Analytical Framing of Violent Extremism and Gender in Kenya: A Review of the Literature

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Abstract
Following an examination of the current gaps in the literature on the role of gender and violent extremism (VE) in Kenya, the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) under the Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism (STRIVE) II programme, in partnership with the French Institute for Research in Africa (IFRA), supported the development of four academic studies exploring regional dynamics of women's involvement in violent extremist activity. This article, which serves as an introductory note to this Special Issue, situates the four studies in the existing literature and explores their contribution to the understanding of the role and impact of women in violent extremism. In particular, the review argues that the four pieces of research contribute to an area of study that has been missing in much of the published work on women's recruitment into VE groups in East Africa. Specifically, the review is premised on the need for examining women's recruitment in VE through a gendered lens that interrogates the norms that construct and compel their recruitment and participation and the differential impact of VE on their lives.

Keywords: Violent Extremism, Women, Gender, Role, Recruitment

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Introduction

In East Africa, the threat posed by the Islamist insurgent group Al Shabaab (AS) remains the principal security challenge (Felter et al, 2018). As per the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data project, AS is currently the deadliest terror group in Africa along with Boko Haram[1] (Raleigh et al, 2017). The group has managed to retain control over large swathes of Somalia and has demonstrated reach and operational capability across parts of Kenya (principally within the north-east and north coastal regions). While AS has been responsible for spreading fear, launching large scale terror attacks and deepening political insecurity within Somalia and the region more generally (Ali, 2016; Bryden, 2015; Menkhaus, 2014; Romaniuk, 2016), the larger trend of radicalisation and recruitment remains a relatively limited phenomenon, with estimates of AS's membership ranging between three thousand and six thousand members.[2]

In understanding the phenomenon of violent extremism (VE) and what encourages individuals to join violent extremist organisations (VEOs), various explanations have been put forward. Within the regional context, structural drivers such as poverty, unemployment, political marginalisation, general life frustration - due to limited opportunities and perceived influence over one's future; have been identified as among the principal drivers of radicalisation and recruitment (UNDP, 2017; Hansen, 2013; International Crisis Group, 2014; Botha, 2014). Despite their relevance however, within most developing and fragile states (that characterise much of the East African region), a large number of people experience underlying structural drivers, and yet typically only a very small fraction of them turn to violence (Denoeux and Carter, 2009). Thus, "most of those affected by the underlying conditions to which VE is often ascribed to do not in fact resort to violence, and frequently it is unclear that those among them who do, whether they are primarily motivated by such conditions" (Denoeux and Carter, 2009:8).

In the context of limited explanatory power of structural factors alone, a range of alternative explanations have been offered. According to Khalil and Zeuthen (2016), apart from structural motivators, a person's trajectory into violence is often also influenced by individual incentives including a sense of purpose, adventure, belonging, acceptance, and rewards in the afterlife as well as enabling factors such as radical mentors, radical online communities, and social networks with VE associations. An individual's trajectory into violence is therefore unique and mostly it is interplay of factors that coalesce and create conditions for radicalisation. In certain situations, there may be a discrete or

trigger event, but under other conditions this may not be the case and the pathway into violence could be driven by a combination of events of circumstances. In other words, it is not possible to draw a linear pathway into violence and consequently it is also extremely difficult to project and outline an individual's potential trajectory (Dalgaard, 2010; Horgan, 2009; Khalil, 2017).

In attempting to unpack the different pathways to extremism, the European Union (EU) in partnership with the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) launched the Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism (STRIVE) I Programme and subsequently STRIVE II. The current phase of the STRIVE II programme[3] is EU's flagship programme for countering violent extremism in the Horn of Africa. With an objective of reducing the risk of radicalisation and recruitment to violent extremism, STRIVE II incorporates a strong research component. Specifically, the programme seeks to strengthen the evidence, knowledge and understanding of the specific threats and dynamics underlining the recruitment and radicalisation of groups and individuals. In doing so, it aims to develop publicly available evidence based on local recruitment dynamics as well as enhance the understanding of how violent extremist groups may utilize on-going conflicts to their advantage (Zeuthen, 2018).

