CAPTIVE MINDS IN SEARCH OF IDENTITY

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By

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I dedicate this work to my children

Royal Frederick Kastens, III
Konstantine George Yatron Kastens
Douglass Menzies Kastens
Theana Noelle Kastens

for their continuous support and encouragement,
but most of all,
for their formidable intellects that challenged me to research deeper
and to produce more substantively.

I also dedicate this to my late parents
US Congressman Gus and Millie Yatron
who blessed me with the sacred gift of deep and abiding unconditional love,
through which they continue to share my life.

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Lastly, I thank Dr. Wilhelm Tenner, psychotherapist and faculty professor, University of Vienna, Austria, who long ago taught me the interdisciplinary network between the human mind and human behavior, which proved foundational for this study.
This study examines the lives of several Western-based individuals who left the West to pursue new lives dedicated to the destruction of liberal Western society with the aim of replacing it with a society based on an Islamic Sharia code of justice. In each case, the examined individuals left sufficiently pronounced social footprints from the time period before their new, radicalized identities emerged to provide insights into the conversion process on their paths to violent Islamic jihadism. Their individual behaviors and mindsets are considered carefully through an interdisciplinary lens that includes religion, geopolitics, history, digital technology, sociology, biology, ethology, anthropology, environment, neuroscience, genetics, memetics, epigenetics, psychology, etymology, mythology, exchange symbolism, and identity.

No one individual is the subject of this work. All selected individuals are collectively considered to illustrate the human mind’s susceptibility to skillfully tailored messages – targeted propaganda – that harness the emotional reins of the individual and produce profound psychological reorientations of reality. Emphasis is placed on the powerful influence of *memes* in shaping an individual’s identity and how that identity commands the life decisions of the individual.

The emerging new reality that takes effect coexists in a parallel world along with the physical world in which the individual continues to inhabit. The backdrop of
everyday life camouflages signs of the individual’s conversion to extremist activities and/or intent. The individual changes before the eyes of others, who remain blind to the import of the changes. The individuals who appear in this study each offer tangible evidence to support singular and interrelating aspects of the insidious effect of targeted jihadist propaganda on the human mind, and how that propaganda shapes their transformed identities.

This study follows a cultural anthropological path, drawing on the works of evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins, cognitive scientist Daniel Dennett, forensic psychologist J. Reid Meloy, cultural anthropologist Adam H. Russell, and others to examine the science behind an individual’s metamorphosis from a traditional Western, secular-based identity to a radical Islamic jihadist identity intent on genocidal annihilation of the West.

The behavioral model that is crucial to defining jihadist identity, and which is employed in this study, was conceived by forensic psychologist J. Reid Meloy, who developed the Pathway to Violence model for the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Behavioral Analysis Unit at the United States Marine Corps Base at Quantico, Virginia. It establishes the progressive conversion of the once seemingly socially adjusted individual to one who perpetrates violence indiscriminately upon an unsuspecting and innocent public population.

The bifurcated focus along which the elements of this study are drawn and are made applicable to this model are centered on social identity and cultural social forces shaping that identity. This study aims to answer the questions of what causes Western individuals to shed their Western identities, what draws them in to identify with forces of
radical and violent Islam, and what encourages them to wage jihad against their homelands in the West.

Basic concepts of social science, such as social identification, cultural anthropology, collective fictions, exchange symbolism, crisis of identification and, in the end, how the “me” becomes “we,” draw this examination of virulent human behavior to a conclusion of deeper understanding about the social forces that threaten a livable level of global peace.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM
OF ISLAMIC RADICALIZATION
-JIHADISM-

Scottish Schoolgirl

Nineteen-year-old, Scottish-born Aqsa Mahmood lived a life of privilege. Her home in Glasgow’s upscale Southside neighborhood, amidst art galleries, fine restaurants, boutique clothiers, and convenient commuter train lines, offered every comfort of shelter, food, and family love. Her father, Muzaffar, emigrated to Scotland with distinction in the 1970s as the first Pakistani on the national Scotland Cricket Team.¹ The same drive that powered his success as an international athlete paved his path to a successful Scotland-based business career in the hotel industry that made it possible for him and his wife Khalida to educate their four children – Aqsa’s older brother, and two younger sisters – at the best private schools in the area, nurturing them towards successful lives of enlightenment and self-determination.² Theirs was a home filled with family love, absent of any noticeable internal family stress.


Aqsa was educated at Glasgow’s exclusive all-girls Craigholme School, known for its academic rigor, and for its career-based curriculum that prepares its students for the future workforce. Its student demographics, with term tuition costing approximately US $5,000 in pound sterling equivalence,³ drew from Glasgow’s more prosperous families. Later, she transferred to Glasgow’s much larger co-educational Shawlands Academy, which champions its emphasis on a broad liberal arts curriculum merged with a mastery of advanced technological skills.⁴ With Aqsa’s father’s pragmatic career guidance and her mother’s nurturing sanctuary at home, she moved forward by gaining admittance to Glasgow Caledonian University’s diagnostic radiography program.⁵ She was well on her way to a career in medicine through diagnostic imaging and the treatment of diseases.

Popular with her friends, Aqsa loved wearing makeup, enjoyed the latest gossip, kept current with tabloid news stories, the latest fashions, the newest songs on the radio -- particularly her favorite band, Coldplay -- and she knew every detail of the Harry Potter and The Hunger Games book series.⁶ Photos of


⁶ Shubert and Naik, “CNN Exclusive: From Glasgow Girl to ‘Bedroom Radical’ and ISIS Bride.”
her with friends reveal a pretty girl, with soft waves of brown hair framing warm brown eyes, and a ready smile that reflected a nonjudgmental character. In multiple photographs, she had the appearance of someone who would be approachable and empathetic, and in whom one could easily confide, feeling safe that one’s confidences would be maintained. Instead of the comical faces with distorted expressions that are currently popular with young people when posing for the camera, Aqsa radiated a quiet, mature sincerity. She appeared as an authentic friend who could always be relied upon in time of need, solidly grounded and trustworthy.

While the Mahmood family thanked Allah for the bountiful blessings of children, good health and financial security, they were not overtly religious. Neither Muzaffar nor Khalida insisted on traditional Islamic dress for their

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daughters and, like so many families in the industrialized world, they believed that they had struck a healthy balance between their religious and secular lives. They found evidence of Allah’s goodness infused in modernity and felt the warm embrace of His love. Both parents were at peace that the tenets of their faith informed their personal conduct in life and their positive regard for their fellow man, and they unquestionably felt Allah’s benevolent protection bestowed upon their family. Although Khalida covered herself modestly, Aqsa’s parents felt no need to establish their spiritual devotion through publicly observable expressions of their Muslim faith.

Hence, it came as a surprise when Aqsa, at age 18, expressed her wish to wear a hijab, which she had earlier considered an unnecessary convention. Her parents saw this change in her expression of dress as a sign of spiritual maturity. Along with her decision to conceal her hair beneath a hijab came her pronounced disinterest in the literature of her childhood. But this, too, seemed the natural progression of one on the cusp of young adulthood, reflecting Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget’s trajectory of human maturation.

Piaget’s theory of cognitive development (1936) explains how the late-stage adolescent becomes less interested in the concrete, locally centered building blocks of one’s life and, as an adult, begins to interact with the world through abstract and theoretical concepts.⁸ Aqsa demonstrated this natural and healthy process of maturation as she had begun to prefer the discussion of world

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events, with a particular interest in the civil strife in Syria and Afghanistan, rather than stories of fiction.

Her parents were proud that she was coming of age with knowledge about her world while continuing discussions with her family about her plans to forge ahead in a career in medicine. Aqsa had the aptitude, was in the right school, lived in a location where future job opportunities were available, and she had the support of her loving family to succeed. What her parents did not realize was that Aqsa was undergoing a metamorphosis before their blind eyes. Soon, all of their lives were about to be inalterably changed.

On a cold, dark November morning in 2013, Aqsa rose at predawn to prepare for her day ahead. She had rested well, spending the night cuddling with her two younger sisters, all in one bed, as she had suggested they should do the night before. She greeted her parents at the breakfast table and gave her grandmother a long, soulful embrace. Then, in one fluid farewell that betrayed nothing out of the ordinary, she picked up her school books, hugged her mother and then her father as though it was a routine school morning, said to them, “Khuda hafiz,” meaning “May God be your guardian,” and walked out of the door to join a millenarian religious death cult in Syria devoted to violent jihad against the West.

“Mother of the Lion”

9 Ibid.

Four days after Aqsa’s departure, her aggrieved parents, and the police who were investigating her disappearance, received their first word regarding her whereabouts. Aqsa telephoned her parents to announce that she had just crossed the Syrian border to become an Islamic State jihadist bride, with intentions to eventually become a martyr.\textsuperscript{11} They would see her again on Judgment Day, she told them.\textsuperscript{12}

Not long after that phone call, she assumed a high-profile Internet role, putting the technological skills she had learned at Shawlands Academy effectively to work as one of the Islamic State’s chief social media recruiters of Western women. Using the name \textit{Umm Layth}, which means “Mother of the Lion,”\textsuperscript{13} Aqsa immediately became a persuasive messenger, dispensing critical information to other young women who were intent on shedding the identities of their Western homelands to assume new lives in the Islamic State’s fanatical religious cult that has become a rogue region, armed with military and mineral-rich resources, intent on the annihilation of Western civilization.

Once international security agencies had determined that Aqsa’s Internet messages had become instrumental in drawing other Western females to join her

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.


jihadist cause,\textsuperscript{14} social networking websites, most notably \textit{Tumblr}, began taking Aqsa’s social media postings down, but some remain or have undergone new identifications from either Aqsa herself, under a new name, or from one or others purporting to be Aqsa.

Like a tour operator, preparing an itinerary, Aqsa has furnished a strict traveling protocol for her recruits:

1. Make sure your plane ticket is a return (two-way) ticket.

2. Make sure you obtain a tourist visa and keep it well (it’s going to be in your passport, so keep your passport securely).

3. Make sure you have a good knowledge of the tourist attractions in Turkey. Go to a travel agent and get yourself some brochures on Turkey or buy a traveller’s handbook. This is important since if they question you, you can just brandish this in front of their noses and show them how serious of a tourist you are.

4. Make sure you don’t have any incriminating evidence against you. (I know this is contrary to what I advised in #DustyFeet part five [a reference to hadiths about martyrdom],\textsuperscript{15} but the advice in this post is from the Turkish brother I spoke to (not directly from me). Bringing, e.g. a knife is RISKY. Don’t neglect this if you’re extremely afraid of getting caught.

5. Make sure your phone and other electronic devices are “clean” from incriminating evidence.


6. Place out an itinerary before you land in Turkey. I advise brothers to take the bus/coach down south. Sisters, read the second half of this post, insha’ Allah, for advice about what you should do.

--- paladinofjihad.tumblr.com\textsuperscript{16}

In another Internet post, Aqsa has cautioned her recruits about what she claims is her “biggest tip to sisters: don't take detours, take the quickest route, don't play around with your Hijrah [journey] by staying longer than one day for safety and get in touch with your contacts as soon as you reach your destination.”\textsuperscript{17} Like a coach, focusing her team on the finish line, she has motivated her recruits with nourishing words, promising the fulfillment of belonging.

Her encouraging words have supplanted the physical helping hand her recruits have reached out to receive, and have emboldened each recruit’s singular sense of individual accomplishment. Many targeted recruits have been young women coming from stable and protective households, not yet fully experienced with life, and some have never before traveled far beyond the city limits of their Western birthplaces.\textsuperscript{18} They have trusted Aqsa with their futures, their life fulfillments, and their happiness. They have trusted her with their very lives.


\textsuperscript{18} Jaffer, “The Secret World of ISIS Brides: ‘U Dnt Hav 2 Pay 4 ANYTHING If U R Wife of a Martyr.’”
Each female who has followed Aqsa’s instructions has reached her new “family” and new “community,” which has become the foundation of her new identity. To ensure that there would be no weakening of resolve, Aqsa has well prepared her recruits for the absolute break they must make from their past lives, and from the only families they have ever known:

The first phone call you make once you cross the borders is one of the most difficult things you will ever have to do. Your parents are already worried enough over where you are… How does a parent who has little Islamic knowledge and understanding comprehend why their son or daughter has left their well off life, education and a bright future behind to go live in a war torn country.

…. They might assume this is a ‘phase’ you are going through or a huge mistake you have made. I know of people who have been here in Shaam [Al-Sham, Syria] for over 2 years and their parents still try to persuade them to come back and live in false hope. Make Duaa [prayers for journey] that Allaah makes it easy for your parents to understand and accept your Hijrah feesabeelilah [religious journey].

Sometimes it would be easier for you to accept your parents disowning you and wanting nothing to do with you.

However when you hear them sob and beg like crazy on the phone for you to come back it’s so hard…. But as long as you are firm and you know that this is all for the sake of Allah then nothing can shake you inshaAllaah [God willing].

19 Hall, “Inside the Chilling Online World of the Women of ISIS.”
There are a number of other principal female voices operating on the Islamic State’s social media campaign, to be sure. “Bird of Jinnah,” which means Bird of Paradise, writes an English-language blog from Raqqa, Syria, and identifies herself as a medical doctor. Her true identity is not known, but her writings suggest an upbringing similar to Aqsa’s in the United Kingdom – one filled with family love, good health, prosperity and education.

She has written thoughtfully about the difficulties of separating from one’s family to become a jihadi wife, and has suggested that it helps to download Western books, such as Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, to ease the separation anxiety of the female recruits through the transition period. She has also encouraged recruits to prepare themselves for the emotional entreaties they can expect to receive from their families after they leave, and she has emphasized the rewarding tribal unity they will enjoy with their fellow jihadi “sisters” once they reach Syria and enter territory controlled by the Islamic State.20

What emerges as one examines the lives of female recruiters of the Islamic State are the privileged, middle-class lifestyles and excellent educations they all have in common and from which they have all fled. Whether one examines an individual’s known background, as with the case of Aqsa Mahmood, or whether one draws clues from the unidentified voices of female recruiters, as with the case of “Bird of Jinnah,” these women did not flee poverty, malnutrition, 

civil strife, emotional or physical abuse, or any other social malady that would
provoke one to flee. Something else is the catalyst for their flight, which calls for
a re-examination of the lives they left.

Why?

Aqsa Mahmood’s story serves as an example of what has happened to
thousands of Western-based youth. For Aqsa’s parents and the parents of
others like Aqsa, and for professionals working in the field of civilian law and
order, and in the sphere of geopolitical global peace – the question is why.

What is the seminal cause for such a radical transformation in a person’s
behavior? Is it caused by a psychological shift of mind through which the
individual reframes one’s reality? Does it stem from a perspectival cultural
change through which religion acts as a potent force, broadly shaping the
collective ideology of a large-scale group of people?

Exploring further the powerful influence of cultural changes on the human
mind, could it be the paradigm shift from postmodern technology to digital
technology, where the human mind is coping with an ever-increasing bandwidth
of information and forcing cognitive adjustments upon the individual in much the
same way the Industrial Revolution of modernity exponentially changed human
behavior by thrusting populations into a massively mechanized way of life? Do
individuals experience societal changes within a prevailing culture that causes
them to reorder their social relationships with others and to make modifications in
certain lifestyles? Could a person’s radicalized perspective on the world be
caused by active or latent manifestations of family conflict, which impacts the individual’s mental and/or emotional stability, and impairs one’s ability to establish constructive behavioral paths for the future?

While each of the above potential causal events would have validity in explaining dramatic changes in human behavior, my thesis will argue that no one component of or influence upon the brain’s complex phenomenon of oscillating neurons – known as the human mind – stands alone in predicting and determining the behavior of the individual.

Instead, this study will demonstrate that it is through an interdisciplinary examination of the agents of change, as identified through the lenses of anthropology, neuroscience, genetics, memetics, epigenetics, evolutionary biology, anthropology, cultural evolution, digital technology, global geopolitics, religion, and identity that we gain the clearest insight into the pathology of the human mind that produces sociopathic and/or psychopathic behaviors in people like Aqsa, and which consequently places worldwide populations at mortal risk.

An examination of human behavior must take into account the interplay of influences, both physical and psychological on the human mind, which commands human behavior.

Chief among these influences is the advent of the digital media age, which represents a paradigm shift in the communication ecosystem. Social media is the new landscape that enables individuals to interact with others on a global basis, to do so in real time, and to turn their own interactions into a medium for the transmission of thought. Previously, the power to influence human minds
could be illustrated by Paul Lazarsfeld’s and Elihu Katz’s two-step communication model. A specific message would reside with a central figure in the first step, the *messenger* – a central figure, such as the late legendary CBS news journalist Walter Cronkite -- and the second step would be achieved when *opinion followers* would receive and embrace the message.\

This linear two-step broadcast model that transmitted filtered information simply no longer exists, upended entirely by the interactive character of social media. Through the medium of the Internet, it was replaced with a “bilateral inverse model many-to-one…. [and] also a multilateral horizontal and symmetrical many-to-many model.” Today information travels at lightening-speed with the ability to influence public opinions in split-second data transfers.

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and to mobilize massive social movements, as evidenced by the Arab Spring uprising (2010-2012), during which the oppressed social underclasses toppled or caused profound instability to the authoritarian governments of Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Syria, Bahrain, and Libya.²⁴

How does the human brain process such massive amounts of information in the digital age? I argue that humans adapt to survive the surging flood of information by adjusting how they process the information. In so doing, humans adapt in the same way Charles Darwin explained in his Theory of Evolution.²⁶ Humans have found the capability to sequester themselves and to slow down the thought processes amidst the rapid-fire intake of information, enabling the

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²⁵ Ibid.

“plasticity” of their brains “to form new connections among the structures underlying vision, hearing, cognition, and language,”\textsuperscript{27} during which their brains can potentially be, but are not always, rewired into completely new mindsets. This process usually takes place alone in one’s bedroom, in the solitudinous absence of any other physical presence, connected to multitudinous voices from around the world through one’s computer, and when a radicalized new mindset takes root – whether it is political, religious, etc. – the resulting new mindset is referred to as a product of \textit{bedroom radicalization}.\textsuperscript{28}

\section*{Bedroom Radicalization}

Social scientists use the term bedroom radicalization\textsuperscript{29} to explain what happens to an individual who self-radicalizes to a dogmatic ideology\textsuperscript{30} when he

\begin{itemize}
\end{itemize}
or she withdraws into the privacy of one’s bedroom, shuts the door to the
surrounding physical world, and enters the virtual world of the cybersphere.
Aqsa’s transformation from a seemingly well-balanced, happy teenager, who
grew up with every advantage in life, to a female jihadist, living a self-described
rewarding life within a violent, barbaric religious cult, is a good initial case to
consider because it parallels the experiences of many young adults from
Western households who have fled eastward to assume new identities as
jihadists.

Their transformations begin in their bedrooms where the only witnesses to
their conversions are the messenger voices that are channeled through the
medium of social media on their cell phones and home-based computers. From
the physical seclusion of her bedroom, and in the guarded privacy of her own
thoughts, Aqsa stepped onto the virtual battlefield of Islamic jihadism. While her
parents believed she was studying hard to do good academic work towards her
future career, and to become a skilled and contributing member of Western
society, Aqsa was plumbing the Internet for social media networks that fulfilled
something she believed was missing in her life.

We do not know precisely with whom Aqsa communicated, nor precisely
what Aqsa was told, as she carefully covered her tracks before her departure
from her childhood home that cold day in November 2013. But we know enough
from other cases, from would-be jihadists who have returned to the West, and
enough about Aqsa’s life in Scotland, to piece together what most probably was
happening to her during her period of conversion.
When Aqsa expressed interest in the world beyond Scotland and wanted to discuss the civil strife in the Near East, her parents were very pleased. They believed their daughter was broadening her intellectual horizons. They thought she had developed an appreciation for their successful emigration from Pakistan to Scotland. Upon their arrival in the United Kingdom, each was distinctly a minority in race and religion, and each had learned how to master the art of cultural assimilation.

They had arrived as societal outsiders, but within a few years they had become members of the bedrock that forms Scottish social stability. Having achieved a level of financial success that freed them from the daily worries of making ends meet, and feeling that they genuinely belonged in Scottish society, Aqsa’s parents viewed and respected their daughter as a young Scottish-born woman, with Pakistani roots, on the cusp of maturity, ready to reflect well on the fine parenting they had provided.

But something was apparently missing from Aqsa’s life. Like others who have been drawn to Islamic fundamentalism, it is clear now from the messages she later broadcast from Syria that she came to feel as though she was living a charade in Scotland and that, despite it being her place of birth, she did not truly feel that she belonged in the United Kingdom. The Internet had opened up and had broadened the world to her, and in this newly found view of the world, she believed she had found her true-life footing following an Islamic jihadist path with others who had chosen the same life.
No matter how much she tried to fit in, to feel that she was part of Scottish society, she had long come to feel marginalized. Some people, as her parents were able to do, distinguish themselves through their uniqueness. But Aqsa came to feel that her uniqueness as a Western Muslim in an overwhelmingly Christian country made her feel like a permanent outsider. The young woman who enjoyed reading *Harry Potter* stories and listening to Coldplay soon saw those primary daily interests as child’s play and pretenses of an unsubstantiated and devalued Western life. Increasingly, there appeared to be nothing that could give her the self-satisfaction of societal inclusion in Glasgow.

As she withdrew from her previous pastime activities, we know from her blog sites that she felt progressively more marginalized in Scottish society.31 A profound sense of isolation batters one’s feelings of worthiness and self-esteem, making it more difficult to answer the fundamental question of the human mind, “Who am I?”32 Aqsa was no longer the Scottish-born school girl of Pakistani parents on a career path to success in the Western world. She was becoming an adherent to a radicalized religious sect of Islam committed to violent jihad against the West and she was destined to become a jihadi wife.

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31 Hall, "Inside the Chilling Online World of the Women of ISIS."

Only the world of the Internet seemed real and as she became increasingly interactive online, it was there that she found fellowship and the social satisfaction of belonging. She found others online who felt the same way as she did. Their words penetrated her sense of self-identity and imbued her with a value of self-worth that defined who she was and not what she would do in a future career. In the blog sites and chat rooms that were controlled by Islamic fundamentalists, she found her voice. She was no longer an outsider. She had found her community and her sense of belonging.

She could not share her innermost thoughts with her parents. They would not understand. They could not. They had devoted their entire adult lives to assimilating to a society Aqsa came to view as alien and hostile to her family’s ethnic and religious roots. Increasingly and progressively, her parents had become the Other. Deceiving them for a cause that she held supremely righteous, and which she believed was directed by Allah, trumped all other considerations in life. She felt commonality with those in the struggle in Syria. Their struggle, their jihad, had become her jihad.

And from the comfortable privacy of her Glasgow bedroom, she felt already shoulder-to-shoulder with her Internet comrades-in-arms. Her parents would not be part of this life, which embodied the new identity she was fast acquiring, because they did not understand. They would try to stop her and she felt it was her life purpose to see her personal mission through to the end. Her true brethren were in Syria. They were suffering. Their words were like a summons on her heart and conscience. This was where she belonged.
Her favorite musical group at the time of her radicalization was Coldplay, which is relevant to the study of memetics in this work. It cannot be proved, but one can imagine her listening to Coldplay’s songs over and over again through the best acoustical, noise-canceling earphones available, while she watched the carnage from Syria’s civil war streaming on her computer in real time. She engaged, she understood, and those who implored her over the digital channels to join their struggle reciprocally understood her. While listening to Coldplay, she would block out the familiar surroundings of Glasgow and the materially comfortable world – the only world – she had ever known.

Aqsa left her home in 2013, the same year when her favorite musical group’s number one song was “Atlas.” This popular music was also the theme song for that year’s movie box office success, *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire*. I bring this song by Coldplay to the fore in this study, not because I hold Coldplay responsible for Aqsa’s actions, but because it lends itself with timely relevance to the powerful effect of information-transmitting *memes* to shape and reinforce one’s perspective on reality. More centrally, memes reinforce one’s sense of self-identity,33 which my study will demonstrate forms the core motivating basis for human behavior. An example of this dynamic can be seen in the rise of “identity politics.” Voters often cast their votes in favor of their cultural

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tribes, just to keep “their side” in power, without any grasp, let alone an understanding of the issues.\textsuperscript{34}

Our social orientation and, by extension our self-identification, takes place in a vast cultural pool in which we metaphorically swim every day, seeking secure fairway buoys in familiar waters, while we churn through Darwinistic variant social currents of new ideas that challenge the status quo, as we know it to be. Just as physical organisms adapt to their earthly environments through the process of natural selection,\textsuperscript{35} individuals make analogous cultural selections about human behavior, which result in dominant, prevailing social cultures, depending on their geographic locations.

The resulting dominant social cultures are sustained by a transfer of memetic informational blocks that individuals pass on from one person to the next. \textit{This is the dynamic of the meme at work}. “Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process, which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation.”\textsuperscript{36} While genes reproduce to further the biological lines of species, memes reproduce in the minds of their host humans, and their units of information are furthered into widespread mindsets and ideologies. Genes affect the physical world. Memes

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affect the cultural world. The potency of memes on the human mind must never be underestimated. Therefore, the music Aqsa listened to prior to her transformation becomes important to this study because the musical meme is effective in the persuasive formulation and transfer of ideas across populations.

In the next chapter, I will more fully define and demonstrate how memes influence the human mind to adopt one worldview over another, which leads to cultural clashes, but it is important now, in the simplest of terms, to understand what memes are and the fact that they are all around us all of the time. Like never-ending waves crashing on rocks and altering the coastal shorelines, memes fill the air waves and enter our fields of sight, affecting our states of mind, encouraging changes in our moods and in our outlooks on life, and, most importantly, they affect our senses of self-identity.

For example, a faculty colleague of mine is a lesbian who, after same-sex marriage was affirmed by the Supreme Court in 2015,37 married her longtime life partner in a ceremony at George Washington’s historic Mount Vernon home. The couple’s selection of their wedding venue was a purposeful statement that, as a same-sex legally married couple in the commonwealth of Virginia, they felt that they belonged in our society. Further, they felt that they so fully belonged as respected citizens of the United States that they exchanged their vows in the home of our country’s first president. In this example, George Washington’s home became a visual meme that conferred upon the couple’s marital union the

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positive characteristics of the legendary man himself, George Washington, along with the liberal ideals upon which our country was established.

Further illustrating how memes affect self-identity, this same colleague has recently reacted with alarm that the fast-food chicken sandwich company, Chick-fil-A, has been granted a campus concession to sell food to our students. Given the company’s owner’s outspoken condemnation of same-sex marriage, the very presence of the food concession and the campus display of Chick-fil-A advertisement logo signs serve as visual memes that transmit the message that she, as a legally married lesbian, leads a lifestyle that should be condemned and that she does not truly belong in our society. This colleague has begun an initiative to have the concession removed from our campus on the basis that the company’s values are in conflict with our college values, which encourage diversity and equal rights.

It has been on this same basis that Chick-fil-A has been blocked from establishing franchises at other public locations, such as Northeastern University in Boston, MA and San Antonio International Airport in Texas. The issue is

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not the quality of the chicken sandwich. The issue is the visual memetic message a mere Chick-fil-A logo transmits in a nanosecond. Whereas my colleague felt like an inclusive member of society at Mount Vernon at the time of her wedding, she now walks past the Chick-fil-A concession on campus and feels the revulsion of social alienation. Like the aforementioned metaphoric waves changing the coastline, memes work subliminally on the human mind affecting self-identity.

