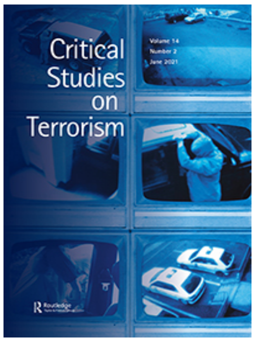

Critical Studies on Terrorism

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rter20

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To cite this article: Torhild Breidlid (2021) Countering or contributing to radicalisation and violent extremism in Kenya? A critical case study, Critical Studies on Terrorism, 14:2, 225-246, DOI: 10.1080/17539153.2021.1902613

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2021.1902613

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Published online: 01 Apr 2021.

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CRITICAL STUDIES ON TERRORISM
2021, VOL. 14, NO. 2, 225–246
https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2021.1902613

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Countering or contributing to radicalisation and violent extremism in Kenya? A critical case study

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I argue that the "theological and social-psychological radicalisation model", which has been primarily used in a Western context, has influenced the strategies used by the Kenyan government to explain and combat radicalisation and terrorism. The model predominantly focuses on religion and social networks as crucial to the radicalisation process. My research in Kenya demonstrates how the underlying principles of the model are used in a non-Western context. I claim that the Kenyan government is increasingly using the model to delegate surveillance, especially to the security sector but also to some civil society actors. As illustrated in my findings, Kenya has, through specific definitions, reports and statements, contributed to the institutionalisation of the term radicalisation and its link to Islam. My argument is substantiated by an analysis of official policy documents, official statements and interviews. Paradoxically, the hard approach taken by the security sector in Kenya towards the Muslim population seems to have further fuelled radicalisation in the country.

KEYWORDS

Theological and social-psychological radicalisation model; suspect communities; aarhus model; critical terrorism studies; orientalism; indicators of terrorist risk

Introduction

In this article, I argue that the Kenyan government has employed and is still employing a strategy to combat terrorism and radicalisation that is similar to what some researchers term the "theological and social-psychological radicalisation model" (see, e.g. Kundnani 2012). The model is currently widely used, especially in the West, to explain the radicalisation process. I first discuss knowledge production by focusing on core concepts like radicalisation, extremism and terrorism. I then discuss the theoretical underpinnings of the theological and social-psychological radicalisation model but also examine its shortcomings, particularly the potential implications of these shortcomings with respect to countering violent extremism. In the article's main section, I elaborate on the theological and social-psychological radicalisation model in a Kenyan context based on relevant documents and fieldwork conducted in Kenya in 2018 and 2019. In doing so, I seek to determine to what extent the discourses of radicalisation and violent extremism in the Kenyan context are socially constructed to fit political interests and, moreover, how critical terrorism studies can help to unpack the

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sustainability of Kenyan policy interventions intended to combat violent extremism and radicalisation.

Knowledge production by academics and policymakers on radicalisation and violent extremism

In this section, I discuss, via the lens of critical terrorism studies, how knowledge production by academics and policymakers, who seek to describe the root causes of violent extremism and radicalisation, is highly contested and subjectively determined. Critical terrorism studies offer a critique of dominant terrorism studies, especially after 9/11, and perceive violent extremism as a social construction. In this paradigm, a critical approach is applied that views the terms radicalisation and violent extremism as the result of socially situated knowledge production that is influenced by ideologies, interests and power structures and thus does not signify so-called neutral, objective knowledge. This approach questions the dominant knowledge production and understanding of social phenomena (Jackson et al. 2011), which, in my case, encompasses radicalisation and violent extremism in Kenya. Thus, such knowledge and understandings and the ideologies and interests on which they are based must be critiqued and deconstructed by social scientists (Smyth et al. 2008). Moreover, much of conventional terrorism scholarship, especially work related to “Islamist terrorism”, is Orientalist (Stump and Dixit 2013). The notion of Orientalism is thus used in this article in order to analyse how the term othering has been central in linking Islam to radicalisation. According to Edward Said (1997), the West’s study of the Middle East and Islam is institutionalised, which means that knowledge is objectivised and taken for granted. In terms of violent extremism and radicalisation, researchers within critical terrorism studies emphasise that these concepts must always be viewed in their historical context and as influenced by asymmetries and special interests (Gunning 2007). It is important to understand how specific interpretations of the terms violent extremism and radicalisation are often used to fit political interests and policy interventions. As I discuss in the next section, the interpretations and definitions of radicalisation and violent extremism have had and still have serious implications with regard to how counterterrorism operations are conducted on the ground.

Terrorism studies became prominent post 9/11 in the US, mainly as a means by which to secure government funding. At first, the main focus was on fighting terrorism with military power, as illustrated by the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and of Iraq in 2003.

In 2005, the notion of violent extremism was introduced, a term which, in contrast to “terrorism”, encompassed an ideological element (Kundnani and Hayes 2018). According to Berger (2018), it is important to distinguish terrorism from extremism. The former, Berger argues, is a tactic, whereas the latter is a belief system. Extremist groups might engage in terrorism, but not all extremists are violent. Extremism can also be defined as long-lasting theoretical/ideological, philosophical perceptions that deviate from hegemonic ethical, moral and political norms. Some such norms, upon which substantial political and moral consensus has been reached, are human rights, human dignity and democratic principles (Gule 2012). However, the term (violent) extremism is also highly contested, meaning there is as of yet no universally agreed upon definition of the term.

A critical approach thus implies that notions like violent extremism and radicalisation are the result of socially situated knowledge production, which generates a variety of theories by different academics. As a result, social scientists may reproduce knowledge, as requested by official institutions that is socially constructed under specific circumstances, but is transmitted as scholarly knowledge (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). This so-called "scholarly knowledge" may consequently be equated with the objective institutional knowledge used to initiate certain policies, as witnessed after 9/11.

Countering violent extremism has become a globally familiar policy, one which implies not only military conflict, but also a conflict of ideas. The shift in terminology from the more general terrorism to the more specific violent extremism has also permitted an analysis of the root causes of violent extremism. Since 9/11, EU member states have used the concept of radicalisation as an analytical tool to explain why youth become involved in terrorist organisations. In 2005, the radicalisation concept was deployed in the US as an analytical lens to explain violent extremism (Kundnani and Hayes 2018). Kundani argues that the new radicalisation theories that emerged from such analytical deployment were based not on objective research but rather on special interests by policymakers. Greater funding was also allocated to those researchers who worked closely with counterterrorism policymakers. The term radicalisation has therefore become highly politicised and shaped to fit political interests (Kundnani 2012).

