Globalization, Gender, and Development

Toward a Theoretical Understanding of Public Gender-Based Violence against Women and Girls

ABSTRACT Research and policy analysis on gender, development, and globalization have focused extensively on the changing roles and social status of women as one of the keys to reaching global development goals and improving social well-being. Yet at the same time as scholars and advocates highlight the importance of women’s autonomy as a key to economic development, the international media are filled with tales and reports of public gang rapes, acid burnings, honor killings, and gang kidnapping and enslavement. We combine observations about growing class inequality among men, theories of male overcompensation, insights on the global crisis of patriarchy, and transaction-cost analyses of asset specificity and sunk costs to explain this gender-based violence.

The data required to assess the causes, prevalence, and effects of public gender-based violence are sparse, and this affects our ability to come to definitive conclusions and policy recommendations. In addition to recommending better and more vigorous data collection on public gender-based violence directed at women and girls, we briefly discuss two possible scenarios that could frustrate attempts to improve the status of women in rapidly developing societies or lead to long-term, sustainable gains.

KEYWORDS gender, violence, interaction, globalization, low-status men
lead to public display and advertising: dead rape victims’ bodies hanging from trees for family members and the public to view; credits (or the acts themselves) posted on YouTube, accompanied by public decrees that express openly that “women don’t know their place” and “need to be taught a lesson.” More disturbing is our perception that such acts are publicized because the global international community will pay attention and disapprove.

Our theoretical exercise attempts to explain why these seemingly contradictory developments (development strategies empowering women, and increasing public displays of violence against women and children) are happening at the same time. If both phenomena are happening simultaneously, then the very mechanisms used to promote development seem to co-occur with gender-based public displays of violence. We contend that the economic and cultural effects of globalization (1) drastically increase class-based inequality among men, (2) increase cultural and economic opportunities for women, and (3) introduce new cosmopolitan cultural ideas and images that disrupt local patriarchal bargains (Kandiyoti 1988; Castells 1997).

These contradictory developments produce cultural and geographic locations where men from traditional patriarchal societies are “left behind”—situations where the only claim to role status available is a gender-based claim of dominance over women. Theoretically we meld the male overcompensation thesis (Willer et al. 2013) and observations on the global crisis of patriarchy and resistance politics (Castells 1997, 1998) to explain why these violent, gender-based, very collective public responses to globalized social change happen. Then we suggest that collective, public, violent responses persist because of the sunk, asset-specific investments in existing cultural arrangements and the transaction costs, uncertainty, and ambiguity associated with changes to gendered cultural institutions and norms (Williamson 1975, 1985).

GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT: THE PROBLEM AND CURRENT EXPLANATIONS

Development scholars of virtually every kind have spoken extensively about improving the status of women as a key mechanism for promoting economic development and integration into the global economy (Blumberg 1984; Boserup 1970; Castells 1997, 1998). The effects of improving the status of women as a means of promoting economic development are very evident from prior research—everything from increased educational attainment to public investments in infrastructure, economic growth, and child well-being have been connected to increasing the status of women (Balk 1994, Berik and Bilginsoy 2000; Boehmer and Williamson 1996; Nyyssola 2007; Obermeyer 1993; Pillai and Wang 1999; Shen and Williamson 2001). Blumberg’s (1984) general theory of gender stratification shows that economic efficacy grounded in control of income is the key variable in women’s empowerment. Raising women’s status is thought to increase their autonomy from men and benefit families, children, and (eventually) men as components of family units.

There are several observations and assumptions behind this effort. Chief among these are the widely held observations that places labelled as “less developed” are thoroughly dominated by men in public life. Men are the only acknowledged economic actors. Men dominate local religious institutions and politics. Women and girls are viewed as property attached to
patriarchal family units. Boys are sent to school (if education is pursued at all); girls are kept at home and trained by mothers and grandmothers to be wives and mothers. Marriages are arranged while the girls are very young with little or no input from the girls themselves. Marriages are often consummated at puberty if not before. All of these practices have been labelled at one time or another as “traditional” or “premodern” by development scholars. It has only been in the last 20 years or so that this monolithic view has given way to discussions of culturally specific nuances and variation within the bounds of otherwise rigid patriarchy (cf. Ganguly-Scrase 2003). Regardless of the recent caveats, global NGOs view increasing the status of women as a primary mechanism for promoting economic development and integration into the global economy (e.g. Cornwall 2014; Meyer 2003; Oxfam 2015; Shen and Williamson 1977; World Bank 2010; World Economic Forum 2013).

But there is a fairly serious oversight in all of these portrayals of gendered development. Most fundamentally, gender is a social role that is enacted through relationships not only with those of the same gender but (most importantly) the opposite gender as well. Gender roles in almost all societies are defined as complementary, and boundary maintenance is highly salient. The gender role system is also the locus of powerful ideologies that define relationships between men and women. These ideologies often have local variants, but in most cases they define men as the principal economic and political actors in public life and (regardless of the truth on the ground) confine women to domestic and private roles as appendices and helpers to men.

When these role definitions and ideologies come into contact with global cosmopolitan culture (cf. Castells 1997; Inglehart and Baker 2000), the interpersonal results for men and women can turn volatile. Globalization and the uneven development it creates add to this volatility by producing dispersed pockets of development and cosmopolitanism geographically proximate to traditional economic and cultural practices. Uneven development takes distant, local cultural practices that could once be ignored as foreign, “Western” or “imperialist” and puts them right at local people’s doorsteps. Worse still, the globalized, cosmopolitan sector of the local economy may seem to be prospering while the local traditional economy stagnates.

