

İSTANBUL BİLGİ UNIVERSITY
EUROPEAN INSTITUTE
JEAN MONNET CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE

Escape from Insignificance: How Moroccan youths radicalize in Europe

Lalla Amina Drhimeur

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Bilgi University**





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Europe**

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PREFACE

In this Working Paper, Lalla Amina Drhimeur, a member of the Prime Youth ERC Research undertaken by the European Institute of Istanbul Bilgi University, elaborates on the ways in which Moroccan-origin youth in Europe radicalize over the last few decades. The author has compiled a very nuanced and detailed body of existing literature on the radicalization processes of self-identified Muslims in Europe with a specific focus on the Moroccan-origin youth residing in European cities. She successfully reveals socio-economic, ideological, and psychological drivers of radicalization as well as the role of migrant-sending states (i.e., Morocco in this case) and migrant-receiving states. This paper derives from the ongoing EU-funded research for the “PRIME Youth” project conducted under the supervision of the Principal Investigator, Prof. Dr. Ayhan Kaya, and funded by the European Research Council with the Agreement Number 785934.

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HORIZON 2020 ERC AdG

“Nativism, Islamophobia and Islamism in the Age of Populism: Culturalisation and Religionisation of what is Social, Economic and Political in Europe”



This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme grant agreement no. 785934.

About the ERC Advanced Grant Project: PRIME Youth

This research analyses the current political, social, and economic context of the European Union, which is confronted by two substantial crises, namely the global financial crisis and the refugee crisis. These crises have led to the escalation of fear and prejudice among the youth who are specifically vulnerable to discourses that culturalise and stigmatize the “other.” Young people between the ages of 18 to 30, whether native or immigrant-origin, have similar responses to globalization-rooted threats such as deindustrialization, isolation, denial, humiliation, precariousness, insecurity, and anomia. These responses tend to be essentialised in the face of current socio-economic, political and psychological disadvantages. While a number of indigenous young groups are shifting to right-wing populism, a number of Muslim youths are shifting towards Islamic radicalism. The common denominator of these groups is that they are both downwardly mobile and inclined towards radicalization. Hence, this project aims to scrutinize social, economic, political and psychological sources of the processes of radicalization among native European youth and Muslim-origin youth with migration background, who are both inclined to express their discontent through ethnicity, culture, religion, heritage, homogeneity, authenticity, past, gender and patriarchy. This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme grant agreement no. 785934.

For more information, please visit the project Website: <https://bpy.bilgi.edu.tr>



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The ERC in a Nutshell

The European Research Council, set up by the EU in 2007, is the premiere European funding organisation for excellent frontier research. Every year, it selects and funds the very best, creative researchers of any nationality and age to run projects based in Europe. The ERC offers four core grant schemes: Starting, Consolidator, Advanced and Synergy Grants. With its additional Proof of Concept grant scheme, the ERC helps grantees bridge the gap between grantees' pioneering research and early phases of its commercialisation.

For more information, please visit: <https://erc.europa.eu>

Biography

Lalla Amina Drhimeur, ERC PRIME Youth Project Researcher

Lalla Amina Drhimeur is an associate fellow at the Center for Applied Research in Partnership with the Orient (CARPO, Bonn, Germany) and a fellow at the American Political Science Association (APSA). She is currently conducting her Ph.D. research in Sciences Po Lyon, France. Drhimeur's research explores the evolution of political Islam within incumbent political parties, democratization process and power reconfigurations mainly in North Africa and the Middle East. She received her M.A. degree in International Relations and Diplomacy from Mohammed V University, Rabat, Morocco and her M2 from Science Po Lyon, where she chose Globalization and Governance as specialty. Her publications include The Party of Justice and Development's Pragmatic Politics (Baker Institute for Public Policy, Houston, Texas) and The rise of populism? Comparing incumbent pro-Islamic parties in Turkey and Morocco (Turkish Studies).

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Introduction

Morocco's relative success in containing radical jihadist threats within the kingdom often contrasts with the prominence of the Moroccan diaspora among the perpetrators of terrorist attacks on European soil. The terrorist attacks in Paris in 2015, Belgium in 2016, Spain and Finland in 2017, for example, were linked almost exclusively to young men of Moroccan origins (Botha, 2008). Different reasons are presented to explain why Moroccan youths radicalize in Europe and embrace extremist points of view or violence. Radicalization is sometimes explained in terms of discrimination and socio-economic marginalization. It is the expression of a kind of social revenge by individuals who feel socially, economically and politically excluded (Truong, 2017). Discrimination pushes the youth to blame the system that seems to reject them (Bonelli and Carrié, 2018). They also accuse the European system of values and secularism in particular for their experience of symbolic violence and failure to accommodate cultural differences (Khosrokhavar, 2018). Radicalization has also been presented as a reaction to colonization and a refusal by young people to see their religious identity being altered (Burgat, 2016). The emphasis is made on social and professional exclusion, stigmatization, and Islamophobia. Racism, the colonial legacy, and Western military interventions are also highlighted. Radicalization happens when there is a lack of sense of belonging both to their country of origin and their receiving countries (Weggemans, Bakker and Grol, 2014).

Between 2012 and 2018, eighty percent of European jihadists who left for Syria and Iraq, are from France, UK, Germany, and Belgium (Micheron, Balanche and Kepel, 2019). Forty percent of these jihadists were French, followed by German, British and Belgian nationals (ibid). Jihadism designates a branch of political Islam which believes that the use of violence is

legitimate to achieve its understanding of Islam (Karoui and Hodayé, 2021). The analyses of Jihadism in Europe disagree on whether the radicalization of young Muslims should be understood in terms of the historical and anthropological evolution of Islamic religious movements since the 1980s (Kepel and Rougier, 2016), or in terms of “the Islamization of radicalism,” meaning that young people radicalize in Europe because they feel disenchanting and lack a system of belief (Roy, 2017). An expression of anger that uses Islam nowadays as a frame, which could previously use another cause, is now finding in Islam “the paradigm of their total revolt” (ibid, p. 6).

The objective of this literature review is to understand why some Moroccan diaspora youths in Europe radicalize. To understand why they have become radicals, one has to analyze not only what pushed them to embrace radicalism in terms of their background, but also what seems to attract them in this ideology and how they have become radicals in terms of ideas, actors, and recruitment processes. Scrutinizing their trajectories requires understanding their personal, local, and ideological histories.

Trouble Defining Radicalization

Despite the fact that there is no scholarly consensus on how to define radicalization, there is a widely shared idea that individuals radicalize when they come to believe the use of violence is legitimate to attain political or social objectives (Neumann, 2013). Radicalization is considered as the conjuncture between an extremist ideology and organized violent act to implement it (Khosrokhavar, 2017). Some conceptions of radicalization highlight the importance of religious ideology, while others understand radicalization as “a process of politicization” (Crone, 2016). The belief that ideology is the precondition for violent acts distinguishes between “cognitive (ideological) radicalization” and “behavioral radicalization” (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2008). As a cognitive process, radicalization refers to the adoption of extremist or radical points of view (Neumann, 2013), and values that deviate sharply from those held by mainstream society (Hafez and Mullins, 2015). To become radical is to be exposed to an overtly ideological message and belief system that encourages movement from moderate, mainstream beliefs towards extreme views that reject the status quo (Bartlett and Miller, 2012).

Radicalization should be understood as a process that does not necessarily lead to violent acts (Benevento, 2021). When radicalization refers to a process, it analyses the adoption of violent behavior and involvement in terrorism (Sedgwick, 2010), or other radical legal or clandestine activities (Hafez and Mullins, 2015). Here, ideology is not perceived as a precursor for radical behavior as some individuals can hold extremist views but refrain from engaging in

violent actions. In contrast, others might engage in terrorism with little or no belief in an extremist doctrine (Borum, 2011).

Defining radicalization as “a process of politicization” considers familiarity with violence. In other words, this definition recognizes previous experiences with violence as a precondition to violent acts since pathways towards terrorism that somehow involve religious ideas are not only religious but first and foremost political (Crone, 2016). It does not necessarily entail a step ‘from talking to action’—from ideology to violence—but could entail a transition from one kind of violence into another from petty theft, drug and fraud charges to terrorism (ibid).

Radicalization has also been defined as a socialization process in which group dynamics (kinship and friendship) are more important than ideology (Coolsaet, 2016a). It is not so much the narratives or an ideology that lures young people into violence but the context in which they find themselves socializing with radicals (ibid). These radicals diagnose problems and attribute responsibility, offer solutions, strategies, and tactics (prognostic framing) and attempt to convince potential members to become active by framing the group’s reality in a way that resonates with potential constituency (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2008).

However, acquiring radical views and the actual turn to violence are not evidently interdependent. Holding radical thoughts or desiring radical change does not necessarily lead to violence (Bartlett and Miller, 2012). Those who resort to violence might do it for different reasons and not primarily for the beliefs they say they hold (Miller and Chauhan, 2017). Thus, the analysis of the drivers of violence requires disputing the links between beliefs, ideas, and violent behavior (ibid). In brief, the analyses point to four different factors that come together and produce radicalization: personal and collective grievances, interpersonal networks, religious and political ideologies, and finally, a conducive environment (Hafez and Mullins, 2015). Radicalization is a set of diverse pathways, mechanisms, and processes that operate differently for different people (Borum, 2011). Within this perspective, radicalization is not the product of a single decision, but the end result of a dialectical process that gradually pushes an individual toward a commitment to violence over time (McCormick, 2003).

According to these attempts to understand how the pathways of radicalization happen, the process starts during adolescence or in the early twenties (Weggemans, Bakker and Grol, 2014). At first, the individual displays a cognitive opening or a willingness to open up to new worldviews (Wiktorowicz, 2005). He/she then comes to believe that Islam is the new path to find meaning and viable answers to his/her perceived deprivation and injustice (ibid). Within this seeking for religion, he/she encounters a group’s narrative that “makes sense” (ibid) and with time becomes more involved in the activities of the group and absorbed into their ideology that

seems to channel his growing frustration into actual political activism (Perliger and Milton, 2016). Finally, the individual further internalizes the group's ideology and is willing to engage in violent activities (ibid).

