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Overcoming ambiguities in war on terror mechanisms in Africa: Acknowledging Africa is not a country

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Abstract
This article critically examines the major shortcomings in multi-country security investments in East Africa during the war on terror. It argues that these investments have not only failed to adequately recognise African contexts but also falls short of recognising the agency of local communities in counterterrorism efforts. Drawing on critical terrorism and security studies, as well as excerpts from interviews with practitioners in Kenya, the article identifies gaps in the prevailing approach that treats Africa as a unitary entity and critiques the notion of universality of knowledge ingrained in these interventions. By taking a decolonial perspective, the article challenges some prevailing constructions about Africa, linked to the war on terror, as the source of this notion of universality of knowledge. By highlighting the connection of counterterrorism strategies to coloniality and the systemic exclusion of subaltern voices, the discussion suggests that a more contextually informed approach is a precursor to envisioning Africa positioned beyond the war on terror.

Introduction

This article provides a critical analysis of counterterrorism efforts in Africa over the past two decades. Specifically, it explores two key aspects that help to better understand the complexity of this issue. First, it discusses the strategies employed in Africa, which are often influenced by the global war on terror (GWoT). The article argues that these strategies often make the mistaken assumption that Africa is a homogeneous region – as if it were a single country – and, hence, susceptible to terrorism. The study thus contributes to the ongoing debate on the need to detach counterterrorism initiatives in Africa from colonial influences such as foreign aid that fail to consider contextual diversities. The article also highlights the challenge of using a narrow perspective to understand the diverse African contexts, which can be attributed to historical and contemporary dominance by the United States (US). The US has historically exerted considerable political power over Africa, as well as in other regions in the Global South, including Latin and South America and numerous Asian countries.[1]

This article contends that the dominant approach to countering terrorism in Africa not only fails to achieve its intended goals but also undermines trust between researchers and the communities they study. This lack of trust is problematic, as it hinders the production of local knowledge

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[1] Jill Koyama and Adnan Turan, 'Coloniality and refugee education in the United States', *MPDI-Social Sciences*, 13:314 (2024), pp. 1–16.

that is essential for effective counterterrorism strategies.[2] The international community's tendency to view Africa as a homogeneous region susceptible to terrorism perpetuates this mistrust and undermines local ownership of counterterrorism efforts. This fallacy about Africa's susceptibility to terrorism can be traced back to historical colonial continuities that have shaped African contexts in the past two centuries. Counterterrorism programmes, mostly funded by the Global North, are often exploited as capitalist commodities in the Global South, while the developed world shifts its focus to other global security matters. This exploitation of Africa as a resource highlights the need to address significant ambiguities in the knowledge production systems for counterterrorism investments.

The article suggests that for future programming and scholarship, a more nuanced under-standing of African communities and the recognition of their diverse experiences and needs are necessary.[3] By acknowledging and valuing such diversity, counterterrorism efforts can be more effective and tailored to the specific contexts of each country – which are intrinsically different from others. This issue is particularly important in the East African context, where counterterrorism programmes are rarely guided by local knowledge and expertise.

The article, thus, calls for a shift away from the dominant, homogenising approach to counterterrorism in Africa. Instead, it emphasises the importance of involving local communities in the development of counterterrorism strategies and recognising the diverse realities of African contexts. This approach will lead to more effective and sustainable counterterrorism efforts in the region.

In short, I argue that the international approach to countering terrorism in Africa has been flawed and ineffective. These efforts have relied on misguided and often discriminatory strategies that do not take into account the unique circumstances and capacities of African countries.[4] Additionally, they have failed to prioritise the rights and needs of local communities affected by terrorism. Instead, there is a need for counterterrorism strategies that are tailored to the specific contexts of African countries, respect the rights of individuals, and involve local communities in decision-making processes.

Theory, method, and scope

A reassessment of terrorism as a security threat and its impact upon security policy and schol-arship in Africa must navigate through an analysis of globalisation. This entails an examination of the Western process of knowledge production and exchange which constructs the world as a 'global village' and considers Africa as one homogeneous context in both scholarship and interven-tions for counterterrorism. According to Afolabi, globalisation 'has been dominated by a biased Eurocentrism and Western-centric knowledge production paradigms and platforms'.[5] This bias defines the changing fortunes of terrorism and counterterrorism as subjects of both 'political and scholarly salience' in Africa.[6] Some African scholars, such as Mbembe, contend that many post-colonial societies in Africa have experienced a 'grey' and somewhat 'murky' articulation in the

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[2]Fathima Azmiya Badurdeen, Michaelina Jakala, and Miho Taka 'Situating trust, values, and ethics in the politics of knowl-edge production: An epistemic shift in the co-production of studying violent extremism', *Qualitative Inquiry* (2024), pp. 1–14 (p. 1).

[3]Jojanneke van der Toorn, Matthew Feinberg, John T. Jost, et al., 'A sense of powerlessness fosters system justification: Implications for the legitimation of authority, hierarchy, and government', *Political Psychology*, 36:1 (2015), pp. 93–110 (p. 93).

[4]Edmore Mutekwe, 'Towards an Africa philosophy of education for Indigenous knowledge systems in Africa', *Creative Education*, 6:12 (2015), pp. 1294–305 (p. 1295).

[5]Olugbemiga Samuel Afolabi, 'Globalisation, decoloniality and the question of knowledge production in Africa', *Journal of Higher Education in Africa*, 18:1 (2020), pp. 93–109 (p. 93).

[6]Amina Mama, 'Feminists organising: Strategy, voice, power', *Feminist Africa*, 1:22 (2017), pp. 1–15.

literature.[7] This can be associated with the period of the war on terror decades, where 'virtually all facets of knowledge production'[8] about terrorism and counterterrorism are more of the same colonial paradigm that Africa has experienced for centuries.

This article uses Ndlovu-Gatsheni's articulation of the theory of decoloniality as a venerable 'political and epistemological movement'[9] to liberate post-colonial states and the academy from the global bondage of coloniality. According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni, decoloniality is 'a way of thinking, knowing, and doing'. Building on this conceptualisation, pioneered by Gatsheni and Mignolo, Global South scholars like Oando and Ilyas have noted that the process of decoloniality is not a smooth way, but 'it is rather a fragile move', as the scholars dare 'to engage in debates and contentions that define the paradox between the knowledge systems of the global North and South'.[10] More challenging is the paradox in the universality of knowledge that cuts across the decolonial turn. However, the duo argue for a transformative approach in the analysis of counterterrorism strategies funded by foreign agencies in the Global South and call for epistemic decolonisation. The call for epistemic decolonisation is highly relevant to academia but also in the programmes supported by donor funding in Africa. Such a theoretical approach is thus grounded in the radical theorising of decolonisation in the production of new knowledge, inclined towards fully recognising the knowledge of counterterrorism which is Indigenous to African contexts. According to Oando and Ilyas:

> decoloniality emerges from evidence in post-independent scholarships that work towards reconstructing the relationship between the colonised and the colonisers by overcoming naivety in the fear of returning to 'a romanticised' pre-colonial past. Therefore, this concept of decoloniality is … a form of 'fundamental rethinking' and redoing of how knowledge is produced, taught, and disseminated in terrorism research to usher a new dawn of a decolonial turn.[11]

Subsequently, an argument against the prevailing strategies of counterterrorism, while envisioning a period beyond the war on terror (WoT), acknowledges the existence of a unique opportunity in local capacities that are worth considering in knowledge production for the future of counterterrorism in Africa.

This article also builds on the critical work of Achieng', Oanda, and Jackson, which declares that 'terrorism studies as a whole', and the process of making steps beyond the war on terror, must 'acknowledge the colonial roots of the field'.[12] Hence, a peek into the future of terrorism studies ought to 'diversify voices' in terrorism scholarship and aim to reconstruct the existing approaches by taking 'concrete steps towards a more decolonised'[13] global agenda and a reconstruction of the racialised response mechanism to terrorism.

The analysis in this article also engages with Gunning's approach to deconstructing coloniality in the regional strategies for counterterrorism.[14] Drawing on ideologies developed by

[7]Mbembe, Achille '*Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive*', An e-book published online by "Africa is a Country" - the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WISER), University of the Witwatersrand (Johannesburg) (2015).

