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pp. 94-101

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**Recommended Citation**

Sibila,, Deborah A. Ph.D.. "Terrorism, Gender, and Women: Toward an Integrated Research Agenda. Edited by Alexandra Phelan. New York: Routledge, 2021.." *Journal of Strategic Security* 15, no. 2 (2022) : 94-101. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.15.2.2031>  
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***Terrorism, Gender, and Women: Toward an Integrated Research Agenda.* Edited by Alexandra Phelan. New York: Routledge, 2021. ISBN 978-0367623081. Notes. Sources cited. 166 Pages. Hardback (\$160.00) and Kindle e-book (\$58.95)**

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*Terrorism, Gender, and Women: Toward an Integrated Research Agenda*, is one of the newest contributions to the topic of gendered terrorism. The text seeks to create and inspire a dialogue among scholars of conflict, terrorism, and gender by suggesting the necessity of incorporating gender analysis to fill gaps within, and further enhance, our understanding of political violence. (p. 1). It encourages a greater integration of gender-sensitive approaches to studies of violent extremism and terrorism.

This edited volume, which consists of an introductory essay and eight chapters, is organized around the theme of gender, women, and terrorism. The articles in the book span a wide range of topics and taken together, encourage a discussion of new ways of understanding how women and men can be affected differently by terrorism and violent extremism and how involvement can often be influenced by highly gendered experiences and considerations (p. 1). Each chapter explores the intersection between gender and terrorism through its own lens. All eight chapters demonstrate how gender analysis and, in some cases, feminist methodology, both contribute to and potentially transform our understanding of recent trends in terrorism and current threats (p. 8). The articles build on existing studies and add new knowledge and insights as well as offering directions for future research and policymaking. The book contents were originally published as a special issue of the journal, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*.

The book begins with an introductory essay written by the book’s editor Alexandra Phelan who identifies and discusses four main approaches to understanding the interplay between gender and terrorism – positivist or “gender-as-a-variable,” instrumentalist, gendered motivations, and gender-based analysis and/or feminist methodology. The first approach to

gender and terrorism deals with differences and similarities in demographics, and intersectionality dealing with differences between women and men's experiences due to age, class, race, and socioeconomic background (p.3). Phelan explains that the second approach is broadly instrumentalist and relates to women and men's roles within terrorist organizations. The third approach pertains to gendered motivations, and how reasons for engagement in terrorism and violent extremism amongst men and women may differ (p. 4). Lastly, the fourth approach uses "feminist curiosity" to examine how femininities and masculinities can serve as dynamics influencing both individual and collective radicalization processes (p. 5). According to Phelan, the chapters in the book are reflective of these four gendered approaches to terrorism and serve as examples of how gender analysis can be used to inform, provide nuance for, and enhance existing explanations of radicalization, recruitment, operations, and overall tactical strategy (p. 6). The four approaches can also provide scholars with a number of pathways for exploring new areas of enquiry into the interplay of gender, women, and terrorism.

In the first chapter, "*Women Too: Explaining Gender Ideologies of Ethnopolitical Organizations*," authors Victor Asal, Nazli Avdan, and Nourah Shuaibi delve into the gender ideologies of ethnopolitical organizations. Asal and colleagues investigate how organizational characteristics impact the gender platforms of ethnopolitical organizations in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Using a sample obtained from the Minorities at Risk Organization Behavior (MAROB) database, the authors for the first time use gender ideology as a dependent rather than independent variable found in previous research. Rather than examining gender ideology's effect on organizational recruitment, practices and tactics of contestation, this article delves into the question of why organizations have specific gender ideologies in the first place. It also shifts focus from gender at the country level to gender at the organizational level. Asal and colleagues found that a group's gender inclusivity was impacted by organizational traits such as overall militancy, overarching ideology (i.e., leftist, nationalist or religious), and social service provision. Findings show that groups that were less militant, embraced leftist ideology, and provided social services to its constituents were more likely to advocate gender inclusivity. The results delineate how parallel mechanisms can propagate gender inclusivity in violent and nonviolent ethnopolitical organizations and provide significant findings

