

İSTANBUL BİLGİ UNIVERSITY
EUROPEAN INSTITUTE
JEAN MONNET CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE

**How to Study Processes of Radicalization
from a Socio-cultural Perspective?**

Ayşenur Benevento

WORKING PAPER No: 15

EU/12/2023



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Working Paper No: 15
December 2023

DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.10229462](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10229462)



The research for this Working Paper was undertaken as part of a Horizon 2020 research and innovation project called ISLAM-OPHOB-ISM under Grant Agreement ERC AdG 785934.

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Preface

In this Working Paper, Ayşenur Benevento, a member of the Prime Youth ERC Research undertaken by the European Institute of Istanbul Bilgi University, elaborates on how youth radicalization unfolds in the European context. The author has compiled a very nuanced and detailed body of existing literature on the radicalization processes of both self-identified Muslim youth and nativist youth in several European cities. Based on various theoretical approaches, she offers a theoretical toolkit to the readers to trace the socio-economic, ideological, and psychological drivers of radicalization among disenfranchised youth in Europe. 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 Agreement Number 785934 and the acronym Islam-ophob-ism.

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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 the early phases of its commercialisation.

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

Biography

Ayşenur Benevento, Postdoctoral Researcher, ERC AdG PRIME Youth Project

Ayşenur Benevento has a Ph.D. in Psychology from the Graduate Center, City University of New York and currently works as a part-time postdoctoral researcher for the ERC project titled “Nativism, Islamophobia and Islamism in the Age of Populism: Culturalisation and Religionisation of what is Social, Economic and Political in Europe”. Benevento's research focuses on the interactions children and young people actively develop with their immediate surroundings, different social entities and culture. Her inquiries led her to be part of many interdisciplinary studies conducted in very distinct cultural and international contexts over the years. She is a product of public school from kindergarten to graduate school.

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How to Study Processes of Radicalization from a Socio-cultural Perspective?

Abstract

This paper revisits a former article I published about the potential contribution of psychology's socio-cultural theory to the topic of radicalization and provides practical advice for future radicalization researchers based on our research team's five-year-long work on the topic. The aforementioned paper (Benevento, 2023) investigated psychology's foundational theories and pondered how they have (or might have) contributed to the study of radicalization from a psychological perspective. Given that I have written an article underlying the necessity of considering socio-cultural contexts of where and whom we study, one might ask 1) how to manage such research, and 2) if I was able to produce research that accomplished the very thing I had suggested. The current paper focuses on those two points. Two aspects were emphasized in each of my publications in this project: 1) Avoiding broad assertions regarding radicalization, and 2) Suggestions for endeavors to deconstruct de-radicalization based on our contextually sensitive *findings*. It is my conviction that in order to maintain a heightened awareness of the socio-cultural, historical, economic, and political milieu, it is imperative to examine the interconnections between the locations, mechanisms, agents, and timing of radicalization. As a result, my individual research focused on discoveries and subjects that were sensitive to the setting. Instead of endeavoring to assemble the entirety of the narratives shared by the 302 research participants during our interviews, I re-sampled and re-categorized the accounts according to the locations of the participants, the content of their narrations, or their actions/inactions. The utilization of comprehensive and contextually appropriate approaches is critical while investigating radicalization. Thus far, initiatives spearheaded by the government and driven by research have integrated religious dialogue, cultural exchange, education, training, and training in order to facilitate the assimilation of minority communities into the majority community. Ignorant of sociocultural norms as well as local economic and political realities, such efforts run the risk of exacerbating the distrust between the populace and government. Hence, strategies that prioritize local and intersectional settings would prove advantageous for persons who seek to transcend the mere profile of radical organizations and individuals.

Introduction

This paper revisits a former article I published about the potential contribution of psychology's socio-cultural theory to the topic of radicalization and provides practical advice for future radicalization researchers based on our research team's five-year-long work on the topic. The aforementioned paper (Benevento, 2023) investigated psychology's foundational theories and pondered how they have (or might have) contributed to the study of radicalization from a psychological perspective. After studying the literature on radicalization, it became clear that there was a dearth of information on specific research contexts and that radicalization was conceptualized in an unclear way. This led to the necessity of conducting a critical examination of the literature. The necessity for radicalization research to acknowledge the socio-cultural, political, and historical context when doing research and presenting findings was one of the paper's claims. The paper emphasized the significance of applying socio-cultural theory to be attentive to various study environments and populations, as contemporary psychology has grown increasingly perceptive of contextual variations. In order to broaden the definition of radicalization beyond acts of violence and extreme behavior, I proposed the socio-cultural school of thought.

In a nutshell, the paper had preached a socio-cultural perspective over the others (Cognitive approach, Psychoanalytic approach, Behavioral approach) without giving practical advice on *how* to study processes of radicalization from that theoretical stance. Given that I have written an article underlying the necessity of considering socio-cultural contexts of where and whom we study, one might ask 1) how to manage such research, and 2) if I was able to produce research that accomplished the very thing I had suggested. The current paper will focus on those two points.

Theory and Study of Change Processes in The Context of Radicalization

The concept of radicalization denotes a progression as opposed to a fixed condition. Radicalism is not a destination that individuals ultimately reach. Additionally, radicalism does not invariably include conduct, much less one that is violent. A cursory examination of the existing body of literature indicates that scholars who conduct psychological research on the subject of radicalization continue to be perplexed by the proper usage of terms such as terrorism, violent extremism, political violence, and radicalism. It is unsurprising, for instance, to encounter pertinent literature while perusing a study entitled *Theories in Radicalization* that investigates "connections between violent extremism and contributory elements" or "causes of terrorism" (see, Kruglanski, Bélanger, & Gunaratna, 2019).

