

Introduction: Rethinking Gender in Responses to Violent Extremism

Sahla Aroussi and Fatuma Ahmed Ali

Abstract: Over the last few years, there has been a growing interest in the role of women in the prevention of violent extremism and within extremist networks. Yet research and scholarship in this area remains limited and a deeper engagement with gender and the role of norms around masculinities and femininities in violent extremism is needed. This special issue includes a selection of both timely and relevant articles by academics and practitioners, mostly from the Global South, focusing on gender and violent extremism particularly in the context of East Africa. The articles were presented at the Global Network on Gender and Responding to Violent Extremism (GARVE) online conference in November 2021. GARVE is an international network involving academics, policymakers and practitioners to promote innovative and critical thinking on violent extremism from a gender perspective and facilitate shared learning.

Keywords: gender, violent extremism, terrorism, race politics, responses, GARVE Network

Note on the authors: Sahla Aroussi is an Associate Professor of Gender and Global Security Challenges at the University of Leeds, UK. She is the co-director of the Gender and Responding to Violent Extremism (GARVE) Network. Her research interests are broadly situated in the field of gender, violence and armed conflicts, particularly the UN's agenda on women, peace and security; gender in peace settlements; conflict-related sexual violence; and gender and violent extremism. Sahla has conducted extensive research in sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East and North Africa funded by prestigious funders such as UKRI, the British Academy and NATO.

s.aroussi@leeds.ac.uk

Fatuma Ahmed Ali is an Associate Professor of International Relations at the United States International University–Africa. She is the director of the Gender and Responding to Violent Extremism (GARVE) Network. Her research interests include gender and violent extremism, preventing/countering violent extremism, women and war, African-Islamic feminism, women's agency, gender analysis, peace and security in the Horn of Africa, conflict-related sexual violence and labour migration/displacements in Africa.

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6827-9090> | fmali@usiu.ac.ke; fatuma07@yahoo.com

Violent extremism is not only a global security threat but also a complex gendered phenomenon that involves both men and women through diverse personal, ideological, structural and context-specific drivers (UNDP 2017). Violent extremist groups and networks have strategically utilised gender to mobilise, recruit and enhance the perceptions of their legitimacy. Yet, in initial responses to terrorism and violent extremism, gender was absent. Huckerby (2020: 181) writes that prior to 2015, gender in countering terrorism was ‘simultaneously everywhere and nowhere’. It is everywhere because gender stereotypes and gendered assumptions are used in counterterrorism, as is evident, for example, in the type of abuse inflicted on prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad (Kaufman-Osborn 2005; Gronnvoll 2007). But it is also nowhere because of the absence of a gendered perspective, particularly on women’s experiences and roles in terrorism and counterterrorism.

Nonetheless, recently we have witnessed an unprecedented level of attention to gender in research and policies on preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE), particularly following the adoption of the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General’s Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism and UN Security Council Resolution 2242 on women, peace and security in 2015. This resolution emphasises the need for gender-sensitive research and for increased consultations with women-led organisations affected by violent extremism (Ndung’u & Shadung 2017: 4; Idris 2020: 9). The 2016 UN Plan of Action for Preventing Violent Extremism dedicates significant attention to women and the importance of gender considerations when developing PVE strategies (Ndung’u & Shadung 2017; Idris 2020: 9). It calls on states to place the protection and empowerment of women at the centre of efforts to address terrorism and violent extremism and to ensure that these do not impact adversely on women’s rights (Ndung’u & Shadung 2017; Idris 2020: 9). In June 2018, the Sixth Review Resolution of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy urged member states and UN entities to integrate a gender analysis on the drivers of radicalisation of women to terrorism into their relevant programmes, and to seek greater consultations with women and women’s organisations when developing CVE strategies (Idris 2020: 10).

Scholarly interest regarding gender in responses to violent extremism was largely generated by the above-mentioned expansion of the UN’s P/CVE agenda; the presumption of a surge in the number of women joining violent groups; the increased attention to the targeting of women and girls by terrorist violence; the integration of P/CVE within the women, peace, and security framework; and the subsequent development and uptake of ‘feminism-as-counter-terrorism’ based on the idea that gender equality can be used as a national security tactic to combat and prevent violent extremism (Huckerby 2020).

