



Stockholm syndrome re-examined: Understanding the relationship between radicalization and building mutuality within Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study re-examines the phenomenon of Stockholm syndrome within the context of Boko Haram, aiming to understand the intricate relationship between radicalization leading to extremism and mutuality building within the group. Conventional interpretations of Stockholm syndrome, where a clear emotional bond develops between the kidnapper and the kidnapped, fall short in explaining the complexities observed within Boko Haram. While victims may engage in the group's activities and even become members over time, this does not necessarily indicate an emotional bond as defined by traditional Stockholm syndrome. Instead, it points towards a process of mutuality building, which facilitates radicalization through various entry points, from ideological bond, coercion to strategic recruitment. Boko Haram's extremist and ideological motivations underpin its operations, but radicalization within its ranks often stems from a blend of social, ideological, political, and economic factors rather than emotional attachment, although in some instances that might be the case. The group's ability to retain members hinges on its leadership's adept exploitation of vulnerabilities, offering financial incentives, sustenance, and a semblance of security to those ensnared by chronic poverty and insecurity in Northern Nigeria. This nuanced understanding of mutuality building sheds light on how individuals become deeply embedded in the group's activities, driven by pragmatic considerations rather than emotional bonds with their leaders. The findings underscore the significance of leadership dynamics within Boko Haram and highlight the necessity of differentiating between mutuality building and Stockholm syndrome in the study of terrorist organisations. This distinction has profound implications for developing effective counterterrorism strategies. Future research should explore counterterrorism through a leadership framework and conduct comparative studies with other terrorist organisations to uncover commonalities and differences in recruitment tactics and leadership dynamics, ultimately contributing to the creation of comprehensive counterterrorism policies and strategies.

Keywords: Boko Haram; Stockholm Syndrome; Leadership; Mutuality; Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Boko Haram¹, a name that often evokes fear and dread, has long been a symbol of terror in Northern Nigeria and beyond.² Yet, amidst the chaos and violence, lies a complex narrative of human psychology³ and social dynamics⁴ that demands exploration. At the heart of this complex issue is the phenomenon known as Stockholm syndrome,⁵ a psychological response where victims develop feelings of attachment and loyalty towards their captors.⁶ However, within the context of Boko Haram, this syndrome takes on a new dimension,⁷ shedding light on the relationship between radicalization⁸ and the formation of mutual⁹ bonds within the group. In this re-examination of Stockholm syndrome within the context of Boko Haram, the study explores Northern Nigeria to disentangle the complexities of radicalisation and the creation of mutual understanding within this terrorist organization.¹⁰

In April 2014, two hundred and seventy-six (276)¹¹ Female students aged from sixteen (16) to eighteen (18) were kidnapped by Boko Haram from the Government Girls Secondary School at the town of Chibok in Borno State, Nigeria.¹² A study¹³ conducted by the Murtala Muhammed Foundation in April 2024 found out that, a

decade later, ninety-one girls remain unaccounted for. Some reports claimed that some of the abducted girls, subsequent to their rescue, chose to remain with the group in the Sambisa forest.¹⁴ Some of them who were abducted as girls returned as mothers having had children with their abductors,¹⁵ the Murtala Muhammed Foundation report states that this confirms that the girls were coerced into marriages and endured sexual violence.¹⁶ Some reports claim that it seems the girls are swayed by the comparative state of the living conditions in the forest, deeming them superior to the circumstances in their communities.¹⁷

In the status quo, a novel and disconcerting trend has emerged: former members rejoin the group even when they have an opportunity to be reintegrated into their communities.¹⁸ Some have fully rejoined,¹⁹ some have expressed an interest in rejoining²⁰ while other ex-Boko Haram members have threatened to do so.²¹ This includes people who were forced to join when they were young, before the group became violent, as well as those who joined willingly.²² This happens in an instance where they are not properly integrated into their communities and do not feel like they belong anymore.²³ It has been difficult to understand why they would want to go back to what

¹ Iyekekpolo, W. O. (2016). Boko Haram: understanding the context. *Third World Quarterly*, 37(12), 2211-2228.

² Walker, A. (2012). What is boko haram? (Vol. 17). Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace.

³ Adepelumi, P. A. (2018). Psychological consequences of the Boko Haram insurgency for Nigerian children (Doctoral dissertation, Walden University).

⁴ Agbibo, D. E. (2015). The socio-economic dynamics of Nigeria's Boko Haram insurgency: Fresh insights from the social identity theory. University of Berkeley. cega.berkeley.edu/assets/miscellaneous_files/110_-_Agbibo_-_ABCA.pdf.

⁵ De Fabrique, N., Romano, S. J., Vecchi, G. M., & Van Hasselt, V. B. (2007). Understanding Stockholm syndrome. *FBI L. Enforcement Bull.*, 76, 10.

⁶ Jülich, S. (2005). Stockholm syndrome and child sexual abuse. *Journal of child sexual abuse*, 14(3), 107-129.

⁷ Ochberg, F. (1978). The victim of terrorism: Psychiatric considerations. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 1(2), 147-168.

⁸ Schmid, A. P. (2013). Radicalisation, de-radicalisation, counter-radicalisation: A conceptual discussion and literature review. *ICCT research paper*, 97(1), 22.

⁹ Olonisakin, F. (2015). Re-conceptualising Leadership for effective peacemaking and human security in Africa. *The Strategic Review for Southern Africa*, 37(1).

¹⁰ Sergie, M. A., & Johnson, T. (2015). Boko Haram. *Council on Foreign Relations*, 7.

¹¹ BBC News. (2022, July 27). Nigeria's Chibok girls: Two victims found eight years on. BBC News.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-62324294> (Accessed: 10/01/2024)

¹² Ijaseun D (2022) From dorm to doom: A timeline of the Chibok kidnapping. *Business Day NG*

¹³ Murtala Muhammed Foundation report (2024) Revealed: a third of Chibok girls remain in captivity on 10th anniversary of kidnapping (Accessed: 14/04/2024)

¹⁴ Nwaubani, A. T. (2017). Exclusive: Some abducted Chibok schoolgirls refuse to be 'freed', says negotiator. Reuters.

¹⁵ Nwaubani, A. T. (2014). Nigeria's Chibok girls: Parents of kidnapped children heartbroken - again. Letter from Africa series, Maiduguri.

¹⁶ Murtala Muhammed Foundation report (2024) Revealed: a third of Chibok girls remain in captivity on 10th anniversary of kidnapping (Accessed: 14/04/2024)

¹⁷ Nwaubani, A. T. (2014). Nigeria's Chibok girls: Parents of kidnapped children heartbroken - again. Letter from Africa series, Maiduguri.

¹⁸ Adewole, S. (2021, March 3). Deradicalised terrorists rejoin Boko Haram after spying on communities, says Zulum. *The Guardian*.

¹⁹ *Ibid*

²⁰ Moaveni, A. (2019, January 14). What Would Make A Woman Go Back To Boko Haram? Despair. *International Crisis Group*.

²¹ DW. (2024, March 6). Nigeria's ex-Boko Haram fighters threaten return to arms.

<https://www.dw.com/en/nigerias-ex-boko-haram-fighters-weigh-return-to-conflict/a-68449555#:~:text=Frustrated%20by%20not%20getting%20enough,of%20neglect%20since%20they%20surrendered.> (Accessed: 15/04/2024)

²² Nwaubani, A. T. (2017, May 8). Exclusive: Some abducted Chibok schoolgirls refuse to be 'freed', says negotiator. Reuters.