The internet and social media provide easy access to uncensored religious content (Hafez and Mullins, 2015) that allows building "common morals" while discrediting "opponents" (Miller and Chauhan, 2017). The internet enables one to build a new identity, (re)imagine and reconstitute oneself (Egerton, 2008), and feel part of a "warm community" (Khosrokhavar, 2017, p. 68). The diffusion of videos and images of 'persecuted Muslims' serves to produce a moral outrage against the West that has embarked on a war against Islam. Simultaneously, it produces "humiliation by proxy" and incites an urgent need for action to revenge Muslims (Rogers and Neumann, 2007). These images consolidate the feeling that their Islamic identity is under real threat and divide the world within a specific narrative, that of "right and wrong, of suffering and resistance" (Egerton, 2008). The internet allows one to form "personal relationships" with an audience in different parts of the world. The feeling that Muslims in Paris or Palestine share the same plight is made possible because these images are decontextualized and emptied of historical references (ibid). It helps forge "a sense of communal belonging" to those who feel alienated (Hafez and Mullins, 2015). What inspires and radicalizes them is the possibility to discuss events and ideas with their "virtual friends" (Sageman, 2011a, p. 116) and feel they are the masters of their own destiny (Khosrokhavar, 2017). Radical ideas within their networks of old friends, networks of new friends after changing home or school, or encountering a charismatic person might also lead to their radicalization (Weggemans, Bakker and Grol, 2014).

Radicalization within a Historical Context

When analyzing why young Muslim people radicalize in Europe, it is essential to understand the historical context of radicalization. These youths usually conceptualize their violent ideas or acts within a historical framework. Past events that explain the rise of religious radicalism and fundamentalist movements include the Arab-Israeli wars of 1948, 1967, and 1973; the Intifadas of 1987 and 2001, the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979; the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979; the Gulf War in 1990-1991 that led to the U.S. military presence in the Gulf, the conflicts in Bosnia and Chechnya and the U.S.-led war Iraq in 2003 (Nesser, 2004).

Before spreading to the West in the mid-1990s, Islamic religious radicalism developed in the Middle East between 1948 and 1981 (Roy, 2017). The Arab defeat against Israel in 1948 contributed to a redefinition of Jihad (ibid). The State lost its monopoly on the definition and application of jihad, which then passed to militants who redefined it as a personal obligation and

a religious duty as long as the Ummah is suffering under foreign oppression (ibid). As such, Jihad found a new meaning:

The greatest deed in Islam and the salvation of the ummah is in practicing it. In times like these, when Muslim lands are occupied by the *kufar* [unbelievers], when the jails of tyrants are full of Muslim POWs, when the rule of the law of Allah is absent from this world and when Islam is being attacked in order to uproot it, Jihad becomes obligatory on every Muslim. Jihad must be practiced by the child even if the parents refuse, by the wife even if the husband objects and by the one in debt even if the lender disagrees (Cited in Roy, 2017, p. 13).

Nasser's crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1960s pushed the radicals to conceive death as the norm because suicide attacks will deliver Muslim society from its impious leaders and guarantee salvation (Roy, 2017). Death became an objective. "We love death as much as you love life," wrote Sayyid Qutb (cited in Roy, 2017, p. 15).

The Arab defeat against Israel in 1967 intensified the feeling of humiliation and the sense that the West is hostile to the Muslim world (Khosrokhavar, 2017). It also nourished the feeling of disillusionment with Arab nationalism (Lal, 2004). The defeat generated common grievances among Islamists who came to believe in armed violence against the infidels (Nesser, 2004). Many turned to Islamism as an ideological framework to help them challenge Western values (Lal, 2004) but also to help them fight against the "corrupt and decadent" pro-Western governments in their home countries (de Wijk, Amghar and Boubekour, 2006). Islamism served to question authoritarianism and corruption that left the middle classes feeling excluded and helpless (Khosrokhavar, 2017). Their political and economic exclusion created a profound resentment against a power they see as devoid of legitimacy. They became tempted by radical violence within a political context that does not allow free discourse to exert a moderating influence (ibid).

The shift from nationalism and leftism to Islamism went hand in hand with a feeling of revolt against the world order carried out by "a global and virtual community of oppressed peoples" (Roy, 2017, p. 69). This shift took place with the disappearance of the bipolar world when Islam was introduced as a viable alternative to both Marxism and liberalism (Khosrokhavar, 2017). Developed within the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt since the 1970s, the revolutionary tendencies advocated for a violent struggle against anti-Islamic forces and found in Afghanistan a "new field of application" (Khosrokhavar, 2017). The Afghan war, which started in 1978, further

familiarized Muslim fighters with a militant Islamic ideology and violent jihad (Lal, 2004). They went to fight in Afghanistan and took jihad with them back to their home countries or abroad (Roy, 2017).

The Islamic revolution of 1979 in Iran was, for the fundamentalists, a clear indication that revolutionary Islam could help defeat the West (Lal, 2004). The revolution's success reinforced the idea that a ruling power based on Islam was accessible and even a global Islamic government was possible (Khosrokhavar, 2017). The 1991 Gulf war made many Muslims feel that Islam was attacked (Lal, 2004). For many, "it seemed to be a religious war, a global conspiracy to destroy Islam and win victory for another religion, the religion of arrogant, capitalist America, even though Mr. Bush from time to time used the word 'freedom' alongside the word 'God'" (Mernissi, 1992, p. 102). The wars in Iraq, Afghanistan or Palestine made Muslims feel that their religion is threatened and that they are victims, and so they should combat these external attacks by turning to radical Islamic values (Lal, 2004). From the mid-1990s onwards, a new generation of "homegrown terrorists" appeared in the West. Their aim was no more to strike attacks concerning conflicts in the Middle East but to become part of a globalized jihad (Roy, 2017).

Radicalization in Morocco

The regime in Morocco has always sought to maintain strict control of the religious discourse both in society and politics, not allowing political Islam to expand (Lal, 2004). This policy has not prevented the formation of different radical Islamic movements since the 1970s (ibid). The arrest stories of individuals accused of plotting against the state or recruiting for Iraq confirm the country's problem with Islamist militancy (Pargeter, 2008). Morocco has also become a major exporter of jihadists to Europe, Iraq, and Afghanistan (Boukhars, 2011).

Morocco insists that Islamic militancy, radicalism, and terrorism are imported ideologies alien to Morocco's tradition of religious tolerance and moderation (Pargeter, 2008). However, these radical religious movements started within traditional Quranic schools in the country after the increase in Saudi funds for religious education in the 1980s (Lal, 2004). The authorities did not pay attention to the network between these Moroccan and Saudi Quranic schools (ibid). Because they mainly were apolitical, they were not viewed as a threat to the regime (ibid). Morocco has also sponsored the Wahhabi movement since the 1970s for specific geopolitical reasons... and also for personal reasons connected to the intimate relations that existed between [Moroccan and Saudi] officials (cited in Pargeter, 2008). The Wahhabi trend was used to contain the influence of the regime's Islamist opposition: the movement of Adl wal-Ihsan (Justice and Charity) (Pargeter, 2008). The movement was formed by Sheikh Abdelsalem Yassine in the early

1970s, challenging the religious and political authority of the monarchy (Lal, 2004). Moroccan imams were also allowed to train in Saudi universities and were given preferential treatment compared to those trained locally (Pargeter, 2008). Some of these Saudi-trained preachers were Mohamed Fizazi and Hassan Kettani involved in the 2003 Casablanca bombings (ibid). Saudi religious satellite channels, Iqraa, for example, have become increasingly popular and the primary source of entertainment, especially within shantytowns (ibid).

These Islamist movements also served to counter the influence of leftist dissent voices (Pargeter, 2008). They were able to dominate universities and have enabled religion to play an increasingly important role in public space (ibid). They have pursued a violent Salafi approach to Islam through the application of *Takfir*, that is to say, declaring governments, pro-governments, and civilians apostates of Islam (Lal, 2004). They include the Groupe Islamique Combattant Marocain (the Moroccan Islamic Combat Group, GICM), Salafia Jihadia (the Jihad for Pure Islam), and Assirat Al-Mustaqim (the Good and Righteous Path) (ibid). These radical groups sent their fighters to Afghanistan, Chechnya, Bosnia, and Kosovo and were behind different terrorist attacks in Morocco and Europe (Botha, 2008). The GICM is believed to support the ideology and the objectives of Al Qaeda and aims at establishing an Islamic state in Morocco (Lal, 2004). It was established in the late 1990s by a Moroccan returnee Jihadist who had previously fought in the former Soviet Union in Afghanistan and provided logistical support to al-Qaeda operatives in Morocco (ibid). The movement established cooperation networks with other radical structures in North African and Europe (Nesser, 2004). The authorities in France and Belgium arrested a number of Moroccans suspected of being members of the GICM and linked to international acts of terrorism (Botha, 2008).

The rise of religious extremism in Morocco is also presented as the result of the failure of the democratization process (Lal, 2004). A country's institutional failures can turn collective grievances into violence (Boukhars, 2011). These movements seek in Islam a refuge from the regime's oppression and a political reason to confront the power (Lal, 2004). The political marginalization and the repression of religious opposition groups might push them to use violence to counter repressive state policies (Boukhars, 2011). These groups also present radical Islamic ideals as a viable political tool given the country's authoritarian regime and the absence of political discourse (Lal, 2004).

These radical groups usually recruit their followers from underprivileged areas where they fill the governmental void and provide social services (Lal, 2004). When formal governmental institutions fail to meet people's demands, citizens resort to alternatives to address their grievances (Boukhars, 2011). Slums and shantytowns proved to be ideal for radical

preachers to spread their ideas and recruit for jihad (Pargeter, 2008). Most of those they recruit have low educational levels, have been involved in petty crimes and juggled small jobs (ibid). They are usually semi-skilled or unskilled individuals (Coolsaet, 2016b). Feelings of social injustice and alienation push some individuals to look for a meaning to life, a sense of self-esteem, and salvation in radical thought (Pargeter, 2008).

The 2003 bombings in Casablanca, which killed 42 people, reflected that radical and fundamentalist groups challenging the monarchy and its political and religious authority were getting increasingly powerful (Lal, 2004). The suicide attacks seem to have been influenced by poor socio-economic conditions that led to a feeling of resentment towards the Moroccan government (Botha, 2008). However, it is not only young people from underprivileged socioeconomic backgrounds that are susceptible to extremism. Abdel Karim Mejjati, one of the masterminds behind the bombings, came from a privileged family (Botha, 2008). There is no direct link between radicalization and poor socio-economic conditions though these conditions might help radical ideologies to thrive (Pargeter, 2008). To be sure, radicalization is not the product of one single factor but a combination of ideological, political, socio-economic, historical, and international circumstances (Boukhars, 2011).

