

ANALYSIS OF GENDER RADICALIZATION IN THE FORM OF MILITARISM IN AFRICAN WOMEN: THE CASE OF WOMEN JOINING AL-SHABAAB

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Abstract: In this article we investigate the process of recruitment of African women in Al-Shabaab as militants. The case is a greater development in processes of gender radicalization in dynamics of twenty 1st century that women playing a *Jihadist* militant role. We founded the bulk of researches on the problem but almost researches are focused on victimization of women by militant organizations as well as giving more emphasis on men recruitment and role in militant organizations. The major questions as we have risen in this study as how did women motivated to join Al-Shabaab? And further, we answered the question that: how women did played militant role in Al-Shabaab? Furthermore, this study ensures an inductive reasoning and bottom to up analysis of women role in Al-Shabaab. We selected a case of Al-Shabaab in the study in hand, due to women are autonomously and actively participating in Al-Shabaab being combatants and non-combatants. We founded unexplored space and role for women in Al-Shabaab. It might everyone knows that Al-Shabaab is very effective militant cum-political organization among African militant and resurgence groups. Across Africa, women are joining Al-Shabaab. It has members from diverse African nations. Al-Shabaab assigns them variety of jobs, it includes; combatant as well as noncombatant jobs. Moreover, this research is very significant in term of academic development as it explores the unexplored dimension of Al-Shabaab in academic circles.

Keywords: Militarism; Recruitment; Indoctrination; Training; Combatants

1 INTRODUCTION

Al-Shabaab is a Somalian based pan-Islamic militant organization but it has a significant influence in Kenya, Ethiopia as well as in other Eastern African states. Generally, it is a considerable existential threat to the entire Horn of Africa. Al-Shabaab is frontline and important stockholder among non-state actors in African political dynamics. More than half part of total Somalia's land has been ruled by Al-Shabaab about for two decades. Now it controls large rural parts of the country's south. It is dominantly men run militant and political organization, but interestingly it has large membership of women too, that is further increasing its scope and activities. This study is conducted to investigate the militant tendencies in women by joining Al-Shabaab. As for the problem, this study is very important in academic sense, for the field, intellectual and international scholars as well as for policy analysts. Besides it, this study provides further insight to the problem in-depth.

Women are associated with love, peace, fragility and altruism, it is a considerable acceleration to the dynamics of the study of gender radicalization at 21st century that women actively as well as passively playing role in militant organizations. There are number of cases of radicalization of gender such as ISIS, Hezbollah but the unique case which is worth of consideration is Al-Shabaab which has been flourished in East Africa. Al-Shabaab has rich voluntary recruitment of women but existing literature in academia are mainly focused on victimization of women rather than women radicalization though some studies are available but most of them are concerned with involuntary recruitment of African women into Al-Shabaab. Al-Shabaab is a best empirical example for women militancy in Africa. Therefore, the study in hand is going to conduct on to investigate the question of African women joining Al-Shabaab.

Despite, every Islamist militant organization imposed religious restrictions on women in the areas under their control, women agency is more vulnerable to suppression and subjugation, but still woman agency is unlike than what has been perceived, having strong tendencies to join militant specially Islamist organizations. Like Islamic State (ISIS) and Hezbollah, Al-Shabaab also has a women wing. Many women from Somalia and Kenya joining and supporting the group actively as well passively, their role in the insurgency is therefore important for explaining the resilience of the group. Apart from passive role Al-Shabaab has different forms of portfolios for women which reflect their more active involvement. Illustrating; women mobilize other women for joining the organization for carrying out operations effectively and spying in hotspot areas, women doing spying very easily because it is general worldview that women is intelligently inferior so they are less subject to doubt. Similarly, they transfer materials and data of information much more easily than men agency, because, the counter security agencies are often less suspicious towards them. Moreover, it is mandatory in Al-Shabaab for

women to participate and deliver Islamic lectures in areas under the influence or control of Al-Shabaab. Women are delivering lectures in order to increase recruitment and keep on indoctrination.