²³ Ochberg, F. (1978). The victim of terrorism: Psychiatric considerations. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 1(2), 147-168.

are perceived as inherently dreadful circumstances. Experts in the field, when discussing Boko Haram and other terrorist/kidnapper groups, have coined this complex occurrence as a manifestation of Stockholm syndrome:²⁴ a psychological phenomenon wherein individuals develop positive sentiments towards their abductors and bond with them emotionally.²⁵

Much of the earlier policy and scholarly debate has been on whether Nigeria will win the 'war on terror' against Boko Haram.²⁶ Originating in Nigeria's North East, this conflict has not only persisted but has also metastasized, extending its reach to the whole country.²⁷ In recent years, the crisis in Northwest and North Central Nigeria has expanded²⁸ and created a domino effect of security challenges for other regions.²⁹ While farmer-herder clashes³⁰ have been a major feature of violent conflicts in the region, other militant factions³¹ have opportunistically exploited security vulnerabilities, expanding their criminal enterprises and successfully enticing susceptible youth into their ranks.³²

The crisis has also weakened social cohesion in many communities and the effects of the violence have created a far-reaching humanitarian impact.³³ The human toll is staggering, with estimates indicating that the crisis has given rise to over five hundred thousand refugees and displaced a staggering two million people internally.³⁴ Communities find themselves increasingly susceptible to the recruitment strategies employed by Boko Haram.³⁵ Economic vulnerabilities, exacerbated by the absence of positive alternatives and avenues for self-advancement, render the youth particularly susceptible to being recruited by the group.³⁶ The crisis, thus, unfolds not merely as a

security conundrum³⁷ but as a complex challenge that intersects with social, economic, and humanitarian dimensions, underscoring the imperative for a comprehensive and nuanced approach to mitigate its impacts.

This study endeavors to address an important question: to what extent do relationships within Boko Haram challenge or bolster prevailing conceptions of Stockholm syndrome? It addresses it through a *leadership as process* framework of analysis. Central to this investigation is an exploration of the tactics employed by Boko Haram, conceptualizing them as *informal leaders* in Northern Nigeria with substantial numbers of *followers* who build *mutuality* with those they capture or those who join the group in various circumstances.³⁸ Very few studies have sought to understand and analyze terrorist organizations from a leadership perspective, and an even scarcer exploration through the lens of the process-based leadership framework.³⁹ This study aims to fill this void by employing a leadership as a process approach, utilizing Olonisakin's process-based leadership framework for analysis. Through this framework, the research endeavors to scrutinize how terrorist leaders within Boko Haram establish mutuality with their followers and how that process leads to radicalisation.

This underutilized leadership analysis adds great value to the literature on conceptualizing Stockholm syndrome specifically within terrorist organizations. While extant studies predominantly concentrate on the psychological

²⁴ Nwaubani, A. T (2018) Chibok girls changed by shame, Stockholm syndrome - experts. ReliefWeb (Accessed: 12/11/2023)

²⁵ Namnyak, M., Tufton, N., Szekely, R., Toal, M., Worboys, S., & Sampson, E. L. (2008). 'Stockholm syndrome': psychiatric diagnosis or urban myth?. *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*, 117(1), 4-11.

²⁶ Oyewole, S. (2016). Boko Haram and the challenges of Nigeria's war on terror. In *The Test of Terrorism* (pp. 79-88). Routledge.

²⁷ Oftedal, E. (2013). Boko Haram: A Transnational Phenomenon? (Master's thesis).

²⁸ Peace, P. W. S. (2020). Violence in Nigeria's north west: Rolling back the mayhem. *Africa Report*, 18(288).

²⁹ Agbiboa, D. E. (2013). The ongoing campaign of terror in Nigeria: Boko Haram versus the state. *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, 2(3), Art-52.

³⁰ Chukwuma, K. H. (2020). Constructing the herder-farmer conflict as (in) security in Nigeria. *African Security*, 13(1), 54-76.

³¹ Stoddard, E. (2019). Revolutionary warfare? Assessing the character of competing factions within the Boko Haram insurgency. *African Security*, 12(3-4), 300-329.

³² Brottem, L. (2021). The growing complexity of farmer-herder conflict in West and Central Africa.

³³ Adelaja, A., & George, J. (2019). Effects of conflict on agriculture: Evidence from the Boko Haram insurgency. *World Development*, 117, 184-195.

³⁴ Nigeria | IDMC - Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

³⁵ Omenma, J. T., Hendricks, C., & Ajaebili, N. C. (2020). al-Shabaab and Boko Haram: Recruitment Strategies. *Peace and Conflict Studies*, 27(1), 2.

³⁶ Alao, D. O., Atere, C. O., & Alao, O. (2012). Boko-Haram insurgency in Nigeria: the challenges and lessons. *Singaporean Journal of Business Economics and Management Studies*, 1(4), 1-15; Onuoha, F. C. (2014). Why do youth join Boko Haram? (Vol. 5). Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace.

³⁷ Anyadike, N. O., & Nkechi, O. (2013). Boko Haram and national security challenges in Nigeria; causes and solutions. *Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development*, 4(5), 12-23.

³⁸ Barkindo, A., & Zenn, J. (2018). Abubakr Shekau: Boko Haram's Underestimated Corporatist Strategic Leader.; Elkaim, Z. (2022). Boko Haram: The rise, success, and continued efficacy of the insurgency in Nigeria. *International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT)*.

³⁹ Olonisakin, F. (2017). Towards re-conceptualising leadership for sustainable peace. *Leadership and Developing Societies*, 2(1), 1-30.

bond between a kidnapper and the kidnapped,⁴⁰ this study introduces a groundbreaking leadership analysis, providing an inherently original perspective that elucidates the trajectory from radicalization to extremism emanating from mutuality building, as opposed to Stockholm syndrome. The study transcends the conventional boundaries of Stockholm syndrome, and gives a nuanced perspective and an explanation of the perpetual trend of members choosing to remain in the group instead of going back to their communities when such an opportunity arises. It will explain mutuality building within Boko Haram and how it differs with Stockholm syndrome, a process which gives a thorough illumination of leadership style and tactics that often lead to radicalisation. By engaging terms such as mutuality, assertions of influence,⁴¹ and role of followers from leadership literature, the study greatly enriches an understanding of kidnapper-kidnapped relationship dynamics in complex cases such as Northern Nigeria, where traditional scholarship has fallen short in providing adequate explanations.

The process-based leadership⁴² framework represents a paradigm shift in defining leadership. Rather than isolating leadership as an attribute inherent to an individual, this framework conceptualises leadership as a dynamic process emerging from interactions between leaders and followers as they collectively respond to shared circumstances.⁴³ This approach diverges from traditional models by accentuating the reciprocal nature of leadership dynamics. A distinctive feature of the process-based leadership framework is its emphasis on situational analysis. It contends that effective leadership is contingent upon a nuanced understanding of the nature of the situation at hand and the inherent challenges it presents. In doing so, this framework acknowledges that leadership is not a static phenomenon, but a fluid and adaptive process shaped by the context and situation.⁴⁴

Moreover, the framework recognizes the dual nature of leaders, acknowledging that they can manifest as either formal or informal in different settings.⁴⁵ It posits that leadership crystallizes when there is a need to respond to a particular situation. In essence, the process-based leadership framework offers a holistic and contextually grounded perspective that captures the dynamic interplay between leaders, followers, and the challenges that they collectively confront.⁴⁶

The study is inspired by dissatisfaction at the way counterterrorism issues are approached both in the scholarly and policy world. There appears to be an inherent tendency to address counterterrorism in isolation, predominantly through the narrow lens of justice, in a bid to explain and understand violent extremism in Northern Nigeria, without adequately incorporating the complex dimensions of informal leadership. Informal leaders are often ignored or downplayed, though their influence has potential to significantly change the political and socio-economic landscape of the country.⁴⁷ The study recognizes that the relative success of Boko Haram in recruiting and retaining followers is indicative of a critical issue that has been unduly neglected.

