Islamic Radicalization: A Conceptual Examination

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Abstract: This paper is a conceptual analysis of Islamic radicalization. Islamic radicalization refers to the process of persuading individuals (e.g., often new or potential Muslim recruits) that jihad is the answer to contemporary problems that have undermined the existence or progress of Islam on a global scale. This topic is important because visualizing the issue in this manner enhances our understanding of the Islamic radicalization process. An important conclusion is that such radicalization is efficient because it has been shown to inspire a wide spectrum of individuals to fight the enemies of Islam in Holy War and die for Allah.

Keywords: Caliphate; communication; framing; fundamentalism; internet; Islam; Islamic radicalization; jihad; Social Movement Theory; terrorism.

Introduction

This paper is a conceptual analysis of Islamic radicalization. Islamic radicalization refers to the process of persuading individuals (e.g., often new or potential Muslim recruits) that jihad is the answer to contemporary problems that have undermined the existence or progress of Islam on a global scale. The three major elements of Islamic radicalization are (1) the teaching of hatred toward the Infidels and foreign invaders (and toward any entity seeking to undermine Islam); (2) the nurturing of feelings that the Apostates (i.e., Muslim "rebels" or "traitors" within the faith) should be disowned or killed because they have associated themselves with the enemies of Islam (i.e., through their policies, actions, or lifestyles); and (3) a desire to rekindle Islamic civilization by establishing a global Caliphate and, thereby, imposing sharia all

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over the world. The Caliphate is an Islamic system of world government; sharia is a body of Islamic law.

This topic is important because present-day jihadism can be framed as a global social movement. Visualizing the issue in this manner enhances our understanding of the Islamic radicalization process. An important conclusion of this conceptual analysis is that such radicalization is efficient because it has been shown to inspire a wide spectrum of individuals to fight the enemies of Islam in Holy War and die for Allah. Particularly emphasized in this paper are the role of Social Movement Theory in Islamic radicalization and the types of people susceptible to it. To this very point, disaffected youths or Muslims coming from contemporary insular communities (i.e., "no-go zones") are more likely to be radicalized. More importantly, Islamic radicalization is not limited to men. For example, since 2016, ISIS has promoted women as a mouthpiece of jihadist recruitment online. Women can also be used in auxiliary roles, such as supporting their husbands and procreating future jihadist soldiers for the next generation of the Caliphate.

This paper ends with the processes explaining how online Islamic radicalization works. Online radicalization happens after a person immerses him- or herself into extremist literature (including graphic images and videos) for long periods of time. As Neumann (2013) reports, as times goes by, that person's emotional desensitization tends to decrease as well. Because the internet has the advantage of having a more distributed effect than conventional media, jihadist ideologues can enhance jihadist recruitment and training in unprecedented ways. Three key concept in this section are sedentarism, radical *dawah*, and digitalized *ummah*. When people become sedentary—i.e., becoming physically inactive due to the massive amount of time devoted to reading internet content—they have a higher propensity to self-radicalize to some level. A radical *dawah* is an aggressive method of proselytizing people into militant Islam. The "digitalized *ummah*" is the global community of Muslims on the World Wide Web; they are the main target of Islamic radicalization.

Radicalization: Definitions

Scholarly works on radicalization, limited in numbers, have mostly examined why and how people come to adopt beliefs and behaviors that culminate into terrorist actions, particularly those killing unarmed citizens. Since the late 1960s, the academic literature has looked for answers to these questions by analyzing terrorism at different levels: individual, collective, organizational, networked, mass-movement related, socio-cultural, and international/interregional terrorism (Borum, 2011). Before providing definitions of radicalization, we need to consider certain issues. For instance, there is no commonly-accepted definition of radicalization among governments and within academic circles. Just like "terrorism," "radicalization" continues to be a contested concept. A predominant problem with the definition of radicalization has to do with "who" is to determine what constitutes radicalization (Schmid, 2013).

