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AN INTERDISCIPLINARY FRAMEWORK TO ASSESS THE RADICALIZATION OF YOUTH TOWARDS VIOLENT EXTREMISM ACROSS CULTURES

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ABSTRACT

The search to understand contemporary terrorism has led researchers to increasingly focus their attention on the radicalization process as a means to gain insight into how individuals become susceptible to recruitment by terrorist organizations. There has been an unending search to identify a set of universal principles that would define the essential nature of radicalization and thereby provide insight into the psychology of individuals who constitute the pool of potential terrorist recruitment candidates. This effort has been primarily carried out by Western scholars theorizing about radicalization from a narrow Western causal-based reductionist perspective. Unfortunately, the product of these efforts has often been characterized as ambiguous and contradictory.

The intent of this study is to provide an alternative perspective to examine the radicalization process that rejects the causal paradigm in favor of a discursive approach that focuses on understanding psychological phenomena as revealed in discourse. To this end, this study offers an interdisciplinary framework using discursive psychology as a mode of explanation to better understand how radicalization may occur at the individual level in various sociocultural contexts as a product of lived experience. The framework employs
positioning theory as an analytic tool to examine discursive exchanges that may potentially provide insight into the unfolding pathways that may lead an individual towards radical beliefs. These dialogic encounters are examined within a narrative context that serves to transmit beliefs, establish norms, delineate duties and obligations that subsequently aid in uniquely positioning an individual within that person’s sociocultural environment.

The framework focuses attention on four social structures selected to capture the most proximate influences that subsequently generate an array of life options unique to the individual. The case study method is used to demonstrate and assess the validity of the framework and its ability to provide insight into the radicalization process at the individual level. It highlights the possibility of identifying common features of contexts in which individuals become radicalized while underscoring the notion of the uniqueness and unpredictability of the radicalization of any particular individual. The results of the study supported the contention that the framework would provide a valuable analytic alternative to the approaches currently in use to study the radicalization process.
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INTRODUCTION

The notion of radicalism has had a long history. Traditionally it has been used to frame discussions of political ideology and social movements centered around competing agendas regarding the need for some type of reform. In this socio-political context, radicalism served as a label to characterize certain sets of ideas that sought to change the social order, often in dramatic ways. In the 18th century “political radicals” within the British Parliament such as Charles James Fox chose to promote such extreme ideas as “universal suffrage” and the “doctrine of the sovereignty of the people”.

Radicalism has also been used to describe societal reactions to and rejection of colonial powers. In 1775, King George III quickly discovered that his colonial subjects in America were quite different from their colonial ancestors who had established themselves in Virginia and Plymouth a century and half earlier, during the reign of James I. It was no doubt disconcerting for the British monarch to learn that Sons of Liberty radical Patrick Henry had branded the English as the enemy supposedly shouting “If this be treason, make the most of it!”

The French Revolution represented a nationalist version of radicalism in which left wing political groups, against a backdrop of abject poverty and deprivation, set out on a program to undermine the Ancien Régime and the concentration of power in the monarchy, aristocracy and the Church. Similarly,
the Russian Revolution of 1917 was the culmination of a series of revolutions led by radical socialist factions aimed at deposing the tsarist autocracy in order to replace it with a Communist government viewed as more responsive to their needs.

Contemporary views of radicalism in the West have been framed primarily within the context of trying to understand current manifestations of terrorism, secular and non-secular, directed against an established governmental authority. The 9/11 World Trade Center attacks and subsequent attacks in Indonesia, Madrid and England in addition to revelations of foiled attacks against targets in the United States, Europe and Africa have generated and fed an almost frantic search to understand modern terrorism and those who choose to enlist in terrorist causes. The sudden publication of hundreds of books and articles on terrorism in the year immediately following 9/11 represented an attempt to fill a void on a topic that had previously been the province of a small group of academic specialists.¹ No less than 800 texts in English alone were published within 12 months of the attacks. Unfortunately, what the bulk of output lacked in quality was made up by quantity and tended to erroneously project the image of an academic community engaged in a vigorous research agenda to understand the terrorist threat.²

The events of 9/11 also served as a turning point for academic institutions, mostly American, that began to view terrorism as a separate academic subject and quickly seized on the interdisciplinary nature of terrorism to create courses across disciplines and departments. During the 2001-2002 academic year, for example, UCLA offered 50 terrorism-related courses spread across 17 disciplines. Concurrent with the introduction of new terrorism courses was the creation of courses on the religion of Islam and the Quran. Numerous centers have since been created at universities, think tanks and government institutions drawing experts from a variety of disciplines in an effort to understand contemporary terrorism and the conditions that foster the recruitment of new terrorists.

Unfortunately there have been a number of obstacles that have hindered the full integration of interdisciplinary research in current studies seeking to understand the radicalization and terrorist recruitment process. These obstacles include the complexity of the problem itself, narrowly focused research paradigms, Western bias, problems with access to data, the lack of an interdisciplinary research strategy to investigate the terrorist mindset, the dominance of the counter-terrorist perspective, and the ongoing debate within

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4 Horgan, *Psychology of Terrorism*, xiii.


the field of anthropology regarding its degree of engagement with the U.S. security and intelligence communities.\textsuperscript{7}

While terrorism has been studied from various perspectives, such as political, sociological, criminological and organizational, the study of the terrorist mindset that presumes a radical belief system has been carried out primarily within a psychological framework.\textsuperscript{8} Horgan notes that psychodynamic theory is statistically the most popular psychological explanation for terrorism.\textsuperscript{9} Many of the studies posit that terrorist behavior is dependent on the individual psyche in attempts to link personality traits to violent behavior. In addition, many studies examining identity formation and its relationship to terrorist behavior also view an individual’s psyche as the source of needs-driven motivation that leads an individual to take action. As a result, the influence of cultural factors tends to be minimized because they generally fall outside the research paradigm of general psychology. As Thomas Kuhn points out in his seminal work \textit{The Structure of Scientific Revolutions}, paradigms will structure the problem as a puzzle and delineate the proper questions to be asked and answered. Consequently, in studying terrorism, a narrowly focused research strategy shaped solely by a specific psychological paradigm that does not consider cultural context may have


trouble addressing the necessary range of issues that are critical in acquiring a full understanding of the radicalization process that may make an individual susceptible to terrorist recruitment. This becomes particularly problematic when trying to understand radicalization in a variety of cultural contexts.

The diverse nature of radicalization as a precursor to terrorist behavior that exists across cultures, in addition to the complexity of the phenomenon of terrorism itself, poses significant challenges to any inquiry seeking to explore how radicalization is related to the mythical “mind of the terrorist”.10 Schmid cites over 100 definitions of terrorism in published research by experts in the field of terrorist behavior to illustrate the heterogeneity of terrorist behavior, at least at the conceptual level, reflecting a lack of consensus that in part may be inescapable.11 Defining radicalization analytically has suffered a similar fate in part because radicalization, when viewed from an historical perspective, represents a point of view rather than an analytical concept that can be assessed and evaluated across cultures. In order to delineate the radical from the non-radical, the researcher is forced to take a position towards the subject under study when radicalization is viewed based on the content of ideas, rather than as a product of underlying sociocultural mechanisms that are influencing an individual’s ongoing social construction of reality.


Western bias has been another obstacle that has impeded research efforts to understand the phenomenon of radicalization as a precursor to militant extremism in non-Western cultures. This is particularly true when examining the psychological foundations of another culture. The “fundamental attribution error” of characterizing groups rather than individuals, which subsequently leads to the construction of stereotypes, has been a powerful factor in shaping attitudes about foreign cultures, particularly of perceptions of the Middle East. When speaking of the Middle East, Gregg notes that, “scholars, journalists, government officials and public figures do not hesitate to offer psychological explanations for issues ranging from economic backwardness to religious fanaticism.”

A persistent problem that continues to plague terrorism research has been the lack of access to important and often critical data required to test hypotheses generated by specific research paradigms. In addition, much of the available data is derived from secondary sources of varying reliability. What little data is available is often culled from newspaper accounts, transcripts or court records. When a researcher has had an opportunity to actually interview a terrorist, it is usually under circumstances in which the terrorist may be incarcerated or has been “rehabilitated” and is willing to discuss his or her experiences, factors which potentially impact the reliability of the data. Finally, critical behavioral data that could provide insight into the terrorist mind is generally collected and classified

12 Gregg, Middle East, 14.
by intelligence agencies and law enforcement entities and consequently are generally unavailable to the terrorism researcher.

These types of problems also plague radicalization research and are even more intractable when trying to understand the formation of extreme beliefs leading to militant behavior. Autobiographical reflections will be selective and, as self-narration, delimits individuals to re-imagine their past only as a single biography in a way that serves to position them in the present.\textsuperscript{13} There has also been a notable lack of research that explores the genesis and emergence of political, social and spiritual ideas among adolescent populations, that may subsequently serve as a foundation for extremist beliefs later in life as they move into their young adult years.

The dominance of the counter-terrorist perspective has been another factor that tends to place emphasis on examining the individual terrorist at the expense of the cultural context in which the terrorist is situated. This has led to an overemphasis in trying to establish a “terrorist profile” because of its potential usefulness in serving as an heuristic tool to narrow the search and identification of individuals who may pose a terrorist threat. The allure of using profiles by counter-terrorist organizations may in part be due to their ability to provide law enforcement and counter-terrorist entities with at least some type of framework through which to perceive the potential threat and take specific actions consistent

with their mission while at the same time reinforcing a sense that they are gaining a greater understanding of the threat. However, as Horgan argues, “in spite of all the evidence that logically terrorist profiles are unlikely to appear at all (at least at the level meaningful or practical to those who call for their identification), that the search for the terrorist profile continues on a number of fronts is unsurprising.”

Trying to define the terrorist profile has become in Kuhnian terms an accepted “puzzle” within the terrorist research paradigm. Merari underscores this point when he argues that it is more correct to state that “no terrorist profile has been found” instead of stepping outside the paradigm and claim that “there is no terrorist profile.”

Another obstacle that has stymied radicalization and terrorism research has been the lack of an interdisciplinary framework to guide research efforts. While there is recognition that the process of radicalization is a complex phenomenon that is interdisciplinary in nature, there does not appear to be an interdisciplinary framework to take advantage of the methodological diversity and richness of the various disciplines that could contribute to increased understanding of terrorism and the pathways that may lead an individual to join a terrorist organization. Researchers in the primary disciplines involved in radicalization research seem content to solve their puzzles by clinging to their

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14 Horgan, Search for the Terrorist Personality, 39.

own paradigmatic piece of the pie while other disciplines that could make greater contributions have not been fully engaged. For example, while researchers in various sub-disciplines within anthropology have addressed radicalization and terrorism issues, the effort has been limited and confined to topical aspects of terrorism despite the methodological and conceptual potential anthropology has for providing detailed insight into the cultural factors that impact an individual within social networks and consequently shape pathways into terrorism. As Taarnby and Hallundbaek note, “the anthropology of jihadism is a virtually non-existent field of research.”16

Related to this issue is the extremely cautionary approach that American anthropologists have towards support to U.S. government national security entities. A report issued by the American Anthropology Association (AAA) highlighted various concerns regarding their membership’s engagement with U.S. security and intelligence communities and offered recommendations to help guide anthropologists in deciding whether they should lend their skills to these government entities and, if so, in what manner consistent with the AAA Code of Ethics.17 Consequently, within the context of terrorism research, particularly with regard to fieldwork seeking to understand cultural factors and social networks at the ground level, there may be a disincentive for anthropologists to


17 AAA Commission Final Report, 24-25.
engage in this type of support if their results would be classified or otherwise non-disseminable to the rest of the academic community for peer review.

This unsettled state of affairs in radicalization and terrorism research has been my primary motivation in seeking a new way to understand and hopefully provide insight into the radicalization process. In my view the primary reason for the ambiguous and often contradictory findings of radicalization and terrorism research has been the misguided attempts by researchers to rely on a casually-based reductionist methodology that is not equipped to adequately account for culture and the fluid nature of individual lived experience. My research project seeks to address this deficiency by offering an interdisciplinary framework that attempts to understand the radicalization of individuals within their unique cultural environment by utilizing a discursive approach in which meaning and mean-construction is viewed as central to understanding social and psychological phenomena. The empirical basis for understanding complex human behavior within a sociocultural context is not through the investigation of casual relationships between independent and dependent variables but rather through the investigation of discourse and discursive practices through which meaning is constructed. This discursive turn in the study of psychological phenomena is itself a radical departure from the way traditional research in the psychological sciences has been conducted.\(^\text{18}\) However, this theoretically-grounded approach will in my view provide the sorely needed methodological alternative to current

strategies that have failed to gain critical insight and understanding into how
some individuals become radicalized.

