Gendering Terrorism: Women, Gender, Terrorism and Suicide Bombers

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Abstract

Although terrorism is as old as humanity, recent events around the globe have however shown that the greatest threat to the future of the world today is not nuclear weapons, military coups or any pandemic or endemic diseases but religion and religious differences which have spurned a form of terrorism that seem to surpass two of the greatest tragedies of our modern history; the two World Wars. However, the involvement of women in terrorism and terrorists' organisations has been obfuscated by media and policy makers, making it look as if it is a recent phenomenon when history actually shows that women involvement had been from inception. While this has become problematic and has generated questions about the frequency, importance, uniqueness and meaning of women's terrorist activities, it is becoming very clear that the relationship between women, gender and terrorism cannot be ignored any longer. Questions about the motivations of the women who become active in these organizations have been raised - do they participate on strictly religious, political or personal reasons and which of these are more important as guiding and motivating their decisions? Is the increased in targeted women recruitment through abduction, compulsion or willingness an important variable in understanding this phenomenon? Could there be separate or different explanations for women's involvement in terrorism as opposed to men's? What is therefore the nexus or dimensions of relationship between women, gender and terrorism? These constitute the polemics which this paper seeks to interrogate.

Introduction

Terrorism has been called "propaganda of the deed" (Laqueur, 1999:43 and Hardman, 1987:227) or "propaganda by deed" (Weinberg and Eubank, 2006:3). Of equal importance is that it is seen as the preferred choice of insurgency out of the many means and strategies of insurgence available to both political and religious insurgents. The eventual choice of terrorism over other means or forms of insurgence such as revolution, coup d'etat, guerrilla war and even riots, is a deliberate one and it is preferred solely because of its psychological impact (Agara, 2012). What should be of more concern to us is the appeal which terrorism and terrorist organisations seem to have for youths irrespective of their nationality and gender. Reports are rife in the dailies of young men and women being recruited and seeking to join terrorist groups especially from countries such as Britain, Australia, France and United States of America. What is unknown are hundreds of others who have joined without drawing attention to this fact Africa and the rest of the world.

For contemporary terrorism, four years stood out as watershed. These are 1968, 1979, 1983 and 2001. For instance, it was first in 1968 that Latin American insurgents launched their guerrilla warfare and Palestinians initiated the tactics of terrorism as part of drawing public attention to their cause. It was in 1979 that the Iranian revolution marked the striking success of radical Shi'ite Islamism facilitating the rise of suicide bombings by the traditional glorification of martyrdom, a tradition that had inspired radical Sunni Islamists of Hamas, Al Qaeda and other jihadists and perhaps most recently, the Nigerian Boko Haram. The 1983 suicide bombings in Beirut, especially the two that killed 241 American Marines and 53 French paratroopers, marked a significant development in international terrorism. Of more recent, is the 9/11 (2001), which marked the final evolutionary stage of classical terrorism and which subsequently, gave rise to the most significant counterterrorism operation aimed at evicting the terrorists from their safe haven in Afghanistan.

Of more currency is the battle against ISIS (or as it is now known; IS), al Shabab (Somalia and Kenya) and Boko Haram (Nigeria) which seem to have taken over from al Qaeda, thereby implying the emergence of many 'al-Qaedas' which has made religious terrorism a vast enterprise, "an international movement or franchise operation with like-minded local representatives, loosely connected to a central ideological or motivational base, but advancing their common goal independently of one another" (Hoffman, 2007:2005-2006).

Events around the globe is showing that the greatest threat to the future of the world today is not nuclear weapons, military coups or any pandemic or endemic diseases but religion and religious differences which have spurned a form of terrorism that seem to surpass two of the greatest tragedies of our modern history; the two World Wars, where millions lost their lives. Although the end of the two World Wars had led to the establishment of both the League of Nations and the United Nations respectively, nevertheless, more wars have been fought since the formation of these two bodies, especially the UN, than before its creation. As wars and conflicts continue to ravage our planet, the UN itself along with its purpose and usefulness is under scrutiny. But of major concern to us in this paper are the millions that have also died over the past 200 years under the destructive hand of religious zeal. World history is replete of misplaced and misguided religious passion that has produced such historical monstrosities and atrocities as the Crusaders, the Inquisition, ethnic cleansing and the horror of the Holocaust. This trend has not dissipated but rather has gathered momentum under Islamic motivated terrorism.

