

## Durable Violence in Southeast Asia: Machinery and Scale

Ario Seto, Gunnar Stange, & Susanne Schröter

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On 9 October 2013, the member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) signed the declaration, “On the Elimination of Violence against Women and Elimination of Violence against Children in ASEAN”, which was followed by a Regional Plan of Action (RPA) issued in February 2016. The action’s very first step is to “develop ASEAN Guidelines on non-violent approaches to the nurture, care, and development of children in all settings” (ASEAN, 2017, p. 20). The prevention program is crafted as a framework for ASEAN nations to support the implementation of one of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals which “promises to strive for a better world that is just, equitable and inclusive” (ASEAN, 2017, p. 20). Such norms have gained urgency as, despite their progress in the development of institutional democratic practices as a means to provide security, Southeast Asian nations are struggling to counter the cycle of violence. A year before the RPA’s publication, for example, the Indonesia Ulama Council (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia*) expressed its concern that the Indonesian government has failed to ensure non-violent content even in its high-school education programs, citing an example of a textbook, “Religious Teaching and Personality”, which justifies Muslims killing the “unbeliever” (Susanto, 2015). Another alarming example relates to gender-based violence (GBV) with “14 percent of all women between the ages of 15 and 49 reported being raped” (The Asia Foundation, 2017, p. 3) in Timor-Leste. True (2017) finds that GBV in Asia has become a persistent form of violence because of its entanglement with “the national or subnational context,” whereby structural gender inequality is embedded in the “inequality of access to resources or to public space and voice, legal discrimination in civil and family status, and societal attitudes that condone violence against women” (p. 221).

This conflicting illustration marks a call to investigate the durability of rampant violence in Southeast Asia, where violence has become a mundane reality (Arendt, 1970) of everyday life. To view violence as a prolonged and intergenerational reality that goes beyond a single disruption or some narrow temporality provides another method to observe the cycle of violence and how it emerges as a common practice. The normalcy or banality of violence could lead to a “crisis of chronicity” (Vigh, 2008), which endorses asymmetrical social relationships, orders, and power, and denies every notion of democratic life (see also Arendt, 1970). Against this background, everyday violence hinders the realization of ASEAN’s (2017), above-referenced goal to create a “just, equitable and inclusive” (p. 20) world. One of the weaknesses in explaining such chronicity is, as the expert on security in Southeast Asia, Sidney Jones, observes in the

context of Indonesia, that activists, academics, and politicians deliver “time frames [of observation which] are too short” (Stange, 2019, p. 270). Responding to the shreds of evidence of chronic violence in Southeast Asia, this issue aims to survey how violence becomes self-generating or autopoietic. To look at how such mundane violence could be addressed, we invited scholars who have been continuously studying the durability of violence in their area of regional expertise to contribute to this issue.

The six research articles and one interview article in this issue represent extensive discussions of lingering violence in Southeast Asia. Peter Kreuzer’s (2019) study on the deadly use of violence by the police in the Philippines shows that although the act has taken the spotlight under President Duterte’s war on drugs campaign, it is not a new phenomenon since criminal enforcement in the country has a long history of extrajudicial (deadly) use of violence by the police. Helle Rydstrom (2019) presents a study of chronic violence against women in Vietnam, which has endured for generations to the point that members of society have begun to consider such abuse “normal”. Observing Islamic fundamentalist social media influencers in Indonesia, Ario Seto (2019) argues that violent behavior is not simply sparked by discontent but is fostered by online and offline sociability of othering and bigotry.

Lúcio Sousa’s (2019) study on the emergence of *lia-na’in* (master of words) as peacemakers in Timor-Leste describes how the state has turned to tradition and spirituality to mitigate centuries of violence while sourcing legitimacy to incite security and stability. Amporn Marddent’s (2019) work highlights how Muslim women in Thailand’s Deep South have become peacemakers, while they nonetheless face the challenge of recognition, as, first, their Salafi belief has been stereotyped as being inherently violent, and, second, as women’s voices are not considered to be representative in a patriarchal society. In the research workshop section, Gunnar Stange, Patrick Saktapolrak, Kwanchit Sasiwongsaroj, and Matthias Kourek (2019) report an imbalance in academic research in the field of forced migration studies in Southeast Asia that could signify indifference towards how internally displaced populations are treated and further victimized in structural violence. The issue, furthermore, features an interview by Gunnar Stange (2019) with the Jakarta based political analyst, Sidney Jones, on violence, religious extremism, and conflict dynamics in contemporary Indonesia. As a long-term observer of Indonesian politics, she warns of the dangers of “intolerant above-ground, non-clandestine organizations” (Stange, 2019, p. 270) for Indonesian democracy.