The way we feel about ourselves is reflected in the way we try to influence our culture. Just as genes are the carriers of physical reproduction, individual memes are the carriers of cultural reproduction, and our cultural environment is what we, as humans, make for ourselves. It is the world that we create by our own chosen design and not one upon which we are biologically dependent to survive. Further, we create our cultural worlds in the image of how we see ourselves. The societies in which we live reflect who we are as a people – our self-identities – and one of the ways we reinforce our self-identities is through our cultural music.

Music is one principal auditory component in a key list of memes that include social customs, religious beliefs, foods, fashions, catch phrases, and slogans, that are identified by evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins as having the ability to convey meaningful messages that impact and define an individual’s self-identification. While musical memes, specifically, will be examined more thoroughly in the next chapter, it is useful now, as this introductory case study

focuses on Aqsa, to consider how musical memes convey the mood and tone of
a place and time that shape the human self and collective populations.

Consider the anti-Vietnam era in the United States during the 1960s-70s.
It would be impossible to seriously consider that period without also being aware
of the music of Joan Baez, Jimi Hendrix, Creedence Clearwater Revival, and
Over a four-day period in August, some 200,000 people gathered to listen to
the lyrics of one anti-war song after another, challenging the US war in Southeast
Asia and echoing the sounds of public protest through the surrounding upstate
New York State woods. The tenor and feeling of the historic Vietnam War era,
marking the social orientation of that time, formed the soundtrack of the 1995
Academy Award winning film Forrest Gump, with strategic punctuation in the
film’s plot by music and lyrics from that era.

Similarly, the music of the Big Band Era of the 1940s, with the sexy
sounds of swing in the hands of Benny Goodman’s clarinet, the syncopated
piano beats that Duke Ellington tapped out lithely on the keyboard, and the

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bold, brilliant sound of the trumpet pressed against Louie Armstrong’s lips, reflected the swagger of American military might and determination during World War II. It also reflected the innocent naiveté of modernity before the dawn of the Atomic Age and the chilling possibility of worldwide nuclear annihilation.

Now, consider the popular music that dominated the air waves when Aqsa was making her secret plans to leave her family and her homeland in pursuit of something she had decided would give her life more meaning. While it is purely hypothetical to suppose that Aqsa may have indeed been listening to Coldplay while cruising the Internet before her departure, it is important to point out that the theoretical application of a musical meme is entirely possible and not a stretch of the imagination when considering the influences on Aqsa’s mind at that period of time prior to her flight to jihadism.

Puzzling through what is known about Aqsa, her likes, and her habits during the period of her transformation, it is not unreasonable to imagine that she sat quietly many nights in her Glasgow bedroom, her earphones pressed tightly onto her ears blocking out the physical world that surrounded her, listening to Coldplay’s 2013 hit song “Atlas,” with mental visions of a different world playing across the landscape of her mind, while she communicated online from her heart with others who had crossed the border into the abyss that called.

Some saw the sun
Some saw the smoke
Some heard the gun
Some bent the bow
Sometimes the wire must tense for the note
Caught in the fire, say oh

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We're about to explode

Carry your world, I'll carry your world
Carry your world, I'll carry your world

Some far away
Some search for gold
Some dragon to slay
Heaven we hope is just up the road
Show me the way, lord because I am about to explode

Carry your world, I'll carry your world
Carry your world, I'll carry your world
Carry your world, and all your hurt.\textsuperscript{46}

From Aqsa’s and from other illustrative cases that follow in this study, we will gain a better understanding of the psychological landscape on which selected memes serve as deeply emotional triggers and potent tools aimed at influencing humans and forming self-identities. This study, which relies on meme theory to explain Aqsa’s behavior, and the behaviors of others who chose the same life path as she, as well as their emergent self-identities, will examine the dynamics of the human mind in the technological era of the Digital Age to explain what happened to Aqsa Mahmood and many others just like her.

No longer should society ask “why” this disturbing genocidal trend is happening on a worldwide scale and continues to cause the deaths of countless innocent people. Instead, through careful evaluation, we need to recognize that the memetic influence on self-identity offers a valuable window to understanding

the murderous madness of violent Islamic jihad. Is it possible that Aqsa Mahmood was drawn to violent jihad through the memetic messages she received on social media that called her to a cultural community of Islamic fanatics whose adherents held as their collective penultimate goal to die as religious martyrs, taking as many non-believers with them as possible? I argue that there is strong correlating evidence in the study of “copycat crime”\textsuperscript{47} to suggest that individuals can be persuaded to take socially aberrant actions when they become aware through news coverage and social media that others have done the same thing.

This study will demonstrate that, unlike “psychological and cultural theories of radicalization…meme theory grounds cultural information and communication in biological impulses, such as love, sex, [family], and community.”\textsuperscript{48} Memes speak to the “who” in the “I am.” Armed with this broadened perspective, social scientists should be able to uncover effective countermeasures to neutralize and combat the social malignancy that religious terrorism has inflicted upon civil society worldwide.


\textsuperscript{48} Glucklich, Ariel, Letter to Theana Kastens, “Questions – Chapter One,” Email, August 9, 2018.
CHAPTER TWO

PERSUASIVE MEME

The Interplay Between Memetics, Genetics & Epigenetics

*Cogito Ergo Sum*

Rene Descartes’s famous “I think, therefore I am,” defines the “ultimate [Cartesian] principle” of self-existence.⁴⁹ Self-identity is the mirror that stares back at the individual as one considers his or her purpose in life, one’s strengths and weaknesses, and the values that shape the individual’s purpose and sense of self. Beyond the borders of self-identity, there are societies, religions, politics, etc., that comprise collective group identities. It is here that the self acquires a “consciousness of sharing certain characteristics (a language, a culture, etc.) within a group.” Symbiotically, “the group to which a person [belongs constitutes] an important part of the social environment in which and through which personal identity [is] formed.”⁵⁰ All self-assessments, -evaluations, and -calculations about the individual take place within the human mind, which presides over the biological composition of each man as the command center for human behavior.


The individual is not an island unto itself. The individual resides in a cultural world that either fosters or impedes the individual’s fully realized self-identified purpose in life. But what are the determinants of a cultural world that make it compatible with the individual self? We find these determinants in cultural markers, such as language, music, art, religion, and social customs. These cultural markers embrace the individual in a satisfactory feeling of belonging and they are packed with potent units of information – memes.

Within the pool of organisms from which all life springs and develops into the genera that subdivide into classifications of species, lies an inorganic unit of information transmission, called the meme. While a meme is technically not organic in form, and therefore non-genetic in content, in scientific circles it is commonly referred to as the “gene of cultural inheritance” because of its ability to affect the cultural orientation of the human mind.

Memes act as cerebral lubricants for the instantaneous transfer of information from one mind to the next, thus helping to facilitate the biological and structural mechanism responsible for the “transmission of information by communication, imitation, teaching and learning.” In parallel action to the evolution of genes, memes have the ability to adapt into new units of information

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that are targeted to audiences receptive to their new emerging messages. Examples of evolving memes will be explained later in this chapter.

In considering an individual’s mindset, there is a third component that enters the cerebral interplay of genes (the organism) and memes (the informational unit). This component is a scientific process called epigenesis, which can, but does not always, affect the manner through which the human mind processes information. Epigenetics is the study of “heritable changes caused by the activation and deactivation of genes without any change in the underlying DNA sequence of the organism.” This is important because the activation and deactivation of genes affects human behavior.

For purposes of this study, it is not critical to know thoroughly the science of epigenetics, as it is to understand thoroughly the study of memes. But it is critical to understand the basic interactions between these three influences on the human mind. Epigenetics examines the extragenetic effect on genes through a process called methylation, which carries the potential to thread genes and memes analogously together into a nuanced cerebral interplay. Since epigenesis does not always occur, it is an irregular agent affecting the human mind, with the potential to make memes more potent in their abilities to influence human thought and perspective.

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54 Ibid.

To be clear, we need to unpack and examine these interactive components before we can have a firm grasp on the important role of the meme in understanding communicative thought and, by extension as it relates to this study, and to the crucial element of human self-identification. If one debates human behavior along the binary argument of nature vs nurture, epigenetics arguably demonstrates that one’s behavior may not necessarily be either nature nor nurture, but could be derived solely upon extragenetic inheritance that is not wired into the DNA.

This is made possible because of the effect that variant and/or abrupt influences in one’s cultural environment can have on individuals. For example, an individual may be genetically programmed to grow tall, but if famine strikes the environment in which the individual lives, the extragenetic influence of malnourishment can have a significant reductive influence on the height of the individual and on the individual’s offspring. This is what separates extragenetic inheritance from genetic inheritance.

Molecular biologist and geneticist Moshe Szyf and neurobiologist Michael Meaney, both of McGill University in Montreal, have teamed up to study methyl groups, a common structural element attached to organic molecules that can effectively turn some genes on and some off, like behavioral control switches, resulting in postnatal genetic inheritance. Szyf and Meaney are widely published on their work, most notably in their landmark study, “Epigenetic Programming by

Maternal Behavior,” which was published in the August 2004 journal *Nature Neuroscience*.\(^{56}\)

In this study, Szyf and Meaney demonstrate how methyl groups bond to DNA, and begin replicating right along as composite parts with the core genetic material in all living animals, acting as genetic on/off switches affecting the behavior of the species. Due to the methyl groups’ abilities to pivot and affect the species’ core genetic material, DNA methylation can also act as an enabler and a disabler for contracted diseases unique to the species, such as obesity and mental illness. Hence, beyond the pursuit of a deeper understanding of human behavior, epigenetics also offers enormous possibilities in the potential repression and neutralization of human diseases. The resulting methylated genetic material, however, does not become a permanent part of the species’ genetic material. There is no mutation of the DNA.\(^{57}\) Instead, methyl groups shed off as easily as they attach to DNA, akin to hitchhikers along the road of life who hop into a passing car and may tell the driver a story that stays with the driver long after the hitchhiker departs, which the driver later tells his offspring and they, too, live on and remember the story.


The epigenetic effect on the human mind is a lingering influence, leaving a long-lasting impression on an individual’s conscious or subliminal memory. “Like silt deposited on the cogs of a finely tuned machine after the seawater of a tsunami recedes, our experiences, and those of our forebears, are never gone, even if they have been forgotten. They become a part of us, a molecular residue holding fast to our genetic scaffolding. The DNA remains the same, but psychological and behavioral tendencies are inherited.” Epigenesis has a direct causal effect on human behavior and human self-identification.

Case in point: between September 1944 to May 1945, in a period known as the Dutch Hunger Winter, Nazi Germany imposed a blockade of food supplies around the Netherlands, starving more than 200,000 people to death. Decades later, epigeneticists discovered that the Dutch offspring of mothers who were pregnant during this particularly harsh winter later developed unique health issues that were not present in those who were in utero either before or after the famine.

While the offspring were not genetically predisposed to obesity, there appeared to be an intrauterine imprint on their developing cells – a methylation of the offspring DNA – that resulted in significant obesity later in life and adult death rates earlier than those who were not in utero during this winter of starvation. While this study was based on a tragically assembled cohort through wartime controls that were imposed on the people of the Netherlands, epigeneticists have

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been able to duplicate this direct causal effect of methylated DNA in rodent and sheep models, demonstrating heritable traits that lie completely outside the core genetic transfer of DNA.\textsuperscript{59}

Another case, albeit less conclusive than the Dutch Hunger Winter case study, can be found in the extraordinary number of suicides within the family tree of twentieth-century writer Ernest Hemingway. It has been a question that has puzzled social scientists for decades. How could a family brimming over with successful, intelligent individuals be seemingly cursed with individual self-destruction?

In addition to Ernest Hemingway’s own suicide, was the famous writer’s father, himself a widely respected medical doctor, as well as Hemingway’s brother, his sister, his son, and his granddaughter.\textsuperscript{60} While genetically-inherited mental illness may very well have contributed to the string of suicides, epigenetics makes it possible to consider an alternative window of understanding. With respect to the Hemingway family, methylation of certain genes in some family members may have been switched on to a path of self-destruction. In those family members who had not and have not taken their own lives, it may have been switched off. Therefore, one might ask which memetic


cues for suicide have acted as trigger points within the family – the prevailing social group of those born Hemingway – for this repeated behavior?

Richard C. Francis, neurobiologist from Stony Brook University, has examined the effect of both physical and cultural environments on genes, and the resulting physiological manifestation rooted in epigenetic methylation that influences human behavior. When we consider behavior, we take into account mental processes, both emotional and logical. In his book, *Epigenetics – How Environment Shapes Our Genes* (2011), Francis states that “among the extragenetic we inherit is a social environment that begins with our parents but can extend well beyond that, up to and including a whole culture.”

Staying with the example of suicide, as with the Hemingway family, Francis's theory that the epigenetic influence on human behavior extends beyond familial genetic bonds comes into focus when one considers the high number of teenage suicides committed by students from one secondary school, W. T. Woodson High School, located in Fairfax County, VA. From 2011 to 2014, six students who were seemingly well-balanced and working constructively towards their futures, alerted no one of their plans, retreated quietly from all friends and family, and ended their lives for no apparent reason.

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All six were “high achievers – a football captain, a Boy Scout, AP students, [and] a track star.” Then, in 2017, another Woodson High School student, who was a member of the Air Force Junior ROTC and who sang in the school’s advanced men’s choir, ended his life the same way. Sixty-three No note. No explanation. Just a definitively terminal act.

The copycat dynamic seen here, as found in copycat criminal actions, is referred to as a “suicide cluster.” It is triggered not only by friends, acquaintances, and family members, but by the suicide of a famous person whose death is covered in the media. In recent years, social scientists have studied this tragic phenomenon, which has extended to the high numbers of military service personnel who, after serving for long periods in Iraq and Afghanistan escaping death, have returned home to the United States and have killed themselves.

What causes this social contagion? This is the subject of current scientific examination. There is presently no definitive answer available. But epigenetics offers the greatest insight to our current understanding. “Recent studies have reported alterations in epigenetic markers in suicide victims suggesting a link

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between mechanisms that regulate gene expression,” leading to Major Depressive Disorder (MDD), which remains an “enigma” to scientists who continue their present-day work towards a more constructive understanding of its effect on human behavior.65

Is this focus on suicide any different from a Western individual’s decision to leave his or her homeland in secret, as Aqsa Mahmood did to wage violent jihad on behalf of a fanatical Islamic sect and with aspirations to die as a religious martyr? I argue that there are strong similarities, and I use the integration of the physical sciences with the social sciences in this interdisciplinary study – memetics, genetics, and epigenetics – to demonstrate the influence of the interplaying meme on an individual’s determination of self-identity.

The epigenetic effect on the human mind’s receptibility and processing of information opens the cerebral pathways for the mighty influential meme in determining what our life purpose is, to which group of people we belong and, most centrally, who we believe we are – our self-identities. Anthropological studies have demonstrated that an individual’s social behavior is shaped by one’s determination “to be, or to become, the kind of person [he or she] identifies” with through idealized terms.66 The cerebral interplay between these


three components, and their resulting influence on the human mind, leads to one’s self-identification, which this study will demonstrate commands one’s behavior.

The Meme

In his seminal 1976 work, *The Selfish Gene*, Dawkins created the word “meme,” drawing on the Greek word μίμημα/mimeme, which means something that is imitated. Describing it as a “noun that conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transmission” in the larger sphere of evolutionary biology, Dawkins lays out the process through which an idea is transmitted from one mind to the next. A meme is a cultural signifier that becomes a corresponding component of the human mind, analogous to the gene by effectively propagating “in just the way that a virus may parasitize the genetic mechanism of a host cell.”67 It is not an accident of language that the popular expression “going viral” has entered our lexicon. It is precisely how a cultural unit of thought spreads from one human mind to the next and lives on in all forms of conscious intellectual discourse.

Through memetic transmission of thought, the human mind processes information holistically, using more than the five major linguistic components of language: phonemes (articulated sounds), morphemes (smallest word units), lexemes (base word set units), syntax (sentence formations), and context (meaning conveyances). Strong emotional identities, such as religious separateness, nationalistic pride, tribal exclusiveness, moral superiority, and

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socio-economical superiority, are often represented by symbols – mental images embedded with potent messages, such as the Jewish Star of David or the United States flag – which appear in the human mind and reinforce the ideological tenets associated with a specific cultural identity.

Dawkins has examined biological impulses and has drawn an analogous connection between the bedrock scientific findings of Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection, and observable social traits and movements, based on the proclivities of a person’s cultural values. The biological drive to survive and procreate, Dawkins argues, operates on a parallel memetic track aimed at ideological propagation, which makes the human mind fertile ground for masters of effective communications. Like genes, which either replicate, mutate to facilitate an organism’s adaptability, or become extinct, memes are units of information that are replicated and passed on from one person to the next or they disappear. “Only memes suited to their sociocultural environment spread successfully, while others become extinct.”

For example, consider the appearance of a fully veiled female in a society where this covered manner of dress conforms to the strict religious requirements of the region, such as Saudi Arabia. The female so completely covered is, without doubt in the minds of those who see her in her native country, someone with unquestioned virtue and respect for the prevailing religious dress code. Not a trace of hair is exposed that could suggest an enticing breach with the piety of regional religious dogma.

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Now, consider the appearance of this same covered female in Western society, where females wear clothes both short and long, exposing skin and flowing locks of hair. The female draped from head to toe in dark attire will strike many in the West as having an entirely different conceptual value. The Western mind may even find the image of this totally cloaked female jarring and will more than likely not consider the draped female as a paragon of virtue, but, instead, as a woman deprived of her humanity. In the Western mind, she becomes a victim of female oppression by men who hold women as their personal property, but who, themselves, remain free to expose their faces and to dress generally however they wish.69

While some regions of the world, such as Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, impose strict religious standards of dress and facial hair appearance on men, as well as on women, far more rigid regulations of dress are imposed on women than on men by the widespread religious conventions in these regions of the Near East. One’s attire becomes a symbol that conveys a message about the individual who is dressed in that particular way and, by extension, to the normative dynamics in the surrounding culture of that individual. Symbols, such as dress, are one type of meme, along with fragrances, music, foods, etc., because of their abilities to stimulate the brain and convey information in split second transmissions from one person to the next.

An encounter with the cultural Other, such as a darkly draped woman in a Western city, memetically triggers an instantaneous message in the Western mind that one has encountered another who is alien to one’s own cultural value system. While it does not necessarily advance to the full potential of awakening the primal fight-or-flight instinct, it does send a surge of adrenaline that signals acute awareness and an unsettling caution to the human mind that the prevailing cultural landscape has been penetrated by an alien influence.\textsuperscript{70}

Likewise, the draped female moving about in seeming isolation amidst a sea of casually dressed women who feel not one hint of hesitation about exposing skin, may feel that she, too, has encountered the Other and may also react with guarded self-protection and shock at the sight of so many physically exposed females. Each person’s perspective is embedded in one’s own culture, which is the schema that oxygenates the widespread dispersion of a particular worldview.

It can be argued that everything and anything has the potential to become a meme. When I traveled years ago along the Camino in Northern Spain on my way to see the famous Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, where the bones of St. James are believed to be housed, I wore no sandals, nor did I carry scallop shells over my shoulder as the pilgrims did. Dressed in my typical Western attire, with comfortable hiking shoes, my occasional use of powered transportation, and

my overnight stays in hotels instead of pilgrimage hostels, known as *albergues*, I was clearly no Catholic pilgrim. By my dress and manner of travel, I was an outsider, a tourist. I stood apart from the genuine tribe of pilgrims.

Every single step the pilgrims took, every solitary thought they had along their ways, the prayerful ways they ate, bathed, and slept, served to reinforce their self-identities as pilgrims. The pilgrims' behavior and my own were all self-determined. There was no coercive authoritative imperative to comply. If there had been, that would have been the enforcement of an external code of behavior, which is different from a memetic code.

An example of an authoritative societal code would include an Islamic dress code or, for Jews, the dietary code that calls for avoidance of eating pork in observant societies. An external behavioral code makes it observationally clear to which tribe of people those who practice the code belong. Memetic codes, however, go deeper to the core of an individual’s self-awareness of self-identity. It is not simply an act of compliance with the externally generated normative societal rules, but it becomes integrated into the very determinative essence of self-identity.

The above examples of Islamic and Western female dress are opposing cultural memes that result in a cultural battle that determines the normative rules regarding how a society decides women should be clothed. The process of selection and adaption with respect to female attire deemed appropriate by society – from burqa to niqab to abaya to hijab to tight jeans to short shorts – is a
memetic progression that determines the prevailing societal norm, and it results in the survival of the fittest cultural meme.

By comparison, it is analogous to the genetic selection and adaption process of dog barks. In their earlier genetic canine state, some 50,000 years ago, dogs did not bark. They wined, yipped or howled, like wolves do to this day. They developed the ability to bark so that they could communicate more effectively with humans, who were and remain dominant in the social environment of dogs’ surroundings. Studies have shown that “a dog’s bark contains information, and that humans can understand that information,”\(^7\) transmitting a range of messages that include possible threats, imminent threats, fear, combativeness, loneliness, happiness, playfulness, and absolute joy.\(^2\) The successful communication story behind man’s best friend just happens to be a clear example of survival of the fittest biological gene.

**Metaphoric Harmonious Notes**

Imagine the metaphor of a piano’s well-tuned keyboard. The skilled pianist strikes a clear note, which resounds with its distinctive timbre and resonance. The note connects through the listener’s ear and delivers perfect pitch to the listener’s mind. It is harmoniously in place. It sounds and feels right.


It belongs. In addition to the memetic symbolism of cultural dress styles, other types of memes work on the mind like notes on a metaphoric keyboard, having the ability to arouse and evoke a full range of human emotions richly rooted in desires, needs, aspirations, fears, mental images of self-identity, and the need to belong.

Recalling from firsthand experience, I remember my own sense of alienation the first time I was present at an Evangelical Christian Church service. Having grown up in the Greek Orthodox Christian Church, I was accustomed to solemnity in which I sat dressed in my finest “Sunday best.” The haunting echoes of the chanter, draped in black, who was singing in response to the priest’s Greek-language exhortations to God, filled the rafters. The clang of the chain censer preceded the wafting smell of incense as it descended on me, all of which was followed by repeated bowing and genuflections, and the continuous crossing of oneself with three pursed fingers in the symbolic sign of the cross.

Instead, the Evangelical parishioners swayed to the sound of contemporary music, performers strummed guitars, sang, danced, and expressed emotions of ecstatic happiness on stage as testament of their love for God. People exalted their devotion to Jesus Christ with raised voices, arms held high above their heads, and everyone shouted “Hallelujah!” While I did not fight or flee, I knew I did not belong.

The cultural memes in that Evangelical Christian congregation, such as their contemporary music, their casual manner of dress, their robust cheerfulness instead of solemn introspection, and the absence of strict church protocols, were
alien to me. There was not the familiar charcoal burning fragrance of
frankincense or fir resin. The absence of incense distinctly alerted my olfactory
sensory neurons that I was in alien territory. I was not one with the group. Like a
piece of inharmonious music, I felt literally an off-key note in the metaphoric
orchestral balance of the Evangelical Church’s normative rule. I was the Other.

I offer this musical reference as a conceptual metaphor for the
psychological effect of memes on the human mind. Euphonic notes advance to
the complexity of musical chords and melodies, and the evocative feelings and
images – summoned by notes/memes – becomes a full symphony of emotional
harmony. The Greek word σύμφωνος/symphonos means harmonious
agreement, and it is from this original meaning that we find the etymological path
to the musical word “symphony.” With this symphonic analogy, it is important to
remain mindful that memes act in the same way on the human mind as do
emotionally evocative musical notes. Memes either resonate on pitch within the
human stream of consciousness or they are non-resonant, triggering a sense of
wariness towards the Other.

In Aqsa’s case, the emotions she expressed following her departure from
the United Kingdom reflected her earlier feelings of societal alienation and
loneliness, all of which were discordant notes, i.e. non-adaptive for her cultural
environment, that drove her to seek a community of belongingness elsewhere.
Before leaving Scotland for Syria, she found the belongingness that she longed
for in the bedroom isolation of her electronic virtual world. Increasingly, through
the mental selection process, Aqsa supplanted the only physical world she had
ever known with the virtual world that called her memetically to its center. Memetic studies establish that individuals selectively adapt to their social environments and form the basis for the “theory of cultural evolution by natural selection analogous to genetics.”

The world Aqsa selected – the Islamic State’s territory in Syria – became her world, and the surroundings of her Western birthplace became the Other, a social order that threatened the survival of the emerging cultural environment to which she had adapted and had claimed as her own. Until the point of her departure from the West, this transformation took place entirely in her mind where one’s own memetic symphony resides.

To understand the memetically driven cultural transition Aqsa was making during her bedroom radicalization from Scottish schoolgirl to jihadi bride, it helps to keep the analogous genetic trajectory of evolutionary biology in mind. Flashing through the cerebral cortex in synaptic synchrony lighting up our Darwinian past is the evolutionary single gene of inheritance that Dawkins claims never dies. Dawkins describes “the particulateness of the gene,” as it “leaps from body to body down the generations, manipulating body after body in its own way and for its own ends.” He refers to this variant gene, which carries forward the genetic allele of distinguishably, observable, hereditary qualities as a “selfish”

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and “immortal” gene, because it “has an expectation of life that must be measured not in decades but in thousands and millions of years.”

Dawkins argues that the behavioral selflessness between two or more genetically related individuals and the resulting genetically selfish-driven impulse to vanquish the threat, which is the Other, is evidentiary proof of a gene’s essential purpose, which is survival of the Self. “Genes change partners and march on.” They are “replicators and [our human bodies] are their survival machines,” which are eventually discarded. “But genes are denizens of geologic time: genes are forever.” Evolutionary biology demonstrates that genes survive by adapting long enough to reproduce, while genes incapable of environmental adaptation are driven into extinction.

While biological evolution is carried on the backs of genes, cultural evolution is carried on the backs of memes, which use human minds as their survival machines. Genes and memes share the same unity of purpose, which is to survive – biologically and culturally, respectively – through adaptation and reproduction, driving opposing forces of biological and cultural social groups – the Other – into extinction.

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74 Dawkins, The Selfish Gene, 34.


Consider a single family that has long existed within a particular economic, religious, or political milieu. If one or some members of the group begin to adopt beliefs or lifestyles that are alien to the family’s preexisting social norm, a line of memetic opposition develops within the group for control of the cultural environment. Memes are powerful cerebral anchors in this ever-shifting cultural horizon.

**Fuel of Fear**

The speed of memetic trajectory throughout one’s own personal cultural landscape is vastly accelerated when human emotions are aroused. In response to a perceived threat to one’s cultural environment, such as the appearance of the aforementioned lady in a Western city, draped in dark religious attire, the human mind instinctively, without conscious thought, assesses and frequently magnifies the threat to greater and often baseless levels. Instinctive action is a trigger response that lies in the limbic system of the human brain, specifically in the amygdala, and is wedded to the individual’s natural will to survive. This innate behavior extends to the individual's impulse to preserve one’s own cultural habitat.

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Antithetical cultural cues give rise to inbred xenophobia, which leads to the emotion of fear, unleashing the most primal of all biological impulses. Fear is the greatest motivator in life, rooted in our basic human instinct to survive. Since time immemorial, fear has served as a conserving agent for man and not as an agent of destruction. Summoning the fight or flight response, fear kicks the adrenal-cortical system into high gear, priming animals, including man, to take action to survive. Fear stores our memories of survival or near survival into the long-term memories of our internal hard drives. “Our most vivid memories are born in fear. Adrenaline etches them into our brains.”

