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Counterinsurgency, community participation, and the preventing and countering violent extremism agenda in Kenya

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ABSTRACT
Over the last six years, the P/CVE agenda has emphasized the need of preventative measures to augment kinetic counterterrorism security approaches. Based on field research in Kenya in 2019, this article analyzes the 'police power' of P/CVE, which compels populations to participate in their own security and ensure their own governability, otherwise marking them for elimination. P/CVE is read as a mode of civil counterinsurgency that operates to pacify populations seen as threats to a liberal international order through peacebuilding and development initiatives, curtailing the autonomy of civic space and securitizing the work of community organizations.

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Introduction

Since the adoption of the United Nations (UN) Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (PVE), communities around the world have been drawn into the fight against violent extremism.[1] Inspired by the Obama administration's promotion of Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) as an alternative, non-kinetic approach to Bush's global war on terror, in 2016 the UN called upon member states to develop plans that would complement, but not replace, counterterrorism measures by addressing the underlying factors believed to be contributing to violent extremism.[2] In the five years since, the agenda now commonly referred to as Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) has grown into a global phenomenon that hinges on the participation of communities in the promotion and enactment of their own security.

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Promoted specifically as 'non-coercive', P/CVE measures are juxtaposed against the coercive action of police and military. Yet, recent scholarship has documented how the P/CVE agenda expands and legitimizes counterterrorism approaches that lead to the gross violation of human rights, the continued perpetration of military interventions including drone strikes that disproportionately target civilian populations, and the shrinking of civic spaces worldwide.[3] However, there is a lack of ethnographic research that examines how P/CVE functions through social and economic coercion at the community level, particularly in the global south.[4] Ethnographic research enables a better understanding of how, as a 'whole-of society' approach that requires the successful cooperation of governmental and non-governmental actors, the P/CVE agenda compels the participation of civil society organizations – and community-based organizations in particular – whose work is geared toward engaging individuals or communities considered vulnerable to violent extremism.[5]

Responding to this gap, the research for this article was conducted in Kenya, where a burgeoning P/CVE agenda has emerged at the intersection of peace, development, security, and human rights.[6] Interviews, focus-group discussions, and participant observation research was conducted with more than 80 civil society actors in the coastal regions of Kwale and Mombasa counties; the Eastern region of Isiolo; and Nairobi, including the informal settlements of Eastleigh, Majengo and Mathare.[7] The findings from this study overwhelmingly demonstrate that community-based actors were critical of government-led and donor-driven P/CVE approaches and yet simultaneously felt they had no option other than to engage with the agenda. In particular, community organizations felt compelled to participate given their reliance on international donorship, which has become saturated by P/CVE funding. In addition, community actors also felt obligated to engage with the agenda in order to shape it, to redirect Kenya's anti-terror security practices away from 'hard' and coercive measures. As one practitioner plainly stated, 'If we don't engage, there will be more challenges. We have to engage'.[8]

Based on this research, this article analyzes how community organizations in Kenya are coerced to participate in the P/CVE agenda.[9] I read P/CVE as a mode of civil counterinsurgency enacted through the peace-security-development nexus that works to interpellate community actors as responsible for their own security. Targeted communities are both the objects and intended recipients of P/CVE programming and policies, and also the subjects needed to implement the work of violence prevention. Here, I am drawing upon literature that understands Western liberal counterinsurgency as a 'biopolitical containment strategy' enacted through the intersection of development and security strategies that seeks to first pacify and then build the capacity of populations toward governability.[10] Such a reading forces a recognition of P/CVE's role in the

larger security architecture of the global war on terror, which works to produce governable populations and states not only 'by policing foreign populations but also enabling them to police themselves'.[11] As a means to manage the risk posed by populations seen as 'vulnerable to radicalizing toward violent extremism', P/CVE closely mirrors pacification strategies wherein individuals are coerced to participate in their own development and security – understood as neutral, apolitical social goods – or are marked 'as threats to the liberal social order and are taken out of circulation altogether'.[12]

The first section begins by reading the P/CVE agenda and attendant discourse of violent extremism as a form of police power enacted within the global context of the war on terror. Here, 'police power' includes not only the formal institution of the police, but also a 'broad range of powers through which social order is fabricated and subjects constituted'.[13] As reported by community actors in Kenya, the language of violent extremism is used to mark minoritized populations, specifically ethnic Somali and Muslim communities, as in need of additional surveillance and policing. While the term 'violent extremism', said to encompass a 'wider category of manifestations' than terrorism, is supposedly not exclusive to any region, religion, or ideology, P/CVE's target audience has overwhelmingly been Muslim communities, in both the global south and the global north.[14] Community actors see P/CVE as fostering Islamophobia and producing the very subjects of violent extremism that it intends to address. Further, in naming populations deemed 'vulnerable' or 'at-risk', P/CVE interpellates community actors as security agents, identifying signs of radicalization among their communities *and* expands formal police power, emboldening institutions such as Kenya's Anti-Terror Police Force (ATPU) through the distillation of counterterrorism norms throughout the whole of society.

