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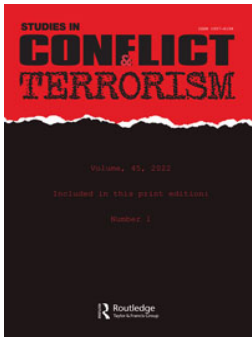
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Queering Terrorism

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ABSTRACT

There are few theoretical and empirical researches on sexual fluidity and sexual victimization against men inside terrorist groups. Drawing from the case of Islamic terrorists group (Boko Haram), queer theory, and discursive accounts of male survivors, NGOs and security agents, I argue that Boko Haram's rape of men and boys, whether collectively or individually, exposes their sexual fluidity. The reconstruction of acceptable sexual norms, syncretism due to the existence of same-sex subculture in Lake Chad, and hypocrisy explain their sexual variability. This study adds to the growing body of knowledge on the dynamics of sexuality and terrorism.

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While there is an emerging body of scholarly evidence that foregrounds the intersections between gender, sexuality, and terrorism, feminist international relations (IR) scholars have contested the dominant notions about women's passivity in terrorism. Such an approach, they argue, reinforces patriarchal socio-cultural notions that depict women as victims or weak or subordinate subjects in terrorism, and it highlights the under-exploration and under-theorization of gender, sexuality, and terrorism discourses.¹ A resounding standpoint that pervades IR feminist theorizing is that the history of terrorism is replete with women combatants, and women have continued to play active roles in terrorist violence in our contemporary world.² On the question of sexuality and terrorism, the prevailing explanations foreground terrorism, particularly Islamic terrorism, as a consequence of sexual depravity or underdevelopment.³ Despite the limited, but growing empirical evidence, Muslim male terrorists tend to be theorized as "hypertrophied heterosexuals"⁴ who show signs of "perverse masculinity, combined with failed monogamy and disability".⁵ However, critics suggest that the notion of sexual frustration or underdevelopment draws on essentialist discourses that depoliticize terrorism.⁶ Sex-essentialist theorizing contributes to influencing the use of torture methods that evoke homosexual performances on Muslim male terrorist suspects in order to undermine their cherished identity as heterosexual males.⁷ While the sexual depravity or underdevelopment debates offers important insights in understanding the sexual dynamics in terrorist organizations⁸, the concept of sexual fluidity among terrorist groups has yet to be adequately addressed, both theoretically and empirically. Sexual fluidity is defined in this research as the ability for situation-dependent flexibility

in sexual response, which permits people to experience shifts in same-sex or other-sex desire across short and extended time periods.⁹

In light of these reflections, this study explores how we can account for the sexual fluidity of terrorists and its diverse consequences, including its gendered and sexual harms. This is critical, as scholars had argued that the gender and sexual victimization of men or same-sex violence by terrorist groups in parts of Lake Chad, particularly in north-eastern Nigeria, has yet to be fully documented in the literature due to a lack of empirical evidence.¹⁰ I draw from the discursive accounts of survivors/victims of Boko Haram¹¹, as well as security agents and Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) to explore the notion of sexual fluidity in the context of terrorism. In doing so, I foreground my analysis using queer theory that contests the view that sexual and gender binary frames are a result of medical ontology. Instead, Queer theorists argue that gender stereotypes are socially constructed for specific socio-cultural and political logic.

Terrorist groups in Lake Chad rejected the existing socio-legal norms, claiming that they had been Westernized and that true Muslims needed to return to traditional translations and literal readings of sacred scriptures. As a result, it is possible to conclude that the rejected beliefs, legal systems, and standards for what is acceptable and what is not were reconstructed and replaced. In other words, drawing from my ethnographic field accounts, particularly the experiences of survivors who narrated being separated or kept for sexual pleasure for many years or months, I argue that Boko Haram re-constituted socio-cultural sexual norms. These sexual practices are reiterative of historical, literary, textual, and anthropological accounts of Islam's toleration of fluid sexual expressions among captured male slaves and the existence of same-sex expressions among the elite social class, including religious scholars.¹² Related to this is the history of the vagueness in the sacred texts on the punishment for sodomy and religious clerics' tolerance or disregarding of homosexual practices.¹³

Furthermore, given the existence of a same-sex subculture in northern Nigeria and the presence of sexual minorities in border countries like Chad and Niger, I also argue that Boko Haram's re-creation of socio-cultural norms may be deemed syncretic. Gender and sexual identities, according to Pierce, have always been "contingent and ambiguous" in sections of Lake Chad, as they are everywhere else in the world, notwithstanding religious reforms. Within well-developed subcultures and thought systems, many forms of non-normative sexuality are also negotiated. Normative and non-normative sexuality coexist and are mutually constitutive, a condition made easier by secrecy, which is mostly behavioral rather than cognitive.¹⁴ As a result, this demonstrates the assertion of queer theorists that what is perceived outside is fully generated within.

In addition, another factor contributing to the organizations' tolerance of sexual fluidity might be hypocrisy. Terrorist organizations preaching what they do not practice are a well-documented occurrence in the literature. Terrorist leaders may express aversion or rejection of political and religious leaders' activities, as well as socio-cultural and legal norms, but they are enmeshed in them in practice owing to political considerations. For instance, Mamdani claims that political identities are not reducible to cultural identities, that Islamic terrorists are not religious clerics, and that they came from a secular intelligentsia.¹⁵ They do, however, utilize religion to further their

political objectives.¹⁶ Interestingly, El-Rouayheb insists that Islamic moralist scholars are hypocrites or not nearly as pure as they claim to be, given how they discreetly and, in some cases, openly express same-sex sensual love through poems and books.¹⁷ In summary, the ideas discussed above may be symmetrically integrated to better comprehend the collective tolerance for Boko Haram sexual fluidity. To put it in another way, the rationale for sexual fluidity might be the consequence of norm re-construction and norm mixing such as syncretism, hypocrisy, or a combination of these causes.

The study contributes to the growing conversation about gender, sexuality, and terrorism through the perspective of queer theory, as well as the gendered and sexual harms perpetrated by Islamic terrorist groups on male sexual assault victims. It also advances the discussion of gender variations in male and female sexual fluidity. It supports queer theory's concepts about social production, control, and human sexuality's constitutive character.