Added to this vulnerable mix is the upending of traditional gender roles and practices that seems to come with global cosmopolitan development. There is ample evidence that the globalized industrial and postindustrial economy values women’s skills and abilities in ways that expand opportunities for women (Castells 1997; U.N. Millennium Project 2005). In many cases the changing economic opportunities for women are sufficient to produce a cultural backlash from men, increasing domestic violence and gender discrimination (Beaver, Lihui, and Xue 1996; Krishnan 2005; Simister and Mehta 2010).

We think the most volatility occurs in situations where economic change increases opportunities for women in new industries and markets while limiting or destroying traditional industries and markets dominated by men. If these economic changes are accompanied by shifts in or exposure to cultural cosmopolitan repertoires that differ considerably from traditional practices, then there is a recipe for expressions of “gender fundamentalism” (Giddens 1991) of the kind our earlier examples represent. However, our argument also involves the
dynamics unleashed by globalization and market liberalization. We argue that these dynamics increase the number of low-status men in an absolute sense (where traditional social and economic status claims are destroyed) and a relative sense (situations where the existing economic and social status of men declines as women’s opportunities expand and change).

Why Do These Expressions of Resistance Happen? The Male Overcompensation Thesis and the Global Crisis of Patriarchy

Gender scholars point to a variety of institutional and interpersonal mechanisms that make up the gender system (cf. Epstein 2007; Ridgeway 2014). The institutional characteristics of gender dominance are well known and extensively researched—extensive job and task segregation (cf. Reskin and Roos 1990); the gendered welfare state and government institutions (cf. Orloff 1993; Quadagno 1987)—and cultural ideologies about appropriate gendered spheres of influence and competence (cf. Epstein 2007; Ridgeway 2014) have long-established roles in maintaining and enforcing gender inequality.

Researchers also point to situations where threats to social status are likely to lead to attempts to reestablish gender hierarchies. Willer et al. (2013) and others (Glick et al. 2007; Kroska 2009; Moffett 2006; Moore and Stuart 2005) suggest that status inconsistency leads men toward invoking gender as a master status that trumps other status claims. The male overcompensation thesis (cf. Willer et al. 2013) provides several mechanisms, from psychoanalytic theories of reaction formation to identity salience claims, as reasons for hyper-masculine responses to status threats. Willer et al. define the male overcompensation thesis as “men react[ing] to masculine insecurity by enacting extreme demonstrations of their masculinity” (981). They argue that “extreme masculine behaviors may in fact serve as telltale signs of threats and insecurity...and conceal underlying concerns that they lack exactly those qualities they strive to project” (1016).

Outside of experimental settings only a few ethnographic accounts, mostly in Western contexts, have discussed the responses of men to status threats and actual downward mobility (cf. Faludi 1991, 2007; Jacoby 2013; Madfis 2014). All point to considerable alienation, anger, and defensiveness associated with invoking a master status when there are few other status claims left to make. Everything from beer guts to beards to pickup trucks to culture-war politics can be tied to the perception that postindustrial economies have generated considerable inequality among men, threatening to lower the social-status claims of many to below those of women, whose economic opportunities and fortunes seem to be expanding. Men in these contexts represent an important and growing status contradiction, where a master status endures while other identity-status-role claims are declining.

In practice these interactional theories have been used to explain gendered interaction in Western cultural settings with highly developed, sophisticated economies and “cosmopolitan” cultures. To date very little of this research focuses on multicultural contexts or non-Western cultures in less developed or rapidly changing economies. Apart from the obvious difficulties with social experiments in these contexts, these settings provide fertile ground for theoretically examining the interactions between changes in the institutional environment surrounding gender roles and shifting displays of status through interpersonal interactions.
Castells’s (1997) work on the global crisis of patriarchy helps bridge the gap between micro-level male overcompensation (research embedded in a Western context) and the global diffusion of new gender norms and ideas that ferment new forms of male violence and cultural resistance. In The Power of Identity Castells (1999) explains how the new network society leads to a disarticulation between the local and the global, producing what he refers to as “resistance politics.” Fundamentalism grows from exposure of the world to globalization alongside nationalism/nation-states as a principal form of social organization (17). Further cultural consequences result from incomplete modernization, which fuels youth unemployment and rural dislocation tied to migration to cities. Simply stated, economic and cultural globalization exacerbates and contributes to a crisis of patriarchalism, which results in local attempts to reassert patriarchal control (Castells 1997:25–27, 65–66).

Specifically, Castells (1997:134–242) argues that the decline of global patriarchy fosters widespread interpersonal violence and anger because men are losing power. The transformation of labor markets and improvements in education open labor-market opportunities for women; reproductive technology has enabled control of fertility; feminism has touched most parts of the globe; and rapid diffusion of ideas has produced a global cosmopolitan culture. The symptoms of the decline of global patriarchy are evident in the contrast between traditional families of immigrants and nontraditional families of natives in developed societies, in the growing presence of women up and down the occupational structure, in the growth of female-centered families, and in the recognition that women’s commitment to men is nonexclusive due to psychodynamic connections with other women. Referring to the entire global communications structure and its relationship to patriarchal identity, Castells states (242):

The continuing struggles in and around patriarchalism do not allow a clear forecasting of the historical horizon. . . . A fundamentalist restoration, bringing patriarchalism back under the protection of divine law, may well reverse the process of undermining the patriarchal family, unwillingly induced by informational capitalism and willingly pursued by cultural social movements. . . . Patriarchalism is still alive and well in spite of the symptoms of crisis. . . . However, the very vehemence of the reactions in defense of patriarchalism, as in the religious fundamentalist movements thriving in many countries, is a sign of the intensity of anti-patriarchal challenges. Values that were supposed to be eternal, natural, indeed divine, must now be asserted by force, thus retrenching in their last defensive bastion, and losing legitimacy in people’s minds.