for both academic and policy communities. As pointed out by the authors of this article, gender ideologies of ethnopolitical organizations can be crucial in that they can influence democratic development and can serve as a promising avenue for redressing political processes in progressing women's agendas. Insights provided by the research also have relevance for how ethnic or ethnoreligious organizations voice their political grievances. This in turn has ramifications for whether societies handle conflicts in a peaceful manner (p. 22).

The second chapter, "*Part and Parcel? Examining Al Shabaab and Boko Haram's Violence Targeting Civilians and Violence Targeting Women*," by Hilary Matfess examines al Shabaab and Boko Haram's respective patterns of political violence targeting both women and civilians and compares them to one another to provide a more holistic and nuanced understanding of the unique violence that women face in conflict (p. 28). The results of the study reveal that although al Shabaab and Boko Haram share several important theoretical characteristics, the nature of their violence targeting women differs significantly. Whereas al Shabaab's violence targeting women is selective (e.g., targeting individual women in response to specific behaviors that violate the rebels' regulation), Boko Haram's violence targeting women is more often collective and directed at groups of women (p. 29). Moreover, the author posits that violence targeting women should be considered a singular form of violence since trends and types of violence used by these groups suggest a different logic may underlie violence targeting women versus violence directed at civilians generally. The study also calls into question instrumentalist arguments that violence targeting civilians is a "weapon of the weak." Matfess' research reinforces the need for policy makers to take a more nuanced approach recognizing important female and civilian targeting differences between al Shabaab and Boko Haram when constructing counter-terrorism strategies directed against those groups. More specifically, understanding crucial differences between the groups will allow for better delineation of patterns of violence, identification of rebel group characteristics that drive targeting decisions (both about who is targeted with what form of violence), and the design of more effective civilian protections programs in conflict zones (p. 39).

According to Mia Bloom and Ayse Lokmanoglu, authors of the third chapter, "*From Pawn to Knights: The Changing Role of Women's Agency*

*in Terrorism?*,” female involvement in religious and far-right extremist groups have prompted fierce debate as to the level of women’s agency within terrorist organizations. The authors address the question: to what extent have women’s roles changed within and across terrorist groups? by examining the roles of women in al-Qaeda, the Islamic State (ISIS), Boko Haram, and the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (the PKK). The authors contend that even in terrorist groups that espouse emphatically patriarchal ideologies, women are entering and carving out roles with either active agency, or the “appearance” of agency (p. 56). Bloom and Lokmanoglu posit that not only are women’s roles in terrorism evolving, but that terrorist organizations have exploited long-established gender stereotypes to their advantage in propaganda, recruitment, and targeting strategies.

In the fourth chapter, “*Do White Supremacist Women Adopt Movement Archetypes of Mother, Whore, and Fighter?*,” authors Mehr Latif, Kathleen Blee, Matthew DeMichele, and Pete Simi seek to broaden readers’ understanding of organized racial terrorism by exploring women’s participation within white supremacist groups. Researchers employ lenses of emotionality and embodiment to explain how women accept and resist group-level gender expectations in white supremacism (p. 63). Latif and colleagues utilized 21 lengthy interviews with former female members of white supremacy groups to provide a rich and nuanced depiction of the integrated nature of the public and private lives of women engaged in political extremism and violent organizations about which little is known. The authors juxtapose the accounts of these women’s participation within racist groups against the archetypal roles of white women as mother, whore, and fighter. According to Latif and colleagues, it is unclear how pertinent the archetypes of mother, whore, and fighter will remain in the future for white supremacist and other extremist groups as membership and participation evolve in variously connected digital and physical spaces of interaction and communication (p. 78). No significant policy implications were identified in the article.