In such communities, P/CVE encourages tactics such as 'community policing' as a non-coercive, 'compliance-based form of law enforcement that seeks to co-produce security with local communities'.[15] Such a strategy is intended to build the capacity of individuals to police themselves and each other, a form of lateral surveillance, as well as to develop greater trust between communities and police to enable greater reporting of individuals suspected of radicalizing toward violent extremism. However, in practice the discourse of violent extremism circulated by the P/CVE agenda foments distrust and divide as it emboldens coercive police and military approaches, resulting in the increased surveillance and harassment of minoritized communities as well as the perpetration of enforced disappearances and extra-judicial killings. The power of the discourse of violent extremism is its requirement that all of society participate as policing agents, policing themselves and one another, or be marked as suspects and targeted for elimination.

Relatedly, the expansive power of the language of violent extremism works in tandem with the omnipresence of the international donor agenda, which has securitized the work of community-based and development-oriented organizations. The second section of the article thus focuses on the 'industry' of P/CVE that seeks to develop communities as governable through programmatic activity promising vaguely defined outcomes such as 'empowerment' or 'resilience'. The use of development as a mechanism through which P/CVE operates has roots in the civil counterinsurgency tactic of community development, which tethers community-based organization to the enterprise of state-building and prioritizes capital accumulation for international organizations vis-à-vis extracting the labor of local populations.[16] Like the tactics of community policing, the industry of P/CVE relies on the participation of the entrepreneurial individual to engage in community development. The intersection of security objectives with development and peacebuilding activities, however, has resulted in canalized and restricted political options and constrained the autonomous functioning of civil society.

The article concludes with a discussion of the figure of 'the returnee', or the individual that seeks to leave a violent extremist organization. Community actors committed to peacebuilding and conflict transformation agree that working with such individuals is imperative to prevent future violence and yet this is the work that is largely unrecognized, unsupported, and often actively repressed by the state. The abject figure of the returnee – the ultimate ungovernable subject – exposes the logic of P/CVE as liberal counterinsurgency, prioritizing the pacification of populations and the containment of threat, rather than the rehabilitation and reintegration of citizens who seek to leave violent extremism.[17] Ultimately, this article argues that the security paradigm of P/CVE depoliticizes and individualizes the phenomenon deemed 'violent extremism', divorcing it from the larger geopolitical context of imperialism, militarism, and other forms of state-perpetrated violence, reproducing the very injustices and exclusions it promises to address.

Communities, police and the coercive and productive power of violent extremism

On a warm afternoon in mid-February, I met with Babu at a university in Nairobi where he was teaching a course. An artist, educator, and activist with a PhD in Peace and Conflict Studies, Babu has worked in the peacebuilding field for decades, long before the P/CVE agenda ever existed. Raised in the informal settlements of Nairobi, Babu began working in violence prevention in the early 90s, when he drew inspiration from Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed to design methodology to address electoral-related violence among communities. It was here that he learned the importance of hearing people's stories, of understanding the power of narrative in creating but also

disrupting cycles of violence. When we met, Babu was working as a consultant on issues related to violent extremism, crafting and implementing frameworks that are responsive to people's lived experiences, which take their lives seriously and treat them with dignity. The discourse of violent extremism proliferated by the P/CVE agenda can cast people out, rather than invite them in, Babu has found, and this requires consistently challenging the language circulated by state and international security and development actors. As Babu explained: 'We need to be careful that we do not fall into the trap of using phrases such as "violent extremism" in the way government uses them, "radicalization" in the way government uses them'.

The discourse of violent extremism inherently disavows the broader context from which such violence emerges. Babu was emphatic and perhaps a bit frustrated that, despite the wealth of knowledge held by peacebuilders around violence prevention and conflict transformation, the stigmatizing language of violent extremism persists:

> Because we know what we are talking about … we *know* what we are talking about. So, it's a question of just the language. Put it in a way that includes people, that gives voice to people. Even when we disagree with people, that their voice *matters*. That's the whole idea. And if we're talking about transformation, don't use language that excludes people and labels people and marks them for elimination or whatever.

When Babu insists that 'we know what we are talking about', he is referring to the fact that most community actors working in violence prevention understand that individuals are largely driven to join non-state armed groups by past and present forms of structural violence, including the colonial displacement of people from their indigenous land, the marginalization and disenfranchisement of ethnic and religious minorities, rampant unemployment, police violence, poverty, government corruption, and Kenya's alliance with the U.S. in the global war on terror. Despite the projected aim of P/CVE to address underlying drivers of violence, the discourse of violent extremism individualizes issues and distorts the geopolitical factors that drive participation in violent extremist organizations. The 'resilience' of communities, or their ability to withstand the lure and enticement of non-state armed groups even while suffering violence and coercion from the state, is prioritized over advocating for substantive and just political, economic, and social transformation.

Most research participants agreed with Babu that the language of violent extremism as promoted by the P/CVE agenda, and thus in effect the P/CVE agenda itself, was problematic. Why then, do most organizations feel compelled to participate? In this section, I focus on the productive and coercive discourse of violent extremism as a mode through which communities are interpellated as either policing agents or subjects to be policed – and marked

either for reform or elimination. The P/CVE agenda contributes to the promulgation of counterterrorism norms and attendant Islamophobia; it is not only as a set of policies and interventions but also as 'a motif, a discourse' that works to produce Muslim communities worldwide as inherently threatening and in need of (self-)policing.[18] While the following section will look more closely at how community-organizations are folded into the industry of P/CVE, tethering their work to state-building projects, this section first analyzes the discourse of violent extremism as the mechanism that enables such securitization.