An examination of the neurocircuitry of fear finds that cerebral pathways open wider, triggering the survival reflex, making the mind more receptive to messages, while overriding critically and calmly reasoned, rational thought. This physiological response instantaneously jolts the human mind into a state of hyperarousal, assessing the unknown – the Other – and is an important and positive requirement for evaluating threats and staying alive. It is also, however, the same stimulus that segregates and reinforces tribal cultural divisions within populations.

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80 Tenner, Wilhelm, M.D., Interview, Allgemeine Krankenhaus, Psychiatrie und Psychotherapie, (Vienna, Austria, 2001).


Robert Sapolsky, Stanford professor of biology and neurology, explains that humans, like chimpanzees with whom humans share more than 98% of their DNA, have brains that are hard-wired for a worldview of “us” vs “them.” It all comes down to survival of the species. The insular cortex (also called insula) of the brain protects humans from mortal threats, such as poisoning from toxic plants, lethal insects, and/or hostile animals. The insula triggers human reactions of “fear, aggression, and disgust,” which activates a “mortally disgusting reaction” towards people we find “disgusting.” The “them” become “vermin,” which need to be eradicated. In pursuit of this instinctive aim, the human mind becomes increasingly receptive to propaganda and hardwired for hate.

It is not simply the differential between species or the varying differences of appearances within a species that triggers the human minds’ innate xenophobia. The human tendency toward in-group/out-group thinking has a “cognitive architecture [that has] evolved to detect any potential cues about social coalitions and alliances,” which are telegraphed through memetic symbols. For example, “the hipster beard, the turban, and the ‘Make American Great Again’ hat all fulfill this role by sending strong signals of tribal belonging.”

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85 Sapolsky, “This Is Your Brain on Nationalism – The Biology of Us and Them.”
Hence, the key question that enters the human mind at the most primordial base level of cognition is whether it has encountered a cultural trait that could or would threaten the cultural world in which that particular human mind lives. Consider the current politically charged rhetoric about Islamic Sharia law in U.S. campaigns, which arouses American fears of being overtaken by and subjugated to an Islamic code of social justice. Despite the absence of any evidence to support even the presence of Sharia law in the United States, in the hands of skilled communicators, collective human minds become ideological pawns in struggles over social values that significantly impact political elections and geopolitical courses of history.

This phenomenon spills over into social arguments about religious freedoms and results in culture wars, such as the right to bear firearms, the right of same-sex couples to marry, and whether Americans have a right to universal healthcare. The issue of socialized universal healthcare arouses the threat felt in capitalistic United States during the Cold War when socialism was viewed as the precursor to communism.

Words become weapons aimed at the extermination of worldviews different from one’s own and, within this linguistic sphere of influence, god-words prove particularly potent in their abilities to marshal ultimate ideological allegiance. “God,” used as a proclamation of one’s tribal unity in the face of persecution, or as a rallying command to brutal battle in warfare, or as means to psychologically enforce social control through mass conformity to a certain
political or religious ideology, may well be the most potently influential meme on the human mind.

Throughout history, with roots deep into the period of the Roman Empire, the *Shema Israel* (Deuteronomy 6:4), meaning “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is One,” became the “ultimate martyrological cry” of Jews in affirmation of their loyalty to Judaism in the face of certain death after refusing to bow to forced religious conversion. The *Shema Israel* would “become the equivalent of the Christian martrys’ proclamation *Christianus sum,*” meaning “I am a Christian.”

When Bishop of Tarragona Fructuosus was arrested for refusing to denounce Christianity under the reign of Roman Emperor Valerian (253-260), he proclaimed *Christianus sum,* knowing that he would be burned alive in the city’s amphitheater as punishment. As the flames rose, he prayed aloud, “I worship the one God who has made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them,” echoing the words of the *Shema Israel*.

Eighteenth-century colonial American theologian Jonathan Edwards moved masses with his sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” which called for societal adherence to a God-centered community, stoking fears of

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falling into the real, physical fires of an eternal hell. The words “under God,” in reference to the Supreme Being of the majority Christian U.S. population in 1954, was added to the U.S. Pledge of Allegiance in response to the Communist fear during the Cold War-era Red Scare.89

From the standpoint of a battle cry, the Latin term Nobiscum Deus, meaning “God is with us,” and the analogous Greek term Μεθ ημων o Θεος/Meth imon o Theos, were used as rallying calls to fight during the Roman and Byzantine Empires.90 Centuries later, the great military leader of the Swedes, King Gustavus Adolphus, who prevailed and stood victorious in the seventeenth century Thirty Years’ War, used the same term in its Germanic expression, Gott mit uns, as a field password steeped in religiosity to signify that the expected battle was about to begin and that their military mission was borne from righteous sanctity on their side of the religious conflict.91 In the twentieth-century, German soldiers carried the motto Gott mit uns inscribed into their belt buckles in both World War I and World War II. The following images were found on the December 29, 2017 “sold listings” webpage of eBay:

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89 Ellis, Richard J., To the Flag: The Unlikely History of the Pledge of Allegiance. (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 124-129.


The continuing contemporary market value of these pieces of military memorabilia reflects not only their appeal as collectors’ items, but the historical strength and longevity of the message that has proven to be so effective in its ability to motivate the masses. An examination of eBay’s “sold listings” on March 14, 2019 for Gott mit uns belt buckles confirmed the continuing market for the historical value of this once-used German war meme.

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“Allahu Akbar” (Arabic “God is greater”) has become the present-day Islamic extremism war cry, usually shouted by a perpetrator with loud, religious fervor before engaging in a fearsome act of violent jihadism.94 This memetically charged expression is considered a literal weapon by jihadists against the West, as September 11 leader Mohamed Atta instructed his fellow hijackers in preparation for their attack. Jihadists believe the fear it instills in their enemy is, in fact, their first strike against those deemed infidels, paralyzing their victims’ abilities to summon a defense and thus enabling the jihadists to more easily dispatch their aim of total annihilation.95

Verbally invoking the presence of an Almighty God is a potent memetic message, whether it is used by Islamic jihadists to strike fear in a perceived enemy or by devout Muslims who pray five times per day in prostrated devotion.


to their God. It is particularly effective when delivered to a receptive target audience concerned about the hereafter, and can be examined and explained by science through observable cultural behavior, which is the outward expression of what is happening within the human mind.

Use of the memetic word “God” is not restricted to just matters of life and death. Even school athletic teams try to co-opt the power of God in their competitions. During the high school football season in fall 2012, cheerleaders at Kountze High School in Kountze, Texas, held up large run-through banners displaying the words, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” As it is a public school, administrators forbade further use of religious words to promote the school’s athletic team’s competitive prowess. The cheerleading squad then took legal action to forbid the school “from interfering with their free speech.” After an injunction was granted in the cheerleaders’ favor and the school appealed, a local judge ruled in May 2013 that the high school cheerleaders could “display banners emblazoned with Bible verses at football games.”

**Survival of the Fittest**

Through Darwin’s work on his theory of evolution by natural selection, we know that “however many ways there may be of being alive, it is certain that

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there are vastly more ways of being dead.”  In his 1986 book, *The Blind Watchmaker*, Richard Dawkins simplifies the dynamic of being alive, that is surviving, in basic lay terms. Life is sustained through the requisite “proficiency” to “stave off death,” using means that may be dependent on a unique talent, such as a bird’s ability to fly, and by working against “a state of equilibrium with [the] environment,” which is illustrated both by the human body’s maintenance of a 98.6°F temperature regardless of climatic temperatures, and a plant’s osmotic balance to retain water in its cells.

To a lesser or greater degree, Dawkins explains, every single living thing is in a perpetual state of dynamic equilibrium in resistance to the environment to maintain the unique essence of its being – that is, of being alive. When this dynamism stops, the living thing dies. Furthermore, self-replication, which passes the unique proficiency of each living thing on to its progeny through the “ability to propagate genes in reproduction,” must occur or an entire living species dies.98

As we understand the genetic trajectory of Darwin’s argument, and replace organisms with ideas and cultures to consider the memetic trajectory of Dawkins’ argument, it is helpful to exchange Darwin’s natural, environmental baseline with Dawkins’ ideological, cultural baseline to observe the progression along an analogous parallel track of survival. Like organisms that adapt and

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98 Ibid., 16.
survive, ideas become homeostatically grounded within prevailing tribal societies, such as national or religious cultures. Ideas operate dynamically along lines of natural selection, embedded in the genetically molded human mind through millennia of conditioning.

For example, the religious dietary prohibition against eating pork is drummed deeply into the minds of the devout followers of those religions that forbid the consumption of pork. Avoidance of pork by those who observe this religious dictate reinforces their feelings that they are living a virtuous life of spiritual piety within the tribal inclusiveness of their equally virtuous brethren. Pork, the food, becomes the symbol that serves as the meme. The individual’s unspoken, but lived, rule of conduct that calls for the avoidance of pork gives the individual happiness. Adherents to the rule belong to a flock of like-minded individuals, who subscribe to the same faith-based dietary disciplines, and their demonstrated obedience to this dietary restriction makes them happy.99

Foods represent a large category of memes across all spectrums of sociological strata, including religious, ethnic, nationalistic, economic, political, and educational perspectives. The foods one chooses to eat reflect ideological baselines hard-wired into the human mind. “Food pleasure reflects social evolution,” and the degree to which strict adherence to food preference is demonstrated reflects the ideological rigidity within a tribal group.100 Paul Rozin, psychologist at the University of Pennsylvania, explains that food “assumes

100 Ibid., 153.
symbolic functions and takes on moral significance,” leading the individual to make “social distinctions and to establish social linkages”\(^{101}\) with others who share the same cultural identification.

Moving away from the example of pork, let’s consider the simple dish of French fried potatoes, called *pommes frites* by the French. Reference to frying shallow slices of potatoes as being uniquely French began in the years immediately following the United States’ War of Independence from England. Diplomatic and trade ties between the two countries were strong, and Thomas Jefferson, who significantly influenced early American culture with his keen attention to architecture, gardening, wines, foods, and books – his own personal collection of books later forming the foundation of the present-day U.S. Library of Congress – himself, referred to *pommes frites* or, more precisely, *pommes de terre frites à cru en petites tranches* (potatoes cut into small slices and fried in tranches) as “French fried potatoes.”\(^{102}\)

In March 2003, when the Bush Administration led the United States into an invasion of Iraq, France objected, claiming there was no legitimate basis for war with Iraq and citing the U.S.’s lack of proof to question the U.S. assertion that there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. When other major nations joined


France’s lead at the United Nations – namely Germany, Russia, and China – the United States, faced with a humiliating diplomatic defeat on the world stage, withdrew its proposed joint resolution for a United Nations invasion of Iraq.\textsuperscript{103} France’s opposition to the Bush Administration’s determination to invade Iraq was seen by many in the then Republican-controlled Congress as an act of disloyalty to the United States. Accordingly, the chairman of the U.S. House Administration Committee, U.S. Rep Bob Ney (R-Ohio), ordered all restaurants at the U.S. Capitol to change the wording on their menus from “French” fries to “freedom” fries.\textsuperscript{104} Ney’s hope was for the name freedom fries to become part of the American English lexicon, serving as a verbal meme that signaled a rebuke of the French for opposing the Bush Administration’s war in Iraq.

What many viewed as an immature and foolish official reaction to the French caught on and was adopted by those in the private sector who believed that unquestioned allegiance to the decisions of the Bush White House was a demonstration of national patriotism. Many private restaurateurs also began changing their menus to reflect the politically charged freedom fries, and diners of the same political persuasion began requesting freedom, rather than French fries. Suddenly, one’s political ideology, or at least the degree of one’s political


rigidity, could be determined and reflected simply by which name one chose to place an order of fries – French or freedom.

This linguistic signifier lost its value within a few short years when the American public came to openly question the Bush Administration’s judgment and veracity in its decision to lead the United States into the Iraq War, and by 2006 one would be hard pressed to find a menu offering freedom fries. The memetic term freedom fries failed to adapt to the prevailing cultural landscape because increasingly fewer people selected the term in their verbal communications, and soon the term was no longer used at all, which is analogous to genes failing to adapt and survive in the physical environment. The meme failed to replicate and to be passed on. It became extinct.

**Musical Memes**

For four days, on August 15, 16, 17, and 18, 1969, the collective voices of worldwide musical giants reverberated throughout the pastural valley countryside of New York State’s Catskill Mountains, echoing the message of a massive countercultural paradigm shift in the United States, which drove America’s youth into the streets to protest what they viewed as an immoral war – the Vietnam War. The United States, which had emerged from World War II as a benign hegemonic power in pursuit of worldwide democracy, was revealed to be a superpower engaged in military deception. A rising American generation,

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105 Rupp, “Are French Fries Truly French?”
being asked to fight and die in Vietnam said, “Hell, no, we won’t go!” The music of each performer who took the stage became burnished into the American psyche like snapshots that remain indelibly in the human mind and have the power to transport the individual in a millisecond to precisely that time and place – Woodstock, New York.

Joseph Allen McDonald, known as “Country Joe” McDonald, was not quite ready to perform, but stepped onto the Woodstock stage earlier than scheduled because Santana, the musical group slated for that hour, was not prepared at all. McDonald had served three years in the U.S. Navy and knew firsthand what a military commitment meant to an individual’s life, including the possibility of the ultimate sacrifice. Proud of his service to his country, he had come to believe that our nation’s armed forces were being misused by politicians in Washington.

He stepped up to the microphone, looked out at the expansive audience and shouted, “Give me an F!” The crowd went wild; they roared and McDonald began to sing “The Fish Cheer/I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin’-To-Die Rag,” which became known as “the premier Vietnam War protest anthem.”

And it's one, two, three, what are we fighting for?  
Don't ask me, I don't give a damn. 
Next stop is Viet Nam. 

And it's five, six, seven, open up the pearly gates. 
Well, ain't no time to wonder why.

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Whoopee! We’re all gonna die.\textsuperscript{108}

Before he was a rock star electrical guitarist, Jimi Hendrix was a U.S. Army paratrooper in the 101\textsuperscript{st} Airborne Division, nicknamed the “Screaming Eagles.” Trained for aerial assaults, Hendrix was intimately familiar with the sounds of massive artillery bombardments – the flashes of light, the incendiary fireballs, the loud, transonic explosions, and the disorienting smoke that obscured the targeted landscape that lay burning beneath a blanket of napalm. Hendrix’s rendition of the “Star Spangled Banner” at Woodstock was raw and rough, reflecting the tattered symbolism Hendrix believed the United States flag had come to represent during the Vietnam War.

In an iconic performance that gave voice to the sound of guitar strings, Hendrix used “the music’s own martial bombast to reflect the violence carried out under his nation’s flag.” With deft skill over the strings, Hendrix “held a key note a little too long, applied a little more pressure to his Stratocaster’s [guitar] tremolo bar, and sent the pitch slowly downward as it rung out. It was a subtly unsettling effect, like the moan of an animal in distress, or an air-raid siren.”\textsuperscript{109}

Joan Baez had grown up in a highly educated family in New York, and spent long portions of her childhood in Europe and the Middle East because of


her father’s work for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). She emerged into young adulthood with a strong sense of worldwide social justice and progressive political advocacy with a fervor that matched the depth of her musical talent as a songwriter and as a performer.

She was particularly gifted in her ability to interpret other songwriters’ music, especially the works of Bob Dylan, with whom she maintained both a close personal and professional relationship. She was the last scheduled singer on the first day of Woodstock when she took the stage at nightfall. At the end of her planned playset, with the crowd still applauding enthusiastically, she added an impromptu encore without even announcing the title or explaining the song. With improvised words, departing from the published work, her crystalline voice rose high above the landscape like a call to the heavens, and with lissome vocal inflections that suggested a responsive promise from beyond.

We shall overcome,
We shall overcome,
We shall overcome, some day.

Oh, deep in my heart,
I know that I do believe,
We shall overcome, some day.
We shall be alright,
We shall be alright,
Oh, deep in my heart,
I know that I do believe
We shall overcome, some day.

We shall live in peace,
We shall live in peace
Oh, deep in my heart,
I know that I do believe,
We shall overcome some day.
We are not afraid,
Oh Lord, not afraid,
Oh Lord, not afraid,
Oh, deep in my heart,
I know that I do believe,
We shall overcome some day.

We shall overcome,
Oh Lord [drawn out],
Oh Lord, overcome some day,
Oh, deep in my heart,
I know that I do believe,
We shall overcome some day.\textsuperscript{110}

\textbf{Mutable Memes}

Memes are not, however, inviolable permanent units of information. They change. They mutate with regularity, just as molecular viruses invade their surroundings and mutate into new forms. Evolutionary appropriation of memetic signifiers follows the genetic path of “variation, selection, and heredity,”\textsuperscript{111} in reflection of universal Darwinism, producing design.

For example, consider the popular Jesus Fish symbol you may see displayed on many car bumpers while sitting in gridlock traffic. This pictorial representation of \textit{Ichthys}, the ancient Greek word for “fish,” is an acronym for “Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior,” and has long been the symbol of Christianity. In the 1980s, when public school science textbooks began teaching Darwin’s theory of evolution, the Jesus Fish mutated into a new emblematic symbol – a


visual meme – as a popular bumper sticker in support of the Bible’s creationist story about how God created the world in seven days.

The basic symbol of the fish has become a replicator that has been copied and transmitted from one person’s mind to the next in a randomness of applications, such that can be seen on car bumper stickers simply by driving on a major thoroughfare, and noting it as it undergoes selective variations and continues to self-replicate, following the basic algorithm – variation, selection, and heredity – of evolutionary biology.

The mutation has not ended there, however. In response to the political fight over public school textbook content, the Jesus Fish meme, has been reappropriated to represent evolution in the form of the Darwin Fish, which to a lesser extent in popularity has also begun appearing on the bumpers of cars.

Following the evolutionary replication of these two competing visual memes in daily traffic, one might also spot a third mutation of this symbol, which
has drawn some to a creative intellectual embrace of scientific explorations of worlds beyond creationism and evolution – the Trekkie Fish.

Cognitive scientist Daniel Dennett explains in *Intuition Pumps and Other Tools for Thinking*, that “memes are informational symbionts, and like the mutualist symbionts by the trillions that also inhabit us, we couldn’t live without them, but that doesn’t mean they are all our friends. Some are harmful plagues we could well do without.”

Memes – visual, verbal, auditory, olfactory, tastes – reinforce our core views, our cultural biases, and from mind to matter, they manifest in the life decisions we make, including the ways we live, dress, pray, eat, go to war, and, in a most extreme adherence to ideological dogma, memetic thought can powerfully foster the way, if so inclined, one chooses to die. *Memes are the road signs directing us to self-identity.*

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CHAPTER THREE

DESTRUCTIVE SEEDS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL DEBASEMENT THEORY

The enduring shock of September 11th is that we did not understand the world we live in, understand that educated young men with bright futures would burn with such hatred that they would die to destroy us. They succeeded by commitment and cunning. We failed from complacency and poor imagination. They caught us by surprise because we did not dream this could happen here.

We can only hope that part of what lies buried beneath the ashes at Ground Zero are America’s illusions.

--- Hedrick Smith, “Inside the Terror Network,” PBS, January 17, 2002

**Why Do They Hate Us?**

In the days, weeks, and months immediately following September 11, 2001, the repeated refrain from the George W. Bush Administration was that the hijackers attacked the United States because they did not like “our way of life.”

Case studies in the course of my research confirm that, on the surface, this statement was and remains true. They certainly did not, nor do they now like our way of life! But the shallow simplicity of this explanation serves only as an impediment to a deeper understanding that is required to defuse global social combustibility.

To examine the roots of radical Islamic jihadism against the West, this study has relied on the science of the human mind. It has relied on an anthropological approach to examine how individuals think, work, and organize themselves, using an interdisciplinary prism that includes neuroscience, religion, politics, history, communications, sociosexuality, as well as exchange symbolism, *the symbols of which are memes!* While I have referred to memes as road signs along the path to identity, these road signs are also the footprints of those who have preceded us along that path. They offer significant insight into who we are and what we believe. All of the aforementioned disciplines, such as religion, history, etc., have the potential to combine into a giant aggregate to define an

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individual’s identity and the resulting memes act as identifying signs, resulting in exchange symbolism, which is “the exchange of signs for the real.”\textsuperscript{115}

For example, the Catholic pilgrims who walk along the Camino across the north of Spain to the northwest coastal town of Santiago de Compostela carry walking sticks with scallop shells hooked to the top end of each stick. The scallop shells are visual memes that identify them instantly as Catholic pilgrims. At nightfall, the pilgrims choose to stay overnight in boarding homes or hostels, as referenced in the preceding chapter, called \textit{albergues}, which the pilgrims identify by the scallop shells that hang from the front door of each \textit{albergue}. In this example, individuals follow the visual memetic road signs of the scallop shell symbols laid out by those who have preceded them. The pilgrims carry their own visual memes, scallop shells, to demonstrate their self-identities in unity with those who operate the \textit{albergues}.

French sociologist Jean Baudrillard first put forth the concept of “symbolic exchange,” which he explained as a system of communication in which signs are “saturated with meaning, along with their phantasies and unconscious logic, as well as their prestigious differential logic.”\textsuperscript{116} One can use the terms symbols and memes interchangeably because they both accomplish the same purpose by


using cultural markers to convey units of information quickly about the culture of a specific group of people.

The complex clarity of Baudrillard’s concept fits both a foundational memetic examination of jihadism and a labyrinthine capstone atop of jihadism’s metastasis. “Behind this dual logic lies the anthropological dream: the dream of the object as existing beyond and above exchange and use, above and beyond equivalence; the dream of a sacrificial logic, of gift, expenditure, potlatch… symbolic exchange.”\(^\text{117}\) Baudrillard theory argues that conceptual objects, tangibly real or idealized, which can be a singular mental concept or an object that is embedded with conceptual meaning, such as the example of the scallop shells, are first coded from their base existence of conventional thought and usage, and then become elevated into an intricately coded communications system that supports social interactions.

Let’s consider some examples that will help to bring Baudrillard’s concept into full view and with a visual memetic application to the concept of jihadism. We will begin with the obelisk. In its origination, the architectural Egyptian obelisk was a symbol that represented the \textit{benben}, “the primordial mound upon which the sun god Atum (Ra) stood at the creation of the world.”\(^\text{118}\) The \textit{benben} was associated with the \textit{benu} bird (also known as \textit{bennu}-bird), a mythological

\textsuperscript{117} Baudrillard, Jean and Bernard Schuetze, The Ecstasy of Communication (Semiotext(e) / Foreign Agents, (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e) Publishing, 2012), 19.

Egyptian deity that had powers of creation of life, rebirth into new life, and regeneration into a new life form. The etymology of the name *benu* means “to rise in brilliance,” just as the sun rises over the eastern horizon each morning and, to the ancient eye, was symbolic of giving renewal to a new day. As the primeval sacred bird of Heliopolis (“sun city” in Greek), the ancient worship center of the sun god Ra, the *benu* bird drew on the power of the sun and was revered for its believed ability to maintain the earthly life cycle.

The image of this bird is striking to the author of this study. While it resembles a heron, long associated with the emerging high ground around the Nile River’s flooding and, as such, a symbol of cyclical regeneration, atop its head is an image that evokes the act of human procreation. There appears a pictorial representation of the female vaginal labia embracing the male phallus, symbol of potent fertility and new life.

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Greek historian Herodotus (fifth century BCE) was intrigued by the mythological powers of the *benu* bird and thus began a Greek revision of the symbolism of the sacred bird, which he called the *phoenix*. The bird died and rose from the burning ashes of its nest to spread its wings with new life. The cultural complexities of this literary motif are profound and global, with linkage from the ancient Egyptian *benu* bird to the Chinese *fenghuang* bird, which is a bird composed of two phoenixes, one a male (*feng*) and the other a female (*huang*), and is believed to be immortal, reflecting the never-ending cycle of

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122 Ibid.
But it is Herodotus’s term – the *phoenix* -- that has long sailed into perpetuity in the Western World, with present day conceptual applications to Japan’s rebuilding after the devastating Kobe earthquake of 1995, as well as to the resolve the United States showed following the devastating terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.\(^{124}\)

The lineage from the Egyptian obelisk’s original *benben* to the *benu* to the *phoenix* suggests the erect structure of The Washington Monument, the tallest obelisk in the world. This massive structure that weighs 81,120 tons and towers 555 feet and 5 1/8 inches\(^{125}\) over Washington, DC., the capital city of the United States of America, stands as a looming, physical presence that conveys the United States’ individual civil liberties, secular government, and colossal, global military might.

No Islamic jihadist needs to be a mythologist, an etymologist, or a student of history to understand the memetic message of power that the United States’ hegemonic symbolism of the monument conveys, nor, on a more subliminal level, what Washington, D.C.’s obeliscal structure communicates. The monument’s message is received on an intuitively nonverbal basis.\(^{126}\) It is "[Nigg, Joseph, *The Phoenix: An Unnatural Biography of a Mythical Beast*, (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 21-23.]

\(^{124}\) Ibid., xv.


message that is felt. In the language of Baudrillard’s exchange symbolism, The Washington Monument is a powerful phallic symbol that signifies in terms both earthly and divine unique blessings on the New World of the Common Era, with the power to reproduce its influence on a worldwide scale.

In New York Harbor, the Statue of Liberty rises high above the United States’ eastern shoreline, recognized worldwide “as a universal symbol of freedom and democracy.” In crafting the giant structure in 1870, French sculptor Frederic Auguste Bartholdi drew his inspiration from the Colossus of Rhodes, which depicted a virile, “naked young man,” with the head of the ancient Greek sun god Helios, “standing stiffly erect... holding a torch in one hand and a spear in the other.” This ancient statue collapsed during an earthquake in 226 BCE, but its original construction was purposefully designed to celebrate Helios’s bestowment of sun-driven energy, enterprise and personal freedoms upon the people of Rhodes following Rhodes’s victory in a battle between the ancient states of Rhodes and Cyprus.

To Bartholdi, the Colossus of Rhodes was symbolic of the universal struggle for personal freedoms from one era to the next and he assigned the same symbolism to the twentieth century population shift from the Old World to


the New World. Batholdi believed the statue he created defined America’s role in the world and he embedded that message into every hand stroke he chiseled upon Lady Liberty’s strong face and body, along with the sweeping majesty of the stola, her fully and securely draped toga-style gown. Bartholdi’s colossus standing in New York Harbor was to be and has remained every inch the symbol of strength that was the Colossus of Rhodes.\footnote{Mitchell, Elizabeth, \textit{Liberty’s Torch – The Great Adventure to Build the Statue of Liberty}, (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2014), 47-53.}

In an 1883 poetry competition to raise funds for the new statue’s pedestal, poet Emma Lazarus carried Bartholdi’s physical message forward with penetratingly eternal words. Born in New York City to a large Sephardic Jewish family that had emigrated to the New World long before the American Revolutionary War, she understood through the personal stories of her family the individual quest for freedom. She knew well the toll it extracted on the human spirit and she projected the symbology of the Colossus of Rhodes onto “The New Colossus,”\footnote{Schor, Esther, \textit{Emma Lazarus - Jewish Encounters Series}, (New York: Schocken Books/Penguin Random House, LLC, 2006), 127.} the name of her poem, and her name for the Statue of Liberty of the New World.

“Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”\footnote{Ibid., 189.} One look at the statue and the split-second memetic impression it makes on the human mind

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\textit{Ibid., 189.}
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leaves an imprint indelible, never fading, and ever vibrant, with a future fertile with human possibilities and opportunities. The Statue of Liberty is a symbol loaded with inspirational thoughts about the sacred rights of man and it conveys its evocative message nonverbally in split-second memetic transmission from one mind to the next. Today we can just imagine the swell of hope twentieth century immigrants felt about their futures as their ships approached the New York shoreline. Lady Liberty, holding her torch, conveyed the message to them that anything was possible.

All of the perceived worldwide potential and possibility of life in the United States – born from the sheer potency of the human spirit and not from God – stands in absolute and diametric opposition to the Islamic jihadist’s worldview of obsequiousness to a faith-based god whose laws are put forth by mere mortals. This is a clash of social identities that makes no accommodation for the Other. On September 11, 2001, the hijackers attacked both New York and Washington, DC, centers of the United States’ financial, governmental, and military might. I argue that the jihadists were drawn into a tribal identity of violent Islamic jihadism, which is predicated on the annihilation of the West, because they felt diminished in self-worth.133 Their worldview was a sociological tinder box. When they stepped onto the planes the morning of September 11, they sought not just physical destruction and mass murder, but the total obliteration of the contagious Western civilization message of strength, influence, virility, and the power to

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reproduce. In the most tangible and destructive way possible they aimed to stop – in the truest sense of Darwin’s word about replication – everything the West had come to stand for at its home and elsewhere in the world. Theirs was a mission of bloodshed and cultural genocide.

**Memetic Road Signs to Identity**

Memes can have both positive and negative influences on the psychological mix of an individual's identity. They can also act as the yellow flashing warning blinkers along a railroad crossing. For example, an individual who is a self-identified “defender” of the U.S. Second Amendment right to bear arms, and who feels also that the Second Amendment is under attack by fellow citizens who advocate stricter firearm restrictions, might decide to begin carrying a firearm on his hip\(^{134}\) to demonstrate his solidarity with the pro-gun political ideology that the National Rifle Association puts forth on a daily basis. The gun on the hip becomes a visual meme. An observer needs only to glimpse the gun, worn like an accessory to the wearer’s clothes, and the observer receives instant information on the wearer’s political ideology. It states loudly and clearly the proactive advocacy about the benefits of having many firearms available and unrestrictedly at hand in a free society.

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Likewise, an abortion rights opponent might wear a Christian crucifix prominently around her neck, unconcealed by blouse collars or scarves, to suggestively demonstrate her self-identification with a religious ideology that is cloaked in self-proclaimed moral superiority and also opposes a woman’s legal right to terminate a pregnancy through medically safe means. In a politically charged environment over abortion rights, the observable crucifix becomes a visual meme that transmits the self-righteous presumption to the observer that God, the conceptual almighty meme Himself, is on the side of the anti-abortion group. Visual memes announce self-identities and reinforce self-held ideologies with versatile effectiveness.

Adherents to Sharia law demand that men grow beards. Like the above examples of the gun or the Christian crucifix, a Muslim male may decide on his own to grow out his facial hair to reflect his devotion to his faith. However, in regions controlled by radical Islamic fundamentalism, wearing a beard is not a matter of choice. Men who do not grow out their facial hair meet brutal physical punishment for their infractions. This requirement is not based on the teachings of the Koran, but, instead, through a hadith attributed to Muhammad, which says, “Cut the moustaches short and leave the beard.”

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According to Sharia law, a man’s beard needs to be at least a “fist” long.\textsuperscript{137} The practice of wearing a beard underscores Islam’s strong insistence on gender identity and the societal supremacy of males over females, who cannot grow beards as Muhammad did. In this example, the visual meme of a man’s beard is sometimes socially enforced, depending on the region. I argue that social enforcement, where it does occur, is evidence of a meme’s power to influence. Otherwise, the prevailing social powers would not want to harness this important message to its cause. Where it is not socially enforced, it remains a clear message by the wearer of the beard that he simply wants it known that he is a devoted follower of Islam.

Big, bushy beards have become so closely identified with followers of extreme Islamic fundamentalism that some countries have begun controlling bearded men as a matter of national security. In 2009, police in Tajikistan “shaved off the beards of almost 13,000 men in a bid to stamp out what authorities deemed ‘radicalisation,’” while the “Chinese city of Karamay banned men with big beards or Islamic clothing from its buses.”\textsuperscript{138} Beards, as well as all other markers of cultural identities, such as selected manners of dress, verbal expressions, religious customs, and social practices, do not always become memes, but they have the potential to become memes. In the Tajik and Chinese


examples above, the observable beard is not only a cultural factor of the Muslim faith, but it is also a visual meme because of the message it sends.

A clear distinction must be made between cultural factors and memes. Cultural factors are a set of precise facts about the people of a tribal group that define the group’s culture. These factors include widely held group values and beliefs, the language the group uses to communicate, the dominant religion of the group, the foods they eat, the music they enjoy, and the art they create. These are purely and simply the facts of a given culture.

Each of these cultural factors, however, have the potential to signify concepts, ideologies, and tribal group associations by instantly transmitting the units of information they carry. When a cultural factor becomes a meme, it no longer simply describes a culture, but it transmits a message about the cultural factor instantaneously from one human mind to the next. Staying with the example of the beard, the message in both Tajikistan and China has been to consider the beard-wearing man with suspicion because he may be an adherent to a radical Islamic group that wishes to create civil unrest.

In addition to serving as demonstrative evidence of one’s self-identification, memes can also signal important changes in an individual’s personal status. For example, traditional Muslim burial practices require a ritual washing of the corpse and removal of all body hair as a requisite act before entering paradise. Knowing that his body will be destroyed in a suicide mission, a bearded jihadist takes preparatory measures beforehand to remove all body hair, including his pubic hair, and then perfumes his entire body with cologne to
sweeten the scent of his soul upon arrival in paradise, making himself more appealing to the virgins that await him. These preparations for martyrdom mark the jihadist’s brotherhood with those who have taken the same path before him. A jihadist’s depilation is in accordance with the hadith that says, “May Allah bless those who shaved.”

While the total absence of body hair on a once bushy-bearded jihadist could signal that preparations for an imminent attack have been made, it could also serve as a useful guise in the art of subterfuge. It is commonly observed that men without facial hair move more freely throughout cities, airport terminals, train stations, etc. They move without prejudice, without pause or hesitation. Hence, it is also a powerfully cunning cover for the jihadist who is intent on committing mass public murder. Go clean shaven and one may not notice the jihadist’s intent – except, perhaps, to the keen law enforcement observer in the prevention of terrorism.

“Me” becomes “We”

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An examination of human identity requires a phenomenological approach because “the complexity of living systems of people and nature emerges not from a random association of a large number of interacting factors,” but, instead, “from a smaller number of controlling processes.” Basic classifications of human identity are based on, but not exclusively fixed on, one's gender, race, religion, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Additional factors that further define an individual’s identifying classification include personal attributes, socio-economical standing, education, and occupation, which swirl continuously around the individual’s ego, leaving a dynamical imprint on the individual’s self-assessment.

Individuals wrap their self-identities around a type of identity that, simply, makes them feel good about themselves at continuously changing times in their lives. The ever-moving components that integrate into human identity make the social sciences, in the words of the late Nobel Laureate in physics, Richard Feynman, the most challenging of academic disciplines. “Imagine how much harder physics would be if electrons had feelings!” Nevertheless, the end goal in the adoption of personal identification is the sense of self-satisfaction in the me.

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144 Russell, “The DARPAAnthropologist.”
One’s identification with a community of socialization is based on societal factors, such as economics, politics, education, geographical regions, national identifications, sports teams, school affiliations and pastimes in common. Successful integration in a community of socialization is important to the human need to belong. But how does an individual come to identify with a specific group of people? This is achieved through enculturation, a process through which the individual gradually acquires the values, characteristics, and normative cultural customs of a given group of people.\footnote{Shimahara, Nobuo, "Enculturation-A Reconsideration," \textit{Current Anthropology} 11, no. 2, 143-54, (1970), \url{http://www.jstor.org.eznvcc.vccs.edu:2048/stable/2740527} (Accessed October 16, 2018).}

Sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann detailed the process of social construction in their 1966 book \textit{The Social Construction of Reality – A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge}. Viewing man through an anthropological lens, Berger and Luckmann explain that “the human being must ongoingly externalize itself in [social] activity,” because “the inherent instability of the human organism makes it imperative that man himself provide a stable environment for his conduct.” The “habitualization” of social activities establish a social “institutionalization,” that fulfils the biological need of humans to be social beings.\footnote{Berger, Peter, L. and Thomas Luckmann, \textit{The Social Construction of Reality – A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge}, (New York: First Anchor Books Edition, 1966 (1967 edition), 51-53.} In fulfillment of the human biological social need to belong, and through the process of enculturation, humans share fictional cultural realities with
others who share the same culture. Once man creates the self, “he must create a social environment which has meaning to him; otherwise unbearable chaos and meaningless result.”¹⁴⁷ This process takes place as an internalized mental process that draws on the extent of positive or negative feedback the individual receives from one’s societal interactions.

Through this process of enculturation, the singular, first-person pronoun perspective, the “me becomes we,”¹⁴⁸ which, it is important to cite, is itself a word meme because of its ability to shortcut communication and transmit thought. Simply upon hearing those three words, the conceptual field of human social constructions is referenced to the social scientist’s conditioned ear, the same way “Never Forget,” draws immediate reference to many Americans about the carnage, pain, and loss the United States suffered in the September 11, 2001 attacks.

Social psychologist Henri Tajfel and his University of Bristol student John Turner demonstrated in their theory of human social identity (1979) that the emerging group behavior, the “we,” is an amplification of the evolutionary development of the individual identity. When the individual belongs to a group of like-minded people, he or she shares a common bonding of self-interest that through sheer numbers boosts the magnitude of the individual’s sense of pride.


¹⁴⁸ Russell, “The DARPAntropologist.”
and self-esteem. But the self-affirmation does not stop there. The individual’s self-image grows exponentially through the enhanced status of the group to which the individual belongs. For example, someone with a strong nationalistic identification with the United States would likely believe in the concept of American exceptionalism and would be an enthusiastic proponent of this baseless theory, possibly with verbal “patriotic chest-thumping” bravado.

The unified message of the American Exceptionalism in-group is that the United States of America is uniquely superior to all other nations of the world in all measurable ways – morally, economically, politically, militarily, philanthropically, etc. While nationalistic ideologies have been commonplace throughout the last 300 years, none in contemporary times has maintained the dominance of American Exceptionalism. Its followers embrace a “patently universal – even messianic – [unique] belief in America’s special character and role in the world.”

However, any noble or genuinely idealistic goal of American Exceptionalism can become prey to the innate human desire to feel better about oneself, resulting in the observable behavior of pure arrogance. Accordingly, an

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in-group may then begin to denigrate the characteristics of out-groups to enhance their own in-group’s self-esteem, as demonstrated by comments made by President Donald J. Trump about African nations and those seeking to immigrate to the United States.\textsuperscript{152} In the view of the American Exceptionalism in-group, the rest of the world are a “bunch of losers!”\textsuperscript{153}

Tajfel and Turner explain that an individual’s self-image as part of a larger social identity group is further enhanced through the practice of “discriminating and holding prejudice views against [an] out-group”\textsuperscript{154} – a group to which the individual does not belong. The ultimate goal of every collective group is legitimacy. The socially healthy need for group legitimacy, which establishes justification for the group’s existence, is an extension of the individual’s self-justification, but on a collective basis.\textsuperscript{155}

Examples of healthy proactive self-advocacy can be observed in American politics where one group, Republicans, have historically in the past called for fiscal responsibility in government and another group, Democrats, have historically called for expanded civil liberties. Both groups compete for political


\textsuperscript{153} McLeod, “Social Identity Theory.”

\textsuperscript{154} Ibid.

dominance, but in the examples of fiscal responsibility and civil liberties, both
groups self-advocate on positive ground. In this example, the collective groups
are still operating along the in-group / out-group dynamic, but the emphasis is on
each group’s positive qualities and values.

The scrimmage between in-groups and out-groups turns toxic when one
group, which we will refer to here as the in-group, believes its justification of
legitimacy has been weakened. At this point we observe an escalation of
discrimination by the in-group to such a degree of discrimination that “it can only
be satisfied at the expense of an out-group.” Using the same example of
American politics, we can observe this escalating hostile dynamic in the current
Republican need to impugn the work of Special Counsel Robert S. Mueller, III in
his investigation into Russia’s interference in the U.S. presidential election of
2016 – known as the Mueller report – because Republicans fear the report will
threaten the legitimacy of the Trump Presidency.

Tajfel’s and Turner’s theory of social identity helps us to understand the
evolution of human social identity. Their theoretical model demonstrates the
continuum from “social categorization” to “social identification,” which leads
progressively to a point of “social comparison,” where one group’s collective

\[156\] Ibid.

\[157\] Lozada, Carlos, “The Mueller Report Isn’t Just a Legal Document. It’s Also the Best
Book on the Trump White House So Far,” The Washington Post, April 19, 2019,
also-best-nonfiction-book-trump-white-house-so-
far?noredirect=on&stream=top&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiosam&utm_medium=email&utm_
source=newsletter&utm_term=.1f0fa912c327 (Accessed April 21, 2019).
fiction is either compatible or incompatible with another group’s collective fiction. It is at this point where social groups must either work out their differences or struggle with each other for categorical dominance.

In the first stage, called “social categorization,” individuals categorize the human characteristics and attributes of the station into which they were born, such as race, ethnicity, religion, types of family or self-employment, political leanings, etc. Individuals then self-explore to determine what, if anything, they have in common with other groups of people. This stage is fluid and with a multidirectional flow of influence on one’s self-perception, because the individual becomes aware that one has diverse points of categorical commonality with others.

The second stage, called “social identification,” is where the individual assigns oneself within a group of like-minded individuals. He or she bonds with

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158 McLeod, “Social Identity Theory.”
those who have similar skills, or with those who have adopted similar worldviews. It is in this stage that memetic signifiers, such as the wearing of religious jewelry, or the enactment of specific behavioral practices, serve to reinforce the individual’s human identity.

The third and final stage is “social comparison,” where groups take measure of one another, and either find common ground or compete with one another to maintain and/or enhance their self-esteem. The competition is not only a contest for resources, as jobs are between the working class and the perceived threat of illegal immigrants siphoning available job opportunities, but also for socially dominant identities and values.

Examples of oppositional collective social identities include:

-- U.S. Politics: Republicans and Democrats
-- Political Ideologies: Conservatives and Liberals
-- Sports: New York Yankees and Boston Red Sox
-- Sectarian: Hutus and Tutsi (Rwanda)
-- Foods: Conventional, Organic, and Genetically Modified Organisms
-- Intra-Religion: Protestants and Catholics
-- Inter-Religion: Christianity and Islam (Crusades)
-- Social: Working Class and Welfare Class
-- State Rule: Democracies and Dictatorships
-- Societal: Western Liberalism and Islamic Sharia

Tajfel and Turner’s model showing the progression from “me” to “we” is reflected in the work of Georgetown University psychologist Fathali M.
Moghaddam, who was a former doctoral student of Tajfel and has expanded Tajfel’s theory to show the influence of collective normative factors on the formation of personal self-identity. “Individual authenticity arises from collective authenticity; more broadly, individual consciousness arises from collective consciousness.” In consideration of terrorism, Moghaddan has established a theoretical model, called the Staircase to Terror, that charts the individual’s progression from membership in the collective group of nonviolent society members to the collective group who execute murderous acts upon society.

On the bottom, ground-level rung of Moghaddam’s theoretical staircase, inhabitants view life as basically fair to all. On the first step up the staircase, the individual who believes he or she can make a difference to improve society, to make it fairer, leave the staircase to pursue their noble interests. Those who are unable to reconcile perceived injustices in society move up to the second step where perceived threats to a just society are being assessed and enemy targets are being determined. On the third step, the aggrieved individual is drawn to the collective of individuals who feel the same way about a perceived societal enemy. It is here that individuals begin to adopt the cultural markers, through enculturation, of their collective “we,” and violence is actively considered as a suitable option in their pursuit of justice. On the fourth step, there is a

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159 Moghaddam, Fathali M., From the Terrorists’ Point of View - What They Experience and Why They Come to Destroy, 26.

pronounced emphasis of “us” versus “them,” and a campaign of active, stealthy recruitment is underway to strengthen the collective so that it can strike hard and fast at the perceived target without warning. On the fifth and uppermost step, the individuals of the collective are ready to strike and kill on broad scale, free of all inhibitions and without hesitation. Their enemy targets have become dehumanized objects that threaten the collective group’s existence (the in-group) and the killers are imbued with a moral imperative that can be satisfied only with the total annihilation of the enemy (the out-group).

**“Us” versus “Them”**

The psychological theme of “us” versus “them,” devoid of reasoned justification, lies at the center of human tension and hostilities. Psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists have long recognized the potent influence of

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161 Ibid.

religious identity in the formation of an individual’s self-identity and the role
religion has played in world conflict, as evidenced by the number of religious
wars throughout recorded history. This supports the point I made earlier in this
study regarding the memetic potency of the word “God” as having the ability to
marshal ultimate ideological allegiances, fostering the human need to belong.

Individuals who have low self-esteem and who feel marginalized in
society, gravitate to a group that helps to elevate their self-esteem. This is
supported by persuasive scientific evidence. For example, brain scans done on
individuals in the course of academic research show demonstrable leaps in
neural activity when a home sports team wins and, also, when a particularly
strong rival sports team loses to a third-party sports team.¹⁶³ There is a deep-
seated pleasure humans feel when they feel like winners and not like losers.
The aggrieved individual who sees himself on the losing side often seeks
retribution through an amplified channel that follows violent tracks of
absoluteness.

Through his bonding with like-minded individuals, the single individual
then finds power in numbers when the violent absoluteness is prosecuted as a
group. The group to which the aggrieved individual belongs gives him “a

¹⁶³ Cikara, Mina and Matthew M. Botvinick, Susan T. Fiske, "Us Versus Them: Social
Identity Shapes Neural Responses to Intergroup Competition and Harm," Psychological
(Accessed April 13, 2019).
collective identity that is stronger than an individual self.”164 Feeling strengthened by the group dynamic, the group acts in unison to strike back at their perceived enemy. The goal of the aggrieved individual on a course of retribution, and now part of a collective group in the same mission of violence, is total obliteration of the Other. There is no negotiable ground in this virulent mindset. The “us” is gripped by a cold, calculative determination to annihilate the “them.”

There are abundant examples of this social dynamic throughout history. Wars have long been waged solely on the basis of sectarian hatred towards any group of people different from another.165 These differences are defined through denominations of social class, race, religion, ethnicity, nationality, and politics, etc., and are driven by a human fear of the Other so deep that nothing short of its total extinction will end hostilities. Sectarian conflicts, such as the ethno-nationalistic-driven Irish rebellion against Great Britain in Northern Ireland, known as the period of The Troubles,166 are powered by memetically charged words that stoke the flames of fear and result in the dehumanization of the target population


by the aggressor forces, hardening the aggressors to eradicate their chosen
targets without hesitation and without a shred of humanity.

In the twentieth-century alone, Germany and Rwanda stand out as classic
to sectarian war by a more powerful population group against a
dehumanized group of victims. During the rise of Nazi Germany, Adolf Hitler’s
propagandists called Jews “rats,” portraying them as an “alien race that fed off
the host nation, poisoned its culture, seized its economy, and enslaved its
workers and farmers.”167 During the 1994 Rwandan genocide, the majority
ethnic Hutu population rose in a 100-day-long bloodthirsty purge of the minority
ethnic Tutsi population, ruthlessly slaughtering some 800,000 people. Hutu
propagandists called the Tutsis “cockroaches” that needed to be exterminated.
“A cockroach cannot give birth to a butterfly… a cockroach gives birth to another
cockroach…. [the Tutsis] occupied the jobs which southern Hutu wanted and
failed to get… [and the Tutsis have] taken a disproportionate share of places in
secondary school and university”168 in an orchestrated quest to dominate all
professional quarters and the government. In both of these examples, these slurs
were more than mere insults hurled with the intention of degradation. These
slurs aimed at the out-group, “rats” and “cockroaches,” came to signify a
pestilence that needed to be destroyed by the in-group for the purpose of the in-
group’s own self-preservation.

167 “Defining the Enemy,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum,

168 “Propaganda and Practice,” Human Rights Watch,
Collective Fictional Realities

Belongingness is a universal human need that transcends all cultural boundaries. Social psychologists Roy Baumeister and Mark Leary explain that “the need to belong is a fundamental human need to form and maintain at least a minimum amount of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships.” The human need to belong to a specific group of people is demonstrated through reciprocal acceptance, recognition, and support amongst members of a group. Social practices that appear as simple cultural norms or practices are also memes because of the instant information they convey. The enactment of a certain gesture or a manner of greeting communicates instantly that there is a shared unity of identification within a group of people, all of whom practice the same common social norm.

For example, in Arabic-speaking regions of the world, it is customary to acknowledge an offering of food with the words Al-hamdu lil-āh, which means “praise be to God.” This expression is used amongst Arab Christians and Jews who are native born in Arabic speaking countries, along with the Muslim majorities of the regional populations. A simple Western response, such as thank you (English), danke (German), merci (French) or grazie (Italian), identifies


the speaker as someone outside the Arabic-speaking diaspora. In this manner, the words *Al-hamdu lil-āh*, which is a common social exchange in the Arab-speaking world, serves as a verbal meme to confirm psychological inclusion in the regional linguistic tribe of native Arab-speakers.  

As this study progresses towards the examination of a more abstract social construct, it is important to underscore the influence of memes in both individual and group identities. Memes, such as manners of dress, adherence to specific ideological beliefs, the embrace or avoidance of specific foods, and compliance with rigid behavioral practices, are amongst the various demonstrable acts that coalesce to signify a shared community of identity. The need to belong and the power of this need on the human psyche cannot be underestimated. It is through a driven identification with common tribes, such as families, clans, villages, neighborhoods, social clubs, or religious groups that an individual is able to fulfill one’s need to belong. It is an anthropological trigger on the most primal impulse to survive where surviving as a tribal group – like wolves in a pack – offers better odds than surviving alone in the world.

A distinction, however, needs to be made between two very distinguishable types of human identity. We learn from Israeli historian Yuval Noah Harari’s groundbreaking work, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*  

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171 Al-Tahrawi, Khalil, Professor of Arabic, Northern Virginian Community College, Interview, Woodbridge, VA, March 20, 2019.

that shared biases, along with core values and worldviews in common, coalesce to create a shared “fictional reality,” also referred to as a “collective identity.”\textsuperscript{173} This refers to the \textit{cultural anthropological} world we make for ourselves. It stands apart and in counteractive opposition to the \textit{physical anthropological} world that makes us through the physical traits of our species. These two coexisting and symbiotic realms of existence create crises of human identities when disjunctions between the social and physical world clash into discord within the human mind.

For example, when a Catholic priest is ordained, he commits to a consecrated life that includes clerical celibacy. This is the cultural anthropological world the newly ordained priest enters. But the priest is a man, who as a biological male carries all of the physical impulses of the physical man, including the male libido that responds upon sexual arousal by sending a blood flow to the genital area in preparation for coitus. This is the physical anthropological world in which the individual lives, driven by his genes, and it is squarely at odds with the cultural anthropological world that is memetically driven and has becomes the individual’s fictional reality. The clash between the two worlds becomes the inner struggle within the individual to suffer the sacrifice of his normal biological urge in expression of his spiritual discipline, and this self-sacrifice serves as a unifying bond within the tribe of his Catholic clergy.

Continuing with Harari’s theory about fictional realities, also called collective identities, it is important to understand that this is the cultural world a

group of people create for themselves. It is viewed differently, set apart in one’s consideration of it, from the physical world in which individuals inhabit, where the climate dictates diet and manner of dress. In considering the parameters of both physical and fictional realities, if one is a loser in a physical reality, one ceases to exist. One dies. If one is a loser in a fictional reality, the human mind has the ability to create a new fictional reality.

A stark example of the physical world would be the Inuit who lives north of the Arctic Circle and subsists on a diet of raw fish and meat, no vegetables, and keeps warm in the frigidly cold climate by dressing in the skins of the animals he has killed to consume their flesh. The Inuit needs food, water, and shelter to physically survive. This same Inuit may pray to Sila, the god whom he believes controls the weather. If the weather is good, the Inuit believes that Sila is happy. If Sila is not happy, the Inuit believes Sila’s wrath is expressed by bad weather that threatens the very survival of the Inuit people. The Inuit may possibly create a new fictional reality in which sacrifices are made to Sila in hopes of gaining Sila’s favor and, thus, receiving favorable weather. This is the cultural world the Inuits create and can recreate for themselves. It is their fictional reality.

It is critical to one’s understanding of human identity to appreciate the important role fictional realities represent in human development. According to Harari, Homo sapiens supplant their rival human species, Neanderthals, with

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their capacity to believe in shared realities. “Religions, nations, and money…. are all human fictions that have enabled collaboration and organization on a massive scale.” Given the landscape of human fictional realities, the potential for conflict grows when opposing fictional realities clash. This leads to the polarizing concept of “us” versus “them.”

Setting Harari’s anthropological physical worlds completely aside, and focusing solely on his collective fictional worlds, we encounter a clash of cultures, which is a clash of fictional realities. If humans believe largely in the same or in similar collective fictional realities – realities that are divorced from the physical world – then it is possible to live in compatible, culturally complex societies. But if one group’s collective fiction is different from another group’s, to the point that they are deemed incompatible and, in fact, intolerable to one another, then a crisis of collective identity occurs. The question is how do we negotiate these social behaviors and identities when the world is changing? “Unfortunately, it is the nature of a species to sometimes respond violently, to try to push the world back into a category where a collective group of people believe it should be, or

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177 McLeod, “Social Identity Theory.”
where they believe it was, where they once understood things and now they
don’t, and that can be very disturbing for our species, in particular.”\textsuperscript{178}

**FBI’s Behavioral Analysis Unit (BAU)**

Alongside the busy I-95 thoroughfare in Triangle, Virginia, tucked quietly in the woods that surround U.S. Marine Corps Base Quantico, is the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Behavioral Analysis Unit (BAU). Here forensic scientists use psychological profiling to understand the perpetrators of crimes and to unmask their identities. Amongst the many well-known cases the profilers have cracked are the Unabomber case, which resulted in the 1996 capture and life imprisonment of Ted Kaczynski,\textsuperscript{179} and the case of serial killer Theodore “Ted” Bundy, executed for his crimes in 1989.\textsuperscript{180}

There are five primary divisions within BAU that operate under the umbrella of the FBI’s Critical Incident Response Group (CIRG) / National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime (NCAVC):

- BAU1 – counterterrorism, arson, and bombing matters
- BAU2 – threats, cybercrime, and public corruption

\textsuperscript{178} Russell “The DARPAnthropologist.”


BAU3 – crimes against children

BAU4 – crimes against adults, and violent criminal apprehensions

BAU5 – research, strategy, and instruction

University of California, San Diego, forensic psychologist J. Reid Meloy has developed a methodology called “Pathway to Violence,” to assist the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigations better identify threats to public safety. By applying Meloy’s model, the FBI’s behavioral scientists have been able to follow the progressively violent path of the individual to the group and, ultimately, on to the stage of the world-at-large. The model was initially created for BAU3’s work in preventing school shootings. Later, forensic profilers found that it had fitting applications in the assessment of threats from terrorism and it became a workable model for BAU1.