Generally speaking, a radical is a person who cherishes "a deep felt desire for sociopolitical changes" (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010, p. 198). That person may embrace a radical ideology without perpetrating acts of violence (Hamid, 2015). Radicalization *per se* is the process by which an individual promotes a radical ideology. The concept captures the essence of "what goes on before the bomb goes off" (Sedgwick, 2010, p. 479). There are multiple conduits to radicalization, which can be individual or group-driven. Some interpret it as the "change in beliefs, feelings, and behaviors in directions that increasingly justify intergroup violence and demand sacrifice in defense of the ingroup" (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008, p. 416). Others call it "a personal process in which individuals adopt extreme political, social, and/or religious ideals and aspirations that justify the use of indiscriminate violence" (Wilner & Dubouloz, 2010, p. 38), or "the process by which an individual, group, or mass of people undergo a transformation from participating in the political process via legal means to the use or support of violence for political purposes" (Crosset & Spitaletta, 2010, p. 10). And some researchers look at it as a "pathway" (Horgan, 2008) or "staircase" (Moghaddam, 2005) to terrorism.

In line with these contentions, radicalization is also a process by which people firmly oppose or decrease the status quo, or fight the ideas and movements of the day (Cragin, 2014; Della Porta, 1995). It is both a mental and psychological process in the sense that it stimulates people to undertake violent actions (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2009). Radicalization is a derivative of the mores or milieus from which individuals come. Under these circumstances, radicalization is a product of a general consensus; for example, it could be a consensus against or in favor of changes in society (Kundnani, 2012; Silva, 2008). Lastly, radicalization often increases "extremity of beliefs, feelings, and behaviors in directions that increasingly justify intergroup violence and demand sacrifice in defense of the ingroup" (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008, p. 416).

Fundamentalism

Fundamentalism often has religious undertones that reveal unfaltering attachment to irreducible dogmas (Nagata, 2001). Fundamentalism reflects the tendency of particular groups or cultures—mostly, but not exclusively, religious ones—to follow a doctrine of painstaking literalism of holy scriptures (or cherry-picked sections from those scriptures), as well as literalism of principles, tenets, and canons in their everyday lives. While fundamentalism is sometimes presented as "different" from radicalization, the two terms share many similarities. With respect to militant Islam, a significant overlap exists between the religious thinking of Salafists—Islamic fundamentalists who want to impose a pure, traditional version of Islam based on sharia (i.e., Islam law)—and the ultra-violent agenda of jihadist organizations (Alderdice, 2017).

This painstaking literalism of holy scriptures is imbued with an ingrained feeling of preserving ingroup and outgroup boundaries (i.e., Social Identity Theory), leading

radical clerics or jihadist leaders to stress the importance of purity and the desire to revisit traditions—i.e., Salafism or the Golden Age of Islam, which Muslims are accused (by Salafists) to have abandoned (Turner, 2010). Fundamentalism and radicalism are appealing to a significant minority of Muslim youths because they deal in absolutes. They adopt a reductionist worldview; in other words, they transform the reality of a complex world into a black-and-white world (Sterman, 2002).

Rejection of diversity

Diversity of religions and opinions is a hallmark of Western civilization. Rejection of such values is a "fundamental" dogma that becomes deep-seated within a group (Boer, 2005). The result is the group members' absolute devotion to the group's beliefs, ideology, or religion—and the possible hatred of other groups'. In this context, radicalization corresponds to the group's refusal to make any accommodations toward other groups—or even any interactions with them. Eventually, such rejection of diversity leads to a strong desire to subordinate or inferiorize other groups (Gross, 2004). In many contemporary situations, multiculturalism and cultural pluralism are rejected in support of a type of cultural narrowmindedness that advocates a universal rejection of diversity (Smith, 1993).

