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## **Studies of Radicalisation: State of the Field Report**

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Political Violence in the New Media Ecology'  
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# **Studies of Radicalisation: State of the Field Report**

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## **Abstract**

As researchers at the New Political Communication Unit begin a study of media and violent radicalisation in an Islamic context, this paper presents an initial review of existing research addressing the radicalisation of Muslims in the West. Definitions of radicalisation focus on a process in which an individual experiences transformation, leading to questions about varying factors that can contribute to this occurring. Given the small numbers and lack of accessibility to 'radicalised' individuals, research to date has tended towards qualitative methods, generating interviews, and biographical data. Though studies indicate that there is no typical 'profile' of individuals who become radicalised, certain characteristics are commonly present in some. Factors contributing to radicalisation are many. And while each study tends to champion a certain explanation over another, the majority agrees that radicalisation is the result of a combination of push and pull factors. This paper examines a series of such factors and considers their role in illustrated cases of 'radicalisation'.



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# Introduction

'I take complete responsibility for my actions. I acted purely in the name of my religion.... I can assure you that one day, should I be set free, I would do the same, exactly the same.... I don't feel your pain. I have to admit that I don't have any sympathy for you. I can't feel for you because you're a non-believer'. (Mohammed Bouyeri, the killer of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gough)

In the past, Western states turned a blind eye to militant 'jihadist' groups on their soil as long as they carried out their 'jihadist' operations overseas, usually in conflict zones such as Bosnia, Kashmir, Afghanistan, Palestine, etc. Even after 9/11, Western governments assumed the threat came from Muslim foreigners and so the main concern was to tighten immigration and travel procedures. However, the 3/11 Madrid bombings (2004), the 7/7 London bombings (2005), and the activities of the Hofstad group in the Netherlands, to name a few, brought the issue of homegrown terrorists to the fore. Such events have created considerable tension with the Muslim diaspora in the West, where the 'war on terror' came to be seen a war on Islam. However, despite this tension and robust counter-terrorism efforts, radicalisation of the Muslim diaspora seems to be present, perhaps because the factors underlying it still are. For this purpose, in recent years scholars and state bodies alike have been trying to pinpoint the causes underlying Islamic radicalisation and the new phenomenon of 'global jihad'. This paper is a review of the literature and wisdom available so far on the main factors and catalysts leading to radicalisation of Muslims in the West. The first part of the paper will set out to identify radicalisation and explain its process. The second part will look at profiles of Islamic radicals and see if there are any patterns. The third and greater part will examine and compare some of the key explanations put forth to account for radicalisation. These factors will be explained in terms of: socio-economic deprivation, problems stemming from globalisation and search for identity, social affiliations, political grievances, and radical rhetoric.

## Radicalisation as a Process

Radicalisation is understood to be 'a process of personal development whereby an individual adopts ever more extreme political or politic-religious ideas and goals, becoming convinced that the attainment of these goals justifies extreme methods' (Ongering, 2007: 3). It is 'a growing readiness to pursue and support – if necessary by undemocratic means – far-reaching changes in society that conflict with the democratic order (AIVD, 2006: 11). As its definitions indicate, radicalisation is a process of change, a transformation from one condition to another. Hence, it is not sudden and people do not snap and become radical, although a certain incident (e.g. experienced act of discrimination, perceived attack on Islam such as the 2003 war on Iraq, or moral crisis such as the death of a beloved person) can accelerate the process. Most female suicide bombers in Iraq were said

to have had family members (father, brother, son, etc.) killed by the multinational forces or state forces in the country.

Studies on radicalisation have shown the process to have several stages: pre-radicalisation, self-identification, indoctrination, and jihadization (NYPD study, 2007: 4); the individual process, the interpersonal dynamic, and the effect of circumstances; a sense of moral outrage; a specific interpretation of the world; resonance with personal experiences; and mobilisation through networks (Sageman, 2007: 3). Despite the different identification of stages, all studies agree that there is a stage of individual change (e.g. increase in religiosity, search for identity), that is enhanced through external aspects (e.g. experienced discrimination or racism, attack against Muslims such as the wars in Bosnia and Iraq), and finally violent radicalisation usually takes place when the individual socialises with like-minded people. However, these stages are not clear-cut and may overlap. Also, they are not necessarily sequential. An individual may skip stages reaching to militant action rather quickly, or become disillusioned at any given point and choose to abandon the process altogether.

