

# Mobs who Stripped Female Robbers but Failed to Strip the Male Robbers: The “Evil Women Hypothesis” on Nigerian Streets

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**Abstract:** Academic reports on the “evil women” hypothesis have focused mainly on the actions of criminal justice authorities (CJA). However, actions based on this hypothesis equally extend to ordinary members of the public. Vigilante justice on suspected criminals by mobs is a regular occurrence in Nigeria. Thus, the current article drew on vigilante justice on robbers to examine the notion of the evil women hypothesis from the perspective of mobs. Three robbery incidents in three different Nigerian cities involving robbers impersonating taxi operators known as “one-chance” robbers, were analyzed. In all the three incidents, the one-chance robbers comprising both men and women were caught by mobs. In all of them, the mobs stripped the female robbers naked in public whilst their male gang members were allowed to wear their clothes. The actions of the mob conformed to those of CJA with respect to the evil women hypothesis whereby female offenders are punished more severely than their male counterparts due to the idea that the former have crossed the morality boundary to commit a serious offense that goes against the gender-role expectations.

**Keywords:** Robbery, one-chance robber, chivalry factor, evil women hypothesis, mob, vigilante justice.

## INTRODUCTION

Since the end of Nigerian Civil War in 1970, armed robbery incidents have increased at an alarming rate in towns and cities (Ekpenyong, 1989). Authorities introduced the death penalty for the offense (Ekpenyong, 1989). The increased prevalence of this problem led to its criminalization under three laws (the Criminal Code; the Penal Code; and the Robbery and Firearms Act), including the imposition of the death penalty for it by both the military and civil administrations (Akem-Vingir, 2020; Ani, 2011). These laws will be described in the body of this article. Robbery offenses, particularly the armed types, have persisted in Nigeria to date, and the police have not been able to address the problem effectively, leading to the establishment of taskforces and vigilantes by state governments and different communities in their efforts to boost security (Akem-Vingir, 2020).

Nigerian authorities record armed robberies differently from robberies that involve no weapon. Based on crime statistics produced by the Nigerian Prisons Service, 11,661 offenders were admitted into the prison for armed robbery, and 13,216 offenders were admitted for robbery in 2013; 10,249 and 8,505 in 2014; 4,867 and 2,880 in 2015, respectively (National Bureau of Statistics, 2016). As one can see from the above statistics, the differences between the rate of robbery and armed robbery incidents in Nigeria are not much. While fewer offenders were admitted into prison for armed robbery in 2013 than for robbery, more were

admitted for robbery in subsequent years. Although the statistics for armed robbery in 2015 are close to double the statistics for robbery, this is usually not the case every year. Akem-Vingir (2020) refers to national statistics to show that 6,929 cases of armed robbery were reported in Nigeria in 2016; 9,016 in 2017; 9,783 in 2018; and 13,278 in 2019 (Akem-Vingir, 2020). These figures suggest that armed robbery, which is a more serious offense than robbery, is on the rise in Nigeria.

While the laws mentioned above are there to punish robbers and armed robbers and to achieve justice for their victims by the Nigerian criminal justice system (CJS) as expected, this is not often the case in Nigerian society where mob justice or vigilantism is commonplace. Vigilantism is a common problem in several societies in contemporary Africa (see Hund, 2004; Ilori, 2020; Luongo, 2006; Mesaki, 2009; Mudasiru & Fatai, 2020; Roxburgh, 2016; Walter, 2003). In Nigeria, the mob often assaults suspected offenders. The mob may later hand them over to the police. In many cases, however, the mob deliberately kills the suspects. This type of justice has thrived in many Nigerian cities and towns (see Ilori, 2020; Mudasiru & Fatai, 2020). The level of brutality used by armed robbers against their victims in Nigeria has meant that the citizens often use violence against them when caught before handing them to police if the mob spares them death.

This article concerns mob justice against robbers, popularly called “one-chance” robbers in Nigeria. These are criminals who impersonate commercial transporters, such as taxi and minibus operators, to pick up passengers from bus stops or on the roads and

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then rob them aboard the vehicle. They often double as kidnappers and robbers because the victims are held hostage in the vehicle against their will before being robbed. In addition, the robbers rape their victims at times. These robbers are armed with a series of dangerous weapons ranging from pistols or handguns, knives, machetes, axes, hammers, scissors, vehicle wheel spanners, and others.