Given the lack of a universally agreed upon definition of the term 'violent extremism', which, like 'terrorism', is 'overly vague and allows for broad discretion in its application', the discourse circulated by the P/CVE agenda works to police an expanding range of behaviors and actions.[19] Articulated at the international policy level and reified by multilateral development agencies offering P/CVE funding, the discourse of violent extremism trickles into community-based organizations implementing P/CVE programming across the world. As such, P/CVE operates as an epistemological framework through which to know – but also to anticipate – various expressions of thought and belief deemed 'extreme' or 'radical'.[20] Babu remembers how, 'in the late '80s, when someone used to call you "a radical" at university it was such a positive thing. Because it meant you were someone concerned with going to the root causes and interrogating systems and seeking transformation . . . But if someone right now calls you a "young radical", than you are a candidate for elimination'. Indeed, the speculative power of violent extremism discourse has shifted the focus of counterterrorism measures vis-à-vis P/CVE into a precrime space, threatening freedom of expression and freedom of religion and producing the very feared subjects it purports to seek to prevent radicalizing toward violence.

The construction of P/CVE as an anticipatory tool to deal specifically with the prevention of violence perpetrated by so-called 'Islamic extremists' has been roundly criticized for its promotion of Islamophobia.[21] While by no means exclusive to Kenya, P/CVE's propagation of a foundational narrative that equates Islam with terrorism has had devastating impacts on Kenya's Muslim and ethnic Somali communities.[22] Patrick, a Mombasa-based human rights activist and the only research participant I interviewed who outright rejects P/CVE funding, explained that the P/CVE agenda reproduces the paradigm of the global war on terror, a war 'cooked up' by the U.S. and its allies, which states 'Islam has a certain potential for terror'. Women community leaders in Isiolo similarly felt that the narratives perpetrated within P/CVE policy and programming reproduce myths about who joins non-state armed groups and why, myths which contribute to Islamophobia. 'We believe the issue of radicalization is bigger than what we see', one woman stated. 'We believe it's an issue of government and United Nations – they want to demonize Islam as a culture'.

Given the association of P/CVE with a Western-led security agenda governed by Islamophobia, community actors often work to implement P/CVE programming but without using the terminology 'violent extremism'. As Stephen, the executive director of a peace and development organization based in Nairobi, explains, programs should not use the language at the community-level because 'it is victimizing, stigmatizing and creates an impediment to the achievement that the project would want to get'. Given this, Stephen always bargains with donors: 'Let's call it CVE in the mother program document that sits with the donor … But when I'm going to implement, I wouldn't call it that, I don't call it that'. Similarly, Sami, who runs a youth program engaged in P/CVE, explained that the language of violent extremism could actually create the problem it seeks to address:

> I always joke and say there is so much saturation of CVE work that most of us are the ones introducing violent extremism to very innocent people. In a small village, you call young people together and say, "You are vulnerable, you are going to be recruited, you are going to get 10,000 dollars." That young person is like, "Wait a minute, what did he just say?! 10,000 dollars!" That sounds not so bad and then in the evening they are on the internet, searching.

Overall, there was a recognition among research participants that the language of violent extremism might actually be contributing to the very problem it sought to address, by fostering greater suspicion and marginalization of Muslim and ethnic Somali communities and even inadvertently encouraging individuals facing economic deprivation toward joining non-state armed groups.

Relatedly, the anticipatory or preventative logic of P/CVE has led to greater policing of communities considered vulnerable or at-risk, both by formal police and military institutions and by compelling communities to self-police. For instance, in Isiolo, which is seen as 'fertile ground for recruitment into Al-Shabaab', the Anti-Terror Police Unit (ATPU) has committed gross human rights violations against Muslim and ethnic Somali communities, contributing to the rise of young people radicalizing in the region.[23] As one youth leader explained to me during a focus group discussion, 'the ATPU harass our youth, saying "you are Al-Shabaab". They set their mind so that our youth say, "these police are calling us Al-Shabaab. Let us just go and join Al-Shabaab"'. In another focus group discussion with youth in Likoni, a division of Mombasa County, young men spoke of how the military in the region had a mandate to patrol to prevent terrorism, which they used to police and discipline the movements of the youth through tactics ranging from checking their identification, to curfews, to direct physical violence. Similarly in Mombasa, community activists argue that police label young Muslims as suspected violent extremists in order to justify their murder. As one Mombasa-based

human rights activist, lamented, 'Every time a police officer goes and kills, it makes our process go back to square one'. Indeed, the day that we spoke, the activist was attending a funeral for a young man who was stoned by police for smoking marijuana. They explained, '[The youth] say there is no need to reform when we are being killed. After all we are being killed, so let us kill'.

Despite its articulation as a violence prevention strategy, P/CVE thus produces a discourse that expands the scope of what and who is in need of policing, leading to the expansion, rather than the reduction of coercive measures used by state security forces. In Kenya, state-sanctioned violence in the form of extrajudicial killings (EJKs) and enforced disappearances are well documented, and are widely believed to be attributable to the ATPU.[24] The issue of EJKs and enforced disappearances were repeatedly mentioned in all three regions of Kenya where I conducted research – Nairobi, Isiolo, and the coastal regions.[25] In Nairobi's informal settlement of Majengo, which is considered an 'epicentre of radicalization', EJKs are estimated to happen at the rate of one a week. And in Mathare, an informal settlement in Nairobi, police are estimated to have executed 800 young people between 2013 and 2016.[26] These killings are documented by the Mathare Social Justice Centre, an initiative to promote social justice and document human rights violations. Stephen, a human rights activist in Mathare, explained that police come to the settlement to terrorize its inhabitants as a way to exert dominance and control. He understands 'criminality and violent extremism to both be manifestation of the same social problem' – namely, unemployment, poverty, and poor governance – and that the state responds to both with the use of force and the marking of populations as ungovernable and candidates for elimination.

