed it. Some, such as Fatou, 47, and Nabou, 52, who never lived in seclusion because their husbands did not have the means to, wish that they could have done so or might be able to do so in the future. Even Sarah, 34, who is a Christian, tells me that she hears about *zaman kulle* but never practiced it, as it is a tradition more common amongst Muslims, though she contends that she would happily adopt this lifestyle if her husband provided everything adequately. To complicate matters, while some of my interviewees believe that some women do indeed choose to live in seclusion, others contend that it is usually the husband's decision that the wives obey accordingly. Earlier, I mentioned that seclusion is often associated with prosperity. This point is supported by Cooper (1997,

p. 134), who notes that many women view seclusion positively, even when they themselves were not secluded, because of its association with class status. Guy Nicholas (1975, p. 181) who highlights that from as early as the late 1960s 'seclusion has grown significantly in larger agglomerations, particularly those where trade and Islamic scholarship flourish' (Cooper, 1997, p. 138). Nicholas argues that women are drawn to seclusion because it frees them from strenuous labour, thus providing them with leisure to set up a trade, 'if many men see this new institution as a means of keeping women from the fields, women themselves take advantage of it to gain access to an enhanced situation which tends to transform them as a group into a kind of privileged class.' (Nicholas, 1975, p. 181). Cooper (1997, p. 138), however, counters this by highlighting that Nicholas' account exaggerates the benefits of seclusion and fails to acknowledge that not all women are able to set up a trade, as seclusion also limits the kinds of trade they can take up in an urban area. In this context, Margaret Saunders highlights that 'despite the air of male dominance, seclusion clearly reduces a wife's workload' thus, is seen as desirable by many women (1978, p. 70). I found that interviewees who spoke positively about *zaman kulle* expressed similar sentiments.

It is important to know that this practice is not limited to backward or rural areas; it is also common among the educated elite in urban areas and can be seen as a sign of prestige and prosperity (Cooper, 1997, p. 131). For example, Jessica, 42, who is a Christian, tells me that she would not mind living in seclusion as long as the man holds up his agreement to provide. She gives me an example of her educated cousin, who just got called to the bar in Nigeria. Jessica's cousin, who is one of four wives, lives in seclusion. Jessica explains: 'all the wives have their own houses and cars with drivers to drive them around and the husband provides everything for her'. Jessica tells me that her cousin was at a wedding a few weeks ago, advertising shoes and clothes for sale. Therefore, despite the fact that her husband provides everything for her, she still wants to have something for herself, so she is not dependent on him for everything.

Despite these accounts, some women, such as Mubina, 22, and Maro, 33, forcefully expressed that they would never want to live in seclusion; they do not think it is a nice or ideal lifestyle. Both Mubina and Maro disagree that it is recommended by religion and think that people simply use religion as an excuse, especially because it does not appear anywhere in the Qur'an. Mubina asserts clearly that *zaman kulle* is 'oppressive' and thinks that those who claim to enjoy it are lying. Fandi, 27, had a stronger opinion on *zaman kulle*, asserting that she has never and will never live in seclusion. In fact, she tells me that her current husband does not like her going out and has reported her to her parents for always going out. Fandi is against *zaman kulle*; she explains that one of her sisters was living in seclusion and could not even escort her guests to the door. Fandi insists that most men who make their wives live in seclusion do not adequately take care of them, and may provide financially but that is the bare minimum. Fandi believes that some men want their wives in seclusion so that their wives would not be aware of their

illicit affairs, while other men she claim 'do it for stupid reason such as they do not want other men looking at their wives'. Diya, 27, insists that those who choose to live in seclusion are uneducated and argues that it does not make sense for someone to work hard, go through education, and then agree to live in seclusion. However, ironically ignoring the class connotations of seclusion in practice, Diya says that for women who did not go to school and have no means of providing for themselves, seclusion is a viable option if the husband provides everything. Diya further explains that kulle is quite common, as it has only recently become normal and common for women to go out and work in offices; people were not so open-minded in the past, she tells me.

Women also play an important role in imposing purdah. While displacement has made it more difficult to implement seclusion, Maman Jaafar, 30, tells me that it is impossible to implement it in camps. Others, such as Fantis 24, tell me that she is still trying to practice *zaman kulle* in camps, although this is very difficult. Falmata, 40, tells me that she still tries to practice kulle while living at the camp, despite it being almost impossible due to the nature of the camp, and Falmata, 40 explains that even though it is difficult to impose kulle in the camp and her husband is hardly around, she still will not go out without her husband's permission. Cooper highlights that women themselves play an important role in the control of their own and other women's movements, and many of these constraints are self-imposed since, as in this instance, men are rarely around, yet women like Fantis and Falmata still maintain this behaviour that restricts their movement and options (Cooper, 1997, p. 139). However, I found that some interviewees expressed contradictions in their thoughts and opinions about purdah.

7.3.5. Contradictory responses to hegemonic systems

Sholi, 26, opens up to me about living in seclusion prior to being displaced, a lifestyle which she tells me was common among Muslim women in her village in Gwoza. Sholi tells me that she never stepped out of her house and everything was done for her. Sholi had a grinding business which she ran from inside her compound, and her female-only customers would come in. Sholi enjoyed living in seclusion and being home with her three children. Occasionally, she attended naming ceremonies and weddings but only with her husband's permission. I ask Sholi how she feels about zaman kulle now that she has been forced out of it for two years due to displacement. She tells me that, although she prefers living in seclusion, given her recent experience, she would not want to go back to living in seclusion. Sholi tells me that if she were forced to choose between having a successful business in the market and living in seclusion, she would choose the latter. However, Sholi also tells me that she would also want her daughter to live in seclusion, although she would want her daughter to go to school and get a good job rather than live in seclusion, but she would not mind if her daughter could combine both working and living in seclusion.

Awa, 37, also expresses similar contradictions and tensions in her response. Like Sholi, Awa lived in seclusion and would only go out with her husband's permission to attend weddings, naming ceremonies, and condolence visits. Awa explains, 'it is very good when your husband locks you at home and provides everything for you; if you have to go out to look for money as a woman, you do not know what types of people you will meet along the way'. Awa had a successful tailoring business while living in seclusion. When I ask Awa, who decided that she lived in seclusion, she told me that it was her husband who decided and her parents encouraged her to live that way as well. We cannot discount the effects here of hegemonic systems, education, and discourses amongst women and their families, with the carrot of class status and the stick of ridicule or displeasure from relatives. Awa believes that *zaman kulle* is good for Muslim women; it makes them respectable and honourable. However, Awa is also, as are all of us, a product of her social milieu regardless of the conflict. She goes on to explain that, when living in seclusion, people regard you with respect and praise your husband for providing adequate care to the extent that his wife does not have to go out. In fact, Awa believes that women who have to go out of their households to work for money is a sign of struggle, in her own words: 'it is only because of Boko Haram that I am in this position of struggle where I have to work'. When I ask Awa if she wants her daughters to live in seclusion, she says that she does; however, she goes on to say that she would rather her daughters go to school and get jobs that would be useful to them and others, as this would not be against religion.

The active participation of women such as Amne, Shatu, Fantis, and Falmata in practices such as Purdah for the advantages it affords (or afforded) them in particular moments, and not to subvert it even when doing so will leave them better off in certain instances, for example, in their current realities in camps where they can go out and make a living, highlights the complexity of the status of women in society. I have argued in Chapter 4 that northern Nigerian women are not a homogenous category, as interests among women vary, and individual women are often pulled in contrary directions by their own experiences and choices (Cooper, 1997, p. 140). These contradictions highlight that women are sometimes complicit in structures and institutions that are still fundamental to defining gender norms in the region, but it also highlights the complexities inherent in gendered agency. Just like the women participants of the piety movement in Egypt in Mahmood's (2012) ethnography, the women who actively participate and uphold the practice of purdah occupy an uncomfortable place within feminist theory as they intentionally subject themselves to practices which feminist scholarship and even many outside of it see as oppressive and restrictive. However, this is not evidence of a lack of agency. Just as the women in Mahmood's study emerge as agentic, evidenced in their ability to attach themselves to and perform the norms of piety in their quest to achieve as much as possible, the ideal or prescribed model of piety, the women who subject themselves to purdah, even when they do not have to, can be said to be agentic in their adoption of patriarchal norms to achieve the hegemonic model of the ideal wife/woman. Indeed, Banaji (2017a, p. 197) reminds us that 'on many occasions, doing something

agentic, does not entail individual rational decisions to take action, or to behave in specific ways in response to perceived structural conditions.