Research on gender and interpersonal interaction has not been systematically used to examine changing institutional contexts and gender role identities in developing or rapidly changing societies. Castells’ (1997) discussion broadens the institutional basis of the argument that patriarchy is under threat, that gender roles are becoming ambiguous in many places, and locates the resistance politics that follows in an attempt to reassert male authority over families and public life. Missing from both the interactional and the institutional analyses is a discussion of why this pattern endures even when the disadvantages of persistence and the benefits of change seem obvious to outside observers. For this part of the analysis we borrow from the transaction-cost perspective.
Why Do These Expressions of Resistance Endure? Asset-Specific Investments and Sunk Costs

To further explain the continued relationship between globalization and low-status men’s public displays of collective gender violence we turn to the transaction-cost perspective (Williamson 1975, 1985). The reason elaborate institutional structures (like gender roles and patriarchal cultural practices) exist and are so hard to change has to do with the costs of acquiring information, making choices, and then monitoring the agreements that are a consequence of those choices. The investments in these existing choices combine with the transaction costs associated with acquiring new information, constructing new arrangements, and monitoring choices to strongly favor existing cultural and institutional arrangements in a path-dependent fashion. The benefits of new gender roles and cultural arrangements may be too vague and the costs of change too high to promote anything except redoubled efforts to maintain the current system.

Gender interactions are not one-shot exchanges among strangers—they are repeated interactions embedded in ongoing relationships and cultural understandings. Our argument is that investments in patriarchy of the kind found in many of world’s developing economies are heavily path-dependent. To see the connection, we will run through four types of constraints that make cultural change difficult from the standpoint of men and women in a prototypical rapidly developing society.

The High Costs of Information

Actors are unlikely to try something new when the costs associated with searching for new information and assessing the relative quality of that information are considerable. In the context of gender interactions, patriarchy, and more importantly local manifestations of it, dominate the cultural landscape in an almost hegemonic fashion (Kandiyoti 1988). In most developing countries the assumption that men will thoroughly dominate public institutional and cultural life over women is woven into the fabric of every social arrangement large and small. These assumptions affect women as well as men. Even as information starts coming in from cultures around the world, this information often is garbled, fragmentary, stylized, or inaccurate. Sifting the truth from the fiction is often difficult, expensive, and threatening to the status quo. To do so from the position of the exploited and powerless is even more risky. The end result is that current cultural practices will continue by default because information that is necessary to change cultural assumptions is impacted, stuck, unrecognized, discounted or ignored until disruptions (cultural and structural) are overwhelming.

Opportunism

Actors desire to withhold information, or provide misleading information, for their own benefit. This increases the costs of finding reliable information and may influence actors’ choices. In the context of gender interactions, men in highly patriarchal societies derive considerable immediate benefit from current cultural and social arrangements. If men control information channels and responses to them they will have an interest in misrepresenting new cultural communications from other places as “imperialist,” “decadent,” “Western,” “alien,” “against God’s will,” or “depraved.” If men can prevent
the information from arriving at all (via press and Internet censorship), that is almost certainly a route that will be chosen. But in a globalized information society outright and total censorship is a losing battle. A more likely response is to attack the sources of new information, their credibility, their cultural salience, and the communicators’ intentions. This can work for a time. The production of open propaganda and misinformation is also a possibility. This can be done via rumor and word of mouth as much as by government and the mass media. If religious institutions are involved it can involve sermons by clerics. These methods are probably more effective than mass propaganda at keeping the lid on things (cf. Sageman 2004).Regardless of the exact mechanism (censorship or discrediting), men will exercise opportunities to limit access to or distort information that threatens their dominant position.

**Asset-Specific Investments Resulting in Sunk Costs and Path Dependence**

Existing cultural commitments often require investments in actions and resources that are specific to the relationship. These resources will be lost if a different course of action is chosen. Worse still, even contemplating a different course of action requires the search for new information and the costs associated with that search. Investments in specific relationships constitute a “sunk cost” that is lost if changes are made. This gives decision-making a path-dependent quality. The decision to go down a specific path cannot be easily changed once the asset-specific commitment has been made.

An example of gender in interaction would be that for men generally, and for low-status men in particular, adherence to local patriarchy is an asset-specific investment. The same is generally true for women, though the advantages of seeking change may be readily apparent. The costs associated with a different course of action are often very high and the payoffs in the future uncertain at best. Worse still, all of the investments in the patriarchal local culture will be lost if a different course of action is taken. These are sunk costs in the present set of interactions that can’t be recouped easily if change is embraced. Men in particular stand to lose their asset-specific investments if women’s empowerment is promoted.

**Relationship Contracting**

There are also sunk costs associated with monitoring ongoing relationships. By and large the current monitoring system will be favored over others, because the existing system is an investment that cannot be recovered if relationships change. An example in gender relationships would be that the prevailing cultural patriarchal arrangements are so ingrained that very little in the way of monitoring is required. Often low-status men invest heavily in “gender monitoring” and display because their status is so precarious, but those investments pale in comparison to those that would be required to abandon an existing set of relationships and reconstruct them under a different set of cultural arrangements that empower women. Women often are in the same boat: to cast off from the existing set of arrangements where men dominate economic, institutional, and cultural life often involves setting out into a great unknown, where the few relationships one does have will be destroyed and the prospects of new ones will be uncertain at best. This mechanism keeps men and women from changing because over time the cost and effort to maintain relationships increases the cost.
of change toward a context where women are empowered to economically contribute in the public sphere.

The concept of male overcompensation explains why and in what situations male gender identity becomes most salient and for whom (low-status men). Castells’s (1997) discussion of the global crisis of patriarchy helps explain the communication and economic mechanisms that lead to the questioning of traditional gender roles (and the resistance politics that follows) in rapidly developing societies. The transaction-cost perspective helps explain why cultural investments are so path dependent, why change is so difficult, and why collective violence and backlash will be resorted to in order to preserve existing cultural arrangements. The costs associated with change, and the uncertain benefits resulting from change, lead to path-dependent resistance to new social arrangements that empower women and (in some cases) disempower men. We argue that these situations are most likely to produce public gender-based violence.

