LESSONS FROM THE PAST:

WOMEN
POLITICAL VIOLENCE
AND CVE

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GEORGETOWN WOMEN PEACE

Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security

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Introduction

In the Malaysian jungles in the mid-1950s, it would have been conceivable for a Malayan Communist Party insurgent – battling the Malayan government and British counter-insurgency forces – to hear the voice of his mother. During 1956, over "600 separate voice messages were recorded and more than 2,200 flights were made by aircraft broadcasting" messages to insurgents calling on them to surrender. Often, the wives or mothers of insurgents recorded these messages.[1] Years later, in 1985 "the first female suicide bomber, a seventeen-year-old Lebanese girl named Sana'a Mehaydali, was sent by the Syrian Socialist National Party...to blow herself up near an Israeli convoy in Lebanon," leading to the death of five Israeli soldiers.[2] These disparate events reveal the long and often forgotten history of women's engagement with violent extremism – a history that can provide key lessons for current attempts to formulate and enact countering violent extremism (CVE) policies.

Over the past decade, CVE has become a key component of broader counterterrorism initiatives, and, increasingly, of academic research agendas.[3] As Owen Frazier and Christian Nunlist point out, "The idea underpinning CVE is that violent extremists should not be fought exclusively with intelligence, police, and military means. The structural causes of violent extremism must also be tackled, including intolerance, government failure, and political, economic, and social marginalization."[4] Yet the roles women play in relation to CVE have been vastly overlooked and understudied.[5] Most research in this area focuses heavily on the most recent examples of political violence and terrorism and few focus on women's roles specifically. Indeed, while CVE as a distinct tool of policy and research is recent, political violence, terrorism, and efforts to combat these forces are not.[6] This study engages with historical case studies of

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[1] Richard Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds in Guerrilla Warfare: The Malayan Emergency, 1948-1960,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 238.

[2] Mia Bloom, "Female Suicide Bombers: A Global Trend," *Daedalus*, Vol. 136, No. 1, On Nonviolence & Violence (Winter, 2007), pp. 94-102, p. 94.

[3] Countering Violent Extremism as a distinct tool and policy of counterterrorism began in the mid-1990s, and especially following the events of September 11, 2001.

[4] Owen Frazer and Christian Nunlist, " The Concept of Countering Violent Extremism," *CSS Analyses in Security Policy,* No. 183, December 2015, p. 1.

[5] See, for example: Faiza Patel and Meghan Koushik, "Countering Violent Extremism," *The Brennan Center for Justice*, March 16, 2017, https://www.brennancenter.org/publication/countering-violent-extremism (June 27, 2017); The White House, "Strategic Implementation Plan for Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States," October 2016, https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/2016_strategic_implementation_plan_empowering_local_partners_prev%20%282%29.pdf (June 27, 2017); Steven Heydemann, "Countering Violent Extremism as a Field of Practice," *United States Institute of Peace*, Spring 2014, https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/Insights-Spring-2014.pdf (June 27, 2017); Daniel Koehler, *Understanding Deradicalization: Methods, Tools and Programs for Countering Violent Extremism* (Milton Park, United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis, 2016); and Andrew Staniforth, Carlile of Berriew CBE QC, and David Omand GCB, *Preventing Terrorism and Violent Extremism* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[6] For purposes of the case studies of this paper, the terms political violence, insurgency, and terrorism are used interchangeably. While clear distinctions in terminology are important to the field overall, this paper's review of

political violence and terrorism and their concurrent counter-insurgency and CVE programs to bring a grounded historical perspective into CVE policy-making.[7] This study aims to better understand how women participate in, counteract, and prevent violent extremism by examining the historical evidence for how they have previously done so. Ultimately, this study seeks to find ways for those working on CVE to use historical evidence in their work in order to create more effective CVE policies.