7.4.   Conclusion

In a situation of crisis where the traditional concept of masculinity has been threatened, familial gender-based violence can also be a significant tool in holding on to or attempting to re-establish masculine identity which is tied to certain ideals such as 'the provider' and 'the one who dominates'. This connection between women's paid labour outside the home and their targeting by men inside the home for violence and abuse is connected to men's individual loss of autonomy and social status, in this case, the men not being able to provide (Harders, 2011, p. 143). Studies show that the use of violence, in addition to the fear of being victimised, is a vital aspect of men reclaiming certain types of expected masculinity (Bowker, 1998; Toch, 1992). This frequent pairing might be one aspect that accounts for the high levels of domestic violence in post-conflict societies, while the trauma of experienced violence, left untreated, might be another, as we have seen cases of women too engaging in extreme violence post-conflict. Additionally, research has shown that the use of violence by demobilised and ex-combatants is common as a means of re-establishing their dominant position in the family or household (as Dolan (2002) shows in the case of Northern Uganda), in the same way as Amatullah and Jessica's husbands, who are also surrounded by violent armed conflict in which men dominate (Harders, 2011, p. 143). It is also an aspect of women's lives in these communities which is barely or almost never raised by national and international mainstream media.

The discussion in this chapter has expanded upon normative conceptualisations of agency by analysing the lives and testimonies of northern Nigerian women who have been displaced by the Boko Haram insurgency. An insight into the complex and multifaceted realities of northern Nigerian women reveals multiple instances of agentic action in the ways that they respond to, negotiate, or resist material and structural constraints, and the way they articulate their idea of themselves when they encounter new ideas. These accounts have provided an alternative discourse to the victim/vulnerable citizen binary often used to frame and represent northern Nigerian women in the media coverage of Boko Haram. I argue that, as evidence of the complexity of their agency, they sometimes embrace practices and structures that subordinate them, and this cannot be denied as agentic, just because they may not be seen as 'progressive' within dominant feminist frameworks.

The discussion above highlights the complexities and contradictions of gendered agency. Ousseina Alidou (2005, p. 88) uses Linda Alcoff's theoretical formulation that highlights the nexus between women's identity, positionality and the agency that manifests as a result of this positionality to analyse this complexity, and thus argues that the possibilities for women to challenge or comply with the status

quo is rooted in how women understand their place in the culture and society and how they use that understanding. Thus, positionality is crucial as it dictates how women interpret and construct their value (Alcoff, 1988, pp. 283–286). As highlighted by the discussion in this chapter, the complexity and contradiction within gendered agency represent a struggle to understand this issue in a way that simultaneously highlights both women's agency and their commitment to a status quo that reinforced their position as subalterns (Masquelier, 2009, pp. xviii–xix). Building on Banaji, Mahmood, and Madhok, my own work nuances this position still further to argue that women's resistant survival tactics or embrace of public freedoms and their commitment to aspects of a patriarchal status quo and enforcement of heteronormative ideologies detrimental to them and their children both express different facets of gendered agency, and cannot be pitted against each other as if agency and complicity are philosophical opposites. To take this a step further, this thesis has ultimately demonstrated the work that agency does, especially in contexts of conflict, such as Boko Haram, and the ways in which media and communication technologies intersect with contextualised gendered agency. The concluding chapter will reflect in more detail on the main contributions of this thesis.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1.   Introduction

Between 2016 and 2018, prior to starting my PhD, my work with the Presidential Committee on North East Initiatives (PCNI) as the program research officer for the Development unit involved frequent travel and fieldwork to north-east Nigeria, specifically Borno State, the epicentre of the insurgency. Through my frequent trips to different parts of the north-east, and my interactions with women who were experiencing violent displacement (living in formal and informal camps and host communities) and trying to rebuild their lives, I began to notice discrepancies between the complexities of their lived experiences, media coverage of their experiences and the narratives surrounding their lives upon which intervention programs were built. The dominant media narratives and discourses about women victim-survivors of the conflict, as I have argued throughout this thesis, are almost always framed by simplistic and essentialist gender definitions. These usually associate the women with a perpetual state of victimhood and vulnerability, reducing them to this label and leading me to conclude that there has been a lack of critical investigative reporting of the conflict. Current focus remains mainly on the 'spectacular' aspects of the conflict. This has ignored its nuanced complexities, to disastrous effect. In addition, global media attention to the insurgency, specifically Boko Haram's tactic of kidnapping and using girls and women as forced brides and suicide bombers, has spurred discussions and debates on the nature, role, and agency of northern Nigerian women. I have argued that these discourses are usually steeped in a dominant western feminist framework, shot through with orientalist and colonial discourses that reinforce the image of 'third world women' as lacking agency (Mohanty, 1991b). These observations, in addition to the invisibility of northern Nigerian women in scholarly research, my identity as a northern Nigerian woman from the conflict-torn north-east and my curiosity as a scholar inspired this attempt to make sense of the role of media, the potentials of agency, and the meaning of communications in the lives and experiences of northern Nigerian women, in and beyond the Boko Haram conflict.

To achieve this, my thesis employed a theoretical framework grounded in postcolonial theory which is also critical of essentialism in regard to postcolonial countries. I engaged, in turn, with theories of media practices, media representation, Global South feminism and transnational feminism, audiences and gendered agency to interrogate the potential universality and potential contextual-groundedness of what gets called agency – and of what is de facto agentic but rarely or never gets called this. By centring the lived experiences, articulations and reflections of victim-survivors of the conflict, I have provided a historicised and sociologically accurate account of the complexities of displaced north-eastern women's struggles, negotiations and mediated encounters. In doing so this, my thesis has shown that analysis of reflections elicited and gathered from northern Nigerian women on the socially transformative impact

of conflict challenge much of what European and North American scholars think they know and assume about the concept of agency, how it is exercised, the work it does, where to look for it and how to think about it in relation to violence and media practice.

A systematic thematic and discourse analysis of my fieldwork data supports alternative theorisations of agency. I draw and build on Mahmood's (2012) work which shows different modalities of agency displayed by the women of the piety movement in Cairo. Most prominently, I investigate and then employ Banaji's (2017a) delinking of agency from resistance to oppression, and her conceptualisation of agency as 'ephemeral', 'contaminated' and 'potential'. I also employ Madhok's (2013) argument for a different site of looking for agency – moving from actions to speech practices. In all of these analyses, and using all of these conceptual tools, absolute autonomy and agency are no longer necessarily linked, although some form of choice is always involved. My findings indicate that victim-survivors respond to their experiences of violent conflict and displacement, and of media representations of their experiences, in complex and sometimes contradictory manners. Sometimes, these responses are in conformity with hegemonic (patriarchal/religious/cultural/governmental) authority or hegemonic (binary/essentialist/orientalist/paternalistic) representations of their experiences. At other times, they are completely in opposition to those tropes and edicts. At yet other times responses are expressed in a manner which is unpredictable or might seem illogical. Yet, the concept of trauma both in the psychosocial and physical sense, allowed me to pursue and understand the rationale beneath such responses. I also looked to history and context in a poststructuralist manner, and to the many identities these women inhibit such as class, age, religion, ethnicity to foreground the different logics of response and self-definition that I was encountering. The insights that emerge from my thesis thus provide a philosophical and feminist argument for, and evidence supporting, nuanced conceptualisations of agency as ephemeral, contaminated and potential, contrary to many dominant narratives of western resistance-to-patriarchy, and evident through speech practices that are not easily deciphered without ethnographic investment. All of this will benefit those in critical theory, media and communications, conflict studies, and development studies who research the role of media in conflict, or feminism in African contexts, or the lives of northern Nigerians, and Global South women in particular.

I gathered and analysed sixty interviews and participant ethnographic notes from displaced women in formal and informal camps and host communities across three states: FCT Abuja, Borno and Adamawa. Alongside these, though by no means giving them more weight, I conducted fourteen interviews with 'experts' including government officials, policymakers, journalists and communication experts, camp managers and coordinators, development and humanitarian workers and community mobilisers who have all been working in different capacities to support victim-survivors and to counter the effects of conflict and displacement across the three states. My analysis and methodological approach to fieldwork and interactions with interviewees were framed by an epistemology grounded in African

feminist research. I placed emphasis on cultural and historical specificity (Asante, 1992; Blay, 2008). I did this both because it allowed me to get under the skin of multiple forms of agency but also to resist Eurocentrism and de-centre knowledge production from the Global North. My work does not just centre work from the 'peripheries', where African knowledge systems have been side lined to (Mohammed, 2019). Rather, my work points to the complex and surprising 'others' and peripheries of those peripheries, the poor, the Muslim, the Christian northerners, the traumatised and displaced, the women survivors of Gender Based Violence (GBV) who are also trenchant supporters of purdah, and of heteronormative patriarchy. Few of these stories and complexities ever make it without reduction into academia or the media.