However, this increased attention to gender within P/CVE work is challenging because there is no agreed definition on what violent extremism is (Ní Aoláin 2016).

One dimension of this complexity is that attempts to define extremism have been politically charged, involving major tensions and disagreements on the sources and meaning of violent extremism between different states (Thiessen 2019). Moreover, what governments and members of the international community would consider violent extremism may not be the same as what local communities, men and women, consider violent extremism. Hence, this makes theorising and designing effective responses extremely difficult.

Moreover, the idea that there has been an increase women's participation in extremist activities is difficult to evidence, and one may argue that women are not more attracted to violence and violent extremist groups but rather that the attention to women's roles in this area has now increased (Tariq & Sjoberg 2021: 1). Historically, women have been involved in political violence and armed struggles (Alison 2004, 2009; Parashar 2011, 2014; McEvoy 2009; Mackenzie 2009, 2012). However, the history of women's involvement in terrorism and violent extremism is difficult to ascertain because these terms are relatively new and ambiguous, and also due to the tendency to marginalise women's contributions to national and armed struggles (Tickner & True 2018).

The articles in this Special Issue were selected from among those presented at the International Virtual Conference on Gender and Responding to Violent Extremism from 23–4 November 2021. This conference explored how, over the last few years, attention to gender in P/CVE research and policies has impacted on responses to violent extremism, the women's rights agenda and local communities. The conference was organised by the Gender and Responding to Violent Extremism (GARVE) network (2019–22) led by the editors of this Special Issue. The GARVE network was funded by the United Kingdom Research and Innovation's Global Challenge Research Fund, and its core members include United States International University–Africa in Kenya, University of Leeds in the UK and Rift Valley Institute, a think tank based in Kenya.

GARVE is a global network that adopts an interdisciplinary approach and a multidisciplinary membership to allow new perspectives on gender and responding to violent extremism to emerge. It promotes critical, strategic, innovative and constructive thinking on violent extremism from a gender perspective and facilitates shared learning. The network encourages alternative ways of understanding and tackling violent extremism based on gender equality, human rights and sustainable development. As a global community of academics, practitioners, policymakers, local organisations and members of local communities from across the globe, the network is aimed to stimulate research ideas, enable generation of research projects, and create synergies between theory and practice around the topic of gender and violent extremism. It also serves as a platform for sharing best practice on community-based and socially engaged gendered approaches to human security through various activities such as roundtables, online seminars and the conference.

The GARVE network's activities have highlighted with concern the fact that threats from violent extremism and terrorism have increased in the last two decades, with violent extremist groups exploiting grievances, inequalities and governance deficits to recruit followers. Atrocities committed by violent extremist groups have exacerbated existing challenges and eroded progress towards gender equality. This is because the underlying premise is that violent extremist organisations tend to take root in marginalised areas, using local grievances to recruit young citizens in vulnerable circumstances and environments characterised by factors such as varying degrees of unemployment, low education or literacy levels, and historical discrimination.

Furthermore, GARVE has also enabled reflections on how securitised and militarised responses to violent extremism in recent years have often taken priority over conflict prevention and peacebuilding approaches (Aroussi 2020). Initiatives to promote the rights of women to participate in security sector decision-making platforms remain underfunded and often tokenistic. Countries experiencing violent extremism devote sizeable portions of their budgets to military spending and counterterrorism operations, funds that otherwise could be invested in services, infrastructure and development projects. As a result, poverty increases and deepens, and the population suffers. Evidence also suggests that attempts to include gender in policies and programmes on violent extremism typically reduce gender to women and girls, leading to tokenism that diminishes women's activism and agency (Huckerby 2020; Skjelsbæk *et al.* 2020). It is further argued that this tokenism complicates the gendered aspects of the push and pull factors in violent extremism and leaves questions unexplored. In addition, human rights violations committed under the pretext of counterterrorism, especially gender-based and sexual violence, are underreported, and perpetrators are rarely held to account. Sometimes, the lack of gender-sensitive approaches leads to harmful practices and/or reinforces gender-based discrimination.

