

Original article

Gendered violence martyring Filipina environmental defenders

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ABSTRACT

This article contributes to discussions of extractive violence by exploring how gender influences violent circumstances under which women were assassinated during environmental conflicts. Partnership with local activists facilitated the reporting of cases of martyred Filipina women environmental defenders on the Environmental Justice Atlas (EJAtlas). Twenty cases from the EJAtlas involving thirty-one women environmental defenders martyred for their activism were analyzed qualitatively examining why and how differences and similarities emerge based on intersectional factors with special attention to gender. Findings suggest that 1) impoverished, rural, Indigenous, and otherwise multiply marginalized women were at high risk of vulnerability and retaliation in environmental conflicts because of their loss of agency and status; 2) mining and logging were deadliest partly because such industries institutionalize and exacerbate violent, gendered subordination 3) the circumstances of their murders were subtly gendered, including their exposure and vulnerability to conflicts, mobilization opportunities, and experienced violence.

1. Introduction

Corporations and governments often forcefully take land and resources from marginalized communities for large-scale extractivism. Environmental defenders are those who mobilize for these communities' environmental and human rights (Simbulan, 2016; Singh and Camba, 2016). Such dissent, however, is often violently repressed through human rights abuses and extrajudicial killings (Delina, 2021; Tran et al., 2020). There is a worldwide pattern of environmental defender assassinations, though the murders are a small portion of other less reported violence leading up to killings, such as evictions or militarization (Moreano Venegas and van Teijlingen, 2022). Former Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment John Knox stated that "for every 1 killed, there are 20–100 others harassed, unlawfully and lawfully arrested, and sued for defamation, amongst other intimidations" (UNEP, n.d.). Extractive violence is also overlooked in understudied countries such as the Philippines (Delina, 2021; Sifris and Tanyag, 2019; Wayland, 2019).

Across the Philippines, private corporations backed by the state have been increasingly pillaging the commons in pursuit of extractivism (Broad and Cavanagh, 1993). This has led to inequality concentrating wealth and power among elites while the majority live in poverty.

Especially for rural areas, the government's neoliberalism diminishes communities' livelihoods, which require access to increasingly degraded natural resources (Holden, 2015). Broad and Cavanagh (1993) recount the history of neoliberalism in the Philippines wherein, since Marcos Sr.'s presidency, the government has prioritized free market transformations characterized by deregulation, privatization, and trade liberalization, ultimately leading to aggressive extractivism in the resource-rich nation. Allowing corporations to control land also has given them leeway to displace communities and violate human rights. Even without considering the increase in climate disasters, the rural poor receive no benefits from extractive pursuits (Holden, 2015).

For years, the Philippines has been one of the world's deadliest countries for environmental defenders (Global Witness, 2021). As Dressler (2021) illustrates, although the Philippines has long been murdering activists, Duterte's authoritative regime emboldened political elites, para/militaries, police, and hitmen to violently target opponents to extractivism, often falsely "red-tagging" them as Communist terrorists. A declaration of martial law in 2017 has since criminalized defenders under the guise of fighting against terrorism, dismantling civil liberties with militarization through curfews, monitoring, arrest, and permission to execute with impunity. Martial law, especially in rural areas, legitimizes intensifying brutality against environmental defenders

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(Dressler, 2021). Indeed, Kreuzer's (2019) analysis of deadly police brutality during Duterte's campaign reveals a dramatic increase in the magnitude and frequency of such violence compared to predecessors. Hundreds of defenders have consequently died in protest against extractivism over the past several decades (Dressler, 2021). The Philippines' future for political violence remains shaky under new president Marcos Jr., son of former dictator Marcos Sr.

Such violence also differs across factors such as gender. Veuthey and Gerber (2011) argue that delegation of women to activities and spaces sensitive to environmental conditions informs how ecological mobilizations are often spearheaded by women. Indeed, across Southeast Asia, women are increasingly at the frontlines of environmental conflicts (Morgan, 2017). Women also use distinct forms of resistance owing to gendered experiences of oppression influencing the tools, opportunities, and agencies they have (Brickell and Chant, 2010; Resurreccion, 2006; Tran, 2021). Yet women environmental defenders (henceforth WEDs) are disproportionately vulnerable to extractive consequences and violence owing to multiple marginalizations (Nguyen, 2019; Tran, 2021). However, not only do few studies draw attention to gender in deadly conflicts, and fewer still research the Philippines as an overlooked violence hotspot (Tran et al., 2020).

Despite the Philippines' reputation for being one of the most gender-egalitarian countries in Asia, discriminatory hegemonies still disadvantage women (Ramalho, 2019). Pre-colonization, women had higher social positions than men valuing them as doctors, political advisors, conservationists, and more. However, colonization introduced patriarchal systems not only subordinating women and stripping away their agencies, but also paving the way for environmental destruction (Gabriel et al., 2020). Stereotypical gender roles now construct women as caregivers performing unrecognized, uncompensated work as mothers and wives wherein they must make life as normal as possible in environmental conflicts. Traditional gender norms of feminine altruism were then co-opted into extractivism, creating a feminization of responsibility unevenly burdening women with social and ecological consequences as well as care work. Mobilizations also perpetuate these dynamics in normalizing Filipina WEDs' sacrifices (Ramalho, 2019). By connecting gender to extractive violence, this article thus explores how gender influences circumstances leading to Filipina environmental defenders' killings using all 20 known cases.

