

Redefining Motherhood as A New Perspective: Transmission of Motherhood in Women Terrorism



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ABSTRACT: This article tries to explain on the correlation between motherhood and women involvement in terrorism; and also, to analyse the role of motherhood studies related to the women involvement in terrorism activity in global context through literature review. Despite of the marital status and children ownership, women terrorism activities are often connected to the role of motherhood. In the meantime, 2019 Global Terrorism Index reported that women involvement in terrorism activities becoming a new trend marked by the increase of women suicidal attack from four (4) incidents in 2013 to twenty-two (22) in 2018. Oftentimes, the discussion of motherhood aspect in women terrorism activities resulting disparity on the analysis. As the result, this article comes into an argument that redefinition as a new perspective in connecting the women terrorism activity with motherhood is indispensable which will imply to the prevention strategy and counter terrorism. In addition, this article also encourages further study to fill the analysis gap of the topic through the field research.

KEYWORDS: Motherhood, motherhood values, terrorism, women terrorism, women terrorists

I. INTRODUCTION

Motherhood Values

The illustration of motherhood in traditional conservative society has reduced the discussion of maternal studies in public sphere. Motherhood exclusively put women in various household responsibilities which leads into women's obedience to men and their family in private space. The personal experience in motherhood mostly framed in a medical discourse related to women reproductive function (especially natural childbirth) also domestic discourse mainly about their capabilities to taking care of the house, having children, doing the parenting, and presenting the motherly instinct which is the fundamental point of their actions. The responsibilities in domestic area and various sacrificial obligation seem to be inseparable from a woman whether she already had children, married, or not even both. Moreover, mother becomes an adjunct concept from her children, in case of fulfilling nutritional needs, building attitude, also providing moral support and affection. Motherhood then is assumed as intensive dedication of a woman and requires great resources investment that leads into her obedience to the family or male figure in the family (Viera et al., 2019).

The various obligations in motherhood role require women to put aside their own interest and also limit them in realizing their personal needs (Rich in Roberts, 1995). Women are often seen ruling out their main responsibilities as a mother no matter what roles they play aside from domestic sphere. In other words, women are required to adjust their capacity in conducting their socio-biologist role; not as an individual who has identity, motivation, and personal preferences.

The oppressive values found in the motherhood are also not spared from various different culture, they even exist in a society that is quite inherent with religious values (Oh, 2010). The relationship between motherhood and religion has been in a very long history, the religious institution continuously controls over women lives by applying rules and boundaries which is impactful to the experience of motherhood (Sered, 1996; Warner, 1976 in Cheruvallil-Contractor & Rye, 2016). The way of motherhood is perceived, constructed, and presents over centuries in various culture is impacted by different kinds of persuasion from religious beliefs (Cheruvallil-Contractor & Rye, 2016).

Through the values of motherhood, purpose and role of women are put as an intensive and exclusive thing; requiring full dedication, resources investment, also broad knowledge which lead into their obedience to men or family. It is as stated by Fineman in Roberts (1995) that motherhood is a concept or value practiced by women, but the implementation is determined and controlled by patriarchal ideology.

The value of motherhood that constructs women as an obedient, protective, and loving figure obscures the complex reality of women's lives including the reality of shifting in women's activities in various social sphere. This situation then set asides the representation of women in various activities outside that construction, one of which is their involvements in act of violence

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(Alvanou, 2006). Therefore, it is not surprising if the conservative understanding of motherhood actually views women who are involved in violence, including terrorism, as an irrational conduct and nullifies the value of motherhood on the women themselves.

The Emergence of Women as Terrorists

The involvement of women in terrorism has been acknowledged since the era of 1980 (Knop, 2007). Some of the cases are found in Al-Qaeda and Taliban, yet the involvement was still passive. The different things occurred when the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) group emerged, since announcing their victory in 2013 this group has shown significant impact on the increasing of women involvement. In 2018 The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR) stated that 41,490 international citizens from 80 countries are affiliated with ISIS in Iraq and Syria. According to the scope and details, up to 4,761 people or around 13% of them are women, and 4,460 people or 12% of them are minors (Cook & Vale, 2018).