The theological and social-psychological radicalisation model

In this section, the theological and social-psychological radicalisation model is discussed with reference to work conducted by scholars like Gartenstein and Grossman (2009) and Sageman (2004), who use narrow theoretical models to explain radicalisation and violent extremism. Additionally, these researchers focus on the theological dimension of the radicalisation process, contending that certain religious beliefs (i.e. Islamic beliefs) could be an indicator of a heightened risk of terrorism (Gartenstein and Grossman 2009; Wiktorowicz 2005; Sageman 2004). Thus, many academics and policymakers have attributed the root causes of radicalisation and violent extremism to Islamic theology, and more specifically to the Salafist ideology.[1]

The social-psychological component of the theological and social-psychological radicalisation model is emphasised by Sageman (2004), who widens the analytical scope by including social networks and kinship as part of the radicalisation process. Sageman (2008) argues that the radical theological beliefs that accompany the radicalisation process of an individual are triggered by something more than religious doctrine, specifically implicating the collective influence of other people who share such radical beliefs and who are willing to enforce them through the use of violence. He thus claims that "this natural and intense loyalty to the group, inspired by a violent Salafi script, transformed alienated young Muslims into fanatic terrorists" (2008, 88). Hence, in his view, the radicalisation process is a combination of radical religious beliefs and friendships/kinship. However, neither Sageman nor other theorists have offered a convincing explanation for why radicalised individuals choose violence over other means to express their beliefs. As Kundnani states:

> [T]he radicalisation literature fails to offer a convincing demonstration of any causal relationship between theology and violence. Moreover, the concept of radicalisation tends to confuse propensity to violence with radical ideas, leading the question of what causes

> violence to be insufficiently isolated from the question of how belief systems and ideologies come to be adopted (2012, 21).

The social construction of radicalisation and violent extremism, which mainly focuses on theology and social networks, has been severely criticised by academics linked to critical terrorism studies, as this approach appears to be blind to other relevant conceptions, such as economic and social marginalisation as well as the phenomenon of othering (Kundnani and Hayes 2018; Silva 2018). As this article will show, the application of the theological and social-psychological radicalisation model has been and is still used globally and can have negative real-world consequences.

From a critical terrorism perspective, the problem with the theological and social-psychological radicalisation model is that it focuses on indicators of and behaviours associated with the risk of terrorism, irrespective of whether they actually cause terrorism (Kundnani 2012). Such indicators can be alienation from family and friends, joining like-minded social groups and wearing traditional clothing. Assumed incubators of radicalisation include mosques but also schools and extremist websites and other “hangouts”. Following the theological and social-psychological radicalisation model, it is critically important to identify these radicalisation incubators. Because the model mainly focuses on the Salafist ideology of Islam, non-violent Muslims, specifically those who hold radical views, have been subjected to surveillance from security forces across the globe (Silva 2018). The focus on “indicators of terrorist risks” is also central to the Aarhus model and, as will be discussed, is utilised by Kenyan policymakers (Andersen and Wiuff Moe 2015). The Aarhus model focuses on preventing radicalisation at three levels. The first level works to prevent radicalisation in the wider community through public outreach, capacity building and related activities. The second level seeks to identify vulnerable people at risk of radicalisation. The third level targets individuals already identified as belonging to a terrorist group with the dual goal of disengagement and reintegration into society. Even though the Aarhus model does not explicitly focus on religion/ideology, the unintended consequence may be that in an islamophobic context it may lead to a disproportionate focus on Muslims (Andersen and Wiuff Moe 2015).

The model downplays political or economic causes

The dominance of the religion/ideology component of the theological and social-psychological radicalisation model in addressing violent extremism is problematic in that it clearly downplays the political and/or economic causes of radicalisation. While there is some disagreement about the role that economic conditions and circumstances play in the radicalisation process, Mesøy (2013) argues that poverty is important in this regard, especially endemic poverty. Political forces, including marginalisation and state violence, are also important predictors of recruitment into terrorist groups (Speckhard and Shajkovci 2019). According to Speckhard and Shajkovci (2019), terrorist groups often exploit such forces and associated grievances in their recruitment strategies by offering ways to combat them. The theological and social-psychological radicalisation model, on the other hand, underestimates or even ignores the often severe economic and political alienation of the others, i.e. Muslims, in favour of a more Orientalist image of “the Other”, i.e. in this case, Islam, one which fixates on the presumed stasis and inferiority of the religion. Although Orientalism as a discourse was presented by Said (1978) as a critique of justifications for Western colonialism and particularly of the dichotomisation between Western people and people from the Orient, in the contemporary world, this dichotomisation is especially relevant in terms of the relationship between Western hegemonic ideology and Islam. In *Covering Islam* (1997), Said underlines how Western knowledge and power have shaped Western "understanding" of Islam. This understanding has had serious implications insofar as it has helped shape dominant Western discourses about and interpretations of Islamic radicalisation and terrorism towards the perception of a static and dangerous Islam. About this, Said writes:

> [W]hat one reads and sees in the media about Islam states that the aggression is coming from Islam because that is what Islam is. Local and concrete circumstances are thus obliterated. In other words, covering Islam is a one-sided activity that obscures what we 'do', and highlights instead what Muslims and Arabs by their flawed nature 'are'. (1997, xxii).

As with the Other in *Orientalism* (Said 1978), Said claims that, in the West:

> Islam represents barbarism; for the left, medieval theocracy; for the center, a kind of distasteful exotism. In all camps however, there is agreement that even though little enough is known about the Islamic world there is not much to be approved of there (1997, iv).

His main point is that the reductive Orientalist perception of Islam as a static and dangerous religion persists (Said 1997) and is influenced by the West's interests in and policies towards Islamic regions.

Islamophobia

Just as the "East" presented lucrative opportunities during colonial occupation, as emphasised by Said, modern studies of counterterrorism have become a career-making endeavour. Thus, the social construction of the Other, especially Muslims, persists in the contemporary world. It particularly increased after 9/11, which, according to Beydoun (2018a), has fuelled increased Islamophobia. Beydoun argues, in line with Said, that Orientalism is the mother of modern Islamophobia, which is typified by the conviction that Islam is inherently violent and aggressive and that Muslim identity is synonymous with terrorism. As Beydoun states:

> Terrorism, within the public and journalistic discourse, is more about phenotype than facts, and religion than motive. Islam, for policymakers and much of the mainstream media, holds a monopoly over the ideology that drives terrorism (2018b, 1).

Moreover, as Beydoun (2018b) argues, Islam is often conflated with terrorism or violent extremism by the US media. Beydoun stresses that despite seemingly neutral definitions in official legislation, journalists and policymakers alike tend to exclusively link terrorism with Islam. For instance, when a far-right person commits an act of political violence, the media is much more reluctant to characterise it as an act of terrorism. Whiteness and being non-Muslim in a sense exempt far-right extremists from being labelled as terrorists. Beydoun thus argues for doing away with the term terrorism because it is so closely affiliated with anti-Muslim sentiments. Based on findings from Silva (2018), Islamophobic discourses are often transferred from academia to the media. When in need of commentators, the media often refer to and/or cite academics who emphasise the psychological and theological aspects of the radicalisation process.