OUR EXPLANATION OF PUBLIC GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE COMPARED WITH OTHERS’

Our explanation of public, collective gender-based violence suggests that specific social groups of men (low-status men) will react to the increasing within-group social inequalities created by modernization and globalization. These reactions occur because (1) low-status men have no master status other than gender to define themselves, (2) they have the biggest asset-specific investment in prior social arrangements, and (3) their route to future social arrangements with greater levels of gender equality is not at all clear and involves considerable transaction costs that may lead to status decline without corresponding compensations.

Our explanation builds on prior analysis of political status threats and political backlash, particularly the work of Lipset and Raab (1978), Chodorow (2012), and Mansbridge and Shames (2008). But our theory differs in that we identify who among an otherwise undifferentiated group of the once-privileged is likely to respond with public, collective, gender-based violence, and we identify why this response is likely even though it may detract from the long-term interests of the group under conditions of rapid social change and rising inequality.

The classic analysis of political responses to status threats comes from Lipset and Raab. Their claim is that extreme political responses from the right (those interested in preventing cultural and social change, in our case men) are geared toward protecting the position of formerly privileged groups who are facing status threats from formerly excluded people. The extreme political responses (including violence) are attempts to keep subordinate groups “in their place.” Lipset (1960) also suggests that the less sophisticated and the more insecure a group is, the more likely they are to accept simplistic ideologies or political programs offered to them. In both cases, in-groups who are threatened by social change use the prevailing institutions available to them in an attempt to protect their values and status.

Our theory of public, collective gender-based violence differs from Lipset and Raab’s formulation by (1) providing a more specific explanation of who is susceptible to acts of violence (low-status men), and (2) explaining why (beyond lack of sophistication) collective
violence might be resorted to when otherwise it would not make sense (asset-specific investments, sunk costs, and the considerable transaction costs associated with change).

Chodorow (2012) suggests that masculinity, nationalism, and violence are a response to humiliation and domination of younger men by older men rather than the sexual exploitation of women. In this case, aggression involves defending the self that is entrapped by humiliation and shame. Our theory ties humiliation and shame to (especially) low-status men because rapid changes in gendered opportunities disadvantage them specifically (see especially the discussion of Boko Haram and ISIS below). The initial humiliation and shame lead to attempts to restore prior prerogatives tied to gender through collective violence by this group because the alternatives involve extensive investments in new cultural norms and behaviors that do not lead to a clear way of organizing the self going forward.3

More relevant to our case is the work of Mansbridge and Shames (2008), who lay out a general theory of backlash (expanding on Faludi 1991). Specifically, Mansbridge and Shames define backlash as an attempt to restore coercive power. While power is defined classically as the ability to turn preferences and intentions into outcomes, coercive power involves the threat of sanctions or the use of force. Backlash involves (1) resistance to something another has done, (2) use of coercive power, and (3) an attempt to reinstate one’s power as the capacity to turn interests into outcomes. Backlash may involve subtle forms of ostracism, ridicule or condemnation or beatings, lynchings, and other forms of violence. But in all cases backlash is the use of coercive power to restore lost power as capacity.

The reactions to potential loss in status will be intense because losses are experienced more painfully than gains, the loss of capacity to act is more emotionally powerful than material loss, and the implied capacity to act is viewed as part of the self (i.e. a natural right). The strongest backlash is produced when proponents of change want to go farther and faster than the general public and when proponents are indifferent to the deepest concerns of opponents. This last point describes the dynamic of rapidly rising inequality in concert with the promotion of social change through expanding women’s roles that occur via development and globalization.

Mansbridge and Shames provide the most coherent theory of backlash we have found. Our theory differs slightly from theirs because we explain why low-status men are especially prone to public displays of gender-based violence, which Mansbridge and Shames define as loss of capacity to act. But we develop further why this gender-based violence occurs and is sustained by invoking male overcompensation, the global crisis of patriarchy, and the lack of readily available cultural alternatives to the status quo (the high costs of information, asset specificity and path dependence).

COLLECTIVE GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE: SOME EXAMPLES
Public Gang Rape, Domestic Violence, and Acid Burning
On June 3, 2014, a six-year-old girl was gang raped by two gym instructors in her school, Vibgyor High. Once the other children in her class had left the gym for the day, the instructors made the girl stay back and then gang raped her. After talking with the victim and reviewing CCTV footage, the police made arrests. Both of the instructors confessed (Times of India 2014).
On May 27, 2014, in the poverty-stricken northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, two cousins’ bodies were found hanging from a mango tree. The girls were between 12 and 16 years of age. Their homes lacked indoor toilets and they had been walking to a field to relieve themselves. It is reported that a group of five men abducted them, sexually assaulted them, and then strangled them, before hanging them from the tree. When one of the fathers reported both young women as missing to a police, the constable yelled caste abuses at the father to protect the accused (Bengali and Parth 2014a, 2014b).

On December 16, 2012, a 23-year-old physiotherapy student left a movie theatre and was riding a bus with a male companion in New Dehli, when both were confronted by a group of men, who proceeded to kill the male companion and then gang rape and torture the woman with a steel pipe while declaring they were going to kill her. Both victims were stripped and left by the side of the road. The woman was taken to a hospital, where she endured multiple surgeries before being flown to Singapore, where she died from her injuries (Harris 2013a).