[8]Afolabi, 'Globalisation, decoloniality and the question of knowledge production in Africa', p. 94.

[9]Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 'Decoloniality as the future of Africa', *History Compass*, 13:10 (2015), pp. 485–96 (p. 485).

[10]Samwel Oando and Mohammed Ilyas, 'Reimaging subjugated voice in Africa: A battle for hearts and minds in terrorism studies', *MPDI-Social Sciences*, 13:6 (2024), pp. 294–311 (p. 305).

[11]Oando and Ilyas, 'Reimaging subjugated voice in Africa', p. 301.

[12]Shirley Gabriella Achieng', Samwel Odhiambo Oando, and Richard Jackson, 'Critical terrorism studies', in Lara A. Frumkin, John F. Morrison, and Andrew Silke (eds), *A Research Agenda for Terrorism Studies* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2023), pp. 63–73 (p. 64).

[13]Achieng' et al., 'Critical terrorism studies', p. 65.

[14]Jeroen Gunning, 'Critical Security Studies and Decolonisation', Keynote Lecture: The State of the Field of Security Studies, Annual conference of the Strategic Studies Unit, Arab Centre for Research and Policy Studies, Doha, King's College London/Aarhus University/LSE, 18 February 2023.

Mignolo and Walsh around coloniality and modernity, Gunning discusses an underlying 'colonial matrix of power' that exists across studies of terrorism, also 'recognising that colonialism is constitutive of modernity and current power relations' between nations. On the other hand, this article underscores that both the 'actors and actions' constituting terrorism vary by time and space.[15]

While considering Gunning's 'overlapping hierarchies' in the geopolitics of counterterrorism, this study adopts an understanding taken by Jackson[16] that, fundamentally, 'terrorism is a social fact, rather than a brute fact, because deciding whether a particular act of violence constitutes an "act of terrorism" relies on judgements about the context'. This includes a basic recognition that the changing circumstances and intentions of violent actions take on a series of social, cultural, legal, and political processes of interpretation and labelling.[17] Using a case study of the multi-country interventions, such as the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the 'Partnership for Regional East Africa Counterterrorism' (PREACT), both of which are heavily funded by the US, the analysis highlights some of the key ambiguities in the WoT.

Drawing on earlier observations by Moosavi, the discussions in this article are further framed around the assumption that an emerging 'decolonial bandwagon in the Global North'[18] creates a looming risk of 'reproducing colonisation' in future counterterrorism interventions, through continued Western domination in the knowledge production space. In this regard, Ilyas advocates for a radical departure from the past through epistemic decolonisation, beyond academia, in the Global South.[19] It is on this basis that this article alludes to the importance of contextual knowledge being considered in the design and implementation of counterterrorism strategies. Contextualising the process of doing counterterrorism thus becomes the premise for an alternative approach to the prevailing [mis]conceptualisation of terrorism and of Africa based on geographical (colonial) state boundaries.

The methods employed in gathering evidence for the article are predominantly qualitative. While the discussions are primarily derived from the literature on CTS, articulating gaps in terrorism studies touching on Africa, which have beenpublished over the past two decades, the analyses are reinforced by excerpts from interviews with peace practitioners in Kenya. The analysis of terrorism and counterterrorism is thus understood in the context that human history exhibits repetitive but distinct patterns, and that strategies should depend on how the patterns are substantially 'shaped by human experiences in a cycle nuanced in competing values'.[20] I explore the situation of violent conflicts and threats of terrorism, before tackling the quest for transformation in the strategies for counterterrorism.

Contextualising contemporary strategies for counterterrorism is, therefore, informed by a reassessment of terrorism as a security threat and its impact upon security policy and scholarship. Chukwuma posits, for example, that 'much work has been done to explore counter-terrorism strategies and initiatives in Nigeria, but there is (still) very little research around the framing of the counterterrorism approach and the implications thereof'.[21] The scope of discussions are thus limited to exposing the gaps in counterterrorism strategies and how they are linked to contrasting

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[15] Shirley Achieng' and Samwel Oando, 'CTS and Indigeneity: Can CTS approaches be Indigenous?', in Alice Martini and Miño Puigcercós Raquel (eds), *Contemporary Reflections on Critical Terrorism Studies* (London: Routledge, 2023), pp. 53–68.

[16] Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism: Language, Politics, and Counterterrorism* (London: Manchester University Press, 2005); Joseba Zulaika, 'The real and the bluff: On the ontology of terrorism', in Richard Jackson (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Critical Terrorism Studies* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 39–48.

[17] Achieng' et al., 'Critical terrorism studies'.

[18] Leon Moosavi, 'The decolonial bandwagon and the dangers of intellectual decolonisation', *International Review of Sociology*, 30:2 (2020), pp. 332–54.

[19] Mohammed Ilyas, 'Decolonialisation and the terrorism industry', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 15:2 (2022), pp. 417–40.

[20] Katharina Schilling, *Peacebuilding & Conflict Transformation: A Resource Book*, ed. Christiane Kayser and Flaubert Djateng (Berlin: Civil Peace Service, Germany and Youth Department of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, 2012), p. 14.

[21] Kodili Henry Chukwuma, 'Critical terrorism studies and postcolonialism: Constructing ungoverned spaces in counterterrorism discourse in Nigeria', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 15:2 (2022), pp. 399–416 (p. 400).

contexts defined by cultural values and identities, salient religious beliefs, and differences over sacred values.[22] I suggest that these factors are profoundly distinct among community groups across the African continent, and also unacknowledged in the Western methodologies which have been used over time.[23]

Complementary evidence from secondary sources, as well as 'using process tracing as the method of analysis',[24] also provides insights from systemic interventions in the war on terror. These help to highlight the changing fortunes of terrorism as an issue of political and scholarly salience. In the next section, therefore, I discuss how the challenge of terrorism has manifested in the East African region, before discussing the interventions which display the two sets of ambiguities associated with the WoT. The final section envisions some prospects for exploring the nature of counterterrorism priorities within social policy, while pointing to the continuing resonance of 'terrorism' in discourses around violence in international politics. The conclusion to the article then discusses the opportunities for subaltern actors and voice in the local African contexts within broader global contemporary security concerns.

In a nutshell, as proposed by Gunning, the discussions herein envisions a situation beyond terrorism as an opportunity for decolonising perspectives that challenge long-standing WoT strategies which are 'embedded in [Western] elite knowledge production'.[25] The discussions further explore some aspects of deconstruction and subsequent reconstruction of 'interventions for counterterrorism based on a framework derived from an African indigenous knowledge landscape'.[26] The structure of discussion is intentional in its considered broad 'engagement with the subaltern'[27] for counterterrorism strategies, in particular to address new concerns related to growing attention to new areas of apprehension such as cybersecurity and the ungoverned use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies. Finally, the article explores ways of incorporating diverse aspects of Indigenous knowledge and the recognition of non-traditional security issues by analysing 'where things could go and how to find a different path', most of which 'requires a fundamental rethink' of what the new face of counterterrorism in Africa would look like.

The terrorism threat and WoT interventions in East Africa

While global concerns about terrorism have arguably started to take a back seat, the challenge of terrorism continues to raise much anxiety in East Africa. It continues to heighten concerns about the survival of fragile states, and the respective policies which have been developed, often with support of Western allies, to strengthen their capacities in the security sector.[28] The East Africa region continues to experience a raft of violent conflicts and 'terroristic' violence that has remained cancerous over the past two decades. In his address to the 'Peace and Security Council of the African Union' on 26 September 2015, President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda outlined the severity of security and terrorism in the region, stating that 'out of the 53 African countries (members of the

[22]Richard Jackson, Harmonie Toros, Lee Jarvis, and Charlotte Heath-Kelly, 'Introduction: 10 Years of critical studies on terrorism', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 10:2 (2017), pp. 197–202.

[23]Achieng' and Oando, 'CTS and Indigeneity'.

[24]Jude Cocodia, 'Rejecting African solutions to African problems: The African Union and the Islamic Courts Union in Somalia', *African Security*, 14:2 (2021), pp. 110–31.

[25]Jeroen Gunning, 'Critical security studies and decolonisation', in *The State of the Field of Security Studies*, Annual Conference of the Strategic Studies Unit Arab Centre for Research and Policy Studies, Doha (Doha: King's College London, 2023), pp. 3–5.