To investigate the issues of violent extremism, the research component of STRIVE II focuses on studying some of the existing gaps in the literature. Among the most significant of the areas identified has been, the relationship between gender and violent extremism in the Horn of Africa, particularly women's[4] active and even willing participation in violent extremist groups (Fink et al, 2016). In addressing the gaps, RUSI under the STRIVE II programme, in partnership with The French Institute for Research in Africa (IFRA), supported the development of four academic studies. Following the launch of a comprehensive project on local trajectories of religious radicalisation and violence, IFRA like RUSI was also interested in looking at the intersectionality of gender and radicalisation. The two organisations therefore decided to pool in their expertise and experience in investigating the varying aspects of women's involvement in violent extremist activities.

The findings from the co-sponsored studies are presented in the subsequent chapters of this Volume. The following introductory note situates the research studies within the context of the extant literature and identifies some of the limitations in understanding that the studies seek to address. The article is organised as follows; section two evaluates the gaps in the literature while

section three analyses some emerging perspectives on women's engagement with VE groups, their roles therein, and the differential impact on their lives. The concluding section then presents the insights from the four research studies and highlights their contribution to the existing evidence base.

Research Gaps: Gender and Violent Extremism
Following the attack on the police station in Mombasa by three women in September 2016 (*BBC,* 11.9.2016), the role of women in VE especially in the Kenyan context has received increasing attention. While the attack was a subject of controversy; concerning the particular group the women belonged to, the incident itself drew attention to the need for a deeper understanding on the role of women in VE. Particularly, there was a need for interrogating their involvement in VE through a different lens, one that did not classify women's roles into broad categories of either victims or peace builders. This was especially considered to be of significance because while women have been found to be adversely affected by VE and can in some context contribute towards peace building and resolution efforts, women's agency as perpetrators or supporters of violence has received relatively little attention (Fink 2016; d'Estaing, 2017). This even though, within the East Africa region similar to trends observed elsewhere, cases of women suicide bombers and fighters have been noted as well as instances of women, supporters and messengers of VE have also been found (Noor, 2015).

According to some scholars such as d'Estaing (2017), the principal reason why women's agency and role within violent extremist groups is often ignored is because women are seen as potential de-radicalizers, embedded security allies and repositories of communal and familial resilience. Women are largely understood as either 'assets' or 'allies' in countering the threat of violent extremism partly because of the role that they are perceived to have as "inside mediators' in families and communities" (ibid). As a consequence of their role, women are viewed by policy makers and programmers as having the ability to interrupt or "influence the social mechanisms that guide individuals to violent extremism" (Quilliam Foundation, 2015 in d'Estaing 2017:106).

For Katherine Brown (in Winterbotham and Pearson, 2016), the trend of instrumentalising women's role in Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) and the denial of their agency is compounded in the context of Muslim communities. The maternalistic logic behind CVE programming targeting such communities is often based on preconceived notions of Muslim women and "their expected

gender and radicalised roles as mothers" (Ibid 2016:56). Within this conceptualisation, Muslim women are assumed to be guided by their maternal instincts that are perceived to shun violence, and also problematically typified as home-makers who on account of their greater presence are considered to be in a better position to spot the signs of radicalisation in their children.

In overcoming the limitations of prevailing conceptualisations regarding women's involvement in VE activity, Sjoberg (2017) advocates the need for incorporating a gendered perspective that would take women's agency as a starting point and would eschew attempts to instrumentalise their role in CVE programming. Such a perspective that acknowledges gender-based differences in the treatment and exercise of power between men and women would encourage a mediated understanding of how gender norms construct, shape and influence women's role, and participation in violent extremist groups (USAID, 2011). It would also contribute to a differential understanding of the impact of VE on women's lives. Thus, the adoption of a gendered perspective would allow for an engagement on the ways in which gender dynamics operate in defining women's position and status within VE groups (Sjoberg, 2017).

In engaging with the literature, while a gendered perspective has been largely missing, there have been a few pieces of research conducted in other contexts, which offer some key insights on the role and impact of women in violent extremist activity. The following paragraphs expound on the main insights from the emergent literature.