If radicalization is indeed a process, then expanding our understanding of the phenomenon by examining how psychology has treated processes including behavioral, emotional, and cognitive development could be beneficial. Contemporary psychology rejects the notion that the human psyche possesses an immutable state of being (Martin & Sugarman, 2000). Presently, the discipline recognizes that individuals are not only shaped by their environment but also by their life experiences and genetic composition, which are continuously evolving to accommodate human beings. The manner in which psychology treats the human quest for change varies according to its perspective on the manner in which life changes. One of the main inquiries in psychology is whether change occurs constantly or discontinuously; this topic has a substantial impact on one's theoretical attitude. The following section provides a concise overview of stage and non-stage theories within the field of psychology.

Stage and Non-stage Theories

Theories that embrace discontinuous viewpoints claim that change occurs in distinct phases. Stages are conceptual frameworks. Theories that employ such unique conceptions, which are referred to as "stage theories," highlight qualitative changes in ideas, emotions, and behaviors and strictly order variations that occur along the course of change. Further, stage theories suggest that change is abrupt and adheres to a uniform trajectory among all individuals. As an illustration, a stage theory of radical behavior delineates a sequential progression of classifications for individuals (e.g., Islamist, nativist, etc.) and delineates the catalysts that incite progression from one category to the subsequent (e.g., perception of discrimination) (e.g., group membership). A social scientist, endowed with such a theory, might be able to discern important stages or stages and concentrate efforts on comprehending the determinants that propel individuals to the subsequent stage. If intervening throughout the process of radical behavior development is the primary objective, then a theory that accurately delineates these stages enables the customization of treatments for specific individuals and the sequential implementation of interventions.

Emphasis is placed on what humans are expected to perform at a particular stage, level, or age, rather than on the manner in which or rationale behind their actions. The process remains largely hidden and uncertain. Non-stage theories, which propose that the process of change adheres to an uninterrupted trajectory, acknowledge that individuals are in a constant state of becoming. Individuals transition between states, albeit not in a logical or sequential fashion, but significantly impacted by the sociocultural milieu in which they find themselves and the way in which they perceive it. Stage theories that emphasize the presence of qualitatively distinct stages

frequently overlook several observable phenomena that are significant in cross-cultural human life yet are in a constant state of change. For example, a woman from a minority background encounters prejudice in a manner that is fundamentally distinct from that of a woman from the majority position. The temporal context (e.g., the 1960s, Europe, childhood, etc.) and location (e.g., a diverse metropolis, a rural village, etc.) in which the two women encounter discrimination are also significant factors in determining how and why they feel that way. Stage theories are deficient in the contextual sensitivity required to analyze distinct yet comparable patterns in the change process across a variety of settings. In psychology, both stage and non-stage theories have gained popularity because they provide a framework for comprehending human cognition, affect, and conduct, and most significantly, they are amenable to empirical investigation. Particularly, stage theories frequently ascribe causality to internal processes, so advancing claims that are challenging to verify or refute through empirical investigation. Scholars can utilize stage theories to replicate and adapt pre-existing models. Step-by-step models that depict psychological processes exert a significant impact on policies and intervention efforts, as they provide actionable steps to reverse unwanted human behavior that are both clear and concise. On the one hand, it is highly controversial what constitutes an undesirable human idea, feeling, or behavior in many settings. Conversely, a limited number of thoughts, emotions, or actions have been firmly established as morally and legally undesirable. For example, engaging in violent behavior intentionally when one is aware that it would cause harm to another person is generally regarded as unwelcome and offensive. Given the widespread consensus that behaviors that cause harm to others should not be condoned, determining the factors that contribute to their existence has become an essential area of inquiry.

Numerous radicalization models posit that it is a progression in which individuals' inclination to employ violent methods in pursuit of desired societal and political transformations grows. As the global incidence of violent extremist and terrorist acts has risen steadily over the last three decades, it has become increasingly intriguing for social scientists to comprehend "what occurs prior to the detonation of the bomb." This understanding is crucial for addressing what has come to be recognized as a worldwide issue. Twenty-one Sedgwick (2010). Subsequently, numerous psychological investigations into radicalization have been focused on delineating the attributes of individuals labeled as terrorists or discerning the stages or contributing elements that precipitate violent conduct. Nevertheless, not all radicalization results in violence, and not all radicalization is detrimental (Bjorgo & John, 2009; Fraihi, 2008). A limited number of radicalized persons engage in violent activity, given the clear differentiation between

merely accepting radical views and actually carrying them out through violent actions (Wilner & Dubouloz, 2010). According to Horgan (2009), a critical analysis of violent radicalization necessitates a change in emphasis from identifying outward traits and tracing pathways rather than pursuing *root causes* (Horgan, 2009). Sociocultural factors will be chosen for evaluation and to feed theories of radicalization in the subsequent section.

Socio-Cultural Approach:

Overall, it appears that the investigation of contextual change processes by psychologists was a protracted endeavor. Thankfully, the demand to comprehend human psychology in context has evolved as a result of the emphasis on diverse cultural practices (Vygotsky, 1978); this has shifted the field away from universal models (Strickland, 2000) and given rise to the concept of *second psychology* (Cahan & White, 1992). This school of thought holds that human psychology can alone be explicated within the framework of its social, historical, and cultural milieu. The human mind is no longer confined inside the cranium; rather, it can be comprehended through its engagement with the external environment.