Paradoxically, P/CVE promotes a trusting and cooperative relationship between communities and police – often referred to as 'community policing' – as a key element of violence prevention. And yet, policing institutions in Kenya and elsewhere have undoubtedly used the expansive discourse of violent extremism to legitimate coercive and violent tactics of control. In Kenya, community actors report that the violence of police, and the APTU in particular, made it nearly impossible to have trust them. Thomas, a P/CVE practitioner at a large international organization, has documented the violence perpetrated by Kenyan security forces in sites including Garissa, Lamu, and Madera. Following terror attacks in those regions, state security forces will come in and burn markets, kill livestock, and arrest or disappear youths. As Thomas explained, this is done in the name of countering or preventing violent extremism and yet, 'it's not the terrorists being targeted, it's the community. The terrorists are already gone … They are going for the heads, not of the terror group but of the people'. Stephen agreed that the raiding of communities actually drives individuals toward violent extremism

and erodes any chance of communities and police working together: 'The issue around relationships – trust is just impossible. Nobody can report to the police anymore, because nobody trusts them'.

The impossibility of communities and police collaborating toward violence prevention was perhaps best illuminated during focus group discussions in Isiolo, which took place roughly one month following a two-day attack orchestrated by a young man from the Isiolo community.[27] Leaders from women's and youth organizations, many of whom knew the attacker, lamented the lack of trust between police and communities, which they believed might have led to the prevention of the attack that took the lives of 21 civilians. Many of the organizations work directly with parents who are concerned that their children have radicalized toward violent extremism or have already left for Somalia to join al-Shabaab. As a youth leader stated, 'In Isiolo, we have a problem of violent extremism. We have lost many, many youths, but our parents are just silent because of fear. They fear for their lives; they fear the police'. Another youth leader explained that he asked a member of the ATPU that had been working among their community what the police officer would do if he was approached by someone who wanted to leave a violent extremist organization: 'I asked him, "what if you met someone who wanted to reform?" And he said there was no solution but a bullet'.

The coercive tactics used by police to suppress populations deemed ungovernable, including those who seek to 'return' from violent extremism, leaves communities without a choice but to work towards enacting P/CVE on their own terms. As Thomas stated, community members often feel they do not have anywhere to turn: 'You are in between terror and police'. Community organizations are therefore compelled to engage in P/CVE because the violent and coercive tactics of police – which are legitimized and emboldened by the discourse of violent extremism – have restricted and canalized their options. P/CVE thus compels organizations and individuals to participate in the project of their own security by enabling the violence of the state through the diffusion of counterterrorism norms throughout society but also because community organizations understand that if they do not step in, communities will remain at the mercy of the police.

The industry of P/CVE: peacebuilding, development, and the securitization of community organizations

In addition to the police power of P/CVE, which identifies communities either as objects to be policed, targets to be eliminated, or subjects to be compelled to enact policing, the pervasiveness of the P/CVE agenda throughout the peace and development sectors enables other coercive strategies of community engagement. The prioritization of P/CVE by multilateral development agencies such as USAID and throughout UN agencies

has led to the prioritization of counterterrorism objectives within the fields of peacebuilding, human rights, development, and humanitarian aid.[28] The vast financial resources available within the P/CVE funding stream has resulted in a wide range of civil society organizations reframing their activities to satisfy donor funding calls.[29] Similar to the postwar technology of community development, which worked to 'mobilize the poor to control their own development and demand better governance', P/CVE can thus be read as a form of 'participatory security' firmly rooted within the peace-security-development-nexus which activates 'non-extremist' individuals in the project of their own security.[30] This is done, in part, through development projects focused on alleviating the deprivation identified as a root cause of violent extremism, despite research that 'disprove[s] the idea that poverty or poor economic circumstances are in themselves conditions conducive to terrorism'.[31] Alongside development approaches, P/CVE works through a number of other areas of programming, including those focused on the promotion of human rights, gender equality and women's empowerment, religious education, and youth empowerment and engagement. In this way, P/CVE works to activate organizations to provide services to their communities in lieu of the state, through what Yazan Zahzah calls 'counterinsurgent social warfare programming'.[32] The dispersion of the P/CVE agenda throughout a wide range of community-oriented programming has resulted in a securitization of civil society, where community actors provide the labor for the P/CVE industry in exchange for funding – but also for protection from being labeled as violent extremist 'sympathizers'.

The overwhelming majority of the individuals that I interviewed spoke of P/CVE as 'an industry'. Sami, the executive director of a large youth organization that operates in multiple regions of Kenya, explains that the way P/CVE is understood at the grassroots is very different than the way it is understood at the international and state policy level. The large organizations overpromise and sensationalize the work, he explained, whereas peacebuilders understand that violence prevention has to take place in small, day-to-day acts among community members who are invested in the outcome. The Western-led donor-driven P/CVE agenda has 'completely disillusioned communities', he explained. 'Communities are fed up with this, because there are all kinds of organizations promising all these things and doing all this CVE and people are like, it's another industry that they are not interested in'. Michael, a peacebuilder and expert on violent extremism in Kenya, had a similar perspective:

> In the boardroom or in the embassies they will want to tell you how much CVE is working at the local level. But the truth of the matter is if you go to the community level and ask whether or not they believe in the whole CVE agenda or whether or not CVE is actually achieving its goals as its perceived,

> you will get a different answer. They will tell you it's not working; CVE is not even a real thing. It's an industry. CVE at the community level is considered an industry.