It is important to note that the Pathway to Violence model includes no specific reference to religion. Instead, the model is entirely psychologically based, structured strictly on a progression of behavior that begins with the low self-worthlessness of the surveilled individual. Meloy’s Pathway to Violence model and Moghaddam’s Staircase to Terror model share the same trajectory from low self-esteem to violence.

In the beginning, there is a grievance. This can be a single event or series of events that have occurred that have caused the individual to feel defeated,

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183 Meloy and Hoffmann, *International Handbook of Threat Assessment.*
shamed, and deeply humiliated. The provoking issues are drawn from any number of disparate causes or events, but these grievances act corrosively in making the affected individuals feel personally debased.¹⁸⁴ Meloy points out that most people are eventually able to “grieve their loss,” but narcissistically sensitive individuals find it difficult to accept responsibility for disappointments and/or failures in life. They follow a life pattern of always blaming others for their failings and inadequacies. Unable or unwilling to recover, these individuals come to feel that the only path forward is to “convert their shame into rage towards the object which they believe is the cause of all their suffering.”¹⁸⁵

The rage the affected individuals feel is a humiliating fury that drives them to crave revenge through targeted violence. This type of violence is different from typical street violence that law enforcement agencies encounter, which is “emotionally charged, impulsive, and reactive.”¹⁸⁶ In a targeted violence, the individual premeditatedly plans an attack with cold, detailed, and highly calculated preparations. The planned attack takes into account not only the object of destruction, but the setting for the destruction, which is selected for the optimum amount of public exposure and, ideally, news coverage.


Following a continuum in which moral outrage follows the grievance, the individual then becomes fixated with the object of his rage and with others whom the individual identifies as victims of the same injustice. This “pathological preoccupation” leads increasingly to a “deterioration in relationships [and/] or occupational performances,” and to an obsessive desire to destroy that which the individual sees as the cause of the individual’s humiliation. The individual views himself as a victim and develops a strong vicarious identification with others whom the individual believes were victimized for the same reasons. Through this transformative mental process, the individual psychologically joins the group he designates as collective victims and he begins to feel the group’s sufferings, real or imagined, which has the effect of keeping the grievance burning and calling for revenge.

Meloy explains that “the lone terrorist often has never actually suffered oppression or victimization as a member of the group with whom he identifies,” citing the November 2009 Fort Hood, Texas mass killer, Nidal Malik Hasan, as a case in point. “Hasan had never been personally attacked by the U.S., had no military comrades who were Taliban; and, in fact, had substantially benefitted from his commission in the U.S. Army, completing medical school, his residency, and his fellowship at U.S. taxpayers’ expense, and attaining the rank of Major.” Meloy explains that the aggrieved individual’s planned act of targeted violence becomes unquestionably justified in his mind, and increasingly carries a moral

\[187\] Ibid.
imperative to succeed. “The motivation [to strike] is completed when the personal grievance and moral outrage is framed by an ideology,” as is clearly demonstrated in the example of Hasan who came to see himself as an ideological vanguard of Islamic jihadism. 188

In the following chapter, we will apply Meloy’s theory to case studies to identify the personal grievance each case individual has harbored, which has given rise to a rage against society, particularly towards Western society. In each case, also, this study will demonstrate how violent Islamic fundamentalism has become a welcome tent, a place that fulfills the human need to belong, while stoking the fires of hatred and revenge against the perceived perpetrator of the grievance – the world of Western civilization.

CHAPTER FOUR

CASE STUDIES OF

THE MUJAHIDEEN OF MASS MURDER

Those Who Have Inspired

188 Meloy, “The Lone Terrorist in the Workplace.”
In his formidable work, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996), Samuel P. Huntington, the late Harvard political scientist, established the influence of “civilization identities” on cultural “cohesion, disintegration and conflict” in vast territorial regions, such as the Western world.\(^{189}\) In particular and with direct application to a civilization’s identity, Huntington identified Islam as constituting “a threat to the basic values” and to the West’s “democratic mode of governance.”\(^{190}\) Why? Because, as this study has established in Chapter Three, it is the nature of an enculturated group of people to attempt to push the world back into a category where the collective group believes it should be.\(^{191}\)

This particular conflict between the collective identities of Islam and the West, Huntington said, is embodied by the West’s “arrogance” and Islam’s “intolerance.”\(^{192}\) By considering Huntington’s macrocosmic perspective and applying it microcosmically to the case individuals of this study, I argue that we can better understand the disaffection and antipathy each individual developed towards the West. Further, I argue that each individual came to identify with a militant role in this perceived clash of civilizations between Islam and the West,


\(^{191}\) Russell, “The DARPAAnthropologist.”

fueled by the personal grievances of each. There is a consistent progression along forensic psychologist J. Reid Meloy’s “Pathway to Violence” methodology, whereby each individual pursues a singular path of violence and then joins collective forces waging violence on the world stage against a common enemy.

Memes, as demonstrated in Chapter Two, are evolutionary concepts that reveal and illuminate the path an individual takes in the journey of self-identification. When that individual fails to achieve one’s expected social identity and functionality, the resulting socio-psychological identification as a “loser” is crippling, giving rise to a grievance. At this point, and unable to deal with one’s own personal failure, the individual is on the first step of Meloy’s pathway and carries the potential to advance to a full-blown metastasis of rage against a perceived enemy.

In examination of this sociological dynamic, this study will now examine the life paths of individuals who have inspired others to follow the path of jihadism. The next chapter will examine those who have accepted the call of jihadism. Both chapters will consider the case studies, principally through the lens of Meloy’s (2012) model, but also with respect to Moghaddam’s (2005) theoretical assessment model for potential terrorism. The consistent application of the key significant element in both models – the identification of a psychological failure that has resulted in a personal grievance that each individual has harbored in life – will be identified. From this standpoint, we will

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follow the memetic path to each individual’s increasingly hardened hostility and complete antipathy towards the West, fueled by words of inspiration and culminating in the ultimate act of murderous martyrdom.

**First Modern-Day Islamic Martyr – Sayyib Qutb**

The word “martyr” comes from the Greek word “witness” (μάρτυς) to truth.¹⁹⁴ It was a term in wide use during the early years of the Christian Church when Christian adherents suffered persecution from the civil authority of the Roman Empire. It confers the meaning that one has witnessed the saintliness of God/Allah and has been willing to sacrifice one’s life by dying for the greater being of God/Allah. Hence, one’s death through martyrdom is held as an act of the highest spiritual order.

Religious historian Daniel Boyarin, University of California, Berkeley, explains that martyrdom was long viewed as the consequence of one’s refusal to “violate his or her religious integrity.” However, we now find contemporary martyrdom “being actively sought as a spiritual requirement and as the only possible fulfillment of a spiritual need.” Further, Boyarin maintains that “it is in this formulation that we find the eroticization of the martyr’s death, as well.”¹⁹⁵ Boyarin’s consideration of eroticism in his characterization of martyrdom is significantly important to this study as the majority of the case examinations will reveal the erotic natures of the case subjects and, I argue, will eventually

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establish a connection between their personal eroticism, or lack thereof, and jihadism.

The original martyr of modern-day radical Islam is arguably Sayyib Qutb (1906-1966), who was executed by hanging as a co-conspirator in a plot to assassinate Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser. Qutb, a founding member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, was consumed with outrage that Nasser, who had successfully overthrown the opulently secular King Farouk, which ended 150 years of the dynastic Muhammad Ali family rule over Egypt, had subsequently rejected the Muslim Brotherhood’s aim for an Islamic theocracy ruled by Sharia law in favor of civil rule based on a secular nationalistic Egyptian ideology. Qutb’s passion for Egypt to be ruled by a primitive version of Islam was grandly stoked by his belief that Islam would eventually dominate the world, succeeding in hegemonic supremacy where just a few years earlier Adolf Hitler had failed.196

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The plan to send suicide bombers into New York City to crash into America’s towering skyscrapers was Hitler’s plan first. According to the November 18, 1947 diary entry of Albert Speer, Hitler’s minister of armaments and war production, Hitler would appear almost in a “delirium, [as] he was picturing to himself and to [others] the downfall of New York in towers of flames…. [Hitler] described the skyscrapers turning into huge burning torches and falling hither and thither, and the reflection of the disintegrating city in the dark sky.”

Hitler’s minister of propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, referred to the United States as a “Jewish state” and viewed New York City, with its large Jewish

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199 Ibid.
population and its robust financial markets, as the “centre of world Jewry.”

Hitler’s planned military strike on New York City was to achieve two purposes. It would deliver a strategic blow to the heart of America’s financial capital and it would continue his singular genocidal obsession against the Jews, which was fueled by Hitler’s fantasy that his actions would “liberate mankind” from a “Jewish world conspiracy.”

The 1944 Daimler-Benz plans for the “Amerikabomber” were based on four-engine aircraft with “raised underbellies beneath which small [bomber aircraft] could be strapped.” The shuttle bay would then launch the smaller plane on a suicide mission against New York City once the mother ship was within striking distance of the United States’ eastern coastline. The smaller attack planes were designed with no landing gear nor conventional weaponry of war. Instead, they were designed for speed, flying at nearly the speed of sound to produce explosive jet fuel suicidal lightning strikes on New York City’s tallest buildings.

Hitler’s North American “Amerikabomber” war plans never came to fruition, but his burning ember of rabid anti-Semitism was not extinguished with

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200 Ibid., XX.

201 Ibid., XX-XXI.

202 Ibid., XIX

the end of the Second World War. His monomaniacal hatred of the Jews found fresh kindling among North African Muslims during the war and burned far and wide long after Hitler's demise in the post-war atmosphere of the Islamic world.

The alliance between Nazi Germany and Islam was sealed in the early years of the war when Palestine’s grand mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini, who served in this capacity from 1917 to 1948, represented Nazi interests in Mandatory Palestine. Al-Husseini openly acknowledged that the Nazis and the Palestinian Arabs shared a common hatred of the Jews. He acted as a Nazi surrogate leader in Palestinian territories, “organized the ‘Nazi Scouts,’ based on the ‘Hitler Youth,’” and established the swastika as the “welcome symbol among many Palestinians.” Hitler’s propagandistic cultivation of the Muslim population throughout the Middle East was an important component of Nazi strategy during the North African Campaign of the Second World War (1940-1943) and produced the Free Arab Legion, comprised of Muslim volunteers who fought on the side of the Nazis.

It was in the anti-Semitic crucible of the post-World War II Middle East that Qutb, as a young Egyptian who identified with al-Husseini’s widely expressed worldview, formed his own dogmatic anti-Semitic ideology. In 1948, he left Egypt

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204 Morse, Chuck, The Nazi Connection to Islamic Terrorism: Adolf Hitler and Haj Amin al-Husseini, (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse Publishing, 2003), XIII.


for the first time in his life to study two years as a foreign student in the United States. It was at this point in his life, first exposed to America’s culturally diversified population, that Qutb’s deeply-rooted feelings of xenophobia prevented him from ever truly learning about and understanding Americans, who had established themselves as a world power following two world wars. For the period of his U.S.-based study, Qutb rejected all modernity as an affront and, in fact, deemed it a personal threat to Allah. He isolated himself in the margins of American society, while viewing the comfortable ease of Western social norms with a mix of keen curiosity, fear, and disgust.207

Sexually inexperienced in middle age, and harboring crippling psychological feelings of erotophobia, he felt constantly threatened by the naturalness with which the genders mixed in the United States. He found social mingling of the sexes revoltingly sinful and he believed it embodied a direct threat to Islam. He called Americans “primitive,” “animalistic,” and “bushmen” and he denigrated them because they liked to dance to jazz music.208 He harbored a particularly deep hatred for American women, whom he imagined having the lethality of the mythological Circe. “She knows seductiveness lies in the round


breasts, the full buttocks, and in the shapely thighs, sleek legs – and she knows all this and does not hide it.”

Studying in three cities, Washington, DC (Wilson Teachers College, now University of District of Columbia), Greeley, Colorado (Colorado State College of Education, now University of Northern Colorado), and at Stanford University, he withdrew socially “into a shell of disapproval, seeing sex as the main enemy of salvation.” He rejected any progressive interpretations of the Koran, believing instead that harsh adherence to the literal word of the Koran was the only redemptive course for humanity.

It was also at this same time of Qutb’s first exposure to Western society that Alfred Kinsey’s groundbreaking work on human sexuality was published, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948), over which Qutb developed an obsession, reading and memorizing passages, which he shared in his letters to friends in Egypt. As he saw it, the sexual act was disgusting and human sexuality was undermining the sanctity of Islam. He offered no philosophical accommodations for the act of procreation. To Qutb, human sexual behavior was mortifyingly abhorrent.

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209 Von Drehle, “A Lesson in Hate.”


Having spent his entire previous life in Egypt already feeling emotionally marginalized by Egypt’s growing secular society under King Farouk, and finding comfort only in the solitary world of his academic books, Qutb came to feel completely culturally exiled during his two years studying in American society. The social mixing of males and females deeply appalled him and struck at the heart of everything that he found wrong in the West. When he expressed his condemnation of societal gender mixing to one of his female professors in Greeley, Colorado, she didactically explained that “'the issue of sexual relations is simply biological [in the United States]. You Orientals complicate this simple matter by introducing a moral element to it. The stallion and the mare, the bull and the cow, the ram and the ewe, the rooster and the hen – none of them consider moral consequences when they have intercourse. And, therefore, life goes on, simple, easy, and carefree.'” Qutb considered the female professor to be “subversive,” and believed that her position on professional faculty made it all the more alarming since “she would be polluting generations of young people with her amoral philosophy.” I argue and will show evidence as this study continues that Qutb’s acute erotophobia, and his searing misogyny, cannot be overlooked as a significant influence in his subsequent radicalized view of Sharia law and Islam’s place in the post-World War II world order.

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213 Ibid., 24.

214 Ibid.
Second to sex in Qutb’s list of enemies of Islam were the Jews, whom he hated with a passion, expressing his hostilities in an abundance of writings, even though he had never come face-to-face with a Jew until he left Egypt and set foot in New York City. He found New York’s pluralistic society, with Jews, Christians, and Muslims functioning constructively together in pursuit of capitalistic aims revolting, reprehensible, and a complete abomination.²¹⁵

Threatened by the social freedoms both women and Jews enjoyed in the United States, and in the absence of any genuine human relationships, Qutb returned to Egypt in 1950 with a fire-hardened brand of Islamic fundamentalism and a powerful desire for belongingness. He based his worldview perspective on a global polarity of Islam versus the West. When he returned home to Egypt, he found that many of his countrymen were becoming not just increasingly secular in mindset, but were adopting observable Western customs, dress, lifestyles, and attitudes at a quickening pace.

Alarmed by this social trend, he began vigorously writing and speaking publicly against Western influence. He made human identification with Islam the focal point of his mission, calling for Muslims to see themselves solely in the family of Islam and not as part of any nationalistic order. This was and remains the seminal thought in radical Islamic fundamentalism – self-identity as a Muslim

²¹⁵ Ibid., 13-14.
first, foremost, and only. It is not unusual to hear present-day scholars refer to “the entire jihadist movement [as] ‘Qutbism.’”

In his 1964 manifesto, Milestones (Ma'alim fi al-Tariq), published two years before his 1966 execution and widely read to this day, Qutb divided the world into two spheres of history – the time before the Islamic Prophet Muhammad, Jahiliyyah, and the time afterwards, Sharia. The ignorant and foolish world, as Qutb characterized existence before the time of the Prophet Muhammad, was Jahiliyyah, a period of ignorance when humans showed submission to other humans instead of to God/Allah. Sharia represented the period of time following the Prophet when Qutb wrote that Allah brought Islamic enlightenment to the world and man understood to show submission to Allah.

In Qutb’s view, only those who self-identified with the most rigid interpretations of Islam should and would inherit the Earth. He called on Muslims worldwide to ban together and to join his “jihad,” calling it a holy Islamic war against the West, which he believed was the embodiment of Satanic forces upon the world. His iconoclastic ideological absolutism targeted secular societies, as well as all other religious systems and faiths in the world, which he viewed as existing malignancies within Allah’s post-Muhammad world.

His jihadist call reached the receptive ears of those who, like himself, felt marginalized by Western civilization and who would respond to his descriptive

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metaphor of the West crushing Islam beneath its feet. “The white man crushes us underfoot while we teach our children about his civilization... [we must instead] plant the seeds of hatred, disgust, and revenge in the souls of [our] children... the white man is the enemy of humanity, and [we] must destroy him at the first opportunity.”

This metaphoric theme of grievance from Qutb's manifesto, which presents as material evidence of Meloy's base step in his Pathway to Violence model, has been frequently repeated in the messages of many radical Islamic opinion leaders who followed Qutb, including Osama bin Laden. Qutb claimed that the glory of Allah’s kingdom on Earth could be restored only through the eradication of Western civilization. In the years prior to the September 11, 2001 attack on the United States, Osama bin Laden cited Qutb as a “martyr” in his own call for “global jihad that [he promised would] end with all men under direct, unmediated rule of Allah.”

A year before the September 11, 2001 attack, two of the hijackers, Nawaf al-Hazmi and Khalid al-Mihdhar, responded to Qutb’s and bin Laden’s clarion call to rise against the West. They received personal spiritual guidance and English language instruction at the Ar-Ribat Al-Islami mosque in San Diego, California from “a gifted and eloquent preacher by the name of Anwar al-Awlaki.” Later, as

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218 Wright, The Looming Tower – Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11, 23.

219 Qutb, Milestones (Ma’alim fi al-Tariq), 44-46.

the planned attack date drew near, Nawaf al-Hazmi again sought al-Awlaki’s guidance at the iman’s new post at Dar El Hijrah mosque in Falls Church, VA. Al-Hazmi brought along a third hijacker, Hani Hanjour. Trained as a pilot in Scottsdale, Arizona, Hanjour would later commandeer the controls of American Airlines Flight 77 out of Washington Dulles International Airport. While four “muscle” hijackers – Nawaf al-Hazmi, Salem al-Hazmi, Khalid al-Mihdhar, and Majed Moqed – subdued the aircraft passengers and crew, Hanjour slammed the aircraft at full throttle into the west side of the Pentagon.221

This study found no evidence of direct face-to-face contact between Osama bin Laden and Anwar al-Awlaki. However, it is reasonable to assume that physical contact between the two men could certainly have taken place through multiple shared geographical and geopolitical spheres of communication and influence, especially as al-Awlaki so ambitiously fulfilled bin Laden’s post September 11 call for martyrdom in pursuit of Sayyib Qutb’s stated goals.

Working from Qutb’s blueprint for jihadism, both bin Laden and al-Awlaki used the same memetically-charged language. Bin Laden called Westerners, particularly Americans, “Zionist-Crusaders” or “global crusaders.”222 For him, it was “a theological war” and that “the redemption of humanity was at stake.”223


Al-Awlaki referred to Westerners as “infidels” and “non-believers,” and said they were unworthy of life, repeating those terms again and again to his online sermon listeners.\textsuperscript{224} In echo chamber response, September 11 hijacker Mohamed Atta referred to Westerners as the “allies of Satan.”\textsuperscript{225} These pejoratives are not just words of insult, but they are words heavily charged with the ability to memetically motivate others to act against a designated enemy in a perceived struggle for survival, and Qutb made clear that the enemy was the West.

Both bin Laden and al-Awlaki self-identified as Qutb-inspired Muslim soldiers in accordance with Sayyib Qutb’s own worldview, which asserted Islam’s imperative to rule the world. Qutb called this imperative the “law of hakimiyyah,” commanding that “all human contact, political, economic, art, literature, or other activities” serve the purposeful pursuit of establishing an Islamic caliphate with dominion over the entire world.\textsuperscript{226}

The law of hakimiyyah is the core tenet of Qutbism, which lays the foundation of jihad against the West and which has been the guiding doctrine for


\textsuperscript{225} Atta, “‘The Last Night’ – Last Words of a Terrorist.”

the principal communicators of jihad – Osama bin Laden, Anwar al-Awlaki, and present-day leader of Islamic State abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The law calls for the literal annihilation of the West through whatever means necessary, even if it results in the annihilation of the individual self because jihadists believe that they alone will survive in paradise as faithful religious executioners of Allah’s will. The forces that these men and others like them have unleashed reflect an abidance with Sayyid Qutb’s central article of faith – the belief that the survival and preservation of their very selves – embodied in their Islamic identity – is threatened by the mere existence of the West – the Other.

Masterful Messenger of Martyrdom – Anwar al-Awlaki

In the wake of Osama bin Laden’s September 11 attack on the United States, no one has been more effective in the recruitment of Westerners to join jihad than Anwar al-Awlaki. Born in Las Cruces, New Mexico to Yemeni-born parents, al-Awlaki held dual American and Yemeni citizenship and had native fluency in both English and Arabic, enhancing his ability to communicate meaningfully to his international constituency in the West about violent jihad. Killed in September 2011 by an American Predator drone strike in Yemen, al-Awlaki remains still and posthumously radical Islam’s most effective opinion leader to date.

While his future voice has been silenced, his words and charismatic delivery live on in the eternity of the digital world. With his commanding oratory, along with meaningful bilingual nuances of persuasive expression, he was a master at penetrating the social media platform, finding his way into the bedrooms or coffee house laptops of potential recruits worldwide. A casual Google search of the name “Anwar al-Awlaki” produces hundreds of hits, which include consolidated news capsules from The New York Times, National Public Radio podcasts, and his countless continuing online sermons.

In the exhaustive, investigative days immediately following the September 11 attacks, law enforcement quickly discovered contact between al-Awlaki and the hijackers, which made him a person of interest. He had not only been the spiritual advisor to three of the September 11 hijackers, but his office phone number at Dar El Hijrah mosque, in Falls Church, VA, had been found in Germany when investigators searched the Hamburg home of Ramzi bin al-Shibh, who coordinated the massive September 11 attacks and who remains at the time

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of this study in detention at the U.S. military prison at Guantanamo Bay Naval
Base, Cuba.

When agents from the F.B.I. asked al-Awlaki whether he had had personal
contact with the hijackers, he denied ever knowing them.\textsuperscript{231} Investigators knew
he was lying and increased their surveillance. It was also during these early
days of the investigation that al-Awlaki reveled in the attention he was receiving
as the imam at the prominent Dar al-Hijrah mosque in the Washington, DC
suburbs. He became the prominent voice of Islam in the nation’s capital city, and
was the first Muslim cleric to lead prayer services on Capitol Hill, sponsored by
the Congressional Muslim Staff Association.\textsuperscript{232} In a \textit{New York Times} article
published just five weeks after the attack, al-Awlaki was cited as one of the
nation’s leading Muslim voices of moderation and constructive dialogue, “held up
as a new generation of Muslim leader capable of merging East and West.”\textsuperscript{233}

\textsuperscript{231} Berger, “Anwar Al-Awlaki’s Links to the September 11 Hijackers.”

\textsuperscript{232} Winter, Jana, “Some Muslims Attending Capitol Hill Prayer Group Have Terror Ties,
Probe Reveals,” \textit{Fox News Politics}, November 11, 2010,

\textsuperscript{233} Goodstein, Laurie, “A Nation Challenged: The American Muslims: Influential
American Muslims Temper Their Tone.” \textit{The New York Times}, October 19, 2001,
http://www.nytimes.com/2001/10/19/us/nation-challenged-american-muslims-influential-american-
Hoping to quell a growing anti-Islamic sentiment within the military in the aftermath of the September 11 attack, then Secretary of the Army Thomas E. White asked his staff to invite a “moderate Muslim cleric" to a luncheon at the Pentagon. Imam Anwar Al-Awlaki was subsequently seated at the table\footnote{Herridge, Catherine, “Exclusive: Al-Qaeda Leader Dined at the Pentagon Just Months After 9/11,” Fox News U.S., October 20, 2010, http://www.foxnews.com/us/2010/10/20/al-qaeda-terror-leader-dined-pentagon-months.html (Accessed June 6, 2017).} of power at the epicenter of the hijackers’ strike against the military might of the United States. He embraced his prominent role as a communications opinion leader, which this study has identified in Chapter One as the key person in the effective transmission of information because this person comes to be widely trusted as one who has a fair-minded opinion.\footnote{Katz and Lazarsfeld, \textit{Personal Influence: The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications}, 168.}

In his initial interviews with local and national media, he spoke with a conciliatory tone about the tragedy the United States had suffered at the hands of Muslim hijackers. Offering a Western perspective, al-Awlaki told The Washington Times on October 11, 2011, that Osama bin Laden had “been able to take advantage” of the anti-American sentiment in the Islamic world regarding “U.S. foreign policy” in support of Israel and the growing American influence in the Middle East. Then, after firmly stating, “We’re totally against what the terrorists had done. We want to bring those who had done this to justice,” al-Awlaki offered a counterpoint, “but we’re also against the killing [by U.S. forces] of civilians in Afghanistan.”

Al-Awlaki was referring to the “quasi-war” the United States military was waging at the time against the Taliban and al-Qaeda after the bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, and the bombing of the U.S.S. Cole in in Yemen that followed in 2000. By drawing attention to the Afghan civilians who had lost their lives in U.S. cruise missile strikes, al-Awlaki was walking a carefully balanced, but not unreasonable, line in the business of public opinion.

On November 19, 2001, al-Awlaki participated in an online Washington Post video, questioning the wisdom of the U.S. entry into war in response to the

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September 11 attack. He suggested that the attack should have been treated as a “crime” and not an act of war. Later, on the same day, when questioned about this position, al-Awlaki clarified his position, using the U.S. First Amendment to rhetorically connect with and appeal to his American secular audience to make his point. “Keep in mind that I have no sympathy for whoever [sic] committed the crimes of Sep [sic] 11th. But that doesn’t mean that I would approve the killing of my Muslim brothers and sisters in Afghanistan. Even though this is a dissenting view nowadays but as an American I do have the right to have a contrary opinion.”

During the crucially sensitive weeks that followed the September 11 attack, leading into the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, and calling for Americans at large to gain a better understanding of Islam, al-Awlaki spoke of the appreciation American Muslims have for the religious freedom and opportunities available to Muslims in the United States. He emphasized the strong Islamic emphasis on “family values,” extolling the virtues of abstinence from food, drink, and from all sexual activity from sunrise to sundown during Ramadan. He preached convincingly about the rewards of a disciplined life and offered a well-calibrated “call for peace.”

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240 Shane, “The Lessons of Anwar al-Awlaki.”

241 Sorokin and Cella, “Muslim Students are Wary of the War.”
Investigators, however, observed a sharp contradiction in al-Awlaki’s public persona vis-à-vis his personal conduct. Acting as a moderate voice within Islam, extolling the peaceful, wholesome, and high moral standards of his faith, he had a keen ability to compartmentalize his public actions, which were at odds with his private life. Al-Awlaki pointedly called for sexual abstinence during the hours from sunrise to sunset during Ramadan, which took place from mid-November to mid-December in 2001, but then quietly and actively pursued prostitutes for liaisons in both Virginia and Washington, DC, during daylight hours when he could excuse his absences as work-related.

On December 13, 2001, investigators followed him from his mosque in Falls Church, VA., over a Potomac River bridge into Washington, DC, to a budget hotel near Dupont Circle, where he met with a prostitute who was later interviewed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. From her they learned that he was a very experienced patron, knowledgeable about the trade, and ready to negotiate his price for additional sexual services. He told her he was in the United States on business from India. Under further scrutiny, U.S. law enforcement learned that he had been arrested previously in the late 1990s for solicitation of prostitution when he was the imam at the Masjid Ar-Rabat al-Islami mosque in San Diego, California. Caught twice, he paid his fines and moved on to Falls Church, Virginia.242

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Adept at preaching wholesome ideals in the mosque, inspiring his congregants to follow his interpretations of the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, and imploring them to make their self-identifications as Muslims foremost in their lives, he could quickly pivot into his double life as a sexual predator, prowling the streets for discreet sexual encounters in cheap motels in the commonwealth of Virginia and in the District of Columbia. Law enforcement carefully documented this pattern. By driving prostitutes across the state line between Virginia and Washington, DC, al-Awlaki was in violation of the Mann Act of 1910, which prohibits the transportation of women across state lines for “immoral purposes.” The law was established principally to combat human slavery, but it also expressly includes consensual sexual liaisons.