Since the terrorist attacks in 2003, Morocco has devoted considerable resources to contain its domestic terrorism threat and extremism in the last decade and a half. Morocco relied on promoting a Maliki school of Islam and adopting a strategy of zero tolerance towards anyone suspected of being involved in a terrorist cell (Pargeter, 2008). To counter the rise of extremist groups, the government has implemented security and educational policies (Feuer and Pollock, 2017). These measures include the 2003 antiterrorism law and greater state control of religious institutions (ibid). The 2003 antiterrorism law expanded the prerogatives of the state's security and domestic intelligence-gathering apparatus that falls directly under the supervision of the palace (ibid). The law broadened the definition of terrorism to include every action considered a threat to public order, sentenced convicted terrorists to the death penalty. In 2014 the law was amended to impose fines (\$60,000) and prison terms from five to fifteen years for every Moroccan citizen trying to join a radical group in Morocco or abroad (ibid).

In the religious realm to reduce the influence of extremist ideologies, Morocco took a series of measures that aimed at greater state control of mosques and Quranic schools (Feuer and Pollock, 2017). Religious teaching focuses on the notions of human rights and religious tolerance. To do so, the training of imams highlights the importance of a discourse of "moderate Islam" as presented by the palace (ibid). The efficiency of these policies remains to be seen. However, the involvement of many Moroccans in international terrorism raises questions about

the efficacy of these measures to limit the spread of extremist ideologies (Boukhars, 2011). Moroccan diaspora involvement also suggests that these measures remain limited to counter religious extremism domestically and within members of the Moroccan diaspora in Europe (Feuer and Pollock, 2017).

Surveys have shown that support for terrorist acts has declined in Morocco since the 2003 terrorist attacks (Wike, 2010). Nevertheless, since 2015, sympathy for the IS in Morocco remains higher than in other Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan (Feuer and Pollock, 2017). The existence of extremist and radical cells is a clear indication that radical thoughts and domestic and international frustration exist (Botha, 2008).

Radicalization in Europe

Islamist insurgents in MENA regimes found in Europe a land of exile and a convenient, practical environment to mobilize. They recruit and raise finances to continue their battle against their repressive home state regimes (Nesser, 2004). Thus Moroccan Islamists fleeing persecution in their home country found sanctuaries in France (Botha, 2008). But they also managed to transplant their activities to other countries in Europe (Coolsaet, 2016b). They forged alliances with other already established radical groups (Nesser, 2004). GICM managed to establish a transnational network in Europe to support both campaigns in Morocco (Botha, 2008) and plot attacks in European cities (Lal, 2004). In Maastricht in Belgium, the GICM recruits fighters for Syria along Sharia4Belgium (Coolsaet, 2016b). Moroccan perpetrators of the 1994 terrorist attacks in Morocco were suspected of receiving radical training from Abdelilah Ziyad, a Moroccan college teacher in France (Roy, 2004, p. 316). Members of the Hofstadgroup in the Netherlands, behind the murder of the filmmaker Theo van Gogh, were in contact with a Moroccan citizen in Spain accused of being involved in the 2003 Casablanca bombings (Schuurman, Eijkman and Bakker, 2014). They also met with another Moroccan citizen in Barcelona suspected of having ties to Ansar al-Islam, a terrorist organization in Iraq (ibid).

Improvements in communication and information technologies have enabled the construction of a Muslim transnational network based on a common and unifying Islamic identity. They facilitate the exchange of material and immaterial resources, cultural influence, and political support (Karasik and Benard, 2004). Globalization has, therefore, favored the interactions, cross-border cooperation, and coordination between radical groups in the MENA and the Muslim diaspora (Nesser, 2004). Some of these networks became vehicles for “mobilization and recruitment,” particularly within cultural centers, mosques, universities, social organizations, youth organizations, and charities (Karasik and Benard, 2004). The internet has also made it

possible to construct a global “virtual ummah” where ideas are exchanged, and local concerns of the Islamists are connected to those of the diaspora (Nesser, 2004).

Some mosques and cultural centers in Europe provide militant groups with structures for indoctrination and recruitment (Karasik and Benard, 2004). Radical groups rely on bookshops and online websites to diffuse their radical materials (ibid). They create websites to diffuse their texts and ideas and get in touch with other youngsters in Europe who share the same opinions or are inclined to adopt them (Schuurman, Eijkman and Bakker, 2014).

Europe then has become not only a facilitation network but also a battleground for their operations and a recruitment base (Botha, 2008). They target the police, the army, the Jewish community, extreme right-wing leaders, and other public figures (Karoui and Hodayé, 2021). They also target public spaces (Strasbourg Christmas market and Bataclan) and public transportation (Paris RER and Madrid train station in 2004) (Roy, 2017). Germany, France, and Belgium became important hubs for radical operations and recruitment within the Moroccan diaspora, as illustrated by Said Bahaji, a German citizen from Moroccan origins who provided logistical and technical support to establish an Al Qaeda cell in Hamburg, Germany (Karasik and Benard, 2004). The number of jihadists between 2010 and 2019 in France was estimated at 2500 compared to 900 in Belgium and 1100 in Germany (Karoui and Hodayé, 2021). The number of those arrested for terrorism was estimated at 1100 in France, 300 in Belgium and 200 in Germany (ibid).

Who are the radicals in Europe?

Radicals in Europe share some common traits. They are usually second and third-generation migrant-origin youth with roots in North Africa (mainly Morocco and Algeria), come from society's lower strata, and have a criminal record (Bakker, 2012). Recruitment usually happens within “loners and social outcasts who have no social or family support” and might have been convicted of petty crime (Karasik and Benard, 2004). Recruitment also happens among teenagers who are often solitary, isolate themselves, or have hostile relations with family and friends (Coolsaet, 2016b). These individuals either radicalize after they break off with their former social environment or are expelled from it after radicalization (Weggemans, Bakker and Grol, 2014). They cut ties with friends and families, who they see as infidels (Rogers and Neumann, 2007). This isolation can both be seen as a precursor to radicalization and its consequence (ibid). It reinforces their extremist views shielding them from oppositional opinions (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010). This social isolation “makes them inherently inward-looking” (Schuurman and Horgan, 2016). Believing their identity is “at odds” with that of the larger society and that they are alone

standing against the world, they live in secrecy and retain only their bonds to members of the group (Khosrokhavar, 2017). The new network is their only source of information on the outside world (Schuurman and Horgan, 2016). Their understanding of the reality around them becomes distorted (ibid). This can lead them to “overestimate their own capabilities, to dismiss information or criticisms that do not fit their preconceptions and to hold stereotypical views of the enemy that prohibit a realistic assessment of their opponents’ capabilities and likely responses” (ibid). Isolation and secrecy also favor group cohesiveness at the expense of personal “rational judgment” (Khosrokhavar, 2017, p. 21)

These young people have practically no religious education (Roy, 2017). Most of them do not possess a sound grasp of Islam (Dawson, 2021). The Hofstad group in the Netherlands, mainly made from the second and third generation of Moroccan immigrants, “practiced a sort of do-it-yourself Islam” they learned about from websites and from a self-taught Syrian Imam who had previously been convicted of drug dealing (Stern, 2010). They mainly relied on their research online (Vidino, 2007). Their ideological core was based on a Salafi-Jihadism understanding of Islam, which considers, “revolutionary violence is necessary to bring about change and safeguard a beleaguered community of believers” (Schuurman, Eijkman and Bakker, 2015). They fantasized about establishing an Islamic state in the Netherlands (Vidino, 2007). The use of violence was justified against non-Muslims and fellow Muslims through the practice of *takfir* (ibid). The decision of Dutch mosques to condemn jihadists such as Osama bin-Laden and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi made the group members discontent with moderate Muslims and the official religious Islamic discourse (ibid). Thus the Hofstad network constituted itself in opposition to the religious “moderate” discourse in the Netherlands and its speech about the need for assimilation (Koning and Meijer, 2010). It became the only venue for learning about Islam, and for debate. The mosque, which could have had a moderating influence, became excluded for “concealing the ‘truth’ from their followers (Schuurman and Horgan, 2016).

The experience of being arrested and then imprisoned for their petty crimes increases the feeling of hostility towards the European states and their representatives (Schuurman and Horgan, 2016). Then a quest for identity starts (ibid). To answer their existential question, they turn to Islam and become almost all “born-again” Muslims after having led a very secular “westernized” lifestyle (Roy, 2017). They fall under the influence of “charismatic persons” or “inspiring figures” (Bakker and Grol, 2015). Their sudden interest in religion comes after encountering a charismatic figure in a mosque or a neighboring town (Weggemans, Bakker and Grol, 2014).

These individuals usually feel disconnected from European societies in which they live. Hence, they feel the need to restructure their lives (Karasik and Benard, 2004). Most of them come from economically marginalized districts where they experience social alienation (ibid). They share the same “youth” culture, which is different from their parent’s culture or understanding of Islam (Roy, 2017). Radicalization is thus a form of revolt against their parent’s Islam, Islam that is also preached within their local mosques (Stern, 2010) and which they perceive as “corrupt” and as an instrument in the hands of authoritarian regimes in the Middle East (Rogers and Neumann, 2007). They do not necessarily rebel against their parents but against what they represent, their understanding of Islam which, according to them, is a colonial heritage linked to humiliation and ignorance (Roy, 2017). They see their parents as “compliant and small, people without a home, neither in Germany nor in the countries they once came from” (*Der Spiegel*, 2014). They reject their parents’ beliefs and avoid mosques that are linked to their parents’ national cultures because, for them, both are “culturally grounding” (Rogers and Neumann, 2007). They, however, favor what they see as pure Islam, which they have discovered online (Stern, 2010). For them, this pure Islam possesses a universal characteristic (Rogers and Neumann, 2007).

The rationale for radicalization is predominantly personal

The study of radicalization should take into consideration the socio-cultural, political and historical context (Benevento, 2021). The combination of grievances, networks, ideologies, and enabling environments might produce extremism. Grievances range from a feeling of victimization, economic and social marginalization, personal disaffection to a general disenchantment with European foreign policies (Hafez and Mullins, 2015). Networks are about friendship and kinship ties that enable the spread of radical ideas while offering a sense of meaning and belonging (ibid). Religious and political ideologies serve to frame one’s personal grievances within a broader religious or political perspective (ibid). The existence of a ‘tipping point,’ a personal crisis that pushes an individual to question previously accepted views, renders him more susceptible to a “cognitive opening” and the possibility of alternative beliefs (Rogers and Neumann, 2007).