Here, the phrase 'CVE is not even a real thing', can be read as referring to how P/CVE, which, given the right framing, could include nearly any activity enacted by community organizations. Michael refers to it as an 'agenda to sell hope', a project of empty promise that people participate in not they necessarily believe it will bring substantive change to their lives, but because they do not have other options: 'We all know that no one is going to care about peace or CVE if they have to go back to their lives at the end of the day. And that is the truth that we all know in this field'.

Community actors were well aware of P/CVE's limited potential, criticizing its lack of long-term funding, sensitive exit strategies, and failure to promote of indigenous practices of speaking to cultural violence. And yet, they participated because, in large part, they need the money. As George, an independent P/CVE consultant explained:

> CVE is a new area to attract funding, so now everyone wants to do CVE not because they understand exactly what they are dealing with but because it's being floated out there by donors, because there's money to it. And that is diverting the attention to real factors that lead to vulnerabilities to violent extremism — diverting focus from the factors that have made the country vulnerable to terrorism.

The saturation of the donor landscape with P/CVE funding has prompted organizations, who would have not previously engaged in work tied to counterterrorism objectives, to participate. Similarly, Thomas observed that civil society organizations have become 'caught up' in the larger political economy of the global counterterrorism agenda which has prioritized terrorism as the most salient threat states face: 'The Kenyan government is getting donor money to address terrorism … a lot of money. CSOs [civil society organizations] are getting money to also do that. So CSOs are caught in between'. Through the industrialization of the P/CVE agenda, the issue of violent extremism becomes the responsibility of communities, depoliticizing and individualizing violence and 'diverting focus' from the larger geopolitical, social and economic factors that enable the conditions for such violence to flourish.

Embedded within the liberal peacebuilding project and the development-as-security sector, P/CVE compels the participation of community organizations through their dependency on donorship. As a youth leader in Isiolo said, 'Everything is donorship, donorship, donorship. We can't do it as our own initiative. We are not self-reliant. We rely so much on the international organizations'. Women leaders in Isiolo similarly expressed frustration with the fact that the work of their organizations was dependent

on the will of donors who worked on behalf of a concept of security articulated by the international community. And yet, they participated anyway:

> In Swahili we say, 'Mtu hana chaguo' [a weak person has no choice]. It's something that we could have rightly rejected because it's disorienting. But we have no choice. If we had choice, we would have rejected these small token and short-term interventions, as it leaves us with a lot of burden on how we can really continue without the support.

The industry of P/CVE is thus reliant on what Michael called the 'transactional relationship' between donors and communities, where communities rely on donors for funding and donors rely on communities for labor. He explains that often, 'the local community doesn't even believe in the project itself. They will participate in it but only insofar as they something out of it, and I mean resources. It's transactional'. Further, a religious leader in Mombasa, who criticized P/CVE as 'more of a window dressing than addressing the real, real issues' explained that the work of community organizations is what sustains the P/CVE industry:

> It doesn't make sense. We, as Kenyans and Africans, are providing cheap labor to the international organizations. So, we become conspirators, together. They become our advocates to say that we are doing wonderful things even if we are doing nothing because that makes them relevant … you are just creating jobs for international contractors but not addressing a problem.

The P/CVE industry, like the peacebuilding and development industries, is rooted in neoliberal economic logic that sees individuals within the global south as resources on which to capitalize. As a Mombasa-based peacebuilder plainly stated, within P/CVE, 'Communities are not the recipients, they are the givers'.

Given that community organizations depend on international donorship, the saturation of the P/CVE agenda throughout the development-security industry has resulted in the securitization of community work. In practice, community organizations have become the subjects needed to enact the security-development agenda of P/CVE and, they have also been the objects in need of greater 'security' – meaning greater oversight by state counterterrorism actors. The P/CVE agenda has thus forced community organizations to work hand-in-hand with the state in ways that compromises their integrity, as Patrick explained:

> Civil society has sold out. They've gone to bed with the state. And it's an indictment they will deny, that they will be reduced to informers … But we used to sit down and conspire against the state, challenge the state. And now we have come to a point where we have a harmonized position on this war with the state. Peacebuilding has lost. Human rights has lost.

This 'harmonized position', as Patrick calls it, is enabled through the police power of violent extremist discourse and the political economy of the P/CVE agenda, situated within the peace-security-development nexus. Organizations are compelled to work alongside the state or risk being named as sympathizers or even suspects themselves.

When organizations threaten the power of the state, the consequences can be grave. For instance, in 2015, the Kenyan government attempted to deregister and freeze the funds of two prominent Mombasa-based human rights organizations, HAKI Africa and Muslims for Human Rights (MUHURI), alongside 85 other companies and organizations on suspicion of funding terrorist operations.[33] Later ruled unconstitutional by the Mombasa High Court, the freezing of funds was believed to be a move on the part of the government to silence organizations that were critical of extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and other human rights violations perpetrated by the state in the name of countering terror. Hassan, the executive director of MUHURI, explained that MUHURI was targeted because they were 'very bold in criticizing our government for their approaches in countering violent extremism'. As Hassan elaborated,

> If you identify as — or are suspected to be — a radical person, you are never taken through due process. You lose your life; you can be extra-judicially killed. We have had issues of enforced disappearances also ... Someone is picked by security agencies and he's never found or she's never found.