Following this introduction this paper is divided into four main sections. Below, section one will provide a literature review and explain further the paper's conceptual framework. This section will give a comprehensive analysis and comparison of existing literature on crucial themes such as Stockholm syndrome, leadership, radicalization, and mutuality building. Section two unveils the empirical component, presenting data derived from ten in-person interviews with former Boko Haram members. These interviews were conducted in Maiduguri, Borno State, working under the auspices of Neem Foundation, a non-profit organization founded as a direct response to conflict in Nigeria. It not only discloses the insights and intelligence gained from these interviews but also gives a thorough analysis of the mechanisms employed by terrorist leaders to foster mutuality with their followers and the process of radicalization underpinning extremism and Stockholm syndrome. Section three will give an in-depth discussion and analysis, challenging the normative understanding of Stockholm syndrome and shedding light on how it manifests within Boko Haram. The final conclusion challenges conventional perspectives on Stockholm syndrome within Boko Haram. It posits that the manifestation of Stockholm syndrome within Boko Haram deviates from generic understandings, where it is understood that a kidnapped victim and a captor gradually form an emotional bond over time. This study illuminates on how the relationship that is usually formed is, in fact, physical, social and transactional. This nuanced insight promises to contribute significantly to the evolving discourse on terrorism and counterterrorism strategies, as well as the policy and scholarly understanding of both Stockholm syndrome and leadership studies.

⁴⁰ Koomen, W., & Van Der Pligt, J. (2015). *The psychology of radicalization and terrorism*. Routledge.

⁴¹ Grint, K. (2010). *Leadership: A very short introduction*. OUP Oxford.

⁴² Grint, K. (2010). *Leadership: A very short introduction*. OUP Oxford.

⁴³ Atem, D. M. (2020). The need for effective leadership for peacebuilding and reconciliation in divided societies. *Journal of Global Peace and Conflict*, 8(2), 1-11.

⁴⁴ Olonisakin, F. (2017). Towards re-conceptualising leadership for sustainable peace. *Leadership and Developing Societies*, 2(1), 1-30.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Unveiling the complexity of Stockholm syndrome

This section offers a literature review and elaborates on the paper's conceptual framework. It will provide a thorough analysis and comparison of existing literature concerning key themes, including Stockholm syndrome, leadership, radicalization, and mutuality building.

Stockholm syndrome manifests as a psychological reaction to being held in captivity.⁴⁸ Psychologists posit that the connection begins to form when a captor threatens the life of the captive, weighs the situation, and ultimately opts not to harm them.⁴⁹ As the captor decides to spare the captive's life, the captive's sense of relief transforms into gratitude.⁵⁰ This gratitude, although paradoxical given the circumstances of captivity, becomes a coping mechanism, a psychological adaptation to the traumatic situation. In the absence of death, the captor assumes an unexpected role as the provider of life, fostering a sense of indebtedness and allegiance from the captive. People with Stockholm syndrome form a psychological connection with their captors and begin sympathizing with them.⁵¹ Medical professionals consider the victim's positive feelings towards their abuser a psychological response and a coping mechanism that they use to survive the trauma or abuse.⁵²

Several psychological theories have been put forth to understand this complex phenomenon. One such explanation involves the psychodynamic concept of identification with the aggressor, wherein an individual in a subordinate position unconsciously adopts certain traits or characteristics of a person in a superior position, thereby establishing an intricate psychological dynamic between the two.⁵³ Additional explanations encompass the deliberate intention to exhibit compliance as a strategy to enhance the likelihood that captors refrain from causing harm. This suggests that individuals in hostage situations may consciously choose to comply with their captors' demands as a strategy to reduce the risk of harm or violence inflicted upon them. This strategic compliance is a calculated decision aimed at self-preservation, rather than

genuine emotional bonding or identification with the captors.⁵⁴

This article challenges the normative definition, specifically using terrorist groups and Boko Haram in particular as a point of context and analysis as earlier debates and conclusions drawn were that terrorist 'hostages' often develop an emotional or psychological bond with them, leading to them staying longer with the group and ultimately being radicalized. Therefore, the operational definition of Stockholm syndrome will shift from the normative definition in this article. For the purpose of this article, Stockholm syndrome includes the physical, social and ideological attachment that both willing sympathisers and unwilling victims develop for their abductors. This article aims to employ leadership theory and related concepts as a lens through which to understand the dynamics characterising the relationship between the leaders of Boko Haram and their followers, including both abductees and recruits.

This will take into consideration the fact that an overwhelming majority of individuals who affiliated with the group before its descent into violence were subjected to manipulation.⁵⁵ Additionally, residents of proximate communities found themselves under the group's dominion in cases where civilians were forcibly seized by Boko Haram.⁵⁶ In contrast to the conventional definition, which posits a dichotomy of abuser and victim or kidnapper and captive, this article will provide a nuanced perspective, introducing the notions of 'willing sympathizers' and 'situational victims' who the leaders of the group have managed to manipulate overtime into carrying out the group's activities. They promote the group's ideology, build mutuality with the leaders and ultimately become members through assimilation, a process this article will define as radicalisation. The operational definition challenges the normative definition to include physical, ideological and transactional bonding and manipulation. This is in order to understand instances where 'victims' were not necessarily kidnapped but they were equally not fully rational or conscious of what they were getting themselves into and overtime carried out the

⁴⁸ Kumar, P. (2022). Stockholm syndrome: An Understanding. *Journal of Psychosocial Well-Being*, 3(1), 1-4.

⁴⁹ De Fabrique, N., Van Hasselt, V. B., Vecchi, G. M., & Romano, S. J. (2007). Common variables associated with the development of Stockholm syndrome: Some case examples. *Victims and Offenders*, 2(1), 91-98.

⁵⁰ Adorjan, M., Christensen, T., Kelly, B., & Pawluch, D. (2012). Stockholm syndrome as vernacular resource. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 53(3), 454-474.

⁵¹ Jameson, C. (2013). The "short step" from love to hypnosis: A reconsideration of Stockholm syndrome. In *Hope and Feminist Theory* (pp. 25-43). Routledge.

⁵² Pramesti, M. A. M. Stockholm Syndrome Phenomenon: Love or Survival Instinct?.

⁵³ Namnyak, M., Tufton, N., Szekely, R., Toal, M., Worboys, S., & Sampson, E. L. (2008). 'Stockholm syndrome': psychiatric diagnosis or urban myth?. *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*, 117(1), 4-11.

⁵⁴ De Fabrique, N., Romano, S. J., Vecchi, G. M., & Van Hasselt, V. B. (2007). Understanding Stockholm syndrome. *FBI L. Enforcement Bull.*, 76, 10.

⁵⁵ Osisanwo, A. (2024). Manipulative and Recruitment Strategies in Boko Haram Terrorist Statements. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 00219096241228795.

⁵⁶ Ogundipe, S. (2019). Thousands trapped as Boko Haram seizes two local government areas in Borno. *Premium Times Nigeria*.

group's activities fully, and did not necessarily form an emotional bond with the group's leaders.

