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Women and Islamist Motivated Violent Extremism in Kenya: A Feminist Perspective

Annie Kathuni

M-IR

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Noragric Department of International Environment and Development Studies
The Faculty of Landscape and Society
P.O. Box 5003 N-1432 Ås Norway Tel.: +47 67 23 00 00
Internet: <https://www.nmbu.no/fakultet/landsam/institutt/noragric>

Declaration

I, Annie Kathuni declare that this thesis is a result of my research investigations and findings. Sources of information other than my own have been acknowledged and a reference list has been appended. This work has not been previously submitted to any other university for award of any type of academic degree.

Signature.....

Date.....

Acknowledgement

Writing this thesis has been the greatest challenge of all! I am however grateful as writing this thesis taught me the value of resilience and sharpened by analytical skills while enabling me interact with various experts whose insights are truly valuable.

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I acknowledge that any errors or omissions are mine and mine alone.

Abstract

As the world takes on a globalized outlook with advancements in technological and innovation realms, violent extremism continues to pose major setbacks to the progression of human race while impacting negatively to efforts directed towards security achievement. Of concern is the increased targeted recruitment and radicalization of women into violent extremism with extremist groups seeming to perceive women as vital assets to their operations. This thesis aims to find out the motivating factors that push women into violent extremism and the roles they play within extremist organization, in this case Al-Shabaab in the framework of Kenya while also trying to understand why women are becoming vital assets to extremist organizations. A feminist lens and a gender sensitive approach will aid in an in-depth understanding of the relationship between women and violent extremism with the aim of reaching comprehensive insightful findings useful in bridging the gaps between policy and practice in counterterrorism and countering violent extremism programs in Kenya.

The thesis employs a case study approach where ten Kenyan experts in terrorism matters in respect to Al-Shabaab and who due to work position came into contact with victims of violent extremism or returnees have been interviewed with their insights providing a nuanced understanding of the study topic.

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

AD – Anno Domini

AMISOM – African Union Mission to Somalia

CSO – Civil Society Organization

CT - Counterterrorism

CVE – Countering Violent Extremism

FBI - Federal Bureau of Investigation

HIV - Human Immunodeficiency Virus

ICT - Information Communications Technology

IR – International Relations

NACCJSG – National Advisory Committee on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals.

ISIL - Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant

ISIS – Islamic State of Iraq and Syria

ISS – Institute for Security Studies

P/CVE - Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism

RQ – Research Question

UN – United Nations

UNSOM – United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia

UNSC – United Nations Security Council

USAID – United States Agency for International Development

USIP - United States Institute of Peace

UK – United Kingdom

US - United States

1.0 Introduction

The dynamics of religious tensions in Kenya have evolved over time and heightened after the incursion of the Kenyan army into Somalia in 2011 to help combat Al-Shabaab insurgency. This incursion exacerbated older disputes in Kenya revolving around perceived inequality and marginalization of ethnic Somalis and Kenyan Muslims, which created the framework under which Al-Shabaab operates on (Ndungu et al., 2017). Of concern is the widespread presence of both local and foreign extremist elements in Kenya, as well as the growing numbers of young girls and women being radicalized and recruited into the terrorist network in Kenya.

Although women are increasingly playing multiple roles in terrorism, few empirical studies have been carried out on women and terrorism in the framework of Kenya and this thesis seeks to examine the relationship between women and terrorism by employing a feminist methodology and a gender-based analysis. The study will provide a comprehensive analysis that examines the relationship between religion and terrorism as well as the interaction between women, gender and terrorism which will be useful in answering the research questions. Although some of the presented causations are in existent and well known in terrorism and gender studies, some findings may present new insights useful in the fight against terrorism in Kenya. Additionally, the critical feminist theory used to analyse women and their involvement with Al-Shabaab aims to bring a fresh outlook in this field of study dominated by masculine perspectives that results to the non-inclusion of women in counter violence extremism programs largely hampering efforts in preventing and countering violent extremism in Kenya¹. The study also aims at encouraging a greater incorporation of gender-sensitive approaches to violent extremism studies.

1.1 Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the potential factors that motivates females to join Al-Shabaab in Kenya?
2. What roles do women involved with Al-Shabaab play in Kenya?

¹ The 2016 Kenya National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism has limited women participation with the process of adopting Kenya's National Counterterrorism Strategy excluding the participation of women organizations and their opinions; more so the contribution of those in affected communities.

In answering these questions, I will draw on informants' experiences which will be conceptualized and analysed from a feminist IR literature for a more nuanced understanding. The informants were drawn from government institutions, civil society organizations, and women group organizations in three cities in Kenya which are prone to extremist elements and act as major operation bases and targets for Al-Shabaab militant group that is Nairobi, Mombasa and Garissa. I however acknowledge that issues of access and security will constrain the qualitative research hence limiting the empirical support for the thesis which calls for more empirical and theoretical work on the research topic.

1.2 Thesis outline

The thesis is divided into four main chapters. Chapter two which follows directly after this introduction presents the theoretical framework which employs a critical feminist IR perspective in the analysis of the study topic. This chapter argues for the use of gender-sensitive concepts as vital tools of analysis in terrorism studies. Chapter three introduces the methodology of the study where choices made for the empirical study part are discussed and justified while also accounting for potential inadequacies in relation to data collection and research methods used. Chapter four presents the findings of this study aligned to the empirical evidence from collected data, with two sub-chapters corresponding to each research question discussing the findings in details. Chapter five summarizes the main findings with chapter six concluding this thesis with the application of reflexivity.

2.0 Theoretical Framework

This chapter presents and discusses the theoretical framework of the study. This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of existing work on women, gender and terrorism while adapting to a feminist perspective with a view of getting insights that can help understand violent extremism dynamics in the context of Kenya. This context is especially useful in analyzing extremist groups like Al-Shabaab that function outside formal state structures in order to understand its engagement with women in Kenya. This chapter will largely help in positioning the research questions in international relations literature while providing useful concepts that will aid in the conceptualization of findings. The overriding viewpoint for this chapter is that women are important political actors whose outlooks and experiences are essential for understanding international politics and more specifically terrorist organizations.

2.1 Religion and Terrorism

A long history is shared between religion and terrorism, so much so that most English words used to describe terrorism and its activities are obtained from the names of religious groups active many years ago (Hoffman, 1995). According to (Lewis, 1985), the word assassin was coined from a religious terrorist group, a radical outgrowth of the Muslim Shia who battled Christian enthusiasts trying to annihilate present day Iran and Syria between 1090-1272 A.D. Before committing murder, the assassin referred to as 'hashish-eater' would consume hashish, an act regarded as a sanctified duty that justified his actions (Lewis, 1985). Similarly, some of the present day terrorist groups including Al-Shabaab also have their own religious beliefs that justify actions, the most prevalent belief being that terrorists who die for their cause die as martyrs and are rewarded with 72 virgins in paradise, thus creating the essence of self-sacrifice through suicidal martyrdom (Hoffman, 1995).

According to Fitzgerald (2007b), religion is a Western concept that lacks a scholarly agreed universal definition due to its complex and problematic nature and can generally be regarded as a social-cultural practice that entails abstract set of beliefs, doctrines and global views in relations to a supernatural being. Regardless of how religion is defined, it has been as a social control mechanism in the society with both positive and negative influences on human history while acting as a motivating factor

for both good and evil (Tarlow, 2017). While sacred texts largely act as the basis for religious beliefs, their interpretation and the environment differs contributing to the understanding of what religion is; all of which act as strong group identifiers differentiating various religions and their adherents. According to Tarlow (2017), most religions are cultural, religious and political systems that establishes themselves in diverse ways creating some form of distinctiveness.

Marx's Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right (1844) termed religion the "opium of the people", acknowledging religion's intense seductive power that draws people to it. While religion in itself, just like societies and ethical structures seldom upholds violence as an end in itself since violence is universally negatively perceived, a few researchers have pinpointed the existence of violence in religion terming it religious violence (Solomon, 2005; Fitzgerald, 2007; Kimball, 2008 & Tarlow, 2017). In her analysis of religious influence on terrorism, Zalman (2008) rejects the notion of a root-cause linkage between terrorism and religion arguing that contrary to widely held belief that religious fanaticism causes terrorism, it does not, but rather creates favorable conditions that encourages terrorism. On the other hand, Tarlow (2017) describes religion as merely a subset of ideology and argues that depending on how religion is used it can become a major inspiration for violence or a major political force. Religious violence has been described as a phenomenon where religion becomes the subject or object of violent behavior, that is; violence inspired by, or is in reaction to religious doctrines or teachings directed towards a specific target or towards a perceived assailant (Hoffman, 1995). According to Hoffman (1995), all world religions have symbols and histories of violence and war, with a general universal indecisiveness between the overall desire to shun violence and the acknowledgement of justifiable uses of violence to avert the evils that permeate all cultures.

There has been a major shift from traditional ethno-nationalist ideologies guiding terrorist groups between 1968 to the early 90's, towards more theologically motivated ideologies, complicating the fight against terrorism (Hoffman, 1993). This can be seen from the 9/11 terror attack that created a discourse that largely highlighted the connection between Islam and terrorism by depicting this attack as being motivated by religious imperatives through extreme interpretation of Islam. Religious motivated terrorists, according to Hoffman (1995), declare total war and carry out terrorist acts

for no audience but themselves, perpetrating violent acts against a diverse target with 'holy terror' expression being directed towards persons not conforming to shared religious beliefs. The use of these terms to condone terrorist acts is widespread, furthering violent acts while portraying victims as deserving and unworthy lesser beings. Hoffman (1995) describes religious terrorism as unconstrained by moral, political or other constraints that interfere with other forms of terrorism while seeing violence as an end in itself. That is; where secular terrorist perceive acts of unsystematic violence as depraved and counterproductive religious terrorist consider similar violence as not only necessary for the attainment of their objectives, but also as morally justified. From these discussions, religion seems to be a legitimizing force for acts of terror, rendering such acts as being borne of religious drives which are most often backed up by the (mis)interpretation of scriptures by clerics claiming to preach divinity.

Currently, religious terrorism is among the most notable forms of witnessed political violence, with many terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda, ISIS, Al-Shabaab and Taliban having strong religious elements marred by political aspects as observed in their political ideologies and actions. Karen Armstrong argument that, "the popular belief that religion is the cause of the world's bloodiest conflicts is central to our modern conviction that faith and politics should never mix" can best explain the aftermath of terror acts of such terrorist organizations (Armstrong, 2014).

A research carried out by Freud (1921, p. 128). on the psychology of religious groups in relation to religious violence stated that "religion, even if it calls itself of love, must be hard and unloving to those who do not belong to it and that indeed every religion is in the same way a religion of love for all those whom it embraces; while cruelty and intolerance towards those who do not belong to it are natural to every religion" This view agrees with that of Solomon (2005) which term religion as dangerous due to its susceptibility to violence, where adherents hold religious claims they make as absolute truth and being antagonistic to those who think otherwise. Kimball (2008, p. 1), argues that "...more wars have been waged, more people killed, and these days more evil perpetrated in the name of religion than by any other institutional force in human history". This agrees with Avalos (2005, p. 347) claim that as opposed to other secular groups, religious sects are "inherently prone to violence" making religion a complex phenomenon.

There has been an academic divide to terrorism phenomenon with some taking a rationalized political, economic or social approaches to terrorism and others taking a less rationalized approach centered on ideologies motivated by religion or emotions (Tarlow, 2017). With no consensus on terrorism definition by the international community and with the United Nations failing to institute an all agreed upon official definition, scholars and policy makers alike have been left to define terrorism according to how they perceive it resulting to various contested definitions. US Department of State (2001) defines terrorism as a “premediated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by subnational groups who promote extremist ideology, usually intended to influence an audience”. The Federal Bureau of Investigations (2005) define terrorism as “the unlawful use of force and violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives” Baylis et. al (2014, p. 358) on the other hand defines terrorism as “the weapon of the weak conducted by a minority of individuals who promote an extremist ideology; and often fails to create political change” with NACCJSG (1976) defining terrorism as “the threat of violence and the use of fear to coerce, persuade, and gain public attention”. The commonalities in these definitions is the use of violence directed towards non-combatants aimed at inducing fear and influencing an audience as well as the achievement of political or social aims. Baylis et. al (2014) definition of terrorism as being used to promote an extremist ideology and often failing to create political change draws different arguments due to Taliban’s ability to create political change after toppling the Afghanistan government in 2020. On the other hand, using Ganor’s (2002) argument that terrorism definition is dependent on the subjective views of the definer one could argue that depending on who is viewing Taliban, Taliban could be perceived as a terrorist organization riding on legitimate goals of fighting for national liberation with such views appearing to legitimize these actions which presents complexities in the conceptualization of terrorism.

According to Ganor (2002, p. 288), states that sponsor terrorism and are after a definition that serve their political objectives are “trying to persuade the international community to define terrorism in such a way that the particular terror groups they sponsor would be outside the definition thus to absolve them from all responsibility for supporting terrorism”. This could explain the lack of agreement on terrorism

definition by the international community. Ganor (2002, p. 288), claims that “an objective definition of terrorism is not only possible; it is also indispensable to any serious attempt to combat terrorism”, while arguing that lack of such a definition would not succeed in the fight against international terrorism. Ganor (2002) however suggests that these definitions should be anchored on accepted international laws and principles that guide the behaviours sanctioned in conventional wars between states.

Cronin (2003) argues that terrorism definition and who is termed as a terrorist change over time, with political viewpoints, strategic interests and cultural beliefs largely determining how terrorism is defined, which agrees with Ganor (2002, p. 287) views that the question of who is a terrorist depends largely on the subjective outlook of the definer while arguing that these subjective definitions are not helpful in determining who the real terrorists are.