The existence of ISIS is depicted in a contrast way from other international terrorist groups; it is more intriguing for the large number of women who join that group. ISIS promote the role of women in their propaganda. They dominantly state in their doctrine that the fight of the women in the name of justice and religion is as “the wife of a warrior and the mother of a lion’s cub”. Women are considered as “the educator of generation and creator of mankind; woman is a shepherd in her house and she is responsible for her flock”. Thus, women are encouraged and adored for encouraging their man to take up weapon, rather than engaging in the combat themselves (Patel & Westermann, 2018).

In this context, ISIS ignores the status, structure, and other opinion of women and children who want to affiliate with them and open the opportunities for them to join (Gan et al., 2019; Shapiro & Maras, 2019; Cook & Vale, 2018). One of these is also shown in the study conducted by Spencer (2016) in *The Hidden Face Terrorism: An Analysis of the Women in Islamic State* which reveals that women had actively involved in terrorism throughout the history and in various kind of context. Therefore, ISIS propaganda provides spaces for women to be at the front row that they call as fight for justice in the name of religion (Biswas & Deylami, 2019; Khelghat-Doost, 2017; Spencer, 2016; Pearson, 2016).

Furthermore, ISIS is the only existed terrorist group in the world, throughout the history, that has woman special force named Al-Khansa Brigade placing gender equality for their propaganda material as well in defending justice and religion. Although the research conducted by Quilliam Foundation (2015) found that this force is only allowed to correct and punish women in their submissive role, the ISIS women special force is unable to punish men though the violation is committed in domestic area. In fact, the stratification of husband’s position in ISIS has impact on the wives who join this force. By that state, the continuous oppression can still be seen though the women are having the opportunities to actualize themselves in that force.

Some records of the world terrorism tragedy that was carried out and involving women are suicide bombing by female member of Liberation Tiger of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) against India Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi (1991); suicide bombing by female member of LTTE in Sri Lanka (1998); suicide bombing by Hanadi Jaradat in Siraal (2003); suicide bombing by a pregnant female member of LTEE against Sri Lankan military chief of staff (2006); the attempt of assassination by Roshonara Choudhry against former British government minister (2010); and the Paris attack by Hasna Ait Boulahcen in France (2015).

An incident in Indonesia in 2018 was also no less shaking, the emergence of female terrorism activities in this country marked by the Surabaya Bombing which happened in three different locations at the same time conducted by a family (father, mother, and the children. In 2019 Philippines also experienced a suicide bombing incident in Jolo Cathedral Church which was also carried out by a husband and wife (Al Jazeera, 2021; BBC, 2019). These incidents give illustration of a more active role of women or it can be said that they are equal to men in terrorism activities. In addition, it is also suspected that the involvement of women in passive role is still exists including as supporting actors, encouraging their relatives or husband who are involved in the act of terror (Spencer, 2016), assisting to provide logistical needs for terrorist group (Cragin & Daly, 2009), and also regenerating the ideology of violence to their children (Spencer, 2016; Knop, 2007). A bigger encouragement regarding the women recruitment by terrorist group is also supported by the increase of women’s motivation to show their agency into a more active direction (Biswas & Deylami, 2019).

At the same time, the reality of women involvement in terrorism group and activity shows the existence of different motherhood value implementation from what had been widely constructed in traditional conservative society. Women were found to have played a role as wife or mother of the terrorist and even further involvement in encouraging, motivating, and involving their children and family in terrorism activities. They are known to have internalized radical terrorism value and regeneration in the family or their relatives (De Leede, 2018).