2. Theoretical framework

Although the gendered aspects of murders of environmental defenders in the Philippines is still a burgeoning inquiry, a considerable amount of work has already covered women's vulnerabilities to violence in conflict scenarios. For example, in Sifris and Tanyag's (2019) study of Indigenous Moro women, findings indicate that on top of the brutality and discrimination the entire community faces in conflict scenarios, Moro women also face gendered violence and uneven burdens. Moreover, some authors on gender and disaster in the Philippines suggest that conflicts exacerbate and increase vulnerabilities with the breakdown of social, political, and legal structures in what is called multilayered violence (Aolain, 2012; Enarson and Chakrabarti, 2009; Neumayer and Plümpert, 2007). In the Philippines, such violence tends to be patriarchal as influenced by conservative Catholic teachings, colonial legacies, and extractivism (Angeles, 2015; Brickell and Chant, 2010; Lee, 2004; Nguyen, 2019; Reese, 2010). Gendered vulnerability then occurs within contexts producing structural and physical violence that mutually reinforce each other (Nguyen, 2019). Structural violence occurs when political, economic, and institutional structures as well as social inequalities such as corruption or poverty impede individual wellbeing (Galtung, 1990). This often informs and enables direct violence, or physical brutality (Tran et al., 2020).

This study contributes to theories of violence in environmental conflicts in the Philippines by adding feminist perspectives in investigating connections between gender, vulnerability, and assassinations.

Accordingly, one main framework informing the methods and analysis is Hooks' (1984; 2013) definition of feminism wherein, beyond fighting for gender equality, movements must also consider interconnected oppressions such as racism, classism, colonialism, and more because neglecting some oppressions maintains the basis informing all oppressions. Oppression means removing a person's ability to make choices, and there are two kinds: silencing those who never learned their rights, and forcefully silencing those who dared to voice their rights (Hooks, 1984). Power operates differently in various contexts, and consequently, women's expressions of agency appear differently. As the other side of oppression, agency is the ability to share in power structures controlling one's circumstances (Hirschmann, 1998). External restrictions on women constructed by the patriarchy such as violent practices (harassment, rape, discrimination, etc.), however, limit their abilities to live freely. This study then considers agency in examining power relations rendering WEDs vulnerable to violent oppression (Parker, 2012).

Attention must also be paid to intersectionality, or how race, class, gender, location, and other identifiers interact to create complex, intersecting experiences of structure, politics, and representation (Crenshaw, 2016). Such positionalities create contextual differences of privilege and marginalization within interlocking systems of power and oppression, typically causing women of color to be disproportionately vulnerable (Hernández & Hernández Reyes, 2019; Lugones, 2014). Moreover, mainstream literature often homogenizes diverse women's experiences (Hernández & Hernández Reyes, 2019; Leopeng and Langa, 2020). Stereotyping women as environmental victims or caretakers often obscures distinct experiences of violence and resistance (Cirefice and Sullivan, 2019; Resurrección, 2013; Tran, 2022).

3. Methodology

Twenty cases from the EJAtlas involving thirty-one women environmental defenders martyred for their activism were analyzed qualitatively examining why and how differences and similarities emerge based on intersectional factors with special attention to gender. This study collaborates with civil society actors in the Asia Pacific Network of Environment Defenders such as Kalikasan People's Network for the Environment (Kalikasan PNE) and the Center for Environmental Concerns Philippines to enrich the data with perspectives from those on the ground. NGO partnership facilitated the reporting of cases of martyred Filipina women environmental defenders on the Global Environmental Justice Atlas (EJAtlas, www.ejatl.org), currently the largest online database of environmental conflicts. Each case contains, in a standardized format, a map pinpoint, the source of conflict, project details, conflict type and mobilization forms, impacts, outcomes, and references. The sheer size of the database (around 3800 cases as of January 2023) facilitates comparative analysis of conflict actors and their forms of mobilization, the companies involved, and forms of violence. The EJAtlas serves as a tool for activism documenting environmental injustices, encouraging knowledge exchange, and more (Temper et al., 2015, 2018). Accordingly, the EJAtlas has already been helpful by making mobilizations more visible, providing documentation activists have used in litigation, highlighting claims and testimonies, and calling for accountability (Martinez-Alier, 2021). The EJAtlas thus not only illustrates findings in this study, but also calls for action against impunity in ongoing cases.

The process of working with EJAtlas cases went as follows. First, Kalikasan PNE identified cases of WED martyrs needing documentation. The cases are all known incidences of Filipina WED killings according to civil society collaboration and thorough perusal of various databases such as Global Witness, Frontline Defenders, and more, making the sample as representative as possible as of 2023. Three cases, however, that of Rechely Luna, Lolita Pepito, and Rita Gascon, were excluded for not having enough documented information. To establish a baseline for data consistency, cases indeed were only included if there was at least enough information to fully fill out all fields in the EJAtlas factsheets.

The organization, from networking and keeping up with news, already had been maintaining a list of names of WED martyrs and rudimentary information such as conflict types, affiliations, dates of murders/discoveries, involvement, and locations wherever available. The term “martyr” was requested by Kalikasan PNE out of reverence for WEDs’ lives and contributions as well the political nature of their assassinations. We define martyrs as those persecuted and killed for speaking out against injustices. Because Kalikasan PNE did not have further knowledge about the cases they had listed, they then requested the perusal of online resources to fill in missing information. Secondhand data from news and academic articles was then used to report the cases on EJAtlas. Informants requested using only already published materials to avoid exposing activists in ongoing danger. Because of the difficulty in obtaining such scarce information, there was less consistency of included data in less-documented cases compared to high-profile cases, especially for those whose assassinations never made it to court. Indeed, according to organization representatives, many extractive perpetrators in the Philippines also own or are major financiers of media corporations, and cases are often censored domestically.