This article will analyze and discuss three cases of a one-chance robbery that attracted mob justice. Each of these incidents occurred in different Nigerian cities. The suspects in all the cases included both men and women. The mobs stripped the women in all three cases but never stripped the men. These incidents will be described in depth under designated subheadings. First, the “evil women hypothesis” will be drawn on to discuss the discriminatory treatment of the suspects based on their genders. While overwhelming academic literature exists on the “evil women hypothesis”, they mostly concentrate on the actions of the CJS personnel. The evil women hypothesis refers to the idea that female criminals, particularly those who commit serious offenses that are more common with male criminals, receive more severe treatment than men for violating normative sex roles (Kruttschnitt & Savolainen, 2009). This term will be discussed in depth in the body of this article.

This current article aims to extend academic work on the evil women hypothesis to the actions of the ordinary members of the public (i.e., the mob). Members of the mob serve as arresting and prosecution officers, judges and punishers, or even executioners of the criminal suspects. The idea that the mob unlawfully carries out the duties of criminal justice agencies makes their actions worthy of academic attention. The discriminatory justice by the mob based on the genders of the robbery suspects discussed in this article mimics that of the criminal justice agencies that punish violent female offenders more severely than their male counterparts. This article will demonstrate how the actions of the ordinary members of the public (the mob) were not too different from those of the CJS personnel concerning the negative stereotyping of female criminal suspects.

## ROBBERY INCIDENTS IN NIGERIA

As previously demonstrated, robbery and armed robbery incidents are commonplace in Nigeria. Nevertheless, the rate of incidents varies significantly among states – from as little as 20 incidents in Kwara,

21 in Sokoto, 22 in Gombe, and 23 in Jigawa to as high as 163 in Edo, 166 in Ogun, 172 in Imo, 194 in Oyo and 300 in Lagos (see Kunnuji, 2016 for recorded armed robbery incidents in all the 36 states of the federation). Several factors might contribute to the rate of armed robbery in a particular state, such as population density, how the residents of a specific state are able or unable to abide by the law, the level of enforcement, or factors likely or unlikely to deter offenders in the state, the availability of valuables or cash sought by armed robbers, and others. The latter may explain the very high incidents in Lagos (the country's biggest and busiest commercial city) compared to other states. Lagos is Nigeria's most densely populated state; it is also the country's main commercial hub. Thus, there are more cash and valuables in Lagos compared to those in other states mentioned above. Robbers seek money and valuables.

It is difficult to estimate the rate of any particular crime in Nigeria. The notion of the “dark figure” of crime means that some crimes do not appear in crime statistics. While this is the case almost in every society, Nigeria's case could be more severe due to the low level of reporting of crimes. Ayodele & Aderinto's (2014) study of crime reporting in Nigeria found that victims reported only 47.8 percent of crimes compared to 52.2 percent that they did not report. This is partly connected to the endemic police corruption in Nigeria (see Agazue, 2015; Emerson, 2010; Mudasiru & Fatai, 2020; Oluwaniyi, 2009; Orole *et al.*, 2015). Such corruption breeds a lack of trust in the police who are fond of arresting and extorting crime victims. In addition, some victims are afraid that the police might inform criminals who reported them since some officers sponsor or work together with criminals (Ayodele & Aderinto, 2014).

Nigerian armed robbers use a variety of weapons. While the robbers use different types of weapons, such as guns, knives, axes, hammers, screwdrivers, and scissors, amongst others, the use of a firearm is very common to the extent that when Nigerians hear about armed robbers, a group of men wielding a gun comes to mind. This also reflects in the law enacted explicitly for it (Robbery and Firearms Act). This will be discussed in the latter part of this article. While Nigerians and other nationals in the country are victims of robbers, the armed ones are a severe source of fear and panic. Armed robbery became common in Nigeria after the Nigerian Civil War ended in 1970 and became very violent (Abbas *et al.*, 2005; Akem-Vingir, 2020; Ekpenyong, 1989; Igbo, 2001). This is attributed to the

proliferation of a substantial number of arms and ammunition in the country as a result of the 30-month Civil War and the vast number of demobilized soldiers who considered armed robbery as a source of income as they were not gainfully employed (Okoli, 2014).

Nigerian robbers usually move around in a group of half a dozen to a dozen persons, almost each holding a weapon, particularly a gun. Robbers numbering up to 20 persons are sometimes encountered (see Ani, 2011). While a robber may act alone, acting as a group is common and beneficial for several reasons, such as having someone to distract the victim while another commits the actual robbery and one standing "guard as sentinels, ever vigilant for law-enforcement activities" while another is busy with the robbery (Hallsworth, 2005, p. 5). The group size may offer the robbers an advantage for intimidation, persuading the victim to hand over the material item demanded by the robbers (Hallsworth, 2005). These are possibilities in robberies in Nigeria whereby robbers often stand guard outside banks, churches, residential buildings, warehouses, shopping malls, and other places holding their guns or shooting sporadically while their gang members are busy robbing inside the buildings.