[26]Samwel Oando and Shirley Achieng, 'An indigenous African framework for counterterrorism: decolonising Kenya's approach to countering "Al-Shabaab-Ism" ', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 14:3 (2021), pp. 354–77. (p. 355).

[27]Gunning, 'Critical security studies and decolonisation'.

[28]James Okolie-Osemene and Rosemary I. Okolie-Osemene, 'The challenges and prospects of security sector manoeuvrability over terrorism in Somalia', in Scott Nicholas Romaniuk, Francis Grice, Daniela Irrera, and Stewart Webb (eds), *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Counterterrorism Policy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 925–43.

African Union), there have been civil wars and terrorism threats in about 10 countries'.[29] This resonates with an observation made by Oando and Achieng'[30] showing that the Horn of Africa (HoA) region has been experiencing waves of violent conflicts ranging from civil wars to terrorism. The situation means that the East African region remains 'one of the most militarized zones in Africa'.[31]

According to President Museveni's speech, it is evident that 5 of the 10 countries affected by violent conflicts are Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, and Sudan. All five countries are part of the East Africa region also known as 'the Greater Horn', a 'political construction' bringing together several countries along the Indian Ocean coast, which adds South Sudan, Uganda, and Kenya into the fold.[32] This group of countries is also part of an amorphous political formation known as the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD).[33] Conflict researchers at the African Union confirm some commonalities and varying complexities in the region regarding the spread of conflict. For example, Elowson and Albuquerque point out that:

> Eastern Africa encompasses several conflict complexes, with major regional dimensions. These include interstate, intrastate, and non-state conflicts, alongside one-sided violence against civilians. The region also suffers heavily from humanitarian emergencies … while struggling with massive refugee flows and the world's largest population of internally displaced people. What complicates the security situation further is the profound climate of mistrust, enmity and rivalry that characterises relations between states in the region.[34]

While political conflicts have affected almost all the countries in this region, civil wars and terrorism have also been common.[35] The varied forms of violent conflicts have a 'direct connection [to] such crises in Africa created by the unhealthy competition between [the] international political systems'.[36] Nonetheless, the most reported activities of terrorism have been linked to the political instability in Somalia, which has led to the Horn of Africa being seen as 'the hub' of terrorism experienced in neighbouring countries.[37]

According to Mutahi and Ruteere,[38] Somalia has been the most troubled zone of terrorism since the early 2000s, when Al-Shabaab emerged as a violent group waging war against the defunct regime and gaining control of much of the country in 2006. Most of the region's terrorist attacks have taken place in Somalia, but Al-Shabaab fighters have also claimed responsibility for multiple cross-border attacks, including attacks in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania.[39] The threat of

[29]Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, 'Speech at the meeting of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union, at the level of heads of state and government', AU Observer Mission, New York, USA (2015).

[30]Samwel Odhiambo Oando and Shirley Gabriella Achieng', 'Peacemaking in Africa and Nobel Peace Prize 2019: The role of Ahmed Abiy Ali in resolving the Ethiopia–Eritrea cross-border conflict', *The African Review Journal*, 48:1 (2021), pp. 22–51 (p. 35).

[31]Kidist Mulugeta, *The Role of Regional Powers in the Field of Peace and Security: The Case of Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa: The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), 2014), p. 7.

[32]Oando and Achieng', 'Peacemaking in Africa and Nobel Peace Prize 2019'.

[33]Kidane Mengisteab, *Critical Factors in the Horn of Africa's Raging Conflict* (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2011), available at: {http://nai.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:471296/FULLTEXT01}.

[34]Camilla Elowson and Adriana Lins de Albuquerque, 'Challenges to peace and security in Eastern Africa: The role of IGAD, EAC and EASF', *Studies in African Security, FOI Memo 5634 Project number: A16104* (Addis Ababa: African Union, 2016), p. 1.

[35]Elowson and Albuquerque, 'Challenges to peace and security in Eastern Africa'; Fathima Azmiya and Paul Goldsmith, 'Initiatives and perceptions to counter violent extremism in the coastal region of Kenya', *Journal for Deradicalization*, 16 (2018), pp. 70–102.

[36]Oando and Achieng', 'An Indigenous African framework for counterterrorism', p. 355.

[37]Mutuma Ruteere and Patrick Mutahi, 'Civil society pathways to peace and security: The Peace and Security for Development programme in coastal Kenya', in Alamin Mazrui, Kimani Njogu, and Paul Goldsmith (eds), *Countering Violent Extremism in Kenya: Between The Rule of Law and Quest for Security* (Nairobi: Twaweza Communications, 2018), pp. 169–82.

[38]Patrick Mutahi and Mutuma Ruteere, *Where Is the Money? Donor Funding for Conflict and Violence Prevention in Eastern Africa* (London: Institute of Development Studies/Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies, 2017).

[39]Oando and Achieng', 'Peacemaking in Africa and Nobel Peace Prize 2019'.

Al-Shabaab's violent activities is conventionally acknowledged, but Ingiriis raises the pertinent issue of an imminent gap in response mechanisms, arguing that:

> [Al-Shabaab's] internal dynamics have not been thoroughly investigated. Although both local-ized and globalized, Al-Shabaab's roots are rarely contextualized further than the 2000s. The emergence of insurgency activities perpetrated and perpetuated by militant and militaristic Islamic groups, such as Al-Shabaab, need to be seen not as a unique phenomenon but [as] a form of mimicry of past insurgency activities.[40]

The disquiet raised by Ingiriis, and alluded to by Romaniuk et al.,[41] suggests that much of the literature about 'terrorism and counterterrorism' in the East African region has 'focused on the strategic and operational policies of major Western states with minimal attention on how terrorism has been a truly global phenomenon and how others have responded to this threat'. This not only demonstrates how Western perceptions of terrorism in East Africa have dominated the prevailing conceptualisation, but it also points to a gap in knowledge about the evolution of terrorism from and beyond Al-Shabaab.[42]

Noting that an understanding of Al-Shabaab has not been contextualised beyond Somalia also limits the analysis of interventions beyond the 'traditional ideologies' of the West, which leave a gap in clarity about terrorism in different countries in the past two decades. Jackson further describes this gap as 'an implicit value-laden tendency to try to determine worthy and unworthy victims of violence';[43] in this case, virtually every violent event is pointed towards the Somalia community – in the name of Al-Shabaab.[44] This implies a lack of understanding about the term terrorism as defined by the local residents in each different context of the East African region. The misunderstsnding renders the local experts on terrorism to remain 'intelligible to Western academe'[45] to determine what constitutes terrorism based on Global North-centric frameworks.[46]

The challenge then arises that terrorism is seen to exist only in situations defined by the designers of the concept of the GWoT.[47] This is a precursor to a 'related but not inconsequential prob-lem [which] lies in the normative implications of actually legitimising and thereby encouraging [some] forms of violence'.[48] In an interview, a local practitioner in Kenya alluded to the challenge of conceptualisation, arguing that,

> Interventions for counterterrorism fail to accommodate the spirit of genuine partnership between actors at different levels. Interventions can work better if it takes the model of the traditional three cooking stones, which take collective responsibility, and actively involving different groups like the state, communities, NGOs, and religious leaders is inevitable. This

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[40]Mohamed Haji Ingiriis, 'The invention of Al-Shabaab in Somalia: Emulating the anticolonial dervishes movement', *African Affairs*, 117:467 (2018), pp. 217–37 (p. 219).

[41]Peter Romaniuk, Tracey Durner, Lara Nonninger, and Matthew Schwartz, 'What drives violent extremism in East Africa and how should development actors respond?', *African Security*, 11:2 (2018), pp. 160–80 (p. 171).

[42]Azmiya and Goldsmith, 'Initiatives and perceptions to counter violent extremism in the coastal region of Kenya'; Linnéa Gelot and Stig Jarle Hansen, 'They are from within us: CVE brokerage in South-Central Somalia', *Conflict, Security and Development*, 19:6 (2019), pp. 563–82.

[43]Richard Jackson, 'In defence of "terrorism": Finding a way through a forest of misconceptions', *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, 3:2 (2011), pp. 116–30 (p. 121).

[44]Oando and Achieng', 'An Indigenous African framework for counterterrorism'.

[45]Gunning, 'Critical security studies and decolonisation', p. 6.

