
KIU Interdisciplinary Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences

THE EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN IN CONFLICT SITUATIONS AND CRISES: A GLIMPSE INTO EDIFY YAKUSAK'S AFTER THEY LEFT AND HELON HABILA'S CHIBOK GIRLS: THE BOKO HARAM KIDNAPPINGS AND THE ISLAMIST MILITANCY IN NIGERIA

Zainab Abdulkarim (Ph.D.)

Faculty of Arts, Department of English Language and Linguistics, Sokoto State University, Sokoto State, Nigeria. Email: z.abdulkarim@ssu.edu.ng , abdulkarimzaynab@gmail.com

Citation: Zainab Abdulkarim (2025). The Experiences of Women in Conflict Situations and Crises: A Glimpse into Edify Yakusak's After They Left and Helon Habila's Chibok Girls: The Boko Haram Kidnappings and the Islamist Militancy in Nigeria. *KIU Interdisciplinary Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 6(1), 39-54.

ABSTRACT

Women in conflict zones often face heightened risks of gender-based violence, including rape, abduction, and forced marriages. Conflicts often result in the displacement of populations. Women and children are particularly vulnerable during these migrations, facing precarious living conditions in refugee camps or as internally displaced persons. Writings from Northern Nigeria provide an essential glimpse into the multifaceted experiences of women in conflict situations and crises. These writers discuss the intersection of cultural expectations and the realities of living through conflict, offering a nuanced view of societal change. Some writers from Northern Nigeria often depict the psychological and physical trauma that women endure in such environments. They also highlight the loss of home, family members, and community, emphasizing the emotional and social toll of displacement. This research will analyze Helon Habila's Chibok Girls and Edify Yakusak's After They. A qualitative methodological approach to research is used. It provides a method that encompasses a technique of knowledge generation through content analysis that allows the researcher to have direct contact with the subject of study with a view to making critical assessment and understanding. These narratives explore how disruptions lead to both challenges and opportunities for redefining women roles in society. Through their writings, they provide a voice to the voiceless, bringing international attention to their plight and advocating for peace and justice. These narratives not only document the suffering and challenges faced but also celebrate the strength, resilience, and enduring spirit of women. By giving voice to their stories, they contribute to a broader understanding and awareness of the impacts of conflict on women and advocate for change and empowerment.

Keywords: Women, Conflict, Crises, Northern Nigeria, Writers

INTRODUCTION

The experiences of women in conflict situations and crises have garnered increasing attention in recent years,

particularly in regions plagued by violence and instability. Northern Nigeria, marked by years of insurgency and social unrest, serves

as a poignant case study of how conflict disproportionately affects women. Women in this region endure not only the immediate impacts of violence, such as displacement and loss of family members, but also long-term repercussions that shape their social and economic realities. The narratives of these women are often overlooked in mainstream discourse, despite their critical importance in understanding the broader implications of conflict.

Historically, women's experiences in conflict have been marginalized, both in the literature and in humanitarian responses. In Nigeria, various organizations and scholars have sought to address these gaps by documenting women's roles and responses to conflict. For instance, the Nigerian government, alongside international NGOs, has initiated programs aimed at supporting women affected by the Boko Haram insurgency and banditry. The *Women for Peace and Security Initiative*, launched in 2016, exemplifies efforts to empower women in peacebuilding processes (Nnadi, 2020, p. 45). This initiative not only addresses the immediate needs of women affected by violence but also recognizes their potential as agents of change in conflict resolution.

Furthermore, scholars have contributed to the discourse by analyzing the representation of women in literature from Nigeria. Writers such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Sefi Atta have highlighted the complexities of women's experiences during conflicts, illustrating their resilience and agency. In her novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*,

Adichie explores the impact of the Nigerian Civil War on women, showcasing their struggles and strength in the face of adversity (Adichie, 2006, p. 243). Similarly, Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* presents a nuanced portrayal of women's lives in a tumultuous socio-political landscape, emphasizing their roles in navigating crises (Atta, 2005, p. 125).

Despite these efforts, the narrative around women in conflict remains largely inadequate, as many voices still go unheard. The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, adopted in 2000, emphasizes the need to include women in peace processes and recognize their experiences in conflict zones (UN Security Council, 2000). However, implementation at the grassroots level, particularly in Northern Nigeria, often falls short. Women's contributions to peacebuilding are frequently undermined by socio-cultural barriers and systemic inequalities.

In this context, this study aims to look into the experiences of women in conflict situations in Northern Nigeria through the lens of local literature. By examining the narratives crafted about women in times of crisis, we can better understand their unique challenges and resilience. This exploration is vital not only for amplifying women's voices but also for informing policy and practice aimed at fostering gender-inclusive approaches to conflict resolution.