Radicals are usually motivated by “a personal and communal desire for revenge, geopolitical grievances, the emulation of role models and the wish to advocate and defend a newfound sense of identity as ‘true’ Muslims” (Schuurman and Horgan, 2016), as the “only true Muslims on earth” (Sageman, 2011a, p. 86). Thus young Moroccans in Europe who turn to violence are usually motivated by personal rationales and not necessarily or exclusively by their extremist religious views (Schuurman and Horgan, 2016). Religious fanaticism does not lead to

violence if not combined with “the influence of authority figures,” “violence-prone personality” and “moral disengagement” (ibid). They engage in violence because first, it offers a path to redemption. Second, it keeps radicals together with high esteem. Finally, it presents a way to countermeasures taken by European authorities (Crenshaw, 1987). Radicalization also happens out of ‘boredom.’ It is the ‘allure’ of adventure, thrill, and rebellion (Perliger and Milton, 2016).

Radicalization speaks of socio-economic grievances

Radicals usually come from lower or lower-middle-class backgrounds with modest levels of education and limited economic prospects (Weggemans, Bakker and Grol, 2014). They were raised in “relatively bad neighborhoods,” being “exposed to crime and drug abuse (in their immediate circles)” (Bakker and Grol, 2015). They usually have “insignificant jobs” they lose after being involved in petty crime or having trouble with the authorities (Weggemans, Bakker and Grol, 2014). In Germany, for example, large numbers of Muslim students find themselves in *Sonderschulen*, schools intended for slow learning children because of their linguistic difficulties (Karasik and Benard, 2004). Some of them have problems getting a job due to the xenophobic sentiments within German companies (*Der Spiegel*, 2014).

In the Netherlands, they often have a hard time at school and end up joining a vocational training program (Weggemans, Bakker and Grol, 2014). Radicals within Shariah4Holland, whose members come predominantly from Moroccan-origin youths, openly express support and loyalty for the Islamic State. These youngsters were raised within lower or lower-middle-class families in vulnerable neighborhoods (ibid), with middle and low education levels (Coolsaet, 2016b). One member, Achmed, born in the Netherlands from Moroccan immigrants, was faced with problems that are very typical for certain Moroccan families. His parents hardly spoke any Dutch and could not be involved in certain aspects of their children’s education (Bakker and Grol, 2015). His father was never home and never acted as head of the family (ibid). Achmed and his brothers had to bring themselves up (ibid). Achmed radicalized after giving up on his prevocational secondary education and experienced drug dealing (ibid). His encounter with a radical group in his neighborhood convinced him that leaving for Syria was an opportunity to start a new life (ibid).

In Belgium, they usually study in “concentration schools” with a high percentage of migrants (Coolsaet, 2016b). The municipality of Molenbeek in Brussels, linked to the 2004 Madrid train bombings, the Charlie Hebdo shooting in 2015, and the Paris attack in 2015, offers another case in point (ibid). With a density of Moroccan migrants, the municipality is a complex mosaic of despair, frustration, inadequate housing, and deficient education (ibid). It has experienced some widespread rioting and became associated with radicalization and jihad (Higgins, 2016).

These youngsters often refer to personal difficulties in everyday life and the absence of a future (Coolsaet, 2016b). They also feel intense frustration regarding “their own societal position ... or that of their ethnic groups” (Weggemans, Bakker and Grol, 2014). They also feel excluded. Lacking a sense of belonging, “as if they didn’t have a stake in society,” pushed some of them to leave for Syria (ibid). Some of them lack a home feeling, belonging to a European country where they were born, and grew up (*Der Spiegel*, 2014). Hostility and lack of trust in mainstream European culture and their own “immigrant sub-culture” are part of the dynamics that explain their radicalization (Perliger and Milton, 2016). “There is a malaise within the community of Moroccan origin” and a strong feeling of exclusion and of being rejected (Higgins, 2016). Their “rebellion is not imported from the Arab world but is a response to life in a Germany” (*Der Spiegel*, 2014). A feeling of abandonment and having no future makes it easy to fall for radical recruiters (Coolsaet, 2016b). The world is perceived in dichotomous terms, divided between them: the precarious, the destitute, and the others: the privileged (Khosrokhavar, 2017). But it is not grievances that push them towards violence; their perception is that their conditions are unjust and give rise to frustration and anger (Crenshaw, 1981).

Radicalization seems to provide them with “alternative illegitimate or illegal paths to improve their life conditions” (Perliger and Milton, 2016). Governmental disengagement in disadvantaged neighborhoods heavily populated by migrants, poor public and educational services paved the way for a Salafi offensive (Bakker and Grol, 2015). Frustration with their current lives and the feeling of marginalization push them to look for alternative structures to have their preferences, services and needs to be met (Karasik and Benard, 2004). To fill the void radical groups have sought to offer assistance programs (ibid).

Identifying a problematic social condition, such as socio-economic grievances, radical groups propose a simplistic explanation for the root cause of the issue. They provide a course of action to deal with it and transform society for the better (Hafez and Mullins, 2015). They try to convince individuals that unfair and oppressive “external forces,” “the system,” “imperialism,” “the powers that be,” or “Zionist- Crusaders” are the reason European Muslims are humiliated and marginalized and propose violence as a legitimate remedy to their grievances by “demonizing or dehumanizing enemies” (ibid). The enemy is presented as devoid of compassion, warmth, or respect (Sternberg, 2003). Disgust, repulsion, and hatred for the enemy serve to destroy any psychological barriers to the use of violence (ibid).

Radicalization is a romantic, utopian idea about a “new beginning,” particularly when these youngsters have limited chances on the job market or feel they have no future in Europe (Bakker and Grol, 2015). A life of petty crime and underperformance in school pushes some

individuals to join radical groups that provide them with existential meaning and respect for their surroundings (Slootman and Tillie, 2006). Within this quest for meaning, it becomes “cool” to embrace traditional afghan clothes, use “warrior language,” and chant “war songs” (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010).

There is certainly a feeling of discontent among the youth (Slootman and Tillie, 2006). However, the fact that Kamel Daoudi or Hakil Chraïbi come from a well-educated and integrated background reveals that radicalism is not necessarily the product of sensitive neighborhoods in Europe or dire socio-economic conditions (Roy, 2017). Some radicals come from middle-class families, have college degrees and decent jobs (Coolsaet, 2016b). They are probably drawn to extremism because it bears a “promise of immense significance” and fulfilling high aspirations (Kruglanski *et al.*, 2018).

The correlation between marginalization, lack of integration, poor socio-economic conditions, and radicalization is very difficult to prove. A survey of Muslims in Western Europe reaches the following point:

On average, respondents from more prosperous families are more likely to practice Islam in a way closely associated with fundamentalism – they are more conservative regarding gender roles, seek the universal application of Islamic law, and embrace attitudes associated with a more politicized Islam.[...] Additionally, respondents espousing this belief set are more supportive of the use of violence to defend their faith (Delia and Jacobson, 2015).

Because they are more prosperous and feel they do not need to “prove themselves,” they are more sensitive to the stigmatization faced by Muslims (Khosrokhavar, 2017). To remedy these “identity wounds” and the sufferings from anonymity and anomie, they resort to violence and the self-proclamation that they are the “spokespersons” against imperialism and Western repression (*ibid.*, p. 110).

Socio-economic factors cannot alone explain radicalization (Coolsaet, 2016b). However, a great majority of the radicalized youths are found in the so-called tough neighborhoods of Europe and are in precarious financial and social situations (Khosrokhavar, 2017). The way a person apprehends the future depends on how one comprehends their environment (Coolsaet, 2016b). A context of no future provides the “conducive environment” to express personal motivations for the use of violence (*ibid.*). The unemployed within migrant communities are also more likely to express their willingness to sacrifice life for their faith, implying that radicalization

is more associated with a feeling of alienation than poor socio-economic conditions (Delia and Jacobson, 2015). Radical youths tend to frame their grievances within a structural exclusion. Usually, they do not believe they can address their grievances or push for change through legal means (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010)

Radicalization is a reaction to symbolic violence

Symbolic violence refers to the ideological, political, and social dimensions of radicalization. As an ideological dimension, radicalization is a search for meaning in a world that is perceived to discriminate against Muslims continuously (political dimension). Joining a radical group offers a sense of acceptance and security (social dimension). Radicals might be motivated by a sense of “suffering” Muslim communities experience in different parts of the world due to colonization, Western military interventions, humiliation, or racism (Delia and Jacobson, 2015). Negative Muslim attitudes towards European societies result from the widespread belief that the West usually holds a double standard towards the Muslim world. Accordingly, the European discourse on human rights and democracy reflects geopolitical interests. Therefore, it differentiates between those “who acquiesce to Western policies and who oppose them” (Hafez and Mullins, 2015).

Radicalization happens as a reaction to what is considered injustice, whether real or imagined, against Muslim communities (Stern, 2010). Military interventions and the counter-insurgency techniques used in detention centers at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay further intensified the feeling that Muslims are being oppressed by the West (de Wijk, Amghar and Boubekeur, 2006). It is also a reaction towards what they perceive as “symbolic attacks against their identity” (Hafez and Mullins, 2015). Many young Muslims in Europe believe that the anti-Muslim books, cartoons and films portray Muslims as the main source of insecurity and link Islam to extremism and violence (ibid). They also believe that the Western narrative on migrants and their descendants ignores how colonialism, western interventions in the Middle East and North Africa and how social exclusion affects migrants’ everyday lives in Europe (ibid).

Radicalization is an idealistic desire to act “out of faith,” “a sense of personal and religious duty,” and an obligation to “help oppressed Muslims” (Schuurman and Horgan, 2016). They are under the impression that a “reformist attitude” cannot remedy this injustice, but only violence can (Khosrokhavar, 2017, p. 26). They are increasingly impatient with legal means to achieve their cause (Crenshaw, 1981). “Action becomes imperative” when they believe they only have a choice “between action as survival and inaction as the death of resistance” (ibid). The perception of injustice and violation is then contextualized to affect them personally, leading to

their personal involvement to end this injustice (Sageman, 2011a, p. 75). They feel they are needed to 'end' injustice and violence (Dawson and Amarasingam, 2017). This narrative serves to understand one's grievances and constructs a "political consciousness" where the quest for identification becomes a motivational force for action (Koning and Meijer, 2010).

