

# Conflicting Identities: The Nexus between Masculinities, Femininities and Violent Extremism in Asia

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**Conflicting Identities:  
The Nexus between  
Masculinities, Femininities  
and Violent Extremism in Asia**

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ISBN 978-974-680-434-9

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# Acknowledgements

**Produced by:** United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific and UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific

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This publication was informed by a collaborative process comprising numerous country-level and regional experts. We would like to thank Hanny Cueva Beteta, Alison Davidian, Nashida Sattar, Julien Domergue, and Kimberly Maldonado for their guidance and feedback on early drafts of the publication. Special thanks to UNDP and UN Women Country Office staff for their valuable insights and contributions. We would also like to thank the authors for their advice and support on each other’s papers, especially at the authors’ workshop held in February 2019.

This report was made possible thanks to the support of the European Union’s Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI) and the Government of Japan.

# Foreword

Violent extremism has emerged as one of the leading challenges to the realization of sustainable peace globally. Across South and South-East Asia, violent extremism poses a direct threat to inclusive development by fuelling intolerance, forcibly displacing communities, exacerbating cycles of insecurity and armed conflict, exploiting existing inequalities, and obstructing the enjoyment of human rights and the rule of law. Underpinning this violence are gender stereotypes that are used to radicalize and recruit men and women, as well as girls and boys, to violent extremist groups.

The United Nations Secretary General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism calls for a comprehensive approach to preventing and countering violent extremism, including through addressing the gendered and structural conditions which allow it to flourish. This is echoed in UN Security Council resolution 2242, which highlights the necessity of women's inclusion and participation in approaches to prevent violent extremism and urges Member States and UN entities to integrate a gender analysis of the drivers of radicalization in research, policies, and programming responses.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UN Women have been working to ensure that efforts to prevent violent extremism are inclusive and based on the promotion and protection of human rights, including women's rights. This research is the result of a joint effort between both agencies to better understand the relationship between violent extremism and gender power relations in South and South-East Asia, specifically as it relates to radicalization and recruitment, in order to inform programming and policy responses.

## Mohammad Naciri

Regional Director  
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This publication includes expert analyses through case studies to highlight how unequal gender power structures fuel and shape violent extremism around the region. It pays specific attention to how constructions of masculinity influence radicalization and the perpetration of violent extremism, offering much-needed insights into how men and boys are implicated in these processes.

This research emphasises how structures of patriarchy and harmful performances of masculinity are deeply embedded in the modus operandi of violent extremist groups. The researchers found that such groups often manipulate or build on existing gender stereotypes to incite men and women to commit violence and to find refuge and support within extremist communities. Much greater efforts are needed to ensure policies address harmful constructions of masculinity and femininity promoted by violent extremist groups. Programmes must work with local communities to respond to the unequal gender power dynamics that shape and fuel extremist violence, including through empowering women and girls to be agents of peace.

This volume offers policy makers and practitioners a unique insight into the gender dynamics that underpin violent extremism in South and South-East Asia. We hope it will benefit stakeholders working in this area to ensure that holistic understandings of gender identity are integrated into policy and programming approaches to prevent violent extremism.

## Valerie Cliff

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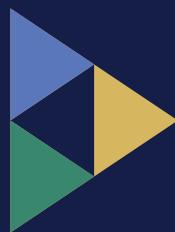




# Introducing Masculinities, femininities and violent extremism in Asia

*Isabella Caravaggio (UNDP)  
and Lesli Davis (UN Women)*

*Contributions by Julien Domergue*



## Introduction

Violent extremism has a clear gender dimension that produces disproportionate effects on women and those who do not subscribe to accepted notions of gender and sexuality<sup>1</sup>. However, while it is well-established that violent extremism produces gendered impacts, there has been relatively little attention paid to how gendered power relations influence violent extremism, including why individuals join extremist groups, how these groups themselves function and what beliefs that they hold.

Our gender identities, including characteristics considered masculine or feminine, influence nearly every aspect of our daily lives, from how long we wear our hair to who is allowed to make decisions within families and societies. It stands to reason that such gendered power relations shape the nature of violent extremism in individuals, families and communities.

Security-oriented attempts to address violent extremism, such as military and police tactics, have recognized the effects that violent extremism has on women. This has often come in the form of securitizing women's rights. For instance, the purported need to protect women victims from violent extremists, thus justifying the use of counterterrorism approaches without examining why women are disproportionately targeted in the first place. Likewise, security approaches have sought to instrumentalize the gendered impacts of violent extremism. For example,

while these approaches acknowledge the restriction of women's rights as a sign of radicalization – and therefore an early warning sign of violent extremism – they do not tend to question why women are differentially impacted by violent extremism and are often blind to the broader effects that gendered power relations have on violent extremism.

To better understand the role that gender plays in violent extremism, we must not only analyse women as victims or as promoters of peace – or even perpetrators of violence. It is critical that we also analyse the ways in which gender relations influence the choices of men and women to engage with violent extremist groups; how they influence the actions that they carry out within those groups; and how they shape the stories that these groups tell about themselves.

Many academic studies draw links between certain stereotypically masculine characteristics such as aggression, strength and lust, and the perpetration of violence.<sup>2</sup> In the past, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) have identified desirable gendered norms tied to violence in their manifesto "*Women of the Islamic State: A Manifesto on Women by the Al-Khanssa Brigade*".<sup>3</sup> Released in 2015, the manifesto clearly defines gender categories that reward men's violence and women's submission. ISIS also uses this stereotypically violent masculine language and imagery as a technique to recruit and radicalize young men, offering

1 See N. Pratt (2012). "The Gender Logics of Resistance to the "War on Terror": Constructing Sex-Gender Difference through the Erasure of Patriarchy in the Middle East", *Third World Quarterly*. Available at <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01436597.2012.728318> and OSCE (2013). Women and Terrorist Radicalization. Final Report. February 2013. OSCE Secretariat – OSCE ODIHR Expert Roundtables. Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe. <http://www.osce.org/secretariat/99919?download=true>.

2 See C. Cockburn (2004) "The Continuum of Violence: A Gender Perspective on War and Peace" in W. Giles & J. Hyndman, eds. *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zones*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, pp. 24–44 and Duriesmith, D. (2017) *Masculinity and New War: The gendered dynamics of contemporary armed conflicts*. Routledge.

3 Translation and analysis by Charlie Winter from the Quilliam Foundation available at <https://therinjfoundation.files.wordpress.com/2015/01/women-of-the-islamic-state3.pdf>.

them avenues to claim honour, power, or supposed manhood. There remains a significant gap in the literature, however, regarding how conceptions of masculinity relate to violent extremism, and how this relationship manifests in South and South-East Asia specifically.<sup>4</sup>

While violence is often linked to masculinity, the reality is much more complex and often paradoxical. For example, although in general women are often expected to occupy submissive, private roles, in South and South-East Asia they have taken on increasingly active and public roles in violent extremist groups. This includes as high-profile recruiters and perpetrators of violence, which would seem to contradict the expectations of women in violent extremist groups as passive and invisible. While limited research is available, accounts from women violent extremists often indicate a keen sense of agency and empowerment in their decisions to join extremist groups.<sup>5</sup>

Literature has tended to focus on women's role or victimhood in violent extremism and not on masculinity and how broader gendered power structures influence violent extremism. This is especially true in the South and South-East Asian regions. To develop policy and programming solutions to address these challenges, UNDP and UN Women commissioned this research volume. The four authors featured use various methodologies including discourse analysis, interviews, and other forms of qualitative research as well as quantitative exploration to provide a deeper understanding of the linkages between gender identity and violent extremism.

David Duriesmith's paper, **Adaptation of**

**militarized masculinity and violent extremism in the Southern Philippines** provides a relational analysis of militarized masculinities in the southern Philippines to illustrate how notions of masculinity and femininity operate in local settings, and how they are linked to notions of violence.

In **Extremist Myths and Violent Extremist Masculinities**, Katherine Brown, Harmonie Toros, and Swati Parashar examine how gender identities are portrayed in the foundational myths and narratives that violent extremist groups tell about themselves. By examining four myths in Indonesia and the Philippines, the authors demonstrate how unpacking the plot lines of violent extremist myths enables us to gain a better understanding of the purpose of violent extremist groups and the roles assigned to women and men.

In **Trajectories of Gender Inequality, Identity and Violent Extremism in Rural Bangladesh**, Farhana Rahman explores the relationship between violent extremism and domestic violence against women, which is often considered to be an unconnected private matter, through interviews with communities in rural Bangladesh. Rahman examines how stereotypical constructions of masculinity and femininity are maintained through community structures, such as fatwas, and explores how these constructions can be manipulated by violent extremist groups for recruitment purposes.

Finally, Jacqui True's paper, **Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Reporting and Terrorism in Asia**, explores the relationship between gender inequality, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and the

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4 See USAID (2018). *The Role of Women in Violent Extremism in Asia*. United States Agency for International Development, Washington. Available at <http://openasia.org/en/g/wp->.

5 See USAID (2011). *The Development Response to Violent Extremism and Insurgency. Putting Principles into Practice*. USAID Policy. September 2011. Available at <http://tinyurl.com/chcmfeb>. See also M. Conway (2016) *Determining the Role of the Internet in Violent Extremism and Terrorism: Six Suggestions for Progressing Research*. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2016.1157408>.



presence of terrorist groups. True examines whether increased reports of SGBV are a lead indicator of – or precursor to – terrorist violence by cross-analysing SGBV reports and terrorist incidents from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) in three countries: Myanmar, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka.

Coming from different angles and utilizing diverse case studies, the authors identify an important set of overlapping thematic issues, conclusions, and recommendations that can be used to guide policies and programming around preventing violent extremism (PVE) in the region.

## Main messages and themes

### 1. There is a pronounced need for a relational and contextual understanding of masculinities and femininities in settings where violent extremism flourishes

Collectively, the authors highlight the importance of understanding diverse notions and characteristics of masculinity and femininity. Their combined analysis demonstrates that within programmes and policies on violent extremism there is a tendency to apply rigid models of gender identity. Expressions of masculinity and femininity, however, are complex, contextual and relational phenomena.

David Duriesmith presents that the concept of toxic masculinity is often regarded as a singular set of problematic practices and ideas. He discusses how this prevents practitioners from understanding the nuances and complexities of masculinity and the ways

in which it varies contextually and locally. He further argues that, in contrast to the view of toxic masculinity as a global phenomenon, masculinities are instead grounded in specific locations and defined relationally. Notions and characteristics of masculinity are historically constructed in specific contexts and shaped in relation to cultural and political expectations of what it means to be a man, as well as local grievances and dynamics.

In the case of the Philippines, Duriesmith argues that men engaged in violent extremism often define their masculinity in relation to other men within a society, and particularly those in the national military. He asserts that both militarized masculinity and masculinities expressed within violent extremist groups rely on one another to claim authority and status. He also argues that the femininity of female violent extremist actors can be maintained through their relationship to men. For example, prominent female leaders who are related to notable male leaders are tolerated, while women whose actions are not sanctioned by a male family member are castigated or largely written out.

The volume returns to this theme throughout the papers. Farhana Rahman's examination of communities in rural Bangladesh discusses the perception that men are expected to discipline their wives in order to "reclaim their manliness when their wife has stepped out of line" by, for example, taking up employment, speaking to men outside of their families, or not showing adequate respect to their husband. Rahman's paper demonstrates how local cultural contexts can entrench notions of masculinity and femininity that legitimize violence against women. She further explores the role that imams and fatwas<sup>6</sup> play in maintaining these gender hierarchies, creating conditions where gender identities

<sup>6</sup> Rulings on a point of Islamic law given by a recognized authority.

can be manipulated by violent extremist groups.

In their research, Katherine Brown, Harmonie Toros and Swati Parashar show that the narratives embedded in violent extremist myths in the Philippines and Indonesia shape notions of masculinity and femininity that “construct meaning, identity, and purpose for violent extremist groups.”

Though local social norms, historical events, and cultural narratives predominantly form violent extremist masculinities, they also tend to link to transnational notions of masculinity. Brown et al. explore how violent extremist groups who claim linkage to Islam use narratives and myths to glorify a powerful global Islamic masculinity. Rahman details how local violent extremist groups refer to “global jihad” and “global Islamic masculinities” in their teachings. Duriesmith likewise notes that some violent extremist splinter groups in the southern Philippines view their cause as part of a larger global struggle to right injustices against Muslims transnationally, and thus do not view the local peace process as a legitimate solution to their grievances. The authors collectively conclude that it is not possible to understand the masculinities and femininities that are related to violent extremism through the unidimensional analysis of global narratives; rather, a more granular, relational and contextual understanding of these identities is needed to better understand how or whether they contribute to the promotion of violent extremism.

## **2. Violent extremist cultural narratives play a critical role in promoting men as martyrs and women as victims**

Another theme explored throughout the collection is the role of violent extremist cultural narratives in reinforcing violent


notions of masculinity while at the same time diminishing the role women play both as perpetrators of violent extremism and agents of peace.

The paper by Brown et al. demonstrates how terrorist myths sustain gender stereotypes through representations of men as valiant and the absence of women who played key roles. For example, narratives created around the Marawi siege in the Philippines broadly overshadow the crucial role played by Farhana Maute, a prominent figure in the Maute Group, in orchestrating the attacks that struck the city in 2017.

In his work, Duriesmith demonstrates how women’s involvement in violent extremism in the southern Philippines is concealed not only by extremist groups, but also to some extent, by government authorities. In his analysis of the conflict in Mindanao, Duriesmith notes that despite their prominent role as combatants, military leaders and peacemakers during the decades-long Moro conflict, women have been systematically removed from official discourses and narratives, only to be depicted instead as helpless spectators of a power struggle between men.

In the paper “Creating the Ideal Man and Woman” Rahman explores how ideas surrounding women’s second-level social standing are reinforced through fatwas declared by imams, who play a central role as religious, social and political leaders within communities in rural Bangladesh. She notes that while fatwas themselves do not intrinsically call for violence, such rulings tend to convey ideals traditionally associated with masculine identities, sustaining men as community gatekeepers, and excluding women from narratives. Fatwas, therefore, can reinforce existing power structures in the community, creating conditions in which violent extremist groups can thrive. In that regard, insights gathered from Rahman’s





interviews, conducted in communities at risk of radicalization, echo the stereotypical views conveyed by imams and fatwas with respect to masculinities and femininities.

### 3. The portrayal of men as both protectors and enforcers is paradoxical

A major theme discussed by the authors is the idea of men as both protectors of women and at the same time as enforcers of women's assigned societal roles. For example, while it may be seen as men's role to protect women from other men, at the same time they police women's actions, which can sometimes come in the form of violence towards those women.

Men engaging in violent extremism may see their actions as protecting women's femininity and purity. Brown et al. and Duriesmith argue that communities with experiences of colonial struggle may use this history, and the myths surrounding it, to both shape their masculine identities and justify their violent extremist tactics and ideologies. Protection of their homeland is simultaneously tied to the need to protect their women – both from violence perpetrated by outsiders, but also from intermarriage and the dilution of lineage. In this scenario, women are seen as a kind of virgin land whose purity requires male protection.

Furthering this notion, Brown et al. demonstrate how masculinity across violent extremist cultural narratives is presented as heroic, self-sacrificing, steadfast and stoic. Violent extremist groups are portrayed as protectors of women against defiling enemies, such as the West and/or the central government. For instance, the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) group described the 2002 Bali bombings as acts of bravery perpetuated by ordinary village boys against the West.

While men seek to reclaim their traditional roles as community protectors through violent extremism, they also try to re-establish themselves as enforcers of women's stereotypical gender roles. Rahman and Duriesmith both provide examples of how violent extremist masculinities help men reclaim traditional roles when they perceive their masculine identities are under threat. Rahman argues that in some rural communities in Bangladesh, violent extremist groups are perceived as a way to reclaim traditional roles for young men who feel ridiculed and undermined by the urban social norms and the perceived Western influences that allow women increasing power and autonomy. Through interview-based case studies, Rahman demonstrates how incidents of domestic violence rise when men feel that their identities or roles in the community are challenged by women's economic and social empowerment.

Duriesmith claims that many men believe their masculinity is threatened by the increasing number of migrant women who have become economic providers to their families in the Philippines. The situation leads some of these men to join violent extremist groups so that they can reclaim their position as community protectors. Duriesmith further argues that this ability to offer young men a pathway into adulthood is one of the key reasons behind the longevity of violent extremist groups. He also asserts that the chronic lack of adequate material conditions and economic opportunities in the Philippines inhibits some men from reclaiming their honour through avenues other than violence.

Jacqui True highlights a clear correlation between the rise of SGBV perpetrated by men and the increase in incidents of violent extremism. She uses statistical regression to provide a comprehensive analysis that



demonstrates linkages between increasing incidences of terrorist attacks and increased levels of SGBV in Myanmar, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka.

## Conclusions

*Based on the findings of the four papers, three key conclusions emerge:*

### 1. It is problematic to understand notions of masculinity and femininity as monolithic concepts.

The reduction of masculinities and femininities to a singular, all-encompassing set of behaviours and motivations prevents practitioners and researchers from fully understanding and analysing the ways in which they are locally derived, relationally formed and vary from context to context. Furthermore, it is important to understand that both men and women define themselves in relation to one another.

### 2. Violent extremist groups manipulate and instrumentalize existing gender power structures and cultural narratives within communities to validate their actions.

Often, the actions of violent extremist groups are depicted as alien to societal norms. However, this research demonstrates that violent extremist groups draw on pre-existing gender norms and cultural narratives to legitimize their cause, recruit members, and even to justify attacks. Further, violence within families and communities, such as intimate partner or domestic violence and sexual harassment or assault, cultivates an environment where violence is normalized,

making it easier to justify extremist violence. Thus, violent extremism and violence against women should not be viewed as isolated phenomena but rather as part of a continuum. To disrupt the draw of violent extremist groups, it is essential to understand how they position themselves within community cultural and gender norms.

### 3. The protector/enforcer paradox justifies men's violence, cements their position in society, and ignores women's agency.

Men's positions as protectors of women's dignity and purity, as well as enforcers of the types of roles that are considered acceptable for women to hold in communities, are deeply tied to men's power, positioning, and status in society. These two roles are used to justify violence, both against women and against other men who are seen to pose a threat to women. The framing of men's roles in this way also serves to ignore women's agency – as actors both within violent extremist groups and in communities as a whole.

## Recommendations for research, policy, and programming in violent extremist contexts

Based on these common themes and conclusions, several important recommendations for designing research, policies and programmes to prevent violent extremism emerge.

### Research

These case studies demonstrate that masculinities and femininities vary significantly across regional, national, and



local levels. It is critical to understand the drivers of violent extremism to better inform evidence-based approaches. Thus, research should seek to comprehend these specific trends by recognizing variance in gender expressions and relations across local contexts and examining how this understanding interplays with regional and global interpretations. Further, while the researchers here present various case studies demonstrating correlations between SGBV and violent extremism or terrorism, more research is needed to clarify if there is a causal relationship and to better understand whether and how this connection plays out in other settings, using other variables.

## Recommendations

- More systematized qualitative analysis that includes gender and violent extremism as well as localized contextual analysis on gender identity and relationships.
- Research on the relationship between violent extremism and SGBV and how it applies to different contexts, incorporated into all programming aimed at PVE.
- More quantitative analysis on both violent extremism and SGBV, both at the government level (including cross-departmentally and at the subnational level) and in academia.
- A review of successful early warning mechanisms to explore the extent to which gender elements are included and how.

## Policy

To address violent extremism, policies must target the power structures that create conditions conducive to violent extremism. We have established through this research that one of the defining factors of community power structures are gender relations

and roles. Thus, it is essential that policies incorporate understandings of how gender influences the creation, perpetration and appeal of violent extremism.

The recently adopted UN Security Council Resolution 2467 (2019)<sup>7</sup> recognizes sexual violence as a tactic of terrorism. Research developed in this study further indicates a correlation between SGBV and terrorism such that the former can serve as a predictive indicator for the latter. This link has implications for early warning systems and other preventive policies. Even though the specific causality of this association is not yet fully understood, it is clear that the relationship exists and therefore governments should closely track and monitor reports of SGBV in efforts to prevent violence that can lead to violent extremism. Other gender equality indicators such as freedom of movement and of dress can likewise strengthen these systems.

## Recommendations

- Policies and laws to tackle violent extremism, such as National Action Plans on PVE, National Action Plans on women, peace, and security, or counterterrorism legislation, must consider local notions of masculinities and femininities and how these may fuel violent extremism.
- The availability and quality of SGBV data should be increased, including at a subnational level, not only to allow for better research and analysis, but to eventually assist in the identification of areas at risk of violent extremism.
- Early warning systems should include indicators linked to gender power relations, including SGBV, hate speech, and other dimensions of gender inequality.

<sup>7</sup> Available at [https://undocs.org/S/RES/2467\(2019\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2467(2019)).



## Programming

Diminishing the draw of violent extremist narratives requires challenging the legitimacy of violent extremism groups and shifting national narratives around masculinity. We therefore need to collaborate with religious leaders, both female and male, on countering violent extremist ideologies in ways that are grounded in religious and/or cultural beliefs. Programmes must focus on educating and using context-specific justifications to promote non-violence and respect for women's human rights. This should involve using locally conducted research to inform the design and implementation of programmes, to ensure that they are not perceived as an outside imposition. In this sense, working with local organizations that are trusted by communities to shape and deliver programming is essential to prevent perpetuating cycles of radicalization and violence.

To prevent the spread of violence towards women, PVE programming should take a whole-of-society approach. Tackling the gender power imbalances that influence radicalization and the perpetration of violent extremism involves challenging beliefs about gender roles that are often deeply entrenched in communities. It is thus crucial that programming also provides men and boys with alternative avenues to fulfil their sense of purpose and empower themselves in ways that do not infringe on the rights and well-being of women.

## Recommendations

- Programmes must be informed by local beliefs and realities as well as by global narratives on violent extremism.
- Programming should understand gender norms as contextual and varying, thus addressing the group as well as the individual. It is also important to connect groups of individuals across provinces, countries and regionally – to identify the existence of regional and national trends.
- Programming should understand gender norms as relational, and thus, take a whole-of-family and whole-of-community approach when designing interventions. To ensure this, ownership needs to be ensured by involving key local stakeholders in the design of the programme.
- Programming aimed at building resilience and confidence in communities to address violent extremism, should incorporate gender-transformative approaches, to both reconstruct harmful community power structures and advance gender equality as well as prevent the burden of community resilience from being placed solely on women.
- Programming aimed at building the capacity of and training law enforcement officers should focus particularly on how masculinities and femininities shape power structures and relate to violent extremism.







# Chapter 1

## Adaptation of Militarized Masculinity and Violent Extremism in the Southern Philippines

*David Duriesmith*



## Introduction

### Violent extremist masculinities as both locational and relational

To effectively respond to violent extremism (VE), there is a need to develop effective and targeted responses that challenge the link between masculinity and violence.<sup>1</sup> Masculinity researchers argue that existing scholarship on violent extremism tends to treat gender as a synonym for women and fails to explore how notions of masculinity shape men's involvement in violent extremist groups (Necef, 2016). As most violent extremists are male, masculinity scholars argue, there is a need for specific policy responses that *gender-menstreams* efforts to counter violent extremism (CVE) policy (Ezekilov, 2017). These calls mirror recent efforts in women, peace and security (WPS) to engage men and boys in the agenda through targeted programming and policies (Duriesmith, 2017b).

A major challenge facing gender-menstreaming in CVE in Asia concerns the lack of empirical knowledge around how violent extremist masculinities operate in the region, with very little scholarship directly exploring masculinities and violent extremism in the region (USIAD, 2018; True et

al., 2019). This paucity of research means that the current knowledge base relies on broad correlations between violent masculinity and violent extremism that have been established in the Global North<sup>2</sup> and Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region (see Bairner, 1999; Kimmel, 2003; Kimmel, 2018; Poloni-Staudinger and Ortvals 2014). These correlations, while important, risk creating a generalized trope of violent extremist masculinity that is formed by an imprecise but common-sense notion of *toxic masculinity* or *hyper masculinity*<sup>3</sup>

To remedy the tendency to generalize, this paper explores how violent extremist masculinities in the Southern Philippines are shaped in relation to mainstream militarized masculinities in the state. To do this, the paper analyses how violent extremists replicate, invert or exaggerate mainstream militarized masculinities. **Replication** in this context exists when a group adopts narratives or norms of mainstream militarized masculinity without substantial alteration. **Inversion** exists when the group defines some aspect of its masculinity in direct opposition to mainstream militarized masculinity while replicating its overall form. **Exaggeration** exists when a mainstream narrative or norm is adopted but taken substantially further in its brutality or intensity. It is hoped that

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- 1 The terminology of *violent extremism* is deeply contested in academic scholarship. In particular, there is debate over whether extreme views are the cause of violence or about how to understand groups with extreme ideologies that do not condone violence (Schmid 2014). Furthermore, sites of armed conflict often feature blurry boundaries between violent extremist groups, insurgent organizations and criminal networks. In this paper, the terminology of violent extremism is used in relation to groups that have been labelled as such by governments and the international community. This use does not imply that the terminology of violent extremism is the best characterization of these groups; however, considering that this paper provides a critique of work on violent extremist masculinities, the use of the term is appropriate.
  - 2 Countries that are economically developed such as the USA, the UK, Canada, Western European nations and developed parts of Asia
  - 3 Increasingly the term *toxic masculinity* has begun to be employed in public discourse to refer to harmful forms of masculinity. The uses of the term vary between a form that is harmful to men themselves to one that is harmful to society at large or oversteps a moral or societal line. These accounts risk giving the impression there is a singular form of real or good masculinity and that other harmful forms are deviations. For more information, see Michael Salter's piece *The Problem With a Fight Against Toxic Masculinity* in *The Atlantic* and available from (<https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2019/02/toxic-masculinity-history/583411/>) or Michael Flood's explainer available from <https://xyonline.net/content/toxic-masculinity-primer-and-commentary>.

this analysis provides new insights into how the dynamics of militarism shape violent extremist masculinity in the Southern Philippines. Beyond the immediate value of understanding the dynamics present in this case, the study highlights the importance of being aware that violent extremist masculinities are varied, grounded in a specific location, and relationally defined.

Across Asia, dominant constructions of militarized masculinity differ substantially in relation to religion, nationalist ideology, the role of women, and many other aspects. This research reveals the limitations of work that presents a monolithic model of toxic masculinity based on cases in the Global North and the MENA region. While this paper is an initial exploration of these issues and limited in scope, it is an important first step in highlighting the need for relational analysis of violent extremist masculinities if prevention strategies are to become truly gender-sensitive.