A theoretical thematic analysis was then conducted with the EJAtlas cases with feedback from civil society actors. In a theoretical thematic analysis, coding is informed by themes identified in other similar studies. Coding then focuses on how these themes appear in the present data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In this study, cases were coded line by line in NVivo to identify data fitting themes related to violence against women defenders in environmental conflicts such as demographics, conflict circumstances, violent incidences, and mobilization tactics. First, EJAtlas cases were uploaded into NVivo and case files were created for each woman or group of women in the EJAtlas cases. Next, attributes were assigned to each WED with values recording demographics only for those women whom the reports explicitly described using labels for indigeneity, occupation, and so on. Incidences of violence were then

coded by reading EJAtlas cases line by line to sort conflict types and incidences of violence such as murders, arrests, evictions, legal harassment, or police brutality. Codes were generated by case rather than by frequency. Coding was then used to identify patterns specific to the Philippines, expanding upon previous global analyses of WED violence and killings (Tran, 2021; Tran et al., 2020). Owing to the underreported and obscure nature of many of the conflicts, some EJAtlas cases additionally did not have enough detail to draw conclusions about gender relations or other intersecting factors. Subsequently, academic sources were used to provide the missing contexts where possible. See Fig. 1 for a map of WEDs.

4. Findings

4.1. Demographics of martyred Filipina WEDs

Among those whose descriptions in either the EJAtlas cases or in media articles included such information, the women defenders were mostly rural low-wage and/or informal workers with few exceptions, and 10 were also explicitly identified as Indigenous. Indeed, all Indigenous women were at the intersections of poverty and rurality, and all the peasant non-Indigenous women were also rural except two (Morales Jose and Capitan). The only two better-off WEDs were specialist supporters of environmental justice movements: a lawyer (Mascarinas-Green) and a social worker (Salvador). The few urban cases had distinct conflict types only found in such spaces, namely hotel development (Mascarinas-Green), post-typhoon relief corruption in a heavily-hit metropolitan area (Morales Jose), and coal-fired power plants (Capitan). Meanwhile, rural cases were overrepresented because land rights inequalities were the main drivers of violence. This aligns with an overall boom in environmental defender harassment and homicides in major commodity frontiers such as Mindanao (the site of 12 cases killing

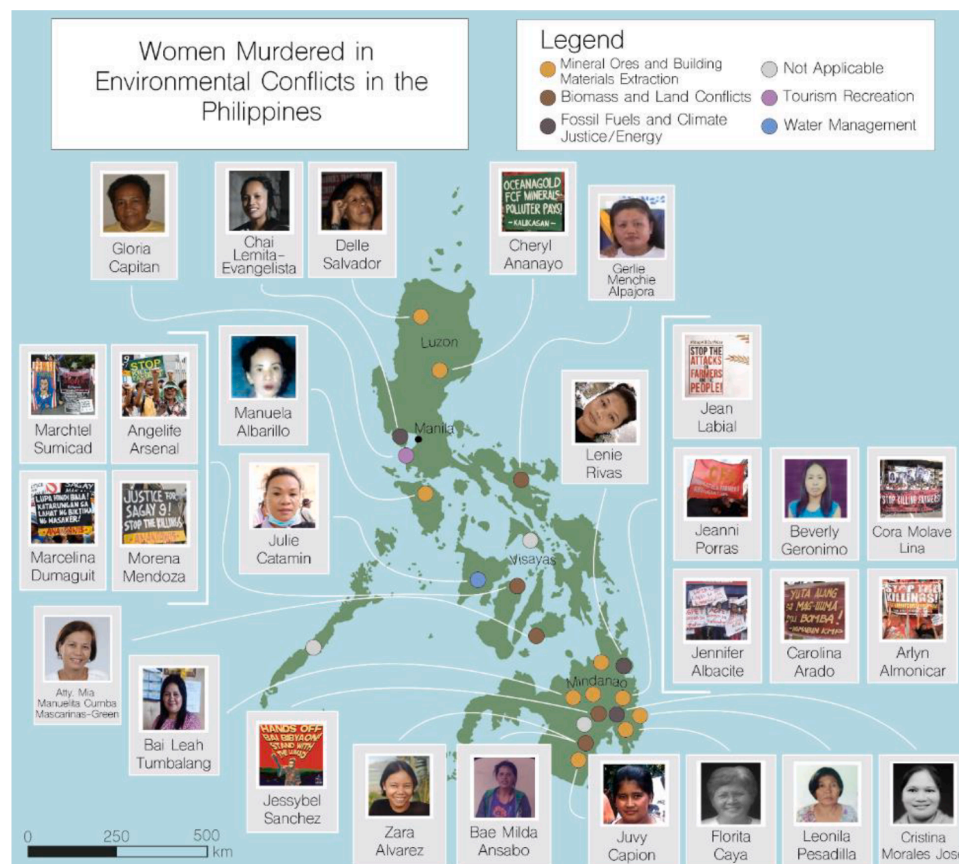


Fig. 1. Map of women killed during environmental conflicts (credit: Arielle Landau).