Concurrently, federal agents scoured his vital records and found that, while he was born in New Mexico, he once stated that he was born in Yemen to qualify for scholarship money in the United States intended only for foreign-born students, and he repeated this falsehood on an application for a U.S. social security card. Increasingly convinced that al-Awlaki’s contacts with the September 11 hijackers were significant, purposeful, and not coincidental, and with the violations he committed in his earlier vital records statements deemed

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244 Shane, “The Lessons of Anwar al-Awlaki.”
insufficient to place him under arrest, it was on the violation of the federal Mann Act that law enforcement in Virginia began to move against him.

On March 22, 2002, al-Awlaki’s carefully composed public composure cracked during his Friday sermon at Dar al-Hijrah mosque. Two days earlier, in a mass sweep throughout Northern Virginia, where the F.B.I. had uncovered a network of suspicious communications and money transfers, the F.B.I. made unannounced visits to area mosques and to the homes of those within the DC-area Muslim community who had come under suspicion. Al-Awlaki’s own home had not been raided, as he was by then a significant target of higher importance and the F.B.I. was still surveilling him. However, instinctively, he felt the F.B.I. closing in on him and he reacted with uncharacteristic aggression towards the country he claimed to respect – the United States of America – the country of his birth. In a voice of rage, al-Awlaki summoned his congregation in a call to war, not to peace:

So this is not now a war on terrorism. We need to all be clear about this. This is a war against Muslims. It is a war against Muslims and Islam. Not only it is happening worldwide, but it is happening right here in America, that is claiming to be fighting this war for the sake of freedom while it’s infringing on the freedoms of its own citizens, just because they’re Muslims.


246 Shane, “The Lessons of Anwar al-Awlaki.”
Al-Awlaki railed about the injustices the F.B.I. had inflicted on the wife and daughter of a friend of his, whose home had been raided, while the man, an official of the Virginia-based Fiqh Council of North America, an Islamic organization, was not home. The F.B.I. agents focused exclusively on searching the premises and made no accommodations for the wife or daughter to veil themselves. Shaking with fury and indignation, al-Awlaki called to his congregation:

If the office of the Fiqh Council of North America were raided and attacked, who’s next? Masjids [mosques] may be raided and closed down. Islamic schools – their reputation has been tarnished through the media. Where is it going to stop? Where is this going to lead to?

…

Therefore it is a responsibility of us as Muslims to make it very clear to the world that American Muslims are persecuted on a religious basis.247

As a young boy, a former student at Northern Virginia Community College in the Virginia suburbs of Washington, D.C., personally witnessed al-Awlaki’s diatribe that day and recalled how al-Awlaki excused the hijackers’ actions as necessary to combat Western persecution of Islam. As the congregation began to shout back at al-Awlaki, rebuking him for his expressed anti-American sentiments, and saying that the imam’s words would make it worse for American Muslims living peacefully in the surrounding community, the student recalls his

mother taking him by his hand and leading him outside away from the unrest in the mosque.\textsuperscript{248}

The duplicity between al-Awlaki’s previous publicly espoused views of peace, his personally held antithetical beliefs in support of jihadism against the West, his professed respect for the sanctity of marriage, and his predatory sexual activities on the street was ripping his life apart.\textsuperscript{249} As authorities were moving in on him at a quickening investigative pace during the spring of 2002, al-Awlaki began to shy away from the high public profile he had been maintaining.

However, he continued his illicit sexual activities with reckless abandon, spending a couple hundred dollars each week for regular sexual encounters in flagrant violation of his marital vows with his American-born wife Gihan Mohsen Baker,\textsuperscript{250} with whom he had a relationship that he regularly held up as exemplary when speaking from the minbar (Islamic pulpit). Eventually, the imam whose inner pride once glowed at being the spiritual advisor to three of the 9/11 hijackers,\textsuperscript{251} sunk into a mood of deep fear and despair that his hypocrisy, both

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{248} Student Name Withheld (made known to dissertation committee - Ghafory, Moubin Abdul), Interview, Northern Virginia Community College, Woodbridge, VA, October 23, 2014.
\end{itemize}
professionally and personally, along with the stinging public humiliation over his serial sexual perversions, would be his undoing.\textsuperscript{252}

According to al-Awlaki’s brother Ammar – who also lived in the Washington, D.C. suburbs and is, at the time of this study, now living in Yemen as the country’s environmental minister\textsuperscript{253} – al-Awlaki asked to see him alone in a nearby library in the Northern Virginia suburbs, and to remove the batteries from their cell phones, which both men did. Looking ashen and deeply troubled, al-Awlaki told his brother Ammar that “something happened last night…. I was told that the F.B.I has a file on me, and this could destroy my life.”\textsuperscript{254} He told Ammar that he was going to leave the United States. Ammar did not ask him what the file was about, nor how al-Awlaki knew.

Later, during the 9/11 Commission, F.B.I. agent Wade Ammerman told the commission that the front desk manager at a hotel al-Awlaki frequented had warned al-Awlaki that “one of the escort services he regularly patronized” had been questioned by the F.B.I. about him. By late spring 2002, al-Awlaki had become sloppy and “stunningly reckless,” according to the F.B.I. Instead of

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using aliases, he had begun arranging for his sexual assignations in his own name. 255

Before al-Awlaki could be arrested and held for questioning on the Mann Act, he disappeared from Virginia, resurfacing in the United Kingdom. He made one quick, discreet trip back to Northern Virginia in October 2002 for reasons that were never determined, and managed once more to leave without detection by law enforcement, never to set foot in the United States again. Making his way to the homeland of his parents, Yemen, al-Awlaki began dominating social media with his inspiring, bilingual, global call for violent jihad. 256 He was determined to act on his grievance against the United States, where his life of duplicity had finally stripped him of all self-respect. Stepping onto Meloy’s methodological base step of grievance, al-Awlaki would exact his revenge against the West.

In April 2010, after al-Awlaki had already inspired Nidal Malik Hassan’s jihadist attack at the U.S. military base in Fort Hood, Texas, 257 as well as the thwarted Christmas Day 2009 “underwear bomber” attack by Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab aboard a Northwest Airlines flight from Amsterdam to Detroit, 258

255 Ibid.


President Barack Obama ordered a drone strike to eliminate al-Awlaki as an “enemy of the state.”\textsuperscript{259} His growing influential presence on the Internet had become increasingly dangerous to U.S. interests at home and abroad. Obama’s action was aimed to remove a serious U.S. national security threat that, by comparison, dwarfed any World War II damage done by Tokyo Rose by the sheer exponential magnitude of social media to globally influence receptive minds.

Called the “bin Laden of the Internet,”\textsuperscript{260} Al-Awlaki was Islamic State’s most effective Islamic propagandist, actively inspiring lone wolf strikes against the West. He was personally successful in summoning a host of otherwise nondescript and ordinary Western individuals to the cause of murdering fellow Westerners in soft target locations on a grand scale. A 2011 Central Intelligence Agency report referred to al-Awlaki as “the most dangerous enemy of the U.S. because of his ability to recruit followers and inspire attacks through e-mails and websites.”\textsuperscript{261}


This study will examine in detail examples of al-Awlaki’s lethality against the United States and other Western nations from his communications base in Yemen, but, in fact, his posthumous words still spawn acts of terror until the present-day. The argumentative premise of Anwar al-Awlaki’s effective global outreach and the continued penetrating presence of his words on social media is based on his interpretation of Islamic self-identity, its self-perceived struggle to survive, and its goal, as stated by al-Awlaki and by Sayyib Qutb before him, to hold dominion over the world.

But how does one convince another to commit mass murder and to purposefully end one’s own life for a cause in pursuit of one’s identity? As this examination of case studies moves forward, I argue that one’s own human sexuality is centrally integral to one’s self-identification. With respect to the male gender, I argue that the psychological condition of misogyny figures prominently in a grievance-motivated self-identity. Further, I argue that humans wed their self-identities to their pursuit of happiness through a life fulfilled in that identity and in tribal unity with others of the same identity. This tenet lies at the core of one’s self-determined actions, and makes the mind most vulnerable to masterful manipulation by messengers like Anwar al-Awlaki.

Lastly, I argue that adherence to the religious dogma of an extreme and radical interpretation of Islam is not the glue that binds those who engage in

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violent jihad. Instead, it is the first step in Meloy’s Pathway to Violence model, a personal grievance that transports the individual to a collective group that share the same common enemy. The glue of this collective is the human desire to belong to an entity greater than oneself – powered by deep personal grievances – propelling these individuals into the tribe of jihadism. It is the power of the pack.

CHAPTER FIVE
LONE WOLVES AND PACK WOLVES
Metaphoric Mentality of the Wolf Pack

“A lone wolf is a wolf that is searching, and what it seeks is another wolf. Everything in a wolf’s nature tells it to belong to something greater than itself: a pack.” Like humans, wolves are very social animals. Ethologists, social scientists who study animals in their natural environments, have long established the behavioral similarities between wolf and man. Like humans, wolves rely on the emotional bond of the family – the pack – to survive. It is not just a physical need, whereby the young are fed by the elders and the weak protected by the strong, but an emotional connection that is intrinsic to their very beings as wolves.

“Wolves” used as a metaphor for “humans,” as this study now employs, is not an accident. As we examine wolf behavior, one could replace the word “wolf” with “human” and the narrative would still make sense. Like the father and mother of a strong, nuclear human family, the alpha pair preside over their offspring and together they determine the territory and prey for their pack to survive another day. In this highly socialized group structure, subordinate wolves, like children working on a family farm, do their parts to contribute to the care of the younger wolves and to secure the borders of the pack’s territorial


boundaries along the buffer zones with other wolf packs. Wolves exhibit many other similar human characteristics, such as a dietary preference for meat. Elk, deer, sheep, and cattle are their daily carnivoral pursuits.\textsuperscript{265} They employ a highly integrated form of communication with one another that involves vocal tones, body posturing and movements, and refined facial expressions. With each subtle or not so subtle shift in the wolf’s communication code, the wolf conveys a complexity of thought to the other members of his or her pack,\textsuperscript{266} and they move in unison.

But it is the wolf’s capacity to feel and express emotion that most uniquely mirrors man’s. Within their packs, they play with one another, tease, chase for fun, roll over, wag their tails in excitement, and wag their tails also to show submission and respect. They are affectionate with one another, greeting each other with “hugs” that are formed by a tangle of open mouths locked in embrace. They groom the fur of their pack mates with thorough licking and they chisel tenderly through knotted fur with their teeth. Older wolves discipline their young with grazing nips from their sharp teeth. And when a member of the pack dies, they mourn their loss with lowered tails, signaling depression.

It has been said that wolves bury their dead, but this research found that a wolf burial is simply a kicking up of dirt, leaves, and snow over the fallen wolf.


Nevertheless, they do not abandon their dead to the elements, but seemingly attempt to return their dead to nature whence they came. Ethologists also believe that the wolf’s complex emotional system includes the capacity for compassion, which is a highly evolved skill of abstract relation to its surrounding world.

However, the overriding state of consciousness within a wolf pack, anchored in the emotional center of the canid cerebral cortex of every wolf, is loyalty to the pack. They are both individual members of the Canine lupus species and bonded units within the Canine lupus pack. This emotional drive outweighs all else in a wolf’s life because without a pack, the wolf becomes lone, depressed, recklessly assertive, and at risk of premature death. Only through a pack orientation can the wolf survive.

When considering the human motivations and behaviors of lone jihadist wolves and jihadist pack wolves, it is useful to keep Rudyard Kipling’s words in mind:

Now this is the Law of the Jungle –
As old and as true as the sky;
And the Wolf that shall keep it will prosper,
But the Wolf that shall break it must die.

As the creeper that girdles the tree trunk,
The Law runneth forward and back –
For the strength of the Pack is the Wolf,

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And the strength of the Wolf is the Pack.269


Bin Laden’s Alpha Wolf – Mohamed Atta

In a PBS Frontline report broadcast on January 17, 2002, investigative journalists Ben Loeterman and Hedrick Smith extensively examined the timeline of the people and events leading up to the attacks on September 11, 2001. With a focus on Mohamed Atta, the leader of the nineteen hijackers, his social maladjustment and seemingly repressed sexual maturation left him feeling extremely marginalized. He fit in nowhere, which led to the grievance of social alienation, placing him on the first step of Meloy’s Pathway to Violence model.270 We see this pattern of marginalization exhibited by other jihadist terrorists and proponents of jihadism against the West, beginning with Sayyib Qutb. Like Qutb, Atta, already in his 30s, demonstrated behavior that suggested an absence of sexual behavior and erotophobia, and with no life partners with whom to build a future.

Throughout his youth in Cairo, where he grew up middle-class with access to an excellent education, he was known as someone who avoided females.


270 Meloy and Hoffmann, International Handbook of Threat Assessment.
Later, as a young adult studying in Germany, he would not make eye contact with females and made himself ever more scarce whenever females appeared. “He was not really interested in girls,” said a former college classmate from Atta’s days studying in Germany. Another classmate remembers that he shied away from girls, stood ill at ease amongst men, and shuddered in disgust when he would witness men openly flirting with women. He had no close friends. A picture develops that through his reserve, Atta made it clear to his acquaintances that he was a loner.

Also like Qutb, Atta was doted on by his mother, overshadowed by his two older sisters, and was considered a “mommy’s boy” by those who knew him. In an attempt to suggest that his son was not capable of executing the September 11 attacks, and to place blame on Israel, saying that the Mossad had carried it out in order to blame the horrific attacks on Muslims, Atta’s father described his son as “girlish.”

As Atta grew in age, he increasingly retreated to his prayer rug instead of seeking female companionship. In his will, he ordered that “no women should attend his funeral, a sign of his growing [misogyny and] obsession with sexual

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271 Loeterman and Smith, “Inside the Terror Network.”


purity.” And then he went on further, writing that the person “who will wash my body near my genitals must wear gloves so he won’t touch my genitals.” He left written instructions that forbade any women from ever visiting his gravesite in the future.

Atta’s view of Egypt’s increasing secularism also paralleled Qutb’s view that this liberal societal global trend was deeply threatening to Islam and that it needed to be repelled from Egyptian soil. While at Cairo University studying architecture and urban renewal, and before his continued graduate level studies in Germany, he felt increasingly under attack by secular Western influences, and saw as his only remedy to retreat to the mosque where he was drawn to the rhetoric of Islamic fundamentalists.

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274 Loeterman and Smith, “Inside the Terror Network.”


276 Signorile, “The Mohamed Atta Files.”
The mere sight of women in Cairo wearing blue jeans and assuming that they had rights to educations and careers was to him an affront to Islam. He believed women should be veiled and covered from head to toe at all times.\textsuperscript{277} He expressed outright disgust over the Egyptian government’s campaign to promote tourism and, without any consideration for the economic benefit it would be to Egypt to attract hard currency to its country through tourism, he believed the government was simply pandering to Western interests.\textsuperscript{278}

According to Hedrick Smith, by age twenty-eight, “Mohamed Atta saw himself an outsider in his own country, as a man with no future there.” Pursuing advanced graduate studies in Hamburg, Germany, with its “permissive culture that is so offensive to devout Muslims, Atta felt even more the alien in an alien land.” Atta’s inner sense of isolation led him to seek emotional refuge at Al Quds Mosque in Hamburg, where he came in direct contact with extremists who were recruiting for Osama bin Laden.\textsuperscript{279}

It was at Al Quds Mosque that Atta was malignantly radicalized and where he found his identity in brotherhood with bin Laden’s espousal of Qutbism, which lays out the principles of jihadism in calling for the violent overthrow of perceived Western domination of Islam. In obedience to the strictest rule of Islamic conduct that requires a man to grow a beard, and in visual memetic affirmation of his

\textsuperscript{277} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{279} Loeterman and Smith, “Inside the Terror Network.”
identification with Sharia law by wearing the obligatory beard, Atta grew a beard for the first time in his life. Like the Samurai, about whom we factually know wore masks in battle, and about the masks, which we memetically know signified military invincibility and were designed to strike terror in the minds of their targets, Atta’s beard became his face of faith (cultural factor) and his face of war (meme).

By age thirty, and having received hands-on training at bin Laden’s militia camps in Afghanistan, Atta was appointed head of bin Laden’s Hamburg cell. He was no longer a “soft and immature” young man, who shied away from his domineering lawyer father, preferring instead the company of his cradling mother, but a cold-hearted, bushy-bearded killer in bin Laden’s armed conflict against the West. After years of rudderless withdrawal and isolation from modern society, Atta had finally found his identity and his path, which he maintained resolutely with a hardened embrace. His transformation was complete.

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281 Loeterman and Smith, “Inside the Terror Network.”

282 McDermott, “A Perfect Soldier.”
The Underwear Bomber – Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab

In 2009, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, the son of one of Nigeria’s most prominent bankers, who had grown up in privilege and had been educated in British private schools in Togo, London and Dubai, traveled to Yemen.\(^{284}\) International travel was commonplace for young Abdulmutallab, whose father formerly served as Nigeria’s Minister of Economic Development.\(^{285}\) But this trip to Yemen was different. Inspired by al-Awlaki’s online sermons summoning all devout Muslims to rise in bonded brotherhood against the West by attacking


unsuspecting Americans, Abdulmutallab traveled to Yemen to receive personal spiritual guidance and jihadist instruction from the imam. The two men spent several days together while al-Awlaki vetted his Nigerian candidate for the spiritual resoluteness to complete the task of martyrdom. Then he turned Abdulmutallab over to Ibrahim al-Asiri, his chief bomb maker, and began the physical preparations for mass murder.

Al-Asiri had developed a concoction of two high explosives, PETN (pentaerythritol tetranitrate) and TATP (triacetone triperoxide), that would escape detection by airport bomb screening devices. With al-Awlaki’s blessings, Abdulmutallab entered an al-Qaeda training camp in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), where he learned the methods required to ignite the explosive, which was embedded in his underwear and tucked close against his scrotum to avoid detection by airport visual screeners. When Abdulmutallab left Yemen, he flew with the explosives, undetected in his underwear, throughout the Near East and Africa to Amsterdam, where he boarded a Northwest Airlines flight to Detroit on Christmas Day 2009.

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287 Finn, “Al-Awlaki Directed Christmas ‘Underwear Bomber’ Plot, Justice Department Memo Says.”

Once he entered U.S. airspace, as directed by al-Awlaki, he attempted to inject a chemical into his underwear to trigger the explosion. Fumbling suspiciously with his pants, he caught the attention of passengers who overpowered him and held him in physical restraints until the plane could land in Detroit. Taken into the custody of U.S. federal law enforcement, Abdulmutallab identified himself as a “jihadist” and it was determined that he could be questioned without being Mirandized for the initial eight hours of his interrogation because of the national security threat he posed.

In the subsequent trial that ended with his receiving a sentence of lifetime incarceration, it is compelling to consider the precise wording of the prosecution’s sentencing report in showing that Abdulmutallab was extended every opportunity to express remorse. Not only did he express no regret, but Abdulmutallab echoed Sayyib Qutb’s definition of a Muslim by resolutely affirming the virtuousness, as he saw it, of slaughtering non-believers en masse in fulfillment of his self-identity as a Muslim. As established earlier in this study, memetic constructs reinforce human self-identity. In this case, the memetically driven command was to commit mass murder. The following words from the prosecution were recorded into the court transcripts:

Never did defendant falter in his resolve or reconsider his decision to commit mass murder. Indeed, as of the date that he entered his guilty plea, defendant stated to this Court that he believes that the Koran obliges “every able Muslim to participate in jihad and fight in the way of Allah, those who fight you, and kill them wherever you find them, some parts of the Koran say, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.”

Defendant added that “participation in jihad against the United States is considered among the most virtuous of deeds in Islam and is highly encouraged in the Koran.”
In explaining his offense, defendant stated that “I attempted to use an explosive device which in the U.S. law is a weapon of mass destruction, which I call a blessed weapon . . .”

In short, defendant is an unrepentant would-be mass murderer, who views his crimes as divinely inspired and blessed, and who views himself as under a continuing obligation to carry out such crimes.289

But what passions stir in a man’s mind to harden such resoluteness steeped in the craven belief that the commission of mass murder against innocent and unarmed people is an act of high holiness? A video of al-Awlaki’s instructions to Abdulmutallab prior to the targeted flight demonstrates the effectiveness of memetic influences to steer the recruit on the path to jihadist belongingness. We gain some insight from this video clip, which was released to the public by the Yemen-based *Al-Malahim Media,* “a clearinghouse for jihadi primary source material.” *Al-Malahim Media* acts as the propaganda wing of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP),290 and the video was published in the British tabloid *Daily Mail.* Al-Awlaki schools Abdulmutallab on how to be a good Muslim by maintaining total adherence to the mission of murdering as many random and unsuspecting Westerners as possible, an act of sanctification in al-Awlaki’s view.


With soft eyes, a gentle voice, empathetic face, professorial spectacles, and a large, long dagger slung bandolier-style across his chest, al-Awlaki instructs his charge on the piety of his mission preparations to explode a fully-loaded U.S. commercial aircraft on Christmas Day, murdering 289 people aboard (288 airline passengers and crew, along with his own “divinely” inspired suicide). “Don’t forget your prayers,” al-Awlaki reminds Abdulmutallab, who gazes servilely at the radical cleric, an obsequious smile on his cherubic face. Al-Awlaki emphasizes that Abdulmutallab should remember, “especially the two prostrations of the Prayer of Need,” referring to the faithful’s need for Allah’s beneficence and submission unto his omnipotence.291

Wearing a white skull cap and white satiny shirt in the video, Abdulmutallab appears rapturously in the tribal fold of Islamic jihadism. When contrasted with the alienated state of mind of his earlier online writings on “Islamic Forum” at the website Gawaher.com, his transformation is stark. He wrote earlier of his frustration with the opposite sex. While conducting himself properly, he wrote, by “fasting” and by “lowering his gaze” when young ladies passed, he felt he made no impression on the females he attempted to impress with his religious piety.292


On his “Farouk1986” account on “Islamic Forum,” another jihadi website, he wrote, “I have no one to speak too [sic]…No one to consult, no one to support me and I feel depressed and lonely. I do not know what to do. And I think loneliness leads me to other problems.”

His absence of social and female union drove him into a deep abyss. Psychologically, his writings reveal someone who was primed on the first step of Meloy’s Pathway to Violence model, ready to blame the West for giving females the right not to subjugate themselves to the wants of a man.

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Described by his friends at the time as a loner and utterly unremarkable, without any notable physical presence, and able to “walk into a room… [and] you wouldn’t know he was there,”\(^{295}\) Abdulmutallab secreted himself in a world where women have no rights and where men can assert their claims of heterosexual bonds without resistance. He found his way to al-Awlaki’s beckoning calls and then felt he had finally found his way to a place where he belonged.

**Fort Hood, Texas – Nidal Malik Hasan**

In November 2009, U.S. Army Major Nidal Malik Hasan, born to Palestinian parents in Arlington, VA, educated at Virginia Tech University, and trained as an Army psychiatrist, shouted “Allahu Akbar,” and began shooting his fellow soldiers at Fort Hood, Texas, killing thirteen.\(^{296}\) The investigation following the fratricidal attack revealed that eleven months earlier, in December 2008, Hasan was deeply lonely, absent of female companionship, searching online for a “jihadi” wife, and had been racked with poor job performance reviews at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Washington, DC. Internal Department of Defense documents revealed that Hasan “repeatedly failed to meet basic officer standards for physical fitness, appearance, and work ethic.”

Hasan’s perceived unappreciation from the military placed him on the first grievance step of Meloy’s Pathway to Violence model. At this point in his life when he felt he should have been feeling fulfilled by his profession and with a

\(^{295}\) Hosenball, “Islamic Radicalization: Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab.”

wife and children, as he had hoped to be, Hassan’s life disappointment was deep and palpable. In response, the U.S. military chose to ignore Hassan’s feelings of alienation. Instead of pushing Hasan to take corrective measures or to discharge him completely from the military, a fateful decision was made to simply move him out of Walter Reed National Military Medical Center and transfer him to the U.S. Army Base in Fort Hood, Texas.297

What Hasan’s superiors had also missed during his time at Walter Reed was that Hasan had initiated and had established direct email correspondence with al-Awlaki. Drawn in by al-Awlaki’s You Tube lectures, Hasan emailed al-Awlaki from his office to volunteer himself as a combatant to the cause of jihad. In a message that caught the eye of FBI detection, but which, regrettably, did not lead to further FBI action, Hasan reminded al-Awlaki that they had met at the Dar al-Hijrah mosque in Falls Church, VA, where Hasan had decided that the cleric held the answers to any American Muslim troubled by the U.S. military conflict with a Muslim country. Hasan, who had come to view U.S. soldiers as the enemy, and not the foreign forces whom the U.S. had declared the enemy, asked al-Awlaki whether deliberate fratricide by a member of the U.S. armed forces

“with the goal of helping Muslims/Islam” would qualify that person as a “shaheed” (martyr). Hasan had bitten al-Awlaki’s You Tube lecture bait.

In a series of email exchanges with al-Awlaki in the months prior to Hasan’s attack at Fort Hood, al-Awlaki reinforced Hasan’s sense of self-identity as a Muslim, and not as a member of the U.S. military, inspiring Hasan to write responsively to al-Awlaki on May 31, 2009, about an unidentified American soldier who had jumped on a grenade to save seven fellow American soldiers. “He consciously made a decision to kill himself but his intention was to save his comrades and indeed he was successful.” Even though the example Hasan cited was one in which an American soldier sacrificed his life for his fellow brothers in arms, Hasan made clear to al-Awlaki that his own brothers were not those who wore the same military uniform as he, but those with whom he shared the same religion.

Their correspondence reinforced Hasan’s self-identification as a Muslim first and only, and broke all preexisting bonds of brotherhood Hasan may have once felt toward his U.S. military brethren. Hasan explained his antipathy towards the men and women with whom he served by telling his family in Roanoke, Virginia that “other soldiers harassed him for being a Muslim.”

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According to Nidal Hasan’s cousin, Nadar Hasan, a respected attorney in Northern Virginia, Hasan’s hostility towards fellow members of the military grew so intense prior to the mass shootings, his cousin had once hired an attorney to try to terminate his commitment to the U.S. military. The legal negotiation went nowhere. Nidal Hasan felt deeply frustrated and he wanted desperately to be released from the military. \(^{300}\)

The depth of Hasan’s alienation knew no bounds and, according to his cousin, the family noticed observable changes in Nidal Hasan. Crippled by the deep-seated belief that he was disrespected by his military peers, Hasan underwent a crisis of identity that he believed was restored only through the online sermons of Anwar al-Awlaki. “I think the terrorists have really an effective poison that they’re putting out there,” explained the cousin, Nadar Hassan, “The terrorists are trying to make it an issue of false choice of choosing God over country,” which is a fallacious argument. “You can be fully Muslim, you can be fully American and there’s no conflict.”\(^{301}\)

Writing about a carefully considered scenario, Hasan laid out his exit plan from the military to al-Awlaki. In Hasan’s mind, it was a plan that cloaked him in the respect he felt he was being denied by the U.S. military. Hasan fantasized about “a soldier…. [who] sneaks into an enemy camp during dinner and

\(^{300}\) Ibid.