The network also highlighted the issues of ethics, methodology and race politics in researching violent extremism as an area for theory, practice and future research directions. Ethics in researching violent extremism is highly significant. The issue of harm, for example, comes up when the research produced securitises the studied population or risks the safety and security of researchers, especially when state security actors consider the information critical. While a foreign researcher working on violent extremism in the Global South might be able to leave the research site safely, local researchers may be subjected to surveillance and scrutiny and harm by security actors or violent extremist groups, particularly after the dissemination stage. Moreover, due to gatekeeping, epistemic bias and the hegemony of Western knowledge production and criteria for publications, local scholars and practitioners often find it challenging to have their work accepted and published in reputable journals.

Racism is inherent in knowledge production on gender and violent extremism and terrorism. Terrorism, as a field of study, is built on gender, racial, imperial and heteronormative aphasias (Gentry 2020). Research in this area has resulted in ‘subjugated knowledges’ where certain experiences and understandings are diminished and dismissed as non-knowledge because of ontological, epistemological and methodological biases (Jackson 2012). Lisa Stampnitzky (2013) argues that Terrorism Studies is dominated by inner circles and subjugated knowledge. Her work examines how the inner circle, or what she calls the terrorism mafia, constructed what violence and actors are included in the label of terrorism. Puar (2007) also highlights how the entrenchment of Islamophobia in Terrorism Studies is both structural and ideological. She invites us to reconsider the scholarship and policies on counterterrorism, arguing that the field of Terrorism and Counterterrorism Studies is dominated by private security trade corporations and neo-conservative think tanks with a vested interest in a particular narrative. Gentry (2020) argues that ‘the label of terrorism is in itself a form of violence that materialises against particular populations’ (Gentry 2020: 4). She contends that the boundaries of what is defined as terrorism are typically drawn around highly racialised discourses and internalised cultural and religious biases reinforced through the contested concept of radicalisation (Gentry 2020).

Since 11 September 2001, we have witnessed a process of racialisation of religion whereby members of Muslim minorities, particularly in the West, are identified as terrorists and dis-identified as citizens (Puar 2007; Cherney & Murphy 2016). Butler’s (2004, 2009) idea of grievable and non-grievable deaths is also of relevance here. People who have lost loved ones in terrorist attacks are depicted as sufferers of trauma and injustice, but those who have lost loved ones because of the war on terror are not depicted as sufferers or victims of injustice. ‘The sexual torture scandal at Abu Ghraib is an instructive example of the devalorisation of the life of one population for the purpose of optimisation and maximisation of the life of another (Western, American)’ (Puar 2007: 33).

Moreover, the epistemic dominance of the Global North in this field of study occurs at the cost of excluding voices that are vital to changing things on the ground (Baaz & Parashar 2021). Baaz & Parashar (2021) highlight how researchers often engage in knowledge production while ignoring vital local knowledge, insights, concerns and development needs. The heightened attention to gender in terrorism and violent extremism in recent years has led to increased involvement of Western women in scholarship, research and policies on countering and preventing violent extremism and the growth of what Abu Lughod called *securofeminism*. Zakaria (2021), in her work on this topic, has labelled the war on terror as America’s First Feminist War. Shepherd (2022) also condemns this increased involvement and participation of Western feminists and scholars with security institutions and actors and their

complicity with the racism, homophobia and exclusion inherent in these structures. [Shepherd \(2022: 737\)](#) calls attention to how epistemic whiteness structures and informs other expressions of white supremacy. Epistemic whiteness, she argues, is a form of ‘feminist knowledge which reproduce[s] racial hierarchies and ignorance about how whiteness functions’ and which maintains white supremacy in the guise of progressive policy and activism. This clearly indicates how politics of representation in knowledge production on violent extremism is centred on race and also how it alienates gendered lived experiences.

A growing body of scholarly research suggests that concerns for more equal gender relations and the empowerment of women may manifest only shallowly, if at all, in P/CVE work, while race is frequently elided altogether ([Shepherd 2022: 729](#)). Therefore, research shows that counterterrorism narratives and interventions have globally racialised, militarised and securitised a group of people as potential terrorists because of their race and religious affiliation. For instance, the construction of Muslim women as passive, invisible victims of a repressive ideology (Islam) and perceived extreme patriarchy is evident in mainstream scholarship, policy and practice ([Ali & Mwambari 2021](#)). Moreover, Muslim women have transitioned from victim to suspect, especially when they fail to follow the gendered norms and expectations of Western society; they are automatically seen as accomplices of Muslim men, not as victims ([Ali & Mwambari 2021](#)).