When talking about and/or defining radicalisation, a clear distinction must be drawn between religious fundamentalism and conservatism on the one hand, and violent/ militant radicalisation on the other, as the former does not necessarily lead to the latter. Muslim fundamentalists who strictly adhere to their religion – even the Salafi ideology – in practice and appearance do not all support certain forms of militant jihad. The Salafi ideology accommodates different strategies: spreading Islam 'da'wa' by peaceful means and showing strict religious discipline in everyday life (the *Tablighi* movement); revival of Islam through political activism and change of society through state organs (e.g. the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt & Jamat-e-Islami in India); and Salafi Jihad that believes that revival of Islam and establishment of the Islamic state (*the Caliphate*) can only be achieved through militant jihad (Sageman, 2004).

The Salafi (also known as Wahhabi) ideology was shaped in the eighteenth century in Saudi Arabia by Mohammed bin Abdul Wahhab because of his perception that Islam had deviated from its righteous path. The ideology calls for the revival and restoration of authentic Islam, strict adherence to Sharia laws, and establishment of an Islamic state (*Caliphate*). The Salafi ideology gained momentum in the mid twentieth century as the Egyptian intellectual and Islamist Sayid Qutub took it to further levels and advocated political activism (Islamism) to overthrow 'false' Islamic states and all those who support them, including 'false' Muslims. This was to be done through waging an all out jihad (holy war). However, it is this radical jihadi-Salafi ideology, or a twisted version or variation of it that has been the inspiration of so-called 'jihadi' operations in the West.



## Profiles

Most studies and research on Islamic extremists have shown the lack of any consistent profile that can help identify potential terrorists (Home Office, 2005: 31). Early studies on terrorism, mainly psychological, in the 1970s and 1980s searched for a 'terrorist personality' and deviant characteristics that basically suggested terrorists were born violent rather than made so by their environment (Gill, 2007: 151). However, recent studies of 'jihadists' have shown that the common characteristic among them seems to be their 'normality' (Krenshaw, 2003: 99; Gill, 2007: 152). In other words, it could be anyone. Some are Western nationals (e.g. 7/7 bombers, Richard Reid); some (failed) asylum seekers (e.g. Algerian Kamel Bourgass of the Ricin plot and those of the failed 21/7 bombings); and others foreign students (e.g. the Hamburg cell responsible for 9/11). Some are well-educated (e.g. M. Sidiq Khan, members of the Hamburg cell), others less so. Some are well-off (e.g. Omar Sharif, Sajid Badat, and most foreign students in the West), others genuinely poor (e.g. the failed 21/7 bombers, mainly consisting of former child asylum-seekers). Some are apparently well-integrated in their Western societies (e.g. Siddique Khan was considered 'a Beeston lad' and had many white British friends), others less so. The majority was law-abiding, others had petty crime records (e.g. Mukhtar Said Ibrahim, Mohammed Bouyeri, and many of the Maghreb immigrants). Many were single, but some were married with children. Some suffered disturbed childhoods and dysfunctional families, others came from stable and loving households. Devji attributes this diversity of 'jihadists' profiles to the diversity of reasons for their joining 'jihad' (2005: 20).

When looking at profiles of 'jihadists', studies usually differentiate between the different diasporic Muslims in the West. North Africans (*Maghareb*, meaning people from al-Maghreb al-Arabi, the Western part of Arabia, which includes: Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia), mainly living in France, Spain, and the Netherlands, are said to be usually poor and involved in petty crime. Their economic situation is mostly considered accountable for their radicalisation. South Asians, mostly in Britain, are considered better off economically but are said to suffer some form of social exclusion which underlies their sense of humiliation and anger. Middle Eastern Arabs, many of them students, are usually well-off. Their motive for joining 'jihad' usually stems from the political grievances and conflicts in their region on the one hand, and their familiarity and indoctrination with the Salafi ideology on the other.

