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Post-9/11 Radicalization Theory and Its Impact on Violent Extremism

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Abstract

Since 9/11, a trend has emerged in which theories of radicalization have come to emphasize religious beliefs, rather than psychological factors or political affiliations, as motives for adopting extremist ideologies. In particular, radicalization has taken on a strong association with Islamic religion and culture, based more on 9/11-fueled fears than on empirical data. This chapter explores this shift in theory and argues that it has, in turn, shifted the reality of radicalization. In the two decades since 9/11, individuals associated with Islam have been suspected of radicalization at higher rates, which has contributed to profiling, targeting, and, in some cases, further radicalization. This chapter first examines the evolution in radicalization theories and discourse since the early twentieth century, revealing a post-9/11 trend toward conflating radicalization with Islam. Second, this chapter explores the consequences of this shift and the role it has played in the spread of Islamophobia, creating profound consequences in domestic and international

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affairs. This chapter argues that the theoretical focus on individuals associated with Islam as holding an implied monopoly on radicalization and violent extremism has exacerbated an ingrained culture of Islamophobia and opened a space for other extremist groups to form and commit acts of violence.

Introduction

What causes individuals to undergo a process of radicalization? Why do some individuals adopt and integrate extremist religious or political ideologies, often culminating in acts of violent extremism? These questions took on new urgency in the United States after the horrendous attacks of September 11, 2001, which were perpetrated by a tiny group of Muslim violent extremists. In response to these violent extremists' destruction of the World Trade Center and part of the Pentagon, the public at large, as well as police, government officials, and academics who had already been engaged in radicalization research, began to reexamine old theories that had explained radicalization in psychological and sociological terms. Such theories tended to focus on political and economic motivations for extremism. In the wake of 9/11, a new trend emerged: theories of radicalization began to emphasize religious motivations and focused in particular on the Islamic religion and culture as fertile grounds for radicalization. Such theories, however well intended, were grounded less in empirical data than in the post-9/11 atmosphere of fear and distrust of individuals who were or were believed to be associated with the culture and religion of the Islamic faith.

For much of the twentieth century, theories of radicalization were the domain of professional researchers and focused on individual radicals as their unit of analysis. Such theories of radicalization sought explanations for radicalization in the emotional and intellectual processes by which individual people came to believe in and act on extremist ideas. By the late twentieth century, theorists came to understand radicalization as a process that was at least social as it was psychological; radicalization was now understood as occurring through a process of socialization, whereby an individual adopts extremist views through various forms of social influence and progresses from an intangible ideology toward an ideology that includes the justification of violent acts (Hardy 2018). Although radicalization is, in principle, a process that encompasses all forms of violent extremism, since the attacks of 9/11, the focus of radicalization studies has been largely on *Islamic* violent extremism. This form of extremism, which is one among many forms of extremism, has been described as the appropriation and corruption of the mainstream Islamic religion, its teachings, its social structures, and its culture, in order to justify violence committed for political reasons (Dyer et al. 2007).

As will be demonstrated in this chapter, the isolation of Islamic violent extremism from other types of violent extremism, such as that of white supremacy groups, Nazis, Burman right-wing nationalists, and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), promotes the false view that Islamic culture is more prone to fomenting extremism than any other. In fact, far more attacks are committed by other

violent extremist groups; in the United States, the greatest threat is posed by far-right extremists. For example, PBS NewsHour reported that from 1990 to 2017, excluding 9/11 and the Oklahoma City bombing, the number of US victims by Islamist violent extremist attacks to far-right extremists was 136:272, respectively. Moreover, while only 36% of victims from Islamic violent extremist attacks were attacked for an intended or specific reason (of which most occurred in the single act of the Pulse nightclub shooting), 53% of far-right extremists' victims were targeted specifically for perceived differences, such as religion, race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation (Parkin 2017). Yet, the conflation of radicalization with Islam leads to the targeting of Islamic communities by government officials, law enforcement, and civilians alike. Such targeting then fuels Islamic extremist groups' recruitment of new members. In this way, the linkage of Islam with radicalization does not advance the United States' goals of national security or social cohesion; on the contrary, it hinders these efforts and results in Islamophobia as well as further radicalization.

This chapter argues that since 9/11, shifts in *theories* of radicalization (i.e., ideas about what factors cause the process of radicalization culminating in violent extremism and who is spreading these theories and how) have shifted the *reality* of radicalization: who is radicalizing, who is being suspected of radicalization, and who is being ignored as a potential candidate for radicalization. Part 1 of this chapter examines the evolution of radicalization theories as well as the radicalization discourse that has existed in various fields of academia, such as psychology, anthropology, and international affairs, since the early twentieth century. A stark contrast is revealed between the pre-9/11 and post-9/11 discourse, as understandings of radicalization have come to focus overwhelmingly on Islamic violent extremism. Part 2 of this chapter, then, explores the consequences of this shift and the role it has played in the spread of Islamophobia and further radicalization. Islamophobia, defined as the social and political fear and suspicion of people who are or appear to be Muslim, has had profound consequences in domestic and international affairs. This chapter argues that the theoretical focus on members of the Islamic faith as holding an implied and constructed monopoly on radicalization and violent extremism has opened a space for various other extremist groups to form and commit acts of violence, as well as establishing an ingrained culture of Islamophobia in the West.

Part 1: Theories of Radicalization

Two Centuries of Radicalization

According to political scientist David Rapoport, modern terrorism has occurred in four distinct phases, or "waves" (Rapoport 2002). The aim of each of the phases has been social revolution. Rapoport says that each phase has lasted about 45 years, which "suggests a human life cycle pattern, where dreams that inspire fathers lose their attractiveness for the sons" (Rapoport 2002). In Rapoport's view, the modern renditions of radicalization and violent extremism began in the late nineteenth century, although radicalization and violent extremism can be seen throughout

history and across cultures. Rapoport argues that what began the modern phases of radicalization and violent extremism are doctrine and technology.

However, radicalization and violent extremism truly came upon the world stage in September 1901, when "an Anarchist assassinated President William McKinley . . . moving the new president Theodore Roosevelt to summon a worldwide crusade to exterminate terrorism everywhere" (Rapoport 2002). Smith expands upon Rapoport's label of the first major phase and includes the anti-monarchy movements of the early twentieth century. Smith says that this anti-monarchy phase was concentrated in individual states and was "focused on initial efforts to build toward a revolution to overthrow oppressive rulers" (Smith and Alarid 2019) Smith continues to say that this phase was largely "characterized by small, local cells within an overall hierarchical structure. Recruitment was top-down, largely face-to-face, and radicalization occurred within the cell as an internal result of socialization, training, and indoctrination" (Smith and Alarid 2019).

The second phase followed the First World War and the signing of the Versailles Treaty, which required that Germany surrender its colonies (Wildenthal 2010). This phase, the anti-colonial phase, was "focused on ridding colonial territories of their external masters and gaining independence" (Smith and Alarid 2019). Smith states that this phase was particularly social, with a focus on "ethnic conflicts, religious and ideological conflicts, poverty, modernization stresses, political inequities, lack of peaceful communications channels, traditions of violence, the existence of a revolutionary group, governmental weakness and ineptness, erosions of confidence in a regime, and deep divisions within governing elites and leadership groups" (Smith and Alarid 2019). It was during this phase that academics and nonacademics alike attempted to find psychological commonalities in those who engaged in violent extremism.