The news media within and outside India are picking up on the changing nature of gender roles and the volatile mixture of caste associated with gender violence. Singh and Mullen (2014) reported on an opinion piece in the Times of India (July 30, 2014) that linked the attack in Uttar Pradesh to a crisis of authority and growing “medieval lawlessness.” After the December 2012 gang rape and murder, the growing tide of gender-based violence was dubbed “gender cleansing,” similar to that in Bangladesh in 1971, when Pakistanis allegedly raped between 200,000 and 400,000 girls and women (Kupoluyi 2013).

Women have made tremendous strides in India in recent decades as their educational attainment approaches that of men, some are in the paid labor force, and some have become political leaders. But as Harris (2013b) points out, gender “makes them vulnerable to attack from a vast and growing sea of unattached and unemployed young men who view women’s success as the reason for their failure.” Dr. K. Srinath Reddy, president of the Public Health Foundation of India, believes that this gender violence is occurring in a traditionally patriarchal society and that great attainments and options for women are producing violence directed against them (Harris 2013b).

The cases described above are only three examples of extreme violence against women, violence that appears to be increasing at an alarming rate. The New York Times (Timmons and Gottipati 2012) reports that rape cases increased 25 percent in the six years leading up to the notorious New Delhi incident, and that rapes and sexual assaults were up 17 percent in 2011 to 2012 in New Delhi alone (our data on the incidence of rape in India are presented in Figure 1). The victims are often blamed for the violence, pressured into silence, or completely ignored. Indian news outlets regularly report these cases, and the 2012 gang rape and murder of the physiotherapy student pushed the government to pass new laws and regulations. The government seems powerless to impact such violence at all, as women continue to be forced into marriages as children and suffer acid attacks and burnings by their families (our data on acid attacks in neighboring Pakistan are presented in Figure 2). The men who are charged with these crimes often go free after their rape cases linger in courts for years. Advocacy groups say that “violence against women is structurally used as a weapon
to maintain existing power dynamics of control and superiority of a certain caste over another” (Singh and Mullen 2014).

Beyond the report by the New York Times, there is little in the way of systematically collected data on gang rape in developed or developing countries. However, there are data from the Indian National Crime Records Bureau and the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan that suggests that domestic violence and acid burnings (a related form of public gender-based violence since it disfigures the victim) have been rising over the past 20 years.
We are careful not to over-interpret these data because of changes in reporting practices (and rates of domestic violence are not synonymous with public gang rapes, though acid burnings do leave their victims publicly scarred), but there does appear to be growing evidence of gendered interpersonal violence, if not gender-based public violence, in these two countries.

Honor Killings

Farzanna Parveen, a 25-year-old pregnant Pakistani woman, was beaten to death outside a courthouse in the large and cosmopolitan city of Lahore, Pakistan, in May 2014. Police reported that she defied the wishes of her family and married a widower, the man of her choice, rather than the cousin her family had chosen for her (Gillani and Walsh 2014). Her father filed a complaint against the widower claiming that he had kidnapped his daughter. On the day of her murder, Mrs. Parveen was scheduled to appear in court to testify that she had not been coerced into the marriage by her new husband. She was walking from her lawyer’s office to the courthouse when her brother fired a gun at her and missed. Then a crowd from her village assembled around her while her brother murdered her with a brick from a construction site. A crowd of about 30 men watched along with her family as the crime was perpetrated.

On July 13, 2008, five women were murdered and buried alive in Baluchistan Province, India. Three of the women were young and planned on marrying men of their choice. The other two were older relatives who attempted to stop the murders. All were beaten, shot, and buried alive. The perpetrators of the crime were men from their village, in a remote tribal area. The vehicles that took the women to the deserted area had provincial government plates. It is reported that one of the perpetrators was the brother of the province’s housing minister (Masood 2008).

Basma al-Goul, a young mother of two sons, was shot dead by her brother after she ran away from her family and husband, who suspected her of infidelity. Her husband divorced her, and while in hiding she married another man. Contempt for her family grew in their community, and community members urged family members to kill her. After six years of searching for her, Basma’s 16-year-old brother shot and killed her. Once this was done, the family could “walk with their heads high” (Jehl 1999).

But incidents of honor killing are not limited to Pakistan or India. In Irving, Texas, the parents of Amina and Sarah Said murdered them in January, 2008, for adopting “Western ways” and otherwise acting in ways that imply loss of control by the family’s male members. The Price of Honor, a documentary about these honor killings, tells this story, analyzing honor violence around the world (Fox 2014).

These are just four instances of what authorities believe are thousands of honor killings worldwide in the past few years. Phyllis Chesler (2010) argues that the United Nations estimate of 5,000 honor killings worldwide in 2,000 “might be reasonable for Pakistan alone” (see Figure 3). In almost every case the killings are carried out for a limited number of reasons: young women refusing arranged marriages at young ages to men selected by their families; living independently or making independent choices that defy parents’ wishes to maintain gender-based control over the young woman’s activities; and/or real or imagined
sexual immorality. In each case the family is placed under enormous pressure to “restore honor” by murdering the offending woman. Because the murders are carried out in the name of family pride and honor, there is usually no attempt to hide the crime. The gender-based norms that are violated by the young women are viewed as so obvious, and the cultural response so preordained, that the murderers themselves are accepted as heroes by families and other members of the same cultural communities.

Apart from these very public incidents, there is superficial evidence that honor killings have been increasing in Pakistan (the only country for which systematic data on the practice over time can be found; see Figure 3). These data suggest that, at a minimum, honor killings are not subsiding or retreating as a response to threats to family honor, and if anything are persisting if not increasing in frequency. We do not consider this definitive evidence of the phenomenon we describe, but it does suggest that honor killings are a response to recent cultural changes and threats in addition to being a long-standing practice in Pakistani culture.

