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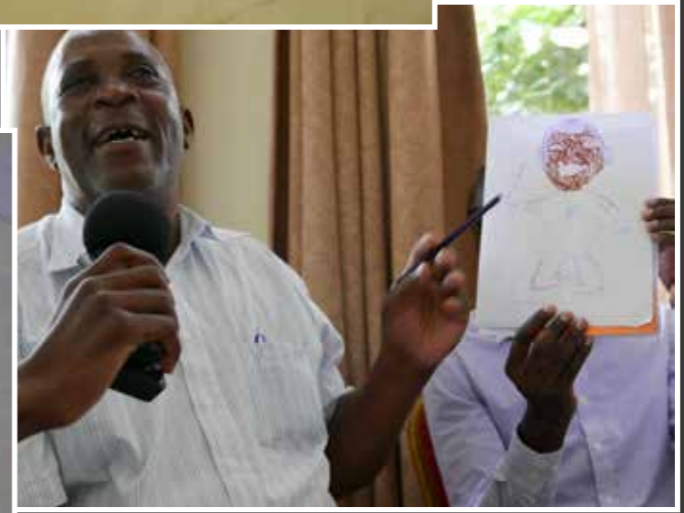
A person wearing a green t-shirt and a black headscarf is kneeling on a white surface, painting a blue map of Kenya. A small blue container of paint is visible next to the map. The background shows a white wall with some faint markings.

## Body Maps of Resistance

Understanding everyday resistance to violent extremism in Kenya

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Sahla Aroussi, Michaelina Jakala, Fathima Azmiya Badurdeen and Xavier Verhoest

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# ABOUT THE PROJECT



*Gender and Resistance to Violent Extremism in Kenya* is a study funded by the British Academy's 'Tackling UK International Challenges' programme. The study explores how men and women at the level of local communities perceive, experience and resist violent extremism in their everyday lives. This project uses the lenses of gender and intersectionality to understand violent extremism and the spectrum of responses to it. The research project is interdisciplinary and innovative and draws on the fields of politics, peace studies, gender studies, international relations and terrorism studies, as well as the arts and humanities.

The study was conducted over the course of 18 months and involved two stages of data collection in Kenya. In the first stage, we conducted interviews and focus group discussions with 67 male and female participants over the age of 18, from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds. The participants were from areas in Nairobi, Mombasa and Kwale that are affected by violent extremism and counterterrorism operations. The participants were ordinary members of local communities and members of community-based and civil society organizations working on countering and preventing violent extremism.

The second stage of the study involved conducting two participatory arts-based workshops in Mombasa using body mapping as a co-creative visual method to explore and illustrate how violent extremism is experienced and resisted at local community level. The workshops involved 10 male and 10 female participants from the Muslim communities around the Kenyan coast.

This book contains a selection of personal stories created by participants during the workshops that illustrate their everyday struggle with violent extremism and their resistance to it. The book is divided into three

sections. In the first section, we discuss the background for the research. The second section describes the body mapping method and process. The third section of this book is dedicated to the artworks created by some of the participants in the workshops and a selection of their personal narratives about violent extremism and resistance.

The research was conducted by Dr Sahla Aroussi, as principal investigator (University of Leeds), in collaboration with Dr Michaelina Jakala (Coventry University, United Kingdom), Dr Fathima Azmiya Badurdeen (Technical University of Mombasa, Kenya) and Xavier Verhoest (Art2Be, Kenya). A team of early-career researchers from Kenya and the UK also supported the conduct of this study at various stages.

For many years, Art2Be has had the privilege of facilitating workshops that encourage research participants, as non-professional artists, to explore their visual creativity and verbal expression using methods such as body mapping in an ethically rigorous manner in a safe setting where respect, empathy and confidentiality prevail. The collaboration with Art2Be in this project has enabled the research team and the participants in this study to learn from the best about the use of body mapping as a research tool.

### **Project background**

In 2015, the former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, presented his 'Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism' to the United Nations General Assembly. The Plan of Action (POA) represented a bid to break away from the legacy of the Global War on Terror and the exclusive military response to counterterrorism, and it redirected the attention of UN entities and Member States towards the prevention of violent extremism. Its softer, development-focused approach was meant to engender support for preventing and countering violent extremism (P/

CVE) among the UN Member States at the General Assembly and to convince a larger part of the United Nations to join forces in addressing the threat of violent extremism.

Within this P/CVE agenda, led by the United Nations, there has also been significant interest in gender and in the role that women can play in this area. The UN Security Council in Resolution 2242 (2015) on women, peace and security (WPS) required Member States and the United Nations to work towards a greater integration of their agendas on WPS, counterterrorism (CT) and countering violent extremism (CVE). In the POA, the UN Secretary General called on States to implement Security Council Resolution 2242, firstly, by mainstreaming gender perspectives across efforts to prevent violent extremism; secondly, by increasing the participation of women and civil society organizations in the prevention of violent extremism; and, thirdly, by investing in gender-sensitive research and data collection on violent extremism.

Since 2015, preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) has become a central concern for the international community and this has led to the global proliferation of P/CVE-related programmes, including those with a gender focus. Yet, violent extremism as a concept does not have a globally accepted definition. The United Nations has chosen not to clearly define violent extremism, opting instead for strategic ambiguity in order to foster consensus and support for its work (Thiessen, 2019). The absence of a definition of violent extremism has left States with the opportunity to reinterpret it in a way that enables them to use countering violent extremism and counter-terrorism as an excuse “to frame conflicts, label enemies, define response strategies and claim resources, and assistance according to their interests” (Saferworld, 2020: 25). With this danger in mind, linking the work on preventing and

countering violent extremism with the UN’s sustainable development goals and the women, peace and security’s agenda is very problematic. The UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism has argued that the lack of precise legal definitions for violent extremism produces widespread abuses and violations of derogable and non-derogable human rights, particularly in relation to the rights of religious groups, minority groups and civil society (UN Special Rapporteur, 2020). The Special Rapporteur has also noted with regret that the flurry of policy and programmes addressing the gender dimension of violent extremism has led not to women’s empowerment or increased gender inequality but rather to the use of women as tools of counter-terrorism and the securitisation of the women’s rights agenda (UN Special Rapporteur, 2020: 15).

Kenya has been the scene of several terrorist attacks linked to international terrorist networks, most notably, the 1998 bombing of the United States embassy by Al-Qaida, which killed over 200 people and injured thousands of others. Since 2011, Kenya has also experienced an increased number of attacks sponsored by Al-Shabaab, a militant group based in Somalia. Much of the scholarly literature on this topic links the attacks by Al-Shabaab to the Kenyan military operation in southern Somalia (Olsen and Gorm, 2018). Kenya, particularly since 9/11, has been committed to counterterrorism and it has become a significant ally of the West, and particularly of the United States, in the Global War on Terror. In a country notorious for ethnic, political and state violence, which has high levels of gang-related violence, the Kenyan government has framed violent extremism as a problem caused by violent Islamist extremism and particularly by groups such as Al-Shabaab. Given that the country has a large Muslim minority, particularly around the coast, the

association of Islam and Muslims with terrorism and violent extremism has led to the treatment of Muslim minorities in Kenya as a security threat and a suspect community. Over the last ten years, Muslim communities in Kenya, and particularly those who are ethnically Somali, have borne the brunt of security and counterterrorism operations (Lind, Mutahi and Oosterom, 2017).

This study on gender and violent extremism in Kenya explores how men and women at a local community level perceive, experience and resist violent extremism in their everyday lives. Since there is no agreed definition for what constitutes violent extremism, we explore the meaning and nuances of violent extremism at a community level and how these relate to the Kenyan national government's and the international community's understandings of violent extremism. This is particularly important since the way in which the international community, the Kenyan government and the security apparatus define violent extremism and sources of violent extremism could be completely different from what men and women in local communities view as violent extremism.

This project uses the lenses of gender and intersectionality to understand the spectrum of responses to violent extremism, one of which is resistance. Within the literature, narratives about violent extremism tend to focus on violence, radicalisation and victimisation. Yet, in communities affected by violent extremism, men and women alike are engaged in a process of everyday resistance to this violence. For every person who has fallen victim to radicalisation and recruitment by terrorist networks, there are hundreds of thousands more who resist such tendencies and forces. Bennoune in her book *Your Fatwa Does not Apply Here* (2013: 6) argued that, in stories about Muslim fundamentalism, "sensible, self-critical voices concerned with the responsibility of Muslims were rarely

transmitted". Narratives of resistance to violent extremism are typically overlooked. This research has given voice to silenced narratives that reveal how communities resist through their everyday struggle against violent extremism; it has also helped to show how this resistance is shaped by gender and intersectionality.

Most studies on violent extremism use resilience rather than resistance as a key concept (Wimelius et al., 2018; Stephens, Sieckelinck and Boutellier, 2019; Stephens and Sieckelinck, 2020). Resilience represents the idea of bouncing back in response to stress or adversity and returning to a state of equilibrium. The concept of resilience originated in the field of engineering but later permeated other areas including the social sciences (Stephens and Sieckelinck, 2020). In more recent literature, the concept of resilience has been expanded beyond the idea of restoring the previous status quo to also encompass the capacity to transform and evolve by taking advantage of new opportunities (Davoudi, 2012; Davidson et al., 2016). In the last few years, enhancing communities' resilience to violent extremism has become a policy priority for many donor governments and international organisations. For instance, the EU's work on internal and external security puts resilience at the heart of its approach to addressing threats by external non-state actors. In 2017, the European Union adopted a strategic, joined-up approach to resilience in its external activities, and this approach has put strengthening state and societal resilience at the centre of the EU's approach to counterterrorism and countering violent extremism (European Commission, 2017).

However, resilience as a framework is not neutral; rather, it is a normatively loaded and value-laden concept. Stephens and Sieckelinck (2020) have argued that the characteristic of resilience takes place within a world-

view which determines a certain outcome as desirable: “That which is considered as desirable – and therefore resilient – outcome in the face of adversity depends upon those features and attributes that are valued by those defining resilience” (Stephens and Sieckelinck, 2020: 144). If an outcome is different from the one normatively perceived as desirable, then it is not considered to constitute resilience.

The framework of resilience has been criticised for its neo-liberal, individualising approach to governance (Joseph, 2013; Chandler and Reid, 2016). By focusing on the role of local communities and individuals, the resilience framework displaces the responsibility for communities’ own security from national governments to local actors (Brasset and Vaughan-Williams, 2015; Anholt, 2017). Anholt (2017) has expressed a concern that depoliticising the concept of resilience renders invisible the structural factors that not only limit individuals and communities’ agency but also define their vulnerabilities to violent extremism in the first place. Any failure to achieve a desirable outcome, then, becomes a problem that can be attributed to a lack of resilience on the part of individuals and communities rather than a governance issue.

A focus on building resilience within the context of P/CVE also generally leads to an over-emphasis on the role of religious ideology as a driver of violent extremism at the expense of other structural factors, despite the lack of empirical data to support the assumption that religious ideology supports terrorism (UN Special Rapporteur, 2020: 7). Research in this area has clearly demonstrated that assumptions about the drivers of violent extremism and its underlying factors must be vigorously challenged (UN Special Rapporteur, 2020).

Although the concept of resilience remains very relevant to our study, it is neither broad enough nor sufficiently neutral to encapsulate a bottom-

up approach to conceptualising violent extremism as a phenomenon. Kenya is a country notorious for police brutality and the excessive use of force, particularly by the anti-terror police. The Kenyan approach to counterterrorism has been condemned in scholarly literature for its blatant human rights abuses. For example, Lind, Mutahi and Oosterom (2017) have compared the Kenyan counterterrorism approach to killing a mosquito with a hammer. The framework of resilience to violent extremism, because it puts the onus for resilience on communities, cannot capture the violence sponsored by the State and its agents in the Kenyan context. It also fails to reflect the power dynamics on the ground and the multiple layers of violence, structures of oppression and complex inequalities experienced by men and women in local communities, particularly, those who live on the marginalised coast.

In this study, we borrow from the literature on resistance and use the framework of everyday resistance to understand individual and community responses to violent extremism. The concept of resistance has been referenced before in studies on violent extremism and terrorism, but in these studies resistance has often been utilised as a medical metaphor to explore how individuals and communities can develop immunity to radicalisation and terrorist propaganda. For instance, a British Council (2018) study on violent extremism focuses on building resistance to radicalisation and the narratives which promote violence as the only route to social change. Cragin (2014) established a conceptual model for resisting violent extremism that makes resistance to violent extremism synonymous with non-radicalization. ‘Resistance to violent extremism’ in these terms is understood as the decision a

body (whether individual or collective) makes to reject violence after being exposed to radical ideologies. Few studies have engaged with the concept of resistance as a theoretical framework rather than using it in its metaphorical or symbolic sense, and the work in this area remains new and exploratory. For instance, Aly (2013) has looked at collective resistance to violent extremism as a model to counter home-grown terrorism, and a study by Al-Rawi (2018) examined everyday resistance, and particularly the use of mediated humour in videos that mocked ISIS, as a form of cultural resistance to ISIS and its extremist ideology (Al Rawi, 2016). More recently, Lemon and Thibault (2018) analysed the role of everyday resistance in the context of violent extremism as a response to authoritarian counter-extremism measures taken by the government in Tajikistan.

In this study, we have used the concept of everyday resistance which is associated with the ground-breaking work of James Scott and Michel de Certeau. In Scott's work, *The Weapons of the Weak* (1985) on peasants' resistance and class struggle, acts of everyday resistance are understood as subtle, covert, informal, unstructured and often individual acts that take place within people themselves, in their homes, at work, and within communities. Everyday resistance takes the form of oppositional acts performed by individuals or collectives who are situated in a position of subordination and live with the experience of domination (Marta Iñiguez de Heredia, 2017). Everyday resistance may be hidden or disguised and it is often not framed as 'political' at all; nevertheless, it is driven by a quest for escape and survival (Lilja and Vinthagen, 2018).

Unlike, the concept of resilience, resistance does not exist in a vacuum and can only be understood in relation to power. Studies of resistance are primarily focused on unpacking responses from below to

power and to violence (structural, cultural, direct and interpersonal), which is understood as an extreme form of power (Lilja and Vinthagen: 215). McGee (2017), in her study of everyday resistance in the violent Colombian Pacific, argued that violence is a form of invisible power that inhibits, constrains or shapes perceptions and the exercise of citizen agency. The study of resistance necessarily implies an analysis of power relations in which power is understood, in the Foucauldian sense, to be plural and ubiquitous. Because everyday resistance relates to power, it is also plural and created in relation to different forms of power. The work of Johansson and Vinthagen (2016) highlighted that everyday resistance is intersectional, heterogeneous, contextual and entangled with everyday power. While Scott conceptualises 'the peasants' in a fixed way, the social identity of the agents of resistance is more properly understood as plural and complex because those agents cannot be homogenised or subsumed under a universal category of 'the oppressed' (Marta Iñiguez de Heredia, 2017). Johansson and Vinthagen (2016: 424) argued that 'there is a multiplicity of power relations played out on the grounds of ethnicity, class, age, religion, sexuality as well as functionality and religion, [and] there is a multiplicity of resistance relations as well'. It follows that an intersectional approach to everyday resistance is essential in order to avoid falling into a one-dimensional understanding of power that can produce a subjective normative judgement on which relationship of power and domination is most important for the agents of resistance.

Studying everyday resistance to violent extremism involves looking, not just at power relations, but at the actors and forms, as well as the sites and strategies of resistance. The framework of everyday resistance is extremely useful for developing an understanding of violent extremism from below and analysing individuals' and community's responses to it.

This framework also naturally lends itself to the use of intersectionality as a research tool and lens of analysis.

### **The stories of everyday resistance to violent extremism**

The eleven body maps and stories presented in this book represent a selection of the inspiring works made by 20 people in Kenya in November 2019. The narratives are told in the words of the artists themselves, and little has been done to alter them: they reflect the individual speech patterns and sentence structures of each participant. Given the sensitivity of the topics raised, many of the participants have used pseudonyms in place of their real names to protect their identities.

The eleven body maps and stories in this volume reveal complex narratives of personal struggle against violence, discrimination and marginalisation that oscillate between hope and helplessness. These stories are personal narratives and, as such, they offer a window into the lives of the participants in this study rather than tools to facilitate generalisations about Muslims in Kenya. The participants in this study are not heroes, and their accounts are about the everyday experiences of ordinary citizens in their struggle against violent extremism.

Violent extremism emerges in their stories as a complex phenomenon that involves Al-Shabaab and other Islamist extremist groups, gang-related violence, the Kenyan government, the anti-terror police, the political elite, ethnically motivated violence and rivalry, family and intimate partner violence, as well as patriarchal culture. The conceptualisations of violent extremism in these narratives are shaped by each participant's experience of violence, and hence they differ from one person to the other.

The narratives and artworks that feature in this book were selected

to represent the crosscutting themes that arose regularly during the workshops. However, the themes included in this volume by no means reflect all of the topics that arose in conversations during the workshops and fieldwork.

In Alian's story it becomes clear that, although he was almost tricked into travelling to Somalia by an Al-Shabaab recruiter, he views violent extremism in Kenya as a tribal and political issue caused by ethnic rivalry and hatred and fuelled by political elites. Alian lays the whole responsibility for violent extremism in his community on the Kenyan government and he argues that corruption, tribalism and marginalisation policies are breeding hatred and hopelessness, as well as feeding into the narratives of violent extremism. His understanding of violent extremism is shaped by his traumatic experience of the violence that followed the 2007 election.

Alian was an actor in a movie – *Watatu* – that has been used with a 'theatre of the oppressed' methodology to engage local audiences in an interactive way that changes the fate of the performance. The theatre of the oppressed is a very powerful tool for engaging communities in finding solutions to their problems and, in this case, radicalisation. For Alian, hate is the root of violent extremism and therefore love is the only way to resist it. He wrote 'love conquers hate' in his body map painting. In addition to being involved in *Watatu* and theatre of the oppressed performances, Alian also works as a mentor to help youths in his community turn their lives around and reject the path of violence. Alian also resists violent extremism by staying away from negative places and influences and putting his energy into helping himself and others.

Adila, a woman from Mombasa whose son has been the target, first of radicalisation and recruitment by radical Islamist extremists and then

by criminal gangs involved in drugs, sees these actors as the main perpetrators of violent extremism in her community. With the danger posed by Al-Shabaab subsiding, she argues that the main threat of violent extremism in her everyday life comes from criminal gangs and youth who sit in *maskani* (a meeting place where people gather informally). While Adila does not see the Kenyan government as a perpetrator of violent extremism, she decries the marginalisation of coastal communities and the profiling of Muslims. Her use of the popular phrase 'the Coast is not Kenya' registers her support for the idea of separating the coast from Kenya as an independent political state

Adila's resistance to violent extremism, performed through her role as a mother protecting her son, has involved speaking out, seeking help from family and neighbours, and getting physical through acts which have included pouring oil on *maskani* bases and fighting with those who were trying to influence and recruit her son.

Ramadhan is a postgraduate student from Kwale. Despite his university qualifications, Ramadhan has struggled to find a job. As a husband, father, son and only brother, his story is characterised by pain and desperation caused by unemployment, marginalisation and rejection. For Ramadhan, violent extremism is primarily about the economic and political marginalisation of the coastal region. He decries government corruption and discrimination against coastal communities, and he resists by not losing hope and by working hard to achieve his dream of gaining financial independence. Ramadhan also uses cultural resistance as a response to the rejection and marginalisation that he experienced from other ethnic groups by sticking to his African heritage and tradition.