Of concern now is the involvement and participation of women in terrorist organizations. Unfortunately, media has drawn the public's attention to this phenomenon as if it is a recent event. In an earlier paper, we (Agara, 2015) have tried to trace the involvement of women in terrorist organizations and terrorism. Their involvement, as Gentry and Sjoberg (2011:58) have equally noted is "not a phenomenon exclusive to the 21st Century. Nor is it limited to Islamist terrorist groups." According to them, women have been documented as been affiliated with the Russian nihilist organization – Narodnaya Vola – in the late 19th century as well as the Socialist Revolutionary Party in the early 20th century. Apart from this, women have also been involved in terrorist attacks carried out by the Shining Path group in Peru, by republican and loyalist insurgent groups in Northern Ireland, the Tamil Tigers of Eelan (Sri Lanka), by the Kurdistan Workers Party (Turkey), Hamas (Palestine), the Zapatista (Mexico), Abu Sayyaf (Philippines), the Taliban (Afghanistan), and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) (Colombia). Women have also been known to assume some form of leadership role in the Baader-Meinhof gang (Germany), the Red Brigade (Italy), Front Line (Prima Linea in Italy), the ETA (Basque Separatist Movement in Spain and France), the Japanese Red Army, the PLO, the Chechen resistance movement, and the Weather Underground (United States).

So throughout history, women have participated in violent uprisings, performing strategic, supportive and even combat roles in a wide range of violent movements (Ness, 2005 and Cunningham, 2003). In Nigeria, the Boko Haram phenomenon has introduced this aspect of militant feminism to the populace. Of all the suicide bombings experienced so far only about two – the Police Headquarters and the Yanyan/Suleja bombings – have been known to have been carried out by male suicide bombers. Today, as Sjoberg, et al (2011:2) have noted, "women's active involvement in militant and terrorist organizations – as support personnel, as logistics personnel, as kinetic resources, as attackers, kidnappers and hijackers and as martyrs – has grown substantially and become a matter of public attention and record across the globe." While this has become problematic and has generated questions about the frequency, importance, uniqueness and meaning of women's terrorist activities, it is becoming very clear that the relationship between women, gender and terrorism cannot be ignored any longer. Questions about the motivations of the women who become active in these organizations are been raised - do they participate on strictly religious, political or personal reasons and which of these are more important as guiding and motivating their decisions? Is the increased in targeted women recruitment through abduction, compulsion or willingness an important variable in understanding this phenomenon? Could there be separate or different explanations for women's involvement in terrorism as opposed to men's? What is therefore the nexus or dimensions of relationship between women, gender and terrorism? These constitute the polemics which this paper seeks to interrogate.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frameworks we intend to use to underpin this perspective which this paper intends to take are derived from the works of Kenneth Burke (1950 & 1966) and Walt Fisher (1989). Both Burke's and Fisher's starting point is the question of motive.

Burke's theory tries to answer what motive is behind a person's words, while Fisher gives the rhetorician a way to evaluate the motives a consumer reads and hears. According to Burke (1950), rhetoric is the art of persuasion or a study of the means available for any given situation. He pointed out that a speaker persuades an audience by the use of stylistic **identifications;** his act of persuasion may be for the purpose of causing the audience to identify with the speaker's interests; and the speaker draws on identification of interests to establish rapport between himself and his audience. So, there is no chance of our keeping apart the meanings of persuasion, identification ('consubstantiality'), and communication (the nature of rhetoric as 'addressed').