Gang Kidnapping and Enslavement

In April 2014 Boko Haram kidnapped 270 schoolgirls in Chibok, Borno, a state in northern Nigeria. The girls had gathered from neighboring regions and were sitting for exams. They were kidnapped and loaded into trucks by gunmen in the middle of the night. In May 2014 a leader of Boko Haram was quoted as saying, “I abducted your girls. I will sell them in the market, by God” (Dixon 2014). He referred to the girls as “slaves.” The president of Nigeria made no public statement about the abductions for three weeks, and then said only that the government had no idea where the girls were.

To date Boko Haram has posted numerous videos concerning the girls, including claims that they have been killed, sold into slavery, sold into forced marriages on an open market, or married off to Boko Haram fighters themselves. The Nigerian government seems to lack the capacity to track the group and find the girls, while parents and family members increasingly despair that the girls will ever return to their families (Economist 2014b).
Boko Haram has been carrying out acts of violence toward the oil infrastructure of Nigeria for some time. More recently they have been taking over towns and villages and imposing severe interpretations of *sharia* law on the affected populations, most specifically women. Women are driven from public places; girls are terrorized and sent home from school; girls are forced into marriage with Boko Haram fighters. They have killed hundreds of children. All of this is punctuated by jingoistic pronouncements on YouTube and other social media outlets telling girls to “go home, be subservient to your families, and learn to be good wives and mothers.” A primary goal of this group is to eradicate all Western influence from Africa (Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism 2014:2).

Very much like Boko Haram, the group known as ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham) uses mass rape and female enslavement as tools to communicate its message of male domination and to reward its fighters for service to the group. ISIS originated as an offshoot of Al-Qaeda in Iraq and is composed of mostly fundamentalist Sunni Muslims, targeting Shia Muslims, Christians, and other religious minorities (whom they consider heretics) indiscriminately. ISIS has used brutal tactics to assert its authority in the areas it dominates. They kidnap journalists and harass or kill aid workers and activists. The Al-Qaeda leadership eventually broke from ISIS over their indiscriminate use of violence and intimidation (Economist 2014a).

A key element of ISIS intimidation (and, some say, a major recruiting tool for young, disadvantaged, powerless Sunni men) is the use of rape and sexual slavery. According to an obscure reading of Islamic law, sexual slavery is permitted by the Koran once the slave is certified as not pregnant (Callimachi 2016). Imprisoned fighters report that ISIS uses promises of cash and “wives” to recruit alienated and disenfranchised young men, and ISIS openly reports in its own online magazine, “One should remember that enslaving the families of the kuffar—the infidels—and taking their women as concubines is firmly established aspect of Shariah, or Islamic law” (CNN, October 29, 2014). So-called slaves are given birth control pills or shots of Depo-Provera so that they may be used as sexual slaves by ISIS followers. The treatment has been especially harsh for Yazidi women, members of a religious sect that the Sunnis in ISIS view as heretics. Thousands of Yazidi women have been turned into sexual slaves and passed from one ISIS fighter to another, with continuous usage of birth control pills and Depo-Provera shots. Official publications by ISIS claim that it is legal for a man to rape a woman he enslaves in just about any circumstance.

The stories from escaped victims of ISIS gang kidnapping and sexual slavery are horrific. For example, one woman told the *New York Times* that she was sold a total of seven times, and each time the buyers asked for assurances that she was not pregnant; boxes of birth control drugs were provided as proof. But one potential owner required her to take off her pants, immediately gave her a shot of Depo-Provera, then pushed her back on the bed and raped her (Callimachi, 2016). Jana, a 19-year-old high school student, was kidnapped with other young women from her village (the men from her village were taken outside of town and shot) and taken to a house in Mosul, where there were several hundred other young women (Watson 2014). ISIS men would come periodically and leave with three or four women as sexual slaves. Ahzin, 22, reports being sold three
different times and having sex five or six times per day while lashed to the bedposts. When she tried to escape she was sent to prison and was resold, passing from one fighter to another as sexual property (Malm 2016).

As with public gang rape, acid burnings, and honor killings, gang kidnapping and enslavement by Boko Haram and ISIS happen because of the seeming inability of authorities to address the threat each group poses to communities and (most notably) women and girls. The groups represent a volatile response and reflect male overcompensation and resistance politics. Most of the members of Boko Haram were recruited from the mass of unemployed Muslim men in the southern part of the country, who see few benefits from Nigeria’s expanding oil wealth. Most ISIS recruits come from the mass of unemployed and underemployed Muslim men in the West and in Islamic countries. They live with the growing influence of globalized, cosmopolitan values on women, which is reflected in growing economic and educational opportunities. The collective loss of male status, the asset-specific investments in patriarchal cultural norms, and the real or apparent upward mobility of women combine with a religious conflict to produce growing problems for and reaction to globalization.

Unlike our other two examples, there are almost no reliable data on the spread of gang kidnappings and enslavement, and estimates of the size of the phenomenon vary widely. However, the gendered motivations of the insurgent groups participating in these activities, and the recruiting grounds from which new insurgents are assembled, are very consistent with our theory of male overcompensation, the global cultural and informational attack on patriarchy, asset-specific investments, and sunk costs. The social movements and insurgent groups engaging in this activity are clearly trying to restore the “rightful place” of men in a patriarchal social order and are engaging in a form of resistance politics, as defined by Castells (1997).

GROWING VISIBILITY AND BRUTALITY OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE: APPLICATION OF THEORY TO EXAMPLES

From a theoretical standpoint these attacks (and the authorities’ interpretation of these attacks) are fairly consistent, and their creation and endurance are at least partially explained by our combination of the male overcompensation thesis, the globalization of the crisis of patriarchy, and our gendered theory of transaction costs.