Just like terrorism, violent extremism is a concept bearing different scholarly, governmental and intergovernmental definitional approaches. According to FBI, violent extremism is the "encouraging, condoning, justifying, or supporting the commission of a violent act to achieve political, ideological, religious, social, or economic goals". USAID defines violent extremism as "advocating, engaging in, preparing, or otherwise supporting ideologically motivated or justified violence to further social, economic or political objectives". The Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security (2014) describes violent extremism as constituting activities of persons and groups willing to use violence so as to achieve political, ideological or religious goals. Sotlar (2004) argues that extremism in terms of terrorism, inter-ethnic and inter-religious hatred, left or right-wing political radicalism and religious fundamentalism is a political term which determines those activities that are not morally, ideologically or politically in accordance with legal and constitutional norms of the state; that are fully intolerant and reject the existing social order” and mainly fueled by extreme religious doctrines. This agrees with Arena & Arrigo (2005), argument that the description of extremism as a motivation for terrorism is that extremism encompasses ideological beliefs about a responsibility to bring back the political system to the desired form advocated by religious norms through violence, which therefore attributes extremism to groups fighting for their political agendas often against governments’ conventional systems. According to Fitzgerald (2007), violent extremism is perpetrated for a variety of ideological reasons and religion is

generally one of the many contributing factors that can result to conflict. He further argues that violence in all its forms is strongly driven by ethnic and political animosities rather than by religious worldviews. On the other hand, Ndungu et al., (2017) argue that terrorism root causes are multiple and religion is one of them, with a combination of factors such as marginalization, political, social-economic suppression, ignorance, corruption and high poverty and unemployment rates being vital factors that can help explain terrorism phenomena. These views agree with Ngari & Reva (2017, pg. 5) who question if religion, with all its various forms of interpretation can be the only “source of extremism, or whether it is a tool used to organize around social-economic, ideological or geopolitical concerns”.

Terrorism and violent extremism have some similarities in their definitions; that is the unlawful use of violence against non-combatants with an aim of achieving political, social, economic, ideological or religions goals. Due to this commonality, the study uses terrorism and violent extremism interchangeably.

2.2 The Insights of Critical Feminist theory

With theories being constitutive of reality and conscious of how ideas help shape the world, many IR feminists have challenged the social scientific frameworks dominating the IR field which portrays gender-blind accounts of world politics (Ackerly & True, 2008; Banks, 2019; Phelan, 2020; Sjoberg & Gentry, 2011; Tickner, 1992). Unlike other IR perspectives that presents IR in a hyper politicized and securitized global discourse, a feminist perspective widens its outlook to incorporate all actors in the international system with the aim of unearthing where women are in international politics. Women and feminism, men and masculinity as well as gender concepts are major units of analysis, with women being the subjects of analysis rather than non-important secondary objects. This implies the perception of different worlds by both IR and feminist scholars who as a result use different methodologies to try to understand these worlds, with Tickner (1999) arguing that critical feminist IR perspectives are significantly ontologically and epistemologically different from traditional IR perspectives.

The power structures in IR have overlooked women in international politics and while women play vital roles such as diplomats’ wives, sex workers or plantation laborers

among others which largely enhances the functioning of power structure in various areas of diplomacy, security and economy, women's contribution to international politics remains suppressed. With power being a concept of interest in both traditional IR and feminist theories, who has or does not have power and how it is used are the key feminist IR questions (Enloe, 2008). As argued by Enloe (2008, p. 258), "a feminist enquiry into anything entails, first, being curious about the creations of meanings for masculinities and femininities; second, taking seriously the conditions, ideas and actions of diverse women, and third, always tracking down what sorts of power are at work, in whose hands, and with what consequence." Enloe (2008, p. 344) further argues that the "personal is international; the international is personal". Feminists thus undertake to study global politics both at the level of individual women's lives as well as viewpoints of the marginalized in the realm of world politics so as to bring to light other alternative voices who see, know and experience international politics differently. The use of a feminist inquiry can bring light to gender hierarchies entrenched in theories and practices of international politics and enable the understanding of the extent to which systems of domination are organized (Tickner, 1992). In addition, understanding the motivation and roles of women in violent extremism through feminist lens matters as it helps shift focus from men as the sole perpetrators of violence to the understanding that women can also make decisions and influence events which is critical in the designing of CT and CVE policies and programs that are able to address the needs of both men and women affected by violent extremism.

Most terrorism studies have omitted women altogether and feminist perspective seeks to find where women are by critically analyzing the gendered dynamics within terrorist organizations. For instance, Sjoberg (2009, pg. 69) argues that much of terrorism studies "treats the 'terrorist' as a subject gendered by male definition; that is the term terrorist is taken to generally mean a man, resulting to women involved in terrorism be portrayed in gendered terms hence obscured. According to Banks (2019) terrorism discourses do not pay enough attention to women which results to the omission of women as victims or perpetrators of that terrorism while resulting to differential impacts of terrorism for men and women. Sjoberg & Gentry (2011) critiques power structures that deny women agency by pointing out that such structures have denied women agency in their political or criminal violence by

holding on to assumptions that incapacitates women's abilities to commit terror acts, assumptions that have largely developed and maintained current perceived notions of women and femininity. Sjoberg (2009) further argues that women engaged in terrorism as 'terrorists' that is women who happen to be terrorists rather than women terrorists, the latter being a gendered term are rational actors in their terrorist acts.

Sjoberg (2009) posits that feminist theory can present different readings of terrorism and argues that feminists' approaches to terrorism studies have questioned and critiqued current definitions of terrorism. For instance, Sjoberg argues that from the US Department of State (2001) definition of terrorism, domestic violence and war time rape also fall under the definition of terrorism with women being more often victims of these attacks. On the other hand, Herman & O'Sullivan (1991) critique the depiction of terrorists as non-state actors and state-actors as counter terrorists due to notable similarities in their behaviors characterized by the element of violence. They argue that the state perceived to be the protector of its citizens often hurt them as the war against terrorism is mostly won at the expense of the marginalized citizens. This highlights the power of a feminist analysis in its attempts to rework definitions of terrorism in such a way that they reflect the empirical world. Additionally, analyzing terrorism from a feminist's perspective provides a unique approach to unearth the dynamics of gendered terrorism which have the potential to significantly enhance our understanding of recent terrorism trends, the current threats as well as best gender-sensitive ways to prevent and counter terrorism.

2.3 Gender (and Terrorism)

Gender has been termed as "a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes and ... a primary way of signifying relationships of power" (Scott, 1986, p.1053-1075). While historically the term gender has been understood from a biological perspective, it is now used by feminists to not generally mean the biological differences existing between males and females, but to refer to a "set of culturally shaped and defined characteristics associated with masculinity and femininity (Tickner, 1992). According to Tickner (1992), gender and gender differences, which are socially constructed vary across history and cultural divides and act as the foundation for socially legitimized imbalanced relationships between men and women that uphold men's superiority over women. A gender

analysis denotes approaches used to comprehend the relationship between men and women and the disparities in these relationships, while also acknowledging that men and women's needs, priorities and life experiences often differ due to divergent political, economic, religious, cultural or social roles and expectations (March et al., 1999). Sjoberg (2007, p.85) argues that although there is "not one gendering" but rather many gendering, arrays "of discourses which can set, change, enforce, and represent meaning" can still be found in various aspects of global politics. According to Ackerly & True (2008), the integration of gender-sensitive approaches and feminist inquiries into the study of international relations help unearth gaps and differences existing between the individual meanings attached by women to their experiences and the meanings society attach to the same experiences, resulting to societal portrayal of women in a false reflection of themselves, with subsequent construction of traditional androcentric biases against women.

Gender analysis is an important part of transforming ways of being and knowing by filtering knowledge to focus on gender as a specific form of power relation, or to find out how gender is central to understanding global processes in addition to helping focus on everyday women's experiences as women while highlight the consequences of women's imbalanced social positions (Steans, 1998, p.5). Ackerly & True (2008) describe international relations as having gendered underpinnings in the modern state system, with high politics being dominated by men and masculinity and argue that masculine underpinnings of international relations through gender hierarchies that uphold men's knowledge and experiences have shaped how the world of international politics is constructed hence our understanding of international politics. This agrees with Tickner (1992) who argues that autonomy, power and rationality, features most valued in international relations are typically associated with men and masculinity, while notions of weakness and naivety are associated with women and femininity, with such discourses riding high in the world of international politics. This exaltation of male power has spawned a gender dichotomy that exists in reality, with this stereotypically socially constructed "hemogenic masculinity sustaining patriarchal authority, while legitimizing a masculine political and social order" (Tickner, 1992, pg. 3).

Phelan (2020) argues for the integration of gender analysis in terrorism studies as it provides a gender sensitive framework that enhances the understanding of recruitment

and radicalization strategies used by terrorist organizations as well as men and women's participation, motivation and experiences in terrorism. According to Phelan (2020), violent extremism and its gendered dynamics can affect the involvement of men and women differently, with the degree of involvement differing due to gendered experiences. In understanding the relationship between gender and terrorism, the focus on masculinity is as important as the focus on femininity, because as Phelan (2020, p.3) argues, understanding masculinity is not just about understanding men, but rather recognizing "the power structures and gendered practices that subordinates both men and women". This understanding can enable in the comprehension and analysis of how and why violent extremists often draw on concepts of violent masculinities to display their frustrations on perceived injustices. For instance, understanding how gender practices and constructs for instance the notion of "manhood" can create the feeling of authority and entitlement can help explain terrorist organizations' militarized masculine structures, their motivation, actions and sustained involvement as well as how recruitment strategies can be efficiently customized differently for men and women (Phelan, 2020). Additionally, a gendered approach to violent extremism gives insights to gendered dynamics in motivation for joining extremist groups and the roles played by both men and women and how they impact on the operations of these groups, hence being in a position to develop responses better suited to addressing the gender-based dynamics that characterize most extremist groups.

The dynamics of the relationship between gender and terrorism is notable within terrorist networks where gender is strategically used to appeal, recruit and create notions of organizational legitimacy (Sjoberg, 2009). This can be seen in ISIS, Al Qaeda, and Al-Shabaab's arrayed efforts of gender consideration in their online messaging through 'women only' platforms, their embracement of patriarchy and toxic masculinities, ingrained women prejudice as well as existing dualities that portray women as weak and men as strong Sjoberg & Gentry (2011). These gendered perceptions have the potential to ignite and spread extremism and violent extremism. Johnston et al., (2020) in examining Islamist extremist websites in Indonesia through gender lens found out the reasons why women join extremist groups was largely based on extremist groups' use of gender specific ideologies, extremist messaging and content directed towards women and meant to lure them into joining extremist

networks. Johnston et al., (2020) argue that the use of gendered messaging by extremist groups targeting men and women differently not only aims to increase their membership but also to promote masculine inferences that offer an “alternative vision of god-ordained gender complementarity” that preserves male dominance.

Sjoberg & Gentry (2011) describe women in terrorism as gendered actors navigating-gendered relationships and living in a gendered world hence the need for gender-sensitive literature that seeks to understand women’s participation in violent extremism in a gender-sensitive way by acknowledging that women, just like everyone else, have intricate personal and political choices that shape their actions. Women involvement in terrorism is therefore not just about women but also about gender, with gender lenses helping bring out other alternative forgotten voices which know and experience terrorism differently from the mainstream and widely held discourses (Bloom, 2005). This therefore calls for the incorporation of in-depth gender analysis to terrorism studies as its exclusion ‘risks forfeiting the potential contributions of women in efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism’ (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2019: 1).

2.4 A Gender Analysis on Women and Terrorism

Traditionally, women and terrorism have been deemed to have no connection and the thought of women as perpetrators of terrorist attacks was unfathomable as it went against the social cultural belief of women being the binding force of family structures, a belief widely held by various communities globally (Sjoberg et. al, 2011). Nonetheless, over the years, women have in various capacities been part of violent extremist and terrorist groups around the globe, may it be their involvement in Ku Klux Klan American group since its existence in the 1860s or in Germany’s Baader-Meinhof gang in the 1970s, their roles in the black widows of Chechnya as well as their involvement in the planning and assassination of Tsar Alexander II by People’s will. According to Sjoberg & Gentry (2011), the historical perspective of women’s involvement in Islamic terrorism dates back to the Quran where the early female fighters known as the mujahidaat were devoted to protecting Prophet Muhammad at any cost. Historical records of women’s active involvement in terrorism is also evident from the recruitment, equipping and deployment of female suicide bombers in the 1980’s by the Hezbollah and the Tamil Tigers, to women’s

involvement in terrorist acts in the Kurdistan Workers Party, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia as well as the Shining path group in Peru where women have fought alongside their male counterparts (Agara, 2015, p. 116).

There has been widespread assumption that terrorists are mainly males, assumptions that could be attributed to few numbers of female terrorists, past terrorism studies leaving out women involvement and gender stereotypes (Banks, 2019). Sjoberg & Gentry (2016) argue that women have always been involved with terrorist groups both as supporters and perpetrators of terror acts and insurrections in countries like Sri Lanka, Chechnya, Pakistan, Iraq, Palestine, Yemen, India and Kenya. Sjoberg & Gentry (2016) estimates about 300 women from Europe and United States as having travelled to Iraq, Syria and Libya battlefields noting that in many cases, social dynamics are at play. This agrees with Banks (2019) argument that women have in reality been part of terrorist organizations as both supporters and fighters and that their involvement in terrorism is not a new phenomenon, rather, the differing extent of their involvement based on their gender experience is. Even with this history, the widely held societal belief that women as life givers are kind and peaceful in nature has created the assumption that women are highly unlikely to be involved in activities that shed blood, making the relationship between women and terrorism a complicated one (Cunningham, 2003).