The paper begins with a literature review on militarized masculinity and violent extremism. It then analyses how mainstream aspects of military masculinity are replicated, inverted and exaggerated in materials produced by violent extremist groups in the Southern Philippines. Finally, the research provides analysis and recommendations on how work on gender and violent extremism can consider the links between different forms of violent masculinity in society.

## Literature review

### Masculinities, militarization and violent extremism


There is a critical link between masculinity and violence (Cockburn, 2004). This work suggests that social norms regarding what it means to be male tend to encourage men to engage in violent or destructive behaviour

to prove their manliness. In societies where the use of violence is closely associated with manliness, this link can fuel conflict and make armed responses to disagreements appear legitimate, inevitable and natural (Duriesmith, 2017a). **While the link between masculinity and violence is one of the most robust relationships established in social science, it is also essential to understand the different ways in which it manifests itself.**

There is a tendency in media discourse to write about so-called toxic or hyper masculinity as a singular set of problematic practices and ideas exhibited to varying degrees. Academic scholarship widely rejects this approach, subjecting it to rigorous scrutiny by scholars who work directly on violence prevention (see for example Salter, 2016 and Seymour, 2018). Instead, the field of critical studies on men and masculinities has tended to follow R.W. Connell's suggestion that a plurality of masculinities needs to be recognized, reflecting the differing ways to be a man in any given society (Connell, 2005; Flood, 2002). This framework indicates not only that masculinities differ between countries but, as masculinities scholars argue, there are multiple articulations of masculinity in each location and these articulations are defined in relation to other masculinities, femininities and non-binary articulations of gender (Myrttinen et al., 2017).

Furthermore, scholarship emphasizes that the salient set of masculinities tend to be deeply contested even within close-knit organizations like the US military (Barrett, 1996). These multiple articulations can be seen, for example, in contestation between men with military experience and men with business experience regarding which set of skills is regarded as the manliest. The claim to masculine status also tends to involve contestation over the rewards certain men are afforded for performing dominant articulations of masculinity. While one group





might claim that authority should be given to those who have served their country by putting their bodies on the line, the other group may argue that rationality and business acumen is a greater determinant of manly status.

Beyond the multiplicity of these articulations, research stresses that masculinities should not be seen as disembodied sets of abstract ideas about how men ideally should behave (Hearn, 2004; Connell, 2004). Rather, scholarship demonstrates that masculinities are better understood as sets of sedimented practices, reinforced by material conditions and institutional arrangements (Lusher and Robins, 2009). While the most privileged mode of masculinity (often referred to as hegemonic masculinity) does matter, its impact may not be direct (Chisholm and Tidy, 2017). For example, the expectation that men accumulate wealth and provide for their family does not necessarily mean that all, or even most, men define their manhood primarily in relation to wealth. Rather, aspects of the association between manhood and wealth may structure a range of masculinities that actively resist materialism on one hand or tacitly support, or even fetishize it, on the other hand. These aspects of dominant masculinity become reference points against which other articulations of gender are defined.

Commentary on masculinity and violent extremism tends to flatten these complexities. This is particularly the case in public commentary, emphasizing that violent extremism tends to be committed by men and its enactment is linked to traditional notions of manhood (Kimmel, 2018; Roose, 2018). While this analysis points out an important connection, it tells us little about exactly how masculinity leads some men, in some places, to engage in violent extremism while for others it does not. This approach also sheds faint light on the significant variations

in articulations of violent extremism or the distinct roles that women play in different violent extremist organizations. Not all articulations of traditional masculinity support violent extremism; similarly, not all articulations of violent extremism are supportive of traditional notions of masculinity (as is the case with some far-left violent extremism).

This framing of an uncomplicated link between traditional masculinity and violent extremism fundamentally misreads the relational quality of masculinities; that each manifestation is defined in relation to multiple contested forms of masculinity and femininity in any given space. While violent extremist groups often draw on narratives of transcending ideology and group membership, existing work on gender and militarism suggests that it is not the presence of violent masculinity in the abstract that matters. Rather, the articulation of violent extremist masculinities, in a given place, is likely to vary greatly and this variance produces tangible differences in the acts in which men are willing to engage. For example, Judith Gardner and Judy El-Bushra's 2017 study, *Somalia: A state of male power, insecurity and inequality*, found that although global gendered narratives of brotherhood, a return to morality, and the need to reclaim lost Islamic honour all mattered, much more important were local gender dynamics. In the case of Somalia, these included the role of clans in establishing men's status:

“ The global war on terror narrative has tended to cast Somali males – and Muslim males more widely – as inherently violent, susceptible to radicalization and a threat to Western security interests. Rift Valley Institute's inception study findings suggest that for the Somali male this narrative is simplistic and inaccurate. Somali society is not routinely militarized, nor is violence – including domestic violence – a culturally accepted and glorified characteristic of

*manhood. On the contrary, throughout a man's life and its milestones, such as marriage and elderhood, his masculinity is judged by how well he manages his responsibilities in accordance with well-defined and exacting social norms and standards of behaviour (Gardner and El-Bushra 2017: 2).*

While their study did confirm the importance of global narratives, such as the War on Terror, Brown et al. (in this collection) suggest that international analysts tend to overstate these issues without paying adequate attention to the local dynamics of masculinity. This analysis mirrors the contributions of Brown, Toros and Parashar, in this collection, regarding the importance of local and global narratives in shaping local gender dynamics. Similarly, Rahman's paper in this collection shows the central role of fatwas in spreading violent masculine ideology in Bangladesh. The central role of fatwas in Bangladesh also highlights how local factors can intimately shape the gender dynamics of violent extremism in a particular location.

These findings align with my own previous work on how Indonesian militant masculinities indicated the importance of men's perceptions of other articulations of local masculinity in a given space (Duriesmith, 2018; Duriesmith and Ismail, 2019). In particular, earlier work suggested that the forms of masculinities that characterized Indonesian militant groups reflected local dynamics around the role of the military, secularism, and the state. Though these dynamics had global characteristics, the most significant factor remained the interplay between competing definitions of how a man should behave and the material conditions that make those definitions salient. The depiction of violent extremist masculinities as monolithic not only fails to capture these important dynamics, but it also reinforces messaging from violent extremist groups that

they are in perennial global conflict with an immoral "other".

The above suggests that, to comprehend violent extremist masculinities, we need to understand the other masculinities they relate to on an intimate level. One of the key links, as yet underexplored in Asian contexts, is the role of mainstream militarized masculinities in shaping violent extremist masculinities. Research on militarized masculinity indicates that militarization not only affects men who directly participate in military institutions, but that militarization of society shapes all other masculinities (Mankayi and Shefer, 2005). Militarization impacts masculinities that emulate military norms without direct involvement as well as men who come to define their masculinity in opposition to militarism (Salter, 2014). Suggesting this link is not to argue that violent extremist masculinities will directly replicate mainstream militarized masculinities. While this may be the case, there is also the likelihood of inverting the norms and tropes of mainstream militarized masculinity and exaggerating others.

## Methodology

To explore the links between mainstream militarized masculinity and violent extremism in Asia, this study explores the case of violent extremism in the Southern Philippines. The paper draws on scholarly sources about militarism, gender and the state to establish a functional understanding of mainstream militarized masculinities. Drawing on this scholarly analysis of militarism, the paper analyses sources relating to violent extremism in the south of the country to gain insight into how they relate to mainstream articulations of militarism.

In developing an account of violent extremist masculinities, I have used a range of sources including media reporting, press releases,





NGO reports and other grey literature. Collections of translated material from violent extremist groups such as *jihadology.net*, which provide direct access to propaganda and media releases from violent extremist groups, were particularly helpful. Though the paper draws on a diverse range of sources, the most valuable materials were videos produced by these groups including execution films and propaganda. Significantly more work could be done to explore these dynamics through fieldwork or access to a wider range of translated sources than those gathered for this paper. After collecting 45 sources, I subjected each one to thematic analysis to identify themes of militarized masculinity.

While productive in scoping aspects of violent extremist masculinities in the Southern Philippines, the paper retains several limitations. Due to the nature of the conflict in the Southern Philippines, and international attention on Islamic State (IS), these sources focus on a range of groups including Abu Sayyaf, the Maute group and Islamic State in Iraq and Syria or ISIS-inspired Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) splinter groups. While the analysis considers this limitation, it is possible that additional dynamics of violent extremist masculinities have been overlooked due to the high profile of these sources. In particular, there are likely to be interesting intergroup dynamics within the south that shape violent extremist masculinity but were not captured. The sources drawn on for this paper overwhelmingly target an international or national audience and this means that much of that nuance may be missed.

This analysis suggests that the relationship between militarized masculinity and violent extremist masculinities is not straightforward

and contains some contradictory components. The study also highlights the need for greater exploration of the relationship between local, national and global articulations of gender in a more dynamic fashion than has been present in other scholarship. **These investigations are not exhaustive and do not provide complete answers regarding the nexus of masculinity, violent extremism and militarism in the Philippines. What this exploratory study does confirm, however, is the need for a situated analysis of masculinities that explores how practices in a given context produce masculinities. Moreover, such an analysis should not rely on vague or monolithic accounts of violent extremist masculinity.** This observation confirms the conclusions of existing anthropological work on the subject of violent extremism and reflects the hope that this work will open a new avenue for analysing violent extremist masculinities across Asia.

## Analysis part 1

### Militarized masculinity in the Philippines

Before comparing the construction of violent extremist masculinities, it is necessary to first contextualize mainstream militarized masculinity in the Philippines. Masculinity in the Philippines is shaped by multiple long-standing traditions of militarism and colonization that inform the various and contested ways to be a man across the country. The history of militarism in the Philippines has deep roots with long-standing martial traditions that pre-date contemporary colonialism (Nadeau, 2008: 4–5).<sup>4</sup> This history is complicated, as today the Philippines is located at the intersection of numerous

<sup>4</sup> The broader historical account of warrior and military institutions in the Philippines is outside the scope of this paper. While there is a lot to say about precolonial and colonial military dynamics, the account here necessarily focuses on contemporary militarized masculinity.



regional powers that have each shaped the character of gendered culture in the region (Eviota, 1992: 33). Scholarship on gender in the Philippines emphasizes the formative impact of Spanish, American and Japanese colonization in crafting a direct link between the military forces, respect, and being a man (McCoy, 2002). The Philippine military, like many South-East Asian militaries, charts its origins to colonial institutions (McCoy, 2002: 14).

The initial structure of the state military, which existed prior to full independence in 1946, mirrored those of the United States (Kaminski, 2013: 1086). While women were formally permitted to join the military as early as 1963, it was not until 1991 (with the Women in Development and Nation-Building Act) that women were permitted to join the Philippine Military Academy or to serve (Tapales, 2003: 168). This is not to suggest that women were not involved in political violence prior to 1991, as women played key roles in the Communist People's Party of the Philippines and the Moro National Liberation Front (Henshaw, 2017: 65–66). Similarly, women continue to play a central role in the violent extremist groups in the state (Ingram, 2019). Despite the diverse roles that women have played, the notion of militarism and the military remain closely associated with notions of masculinity in the region.


The connection between militarism and masculinity in many ways mirrors links seen in the Global North. Like other postcolonial states, the Philippines has some military traditions in common with militaries in the Global North, while also diverging substantially on other points. Shared characteristics include “being good providers, virile sex partners, firm and strong fathers” (Pingol, 2001:7). Similarly, military culture in the Philippines replicates the hierarchical tendencies, the pattern of homosocial violence, and the strict policing

of sexual diversity that characterize militaries in the Global North. These patterns have a direct link to colonial influence on the Philippine military.

McCoy's 2002 study *Closer than brothers: Manhood at the Philippine Military Academy* strongly emphasizes the shadow colonialism casts over militarized masculinity in the Philippines. This work, which charted the 1940 and 1971 classes of the Philippines Military Academy, explores how militarized masculinity was shaped by experiences of colonialism and then came to replicate colonial anti-insurgent tactics in its own institutions. While McCoy (1998: 295-296) finds that the original class of 1940 began with a sense of detached professionalism and service to the nascent nation, he argues that the subsequent experience of counter-insurgency undermined this professional ethos and replaced it with a new emphasis on national unity and strength. Over subsequent years, McCoy (2002: 183-221) shows how militarized masculinity in the Philippines came to justify brutal tactics to protect the state from perceived internal threats. This dynamic has meant that the military culture of the Philippines army emphasizes independence, moral strength, opposition to external oppression and, above all, brotherhood. The rapid emergence of communist and Muslim rebel groups after independence meant that the untried military institutions of the Philippines were shaped by the threat of national disintegration (McCoy, 2002; Albuero, 2011). The military institutions of the Philippines cut their teeth using counter-insurgency tactics that mirrored many of the tactics employed by former colonial oppressors.

While the norms associated with Philippine militarized masculinity still bear commonalities with those of militaries in the Global North, the dynamics of colonialism, history of counter-insurgency and anti-





separatist backlash all shift the nature and implications of these norms. Since independence, Philippine military masculinity has continued to be shaped in relation to the threat posed by separatist groups. Militarized masculinity was likewise shaped by Ferdinand Marcos' rule between 1965 and 1986, and in particular, through the nine years of martial law before he was deposed. Marcos' authority was in part justified by his claims of involvement in military campaigns against the Japanese, which bolstered his status as a masculine warrior (McCoy, 2002: 143-180). When Marcos took power, he rapidly expanded the military and continued a close association with the armed forces during the period of martial law. This period solidified the association between the Philippine state, military service, and masculine political authority.

The existence of the threat of separatists has secured the centrality of militarized masculinity in the state, becoming increasingly relevant in recent years with the rise of President Rodrigo Duterte (Tanyag, 2018). Militarized masculinity in the Philippines has also been directly shaped by an emphasis on pedigree, or connection to family tradition. This means that many politicians and political figures may not have direct personal connection with the military, such as Benigno Aquino III, whose great grandfather Servillano Aquino was a prominent general in the Philippine Revolution against Spain. Similarly, there is greater tolerance of female leaders who are affiliated with a powerful family, although this does not necessarily challenge the political centrality of militarized masculinity in the Philippines. These factors all affect the social significance of the military while at the same time sculpting the dominant masculinity in

state institutions.

The political significance and structure of militarism in the Philippines also reflects shifts in the broader political economy and the impact of globalization in recent years, which have destabilized other aspects of men's traditional roles.<sup>5</sup> The increased significance of militarized masculinity in the past 40 years needs to be understood within the broader context of how masculinities have changed in the Philippines. The effects of a globalized political economy on Philippine men are widely documented, producing vulnerabilities that are distinct to those faced by many women. The trend towards women's migrant labour in the political economy of the Philippines has meant that men's historical role as the pillar of the family (*haligi ng tahanan*) has been undermined (Yea, 2015: 129). No longer able to financially support their families, some men must assume the role of *house-husband* with fewer alternatives to gain economic status and wealth within the Philippines (Pingol, 2001; Angeles, 2001). While the increased significance of women's migrant labour in the economy of the Philippines has not produced gender equality, as much of the labour has remained in stereotypically feminine roles, it has shifted family dynamics and limited men's capacity to live up to patriarchal ideals of masculinity. These shifts alter the significance of other domains of traditional masculinity, such as the military.

Historically, the ability to provide economically is one of the most significant roles for men. As Yea (2015: 129) notes, men prove their manhood when they "start a family and can demonstrate that they are able to look after

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<sup>5</sup> Political economy refers to the links between the economy, social structures and political institutions. For more details on the case of the Philippines see Bello et al. (2000) and Parreñas (2000).

the family's welfare". The loss of this historical position for many Philippine men has led to the emergence of grey-market activities like the organ trade and criminal organization on the main island of Luzon (Yea, 2015: 133–135). In this context, the security forces provide a conventionally masculine domain that still provides men with a degree of wealth, status and stability. With a third of the population under 15 years of age and half under 24, militarism provides young men with one of the only reliable pathways for status and belonging (Templer, 2017: 29). These changes have not occurred with corresponding shifts in social norms regarding the expectation that men provide for their family; thus, they have not produced more substantial forms of gender equality. The youthfulness and economic vulnerability of men contributes to the dominance of militarized masculinity.

The significance of militarized masculinity has shifted at various times since Philippine Independence but has most recently been shaped by the War on Terror and the rise of populism. Since 2001, the armed forces have been actively involved in fighting the War on Terror. This engagement resulted in the rebranding of an existing conflict against radical splinter groups, such as Abu Sayyaf, due to their connections with global terror networks. The shift reframed existing struggles within broader discourses of what is now referred to as violent extremism. This transformation of the pre-existing local conflict to a perennial and global struggle against terror has placed renewed importance on militarism in the Philippines and allowed political leaders to deflect criticism of the slow peace process or purported military abuses committed in the south.

Subsequent political leaders, such as President Duterte, have also reinforced the centrality of the military in Philippine identity. They have shaped their authority around having the strength to suppress fighting in the Southern Philippines. As Tanyag suggests, the populist use of vulgarity, threats of sexual violence and use of martial law in 2017 have all shifted the tone of militarized masculinity (2018). Although these factors are not new, they have fortified the model of strongman masculinity in public discourse.

While many aspects of militarized masculinity in the Philippines replicate militarized masculinity in the Global North, local dynamics have produced substantial differences. In contrast to dominant constructions of masculinity in the Global North, hegemonic masculinity in the Philippines was historically less preoccupied with aggression, emotional suppression and physical strength (Rubio and Green, 2009). The violent excesses of the Philippine military are produced in a different context and reflect diverse histories and contexts to those of Western militaries. The inculcation of strongman culture, the replication of colonial forms of violence and clientelism all reflect particular histories and dynamics (Quimpo, 2005). The specific history of the Philippine military, and the material conditions which shape the country, define the nature and significance of national violent extremism.

The conflict between separatists in the Southern Philippines and rules from the north predates independence and tracks back to the precolonial sultanates. While there are diverse armed groups, including left-wing organizations and secular groups, the majority now adopt some variation of Islamist ideology. Due to this development,





the bulk of violent extremist groups in the country originate from Mindanao and the surrounding islands in the Southern Philippines. These groups come from the 13 predominantly Muslim ethnic groups that make up the Moro people. There have been several violent extremist groups since Independence, but the main groups over the past decade include Abu Sayyaf, Ansar Khalifa, the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), Khalifa Islamiyah, the Maute group and other ISIS-inspired splinter groups from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). These groups vary from large, organized and territorially bound organizations to small family-based bands of fighters such as the Maute group. While there is considerable diversity across these groups in terms of the tactics they are willing to employ and their theological responsibilities, all share at least some ideological commitments and have been involved in separatist struggles against the Philippine government.

## Analysis part 2

### Violent extremist masculinity and the Mindanao conflict

Analysis of the sources relating to violent extremism in the Southern Philippines revealed **four key themes in shaping notions of masculinity: global brotherhood; reclamation of lost honour; the protection of Islam's purity; and the transition to manhood through participation in militant groups.** These themes are hardly surprising for groups of this nature and might be read in a universalized way. When situated within the broader context of the Philippines, however, they can be understood in relationship to mainstream militarized masculinity through the dynamics of replication, exaggeration and inversion.

Armed groups in the Southern Philippines regularly claim membership in a global struggle, with organizations such as Abu Sayyaf, the BIFF and Khalifa Islamiyah all expressing loyalty to the Islamic State. Videos released by groups also regularly invoke the notion of brotherhood and seek to connect local issues – such as displacement, economic deprivation and military abuse – to a worldwide struggle against disbelief. Similarly, the styling of videos picks up on techniques employed internationally, such as the use of *nasheed*, or Islamic religious songs, to portray members of local violent extremist groups as the kind of globalized warrior monks idealized by Islamic State (Stenersen, 2017; Brown, 2018). As with videos produced in the Balkans, the Middle East and Central Asia, the propaganda from groups in the Southern Philippines tries to draw on a shared vocabulary of imagery and tropes that link their struggle to global movements.

The attempt to frame participation in these groups as a global enterprise is profoundly gendered and claims a masculine status not rooted primarily within local tensions over land ownership or the struggles that young men face in Moro societies. This finding supports analysis in this collection by Brown, Toros and Parashar of the 1968 Jabidah Massacre. The authors also suggest that the myth of the Jabidah Massacre has been used to downplay local ethnic or territorial tensions and connect current conflicts to a history of interreligious struggle. Similarly, their analysis of the Battle of Marawi suggests the central role of globalizing local conflicts by positioning violent extremist masculinities as transcending these local concerns by being part of a larger cause.

## Box 1: Replication

**Replication** is a common dynamic in violent extremist groups and entails the replication of components of mainstream masculinity. This often involves a violent extremist group adopting an aspect that is accepted in mainstream society, such as the expectation that men will protect the weak. **In contrast to exaggeration or inversion, replication does not entail substantial alteration of the norm or narrative.** The adoption of the norm may involve a claim that violent extremist men, and not men in mainstream society, fulfil the expectation authentically. Or replication may be a more reciprocal relationship where both sides buy into the same narrative, as is the case of the Philippines where both sides frame the conflict as a global struggle between Islam and Christianity.

This globalization of violent extremist masculinities directly replicates the narratives used by the armed forces in their references to the global War on Terror to justify their actions. As with mainstream militarized masculinity in the Philippines, the claim of being part of a larger perennial struggle shifts the dynamic of conflict and undermines existing efforts to establish peace through regional autonomy. In 2012, the MILF signed a peace deal with former President Aquino III ensuring autonomy in Mindanao. While this agreement represents a significant step towards ending the conflict, it also threatens the authority and status of the smaller armed groups in the region who will no longer have a place in an integrated Bangsamoro region.

The presentation of the conflict as global, rather than regional, is expedient both for the armed splinter groups aligned with Islamic State, and for military men who wish to maintain their central role in the Philippine state. Efforts to diminish the salience of these violent extremist masculinities, therefore, not only requires challenging the legitimacy of separatist violent extremist groups, but also demands shifting national narratives around militarized masculinity. In a case like the Philippines, both groups of militarized men gain status from the elevation of the conflict into the global arena. De-escalation of the conflict and attempts to combat violent extremist masculinities will necessitate similar

shifts in mainstream militarized masculinity. The replication of global conflict narratives – which positions these conflicts as part of a larger globalized struggle – by both sides represents a symbiotic relationship between these two articulations of masculinity, defined as they are by their opposition to one another.

This globalized conflict narrative not only reinforces the legitimacy of violent extremist masculinities, but it also undermines women's rights in the region, rendering it more difficult to address the abuses of the state military that fuel conflict. Women in Mindanao play a central role within the conflict as direct combatants, military leaders and peacemakers. In particular, women's organizations play a crucial role in curtailing local *rido*, or clan conflicts, and establishing dialogue between competing sides (Dwyer and Cagoco-Guiam, 2012: 8). Indeed, women historically, and currently, assume central roles in the clan system that dominates Moro societies.

There are long-standing patterns of reciprocal conflict and revenge in the Southern Philippines that are increasingly subsumed by the global narrative of manly struggle between Islam and its enemies. **The political significance of women in Mindanao is completely written out in representations of the struggle both by the state military and violent extremist groups.**



Both militarized masculinity and violent extremist masculinity in the Philippines rely on the notion that women are passive and that their experiences are secondary to the more important struggles between men.

The second key theme which emerged consistently in sources relating to violent extremist masculinity in the Southern Philippines is **the need for men to reclaim their lost honour**. In particular, videos and media releases from violent extremist groups often state that the Moro people have been humiliated, oppressed or shamed by the Philippine government. These assertions directly point to the Philippine government as the oppressor of the Moro people and demand redress for the wrongs committed. While the framing of this humiliation has global resonance in discourses around oppression and humiliation during colonialism, it also inverts the narrative of humiliation and reclamation of honour employed by the Philippine. As explained earlier, mainstream militarized masculinity in the Philippines is shaped directly by the experience of colonialism and attempts to reassert national dignity through militarism.

This narrative has been adopted and inverted by violent extremist groups who level the charge of colonialism against the Philippine state and the claim humiliation by

the military. President Duterte reinforces this dynamic by asserting the central importance of maintaining national strength through military intervention. As Tanyag (2018) suggests, the national leader appears to condone the use of brutality against Moro populations, including sexual violence. While Duterte's rhetorical style helps maintain his position as a strong leader, it also reinforces the narrative of emasculation to which violent extremist groups appeal. **It is precisely such practices of mainstream militarized masculinity in the Philippines that enable violent extremist groups to effectively invert the narrative of colonial humiliation.**

Violent extremist groups invert narratives of colonial oppression to justify their existence and tactics. As Brown, Toros, and Parashar note, by claiming oppression by a colonial northern power who has humiliated their people, violent extremist groups in the Southern Philippines replicate a familiar narrative while infusing it with fundamentally different meaning. The similar structure of the narrative employed makes the account easily intelligible within the context of the Philippines. Such narratives can be viewed in the frequent video messages dispersed by violent extremist groups in the south, which draw liberally on tropes of colonial occupation and reclamation of Muslim land.

### Box 2: Inversion

**Inversion** is a dynamic that occurs when violent extremist masculinity takes a norm or narrative that exists in mainstream masculinity and alters a key component of it while retaining similar narrative structure. This can commonly be seen in instances where violent extremist groups make the claim that real men are willing to use any tactics to get the job done, thereby inverting mainstream military norms around the use of tactics that target civilians. *Inversion contrasts replication by exchanging some aspects of a mainstream norm or narrative while retaining a relationship to the mainstream version.* Other examples involve narratives told about the nature of a conflict that may replicate many common reference points but invert the interpretation of those events entirely. While inversion produces very different norms and narratives to replication, it is still defined in relation to the mainstream narrative it intends to disrupt.



### Box 3: Exaggeration

**Exaggeration** is a dynamic that exists when violent extremist groups adopt an aspect of mainstream masculinity while magnifying components of it. Most notably, exaggeration exists in many violent extremist groups in relation to masculine norms of sacrifice or brotherhood. These norms, which exist in mainstream masculinity, are adopted by violent extremist groups but taken much further, thus requiring far more intense tests of manhood or exaggerated displays that would be read as excessive in mainstream society. In the Philippines, the exaggerated expectations of reciprocal violence do have resonances with mainstream militarized masculinity but they take the demands for violence far further and manifest it in ways that would be unacceptable to mainstream society.

The way in which some aspects are directly adopted – while the meaning itself is flipped – is exactly what makes inversion such a powerful component of violent extremist masculinities in the Southern Philippines.