The terrorist group has involved various subject of women; the ones with children, no children, or even unmarried. The stigma of women involved in terrorism is often associated with the role and value of motherhood without looking back at the complex and diverse experiences of the women themselves; as if they have lost the motherhood value alongside with their perspective on violence and involvement in terrorism. There is quite large number of studies and analysis of women involved in terrorism which resulted in disparity, as if the emergence and existence of women role in terrorism conduct is connected to the general construction of motherhood value. Apart from this fact, the studies of women and terrorist which discuss motherhood issue

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is limited and the scope development of the values of motherhood as well. In consequence, a better understanding in motherhood especially in the context of women involvement in terrorism is very much needed.

II. DISCUSSION

Motherhood and Women Involvement in Terrorism

The women involvement in terrorism challenges the common perception about female that is often described as the symbol of peace and love. Instead of playing the role of life maker, the involvement of women in terrorism brings the illustration of female as a figure that is harmful and threatening to the safety of civilization (Doran, 2022). It shows how the women involvement in terrorism is often related to the “nature” of woman which is supposed to be “the life giver and caretaker” for women’s decision to participate in terrorist group.

The literature review in this study found a research conducted by Haq (2007), although it was limited, discussed the role of motherhood in the Laskar-i-Tayyiba (LT) terrorist group in Pakistan. It describes the role of motherhood in old terrorism model, regarding the supporting role and domestic work to assist the goal of the terrorist group. The main responsibilities of the women in the group is to be the mother of fighters in the name of religion and spread the message to the society. Sorrow and grief of mothers are basically exploited by LT group to get huge support for their goals and political agenda.

Meanwhile, in Pakistan, women fulfil the motherhood in the patriarchy term by submitting their body (martyr) to the terrorist group, collective society or country (Ness, 2005). This actualization is clearly seen in case of women lone wolf terrorism. Weinberg & Euban (2011) conducted a research with similar topic and resulted that the women participation was actively seen through four terror violence waves in 19th century. Women involvement related to the religion-based violence wave was investigated by Cunningham (in Ness, 2007) since the Iran revolution and spread to Czech and Palestine. While Davis (2013) claimed that after the year of 2000 until now, the perpetrators of religion fundamentalist group keep using women suicide bomber.

However, there is no deeper investigation of motherhood in those research. Some studies discuss about the motivations of women involvement in terrorism. Some of the results are economy, ideology, gender limitation, patriarchy environment, revenge, personal relationship, rebellion, agency or even the willing of freedom and excitement (Kneip, 2016; Pearson, 2016; Biswas & Deylami, 2019).

Regarding to those results, it is found that women who consciously take the decision to involve with terrorism having freedom to control their lives, a full control of themselves, and being respected as a woman by society. The emancipation or agency of women who join terrorist group might have freedom from restrain, control-free life by leaving their families, releasing themselves temporarily from their father’s nurture (Kneip, 2016). This might be emphasized for women have to bear the burden of exclusion and discrimination because of gender expectation and failure to fulfil the traditional gender role (Berko & Erez, 2007).

Further investigation of this study also found out that women who are involved in terrorism tend to be more active conducting their activities in cyberspace, either as propaganda cell or recruiter. Social media turns into an alternative space to lift up the voice of women. It is as stated by Nuraniyah (2018) that women utilize the advance of technology and social media to access, obtain various kind of information, and talk in online radical forum (Nuraniyah, 2018). The freedom in cyberspace seems to give opportunities to women which they cannot have in reality. In this context, women are becoming free propaganda cells that initiate and encourage people to take part in violent in the name of religion, and also their loyalty to the family and Moslem solidarity.

In other literature, figure of a mother is illustrated as pioneer to decrease violence values in her family, considering that a mother has authority in the family and community through their emotional bonding with family especially children. This is also vice versa, that family and society put their trust to mother (Henty & Eggleston, 2018). In addition, blessing from parents, especially mother, considered as the main important thing, even it is often justified with religion dogma through hadith and glorification of stories of the prophets (Al-Uyair et al., 2007). It is a general view that shows how the impact of parents, especially mother, on their children’s decision making, including on terrorism activities (Ndung’u & Shadung, 2017). As Hasso (2005) states on his study that a woman is a mother, sister, daughter, and also a wife of terrorist which now she has taken the role as martyr. Role as a mother is still remain on women, no matter what actions they take.

