

De/Reconstructing the Notion of Women as Perpetrators of Terrorism: The Case of Boko Haram

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Abstract : The debate on women's roles in insurgencies and terrorist organizations continues to garner scholarly attention. While some scholars view women insurgents and terrorists as perpetrators, others have argued that they are non-agents and victims. This paper de/reconstructs the notion of 'women as perpetrators' of terrorism. Drawing on the narratives of rescued female Boko Haram operatives, and Boko Haram's tactics for recruiting and deploying women and girls, the paper advances three main arguments. First, the growing social construction of women as perpetrators of terrorism - particularly radical Islamic terrorism - downplays the socio-cultural and structural processes leading to women's involvement with terrorist organizations. Second, women agency in Boko Haram activities is better understood when grounded in the cultural and structural contexts of Northern Nigeria, Boko Haram's construction of 'female,' and the experiences of female Boko Haram operatives. Third, the mechanisms through which female Boko Haram operatives are recruited and deployed make them more of non-agents and victims than perpetrators of terrorism. The paper draws on the agency-structure approach and argues that the gendered power asymmetries embedded in the cultures and structures of Northern Nigeria -the base of Boko Haram- contribute to the nature and dynamics of women's involvement in the insurgency. Although the paper does not negate the agency of women in terrorism, it aligns with the studies that consider women insurgents as more victims than perpetrators of terror.

Keywords : Boko Haram, female agency, Northern Nigeria, patriarchy, perpetrator of terror, radical Islamic terrorism, sharia, victim of terror, women insurgents

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