The third phase of radicalization and violent extremism is called the nationalist phase by Rapoport, the New Left Phase by Smith, and the Internationalization of Terrorism phase by Bruce Hoffman. This phase began in 1968, when "three armed Palestinian terrorists, belonging to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), one of the six groups that then constituted the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), hijacked an Israeli El Al commercial flight en route from Rome to Tel Aviv" (Hoffman 2006). In this phase, embassy attacks and airline hijacking were commonly used tactics, with over 100 airplane hijackings taking place (Rapoport 2002). Hoffman explains that this action marked the beginnings of a truly international terrorism because of its political nature, the importance of national identity, communication between organizations and states, and the power of the media to spread narratives and demands internationally (Hoffman 2006). Smith echoes Hoffman stressing the importance of the media, as well as emphasizing that "residual anti-colonial, anti-imperialism sentiments gave rise to communication and cooperation, and to anti-colonial groups modeling each other across several world regions" (Smith and Alarid 2019).

The world in which we currently live is defined by the fourth phase, which Smith calls "New Terrorism," characterized by the "willingness to impose mass casualties and the willingness to die for the cause" (Smith and Alarid 2019). Smith explains

that in New Terrorism, "the traditional model has adapted to a new form, with self and small-group largely autonomous recruitment, and a guided radicalization process" (Smith and Alarid 2019). This phase is also popularly defined by its religious aspect, a clear and sudden shift away from the political motivations that had previously come to define radicalization and violent extremism. Suddenly, religious identity began playing a key role in the characterization of radicalization and violent extremism. Smith continues that the "contemporary phase of terrorism, the religious phase, in the wake of the US withdrawal from Vietnam were the Iranian Revolution and the Soviet incursion into Afghanistan, both in 1979 with both having a distinctly Islamic dimension" (Smith and Alarid 2019). Hoffman argues that in Osama Bin Laden "thanking his god for the death and destruction that al Qaeda wrought on 9/11, bin Laden clearly had cast his struggle in incontrovertibly theological terms" (Hoffman 2006). Yet, if looking further into bin Laden's statement, bin Laden's motivation is political and social, citing Palestine and American military presence in Saudi Arabia. This political and social motivation follows the trend in radicalization and violent extremism for the past 100 years. This phase clearly demonstrates the shift from political to religious motivations, and academics and nonacademics alike have followed this shift in trend to focus on the religious aspects and tones of radicalization.

Olivier Roy, professor of Political Science at the European University Institute, argues that this current phase of radicalization and violent extremism should not be characterized as a religious phase, but rather as a social phase. Roy says that this latest phase of radicalization is a "youth revolt against society, articulated on an Islamic religious narrative of jihad" (Swanson 2015). Roy demonstrates this argument by examining the individual cases of homegrown jihadists to show that about 70% of those who became radicalized had "scant knowledge of Islam, and suggests that they [were] radical before even choosing Islam" (Lerner 2017). Roy cites various cases of European converts who resorted to reading *Islam for Dummies* before joining radical groups, as well as cases of second-generation Muslim youth who were disconnected from the Muslim communities and instead had records as petty criminals and had no prior history of political or religious militancy (Swanson 2015).

This societal revolt, as Roy describes it, largely affects second-generation Muslim youth and is essentially a reaction to a "process of deculturation" where the individual is "ignorant of and detached from both the European society and the one of their origins" (Lerner 2017). Roy says, "The second generation have lost their culture and some of them reconstruct their own Islam because there is no transmission of their religion from their parents" (The World Today 2017). In essence, Roy argues that what leads to radicalization is not religion, but rather, a misunderstanding of and isolation from the true self. This search for identity is then exasperated by societal attitudes, such as Islamophobia, leading to an identity that is divorced from the truth and instead founded on feelings of alienation. Roy states:,

> In traditional Muslim societies, religious prescriptions are embedded in culture and often in law. In a situation in which Muslims are a minority, these prescriptions are disentangled from

> the web of socially acceptable and culturally normative attitudes: they have to be recast as purely religious norms. But they are also sorted differently and categorized according to the legal system of the host country: this will be referred to as the formatting effect of the state. The right to wear the veil, for instance, could be treated according to different co-existing normative domains: gender equality, personal freedom, neutrality of the civil service, labour laws, security requirements, etc. Religious norms are recast either as values or as new norms defined by new paradigms (individual freedom, freedom of religion). This formatting effect is not only accepted, but also promoted by Muslims (liberals as well as conservatives) (Roy 2013).

Roy suggests that the true issue at hand is not Islam, but rather says that "it is the *Islamification* of radicalism that we need to investigate, not the radicalization of Islam" (Lerner 2017). As radicalization itself has evolved, so too have the academic theories that have purported to explain its causes, nature, and effects.

From Individual to Social Forces: Radicalization Theories Before 9/11

Throughout the twentieth century, academic theories of radicalization tended to deemphasize the role of deliberate, rational choice on the part of individuals who became radicals. Early radicalization theories tended to focus on the individual as the unit of analysis and attributed radicalization to psychological factors. In the mid-twentieth century, theorists began to consider the role of social factors in leading to radicalization, but socialization, too, tended to be understood outside the realm of rational choice, operating as a sort of conditioning, even brainwashing force on the individual. Social pressures were primarily understood as political and economic, rather than relating to religious or cultural factors.

Prior to 9/11, one of the most popular theories to explain the radicalization process was the psychological attribution theory. According to this theory, those who joined violent extremist groups and movements did so due to personality or psychological abnormalities. The theory stated that only someone with a severe mental illness would join extremist groups or could commit violent acts such as those common to violent extremist groups. The theory led to the creation of a specific psychological profile for violent extremists in order to understand the inherent nature of radicalized individuals. However, when violent extremists were examined directly, the empirical evidence showed that the psychological profiles of those who participated in violent extremism were indistinguishable from those who did not participate in violent extremism (King and Taylor 2011). Each psychological abnormality or personality disorder that was attributed to the violent extremist profile was contradicted by empirical evidence.

As researchers continued their attempts to create an accurate and universal psychological profile of a violent extremist, the results were consistently met with contradictory evidence. Other attempts to attribute psychological abnormalities to violent extremists later relied on personality disorders (Borum 2012). The disorders were typically linked to foot soldiers who were regarded as having pathological personalities, such as paranoia, narcissism, and antisocial tendencies. Theorists L. Suellwold and R.M. Turco both utilized this description to provide their terrorist's model, claiming that individuals that possessed these characteristics were more

inclined to participate in violent extremist activities (Silke 1998). Unfortunately, whether psychologists asserted that violent extremists suffered from any or a mix of the personality disorders mentioned, the critique of their theory was that their evidence was either anecdotal or an interpretation of secondary sources, rather than a direct examination of violent extremists (Silke 1998).

Ultimately, it took 40 years of research to develop the components of a unique terrorist profile, yet a universal profile was not able to survive rigorous research or peer review. One of the most significant blows to the psychological attribution theory was published by H.A. Lyons and J. Harbinson in 1986. Lyons and Harbinson examined convicted murderers from Northern Ireland. Crucial to the study, the murders were divided into politically motivated murders and non-politically motivated murders. The study discovered that only 16% of those who had committed politically motivated murders were considered to have a psychological abnormality, compared to 58% of the non-politically motivated murders. While this study could not provide a definitive conclusion regarding all violent extremists, the striking contrast found in the study called into question the legitimacy of the existing psychological profiles and indeed raised the question as to whether a unique psychological profile could actually exist (Silke 1998). As such, many theorists have discredited the psychological attribution theory as an approach for learning about how or why radicalization takes place, and as a way of understanding the common psychological and personality traits of violent extremists.