Almost nowhere is safe from robbers in Nigeria, as they target households, churches, offices, shops, marketplaces, banks, warehouses, moving vehicles, and more. Those engaging in sophisticated operations are often armed with sophisticated weapons, such as welding tools, gas cylinders, and dynamites used to blow up safes and others (Ani, 2011). The robbers sometimes use explosives in bank robberies. In the notorious Offa bank robbery where robbers killed 9 police officers and 8 civilians on April 5, 2018, explosives were used to attack the bank and also a nearby police station, simultaneously (Punch, 2020). The robbers also stole 21 AK47 rifles from the police station after shooting dead the officers on duty and using explosives to blow open the security tower of the police station (Punch, 2020).

The prevalence of armed robbers in Nigeria is compounded by the presence of competing criminal gangs and cult groups (see Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, OCCRP, 2020) in different Nigerian cities and towns who fund their activities through armed robbery, kidnapping, and other organized criminal activities. The proliferation of these deadly gangs means more armed robbery activities in communities. It is mainly a problem due to gang members moving around in groups. It is common for a

brave and clever citizen to overpower a lone armed robber, but this is extremely difficult when they operate as a gang. Operating as a gang also means difficulty for law enforcement operatives, who may sustain injuries or die while confronting the criminals. In addition, bystanders sometimes get caught in the crossfire (see Ehikhamenor & Ojo, 2005; Mohammed *et al.*, 2005). Police reports indicate that of the total 652 victims killed in connection to robbery incidents at a certain period, 348 (68.1%) were armed robbers; 134 (26.2%) were bystanders; and 29 (5.7%) police officers (Ehikhamenor & Ojo, 2005).

### **ONE-CHANCE ROBBERY**

A one-chance robbery is a form of robbery in Nigeria that one can hardly find in academic publications. These criminals operate in several busy cities. This robbery is perpetrated by criminals who pretend to be commercial transporters using cars or minibusses driving around major transport routes picking up passengers targeted for robbery. Although the robbers may also assault or rape the victims during the process, the former target the latter primarily for robbery. As previously stated, the robbers are always armed with dangerous weapons or tools (e.g., a gun, knife, machete, axe, hammer, scissors, and vehicle wheel spanner).

The term "one-chance" is in Pidgin English translating to "one passenger", that is, only a passenger is needed for the vehicle to proceed to its destination. Commercial transport vehicles in Nigerian cities and towns often attract passengers more quickly when they assure them that the vehicle is almost fully boarded or that they are not interested in getting more passengers. Many passengers are in a hurry, and most of these vehicles do not depart at a specific time, but when passengers fill up the vehicle seats. Thus, these criminals exploit the psychology of the passengers, who prefer a vehicle departing immediately to one that would spend more time at the bus stop to assure passengers that the vehicle must depart once the passenger is boarded. The unsuspected criminals often shout "one chance" to attract the attention of potential passengers in a hurry. This is how the criminals got this name, "one-chance". It is worth clarifying, however, that the shouting of one-chance is not exclusive to one-chance robbers, rather, legitimate commercial transporters do the same. The robbers exploit this to attract passengers who become robbery victims. Although the term one-chance refers to this particular group of robbers, not all of them use this term. This is

dependent on the type of transporters and their location of business. This term is common in the Lagos metropolis, but not all the one-chance robbers are known for it, even in Lagos.

Interestingly, the assurance to potential passengers that only one sitting space is left in the vehicle has also become a way of detecting one-chance robbers. One of the tips provided to the residents of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) by the deputy superintendent of police (DSP) of the FCT Police Command, Anjuguri Jesse Manzah, on how to spot one-chance robbers was to “look at the composition of persons in the car” and to “be wary” when “a car is having a space for only one passenger” (The Whistler, 2019). Of course, legitimate transporters would always have a space for one passenger, but being mindful of space for one passenger and carefully assessing the existing passengers in the vehicle is likely to save a potential victim.

Although Manzah’s advice is credible, this is not always the case with one-chance robbers. Manzah’s advice seems valid for transporters using cars, but his observation is not very helpful for those using minibusses. One-chance robbers operating in cars often leave one-seat space for their victim in the middle of the backseat. They almost always need one passenger, that is, their victim. The passenger is then surrounded on both sides by two robbers sitting by both doors of the vehicle’s backseat. There is usually another robbery gang member sitting in the front seat. The driver is automatically a member of the criminal gang. One-chance robbers in minibusses use a different approach, making Manzah’s advice irrelevant. The robbers often look for multiple victims. The robbers always ensure that they have sufficient space in the vehicle to be able to deal with the multiple victims while at the same time ensuring that the population of the gang members is higher than that of the victims. The ratio of the robbers to the victims in minibusses could be up to three robbers to one victim.