Burke (1966) has argued that to understand human behavior, one has to understand human language. The task of the critic then is to judge the motives of rhetoric because the rhetor uses 'terministic screens' to both reflect and deflect different realities. Thus according to Burke (1966:45), "even if any given terminology is a reflection of reality, by its very nature as a terminology; it must be a selection of reality and to this extent, it must function as a deflection of reality." Thus, terministic screens are used by the rhetor to convey a certain agenda or idea to a specific audience. The screens "direct the attention" of the audience "into some channels rather than others." Thus, the rhetor uses terminology that leads an audience to a specific figurative location (reflection) rather than to an unwanted place (deflection). So for Burke, motive becomes the key determinant in rhetorics – why is the audience guided in this direction or in a particular direction?

Applying Fisher's (1989) narrative theory, we are persuaded to argue that stories of women that rely on stereotypes help the public to create a narrative that coheres with its beliefs that women are powerless and are only good in secondary helping and caring jobs. According to Fisher's narrative theory, all communication is about telling a story. Narrations are words and deeds that have a sequence and a meaning for those who live, create or interpret them. In order for a narrative to work, it needs narrative probability and narrative fidelity. Narrative probability means that the story is credible in its sequence and that it makes sense in reality (Fisher, 1989:47). Narrative fidelity means that the story matches the values and beliefs of the audience. If it does, then the audience is more likely to believe the narrative (Fisher, 1989:47). So for Fisher's, by interpreting narratives, one uncovers the motives. For Burke, the analysis of rhetoric uncovers motives. Thus, and for our purpose, Fisher's and Burke's rhetorical theories help us to understand that there are motives behind the narratives that women are incapable, helpless in a man's world and should therefore remain in their traditional roles of mothering and caring. Together, these two theories provide for us a way of conceptualising why the emphasis on the polarity between male and female genders. The image in the eye of the public of women in violent enterprises or who aspire to such positions is one of rebellious, infertile or uncontrollable women. What this implies then is that if the public primarily ascribe certain gender roles (mother and wife) to women, then in order to make sense of these women doing and been involved in what has been ascribed as exclusively male role or occupation, then the public must see them as deviants. The media and society create these narratives in order to maintain narrative fidelity about what it means to be a woman.

Women (Terrorists)

Ebohon (2006:137) has noted that a woman is "the feminine component of the human species who apart from serving as vehicle for nurturing human life is also a producer, a consumer and equally endowed agent for fostering a wholesome political, social and economic development in society." Given this perspective therefore, most societal notion of what it means to be a woman emphasises peacefulness, mothering, caring and interdependence rather than violence. Society's stereotype of the women folk is seen in their being identified by their sex when they are found in professions usually associated with the male folk such as women soldiers, women political leaders, women manager or CEOs, and now even women terrorists. Conversely, those professions usually associated with female folk do not bear the sex prefix. For instance we do not hear of women housekeeper, women teachers or even women nurses. As Sjoberg et al (2011:4) have noted, this is because women are "assumed to belong to these professions rather than the ones that remain at odds with ideal-type notions of what it means to be 'a woman' despite women's participation."

Thus, although norms associated with manliness (bravery, and self-sacrifice) and womanliness (innocence and fragility) are as old as society itself, women's association with violence is seen to "fall outside of these ideal-type understanding of what it means to be a woman" (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007:2). The involvement of women in terrorist activities and violence attacks the sensibilities of the cultural prevalence of society's concepts of femininity which cannot comprehend the notion of women as militants, terrorists or suicide bombers.

This stereotype is the result of transference of Western culture because traditional African societies' history, for instance, is replete of women involvement in wars. In Nigeria, the examples of Moremi (Yoruba), Queen Amina (Hausa/Fulani), Emotan (Benin Kingdom) and Inkpi (Igala Kingdom) are still salient. As Sjoberg and Gentry (2007:14) have noted, the notion of "violent women, whether terrorists, suicide bombers, war criminals, or perpetrators of genocide, interrupt gender stereotypes about women, their role in war, and their role in society more generally. Women who commit proscribed violence are not the peaceful, war-resistant, conservative, virtuous and restrained women that [male] warriors protect from enemies. . . . Instead, these women are a security threat themselves."