This Special Issues concludes the work of the GARVE network. The Special Issue critically reflects on the role of gender in violent extremism and on responses to it, and it constructively offers alternative approaches to understanding and tackling violent extremism using a gender lens. The articles in this volume are both diverse and grounded, looking at women’s involvement, recruitment, radicalisation and disengagement; the impact of violent extremism and counterterrorism operations on communities; the role of motherhood from an African feminist perspective; and issues of masculinity, gender inequality, misogyny and human rights. Some of them suggest solutions to violent extremism by proposing Islamic feminism as a potential alternative strategy for preventing and countering violent extremism and salvaging the P/CVE agenda by transforming its harmful aspects into a more positive set of values and principles drawing on the nexus between peacebuilding leadership and gender identity. These articles also approach gender in responses to violent extremism from an intersectional perspective through a generational lens that is concerned with how innocent men, boys, women and girls are impacted by racialised and masculinised security discourses at both the national and global levels.

Additionally, this volume is a reflective analysis of the theory and practice of gender and violent extremism today. The authors comprise practitioners and academics, mainly from the Global South, who seek to stimulate significant conversations and

debates and engage in knowledge production in rethinking gender in responses to violent extremism. Moreover, many of the authors are practitioners, and their contributions demonstrate their capacity for reflexive analysis of their practice and lived experiences. The authors of this Special Issue further choose to rethink gender in responses to violent extremism by moving beyond the gender essentialist perspective – assuming that men and boys are the main perpetrators and targets for radicalisation and women and girls are the victims, mothers and wives of recruits or potential recruits – that until recently was the main approach in understanding and responding to violent extremism.

In rethinking gender in responses to violent extremism, Hawa Noor Zitzmann's article in this volume looks at women's pathways into Al-Shabaab. The article discusses how the responsibility for women's involvement with terrorism in Kenya is often attributed to men, with women only represented as victims without agency. Based on 15 explorative interviews with female returnees from Mombasa and Kwale, the article argues that the motivations for women's participation in religion-inspired militancy are complex and multiple and therefore defy the simple binary of agency and victimhood. The article contextualises women's recruitment to Al-Shabaab in the Kenyan political context, arguing that this phenomenon only became prominent after Operation Linda Nchi due to increased demands for additional followers and the enhanced operational capacity of the group. The article identifies three pathways to joining Al-Shabaab: retaliatory, responsive and reunion paths. The first pathway demonstrates that women who join Al-Shabaab can do so for political reasons, enabled by political grievances and experiences of marginalisation, as well as for personal reasons such as the desire for revenge and retaliation. Discussing the responsive pathway, the article reveals that women can also be motivated by socio-economic opportunities such as employment and education in their decision to join Al-Shabaab either consciously or by deception. The reunion pathway explores how reunion with a partner or a husband or promises of love and marriage can also motivate women to join Al-Shabaab. The article argues that the conditions of impoverishment, violence and marginalisation in which these women lived and their desire for love, family and a decent life and livelihood are what unite the three pathways. These conditions were successfully exploited by Al-Shabaab to recruit them, whether this happened unwittingly or intentionally. The article therefore concludes that efforts to counter the recruitment of women into extremism must take into consideration how the involvement of women with extremist groups is enabled by the unjust, insecure and unequal economic, political and social structures in which they live.