Women globally have over the years risen to take up positions in various political and social-economic positions reserved for men. However, even with these developments, women and femininity remain subordinated to men and masculinity with women being largely under-represented in global political economy undertakings while being perceived as repressed actors in the international system (Ackerly & True, 2008). Sjoberg & Gentry (2011) argue that even where women have created a niche for themselves in professions associated with masculinity, they are often referred by their sex, for instance women pilots, women soldiers, women leaders or even women terrorists, putting their gender at the forefront of accounts. However, this is not the case in professions associated with femininity such as teaching or nursing, where women are simply referred to as nurses or teachers without being branded women teachers or women nurses. This form of gender stereotype can be associated with cultural norms expressed through folklores that upholds men's superiority over women by portray men as the stronger gender (as warriors, brave and strong) while

portraying women as the weaker gender (fragile and innocent) which is deeply embedded in most societal practices especially in the global south where women's voices remains largely suppressed. These kinds of cultural beliefs and gender stereotypes on women have not gone unnoticed by most terrorist networks who have taken advantage by increasing targeted recruitment of women due to the strategic advantages that can be accrued from including women in their operations.

The focal question that feminist inquiry asks of where women are in international politics leads us to recognize that among other places that 'women are' such as diplomats' wives, women are also in terrorist organizations where they are increasingly being incorporated in various ranks, both in support roles and as perpetrators. According to Bloom (2010, Pg. 95), terrorist groups exploit gender stereotypes strategically by widely using "women as frontline operatives, making women the ultimate stealth weapon; partly to substitute the loss of male recruits, and partly to evade counter-terrorist profiles" and also because of their ability to access various targets with greater ease due to the assumption that women are less potent. This agrees with O'Rourke (2009, pg. 689) argument that compared to men, women are more likely to pass security measures without being subjected to stringent security checks and also have a greater capacity to conceal explosives without generating much suspicion, hence being in a position to carry out deadly attacks which are as lethal as the ones perpetrated by their male counterparts. According to UNSOM (2017), in addition to women's ease in target penetration whilst attracting less attention than their male counterparts, they are mostly recruited because of their effectiveness in enticing new male recruits thus helping grow the militants' numbers and capabilities.

The increasing involvement of women in terrorism which is male dominated in nature, has seen a somewhat female acceptance in the male oriented networks leading to increased complexities in the modus operandi of terrorist networks, with the most common strategy being use of surprise attacks perpetrated by women especially suicide bombings on specified targets (Sjoberg & Gentry,2011). Bloom (2005) suggests that while women in terrorist organizations play similar roles to those played by women in the society; generally, as mothers, wives or nurturers, these roles have expanded to the provision of administrative, logistical and operational support which deviate from the traditional confines of femininity to household levels. Sjoberg &

Gentry (2011) however argue that women's inclusion in terrorist groups regardless of their education levels and roles is unlikely to change their social status in Islamic societies, a camouflage that makes women vital assets for terrorist groups while posing a great security threat. According to Miller (2007), even with increasing women's participation within terrorist organizations with similar or more individual capabilities than their fellow men, just like the dominant patriarchal features dominating the international system, most male terrorists continue to perceive women militants as the lesser sex compared to men, with increased recruitment of women not necessarily meaning or reflecting a reformist outlook of women or gender equality within terrorist organizations. This could explain why most major terrorist attacks globally are male dominated with women operating under the behest of men, bringing back the subordination of women under highly influenced patriarchal systems. This view agrees with Gentry (2019) who argues that misogyny is integral to most terrorist groups, with women being coerced to comply with patriarchy deemed as dominant. According to Bloom (2005), portrayal of women terrorists as only capable of acting under the authority of men denies them agency, rendering them voiceless and hidden, which leads to partial understanding of terrorism in general.

On the other hand, Alison (2009) suggests that the general labelling of women in terrorism as psychologically or emotionally unstable, gender defiant, sexually anomalous or as easily manipulated is self-defeating urging both scholars and policy makers to critically analyze the context of women's violence with the aim of correcting these assumptions as well as enabling a nuanced understanding of women and terrorism which is imperative in counterterrorism efforts as well as helping women who are victim of terrorism. Pape (2005) argues that just like men, women are rational actors in their undertaking of terrorism activities. In his case study Pape (2005) argues that women are rational actors in their terror actions by giving an example of a woman suicide bomber's decision to blow herself up after being raped, an act that renders the woman impure and an outcast with the likelihood of never getting married and having children, which in itself is humiliating to the rape victim, with Pape perceiving the suicide decision as a rational alternative decision to living a life of humiliation and misery at the hands of the judgmental society. This shows that far from assumptions that women involved in terrorist acts are mentally depraved, women are rational actors with individual agency and just like men, are equally a

security threat. Sjoberg & Gentry (2011) however argue that this agency is never devoid of constraints from patriarchal themes that guide most terrorist organizations.

According to USIP (2015), although recruitment of women in extremist groups is primarily voluntary especially through family ties; as a wife or sister of extremist group member, a large number of new recruits is forcefully recruited, some through kidnapping or intimidation. While using women as perpetrators of terrorist attacks, terrorists that identifies as 'Islamists' abide by traditional norms and sex separated roles which allow men to dominate and occupy public domains while limiting women to domestic and private spaces while being subservient to men, with violations of norms being meted with violent punitive measures (Shumway, 2007). Sjoberg & Gentry (2011) argue that with increased violence levels towards women notably rape and kidnapping by extremist groups, these groups are not ardent in seeing women attain more rights and neither are they keen on human rights. Even with this kind of treatment of women, more women are joining terrorist organizations begging the question what motivates women into violent extremism. From this discussion it can be argued that among other strategies, women will continue to be used by terrorist organizations as long as they find them useful in adapting to the changing security environment.

2.5 Gendered motivations

In understanding gendered motivation and how reasons for engaging in violent extremism may differ between men and women, Phelan (2020) posits that differing political, ideological, social-cultural and economic factors can explain how and why men and women join terrorist organizations. These factors can also be looked at from the terrorist organizations' perspectives with the aim of understanding how and to what extent gendered motivations influence these organization's policies and recruitment strategies. While motivation has not been perceived as a concern for male terrorists as they have been assumed to use violence in pursuit of political or organizational cause, women's motivation has been perceived differently from men's due to assumptions that women are victims of violence rather than its perpetrators (Banks, 2019). These perceptions can be attributed to deeply rooted patterns involving what shapes appropriate female behavior as highly influencing beliefs about women.

This gender difference has been captured by Sjoberg & Gentry (2016) as follows:

“Media, scholarly, and policy world reactions to women’s participation in violence classified as terrorism” is to treat women’s terrorism “as not terrorism but women’s terrorism, and women terrorists are at once characterized as aberrant, personally motivated, and beyond the agency of the female perpetrator.” (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2016 p. 145).

Coomaraswamy (2015) describes the increased involvement of women in terrorism as majorly being due to structural factors denoted by weak government institutions, development in information technology, personal or ideological drives and civil wars. Bloom (2011) study in the Middle East and North Africa revealed common motivating factors for both men and women; push factors such as oppression and marginalization in political, economic or social fronts, ethnic profiling characterized by humiliation in the hands of security forces resulting to torture or even death, and pull factors such as religious ideologies, patriotism or financial benefits. Ndungu et al (2017) describes motivation for violent extremism as being inclined on religion while arguing that although religion is not a threat in itself, it is used to initiate violent ripostes to set of circumstances and can be used for formation of identities which is an important feature of group violence. Zalman (2008) findings mirror the above views by pinpointing two factors motivating terrorist acts; social and political injustice where terrorist acts are directed towards righting perceived historical, social or political wrongs; and the belief that violent means will culminate to desired change.

Past studies on women and terrorism have argued that women’s involvement is either a representation of empowered liberated feminists or is a result of gender oppression, with the latter inducing personal motives rather than ideological ones (Berko & Erez, 2007; Margolin, 2016). This agrees with a study by Nuraniyah (2018) suggesting that self-agency is exercised by women terrorist with motivational factors being less ideational and more emotional such as the feeling of empowerment, moral duty, acceptance or redemption which could explain women’s involvement and continued stay in terrorist organizations even when they face hostilities or victimization from these groups. On the other hand Davis (2017), argues that while men and women share similar reasons for radicalization and motivation into terrorism, unlike men, women are highly likely to engage into terrorism where there is a personal

connection, and less likely to join by themselves in the absence of a group structure with Loken & Zelenz (2018) arguing that while men and women might share motivations for joining terrorist groups, religious ideologies with a gendered structure are the primary drives for women. This particular view is useful in understanding women drives for violent extremism and recruitment strategies employed by Al-Shabaab in Kenya that seems to target women within the confines of group structures where women are radicalized within family structures or through community structures such as through peer pressure.

Bloom (2010) cites almost solely personal reasons as motivating factors for women's involvement in terrorism, including "revenge for a personal loss, the desire to redeem the family name, to escape a life of sheltered monotony, to achieve fame, and to level the patriarchal societies in which they live." Bloom (2010) specifically pinpoints the role of sexual abuse in pushing women into terrorism stating; "What is incredibly compelling about delving into how and why women become suicide bombers is that so many of these women have been raped or sexually abused in the previous conflict either by the representatives of the state or by the insurgents themselves." Bloom (2010) further argues that even though women's involvement in terrorism is often linked to men, it is erroneous to assume that they are devoid of their own political motives.

A publication by the Israeli government indicates that women's involvement in terrorism is on the rise in Palestine, noting that terrorist organizations are out to exploit the advantages of dispatching women for tactical operations under the assumption that a women are thought to be gentle, soft and innocent and therefore rouse less suspicion than men (Pape, 2005). The publication further notes that women play multiple roles, the highest being female suicide bombers in addition to acting as facilitators in both planning and carrying out terrorist attacks. The publication pinpoints personal issues as a major cause for women's involvement and concludes that personal and social motives appear to be the most dominant drivers for women into violent extremism. Sjoberg & Gentry (2011) have linked women's drives to similar political and ideological dominant factors that motivate men into terrorism and critiqued findings that tend to explain women's terrorism as having differing drives from men's arguing that they deny women's agency while sanctioning gender stereotypes and women subservience. According to Sjoberg & Gentry (2011), even

with similar grievances, reasons for women involvement in violent extremism may vary from woman to woman due to differences in personal incentives for terrorism and from country to country due to political, cultural or religious differences which could explain why some countries particularly in the Middle East have women suicide bombers, with other countries like Kenya where the Al-Shabaab is prevalent not popular with women suicide bombers.

Banks (2019) argues that the sole focus on women motivation for suicide bombing tends to neglect the significance of strategies employed by male leaders to recruit women such as enticements of “gender equity in martyrdom for a cause, notions of hyper-femininity, redemption offers for those who have violated gender norms and faced community rejection, revenge for the death of a relative in a terrorist act, as well as religious incentives. For example, for their commitment, Hamas give women promises of arranged marriage (if unmarried when alive) with a member of Hamas or promises of being reunited with their husbands in paradise (Margolin, 2016). This largely agrees with Sjoberg & Gentry (2011), argument that terrorist groups offer persuasive reasons for women involvement with individual, organizational or national benefits being prevalent motivating factors. Even so, strategic rewards directed towards motivating terrorist activities can be argued to be gender specific and largely favouring men; for instance, the promise of 72 virgins in paradise for terrorists who die for their cause as martyrs is considered one of the highest honours for such ‘male martyrs’, with a lack of matching rewards for female ‘martyrs’ fighting for the same cause. Cunningham (2003, p. 171) describes these rewards as being based on the belief that women “lack credibility as terrorist actors as they do not fit the stereotypical model of the terrorist”.

Victor (2003) findings from interviews with Palestinian women indicate that patriarchal cultural norms and male-control of family honor were the main motivating factors for suicide acts, which agrees with Miller (2007, p. 52) argument that drives for women to suicide terrorism can arise when “pressures from within their familial units and social structures violate, weaken, or constrain their right to live”. Victor (2003) study also found out that the Palestinian women involved in suicide bombing experienced a sense of empowerment and liberation, although as argued by Berko & Erez, (2007, p. 511), such sense of empowerment is short-lived due to community’s

condemnation of the violation of gender norms that privilege caring for the family and upholding family honor as a bride and mother.

Speckhard (2008, p. 1023) rejects the concept of a “feminist cause” as the explanation for female terrorists and pinpoints “motivations inside conflict zones of trauma, revenge, nationalism, expression of community outrage and in non-conflict zones feelings of alienation, marginalization, negative self-identity, and a desire to act on behalf of those inside conflict zones” as motivators. This implies that motivation for both men and women could therefore be found in the same social practices and experiences that altogether denote “deep commitments to their communities” which erodes gender differences (O’Rourke, 2009, p. 684).

Margolin (2016) argues that with religious authorities enabling the designation of women as shahidas or martyrs, a high-level status formerly bestowed on men, motivation for women to join terrorist networks has risen and their actions justifiable, with women gaining status in the Islamic society. However, Sjoberg & Gentry (2016 p.151) have criticized this perspective arguing that acknowledging women’s empowerment in terrorism as being within the confines of patriarchal dispositions is reductive as women, just like any rational actor define their actions “inside a matrix of constraints, social expectations, and political pressures which are a part of the constitution of their decision-making process, rather than just an influence on it”. Sjoberg (2009, p. 73) argues that drives for terror acts are partly agent, partly structure, with the extent of each being based on the question of ‘relative power’ which agrees with MacKinnon’s (1993) views that the decision to commit terror acts is fully decisional and fully socially constructed.