To attempt to develop a universal profile of a violent extremist is a dangerous undertaking. It has the potential to create problematic situations for many people who have certain traits but are not violent extremists. It also has the potential to treat race and social status as psychological traits, which can put people in real danger who possess the identified traits but have no inclination toward violent extremism. For example, King and Taylor (2011) asserted that homegrown jihadists were often second- and third-generation young Muslim men; however, that description is far from a psychological profile and can be more accurately described as a social profile. As such, the pursuit to discover psychological or behavioral abnormalities within a specific community could cause unnecessary racial profiling.

Given this understanding and the lack of empirical evidence supporting a violent extremist psychological profile, many theorists opted out of using it to understand radicalization and began in the 1970s to rely more on social theories. This shift in focus from the individual to the social can be attributed to the popularity of social movement theory, which had emerged in the 1940s and began to be used to explain radicalization as collective behavior (Borum 2012). Examining the social dynamic of violent extremism offered an understanding of collective behavior, social pressure, and commitment to social movements. This theory was not specific to violent extremist organizations, but rather enveloped a wide class of organizations, as social movements, which are defined as a population that held a set of opinions and beliefs with the desire to change certain elements of the status quo (Borum 2012).

Researchers found that movements were able to create solidarity within the group by establishing strong social networks and social identities through their dress as well as through various symbols associated with the movement. As people started to

find solidarity within the movement, their identity within the group began to take precedence over their individual identity. As outlined by Ezekiel's ethnographic research of right-wing extremists in 1995, personal sentiments were often sacrificed for the integrity of the movement (Holt et al. 2018). These theories also provided validity toward issues of grievances as social movements allowed for mobilization. Many theorists recognized that without the resources and networks within violent extremist organizations, many individuals would not have been able to engage in radical political action. These groups both promote and provide the necessary support to engage in violent political action, making them integral to an understanding of radicalization (Maskaliūnaite 2015).

As the social movement theory developed, certain theorists began to make a distinction between sympathetic participation and active participation. This distinction later helped to develop the contrast between political activism and political violence in radicalization theory. One such theorist in the late 1990s was Klandermans, who theorized that sympathy toward a cause was a necessary indicator for future political activism. In his theory, Klandermans recognized four stages of social movement engagement, which demonstrated the progression that an individual would have to take in order to shift from sympathy to active participation (Thomas et al. 2014). His Action Mobilization model has four stages: sympathizer, targeted, motivated, and participant. At any of the stages, an individual could stop or turn back from the route toward becoming an active participant. As described by Klandermans, "people need to *sympathize* with the cause, need to *know* about the upcoming event, must *want* to participate, and they must be *able* to participate" (Stekelenburg and Klandersmans 2013). Therefore, while there may be a wide pool of cause sympathizers, only a few will be targeted by the group for recruitment. Of those who were targeted, only a few would show motivation to participate. When it came time to participate, it is likely that some people would have left before becoming active participants (Stekelenburg and Klandersmans 2013). These stages provided an understanding of the social engagement aspect of radicalization, as violent extremist groups could already be viewed as politicized groups that would follow a similar model as that produced by Klandermans.

Ultimately, theorists in the 1980s and 1990s came to recognize that the essential task of social movements was to maintain an active, growing, and participating population. Without growth, the movement would not be able to spread its influence. Therefore, recruitment and social relationships were necessary to replenish losses to the group and maintain current members. With this understanding of the process of recruitment and engagement, social movement theorists asked whether the same process might be applicable to groups that relied on extremist methods to enact social and political change. Emma Thomas, influenced by social movement theories such as Klandermans', conducted a social experiment to find what role social engagement played in a group adopting illegal measures versus legal ones (Thomas et al. 2014). The experiment showed that the groups who were engaged in a social discussion immediately after being given a call to action were more likely to become participants in a movement. This included groups that were given an extremist call to action (Thomas et al. 2014). While the results did not speak as to what would turn a

group of political activists toward radical measures, it showed that social engagement is necessary to successfully motivate individuals to sign a letter of participation for an extremist demonstration.

The foundation that social movement theory provided for understanding radicalization was likely the most significant and beneficial influence on radicalization research. From its early stages, theorists began to understand radicalization as a gradual process wherein social networks within violent extremist organizations provided compelling reframings of individuals' experiences and environments. For example, Dalgaard-Nielsen recognized that "movements diagnose problems and attribute responsibility, offer solutions, strategies, and tactis, and provide a motivational frame to convince potential participants to become active" (Borum 2012). The development that has come from understanding the socialization of radicalization has contributed much to the theories that would emerge in the post-9/11 era.

Another factor that became an important way to understand individuals' responsiveness to violent extremism and attraction to the radicalization process was the concept of grievances, as shared grievances are a foundational factor of social movements. Issues such as lack of social integration, economic deprivation, and other perceived injustices are among the many that have often been cited as reasons for a movement's genesis. One need only look at various violent extremist groups, such as the Taliban, to observe that they rose in reaction to a particular grievance. In the case of the Taliban, they rose in reaction to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and its resulting refugee crisis, which allowed for socialization of new ideologies. Given that social movements are a collective response to a common belief of relative deprivation, theories of needs and grievances also provide insight into the radicalization process by which an individual comes to engage in a movement. Perhaps one of the most influential insights into grievances is A. H. Maslow's 1943 work, *A Theory of Human Motivation*, which asserts that one of the basic physiological needs of an individual is food. Should an individual go without food for a prolonged period of time, Maslow theorized that their need to satisfy their hunger, or their grievance, would suppress other higher needs, such as personal safety and intimacy. As Maslow wrote, "For the man who is extremely and dangerously hungry, no other interests exist but food. He dreams food, he remembers food, he thinks about food, he emotes only about food, he perceives only food and wants only food."(Maslow 1943) Until the needs of the individual are met, the individual can become desperate and violent, which can result in the individual using methods that he or she might not normally resort to in order to satisfy his or her basic needs or grievances. While the research was not initially intended to address motivations for acts of violent extremism or joining radical social movements, it became a general theory to highlight motivation as an important impetus to fulfill a sense of lacking or grievance and would ultimately illuminate how individuals' sense of vulnerability can lead them to violent extremism. Early studies of grievances paved the way for understanding why an individual would be inclined to join a social movement. Maslow's hierarchy of needs, as well as radicalization theories that focus on grievances, points to how an individual or a group's movement toward radicalization could be motivated by needs for employment, social inclusion, admiration, and

mobility within a social hierarchy. Movements address not only physical needs but also social ones, forming subcultures with their own ethics, hierarchies, and values that allow members to satisfy their desires for friendships, status, a sense of belonging, and sometimes even employment.

For the most part, theories of radicalization prior to 2000 argued from the position that radicalization occurred through a sort of brainwashing or conditioning, wherein an individual who was suffering from a crisis or psychological need had his or her will overpowered by indoctrination (Borum 2012). This type of radicalization was considered passive, as the decision to join a movement was caused by the overwhelming environmental conditions to which the person had succumbed. As such, radicalization that occurs passively occurs almost out of necessity (Borum 2012). Theories that have adhered to these views have primarily been older social movement theories. The decades after 9/11, however, would see a new trend in radicalization theories, as they shifted toward framing radicalization as being more often a result of rational choice or as part of a cost-benefit analysis (Borum 2012).