Fathima Azmiya Badurdeen, in her article, also focuses on women and girls in extremist organisations, asking not only why they joined, but also why and how they left. Using narrative enquiry and drawing primarily on 23 interviews with female

returnees in Kenya, the article considers the role of gender in the disengagement and reintegration of defectors. Badurdeen argues that the gendered recruitment process that leads women into Al-Shabaab is a continuum that ranges from voluntary to involuntary (deceptive or forced) recruitment. Badurdeen warns against treating these two as a binary, arguing that individuals often fluctuate between voluntary and involuntary involvement, with positive and negative experiences within the movement shaping and altering their decisions at any given time. Badurdeen links the potential for reintegration with the reasons behind disengaging from violent groups. Disengagement, she argues, often happens when expectations of joining the violent groups are unmet. She explains that when female recruits find themselves performing roles they consider demeaning or difficult, they are more likely to seek to disengage from the network out of feelings of disillusionment, frustration and anger. While acknowledging exceptions where certain women gain trust within the network or acquire status through marriage, the patriarchal and rigidly hierarchical nature of groups such as Al-Shabaab, as well as the prevalence of racism and tribalism within these groups, all limit the roles and spaces permitted to women, which can lead to disenchantment. As such, identifying what roles returnees played in the network can in many cases shed further light on their reasons for disengagement and potential for deradicalisation, rehabilitation and reintegration or re-engagement. However, understanding how and why they left the group is also important for assessing the reintegration of female returnees. Reintegration is more successful when the decision to disengage was made voluntarily. The article also identifies some of the reasons for returning from Al-Shabaab, including the amnesty offered by the Kenyan government; family and community acceptance and support; available livelihood opportunities and financial incentives; the possibility of creating a new life or to be with children or parents; and divergence from the religious ideology of Al-Shabaab. Effective reintegration, however, rests on the availability of conducive factors such as family and community acceptance and support.

The article argues that successful rehabilitation and reintegration requires assessing and addressing the returnees' psychosocial, vocational, financial, educational, legal, religious, familial and communication needs. It calls for gender-sensitive and long-term psychosocial supports targeting returnees as a prerequisite for successful rehabilitation and reintegration and healing. Cultural and community-based stereotypes around women can also impact on their effective reintegration. Hence, the article calls for gender-sensitive, culturally appropriate and context-specific reintegration programmes delivered in coordination between the Kenyan government and different actors such as civil society organisations, religious and traditional leaders, and the wider community. The author also recommends tailor-made approaches adapted for each returnee based on their needs.

The next article in the volume shifts the focus from women who join terrorist groups to those who are left behind. In his article, Hussein Abdullahi Mahmoud takes us on a journey to explore the impact of violence and counterterrorism operations on communities around the Kenyan coast. The author first examines the typology, actors and main victims of this violence. The author particularly highlights the plight of the families of those who have fallen victim to the Kenyan war on terror through extrajudicial killings and forced disappearances. Using key informant interviews, the author discusses the difficulties experienced by these secondary victims. The findings show that the widows and children of those who lost their lives often find themselves unable to obtain death certificates, which are essential for accessing bank accounts to claim funds and for inheriting properties from the deceased. These certificates are also required for widows to remarry and to secure identity documents for their children, such as birth certificates or passports, and to access public services such as healthcare and education. The author concludes that the Kenyan state has no clear policy or protocol on how to respond to and support the families of those who have been killed or disappeared in the war on terror and that such failure is tantamount to a loss of citizenship status.

Staying with the theme of families, in their article, Beatrice Kizi Nzovu and Fatuma Ahmed Ali focus on the mothers of recruits. They discuss the roles that mothers already play in preventing and responding to violence at the family and community levels, arguing that the inclusion of women in efforts aimed at curbing violent extremism would necessarily deliver more effective strategies. The authors offer a detailed examination of Kenya's countering violent extremism and counterterrorism policies to highlight the inconsequentiality of mothers' knowledge in policies and discourses around violent extremism. This disregard for mothers' knowledge, according to Nzovu and Ali, is not accidental but a form of deliberate erasure deployed by a patriarchal state machinery, even when several United Nations resolutions and reports have emphasised the importance of and need for women's meaningful participation in efforts aimed at countering and preventing violent extremism. The authors employ an African feminist theoretical perspective informed by Motherism to argue that the views and lived experiences of mothers are essential in efforts aimed at addressing and preventing violent extremism. African feminism recognises the importance of culture and cultural practices to African women's identity and lived experiences (Coetzee 2018; Atanga 2013). An African feminist perspective is one that celebrates those cultural practices that value women's contribution and knowledge, and one that works with men – rather than against them – towards a fairer and gender-inclusive African society (Mekgwe 2006). Motherism, as a concept, contends that the mother's role and close connection with her children is an essential component of African feminism. Motherhood bonds women and their children even when the latter are recruited to violent extremism,