In sum, my thesis contributes to a mix of sub-fields: non-western media studies, media and conflict, Global South, African, and transnational feminism, gender studies, specifically on northern Nigerian women and to literature of Islam, conflict and modernity. Methodologically, my work points the way to conducting extended and non-touristic fieldwork in northern Nigeria, a region which is deeply fractured: fieldwork during conflict with a population of traumatised victim-survivors, fieldwork during a global pandemic, and African feminist methodologies. Theoretically, my thesis contributes to critiques of Western feminism and arguments for alternative theorisations of agency in feminist studies. Overall, my thesis provides a more comprehensive and critical framework to further knowledge about the complexities of gendered agency in conditions of constraint, contradiction, displacement and violent conflict. In the sections that follow, I tie together the major contributions of my thesis and relate them back to the theoretical framework (cf. Chapter 2) and historical context (cf. Chapter 4) upon which this study is built. Finally, I summarise the implications of my thesis for future studies on the lives of northern Nigerian women.

8.2.   Media practices of displaced women as an expression of audience agency

The empirical chapters begin with one which discusses the media use and practices of victim-survivors, that is, what they *do* with the media, how their circumstances and environments determine these media habits and practices and what role these all play in expressions of agency. Chapter 5, thus sheds light on Research Questions 1 and 2 which explore how media logics in international and Nigerian coverage of the Boko Haram insurgency (outlined in the introduction) are received and contested by northern Nigerians displaced by the insurgency. This chapter also discusses and northern Nigerian women's understandings and lived experiences of trauma and victimisation coincide with or diverge from how they are imagined and represented in scholarly and media coverage of Boko Haram. This chapter highlights the disconnect and tension between the global media coverage of the insurgency, which has been spectacularised, and the simultaneous absence of media and communication technologies and

representations in the lives of victim-survivors because of a myriad of factors, both material and immaterial.

While media and communication technologies emerge as both necessities and luxuries in the lives of victim-survivors, findings suggest that there also appears to be *a deliberate refusal* as a result of a cocktail of factors, both material and immaterial. These technologies appear to be vital for displaced women to keep in touch with families and relatives left behind, and to maintain social relations to community which are a source of emotional and psychological support (Eide, 2020); while material factors such as extreme poverty, lack of access to electricity, and physical insecurity limit their access to these technologies. Meanwhile immaterial factors such as focus on survival, language barriers, trauma, and PTSD impede their level of engagement or cause anger and disengagement from mainstream media.

Most importantly and answering the second research question, which seeks to understand northern Nigerian women's understanding and lived experiences of trauma and victimisation and how they coincide or diverge from how they are imagined or represented in both scholarly and media coverage of Boko Haram, findings suggest that their reflections on the media representation of themselves and their experiences, in addition to the trauma (both individual and collective) that they have endured and continued to endure is a major factor in their *deliberate refusal to engage with the media coverage* of Boko Haram, specifically. There is, thus, a striking divergence between their understanding of their conditions of existence, lived realities and how these are erased, misrepresented, essentialised and spectacularised in Global North, and Southern Nigerian media. So, Chapter 5 finds that despite limited access to media and communication technologies due to the factors mentioned above, even when victim-survivors encounter media coverage of Boko Haram, they refuse to view it and trust it, or do not believe what they see or hear as the truth unless they confirm it with a source back home. This is due not only to a *general mistrust of the media* as a result of bad experiences with media reporting about their communities which they argue are usually untrue and inaccurate, but also to specific misinformation which misrepresents both their experiences and members of their community, who are stereotyped in negative ways through media coverage. In addition to these, many interviewees, especially those in host communities in other states, report that they encounter the effects of media coverage of the insurgency through in-person interactions. I have used the term 'mediated encounters' to refer to the ways that media coverage of Boko Haram has shaped the perceptions and interactions people from other parts of Nigeria have with victim-survivors and other northern Nigerians, specifically those who are IDPs from the north-east. Upon learning that they are from the north-east, many even stereotype them as 'Boko Haram terrorists'. Despite dismissal by upper-class northern Nigerian women (cf. 5.6.5), this highlights the real-life consequences of media representation. This finding suggests that

encounters and interactions between displaced victim-survivors and other people remain heavily influenced by perceptions informed by the media coverage of Boko Haram.

There are two major conclusions to draw from the analysis in Chapter 5. The first is that this ability of victim-survivors to refuse to engage with media coverage of Boko Haram, and to contest the ways that they are represented by this coverage, indicates agentic behaviour, that is, *an expression of their agency as audiences*. They are not *the* imagined audience. But they do have forms of audience power. This answers the first two research questions; due to the divergence between media representations of their experiences and identities and their own understandings and lived experiences with trauma and victimisation, northern Nigerians displaced by the insurgency contest the media logics employed in the media coverage of Boko through their *deliberate refusal* to trust it, or engage intellectually and affectively with it. This confirms the role of the media as a site of contestation and supports theories that conceive of audiences as agentic in complex and unpredictable ways (Banaji, 2006, 2017a; Mankekar, 1999). Second, these findings suggest a strong relationship between mediated encounters, media representations and media use and engagement. As these findings suggest, mediated encounters and media representations can further our understanding of displaced people's media habits and engagements while media technologies such as radios and phones can further their attempts to find loved ones, rebuild communities, heal from trauma and find ways of working and surviving. This notions of 'mediated encounters' thus challenges the audience studies research which considers a direct relationship between the media and audiences. The concept can enhance studies on audiences by considering the indirect ways that audiences encounter the media, without direct interaction.

8.3. Misrepresentation and erasure of the socially transformative impact of conflict

In chapter 6, I argue that both in media and in development work there remains a dangerous neglect of aspects of the insurgency that are *unspectacular*. Media coverage of Boko Haram remains uncritical and surface-level. This has led to the neglect, erasure, and misrepresentation of crucial aspects of the insurgency, (such as the incredible violence and trauma experienced by many men and boys, survived and perpetrated by men but also some women). It has also fuelled misleading tropes about the 'cultural' and 'primitive' (as opposed to *political* and *modern*) nature of this conflict, the fixity of gender and the absence of agency amongst women in northern Nigeria.

The lack of understanding of the subtle but pervasive social transformation being wrought by the conflict and by violent displacement are secondary by-products of the aforementioned myopia. IDPs who do not reside in government camps and instead live in informal camps or settlements and host communities are almost entirely invisible both to media and to government, furthering cycles of trauma and social exclusion. In addition, the simplistic coverage of the conflict which relies on stereotypical gender binaries of men as perpetrators and girls and women as victims has led to the erasure of sexual

violence weaponised against adolescent boys and men and the complexities of women's agency when they collaborate with or tacitly support ideological tropes circulated in a very calculated manner both by Boko Haram and by their opponents. This essentialised gender binary, and the reduction of Islam itself to a parochial and patriarchal set of dictates not only silences victims of complex trauma at the hands of the state and the insurgents, but also highlights a deep misunderstanding of Global South feminist politics which aims to eradicate all forms of sexism (Banaji, 2012; hooks, 2000). In a thread that seems to run throughout this thesis, citizens' mistrust of the government is also evident in the material consequences and cycle of retaliatory violence that occurs because of unaddressed grief and grievances after extrajudicial killings and displacement.

While loss of community and loss of a way of life is a major theme in the lives of interviewees, my analysis and findings suggest that despite numerous material and immaterial impediments preventing community mobilisation, there were always attempts by women, both individually and collectively, to mobilise and show solidarity with one another in an attempt overcome this. I observed this in instances where women come together to buy pots, food flasks, coolers, and cutlery to be used in naming ceremonies and weddings rebuilding the fabric of torn communities, or practices such as *adashe* which have been very useful for women such as Sarah, in running and growing her business. I argue that these moments indicate and can be read as democratic motifs which exist despite violent conflict and displacement, hunger and unemployment, trauma, and gender-based violence in the domestic sphere. The practice of *Adashe* and women coming together to buy items used for weddings and naming ceremonies should also be understood, I argue, as some of ways which women exercise collective agency and try to draw those most deeply traumatised back into the mundane.

These are the activities and practices through which victim-survivors choose to navigate and respond to the constraints on them because of violent conflict and displacement which destroyed their existing community ties and relations. Such actions hold subtleties – for instance, the marriages may be those of very young women or even teenaged girls whom parents are trying to marry off to protect from sexual violence in the camps, or because they cannot feed them; and cannot be recognised in their full complexity through normative conceptualisations of agency outside the context of these women's lives. Since realistically, as I have argued earlier, no one lives in a completely free and equal world, agency is always exercised within some a spectrum of social constraint, in this case, conflict and violent displacement.