**As with the globalization of the conflict, the narrative of colonial humiliation is also used to silence and marginalize women on both sides.** When conflict is framed around the need to reassert honour and dignity, it becomes very easy for women to become symbolic figures of victimhood whose purity needs protection from a rapacious other. This framing occurs on both sides in the Philippines. Military strongmen like Duterte invoke the spectre of violent Muslim men to justify muscular interventions as the only way to peace. This narrative is again inverted by violent extremist groups who point to instances when the state military commits abuses against civilians or breaks customs around purity.<sup>6</sup>


Finally, **violent extremist groups in the Southern Philippines appear to have endured in part due to their ability to offer a pathway into adulthood for young men in Mindanao who suffer significant economic obstacles, including restricted freedom of movement, few job prospects and constant**

**scrutiny from the state.** Dwyer and Cagoco-Guiam's 2012 report *Gender and Conflict in Mindanao* signalled that limitations placed on young men's mobility formed a powerful driver of conflict as they found themselves humiliated at checkpoints, frustrated by restrictions on their movement, and excluded from education and job opportunities. Such limitations placed on men create a sense of loss of social role and significance. With few other pathways to masculine status left, joining a violent extremist group offers a unique chance for young men to prove their manhood (Dwyer and Cagoco-Guiam, 2012: 9-10). This dynamic resembles that of mainstream militarized masculinity discussed above and reflects the **exaggeration of militarization** as a pathway to manhood under material conditions that have blocked other avenues.

This exaggerated form, as seen in the Southern Philippines, also reflects norms among Moro groups regarding masculinity. Within many Moro ethnic groups, men are expected to respond to humiliation with violence to reclaim their status. As explained by Torres (2014: 13), "an offense committed against a man that shames (*sipug*) him results in a reduced self-image. This situation creates a state of enmity and has potential

<sup>6</sup> There are numerous examples of this including prominent instances when military units in the South have been rewarded with lechon (pork) and alcohol after winning battles. These symbolic acts are intended to humiliate Muslim men while fuelling VE narratives that this is a perennial war against unbelievers.





for conflict as society expects the offended person to seek redress for the grievance so as to erase the shame and sustain his self-image as a brave man.” Similarly, Barreveld (2001) noted that in many Moro languages there is no word for excessive violence, with the closest terminology being terms of masculinity and bravery. While these pre-existing cultural factors indicate that aspects of masculinity were already primed for violent extremism, they have been further activated by their relationship to mainstream militarized masculinity. This relationship should not be read as discounting pre-existing norms that enable violence but as a necessary complement to an understanding of prevailing masculine norms in Moro communities.

For mainstream Philippine society, participation in the armed forces provides one of the few readily accessible pathways for males to assert their manhood, including by earning income and providing for the household. In so doing, they engage in security actions that undermine the capacity of Moro men to access pathways to traditional masculinity, thus creating the material conditions for violent extremism to thrive. It is easy to look at this case and conclude that the problem resides with Moro forms of masculinity; however, this fundamentally misreads the relational nature of masculinity. The contestation over masculine status is one that relies on the relationship between mainstream militarized masculinity and the forms of masculine protest seen in violent extremist groups. Both militarized masculinity and violent extremist masculinity rely on one another to claim authority and status. Their salience and respectability necessarily rely on the actions of the other. **The singling out of the masculinity of violent extremist groups as uniquely pathological misreads the dynamic nature of militarism in the Philippines.**

## Conclusion

This paper draws on the example of violent extremism in the Southern Philippines to suggest that violent extremist masculinities must be understood contextually and relationally. It argues that **to fully appreciate the role of gender in propagating violent extremism, it is necessary not only to demonstrate the broad correlation between masculinity and violence, but to also pay attention to the articulations of masculinity against which armed groups define themselves.** The study does not claim to be comprehensive in scope as it explores the relationship between militarized masculinities and violent extremist masculinities in just one case. Due to the methodology employed and its limited focus, the study is not intended to provide complete answers regarding the complex relationship between masculinity, militarism and violent extremism in the Philippines. Many of the findings remain tentative suggestions which warrant further investigation to confirm exactly how such dynamics might be playing out on the ground. Further attention needs to focus on numerous gender dynamics to fully understand and contextualize the proliferation of violent extremist masculinity in the Philippines. However, based on the research, analysis clearly needs to target a specific context and be more granular in character rather than risk overgeneralization.

The profound differences in militarism and militarized masculinities across Asia mean that an overly broad approach would be misinformed. Similarly, the limited work on violent extremist masculinities to date has suffered from a tendency to focus on the most exceptional and spectacular aspects of manhood rather than the more routine components that propel men to join violent groups. **In the case of the Philippines, broad ideological agendas were relevant, but so too were much more mundane concerns, such as**



young men's lack of access to employment or education. Certainly, more work needs to be done to explore the question of structural disadvantage within masculinity work on violent extremism.<sup>7</sup> Some early positive signs can be seen in the Philippines' recent National Action Plan on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism that includes a pillar on socioeconomic interventions and explicit provisions on gender.

There is much more work to be done in this regard, particularly in understanding masculinity and the everyday character of violent extremism in the Asian region. In this instance, the key components of violent extremism's commonplace aspects were not possible to explore in detail due to the research method employed. The analysis does, however, suggest that more detailed ethnographic study would likely yield valuable insights regarding violent extremist masculinities not captured here. While the connection between mainstream masculinity and violent extremism in Asia is poorly understood, this paper takes a modest step towards clarifying the link.

Furthermore, the research emphasizes the importance of understanding violent extremist masculinities **relationally**, avoiding monolithic accounts of toxic or hyper masculinity. Indeed, the comparison between mainstream militarized masculinities in the Philippines and violent extremist masculinities suggests that both forms exist relationally and symbiotically. The dynamics underpinning this relationship are informed by the patterns of colonialism, military rule and globalization that inform gender relations in the Philippines. The focus on dynamics necessitates a shift in

how responses frame the problem of violent extremist masculinities. Rather than being a set of isolated qualities, norms and narratives, **this study suggests that violent extremist masculinities are produced in intimate relationship with other forms of masculinity in society. These dynamics should be further studied to build on this initial scoping study.**


The findings of this paper should also be read in relation to research by Rahman and by Brown, Toros and Parashar in this volume. Both papers likewise confirm the interplay between local narratives, material conditions and power structures in forming violent extremist masculinities. The two papers adopt different focus areas and methodologies – for example Rahman's analysis of the production of ideal men and women through fatwas – but both papers do confirm the importance of contextualizing violent extremist masculinities. Thus, any attempt to unmake violent extremist masculinities will be far more effective if it targets the dynamics and relationships that make certain masculinities more pronounced.

**For programming on gender and violent extremism, the findings of this study imply considerable value in focusing on the local dynamics of masculinity rather than the broad correlation between patriarchal masculinity and violence.** While existing programmes focused on masculinity and the rise of violent extremism are not insensitive to local masculinity, there is growing interest in replicating existing models of engaging men and boys from other sectors and focusing on norms associated with violent extremism (Duriesmith, 2017b).

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7 Work on the link between poverty and armed violence is not straightforward and deeply contested. While some studies suggest that social marginalization, lack of education and poverty might correlate with militancy, these claims have also been widely disputed. For more on these debates, see Blair et al. (2013), Bhui et al. (2014), and Berman and Matanock (2015). The bulk of work on this topic focuses on broad quantitative analysis of correlations between poverty, education and violence. From a gender perspective, this analysis has limitations because it does not explore the social significance of deprivation within a gendered context. More work is needed on this topic, particularly within Asia where these dynamics may differ significantly from the locations where existing research has focused.





In contexts like the Philippines, it is not just a broad link between manhood and violence that has made violent extremist masculinities so prominent. Rather, there are specific economic conditions and structural arrangements that make the military so effective. **If programming works with at-risk communities on the direct impact these conditions have for men (and particularly young men), it is likely that efforts to engage men will be more locally relevant and effective.** Such efforts would require leveraging greater local knowledge and more substantial adaptation of existing programming but are likely to have a substantial pay-off compared to potential costs. Similarly, the findings suggest that approaches that target violent extremist masculinities in isolation are likely to have limited effectiveness.

Despite the limitations of this study, there remain lessons regarding how to respond to violent extremist masculinities. **The most substantial implication of this study is the importance of targeting mainstream militarized masculinities in addressing violent extremism.** So far, interventions focused on gender and violent extremism have tended to focus on at-risk communities. This research indicates that in the Philippines, and more broadly, it is not enough to work with at-risk communities. Rather, mainstream masculinities such as the militarized masculinities analysed here are also critical for defining other relational masculinities in society. By shifting aspects of mainstream military practice (e.g. actions that humiliate southern communities), the emphasis on the global War on Terror, and the practice of reciprocal violence will likely all have an impact.

The provision of gender-sensitive reform training in the security sector would likely be particularly effective due to the significant

agency militaries have in relation to issues like violent extremism. There have been serious efforts to make security sector reform more sensitive to gender (Duriesmith and Holmes, 2019). While a large component of this work has been to render militaries more hospitable environments for female service providers, another substantial aspect has been challenging patriarchal notions of soldiering. It would be useful to reform this programming to also include a component on the potentially harmful effects military personnel can have on the propagation of violent extremist masculinities.

This effort would require localizing each training to specifically target the interaction between militarized masculinity and violent extremist masculinities in that location to show the value that altered forms of security practice might offer. Such an approach would require substantial buy-in from military leadership and would likely require prior relationship-building to convey the value of gender-sensitive security sector reform in effecting change on violent extremist masculinities. Despite the challenge of changing entrenched military practice, the growth of work on challenging sexual exploitation and abuse suggests that it is an attainable goal (Westendorf and Searle, 2017).

By viewing these components of mainstream militarized masculinity relationally, we can see new sites for engagement that do not require directly working with men involved in violent extremist groups – individuals who are often both difficult to access and resistant to change. The research has the potential to inform programming that targets at-risk communities directly. By considering the relational construction of violent extremist masculinities to mainstream masculine norms, programming can more effectively develop messaging that neither essentializes

nor exceptionalizes violent extremist masculinities. To do so, we may learn from the rich scholarship concerning working with men and boys to promote gender equality (Flood, 2019).

Various techniques have been developed to change men's attitudes towards gender. These include small group work with perpetrators or potential perpetrators, community-level programming, curriculum development and male advocate programmes. Such work has been adapted to the problem of violent extremism in at-risk communities and among those most vulnerable to recruitment, such as young men. It is probable that techniques focusing on working with men on gender could also be adapted to address violent extremism. Despite the omission of scholarship on this topic, the research does provide a robust body of evidence regarding how programmes can work directly with mainstream men to shift their approach to masculinity (Flood, 2015). If programmes targeting men and boys were adapted to be sensitive to the conflict dynamics that promote violent extremist masculinities, they might well produce positive change. Such an approach is likely to prove more effective if it reflects an appreciation for why certain masculine norms or narratives are clearer in one context than another. It likewise has the potential to situate programming within the contexts of violent extremism in Asia.

Finally, this paper further indicates the role of political economy in shaping violent extremist masculinities. It is not new, for example, to suggest that poverty might be linked to militant action. However, this paper implies that mainstream trends in relation to political economy, such as the role of migrant labour in the Philippines, might shift mainstream masculinities in ways that indirectly shape violent extremist masculinities. The shifts in political economy in the Philippines have

had the effect of reshaping mainstream masculinities to centre strongman politics and the role of the military. This change has had the domino effect of then reshaping the country's violent extremist movements as military action became more kinetic and significant in the states.

An understanding of how such large, potentially indirect shifts in the political economy might impact mainstream masculinities will help policymakers develop effective responses. In the case of the Philippines, this means that programmes focusing on women's empowerment might also, for example, include some messaging to counter potential backlash. As the rise of mainstream militarism is linked to women's enhanced economic role, it is reasonable to suggest that a similar dynamic may occur within at-risk communities. Though this is by no means a reason not to pursue women's empowerment, it does mean that parallel programmes with men would do well to preempt backlash politics. This advice reflects how local dynamics in each state shape the landscape of violent extremist masculinities and the importance of understanding the particulars of local political economy.

While the study indicates that similar local power dynamics are likely to shape violent extremism in other parts of Asia, it is not intended to suggest that these contexts are likely to be similar. Other sites like Indonesia or Myanmar may echo patterns that this paper suggests are in the Philippines. It would be a mistake, however, to shift from a globalized model of violent extremist masculinity to a regional Asian model instead. **Only historically grounded analysis that is sensitive to material conditions and relationally oriented can provide a stronger basis of knowledge on violent extremist masculinity in Asia.**



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# Chapter 2

## Violent Extremist Myths and Masculinities: two country case studies

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## Introduction

### Myths, masculinity and violent extremism

Through grand narratives, myths help explain what might otherwise be unintelligible. They are models of, and for, society. They tell us about the apparent fabric of the world, revealing moral messages that hold the narrator's universe together. Mythical narratives are not just a matter of individuals creating their inner and social self; they are also what bind societies and cultures together. Myths enable the integration of events and actions through time into meaningful patterns that help explain the interrelationships of events in our lives. Mythical narratives also tell us which events and actions are significant and which can be ignored. As such, myths always have normative content, describing what is important, good, and better, and what is not (Halverson et al., 2011). Our sense of meaning and purpose, our values and motivations, are based on these narratives.

Charles Taylor argues that stories about self and society are how humans construct the "horizons of meaning" that form the critical background for social relations and life choices. These narratives always represent a kind of movement in moral space. They are our way of constructing coherence and continuity in our lives (Leonard and McClure, 2004). Myths do not gain authority based on the accuracy of their claims to truth, but because they are perceived as credible, as natural, almost obvious. As the political philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre said, "[m]yths are alive or dead, not true or false" (MacIntyre, 1967). In other words, myths must be believed to be true, but from an outsider's perspective they may appear absurd and easily falsifiable. However, myths sit above such empirical truth claims because they are processes of meaning-making. The same can be said of the specific myths of violent extremist groups.

By recognising the essential element of myths as meaning-making through grand narratives, we can better understand the persistence and adaptability of violent extremist groups (Glazzard, 2017). Such groups create their own mythologies and perpetuate historical and classical myths in the societies around them. Deconstructing and analysing these stories enables us to better understand the legitimisation strategies, actions, and frameworks of understanding used by extremists. This insight suggests that attempts to counter extremist groups that rest on challenging the empirical grounds of their narratives without also addressing these broader questions of belief and meaning-making will ultimately fall short.

It is likewise vital to apply a gendered lens to this analysis. Gender, like myths, is socially constructed, and refers to the attributes and opportunities that a given society at a given time considers appropriate for men and women, as well as the relationships between and among them. Myths are part of the process by which these gender roles, behaviours, activities and attributes are normalized within violent extremist groups. Gender analysis is more than determining what women do; it draws our attention to the power relations, institutions, and roles in extremist groups and in wider societies, it involves unpacking what men and women do socially, politically and economically as part of violent extremism. The gender ideologies of the groups help us understand the ways in which these groups function, their identity, and their cause. Revealing which femininities and masculinities are prioritized in extremist myths – in other words, what kind of cultural meanings and values the myths apply to maleness and femaleness, respectively – helps us further understand the ways in which violent extremist groups make sense of their cause and who they think they are.



## Methodology

This is a comparative study of two countries. Rather than focusing solely on one country, the methodology allows for better identification of lessons for countering violent extremist narratives and disrupting their connections with society. The comparative approach also resists essentializing any perceived master narratives of a global Islamist extremism (Halverson et al., 2001). We assert that culture and cultural variations influence the manifestation and concerns of extremist groups even when such groups claim a connection to a wider mythology.

There are limitations to this comparative and narrative approach. First, it may be read as reducing religion to belief rather than also recognizing the importance of belonging and behaviours in understanding it. Second, the focus on myths necessarily means less attention paid to the everyday and real-life operations and experiences of extremists and those living alongside them. Third, the country case studies and myths themselves all draw upon religious ideas and violent politics connected to Islam or Islamic identity; this may lead some to conclude erroneously that these myths are therefore purportedly Islamic or that Islam is inherently violent. We therefore stress that myth-making among violent extremist groups is not unique to these religiously framed groups: Marxist and other groups in South Asia hold secular myths pertaining to Indian independence icon Mahatma Gandhi, such as the story of the lone white ticket inspector refusing to honour the first-class ticket of the Indian-born barrister, whose brown skin placed him among those designated as coloured under South Africa's apartheid (Nandy, 2002). We also stress that all religions and religious identities have the capacity for violence, and that it is not possible to study that violence in isolation or without understanding the context of religious narratives.

A key difference between our approach and much current research on extremist narratives and counter-narratives is that **we do not presume in advance to know the function of extremist myths; they are not assumed to be instrumentalist propaganda.** Extremist myths are regarded as part of the wider culture in which extremist groups and individuals exist. An awareness of the importance of a recognizable extremist culture has only just emerged in academic and think-tank considerations. Thomas Hegghammer (2017), Elizabeth Kendall, Daniella Pisou, Thomas Johnson (2011, 2017), and Michael Semple (2011) are among those studying culture and utilizing literary approaches to understand extremism. While insightful, these researchers primarily focus on the Middle East and North Africa region, and do not formally consider myths.

This study's data collection derives from primary and secondary source material. The focus is on the content and context of myths rather than their production or delivery; it is hard to identify their reception in wider society. Myths were selected based on a) their contemporary importance to extremist and armed non-state actors in the two countries and b) whether they enable the extremist groups to connect to the wider society around them. The structure of this paper follows the methodological steps we used in the analysis for each case study: taking each country in turn, first, we look at mythical characters, then the plot lines of each myth, before finally exploring the functions of myths.

**The discussion of these myths is not to affirm the truth claims made by the extremist groups, and it is not to adjudicate the veracity of their statements. The methodological aim is to examine how extremist groups construct gender, specifically masculinity, within their telling of the myths and how this connects to wider extremist culture.**



## Box 4: Mythological narrative approach

### Features of myths

Myths address matters of life and death. They have explanatory components; teachable moments; supernatural and extraordinary characters and powers; confrontation between irreconcilable opposites; dilemmas which shape the story. Gendered relations within extremists' myths, the construction of the 'hero's quest', and the means available to succeed within the myth, demonstrate how violent extremist groups make sense of violent action and of the relations between group members and wider society.

### Analysing characters

Characters serve as ideal types for violent extremist group members and potential recruits. There are heroes, tricksters, evil villains and victims, and supernatural beings. From their actions and the consequences we see values of the myth: honour, loyalty, love, obedience. Women are rarely heroes; instead they are often the 'prize' of the quest, but sometimes they are tricksters or villains.

### Analysing plots

Plots and settings are often epic featuring extraordinary and extreme events and actions. Often myths are quests, with trials, tests, and danger. Monsters and evil villains are defeated, usually at great cost. Heroes are rewarded. What they fight for, how they fight, how they are recompensed, shows what is considered important and how causality is understood.

### Analysing functions

Myths have the broad function of meaning-making. Myths help groups make sense of current situations, behaviours and rituals. Myths legitimize the status quo or offer theories to explain world change. To understand their functions for extremists, it is necessary to contextualise and locate the myth and the group in wider society.

## Case study

### The Philippines

The Philippines has been home to numerous non-state armed groups motivated both by ideology and identity or secessionist claims. It often ranks in the top 20 countries in the world for incidence of terrorist violence (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2017). This violence includes attacks carried out by large left-wing organizations such as the Maoist-inspired New People's Army, as well as numerous Islamist groups fighting for the separation or autonomy of Mindanao (an island group in southern Philippines and traditional home of the Moros or Muslim minority) and/or to establish radical Islamist

rule in the region and extend the so-called Islamic State. This paper will focus on the myths of the latter two movements because of their key role in the landscape of violent extremism in the Philippines, and to facilitate structured comparison.

The Moros, or Bangsamoros, as they call themselves, have struggled with being ruled by the Christian-dominated state for centuries. Motivated by widespread political and economic discrimination and the desire for self-governance, the movement took up arms in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The

first armed group to be formed was the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), followed by the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), which remains to this day the most important non-state armed group fighting for greater autonomy, and at times independence. Both MNLF and MILF have entered successive agreements with the national government, and MILF is currently a central actor in the implementation of a peace agreement to establish greater autonomy in Mindanao.

Since first MNLF and then MILF entered peace talks, various hard-line splinter groups have formed, the most important of which have been Abu Sayyaf (AS), the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), and, more recently, the Maute Group. All three groups have links and have pledged *bay'aa*<sup>1</sup> or allegiance to the Islamic State (IS). Indeed, AS leader Isnilon Hapilon, until his death in 2017, was declared by IS to be “Emir of the Soldiers of the Khilafah [Caliphate] in East Asia,” (Rumiyah, 2017) thus establishing a strong link between the two organizations and allowing IS to claim credit for the attacks carried out by these groups in Mindanao, including two bomb attacks that killed 13 people in July and August 2018 (Counter Extremism Project, 2018b).

Aside from what can be broadly understood as local criminal activity, including extortion and kidnapping, AS, BIFF and the Maute Group have carried out violent attacks against civilians with varying degrees of effectiveness, including bomb attacks on civilian targets, direct attacks on police and armed forces, and sieges of towns in Mindanao, including Marawi in 2017.

Although MILF has a very strong Islamic identity and argues that Mindanao should not be governed in a way that is contrary to Islam, neither MILF or MLNF have made the establishment of a radical Islamist state a central goal of their struggle (Toros, 2007; 2012). By contrast, AS, BIFF and the Maute Group by pledging allegiance to Islamic State have adopted the “goal of establishing Allah’s rule in the land,” and rejected the “apostasy” of “entrance into democracy, and ... allying with the *mushrikin*” (Rumiyah, 2017).<sup>2</sup> These three groups describe the Philippine army as “crusaders” whose deaths are to be celebrated (“so Allah aided us against them and we massacred them”). Hapilon described MILF and anyone willing to enter into negotiations with the government as “misleading deviants.” Furthermore, a few months before his death, Hapilon insisted that the groups linked to IS “would never accept putting down their weapons” (Rumiyah, 2017).

## The Jabidah Massacre of 1968

Bangsamoro rebellions can be traced back centuries. The origin of the contemporary armed campaigns, however, are often traced back to the Moros response to the 1968 Jabidah Massacre, turning it into a central myth of the Moro rebellion (Tiglao, 2018). Some political figures and commentators still contest the events of the Jabidah Massacre, arguing that these are fabrications of the Moro movement or of opposition figures to then President Ferdinand Marcos. However, most analysts have concluded that between

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1 The *bay'aa* (sometimes spelt as *bay'ah* or *bay'a*) is a pledge of allegiance. It has specific religious connotations and is more than offering support, and places the group offering their allegiance under the authority of those to who it is offered. However in different regions it carries more or less significance in practical terms, but holds symbolic and normative value. For a discussion see Milton (2015).

2 *Mushrikin* is someone who engages in *Shirk*. *Shirk* is loosely translated as a polytheist, or those who associate or ascribe divinity to someone/something other than *Allah* (God), and is sometimes applied to Christians because of the theology of the trinity.



12 and 68 Moro recruits were killed by their commanders on March 18, 1968 on the island of Corregidor off Manila. For the purposes of this study, however, the facts of the events are less relevant than the myth that was created around it.

### Principal characters

Although a variety of characters have entered the myth of Jabidah, two villains, two heroes – all four of them men – and a civilian woman are particularly interesting for this study. The two villains, then-president Ferdinand Marcos and Major Eduardo “Abdul Latif” Martelino, are both clearly identified as the culprits behind the massacre. Marcos, who governed the Philippines from 1965 to 1986 and used the response post-Jabidah as a reason to crack down on Moro dissenters, is presented in the myth as animated “by the obsession to stay in power” and willing to resort to “extra-legal actions,” to secure his aims (Jubair, 1999).

The operational hand of the massacre, though, is identified as Martelino, a major who converted to Islam to marry Sophia (or Safiyah<sup>3</sup>), the only woman to figure broadly in the myth. Sophia, after whom Martelino named the camp in which the Muslim recruits were living and training at the time of the massacre, is presented as a young woman of particular beauty, so much so that one version erroneously notes that her name means, “stunningly beautiful woman” (Medina and Pulumbarit, 2013). Martelino plays a central role in recruiting the young Muslim men and was held accountable for their killings. The two heroes are both Muslim men: the lone survivor of the massacre, Jibin Arula; and in some versions of the myth, Nur Misuari, the founder and at the time of writing current head of MNLF. After an initial intensive

media and political presence following the massacre, Arula was forced into hiding for decades but then returned to the spotlight some 40 years later to recount his experience of the events in numerous rallies in Mindanao and elsewhere.

### Plot lines

The Jabidah Massacre myth starts with Marcos’s plan to send young Muslim recruits undercover into the nearby Malaysian province of Sabah, to which the Philippines lays claim, to stir up violence that Marcos would then use as justification to invade and reclaim the area. The plot line then splits into two versions. The one preferred by MNLF, MILF and other armed groups is that the young Muslims discovered they were being trained to fight against other Muslims in Sabah and refused to do so on grounds that they could not kill their Muslim brothers. In this version, Martelino ordered that the men be executed to avoid any news of the plan reaching the press or the opposition.

In the second version of the story, supported by Arula’s testimony as the only survivor, the recruits knew the aims of the mission all along but were tired of being abused and denied their promised pay and mutinied against their commanders, which led to their execution. As the shooting started, Arula started running despite being shot in the thigh. He fell off a cliff into the sea, where he hung onto a plank of wood for hours avoiding detection, and was then able to convince local fishermen that he “got drunk and fell off a ship” and needed rescuing. Jibin Arula then tells the story of how Nur Misuari met him a short time later when he was under the protection of an opposition governor and promised revenge: “Jibin, I can’t help you with money but remember we

3 Safiya is the Muslim version of the same name,

will avenge Bangsa Islam. We will fight the government of President Marcos" (Arguillas, 2009). In this myth, Misuari founded MNLF just after the massacre and in response to it. Commemorating the 30th anniversary of the massacre in 1998, Misuari declared 18 March to be Bangsamoro Day (Curaming, 2017).

## Functions of the myth

The Jabidah Massacre myth performs three principle functions for the Moro armed groups. First, it serves as the origin myth behind the state's violence, which the Moros are responding to in self-defence. The second function lies in the consolidation of the myth of Moro identity, one that is distinct from the Christian majority and from other ethnic groups. Third, the massacre is a recruitment myth that valorizes the Moros who join the fight to defend themselves and avenge injustice. As noted by Aristotle, an origin "is that which does not itself follow anything by causal necessity, but after which something naturally is or comes to be" (Aristotle). By mythologizing the Jabidah Massacre as the beginning of the Bangsamoro struggle, the myth's proponents present the Moro call to arms as the only possible response to such violence. It thus naturalizes the violence of MNLF, and that of subsequent splinter groups as the only response to the "oppressive character of the state, which is allegedly bent on exterminating Muslims" (Aljunied and Curaming, 2012).