The Muslim diaspora in the United States is said to be different and less critical than that in Europe (Mohapatra et al. 2003; Cesari, 2007; Sageman, 2007). Several reasons are given for such difference. American Muslims are better educated and economically comfortable

(Cesari, 2007). They are more integrated with mainstream society - though discrimination and racism undoubtedly exist - and are better represented in the political sphere (Sageman, 2007). Their numbers compared to Muslims in Europe are rather small, and the geography of the United States allowed their dispersion across the vast continent thus reducing segmentation along ethnic and religious lines. Another reason, which Huntington highlights as a 'fundamental difference', is that the United States does not border Muslim countries, which makes illegal migration of Muslims – common in Europe - more difficult (2007: 58). In light of the above, their support of 'jihad' would mainly be in the form of financial donations (*zakat*) to political radical groups such as Hamas and Hizbullah (Cesari, 2007: 34).

Despite the inconsistencies in the profiles of radical Islamists, studies have nevertheless yielded certain similarities. A key commonality is that the majority of Muslim youth in the West who become involved in violent extremism are religious novices - perhaps exploring religion for the first time as born-again Muslims or converts – who have superficial knowledge of the theological underpinnings of Islam. As such, they are unable to assess the authenticity of the version of Islam they come across through preachers and texts, which in turn renders them vulnerable to extreme interpretations (Sageman, 2004; Roy, 2004; Choudhury, 2007; Dalgaard-Nielson, 2007; Dittrich, 2006). As a once zealous Islamist, Ed Husain reveals how it was mostly 'second-generation British Muslims and converts who were seduced' by the fiery speeches of the radical preacher Omar Bakri Mohammed, given his mastery of the Arabic language – which most of them did not speak – and his ability to quote from the Quran and other sources (2007: 82). Many of the youth at the Islamist gatherings 'did not know how to pray', and converts although showed strong conviction in the superiority of the Islamic political ideology and the need to spread it, lacked 'basic knowledge of worship' (*ibid*).

Another characteristic the NYPD comparative study highlights is that individuals who get involved in militant 'jihad' have 'unremarkable' lives (2007: 2). They have average education, average jobs, and little, if any, criminal history. Such subtle nature, or normality, makes it even more difficult for authorities to identify or monitor potential terrorists (*ibid*). This overall characteristic of being 'unremarkable' is rather significant as it may in due course lead certain individuals to want to do something 'remarkable'. Indeed, many researchers on terrorism and Islamic radicalism suggest that militant operations, especially suicide ones, are often driven by 'young Muslims chasing dreams of glory...trying to impress their friends with their heroism and sacrifice' (Sageman, 2007). Just a 'bunch of young guys', Roy explains, with unfulfilled expectations who choose suicide 'as a way to exist as heroes' (2007), which hints to a psychological dimension. They are 'fantasists, wannabe terrorists looking for some sense of identity and



meaning in their lives' (Durodie, 2007). The making of videos prior to suicide operations and using speeches that indicate sacrifice for the sake of the Muslims and the *ummah* are all part of this desire to become a hero, a *shaheed* (martyr) in the eyes of the suicider's people, (Roy, 2007; Gill, 2007: 148). However, the fact that suicide bombers kill themselves in the process casts serious doubts about their worldly desires. Such arguments seem to deny the radicalisation process any genuine spiritual, religious, and political convictions and aspirations.

In terms of academic background, the majority who are educated tend to major in scientific/ technical fields (medicine, engineering, physics, IT, etc.). Of the 9/11 group, Mohammed Atta studied architecture, Ziad Jarrah aerospace engineering, Zakariya Essabar medical technology, Said Bahaji and Munir Mutassadaq electrical engineering; and Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, who is said to be the mastermind of 9/11, studied at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical University. Many radical imams and sheikhs such as Abu Hamza al-Masri and Omar Bakri Muhammad also studied science and technology. The list goes on. Many similar examples exist but cannot be mentioned due to the scope of the study.