Background to the Study

Northern Nigeria has been engulfed in various conflicts that have deeply affected

its socio-economic fabric, particularly impacting women and children. The ongoing violence is primarily driven by the Boko Haram insurgency, banditry and ethnic clashes, both of which have compounded the vulnerabilities of women in the region. This background aims to illuminate these conflicts, providing evidence of their effects and highlighting the urgent need for focused research on women's experiences in these tumultuous contexts.

The Boko Haram insurgency, which erupted in 2009, has emerged as one of the most catastrophic conflicts in Nigeria's history. Originating in Borno State, Boko Haram's ideology is rooted in a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam, with the group's leaders advocating for the establishment of an Islamic state governed by Sharia law. Over the years, Boko Haram has been responsible for heinous acts, including mass killings, abductions, and the destruction of infrastructure (Owolabi & Olubunmi, 2022, p. 218). The group has specifically targeted women and girls, subjecting them to sexual violence, forced marriages, and enslavement. Reports from Amnesty International indicate that between 2014 and 2018, more than 2,000 women and girls were abducted, highlighting the gendered nature of the violence perpetrated by the insurgents (Amnesty International, 2018, p. 10).

The ramifications of the insurgency extend far beyond physical violence. A staggering 2.3 million people have been displaced as a direct result of the conflict, with women and

children comprising a significant proportion of the displaced population (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [OCHA], 2020, p. 5). Displacement disrupts social structures, leading to increased vulnerabilities, as many women are left to care for their families in unstable and insecure environments. Moreover, the insurgency has severely restricted access to education, particularly for girls, further entrenching gender inequalities. A report from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) states that over 1.3 million children in Northeast Nigeria are out of school due to the conflict, with girls being disproportionately affected (UNESCO, 2020, p. 12).

In addition to the Boko Haram crisis, Northern Nigeria has also witnessed persistent ethnic clashes, primarily between herders and farmers and banditry. These conflicts are often rooted in competition for land and resources, exacerbated by climatic changes that have intensified the struggle for arable land. For example, the violent clashes between the predominantly Muslim Fulani herders and predominantly Christian farming communities in Plateau and Benue States have resulted in thousands of deaths and displacements over the years. According to the International Crisis Group, more than 1,600 people were killed in communal violence between 2016 and 2018 alone, highlighting the severity of the clashes (International Crisis Group, 2019, p. 3).

These ethnic conflicts further complicate the situation for women, who often bear the

brunt of the violence and its aftermath. Women are not only victims of the direct violence but also face increased responsibilities as caretakers for their families, often in the absence of male family members who may have been killed or displaced. A report by the European Union states that women are forced into survival strategies, including engaging in precarious economic activities, which increases their risk of exploitation (European Union, 2019, p. 8).

The pressing nature of these conflicts, coupled with their gendered impacts, underscores the necessity for this study. While there is a wealth of literature addressing conflict in Northern Nigeria, women's voices and experiences often remain marginalized in both academic and policy discussions. Understanding the specific challenges faced by women, as well as their resilience and agency in navigating these crises, is essential for developing effective interventions and policies that address their unique needs.

Moreover, documenting women's experiences in conflict literature not only contributes to the academic discourse but also empowers women by validating their narratives. It is crucial to amplify these voices, particularly in a context where women's experiences are often overlooked or trivialized. By examining literary representations of women in conflict situations, this study aims to fill this gap and highlight the importance of gender-inclusive

approaches in addressing the broader impacts of conflict in Northern Nigeria.

The protracted conflicts in Northern Nigeria, particularly the Boko Haram insurgency, ethnic clashes and banditry, have precipitated a humanitarian crisis that disproportionately affects women. Women in these regions face multifaceted challenges during conflicts, including rampant violence, forced displacement, and the loss of livelihoods. These challenges are not merely incidental; they stem from a patriarchal society where women's roles are often marginalized, rendering them more vulnerable during times of crisis.

Violence against women in conflict situations is alarmingly prevalent. Reports indicate that women and girls are often subjected to sexual violence, including rape and sexual slavery, as tactics of war employed by insurgents and armed groups (United Nations, 2018, p. 15). A Human Rights Watch report details instances of abduction and forced marriages, revealing the horrific realities that many women face amidst the chaos of conflict (Human Rights Watch, 2021, p. 27). This form of gender-based violence not only results in physical and psychological harm but also stigmatizes survivors, making it difficult for them to reintegrate into society.

Displacement represents another significant challenge. As conflicts escalate, millions have been uprooted from their homes, with women and children comprising a large portion of the displaced population. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

reports that over 2 million people in Nigeria have been internally displaced, with women often bearing the brunt of this upheaval (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2021, p. 3). In the refugee camps, women frequently encounter inadequate living conditions, insufficient access to food, healthcare, and educational opportunities. This precarious situation heightens their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse, exacerbating existing gender inequalities (UN Women, 2020, p. 12).