Understanding Stockholm Syndrome from a Process-Based Leadership Perspective

The main interest in Boko Haram and leadership has been around the group's two well-known leaders: Mohammed Yusuf and Abubakar Shekau.⁵⁷ However, Boko Haram is operationally spearheaded by other informal leaders within the ranks who have wielded considerable influence, effecting substantial changes in the political, social, and economic fabric of the nation. The impact of these leaders extends beyond mere disruption, as they play a pivotal role in reshaping the broader landscape of Nigeria, contributing to a complex and challenging environment for peace and security.⁵⁸ These informal leaders have ascended to positions of influence within their communities, adeptly garnering support from their followers.⁵⁹ The intricacies of their capacity and capability to establish and sustain such organized and influential organizations demand comprehensive study. Such an examination is crucial for a nuanced understanding of the complexities inherent in developing world settings, shedding light on the dynamics that contribute to the emergence and resilience of these leaders and their organizations in the face of broader societal challenges.

Process Based Leadership Framework

Introduced by Keith Grint, this framework defines leadership as a process of interaction between leaders and followers in responding to their mutual situations, as opposed to focusing on an individual as a leader.⁶⁰ It further focuses on the nature of the situation that is being analyzed and the challenge it presents. The perspective acknowledges the dual nature of leadership, distinguishing between formal and informal roles. It contends that leadership emerges when an individual effectively addresses specific societal needs. Consequently, those whose expressions resonate within a community are predisposed to ascend to leadership positions.⁶¹ This framework aids in comprehending the process through which leaders emerge within their communities, as their credibility is established through the endorsement and shared interests.

Furthermore, Olonisakin's process-based leadership analytical framework is particularly useful (and intended

for) better understanding the complexity of developing world contexts. This framework elucidates on three main elements that engage persistent questions surrounding armed conflict and how these issues can be transformed in order to achieve sustainable peace. *Context* is the first element. Olonisakin argues that the circumstances facing a group or society significantly shape the leadership dynamics within that context. In areas affected by conflict, it is essential to evaluate how widely the situation is felt throughout the community as a crucial starting point for analyzing leadership.⁶² The second element is *mutuality*, Olonisakin states:

'Understanding the range of people or actors whose concerns and/or Interests that are mutually linked in a situation are crucial in a peacemaking effort. This makes it possible to assess, for example, the degree of fragmentation in society or indeed, the inclination to pull together thus offering the potential for collective solution finding across a conflict-affected society.'⁶³

Influence is the third element. As explained by Olonisakin, how influence is exerted, acknowledged, and reciprocated within a specific scenario is the core essence and the primary catalyst of leadership. As Olonisakin reflects, at the heart of influence lies the nature of the relationship between leaders and followers. In every scenario, individuals who propose solutions for the prevailing issues typically exert influence over those who are mutually impacted or interested in that situation. When this influence is acknowledged and embraced, leaders naturally emerge within that context. 'Those who become leaders in that setting are not necessarily those in assigned positions of formal authority. And those often referred to as followers, are in actual fact those who pursue shared goals with the leader(s).'⁶⁴

Thus, this framework provides valuable insight into the dynamics of informal leadership within Boko Haram and similar terrorist groups, where individuals hold no formal positions of authority. In the context of Northern Nigeria, numerous issues afflict the region and its communities. Due to these shared concerns and the widespread impact of conflict, Boko Haram's

⁵⁷ Brigaglia, A. (2014). Abubakar Shekau: The Boko Haram Leader who never Came 'back from the Dead.'. *The Annual Review of Islam in Africa*, 12(1), 2013-2014.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*

⁵⁹ Onuoha, F. C. (2014). *Why do youth join Boko Haram?* (Vol. 5). Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace.

⁶⁰ Grint, K. (2010). *Leadership: A very short introduction*. OUP Oxford.

⁶¹ *Ibid*

⁶² Olonisakin, F. (2017). *Towards re-conceptualising leadership for sustainable peace. Leadership and Developing Societies*, 2(1), 1-30

⁶³ *Ibid*, p.25

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p.20

recruitment strategy⁶⁵ has capitalized on this situation to rally 'support' and propose 'solutions' to community problems, fostering a sense of shared purpose among its followers. Consequently, as these leaders wield influence, their authority is then recognized, leading them to naturally emerge as informal leaders.

Olonisakin and Grint's contribution to leadership literature is much needed as understanding leadership studies has traditionally been used mainly in business or education settings, typically within developed world contexts. Most well-known leadership scholars, such as Keith Grint, Bernard Bass,⁶⁶ Peter Northouse⁶⁷ and James MacGregor Burns⁶⁸ are all typically white European men; and even Barabara Kellerman,⁶⁹ as a female doing interesting work on followership and other cross-cultural settings, typically focus on Western contexts in their studies. This article fills a significant gap by using an African context and case study through providing a fresh perspective on understanding Stockholm syndrome within the context of Boko Haram and its implications through a leadership lens in a developing world setting. Capitalizing on the framework developed by Grint and Olonisakin, the paper contributes to the existing body of leadership literature, offering insights into the dynamics of Boko Haram and the manifestation of Stockholm syndrome within its operations.

This approach requires focus on and interrogation of three interrelated main elements that this research seeks to investigate. The first element is understanding the Nigerian context and how terrorism in Nigeria has over time influenced the emergence of informal terrorist leaders, specifically within Boko Haram. Secondly, this approach sheds light on and critiques the traditional understanding of Stockholm syndrome. The final element involves investigating how Boko Haram leaders utilize mutual or shared interests to mobilize individuals and persuade them to join the group or form alliances and ultimately radicalize their followers.

Methodology and Findings – speaking with former Boko Haram members

This section details the methodology and unveils the empirical component, presenting data from ten in-person

interviews with former Boko Haram members. These interviews took place in Maiduguri, Borno State.

This paper employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating both primary and secondary data collection methods. Primary data was gathered directly from research participants, ensuring firsthand, uninterpreted insights that few researchers have been able to gather. The interviewees for this research were individuals with firsthand experience, specifically former Boko Haram members situated in Borno State, Maiduguri. Ten ex-combatants were interviewed, where the key informants' interviews gave evidence-based answers to the research questions. Simultaneously, existing data sources were leveraged, allowing for a comprehensive examination and interpretation of the collected information. The research used a qualitative method of collecting and analyzing data basing it on triangulation to unpack mutuality building within Boko Haram.⁷⁰ As a complex phenomenon, it is fitting to use different data sets, theories, investigations as well as methods to converge information and draw informed conclusions. This method of cross-validation and verification of facts strengthened the objectivity and credibility of information collected from multiple sources. The research employed a comprehensive approach, drawing upon both non-academic and academic publications, interviews, reports, and official documents to collect data and formulate conclusions.

As is the case, Boko Haram still occupies some parts of Borno, Maiduguri and attacks on civilians are still rampant.⁷¹ There were security issues arising from collecting data in Maiduguri and speaking to ex-combatants. However, Neem Foundation, a Non-Governmental Organization founded as a response to violence and conflict in Northern Nigeria facilitated the access to participants. As Neem Foundation has done comprehensive and longer-term work in responding to the Boko Haram insurgency through providing education, mental health and psychosocial support as well as conducting research, in Northern Nigeria, they have gained support and trust from civilians in the area.⁷² An acknowledge limitation of the work is that only *former* members of Boko Haram were interviewed. Speaking with current members would likely add further insight and intrigue; however, this would clearly be unwise, unrealistic, unethical and illegal to do. The remarkable access and

⁶⁵ Babatunde, O. A. (2018). The recruitment mode of the Boko Haram terrorist group in Nigeria. *Peace Review*, 30(3), 382-389.