Women, Political Violence, and Violent Extremism

The roles that women play in regard to violent extremism vary across ideological, geographical, and religious lines. "History provides us," according to Eva Herschinger, "with numerous examples of women's involvement in political violence."[8] In examples from across the globe-Afghanistan and Colombia to Russia and the Philippines- women have actively participated in violent extremism. Belquis Ahmadi and Sadaf Lakhani, discussing Afghanistan, note that "women can and do play an active role in propagating violent extremism, they are not simply victims with inherent desires and capacities for peace."[9] As Caron E. Gentry and Laura Sjoberg note: "It has been documented that women were affiliated with the Russian nihilist organization Narodnaya Vola in the late nineteenth century, as well as with the Socialist Revolutiary Party in the early twentieth century. Women have been involved in terrorist attacks carried out by Peru's Shining Path (Sendero luminoso), by republican and loyalist insurgent groups in Northern Ireland, by al-Qaeda, by the Liberation Tamil Tigers of Ealam (Sri Lanka), by the Kurdistan Worker's Party (Turkey), by HAMAS (Palestine), by the Zapatistas (Mexico), by Abu Sayyaf (Philippines), by the Symbionese Liberation Army (United States), by the Taliban (Afghanistan), by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) (Colombia), and by a number of groups in the Iraqi insurgency."[10]

Like the myriad roles they play, women's reasons for involvement in violent extremism vary widely – and can be found deep in the historical record. Farhana Qazi studies the origins of Islamic female fighters, tracing their history from the seventh century. From such a historical perspective, she notes, "no two conflicts in which female suicide terrorists originate are alike and therefore that the motivations of female bombers will vary both individually and from country to country."[11] This statement rings true beyond female suicide bombers. From one of the only female fighters mentioned in the Quran, Umm Umarah, who lost an arm and suffered

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historical case studies necessitates using ahistorical terminology (such as CVE) to describe events that were not labeled as such contemporaneously.

[7] The cases in this study were chosen for their geographic, chronological, and ideological disparity. Likewise, they also encompass a variety of different roles women have played in relation to violent extremism. The purpose of this study was to show that women have played multiple roles in this regard, via examples from multiple regions, time periods, and movements.

[8] Eva Herschinger, "Political Science, Terrorism, and Gender," *Historical Social Research,* Vol. 39, No. 3 (140\9), Special Issue: Terrorism, Gender, and History. State of Research, Concepts, Case Studies (2014), pp. 46-66, p. 49.

[9] Ahmadi and Lakhani, p. 2.

[10] For more, see: Gentry and Sjoberg, p. 59.

[11] Farhana Qazi, "The Mujahidaat: Tracing the Early Female Warriors of Islam," in Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Genrty, Eds., *Women, Gender, and Terrorism,* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 2011), p. 30.

eleven wounds defending the Prophet Muhammad during a battle in 625 CE, to a "Black Widow" avenging the death of a family member in Chechnya in the early twenty-first century, women's decisions to join violent groups have been, and will remain, varied and contextually specific.[12] To gain a fuller understanding of this issue, these examples in the following section range across geographical, ideological, and chronological boundaries, and provide examples of women's roles in violent extremism. Creating specific CVE policies that recognize this complexity will be key to future success.[13]

Colombia

Women in Colombia played multiple over the 60-year conflict known as *La Violencia. La Violencia* began with a period of instability following the assassination of a popular political leader in 1948, and eventually escalated into a continuous asymmetric war between leftist guerilla groups, organized crime entities, paramilitaries, and the government – with the Colombian population being the main victims.

A number of factors both push and pull female participation in Colombia's insurgency, and rebel groups like the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). According to a United Nations (UN) study,

> Domestic abuse and the lack of meaningful options for girls are among the main push factors women cite for joining the FARC. Girls in some regions join the insurgency as an alternative to prostitution or coca production. For some girls, joining an armed group has provided a way to break with restrictive gender expectations, and offered new leadership opportunities that were not accessible in the broader Colombian society. Other pull factors include educational opportunities.[14]

Women who have taken part in the Colombian insurgency have mostly done so as either part of the FARC or the National Liberation Army (ELN). It is estimated that up to 40 percent of the FARC are women, occupying various roles and positions, some even rising to positions of "military and political authority."[15] About one-third of the ELN's makeup is estimated to be women, and some "play leadership roles in education, health, communications, international

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[12] Ibid; Alisa Stack, "Zombies versus Black Widows: Women as Propaganda in the Chechen Conflict," in Sjoberg and Genrty, p. 83-95; and Mahani Musa, "Women in the Malayan Communist Party, 1942-1989," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 44 (2), pp. 226-249, June 2013, p. 227.