Those who reject diversity want to see a rift between groups and cultures. For these people, concepts like solidarity, internationalism, and universalism symbolize "dangerous narratives," "totalization," or "essentialism," all of which are fundamentally tyrannical, Eurocentric, and imperialist. Islamists have their own social construction of "Muslim woman," but they discriminate between Muslim and Western women by constructing a stereotyped "West" that is flawed and immoral. The West is pigeonholed into an immutable, evil entity. In the minds of many Salafists, there is a serious debate about the "Western world" and the dominant "Western culture" (Mojab, 1998). Overall, rejection of diversity implies rejection of the *Other* and resists innovations or adaptation within a culture (i.e., any form of adaptation that could replace aspects of that culture) (Ge, 2001). The corollary is the belief that a universal culture for the entire humankind is either threatening or impossible (Ravitch, 1990).

Islamic Radicalization

The three major elements of Islamic radicalization are (1) the teaching of hatred toward foreign invasion and toward any entity seeking to undermine Islam; (2) the nurturing of feelings that Muslim apostates (i.e., rebels or traitors within the faith) should be disowned or killed because they have associated themselves with the enemies of Islam (i.e., through their policies, actions, or lifestyles); and (3) a desire to rekindle Islamic civilization by establishing a global Caliphate and, thereby, imposing sharia all over the world (Halverson, Goodall, & Corman, 2011). A Caliphate is an Islamic system of world

government. In general, Islamic radicalization champions a worldview that categorically rejects the adoption of new values and principles within Muslim societies. Vis-à-vis the Western-style democracy, Islamic radicalization wants to replace it with religious supremacy—because of its abhorrence of the core precepts of democracy (such as freedom of the press and universal human rights). The process of Islamic radicalization also entails methods whereby jihadist leaders, militant imams (i.e., Muslim religious leaders or clerics), or community organizers attempt to accomplish their Caliphate objectives by adopting laws that would considerably curtail many of the current basic rights that Muslims enjoy in Muslim-majority countries (Borum, 2011).

Although Islamic radicalization mirrors the process of adopting these fanatical ideas, jihadism is the performance of extreme violence based on Islamic radicalization. The ultimate objective is to strong-arm a government and/or population into subjugating themselves into the Caliphate ideology. However, what is seen as a "radical idea" may differ across the social, cultural, religious and political spectrum of the entire *ummah*—i.e., the global Muslim population or the Islamic Nation (Rane, 2016). From a Western standpoint, Islamic radicalization often includes the practice of teaching new recruits to reject fundamental Judeo-Christian values such as equality, voting rights, gender pluralism, civil liberties, divorce between church and state, and peaceful transitions in political leadership. On the other hand, ideas that are popular within radicalized Muslim cultures, even those in Western countries, include the legitimization of ultra-violence (e.g., jihad for the Caliphate), support of sharia as the main legal system in all countries, and unconditional rejection of diversity (Rabasa & Benard, 2015).

Islamic Radicalization through Social Movement Theory

An appropriate theory to further explain the process of Islamic radicalization is Social Movement Theory (SMT). Zald and McCarthy (1987) refer to a social movement as "a set of opinions and beliefs in a population, which represents preferences for changing some elements of the social structure and/or reward distribution of a society" (p. 2). SMT postulates that social movements construct, cultivate, and diffuse meaning by word of mouth, through traditional media, and on online social media. SMT also explains how a movement's framers communicate messages in manners that echo the wills, passions, ideologies, or beliefs of mass populations—a phenomenon named "cultural resonance" (Berbrier, 1998). Over time, as the masses adopt the movement's messages, they agree with what the social movement stands for and identify with it—with good or disastrous outcomes (Borum, 2011). Dalgaard-Nielsen (2008) adds that,

> movements diagnose problems and attribute responsibility, offer solutions, strategies, and tactics (prognostic framing), and provide motivational frames to convince potential participants to become active. Key to mobilization, according to this perspective, is whether the movement's version of the "reality"

> resonates or can be brought to resonate with the movement's potential constituency. Some scholars have referred to this process as "frame alignment" the emergence of congruence between an individual's and an organization's interests, values, and beliefs (p. 40).