Furthermore, Puar and Amit stated that "Sexuality is central to the creation of certain knowledge of terrorism."¹⁸ It is expected that, as a result of this study, terrorism scholars will consider using the critical lens of queer theory to examine existing hegemonic ideas on gender, sexuality, and terrorism in ways that demonstrate the underlying variety and fluidity of human sexuality. Studying terrorist groups' sexual identities would indicate their capacity to inflict various sexual or gendered harms. It will also help with the creation of effective victim policy interventions. Moreover, queer theory might also help break down preexisting gender and sexual stereotypes resulting from new studies or concepts regarding LGBTQ+ sexualities and experiences among counter-terrorism security professionals, as well as LGBTQ+ people's experiences in terrorism-affected areas.

Gender, Sexuality and Terrorism

In recent conversations within academic and policy circles, there has been renewed focus on the gendered and sexual dynamics of terrorism. Nonetheless, feminist IR scholars contend that these debates are yet to be fully explored and are thus under-theorized. Regarding the debates on gender and terrorism, scholars such as Banks argue that the popularly held beliefs of the terrorist as a male and gender stereotypes influenced how gender was glossed over in the historical analysis of the four waves of terrorism. There has been documented evidence of women's involvement as combatants in terrorist acts. Among them are Ulrike Meinhof, who co-founded the Red Army Faction in the 1970s, Vera Zasulich, a key figure of the *Narodnaya Volya*-a Russian terrorist organizations, and Fanny Kaplan, a member of the Bolshevik Socialist Revolutionary party.¹⁹ Even amongst contemporary terrorist groups, women play several roles ranging from being active perpetrators to providing other forms of support.²⁰ However, terrorism studies have been largely silent about women's role in the analysis of terrorism.²¹ Alexandra Phelan stated that "This is not to say that the relationship between women, gender, and terrorism has been altogether ignored in the field of terrorism studies. Rather, the benefits of gender-sensitive frameworks have not been fully utilized to account for nuances that can enhance our understanding of motivation,

participation and experience amongst women and men in terrorism.”²² Gender labels contribute to the coding of how we understand the motivation of women’s involvement in terrorism. While men are seen as being dedicated to their ideals and goals, women’s impetuses are seen as personal due to gender oppression or that their action is a result of “liberated feminism”.²³ For Audrey Alexander and Serrano-Amaya, many studies on the intersections between gender, sexuality, and terrorism are marginal in mainstream international relations, conflict and transitional justice, and terrorism and political violence studies. At best, these discourses are influenced by Western perspectives and stereotypes and thus misinformed policy outputs or responses to terrorism.²⁴

The Women Peace and Security Agenda was arguably created as a result of public and intellectual discussions and activism over the inclusion of women in global security planning and enforcement (WPS).²⁵ Specifically, the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, 2242, and 2106 underscores the global drive to eradicate gendered harms that women and men faced in conflict and post-conflict settings by integrating women in the making of security policies.²⁶ Feminist scholars and activists see UNSCR 1325 and 2242 as a significant step toward protecting women and girls as well as their representativeness in the global discourse on security.²⁷ Critiques posit that these resolutions have essentialized women²⁸ and failed to deconstruct the intrinsic gender binaries which instrumentalized women for counter-terrorism objectives without considering the unique harms they face.²⁹ Furthermore, they argue that many critical counter-terrorism structures tend to be gender insensitive.³⁰ Similarly, Pearson and Nagarajan argue that irrespective of these UNSCR resolutions, women and men still suffer from gendered security harms while most states continue to implement counter-terrorism interventions in ways that are gender-neutral. Thus, they are unable to effectively address the “complex gendered dynamics of jihadist actors”.³¹

While the focus in terrorism studies has mainly been on women, the gender question as it pertains to men in the context of terrorism has recently emerged to attract traction³², particularly as a counterpoint to the concept that ties terrorism to sexual depravity or underdevelopment. Existing discourses are particularly critical of dominant framings in Western media, academia, and policy circles that link terrorism to sexual perversion, dissatisfaction, or underdevelopment.³³ Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, there have been claims that the pent-up sexual depravity and dissatisfaction among young people in the MENA region explained their engagement in violence and terrorism.³⁴ Similarly, Western media often described Islamic terrorists as psycho-pathological, meaning that they are sexually underdeveloped due to their repressed sexual identities termed as perverse.³⁵ The view about Muslim men’s sexual vulnerability or as “hypertrophied heterosexuals”³⁶ contributed to the sexual torture practices carried out by some U.S. soldiers during the United States-led war in Iraq and Afghanistan. Sexual torture practices that invoke homosexual performances were used to emasculate the masculine or heterosexual status of Muslim male terrorist suspects in order to attack their honored status as “straight”.³⁷ Gilbert Caluya, Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai critiqued the sexual frustration thesis of terrorism and the psycho-pathological argument. For Caluya, sexual frustration thesis invokes and sustains heteronormative or even racist tropes and, more importantly, depoliticizes terrorism. It “treats non-western behavior in the international arena not as a result of rational, political processes, nor even emotive

passions, but as the outcome of the most basic biological processes”.³⁸ For Puar and Rai, the psychopathological argument “enables the practices of normalization, which in today’s context often means an aggressive heterosexual patriotism,” thus informing the use of specific torture tools against a perceived state enemy.³⁹

While the above discourses on the gendered and sexual dynamics of terrorism provide a foundation for this study, my sense is that the field on the intersections of gender, sexuality, and terrorism is yet to be fully developed.⁴⁰ In other words, despite the notion that terrorist groups are perverse or sexually pathological, as well as the criticisms of these arguments, there is a lack of empirical evidence to support claims about terrorist groups’ sexual identities, thus necessitating the need for further empirical and theoretical investigation. Similarly, when it comes to terrorist groups’ gendered harms to males, Pearson and Nagarajan emphasized the paucity of empirical evidence of sexual victimization of men as well as gendered or sexual harms in terrorism-affected countries. As a result, this research fills crucial gaps in the literature, as the notion of sexual fluidity in explaining the sexual behaviors of terrorist groups is much more nuanced and in need of a contextually driven theoretical and empirical studies that account for its complexities. However, I do not consider these sexualities to be “perverse” or “psycho-pathological”, and I do not support the use of sexual torture instruments on anyone. Furthermore, sexuality is not addressed as a primary cause of terrorism in this study. Instead, I use the narratives of male sexual violence victims of Boko Haram to empirically and theoretically investigate the concept of sexual fluidity inside Islamic terrorist organizations or LGBTQ+ terrorists, as well as the kinds of victimization that arise.