As seen in the examples discussed in this thesis, theorising agency and examining expressions of agency within constrained conditions give us the ability to recognise 'the role that collective mobilisation can play in transforming the ways women perceive, and they ways they challenge these constraints' of violent conflict and displacement (Madhok 2013, p. 8). This also highlights that agency goes beyond

individual actions or expressions alone, it can also be expressed collectively (Banaji, 2017a; Madhok 2013, p. 8). From this, insights begin to emerge about the work that agency does and the social structures and activities through which individuals and groups exercise agency. These are discussed in more detail in the next section. The question that remains is whether and in what way the media enables or is implicated in expressions of agency in times of conflict.

8.4.   The work of agency and the role of the media

In chapter 7, I provide detailed accounts and testimonies from three northern Nigerian women experiencing violent displacement because of the insurgency; and discuss the different ways that they negotiate and navigate the numerous constraints within which they and their loved ones now have to live and grieve. This is the crux of this thesis. Findings suggest that these women's accounts show that northern Nigeria's women's responses to the conflict reflect and produce subjectivities that range from those that conform with globally hegemonic representation and construction of themselves as 'the pitiable other', to those in complete opposition to these hegemonic representations. A spectrum of other unpredictable negotiations are expressed, often predicated on and complicated by intersecting factors such as ethnicity, class, age and religion. The kind of security available to northern Nigerian women with money and education could only be dreamed of or aspired to by others. The kinds of freedom to act, to work, and to earn that were made imperative by the conflict were not always welcomed by any of the women; and the kinds of desires they evinced for softness, privacy and protection, are not to be despised simply because they do not accord with some figurative notion of gender equality. That is to say, when my study gave these women an opportunity to feel their feelings, and to inhabit their world affectively and imaginatively rather than in an instrumental way for a development organisation or for a media house, the agency they evinced was faint and often ephemeral, contaminated, and potential, and also sometimes resistant, in unexpected and unrecognised ways. I found that agency also occurs through their speech practices in such conditions, rather than just through notionally free actions. This is seen in the way that Diya's articulation and the creative thinking she undertakes, when she encounters and rejects the label of 'victim' during her discussions with interviewers who focus on her trauma; Diya instead, through her speech practices, turns the focus to the way she has been able to rebuild her life. Diya articulates a different idea of herself when the label of vulnerable victim imposed on her.

Most times, the different strategies that these women employ to navigate the different structures that govern and sometimes destroy their lives are nuanced, subtle, complex, and only recognisable when interpreted within the context of their social, cultural and historical realities. By showing that northern Nigerian women are still able to be agentic while constrained in precarious conditions of violent conflict and displacement, rather than championing all agency as de facto resistance to patriarchy, this study provides an argument for alternative theories and conceptualisations of feminist agency. Discussions

on women's responses to the practice of purdah and changes in marriage and gender roles due to the conflict highlight the complexity of gendered agency when norms associated deeply with a region and a people are under threat. Indeed, I find that women in northern Nigeria, and by corollary all over the world, can be agentic by participating in and supporting practices and institutions that appear to work in their favour as classed, or as religious subjects, or even as younger or older versions of themselves. This contributes to theorisations of the precise relationship between gender and agency under conditions of constraint which remains under-theorised and addresses the different ways in which assumptions about agency continue to be gendered and racialised through normative conceptualisations, and their implications (Madhok 2013, p. 2).

In chapter 2, I indicated that one of my interests is this: when thought of as members of an audience who encounter representations of themselves-in-conflict-situations, what can one say about the ways in which subalterns such as northern Nigerian women integrate or reject, negotiate, or sidestep the positions and stereotypes designated for them? Is this simply a facet of their agency as audiences or a deeper expression of gendered agency as northern Nigerian women? Considering the discussion above, I contend that the answer to this is that it is an expression of both these types of agency: audience agency and gendered agency as northern Nigerian women. However, given that I argue for a delinking of agency from a normative sense of resistance inherent in western normative theorisations, this is not necessarily the victory and validation that some might imagine. At the end of chapter 7, I highlight that my thesis is ultimately interested in *the work that agency does* in the context of complex conflicts such as that between Boko Haram and the Nigerian government, and how media and communications technologies intersect such gendered agency in ways that enhance or suppress particular versions.

So, what work does agency do? How is this facilitated or precluded by the media? From the discussion in this thesis, it emerges that agency is something that allows people, either individuals or collectives, to navigate the structures that surround them, rather than something with positive moral attachments (Hemmings and Kabesh, 2013: 8). Agency also allows individuals and groups to make sense of and re-articulate their selves upon encountering new discursive ideas. Media and communication technologies thus provide the possibilities for agency and the social or collective activities through which agency can be exercised (Madhok, 2013: 7). Thus, it can be concluded that media and communication technologies facilitate the expression of both individual and collective agency, the representation and misrepresentation of this agency; and the suppression (by violence and by securitisation and surveillance) of both individual and collective agency. The theoretical framework outlined in chapter 3, enables us to make connections and see how northern Nigerian women employ various strategies (which are often embodied, sometimes fleeting, sometimes complicit and sometimes discursive) to navigate the realities of violent displacement and to articulate their ideas of themselves.

8.5.   Possibilities for transnational feminist solidarity

An important question that emerged in this thesis concerns the possibilities for transnational feminist solidarity in a globalised and unequal world, where the power dynamics of today and discourses about the Global South are still rooted in colonialism and racism. I highlighted those campaigns such as #BringBackOurGirls, which was responsible for globalising the discourses on northern Nigerian women within the Boko Haram conflict. The fact that awareness raising campaigns such as the BBOG circulate beyond its local context poses ethical questions for feminist outreach i.e., how can feminists worldwide navigate the need to draw attention to feminist issues without reproducing problematic and essentialised narratives of gender, womanhood and unequal power relations? (Loken, 2014, p. 1101). Is there space for transnational feminism across borders?

The fact that we live in a highly globalised media environment where media products whether factual or fictional foster a sociological imagination through ideological means makes such questions pertinent. While such critiques do not necessarily mean that everyone in the West or Global North who participated in raising awareness on the plight of the Chibok girls intentionally dehumanised the girls and women of northern Nigeria, such seemingly altruistic actions, no matter how pure or noble the intention, cannot be removed from the legacy of colonialism, the logic of racism and the unequal power dynamics that frame the relationship between the north and the south (Maxfield, 2016, p. 986). These seemingly altruistic attempts at advocating for and amplifying the voice of the 'other' ends up amplifying the voice of the parties most removed from that experience, in this case, the women and feminists in the West including celebrities who are already hyper visible, well to do southern Nigerian women and upper class northern Nigerian women, while indirectly reproducing and reiterating narratives and idea which position the 'other' in this case northern Nigerian women and girls, and Muslims in particular, as perpetual victims who lack agency but also as intrinsically suspect, thus perpetuating harm. According to hooks, 'they could not see that their generosity was directed at themselves, that it was self-centred and motivated by their own opportunistic desires' (hooks, 1999, p. 383).

Nevertheless, I contend that there are still possibilities for transnational feminist solidarity. bell hooks (1999, p. 385) describes that this solidarity can be achieved through active practices which where feminists 'assume responsibility for eliminating all the forces that divide women'. Similarly, Mohanty (1991a) insists that 'political .... basis for alliances that women of all colours (including white women) can align themselves with and participate in' is crucial for this solidarity. Based on hooks' and Mohanty's ideas, this thesis emphasises the need for and importance of such solidarity built on accurate, historicised and situated knowledge. This thesis, using the media coverage of the Boko Haram, shows

why this proposed political alliance between all women with an emphasis on historicised knowledge, especially in this highly neoliberal mediatised world could contribute to enabling this solidarity.