## Studies

Despite the recent rush to unpack terrorism and theorise about militant Islamic radicalisation (scholarly papers in the discipline are believed to have increased by 300% (Jackson, cited in Shepherd, 2007), empirical studies have been lacking given the difficulty, as well as danger, in meeting up with and interviewing members of radical groups, who may even then be unwilling to disclose critical information for security reasons. Moreover, successful suicide bombers - whose mindset and circumstances studies mainly seek to understand – kill themselves in the process of the terror attack and take their secrets with them. Despite these difficulties, the seriousness and urgency of the matter has driven many scholars and security and intelligence bodies alike to investigate the recent phenomenon of 'global jihad'. Studies are mainly conducted using qualitative methods in analysing data and are empirically and/or theoretically driven. Farhad Khosrokhavar, a sociologist and anthropologist, relies on primary data gathered through interviews carried over a period of 18 months with Muslim radicals in French prisons, as well as analysis of texts (2005: 5). Wiktorowicz (2004) adopts an ethnographic approach, and bases his research on observation and interviews conducted in the UK with members of the now defunct *al-Muhajeroun*. 'The group was disbanded in October 2004, however, all indications are that the group have simply re-branded themselves as *al-Ghurabaa* [<http://www.al-ghurabaa.co.uk>], becoming more hard-line in the process, and without the spiritual succour of their now exiled leader.' This group achieved notoriety recently during a demonstration in

London against caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad printed in the European press, during which they displayed banners with incendiary slogans such as 'behead those who insult Islam' (Awan, 2007: 12). Wiktorowicz explains 'global jihad' in terms of social movement theory. Using the social network theory, Sageman, a psychiatrist and sociologist, bases his study (2004) on the biographies of 172 convicted terrorists gathered from open sources. Finally, state security institutes have also been active in coming up with their own analysis drawing on their experience and compiled intelligence information. However, for security reasons, not all their reports are published. Those that are usually take an empirical rather than theoretical approach.

## Explanations

The paper will now turn to review some of the key explanations given for the 'radicalisation' of Muslims in the West.

### 1. Socio-Economic Deprivation

Socio-economic deprivation, including low education attainment, unemployment and underemployment, are amongst the most common, as well as most contested, explanations for radicalisation. Statistics show that Muslims, compared to other faith groups, have the highest rates of unemployment. These rates are highest for Muslims aged between sixteen and twenty four years old and they also have a disproportionately high prison population, and poor housing facilities (Awan, 2007: 211). All give a sense of unequal opportunities and lack of social integration. 'This sense of inequity is reinforced by statistical data which indicates that South Asians have higher levels of unemployment than whites and other racial minorities' (Modood et al., 1997). There is also a general sense of discrimination in housing and social services (Weller et al., 2001; Ansari, 2002; Wiktorowicz, 2004: 15).

Socio-economic frustration and lack of self-fulfillment – that may be seen as the doing of a hostile unwelcoming society - along with bitter experiences of racism, discrimination, and Islamophobia can trigger violent radicalisation. This explanation perhaps links to economist Gary Becker's theory that 'the greater amount of human capital a person accumulates, the less likely that person is to commit crime' (Becker in Atran, 2004: 74). In the context of terrorism and suicide operations, the less promising one's future is, the easier it becomes to end one's life.

Socio-economic deprivation is perhaps most evident in the Muslim diaspora of North African Arabs (*Maghreb*), mostly residing in France, but also in other European countries such as Spain and the Netherlands. Most French Muslims who join al-Qaeda, says Roy (2004: 215), are from impoverished suburbs. And though they could become centres for recruitment, 'their main goal is economic in nature, not religious' (Haut, 2007: 25). The autumn 2005 riots in France, which some assumed were of an Islamic nature, were but a reaction to the



'dire socioeconomic situation of Muslims in France' (Dittrich, 2006: 15). This argument has led many to believe that the threat of home-grown terrorists in the United States is lower than that in Europe since the majority of American Muslims are 'much better educated and economically better off', with more than half holding university degrees and earning over US\$50,000 annually (Cesari, 2007: 31).