\(^{301}\) Ibid.
detonates his suicide vest…. to prevent [an] attack to save his fellow people the following day.\textsuperscript{302}

Through more than sixty different encrypted email accounts,\textsuperscript{303} using language rooted in memetic connections to religion, ethnicity, fellowship, and to the almighty will of Allah, al-Awlaki rotated his accounts, allowing some to go dark, while others lit up, on a carefully measured basis to avoid security detections. For example, he would consistently reference the utter incompatibility of living as both an American, which was his nationality, and as a Muslim. This became a core message that al-Awlaki hammered into the consciences of his listeners, and then which al-Awlaki later expanded to incompatibility between Islam and all other Western nations. His words were directly aimed at the self-identities of his listeners, which is a pure memetic persuasion that comes down to the “us vs them” binary.\textsuperscript{304}

Hasan listened intently to these sermons, which would begin as Islamic “history” lessons, with reference to “an ancient Islamic book called ‘The Book of Jihad.’” But the listener would soon become aware that al-Awlaki’s words about

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\textsuperscript{302} Shaughnessy, “Hasan’s Email Exchange with al-Awlaki; Islam, Money and Matchmaking.”
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\textsuperscript{303} Herridge, “American Cleric Used More Than 60 Email Accounts to Reach Followers, Including Hasan.”
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the message in this book applied to the present day. If one was a genuine Muslim, one had an obligation to rise against the oppressive West.\footnote{Ibid.}

Al-Awlaki’s efforts were broadly systematic and effective, largely avoiding U.S. national security scrutiny, while summoning Hasan’s self-identity as a Muslim to use his unique location at Fort Hood to strike a deadly blow on the U.S. military. On November 5, 2009, twenty-three days before he was to be deployed to Iraq, U.S. Army Major Nidal Hasan walked into a medical processing center at Fort Hood, Killeen, Texas, and viewed his fellow countrymen as enemies – \textit{the Other}. Shouting “\textit{Allahu Akbar},” he began firing from his automatic firearm, spraying the crowded quarters into a bloody carnage that left thirteen dead and scores injured.\footnote{McFadden, Robert D., “Army Doctor Held in Fort Hood Rampage,” \textit{The New York Times}, November 5, 2009, \url{http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/06/us/06forthood.html} (Accessed August 4, 2017).}

Immediately following the Fort Hood massacre, Anwar al-Awlaki issued a statement on social media to his followers worldwide praising Nidal Hasan, as "a hero" and "a man of conscience who could not bear living the contradiction of being a Muslim and serving in an army that is fighting against his own people."\footnote{Ghosh, Bobby, “Was Hasan Inspired by a Radical Imam’s Sermons?” \textit{Time Magazine}, November 9, 2009, \url{http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1936973,00.html} (Accessed August 4, 2017).}
In an interview with Al-Jazeera news, one month after the Fort Hood attack, al-Awlaki elaborated on the righteousness of Hasan’s act, again invoking the most powerful memetic influencer, as he so often did – God/Allah – and cradling the potency of his message in the landscape of a struggle against a modern-day pharaoh. It is important to note that, again aimed at his listeners’ sense of self-identity, al-Awlaki skillfully used ancient history, like a historian who is merely edifying his listeners to the roots of their past, using Biblical allusions to summon their Islamic bloodlines to rise in the struggle of jihad. In the name of their common identity as Muslims, al-Awlaki commanded them to be bound by a shared loyalty to destroy the West.

Al-Awlaki said:

Nidal’s target was a military target inside America and there is no dispute over it. Also, these soldiers weren’t normal ones, but they were prepared

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and getting ready to take off to fight and kill weakened Muslim [sic] and commit crimes in Afghanistan.

He did not betray his religion. Working in the American Army to kill Muslims is a betrayal to Islam. America today is yesterday’s pharaoh; it is an enemy to Islam.

A Muslim is not allowed to work in the American Army unless he intends to walk the steps of our Brother Nidal. Loyalty in Islam is to Allah, His messenger and the believers, and not to a handful of soil they call “nation.”

The American Muslim’s loyalty is to the Muslim Nation and not to America, and brother Nidal is a proof on that through [the execution of] his blessed operation, so may Allah reward him the best of the rewards for that.

I ask from Allah to accept him amongst the martyrs as he did what he did expecting martyrdom, so if he gets executed then congratulations to him.  

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British Airways Plot – Rajib Karim

In a jihadist plan to blow up a British Airways plane across the Atlantic midflight to the United States, transcripts of al-Awlaki’s communications to British Airways service employee Rajib Karim were made public during the 2010 trial in England that convicted Karim to a 30-year prison sentence at the maximum-security HM Prison Frankland in Durham. Rajib Karim’s brother, Tehzeeb, had brought him to al-Awlaki’s attention with particular note of Rajib Karim’s airport place of work. Tehzeeb had met al-Awlaki while undergoing training at a Yemeni-based al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) base. Al-Awlaki

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immediately pursued the lead in Tehzeeb’s communication by writing directly to Rajib.

In reading the direct transcript, it is noteworthy how agilely al-Awlaki characterizes Muslim identity as membership in the jihadist brotherhood of humans who struggle together in pursuit of a common cause to destroy the West. And then, like a skillful tactician, al-Awlaki lists the requisite information he needs as the operational mastermind as he plans for another mass murder. Al-Awlaki writes to Karim:

“We search for such men and women. I pray that you are one of them, dear brother. I was pleased when your brother [Tehzeeb] conveyed from you Salaams to myself and was excited by hearing of your profession.

How much access do you have to airports?

What information do you have on the limitations and crack in present airport security systems?

What procedure would travelers from the newly listed countries have to go through?

What ways can you help us based on what you know of your job and our objective?

For security reasons, I prefer to communicate with you through your brother’s account. However, please maintain the other account by keeping it open just in case I need to contact you there. Awaiting your answer.”

Communications between the two men progressed, through which al-Awlaki nurtured a confidence in Rajib Karim that their planned actions were

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divinely inspired and would bring great pleasure to Allah. Increasingly, Karim, who was born in Bangladesh and who was already an Islamic fundamentalist, came to view his life amongst Western infidels in Newcastle as both a hellish torment that threatened his own deeply rooted sense of personal identity as a Muslim and as an opportunity to wage a holy war against the secular West.

Born to a wealthy family, he received a private school education, earned his college degree at Manchester University in the United Kingdom, and married a British-born woman with whom he then later returned to Bangladesh. He and his brother Tehzeeb eventually became active supporters of the Jummat-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), a subversive group of Islamic fanatics who have used social unrest and violent bloodshed to attack secularists in the cause of bringing Islamic Sharia law to Bangladesh. In 2010, Karim felt deeply defeated and, along with his fellow members of the JMB, socially diminished and marginalized when “secularism” was restored in the country’s constitution as a fundamental right of all citizens.312 On the base grievance step of Meloy’s Pathway to Violence, Karim held the cultural dominance of the West to blame for his political defeat in Bangladesh.

When Karim’s firstborn son became ill, he and his wife returned to England to seek medical treatment that was not available in Bangladesh. Trained as a computer software engineer, he sought and gained work at British Airways. It was not, however, simply a place where his work skills were

transferable. He saw it as an opportunity to expand his jihadist activities beyond the borders of Bangladesh and throughout the entire British Airways system, with a global focus of jihad aimed at the world at large.

He felt embedded in enemy territory – Newcastle – an industrial city along the banks of the River Tyne, which flows through the city center to the North Sea. Everything about Karim’s English surroundings in Newcastle – the climate, the terrain, the city’s medieval layout, the language, the religion, and most of all, the people – reinforced Karim’s sense of isolation and the imperative to take action on his driving ambition to bring Islamic Sharia to the world on behalf of his brethren.

The coldness he felt towards Newcastle was soothed only by his desire to use his geographic location and workplace to wage global jihad. In pursuit of this goal, he felt he belonged to something greater than that which a mere day would bring to his everyday life in England. He was a man with a mission.

In evidence that became public during his trial, he wrote to his brother Tehzeeb that he was “desperate to fight and die in a holy war.”\(^{313}\) He hoped to die in martyrdom before his brother did. This bond of brotherhood in divine death kept him going. His wife, pregnant with their second child, became an added bonus in his quest for martyrdom. He believed that if he took her along with himself, Allah would bestow particular favor on him for sacrificing thrice – himself, his wife, and his unborn child. “If the new baby dies or if she dies while

\(^{313}\) Swann, Steve, “Rajib Karim: The Terrorist Inside British Airways.”
delivered…they will be counted as martyrs,” he wrote to his brother Tehzeeb.\footnote{Ibid.}

In the course of zealotry, there would be no reasoning or moderation. His greatest achievement, as he articulated to his brother, would be to die for the sake of Allah, and in that he would find eternal brotherhood in Allah’s favor. He longed for Allah to grant him “martyrdom at the earliest.”\footnote{Ibid.}

Karim spoke no Arabic and he had never met al-Awlaki in person. But al-Awlaki’s English-language messages filled the void in Karim’s life. Karim wrote often to his brother about his isolation in British society. He was certain that his sense of feeling adrift in life would be remedied by joining the fight to kill infidel Westerners and to die as a martyr in the process. The mere sound of al-Awlaki’s voice over the Internet, Karim told his brother, filled his “heart with joy.”\footnote{Ibid.}

From Newcastle, a quietly ordinary city perched along the cold British coastline of the North Sea, Karim’s found the familial warmth of tribalism in al-Awlaki’s online presence. Al-Awlaki’s words about the Western enemy, the proper ways to pray, the manners of dress to show devotion to Allah, and the promised glory in paradise that awaited him as a martyr were all memetic tools that al-Awlaki employed to reinforce Karim’s Muslim identity and to control Karim’s actions in the name of Islamic jihad. True to Qutb’s brand of Islam, one’s identity as a Muslim and inclusion in the brethren of Islam could be

\footnote{Ibid.}
achieved only through jihad. Karim identified as a true Muslim and he welcomed the opportunity to demonstrate his membership in the family of Islam.

By 2010, and with the ultimate goal of becoming an Islamic martyr, Karim wrote al-Awlaki that it was not his intention to remain, work, and earn a living in England, but to act on his life “niyah [purpose],” which was “to do something for the deen [faith].” Al-Awlaki emphasized that chief among Western targets was the United States and he told Karim that all efforts should be directed toward that singular goal.317

Karim confirmed that he would work on it with others in England with whom he had formed a secret network and who wished to achieve the same purpose. He promised to report to al-Awlaki as soon as he had progress to report, adding that he had recently requested a transfer to work in an airline cabin crew, which would place him on the jetliner himself. Karim expressed what gratification it would give him to be able to strike at the West through his own personal actions.318

Investigators believe that Karim’s intentions were not just to murder hundreds of innocent airline passengers by planting an explosive on board a jetliner destined for the United States, but to also sabotage British Airways’ computer systems to cripple its operations globally and to render financial


calamity affecting the airline and its counterpart airlines worldwide. But his ultimate goal was to have a glorious death in full physical expression of his determined religious extremism and all would be the better to take as many people as possible with him. The act of self-destruction as a martyr would be the ultimate demonstration of his affiliation with Islam and, Karim believed, Allah would richly reward him for his devotion when he would arrive in paradise.

With no physical contact between the two men whatsoever, Al-Awlaki’s call to martyrdom was done entirely over email and social media, completely detached from physical reality and completely inside the realm of virtual reality. The words of this one messenger to martyrdom was a summon to Karim’s self-perceived, heartfelt destiny in fulfillment of his own core identity as a Muslim. In transcripts of the two men’s text communications that were presented in court, Al-Awlaki made clear that his singular pursuit was to use Islamic martyrs for purposes of warfare to destroy the West, which he, like Qutb and bin Laden before him, deemed the mortal enemy of Islam. Again, driving hard on the goal of bringing down a U.S. commercial airliner, al-Awlaki wrote to Karim, “our highest priority is the US. Anything there, even on a smaller scale compared to what we may do in the UK, would be our choice. With the people you have is it possible to get a package or a person with a package on board a flight heading to the US?”

Karim assured al-Awlaki that it could and would be done, but he was not yet sure if the “two brothers” in his jihadi network could be trusted with this.

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319 Swann, “Rajib Karim: The Terrorist Inside British Airways.”
mission, one of whom worked in baggage handling and the other in airport security, because he was not sure they were “ready to sacrifice with their lives.” But Karim, who saw martyrdom as the penultimate step to everlasting reward in paradise, was himself ready. He advised al-Awlaki that he was doing his utmost to be assigned to an aircraft in any capacity, and he boasted about how effectively he was working at portraying himself as a “liberal Muslim” in the United Kingdom so that no one would suspect him.320

It was while monitoring Al-Awlaki’s online presence as closely as possible that investigators discovered Karim’s enthusiastic messages, imploring al-Awlaki to remember his name to Allah so that he may be chosen for Allah’s reward in paradise. Under close surveillance by British authorities, Karim, the aspiring martyr-cum-mass-murderer received one last message from al-Awlaki, which invoked the powerfully used memetic cue this study has identified – God/Allah. "I pray that Allah may grant us a breakthrough through you.”321

320 Ibid.

It should be noted that millions around the globe pray to and invoke the Supreme Being’s name daily, with reverence for life and not for death. It is a twisted psychology of radical Islamic martyrdom that takes the word, Allah, and uses the signification of the word to conceptually espouse an idea – that is, to die in the process of destroying non-believers, and by doing so, Allah bestows his everlasting grace upon that person.

Neither the word God nor Allah, as defined by the letters that form the words, are memes. But, as stated earlier in this study, the conceptual idea that is communicated through the use of these words is without equal in its ability to

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memetically influence the human mind. Seventeenth century English philosopher and physician John Locke (1632-1704) offered a clear explanation for the memetic capacity of a mere grouping of letter symbols, forming morphemes, that represent the articulation into sound bites, forming phonemes, which convey meaning. “Words, in their primary or immediate signification, stand for nothing but the ideas in the mind of him that uses them.” To Rajib Karim’s mind, the sheer invocation of the word “Allah” was an irresistible summon, in fact, a divine command, to Islamic martyrdom and Anwar al-Awlaki was the messenger.

**Boston Marathon Bombers – Tamerlan and Dzhokhar Tsarnaev**

The Boston Marathon is the oldest annual marathon in the world. It takes place always on Patriots’ Day, a legal holiday in the commonwealth of Massachusetts to celebrate the 1775 Battles of Lexington and Concord, which marked the beginning of the American Revolutionary War. With a mix of national pride and community high spiritedness that comes with a world-class athletic competition, an estimated one million spectators line the 26.2 mile

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course to watch the race that attracts over 30,000 elite runners each year from all corners of the globe.

On April 15, 2013, beneath partly cloudy skies, a cool breeze, and an ideal temperature range between 30 degrees to 50 degrees Fahrenheit from the start to the finish, the race began briskly at 7 am. Ethiopian runner Lelisa Desisa Benti crossed the finish line at Boylston Street in 2 hours, 10 minutes, 22 seconds to collect $150,000 in prize money, but the ultimate prize for all race participants was just to be able to finish the grueling footrace and that is what held the packed, day-long, cheering crowds in place, encouraging every runner’s step that met the road towards the finish line.

Suddenly, at approximately 2:50 pm, two homemade pressure cooker bombs exploded, each within sixteen seconds of the other near the finish line, spewing “orange balls of fire into the air, lifting runners off their feet,” killing


three spectators, and critically injuring hundreds, many of whom emerged from their trauma maimed for life. As the carnage engulfed an unsuspecting public, and first responders rushed to save lives, two brothers, united in bloodline, bloodshed and purpose, walked casually away.

Twenty-six-year-old Tamerlan Tsarnaev, and his younger brother Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, age nineteen, were born of Chechen descent in the former Soviet Union. Their ancestral background was rooted in the family’s expulsion and displacement by Soviet dictator Josef Stalin, who ordered that some 85,000 Chechens be expelled from Chechen Soviet territory in 1944 in response to a Chechen uprising against Stalin’s brutal oppression. At that time, the family began a history of living as rootless wanderers in various Soviet republics and with no sense of belongingness. Subsequently, both young men grew up with a sense of social alienation inculcated in their family line from one generation to the next during the second half of the twentieth century.

**Tamerlan – Older Brother**

In 1986, their mother, Zubeidat Tsarnaeva, gave birth to Tamerlan, the older of the two brothers, in Kalmykia, “a barren stretch of Russian territory along

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the Caspian Sea," before the Chechen-speaking family moved farther inland to Kyrgyzstan, where Dzhokhar was born in 1993, and where the family remained in minority status amidst the majority Kyrgyz- and Russian-speaking population. Two more children followed, sisters, and the Tsarnaev family increasingly came to the opinion that there was no social integration nor good employment for them anywhere in the former Soviet republics.

Thirteen years to the month before the Boston Marathon bombing, in April 2002, their father, Anzor Tsarnaev, secured a tourist visa to enter the United States with his two sons, Tamerlan and Dzhokhar. Immediately upon arrival, Anzor filed for political asylum with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, claiming Russian persecution of Chechens, which was, in fact, a genuine international human rights issue in 2002. Anzor Tsarnaev received refugee status and thus began the Tsarnaev family emigration from their then-home in Dagestan. Tamerlan and Dzhokhar were, respectively, ages thirteen and six at the time when they arrived in the United States. They settled in

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Boston, and in 2007 they received legal permanent resident status to live in the United States.\(^{335}\)

Both young men completed their high school educations at The Cambridge Ringe and Latin School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where the school motto is “opportunity, diversity, and respect,”\(^{336}\) and then followed separate paths in higher education. When Tamerlan’s application for admission to University of Massachusetts Boston was rejected,\(^ {337}\) he enrolled in Bunker Hill Community College to study accounting, but he dropped out after three semesters, feeling like a failure and in deep need for success in life.\(^ {338}\) Without a clear path to higher education and suitable employment, he concentrated solely on his favorite sport – boxing.

It was in boxing that Tamerlan achieved a rewarding degree of success and recognition that, for a time even before he finished high school, had constructively shaped his life. Tall, with a strong build, natural athleticism, and a powerful punch, he had adopted a confident stride and a tough guy identity. He had become a star at the Somerville Boxing Club, where he scored countless


\(^{338}\) Finn and Leonnig, Englund, “Tsarnaev Brothers Homeland Was Worn-Torn Chechnya.”
victories under the tutelage of his father, Anzor, who had also been a successful boxer during his youth in Kyrgyzstan.

In 2004, Tamerlan won the novice title for the 178-pound weight class of the Greater Lowell Golden Gloves Competition.339 As he matured, he became as much known for his fashion as he was for his prowess in the ring. “The cocksure fighter, a flamboyant dresser partial to white fur and snakeskin,”340 trained with an intensity akin to religious devotion and, by 2010, he twice captured the New England Golden Gloves title for the heavyweight division. He felt a gratifying brotherhood with his fellow fighters, all street toughs with whom no one tangled lightly, and he told friends that he planned to train to represent the United States in the Olympic boxing competition that would be held in Rio de Janeiro in 2014. He believed his application to become a U.S. citizen would be hastened if he were to first box on behalf of the United States of America. Investigative journalist Michelle McPhee, who has written of the deep grievances both brothers came to harbor against the United States, said, “Tamerlan was more than motivated to become a [United States] citizen.”341 His plans, however, were thwarted.


340 Sontag and Herszenhorn, Kovaleski, “A Battered Dream, Then A Violent Path.”

The National Tournament of Champions, the organization that ranks the athletes, decided to change the competition qualification rules. Boxers who were not already American citizens were no longer allowed to compete. The ruling stunned Tamerlan and then, according to friends, left him embittered. He felt stripped of the only thing in life that had ever given him a sense of accomplishment and pride.

With his feet firmly planted on the first step of Meloy’s Pathway to Violence model, Tamerlan felt a steely need to immerse himself into something that required the same devotion he had given to boxing. He would undergo a change in identity and channel his capacious inner discipline to exact revenge on Western society for the crushing humiliation he felt. He stopped training, shed the fancy clothes, draped himself in white flowing garments, and grew a long, bushy beard. Radically changing his persona, he became a fanatical adherent to radical Islam and the United States became his enemy. Tamerlan had abandoned his membership in the tribe of American athleticism and had joined the tribe of Islamic jihadism.

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342 Sontag, and Herszenhorn, Kovaleski, "A Battered Dream, Then A Violent Path."
R. Douglas Fields, head of the Neurocytology and Physiology Unit at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, MD, explains that “tribalism arises from

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human herding behavior, which in cognitive neuroscience and psychology describes the alignment of thoughts and behaviors of individuals within a group.”

Fields cites the modeling of behavior as one of the hallmarks of tribalism. Adoption of uniform manners of dress, social behavior, and world views – all of which are memes – are the observable traits that marked one’s membership in a specific tribe of human bonding. The “same neuroscience that drives [popular] fashion… is what drove German citizens to embrace Nazism, and it [also] drives different religious and political groups in the Middle East in violence today.”

Having identified a new tribal bonding that he felt gave his life meaning, Tamerlan began immersing himself in online indoctrination to Islamic extremism. He closely followed the video messages of Anwar al-Awlaki and stored photographs on his laptop of children purportedly killed in American strikes. He quarreled often with the elders at his mosque who subscribed to a more lenient American approach to their faith. Eventually, the elders told him to conform to the prevailing standards of the mosque or go away. One year before the Boston Marathon bombings, in 2012, he traveled to Dagestan for a

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prolonged six-month visit. There he spent his days praying, networking and, it is believed, training in the skill of bomb making.

When he returned to Boston, an undisclosed foreign government whom many believe was Russia, asked the United States to interview Tamerlan about his activities in Dagestan. The FBI erringly “concluded that he was not a threat,” but, as a matter of perfunctory precaution with no follow up whatsoever, his name was placed on the FBI watch list. Unbeknownst to law enforcement authorities, Tamerlan’s conversion from a Boston-based boxing contender to a violent Islamic jihadist was already complete.  

Dzhokhar – Younger Brother

By contrast to Tamerlan, his younger brother Dzhokhar faced a future of academic promise upon graduation from The Cambridge Ringe and Latin School in May 201. He received a merit scholarship of $2,500 from the city of Boston to further his studies and was immediately accepted at University of Massachusetts Dartmouth for the fall semester. The timing of Dzokhar’s


scholarship was particularly fortuitous, coming just after the family began to split apart. Their parents, Anzor and Zubeidat, divorced in February 2011, reportedly over Zubeidat’s growing Islamic fanaticism, and then each returned to Dagestan, where they eventually reconciled.\textsuperscript{351} Seemingly overnight, left behind in the United States, older brother Tamerlan became a surrogate parent to Dzokhar.

Dzhokhar’s academic potential, however, was never fulfilled as he repeatedly skipped classes, failed courses,\textsuperscript{353} and relied increasingly on his older


brother Tamerlan for life direction.\textsuperscript{354} Just seven months before the bombings, on September 11, 2012, Dzhokhar demonstrated his last attempt to complete his assimilation into American society when he stood amidst a large assembly at the TD Bank Garden in Boston, raised his hand, and took the oath of citizenship of the United States of America.\textsuperscript{355} By spring semester 2013, he was enrolled in an “Introduction to Ethics” course at University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, while simultaneously planning mass murder in the name of Allah.\textsuperscript{356} His parents had left the country. He had no job. He had no money. Feeling destitute, he stood with his brother on that first step of Meloy’s Pathway to Violence and held Western society to blame for his diminished station in life.

His course selections showed no concrete purpose towards a degree and with his consistent failing grades, he lost his college financial aid. On January 24, 2013, he filed a financial aid appeal with the university, explaining that he had been under undue stress because of the persecution of Chechen family members and friends in Russia, stating that he had "lost too many of [his] loved relatives… by Russian soldiers that falsely accuse and abduct innocent men under false pretenses and terrorist accusations."\textsuperscript{357} He wrote in his financial aid appeal:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{355} Bump, “How the Boston Bombing Suspect Became a U.S. Citizen.”
  \item \textsuperscript{357} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
appeal that he hoped to earn a college degree so that he could work in the future towards alleviating the plight of the Chechen people.

Instead of studying for his college courses, however, Dzhokhar joined his brother Tamerlan at the Manchester Firing Line Range in Manchester, New Hampshire, where they “honed their shooting skills” on rented Glock 9mm pistols. He also immersed himself deeply in the online sermons of Anwar al-Awlaki, whose words called for a fervent hatred of Americans as the natural enemy of Islam. Using the screen name “Ghuraba,” which means stranger or foreigner in Arabic and has become a code word to self-identity as a jihadist, Dzhokhar tweeted just weeks before the bombings, “Listen to Anwar al-Awlaki’s [‘Hereafter’ sermons, and]... you will gain an unbelievable amount of knowledge.” Social media continues to carry Ghuraba messages until the present day.

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360 Shane, “The Enduring Influence of Anwar al-Awlaki in the Age of the Islamic State.”
On January 28, 2013, just four days after submitting a written reaffirmation of his commitment to scholarship in his appeal for financial aid, Dzhokhar texted a friend that he had alternate plans in mind for his future that did not include a college degree. His friend texted back, asking whether Dzhokhar was planning to get married and settle down with a family. No, Dzhokhar responded, and then wrote the following:

“I mean there’s 1 other option, bro.

Highest level of Jannah

Paradise.

Only the most pious of Muslims get to Jannah. But there’s a short cut, according to proponents of jihad: You can become a martyr. I’ve got a plan.

I’ll text you about it later.”\textsuperscript{362}


In the investigation that followed the marathon bombings and the subsequent killing of Massachusetts Institute of Technology police officer Sean Collier, whom the brothers killed execution-style so they could steal his gun during the police manhunt,\(^{363}\) it was revealed that Dzhokhar had memorized al-Awlaki’s online words verbatim, later defiantly reciting them in response to law enforcement when he was captured and recovering in the hospital.\(^{364}\)

In the dry-docked boat in which he was found during his capture, Dzhokhar had left a handwritten message declaring that his acts had been in retribution for U.S. military aggression in Muslim countries. “We Muslims are one body you hurt one you hurt us all. I don’t like killing innocent people it is forbidden in Islam, but due to said (...) it is allowed.” One word was missing from his message, struck by a bullet.\(^{365}\)

Al-Awlaki’s many online sermons were stored in Dzhokhar’s computer, along with al-Awlaki’s widely listened to “The Hereafter” sermon, which is a description, according to al-Awalki, of the human experience phases from declaration against the enemy in the name of Islam, to martyrdom, to paradise.\(^{366}\)

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Dzhokhar also saved an article on his computer entitled, “How to Build a Bomb in the Kitchen of Your Mom,”\textsuperscript{367} that appeared in the online magazine \textit{Inspire}, which is published in the region controlled by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), where al-Awlaki was based before his death. This instructional article from \textit{Inspire} has also appeared online under the title “Make a Bomb in the Kitchen of Your Mom,” by “The AQ Chef.”\textsuperscript{368}

Tamerlan Tsarnaev died during the manhunt that gripped Boston in the hours immediately following the bombings when his brother Dzhokhar, amidst a shoot-out with police, accidentally drove their getaway car over Tamerlan. His body lies buried in an unmarked grave at Al-Barzakh Muslim Cemetery in Doswell, Virginia, arranged by his uncle, Ruslan Tsarni, a respected attorney in the Maryland suburbs of Washington, DC.\textsuperscript{369} Two years later, in April 2015, Dzhokhar was convicted and sentenced to death by a jury of his peers.\textsuperscript{370} As of the date of this study, he remains imprisoned at The United States Penitentiary,

\textsuperscript{367} Ibid.