At the forefront of modern psychological scholarship is an effort to combine data from multiple organizational levels that comprise the ecology of human experience (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). This approach emphasizes the criticality of taking into account the social and physical environment in which changes transpire (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). What is the most critical and potentially crucial element of the environment that determines whether or not it is ideal for a specific developmental asset? Culture. For the broadest definition, culture pertains to "an adaptive procedure that amasses partial solutions to issues that are regularly faced... It is the procedure via which our routine cultural behaviors are implemented." (Hutchins, 1995).

It can be inferred from this description that culture encompasses more than only stable norms, standards, values, or codes that are isolated. It establishes cohesive patterns that render the documentation of its variants nearly challenging for a researcher. Furthermore, it is crucial to acknowledge that human behavior is accompanied by intricate and ever-changing divisions of experience across cultures (Daiute, 2014). Consequently, it is unreasonable to expect individuals from the same cultural group or who are experiencing the same context to ascribe identical significance to the same experience. Through the implementation of culturally sensitive research, psychology can assist in the identification of optimal environments and the analysis of patterns among diverse experiences. Rather than fixating on cross-cultural variations in products, it is critical to recognize the influence of culture on the change process (Cole, 1995).

Approaches to Studying Processes of Radicalization from a Socio-cultural Perspective:

Why do certain radicalization analysts depict certain demographics and locations (e.g., European Muslims) as centers of radicalization, when others, including ourselves, maintain that such depictions are false? The study approach that provides the basis for these evaluations could potentially provide an answer. Reports that center on the purported menace of youth radicalization in Europe, often, do not incorporate fieldwork, in contrast to the study project that we undertook. Conversely, many of these studies are predominately derived from intelligence sources, newspaper reporting, and indictment records pertaining to the violent perpetrators. These sources of information are reliable, and the scholars who rely on them recognize numerous issues that Europe encounters. However, participant observation in the community and interviews with religious activists, community members, and local leaders do not inform these studies. The absence of insights derived from fieldwork hinders the identification of many local and contextual situations that starkly contrast with the notions of European youth held by foreigners. These characteristics have been specifically emphasized in our study. Although our field research remains inconclusive, it does prompt significant inquiries regarding the accuracy of characterizing the four countries we examined—Belgian, French, German, and Dutch—as hotbeds of radicalization. These factors have been predominantly disregarded. Conversely, the narratives that do not incorporate empirical research have acquired credibility, as they are cited favorably and unchallenged by journalists and scholars. It is assumed that they reveal the alleged descent of these four nations into radical Islam or nationalism, or even worse, youth violence.

How does one study the role of local cultural context using the socio-cultural perspective? The social and cultural elements that may contribute to radicalization are the focal point of a sociocultural perspective on the subject. Followers of this viewpoint aim to comprehend the ways in which the cultures in which they reside exert impact on both individuals and collectives, as well as the ways in which such factors may precipitate radicalization. This methodology promotes the notion that researchers ought to transcend personal incentives and interests.

Ethnographic Approach:

One way to study radicalization from a socio-cultural perspective is to conduct ethnographic research. This involves observing and interviewing people in the communities where radicalization is taking place. Ethnographers can learn a great deal about the social and cultural dynamics of these communities, such as the social networks, cultural practices, and shared

experiences that may contribute to radicalization. A quick review of the scarce collection of ethnographies presents that the studies focus on Muslim communities in places outside of the West. Kenney (2011), for instance, demonstrates the value of ethnographic research in radicalization through their investigation of Príncipe Alfonso in Ceuta, an area that has long been recognized as a hub of Islamist radicalization. Similarly, Shajkovci (2015) centers their research on Kosovo's Muslim population engaged in the Syrian and Iraq conflict. Yun and Kim (2017) investigated the Islamic radicalization process within South Korea, particularly within the Indonesian-origin Muslim immigrant community. Discussing the assumption made on Muslim radicalization all around the globe is beyond the scope of this article but a topic we had discussed in our previous publications (Kaya & Benevento, 2021).

An encouraging advancement in ethnographic research seems to be the use of e-ethnography. Actually, e-ethnography is a covert methodological strategy that enables social analysis to be expanded (Hetland & Morch, 2016). When it comes to studies on radicalization; blogs, information, and pages on the Internet may be the only sources of data available to conduct a thorough and comprehensive global analysis of radicalization. Researchers can analyze social media content to identify the ways in which extremist groups use these platforms to spread their message and target vulnerable individuals (Hollewell & Longpré, 2022). Additionally, radical organizations can reveal more on anonymous websites through the use of the Internet for proselytizing and propaganda than they could through in-person experiments in research (Lazzari et al., 2016). Researchers can also explore the role of social media in spreading extremist ideologies and facilitating radicalization. Social media platforms can provide extremist groups with a platform to reach large audiences and recruit new members. There has been some work in the domain of white supremacy community detection on social media but overwhelmingly, this work is dedicated to identification of Jihadists and Islamists in Caucasian countries (Agarwal & Sureka, 2015).