As militancy in across the world remained in the shape of resistance movement to foreign invasion and resistance to powers, world powers portray them terrorist but the term is very contested in the language of Noam Chomsky (a prominent American linguist and political philosopher) “the weapon of weak is terrorism [1].” Similarly, Al-Shabaab is also in large a part and product of decades of state’s bad governance, disability, crisis and foreign interventions in Somalia. It was founded by Somali Islamists in the begging of 2000s, they were formerly, associated with Al-Etihad ul-Islami; a pan-Islamic organization that sought to impose Islamic *Shariah* throughout “the Horn of Africa” generally and in Somalia specifically. It then rose to prominence as an agency of law and order enforcement agency for the Union of Islamic Courts, a coalition of sharia courts financed by Somali business community that seized Mogadishu in 2005. Due a threat perception of Islamization of the entire Horn of Africa, Ethiopia ousted the Islamic Courts in 2006, backed by USA, perusing policy of regime change in developing countries [2]. After ousting their government, the hardliners among Islamic Courts almost the personnel of militia as known Al-Shabaab resisted Ethiopian invasion, generated considerable local anger and a grounds well of support from the people.

After the withdrawal of USA backed Ethiopian forces in 2009, Al-Shabaab took over control of major part of south-central Somalia, including much of the capital area of Mogadishu. Then in 2011 the coalition forces of African Union under the African Union Mission (AMISOM) led by Burundian and Ugandan contingents who were deployed in 2007 had spelled Al-Shabaab from Mogadishu and its periphery. An AMISOM surge in 2014, by this time it was developed into a grand military forces alliance of African nations, it includes; troops from it immediate neighbor countries; Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya, forces recaptured other areas too. The Somali government controls most of Mogadishu and other major towns, but has been largely failed to capture and establish a permanent hold in the areas beyond urban and improves its delivery of public services [3].

On the other hand, Al-Shabaab the established control over many rural areas and some small towns in urban too with very stable grip. Usually, sets up check posts along main roads and exerts pressure on nominal government that held controls some towns and cities. It has shown tactically flexibility on launching attacks over government sites, breaking of supply lines, targeting troop’s convoys, assassinating leaders who help foreign forces. Moreover, it still does clever clan politics, avoiding too close connection to any one clan, but often backing weaker groups against stronger counter parts or mediating disputes. Foreigners, especially other East Africans, fight in its ranks but the organization and movement wants to preserves its Somali identity and its top leaders are Somalia [4].

Women contributing in multi-ways to Al-Shabaab in the areas controlled by it, their support for the group is due to various reason and motives; it might be owing to they getting material benefits from its affiliation, material benefits includes their salaries, pension, health care, food procession etc. in the areas where state services and support are slim to non-existent, example many women support Al-Shabaab due to economic incentives given by Al-Shabaab that the it is promises to improve their economic condition of families by paying its male fighters. In other hand, these women receive privileged treatment from the organization. Besides these material gains the matter for motivation to join and work for Al-Shabaab is an ideological or religious for what women play varied and often vital roles in the movement. The recruitment of women from Kenya has another dimension that needs to be addressed. Amongst the factors that lead women to travel to the battlefield are threat perceptions or real threats for the Kenyan government. The Kenyan women joining Al-Shabaab for the reason of maltreatment of their husbands in homes, it includes; extrajudicial killings, domestic harsh violence vise versa [4].

Moreover, number of literatures are available on women militancy in the case of Al-Shabaab, but almost are just concern with the victimization of women and role of men, very scarce literatures are concern with women characters as militants. It is significance of the study in hand that, there is no enough literature to address the issue completely. So, this research is going to relies on very scarce literatures which are can be reviewed as:

By reviewing to identify some of the gaps in the literature as were applied to the African contexts, the following parts attempts to capture some of the key insights that have emerged from the four research works did by the prominent Kenyan academics. The prominent work “women and recruitment in the Al-Shabaab network: stories of women being recruited by women recruiters in the coastal region of Kenya” Badurdeen F.A [7]. She used a biographical approach, traces the elements leading to women’s recruitment into militant organizations as well as their involvement in the process of recruitment. Mainly she sheds light on the process of recruitment in the dimensions of voluntary and involuntary participation in Al-Shabaab. She pointed out that women’s economic need made them particularly vulnerable to recruitment. Furthermore, the most significant thing in this work is the role played by women recruiters. They motivated their fellow women to join Al-Shabaab [5].