The increase in the anti-Muslim and migrant sentiments in Europe has pushed some Muslim youths to "turn to extreme form of religious identity" (Kaya and Adam-Troian, 2021). The images of persecuted Muslims diffused online serve to place their own story of grievances within a global Islamic community attacked by non-Muslim opponents (Egerton, 2008). In other words, when young Moroccans in Europe understand their perceived discrimination within a context of discrimination against Muslims worldwide and that their personal grievances are part of "general hostility against Islam," they might turn to violence (Sageman, 2011a, p. 83). Young Moroccans in the French suburbs often speak of what Palestinians experience in the hands of the Israeli army whenever they explain their relations with law enforcement in France (Khosrokhavar, 2017). Theo van Gogh's murderer explained that his act "was a personal duty to kill blasphemers, as well as a desire to avenge perceived injustices" (Schuurman and Horgan, 2016). It was a form of "rage" directed towards local Dutch individuals he perceived as enemies of Islam in the Netherlands (Vidino, 2007). It was framed within domestic and foreign issues under the umbrella of the "war against Islam" (Koning and Meijer, 2010). They are motivated by a feeling of solidarity with Muslims who are victims of authoritarian regimes and western powers in the Middle East (Crone, 2016). The Hofstad group members behind the murder felt it was their duty to assist Islamist insurgents against foreign aggressors. They tried to travel and settle down in Chechnya and Pakistan/Afghanistan (Schuurman, Eijkman and Bakker, 2015). The Dutch government's involvement in the war against Iraq in 2003 made members consider warranting terrorist attacks against the Netherlands (ibid). They justified their violence as a reaction to the Dutch government's support for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and a way of "punishing" the authorities (Schuurman and Horgan, 2016).

In their writings, they pointed out the "double standard" of Dutch society where Dutch politicians have the right to 'insult' Muslims, while Muslims do not have the right to criticize the Netherlands or express support for Islam (Koning and Meijer, 2010). Some believed that a terrorist attack in Europe would convince European governments to change their foreign policy (Coolsaet, 2016b). Others explained that their incarceration reinforced their hatred towards European governments and convinced them that Muslims are being "persecuted" everywhere (Schuurman and Horgan, 2016). Radicals place their violence within a transnational meaning to justify their personal desire for revenge against European authorities, whom they feel "had

thwarted” them after being arrested (Schuurman and Horgan, 2016). When released, some members of the Hofstad group sought to create a successor to the group known as ‘Piranha’ (Schuurman, Eijkman and Bakker, 2014). They intended to commit terrorist attacks in the Netherlands (ibid). They expressed how they were seeking revenge for their poor treatment experiences by the police and the justice system (ibid).

The use of religious discourse, the need “to restore respect, honor, and autonomy lost by the Muslim ummah at the hands of foreign aggressors,” serves to justify their desire for revenge to “restore” pride and honor (Schuurman and Horgan, 2016). Revenging other Muslims is motivated by the idea that God would then intervene to “establish a universal theocracy” and “annihilate the more powerful enemy” (Khosrokhavar, 2017, p. 30). To make sense of the “moral shocks” of the persecuted Muslims worldwide and the ‘verbally abused’ Muslims in Europe, radical Moroccan youths frame their individual grievances within a global narrative of the war against Islam and terror (Koning and Meijer, 2010). Thus, their personal crisis of alienation is attributed to the same forces that persecute Muslims elsewhere and that together they are part of the same fight (Rogers and Neumann, 2007). To channel those anxieties, fear, and indignation, they resort to an “attack mode” against those deemed responsible for the injustice (Koning and Meijer, 2010). Avenging oppressed Sunni Muslims is what they believe is the ultimate goal of their lives (Dawson and Amarasingam, 2017). In other words, they want to “inflict an even more profound humiliation on the adversary” on the “arrogant West” (Khosrokhavar, 2017, pp. 29–30). Dawson (2017) explains the reason for radicalization as follows:

[It] offers a simple but definitive explanation for their angst, offers a grand solution, targets a culprit, and prescribes a course of action. Most of all, it sets the individual’s struggles in a transcendent frame of meaning that gives an ultimate and virtuous purpose to their existence. It places their personal troubles in solidarity with those of a whole people.

Radicalization as an ideology is a “moral reductionism” that explains complex events in simple causes and offers simple remedies. It is this “simplicity” that makes it easy to understand and accept (Sageman, 2011a, p. 88). At first, radicals are convinced that democracy is inefficient to fight against injustice and that violence is inevitable (Koning and Meijer, 2010). Later they become convinced that violence is the only way to fight for one’s religion (ibid).

When feeling humiliated and to “reduce anxiety arising from the discrepancy between their ideal state of self-positive image and the experience of humiliation” one might turn to

violence to compensate for the loss of significance (Kaya and Adam-Troian, 2021). This feeling of humiliation pushes some European-born Muslims to claim a “communalist identity” or “reactive religiosity” to defy the hegemonic culture (Hafez and Mullins, 2015). Violent radicalism reflects a need for “personal significance,” a desire to matter, a longing for respect. When these needs remain unmet, a sense of frustration is born, and behavior, probably violent, is enacted to regain meaning for oneself (Kruglanski *et al.*, 2018). The radical believes himself to be a ‘hero’ who will avenge “Muslim people” against the atrocities committed by Western countries and feels responsible for protecting his “brothers and sisters” (Dawson and Amarasingam, 2017). A “hero,” who used to lead an empty life, finally has the power to decide for life and death (Roy, 2017). Radicalization thus offers the possibility to combine heroism with politics: performing great deeds to make one’s name famous and immortal. They are able to transform themselves from petty criminals, pariahs and outcasts into post-mortem heroes (Crone, 2016). The idea of ‘humiliation’ and ‘oppression’ helps to construct a “group identity,” offering a sense of belonging and “solidified the us-versus-them outlook” (Coolsaet, 2016b). When this perception of worldwide ‘oppressed’ Muslims resonates with one’s grievances, and hence, the ‘global’ reinforces ‘local’ moral outrages, one can turn to political violence (Sageman, 2011a, p. 83).

After being “shocked and outraged by images of Muslim sufferings in places like Chechnya, Palestine, and Afghanistan,” they turn to the internet to look for answers and end up forming ties with “like-minded individuals” (Schuurman and Horgan, 2016). They establish an imaginary global community that connects European youths’ perception of exclusion and discrimination to the suffering of other Muslim communities worldwide. The process “feeds” the feeling of resentment and hostility towards the West (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010). The Hofstad group in the Netherlands has sought to create a parallel virtual and anti-Western world because “we reject you. We reject your system. We hate you” (cited in Vidino, 2007). Radical Islamism indeed attracts because of its antisocial aspect, contempt for society, and its anti-domination dimension (Khosrokhavar, 2017).

This Muslim community they refer to is never specified (Roy, 2017). References are randomly made to Palestine, Iraq, or Bosnia because this community exists beyond geographical boundaries (*ibid*). It is a “global and virtual” ummah (*ibid*, p. 50). The weakening of traditional identities made it possible to construct this neo-ummah as an alternative to Western society (Roy, 2004). It is built in opposition to Western culture and allows them to break free from the “narrowness” of their parents’ cultural understanding of Islam (Rogers and Neumann, 2007).

This sort of parallel society on the periphery, where second-generation Moroccan migrants, in particular, seem to find refuge, reflects the existing gap between Muslim citizens and

the policy elite in Europe (de Wijk, Amghar and Boubekeur, 2006). It also demonstrates a willingness to “mark themselves off from the cold society in which they live, where anomie (literally, “without law,” lack of membership in a group that confers identity) goes hand in hand with stigmatization and social insignificance” (Khosrokhavar, 2017, p. 23). Social and political frustration that activates “a politicized social identity” generates a need for “an imagined political protest community,” which in turn can lead to violence (Sageman, 2017). In other words, the internet, which helps them explore their aspirations online and offers them a sense of belonging, serves to construct a virtual ummah and at the same time convinces them of the existence of an “imagined Muslim nation,” “egalitarian” and caring (Sageman, 2011a, p. 116). They are “born again” with a new identity, but most importantly, they are heroes now who will combat the external world (Khosrokhavar, 2017, p. 25).

The concept of the Ummah becomes their only identity, the one that transcends all the others, and every enemy to the Ummah is, in fact, an enemy of God (Rogers and Neumann, 2007). They believe that fighting the “evil West” will help them “expel from their own souls the share of the devil that has found its way in” (Khosrokhavar, 2017, p. 68). The devil here is their western “impure” identity or their “dual unbelonging” neither European nor Moroccan (ibid, pp. 68-69). Violence is the only way to ‘cleanse’ their identity (ibid).

Some second and third-generation Muslim youths suffer from a “dual exclusion” (Hafez and Mullins, 2015) and feel alienated, failing to identify with the values of their families or their surrounding cultures (Karasik and Benard, 2004). Because they have grown in Western societies, they continuously challenge their parents’ traditions, customs, and even understanding of Islam which, according to them, do not make sense anymore (Rogers and Neumann, 2007). These young people might then opt for a “stricter” interpretation of religion (Transformation of jihadism in the Netherlands, 2014). They become radicals because it offers them the feeling that they “know better,” that they hold the truth, and this makes them better than their parents (Roy, 2017). Violence or death are believed to free their parents from their sins and ensure their salvation and paradise (Roy, 2017).

They also fail to identify the identity of their European societies due to perceived socio-economic discrimination (Khosrokhavar, 2006). Some believe they are perceived and treated as outsiders (Karasik and Benard, 2004) and are still referred to as “migrant communities.” However, they have settled in Europe for three or four generations now and have acquired European citizenship (Coolsaet, 2016b). They believe they are not offered respect and equality and are “regarded with suspicion... On a day to day level, this is what it often comes down to... The fact that, in their eyes, you are a foreigner” (cited in Rogers and Neumann, 2007). As a

consequence, some withdraw from their families and friends (Bakker and Grol, 2015) while others “develop an idealized vision of Islam” free from specific ethnonational influences (Hafez and Mullins, 2015). Their confusion about their own national identity might turn them to a pan-Islamic ideology as portrayed by radical groups to resolve the question about their identity (Karasik and Benard, 2004). Identification with Islam serves to construct an identity that is neither European nor Arab (Khosrokhavar, 2017). Islam then, with its rules, is a form of “emancipation from the decline of values,” a “meaning of life,” and “a guidebook for living life successfully” (*Der Spiegel*, 2014).

Most importantly, it is not “tainted” by Western civilization, by its anti-Islamic evil stance (Khosrokhavar, 2017, p. 103). This “idealized vision of Islam” enables them to regain their dignity (Khosrokhavar, 2017) and identify with Muslims around the world (Hafez and Mullins, 2015). Then extremism becomes the basis of “an easy conscience and an absence of guilt” (Khosrokhavar, 2017, p. 104). It is presented as the ideology that would explain reality and worthy collective goals to pursue and provide personal significance, including honor (Kruglanski *et al.*, 2018). Violence is then presented as a morally acceptable means to attain this significance (Kruglanski *et al.*, 2018)

Militant Islamism fills the void and provides answers to their quest for identity (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010). What also attracts within radicalization is its ability to offer a new identity, to transform the local Muslim into a “global Muslim,” one who is completely detached from family, ethnic and tribal bonds, from everyday political life to adopt a “global” Muslim lifestyle (Roy, 2017). It is a system of fixed values, of references, an “alternative community” to their hostile European context, and “an outlet for the frustration they feel due to everyday racism” (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010). They finally get the sense that they have a “unified” and “cohesive” identity independent from the “multiple” and “shattered” identity European societies impose on them (Khosrokhavar, 2017). Their adherence to the group provides them with “status” or “personal gratification” (Schoorman and Horgan, 2016).