Because MUHURI worked to hold the government accountable for such injustice, they were 'suspected of being terrorist sympathizers'. HAKI Africa was similarly named by the government as a 'sympathizer of al-Shabaab' because they would work to support individuals targeted by police and expose EJKs and enforced disappearances. As one member of HAKI Africa told me, 'If they respected the rule of law and the constitution, they wouldn't be violating human rights. And they need to recognize the work of civil society – we should not have this shrinking space of civil society'.

Indeed, P/CVE's coerced compliance has resulted in the securitization and thus shrinking of civil society. Reliance on donors combined with targeted tactics like freezing the accounts of community organizations deemed 'suspect', P/CVE gives the state powerful oversight of the work of a broad range of community actors. For instance, in the summer following my research stay in January and February of 2019, the Kenyan government signed into law an amendment to the Prevention of Terrorism Act. This amendment authorized the National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC) to act as

> an approving and reporting institution for all civil society organisations and international non-governmental organisations engaged in preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalization through counter-messaging or public outreach, and disengagement and reintegration of radicalised individuals.[34]

The amendment further authorized the NCTC to 'request any person or government body for any information relating to terrorism' and reminded all members of the public of their 'responsibility to furnish the Centre with any information relating to terrorism which is within their knowledge'.[35] Civil society organizations engaged in P/CVE efforts widely criticized this amendment, arguing that such legislation forced them to operate as an extension of state intelligence and surveillance, weakening peacebuilding and violence prevention efforts from the ground up. Mutuma Ruteere, the director for the Center for Human Rights and Policy Studies in Kenya, cautioned that the amendment would act as an 'additional regulatory regime for CSOs whose likely effect will be to limit operating space for CSOs in Kenya'.[36] Given the capaciousness of the P/CVE framework, many activities such as 'peace building, youth empowerment, community-police relations and governance in general' may all be 'made subject to approval by the NCTC'.[37]

The P/CVE agenda is not the origin of the 'shrinking space of civil society', but this truncation has accelerated with it.[38] As Anne Charbord and Fionnuala Ní Aoláin argue, 'it is no coincidence that the proliferation of security measures to counter-terrorism and P/CVE, on the one hand, and the adoption of measures that restrict civic space, on the other, are happening simultaneously'.[39] The discourse of violent extremism, as explored above, coerces community organizations into participating in the P/CVE agenda in order to make clear that they are working against, and not for, violent extremist organizations, giving the state oversight of their activities and curtailing their ability to work independently. This is, once again, linked to the coercive and productive power of P/CVE, which works to pacify communities and quell resistance. This has, as Charbord and Ní Aoláin write, 'translated itself into polarizing political rhetoric of "with us or with the terrorists", which soon led to the targeting of members of civil society who called into question the legitimacy of these measures and called for government accountability'.[40] As explored throughout this article, P/CVE operates through the logics of civil counter-insurgency, interpellating populations to act as agents of their own security and marking others as candidates for elimination. The industry of P/CVE thus compels the participation of community organizations through not only their reliance on donorship but also through the coercive power of such 'polarizing political rhetoric' that forces organizations to hide work that might result in their being labelled as 'terrorist sympathizers'.

Conclusion: the returnee, ungovernability and the counterinsurgency logic of P/CVE

Throughout my field research, a number of community actors spoke of their work with returnees, particularly those working on the coast. Returnees – individuals who have decided to leave violent extremism and 'return' to their

home community – often turn to human rights and peacebuilding organizations for psychological support, medical assistance, and financial resources.[41] While some organizations make their work with returnees known to the NCTC in order to link individuals with state services, others choose to keep their work quiet. Despite the government's 2015 announcement that it would extend amnesty to those who wished to exit violent extremism, to date, no comprehensive framework exists for the rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees in Kenya.[42] In addition to the absence of a coherent understanding of the legal status of returnees, the stigma of being associated with violent extremism and the omnipresent threat of police violence means that community actors often risk their lives and livelihoods to do such work. As I was told bluntly by one human rights activist, 'if you go and involve yourself with returnees, you'll always be considered as a sympathizer'. Yet, they do it anyway; for them, this is precisely *the* work that must be done in order to prevent or counter violent extremism.

As a state-building project, contemporary civil counterinsurgency seeks to 'win' the support of the population against insurgents through the provision of public services, expanding the scope of the state and gleaning actionable intelligence from the grassroots. In the security agenda known as P/CVE, however, donor-funded civil society organizations are compelled to enact community development and act as security agents, offering the services that the state is either unable or unwilling to provide. Implementing a wide range of programming seen as contributing to P/CVE, the work of community organizations falls under the purview of the NCTC, expanding the reach of the state and drawing information upward from the grassroots. P/CVE as a mode of civil counterinsurgency interpellates communities as responsible for the prevention of violence and yet that work has to be conducted in the particular manifestations allowed by the P/CVE agenda, often with largely undefined or vague development objectives of empowerment or resilience. Working with returnees is considered by peacebuilders as the crucial to the prevention of future violence, and yet it is the work most unsupported by the P/CVE agenda.[43]

Within P/CVE, the returnee largely remains an illegible and abject figure, their rehabilitation imagined as unlikely and thus unaccounted for in policy and programming.[44] Within society, they live in the margins, their existence often known only to community organizations. As one community actor explained, 'We felt that if we surrender them to police there's nothing much they're going to do except kill them … The first place they come is [to our organization]. Not the police. Civil society is doing the work the police can't do'. Operating as the ultimate ungovernable subject, the returnee poses an unknowable and thus unmanageable risk to the pacification objectives of the global war on terror, pushing such work further into the shadows. The kind of healing, transformative work promoted by

peacebuilders like Babu is exceedingly difficult when people are considered untouchable, when they are cast out rather than invited in. As a community actor in Mombasa explained, this has resulted in a culture of fear and silence around returnees: 'Now these people are down there, covered in sand'.