Dhahabu is a female university graduate from Kwale, who like Ramadhan, is looking for a decent job. Dhahabu argued that violent

extremism in Kwale is mainly a problem of radicalisation by groups such as Al-Shabaab, and she describes how terrorist-related violence by Al-Shabaab has impacted on her own feelings of security in places such as malls. In addition, to Al-Shabaab, Dhahabu who is a Luo and a proud Kenyan, also considers the Mombasa Republican Council (MRC) and the criminal gangs that are terrorising people in her area as violent extremist groups. Dhahabu is passionate about community work and helping young people, and she uses *maskani* safe space talks with youth to help them resist violence, radicalisation and extremism.

Muzammil's experience with violent extremism came at university when one of his friends was radicalised and later on killed by the police. His understanding of violent extremism is focused on the role of religious ideology and recruitment to groups such as Al-Shabaab. For Muzammil, resistance to violent extremism is about resistance to radicalisation. It involves developing a strong knowledge of religion and applying critical thinking that allows people to question extremist messages.

Rambo, as a female village elder, argued that the threat of violent extremism that she confronts in her daily work at the community level involves criminal gangs selling drugs and radical preachers spreading extreme religious messages. On a personal level, Rambo believes that her struggle with violent extremism is about her experience of intimate partner violence at the hands of her ex-husband. Rambo, who stood up to gangs and fought them to the point of being stabbed, still finds this experience of domestic abuse overwhelming. This experience, however, has motivated her to open her arms to helping others. As a village elder, Rambo uses the women's *barazas* (assemblies) and her position to lead efforts to resist violent extremism in her community.

Hearts and Malenga 001 are both artists. Their stories are about their

passion for their arts. Hearts argues that violent extremism is mainly a problem of recruitment into gangs and insecurity caused by these groups. Hearts' story describes a landscape of violence that marks his experience in the everyday and has certainly shaped his own understanding of violent extremism. For Malenga 001, violent extremism is about all kinds of violence, but he particularly highlights the problem of police brutality and gang-related violence as the most problematic in his community.

Resistance, both for Malenga 001 and Hearts, starts with using the arts to highlight social injustices, marginalisation and radicalisation. As artists, they argued that art has the potential to protect youth against violent extremism by redirecting people's energy towards their own passions and talents and keeping them busy and away from negative influences. Both Malenga 001 and Hearts describe the importance of a strong family support network and a strict upbringing in helping to protect them from the danger of violent extremism.

Amy and Habiba's stories show that violent extremism largely takes root in patriarchal culture and in practices such as female genital mutilation, denial of education, forced marriages, forced veiling and gender inequality. Amy and Habiba are both Kenyan Somalis and although they come from different areas, their struggle is to some extent similar. Habiba described her story of resistance to early marriage, fighting to continue for her education and standing up to female genital mutilation (FGM). Habiba used her painting as an opportunity to highlight the problem of FGM in her community. Amy finds cultural control over Somali women's bodies in the form of dress codes very oppressive. She uses Instagram and her own imagination to resist this form of oppression. Amy also made her body map a site of resistance and liberation by drawing her

hair wild and free. As Somalis, both Amy and Habiba describe their experiences of racial profiling, exclusion and the struggle to belong. Habiba argues that, even though she has never been to Somalia, she remains primarily perceived as Somali rather than a Kenyan. Amy discusses how she was frequently called Al-Shabaab, which she found very painful. To resist this violence and oppression, Amy uses humour and calls herself 'Al Sha- babe' to empower herself.

Finally, Waleed's story describes the high level of gang-related violence, drugs, police brutality and ethnic violence that he experienced in his environment. Waleed struggles to resist negative influences and mixing with the wrong groups. His account shows that the path of resistance is not easy.

The body maps that emerged from this study, and the personal stories behind them, highlight the multifaceted and ubiquitous nature of violence that the participants experience in their everyday lives and which they perceive as violent extremism. By bringing together these voices and lived experiences, we hope to interrogate understandings of and responses to violent extremism in Kenya and beyond. By highlighting stories of resistance and the positive role that individuals play in resisting violent extremism, we are also hoping to engender change in the narratives around communities affected by violent extremism.

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# BODY MAPPING



## THE BODY MAPPING METHOD

In November 2019, twenty women and men from the coastal region of Kenya gathered in Mombasa for two weeks of 'Body Map' workshops.

The participants were selected by the research team using community-based organizations and informal networks, on the basis of their gender, ethnicity, age, religion and socio-economic background, and they were invited to create a life-sized painting called a 'body map' to express their views and experiences of violent extremism and their resistance to it. So that the research could view these issues through the lenses of intersectionality and gender, we involved both male and female participants from different ethnic groups. The workshops were conducted on a single-sex basis due to the sensitive nature of the research topic.

The research used an art-based, visual and participatory method called body mapping. Body mapping is a form of embodied storytelling that allows participants to reflect on their experiences and feelings in a number of ways: physically through the body, visually through the arts, verbally through storytelling and relationally through their connections with other participants and the researcher (Dew, Smith, Collings and Savage, 2018). Body mapping is a tool of personal self-discovery and exploration. Evidence from research on violent extremism points out that the journey to radicalisation and violence is very personal (UNDP, 2018), and individuals' capacity for resilience as well as their resistance strategies are also very personal. Hence, reflection on the body, as a window into one's own self, was very useful for the purposes of our study.

Violent extremism is certainly a very sensitive and complex topic.

Participants may encounter difficulties in verbalising their feelings and talking about their own experiences of violence and resistance. Body mapping allows the participants to tell their stories and express their feelings and views using non-verbal visual and creative tools in a safe and supportive environment. By its very nature, body mapping reduces reliance on verbal communication and this makes it particularly useful for exploring sensitive and controversial topics (Dew, Smith, Collings and Savage, 2018). The lack of reliance on verbal communication is especially beneficial for participants from disadvantaged educational and socio-economic backgrounds as it can help to overcome language and literacy barriers.

In this research, we used body mapping not only to understand communities' everyday experiences of violent extremism and resistance to it but also as a tool for social transformation. Art-based methods are transformative because of their potential to build trust and challenge stereotypes and misconceptions; they also helpfully engage participants in the creation of situated knowledge about their lives. The body mapping workshops created a safe space for participants from diverse and often conflicting ethnic identities, where they could explore personal experiences, emotions, foster mutual understanding and work collaboratively on their different body-mapping projects. When art-based methods such as body mapping are used in the study of different forms of violence, they can become tools that enable participants and communities to transgress, challenge and transform violent practices and promote peace (Christensen, 2019). It is our hope that the body maps that resulted from this project will engage communities and policymakers in Kenya and beyond in recognising and challenging violence and injustices related to violent extremism.

## THE BODY MAPPING PROCESS

*'When arts-based research has the capacity to evoke emotions and promote reflection'.*

Throughout the two sets of 5 whole-day workshops, body mapping created a deeper understanding of narratives and lived experiences of violent extremism. Participants explored and learned the means and ways of everyday resistance. They made meaning through artistic creation and encountered its transformative power in a process that engaged their physical, emotional, and existential realms.

The body-mapping process brings together bodily experience and visual artistic expression. In its most basic form, it involves a person painting a life-sized representation of their own body onto a large surface and adding colours, pictures, symbols and words to show the path that they have taken through life. It can open new, safe and inspiring channels of communication that allow participants to take ownership of the process. Whether the journey is emotional, aesthetic, historical, political or cultural, body mapping allows the participants to create new types of testimonies.

The two workshops in Mombasa triggered lengthy discussions and exchanges on questions of violent extremism, experiences of violence and insecurity, personal and collective resistance, aspirations, grievances, identity and belonging. Over five days, each workshop became a place for the participants to nurture their skills, grow their knowledge and question their place in and contribution to Kenya. The diversity of the participants enabled a narrative that wove together a tapestry of Kenya in all its complexities – historical, cultural, ethnic, economic, social and political.

## Creating a Body Map

Each workshop was structured as a set of activities that used the same methods, but there was some fluidity and adaptation involved too. The participants in the workshop helped each other to trace and create their own body maps. We asked the participants a set of questions, and their responses were made each time in the form of a drawing on a sheet of paper. At the end of each individual work session, the content and meanings of the drawing were shared with the other participants in a group discussion. These same drawings were, at a later stage, placed within the life-sized painting that represented the life and experience of each participant.

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Day 1

Using Art to Express Yourself

WRITE YOUR NAME IN AN ARTISTIC WAY,  
AND SHARE

"I will use for this workshop a new name:  
call me Malenga 001. Malenga is a Swahili  
poet. 001 means I'm from Mombasa  
County. The sun here on my drawing is  
the sun in Mombasa and I also believe  
I'm shining. This is the sea in Mombasa.  
There is a microphone here. As an artist,  
a microphone is very important because it  
is the tool he uses each and every day to  
express himself"

Malenga 001, Nov 2019



IF YOU WERE AN ANIMAL, WHAT WOULD  
YOU BE? DRAW AND EXPLAIN

"An eagle is a powerful animal, he flies  
high and he has a good vision just like the  
roles of a leader. I believe a woman can be  
a leader. I can be that leader"

Fatmeru, Nov 2019

## WHERE DO YOU COME FROM?

"I come from my culture. There is a house, it is my culture as a Digo and it is the place of my origin. In olden days there was no electricity, we were living in an analogue life we used traditional lamp and my grandparents used bow and arrow for hunting wild animals"

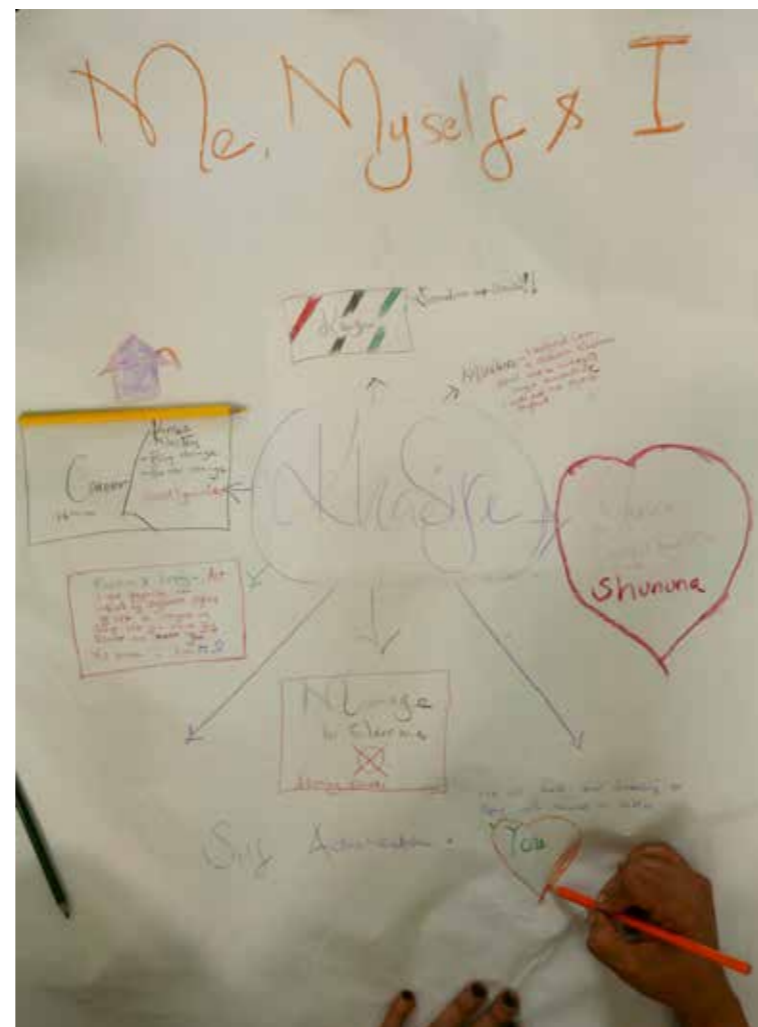
Hindi, Nov 2019



WHO ARE YOU TODAY? USE THE IDENTITY MOLECULE TO REFLECT ON YOUR IDENTITY AND WRITE THE DIFFERENT CATEGORIES THAT MAKES YOU WHO YOU ARE.

"I am made of different categories that makes who I am today: I see myself as a woman, a mother, a Muslim, a Kenyan and someone who has studied and want to build a career. This identity molecule activity has helped me to discover that I am not static, I am made of different parts, some are good, some are challenging for me"

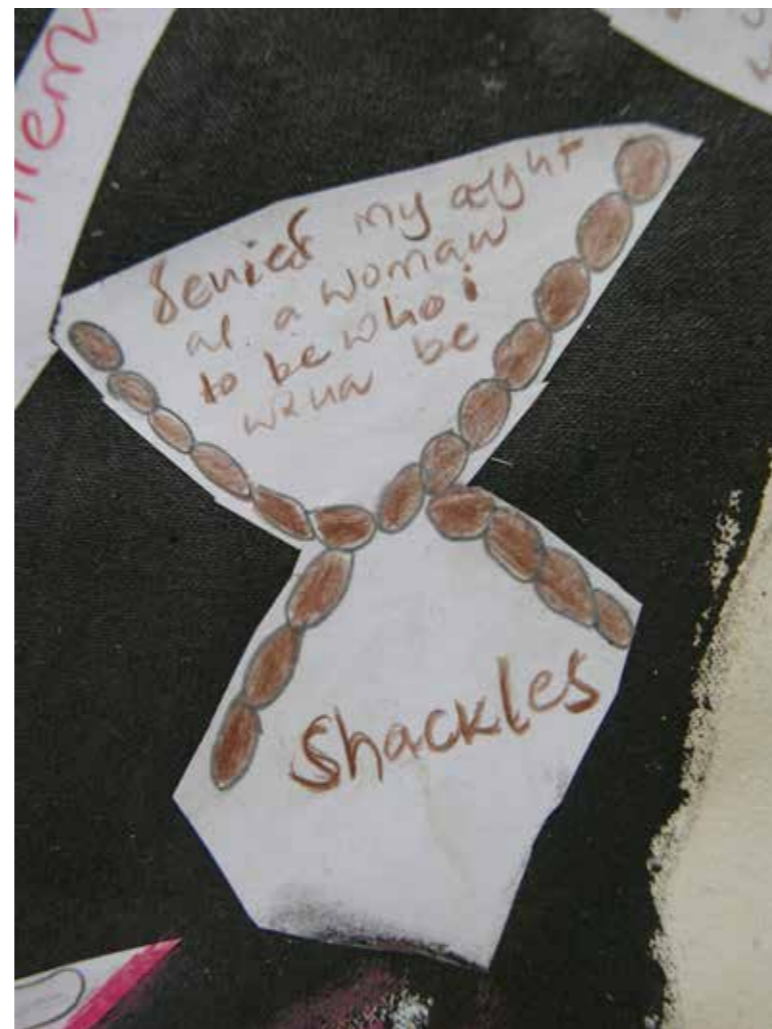
Didje, Nov 2019



WHICH OF THESE CATEGORIES DO YOU STRUGGLE WITH MOST?

"I put the dress code there because Somalians they wear a Dhera that's really transparent [...] but they call trousers and t-shirts and decent dress and some good things clothes for whores so that's why I put it there with the dressing code that looks like a whore. [...] I would definitely love not be forced to wear a hijab. People giving you the bad look when you are walking the neighbourhood [thinking] she is out of the religion, she doesn't cover herself up"

Amy, Nov 2019



"These shackles are here to say that I am denied my right as a woman [to be] who I want to be. At the coast we tend to be ostracized and are thought to be the weaker sex, we cannot do anything [...]. I feel am yet to bloom blossom"

Didje, Nov 2019

FIND A POSITION + DRAW THE OUTLINE  
OF YOUR BODY ON THE CANVAS

“This is the position of an open person, I  
have open my arms because I am eager to  
meet other people and learn about them”

Muzzamil, Nov 2019



FIND A COLOUR(S) TO PAINT THE INSIDE  
OF YOUR BODY

“I see blue as my colour, the colour of  
peace, and as someone who lives along  
the ocean, this is the colour that represents  
my surrounding”

Muzzamil, Nov 2019



Day 2

On Violent Extremism in your life

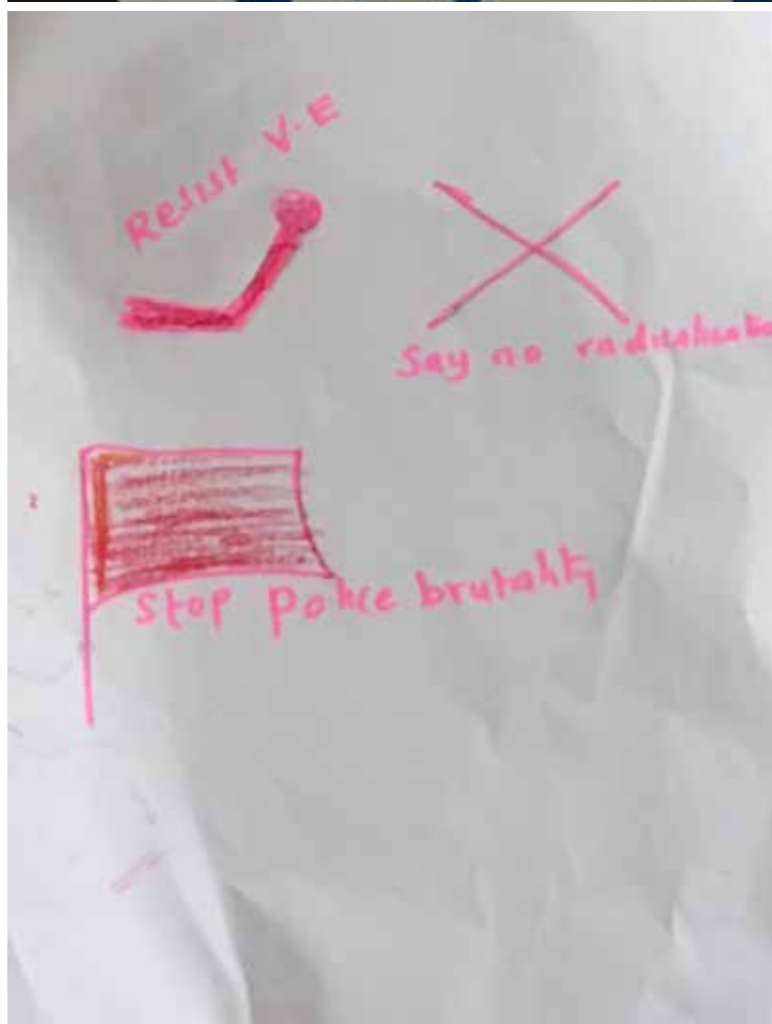
CAN YOU REFLECT AND DEFINE VE IN YOUR OWN WORDS? CAN YOU DRAW IT?