However, this socio-economic deprivation theory does not explain why some well-off Muslims in Europe who do not lack education or resources also engage in 'jihadist' operations. Omar Sheikh, Sajid Badat and Omar Sharif all attended private schools (Awan 2007: 4). The nineteen 9/11 hijackers, of whom fifteen were Saudi Arabian, had modern Western education and no financial worries whatsoever (Khosrokhavar, 2005: 175). And most recently and surprisingly, the failed car-bomb attacks in London and Glasgow in June 2007 involved physicians. Sageman (2004: 74) strongly refuses this 'conventional wisdom' that terrorism is the choice of the dispossessed and powerless who are naïve and have limited education. In terms of education, out of the 172 biographies of 'Salafi-jihadists' Sageman examined, over 60% had at least some college education, while the central staff/leadership were well-educated (88% had finished college and 20% had doctorate degrees) (ibid: 76). In terms of employment, at the time of joining jihad, out of 134 individuals, 57 were professionals (mostly in scientific disciplines), 44 had semi-skilled occupations (police, military, mechanics, civil service, small businesses, and students), and 33 were considered unskilled (usually from the Maghreb cluster), (ibid: 78).

However, a note of caution must be mentioned here. Academic attainment and economic well-being does not necessarily indicate social integration with mainstream society, nor does it detach well-off persons from the socio-economic problems facing their communities. 'By focusing on individual circumstances and achievements, we not only do a great disservice to the genuinely impoverished communities from which they hailed, and which held a profound resonance for them, but we also fail to apprehend the communal nature of radical Islamist discourse' (Awan, 2007: 213).

## 2. Globalisation and the Search for Identity

Identity politics is another key factor in understanding the radicalisation process. French sociologists such as Olivier Roy, Gilles Kepel and Farhad Khosrokhavar put much emphasis on problems stemming from globalisation and Westernisation which prompt second and third generation Muslims in Europe to question what it means for them to be Muslims in a Western society. What is at stake here, Roy notes, is not necessarily economic grievances but 'the reconstruction or recasting of a lost identity' (2004: 315). Being part of both (their parents' ethnic communities and the Western societies they live in) but feeling they belong to neither, Muslim youth start to carve out their

own identities. Some Muslim youth consider their parents' cultures remote and outdated, not to mention seeing some of their cultural practices as *bidaa* (practices that are foreign to Islam) and therefore not worthy of adopting. This in turn creates a gap between radical youth and their families. Blame in this respect is also put on some Muslim parents who cannot or do not communicate with their youth. 'The older generation of immigrants in the UK is not aware of what is happening with the younger generations. 7/7 has highlighted this generation gap' (Bagguley & Hussain, 2007: 12).

Through interviews with members of the al-Muhajeroun, Wiktorowicz (2004: 14) found that most of its members had initially experienced a severe identity crisis prior to their participation. This identity crisis is sharpened through an experience or perception of discrimination or abuse. Khosrokhavar (2004) repeatedly talks about the general sense of humiliation felt by Muslim youth in the West because they are treated and/or perceived as 'different' and 'inferior'. Even those who are not excluded economically and are relatively well-integrated may still experience 'a more or less covert racism and find it profoundly humiliating' (ibid: 197). The following quote is from radical cleric Omar Bakri Mohammed, whose perspective may exemplify this position:

People are looking for an Islamic identity. You find someone called Muhammad, who grew up in western society, he concedes a lot so people accept him. He changes his name to Mike, he has girlfriend, he drinks alcohol, he dances, he has sex, raves, rock and roll, then they say, "You are a Paki." After everything he gave up to be accepted, they tell him he is a bloody Arab, or a Paki (Omar Bakri Mohammed as quoted in Lebor 1997: 129).