Notes

1. The language of "violent extremism" is problematic. However, I choose to use the term as it reflects the dominant discourse used by policymakers, funding agencies and the communities tasked with implementing programming to address its prevention.
2. See Ucko, "Preventing Violent Extremism Through the United Nations," for an overview of the development of what is now referred to as the P/CVE agenda.
3. Attree, "Shouldn't YOU be Countering Violent Extremism?"; United Nations Human Rights Council, *Impact of measures to address terrorism and violence extremism on civic space and the rights of civil society actors and human rights defenders*; and United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Fact Sheet No. 32, Human Rights, Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism*.
4. There has been important critical work on the negative impacts of P/CVE policy and programming in the UK (Kundnani, *The Muslims are Coming!*), the US (Nguyen, *Suspect Communities*) and broadly (Aziz, "Losing the War of Ideas"). However, there has also been recent research that demonstrates the importance of P/CVE as sites of agency and negotiation for Muslim women in the US (Basarudin and Khanum, "The Contours of Speaking Out") in the UK (Pearson, "Between Protection and Participation") and in Kenya (Mesok, "Beyond Instrumentalisation").
5. The "whole-of-society" approach comes from public health; see United Nations General Assembly, *Political Declaration of the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases*. Other nongovernmental actors include the private sector and industry, media, academia, families, religious institutions, and schools. In this article I differentiate between civil society, which broadly includes civilians and non-governmental organizations, and community-based organizations, which refer specifically to organizations that represent the needs of particular groups, communities, or populations within communities.
6. See Crisman et al., "Preventing Violent Extremism" for an overview of the emergence and impact of the P/CVE agenda in Kenya.
7. This research was conducted while I was a senior researcher at the Swiss Platform for Peacebuilding, KOFF at swisspeace, a practice-oriented peace research institute located in Bern, Switzerland. Over the course of a one-month research stay, I spoke with 82 individuals engaged in violence prevention work across a variety of civil society, grassroots or community-based organizations, including human rights, peacebuilding, youth, religious, and women's organizations. Research findings were first published in the report Mesok, *Women, Peace and Security and the Prevention of Violence*.

8. All uncited quotations attributed to civil society actors in Kenya are from interviews conducted between 17 January and 14 February 2019. The names of individuals and organizations are only used with permission.
9. My use of the concept of coercion is meant to highlight the constrained options available and the various factors that compel or coerce organizations to participate in the security agenda. This does not mean that actors are lacking in agency or are unaware of the problems with the agenda – it is quite the opposite. For a discussion of how community organizations in Kenya enact agency through and against the P/CVE agenda, see Mesok, "Beyond Instrumentalisation."
10. Duffield, "Global Civil War," 146. See also: Kienscherf, "A Programme of Global Pacification"; Kienscherf, "Producing "Responsible" Self-Governance"; Kienscherf, "Beyond Militarization and Repression"; Oppenheim, 'Community and Counterinsurgency"; and Schrader, "To Secure the Global Great Society."
11. Kienscherf, "Producing 'Responsible' Self-Governance," 174. Katherine Brown's *Gender,Religion, Extremism*, also draws the connection between P/CVE's anti-radicalization efforts and counterinsurgency.
12. Kienscherf, Beyond Militarization and Repression, 11.
13. Mark Neocleous, *War Power, Police Power*, 10–11.
14. Indeed, the UN's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism states that 'violent extremism is a diverse phenomenon, without clear definition' and recognizes that it encompasses a 'wider category of manifestations' than the term 'terrorism' (United Nations General Assembly, *Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism*, 2).
15. Kienscherf, "Beyond Militarization and Repression," 9.
16. See Oppenheim 2012.
17. While it exceeds the scope of this article, it is important to note the racialized logic that constructs 'returnees' or 'formers' who chose to exist violent extremist organizations classified as Islamist as unable to be rehabilitated. This is sharply contrasted with the treatment of those – predominately white – individuals who 'exit' far-right extremist groups, whose rehabilitation is often commended and whose stories are often used to motivate others to reform.
18. United States General Assembly, *Human Rights Impact of Policies and Practices Aimed at Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism*, 2.
19. United States General Assembly, *Human Rights Impact of Policies and Practices Aimed at Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism*, 5.
20. For a discussion of P/CVE as enabling pre-crime or pre-terrorist measures, see United States General Assembly, *Human Rights Impact of Policies and Practices Aimed at Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism*.
21. Kundnani and Hayes, *The Globalisation of Countering Violent Extremism Policies*; Kundnani, *The Muslims are Coming!*; Aziz, "Losing the War of Ideas"; and Beydoun, '9/11 and 11/9.' For a discussion of how the pre-criminality of P/CVE approaches in Europe institutionalize Islamophobia, see Shafi and Qureshi, *Stranger than Fiction*.
22. See Breidlid, "Countering or Contributing to Radicalisation and Violent Extremism in Kenya?" for an analysis of how the rhetoric of violent extremism and radicalization has institutionalized Islamophobia in Kenya.
23. Isiolo County Government, "Isiolo County Action Plan on Prevention and Countering Violent Extremism, 2018–2022."