Thus, female terrorists and suicide bombers abuse societal sensibilities and interrupts stereotypical perceptions of women as pure, innocent and nonviolent. So wherever they are identified as active participants in a cause or terrorist act, sensationalised media coverage attributes their actions to influence from husband, boyfriends, or generally from the male folk, thereby reifying the doctrine of domination by men instead of attributing their actions to similar motives and factors as those of the men or even to other individual choices. This has therefore deflected policy makers', security forces' and the public's attention to how to handle this ominous development and making it less likely to recognise the capacity of women to be suicide bombers rather than to see this phenomenon as indicating a degree of desperation among terrorist groups. As Alli (2005) has noted, the involvement of women in terrorism has made women more dangerous than men because they have more access to sensitive areas and because their attacks carry more significant shock value.

Scholarly attention has come up with many reasons for women participation in terrorism which imply that they are fundamentally different from men's and therefore their motivations are gendered. Many have tended to link women's participation to something bad that have happened to them such as abuse, rape, use of drug, and loss of loved ones such as brother or husband or child. Still others have argued that women got involved in violence in pursuit of women's liberation (Talbot, 2001, Cunningham, 2007). All these academic and scholarly perspectives have further obfuscate this problem because very few have linked women terrorist activities to political devotion to the cause, despite the fact that this factor featured prominently in explaining why men choose to commit terrorist acts.

Gender (and Terrorism)

Earlier definitions of gender were meant to distinguish between the social and biological differences of men and women. As Nelson and Nelson (2010:80) have noted, gender was "conceptualised as the socially defined roles, attitudes and values which society ascribes as appropriate for one sex or the other." Thus gender marks a difference between the 'sexes' which connotes a biological difference. However, later conceptualisation of gender assumes a broader and sociological connotation. For instance, Eagle and Steffan's (1984) view of gender is tied to power, and so they view it as a social construct based on the assumed power and position that a person possess. By power, they imply the ability which individuals have to make decisions and to behave as they please. On the other hand, Scott (1994) asserts that gender is "a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes." Later, scholars such as Lorber (1994) and Rilley (1999) were to push the concept far beyond the level of individual attributes and rather argue that it defines specific forms of social organisation. It is in this respect that Lorber (1994:13) opines that "gender is a set of social and cultural practices that influence the lives of women and men in society." This makes gender culture specific and constructed through the institutions of the society.

Okunade (2001) has observed that despite its high profile and long usage, the concept of gender is still not always well understood although two types of usage are common; first as synonym for women and second as synonym for biological sex. However, Okunade (2001:1) would prefer that it can merely be described as a social construct of roles and responsibilities assigned to women and men, influenced by environmental, economic, political, cultural and religious factors. But according to Ogundipe-Leslie (1988), gender denotes the socially defined capacities and attributes assigned to persons based on their alleged sexual characteristics. It is essentially a process through which sex-linked attributes acquire social meanings. Rhode (1990:133) has also opined that while sex refers to biologically-based distinctions between men and women, gender refers to their cultural constructions. Underlying these distinctions made by Okunade, Rhode and Ogundipe-Leslie is that the most significant difference between men and women is a function of culture rather than chromosomes.

In spite of its constituting a source of personal identity and setting societal expectations, gender has been used as a major criterion for the distribution of important resources in the society, including political positions. It is in this unique way that gender is an important determinant of social stratification and inequality, its influence being heavily dependent on other cultural institutions, ideologies and ideals (Newman, 1999:238).

Two contradictory beliefs emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s as part of the general tendency to differentiate between gender; women and men. The first was that there is a deep rooted difference between the two genders and this is natural. The second is a denial of the first belief; it states that women and men are basically the same (Nicholson, 1997:3). While feminist scholars have vacillated between these two opinions, most radical and socialist feminist scholars have advocated for a-woman-is-different-from-man perspective because they reject a politics that merely strove toward placing women where men had previously been as lacking ambition. Rather, they argued for a politics which radically will alter the status quo and in doing that, they needed to focus on the deep ways society differentiated between the life activities and psyches of women and men. What has emerged from this debate therefore is the emphasis on the differences between women and men in terms of the unique situation and characteristics of women. This tendency in scholarly works has been called "gynocentric" feminism (Young, 1985:173-183).