Although all the presented cases of violence are rooted in the region’s heterogeneous colonial history, the contributors to this issue highlight how contemporary violence is augmented and amplified by post-independence socio-political dynamics. By doing so, the articles reveal that historically prolonged violence, or what we call the durability of rampant violence, is subdued by the dimensions of machinery and scale. The machinery could be “actors” (Kreuzer, 2019; Rydstrom, 2019; Seto, 2019; Sousa, 2019) or “the autopoietic of violence”, which hinder peace or keep non-violent struggles from emerging (Marddent, 2019; Rydstrom, 2019; Sousa, 2019). The articles provide a common argument that violence becomes durable because the machinery is able to preserve it at different scales and in different arenas: across national and subnational geography (Kreuzer, 2019; Marddent, 2019; Seto 2019; Sousa, 2019), in private and public sphere (Marddent, 2019; Rydstrom, 2019; Seto, 2019), and in legal

and illegal practices (Kreuzer, 2019; Marddent, 2019). In articulating how its machinery and scale operate, this issue discusses violence in four constellations of practices and discourses: (1) when violent actors operate beyond the state's governmentality; (2) when violence is framed within an institutionalizing discourse; (3) when violence functions to delineate, or, on the contrary, strengthen, borders, and legitimizes respective claims; and (4) when violence hinders the establishment of non-violent discourses. Besides these four constellations, some articles in this issue also advise that the media has played a role in influencing both the scale of violence and how violence is observed. Before we discuss how the machinery and scale of violence operate corresponding with these constellations, we will look at the importance and the current need for deeper analysis of violence in Southeast Asia in the next section.

### NORMALCY AND CHRONICITY OF VIOLENCE

Even democratic states with their established legal arms to steward order are not violence-proof. Della Porta's (1995) rigorous study of social movements in Italy and Germany in the 1960s shows that violence is part of a repertoire of political action and cannot be isolated to a certain ideology; actors socialized in non-violent environments can still fall into violence. Violence emerges in expressions that also advocate equal rights and peace, including left-wing movements. She contends that

radical groups took advantage of the available resources in their environment to strengthen or reinforce their militancy, their decision to emphasize violence can be considered a rational choice. [...] But the choice of radicalization was also a contingent development, for it depended on the supply of resources available to each particular movement's organization: not surprisingly, the organizations that became most violent were those that lacked resources giving them access to the system (della Porta, 1995, p. 198).

She has also recently warned that "the availability (or lack) of material and symbolic resources affects the choice of radical repertoire" (della Porta, 2018, p. 464). Her work in connecting violence as radical acts to resource tapping and repertoire is helpful in invigorating observations of how violence becomes a durable problem and takes place in precipitating events and endures from time to time, including in various democratic realities.

The six articles in this issue correspondingly deliver similar observations about how the problem of resources and repertoires provides the texture of the violence currently enduring in Southeast Asia. However, we would like to extend the thesis. We propose that in some conditions, rather than sealing off the emergence of violence, the opening to democracy and the emerging economic stability have offered new arenas of resource tapping and have allowed engineered violent confrontations to manifest out of cleavages that were tempered by previous authoritarian rule (e.g., Stange & Patock, 2010). In this context, resources play a role not because of their scarcity, but because of their availability. The growth of ethnocentric paramilitary groups and radical Islamists in Southeast Asia (Hadiz, 2016; Wilson, 2010) are two fitting examples of such violence, particularly when violence has become a common

repertoire of action, which both the state and non-state actors engage to secure their political power as a means to accrue available resources. In this setting, evolving violence cannot be confined simply by empowering the state's agency of policing to maintain order, since, in some cases, the state and state actors are part of the competing groups seeking to secure the resource (e.g., Böhmelt, Bove, & Gleditsch, 2019; UNHCR, 2018).