First, the men involved are relatively low-status and threatened. Public, gender-based violence is a form of male overcompensation and resistance politics, as Castells describes, and perpetrators appear more often than not to be low-status men (unemployed, underemployed, young, and/or rural). In the cases of rape in India, the rapes are collective acts, and there appears to be no attempt to conceal the crimes. The same could be said of acid burnings, honor killings, and the kidnappings and sexual enslavement by Boko Haram and ISIS. There are multiple men (and in the case of honor killings, women as well) who actively participate in the violence. Some act to lure victims to a specific spot. Other act as lookouts for police or the authorities. Others actively participate in the violent acts themselves and/or look for others against whom such violence can be directed. The crimes take place in public places designed to “send a message” (regardless of whether this was the conscious intention
of the perpetrators or not), and the collective responses are fairly consistent and put pressure on authorities to sanction the perpetrators.

Second, there is an extensive set of asset-specific investments that is clearly under threat. Not only do the specific men involved feel that their investments in gender hierarchy are threatened, but there is an extensive institutional investment in this system that is threatened as well. The responses of local authorities seem designed to protect asset-specific investments and the male privilege associated with them. The reality or the perception is that traditional patriarchal arrangements, and people’s investments in them, would be lost under a new globalized, ambiguous, and alien set of social arrangements.

Third, there is a great deal of opportunism that is exacerbated by the high costs of information about alternative courses of action. The perpetrators have a subculture that actively supports and glorifies their actions, including family members, friends, or online chat rooms of the like-minded. These people positively reinforce violence by others and enforce norms designed to shun people who do not engage in the sanctioned activity. To the male gang rapists, nonparticipants are wimps, gays, or girlish. In the case of honor killings, the disapprovers dishonor the family and kinship system. In most cases religious justifications are rendered, whether theologically orthodox or not (they usually are not). Authorities seem to be powerless to act and, in many cases, don’t easily perceive alternatives to standard responses such as “women deserve it,” “women don’t belong in the public square and it is our job to push them out,” and “young women should do as they’re told, marry a man their parents select, and have children. That’s it.” That men benefit (in the short term) from these displays is assumed, and there are considerable informal and formal cultural rewards for enacting collective gender-based violence to maintain or restore gender status hierarchies. Cultural actors on the sideline of specific events champion the interpretation of the perpetrators and champion the ideologies and distorted information flows from the events that maintain male dominance.

Fourth, the high costs of credible information, the distortion of information by supportive bystanders and the authorities, and the sunk-cost investments and path dependence in the current system limit the ability of low-status men to see clear alternatives. The globalized world, complete with cultural and economic independence for women, seems to have no role for the low-status men (Castells 1997:227). The costs associated with change seem high and the benefits far from certain. In this situation public gender-based violence seems to be sending two messages: a local message that changing gender roles might not be worth the price for women who dare to be different, and a global message that cultural prerogatives will be defended in the face of new, “imperialist” ideas that arrive without the mediation or protection of local cultures (17).

In situations where there is growing class inequality among men, and where globalization has produced pockets of opportunity that lead to widening social roles and social ambiguity for men and women, the reassertion of patriarchal prerogatives through public violence is a product of masculine overcompensation, culturally available resistance politics, and asset-specific investments in patriarchal social arrangements. This violence is most likely resorted to among low-status men because they have no other master social status on which to base their claims to social position. Further, the inability to “control gender” during these times
of ambiguity and change leads to attempts to reassert control using the only tools that are culturally available and are consistent with the path dependence of investments by low-status men.

CONCLUSION
We would be the last to argue that we have developed a comprehensive and all-encompassing perspective for the understanding of public gender-based violence against women and girls in the context of rapid social change. Our analysis presents a potentially chilling scenario for those who aspire to foster economic development in different parts of the world. These attempts almost always involve expanding economic and cultural opportunities for women. This is (rightly) a key focus of development initiatives and researchers interested in lasting social change around the world. Our analysis points to a series of potential bumps in the road on the way to a world of (hopefully) expanding opportunities for women worldwide. We simply argue that uneven development and globalization produces situations where traditional statuses are challenged and (in the absence of clear interventions) potential alternatives are not clear.

Our analysis suffers from the weakness of fragmented and, at best, suggestive data (see note 3). Beyond the compilation of press accounts that represent "cherry-picked" decisions by news organizations, there is very little in the way of systematic data collection on public gender-based violence of the kind discussed here. Such concepts as gang rape, mass kidnapping and enslavement, and honor killing are the subject of sporadic and inconsistent data collection by individual nation-states. Global agencies like the U.N., World Bank, and UNICEF talk about the phenomenon in specific contexts but provide little in the way of systematic and/or longitudinal data on the collective threat that women face as economic development and cultural change moves forward. There is little doubt that gender-based violence has been a mainstay of many cultures around the world for a long time. What we argue (but have only suggestive and superficial data to suggest) is that the nature of this violence has changed and that the resistance politics that incites this violence combines interpersonal threat with changes occurring through the spread of the information society and cultural diffusion. The cultural resistance to these changes constitutes the aftermath of what Castells (1997) refers to as the "global crisis of patriarchy." Our presentation merely asserts where and when the reactions to this crisis are likely to bubble over into collective gender-based violence.

In addition to better data on public, gender-based violence, another data remedy that would greatly help to assess our argument is better national and regional data collection on the economic prospects of men and women separately. International agencies and data collectors tend to provide data on economic and political changes affecting women (e.g. the gender development indices), but usually fail to address economic and labor market statistics for men and (more importantly) men in different age groups and stages of the life course. These data would be difficult to collect but would go a long way toward helping researchers assess how changes in the social and economic status of men and women leads to backlash, new investments in changing social norms, or even collective expressions of violence.
The data deficiencies we face leave our analysis in a theoretical and suggestive place. However, two related descriptions of how change is being approached and the cultural consequences of that change, by Appiah (2010) and the World Bank (2014), are consistent with our account. The World Bank’s Voice and Agency study describes a variety of interventions designed to promote economic development by increasing the voice and agency of women. The report graphically points to the economic and social costs of violence against women and limiting women’s opportunities and autonomy, estimated to be between 1 and 3 percent of GDP. Further, the report suggests that gender-based violence is not merely a side conflict connected to war but pervades places where rapid social change and rampant inequality are taking place.