[13] While this paper's aim is not to attempt a full study of women's reasons for joining violent extremist groups, it is worth noting that there is an ongoing debate within the academic community regarding this topic. As Eva Herschinger notes, "the question of motivation has been the *epicenter* of most of the studies on female terrorist violence and highlights the disagreement with regard to the prominence of specific reasons (mono- or multicausal?), in particular with regard to female suicide terrorists, as well as with regard to potential differences in motivation between men and women." A concise overview of this debate can be found in: Herschinger, "Political Science, Terrorism, and Gender," pp. 54-55.

[14] Virginia M. Bouvier, "Gender and the Role of Women in Colombia's Peace Process," UN Women Background Paper, Prepared for the United Nations Global Study on 15 Years of Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), March 4, 2016, p. 15.

[15] Ibid, p. 24.

work, logistics, organizational definition, intelligence, political work, and military combat."[16] The Colombian example demonstrates the complex nature of women and political violence. Not only were women victims throughout decades of violence—through kidnapping, forced recruitment, drug trafficking, the loss of family members, and sexual abuse—but they also participated in the insurgency from the lowest levels to key leadership positions.

Malaya

Women in Malaya both actively participated in insurgent activities and were the victims of harsh treatment from security forces and insurgents. During the British Emergency in the 1950s, in which the British and their allies in the Malayan government fought a counter-insurgency against the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), British forces undertook a massive resettlement program to move mostly ethnic Chinese squatters into secure areas. As in many insurgencies, the MCP depended heavily on the acquiescence and/or aid of indigenous populations.[17] In order to break this cycle, between 1950 and 1954, the government moved approximately 700,000 rural Chinese into secure areas and created over 400 "New Villages."[18]

Women played a significant role within the MCP, both in its struggle against the occupying Japanese during World War II, and later, against the British and Malayan governments. As Mahani Musa has pointed out, "women in the MCP have been presented largely as nurses, cooks, seamstresses, couriers, and wireless/radio operators, but they went through hardship and danger and fought the same battles as the male guerrillas. A few even climbed to the top party posts through hard work, intelligence and personal sacrifice."[19] As noted earlier, women joined the MCP for various reasons, but the end result was the same: large numbers of women played a multitude of roles within the organization and the guerrilla movement. "The party communication system depended on female couriers," and, in fact, a woman arrested in 1953 was the individual coordinating all of the group's "underground activities in Singapore in the early 1950s."[20] Those women who joined the guerrilla campaigns also played a significant role in fights with the Japanese and British throughout this period, with some leading their own squads—and many dying during these attacks.[21]

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[16] Ibid.

[17] For an account of the relationship between local populations and insurgent groups, see: Seth G. Jones, *Waging Insurgent Warfare: Lessons from the Vietcong to the Islamic State,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[18] For more details on resettlement and the numbers involved, see: Richard Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds in Guerrilla Warfare: The Malayan Emergency, 1948-1960,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 100-107; Richard Clutterbuck, *Conflict and Violence in Singapore and Malaysia, 1945-1983,* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1985), pp. 175-178; and Souchou Yao, *The Malayan Emergency: A Small, Distant War,* (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2016), pp. 86-87.

[19] Musa, p. 226.

[20] Ibid, p. 238-239.

[21] Ibid, pp. 242-245.

Cyprus

Known, but understudied, is the fact that women played significant roles during the Greek Cypriot paramilitary organization EOKA's armed insurgency against the British colonial administration in Cyprus in the late 1950s. The conflict involved EOKA's effort to unify the island with Greece, as the majority of the islands inhabitants were of Greek origins. Insurgents actively recruited women—some as young as school-age children—to participate, mostly in noncombatant roles. As David French points out, women couriers were "chosen on the assumption,"—as is the case in many insurgencies—"that as the security forces were under orders that soldiers were not to search women, and they lacked sufficient female personnel to do the job, they were less likely than men to be arrested at checkpoints." In fact, "in 1956-7 EOKA's central post office in Nicosia was run by five women, the youngest of whom was 17 and the eldest 23. Messages were concealed in the hollow frames of bicycles or concealed inside the lining of handbags."[22] In one instance, EOKA employed girls to both supply assassins with guns, but to also retrieve them from the assassins immediately after the killing of two British policemen.[23]