SMT scholars maintain that leaders of social movements work hard to recruit new members; they act as "rational prospectors." They see movements as worthy "operations" because of their collective effervescence. They inflame passions and smooth the progress of conversion to new ideologies. Rational prospectors try different methods of recruitment and "enlist" those who are the most likely to leave everything behind and fight for the cause (Brady, Schlozman, & Verba, 1999).

Social Movements and Present-Day Jihadism

Present-day jihadism can be framed as a global social movement. Visualizing the issue in this manner enhances our understanding of the Islamic radicalization process. First, it provides a context for "mobilization potential"—e.g., the extent to which a movement can use human resources—and for describing how people with the same beliefs or attitudes congregate, join forces, and agree to assume various types of actions and roles. Second, it introduces the concept of "recruitment networks", which explains the processes by which those networks form. Third, it provides the method of "frame alignment" to shed light on the way jihadist leaders manipulate members' beliefs and sentiments in order to get them to comply with the group or movement. Fourth, it emphasizes the necessity to identify other tactics of Islamic radicalization. For example, one can explore the myriad incentives to increase radicalization or the way jihadist organizations impose or remove obstacles to recruitment (Borum, 2011).

The radicalization theory rests on the premise that the success of jihadist persuasion is contingent on effective "framing" creating "cultural resonance" between radical Islamic ideology and the long-established views of mass audiences. Every time a specific aspect of such extreme ideology becomes popular within a mass audience, it is this "alignment" or "cultural resonance" that confirms its appeal (Della Porta & Diani, 2005; Smelser, 2010). Dreaming of global dominance, jihadist movements are expansionist in nature. Jihad framers know how to lay the groundwork for community support—both offline and online—and manage to communicate their message among people who live in areas that could easily be "expanded" into sharia-compliant areas. In response to enemies both outside and within their own ideology, they resort to scary or threatening tactics as a method to reinforce their position and prevent dissention (Halverson, Goodall, & Corman, 2011).

Four Radical Islamic Conversion Categories

The FBI's Counterterrorism Division has classified the procedures of Islamic radicalization into four different categories (cited in Borum, 2011):

- **Jilted Belief**: jilted believers are believers who feel excluded or abandoned. They are motivated converts for whom "internal frustration and dissatisfaction with the current religious faith (has led) the individual to change belief systems" (p. 26).
- **Faith Reinterpretation**: a fundamentally motivated individual has "faith reinterpretation" when he or she "alters his or her religious tradition through introspection and evaluation. This motivation refers specifically to those who are Muslim by birth but then choose to follow a more extremist form of Islam" (p. 26).
- **Protest Conversion**: an outwardly motivated individual experiences "protest conversion" when his or her feeling of perceived deprivation "negatively affects that individual's attitude and beliefs toward those implicated, leading to a change of faith as an answer to the deprivation" (p. 26).
- **Acceptance Seeking**: also a form of outwardly motivated conversion, a person experiencing "acceptance seeking" is determined by the need to "form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting and significant interpersonal relationships" (p. 26).

Who Is Susceptible to Islamic Radicalization?

Although there are several pathways of radicalization with different outcomes (or even conflicting ideological purposes), radicalization can materialize through multiple routes that all have a common denominator. An example of common denominator is the perceived injustice experienced by new recruits, which facilitates their adoption of radical ideas. The now radicalized convert is likely to take actions against the status quo (Khosrokhavar & Todd, 2017). Prior to the radicalization stage, there is a stage called "pre-radicalization," during which people look for more information about the ideology. Websites can influence pre-radicalized individuals by publishing the mission statement and recruitment pages of a terrorist organization (e.g., including articles about religious purity and the wicked enemy). The main stage of the radicalization process is the indoctrination stage, during which people embrace the central ideology and beliefs and are more ready to carry out the goals of the terrorist group. At this stage, the person becomes "jihadized" (Hahn, 2008). During this transformation into jihadization, the internet allows the person to acquire more information on how to be the ideal Soldier of Allah or connect with peers (i.e., actual terrorist organization members) to plan and perpetrate their own attacks (Lieberman & Collins, 2008).