17 WEDs, see Fig. 1) owing to violent repression paving the way for such projects (Dressler, 2021). Furthermore, Indigenous WEDs were approximately a third of those martyred and nearly all of the rural and the poor, which is disproportionate given that Indigenous populations make up 10–20% of the Philippines’s total population (IWGIA, 2022). Indeed, Indigenous peoples are at higher risk of killings because they not only have historically been displaced to commodity frontiers, but also suffer systemic discrimination and rights violations (Butt et al., 2019; Hanaček et al., 2021; Scheidel et al., 2018) (Fig. 2).

Among the WEDs with such information available, 12 were movement leaders, 2 were specialist helpers (social worker Salvador and attorney Mascarinas-Green), and 17 were movement members/protestors. The impact of their roles on the violence they experienced, moreover, was that whereas members were more often killed during mass violence breaking out during protests or raids, WED leaders and supporters were often singled out and individually assassinated. Source materials the EJAtlas cases cited also often depicted a majority of 16 women as wives, mothers, and grandmothers in explaining their movement contributions and motivations. This reflects the gender nuances behind WEDs’ decisions and opportunities to mobilize (Fig. 3).

4.2. Violent patterns across conflict types

Violence was higher among mining (10 cases killing 16 WEDs) and biomass (logging/plantations/fishing) cases (4 cases killing 8 WEDs) which have distinct contextual legacies in the Philippines. Because of these legacies, there were near-universal patterns in how various types of extractive projects began and the ensuing violence against WEDs and their communities. The less-represented conflict types (two urbanization cases, one each for climate disaster, dams, and fossil fuels; 1 WED killed per case) also were rooted in the same inequalities.

In every mining case, corporations violently displaced communities without consent. According to international news coverage of corresponding court cases cited by the EJAtlas, perpetrators were transnational corporations financed by banks in Canada, China, Japan, the U. S., Switzerland, and more, some with known ties to government authorities. Some exceptions were illegal mines run by paramilitary groups, which the government turned a blind eye to. Affected populations were mainly Indigenous, sometimes including non-Indigenous



Fig. 3. WEDs’ mobilization roles.

peasants. In the Philippines, as Holden et al. (2011) explain, the government’s mining interests target the Indigenous because of their historical settlement in mountains where there are high concentrations of minerals and ease with which corporations can cheat legislation. Even for the two cases with partial success, legislation initially recognizing communities’ land rights were later violated anyway. Moreover, every mine deployed armed troops to brutally evict people without repercussion. Additionally, armed groups use mining and related corruption as opportunities for extortion and recruitment, often militarizing mines in southern regions such as Mindanao (Holden, 2014), where many cases occurred. Mindanao consequently has the nation’s highest levels of armed conflict, environmental injustice, and gender injustice (Dwyer and Cagoco-Guia, 2011) (Table 1).

Biomass conflicts follow patterns of illegal encroachment enabled by and intertwined with colonial histories. In the two cases of communities encroached upon through colonization, one of the main reasons the United States annexed the Philippines was for deforestation and plantations. As the economy became export-oriented, a new land ownership

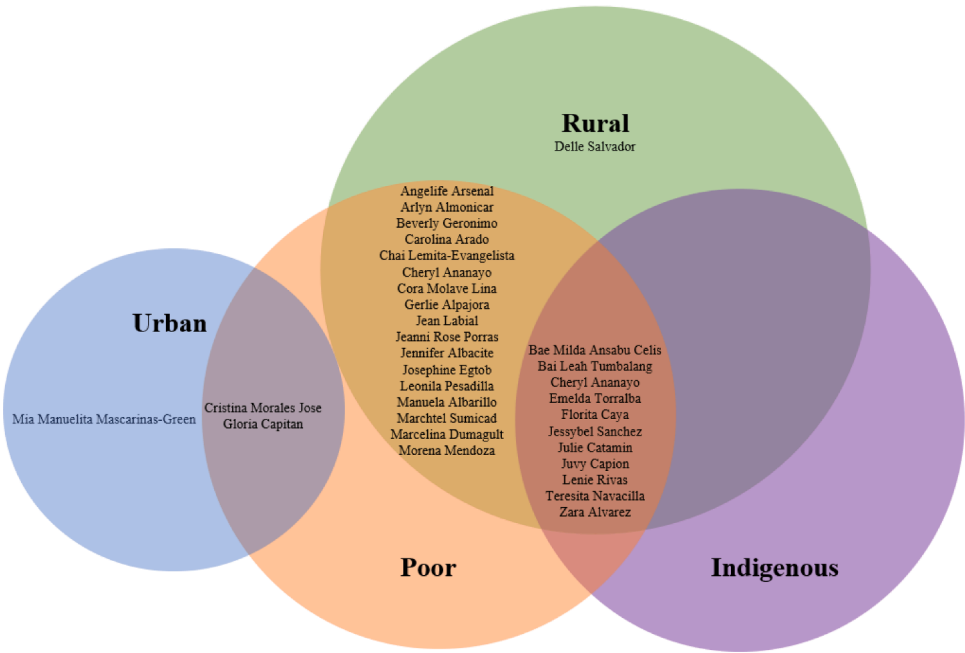


Fig. 2. Distribution of WEDs by location, occupation, and racialization.

Table 1

Circumstances behind primarily mining-related conflicts.