**The myth also consolidates the Moro/Muslim as a distinct identity by stressing that all the victims were Muslim and all the perpetrators were either Christian or "fake converts,"** (as Martelino is accused of being (Jubair, 1999)) and that the Muslim recruits were, in one version, killed because they refused to

harm their Muslim brothers of Sabah. This has an added ethnic dimension, as the myth highlights that both villains, Marcos and Martelino, are Ilocano, an ethnolinguistic group from the northern Philippines. This serves to reinforce the construction by which the many ethnolinguistic groups living in Mindanao all become primarily Moro/Muslim.

Finally, the myth has served clear recruitment functions over the decades. The MILF website says that from the massacre "Moro consciousness, based on Islamic revivalism and knowledge of a distinct history and identity, gathers steam. Political organizations emerge to culminate eventually in the establishment of the MNLF."<sup>4</sup> Even 50 years later, Abduhraman Idris, the grandson of one of the recruits, in an Al Jazeera interview stated: "As a Bangsamoro youth, we have to correct historical injustice as we are the future of the Bangsamoro."<sup>5</sup> Ultimately, the injustice of Jabidah is a rallying call for Moros to join the struggle.

## Gendered dynamics

Three main gendered aspects of the myth have been identified, two focusing on women and one on men. First, the presence of Sophia or Safiya is important. She is a young woman of extreme beauty and her looks and naivety are taken advantage of by unscrupulous 'other' men (in this case, Martelino who allegedly pretends to convert). In a construction that is common in the myths of war and fighting, Sophia represents Mindanao itself, a virgin land of natural beauty that is described as spoiled by the crusaders. Tellingly, Martelino names the camp after her, turning her into the physical territory on which the betrayal and abuse occur.

4 <http://www.luwaran.net/home/index.php/news/19-national/638-multi-sectors-commemorate-48th-anniversary-of-jabida-massacre-launch-all-4-peace-movement>

5 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mSfO1R8OkQU>

Second, Martelino as a villain is presented as lacking respect for women and is described as “adventurous, womanizer, unscrupulous, reckless, mercenary” (Aljunied and Curaming, 2012). The heroes on the other hand speak, in the words of Misuari himself, as wanting to protect “our mothers,” while Arula is said to have longed for the first wife he had to leave behind when he went into hiding (Arguillas, 2009a). Men are revealed to us as good or bad based on their treatment of women and whether they have pious relationships with them.

Finally, women are presented as a means to integrate a social group for both hero and villain in the myth. Martelino uses Sophia to appear to become a Muslim, while Arula is told to “go and find a woman from Visayas and marry her” in order to integrate a new social group and avoid detection after the massacre (Arguillas, 2009a). Thus, in the final dynamic, relationships to women are seen as a key vector of social integration – whether genuine or deceitful. **Overall, the myth sustains gender constructions of women as virgin territory to be protected by heroes from defiling villains, as well as women as the foundation of men’s social identity.**

## The Battle of Marawi

The myth surrounding the Battle of Marawi between the IS-linked Maute Group and sections of AS, and the Armed Forces of the Philippines offers an interesting and contrasting version of the Jabidah myth. As it relates to events that occurred in 2017, it has not had the time to develop into as layered a myth, but its production during the 153-day battle offers an interesting insight into the process of mythologizing the present. AS and the Maute Group, and also IS, mythologized the battle through statements, publications,

videos and songs that were circulated during the siege as well as after.

Initially, the end of the Marawi siege and the deaths of Hapilon and the Maute Group leadership, along with several hundred other insurgents, considerably weakened these groups (Heydarian, 2019). However, several analysts have warned that the violence of the state response, coupled with the slow reconstruction, represent key recruitment assets for these groups in Mindanao. Indeed, Joseph Franco argues that “beyond victories in the kinetic space, it is clear that socio-economic roots of conflict in Mindanao need to be resolved lest Marawi just be the harbinger of recurring conflict” (Franco, 2017).

## Principal characters

Four men are key with three presented as heroes and one as a weak hostage. The first is Isnilon Hapilon, the leader of AS who was declared by IS as the “Emir of the soldiers of the Khilafah [Caliphate] in East Asia.” The two others are the brothers Abdullah and Omarkhayam Maute, leaders of the Maute Group. All three died in the Marawi siege. Finally, there is Father Chito Soganub, a Catholic priest, taken hostage at the start of the fighting, who was forced to appear in a video appeal to President Rodrigo Duterte.<sup>6</sup>

## Plot lines

Although widely accepted accounts of the Battle of Marawi state that it began as a response to attempts by the Philippine Army to arrest Hapilon after receiving intelligence he was in Marawi, the myth constructed by IS and its regional allies is that the battle was pre-planned by Hapilon and the Maute brothers. Indeed, video footage shows the three men sitting with several other men carefully planning the areas to be attacked, as

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QL7ITEv4kiE>



well as the sequencing of the attacks.<sup>7</sup> IS itself claimed that it was Hapilon and the Maute group that “stormed the city of Marawi ... chased out the local police and the military, and raised the banner of the Islamic State” (Rumiyah, 2017: 5). Aside from engaging in precise planning, the men also clearly aim at demonstrating effectiveness and ruthlessness. Abdullah Maute is heard telling the group: “I will kill four every time I fire a gun,” and “we can penetrate the schools and take some hostages.”<sup>8</sup> By contrast, Christian men, epitomized by Father Chito, are presented as weak and begging for mercy. In the video released during his captivity, Chito himself sets up the contrast, stressing that “they are ready to die for their religion.”<sup>9</sup>

## Functions

The myth so far has had three principal functions. The first is to outflank MILF and demonstrate that the groups linked to IS, and in particular AS and the Maute Group, represent true fighters for Islam. Events have, Hapilon states in an interview, “helped uncover the reality of those misleading deviants” (Rumiyah, 2017: 40). This outflanking has a clear recruitment function that the IS-linked groups are open about, stating that the battle revealed the “evil nature of [MILF’s] methodology and the lies perpetrated by their leaders, with some fighters joining the Islamic State” (Rumiyah, 2017: 37). The second function is to demonstrate the increasing reach of the Khilafah or Caliphate declared by IS in 2014. Indeed, the mythologizing of the battle also served IS, which chose to headline it in one of its English-language publications, Rumiyah (2017). Its opening editorial stated that Marawi demonstrated

that “despite the claims that the Islamic State has been weakened, the mujahidin’s ousting of the Crusaders and their puppets and their attainment of consolidation in the land can come as quickly and unexpectedly in any region on earth” (Rumiyah, 2017: 5). The publication then shows a picture of an “IS checkpoint” in Marawi, an indication of their control of territory.

## Gendered dynamics

Several gendered dynamics can be identified in the publications of the groups, most of them relying on, and sustaining, gender stereotypes through the representation of men and women but also through the absence of key women. One element of the myth widely used by IS about fighting in other contexts, is the women-as-reward dynamic. Indeed, a *nasheed*, or religious song,<sup>10</sup> was circulated called *The Brothers of Marawi* that promised in its chorus: “Diamonds and pearls and palaces awaiting the men of Tawhid; Virgins and wine, never ending time and gardens with rivers beneath.”<sup>11</sup>

There is also a feminization of Christians throughout the myth. This can be seen in propaganda footage showing fighters destroying statues of the Virgin Mary in churches with the butts of their rifles but also in the portrayal of Father Chito in his appeal for mercy. Father Chito’s appeal emotionally for empathy from President Rodrigo Duterte: “From our heart, please consider us, Mr President, you know it is hard sometimes, from time to time we hear bursts of gunfire.” That appeal is placed in sharp contrast to his representation of his kidnappers as rational actors who “are just asking for their land,”

7 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=whi0UE2JefY>

8 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r19a5bqpE1Y>

9 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QL7ITEv4kiE>

10 A *nasheed* is a chant, hymn, or song in a cappella or accompanied by percussion instruments. They are often religious. See Gråtrud (2016) and Said (2012).

11 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gKNbmjPprC4>





and as willing to fight and die.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, the myth is interesting due to the absence of Farhana Maute, mother of the Maute brothers. Indeed, the Philippine state and mainstream media ascribe a considerable role to Farhana Maute in financing the group and recruiting new members. A businesswoman believed to have property even in the capital Manila, Farhana is accused of using her strong clan connections to also support the group. She was arrested during the siege, traveling in a “vehicle loaded with firearms and explosives” leading a military spokesperson to call her the “heart of the Maute organization” (Reuters, 2017). The absence of Farhana from the myth constructed by the violent extremist organizations can be seen as a telling indication that the groups do not wish to disrupt gender stereotypes, particularly with audiences beyond the Philippines that may have trouble comprehending the matriarchal structures that exist in parts of the country.

## Case study

### Indonesia

Indonesia is both a majority-Muslim nation with the world’s largest Muslim population, and an ethnically and religiously diverse country (Timberman, 2013). Violent extremist acts since the 2002 Bali bombings have fuelled many incidents threatening religious tolerance and pluralism within the country and security dynamics across the region. Two well-known jihadist movements have drawn youth into acts of terrorism since the independence of the country from Dutch colonial rule. The words Darul Islam (DI) are used chiefly to describe the post-1945 organization that tried to realize the ideal of a Negara Islam Indonesia (an Islamic State of Indonesia). The roots of the DI, however, lay in 1942

with the Islamic mystic Sukarmadji Meridian Kartosuwirjo. The DI was wiped out under a fierce military campaign by the government that ended in the 1960s. Since then, Islamic radical and militant movements such as Komando Jihad, Warman Reign of Terror, Free Aceh Movement, Usroh, Ring Santa, and Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) have committed acts of terrorism against foreigners and state targets (Counter Extremism Project, 2018).

Local and national political considerations influence the Indonesian government’s Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) efforts. At the local level, the advent of decentralization and elections made local politicians more susceptible to pressure from hard-line groups. They have become willing to appear more Islamic to pre-empt such groups, particularly in the run-up to elections. As a result, numerous local ordinances enforcing Islamic values have been adopted. Additionally, there is no consensus in the Indonesian Muslim community on what would constitute unacceptable speech or incitement to violence (Timberman, 2013). This was exemplified in the 2016 case of Jakarta’s Christian governor who was named a suspect in a case of alleged blasphemy.

In the past, Indonesia’s transition to a democratic, participatory political system has presented several challenges for the government. The government was careful in their response to insecurities caused by the scourge of violent extremism so as to avoid antagonizing Islamic interests. In the domestic realm, following the Bali bombing, Jakarta promulgated a Presidential Emergency Decree on the Prevention of Terrorism and implemented a new anti-terrorism law. Although the legislation does not empower the Indonesian central government to the same degree as Singapore’s Internal Security Act, it does enable security personnel to

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QL7ITEv4kiE>

detain suspected terrorists for 20 days. This period can be extended for another six months based on preliminary evidence reported by intelligence services.

Prior to the introduction of the new anti-terrorism legislation, Indonesia's counter-terrorism efforts were focused primarily on de-radicalisation programmes, intelligence, and police operations (Febrica, 2010). Following these efforts, the strategy changed towards a more comprehensive approach in dealing with counter-terrorism and P/CVE, including both hard and soft measures. Within these programmes, emphasis has been placed on the empowerment of religious leaders, scholars and psychologists, to provide counter-narratives.

Terrorism in Indonesia has revolved around contestations between secular forces and those who desire an Islamic caliphate. The latter have always drawn linkages to anti-colonial struggles and evolved their own narratives and myths about Indonesia's past. Since the main perpetrators of terrorism in Indonesia have been the Darul Islam (DI) and the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and its affiliates, it is useful to pay attention to the myths perpetuated by these groups and their principal ideologues.

## The Darul Islam rebellions

On 12 October 2002, Muhammad Iqbal blew himself up along with hundreds of others at the Sari Night Club on the island of Bali. In his suicide note, he hardly referred to the terrorist group behind the bombings, Jemaah Islamiyah. Instead, he mentioned the contributions of Darul Islam, a group that predated independence and whose leader was captured and executed 40 years before Iqbal's mission. Iqbal wrote about the commitment of DI founder, Imam Kartosuwirjo, to the independence of the Islamic State of Indonesia and called upon

all the other children of DI and its armed wing Tentara Islam Indonesia (TII) to fight for Islam. His reference to DI and TII underscores continuities between the pre-independence goal of creating an Islamic state of Indonesia and the current jihadist structure. Frequent references to DI rebellions among groups like the JI locate the current jihadi trend as part of the freedom struggle, largely against Western powers, to create an independent and Islamic Indonesia. Such groups believe that the early anti-colonial efforts such as the DI rebellions were derailed and quashed by the postcolonial secular republican state first under President Sukarno and later under Suharto.

## Principal characters

Kartosuwirjo was a nationalist who developed the concept of an Indonesian Islamic State known as Negara Islam Indonesia (NII). He was also involved in the Indonesian revolution during Dutch aggression after the Proclamation of Indonesian Independence, to defend the existence of Indonesia as a state (Penders, 2002). Kartosuwirjo proclaimed a jihad against the Dutch and the republicans "until the Islamic Revolution is ended and the Islamic State exists completely in the whole of Indonesia". However, after the independence revolution, Kartosuwirjo, through his movement DI, continued his revolution against the Sukarno government. Eventually in 1956, the Indonesian government decided to launch a large-scale offensive against DI. The capture and execution of Kartosuwirjo in June 1962 further weakened the movement (Soebardi, 1983).

The story of Kartosuwirjo's two swords named Ki Dongkol and Ki Rompong highlights a peculiarity in his beliefs underscoring the difference between his own ideas and those of modernist Islamists. Kartosuwirjo perpetuated the myth that, when wielded in unison, the swords would bring prosperity



and victory in battle. He also claimed that he was a *Ratu Adil* (Just King) and also the Great Imam, and his followers believed that he could vanish with the speed of light, could put potent curses on defectors, and that he was immortal (Kumar, 2009).

Kartosuwirjo's conviction that he was an international Muslim leader, equal to a prophet, went against fundamental beliefs of Islam. During that volatile period, however, they were unquestioned. Sidney Jones, the most authoritative voice on terrorism and radicalization in Indonesia, argues that Kartosuwirjo "remains the primary political inspiration for [JI leader] Abu Bakar Bashir, his associates and thousands of others."

### Plot lines

Kartosuwirjo and his DI followers had earlier worked with the republicans against the Dutch colonialists but when they realized that their aspirations for an Islamic state of Indonesia were thwarted under the Sukarno regime, they directed military campaigns against government forces. By 1962 the DI rebellion was crushed and Kartosuwirjo was captured and executed. DI then splintered into several factions and went underground.

While DI failed to attain its political goal of an Indonesian Islamic State, it nevertheless "inspired subsequent generations of radical Muslims with its commitment to a *shari'a*-based state and its heavy sacrifices in the cause of jihad" (Fealy, 2004). DI continues to provide ideological sustenance to militant Islam in Indonesia, and the idea of an Islamic state continues to resonate with new generations, as was evident in Iqbal's suicide note (Jones, 2010). Kartosuwirjo's justification for jihad against a *kafir* or infidel state (first the Dutch, then a secular republic), as embodied

in the JI rebellion, continues to feed the myth about the enemy that does the bidding of the outsider and is inimical to Islam and Muslims.

### Functions

First, through this myth terrorist groups restore the postcolonial continuities of violence and terrorism. The secular state in Indonesia is understood using the same metaphors and references as for the former Dutch colonialists. Second, the DI myth challenges the Indonesian state ideology of *Pancasila*<sup>13</sup> or "Five Principles", and provides an alternative value system to form and govern the state. It is therefore not only resistance against the state but a vision of an alternative order. This is an important reminder that violence against the state is not just destructive but also seeks to create, and, therefore, their masculinities are not only protest masculinities. Third, the myth instructs listeners about the events of the rebellion or about heroes in order to inspire, and it gives wider lessons in morality, divinity and politics; in the words of Clifford Geertz, they "synthesize a people's ethos" (Geertz, 1973).

### Gender dynamics

The DI myths have sustained the notion of powerful Islamic masculinity in contest with a weak, colonial and later, secular independent state. Warrior masculinities are also constructed by "tensions between, and synthesis of, anti-colonial notions of organised violence that are rooted in Indonesian history and globalized jihadi discourse on war" (Duriesmith, 2018). The DI, JI and other jihadist groups in Indonesia have been hierarchical organizations where women have been relegated to the private sphere. This is necessary because nationalism and

13 Pancasila is an Indonesian political philosophy that has five principles, and was first formulated by Sukarno. It is now state ideology. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Pancasila>; Ramage D. E (1995) *Politics in Indonesia: Democracy, Islam and the Ideology of Tolerance* Routledge: London.

postcolonialism did not bring a patriarchal dividend to all men; non-Javanese and working-class men are infantilized in state discourses (Nilan, 2009). To compensate for this, **we see women's domesticity justified as reflecting biological density (*kodrat*), enshrined in regional law, but from extremist perspectives also sanctioned by God** (rather than the kingly or presidential authority).

Second, we see the myth mirroring the policies of Suharto, informally known as the Father-King, in this case from the Just King and the Great Imam. Geertz and other anthropologists note how the strong father-figure is dominant in Indonesian culture (Geertz, 1976). The concept of *bapakism*, or "father knows best", frames these relationships between men in Indonesia, and in both cases the leaders are immortalized and their powers over time have increased in the eyes of supporters.

## Bali bombing

In October 2002, 202 people were killed and another 209 injured in explosions in the tourist centre of Bali during a coordinated attack on two sites, Paddy's Irish Pub and the Sari Club. A third smaller device detonated outside the United States consulate in Denpasar, causing only minor damage. An audio cassette carrying a recorded voice message purportedly from Osama bin Laden stated that the Bali bombings were in direct retaliation for support of the United States' War on Terror and Australia's role in the liberation of East Timor. Following this attack, subsequent bombings were attributed to JI in 2003 at the Marriott Hotel, the Australian Embassy in 2004, a beach resort in Bali in 2005, and others in 2009, 2010, 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2018.


## Principal characters

Feri, known as Isa, and Arnasan, known as Iqbal, both died in the bombings. Imam Samudra, Ali Imron, Amrozi Nurhasyim and Huda bin Abdul Haq are the three additional bombers executed for their involvement. In

Amrozi's home, authorities found speeches by Osama bin Laden, and Abu Bakar Bashir, as well as training manuals for carrying out jihad. Bashir praised the bombers as heroes after their executions: "Their fighting spirit in defending Islam should be followed. We will win the fight in this world or die as martyrs. Even if they are murdered, they will die as Islamic martyrs."

Abu Bakar Bashir is the ideological founder of Jemaah Islamiyah and is serving a prison sentence for his role in the bombings. Recent efforts to release him from prison by President Widodo have not yielded any results, as the 80-year-old Bashir is unrepentant. He has perpetuated the myth that there is no terrorist group called Jemaah Islamiyah and that the Bali bombings were a Jewish-CIA conspiracy. He has also claimed that the 9/11 attacks were orchestrated by the United States and Israel as a pretext to attack Muslims in Afghanistan and Iraq. "In Bali, where 200 people died, it was America's bomb. That was a major attack and Amrozi doesn't have the capability to do that" (Altran, 2005). He has repeatedly stated that Indonesia must adhere to sharia law under an Islamic state. "We demand an Islamic state, and not some form of Islamization of society. We want the state to be Islamic, with Islamic leaders who have the courage and will to implement the sharia in total. There is no other way" (Noor, 2006). He has persistently called for "hatred" against America as a religious duty. He talks of three ways of attacking: "with your hand, your mouth and your heart" (Altran, 2005).





Riduan Isamuddin, also known as Hambali, was believed to have ordered a new strategy of hitting soft targets such as nightclubs and bars rather than high-profile sites like foreign embassies. He remains detained in Guantanamo Bay but is not linked directly to the bombings. Imam Samudra determined that Bali should be the target. After several

years in judicial custody and court trials, Imam was executed in 2008 along with two others. He captured the myth of foreign conspiracies against the Islamic world, in his trial statements, confessions and in his 2004 book, *Aku Melawan Teroris*, or “I fight terrorism”. He argued that Muslims around the world are oppressed by “America and its allies,” who are “cruel and sadistic monsters.” He wanted to debunk the myth that JI was involved in terrorism because its members were poor, illiterate and misguided by Islamists. He wanted his readers and most Indonesian Muslims to believe that JI was engaged in the righteous path of jihad towards the creation of an Islamic state in Indonesia. His autobiography offered a justification of jihad that eventually became a popular best-seller, inspiring younger men.

### Plot lines

The myth sets up ordinary village boys winning against powerful global or Western forces. Against such power attacking Islam and Indonesia, the myth suggested there was a religious duty to carry out the bombing. Two died in the attack, but even in the myth it is not clear if this was a deliberate act of suicide or if the bombs went off prematurely. As a result, the two are more easily seen as martyrs if they did not deliberately seek their own death. Initially, the three surviving men who were prosecuted for their roles refused to seek a pardon; as their execution dates came

closer, however, all three sought to overturn and appeal their convictions. They were unsuccessful and, in the eyes of JI supporters, became martyrs in 2009. The attack was originally planned for 11 September 2002, to mark the first anniversary of the attacks in the United States. This rationale is connected to a global Islamic Manichean worldview<sup>14</sup>, seeking a dramatic awe-inspiring action. The bombers seem less enthused by desires for an Islamic State, as others in JI have wanted, but were very much focused on hatred of the United States and Christians.

Conspiracy theories quickly emerged in Indonesia. According to these, either the CIA or Israeli Secret Service carried out the attack to demonize Islam, or the Indonesian military instigated it to reassert its power, which had been waning since the fall of Suharto. Finally, many doubted that Al-Qaida or JI had the skills or capacity to carry out an attack of this nature. Alongside Bashir’s denials, this was a view originally held by many in Indonesian politics and in the military. Indonesia’s former president Abdurrahman Wahid argued in 2002 that when it comes to the various bombing cases and arrests of suspected terrorists at that point, “none of the news that terrorists are here is convincing to me.” Lieutenant-General Zaini Maulani, former Head of Indonesia’s National Intelligence Agency, argued in 2003 that the United States was using the threat of Islamic extremism and its war on terrorism to gain control of Indonesia (Singh, 2004). The situation underscores that the myth reflects conspiracies on both sides, Manichean perspectives, and grand spectacular actions.

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14 A Manichean worldview is one where the world is divided into two – good and evil with no ambiguity.



## Function

The Bali bombing myth is one of world-creation and affirmation and it was based on and affirms a world divided in two: a world of war, and a world of Islam or peace. The Bali myths confirm a global conspiracy against Islam, enabling Indonesian jihadis to feel affinity with suffering Muslims in other conflict theatres such as Iraq and Afghanistan. The *Istimata* (or Absolute Struggle) webpage declared: "Let it be acknowledged that every single drop of Muslim blood, be it from any nationality and from any place will be remembered and accounted for... To all you Christian unbelievers ... [t]he cries of the babies and Muslim women...has [sic] never succeeded in stopping your brutality. Well, here we are the Muslim men! We will harness the pain of the death of our brothers and sisters. You will bear the consequences of your actions wherever you are."<sup>15</sup> Local angst and concerns about a secular state that destroys Islam in Indonesia are merged with the global jihadist ideology of Al-Qaida and IS. This creates a moral geography where there is a strict segregation of foreign and indigenous elements. Pancasila is foreign, sharia is indigenous and aspirational; secularism is Western, Islamic is Indonesian; the United States and Israel are conspirators destroying peace in the Islamic world and killing Muslims. Most attacks subsequently follow the Bali model: targeting foreign (non-Islamic) and Western elements. The myth of the simple binary division of power and of people confirms who or what is a legitimate target and who is not in the JI world.

However, the Bali bombing caused divisions and split JI away from Al-Qaida. While many in JI believe that jihad and violence against civilians and non-Muslims are necessary in

areas where Muslims are under direct threat, and so supported other JI attacks in Ambon and Poso, the attack in Bali did not fit this model (Jones, 2005).

## Gender dynamics

First, the Bali myth reveals the desire to **reclaim the perceived perfect masculine self through the perfection of Islam**. This perfect selfhood is constructed through notions of hegemonic masculinity that draw on warrior myths, weapon-wielding jihadis and total annihilation of the enemy for greater good.

Second, by targeting nightclubs and tourism, **the bombers demonstrated that they can act decisively against promiscuity and sinfulness**, thereby reinforcing the link between individual morality, state morality and the need for jihad and reform. **This moral targeting is strategic and gendered** (Mustafa and Tillotson, 2013).

Third, the Bali bombing myths reinforce **patriarchal (*bapakism*) relationships within radical Islam in South-East Asia because of the hierarchal organizing**, and the schooling and training the bombers had under key leaders of JI, creating good sons who are obedient and uphold their religious duty: "the bomb ... was truly the great work of Indonesia's sons".<sup>16</sup> But it also empowered them against hegemonic others. Both Amrozi and Ali Imron boasted about how they, as poor village boys, were able to strike such a blow against powerful Western interests (Fealy, 2004).



<sup>15</sup> *Istimata* webpage [www.istimata.com](http://www.istimata.com) (now shut down) and *Kompas*, 5 December 2002.

<sup>16</sup> Ali Imron cited in *Associated Press*, 17 January 2003; *Jakarta Post*, 17 January 2003.

