Deradicalisation in Malaysia

GENDER & EXTREMISM

edited by
Kartini Aboo Talib@Khalid
Mohd Irwan Syazli Saidin
Zaireeni Azmi

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Preface

This book shares the stories of Malaysian women who were formerly detained under the Security Offences [Special Measures] Act (SOSMA) and explores the factors that led to their decision to be involved in terrorist activities. The investigation into the reasons women are involved in radical social movements, known as terrorism, is guided by the objective of getting information from the horse's mouth instead of relying on the Internet for such information. While the Internet might be a valuable medium to learn more about the experiences of these women, it can become a double-edged sword as certain groups may have their agenda in crafting their content and consequently produce exaggerated or inaccurate information. Women are strong-minded, feminine and nurturing in nature and thus, it is pretty challenging to imagine them choosing the path of violence.

There are examples of women engaging in radical social movements across the world. These include the women in Sri Lanka who joined the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) as suicide bombers. These women fought for independence and were involved in guerilla warfare. Some of these women decided to commit suicide due to the longstanding oppression that they faced and, therefore, succumbed to such drastic measures as a last resort. Others appreciate their sacrifices as sacred and earn a better reincarnation in their next life cycle. Consequently, it has been argued that these women were – and continue to be – victims of political manipulation, and the issue has led to protracted debate concerning ethics and beliefs. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of women engaging in radical social movements is minimal, relative to men.

Although Malaysia has experienced its share of violence in the past, it has been spared from incidents such as bomb blasts and random shootings. It is unlikely to turn to violence to resolve internal disputes. Even in pursuing independence, negotiation and bargaining were the core approaches in moulding the nation's history. Most Malaysians would disregard any form of militancy or violence in the name of democracy and freedom. Furthermore, the uniquely Malaysian experience of growing up in a multi-racial and multi-religious society means that Malaysians are exposed to the spirit of tolerance and, therefore, would be less likely

to engage in terrorist activities. This spirit of tolerance is encouraged at home and school; Malaysians are encouraged to be friendly with their neighbours and peers.

The nature of Malay etiquette is highly appreciated in Malay society. Humble and humility have been nurtured since childhood, and to be arrogant or to show off is disregarded. These values and practices continue in everyday defined activities, including in *surau*, mosques, or even in school associations bearing the name of Islam. It will show, in general, that its members' good behaviour, obedience to teachers, obedience to school rules, and the activities carried out also tend towards looking after the welfare of fellow students. For example, the Girl Guides Association, the Muslim Women's Association, and the Red Crescent Society apply values and customs that train them to be caring, independent and creative-minded.

Socialisation agents such as family, religious beliefs, peers, ideological exposure, and associational membership influence individual and group attitudes. These agents are social constructions strongly influenced by multidimensional factors, and how they change influences people's decisions and actions. For example, teenagers raised in a peaceful, educated, loving, and caring family may still get involved in extreme social movements through influence from peers or associations they joined after living independently. This is unsurprising because changes in attitudes due to current orientation can influence an individual's actions even if one has been well-educated. This decision may have been affected by the self-interest that the benefits felt good at the time.

The involvement of women in this radical movement has its own story in a relatively peaceful country compared to the United States, which has rates of various forms of crime, such as random shootings or genocide that are far more violent and alarming. For example, the explosion of a federal government building in Oklahoma City in 1995, the accidental shooting by Stephan Paddock in Mandalay Bay, Las Vegas, the massacre at a Charleston, South Carolina church by Dylan Roof, a terrorist who understood white supremacy, and many more cases in the United States where data and information about the tragedies can be retrieved online. (Kartini & Munawar 2020: 28). Meanwhile, in Malaysia, referring to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM 2019), the ratio for a population of 100,000 in the highest state in the Federal Territory is 592.3 compared to

the United States for a proportion of 100,000 people in the city of Detroit, the crime rate is 1,965.33 (UNODC Report 2019).

The impetus for these women in joining terrorist organisations such as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is the belief that they are engaging in a form of *jihad*. Deciding to join their husbands, they believe that their participation in such activities allows them to fulfil a *jihad* against those whom they perceive as infidels and, therefore, will be able to purify themselves from past sins and be guaranteed a place in heaven. This is problematic as their understanding of *jihad* is often influenced by the content they see online, and such content may not accurately depict the facts of the situation. Consequently, they decide to engage in violence as a result of such misinformation.

The goal of this book is to shed light on how terrorist movements abroad have succeeded in attracting Malaysian women to engage in violent struggles whose goals are unclear. More interestingly, this woman lives in a relatively peaceful country with no daily violence, which can be referred to as a trigger for the desire to choose a path of life as a terrorist. While these women are inevitably exposed to such ideas and struggles as a result of social media and globalisation, in many cases, they are victims of exploitation. They were deceived or misunderstood the reason for detention. It is time for them to wake up from a long slumber with a bold stand rejecting violence.

This ontology brings together a pool of concepts, case studies, and the experiences of researchers who were involved in collecting data and information on Malaysian women who were involved in terrorist activities. It is hoped that this collection of chapters can help students, social activists, and organisations understand the meaning of violence and the nature of women's involvement in violent activities. The chapters clearly show that their participation in violent activities is strongly influenced by their contemporary surroundings, which tend to victimise them or put them in a dilemma of choosing between religion and love.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that states and institutions have been resilient and firm in the fight against terrorism. Various measures have been introduced to rehabilitate and deradicalise those who were involved in terrorist activities. Such measures include cultivating awareness and skills that will assist them in starting a new life more meaningfully. May this humble effort and collaboration with Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS-Malaysia) code RE-2022-003, titled "Women and Extremism:

Rehabilitation and Deradicalisation" can encourage readers to understand women's involvement in violence and terrorism without immediately labeling them as radical terrorists.

Kartini Aboo Talib@Khalid
Mohd Irwan Syazli Saidin
Zaireeni Azmi