Roy (2008) claims that there is little reason or evidence to claim that religion itself is an important part of the radicalisation process or that a causal relationship exists between Salafist beliefs and violent extremism. He instead argues that the main reasons for violent extremism are behaviourally based, even though religious rhetoric and Salafist references are often used to legitimise the terrorist cause.

Even though religious ideology may play a part in the radicalisation process, at least for some individuals, there is no empirical evidence that this is the only or even the most significant factor (Silke 2008) in the radicalisation process. As such, judging an individual's propensity for radicalisation based solely on their religious identity should be avoided.

The emergence of critical terrorism studies has, however, contributed to increased criticism of narrower psychological radicalisation models. Some researchers, such as Sageman, have also changed their position, now arguing that the theological aspect is no longer essential in the radicalisation process (Hasan 2013). However, governments in the West continue to focus on psychological and theological aspects of radicalisation in their counterterrorism strategies, seemingly disregarding extant critical analyses of the basis and focus of such strategies. This is evident in government funding, most of which continues to be allocated to research on risk indicators and on the theological and social-psychological radicalisation framework (Silva 2018). Moreover, most such research has focused on the implications of this framework in a predominantly Western context. As stated by Kundnani and Hayes (2018), further research should focus on how policies stemming from this research are implemented in other countries and contexts. Hence, I demonstrate in this article how the theological and social-psychological model is highly relevant to and can be applied in a Kenyan context.

Materials and methods

My primary data are based on qualitative research, including document analysis of relevant sources regarding violent extremism and radicalisation in Kenya as well as interviews carried out in Nairobi in 2018–2019. More specifically, I analysed a government website by the National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC) and legislation on counter-terrorism, including the Prevention of Terrorism Act and Security Laws Amendment Act. County plans and models on countering violent extremism, such as the Lamu County Plan for Countering Violent Extremism, the Action Plan for Countering Violent Extremism- Kilifi County and the Aarhus Model, were also scrutinised. Moreover, the outcome document from a regional conference on countering violent extremism in 2015 was analysed as well as a speech by the current president of Kenya, Uhuru Kenyatta in 2017. All reports, plans and Kenyatta's speech were available online. The primary aim of the document analysis was to identify the ideological undercurrent of these documents and the speech in terms of radicalisation and violent extremism.

When reading through and analysing the documents, I asked myself the following questions: How are the terms radicalisation and extremism understood and defined? How do the documents explain the root causes of radicalisation? According to the documents, what are the best ways to counter violent extremism in Kenya?

In the discussion of my findings, I explore the implications of the understandings of radicalisation and violent extremism as expressed in the documents by the Kenyan government’s counterterrorism strategies.

Interviews were conducted with informants from the Kenyan civil service, Kenyan civil society organisations, the Kenyan university sector and Kenyan high schools. The rationale for selecting a variety of research informants was to obtain a more holistic understanding of different perspectives on radicalisation and violent extremism in Kenya. In addition, these informants possessed in-depth knowledge of Kenyan counterterrorism measures as well as their consequences for the Kenyan population as a whole. Prior to commencing data collection, I obtained approval from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD). I also received ethical approval from a Kenyan University as well as a research permit from the Kenyan National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). I recruited research participants via non-probability sampling techniques. More specifically, some potential informants were formally and directly contacted, whereas others were referred to me by other informants, i.e. via snowball sampling. I also relied on my pre-existing professional and social network in Kenya to recruit research participants. The interviews, which lasted anywhere between 60–180 minutes, were directed by an interview guide and consisted of both semi-structured and open-ended questions, i.e. although many questions were initially prepared prior to interviewing, the informants were free to digress into any topic of their choosing. The primary questions asked during the interviews were as follows: What do you understand by the terms violent extremism and radicalisation? What do you think are the root causes of radicalisation in Kenya? How do you view the government`s counterterrorism policy? To what extent do these counterterrorism measures affect your job?

Due to the sensitive and controversial nature of my research, pseudonyms were given to the informants and distinctive personal details were changed in order to preserve their anonymity. These measures were taken to ensure that my research would in no way threaten the safety and reputation of the participants.

The interviews were audio-recorded on a secure dictaphone, after which they were transcribed and then organised and analysed thematically based on my research objectives and questions. Following the structure of the interview guide, I sought to elicit the informants’ reflections on the terms violent extremism and radicalisation. Thereafter, I focused on how the informants viewed the Kenyan government´s counterterrorism policy. In the second research stage, I analysed whether the interview responses agreed with or rejected the dominant radicalisation model. Finally, as presented in the discussion of my findings, I sought to identify and explicate the implications of the informants’ understandings of radicalisation with regard to countering violent extremism in Kenya.

Presenting and analysing my findings

The theological and social-psychological radicalisation model in Kenya

The analysis revealed that the Kenyan government has adopted a strategy to combat terrorism and undermine the radicalisation process that seems to bear the influence of the theological and social-psychological radicalisation model. This finding is substantiated by data derived from both official policy documents and statements and interviews with key stakeholders. Moreover, by reference to official documents, it appears that the theological and social-psychological radicalisation model deployed in Kenya is to some extent similar to the Aarhus model – indeed, the Aarhus model is explicitly mentioned in some of these policy documents.

The influence of the theological and social-psychological radicalisation model and its focus on ideology are readily apparent in the NCTC's definition of radicalisation:

> It is a gradual or phased process that employs the ideological conditioning of individuals and groups to socialise them into violent extremism, and recruitment into terrorist groups or campaigns. It is dependent on a fanatical ideology that rejects dialogue and compromise in favour of a ends-justifies-ends approach, particularly in the willingness to utilise mass violence to advance political aims — defined in racial, ethnic, sectarian and religious terms — opposed to the democratic principles enshrined in Kenya's Constitution (National Counter Terrorism Center [NCTC] 2020).

While the NCTC, which was set up by the Kenyan government with US support, defines radicalisation in ideological, racial, ethnic, sectarian and religious terms, other factors, such as marginalisation, discrimination, poverty or state violence, are not mentioned. In this way, the NCTC's definition of radicalisation is similar to that espoused in the theological and social-psychological radicalisation model, which focuses on the theological dimensions of the radicalisation process and asserts that certain religious beliefs (i.e. Islamic beliefs) could be an indicator of terrorist risk (Gartenstein and Grossman 2009; Wiktorowicz 2005; Sageman 2004). The focus on religious ideology and the lack of emphasis on economic factors were also expressed by a Kenyan government counterterrorism official when asked about his opinion on the main reason for radicalisation:

> Some people talk about poverty and unemployment as causes of radicalisation, but the most important thing the Kenyan state can do is to address religious ideology. That is what we can address. I think religion is very important. That is why it is important to work with other faith groups to counter religious ideology (Interview, Nov 2018).