Sexual fluidity entails the expression of same-sex or other sexual desires over both short and long term periods, and both heterosexual and homosexuals can be sexually fluid. There is no clear-cut way of measuring people’s propensity for sexual fluidity or its occurrence in different contexts. However, it can be indirectly assessed through the following three ways: “(1) nonexclusive (i.e. bisexual) sexual attractions, (2) change in sexual attractions over time, and (3) inconsistencies among sexual attraction, behavior, and identity.”⁴¹ Interestingly, while abundant research have examined sexual fluidity, gender differences in sexual fluidity are regarded as one of the most critical yet unanswered questions.⁴² Existing conclusions were that sexual fluidity is more common in women than in men.⁴³ Recent works have begun to contest this observation.⁴⁴ Thus, in a way, this study also contributes to this conversation on the gender differences in sexual fluidity, as it draws from queer theory and empirical evidence of the socio-sexual life of male Boko Haram terrorist groups in the Lake Chad region. To the best of the author’s knowledge, studies utilizing queer theory and original data to interrogate the intersections between sexuality and terrorism are few and far between. Hence, this study provides a theoretical lens that aids in sustaining the dialogue on the emerging field on the gendered and sexual dynamics of terrorism. It contributes to the debate of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) against men by highlighting how heteronormative narratives often silence sexually violated men and influence legal and policy vacuum and dearth of humanitarian interventions for victims of same-sex violence in conflict and post-conflict settings. Studying sexual fluidity or LGBTQ+ terrorists through the lens of queer theory can produce counter-hegemonic theorizations or interrogate gender stereotypes, heteronormative narratives and fixed

binary frames. It has the potentials of birthing new knowledge, the emergence of concepts and methodological designs that would advance the understanding of the intricacies within jihadist terrorist groups.

Queer Theory

Queer theory is rooted in the poststructuralist critical approach to understanding the history of human sexuality, particularly in the canonical works of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Judith Butler, Eve Sedgwick.⁴⁵ Queer theory explores and contests the dominant binary categorization of gender, sexuality or heterosexual hegemony of heteronormative societies. It contends that sexual and gender tropes result from social-cultural and discursive logic or a collective acceptance of the constitutive nature of human sexuality. Thus, it debunks the idea of sexuality or gender as the conclusion of scientific ontology or epistemology. Foucault challenges the notion about silence on sexuality and contends that historically the medico, juridical, and political structures produce, regulate and sustain the construction of homosexuality as perverse. Thus, the configuration of acceptable sexual identity is not a natural phenomenon; rather, it was manufactured.⁴⁶

Similarly, in contesting the dominant binary frames of homosexuality and heterosexuality Ki Namaste invoked Derrida's Logic of Supplementarity to argue that heterosexuality can only be described in contrast to what it is not, as making sense of the former has to be seen in opposition to the later.⁴⁷ Thus, the idea of heterosexual hegemony is misleading, as meanings are interdependent. Hence, the creation of differences, categories, and privileges is influenced by social, cultural norms, and interpretations. Furthermore, Namaste contends that "queer theory recognizes the impossibility of moving outside the current conceptions of sexuality. We cannot assert ourselves to be entirely outside the heterosexuality, nor entirely inside, because each of these terms achieves its meanings in relation to the other."⁴⁸ Therefore, queer theory deconstructs the idea of heterosexual hegemony by revealing its vulnerability, as heterosexuality continuously amplifies itself, revealing its insecurities.⁴⁹ Furthermore, queer theory deviates from extant LGBTQ+ assumptions. It asserts that many LBGTI theorists focus on the binary frames of gender and sexuality, thus reinforcing the minority status of homosexuality.⁵⁰ Queer theory underscores the need to move beyond the obsession of boundaries on sexual identities, or the quest to be assimilated into the discourses of sexual acceptability, but to reflect over the formation, purpose of these identities, and more importantly to contest it.⁵¹ Therefore, the theory promotes a more flexible conception of gender and sexuality.⁵² Drawing from the works of Foucault and Butler, Seth et al. assert that "by examining the various understandings, both culturally and historically, of same-sex and opposite-sex desires, queer theory explores how these relationships are a product of their time and place and the entrenched power structures that shape these understandings"⁵³

However, queer theory has faced some criticisms over the years. First, queer theorist has enabled us to understand the significance of texts which is the theory's primary approach. But queer theory has not been able to fully move past textual descriptions to capture the lived experiences of individuals. This situation underscores the

uncertainty of their sexual identities in the real world, thereby requiring the “need to look at how identities are constituted in the cultural practices of everyday life”.⁵⁴ Second, queer theories that capture the experiences of queers in the real world have been criticized of privileging gay white male identities relative to people of color such as male, female, and transgender individuals.⁵⁵ Similarly, there have been arguments that while queer theory contests the hegemonic binary of hetero/homosexuality, it is silent on other sexual identities that fall outside this binary,⁵⁶ particularly bisexual identity. Thus, Callis stated that coding bisexuality into queer theory would advance analytical frameworks of “medicalization, speciation and reverse discourses”.⁵⁷ It would reinforce Butler’s claim of gender as performative.⁵⁸ Hence, queer theorist is admonished to also focus on issues relating to intersectionality and power.⁵⁹

In addressing these gaps, this study moves beyond textual discourses. Furthermore, the current study brings into the literature on queer theory the experiences of black Africans and their sexual identities beyond the binary of homo/heterosexual identities to include bisexuality. By so doing, it moves beyond the emphasis on white gay male identity. Importantly, this study contributes to terrorism studies by providing a critical theoretical lens that disrupts existing knowledge or paradigms around gender, sexuality, and terrorism. It takes an ontological position that challenges dominant normativity and queers terrorism studies and security studies more broadly. Thus, the study raises prospects for a new direction in the studies of terrorism, security, conflict, and war more broadly.