These criminals do not board at transport terminals because they are not registered commercial transport operators, thus, could be easily spotted by legitimate transporters. They mostly pick up passengers on the roads. All the gang members do not need to be in the vehicle by the time they pick up a victim. A gang member could wait for the driver to pick him or her up from somewhere when the victim (an unsuspecting passenger) is already in the vehicle, and the robbery may start after that. The robbers may pick up their

gang member disguised as a passenger alongside a targeted victim (i.e., a legitimate passenger) at a certain bus stop.

While one-chance robbers often use standard weapons or tools to attack their victims, some of them use distraction tactics, such as engaging the passenger in a conversation while another gang member searches the passenger’s bag, where this is possible. In addition, some robbers carry certain chemical substances to tranquilize certain victims to enable the former to search and/or rape the victim easily. The victims are often pushed out of the moving vehicle by the robbers at the end of the operation. Occasionally, the sympathetic ones may slow down or stop to allow the victim to alight before pushing the victim out. Pushing victims out of moving vehicles on highways means that people fear these robbers because of the possibility of severe injury or death. With the increasing use of automated teller machine (ATM) cards in Nigeria in recent times, robbers sometimes force the victims to transfer money to accounts linked to the criminals. However, the victims may also be taken to an ATM station if the robbers feel safe that this could be executed without being caught.

One-chance robbery involves more than robbery; while assaults and rape of victims have been the typical “signature” of Nigerian street robbers, one-chance robbers not only do these to some of their victims too, but they also kidnap some of their victims who they rape repeatedly. They may also hold a victim hostage to collect ransom for a victim believed to have more money elsewhere than what they could get from the victim on the spot. There are one-chance robbery groups that specialize in withdrawing money from their victims’ accounts after collecting their ATM cards and PINs. This group often holds the victims hostage, for as long as it would take for a gang member to visit an ATM station to withdraw cash from the victim’s account. The victims of these robbers are sometimes picked up unconscious by bystanders from the highways with severe injuries after being thrown out of a moving vehicle in addition to the injuries that might have been inflicted on the victim inside the vehicle with a weapon. Victims are known to have been run over by oncoming vehicles after being pushed out of the robbers’ moving vehicle (see Kosofe Post, 2019; The Sun, 2019).

## **MOB JUSTICE AGAINST ROBBERS**

Nigerians prefer to assault or harm criminal suspects without recourse to security operatives (Ilori,

2020). However, the extent of this lawlessness in Nigeria varies considerably based on cities or towns and the demographic composition of the mob. When those supporting vigilantism dominates the composition of the mob, those calling for police intervention may be overpowered by the former and vice versa. Mob action in Nigeria is highly connected to police corruption and incompetence. Vigilante justice in Nigeria is linked to the perception by the members of the public that criminal justice from the state does not exist. Where it exists, it is ineffective or inefficient (Akem-Vingir, 2020). Ilori (2020) links vigilante justice in the country to the incompetence of security personnel, particularly the police, in responding to emergencies of this nature. He is partly correct. However, a delayed response or a lack of response by security operatives should not usually lead to vigilantism among law-abiding citizens. Therefore, what appears to be the primary factor responsible for vigilantism in Nigeria is the endemic lawlessness in the country, which is reinforced by endemic police corruption.

Police corruption is a serious problem in Nigeria (see Agazue, 2015; Emerson, 2010; Mudasiru & Fatai, 2020; Oluwaniyi, 2009; Orole *et al.*, 2015) and this means that even dangerous criminals, such as armed robbers and kidnappers do occasionally regain their freedom after bribing the police or when by order of a powerful person, such as an influential civil servant, politician, pastor or moneybag. Nigerians know this as they often see arrested or prosecuted criminal suspects returning to the community to continue their mayhem when they are expected to be in detention. As a result, justice is hardly achieved for their victims, instead, these dangerous criminals may go back to attack their victims again or those they believe played a part in their arrest. Vigilantism usually reflects the breakdown of social institutions in protecting communities (Ashforth, 2015). Thus, the Nigerian law enforcement operatives' failure explains Nigeria's recurrent vigilantism as many citizens prefer to punish the offenders and achieve justice for their victims. This was the case with the three robbery incidents to be analyzed in this article.