Like Badurdeen, Mwakimako in his work he explained the experience and encounters of women travelling to Somalia and finded out that most of the returning fighters were participated involuntarily. So, for Mwakimako the involuntary reporting of the process of recruitment must be also seen as a product of the respondent’s narrative style and how women in hurdled social set up come to justify and relay their experience. However, by using biographical narratives style, this article made a transformation in research about female militancy and radicalization. The narratives explain the agency of personal experiences of victimization and loss experienced by women in their joining of militant organizations [6].

The paper “Islamist Extremism in East Africa” by Ali, tries to explore the role of gender in relations to radicalization and recruitment of young Muslim women in higher profile educational institutes in Kenya in order to answer the question that; why the young women at learning institutions are tended for recruitment in militant organizations. In doing so, this paper in contrast to two aforementioned papers (by Badurdeen and Mwakimako) it attempts to explore that why women from poor backgrounds or lower class are motivated to join militant organizations. Ali conducted his study based on focus group discussions; he finds that recruiters often appeal to patriarchal values while recruiting women into militant organizations, particularly, the idea of “marriage is need for satisfaction to societal and family expectations” was an important recruitment tactics, recruiters often trapped on the idea of insecurity of young Muslim women who feeling risk of that higher education may delay their marriage and further deprive them of much-needed protection and financial security [7].

2 METHODOLOGY

The study in hand enquires solution to the problem of ‘gender radicalization’ in the form of women militancy in 21st century. Furthermore, it is focused to investigate the case of African women joining Al-Shabaab. It aims to explores that; how African women are joining Al-Shabaab and what sort of role they performing in such a militant organization? At the end, its purposed is to understand the factors which are motivating women recruitment into Al-Shabaab. So, the enquiry of the case follows a scientific method of research. Methodologically, this study is carries out qualitatively, because, no numerical and statistical formulas and process has been used during enquiry. In a large, opinions, perspectives are been analyzed. Broadly, it follows a post-positivist or anti-positivist approach because it is based on interpretation rather than quantification and measurement. Due to the limitation of accessibility only secondary data has been utilized to fulfill the gap, therefore, documents were thematically analyzed. The documents were collected from various fields such as; libraries, research journals, websites, annual surveys reports etc. via purposive and convince sampling technique. In term of research design, this study is based on non-experimental design and it has exploratory purposes.

2.1 Variety of Motivations for Gender Radicalization

The phenomenon of ‘Gender radicalization’ has shifted the analytical gravity of gender disparity discourse to a vital angle that is women and radicalism. In early world view women were projected as: marginalized, weaken and sidelined group, even a leading feminist Simon de Beauvoir referred the status of women as a second sex [5]. In early twenty first century, largely in reaction to USA interventionist politics in Muslims countries has changed the dynamics Muslim world politics. Number of militant reactionary organization came into being to resist the intervention and influence of Western powers in their lands. In order to overcome the foreign interventions and to regain and preserve the identity and dignity of Islamic Civilization, for the project and agenda militant organization started to give space for women role as well. Firstly it was started by ISIS and Hezbollah then specifically by Al-Shabab. In case of ISIS large number of western women also joined the organization [8]. Similarly, women across horn of Africa joining Al-Shabaab but, on the question of women recruitment into militancy responded by the bulk of researcher with diverse perspective regarding their motivations to join militant organizations. The original and predominated variable for recruitment to Al-Shabaab is religious and Jihadist motive. By contrast and divergence from old views somehow according to the present circumstances in the atmosphere of Africa researchers have been discovered the other dimensions too.

2.1.1 *By overcoming victimization–feminist perspectives*

The first of the perspectives on the question that why women may be inspired to join violent extremist groups? According to researchers women are joining militant organizations as a reaction to the traditional gender norms. The women who are appear to deviate from norms and standards due gender based violence against them they are vulnerable to join such organizations. By overcoming the feelings of victimizations– is the prime motivator to join militant organizations [9]. In some conservative societies women used martyrdom strategy to escape from shame of being victim of rape. Particularly its evidences are experienced in Iraq [10].