Drivers of Radicalisation and Recruitment of Women
The first of these perspectives focuses on the reasons why women may be inspired to join violent extremist groups. According to researchers such as O'Rourke (2009) contrary to expectations that women join VE groups to protest the imposition of traditional gender norms, women appear to join VE groups for opposite reasons. Based on a global survey of female suicide attacks, O'Rourke (2009) finds that women may be attracted to join VE groups to re-establish their attachment to expected norms on the role and status of women in society. Women who are seen to have deviated from such standards – due to rape, infertility, lower marriage prospects, may be more likely to join such groups (Ibid). The need for overcoming feelings of victimisation thus as per this view, is a prime motivator for women joining extremist groups (Ibid). In a similar vein, Harmon and Holmes-Eber (2014) quoting studies of female suicide bombers, argue that the shame of experiencing violence and the need for redemption are

powerful incentives guiding women's recruitment into VE groups. Particularly in conservative societies, Bloom (2011) finds that, martyrdom is seen as a viable strategy for dealing with the shame of being a victim of rape. In certain contexts, such as in Iraq[5], rape and other types of sexual violence were often deliberately inflicted on women by terror groups to generate new recruits. The use of such tactics was particularly powerful, according to Bloom, because it left "no avenue for exit"(Bloom 2011: 15).

Other studies have demonstrated that relationships and kinship networks may be a key predictor of women's involvement in VE groups. In a study conducted by Taylor and Jacques (2013), of the 222 female terrorists identified across various conflict zones[6], almost a third of the female terrorists in the sample had family connections to terrorism, suggesting that activism among kin may play a role in the involvement of some females. Within the East African context, qualitative research conducted by the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) (Ndungu et al, 2017) found that relationships maybe a key predictor of women's involvement in an extremist group. The study found that if a woman has a male relative involved in an extremist group then that increases the "likelihood that she will be welcomed into that group" (Ndungu et al, 2017:38). Thus, the primary motivator for women's recruitment into AS, was not so much ideological or religious but was rather linked to their need to follow their husbands and partners to Somalia (Ibid).

In addition to the role of kinship networks, the economic insecurity of women has also been highlighted as a factor that makes them particularly vulnerable to being recruited by extremist groups. Women's lower economic status in much of the developing and the developed world may make them particularly vulnerable to exploitation by VE groups. According to Ndungu, et al, (2017), women have been lured into joining violent extremist groups with promises of jobs, money and other livelihood opportunities. However, in understanding the specific vulnerabilities experienced by women, Sjoberg (2017) warns against viewing women's involvement through gendered characterizations that cast women as the "beautiful souls of war" (Sjoberg, 2017:297) – innocent of the causes of war and uninvolved in the fighting. While not denying the coercive nature of recruitment tactics sometimes employed by VE groups, Sjoberg and Gentry (2007) argue that the flipside of such perspectives is that it reinforces prevailing constructs on women's involvement in VE groups, where women are seen as–"deviants, monsters, or victims to be rescued" (Sjoberg and Gantry, 2007:297).

In departure from the perspectives that look at the specific interests and drivers of women in joining VE groups, a number of other studies have found that overall women made the decision to join VE groups for much the same reasons as men (Jackson et al 2011). Similarly, according to a study conducted by Sjoberg and Wood (2015) in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, while there were some gender specific push and pull factors, when it came to motivation, recruitment, and ideological commitments, male and female members of VEOs in MENA had more in common than not. Common factors identified for both groups included: "dissatisfaction with the status quo and political and economic conditions, desire to escape social or economic pressures experienced within one's community, personal experience of abuse or humiliation by state security forces or foreign forces, or the death or abuse of family members at the hands of these forces" (Sjoberg and Wood, 2015:2).

Thus, the literature encourages the need for identifying the gender specific nuances in push and pull factors. In doing so, it underscores the importance of moving beyond generalized assumptions and embracing the perspective that gender norms construct and compel women's involvement in VE activities and that female participants like male participants are agents who exercise their choice, even within highly constraining social structures. The adoption of such a lens is particularly relevant in the East African context, as it would help shed insights on the intersectionality of women's recruitment into VE groups, which despite some research on the subject, continues to remain a relatively underdeveloped area of study.