## **LAWS AGAINST ROBBERY IN NIGERIA**

Robbery is defined as a "theft or attempted theft by force or the threat of violence" (Cook, 1987, p. 357). The definition of robbery considers that robbery is a property crime and a crime of violence (Cook, 1987). This is also reflected in the legal definition of robbery provided by Nigerian law as stipulated in section 401 of

the Nigerian Criminal Code, Chapter 36 of the Laws of the Federation of Nigeria (LFN, 2004):

Any person who steals anything and, at or immediately before or immediately after the time of stealing it, uses or threatens to use actual violence to any person or property to obtain or retain the thing stolen or to prevent or overcome resistance to its being stolen or retained, is said to be guilty of robbery.

Some robbery incidents involve the use of weapons, which is often referred to as "armed robbery". The difference between a robber with a weapon (i.e., armed robber) and one without a weapon is made clear in section 402 of the Criminal Code, which deals with the punishment of the offense of robbery. This will be discussed below. The Criminal Code, Chapter 36 of the LFN (2004); the Penal Code (1963), Chapter 89 of the Laws of Northern Nigeria (LNN); and the Robbery and Firearms (Special Provisions) Act, Chapter R11 of LFN (2004) deal with robbery. The Criminal Code applies to the southern states of Nigeria, whereas the Penal Code applies to the northern states, including the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja (Ani, 2011). The Robbery and Firearms Act applies to all the states of the federation.

The Robbery and Firearms Act first came into force as a Decree (No. 47) in 1970 in response to the problem of armed robbery in Nigeria after the Nigerian Civil War (Bello, 2013). Thereafter, it was repeatedly amended and repealed before its current stipulation (Ani, 2011; Bello, 2013). Although there are different provisions in the three laws mentioned above, the maximum penalty for robbery in Nigeria is a death sentence based on both the Criminal Code and the Robbery and Firearms Act. The death sentence applies to a robber who is armed with a firearm, an offensive weapon, obnoxious or chemical material, or with someone who is armed with these or any of such weapons. A robber without a weapon shall be imprisoned for over twenty-one years.

## **THE EVIL WOMEN HYPOTHESIS**

The evil women hypothesis is predicated on the basis that female offenders are treated more harshly than their male counterparts, not only for violating the law but also for going against the gender roles in their offenses (Belknap & Holsinger, 1998). Females receive more stigma than males for criminal engagements and suffer greater consequences than males

(Steffensmeier & Alan, 1996). In some states in the United States, women received indeterminate sentences for the same offenses, of which men were given determinate/shorter sentences (e.g., see Moulds, 1978). However, some studies suggest that the CJS does not always treat women more harshly than males for some of the serious offenses, instead, the women are treated as men (see Embry & Lyons, 2012; Lu *et al.*, 2013) or still more leniently (e.g., Embry & Lyons, 2012) when people expect that women should be treated more harshly. This will be discussed below.

The evil women hypothesis goes contrary to the “chivalry factor” concerning the treatment of female offenders. Belknap & Holsinger (1998, p. 46) define chivalry in the context of the CJS as “the assumptions that society is paternalistic and chivalrous toward females, and therefore the police, prosecutors, judges, parole reviewers, and other decision-makers will be chivalrous, as well”. Historically, chivalry “implies basic forms of human interaction befitting a model of political paternalism” (Moulds, 1978, p. 417). Moulds trace the emergence of chivalry to the feudal culture of Middle Age Europe, where knights were sworn in to protect ladies from devils and dragons. Moulds acknowledges that while this type of chivalry (protecting women as the weaker sex) had long disappeared as a formal institution, several chivalrous practices remain and favor women. Since men dominate the CJS, men consider women as deserving of protection (Embry & Lyons, 2012). This is also based on the idea that women constitute the weaker sex that needs protection (see Moulds, 1978; Franklin & Fearn, 2008). The CJS favors women in two different ways. Firstly, the court hands lenient sentences to female offenders. Secondly, the court punishes male offenders who victimize females severely (see Curry *et al.*, 2004). Female defendants with male victims are more likely to have their cases dismissed (Romain & Freiburger, 2016).

While the above paragraph indicates that chivalry is commonplace in the CJS, another set of evidence suggests that chivalry is limited. For example, while Nagel & Hagan’s (1983) review found that female offenders benefited from chivalry from the United States courts, the such benefit was restricted to less serious offenses as the same courts punished women more severely for serious offenses, which supports the evil women hypothesis. Romain & Freiburger (2016) found that the court was likely to dismiss felony cases involving women compared to other cases. In all three jurisdictions (Miami, Chicago, and Kansas City) studied by Spohn and Beichner (2000), they found that the

seriousness of offenses, and prior criminal history of the female offenders influenced sentencing decisions significantly, that is, to incarcerate and punish more severely. They found that while judges usually considered the women’s social and economic responsibilities, including childcare, in sentencing, the judges did not consider when the offense was serious or when the offender had an extensive prior history of offending.