2.1.2 *Role of kinship*

departure from the feminist perspectives the study conducted by Taylor and Jacques demonstrated that relationships and kinship networks are key predictor of women’s involvement in militancy. They identified 222 female involved in militancy throughout various conflict zones mostly one third were belong to militant families, the study finds that militant activism has kinship motives behind [11]. Similarly, a qualitative study conducted by the Institute for Security Studies in the context of East Africa. The study founded that relationships is a key motivator of women’s participation in militancy. The study means that if a male relative of a woman affiliated with any militant organization then that particular woman also joins the organization. It illuminates the case of Al-Shabab, in sense that the basic motive for women joining Al-Shabaab is kinship [12].

2.1.3 *The threat of economic insecurity*

In addition to the role of family bond the economic insecurity of women has also been considered a factor that makes women vulnerable to being recruited by militant organizations. The militant organizations exploiting the lower economic status of women, mostly in the developing countries, they are promised jobs, funds and other economic opportunities [13].

The critical economic situations in Somalia and in Kenya force women to join Al-Shabaab for economic benefits. Al-Shabaab promises to ensure their security by providing economic incentives and social security, specifically to the young women of Eastern Africa. Thousands of young women are fled from Kenya to join Al-Shabaab for economic security and stability [14].

2.2 Critical Analysis of the General Perspectives and Information

In the light of the diverse perspectives as mentioned above, it is hard to define a problem from one dimension and observe with single lens. Women radicalization is multi-layered and a complex phenomenon and it requires an in-depth inquiry to this complex net of fabrics with help of variety of lenses. By examination of the aforementioned general perspectives, and information gathered from various secondary sources it is pointed out that the recruitment of women into Al-Shabaab has a diverse and broad spectrum as it has been illuminated in different literatures. According to general feminist perspectives social structure, status quo in society and violent structure is responsible for women's radicalization. But this perspective may be applicable to some exceptional cases in some specific places putting it a unilaterally would not be related. And it would also narrow down the cause of Al-Shabaab by putting it central to the matters of motivation for Al-Shabaab. On the other hand economic insecurity is may be push and full factor behind by women joining militant organizations. But in case of Al-Shabaab it is also rare. By examination of different reports and literatures about women participation in Al-Shabaab, its inferred from the collected data that the case of Al-Shabaab is much related to its original caused what was religious and patriotic. With the lapse of time other variables also became attached to its entity mainly the social and economic circumstances in the atmosphere of operation of Al-Shabaab. But still Al-Shabaab has a clear narrative of Muslims liberation from Christian Kenya and from oppression of Somalia's government. This resonates, the global marginalization of Muslims.

2.2.1 Religion and ideology are key divers for women joining Al-Shabaab

In doing so, it is significant to move beyond generalized perspectives and embracing the assumption that gender norms, economic needs and kinship construct and compel women's participation in militant organization. Adoption of such lens in particular context of East Africa is narrow in nature because, women involvement in militancy is actually some like male involvement who exercise their choice, even within highly constraining social structures. In the context of East Africa religion and ideology are the main divers that motivate women and men to fight.

By keeping religious motive, Al-Shabaab has very strong stimulus to upraise African Muslims. Because, there in some African states in fact Muslims are in majority but minority Christians rule them. In the present age of democracy very less countries are ruling by the minority. Illustrating, Kenya has Muslim majority population but it is ruling by Christian minority and Muslims has an oppressing history in Keya. The atrocities of Kenyan government on Muslims are a big concern and voice for Al-Shabaab. In order to overcome discrimination and oppression, Muslim women from Kenya are joining Al-Shabaab. Similiarly, In Somalia Al-Shabaab also has a solid ground to take its position. There it keeps narrative that despite, Somalia is a Muslim state not independent and immunes from foreign influence and direct intervention and having no Islamic governance. On the other hand, it portrays Islamic rule, in the Al-Shabaab's control areas there is rule of Islamic law, relevant peace, stability, law and order etc. which are source of inspiration for women to join Al-Shabaab from in land [15].