Contextual Background: Terrorism, Sexual Violence in the Lake Chad Basin

Despite global and regional efforts to curb terrorism in Africa, the Lake Chad Basin, which comprises Nigeria, Chad, Niger, and Cameroon, has been enmeshed in violence by jihadist terrorist groups such as Boko Haram, the Islamic State of West African Province (ISWAP). These terrorist groups continue to carry out attacks and have made Nigeria’s northeast region their operational headquarter. Southeast Niger, Chad, Mali, and Northern Cameroon, which were once their safe refuge against Nigeria counter-terrorism operations, have also seen various forms of violent attacks. The Lake Chad Basin is particularly attractive to terrorist groups due to the rich agriculture, pastoralism, fishing, and farming. Since 2014 the activities of terrorist groups have faced resistance from Chad and Mali who were initially reticent, considering it as Nigeria’s problem. Today, the governments of these countries have militarized the Lake Chad Basin.⁶⁰ However, despite the counter-terrorism expenditure and efforts of these countries to curb terrorism under the rubric of the revised Multi-national Joint Task Force, the violent activities of jihadist terrorists continue to rise and spread⁶¹, thereby negatively affecting their economic, socio-political, and security infrastructures.

Sexual violence on women and girls is one of the patterns of these terrorist groups. Women and girls are kidnapped and used as sexual slaves. Many are forced into marriages with terrorist members used as labor or sold. ReliefWeb reported that “in Cameroon women and girls make up the majority of 1,000 persons adopted by Boko Haram since 2014”.⁶² In Nigeria, the figure of survivors of sexual violence stood at

7,000.⁶³ Victims are forced to marry their abusers while parents who can no longer cater for a large number of children due to their economic condition, forced their young girls into marriages. For instance, “In Diffa region in Niger, a 2016 survey conducted by DRC found the prevalence of forced marriages in 26 out of 42 accessed sites and early marriage in 21”. In Chad, traditional leaders handle sexual violence issues and often have favored perpetrators by forcing them to marry their victims. Thus, there is usually no justice for victims.⁶⁴ Furthermore, many of these women and girls abducted by terrorist groups are stigmatized and rejected by their families and communities. Many are called derogatory names such as “Sambisa women” and BH wives, which reinforced the stigma and social exclusion thereby frustrating the re-integration process. Many of these socially excluded women are forced into the sex trade to survive.⁶⁵

While much emphasis has been paid to women and girls, men and boys have been overlooked in discussions about sexual victimization in the context of terrorism and in the Lake Chad region.⁶⁶ Men are frequently seen as terrorist perpetrators or terrorist foot soldiers whereas women and girls are viewed as victims of sexual violence. These gender stereotypes have affected how we think about Islamic terrorists’ gendered and sexual-based violence, as well as how we make sense of the forms of victimization. In other words, the perspective that men and boys may be victims of sexual violence by Boko Haram in the same way that women and girls can is still being debated, a scenario that Pearson and Nagarajan ascribe to a lack of empirical data.⁶⁷ I believe that, among other things, the absence of attention on males as victims may be attributed to the heteronormative character of the societies that make up the Lake Chad Basin, where homosexuality is considered aberrant, even too bizarre to discuss.⁶⁸ The argument by Pearson and Nagarajan, as well as my thoughts, highlight the need of researching the sexual fluidity of jihadist terrorist groups in the Lake Chad area. To do so, I use survivors’ stories as well as security agents’ and NGO workers’ testimonies to show that the Boko Haram terrorist groups are not only interested in women and girls for sexual pleasures but also have same-sex inclinations that they express through sexual violence against men and boys.

Methods

The study adopted a phenomenological case study design, as it used the lived experiences of sexually violated victims to examine the sexual behaviors of Islamic or jihadist terrorist groups in the Lake Chad region.⁶⁹ In other words, how victims make sense of their experiences is the basis for understanding the case. This approach provides opportunities to explore contextual issues that can enable us to imagine the sexual identities of Islamic terrorist groups beyond heteronormative tropes. This is in line with Chris Dolan, Maria Eriksson Baaz and Maria Stern, Phillip Schulz and Helen Touquet proposition on the use of “victim-centered” approach to articulate and theorize the motivations for conflict-related sexual violence.⁷⁰ The study was conducted in Borno and Adamawa States in the northeastern part of Nigeria. These locations were chosen as they are considered the operational headquarters of jihadist terrorist groups

in the Lake Chad Basin. Interviews were also done in Abuja and Lagos, which house the security agencies' and NGOs' headquarters in Nigeria.

This study drew from an original dataset made up of 31 participants who were purposively selected based on their experiences as either survivors or positions with respect to the care and protection of male survivors of sexual violence and roles in terrorism affected communities. This study used ten male survivors' interview responses. Ten gender-based NGO workers supporting sexual violence victims of Boko Haram (BH), three security operatives, who are at the frontline of terrorist violence, and a community leader were purposively selected. Moreover, NGOs were selected because of their capacity building, technical assistance, and advocacy on sexual and gender-based violence in the North-east. Also, security agents were selected due to their experiences in counter-terrorism operations in the North-east.

Interview Procedure

A preliminary study was conducted in 2019. This aided in getting a better perspective of the issue and the reframing of the research instruments. Before the main fieldwork, the researcher sought for and was granted ethical approval by the National Health Research Ethics Committee, Department of Health Planning, Research and Statistics, Federal Ministry of Health, Abuja, Nigeria in October 2020. The author worked with gender-based NGOs that provide support to the survivors so as to access them and then provide psychosocial counseling after the interviews. After receiving verbal consent from the respondents, each interview lasted between 5 and 65 min, and the interviews of survivors/victims were audio-recorded in Hausa (the primary language spoken by the participants). The transcripts of the interviews were provided by four experienced translators and transcribers who are native Hausa speakers. A couple of the responders' remarks were rewritten for clarity and readability. The researcher used labels such as "Survivor 1–10" throughout the text to protect survivors' anonymity. For other categories of respondents, the nature of their work was used to label them. The questions posed to survivors include experiences of CRSV; their perpetrators; how they made sense of their perpetrators' motives; reporting of their experiences to family members or security agents; and the psycho-social and physical impact of CRSV. NGO workers, community leaders, and security agents were asked their views on sexual violence in the northeast: the roles they played in resolving it; the challenges; who the perpetrators were and their motives; reportage of CRSV; and the psychological, socio, legal and physical effects on victims. Secondary data were sourced from reports of international, local and NGOs, newspaper reports on sexual violence in the northeast and academic literature.