Ora Szekely, author of the fifth chapter, “*Exceptional Inclusion: Understanding the PKK’s Gender Policy*,” argues that PKK’s (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*, or Kurdistan Workers Party’s) gender policy which incorporates the promotion of women’s liberation as a key component of its political platform, makes the PKK an outlier among other leftist groups in the Middle East. Szekely soundly rejects the idea that Kurdish culture is

uniquely responsible for the PKK's gender policy. While acknowledging the importance of ideology, leadership preferences and recruitment pressure in contributing to PKK's gender policy, Szekely argues that ultimately it was the influence of women from within PKK itself that was the determining factor in shaping the organization's commitment to gender equality. According to Szekely, there have been women in the PKK, including in its leadership from the organization's earliest days. As the number of women in the PKK grew throughout the 1980s and 1990s, there was a corresponding increase in the discussion of and focus on women's issues. Escalating violence by Turkish authorities during this period against Kurdish communities disrupted previously rigid societal gender roles and sparked the activism of significant numbers of Kurdish women allowing them new autonomy and a powerful sense of agency. Over time, the increasing number of women within the PKK and their demands for gender equality meant that the movement became not only about the liberation of Kurdistan, but also about the liberation of the women who joined the movement (p. 93). Szekely's discussion of structural factors influencing women's decisions to join the PKK and their impact on the organization's gender policy avoids spurious conclusions previously identified by Margaret Gonzales-Perez (2008) in her analysis of the PKK's attitude to feminism.<sup>1</sup>

Employing a comparative framework to examine the incorporation of women into Colombia's civil war, the author of the sixth chapter, entitled "*Outbidding and Gender: Dynamics in the Colombian Civil War*," Alexis Henshaw examines factors that determine whether armed non-state actors adopt a progressive stance on women's issues. She suggests that by using the theoretical concept of outbidding more can be learned about the circumstances under which extremist organizations develop and deploy gendered ideology. Henshaw uses primary source material from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the National Liberation Army (ELN), and the 19<sup>th</sup> April Movement (M-19), to examine gendered outbidding in two separate but inter-related periods in the Colombian conflict. The first follows the Cuban Revolution and commonly includes groups that were to some extent inspired by that conflict, while the second includes groups founded in the late 1970s/early 1980s. According to Henshaw, the mobilization and expansion of women's roles in Colombian armed groups during these periods was driven by competition among leftist groups involved in the conflict. While the FARC, the ELN, and M-19

all valued women, the perceived value of female combatants significantly intensified in the latter years of the conflict, when recruitment became more difficult, and women were seen to have strategic value. More specifically, recruitment of women offered material benefit to these leftist groups in multiple ways – in addition to providing sheer numbers to aid in the struggle against the government, women were also believed to fight harder and remain on the battlefield longer than men and were viewed as less likely than men to defect from their armed groups (p. 108).

Each of the groups found ways to package women's rights within a larger rights-based framework, creating common cause and emphasizing the potential for mutual gains (p. 110). Henshaw argues that a competitive environment conducive to outbidding and involving leftist armed groups is a necessary but not sufficient condition for substantive engagement on gender – other factors including the intervention and support of outside actors are equally important in converting talk into action. Intervention of outside actors exerting pressure on FARC in 2012, ensured that women were included in peace negotiations between the rebel group and the Colombian government. Participation by women in the peace negotiations significantly contributed to the recognition of feminism as integral to the work of the FARC and its future as a political party (p. 109).

Authors Melissa Frances Johnston, Muhammad Iqbal and Jacqui True utilize gender-sensitive content analysis to examine Islamist extremist websites in Indonesia in the seventh chapter entitled "*The Lure of (Violent) Extremism: Gender Constructs in Online Recruitment and Messaging in Indonesia.*" Research analysis makes plain that extremist groups in Indonesia are using distinct online strategies to recruit women to extremism, and to engage their support. According to Johnston and colleagues, these groups use gendered messaging to reach out to women and to bolster their membership while promoting patriarchal relations that offer women an alternative vision of God-ordained gender complementarity (p. 131).