The process of Islamic radicalization would not be successful without its shift towards religious fanaticism and a radical Salafist interpretation of purist dogmas. Sageman's

(2004) study on jihadist backgrounds reveals that 99% of Islamic extremists see themselves as very religious even before joining a jihadist organization and fulfilling terrorist missions. Though committing violence is not necessarily on the minds of all pre-radicalized individuals, those who do actually turn into jihadists often believe that (1) Islam is under constant threat by Western civilization, (2) the Muslim world is divided between true Muslims and the Infidels (and Apostates), and (3) jihad is a necessary method to defend Muslims from the rest of the world (Mullins, 2012).

Islamic Radicalization of Disaffected Youth

Since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Generation X and Generation Y Muslims have grown up hearing words like "Islam," "Muslim," and "jihad" in everyday media and have experienced more scrutiny accordingly. This has pushed a significant minority of them to undertake soul-searching, looking for ways to understand their own Muslim identities in today's world and to develop a type of defense mechanism in order to prepare themselves for possible hostilities. Customarily, a cohesive family structure within their environment gives them comfort or more answers as to how to handle possible confrontations or antipathy from their non-Muslim peers. Yet, within contemporary insular communities, called "no-go zones" by some critics (see Lebl, 2013; Quraishi, 2005), those youth complain about being disaffected or neglected because they enjoy less support from the dominant society (Liang, 2015).

This has caused some of those youth to delve into the internet for answers, where they eventually "find" mentors (often recruiters or activists) who promise them a better life. Examples of jihadist narratives for a "better life" are the recompenses of *Jannah* through heroic death in battle or the chance of marrying several women (sometimes all at once) after completing the jihadist training successfully (Bjørgum, 2016). The peculiarity of these online communications is the mentors' propensity to portray jihad as a necessity to conquer both the Infidels and Apostates. These online recruiters and activists will even resort to employing jihad rap videos (i.e., pop-jihad) and other methods (e.g., online jihadist magazines) with cleverly crafted messages tailored to naïve or disaffected youth (Al-Rawi, 2018).

Gender Considerations

The average jihadist foreign fighter is a man aged 18 to 29, although some exceptions exist outside that age range and outside that gender. Indeed, jihadization is not limited to men. Consider the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS): Since 2016, ISIS has promoted women as a mouthpiece of jihadist recruitment online. Aqsa Mahmood was one of the many females employed to attract foreigners to join ISIS. She decided to leave her quiet, happy adolescent life in Glasgow (Scotland). She exposed her transformation and attraction to jihadism on Tumblr and moved to Syria. From Syria, she used Twitter and Tumblr as a platform to incite others into imitating her radicalism (Aly, Macdonald,

Jarvis, & Chen, 2017). The persuasive narratives to draw male foreign fighters into jihad have also been aimed at female audiences. This was achieved, in part, by magnifying the Western "victimization" of Muslims, by glorifying the new utopian state of the Caliphate, and by extolling the virtues of martyrdom in the cause of Allah. Some women are also dreaming of becoming the wife of a jihadist fighter one day—without worrying about becoming a widow when he dies as a martyr for the cause. As a result, many foreign girls are paired—into marriage—with jihadist males upon their arrival (Aly *et al*., 2017). A case in point is the recent headline surrounding Hoda Muthana, the Muslim woman who "deeply regretted" to have joined ISIS and wanted to return to her native United States in 2019 (Chulov & McKernan, 2019).

A study by Meleagrou-Hitchens, Hughes, and Clifford (2018) reveals that 11% of U.S. foreign fighters and people moving into ISIS's territory are women. The role of individuals who support—but do not combat for—jihadist organizations is something to behold. Of note are female supporters, who more likely than not to assume secondary roles in those organizations. Their roles are found within logistical and financial operations, as well as other simpler, daily operations (e.g., providing safe houses or even cooking for their fellow terrorists). Although ISIS privileges men to fulfill roles that are potentially lethal (i.e., fighters and martyrs), women can be used to nurture their husbands and procreate future jihadist soldiers for the next generation of the Caliphate. Women's skills at attracting new people through the internet, their dedication to auxiliary and operational roles, and the public's difficulty to regard them as terrorists, make them a potentially greater threat to U.S. security (Alexander, 2016).