Data Analysis

The interviews were coded thematically to reflect the study's key objectives: examining the sexual fluidity amongst Boko Haram members and by so doing contesting gender stereotypes and heteronormative narratives of societies in the Lake Chad, the impact of sexual violence on victims, and its socio-political implications. The researcher used

the secondary data to triangulate the findings of the empirical data derived from interviews.

Queering Terrorism in the Lake Chad Region

The purpose of this section is to explore terrorists' reasons for sexual violence. Two main concerns that undermine heteronormative socio-cultural norms in Lake Chad are highlighted in the empirical material. The first argument indicates that Islamic terrorist organizations abduct both sexes for sexual pleasure in the Lake Chad Basin. Men and boys are groomed to become terrorist foot soldiers even when kidnapped, and they perform dual roles as warriors and sexual pleasure instruments. The investigation of how victims make meaning of their assailants' motivations was carried out in the second issue, which builds on the first. Their overwhelming answers indicating terrorists' expression of sexual pleasures during and after rape confirm and reassert the idea that sexual satisfaction is a driver for CRSV against men.⁷¹ Third, when it comes to Boko Haram aggressive sexual behavior, it's critical to examine the gendered and sexual harms on their victims as well as the security implications.

The Sexed Story: Combatant and Sexual Objects

In studies on the explanations of wartime rape of men, the predominant narrative is centered on "the gendered story" or sex as a weapon of war argument. Recently, scholars have termed this view reductionist, as it simplifies the complex and complicated nature of CRSV of men and further contends that CRSV about power, domination as well as for sexual pleasures or what is known as "the sexed story".⁷²

A similar trend is being observed in the context of terrorism. Specifically, many of the survivors gave accounts about how terrorist groups kidnapped them to serve the dual roles as fighters and sexual tools. However, others stated that they were kept solely for pleasure. For instance, a female survivor, who is a sister to one of the male survivors narrated that some kidnapped victims of both sexes were separated and kept where terrorist members come to rape them: "They took many young girls and small boys; we became their sex objects. They raped us three to four times daily without any protections."⁷³ Furthermore, the nine men or boys recounted how they were abducted by terrorist groups and raped repeatedly.⁷⁴ Male survivors were raped either at night or taken to secluded places. Terrorists threatened to kill any survivor that resisted rape. For instance, Survivor 2 stated thus:

"on a very fateful day, we were all home with our parents when Boko Haram attacked our community. I was abducted along with my brother and a neighbour. When we got to their base, we were set aside and our job is to serve them sexually. A Boko Haram member took me to a separate room and undressed me. I was scared, and I told him I couldn't do it. He knocked me and cracked his gun threatening to kill me. I got scared and gave in. He penetrated me through my anus."⁷⁵

Survivor 4 shared similar experience:

“Boko Haram abducted about twenty of us and took us to the Sambisa forest. I stayed there with them for about three years. During my stay I was molested and abused sexually; they taught me how to shoot guns. They sexually abused me for three years.”⁷⁶

Remarkably, some of the survivors were not kidnapped but lured into terrorist camps by relatives and community preachers. From the interaction with the survivors, it appears that their parents or legal guardian were, at the time, oblivious of the real intention of their relatives and preachers, as they were told that their children were taken to Islamic schools. Survivor 8 narrated his experiences:

“My uncle told my father that I am grown and not supposed to live with him. He told my father that he wants to take me to an Islamic school. That was how he took me to Boko Haram. I thought it was really an Islamic school, but it wasn't. We were trained how to shoot guns and all manners of things. During my stay, I was sexually molested and abused by other members.”⁷⁷

Likewise, survivor 9 stated thus:

“we were seated in Duhu district in Madagali Local government Area, Adamawa State. A man came and told my father that we are not supposed to live in sin. He said there is a religion which is the right one. We are six from my father's side and he said all of us should follow them. We followed them and the preacher took us to Sambisa forest near Gwoza. Some other big men of my age are trained on how to shoot guns and taught some kind of religion. During this period, I was repeatedly raped.”⁷⁸

To corroborate the survivors' accounts, NGO workers, security agents, and a community leader confirmed that the men or boys kidnapped by terrorist groups double as combatants and sexual objects.⁷⁹ For instance, a gender-based NGO and a peace-building and development worker stated thus: “They kidnap and recruit men to serve as their army. Also, they keep these men in a secluded place, and use them when they want to satisfy their sexual desire; we believe they do it just for sexual pleasure.”⁸⁰

The accounts of survivors disrupt existing scripts that sex between men in conflict and post-conflict is strategic and that it is done in the public view to emasculate and homosexualize, subdue and humiliate male victims.⁸¹ The quotes above show that male survivors were either violated in the privacy of the night or taken to secluded areas to be raped. This suggests that the perpetrator's motive is partly for sexual pleasure, and not for strategic objectives, even though there is an element of power involved whenever the victims do not consent to the act. The above highlight the terrorists' sexual preferences. Schulz and Touquet stated that in the context of prolonged civil war, while perpetrators carry out sexual violence privately, it does not tell us about the perpetrator's sexual orientation.⁸² In the case of terrorist organizations in Lake Chad, their propensity for both opposite sex and same-sex violence, as well as the number of times or long periods during which they sexually violated men or boys, reflects their fluid sexual tendency, which includes what we know in the Western lexicon as gay and bisexual orientations. An NGO worker who has worked with ex-combatants confirmed the above, claiming that the terrorists were having same-sex

relationships. They were able to express their sexual inclinations as a result of their membership in Boko Haram: "I can tell you, the Boko-Harams are perpetrators number one... they take it as an opportunity for them to enjoy themselves because they are already into the act (of homosexuality/bisexuality)."⁸³ The preceding arguments advances the claims by Chris Dolan, Maria Eriksson Baaz and Maria Stern when they pondered over questions raised by the participants of their study on wartime sexual violence: "can you really ejaculate (which the perpetrators do) unless you feel desire?" They conclude that there is a convergence of motivations for CRSV where violence, domination, and sexual gratification are all integral components.⁸⁴ As a result, despite the availability of the female gender, the evidence of a consistent preference for male rape by terrorists suggests that offenders' sexual fluidity is difficult to dispute.