One area of particular concern to me has been how little consideration has
been given to looking at adolescent youth who constitute a key at-risk
demographic across of range of issues that threaten their safety and security.
The lack of focus on adolescent youth may be an artifact of researcher bias in
choosing to diminish the validity of the political and spiritual life of children as
foundations for future actions as young adults. I think it is important to attempt
to gain insight into the belief systems of adolescents, no matter how inchoate the
belief systems may be at that stage of development, if we are to understand the
social and psychological migration of those youth towards extremist social
structures later in life. Consequently, attention to the human development
dimension will be also feature of my interdisciplinary approach.

I also have no pretense of making any truth claims or of providing
definitive answers to the question of how the process of radicalization occurs
across cultures. I am, however, offering an interdisciplinary framework that I
believe is a valid way to gain greater insight into the radicalization of individuals
within their own cultural context. My research is intended for scholars and
researchers involved in radicalization and terrorism research, particularly
analysts working in governmental intelligence and national security
bureaucracies. In this sense, I hope my framework will lead to another way of
understanding the problem of radicalization that will in turn stimulate innovative
policy prescriptions that will help reclaim the creative and productive power of at-risk youth in our global community.

The need to understand the conditions that promote the type of radicalization that leads to militant extremism is not simply a matter of responding to threats to national security or the social disruptions caused by intergroup conflicts. It is also an attempt to address basic challenges to universal human rights in which the promulgation of certain radical belief systems threaten individual freedom and personal security. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, drafted by the United Nations and adopted by its Members on December 10, 1948, provides a common standard by which individuals, groups and nations are measured in their efforts to respect and promote human rights. As noted in the Preamble to the Declaration:

Every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.¹⁹

Within the context of the Declaration, respect for individual beliefs and the diversity of beliefs systems is a fundamental guiding principle that seeks to promote the universal observance of human rights. Militant radicalization defies this principle by posing a direct challenge to the global community by threatening

individual human rights by nurturing intolerance of others as a means to impose radical belief systems through conflictive engagement. In keeping with the Declaration’s call to promote respect for universal human rights through teaching and education, it is important that we work towards gaining a clear understanding of how militant radicalization manifests itself in the diverse sociocultural environments that compose the global community. By gaining insight into how radicalization occurs at the individual level, we can begin to understand the conditions in which intolerance may take root in individual lives that make those individuals susceptible to recruitment by militant extremist organizations.

The current state of radicalization research reflects a field still in search of ways to reduce the ambiguous and often contradictory results that continue to plague the field as it tries to establish casual relationships as a means to define the essential nature of militant radicalization. My proposed framework, employing a discursive approach, is a departure from the casual-reductionist perspective in that individuals are assessed within their sociocultural environments, that is, culture matters and helps structure a multitude of life choices that we face each and everyday. In this sense, our behavior is not caused per se but rather unfolds as a consequence of choices made among an array of perceived options in situations ranging from the mundane to life altering.

My proposed framework is thus offered as a valid alternative to the current causal approaches to understand the militant radicalization process. My research project hopes to demonstrate the validity of my proposed framework as
a new analytic tool as a means to gain new and fresh insight into the radicalization process to not only assist law enforcement and national security analysts track potential terrorists threats but also to provide the basis for a deeper understanding of the radicalization process on which to fashion responsive government policies that promote individual human rights through training and education as urged in the Preamble to the Declaration.
CHAPTER ONE

ADJUSTING OUR GAZE: THE NEED FOR AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF RADICALIZATION

The Future is Now

The radicalization of at-risk youth populations in various global cultural communities has led to the creation of a pool of potential candidates vulnerable to recruitment by extremist organizations seeking to establish their version of a utopian society. In some parts of the world the radicalization problem has been particularly exacerbated by the marginalization of disenfranchised youth disillusioned by the lack of economic and political opportunities. In the Middle East, for example, youth face the paradox of having expanded access to education only to learn upon graduation that many will be unable to find jobs.¹ Despite this, youth-led protests in Tunisia and Egypt have demonstrated that the majority of youth in these countries remain politically engaged and are actively seeking a voice in determining their future. Within this context, youth have chosen to engage their respective political systems through civil resistance in order to promote the removal of autocratic elements in their societies in favor of a more inclusive and participatory form of government. It has been a messy, turbulent process that has also displayed an unsettling violent dimension as government authorities and protesters have periodically clashed; however, there

remained the underlying assumption that the political system needed to be reformed, not destroyed, and elections were subsequently held as scheduled. Alternatively, there remains a small minority of violent extremists who reject all forms of political engagement with established authority and view the destruction of the current system and the imposition of their worldview as the only legitimate form of governance. Consequently, extremist groups on both the right and the left, secular and non-secular, remain positioned to offer a radical option to susceptible youths who have determined that they have no real future within any version of the current system.

A starker set of circumstances confront youth living in extremely hostile environments such as war zones where their security and very survival are threatened on a daily basis. In the case of Sri Lanka, a generation of children grew up during a civil war never having experienced peace, their world constantly populated by enduring threats. On one hand, there were the threats posed by the Tigers of Tamil Elan, commonly known as the Tamil Tigers (LTTE), who would often bolster their ranks by kidnapping youth and subsequently training them to be soldiers. On the other hand, the Sri Lankan government has been accused of incarcerating and even killing young men whom they believed supported the LTTE in any way. The youth within this sociocultural environment were forced to weigh their futures within the context of trying to satisfy their fundamental needs for safety, security and ultimately, survival. They had to live with the
realization that their closest caretakers were unable to provide for their safety and security.²

It has often been said that the first casualty of war is truth. For youth trying to endure the devastatingly debilitating impact of surviving in a war zone, for them the first first casualty of war is trust. Whom they trust would in large part be the product of encounters with those whom they believe can reliably provide for their safety and security. In contrast, the situation is quite different for youth who grow up in cultural environments in which family and community narratives are supportive of attitudes and beliefs that would be considered radical by others outside of their particular sociocultural milieu. In this sense, radicalization may be more properly understood as a type of indoctrination in which a child is subjected to a rote learning style to inculcate a specific set of unchallengeable beliefs with the aim of establisihing a personal commitment to a narrow interpretation of an ideology or doctrine and that can be translated into disciplined action to support that personal commitment. We see this process occurring in radical extremist madrasas, such as those that furnish young recruits for the Pakastani terrorist group Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT). The madrasas tied to LeT are designed to impose a culture of strict obedience and conformity to Quranic belief as interpreted by the radical clerics providing instruction. In this process developing youth are brought to accept only one permissable truth.

According to Pakistani Senator Arasiab Khattak, former chairman of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, “The madrasas indulge in brainwashing on a large scope, of the young children and those in their early teens.”

In an example drawn from Northern Ireland we can see the critical impact of family and community socialization practices and narratives that serve to narrowly define a young child’s social reality. Child psychiatrist Robert Coles, in his investigation of the political life of children, reports on a “vivd lecture” given to him by a seven-year-old Catholic girl in Ulster named Nora. The lecture centered around the researcher’s use of the city name Londonderry. Catholics in that region refer to the city simply as “Derry”. Protestants generally refer to the city using the full name. Nora adamantly pointed out to Coles:

Never say Londonderry here in the Bogside. You’ll be killed. Everyone will think you’re an Orangie. Maybe if you’re lucky they’ll hear you say a few words, and they’ll know you’re an American; but if they don’t spot your accent, you’ll be wiped out!

When Coles asked Nora about her vehement response, he reports that she angrily “lets loose a blast of historical references.”

You see that wall over there? It was built in 1618. The English came here, businessmen from London. They named the city after their capital. They used to stand on the wall and call us ‘croppies,’ and throw pennies at us. They called us pigs. They said we belonged in huts, and we should do their dirty work, and be honored we had the chance. The bog -- they said that’s where we belong! Well, let them chase us out of the bog now. This is Free Ireland!

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At the age of seven years old Nora had already learned the anti-Protestant narrative prevalent in Catholic communities in Ulster. Young Nora was already developing a specific worldview even though she had neither the cognitive tools nor the life experience to assess and challenge family and community narratives that were constructing her social reality that would ultimately influence her life trajectory.

In Europe, second- and third generation Muslim youth face the challenge of trying to negotiate multiple identities across ethnic, social and religious dimensions that has complicated the way they situate themselves in their particular societies. As Abbas notes, indigenous-born European Muslims had to endure discrimination and racism aimed specifically at minority Muslim communities. In addition, local education in Muslim communities was often substandard. Intergenerational tensions between Muslim youth and their traditional and often less educated parents created another flashpoint. Muslim youth were confronted with the task of measuring the narrative of “the good Muslim” against “life in a liberal, secular nation-state.” Meanwhile, these tasks had to be undertaken within the context of an unfolding developmental process in which Muslim youth were seeking to establish stable personal and collective identities. For some, the path towards finding a stable identity in the midst of an often hostile sociocultural environment has led them to accept radical

interpretations of Islam that provided them a personal sense of safety, security and self-worth. Reflecting on his youth, Ed Husain, a British-born former Islamic radical whose father was from British India and his mother from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), expressed his sense of dislocation within British society. Husain notes that as a teen in the British school system he felt isolated describing himself as a misfit and loner who was often bullied by the other students. At home his parents practiced a moderate, mainstream version of Islam that provided Husain his early spiritual guidance. As a teen, however, the Islam of his parents no longer provided the comfort and security he had felt as a young child. Through his only friend, Falik, Husain was introduced to the Young Muslim Organization (YMO) that viewed Islam not only as a religion but also as a political ideology. During his first meeting at the YMO Husain noted the difference between Brick Lane, the moderate, mainstream mosque he attended with his family, and the YMO atmosphere:

There (at Brick Lane) I was a young boy, in my father’s shadow; here (at the YMO) the place was buzzing with young, trim-bearded, English-speaking activists. There was no sombre and elderly worshipful Muslims in these offices -- pious Muslims belonged only in the prayer hall -- rather a sense of organization and discipline; everybody seemed to know their place... Almost without exception they took an interest in me, my studies, my family and my future plans. I could relate to them. I respected them for their seniority, dynamism and commitment to Islam. They seemed like worthy role models: English-speaking, educated and rooted in faith. I felt that I could easily become part of this highly organized robust network of brothers who led a mosque-centered life. At Brick Lane the elders only stroked my head to acknowledge me. It was my father they engaged
with; I was merely a little boy. The people here were interested in me. To an isolated schoolboy, that mattered.6

In contrast to Nora’s story, Husain’s story is one in which family and the local Islamic community, represented by the Brick Lane mosque, failed to address Husain’s immediate social and psychological needs. Husain’s encounter with the activists at YMO enabled him to identify an alternative social structure in his community that could address his development needs at that particular point in his life. It was not only the activist dimension of YMO’s interpretation of Islam that attracted Husain but from his point of view it was also the acceptance of him by the YMO activists as a valued member of their group. The activists at YMO were able to address Husain’s deep psychological need for affiliation and acceptance from his peers. In this sense, Husain’s perception of the YMO as a welcoming network of like-minded young Muslims with a sincere interest in his personal life facilitated Husain’s migration into YMO’s more congenial social structure, which would ultimately serve as the starting point for Husain’s journey towards increasingly radicalized interpretations of Islam.