Role of Women in Violent Extremism Groups
Similar to the limited focus on the drivers and factors underpinning women's involvement in VE, the diversity of roles that women play in VE groups has not been fully developed in the existing literature. The second set of perspectives in this article therefore focuses on current insights on the types of roles that women come to play within such organisations. According to some such as Balasubramaniyan and Raghavan (2015), the lower social position of women in patriarchal societies often is replicated in the context of VE organisations, where consistent with prevailing gender norms, women are recruited to provide logistical and nurturing support (Balasubramaniyan and Raghavan2015). Based on a study with Islamic State (IS) recruits, Spencer (2016) similarly finds that with the exception of a handful of narrowly defined circumstances, women in the so-called Caliphate inherently hold "back seat" roles. In general, they are expected to perform activities that are largely in keeping with the idea that the

purpose of a woman is to support the *Ummah* by being a good wife first and foremost to her husband, reproducing the next generation of fighters and maintaining the household.

The specific role that women play within VE organizations is however coloured by the ideologies of the groups involved. Spencer (2016), for instance, highlights that despite the relegated roles of women within IS, there is a distinction between how it and other groups such as Hamas and Al Qaeda (AQ) conceive of women's participation. Within Islamist organisations such as AQ, the responsibilities of women were traditionally to simply provide moral and logistical support. "Women were to remain hidden and veiled" performing only background operational roles (Spencer 2016:77). In contrast, for groups such as IS, while women may have also been relegated to non-operational spheres, the IS state actively recruits women for a variety of reasons including for expanding their membership and creating media attention. Akin to many terrorist organisations today, "IS views women participants as an untapped resource and is increasingly willing to make concessions in its ideology to fold women into its ranks" (Spencer, 2016:78). In particular, the group has been famous for using women recruiters, especially as online recruiters who play a very active role, projecting IS' beliefs through social media.

The role of women recruiters has also been highlighted by Hoyle, Bradford and Frenett (2015), who argue that women are often being employed in such positions owing to gendered notions of their inherent "trustworthiness". They find that, recruiters, many of whom are western female migrants, often encourage others to leave their homes and families and travel to IS held territories. In addition to the encouragement, they often provide practical advice to those wishing to travel to support the Caliphate. According to Saltman and Smith (2015), it is the ability of women to socialize relatively easily that makes them better recruiters. In the context of AS recruitment, the ISS study finds that women recruiters were viewed through the lens of contrasting stereotypes of mother and temptress. Those who used their "influence within the home as the familial custodians of culture, social and religious values – were viewed as mothers", whereas those who recruited within contexts external to the home environment, e.g. social media or a refugee camp, were viewed as temptresses, luring young men with false promises (Ndungu et al, 2017: 31). Apart from such roles, the study also revealed that women performed other supportive functions - including providing shelter for hiding terrorists, financing terrorism by arranging transactions and providing medical care, amongst others.

Thus, existing evidence on the role of women within VE groups points to the replication of their lower social status. VE groups therefore appear to reinforce gender stereotypes, but the type and nature of the replication differs across groups. IS and AQ affiliate groups appear to have different perceptions of women's status. Within IS, women are seen as untapped resource who can assist with the recruitment of others, while for AQ women are simply to remain hidden and veiled. As an AQ affiliate, similar perceptions of women's role within the AS can also be extrapolated. However, the extent to which such assumption may be accurate and consistent within the organisation is not clearly known and more research is needed on the subject.

Impact of Violent Extremism on Women
Along with the limited focus on the role and rationale guiding women's involvement in violent extremist activity, the gender specific impact of violent extremism has also received reduced emphasis. This is despite the fact that, the radicalisation of young people, the violence inflicted by extremist movements and the state's response, have all had a severe impact on family dynamics, particularly, gender relations. In some contexts, as in the case of Somalia, the loss of the male breadwinner has encouraged women to take on more economically active roles (Gardner and Bushra 2004). According to Gardner and Bushra (2004), war and state collapse in Somalia have altered family dynamics such that women have emerged as primary decision makers who have assumed responsibilities for their family in the absence of the male head. Opportunities for male members to fulfil their gendered roles have consequently been reduced, providing men with few alternative trajectories to achieve their "manhood" (Gardner and Bushra, 2016). While the increased economic role played by women have contributed to greater say in household decision making structures, it has not been wholly allevaiting. Within the Somali society, women's role and status is still governed by gendered norms where a woman's involvement in economic activity is considered a secondary source of income even when in reality their level of contribution may be quite different. Gardner and Bushra (2016) note that in all regions, men still dominate the formal business sector, the various civil services, paid political posts, as well as police and defence forces.