Quantitative Methods:

In addition to these qualitative approaches, researchers can also use quantitative methods to study radicalization. Contrary to the general disbelief, it is possible to conduct socio-culturally sensitive research study by using survey techniques. For example, researchers might collect data on certain radicalized individuals and groups to identify the factors that are most strongly associated with *their* radicalization. This data could then be used to develop theoretical models of radicalization and to test the effectiveness of different prevention and intervention strategies. For instance, in order to search dynamics underlying radicalization, Jensen et al. (2016) compiled

70 factors that were found to be associated with the process in the past. Called as antecedent factors for radicalization, they ranged from intrapersonal to group-level factors (Jensen et al., 2016). The analysis of 500 possible combinations of 70 causal mechanisms revealed that having a sense of belonging to a community that has been collectively victimized is key to setting the contextual environment for radicalization to be possible. Mind the wording; the finding is far removed from any deterministic claim. Rather, it emphasizes the potential vulnerabilities perceived and shared by a group of communities have in creating a context for radical individuals. To conduct an analysis that is perceptive to the socio-cultural and political differences, researchers need to prioritize designing studies that open the space for research participants to express themselves freely. Only this way, researchers can recognize the variety of individual experiences while detecting contextual differences.

Historical and Political Analyses:

Another approach is to analyze historical and political contexts. This involves examining the social, economic, and political conditions that may have created the conditions for radicalization. History, philosophy, politics, geography, and economics have major influence on the ways in which individuals experience processes of change. The socio-cultural approach, therefore, claims that there is no such thing as a unique, inevitable, or desirable endpoint of cognitive, behavioral, or emotional change for every culture, every context, and every individual. The work we have done in our project PRIME Youth could set a good example for researchers interested in considering the unique conditions in which the populations they are studying.

Situating PRIME Youth Project in the Historical, Spatial and Political Context

With two major crises—the global financial crisis and the refugee crisis—PRIME Youth set out to examine the political, social, and economic landscape of the European Union today. These crises have combined to make some sections of the public in Europe more fearful and prejudiced against those who are different from them in terms of their ethnicity, culture, or religion. The central claim of the study is that different groups within the European public, whether they are right-wing sympathizer native populations or Islamist populations of migrant origin Muslims, have been alienated and carried away by the current trends of globalization. These trends can manifest themselves in different ways, such as deindustrialization, migration, mobility, trade, social-economic inequality, artificial intelligence replacing middle-class jobs, and youth emigration. These groups are also more likely to adopt two mainstream political discourses, Islamophobia and Islamism, which have become crucial with the rise of the civilizational rhetoric since the early 1990s. Stated differently, it seems that the neoliberal period is contributing to the

Islamization of radicalism in certain segments of the impoverished migrant origin populations and the nativization of radicalism in some sectors of the disillusioned host populations. These groups have one thing in common: they are both predisposed toward radicalism and have a downward mobility. Studies that have already been conducted have so far produced results that place these two groups of youth in distinct ethno-cultural and religious categories (Kepel, 2017; Roy, 2015, 2017; and Mudde, 2007, 2016). The peculiarity of our research is in its endeavor to de-culturalize and de-religionize social-economic and political phenomena. It is based on the concept of providing a single scientific optical lens to closely look at some native and migrant-origin youth at the same time. Both Islamist and populist discourses are used to radicalize groups of people who have been disenfranchised and washed away by the existing neo-liberal systems of government. It is these radicalization processes that require further understanding. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the social-economic, political, and psychological factors that contribute to the nativization of radicalism among young people of European descent and the Islamization of radicalism among young people of Muslim descent who are immigrants, respectively.

Since twenty years ago, the lead investigator of the project has examined the evolution of youth cultures in the four countries where the study took place – Germany, Belgium, France and the Netherlands. A comprehensive qualitative investigation was feasible due to the researcher's access to research networks in the four nations and his knowledge of the political and historical circumstances in each. The project is founded upon his extensive ethnographic research experience spanning several years concerning Muslim-origin migrants and their descendants residing in Europe. Such familiarity of the local and historical realities in the named countries helped the project become sensitive to the socio-cultural context. Additionally, the project draws upon the principal investigator's subsequent investigation into the populist reactions exhibited by certain segments of the European public in response to the global financial crisis, refugee crisis, and Islamist radicalism (Kaya, 2017). By collecting and presenting the perspectives of disadvantaged and marginalized youth in those countries over an extended period, the study identified these two youth groups as being in a parallel radicalization process due to their ethnic, religious, or political affiliations, which involve alienation and humiliation.

After my recruitment in this European Research Council funded transnational project as a post-doc researcher, I was quickly brought to the task of managing the qualitative data collection processes and the analyses in collaboration with the PI and other post-doc researchers. My responsibilities for the project encompassed the development and execution of

recruitment tactics, deliberation on external factors like pandemic regulations, and delivery of research presentations to prospective participants. I wrote three articles describing those processes extensively (Kaya & Benevento, 2021; Benevento, 2022; n.d.). As for *research findings*, I valued two things in each of my publications: 1) steering clear of general claims about radicalization, grounded on my research experience in narrative inquiry, and 2) implications for de-radicalization efforts. If one were to stay sensitive to the socio-cultural, historical, economic, and political context I believe there is an absolute requirement to look at intersections of where, how, when, and by whom the radicalization occurs. Accordingly, my individual studies went toward contextually sensitive topics and findings. Rather than attempting to compile all what the 302 research participants have said in our interviews, I re-sampled and re-categorized the narratives either by our participants' actions/inactions, by their locations, or the content of their narrations. Here, employing thorough and locally sensitive methodologies is vital in the study of radicalisation. Up to this point, research-driven and government-led projects have combined education, training, cultural exchange, and religious dialogue to help minority communities integrate into the majority society. The initiatives that are blind to the socio-cultural norms and the local economic and political realities risk widening the trust gap between those people and authorities. Therefore, approaches focusing on local and intersectional contexts would be helpful for those who aim to go beyond profiling radical groups and individuals. Below, I present three case studies I conducted with the hope that it might inspire future researchers of radicalization.