A common thread that runs through these various cultural scenarios is that at-risk youth encounter radicalizing narratives in ways that are unique to their particular cultural environments. Whether encountering radicalizing narratives in the course of cultural indoctrination, a search for physical safety and security or in the pursuit of a personal and collective identity that may situate a minority

youth in a dominate society, each cultural environment will present a unique set of social and psychological challenges at a critical developmental period in a child’s life. It is little wonder that approaches seeking to find an underlying set of root causes that claim to account for radicalization and terrorism across cultures will yield contradictory and ambiguous results.7

**Contemporary Research: Radicalization as a Causal Process**

When scholars discuss radicalization it is generally Western scholars theorizing about radicalization from a narrow Western causal perspective. For example, in a general review of radicalization studies by Mina al-Lami, the author limits the review to the radicalization of Muslims in the West. There is inherent methodological bias in the review in that the study is looking at the “wisdom available so far on the main factors and catalysts leading to the radicalisation of Muslims in the West.” (Italics added.)8 The results of al-Lami’s review of the various selected radicalization studies, all utilizing causally-based methodologies, predictably yields a laundry list of contested explanations (socio-economic deprivation, globalization, search for identity, political grievances, etc.) that have tended to generate much ink but little understanding. The studies all seem to yearn for the discovery of a set of universal principles that could shed

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light on the essential nature of radicalization but in the process has revealed that their methodologies may be inappropriate to the task of understanding behavior as lived experience within a particular cultural context. In reviewing an oft-quoted 2004 study on jihadi extremism, *Understanding Terror Networks* by Sageman, terrorism scholar Andrew Silke on one hand lauds Sageman for being able to build profiles of jihadi extremists while at the same time charging that the publically available sources of information used by Sageman were not always reliable. Silke further noted that Sageman failed to make comparisons with individuals who were not members of extremist groups.\(^9\) Within the context of this particular research design, Silke is essentially charging Sageman with committing the methodological error known as “selection on the dependent variable” in which Sageman chose his cases based on the particular value they may have in helping to establish patterns.\(^10\) Bakker replicated part of Sageman’s study looking at jihadis in Europe noting Sageman’s contribution of underscoring the important role of radicalization and of social networks in providing potential entrée into terrorist organizations. He notes, however, that Sageman’s characterization of jihadi extremism as being linked to global Salafi networks does not fit well with current European realities in which successful attacks, such as those in Madrid, Amsterdam and London, as well as failed attacks and plots,


were “homegrown” in which the attacks were carried out without the central control of any organization in the global jihadi movement. Sageman updates his views in a later work in which he characterizes the current version of the global Islamist threat as “leaderless” falling more in line with Bakker findings on the nature of the European jihadi movement. He states:

The threat from al Qaeda and its local affiliates is rapidly changing. The Islamist terror networks of the twenty-first century are becoming more fluid, independent and unpredictable entities, than their more structured forebears, who carried out the atrocities of 9/11. The present threat has evolved from a structured group of al Qaeda masterminds, controlling vast resources and issuing commands to a multitude of informal local groups trying to emulate their predecessors by conceiving and executing operations from the bottom up. These “homegrown” wannabes form a scattered global network, a leaderless jihad.

What is notable about Sageman’s updated account is that the study recognizes that the jihadi movement has changed over time. Consequently, the methodological approach employed by Sageman can offer only a snapshot in time while the movement itself continues to morph and change, i.e. this approach does not account for time and the fluidity of events that Sageman refers to in his update. It also is representative of many studies that seek to use a correlational approach to support rebuttable assumptions. For example, Sageman equates attending university and obtaining a degree as a measure of educational level without contextualizing the education experience of the individual in terms of

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quality of education, experience in school, the availability of resources, and the potential discriminatory practices within the school system that the individual would face if a member of a religious or ethnic minority. This data-driven approach highlights another unfortunate feature of many current efforts to study radicalization. As Veldius and Staun rightly assert, most research on radicalization, particularly after 9/11, has basically utilized a post hoc approach in which terrorist attacks have often been the starting point towards investigating the radicalization process.13

Terrorism scholar John Horgan reflects the frustration in the current state of radicalization and terrorism research asserting that “A legacy of the reductionist approaches to understanding terrorist behavior is not only confusion about what a psychology of terrorism implies, but also the realization that even some of the simplest analyses of terrorists produce inconsistent and confusing uses of psychological findings.” Horgan argues for an interdisciplinary approach that will provide a more sophisticated understanding of the psychological processes involved in terrorism. He suggests that researchers should begin to think in terms of “pathways” instead of “profiles” and “root causes” when seeking to understand terrorist behavior.14 In this sense, examining “pathways” would presumably include an understanding of the


radicalization process and provide a way to understand how an individual moves towards radicalized beliefs over time in a fluid and constantly changing social
environment. Unfortunately, in providing a risk assessment to predict an
individual’s eventual involvement in terrorism, Horgan offers what he terms a
“powerful framework” composed of a list of factors (alienation, identification with
victims, necessity of a terrorist strategy, etc.), which seems to violate his
admonition to move away from root causes to pathways. It is essentially a
reductionist approach that Horgan had warned against.

The “root causes” narrative has become firmly embedded in the policy
processes in Western governments as various researchers privilege their
favored understanding of the causes of radicalization and terrorism in testimony
in front of official governing bodies charged with national security responsibilities.
These views then often become integrated into an operational working narrative
that a government agency uses in the formulation of a policy response to
radicalization. For example, drawing on input from external experts and
interagency partners, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in
a policy statement viewed the rise of violent extremism in terms of “structural
push factors” such as social marginalization, poor government, government
corruption and repression, and “pull factors” at the individual level such social
networks, presence of radical groups, the role of family.15 While these factors

15 U. S. Agency for International Development. The Development Response to Violent
Extremism and Insurgency: Putting Principles into Practice, September 2011, 3-5.
may be useful starting points for examining individual behavior within a particular cultural context, it is critical that researchers employ a methodology that will allow access into how individuals extract meaning from their environment that will subsequently influence their life choices and life trajectory over time.

The analytic challenge in understanding the radicalization process is to identify an approach that can be used to understand psychological phenomenon of developing youth within their own cultural context in a way that allows the researcher or analyst to gain insight on how their lives (pathways) unfold as they confront the various narratives resident in the social structures that are nurturing their development. While a causal approach may at best describe what may be happening at a particular point in time, it has been unable to provide insight into psychological phenomenon of individuals embedded in a fluid and constantly changing culture context. It is my contention that focusing analytic attention on discursive practices will offer a critical window into understanding individuals as they subjectively experience their lives embedded within their particular culture. Through an examination of their lived experience as revealed in discourse, analysts will be better positioned to gain insight into life trajectories that gravitate towards narrowing arrays of life options potentially funneling towards more radicalized belief systems. My central argument is that a discursive approach, which I detail more fully in Chapter Two, offers a theoretically-grounded alternative with greater explanatory power than is offered by the causal, reductionist approach that currently dominates the field. A discursive approach
brings us into the life of the individual as someone experiences it personally across time. In a very real sense a discursive approach reveals how in each moment we are on the threshold of our unique possible futures as we engage in dialogic encounters with ourselves and others. In many ways, the future is literally now.

**An Alternative Concept of Radicalization**

Broad concepts are always notoriously difficult to specifically define in a way that will account for all cases at all times. This is perceived as a persistent problem, for example, in terrorism studies where there is no consensus on the meaning of terrorism and who, for that matter, should be considered a terrorist.\(^{16}\) Was Ted Kaczynski, the Unabomber, a terrorist or merely a serial bomber? What is the difference between a religious martyr and a suicide bomber?

A similar difficulty exists in trying to define radicalization. There seems to be as many definitions of radicalization as there are research paradigms and government institutions looking at the issue. The diversity of views regarding a specific and bounded definition of radicalization has been viewed as a problem within the field and has been the subject of continuing debate.\(^{17}\) There seems to be a presumption that there needs to be a consensus on a precise definition as a

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\(^{16}\) Scholars A. P. Schmid and A. I. Jongman identified 109 different definitions of terrorism in their study *Political Terrorism*, (SWIDOC, Amsterdam and Transaction Books, 1988).

precondition to fully understand radicalization and develop policies to address it. It becomes a particularly thorny issue when viewing radicalization as a change in one’s mental state and thought processes that subsequently determines how an individual socially constructs his or her world. In the case of terrorism, there is at least some tangible, observable objects or events to reference when determining whether a terrorist act has occurred. Changes in one’s mental state and thought processes are less obvious and requires an analytic approach that can gain access to the individual’s cognitive processes to determine the impact of radicalizing influences. However, some researchers insist that radicalization of “behavior” should be the central focus of concern. For example, in a puzzling formulation, McCauley and Moskalenko define behavioral radicalization as “increasing time, money, risk-taking and violence in support of a political group.”

Defining behavioral aspects of radicalization in this manner confuses operational targeting with analytic vigor in viewing radicalization as a psychological process and consequently represents an example of muddled thinking. With the exception of the focus on violence, observing an individual’s behavior with respect to the devotion of time, money and risk-taking in support of a political party or group does not necessarily denote radicalization. Quantifying behavioral acts in support of violence in this manner represents a default to a reductionist approach influenced primarily by a law enforcement perspective that

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seeks to monitor and identify potential perpetrators rather than seek an understanding of the cognitive processes that guide overt actions.

The analytical angst that has been expressed by various researchers may be misplaced when we consider the diversity in the sociocultural environments where individuals have become radicalized. Instead of seeking a specific, bounded definition of radicalization required of a causal approach, it may be more fruitful to conceive of radicalization in the Wittgensteinian sense of having a “family of meanings” that form a network of overlapping similarities. In this sense, it is not analytically useful to search for some hidden essential feature that will serve as a common thread to unify all meanings of radicalization across diverse cultural contexts over time. Instead, the meaning of radicalization may be better understood as a category in which various versions of radicalization will be defined by how people actually understand and interpret radicalization within a particular cultural context. Wittgenstein’s aphorism “let the use of the words teach you the meaning” seems like good advice.

So when I talk about radicalization, what do I mean? My working definition of radicalization is: the process by which an individual learns and

19 Wittgenstein illustrates this notion of commonality of meanings in his discussion of the word “game” in which he notes that there can be various meanings of the word depending on how people actually use it. Game may refer to card games, board games, sporting events, games of skill, games of chance, etc. There may not necessarily be common features that run through all of them but there are “family resemblances” that allows an individual to recognize and group the various versions of games into a “family.” In sum, Wittgenstein argues that you do not need a precise, bounded definition to understand the concept of a word. For Wittgenstein’s illuminating full discussion of this example see Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 36-41.

accepts an increasingly delimited set of beliefs, secular or religious, that are in irreconcilable conflict with other sets of beliefs perceived as an external threat to the individual’s current belief system. The implication for radicalization as an ongoing psychological process that funnels individuals towards a narrowing array of choices over time is consistent with Moghaddam’s metaphorical view of individuals climbing a staircase that leads to a diminishing range of options that may result in the individual engaging in destructive behavior seeing that this is the only option.21

In defining radicalization in this way I’ve sought to provide a neutral, descriptive definition that leads the way towards a language-based understanding of the world rather than conceptualizing radicalization as extremism per se. When we try to specifically define radicalization in terms of extremism, it begins to beg the question of “extreme relative to what? - relative to researchers beliefs, a government’s belief, a counter-terrorism perspective, accepted political processes, etc.? It is only when we move from general notions of radicalization to specific cases anchored within a particular cultural environment that we can begin to speak in terms of extremism. In other words, the meaning of extremism in my formulation refers to the interpretation of radicalization within a specific context. For example, in the case of young Nora, we can speak of radicalization in terms of indoctrination in which Nora’s social

21 Fathali M. Moghaddam, From the Terrorist Point of View: What They Experience and Why They Come to Destroy (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2006), 43-44.
encounters with family and community serve to generate narratives that funnel her towards a narrowing range of political beliefs. However, it is only when we begin to interpret those beliefs within a particular cultural context do we establish a set of reference points according to our own hermeneutical model to assess and compare those beliefs in relation to another set of beliefs external to Nora’s social group. From the perspective of British security officials, Nora might be considered a potential security risk in the future, categorized as one of many radicalized youth growing up in a region hostile to British authorities. However, the Irish Northern Aid Committee (NOAID), a U.S.-based fund raising organization organization that has been accused of being a front for the Irish Republican Army, may consider Nora a young patriot who must be supported in her beliefs. Alternatively, the cultural distance between two sets of beliefs may be so great as to make the belief systems incommensurable. Inhabitants of a remote village in Cambodia would most likely have no real context in which to judge Nora’s beliefs except in relation to their own cultural norms. How is extremism understood across cultures? Would extremism even be a relevant interpretative category among the people of the remote Cambodian village?

**Importance of Cultural Context**

Most of the research to date on radicalization and militant extremism has neglected to examine the interaction between cultural context and an individual’s cognitive development which combine to constantly shape and reshape the
individual’s worldview that will ultimately determine that individual’s particular life trajectory. As Valsiner notes, “All human beings are said to belong to society -- or societies. Yet they do so in different ways...” An individual is not only embedded in society but society is also embedded in the individual in a way that is personalized and unique. That is, from an analytical standpoint, culture matters and must be taken into account if we are to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of the radicalization process and the pathways that may lead individuals towards extremist behavior that may culminate in violence. The later work of cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz led the way in championing an interpretative version of anthropology that helped redirect our attention towards understanding individuals within their own cultural context. Through intensive ethnographic study Geertz sought to obtain a detailed description of the individual’s social reality as perceived by that individual from within the culture as a means to establish possible reasons behind human actions of individuals within that particular cultural context. Drawing on the work of Gilbert Ryle, Geertz’s ethnographic approach to gathering detailed information in order to comprehend how such things as events, rituals, ideas, are understood within the culture became known as “thick description,” which sought to establish how the inhabitants of a particular culture socially constructed their

own reality. Geertz reminds us of the complexity of trying to understand another culture through thick description by insightfully noting that “what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to.”

Conceptualizing individual agency as culturally constituted particularly matters in trying to understand the local meanings of globalized faiths. Speaking of the Muslim faith Mandeville notes “Islam should always be considered in relation to how it is understood and experienced in specific contexts and circumstances.”