Furthermore, the loss of livelihoods due to conflict further compounds the struggles of women. Traditional economic activities are disrupted, leaving many women without income or means to support their families. As noted by the United Nations Development Programme, women are often pushed into informal and low-paying jobs, which increases their susceptibility to exploitation (UNDP, 2019, p. 18). The World Bank highlights that the economic fallout from conflict has led to a rise in dependency on humanitarian aid, leaving women in a precarious state (World Bank, 2020, p. 22).

While there have been previous efforts to address these issues, they have often been insufficient in fully understanding or responding to the unique challenges faced by women in conflict settings. The Nigerian government, alongside NGOs and international organizations, has launched initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality and addressing violence against women. For instance, the National Action Plan on United Nations Security Council

Resolution 1325 emphasizes the need for women's participation in peacebuilding processes (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2017, p. 10). However, these initiatives frequently encounter challenges such as inadequate funding, cultural barriers, and insufficient representation of women's voices in decision-making (UN Women, 2020, p. 8).

The current study seeks to fill a significant gap in the existing literature by focusing on the lived experiences of women during conflicts in Northern Nigeria. Unlike previous studies that primarily employ quantitative methods, this research adopts a qualitative approach, analyzing literary texts and narratives to capture the voices of women affected by conflict. By exploring how local writers depict women's struggles and resilience, this study aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of the challenges they face. Furthermore, it emphasizes the intersection of gender, conflict, and culture, highlighting how women navigate their realities amid violence and displacement.

Impact of Conflict on Women's Lives

A foundational concept in this research is the understanding of how gender dynamics shape the experiences of women during conflicts. According to Enloe (2014, p. 45), conflicts are not gender-neutral; rather, they exacerbate existing inequalities and create new vulnerabilities for women. Women are often portrayed solely as victims in conflict narratives, which neglects their roles as agents of change and active participants in peace processes. This perspective is crucial, as it underscores the importance of

integrating women's voices in conflict resolution and post-conflict rebuilding efforts.

Research has shown that conflicts disrupt traditional gender roles, leading to both challenges and opportunities for women. For example, the rise of women's participation in the labor force during conflicts has been documented, as many women are forced to take on new roles to support their families (Peterson, 2020, p. 132). However, these roles often come with significant risks, including increased exposure to violence and exploitation.

The impact of conflict on women's lives is multifaceted, encompassing issues of violence, displacement, and loss of livelihood. Gender-based violence is often weaponized during conflicts, with armed groups using sexual violence as a tool for control and terror (United Nations, 2018, p. 15). The prevalence of such violence not only affects the immediate well-being of women but also has long-term psychological and social consequences. As highlighted by Human Rights Watch (2021, p. 27), survivors of sexual violence frequently face social stigmatization and marginalization, which can hinder their recovery and reintegration into society.

Displacement is another critical aspect of women's experiences during conflict. Research indicates that women and children constitute the majority of displaced populations, leading to unique vulnerabilities (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2021, p. 3). Displaced women often struggle with inadequate

access to healthcare, food security, and education, which can perpetuate cycles of poverty and dependency (UN Women, 2020, p. 12). The lack of targeted support services for displaced women further exacerbates their challenges, highlighting the necessity for policies that prioritize their needs.

Furthermore, the loss of livelihoods during conflicts forces women into precarious economic situations. The United Nations Development Programme (2019, p. 18) notes that women are often pushed into informal and low-wage jobs, increasing their susceptibility to exploitation and abuse. This economic disenfranchisement not only affects individual women but also has broader implications for community resilience and recovery.

Numerous initiatives have been implemented to address the challenges faced by women in conflict situations. The Nigerian government has developed policies, such as the National Action Plan on United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, which emphasizes the inclusion of women in peacebuilding processes (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2017, p. 10). However, the effectiveness of these policies is often hindered by systemic barriers, cultural norms, and inadequate funding.

Despite existing efforts, significant gaps remain in the literature regarding the lived experiences of women in conflict, particularly in Northern Nigeria. Most studies have relied heavily on quantitative methods, which may overlook the complexities of women's experiences and

agency (Alkali, 2018, p. 56). By focusing on narrative analysis and qualitative methodologies, this research aims to bridge this gap, providing a deeper understanding of how women navigate their realities amidst conflict. This approach is essential for developing more effective policies and interventions that are responsive to the specific needs and voices of women in these contexts.

Theoretical Framework

The framework for this research paper is grounded in feminist theory, which emphasizes the importance of gender as a social construct that shapes experiences and identities (Tong, 2009, p. 45). By applying a feminist lens, this study aims to highlight the agency of women in conflict situations, challenging the notion of women as mere victims. Furthermore, the framework recognizes the intersectionality of gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status, which influences women's experiences during conflicts. This intersectional approach is crucial for understanding the diverse and multifaceted realities of women in Northern Nigeria, enabling a more comprehensive analysis of their challenges and resilience.