The Kenyan government has for years equated "violent extremism" with "Islamic radicalisation" (see Mogire and Agade 2011). This is largely due to the Kenyan government's working relationship with the US and its efforts to contain the Muslim community (Mogire and Agade 2011). After 9/11, the Kenyan government joined the global "war on terror", which included the enactment of various legislation and counterterrorism centres in Kenya. In the Kenyan context specifically, the war on terror has been mainly directed against Al-Shabaab, which is a terrorist organisation that has operated in Kenya for many years. As my findings clearly show, Kenya has, through specific definitions, reports and statements, contributed to the institutionalisation of the term radicalisation and its link to Islam.

The link between violent extremism and Islam was also emphasised by a delegation consisting of regional leaders from the African Union and United States representatives at a regional conference in Nairobi in 2015:

> [V]iolent extremism, in particular Islamic fundamentalism, is part of a global political project that is driven by an ideology of self-affirmation rather than a reactive phenomenon (e.g. against oppression or marginalization) (National Counter Terrorism Centre 2015).

Moreover, in the Kenyan discourse, a specific ethnic group – the Somalis, who are predominantly Muslim – are often linked to violent extremism.

The state discourse concerning the Dadaab[2] refugee camp is that it facilitates radicalisation, which in turn implies that the Somali residents of this camp are violent extremists. This discourse is illustrated in the following statement about Dadaab issued by President Kenyatta:

> Of serious concern, the camp has . . . lost its humanitarian character. It is not acceptable to us that a space that is supposed to provide safety and assistance, is transformed to facilitate agents of terror and destruction. Instead, Dadaab has become a protracted situation, characterised by hopelessness that easily feeds . . . conflicts between refugees and host communities; insecurity; radicalisation; criminality; and allows terrorist operatives to exploit it for their operational efforts (Republic of Kenya 2017).

Thus, in Kenya, the theological and social-psychological radicalisation model has been expanded to include and thereby link ethnic Somalis to violent extremism.

As noted, the second part of the theological and social-psychological radicalisation model dyad also incorporates a social-psychological dimension, one which is reflected in Kenyan policy documents that emphasise the importance of social networks in the radicalisation process. This is clearly evident in the Lamu County Plan for Countering Violent Extremism (LCPCVE), in which it is stated:

> Peers: These are friends or age mates that children play with and learn many aspects of life that parents shy away from socializing their children. Within the framework of differential association, when a child associates with good peers, the expectation is that the child will acquire approved behavior. Conversely, when a child associates with bad peers, chances are that they will develop abnormal behavior. This explains in a nutshell, radicals and violent extremists in society. Peers are a very powerful source of socialization rivalling the institution of the family as the second primary agents of socialization. It is imperative therefore that LCPCVE should have programming that ensures positive peer influence and that parents are vigilant in ensuring their children interact with the right friends (Lamu County Plan for Countering Violent Extremism 2017, 28).

Moreover, the plan states that “Radicals and violent extremists were not born as such but are outcomes of an abnormal socialization process. However, socialization into conforming or non-conforming behavior takes place in the hands of agents” (LCPCVE 2017, 27). Interestingly, the LCPCVE underlines its theoretical basis by stating that the plan is “anchored in two theories that will guide the change process, namely Social Interaction and Socialization theory” (Lamu County Plan for Countering Violent Extremism 2017, 26).

Hence, in line with the theological and social-psychological radicalisation model, the presumption in the LCPCVE is that radicalisation is based on a socialisation process in which interpersonal – i.e. inter-psychological – interaction with already radicalised peers, relatives and friends is essential to the radicalisation process. Hence, potential radicalisation incubators include neighbours, family members, fellow worshippers and classmates.

Indicators of terrorist risk

As the theological and social-psychological radicalisation model is mainly linked to Salafi ideology, non-violent Muslims with nonetheless radical views are considered a potential terrorism risk. Central to this model is a focus on indicators of terrorist risk, as discussed in the first part of this article. Indicators of terrorist risk are likewise central in the Aarhus model, which is explicitly mentioned in Kenyan county documents. The Aarhus model was introduced to Kenya by the Danish government in 2012. This collaboration between the Danish Security and Intelligence Service (Politiets Efterretningstjeneste [PET]) and the Kenyan NCTC was part of an emerging global pattern of radicalisation models being exported to countries in the global South (Andersen and Wiuff Moe 2015). The Aarhus model is thoroughly explained in a variety of Kenyan county plans. As stated in the Lamu County Plan for Countering Violent Extremism, for instance: “The Lamu Plan for CVE borrows from the Aarhus model as it designs measures to tackle VE and radicalization” (Lamu County Plan for Countering Violent Extremism 2017, 14). For the purpose of this article, the second level in the Aarhus model is of particular interest. As explained in the Lamu County Plan for Countering Violent Extremism:

> On the other hand, there are the radicalized members who have embraced extreme views and ideologies but who are as yet not violent. These need various interventions that will maintain them at the radical level without being militant or where possible measures should also help them renounce radical and militant ideologies (Lamu County Plan for Countering Violent Extremism 2017, 14).

The Aarhus model is also emphasised in the Action Plan for Countering Violent Extremism-Kilifi County:

> The next phase (orange zone) is where the target groups are radicalized but are not yet violent. Capacity building of influential members of the community like Imams and CSOs so as to help in countering radicalisation. The field workers receive extensive training in preventive work, and act as crucial intermediaries in a dialogue between civil society and potential extremists.*There are several warning signs, such as skipping school all of a sudden or keeping a new distance from friends and family, which can precede the decision to become a Jihadi, and the field workers of the PET are professionally trained to spot these signals and encourage a different path* (Action Plan for Countering Violent Extremism-Kilifi County 2017, 22, emphasis added).

A focus on indicators of terrorist risk is thus central in the second level of the Aarhus model. “Fieldworkers” are therefore instructed to look for warning signs of potentially radicalised individuals.

As discussed below, a Kenyan state discourse on violent extremism that combines religious ideology, Somali ethnicity, social networks and indicators of terrorist risk has had severe real-world consequences in the nation.

The real-world consequences

Islam and social networks

As noted in my analysis of the policy documents, Kenya downplays economic and political reasons for joining terrorist groups like Al-Shabaab. The policy documents argue that the terrorist problem primarily stems from radical religious beliefs as well as from their adherents’ links to their immediate social networks, such as neighbours, family members and fellow worshippers. Hence, different radicalisation incubators such as mosques, madrassas and social networks need to be identified. Such a view legitimises that the Kenyan state should surveil and monitor “suspect communities” which Pantazis and Pemberton (2009) define as follows:

> [A] sub-group of the population that is singled out for state attention as being ‘problematic’. Specifically in terms of policing, individuals may be targeted, not necessarily as a result of

> suspected wrong doing, but simply because of their presumed membership to that sub-group. Race, ethnicity, religion, class, gender, language, accent, dress, political ideology or any combination of these factors may serve to delineate the sub-group (2009, 649).