⁶⁶ Bass, B. M., Avolio, B. J., Jung, D. I., & Berson, Y. (2003). Predicting unit performance by assessing transformational and transactional leadership. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88(2), 207-218. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.88.2.207>

⁶⁷ Northouse, P. G. (2021). *Leadership: Theory and practice*. Sage Publications.

⁶⁸ Burns, J. M. (2012). *Leadership*. Open Road Media. <https://doi.org/10.9781453245170>

⁶⁹ Kellerman, B. (2007). What every leader needs to know about followers. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved from <https://leadershipforlawyers.com>

⁷⁰ R Heale, D Forbes (2013) Understanding triangulation in research

⁷¹ Oluwafemi, A. (2024). 'Six soldiers' killed in Boko Haram ambush along Borno-Yobe road. *The Cable*.

⁷² Neem Foundation's projects and programs can be accessed on their website: <https://neemfoundation.org.ng/>

connections established by Neem with a group that is typically challenging and almost impossible to reach unquestionably rendered the interview process somewhat exceptional. This unique accessibility allowed for insights and perspectives that might otherwise be elusive, contributing to the richness and depth of the research findings. An additional minor limitation was language barrier as the participants mostly speak Hausa and Kanuri, but these were overcome by conducting interviews with interpreters from the Neem Foundation research team. The entire data collection process proceeded smoothly and was generally safe. The findings of that research are now presented and discussed in the remaining sections.

Radicalisation leading to extremism in Northern Nigeria

What conflict situation is confronting Nigeria's Northern region, and what are the resultant dynamics of kidnapped-kidnapper relations? The process of radicalization leading to extremism in Northern Nigeria is a complex phenomenon shaped by various factors,⁷³ including socio-economic disparities, political grievances, religious ideologies, and security challenges.⁷⁴ Understanding this progression is crucial for devising effective counterterrorism strategies and fostering sustainable peace in the region. Individuals may be radicalized when exposed to an extremist worldview that exploits existing grievances or perceived injustices.⁷⁵ Additionally, the influence of a radicalizer, who may directly or indirectly interact with a vulnerable individual, can be a pivotal factor in the radicalization process.⁷⁶ Certain practices undertaken by Boko Haram are designed strategically to achieve their objective of recruiting individuals and ultimately radicalizing them.⁷⁷ This process strategically exploits the innate human susceptibilities for recognition, elevated status, respect, and a sense of belonging in their lives.⁷⁸

Revelations from Interviews with former Boko Haram members

The interviews yielded several thematic areas, enriching this study with nuanced perspectives on the factors that "compel" individuals to join terrorist groups, the dynamics of leadership within such groups, and the strategies employed for building mutuality between leaders and followers therein. This comprehensive understanding

facilitated a re-examination of Stockholm syndrome and radicalization, leading to informed recommendations for the establishment of sustainable support structures within Nigeria. These insights are pivotal for the success of deradicalization, demobilization, and reintegration efforts.

As the Chibok girls' case was earlier referenced, coincidentally, two ex-combatants who were interviewed actively participated in the kidnapping of the girls and two others who were responsible for their upkeep. This means that this study was able to ask questions related to previous academic and policy debates such as the motive for kidnapping them, how they were treated by the group and whether the video released of them saying that they did not want to return was authentic. Firstly, this study found out that there are quite a number of positions that a person can hold within a group. For instance, interviewee 1 recalls:

'Before I joined the group, I was a farmer, therefore I was appointed as the chief agropastoralist, mainly responsible for rearing livestock. I was also responsible for slaughtering cows and feeding the Chibok girls.'⁷⁹

The interviewees revealed that Boko Haram functions similarly to any conventional community, comprising leaders, police, farmers, and other roles. Intriguingly, the research discovered that initially, when the Chibok girls were kidnapped, the group's leaders did not foresee the magnitude of the local and international outcry and attention they would garner. Subsequently, upon realizing the attention they were receiving, the group strategically exploited it to their advantage, leveraging the publicity to enhance their popularity and recruit more unsuspecting victims and willing sympathizers. As a respondent who was involved in that abduction explained:

'I was part of the group that kidnapped the Chibok girls, I was particularly responsible for registering them and ensuring that they arrive at our site. We were doing this to scare the public and get the government's attention.'⁸⁰

This supports the view that terrorists exploit the media for the benefit of spreading propaganda, gathering information and recruiting.⁸¹ In most instances, terrorists target the

⁷³ Alao, A. (2013). Islamic radicalisation and violent extremism in Nigeria. *Conflict, Security & Development*, 13(2), 127-147.

⁷⁴ Onuoha, F. C. (2014). Why do youth join Boko Haram? (Vol. 5). Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace.

⁷⁵ Alao, A. (2013). Islamic radicalisation and violent extremism in Nigeria. *Conflict, Security & Development*, 13(2), 127-147.

⁷⁶ Ogbosor, E. (2016). Causes and consequences of violent extremism in Northeast Nigeria (No. 227). Households in Conflict Network.

⁷⁷ Brakoniecka, S. (2024). The Role of Religion in Triggering Radicalism in Northern Nigeria: The Case of Boko Haram. *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 1(aop), 1-24.

⁷⁸ Onuoha, F. C. (2014). Why do youth join Boko Haram? (Vol. 5). Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace.

⁷⁹ Interviewee 1, Borno Maiduguri, 17 January 2023

⁸⁰ Interviewee 4, Borno Maiduguri, 18 January 2023

⁸¹ Lieberman, A. V. (2017). Terrorism, the internet, and propaganda: A deadly combination. *J. Nat'l Sec. L. & Pol'y*, 9, 95.

audience and how they react to their activities as opposed to their victims. Without the existence of the media, their activities would not reach the greater population hence making it difficult for them to recruit or popularize their actions.⁸² Indeed, terrorist groups often feel compelled to claim responsibility for their attacks, produce videos, and consent to interviews with prominent international media outlets. This deliberate engagement with the media is strategic, as these groups are acutely aware of the specific audiences they seek to reach and the desired outcomes they aim to achieve. By actively participating in media coverage, terrorists not only seek visibility but also strive to shape a narrative that portrays them as assertive and in control, thereby furthering their objectives through the dissemination of their messages.⁸³ At a point where they have successfully inflicted fear both on the government and the civilians, they use that window to negotiate, buy more weapons, recruit and reaffirm their mission.⁸⁴ When there is a huge media coverage of a terrorist attack like kidnappings of school children, this gives terrorists an incentive to hold them captive for even a longer period of time to put pressure on the government as they want as much publicity as possible.⁸⁵

This study also interviewed a preacher, who revealed that one of his key responsibilities was to brainwash new captured civilians and willing sympathizers. The study found out that they would 'twist Qur'an teachings or not use the teachings within the right context and radicalize them to a point where now the new 'joiners' were fully indoctrinated.' The interviewee narrated that the teachings are held everyday and are consistently aimed at brainwashing the victims. This study also interviewed a former bomb maker who was responsible for strapping suicide bombers with bombs and making bombs for the group. It was found out that the reason why the group has been using women as suicide bombers was as result of their vulnerability. The preacher said:

'As the preacher, I was responsible for emotionally preparing the women before they carried out the attacks. They are usually not told that they are going to die and what will cause the death, they are just told that they are going to paradise. After a girl volunteers, I will isolate her from the rest of the group for about twenty days. During those days, I will twist the Qur'an teachings and ensure that I reduce their peripheral awareness and only respond to what I am saying to them. This process often makes them hate the who we referred to as 'unbelievers' and motivate them to carry the attack.'⁸⁶

⁸² *Ibid*

⁸³ *Ibid*

⁸⁴ Nussio, E., Böhmelt, T., & Bove, V. (2021). Do terrorists get the attention they want? Comparing effects of terrorism across Europe. *Public opinion quarterly*, 85(3), 900-912.