Feminist Theory provides a critical lens through which to examine the roles and experiences of women in conflict situations. It posits that gender is a fundamental category of analysis that shapes individuals' experiences and societal structures. According to Enloe (2014, p. 31), conflicts are not gender-neutral; they amplify existing

inequalities and create new vulnerabilities for women. Feminist scholars argue that traditional narratives often portray women solely as victims, neglecting their roles as active agents in peace processes and conflict resolution.

For example, in the context of the Boko Haram insurgency in Northern Nigeria, women have been disproportionately affected by violence and displacement. However, many have also taken on leadership roles in their communities, advocating for peace and supporting the needs of displaced families (Umar, 2018, p. 45). Feminist Theory emphasizes the importance of including women's perspectives in conflict analysis and policy formulation to ensure a more comprehensive understanding of their experiences.

Furthermore, Feminist Theory critiques the systemic power structures that perpetuate gender-based violence during conflicts. Cohn (2013, p. 123) highlights how sexual violence is often used as a strategic weapon in wars, reinforcing patriarchal norms and exacerbating women's vulnerabilities. However, Feminism does not have a universal application and suitability, especially for African Women. As a result, other forms of Feminism emerged, such as Womanism, and the various forms of African feminism, such as African Womanism, Stiwanism, and Motherism. Nnaemeka develops more sensible and rewarding feminism, a term she calls Nego-feminism, after all these "new feminist models are

needed especially those that are realistic, practical and, fundamental” (Ezeigbo, 2012, p. 26). In her paper, “Nego-feminism: Theorising, Practicing and Pruning Africa’s Way” (2003), Obiomma Nnaemeka proposes Nego-feminism from two similar positions. First, it directly flows from ‘negotiation’. Second ‘n-ego’ translates to ‘non ego/ no ego’. It is, therefore, a feminism that is free from egoistic tendencies which neither male nor female holds. The centre of her theory emphasises the complementarity of sexes” (Nnaemeka, 2003, p. 360). Nego-feminism charges both sexes to be willing-partners in progress. In short, where the notorious western and radical feminism is extreme and sidelines some aspects of African culture, Nego-feminism is open to the present and the future. This research adopts Nego-feminism because it gives room for understanding and appreciation of both sexes. It is also not harsh and extreme in approach. Alkali, Tolif and Jan (2017, p. 10) agrees that “Nego-feminism surrounds issues of peace or conflict management, negotiation complementarity, give-and-take, collaboration, bargaining, mediation, and arbitration. Nego-feminism offers to the world how to manage the two sexes harmoniously”.

Empirical Studies on Women in Conflict Situations and Crises

Hughes (2009) *Gender and Displacement: The researcher studies the impact of Conflict on Women*. The study explored the gendered impacts of displacement caused by conflict. The methodology employed was

qualitative interviews with displaced women from multiple conflict zones. The findings revealed that women face heightened risks of exploitation, trafficking, and sexual violence. However, this study did not explore specific contexts in sub-Saharan Africa, thus leaving a geographical gap. This research laid the groundwork for future studies focusing on the experiences of women in displacement but lacked detailed regional analysis. The study Lack focus on sub-Saharan Africa, specifically Northern Nigeria. Enloe (2014) *Women’s Bodies as Battlegrounds in Conflict Zones*. *The work analyzed the systematic use of sexual violence in conflicts worldwide. Through case studies and interviews, Enloe highlighted the psychological and social impacts of such violence. Although significant, the study mainly focused on sexual violence without examining other economic or social aspects of women's experiences in conflict. The gap has no focus on economic displacement or recovery efforts for women.*

Brett and McCallin (2010) *Gender and Peacekeeping Operations*. The research provided insights into the role of women in peacebuilding post-conflict. The study employed case studies from several post-conflict African countries but did not cover Northern Nigeria specifically. This study also failed to consider the unique challenges faced by displaced women. There is no specific analysis of displaced women or the Nigerian context.

Afolabi (2020) *The Socio-Economic Impacts of Boko Haram Insurgency on Women in*

Nigeria. The work focused on the socio-economic impacts of the Boko Haram insurgency on women, particularly in Northern Nigeria. Using interviews and surveys, this study highlighted the economic hardships and loss of livelihoods faced by women. While comprehensive in economic analysis, it did not explore the psychological toll or the long-term societal impacts of displacement. The study is limited to economic impacts and it lacks psychological analysis.