"No one is there to bring changes that shall help all the people. They openly practice tribalism, and discriminate against others when it comes to development. We do not consider mass action to push for our rights because we are a very small community from a very rich land. Kwale is very rich in titanium; it has gold, as well oil and gas deposits. But unfortunately the Government comes and grabs those, just because we are poor as a community

Hassan, Nov 2019

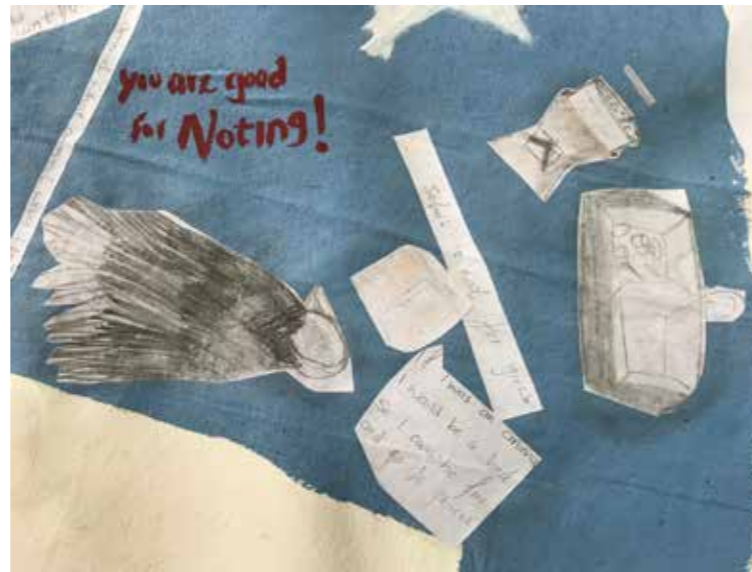


"Violent extremism is something that is a threat to human life. [...] For me what has really affected me are the Police and the Al-Shabaab. Now terrorists some are in Kenya and others live in Somalia but they have sympathizers in Kenya. They know when they are attacking a certain area; it is like they have studied that area for a long time [...] Now Al-Shabaab they don't differentiate people. If you are in a certain area and they come to bomb that area, they won't say this is Christian and this is Muslim, they just don't care that is why I fear them for they are a threat to human life. At the same time, police brutality



happens when there is an attack in certain area the police don't think outside the box they just beat and punch anyone on the streets. They don't identify people visiting. If it is like in Mandera, in the next one hour you will see all people beaten and taken to jail. With Police whenever there's trouble it is like I have to produce my identity, hence walking with my ID card wherever I go. [...] In some parts [of Kenya] it is not easy to get an id card"

Noor, Nov 2019



"Somalis believe schools are not for girls if a lady goes to school she is just a whore she will bring unwanted children to the house so I put it here because it is part of my life too they made me not to go to school. These are the utensils. Somalis believe a woman place is in the kitchen and I believe it is not in the kitchen"

Amy, 2019

"I see VE as a set of beliefs and traditions that are imposed on me against my will. Denial of education, denial of freedom of expression. As a person I don't feel it is right, I don't have any choice to say no to them. That is what I understand by Violent Extremism "

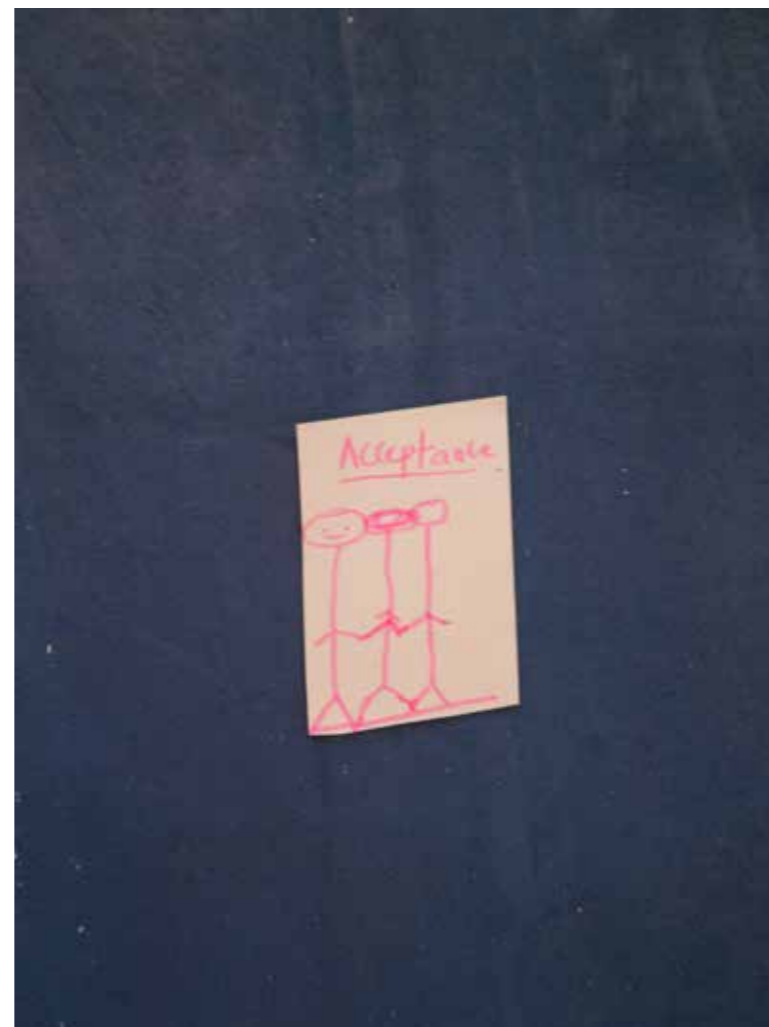
Didje, Nov 2019



WHAT IS YOUR OWN EXPERIENCE OF VE? CAN YOU DRAW IT?

"I told my sister please let's go to my uncle, I am afraid of all these thing, I was 10 years. Let's go to my uncle place because my mum can't say no to these things. Her family did it, her grandma did it, people in her village did it so she cannot say no. He told us no, you can't escape from this thing and it's a must for you to do especially you ladies, you have to go through. From that day I said if there was no one to stop that thing on me, I can stop it for somebody else. It is my fight now to stop FGM"

Nusra, Nov 2019



"You are praying. Someone can look at my leg. It is kind of different because it is black. So, when I'm praying with an Arab, I'm trying putting my leg there and the guy is moving his leg. He is not even concentrating on the prayer; I can see his head looking at my leg. And then I'm like why is this guy doing this? So, people talk about racism in Europe but even here there's racism among Muslims. Then the guy is calling himself a Muslim? Between Islamic identity and clan identity, the latter is stronger, first clan, then culture, and after race. Some people and culture feel superior to you. They think you are just poor, mere people"

Ibra, Nov 2019

"In Bamburi there was an attack recently, 30 people in a lorry. When they got off the truck, they were armed with machetes, pangas and started cutting everyone, stealing everything, it was around 9:30 pm. And come to think of it, they were like someone was using them and had brainwashed their minds. I feel I can't move in the same way"

Hunter, 2019



IN THE HISTORY OF KENYA, CAN YOU SELECT IMPORTANT MOMENTS LINKED TO VIOLENT EXTREMISM THAT AFFECTED YOU MOST? HOW DOES IT RELATE TO YOUR LIFE AS A KENYAN?

"I remember the terror attack at Dusit, Nairobi in 2019; I had a friend inside, she had to pile herself on top of the dead bodies so that she could look dead and I saw pictures of this. It really scared me and it made it even worse when I am out because it makes me more hyper vigilant like I can't go to any of these posh places. The attack really affected me so much because I had never seen a dead body"

Ibra, Nov 2019

"There was this video from cctv cameras, they were killing people and then go to pray. You could see people lying there and the person is praying nearby. So really someone had played with their minds. When you go there they'll tell you the religion says this and this and yet the religion condemns killing someone. I feel bad; it really made me to hate those people. It created a scenario where people are no longer safe. Because they have hit where people gather, or in the public transport systems, I cannot use the ferry so that when it hits, the whole country feels it. At the same time, I have created my resistance, I say no to this violence"

Hunter, Nov 2019



PORTRAIT DRAWING IN GROUP OF TWO

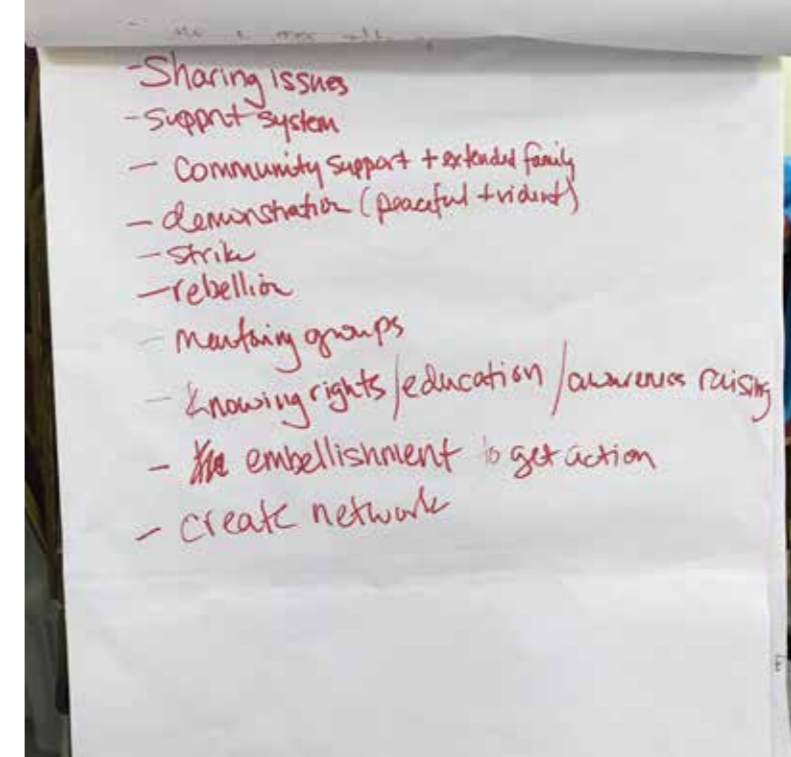
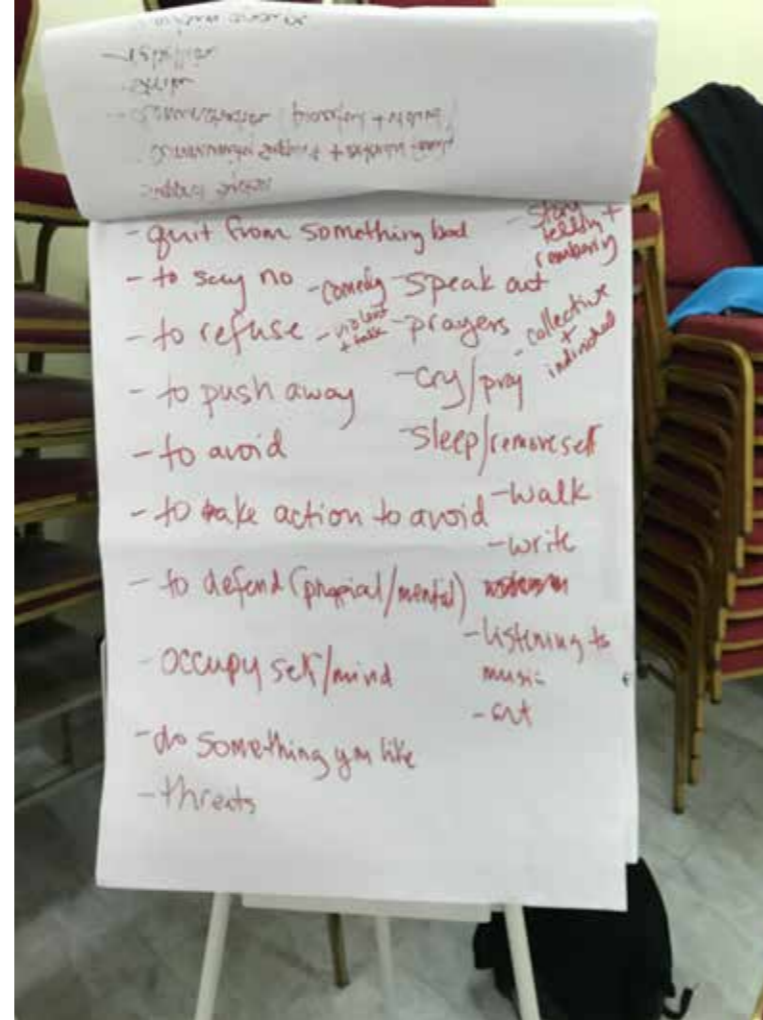


PAINTING YOUR PORTRAIT ON THE CANVAS

Day 3

On Resisting Violent Extremism

**WHAT IS EVERY DAY RESISTANCE:  
INTRODUCTION AND SUBGROUP  
DISCUSSION**



CAN YOU REFLECT ON EVERYDAY RESISTANCE TO VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN YOUR OWN LIFE? WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE? CAN YOU DRAW IT

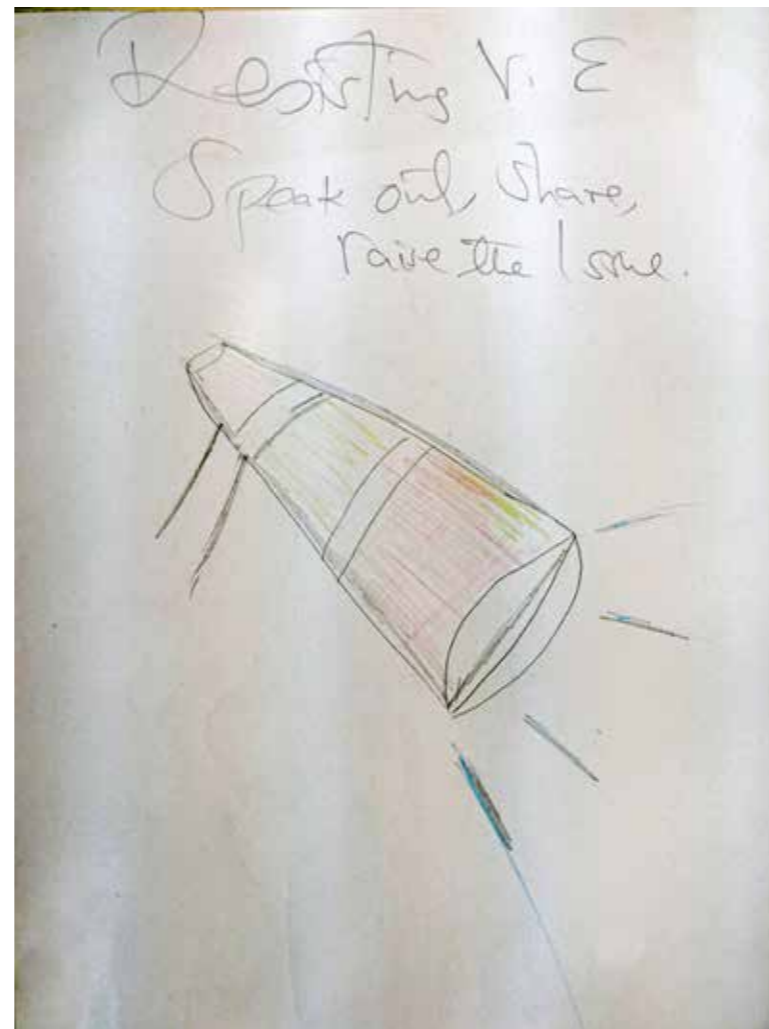
"We spread these message during public participation, in Barazas even when there is a burial we and the village elders we have to resist, we have to keep off the guns because they are bringing danger in our community. We have to say No"

Hindi, Nov 2019



"This picture is showing how I sit with my children. I have witnessed danger for them. I often encourage them to follow my advice and whoever goes astray is on his own. We are surrounded by evil things all around us. You see children spoilt cutting people. There are people who come to cheat the youths, they give them money and promise things to make them fight for the Alshabab. But there are others who are promised money and houses but they refuse. My sons were approached but thanks to God, they did not leave because I was tipped that day. Fortunately I was able to talk to them and they heard me. I don't know if they would have gone was I not informed, I'm grateful that my children are okay"

Hassan, Nov 2019



"You are not alone for the ones who faced violent extremism we can raise our voice and shouldn't stay silent about it. Too many of us go through this and keep quiet. I believe we can be a better society. When it comes to fight I defend someone in case you are wrong. I will tell you so I raise my voice to stop injustice"

Fatmeru, Nov 2019

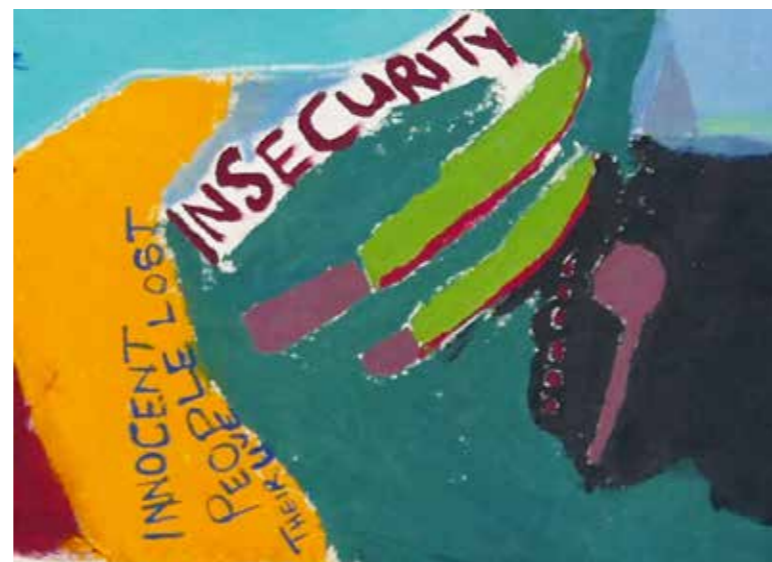
Day 4

The Outside World

HOW DID VIOLENT EXTREMISM AFFECT YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD? WHERE DO YOU FEEL SAFE OR UNSAFE?