Esposito underscores the diversity of Islam by observing that the majority of the world’s 1.3 billion Muslims live in Asia and Africa and that only 20 percent are Arabs. In addition, Muslims live in over 57 countries with the largest concentration of Muslim communities in Indonesia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, India and Nigeria.

Speaking of Islam as a monolithic religious doctrine elevates it to a level of abstraction that does not reflect the pluralism of Islam as the lived experience of individuals situated in diverse sociocultural communities in which Islam is understood and expressed differently from one community to the next.

The same can be said for all globalized faiths that spread to various cultures and

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have adapted to local conditions. In order to gain insight into the radicalization process it becomes vitally important to understand how individuals extract meaning from their particular sociocultural environments and how that meaning influences the way they interpret their faith.

The Legacy of the Natural Science Model

The ambiguous and often contradictory results that have emerged from radicalization and terrorism research dominated by a causal approach highlights an even deeper issue regarding the nature of explanations when it comes to gaining insight into human behavior. Is the natural science paradigm the proper model to study social behavior? Harré asserts that “in point of fact, it is often not the real methods of natural science but some imitation of their superficial features that is followed.”

Harré notes that inquiry in the natural sciences has alternated between two paths. One path has been the “positivist” approach that delimited investigation to observable phenomena and defined causality as a regularity in patterns of data. The other path was the “realist” approach that in addition to using theory to describe regularities, also sought to provide insight into hidden and unobservable processes that led to the observed regularities. The first cognitive revolution embodied in contemporary cognitive science emerged within the context of the realist approach that sought to make statements about unobserved mental states. Harré notes that “hypotheses about unconscious
mental states are invoked to account for the mental activities both private and public, of isolated human beings." The major flaw in the first cognitive revolution has been its inability to consider human beings as social animals embedded in a sociocultural matrix of human relationships. There is an inherent contradiction in assuming that human behavior exists in isolation from the sociocultural environment in which it occurs if the aim is to investigate human behavior as lived experience.

The application of the causally-based natural science model to the investigation of psychological phenomena has led to a number of problematic assumptions that raise questions concerning the validity of research in social psychology and its applicability in a cross-cultural context. This has obvious implications when assessing the validity of radicalization and terrorism research particularly across cultures.

A major obstacle that has hampered the meaningful scientific investigation of radicalization as a context-sensitive and culture-inclusive process has been the dominance of a quantitatively oriented North American research paradigm in the social sciences. Toomela notes that while the North American approach has provided ways to statistically predict how one variable may predict the variability of another, the resulting fragments of data do not shed light on complicated underlying mechanisms that may be influencing the results or how the

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experimental conditions themselves may be impacting results. Statistical probabilistic prediction has become an end in itself at the expense of trying to understand individual behavior within a particular cultural context over time.\textsuperscript{28}

This problem of a quantitative emphasis in the social sciences has been exacerbated by non-representative sampling in which research participants are recruited primarily from undergraduate psychology classes. The assumption made by most psychologists is that inferences about the human mind based on this over-represented pool of participants could be generalized to other sociocultural contexts. This sampling method has been criticized for many years, however, the inconvenient truth of non-representative sampling has rarely been challenged.\textsuperscript{29} In fact, the early history of psychology reveals that random sampling was not taken into account. The focus was on the investigation of mental states such as the unconscious or on individual behavior. It was only when psychological research began to focus on developing information about the individuals in specific groups, such as students in a classroom setting or soldiers in military units, that attention began to be paid to obtaining random samples.

Another issue that should be of concern has been the geographical over-representation of research that raises questions of Western bias when making


inferences about other cultures. A review of published papers of the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology since its inception revealed that 92% were from the U.S. and Canada which increased to 99% if you include all Western countries. A review of major psychology journals from 1994 - 2002 using the keyword “culture” found the term appeared in less than 5% of the articles. Norenzayan and Heine concluded that instead of studying human nature, psychologists “have been investigating the nature of educated, middle-class, young adult Westerners (or children of such people.)” They note that this type of sampling represents a cultural anomaly in which the sampling methodology results in biased samples reflecting psychological dimensions typically associated with the West, ex. individualistic, affluent, secular, low context, analytic. Thus, sampling based on the underlying assumption of universality can lead one to the uncomfortable conclusion that much of the bedrock of psychological knowledge claimed in the West may be valid only as special cases that apply only in a Western context and, perhaps, not even there.

In this same vein, Maruyama provides a persuasive critique of the methodologies of mainstream comparative culture, anthropology, social psychology, and international management that attempt to compare cultures by employing a normal distribution assumption to make comparisons based on

means and standard deviations. He notes that researchers attempt to argue that epistemological similarities between individuals from different cultures can be explained in terms of the overlapping of two normal distributions. Maruyama points out, however, one cannot assume a normal distribution within a culture given that the elements of the sample must meet the requirements of being “random” and “independent” of each other. In addition, the calculation of a “mean” and “standard deviation” can also be obtained from non-normal distributions. The nature of lived experience, the individual’s social interaction with others, clearly violates the conditions of both randomness and independence required of the statistical application of a normal distribution assumption in making cultural comparisons among individuals. As a consequence there is no reason to suspect that within a particular culture individuals will be epistemologically homogeneous and whose distribution within that culture can be represented by a bell-shaped curve. Maruyama further argues that the tendency for researchers (as well as laymen, for that matter) to view society through the lens of a homogenistic epistemology is an artifact of our need to classify all things into categories in which we assume a homogeneity across the category.31

The emergence in the past several decades of the internationally-based and interdisciplinary-oriented field of cultural psychology has brought into relief

many of the inadequacies of Western-dominated general psychology and the methodology it brings to bear in making claims about psychological universals. In fact, Norenzayan and Heine, note that in the last two decades there have been numerous studies in cultural psychology that have demonstrated the inadequacies of generalizing psychological theories developed in the West to other cultural contexts.\footnote{32} Geertz had warned about the dangers of a “consensus gentium” approach in which social scientists become driven by the search for cross-cultural universals.\footnote{33}

In contrasting cultural psychology with general psychology, Shweder states that the basic assumption of general psychology is that people are the same everywhere often referred to as the “principle of psychic unity of humankind.” This presupposes some sort of central processing system inherent in human mental activity. The aim of general psychology, therefore, is to investigate and describe this central processing system that all humankind presumably shares. As such, the central processing unit is independent of context and consequently serves as a consumer and manager of the content of culture, context, tasks and stimuli that wash over an individual in the course of daily activities. Shweder notes that it is from this ontological basis that general psychology, perceived as the explicator of the grand central processing unit

\footnote{32} Ara Norenzayan and Steven J. Heine, “Psychological Universals: What Are They and How Can We Know?” \textit{Psychological Bulletin} 135 (2005): 763 -784.

assumed to be inherent in the human species, is esteemed as the pathway to establishing universal psychological truths. In Shweder’s view, this represents an “unbreachable divide between general psychology and cultural psychology” in that general psychology seeks to transcend the noise and clutter of culture and context, in a sense, bleaching out the impact of the environment in order to flesh out the universals that are presumed to exist. Cultural psychology, on the other hand, looks at this so-called noise as an integral part of the individual’s intentional world where the drive to reduce existential uncertainty strongly motivates the individual “to seize meanings and resources out of a sociocultural environment that has been arranged to provide... meanings and resources to seize and to use.”

Valsiner concurs with Shweder and concludes that the traditional methodology of general psychology is ill-equipped to study the phenomenon of life as lived experience within a particular sociocultural context. Consequently, the methodology of general psychology determines the types of questions that are asked and not asked. Valsiner laments:

Issues of religious devotion are rarely studied by psychologists at the present time -- while the popularity of the studies of emotional intelligence seem to fascinate psychologists and laypersons alike. It probably is easy to see that human beings have both benefitted and suffered more from religious devotion in their history than from lack -- or abundance of emotional (or other kinds of) intelligence.


35 Valsiner, Integrating Psychology, 4.
Instead of using our analytic toolbox to assist in answering our research questions, we are allowing our toolkit to determine what questions we can ask.

**Emergence of a New Paradigm**

As Harré notes, the second cognitive revolution currently underway essentially rejects both natural science models - positivism and realism - in favor of explanations that rely on a normative approach to explain human behavior. The emergence of discursive psychology has been a product of this second revolution and represents a radical departure from the causally-based natural science paradigm. Its emergence in the last twenty years reflects the growing skepticism and increasing doubts about the plausibility of claims of causal models in cognitive science that rely on hidden cognitive mechanisms to explain human thought and behavior. Utilizing a discursive approach, in which rules duties and obligations influence an individual’s life trajectory and considers human behavior within a particular cultural context that is fluid and constantly changing, provides access to understanding human behavior as lived experience. The discursive approach has the advantage of accommodating the insights of Bruner and others regarding the role of story-telling and its organizing role in helping to structure the narratives that help order ordinary life. In this sense, conceptualizing the flow of life events in terms of narrative directs our attention to the notions of intentionality and normativity of continuously shifting
situational contexts.\textsuperscript{36} In sum, a discursive approach provides the opportunity to gain insight in human behavior as embedded in a fluid and constantly changing sociocultural environment. The assumptions and the outline of my use of the discursive approach as my method of investigation will be detailed more fully in Chapter Two.

\textbf{The Developmental Dimension}

There is very little research that has looked at the radicalization of youth from a developmental perspective. Lo Cicero and Sinclair, researchers who have investigated radicalization and terrorist recruitment of youth, remind us that in assessing and analyzing youth involvement in terrorist activities it is important that we consider:

(1) the role of child and adolescent development, and how being young, seeing the world as a young person, and thinking like a young person, presents an array of vulnerabilities to become involved in violent activity, voluntarily or involuntarily; and,

(2) how the context in which one develops affects the fundamental capacities, as well as the content of one’s developing ability to think.\textsuperscript{37}

Consequently, my framework for understanding the radicalization process across cultures will take into account the unique developmental challenges that situate youth in particular sociocultural environments in ways that are often dependent on their cognitive abilities. For example, youth who lack the cognitive complexity

\textsuperscript{36} Rom Harré, \textit{Singular Self}, 31-34.

\textsuperscript{37} Lo Cicero and Sinclair, \textit{Creating Young Martyrs}, 35.
to effectively evaluate and challenge the rhetorical arguments of a radical Imam seeking to direct them towards membership in a terrorist organization will perceive a narrower range of options and may unquestioningly assume that no additional life choices will be available to them.

**Research Assumptions**

The construction of my interpretative framework to serve as a guide to understand the radicalization process across cultures will be built on four basic research assumptions:

First, an individual’s subjective experience of reality is socially constructed. The discursive approach to psychology is rooted in social constructionism which I will further detail in Chapter Two.

Second, the formation of attitudes and beliefs systems in individuals begin to congeal into a more coherent form during their adolescent years within the context of the search for a stable personal and social identity.

Third, the principle of “psychic unity of mankind” that undergirds research methodology in general psychology is rejected in favor of a cultural psychology-based approach that views an individual’s cultural context as fundamental to understanding a person’s intentional world and the choices that are made to reduce existential uncertainty.
Fourth, using a discursive approach offers the most fruitful methodological orientation to understanding complex human behavior in a particular sociocultural context.

These assumptions will be used as a basis to build an interpretive framework that hopefully points in a new analytic direction that will help us better understand the radicalization process and the potential for terrorist recruitment of at-risk-youth.
CHAPTER TWO
THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

To put it bluntly, in this universe, there are people performing discursive acts and there are material poles and charges. That is all.