The Philippines

As insurgent violence continues in the Philippines— increasing due to President Duterte's newly enacted policies—it is important to remember that women's roles with insurgent groups in the Philippines have been long and varied. During the guerrilla war against the United States at the turn of the twentieth century, women took on numerous roles providing aid and logistical support. Women played a key role in the September 1901 Balangiga massacre, which saw the heaviest American casualties incurred in any action during the war. The night prior to the attack, American soldiers stopped heavily clad females delivering small caskets to the local church. Due to recent reports of soldiers raping local women, the American sentries were not able to search the women (who were carrying weapons under their clothes). Inside the caskets, the soldiers saw children's bodies, and let the women and the caskets pass. Unbeknownst to them, the children were only sleeping, having been drugged, and were lying atop a cache of munitions and machetes. These weapons were used the next day to kill fifty-nine US soldiers.[24]

Almost half a century later, insurgents would once again organize in the Philippines. The Huks were a leftist organization first formed in 1942 to battle Japanese occupation. Following World War II, they regrouped following a short respite to battle against a continued US, anti-leftist, dominance.[25] According to Vina Lanzona, the Huk movement "was the first major political and military organization in the country to include and actively recruit women. Women played a

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[22] David French, *Fighting EOKA: The British Counter-Insurgency Campaign on Cyprus, 1955-1959,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 53.

[23] Ibid, p. 55.

[24] James R. Arnold, *A Century of Counterinsurgency Warfare From the Philippines to Iraq,* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009), pp. 50-52.

[25] Vina A. Lanzona, *Amazons of the Huk Rebellion: Gender, Sex, and Revolution in the Philippines,* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), pp. 6-7.

central role in the Huk rebellion, and a significant number of Filipino women, mostly from peasant backgrounds, abandoned their traditional roles in Philippine society to participate in the struggle."[26] Although the large majority of women were not involved in combat, a good portion did receive training in guerrilla techniques, with some seeing combat.[27]

Northern Ireland

One of the most well-known instances of women's involvement in political violence is that of Northern Ireland, where women were significant contributors to both the loyalist and republican sides. The Ulster Defence Association (UDA)—a Loyalist Paramilitary Organization (LPO)—was the largest pro-British/pro-Protestant militant group. At its peak, the UDA had approximately two-dozen women's units and nearly 3,000 women members overall. These women were tasked with anything from "transporting arms, munitions, and intelligence in baby carriages, purses, cars, and on their bodies," to "carrying out punishment beating," and "armed robbery."[28] Not only were these women integral to the functioning of their respective LPO, but Sandra McEvoy argues that these women actively pursued the failure of a range of peace processes over the course of forty years because they—women active in the political violence—had been left out of the peacemaking process, a not uncommon occurrence for women during post-conflict transitions as former combatants negotiate their future political roles.[29] In McEvoy's words, "the exclusion of LPO women created an additional fractionalization within Northern Ireland, and an additional constituency that felt disenfranchised not only by their own government and the British government, but also by their own representatives in the peace process."[30]

Suicide Bombings

As noted in the introduction, women within both ideological and religious movements, and in various locales, also have chosen to take part in suicide bombings, and the trend is apparently growing. While there has been much debate both within and between religiously driven groups regarding the acceptability of using women as suicide bombers, women perpetrated about 15 percent of suicide attacks between 1985 and 2006, according to one scholar.[31] Female suicide bombings have taken place in Sri Lanka, Turkey, Chechnya, Israel, Iraq, Nigeria, Mali, Cameroon and Syria, with at least seventeen groups using female suicide bombers.[32] As with their insurgent counterparts across the globe, women who take these actions have varying motives.

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[26] Ibid, p. 7.

[27] Ibid, pp. 153-155.

[28] Sandra McEvoy, "Loyalist Women Paramilitaries in Northern Ireland: Beginning a Feminist Conversation about Conflict Resolution," *Security Studies*, 18:2 (2009), 262-286, pp. 269-270.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid, p. 284.

While still being debated within the academic community, some of these reasons may include: "to avenge a personal loss, to redeem the family name, to escape a life of sheltered monotony and achieve fame, or to equalize the patriarchal societies in which they live," but most women usually become involved for personal reasons such as these.[33]

This sample-set has described just some examples of the ways in which women participate in political violence. While far from exhaustive, it highlights the point that women's roles were not just that of victims. It demonstrates the diversity of their roles in different conflict settings. From women in Colombia joining rebel groups and even rising to positions of leadership, to women performing logistical support, and to women from the Philippines and Chechnya, for example, taking up a gun or strapping on a suicide vest, women have participated in and aided in insurgent movements throughout history and to today. What drove women to participate in political violence in the past? Were previous governments and administrations effective in steering them away from violence? Are there tools available now that could aid in this process that were not present 50, or even 100, years ago? Knowing the answers to these questions is imperative to devising policies today. In the following section, we will describe the ways in which women have taken part in CVE, or CVE-related activities.