Filtering Women on the Path to Radicalization

The under-researched subject of gender in radicalization studies was one of the subjects I immediately noticed and discussed in our project. I was surprised to find only a small amount of literature on women's radicalization despite the global financial crises and the ensuing redistribution of social wealth, which had a significant effect on gender norms in the 21st century. During our routine consultations with the field researchers, we deliberated on the lack of female representation in the radicalization literature, with a particular emphasis on the viewpoints of right-wing native women. Based on the definition of radicalization in the main study (Kaya, 2020) as "a defensive and reactionary response of individuals confronting social, economic, and political forms of exclusion, marginalization, alienation, and isolation," I contend that women are the most suitable population to examine the psychological and structural influences of radicalization and to reassess the efficacy of current deradicalization initiatives. Gender ideals are not always founded on detrimental conceptions of masculinity and femininity, as the

investigation demonstrated. It is crucial to include less subtle and implicit gender norms when doing research that assists women in critically examining previously held ideas.

The local researcher in Belgium recruited the greatest number of women (N=39; 27 self-identified Muslim women and 12 right-wing native women) among the four nations examined in the investigation, thereby effectively securing female research subjects. The progress made on our gender discussion thus far was made possible by her endeavours. The analysis of narratives from Belgian women observed two gendered practices that are already value-loaded: veiling and mothering. The investigation uncovered a surprising parallel between the manner in which young native women who identify as right-wing and self-identified Muslims interpret these traditions through the lens of their own decisions. By emphasizing the significance of providing human agency and personal space in decision-making and taking responsibility for one's actions, they demonstrated an exceptionally refined and intricate approach to sense-making. In the end, by examining the arguments provided by women for their activities, I was able to identify a common thread that connected the narratives of persons who seldom get the chance to contact. The emergence of the significance attributed to the personal agency in decision-making processes during debates concerning veils and the responsibilities of mothers appears to provide a conundrum.

The findings of this research underscore the importance of providing platforms for women who experience marginalization on account of their political or religious beliefs to engage in dialogue and cultivate a sense of empathetic inquisitiveness regarding one another's personal stories. When designing spaces for women from diverse backgrounds to unwind while exercising autonomy through the appropriation, negotiation, and resistance of identities (Hey, 1997) and gain an understanding of and regard for the desires and emotions of others, the literature on women's friendship and leisure can serve as a substantial source of inspiration. Women-only gatherings that enable independence and freedom from caregiving obligations provide an essential venue for self-empowerment and autonomy (Freysinger, 1995). In an ideal world, deradicalization programs would not lecture "troubled" persons but rather assist them in sharing their personal experiences and identifying and analyzing the ways in which they dealt with their emotions of exclusion, marginalization, and isolation. Deradicalization can subsequently be conceptualized as a state in which the fundamental demands that prompted the radicalization are being fulfilled. This advice pertains to deradicalization initiatives in Belgium and beyond in which both men and women participate.

Filtering the Politically Organized Youth

As a developmental psychologist, my primary focus is on the advancement of theory, research, and programs that encourage children and young people to express their viewpoints and concerns more openly, with the ultimate goal of ensuring that their rights are more effectively respected. My research is concerned about subpopulations of children and youth for being at the margins of their societies and accustomed to being censored due to their young age and political positions. Young people are at risk as a vulnerable age group whose practices of knowledge, knowing, and being a knower are often undermined by elders, market strategies, and the political establishment. The attraction I have for hearing and amplifying the interests and concerns of young minds motivates me to create safe spaces, where children and young people can narrate their perspectives and experiences. To address this motivating goal, I collaborated with scholars with diverse backgrounds, civil society actors and community-based organizations that work with and for children and young people in various parts of the world. This background and research interest inspired me to bring the concepts of political participation and radicalization together and examine only those youth who are actively and purposely using their self-determination rights in order to voice their political concerns. In other words, youth who are organized and radical at the same time.

People on the path to radicalization may wish to believe that they autonomously generate progressive ideas, but radicalization entails substantial involvement with ideologies and movements established by organized individuals or groups to challenge the existing political and social order. While not all political engagements may be classified as radical, radicalizations invariably entail involvement in a discourse or movement, even in the absence of direct interaction with organized group members. While there have been assertions regarding the existence of lone-actor radicalization pathways (e.g., Malthaner and Lindekilde, 2017), I argue that radicalization cannot occur in the absence of other individuals, groups, and movements, hence lone-actor participation is impossible. Radicalization and participation are, in fact, comparable notions in that they both refer to intergroup dynamics. Radicalization is not an independent process; instead, it occurs within the framework of a collective entity and is facilitated by the socially constructed reality of that collective.