Overall, the growing number of females as both supporters and combatants signals a shift in ISIS's methods of radicalization and recruitment, notwithstanding the jihadists' strict views on gender roles in groups. Within the Caliphate ideology, men are the ones who fight, not women, who are expected to stay home and care for as many children as possible (Mironova, 2019). Over the past few years, however, ISIS's propaganda has laid the foundations for a radical change: in October 2017, the Islamic State's newspaper openly called on all women of the *ummah* to prepare for battle (Dearden, 2017). By early 2018, ISIS was publicly praising its female combatants in a video that showed a woman carrying an AK-47, the commentary describing "the chaste mujahed woman journeying to her Lord with the garments of purity and faith, seeking revenge for her religion and for the honor of her sisters" (Mironova, 2019, p. A1). An important deduction that one can derive from this section is that the jihadist ideology can inspire a wide spectrum of individuals to fight the enemies of Islam, to establish the global Caliphate, and to unite the brothers and sisters of the *ummah*. More importantly, in terms of age and gender, there is no reliable profile for a typical jihadist foreign fighter. In fact, after more than forty years of research on radicalization, no consistent age-based or gender-based pathway toward terrorist violence has been identified (Aly *et al*., 2017).

Islamic Radicalization Linked to Poverty?

In like fashion, the link between Islamic radicalization and poverty remains, to some degree, a myth. A high percentage of jihadists are middle-class youths who graduated from college, principally in the STEM fields (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math). Only minor statistical evidence about poverty-linked Muslim radicalization exists. While poverty and hardship may be, for some, a massive motivator to join extremist organizations that guarantee change, this does not ascertain that poverty *per se* is a leading cause of Islamic radicalization (Baylouni, 2015). The same is true regarding suicide bombers, whereby the role of money—or the lack thereof—is virtually nonexistent (Pape, 2005; Pape & Feldman, 2010).

Islamic Radicalization Linked to Psychological Factors?

If mental depression or illness is associated with poverty, this factor remains to be ascertained as a major factor in jihadism or the support of jihadist ideology (Pape, 2005; Pape & Feldman, 2010). Scientific evidence that ordinary citizens become jihadists out of psychological needs remains scant. In fact, past research reports no psychological aberration or deviation in most cases of jihadist radicalization. As Silke (2008) explains, "despite the indiscriminate and extreme violence of many terrorist attacks, the vast majority of research on terrorists has concluded that the perpetrators are not psychologically abnormal" (p. 104). Sageman's (2008) study of the backgrounds of jihadist terrorists also confirms the lack of evidence of psychological abnormalities. On the contrary, a common denominator across jihadist motivations is a feeling of social alienation, even among the most educated youths in the West. Silber and Bhatt's (2007) study revealed that European Muslims have higher rates of joblessness and imprisonment, and are underrepresented in politics.

How Online Islamic Radicalization Works

Since the early 2000s, scholars and practitioners have identified the predominant processes and forces that drive online radicalization and how cyberspace can be easily exploited to propagate fanatical ideas and "solutions". They warn about the consequences of exposure to terrorist content. One single piece of terrorist propaganda rarely transforms an individual into a killing machine. However, in many situations, online radicalization happens after a person immerses him- or herself into extremist literature (including graphic images and videos) for long periods of time. As times goes by, that person's emotional desensitization tends to decrease as well (Neumann, 2013).