“This is my maskani in Kwale. It can be either under a tree or in a small Kibanda-Kiosk, wherever we feel safe. In this place, we discuss issues that concern us. We try to find solutions I feel much safer because when a fellow youth complains about a thing that affects me I realize that I am not the only person suffering the same problem. We are so many and through unity I believe we could get a solution”

Dahabu, Nov 2019

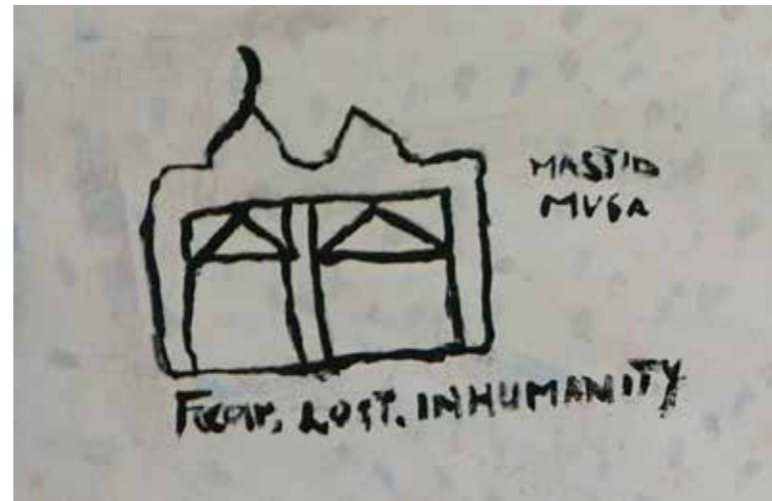


“I can’t even attend night discos or weddings because they come and hide themselves in the darkness. They have that song, so if they sing, all of them take out their knives, pangas and they are ready to do anything to anybody who come across”

Hindi, Nov 2019

"This beach sometimes back people used to go to the beach enjoy the breeze stay there until late at night but these times it's not safe because of these men they hide in the bushes early at 4 they are all around ready to rape you cut you off steal your things"

Dee 001, Nov 2020



"I was in form two in Majengo. At that time, there was a rumor that Sheikh Albothrouk Almaratihum [...] was recruiting people to Al-Shabaab. Two of my best friends who were twins used to go to that Mosque. One day, the Mosque was attacked by the security forces and one of the twins was short dead. He had a Mango in his hand but they shot him thinking that he had a grenade. They shot him and I am still living with that fear"

Hearts, Nov 2019

"I was not able to practice my religion well because I had phobia of even wearing the hijab cause I was at school and being in school we had different cultures, different types of people, when you walk past the corridors they will call you Al-Shabaab. It was unsafe for me because you never know how the youth can behave, you can get raped, you can get mugged. It wasn't safe for me"

Didje, Nov 2020



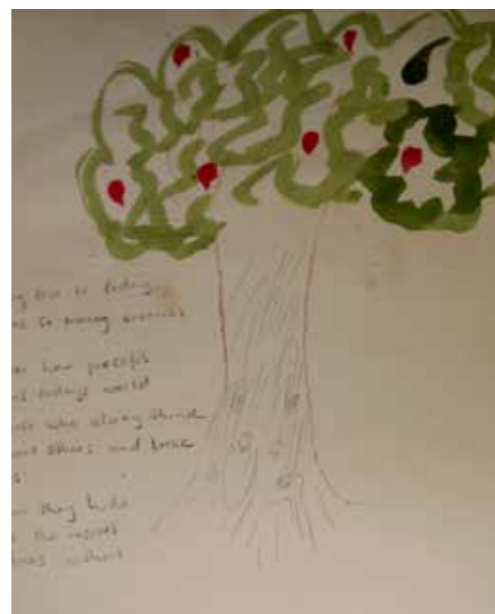
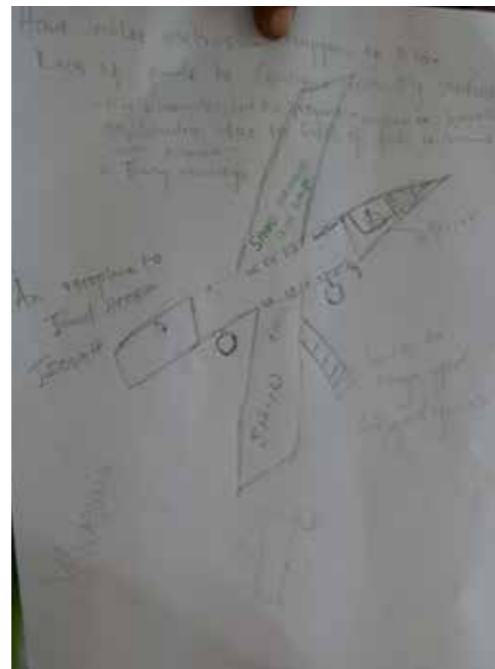
Day 5

Process & Impact

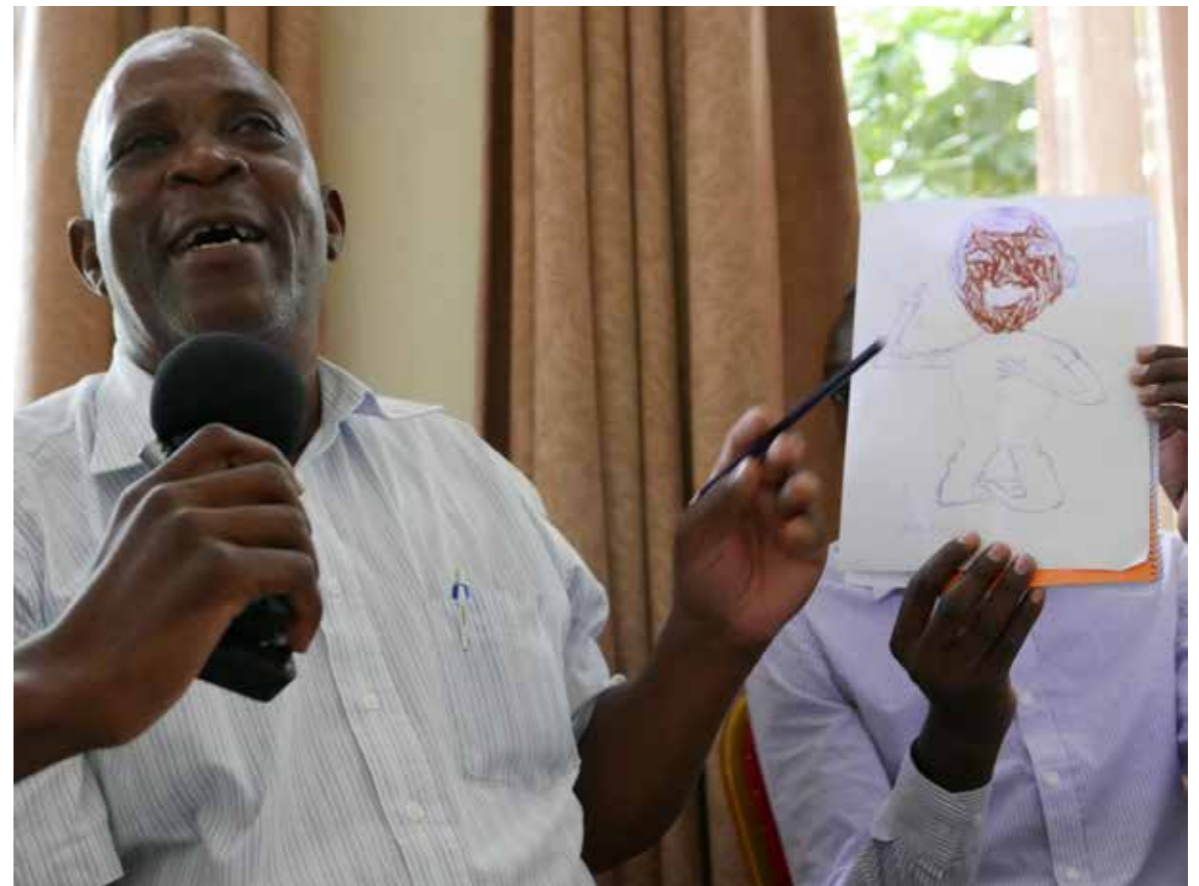
## HOW WAS THE EXPERIENCE FOR YOU?

"Art can tell my story. At first we had to draw and do our writings on the A4 papers. Afterwards, I could narrate my drawing, in fact when it comes to drawing that's why you can remember things to add on it. Even the whole week you can stay here and make additions that you could not even see before. It is an empty space that you fill because every day you are coming with new ideas. I was able to narrate and share my difficult journey in Saudi Arabia and what violence is in my life...I have learnt many things from my friends here, to be open, maybe something hurt you and you have to share, there were people staying with things for many days. It gave me courage. We became stronger. I have learnt a lot here. I have come across different communities, I have learnt different ideas. I have known from the Somalis and the Arab. Never come across them. Never seen such a process. It is like I couldn't see, couldn't imagine and reflect on what happened before. Maybe it also gives me courage to what had happened to me in the past and my difficult experience to Saudi Arabia. I know I have resisted and will still do"

Hindi, Nov 2019



## Body Maps and Stories



The 11 body maps and stories shown in this book are a selection of the inspiring work made by 20 people in November 2019. The attached narratives are told in the words of the artists and little has been done to alter them. Hence, they contain the individual speech patterns and sentence structures of each participant.

The selection in this book is based on cross-cutting themes that arose regularly during the workshops. The artworks raise numerous themes and the ones discussed in this project are by no means a reflection of all the conversations.



## HOPELESS KENYANS

I am Alian. I love my name. It is a unique and rare name. I am 28 years old, and I live in Mombasa. I belong to the Giriama clan. In the Mijikenda community, the Giriama are looked down upon. In Kenya, people from Mombasa are regarded as lazy people who know nothing and just sit down and wait for the mangoes to fall. But for a Giriama person, it is even worse. So, to protect myself from prejudice and stereotypes, when I'm asked what tribe I'm from, I respond that I'm a Kenyan.

I was the first born in my family, and I have two younger sisters. I am educated. I went to primary and secondary school and then college where I did French. I also did business training. I have a shop selling coconuts. I was engaged to be married, but I am now single. Her name was Rashida and she was a good girl. She passed away, last year, in a road accident. She is the one who introduced me to the coconut business. She had a good influence on me and pushed me to be a better person. I loved her so much. It still pains me.

Violent extremism for me starts with the person. It starts with you when you hate your fellow Kenyans and think that you are hated by them. You don't have to be in a gang or a member of Al-Shabaab. Hate will lead to violence. Everything that we encounter in our everyday life is somehow connected to violent extremism. In Kenya, radicalisation is more of a tribal and political phenomenon. The violence after the election in 2007 touched Mombasa very badly, with many people displaced and dispossessed. At that time, people didn't want to see other cultures in Mombasa. They were saying that all people who had come from inland should go back to their places. The Kikuyu, in particular, were mostly hated. People were told, "The Kikuyu own big companies, they have good jobs and good money, so what are you coastal people waiting for? Let us go and fight for what is ours". Because of hatred and prejudice, people fight. Our politicians will be on the television abusing each other, spreading ethnic hatred and telling lies. When the conferences finish, they talk and hug each other, but what they are creating for us, the communities, is something else. I have now also come to realise that our government keeps bringing up stories about Muslims that make people, in this country, hate Muslims. This particularly started after the Kenyan Defence Forces went to Somalia. Somalia is another country.

People here were bitter about why our troops were taken to Somalia while people are experiencing violence and fighting in our country. Why can't we just stay in Kenya and deal with our own problems?

The radicalisation issue is very common in my community. In 2007, I was just in Form Two, and at that point I started to sit at *maskani* (a meeting place where people gather informally), smoking, and I had bad company. When the violence started, I remember people were coming from the roads shouting "HAKI YETU!" (Our rights!). I was wondering, what rights are these people talking about? I heard so many things that made me feel bitter and I felt that I had to do something to make the Kikuyu feel pain about what they were doing to us in Mombasa. So, I joined my friends and engaged in violence against the Kikuyus. This was a turning point for me. After that, I started to ask myself, "Is this what I wanted in life?" I am not a violent person. So, I stopped going to *maskani*, stopped taking drugs and I stopped everything. I came to realise that the politicians are misleading us. They are trying to separate us, incite us to hate each other and use violence. Nowadays I refuse to listen to hate messages. Today, when I go to the mosque, I just pray and leave without waiting for the sheikh to tell us the sermon. I don't want to listen to anyone anymore because, once you listen to these people, they will put negative things in your head and then you will start doing wrong things.

After the 2007 general election, when I was 15 years old in 2008, I met a woman online named Sadia. She was older than me, around 22 years old. I found her on Facebook and I used to chat with her until three o'clock in the morning. She used to treat me well and send me money to go to school. If I asked her for 100 shillings, she would give me 500 shillings. My father was a taxi driver. He used to give me just 100 shillings a day as pocket money, yet other kids came to school with 250 shillings. I was not proud of my family. I wanted big things, but my dad wasn't able to afford them. I felt like Sadia was the person that I needed to have in my life because she used to treat me as a king.

Then one day, she called me to go to Wajir to see her in person for the first time. I thought I was in safe hands, and so I accepted. I never knew what would happen to me once I got there, as she had pampered me so much. During those times, there was a curfew in Garissa and roadblocks

everywhere. I told the police I was going to see my aunt. I had to lie all the way and I used my school ID. When I met with her, she asked me what I wanted in life. I told her that I wanted a good life. I wanted to have a good job and a lot of money. She was trying to convince me to get out of school and told me that she would give me a good job.

At that time, I wanted to help my family and to change my life. We had only a one-bedroom house. I used to feel bad sleeping in the living room along with my sisters, particularly when we had visitors. I was never satisfied with the life that I was living at that time. I wanted to have good things and fast. She confused me with her words and so I agreed. I stayed in Wajir for six days. On the morning Sadia was meant to pick me up to take me to a person who would take me to the job, the caretaker in the hotel where I was staying came to speak to me. He told me that he knew Sadia and that she was married. He showed me pictures of her being arrested with her husband who was said to be an Al-Shabaab member. The caretaker warned me that Sadia was in fact a recruiter for Al-Shabaab. So, I got really worried and asked him to help me. He agreed because he felt that I was young and innocent, as long as I didn't tell Sadia about it. So he paid for my bus fare to Nairobi as I did not have any money. Then I called my dad from Nairobi, lied to him and asked him to pay for my fare back to Mombasa. I wanted to be the big guy with a lot of cash just like in the movies. I never knew it would take me to a bad place.

Since then, my life has changed, particularly after meeting Rashida. She really understood me, encouraged me and gave me hope. She played a big role in my life and showed me the right path. My parents were not the kind who would sit me down and talk to me about good things in life. They never had that time, but she did.

In 2013, an NGO called Safe Pwani organised auditions for a movie called *Watatu*. I was a good actor and so I got a part in *Watatu*. *Watatu* showed the impact of radicalisation on society and how communities can intervene to counter radicalisation. After the movie was made, we turned *Watatu* into a theatre education group. We started going to do outreach work and capacity-building at community level. I would go to NGOs and ask for a little cash, use it to hire a hall, invite people and then showcase the *Watatu* film. We do around five performances a month, depending on the

payments we receive. First, we show the movie, and then we engage with the participants in discussions about what could have been done differently to stop radicalisation. We act out the different scenarios in front of the community. The communities are the ones giving us the answers. *Watatu* has changed me as a person and now I am trying to use *Watatu* to change the community for the better. That is why, whenever I go out to communities, I want to give them hope and influence them to be good to each other and to live good lives. *Watatu* has been very good to me and helped me to express my inner feelings about what ought to be done. After *Watatu*, I worked on several other TV programs.

I also try to engage with youth at risk, talking to them individually to understand their stories and heal their traumas. I take them to the beach to have a one-to-one talk. Some people have not been to the beach for so long. Once you take someone to the beach, they start opening up to talk. From that, you get to know what their problem is and how you can help them. Then, I engage them in different activities so that they don't feel isolated. I will do this for six months, four times a week. I used to do that every day, but now I only do it once I get a call from an organisation asking me to do it. I also act as a mentor for the community. I went to Watamu the other day to participate in a youth summit about violent extremism. It was organised by one of the international NGOs. I was given an opportunity to talk to youths about their journey through life. I was chosen to give hope to my fellow youths.

I am from a community-based organisation called Manyunu. We work together. We get funds from NGOs and we do meetings with youths in churches, mosques, video shops, and even at *maskani*. We meet with them, we talk and exchange ideas and, at some point, they feel engaged. *Maskani* youth always feel that they are not engaged, so, once we go there, they feel happy. We empower them. They do not want to be paid. They are just glad that we have remembered them. Everybody knows I am a mentor. I have helped reform and guide many youths in my community and I feel very fulfilled in this role.

My former *maskani* friends were a bad influence. They still try to influence me to go to the old ways, to smoke and chew *miraa* (khat). They don't want to see you changing. Instead, they wish to see you stay like them. I like change. My way of resistance is to be active, keep busy, work hard and keep myself to myself. I do things my own way and I always plan

ahead. I no longer chew *miraa* and I don't go to *maskani*, unless there's someone I want to talk to for mentoring purposes. Otherwise, I keep away. In my house, I love watching movies and listening to music when I am free. Whenever I feel stressed, I go to the beach. I just sit there and enjoy myself. I also like praying. If I feel confused or stressed, even late at night or very early in the morning, I get up and go to the mosque.

Radicalisation is a problem in my community. The community does not resist violence – they just watch and nobody does anything about it. Youth unemployment is a big challenge here. I live a community full of hatred, jealousy, marginalisation, and theft, where there are radicalised youths, a high rate of unemployment, bad governance and poor infrastructure. The leaders in our country do not engage youths in building the nation. Because of this, I often feel that I do not belong. I don't feel engaged. I vote and pay taxes, but I haven't received anything.

In my community, there is police brutality, harassment, corruption and tribalism. In school, I had a good Somali friend. One day we were going to the mosque when two guys kidnapped him and he was never seen again. After that, I hated policemen. I was terrified that they might even shoot me. There was another incident where the police came to my *maskani* and started beating us for two hours and asking for somebody that we didn't know. We had to lie and say that we knew him just so that they would stop beating us. We were then taken to police cells. After we were released, one of my friends became so embittered that he decided to join a gang as revenge. Unfortunately, he was killed shortly afterwards.

We spend so much effort trying to talk to the youths to help them reform and be good people, but police officers will go to a *maskani* and demand that they pay, let's say 10,000 shillings a week, so that they are not harassed whenever there's a police operation. So, the *maskani* youths will have to up the beatings and robberies to get the 10,000 shillings. So, imagine! We are discouraging violence and crime and the police officers are the ones that are encouraging it through harassment and extortion. No wonder people say radicalisation will never end in this country.



## My Body Map

Everyone has a story: you find first what is inside you, what you do or do not do, and later you reflect on the outside world. Once you know these two things, you are able to engage, face people and conquer the outside world. I have never seen people do such things. This workshop has been unique.

The title of my painting is "Hopeless Kenyans" and it talks most about how the government is treating the community. My message is that the youths in this country have never been engaged in anything and that is why they are very bitter. Politicians are eating well, driving nice cars and shopping in big malls. But we, as common citizens, do not have the authority or ability to do that. Except for a birth certificate and an ID card, the Kenyan government never gives you anything. We are paying taxes for nothing. I just live to get cash today, eat and wait for tomorrow. I do not know what the next day will be like. The government and the politicians are the ones making this community bitter and driving it into violent extremism. They only come to the community when they want our votes. The Kenyan political system should be changed. There should be citizen participation. People should know their rights and should know how they can exercise them.

The colours I chose for my painting are red, black, green and white as a symbol of Kenya, the same colours as the Kenyan flag. I chose blue to symbolise people's feelings of bitterness and used black to show that people lack choices and opportunities.

I chose to paint the hands in this praying position. This is like I am asking for help from God. I drew the feet together, as if fixed or tied. This is to show feelings of helplessness. You feel that you do not have any rights; you cannot do or say anything, and you are blocked. There is no freedom and no escape. You cannot go anywhere. You are just praying to God. That is how Kenya is now. There is a feeling of hopelessness and disappointment. This is about joblessness.

This is a window but it is also like a cage. This represents the feeling at the community level with no jobs and nowhere to go. No one wants to listen to them, so they feel like they are caged, kept in a place where

they can't get out. These arrows are representing the struggles people go through in Kenya – like trying to get jobs, live a good life – but there's no way you can live a good life. These are *madafu* or coconuts. They represent hope. I am trying to say that, "wherever there's struggle, there is hope". So, the hope is here to fight corruption, tribalism and the like.

I have written "no place for hate" and I drew a woman inside my heart. The woman there is my mum. My mum is a good loving person. She does not speak that much and keeps to herself. My dad made her that way. He is the kind of person who, when mum wants to go out, she has to ask for permission. If he says no, it is a nay. She was treated like a slave. She has no voice. That strong mother-son bond was not there. I always think about her and I want her to know that I am there for her. That is why I drew her.

I also wrote "love conquers hate". This is about my wife-to-be Rashida. She really understood me, encouraged me, and gave me hope. She played a big role in my life. She was so close to me. She took a role my mum would have had. A mother is someone who should talk to her children to show them the right path. Rashida talked to me as a mother and a friend. So, love conquers hate. We need to love each other so that we can get to help each other and have a good life, but hatred will never help. Hate is built in so many things. We have to remove hate from ourselves to be able to receive and feel love.

## STAND STRONG

You can call me Habiba. I am 20 years old and single. I am a student in Mombasa, but my family is from the Tana River County and that is where I belong.

Though I do not even know what Somalia is like, sometimes I do feel that we Somalis are not considered as part of Kenya. I hear about Somalia. We speak the language. The grandpas and grandmothers, and our ancestors, used to live there, but we are born and raised in Kenya. I belong to Kenya.

I want to be a strong girl who gets the chance to help others by bringing change in my community. Back home in Tana River, young Somali people are still struggling. Most people in my community only focus on boys. They believe girls going to school will reach nowhere. They believe we will become prostitutes, and we can bring unwanted pregnancy, and so people let us down. They see denial of education for girls as normal, but it is illegal. To me, in Tana River violent extremism is in so many things. I think about the way girls and women are treated when it comes to education, early marriages and female genital mutilation, and, in all of this, I was involved personally and it affected me very much. Most of the people still live in a conservative way of living and thinking.

I see myself as a fighter. For instance, my father was very harsh, but, with time, he understood that I am part of a change. Back in primary school, he was not even ready to pay 30 bob (Kenyan shillings) for my school exam. He used to say "a girl is nothing – there is no benefit in educating you".