If we refer to the result of that literally study mentioned before, it is said that the actualization of motherhood in activity can be realized in several forms. First, it comes as supporting role for the male terrorist. Women become loyal followers and companions, bringing the identity as wife and mother of the seeds of terrorist as well. The role is to take care her husband and children. The selection of the mother holds similar level with a soldier or leader, yet their position is still inferior in front of their husband, as applied in ISIS (Affianty in Azra et al., 2017). Furthermore, women are also empowered as logistics expert in terrorist organization. Women are often used by the terrorist group through symbol or tools needed in motherhood role, such as baby stroller, clothes, ect in order to hide weapons and explosive materials. The utilization of motherhood attribute gives impact to the effectiveness of women’s attacks in three ways: resulting less vigilance and more flexibility of security detection.

Second, the actualization of motherhood is manifested in a form of value regeneration or ideology of violence on children, which is stated by Cragin & Daly (2009) as historical conscience. Women who act as mothers are key figure in historical science who pass down their experience or violence narratives which have happened in their lives to the next generation to continue the

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struggle for their beliefs, especially in the context of terrorism. It can be said that the function of historical science as natural recruitment mechanism to regenerate the terrorist actors (Cragin & Daly, 2009). Third, the actualization of motherhood in the form of agency and effort to play their role independently based on their personal experience and motivation. Most of the women involved in terrorism had their own personal agenda, such as (1) personal self-crisis, (2) part of the revenge, (3) effort to achieve same level participation with man in the fight for religion, (4) even as symbol of change in their new meaningful life (O'Rourke, 2009).

In the context of motherhood, women who are involved in terrorism are often seen as failure in being mother. According to Melzer in Doran (2022), society has equal view for women and motherhood, as well as the motherhood values which is strongly tied to the non-violence assumption. Thus, the concept of terrorism (violence) and women (mother) is more imagined as two different point of view; it is not compatible to be discussed as an implicated one issue. This certainly is a discourse that needs to be re-examined whether it means the values of motherhood have gone, or it is also transmitted in women activities in terrorism.

Transmission of Motherhood as a New Perspective

This article is based on the result of monumental study which then break in the point of view in motherhood issue, Of Women Born by Adrienne Rich (1976), that stated if motherhood is not just an experience but an institution and ideology. As a study, motherhood is based on a premise that mothering, life experience as a mother, is not a single practice. So is "mother", as a verb, which can't be understood as one single-practice category, referring that among the same mothers there is also variety of practice (Chandler, 2007 in Takševa, 2018). Thus, that premise has important implication to understand identity, experience, and agency in the study of motherhood and also feminism (Takševa, 2018).

O'Reilly (2007) provides a description of motherhood through three perspectives: as an institution or ideology; as an experience and role; and as identity or subjectivity (O'Reilly, 2007; Hallstein, O'Reilly, & Giles, 2020). As the part of patriarchal ideology and culture construction, Rich views that the meaning of motherhood can vary in many dimensions of space and time, interchangeable, challenged, or redesigned continuously in different ways or forms.

Motherhood is known crosses with various values, from class, ethnic (Lim H, 2019), religion (Rahbari, 2020), ability (Korzec, 1997), sexuality (Rosenthal & Lobel, 2016), popular culture (Bates, 2018), economy (Glauber, 2018), neoliberalism (Boyer, 2014), globalization (Kuleshova, 2015), politics (Christensen, 2018), social media (Harding et al., 2021), to agency or maternal activity (Cook, 2020). Unfortunately, these studies are not interrelated with other issues and there is no single study which focus its discussion on the development of the scope of motherhood values, especially those that lead to terrorism.