[46]Isabella Pistone, Erik Eriksson, Ulrika Beckman, Christer Mattson, and Morten Sager, 'A scoping review of interven-tions for preventing and countering violent extremism: Current status and implications for future research', *Journal for Deradicalization*, 19 (2019), pp. 1–84.

[47]Vincent O. S. Okeke, 'Africa and the war on terrorism: The role of African Union', *Global Advanced Research Journal of Social Sciences*, 3:3 (2014), pp. 25–36.

[48]Jackson, 'In defence of "terrorism"', p. 121.

should be based on their capabilities to bring change. (Interview #19, with female practitioner in Northern Kenya)

This voice articulates disquiet from the beneficiary groups concerning a collaborative approach, consistent with the concept of hybridity, which would emerge 'in both scholarly and policy domains'.[49] At the national level, the participant's voice expresses the desired collaboration between the international and community level. The East African region has faced an evolving security challenge over the past three decades, with several complex violent conflicts.[50] Some of these conflicts have been associated with terrorism, in terms of the prevailing social constructions, while some forms of violence are alternatively classified as 'internal armed conflicts and resources-based conflicts'.[51] Notwithstanding the difference between the many forms of violence, it is notable that,

> [A] solution to this misconception lies in recognising that it is the instrumentalisation of the victims as a means of communicating with an audience that characterises terrorist violence, not the identity (civilian or military, combatant or non-combatant) of the direct victims of the violence.[52]

The different forms of violent conflicts have been largely constructed by the states in the East African region as the threat of terrorism.[53] This common construction explains in part how interventions for 'violence reduction' became 'a shared goal' for the East African countries and a major priority for the Western donor community.[54] Notably, most cross-cutting interventions for peace undertaken by state and non-state agencies over the past two decades are actually broad-based counterterrorism programmes designed by the US and UK for Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, and Uganda.[55] Most the interventions are founded on the WoT campaign applied to Africa.

It is within this scramble for violence reduction that major 'institutional structures' of the West invested in 'the decolonial debate'[56] argue for these strategies to be seen as politically correct.[57] Faloyin, for example, reminds us that although the multiple conflicts in Africa are most often presented by the international media as threats in the GWoT, it must be contested that 'Africa is not a country',[58] and outside actors should not design homogeneous interventions across many African nation-states as if they are one social unit. He attempts instead to create:

> A portrait of modern Africa that struggles to push back against harmful stereotypes to tell a more comprehensive story – based on all the humanity that has been brushed aside to accommodate a single vision of blood, strife, and majestic shots of savannahs and large yellow sunsets.[59]

According to Faloyin, arbitrary national borders established by the colonial authorities already pose a significant challenge for the interventions to yield any positive outcomes, because they outrightly

[49]M. Anne Brown, 'Hybridity and dialogue – Approaches to the hybrid turn', *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal*, 2:4 (2017), pp. 446–63 (p. 446).

[50]Samuel Aronson, 'Kenya and the global war on terror: Neglecting history and geopolitics in approaches to counterterrorism', *African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies: AJCJS*, 7:1&2 (2013), pp. 24–34.

[51]Mutahi and Ruteere, *Where Is the Money?*

[52]Jackson, 'In defence of "terrorism"', pp. 121–2.

[53]Mutahi and Ruteere, *Where Is the Money?*; Cocodia, 'Rejecting African solutions to African problems'.

[54]Ruteere and Mutahi, 'Civil society pathways to peace and security'.

[55]Brendon J. Cannon, and Dominic Pkalya, 'Why Al-Shabaab attacks Kenya: Questioning the narrative paradigm', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 31:4 (2019), pp. 836–52; Katharine Petrich and Phoebe Donnelly, 'Worth many sins: Al-Shabaab's shifting relationship with Kenyan women', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 30:6–7 (2019), pp. 1169–92.

[56]Gunning, 'Critical security studies and decolonisation'.

[57]Elizabeth Pearson, Emily Winterbotham, and Katherine Brown, *Rethinking Countering Violent Extremism: Making Gender Matter*, ed. Roger Mac Ginty (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), p. 365.

[58]Dipo Faloyin, *Africa Is Not a Country: Breaking Stereotypes of Modern Africa* (Dublin: Vintage, 2023), p. 380.

[59]Dipo Faloyin, *Africa Is Not a Country*, p. 7.

fail to harness local knowledge, local ownership, and, ultimately, local paradigms. These failures result from the fact that colonial divisions split many ethnic groups into different territories, and so some boundaries are hardly recognised by local communities, making it quite difficult to have a common understanding about the problem of terrorism and the war on terror strategies in local contexts.

In the next section, the article delves into a case study of one of the most dominant interventions during the war on terror that has shaped donor engagement in the East African region. This is the US-funded 'Partnership for Regional East Africa Counterterrorism' (PREACT). In this intervention, the two ambiguities that are claimed to perpetuate colonial continuities are discussed in more detail. Other broad-based interventions led by the United Nations and continental or regional blocs, which borrowed so much from the PREACT model, are also briefly discussed to demonstrate the influence and historical dependency on the WoT. The case of PREACT, therefore, provides insight into state-led initiatives that homogenise Africa.

A case of PREACT as a [colonial] model of counterterrorism in East Africa

The choice of PREACT as a case study among the most prominent counterterrorism programmes in Africa is made in terms of funding volume, length of intervention period, and number of countries covered by a single programme.[60] PREACT interventions aim to build the capacity of both military and civilian actors in relation to 'how best to do counterterrorism'.[61] Specifically, the programme is a 'multi-year, multi-sector initiative to build the long-term capabilities of East African partners to contain, disrupt, and marginalize terrorist networks in the region'. The same activities that are designed for implementation in Tanzania are also planned for Somalia and Kenya as the core countries of focus. However, 10 other countries are covered by the programme – Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Rwanda, Seychelles, South Sudan, Sudan, and Uganda – without acknowledging the diversity of understanding and experiences of terrorism that exist in each country.

It is thus evident that activities of this strategy are designed to employ a 'top-down approach', where the funding agency – USAID – 'controls all aspects of the programme'. The agency, however, grossly falls short of outlining the possibility that a 'complex set of knowledge exists [or can be] developed around specific conditions of populations and communities indigenous to a particular geographic area' of the respective countries.[62] The failure to recognise that terrorism in the East African region is unique to its geographical settings demonstrates some lethargy in acknowledging how the problem itself is influenced by 'contextual' religious, cultural, and ethnic value systems.[63] Failing to account for such diversities leads to a 'misprioritisation' and misidentification of the terrorism problem and a matching mitigation approach that contradicts local understandings of the problem.

This ignoring of the unique context is the result of an over-reliance on the Western (American) experience, whereby US military experts assume the overall duty to build capacity of the local military groups and communities. Such lack of understanding can directly contribute to escalating threats and lack of support by local communities.[64] This approach also reveals colonial continuities that have been adopted by East African states, such as using terror to counter terrorism, a

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[60]Peter V. G. Gatuiku, 'Countering terrorism in the Horn of Africa: A case study of Kenya', master's thesis for International Studies, University of Nairobi (2016).

[61]Mohammed Ilyas, 'Decolonising the terrorism industry: Indonesia', *Social Sciences*, 10:2:53 (2021), pp. 1–16 (p. 7).

[62]Dennis Ocholla. 'Marginalized knowledge: An agenda for indigenous knowledge development and integration with other forms of knowledge', *The International Review of Information Ethics,* 7 (2007, September), pp. 236-45 (p. 238), available at {https://doi.org/10.29173/irie26}

[63]Akwasi Aidoo, 'Cultural understanding: The values of war and peace in Africa', *Beliefs and Values*, 1:1 (2009), pp. 45–52.

[64]Okolie-Osemene and Okolie-Osemene, 'The challenges and prospects of security sector manoeuvrability over terrorism in Somalia'.

strategy inherent to the GWoT.[65] From this perspective, PREACT may be seen as abetting state terrorism, including the use of targeted killings and refoulement of Al-Shabaab suspects in Kenya and Somalia.[66] This is a crucial problem with the war on terror that must be taken into account in any global strategy beyond the period of terrorism.