and as such mothers' knowledge and experiences become crucial if we are to understand and respond to violent extremism effectively. Looking at the policy framework in Kenya, which includes the Prevention of Terrorism Act (2012), the National Strategy on Countering Violent Extremism and the Statute Law (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill (2019), which modified the Prevention of Terrorism Act (2012), the authors condemn the fact that women, and particularly mothers and motherhood, not only remain at the periphery of the policy framework on countering violent extremism but are also exploited as a source of information and as a focal point for intervention by actors working to prevent violent extremism. Nzovu and Ali argue that both policy development and implementation processes in Kenya should meaningfully capture contributions that recruits' mothers can make to addressing violent extremism.

Moving away from discussing motherhood and feminism, the next article in this volume focuses on the role of men and masculinities in violent extremism. In his article, Okumba Miruka considers, first, the fact that most identified terrorists are men, and second, the irrefutable evidence that most men, including in areas where radicalisation is high, do not engage in violent extremism. Miruka argues that these two facts place gender, and particularly masculinity, at the heart of any quest for understanding violent extremism. In his article, Miruka first reviews the literature on masculinities and violent extremism to comprehend the nature of their connection. The article explores six prominent themes within the literature on men and violent extremism: the concept of masculinities; gender norms in the context of economic challenges; disillusionment and alienation; ideological and familial solidarity; militarisation; and inversion. Based on this review of the literature, Miruka argues that the inclination to join violent extremist groups should not be generalised as natural in all men. The article argues that there are multiple and complex factors that may lead individuals into violent extremism which are recurrent within the literature. It emphasises the need to contextualise and localise research on masculinities and violent extremism, drawing on existing research in the field. In its last section, the article proposes three conceptual frameworks for researching masculinities and violent extremism that provide a better understanding of the phenomenon and can potentially contribute to preventing it. The first framework focuses on understanding the categories of violent extremism – ideological, issue-based and ethno-nationalist/separatist. The second is an ecological model that enables understanding of the varied reasons and factors for joining at the individual or micro, meso and macro levels – the community, societal and global levels. The third framework is one that takes into consideration the push and pull factors for violent extremism. The article concludes by offering a few recommendations for future research on this subject.

In the final two articles, the volume moves to consider solutions to violent extremism. Rickline S. Ng'ayo's article explores how Islamic feminism can potentially be

used as an alternative strategy for preventing and countering violent extremism. The article argues that Islamic feminism can empower Muslim women against recruitment into extremist groups. The article claims that women who join violent extremist groups have little religious or formal education and are therefore less knowledgeable about their rights and freedoms as Muslims, making them vulnerable to exploitation and recruitment. The article contends that relying on patriarchal norms, Al-Shabaab successfully leveraged both religion and femininity in their recruitment strategy. Stereotypical gender constructions around Muslim women's purity, women's role as good Muslim wives and mothers, and the desire for redemption, love and the thrill of adventure are all exploited by Al-Shabaab to motivate women to join the group. The lack of economic and social independence is also an obstacle for women, which leads to forced or involuntary recruitment into Al-Shabaab alongside their husbands and partners. The article also argues that Kenya's National Countering Violent Extremism policies are underpinned by patriarchal assumptions and a lack of gender insights and therefore have failed to counter the gendered strategies used by Al-Shabaab, leaving women vulnerable to exploitation and recruitment. As a solution to this rather thorny issue, the article proposes Islamic feminism as an alternative strategy for countering the narratives that Al-Shabaab uses to recruit and radicalise women and for the promotion of women's rights. Islamic feminism, according to Ng'ayo, offers women additional rights and freedoms and a chance for change and empowerment in accordance with Islam and hence reduces the appeal of these violent groups.

In the final article, Rosalie Fransen, reflecting on 20 years of practice, considers the question 'can P/CVE be salvaged'. The article argues that there is a conceptual incompatibility between the problem-oriented P/CVE discourse and the aims and objectives of peacebuilding and the women, peace and security agenda. This mismatch has necessarily resulted in serious compromises on the principles of human rights, gender equality, peace and non-violence. The article argues that the global P/CVE agenda has resulted in a narrowing of the scope of work of civil society organisations involved in peacebuilding, endangered their safety and limited their ability to hold states accountable.