Some Muslims in Europe may find themselves alienated and unwelcome which feeds their feelings of social exclusion and even victimisation. The 2001 census showed the segmentation of British society thus contradicting British multiculturalism. While some of the ghettos and pockets of people were created naturally, others were the result of segregation (Bagguley and Hussain, 2007: 10)

Feelings of humiliation and subjugation are intensified by conflicts in Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, Bosnia and elsewhere where Islam and the Muslim *ummah* as a whole is seen to be under the attack of a neo-crusade. As Muslim youth consider their ethnic communities too corrupt or too compromising with the West to represent their feelings, they begin to search for alternative representations. The appeal of radical Islamism, particularly to young Muslim males, lies not only in the sense of belonging and global Muslim fraternity it offers, but also in the perceived strength and challenge (to the West) it represents, as opposed to the stereotypes of 'passivity' of their ethnic communities



(Choudhury, 2007: 4). Husain, a former Islamist himself, describes such appeal: 'Cut off from Britain, isolated from the Eastern culture life of our parents, Islamism provided us with a purpose and a place in life' (2007: 73), '...it gave one a sense of belonging, a sense of connection not just to the structure here in Britain, but also a cause globally' (CNN, 2007).

Identity politics, alienation, discrimination, and humiliation may contribute to an explanation of why some of the well-off educated young Muslims mentioned earlier choose to construct a radical Muslim identity. The NYPD study highlights this struggle between the Muslim individual and his secular environment and contests that radicalisation in the West is not triggered by political, economic, or social grievances – as in the case of the Palestinian struggle – but rather by this quest for identity and belonging (2007: 8).

### 3. Social Affiliations

Proponents of the social network and social movement theories contend that radicalisation is transmitted and intensified through social affiliations. Drawing on biographical evidence, Sageman (2004) argues that violent radicalisation of Muslim youth takes place through bonds of friendship, kinship, discipleship and other social networks. The imam of a mosque in Brighton where Abu Hamza al-Masri started doing chores in return for a small rent while an engineering student said that he (al-Masri) was 'a good-looking man, very polite but had no understanding whatsoever of Islam' (BBC Online, 2006). After mixing with a group of Algerians at the mosque, who were members of an Islamist movement, al-Masri changed and became extremely radical (*ibid*). In a sample of 100 'militant-jihadists' he examined, Sageman found that only 13 attributed their affiliation with 'jihad' solely to their religious beliefs and without the intervention of friends (2004: 115). Radicalisation escalates as militant-jihadist rhetoric, circulation of jihadist material (e.g. extreme Islamic literature, videoed militant operations, internet sites), denunciation of the West, and intensive interaction facilitates transformation culminating in a group's readiness to join 'jihad'. 'Group-think', warns the NYPD report, is a very powerful catalyst that allows individuals to feed off each other's radicalism and later pave the way for action (2007: 43). As action becomes the objective of the group, each member is 'challenged to accept jihad as an individual obligation' (*ibid*). Moreover, being part of a group creates in-group 'jihadist' competition.

As such, joining 'militant-jihad', according to Sageman, is likely to take place bottom-up, unlike the conventional wisdom that potential Muslim youth are recruited and brainwashed. There is no 'active top-down organizational push to increase al-Qaeda's membership', says Sageman (2004: 123). In fact, al-Qaeda, argues Devji (2005: 19) seems to lack any kind of formal procedure of recruitment and indoctrination.

A research project funded by the Danish Ministry of Justice that examined the Hamburg cell concluded that its members joined the global jihad in a 'self-generating process from below' (Taarnby, 2005: 22). 'Jihadist' recruitment has always been 'diffused, localized, and informal', says Jenkins, while 'self-radicalisation' is often the norm (2007: 2). In most of the cases, small groups 'initiated contact' with bigger 'jihadist' networks when they felt they were ready to take their radicalisation to the next [militant] level (Sageman, 2004: 109). Such grassroots 'jihadisation' is even more dangerous, easier to spread, and difficult to monitor.