The normalcy and chronicity of violence are sustained by the emerging ideology of development, through which the state regularly imposes indisputable security to maintain order to create political stability. Located between China and India, Southeast Asia is home to the world's fastest-growing economies, such as Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, the Philippines, and Indonesia (OECD, 2019). A consequence of such economic development has been the introduction of cultural policies that are imagined to ensure national security and productivity, such as Vietnam's *Đổi Mới* (renovation) policy, Indonesia's *Pembangunan* (development) credo, and Thailand's National Culture Act. In these policies, economic development has become a prominent orientation, if not an ideology, for state actors to incite expeditious stability rather than creating a laborious public sphere. The cultural program therefore often asserts nationalist sentiments and unity as the moral resources of stability and the nation's betterment. This is where violence as a repertoire comes into play, as the state enacts strong policing to maintain order. In nonaggressive circumstances, power organizes people to internalize certain norms, such as how to be submissive to the government in the name of national unity, which is also enforced by the law and institutions of justice. Any dissatisfaction, then, is suppressed within normalcy or, as Foucault (1978) describes it, "a normalizing society is the historical outcome of a technology of power centered on life" (p. 144).

Such developments provide a new opportunity to investigate the 'old' violence beyond its colonial history (e.g., van Klinken, 2007; Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois, 2004). We believe that most cases of violence discussed in the articles of this issue render a postcolonial problem. However, we would like to add complexity by arguing that these nation-states have the agency to come to terms with their colonial pasts, practices, and repertoires of violence. Take the Philippines as an example: Boyce (1993, p. 131) examines that development strategies crafted during the Marcos era were unsustainable and created larger social gaps, such as landlordism as a product of problematic land rights, which are prone to armed violence conducted by local entrepreneurs. In Indonesia, Suharto's developmentalist regime imposed a military approach to suppress discontent in Aceh, Papua, and East Timor (McGibbon, 2004).

Investigating the state's relation and response to durable violence, then, involves a deeper view of how these policies influence the local historical contexts and current political contestation or discontent. Van Klinken (2007) argues that such examinations not only require continuous observation of political dynamics, but also cultural changes. Assessing the communal violence in the Moluccas in the early 2000s, he exemplifies that violence and conflicts in the Global South appear to be different than their counterparts in the Global North where the presence of the state and policing mechanism is more pronounced. Van Klinken (2007, pp. 9-10) warns that violence is not simply ideologically driven, but that contesting actors are entangled in "a struggle for power in a political system structured along lines of personal relationships rather

than formal rules” (p. 136). They are entangled in a historical patron-client loyalty rather than emancipatory expression, where they act opportunistically, rely on rumors rather than verified news, and have – to some degree – a relationship with state institutions. In such settings, violence becomes a lateral common reality for fostering state-building, as violence remains a powerful repertoire, both as the language of contestation and as that of the traditional relationships that configure social relations between actors and interest groups in Southeast Asian countries. Accordingly, violence transcends the emergence of the modern state. These actors also understand the notion of crisis differently than those in Western states. As van Klinken (2007) describes, “even in the midst of such security crises, many people were still conducting politics as usual, albeit in crisis mode and of a kind considered patently abnormal in the West” (p. 10).

Veena Das (2004) shares a similar observation in her study on the Indian state and extraordinary events, such as periods of communal violence. She finds that although violence as an event has ceased, the language of violence transcends the episode into the quotidian everyday life, while on the other hand, everyday life encounters provide the texture of violence. Das (2004), therefore, calls attention to the normalcy of violence as a durable reality. The presence of violence in everyday life is not simply a matter of practice, but also a subject of institutionalization. Based on their research on Hindu-Muslim violence and riots in a slum in Mumbai, Chatterji, and Mehta (2007) argue that the experience of violence as a “normalcy” is formed through patterns of state and institutional governance. This includes, among other practices, establishing government commissions to investigate the riots, the documentation of the riots in official narratives, the remaking of slum spaces, crafting redevelopment programs, and inviting other non-governmental actors, such as NGOs and civil society organization, to participate in these processes. With the rising complexity of rehabilitating everyday life, members of the community eventually lose their agency, which leads to another form of structural violence. While strong administrative states, such as those in the Global North, are trained to confine violence, ASEAN states’ historical approach to violence appears to be rather one of indifference in the six cases presented here. Thus, when violence becomes an intergenerational reality, the question remains: How do Southeast Asians manage to live with it?