Women, Governments, and CVE

The previous pages provided examples of the different roles women played in political violence. The goal is to use this historical knowledge to fashion better policies to combat political violence in the future. With that in mind, we also have to gain more historical context of the relationship between women and CVE, or what activities and policies in the past would today be termed CVE. Whether it was tactics that incorporated women's aid in stopping others from taking part in an insurgency, or government strategies aimed at women themselves from enacting or aiding violence—women and CVE have a long history.

There are particular examples of government CVE polices that took place in the Philippines, Greece, and Malaya during the 1940s and 1950s that highlight this point. Government officials in the Philippines played upon gendered stereotypes of women, using societal norms of what it meant to be a respectable women, and notions of motherhood. As Lanzona writes, "many of the young, single women who had joined the Hukbalahap feared their social reputations had been tarnished by their close association with its mostly male members and their independence from parental authority. They felt great pressure to reclaim their identity as women after the war and regain the respect of their families and communities. The best way to do this was to marry and have children."[34] Government officials played upon this "pressure." Government security forces used children abandoned by their Huk parents escaping arrest as propaganda

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[34] Lanzona, p. 96.

tools, and "rescued," these "Huklings." These children, depicted in the media as malnourished and disease ridden, were raised in military orphanages. The government publicized a series of photographs showing the great care the government was taking to raise the children in healthy and caring settings. Meanwhile, the government also undertook a propaganda campaign to encourage women Huk fighters to abandon their mountain redoubts and reunite with their children.[35]

Issues of morality and gender in early CVE campaigns were not unique to the Philippines. In much the same manner, in post-war Greece, the government launched an all-out psychological assault against women participating in the communist movement, "depicting female revolutionaries as 'moral degenerates' who were 'dangerous to public welfare' to make sure they returned home and stayed there."[36] The British used similar tactics in Malaya in the 1950s, oftentimes using captured information or reports from former insurgents to target individual women. The government used both pamphlets and loudspeaker aircraft for these purposes. In one instance, a pamphlet was directed specifically at female insurgent Lim Yook Kee, who was pregnant. The pamphlet "showed a picture of a baby in a hospital cot over the caption 'How safe and comfortable is this baby in a government maternity hospital!'" The pamphlet offered Lim Yook Kee congratulations on her pregnancy and urged her, "For her own safety and especially that of your new impending baby, come out at once and self-renew and have your child safely delivered in the Maternity Hospital." These government efforts were evidently successful (or at least the MCP feared that they could be), as the Malayan Communist Party imposed the death penalty on anyone possessing a leaflet.[37] We can see from these examples that governments understood that women were participating in insurgencies—either through violence themselves or logistical aid—and were viewed as legitimate targets of CVE-style campaigns of the day. Grasping this fact allows for current CVE planners to study what worked or did not work in the past, and to determine what could, or should, be transferred to the present.

Governments have also specifically sought out women to aid them in their fight against political violence. Contemporary policies may attempt to emphasize intervention before radicalization, but historically, governments have prioritized the surrender of extremists. The large-scale use of recorded messages and pamphlets in Malaya provides one such example of government action. As part of the larger British effort at psychological warfare, loudspeaker aircraft would fly over rebel-held areas broadcasting messages to the insurgents below. In many instances, the wives or mothers of specific fighters would write messages on leaflets or record messages that would play on the aircraft loudspeakers. On top of the over 600 separate recordings created in

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[35] Ibid., pp. 138-143.
[36] Ibid, p. 96.
[37] Nagl, pp. 93-95.

the 1950s, "ninety million leaflets were printed and distributed in 1956." This tactic was also used in the Philippines in the 1950s.[38]