This observation aligns with earlier research findings that indicate a pervasive global trend wherein terrorist organizations increasingly deploy women as suicide bombers.⁸⁷ The utilization of female operatives in such capacities is a strategic evolution within these groups, leveraging societal perceptions and gender stereotypes to further their objectives. The deployment of women in these roles not only reflects a tactical adaptation to security measures but also underscores a broader, more insidious trend within the modus operandi of contemporary terrorist entities. This phenomenon highlights the multifaceted nature of modern terrorism and the evolving methodologies employed to perpetrate violence.

The interviewee's account highlights that, in 2012, during the height of the insurgency, some individuals from his community felt compelled to join Boko Haram due to the harsh circumstances in their society. He claims that a militarized approach was introduced, involving night-time hunts and arbitrary detentions without thorough investigations, which instilled fear among young boys. It is crucial to emphasize that respondents consistently claimed that they were not informed about the group's involvement in brutal activities such as suicide bombings, mass killings of innocent civilians, or attacks on the government. The account of a twenty-five-year-old individual, whose primary aspiration was education, underscores the profound impact of the circumstances. Unable to return to his community due to the risk of being labeled a terrorist, he found himself compelled to join the group as an unintended consequence of the complex and challenging situation he found himself in:

'I joined the group because I wanted to provide for my family, the recruiters convinced me that I will be able to make money while I still go to school and that the only way to go to Paradise is to join the group. Though I wanted to go to school, I thought I would still be able to, so I joined the group. After learning about the group's activities, there was no option to go back so I started participating fully.'⁸⁸

This study uncovered a parallel narrative involving a young man from Maiduguri, Borno. With two siblings already part of the group, he faced threats from them, asserting that if he did not join, he would be killed. Despite growing up in a seemingly 'normal' family with a father serving as a judge and another brother working as a court clerk, his aspiration to become a judge himself was upended. Amidst the insurgency, the community's

⁸⁵ *Ibid*

⁸⁶ Interviewee 4, Borno Maiduguri, 18 January 2023

⁸⁷ Bloom, M. (2007). Female suicide bombers: A global trend. *Daedalus*, 136(1), 94-102. Retrieved from JSTOR.

⁸⁸ Interviewee 2, Borno Maiduguri, 17 January 2023

atmosphere of suspicion led to wrongful accusations and vilification based on associations with suspected Boko Haram members. The young man's father and brother faced six months of military detention, and escalating hatred culminated in the burning of their home and belongings. In response to the escalating threats and the hostile environment in their community, the young man and his family fled to the Sambisa forest to join the group.⁸⁹ Parallel to the first case, this study revealed a consistent pattern wherein individuals were informed that the group's sole aim was to practice Islam properly, with assurances that no violent activities would be carried out. This deceptive narrative, employed by the group for an extended period, served as a tactic to entice unsuspecting victims into joining their ranks.

The process of mutuality building and radicalisation: how the leaders form a bond with their followers

This section provides a detailed discussion and analysis that challenges the conventional understanding of Stockholm syndrome, illuminating its manifestation within Boko Haram. The interviewees revealed that the process of mutuality building between terrorist leaders and their followers is a thorough, systematic and calculated one. These leaders rely heavily on the support of their followers for the group's sustainability and stability. Without a strong belief in the group's leadership, it could lead to a factional schism, whereby the group is bound to revolt and/or split.⁹⁰ Boko Haram became, in fact, a classic example of such, as in 2016 the group split into two factions: Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'adi wal-Jihad (JAS), led by Abubakar Shekau, and the Islamic State-West Africa (ISWAP), led by Abu Musab al Barnawi.⁹¹

The insights gathered from the interviews revealed that terrorist leaders occupying higher positions strategically capitalize on the needs of their followers, ensuring provision for their necessities. These leaders adopt a differential treatment approach, offering financial incentives, facilitating marriages, involving them in the decision-making process and allowing them to lead battalions and even promoting their followers up the ranks. This method serves to create a contrast between the perceived benefits within the group and the challenges or neglect experienced in their respective communities, reinforcing the followers' loyalty and commitment to the group's ideology.

'As the leader of my battalion, I was kind and very generous, I gave my followers everything they needed, money, wives and status. This made them love and trust me.'⁹²

One participant claimed that when the Chibok girls were kidnapped, they were treated 'well' by the group. He said he was a businessman before he was forced to join the group, because of his expertise, the group's leadership appointed him as a businessman. He stated that he was only responsible for that, keeping livestock, slaughtering cows for the Chibok girls and ensuring that they were fed. He said that this was a tactic used by the leaders to build trust in the girls that the forest was a conducive living environment. He said:

'The Chibok girls were 'well treated'. Our leader, Abubakar Shekau instructed us to treat them well. They had access to food and jewelry. This was a strategy to recruit them into the group and ensure that they stayed. Over time, some of them started to enjoy staying in the forest. Because of how well they were treated, this made them want to stay and get married as the conditions they were living under were better than the ones back in their village, Chibok.'⁹³

While this assertion cannot be substantiated due to the paucity of scholarship and research specifically addressing this case, it does correspond with previously referenced claims in this paper that some girls opted to remain in the forest.⁹⁴ However, it is crucial to recognize that these girls were young, and their capacity for reasoning and decision-making cannot be verified. These girls were young, and one participant who is a preacher already admitted that they were constantly manipulated. Therefore, their capacity for independent reasoning and decision-making is inherently limited and cannot be reliably verified. The psychological, emotional, and situational factors influencing their decisions must be considered, recognizing that their perceived choices might have been constrained by coercion, fear, or a lack of viable alternatives. Consequently, any conclusions drawn must be approached with caution, taking into account the broader context of vulnerability and manipulation to which these young individuals were likely subjected. Therefore, if this claim holds true, it remains uncertain whether their decision was made rationally.

The interviewees consistently defended their past association with Boko Haram, despite having various paths of joining the group. They praised their leaders as "nice, kind, very generous, and leading by example." This discovery

⁸⁹ Interviewee 9, Borno Maiduguri, 19 January 2023

⁹⁰ *Ibid*

⁹¹ 1.3.1. Boko Haram, including JAS, ISWAP and Ansaru - EUAA

⁹² Interviewee 6, Borno Maiduguri, 18 January 2023

⁹³ Interviewee 1, Borno, Maiduguri, 17 January 2023

⁹⁴ Nwaubani, A. T. (2017). Exclusive: Some abducted Chibok schoolgirls refuse to be 'freed', says negotiator. Reuters.

diverges from the conventional understanding of Stockholm syndrome, which suggests the formation of an emotional or psychological bond. Instead, this mutual rapport is established through the leaders of Boko Haram presenting themselves as problem solvers in a situation that impacts everyone. Consequently, they exert influence and foster a sense of shared purpose among their followers, as illustrated by the quotes from two interviewees below:

‘The leader of my battalion always gave us money, he could give us fifty thousand naira, that showed that he cared about us.’⁹⁵