### VIOLENT ACTORS AND THE STATE

The conditions of abnormality and normalcy have been important dimensions for discussions of violence since they have been related to how the state, regime, or authoritative class governs or controls the population. While modern states are expected to regulate the control of law and order, it is never the case that it has the full control of order (e.g., Tilly, 2003) and engenders a situation where the state confines its power to governmentality or to the authoritative legitimation of control (Foucault, 1991). Foucault (1991) asserts that, through its government, the administrative state takes on a posture of “apparatuses of security” (p. 102), which control social and political institutions to establish order and to avoid violence. Yet, the rise of democracy and the administrative state does not eliminate violence. On the other hand, Mbembe (2003) and Rojas-Perez (2017) underscore that the reign of governmentality

has consolidated power, which shapes “necropolitics” – the use of social and political power to dictate how some people may live and how some must die (Mbembe, 2003) – where the state dominates individuals’ legitimate decision-making.

In a totalitarian state, the state’s control of its citizens’ lives is utterly decisive, whereby those deemed to threaten the state’s policy or ideology will be systematically incarcerated and their living conditions reduced to “bare life” (Agamben, 2005). In other state formations, state control takes shape in the state’s power to cancel a person’s citizenship, and, thus, their administrative identity, to marginalize minorities to those deemed to be unfit for the majority, such as LGBTQ+ groups in many countries. At large, Bourdieu (1992) contends that, when violence is suspended, the relationship between the state and its citizens, or between the ruling class and the commons, remains volatile since the latter is organized within a cultural arrangement – “pact of symbolic nonaggression” (p. 145) – or dominated and legitimized by the first through “symbolic violence” (pp. 145, 167).

The contributions to this special issue provide evidence that extend these mentioned studies, showing how violence is durable because of its scaling ability to transcend the state-citizen boundary through which the actors involved have the capacity to operate *beyond* the state or the state’s legal system. There are some patterns in how this could be observed. The first relates to cases in which the actors represent the state, or are part of the state machinery, and obtain the legal justification to define the action as the “zone of exception” (Agamben 2003). An exemplary case in this regard is Kreuzer’s (2019) article, which depicts how the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP) have the authority to shoot and kill suspected drug dealers and users as well as other crime suspects. Although the state has denounced extrajudicial killings, President Duterte’s drug war campaign and the 2016 Davao City bombing created the opportunity for the president to issue Proclamation No. 55 and Memorandum Order No. 3 released on 7 September 2016 on “violence suppression” leading to the legal approval of the use of deadly force in cases of suspected crime (Kerrigan, 2017, p. 423).

The availability of legal sources to prevent, or, on the contrary, to endure violence is decisive in shaping the actions of violent actors in the zone of exception. Marddent (2019) provides a case where violence endures in Thailand’s Deep South because the non-violence values of the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, which are being practiced by various actors including the state itself, is not accommodated in the new security policy. Although the state recognizes the role of UNSCR 1325 as a guideline to enforce peacebuilding, the military – as an element of the state – seems to be indifferent, upholding its own prescription of security, which centers on the use of force and, ultimately, the use of violence as a means of conflict management.

The second pattern of *beyondness* appears when attempts to counter violence are problematic because the actions are considered social practices and the violent situation is not recognized as an abnormality. Rydstrom’s (2019) work, for example, problematizes how violence against women in Vietnam is a chronic practice that is justified by a cultural understanding of men’s “hot temper”, even though the state has clearly stated its intent to eradicate the “social evil”. Similarly, Seto (2019) concludes that online hate speech and othering messages produced by Indonesian Islamic fundamentalists are difficult to counter since the prosecution of religiously justified

expressions such as those would be considered “anti-Islam” by the masses.

One of the consequences of the conditions in which violence could operate beyond the state is that the state has lost, to some degree, its legitimacy to govern. With the enduring rampant violence and public distrust of the state apparatus in Timor-Leste, Sousa (2019) exemplifies that, instead of applying formal legal procedures, customary law might help to foster the emergence of a non-violent environment. In such an example, the state apparatus does not have the power to follow up the legal case, for example against a cattle thief, as his ethnographic description shows. Even when the state is present and equipped with institutions to counter violence, violence might emerge as unintended consequences beyond its control. The contribution of Stange et al. (2019) highlights that, although internal displacement represents by far a larger challenge than cross-border displacement in Southeast Asia, scholarly attention in the past five years has mainly focused on the latter. Protracted crises as well as reoccurring natural disasters in the region, and their oftentimes short-lived repeated presence in the media, might just be another example of how structural violence can become a “normalcy”.