More recently, the government of Bangladesh enacted a new initiative in 2009 focused on monitoring radicalization at the local level. The initiative specifically targeted areas where there was little previous government penetration. This effort includes women, who "interact closely with villagers."[39] Governments have also begun employing women at the opposite end of the radicalization spectrum. Both Malaysia and Saudi Arabia use women and family members as a major part of their deradicalization programs. While less institutionalized than the Saudi program, in Malaysia the government "uses appeals by family members to try to convince detainees to renounce violence and to provide them with an incentive to reform by knowing they are still wanted by their families. Meanwhile, in Saudi Arabia, the government covers all travel and accommodation costs for family members who visit detainees. Once a detainee is released, family members become major moderating voices in a former detainee's life, not to mention a first-level monitor of behavior.[40]

These examples—whether it be government attempts to curtail women's roles in political violence, the government working with women to stop the violence of others, or attempts at curbing the appeal of radicalization—demonstrate two main points. First, it highlights that women have not been monolithic actors in one way or another. Second, it demonstrates that elements of what we now know as CVE were in place long before the policy gained more relevancy in current counterterrorism policy, allowing us to use this history for "lessons learned."

Women, Peace, and CVE

Women have also undertaken numerous initiatives regarding conflict resolution and countering violent extremism outside of government auspices. Because the international community is only now beginning to recognize the need to include women in the scope of CVE, most prior women's movements in this regard have been self-initiated. Two examples, both unique within their own contexts, describe ways in which women are taking the lead in many areas to promote peace and understanding. While in many cases a separate endeavor from CVE, these undertakings also have many overlapping characteristics, including notions of working across divides and seeking a moderation of views from what are oftentimes hardened revolutionaries, insurgents, and extremists.

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[38] For more information on loudspeaker aircraft and women's roles in its use, see: Stubbs, pp. 237-239; Christopher Hale, *Massacre in Malaya: Exposing Britain's My Lai*, (Gloucestershire, UK: The History Press, 2013), pp. 374-375; Nagl, pp. 93-95; and Beckett, p. 104.

[39] Hamad El-Said and Jane Harrigan, *Deradicalizing Violent Extremists: Counter-radicalization Programmes and their Impact in Muslim Majority States,* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 68.

[40] Ibid, pp. 153 and 214-215.

Northern Ireland has seen a remarkable amount of women's initiatives involving conflict resolution and attempts to counter extremism.[41] One example of women working across the divide is the Women's Information Group, formed in 1980. Holding monthly meetings in Belfast that alternate between Catholic and Protestant sites, the group of 150 to 200 women has discussed issues women prioritize, including rent rises, health problems, and juvenile crime. Most importantly, "even after major incidents which heightened tension between the two communities, the meetings have continued to take place."[42] These types of ongoing and historical groups add useable and important knowledge to practitioners and planners that are today seeking ways to include women more actively in CVE.

More recently, women in a rural Northern Ireland community have come together in ways that are upending long-standing stereotypes, breaching strong ideological views, and allowing room for discussing difficult issues. In 2002, the Moyle Women's Forum undertook a photo-voice project, called "Snapshot on Identity," which included both Protestant and Catholic women. Photo-voice, according to Katherine Side, "uses the medium of photography and discussion of photographs to capture the experiences of women's daily lives with the intention of bringing about change." The project had three main goals: "team building among individual participants, with the explicit intention of improving community relations; bringing together women from the two dominant communities to engage in frank and open discussion about sensitive issues; and developing photography skills as an aspect of life-long learning."[43] The women were given five themes to photograph: "family and people; landscape/seascape; rural community; religion; and contentious issues."[44] Ultimately, Side found that the project, "despite its small scale and limited duration, broached long-standing community divisions," and shifted the women's "ideas about the non-retractable nature of community divisions in their district and about the transformative potential of the women's voluntary sector to address the larger arena of community relations in Northern Ireland."[45]

Pakistan, for its part, has been dealing with extremism and issues of radicalization since at least the "Jihad" that began in 1979 against the Soviets in neighboring Afghanistan. Women have been no strangers to this violence and radicalization, as terrorist bombings have also become an internal Pakistani problem over the past two decades, and youth have left in increasing numbers to join extremist groups. One group of Pakistani women in particular has been working to curb radicalization. The PAIMAN Alumni Trust began the "Let's Live in Peace" initiative in 2008. One of the program's aspects was "to empower mothers of extremists and other women in the community to help in the prevention of radicalization."[46] PAIMAN has

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[41] The Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security has done commendable work on the topic of women and conflict resolution, including specific work on Northern Ireland. For more, see:

[42] Ibid, p. 15.