Recidivism is as important as the severity of the offense in invoking the evil women mindset in the personnel of the CJS. This can be seen in Spohn & Beichner’s (2000) report above. While Hartley *et al.*’s (2010) findings in their study of the chivalry factor in South Korea support those in Western societies that women are treated more leniently by the court, they also found that incarceration decisions for female recidivists did not differ much from those made for their male counterparts. While Goulette *et al.* (2015) found evidence of the court system’s chivalrous treatment of female defendants, they also found that the court gave harsher sentences to female offenders who had previously served a sentence. Lu *et al.*’s (2013) investigation of gender disparities in sentencing decisions in China found that for a woman to receive a death sentence in a murder case, several criteria should be met, such as prior criminal record, the involvement of major offense severity, targeting a stranger as a victim, additional felony and the involvement of other offenders.

Nagel & Hagan (1983) have offered some explanations regarding the disappearance of chivalry and the appearance of the evil women hypothesis by arguing that chivalry is rendered inappropriate when the seriousness of the woman’s offense leads to the lessening of her presumed innocence and the evidence that her behavior has deviated from the traditional pattern of female behavior. This would prompt the court personnel to move the woman to the evil woman hypothesis category. It is worth acknowledging that even the evil women hypothesis does not always reflect in sentencing even when one would expect it. For example, murder is a grave crime and as Lu *et al.*’s (2013) study above shows, the women were not punished severely for this act for being a serious crime, rather, their offense histories had to be considered first. Similarly, Embry & Lyons’ (2012) analysis of data on 269,476 sexual offenses collected from the National Corrections Reporting Program in the United States for 10 years (1994-2004) found that on average, men received longer and harsher sentences than women for

child sexual assault, rape, and forcible sodomy. One of Embry & Lyons' hypotheses that "anticipated longer sentence lengths ascribed to women who had been sentenced to offenses that displayed the most severe departure from traditional gender roles" could not be supported (p. 156). They found no significant gender differences in sentence length for sexual assault.

Embry & Lyons (2012) argue that rape, forcible sodomy, and child sexual assault are serious crimes that are socially unacceptable and depart from the gender role considering women's traditional role as caregivers. They expected that these offenses would have been penalized in light of the evil women hypothesis, but this was not the case. These findings suggest that chivalry also applies to some serious offenses to a certain extent. Reza's (2005) report on the vast disparity between men and women who received the death penalty and were on death row in the United States, is another source of evidence that despite committing crimes expected to attract harsh treatment, the women were pitied. Thus, Reza (2005, p. 184) concluded: "The most logical and seemingly apparent explanation for this disparity is that the current statutory capital punishment system is not gender-neutral".

## METHODS

### Design

The qualitative research paradigm was adopted for this current analysis. The qualitative approach emphasizes meanings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Willig, 2013). Thus, it is indispensable when there is a need to understand the complexities of human behavior that require answers to "why" and "how" questions (Lakshman *et al.*, 2000). For example, the current researcher needed to establish why mobs decided to give harsher punishment to female robbers than their male gang members, even as both genders engaged in the crime equally. The qualitative paradigm was also chosen to provide complete contextual information surrounding the incidents while drawing on criminological theories to explain why the behaviors of the mobs (i.e., stripping of female robbers only) were consistent in different crime scenes.

### Data

Secondary data were used in this current analysis. Three incidents were drawn from media reports to illustrate the practice of stripping female robbers while

leaving their male gang members fully clothed in Nigeria. These incidents took place in different Nigerian cities. A total of three incidents were described under three separate subheadings under the "Description of Incidents" section below. Incident 1 was reported by the Independent (2020), titled *Female robbery stripped naked alongside her gang in Benin*. Incident 2 was reported by Daily Post (2016) with the following caption: *A "one chance" female robbery leader caught and stripped naked in Port Harcourt*. Incident 3 was reported by the Premium Times (2019) with the following caption: *FCT police rescue "one-chance" suspects from the mob*. The details of these incidents, in addition to the differential treatments of the robbers based on their gender, will be described in depth in the next section of this report. After the descriptions, the incidents will be discussed in light of existing literature in the field.