--Rom Harré

Types of Scientific Explanation

A debate that continues to engage philosophers of science to one degree or another centers around questions concerning the possibility of obtaining “scientific knowledge” about the social world. Montuschi frames the issue in terms of two related questions: Is it possible to obtain “objective” knowledge of the social world? And, related to this question, can knowledge of the “social” be scientific? The natural science school has argued that objective knowledge can only be created by employing the “methods and procedures” of natural science. According to this view, in order to be scientific, the natural science model must be employed as the method of inquiry in order to obtain the highest type of scientific knowledge. As Montuschi points out, this is essentially a normative argument that has, however, encouraged social scientists to utilize natural science methods and modes of thinking to arrive at objective understandings of social phenomena. History becomes “objective” when explanations are derived from logical inferences based on stated laws that conform with observed events. Similarly, anthropological and sociological knowledge has also sought

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explanations in which observations were treated as data used towards establishing generalizable universals.²

The field of modern psychology that began to emerge by the mid-19th century found itself on a dual track of competing visions of what constituted a scientific explanation. On one hand psychology was viewed as a causal science based on the natural science model. Its research method was dominated by laboratory-based experiments that sought cause and effect relationships with the aim of establishing universal behavioral principles and laws that had predictive value. On the other hand, psychology was also viewed as a normative science in which psychological phenomenon were best understood as residing in language, culture and the social interaction of intentional human beings. Both of these approaches were reflected in the work of Wilhelm Wundt (1832-1920); however, researchers over time favored the “experimentalism” approach that sought to find the “hidden causal hand” that would provide insight into the predictive laws of human behavior. History, meanwhile, accorded Wundt the title of the father of psychological experimentalism despite his considerable work in establishing the relevance of the normative approach as reflected in his work on folk psychology.³

The social sciences continued to struggle, however, to adapt the methods and protocols of so-called “real” science to their research endeavors but, as


Montuschi argues, they emerged with an “inferiority complex” because of the inability to withstand the critique from those within the natural science paradigm.4

As Harré notes, the legacy of the natural science paradigm within the social sciences remains, along with its claims of producing objective knowledge. In the realm of psychology, causal-based approaches to understanding human behavior such as behaviorism and its opponent, cognitive science, both still reflect versions of a natural science approach. The causal-based approach relies on the use of independent and dependent variables to transform complex human behavior into categories of data that can be manipulated to discern statistical patterns within the data set. This approach remains the primary scientific mode of investigating the radicalization process and terrorist behavior. In sum, the natural science approach tends to encode observations of behavior as data in an attempt to find universalizable patterns in which to base inferences and establish laws to predict future behavior.

The alternative approach for understanding human behavior is to view it within a normative context, which seeks to provide a rule-based account of human behavior to establish the shared meanings of social actions of individuals within a particular cultural matrix. The aim is to understand the individual as embedded within a particular sociocultural environment in which an intended act is properly understood by others within the cultural context in which it occurs. In contrast to the natural science paradigm, the normative approach has two

important advantages. First, a normative approach can account for the intentionality of human behavior. Second, it frames social behavior by providing a set of rules to appraise individual behavior within a particular cultural context at a specific point in time.\(^5\) Consequently, the methodological goal is to employ an analytic perspective that will capture both an individual’s intentionality within a specific cultural environment in a way that will also allow an appraisal of the individual’s behavior in relation to local norms - fulfilling them or falling short. In either case, the norms shape action not the local events. To satisfy these two conditions I chose a discursive approach as the means to analyze the beliefs and propensities of individuals as embedded in their cultural contexts in order to gain access to insights that would help understand radicalization as a psychological process that occurs in a particular cultural context over time.

The Discursive Approach

The central tenet of the discursive approach is that any understanding of human behavior must include the study of meaning and how meaning is constructed. This insight finds its roots in the thinking of Wittgenstein who argued that it is only by looking at how people utilize discourse and sign systems that we can begin to grasp meaning and the intentionality of the individual within context.\(^6\) Given that meanings are constructed in discourse and discursive

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practices, and that psychological phenomena are constituted by such practices, the investigation and analysis of discourse offers an epistemic opening into psychological phenomena of individuals acting intentionally within their cultural context. In this formulation the study of psychology is essentially the study of discursive practices. The analysis of discourse that constitutes discursive practices will thus serve as the basis from which to gain insight into the psychological phenomena that influence an individual’s life trajectory.

**Social Constructionist Roots of Discursive Psychology**

Discursive psychology has its roots in social constructionism. The term social constructionism was first introduced by Berger and Luckmann in their investigation of the sociology of knowledge. Their central idea is that individuals and groups interacting in a social system over time intersubjectively share commonly understood meanings formed from concepts or mental representations of each others actions that subsequently constitute the social reality of everyday life. This social process institutionalizes meaning as understood within a particular society. In this sense, knowledge and beliefs of individuals embedded in a particular sociocultural environment are said to be social constructions. A critical element that allows social construction to occur is the integrating role of language that enables people to establish meaning that

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allows them to interpret various spheres of reality. Language is particularly relevant in navigating through different realms for such processing as thinking, dreaming, the entertaining of mystical and religious beliefs, and, of course, cognitive construction. Berger and Luckmann note:

Language is capable of transcending the reality of everyday life altogether. It can refer to experiences pertaining to finite provinces of meaning, and it can span discrete spheres of reality. For instance, I can interpret “the meaning” of a dream by integrating it linguistically within the order of everyday life. Such integration transposes the discrete reality of the dream into the reality of everyday life by making it an enclave within the latter.8

Language thus connects the individual to a sociocultural context by providing the tools that allow the individual a way to construct and establish interpersonal meaning, even in establishing a separate realm of reality. For example, among the Taliban, “true night dreams” have the status and power of prophecy, i.e. these dreams are treated as an authoritative embodied voice that serves as a spiritual guide to actions. Language serves to translate the dream and, through social practice, fosters the acceptance of the dream as everyday reality.9

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9 The rise of the young Pashtun refugee “Malik” to the position of spiritual advisor to Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar is an example of the power and authority of dreams that essentially constitute part of the everyday reality of the Taliban worldview. Malik, at the age of sixteen, had what was considered a “true night dream” which foretold the “miracle of Mullah Omar and the Blessed Cloak” in which Mullah Omar went to Kandahar and secured the Blessed Cloak supposedly worn by the Prophet Muhammad and in so doing was proclaimed by the Taliban as “leader of the faithful. For further detail of how Malik rose to become the spiritual seer to Mullah Omar see Ken Ballen, *Terrorist in Love: The Real Lives of Islamic Radicals*, (New York: Free Press, 2011), 79-113.
Harré offers two doctrines that are specifically relevant to constructionist conceptions that are seen to embody discursive approaches to psychology in addition to the complementary disciplines of cultural anthropology and socio-linguistics. The first doctrine states that human beings emerge as psychological beings through their “symbiotic” interactions with other humans. The human life form establishes a universal basis on what an individual human can become while the diversity of culture provides a framework that sets the stage for what an individual actually becomes. The second doctrine notes that language creates a universal linguistic bond among humans and determines the potential of human activity while culture imposes a type of bounded diversity that delimits what a human being can actually do within a specific cultural arrangement. The underlying parallelism between the two doctrines is that both underscore what Harré refers to as the “universal and local aspects of the human condition.”

Main Principles of the Discursive Approach

The central focus of discursive psychology, according to Potter and Edwards, is “the action orientation of talking and writing (that is, what talk and writing is being used to do.)” The main principles of the discursive approach are the following:

10 Harré, Singular Self, 18.

1) Psychological phenomena are understood as objects or features of discursive practices generated by individuals functioning as active agents employing certain skills in an intentional manner. This contrasts with the causal approach which views external conditions as a “cause” of behavior rather than behavior generated by an intentional human being.

2) Symbolic systems used by individuals are generated from discursive processes of the individuals embedded in an interactive sociocultural context that is constantly re-negotiated over time.

3) Individuals are embedded in a normative social context that makes the production of psychological phenomena dependent to a degree on the individual’s relative moral standing in that person’s particular cultural community, the skill of the individual and the eventual story-lines that unfold. The meaning of an individual’s public and private discourse is situated within and could only be understood with respect to the prevailing cultural norms in which the discourse takes place.\textsuperscript{12}

Discourse analysis is centered around several basic features that provide access to the psychological phenomena that undergird human intentional behavior. The most critical and distinctive feature of discourse analysis within the social constructionist framework is its reliance on the documentation of the

\textsuperscript{12} Harré and Langenhove, \textit{Positioning Theory}, 4.
social “naturalistic” interaction of individuals within their sociocultural context. The records that constitute documentation include such discursive forms as conversations, legal arguments, newspaper reports, autobiographies, and interview transcripts.\textsuperscript{13}

Another feature of discourse analysis is its focus on the content of the discourse under investigation with regard to its subject matter. The emphasis is given to the social organization of the discourse in contrast to its linguistic organization. As Harré notes, “discourse constructed jointly by persons and within sociocultural groups become an important part of the framework of interpretation.”\textsuperscript{14}

A central concern of discourse analysis is how talking and text create social actions that are constructed from an array of linguistic and rhetorical resources that situate the individual in a particular sociocultural environment. It is through variations in the account(s) that may provide critical information offering insight into situational versions of a social action. For example, a college student in talking about his "junior year abroad" experience in Rome in a conversation with parents might present a certain version that emphasizes the educational and cultural benefits from the trip. In talking about the same trip with friends from college, the student may offer a story-line that emphasizes his


\textsuperscript{14} Harré, \textit{Discursive Mind}, 22.
Discourse analysis is also useful in exploring the rhetorical dimension and organization of everyday conversation and internal thought processes that contribute to the generation and delineation of specific story-lines. Harré argues that the basic theoretical model of human beings should be “man as a rhetorician” in which the expressive and persuasive nature of speech and action is aimed at influencing the perceptions and actions of another individual. Billig believes a more forceful version of this view would be to consider adding “argumentation” as specific mode of discourse.\(^{15}\) The ideas of persuasion and argumentation both play roles in the rhetorical process of structuring another person’s perceptions (and hence the individual’s social reality) that will generate an array of life choices available to the individual. Within the context of radicalization, we can easily see how the rhetorical dimensions comes into play, for example, in the case of the knowledgable Imam, well versed in the Quran with finely honed rhetorical skills, who finds it easy to persuade a vulnerable youth with few rhetorical skills and only a superficial understanding of the Quran. In this instance, it is not a reasoned argument that serves to persuade the youth towards a more radical interpretation of Islam but rather a *final* argument or series of arguments that the youth is unable to challenge or refute that

consequently leads the youth to accept the only conceivable option as presented by the Imam.

Discourse analysis also provides the opportunity to explore cognitive features of the mind such as belief, identity and concepts of self. This becomes particularly important in understanding the development of youth within their specific sociocultural environment and how their cognitive abilities and belief systems form and inform behavior. Central to this process is the symbiotic relationship between cognitive skills, constantly being developed and refined, and the emergence of a sense of “self” that orients and embeds an individual in their particular social matrix. Harré characterizes the development of a sense of self by summarizing the insights of Lev Vygotsky:

The biological endowment of a human being with an active brain and nervous system is manifested at first in relatively undifferentiated and unordered mental activities that are then shaped and modulated by the acquisition of discursive and practical skills which facilitate display of the central organization we recognize in our own experience. This pattern of development could be thought of as the transition from the characteristics by which we would recognize any animate being capable of mental activity to the characteristics definitive of what it is to be a person, that is to be a human being with both sense of self.\(^\text{16}\)

**Acquiring a Sense of Self**

The emergence of one’s sense of self that subsequently influences how one interprets his world will be dependent on the formation of the individual’s self-conception that is under constant re-negotiation through interaction with that

\(^{16}\) Harré, *Singular Self*, 12.
person’s social environment. Davies and Harré posit the following processes under which the development of a sense of self occurs:  

1) Individuals learn categories that provide a heuristic way to order social relations into groups and subgroups that may or may not overlap. Cantor, *et. al.* have argued that categorization is a fundamental quality of cognition in which categorization schemes give structure and coherence to our general knowledge about the social world, expectations about behavior and variations among people with regard to their actions and attributes.

2) Through the use of discursive practices, individuals allocate meaning to the categories that they have established to order their unique interpretations of their particular social reality. Allocating meaning to these categories includes the creation of different story-lines that establish the positions of the individuals within their social environment.

3) A person thus positions him- or herself through the process of categorization and the delineation of story-lines in a way to allows the person to establish a sense of self.

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4) The individual comes to recognize membership in a number of categories and subcategories that form a sense of belonging to the world in a certain, unique way. This particularized perspective forms basis from which the individual perceives, extracts and interprets meaning in the person’s sociocultural environment.

5) The four processes contribute to a theory of a person as a certain kind of self in which individuals understand themselves historically as continuous and unitary.

The Narrative Structure of Lived Experience

A self without a story contracts into the thinness of its personal pronoun.

--Crites\textsuperscript{19}

Human beings are constantly challenged to manage the chaotic flow of stimuli that washes over them and constitutes the experiential feedstock used to fashion personal understandings of themselves and how they belong to their particular sociocultural environment. An important organizing principle to manage this flow of stimuli and transform it into understandable events and human action has been the structuring of lived experience as \textit{narrative}. Sarbin suggests that imposing structure on human experience through the use of narrative projects a very different approach than that offered by traditional

psychology in that human thought and behavior can be viewed as being guided by “our hopes, dreams, fears, fantasies, planning, memories, loving, hating, the rituals of daily life... - all guided by narrative plots and are organized to tell the stories of the individual’s involved.”

Narrative not only positions the self within a cultural context and organizes experience into meaningful events, it also has a critical temporal component that serves as a vehicle to transport cultural values and beliefs that help constitute the social reality of future generations within a particular cultural community. This approach contrasts sharply with traditional psychology which seeks to find causally-based predictable laws of behavior that assume that human beings act according to a universally accepted logic. As Harré notes, logic in the formal sense is only one of many “grammars” that can be used to structure discourse. Even within the narrative presentation of scientific experimentation, much of the writing conforms more closely to “story-telling conventions rather than logically ordered premises and conclusions.”