In other cases, conflict and violent extremism have resulted in stricter adherence to gender norms because of ideological impositions by VE groups. Violent extremist groups with conservative or reactionary ideologies in particular may seek to restrict women's roles and rights. For instance, research

by the Human Rights Watch finds that in Iraq "extremist armed groups have placed discriminatory restrictions on women and girls [including] strict dress codes, limitations on women's engagement in public life, their ability to move freely, and constraints on their access to education and employment" (Human Rights Watch 2016:1). In areas controlled by Islamic State (IS), only women who were dressed in full face veil and accompanied by a close male relative were allowed to leave the house (Ibid). These rules, enforced by beatings or fines on male family members or both male and female members, have served to isolate women from family, friends, and public life (Ibid). In the context of Nigeria, Human Rights Watch (2014) also find that women abductees of Boko Haram were subjected to physical and psychological abuse; forced labour; forced participation in military operations, including carrying ammunition or luring men into ambush; forced marriage to their captors; and sexual abuse, including rape. In particular, the group has been notorious for using, what Bloom and Matfess (2016) describe as employing women for "operational purposes", i.e. using them as reproductive agents, frontline suicide operatives, bargaining chips with the Nigerian government, and as tools for terrorising communities and demonstrating their prowess.

For Sigsworth in Carter (2013) however, while entire communities suffer the effects of armed conflict, women in particular bear a disproportionate burden owing to their enervated social status. More specifically Sigsworth (in Carter 2013) notes that in the aftermath of conflict, women are targeted with forms of sexual violence (including: mass rape, forced pregnancy, forced prostitution, forced marriage, and sexual slavery) and also face domestic violence, extreme economic vulnerability, and secondary victimisation through state institutions such as the criminal justice system. Hardy in Carter (2013) also finds that some extremist groups may target female victims for their violent acts, because of the emotional impact of female casualties. Similar findings have been noted by Human Rights Watch (2016) which found that Boko Haram particularly targeted Christian and later Muslim females to hurt communities that opposed their rule, as a politically symbolic imposition of their will.

In contending with these perspectives, there is thus a need for interrogating the extent to which women experience a differential impact of violent extremist activities, either by the extremist themselves or as a consequence of state or societal repression in response to violent extremism. Understanding the nature of such impact is especially pertinent if new familial and decision-making arrangements are engendered, as such strategies could help shed light on the

ways in which efforts to counter VE can be empowering and implemented in ways that do not instrumentalise and reinforce existing gender stereotypes.

Literature Review

The review of the literature points to key perspectives and gaps in a developing area of research. While some research has been conducted thus far on women's recruitment into VE groups in East Africa, a more nuanced perspective of how and when women exercise such agency is needed. In addition to such understanding, it is also important to interrogate women's role and status within VE groups. Although much is known of women's treatment within AQ and IS groups, little information exists on women's role within groups such as AS (and to some extent also IS in the region), specifically their involvement as recruiters and supporters. Lastly, the review also highlights the importance of understanding the differential impact of violent extremism on women, either by the extremists themselves or as a consequence of state or societal repression in response to acts of violent extremism. This is key in the context of East Africa, where poverty, patriarchy, corruption and state response, can combine to impose additional costs on women.