EJAtlas case	Affected population	Encroachment method	Perpetrators	Case outcome
Andap Valley Complex coal mining, Surigao del Sur	Indigenous groups	Land sold to foreign investors by government; militarization; violent forced displacement	Transnational corporations	Impunity
Didipio Gold and Copper mine, Nueva Vizcaya	Indigenous groups	Land sold to foreign investors by government; violent forced displacement	Transnational corporations	Impunity
Diwalwal Mineral Reservation on indigenous land, Mindanao	Indigenous groups	Illegal entrance with no government intervention; violent forced displacement	Transnational corporations	Partial success
Glencore Xstrata Tampakan Copper-Gold Project, South Cotabato	Indigenous groups	Land sold to foreign investors by government; militarization; violent forced displacement	Transnational corporations	Impunity
Human rights and environmental defenders killed in 2017, Compostela Valley	Indigenous groups; peasant farmers	Land sold to foreign investors by government; violent forced displacement	Transnational corporations	Impunity
Killing of anti-mining activists in Mindanao	Indigenous groups; peasant farmers	Land sold to foreign investors by government; militarization; violent forced displacement	Transnational corporations	Impunity
King-King Copper and Gold Mine, Mindanao	Indigenous groups	Land sold to foreign investors by government; violent forced displacement	Transnational corporations	Impunity
Mining and logging operations in Pantaron Range	Indigenous groups	Land sold to foreign investors by government; militarization; violent forced displacement	Transnational corporations	Impunity
Mining and murders on indigenous land, Mindoro Oriental	Indigenous groups	Land sold to foreign investors by government; bribery; violent forced displacement	Transnational corporations	Partial success
Open pit mining in Ucab	Indigenous groups	Land sold to foreign investors by government; violent forced displacement	Transnational corporations	Impunity

system concentrated land among the elite few (Cherniguin, 1988). The creation of agrarian laws privatizing communal peasant-occupied lands for large-scale agribusinesses continues today. Since the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Programme was introduced in the Philippines in 1988 during the Marcos Sr. regime, agribusiness elites have been exploiting the laws to retain ownership of large estates or illegally appropriate peasants' and Indigenous groups' lands (Diprose and McGregor, 2009). State agencies also commonly criminalize poor farming communities, scapegoating them for the environmental degradation associated with biomass conflicts (Mostafanezhad and Dressler, 2021). Consequently, biomass cases were perpetuated by severely weakened regulation allowing for illegal exploitation of the poor and rural then and now with near-total impunity for corporations. The one exception was of a fishing community that was able to create new legislation protecting against large-scale illegal fishers, but this was done at the cost of the late WED Gerlie Menchie Alpajora and her rare success in managing collaboration with the police to investigate and prosecute perpetrators (Table 2).

Table 2

Circumstances behind primarily biomass-related conflicts.

EJAtlas case	Affected population	Encroachment method	Perpetrators	Case outcome
Banana plantations and logging in Mount Apo Natural Park, Mindanao	Indigenous groups	Colonization	Transnational corporations	Impunity
Illegal fishing in Bicol	Peasant farmers/fishers	Illegal entrance with no government intervention; bribery	Domestic corporations	Success
Murders of UMAN leaders over mining, logging, and plantations near Butuan City	Peasant farmers	Illegal entrance with no government intervention; militarization; violent forced displacement	Transnational corporations	Impunity
SagayM assacre of Sugar Farmers	Peasant farmers	Colonization	Domestic corporations	Impunity

The other conflict types (urbanization, climate disaster, dams, and fossil fuels) followed land-grabbing patterns that varied depending on location. The rural cases of Hacienda Looc and the Jalaur dam followed patterns similar to mining conflicts wherein corporations took advantage of lax regulation to forcefully displace communities. Meanwhile, the cases affecting the urban poor were the only ones without displacement. Instead of the introduction of new extraction efforts displacing people at commodity frontiers, communities were made to suffer consequences of intensifying polluting projects in already-industrialized areas. The perpetrators were a mix of domestic and transnational corporations, though with more presence of wealthy domestic business tycoons and politicians directly named in the cases, possibly facilitating the total impunity (Table 3).

4.3. Circumstances behind Filipina WEDs' assassinations

Most of the WED martyrs were shot dead, with many of them being targeted by hitmen on motorcycles. This aligns with a pattern Holden (2014) identifies for environmental defenders generally wherein the nature of such extrajudicial killings indicates a lack of fear of police intervention. Meanwhile, 8 WED martyrs were assassinated during military and police raids on protests and/or communities. Such mass violence included arson, bombing, property damage, and gassing. Sexual assault also commonly occurred during raids. The circumstances during which the individual shootings occurred also matter. In 14 cases, WEDs were not only themselves attacked, but so were others accompanying them in clustered serial killings or crowd violence. Furthermore, the killers had total impunity. Police and courts often delayed and covered up murders as well as did not investigate them properly. Obstruction of justice was also observed for the conflicts as a whole in that communities were not able to obtain any kind of retribution for environmental crimes.

In many cases, the State and the corporations sent military and/or police to crack downs on environmental defenders frequently veiled as terrorist rebels under red-tagging. Indeed, militarization of areas accused of housing communist rebels is often used to suppress Indigenous and local peoples' opposition to harmful projects or coerce them into consenting. Paramilitary groups likewise violently take over communities to control extractive projects (Holden et al., 2011). Reflecting such national patterns, most of the violence in the cases was associated with increased militarization and police presence during environmental conflicts. For instance, soldiers forcefully evicted Lumad communities from the disputed land marked for the Andap Valley Coal Complex. The

Table 3
Circumstances behind other conflict types.