From Political to Religious Motives: Radicalization Theories Post-9/11

The events of September 11, 2001, brought a dramatic shift in discourses around theories of radicalization. Whereas pre-9/11 radicalization theories and discourses tended to focus on political motives as the social forces leading to violent extremism, the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon brought new attention to religion as a motivating social factor. This shift was led by nonacademics, including top-level government agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), as well as police forces such as the New York Police Department (NYPD), who joined the conversation surrounding radicalization theories. The rise in public involvement in the theorization of and in the discourse surrounding radicalization was, of course, out of immediate reaction to 9/11 and the two resulting wars of Afghanistan and Iraq. These moments exposed the underbelly of radicalization and violent extremism and created urgency to quickly develop the theories so that radicalization could be halted as well as to provide a new framework for countering violent extremism policies. The shift of focus to religion as a motive for extremist violence also corresponded to a shift in understanding of radicalization as an active, rational choice. Radicalization came to be understood as not just a reaction to a specific social condition, such as poverty or indoctrination, or a result of a psychological abnormality, but rather, radicalization theorists began to understand that radicalization was an all-encompassing process of socialization. At the beginning of the new millennium, theorists began to claim that radicalization was a social process or a pathway (Thomas et al. 2014). This meant that the shift toward accepting radical ideologies and utilizing those ideologies to justify acts of violence was a gradual change that progressed over a period of time.

One of the rational choice models to be advanced in the early twenty-first century was Moghaddam's staircase (2005), which is best understood as a metaphor for how a small percentage of individuals within a large community may progress all the way from a perceived injustice to committing violent extremism. Like most theories on the radicalization process, Moghaddam's staircase begins with a perceived injustice or sense of deprivation by an individual. If the individual perceives that his or her community is at an unfairly low social status, for example, then his or her motivation to address that will move him or her toward the first step. How he or she chooses to address his or her group's relative deprivation will determine whether he or she advances to the second step. Should the individual believe that it is impossible for anyone within his or her social group to advance through the existing framework of the established social hierarchy and should he or she also actively decide to displace his or her anger onto the whole of society rather than on the direct cause of his or her relative deprivation, that will move him or her to the third step (King and Taylor 2011). There, the individuals begins to show sympathy for acts of violent extremism as an acceptable means to rectify the relative deprivation that he or she perceives. Next, the individual would likely seek like-minded individuals and share his or her beliefs within a social setting, which would then further his or her radicalization. Should the process of radicalization progress, the individual would reach the fourth step of Moghaddam's staircase: joining a violent extremist organization. Only at the fifth step, once the individual has joined the organization, does conditioning occur, and black and white dichotomies are constructed. After a process of indoctrination, the individual reaches the final step, where he or she expresses a willingness to commit an act of violent extremism out of loyalty to the group, and social pressure from other members supports this impulse (King and Taylor 2011). Moghaddam's model emphasizes how individuals internalize factors surrounding their individual lived reality rather than relying on social pressure or external conditioning from a charismatic leader. As an individual moves up to the sixth steps of the staircase towards radicalization, he or she makes rational choices according to cost-benefit analysis.

Another rational choice model, Hafez's (2015) puzzle model, explains the radicalization process as nonlinear. Hafez developed this model to accommodate the various pieces that theorists have discovered contribute to radicalization but have been unable to connect in a way that encompasses the diverse and highly individualistic process of radicalization. Hafez states, "The pieces of the puzzle consist of grievances, networks, ideologies, and enabling environments and support structures. Each piece of the puzzle can come in a different representation just like similarly structured jigsaw puzzles could reveal diverse images once their pieces are interconnected" (Hafez and Mullins 2015) For Hafez, the puzzle metaphor offers an explanation of radicalization because it accounts for the nonlinear nature of the process. The model addresses the most concerning questions about radicalization, such as how or why a person would decide to commit an act of political violence, while embracing the consensus that radicalization is the result of multiple contributing factors that are unique to the individual (Hafez and Mullins). As Hafez stated, the desire to understand how and why an individual would commit an act of political

violence was paramount after the attacks on September 11, 2001. That infamous day brought the United States' collective attention to a new international threat, Islamic violent extremism, a form of violent extremism that was thought to be unlike any that had come before it. Moghaddam's staircase and Hafez's puzzle metaphor demonstrate the social aspects of radicalization and highlight the theory that radicalization does not take place in isolation but rather in social groups. Gill, Sageman, Koehler, and Neumann's work also highlights the social aspect of radicalization and links it to ideological foundations. Since 9/11, at least 90% of the overall publications on radicalization theory have been devoted to understanding the pathways to radicalization (Holt et al. 2018).

However, while these post-9/11 theories of radicalization may have contributed useful insights to our understanding of how individuals become attracted to violent extremism, they have a critical shortcoming. The majority of these works stress that the ideological foundations of radicalization arise specifically from a distorted interpretation of the Islamic faith. The attention that has been given to understanding radicalization has often focused exclusively on Islamic violent extremism, resulting in an unintended consequence of creating a link between the religion of Islam and terrorism, as well as the conclusion that Islamic violent extremism was and is the major source of terrorism. Hoffman, for example, wrote that the "religious imperative for terrorism is the most important defining characteristic of terrorist activity today." The linkage of Islam with the social aspect of radicalization is the main shift in radicalization theory in the post-9/11 world. While the majority of these works have stressed that the ideological foundations of radicalization arise from a *distorted* interpretation of Islam, they are still forging a connection between the Islamic faith and radicalization. Theories that stress the social aspect of radicalization lend themselves to support the argument that radicalization is culturally or religiously specific, and they also lend themselves to imply that the religion of Islam, as a social network, is more prone to radicalization than other groups. This is, of course, a proportionally unjustified connection and can be applied to any social or religious group. Its practical application to the Islamic community has produced worrying consequences.

Part 2: How Theory Shapes Reality

The magnitude of the potential threat posed by Islamic violent extremism was introduced to the world on September 11, 2001. In the new reality of the post-9/11 world, Islamic violent extremism became an important topic and concern in many spheres. Islamic violent extremism as a topic and study branched into both academic and nonacademic realms, as well as became a daily concern of the average citizen through intensive and extensive media coverage and the entertainment industry, giving rise to the mental imagery of the everyday citizen of Islam's inherent connection to violence. In addition, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as the 40-year tension with Iran, have cast the religion of Islam and its followers in the role of the United States' natural antithesis. Islamic violent extremism became separated from previous forms of political violence and spurred new, evolving

theories as to how an individual or a group could become radicalized to the point of committing acts of violence. Islamic violent extremism came to frame national security policies, and reducing the threat of Islamic violent extremism became the platform of politicians worldwide. Many of these politicians won elections based on their proposed solutions to this problem. An examination of the FBI's Violent Extremist Group webpage highlights six of the most dangerous international extremist groups, four of which are classified as Islamic groups (Countering Violent Extremism 2019). Because Islamic violent extremism has largely been viewed as a monolithic threat with two major origins, al Qaeda and later Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), many current theorists have focused their models of the radicalization process solely on Islamic violent extremism.