Mustapha (2019) *Women and Peacebuilding in Northern Nigeria*. The study examined the involvement of women in peacebuilding efforts in post-Boko Haram Northern Nigeria. The research methodology involved in-depth interviews with women peace activists. Findings indicated that cultural and institutional barriers hinder women's participation in formal peace processes. However, the study did not address women's socio-economic recovery post-conflict. The study lack focus on socio-economic recovery and psychological well-being.

Sadiq (2018) *Understanding Gendered Violence in the Boko Haram Conflict*. The research focused on the use of gender-based violence by Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria. Employing both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, this study showed how sexual violence was used to destabilize communities. It failed, however, to explore other socio-economic impacts or the roles of women in conflict resolution. There is no exploration of women's roles in

peacebuilding or economic recovery in the study.

Ibrahim (2023) *Women and Health in Conflict Zones: The Case of Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria*. This empirical study focused on health challenges faced by women in conflict zones, particularly IDP camps in Northern Nigeria. Using a mixed-method approach (surveys and interviews), Ibrahim highlighted the lack of access to healthcare for displaced women, particularly in reproductive health. However, the study lacked a comprehensive analysis of the socio-economic recovery of these women. The study does not focus on socio-economic or psychological recovery.

Nnaji (2021) *Exploring Women's Narratives of Resilience Amidst Conflict in Northern Nigeria*. The research is one of the more recent studies focusing on women's resilience in Northern Nigeria. Using a narrative methodology, the study revealed how women created informal support networks to survive the Boko Haram insurgency. While it focused on resilience, it lacked a broader analysis of the socio-economic challenges that still persist. The study focuses on resilience but lacks economic and psychological analysis.

Okwor (2023) *Gender-Based Violence in Conflict Zones: A Case Study of Northern Nigeria*. The recent research examined the role of gender-based violence in the Boko Haram conflict and its long-term effects on survivors. Using a mixed-method approach, the study highlighted how sexual violence continues to affect women's reintegration into society post-conflict. However, the

research did not address the economic recovery of these women. The gaps do not address economic recovery, which remains a critical issue.

The Experiences of Women in Conflict Situations and Crises in Edify Yakusak's *After They Left* and Helon Habila's *Chibok Girls: The Boko Haram Kidnappings and the Islamist Militancy in Nigeria*

Conflict situations and crises have profound impacts on women, who often bear the brunt of violence, displacement, and disruption of social systems. While men are typically seen as the direct combatants, women's experiences in conflicts and crises reveal specific challenges, from gender-based violence (GBV) to increased vulnerability to poverty, loss of livelihoods, and disruption of education and healthcare. Understanding the roles, experiences, and agency of women in such situations is crucial to developing comprehensive responses that address the unique gendered dimensions of conflict.

Edify Yakusak's *After They Left* is a story about the inter-ethnic and religious crisis that occurred in the Northern part of Nigeria, Jos precisely. The crisis was awful, claiming lives and leaving the bereaved in melancholy *After they Left* has its set mainly in Jos, North-central Nigeria at a time when the town was ravaged by the carnage of ethnic and religious crises. The author, Edify Yakusak, a plateau State born lawyer writes about the bloodshed that has claimed many lives. The suitability of the time setting is

such that it came at a time when there is the need to tell the unpleasant tales of human and material waste not just in Jos, but all over Northern Nigeria. Evidently, the characters' names-Mafeng, Jugu, Bot, Nankwat, among others are suggestive of the naming system of the Berom ethnic group, located in Jos and its environs. Through the narration, we are told about the actions of the protagonist, Mafeng, born in Anang is the first daughter of the family and has a responsibility of putting her duty first before her love. She married Bot and went to leave in Abuja. She relocated to Jos, months after her husband's death, nine months before the crisis.

After they Left is a novel that not just blame the orchestrators of evil and killings, it is also an indictment of the social order, leadership system, and security and law enforcement system of a nation. A government has the responsibility of protecting the lives and properties of the people it governs. This government is also responsible for ensuring the prompt enforcement of law and order to check crime and social vices, and to protect the lives and properties of the people. To start with, there is a high level of restriction on even the police men's access to weapons not even to protect themselves and families. If Samuel had a gun, he would have defended his family. The inability of the law enforcement agents to respond quickly to crisis situations is a contributive factor to the swell in the number of victims of such attacks. Our first contact with this particular massacre was in Mafeng and Samuel's home in Asan and it spread to Anang,, a fifty

minute distance away. Within this period, the law enforcement agents had not gotten wind of the situation or come to the rescue of these victims. Kim and Jugu were in the water drum for about six hours a period within which Samuel could probably have survived if help had come. The kids were saved from danger during their journey to grandmother's house by divine intervention. The idea of taking refuge in grandmother's house rather than the police station exemplified the fact that, they are not reliable or effective. The authorial intrusion in the deranged man, tried to call Mafeng to order, when she blamed God for all her misfortune. He said God didn't kill your family members. They were killed by our country. A system so abysmal, so wicked... the greed, evil and wickedness in the society did" (141).