## Comparisons and analysis

Table 1: Summary of four gendered violent extremist myths

	Context	Key characters	Plot lines	Functions
<b>Jabidah Massacre</b>	Bangsamoros in Mindanao struggle with Christian-dominated rule; desire for self-governance and frustration with discrimination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jibin Arula</li> <li>• Nur Misuari</li> <li>• President Marcos</li> <li>• Major Eduardo “Abdul Latif” Martelino</li> </ul>	Muslim soldiers executed by state for refusing to fight other Muslims.	Origins story
<b>Battle for Marawi</b>	5-month armed conflict between state and ISIS-affiliated groups. 1,000 dead and 4,000 displaced. Led to martial law.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Isnilon Hapilon</li> <li>• Abdullah and Omarkhayam Maute</li> <li>• Father Chito Soganub</li> <li>• Musharraf</li> </ul>	Maute and Hapilon stormed the city to capture it.	Recruitment
<b>Darul Islam Rebellions 1948-1962</b>	Militia engaged in armed conflict against government to set up an Islamic State of Indonesia post Dutch colonial rule. Darul Islam (DI) were established in 1942, but did not disband following independence. Founder was executed in 1962.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Imam Kartosuwiryo</li> </ul>	Two swords used in battle would bring prosperity and victory.	Origins story
<b>Bali Bombing 2002</b>	Jl shift strategy to ‘soft targets’ to help establish “Daula Islamiyah Nusantara” (pan-Islamic state across Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, Brunei). 202 killed; 209 injured	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Imam Samudra</li> <li>• Abu Bakar Ba’asyir</li> <li>• Western “infidels” &amp; colonial ‘Musyrikeen’</li> <li>• Sukarno</li> </ul>	Omar al-Faruq and others plot soft targets, Imam Samudra plans Bali;	Globalisation of local conflict

### Characters: gender and extremism

Across all these myths, women are largely written out of the telling, even when they are central to it. Where they are included, their agency is rendered suspect (as treacherous with their beauty) or relational; as mothers, wives and sisters of the important men in the myths. Masculinity across the myths is presented as heroic when it is a) self-sacrificing and lacking in self-interest and b) connects to a steadfast and stoic manliness. Even in the face of defeat, the heroes of these myths do not surrender, and their goodness is unambiguous. They are

also seen as ordinary men called to greatness by circumstance. Those who became martyrs attain a form of immortality through the myths, and all these heroes become greater or better men and Muslims, not only in their death but in the retelling. They are provoked through the unjust, cruel or un-Islamic behaviour of others and their actions are always defensive, even the Bali attacks. This presents their masculinity and violence as measured, reasonable, and justified, in contrast to oppositional narratives that present them as barbaric, unjust, and irrational. Another key feature of masculinity in the myths is the importance of a father-like figure who shapes, supports, and motivates the



protagonists' actions. There is an element of paternalism within the myths that mimics the social and political norms of Indonesia and the Philippines.

## Plot lines: gender quests and significance

The quests of myths do not fit neatly into the standard narrative structures. This is in part because the myths discussed here result in the martyrdom of the heroes rather than their return home as we find in classical Western myths. As a result, the ability to return home is rewritten as a return to God or paradise. Nevertheless, **the myths provide quests and give significance to future violent acts** by connecting them to past founding events, or as continuing to fight the same Devil.

The plot lines show a great struggle against evil, and even if they lose a given battle, it contributes to the victory of good in the war. By presenting their actions as part of a grand historical struggle, it dehumanizes opponents, who are seen as dogs, shaytan (devils), or unbelievers. Consequently, the myths both grant and deny power to enemies: On one hand, they become worthy opponents who require great skill and courage to overpower, while on the other, the enemy can only be killed.

The other important point from these myths is the importance of religion, and the divine as an active force in the world. They show how God, the divine and religion are not abstract concepts, despite often framing the myths as defensive oppositional political justice. Instead, the divine, by giving his faithful exceptional powers, strength, and aids (such as swords) to succeed, clearly shows groups which side he is on.

## Function: gendered legitimation and meaning-making

The myths make sense within their local contexts; as Durie-Smith's paper also highlights, they connect to existing narratives of the state and anti-colonial or anti-Western framings. The forms of masculinity, while generalizable, are also connected to local cultural norms and ideas. In Indonesia and the Philippines, the connection to revenge is less evident in the narratives (except for the Bali bombings); rather, the myths connect to an idea of challenging deceit and betrayal (these appear like revenge but the framing is different, as it requires ongoing, not merely historic, deceit and betrayal). The myths therefore justify and give meaning not only to certain actions and events in the narration but also to a broader moral geography.<sup>17</sup>

## Conclusion and policy implications

These myths give us great insight into how extremist organizations construct their worldviews and sustain themselves in the face of challenges. The important elements are that the myths are enduring and resist alteration, even in the face of facts that contradict their telling. Myths work to build a coherent picture, linking organizations with the past, the divine, and with place. Myths, through their historicity and moral geography, provide origins, explanations, and justification for ongoing action by individuals and groups. This means that academic or policy theories (such as radicalization theories) that have the individual, not the group, as the primary focus, will be unable to address the recurring

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<sup>17</sup> Moral geography is a term to denote the relationship between morality and space or place. The focus on moral landscapes aims to determine the association of particular landscapes with schemes of moral value. See Matless (1997), Sibley (1995), Cresswell (1996) and Devji (2005).

and connective nature of violent extremism.

Many efforts to prevent violent extremism focus on providing socio-economic alleviation for populations seen to be at risk of violent extremism, and as a mechanism for addressing discrimination and marginalization. However, the centrality of world change and the notion of a quest both for and of significance to the myths of violent extremist groups shows that addressing material conditions is not enough. Certainly, PVE programming must tie these activities to an alternative sense of purpose and different worldview framing.

**Myths are gendered, promoting particular ideas about masculinity that create a gender hierarchy by granting authority, power to those that exhibit valued masculine traits, and legitimating their use of violence.** They reveal that explanations for extremist violence that are rooted in toxic masculinity<sup>18</sup> are less convincing when we look at the myths of these groups because in these myths, their men are heroes who are empowered through their actions against overwhelming odds, and act rationally and in measured ways. **The myths highlight other male characters, including paternal or scholarly figures, which show how in these myths extremist masculinity is not rooted in uncontrolled hot-headedness or youth violence (traits associated with toxic masculinity) but is presented as a guided and considered action. This challenges ideas that violent extremism is a product of angry young men lacking outlets and acting alone.**

Despite these characteristics, myths can be challenged and programming can address the underlying values, plots and gender identities that they support. Moreover, programmers can learn from the myths that violent extremist groups advocate, as

they reveal underlying structural conditions conducive to violent extremism in a particular context and the processes of radicalization that emerge.

## PVE programme and policy recommendations

### Recommendation 1: appeal to different types of masculinity

Violent extremist myths appeal to a range of male behaviours and attributes. This requires programmes shift their focus past those character types actively participating in the turning point event of the myth. Programmers need to consider activities that engage the whole supporting cast of men who appear in these myths, such as the supporters and guides for the hero(s).

### Recommendation 2: focus on the teachable moment

Myths, as narratives, reveal the underlying values and ideas of violent extremist groups and link events in causal chains of explanations. Therefore, rather than focusing on one element of a myth, the facts of an event, or the failings of a hero, alternative narrative efforts should challenge the lessons learned by the heroes in the myth.

### Recommendation 3: address the group as well as the individual

Programmes and interventions need to address the recurring and connective nature of violent extremism. Interventions need to disrupt the autobiographical histories of violent extremist

<sup>18</sup> Toxic masculinity is a term to denote masculine norms that can be harmful to men. It links aggression, irrationality, misogyny and negative health outcomes for men to certain male behaviours, it posits the opposite, a healthy masculinity, as the cure. For an alternative argument see Haider (2016). For a related discussion see Durie-Smith (2018).

groups and the claims to causality within them by addressing underlying conditions. This means the logic of the group's existence and violence, as opposed to the motivation or behaviour of an individual, need to be analysed and addressed.

## **Recommendation 4: construct meaning in programming**

Plot lines show how important quests are for myths. Empowerment for men in violent extremist myths is often paradoxically rooted in narrating agency and autonomy through their submission and sacrifice to the quest. Therefore, programmes need to facilitate opportunities for pursuing pro-social activities and discovering alternative ways to fulfil their sense of purpose and find empowerment.

## **Recommendation 5: disrupt the connections between violent extremist beliefs, belonging and behaviours**

Myths, to exist, do not rely on whether they are true or not, but on whether they are made real through the lived realities of believers. The beliefs of violent extremist groups, as brought out in their myths, connect to their modes of belonging and behaviours. **Disrupting this trio of extremist beliefs, behaviours, and belonging is more important in PVE than attempting to disprove and undermine one of the three components in isolation**

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# Chapter 3

Trajectories of Gender Inequality,  
Identity, and Violent Extremism  
in Rural Bangladesh

*Farhana Rahman*





## Introduction

South Asia, and Bangladesh in particular, receives little attention in research on the prevalence of violent extremism, its underlying gendered impacts in the country and, most importantly, the crucial connections between gender, identity, and violence. The interest of researchers, however, has begun to shift in response to recent deadly attacks in the country. On the night of July 1, 2016, five pro-Islamic State (IS) militants led an hours-long attack on the Holey Artisan Café in an upscale Dhaka neighbourhood. The incident left 29 people dead and catapulted Bangladesh into the international spotlight. Since the attack, research has explored the factors leading to radicalization in Bangladesh, the changing dynamics of violent extremism, and the response from the Bangladeshi government (Khan, 2016; Riaz and Parvez, 2018). Even more important is work highlighting women's roles in countering violent extremism (CVE) in the country. Several prominent reports on CVE, particularly in the context of Bangladesh, provide insight into this growing topic of concern, including some that build on the premise that "women can be powerful partners in fighting violent extremism" (True, 2018).

A further study by Monash University's Centre for Gender, Peace and Security (2017) finds that women occupy the role of "first responders" to potential radicalization within their communities, thus pointing to the need to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. In a similar vein, Iftexharul Bashar (2017) argues that severe challenges in effectively countering violent extremism in the country remain, due to Bangladesh's weak CVE programming; thus, a long-term strategy is required.

While understanding women's roles and engagement in Bangladesh is certainly an important first step to countering and preventing violent extremism, further

research can explore the perpetuation of violence at the macro level and how it initially takes root at the micro level; namely, the home and community. In important ways, violence against women and violent extremism are intrinsically linked. Thus, analysing the prevalence of violence and gender inequality at family, community, and everyday levels helps us understand the role of gender relations, and the construction of masculinity and femininity in violent extremism.

Gender inequality and violence against women is certainly not a new phenomenon in Bangladesh. Indeed, fatwa-related violence in rural areas is a serious concern, at times distorting Islam to resemble the extremism of IS and Al-Qaida. Typically, it is women who are placed at the forefront of the fatwa crisis. In the Libyan case of violent extremism, Sussan Tahmasebi (2017, p. 1) argues that "the targeting of women's rights and the perpetuation of violence against women are strategies used by violent extremists to gain legitimacy within their communities." In this example, violent extremists targeted women based on traditional beliefs and misinterpretations of religious texts.

Similarly, in Bangladesh fatwa-instigated violence remains prevalent in rural areas despite a government ban against it. In the countryside, the practice persists through mullahs (local religious leaders), imams (mosque prayer leaders) and d'objectifs (village political elites). These leaders can promote a patriarchal and authoritative stance on human rights coupled with an ideology of toxic masculinity that underpins a male-dominant status quo in society (Rahman, 2017). For instance, *matabbors* may use widespread social norms in rural Bangladesh, and the position of women in society, to propagate their ideology. The effect is to threaten female agency. As recently as December 2017, a mullah in a local mosque in Kushtia district banned women from leaving their homes to farm in the fields,

claiming that such an action contradicted religious tenets (Daily Sun, 2017).

Previous research conducted in Sylhet and Comilla in rural Bangladesh found that women who engaged with women-centred programming run by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), such as the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), experienced severe consequences within the household, further deepening the gender divide (Rahman, 2017). While on the one hand, women-centred NGO programmes provided independence and opportunities for women, their mobility outside the home became a point of concern for male family members (such as husbands and fathers) and local *matabbors* as the men felt they were losing their control over women (Rahman, 2017). Consequently, the breakdown of traditional gender identities, unequal power relations within the family, and gender inequality in rural contexts spiralled into increased violence against women. The situation led to a greater awareness of how gender relations at the familial and community levels perpetuate violent extremism in its various forms.

Extensive research on the links between local and domestic violence and violent extremism is more readily available in the Western context than in Bangladesh, where systematic research exploring this relationship is scarce. There is also a need to examine how gender identities constructed in day-to-day lives are manipulated for recruitment purposes. Thus, through qualitative research, this paper explores the conditions under which violent extremist views are perpetuated in Bangladesh through stereotyped and traditional constructions of masculinity and femininity. The paper focuses on everyday gender inequality, violence against women, and violence-supportive attitudes at the family and community level. Furthermore, the study explores how these roots can extend to the use of collective violence, including violent extremism.


The research is driven by the following questions:

1. What are the linkages between gender inequality or rigid, restrictive gender norms and violent extremism in rural Bangladesh?
2. In what ways is violence against women used as a strategy to support ideologies that promote violent extremism?
3. How do notions of masculinity and femininity impact gender inequality at the rural level?
4. How do these notions reconfigure mindsets, making them more vulnerable to certain extreme ideologies?

**The research paper clarifies how structural inequality with respect to gender norms at the rural community level in Bangladesh helps construct gender identities and how groups advocating violent extremism can manipulate this inequality.**

Rural communities operate within strong and long-established power hierarchies that place men in a privileged position in society. This hierarchy is maintained through the promotion of strict and clearly defined gender roles, categories, and expectations for men and women. Religious leaders also play a role in maintaining hierarchies, as norms regarding religion and gender can be transmitted to children through madrasa education and mosques. Transgressors of these norms, such as women seeking work outside the home, are viewed negatively by the community and this helps maintain the existing power hierarchy. Norms regarding “appropriate behaviour” may then be manipulated by extremist groups. **It is the relational quality and power dynamics between and among men and women in rural communities, and norms about manhood and womanhood, that create the background conditions for violent extremism.**





Certain extremist groups in Bangladesh sometimes recruit rural members to their rank and file by presenting the group's own ideologies as compatible with community norms. When young men attend madrasas (religious schools), or move from rural villages to urban areas for university study, they encounter various ideologies. They also meet criticism of their rural community practices as regressive. Extremist groups manipulate the insecurity the rural youth may then feel and provide an apparently safe space where those individuals can seek validation of their rural practices. Furthermore, the resentment that arises from such vulnerability helps extremist groups advocate even more hard-line and violent practices, as a means of rejecting those ideologies viewed as "Western" or "liberal". Thus, **this paper helps elucidate how gender inequality and gender norms contribute to further violent extremism on a community and structural level in Bangladesh and how these gender rigidities may lead a person to violent extremism on an individual level.**

A note is warranted on some of the terminology employed here. The focus on toxic masculinity throughout this paper is not meant to essentialize a diverse set of practices into a monolithic term (see Durie-Smith in this volume for detailed discussion of the concept). Use of the term is sometimes criticized for collapsing the variety of masculinities that arise in different societies and treating them as a single concept that may be present or absent at varied levels. In this paper, the notion of toxic masculinity, which signifies masculine gender roles associated with aggression and possibly violence, is broken into its constituent components with the specific goal of understanding how it emerges from a combination of various conditions. This paper offers a granular understanding of the term through my interviews.

The first section delves into the concepts used to frame this research, detailing key background and contextual literature. Secondly, the paper highlights the analytical and research methods employed. Thirdly, I discuss the main qualitative findings that emerged from my interviews and other primary data before finally providing several key recommendations for policy and programming on the prevention of violent extremism (PVE).

## Analytical approach and methods

### Constructions of gender identities in Bangladesh

Gender serves as an entry point for understanding the way constructions of masculinity and femininity in Bangladeshi society play an important role in understanding the intersections across gender inequality, violence against women, and violent extremism. By examining gendered identities – particularly masculinity – and how they are constructed in everyday life, we gain insight into how recruiters manipulate these constructions and influence the choice of men and women to become engaged in violent groups.

Gender is a social construction: Men and women perform behaviours and practices strongly linked to the social order and culture of a society (Kandiyoti, 1988; Lorber, 1994; Butler, 1998; Ferree et al., 1999). Butler (1998) argues that gender identities are not based on inherent biological or natural characteristics, but rather are the "effects of signifying practices rooted in regimes of power-knowledge characterized as compulsory heterosexuality and phallogentrism" that places male dominance at the core of gender construction (Jagger, 2008). Gender norms and behaviours are thus constructed

by deeply entrenched power hierarchies and restricted by regulatory frameworks (Butler, 1998). This construction plays a role in the way gender relations are understood in society, as gender is a way by which societies and cultures construct ideas and knowledge about men and women through placing each in the context of differentiated gender relations. These constructions explain unequal power relations between the sexes and it is through this study of gender relations that feminist scholars have theorized gender relations as ones of domination, and that take place within hierarchies of power and privilege (Kandiyoti, 1988; Flax, 1990; Ferree and others, 1999).

What is central, then, to studying gender is the importance of understanding and analysing societal and cultural constructions of the notions of men and women, masculinity and femininity, and more broadly, how these notions structure human societies (Flax, 1990). Thus, individuals are held accountable for their behaviour by societal and cultural expectations of what is appropriate for men and women, which in Bangladeshi society is guided by strict notions of masculinity and femininity, and expected roles for men and women. These gender theories serve as the backdrop for our qualitative analysis and provide the framework for understanding the way gender identities and roles have meaning within Bangladeshi culture.

## Brief note on fatwa rulings in rural Bangladesh

It is important to note that fatwas play a significant role in the way gender inequality plays out in rural Bangladesh. Fatwa violence is a form of extreme violence particularly set against women. The way fatwas are decreed in Bangladesh misunderstands Islamic jurisprudence. According to a World Bank report, “Fatwa, essentially being a decision or decree on a complex jurisprudential


issue touching upon human reality, cannot be violating or degrading” (World Bank, 2008). Yet some fatwa rulings issued by village mullahs and *matabbors* in rural Bangladesh directly contradict the intention of the decrees. Sometimes local leaders and elites use their authority to enforce personal or political ideologies as they charge women with adultery (*zina*), or for engaging in development activities, premarital relationships, and other activities that may go against local norms or customs (Hodge, 2014). This misinterpretation is due primarily to the lack of formal education of the fatwa-givers in rural Bangladesh who have only attended madrasas and thus issue fatwas without being formally trained as muftis, or Islamic jurists. While the state has expressed anxiety over the increase in rural fatwas, it has also failed to maintain control and regulation over the education system and curricula of madrasas (Hodge, 2014; Rahman, 2017).

Although fatwa punishments are illegal under Bangladeshi law, the persistence of these verdicts in rural communities suggests a distortion of Islamic legal jurisprudence and an erosion of the basic human rights of women in the country (Riaz, 2004). This distortion is due to a complex web of cultural and societal forces and pervasive patriarchal ideologies with local *matabbors* and mullahs using the social norms of rural Bangladesh and the lower position of women in society to further propagate their ideology (Rahman, 2017).

## Research design and data analysis

The research involved **55 qualitative first-hand interviews in three rural sites: Cox’s Bazar and Comilla in southern Bangladesh, and Rajshahi in the north.** The findings help draw a picture of how extremist groups use particular ideologies at the rural level to





their advantage. Through prior networks developed in earlier research, I gained access to these communities and worked with gatekeepers who ensured that my questions were appropriate and sensitive. Rural community members I interviewed were recruited by me initially with the help of my gatekeepers although over time this interaction led to further interviews with other diverse community members.

I interviewed 12 men and 12 women in Cox's Bazar and in Comilla. For this **first group of men and women**, the men were either identified as madrasa students or graduates, and imams or mullahs. The women were more varied; some participants were wives and mothers of madrasa graduates, or of men working in the community, while others were mothers of men studying at university in Rajshahi. The goal of these interviews was to gain insight into at least some of the communities' prevailing norms and practices.

The **second group** of people I interviewed were **university students** in Rajshahi in northern Bangladesh. I chose Rajshahi because of the presence of extremist groups in the area. As well, three of the male university students studying in Rajshahi were also from the village in Cox's Bazar, while one was from Comilla. I was introduced to these young university students by my gatekeepers; while no one was directly associated with terrorist groups, all were acquainted with members of such groups. Given the difficulty in locating such students, I was able to speak with only five male and two female students. From these interviews I began to understand how terrorist groups instrumentalize widespread norms and practices in rural communities – many of which are repressive towards women – to recruit members to their ranks.

All interviews, both individual interviews and focus group discussions, lasted approximately 40 to 50 minutes. I recorded

most comments and notes immediately after the interviews so as not to disrupt the flow of conversation. I used a recorder to tape the interviews and took notes at the same time; these were translated later from Bengali into English. With the aid of my gatekeepers, the transcripts were checked for accuracy upon translation. Due to the sensitive nature of the research, informed consent was obtained from all interlocutors. Questions revolved around toxic masculinity, gender inequalities, the use of fatwas, women's rights, dissatisfaction resulting from the transformation of gender relations, violence against women, and attitudes towards violent extremism. The objective of the interviews was to hear first-hand the voices and perspectives of interlocutors and to discover common themes. Following transcription of the interviews, I began analysing each one using grounded theory approaches, assigning codes to content and ideas, and then creating themes and sub-themes.

Given the limited scope of the fieldwork, there are several limitations worth noting. Firstly, my research was not fixated on finding a direct causal relationship between practices in rural Bangladesh and the ideology of terrorist groups. Rather, I wanted to understand if, and how, extremist groups manipulate the ideologies held by individuals from rural areas who later have contact with such groups. In other words, the research sought to show what type of conditions, initially developed at the rural community level, could be manipulated by extremist groups. It is worthwhile noting here that I do not imply that all such rural community members were necessarily manipulated.

Secondly, my research also focuses on the trajectory of ideologies of students from rural communities; it does not cover those students coming from educated and/or elite backgrounds who subsequently join extremist groups.



Thirdly, the study is limited in size to 55 individuals. The goal is not to make any grand claims regarding the generalizability of the findings, but rather to use the words of a small set of individuals to provide a solid understanding of some of the existing trajectories to violent extremism.

## Key findings

### Toxic masculine ideologies spread through fatwas

The concept of toxic masculinity relates to an understanding of masculinity that reflects attitudes of aggression and, if taken to the extreme, violence (Whitehead, 1999, 2002; Connell, 2002, 2003; Kupers, 2005). The term “toxic” also serves to signify the notion of men’s dominance over women in social affairs, whether in the public or private realm. Elements of toxicity emerge from the social environment in which males are raised, socialized, and taught notions of what it means to be a man. These understandings are reinforced through interactions with male family members and male community leaders who may provide positive reinforcement of aggressive behaviour. Furthermore, exposure to treatment of women that restricts mobility, confines movement, and regulates their interactions in the public sphere also fosters the notion of men’s dominance over women in various areas of social life.

An emergent theme, revealed by interviewees, was a pervasive sense of toxic masculinity among boys and men. **Importantly, a unique aspect of toxic masculinity in the community was its close ties to the issuance and implementation of fatwas by male community members.** When a concern arises among community members, someone such as the community religious leader is asked to mediate the matter. While issues are raised by both men and women in the community, the latter case is less likely since male family

members sometimes curtail women from raising issues that may affect their own image as men. In some cases, women require the tacit or direct permission of males to raise any issue in a public forum.

Regardless of how matters reach the community level, those who deal with the matter are exclusively male. The community imam plays a crucial role in this regard, and authoritative rules often take the form of the issuance of a fatwa. To understand the role of fatwas, it is necessary to first appreciate the central role of the imam in daily life. The imam provides religious lessons in the boys’ madrasa to children aged five to sixteen. He provides lessons to girls from the age of five to nine, after which girls either go to an all-girls institution or disappear from the public space. The centrality of the imam during the formative period of so many young people (of both sexes) reflects his position of respect within the community.

Furthermore, the emphasis on the tenets of Islam as providing the guiding principle in the lives of community members further bolsters the centrality of the imam since his primary job is to disseminate religious knowledge within the community. Even those male community members who do not attend the madrasa hold respect for the imam; they interact with him during visits to the mosque, chance encounters in the community, and vicariously through the discussions and conversations of his followers. Thus, the imam and the religious tenets he promotes play a decisive role in the socialization of community members and the dissemination of norms.

Beyond day-to-day socialization, occasionally a community needs a decisive judgment on a matter. In such instances, the imam issues a verdict in the form of a fatwa. This provides a definitive ruling on the matter based on the imam’s religious interpretation and its application in the specific context. The fatwa is as much an event as it is a judgment. As an





event, the fatwa underlines the centrality of the imam in driving the normative discourse, practices, and perceptions of the community, particularly when any unresolved matters require resolution. The fatwa, therefore, plays a constitutive role, not only for the substantive ruling it provides, but also in its reaffirmation of the existing power structures within the community. As a female university student in Rajshahi stated:

“ You know, imams are the most highly-respected person in the community. The matabbors use imams as a way to exercise their power. So, any matter that needs to be dealt with goes directly to the imam. Even if it’s against Islam, even if it has nothing to do with religion, if the imam says something everyone listens to him. This is how the elite men and matabbors always use the imam for their own political reasons, and this is usually done by giving a fatwa.

Closer inspection of the use of fatwas reveals their entanglement with particular notions of masculinity – from which toxic masculinity sometimes emerges. The operation of fatwas in Cox’s Bazar and Comilla reveals how they affirm the existing patriarchal structures that govern social life. The gatekeepers of rural communities, that is the imams, community leaders, followers, and heads of households (many of whom were previously madrasa students), are exclusively male. The discussions that take place among these gatekeepers exclude the voices of women. Moreover, many issues in the community are filtered by gatekeepers before ever reaching the imam.

The comments of interviewees confirm how fatwas shape notions of masculinity and femininity and structure community patriarchy. In the name of upholding the existing patriarchy, notions of masculinity can sometimes turn toxic, as men become increasingly aggressive in their assertion of authority. Fatwas may then become more

about maintaining those hierarchies than they are about providing religiously-informed decisions. The end result is that women suffer as their rights are neglected, including the right to voice opinions. Ill-informed fatwas can serve as a veneer for the underlying power interests they serve. One woman, unhappy about the use of fatwas in her Comilla community, observed the following:

“ These fatwas are ruining everything. Only men are making all the rules and using religion falsely to say we cannot do this and that. We cannot work. We cannot go outside. Every decision is made by them. Everybody knows that these fatwas are not based on any real Islamic knowledge – men are just using their power willy-nilly to control us. It is these kinds of wrong ideologies that are leading men to do horrible things...Yes, fatwas have a role to play.

When an issue eventually reaches the imam, his ruling provides direction on a matter while also affirming the existing patriarchy. The fatwa serves as the decisive ruling that helps to reaffirm categories of right and wrong that are aligned with existing patriarchies and aggression against women. Once internalized by male community members, these categories translate into behaviour that emerges as toxic masculinity. As a male university student in Rajshahi, also previously a madrasa student in Cox’s Bazar, asserted:

“ You have to have control over your wife to be a real man. A real man uses violence and aggression against his wife to show that he is the boss of the house. This is why men are in charge of the shalish [community-based dispute resolution] and decision-making in the fatwa. I am telling you now, imams listen to everything we say. If we tell them to make a fatwa that women cannot do this thing, they’ll make the fatwa. And the imam will understand that such a fatwa is necessary. At the end of the day, in our society, if you don’t use force on your wife, what kind of man are you?



