



Book Review

Katherine E Brown (2020) *Gender, Religion, Extremism: Finding Women in Anti-Radicalization*. New York: Oxford University Press

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Katherine E. Brown's *Gender, Religion, Extremism: Finding Women in Anti-Radicalization* is a powerful analysis of the relationship between gender, religion and extremism. Brown's assessment is well articulated, comprehensive and easy to digest. The book examines anti-radicalisation programs operating in five countries (i.e., Indonesia, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom), focusing squarely on the governments' and their agencies' worldwide perceptions of the influence of women and gender roles in Anti-Radicalisation programs. Despite focusing on only five countries, Brown's findings and analysis have broader international implications.

Brown, a reader in religion and global security in the Department of Theology and Religion at the University of Birmingham, has written extensively on the role of gender and religion in relation to extremism and terrorism, and she has been called on as an expert witness in court cases involving the radicalisation of women and children in the United Kingdom. *Gender, Religion, Extremism: Finding Women in Anti-Radicalization* is a credit to her work in the field and demonstrates sound knowledge of the subject matter and theoretical and practical implications of the contributions needed to advance the areas of anti-radicalisation and counterterrorism. (For her biography, research activities and scholarship, see <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/staff/profiles/tr/brown-katherine.aspx>.)

Gender, Religion, Extremism Finding Women in Anti-Radicalization is effective and persuasive. Brown provides a clear examination of the physiological and psychological perceptions of the role of women in radicalisation, and her writing is supplemented by condensed explanations of the various elements, contributions and repercussions (present and future) of radicalisation. The organisation of her narrative and the divisions of her book, both of which are well constructed, provide proof of the book's robust linkages to the jurisdictions that Brown selected and to the ways in which the programs' tactics differ. The arguments that Brown offers are well balanced and free of significant bias, which makes the book engaging to read.

Brown describes present anti-radicalisation initiatives and asserts how they must incorporate feminist thinking and research. She asserts that individuals actively involved in anti-radicalisation initiatives should be willing to seek more effective solutions



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outside established procedures and norms. Brown notes that researchers face difficulties in generating any causal theory of radicalisation derived from comparisons between radically different activities (even those with the same stated goals) due to the lack of agreed-upon indicators of success or objectives and the lack of accountability and transparency in programming and commissioning.

Brown's book encourages readers to contemplate the unintended effects of failing to consider gender and the role of women in anti-radicalisation efforts. Brown argues that these considerations are important in the evaluations, reviews and success of such programs, and she directs her argument towards those who practise or study de-radicalisation programs, as well as to those who attempt to influence broader governmental agendas. One of the takeaway points of the book is that the careful implementation and transplantation of these initiatives on a global scale may go some way towards resolving the contrasting needs for effectiveness and efficiency of responses to radicalisation.

For key policy makers and researchers in this field, *Gender, Religion, Extremism: Finding Women in Anti-Radicalization* shines a spotlight on the absence of women as stakeholders in implementing, evaluating and critiquing the outcomes of such policies in the global context. The book clearly contends that the inability of governments to appreciate or understand women's motives for engaging or participating in radicalised activities and behaviours contributes to the formulation of ineffective anti-radicalisation policies. In *Gender, Religion, Extremism: Finding Women in Anti-Radicalization*, the reader is taken on an eight-chapter journey of the exploration of the history of gender, religion and radicalisation. The reader is provided with insights into the perspectives of mothers and wives, fathers and heroes and an understanding of the protection and limitations of anti-radicalisation efforts. The fact that many anti-radicalisation initiatives are not founded on frameworks that are based on gender and human rights clearly justifies the concerns that these initiatives can have negative results in the form of adverse gendered dynamics, inequalities and discrimination. Based on her study, Brown observes that when women are included or discussed, it is typically in the context of their being victims of radicalisation and terrorism and that, to date, women are frequently featured and imagined as peacemakers and moderators in anti-radicalisation efforts.

Gender, Religion, Extremism: Finding Women in Anti-Radicalization begins with Chapter 1, 'Gender, Religion, and Radicalization', which defines the three concepts in the book's title. Chapter 2, 'Country Focus and Global Endeavours', introduces each of geographical areas that Brown selected and describes various policies, statistics and perceived successes of current anti-radicalisation programs in these areas. Chapter 3, 'Groomed and Seduced', focuses on radicalisation theories and the process of radicalisation. Chapter 4, 'Moderate Women and Violent Youth', examines the role of women and their contributions to anti-radicalisation efforts. Chapter 5, 'Mothers and Wives', asserts that the task of radicalised motherhood is reduced to the concept of parenting and ignores the various responsibilities of women, including their role in larger struggles against terror, discrimination and unemployment. Chapter 6, 'Fathers and Heroes', focuses on the logics of maternalism and paternalism, highlighting the incapacity of governments to reconcile competing logics and outlining the implications that these logics have within the discourse. Brown contends that maternalism and paternalism produce inconsistent and contradictory results. She asks whether state anti-radicalisation initiatives and programs are constructive strides forward or, as she puts it, 'iron fists covered in velvet gloves' (p. 24) if they are intended to exhibit humanity but instead perpetuate emasculating stereotypes. Chapter 7, 'The Antiradicalization Protection Racket', then explores the effects of anti-radicalisation efforts on society and the contributions of such anti-radicalisation endeavours in reducing radicalisation. She plainly and eloquently explains that such programs and policies fail to shield women and that due to the nature of how they are constituted, the very instruments themselves require alternatives. Chapter 8, 'The Limits of Antiradicalization', provides insights from feminist analyses and research into the scope and extent of anti-radicalisation gendered concepts and the alternatives and lessons that can be learnt from current practices.

The contribution of *Gender, Religion, Extremism Finding Women in Anti-Radicalization* to gender studies, counterterrorism studies and feminist studies is multifaceted and useful in addressing current weaknesses and provides an opportunity to improve and address the provision of fundamental security to all. The insights and conclusions should prove helpful to policymakers and researchers involved directly or indirectly in the creation, implementation and extension of anti-radicalisation programs. Changes in Anti-Radicalisation programs can be accomplished by raising awareness of the significance of gender in anti-radicalisation work and the role that gender should play in the implementation of programs of this kind. This book scrutinises maternalism and paternalism, 'and the effects (intentional or not) of radicalisation. In addition, Brown's book provides a toolbox of thoughts and ideas that can be used for a broad range of global concerns, such as anti-radicalisation and counterterrorism.

Brown's powerful argument has significant implications for our knowledge of how gender, race and class intertwine. It highlights how current anti-radicalisation efforts fail to provide the security required for society. Instead, Brown suggests redefining current anti-radicalisation policies and programs as a feminist peace initiative, emphasising the need for women's visibility. The suggestion is that in doing so, anti-radicalisation efforts will be more inclusive, transformative and expansive. There is little doubt that anti-radicalisation efforts need to be improved locally and globally for future leaders, researchers and policymakers in this field. Doing so will maximise the potential impact that their work will have in the area.

In conclusion, the balanced argument and analogies in the book, along with a substantial literature review, compelling case studies and theoretical integration, make this book an absorbing read. Brown might have fleshed out some of the concepts and terms that she uses, such as 'enemy-centric; and 'population-centric' (p. 48); however, these minor issues do not detract from the information that Brown seeks to portray. *Gender, Religion, Extremism Finding Women in Anti-Radicalization* should find a place in undergraduate and postgraduate courses in gender studies and international anti-terrorism studies, as well as in courses on national and international policing and anti-terrorism law and policy.

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