Many self-identified Muslim youth in Europe have been reporting feelings of unfairness brought on by misconduct that are blamed on the government or other state actors (Kaya, 2015; Kaya; 2021; Yazdiha, 2019). Many native youth in Europe, on the other hand, have been manifesting a sense of loss of nation, adequate government, and a voice (Baker, 2018) as a

reaction against the flow of new migrants. Having access to varying sources of social, cultural, and financial capital, both groups, differ in terms of the resources available to them. One of the resources these young people seek support from is their peers. The PRIME Youth project quickly found that seeking politically and religiously organized youth can help both for recruitment efforts and enriching the data we collect. Among the 302 young people, 122 native European youths openly admitted to supporting movements labelled as far-right; and 109 migrant-origin self-identified Muslim youth claimed to have strong organizational ties with religious communities. Instead of parroting “the politically wise” discourse in Europe, these young people seek out like-minded people and prefer to socialize with them. Rather than trying to fit in with diverse peer groups that are available in commonplaces such as schools, some might prefer seeking out only peers that are like-minded in ideologically or religiously driven organizations. Thus, their radical perspectives are only *heard* in their isolated, safe-to-speak communities. Those religiously or ideologically driven communities of social movements are formed in response to dominant political discourses and through dialogue and interaction with prior or co-existing movements.

Narratives pertaining to a range of political involvement tactics were incorporated into the research in order to gain a deeper comprehension of the means by which radically minded youth express their concerns beyond their local communities. In general, the results of the study indicated that the organized participants regarded prevalent forms of political engagement with indifference, and they exhibited comparable levels of scepticism about politics. Both sub-sample groups emphasized similar values at similar levels with regard to the efficacy or inefficacy of street protests and voting. In actuality, the results did not indicate any discernible variations among the countries, except for one value expression: A significant proportion of the participants (n=68) who voiced their scepticism regarding voting procedures (n=29) were from France.

In the context of this study, the values articulated concerning street protests and volunteer work appeared to be extraordinarily revealing in terms of understanding how young people perceive the challenge of being heard on their own terms. In reality, individuals are subjected to greater risk and expense while participating in protests and voluntary acts as opposed to electing to vote. Organized Muslim youth, who identified as such, prioritized community work to a higher extent than their native counterparts. Their concerns regarding their involvement in street demonstrations were exposed through their testimonies of said activities. Conversely, some native youth on the organized right-wing highlighted the possibility that unlawful actions could be employed to advance political goals in the context of public demonstrations. By contrasting prevailing value expressions of aversion and decision-making

concerning street protests with alternative interpretations of philanthropic endeavors, specific characteristics and (de)motivations of the participants in the study are illuminated.

The organized native youths with whom we have conducted interviews are common individuals who reside predominantly in rural regions of their respective nations. Their prior participation in right-wing political organizations, which were notorious for disseminating conservative political propaganda, could have significantly impacted their accounts of street demonstrations and protest experiences. In order to amplify the volume of their words, it is conceivable that they are motivated to undertake measures beyond mere street occupation. Conversely, the majority of Muslim adolescents of migrant origin who have organizational ties to religious organizations may be more obedient to authority, such as the state, and have a lower tolerance for disorder. Thus, without attempting to do so, the research is relevant in that it provides guidance for the domain of unlawful protest actions that have been inadequately investigated. Additionally, endeavors to de-radicalize should examine the potential correlation between religiosity and the value attributed to compliance with the state order during street demonstrations. This field of study would be considerably more fruitful if it were applied to non-religious natives and religious fanatics in addition to Muslims residing in non-Muslim states.

Filtering the Radicalized Youth Based on Their Residential Choices

Could it be so that the marginalized youth prefer to organize with like-minded people in the same way they do prefer living in their segregated neighbourhoods and remote cities? Could the intersection of mobility choices and youth radicalization offer any answers as to how and why some youths are drawn to radical ends of political spectrums? The choice of living close to people with similar ethno-religious groups also appears to be a reactionary form of resistance, an expression of communal resilience (Wilson, 1996; Wacquant, 2006). With my colleagues, I attempted to clarify the boundaries where the flight and avoidance are drawn for our participant profile and explain how the investigation of those boundaries occurred in the Netherlands, Germany, and Belgium.¹

As in the above two studies, the study involved re-sampling our research participants. Our analysis rested on 166 interviews done with individuals (65 migrant-origin Muslim and 101 right-wing native young individuals; aged 18-30) who currently live in places that fit into our residential criteria in Germany, the Netherlands, and Belgium: For migrant-origin Muslim youth

¹ The interview data from France did not fit into our residential selection criteria for majorly including right-wing nativists from Lyon; thus, it was excluded from the current analysis.

with Turkish and/or Moroccan backgrounds, we selected those who currently live or have spent most of their lives in segregated neighborhoods in big cities and for right-wing native youth, we looked for those who live or have spent most of their lives in geographically remote places.

Researcher: *Have you ever stayed in any other city, or any country before for the long term, or a few months? Can you tell us where you stayed and what was your purpose? (For instance, education, labour, EU projects, or other purposes).*

Research Participant: *No.*

The aforementioned example aptly demonstrates the limited knowledge we possess regarding the mobility encounters of our participants. The options for both sample groups to benefit from the mobility aspect of globalization were restricted, according to our interviews. In contrast to migrant-origin Muslims, who exclusively discussed their journeys back to their country of origin, right-wing native youth (predominantly from Germany) represented their mobility experiences in relation to jobs and education. Meanwhile, our values analysis revealed that right-leaning native youth and migrant-origin Muslim youth prefer to reside in an isolated community where they feel comfortable interacting with other members.