Through analysing the case studies profiled in 'Case studies on the role of gender and identity in shaping positive alternatives to extremism' (ICAN, 2021), the article evaluates the contributions of women peacebuilders and pro-peace organisations in delivering alternatives to extremism grounded in the framework of peace, resilience, equal rights and pluralism (PREP) as proposed by Sanam Naraghi Anderlini (2018). The article argues that despite being negatively impacted by the P/CVE agenda, local, women-led civil organisations and pro-peace organisations have managed to continue to work towards realising peace, justice, human rights and gender equality by being authentic, flexible and adept at managing hostile political spaces. The main

contributions these organisations make to their communities include providing positive alternatives and creating space for power-building in programmes and activities aimed at transforming extremism. By engaging people in different activities, they can help empower them, strengthen their sense of belonging and enhance their resilience to extremism.

The article argues that salvaging P/CVE requires reimagining this practice in a way that recognises the leadership of women peacebuilders and the significance of gender and identity, cultural credibility and trust, and power-building. The article concludes that there is a need for a transformational shift away from the harmful P/CVE agenda towards a positive set of values and principles – conceptualised using either the PREP framework or a similar model – that better aligns with and supports the work of women-led civil society.

The articles in this Special Issue reveal that a more nuanced picture is emerging from the growing body of literature on gender and violent extremism, which sheds light on the importance of women for violent extremist organisations such as Al-Shabaab and in the P/CVE initiatives. The publication of this volume is one of the key achievements of the GARVE network, which was formed with the aim of bringing together diverse members from a multidisciplinary background to promote innovative and critical thinking on violent extremism from a gender perspective, to facilitate shared learning, and to attempt to dispel stereotypes and influence mainstream or policy-level thinking. It also highlights our approach to gender as a relational experience where female gender norms are constructed in relation to male gender norms and vice versa.

References

- Ali, A.F. & Mwambari, D. (2021), 'Black Muslim women in security studies', *Critical Studies on Security*, 9(1): 31–5. <http://doi.org/10.1080/21624887.2021.1904193>
- Alison, M. (2004), 'Women as agents of political violence: gendering security', *Security Dialogue*, 35(4): 447–63.
- Alison, M. (2009), *Women and Political Violence: Female Combatants in Ethno-National Conflict* (London, Routledge).
- Aroussi, S. (2020), 'Strange bedfellows: interrogating the unintended consequences of integrating countering violent extremism with the UN's women, peace, and security agenda in Kenya', *Politics & Gender*, 17(4): 665–95. <http://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X20000124>
- Atanga, L.L. (2013), 'African feminism?', in Atanga, L.L., Ellece, S.E., Litosseliti, L. & Sunderland, J. (eds), *Gender and Language in Sub-Saharan Africa: Tradition, Struggle and Change* (Amsterdam, John Benjamins), 301–14.
- Baaz, M.E. & Parashar, S. (2021), 'Race and racism in narratives of insecurity: from the visceral to the global', *Critical Studies on Security*, 9(1): 2–6. <http://doi.org/10.1080/21624887.2021.1904186>
- Butler, J. (2004), *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London, Verso Books).
- Butler, J. (2009), *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London, Verso Books).