It is also witnessed as: F. A. Badurdeen narrates the story of two women in her studies; she explained their motivations— to be wives of martyrs and to play their role to support the 'Muslim Ummah' [16]. She has explained nine interviewees in her study that how religious belief influenced their decisions to support the Al-Shabaab strategy. One of them is Aisha, 25 year age at the time, an Al-Shabaab returnee who defected after two years told that: "she read a lot of materials she was sad at how Muslims were treated as a second class people. Further told that; she didn't want her Muslim brother to suffer any more, she needed to do something. She wanted to assist them in Somalia by joining Al-Shabaab [17]."

Ideological Indoctrination: Some women might have been recruited involuntarily whenever, as an organization operating in society some people becoming its members involuntarily. Now, Al-Shabaab is a significant part of African society particularly of rural Somalia. Whenever, women meet their fellow women associated with Al-Shabaab and sometime having a prolonged stay in the camps of Al-Shabaab with other women fighters, they are involuntarily receiving their messages thus they indoctrinating. In the study of Badurdeen three of the sixteen women which are she identified for accepted the ideology and subsequently volunteered to join Al-Shabaab, she narrates in her study that Mary, a converted Muslim, was recruited by a friend in the guise of a job in Somalia. She was of eighteen years, when she was recruited in 2015. In camp, she was subjected to work and religious indoctrination. "After a few days, she was worn out while learning the religion...further the author narrates that when she was gladdened and started to accept ideology and felt it was right to fight for our [Muslim] freedom. It was like a moral obligation. Then she wanted to be a part of the network of Al-Shabaab [18]." The process of indoctrination is the job of women to indoctrinate other women. Therefore door to door campaign is also its part.

Al-Shabaab using women to indoctrinate other women to accept the pathway and do fight for Al-Shabaab's cause. Women are doing door to door campaign go to indoctrinate neighbourhood women and organise lectures and discourses for women

at madrasas or other institutes, for cultivation of women's support for the movement's values and aims, and also encourage women who are married having fighter husbands to themselves become active and involved passively [19].

2.2.2 Indoctrination in the process of recruitment

In return to the earlier mentioned non-religious and materialistic interpretation of the phenomena women recruitment to militancy, whenever women come to join Al-Shabaab for either reason why not for their materialistic needs, in the process of recruitment women stay in their camps, it is necessary for them to impart its ideology and abide the rules. Thus, being part of Al-Shabaab they would be indoctrinated passively, for instance, a respondent explained to Badurdeen when she conducted her interview that "after continuous trainings and discussions on the Al-Shabaab ideology in their trainings, you fall into a context, where is injustice, social stratification, inequality, anarchy and extreme physical violence. On the other hand you listen the message of Islam which is total peace and justice in all sense then you tend to accept the ideology, and you will feel the state is responsible for all the problems you have undergone [20]."

In same way, in the study of Hassan the interviewee responded that "ideology was forced upon, via sophisticated trainings on a daily basis, where by reading the special documents of Al-Shabaab, constantly revising the materials, watching the videos violence imposed on people by the other war lords or government then we accept the ideology because we have to survive there we had no alternative option and had lost hope in returning back to our homes." In the words of another respondent "Al-Shabaab promises paradise in reward the reward of struggle in the way of Allah (*Jihad*)" though it is common in all Islamist militant organization that they brain-washing the young minds by telling to them that it is your responsibility to strive for Islam [21].

3 ROLE ASSIGN TO WOMEN IN AL-SHABAAB

Herein the discussion it is important to answer these two questions first, why in today warfare feminine gender is so vital, even Al-Shabaab also need this vital gender? And second, where Al-Shabaab relies on women? To advance the argument, warfare is different today than in the past, we need to recognize other vital gender characters in war rather than relies on single character of man. In Past lied inside a simple combat which remain heavily masculinized, when we look the complexities combats in the age we are encountering, the immediate and indispensable vacancies to be seemed for women, where especially non-state armed actors should feel the relay on women role. As women can be best used for fundraising, spying, recruitment teaching and in somewhere they also can be used as direct combatants etc.