Contrary to its usage and implication, sex and gender are not synonymous. While biological maleness and femaleness is one's sex, gender, on the other hand, refers to characteristics that a person biologically classified as either male or female is expected to have based on the person's sex. Put differently, gender refers to the characteristics associated with expectations of being a man or being a woman. So, all that gender does is to describe the socially constituted behavioural expectations, stereotypes and rules that construct masculinity and femininity. Therefore, looking through gender lenses to study terrorism, the concept of 'women' should not be seen as gender-neutral but rather they should be seen as gendered actors actively participating in terrorism as individuals and living in a gendered world.

Terrorism (and Women and Gender)

In order to meaningfully talk about terrorism, it is crucial to have both a general and a critical understanding of the concept and its intellectual and political implications. This implies that it is almost impossible to un-problematically or apolitically define the concept without generating substantial controversy. However, I have found that the easiest way out is to historically trace the evolution of the concept. The origin of the concept can be traced to the ancient Greek and Roman republics, although the official use of the term 'terrorism' emerged from within a political context and this is usually traced to the period of the French revolution and the Jacobin reign of Terror (1792-1794). Since then, the term has suffered from a consensus of agreement as to its actual meaning. A major reason for this has had to do with the varying contexts within which the term has commonly been used. Since its first usage in the period of the French revolution, its reference has become enlarged to include violent revolutionaries, who revolted against governments, violent activities of groups such as labour organisations, anarchists, nationalists demanding independence from foreign rule and the activities of violent left-wing groups. It was also used to include various types of war such as commando tactics and guerrilla warfare. Even in some situation, political repression has been deemed as a form of terrorism. In recent years, even the manifestation and violent activities of extreme religious beliefs has also been labeled terrorism. Today, the definition of the concept has acquired an ethnocentric character depending on whether one is considering the American, British, Israelis or even German definitions.

Currently, specific attempts to define it can be grouped into two; official and academic definitions. Schmid and Jongman (2005) have compiled a number of official definitions of terrorism. According to them, the U.S. Vice President's 1986 task force defined terrorism as "the unlawful use or threat of violence against persons or property to further political or social objectives. It is generally intended to intimidate or coerce a government, individuals or groups to modify their behaviour or policies." A British legal definition as given by Schmid and Jongman (2005) has terrorism as "the use of violence for political ends, and includes any use of violence for the purpose of putting the public or any section of the public in fear." The US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) defines terrorism as "the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives".

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) states that terrorism is "any activity that involves an act that is dangerous to human life or potentially destructive of critical infrastructure or key resources; and … must also appear to be intended (i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population, (ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or (iii) to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination or kidnapping." The US Department of Defense defines terrorism as "the calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological objectives." Not surprisingly, the definitions betray the priorities and interests of the different governmental bodies. For instance, given the specific mandate of the FBI, it is not surprising that its definition address the psychological aspect of terrorism, stressing on the intimidatory and coercive aspect of terrorism. The Department of Defense definition seems to be the more complete than the others because it focuses on threat as much as the actual act of violence and the targeting of the whole society as well as the government even though the definition did not distinguish between attacks on military combatant and non-combatant civilians. Nevertheless, three commonalities can be discerned from these official definitions; (1) the use of violence, (2) political objectives; and (3) the intention of sowing fear in the target population.