EJAtlas case	Affected population	Encroachment method	Perpetrators	Case outcome
Coastal and land grabbing for tourism in Hacienda Looc, Batangas	Peasant farmers/fishers	Land sold to domestic investors by government; violent forced displacement	Domestic corporations	Impunity
Environmental lawyer killed in Bohol, Visayas Islands	Urban poor	Land sold to domestic investors by government	Domestic corporations	Impunity
Jalaur River Multi-Purpose Project (JRMPP) Phase II Dam, Iloilo	Indigenous groups	Land sold to foreign investors by government; bribery; violent forced displacement	Transnational corporations	Impunity
Resistance to coal stockpiling leads to Gloria Capitan's murder, Bataan	Urban poor	Land sold to domestic investors by government	Domestic corporations	Impunity
Typhoon Boph as post-disaster climate injustices and relief corruption, Comp ostela	Urban poor	n/a	Domestic and transnational corporations	Impunity

military and police justified evictions by claiming that the communities had to be suppressed because they were full of NPA sympathizers. Meanwhile, they brought in coal mining machinery and fuel trucks while torturing and killing protestors such as Lenie Rivas.

In cases without red-tagging, companies hired thugs to repress dissent, though hitmen were often suspected military personnel. In state-backed violence perpetrated by military, police, and/or guards during specific protesting incidences, highly visible mass attacks publicly terrorized and smeared the entire community. Whereas red-tagging deems WEDs communist enemies of the state, criminalization uses trumped-up charges. Meanwhile, the cases involving hitmen and thugs targeting a specific person were less formal and less visible. Martyrs were usually killed through drive-by shootings blocking them from action, such as two hitmen suspected of being militia shooting Jessybel Sanchez in transit from a meeting about her community's petition and legal battle against logging firm Alcantara & Sons. Such killings typically involved death threats prior to the murder, such as in the case of Gerlie Menchie Alpajora. Alpajora was intimidated for a week discouraging her from her advocacy against illegal fishing in Bicol. She was shot dead sleeping next to her sons at home after her reports led to the arrests of several culprits. Although her killer was never apprehended, her death sparked a successful campaign jailing large-scale fishers and introducing protective measures in the local legislation (Table 4).

5. Discussion

5.1. Filipina WEDs at the intersection of rurality, poverty, and indigeneity

As the results indicate, impoverished, rural, Indigenous, and otherwise multiply marginalized women were at high risk of vulnerability and retaliation in environmental conflicts associated with a loss of status and agency. Indeed, WED martyrdom occurred mostly among rural,

poor contexts as well as disproportionately among Indigenous groups. Poor communities were most negatively affected by extractivism owing to the Philippines' shift toward foreign export markets and deregulation. Rural commodity frontiers additionally became marginalized as places to exploit in service of urban centers (Holden et al., 2011). Consequently, a large proportion of these cases involved dubious or no prior consent, especially among Indigenous land rights cases. Dubious consent may reflect gendered power imbalances and status degradation concentrating decision-making power among men that corporations designate as spokespersons for the entire community. This was exemplified by the Jalaur dam's bribery of assigned male spokespeople to access Indigenous Tumandok land despite resistance from community members and Julie Catamin, whose leadership and perspectives went unheeded despite her position as barangay captain. Moreover, corporations often discredit poor, rural, typically Indigenous peoples as uneducated, backwards, and against economic development, a pattern common in the Philippines and among Southeast Asian conflicts generally (Cabunilas, 2019; Großmann et al., 2017). WEDs at the intersection of rurality, poverty, and Indigeneity are particularly prone to such dehumanization in gendered ways, as observed in the case of Lenie Rivas' sexual assault and killing in the wake of Duterte's orders to "shoot female rebels in the vagina" and dismissal of the violence as "collateral damage" in the Andap Valley case (Peoples Dispatch, 2021). Her humanity was disregarded owing to her sexual and intersectional inferiority and disposability as a poor rural Manobo woman. Women's exclusion from decision-making has not only marked a loss of status but has also contributed to a loss of agency.

Regarding agency as one's ability to participate in shaping one's circumstances and live freely, poor, rural WEDs lost agency when violence was institutionalized by various forms of structural violence. Firstly, juridical bodies, police/military, and other institutions used social structures such as selective enforcement of policies/laws to facilitate the entry of unwanted extractive projects. Indigenous WEDs experienced additional intersectional loss of agency. The cases recount how gender relations worsened when new legal, administrative, and market structures concentrated power among men in businesses, police/military, and more upon land-grabbing and the subsequent implementation of extractive projects (Großmann et al., 2017). Alternative, more egalitarian gender roles have long been well-documented among Indigenous groups in the Philippines. However, colonization introduced discrimination and violence that were previously uncommon and erased previous gender dynamics (Gamboa et al., 2021; McSherry et al., 2015). Extractivism then exploited such gender inequalities to support further industrial growth and exploitation through enforcing unfair gendered divisions of labor. Consequently, new gendered power imbalances superseded the agencies women previously had according to Indigenous gender relations and land ownership (Großmann et al., 2017). The cases illustrate the continuing development of such patterns in how WEDs faced uneven burdens managing increasingly difficult care work and taking on wage labor demands upon men's absorption into extractive work and/or migration (Angeles, 2015; Tran, 2021). Moreover, structural violence formally sanctioned direct brutality against WEDs in giving legal rights and preferences to companies granting impunity for violent entry, extraction, and extermination methods. Rurality, poverty, and Indigeneity thus may subject WEDs to conditions diminishing their agency and status because governments and corporations violate their rights, reducing their decision-making opportunities, and reinforcing unequal gendered divisions of labor.

5.2. Mining and biomass industries' bloody legacies

Mining and biomass conflicts may have been deadliest because of an association with industries and violent, gendered subordination. Mining is "an exceptionally masculinized industry in terms of the composition of its workforce and its cultures of production as well as symbolic exploitation of feminized nature" (Großmann et al., 2017, p. 16). Various

Table 4
Circumstances behind WED assassinations.