24. The APTU regularly perpetrates human rights abuse in its extra-legal approach to “fighting terror,” including “use of excessive force during house raids; torture and ill-treatment of detainees; arbitrary detentions, including disappearances; and rendering terrorist suspects to countries where they face a real risk of torture.” (Horowitz “We’re Tired of Taking You to Court,” 19). See also Kenya National Commission on Human Rights, *The Error of Fighting Terror with Terror* and *Return of the Gulag* and Al-Bulushi, ‘Citizen-Suspect.’
25. These human rights violations by security agencies against individuals suspected of terrorism are present in other regions as well, with the most affected counties being Nairobi, Wajir, Mandera, Garissa, Lamu, Tana River, Kwale, Kilifi, and Mombasa (Human Rights Watch, *Death and Disappearances*). The KNCHR has documented more than 150 cases of EJKs or enforced disappearances by security agencies (Omilo, “Senate panel hears chilling tales of extra-judicial killings.”)
26. Nyabola, “The Killing Fields of Mathare.”
27. On January 15 and 16, 2019, al-Shabaab attacked the DusitD2 hotel and office complex in Westlands, an affluent neighborhood in Nairobi. The attack was allegedly orchestrated by a young man from Isiolo who was well known by my interlocuters.
28. See Alitok and Street, “A Fourth Pillar for the United Nations?”; and Ucko, “Preventing Violent Extremism Through the United Nations”.
29. This issue, referred to by Altiok and Street as the “PVE-isation’ of human rights and peacebuilding, has been particularly criticized by feminist scholars who see the linkage between the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda and the P/CVE agendas as amounting to ‘agenda-hijacking.’ In other words, the saturation of P/CVE among peace and development means that the promotion of international human rights norms are tethered to state-defined security objectives. One concern, among many others, is that once the promotion of gender equality or women’s rights, for instance, no longer serve a security purpose, such objectives will be once again deprioritized and underfunded. See Huckerby, ‘Feminism and International Law in the Post-9/11 Era’ and Ní Aoláin, ‘The “War on Terror” and Extremism.”
30. Oppenheim, “Community and Counterinsurgency,” 249.
31. United States General Assembly, *Human Rights Impact of Policies and Practices Aimed at Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism*, 8.
32. Zahzah, “Warcare Economies.”
33. Counterterrorism financing laws have been used worldwide to expand the legal power of states to sanction proscribed individuals and organizations. This has had a particularly negative impact on women’s rights and women-led civil society organizations. See Duke Law International Human Rights Clinic and Women Peacemakers Program, *Tightening the Purse Strings.*
34. Laws of Kenya, Prevention of Terrorism Act. No. 30 of 2012, p. 25.
35. Ibid.
36. Mutuma Ruteere, “Comments on the Proposed Prevention of Terrorism Act, 2012 Under the Statue Law (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill, 2019. Nairobi, Kenya: Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies.
37. Mutuma Ruteere, “Comments on the Proposed Prevention of Terrorism Act, 2012 Under the Statue Law (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill.”
38. The concept of “shrinking civic space” refers to the increased criminalization and bureaucratization of the work of human rights defenders, activists, and organizations. Methods to restrict the actions of civil society include legislation regulating the activities of CSOs; policies which restrict the freedom of assembly, the

freedom of association, and the freedom of expression; direct acts of intimidation and violence either by state or non-state actors; and laws which limit CSOs' ability to receive international funding. In the years prior to the adoption of the UN's Plan of Action to Prevent PVE, more than 63 countries passed legislation that contributed to the narrowing of civic space, 'increasing the criminalization and discrimination against NGOs worldwide' (Wagner and Dankova, *The CSO's Shrinking and Closing Space Tendency*, 1). Also see United Nations Human Rights Council. *Impact of measures to address terrorism and violence extremism on civic space and the rights of civil society actors and human rights defenders*; Duke Law International Human Rights Clinic and Women Peacemakers Program, *Tightening the Purse* Strings; Wassholm, *Suffocating the Movement*.

39. Charbord and Ní Aoláin, *The Role of Measures to Address Terrorism and Violent Extremism on Closing Civic Space*, 5.
40. Ibid., 6.
41. The language of "returnees' refers to "all individuals 'all individuals returning from association with violent extremism groups," which includes those returning across national borders or from within a community (Anderlini and Holmes, *Invisible Women*, 24).
42. See Al-Bulushi and Daghar, "Rehabilitation or Indefinite Detention?" and Akoth, "Returnees and Justice."
43. See Holmer and Shtuni, "Returning Foreign Fighters and the Reintegration Imperative."
44. Importantly, those 'returning' from Right-Wing Extremism are considered differently. So-called 'exit' programs offer assistance to those, usually white men and women, who wish to leave far-right groups. Deradicalization and rehabilitation programming for the far-right versus 'Islamic' violent extremism are deeply informed by racialized and colonial notions of who is governable.

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