8.6.   Theorising agency as we move forward

So, theoretically, what are the implications of these new nuanced alternative theorisations of agency that my thesis has argued for? There is still openness to be maintained when considering the implications of these new theorisations of agency for communities, scholars and media practitioners. I outline two implications which I believe are crucial. First, if we come to understand agency as being always a potentiality, sometimes ephemeral, sometimes contaminated or complicit and sometimes resistant in ways that do not fit enlightenment normativity in this regard, an understanding that thesis has argued for, this has implications for media representation, communicative justice and democracy. I have demonstrated throughout the thesis that there is a strong relationship between mediated encounters, media representations, perceptions and self-perceptions and media habits and practices. Given this, my findings call for fresh representations of northern Nigerian women before, during and after the Boko Haram conflict, which are more nuanced with regard to their trauma and their agency, more ethical in including their own narratives, and far better culturally and historically grounded than current media or scholarship practice. Also, it seems to call for a rethinking of the role of media (as trivial, irrelevant or intimate intermediary for community) and violence (as socially transformative and psychologically devastating), in reconfiguring gender norms and agency through material and discursive aspects of the insurgency. Media has to be consciously thought about as something which facilitates and also blocks multiple types of agency. In this case, it is also worth thinking about local NGOs making space for northern Nigerian women's own media training, production and participation in the coverage of their experiences by giving them the jobs, remuneration, space and a platform to articulate their own experiences in their voices rather than gathering suitable clips and photos to file field reports.

Second, while theoretically, these alternative theorisations of agency move us beyond its narrow enlightenment normative conceptualisations of free will or free action and resistance to more nuanced conceptualisations which allow us to understand and recognise the different ways that agency is expressed under conditions of authority, constraint and trauma, these new theorisations also entail complexities and have implications for how we act. For example, what does it mean when we recognise that women are being agentic by making choices which are against their own interests and sometimes in ways that endanger their lives as is the case for some kidnapped women who are rescued from Sambisa forest, but *choose* to go back to their Boko Haram husbands? It is not enough to simply just recognise these moments of agency and conclude that northern Nigerian women are agentic, neither is it enough to give them this feeling of agency through media representations, we also need to think about

how we can make the choices available to them better, while simultaneously resisting the attachment of agency to certain 'logical' choices or actions. This is a tension which should be explored by future research.

Relating these findings back to the historical narrative outlined in chapter 4, an important question that emerges is: how can the history of women's organising, feminist consciousness and the factors that have determined the positioning of women in northern Nigerian society be thought of in light of these alternative theorisations of agency? Since religious revival is a response to the tensions of late modernity (Kane 2003, p. 48); women's roles, their place in society and their identities have always been subject of contested control in reform movements (Alidou 2005, p.10). I contend that, northern Nigerian women's articulations and negotiations are expressions of collective agency in the search for their place within modernity. This work thus equips us to think about the diverse ways that northern Nigerian women express agency as a response to the tensions of their faith and of changing modernity. Sometimes, they respond to these tensions by organising and resisting as can be seen in chapter 4, other times, they retreat to hegemonic authority, norms and values as can be seen in interviewees partial longing for and reading of the past and purdah as safeness. As such, this thesis also provides insight into ways of thinking about the complex ways that women, and Muslim women in particular, respond to their changing positions within Islamic modernity.

In general, there needs to be more documentation and scholarship on the lives and activities of northern Nigerian women. Work on Nigerian women does not take the full complexity of northern Nigerians women's Islamic identity at the intersection of Nigerian identity into account, neither does it consider the complexity of Christian northern women, who are culturally northern but minoritised in some ways; media narratives and scholarly work on Muslim women in Africa often discounts sub-Saharan African women; while the global dominant (usually white) feminist discourses are not intersectional enough to be attentive to the experiences of Black and Brown women, outside the Global North. It would be interesting and important to further examine the silences in each field in more depth and connect them to one another to make an argument about the politics of knowledge production of northern Nigerian women.

8.7.   Limitations of this thesis and directions for future research

From the data I gathered during my fieldwork interviews and notes from ethnographic participant observation, there were other relevant issues and ideas outside the focus of this thesis. Some might have positioned media more centrally in the analysis, and concerned themselves less with the historical and political context of the Boko Haram conflict. However, my goal and intentions were to ground and amplify the voices of the women of the north-east both in and beyond media and political rhetoric about

the conflict; thus, I chose to delve into women's own articulations of their experiences of and with conflict, media, violence and displacement. The implication of this choice is that, methodologically, my thesis does not offer a systematic content analysis to examine the media coverage of the insurgency, but rather presents curated examples that typify the coverage. As I highlighted in chapter 1, this is neither a production nor a reception study, so it does not focus exclusively on media production of Boko Haram nor on reception of news about it, instead, it examines the tensions between production frames and receptions frames as experienced by women victim-survivors, with a particular view to theorising their media use, changing social circumstances and agency.

My initial research proposal sought to conduct a comparative audience reception analysis to explore the nature and source of audience belief and the ways through which Nigerians with different political and historical imaginaries come to know and make meanings about northern Nigeria as a region, its culture and northern Nigerian women, based on the media coverage of Boko Haram. The Covid-19 pandemic and my own changing interests intersected to prevent a wide and shallow comparative audience study and limited me, but also focused me, on the north-eastern women whose everyday lives are easily stereotyped, dismissed or erased in media coverage. A wider audience reception analysis would offer an additional perspective on the second research question, which looks at how northern Nigerian women's reflections on their own trauma and lived experience diverges from how these experiences are represented in the media coverage of Boko Haram. This is a relevant research area that is worth pursuing in future research, especially given the ethno-religious divisions in Nigeria.

In terms of language, I was largely limited to English language media. In northern Nigeria, the local media on TV and radio is usually broadcast in Hausa. However, it is both more difficult to access if you are not a resident of that region and more complex to review systematically based on episodic exposure. While I was conducting fieldwork in Maiduguri and Yola, I did not have the time to listen to the radio or watch TV. Although there are Hausa language media platform online such as BBC Hausa, an analysis of Hausa language media coverage of the insurgency would have necessitated the hiring of a dedicated translator. The limited time I had for my fieldwork made this impossible; but my own sense that the women conveyed to me of their media consumption and responses made it undesirable. However, in a different kind of study, it would be tremendously useful to understand the media logics employed by local northern Hausa media in the coverage of Boko Haram to determine how girls and women are framed and how this differs from English language media, both in Nigeria and internationally. This is a relevant research area worth exploring in future research.

8.8. In conclusion

My thesis has demonstrated that the debates and discourses on women's roles, representations and identities transcends the borders of northern Nigeria and extend across the globe, largely due to the increasingly neoliberal, and centralised, global media environment. Consequently, the actions, roles and identities of northern Nigerian women are framed within and contribute to colonial, patriarchal and Islamophobic political logics, and analysed and debated within the context of western, largely bourgeois feminist, but also Christian-centric paternalistic frameworks in the media coverage of Boko Haram. This thesis challenges those on the edges of these debates, and those steeped in these discourses, to do better and be better so that there is more scope for representational justice, social equity, and enduring peace in the region.

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APPENDIX 1: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM

Department of Media & Communications

London School of Economics & Political Science (LSE)

What is the study about?
This research explores the historical invisibility of northern Nigerian women, the erasure of their voice and agency in the national and international public spheres (even in issues directly concerning them) and subsequently, the re-construction of their identities via stereotypical tropes in the media coverage of the Boko Haram crisis. Through alternative theorisations of agency which centre the experience and articulations of northern Nigerian women, this work hopes to provide a culturally and historically grounded account of the struggles, negotiations and navigations which shape everyday lives of Northern Nigerian women.

What will taking part involve?
My methods of data collection are participant observation, in-depth interviews and focus groups. Most of the interviews and focus groups will last for about an hour and would take place either at your workplace, a social gathering, or any other location where you would feel most comfortable. I will be interested in discussing your experiences, values, and perspectives on issues around the media coverage of the Boko Haram insurgency, perspectives on gender and conflict and the lived experiences of northern Nigerian women. I plan to record the discussions; however, I will only record with your consent and you will be free to ask me to stop and/or destroy the recording at any point.

Can I change my mind / withdraw from the study?
You can withdraw at any point of the study, without having to give a reason. If any questions during the interview or focus group make you feel uncomfortable, you do not have to answer them. Withdrawing from the study will have no effect on you. If you withdraw from the study we will not retain the information you have given thus far, unless you are happy for me to do so.

Will taking part be confidential?
The records from this study will be kept confidential. Any audio tapes and transcripts will be uploaded to a secure server immediately, where only my supervisors and I will have access to them. In addition to this, your data will be anonymised which means that your name will not appear in any publications resulting from the study. Any information you provide which may be used to identify you will be kept in a separate and secure location.

Data Protection Privacy Notice
All data is collected and stored in compliance with UK-EU data protection legislation. To request a copy of the data held about you please contact: glpd.info.rights@lse.ac.uk

What about Covid-19?
Please note that social distancing will be strictly adhered to during the interviews and focus groups, and participants will be provided with masks and hand sanitisers to use before the interviews and focus groups commence.

Who should you contact for further information?
If you have any further questions regarding the study please contact the researcher, Husseina Ahmed, at h.u.ahmed@lse.ac.uk.