The narrative structuring of experience and accounts in the form of memory exhibit certain characteristics. The central characteristic of narrative, according to Bruner, is that it is sequential. Bruner views narrative as composed of a sequence of events and mental states that form a type of story in


which human beings serve as characters and actors in a story-line. This “sequential imperative” generates stories with a beginning, middle and end that follow a certain plot line in which human predicament and conflict seek some sort of resolution. This sequential imperative is reflected in the work of Propp who proposed a system of classification of Russian fairy tales based on descriptions of the functional plot elements of the stories as a means to provide a basis for conducting a structural analysis that would allow comparisons between stories. 

Another essential characteristic of narrative is its capacity to provide the basis for and interpretation of meaning within a particular cultural community. Among its many important functions it can legitimize authority structures as well as provide a means to interpret the norms and rules that guide individual behavior. In this sense, narrative serves to highlight deviations from canonically established sociocultural order. Bruner asserts that “the function of a story is to find an intentional state that mitigates or at least makes comprehensible a deviation from a canonical cultural pattern.” Within the context of radicalization, a group narrative serves to establish a standard of group conformity in which an individual must decide to either leave the group or share in the doctrinally established group narrative.

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23 Vladimir Propp, Morphology of Folktales (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 5-16.
Another element of narrative posited by Bruner is its so-called “dual landscape” in which “real world” events are juxtaposed against the mental events in the consciousness of the protagonist which subsequently animate a quest to establish meaning through interpretation as a way to reconcile those two worlds. It engages the individual by linking the person’s intentional state to the norms and rules of a particular cultural community.

Bruner also refers to narrative as being “factually indifferent” in the sense that the force or power of a story does not depend on satisfying any claims to truth. The truth of a story is an interpretative event in which people determine how “real” the story is to them.24 The various conspiracy narratives that circulated following the 9/11 attacks stating that the attacks were actually “staged” by the West in order to falsely blame Muslims is an example of how the “truth” of a narrative is not relevant to how an event is understood and interpreted.

**Positioning Theory**

Positioning theory is a theoretical and analytical model introduced by Harré and Langenhove in 1999 to attempt to understand psychological phenomena that are produced in the process of public and private discourse. It incorporates and relates the three central elements that are fundamental to understanding the psychological and social acts of an individual within the

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person’s cultural context, namely, the person’s position, discourse or speech acts, and story-line that represents a narrative generated by the person through dialogue.

Positioning theory breaks away from the traditional social psychological approach of understanding social activity within the context of assigned “roles” and contextualizes the concept of role by viewing it as a “position” with certain inherent qualities. Within positioning theory, a position represents on one hand a collection of rights and duties available to the person contingent on the social situation in which the discourse takes place. On the other hand, position also refers to potential attributes (psychological, social, moral, etc.) that locate the individual within a specific dialogic exchange. Positioning theory essentially takes the notion of “role” and particularizes it to a specific individual.²⁵ For example, the traditional formulation of the role of a “mother” might suggest a number of expectations associated with the general notion of being a mother, i.e. nurturing, attentive, understanding, patient, etc. Positioning theory in this instance would provide an analyst a perspective on how to understand the social dynamics of the means by which a biological mother positions herself and/or is positioned by others in specific dialogical encounter that engenders a specific set of rights and duties understood by the participants in the exchange. Was being a mother a forced choice and if so, how is this revealed in discourse? Will the mother position herself differently when speaking to a priest than in speaking with

²⁵ Harré and Langenhove, Positioning Theory, 14-19.
her doctor? If the mother is involved in a custody battle for her children, how will
she position herself and be positioned by the other parties in the dispute? Does
the fact of motherhood create an absolute right of possession; if not, how are
such rights distributed? It is within the various dialogic encounters that story-
lines are created and form the contextual narratives that make human action
intelligible and provides a narrative context of future social action. While these
dialogic encounters generate story-lines that assist in establishing fixed meaning,
it also provides a sense of human social action conceived as an “unfolding”
process that is contingent and indeterminate underscoring the embeddedness of
an individual in a particular cultural context that is fluid and constantly changing.
In this sense, although an individual’s position represents a set of beliefs that
defines what actions are socially possible, the person’s position is also
ephemeral in that positions are re-negotiable in each dialogical encounter.26

The Positioning Triangle

Within positioning theory, the positioning triangle serves as the primary
analytical tool to conceptualize how individuals become positioned through the
natural flow of conversation within a specific social context. The bidirectional
arrows capture the mutually reinforcing nature of the constituent parts of the
triangle as a means to characterize the fluid nature of social discourse over time.

26 Harré and Langenhove, Positioning Theory, 4.
The dynamic nature of the tri-polar construction of the conversations allows a way to understand the episodic aspect of dialogic encounters. The social force of relatively determinate speech acts will affect how a person positions himself and how that person is positioned by others in the conversation, which in turn impacts how the story-line is generated. The triad also assists in gaining greater clarity on how people are repositioned during the course of a conversation as story-lines are generated and positions are reevaluated and acted upon.27

27 Harré and Langenhove, Positioning Theory, 18.
Among the various modes of positioning arrangements the most basic distinction is made between *first order* positioning and *second order* positioning. First order positioning is the process of locating oneself and others within a particular moral space utilizing categories and developing story-lines that situate the participants within the context of the conversation. Second order positioning refers to a situation in which first order positioning is challenged and a repositioning occurs.\(^{28}\)

A distinction can also be made between tacit and intentional positioning. Tacit positioning generally refers to the discursive practice in which individuals position themselves, position others or are positioned (first order positioning). Intentional positioning occurs when positioning-talk within the ongoing story-line repositions a participant in the conversation (second order positioning).

Positioning theory posits four distinct types of intentional positioning – deliberate self-positioning, forced self-positioning, deliberate positioning of others and forced positioning of others. Deliberate self-positioning is an expression of personal identity (the “I” in contrast to the “me”) and social identity (the type of person I am). An individual will strategically position him- or herself by crafting a tailored narrative to achieve a certain objective by establishing rights or duties within the context of a specific discourse. This is particularly relevant when analyzing an individual’s autobiographical account of him- or herself directed (marketed) towards a specific audience (readership).

Forced self-positioning essentially involves an individual accounting for who they are, usually by an institution that has some type of authority to make judgments about the individual, for example, the individual’s employer. Deliberate positioning occurs when one individual defines another within the speaker’s story-line. Forced positioning of others refers to the discursive practice in which an individual is directed to position a third party. For example, a CEO of an ad agency may direct the VP of marketing to communicate to a head of the creative department that the new marketing initiative for their top client is unacceptable.²⁹

The flexibility of positioning theory is demonstrated by its ability to be applied to understanding the ongoing development of the “self”. Through the process of discursive interaction, individuals gain a sense of who they are and how to interpret the world by exposure to categories and their meanings. In addition, an individual experiences different positionings as elaborated by various story-lines dependent on the discursive context. There is also a positioning of self with regard to various categories and story-lines, real or imagined. Positioning theory also allows one to locate oneself as belonging to multiple categories and subcategories which provide insight into the particular ways we belong in the world. Taken together, these notions theoretically comprise a process that allows an individual to understand him- or herself as a continuous and unitary being. As noted by Davis and Harré, experiencing

positions as contradictory can become problematical when a diversity of incompatible positions reside within an individual’s sense of the immediate social reality that are difficult to reconcile or are experienced as irreconcilable. While seemingly incompatible or contradictory positions can be resolved through the dynamic of understanding, there is also the possibility that these contradictory positions will remained unresolved.\(^{30}\) Within the context of radicalization and terrorist recruitment, a recruiter can be conceived as an individual that intentionally positions his target in way that helps the target reconcile what in the targets mind may be contradictory positions in favor of the recruiters goals, i.e. that moves the target towards the acceptance of the recruiter’s ideology with the aim of recruiting the individual into the recruiters organization.

Central to the dynamic emergence of selfhood through discourse is the concept of “reflexive positioning” which Moghaddam defines as “a process by which one intentionally or unintentionally positions oneself in unfolding personal stories told to oneself.” The notion of self-narration in which one becomes positioned through intrapersonal discourse through the creation of storytelling provides a framework for understanding how our self-conception changes overtime. In addition, it appears to have an integrative function in which disparate fragments of the self can become part of a broader story-line that an individual experiences as a greater coherent unity over time. This may be reflected in an individual’s overall feelings of confidence and self-esteem in a

\(^{30}\) B. Davies and R. Harré, Positioning and Personhood, 49-50.
broader arena of social interaction. That said, individuals still remain a collection of personal narratives comprising a compendium of voices that inform and position the individual through intra- and interpersonal discourse.

An important aspect of reflexive positioning which is emphasized by Moghaddam is the cultural dimension in which discourse takes place. Moghaddam notes three cultural factors that may have an impact on positioning: cultural ideals, cultural conceptual categories and preferred forms of autobiographical storytelling. Cultural ideals may encompass such things as popular views that have become appropriated by an individual that color and influence the construction of personal narratives. For example, the popular notion that Midwesterners are straight-forward, practical people may influence the way an individual narrates his or her story-lines and positioning of others who are not from the Midwest. Cultural conceptual categories generally surface within a cross-cultural context in which one culture is being examined from without. An example would be the collectivist-individualistic dichotomy that is used to characterize particular cultural units such as the “individualistic” cultural orientation of Western societies versus the “collectivist” orientation of Asian societies in relation to the salience of family to the freedom to adopt positions. In addition, membership in a particular culture will influence the way personal narratives are generated, which in turn influences reflexive positioning and the

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subsequent story-lines and repositioning that occur through time. For example, in traditional cultures, motherhood fulfills a woman’s destiny and confirms her adult status and solidifies her marriage. Failure to conceive would generate personal narratives within the mother that affirm a negative self-image and promote the lack of self-esteem. In sum, the cultural dimension must be incorporated into any analysis utilizing a positioning theory approach. This is particularly important in the application of positioning theory to radicalization and terrorism studies.

Application of Positioning Theory to Radicalization Studies

Examining the discourse between a radicalizing influence (person, text, computer persona, etc.) and a potential target will provide insight on how the radicalizing influence position’s itself and its potential target within the course of a dialogic encounter. Positioning theory in this sense can put into a particularized context the myriad of factors, experienced as story-lines, that influence the radicalization process (family ties, social networks, media/educational discourse, culturally constituted rules and obligations, religious doctrines/practices, etc.) by providing a way to assess the individual’s vulnerability to being funneled towards a narrowing array of life choices leading to extremist positions. Positioning theory analysis would be particularly useful in understanding the radicalization of individuals already predisposed towards accepting radical doctrines by identifying potential pathways an individual may follow to address a particular need.
Positioning theory, for example, would help elucidate what a terrorist recruiter views as a vulnerability in a potential recruit by identifying within the nature of the discourse the salient features the recruiter chose to focus on in positioning the target to become the hero of his own personal narrative blending duties and rights within a story-line. For example, Ahmad, a Palestinian teenager, is the sixth child of a family of eight children from a poor family living in Gaza. He aspires to be a writer but educational opportunities are almost non-existent. The idea of the state of Israel and its supporter, the U.S., have been positioned as evil entities by the media and educational institutions he was exposed to while growing up. A Hamas recruiter approaches Ahmad and pre-positions him as a potential hero to his family and his faith by offering him the opportunity to join Hamas which would yield financial rewards to his family as well as boost the status of Ahmad’s family among its neighborhoods. A new set of duties are unveiled for him. He may come to believe he has a right to a fulfilling life.

In less clear circumstances, an individual may be undergoing the process of radicalization via the Internet, by media exposure and by virtue of the person’s minority status in a non-Muslim country which is experienced as a hostile environment. In this instance the introduction of a recruiter from an extremist organization may spend time carefully assessing while simultaneously positioning the potential recruit as having a duty to accept more radical positions by fashioning suitable story-lines that could be incrementally adopted by the target, thus moving the individual to increasingly more extreme positions and
perhaps eventual recruitment into the extremist organization. This approach offers a greater degree of analytical precision than, for example, the use by Wiktorowicz of the term “cognitive opening” to refer to the phase of being pre-disposed to becoming part of the broader terrorist storyline but remaining undecided on whether to act on those feelings. However, the devil is in the details and Wiktorowicz only defines “cognitive opening” by its potential causes. Wiktorowicz notes:

Individuals are initially inspired by a cognitive opening that shakes certitude in previously accepted beliefs. Individuals must be willing to expose themselves to new ways of thinking and world-views, and a cognitive opening helps facilitate receptivity. Any number of things can prompt a cognitive opening (experiences with discrimination, socioeconomic crisis, political repressions, etc.) which means that there is no single catalyst for initial interest. In addition, movements can foster cognitive openings through activism, and outreach by raising consciousness, challenging and debating alternative ideas and persuading audiences that old ways of thinking are inadequate for addressing pressing economic, political, political and social concerns.\textsuperscript{32}

Wiktorowicz’s characterization of “cognitive opening” seems equivalent to the general notion of having an open mind. Consequently, from an analytic standpoint, it does not seem useful in providing any distinctive insight specific to the radicalization process. Positioning theory can fill this void by adding precision to the analysis by providing a means to measure the dynamic progress of the radicalization recruitment process by identifying the re-positionings that take place as story-lines are reconstituted in the mind of the intended target,

\textsuperscript{32} Quintan Wiktorowicz, \textit{Radical Islam Rising} (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 5.
which serve to radicalize the individual and bring the person closer towards extremist beliefs thereby increasing the probability of the individual’s recruitment into the group.