Very few accounts link women’s terrorism to political commitment to the cause, despite such commitment being a dominant feature in most literature’s explanations of men’s’ drive to terrorist acts. However due to gender being a socially constructed phenomenon in different societies and during different historical periods, with time we can indeed expect to see various deviations in how gender can affect motivations, roles, radicalization and recruitment strategies of terrorist organizations.

2.6 Gendered Roles

With gender being at the heart of most terrorist groups where there is a specific link between gender norms and modus operandi, integrating gender into terrorism studies is imperative as it constitutes a vital factor of the overall ideology of many terrorist movements (Weilnböck, 2014a, 2014b). Bayard de Volo (2018) suggests that terrorist groups use gender tactically and strategically in the achievement of their aims and argues that most terrorist groups tend to have very specific expectations of what is supposed to be done by a man or woman. In looking at the roles played by women in terrorist organizations such as Al-Shabaab for instance, there seem to be an interplay between gender stereotype and traditional roles of men and women, with traditional gender norms largely shaping roles played, for instance men as combatants and women in support roles. The dominant support role, that is women as mothers has received much focus, with mothers deemed to have significant influence in their family structures and communities and thought to be the source of radicalization or as critical agents in de-radicalization and prevention efforts (Bloom, 2011).

For instance, according to Bloom (2011, p. 20) a notable jihadi Al Qaeda leader, Sanafi al-Nasr, eulogized his mother on social media saying, “She never asked for my return, rather she prepared and urged me to Jihad”, and describes mothers as being the source of radical views in many cases, as well as being at the forefront in creating notions that portray women as having a duty to raise their sons while prepare them for jihad in the sustenance of their fathers’ traditions. Even with most terrorist organizations incorporating gender in their operations, their perceptions on the roles of women, including mothers as vary, with ISIL for instance having retrogressive views on women and gender roles (Bloom, 2011). Bloom (2011) argues that ISIL discourages women as militants or suicide bombers and depict them as commodities where their degradation and abuse by male fighters is seen as leading to the achievement of hyper-masculinity.

The twenty first century has however seen rising complexities in women’s positions and roles in terrorist groups expanding from support roles to more active operational roles perceived as masculine (Bloom, 2010). With changing women’s roles in terrorism, terrorist groups are succeeding in using traditional gender stereotypes and gender norms to their advantage in gendered targeting, propaganda, recruitment and

radicalization strategies, with the targeted recruitment of women being perceived as vital in sustaining terrorist movements and motivating commitment amongst radicalized males, hence sustaining their continuous involvement in terrorist organizations (Bloom, 2011). Sjoberg & Gentry (2016) who posit that there is an increase in women's active participation within terrorist organizations where they play multiple roles such as support and logistics personnel, as kinetic resources, as kidnappers, hijackers, attackers and as martyrs. Huey & Witmer, (2016) describes the role dynamics in terrorist organizations as having changed with women playing multiple active roles both in real-time and online social networks among them facilitators, propagandists, recruiters, widows, leavers, planners and attackers, with these roles having major impact in these terrorist organizations. According to Sjoberg & Gentry (2011), women's roles in terrorist organizations can be delineated into different levels, with the highest being that of female suicide bombers, with other roles falling under support and facilitation in both planning or perpetrating terrorist attacks.

The changing roles of women depicts a shift from how traditional gender norms shaped the roles of men and women in terrorist groups, to a more strategic logical approach that does not limit women to support roles, all aimed at the achievement of their goals. Bloom's (2011) argument that even in organizations that uphold extreme patriarchal ideologies women are slowly taking up various roles with either active agency, or the appearance of agency could best explain these role dynamics within terrorist organizations.

With Kenya largely being a patriarchal society, the in-depth analysis of gendered motivations and roles will be definitive in understanding the potential drives for women in joining Al-Shabaab and the roles they play which will help provide a more complete image of Al-Shabaab and its use of both men and women as vital assets which could help in projecting Al-Shabaab's future plans while aiding in the development of the right strategies in the fight against violent extremism in Kenya,

2.7 Islamist Motivated Terrorism in the Context of Kenya

The early manifestation of rising threat of extremism in post-independence East Africa is traceable from a terrorist attack by an extremist Palestinian group, in 1980 targeted a Nairobi hotel in retaliation to Kenya's government support to Israel's

Operation Entebbe in Uganda where 20 people lost their lives (Princeton, 2020, p. 9). Subsequent major terrorist attacks targeting US embassies in the capital cities of Kenya and Tanzania were witnessed in August 1998, attacks perpetrated by Al-Qaida and killing over 200 people and injuring about 4,000 Kenyan and foreign nationals (Princeton, 2020). The threat of extremism has over the years expanded beyond its exclusively foreign eccentricity with national and regional extremism growing

Al-Shabaab, meaning “the Youth” is a Somali-based Islamist militant group with links to Al-Qaeda, whose strategic objective is the establishment of an Islamist state based on Sharia laws in the Horn of Africa while spilling over its ideologies throughout Africa as well as the elimination of foreign influence, including through violent means (“Al-Shabaab militant group”, n.d.). Al-Shabaab was termed an international terrorist group by the UK government in March 2010, with the group being recognized as a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the US government since 18th March 2008. A report by UNSC (2019) estimates Al-Shabaab’s membership to fall between 5,000 and 10,000, with about 30/40,000 “associated persons”, with the Security Council acknowledging that the true number is hard to determine due to the group members’ ability to blend into civilian life. Although Al-Shabaab’s roots are in Somalia, increased acceptance of Al-Qaeda and Al-Shabaab’s philosophy by Kenya’s local communities has seen Al-Shabaab’s influence across various parts of Kenya (Ndungu et al, 2017).

Al-Shabaab heightened its attacks in Kenya especially after Kenya contributed troops to AMISOM in 2011 and also due to Kenya’s troops continued military operations targeting Al-Shabaab in Southern Somalia (ISS, 2012). Further, this military deployment exacerbated older disputes in Kenya revolving around perceived inequality and marginalization of ethnic Somalis and Kenyan Muslims on political, social and economic fronts, which created the framework under which Al-Shabaab operates on in its recruitment and radicalization strategies (Ndungu et al, 2017). These targeted recruitment strategies have led to growing Al-Shabaab membership with an estimated 10% of Al-Shabaab radicals being of Kenyan origin, a trajectory with serious consequences for the Kenyan government due to increased presence of both local and foreign extremist elements in Kenya (Ndungu et. al, 2017). A paper by Hansen et. al (2016) concludes that insecurity, never-ending clan conflicts, lack of opportunity and justice have induced Al-Shabaab’s rise while noting that the reasons

people join Al-Shabaab can be linked to economic and security needs. A paper by ISS (2019) outlines three reasons that draw people to Al-Shabaab; political or socio-economic grievances, ideological and personal motives.

The manifestation of Al-Shabaab's abilities to strike beyond Somalia is seen in its well-coordinated execution of attacks in Kampala, Uganda in 2010 through two suicide attacks, with various terrorist attacks in Kenya ranging from the 2013 Westgate Mall attack in Nairobi which killed 67 people including foreigners, the 2015 Garissa University terrorist attack which claimed 150 lives and the DusitD2 hotel complex attack in 2019 that killed 21 people ("Terrorism in Kenya", n.d.).

Despite Al-Shabaab adhering to strict Sharia laws that subordinates women to men, restricting them to private spaces and denying them basic human rights, Al-Shabaab is actively recruiting and incorporating women into its organization (Ndung'u & Salifu, 2017). Donnelly (2018) notes that Al-Shabaab has taken upon itself to understand the role gender plays in Somalia and has used traditional beliefs about women to successfully assign them significant non-combat roles that fall outside stereotyped combat roles that are highly masculinized. This agrees with Hansen et al., (2016) findings that women do not only act as subjects but have active roles in Al-Shabaab such as tax collectors, checkpoint guards, shopkeepers, informants, teachers, or wives and used to fetching supplies. Due to the perceived benefits that can be gained from women's involvement, Al-Shabaab has increased women recruitment either voluntarily or through intimidation, depending on the group's motives and recruitment strategies. Ndungu et. al (2017) argues that while Al-Shabaab recruits voluntarily in areas it does not control, it recruits forcefully in areas under its control especially in Somalia and parts of Kenya, with women victims becoming members through forced marriages to the militants. In some cases where women become victims of violent extremism either through abductions, forced marriages or through coercion, they sometime become perpetrators, signifying the existent of a thin line between women as victims or perpetrators due to the complex nature of roles associated with violent extremism (Bloom, 2011). This is captured by Badurdeen (2020, p.1) who posits that "women and girls may shift their positioning on the continuum based on allegiance, social interactions, ideological resonance and changing circumstances within and beyond the Al-Shabaab network". According to Spencer (2016), Al-Shabaab has earned a place amongst world's prominent

perpetrators of gender-based violence including the use of patriarchal and rigid gender norms to enforce restrictions and deny women their basic rights. Despite this inhumane treatment, many women are joining Al-Shabaab for various reasons among them perceived physical security it can offer to women and girls in areas it controls and more so due to some degree of women rights protection in divorce and inheritance matters through its courts that run on Islamic family law doctrines in Somalia, in a way that the formal justice system is unable to (Idris, 2020).

Youth involvement with Al-Shabaab is on the rise in Kenya with recruits being drawn from different ethnicities and religious backgrounds especially in North-East and Coastal Parts of Kenya as well as Kenya's capital city, which are all hotspots for radicalization. The North-Eastern part of Kenya especially Garissa town, are susceptible to Al-Shabaab's influence as they border Somalia and are characterized by a porous Kenya-Somalia border, with the Coastal Parts especially Mombasa and its environs being marred by deeply embedded presence of extremist Islamist movements like the Mombasa Republican Council; and Nairobi's Eastleigh estate being perceived as the hub of Kenyan-Somali Muslims most of whom are alleged to be Al-Shabaab facilitators and sympathizers, with the neighbouring Majengo Estate being known for rampant youth recruitment into violent extremism (Botha, 2014).

Of great concern is Al-Shabaab's ability to penetrate rural settlements especially in Kenya's Western and Central regions which are far from traditional insurgent hotspots and whose inhabitants abide by staunch Christian doctrines, with many youths converting to Islam. Women involvement with Al-Shabaab is also on the increase with (Ndungu et al., 2017, p. 20) arguing that although Al-Shabaab subordinate women to men, women are "mobilized and politicized" in the same way as men. with factors driving men into violent extremism also being a driving force for women. Hearne (2009) argues that the main reason for targeting women as terrorist actors is to create media attention due to the enigma that surrounds women and danger, thus attracting viewership that eases recruitment while helping the growth of Al-Shabaab's membership and capabilities. On the other hand, increased recruitment of Kenyan youths, both Muslims and non-Muslims, has been attributed to Al-Shabaab's use of carefully tailored online propaganda messaging on various social media platforms targeting youths in highly gendered ways (Pearson, 2016). Although there is an increased trajectory in women's involvement with Al-Shabaab in Kenya,

cases of female suicide bombers remain rare, with Shire (2019) attributing this to the group's adherence to a strict gender binary principle with limited flexibility where men are groomed as fighters with women being confined in domestic spheres and largely non-combative.

A study by Idris (2020) describes the ability of Al-Shabaab to exploit Kenya's weaknesses such as gaps in legal system with perceived lack of justice for many, rampant corruption, depraved economic conditions resulting to limited economic opportunities, human rights abuses and gender based violence among others and the use of these grievances in propaganda messaging as a well-defined strategy to attract aggrieved populations to its organization. This mirrors UN Women (2020, p. 4) claim that the innovation and agility in the way violent extremist organizations "use and disseminate information, create narratives and offer incentives to support their ideology...(the) plethora of different vulnerabilities people are subjected to... (create) potential openings for violent extremists and their narratives'.

While Al-Shabaab has carried out numerous attacks in Kenya the most notable feature is the use of males as key perpetrators. Although there is limited evidence of female perpetrators, publicized reports have cited women involvement in violent extremist organizations with women reported to either travel to Somalia for training or to become suicide bombers, aiding in the formation of terror cells, masterminding and participating in terrorist attacks especially in Nairobi and Mombasa, undertaking recruitment efforts and fundraising for Al-Shabaab (Ndung'u et al., 2017; Miriri, 2019). Despite the appeal for women suicide bombers by Al-Shabaab due to their ability to raise less security suspicion, the numbers of women suicide bombers are low with a study by Stern (2019) indicating that less than 5% of suicide bombings by Al-Shabaab were perpetrated by women.

Few notable conspicuous roles of women's involvement with terrorism activities in Kenya have generated debates on women's active roles in terrorist organizations. For instance, a terrorist attack in 2013 at Westgate mall in Kenya's capital city which claimed 67 lives was reported to be planned and coordinated by a female British national, Samantha Lewthwaite aka the white widow (Miriri, 2019). An Al-Shabaab female recruiter who remains at large was in 2015 identified by security officers as a

perpetrator of terrorist acts after she claimed responsibility for grenade attacks and in Mombasa (Ndung'u & Salifu, 2017).