While this remark was echoed by several interviewees, this student's words were particularly striking as they reveal not only the way in which toxic masculinity lead to aggression against women, but also how the fatwa serves as a device to reinforce such behaviour. While such toxic masculinity reveals the chauvinism associated with the issuance of fatwas, some study participants also pointed out how such male behaviour could be linked to the parochial views held by more extreme terrorist groups. One male community member in Comilla, somewhat weary of the hyper-masculinity promoted by fatwas, stated:

“ These imams say things like “women must not go outside, especially at night. They have to maintain purdah – if women go outside we will hurt them”. If they see women outside, they will ask them “what are you doing here?” It's quite common knowledge that those who are against women have more tendency to join one of these terrorist groups.

This same community member went on to explain how terrorist groups build upon constructions of the world that are black and white. Such categorical thinking makes it even more possible for terrorist groups to superimpose notions of right and wrong, religious and irreligious, and Islamic and un-Islamic onto a mindset already shaped by toxic masculinities.

Fatwas also serve to sustain conditions at the community level that cause toxic masculinity to proliferate. While fatwas in themselves may not necessarily contain terrorist ideologies, violent extremist groups sometimes succeed in mobilizing toxic masculinity through their issuance and attract certain individuals to join their ranks. In this way, fatwas can help integrate extreme ideologies into existing notions of right and wrong.

As noted by an imam in Cox's Bazar, fatwas that direct violence towards women

are not rooted in Islam and should not be seen as such; those who promote such fatwas are thus going against what should be considered the proper behaviour of men and women. As the imam contended:


“ Those imams who promote these ideas are not following the proper teachings of Islam. Our Prophet taught us to treat our wives with care, so those men who show aggression are directly going against our religion. Anybody who does this should not be followed. I make sure to teach this in my community.

The comments above underscore that while fatwas are sometimes used to legitimize violence, it is also true that diverse opinions exist among local community religious leaders on their usage. Some imams may be quite critical of the use of religious edicts to justify power hierarchies between men and women instead of promoting greater respect for women. This imam's remarks indicate the variations that exist at the community level, thereby refuting the notion that processes such as the issuance of fatwas follow a homogenous script. The claim being made in this section is that while some imams issue such fatwas, others actively work to better educate men and it is these leaders who help counter the spread of extremist ideologies in rural communities.

## Creating the “ideal man and woman”

While the previous section explored how fatwas have become tools through which the community perpetuates existing patriarchal hierarchies, it is also important to point out that the community holds ideal types of behaviour for men and women, respectively. These categories help define clear gender roles that sustain the day-to-day functioning of the rural community. In the regular course of socialization, males and females normally adopt these categories without even realizing how they shape their daily lives.





The research indicated that the principle role of a man is to serve as the head of the household. Among rural community members, it is generally accepted that major decisions are taken by the male family head or by another person with his approval. The male head of the household may discuss a matter with his wife if he chooses to do so but it is not required. It is common for men, however, to discuss important matters with other men in the community, usually close family members and religious leaders. As one madrasa student in Cox's Bazar stated:

“ *Men are the boss of the house. This is how it should be. When we have decisions to make, we consult each other – there is no need to consult the women.* ”

Furthermore, it is principally the man's role to take care of tasks in the public domain such as earning an income, attending public office if necessary, acquiring goods from markets outside of one's immediate vicinity, and interacting with other community members.

A woman, however, is expected to remain within the household and nearby areas. Her role is to maintain domestic affairs. She provides support to her husband by performing various domestic affairs, whether cooking, cleaning, making household purchases from nearby markets, and ensuring the general order of the house. While some view this position as subordinate to the men of the household, many of the women I interviewed view their position as complementary. Several women expressed contentment with their role in the household and shunned the idea of having to deal with the stress and hustle of working in the public domain. As one woman in Comilla commented:

“ *We are happy in the way things are here. We prefer staying at home – there is a lot of stress working outside and lots of difficulty. We're not used to that. We believe a woman's place is within the household – it has been like that for generations and* ”

*that is how it should be. Why should we try to change this now? It has worked for our mothers and grandmothers. Men go outside to do the 'outside' work, and we do the 'indoor' work.*

Importantly, maintaining this equilibrium within the household requires that women remain obedient to their husband. As suggested above, many women see this simply as the natural order of affairs. When asked whether they felt disempowered, some women pointed out that their primary task is to maintain the household and ensure that their children and other family members are all looked after, whether her husband's parents or other relations in the household or nearby. Child rearing was viewed as an activity that only females are fully capable of performing. Thus, the willingness of these interviewees to adhere to the direction of their husbands was connected to the agency they gained by playing the central role in childrearing.

Community dynamics remain stable when all members follow their prescribed scripts. Those fulfilling their expected roles without any sign of issues arising in their household receive tacit rewards from other community members. The reputation of the family increases as others view their behaviour favourably and as a positive contribution to the community. The husband gains respect in the eyes of others for his ability to maintain his household and provide the family with adequate resources. The woman of the house increases in public esteem through her ability to listen to her husband, maintain the dignity and upkeep of the house, and raise the children. This positive reinforcement plays a crucial role in the reproduction of these idealized categories of performing “manhood” and “womanhood” since individuals naturally incline towards behaviour that is rewarded and supported by other community members. As one madrasa student in Cox's Bazar noted:

“ Our society is built on community respect. It is important for others to view you in a positive way. If they do not, then you are not a proper man – you don’t know how to keep your family in order.

As the research suggests, disciplining one’s wife may help a man maintain his dignity. For instance, some men commented on how when a woman goes outside her domestic role by taking up employment, speaking to members of the opposite gender, or not showing adequate respect to her husband, he may physically discipline her with the tacit support of many in the community. In doing so, the man demonstrates that as household head he can maintain order when those under him fall out of line.

Respect is highly valued by both men and women. People go to great lengths to outwardly perform their expected gender roles, even if it masks other characteristics. For example, certain men adopt abusive behaviour within the household. Sometimes this may be due to an inability to find meaningful employment or by consuming too many locally produced intoxicants. At other times, such behaviour is a means for a male to vent his anger, whether due to the spouse’s actions or those of another person. As one woman in Cox’s Bazar said of her husband’s strong interest in extremist groups that condone violence:

“ Before he became more interested in the teachings of these groups, he was always abusive and would remind me of what my place is. He was never particularly religious ever, so it was strange to me when he showed interest in these groups, especially because he was always a big drinker. His biggest problem is he drinks a lot, and then he becomes extremely angry. But it is hard for me to share with others that he has a drinking problem because that would make me a bad wife to share his shortcomings with others. I need to always

show others that he is a good, religious man – even if he is not.

As the research suggests, a wife may hide any problems in the household since the spread of such information may affect her image negatively if others view her as unable to serve her husband and take care of the household. Furthermore, the husband may suffer reputational damage if rumours were to spread that impugned his character – a situation that may also result in future abusive behaviour in the household.

Women generally complained about the hypocritical behaviour of men in their community who act one way outwardly though differently in private. As one community woman in Comilla contended:

“ The men who are the most active have a superiority complex and think they are better than everyone else. It is good to respect those who have true knowledge of Islam and understand the religion. But in our community, these men walk around wearing a tupi and panjabi and somehow believe they are a perfect example of a man. For them, the outward appearance is always more important than actually doing good deeds. They are always preaching that a good Muslim man does such and such a thing, he must dress this way, treat the women this way, do that. But the problem is that they are also preaching many things that are against Islam. Many madrasa students always do this.

Insurgent groups may seek to utilize these gender categories as a basis to promote their own ideologies of what being an ideal man and woman should mean in society. The coming together of rural notions of gender and their connection to religion with differing university perspectives provides an opening for extremist groups to recruit. As young men continue to study in madrasas and move from rural areas to attend universities, they become increasingly exposed to new



ideologies, such as those that encourage greater participation of women in the public space. Moreover, these ideologies often also justify their discourse through religious doctrine, as explained by one female university student in Rajshahi:

“ *But Islam does not restrict women – Allah has given women rights, but here in our culture, especially in the rural villages, men always take away women’s rights and create certain ideas of what a good woman is – that their place is in the home. And a good man is someone who should have superiority over men. Yes, men and women have different responsibilities, but Islam did not say anywhere women can’t work or shouldn’t have a say in decision-making in the home. That is not what our religion teaches us. Even our Prophet’s wife was a successful businesswoman and was a leader in her community. It is these kinds of wrong thinking in the villages that make men think there is only one way to be a good man.*

Thus, young men who move from conservative rural environments to study in madrasas or to the large cities where liberal discourses are present are sometimes castigated for their “backward” beliefs about men and women – beliefs that may contradict more progressive understandings. The situation presents extremists with an opportunity to capitalize on this vulnerability; they can provide young men with a safe space where their understanding of gender norms is not only preserved but also respected and encouraged.

### Limits of parenting

While the categories of ideal man and ideal woman provide a template for behaviour within the community, realities within rural communities reveal these categories to also contain significant boundaries, although these are not always apparent. Interviewees

mentioned parenting as one of the principal tasks of women. They noted that rather than spending time in the public sphere, a mother should busy herself with domestic affairs, such as raising children. The position of the woman, therefore, seemingly places her in an ideal position to provide her children – particularly her sons – with various ethical values such as respect for women. However, based on concerns raised by research participants, the reality of rural women’s lives reveals their limited ability to spread such values.

While women in rural communities provide primary support to their children up to a certain age, adolescent boys are no longer primarily socialized by their parents (and particularly, their mother). Rather, the larger community takes over this role, as norms and practices enter the social world of adolescent children. Rural women face a common reality that the agency they gain in being in control of domestic affairs extends only over the early years of their children’s lives. The result is that in being socialized mostly by their fathers and the male-led community, male children and adolescents eventually adopt the general mindset that women are subordinate to men and that the man is the leader of the household. Sons may gradually change from being dependent on their mothers to being disrespectful and at times abusive towards them, though these sons are not necessarily aware of this change in their behaviour. Indeed, society tacitly encourages such behaviour. Moreover, women are often powerless to change the situation, since they lose the ability to control their children’s affairs after a certain age. Many women come to terms with this loss of influence by simply accepting it. As one woman in Comilla observed:

“ *My son is only 15 years old but since he was 10, he has been slowly going away from my control. I am not able to tell him*

*anything and he never listens to me. There is general respect but you know in our society, especially growing up with poverty, these boys become men so quickly. Then they start making all the decisions and leave us behind. He spends a lot of time mostly with his father in the family shop at the bazaar and then with the other men in the village. I hardly see him all day. If I do see him, it's just when he needs money from me.*

Sons are particularly encouraged to prove their manhood among peers and other males in the community. By ascribing to the values expected of males, sons show their transition into adult members of the community. The expectations of males are transmitted through peer interactions, lessons in the madrasa, mosque, and school, and through lessons from adults. As a community man in Cox's Bazar noted:

“Boys must spend time with their male elders in the community. That is the only way they will successfully learn what is expected of them in society. No boy should be with the women and doing women's work – that is not right in our community.

Women, however, are not asked for their opinions, nor are they given a voice in community affairs and in raising children beyond a certain age. Rather, a woman is tacitly rewarded by the community with respect for her ability to raise children up to a certain age and then allowing her sons to become men while she herself remains in a subordinate position. Throughout this transition, a woman is not expected to provide her opinion. One woman in Comilla explained this reality as follows:

“Women are not asked their opinion when it comes to raising their sons. My husband always says he knows better about what is best for my son so I let him take charge. There is no point in arguing because nobody will listen. I know everything that

*is going on – all the problems that my son is facing – but I cannot argue with my husband. I want to help my son, but I cannot argue with my husband.*

The research revealed that young men are socialized by the larger community where they will have a voice while women's voices are largely silenced. **The unfortunate consequence of this diminished role for mothers is the lost potential to counter violent extremism despite being well positioned to identify potentially extremist ideologies among adolescents and young adults. If their position in the family and community afforded them greater respect, they could possibly reorient such children.** As the reflection of a woman in Cox's Bazar suggests, it is difficult for mothers to exert any influence over their older sons:

“My son, who is a madrasa graduate, is extremely religious now, which is good, but he is becoming more and more controlling especially towards his younger sisters – telling them how to dress and what where not to go. He was also involved in one of the fatwas that took place a few years ago. My husband is old now so my son is the head of the household. I cannot tell him anything to make him listen to me. He has been making a lot of the decisions in the house, whether financial or otherwise. I don't always agree with what he is doing, but I am just a mother...which son listens to his mother after a certain age?

The constraints on women's parenting play an important role in not only the reproduction of patriarchal hierarchies in the community but also the ability of extremist groups to manipulate such mindsets. Not all, or even most, children who adopt hard-line views in their youth end up being attracted to extremist ideologies. But among those who do, rural women recognize that, were they aware of such ideologies brewing within their children, they would not be in a position







to make any significant changes. As some young men go on to university and become more extreme in their views, they also recycle these perspectives into the community, thus sometimes asking female family members to be stricter in their practice of purdah and covering their faces when going outside. As one male university student in Rajshahi stated:

“ I don't know whether, if my mother told me to stop, I would necessarily listen to her. You know, our parents come from a different generation and they are not educated like us. So many times we know better than them. Maybe I would listen to my father but that's because he also goes to the mosque and has more direct access to religious knowledge than my mother and knows better than her.

## Competition and an inferiority/superiority complex

A discussion on countering violent extremism would be incomplete if it did not address how competition between the sexes, and changing notions of masculinity, shape the behaviour and decisions of individuals. Among my interlocutors, **an emergent theme concerned the superior status men hold over women and how this is compromised when women seek to work outside of the house and become more active in the public sphere.** This shift in the role of men and women pulls at traditional notions of masculinity and femininity, with men feeling increasingly insecure. Indeed, this dynamic can lead to a perception of competition rather than cooperation in their respective roles. As men feel their masculinity increasingly under attack, they begin to harbour resentment and anger against women, thus seeking to change their condition through the violence expressed by fatwa decrees. Indeed, in certain instances extremists may be able to exploit

the frustration felt by men. The ideologies and even the violent acts of extremist groups offer such men a sense of vindication and the opportunity to reclaim their manhood.

In rural communities, men are commonly breadwinners outside the home while women remain largely outside the public eye. Tensions sometimes arise once women start to play a more direct economic role in the running of the house. By serving as the sole breadwinner, a man can assert his leadership position in the household through his economic authority, as decision-making is attached to finances. Men establish their self-worth through their economic contribution to the family. When a wife starts to contribute to the family income, the traditional model is disrupted. The instability that ensues creates an inferiority complex as men struggle to re-assert their role as head of the household. As a male community member revealed:

“ I felt a lot of resentment towards my wife that she could secure full-time employment. She always used to say that she wanted to buy so many beautiful things but I was not able to buy them for her. We used to fight a lot and she always accused me of not being man enough to hold down a job. It is too much pressure. Women are always getting more opportunities than us. It's not acceptable at all. Their place is in the home – this modern thinking of going out to work is against our culture.

**The research indicated that young men feel particularly resentful towards these shifting gender dynamics.** In the transition into adulthood, young men are often expected by peers to assert their manhood as evidence of their maturity. In the private domain, this means taking control of their families as the leader of the household. This position then facilitates their interaction with other household (male) leaders in the public domain. If a woman seeks to enter the public domain and gain work, many men feel that



this threatens their position as leaders of the house. Thus, in seeking to maintain the existing hierarchy in the household, as well as the prevailing relational structure vis-à-vis other community members, a man may be expected to control his wife by preventing her from gaining a work position.

A man's inability to control his wife may be taken as an indication of his weakness on two fronts: First, he may be viewed as unable to support his family and second, in terms of his household, he will be viewed as unable to control his wife. When the man quoted above spoke, a male friend jumped into the conversation and added his own thoughts regarding the speaker's feelings of resentment and anger:

“ That's because you don't know how to control your wife! The role of a woman should be to stay at home and cook for you. She should not be working outside. Our fathers didn't make our mothers go to work, why are we doing this now? I would slap my wife if she did something like this.

The friend's comments underscored how a man's self-image is tied strongly to widely held opinions within the community on the appropriate hierarchies within a person's household and what is acceptable as appropriate action against a wife. Since images of manhood take shape in the public domain, what is viewed as appropriate for a man are those that are accepted across the community. Failure to control one's wife brings the husband under the suspecting gaze of other male community members. This community dynamic brings shame to the husband as his manhood becomes an issue of public discourse. At the same time, the public scrutiny serves as a mechanism through which the entire community reproduces the existing patriarchal hierarchy. Men who fall outside the existing normative structures because they have lost control of their female

family members are regarded as weak men and afforded little respect in the community.

Men often complained about having unreasonable expectations placed on them. On the one hand, they were expected to be the sole breadwinners of their family, whereby the woman of the house could focus her energies within the household. On the other hand, the men were expected to find adequate income in a market with shrinking opportunities. Thus, the competing pressures of community norms and market realities only added to the bitter resentment felt by many young men. As one unemployed young man in Cox's Bazar, facing financial stress, remarked:

“ I sent my wife to work, but now everyone says I am a bad man for allowing her to work with other men while I stay at home. Sometimes I tell her to stop working. People make a lot of gossip. But then I think, where will we get food if we have no money? Why aren't there more jobs for us men? Lots of companies and NGOs always only want to include women and forget that we [men] are supposed to be the breadwinners.

Noteworthy in this last statement is the moral dilemma this man faced between his own self-image and the household's economic insecurity. Without a way to reclaim his manhood, the man shifts responsibility for his predicament from himself to companies and NGOs. Such NGO initiatives were seen by many respondents as only exacerbating a problem that was starting to take root in the community. Another young man in Cox's Bazar made the following allusion to the perceived trouble related to the increasing presence of NGOs:

“ The NGO types are the biggest problems. They are always giving women jobs. All the workshops and programmes, everything is about "women's empowerment". Now





*because of this women's empowerment, women are going into the public sphere and working, which makes it more difficult for us men to find jobs. But we have to be the breadwinners – we have to take care of our families, not just wives, our parents, siblings and others. So, when women come and take the opportunities for us, you tell me, how should that make me feel when I am supposed to be the man of the house? It makes me so angry, I always fight with my wife...yes, because of this I do beat her sometimes, but I feel she deserves it.*

In summary, the changing role of women in the community has created a number of new insecurities for men. Firstly, the entrance of women into the workplace is changing the dynamic within some households since men are no longer viewed as the patriarch in control of their wives. Secondly, economic constraints compound this changing dynamic, placing added pressures on men to be the sole breadwinner even when jobs are scarce. Thirdly, the increased presence of NGOs, which often focus on rural women, further increases insecurities in young men by providing opportunities only for women. These factors combine to further upset community dynamics. Some men who experience increased frustration, as they feel their manhood is attacked, lash out through violent acts against their wives.

Another man in Cox's Bazar, however, noted that masculinity in his community is not necessarily attached to how well one can provide for his family or more traditional constructions of dominant masculinity. Instead, masculinity is rooted in being a "good man" – one who is kind-hearted and shows respect for his wife and others. As he remarked:

“ Here in rural Bangladesh we are poor people, most of us are all trying to live an honest, simple life. I try my best to be a good man and treat my wife with respect.

*I am not opposed to her going outside to get a job. I don't like to beat her or use force with her. But the problem is also that we are ridiculed in our community if we do not use some force. People will say we are becoming weak like women.*

The interviewee's comments point to constructions of masculinity within the community that are at odds with each another. On the one hand, there is the goal of being a "good man" while on the other hand, he faces pressure to be more aggressive and "forceful" so as not to be viewed "like a woman". Aware of the ongoing tension with respect to masculinity in their lives, such community men constantly seek to strike a balance between the two perspectives. In so doing, they challenge categories such as "inferior" and "superior" since some men seek to assert their masculinity through empowering and respecting women.

Nonetheless, these changing community dynamics allow extremist groups to provide an outlet for certain men who feel they have been "pushed to the end" and can no longer bear humiliation before their families and communities. The discourse of extremist groups reasserts the importance of the patriarch in the proper functioning of a household. These groups may provide such embittered men a safe space and validation. As recounted by one madrasa student in Cox's Bazar, whose friend had joined a militant group a few years earlier:

“ With all the luxuries women are getting these days – education, going out to work and so on – my friend became very angry. He was always arguing and complaining to the imam to do something about it. He was one of the ones that created a fatwa against women leaving the house to do NGO work – it was a big problem in our village. He didn't want women to leave the house at all, do any work, even to go to the market. He didn't listen to anybody

*and then eventually he got very upset and moved away with the group. I don't know where he is exactly now.*

Extremist groups seek to go a step further by providing frustrated men with an outlet to prove their manhood. By adopting hard-line ideologies, young men may be able to transform their feelings of resentment into expressions of male domination and women's subordination, as well as hostility towards "Western influences" such as those brought about by NGOs. Expressions of bravado help a man regain his manliness, thereby raising his self-image. Honour and self-respect coalesce in an act that is simultaneously vengeful; it has at its core a redemptive element, while also leading to a sense of contentment in having regained one's dignity. As one male university student in Rajshahi stated:

I feel frustrated when I think of the political situation and the very difficult situation we have to grow up in. There are no opportunities for us. There are so many expectations on us to take care of our families. When I am not able to provide what is socially expected of us men, you tell me how I should feel then? I am always frustrated. This frustration can sometimes lead to violence against the women in my family. I know one student here who joined a group because he really needed the money. Honestly, if someone offers me a lot of money to join such a group, I might do it. There is so much pressure on men to take care of our families. It would be better for me to take the money if it means I can take care of my family...Yes, I would definitely join the group for money.

## Discussion

The findings above highlight the various factors that explain how ideologies in Bangladesh's rural communities lead to a sharp demarcation of gender roles. When young men from these communities attend


madrasas, or travel to university and become exposed to extremist ideologies, rural community norms are manipulated, making these men increasingly prone to violence, particularly against women.

Gender violence against women must be viewed as a product of the construction of both male and female gender norms. Constructions of masculinity and femininity, established at the rural community level, inform the norms that community members are expected to follow. These norms maintain and reproduce various power hierarchies in the community and ultimately confine the movement and participation of women in the public sphere. Women's activities are monitored by their husbands and other male family members – including their sons – as well as by the community.

Men are expected to work and provide support to their families by participating in the public sphere and remaining the leader of the household, while women are expected to limit their activities to domestic affairs. It is the relational quality and power dynamics between and among men and women, and the norms about manhood and womanhood, that create the background conditions for violent extremism (Kuehnast and Sudhakar, 2011). These relational qualities exist not only by looking at the relationship between husband and wife, but also between mother and son, father and son, and so forth.

The research focus on the two rural communities of Cox's Bazar and Comilla stresses that ideologies travel across spaces and may transform in the process. Within rural communities, patriarchal hierarchies are used to maintain power structures at the community level. However, when young men attend madrasas or travel to universities (Rajshahi in this instance), these hierarchies are then transformed as they encounter other perspectives. For instance, young men





from rural communities who go on to attend universities in urban areas may develop resentment in response to discourses that paint their home communities as regressive. Violent extremist groups latch onto this insecurity by validating and supporting strict categories similar to those found in rural communities. Furthermore, violent extremist groups channel men's frustration into allowable forms of violence that also further promote this separation of gender categories. Thus, such men are more prone to violence against women as a means of promoting gender rigidities while simultaneously supporting more extreme ideologies that condone and even promote violence.

**It is critical, therefore, to view violent extremism as more than simply fatwas issued by rural imams. It is vital to see the deeper structural issue regarding how violent extremist ideologies are developed by manipulating community practices.** At the level of rural communities, fatwas serve to uphold prevailing patriarchal structures and ultimately create a specific understanding of the world as well as form notions of femininity and masculinity. As such, the social construction of what it means to be manly plays an important role in hindering gender equality through the perpetuation of fatwas that promote and legitimize violence.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that this research does not claim that all forms of violence at the local community level are causally related to violent extremism. Patriarchal structures exist to help reproduce the prevailing hierarchy that allows men to remain the decision makers and power holders in their communities. However, this process does not necessarily (nor is it sufficient to) lead to extremist ideologies. **Rather, this study finds that extremist ideologies that promote violence may emerge from a combination of the movement of young men from their communities to hard-line**

**madrasas or universities in more urban areas, exposure to competing ideologies, feelings of insecurity and resentment, and, importantly, contact with violent extremist groups keen to exploit youth dissatisfaction for their own purposes.**

The combination of these factors begins to explain how rural community-level practices may ultimately lead some individuals to adopt violent extremist ideologies. Such ideologies promote and legitimize violence, which in turn foster gender inequality and violence against women. **Violence against women thus becomes a means of proving manhood and family leadership as well as rejecting non-extremist ideologies.** As such, this paper contributes to understanding how gender inequality and gender norms may enable violent extremism at the community and structural level in Bangladesh; it helps clarify how these gender rigidities may lead a person to turn towards violent extremism on an individual level.

## Policy and programming recommendations

**Help rural communities become aware of how their practices can be manipulated by extremist groups.**

While rural communities are certainly not the reason violent extremist groups exist, communities can foster practices that such groups can attempt to manipulate for their own ends. Rural communities need to be made aware that extremist groups sometimes recruit community members to their ranks by first validating rural community practices. Awareness-raising is the first step in enabling rural community members to recognize this manipulation and take steps to counter

it. Greater awareness of the factors that can lead to violent extremism would allow community leaders to distinguish between local notions of masculinity and more toxic forms of masculinity – the latter being much more susceptible to violent extremism. It is critical that local leaders and lay members, along with NGOs, engage in community-level dialogues on the topic of violent extremism to identify how individuals may intervene to help combat its presence.

### **Educate men and women on the role of families in preventing violent extremism.**

Both men and women need to understand that the family plays a crucial role in countering potential violent extremism. As fathers (or male guardians) play a significant role in influencing children's lives, men must be made aware that a culture that fosters the ill-treatment of women in domestic affairs risks allowing violent extremist tendencies to go unnoticed and unchecked. Both men and women need education on recognizing the signs that their children, particularly adolescent sons, may be moving towards violent extremism. Unaddressed tendencies may have repercussions for the entire community, both male and female. Programming for both men and women is required to improve parenting skills, child development, and to understand gender norms. Such programming also needs to recognize men's burdens and social pressures, and help community members to discern early warning signs of radicalization. For example, religious leaders, who already provide religious education to young men, are well-positioned to emphasize the role that men need to play in child-rearing, which could include early identification and addressing of potentially radical ideologies.