Although self-identified Muslims exhibit comparable patterns of residential clustering, their decisions on residency continue to face greater criticism in Europe compared to those of locals. Although the evidence linking "ghetto-like" conditions to gang membership, criminal activity, and terrorist recruitment among Muslim youth is considerably limited (Varady, 2005), security officers, the media, and policymakers continue to target densely populated Muslim communities in an effort to "fight" political radicalization. Conversely, right-wing residents who prefer to reside in isolated rural areas with like-minded individuals and avoid ethnically varied neighborhoods are not questioned or evaluated for their interference with the peaceful integration process that policymakers envision. Given the principle that "private decisions have public repercussions" (Saporito, 2003), our research focuses on the conduct of indigenous individuals, whom we perceive as vulnerable and confined insiders.

The emphasis so far has been completely on the European Union's integration policies, as the Union is important for having the most various member states in the world. All those involved in drawing integration efforts in the EU should be proud to have achieved a world consensus on consolidation equipped with implementation mechanisms. But while maintaining the spotlight on the EU, the time has come to turn as well to the local levels – municipalities, communities, etc. where the agreements must also be implemented. A current concern is that if

we keep too great a focus on where the nation as a whole stands on a global scale, we will end up with a reactionary rejection of the universal standard at the local level and the Union's function will be policing what humans do in terms of youth's development. Hence, the more we reinforce international and national action, the more we have to strengthen the community-based action as well.

There is a vast literature on the formulation and functioning of community-based youth groups from practitioners and academia. The current literature explores how community-based youth groups can be effective in reinforcing young people to practice their participation rights, and preventing and responding to violence against them and other issues related to their well-being. Schools, and locally based organizations in villages or city councils have much greater potential to involve youth who know their community and understand what the needs of the youth within it are.

Local-level knowledge and commitment make unique contributions to neighborhood services and eventually help organized children and youth to build social capital to protect themselves and each other. For example, Stephenson's (2001) study of street children and youth in Moscow reveals how young people organize themselves into groups for protection, companionship, and economic benefits. Stephenson acknowledges the risks young people in gangs face, but also that young people seek social relationships that offer protection because they are critical for survival without more appropriate means.

Collectively, these studies and anecdotes point to the importance of spaces where young people come together to form relationships that are protective and promote their well-being. It is within these local groups that youth have the most opportunity to be involved in different types of decision-making, including the design and implementation of programs, as well as the governance of an organization. Every country, rightfully, has a different social agenda and set of priorities they want to implement to guarantee the best interest of their youth and thus, society. Beyond the level of individual youth groups, there is great value in enabling youth to build local networks of communities. It has been lately well documented by practitioners and academia the importance of providing communities with bottom-up policies that address their concerns and include their own knowledge in the solutions offered. Top-down policies have been shown to be inefficient in tackling the nuances of local norms and contextual differences. Local youth organizations and networks are crucial to including the voices of marginalized youth.

Possible Other Directions for The Study of Radicalization from Socio-cultural Perspectives

Despite our tedious job at considering unique features of the populations and the places we study, our study is far from perfect. There is, I believe, overemphasis on the study of radicalization in Western hemisphere. Making conclusions about general human psychology from the studies solely conducted in Western societies in "optimal" environments (Rogoff, 2003) is not enough for us to enhance our knowledge. A few examples from different parts of the world emerge as alternatives to our limited knowledge of radicalization. For example, researchers might look at how poverty, discrimination, and conflict can lead to feelings of marginalization and despair, which can make people more susceptible to radical ideologies. Two studies focused on radicalization in different places and time periods might be helpful to reflect on the importance of the context in which radicalization occurs. For instance, after closely examining the economic and political context in Nigeria, Johnson (2019) argues that the majority of people (specifically, unemployed young men) who show signs of radicalization do so because they have no job prospects and therefore no chances for acquiring wealth and a better life. After claiming that their livelihoods are threatened by globalization, Johnson (2019) asserts that the ongoing conflict in the region since the 1990s led citizens of the Niger Delta to find a way to have a voice in how the natural resources were extracted and how the profits were distributed. Another example of a contextually sensitive examination is a study of Kurdish radicalization in 1970s Türkiye. The study claims that repression of the state and the dominant nationalist discourse forbidding assertions of ethnic identity might have created a context where Kurdish people started to radicalize (Ercan, 2010). This analysis asserts that political opportunities for claiming ethnic rights were almost impossible in 1970s Türkiye and the restrictive context and the history of oppression might have contributed to the escalation of radical acts among Kurdish individuals.

Here are some specific research topics and questions that a researcher interested in radicalization could also investigate from a socio-cultural perspective:

The role of social media and online platforms in radicalization. How do social media algorithms amplify certain content and make it more likely to reach vulnerable individuals? While there has been some research on this topic, more is needed to understand how different platforms are used to radicalize people, how to identify and counter radicalizing content, and how to support people who are at risk of being radicalized online. For example, more research is needed to understand how radicalization algorithms work, how social media platforms can be used to spread disinformation and propaganda, and how to develop effective counter-narratives.

The role of age in radicalization. Research on the relationship between age and radicalization is still in its early stages, but it is clear that age is a significant factor in the radicalization process. Different factors influence the radicalization process at different ages, and it is important to develop age-specific research and policy strategies. Overall, the research suggests that age is a complex factor in the radicalization process, with different factors influencing radicalization at different ages. It is important to develop age-specific prevention and intervention strategies to address the unique needs of different populations.