The operationalisation of "suspect" is therefore not linked to a legal category dependent on an individual's association with a terrorist activity. Pantazis and Pemberton (2009) depict "suspicion" as a pyramid, where, at the bottom, the majority of cases and suspected cases based on membership in a sub-group can be found. Muslim communities are targeted not only by the state but also by the media, which play a critical role in creating discourses about suspect communities. The middle section of the pyramid includes the informal suspicion, arrest and interrogation of individuals, whose treatment may be ultimately legitimised by these actions. The apex of the pyramid comprises terror suspects who are under either house arrest or surveillance; these relatively few cases are typically based on more solid legal grounds and more substantial evidence (Pantazis and Pemberton 2009).

As discussed below, the creation of suspect communities is, in a Kenyan context, highly political, being based mostly on an Islamophobic discourse targeting primarily Muslims. As a consequence, non-violent Muslims with radical views are targeted for surveillance by Kenyan security personnel. The Kenyan government actively combats what it sees as the root causes of radicalisation, investigating and closing certain madrassas and deporting foreign clerics who are suspected of teaching terrorism (Mogire and Agade 2011). According to Goldsmith (2018), there is very little evidence to support such claims, and most Kenyan Muslims in fact support a more moderate form of Islam. The repressive apparatus of the Kenyan state is of particular interest to critical terrorism studies and to my research especially, as such an apparatus is shaped by the power interests and ideology of the Kenyan state. The biased social construction of Islam in the dominant discourse and in Kenya's framing of Muslims as shown in my findings is clearly evident when compared to the treatment of other groups accused of or known to engage in violence, such as the Mungiki ethnic group, which has never been formally accused of perpetrating acts of terrorism (Mogire and Agade 2011).

As a consequence of intense surveillance, some Kenyan Muslims have fled to Somalia to join Al-Shabaab. As explained to me by an informant in a civil society organisation:

> When Muslims in Majengo see Muslims in North Eastern, or Muslims in Eastleigh or in other parts of the country, being persecuted, they feel bitter. Most of them are not able to control their anger, so they look for ways to vent out, and one way is to join Al-Shabaab so that they can unleash the bitterness that they have. You realise most of the Muslims from Majengo went to Somalia because of the injustices, the bitterness and frustrations that they have experienced. They have never healed from the traumas that they have experienced (Interview, Nov 2018).

Many suspected terrorists, often Muslims, are also placed in so-called rehabilitation centres. Scholars argue that these facilities are often used as detention centres, and that they thereby produce "tensions between discourses and practices of compassion on the one hand, and repression on the other" (Al-Bulushi, Samar and Daghar 2019, 161). As explained to me by a civil society organisation spokesperson, in stark contrast to their stated aim:

> There is little flexibility in these rehabilitation programmes, and 'suspected terrorists' who want to travel outside the city have to report to the security forces. Several of those who did

> not submit such a report have suddenly ‘disappeared’. And if a terrorist attack occurs, it is often suspected terrorists/Muslims who are subject to reprisals and arrests by the security forces – arrests they will probably never return from (Interview, Nov 2018).

According to a recent United Nations survey, 71% of former members of African terrorist organisations have claimed that the state’s actions, including arrests and killings of family members, were the main reason they joined a terrorist group (UNDP 2017). In line with critical terrorism studies, it is therefore necessary to problematise the official discourse of violent extremism by scrutinising what it obscures and on which types of knowledge production the discourse is based. It seems apparent that interventions by state actors can in many cases destabilise the lives of their Muslim populations instead of preventing terrorist attacks, thereby highlighting the shortcomings and often paradoxical consequences of basing interventions on a narrow constructivist model.

As my findings show, in the Kenyan context, the state discourse focuses specifically on Somalis as being linked to violent extremism. In 2011, Kenya intervened in Somalia through the so-called Operation Linda Nchi (Protect the Country), a 22,000-strong African Union military operation against Al-Shabaab. The operation was primarily triggered by kidnappings of tourists along Kenya’s border with Somalia and around Lamu Island. After the military intervention, Kenya suffered several violent attacks by Al-Shabaab, which had taken advantage of Kenya’s internal vulnerabilities, such as corruption, a porous border and the presence of terrorist cells within the country (Goldsmith 2018).

The Kenyan state has, through the social construction of the Somali population (and Muslims more generally), created a Somali identity based on criminality and security risk, which has in turn justified the Kenyan government’s hardened security approach towards Somalis. My findings clearly demonstrate the prevalence of a state discourse of the Dadaab refugee camp as facilitating radicalisation and thus of Somalis as violent extremists. Mwangi (2019) also argues that there has been a “Somalization of terrorism” in Kenya. This is evident in the government’s constant threat to shutter Dadaab on the grounds that it is harbouring terrorists. By characterising Somali refugees and the Dadaab refugee camp as a threat to national security, the Kenyan government has also legitimated a breach of its international obligations. It has done so by arguing that national security must be prioritised over the principle of non-refoulement (i.e. not sending refugees back to their home countries, where they would likely be at great risk of persecution) (Mwangi 2018).

Al-Shabaab is easily infiltrating Kenya by exploiting internal stressors, such as inequality, land issues, marginalisation and state violence (Hansen, Lid, and Okwany 2019). Findings by Speckhard and Shajkovci (2019) also reveal that financial constraints and unemployment are important drivers of recruitment to Al-Shabaab. According to Lind, Mutahi, and Oosterom (2017), the greatest threat to peace in Kenya is unequal citizenship and the marginalisation of Kenya’s minorities rather than an external terrorist group such as Al-Shabaab.

Another reason for Kenya´s terrorist problem is the impunity enjoyed by the security sector. What was once essentially an “external problem”, radicalisation has been domesticated as a consequence of the security sector (Goldsmith 2018). As argued by Kresse (2016), the work of Chabal and Daloz (1999) on the instrumental use of disorder is relevant in this case. The Kenyan government exploits the “terrorist” problem in order to cover up its security interventions and undermine provisions in the constitution, such as freedom of speech (Kresse 2016).