‘Our leader always went to fight with us, we were not allowed to leave anyone behind no matter how badly injured they were. He always rewarded us, until he was unfortunately apprehended by the police I hope he gets out one day, he was a good leader and I ask for mercies upon his life everyday.’⁹⁶

These testimonies contribute another dimension to our understanding of mutuality building and the ways in which the leaders forged bonds with their followers. It is evident that significant efforts were made to foster a sense of camaraderie and solidarity among them. These efforts included attentively listening to their grievances, dispensing rewards, and offering motivational incentives. Such strategies were meticulously designed to manipulate their perceptions and construct an illusory narrative that life in the Sambisa Forest was not only viable but also conducive to their well-being. This calculated orchestration of psychological and material inducements served to obscure the harsh realities of their circumstances, thereby entrenching a deceptive sense of normalcy and acceptance. Interviewee 10, quoted above as still praying for his former leader, was asked if he felt emotionally connected to him, either at the time of recruitment or up to the present day. His answer was no, and he said:

‘I pray for him because he was a good leader and he doesn’t deserve to be in prison. There are a lot of bad leaders who roam the streets who should be in prison. My relationship with him was purely materialistic and I performed the group’s activities because I was going to be rewarded and my problems were being solved. I also had a good social life.’⁹⁷

Five interviewees out of ten expressed an emotional connection to the ideological cause of the group rather than to a specific leader. They mentioned becoming radicalized due to their passion for what they believed was the advocacy for Islamic principles by the group. This discovery is in line with Olonisakin's scholarship on mutuality, which suggests that commitment to a cause, rather than a specific leader, is what defines mutuality.⁹⁸ It also resonates with Cornell's analysis, which argues that mutuality in leadership is the intangible factor that binds leaders and followers, forging enduring outcomes through a shared commitment to common objectives.⁹⁹ Within Boko Haram, this connection is evident in the radicalization process, where the group successfully makes their followers believe in their cause to the extent that followers are willing to sacrifice their lives for it.

Reflecting on the events that transpired, interviewees commonly expressed a shared sentiment: the group's purpose had become unclear, leading many to depart and leaving them uncertain about what to believe. This finding supports the view that Boko Haram focuses more on brainwashing and taking advantage of the vulnerable situations they were in by offering them money and social status. Of greater significance, it also corresponds closely with the notions of thick and thin mutuality.¹⁰⁰ In instances where mutuality is thick, leaders and followers collaborate harmoniously towards a collective aim. However, when this objective loses clarity, mutual engagement weakens.¹⁰¹ Cornell supports this by saying that the extent of mutuality varies, influencing both the nature and durability of the outcome.¹⁰² This also demonstrates that, while a bond was established, it cannot solely be categorized as emotional or psychological. Typically, an emotional attachment would require a longer period to dissolve, often with the assistance of professionals. However, in the case of mutual engagement, once the sense of shared purpose dissipates, the connection ceases to exist.

Why and in what ways are societal dynamics and peacebuilding efforts affected by the relationships built between leaders and followers within Boko Haram and Northern Nigeria?

Prolonged conflict in Northern Nigeria in recent years has caused significant negative impacts to the development of this region, as well as the quality of life of its residents. It is without a doubt that this conflict has significantly reduced welfare and impact on the livelihood of households and the larger economy of Nigeria¹⁰³ with a high-level conflict risk

⁹⁵ Interviewee 9, Borno, Maiduguri, 19 January 2023

⁹⁶ Interviewee 10, Borno, Maiduguri, 19 January 2023

⁹⁷ Interviewee 8, Borno, Maiduguri, 19 January 2023

⁹⁸ *Ibid*

⁹⁹ Cornell, M. A. (2018). Mutuality on a spectrum: Ownership and Buy-In. *Leadership and Developing Societies*, 3(1). <https://doi.org/10.47697/lids.3436104>

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*

¹⁰² *Ibid*

¹⁰³ *Ibid*

index. Now the country is not only faced with security crisis,¹⁰⁴ but also increased socio-economic vulnerability such as financial inequality, food insecurity and an increasing risk of poverty.¹⁰⁵

This situation has significantly disrupted livelihoods, it has paralyzed businesses, banking, tourism, investments and transportation in the region. As a result of the insurgency, there has been an increase in poverty, illegal migration, human/child trafficking and socio-economic development has been stagnant. Where the interviews were conducted in Maiduguri, most of the buildings have either been burnt down, destroyed or are empty. While civilians continue with their lives, it has now become incredibly difficult for their businesses to thrive or for them to access services. The military has to constantly roam the streets and ensure that they are vigilant and guarding all parts of Maiduguri, while this is impossible, it has left many people living in fear. Women and children, who often face a variety of challenges and inequalities, are even greatly affected as insecurity has exacerbated the already existing inequalities. The societal dynamics and peacebuilding efforts have greatly been affected by the relationships built between leaders and followers within Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria.

One may assume that terrorist leaders may not be recognized as leaders due to the nature of their organizations and methods, this study revealed that among their followers, these leaders are feared, respected, and considered as 'effective' or 'good' leaders. The participants of this study revealed that they recognise them as leaders, and found them 'reliable, charismatic and dependable.' This sentiment is evident in the sustained growth and popularity of terrorism and terrorist groups in Nigeria. The acknowledgement of terrorist leaders as 'effective' leaders among their followers is a concerning aspect, contributing to Nigeria's high terrorism threat levels on a global scale.

This finding will inevitably be seen as shocking and somewhat disturbing for many, but these leadership dynamics have certainly led to the successful recruitment of many young people in Northern Nigeria who are convinced by these informal leaders and get recruited into Boko Haram. Normally, formal leaders are expected to build mutuality with their followers and both parties participate in ensuring the successful running of their communities. However, the overwhelming majority of the participants say they would rather choose their terrorist leaders over formal leaders, citing the dissatisfaction with the way formal leaders lead. Below are three quotes from three interviewees who had a similar view:

'I still do not like the leaders in my community, I would choose the leader of my battalion any day.'¹⁰⁶

'I like how charismatic the leader of my group was during his early days as a leader, he was charismatic, he united us and was a great problem solver. These days, the leaders in our communities do not care about us, but just their interests.'¹⁰⁷

'Our leaders are full of empty promises, they will promise food, water and jobs but look, we are suffering. However, the leader of my battalion made sure I had all I wanted as long as I stayed loyal.'¹⁰⁸

Insurgents, by posing a direct threat to peace-building processes and objectives, have significantly impeded peacebuilding efforts. Moreover, the understanding of propensities for peace varies considerably among former extremists. For some, peace is defined simply as the absence of war, while others associate it with basic needs such as access to food or water. Some view peace as the ability to move freely without fear of attacks, and yet others define it as the ability to coexist harmoniously and have equitable access to resources. This is in line with Galtung's conception of peace occurring on a spectrum of positive and negative peace which can occur amidst both structural and direct violence.¹⁰⁹ This diversity in perspectives adds complexity to the overarching goal of achieving peace. In Northern Nigeria, the harsh realities of human insecurity, resource scarcity, banditry, and high crime rates shape the daily lives of the people. Consequently, the implementation of government policies to address these challenges becomes a formidable task. Simultaneously, terrorist leaders find it relatively easier to recruit followers as they exploit and capitalise on the societal problems prevalent in Northern Nigerian communities. The existing vulnerabilities and struggles in these communities create fertile ground for the recruitment efforts of extremist groups.

To what extent do experiences within Boko Haram challenge or reinforce understandings of 'Stockholm syndrome'?