The role of gender in radicalization. How do older adults' or children's radicalization differ from or similar to youth radicalization? Most research on radicalization has focused on men and boys, but there is a growing recognition that women and girls are also vulnerable to radicalization. More research is needed to understand the specific factors that make women and girls vulnerable to radicalization, and how to develop effective prevention and intervention strategies. For example, more research is needed to understand the role of gender roles and stereotypes in radicalization, and how to promote gender equality as a way to counter radicalization.

The role of family and community in radicalization. What are the long-term consequences of radicalization for individuals, families, and communities? How do the social and cultural norms of a community influence the likelihood of radicalization? Families and communities can play an important role in both preventing and countering radicalization. However, more research is needed to understand how families and communities can be supported to play this role effectively. For example, more research is needed to develop effective programs to support parents and caregivers in preventing radicalization and to build resilience in communities.

The role of mental health in radicalization. There is a complex relationship between mental health and radicalization, and more research is needed to understand this relationship. For example, it is important to understand how mental health problems can make people more vulnerable to radicalization, and how radicalization can impact mental health. More research is also needed to develop effective mental health support for people who are at risk of being radicalized, or who have been radicalized.

The role of ideology in radicalization. How do different socio-cultural factors interact to influence the radicalization process? How do radicalized groups exploit existing social divisions and grievances to recruit new members? Radicalization is often seen as a process of

becoming more and more extreme in one's views. However, it is important to note that not all extremist views are radical. More research is needed to understand the role of ideology in radicalization, and how to distinguish between extremist views and radical views. For example, more research is needed to understand the different types of extremist ideologies, how they are disseminated, and how to counter them.

The role of trauma in radicalization. Many people who are radicalized have experienced trauma, such as violence, abuse, or war. More research is needed to understand the relationship between trauma and radicalization, and how to support people who have experienced trauma to prevent them from becoming radicalized. For example, more research is needed to understand how trauma can make people more vulnerable to radicalization, and how to develop effective trauma-informed interventions.

The role of counter-radicalization programs. There are a number of different counter-radicalization programs in operation around the world. However, there is limited evidence on the effectiveness of these programs. More research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of different counter-radicalization programs, and to identify best practices. For example, more research is needed to understand the different types of counter-radicalization programs, how they work, and who they are most effective for.

Conclusion

Two aspects were emphasized in each of my publications in this project: 1) Avoiding broad assertions regarding radicalization, and 2) Suggestions for endeavors to deconstruct de-radicalization based on our contextually sensitive *findings*. It is my conviction that in order to maintain a heightened awareness of the socio-cultural, historical, economic, and political milieu, it is imperative to examine the interconnections between the locations, mechanisms, agents, and timing of radicalization. As a result, my individual research focused on discoveries and subjects that were sensitive to the setting. Instead of endeavoring to assemble the entirety of the narratives shared by the 302 research participants during our interviews, I re-sampled and re-categorized the accounts according to the locations of the participants, the content of their narrations, or their actions/inactions. The utilization of comprehensive and contextually appropriate approaches is critical while investigating radicalization. Thus far, initiatives spearheaded by the government and driven by research have integrated religious dialogue, cultural exchange, education, training, and training in order to facilitate the assimilation of minority communities into the majority community. Ignorant of sociocultural norms as well as local economic and political realities, such efforts run the risk of exacerbating the distrust

between the public and government. Hence, strategies that prioritize local and intersectional settings would prove advantageous for persons who seek to transcend the mere profile of radical organizations and individuals.

The consequences that the findings may have for integration efforts make it imperative that a comprehensive and culturally sensitive approach be taken to the study of radicalization. Through a combination of education, training, cultural and religious discourse, and government-led and research-driven efforts, the challenge of integration has thus far been tackled by facilitating the assimilation of individuals of tiny communities into majority countries. Ignoring local economic and political realities and socio-cultural norms, a government-led initiative or research that disregards these factors is not only unlikely to be accepted by those who already hold a negative perception of authorities but may also exacerbate the distrust between those individuals and the authorities themselves. As a result, individuals who wish to examine patterns of similarity and dissimilarity with others who possess like attributes may find much to gain from a socio-cultural perspective in addition to comprehending the radicalization process within a particular setting.

Some researchers recognize that routes to radicalization are complex and comprise various tiers of elements, such as personal, communal, and global ideological influences (e.g., Ferguson & Binks, 2015, Ferguson & McAuley, 2019; Ranstorp, 2016; Ravn, Coolset & Sauer, 2019). Furthermore, despite the fact that numerous radicalized individuals recount comparable experiences, research findings indicate that there is no explicit correlation between the process of intellectual and political radicalization and the occurrence of extremist violence (e.g., Della Porta & La Free, 2012; Ferguson & McAuley; 2019). These types of narratives, which contest previously validated notions, should encourage researchers to abstain from making positivistic and normative assertions. In addition to a rigorous and sensitive investigation of how individuals in various circumstances encounter the radicalization process, twenty-first-century psychology necessitates critical thought regarding the discipline's underpinnings.

Acknowledgements

This paper derives from the ongoing EU-funded research for the “Prime Youth” project funded by the European Research Council with the Agreement Number 785934 and the acronym Islamophob-ism. The paper does not contain any studies with human participants performed by the author.

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The research for this Working Paper was undertaken as part of a Horizon 2020 research and innovation project called ISLAM-OPHOB-ISM under Grant Agreement ERC AdG 785934.

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