The final chapter, "*Gendered Reflections? Extremism in the UK's Radical Right and al-Muhajiroun Networks,*" by Elizabeth Pearson considers the role of gender in extremist narratives, and ideology in two extremist movements – a network linked to the U.K.'s banned Islamist group al-Muhajiroun; and activists for the English Defense League, Britain First.

Using a gendered analysis, Pearson critically examines masculinities and femininities in both groups and shows how gender contributes to group members' activism. This chapter challenges assertions of straightforward gender parity between these movements and outlines the ways in which gender produces tensions and fragmentations; the diversity of masculinities in both movement; and the ways in which feminisms are co-opted and women's roles and rights celebrated in both (p. 138).

## Conclusion

*Terrorism, Gender, and Women: Toward an Integrated Research Agenda* is a welcomed addition to the study of how women and men can be affected by terrorism and violent extremism differently. The book is well-structured and well-written. The text has a strong central thesis which is forcefully argued throughout – that women and men experience terrorism differently, and that gender analysis is crucial to addressing many under-explored questions regarding divergences in radicalization to violence, terrorist motivations, roles and factors that can sustain involvement (p. 8).

Many of the articles in this influential contribution to the literature on gender and terrorism recognize the need for more empirical and theoretical work in this field. As noted by Cindy Banks (2019), qualitative studies that can communicate subjective explanations and meanings and fully contextualize the experience of being a woman and a member of a terrorist group are scarce (p. 186).<sup>2</sup> This volume contains two salient qualitative studies that help to fill that gap while also providing (1) important insight into white supremacist activist women, a group about which little is known, and (2) knowledge of the origins of the PKK's ideological and policy positions on women's rights and the politics of gender. Another major strength of this text is its timely incorporation of recent developments in the field– such as the proliferation of propaganda and online messaging, the “decline” or shifting presence of ISIS, the continued “rise” of far-right extremism, and the changing roles of women in political violence – to demonstrate how crucial a gendered understanding of radicalization, participation, and of strategies is needed to counter and prevent both violent extremism and terrorism (pp. 1-2). A third strength of the current book is that it avoids the over-simplistic explanation of women joining terrorist organizations to pursue a broadly

feminist ideal of gender equality. As discussed in multiple chapters of the book, women join or are recruited into terrorist and other extremist groups for a variety of reasons.

This text is an excellent addition to criminal justice, security studies, and other courses examining women and terrorism. For policymakers, this book further highlights the critical importance of addressing gendered issues when designing counterterrorism strategies. Additionally, the book's length and authors' straightforward writing style will appeal to general readers who would like to expand their knowledge of gender and conflict. Anyone interested in understanding the evolving roles of women in terrorist and other extremist groups should immediately purchase and read this thought-provoking text.

Finally, gendering terrorism means questioning terrorism itself and the policy and manner of counterterrorism, addressing the silences they contain about women and gender, and acquiring a sharpened comprehension of political violence generally.<sup>3</sup> That is exactly what this text does. This informative book provides readers with an indispensable guide to examining the interplay of gender, women, and terrorism.

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<sup>1</sup> Margaret Gonzales-Perez, *Women and Terrorism: Female Activity in Domestic and International Terror Groups* (London: Routledge 2008), 86-87, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203926550>.

<sup>2</sup> Cyndi Banks, "Introduction: Women, Gender and Terrorism: Gendering Terrorism," *Women & Criminal Justice* 29, no. 4-5 (2019): 181-187, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08974454.2019.1633612>.

<sup>3</sup> Cyndi Banks, "Introduction: Women, Gender and Terrorism: Gendering Terrorism," *Women & Criminal Justice* 29, no. 4-5 (2019): 181-187, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08974454.2019.1633612>.