**Self and Culture**

A person’s acquired sense of self evolves in concert with the emergence of language within the individual and its use by the person. Language thus binds the individual into a particular cultural context that in turn provides meanings and a rule-based framework that constitutes the individual’s social reality. Within the context of positioning theory, an individual’s position is established simultaneously with others sharing the same discursive space. Consequently, the notion of the “position” of the self at a particular moment will reflect a narrative self-construction of the self within that particular discursive space that embodies the social and cultural rules and norms specific to that dialogic encounter.33

Individual attitudes play an important role in navigating social pathways. How and when an individual expresses an attitude will be contingent upon the specific sociocultural context in which the discourse takes place. Consequently, it is important to study the expression of a particular attitude within the specific context in which it occurs.34 This is particularly relevant when understanding the

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33 Davies and Harré, Positioning and Personhood, 36 - 39.

radicalization process in which an individual may “test out” an attitude in various discursive encounters which then form the basis of that individual’s choice of future discursive encounters. The meanings extracted from the discursive encounters by the individual will be used to assess the attitudes held by the person which will then structure the range of choices that the individual will make in establishing future encounters. Does a third generation ethnic Bangledeshi Muslim youth in London continue to attend the moderate mosque or does the person seek out “clarifying” discourses online, with friends or from a local Muslim organization espousing extremist views? It is understanding the relationship between attitudes of individuals, in particular, the emerging attitudes and personal and social identities of developing youth, that will provide insight into the ways psychological phenomena, such as attitudes and identity, unfold in specific, dynamic contexts. It is when attitudes congeal into hardened beliefs across a broad range of specific sociocultural contexts that world views become crystallized and dominate the future unfolding of meanings and life choices.

Within the context of radicalization, an individual may be seen to gravitate towards individuals and groups that position the individual in a way that fulfills that person’s needs in their particular cultural community. In this new situation you have powerful rights and you will find duties to satisfy your sense of worth. The discursive approach, and in particular, positioning theory and the use of the positioning triad, offer powerful analytic tools to understand psychological
phenomena within context and potentially provide insight into the radicalization process.
Discursive Psychology as the Mode of Explanation

In the preceding chapters a number of troubling methodological issues were raised regarding the application of a causally-based approach derived from a natural science paradigm seeking to understand psychological phenomena of individuals within their sociocultural context. These issues have included non-representative sampling, Western bias in research design and in the interpretation of results, and the dominance of a quantitative approach that removes individuals from their cultural context in order to isolate psychological phenomena. The underlying assumption of general psychology that buttressed this approach was the notion of universality often referred to as the “principle of psychic unity of humankind” widely accepted within psychological research as the fundamental basis for establishing psychological truths. According to this view, people are supposedly the same everywhere and all that is required is to focus research aimed at understanding psychological phenomena as emanating from a “central inherent processing system.” As Norenzayan and Heine have noted, studies in cultural psychology in the last two decades have severely

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challenged the claims made regarding the applicability of psychological theories developed in the West that imply cross-cultural universals.\textsuperscript{2}

The discursive approach employed in my study utilizes a fundamentally different ontological approach as compared to the causally-based reductionist approach that underlies research assumptions in general psychology. The discursive approach relies on examining discourse as a window into understanding psychological phenomena of individuals within their own sociocultural context. No assumptions are made or required about the generalizability of the results of such studies. Of course our meta-language is English so we must “keep an eye” on the implicit psychology of English as we proceed. The positioning triad will be used as the analytical method to examine the discourse of individuals who claim to have held radical beliefs. Consequently, the main focus of attention will be paid to speech acts, positions and story-lines. These component elements of the positioning triad derived from a discursive ontology are contrasted with elements found in the mechanistic Newtonian ontology that provides the basis for the causal approach of the natural science paradigm.

\textsuperscript{2} Ara Norenzayan and Steven J. Heine, “Psychological Universals: What Are They And How Can We Know?” \textit{Psychological Bulletin} 131, no. 5 (2005), 763-784.
In the discursive approach utilizing a “Vygotskian” ontology of psychology, the location of speech acts are to be found in individuals. In contrast to the Newtonian approach, it does not necessarily matter *where* a speech act occurs but rather *who* generated the speech act. In this sense, people become spatial points in which speech acts occur in a sequence that constitutes and defines a flow of discursive time.

The speech act serves as the fundamental entity in the discursive ontology. The intentional utterance of a speech act within a particular context is defined by its social force. Every speech act possess an *illocutionary force*, a social power created by a speech act that helps the speaker achieve some specific aim within the narrative exchange. Examples of the types of speech acts that possess illocutionary force include invitations, promises, threats, warnings, etc. The *perlocutionary force* of a speech act refers to the effect on the
individual to whom the speech act was directed and on the speaker; that is, what was accomplished during the exchange? Did the invitation result in the person attending the party? Did the warning remind the individual of a duty, for example, to defend his faith? The actual social force of the utterances will be shaped by rules and norms in which the speech acts occur and by whom the utterances were made.³

A key element in determining the social power of speech acts contained within a discursive exchange is the beliefs held by the participants in the conversation. It is within “positions” that beliefs reside in the form of rights, duties and obligations that help structure the social acts available to the person. In addition, positions also contain beliefs that reflect psychological, social and moral attributes and dispositions that help establish the force of a social act.

Positioning of and by individuals within the fluid context of a discursive exchange generates story-lines that provide a means to understand a person’s actions within the context of their particular exchange. In this sense, speech acts do not cause behavior but are evaluated within a normative context by the participants according to the beliefs of the individuals that serve to sequence the speech acts in a way that forms a story-line. It is through relatively determinate speech acts that story-lines begin to congeal and become coherent. There is no predetermined story-line, but rather the unfolding of story-lines during the course

of a discursive exchange. For example, an individual’s willingness to entertain more extreme interpretations of a shared faith do not rely on the acceptance a set of specific propositions by logical argumentation. The unfolding dialogical encounter between the recruiter and the target will be dependent on the beliefs, rules, and norms that compose participants’ positions and positionings of each other, the social force of the speech acts within the discursive exchange and the story-lines that emerge from their exchange. The positioning triad methodology would potentially be able to help understand why, for example, two third-generation Muslim youths in Denmark could listen to lecture by a radical Imam and come away with very different impressions regarding the Imam’s message.

**Ethnographic Perspective**

A critical challenge in peering into another culture to gain insight into how an individual is embedded in his or her particular sociocultural environment is the ability to “bracket” our own cultural perspectives to overcome the experience of “strangeness” that potentially leads to ethnocentric judgments. In my study, my analysis will incorporate an ethnographic perspective to gain access to the broader sociocultural dimensions in which the individual finds him- or herself.

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The aim is an attempt to avoid the problem of ethnocentrism by trying to understand individuals in their particular culture from their point of view. How do they understand their own culture? What are their cultural resources and how do they use them? How do they understand their rights and duties, as well as their specific cultural conventions that structure their daily lives? What are the cultural narratives that potentially shape their worldview and define their experiential horizons?

Another challenge in understanding individuals within the matrix of their own sociocultural environment is to become comfortable with the idea that we may be only able to capture a small glimpse of how individuals encounter their social reality as lived experience. It is not possible to capture every aspect of a person’s life. Consequently, analytic decisions must be made regarding the types of cultural traditions that should be the focus of investigation. For example, does the analytic question involve gaining understanding of a large national or societal culture (however culture may be defined) or should the investigation be directed towards regional cultures? Racial-ethnic cultures? Which specific cultural traditions are most relevant in addressing the research question - family, religious and spiritual, class, educational, occupational, musical, artistic, political? How are these traditions understood?

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5 John L. Caughey, Negotiating Cultures & Identities: Life Histories Issues, Methods, and Readings (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 23.

6 McCaughey, Negotiating Cultures, 15-19.
Geertz argues that an ethnographic investigation is not merely a description of but rather a process in which the ethnographer “inscribes” social discourse, fixing it in a form that can be inspected and interpreted. He posits three characteristics inherent in ethnographic description. First, ethnographic description is interpretive. Second, it is specifically interpretive of the flow of social discourse. Third, the goal of the interpretation is to insure that the “said” contained within the discourse does not perish and can be further reviewed to gain further insight.7

Consonant with Geertz’s theme of ethnographic description as the interpretation of inscribed social discourse, Harré underscores the vital importance of understanding any social world as a discursive construction. Harré coins the term ethogenics to refer to a system of beliefs or meanings that are linked to broader society by the rule, norms and cultural resources of the society.8 It is the ethnographic concern with discourse that provides a critical window into how individuals extract meaning from their cultural environment that informs and influences their subsequent life choices.

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8 Harre and Gillet, *Discursive Mind*, 7-8.
Narrative Perspective

Narrative theory posits that we all enter a storied world in which our lives unfold amidst the creation and exchange of narratives. The access to these narratives will in large part be dependent on the language and linguistic practices of the culture in which they occur. The narratives that are present in the daily lives of individuals offer a way for individuals to make sense of themselves and their place in their particular sociocultural environment. In my study, I am employing a narrative perspective in my analysis within the context of social constructionism which seeks to understand how the constantly emerging aspects of self change over time. Potter and Wetherell argue that viewing narrative within a social constructivist context serves as follows:

To displace attention from the self-as-entity and focus it on methods of constructing the self. That is, the question becomes not what is the true nature of the self, but how is the self talked about, how is it theorized in discourse.

Within the context of positioning theory, narratives function to transmit beliefs, establish norms, delineate duties and obligations and help position an individual within that person’s sociocultural matrix. In one sense, a cultural narrative provides an individual with a “way of being in the world.” How the self is constructed over time will be dependent in many regards on the way individuals

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gravitate towards and accept specific narratives that help them make sense of their worlds. As Harré notes, it is often the plausibility of a traditional story-line rather than some strict criteria of logic that will steer an individual towards a particular life trajectory.\textsuperscript{11} The emergence of unique life trajectories of individuals has been complicated by the globalizing effects of increased levels of migration that have challenged the very concept of “cultural community” while the commodification of narrative through global communications has generated multiple narratives that continuously vie for legitimacy. The individual is thus confronted with competing narratives from which to draw on that will ultimately socially construct and uniquely position the person in his or her sociocultural environment at a particular point in time. Will a third generation Spanish-born Algerian teenager living in Madrid be shaped by the traditional beliefs and ethnic traditions of Algeria or will Spanish narratives have a more influential role in shaping the teenager’s emerging sense of self? Who are the sources of the narratives and what credibility do these sources have in the eyes of the individual? An ethnographic approach thus serves to guide us towards potential narratives that ultimately embody the elements inherent in a positioning analysis.

Research Plan

The interdisciplinary framework that will be detailed in the following chapter will be used to organize data within four cultural traditions chosen for their particular relevance for developing youth. The four cultural traditions embodied in social groups are: family, school or educational traditions, peer group, local community. Using the case study method, I will employ positioning theory as an analytic tool to examine the discourse of two former radicals and one incarcerated former Al-Qaeda operative. The proposed research plan is the following:

I. Presentation of radicalization case studies:
   
   A. Ed Husain, British citizen of Indian/Pakistan descent who was a senior official in the British faction of the Muslim extremist group Hibz ut-Tahir who subsequently renounced extremist views
   
   B. Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, U.S. citizen who worked for the Al-Haramain Islamic Foundation, a charity that had been implicated in serving as a fund-raising arm of Al-Qaeda.
   
   C. Zacarias Moussaoui, former A-Qaeda operative and so-called 20th hijacker in the 9/11 World Trade Center tower attacks.
II. For each individual, discursive material in the selected cultural traditions will look at the discursive structure utilizing analysis of:

A. Story-lines
B. Positions
C. Speech Acts

The objective of the analysis is to determine potential pathways that unfold for the individual leading towards an increasingly narrowing array of choices that begin to compose a set of beliefs that the individual finds irreconcilable with other external belief systems that come to be viewed as a threat to the individual.