These young people are looking for a place where they can practice their new identity, their “pure Islam” within a “territorial niche,” and this is what this global ummah offers: an “Islamized space” where they can live under what they think is the true Islamic law, an “authentic Muslim environment” (Roy, 2017, p. 48). This “Islamist extremism proposes a political utopia: a political fantasy about society, where shari’a is applied to the letter and justice will rule” (Crone, 2016). For radicals, violence expresses their desire to “bring back the law of Allah” and to reject “the immoral nature of life in the West” (Dawson and Amarasingam, 2017). It is a need to “find

refuge in a more welcoming environment, where they wouldn't feel excluded, and where they would be able to finally take control of their life" (Coolsaet, 2016b).

Children of immigrant origin people usually feel an intense pressure to reconcile between two different discordant worlds: the traditions of their parents and the 'modern' expectations of their peer groups (Dawson, 2017). They wish to fit in, but at the same time, they long to be different (Roy, 2004). They would choose to live at the margin of the European society because "desocialization," breaking with the West, would enable them to form their counter-society with their "brothers and sisters" (Roy, 2017). At the same time, Islam offers the possibility of forming a "counter hegemonic global political movement" to stand up against injustice (Kaya, 2021). They might experience an existential quest for "anthological security" (Dawson, 2017). They might develop a "supranational Muslim identity that produces a virtual ghetto" (Roy, 2003). If, in this case, Islam assumes a "re-communalization along supranational lines," then "radicalism and violence become potentially serious issues" (ibid).

The "deculturation" of Islam within a globalized secular system that fails to understand the religious realm and to make sense of the generational gap has contributed to the "fundamentalist rigidification" of religion (Roy, 2017). Radicalization is here understood as a reaction to globalization and the weakening of traditional identities (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010). Globalization has deepened economic disparities resulting in the perception of migrants as a source of socio-economic threats (Adam-Troian, Tecmen and Kaya, 2021). In their turn migrants feel "threatened" and "oppressed" which might result in support for political violence (ibid, p. 19). The second generation of migrants, who have lost touch with their parents' culture and religion, feel the need to create a religion "without any social and cultural grounding" (Roy, 2017, p. 63). While making their identity, these individuals lack formal institutional and informal family social structures (Rogers and Neumann, 2007). This makes them susceptible to extremist discourses that offer to fill the identity void (ibid). They lack religious and ideological references, are left "to their own devices and exposed to society" (Coolsaet, 2016b). Islam then becomes their home, where everyone is "equal" (*Der Spiegel*, 2014). Only one's identity as Muslim counts. It matters over any other national or ethnic identity (Koning and Meijer, 2010).

Self-identified Muslim youngsters then resolve to religious symbols including the veil to express their discontent with discrimination, Islamophobia or racism against Muslims (Kaya, 2021). While attempting to reconstruct their "lost identity" within an environment they perceive as hostile, individuals might find their potential answers within militant Islamism (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010). They come to believe that the militant Islamism is the only antidote to imperialism and secular political regimes (Khosrokhavar, 2017). Radical groups attract these individuals with their

ability to offer an alternative 'culture' to young people who are struggling with the political and cultural dimensions of their identities as Muslims within a non-Muslim environment (Perliger and Milton, 2016). Their "deculturation" is a source of pride because it makes them "actors of a globalization that levels everything out," one that makes cultural roots pointless (Roy, 2017, p. 63). After all, they have become "globalized" individuals. They adopt a language tainted with religious references, address each other as *Akhi* (brother) and *Ukhti* (sister), "allowed" becomes "halal" and "forbidden" "haram" (*Der Spiegel*, 2014). The reconstruction of their religious "deculturation" might take a fundamental turn because "it drains religion of its social and cultural self-evidence" (Roy, 2017, p. 65). They feel the need to prove there are "better Muslims" and engage in chat rooms and social media to learn about the Islamic economic system on websites like Generation Islam, and talk to "non-Muslims" and lecture them (*Der Spiegel*, 2014).

When religion as an identity is rejected out of the public sphere, and when religious symbols are perceived as scandalous, the religious sphere becomes "decultured" and constructed separately and independently from society (Roy, 2017). This religious "deculturation" finds sources also in secularization (*ibid*). The management of Islam and Muslim communities has been carried out within a logic of securitization, defining what is deemed "acceptable" and what is deemed "unacceptable" (de Koning, 2020). The debate on assimilation often presented Islam as a threat to integration and the European values of rationality and tolerance (Koning and Meijer, 2010). The discourse on Muslim communities' political and social integration has been conceptualized within the framework of "clash of civilization" and that Islam is "a crisis phenomenon" that needs to be regulated to avoid rioting and social discord (de Wijk, Amghar and Boubekour, 2006). Migrants are increasingly perceived as "an economic burden" (Hafez and Mullins, 2015). The "racialization" of Muslims as a group sharing the same "biological, cultural, and religious" attributes served to distinguish them from the rest of society (de Koning, 2020).

It also serves to define "who belongs to the nation-state and who does not," leading to the stigmatization of Muslim communities in Europe (de Koning, 2020). The debate is still going on about whether Muslim communities should be defined as immigrants, minorities, or new Europeans (de Wijk, Amghar and Boubekour, 2006). Furthermore, the failure of some civil rights movements in Europe, for instance, the Beurs' March for Equality and against Racism, which was led by the descendants of North African immigrants in France in the 1980s, played a role in the radicalization of some youths who lost hope in Europe's integration policies (Khosrokhavar, 2017). Xenophobia combined with Islamophobia has made it difficult for one to display his/her Islamic identity (Hafez and Mullins, 2015).

Secularism makes the religious in public space odd. The odd attracts young people who would like to break off from society (Roy, 2017). The ban on the hijab and Islamic symbols intensified the feeling among young Muslims that they should “renounce their faith” (Khosrokhavar, 2017, p. 108). They have also boosted the feeling of humiliation, exclusion, and anger among Muslim youths in Europe (Hafez and Mullins, 2015).

The expulsion of Islam from the public space ends up placing religion in the hands of radical groups (Roy, 2017). The securitization of Islam within immigration and integration politics limited religious opportunities for Muslims, who then look for alternative networks (de Koning, 2020). Young radicals then come to believe that “individual salvation” can only take place through violent confrontation that would save Muslims from the “perversions” of secularism that “denies the power of God and His commandments” (Khosrokhavar, 2017, p. 107).

The events of 11 September 2001 renewed youths' interest in religion and fervor for the most militant interpretation of Islam (Vidino, 2007). Websites, publications, videos, summer camps, chat rooms, and conferences flourished (ibid). This has made possible a new form of “spontaneous” and “autonomous radicalization” where individuals adopt radical views without support from the outside (ibid). Religion in the construction of their identity divides the world between “us” and “them,” between true Muslims exclusively loyal to Islam and everything and everyone deemed un-Islamic (Koning and Meijer, 2010). Radical groups present the world as a struggle between justice and inequity, between the “morally bankrupt” west and “true Muslims” who defend their faith (Hafez and Mullins, 2015). This dichotomous worldview mirrors and stands in opposition to the European debate, which increasingly represents Islam as a religion at odds with European values (Koning and Meijer, 2010). Violence for the youth is a way to reject European society that discriminates against them (Vidino, 2007). A form of “reverse racism” against both European societies, in which they feel they would never be regarded as Europeans, and Arab countries where they are referred to as “dirty Arabs” (Khosrokhavar, 2017, p. 88). They resort to religious symbols (the burqa or the turban) because they “seek out radicalism for its own sake” (Roy, 2017, p. 67). Their attitude is not as much a protest against Islamophobia. It is put simply a willingness to scare (Roy, 2017), scare the “whites” from whom they received “contempt or rejection” (Khosrokhavar, 2017, p. 84). While disenchantment With European societies and grievances affect millions of Muslims in Europe, only a tiny minority of them become radicals (Hafez and Mullins, 2015). This discrepancy requires looking for the proximate causes of radicalization in other factors.

Radicalization as a form of “nihilism”

Sometimes radicals are motivated by a pure sense of revolt, and “violence is not a means. It is an end in itself” (Roy, 2017). Neither the rise of fundamentalism nor the radicalization of Islam can explain or produce religious violence (ibid). Contemporary Islamic violence and terrorism seem to be the result of the “Islamization of radicalism” and not the “radicalization of Islam” (ibid, p. 6). Most of these young individuals have become “much more religious, engaging in intensive study and practice of their faith” prior to their radicalization (Dawson and Amarasingam, 2017), and sometimes it is after radicalization that they felt an urgent need to learn more about Islam (Khosrokhavar, 2017).

The change in the behavior is often quick as Achmed, born in the Netherlands from Moroccan migrant parents, suddenly “started to observe Islamic rules stricter,” to “dress differently and he talked pedantically to his parents about their religious ideas” (Bakker and Grol, 2015). This increased interest in religion manifested itself “in visiting (different) mosques, changing eating habits, entering into religious debates, and visiting certain websites or online forums” (Weggemans, Bakker and Grol, 2014). This sudden surge in conservative religiosity helps them to construct their identity and a sense of purpose in life (Dawson and Amarasingam, 2017). Van Gogh’s murderer in the Netherlands went from a well-integrated member of the Dutch society to an Islamist extremist in the space of several years (Schuurman and Taylor, 2018). After stabbing a police officer, his imprisonment pushed him to look for the ‘truth’ and renewed his interest in his Islamic faith (ibid). He then withdrew from “mainstream” society (Schuurman, Eijkman and Bakker, 2014). He quit his job, his voluntary work in his community and broke off with friends he considered non-religious (ibid). He started adopting “the clothing, facial hair style and convictions of a fundamentalist Muslim, leading him to become known as ‘the Taliban’ among youths in his Amsterdam neighborhood” (ibid).

Some radicals pick up ready-made Islamic slogans online. These youngsters give themselves the right to interpret religion as “they see fit” to justify and legitimize their conduct (Coolsaet, 2016b). It is easier for radical groups to recruit young people without a proper background in Islam because they lack the means to evaluate their religious claims and accept the religious legitimacy of the groups’ leaders without questioning (Sageman, 2011a). Before they radicalize, these youngsters often feel “apathy and lack of meaningfulness” in their lives (Weggemans, Bakker and Grol, 2014). Radicalization is “compensatory” in the sense it compensates for a lack of meaning in one’s life (Dawson and Amarasingam, 2017). It also allows restoring significance within a European context of racism and xenophobia and on behalf of other Muslims who are humiliated worldwide (Kruglanski *et al.*, 2018).