In several places throughout the report, the authors talk about heightened risks and vulnerability to gender violence that result from these attempts to produce change. The authors further claim that some of the interventions have produced disappointing or potentially contradictory results (for example, direct cash infusions to women represent a threat to traditional gender roles). These disappointing results suggest that resistance politics and status threats may be fueling gender violence as traditional authority structures are upended but the clear benefits of new cultural arrangements are far from apparent.

Another promising way forward is provided in Appiah’s *Honor Code*, where he reports that changes in social norms occur most readily when the concept of collective honor or shame is attached to changing social norms. He especially points to the role that grass-roots efforts from within communities play in leading to enduring social change. To date our suspicion is that the cultural honor codes are applied to male loss in status and that resistance to the global crisis of patriarchy involves attempts to restore that status. Appiah’s work suggests that considerable grass-roots efforts will be needed to change this dynamic so that honor is attached to embracing changing cultural norms that are of greater benefit to women and (as prior work has suggested) of long-term benefit to the wider society and culture as well.

By way of conclusion we offer a graphic display of our theory of public gender-based violence against women and children related to globalization and development (Figure 4). Our argument suggests that globalization, in combination with development investments in different parts of the world, begins to interfere with men’s dominant status as women start to expand their horizons and opportunities. Globalization and neoliberal economic policies in particular start to increase inequality among men—to put it simply, some men benefit from the expanded opportunities of globalization but large numbers are left behind.

This is the area in Zone A of the figure. Cultures start out totally dominated by men, then globalization and NGO activity starts to increase women’s empowerment. Men’s utility goes down (albeit from a high starting point). Women’s utility goes up (albeit from a low starting point). But, as prior research on the effects of globalization has shown (cf. Castells 1997), globalization creates critical masses of downwardly mobile men, and the resulting pockets of resistance (represented by the decline in women’s utility in Zone B) leads to stagnation or roadblocks to the improvement of women’s status. This resistance is manifested in collective gender-based violence, as we have described, and in politics that include the rise of
cultural traditionalist ideas and movements that appeal to a patriarchal past, religious revolts, and calls for fundamentalism and purity. There is growing support for (or reluctance to prosecute) domestic violence and other legal and extralegal attempts to reassert cultural and political patriarchy.

It is here where we think two future scenarios are possible, though each is far from guaranteed. As Castells suggests, forecasting future changes in this area is difficult, if not impossible. In one scenario, new cultural routines are learned and expanded that allow new arrangements of gender roles. Men and women seek complementary relationships that acknowledge new realities and either create or borrow cultural narratives from other places, adopting them to local conditions, as the information society Castells describes expands (this is Zone C, where men’s status and women’s status increase together). In the second scenario (Zone D in our figure), resistance politics and public gender-based violence continue and expand as a response to the status and cultural threats posed by an increasingly globalized cultural and economic world, and men’s status and women’s status are both harmed as a result. The status of women in both scenarios may improve, but not at the pace or consistency observers would like. In the extreme, the backlash and resistance politics continue, gain traction, and succeed in frustrating the global development of women’s lives. In the end this makes everyone worse off and is the outcome that development scholars, human rights advocates, and NGOs want to avoid.
REFERENCES


NOTES

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1. Our analysis here is limited to situations of public, collective gender-based violence. While our theory may be applicable to other forms of gender-based violence (for example, wife/partner beating or individual rape), the theory attempts to explain why collective responses are occurring at a time when gender roles are under pressure to change rapidly. While we believe that such incidents are on the rise, it is also possible that the reporting of these incidents (given the globalization of communications technology) is much better, and so cosmopolitan actors and others are more aware of these collective-violence incidents. In either case the major thing that interests us is the persistence of the behavior even in the face of growing global condemnation and the lack of attempts to hide the collective assertion of gender-based intimidation through violence.

2. Giddens (2004) also discusses reactions to rapid cultural changes from the right as a form of fundamentalism, where fundamentalism involves a denial of dialogue and a unilateral assertion of cultural status. Our explanation is more specific than Giddens’s because we identify who is susceptible to fundamentalist claims and we explain why fundamentalism is resorted to when other responses might be more adaptive over the long term (asset-specific investments and high transaction costs associated with embracing change).

3. Indeed, there is very little systematic data collection on public, gender-based violence over time. Online reports by Amnesty International (http://www.amnesty.ca/blog/shocking-surge-of-honor-killings-in-pakistan), National Geographic (http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2002/03/0212_021212_honorkilling.html), the Canadian government (http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/fv-vf/hk-ch/toc-tdm.html), and groups like Human Rights Watch (https://www.hrw.org/report/2004/04/19/honoring-killers/justice-denied-honor-crimes-jordan) and Honor-Based Violence Awareness Network (http://hbv-awareness.com/regions/) document individual, high-profile instances and suggest that, at a minimum, public gender-based violence of the kind we are discussing here persists and (in some cases) might be rising. None of these accounts really provide reliable, data on the prevalence of honor killings, gang rape, acid burnings, or group kidnappings and abductions over time. The three sources we use, the Times of India in combination with the Indian National Crime Records Bureau and the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, provide the most consistent such data, but even here the coverage is inconsistent. Our data presentation uses these three sources and draws from the accounts of the others. At this point, the press accounts alone suggest that lower-status men are engaging in much of the recent public gender-based violence, and our explanation focuses on why this might be so. This leaves our conclusions tentative, and we make recommendations for better data collection in this area so that changes in the types and range of gender-based violence and its perpetrators can be analyzed and tracked.