The cases in this issue do not imply that violent actors are above the law, but problematize how state action is bounded by normative orders beyond the state’s authority to govern. In this context, although the work of Foucault (1991) and Mbembe (2003) are helpful in identifying how the state responds to violence, the contributions exemplify that there are practices, or enduring mechanisms, such as the public acceptance of violence or discrepancy in terms of how victims are treated, that operate beyond the state. Sousa’s (2019) work in this issue provides a critical case whereby the state, incapable of establishing an effective politics of reconciliation, has turned to the ritual of the sacred world to achieve legitimacy for its peacebuilding.

### VIOLENCE FRAMED WITHIN AN INSTITUTIONALIZING DISCOURSE

The aforementioned enduring mechanism is related to how violence can become an everyday life normalcy, if not ritualized. Kreuzer (2019) shows that police officers’ deadly use of force in election years seems to decline because they are busy preventing election violence. Ironically, it is through these elections that politicians who support, or are reluctant to end, the use of deadly force are elected. The relationship between violence and political cycles also emerges in Sousa’s (2019) work. His case shows an example of how, after centuries of violence and obscure frictions between political factions, the legal discourse of peacebuilding might disappear from the repertoire of peacebuilding entirely.

The difficulty associated with fostering non-violence is, in some cases, the result of the embeddedness of violence in the regularizing practice. Rydstrom (2019) describes that even Vietnamese women, who are within the same cohort group of the victims, do not perceive male violence against women as an anomaly. Rydstrom’s (2019) interlocutors explained that physical abuse against women is normalized within the male-female cosmology where women are expected to show feminine qualities of calm and indulgence to the adversity. Expressing an objection to domestic abuse could lead to a condition where society, even the same gender group, blames the victim. In one case, she exemplifies the experience of a victim who is blamed by

other women for inciting marital violence, as she had complained about her husband and was thereby perceived to have provoked him. Similarly, Seto (2019) shows that Islamic-fundamentalist violence in public space is a stick-and-carrot action to solicit religious obedience from fellow Muslims, who are rather relaxed in practicing Islam.

In Thailand, Marddent (2019) depicts that bureaucratic complexity has been unable to change the military understanding of security. In this notion of physical and armed “security”, peace has been confined to the presence and absence of gunshots, instead of order and non-violence. On the other hand, from the perspective of the dissidents, the regularizing practice of violence is embedded in the actualization of identity, as violence is perceived to be a necessary performance to counter the Buddhist central government’s oppressive assimilation policy.

Scheper-Hughes (2008) suggests that these cycles of violence represent a “continuum of violence”, which denotes the interconnectedness of all forms of violence and can also lead to the emergence of “extraordinary violence that is authorized, public, visible, and rewarded” (p. 81). In this continuum, the affected societies understand the normalcy of violence within a register of institutionalizing discourses: violence is placed within rudimentary notions of security (Marddent, 2019), armed encounters (Kreuzer, 2019), displacement (Stange et.al, 2019), forces of cosmology (*Duong-Âm*, Yang and Yin in Chinese, Rydstrom, 2019), and within the religious discipline necessary to prevent evil (Seto, 2019).

Accordingly, the emergence of a new order that could establish non-violent values would first need to contest these discourses. Marddent (2019) exemplifies that while the state has failed in securing the ecology of non-violence, grassroots women’s movements rely on Salafi discourses to provide applicable methods of peace. Yet, they remain at the periphery of peacebuilding efforts since Salafism is generally viewed as a violent discourse. Her case is therefore indicative of a stuck-in-the-moment episode, in which peacebuilding actors struggle to gain recognition of their value in the negotiations. This presents a double-edged problem. First, the common perspective is that Islamic communities in Thailand’s Deep South, which includes the peacebuilding actors, are the usual suspects in the region’s uprising. The recognition of Salafi actors as peacemakers will tarnish this common knowledge and alter the historical record that the Thai Muslim community is a violent rebellious group – a political stance that is problematic for the Thai government and its military, whose memory glorifies the fallen soldiers in the region. Moreover, international NGOs in the region would also need to shift their understanding beyond global notions of Salafism as a threat to democracy if Salafi actors are to be welcomed into the peacebuilding discourse. Second, if Muslim women’s voices are to be included, they would first need to be accepted within the patriarchal society.