## DESCRIPTION OF INCIDENTS

### Incident 1

These robbers were on a one-chance robbery operation on the Auchu-Benin Highway in Edo State where they were caught by a mob. The robbers comprised 3 men and 1 woman who were in a vehicle disguised as a taxi. They picked up an unsuspecting passenger, Mrs. Mariam Ufua, dragged her bag from her, and collected thirty thousand Naira inside the bag while she was in the vehicle. The robbers then opened the door of the vehicle speeding on the highway and started pushing Mrs. Ufua out of the moving vehicle, but she began struggling with them while screaming for help. A taxi driver heard her and started chasing the vehicle. When the robbers became aware that the taxi driver had identified them as robbers, they sped up to escape, but the robbers' driver lost control of the vehicle and crashed into a gutter. That was where the mob caught up with them. The mob singled out the female robber from her male gang partners and stripped her naked. The mob was preparing to lynch her, but security operatives arrived on time before the mob could succeed. The news reporter displays the photo of the only female robber, who appears completely naked, although the reporter covers her breast and groin areas. A picture of this same incident appeared on a blog called *Gistmania*, showing the two gang members fully clothed while the only female gang member was naked. Like the reporter for the Independent (2020), the blogger also covered the robber's breasts and groin areas in the photo.

## Incident 2

A mob reportedly caught the one-chance robbers in this incident after robbing an unsuspecting man of two million Naira around the Cottage Hospital in Port Harcourt, Rivers State (Daily Post, 2016). Their victim raised the alarm, which attracted the attention of bystanders, who immediately formed a mob that blocked the exit of the robbers' vehicle. Consequently, the mob caught the robbers. Although Daily Post did not present the photo of the robbers, the image appeared on a blog called *Briggs' Blog*, showing two men and a woman sitting on the ground and surrounded by a crowd, including police officers who rushed to the crime scene to arrest the suspects. While the two male robbers were allowed to wear their clothes, their female gang member was stripped of her top, leaving her topless from her waist upwards, although the blogger covered her breasts in the photo on the blog. In addition, wounds and blood could be seen on her neck and arm, suggesting that the mob beat and/or injured her.

## Incident 3

This incident occurred along the Kubwa Expressway in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja (Premium Times, 2019). The gang involved a total of 5 suspects, but the mob caught 4 while one escaped with the victim's cash and valuables. The police later arrived at the scene and took them away from the mob. Among the four suspects caught by the mob were 3 women and 1 man. The mob stripped all 3 female suspects fully naked but failed to strip the only male suspect in the act. Although there is no image with this report by the Premium Times, a video of this incident that appeared on social media shows all the women being beaten by the mob who forced them to lie on the ground fully naked, except the male gang member. Nevertheless, the only male suspect appears topless in the video, but his shirt can be seen tied to his waist, suggesting that he was not forcefully stripped but might have deliberately removed his shirt as some men do as a result of the hot Nigerian weather.

These incidents will be discussed in light of the literature on the evil women hypothesis under the next subheading. The discussion will demonstrate that the mob action targeted at the female robbery suspects was in line with the evil women hypothesis due to the severity of the crime the suspected female robbers committed. It is worth stressing that these women were simply robbery suspects yet to be processed by the

CJS to establish their guilt or innocence. Victims of jungle justice are not always guilty of what they are accused of. Thus, they could not be described as criminals in this report even though they were caught in the act. Whether they were eventually found guilty of these acts or not, these incidents demonstrate the discriminatory treatment of female robbery suspects compared to their male partners.

## DISCUSSION

The discriminatory treatment that the mob gave to the female robbery suspects in all the cases compared to their male gang members cannot be considered a coincidence. These incidents occurred in different cities and periods. Benin to Abuja is no less than 400 kilometers. Benin to Port Harcourt is 250 kilometers at minimum. Abuja to Port Harcourt is more than a distance of 700 kilometers. The first incident occurred in 2020, while the second incident happened in 2016. The third one took place in 2019. Therefore, this could not have been a matter of coincidence. However, Nigerians might have copied this sort of treatment in these different locations from the scene where a mob had previously treated a female robbery suspect in that manner. Wherever it originated, the point here is that mobs accept it in different parts of Nigeria as an appropriate treatment for female robbers.

Stripping is usually the first or among the first things done to criminal suspects caught by the mob in Nigeria. It is a disgraceful practice that ordinary people would typically find uncomfortable. Thus, the mob does this strictly to humiliate criminal suspects. The suspects are most often males. It is interesting, however, how the mobs in all three cases, did not bother to strip any of the male robbers, which has been the norm when these robbers are mostly men. The presence of female suspects diverted the attention of all the mobs away from the male suspects. Arguably, the mob felt that the male robbers were not their problems in those cases but their female counterparts whose involvements in male types of crime constituted "evil".