The young soldier at the checkpoint, Osas and his colleagues rescued the girls from the traffickers, but were ordered to return them to the IDP camp on the excuse that they "didn't want to incur more cost on the already strained military budget" (209). No attempt was made to investigate and unravel the mystery behind the abduction or attempted trafficking. The girls were therefore returned to the very people who sold them out.

As a result of this lack of effective security system, the masses, especially the women and children are exposed to dangers like rape, molestation, kidnapping, trafficking and destitution. As a result of the poor order of things, Madam Mati had a monopolistic

control over the Niyri IDP camp which she used to her own gain without any suspicions. The lack of positive response to Kim's allegation against Madam Mati and Mafeng's denied access to the camp to search for her children is a symbolic portrayal of the irrelevance of the people's voice in social scheme of things in the society.

The traumatic condition of survivors of these crises is termed mental illness and they are confined to the psychiatric hospitals, rather than give them support to recover and overcome their trauma.

The novel addresses the deep-seated ethnic and religious tensions that fuel the violence in Jos. These tensions are depicted as the result of historical grievances, economic disparities, and political manipulation. Yakusak suggests that the violence is not simply the result of spontaneous hatred between groups, but is often incited and exacerbated by external forces, including political leaders who exploit these divisions for their own gain.

Through the depiction of the violence in Jos, Yakusak critiques the failure of the government and societal institutions to address the root causes of conflict. The lack of effective conflict resolution mechanisms and the impunity with which violence is often carried out contribute to a cycle of violence that is difficult to break.

Habila's *Chibok Girls; The Boko Haram Kidnappings and the Islamist Militancy in Nigeria* (2016) is a non-fiction. It tells the story of the 2014 kidnapping of 276 school girls from Chibok. The book provides

contexts of Boko Haram insurgency, its origin and the Nigerian government responses. The author recounts the events surrounding the April 14, 2014 kidnapping including eye witness accounts and the subsequent search efforts. He also discusses the international response and the global outrage and the #bringbackourgirls campaign, personal stories of the families of the victims and the impact on the community. He conducts his own investigation by interviewing locals, officials and experts to piece together what happened. Lastly, he reflects on the broader implications of the kidnapping, including the on-going conflict and social injustice in Nigeria.

To uncover the truth, Habila, who grew up in northern Nigeria, returned to Chibok and gained deep access to the families of the kidnapped girls, offering a harrowing account of a tragedy that shocked the world. With compassion and a keen understanding of the historical context, he shares the girls' stories and the anguish of their families, detailing the rise of Boko Haram and the Nigerian government's ineffective response, while also critiquing the media and the international community for their indifference once the initial shock faded. Combining the sensitivity of a fiction writer with the inquisitiveness of a journalist, *The Chibok Girls* presents poignant portraits of everyday Nigerians whose lives have been upended by extremist violence. Habila sheds light on the long legacy of colonialism and exposes the cultural and religious dynamics that have fueled the ongoing conflicts in the

region. The journey motif in *The Chibok Girls* starkly illustrates the devastating impact of Boko Haram's terror on Nigeria's socio-political landscape, exemplified by the corrupt practices of police officers at roadblocks. Habila describes the situation as follows: "check points, commonly known as roadblocks, are a familiar aspect of road travel in Nigeria.

Citizens have grown accustomed to them, much like their acceptance of unreliable electricity and water supply. While these roadblocks are ostensibly intended to enforce traffic laws and ensure travelers' safety, in reality, they serve as extortion points where individuals must pay their "taxes" at gunpoint" (p. 4). The terror of the insurgency is starkly laid bare. The impact of the insurgency is reflected in the overwhelming distress of parents in the Chibok community. Many have succumbed to stress-related illnesses due to the trauma of their daughters' abduction, with reports indicating that at least eighteen parents have died from conditions like heart failure and hypertension since the kidnapping. One father, after losing track of his missing daughters, is found wandering in the hills, further illustrating the psychological toll of the crisis (p. 78). The narrative underscores that traumatic grief, anxiety, behavioral issues, and the pervasive bereavement suffered by those who have lost their loved ones are haunting realities that continue to afflict the people of this region.

The Impact of Conflict on Women

Women in conflict zones often experience violence and displacement differently than men. Gender-based violence, including sexual violence, has been systematically used as a weapon of war. According to Enloe (2014, p. 58), women's bodies become battlegrounds, with rape and sexual assault used to terrorize communities and break societal structures. These actions leave long-term psychological, physical, and social scars on survivors, impacting not only the women themselves but also entire communities.