In an attempt to address some of the gaps in the literature as they apply to the East African contexts, the following section attempts to capture some of the key insights that have emerged from the four research studies led by prominent Kenyan academics supported by RUSI and IFRA. To begin with, the paper by Badurdeen studies the process of recruitment into violent extremist groups. Using a biographical approach, Badurdeen traces the factors leading to women's recruitment into VE as well as their involvement in the process of recruitment. In departure from other prevailing explanations, she highlights that within her sample, most of the respondents appeared to be recruited into AS involuntarily and for majority their economic vulnerability made them particularly susceptible to recruitment. Only two of the respondents included within the study however came from middle class backgrounds and had an interest in asserting their economic independence, which also made them easy victims for entrapment by recruiters. What is most interesting about Badurdeen's study is the role played by female recruiters. Unlike the involuntary nature of how women were recruited into AS, the reasons for involvement of female recruiters appeared to be quite diverse. As per the study, in some cases female recruiters were guided by economic incentives alone and participated in recruitment activities by weighing the costs and benefits associated with such activities - i.e. the level of punishment versus the financial dividends from supporting VE

activities. However, in other cases recruitment was motivated by ideology or by the use of force for reasons such as the need to secure their own freedom or the safety of their families.

Further, similar to the findings of Hoyle, Bradford and Frenett (2015), female recruiters within Badurdeen' study were able to recruit women based on the trust networks generated. However, unlike the online recruiters in Hoyle, Bradford and Frenett (2015) study, these women were able to generate and build trust because of their prior contact with the recruits, their stable financial standing, "well-integrated lifestyle"(Hoyle et al, 2015) and owing to the counselling and psychological support they offered. In addition, the power difference also explained to a large extent the reasons why the recruiters were able to lure and convince the women recruits. The recruiters exercised this power in part by the very position that they held in society and/or with respect to the female recruit – example as an employer, as well as by isolating the recruits from their circumstances and constraining the space for them to exercise their individual agency.

Like Badurdeen, Mwakimako traces the experience and encounters of women travelling to Somalia and identifies that most of the returning fighters were recruited involuntarily. However, for Mwakimako the involuntary reporting of the pattern of recruitment must be also seen as a product of the respondent's narrative style and how women in constrained social settings come to justify and relay their actions. The act of narration is an act of storytelling, which is coloured by the respondent's interpretations of events, their contemporary situation and the subjectivity of the researcher. However, in the interpretation of their own events, the respondents according to Mwakimako, constrained their discourse within the gender motifs that- to use Sjobeg's terminology, are typically used to describe women's engagement in violent extremist activity – as "deviants, monsters, or victims" to be rescued (Sjobeg, 2017). Women narrated their experience of recruitment and participation within the groups, by emphasizing their lack of agency in all types of tasks performed – be it domestic or sexual. This was, even though women finding themselves in situations of subordination and oppression were able in part to exercise their agency especially when it came to negotiating the terms of their escape. Thus, while not discounting the potential coercive practices of recruitment, for Mwakimako it was the victimization narrative; consistent with gender norms within patriarchal contexts that shaped much of the relaying and also understanding of the role of women in violent extremist groups. The significance of subscribing to

such narratives, in turn was linked to the need for reconciling past experiences with their current realities and for finding pathways for reintegration with the larger community.

The paper by Ali tries to understand the role of gender relations in radicalisation and recruitment of young Muslim women in higher learning institutions in Kenya in order to answer the question why young women at learning institutions are targeted for recruitment by violent extremist groups and IS in particular. In doing so, this paper in departure from the other two studies by Azmiya and Mwakimako attempts to understand why women from less vulnerable backgrounds may be motivated to join VE groups. Based on Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) conducted, Ali finds that recruiters often appeal to patriarchal constructs to recruit women into violent extremist groups. In particular, Ali finds that the idea of marriage and the need for conforming to societal expectations was an important recruitment tactic. Recruiters often preyed on the insecurity of young Muslim women, who feared that higher education may delay the possibility of marriage by a certain age and in the process deprive them of much-needed protection and financial security. Thus, similar to other studies by Bloom (2011) and O'Rourke (2009) it was the need to conform to gender norms, which often compelled women to join violent extremist groups.

However, while this was the case for some, Ali also finds that the need for asserting their independence was a powerful motivator for others. According to the respondents interviewed, the act of joining a VE group represented an assertion of their independence, as it was a chance for them to make their own journey of *Hijra* to serve the interests of the Islamic state. In addition to such factors, Ali also observes that that the university context could provide grounds for radicalisation and recruitment even if such institutions characterise themselves as secular spaces. For Ali, the threat of radicalisation may be higher in public universities, which do not have as many controls as private educational institutions, on the dissemination of specific messages or content including those of religious or ideological nature.