Men have been the people committing the vast majority of robberies in Nigeria in their different forms. Of all the 11,661 offenders admitted into the Nigerian prisons for armed robbery and 13,216 admitted for robbery in 2013, females made up only 296 and 197, respectively; of the 10,249 admitted for armed robbery and 8,505 admitted for robbery in 2014, females made up only 282 and 262, respectively; of all the 4,867 admitted for armed robbery and 2,880 admitted for



robbery in 2015, females made up only 115 and 131, respectively (National Bureau of Statistics, 2016). This is not surprising considering the link between masculinity and criminality, especially serious crimes (see Birch, 1993; Borzycki, 2005; Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004; Daly & Wilson, 1988; Feld, 2009; Fishbain *et al.*, 1985; Gurian, 2011; Hickey, 2003; Kellermann & Mercy, 1992; Messing & Heeren, 2004; Perrini, 2013; Otu, 2003). Even the female robbery gang members hardly engage in the robbery but serve as informants and sexual gratification partners to the male robbers (Otu, 2003). Thus, from the chivalry perspective, the female robbers deserved sympathy from men, firstly, for being women, that is, the weaker sex in need of protection, and secondly, for not being the usual robbers that maim and kill citizens. Unfortunately, the significant attention directed at them and their stripping indicates zero tolerance for their behavior by members of the public.

The point above is that the mere involvement of a woman in a robbery is sufficient to numb the minds of bystanders because women are usually not the significant sources of threat connected to this particular crime. Thus, men should be the primary target if there must be gendered anger and retaliation for robbery in Nigeria, considering how armed robbers have often maimed and killed citizens. Unfortunately, women are the primary targets, which reflects the evil women hypothesis. The three cases presented above are exemplary. It is worth acknowledging that many instances have been witnessed in different Nigerian cities whereby the mob similarly paid great attention to the only female suspects among two or more male one-chance robbery suspects. Many cases have appeared on social media recently, which did not appear in this current article, and in all these cases, the mobs stripped only female suspects. For example, in Onitsha, Anambra State, in March 2019, only the female robber was stripped naked and forced to sit on the ground. The mob beat her severely and injured her with sharp objects, which led to blood gushing out from different parts of her body. Her male gang members seemed to have escaped, probably due to the less attention given to them by the mob, who were incredibly busy catching and dealing with the "evil woman". Nevertheless, a male gang member is more likely to escape faster than his female counterpart or more able to subdue someone trying to catch him compared to a female suspect.

The treatments of the female robbers suggest a limit to the chivalry factor. Although Belknap & Holsinger

(1998) define the evil women hypothesis because female criminals have crossed the acceptable boundary by committing offenses, there is more to the harsh treatment of these women than their criminal engagement. If it is simply about committing a crime, then chivalry might not have existed in the first place, after all, the females who received chivalrous treatments received them as criminals. The problem is not committing an offense per se but the "type" of the offense committed, that is when the offense suggests dangerousness on the offender's part, including an existing criminal history (see Embry & Lyons, 2012; Lu *et al.*, 2013). While lenient treatment is accorded to female offenders due to the perception that they pose less threat than men (Kruttschnitt & Savolainen, 2009; Steffensmeier, 1980), there is an exception, when this falls within the "evil women hypothesis" (Kruttschnitt & Savolainen, 2009). Serious crimes and recidivism blind criminal justice agencies to chivalry as they activate a mindset focusing on the evil women hypothesis (Nagel & Hagan, 1983). This can be said about the actions of the mob analyzed in this current article. While there are no different laws for men and women, "if a woman commits a crime that society does not expect her to commit ... she will invariably be treated harshly by that society" (Al-Rawahi, 2017, p. 24). The discriminatory treatments of female robbers in three different Nigerian cities support the above statement.

## CONCLUSION

This article has explored three incidents involving one-chance robbers in different Nigerian cities to demonstrate how the jungle justice meted out to the female robbers conformed to the evil women hypothesis. Interestingly, the cases in this article followed similar patterns in academic literature, suggesting that members of the public are keen to give harsh treatment to women who engage in serious crimes, such as robbery. This current article has demonstrated that the mob could judge and treat a female offender who had committed a serious crime in the same way CJS agencies did. However, the idea here is the harsh treatment of the female suspects compared to their male counterparts and not the nature of the treatment itself, as the criminal justice authorities would not strip suspects in public.

While overwhelming academic literature exists on the evil hypothesis, such literature mainly concentrates on the actions of the CJS and related groups. Scholars most often use the evil women hypothesis in the context of criminal justice agencies, that is, how law

enforcement agencies, court personnel, prison staff, and correctional officers perceive and treat male and female offenders differently. The incident in this article did not involve any of these staff but the mob constituting ordinary members of the public. The current report, therefore, has extended this to the context of mob action and vigilantism. This finding is intriguing as it shows that the views of ordinary members of society towards female suspects are not different from those working for the CJS.

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