Within the development of radicalization theory to address this new threat, the fixation on Islamic violent extremism began to be displayed in Islamophobic rhetoric within the theories themselves, as they asserted that Islamic violent extremism was more dangerous and more pressing than other forms of violent extremism. The theories that focused on this phenomenon labeled the threat of Islamic violent extremism as significantly higher than other forms of violent extremism, thereby justifying the amount of attention that it received. In Alex S. Wilner's radicalization theory, Wilner stated that the difference between domestic terrorism, which originated from Western states, and homegrown jihadi terrorism was that the latter was far more destructive than other forms of domestic terrorism (Wilner and Joehanne-Dubouloz 2010). Likewise, Hafez promotes a similar view, stressing the major concern that Islamic violent extremism poses to the West and the accelerating rate at which jihadism is growing within the West (Hafez and Mullins 2015).

While Islamophobia has shown a marked increase post-9/11, it is not an entirely new phenomenon. In his 1981 work *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, Edward Said attributed the sentiments and media narratives of that time to the geographic proximity and historic power conflicts of the expanding Christian and Islamic nations (Said 1997). Sanjeev Kumar echoed this sentiment, discussing how "the West long viewed the Muslim world as a menace and a problem for Christian Europe" and "looked at Muslims with a mixture of fear and bewilderment" (Elman 2019). Islamophobic actions and ideas take many forms. A few of such are seeing Islam as:

> a political ideology, used for political or military advantage; Criticisms made by Islam of "the West" rejected out of hand; Hostility towards Islam used to justify discriminatory practices towards Muslims and exclusion of Muslims from mainstream society; Anti–Muslim hostility accepted as natural and "normal"; Islam seen as a single monolithic bloc, static and unresponsive to new realities; Islam seen as separate and other – (a) not having any aims or values in common with other cultures (b) not affected by them (c) not influencing them; Islam seen as inferior to the West – barbaric, irrational, primitive, sexist; Islam seen as violent, aggressive, threatening, supportive of terrorism, engaged in "a clash of civilizations" (Tarlen 2018)

These Islamophobic beliefs and actions had previously been localized. With globalization, the facility of spreading ideas, and current affairs, Islamophobia has also

gained ground and has become ingrained in a fashion that is no longer localized and can be seen as retaining a strong foothold in academia, as is the claim of Edward Said in his 1978 work *Orientalism*, and in national security matters. Islamophobia would, however, take on unprecedented prevalence and intensity in the wake of 9/11.

What discussions of Islamic violent extremism leave out is the grave threat posed by non-Islamic violent extremism. While the phenomenon of homegrown violent extremism is consistently tied back to al Qaeda and ISIS, which have made their presence known in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, when acts of violent extremism are committed in the name of white supremacy, Neo-Nazism, or any other far-right violent extremism, there is no specific source that individuals can indicate. As a result, these forms of violent extremism do not shape the public imagination in the same way. They are harder to track, so they often escape from view. This leads to an overlooking of the interconnectedness of white supremacists or Neo-Nazis and downplays the threat they pose. If the attacks committed by violent Islamic extremists were compared to attacks committed by other violent extremists such as white supremacists, patriot groups, or far-right winged extremists, there are far more attacks committed by other violent extremist groups than by Islamic violent extremists. According to U.S. News, far-right groups and individuals were responsible for 127 attacks in Western countries between 2013 and 2017, causing a total of 66 deaths (Trimble 2018). An article by PolitiFact, using data from the US Extremist Crime Database, reported that from September 12, 2001, to December 31, 2016, a total of 85 attacks were waged in the United States by violent extremists, resulting in 225 deaths. Of these, far-right violent extremists committed 62 separate attacks, resulting in 106 deaths, and Islamic violent extremist committed 23 separate attacks, resulting in 119 deaths (Valverde 2017). PBS NewsHour published a similar article, increasing the timeline from 1990 to 2017, and the results were even more staggering. Using the same U.S. Extremist Crime Database, excluding 9/11 and the Oklahoma City bombing, the number of United States victims by Islamist violent extremist attacks to far-right extremists was 136:272, respectively. The analysis showed that 63% of the victims from Islamic violent extremist attacks were not attacked for an intended or specific reason but, rather, were at the wrong place at the wrong time. The remaining 36% likely stemmed from the single act of the Pulse shooting (Recently, the attack on the Pulse nightclub has recently gone under debate that the attack was not intentionally anti-LGBT. News sources have begun reporting that the gunman responsible for the attack had chosen the club at random. If this were to be true, that would mean that all of the victims of Islamic extremism were not chosen for any particular reason, unlike more than half of the victims of right winged extremists (Fitzsimons 2018). Meanwhile, in the case of violence by far-right extremists, 53% of victims were targeted specifically for perceived differences, such as religion, race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation (Parkin 2017). In 2018, the Anti-Defamation League released a report indicating that "attacks with ties to right-wing extremist movements killed at least 50 people in 2018. That was close to the total number of Americans killed by domestic extremists, meaning that the far right had an almost absolute monopoly on lethal terrorism in the United States" (Serwer 2019) More recently, the Anti-Defamation League reported that, "American white

supremacists have also stepped up their propaganda efforts at home," and in 2018, "there were 1,187 reported incidents in which such individuals used "explicitly racist images and words" and distributed "racist, anti-Semitic and Islamophobic fliers, stickers, banners and posters"— an increase of 182% of similar incidents the year before" (Chan 2019).

Importantly, the aforementioned research bias means that what does not get recognized in many cases is it is Muslims who are the victims of terrorism. On March 15, 2019, for example, an Australian man was responsible for the shooting of two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, that led to the death of 50 Muslims and the injury of dozens more. Radicalism and violent extremism do not belong to a single community, nor is Islamic violent extremism a greater threat than any other form. Theorists ought to be aware of how their generalizations may be used to justify stigmatizing an entire community as potential terrorists. For example, the theory that second- and third-generation young Muslim men are most vulnerable to the radicalization process and, therefore, the most likely to be radicalized may lead to a stigmatization of this group. Not only does this casting of a segment of a population create the narrative that only the Islamic faith produces terrorists and extremists, but this linkage, once again, downplays the real and dangerous threat that is posed by other forms of violent extremism.

Profiling, Targeting, and Discrimination Against Muslims

Theory is not neutral. The focus of radicalization theory on Islamic violent extremism has corresponded to a rise in the profiling and targeting of Muslims and those who are believed to be Muslim, as well as discrimination against members of these communities. Since the adoption of the Patriot Act in 2001, the policing of Muslim-Americans has been on the rise and perpetuates the discrimination that many Muslims face today. The tendency to attribute radicalization to second- and third-generation young Muslim males can lead to local law enforcement racially profiling individuals whom radicalization theories have stated are more prone to radicalization. This type of profiling is problematic as it leads to criminalization of entire communities. These profiling methods, which are utilized as part of police methodologies worldwide can best be described as "pre-crime" methods of profiling and surveillance (Maskaliunaite 2015; Al Jazeera 2019). Indeed, these statistical profiles can be seen as a modern rendition of the failed psychological profile of the mid-twentieth century. A rising trend in the United Kingdom and the United States has seen police departments relying on mathematical algorithms derived from social media data, surveillance cameras, and police records, along with various social factors such as economic status, age, race, and education, to create strategic subject lists for surveillance (Al Jazeera 2019). Yet these lists are not objective and are prone to disproportionately target and cast minority groups in the role of violent actors. The surveillance subject list and, coupled with and existing ingrained social dynamics such as Islamophobia subject these groups to further discrimination and social isolation, and as such, they have the potential to create a self-fulfilling prophecy

by pushing the list subjects away from the social core. Since the adoption of the Patriot Act in 2001, the policing of Muslim-Americans has been on the rise and perpetuates the discrimination that many of the Islamic faith and culture face today.