However, a larger issue is not just how US dominance influences local strategies, but how African states are overly reliant on global support for counterterrorism. This raises the question of whether local actors, including states, are aware of the emerging global shift towards situations similar to the Cold War polarities. A prevailing assumption made by local actors in counterterrorism strategies, whether interventions are carried out by individual states or regional blocs, is the belief in the universality of knowledge across multiple countries treated as a single entity. This assumption underlies the military approaches of the war on terror, which has been perfected by AMISOM and local programmes designed by regional blocs.

While it may be tempting to assume that the same Somali ethnic community in Kenya and Ethiopia has a unified understanding as other communities in the respective countries, regarding terrorist groups like Al-Shabaab, the reality is more nuanced. Other communities in these countries, even those sharing a national context with the Somali ethnic group, may not view the group in the same way. For example, the Borana community in Kenya may have more cultural similarities with the Borana community in Somalia and Ethiopia than with other communities in Kenya.

This highlights the importance for actors involved in counterterrorism efforts to recognise that knowledge production about terrorism and counterterrorism in East Africa cannot simply rely on the colonial boundaries of states. Rather, it requires a deep understanding of the unique dynamics between different ethnic communities and their relationship with terrorist groups like Al-Shabaab. Tuck connects the assumed doctrine to the culpability in practice posed by the military approach to counterterrorism based on Western imperialism:

> Military doctrine on stability operations reflects predominantly a 'planning-school' approach. Consciously or unconsciously, this approach assumes [that] rebuilding the capacity of weak or failed states is a matter of preparation and technique. It is about planning, inter-agency cooperation, and a whole-of-government approach. It assumes success is a matter of the right principles and the right techniques. It reflects a rationalist, problem-solving approach. Military doctrine on stabilization reflects Western liberal assumptions on how these operations should be conducted.[67]

This assumption that Africa can be treated as a uniform entity when it comes to counterterrorism efforts is flawed and perpetuates stereotypes about the continent. The approach ignores the diverse identities and Indigenous knowledge systems that exist within Africa. Instead, counterterrorism efforts need to be informed by a deeper understanding of the unique dynamics and histories of different regions and communities.[68] In fact, the colonial legacy of knowledge production in Africa has privileged certain perspectives and excluded others. This has led to a limited understanding of the complexities of terrorism and counterterrorism in the region. It is crucial to challenge these colonial narratives and move away from a one-size-fits-all approach to African problems.[69]

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[65]Anneli Botha, 'Political socialisation and terrorist radicalisation among individuals who joined Al-Shabaab in Kenya', in Alamin Mazrui, Kimani Njogu, and Paul Goldsmith (eds), *Countering Violent Extremism in Kenya: Between The Rule of Law and Quest for Security* (Nairobi: Twaweza Communications, 2018), pp. 83–120; Anneli Botha and Mahdi Abdile, 'Reality versus perception: Toward understanding Boko Haram in Nigeria', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 42:5 (2019), pp. 493–519.

[66]Shofwan Al Banna Choiruzzad, 'Within a thick mist: Conspiracy theories and counter terrorism in Indonesia', *International Journal of Social Inquiry*, 6:2 (2013), pp. 96–116.

[67]Christopher H. Tuck, 'The "practice" problem: Peacebuilding and doctrine', *Parameters*, 46:2 (2016), pp. 69–80 (p. 70).

[68]Marc Epprecht, 'Sexuality, Africa, history', *The American Historical Review*, 114:5 (2009), pp. 1258–72 (p. 1259).

[69]Jude Cocodia, 'Rejecting African solutions to African problems: The African Union and the Islamic courts union in Somalia'. *African Security*, 14:2 (2021), pp. 110-31.

Nonetheless, while Indigenous mechanisms and local solutions can play a significant role in addressing terrorism, they should not be viewed in isolation. Historical context and global knowledge networks are also important factors to consider. By recognising the interplay between Indigenous knowledge and broader knowledge systems, more effective and context-specific counterterrorism strategies can be developed.[70] It is thus increasingly obvious that the design and execution of the WoT in Africa have eliminated local ownership of the programmes, as well as perpetuating Western domination of the knowledge production system in the scholarship and practice of counterterrorism. Hence, exploring the prospects beyond the WoT creates an opportunity to reconstruct the intervention domain and interrogate the scope of research to expand the space for local voices in Africa. The next section presents what the next steps may look like in the global shift from terrorism to the great power contest.

Interventions in the East Africa region based on the PREACT strategy

Using the same script as the PREACT programme, states have frequently chosen to participate in regional economic community (REC) formations in order to mitigate violent conflicts in the East African region. Examples of such RECs include the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the East African Community (EAC).[71] Unlike the EAC, which brings together Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda, the IGAD bloc has been the most focused and effective regional organ undertaking state-led political interventions and humanitarian support to prevent violent conflicts.[72] For instance, IGAD's 'specialized institutes' create interventions through the 'Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism and the Security Sector Programme', as 'guided by the Peace and Security Strategy' of 2010.[73]

However, despite the great efforts made by IGAD as a bloc, Royster observes,[74] as later noted by Oando and Achieng',[75] that 'no single country finances' the logistics or contributes to the funding for these interventions. The result is that the economic blocs only provide a platform for Western donors to lead the design of what would work for the countries, collectively or individually.

Insights from interviews conducted in Kenya confirm a disconnect between the local- and Western-designed initiatives, pointing to local fears of 'Western control' through the interventions. The disconnect reveals an existing narrative about possible mistrust and disconnect in the local context. A practitioner in Nairobi working on a US-funded project noted that:

> Most of such interventions are not sustainable because they are fully dependent on donor funding such that when the funding stops the interventions also stops. The intention is very suspect. What meaningful change can we achieve in a community with such interventions? (Interview #15, Government officer in Nairobi)

Based on such concerns raised by practitioners, it is indicative that the interest of funders may cause panic or lead to more vulnerability of the beneficiaries due to mistrust. Such fears are confirmed when much of the information gathered through the donor interventions is used as part of intelligence collection by the funding states. Ilyas cautions in this regard that the foreign funding regimes may prioritise their own hidden interests, which are often included as conditions to the financing agreements and which may not necessarily be consistent with the interests of the

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[70] Mbembe, Achille *Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive* (2015).

[71] Elowson and Albuquerque, 'Challenges to peace and security in Eastern Africa', p. 1.

[72] Elowson and Albuquerque, 'Challenges to peace and security in Eastern Africa'; Tim Murithi, 'Inter-governmental authority on development on the ground: Comparing interventions in Sudan and Somalia', *African Security*, 2:2–3 (2009), pp. 136–57.

[73] Elowson and Albuquerque, 'Challenges to peace and security in Eastern Africa'.

[74] Michael D. Royster, 'Ambivalence in counterterrorism efforts: The case of South Africa', in Scott Nicholas Romaniuk, Francis Grice, Daniela Irrera, and Stewart Webb(eds), *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Counterterrorism Policy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 1055-68.

[75] Oando and Achieng', 'An Indigenous African framework for counterterrorism'.

countries involved.[76] The circumstances of subtle interests attached are likely to subject the grant recipients, being African states, to subordination because they are likely to lose full 'command of their own territories' to the Western countries providing the financial support.[77] This leads to imbalanced engagement in counterterrorism that further poses the biggest challenge of the exclusion of the subaltern, because it diminishes the involvement of Indigenous mechanisms and the subaltern voice.

The imbalance thus gives a free pathway for Western 'elitism and universalisation [that is already] embedded in much scholarly knowledge' about terrorism and counterterrorism. Given that subaltern voices may not have much prominence in Western-controlled research (and publications), it is very likely that strategies developed in the subnational contexts of East Africa then suffer unhealthy relegation and remain seen as 'informal practices rooted in pre-colonial customs.'[78] Thompsell, therefore, refers to this situation of subordination as creating space for the intentional agenda to ignore 'earlier sources of information' about Africa, in the justification of colonialism and 'anti-Africanness' that becomes the gist of 'the capitalist logic of coloniality' in counterterrorism.[79] Similar predicaments have faced counterterrorism strategies by the African Union,[80] as witnessed in the challenges that faced the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM).[81]

In some cases, individual countries like Kenya and Ethiopia made frantic attempts to design their interventions based on their experience of attacks by terrorist cells. Kenya, for example, made a unilateral decision in October 2011 to deploy forces into Somalia to counter the increasing invasion and insurgency of Al-Shabaab militants into its territories.[82] This was in response to an estimated 409 cross-border attacks by the terrorist group between 2005 and 2017.[83] The Kenyan intervention was designed and planned not only on the PREACT model; practitioners believed it was a true copy of the American invasion of Iraq in 2001, which in practice quickly 'degenerated into [an unpopular] costly and bloody counter-insurgency campaign.'[84] Similarly, it did not take long before the Kenyan invasion suffered regrettable consequences, as described by Anderson and McKnight.

> The Kenyan [forces] progressed to within five kilometres of Afmadow five days into the invasion, where they later linked up with Madobe's Ras Kamboni forces and the Somali National Army (SNA) in early November, but it would be several months before they finally wrenched the town from Al-Shabaab control. There is little information on casualties and costs of the operations, with the Kenyan press preferring upbeat coverage of the war in the early months. However, estimates suggest that the first five months of the campaign cost the Kenyans $180

[76]Ilyas, 'Decolonising the terrorism industry: Indonesia', p. 53.

[77]Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 'Decoloniality in Africa: A continuing search for a new world order', *The Australasian Review of African Studies*, 36:2 (2015), pp. 22–50.

[78]Gunning, 'Critical security studies and decolonisation', p. 12.

[79]Angela Thompsell, 'Why Was Africa Called the Dark Continent?' ThoughtCo (19 September 2021) (published online), available at: {thoughtco.com/why-africa-called-the-dark-continent-43310}.

[80]Cecilia Hull and Emma Svensson, *African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM): Exemplifying African Union Peacekeeping Challenges* (Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency, 2008), p. 58.

[81]Paul D. Williams, *Fighting for Peace in Somalia: A History and Analysis of the African Union Mission (AMISOM), 2007–2017* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group, 2005–2012* (2013; online edn, Oxford Academic, 18 September 2014), available at: {https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199327874.001.0001}, accessed 22 October 2024.

[82]Cannon and Pkalya, 'Why Al-Shabaab attacks Kenya'.

[83]Anne Speckhard and Ardian Shajkovci, 'The jihad in Kenya: Understanding Al-Shabaab recruitment and terrorist activity inside Kenya – in their own words', *African Security*, 12:1 (2019), pp. 3–61.

[84]Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri, *Fatwa on Terrorism and Suicide Bombings*, ed. John L. Esposito and Joel S. Hayward, *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, vol. 14 (London: Minhaj-ul-Quran International (UK), 2013), p. 30.

million, and that more than 50 Kenyan soldiers may have been killed. The Ethiopians, also circumspect in declaring losses in their struggles against Al-Shabaab, have acknowledged heavy casualties.[85]

It is clear that Kenyan Defence Forces made a very aggressive insurgency into Somalia believing in their military superiority over the local resistance in Somalia, but this could proceed only for five kilometres. In addition to the visible drawbacks, Kenyan forces suffered multiple mortalities following 'blowback' from the unpopular invasion. The drawbacks from this invasion later evolved into adverse ethnic and religious tensions in Kenya's internal politics, already troubled by negative ethnicity and mistrust.[86] It was after the invasion, for example, that Islamist extremists skilfully exploited 'local political quarrels' to execute numerous attacks in Kenya, while citizens struggled with coming to 'terms with the fact they are at war'.[87] Clear concerns were raised by Kenyan peace practitioners from the joint platform of civil society and state agencies, who shared their dilemma as follows:

> The problem we have is that programs, by Government and Civil Society, are mostly designed for us by the funding countries, which always prioritise military support based on their own conditions. We therefore become spectators where we should be the lead actors. The design of these programs is, therefore, never in line with the realities on the ground. (Interview #20; Programmes Manager with an International Non-Governmental Organisation (INGO))

It can be deduced from this interview that some interventions serve more the interests of the wider military schemes and international politics than the interests of local communities. Consequently, local peace actors struggle to cope with the tensions. One can then conclude that the WoT has helped the international community more to 'control security and intelligence' among African countries than to serve the immediate need for peace at the local level.[88]

Despite these immense challenges, multi-country interventions continue to be adopted by Western donors in the war against terror. For instance, despite facing monumental difficulties in the direct invasion of Somalia, Kenyan troops were eventually admitted into the UN-led AMISOM programme. However, AMISOM itself, which may initially seem to have been an African-led intervention by neighbouring countries, is no different from the IGAD interventions, fitting perfectly into a pseudo-imperialist international counterterrorism system.[89] In this arrangement, neighbouring countries only contributed troops, while funding and command remained in the hands of Western countries.[90] From 2009, this UN mission remained part of protracted international campaigns that unfortunately led to multiple unintended casualties in the neighbouring East African countries.[91] As noted by Okolie-Osemene and Okolie-Osemene, it is truly unfortunate that these

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[85] David M. Anderson and Jacob McKnight, 'Kenya at war: Al-Shabaab and its enemies in Eastern Africa', *African Affairs*, 114:454 (2015), pp. 1–27 (p. 8).

[86] Dominic Burbidge and Nic Cheeseman, 'Trust, ethnicity and integrity in East Africa: Experimental evidence from Kenya and Tanzania', *Journal of Race, Ethnicity and Politics*, 2:1 (2017), pp. 88–123.

[87] Anderson and McKnight, 'Kenya at war'.

[88] Sharland, Lisa, Tim Grice, and Sara Zeiger, 'Preventing and countering violent extremism in Africa: The role of the mining sector' (Australia: the Australian Strategic Policy Institute ., 2017), pp.1-50 (p. 5).

[89] Arun Kundnani and Ben Hayes, *The Globalisation of Countering Violent Extremism Policies: Undermining Human Rights, Instrumentalising Civil Society* (Amsterdam: The Transnational Institute (TNI), February 2018), p. 48.

[90] Paul D. Williams, 'Strategic communications for peace operations: The African Union's information war against Al-Shabaab', *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, 7:1 (2018), pp. 1–17; Stanley Ehiane, 'Strengthening the African Union (AU) counter-terrorism strategy in Africa: A re-awakened order', *Journal of African Union Studies*, 7:2 (2018), pp. 109–26.

[91] Williams, 'Strategic communications for peace operations'.

joint approaches by regional military groups actually exacerbated the violence[92] linked to the Al-Shabaab threat, rather than reducing it.[93]

Epistemic contestations against the WoT

There are various criticisms within local scholarship regarding the WoT. Some scholars argue,[94] for example, that the counterterrorism strategies adopted in this context are heavily influenced by a colonial mindset, particularly from the perspective of white conservatives. The conservative Western scholarship and intervention design are criticised for overlooking the needs and interests of local communities, instead perpetuating a narrative that Africa is a chaotic and violent continent.[95] While tracking the changing status of terrorism, a great contention to these constructions is that:

> the process of knowledge production [in Africa] has been muddled, supplanted, and ultimately made subservient to orthodox Western … structures of colonial authorities. The global political economy of knowledge production [during the war on terror] has [only] consigned indigenous knowledge to being regarded as traditional, unscientific and value-laden."[96]

Gitau, for instance, raises concerns about donor-funded counterterrorism strategies as having been developed in a dependency mode, using deceitful constructions of a homogeneous African society for whom counterterrorism knowledge is externally created.[97] This illustrates how the WoT has treated the entire African continent as an entity that waits to be supported through policy formulation and intervention design. But a worse notion that exists through the counterterrorism agenda in Africa is the creation of an 'image of a suffering African poor' who can be easily induced into terrorism.[98] This false construction has often led to a universal victimisation of young people in Africa due to the unknown fear of a bulging youth population on the continent. The perception construes a colonial-centric state being used as an excuse to generally profile local citizens as suspects, 'to legitimize a discourse of humanitarianism'.[99]

Gitau's reservations, therefore, depict the first ambiguity that emerges from the WoT strategies, which also claim to uphold human rights in the global arena[100] while they are, in contrast, embedded in collective 'military' enforcement of discriminatory practices. In Kenya, for example, some of these colonial and discriminatory practices include unwritten laws on mandatory screening in all public places, including in government buildings.[101] While the excuse for such interventions is based on the preventive agenda against unknown threats, the mandatory screening has caused much discontent locally for exposing citizens to collective trauma and 'a collective identity' of guilt. Furthermore, major ethical concerns have been

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[92] Anderson and McKnight, 'Kenya at war'.

[93] Okolie-Osemene and Okolie-Osemene, 'The challenges and prospects of security sector manoeuvrability over terrorism in Somalia'.

[94] Angela Thompsell, 'The work of peace: History, imperialism, and peacekeeping', *Insight Turkey*, 21:1 (2019), pp. 53–76 (p. 54).

[95] Mutekwe, 'Towards an Africa philosophy of education', p. 1295.

[96] Afolabi, 'Globalisation, decoloniality and the question of knowledge production in Africa', p. 93, emphasis added.

[97] Lydia Wanja Gitau, *Trauma-Sensitivity and Peacebuilding: Considering the Case of South Sudanese Refugees in Kakuma Refugee Camp* (Cham: Springer, 2018).

[98] Samwel O. Oando, 'Space for African Women in Tackling Violent Extremism: Engendering Conflict Transformation in Kenya', PhD Thesis, University of Otago, 2022.

[99] Gitau, *Trauma-Sensitivity and Peacebuilding*, p. 58.

[100] James W. Nickel, 'Is today's international human rights system a global governance regime?', *The Journal of Ethics*, 6:4 (2002), pp. 353–71.

[101] Badi Hasisi, Simon Perry, and Michael Wolfowicz, 'Counter-terrorism effectiveness and human rights in Israel', in Eran Shor and Stephen Hoadley (eds), *International Human Rights and Counter-Terrorism* (Singapore: Springer, 2019), pp. 409–29.

raised among African scholars such as Ndaka and team[102] regarding the management of the massive data collected at the security screening points, given the growing use of Artificial Intelligence (AI).[103]

An epistemic dilemma arises further from the capitalist relationship between states, where the powerful states of the Global North make a uniform package of international aid on counterterrorism to African countries through the supply of security equipment, following liberal economic logic.[104] This kind of aid for peace and security support to Africa informs reservations in this article regarding continuing imperialism embedded in capitalism through the WoT.

Adams, for example, observed in the most explicit manner that successive US administrations have consistently provided 'security' aid to Africa for counterterrorism in the form of weapons and training for militaries for over 25 years, spending billions of dollars.[105] The support has primarily been provided to enhance intelligence and military operations aimed at countering terrorist activities throughout the continent. In addition, the US military's regional command for Africa set up operational military bases and dispatched forces to African countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Guinea (in West Africa), Somalia and Djibouti (in East Africa) and Chad (in North Africa). Adams contends that:

> Ostensibly the goal of all these military efforts has been to strengthen the ability of African militaries to prevent and defeat terrorism and, secondarily, to build or strengthen democratic governance. [However,] *The Times*, which has reported on these efforts, rather uncritically, for two decades, acknowledges that there are more terrorists than ever in these countries [which received aid].[106]

Adams argues further that the acknowledgement by the *Times* of the failure of the counterterrorism measures is 'an understatement'. Instead, it is indicative that, further to the increased number of terrorists and terrorist organisations in many countries, some of the very military forces trained and armed by the US have since taken over governments through unprecedented coups d'état in the last three years.[107]

The concern here is not about incidents of state instability and coups in Africa, but an observation about the capitalist imperialism inherent to counterterrorism, which is in turn based on a uniform construction about Africa. This confirms that historical 'solutions' to violent conflicts designed by profiteering entities are not necessarily undertaken to solve particular 'problems' of conflict, but rather, some complex problems – such as terrorism – evolve to become susceptible to being intentionally exaggerated or (mis)conceptualised.[108] This happens when prescriptive, tailor-made solutions are sought as an opportunity for enhanced diplomatic relations between the West and Africa.[109] The possibility of turning counterterrorism strategies into a business opportunity

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[102] Angella Ndaka, Philippe J. C. Lassou, Konan Anderson Seny Kan, and Samuel Fosso-Wamba, 'Toward response-able AI: A decolonial perspective to AI-enabled accounting systems in Africa', *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 99 (2024), p. 102736.

[103] Farangiz Atamuradova and Sara Zeiger, 'Looking ahead: Recommendations For P/CVE policy, programs and research', in *The 6th International CVE Research Conference*. Held in Melbourne, Australia from the 8th to 10th of October 2019 (Melbourne, Australia: International CVE Research Conference, 2019), pp. 1–30.

[104] Ramón Grosfoguel, 'Decolonizing post-colonial studies and paradigms of political-economy: Transmodernity, decolonial thinking, and global coloniality', *Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*, 1:1 (2011), pp. 4–18.

[105] Gordon Adams, 'Time to terminate US counter-terrorism programs in Africa: They don't work, they don't achieve the projected goals, they waste funds, and they are counter-productive', *Analysis | Africa* (21 June 2024).

[106] Gordon Adams, 'Time to terminate US counter-terrorism programs in Africa', pp. 1–2. Emphasis added.

[107] Gordon Adams, 'Time to terminate US counter-terrorism programs in Africa'.

[108] Norman Sempijja and Ekeminiabasi Eyita-Okon, 'Counter-terrorism resolutions and initiatives by regional institutions: African Union and African Commission on Human and People's Rights', in Eran Shor and Stephen Hoadley (eds), *International Human Rights and Counter-Terrorism* (Singapore: Springer, 2019), pp. 55–74.

[109] Horace G. Campbell, 'The war on terror as a business: Lessons from Kenya and the Somalia interventions', *The African Review*, 2020 (2020), pp. 27–40.

links to the charges laid against global capitalist systems[110] which treat Africa as one big market for foreign aid in security hardware and capacity building. This can also explain the magnitude of possible malevolence behind some innovations by firms which are involved in the war on terror.[111]

The probability of capitalist exploitation is increased by the asymmetrical and superior–inferior relationships between the West and African countries, as described by Afolabi,[112] in which virtually all facets of knowledge production in Africa have been dominated by the West. While the African community is conditioned to using the security hardware, the suppliers are primarily focused on the returns on investment and not necessarily on the welfare of the local citizens. It is in this discourse of exploitative relations that 'the concept of capitalism implied in this perspective' offers a selective privilege of domination by the 'Western friends' of Africa 'over other social relations'.[113] This hidden pursuit of self-interest, rarely declared in interventions for counterterrorism, poses a potential threat of (re)producing a new and biased political structure, akin to other forms of political and epistemic domination by the West.[114]

A second ambiguity in the African counterterrorism discourse is closely related to the first and is connected to what Thompsell[115] refers to as a 'misleading and disingenuous' answer to the construction of Africa as a dark continent. In a way, such a claim assumes that Africa is in some sense a homogeneous society – in the sense of a country – which European scholars and polity might not have known much about.[116] This generalisation leads to characterisations of Africa by the West 'as a global security threat; a continent that is unsafe, dangerous, and emblematic of environmental, biological, and terrorist threats to the rest of the world [since] the post-September 11 world'.[117] Thompsell argues further that Western leaders purposely affirmed such generalisations and ignored 'earlier sources of information' that were factual about Africa in order 'to justify colonialism and anti-Blackness'.[118] Smith, furthermore, questions 'the epochal claim that the terrorists' attacks of 9/11 changed everything'[119] in the global security system, and which are claimed to have created Africa as an entirely dangerous continent.[120]

The broader challenge is that although scholars have engaged with some of these deceptions over the past two decades, they unfortunately are endorsed by the grant makers in the design of counterterrorism strategies based on the WoT. This unilateral endorsement is what constitutes a sense of coloniality, whereby regions of Africa affected by terrorism are classified as 'ungoverned spaces'.[121] This raises a pertinent concern as to whether Africa is constituted by the WoT strategies as a country or as a homogeneous geo-space in relation to counterterrorism. This question informs the hypothesis that the WoT shapes its image of Africa through what is constructed (said, written, and shared by the media) in the West, and the 'strategic silences' within unproven discourses delimiting how actors in counterterrorism can theorise about Africa's heterogeneity.[122] The

[110]Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

[111]Mohammed Ilyas, 'Decolonialisation and the terrorism industry', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 15:2 (2022), pp. 417–40.

[112]Afolabi, 'Globalisation, decoloniality and the question of knowledge production in Africa'.

[113]Grosfoguel, 'Decolonizing post-colonial studies and paradigms of political-economy', p. 6.

[114]Ken Ward, 'Non-violent extremists? Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 63:2 (2009), pp. 149–64(p. 149).

[115]Thompsell, 'The work of peace', p. 4.

[116]Malinda S. Smith, *Securing Africa: Post-9/11 Discourses on Terrorism* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

[117]Malinda S. Smith, 'The constitution of Africa as a security threat', *Review of Constitutional Studies*, 10:1–2 (2005), pp. 163-206(p. 164).

[118]Thompsell , Angela. "Why Was Africa Called the Dark Continent?"(2021).

[119]Smith, 'The constitution of Africa as a security threat'.

[120]Smith, *Securing Africa: Post-9/11 Discourses on Terrorism*, p. 15.

[121]Kodili Henry Chukwuma, 'Critical terrorism studies and postcolonialism: Constructing ungoverned spaces in counterterrorism discourse in Nigeria', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 15:2 (2022), pp. 399–416 (p. 399).

[122]Smith, 'The constitution of Africa as a security threat'.

silences are also perpetuated by African scholars and politicians who prefer embracing, uncritically, knowledge produced through the 'enlightenment reason and Euro-North American-centric modernity'.[123]

Consequently, this article questions the two sets of constructions behind these ambiguities to explain 'what the War on Terror leaves behind in Africa'. These ambiguities in contemporary strategies for counterterrorism are associated with strategies developed in the WoT. An impending complexity lies in the reassessment of old and new security challenges, which relegates global attention on terrorism to a diminishing importance.[124] While the global powers are embroiled in the looming spectre of great power nuclear threats,[125] with the Ukraine–Russia war being the current axis of contention, African leaders remain ensnared in the ambiguities of the WoT as a major source of foreign support for national security infrastructure.[126] An emerging dilemma in the presumed fortunes of terrorism within global security consciousness, therefore, reveals continuation of the liberal state-building paradigm. Hence, envisioning what the 'war on terror' leaves behind must engage with the past by reviewing the liberal WoT strategies that are dependent on democratisation processes, economic system interventions, capacity support through security sector reforms, and the broad-based foreign aid for establishing numerous instruments for transitional justice.[127]

Beyond the WoT: Prospects for Indigeneity

Examining Africa's position beyond the WoT offers the prospect of overcoming two significant challenges: ambiguity about the past, and the future of terrorism. The ongoing WoT initiatives, which still exist in many countries, present a dilemma that needs to be totally abandoned. Hence, this article envisions interventions by African actors with no reliance on foreign support. This implies that African political leaders must shift from being consumers of information regarding the changing dynamics of power between the East and the West and instead become knowledge producers. By going beyond the war on terror, Africa has the opportunity to critically examine how colonialism has influenced its own theories and to confront the power imbalances between the countries that provide financing and those that benefit from it.[128] Through this introspection, Africa can develop the potential for emancipation not only by identifying and addressing the underlying divisions, but also redesigning independent pathways free from the legacies of the WoT. This can commence from harnessing the methodologies based on Indigenous knowledge of local communities in developing home-grown solutions.

The re-emergence of the East–West axis, similar to the Cold War, through the WoT in foreign interventions is another important issue to consider when designing a new trajectory in the peace and security architecture. The strategies don't have to fall within the polarity of the two hegemonies but may instead provide an alternative source of global knowledge based on Africa's pre-colonial experiences. It has become clear that the most significant interventions in Africa have always involved support by countries like the US, the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, and the former colonial powers. These interventions have entangled themselves in numerous African conflicts.[129]

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[123]Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 'Rethinking development in the age of global coloniality', in Busani Mpofu and Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (eds), *Rethinking and Unthinking Development: Perspectives on Inequality and Poverty in South Africa and Zimbabwe* (Berlin: Berghahn Books, 2019), pp. 25-49 (p. 27).

[124]Andrew Futter and Benjamin Zala, 'Strategic non-nuclear weapons and the onset of a third nuclear age', *European Journal of International Security*, 6:3 (2021), pp. 257–77.

[125]Futter and Zala, 'Strategic non-nuclear weapons and the onset of a third nuclear age'.

[126]Campbell, 'The war on terror as a business'.

[127]Elisa Randazzo, 'The local, the "Indigenous" and the limits of rethinking peacebuilding', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 15:2 (2021), pp. 141–60.

[128]Gunning, 'Critical security studies and decolonisation', p. 8.

[129]Elizabeth Schmidt, *Foreign Intervention in Africa: From the Cold War to the War on Terror, New Approaches to African History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 1.

African countries, therefore, have an opportunity to regenerate their own strategies based on the African knowledge base. Schmidt argues that both the GWoT and the Cold War have led to a significant increase in foreign military presence in Africa. This trend must change for an alternative African approach to emerge. The increased presence of foreign powers has only resulted in conditional foreign support for repressive governments in Africa, which is not in the best interest of the local citizens. If this power contest continues, it is likely that dominant foreign interests will re-emerge in many African countries without recourse. Unfortunately, these foreign interests may not align with the interests of the local citizens but result in continued exploitation. Instead, they are more likely to alter the dynamics of peace and the security architecture in Africa, potentially leading to intra-country conflicts with devastating effects on the African people.[130]

This article suggests that African leaders must take an active role in shaping the future of global politics and not remain as 'loyal recipients' of political ideas from the West. It is important for them to recognise the role of subaltern voices in shaping national ideology within the broader international framework. This requires an expanded space for Indigenous knowledge, both as part of global knowledge systems on counterterrorism, and as a pathway for Africa to overcome the lingering effects of colonialism.[131] To move beyond the war on terror, Africa must undergo a radical paradigm shift that liberates its people from the underlying imperial structures of knowledge production and fosters self-determination.[132] This means confronting the structures that perpetuate colonialism in both theory and practice, including the over-reliance on Western knowledge production. Instead, African countries should prioritise the expansion of Indigenous knowledge in counterterrorism efforts and shift their focus beyond the problem of terrorism itself.

By incorporating Indigenous knowledge in the local agenda for counterterrorism, Africa can construct a more holistic understanding of geographical space. This recognises that the continent is not simply a natural background, but a product of historical events and civilisations built on diverse socio-cultural blocs. This recognition should open up new prospects for Indigenous knowledge in shaping Africa's future beyond the war on terror.[133]

Conclusion

Africa's position in the geopolitics beyond the WoT requires a reimagining of knowledge production and a shift away from reliance on Western perspectives. To achieve a more inclusive and equitable future, African leaders must actively reconstruct a vision that incorporates Indigenous knowledge in the peace and security architecture and be prepared to challenge the hegemony of Western ideologies. There is a need, therefore, for African countries to consider self-financing and designing their own home-grown programmes, leveraging their local expertise. By contesting methodological platforms that inhibit African solutions and amplifying the voices of Indigenous communities, Africa can reclaim its agency and bring stability to regions like Somalia without begging for support from the West or East.

Based on evidence from PREACT and other transnational strategies informed by the WoT approach, it is notable that international interventions for counterterrorism have often failed to accurately capture local realities and have not produced the desired outcomes. Therefore, it becomes more crucial for Africa than ever before to adopt transformative interventions that do not view the continent through the lens of colonial state boundaries but rather recognise the diverse contexts and contributions of Indigenous actors. Incorporating Indigenous knowledge in the new dispensation will not only provide a favourable alternative to the WoT, but it will also promote

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[130]Elizabeth Schmidt, *Foreign Intervention in Africa after the Cold War: Sovereignty, Responsibility, and the War on Terror* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2018).

[131]Moosavi, 'The decolonial bandwagon and the dangers of intellectual decolonisation'.

[132]Arjun Appadurai, 'Beyond domination: The future and past of decolonization' (2021), available at: {https://www.thenation.com/article/world/achille-mbembe-walter-mignolo-catherine-walsh-decolonization/}.

[133]Arjun Appadurai, 'Beyond domination: The future and past of decolonization', *The Nation* (9 March 2021).

mutual accommodation of subaltern knowledge, social justice, and a comprehensive approach to addressing the multifaceted dimensions of violent conflicts in the continent.

Reviving traditional structures lost to colonialism may also provide opportunities for protecting African communities from epistemic exclusion and exploitation. This article argues that by taking a step towards shaping the future of global politics through the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge, African countries are likely to overcome the lingering effects of colonialism and ultimately achieve self-determination. This paradigm shift is essential for Africa to move beyond the WoT and to chart its own path towards a more equitable and sustainable future.

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