[43] Katherine Side, "Snapshot on Identity: Women's contributions addressing community relations in a rural Northern Irish district," *Women's Studies International Forum* 28 (2005) 315-327, pp. 318-319.

[44] Ibid, p. 19.

[45] Ibid, p. 316.

[46] Mossarat Qadeem, "Women's Participation in Transforming Conflict and Violent Extremism: A Case Study of the Paiman Alumni Trust," *UN Chronicle;* 2015, 52, 4, pp. 10-12.

worked to educate mothers in order for them to counter extremism (Ahmadi and Lakhani also highlight the need for this type of education),[47] taught them livelihood skills so they can earn money for their families, and brought on board male relatives and influential local leaders, enabling them to work in the community more freely. The program consisted of two phases. The first gave women "marketable livelihood skills as per their aptitude because they needed to establish a position of authority within their families." The second was to provide them with the requisite "knowledge and self-confidence to become active players in their family and community." They did this by building "their capacity for critical thinking, allowing them to recognize indicators of violent extremism in an individual and in their communities, and to find ways to address these early warning signs by promoting dialogue and community peacebuilding."[48] To date, PAIMAN has trained "745 mothers," and "educated and sensitized 15,000 female community members."[49]

Both the Northern Ireland and the Pakistani examples (just two of many), demonstrate ways in which women are undertaking CVE-type activities on their own initiatives. It is imperative that those creating CVE policy understand this and are aware of such efforts moving forward, so that they can incorporate those programs that are succeeding. The Pakistan case, in particular, provides a good example of why context and education matter. Not knowing that some women in Pakistan do not have the knowledge needed to realize why they should combat extremism, or do not know enough about their religion to do so, could create CVE policies that are doomed to failure from the outset.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Grounded in historical analysis, this study provides an overview of the myriad roles that women play in relation to violent extremism in order to more fully equip the international community to integrate women into CVE policies and programs. Women have been female suicide bombers, gun-toting insurgents, and community members providing food and logistical aid; they have called on their sons to surrender and educated mothers on how to combat radicalization. The rich depth of women's experiences will make for better CVE policy if they can be successfully integrated. With this in mind, this study provides recommendations moving forward:

- **More research is needed:** As this study has shown, women's roles in violent extremism are much more nuanced and wide-ranging than just violent actors or inherent peacemakers. In order to truly understand the role that women play in this realm—and assist the international community in devising the most successful CVE policies—more

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[47] Specifically when it relates to religious knowledge, Ahmadi and Lakhani note that in the context of Afghanistan, "Women are at a particular disadvantage when it comes to questioning violent extremist narratives—especially when the narratives are allegedly based on Quranic teachings. Women's religious knowledge is often more limited than that of the men in their families, they have little access to information from outside the home and gender norms do not permit their questioning male or religious figures of authority." Ahmadi and Lakhani, "Afghan Women and Violent Extremism," p. 10.

[48] Qadeem, p. 11.

[49] Ibid.

research and writing needs to be done that encompasses the full range of women's activities. This includes moving beyond gender as a sexual category and using gender as an analytical category.

- **Context matters:** This study shows that a variety of issues drove women to interact with extremism in one way or another. Each type of interaction has its own, unique aspects. This must be taken into account when formulating CVE policy. Broad, generalized policies that try a "one-stop shop" approach will not work. While time consuming, policies must be specifically programmed for each context.

- **Education first:** As we have seen, in many instances, women involved in insurgent movements, or those not actively working against extremism, have only one-side of the story. In other cases, such as Afghanistan, women are not in a conducive social situation that allows for learning, which is needed to critically assess extremist beliefs. Keeping in mind the previous recommendation on context, CVE policies need to keep in mind that not all women and women's groups will come equipped with the requisite knowledge on why they should conduct CVE. Governments and the international community need to start at the beginning, in many instances, to educate those who need it on the falsehoods and negative aspects of extremism.

- **CVE needs to be aimed *at* women as well:** From Afghanistan, Colombia, Syria, and beyond, women play active roles in terrorism, insurgency, and revolution. CVE policies cannot be directed only towards women as purveyors of peace and active participants in countering violent extremism. Programs that are specifically aimed at women involved in political violence are needed as well.