However, academic definitions are rather more complex, all-embracing and more diverse. For instance, Hoffman (2006:40) has defined terrorism "as the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political change, while Combs (2003) has defined it as "a synthesis of war and theatre, a dramatisation of the most proscribed kind of violence – that which is perpetrated on innocent victims – played before an audience in the hope of creating a mood of fear, for political purposes." Nicholson (2003) has defined terrorism as "the deliberate killing of non-military personnel in order to pursue a claimed political goal through exertion of pressure on a society". Jenkins (1980:2) has argued that terrorism should be defined "by the nature of the act, not by the identity of the perpetrators or the nature of their cause." Shimko (2008:319) has defined the terrorism as "the indiscriminate use or threat of violence to advance social, political, economic, or religious objectives by creating a climate of fear." Rourke (2008:316) has defined terrorism by attempting to highlight the features common to it thus; "terrorism is (1) violence; (2) carried out by individuals, non-governmental organisations, or covert government agents or units; that (3) specifically target civilians; (4) uses clandestine attack methods, such as car bombs and hijacked airliners; and (5) attempts to influence politics." Kegley and Wittkopf (1999:189) have defined it as "criminal acts and threats against a targeted actor for the purpose of arousing fear in order to get the target to accept the terrorists' demands."

Deriving from the various academic or scholarly definitions of terrorism, it can generally be agreed then that terrorism involves three basic components: the perpetrator(s), the victim(s) and the target(s) of the violence (Badely, 2007:1). The perpetrators are seen as fanatics, disaffected groups or minorities who employed terrorism as a tool to oppose the rule and the oppression of an established and militarily superior power (Nicholson, 2003). The victims are seen as innocent people who have no part or are directly involved in the struggle and the struggle or target is political. Terrorism can be seen as acts of violence deliberately perpetrated on innocent victims (third parties) in an effort to or with an intention to coerce or force the opposition or persons to act in a desired way. Victims are not chosen because of their involvement or guilt but because their death or injuries are determined to create not only fear but also to shock the sensibilities of normal people such that pressure can be made to bear on the opposition or in most cases on the government to concede to the demands or make some concessions to the terrorists. If this is the case, then it means that terrorist violence is merely a means to an end. Violence, mass deaths and injuries caused by terrorists' attacks are basically geared towards achieving an end. Within a state system, the end can only be a political goal. However, much controversy attends the admission of a political goal for terrorists' attacks.

Feminist scholars do not agree with any of these definitions, either official or academic, basically because the definitions are selective and do not take into cognizance the feminist perspective. For instance, Sjoberg (2009:69-74) giving voice to the feminist perspective, have argued that although;

there are several behaviours that fit the letter, if not the intent, of those definitions of terrorism which are normalised in everyday within the state. Many feminists in social work and psychology have demonstrated the parallels between domestic violence and terrorism.

These scholars point out that victims of domestic violence face violence or the threat of violence to inculcate fearand to coerce or intimidate them into compliance with a partner'sobjectionable demands for control, sex, or household labour – a pattern which is repeated, anxiety-inspiring and consistently aimed at a certain sector of the population. . . .specifically on the basis of gender. Feminist scholars have also identified wartime rape specifically and rape more generally as tools of terror.

Suicide Bombers (and Women and Gender)

Approximately 26% of all suicide attacks carried out between 1981 and 2007 involved women and since 2005 there have been a marked increase in women participation in these attacks (Ness, 2005 and Cunningham, 2003). As pointed out earlier, the Nigerian situation also reflects this increase in the number of women suicide bombers, making scholars and analysts to believe that this is a novel but growing trend in spite of the fact that throughout history, women have been known to actively participate in proscribed violence, performing strategic, supportive and combat roles in a wide range of violent movements. This leads us to considering what suicide terrorism is.