"They Groan with Happiness, While I Cry in Pain and Sadness": Making Sense of Sexual Violence Victimizations

Many of the survivors recounted how the perpetrators expressed happiness and sexual satisfaction during and after rape acts. For instance, survivors 2, 4, 5 and 3 described their experiences thus: "They do (enjoy) themselves, you can see them jubilating."⁸⁵ Survivor 4 stated thus: "They do enjoy themselves, they groan with happiness while I cry in pain and sadness."⁸⁶ Survivor 5 added that: "they do it for many reasons, and they enjoy it because you can see it from their reactions."⁸⁷ Survivor 3 also stated thus: "I think they do it for some worldly pleasures and to satisfy their desire."⁸⁸

Interestingly, Survivor 9 tried to make sense of the violent sexual act in the light of their religious norms he believed he shared with the terrorists, where same-sex is forbidden and is a punishable offense under Islam. He explains further:

"First time it happened to me was around 11 p.m., and I was sleeping when I heard someone touching me. I wasn't scared. He told me he liked my skin. The following night he repeated it, so I went to report him to our *Amir* (leader). The following night they came together with the leader and they took me to the riverside and threatened me (with a gun) to pull my trouser. The gun was on my forehead, and I obeyed for fear of getting shot and they raped me."⁸⁹

With this, it can be deduced that members of the Islamic terrorist groups do not only enjoy same-sex violence but there is a collective awareness, approval and participation in it. Thus, while heteronormativity and homophobia have often been projected to describe sexually acceptable and forbidden practices amongst terrorists, the acceptability or best toleration of same-sex violence in the Lake Chad region problematizes the preexisting notions. Thus, have terrorist groups in the Lake Chad reconstituted the socio-norms of acceptable sexual practices?

Despite Islamic teachings prohibiting homosexuality, a recurrent thread that runs across survivors' and victims' narratives and experiences within Islamic terrorist camps is that same-sex behaviors are a common social-sexual norm, as survivors recount being raped throughout their captivity in terrorist camps. For instance, Survivor 2 stated: "when we got to their camps we were set aside and our job is to serve them sexually. Whenever they are aroused they pick any one of us to quench their desire"⁹⁰. Also, Survivor 4 stated "they sexually abused me for three years."⁹¹ Similarly, Survivor

7 stated that my four months stay with them was devastating as I was raped, I was just there as a sex object".⁹² The sexual fluid behaviors within the Islamic terrorist resonates El- Rouayheb, Murray and Roscoe, Dunne, Schneider, Kligerman, and Hunt arguments about the historical, textual and anthropological accounts of re-constitutiveness of same-sex practices within Islam. For instance, Dune stated that in pre-Islamic and Islamic times in the Middle East there are evidences in classical writings, poetry, and medical texts or records of the acceptability of homosexual practices which gradually was prohibited in the Quran and the Hadith.⁹³ Also, within medieval medical texts such as the "Treatise on the Hidden Illness" written by Ar-Razi, the epistemologies represent the existence of sexual variants believed to have "natural illness" which is predominant among the elites. However, Ar-Razi's successors—Ibn Sina and Ibn Hubal re-interpreted homosexuals outside of medical terms or Ar-Razi genetic or natural illness thesis. They claimed that it was a social issue and that those engaged in it were morally bankrupts.⁹⁴ The reconstitution of homosexuality and bisexuality as perverse, offensive, and punishable in the Quran was drawn from the biblical story of Lot and his people whom God destroyed for practising sodomy.⁹⁵ According to Dunne, the Hadith and Akhbar, which define the principle of sexual morality, resulted from five centuries of construction and reproduction of sexual purity by religious scholars from the middle class.⁹⁶ Within these periods, there were changes in the severity of punishments within Muslim communities.⁹⁷ These changes in punishment were often aimed at serving political ends such as imbuing fear and superiority, particularly in conquered territories, where Islam had been imposed.⁹⁸ Dunne stated that these changes were evident in "the failure of the Quran to specify a punishment for sodomy (which) left considerable room for flexibility, bargaining, and accommodation. Thus, some religious authorities authorized sexual intercourse with non-Muslims males, thereby sanctioning homosexual practices among slaves".⁹⁹

Thus, the historical evidence of the trajectory of same-sex activities in Islam and the narratives of survivors highlight how the expression of various sexual identities is once rejected, accepted, and tolerated. This is reflected in the case of Survivor 9, who believed that same-sex practises were forbidden in Islam and thus reported male sexual advances to an Islamic terrorist leader, only to be raped by the same leader and other members. The same observation can be made for survivors who recount being explicitly kept for sexual satisfaction for many years or months. When Islamic terrorist organizations first appeared in the Lake Chad area, they rejected current socio-legal norms, arguing that they had been westernized and that real Muslims needed to go back to old translations and literal interpretations of sacred scriptures. As a result, it may be concluded that the rejected ideas and legal system, as well as norms on acceptable or tolerable sexual activities, were reconstituted and replaced. In other words, based on my ethnographic field accounts, I am arguing that Boko Haram re-constituted the socio-cultural norms on sexuality. I foreground my argument in the discursive accounts of survivors who recounted being separated or kept for sexual pleasure, which are reiterative of historical, literary, textual and anthropological accounts of Islam's toleration of fluid sexual expressions among captured male slaves¹⁰⁰ and the existence of same-sex love by the elite social class including religious scholars.¹⁰¹ Related to this is the ambiguity in the sacred texts regarding punishment for sodomy, as well as the history of religious clerics' toleration or ignoring of homosexual practices.