EJAtlas case	WEDs	Assassins	Murder type	Other victims	Justification	Outcome
Andap Valley Complex coal mining, Surigao del Sur	Lenie Rivas	Military; hitmen	Military raid	Fellow mobilizers; family/children	Red-tagging	Impunity
Banana plantations and logging in Mount Apo Natural Park	Bae Milda Ansabu Celis	Hitmen	Home shooting	Family/children	None	Impunity
Coastal and land grabbing for tourism in Hacienda Looc	Chai Lemita-Evangelista	Military	Serial killings	Family/children	Red-tagging	Impunity
Didipio Gold and Copper mine, Nueva Vizcaya	Cheryl Ananayo	Hitmen	Drive-by shooting	Fellow mobilizers; family/children	None	Impunity
Diwalwal Mineral Reservation on indigenous land in Monkayo, Compostela Valley	Florita Caya	Hitmen	Drive-by shooting	None	None	Impunity
Environmental lawyer killed in Bohol, Visayas Islands	Mia Mascarinas-Green	Hitmen	Drive-by shooting	Family/children	None	Impunity
Glencore Xstrata Tampakan Copper-Gold Project in South Cotabato	Juvy Capion	Military; police	Home shooting	Family/children	Red-tagging	Impunity
Human rights and environmental defenders killed in 2017, Compostela Valley	Leonila Pesadilla	Military; hitmen	Home shooting	Family/children	Red-tagging	Impunity
Illegal fishing in Bicol	Gerlie Menchie Alpajora	Hitmen	Home shooting	Family/children	None	Impunity
Jalaur River Multi-Purpose Project Phase II Dam, Iloilo	Julie Catamin	Military; hitmen	Drive-by shooting	None	Criminalization	Impunity
Killing of anti-mining activists in Mindanao	Cora Molave Lina, Arlyn Almonicar, Carolina Arado, Jeanni Rose Porras, Jean Labial, Beverly Geronimo	Military; hitmen	Serial killings	Fellow mobilizers; family/children	Red-tagging	Impunity
King-King Copper and Gold Mine, Mindanao	Teresita Navacilla	Military; hitmen	Drive-by shooting	None	None	Impunity
Mining and logging operations in Pantaron Range	Jessybel Sanchez	Military; hitmen	Drive-by shooting	None	Red-tagging	Impunity
Mining and murders on indigenous land, Mindoro Oriental	Manuela Albarillo	Police	Home shooting	Fellow mobilizers; family/children	Red-tagging	Impunity
Murders of UMAN leaders over mining, logging, and plantations near Butuan City	Emelda Torralba	Hitmen	Drive-by shooting	None	None	Impunity
Open pit mining in Ucab	Delle Salvador	Military	Work shooting	Fellow mobilizers	None	Impunity
Resistance to coal stockpiling leads to Gloria Capitan's murder	Gloria Capitan	Hitmen	Drive-by shooting	Family/children	None	Impunity
Sagay Massacre of Sugar Farmers	Angelifa Arsenal; Morena Mendoza; Marcelina Dumagult; Marchtel Sumicad	Military	Military raid	Fellow mobilizers; family/children	Red-tagging	Impunity
Typhoon Bopha's post-disaster climate injustices and relief corruption, Compostela	Cristina Morales-Jose	Military	Military raid	Fellow mobilizers	Criminalization	Impunity

scholars (Bradshaw et al., 2017; Großmann et al., 2017; Jenkins, 2017; Kopusar, 2002; Sinclair, 2021) concur that mining disproportionately affects women because of gendered roles as subsistence providers. All the mining cases also featured high rates of WED repression by militia in raids or as suspected hitmen. Many of the mining cases were forced upon communities through militarization. The government's low tolerance toward anti-mining protests means that many mining hotspots are militarized for "security" (Holden, 2014). Consequently, as the cases show, conflict brutality often escalated owing to militaristic violence. Militarization possibly institutionally excludes women from participation in decision-making owing to the military and extractivism centralizing power among men, leaving women with less agency and uneven burdens (Angeles, 2015). For example, in the Glencore Xstrata case wherein Indigenous B'laan Juvy Capion was martyred, community tensions increased as Sagittarius Mines Inc. unequally granted employment, bribes, and political power to certain men they designated as decision-makers. Military camps may also reduce women's mobility and therefore agency because of increasing dangers of sexual abuse among other violences without recourse, especially among the Indigenous (Holden et al., 2011). Furthermore, all hitmen and military/police aggressors were explicitly male. Men's appointment into such violent roles during extractive conflicts may be rooted in male-dominated structures promoting dominance over marginalized peoples (Angeles, 2015).

The possible connection between industries and worsening gender

inequality/violence is also the case for biomass conflicts owing to exploitative land policies, namely elites manipulating the nation's Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program for agribusiness (mostly monoculture plantations, but also livestock) and logging (typically in tandem with plantations). Several scholars have previously observed how across Southeast Asia, such projects lead to major changes in land ownership regimes, which in turn introduces or intensifies violent gender stratification (Elmhirst et al., 2017; O'Shaughnessy and Krogman, 2011; White and White, 2012). These conflicts affected WEDs especially because, as other scholars have also found in the Philippines and Southeast Asia, such projects profit off land-grabbing and entrapment of local communities. This limits resources available for local households and widens pay gaps owing to gendered divisions of labor in biomass industries (Appelt et al., 2022; Hirsch, 2020). As with other conflict types, ensuing disputes are then rooted not only in concentrations of power shifting in favor of elite men, but also in burdening women with managing subsequent displacement and environmental consequences.