- Cherney, A. & Murphy, K. (2016), 'Being a "suspect community" in a post 9/11 world – the impact of the war on terror on Muslim communities in Australia', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, 49(4): 480–96.
- Coetzee, A. (2018), 'Feminism is African, and other implications of reading Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí as a relational thinker', *Gender and Women's Studies*, 1(1): 1–16.
- Gentry, C. (2020). *Disordered Violence: How Gender, Race, and Heteronormativity Structure Terrorism* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press).
- Gronnvoll, M. (2007), 'Gender (in)visibility at Abu Ghraib', *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, 10(3): 371–98. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41940152>
- Huckerby, J.C. (2020), 'In harm's way: gender and human rights in national security', *Duke Journal of Gender Law & Policy*, 27:179–202. <https://scholarship.law.duke.edu/djglp/vol27/iss1/11>
- ICAN (International Civil Society Action Network) (2021), 'Case studies on the role of gender and identity in shaping positive alternatives to extremism'. <https://icanpeacework.org/2021/10/21/gender-and-identity-extremisms/>
- Idris, I. (19 October 2020), *Gender and countering violent extremism (CVE) in the Kenya-Mozambique region*, GSDRC, University of Birmingham.
- Jackson, R.D. (2012), 'Unknown knows: the subjugated knowledge of terrorism studies', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 5(1): 11–29.
- Kaufman-Osborn, T. (2005), 'Gender trouble at Abu Ghraib?', *Politics & Gender*, 1(4): 597–619. <http://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X05050178>
- MacKenzie, M. (2009), 'Securitization and desecuritization: female soldiers and the reconstruction of women in post-conflict Sierra Leone', *Security Studies*, 18(2): 241–61.
- MacKenzie, M. (2012), *Female Soldiers in Sierra Leone: Sex, Security, and Post-Conflict Development* (New York: New York University Press).
- McEvoy, S. (2009), 'Loyalist women paramilitaries in Northern Ireland: beginning a feminist conversation about conflict resolution', *Security Studies*, 18(2): 262–86.
- Mekgwe, P. (2006), 'Theorizing African feminism(s): the "colonial" question', *QUEST: An African Journal of Philosophy/Revue Africaine de Philosophie*, 20(1–2): 165–74. http://quest-journal.net/Quest_XX_2006.pdf#page=11
- Naraghi Anderlini, S. (2018), 'Challenging conventional wisdom, transforming current practices: a gendered lens on PVE', *Berghof Handbook Dialogue Series*, 13. <https://berghof-foundation.org/library/challenging-conventional-wisdom-transforming-current-practices-a-gendered-lens-on-pve>
- Ndung'u, I. & Shadung, M. (2017), 'Can a gendered approach improve responses to violent extremism?' Institute for Security Studies (ISS). <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/aitwr-5.pdf>
- Ní Aoláin, F. (2016), 'The "War on Terror" and extremism: assessing the relevance of the women, peace, and security agenda', *International Affairs*, 92(2): 275–91.
- Parashar, S. (2011), 'Gender, jihad, and jingoism: women as perpetrators, planners, and patrons of militancy in Kashmir', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 34(3): 295–317.
- Parashar, S. (2014), *Women and Militant Wars: The Politics of Injury* (London, Routledge).
- Puar, J.K. (2007), *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC, Duke University Press).
- Shepherd, L.J. (2022), 'White feminism and the governance of violent extremism', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 15(3): 727–49.
- Skjelsbæk, I., Hansen, J.M. & Lorentzen, J. (2020), 'Hopes and misguided expectations: how policy documents frame gender in efforts at preventing terrorism and violent extremism', *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 21(4): 469–86. <http://doi.org/10.1080/21567689.2020.1851873>

- Stampnitzky, L. (2013), *Disciplining Terror: How Experts Invented 'Terrorism'* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press).
- Tariq, I. & Sjoberg, L. (2021), 'Women and violent extremism: Concepts and theories', in Oxford Research Encyclopedias, Criminology and Criminal Justice. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264079.013.683>
- Thiessen, C. (2019), 'The strategic ambiguity of the United Nations approach to preventing violent extremism', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 45(2): 111–32. <http://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2019.1647685>
- Tickner, J.A. & True, J. (2018), 'A century of international relations feminism: from World War I women's peace pragmatism to the women, peace, and security agenda', *International Studies Quarterly*, 62(2): 221–33. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqx091>
- UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) (2017), 'Journey to extremism in Africa: drivers, incentives, and the tipping point for recruitment'. <https://journey-to-extremism.undp.org/enter>
- Zakaria, R. (2021), *Against White Feminism* (London, Hamish Hamilton).

To cite the article: Aroussi, S., & Ali, F.A. (2023), 'Introduction: Rethinking Gender in Responses to Violent Extremism', *Journal of the British Academy*, 11(s1): 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.5871/jba/011s1.001>

Journal of the British Academy (ISSN 2052–7217) is published by
The British Academy, 10–11 Carlton House Terrace, London, SW1Y 5AH
www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk