Encountering Extremism. Theoretical issues and local challenges

Alice Martini, Kieran Ford and Richard Jackson (eds.)

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Throughout these past years, the term "extremism" has been widely used in contemporary discourses. It has reached the point in which it explains, almost as a synonym, other terms such as terrorism or radicalism, even if there is no empirical evidence of the causative relation between those terms. It is therefore understandable that difficulties arise when aiming to define the word extremism, since it is subjective to the actor describing it, it entails the need for a "moderate" option to compare it to and it is now commonly understood as a wide spectrum of different ideas and practices. Along the lines of this book, Alice Martini, Kieran Ford and Richard Jackson together with a long list of excellent contributors, aim to discuss a wide variety of topics related with how the international community has constructed terms, ideas and practices surrounding extremism. The book thus brings together a wide variety of approaches and critiques to the practices of countering violent extremism (CVE).

The book is divided into an introduction, followed by two sections with seven chapters each. The two sections are related to one another but still explained in a way the reader could understand them even if reading just a chapter, since they entail different approaches or concerns. While the first section develops a theoretical frame for understanding and deconstructing extremism, the second section focusses on international cases of counter-extremism examples in countries such as Tunisia, Spain, United States of America, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Pakistan or Nigeria.

The first chapter of the first section of the book analyses how the international community has constructed and broadened the meaning of extremism. The evolution of the concept of violent extremism is deeply discussed by Chin-Kuei Tsui. The author compares the differences between the US and other Western states and explains how these countries have used the concept to justify and legitimate their actions. Furthermore, the chapter analyses some of the policies that were implemented, the consequences and repercussions they had on society. To continue with this line of thought, in the second chapter, Sondre Lindahl uses Weber's theory of the ideal types to study and evaluate the critical theory of counter-extremism. He explains how this can be used to maintain ontological, epistemological, and normative commitments to Critical Terrorism Studies when developing violent extremism studies. Following this constructivist and poststructuralist analysis, Mariela Cuadro analyses, in the following chapter, the relation between knowledge, power and the subject, under Foucault's theory. This chapter theorises that a "moderate" is needed in order to create the "extreme". This rises a problem since the binary is a subjective categorization rather than an objective. Therefore, and connecting to what is described in previous chapters, this term can be used by liberal democracies to create a dichotomy between moderation and extremism.

Bringing the theory to contemporary insecurities, Marie Breen-Smyth aims to understand in the fourth chapter of the book the different treatments the "white lone wolf" gets from the so-called suspect communities, such as the Muslims, securitised by the discourse on CVE. Continuing with this political frame, the fifth chapter presents, by the hand of Jessica Auchter, feminist critiques of countering violent extremism. The author points out that extremist groups and common understanding of the society unconsciously manipulate the prevailing gender norms and stereotypes for their recruitments, as women are often seen as peaceful housekeepers rather than warriors. Furthermore, these stereotypes exclude the possibility for women to consciously take part in the military or in any violent action, and when they do participate, their motivations are usually linked to causal factors stemming from men. Kieran Ford uses in the sixth chapter of this book Galtung's theory of direct and indirect violence to present a critique of how liberal peace is understood. He argues that this can be seen as a continuation of historical processes of imperialism, neo-colonialism and westernisation. The author explains how current counter-extremism measures produce several types of violence, like cultural violence or epistemic violence. In the last chapter of this section Aislinn O'Donnell analyses how education can shape the way society reacts and responds to extreme and radical ideas. The author reinforces the impact that education has on countering-extremism approaches and in the creation of certain values and beliefs.

The second part of the book aims to explain the theorical part with examples of international and local challenges. Alice Martini starts chapter eight by discussing the role of the United Nations Security Council, its policies and its discourse regarding extremism and the enforcement of international standardized governmentality by promoting "moderate" and liberal ideas and values. Guendalina Simoncini uses chapter nine to provide a study of International Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE) in Tunisia and explains how certain discourses given in the country have created a link between youth, women and security. The author also gives an interesting critique of the donor's conceptualisation of peace and social cohesion used in this country to maintain the already stablished statu quo. Laura Fernández de Mosteryín continues in the following chapter with an insight of how communication strategy in Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) has worked with Spanish group ETA. Crossing the Atlantic Ocean, chapter 11 brings, by the hand of Priya Dixit, a discussion of how radical discourses have promoted extremism in the United States, analysing radial biases and the creation of suspect communities.

In chapter twelve, Tanja Dramac Jiries explains the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The author studies CVE practices in the country and discusses how part of its civilian population joined external wars when the government was implementing CVE measures. Furthermore, the chapter also deepens in Islamic fundamentalism in this multi-ethnic country. Afiya Shehrbano Zia discusses in chapter thirteen Pakistan's CVE measures and how they are shaped by certain beliefs that exclude women, minorities or civilians. The author argues that women's voices should be taken into account by policymakers and uses the role of Jamia Hafsa madrasa to exemplify her point of view. Lastly, Akinyemi Oyawale closes the book with a last chapter discussing Nigeria's case study. The author argues that the current literature and understanding of extremism in the country has led to a narrative of Islam vs. the West to conclude the book.

Overall, the book brings together several authors that show how language can shape reality, and how, through the lens of constructivism, policymakers and society in general have broadened the original meaning of extremism, to the extent, almost as a synonym of terrorism. From my point of view, this book contributes to the field of International Relations. It brings up new perspectives and points of view such as the role of governments and international organizations' communication regarding CVE, PVE and extremism. One of the strengths of the book is that it introduces new perspectives in the field of International Security such as the role of women. Furthermore, every chapter deeply examines through the lens of constructivism, rather than focusing on how states and people should act from a realistic or liberal point of view. In addition, some authors explain philosophers such as Foucault or Weber, and, through their theories, explain how language shapes our reality. I personally enjoyed the chapters touching upon the debate about what society considers as normal or moderate, who determines who and what is considered as extreme. Furthermore, some chapters allow us to question the practices of in-

ternational organisations or states in original ways. This unique work brings up new lines of thought that set up new questions to think and debate about extremism and counter-extremism practices. In short, this book will be of interest for students of International Relations, practitioners and academics because of its new challenging perspectives.