



EGERTON UNIVERSITY

Department of Philosophy, History & Religion

## **Art of Countering Violent Extremism in Kenya: Things, Texts, Images**

An Exhibition on Performativity and Materiality of Countering Violent Extremism in Kenya

**Funder: Volkswagen Stiftung, Germany through Egerton University**

**Supported by: Horn International Institute for Strategic Studies, Centre for Sustainable Conflict Resolution, YADEN East Africa, Nairobi National Museum**

Dates and Venues: 08-28 February 2021, Nairobi National Museum (physical), Virtual (online)

This exhibition is a public engagement dimension of Volkswagen Foundation funded Senior Humanities Postdoctoral Fellowship Project of Dr. Halkano Abdi Wario titled 'Jihad for All? Religious Knowledge, Counter-Narrativity and De-Radicalisation Strategies in Kenya

### **Exhibition Concept Note**

Kenya is one of the leading regional partners to the United States and other western powers since 2011 in what has been called Global War on Terror. Way before then, on August 08 1998, the country suffered heavy casualties when al Qaeda carried out simultaneous twin bombing of the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. The country neighbours Somalia which had no stable government since 1991. Somalia has had protracted civil strife and terror related

violence including since 2006 rise of militant al Shabab a long time al Qaeda affiliate in the Horn of Africa. Al Shabab engaged in series of cross border raids and kidnappings in 2010 and 2011 leading to Kenya Defence Forces making a unilateral incursion in October 2011 into Somalia displacing the group from maritime port of Kismayu and other lucrative territories in south west Somalia. Kenya later joined United Nations backed African Union Mission in Somalia.

Since 2011, the country had witnessed numerous high target attacks from the terror group in Nairobi, Garissa, along the border to Somalia and in coastal counties of Lamu, Kilifi, Mombasa and Kwale. The group also recruited into the ranks dozens of disgruntled Kenyan Muslim youth from the coast, Nairobi and northern Kenya using sophisticated radicalizing narratives based on existing and perceived feelings of persecution, marginalization and underdevelopment, jihadi religious ideologies and financial incentives.

A shift in global strategy in war against terrorism in 2008/2009 gave rise to introduction and establishment of softer community oriented measures meant to address underlying causes of radicalization and attraction to violent extremism by reaching out to and winning hearts and minds of vulnerable groups and so called at risks communities. This new campaigns were called Prevention/Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE or CVE in short).

CVE programming include by not limited to youth economic empowerment and skills development programmes, mentorship and leadership trainings, counter-radicalization and counter narrative production and circulation, training of community leaders and youth in interfaith relations, tolerance, responsible citizenship, advocacy and grievance forwarding to relevant authorities, human right trainings, workshops and trainings on dangers of violent extremist groups, how to identify early signs of radicalization and response to it and how to use community based resources including art and talents to address the problems of violent extremism.

It is to this creative dimension of the CVE programming that we turn to now. Youth are perceived to be central to turning tide against emerging cases of their fellow youth radicalization and recruitment into terror groups. They are seen by those behind CVE programming that they are particularly vulnerable to sophisticated targeted online performative recruitment videos and other visuals by jihadi groups. So they imagined as the

best bet against jihadi propaganda if their creative side can be tapped into. In order to realize these, all sort of intervention targeted to incorporate the youth into CVE campaigns more or less see them as co-creators of mediated counter radicalization contents.

This co-option takes various forms in all areas where CVE interventions are carried out. Most prominent ones include youth art festivals and events, talent competitions, youth acts as props during community sensitizations among other. However, it should be noted that there are also others who fall outside the bracket of youth who have produced art of counter-radicalization.

P/CVE (Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism) programmes run by these various stakeholders in the country has produced sizeable number of visual, audio visual, written and tangible and intangible materials over the last few years.

What fuses all these 'things' together is that they are a product of human creative responses to violent extremism from various perspectives and brings out aesthetical dimension of how stakeholders define, struggle, appropriate and repackage critical and often ambiguous concepts and processes at the core of P/CVE programmes.

Despite its apparent visibility of materiality of counter-terrorism over the last half decades in the country, there has been little focus on it. There is urgent research needs to examine and analyse, survey and most importantly exhibit and ignite public discourses around the question of materiality of counter-terrorism.

#### **Materials for exhibition include**

- Excerpt, trailers and short documentaries that touches on the team of countering violent extremism
- Counter narrative materials produced by faith based and interfaith initiatives such as BRAVE Movement
- Materials from youth CVE festivals, talent shows, theatrical performances
- Materials out of CVE themed competitions such as Lenga Ugaidi na Talanta
- Spoken words (poetry), short films, songs, skirts produced by the youth
- Creative written outputs and literature of CVE counter narrative campaigns such as training manuals, cover pages of county action plans, national and regional strategies
- Snapshots of social media campaigns