A number of approaches have been adopted in the literature to understand this phenomenon. The quest to find the root cause of suicide terrorism has made scholars to argue that it is the weapon of the weak and oppressed; the last recourse of those who have no other option (Pape, 2005:9). Consequent on this assertion is the view of suicide bombers and their organisations as simply reacting to structural and externally imposed pressures in a mechanistic manner. Within this frame of reference is the portrayal of suicide bombers as the isolated few among a largely passive, submissive and oppressed people. This portrayal further leads to the consideration of why these particular few are engaged in such activities and in reaction to this, scholarly opinions are rife that this unusual and unnatural behaviour is attributable to the individual suicide terrorists' madness, weak personal and social worth, homesickness and the alienation they experience as migrants, their quest for redemption, the importance of friendship and kinship networks and madrassa education (Khashan, 2003; Gordon, 2002; Pedahzur, 2005; Atran, 2007; Hafez, 2006; Hacker, 1976). The main implication of all these reasons is the confirmation of the fact that "individuals are motivated differently [and] there is not a single pattern" (Crenshaw, 2007:157) to suicide bombers' profiling and motivation, be them male or female.

Given this fact that attempts at profiling suicide bombers have not produced any worthwhile result, scholarly attention then turned to organisations involved in suicide terrorism. The explanation usually given is that the concern of such organisations with strategic effectiveness, attainment of political goals, organisational structures and an opportunity to increase market share in a potentially sympathetic population, are causal factors for resorting to taking such actions as suicide terrorism (Pape, 2003; Hoffman & McCormick, 2004; Bloom, 2005; Cunningham, 2007a). However, both Hoffman and McCormick (2004:272) have concluded on their part that "there are only two basic operational requirements that an organisational must be able to satisfy to get into the game: a willingness to kill and a willingness to die." Going by this, then there is nothing to distinguish between all terrorist organisations because by their modus operandi, they all evince these same values.

The third level of analysis in the literature concerned with suicide terrorism is the impact, influence or role which both the society and culture play in sanctioning martyrdom operations. Among the themes that have emerged are the amount of public support which both the perpetrators and their organisations enjoy, an accepted culture of martyrdom and violence, level of feelings of societal humiliation, the level of the sense of alienation due to the societies' marginal status in the neoliberal capitalist world order and Islam's geography (Hafez, 2006a; Jugensmeyer, 2003; Huntington, 1993; Barber, 2003 and Laqueur, 2003).

The fourth is the polemics surrounding whether the hadith or Qur'an sanction suicide terrorism. There is a confusion and disagreement even among Muslims as to the desirability of using women as suicide bombers or the religious acceptance of suicide bombing itself. Until recently, female suicide bombers were extremely rare among Muslims and some fundamentalist Islamic terrorist organisations do not even recruit female as combatants less as suicide bombers. For instance, historically, Hamas and the Islamic Jihad were adamant that women should not participate in violent demonstrations but rather remain at home and perform their established roles as mothers and wives, wearing traditional dresses and head covering and rarely appearing in public unaccompanied. But in 2002, Yasser Arafat, in his famous "army of roses" speech, called on women to join as equals in the struggle against Israel, coining the term *shaheeda,* the feminine of the Arabic word for martyr (Victor, 2003). As if on cue, that same afternoon, Wada Idris became the first female Palestinian suicide bomber (Reynolds, 2002; Tierney, 2002). Many more were to follow suit later.

This remarkable innovation of using women or female suicide bombers started by the Kurdish terrorists in Turkey in 1996-1999 and made popular by Palestinians from January 2002 (Cunningham, 2007; McKay, 2005; Patkin, 2007) have been accepted by all religiously motivated terrorist organizations. The issue of suicide terrorism has raised fundamental issues and important questions concerning Islamic teaching. Many hold on to the fact that Islamic doctrines and teachings are against suicide and the suicide is punished by eternal damnation in the form of endless repetition of the act by through which the suicide initially died (Rosenthal, 1946). The passages from the traditions of the Prophet are many but this have him saying specifically;

Whoever kills himself with a blade will be tormented with that blade in the fires of hell. He who strangles himself will strangle himself in hell, and he who stabs himself will stab himself in hell ...whoever kills himself in any way will be tormented in that way in hell...Whoever kills himself in any way in this world will be tormented with it on the day of resurrection.