Furthermore, given the historical prevalence of same-sex subculture in northern Nigeria and bordering Chad and Niger, another explanation is that it is just a case of syncretism within Boko Haram.¹⁰² According to study participants, many of the perpetrators who raped men or boys had been doing so for a long time, and their power over the men or boys provided them with the leverage to continue unabated. In the words of a NGO worker: “some of them had been involved in the act of homosexuality”.¹⁰³ This blending of traditional and Islamic norms is not a new issue; following Usman Dan Fodio’s religious revivalism, which converted northern Nigeria and neighboring nations to Islam, some individuals and leaders continued to practise old religions or blended Islam with traditional worships and practices.¹⁰⁴ As a result, I argue that Boko Haram’s expressions of sexual fluidity reflect the historical existence of a same-sex subculture in Lake Chad. Though northern Nigeria and the Lake Chad areas are typically seen as culturally patriarchal and heteronormative,¹⁰⁵ these are just hallmarks of Islamic theological reforms which do not capture the full history of the existence of same-sex cultures.¹⁰⁶ According to Pierce, gender and sexual identities have always been “contingent and ambiguous” in parts of Lake Chad, as they are everywhere else in the globe. Various sorts of non-normative sexuality are also negotiated inside well-developed subcultures and systems of thought.¹⁰⁷ For instance, *Yan Daudu* refers to effeminate men who are regarded to have resisted masculinist conventions within the same-sex subculture. These men dressed as women, used female pronouns, and had same-sex relationships. There’s also the *Yan Kefi*, which refers to women who have sex with other women or lesbians, and the *Masu Harka*, which refers to persons who are thought to be heterosexual yet participate in same-sex behavior. Among these, the *Yan Daudu* is the most apparent in society and one of the main targets of religious reformers.¹⁰⁸ Regardless, normative and non-normative sexuality coexist and are mutually constitutive. This exemplifies queer theorists’ claim that what is deemed outside is entirely produced within. Secrecy, on the other hand, facilitates the co-constrictiveness of both acceptable and non-acceptable sexuality.¹⁰⁹ Pierce stated that secrecy is more than just avoiding exposing patterns of behavior that violate widely accepted moral norms and ensuring that others are unaware of it. Being discreet, avoiding engaging in conflicts that could cause terrible realities to be talked out too openly and comporting oneself in a modest, controlled fashion are all examples of good behavior in northern Nigeria.¹¹⁰ The perceived ignorance of society does not mean “their absolute lack of awareness of same-sex activities; rather, it stems from their ability not to admit knowledge of specific instances of it. The knowledge in question is not cognitive but behavioral”.¹¹¹ The foregoing reflects victims’ stories of sexual assault occurring in the dead of night or in remote locations. With terrorist groups in Lake Chad, secrecy is the moral rule under which fluid sexuality is allowed or even welcomed. In some respects, this explains Survivor 9’s experience of being gang raped by both members and leaders after reporting sexual advances by a male member of the group, which he believed was against Islam. As a result, I argue members may have thought that he had violated the rule of secrecy by reporting same-sex flirtation and so ought to be punished or, at the very least, assimilated.

The concept of hypocrisy can aid our understanding of Boko Haram’s tolerance of same-sex violence. The phenomenon of terrorist organizations preaching what they do not practise is well-documented in the literature. Terrorist leaders may profess aversion

or rejection of political and religious leaders' activities, as well as socio-cultural and legal principles, but they are imbricated in them in practise. According to Gunaratna, "Al-Qaeda corrupts, misrepresents, or misinterprets the Koranic text in order to galvanize the spirit of its adherents."¹¹² This is in line with Mamdani's claim that political identities are not reducible to cultural identities. Terrorist organizations arose from secular elite, not from traditional religious currents. In other words, Osama bin Laden is a political strategist who uses religious texts and concepts to attract certain groups in order to achieve his political objectives.¹¹³ Similarly, Osama bin Ladin's rhetoric, according to Hellmich, encourages his followers to commit heinous acts of destruction while believing they are doing God's will by appealing to powerful images encoded in the Muslim community's shared awareness and by bringing together his political objectives through Islamic teachings.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, based on the fact that they express sensual love through poetry and novels, sometimes subtly and at other times outright, Rouayheb asserts that Islamic moralist intellectuals are hypocrites, or at least not nearly as pure as they profess to be.¹¹⁵ In the context of Nigeria, Mohammed Yusuf, Boko Haram's first leader, was accused of being a hypocrite for utilizing modern technologies and charms or talismans despite the group's anti-modern and ultra-fundamentalist views in the early days.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, survivors' accounts of how sexual violence acts by both leaders and members of Islamic terrorist groups were carried out in secret, either at night, in separate rooms, or in secluded locations, and how some of the men or boys were threatened with a gun before being raped highlight the groups' efforts to keep same-sex behavior from becoming public knowledge. The cover-up will keep allegations of hypocrisy at bay. As a result, the notion of hypocrisy by Boko Haram may also explain its tolerance, if not permissibility, of same-sex violence against kidnapped men and boys. Also, bringing up the instance of Survivor 9, who was gang raped after reporting sexual advances by members, might be a tactic to keep him from speaking out about or disclosing the group's hypocrisy when it comes to religious observance.

In summary, the aforementioned arguments for sexual fluidity among terrorist organizations in Lake Chad may be symmetrically combined to elucidate the group's tolerance for sexual fluidity. To put it more simply, the explanation for sexual fluidity might be the result of socio-cultural norm reconstruction, or norm blending such as syncretism and hypocrisy, or a combination of these factors. The next section discusses male gendered or sexual harms and their ramifications.