A recurring explanation for online Islamic radicalization is the following: the internet is so vast that it has the capacity to get people to connect with one another with just a few mouse clicks away—beyond the space-time dimension. As Mitchell (1995) puts it, the internet negates geometry; it can be nowhere and everywhere at once. Salafist

or jihadist websites often have unfiltered control of their blogs or images. Because the internet has the advantage of having a more distributed effect than conventional media, it is not surprising, then, that jihadist ideologues can enhance jihadist recruitment and training in unprecedented ways. At a broader level, the actual names of jihadist sites, internet domains, and online magazines carry symbolism within them, a propagandistic move to sway online readers into identifying with the jihadist ideology even more (Rudner, 2017).

Sedentarists and Self-Starters

Constant exposure to glorified accounts of martyrdom and fatal punishments of enemies—e.g., by listening to testimonies of martyrs' (suicide bombers') wives or watching videos of suicide missions and decapitations—leads to "mortality salience," an obsessive focus on one's own mortality, which cherishes the desire to become martyrs or jihadist soldiers in the near future (Pyszczynski et al., 2006). Persuasive online articles and images of destruction in conflict zones—e.g., those depicting the alleged cases of torture, killing, and other "calamities" wreaked by Coalition Forces—can prompt sentiments of moral indignation, which Gabriel Weimann (2012) sees as a stimulus for online Islamic radicalization. All jihadist leaders on the internet support Iraq and Syria rather than the Western-backed régimes of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. As expected, internet-driven jihadist training happens in Iraq and Syria (rather than the last two).

Persuasive online articles and images are generally retrieved in the social environment where people use the internet the most: one's home (even one's parents' home) or one's friends' place. This is where self-radicalization peaks—usually over the course of several months to several years (Sageman, 2008). When people become sedentary—i.e., becoming physically inactive due to the massive amount of time devoted to reading internet content (Matusitz & McCormick, 2012)—they have a higher propensity to self-radicalize to some level. In fact, Khan and Butt (2017) have demonstrated that online self-radicalization is frequently the result of sedentarism. In the context of jihadism, a marginal percentage of sedentarists become embedded in what Sutherland and Cressey (1947) describe as "criminogenic environments," a phenomenon whereby deviant or threatening behaviors are interiorized and coopted because of extensive exposure to extremist views.

The newly radicalized online reader enters the jihadist world with a perverted notion of reality in which jihadist ultra-violence is no longer unprincipled or forbidden. Quite the opposite, jihad is "cool" (Gerraerts, 2012). The Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (2012) in the Netherlands conceded that, because of the internet, online jihadist magazines (such as Al-Qaeda's *Inspire* and ISIS's *Dabiq*) can effortlessly create that perverted notion of reality because the youth are more likely to fall prey to the jihadist mindset than their older peers, even those youth with only a modicum of knowledge of

jihadism. To this point, some of the youth do not even go to the mosque on Fridays—or other worship centers and religious events. Their internet-driven self-radicalization, though, makes them self-starters, amateurs, or free-lancers. In other words, even online readers from distant countries can become self-starters through intense exposure to jihadist content and turn their newly terrorist ambitions into reality (Kirby, 2007).

Radical *Dawah* and Digitalized *Ummah*

For jihadist ideologues, the internet is the ideal conduit for jihadist recruitment because it provides myriad prospects to launch a radical *dawah*. A radical *dawah* is an aggressive method of proselytizing people into militant Islam (Whine, 2001). In this day and age, jihadist proselytization happens through an open call on the internet; propagandists openly ask Muslims to leave their lands, join the *ummah* in holy places or war zones, receive jihadist training, and fight for Allah (Neumann, 2013). Jihad promoters are well aware of the internet's astronomical potential for radicalization and are devoting their time and energy toward online radicalization and recruitment of new operatives. The radical *dawah* cultivates a space for a "digitalized *ummah*," facilitated by the unremitting propagation of persuasive articles and images in cyberspace (Kaya, 2010).