September 2016 witnessed the first female led attack in Kenya where three women insurgents heavily dressed with their faces covered arrived at a Mombasa police station where upon the failure to detonate a suicide vest one woman set off a petrol bomb and stabbed an officer before being shot dead (Africanews, 2016). A widow of a notorious slain cleric in Mombasa has consistently been linked to extremist network with accusations of gathering intelligence and mobilizing funds to aid terrorist activities (Ocharo, 2016). A terrorist attack at hotel Dusit2 Complex in Nairobi in 2019 saw the involvement of the wife of the mastermind of the attack, who sheltered her husband and his fellow militants in her house for weeks as they planned the attack, with another woman said to play the role of planning for weapon logistics in preparation for the attack (Miriri, 2019). Violet Kemunto, aka Khadija, another non-traditional recruit and the wife of Ali Salim Gichunge aka Farouk, the mastermind behind Dusit2 Complex terrorist attack, hailed from a reserved community in Western Kenya and had converted to Islam after marriage and described herself as an 'Al-Shabaab bride' on social media. Ali Salim Gichunge, a 26-year-old Kenyan and son of a Kenya Defence Forces soldier had been raised in a strict Muslim family, but became a victim of online radicalization which resulted to his crossing over to Somalia in 2015 for supposed Al-Shabaab training (Nation, 2019). Gichunge and four other attackers died in the 2019 Dusit2 Complex attack, with Gichunge's wife believed to have crossed into Somali after the attack. This particular terrorist attack was the first to be led by a non-ethnic Somali since Al-Shabaab began major cross-border operations in 2010, Miriri (2019) which shows Al-Shabaab's ability to recruit outside its traditional strongholds.

3.0 Methodology and Research Design

The following chapter will account for the methodology used in the study, discuss the research design, challenges faced and ethical considerations. A feminist methodological approach and a qualitative interpretative method were chosen as the appropriate methods for gender-sensitive insights and to capture the complexities of participants' impressions of violent extremism in the framework of Kenya. The focus of this study is on women's involvement with Al-Shabaab fits within the feminist security studies approach.

The study used a combination of primary and secondary research methods. An in-depth review of relevant literature including academic publications, media reports and policy research aided in bridging the knowledge gaps and in the understanding of the research topic. Additionally, a gender inclusive interview was conducted with 10 individuals, among them government officials, civil society representatives, women group representatives and security officers directly involved with returnees or victims of violent extremism or involved in CVE programs in the case of government officials and civil society organizations. The first section discusses the feminist methodological approach and a qualitative interpretative method while justifying their use for the study. The second section discusses case study approach outlining its importance and limitations with fourth section focusing on data collection methods and data analysis. The last chapter will highlight the concept of validity and discuss the ethics of the study.

3.1 A feminist methodological perspective

Reinharz (1992, p. 243) argues that there is “no single standard of methodological correctness or feminist” way to carry out research”. This agrees with Tickner (2005, p.3) views that although there is no “exclusive feminist research method, the uniqueness of feminist research lies on its distinctive methodological approaches that challenge perceived androcentric biases in the way that knowledge has traditionally been constructed in all disciplines”. Even with differing perspectives, feminist methodologies have expanded to comprise both quantitative and qualitative methods with a shared commonality; the reflection of gender subservience in global politics (Ackerly, Stern, & True, 2006).

As a dialectical process, feminist inquiry entails listening and understanding how the subjective meanings women ascribe to their experiences often differ with how society attach meaning to the same experiences which is non-representative of women's experiences often resulting to gender inequality and subordination of women to men (Nielsen, 1990, p. 26). Only through the understanding of these biases can feminist approaches build knowledge in a way that has the potential to improve women's lives, sentiments which mirror Hutchings (1999 pg.25) argument that gender theories focus on 'silenced subjects, reflecting upon a concern with a universalist commitment to hearing all voices". Due to the diversity of research questions posited by IR feminists, the methodological pluralism used in feminist research have tended to be reflexive, critical, interdisciplinary and transformative which is vital in understanding the gendering of global politics and its impact on both men's and women's lives.

Harding (1986, p.29) terms feminist empiricism, an epistemology that perceive sexism and androcentrism in research as 'social biases' correctable through stringent adherence to the appropriate 'methodological norms of science'. Due to feminist perspectives' inquiring nature on patriarchy structures and the socially-constructed nature of gendered identities, feminist perspectives can be useful in terrorism studies where they can examine how gender dynamics can act as ideological enactors or constraints within extremist groups. This reflects Ackerly, Stern, & True (2006) sentiments that gender approaches to violent extremism offer a fresh outlook to concept of security and enables a "reflective theoretical conceptualization of bottom-up security concerns". Analyzing the study topic from feminist lens helps to bring a self-reflective element, one which will enable me to critically examine and be open to my biases aimed at making the study be value-based while giving comprehensive findings that will give insight to this field of study.

The research employs an interpretative qualitative case study design in the exploration of women's involvement in Islamist terrorism in the framework of Kenya. Case study design is chosen as it not only allows for a detailed and an extensive analysis of a single case but also examines the case as part of wider category to which it belongs to (Bryman, 2012). While the broader category for this study concerns women's involvement in religiously motivated violent extremism, the narrower category analyses women's involvement in Islamist motivated terrorism with a major focus on Al-Shabaab in the case of Kenya. In a case study, the case is the 'object of interest in

its own right' with the researcher aiming to provide a critical examination of it (Bryman, 2012, p.61). Yin (1994, p. 13) argues that a case study allows for thorough investigation of "a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context" which makes it appropriate for this study. Although case studies are sites for use by both qualitative and quantitative methods, qualitative methods such as unstructured interviewing or participant observation are deemed useful in generating in-depth detailed analysis of a case (Bryman, 2012).

A standard criticism of case study is its inability to generalize findings, with case study researchers arguing that their findings are limited due to restricted external validity and further argue that besides these limitations the purpose of their craft is not to generalize to other cases or population beyond the case but to showcase how well the researcher can generate theory out of the findings (Bryman, 2012, p. 64). While Yin (2009) has termed this generalization concept as 'analytic generalization', Mitchell (1983) has termed it 'theoretical generalization' with Williams (2000) arguing that case study researchers are able to generalize by drawing on findings from similar cases examined by other researchers.

3.2 Interviewing as a method

In order to better explore the research questions, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten individuals drawn from both government, non-government institutions and women group organizations in Nairobi, Mombasa and Garissa, three towns in Kenya known for increased extremist activities. The interviewees were chosen due to the positions held in their respective institutions and their vast knowledge on Al-Shabaab as they head departments that are concerned with terrorism matters or are either in contact with detainees, returnees or victims of violent extremism or their relatives. Interviews with these experts was chosen for this study as it was not possible to gain direct access to women involved with Al-Shabaab due to security concerns. In addition, the deeply rooted religious, cultural and societal norms that restricts outsiders from freely interacting with most members of the Muslim community in Kenya made any form of interaction almost impossible due to one being treated with suspicion and mistrust, especially with the nature of the research topic.

Semi-structural interviewing was employed as it aids the researcher in keeping an open mind on the forms of knowledge he or she needs to know about, which help in the formulation of concepts or theory out of the data collected (Bryman, 2012). The less structured approach to collection of data reflected the open-ended nature of the research questions, with these interviews designed to encourage conversations and allow participants to freely air their own account of events. An interview guide (Appendix 1) developed based on the research questions and literature review was used in conducting interviews, with this guide allowing for flexibility in data collection where questions not included in the interview guide were asked freely as they arose which aided in the collection of rich data without deviating from the research objectives. I made use of probes and prompts for elaborate answers and to gather rich data useful for the study and ensured that participants felt comfortable and able to express their views without interruptions.

The interview dates were agreed upon between the researcher and the interviewees with the latter choosing suitable meeting venues like restaurants, away from their work places. I travelled to each county to meet with the interviewees on the agreed dates with interviews lasting between one and one and half hours. What I noted with the interviewees was their interest and enthusiasm on the research topic since it deviated from the traditional focus on men to include women involvement with terrorism, with all participants airing their views freely. Although all interviewees acknowledged the expansion of women roles within Al-Shabaab, disagreements arose on women's roles as suicide bombers in Kenya, which could form basis for future research.

The interviews were conducted in both English and Swahili which gave participants the opportunity to air their views devoid of language restrictions which could hamper expressions and intended meanings. This allowed for an in-depth collection of data which enabled the development of concepts useful for the study. In addition to interviews secondary data sources such as academic research studies, open-source media reports, public and web based reports on women and terrorism were used, with reliance on secondary data being attributed to difficulties associated with accessing clandestine populations in sensitive areas of study

The use of multiple data sources ensures that findings can be collaborated and the strengths of one source of data can compensate for any weaknesses in the other sources which enhances both validity and reliability (Bryman, 2012). However, lack of major primary sources such as interviews with women actively involved with Al-Shabaab or those actively supporting their husbands or family members who are Al-Shabaab militants has the probability of skewing the research's findings.

3.3 Selection of informants

Participants were identified and carefully selected through purposive sampling technique, one of the types of non-probability sampling and snowball sampling methods. For purposive sampling, the samples were not chosen randomly but selected based on my judgment as a researcher with these cases being selected with a specific purpose in mind. Purposive sampling was chosen for the study due to its suitability in identifying individuals with specific characteristics useful for a study, its ability to present in-depth reliable information and because it is less costly (Daniel, 2012). However, purposive sampling presents a challenge in ensuring that the sample is a true representation of the study population thus the argument by Bryman (2012) that more “emphasis should be placed on the researcher to assess the elements of the population,” which I did by ascertaining that the participants were in positions that enabled them to have extensive knowledge on violent extremism and Al-Shabaab activities in Kenya, knowledge built over time.

Purposive sampling was reinforced by snowball sampling as it allows for sampled participants to propose other participants with experience and well versed with the study topic, with both sampling methods enabling the selection of ten participants drawn from three towns in Kenya (Nairobi, Mombasa and Garissa) known for their extremist activities. The sample thus consisted of ten individuals among them 2 senior government officials, 2 representatives from civil society organizations, 3 women group representatives, 3 security officers, all drawn from the three key towns in Kenya. The narrow population sample was as a result of hesitance on the part of targeted participants due to the sensitive nature of the research topic, the covid-19 pandemic that affected potential participants as well as the limited time frame for undertaking the study,

Due to a narrow population sample, the study findings risks vulnerability to researcher bias, errors, lack of generalizability of research findings and reliability issues to some extent. Future research could widen the scope of study to include geographical differences and cultural aspects as well as the use of a larger population sample as a way of aiding in the generalization of the results.

3.4 Data Analysis

All conducted interviews were recorded with participants' consent and saved in a password protected folder in my phone and a back-up computer. I also put in writing all interview proceedings which were conducted in both English and Swahili noting down the tone of voice to denote either anger, frustration or joy and capturing facial expressions and any other body language behind statement made to help get the full meanings of these statements during the transcription process.

In transcribing interviews, I played and re-played small sections of audio recording at a time and wrote down the contents word for word taking notes of any pauses or tone variation, which I compared with earlier taken notes during the interviews for a nuanced understanding of projected meanings. Any responses in Swahili were translated to English while retaining their true meaning. The final draft was edited with intelligent transcription being adopted where every word was transcribed while ensuring the interpretation was devoid of filters or any irrelevant repeated words or sentences that did not change the meaning of the narrative.

This draft was shared with respective interviewee for them to ascertain if the translation and wording was a true representation of their views. All participants identified with their views with three changing some of the wording which I took into account to ensure the responses were a true representation of interviewees perspectives. All participants requested for anonymity of their responses.

The study employed inductive reasoning to understand and structure the meanings obtained from collected data. Qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews was thematically and content analyzed so as to examine the “presence, meanings and relationships of concepts” for a deeper understanding of the study (Bryman, 2012, 570).

Data obtained from interview transcripts was coded by labelling and organizing qualitative data to help find out different themes and the relationships between them. Coding involved assigning labels to recurring words or phrases that represented important themes in each interview response. Themes such as loss of economic opportunities, collateral damage, economic distress, mistrust of authorities, gender-sensitive among others were picked up from collected data. This aided in thematic analysis of recurring themes extracted from interview transcripts by looking at their wording and sentence structure which enhanced the understanding of interviewees perspectives and experiences with the study phenomena which allowed for comprehensive study findings.

3.5 Internal Validity

LeCompte & Goetz (1982), claims that a major aspect to consider when choosing a research design is the degree of validity it can achieve while arguing that internal validity tends to be a “strength of qualitative research, especially ethnographic research due to long period of research which allows the research to develop a relationship between concepts and observations.” On the other hand, Bryman (2012, p. 384) describes internal validity as referring to whether there is the correspondence between researcher’s observations and the theoretical ideas they develop. LeCompte & Goetz (1982, p.35) further argues that unlike internal validity, transferability which parallels external validity is difficult to achieve since it is not possible to “freeze a social setting and the circumstances of an initial study to make it replicable in the sense in which the term is usually employed”.

For this study I aim to achieve internal validity by ensuring that any conclusions and ideas developed flow directly from critical observations made and knowledge amassed in the course of data collection. The study will however might not achieve external validity due to the small sample employed and use of a single case across a population of cases. The single case of analyzing women involvement with Al-Shabaab in Kenya therefore means that although the findings may achieve some degree of credibility, it might not be transferable to other cases of analysis; for example, in Somalia due to geographical, social-cultural, political or ideological differences.

Further, the achievement of internal validity will call for my avoidance of confirmation bias, especially since I have been a victim of terrorist attack in Kenya. According to Yin (2009, p.72), confirmation bias can occur especially where the study's prospects are based on specific themes or concepts or in cases where the research design is chosen to push for a specific issue. In avoiding this bias, George and Bennett (2005) suggests the use of process tracing in conjunction with congruence method which allow for the evaluation of a theory's capabilities in explaining or predicting the outcome in a specific case which I will aim to achieve.

3.6 Ethical consideration

According to Bryman (2012, p. 121), ethics in research requires researchers to be reflective and conscious of ethical dilemmas they encounter when conducting research and argues that the "question of ethical issues is in many ways another dimension of the validity and integrity of a research".