If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the conduct of the researcher, please contact the LSE Research Governance Manager via research.ethics@lse.ac.uk.   If you are happy to take part in this study, please provide verbal consent.

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW GUIDES

Topic Guide V1

This is a rough topic guide outlining possible topics of conversation as well as questions and cues to approach topics of interest.

Time guide: 60 minutes (or more, depending on the category of the interview participant)

Introduction

- Welcome interview participants and give a brief introduction of the researcher and the project
- Reaffirmation of consent to be interviewed
- Permission to turn on digital recorder

Rapport Building Questions (for non-elite audience)

- How are you? How have you been?
- What is keeping you busy these days?
- How long have you lived here?
- Where did you grow up?
- Can you tell me a bit about your family?

OVERVIEW: MEDIA USE AND MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE BOKO HARAM INSURGENCY

Non-expert interviewees

- Do you listen to the news?
    How do you get access to the news?
    Do you have a mobile phone? TV? Radio?

- How do you get updates and reports about what is going on [back home]?
    How important is it for you to stay up to date about what is going on?

- Are the things you hear on the news about Boko Haram often true?
    Do you believe what you hear on the news about Boko Haram?

- Did you ever hear anything about your town or village?
    How true or false was this?

- Do you get interviewed by a lot of people?
    If so, by who? What sort of questions do they usually ask you? How does this make you feel?

- What do you think is most important for the others to know about your experience?

Expert interviewees

Journalists

- Can tell me about yourself and your work as a journalist?
- What are your main priorities when covering the insurgency? Can you give me an example that highlights this?
- In your view and from what you have seen through your work, what factors made the region vulnerable to the conflict?
- In your own opinion, what is the most important aspect of the conflict that you reported on? Why do you think this is important?
- What are your thoughts about the way the kidnapping of the Chibok girls came to define the insurgency?
- What would you want to highlight the most about the plight of women in the region, especially within the context of the insurgency?
- If applicable, does your reporting advocate for women who have been victim-survivors of the insurgency? If so, how?

- Who do you think of as your target audience?
- Were there certain types of stories that you were encouraged to report on/cover? If so, what types? What types of stories do people engage with the most?
- If you were working for an organisation or publishing on a platform, were there certain stories that you were not allows to publish? If so, what types and why?
- What do you expect to be the outcome of your work?
- What are some of the challenges of your work?

Gender experts

- Can you please tell me about the work you do as an activist? Why do you think the work you do is necessary?
- Northern women were tossed into the limelight in an unprecedented way due to the Boko Haram insurgency, do you think that this media coverage has led to a better understanding of northern Nigerian women or it has led to more misunderstandings
- Is there a particular news story/article/TV show that stands out to you in its coverage of women within the insurgency? Why?
- Are there any types of stories about northern women that you think needs to be more visible in the media? If so, what types of stories?
- The major event that really made the world aware of the insurgency was the kidnapping of the Chibok girls; what are your thoughts about the way that story came to define the insurgency, especially as it resulted in the successful BBOG campaign? Why do you think BBOG was so successful?

AGENCY

Non-expert interviewees

- How do you find life in the camp? Compared to life before you started living here?
- What is the biggest change that you've faced in the past few years?
- Tell me about your family – who is the head of the family?
- Who are the figures of authority in your life / who decides important things in your life? i.e. if you wanted to do something, who would you go to for permission?
- What would happen if they don't agree with what you want to do and you go ahead and do it anyway?
- [If married] Tell me what the process of getting married was like for you from start to finish
- Are there any expectations from you, from your culture? If so, what are those?
- Are there any expectations from you as a Muslim/Christian woman? If so, what are those?
- Is there anything you have to do because of your culture/religion/society that you do not like to do?
- If you do not do something according to your culture/religion, will anyone have a problem with it? Give me examples
- Tell me about your education, did you go to school? Did/do you like it?
- Who in your community do you go to for support? Can you describe who and what supported you through the most difficult times?
- Are there any groups that you belong to within your community for support?
- What about your livelihood, how did that change with the insurgency? Who do you rely on for financial support?
- There have been reports that some kidnapped women go back to their Boko Haram husbands after being rescued, why do you think this happens?
- Is there anything about your experience you think people don't talk about or ask about enough, that you think is important?

FEMINISM

Non-expert interviews

- What is life like for you as a woman in your community?
- Are there things that you cannot do, as a woman? Do you choose not to do those things, or you are not allowed? If so, who is stopping you?
- What are some of the biggest disadvantages you face as a woman?
- What roles do culture and religion play in your life? Do you feel supported by your culture of religion? If yes, how? If no, how?

Expert Interviews

Government experts, NGO workers, fieldworkers

- You have specific programs and policies aimed at women, tell me a bit about those
- How do you decide what types of interventions/programs to implements at a particular time? Who do you consult? What are the most important factors involved?
- How do you measure value/success of a program or policy?
- What 'type' of woman do you hope the beneficiaries or recipients of your program become as a result of your program/policy?
- Your programs/policies are successful, what does that look like? Specifically with regards to the lives of women? Give me an example of a successful program/policy and how it has transformed the lives of women who were beneficiaries
- What are the challenges involved with gender specific programs/policies in the case of a contracted conflict such as Boko Haram? Give me an example of a real life situation
- Have you faced any specific challenges that you didn't anticipate in the North East with gender specific programs/policies? Give me an example
- What are some of the challenges faced specifically by women in the North East? What factors contribute to these challenges? How has the insurgency affected this?
- Do these women need to be 'liberated' or 'empowered'? If yes, liberated from what or who? How can one go about this liberation or empowerment?
- What does a 'liberated' or 'empowered' woman look like to you?
- What do you expect to be the outcome of your work?

Topic Guide V2

NON-ELITES: NORTHERN NIGERIAN WOMEN (IDP's)

<u>1. Overview</u>
- Where are you from? Were you born there? Where did you and your family live before the crisis?

(When they started, whether it was what they always wanted to do, career trajectory they envision, good income or not)
- How long have you lived here in this camp? What has the experience been like?

(When they got here, how different it is from their lives back home, the biggest changes they have faced since being displaced)
- Why did you decide to leave your home? How did you get here? Who did you come with?

(Their experience with Boko Haram, who decided that they should leave their homes, what was the last straw that made them leave, what their journey was like)
- What work do you do now, if any? What is your source of income?

(What was their source of income before being displaced, who the main provider in the home was, how has this changed since the insurgency started?)
- What does your husband do now? What did he do before the insurgency?

(How has his income changed? how has this change affected your marriage?)

<u>2. Media use and media coverage of the insurgency</u>
- Do you listen to the news, if so, how do you get access to the news?
- How did you communicate with your relatives when you were on the run?
- How did you stay updated about Boko Haram/what was going on?
- What do you think is most important for people to know about your experience?

<u>3. Audience reception (understandings and perceptions of NN women (context: media coverage of Boko Haram)</u>
- How do people who come to help you treat you as IDP's?

(*What do you think people think of IDP women?)*
- What sorts of training programs to NGO's offer to women?

(Have you taken part in any of these? Who decides the curriculum or skills that you get trained in? Have they been useful? What would you rather these NGO's do instead? What are the assumptions they make?
- What do you think people misunderstand or do not know about your lives and the insurgency?

<u>4. Agency</u>

<u>Lived Experiences and expressions of agency</u>
- What was your life like before the insurgency?

(what was your day-day? What did you do for work/income?, what do you miss the most?)
- Would you want to go back to your old lifestyle?

(*given this new experience, is there anything you would change if you were to go back?)*
- Who makes the important decisions in your household?

(*Has this changed since you've been displaced? Who decides how money is spent in the household? Who makes decisions regarding your children e.g. the schools they go to etc.)*
- What are some things women experience in your society that you wish you could change?

(*how are you ensuring that this is different for your daughter?)*
- If you could be in charge of the government of (North/ Nigeria/ the town/ village) for a year, what changes would you make?
- If you could say one thing to "x" (politician, Boko Haram, a local powerful person" what would you say?
- If you could ensure that your children have a different life from you, how would it be different?"
- What makes you happy every day?
- What makes you angry every day?

<u>Conditions, options, and costs of making certain choices</u>
- How did you meet your husband? Was it a love marriage?

(At what age did you get married? What was the process of getting married? Who did you/your husband have to get permission from? How did your life change after getting married? Are you happy in your marriage?)
- How important is religion in your life? How does it regulate/shape your life? What about your culture?

(what are the consequences of not abiding by religious rules e.g. hijab, who are the gatekeepers or enforcers of these rules?)
- Are there any expectations of you from your culture and religion? Tell me about them.