Along the same lines, Wiktorowicz (2004) draws on the importance of group dynamics using the social movement and resource mobilisation theories. He bases his findings on interviews conducted in the UK with members of al-Muhajiroun. However, unlike Sageman, he argues that active outreach, indoctrination, and covert recruitment by radical groups or movements do exist through entrepreneurs who seek to attract members through various innocuous means (e.g. engaging them in debates, lectures, camps, demonstrations, pamphlets, etc.) and under different organisational names (2004: 4). By constantly raising issues of importance to Muslim youth - through students associations and religious speeches following congregational prayers on Fridays - Islamist movements seek to attract potential recruits by 'offering an identity of empowerment in the context of discrimination and sense of alienation' (*ibid*). Once an individual becomes a member, he too is intensively trained to become a leader or organiser to spread the movement's ideology and bring more recruits, an organisational format common to many radical political movements through feminism to neo-conservatism. Perhaps this social movement theory falls well with Ed Husain's account of the active mechanisms of recruitment of radical Islamist groups such as Hizb-u-Tahrir (2007).

Thanks to technology and the internet, the networking and connection of like-minded people has never been easier. The internet has made it possible for an individual to be 'radicalised' in the solitude of his/her own bedroom through linking and interacting with virtual friends and groups, electronically exchanging militant material, and even acquiring the know-how for terrorist operations through manuals available online. Younis Tsouli, who called himself Irhabi 007, grew from merely browsing the web and observing jihadist sites to actually creating and running them all from his bedroom in West London after being approached (online) by radical figures who realised and utilised his IT potential (BBC Newsnight, 2008). And though there is still much debate as to how and whether the internet (consumption of jihadist media) can cause radicalisation of Muslim youth, more and more studies suggest that it certainly is an enabler and facilitator.



#### 4. Political Marginalisation & Grievances

Marginalisation of Muslim youth in mainstream politics in Europe has driven many to seek representation through radical Salafi movements and groups. Some claim that Muslim youth are not only alienated from politics at the national level, but also at the community level where seats are reserved for the community elites or elders who are often 'of a different make-up and outlook to those they seek to represent' (Abbas, 2006: xxi). Hence, Muslim youth find that they have no voice or legitimate outlet for their frustration. Farrar (2005) contends that the commonality between all the narratives of Muslim radicals in Europe seems to be their complete divorce from the conventional political processes (Farrar in Awan, 2007: 213). So with the doors of national and local politics closed on the one hand, and the doors of radical Islamism wide open on the other, it is no surprise that many youth turn to the latter. Compared to Europe, American Muslims are said to be less inclined to join radical groups given the American grassroots voluntarism that allows them to vent some of their discontent in local politics (Sageman, 2007: 2).

A key catalyst for radicalisation in general and terrorist operations in particular is Western foreign policy, which has backfired domestically. Conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, Bosnia, and Chechnya come to be seen as crusades and convince some Muslims that the West is bent on subjugating Islam and Muslims. The sufferings of people in these conflict zones and the humiliation of Muslims in Abu Ghraib prison, Fallujah, and Guantanamo Bay – which news media allow people to witness as they unfold – cause diasporic Muslims to experience what Khosrokhavar labels 'humiliation by proxy' (2005: 157). The sufferings of Muslims in Bosnia and failure of Western super powers to interfere to save them gave rise to the extremist argument that the West was complicit in their deaths and thus aroused anti-West sentiment in the West (Whine, 2007: 27). Iraq, it seems, was the straw that broke the camel's back. In a recent poll, Britons (Muslims and Non-Muslims) considered their country's participation in Iraq to be the main reason behind the 7/7 bombings in London (Bagguley and Hussain, 2007: 7; Dittrich, 2006: 25).

Political impotence and inability to deter the course of events through demonstrations and protests – such as those in the wake of the massacres in Bosnia and war on Iraq - can cause disillusionment with the democratic system and its principles (Awan, 2007: 213). Such disillusionment may render the state illegitimate in the eyes of the discontented, which in turn legitimates a war against it and all it stands for, including its people. In his taped video message broadcast on al-Jazeera, Mohammad Siddique Khan states: 'Your democratically elected governments continuously perpetuate atrocities against my people all over the world'. Hussain Osman told Italian interrogators

that he resorted to violence only after conventional means (rallies and demonstrations) to stop the war on Iraq failed.