Van den Hoonaard (2001) describes ethical concerns in the current research environment as having the characteristics of a 'moral panic'. Even so, the study ensures greater sensitivity to ethical issues the first one being the protection of participants from harm. Bryman (2012, p. 127) argues that a problem with the 'harm-to-participants' principle is that it is impossible to identify in all circumstances whether harm is probable, although this should not be taken to mean the inability to protect participants from harm. In protecting participants from harm or any psychological distress, I first and foremost ensured that there were no deceptive practices in designing the study by presenting true information of research elements. I then ensured that I met the participants in their preferred venues away from their workplace (mostly in restaurants in safe locations) as they did not want to attract much attention. For my safety I also cased these restaurants in advance to ensure their suitability in terms of safety and their ability to offer a quiet confidential environment suitable for conducting. However, in one case in Garissa town, I had to request an interviewee for change of venue to suitable upscale parts of the town frequented by both Muslim and non-Muslim communities to be able to fit in; to which the interviewee agreed.

Further, informed consent was fully explained and obtained from all participants who were over 18 years old. Here, I explained to the interviewees what the research

objective was, what was expected of them and informed them how their data was to be used; that is for academic purposes only. According to Bryman (2012), consent empowers the researcher to involve the participant in the research project and at the same time ensures the respondent's rights are protected. Interviewees were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time if they wished to, with all of them participating fully.

I ensured interviewees' anonymity and confidentiality were protected through use of pseudonyms and upheld their autonomy in interview responses which encouraged them to express their views freely without fear of victimization. Arsel (2017, p. 944) argues that participants are not 'marginalized or in a relatively lower position' than the researcher, and this I put in mind while treating the participants with respect and as experts in the area of study and whose opinions highly mattered in enhancing the understanding of women and terrorism in the context of Kenya.

I ensured interview records were secure through use of password protected folders, encrypted file sharing with participants, my supervisor over the internet and made use of lockable doors and drawers for safety of data in hard copies.

4.0 Findings and Analysis

The objective of this chapter is to answer the research questions and analyze the findings. The chapter aims to gain in-depth understanding of potential motivating factors that drive women to violent extremism and the roles they play within Al-Shabaab terrorist group in Kenya. From the findings, violent extremism was understood by respondents as Islamic extremism with their responses being shaped by this understanding. The literature review chapter of this study has discussed diverse motivating forces and roles played by women in extremist organizations around the globe. The findings of this study in the context of Kenya augments this evidence where economic deprivation, political and social grievances, personal and ideological reasons and governance issues appear to be some of the motivating factors, with women playing various support and largely non-combatant roles as discussed below:

4.1 RQ1. What are the potential factors that motivates females to join Al-Shabaab in Kenya?

4.1.1 Economic Factors

Findings indicated economic factors characterized by high youth unemployment rates and poverty levels as the main reason for increased radicalization and recruitment of women in Kenya. Interviewee N3, a woman group representative from Nairobi, claimed that lack of employment opportunities for youths, even graduates led to frustrations which Al-Shabaab took advantage of to lure vulnerable youths with material and cash incentives and job promises with salaries ranging from \$50 to \$200 a month.

According to Interviewee M1, a civil society representative from Mombasa, most women who fell for these deceptive job promises were taken to Al-Shabaab camps in Kenya's Boni forest and in Somalia under poor living conditions where they received religious, self-defence, first aid and weapon training while being exposed to gender-based violence from male militants, with younger girls being exposed to early forced marriage to militants. Interviewee M1 further stated that those who received cash and other material incentives were forced to join Al-Shabaab which they involuntarily did as they lacked financial capabilities to return these 'gifts' resulting to threats and

subsequent radicalization and role assignment aimed at enhancing Al-Shabaab's operations.²

The findings also revealed that in some cases women were forced to become breadwinners for their families after their husbands, sons, brothers left for Somalia to join Al-Shabaab and never returned nor sent money for upkeep. According to interviewee M3, a woman group representative from Mombasa, due to harsh economic conditions that weighed on them after the departure of these breadwinners, some women, mostly wives, opted to join their husbands hence getting assimilated into the movement. Interviewee M3 further reported that other women left behind with no source of income especially those from the slum areas of Majengo in Nairobi and Mombasa were forced to join Al-Shabaab as a matter of survival, due to perceived financial benefits so as to help cater for their family's needs.³ This mirrors literature on women being rational actors and having some form of agency in making decisions on whether to join extremist groups or not, in this case their choice for joining Al-Shabaab being based on perceived financial stability it can offer. Interviewee N1, a civil society representative from Nairobi explained that even if Al-Shabaab lured youths with promises of good salaries, most recruits especially those from non-Somali ethnicity were not paid and were discriminated against, with many dying in the course of 'duty' and few managing to escape the harsh realities on the ground and quietly finding their way back into the community. Interviewee N1 further reported that due to lack of job opportunities coupled with discrimination and marginalization from community members, these returnees quickly got involved in criminal activities or found their way back to extremist activities, a view supported by Bloom (2010) argument that personal reasons such as escaping a life of sheltered monotony can be a drive to violent extremism.

Interviewee N1 noted that regions with increased Al-Shabaab activities were not only characterised by economic vulnerabilities but also social-political exclusion and little government effort in infrastructure development which built up frustrations and resentment, with both men and women from various ethnicities and religious backgrounds willing to join Al-Shabaab to retaliate against perceived injustice.⁴

² Interview with Civil Society representative, Mombasa 16 March 2022.

³ Interview with a woman group representative, Mombasa 17 March 2022

⁴ Interview with Civil Society representative, Nairobi, 28 March 2022.

4.1.2 Ideological and Religious Factors

Findings indicated religious teachings as being a source of youth radicalization where unscrupulous religious leaders and teachers were claimed to distort religious narratives and made use of propaganda and religious indoctrination in mosques and madrassas. Accounts of women group representatives from their interaction with women returnees, women affected by violent extremism or their relatives in the three towns of study revealed that most women noticed radical behavioral change in several children attending Madrassas, with these children being reported to be withdrawn and exhibiting violent outbursts from time to time.⁵ According to the women group representatives, these women reported having noticed a trend where most of their male children, and those in the community aged 15 and above simply disappeared from home with rumours circulating that they have either joined Al-Shabaab in Somalia or are victims of police raids on suspicion of being members of extremist groups. Although these are unsubstantiated reports, the mere thought of children leaving Kenya for Somalia indicates a well-organized network with complex transport logistics able to coordinate movements of potential recruits across borders. Additionally, distorted teachings resulting to extreme ideologies taught especially in Madrassas by deceitful leaders believed to have links with Al-Shabaab were said to deliberately target young girls who were filled with ideas of becoming Jihadi brides from an early age.⁶

Although all interviewees were of the opinion that ideological factors were key drives for violent extremism especially in Mombasa, they all indicated (except government officials) that ideological and religious factors did not appear to be the major motivating factor in all parts of Kenya, arguing that drives for violent extremism in Kenya seemed to be intrinsically connected to economic distress which resulted to voluntary involvement with extremist groups by women of all ethnicities, with their sole reason for joining being nested on achieving financial stability promised by these groups.

Government officials were however of the opinion that ideological factors were the major drive for women's involvement with violent extremism arguing that Muslim

⁵ Interview with women groups representatives Nairobi, Mombasa and Garissa, between 16th & 29th March 2022

⁶ Ibid

women and girls were easily radicalized due to their being brought up with extremist teachings as well as adhering to strict religious and cultural norms that required them to solely operate under the direction and control of husbands, fathers or male figures in their communities hence being easily influenced.⁷ This kind of thinking could explain the highly militarized security approaches to violent extremism in Kenya and the reluctance to acknowledge shortfalls in economic policies.

4.1.3 Governance and Structural Issues

Findings revealed that perceived marginalization in political, economic, and social processes and widespread ethnic profiling of Muslim communities especially that of Kenya-Somali Muslims and the general feelings of oppression of the minority Muslim community in Kenya created feelings of frustrations and resentment towards the government. Findings also revealed that limited representation of the Muslim and the Kenya-Somali communities in parliament in addition to gender subordination exposed them to human rights abuses and denial of basic rights such as the denial of national identity or travel documents due to perceived association with terrorism making it difficult for them to access equal education or job opportunities like other citizens. Due to this marginalization and being locked out of political and economic processes many women especially Kenya-Somali nationals were said to lack formal education and left to undertake informal jobs mainly selling linens at Eastleigh market in Nairobi to make a living, with challenges faced in this kind of work pushing them into violent extremism or being Al-Shabaab sympathizers and facilitators to retaliate against these perceived injustices.⁸ Interviewee G4, a security officer from Garissa cited Kenya's porous border with Somali as largely enabling Al-Shabaab militants to cross over to Kenya to plan and carry out attacks and easily cross back to Somalia.⁹ On the other hand, Interviewee G3 claimed that government security officers often took bribes from undocumented immigrants allowing them to cross over to Kenya thus rendering the country prone to criminal elements.¹⁰

Interviewee M1 opined that terrorism had been turned into 'a business venture' at the expense of Kenyan citizens who become victims either through radicalization or

⁷ Interview with government officials Nairobi and Mombasa between 16th & 28th March 2022

⁸ Interview with women group representative, Garissa 21 March 2022

⁹ Interview with security officer, Garissa 21 March 2022

¹⁰ Ibid, 8

through terrorist attacks.¹¹ Interviewee N1 described Kenya's vulnerability to terrorist attacks as being 'self-made' with other interests in mind, specifically 'to attract donor funding',¹² with interviewee M1 opining that security in Kenya was increasingly being politicized, with political leaders playing blame games while creating political divisions along tribal lines for their own interests.¹³ This, coupled with poor economic conditions was said to create widespread frustrations on government's inability to shield its citizens against all forms of security threats emanating from within or without, hence creating an enabling environment for Al-Shabaab to thrive in.

Interviewee N3 a woman group representative from Nairobi, opined that rampant corruption in vital government offices namely police and immigration departments exacerbated the terrorist issue and added that gaps in the legal systems failed to prosecute many of those faced with terrorism charges in Kenya.¹⁴

Security officers from Nairobi, Mombasa and Garissa towns described prisons as increasingly being used for religious indoctrination and radicalization with the structures in place being unable to prevent these practices.¹⁵ They explained that limited resources saw many inmates crumped in one cells or in small spaces which enabled the spread of extremist ideologies with many of the radicalized released inmates joining Al-Shabaab. According to Interviewee N1 prisoners were able to acquire phones due to widespread corruption in these institutions with women being actively involved in online recruitment and the spread of online propaganda messaging from their prison cells.¹⁶

Interviewee G3 a woman group organization representative from Garissa opined that although the Kenyan government had prioritized the fight against terrorism and invested in hard counterterrorism strategies, these strategies heightened human rights abuses which impacted negatively on Kenya's human rights records while creating feeling of mistrust between targeted Muslim communities and the government.¹⁷ Findings revealed that police brutality and use of heavy-handed securitized approaches directed towards members of Muslim communities especially in

¹¹ Ibid, 2

¹² Ibid, 4

¹³ Ibid, 2

¹⁴ Interview with a woman group representative, Nairobi 29 March 2022

¹⁵ Interview with security officers, Nairobi, Mombasa, Garissa between 17th & 29th March 2022

¹⁶ Ibid,4

¹⁷ Ibid, 8

Mombasa and Nairobi's Majengo and Easleigh areas were factors that drove women into violent extremism. Women group representatives from the three study areas revealed that women suffered the most in police raids which saw indiscriminate arrests with some women becoming victims of brutal beatings and sexual abuse and a majority losing their husbands, brothers, sons to what they termed as 'extrajudicial killings'. These crackdowns targeting Muslim communities were said to send a message to the wider population that Muslims were supporters of terrorism, thus fueling Islamophobia and stigmatization and marginalization of Muslim communities in Kenya.¹⁸

Interviewee N3 recounted an incident in 2019 where a heavily veiled Muslim woman was ordered out of a bus by other passengers who feared she might have some hidden explosives underneath her clothes. When she refused to move all passengers alighted and called the police who arrested her for questioning with the woman being released after the intervention of Sisters without Borders women group. This form of stigma was said to be the source of non-cooperation by victims of violent extremism or anyone with vital information on terrorism activities with security officers due to fears of arrests as well as fears of extrajudicial killings¹⁹

Interviewee N2, a government official from Nairobi however downplayed the hard security approaches claims describing the CT and CVE strategies in place, supported by various donors, as being efficient in combating violent extremism which poses a serious threat to national security.²⁰

4.1.4 Relations and Social Interactions as a Motivator

Findings indicated that personal relationships through family ties or friendships largely influenced women's decisions to join Al-Shabaab. For most women, having a family member involved in extremism placed them at a high risk of being radicalized. Interviewees M3 and G3 women group representatives from Mombasa and Garissa respectively indicated that most women were being forcefully radicalized by their husbands and being bestowed a sense of responsibility that required them to follow their husbands throughout their deployments to keep them company as well as to carry out assigned support roles.