(What will happen if they do not abide? E.g., dressing)
- How far did you go in your education?

(who made decisions / what were the factors that determined them going school and not continuing?)
- Are there women who are active members of Boko Haram?

(*Thoughts on if they joined freely or were forced What do they get out of it? What does the community say about this?)*
- Some kidnapped women go back to Boko Haram after being rescued, why do you think they do?

<u>How do actions, articulations and subjectivities complicate notions of agency and victimhood</u>
- Were you living the Kulle (seclusion) lifestyle? Was this your choice? Tell me about it?

(*What are your thoughts on Kulle and women who live like that? What does kulle signify? What did you do at home all day? Did you have a small business? Would you want this for your daughter too?*)
- What are your thoughts on other people's view of Northern Nigerian women as oppressed?

(*what type of life would you want they want for themselves if they could choose? What roles are most important to them as women*)
- With everything that has happened, do you see yourself as a victim?

(*Do they pity themselves or see themselves as a strong women having survived this far?*)
- What are you most proud of yourself for achieving in the past few years?

<u>5. Gender Roles/Feminism (underlying perceptions/ideologies about gender)</u>
- What is lifelike for you as a woman in your society?

(*what are some challenges unique to women? Best and worst parts about being a woman*)
- How have the lives of women in your community changed since the insurgency?

(*Household dynamics and gender roles*)
- What are the responsibilities of women in your community? What about the men?
- What are you responsible for in the household? What about your husband?

(*Who does the household chores? Who is responsible for the kids? Do you contribute money to the household?*)
- Who makes major decisions in your family?
- Do you think women are disadvantaged in your community?
- How will you describe an ideal woman?

(*How should a woman behave?*)
- Are men and women equal? Why or why not?

(*what should the dynamics between men and women be?*)

<u>What are the types of activities and forms of power do NN women hold in their environs?</u>
- Are there any leadership roles or positions of authority that women occupy in your community?
- What types of power does the woman have within the household?

<u>6. Support</u>
- If you make any money, what do you use it for?

(*Do you save? Do you take part in adashe? Does your husband*)
- Can you describe who and what supported you through the most difficult times?

(*both emotional and financial support*)
- What is the government doing to improve your livelihood?

(*Their experience, whether it has been effective/ sufficient, whether they feel state should play bigger role*)
- Do you receive any support from the church or mosque or traditional leaders?

(*what role do these institutions play in your life?*)
- Do you belong to any groups where you support one another?

(*Religious or otherwise*)
- Do you provide support for anyone?

(*what type of support?*)
- Do you think it is important for women to have their own source of income? Why?

(*Has this always been the case or it's just a recent thing?*)
- Do you feel that it's best to rely on what you can do for yourself through your work?

(*Whether they believe in individualism vs collectivism, what is more effective, whether they would rather rely on state/ family*)
- Is it your responsibility to improve your circumstances or is it the government's responsibility?

Conclusion: Do you have any question to ask me? Are there any questions you think I did not ask that I should have asked? Is there anything you want to tell me at all?

Topic Guide V3

NON-ELITES: NORTHERN NIGERIAN WOMEN (IDP's)

<u>1. Overview</u>
- Where are you from? Were you born there? Where did you and your family live before the crisis?

(When they started, whether it was what they always wanted to do, career trajectory they envision, good income or not)
- How long have you lived here in this camp? What has the experience been like?

(When they got here, how different it is from their lives back home, the biggest changes they have faced since being displaced)
- Why did you decide to leave your home? How did you get here? Who did you come with?

(Their experience with Boko Haram, who decided that they should leave their homes, what was the last straw that made them leave, what their journey was like)
- What work do you do now, if any? What is your source of income?

(What was their source of income before being displaced, who the main provider in the home was, how has this changed since the insurgency started?)
- What does your husband do now? What did he do before the insurgency?

(How has his income changed? how has this change affected your marriage?)
- What are you responsible for in the household? What about your husband?

(Who does the household chores? Who is responsible for the kids? Do you contribute money to the household?)
- Who makes major decisions in your family?
- How did you meet your husband? Was it a love marriage?

At what age did you get married? What was the process of getting married? Who did you/your husband have to get permission from? How did your life change after getting married? Are you happy in your marriage?)

<u>2. Agency</u>

<u>How do actions, articulations and subjectivities complicate notions of agency and victimhood</u>
- Were you living the Kulle (seclusion) lifestyle? Was this your choice? Tell me about it?

(*What are your thoughts on Kulle and women who live like that? What does kulle signify? What did you do at home all day? Did you have a small business? Would you want this for your daughter too?)*
- What are your thoughts on other people's view of Northern Nigerian women as oppressed?

(what type of life would you want they want for themselves if they could choose? What roles are most important to them as women)
- With everything that has happened, do you see yourself as a victim?

(Do they pity themselves or see themselves as a strong women having survived this far?)
- What are you most proud of yourself for achieving in the past few years?

<u>Lived Experiences and expressions of agency</u>
- What was your life like before the insurgency?

(what was your day-day? What did you do for work/income?, what do you miss the most?)
- Would you want to go back to your old lifestyle?

(*given this new experience, is there anything you would change if you were to go back?)*
- What are some things women experience in your society that you wish you could change?

(*how are you ensuring that this is different for your daughter?)*
- If you could be in charge of the government of (North/ Nigeria/ the town/ village) for a year, what changes would you make?
- If you could say one thing to "x" (politician, Boko Haram, a local powerful person" what would you say?
- What do you think is most important for people to know about your experience?
- What makes you happy every day? What makes you angry every day?

<u>Conditions, options, and costs of making certain choices</u>
- What are the consequences of not abiding by religious or cultural rules e.g. hijab, divorce

(who are the gatekeepers or enforcers of these rules?)
- How far did you go in your education?

(who made decisions / what were the factors that determined them going school and not continuing?)
- Are there women who are active members of Boko Haram?

(*Thoughts on if they joined freely or were forced What do they get out of it? What does the community say about this?)*
- Some kidnapped women go back to Boko Haram after being rescued, why do you think they do?
- If you could ensure that your children have a different life from you, how would it be different?"

<u>3. Gender Roles/Feminism (underlying perceptions/ideologies about gender)</u>
- How have the lives of women in your community changed since the insurgency?

(Household dynamics and gender roles)
- Do you think women are disadvantaged in your community?
- How will you describe an ideal woman according to your culture/religion?

(How should a woman behave according to these institutions?)

- Are men and women equal? Why or why not?

(*what should the dynamics between men and women be?*)

4. Media use and media coverage of the insurgency
- Do you listen to the news, if so, how do you get access to the news?
- How did you communicate with your relatives when you were on the run?

5. Audience reception (understandings and perceptions of NN women (context: media coverage of Boko Haram)
- How do people who come to help you treat you as IDP's?

(*What do you think people think of IDP women?*)
- What sorts of training programs to NGO's offer to women?

(*Have you taken part in any of these? Who decides the curriculum or skills that you get trained in? Have they been useful? What would you rather these NGO's do instead? What are the assumptions they make?*)
- What do you think people misunderstand or do not know about your lives and the insurgency?

6. Support (Yes or No)
- If you make any money, what do you use it for?

(*Do you save? Do you take part in adashe? Does your husband save?*)
- Can you describe who and what supported you through the most difficult times?

(*both emotional and financial support*)
- Do you receive any support from the church or mosque or traditional leaders?

(*what role do these institutions play in your life?*)
- Do you belong to any groups where you support one another?

(*Religious or otherwise*)
- Do you think it is important for women to have their own source of income? Why?

(*Has this always been the case or it's just a recent thing?*)
- Do you feel that it's best to rely on what you can do for yourself through your work?

(*Whether they believe in individualism vs collectivism, what is more effective, whether they would rather rely on state/ family*)

Conclusion: Do you have any question to ask me? Are there any questions you think I did not ask that I should have asked? Is there anything you want to tell me at all?