Radicalization thus provides them with “a sense of purpose and fulfill their need to belong” (Weggemans, Bakker and Grol, 2014). For others, the focus on one’s own religious beliefs is “a search for truth” after having undergone negative personal experiences, spending time in prison, or losing a parent (Schuurman and Horgan, 2016). The adoption of radical thoughts can be described as part of a youth subculture of rebellion within big Western European cities (*Der Spiegel*, 2014). A feeling of madness at the fact of being “neglected” because of their social or ethnic backgrounds (de Wijk, Amghar and Boubekeur, 2006).

The ideologization of this “sense of the internalized ghetto,” of humiliation, frustration, social and economic exclusion, would push some of them to revolt and act (Khosrokhavar, 2017, p. 24). Violence is “not the expression of a radicalization of the Muslim population, but rather reflect a generational revolt that affects a very precise category of youth,” rooted in “a no-future youth subculture” (Roy, 2009). “Completely and utterly mad” youths who are “from top to toe unreligious and completely lost for Islam” (cited in de Wijk, Amghar and Boubekeur, 2006). It is part of a rebellion against their parents and their values (*Der Spiegel*, 2014). It is the attraction of the “super gang,” “a new and supplementary channel for deviant behavior, next to membership in street gangs, rioting, drug trafficking, and delinquency” (Coolsaet, 2016a). It is a desire for “adventure and action” (Schuurman and Horgan, 2016).

The Internet and social media help them construct this subculture they long to be part of (Crone, 2014). Online speeches, images, and sounds “provide religious models that enable imagination, identification and mimetic practice” (ibid). They watch and hear « models » who represent the life they want to lead, how they should behave, dress, protest, and eventually kill (ibid). They strive to become part of a militant subculture (ibid). They adopt « an art of existence » because they are seeking to become a new type of person and lead a new kind of life (ibid). In other words, it is a willingness to distinguish oneself from mainstream European society and other subcultures as well (ibid).

The “no future subculture” attracts ‘vulnerable’ and ‘frustrated’ young people (Coolsaet, 2016b). Violence is “fun,” and the “loser can become someone” (*Der Spiegel*, 2014). Former friends or neighbors often describe these young radicals as street thugs. It is this “parallel environment” of violence carried out on the margins of society where they feel they do not fit, this environment where they create new kinship and friendship ties and which “provide them with support, protection, and shelter in case of need” that attracts them in joining a radical group (Coolsaet, 2016b). These new peers and kin reinforce their rejection of society (ibid). “Religiosity is not the strongest explanatory variable” for understanding why young people radicalize (Perliger and Milton, 2016), but Islam became the paradigm of this youth revolt and a framework for their

experiences (Dawson and Amarasingam, 2017). These young radicals use Islam to “project their inflated self-esteem to the outside world” and to act out their violence in a “seemingly morally legitimate” way (cited in *Der Spiegel*, 2014).

European Muslim youths with North African origin seem more prone to embrace radical thoughts than young Turks, though they share the same religion and similar socio-economic grievances. One explanation is that the Turkish state has always sought to control the religious discourse within its mosques in Europe (Drhimeur, 2020a). It has also sought to establish a strong network of imams and local leaders who keep “a close eye on potentially wayward elements in the community” (Higgins, 2016). Much of the Moroccan community originates from the Rif region in Morocco, an Amazigh-speaking community that often criticized the monarchy (Drhimeur, 2020b). State encouragement of migration from this region meant getting rid of dissent voices (*ibid*). This has created a divided community in contrast to the Turks (Higgins, 2016). Turkish communities have managed to build a close-knitted network of associations that helps newcomers and strengthens a feeling of connectedness to their ethnic in-group and cultural integration (van Bergen *et al.*, 2015). Turks seem to “suffer much less from an identity crisis,” which helps them resist radical thoughts (Higgins, 2016). The Moroccan community in Europe often has difficulties identifying either as Moroccans or as Europeans. This context of acculturation and perceived deprivation among youths from Moroccan origins explain their willingness to use religious violence (van Bergen *et al.*, 2015).

Violence becomes an outlet for their “anger with an Islamic dressing” (cited in Coolsaet, 2016b). Radicalization is not the consequence of religious radicalization; it is a form of “fascination for death” for wanting to die in action (Roy, 2017). Violence is the end, and Islam is the “framework for thought and action” (*ibid*, p. 32). These young individuals, who have experienced personal difficulties (of various kinds) that left them feeling stifled and discontented frequently at odds with family and friends, in search of belonging. The succession of such estrangements result at a certain age in anger (Coolsaet, 2016a). Radicalization or opting for violence stem from “an exaggerated credulity, a form of naiveté resulting from misunderstanding or ignorance of Islam” (Khosrokhavar, 2017, p. 80).

Religious observance is not particularly important because they believe violence or death will erase all their sins (Roy, 2017). Death here has “meaning and continuity” (Crenshaw, 1981). It offers “fame and immortality” and “a desire for transcendence” (*ibid*). Because they are not afraid of death, they go from feeling “inferior” to “superior,” “better” than anyone else (Khosrokhavar, 2017). When explaining their act, the emphasis is not made on the need to establish an Islamic state as much as showing interest in the type of weapon they use, the

training they allegedly have received, and the hardship they went through (Schuurman and Horgan, 2016).

These are not manipulated individuals but “are radicals because they choose to be because only radicalism appeals to them” (Roy, 2017, p. 42). It is not religion as much as religiosity or the way one experiences religion and appropriate its elements, that makes the radical fascinated with death and feeling deep contempt for his own life and that of the others (Roy, 2017). Youngsters within the municipality of Molenbeek in Brussels were found to display a “perplexing capacity to hate” (Coolsaet, 2016b). Radicalization expresses their need to “find a release for feelings of anger and revenge” (Schuurman and Horgan, 2016), and “anger brings the desire to right a wrong, and this may lead to violence” (Sageman, 2011a, p. 73). When this hatred is ideologized, it becomes “holy,” for it will revenge Islam and the Muslims (Khosrokhavar, 2017). It is a “thrilling” experience that adds a “larger-than-life dimension to their way of life—transforming them from delinquents without a future into mujahedeen with a cause” (Coolsaet, 2016b). These young radicals are looking for a way to escape “boredom and the banality of everyday life” (*Der Spiegel*, 2014).

The radical is also fascinated with violence and how it is “theatricalized” and presented in propaganda videos (Roy, 2017, p. 50). They are also fascinated with the “virtual glorification” of foreign fighters left for the Middle East (Weggemans, Bakker and Grol, 2014). The perpetrator of the murder of Van Gogh in the Netherlands shot his victim many times before trying to decapitate his head using a kukri knife (Schuurman, Eijkman and Bakker, 2014). He had quit his job, dropped out of school, and left his family’s home to live isolated (Schuurman and Horgan, 2016). He was rarely exposed to “countervailing opinions” or ideas that challenged his own beliefs (*ibid*). “His life revolved around his beliefs” such that they ended up controlling his behavior (*ibid*). The murder was motivated by “fanatical beliefs[...]a fear of spending an eternity in hell for failing to live up to his god’s commandments.” Still, it was also a theatrical work trying to turn “the murder into a gruesome act of theater[...]One that underlined his overarching desire to show himself to the world as a ‘true’ Muslim” (*ibid*). This “aestheticization” of violence attracts because it makes the socially excluded migrant in European suburbs “handsome” (Roy, 2017).

The glorification of violence and particularly death attracts young radicals who “are not utopians, they are nihilists because they are millennialists” (*ibid*, p. 53) because suicide is “messianic” (*ibid*, p. 56), it is their “fate” and part of their “freedom” from the neighborhood and society (Khosrokhavar, 2017, p. 102). It can also be a desire for attention, a form of narcissism taking selfies and filming themselves because, for some of them, “being radical is fun” (Coolsaet, 2016b). These are not the characteristics of religious extremists but of the very contemporary

selfie-generation to which they belong (ibid). They are violent because it is the way for them to attract attention (Khosrokhavar, 2017). Young radicals might perceive violence as “jihadi cool” and show a willingness to adopt “pop-jihad as a lifestyle” (Coolsaet, 2016b). In other words, “they are looking for a fight, or for adventure, or revenge, because they do not fit in society” (*Le Telegramme*, 2015). They assume the status of ‘negative heroes’ because the more they are feared, the more “glory” they would attract either within the media or within other “oppressed” youths (Khosrokhavar, 2017, p. 25). It is about the circumstances and the context, an ‘instigating’ environment that provides motivation to use violence (Sedgwick, 2010). A willingness to break free from the past of petty crime to construct a “brand-new” life (Coolsaet, 2016b).

Radicalization is a socialization process

Here the analysis of radicalization highlights the importance of social networks and interactions for the transmission of radical ideas. These interactions usually happen at work, within professional associations, educational or faith-based institutions, civil society organizations, local charities, and prisons (Hafez and Mullins, 2015). These organizations seek to achieve collective values based on intense loyalties between members to deter defection or dissent voices (Crenshaw, 1987). To build this strong feeling of loyalty, members of a radical group spend hours watching videos of persecuted Muslims worldwide and discussing jihadist tracts (Dawson, 2017). Members of the Hofstad group in the Netherlands used to discuss Islam and jihadi videos and ended up creating alternative truths, norms, values, and explanation of religion (de Wijk, Amghar and Boubekour, 2006).

Radical groups are often based on preexisting kinship and friendship ties (Coolsaet, 2016b), “bonds of solidarity, and trust,” which provide members with material and psychological benefits (Hafez and Mullins, 2015). They offer a sense of satisfaction because, in the radical minds, they are contributing to a “worthy cause” (Crenshaw, 1987). They also provide the possibility of redemption, of changing one’s life and replacing the current political system (Crenshaw, 1987). Radicalization happens within these smaller groups “where bonding, peer pressure, and indoctrination gradually changes the individual’s view of the world” (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010) and his /her perception of self-interest (Rogers and Neumann, 2007).