One highly controversial governmental initiative was Operation Usalama Watch in 2014, also known as Operation Sanitise Eastleigh, in reference to the Nairobi suburb of the same name. The purpose of this operation was to expose Al-Shabaab members and search for weapons, explosives and other arms to deter terrorism and other criminal activities (Wairuri 2018). As stated by an informant from a civil society organisation:

> During Operation Usalama Watch, Somalis were being taken to Kasarani Stadium. The residents in Eastleigh (the majority are Somali) experienced harassment, assaults, arbitrary arrests, deportation and several other human rights abuses. In Mombasa, the police entered the mosques in shoes and targeted Muslims. Muslims in some parts of the country became bitter because of the injustices they were experiencing (Interview, Nov 2018).

Extra-judicial killings in Kenya have also fuelled anger and frustration, especially in the Muslim community and among members of the Somali community, which may have in turn triggered violent extremism (Hansen, Lid, and Okwany 2019). According to Goldsmith (2018), violent extremism in Kenya is attributable more to violence committed by the security sector than to the shallow roots of extremist ideology in the country.

Paradoxically, most of those who are being recruited to Al-Shabaab are Kenyans, not Somalis. Kenya's National Intelligence Service identified a Kenyan of Kikuyu ethnicity as the mastermind of the terror attacks in Lamu and Tana River in 2014 (Lind, Mutahi, and Oosterom 2017). In the attack on the Dusit Hotel complex in Nairobi in 2019, three of the five terrorists were Kenyans (Breidlid 2019).

According to one civil society informant, most Somalis who have fled Al-Shabaab have had relatives killed by the terrorist group in Somalia, and as such they hold overtly negative sentiments towards the group. According to the informant:

> The biggest percentage of youths in Al-Shabaab are youths from different counties in Kenya and not from Somalia. They are from Mombasa, Majengo and Isiolo and some places in Kakamega. The police have negative stereotypes about the Somalis and have thus connected them to Al-Shabaab. It is, however, not only Somalis who have experienced police violence. Most people in Majengo have been affected by police brutality, since this is a place which consists of a huge Muslim and Somali population (Interview, Nov 2018).

Interestingly, some Kenyans feel that government interventions against the Somali population are at times justified. Negative attitudes towards the Somali population are prevalent and are often expressed via dehumanising metaphors. A conversation I had with a professor at a Kenyan university illustrates this point, with the professor stating "I understand the hard crackdown on the Somali population, you can`t really trust them. They are like cockroaches . . . !" (Interview, Dec 2018).

Such negative attitudes towards Somalis are not only promulgated via state discourses and interventions but are also tied to unequal citizenship rights, which affect public opinions about the Somali population. In line with Kenyan government policy, many Kenyan nationals also associate Somalis with membership in Al-Shabaab. In 2012, a grenade attack on St. Polycarp Church, which killed a baby, provoked outrage and reprisals against Somalis living in Eastleigh by Kenyans. A few months later, Somalis were again attacked by Kenyans in Eastleigh after the detonation of an explosive device (Botha 2014).

The creation of suspect communities

As violent extremism in the Kenyan dominant discourse is primarily linked to Islamic theology and Salafism, Muslims with political interests or intentions risk being labelled as terrorists, whether they have engaged in violence or not. According to the critical perspective taken by Kundnani, such a skewed construction of reality:

> builds into official thinking biases and prejudices that, in turn, structure government practices introduced to combat radicalization, resulting in discrimination and unwarranted restrictions on civil liberties (2012, 8).

The Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) (2012) and the Security Laws (Amendment) Act (2014) illustrate this point. When these bills were passed in the Kenyan Parliament, they were highly criticised, especially for prioritising security concerns over human rights. A focus on "risk" instead of "threats" informed the bills. The Kenyan government's stated purpose in the global war on terror was to prevent terrorism from occurring and to pre-emptively take action before an attack occurs. A strong emphasis was thus placed on individuals who had the potential to be at "risk" of radicalisation or the propensity to commit terrorist attacks (Badurdeen 2018). This focus on risk is also central in the theological and social-psychological radicalisation model, in which a specific disposition, such as religious (i.e. Islamic) beliefs and associated social networks, are seen as indicators of terrorist risk. Hence, security forces can ostensibly use these indicators as an "analytical formula" to predict terrorism and detect future terrorists. In Kenya, the focus on risk over threat has prompted Kenyan actors to focus especially on those individuals who might be at risk of becoming radicalised. Defining which individuals are at risk of radicalisation or are suspected of being radicalised has become highly political and is aligned with Kenya's dominant discourse, which is fundamentally concerned with retaining political control. Moreover, as I found in my document analysis, a potential problem with the Security Laws (Amendment) Act is that even though it defines radicalisation, it does not offer a proper definition of extremist beliefs. Provision I2D of the Act states:

> A person who adopts or promotes an extreme belief system for the purpose of facilitating ideologically based violence to advance political, religious or social change commits an offence and is liable to conviction, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding thirty years (SLAA 2014).

Hence, the provision does not give any clear indication of what actually constitutes extremist beliefs – accordingly, nearly anyone who expresses dissenting political/religious opinions is at risk of being characterised as an extremist. The Security Laws (Amendment) Act also gives the Kenyan authorities broad surveillance powers, thereby making it much easier to surveil anyone suspected of having extremist beliefs. This includes Section 42 of the Act, which gives the Director General of the National Security Agency complete discretion to authorise the surveillance of anyone in order to combat "any threat to national security or to perform any of its functions" (Security Laws (Amendment) Act 2014). Thus, the Security Laws (Amendment) Act legitimates the surveillance of anyone suspected of holding extremist beliefs. Worse, different security actors have total discretion in defining what constitutes extremist beliefs.

The practical implication of this is that any dissenting opinion could be considered an indicator of radicalisation. According to Badurdeen (2018), many Muslims avoid speaking about issues such as jihad and Sharia, even if it is for preventive reasons, out of fear of being classified as suspects and put under surveillance. As noted earlier, the focus on indicators of terrorist risk has also informed Kenyan county plans, which borrow heavily from the Aarhus model.

However, as stressed by Lindekilde (2012), there is no such thing as a "terrorist profile", and as such a variety of social and structural factors must therefore be taken into account when seeking to prevent violent extremism.

In the process of implementing policies and legislation meant for individuals, whole Muslim and Somali communities have been targeted and defined as "suspect communities", which is as noted a social construction based on an Islamophobic discourse (Badurdeen 2018). Pentazis and Pemberton (2009) state that the concept of suspect communities can have devastating effects on individuals. In practice, this means that an individual can be labelled a terrorist simply for being part of a community, not for actually committing a violent act. A culture of fear and suspicion seems to be the outcome of this governmental policy, which mainly focuses on religion, social networks and Somali ethnicity as the main ingredients in the radicalisation process: an interpretation that clearly negates other understandings of radicalisation. Ultimately, as mentioned above, this policy has been demonstrably counterproductive in combating serious threats to Kenyan society.