One of the more memorable moments in the hours that followed the murderous carnage of April 15, 2013 was when the young men’s uncle, Ruslan Tsarni, faced reporters outside his Montgomery County, Maryland home and

denounced his nephews as “losers.” When Tsarni was asked what he thought, as a member of the Tsarnaev's extended family, provoked the actions of his nephews, he responded, “Um, being losers. Hatred to those who were able to settle themselves. These are the only reasons I can imagine of. Anything else, anything else having to do with religion, with Islam, it’s a fraud, it’s a fake.”

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They hate what they see right here in this chamber: a democratically elected government. Their leaders are self-appointed. They hate our freedoms: our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other…

We have seen their kind before. They’re the heirs of all the murderous ideologies of the 20th century. By sacrificing human life to serve their radical visions, by abandoning every value except the will to power, they follow in the path of fascism, Nazism and totalitarianism. And they will follow that path all the way to where it ends in history’s unmarked grave of discarded lies.

President George W. Bush
Address to a Joint Session of Congress and to the Nation
Washington DC
September 20, 2001

Presidential Pronouncements

President George W. Bush was correct in his message to the nation just nine days after the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States. But his message never evolved to explain “why” the Islamic jihadists hated our freedoms

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and “why” they harbored such depraved, murderous malignity towards the West, and specifically towards the United States.

In later years, President Barack H. Obama went to great lengths to focus beyond the superficial and fallacious narrative that the United States was at war with Islam and he attempted to thwart the recruitment of Westerners to the cause of Islamic jihadism through a deeper understanding of the social threat. In 2015, Obama said, “We are not at war with Islam…. If we’re going to address the challenge of their efforts to recruit our young people, if we’re going to lift up the voices of tolerance and pluralism within the Muslim community, then we’ve got to acknowledge that their job is made harder by a broader narrative” than the one that exists “in many Muslim communities around the world [today] that suggests that the West is at odds with Islam.”

The genuine and hopeful predispositions expressed by Presidents Bush and Obama to better understand the phenomenon of radical Islamic terrorism took a difficult stochastic step backwards with the ascension of President Donald J. Trump in 2016 and his Muslim travel ban to the United States. The travel ban was legally challenged on constitutional grounds, but then upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2018. In explaining his course of action, President Trump

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said, “If the ban were announced with a one week notice, the ‘bad’ would rush into our country during that week. A lot of bad ‘dudes’ out there!”\textsuperscript{378}

These references to presidential pronouncements are not included in this study as a critique of a president’s fitness for office, but rather to illustrate the shallowness of our national dialogue during three consecutive presidential administrations, and to cast a broad light on how little the American public still understands, nearly two decades later, about the reasons why the United States was attacked on September 11, 2001, and why Islamic terrorism remains an ever-present threat worldwide until the present day.

Believing solely that Islam is evil and that its inherent malevolence is the driving factor in Islamic terrorism\textsuperscript{379} reflects no insight, a benighted worldview, and offers no protective recourse for all populations around our world. If we identify the Islamic faith as the sole root of terrorism, and if we believe that dogmatic adherence to the tenets of Islam command violence up the world’s innocent and unsuspecting population, we remain blind and vulnerable not only to Islamic terrorism, but to an entire spectrum of terroristic trends that share

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common ground with Islamic terrorism, such as the white supremacy\textsuperscript{380} and the misogynistic “incel” (involuntarily celibate)\textsuperscript{381} movements. Instead, it is imperative that we understand the genesis of violent behavior, which spawns radical Islamic fundamentalism and, which, without this understanding, the civilized world cannot protect itself.

To this end, by examining the science of memes through an anthropological application to understand the formulation of human behavior, this study rests upon critical bedrock on the importance of self-identity in determining the course of human behavior. In each case, the jihadist took his or her actions by responding to an inner Cartesian voice that questioned not just “what am I,” but “who am I.” In all of the cases, the jihadists cloaked themselves in the memetic draperies that reinforced their self-identities and announced their tribal identities to others.

Memes were never at the core of understanding terrorism. They were, however, important road signs in pursuit of this understanding. Nor was religion ever at the core. In the construct of Islamic terrorism, religion has served as an instrument of hijack for a violent personality. Further, religion is positioned conveniently for the sociological “we vs them” dynamic, which deepens the


clouds of continuing public misunderstanding. The tinder box of terrorism cannot be defused without clarity and, once the field of competing distractions are eliminated, one’s self-identity emerges and remains the defining factor in a constructive understanding of Islamic jihadism.

**Losers**

“Losers” was the word that sprang immediately from the lips of Ruslan Tsarni, a successful attorney in the Maryland suburbs of Washington, DC, when asked to explain why he thought his nephews, Tamerlan and Dzhokhar, had carried out such heinously murderous acts. It may have made a good news sound bite and the familial condemnation may have been satisfying for many who witnessed the uncle’s powerful denunciation, but the meaning of the word “loser” has strong implications for one’s self-identity, which this study has revealed is the critical factor in the recruitment of would-be Islamic jihadists.

A loser is “someone who is helpless to influence the course of [one’s life]” and who often demonstrates a purposeful hatred towards another group of people solely because an associated group to which the loser affiliates dictates such antipathy. Individuals bond together within a group, fulfilling the human need to belong, and their shared hostility towards another group gives rise to the “we vs them” paradigm. One significant benefit of belonging to a group is the degree to which the individual comes to feel self-affirmed. Social

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scientific studies reveal that self-affirmation is particularly important to individuals who feel marginalized in society because it gives those with low self-esteem a sense of success.383

The self-identity of being a loser is a powerful psychological trigger that either vanquishes the emotional will of the individual or propels the individual to identify with a group – a new fictional reality – that the individual perceives as being successful.384 We see the human value of being a winner, and not a loser, in the verbal expressions of our current U.S. president, Donald J. Trump, who self-identifies on a nearly daily basis with the classification of a winner, while he disparages those he views as losers, and usually with an absence of evidence to support his claims.385 Given the current political polarizations in the United States, my reference to President Trump must not be seen as a criticism of his political argumentations, but, rather, as a frequently observed example through his political posturing of the powerful human need to be viewed as a victor. This need is not just an individual human need, but is adopted by nationalistic identities, as well.


The desire to self-identify as a victor also plays out within the internal deliberations of the human mind when the individual considers his standing in society, the different life paths at his disposal, and his decisions about which paths to follow. These decisions form the fictional realities in which we live, as was explained in Chapter Three of this study in the examination of historian Yuval Noah Harari’s work. Fictional realities are unlike the physical realities that we, as biological humans, must physically adapt to in order to survive.

Considering each of the case studies in this study, it is important to recognize the trend from self-perceived loser to successful group member in this clash between cultural and physical anthropology, and the consequential psychological struggle. This is the jihad in the original meaning of the word, which in Arabic refers to an internal spiritual struggle.

For example, and most prominently, the life work of Egyptian-born Sayyib Qutb, the man who is considered the father of modern-day radical Islamic ideology, presents a classic example of this cultural-psychological-physical clash. Qutb found the social permissiveness between the sexes in Western society deeply revolting. As simplistic as this may appear to those who have not before studied Qutb’s influence in the Middle East, Qutb feared that the social familiarity of the West would spread to Egypt. He felt so strongly that Western culture threatened Islamic culture, which strictly enforces a separation of the sexes, his

\[386\text{ Harari, Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind.}\]

vitriolic public pronouncements were the inaugural twentieth century call for violent Islamic jihad against the West.

Qutb saw Islamic culture as the loser in the worldwide growing influence of Western culture during the era that followed the Second World War. The malignant psychology of being a loser extends from the individual to a group, such as a nation, but also to smaller collectives, such as a religious sect or an ethnic community. As a deeply embedded member of fundamental Islamic culture, Qutb saw himself on the losing side of this hegemonic clash of cultures -- both of which are fictional realities – not only as an individual loser in world society, but as a member of the collective losers his radical brand of Islam represented.

Sayyib Qutb was completely demoralized by Israel’s 1948 triumph over a military coalition of seven Arab states – initially, Egypt, Transjordan (present-day Jordan), Syria, Iraq, Lebanon – and later broadened to include Saudi Arabia and Yemen.\textsuperscript{388} Israel’s victory established the official state of Israel. The Arabs, who went to war with a false sense of superiority and their own brand of manifest destiny, were shaken to their cores, “not only by the determination and skill of the Israeli fighters but by the incompetence of their own troops and the disastrous decisions of their leaders. The shame of that experience would shape the Arab

intellectual universe more profoundly than any other event in modern [Arab] history."\(^389\)

Another actor in the fundamentalist Islamic-Western cultural clash includes Nigerian-born Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, known as the “underwear bomber” for his attempt to blow up a Northwest Airlines flight en route from Amsterdam to Detroit on Christmas Day 2009. Prior to his becoming an Islamic jihadist, Abdulmutallab wrote extensively on a jihadist Internet blog site, expressing his loneliness, his failure to attract females, and the feeling that he lacked social support from those with whom he interacted on a daily basis.\(^390\) By bringing down a large Western commercial jetliner on behalf of Islamic jihad, Abdulmutallab would show the whole world that he was not a loser and who was really in control.

The dangers posed by someone who is a self-identifying loser is further demonstrated by one, Rajib Karim, who reacted violently upon the world in retribution for finding himself on the marginalized fringes of society, and not at the center of society’s preeminent cultural reality. His hard-fought violent struggle to bring Sharia law to his country of birth, Bangladesh, was decisively defeated when secularism – a foundational tenet of the West, and not Sharia law – was protected as a fundamental human right under his country’s constitution.\(^391\)


\(^390\) “Profile: Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab,” *BBC News*.

He later struck out by trying to blow up a British Airlines flight midflight across the Atlantic Ocean. In his mind, British Airways was a symbol of Western secularism, the victor in the fight for cultural supremacy, and he was going to destroy it.  

Before his transfer from Washington, DC’s Walter Reed National Military Medical Center to the military base at Fort Hood, Texas in May 2009, American-born Nidal Malik Hasan was lonely, without female companionship, unable to find a sought-after arranged jihadi wife, and mired in poor job performance reviews at Walter Reed that left him deeply frustrated with his life at the time of his transfer to Fort Hood, Texas. Feeling devalued by the military and by life in general, he opened retributive fire on his unarmed brothers-in-arms, exacting revenge for all of life’s slights. He presided over his bloody carnage as a self-perceived victor, a “soldier of Allah.”

Boston Marathon bomber, Tamerlan Tsarnaev, was a boxer who wore colorful clothes and walked cocksure through the streets of Boston until he felt kicked to the curb and foiled from contender greatness by those who made the boxing tournament rules. His brother Dzhokhar Tsarnaev squandered all of his

392 Dodd, “British Airways Worker Rajib Karim Convicted of Terrorist Plot.”


394 Barnes, “Handling of Ft Hood Shooting Suspect Could Bring Discipline.”

academic promise and was a soon-to-be college dropout with no direction in life when he decided to join his older brother’s psychopathic path of vengeance on a fantasized enemy, the West, on which they both projected responsibility for their own life failures.

Prior to becoming a jihadist, Mohamed Atta was an unremarkable student of architecture, who shied away from females and whose own father described him as “girlish.” Whatever success he had envisioned for himself during his lifetime appears to have been vested in his perceived future life in paradise, as he detailed in his final writings, entitled “The Last Night,” in which he described how he and his fellow hijackers would be received as victors in Allah’s grace, and deep in the embrace of seventy-two virgins, following their genocidal destruction on September 11, 2001.

Each of the above-mentioned individuals had reasons to believe that they were “losers” — an immensely degrading self-perception. Like countless other jihadist actors, they all “found in radical religion an ideology that lets them rail

396 Signorile, “The Mohamed Atta Files.”


against the modern world.”^399 All sought personal redemption and restoration of self-identity in the tribal brotherhood of violent Islamic extremism against the West.

French-Lebanese writer Amin Maalouff examines the powerful human impulse of belongingness in his work, *In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong*. “It’s easy to imagine how it can drive people to the worst kind of extremities: if they feel that ‘others’ represent a threat to their own ethnic group or religion or nation, anything they might do to ward off that danger seems to them entirely legitimate.”^400 This logical consequence is what leads to massacres, holocausts, and countless other human atrocities.

This reasoning also explains the war criminal’s inability to understand why his or her actions have been met with such widespread condemnation. When Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann was led by the Israelis to the gallows in 1962, he remained unrepentant, stating, “Long live Germany. Long live Argentina. Long live Austria. These are the three countries with which I have been most connected and which I will not forget.”^401 Eichmann lived and died still clinging to his tribal group.

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Sexual Self-Concept – The Heart of Self-Identity

Sexual self-concept is defined as “the cognitive perspective concerning the sexual aspects of ‘self’ and refers to the individual’s self-perception as a sexual creature.” The works of Charles Darwin, evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins, and cognitive scientist Daniel C. Dennett, which are thoroughly examined in Chapters One and Two of this study, make clear that the human gene’s essential purpose is survival of the self. Genes survive by adapting long enough to reproduce, while genes incapable of environmental adaptation are driven into extinction. Further, there is “no aspect of human existence that has been so prone to cultural influences as our reproduction.”

Hence, it is paramount to our understanding of this malignant psychopathy – violent Islamic jihadism – to understand also the umbilical relationship between sexual expression and social adaptation. Sexual activity takes place within the cultural constructs of a society, and both human procreation and cultural


403 Darwin, The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, 39.


405 Dennett, Darwin’s Dangerous Idea: Evolutions and The Meanings of Life, 40.

continuity follow. Physical life carries forward and the prevailing culture, which is the fictional reality that the collective has created for themselves, also lives on. Sex lies at the heart of self-identification, which is the end-point of this Darwinistic dynamic. “Sex defines who we are.”

It is deeply revealing that the September 11 hijackers, who murdered thousands and self-annihilated in the cause of religious and sexual pureness, spent their final nights amongst the living in strip clubs and with prostitutes. We will never know the full extent of their sexual repressions and dysfunctions, but we do know that each one of them expected to receive sexually orgasmic existences in perpetuity. They would attain a never-ending level of sexual expression, completeness, and fulfillment in paradise that is simply non-existent in life.

In the charred debris that became the landscape of Lower Manhattan in the days following the September 11 attack, investigators located the suitcase belonging to Mohamed Atta. Inside they found a four-page manifesto Atta had penned, called “The Last Night,” which was written to remind his companions

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and himself of their mission and, more precisely, to remind them of their shared identity – who they were and where they, in bonded unity, stood in the world at large, both earthly and celestially. Together they would reap the sexual awards that awaited them in paradise.\textsuperscript{410}

Atta began his written message by invoking specific actions required of his comrades. Each action is itself a behavioral meme that signifies their shared identities as martyrs. “[Make] an oath and renew your intentions. Shave excess hair from the body and wear cologne. Shower.” Then, placing his comrades’ mindset in the afterlife, he continues, “Completely forget something called ‘this world’… bless your [bodies] with some verses of the Qur’an,” which means that his comrades should recite supplications while rubbing their hands over their bodies. “Tighten your clothes,” in reference to the sacred Islamic practice of keeping their genitals securely covered, “since this is the way of the pious generations after the Prophet. They would tighten their clothes before battle. Tighten your shoes well, wear socks so that your feet will be solidly in your shoes.”\textsuperscript{411}

Every ritual step served as a memetic imprint upon the human mind that each individual was a warrior in a battle against a common enemy on a path to martyrdom. The fact that their designated enemy was an unarmed group of

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\textsuperscript{411} Atta, “The Last Night.”
unsuspecting targets, virtual sitting ducks traveling in airplanes, was lost in the preparatory warrior rituals. The only thing that mattered was their assertion of a shared identity in vengeful pursuit of perceived injustice from their designated enemy, which, they held fast, would end in jihadist martyrdom. Atta continued along lines of identity, instructing them to repeat their supplications fervently while executing their attack in unity of spirit and action.

He identified the enemy as the West, calling Westerners “allies of Satan, who [were] the brother of the devil…. who [were] fascinated with Western civilization and have drank the love [of the West] like they drink water.” When coming face-to-face with the enemy, Atta directed his comrades to repeat, “There is no God, but God” to channel divine courage and strength to overtake their targeted vulnerable and defenseless Western enemies. God would then receive each of them into eternity, Atta wrote, where they would be met by “the women of paradise” who have alluded them on earth, but are in the afterlife receptively “waiting, [and] calling out, ‘Come hither, friend of God,’… dressed in their most beautiful clothing.” Atta closed his manifesto with the proclamation that they would “all meet in the highest heavens, God willing.”

The concept of seventy-two virgins (houris) residing in paradise (Jannah), eagerly awaiting the arrival of Islamic martyrs (shahids), is grounded in the erotic nature of paradise in the Qur’anic text. However, it is from the six major Islamic traditions (hadiths) that the particular descriptions of and expectations from

\[412\] Ibid.
paradise have been so graphically described. Hadiths are Islamic texts that interpret the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad.\textsuperscript{413} There are thousands of hadiths, but six major hadith collections of Sunni Muslim scholarly interpretations establish the foundation:

\begin{itemize}
  \item Sahih Bukhari, collected by Iman Bukhari (d. 870)
  \item Sahih Muslim, collected by Muslim b. al-Hajjaj (d. 875)
  \item Sunan al-Sughra, collected by al-Nasa’i (d. 915)
  \item Sunan Abu Dawood, collected by Abu Dawood (d. 888)
  \item Jami al-Tirmidhi, collected by al-Tirmidhi (d. 892)
  \item Sunan ibn Majah, collected Ibn Majah (d. 887)
\end{itemize}

This corpus of written interpretations was written approximately two hundred years after Muhammad’s death and its instructional value shapes Islam to the present day.\textsuperscript{414}

From this broad foundational collection of writings, future Islamic scholars constructed their own phenomenological interpretations, often embedding their texts with vivid detail as visual, didactic imprints on the Islamic mind. For example, while suicide is forbidden by Muhammad, martyrdom is exultingly praised as a person’s pathway to paradise. The Qur’an describes paradise as


“the Gardens of Pleasure,” where no soul will ever wish to leave, except to return to the earthly world to be killed again for the sake of honor and service to Allah.

In a hadith issued by the widely respected fifteenth century Egyptian Islamic scholar and polymath Al-Suyuti (d. 1505), paradise is described as a garden of sensual and sexual pleasures. “Each time we sleep with a houri we find her virgin [sic]. Besides, the penis of the Elected never softens. The erection is eternal; the sensation you feel each time you make love is utterly delicious and out of this world and were you to experience it in this world you would faint. Each chosen one [i.e. Muslim] will marry seventy [sic] houris, besides the women he married on earth, and all will have appetizing vaginas.”

A student at Northern Virginia Community College commented that Westerners think the Qur’an is the sole influential written work in Islam. But hadiths, he explained, are what Muslims most often rely on to understand the teachings of Muhammad and the Qur’anic word. From a contemporary perspective, he explained, hadiths explain to the faithful how to implement the

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word of Allah in their daily lives. Hadiths embody Islamic law and morality, and their influence on the Islamic mindset cannot be overstated. Further, it is through the hadiths, and not the Qur’an, that differences in Islamic dogma rise within Islam. With this understanding about hadiths clearly in mind, and the aforementioned descriptions of euphoric sexual encounters with comely and untouched, voluptuous virgins, it is reasonable to understand what potential jihadist martyrs who believe in the hadiths believe they can expect to find awaiting them in paradise.

In the cultural milieu of Islamic fundamentalism, sexual relations are viewed through the lens of sexual repression. But in paradise, the promise is a boundless sexual reward with virginal females, identified as pure and clean because they are women who have never known the touch of man. It is important to remember the inspiring and providential words of Mohamed Atta to his 9/11 comrades prior to the attack. “The virgins are calling you.” Atta’s “The Last Night” plays out like a psychopathic fantasy of murder in baseless retribution through which one will be rewarded sexually in paradise.

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418 Student Name Withheld (made known to dissertation committee – Munir, Sulaiman), Interview, Northern Virginia Community College, Woodbridge, VA, April 15, 2018.


421 Kristof, “Martyrs, Virgins and Grapes.”
Connection to Incels

This study has found personal and social identity deficits in individuals who, as recruits, were drawn to radical Islamic jihad. Included in these findings of deficits that have effectively made the case study individuals feel marginalized in society is a particularly significant psychological category with dangerous sociological import. A person who meets this psychological profile is referred to as an “incel,” a term that means that the individual has been “involuntarily celibate.”

Fifty percent of the male case studies in this work fit the profile of an incel. The term is applied to both male and female virgins who long for sexual union in fulfillment of societal expectations and personal satisfaction. However, in recent years the plural term incels has been dominantly applied to misogynistic males who harbor rage towards society because of their perceived rejections by females.

Male incels have not adjusted to the sociological paradigm shift of the latter twentieth century from when a female was considered a positive accessory to a man’s life, at best, or at worst, as chattel, to the modern era of time when a female came to view herself as independent to choose her own life, her own

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path, and her own sexual partners. Internet dating and mating practices in the Digital Age have completely altered the previous longstanding courtship dynamic.

Just sixty years ago, a woman's chief life occupation was to make herself attractive and available to men, to become the wife of a man with a solid economic future, to produce children, and to keep a clean house for the male head of household. Today this convention is long gone. Economic realities have pressed women into the professional workforce at unprecedented levels. Increasingly women have become chief breadwinners in family units and, with a single computer key stroke, women can obtain available sex and companionship on demand through Internet websites, such as Tinder and Grindr. 424

The contemporary empowered female has become a threat to the male with low self-esteem. Subsequently, the individual male who feels neutered by the powerful female has gravitated to the incel group identity, which imbues him with the power of identity through group belongingness, and where he subscribes to "a violent political ideology around the injustice of young, beautiful women refusing to have sex with them."425

Male incels are "diabolically misogynistic," harboring vicious fantasies of rape and murder that they wish to inflict on the sexually liberated female and often do so with horrifically bloody outcomes. They seek a redistribution of


425 Tolentino, “The Rage of the Incels.”
sexual power within society and, consequently, have found a current political home with the “alt-right” movement, which champions the ideology of white, male supremacy. Male incels rage against egalitarianism in society, which they blame for their feelings of their impotence. But it is important to note that sex with women is not the end game. “They are looking for absolute male supremacy” over society, driven by deeply disturbed minds mired in malignant misogyny. Societal supremacy is the motivating goal of terrorist movements, such as white supremacists, incels, or Islamic jihadists, who resort to violence to achieve their goals.

The threat assessment of FBI’s BAU1 profiling unit for terrorism has currently a sharp focus on the emerging new ground of incel-related terrorism, and they have established a psychological overlap between incels, who seek male supremacy, and Islamic jihadists, who seek the same. The BAU1 cites the April 23, 2018 attack in a quiet northern neighborhood of Toronto, Canada, when 25-year-old Alek Minassian proclaimed on Facebook that “The Incel Rebellion has already begun!” and then he mowed a rented, white “paddle-style”

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427 Tolentino, “The Rage of the Incels.”

van into a crowd of pedestrians along Yonge Street and Finch Avenue, killing ten
and injuring fourteen others.\textsuperscript{429}

Among other social scientists who are actively evaluating the extent to
which the sociological malignancy of the incel movement is symbiotically
connected to violent Islamic terrorism is Simon Cottee, sociologist and senior
lecturer in criminology at the University of Kent in England. The April 23 attack in
Toronto followed a classic Islamic State strategy and plan of action. Cottee
called this “an Islamic State-inspired attack minus the Islamic State ideology.”\textsuperscript{430}

In an op-ed piece Cottee wrote for \textit{The New York Times}, he states the
connection between incels and jihadists in brutally stark terms. Considering
Sayyib Qutb’s and Mohammed Atta’s erotophobia, the careful current research
by social scientists into the mindsets and behaviors of incels, demonstrates how
closely incel radicalization follows the Meloy model\textsuperscript{431} on the pathology of
jihadists:

- Sexual shame is the “core emotion” of an incel.
- They join an “online subculture… to rationalize their shame.”
- The subculture redirects blame for “their failure onto women.”
- Like incels, jihadists “crave sex,” but are met with frustration.

\textsuperscript{429} Winsor, “Toronto Van Attack Suspect Declared ‘Incel Rebellion’ in Chilling Facebook
Post.”

\textsuperscript{430} Cottee, Simon, “Sex and Shame: What Incels and Jihadists Have in Common,” \textit{The

\textsuperscript{431} Meloy and Hoffmann, \textit{International Handbook of Threat Assessment}, 11.
Both exhibit sexual frustration that leads to “murderous rage.”

In the same op-ed piece, Cottee quotes other notable public intellectuals who have made the same connection:

“Testosterone-sodden young men” unable “to get a woman in this world might be desperate enough to go for 72 private virgins in the next.”
- Richard Dawkins, evolutionary biologist

“The problem is not so much that they desire virgins as that they are virgins.”
- Christopher Hitchens, late religious and social critic

“Can't get married, can't have sex, so they blow things up.”
- Mark Juergensmeyer, religious sociologist

Concluding Thoughts

There is a librarian in the college campus library at Northern Virginia Community College, Woodbridge, VA, who, as an American-born, white woman from a Baptist family, met a group of Muslim friends with whom she felt a sense of belonging and, before too long, she embraced Islam as her new faith and donned the tradition clothes of a Muslim woman, wearing a hijab and covering

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432 Cottee, “Sex and Shame: What Incels and Jihadists Have in Common.”

433 Ibid.
herself to the floor. The visual transformation caught many on campus by surprise and, in our current post 9/11 era, some expressed disdain for the growing presence of Islam in the United States. This particular librarian has maintained a singular steadiness amidst the whispered comments about the violent nature of the Muslim faith. Had she been born Muslim, I suspect she would not have become the focus of such negative attention. How could she as an American-born Christian woman become a Muslim, some asked, when the Muslim religion did to us what it did on 9/11?

One notable feature about this librarian is that she carries herself forward each day as someone who is at peace with herself at her very center. There are no perceived slights on her part and, if she is aware of direct slights, she takes no umbrage. She carries out her responsibilities each day in the constructive world of academia that she has made for herself. She exemplifies Shakespeare’s words in *Hamlet*, when Polonius tells Laertes, “To thine own self be true.” Our college librarian knows who she is. She lives as a Muslim minority convert in overwhelmingly Christian Northern Virginia. She is at peace with her identity and is no danger to anyone else.

I offer this librarian’s identity profile as a juxtapositional comparison to the individual case studies in my doctoral work. They, too, were Muslim. But therein the similarity ends. In the case of Islamic jihadists, this study found that they are chiefly motivated – not by their Muslim faith – but by a debased sense of

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self-identity. Their self-identification deficits are caused by their personal senses of defeat in cultural battles against stronger hegemonic forces and/or the crippling disablements of physical or emotional impotence. The subsequent inability of each of my case studies to fulfill the telos of his or her potential as a human being, able to live constructively in a rational world, or to be able to carry one’s seed to a new generation, has resulted in a deadly, sociological malignancy.

This study shows that Westerners are not drawn to violent Islamic jihad because of religion, but merely to establish their self-identities through a strong need to belong. Until we in the West understand that the draw is psychological, and not theological, we will not have peace in this theater of global conflict. Only through the clarity of keen understanding and insight into “the Other” will the civilized world have a chance to defuse the ticking Jihadist time bomb.
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