I still have a vivid memory: back in Form Two, I got this prize. I was number one. So proud. I went back home full of happiness, and he took a look at it and said: "It is better you bring me a piece of samosa!" He could not see any meaning to it. I thank God because some of my relatives encouraged me that day. My father, with time, started to appreciate my success at school and today he is supportive. I have always promised to him that I would get a job and make him proud. When I think of it, it was my way of resisting that pressure of not being educated as a girl.

Another issue is early marriage. In 2017, there was a young man who just got a job in the Kenya Defence Forces, so he was feeling so strong and proud. He thought he could do everything. He came with his family to my village to ask my father to marry me. I was so confused. I was just finished Form Four. I had not even started my studies. I started to cry. Even my mother was not informed about this proposal. After a short while, I took the decision not to accept but to resist this forced marriage. I did not fear my dad's reactions anymore. I had to take action and tell him the truth: my priority was to get educated. My father has three wives. His third wife has a girl my age who has never gone to school, and his first wife has another two girls who could not continue their studies, so imagine how difficult the situation was for me. So, at the end, the unimaginable happened, my father told my suitor's family: "Now, it is your choice, you can have the non-educated one but not Habiba". But they kept begging him. I was afraid they might change dad's decision, but I stood strong and told my dad: "I will only marry a man of my choice and it is not him". I thank God because my dad listened to my words and finally they decided to marry my sister.

My father was really surprised by how strong I was. Sometimes the truth helps. Since then, he often tells me: "You are a man, not just a woman. You can do whatever a man does, so you will get your education and a job".



## My Body Map

I love this work. I am very proud. I had an amazing time and it helped me so much to reflect on myself.

You see, I am dressed in the Somali way. The beautiful white with 4 coloured stripes, that is me.

My Somaliness – I am proud of it. This is normally the dress of a woman during the wedding celebration. It shows the time when they wanted to marry me. I was very young but I did resist. On my left hand, I have this ring. One day, I will marry the man of my choice.

I painted my face with that brown colour showing a kind of ‘ugliness’ in terms of appearance because I was not ok. I was angry by that time.

My hands are crossed behind my head. They fight. They convey a message: “I am strong and I can do it”. I have opened my hair as well, without a scarf: I am a woman and my hair brings out my openness: I am opposing, resisting my culture – the girl’s lack of education, the early marriage, the FGM. I resist and I can go further, do more. With my legs I can still walk. I go beyond what they expect from me.

I have drawn the Somali flag and I have written: “No to FGM!”

I do resist FGM. I hate the practice in my community. Fortunately, the government is helping the girls and some communities have even stopped FGM in Kenya, but, for us Somalis, it is still there. It is an act of violent extremism. I wish I could have the power to stop these people.

It is happening inside me, I can feel deep inside. My people who are responsible. They are not facing up to that crime but I have to live with it. I was in Class Three when they did FGM to me. I thought I was dying, over-bleeding. I did not have any choice, no opportunity to refuse. They forced me, and you are still a child. The big mums will catch you and force you. This is why I wrote “NO TO FGM” in red colour because it is dangerous.

It took me three weeks to heal. We were several girls at that time. I faced more pain during the first week but slowly I recovered until I was allowed to come out from the *manyatta* (home). These are houses built by the pastoral community from mud, sticks, and *makuti* (palm leaves)

as temporary settlements because they like to move around. I was just sitting playing with pebbles with my sister. After a moment I saw blood coming out of me. I was confused. I bled until I lost consciousness. When my mum came that evening, they could not send me to the hospital because FGM in Kenya is illegal. It took six long days for me to recover. Even after healing, you feel the sound of the razor blade cutting you. Just remembering it is like they are doing this to me again now. I was in a state of dying, but Allah saved me. In Tana River, they use razor blades, but in some parts of Garissa – I saw it – they are using knives. They even take a spoon into the fire, then they burn it.

What hurts me is that the FGM practitioners are women. They even celebrate the one who is strong, who never cries in that state, and afterwards they do that sound, ululating. I can still hear it. If I have a daughter one day, I will not allow them to touch her.

I drew two trees: one is dry and has no leaves. The other has leaves and fruits. It resembles my life, from all the difficulties that I have been through to a better and beautiful life. There is the mosque, the moon and the star, and what we call the *mimbar* (pulpit), where the leader or the sheikh usually stands and leads the prayers. I am always that person who, in times of difficulties or in times of happiness, has to pray. It is safe for me. When things go wrong, I always go back to read the Quran and that is how I feel very comfortable.

I love green; it shows that education is life. I did not draw a boy but I drew myself as a girl because it is generally girls who are denied education.

I choose yellow for hope because it is bright and unique. That hope brings me that strength of facing the challenges, because I believe in changes.

When I was asked on the first day of the workshop which animal I resembled, the giraffe came to my mind. It is tall like me. It stands in the grass, this fertile ground, standing for a better life.

The place where I am from in Tana River is full of crocodiles. It is a danger for everybody, not only the Somalis but also the *Ormas* and especially the *Pokomos* because they live near the river. Unfortunately, in my region, there is a lot of tribalism and harassment at times. Different communities are fighting along the Tana River for the land, the water,

the grazing. It is something that makes me feel sad at times.

My artwork is called "Stand Strong", I drew my body map to represent me, my life, my background and what I really wish to be, able to walk in different places where I can do a lot, have that courage that, as a girl or as a woman, I can do what is good. I was so happy to interact with different people, different cultures and share ideas. I felt so special.

## MY EXPECTATIONS

I am 26 years old, from Kwale County. My nickname is *Muzammil*, which means 'wrapped up in his garment' or 'fully covered'. My family is from the Mijikenda clan, which is a Digo sub-tribe. I have two brothers and three sisters. I am the first person in our extended family to go to university through government sponsorship. Since graduating, I have been working for a construction company. I work far away from home and live alone. Most mates of my age still live with their families and that sometimes makes me feel different. In five years, I am hoping that I will find employment, either in a government institution or having my own company.

I was brought up at the mosque and I have gone through both religious and secular education. I have been teaching at the madrasa and I normally lead prayers when I am back at home at the weekends.

Personally, I feel that violent extremism is not good and radicalisation is something real. To get rid of these things is very difficult. I am sure there are some people who get involved in violent extremism accidentally and others who are radicalised through propaganda. I feel that there are many temptations and propaganda. I think it is only through God's intervention that I am lucky, but I feel like anyone could be radicalised depending on the approach which is being used. Violent extremism does not just start abruptly. One has to be radicalised until he/she is saturated to the point of eruption.

It normally starts with the type of education that people get and the interactions they have. There was a bigger madrasa which I went to briefly where there were people with that extremist mentality; for example, saying that if a Muslim does not pray then if he dies you should not pray for him, as he is just not a Muslim. Some of them were even not attending the burial of their own parents. There was a scholar I remember who was talking about the jihad in Somalia instead of telling us that we should not go. So, there I found that things were different to what I thought and I moved to a different madrasa.

I realise that people make mistakes, but, actually, it is largely due to lack of knowledge. I know of a person who was about to go to Somalia. The sheikh in my madrasa went and talked to him explaining that what

is happening there is not jihad and that they are killing even fellow Muslims. What I learned from that sheikh has changed a lot in my line of thinking. These are some of the things which made me convinced to teach at the madrasa. Because the knowledge which I got and the interpretation I came to find made me realise that even sheikhs are opposed to violent extremism. When someone wants to confuse me, I remember the words of that sheikh. You should not take things on their face value or the way they appear. You ought to think of it in a critical way.

The defining moment in relation to violent extremism for me was during the Sheikh Aboud Rogo situation and the killings. During those times, I was in Mombasa at the university. One of the students who was shot during the raid at Masjid Musa was someone that I personally knew. It was very sad. Before that, he was very much interested in these issues. You would find him with a laptop watching those extremist videos online. I remember him telling me one day, "Brother, this is the way now. You should just stand for *shahada*" (the testimony). When talking about different sheikhs, I remember him analysing the different sheikhs, calling others hypocrites because of this or that. So, I feel like violent extremism is killing many dreams and damaging intellectual minds. The problem is that once an intelligent person has been radicalised, trying to convince them to see things in a different light is very difficult.

Also, what pains me most is the approach and abduction by the Kenyan government of the so-called terror suspects. I feel like it is not fair and it is not right. There was a person my age who I know and who disappeared. He was a Moi University student doing electrical engineering and I think got a First Class degree. His mother was a friend of my mother. How his dreams came to be shattered! His mother is devastated, left not knowing whether her son is alive or dead. Sometimes, she would spend whole days and nights crying and not sleeping. Until now, I don't know whether he was really a member or not. This has changed my thinking and made me scared of taking leadership positions, particularly religious ones, for fear that I could be taken in mistakenly by the government and leave my people behind suffering. I have been brought up in an Islamic way and, naturally, I would like to take up and play a role in religious activities. But you don't feel safe because, in case anything happens, you could just be victimised. It could be that somebody has framed you. It would be very difficult. Now, when you weigh up all

those options, you feel like the consequences are grave.

When I was a student, I once took an official position at the Muslim Student Association. However, soon after joining, I realised that, even among Muslims, there were many divisions particularly based on tribes and ethnicity: the Swahili part, the blacks and the Somalis .... Religion was bringing people together but what was separating us was culture. I felt that I could not be there, so I just left. For us, the *Mijikendas*, there is a feeling that the Swahili people always want to appear superior. Even when it comes to organising events, they would just involve you on minor issues. They make the policies and take the decisions and you implement. That is why most of the other tribes were refusing to be slaves of the Swahilis. The Swahilis take them for granted. So, the different Muslim groups end up not supporting each other.

My resistance to violent extremism started first with education. The madrasa which I went to, and the perceptions that the people had there, helped me because the sheikhs were open-minded and they taught us the real thing about violent extremism, telling us that even in the Qur'an we are told that, after fearing Allah, the next people to fear and respect are our parents. From my analysis, most of those who have been radicalised do not have a good relationship with their parents. So, for me, I decided that, in anything that I do, I should make sure that I maintain a good relationship with my parents.

The second way of resistance is through seeking knowledge, listening to every sheikh that is speaking and then analysing and reflecting. The time that I was most exposed was at university because there, I had friends who were watching those extremist videos and listening to speeches from other sheikhs, and the late Sheikh Rogo. The way he was talking was very persuasive. But my resistance was that I would listen to him and then I would listen to other scholars and compare. I would also ask many questions. I remember, one of the sheikhs once said to me, "I think you need to be given a trophy for asking a lot of questions". There are those people who would just listen and go like that, but I'm not that type of a person. I like questioning things and reflecting. I would listen and then ask "What do you say about this issue of jihad?" When I heard about the other sheikh talking about quoting that Aya (verse from the Quran) I posed him that question. Then, from there, the

truth is revealed to me. In my interaction with my friends, I just tell them about it and spread the knowledge which I got.



MY EXPECTATION

## My Body Map

The painting process was very nice; I appreciated the mixing of the colours and I felt very relaxed. Blue is my favourite colour. I have a history with blue which started when I went away to high school at 13. I was very young, and I was not good at washing my own clothes. My aunt used to tease me and say, "When you go to high school, I'll be coming there to wash for you". I was praying we would not have white shirts, but they were luckily blue, and so I love that colour.

I love this kind of posture very much: it is like a calling. The green reminds me of our home during those weekends we would go herding. My father keeps cattle and it is a must to go and do the herding. It also symbolises a calm environment, so, when I am tired, I relax under a tree. It is a time for me and for reflection. I feel relaxed.

Most of the time here I have been quiet, reflecting, thinking about myself, the colours I would like most. When it came to colouring myself, I took time to think and decided to do black. The colour black here is the common colour for me. I didn't know how to wash my clothes, but now I am living alone, I just wear black. Maybe when I am married, I will change the lifestyle. This yellow is just to make it brighter. Pink on the dress, since pink is attractive and loved by most women.

I hate betrayal most. I have even placed it down by my feet. I hate people who are not straightforward, who pretend that they are with you, but they are not. The word 'unity' means people being together. The thing, which will make me belong is unity. We need unity, cohesion – like a family, you stand together during the good and the bad moments. If something is wrong, people ought to just sit and talk about it. That is the way my father taught me. When we are united, many things are going to happen, both within the family and at the village. When I was in school three robbers broke into our house. It was quite a very bad experience and my father was injured. It was tough, but what I liked was the way in which the villagers came to assist us. I like the unity and cohesion in our village. That is why I said I belong to my village, because these values are there.

The mango tree represents fruits and peace. During the mango season, they fall down. Children from neighbouring village can come to pick

them, eat or do whatever. But, the rule is that you should not harvest those mangos that are still on the tree. It is as if you would be casting away all the blessings. So, I like the peace that is there and the discipline.

These two bodies represent my character because I feel like I am a person who likes a lot of teamwork. Even my sisters tease me, saying I cannot do anything alone. I like to share things and I am a friendly person. That is why I have drawn it near my heart. That is also an expectation of the person who I am hoping to marry in the future. Here is a pumpkin tree. When growing, a pumpkin jumps, coils, but, with another tree nearby, it climbs it. Here are the fruits which it is bearing. I think that I am like a pumpkin tree. That is why people say I like teamwork. If you are close to me, you will be involved.

The two helicopters over my head are about resistance and rescue from violent extremism. It is like there is a river sweeping very fast, and people – even the best swimmers – can drown. I believe everybody should watch over the other person. That is why I said, being alone, it is not easy. Other people must always intervene in our life for our success and safety. If you see someone getting into violent extremism from an early stage, try to save him.

The trap is violent extremism. Many people start after being convinced that, when they go to jihad and die, lots of good things will happen to them: they will be given 70 virgins, have houses in paradise, or that they will be paid. These are the things that people are promised. If you are here, looking at this, you see many good things. Everybody wants good things and that is why it is used as a trap. Now here, in this part, these are the people who are holding you from falling into the trap, such as your parents or other people who tell you not to go as it is just a lie. They are down here because they are seeing things from a different angle. They do not see what you are seeing. There are the gaps and you could stumble, trip and fall.

To be a pilot was my childhood dream, but now I have chosen a different career path. The helicopter symbolises travelling, and maybe one day I could have an opportunity of going to the United States. Those are the great expectations. That is the positivity in me. I could go for further study to become a professor.

## I SAVED HIM

My name is Adila. I am 47 years old. I am divorced, and I have two children and a granddaughter. I am proud to be called a grandmother. When somebody calls me a grandmother, I feel so happy. I earn my living selling juice, pickles and clothes.

My parents are of Arab and Agha Khan ethnic origin. The Agha Khans in Mombasa are called Khojas. They are a different kind of Muslim. They go to the mosque without scarves and with shoes. They can wear trousers and pray dressed even in mini-skirts.

I live in a marketplace in Mombasa. There are many Muslims here and a sense of unity. Elsewhere in Kenya, light-skinned people are called Al-Shabaab, particularly if they wear the abaya, jilbāb or hijab.

In my area, we used to have an Al-Shabaab problem. Now we have a gang violence problem. I live in a marketplace where there are a lot of people with so many children. The more people there are in an area, the more you can influence them. If one gets affected by extremism or is influenced, so many other people will be brainwashed. This happened to me.

My son used to frequent one of the mosques. Since he was five years old, he used to love going to the mosque to pray and wanted to be a staunch Muslim. He was a very good boy. When he was 14 years old, he met with people at the mosque who came from other foreign countries under the pretence of spreading *daawah* (proselytising Islam). They brainwashed my son and he did not want to continue with his studies anymore. They wanted to take my son away with them for *daawah* and offered him a huge amount of money to travel to Somalia. I was suffering at the time, following my divorce, and I was struggling financially. My ex-husband was not helping. My son came and told me, "Mum, if I go there I will bring you a huge amount of money. Maa, please let me go". I said I didn't want money. I want you. He tried to convince me but I said "NO!", because I had suspected that the people influencing him were Al-Shabaab. So I struggled with him and I resisted. My neighbours had already warned me about people who were taking young boys to Somalia. Three of my friends had had their children taken just like that. They left and they never came back. I went and told my brother-

in-law about this to seek his help. But when he went to the mosque to confront them, they had already escaped. This was 11 years ago. My son is now 25 years old, but I still feel worried because he doesn't have a job, so he is very vulnerable and can be tempted if they come back and offer him money.

Although my son didn't go to Somalia, he later on fell into bad company and was sitting in *maskani* (a meeting place where people gather informally). At first, he was spending a lot of time out, so, one day I decided to follow him to find out what he was up to. It was then that I realised that he had been hanging out in *maskani* using bhang and khat. He didn't want to continue with his studies and didn't want to go to school anymore. I struggled with him and then sought assistance from my brother-in-law. That time we put him in a boarding school. But when he failed Form Four, he went back to the *maskani*. They were bigheads there and they used to take him to sell drugs. I really felt bad. I went and complained to the police, but the police didn't do anything. I decided to take matters into my own hands.

I went to the *maskani* to confront this group. I quarrelled with them. I fought with the youths for the sake of my child. They wanted to beat me, but Allah gave me strength and I beat them. Two men were holding me down like this and I used my legs to fight them. I made a lot of noise and I screamed and I took my son away from them. So this bad group of boys used to say he was a "mama's boy". "His mother doesn't leave him anywhere". So, I said to my son, "Let them call you whatever they want. I will never leave you, I will guide you so that you won't be in these bad groups". When they used to come, I would chase them away. I really tried. Then I made my son travel to Qatar for work to separate him from the evil company. I forced him to travel to seek opportunities in Qatar. I forced him to travel and he stayed away for two years. But I felt bad because he was not there with me. After he finished the contract, he came back. When he came back, I was happy. He has become a good child. He got married to a good Somali girl and I now have a grandchild. After he came back, he acted like a source of motivation to the other boys. Alhamdulillah.

In my everyday life, I continue to struggle with these violent groups sitting in *maskani*. Youths –especially nine- to eleven-year-olds – usually join these groups. They are used by adults to sell drugs and engage

in violence and will become addicts themselves and will not have any future. So when I see a *maskani*, I try to break it up. I will often take grease or oil and smear them on those permanent benches where the youths sit so that they can't sit there anymore. Even if I see two boys, I ask them "What are you doing here?" I talk to them and I make a lot of noise to resist the *maskani* culture.

Today, I feel that the main threat of violent extremism currently comes from gangs and youth sitting in *maskani* using drugs and alcohol. For me, I think that the danger from *maskani* is very similar to the danger from groups such as Al-Shabaab. In my neighbourhood, there were these guys who used to sit around early, at around 4 in the morning. I normally sell juice in the morning. When I was taking juice to the market, those guys used to attack me and other people. They took money, phones and everything. They attacked us with *pangas* (machetes) and used to cut people. If you didn't have money, a mobile or anything, they felt angry and they cut you. If you did have those things, they'd take them and go. So, I went to talk to my neighbours and we decided to report the issue to the police. Instead of doing something, the police were asking about my papers, my citizenship, and everything. I told them I was Kenyan, born in Kisumu and raised in Garissa. The police did nothing. The police don't take their duties seriously. They will just patrol and go. It's not like they would take matters into their hands.

I don't feel that the coast is Kenya – "*Pwani Si Kenya*" – because the police don't help us. Instead, especially when we are faced with anything, they harass us. So I, together with my neighbours, came up with the idea of putting street lights in my area to improve security and prevent crime. I feel that as a community we are better at resolving the problem. Now we have got youth volunteers who monitor our area at night. They call themselves *Sungusungu*, like community policing. We selected them, and they have helped a lot.



## My Body Map

The title of my painting is "I saved him". It is about helping others. It is also about saving an old man in my community. He was a friend of my father, too ill to look after himself. He needed someone to look after him, but he did not want to be washed by someone who was not related to him. I suggested that he married me so that I could look after him and he agreed.