Several actualizations of motherhood in women's activities in terrorist group from the previous section illustrates that the definition of motherhood, which then limited to one point of view, no longer reaches the whole motherhood experience that has been through by women especially those who are involved in terrorism. This is also said by Melzer in Doran (2022), the behaviour of women involved in violence shows that the idea of motherhood is limited to one definition that is identical with domestic sphere. Motherhood is said as an interesting concept, but that concept tends to be idealistic in viewing the affinity of women with non-violence politics. In other word, the traditional concept of motherhood does not fully explain the reality of women and ignores various factors that affect the availability of choice as well as decision-making process for women in delivering the values of motherhood.

Referring to the previous explanation that instead of as an achievement, the whole system in terrorist organization is actually exploitative for women. Structural oppression and victimization are only a form of expansion by providing different actualization space for women. Women who have been exposed with violence ideology and become part of extremist group no longer views that action as right or wrong. For them, that decision is form of activism, loyalty, and sacrifice in delivering the role of motherhood in unusual ways.

On the other hand, the consequences of this thing have an impact on the depiction of women who involved in violence as individuals who commit multiple offenses, women who are involved in terrorism, taking lives, delivering propaganda, tricking the officers are not women at all (Doran, 2022). Moreover, the representation of women as terrorist perpetrator is often illustrated as monster, not as feminine figure, not even human (Cruise, 2016).

In fact, as mentioned before, the motives and background behind this involvement have many probabilities that push women to engage in terrorist activities. Such as limited access to education, extreme parenting, lack of opportunity to run from violence culture, patriarchy and discrimination, limited access to get information, structural victimization, etc. Most of them are also not raised in whole family (Jahanbani & Willis, 2019); Nuraniyah, 2018; Ahmadi & Lakhani, 2016; Pearson, 2016; Bloom, 2012). The life experiences of women and culture around them is very complex, an open and dynamic point of view in situational analysis are needed to understand it (Kowino, 2013). It is also possible that traditional motherhood values which are considered as ideal and burdened to women have never been obtained or experienced throughout their own lives.

Therefore, the absence of discussion this field creates an urgency which makes the focus of motherhood studies in terrorism scope needs to be viewed as a new perspective. One of those, as means to redefine motherhood through various transformative practices in possible social changes, culture, and politics. Not only for the sake of women studies, gender, terrorism, or motherhood

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itself, but also for the intersection of those four. Women who are involved in terrorism tend to be illustrated based on exaggerating and inappropriate assumption especially from the construction of maternal experience point of view.

Thus, we need to change our point of view that was used to be partial by conducting further study in order to allow the follow researcher to truly explore the lives and experiences of women involved in terrorism. The increase of women role in terrorism alongside with various type of transmission in motherhood in it, infers the possibility of these two issues have implication to each other. The values of motherhood from women involved in terrorism becoming the basis for them in seeing the available choices and decision making for the ideology and group interest that go beyond themselves.

III. CONCLUSION

This study views that the motherhood values actually have been constructed outside women; they even have no controls over the conventional maternal ethic which later are burdened to them. Instead of observing the needs of better understanding in handling women involved in terrorism, the attention to them is often focused at the illustration as an extraordinary criminal.

The overall findings of this research show that motherhood (as a value which breaks down into practices) is very broad and various. Motherhood is keep evolving; it is no longer at the boundaries that previously had been constructed or in the other word still in the norm border. The values of motherhood in the context of terrorism activity has significant implication. This thing makes a rigid definition of motherhood in seeing the women experience only at the scope of marital status, child, and family care, tends to be irrelevant.

Therefore, this study sees the need of understanding and redefining to the concept and meaning of motherhood so that it will be no more limited in domestic stuff, child, and ideal motherhood ethic. It is hope that this article can trigger further studies to investigate motherhood and terrorism issue, through field research and open up a space for women who are involved in terrorism.

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