In addition to violence, conflict situations exacerbate the socio-economic vulnerabilities of women. For instance, in regions affected by the Boko Haram insurgency in Northern Nigeria, women are disproportionately affected by poverty and displacement. Research by Afolabi (2020, p. 39) reveals that women, particularly those heading households, are often left to fend for themselves and their families without adequate resources or support systems. The loss of male breadwinners to conflict results in a greater economic burden on women, further entrenching them in cycles of poverty.

Displacement and Refugee Status

Displacement is another critical issue that disproportionately affects women in conflict situations. Women and girls make up the majority of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) globally, and their experiences in camps or host communities are marked by challenges such as lack of access to healthcare, education, and adequate shelter. According to Hughes (2009, p. 102), displaced women often face

increased risks of exploitation, trafficking, and gender-based violence within refugee camps, as well as barriers to securing basic necessities.

In Northern Nigeria, for example, displaced women in IDP camps face significant health challenges due to limited access to reproductive healthcare. Ibrahim (2023, p. 51) notes that women in these camps often suffer from untreated maternal health issues, exacerbated by the collapse of healthcare systems during conflicts. These conditions worsen the already high maternal mortality rates in conflict-affected areas.

Women's Roles in Peacebuilding

Despite the overwhelming challenges faced by women during conflict, they also play significant roles in peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Women often act as mediators, community organizers, and activists in the aftermath of conflicts. In post-conflict situations, women's involvement in peace processes has been shown to lead to more sustainable and long-lasting peace agreements (UN Women, 2015, p. 23).

However, women are frequently excluded from formal peace negotiations and decision-making processes. Mustapha (2019, p. 21) highlights the challenges women face in being recognized as legitimate actors in peacebuilding, noting that cultural and institutional barriers often prevent their participation. To address this gap, there has been a growing push for the inclusion of women in peacebuilding processes, as evidenced by UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which calls for

greater female representation in peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction.

Women's Agency and Resilience in Conflict

While women are often portrayed as passive victims of conflict, many demonstrate remarkable resilience and agency. Women in conflict zones develop adaptive strategies to survive and rebuild their lives and communities. Nnaji (2021, p. 16) explores the narratives of women in Northern Nigeria, finding that many take on leadership roles within their communities, organizing informal support networks and advocating for the rights of survivors.

These forms of resilience are critical to the recovery and rebuilding of conflict-affected societies. Women's roles in providing education, healthcare, and emotional support within their communities are often overlooked in policy and academic discussions. Yet, as Brett and McCallin (2010, p. 292) note, supporting these grassroots efforts is essential for creating stable post-conflict environments.

Despite the international recognition of women's roles in conflict and post-conflict settings, there remain significant gaps in policy and intervention. Many governments

and international organizations fail to prioritize the specific needs of women in conflict, resulting in inadequate protection and support systems. For example, although UN Security Council Resolution 1325 was a landmark achievement in recognizing women's contributions to peace, its implementation has been inconsistent, and women remain largely underrepresented in peace negotiations (Tickner, 1992, p. 97).

Conclusion

While previous studies have focused on gender-based violence, displacement, peacebuilding, and socio-economic impacts, there remains a significant gap in integrating all these aspects into a single study that also considers long-term recovery efforts for women. The current research aims to fill this gap by adopting a comprehensive approach that examines the psychological, socio-economic, and health challenges faced by women in conflict zones in Northern Nigeria. This study will provide a holistic understanding of the multi-dimensional impacts of conflict on women. Additionally, it will offer policy recommendations that address not only immediate needs but also long-term recovery strategies for women.

REFERENCES

- 1) Adichie, C. N. (2006). *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Knopf.
- 2) Afolabi, A. (2020). The socio-economic impacts of Boko Haram insurgency on women in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Social Sciences*, 8(2), 34-50.
- 3) Amnesty International. (2018). "They Set the Classrooms on Fire": Attacks on Education in Nigeria's North-East. Amnesty International.
- 4) Alkali, A. A. (2018). "Gender and Conflict in Northern Nigeria: Perspectives from Literature." *African Journal of Gender Studies*, 12(1), 50-65.