Contrary to the popular understanding of the kidnapped-kidnapper relations and the traditional definition of Stockholm syndrome, the victims/followers of Boko Haram do not usually form an emotional or psychological attachment to them. The research discovered that, in many instances, the bond between victims and Boko Haram is primarily transactional and social rather than emotional.

¹⁰⁴ Udosen, N. M. (2021). Farmers-herders crisis and food security in Nigeria: causes and implications. *European Journal of Political Science Studies*, 5(1).

¹⁰⁵ Ayinde, I. A., Otegunrin, O. A., Akinbode, S. O., & Otegunrin, O. A. (2020). Food security in Nigeria: impetus for growth and development. *J. Agric. Econ*, 6, 808-820.

¹⁰⁶ Interviewee 1, Borno, Maiduguri, 17 January 2023

¹⁰⁷ Interviewee 2, Borno Maiduguri, 17 January 2023

¹⁰⁸ Interviewee 5, Borno, Maiduguri, 18 January 2023

¹⁰⁹ Grewal, B. S. (2003). Johan Galtung: Positive and negative peace. *School of social science, Auckland University of technology*, 30, 23-26.

Due to limited opportunities, pervasive insecurity, and dire economic circumstances, individuals subjected to Boko Haram's influence often choose to stay *not* out of emotional attachment; but as a result of a pragmatic cost-benefit analysis. Their decision to stay is driven by the perceived benefits, the fear of being killed, and apprehension about potential persecution by their communities.

The dynamics of the relationship reveal that members receive financial rewards, promotions, and marriage opportunities, and their loyalty to the cause is acknowledged by leaders. Despite these internal dynamics, externally, all members of Boko Haram may indeed appear fully committed to the group's ideology and activities. None of the participants admitted to having formed a psychological bond with their leaders, despite spending many years with the group, some from a young age, and others from adolescence into adulthood. Their accounts consistently emphasized that their involvement was purely a transactional arrangement, characterized as "business," where they were rewarded for their contributions and saw no better alternative in their circumstances.

The study revealed that followers engaged in the group's activities as instructed by their leaders because they perceived them as 'good' and 'intentional' leaders. The leaders were characterized as charismatic, spending considerable time with their followers, building relationships, listening to them, providing financial incentives, and promoting them when deemed appropriate. This underscores that the success of radicalization within Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs) stems from the effective mutuality-building between leaders and followers, rather than solely relying on trauma bonding, emotional connections, or Stockholm syndrome. A notable supporting factor is that all interviewees surrendered their arms upon hearing a call to do so. In 2016, Nigeria launched a program to help Boko Haram defectors reintegrate back into their communities through a policy called Operation Safe Corridor as a national strategy to degrade militant activity in the country's northeast region.¹¹⁰ This programme encouraged voluntary defections, including all the participants of this study, who revealed that they left because though they participated in the group's activities, they did not believe in the ideology anymore nor did they bond with the leaders emotionally, but when a window of opportunities was opened they took it, hoping that it will present them with better opportunities. This further aligns with Cornell's seminal research on the mutuality spectrum, which elucidates how fluctuations in the level of mutual engagement significantly influence both the nature and duration of the outcomes. Cornell's work also posits that the mutuality between leader and follower, or kidnapper and kidnapped, can reach such an intensity that it precipitates criminal acts or even suicide at particular moments.

However, this mutuality often remains tenuous, prompting individuals to abandon these relationships as soon as more favorable opportunities present themselves.¹¹¹

The study challenges the perception that expressing love for a leader or praying for them necessarily indicates an emotional bond. Participants who maintained positive relations with their leaders and even prayed for them asserted that this connection was not emotional. The study therefore concludes that if the leaders of terrorist groups effectively build mutuality with their followers, even when relying on more transactional approaches, then the radicalization process can become successful.

The deduction derived from the analysis of the ten interviews indicates that a substantial proportion of Boko Haram 'affiliates' were not subjected to abduction but mass recruitment, in some instances forcefully or through manipulation, or when Boko Haram raids and takes over communities. A prevalent pattern emerged wherein numerous unwilling individuals fell prey to manipulation, deceitful tactics, and recruitment strategies employed by Boko Haram, it usually works within partners where the husband is a member then he forces his wife or convinces her to join, or within the family members of friends, or twisting teachings of their religion. As earlier mentioned, the group takes advantage of the unfavorable social and economic situation in communities, then they emerge as leaders who seem to bring solutions and people together in order to attain a common goal. Simultaneously, others found themselves subjugated under the command of Boko Haram during multiple instances when the group seized control of communities. In terms of leadership, this underscores the group's initial reliance on coercive power, followed by transactional support to secure loyalty. While this process differs from the establishment of mutuality, it yields similar outcomes, namely radicalization leading to extremism.

CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of Stockholm syndrome within the context of Boko Haram deviates from conventional and generic understandings delineated in existing literature. Unlike the typical scenario where a clear-cut kidnapper and kidnapped individual gradually form an emotional bond over time, the manifestation of Stockholm syndrome within Boko Haram exhibits distinct nuances and complexities that defy traditional characterization.

While victims may, over time, actively partake in the group's activities and become members, such a phenomenon does not align with the conventional parameters of Stockholm syndrome; rather, it aligns more

¹¹⁰ Operation Safe Corridor Programme and Reintegration of Ex-Boko Haram Fighters in Nigeria

¹¹¹ *Ibid*

closely with the process of mutuality building leading to radicalisation and extremism. These two terms, despite sharing certain attributes, diverge fundamentally: Stockholm syndrome entails an emotional bond with the kidnapper, yet it fails to elucidate scenarios where followers were not forcibly abducted. While it is true that Boko Haram's motives are rooted in extremist and ideological beliefs, the process of radicalization leading to extremism does not necessarily culminate in an emotional bond, but more of an ideological bond. Moreover, participation in the group's activities cannot be interpreted as indicative of such a bond. Radicalization is a complex process influenced by various social, political, and economic factors, and the commitment of individuals to the group's cause may be driven by coercion, survival, or pragmatic considerations rather than emotional attachment. Conversely, mutuality building offers insights into various entry points, ranging from coercive tactics to recruitment strategies. It comprehensively explains that the attachment is not solely to a leader but to a cause, implying that individuals can be linked to the group socially, financially, or ideologically.

At the core of Boko Haram's 'efficacy' lies its leadership. The dynamics within Boko Haram's relationships and the group's ability to 'retain' members transcend mere manifestations of Stockholm syndrome. The leaders employ diverse tactics to cultivate mutual understanding with their followers, actively identifying vulnerabilities that can be exploited and leveraged to forge a sense of camaraderie. Amidst the prevailing insecurity, lack of self-actualization, and chronic poverty in Northern Nigeria, a pervasive sense of hopelessness ensues among civilians. Exploiting this despair, terrorist leaders entice potential recruits by offering and to some extent providing financial incentives, sustenance, a semblance of 'security,' and differential treatment, strategically tailored to appeal to their targets. Consequently, many victims and willing sympathizers become radicalized, actively engaging in the group's brutal activities as a direct consequence of the relationships established with their leaders.

The observations regarding how terrorist leaders exploit despair to recruit members have significant implications for leadership and Boko Haram studies. It underscores the importance of understanding mutuality building, a process that ultimately radicalizes individuals. Further research could explore countering terrorism using a leadership framework. Moreover, comparative studies with other terrorist organizations could provide valuable insights into commonalities and differences in recruitment tactics and leadership dynamics. This would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the group's behavior and strategies, leading to creation of comprehensive counterterrorism policies and strategies.

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