An exemplary disruptive method to end the cycle of violence emerges from Sousa’s (2019) work in Timor-Leste. Since the nation has been in a constant state of violence stemming from 400 years of Portuguese colonialization, 25 years of Indonesian occupation, and early-independence civil conflicts, political elites have partly delegitimized politicians’ historical accounts and have turned towards rural-based narratives. In this peacebuilding endeavor, the traditional leader *lia na`in* plays the role as the personification of peacebuilding to deliver an oral history of the young nation. In that way, the political elites are also able to present a party that is less



such cases, the center only appraises social issues under the guise of whether they might hamper economic development. To note, although not discussed in this issue, such chronic violence also can be found in Indonesia's Papua provinces and in the case of the Rohingya in Myanmar. Prolonged conflicts preserve contentious politics where the conflicts also show how violence can become a currency (e.g., Liow, 2016; McCargo, 2014). While the centers urge national stability to create an environment conducive to economic development, resistance and liberation movements in the periphery view that it is only from severe violence that they can create leverage for their demands. The reaction to this is often a military solution that will only increase the severity of violence (Marddent, 2019).

When claims of a right to violence cannot be broken, it risks prolonging the act of violence in other forms of violence. Kreuzer's (2019) research finds that the lethality levels of police departments' use of deadly force were evident during the pre-Duterte period as well as during his presidency. Yet, through his rhetoric on the war on drugs, Duterte has gained a certain political spotlight, which helped him win the campaign (Curato, 2017). From her interviews, Marddent (2019) found that local Malay Muslims view armed violence as a "security industry." This is exemplified in this issue's interview with Sidney Jones (Stange, 2019) and her criticism of the Indonesian government's single-sided development approach to conflict management in Papua, which she contends has led to a deep entrenchment of structural violence in the region. Such settings provide violent actors with the possibility to control the scale and spatiality of violence. The risk, then, is a rollback of the pro-democratic progress that can be observed in Southeast Asia in recent years.

At the same time, such processes of accumulation have convoluted the goal of enacting violence. Along the course of prolonged violence, actions follow various trajectories and goals are adjusted. In such settings, violence becomes a practice rather than deviant behavior, posing the risk of becoming a collective mundane experience as previously discussed. This view is an invitation to contest Riches' (1986) argument, which laments that violent actors always have choices, as they have chosen the conduct for they have calculated that it would be advantageous in dealing with the opponent. Emerging nation-states have been pacified by the opening of democracy. Yet, there are practices that are retained within their political regularities that prevent the total emergence of a non-violent environment.

## PEACEBUILDING AND ITS DISCOURSES OF ORIGIN

The durability of violence impacts the creation of non-violent initiatives. When the state and its legal system displays its weakness in delivering non-violent spaces, non-violent spaces might emerge unexpectedly from below as the contributions by Rydstrom (2019), Marddent (2019), and Sousa (2019) show. Rydstrom (2019) underlines that there is a connection between the effective local movement of "Say No to Violence" (*Nói Không với Bạo lực*) in Vietnam to the larger global initiative of "Say NO – UniTE to End Violence against Women" sponsored by the UN. In the case of peacebuilding in Thailand's Deep South, Marddent (2019) depicts that Salafism, as a global religious discourse, has played a role in inciting one of the most effective approaches to peacebuilding. She acknowledges that Salafi actors have initiated education circles

to teach “spiritual healing” in mainstreaming life-security discourses. Spirituality also appears in Sousa’s (2019) work. While the Timorese doubt the state’s historical narrative because of its victors’ bias, it turns to the *lia-na’in*, the guardian of the sacred houses in the mountains, as a source of legitimacy in recounting the history of the nation, even though the latter hardly appeared as an authority on the national scale in the history of Timor-Leste.

These three anthropological works advise that peacebuilding requires a convincing discourse of origin. In Marddent’s (2019) and Sousa’s (2019) cases, spirituality becomes convincing because the people have witnessed that the “rational” governmental approach to violence has not been working for decades. And when it does work, it simply delivers the status quo. Marddent’s (2019) interlocutors believe that the Islamic notion of patience (*sabr*) provides a practice that is helpful for ending the cycle of violence because it is a practice to find inner peace. In Timor-Leste, *lia na`in*’s blessing is viewed as a spiritual union of the nation and its ancestors and “represents a unity between the people and the politicians as the personification of the state in the post-conflict nation” (Sousa, 2019 p. 218). In these cases, the spirit overcomes political differences. While Malay Muslims in Thailand and the Timorese seek out non-violent practices through their cosmologies, Vietnamese women did the opposite as their cosmology normalizes violence against women. In search of security, they sourced their narrative from global awareness movements. The effort to end violence against women became a convincing public discourse not simply because local women had demanded it, but because it found support in massive efforts from local organizations and NGOs along with the global #MeToo movement to recognize the problem (Rydstrom, 2019).