The message I have for others is about thoughtfulness. This is about helping people, helping my son and self-help. It is also about unity within the community and between neighbours.

I chose this position for the body because this is how I sleep. When I lie down, many important thoughts come through my head, like about how to help these children: my own children and the community's children, my neighbours' children.

I used green because it symbolises peace. The cream colour in the *umoja* side symbolises unity. I used the blue colour in my painting to symbolise the earth and the ocean, the sky and water. The sky symbolises the sisterly love in this world. The yellow colour symbolises fire. I used the orange colour because it is captivating. I want people to be captivated by my words so that they know.

I drew myself wearing the abaya. The beautiful girl wearing black symbolises me. I love this, wearing hijab and abaya. This is my culture. I am a Muslim and an Arab. On the Hindi side of my family, they wear *sarwal* (trousers) but I love *buibui* (hijab and abaya). I love my religion. Prayers help me through the difficulties in my everyday life. Prayer helps me resist and to remain strong. It guides me when I am struggling to make a decision.

Inside the body, I drew an animal that represents me. I chose a camel. The camel is an important thing to me. The milk is medicinal – it treats a lot of diseases. The camel is known for its resilience, endurance and perseverance. It can take you to different places. It doesn't get tired, plus it doesn't disturb you every time it wants water or is thirsty.

I drew a picture of a *Mskiti* (mosque) and a moon in the painting. This is where my son was almost lost. He was almost recruited. I also drew *daawah* people, the ones who wanted to brainwash my son. This experience still hurts me deeply. It is within me. It's in me, in my heart,

and that's why I drew these people inside the body. The words – *wazimu* and *huzuni* – mean death, thoughts, sickness, craziness and sadness. This how I would feel had my son been recruited by Al-Shabaab. The face is sulking in the picture and the hands are crossed that way because I am still thinking about whether the *daawah* men might come back and take my son away. Like lots of other women, I am still worried about this. He is unemployed now, and so I fear that if those people come back he may be recruited. But I will not let it happen. I will make noise. I will go and look for them, wherever they are. I will pour petrol and burn the mosque down.

I drew a *maskani* as a warning to boys after what happened to my son. All of that is still with me. I still carry that pain in my heart. For me, breaking the *maskani* is important.

I wrote STOP here in red to symbolise stopping bloodshed.

I wrote *umoja* too. This word means unity in Swahili. I feel part of the community. We live in unity and we support each other. That's why I have *jirani* (my neighbours) in my picture. These are the neighbours who helped me in rescuing my child.

This is my family, myself, my son, the children, and the granddaughter. Whenever I have a problem or I feel under pressure or stressed, I go to my sister. At my sister's house, I feel safe, I open up about my problems and I get advice. This is a place of importance for me. My brother-in-law is the one who has helped me so many times. Even when my son used to frequent the *maskani* and refused to study, my brother-in-law is the one who helped me. That's why I wanted to include him in my painting. That white part of the painting symbolises him.

Those are lips. They symbolise how I was able to speak out and resist. The words in Swahili are about speaking out. I have three younger sisters. After my parents died, we used to live with my aunt. Then, at some point, my aunt wanted to deny us our right to education and to stop us going to school so that we could work and do house chores. I spoke out against this, and I pleaded with my aunt. I volunteered to sacrifice myself to do the house chores and work, as long as my sisters were able to continue going to school. They went all the way to university. I am glad because I helped out my sisters. They are doing good jobs now.

## MPAMBANAJI

I am Malenga 001. I am 22 years old. I have an elder brother and a sister. I am a Bajun by ethnicity and a Muslim by religion and culture. I was born in Nairobi but moved to Mombasa at the age of seven. I now live in Likoni. It is a densely populated metropolitan area where people from many tribes such as the Bajun, the Luhya, the Luo and the Kikuyu live together. I completed high school in 2015. 'Malenga' represents a Swahili poet. '001' refers to Mombasa County. I am a poet, an actor and a writer. I am using arts to earn a living. I volunteer with different organisations. They use my art to create pieces that will enlighten the community to resist violent extremism and which the community can relate to and understand. I also sometimes act in TV programs and in the theatre.

My Islamic culture is what makes me who I am. I was brought up in this culture on values of humanity and respect and I am attached to it. For example, as I am at an age of marriage, I will look for a woman from my community who would dress as per my culture and cover up her body. If I leave Likoni to live in Nairobi, I will still respect my neighbor as per my culture.

Three things drive me in life: my art, faith and family. I am an artist and I use art to find my daily bread. I feel attached to the Swahili pot-hub art space. My person of influence is the patron of the Swahili pot-hub, Mr Muhamoud Noor, the village elder and my fellow volunteers at Swahili pot-hub.

In my everyday life, I use the art of spoken words and poetry to resist tribalism, corruption and violent extremism. For instance, I wrote a poem about marginalisation and tribalism. There is a line in the poem which says "*Kama ni lazima ukabila utugawanye basi utugawanye kwenye chakula. Mdigo achukue sima, Mjaluuo achague samaki. Lakini ukabila usitugawanye katika misingi ya maisha*". That is: "If it is a must for us to be divided by tribe, let tribalism divide us on the type of food we eat. The Digos love *sima*, so let them choose *ugali*, let the Luos choose fish, but let's not let tribalism divide us in our lives". When it comes to our day-to-day lives, we are all the same regardless of our differences. We should all be equal and receive the same treatment.

In Kenya, certain regions and communities are treated more favourably

in terms of access to resources, investment and opportunities. This leads to feelings of marginalisation and makes people from other regions and communities feel less Kenyan than others. People from Likoni feel marginalised because the government did not build a bridge for us. For some people this is enough reason to become violent and radicalise other youths. Many of the residents in Likoni have to go to town every day to work, and get their daily bread using the ferry. The bridge to the Likoni people would mean that their lives would no longer be in danger when the ferry capsizes. I personally believe that once the bridge is built the economy will improve. Tribalism also means that in Likoni, the port itself has not benefited the people who are living in here. This is because Kenya Ferry Services hire people from faraway regions, instead of employing the youths of Likoni with the same skills. Corruption is also a major issue in Kenya, and it affects youths seeking jobs. You may be qualified with the right skills, but you will not find a job simply because you do not have a relative at the top who can use influence to get you a job or money to bribe. In Likoni, the Chief's Office is from the Digo tribe, and most of the favours or the things you need are given to the Digos. It is very unfortunate.

In my poetry, I have also written about counter-radicalisation and extremism. There is a line in my poem that says "*Usipewe mia ukamwage damu mitaani. Na kama wewe damu yakuzuvutia, kaombe kazi kichinjioni au jeshi nenda pia, 'D' tu uko kikosini*". That is: "Do not be bribed by a 100 bob [shillings] to go and shed blood in the streets. If you are attracted to blood, go and work in slaughterhouses or join the military. Qualification is only a D".

Violent extremism to me is any forceful or violent activity that someone does to harm another human being. It can be terror gangs or police brutality that are violent extremism, and it can come from both the community and the government. In Likoni, the serious type of violent extremism that affects people in their everyday lives is gangs. Due to youth unemployment, illiteracy and idleness, many youth are joining terror and juvenile gangs, which became a major source of insecurity for the local community.

In thinking about terrorism and violent extremism in the Kenyan context, the *kikambala* bombing is the one that affected me most. This is because,

after this incident, my uncle was arrested and sent to Guantanamo Bay. However, after the US government declared him innocent, the Kenyan government still refused to allow him back into Kenya and he is still there now. This has affected me directly because he is my uncle, and it made me resolute to do anything possible to fight violent extremism.

In addition to my art, my faith is essential to me. I find comfort in prayers. Whenever I pray, I believe that God listens to my prayers and it will eventually work someday. At the mosque, there is neither marginalisation nor corruption. God listens to the prayers of everybody at his own time. So, prayers are really crucial for me.

Finally, family is very important to me. My family has been supportive of my art: my mother, father, sister and my brother. They never discouraged me from taking arts as a career. Art is not something that many people appreciate as a career choice. Since my mum and my sister discovered that art is what I love to do, they have been there for me. I imagine if all mothers were there for their sons, probably many would not have joined juvenile gangs or terrorist groups. For fathers, it is different. Fathers when they see their son or daughter going astray, they are very quick to disown them. Fathers only associate with their successful children. But, mothers – they can really play a big role when it comes to guiding their children to the right paths.



## My Body Map

On the inner part of my painting, I have used green because it signifies I am only human. On the top part of my hands, I used yellow because I believe I have the ability to enlighten and bring light onto people's lives with my talents. I have painted my feet red because I want to leave footsteps of love wherever I go.

The lower background is blue. This is the sea in Mombasa. The upper background part is yellowish orange to signify light. There is still light at the end of the tunnel – don't let yourself drown – but you should look at the opportunities that can make you triumph. I wrote *MPAMBANAJI* in Swahili. This means that I am a fighter and a conqueror. I think everybody out here is fighting their own battle and we should keep on fighting – positively not violently – for change and opportunities.

There is a drawing of MV Likoni on top of my painting because that's where I live. There is a mosque there as well because I belong to the Muslim community.

On the lower part of the body-map, I drew a gun and a hand on top of it because I resist the juvenile gangs, killings and violence. I also wrote 999 and GK to represent the Kenyan Police and the government of Kenya. This is about police brutality and marginalisation.

Inside the body map, I drew someone drowning. Just a few metres from him is a floater. He is trying to make it to the floater. What keeps him alive is hope. That is why I have used the word 'HOPE'. I commute using the ferry every day. These vessels are really old and dangerous. What really keeps us alive or keeps us going on every day back and forth is just hope, hoping that we will come home safe. This is about marginalisation, which is a big contributor to violent extremism.

I also drew a heart inside the body map, with microphone, a pen, and a mosque inside it. I use these tools every day as an artist and a poet. I am an actor and I am proud of it. I use art to resist violent extremism. Those are the things that I really feel inside my heart and that I depend on. Wherever I am sad or depressed, I pray. In Likoni, I feel attached to a certain mosque because it is youth-led. There are others mosques that are not youth-friendly. In Islam, the Prophet taught us that when someone is in the wrong, you advise but some mosques do not advise but rather criticise young people.

I also drew a big tree, a very tall wall and two people; one has a hammer and another, with a sprinkler, is watering a plant. This big tree symbolises job opportunities that we as people in Likoni do not get. This wall denotes tribalism, marginalisation and all the problems we undergo. The man with the hammer represents the people getting into the violent extremism, like terror gangs, Al-Shabaab and others. If you try to break the wall, those people (extremists) will come for you. I am the person with a sprinkler. With a few seeds, I can grow my own tree and create my own opportunities. What I am trying to say is that each one of us with our own little abilities can grow our own trees. So, this is how I resist violent extremism.

Art can do a lot, because it speaks the unspoken. I have really liked how this work was interactive. People opened up, people learned from other people, a lot of diversity, different tribes, and different geographical backgrounds. This was very enlightening for me.

My message to the outside world is that "It doesn't matter where you come from, just find it within yourselves". I believe everyone in the smallest possible way is talented. They are able to bring change to their community or society. So, just find it within yourselves to contribute towards change in the community or society to resist any form of violence.

## **IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT YOU GO THROUGH, YOU CAN STILL MAKE IT WITH A SMILE**

My name is Amy and I am from Mombasa. I am the first-born and have six siblings: three boys and three girls. I did not finish school. I had to drop out in Grade 6 to give my siblings a better future so that they could have better education.

I am a henna artist. It does not pay me much, but at least the money that I get can buy period pads, and I can go to the salon to do my hair and give my mum or the kids some money. I also volunteer as a make-up artist at a youth community centre. They do not pay me, but I still do it to support them, to give them hope and show them that we can do this together. I feel like I am like a godmother to the youth. I also volunteer with a group of comedians to direct them.

I am a Somali. I call Kenya my home because I was born and raised here, though I do not feel accepted. I feel safe in Kenya, but sometimes I feel like I do not belong. I used to hate to be a Somali. In school, when they used to ask me what tradition I was, I would say "I am Kikuyu" because I was so dark. People think Somalis are bad, but I feel that through volunteering I can show that Somalis are not as bad as they think. I tell myself, "I am strong, I can do this". I believe in myself, and God supports me and pushes me to people who suffer more than I do. I get energy through helping them. I tell myself I can do this. If they can survive, I get the vibe too, so that is what pushes me up.

For me, if I were to define what violent extremism is, I think the first thing that I would say is that it is about religion. Religion is not that bad, but people make it bad, starting with practices such as forcing women to cover their bodies, performing female genital mutilations, and calling for people to join jihadi groups to fight. I do not see the point of fighting. Our prophet fought and it ended. You are bringing up something that is already dead and it is infecting us, the youth. I think that is so wrong. With female genital mutilations, so many girls are dying and it is painful. You end up having infections. Some girls end up having wounds with maggots in their inner parts. Some die. I also feel it by not covering up. Sometimes I do not like covering up – I feel suffocated and sometimes I feel I need to cover up. There was a day –

I was in Eastleigh and I was wearing jeans, a long shirt, a long-sleeve shirt and a hijab – a woman from a high building threw an egg at me and hit me.

Violent extremism is also gang violence and Al-Shabaab. Al-Shabaab always ends up in Somalia, but we all know that it is just not Somalis. There are Arabs and Africans as well, but we, as Somalis in Kenya, end up being affected. We feel like we killed people, yet we did not do anything. Sometimes people make jokes about Somalis that are painful. They are like "Ah, you are Al-Shabaab!" I used to tell myself "Yeah, whatever. I am Al-Sha-babe! I am the bomb! I am beautiful". I made it funny for myself. You know, I can be a comedian in a rude way. When people say mean things to me about being Somali, I am going to answer it in a twisted way. This is how I resist.

Sometimes when I wake up, I go on the internet and on Instagram watching videos, the beautiful art, the hairstyles, and the make-up tutorials. I just imagine myself in that position. Sometimes, what gives me strength is going to watch the sea, the sun and the trees. I also like to read and listen to music and to play with my nephew. That is how I resist every day.



IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT YOU GO THROUGH, YOU CAN STILL MAKE IT WITH A SMILE

## My Body Map

It doesn't matter what you go through you can still make it with a smile.

That is me jumping – I am always hype! I am on the outside a jolly person, a happy person, but deep down I am not happy in myself, and that is why we have these things inside my body.

I call my hair the Medusa hairstyle. I feel it is free. I do not really get to open my hair. It is just covered every day, even when I am in the house in my room, when I have locked myself inside. Through the painting, I got the chance to show my hair – to see it be free, the colour and everything. It is a painting, but I feel like the air is going through my hair. I feel like I am connected to the painting. I just feel free, just seeing my hair like that ... I believe it is not necessary for you to cover up as a Muslim. Islam is deep down inside your heart and not the outside. That is what I believe.

What I can say about the face is that I can smile through everything. The bluish grey symbolises my darkest times. Whenever I remember that, it hits me like a wave, and, for me, resisting is being strong.

The flowers look pretty, but the red colour is about pain. There was a time, when I went through female genital mutilations. It was painful. That is what red stands for. The white colour is to symbolise the talent that I have from my hands and the peace that I am looking for. The black is my favourite colour. I believe that black suits me.

This is the blackbird. I put it here because it is from my heart. When I was growing up, I was often called the blackbird (black crow) because I was the darkest in the family. So, I told myself, as a blackbird, I can fly, I can be free and go to places. Blackbirds protect each other. When one blackbird dies, they gather to protect it.

Blue and white is for the Somali flag. The white trousers and the blue top are to say that deep down I am a young Somali. But sometimes I don't feel I am safe as a Somali in Kenya, and I would think twice before saying that I am Somali. I wonder what will people say and whether they will think that I am from Al-Shabaab, trying to kill them or to get information from them.

The star, the red cross and the word 'hope' are about hope for Somalia. I still have hope for change and peace in Somalia. In fact, one of the

meanings of my name is 'hope' and I never give up. You people have taught me how I can express my feelings through colours and symbols.

I put a bus on my knees because, once, when I was travelling from Wajir to Nairobi by bus, I was stopped, harassed and even slapped by a police officer. He accused me of carrying fake identity documents. Because I was a Somali, he stood me aside from the other passengers and accused me of wanting to go to Nairobi to kill people.

That is me wearing an abaya, going to the community youth centre for work and volunteering, I go there really early in the morning just to sit and watch the trees to just calm myself down. It's like a yoga thing for me.

On my right hand, this is the Kenyan flag. Kenya will always be my right hand. It does not matter where I go, it would be home for me. The sky, the blue – this is the blue sky. My happy. On the left side, I put yellow. It is a happy colour and my nephew likes it. I believe I have enough space to be happy. I put some people there too, to make them happy. I also put, there on top, things and activities that I do just to make myself happy.

I love mosques. The mosque used to be the safest place in the world, but now I do not feel like it is as safe as before because of attacks and violence.

I put the words that hurt my feelings, the things that drag me down, under my legs because I jump through this. I put them together. The hands are my hands, but at the same time, I am talking about people that are dragging me down, so the hands are like reaching to me to grab me. Jumping means resisting. I made it to the sea.

I learnt a lot through this process. I felt that am loved and I learned that I could talk through painting. It taught me to trust people and to smile through whatever. Because all women go through such things. It taught me to find myself, to resist and to share with others. I had stuff inside me, and you showed me how to paint them on canvas. Taking them out on the canvas, felt like life changing. I can see myself almost doing this every day of my life. I feel so alive, like a new person. Yesterday, when I went home, I was smiling for no reason, and my mum was asking me "Are you on drugs?" Why can't I be happy? Why can't a woman be happy? I never knew I would like this workshop. But, day after day, I

felt more and more comfortable. I never really felt comfortable like this before. No one stopped me. I felt so connected with myself and others. I am stronger.

## YOU HAVE TO STAND ON YOUR OWN – MAKE YOUR OWN DESTINY

My name is Ramadhan. I drew a sun setting and a mosque with people having their evening iftar during the month of Ramadhan. I was born at that time.

I am married with two daughters. Our first daughter was born in 2004, and the second one was born in 2008. I am originally from Kwale, from the Mijikenda community. I grew up in a place called Kinango. I am the only son in a family of eight children, all girls. My mum raised me up on her own by selling fried fish. She used to travel from Kinango to Vanga near Lunga Lunga across the Tanzanian border. She goes there, gets some of the fish, prepares it and then comes to Kinango and sells it during the evening-time. This is how she was able to raise money for my school fees.

When I was in Class Eight, my mum told me, "You need to make sure that you work hard so that you get to high school". So, I had to work hard. I got good grades and went to a good school. After completing my 'O' level, I did some casual work, like sea ferrying and road construction at home. It is not easy to find a job in this part of our country, Kenya. There was a time I went for armed forces recruitment, and I went for the interview up to the last stage. Then, we were asked, "Who were you with? Who do you know here?" It was around 6:00 or 6:30 pm. I told them I did not know anybody. Those who knew someone were taken, but I was told to try for the next intake. I just felt heated in my heart. I was very hurt. Since then, I have applied for different jobs until I realised that I needed to go back to the books. Let me go and study. That is why I did my Diploma in Community Development, I did my degree here, and now I'm almost finishing my master's degree in development studies. I am really trying to make myself strong academically, because education is the only way I can think of to turn around the poverty.

Fortunately, my wife has a job. She is the one who is contributing to me – everything, children's clothing, food, and all that kind of stuff. It is very hard to be having a wife of this calibre. She is the one who brings in money... I'm just there assisting.

I'm the only son, and, for my sisters, I am their security. So, I have to be there to help. My mum also depends on me a lot. She sees me as the

father of the family. If anything happens at home, she expects me to do something about it, even though she knows that I'm not working. But, I have to just find ways and means to send something, a little money, and sort it out.