Lastly, in departure from the other three studies, the study by Shauri looks at the impact of VE and recruitment of male spouses on widows in the coastal regions of Kenya. Based on interviews with 30 widows the study captures the physical, psycho-social, emotional, economic and structural repercussions that widows endure. In detailing the specific vulnerabilities that widow's experience

– including physical torture, sexual assault, poverty and destitution, suspicion by security forces, Shauri also demonstrates the types of coping mechanisms that such women have developed. In particular, he notes that in the absence of a formal structured approach to mitigate the negative impacts of radicalisation and recruitment of male spouses into VEOs, there are four primary strategies that women seemed to employ. These included livelihood, psycho-social, spiritual, and structural support infrastructure. Similar to the findings by Gardner and Bushra (2001) in Somalia, the principal livelihood strategy employed by widows was engaging in economic activities that had hitherto been the preserve of men. Despite adopting a more active economic role, the widows within Shauri's study continued to face challenges in meeting the basic needs for themselves and their families. The problem in part related to their low levels of education and skills as a consequence of their lower economic status and gendered position in society. Further, the stigma associated with the women being spouses of violent extremists also added to their marginalisation from the community.

In addressing the challenges facing these women, Shauri recommends the need for welfare provisions to be made by the government to enhance the living conditions of the widows and their families, especially once it has been confirmed that they were not directly or indirectly involved in VE activities. Further, in responding to the psychological and emotional trauma experienced, Shauri identifies the need to extend psycho-social support and counselling services. Lastly as a preventive measure, Shauri suggests efforts should be undertaken by the government and security forces to reduce the levels of harassment and human rights abuses faced by such groups.

Conclusion
In conclusion it can be posited that, while many of the factors compelling recruitment and radicalisation into VE groups have been unpacked in the context of East Africa, a gender specific dimension has been largely missing. In examining the reasons for women's involvement in VE groups, while some research has been conducted, there continues to be a need for a more gender specific approach. Such an approach would involve understanding of how gender – based differences construct and constrain women's involvement in VE and the differential impact of such activities on their lives. The studies included within this Volume, have in some part attempted to contribute to this perspective, through an interrogation of the extent of women's agency in recruitment into VEOs and support for such groups, the meaning and motifs

they appropriate in making sense of and reconciling their experiences and lastly the impact and also the coping mechanisms that women develop in dealing with the consequences of violent extremism. In contributing in such ways however, the studies offer some important insights but are far from conclusive. Further research is therefore needed to address this critical gap in the literature and to strengthen policy making and programming responses to counter the gender specific dimension of violent extremist activity.

Notes
1. The report produced by the Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS), argued that Somalia's Al Shabaab has eclipsed Nigeria's Boko Haram, to become "Africa's deadliest group". The claim was supported with data drawn from ACLED. ACLED has since released a post stating that both groups are deadly and a specific prioritization of the level of deadliness needs to be made within a context and with an appreciation of the limitation of conflict data.
2. U.S. State Department estimates however reported that these figures were likely to be lower owing to an increase in defection rates over the last two years due to U.S. air strikes and the group's negligence in paying low-level fighters (Felter, Masters, and Sergie, 2018).
3. For more details on the programme please see: https://rusi.org/projects/strive-horn-africa
4. Throughout the paper, the terms men and women are used as sexual categories and the adoption of these terms does not preclude transsexuals and/or other categories. Further the focus on the sexual category of women within the gender discourse does not also imply that the role of masculinity and the constraints that it imposes on 'men', is not considered to be of relevance. Rather the emphasis on women is from the perspective that there has been a limited focus on their role within violent extremist groups.
5. In the ongoing conflict in Iraq rape was often used as a common recruiting tool. In 2009 Samira Ahmed Jassim, known as Um al Mu'emin, Mother of the Faithful, was arrested for having orchestrated the rapes of eighty girls in Baghdad and Diyala province to recruit them as suicide bombers for Ansar al Sunnah, a Sunni group with links to Al Qaeda.
6. Using biographical data, the researchers developed a database of 222 female terrorists across 13 conflicts. The examination of females across

multiple conflicts, rather than one specific conflict or one particular type of conflict, made it possible to generalize findings.

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