This image of suspect communities has also been reproduced and even expanded in the media as well as among the general public. Islamophobia is therefore a core issue in the Kenyan context, in which misconceptions and misrepresentations of Islam have legitimised the formation of the Other – i.e. the Muslim and Somali populations. According to Goldsmith (2018), the national media are responsible for reproducing perceptions of Muslims and Somalis as having links with Al-Shabaab. The othering of Muslims continues to persist in contemporary Kenya, where Muslims living along the coast are considered backwards, as villains and as in need of guidance from the central government. Such an Orientalist discourse among the public and in the media supports the legitimisation of the harassment of Muslims by the Kenyan security forces.

Civil society organisations working with radicalised youth have also experienced difficulties working under the POTA. As Provision 46 of the POTA states:

> Refusal of applications for registration, and the revocation of registration, of associations linked to terrorist groups (1) The Cabinet Secretary may, where he has reasonable grounds to believe that a registered company or association or an applicant for registration as a company or association has made or is likely to make available, directly or indirectly, any resource support of a terrorist group, issue an order to that effect in the prescribed form (POTA 2012).

Hence, the POTA makes it difficult for faith-based groups and community organisations to offer support to young Muslims who experience harassment and discrimination by the Kenyan police and other security forces. This is because the law makes it easy to be charged by the state if one is perceived as offering or providing "material support" to "suspected terrorists". For instance, in 2015, the civil society groups Haki Afrika and Muslims for Human Rights were accused of having links with Al-Shabaab (Hansen, Lid, and Okwany 2019). Their work on countering violent extremism involves, among other actions, exposing the government's extra-judicial killings of Muslims and suspected terrorists. These groups also advocate for the fair treatment of terror suspects and for the establishment of rehabilitation programmes for returnees. The Kenyan government reacted to these initiatives by freezing the bank accounts of both organisations (Hansen, Lid, and Okwany 2019). By doing so, instead of fostering cooperation with Muslim civil society organisations, mistrust and enmity were created between the government and parts of civil society. The "terrorist stamp" thus "legitimises" the impunity of the Kenyan security forces in suppressing Muslim civil society organisations, making it exceedingly difficult for these organisations to constructively counter radicalisation and terrorism. Such hostile government interventions have had an overwhelmingly negative impact on the rights of civil society organisations, substantively narrowing the scope of dissent and the extent to which they can criticise the government. Many civil society organisations now feel compelled to align their policies with those of the government, particularly counterterrorism policies and strategies (Badurdeen and Goldsmith 2018). According to Kundnani and Hayes (2018), this is also a global trend, where CVE programmes that conform with the government's agenda are increasingly being rewarded. In contrast, NGOs, which typically question the government's agenda and associated policies and interventions or promote valuable grass roots knowledge production and dissemination, are often marginalised or outright silenced by the government.

Another illustrative example is the portrayal of the Mombasa Republican Council (MRC), a Muslim legal advocacy organisation dedicated to addressing historical grievances against the Muslim population with an express focus on non-violence. And yet, the Kenyan media and the Kenyan government have portrayed the MRC as a violent ethnic gang with ties to Al-Shabaab, and as such the government has frozen funding to the organisation – an indisputably counterproductive means of fighting violent extremism (Goldsmith 2018). It goes without saying that what Muslim youths need most of all is social and verbal support from their society, not aggressive government interventions designed to stigmatise important, non-violent organisations whose purpose is to prevent the alienation – and thus radicalisation – of these youths.

Indicators of terrorist risk in "soft" approaches to countering violent extremism

Due to international, but also local, criticism of the hard approach taken against the Somali and Muslim populations in Kenya, the National Strategy on Countering Violent Extremism (NSCV) was launched in 2016. Various county plans stemming from this national initiative were launched the following year, with each stressing more holistic, grass roots-level interventions for countering violent extremism (Halakhe 2020). These county initiatives are, as mentioned earlier, based on the Aarhus model, which foregrounds the important role that community and civil society actors can play in countering violent extremism. The Aarhus model has been praised internationally and continues to be well regarded as a successful model in many contexts. Unfortunately, however, even though the acceptance of this model indicates a shift in Kenya's formerly heavy-handed security response strategy to a more community-level focus on countering violent extremism, it also appears to have exacerbated already existing tensions between the Kenyan state and its Muslim population.

Even in Denmark, the implementation of the Aarhus model has had negative consequences. In the Danish discourse, in which terrorism is also mainly linked to Islam, the secondary level of the model, which focuses on indicators of radicalisation, has had the unintended consequence of making Muslim residents feel stigmatised and targeted

(Andersen and Wiuff Moe 2015). This is because holding certain religious beliefs were seen as potential indicators of terrorist risk. In a Kenyan context, where the profiling of Muslims due to pre-existing inter-religious and inter-ethnic power struggles is, historically speaking, already a common practice, the Aarhus model has an even greater likelihood of making Muslims feel stigmatised, discriminated against and othered. According to findings by Badurdeen and Goldsmith (2018), many contemporary CVE programmes in Kenya are intrinsically linked to Islamic radicalisation, meaning that many Muslim residents have already felt stigmatised from these programmes. Hence, there is a clear danger that by using communities and prisons to look for indicators of radicalisation with the intention of identifying vulnerable young people, mistrust might be increased and perhaps even violent reactions may occur.

As stated by Kundnani in another context:

> By placing legal obligations on public bodies and private actors to become the 'eyes and ears' of the police in respect to signs of extremism or radicalisation, their autonomy, independence and professional ethics are also fundamentally called into question (2018, 37).

Still, counter-radicalisation models and strategies continue to be exported to different contexts without taking into consideration various differences in societies and cultural practices (Lindekilde 2012; Mattsson 2019).

Even well-meaning CVE programmes focusing on indicators of radicalisation might ultimately be counterproductive. Such programmes have now even been expanded to Kenyan schools. As stressed by a Kenyan government official:

> The National Counter Terrorism Center and the National Integration Commission have also developed tools and trained teachers through Amani Clubs (Peace Clubs) so that they can monitor radicalisation among the children. The teacher can then report children who are acting in a suspicious way or wearing specific clothing to the National Counter Terrorism Center (Interview, Dec 2018).

One high school teacher explained to me that Kenyan teachers "are supposed to look for signs of radicalisation. Important indicators are behavioural change and conversion from Christianity to Islam" (Interview, March 2019). Hence, by expanding such programmes to schools, the likelihood that Muslim children will eventually feel stigmatised and discriminated against in learning spaces that are supposed to be safe and nurturing will only increase.

Thus, the community-level emphasis of the Aarhus model poses the risk of actually extending or exacerbating already existing Kenyan state profiling practices and even extra-judicial killings. It therefore remains to be seen whether the implementation of the Aarhus model will ultimately be capable of ameliorating the long-standing, deep-seated mistrust between Muslims and other marginalised communities and the Kenyan state police and other security forces.