Because of unemployment, I don't feel proud to be a Kenyan. You must have a backup, political or otherwise, to get a job in this country. Unless you have somebody to push you up, you will have nothing but failure. It really pains me. I felt happy when we voted for the first multi-parties when the former President Mwai Kibaki took power. I really had hopes. But eventually all the hopes perished. We hoped things would change, but nothing happened. It just happened for a few individuals, but not for all people.

If I go back to my Mijikenda community at large, a lot of them got lower-rank jobs. It pains so much. In Mombasa and other big towns in the coastal region, most house helps are from the Mijikenda community. Because there are no job opportunities here, they are pushed to do it, and some of them are mistreated, sexually harassed, and all those kind of things. Because of poverty and economic marginalisation, people are engaged in activities like sex tourism, sometimes sex for fish. Teenage mothers are forced to engage in nasty things; young girls are married off to old men and all those kind of things.

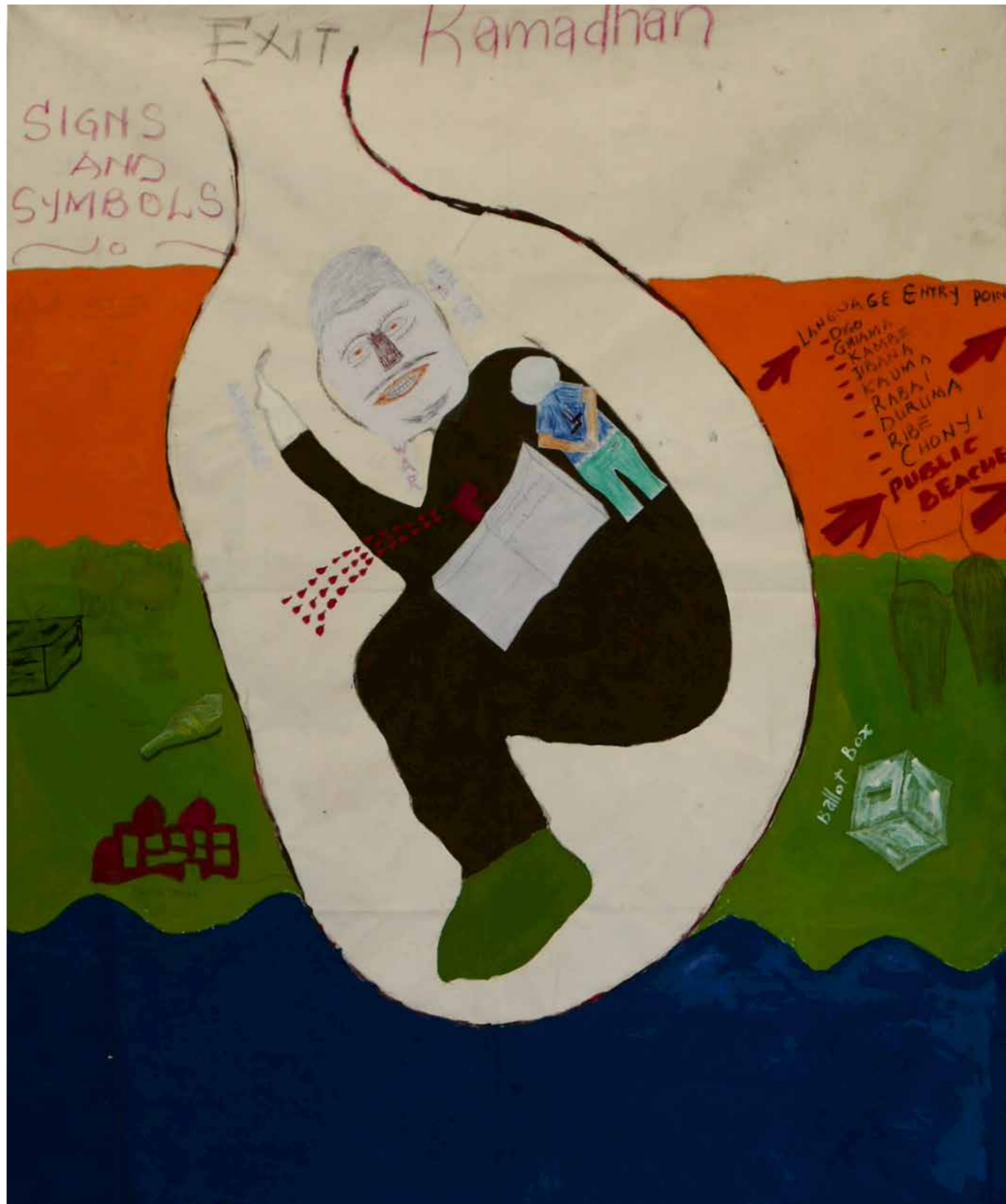
We are marginalised and there is still the mentality that Africans are just slaves of the Arabs. In 2017, I contested for the County Assembly's seat in my home village. The other contestant was of Swahili origin with a *Bajuni* father. I remember, I was engaged in a Friday prayer at the mosque when the imam said, "We need to vote for Salim. He is one of us. He is a Muslim". I just stood up and I said, "What? Am I not a Muslim because I am black?" Ever since then, I don't go and pray in that mosque because, there, they don't consider me as one of them among the Muslim community. Instead, I go to another mosque, far away from my house. It is a mosque where the people recognise me as one of them. Even in terms of marriage, if you ask to marry a Swahili girl, they don't accept. They say you are going to spoil the breed.

If I were to be radicalised, I think I could have already entered into it several years back, because I have friends who were hooked and went. Some came back, but some never came back. But they just went, maybe because they didn't have jobs. Some go there for jihad. But with me,

no. I don't feel like being part and parcel of it, but I know what causes this: poverty, lack of job opportunities and marginalisation. So, how can we curb radicalisation? It is just time to find mitigation measures for how to tame this kind of menace.

Violent extremism to me is underpinned by economic issues. I am a victim of violent extremism. I'm here, not working, and my wife is the one who does everything. This is really troubling. Sometimes, I just wonder what I can do to get enough money to sustain my wife and my daughters, but sometimes you just feel like, what is this life? Why should I not go to the bridge and just drown myself? Then you encourage yourself to keep hope alive.

The heart. When it gets too much to bear, I go to the holy book and get solace. The first line. Whenever we start to recite the holy book, you have to start with '*Bismillahi al Rahmani Al Rahim*', and the second line is '*al Hamdu Lilahi Rabi Il Alamini*' (I thank the almighty for whatever He has given to me). It is a resistance sign. Love is also a source of resistance for me. I resist with love. The love of my mother, my wife and my family. I also resist by being attached to my culture and traditions. I got married the traditional way. I never took it in the Islamic way. Traditionally, you just go to bride's family. Once you are done with the dowry, they just say the wise words of blessings unto you, and then pour some water in the mouth and spew over your chest and your feet. Then the lady, and the uncles, grandmothers, the father of the daughter, etc. Then it is done.



YOU HAVE TO STAND ON  
YOUR OWN – MAKE YOUR  
OWN DESTINY

## My Body Map

This is a womb. Inside, there is a young person expected to be born: me. My dad (deceased) left my mum when I was very young. When I went to my uncle's, they never had that urge to support me as their son. My mother brought me up. If I call my mum and tell her that I'm sick, she doesn't feel well. Inside the womb, I still need a good job and to build for my mum a good house prior to mine. That is one of my dreams.

This posture is, as well, of a person who is close to God, praying, with all his consciousness to Him for more reason, calmness, for peace, trying just to be closer to the Almighty, just to express all your cries, all your prayers. You just say them there so that you can get the heavenly support from the Almighty.

I drew a mosque. I was there in the Masjid Musa for Friday prayers. I was with a friend, the Government Security Units (GSU) entered the mosque, with their shoes on. We were not in a good position, and my friend was shot in the head. Right now, when I see a policeman, I just feel too bad. I don't feel safe. I still feel traumatised. Nothing has been done to bring justice for the deceased. I can't tell if the police raiding the mosque was justified or not. I can say we are lacking freedom of speech and I don't like it. I don't feel Kenyan at times. I am a coastarian.

Sometimes I think about war, because there is no security. When I think about war, the heart cries. If it cries, the tears are blood. When I think about violence, I say, first we need to talk about peace. From every move to peace emanates resistance. We need to embrace peace in all we do.

The white colour on the hands means peace. The 'L' is for love. It goes this way and the other goes that way. I resist with love. When something hurts me, I go to love and I go to the holy book and get solace. That is how I resist.

The village where my mum lives is called Kinango, in Kwale County. I feel relaxed whenever I go there. After prayers, I usually go back and talk to mum and get lunch. Coming back to Mombasa, I feel hectic. The mind rotates while you are sleeping. You are just thinking about tomorrow: what will I do? I have to go and do this and that. Mombasa is a difficult place to live. I don't feel like staying here.

This green colour stands for the vegetation, and the chocolate brown is my favourite colour.

The ballot box, painted white, represents politicians. Very few stick to their word. A big number of them are not genuine.

This is the place where I am living in Mombasa. I have my *maskani*. It is just here, next to my house. I normally sit there with good friends of mine. One of them is a person who works as a cobbler for a living, but he is learned and we sit and exchange ideas.

The drafts is a place I normally visit in the evenings, especially on Sunday afternoons. We usually have a good number of us. I just enjoy watching people playing drafts. This is the graduation cup. I drew it because one day I will be in a position to get a job and raise the living standards of my mother.

The beach clothing item, this kind of dress, I do not admire it. I am attached to my culture. A big number of my community are Muslims. So, they normally dress with Kanga (a cotton cloth used as a garment by women), and, for the men, they can just have the vest inside plus kikoi (a piece of cotton cloth, worn wrapped around the body). I have no problem with the tourists, but I think that walking with the underpants visible ... that is secret clothing. We are normally not meant to see a woman's underpants, even at home. It is very personal and intimate.

During this week, I managed to explore what was in me which has been really haunting me for quite a while. It is a form of relief.

It helps me to be in a position to stand on my own, not to depend on anybody. Just struggle and make the ends meet. Be on your own. Do not depend on your uncle, sister, or wife – no. Make your own destiny.

## HOPE

You can call me Rambo. I am 43 years old and have two kids – a very beautiful girl and a very handsome boy – and a granddaughter. I am divorced and I live with my son. My daughter has married and moved out from the house but she lives close to my place. She visits me every now and then and we talk to each other daily. I have a good relationship with my kids. I thank God for that. I live in Nyali, near Rockwall.

I am a Nubian from Kenya. I was born in Kenya, but my grandfather came from Southern Sudan. My father was born here, he went to school here and we are Kenyans. I was born in Mombasa. I love beads because beads symbolise our culture. Most of the time, the beads are used as symbol of your tribe and have different beautiful colours. Beads depict our inheritance. When you are young, you have different beads. When you mature, your aunt will give you her own beads; then you are supposed to give them to your children so it will go on for generations. Beads have meanings. We have the one for the neck, waist, ears and for the legs. The one for the waist is not supposed to be seen by anybody: it is a depiction of being married.

I was lucky to be a village elder at a very young age. Most of the village elders are elderly. Initially, I had a lot of resentment for being a young village elder. Years back, most of the village elders were men. Being young and being a woman village elder was not easy. The area chief nominated me as a village elder when he realised my efforts in the community. The previous village elder had left his position when he travelled to Sudan. Most of the opposition came from the women. This was mainly because of my age, as I was young. The perception is that most village elders should be elderly as they have had enough time to go around the villages or hang around at the chief's office assisting in solving problems. However, today with a female chief and a female sub-chief, our positions as women leaders are much better.

I was nominated because of my intervention in following up on illicit drug dens and gangs. Drug use was a hot issue and the entire community was affected by it. I fought against drug abuse in the community and I took the matter dearly close to my heart. At one point, my fight almost cost me my life as they attempted to kill me. They sent goons to

threaten me and, when they couldn't, they stabbed me. They stabbed me behind my shoulder. They attacked me in my own house. After I was stabbed, I was not deterred. Instead, I was motivated to fight even more strongly. I have to thank God, as I was lucky to have a stepbrother who was a police officer. My brother guided me and made me seek police assistance. He arranged for me to talk to the Officer Commanding Police Station (OCPS). I usually took the community issues to the OCPS. He used to listen and assist me. In those days, we did not have police cars patrolling around and hence there was no security. People were mugged by youth gangs (mainly related to drugs) who used to steal phones and other belongings – even when you were inside a car. They would snatch your phone and run away. Now the police patrolling has helped maintain security up to an extent.

For me personally, violent extremism is like when somebody hurts you deep inside. Violent extremism can be both physical and mental, such as being in an abusive marriage. I was in a very abusive marriage. Being married to my husband was the worst mistake in my life. My husband thought I was an object that he could push around because he had a good government job and position. Because I was not very educated compared to him, he looked down on me and expected me to tolerate his abuse.

In my work as a village elder, I also encounter different forms of violent extremism in the community. Based on the cases I hear in my community, we have religiously inspired violent extremist groups in mosques. One mosque, in particular, has many unknown preachers coming as sheikhs with different types of teachings. When I say different types of teachings, I mean it is not the same Islamic teaching as we used to know. They are telling us that we don't know about our religion and that we are not religiously educated enough to understand them. Even the boys who frequent this mosque behave differently. They have extreme forms of beliefs. For example, they even refuse to greet us. We have discussed this issue in the women's *barazas* (assembly). We have talked about how we are not sure of these mosques and about whether our children are safe and what we should do about it. Other forms of violent extremism include the increasing spread of gangs. My area is not like the *Wakali Kwanza*. Here, gangs are just thieves who like to steal phones and handbags because our location is a busy area with many connecting road networks and we have the famous *Kongoweya* market. This is like

a disease, where these gangs spread from other areas such as Kisauni and Bamburi.

I have a very beautiful girl and a very handsome boy. My struggle is all about being a single mother raising up children in an environment that is not friendly, and being single is a big challenge to all women. I love my children. I have done my best as I have struggled to see them through good education and a good life. I am who I am because I am a woman and a mother. Being a woman, you are a victim, and being a victim you also have to learn to survive. What I hate is men who run away from their responsibilities leaving women in very difficult situations. They leave their children with the wife who does not know where to start or where to go for help. I used to be married to a very bad husband. The fear of talking about him and the fear of what he could do to me made me live in terror. I had to see a psychiatrist to help me face the challenges and understand myself. I could not talk, I could not express myself, nor understand what was happening to me. It took me three years to overcome my fear, thanks to the psychiatrist. When I share my story, I know that I am giving a good example of fighting back as a woman rather than accepting hurt and living with it.

I like to work with youth as it involves spending a lot of time with them. As a village elder, I started my own campaign in the community within circles where illicit drugs were available. I summoned the community members to my house and told them that this fight is not only mine but that everyone has to come together to save our children. For most of the drugs come from outside, but the invitation (demand) comes from our own boys. I mobilised the community to carry out programmes for school dropouts and at risk youth to prevent drugs being smuggled to our area. I actively participate in *barazas* to create awareness. When we feel any suspicion about strange men entering our community or notice any incidents, we discuss them in the *barazas*. It is important to make people aware. We also have circles for women and youth, where we discuss pertinent issues with regard to radicalisation and recruitment to violent groups. As the village elder, I walk with my chief to the *maskanis* (places where people gather informally) in my area and then talk to youth who are using *bhang* or are involved in petty crimes. We try to talk to them, so that they do not recruit others. We also summon our own boys. Parents know their children, so we use mothers to call their kids. We create peer education, where kids protect one another. In my

area, we have the Watoto Peace Project (Children's Peace Project). We put the children in community projects like clean-ups where we clean our own area or we have sporting events where every weekend we have tournaments. We don't have funds – we generate our own funds in the community. We are doing all that to distract youth from getting involved in drugs, radicalisation and/or extremism.



## My Body Map

I didn't hold it in anymore. I decided I was safe and trusted everybody here. It's like I knew everybody from before. We bonded in a way that I can't just explain. I never felt like this in my 43 years I have lived.

I named my artwork HOPE because there is hope in talking it out rather than dying in silence. My body map message is that you are not alone in the path of resisting violent extremism. My arms are wide open to support you and those affected.

I love beads and my community uses beads a lot. That is why, on the body map, I have put beads in my hands. The necklace symbolises me as a Nubian woman. I used different types of colours in my necklace and I have earrings and a bracelet. My hair in my drawing is bushy. We are still Africans, and I love my hair bushy. I don't like to tie my hair – I want it to be open. If I tie my hair, I feel like sweating. The *Kitenge* fabric on my painting is African. The *Kitenge* sign means I am a woman who loves dressing in my own culture. I love the blue. There is blue, and yellow coming down to it.

I have positioned myself with open hands. My hands are open, so that I can hug you when you come to me, as I am ready to face it with you together. I have a hand that says "STOP". I live in a community where you need to be proactive in stopping someone who is violent. You have to stop it by speaking out about it. If something is not right, I cannot keep quiet. It's in me – I refuse to be intimidated. To stop something is to raise your hand to resist it. You have to stop it first, and then you can help others. I came out of an abused marriage, so I believe I can stop other ills too, such as child abuse, rapes and brutality, which children undergo. These topics really touch me. I have a lot in my head to say on resistance, but first, you need to conquer the life that you want to live – that is resistance.

I chose to be a butterfly. It is a very peaceful butterfly with very beautiful colours. A butterfly can fly high up. I am a butterfly coming to my tree during darkness. The darkness that is under the tree is my marriage. If anyone is to face violence and extremism in their marriage, then they have to remember that there is hope. They have to know that they are stronger than those black waves.

The road of darkness is about some aspects of Nubian culture, like the

practice of FGM (female genital mutilation). Thanks to the government of Kenya, if you are caught doing FGM, you will rot in prison. The darkness is because girls are put in the dark during FGM. There is blue sky because, even on the road to darkness, there is brightness outside. In the forest, you can see there are trees, flowers inside and small birds who sing beautiful songs. If you are inside that dark room, you cannot see the birds, but you are going to hear the sweet songs that are going to inspire you. There are people here watching over you and you are going to hear their voices.

I live in Nyalii, and this road is the way to my house. When you pass my house, you will see a blue beach. The brown area on the other side of my house depicts spaces that are vulnerable to violence. This can be an abusive marriage, gangs or youth radicalisation.

## THE DREAM CHASER

My name is Hearts. I am 23 years old. I am a photographer by profession and by passion. That is how I earn my day-to-day living, but it is not easy.

I have seen and experienced violent extremism. It is around me, and I have met people who were caught in it. Some of them were my fellow students. We were in the same classroom, and some were even my best friends. I remember Salim. He was the leader of a group called (name omitted for anonymity). We sat, ate and studied together for many years. He used to tell me what he was doing around our area like robbing, fighting and killing ... I was always thinking, this guy is just telling me stories. It sounded too much like movie stuff. I never knew his other side. He was so good at boxing and kickboxing. He was huge in size and very strong, unlike most of us who were just thin. I used to ask him, "How could you do all these things?" "I am just not myself. I use some stuff to do all this", he would respond. With time, I started building my own walls, as I grew afraid of him. I could not be the friend of somebody who can kill and does all those things. With time, Salim got more and more involved, taken to police stations, a cycle of violence. I have since lost touch. I do not know if he is still alive or not.

There was another guy, who was much loved in the whole area. He was a talented footballer. I looked up to him, but, unfortunately, he did not have the opportunity to get to play at a higher level. He later on became a jailbird. But when he came out of prison, he reformed. Although he was no longer part of these gangs, one day the police came and killed him. Then, there was this other one, who became a thug. One day, when he was stealing phones in my area, he was caught. People started beating him. He just stood there and he tried to plead but no one listened. They kept on beating him, mob-justice style, until someone came with a big stone and hit his head. They beat him to death – he just died like that.