The group consensus on narratives serves to prove that violent extremism is veracious and sound (Kruglanski *et al.*, 2018). When seeking religious meaning, individuals usually turn to friends and family whom they trust (Hafez and Mullins, 2015). If some of these family members or friends are already radicalized, exposure to their views makes violence as a means to pursue social and political objectives ‘cognitively accessible’ (Kruglanski *et al.*, 2018). These bonds

facilitate the process of radicalization because they offer “mutual emotional and social support, development of a common identity, and encouragement to adopt a new faith. [...] As in all intimate relationships, this glue, in-group love, is found inside the group,” and it is this “in-group love than out-group hate” that consolidates extremist views (Sageman, 2011b, p. 135). These groups exercise a socializing function similar to that of the family (Rogers and Neumann, 2007). They become a new family for those who “broke with their parents” and “were cut off from everything” (cited in Rogers and Neumann, 2007). Leaving the group is difficult because they are afraid of becoming “pariahs” again (Rogers and Neumann, 2007). Group identification is made possible as members share the same feelings of humiliation, anger. After all, people oppose their cause, pride, and joy (McCauley and Moskaleiko, 2008).

People usually seek other individuals who share similar beliefs because it helps them create a “collective identity” (Hafez and Mullins, 2015). The initial group formation of the Hofstadgroup was based primarily on “pre-existing ties of friendship” between different members who grew up in the same neighborhood, who went to the same school or prayed in the same mosque (Schuurman, Eijkman and Bakker, 2014). Radicalization does not mainly happen within mosques but individually within groups (Roy, 2017), who more or less live in the same residential area and belong to the same age group (Bakker, 2006). These individuals refrain from visiting non-political mosques, which they believe fail to adequately represent their identities (Koning and Meijer, 2010). It also happens within individuals who feel frustrated or discriminated against and who then “mentally” separate from their society and seek other individuals who feel the same way (Coolsaet, 2016b). Recruiters, “who are further along the path of violence and who are willing to explore it with them” (Sageman, 2011a, p. 84), then appeal to this “sentiment pool” (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010) and attempt to mobilize people’s grievances, vulnerabilities and channel them towards concrete violent action (Rogers and Neumann, 2007). They offer them psychological incentives to join the group: the feeling of belonging, of having comrades, a social status, respect, admiration, and reputation (Crenshaw, 1987).

Individuals who are experiencing a quest for significance and who are exposed to a social network that represents violence as a legitimate means to restore significance, respect, and admiration are more likely to embrace radicalization because friends, family members, and comrades “function as an epistemic authority” who validate violence as appropriate to attain both one’s own goals and those of the group (Kruglanski *et al.*, 2018). Online within chat groups or among circles of young people, socialization serves to convince individuals that “sacred” violence is the only “legitimate” path to escape insignificance (Khosrokhavar, 2017, p. 107).

These groups are usually well-structured because they are based on a feeling of solidarity between family members and friends and the existence of a religious leader (Karoui and Hodayé, 2021). They are attracted to “warm camaraderie,” “brotherhood,” a feeling of “empowerment” of having control over one’s destiny, “respect,” and “recognition” (Coolsaet, 2016b). They feel they are “among peers” (Roy, 2017). These “identities of empowerment” allow them to regain confidence and self-worth (Rogers and Neumann, 2007). These groups provide individuals with a sense of belonging to a community, being accepted, and even having a feeling of being important having a great mission to accomplish (Rogers and Neumann, 2007). When personal grievances remain unresolved and too outstanding for one to carry, this new community provides a feeling of security and produces a sense of personal “greatness” (*Der Spiegel*, 2014). Within these groups, “personal feelings get politicized,” and the group ideology becomes “an unquestioned belief system and attitude (Coolsaet, 2016b). Their isolation further intensifies their shared beliefs and “make faith in the cause imperative” (Crenshaw, 1981). Within these groups “ideology helps to dehumanise the outside-group and transforms innocents (who bear no responsibility for the original feelings of frustration and inequity) into guilty accomplices” (Coolsaet, 2016b). Hating and dehumanizing the other, the target of violence erodes psychological barriers to violence (Sternberg, 2003).

Radicals are trying to copy the jihadi role models they saw online (Schuurman and Horgan, 2016), whom they see as “pop idols” (Coolsaet, 2016b). The internet serves to diffuse images and videos of ‘successful’ violent actions to ‘inspire’ other young people to join the movement (Sageman, 2011a, p. 122). The internet and social media help them create a particular “aesthetic” image of the self and enable them to “transform” themselves to accept and endorse religious violence (Crone, 2014). They help to “materialize” violence and death, bring them into being, and making them accessible (*ibid*). They are “transmitted into practice without a theoretical discourse” (*ibid*). They are “enacted, lived and inhabited,” part of the present, a possibility while allowing them at the same time to imagine themselves in the future (*ibid*). These images serve to spread the idea that ‘true’ Muslims have the opportunity to become “heroes” and defend their faith (Hafez and Mullins, 2015). Violence is also attractive because it draws attention from the authorities, the media, and the perpetrators of violent actions, who usually feel ignored or powerless, get to feel noticed (Kruglanski *et al.*, 2018).

Emulation of other members of radical groups also provides them with the incentive for violence (Schuurman and Horgan, 2016). The attacks of 9/11 “inspired” young Muslims who came to believe conducting a raid on European soil was possible (de Wijk, Amghar and Boubekeur, 2006). There was an explosion in the number of terrorist attacks in Europe after 9/11

(de Wijk, Amghar and Boubekeur, 2006). The Murder of the filmmaker Van Gogh in the Netherlands was 'inspired' by 9/11 and by the terrorist attack in Madrid in 2004, which made members of the group believe that orchestrating similar attacks in the Netherlands was possible (Schuurman, Eijkman and Bakker, 2014). At the same time, the murder represented an example for other members to follow (Schuurman and Horgan, 2016), though not only them. A number of Dutch teenagers of Moroccan descent viewed the group as heroes and exchanged their pictures and wrote their names on backpacks (Vidino, 2007). "The attacker was a friend who became a role model for what it meant to be a 'true' Muslim as well as a source of peer pressure" (Schuurman and Horgan, 2016). He felt the need to "step up" and commit an attack in the Netherlands before being arrested (*ibid*). Put simply, violence, "martyrdom" communicates a willingness to "sacrifice" oneself for a cause. This commitment to a cause to one's values also serves to enhance one's perception of personal significance (Kruglanski *et al.*, 2018). Having lost hope of integration within European societies, these "victimized young" seek recognition and significance through fear and terror (Khosrokhavar, 2017, p. 108). Violence thus is a "mark of distinction" between true Muslims and hypocrites, the only way to prove one's devotion to God (Koning and Meijer, 2010) and re-establish the balance between the Muslim world and the West (Khosrokhavar, 2017).

Prisons are also a privileged territory for radicalization (Karoui and Hodayé, 2021). Some radicalized in prisons, while others used the conditions in prisons to diffuse their radical ideology (Karoui and Hodayé, 2021). They usually find it easier to diffuse a "simplified Salafism," one that represents violence as a "legitimate political protest" (Roy, 2017, p. 30) and a "higher duty" (Rogers and Neumann, 2007). Within this vision of Islam, the "political is a subcategory of the religious" and transforms their grievances into "religious imperatives" (Khosrokhavar, 2017, p. 150). Because Islam has become "the religion of the oppressed" in Europe, it attracts young people in prisons who have strained relationships with society, experience feelings of social and economic exclusion, and believe they are culturally stigmatized (Khosrokhavar, 2017). Religion also provides "a sense of certainty and security," an opportunity to break free from the past, which helps explain (Rogers and Neumann, 2007). At the same time, the rate of religious conversion within European prisons is usually higher than with the general population. Embracing Islam provides them an opportunity to fight the imperial West, affirm oneself in opposition to Western culture, and save oneself (Khosrokhavar, 2017).

The ability to rub shoulders with other jihadists has enabled them to strengthen their ideology and to recruit new activists to their cause (Karoui and Hodayé, 2021). In prisons, where the feeling of frustration against the system is accentuated, being part of a group offers a sense

of dignity and pride (Khosrokhavar, 2016). Frustrations are highlighted by the impossibility for some prisoners to celebrate collective prayers, bring a prayer rug to their cells, wear traditional Islamic clothing, or have access to halal food (Khosrokhavar, 2017). It makes them even more convinced that the West holds deep contempt for Islam (ibid). Joining a radical group helps them avoid isolation while sharing a common identity provides the individual with “a sense of strength and superiority” (Rogers and Neumann, 2007). The existence of a charismatic leader, the perceived prestige of returnee jihadists, and the feeling of resentment towards European societies contribute to a rapid expansion of radical ideas within prisons (Karoui and Hodayé, 2021). Thus the combination of grievances, criminality, and connectedness to radical networks explains why Moroccan youths in Europe become susceptible to radicalization that promises significance, honor, heroism, and redemption in their afterlife.

Conclusion

The combination of socio-economic grievances, networks, ideologies, and enabling environments might produce radicalism. Radicals usually come from lower or lower-middle classes with modest or inadequate levels of education. They are raised in what is commonly referred to as bad neighborhoods and have limited economic prospects. They have experience with drug abuse and petty crimes. Some express the absence of a future and a sense of belonging. Their frustration and anger are nourished by the perception that their conditions are unjust.

Radicalization is also a search for meaning in a world perceived to discriminate against Muslim communities continually. Radicals frame their violence within a historical perspective, that of the “suffering” of Muslims due to colonization, Western military interventions, and racism. These radicals believe it is their duty to revenge all the oppressed Muslims wherever they are. They might turn to violence after placing their individual grievances as part of a global hostility against Muslims. The radicalized individual believes himself to be a hero who will avenge other Muslims. Besides this quest for meaning, radicalization reflects a need for personal significance, honor, and respect. When one feels humiliated and frustrated, he might adopt violent behavior to regain significance.

Among other elements that motivate young individuals are a pure sense of revolt against their parents and their values, an attraction to the super gang culture, and a desire for adventure and action. Violence is perceived as fun and a way to become someone. Radicalization here does not reflect religion as much as it reflects madness, anger, and frustration. It is a fascination

for death that would erase all their sins, offers them a sense of superiority, and frees them from their societies.

Above all, joining a radical group offers a feeling of belonging to a global Muslim community constructed in opposition to Western culture. A kind of counter-society where they withdraw when they feel they cannot either identify with the values of their families or the values of their surrounding cultures. This makes them susceptible to extremist discourses that fill the identity void. Militant Islamism becomes the only alternative to imperialism and secular political regimes.

Finally, radicalization is a socialization process. Many radical groups are based on preexisting kinships and friendship ties. These bonds, based on trust, facilitate the spread of radical thoughts as they offer emotional and social support and collective identity. Radicalization also involves a multitude of influences, decisions, and social interactions between individuals and groups from different social backgrounds. Different individuals radicalize in different ways. For some, religion frames their thoughts and provides identity and purpose. Without an environment conducive to violence, radicalization might fall on deaf ears.

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