### **Employment opportunities for women must take place alongside the creation of similar opportunities for men.**


If women are provided employment in a context where men do not have such opportunities, there is potential to create community resentment and exacerbate hostilities towards women. Violent extremist groups may use these tensions to prey on men who harbour resentment towards women. To avoid potential backlash against women and men who allow wives to work outside the home, community leaders, imams, and local NGOs must focus on awareness initiatives that stress the importance of employment for both men and women. **Efforts need to coincide with policy planning that stresses equal provision of work opportunities. One step would be for NGOs to emphasize hiring men who may then be included in the organization's various initiatives.**

### **Consider power differentials in programmes that address gender inequality.**

Programmes that promote gender equality, whether through women's participation in community affairs or otherwise, **must be mindful of the way power hierarchies operate in the community.** Rural communities are structured to perpetuate patriarchal hierarchies. Programmes that counter these hierarchies run the risk of creating problems in the community as men may feel that their way of life is under threat. Such feelings of vulnerability may then be manipulated by violent extremist groups and subsequently translated into violence against women as well as opportunities for recruitment.







In addition, as men play an influential role in the decision-making of their children's lives, programmes must leverage this role and promote gender equality by integrating men into the process. It is vital to design community-level human rights-based programming that raises awareness of how gender norms hinder women's empowerment. This can be done by including men as key partners in women's empowerment. Furthermore, awareness of the social pressures that affect men's mental health can help foster much-needed discussion around the factors that leave men vulnerable to recruitment by violent extremists and the appropriate steps to counter such an outcome.

### **Gender programming should help empower women in the domestic sphere, rather than take such empowerment for granted.**

There is a false understanding among policymakers that women always have a strong role in the domestic sphere even if they are not visible in public. Instead, the research indicates that many women feel disrespected by husbands and sons (noting that they feel "invisible"). In interviews, women highlighted that they are indeed aware of power hierarchies; the real issue is that they are simply not listened to by males. As well, to keep peace in the family, women may not speak up against their husbands and children. Thus, **there is a need to help empower women as sisters, wives, mothers, and daughters so that they have a stronger voice within the home. Without voices to speak up against their children, mothers can be passive or active enablers of violent extremism** (often unknowingly).

Programming, therefore, needs to provide tools to help women speak up when family members shift towards radicalization. One practical step would be to encourage the formation of community-level collectives consisting of other women. Study participants sometimes fixated on the false binary of women either having to remain in the house or finding employment outside. However, there are many other productive activities that women can play in the public sphere besides working. For instance, they can meet with other women to educate one another, exchange experiences, provide mental and emotional support and organize community activities. Local NGOs could help provide a sense of organization, enabling community women to be the driving force in these collectives.

### **Researchers need to examine the nexus between rural community leaders and violent extremism.**

Further research must be conducted on the role community leaders can play in countering violent extremism. On the one hand, male community leaders, particularly imams, play a key role in perpetuating categories, such as ideal notions of manhood and womanhood, and these can consolidate patriarchal hierarchies. On the other hand, these same leaders may not necessarily ascribe to extremist ideologies. Thus, **further research must consider the potential role community leaders can play in actively directing men away from violent extremism.** By extension, greater focus on community leaders also raises the relational dynamics between all members of the community. Further research on the myriad roles and relationships found in rural communities can help to identify how best to combat and prevent violent extremism.



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# Chapter 4

## Sexual and Gender-based Violence Reporting and Terrorism in Asia

*Jacqui True*



## Introduction

There has been significant research into the conditions under which mass or large-scale sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) occurs and where the risk factors for such violence increase (Heise and Kotsadam, 2015). We know, for instance, that SGBV is heightened during recognized civil conflict (Cohen and Nordås, 2014), in natural disasters and humanitarian disaster response (Neumayer and Plumper 2007) and during large events such as football matches and sizeable development projects involving housing evictions and land confiscation (True, 2012; Cohen and Nordås, 2014). But does reported sexual and gender-based violence increase alongside the rise of violent extremism that leads to terrorist events?

There remains a gap in the literature regarding how sexual and gender-based violence, and distortions of masculinity, relate to acts of violence leading to terrorism. To develop policy and programmes that address terrorism and violent extremism, further research is needed on the relationship between gender inequality, sexual and gender-based violence, and the presence of violent extremist and terrorist groups. SGBV is not limited to conflict situations; indeed, women and girls experience sexual and physical violence both from ideological/militant/violent extremist groups and counter-terrorism security forces. Further, the latter is often the reason why women become resisters and combatants (Brown, 2018; Parashar, 2014). **Importantly, this research paper asks whether an increase in the reports of sexual and gender-based violence is a lead indicator or precursor to terrorist violence.**

Data is now available to measure both SGBV reports and terrorist attacks; however, the measurement of violent extremist acts is more complicated due to the lack of consensus on the definition of such acts. Exploration of the relationship between terrorist acts and SGBV reports has crucial implications for early warning systems and preventing violent extremism from leading to terrorist attacks. With more information on the location of crimes, of the perpetrators, and of the organizations reporting SGBV, we can better report, respond to, and prevent future violence (Caprioli, 2005).

In Asia, the history of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence is deep. Painful testimonies of rape and sexual violence reach back to the Rape of Nanking (Chang, 2012), the experiences of Korean *comfort women* in World War II (Yoshimi, 2002), the tribulations of South Asian women during the Wars of Partition in India and Pakistan in 1947 and the 1971 Bangladesh War (Da Costa, 2010), and the forced marriages and sexual slavery during the Cambodian genocide (Tyner, 2018). At the same time, there is little knowledge about the prevalence and patterns of SGBV in Asia<sup>1</sup>. Beyond single-case studies no research has yet examined the relationship between SGBV and terrorism in the region. **Thus, this paper also asks a new question: To what extent are reports of sexual and gender-based violence associated with – or have even anticipated – acts of terrorism in Asia?**

<sup>1</sup> Surveys commissioned by The Asia Foundation (2017) suggest that GBV is one of the deadliest types of violence in Asia, killing more women across the region than armed conflict. It should be borne in mind that GBV is undoubtedly part of conflict dynamics, but that it also exists before and after armed conflict.

## State of knowledge on patterns of sexual and gender-based violence and political violence

Despite the recognition of acts of sexual and gender-based violence as international crimes, scholars continue to struggle to explain why and when this violence is used in conflict, and what is unique about its occurrence in conflict (Henry, 2016). Some scholars argue that conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence is likely to be heightened in the context of above-average, systemic and structural gender inequality (Davis, True and Tanyag, 2016). Moreover, recent research has shown that societies with higher levels of gender equality are less at risk overall of being both targets/victims and/or creating perpetrators of terrorist violence (Salman, 2015). The causal pathways through which gender equality affects the occurrence of terrorist events have yet to be fully explored. The implication of this macro research, however, is that more equal gender norms and societal structures that uphold women's rights may well be protective factors against the rise of extremism that condones or promotes violence and terrorism. Gender inequalities within states are already known to affect conflict and state behaviour in a range of ways. During crises, the instigation of conflict and the escalation and severity of violence are exacerbated in states with greater domestic gender inequality (Caprioli, 2005).


In the field of political science and international relations, crucial typologies of sexual and gender-based violence in conflict situations have been developed (Boesten, 2017). This violence includes opportunistic, instrumental, and genocidal crimes as well

as gender-targeted persecutions (Baaz and Stern, 2013). Such crimes are perpetrated by one or more sides (ethnic, political, religious, or criminal groups) that are in conflict (Da Costa, 2010). The perpetrators may be state or non-state actors. They may be men and women, soldiers, militias, or civilians.

An analysis of all relevant books, research and review articles on the topic sexual violence in conflict published in social sciences journals and books between 1998 and 2018, however, reveals that most of these 418 publications identified just three main types of conflict to help understand sexual violence patterns: civil war, war (interstate conflict), and the ceasefire peace process (Web of Science, 2019). Most studies and datasets, however, tend to select cases of sexual violence within one of these types of conflict; in other words, they are studies of patterns of sexual violence in civil wars or comparative studies of civil wars and interstate conflicts (Cohen and Nordås, 2014). Studies of sexual violence during public protests, locations of terror attacks and one-sided violence against civilians (such as genocide) are all single-case study explorations (Brown, 2018; True and Eddyono, 2017).

Qualitative and quantitative studies on sexual violence in armed conflict point to a tip-of-the-iceberg phenomenon (Palermo and Peterman, 2011), where there is a high prevalence of SGBV but a low level of reporting. However, the norm of reporting sexual violence is shifting, and the number of reports grows each year (Skjelsbaek, 2018). For instance, the International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict directs humanitarian organizations to document the crimes that they witness (Maras and Miranda, 2017) and calls on states to not supply arms to countries where sexual and gender-based violence is widespread (Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 2019). It is





also important to note here that increased reporting may fail to reflect the scale, intensity, or diversity of crimes and their geospatial location – notably at the subnational level and in fragile situations. Certainly, this is an opportune moment, both politically and academically, to examine the relationship between the patterns of reported SGBV and terrorist attacks.

SGBV against women and girls is pervasive in the Asian region, even before accounting for the effects of conflict or terrorism. The prevalence rate, however, varies within and across Asian countries. Ever-partnered<sup>2</sup> women in South-East Asia have been found to have the highest lifetime prevalence of physical violence of those in any region (37.7 percent), second only to Africa (World Health Organization, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and South African Medical Research Council, 2013). In the 2010 Global Burden of Disease study, the South-East Asia region also recorded the second-highest prevalence rate of intimate partner violence at 41.73 percent, after Central sub-Saharan Africa. A UN survey of men and women in nine rural and urban sites across six countries found men’s perpetration of intimate partner physical and sexual violence extremely common, with rates of 26 percent to 80 percent across sites, and women’s experience of partner victimization at 25 percent to 68 percent. Among women respondents, between 10 percent and 59 percent reported rape by a non-partner. According to the study, the majority of men perpetrating rape – between 72 percent and 97 percent of those, across the nine sites – did not experience any legal consequences (Fulu et al., 2013).

We expect that acts of terror would increase the prevalence of these types of gender-based violence. But research has found causal links of several types, and in both directions. There is some evidence that sexual assault, rape and other violence may be used to shame or lure victims into joining or supporting terrorist groups (Brown, 2018; True and Eddyono, 2017). Women have joined militant or guerrilla groups of all ideological persuasions after experiencing sexual violence not just within their own communities but especially when perpetrated by state security forces in their counter-terrorism efforts (Komnas Perempuan, 2006, 2007, 2009). Where there is heavy military counter-terrorism deployment, for example, violence against women and girls may be a direct result.

## Approach and methodology

This paper assesses the relationship between acts of terrorism and SGBV reports between 1998 and 2018 in Myanmar, the Philippines and Sri Lanka. As mentioned, it is challenging to measure violent extremism because there is no consensus on the definition of these acts. So, based on the data available, the paper analyses the relationship between terrorist attacks and SGBV reports in three specific country cases in Asia. The research draws upon a new dataset on SGBV reports, Preventing Mass Sexual Violence in Asia-Pacific (PSVAP), which compiles all existing reports of types of sexual violence and gender-based violence by official, unofficial and media organizations (see box 5).


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<sup>2</sup> Reporting having had sex, been married, or been in a romantic relationship at any point.



## Box 5: PSVAP database definition of sexual and gender-based violence

The dataset uses the international definition of sexual and gender-based violence. The 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) defines *sexual and gender-based crimes* (SGBV) as follows:

 **Gender-based violence (GBV)** is a crime committed against persons, whether male or female, because of their sex and/or socially constructed gender roles that “results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological, or economic harm or suffering, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.” Coding for gender-based violence excludes sexual violence. Reports refer to attacks on women and girls, and men and boys, because of their gender, i.e. attacks or arrest for homosexuality, forced nudity or strip searches at checkpoints, and forcible removal of children from parents. Acts of domestic violence against women are not included (International Criminal Court, 2014).

 **Sexual violence (SV)** is listed in 1998 Rome Statute as acts of violence that constitute acts of genocide (Article 6), crimes against humanity (Article 7) and war crimes (Article 8). The Rome Statute and the ICC Elements of Crimes list crimes of sexual violence which may occur during conflict and in the absence of conflict. Acts include: rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilization, or any other form of sexual violence. Acts of trafficking are not included.

A report is recorded when at least one listed SGBV crime was mentioned and/or the terms “sexual violence” or “gender-based violence” or “sexual and gender-based violence” were used in the relevant report.

**Note:** GBV and SV are both gender-based but because we wanted to understand the specific reporting prevalence of gender-based violence that is distinct from reporting on sexual violence, we disaggregated these categories, and for the purposes of this research on terrorism have combined them.

**Source:** Codebook (Davies and True 2018)

The PSVAP dataset codes a wider range of sources of reporting than the Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict dataset (Cohen and Nordås, 2014). The latter relies on three international sources of English language reporting, namely the United States State Department, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International, that are likely to be heavily compromised in Asia, where local civil society and news reports may be more important for tracking SGBV.

The Global Terrorism Database (GTD) defines a terrorist attack as “the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation.” GTD has several variables that measure the occurrence of terrorist attacks (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism

and Responses to Terrorism, 2018). In this paper, the variable attack type is used, which includes nine categories of attack: assassination, armed assault, bombing or explosion, hijacking, hostage taking using a barricade, hostage taking involving kidnapping, attack on a facility or infrastructure, unarmed assault, and unknown.

Moreover, to be recorded in the GTD dataset as a violent extremist (VE) or terrorist attack, the event must meet three criteria:

1. The incident must be intentional, aimed at attaining a political, economic, religious, or social goal.
2. It must entail some level of violence or immediate threat of violence to a large audience.

3. The perpetrators must be subnational actors with the action outside international humanitarian law.

This paper adopts the GTD definition, and Global Terrorism variable, to count any attack that meets all three of these criteria for every year in the period 1998–2016 and for each country. If an attack involves a sequence of events, only the first event is counted.

In previous research, Davies and True (2017, 2018) analysed the relationship between SGBV reports and patterns of armed conflict based on the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP).<sup>3</sup> The researchers found that SGBV reports often precede and anticipate the outbreak of conflict. The increase in crimes of sexual violence occurring not only in previously conflict-affected areas but proximate areas warns of escalating conflict. Reports are not an exact proxy for actual violence. However, taken together with analysis of the context and local conditions for reporting, and with increasing awareness of the possibility to disclose these crimes, reports can provide a strong indication of patterns of SGBV. In this paper, with analysis of the new PSVAP dataset, there is an opportunity to explore the difficult-to-test and entirely unresearched causal relationships between sexual and gender-based violence in any location or region and the violence associated with terrorist groups. Descriptive statistics and panel data analysis enable us to examine patterns of association between terrorist events and official, unofficial and media reports of sexual and gender-based violence by organizations rather than individuals (which may include

multiple acts affecting many individuals). They also allow this examination with respect to the reported prevalence, count and location of the violence, as well as whether the gender and ethnicity of the perpetrators and victims of these types of violence are similar or different.

## Terrorism and SGBV in Asia

An SGBV lens helps us see how forms of violence are connected, from the interpersonal to the intergroup and overtly political types of violence. The power of SGBV, compared with other types of violence, lies not only in the physical acts of violence themselves, but also in the shame and social stigma that victims suffer. Physical, psychological, sexual, or economic (e.g. controlling family resources) SGBV intends to denigrate and silence the victims and, by association, their families and the groups to which they belong. It both exploits and reinforces stereotypes and oppression based on gender, ethnicity, class, caste, sexuality, or other identities. **Thus, SGBV may be a lead indicator of the onset, or acceleration, of conflict or other violence such as terrorism. These types of violence may play into and affect one another.**

In this paper, we examine the relationship between acts of terrorism and reports of SGBV in three low-intensity, conflict-affected countries: Myanmar, Philippines and Sri Lanka.<sup>4</sup> The average number of terrorist attacks is lowest in Myanmar and

3 Studies of conflict typically use the Uppsala Conflict Dataset (UCD) that identifies a conflict situation in terms of battle death counts per year. *Organized state violence* is measured between the state and (at least) one other state or non-state armed group if deaths are above 1000 per year. *Non-state conflict*, which is conflict between two or more non-state armed groups is measured if deaths are above 25 per year. *One-sided violence* is measured where civilians are targeted by the state or non-state actor with one or more deaths. These definitions of conflict typically do not include situations that do not meet battle-death thresholds but have experienced recurrent insurgency, violent extremist events, terrorist attacks, and countries facing the impending threat of war identified as 'fragile'. See Bauer, Ruby, and Paper (2017).

4 Uppsala Conflict Data Program states that the threshold for a conflict to be classed as low-intensity is fewer than 1,000 battle deaths in any given calendar year.

highest in the Philippines, where the average number of SGBV reports is likewise higher. The Philippines is home to several terrorist or violent groups, including splinter groups and communist insurgents. The country also has the most developed infrastructure for reporting sexual and gender-based violence, including designated police units with female officers ready to receive reports from women and girls. These provisions notwithstanding, this study also considers unofficial and media reports of these types of violence. In the Philippines, there is evidence that SGBV is a trigger for *rido* or clan-based violence at the community level, and that where clans are connected to armed groups SGBV also serves to fuel political violence (Hilsdon, 2009).

However, the purpose is not to compare the three countries but rather to analyse the trends and relationships between the two broad categories of violence within each country. Given the variation in reporting of specific kinds of SGBV committed by civilians, non-state armed groups and government militaries in each case, further

qualitative research within communities affected by terrorism would be necessary to further corroborate the observable macro patterns for particular regions and localities. For instance, not all official, unofficial and media reports provide the region or the exact location of the acts of sexual and gender-based violence. Region or locality may not be essential however, for an analysis of the relationship to potential acts of terror given that the location of these acts may not reflect the grievances of the perpetrators but rather their political objective to gain the greatest attention, usually in urban areas with a large presence of civilians. This research is indicative only and is limited in its specific analysis of risk-prone areas and regions. However, the strong correlations demonstrated here and contextualized with reference to field research suggest that there remains a need for further localized analysis and research on the dynamics of sexual violence and acts of terror in the countries under study here as well as in other countries around the world.

**Table 2: Descriptive statistics by country, 1998–2016**

Myanmar				
Variable	mean	std. dev.	min	max
Number of VE/terrorist attacks	13.16	17.23	2	74
Number of reports SGBV/SV	22.16	19.77	2	78
Philippines				
Variable	mean	std. dev.	min	max
Number of VE/terrorist attacks	225.11	239.95	18	721
Number of reports SGBV/SV	43.16	39.67	1	114
Sri Lanka				
Variable	mean	std. dev.	min	max
Number of VE/terrorist attacks	47.47	58.60	1	217
Number of reports SGBV/SV	36.79	28.93	5	111



## Myanmar: narrative and patterns

Figure 1 shows trends, by year, in the number of terrorist attacks and sexual and gender-based violence reports. The data on SGBV reports is *lagged by one year*; that is, we look at reports the year before a VE/terrorist attack. This is to see whether these reports precede, and therefore might predict, terrorist attacks. So, where the SGBV graph line traces the number of reports by year, the year of reporting is one year previous. Thus, when there is a correlation between the increase in terrorist acts and SGBV reports, as we see in figures for the years 2003, 2008 and 2011–2012, this pattern is based on SGBV reports in 2002, 2007 and 2010–2011, respectively.

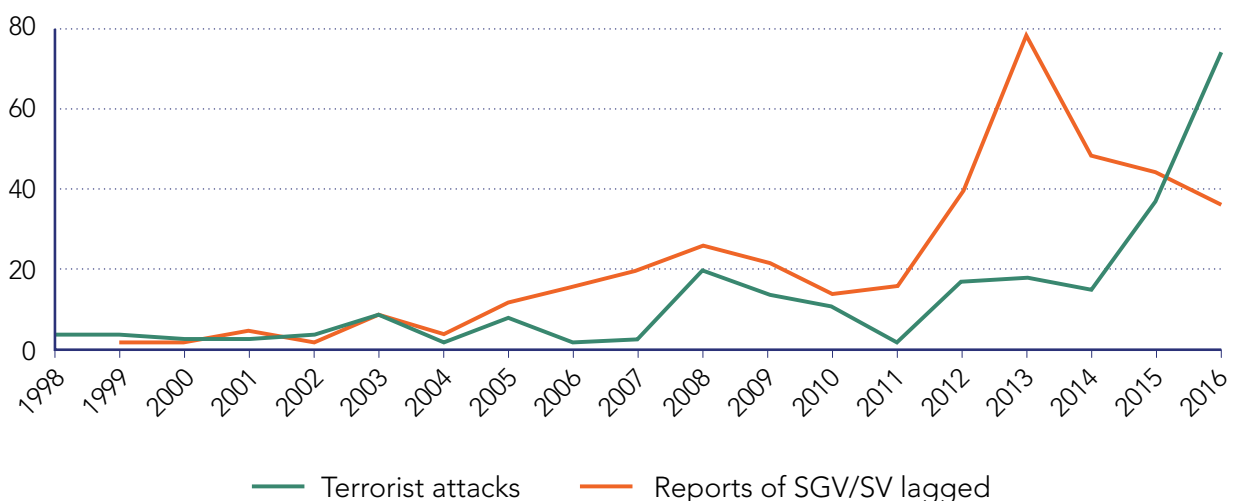
Myanmar’s conflict was at one of its deadliest points in 2007 and the number of terrorist attacks increased from three in 2007 to 20 in 2008. But there was a significant increase in SGBV reports up to 26 in 2007 – an increase which anticipated by one year the peak in both SGBV counts (how many victims affected in each report) and acts in 2008 (Gender Equality Network). Threats, as well as acts, of sexualized violence against women

and girls that aim to oppress and shame an entire ethnic group, may be used in conflict scenarios by non-state militia groups such as the Kachin Army in Myanmar to recruit and mobilize members to fight, as well as by government forces such as the Tatmadaw state military (McCarthy and Menager, 2017). Overall, reporting of SGBV was high between 2006 and 2008. As acts of terrorism declined in 2008 and 2009, SGBV reports also begin to decrease.

There is no specific anti-VAW law in Myanmar, only the Criminal Penal Code providing some redress for victims of sexual and gender-based violence. However, reports of sexual and gender-based violence, while not systematic and likely the tip of the iceberg due to the many institutional barriers to reporting, were routinely made by official, unofficial and media organizations throughout the period of analysis, 1998-2016. These reports by organizations rather than individuals have increased alongside the increased presence of international humanitarian agencies in the country with its democratization since 2010.

The rise in SGBV reports in 2011 and 2012 (some relating to unofficial reports of sexual violence in Rakhine state) also occurred a

**Figure 1: Myanmar: Number of terrorist attacks vs. Number of reports of SGBV/SV**



year prior to a spike in terrorist attacks. Based on this increase, we might have predicted increased terrorism today, in the period after 2014. However, SGBV reports are in decline in this period. This decrease is likely due to the extreme difficulty for minority women and girls in reporting SGBV, as in the case of Rohingya women and girls in camps for internally displaced persons with restricted humanitarian access, a situation indicated by the testimonies of humanitarian workers. Qualitative studies of the Rakhine case in this period suggest that SGBV is widespread and the low level of reporting does not reflect actual levels (Davies and True, 2017). Nevertheless, the PSVAP 1998–2016 dataset reveals a striking general pattern: that an increase in sexual and gender-based violence reports in Myanmar occurs just before, and at the same time as, an increase in terrorist attacks.

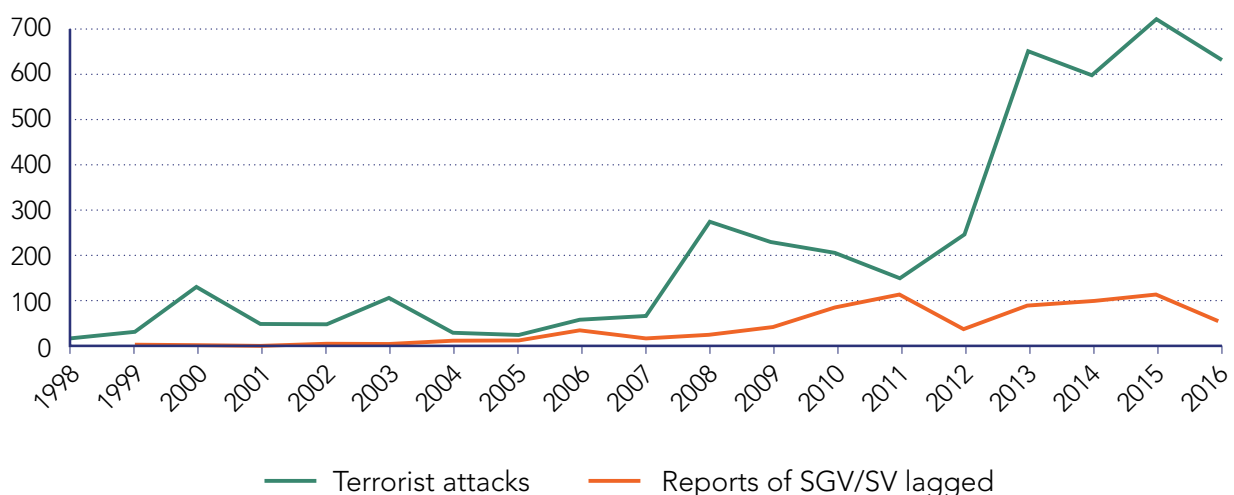
## The Philippines: narrative and patterns

The Philippines has among the highest levels of reported violence against women and girls in Asia, reflecting the country’s early adoption of an elimination of violence against women (EVAW) law and the government’s institutional

capacity to implement the law. However, the conflict-affected Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), where many of the VE and terrorist attacks have taken place, recorded the lowest number of SGBV cases of any region in the Philippines in 2014 and 2015. Due to strong gender-based codes of honour within families and communities in ARMM, including the shame associated with rape and other sexual violence, women and girls are expected to keep silent about the violence they experience. They may do this to prevent the escalation of further violence in contexts where abduction, rape, and forced marriage are common, and where daughters may be offered for marriage to appease warring clans (Davies, True and Tanyag, 2016).

Despite these limitations in SGBV reporting, there is evidence of correlations between rising SGBV reports in the year preceding an increase in terrorism in two key periods: 2005 to 2006 and 2012 to 2015 (see Figure 2). In 2006, there were 58 terror attacks in the Philippines; an increase from 25 the previous year, when SGBV reports increased to 35 from 13 in 2004. A similar pattern is evident in the 2012-2015 period. SGBV reports substantially increased to 91 in 2012 from 39 the previous year prefiguring a more than

Figure 2: Philippines: Number of terrorist attacks vs. number of reports of SGBV/SV



doubling in terrorist attacks from 249 in 2012 to 651 in 2013. In the following two years, 2013 and 2014, we see consistent increases in SGBV reporting as well as the highest number of terror attacks in the Philippines, with 721 recorded in 2015. **Overall, in the Philippines, as with Myanmar, we observe a broad pattern where an increase in sexual and gender-based violence reporting takes place the year before, and alongside, increases in terrorist attacks.**

### Sri Lanka: narrative and patterns<sup>5</sup>

In Sri Lanka, government reports refer widely to SGBV; however, there are only a few official reports of sexual violence (UNFPA 2016). The *United Nations Report of the Secretary-General's Panel of Experts on Accountability in Sri Lanka* (Darusman, Ratner and Sooka, 2011) found that acts of SGBV were committed by both the Sri Lankan armed forces and the Tamil Tigers, also known as LTTE and categorized as a terrorist group by the European Union and the United States. This is despite the official narrative that the LTTE did not perpetrate SGBV within the group due to a moral code prohibiting sexual relations (Darusman, Ratner and Sooka, 2011).