Another problem with these theories of radicalization is that they lead to community-based de-radicalization efforts that are bound to be ineffective. Many countries have such anti-radicalization programs in effect, such as the Prevent Strategy in the United Kingdom, and the EU funded "Radicalism: No Thank You" project in Morocco (Dryden 2019; Stopping Violent Extremism 2019). These programs largely rely on community efforts to prevent, spot, or de-radicalize, and yet the problem remains. Relying on community efforts creates a culture of continuous surveillance and a discourse of suspicion, as described by Jennie Sivenbring that is largely focused on a single religious and a constructed racialized group. Sivenbring says that this reliance and discourse coupled with human subjectivity and cultural ignorance creates the space for misinterpretation of various behaviors, especially when not considering "the role of health, social services and educational interventions within the war on terror context, [and the fact that] vulnerability or distress among youth may sometimes manifest itself with the same signs listed as signs of someone being at risk of becoming radicalized" (Sivenbring 2019) For example, the NYPD's de-radicalization process, developed by Silber and Bhatt, asserts that young Muslim men from middle-class backgrounds in male-dominated societies are especially vulnerable to radicalization. They further claim that these individuals are likely college-educated and are recent converts to Islam who lack a criminal history (King and Taylor 2011). According to the NYPD's radicalization theory, Muslim-Americans are the main subject within their framework, despite non-Muslim domestic terrorism being on the rise within the United States.

The NYPD's theory of radicalization is emblematic of the larger problem with post-9/11 theories that emphasize the religion of Islam as fertile grounds for potential radicalization. Its four-stage process of radicalization includes the phases of pre-radicalization, self-identification, and indoctrination as steps in adopting extremist ideologies. While these phases might apply to radicalization in other contexts, the NYPD specifically relates it to the Islam-specific process of "*jihadization*," in which "the terrorist group or movement's goals take complete precedence for individuals, and the final stage is taken toward violence as individuals train, acquire weapons, and ultimately attempt to carry out attacks" (Smith 2018) These descriptions thus imply a conflation between radicalization and Islamic violent extremism.

Cycle of Radicalization

Criminalizing an entire community is not only inherently problematic; it also can lead to real or perceived discrimination that can be exploited by Islamic violent extremist groups to further fuel their propaganda. With the new millennium came technological advances that allow every individual to access shared and stored information anywhere and anytime. Smartphones, home computers, laptops, and global Internet access have placed local events on a global stage. Nearly every phone

comes equipped with a camera that allows for anyone to livestream events, like the active shooter from the Christchurch shootings in New Zealand. Thus, incidents of discrimination can gain global attention and be utilized as proof of perceived deprivation. Individuals are exposed to more information now than they have ever been, and the interconnectivity of the Internet has allowed them to share this abundant information with anyone around the world. As it stands today, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Messenger currently connect 2.32 billion people through their social media platforms alone (Statista 2019).

Social media has erased the difficulty of finding like-minded individuals and reaching out to them. The Internet brings together individuals of similar ideologies, bridging geographical gaps that had previously contained and localized radical ideologies. With the advent of social media and chat rooms such as 8Chan, radical ideas have been given the space to spread, and individuals have been allowed to conceal themselves behind online identities as they express radical ideas, sentiments, and values that might have otherwise created strains on relationships or affected their employment if they were to make those remarks in public. As for reaching out to new recruits, violent extremists have utilized avenues such as Twitter and Facebook as well as online chats in video games. Few sites have acted more as a meeting place for violent extremists and domestic terrorists than 8Chan. Self-described as the "Darkest Reaches of the Internet," it has provided an anonymous and poorly policed space for radicals, violent extremists, and recruiters alike to voice and spread their ideologies (Cook 2019). The rise of the Internet and chat rooms like 8Chan has created a whole new problem in the radicalization discourse that had been previously overlooked due to the focus on Islamic violent extremism: domestic terrorists and "white supremacists—an increasingly internet-driven phenomenon of lone wolves, not groups, that will prove immensely difficult to combat" (Tavernise et al. 2019) After the August 3, 2019, shootings in El Paso, Texas, a counterterrorism official issued a statement saying that "domestic terrorism should be treated as a high a priority as countering international terrorism has become since 9/11" (Miller 2019) From these various channels, recruiters have been able to interact with individuals and create the illusion of genuine relationships with potential radicals. Effectively, the invention and connectivity of the Internet has unintentionally provided recruiters of violent extremist organizations with a powerful tool that allows them to inspire or enlist other people across the globe from the comfort of their home computers. The power that social media and the Internet hold as tools for radicalization cannot be stressed enough.

The recruiters' formula is simple: photograph or record egregious behavior at the hands of a government authority against a presumably innocent person, post the images to a social media application, and watch as it quickly spreads to users throughout the region via the Internet. People are outraged that the behavior is condoned by the government. Bloggers discuss the event and provide their opinions. Users share information back and forth via social media. Twitter hashtags record the tweets relating to the event. If there is a death, Facebook pages will be created to condemn the abuse at the hands of the government. Links to YouTube videos are provided so that people can see the event for themselves. As people become

radicalized, they discuss a response to the incident. The response is carried out via a protest that could lead to a revolution (Holt et al. 2018). Benford and Snow, two social movement theorists, describe this pattern of recruitment "as the three frame dimensions: the diagnostic, prognostic and motivational frame which can facilitate in this context the categorization of ISIS's propaganda content" (Seib 2018)

Cases of discrimination and prejudice against Muslims are often showcased in Islamic violent extremist propaganda. As described in an ISIS propaganda video by Sheik Anwar Al-Awalki:

> Americans are being American, and we are not against that. The thing we are against is the merger of evil and America, which has made this nation evil. What we are seeing is America invading two Muslim countries. What we see is Guantanamo Bay, Bagram and Abu Ghraib. We see cluster bombs and cruise missiles and the death of twenty-three children and seventeen women in Yemen. This is what we can't face at all and will fight back and invite others to do the same as well (S3Look).

These incendiary incidents, especially the photographs surrounding the prison abuse scandal of Abu Ghraib that were released in 2003, are common examples of alienation that Islamic violent extremists use as a form of propaganda. Their goal is to exploit the grievances of youth who are alienated to give them a sense of purpose and provide social bonds and a thrilling call to action. Therefore, acts of discrimination and prejudice toward Muslims, known as Islamophobia, must be monitored and countered so that they are not utilized as forms of propaganda to radicalized homegrown violent extremists.

Many scholars have contended that discrimination is not a potential factor in radicalization, yet studies have emerged that directly correlate areas with high anti-Muslim views with pro-ISIS searches. It is in part due to these acts of discrimination that some Muslims have started joining ISIS. There are higher reports of news regarding people joining ISIS in communities where people express a strong anti-Muslim sentiment, finding that "anti-Muslim searchers are strongly associated with pro-ISIS searchers, particularly in communities with high levels of poverty and ethnic homogeneity" (Fox 2018) Usually, in the United States, this means communities where whites tend to dominate in terms of race and where ethnic minorities stand out. As sociologist Christopher Bail said in an interview with NBC News, "These are places where a member of a minority group might be more likely to be visible and perhaps more likely to experience discrimination because of their isolation." Bail continued, "But if our goal is to prevent further radicalization, and if there is evidence that discrimination against Muslims might be driving radicalization, I hope we can at least agree that very public attacks on Muslims should be carefully thought out" (Fox 2018) Indeed, the discrimination felt by Muslim communities has led to Muslims' mistrusting the federal government and even refusing to provide crucial tips about potential terrorists, according to claims made by law enforcement officials and Downing to NBC News. The National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NESEERS) and New York City's Zone Assessment Unity, which were disbanded in 2011, were two examples of discriminatory counterterrorism programs. Featuring questions such as "Which mosques do you

attend?" and "When did you become Muslim?," the programs led to the interrogation of many Muslim-Americans who were questioned without probable cause. While the Supreme Court eventually found these programs to be unconstitutional and shut them down, during the 9 years they were in operation, they served to "other" and ostracize many law-abiding Muslim-Americans.