There was a time when I almost got killed. One day, someone texted me about taking photos at a party. It was not in a nice area, so I was feeling uneasy and decided to take a friend with me. On entering the place, two people attacked us and one stabbed me and threatened to

kill me if I did not give him my camera. I felt very weak and gave them my bag. He hit me with the blunt side of the *panga* (machete), took my phone and ransacked my pockets. This is such a bad memory.

In our community, killing gangs are the prevalent form of violent extremism. I want peace, dreams, hope and humanity. There are small children who have hopes in their lives. But, when they grow up, they come across violence, death, and drug addiction and their dreams are shattered.

I grew up surrounded by violence, gangs and drugs. But luckily I was raised in a strict family and, throughout my education, I was properly advised by my dad and my friends. They made me become a caring and responsible person. After finishing my studies, I decided that, instead of idleness and just complaining to people about being unemployed, I would make myself busy. So I have started to work as a photographer. I have no time for boredom or moods. I keep myself busy. I do not go to *maskani* where I see many negative influences and I try to avoid bad company. My only *maskani* is home. When I get home, I have my laptop, I do my research. I find novels, movies, all kind of knowledge. I am currently mentoring two young aspiring photographers, so I use my knowledge to stop others from falling into violence.

People from the coast are marginalised, especially in terms of employment opportunities. The negative mindset and stereotypes around coastal people do not help. People from outside see us as uneducated and lazy. These are harmful stereotypes that make us feel bad, underappreciated, and they are affecting us. Actually, I would say that the youths are not easily brainwashed. I do not think that it is easy for terrorist groups like Al-Shabaab to recruit young people. There are some instances, but these, in my opinion, are rare. However, most of the youths at the coast feel bitterness inside them and this is how some end up in violent extremism, killing people, feeding on the innocent souls. The good thing is that today, in our community, we have security thanks to the Community Police. They are the ones who are taking care of the youths.



THE DREAM CHASER

## My Body Map

I call this body map painting "The Dream Chaser". It is about a boy's dream to be someone and to achieve something in life. It is about hope.

I love the position of my body because this is how I normally lie in bed to think about the day's events before I fall asleep. I feel safe in this position. I used green because of its peaceful side. Yellow is my favorite colour. The dots mean the scattering of the people, the tribalism, the marginalisation, the unemployment, and the killings.

My heart is the biggest inner peace that I have inside me. If only I had listened to my heart on the day I was attacked, I would not have gotten this trauma. I should have listened to my heart.

When I am not busy, I go to a *Swahilipot* meeting with friends, making my plans for my day-to-day activities. I often think about other people like those that I went to school with. I think about the group who go around killing and robbing. Will they change?

The camera is my passion and my employment, and I love teaching my friends photography. I empower them instead of just roaming around the town claiming to be unemployed. It is true that the government does not look after us anymore. You see young and talented people killed and their lives wasted because they did not get an opportunity in life or have education and aspirations. This does not make me proud to be a Kenyan. I have all the rights to be a respected Kenyan citizen, to be what I want to be.

Inside my body map, there is a boy who has stopped engaging in violent extremism. However, there is darkness around him and he is lost inside. He does not know where to go. There is rain and a thunderstorm – the rain is the society. How is society going to respond to the death that maybe this boy has caused? Like the story of my friend the footballer who was killed, what if he had reformed? How would society have accepted him? The thunderstorm is the government side. Even if you go to rehab, they can still kill you. That is the thunderstorm: they can kill you anytime.

There is a patch of blue in the painting and a boy swimming in the ocean or in a pool. We must find ways to kill the idleness, to be healthier. An idle mind is a devil's workshop. At a time when you are just sitting there

with nothing in your pocket, you can easily go and do something bad. Once you are being influenced, you can easily be taken away.

When I think about my outside world. I see Masjid Musa mosque. The incident at Masjid Musa affected me so much. The security that I used to feel whenever I was in the area of Majengo, the faith, and the love. I went to school there, and it made me who I am today. I have lost all that because of the killing that happened in that mosque. The government security forces got into the mosque with their shoes on, and they beat and killed innocent people. I lost friends in that mosque. Now, I do not want to go back to that mosque ever again. I fear it very much.

Below the mosque, there is my house. This is where I feel safe, love, hope, happiness and humanity. It is a place where I can freely talk, say anything I want and share what I learned and from where I can bring a change to the people around me.

On the opposite side of my painting, there is the *Swahilipot*. It is the place where I was made, where I got empowered to be who I am today. It is where I can achieve my dreams. I got my chance of being educated there. I will do my website classes there and, by using the internet, I will grow.

My hand printed in red represents the blood that has been shed. I say no to violence. It is a 'Stop' sign. I want to believe in a path to peace. This path is expressed with the green and the white in and around my feet.

I used this hut to represent my mum. She is the light of my heart. She is always there in my heart guiding me to the right path. Women are important in the upbringing of children. A mother's love is the best love. A mother cannot allow her son to be taken by Al-Shabaab. She will not accept that. She would be fighting and resisting those who want to take her son away.

I have been against violent extremism for some time, but this artistic process has made me understand how to fight it better. I can resist anything that comes my way, but I never thought that I could have new ways of resisting that are within me. Art is another way of self-defence. It is a way of being your own self and a way to engage constructively with others. This art can bring social change.

We need to create hubs and platforms to empower the youth and to learn new things. Through projects like the body mapping, we can become different people. We can speak through art. Now, I can just stand there and let someone see through me. I believe that this painting and my words can influence others.

## AFRICAN QUEEN

My name is Dhahabu. I am a Luo. I live in Kwale, an area with a majority of Digo and Mijikenda communities. At the coast, Luos are referred to as *wabara* or people from upcountry (the Western part of Kenya) who are stealing jobs and other opportunities from the indigenous coastal community. Because of this, at times you feel that you are not part of the community. However, being a Muslim, I have been able to integrate into the Digo community because of my dress code – the Muslim attire for women. My hijab is my identity. I cannot go anywhere without it. I could put on a trouser or anything, but not without my hijab.

My mother is a Muslim and my dad is a Christian. We followed my mum's religion because, like any other mother, mum spent most of the time with us, and I love the fact that my dad respects who we are. My mother is a second wife to my dad. She is a strong woman. After my dad lost his job, she looked after us and managed to educate us up to university level. I have two brothers and four sisters. I would not be where I am today if it were not for my family. My sisters are a source of great inspiration in my life, and they took part in nurturing me. My elder brother is a source of security for me. If someone disturbs me, he will protect me. I am engaged to a good man of my choice and will be getting married this year.

I did my undergraduate studies in Development Studies at the Technical University of Mombasa, but I have not yet found a job. In Kenya, being a youth is a struggle. Unemployment is a big problem here. You graduate, you have your good qualifications, but still you will not get a job. For a woman, this is even worse as people can take advantage of your vulnerability and desperation by exploiting and abusing you, even sexually. However, I believe that we as youths, by working hard, can create opportunities for ourselves instead of waiting to be spoon-fed. I am young and very energetic.

Despite the challenges that I am facing, with the little knowledge that I have, I believe that I can still start a business and create employment for myself. Ever since I was a student in my second year at university, I have been doing business. I once had a juice parlour and I even sold clothes and cosmetics back on campus before my business collapsed.

Although I am unemployed, I am currently freelancing as a community development worker on issues of human rights, peace and security, working as a volunteer alongside other youth with NGOs and community-based organisations in Kwale. I am passionate about community work and helping people. As youth volunteers we are not paid, but we do it to get experience and knowledge, which is power for me.

In Kwale, there is a high level of recruitment and radicalisation into violent extremism because of the high illiteracy level. We have returnees who have come back from Somalia after joining Al-Shabaab. Some of these people have submitted themselves to the police, but others are in hiding. There are also criminal gangs such as Wajukuu wa Bibi – these are groups of young boys with extreme behaviours who are terrorising people using violence. Corruption within the security forces and inaction in tackling gangs is also a problem, and sometimes it feels that members of the local police are working hand in hand with these groups. In the coast, we have the MRC, a group that I also consider as extremist. Although, the MRC as a group originated through the initiatives of elderly leaders, it took a tribal outlook, with many coastal tribes joining the movement against the *wabara* – people from the western part of Kenya.

To resist and prevent violent extremism, I do *maskani* safe space talks with youths. We (the volunteers) are around 15 youths, but we do this in smaller groups. In our talks, we try to find out the problems that our fellow youths are facing in their area. We discuss, mostly, peace, security and developmental issues. We sensitise the community to how they can have a good relationship with the security agents by inviting the police to our meetings with the community members and about their rights as humans. For the community policing efforts, we enable trust-building between the community and the police. We also invite those who work at the court, so that they can tell the youth how to follow due process when arrested, and how to protect and defend themselves if they happen to be taken to the court for the offences they might have committed. We also do *maskani* talks with women to sensitise them on women's rights issues. We do talks about countering violent extremism but away from the affected communities for purposes of security for all of us. We have had recent cases of religious leaders who were killed because they are termed as informers, forcing us to find faraway safe spaces for discussions on violent extremism.

When we first started the *maskani* talks, I felt it was the hardest thing to do because you come from a community where most of us are unemployed. You want to go and talk to other youths, consuming their time, but you do not have anything to give them, not even a snack or their transport, and you do not know whether they are going to listen to you and your ideas. However, when people started to realise that our talks were important, then the *maskani* talks became a safe space for us. Youths are energetic and, if we are united, then we have the potential to come up with ideas and solutions to solve our problems and achieve our dreams.



AFRICAN QUEEN

## My Body Map

The title of my painting is "African Queen". It is about my identity and my pride as an African woman. This is why I have added African fabrics and symbols in my artwork. For instance, I have the calabash, the pot, the milk gourd and a sisal basket. The milk gourd is used to store milk. My grandma used to put milk in the gourd, and it fermented in a way that made it both sour and very sweet. The pot is where Africans keep water so that it is cool, and it can also be used for cooking meals. The sweetness of food cooked in a pot is on another level. The sisal basket (*kiondo*) which I decorated in African fabrics is used by the Luos when we go to the farms to harvest maize. I used the green to represent the vegetation. Luos have farms where we grow maize for *ugali*. *Ugali* goes well with tilapia fish. My heart is Luo. I come from Kisumu – known for the lake fish, tilapia. That is why I painted tilapia fish on my body close to my heart. The skirt and the Luo hut are also part of my identity.

I chose the pink colour because it is bright and feminine – I love bright things. My body position shows that I am in a jumping position, depicting myself as having the freedom to jump high and reach my goals. My message is that, as a woman, you can go to school, have a job and earn good cash, on a par with men. I drew the camel because of its resistance. It symbolises my strength as a woman. I believe that, even in the darkest moments, I can still see the light. The blue in the upper part of my painting represents the sky, and the dove with a colourful flower represents freedom. I drew the dove because in African culture women are seen only as wives meant for the kitchen but men are supposed to go to school. The dove and my beautiful flower symbolise the fact that things are changing, and I believe there are better opportunities for us females that will allow us to fly even higher than men.

In the lower and brighter, pink-coloured part of my painting, I drew a *maskani* and right next to it I have written "United we stand divided we fall". This *maskani* is a safe space, where female and male youth volunteers like myself address our problems. Whether female or male, we can work together and achieve what we want.

I also drew a family because the family unit is a very important thing to me. I put my siblings inside a heart, as these are the people that I love most. Next to the family, there is a mosque, which is about my identity as a Muslim growing up reading the Qur'an in the mosque and

performing Salah.

Kenya is my country and my home. The constitution guides me and protects my rights as a woman, and that is why I have chosen to paint the flag of Kenya and the constitution.

There is a dark side to my painting. Here, I drew a beach and a dolphin. At the coast, people believe that *jinns* (bad spirits) inhabit the ocean. The beach has become a place where I do not feel so safe because of that.

I used grey and drew a mall to represent things like the bombing of the Westgate and Dusit malls. Many innocent people have died in these attacks. The red and black colours symbolise the blood that was shed when many Kenyans lost their lives. Personally, I love malls and going window-shopping. After these incidents, I felt the malls are not safe for me. People can come across our borders with explosives and we cannot stop them. I come from the South Coast, where I have to cross on the ferry. I think twice when I have to come to town. I do not know who is a friend or who is an enemy or who has good and bad intentions. I do not feel safe in crowded places.

Finally, I drew a second mosque in this darker part of the painting to draw attention to the fact that mosques are, at times, used for the wrong purposes to radicalise and recruit youths.

Looking back at this workshop, I realise how much I have talked to express my feelings. The use of colours helped me a lot. I want to start using this method when we go for our *maskani* visits, to let people think deeper and use colours to express what they think and feel. Assist them to find the words, explain the pain they feel, without being too emotional. Art helps to find a solution.

## KISAUNI, WHERE I STAY

My name is Walid. My nickname is *Wildano*, which stands for wild animal. My life has been good, but my father passed away when I was in Form Four. I was saddened and shocked and this has negatively affected my studies. My uncle supported me after my father died. After school, I began work at his hardware shop. There are seven of us in my family: one girl and six boys. I'm the second last. They are my elders and saw the sun before me. Everyone is for himself or herself, so I help myself.

We perform the life – we don't rehearse it. In my environment, there is a lot of peer pressure. Sometimes, you do things that are not safe for you to sustain hope and confidence about living in this place. There is so much violence here. So, in our place, extremism is a way of life. I cannot escape from it. People are being robbed in the street and in their houses. They are attacked by *pangas* (machetes) and slaughtered! There is so much drug abuse too. In my family, my brother is an addict. He wants to quit, but he has been jailed for seven years for the same drugs. He is out, but worse. The gang members in my area know me and treat me well. I feel safe because when you stay with gangs no one can gang up on you, but I would not feel safe in other areas. I love going to *maskani* to teach and preach about peace or goodness. I don't judge. I just talk to youth. Sometimes you want to make someone change and do well, but at the end you do badly and fail. You yourself, you are struggling. Allah will see us for our good intentions and not misjudge us.

The other day, I was at my shop when a policeman killed a boy member of a gang. He shot him eight times and he died just at our place. The policeman did it although he himself is a thief. It is like, you love peace, but the police are very brutal to our communities and to the common people and individuals. Some time ago, I was arrested in Tanzania in a case of mistaken identity on suspected violent extremism charges. There, while in Tanzanian police custody, calamities and disaster befell me. They beat me there in jail and, before I slept, I swear they would put guns in my nose and everywhere. The brutality made me think I should have died.

The last time I was in my hometown Lamu, I visited a place called

Mpeketoni. It was beautiful: the farming, the cows, the shops and everything. After a week, I saw on TV that Mpeketoni has been bombed. There were sad people on TV, people were killed, and others displaced, so I felt very bad. It felt very bad seeing the beautiful town destroyed and human beings attacked without a reason. They were all Kenyans. Sometimes I wonder what the Mpeketoni people did to deserve that.

I bought a little farm there in my hometown, back in Lamu, but my neighbours did not like me. One day, they beat me so bad and they almost set me ablaze. They were saying that I am an outsider, and so I am a thief, coming to take their land and that I do not belong there. I am from the coast so I do not understand why they are calling me an outsider. I am from originally from Lamu, but my father came up to Mombasa to escape the calamities of the war and the spillover from Somalia. I love Kenya because I was born and raised here, and I hope to die here because my father and late grandfathers have all died in Kenya. It was all very sad. Nowadays, one cannot move freely in Lamu, neither for business nor for pleasure.

In relation to the violent extremism, during the 2007 elections, I remember that I was at my shop when people were being killed, beaten and stolen from. They were escaping from the streets and coming to our shops. Though we let them in and saved them, we did not know what to do. But eventually we made them go to their homes, escorting them; others stayed for a week at our place.

Those are my personal experiences. Allah said he would test us in different kinds of situations, and so I accept it. If it were not for Allah, I could have killed myself. Death is another way of surviving this place.



## **My Body Map**

My title would be "Kisauni, where I stay".

My painting is like a rainbow: every colour means something. The blue is for the ocean in Kenya and the green is for the forests and other types of natural vegetation.

'Stop the killings': This is about gang violence and drugs. Nowadays Muguka leaves, marijuana and drugs are everywhere. Even if you do not have money, they will give you the drugs on credit. We need help from God and the Prophet. We need help from the community, the government and companies with job creation.

'Stop police brutality': This is about police brutality. When I was arrested in Tanzania, I experienced police brutality. They beat people in jail. Police brutality needs to stop.

The red marks on the painting show blood. Blood is everywhere in our veins, but they want it out of our bodies. In our bodies blood has its use, but outside our bodies it symbolises abuse.

'Stop war feed the poor': Unity, love and peace first come with empathy. They have money for the war, but they do not have money to feed the poor.

The white color is for peace, black is for our race, the red for the bloodshed and green for the vegetation.

This is a shield. It is a symbol of resistance. By drawing a shield, I wanted to state that 'I resist extremism'. My ability is that I am shielding, not urging anyone to make fights. Feed the poor: if you feed me and give me a job, then I am good. Love first comes with empathy and with understanding each other. That is what will build unity and peace. It is a very individual thing.

You know, the environment which you are in changes you a lot. When I came here, you made me a good person because I was not smoking. In the five days we have been here, I have felt very good. I feel sad now because it is ending. However, I have gained something. I have learned about violent extremism and that to resist you need to start with yourself. I have learned how to draw, to paint and to mix paints in different colors and it felt amazing. I also learned to communicate with others and to share stories that I have never shared with anyone before.

Many people do not know how to draw, and so when you ask them to draw, they would feel skeptical. At first, people would say to you, "Are you kidding me?" But, in a real sense, art can make social change. This is because in people there is a language barrier. Many are using broken English, but art expresses everything.

# Reflections



# On Body mapping as a fertile ground

by Xavier Verhoest

The body mapping process shows the importance of exerting through art. This process is not about standing still but about exposing fields of tension and creating a future where the self and the other can coexist and blend if possible.

A body map is the expression of being present, alive, and becoming resilient in a context where external forces, limitations and influences are increasingly present and unbearable for some. The human body is a home, the place where we are from, the place we live in and the place we want to be. Outside the human body, there is a world with barriers that include religion, ethnicity, class, culture and gender inequality. They are the fractures through which many live on a daily basis. Each of these body maps talk about one Kenya from a very different viewpoints, but in ways that are familiar to most of the participants and the researchers, they are all interconnected and thus making the personal borders more porous.

It is a living being, a rediscovery of moments in life that give meaning and a new shape to the one creating it.

It becomes a shape of oneself that lends meaning to life and gives strength, confidence and conviction.

It then appears to oneself and the others as a

discovery and raises the curtain on the silence.

The Body map helps each person to tell stories and share them as they recognize them and hear their voices. It opens a new world with its potential.

The key is this potential filled with new meaning thanks to the metaphor of the painting. It allows each participant to express and comment on their experience of the world, in this case on their experience and definition of violence and their capacity to resist this violence.

No participant is a professional painter.

The process entails a transformation leading to a better understanding of self and the world, it is another way to apprehend the complexity of a human experience.

Poised between chaos and balance, the participant slowly explores the shape of his or her experience with a patient opening up of himself or herself and to the others.

Ultimately, trust grows...

Art as a way to know with tears and laughs, a readjusting of life to make a full circle-

Art triggers inner resources, the circle of past, present and future leading to question where do I come from, who am I and where am I going?

Art and its power, portraits that break our incompleteness, go beyond our limits, misunderstandings and lies.

Work together, share in the same space, give yourself to the others, everybody map is a light on an experience, a gift of oneself, a gift from one and to the other.

Stop time, come out of chaos, stop running and find the inner world, its silence and from this strength grow with colours, textures, smells and become another.

Together, unique and universal.

As a facilitator of the body mapping workshop, I want to express my deep gratitude to Sahla and her team who are willing to innovate, transgress, and disrupt "research as usual" with creativity, vision, and desire to engage in social change with work that inform us in special ways that are only rendered possible through artistic forms of expression.

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