Trauma Bonding: The Effects of Male Sexual Violence and Its Implications

It is crucial to examine the harms terrorist sexual behavior poses to the victims, governments' responses in the region, and its implications. First, all of the survivors described the physical, psychological, and social harms they faced during their experiences. These include anger, feelings of gender displacement, and social stigma. Four survivors reported the following when they were asked the effects of their experiences. Survivor 2 stated thus: "I am just scared of men entirely. I am sick and tired of this life. I feel pained and depressed whenever I think of it."¹¹⁷ Survivor 10 added: "I feel devastated up till date. I find it difficult to eat and mingle with men. It is a very sad experience."¹¹⁸ For Survivor 7, "It has affected me, deep inside me. I feel I have low

self-esteem. I feel I am a woman in a male body.”¹¹⁹ Survivor 9 also reported that: “I no longer feel like a man. I feel belittled.”¹²⁰ These experiences are consistent with existing works on the physical and psycho-social effects of wartime sexual violence on men and boys.¹²¹

However, despite the evidential arguments that men and boys are also sexually victimized in conflict and post-conflict settings, there are little or no comprehensive policies, institutional, health-related or psychosocial interventions available to male victims.¹²² This is marked by the lack of efforts to recognize and support male victims of sexual violence by terrorist groups in the Lake Chad Basin. For instance, an NGO worker stated that their organizations do not have programs for male sexual violence victims and was surprised during a field operation where someone raised the issues of male rape during an outreach on women and girls. She further stated thus: “I’m not sure concrete steps were taken by the government and aid agencies toward addressing those issues.”¹²³ Similarly, a security agent stated that government ignores the issue of male rape except when a case is all over the media. “Those that do not come to their notice, the government will not address it.”¹²⁴ This does not suggest that there are no efforts at all. However, these interventions are at best negligible compared to the level of support given to the female. We can see this in the lack of policies, laws, socio-cultural, and health-related programs that comprehensively address the gendered effects of terrorism and counter-terrorism in the Lake Chad Basin.¹²⁵ The reasons for the inattention are not far-fetched, as debates and supports of male victims would be seen as distorting heteronormative paradigms, or as Onyango and Hampanda stated that it “undermines the social constructions of masculinity”.¹²⁶ Countries that make up Lake Chad Basin are known for their hyper-masculinity, heteronormativity, and collective homophobia, which mirror their socio-political and legal structures. These intrinsic features impede any efforts at recognizing same-sex violence.^{127,128}

The governments’ (in)actions have potential security implications, as silenced victims could potentially express the trauma in various anti-social ways, part of which may include trauma bonding. Trauma bonding, also known as Stockholm Syndrome, entails forming emotional bonds between abused victims and the abusers. The trauma experienced by male victims of sexual violence, as a result of government laxity and community stigma, and hostility toward victims could potentially influence them into forming emotional bonds with their perpetrators, particularly those that were captive for years. Trauma bonding is mediated by the type of comfort that captivity provides for victims such as food and security despite being against the sexual abuse. Three survivors stated that they were treated well and protected in the Boko Haram’s camps relative to the Internally Displaced Persons’ camps. Specifically, they stated that they ate chicken, cow meat, fresh milk and lived like kings in camps. However, they said the only thing they hated about Boko Haram was the sexual violence. If the opportunity of meeting the terrorist groups presents itself, they will go back to them.¹²⁹ This has implications for counter-terrorism operations; such emotional bond could influence them to seek a return to the terrorist groups, serve as spies, and provide intelligence for terrorists on the military’s activities or movements. Thus, the importance of recognizing and comprehensively addressing the gendered harms caused by terrorist groups is now expedient.

Conclusion: Queer Theory and Terrorism Studies

Queer theorists like Butler and Sedgwick warned us against oversimplifying the gender and sexuality discourses because it restricts the grasp of the fluid character of human sexual identities.¹³⁰ I have sought to illustrate in this study the co-existence, co-constitutiveness, or tolerance of sexual fluidity inside the Boko Haram group in Lake Chad by drawing on the discursive accounts of survivors, NGO workers, and security officers. Furthermore, I argue that without the empirical evidence¹³¹, the Western media and scholarly and public representation of terrorists' sexuality as disordered and undeveloped, as well as later criticisms of these public impressions,¹³² did not allow for a deeper contemplation of terrorist groups' sexuality. I investigated these existing issues in the light of these gaps. I propose that, based on historical precedents on the creation and reconstitution of sexual norms, terrorist organizations in the Lake Chad area have replicated standards of acceptable or sufferable sexual behaviors known today as homosexuality and bisexuality. The terrorist groups' support for old translations of sacred texts may have shown the sacred texts history of vagueness in prescribing penalty for sodomy, allowing for malleability, negotiation, and tolerance of a variety of sexual behaviors. I also suggested that Boko Haram's re-creation of socio-cultural norms might be considered syncretic, given the existence of a same-sex subculture in northern Nigeria and the presence of sexual minorities in border countries like Chad and Niger. Another rationale for the groups' tolerance of sexual fluidity might be a matter of hypocrisy, which the groups have been accused of from their inception. Furthermore, all of these variables may contribute to the central explanation of Boko Haram's tolerance for sexual flexibility. As a result, this research contributes to current discussions about fluidity in human sexual experiences, and it sheds further light on a fundamental topic in the area that concerns gender differences in sexual fluidity.¹³³

Importantly, the paper also contributes to the emerging discourse on gender, sexuality, and terrorism through the lens of queer theory.¹³⁴ It bolsters queer theory's ideas about social production, control, and the constitutive character of human sexuality. As a result of this research, It is anticipated that terrorism scholars would explore using the critical lens of queer theory to question existing hegemonic knowledge on gender and sexuality in ways that highlight the fundamental diversity and fluidity of human sexuality. Studying terrorist groups' sexual identities would reveal a variety of consequences, including terrorists' ability to inflict various sexual or gendered harms. Queer theory may also aid in breaking preexisting gender and sexual stereotypes, thereby generating innovative ideas about LGBTQ+ sexualities and experiences among counter-terrorism security personnel, as well as LGBTQ+ people's experiences in terrorism-affected places. It will also aid in the development of appropriate victim policy interventions. I argue that a sustained dialogue between queer theory and terrorism studies will give birth to new theoretical frameworks, analytical tools, and methodological designs that will facilitate better comprehension of gender, sexuality, and terrorism dynamics.

Notes

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