Different from the previously mentioned discourses of peacebuilding, the work of Stange et al. (2019) shows that those who are displaced by natural disasters often only gain national, and not international, attention because natural disasters are often considered a national problem with the victims ‘only’ internally displaced. By contrast, refugees classified as asylum seekers and stateless persons gain more academic attention because their mobility concerns at least two states.

## MEDIA

Most of the articles in this issue address the role that media has played in the creation of violence and non-violent initiatives. As mentioned earlier, the national awareness to end abuse against women in Vietnam has seized on the crucial momentum of the #MeToo movement (Rydstrom, 2019). Sousa (2019) also notes that media has a certain interest in covering official ceremonies, such as with *Dada Ikas* (withdrawing the oath) and *Loke Dalan* (opening the way), when *lia na`in* are present. On the contrary, Seto (2019) presents a case that digital media becomes a useful scape for Indonesian Islamic fundamentalists to encroach on public space and to gain new followers. It is exactly because of the circulation of problematic online content, such as bigotry and hate speech, that the Islamists could defeat the Christian incumbent in Jakarta’s Gubernatorial election, even though the latter was predicted to win.

The outstanding work of Kreuzer (2019) in this issue demonstrates that the role of media is not confined to the representation of actors, but as the source of verifiable

quantitative data. Since the state does not provide credible data, he mined reports of the use of deadly force by police from various news sites. With such a rich data set, he imposes that violence should be measured to observe its intensity and its lethality. In one of his findings, he exemplifies that “given a large number of armed encounters, the absence or extraordinarily low numbers of killed or wounded police-officers, signals [actually] excessive violence” (Kreuzer, 2019, p. 153).

## CONCLUSION

Throughout the articles in this issue, we seek to reconstruct the current contours of violence in Southeast Asia. The articles in these issues advise that durable violence operates through machinery, may that be through the state apparatus (Kreuzer, 2019; Marddent, 2019), (legal) discourse (Kreuzer, 2019; Marddent, 2019; Stange et al., 2019), cultural praxis (Rydstrom, 2019), or unresolved frictions of civil groups (Seto, 2019; Sousa, 2019). These machineries operate in certain constellations through which violence could be reproduced as repertoires and a problem of resources. Thus, violence could be studied through inquiries that focus on: (1) questions of how violence creates new opportunities in institutionalizing movements and networks; (2) how violence is institutionalized; (3) the transferability of ideologies and violent discourses across spatial and temporal boundaries; (4) the weakness of civil society; (5) the ambiguous role of the state; and (6) the precarious transformations that transpire when political orders are being contested.

It is against the background of durability that questions about the scale and transferability of violence emerges, which requires investigations of the stewardship of local culture, institution, and power. This issue, therefore, seeks to initiate a discussion of how violence operates on different scales through possible machinery. Violence in this context is not simply an outcome of tension but a mechanism that actors and organizations deploy to stabilize their struggles, which eventually makes peacebuilding or democratic projects volatile.



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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Ario Seto is a postdoctoral researcher and media anthropologist at the Collaborative Research Center “Discourses of Weakness and Resource Regimes,” Goethe University Frankfurt, Germany. His recent book *Netizenship: Activism and Online Community Transformation in Indonesia* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017) details the disciplining practices and ethics in shaping militant netizens.

► Contact: [seto@em.uni-frankfurt.de](mailto:seto@em.uni-frankfurt.de)

Gunnar Stange is a post-doctoral researcher in the research group Population Geography and Demography at the Department of Geography and Regional Research, University of Vienna, Austria. His research interests include peace and conflict studies, development studies, and forced migration studies. His regional focus is on Southeast Asia.

► Contact: [gunnar.stange@univie.ac.at](mailto:gunnar.stange@univie.ac.at)

Susanne Schröter is a professor at the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the Goethe University Frankfurt, Germany, and founder as well as director of the Frankfurt Research Center on Global Islam. She is also a principal investigator at the Cluster of Excellence “The Formation of Normative Orders”. Her research interests include political Islam, Islamic extremism, the transformation of gender orders, and religious, political, and ethnic conflicts.

► Contact: [s.schroeter@em.uni-frankfurt.de](mailto:s.schroeter@em.uni-frankfurt.de)

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