Appendix 3: Overview of interview respondents

	NON-ELITE RESPONDENTS INFORMATION				Phone		TV		News		Radio
	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Religion	Ownership	Use	Ownership	Habits	Believability	Source of news	Use
1	Asiya	Female	26	Muslim	Yes	Calls home and relatives	No	Yes, occasionally	No	Word of mouth	Yes
2	Muna	Female	24	Muslim	Yes	Calls home and relatives	No	None	No	Word of mouth	Yes
3	Aissa	Female	26	Muslim	Yes	Calls home and relatives	No	None	No	Word of mouth	No
4	Aissata	Female	24	Muslim	Yes	Calls home and relatives	No	None	No	Word of mouth	Yes
5	Habsatou	Female	37	Muslim	Yes	Calls home and relatives	No	None	N/A	N/A	No
6	Amatullah	Female	35	Muslim	Yes	Calls home and relatives Listens to the radio	No	None	Sometimes	Radio	Uses phone
7	Zulai	Female	23	Muslim	Yes	Calls home and relatives	No	None	Yes	Radio Word of mouth	Uses phone
8	Kulthum	Female	21	Muslim	Yes	Calls and relatives Romantic relationship(s) Watches Hausa and Indian films	No	Sometimes women gather to watch films on someone's TV	No	Word of mouth	Uses phone
10	Fatiya	Female	24	Muslim	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
11	Asabe	Female	20	Muslim	Yes	Calls home and relatives Listens to the radio	No	None	No	Word of mouth	Uses phone
12	Lilia	Female	45	Christian	Yes	Calls home and relatives	No	None	No	Word of mouth	No
13	Asiaa	Female	16	Muslim	No	Uses dad's phone to play games and listen to Quran recitations	No	None	No	Word of mouth	No
14	Hannah	Female	16	Christian	No	Uses her dad's phone for homework	No	None	No	Word of mouth	No

15	Laraba	Female	51	Christian	Yes	Calls home and relatives Watches Hausa and Indian films Work calls	Yes	Yes, for films	No	Word of mouth	Has access but, does not listen due to stress
16	Beauty	Female	23	Christian	Yes	Calls home and relatives Listens to the radio	No	Yes, through neighbour's TV's	Sometimes	Radio Word of mouth	Uses phone
17	Elizabeth	Female	38	Christian	Yes	Calls home and relatives Listens to the radio	No	None	No	Word of mouth	Uses phone
18	Mariya	Female	25	Muslim	No	N/A	No	None	No	N/A	
19	Haroon	Male	50	Muslim	Yes	Calls home and relatives	No	None	No	Word of mouth	Yes, uses phone
20	Mary	Female	17	Christian	No	Uses her mom's phone to call relatives Watches Hausa and Indian films	No	None	No	Word of mouth	No
21	Aminata	Female	40	Muslim	Yes	Calls home	No	Yes, occasionally	No	Word of mouth	Yes
22	Fadimatu	Female	38	Muslim	Yes	Calls home Relationship	No	None	No	Word of mouth	Yes
23	Fannah	Female	33	Muslim	Yes	Calls home Relationship	No	None	No	Word of mouth	No
24	Sholi	Female	26	Muslim	No	Calls home using other people's phones	No	None	No	Word of mouth	No
25	Awa	Female	37	Muslim	No (stolen)	Puts her sim card in other people phones to call home	No	None	No	Word of mouth	No
26	Hajjo	Female	33	Muslim	Yes	Calls home and relatives	No	None	No	Word of mouth	No
27	Hapsy	Female	26	Muslim	Yes	Calls home and relatives	No	None	Yes	Radio Word of mouth	Yes
28	Jessica	Female	42	Muslim	Yes	Calls home and relatives	No	None	N/A	N/A	No
29	Asta	Female	28	Muslim	No	Uses other people's phone	No	None	No	N/A	
30	Fantis	Female	24	Muslim	Yes	Calls home and relatives	Yes	Yes (films and programs)	No	Word of mouth	No

31	Hafsah	Female	38	Muslim	Yes	Calls home and relatives	No	None	No	Word of mouth	No
32	Hadiya	Female	40	Muslim	Yes	Calls home and relatives	None	None	No	Whatsapp Facebook Radio	Uses phone
33	Fatou	Female	47	Muslim	Yes	Calls home	Yes	News (occasionally)	Yes	TV Phone	No
34	Mubina	Female	22	Muslim	No	Calls home using other people's phones	No	Yes, occasionally, through other people's TV's	Yes	TV Radio	Yes
35	Mariri	Female	20	Muslim	Yes	Calls home and relatives	No	No	No	Word of mouth	No
36	Fandi	Female	27	Muslim	Yes	Calls home and relatives	No	Occasionally, through neighbour's TV	No	N/A	No
37	Hillu	Female	34	Muslim	Yes	No	No	None	No	N/A	No
38	Maman Jafar	Female	30	Muslim	Yes	No	No	None	No	N/A	No
39	Amne	Female	32	Muslim	Yes	Calls home and relatives	Yes	Hausa and Indian films	No	Word of mouth	Radio (BBC)
40	Shatu	Female	31	Muslim	No	N/A	No	Yes, occasionally, through neighbour's TV's	No	N/A	No
41	Abule	Female	27	Muslim	No	N/A	No	Yes, occasionally, through neighbour's TV's	No	N/A	No
42	Nana	Female	20	Muslim	Yes	Calls home and relatives Relationship Hausa and Indian films	No	None	No	Word of mouth	No
43	Kulche	Female	26	Muslim	Yes	Calls home and relatives Watches Hausa films	No	None	No	Word of mouth	Occasionally
44	Falmata	Female	40	Muslim	Yes	Calls home and relatives	No	Yes, occasionally, through neighbour's TV's	No	Word of mouth	No
45	Halimatou	Female	42	Muslim	Yes	Calls home and relatives	No	No	No	Word of mouth	No
46	Mairama	Female	33	Muslim	Yes	Calls home and relatives	Yes	Yes News, films (Indian)	Sometimes	Word of mouth	No
47	Dija	Female	30	Muslim	No	N/A	No		No	N/A	

48	Maro	Female	33	Muslim	No	N/A	No	Yes, occasionally		Word of mouth	No
49	Zayna	Female	35	Muslim	Yes	Calls home and relatives	No	None	No	Word of mouth	No
50	Sarah	Female	34	Christian	Yes	Calls home and relatives	No	None	No	Word of mouth	No
51	Eesha	Female	25	Muslim	Yes	Calls home and relatives Listens to the radio	No	None	No	Word of mouth	Uses phone
52	Nabou	Female	35	Muslim	No		Yes	Yes, occasionally Films	No	Word of mouth	No
53	Hassana	Female	53	Muslim	Yes	Calls home and relatives Listens to the radio	No	No	Yes, but call home to confirm	Radio Word of mouth	Uses phone
54	Hajiya Fanta	Female	30	Muslim	Yes	Calls homes and relatives Listens to the radio	No	No	Yes	Radio	Uses phone
55	Hajiya Hadi	Female	50+	Muslim	Yes	Calls home and relatives	No	No	No	N/A	
56	Hajiya Awa	Female	50+	Muslim	Yes	Calls home and relatives	No	No	No	N/A	
57	Hajiya Gumus	Female	50+	Muslim	Yes	Calls home and relatives	No	No	No	N/A	
58	Diya	Female	50+	Muslim	Yes	Calls home and relatives	No	No	No	N/A	
59	Talatu	Female	27	Muslim	Yes	Calls home and relatives	No	No	No	N/A	
60	Adamu	Male	35	Muslim	Yes	Calls home and relatives	No	No	No	N/A	
61	Baffa	Female	45	Muslim	Yes	Calls home and relatives	No	No	No	Word of mouth	No
62	Hawwa	Female	40	Muslim	Yes	Calls home and relatives	No	No	No	Word of mouth	No

EXPERT RESPONDENTS

S/N	Pseudonym	Location	Gender	Organisation	Role	Topic
1	Maina	Maiduguri	Male	SEMA	Camp Manager	Gender
2	Lawan	Maiduguri	Male	CJTF	CJTF	Gender
3	Ayo	Abuja	Male	Human Angle	Journalist	Media
4	Hadiza	Abuja	Female	FOMWAN	Programs/admin	Gender
5	Maya	Abuja	Female	Save the Children	Comms specialist	Gender, Media
6	Ms. Umma	Abuja	Female	PAGED Initiative	Dev/comms expert	Gender, Media, Development
7	Suleiman	Yola	Male	SEMA	Humanitarian	Camp affairs
8	Yakubu	Yola	Male	SEMA	Camp Coordinator	Camp affairs
9	Peter	Yola	Male	NEMA	Camp Manager	Camp affairs
10	Mohammed	Yola	Male	SEMA	Camp Manager	Camp affairs
11	Ahmed	Abuja	Male	Human Angle	Journalist	Media
12	Hala	Abuja	Female	Human Angle	Journalist	Media
13	Hajiya Mairo	Abuja	Female	Federal Government	Public servant	Gender, Media, Development
14	Sarki	Abuja	Male	Federal Government	Public servant	Media, Development

SEMA: State Emergency Management Agency
NEMA: National Emergency Management Agency
PAGED: Participatory Communication for Gender Development Initiative
CJTF: Civilian Joint Task Force