- 5) Atta, S. (2005). *Everything Good Will Come*. Farafina.
- 6) Brett, R., & McCallin, M. (2010). Gender and peacekeeping operations. *International Peacekeeping*, 17(3), 289-307.
- 7) Cohn, C. (2013). *Women and Wars: Toward a Conceptual Framework*. In: *Women and Wars: Contested Histories, Uncertain Futures*. Zed Books.
- 8) Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989(1), 139-167.
- 9) Davis, A. Y. (2008). *Women, Race & Class*. Vintage Books.
- 10) Enloe, C. (2014). *The Logic of Militarization and Gender*. In: *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*. University of California Press.
- 11) European Union. (2019). "The Impact of Armed Conflicts on Women and Girls in Nigeria." European Union External Action.
- 12) Federal Republic of Nigeria. (2017). *National Action Plan on United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325*. Federal Ministry of Women Affairs.
- 13) Habila, H. (2016). *The Chibok Girls: The Boko Haram Kidnappings and the Islamist Militancy in Nigeria*. Paresia Books.
- 14) Hughes, L. (2009). International Journal of Refugee Law, 21(1), 95-116
- 15) Hughes, L. (2009). Gender and displacement: The impact of conflict on women. *International Journal of Refugee Law*, 21(1), 95-116.
- 16) Human Rights Watch. (2021). "You Will Not Have a Place in the World": The Impact of Boko Haram on Women and Girls in Northeast Nigeria. Human Rights Watch.
- 17) Ibrahim, A. (2023). Women and health in conflict zones: The case of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. *International Journal of Health Services*, 53(1), 45-60.
- 18) International Crisis Group. (2019). "The Challenge of Herdsmen-Farmer Violence in Nigeria." International Crisis Group..
- 19) Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. (2021). *Global Report on Internal Displacement 2021*. IDMC.
- 20) Mastorillo, M., et al. (2012). *Global Public Health*, 7(6), 636-649.
- 21) Mustapha, S. (2019). Women and peacebuilding in Northern Nigeria: Challenges and opportunities. *African Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies*, 7(1), 14-28.
- 22) Nnadi, O. (2020). Women's Agency in Conflict Resolution: The Case of Northern Nigeria. *Journal of African Studies*, 14(2), 43-56.
- 23) Nnaji, C. (2021). Exploring women's narratives of resilience amidst conflict in Northern Nigeria. *Journal of African Studies*, 15(3), 1-20.
- 24) OCHA. (2020). *Nigeria: Humanitarian Response Plan 2020*. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.
- 25) Owolabi, A. & Olubunmi, A. (2022). "Boko Haram Insurgency and its Impact on Women in Nigeria: A Case Study." *Journal of Gender Studies*, 31(2), 217-230.
- 26) Okwor, E. (2023). Gender-based violence in conflict zones: A case study of Northern Nigeria. *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, 15(2), 200-215.
- 27) Peterson, V. S. (2020). *Gendered States: Feminist (Re)Visions of International Relations Theory*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- 28) Sadiq, F. (2018). Understanding gendered violence in the Boko Haram conflict. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 27(5), 557-570.
- 29) Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1986). *The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior*. In: *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*. Nelson-Hall.
- 30) Tong, R. (2009). *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*. Westview Press.
- 31) Tickner, J. A. (1992). *Gender in international relations: Feminist perspectives on achieving global security*. Columbia University Press.
- 32) Umar, A. (2018). The Role of Women in Peacebuilding in Northeast Nigeria. *Journal of Peace Studies*, 25(1), 40-57.

- 33) UNESCO. (2020). "Education in Nigeria: A Study on the Impact of Conflict." United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
- 34) UNDP. (2019). "Women's Economic Empowerment in Conflict-Affected Areas: A Focus on Nigeria." United Nations Development Programme.
- 35) UN Women. (2020). "COVID-19 and Violence Against Women: The Evidence and the Impact in Nigeria." UN Women.
- 36) United Nations. (2018). "Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence." United Nations.
- 37) UN Security Council. (2000). Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security. Unit
- 38) Vollhardt, J. R., & Bilali, R. (2015). Collective Trauma in Intergroup Conflict: Lessons Learned from the World's Largest Refugee Crisis. In: *The Social Psychology of Collective Trauma*. Routledge.
- 39) World Bank. (2020). "The Impact of Conflict on Women's Livelihoods in Nigeria." World Bank.
- 40) Yakusak, E. (2016) *After They Left*. Nigeria: Kurdan Publishing House.
- Obi, C. (2010). Oil extraction, dispossession, resistance, and conflict in Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta. *Canadian Journal of Development Studies*, 30(1-2), 219–236.
- 41) Ogoe-Chimezie, O. G. (2018). Environmental perspectives in selected poetry of Tanure Ojaide. *Awka Journal of English Language and Literary Studies*, 6(2).
- 42) Ojaide, T. (2007). *The Tale of the Harmattan*. African Heritage Press.
- 43) Okuyade, O. (2013). Eco-critical consciousness in contemporary African literature: Re-reading Tanure Ojaide's Delta blues & home songs. *International Journal of Social Science & Education*, 3(4), 933-946.
- 44) Osundare, N. (1986). *The Eye of the Earth*. Ibadan: Heinemann Books Nigeria Limited.
- 45) Trexler, A. (2015). *Anthropocene fictions: The novel in a time of climate change*. University of Virginia Press.
- 46) Ushie, J. (2010). Niyi Osundare's eco-criticism: Environment and politics in Nigerian poetry. *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde*, 47(2), 123-137.