The failure to recognize conflict-related SGBV and the lack of institutional capacity to respond to post-conflict SGBV reflect a self-reinforcing cycle of acceptance of this violence. According to reports available since the end of the war in 2009, minority women in Northern and Eastern Provinces appear to experience the highest levels of SGBV, as well as other violations of physical security (FOKUS, 2016; Guruge et al., 2017). A UN survey of SGBV perpetrated by men, based on a national sample across four

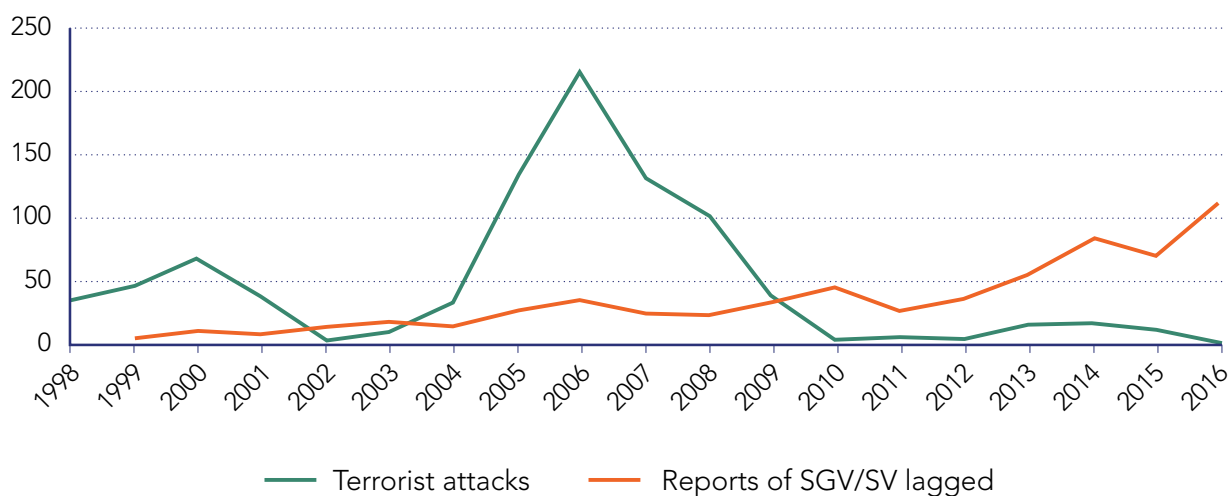
districts including two in the war-affected Eastern Province, indicated that less than 10 percent of rape cases have been successfully prosecuted in Sri Lanka, and that 60 percent of men feel entitled to sex without the prior permission of a partner (Fulu et al., 2013).

In Figure 3, based on the PSVAP database, we do not observe an overall correlation, as in the other two cases, between the trend in increased reports of SGBV and increased VE or terrorist attacks. There are points in 2006 and 2014 where a similar rise in both SGBV and VE or terrorist attacks is evident. In 2006 this is possibly due to overall increased violence near the end of the Sri Lanka civil war, since most of this violence involves armed groups (and, where the region is reported, is in conflict-affected areas), while the violence in 2014 mostly involves civilians. However, the relatively low reporting of SGBV during the war in Sri Lanka makes it difficult to establish how systematic the relationship may be. We do see a pattern toward the end of the civil war in 2004 and 2005, when SGBV reports rise to 25 and 34 respectively with concomitant increases in VE attacks to 133 and 217 in the respective following years. Despite the official narrative, the LTTE were suspected of committing SGBV within the Tamil and Muslim minority populations to increase conscripts and coerce civilian support with threats of rape and abduction of family members (Davies and True, 2014). Given that no prosecutor has been appointed to investigate war crimes, including SGBV, there are strong incentives to *not report* this violence.

<sup>5</sup> This research only considers the period 1998-2016. Therefore, terrorism attacks occurring 2017-2019, and notably the significant recent attack on 21 April, 2019, are not included in the analysis, though we might argue that the trends in this research and the model presented may have predicted the chance of such an attack.



**Figure 3: Sri Lanka: Number of terrorist attacks vs. number of reports of SGBV/SV**



After the war's end in 2009, however, VE acts diminish while SGBV reports continue to increase, with greater potential to report this violence. Yet, in 2013 there is an uptake in SGBV from 34 reports in 2011 to 55 reports in 2012 and 83 reported incidents in 2013. These reports do not indicate the number of violent acts or count of SGBV, rather one report by an official government or international organization, an unofficial organization such as an NGO or by a media organization may involve multiple acts of violence against a number of individuals. The publicly available PSVAP dataset provides further details, although the region or area is often not reported for Sri Lankan incidents. Where possible the location (urban, prison, state or military compound, refugee camp, home, village etc.) as well as the region of the violence is reported, as is the sex of the victim and of the perpetrator, and any reason or motivation for the attack that can be gleaned from the report. This uptake is followed by an increase in VE acts from four in 2012 to 14 in 2013 and 16 in 2014. How do we explain this apparent pattern?

Both the government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam (LTTE) were responsible for sexual and gender-based violence war crimes and crimes against humanity in the final stages of the war. Victory further led to the government forces committing ongoing sexual abuse, torture and other human rights violations in the aftermath of the war, and failing to create a transparent and accountable transitional and reconciliatory justice process (Davies and True, 2018). The data shows us that violent extremist attacks increase when government legitimacy is fragile, particularly in Northern and Eastern Provinces.<sup>6</sup> This pattern lasts only until 2015 when SGBV reports and VE attacks diverge again. However, were the dataset to include 2017 and 2018, we may see further relationships. Violent hate crimes took place in Kandy in March 2018 and unofficial SGBV reports (including via social media) are known to fuel intergroup grievances and conflict leading to terrorism. Moreover, the political crisis in Sri Lanka has increased tensions – and, potentially, political violence – within and across all groups.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations (UN) investigations have identified this perpetration of sexual and gender-based violence human rights violations. See Darusman, Ratner, and Sooka (2011); Petrie (2012); Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2015); and Davies and True (2017b).

## What other factors explain patterns of terrorism?

So far, correlation and a potential causal pattern have been established between the two types of violence for Myanmar and the Philippines by analysing the relationship between SGBV reports for one year and terrorist attacks in the following year. We have also provided some contextual, case-specific explanations for the relationship. However, other factors may explain the trends in terrorist attacks. By modelling their effects, we can assess whether reports of sexual and gender-based violence are still a lead indicator of future terrorism. To do this, we used a panel data method to analyse the same three country cases by year for the period 1998 to 2016.<sup>7</sup> The data for some indicators was statistically imputed in order to achieve a strong balance in the panel.<sup>8</sup> We adopted a matrix-form model to explain the number of terrorist attacks, following the GRD definition above, per year and per country.<sup>9</sup> As in the bivariate analysis above, this dependent variable was constructed based on the Global Terrorism Database (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, 2018).

We also considered a range of social, political and economic factors that conceivably influence trends in terrorism as well as the PSVAP dataset's record of the number of reports of SGBV per country per year – both in the year before and in the same year as an attack (Davies and True, 2017a).

**Social disorder events** in the public realm, where individuals and groups with grievances can visibly express their grievances and/or political identities, may be expected to diminish terrorist attacks. These events allow the state to monitor the activities of potentially violent groups and avert any attacks. At the same time, they provide an outlet for individuals and groups that might otherwise resort to clandestine methods to make their causes heard, such as those used in terror attacks. Through employing information from the urban social disorder events dataset (Urdal and Hoelscher, 2012), we combined six types of social disorders in a categorical variable per year and country as follows:

- **General warfare:** Distinct events related to a protracted, interactive, and violent conflict involving at least one organized, non-state actor group fighting with government authorities over ethnic, political or economic issues.

7 The advantages of panel data are twofold: First, since panel data relate to countries over time, there is bound to be heterogeneity in these units. The panel data estimation can take such heterogeneity explicitly into account by allowing for subject-specific variables. Second, panel data gives more informative data, more variability, less collinearity among variables and greater efficiency.

8 The dependent variable had missing data in Myanmar 1998 and 2000, and Sri Lanka 2011. Also, the variable *number of reports of GBV/SV* had missing information in 2016. In both cases, the missing information was imputed using the previous or later year with information available. The variables from the Worldwide Governance Indicators with missing information was imputed following a linear interpolation.

9 The matrix equation is as follows:  $Y_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_{it-1} + \beta_2 X_{it} + \beta_3 D_{it} + \epsilon_{it}$ . Where  $i$  represent the countries and  $t$  years. Also,  $x$  represents the explanatory variable of interest, lagged for a period and non-lagged,  $D$  is the matrix form for explanatory variables in our model and contains the residuals. We used a fixed-effects model (FEM). In particular, the model that we estimate takes the form:

$$\begin{aligned} & \text{attackterrorist}_{it} \\ & = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{SGBVreports}_{it-1} + \beta_2 \text{SGBVreports}_{it} + \beta_3 \text{socialDisorders}_{it} \\ & + \beta_4 \text{PoliticalStability}_{it} + \beta_5 \text{Corruption}_{it} + \beta_6 \text{FreedomExp}_{it} \\ & + \beta_7 \text{equalDistribution}_{it} + \epsilon_{it} \end{aligned}$$

- **Organized violent riot:** Distinct, continuous, and coordinated actions staged by members of a singular political or identity group and directed toward members of a distinct “other” group or government authorities.
- **Spontaneous violent riot:** Distinct, continuous, and uncoordinated actions resulting from an originally non-violent protest and directed toward members of a distinct “other” group or government authorities.
- **Organized demonstration:** Distinct, continuous, and coordinated largely peaceful actions directed toward members of a distinct “other” group or government authorities.
- **Pro-government demonstration:** Distinct, continuous, and largely peaceful actions in support of government. May be coordinated or uncoordinated.
- **Spontaneous demonstration:** Distinct, continuous, and uncoordinated largely peaceful action directed toward members of a distinct “other” group or government authorities.

When Myanmar, the Philippines or Sri Lanka experienced any of these six types of social disorders we coded the variable 1, or 0 if no such events occurred. These values are aggregated in this single categorical variable with 6 representing the highest number of social disorders that a country can have in a given year and 0 representing the minimum value.

## Political factors

With respect to political factors, the stability of a government and the perception of its governance, notably whether it advances the interests of the people or the private interests of elites or factional groups, can be expected to have an impact on the presence of terrorism (Newman, 2006). Powerless individuals and

groups may perceive government corruption and look for ways to combat it. Indeed, such actors may view acts of terrorism as their only form of recourse.

To operationalize these factors, two variables from *Worldwide Governance Indicators* are included in our model. **Political stability** as a variable captures perceptions of the likelihood that a government will be destabilized or overthrown by unconstitutional or violent means (World Bank, 2018) and control of corruption captures perceptions of the extent to which public power is exercised for private gain, including both petty and grand forms of corruption, as well as the capture of the state by elites and private interests (Kaufmann, Kraay and Mastruzzi, 2010).

The degree of political freedom of expression is another factor that may indirectly affect the likelihood of terrorist attacks (Abadie, 2006). If there are few opportunities for voice and freedom of expression to attract attention and influence the political system, terrorism may be seen as a potent option. To consider this factor in our model, we include the Freedom of Expression Index from the *Varieties of Democracy dataset*. This index is based on six indicators: government censorship efforts; harassment of journalists; media self-censorship; freedom of discussion for men and women; freedom of academic expression; and of cultural expression. This index ascertains the extent to which the government respects press and media freedom, the freedom of ordinary people to discuss political matters at home and in public, as well as the freedom of intellectual and cultural (including religious) expression (Coppedge et al., 2018).

## Economic factors

While some economists discount economic root causes of terrorism such as poverty, unemployment and lack of opportunity





(Krueger, 2007), high levels of inequality in a society and poor access to resources and services among the population are frequently considered factors that increase support for violence and thus create conditions conducive to terrorist attacks. The Equal Distribution of Resources Index measures

equality of distribution of tangible and intangible resources in a society. The index measures the distribution of power among different socioeconomic groups, ethnic groups, sexes and so on (Coppedge et al., 2018). The source of the data is the V-Dem dataset.

### Table 3: Model Results

Table 2 below sets out three models which test the effects of SGBV reports both one year before the terrorist attack (dependent variable) – our lagged variable – and in the same year (our non-lagged variable).

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
SGBV/SV reports (lagged)	2.74*** (0.624)	3.05*** (0.472)	- -
SGBV/SV reports	1.184* (0.639)	- -	2.931*** (0.494)
Social disorder events	-47.272*** (17.313)	-44.08** (17.685)	-59.00*** (18.473)
Political stability	-5.426*** (1.639)	-4.69*** (1.633)	-5.90*** (1.640)
Control of corruption	13.303*** (2.415)	13.70*** (2.470)	12.10*** (2.600)
Freedom of Expression Index	-6.584*** (1.690)	-7.27*** (1.693)	-4.95*** (1.811)
Equal distribution of resources	-10.293* (5.927)	-6.57 (5.724)	-14.37** (6.498)
Constant	492.227** (231.139)	362.82 (226.19)	6.42.06** (252.84)
Rsq	0.69 $F(7,44) = 13.88$ $Prob >F = 0.0000$	0.66 $F(6,45) = 14.83$ $Prob >F = 0.0000$	0.59 $F(6,48) = 11.57$ $Prob >F = 0.0000$

Model 1: lagged and non-lagged  
 Model 2: only lagged  
 Model 3: with non-lagged only

As shown in Table 3, Model 1 is the best model for analysing the factors that explain and potentially predict the prevalence of terrorist attacks. Combined, the factors in this model explains 69 percent of the yearly change in the number of terrorism attacked. Moreover,

increasing SGBV reports in the year before a VE or terrorist event is a very significant factor that predicts an increased chance of a terrorist attack in the following year. We can see that all variables are significant at a 95 percent confidence interval, except for

non-lagged SGBV reports and the Equal Distribution of Resources Index variables which are significant at 90 percent.

**Table 4: Fixed-effect model**

Variables	Model FE
Reports SGBV/SV (lagged)	2.74*** (0.624)
Reports SGBV/SV	1.184* (0.639)
Social disorder events	-47.272*** (17.313)
Political stability	-5.426*** (1.639)
Control of corruption	13.303*** (2.415)
Freedom of Expression Index	-6.584*** (1.690)
Equal distribution of resources	-10.293* (5.927)
Constant	492.227** (231.139)
R2	0.69
N	54
F(7,44) = 13.88	Prob >F = 0.0000
*Significant at 0.1 ** Significant at 0.05 ***Significant at 0.01 Error standards in brackets	

Specifically, holding all other factors affecting terrorist attacks constant, the analysis finds that:

- For every additional report of *sexual or gender-based violence (SGBV) in the previous year* (lagged variable), the chance of a terrorist attack increases by 3 percent. Thus, there is a relationship between rising reports of SGBV in the year before, and the

likelihood of a VE or terrorist attacks above and beyond the impact of other factors.

- There is a negative relationship between *social disorder events* and terrorist attacks. Every additional social disorder event reduces the likelihood of a terrorist attack.
- When the *perception of political stability* increases by 1 percent, there is a 5 percent-lower likelihood of a terrorist attack.
- If the *lack of control of corruption* increases by 1 percent, the chance of a terrorist attack increases by 13 percent.
- When *freedom of expression* increases by 1 percent, a terrorist attack is 7 percent less likely.
- For an increase of 1 percent in the *equal distribution of resources*, the likelihood of a terrorist attack is 10 percent lower.

Based on the model shown in Table 4, social disorder events, corruption, unequal distribution of resources, political instability and lack of freedom of expression appear to have a greater impact on the likelihood of terrorist attacks in each country and year. Table 5 shows that when we remove the SGBV reports (both one year before and in the same year), the model is no longer significant. The F statistic shows that our model is correctly specified. However, omitting lagged and unlagged SGBV reports, the R square is far lower than the original model, explaining only 29 percent of the variation in terrorist attacks compared with 69 percent. SGBV reports one year before, and in the same year, are not only significant variables helping explain the occurrence of terrorist attacks, but when included in the model the association with the independent variables and terrorism is stronger. Thus, **increases in SGBV reports form a critical component of the overall model and explanation behind terrorist events.**



Table 5: Comparing models with and without SGBV reports variable

Variables	Original	No SGBV/SV
SGBV/SV reports (lagged)	2.274*** (0.624)	-
SGBV/SV reports	1.184* (0.639)	-
Social disorder events	-47.272*** (17.313)	-69.273*** (23.967)
Political stability	-5.426*** (1.639)	-2.627 (2.013)
Control of corruption	13.303*** (2.415)	12.136*** (3.388)
Freedom of Expression Index	-6.584*** (1.690)	-5.668** (2.354)
Equal distribution of resources	-10.293* (5.927)	-2.585 (8.063)
Constant	492.227** (231.139)	240.24 (317.445)
R2	0.69	0.29
N	54	57
	$F(7,44) = 13.88$ $Prob >F = 0.000$	$F(5,49) = 4.03$ $Prob >F = 0.003$

While not the focus of this paper, tests of the bivariate relationships between the independent variables show strong relationships between increases in social disorder and increases in SGBV reports. There is also a robust relationship between the SGBV lagged report one year before and social disorder events, political stability, freedom of expression and equal distribution of resources, thus verifying the significant relationship among the variables without attributing causation. These results are reported in Appendix 3.

## Conclusion: implications for policy, programming and future research

This research paper explored whether there is a relationship between the reporting of sexual and gender-based violence and the occurrence of terrorist attacks using a new dataset based on three Asian countries that have experienced such attacks. While the literature has theorized some of the causal mechanisms linking incidence and prevalence of violence against women to violent extremism leading to terrorism, the empirical relationship has until now been neither studied nor quantified. **This research on Myanmar, the Philippines and Sri Lanka, in its depiction of critical correlations between SGBV and terrorist events based on available data, has significant implications for the prevention of violent extremism that leads to terrorism.** Based on these findings, we recommend further investigation, monitoring and assessment and research on sexual and gender-based violence as a lead indicator.

Given the pattern of correlation between SGBV reports in the previous year (lagged variable) and the number of terrorist attacks, which is statistically significant, we make the following recommendations:

- **Monitoring SGBV in the community needs to be part of PAVE indicators and strategies with the purpose of preventing a potential pathway to terrorism.**
- **SGBV reporting data should inform all country-specific terrorism intelligence assessments.**

In order to improve risk assessments for terrorism, and extremism that condones or promotes violence leading to terrorism, it is also crucial to similarly build into these



assessments knowledge about locations and populations at higher risk of SGBV.<sup>10</sup>

Country-specific analysis of the relationship between the incidence of sexual and gender-based violence and indicators of terrorism should inform early warning and prevention strategies. At present, to anticipate and respond to international security situations of concern for SGBV, the international community draws on two sources to inform prevention: United Nations reports on Sexual Violence in Conflict (UN 2018) and the (Inter-Agency) Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS 2019) (see Appendix 1).

However, some countries that were in the top 20 for acts of terrorism in 2017 are not currently considered situations of concern for conflict-related SGBV. Indeed, several countries (including four in Asia) that are known by humanitarian actors on the ground as situations of concern for SGBV, and have experienced terrorist attacks, are not currently focus countries in the GBVIMS lists, namely: Pakistan, India, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Ukraine, Cameroon, and Turkey. Thus, we further recommend the following:

- **SGBV should be monitored in known high-risk countries for terrorism. Reporting conditions should be closely assessed and reporting institutions strengthened.**
- **Consider terrorist attacks and extremism condoning violence leading to terrorism as possible reasons for the underreporting of SGBV.**
- **Closely examine cases where there is a high risk of terrorism and evidence of SGBV.**

The failure of governments in Myanmar, Sri Lanka and the Philippines to prosecute the perpetrators of conflict-related sexual and

gender-based violence crimes, or to provide women victims with justice, reparation, and rehabilitation, may fuel support for and recruitment to terrorist groups. That is, the response to impunity and widespread individual and group shame and stigma may ultimately encourage violent extremism leading to terrorism. As research by Fulu and others (2013) suggests, male sexual entitlement appears widespread in the region. If gender inequalities in the law and justice system are not addressed, perpetrators will continue to commit unlawful violence with possible connections to terrorism.

- **The investigation of SGBV victims and survivors should include profiling of the perpetrators and their connections to terrorist groups.**

Moreover, if better government service provision for survivors (e.g. women police units in areas of high risk) is not provided to address victim or survivor's health, psychological and livelihood needs then their anti-government grievances will fester and carry over into the next generation.

Further research should explore the relationship between SGBV as a precursor to acts of violent extremism with a need for enhanced data collection on SGBV reports and reporting acts of violent extremism.

Finally, given that this is a pilot research project analysing SGBV reporting data for three countries only, further research should be conducted on an expanded set of medium- to high-risk country cases. For instance, research could focus on countries that appear both in the top 20 countries on the Global Terrorism Index for terrorist attacks and on the cumulative UN Secretary-General's list of situations of concern for conflict-related SGBV. Such research may suggest contexts in which violence that

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<sup>10</sup> There is now interest in linking risk assessments of sexual and gender-based violence to the UN Security Council Sanctions Committee and Arms Trade Treaty States Conference. See Huvé (2018) and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (2019).



condones or promotes terrorism is prefigured by sexual and gender-based violence. Nigeria and Thailand are two such examples where we observe a strong correlation between SGBV and terrorist attacks, a pattern to be further investigated at a more granular level with respect to subregion and by monthly rather than yearly occurrence. This type of analysis should be possible with further data collection.

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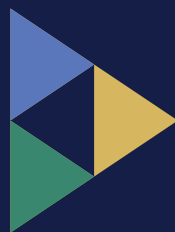
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# Appendices



## Appendix 1

Known situations of widespread sexual violence in armed conflict and gender-based violence in emergencies

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**UN sexual violence in armed conflict list 2010–2018 (includes situations that predate 1992)**

- |                                |                 |                  |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| • Afghanistan                  | • East Timor    | • Nepal          |
| • Angola                       | • Egypt         | • Nigeria        |
| • Bosnia-Herzegovina           | • Guinea        | • North Korea    |
| • Burundi                      | • Guinea-Bissau | • Sierra Leone   |
| • Cambodia                     | • Haiti         | • Somalia        |
| • Central African Republic     | • Iraq          | • South Sudan    |
| • Chad                         | • Kenya         | • Sri Lanka      |
| • Colombia                     | • Liberia       | • Sudan (Darfur) |
| • Cote d'Ivoire                | • Libya         | • Syria          |
| • Democratic Republic of Congo | • Mali          | • Yemen          |
|                                | • Myanmar       |                  |
- 

**Gender-based violence information management system list 2006–2018**

- |                                |           |                |
|--------------------------------|-----------|----------------|
| • Burundi                      | • Haiti   | • Pakistan     |
| • Chad                         | • Iraq    | • Philippines  |
| • Central African Republic     | • Jordan  | • Sierra Leone |
| • Colombia                     | • Kenya   | • Somalia      |
| • Cote d'Ivoire                | • Lebanon | • South Sudan  |
| • Democratic Republic of Congo | • Liberia | • Tanzania     |
| • Ethiopia                     | • Mali    | • Thailand     |
| • Guinea                       | • Nepal   | • Uganda       |
|                                | • Niger   | • Yemen        |
|                                | • Nigeria |                |
-

## Appendix 2

Number of terrorist attacks and number of reports of SGBV and SV per country and year

Year	Myanmar		Philippines		Sri Lanka	
	Number of terrorist attacks	Number of reports SGBV/SV	Number of terrorist attacks	Number of reports SGBV/SV	Number of terrorist attacks	Number of reports SGBV/SV
1998	4	2	18	3	35	5
1999	4	2	31	3	46	9
2000	3	5	132	1	68	8
2001	3	2	50	6	36	13
2002	4	9	48	6	3	17
2003	9	4	107	14	9	13
2004	2	12	32	13	33	25
2005	8	16	25	35	133	34
2006	2	20	58	17	217	24
2007	3	26	65	26	132	22
2008	20	22	276	43	100	34
2009	14	14	229	86	37	46
2010	11	16	205	114	3	26
2011	2	39	151	39	4	34
2012	17	78	249	91	4	55
2013	18	48	651	101	14	83
2014	15	44	597	114	16	69
2015	37	36	721	54	11	111
2016	74	26	632	54	1	71

## Appendix 3

### Bivariate tests of the SGBV unlagged with the other variables in the model

Dependent variable: reports of SGBV/SV (unlagged)	Coef	R-sq	Prob > F
Social disorder events	-9.987* (5.214)	0.0648	0.0608
Political stability	1.126** (0.442)	0.1092	0.0137
Control of corruption	0.158 (0.585)	0.0014	0.7875
Freedom of Expression Index	0.417 (0.340)	0.0277	0.2248
Equal distribution of resources	3.687** (1.428)	0.1117	0.0127

\*Significant at 0.1 \*\* Significant at 0.05 \*\*\*Significant at 0.01  
Error standards in brackets

The F statistic test analyses whether the coefficient in the model is different to zero. The expectation is that this number will be lower or equal to 0.05. If not, the model is not correctly specified; that is, the independent variable does not explain the dependent variable (which is the case with the 'control of corruption' and 'freedom of expression' variables).

### Bivariate tests of the SGBV lagged with the other variables in the model

Dependent variable: Reports SGBV/SV (lagged)	Coef	R-sq	Prob > F
Social disorder events	-13.115** (5.327)	0.1081	0.0173
Political stability	1.485*** (0.466)	0.1684	0.0025
Control of corruption	0.665 (0.609)	0.0233	0.2798
Freedom of Expression index	0.723**	0.0828	0.0386
Equal distribution of resources	0.0654 (1.497)	0.0674	

\*Significant at 0.1 \*\* Significant at 0.05 \*\*\*Significant at 0.01  
Error standards in brackets

The interpretation in those models is neither logical nor explanatory. We cannot say that an increase in social disorder today reduced the number of reports of SGBV/SV a year ago. However, these correlations are useful to verify the significant bivariate relationships.





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