¹⁸ Ibid, 5

¹⁹ Ibid, 14

²⁰ Interview with a government official, Nairobi 28 March 2022

Interviewees M3 and G3 further indicated that at community levels, different families with links to Al-Shabaab intermarried, with younger women aged between 14 – 18 years being forced into marrying Al-Shabaab militants to strengthen family ties thus consolidating Al-Shabaab links. All women group representatives indicated that older women often led younger girls to believe that forced marriages to militants was their moral duty and part of life with these girls being susceptible to misguided teachings due to their vulnerable age and being at the risk of exposure to child abuse and gender-based violence at tender age. Due to this exposure at a young age those who survive to mid-adult age were said to be notorious actors of violent extremism.²¹

Young girls who resisted were said to face threats from either family members involved with Al-Shabaab, or other Al-Shabaab members known to them which forced them to either join or flee to other parts of the country.²² Additionally, gender-based violence experienced by some women in their families, feelings of discrimination, and internal family conflict were cited as motivating factors for young women joining extremist groups to achieve a sense of belonging and liberation.²³

Findings revealed that younger women easily succumbed to peer pressure of becoming Al-Shabaab's brides referred to as 'Al-Shababes' whose fantasized notion appealed to most due to being surrounded by the 'aura of danger alongside charming brave heroes', with many young girls marrying Al-Shabaab militants and converting to Islam if non-Muslim. Findings further revealed that due to widespread fantasized notion of Jihad brides, Al-Shabaab fuels this propaganda luring many young women while targeting learned women to Somalia with promises of marital bliss. This is evident in 2015 after the arrest of three female university students two Kenyans, and one Tanzanian aged between 19 and 20 years while trying to cross to Somalia to allegedly become jihadi brides or suicide bombers after being lured and recruited through social media while in school (Capital Campus, 2015). This shows Al-Shabaab's carefully tailored recruitment strategies aimed at not only recruiting women, but women with strong academic background and with essential skills useful for its cause.

²¹ Ibid, 5

²² Ibid

²³ Ibid

According to security officers drawn from the three study areas, there was an increased rate of arrests mostly of non-Muslim or newly converted Muslim women on charges of aiding and abetting terrorist activities, with some claiming they were not aware they were abetting crime. According to these officers most of these women were new brides of suspected Al-Shabaab militants, with others being in connection with radicalized friends who were said to have used them in spreading propaganda messages on social media, or used their houses to hide weapons or harbor militants.

4.1.5 Personal Factors

Findings revealed that women were more likely to join extremist groups on family and social grounds, such as to offer support to a husband, son or brother militant or due to peer pressure from friends or family members. Findings also indicated personal factors such as experiences of humiliation or abuse by security officers, revenge for abuse or death of a loved one killed by security officers, experiences of discrimination or sexual and gender-based violence in a family or community setting as major personal factors that led women to join extremist group with the aim of retaliation as well as seeking a sense of belonging and identity. Interviewee M3 cited unstable environments characterized by criminal violence especially in slum settlements as major drives for women to get involved in criminal activities, with many being used by criminal gangs to hide stolen goods and harbour them to avoid police detection.²⁴ Interviewee N4 a security officer from Nairobi noted that there were increased cases of women involvement in criminal activities as well as reported cases of sexual and gender-based violence especially in the slum area of Majengo in Nairobi, with a noted rising numbers of women from these settlements joining Al-Shabaab. This could be argued to be a choice made to emancipate oneself from these dire conditions or choices made with the aim of taking up violence at a higher level by hardcore women criminals.

²⁴ Ibid, 3

4.2 RQ2. What roles do women involved with Al-Shabaab play in Kenya?

4.3 Direct Roles

4.3.1 As perpetrators

Although findings indicate that women are far much involved in various auxiliary roles, there was limited evidence of women as direct perpetrators of terrorist acts in the context of Kenya. All interviewees acknowledged lack of direct knowledge of women as perpetrators of terrorists acts and instead cited media or government reports. Respondents were of a common opinion that it was highly unlikely for Kenyan women involved with Al-Shabaab to take up direct combat roles such as that of attackers due to social-cultural settings and norms that shapes behaviour of most Kenyan communities noting that this was mostly a man's role. In addition, Kenya just like Somalia rides on patriarchal societal structures that largely subordinates women while restricting their roles which could explain Al-Shabaab's limited use of women as direct perpetrators of extremist acts in Kenya. This view closely mirrors Petrich & Donnelly (2019, p. 1178) argument that Al-Shabaab may be hesitant in engaging women in public roles, especially those of Somali origin, yet it depends on women for its operations.

Among the cases mentioned of women's direct participation with violent extremism was the involvement of a British National popularly known as the 'white widow' in the planning of the 2013 Westgate Mall terrorist attack in Nairobi carried out by Al-Shabaab (Miriri, 2019). Another mentioned case was the Mombasa police station attack by three heavily veiled Muslim women who after failing to detonate a vest bomb one stabbed a police officer before being shot dead (Africanews, 2016). The 2019 Dusit2 Complex attack was also mentioned, with interviewees pinpointing the vital role played by Dusit2 mastermind's wife who was said to harbour terrorists and weapons as well as aiding in weapon movement with the help of a female friend (Miriri, 2019). Apart from these known cases there were unverified interviewees' claims of women suicide bombers in some terrorist attacks in Nairobi and Mombasa, with doubts and uncertainty surrounding these claims.²⁵

²⁵ Ibid, 3

4.4 Indirect Roles

Findings revealed that young women recruits thought to be between eleven to mid-twenties played a number of roles among them cleaning and cooking for the militants whether in combat or non-combat zones, with those in combat zones said to serve as militants' concubines with many facing sexual gender-based violence and human rights abuses. Despite limited evidence of women as perpetrators in Kenya, findings indicate that they play a myriad of non-combatant roles as discussed below:

4.4.1 Women as mothers, wives, sisters

Findings revealed that women as nurturers, played a major role as the binding force of their families, with mothers having much influence which empowered them to become custodians of traditional, social and religious values which they passed from one generation to the next. Interviewee G3 a woman group representative from Garissa opined that mothers involved or supporting extremist groups constructed extremist identities and ideologies which they passed to their children and to other family members resulting to their involvement through family pressure. All interviewees from Mombasa noted that in some cases mothers were a source of radicalization to their children, with children especially sons of a militant fathers said to be prepared to succeed their fathers in Jihad, and daughters being moulded into future jihadi brides from an early age.

All interviewees were of the opinion that the role of women as wives entailed bearing a sole responsibility to their husbands, being a source of comfort and being dedicated submissive companions. Findings revealed that women regardless of their positions as mothers, wives or sisters or daughters of militant members bore the responsibility of supporting and keeping their family members extremist activities hidden from the prying eyes of security officers and the public. Interviewee N3 reported that in many cases women became breadwinners for their families whenever their loved ones that is husbands, fathers or sons left for Somalia to join Al-Shabaab and never returned or in case of death in the battle field.

4.4.2 Intelligence gathering

For a non-state actor seeking to spread its extremist ideologies, intelligence gathering is vital to protect itself from continuous targeting by state-actors and for its survival, which Al-Shabaab understands in its intelligence collection strategies.

Findings indicated that Al-Shabaab has capitalized on the use of women as strategic tools for intelligence collection and surveillance due to their easy demeanour and the general perceptions of women as peaceful and accommodating in nature. Government and security officers revealed the use of women to infiltrate security meetings whether at the community or national levels where real-time information on security issues on national interest was obtained and passed over to Al-Shabaab. All women group representatives on the other hand indicated Al-Shabaab's heavy reliance on sex workers to target and pry on government and security officers' weaknesses for sex or alcohol to collect intelligence especially on police checks, military movement and operations, government strategies on combating terrorism among other vital information with these efforts geared towards strengthening Al-Shabaab's intelligence collection wing, Amniyat. Targeted use of sex workers for collection of strategic information useful for the group's operations shows how the issue of morality is a non-concern for Al-Shabaab in its quest to achieve its objectives.

4.4.3 Domestic Workers

Interviewee N3 a woman group representative from Nairobi explained that some women joined Al-Shabaab voluntarily where they cooked and cleaned for the militants in combat zones before eventually getting married to the militants and followed them throughout their deployment. Interviewee M3 a woman group representative from Mombasa reported that young girls either forced into joining through either abduction or forced marriage also played the roles of cooks, cleaners or messengers with many experiencing sexual and gender-based violence including domestic violence and sexual abuse as well as the infringement of their human rights.

Additionally, Interviewee G3 a woman group representative from Garissa indicated that many women became widowed at a young age and were forced to re-marry with this cycle recurring. Interviewee N1 a civil society representative from Nairobi who through contact with a male returnee explained that according to this returnee, male

militants were encouraged to uphold gender-based violence specifically rape, torture and subordination of women as a sign of masculinity and authority.

According to interviewee N1 women in community settings away from non-combat zones also cleaned, cooked and gave comfort to militants in addition to sheltering them away from the prying eyes of security forces. Interviewee M1 a civil society representative from Mombasa recounted how through reliable information from a returnee they had involved police who identified an Al-Shabaab safe house with two women occupants and their children where they recovered several assorted weapons. according to interviewer M1 the women had lived there for more than five years and appeared to live a normal life with their relations visiting them from time to time. This shows the effectiveness of using women by Al-Shabaab and also the effectiveness of elaborate returnee programs to help enhance PVE and CT initiatives.

Interviewee M3 reported that women were reported to provide medical care to wounded Al-Shabaab militants in Boni forest camps, which shows the vastness of the supportive roles played by women within Al-Shabaab militant group.

4.4.4 As Recruiters

Women as recruiters was a dominant finding with indications that women of all kinds whether mothers, wives sisters, Muslims and non-Muslims used their positions to strategically recruit for Al-Shabaab. Findings further indicated that women as mothers used their influence to radicalize their children through instilling extremist ideologies from a younger age with these children growing up upholding these ideologies and which made them easy targets for extremist groups' recruitment strategies.

Interviewees M3 and N3 women group representatives for Mombasa and Nairobi respectively, reported that younger women especially in Mombasa and Nairobi's Majengo slums were actively involved in luring young jobless men and women alike into joining Al-Shabaab with promises of well-paying jobs overseas, with many falling for these promises. This finding mirrors Idris (2020) views that unlike men who are able to recruit other men, women are able to recruit both men and women, and are also capable of having higher network connectivity than their male counterparts making them more effective for online recruitment through targeted propaganda messaging aimed at spreading extremist Jihadist ideologies. Civil society

representatives indicated a rising trend in youth recruitment in Kenya pointing out women's active involvement in the recruiting process with interviewee N1, a civil society representative from Nairobi giving an example of reports that indicated the role of women as active recruiters in Kenya's educational institutions mainly colleges and universities, in prisons and in refugee camps especially in Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps in Kenya.

These sentiments were echoed by prison officers from the three regions of Nairobi, Mombasa and Garissa who reported increased recruitment in Kenyan prisons either physically by recruiting fellow inmates or use of online platforms. Findings indicated that due to rampant corruption and security lapse in most Kenyan prisons inmates were able to get access to phones which exacerbated the issue of online recruitment. Finding indicated that women recruiters used highly gendered messaging targeting youths from different religious and ethnic backgrounds in various social media platform most notably Facebook with all women group representatives noting that online messaging drew on women's vulnerabilities of lack of jobs with promises lucrative jobs overseas, or promises of being Al-Shabaab brides as well as offering opportunities for retaliation on perceived injustices by the government. This finding mirrors Bloom (2010) claims that personal reasons seem to highly motive women into violent extremism.

4.4.5 As Fundraisers

Findings indicated that women provided external sources of funds for Al-Shabaab which largely helped sustain its operations. Interviewee M1 reported use of elaborately organized financial transacting through Mpesa and Hawala money transfer systems in Kenya to transfer funds within and beyond Kenyan border to aid in extremist activities. Additionally, interviewee N1 claimed that various businesses in Eastleigh area of Nairobi whose inhabitants are mainly Somalis and ethnic Kenyan Somali were suspected of money laundering for Al-Shabaab's activities, claims that were not substantiated. Women group representatives from the three towns of study reported that women used money from their businesses to fund Al-Shabaab's activities with the use of women by Al-Shabaab being largely due to their strong business skills and their ability to access loans from local banks. Further, woman group representatives reported increased cases of women heavily borrowing from

local woman banks and failing to repay loans with Kenya Women Finance Trust being a victim of this elaborate predation.

4.4.6 As Victims

Al-Shabaab are said to treat Somali women differently to Kenyan and other East African women; being a primarily ethno-nationalist movement, Al-Shabaab prioritises enforcement of purity and moral codes of behaviour on Somali women. Protecting Kenyan women is seen as less essential given Al-Shabaab's focus on promoting a new Islamic Somalia (focused on ethnic Somalis) (Petrich & Donnelly, 2019, p. 1183).

Findings indicated that women and young girls got involved in violent extremism either through forced marriages to members of extremist groups, kidnapping, human trafficking or voluntarily due to lack of other viable options. Interviewees from Mombasa region indicated that there was an increase in the number of ethnic Kenyan women returnees escaping from mistreatment and abuse by Al-Shabaab militants who were said to discriminate and differentiate their treatment of Somali and non-Somali women and girls. While some of Somali women were said to be victims of violent extremism through forced marriage to Al-Shabaab militants, they were treated as legitimate wives and accorded some degree of special treatment while being spared from the tiresome domestic chores which were delegated to ethnic Kenyan or Tanzania women whether married to these militants or unmarried.() Petrich & Donnelly (2019, p. 1183), claims that Al-Shabaab "prioritises enforcement of purity and moral codes of behaviour on Somali women." With the protection of non-ethnic Somalis seen as non-important given "Al-Shabaab's focus on promoting a new Islamic Somalia (focused on ethnic Somalis)" could help explain perceived discrimination by Kenyan women returnees.

Women from non-Somali ethnicity were reportedly being tasked with duties of cooking, washing clothes for the militants, cleaning of weapons and the camps and most significantly being typically used for sexual gratification while facing other abuses and gender-based violence, with many women reporting gang-rapes and physical torture. Interviewee M1 reported that Al-Shabaab militants forced these women to take contraceptive to avoid getting pregnant with many women contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. This finding mirrors Petrich & Donnelly

(2019, p. 1183) views that Kenyan women are generally used as “sex slaves and as domestic labourers and their argument that their recruitment and deployments in Al-Shabaab camps “could be seen as a way to prevent Al-Shabaab militants from raping Somali women”. This view is contradictory due to Al-Shabaab’s degrading treatment of women in Somalia who face sexual and gender-based violence including domestic violence, sexual abuse and rape while infringing on their human rights (UK Home Office Report, 2018).