An experiment conducted by Tamar Mitts of Columbia University reviewed expressions of support or votes for political members who expressed anti-Muslim rhetoric and cross-sectioned these with known ISIS sympathizers or activists who maintained public profiles over the Internet. Mitts found that social media played an important role in radicalization, noting that of the people who were arrested for supplying material support for ISIS, "62% used social media when they were radicalizing, and among those, 86% expressed their support for ISIS in publicly viewable posts" (Mitts 2019) Mitts hypothesized that social isolation heightened the process of radicalization by causing individuals who experienced discrimination to be more attracted to violent extremist propaganda. To measure this correlation, Mitts developed an algorithm that collected data from multiple Twitter accounts that were affiliated with or followed known ISIS accounts, geographically mapped the location of those accounts, and classified the millions of tweets to differentiate those that expressed ISIS sympathy. Using this algorithm, the geographically placed tweets were found to directly correlate in a positive trend with areas that expressed or voted for politicians who expressed exclusive and xenophobic policies (Mitts 2019). This correlation was also present in locations that reported higher numbers of anti-Muslim hate crimes. As reported by Mitts, "a unit increase in the number of hate crimes is linked to an increase of about 10-11% in the number of pro-ISIS tweets posted by each user, or an average increase of 7,000-18,000 tweets across the entire sample" (Mitts 2019). This survey is among the first to illustrate with empirical evidence the potential backlash that can occur from Islamophobia. Not only does Islamophobia contribute to alienation and discrimination, which are popularly cited grievances that leave individuals vulnerable to radicalization, but the direct correlation between a rise in hate crimes with a rise in ISIS support shows that Islamophobia may also exacerbate the radicalization process. More importantly, this study confirmed the existence of dormant support that the Islamic violent extremists could exploit in exposing individuals to their propaganda. As is the case with most social media posts, they have the potential to reach anyone, anywhere, and at any time. Tweets can collaborate through hashtags, be shared among other users so their followers can see them, and even be posted through other forms of social media. With the current population of Twitter users at 321 million people and growing rapidly, the increase in public pro-ISIS posts can expose millions to these messages and be endlessly saved and shared by other users (Statistica 2018). By utilizing social media, Islamic violent extremists have found the perfect propaganda tool to keep their message alive.

While theorists have asserted that many will endure discrimination long before committing an act of violence and that most individuals who are exposed to propaganda will never radicalize, recruiters only require a few for mobilization. And, social media provides them a fertile platform for following the recruitment

process described by Klandermans. The targets of Islamic violent extremist propaganda are "fence sitters," or individuals who show sympathy or support for the actions taken by Islamic violent extremists but are not, themselves, motivated to participate in acts of violent extremism (Helmus et al. 2013). Thus, if hate crimes toward Muslims directly correlate with an increase in support for Islamic violent extremism, then perpetrators of Islamophobia are effectively increasing the pool from which recruiters can pull. This causes the damage of Islamophobia to be twofold: not only does anti-Muslim sentiment increase sympathy for Islamic violent extremism, but also that same example of Islamophobia then becomes a subject for the organization's propaganda.

The role of Islamophobia and social media cannot be underestimated in the pursuit of understanding radicalization. While discrimination and prejudice are known grievances that have incited movements in the past, empirical evidence has also begun to show a direct correlation between anti-Muslim hate crimes and support for pro-Islamic violent extremism. The current trend in Western society is a vicious cycle wherein anti-Muslim sentiment rises in response to an act of Islamic violent extremism, which in turn motivates an individual to commit an Islamophobic hate crime. This hate crime then fuels support for Islamic violent extremism and potentially intensifies the radicalization process, which could then lead to a later act of Islamic violent extremism, perpetuating the vicious cycle of radicalization. As one study notes, "A poll by Pew Forum in 2010 indicated a majority of Americans fear Islam at some level. It can be concluded that this fear perpetuates our acceptance of racial profiling to occur on the basis of national security threat" (Pitt 2011) Because Islamophobia can originate from a myriad of sources, such as profiling the Muslim community as potential extremists, identifying Islam as the major source of violent extremism, or stating that Islamic violent extremism is more dangerous or deadly than other forms of violent extremism, it is imperative for theorists to avoid such statements within their work lest they provide justification for the current trend of anti-Muslim sentiment. Not only have discrimination and racism fueled the "othering" of many Muslim-Americans within the United States, but also the programs perpetuating these sentiments have contributed to the growth of violent extremists worldwide. While many policies for countering violent extremism feature combatting the narrative of insurgents, these efforts have, unfortunately, gone unnoticed, as violent extremists have succeeded at "*winning the hearts and minds*" of radicalized individuals.

Although the interconnectivity of the Internet is largely taken for granted, when the big picture is considered, we can see that small acts become big news, and large acts are never forgotten. As such, this inclusive global medium provides violent extremists with an effective means of spreading their propaganda through messages, blogs, e-magazines, and videos to espouse their narrative that the West is persecuting the Islamic way of life. As Daniel Koehler stated, al Qaeda has made excellent use of various methods for spreading propaganda, which shows that it does not rely on just one medium to circulate its messages to members. Furthermore, information technologies have enabled al Qaeda to revolutionize its operations on the Internet. SITE Institute has detected that jihadists are exchanging information on their forums, in

which the members inform others regarding the latest technological trends being used (Hayes 2018). One such platform is al Qaeda's e-magazine, *Inspired*, which was specifically tailored to English speakers to radicalize and mobilize them to commit acts of violence (Holt et al. 2018). The sophistication of these messages exploits numerous experiences and sentiments felt by potential recruits, such as bullying, racism, and even assaults committed against them because of their Islamic identity. These messages also include sentiments of a sense of belonging and purpose by participating in the defense of Islam, which functions to motivate individuals to take part in the extremist organization (Holt et al. 2018).

Islamic violent extremists have long made effective use of technology in recruitment. In March 2006, for example, a posting in one of the extremist's forums described an opportunity for members to send free and clandestine text messages to one another through a cellular device. This clandestine messaging system was then used as a medium to send a caricature of the Prophet Muhammad to organize a flash mob protest against the agency that created it. A guide was also found in another forum about anonymity and Internet safety. That guide produced some vital information regarding the procedures the government used to identify the users. The Global Islamic Media Front, an Islamist propaganda organization, provided a high level of sophistication, which was achieved by the cyber-jihadists. Then, al Qaeda illustrated the guide to issue it manually as well as provided a detailed guide and technically advanced devices for creating Internet proxies. Al Qaeda even provided guides for creating one's own private proxies, accompanied with instructions utilizing the proxy with a combination of analogies and images, all of which was mentioned in the 11th page of the guide. The guide also mentioned many varieties of web applications, language scripts, and Internet protocols. Al Qaeda's creation and distribution of guides for networking and organizing has greatly helped advance its cause. Another way violent extremists have used the Internet is to promote job advertisements. In October 2005, for example, a posting on the Global Islamic Media Front advertised an opening for a job position for an "electronic mujahedeen"(Angel et al. 2006). As these examples illustrate, the presence and strength of violent extremists on the Internet and social media is serious and cannot be underestimated. Violent extremists utilize the open platform of the Internet to their advantage and will continue to do so as long as this platform is available to them.