The "digitalized *ummah*" is the global community of Muslims on the World Wide Web. As potential recruits and jihadist operatives, they can become absorbed into the jihadist counterculture because territorial or civic rules online barely exist and virtual Islamic radicalization challenges the dogmas of established *mullahs* (religious scholars) in traditional Muslim societies (Brophy, 2013). Jihadist recruiters are successfully capitalizing on a virtual diaspora of the *ummah* through countless capabilities that the internet provides—and that also includes smartphones, social media, and apps. The objective remains the same: to promote the radical Islamic doctrine.

Four-Stage Jihadization Process

Jihadization is the process of becoming a jihadist and enlist as a fighter in Holy War (Lahoud, 2010). Today, it works through a "tried and true" method of interaction between jihadists and internet users via social media or similar online platforms. The internet allows jihadist leaders and ideologues to influence the minds of potential recruits and convince them that violent action is necessary (Jones & Wright, 2017). Jihadization also happens through self-radicalization after prolonged exposure to terrorist content. For instance, online jihadist magazines such as Al-Qaeda's *Inspire* and ISIS's *Dabiq* offer captivating articles and images of Islamic fighters who returned from successful missions. This is like a call to arms that a certain number of young Muslims find fascinating.

To illustrate the jihadization process further, Helfstein (2012) crafted a model that follows four stages: *awareness*, *interest*, *acceptance*, and *implementation*. In the model, *awareness* is the stage that is the lengthiest; the more time the online user devotes to

reading jihadist content, the more his or her knowledge base of the jihadist ideology expands. *Interest* is a stage that encompasses "the willingness to alter one's belief system or social norms to reflect those associated with an ideological doctrine" (Helfstein, 2012, p. 16). When readers become "interested" in the jihadist doctrine, they progressively adopt jihadist ideas into their everyday lives, a stage called *acceptance*. *Acceptance* is the indispensable assimilation of extremist ideas and behaviors into the thought process. At this stage, he or she acknowledges the significance of jihadism to please Allah's will and fight for the Caliphate. At that moment, the now-radicalized individual can carry out or *implement* the jihad.

Discussion

What this conceptual analysis has demonstrated is that Islamic radicalization is a clear and present danger because, through various strategies and channels such as social media sites and online jihadist magazines, jihadist leaders and ideologues have framed messages that are appealing to a significant minority of Muslims (particularly youths). Islamic radicalization communicates messages in a reductionist worldview, by transforming the reality of a complex world into a black-and-white world. As we have seen, Social Movement Theory explains how techniques such as "frame alignment" and cultural resonance" (between radical Islamic ideology and the long-established views of mass audiences) contribute to the "jihad is cool" phenomenon. Jihad propagandists manipulate members' beliefs and sentiments in order to get them to comply with the jihadist doctrine. "Jihad is cool" is so attractive that even women have become radicalized and supported the global jihad. This can be achieved by magnifying the Western "victimization" of Muslims, by glorifying the new utopian state of the Caliphate, and by extolling the virtues of martyrdom in the cause of Allah. In fact, in terms of age and gender, there is no reliable profile for a typical jihadist foreign fighter.

In line with this argument, the internet gives jihadist leaders, ideologues, propagandists, and sympathizers immense capabilities for radical *dawah*—for inciting, recruiting, and driving new jihadist fighters all over the world. The internet allows the person to acquire more information on how to be the ideal Soldier of Allah or connect with peers. Some of the disaffected Muslim youth delve into the internet for answers, where they eventually "find" mentors (often recruiters or activists) who promise them a better life. The radical *dawah* cultivates such an environment to create a "digitalized *ummah*", so that jihadist attitudes and anti-Western sentiments become homogenized and normalized. The consequences can be nefarious: as scholarly and government data have shown, a significant minority of online users become jihadist fighters or leave their lands for jihadist training. Ultimately, they are recruited and transformed into killing machines in order to fulfill Allah's will and establish the Caliphate.

It is the author's hope that this analysis of the processes of Islamic radicalization has shed light on an ongoing global threat. No matter what strategy or medium, the objective of jihad framers will always remain the same: to promote the radical Islamic doctrine and the establishment of the Caliphate.

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