Additionally, findings indicated that women were the biggest victims of extremist acts, with interviewees indicating that terrorist attacks claimed a disproportionate number of women as collateral damage compared to men more so due to terrorists’ targets that is malls, churches which are frequented by women. Women group representatives and civil society representatives from the three regions of study reported that women suffered collateral damage during CT operations which they claimed used excessive force that resulted to death of loved ones, arrests, torture and sexual abuse at the hands of security officers and displacement which caused deep psychological trauma that affected their day to day activities.

Interviewee M1 however noted that in some cases women as victims could also become actors of violent extremism. Interviewee M1 recounted cases of women victims acting as agents of Al-Shabaab’s human trafficking networks, with these women identifying possible targets and luring them with job promises or arranging for their kidnapping and facilitating their movement to Al-Shabaab camps in Boni forest on Kenya Somalia border for possible crossing to Somalia, a finding that mirrors Bloom’s (2011) view that indicating that there exists a thin line between women as actors of violent extremism and as victims of violent extremism.

4.4.7 As Skilled Workers

Findings indicate that Al-Shabaab was increasingly targeting individuals with professional degrees and was successful in attracting recruits with vital skills particularly in the areas of engineering, piloting, medicine, science, ICT and business. Civil society representatives in Nairobi and Mombasa indicated that Al-Shabaab was keen in amassing essential skills to a point of funding bright recruits to pursue education overseas in any of these fields with the aim of benefiting from this knowledge. However, the interviewees were reluctant to offer further details

regarding the number of youths, their ethnicity, age, field and countries of study of the said recruits. Although unverified these findings seems to hold some weight and can help explain the 2016 arrest of three medical students enroute to Somalia to allegedly become Jihadi brides, and the 2018 kidnapping of Cuban doctors in coastal Kenya. This targeted recruitment of young female medical student and the seasoned Cuban doctors shows Al-Shabaab's well aggressive and well thought strategies of being a self-dependent organization through benefiting from the best available skills hence ensuring its survival and the well-being of its members. This also highlights Al-Shabaab's strategic recruitment of skilled youth showing that the need for skilled recruits is not limited to men but also to women who in addition to providing these essential skills can multitask and undertake a myriad of roles within extremist organizations.

4.5 Discussion of findings

The purpose of this study was to find out the potential drives that pushed women to join Al-Shabaab and the roles they play while highlighting the importance of women to Al-Shabaab.

Findings revealed a shared commonality in factors acting as drives for women's involvement with Al-Shabaab with those motivating men such as economic distress, social-political grievances and ideological and religious reasons. Although some pull and push factors to violent extremism are gender specific such as the lure of violence motivating men more than women and the lure of a romanticized adventure motivating women more than men, economic factors characterized by high poverty rates and youth unemployment due to limited economic opportunities which made life almost impossible for many was found to be the major common drive that pushed both men and women into joining violent extremist organization due to perceived financial gains.

Study findings indicate that poverty and lack of economic opportunities are powerful motivating factors for radicalization into violent extremism in Kenya. Poverty and violent extremism can be said to be mutually reinforcing as poverty can also be said to be exacerbated by violent extremism, especially in the cases on death or arrest of a militant breadwinner.

These are also the factors that extremist groups like Al-Shabaab take advantage of to lure affected youths in vulnerable into violent extremism with findings from the slum areas of Majengo in Nairobi and Mombasa revealing dire economic distress as largely pushing women to join extremist groups like Al-Shabaab in the absence of other alternative choices just for economic sustenance. From the findings it is evident that there is a non-alignment between the drivers for violent extremism and government responses to these drivers which do not adequately address the economic situation further complicating the fight against violence extremism in Kenya.

Findings reflects a hard securitized approach as the most notable response to violent extremism in Kenya with brutal police raids targeting Muslim communities which further marginalizes and alienates them while creating feelings of suspicions and mistrust between Muslim and non-Muslim communities in Kenya.

Kenya, a deeply patriarchal society characterized by gender stereotypes, inequality and gender based violence could explain the current gender insensitive CVE efforts characterized by hard security approaches inform of police violence which violates human rights while focusing on Al-Shabaab's male fighters and overlooking the importance of their female counterparts.

Findings also highlighted ideological factors through religious indoctrination especially in mosques and Madrassas as key drives to violent extremism especially for the younger generation which calls for violent extremism sensitization at community levels as well as the partnership between the government and religious leaders to help address gaps in curriculums taught in Madrassas in addition to addressing gaps in religious teachings that provided a leeway for distortion by unscrupulous religious leaders.

Findings also pinpointed family and social interactions as notable drives to violent extremism with the dynamics of women radicalization being within the confines of family oriented grounds or within the confines of social interactions with friends or acquaintances at the community level. This emphasizes the need for partnership between the government, communities, civil society and women group organizations to help sensitize and empower women especially mothers to use their influence to champion P/CVE efforts while building resilience at community levels.

When it comes to roles played by women in Al-Shabaab militant group, findings indicate limited evidence of women as perpetrators with very few cases tying women to direct roles. However, the case of Mombasa police station attack by the three women stands out with these women showing some level of confidence which indicates full agency and rationality in the choice and mode of attack. Why this is an isolated case with no obvious replication countrywide even with the evident ease of target access portrayed by these women is a question of interest as the restricting traditional social cultural norms that guide community behavior do not seem to be sufficient enough to explain the non-replication of this case to other targets of interest countrywide which means there are other factors in play that transcends traditional gender norms or even ideological factors.

Although the number of cases of women as perpetrators of violent acts cannot match men's and claimed to be fewer in number globally compared to men's (Ndung'u et al., 2017), limited evidence of women as perpetrators in the framework of Kenya could be attributed to a number of reasons. Kenya, just like Somalia are both patriarchal societies guided by traditional, social-cultural and religious norms that limit the roles of women at the society level while largely restricting them to household levels (Idris, 2020). The same norms appear to restrict women's roles in extremist organizations which are themselves highly masculine, with women roles being largely confined to support roles, unless stated otherwise by the authoritative male figures, which denies women agency while restricting their contributions to these extremist organizations which could to some extent explain the limited role of women as perpetrators.

Additionally, stereotypes that portray women as peaceful and loving in nature could be argued to enable the use of women by extremist groups to access targets that pose a challenge to male militants with women being able to get easy access without attracting much attention from security personnel due to these widely stereotypes. The involvement of women as perpetrators of violence can thus go unnoticed hence undocumented. Another reason that could explain the limited evidence of women as perpetrators of violent extremism in Kenya could be argued to be nested on cultural and religious norms which limits the interaction of Muslim women in some communities with outsiders especially of different ethnicities or religious backgrounds, with most of the interactions being done by men (Ndung'u et al, 2017)

largely preventing women from voicing their experiences with violent extremism. This coupled with fear of involving security personnel by women perpetrators or even victims due to mistrust of state actors and perceived threats posed by Al-Shabaab operatives or community stigmatization largely contributes to evasion of tangible knowledge of women 's direct involvement with violent extremism.

It is evident from the findings that although not in the war frontlines, women are actively involved in diverse indirect roles that transcend gender norms and which are significantly important to Al-Shabaab considering that militants cannot easily access vital services like healthcare or stores. Also from the findings, Al-Shabaab has recognized and taken advantage of gender norms that portrays women as peaceful in nature hence incorporating women and girls into its network as they attract less suspicion than men. A good example of how Al-Shabaab has taken advantage of gender stereotyping in Kenya is witnessed in 2013 Westgate Mall terrorist attack by the Al-shabaab where perpetrators were able to easily escape by dressing like women and mingling with other victims who were being evacuated by security forces without arousing suspicion from both the security officers and members of the public (Miriri, 2019). This incident revealed the gaps in CT and CVE strategies and their gender-blind policies which resulted to ineffective responses to this attack which calls for gender inclusive CT and CVE initiatives.

Findings further indicate that women and girls are increasingly being used by Al-Shabaab in multiple ways notably to provide labour service, as a source of income, used as sex slaves primarily as rewards for fighters which in itself is a major pull factor for potential male recruits, for radicalization purposes, for intelligence collection which signifies the importance of women to Al-Shabaab. From the findings, women as recruiters seems to be a major strength for Al-Shabaab with women's unique ability to interact and connect with different people globally largely aiding in advancing Al-Shabaab's ideologies and propaganda messaging while attracting and radicalizing large numbers of new recruits thus helping increase the group's membership. Online recruitment poses a serious security threat as from the findings Al-Shabaab is able to spread its influence across Kenya with many jobless youths, who spend most their time consuming online content, falling prey to Al-Shabaab' online recruitment and radicalization strategies. This calls for active

government responses through its ICT infrastructures to counter and control online contents.

Another key finding was women as victims of violent extremism. However due to the existence of a thin line between women as perpetrators of violence or as victims of violence as posited by Bloom (2011), the understanding that women are not intrinsically more peaceful than men is imperative when designing returnee and CVE and CT programs. This however does not mean that security officers should use oppressive hard security approaches on women as counterterrorism measures, but prioritize the inclusion of women in designing and implementation of CVE programs. Additionally, the victimization of women by extremist groups may push them to join CVE efforts which could highly help in the fight against extremist elements. However, if CVE efforts are gender insensitive marred with gender stereotypes they are likely to push away women and girl victims of violent extremism hampering these efforts.

5.0 Conclusion

It is evident that women recruitment in violent extremism is increasingly evolving and is on the rise with women playing diverse roles in Al-Shabaab militant group in Kenya. However, Kenya is nested on patriarchal norms that uphold gender stereotyping which depict women as victims of violence and as generally less dangerous than men. These gender stereotypes that describe women as victims and defines them through their husbands or sons such as wives, widows or mothers portrays women as being dependent on men and unlikely to carry out violent acts on their own without the control of a male figure. These stereotypes are damaging as they reflect on gender-blind CT and CVE policies and programs which are rendered ineffective in responding to violent extremism. Designing of CVE programs that takes into account that women can be victims as well as actors of violent extremism is also imperative to avoid the element of surprise by women perpetrators.

Although the government is stepping up its efforts in the war against terrorism with positive initiatives through collaboration in intelligence sharing which has largely reduced terrorist attacks in the country, there is dire need for the government to reflect gender issues in all CT and CVE policies and programs and to include women in the designing and implementation of these programs which can largely enhance other efforts aimed at combating violent extremism menace in Kenya.

On the other hand, development issues which act as key drivers for increased women involvement with violent extremism should be adequately addressed with women being empowered through viable business opportunities aided by government loan grants to enable them sustain their livelihood hence giving them alternative choices away from violent extremism and making them less vulnerable to extremist groups' targeted recruitment.

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Appendix 1: Interview guide

Date and time of Interview:

Location:

Language of Interview:

Name:

Organization:

Position and a brief description of roles played:

Thesis topic to ensure an understanding of research and interview objectives:

Section 1- INTRODUCTION:

- ✓ Introduce thesis topic and its objectives
- ✓ Obtain informed consent
- ✓ Request if I can conduct the interview and ask for permission to record the interview.
- ✓ Explain that I am seeking for their opinions informed by their experiences being in contact with either victims of violent extremism, returnees or those actively engaged in violent extremism or their close contacts.

Section 2- GUIDING QUESTIONS:

1. How do you understand the concept of violent extremism?
2. In what ways is violent extremism evident in Kenya?
3. Which regions and communities in Kenya have been considerably affected by terrorist activities?
- 3a. What do you attribute this to?
4. In your view do we have extremist organizations in Kenya? If yes which ones?
5. Have you experienced violent extremism in your locality? If so how?

6. In your view do you think that Kenyans are sensitized on violent extremism? What is the resulting factor?
7. In your view do you think that women are involved in violent extremism in your region?
8. What do you think are the primary reasons that lead women into violent extremism?
9. In your view are women prone to violent extremism? If yes, why do you think so?
10. In your view do you think extremist groups are targeting women? if so what kinds of women and why?
11. In what ways do extremist organizations target women in your region?
12. What, in your view are the various roles played by women in extremist organizations?
13. Why do you think women play these roles?
14. How are these roles different from men's roles?
15. How, in your views has violent extremism impacted on women and girls in your region?
16. What in your view can be done to empower women and girls to better respond to violent extremism in the affected and communities?
17. Do you know of any government's initiatives aimed at responding to terrorism in Kenya?
18. In your views are these initiatives effective in responding to terrorism in Kenya?
19. Do these initiatives address the different ways that women and girls get involved and are affected by violent extremism?
20. Would you say these CT programs and policies are gendered?
21. What would you say are the strengths and weaknesses of the existing CT programs, policies and strategies?

22. In what ways do you think women's perspective and inputs are important for the success of such programs?
23. Are these programs effective in responding to the threat of violent extremism?

Appendix 2: Interview Field Research Summary

Interviews

Interview No.	Date of interview	Informant	Town
Interview 1	16 March 2022	Anonymous M1	Mombasa
Interview 2	16 March 2022	Anonymous M2	Mombasa
Interview 3	17 March 2022	Anonymous M3	Mombasa
Interview 4	17 March 2022	Anonymous M4	Mombasa
Interview 5	21 March 2022	Anonymous G1	Garissa
Interview 6	21 March 2022	Anonymous G2	Garissa
Interview 7	28 March 2022	Anonymous N1	Nairobi
Interview 8	28 March 2022	Anonymous N2	Nairobi
Interview 9	29 March 2022	Anonymous N3	Nairobi
Interview 10	29 March 2022	Anonymous N4	Nairobi



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Annie Kathuni

M-IR