5.3. Gendered circumstances behind Filipina WED martyrdom

The circumstances of WEDs' murders were subtly gendered, including their pre-conflict vulnerability, mobilization opportunities, and experienced violence during conflicts. Firstly, gender informed

vulnerabilities putting the WEDs at additional risk, such as the social and economic conditions contributing to the martyrdom of Cristina Morales Jose in the aftermath of Typhoon Bopha. As [Nguyen \(2019\)](#) writes, unstable conditions aggravate pre-existing gender and social tensions. Conflicts thus become the trigger exploding underlying preconditions into violence ([Aolain, 2012](#); [Enarson and Chakrabarti, 2009](#); [Neumayer and Plümper, 2007](#)). Such was the case with Morales Jose's assassination on her way to file a lawsuit during militarization of relief operations. She was intersectionally marginalized as a poor woman in an urban space long-degraded by industrial activity. She already faced gendered vulnerability and restricted agency facing uneven burden living in a place physically and socioeconomically unable to withstand disasters in a context rife with corruption and structural inequalities. The typhoon's devastation of land and resources triggered violence and killings that would not necessarily have occurred had the prerequisite intersectional inequalities, government corruption, censorship of corporate culpability, and military impunity not already made her life so disposable in the eyes of her killers.

Regarding mobilization opportunities, violently blocking WEDs from mobilizing and widespread fear restricted women's agency to enter public spheres by making it unsafe for them to move and speak freely. This restrained WEDs to certain spaces as well as in some cases, forced them to evacuate or hide themselves and their families. WEDs' mobilizations often centering around motherhood themes also reflects the gender nuances behind WEDs' decisions and possibilities to mobilize. Many WEDs additionally mobilized in response to increased burdens from environmental consequences owing to gendered division of labor, such as Juvy Capión and other B'laan women's difficulties with food insecurity when mining degraded and blocked their access to the land. Capión, among some other WEDs, also described themselves as mothers to justify their activism as an extension of maternal duty when scrutinized for protesting. WEDs both constrain and enable parts of their identities within cultures that predetermine which practices and spaces are legitimate for whom. Some Filipina WEDs thus shaped their advocacy using motherhood tropes because as intersectionally marginalized people facing loss of agency, their mobilizations were constrained to what was socially acceptable and safe.

As for violence during conflicts, although all genders of defender are killed, there are gendered nuances in women's killings. For instance, 12 of the WEDs were killed while at home and accompanying family members. Shooting mothers and grandmothers in front of their children and grandchildren in such a vulnerable space carries different meanings and consequences for the entire community. Beyond the loss of community lynchpins, such terror tactics may carry additional emotional impact from violently disrupting the sanctity of family and home life. Moreover, certain forms of violence such as sexual assault typically occur specifically against women, preying on cultural narratives of women's bodies as embodying shame and symbolic of a community's sanctity ([Taylor, 2018](#)). These violences thus had material and physical consequences that restricted surviving WEDs' capacities to exercise agency in fear that by mobilizing, they not only put themselves at risk, but also others. Moreover, for WEDs facing additional intersectional marginalizations, discourse about the environmental conflicts focuses much more on the gruesome details of their murders rather than on honoring and recognizing the WEDs' lives and causes. This both sensationalizes the violence and normalizes the deaths as not newsworthy beyond violence inflicted upon a dehumanized Other ([Tran, 2022](#)). The gendered nuance between Filipina WEDs' killings and that of others is that, as gendered, racialized, socially and geographically distant targets for violence, their relative vulnerability and invisibility before, during, and after conflicts perhaps compels systemic impunity and apathy among extractive benefactors and silencing among peers.

6. Conclusion

This article explored how gender influences circumstances leading to

Filipina environmental defender assassinations. The Philippines is one of the world's deadliest countries for environmental defenders, especially in mining and biomass conflicts. The contribution of this study was empirical data showing gendered, intersecting vulnerabilities WEDs faced leading up to martyrdom. Many of the WED martyrs were a combination of working-class rural Indigenous people, which reflects historical inequalities targeting these demographics for extractive violence. Such vulnerability was institutionalized by structural violence taking advantage of gendered disempowerment to facilitate extractive encroachment. How women decide to and can get involved in mobilizing is also subtly gendered. On one hand, women often mobilize in response to increased vulnerability and burdens from environmental consequences connected to hegemonic gender roles. On the other hand, environmental conflicts aggravate underlying preconditions for violence that had been building up. Furthermore, cultural violence, especially red-tagging, made it unsafe for many WEDs to move and speak freely.

Yet women's increased suffering from mass brutality indicates their increasing representation at frontlines as WEDs are now recognized as powerful albeit threatening. Acknowledging their roles as community and movement lynchpins, however, meant that a large proportion of WEDs were not only themselves attacked, but so were others associated with them in clustered attacks. While hitmen and armed forces shoot anyone they deem as threats, this carries a different weight for women shot in front of their children. Filipina WEDs loss of agency and martyrdom in conflict scenarios thus perhaps stems from the use and interpretation of intersecting marginalizations across gender, race, class, location, and more to feed into and support agendas developed by and for elite men to serve extractive interests. While there is now enough cultural recognition for women's leadership in environmental conflicts to deem them threats that need to be controlled, there is not enough to give them safe, respected platforms to voice concerns.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The author declares no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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