A related community-level initiative that has received substantial criticism is the Nyumba Kumi neighbourhood watch programme, which was first implemented in 2013. This programme tasked 10 households with reporting suspicious activity that could be linked to terrorism to the police. However, it is not hard to see how the Nyumba Kumi programme led to increased suspicion and mistrust in the community. Somali residents especially felt targeted and stigmatised by the community. Hence, the danger of such multi-agency community projects involving the police may make these soft approaches less efficient (Lid 2020).

Critical terrorism studies as applied to radicalisation in Kenya

Despite the stated policies of the NSCV and county plans with respect to human rights in counterterrorism operations, civil society organisations continue to report on the failure of the Kenyan government to prosecute or even investigate extra-judicial killings, disappearances and torture of suspected terrorists and Muslims by Kenyan security forces (Lind, Mutahi, and Oosterom 2017). As explained to me by one civil society organisation, such policies and plans are not always implemented in practice:

> You know the problem is that we have very beautiful documents like the constitution, the National Strategy on Violent Extremism, and the forthcoming Nairobi County Action Plan, but in reality people are not obeying the constitution or the county plans. Even if the people on the ground follow the constitution, the people on the top don't follow it. It then becomes difficult to tell people why they should follow the constitution (Interview, Nov 2018).

Providing more economic opportunities for youths is also addressed in county plans intended to counter radicalisation.[3] However, as stated by one Kenyan academician in the field of terrorism studies in Kenya:

> The problem is that these elements in the county plans are not implemented. I visited Majengo in Nairobi, a hotspot for recruitment to Al-Shabaab. I talked to the local chief and he had received money from the National Counter Terrorism Center, but no instructions on how to use this money in anti-radicalisation work in the community. There had been no training nor any information sharing on how to counter radicalisation in the area (Interview, March 2019).

Moreover, the county plans, though distinct in some respects, share a focus on cooperation with civil society as a means of cultivating a better relationship with the police and the community.[4] However, as stated by one representative of a civil society organisation, this initiative is often exploited by the police:

> There are cases where we are trying to bridge the gap between the police and the community through meetings and dialogue. The youth than talk about different issues and problems. Then suddenly you hear that the anti-terror police have abducted one of the participants. It is like you are organising these things so the police can fish out suspects from this process. It is discouraging our efforts of promoting good relationships between the police and the community. We realise that we are trying very hard, but it is becoming difficult (Interview, Nov 2018).

In sum, these testimonies and reports illustrate the contradictory nature of the Kenyan state, with an emphasis on human rights and soft measures on the one hand, and a focus on oppressive and even abusive practices in addressing terrorist threats on the other.

Conclusion

The findings from my analysis demonstrate that the dominant discourse of radicalisation in Kenya is socially constructed more or less solely on the basis of a theological and social-psychological radicalisation model and on an Orientalist discourse. This discourse is in turn used to legitimise and reinforce official Kenyan policies. It is not surprising from a critical terrorism perspective that a dominant discourse that does not include multiple interpretations of social phenomena, i.e. in this article, radicalisation and violent extremism, is often ultimately counterproductive.

A focus on indicators of terrorist risk has also predominated in Kenyan legislation and CVE plans. As Islam is often perceived as an indicator of terrorist risk, many non-violent Muslims have experienced harassment and discrimination by the Kenyan security sector. In addition to Islam, ethnic Somalis, who are Muslims, have especially been linked to violent extremism. Thus, the Somali population in Kenya often experiences intersectional discrimination in terms of both ethnicity/nationality and religion.

Some scholars suggest that the Kenyan elite actually benefits from having a "terrorist threat" insofar as it has justified Kenya's interventions in Somalia, which have reaped many benefits (Goldsmith 2018). Therefore, Kenya authorities might be content to perpetuate the "status quo" and would thus have little interest in making any real progress in their conflict with Somalia. The war on terror has allowed the Kenyan government to extract revenue from donors, especially from the US (Franklin 2017). This has in turn permitted large-scale corruption to occur, ultimately tempting Kenyan authorities to continue the conflict. That Al-Shabaab continues to control some areas in Somalia and can successfully carry out attacks is not because they are really that adept or powerful, according to this interpretation. Rather, Al-Shabaab's resilience is related more to Kenyan corruption and misallocation of resources in a deliberate attempt to prolong the conflict with the terrorist group (Franklin 2017).

Moreover, the war on terror also gives the Kenyan government a legitimate reason to retain its troop presence in Somalia and obfuscate its own national interests in the country (Goldmith 2018). For instance, a leaked UN report revealed collaboration between Kenyan Defence Forces (KDF) and Al-Shabaab in the illegal export of sugar and coal from a port in Somalia (Daily Nation 2014). It therefore remains to be seen whether the Kenyan government is actually serious in its stated commitment to withdraw from Somalia in 2021 (Hansen 2020). At the domestic level, the war on terror has permitted the Kenyan government to cover up human rights abuses and discrimination against its Muslim and Somali populations.

There are no easy solutions to preventing radicalisation in Kenya. The variety of abuses to which marginalised communities have been subjected are nonetheless in urgent need of remediation by the Kenyan state. From a critical terrorism perspective, deconstructing violent extremism as a phenomenon with roots beyond mere religious convictions or ethnic identities constitutes a vital first step in removing the stigma from and the associated burdens of marginalised communities. But this step must be taken not just by the Kenyan government, but also by the Kenyan media, civil society organisations, schools and other influential institutions.

Notes

1. Salafists follow the example of the first three generations of Muslims, the pious predecessors, because they are regarded as having a pure understanding of Islam. The text in the Quran or the Sunna is to be understood literally, and scholars with authority within the Salafi community present the truth (Wiktorowicz 2006).

2. The largest concentrations of Somalis in Kenya can be found in the Dadaab refugee camp. Moreover, Dadaab is the world's largest refugee complex. As of January 2018, it hosted 234,346 refugees, 96% of whom were Somali (Mwangi 2019). Dadaab developed in large part from the mass influx of Somali refugees fleeing the civil war in Somalia in the 1990s.
3. The Action Plan for Countering Violent Extremism- Kilifi County Strategic Objective 8 states: "To enhance growth and development of economic opportunities in Kilifi County for enhanced livelihood strategies". To achieve this objective, the focus is to "Create employment opportunities for the youth in both the formal and informal sector" (Action Plan for Countering Violent Extremism- Kilifi County2017).
4. The Strategic Objective 6 of the plan is "To secure Kilifi County from external and internal threats to insecurity, especially radicalisation and VE". In order to achieve this objective, the aim is to "Enhance police – community relations and trust through inclusive and innovative ways of participation" (Action Plan for Countering Violent Extremism- Kilifi County 2017).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest is reported by the author.

Funding

No specific funding was received for this work.

Notes on contributor

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