#### 5. Radical Rhetoric

The spread of the jihadi-Salafi rhetoric in the West through preachers, text, and audio/video material is often cited as responsible for the radicalisation of the Muslim diaspora. Muslim veterans (former *Mujahideen*) who went to settle in the West after fighting in Muslim conflict zones such as Afghanistan and Bosnia are said to have played an important role in spreading extreme religious views, especially that they had both the radical rhetoric and militant training upon which to act (Bell, 2007: 22). Their credibility and legitimacy came from their 'heroic' past as *Mujahideen*, not to mention their command of the language of the Quran (Arabic). Whine says that by 2001, this surge of Arab veterans managed to penetrate the South Asian communities in Britain in what has been called 'the "Arabisation" of the South Asian communities' (2007: 28). They also succeeded in taking over moderate mosques in North London and Brighton where one became the 'base for organizing convoys to Bosnia and the other a recruitment center' (*ibid*). Radical preachers such as Abu Hamza al-Masri, Omar Bakri Mohammed, and Abu Qutada played a significant role in disseminating the Jihadi-Salafi ideology and intensifying anti-Western sentiment. Moreover, transnational Islamic movements such as Hizb-u-Tahrir and Jamat-e-Islami, though they may not be considered terrorist organisations in themselves, are considered 'conveyer belts' as they advocate and preach radical Islamism which in turn may facilitate their members recruitment/ assignment by terrorist groups (Dittrich, 2006: 34). As mentioned earlier, the internet – as well as books by radical ideologues such as Sayyid Qutub and Mawdudi that are still available at low prices in Muslim bookshops/ stalls in the West – has made it possible for individuals to become familiar with and influenced by radical ideologies without even socialising with radical groups.

However, the condemnation of mosques and preachers (*imams*) must be kept in context. Upon their return from Afghanistan, many radical *Mujahideen* tried to take over mosques but were repelled (RAND, 2007: 13); Abu Hamza al-Masri was banned from preaching at Finsbury Park mosque following his violent sermons; and Richard Reid was expelled from his place of worship because of his radicalism. Radicals and radical groups in general are not welcome in mosques (other than those themselves espoused by radical management). Not mosques but 'basements, backrooms, bookshops, youth clubs, the Internet, and other informal institutions are what we must focus on', argues the RAND group (*ibid*). The nature of the phenomenon – networks of radicalisation – make these multiple private spaces critical sites for analysis.



While the Salafi ideology bears no direct relation to terrorism, it provides a similar religious interpretation and framework to that adopted by terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda (Cesari in Dittrich, 2006: 33). Thus, preachers advocating the Salafi ideology must be cautious as some of their young and impressionable audience may find in their rhetoric a justification for terrorism.

## Conclusion

Several findings emerge from this review of existing studies on radicalisation:

- Radicalisation is a gradual process of change and transformation that involves different stages. However, it is not a linear process and the stages are not clear-cut, nor necessarily sequential. The acceleration, slowing down, or even abandonment of the process depends on internal and external variables.
- Researchers need to distinguish Islam, mosques, and religious conservatism on the one hand, and radicalisation that endorses or leads to violence on the other. Mosques and Muslim scholars do not necessarily breed radicalisation, but closed groups and gatherings run by preachers with extremist views can.
- While profiling appears non-applicable for identifying those 'at risk' of radicalisation, there are some common features in a significant proportion of cases.
- Given the small numbers and lack of accessibility to 'radicalised' individuals, research to date has tended towards qualitative methods, generating interview and biographical data. This raises the question: will further radicalisation lead to a larger sample of 'objects' to be researched, i.e. radicalised individuals, making large-n, quantitative studies more feasible? Yet qualitative research appears useful for explaining in detail how contributing factors combine and interlock in the lives of individuals over time.
- Looking at the biographies of individuals involved in 'jihad', radicalisation appears to be not the result of a single factor but a combination of several interacting ones. However, a common underlying explanation seems to be feelings of humiliation on behalf a larger imagined community of Muslims (*ummah*) and anger towards perceived Western hegemony and interference.

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