But then, what is suicide bombing or terrorism? Suicide is easy to conceptualise as the willful and deliberate taking of one's life as a result of some perceived reason or cause, what Gere (2007:363) has called "homicidal self-sacrifice." According to *Jane's Intelligence Review,* "suicide terrorism is the readiness to sacrifice one's life in the process of destroying or attempting to destroy a target to advance a political goal. The aim of the psychologically and physically war-trained terrorist is to die while destroying the enemy target." As Gere (2007:363) had pointed out, the use of suicide bombers occur in two contexts: in declared open war in which regular combatants are involved, targeting other uniformed enemy soldiers, equipment and installation; and in undeclared conflicts which can be civil, ethnic or religious in nature. Thus, it becomes important to distinguish between wartime suicide operations made popular by the Japanese kamikaze during World War II and terrorist suicide operations such as those carried out by Palestinian Islamist organisations and made more desirable by Al Qaeda. Suicide bomber is a human being turning or transforming himself into a weapon in order to kill other human beings. Patkin (2007:170) has defined suicide bombing as "a bomb attack on people or property, delivered by a person who knows the explosion will cause his or her death." Compared with other forms of insurgency, suicide bombing is inexpensive, cost-effective, media-friendly and with a built-in intelligent guidance and delivery system very effective as a psychological warfare (Hoffman, 2003, Agara, 2014). For the Islamic or religious insurgents, killing oneself is no longer an act of self-destruction (*intihar*), but rather divinely commanded martyrdom (*istishad*), in defence of the faith (Stern, 2003) and a continuation of the *jihadic* struggle between the house of Islam or Peace (*dar al Islam*) and the house of war (*dar al harb*).

It is interesting to note that in its approach to the issue of security against suicide bombings, the state has not engaged itself with the politics of terrorist groups but rather focus its attention on how to respond to terrorist methods by improving physical security and engaging in early detection activities so as to deny terrorists their desired success. As Brown (2011:201) has noted, this security approach is thus "blinded by the glare of the explosion" because it fails to see the insecurity of women as both actors and victims of suicide bombings. As Alli (2005) has noted, researchers and policy makers are blind to the role of women in political violence because the idea of it runs "counter to Western stereotypes and misconceptions of male terrorists; we assume that women are second class citizens and rely on the men to run the organizations." Thus, female suicide terrorists are pictured generally in the media as the irrational other of the rational enlightened Western self.

Conclusion

What conclusion can we then reach concerning women participation in suicide terrorism and terrorist organisations? It is that society should wake up, security agents and policy makers and media should stop treating women's active participation in terrorist suicide operation and organisations as deviance and aberrant. Rather it should be seen for what it is; a conscious decision taken by a conscious person aware of the implication and impact of such action, same as the average male terrorist. As long as women are viewed and seen through stereotype gender lenses as the weaker sex, terrorist organisations will continue to exploit this deficiency in society's perspective and wreak havoc on the society through using women suicide bombers.

In concrete terms, we reiterate here Sjoberg's (2007) observation that irrespective of sex or gender, (1) suicide terrorists, like states, do not always have complete freedom of choice or action and instead rely in part on the choices and actions of others. (2) Different suicide terrorists, victims, societies, and states are situated in different positions and consequently hold different perspectives, thereby giving vent to the fact that there is no single universally applicable explanation or criteria that would legitimise suicide terrorism.

(3) Actors in suicide terrorism have different degrees of power and freedom, hence the meaning they ascribe to their actions/deeds and the justification they offer are not on equal footing with the various explanations offered by Western analysts.

It is interesting that while society engages in viewing as something atrocious and denying the reality of women's participation in terrorism and as suicide bombers by alluding to internal gender codes of modesty, six recognised *fatwa* issued by Islamic clerics have shown that Islamic discourses can be employed to grant authority, validity and legitimacy to the use and participation of women in suicide terrorism. After all, the bomb does not discriminate among the victims of its explosion or is it interested in the sex of who detonates it. This gender discrimination of actors in terrorist organisations and their suicide missions only serves one purpose; the rise in the use and deployment of female suicide terrorists and hence normative constraint is tactically detrimental.

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