Return to the second question Al-Shabaab relies on women in fundraising, as this position has already been fulfilled by women, it was witnessed that two women were convicted for fundraising those were: Amina Farah Ali and Hawo Mohammad Hassan were convicted in Minnesota for fundraising while doing job for Al-Shabaab in USA. They led an aiding network in USA for Al-Shabaab by sending dresses and monies [14]. During the trial of these ladies, attorneys played recorded phone calls between Farah Ali and key Al-Shabaab leaders. In one call played at the trial, Farah Ali had leading a conference call with other women in the United States (in some calls she had as many as 143 women) and tells the women about their job that will be sending money and clothes to Somalia and motivates them by telling that doing this job "is like someone who went to jihad [22]."

Another main role women play in Al-Shabaab is collection of intelligence information as women are less suspicious for such activity; to some extent cultural norms immune women in Somalia from cautious surveillance and somewhere women are less likely to see women as a threat and may not suspect them of working with Al-Shabaab. Moreover, women also play conventional or traditional roles inside Al-Shabaab. These roles are frequently seen as non-significant, as like to the way in which domestic work of women is not valued in many economies. This work is essential to non-state armed actors, particularly when we consider that organization members and their families cannot access conventional services like utility stores or health centers. A woman who serves to provide medical care to Al-Shabaab fighters is likely the organization's only way to access health service [23].

Lastly, the most important role playing women in Al-Shabaab is a support of being combatants or fighters. In operations, they not only provide intelligence services, but also work with weapons. Somali society traditionally does not perceive women as threats and, until recently, government-run checkpoints, which often had no female security personnel, rarely searched women. But, radicalization of women and recruitment of women into militancy by Al-Shabaab is a significant milestone in African history that women deviation from status-quo and became participants in war directly as fighters [24]. According to one ex- Al-Shabaab's women, as the central government security rules have harshen and restricted male operatives' movement, women are indispensable to transporting explosive devices and their components. This is an interview conducted by International Crisis Group from a woman activist belong to Marka, the largest town in Somalia's Lower Shabelle region, which though nominally government-held has a heavy Al-Shabaab existence, with militants dominating surrounding areas, added that while [25].

Although women's intelligence gathering and logistics support are crucial to the movement's military resilience, Al-Shabaab generally does not often engaged women in a direct combats. This choice is reportedly due to partly commitment to Somali conventions that ascribe the fighting role to men and partly to religious prohibitions against women's participation in direct fights. But, it is a ground for Al-Shabaab that women are been participated in Holy wars during

Prophet's time being nurses. Unlike to some other African militants, Al-Shabaab does not tend to deploy women and girls as suicide bombers. For instance, Boko Haram, the jihadist organization operating in Nigeria and its proximities, used women more than men as suicide bombers for years. In other hand, according to one tally, Al-Shabaab has deployed only ten women and girls as suicide bombers since 2006, representing less than 5 per cent of the total number, though the precise number of Al-Shabaab attacks perpetrated by women is disputed. A senior AMISOM official said their own tallies showed that attacks perpetrated by female Al-Shabaab suicide bombers were "in the single digits" Whatever, but Al-Shabaab has greatest number of women recruitment than any other militant organization in Africa [26].

4 CONCLUSION

Conclusively, today's warfare is different than what was in past, we need to recognize and describe the other vital gender character rather than man agency. Twenty 1st century's women militarism is a significant twist in historical women militarism. The major portion of history has been occupied by the militant role of man. Rather than to explain a status-quo and mere emphasis on man role battle ground it is need to explore the role of women in battle field if it is negative or positive negative in term of terrorism and positive may be in term of anti-colonial and anti-suppression and subjugation. Women are actively as well as passively participating in militarism as in hybrid warfare tactics in 21st century. Al-Shabaab has a complex network of women in order to maintain rule and control in more and more areas of Somalia. Women from across Eastern Africa and particularly from Kenya and Somalia joining Al-Shabaab, there are variety of factors of motivation of women while recruiting into Al-Shabaab, according variety of approaches to the case.

Although, no single driver is behind women motivation for joining Al-Shabaab, there are diverse motives as push and pull factors but as for our inference, the most effective and vital motivation is religion and ideology which work as a pull and push force for women recruitment in Al-Shabaab. In order to sacrifice for ideology and religion women are serving Al-Shabaab in various areas such as health services, intelligence gathering, and weapons transportation to Al-Shabaab's areas and direct participation in combats. Economy associated with Al-Shabaab serves secondary interest for major women combatants but serves primary interest for some women.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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