Radicalization in the War on Terror

In 2010, the U.S. State Department's Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications (CSCC) was founded "as the world's first government-sponsored enterprise not run by an intelligence agency to counter online jihadist propaganda" (Rabasa 2015). The CSCC is engaged in the online war of narratives by providing a counter-narrative to combat the messages that ISIS and other groups post online. Alberto Fernandez, the CSCC's coordinator, said that in 2014, ISIS released over 90,000 Tweets per day, most of which stressed the grievances against the Muslim population as well as the intractability of the East-West divide:

> Muslims are being killed and we are the solution. There is an appeal to violence, obviously, but there is also an appeal for the best in people, to people's aspirations, hopes, and dreams, to their deepest yearnings for identity, faith, and self-actualization. We don't have counter-narrative that speaks to that. What we have is half a message: "Don't do this." But we lack the "Do this instead." That's not very exciting. The positive narrative is always more powerful, especially if it involves dressing in black like a ninja, having a cool flag, being on television and fighting for your people (Rabasa 2015).

With this powerful online medium at violent extremists' disposal, it is now more important than ever to recognize the information and narratives that can spread through social media and, additionally, that can be utilized as propaganda by Islamic violent extremists. As such, the propensity to fixate on Islamic violent extremism while downplaying the existing threat of other forms of extremism plays into the narrative of violent extremists that the United States is at war with Islam.

Islamic violent extremism is rarely understood as separate from the Global War on Terror, which often plays out as a war of narratives where each side is vying for supporters to defeat the other side. The battlefield has become a warzone of information, where popular opinions and control of the narrative have become just as significant as frontlines and strongholds. For the violent extremists, their overarching narrative is that the United States and its allies are persecuting Islam and their way of life. They spread propaganda to the Muslim community by highlighting travel bans and other Islamophobic occurrences that show Westerners linking Islam to terrorism. Clinton Watts, a terrorism expert with the Foreign Policy Research Institute, said, "This plays into the hand of jihadists because it doubles down on Al Qaeda's justification for attacking the United States, to begin with" (Almedia 2017) Jihadists insist that Americans who reveal Islamophobic statements represent the "real" United States. They claim that previous administrations have been disingenuous in their attempts to differentiate "Islam" from "terrorism" and in their claims that the War on Terror was only about targeting extremists, and not Muslims in general. The aim of the extremists is for the Muslims of the United States to band together and join ISIS and other similar groups, to fight back against the global mistreatment of Muslims by Westerners. These extremist groups believe that their propaganda will eventually make people realize that Americans and their allies only think of Muslims in one way, as terrorists. Violent extremists want the world to believe that the United States and its allies have always considered Islam and terrorism to be synonymous.

The foundation of violent extremists' strategy is to create civil unrest within the West. When atrocities are committed against Westerners, this creates a sense of fear and panic within Western communities, and the aggression of those communities is often then misdirected toward Muslims in general, out of paranoia. This, in turn, causes a rise in anti-Muslim hate crimes due to the lack of social integration and cultural understanding from the average Westerner, which violent extremists use as a reason to say that the Western world does not accept Muslims. Baddar reported that according to the FBI, "a total of 7,175 hate crime incidents were reported in 2017, representing a 17% increase over 2016 data and the greatest single-year increase reported since 2001, when hate crime targeting Arab-Americans and Muslim-Americans, and those perceived to be Arab or Muslim, surged in the aftermath of 9/11. Since the FBI reported

a 6.8% increase in 2015 and a 4.6% increase in 2016, the 2017 data also represent the first three-year consecutive annual increase since 2001" (Almedia 2017). These statistics reveal a troubling increase in anti-Muslim hate crimes within the post-9/11 atmosphere of Islamophobia.

The United States has for over two centuries been held together as a single society that values personal freedom, the freedom of capital, and the freedom to acquire. However, these values can also be used against any individual, thereby weakening the fabric of society. Violent extremists claim that they have put an end to the bonds of American society and that it is only a matter of time before these bonds will disappear and the society will collapse. When these foundations start to disintegrate, the citizens will lose their patience and begin to turn on one another. In a 2006 interview addressing al Qaeda's declaration in Iraq, Yaman Mukhaddab (2017) stated:,

> Everything we read, hear and see of commiseration about freedoms and unease about the repression and restriction of freedom of opinion and freedom of capital is only the first sign of this unrest over the loss of the foundations of the building of this vulgar, materialistic society.

Yaman Mukhaddab explicitly expresses the hope that continued occupation of Afghanistan will continue to erode social foundations of the United States (Jihadists Target the American Dream 2017). The extremists' arguments suggest the level of threat they pose to the United States, and yet the political standoffs and partisanship among those who debate national security and civil rights in the United States suggest that the country does not recognize the strategic threat that violent extremists actually pose.

Conclusion

The cultural narrative of the Islamic religion being advanced by a small but growing contingent of post-9/11 radicalization theorists is that the religion is an inherently violent one. While this narrative has grown out of the real threat posed by radical extremists, it is ultimately a dangerous mischaracterization of Islamic culture and religion as a whole. This trend has brought a shift in narrative that has taken the focus away from other forms of violent extremism, downplayed their threats, and profiled members of the Islamic faith as suspect. This profiling isolates these individuals from their fellow citizens and exposes them to open social discrimination, violence, and recruitment into the ranks of the violent extremists. Empirical evidence has shown that heightened levels of Islamophobia have a direct correlation to pro-Islamic violent extremist support. Violent extremists use the sentiments and social realities that Islamophobia provides to recruit new members. Recruitment is now easier than ever and can be done from anywhere in the world due to the rise in popularity and accessibility of social media platforms. Thus, the theories that exaggerate the (albeit extant) threat of Islamic violent extremism, while downplaying the effect of social isolation and discrimination against the Muslim community, are likely

an outgrowth of the rise in ingrained Islamophobic sentiment within Western culture. This trend among academics and society at large is most concerning, particularly because a strong sense of belonging is what contributes to social integration and inoculates against radicalization (Bastug and Akca 2019).

This chapter has argued that theorists should be cautious of profiling an entire religious or cultural group and aware of the dangerous effects to which such profiling can lead. Trends in academic theory can indeed have ramifications in social and political life. While this chapter in no way intends to downplay the threat of the few radicalized Islamic violent extremists who were responsible for 9/11, who wish to do real harm to the West, and who pose a real threat to America's national security, it remains critical that post-9/11 theorists avoid the temptation to associate violent extremism with an entire Abrahamic religion of 1.8 billion people who comprise close to 25% of the world population. Indeed, many victims of Islamic violent extremism are Muslims themselves. Winning the hearts and minds of these individuals by taking a more accurate view of the sources and causes of radicalization would go a long way toward advancing US national security and winning the War on Terror. Theories of radicalization should be grounded in empirical research rather than fear-based reactions or short-sighted political agendas.

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