III. The primary research hypothesis is this: Individuals will migrate towards social structures that fulfill their developmental needs. This is a continuous process that over time will result in an individual moving into and out of social groups that represents an unfolding of an individual’s life trajectory. Radicalization will be viewed as an individual’s migration towards a social structure that enforces a belief system that is in irreconcilable conflict with belief systems outside that social structure.

A. Do any patterns exist across the case studies?
B. How do discursive practices position individuals in the study to perceive greater/fewer life choices?
The discursive material for Zacarias Moussaoui is derived from a study that explored his background and childhood within the context of the legal proceedings against him and eventually sentencing to life imprisonment by a U.S. court. I also use material contained within an interview with one of Moussaoui’s sisters. My analysis of Ed Husain and Daveed Gartenstein-Ross are derived from discursive material provided in their published memoirs.

**A Note on Autographical Positioning Analysis**

Reflexive positioning is a process in which an individual positions himself in an either intentional or unintentional manner through the self-narration of personal stories told to oneself. Memoirs represent a type of reflexive positioning in which the author through written text generates a sense of personal identity across a lifespan that contributes to a broader sense of personhood.\textsuperscript{12} According to Harré, an autobiographical account is an expression of selfhood in that it is “one’s sense of a life history which is, at any moment, a selection from a variety of possible pasts related to anticipations that project one of a variety of possible personal futures.”\textsuperscript{13} From the perspective of positioning analysis, indexing the self as “I” creates an act of self-positioning that invests the self projected in the text with a moral commitment to the discursive acts revealed in the text. However, as Harré points out, the autobiographical account as an

\textsuperscript{12} Harré and Langemhove, *Positioning Theory*, 60-61.

\textsuperscript{13} Harré, *Singular Self*, 164.
expression of selfhood represents only a possible past and therefore must also be considered within the context of how the author may be using the memoir to strategically position him- or herself as well as the intended audience in support of the social construction of a particular narrative. Consequently, the memoirs of Husain and Gartenstein-Ross must be considered not only with regard to the discursive material revealed in the text but also within the broader context of the narrative that they are trying to create. How do they position themselves in the life story they want to relate to their potential readership? What did they leave out of their narrative? How would the story change if told to a close friend rather than to an impersonal readership? Do the discursive exchanges selected by the authors that reveal their “journey” to and from acceptance of radical beliefs create a specific narrative intended to position themselves as sympathetic characters? Are the memoirs acts of confession that a Judeo-Christian Western culture requires for redemption as a means to revalidate community membership? With these caveats in mind, my contention is that the memoirs do in fact offer a means of examining the radicalization process from the unique personal perspective of the authors as lived experience.
CHAPTER FOUR

PROPOSED INTERDISCIPLINARY FRAMEWORK TO ASSESS RADICALIZATION ACROSS CULTURES

The time to make up your mind about people is never.

-- Katherine Hepburn as Tracy Lord, *The Philadelphia Story*

Introduction

The causal approach that serves as the dominant mode of investigation in radicalization research has generated numerous studies that have yielded ambiguous and often contradictory results. As Horgan notes:

The common personal, situational, and cultural factors across accounts that reveal issues relating to why and how people become involved are usually quite broad and seem unrelated in a practical sense, in that very often there is no clear, and certainly no singular, involvement catalyst (and when an individual him or herself suggests this catalyst, we ought to interpret its significance with great caution since it often obscures the expected positive features of the involvement and generally forms an incomplete picture of the factors seen to influence involvement.)¹

What Horgan seems to be giving voice to is the frustration of trying to identify common factors to understand and explain instances of complex human behavior across various cultural contexts. Unfortunately, it has been the search for universal factors aimed at defining a supposed essential nature of radicalization that has obscured the ability to develop insight into the psychological phenomena that influence an individual’s life trajectory. My

The proposed interdisciplinary framework offers analysts an alternate way to conceptualize and analyze the radicalization process despite the diversity encountered in the various sociocultural environments in which radicalization is believed to have occurred and to be occurring now.

The proposed framework is designed to achieve the following objectives:

First, the framework is designed to assess the beliefs, character, plans and convictions of individuals each within a specific cultural environment. In contrast to a causal approach, my framework views the individual as inseparable from the particular sociocultural environment in which they are embedded. Psychological phenomena of individuals emerge as a result of the symbiotic relationship that exists between the individuals and their cultural environment that is particularized and unique to each individual. Utilizing “cultural community” as a guide helps to locate the individual within a cultural milieu that has the most proximate influence on an individual’s behavior. The notion of focusing on an individual’s behavior within the context of lived experience means looking at the day-to-day discursive acts that occur in the individual’s daily life. The aim is to avoid establishing false categories or, related to this problem, over-emphasizing one category at the expense of another that may seem more analytically useful. In both cases, the analysis would lead to potentially biased results. For example, if the Danish security services became convinced as a result of their assessments that certain elements in the Somali immigrant community were
becoming more radicalized in their beliefs, would it be analytically reliable for them to assume that what may be radicalizing Somalis in Denmark is the same process that is occurring in Somali communities throughout Europe or even outside of Europe? The error would be to make the assumption that Somali communities are all homogeneous and situate themselves in foreign cultures in isolation from the host cultures and so develop points of view and political convictions in the same way. Only by focusing primarily on how individuals in the Somali immigrant community in Denmark are embedded in and extract meaning from their particular community and interpret their presence within a Danish cultural environment, will we get a better understanding of the emergence of radical beliefs within that context. Would the emergence of radical beliefs of Somali immigrants in Minnesota, for example, emerge in the same way? My framework posits that to understand the complex psychological phenomena that lead an individual towards radicalized beliefs requires an analysis of the thoughts, feelings and convictions expressed by an individual within their cultural context. The social reality of a Somali living in Minnesota will be quite different than the social reality of a Somali living in Denmark. Consequently, how they extract meaning from their respective cultural environments and act on those meanings that inform their life choices will be potentially different. There may be similarities across some dimensions but simply making general assumptions about expatriate Somali communities worldwide based on ethnicity would open
the door to analytical bias that would lead to erroneous conclusions how radicalization occurs in those communities.

Second, the framework draws attention to the developmental process generally neglected in most studies on radicalization. The development of cognitive tools during youth that are subsequently available to manage experience are dependent in large part on the socializing influences of the various groups most proximate to children during their early years. The development of their cognitive abilities will influence the ways in which they extract meaning from their environment, which in turn contribute to their sense of self that is constantly emerging and forming the basis of a worldview unique to each individual. The framework posits that there is a difference between adult cognitive skills that have been tempered by experience and the way developing youth cognitively manage the flow of events that constitute their lived experience. For example, we might compare authority respecting and evidence seeking as relevant distinctive stances. How do developing youth understand and elaborate cultural narratives resident in their particular cultural community? For example, when a Palestinian grandfather in Jordan takes his grandson to a cafe to listen to the famous storyteller relate tales of how the infidel Crusaders were defeated by Saladin at Hama in 1178, how does the young boy understand the story and extract meaning from it? When the storyteller animatedly relates how Saladin ordered the captive Crusaders beheaded for “plundering and laying waste the lands of the Faithful,” how does the young boy interpret this story in the context
of the present? How does his grandfather interpret the story for him? How do these discursive acts begin to establish a sense of rights and obligations in relations to the emissaries of the Christian West in the mind of the young man and what cognitive tools are available to assess the narrative that will influence how it will be integrated into a developing sense of self and emerging worldview?

Third, the framework will assist in sorting out competing narratives that an individual may confront that are resident in the various social structures in which the individual is embedded. Through the analysis of discursive acts, the framework will provide a means of gaining insight into how an individual manages the narratives that help a person obtain an evolving sense of self across multiple social contexts. How do the cultural narratives within particular social structures influence a person’s life trajectory? How do youth in a particular context value one cultural narrative over another? Why is one particular narrative rejected in favor of another? For example, why do some fundamentalist Muslims believe in pursuing the establishment of an Islamic caliphate peacefully through proselytization while others believe that the only way to establish the caliphate is through terrorism? How do youth manage the variety and increasing volume of narratives that wash over them during a critical stage in cognitive development in which the ability to assess and critically evaluate cultural narratives take shape? Can we observe how an individual hierarchically arranges narratives that have been integrated into the person’s emerging worldview and gain insight into how certain narratives become privileged over
time? For example, in Jamaa Mezuk, a neighborhood in the northern Moroccan city of Tetouan, youth are confronted with a variety of narratives. The city, which is located near the Mediterranean Sea, reflects narratives of both African and European culture. It was a blend of urban dwellers struggling to make ends meet and rural farmers who migrated to the city trying to grind out a living and adapt to urban life. Against the backdrop of economic depression and high unemployment, two prominent narratives were common among youth in this neighborhood during the mid-2000s. In one narrative there was a glorification of the Muslim soccer player of Algerian descent, Zinédine Zidane, who dominated the soccer world while playing for a team in France. The other prominent narrative among the neighborhood youth was their belief in Osama Bin Laden's interpretation of Islam. Speaking to a New York Times journalist, a teenage boy from Jamaa Mezuk said “We want to help our Muslim brothers. If they kill us, we go to God. If we stay here, there is joblessness.” It was in this neighborhood that Jamal Ahmidan, the so-called mastermind of the 2004 Madrid train bombings, spent his childhood and young adult years. Some teenage boys from the Jamaa Mezuk remained. Ahmidan left the neighborhood and went to Spain to run a drug trafficking network which he continued to run even after his conversion to a Bin Laden interpretation of Islam. Still others made their way to

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Iraq to fight for the radical Sunni Islamic insurgency against U.S. troops and other Islamic sects viewed as infidels.

Fourth, an important analytic element of the framework is its ability to identify potential information gaps that, if not addressed through effective means of collection and perhaps interrogation, could result in a skewed, biased or otherwise misleading analysis. Using the framework to identify information gaps is particularly relevant for analysts working in national security or military bureaucracies charged with understanding the radicalization process in their particular areas of interest or operation. The framework will provide analysts with an important resource to bring to the task of working with national collection assets in a more focused and efficient manner.

Fifth, the framework will hopefully reduce analytic bias by reinforcing an interdisciplinary perspective that challenges the “received wisdom” of experts in individual disciplines. Rob Johnston, an anthropologist who conducted an ethnographic analysis of the intelligence community’s analytic cadre shortly after 9/11, sagely pointed out that “becoming an expert required a significant number of years viewing the world through the lens of one’s specific domain. The concentration gives the expert the power to recognize patterns, perform tasks, and solve problems, but it also focuses the expert’s attention on one domain to the exclusion of others.”

Johnston is essentially echoing Kuhn’s notions of how

working within specific research paradigms will determine what questions can be asked and what methodologies will be used to answer those questions.\(^4\) A principle goal of my proposed framework is to offer a way to effectively minimize analyst bias by employing various disciplines to investigate the radicalization process rather than have a specific discipline define the types questions that can be asked about radicalization. The proposed framework will be able, for example, to integrate the tools of discursive psychology, in the form of the positioning triad, with anthropology’s ethnographic approach that evolved through many years of anthropological investigation of foreign cultures. It is the effective integration of disciplines that will allow a fuller understanding of psychological phenomena of individuals within their cultural context. Another aspect of the analyst bias problem that Johnston observed is the tendency for analysts to rely on “intuition” in which the analysts own cognitions and norms are culturally encoded and contribute to an ethnocentric perspective.\(^5\) In this sense, my proposed framework is an attempt to overcome what Popper calls the Myth of the Framework in which individuals are all condemned to live within their own intellectual horizons in the context of their own culture and paradigms that structure their way of seeing and understanding the world.\(^6\)


\(^5\) Johnson and Berrett, *Cultural Topography*, 2-3.

seeks to challenge the Myth of the Framework notions of relativism and incommensurability in the analysis of foreign cultures by directing attention to the universal dependence on language as a means of communication that connects individuals to their sociocultural environment and is used to construct their social reality. It is the analysis of how language is used within various cultural communities and how individuals within those communities extract meaning from their discursive exchanges that enables an analyst to peer into another culture in a way that minimizes cultural bias. My proposed framework would assist in helping the analyst identify the prevailing folk psychology in a particular cultural community by identifying the operation and management of individual rights, duties and obligations that help structure psychological phenomena among the members of the community.

Components of the Framework

As I have previously noted there are a number of cultural traditions within a particular cultural community that could be the object of inquiry to gain insight into how individuals construct their social reality. My particular guideline in determining what specific cultural traditions should be the focus of investigation in my framework is based on two primary considerations: First, what traditions offer the best potential for understanding the individual as a developing youth within a potential at-risk environment broadly defined. An at-risk environment for a youth can range from a Muslim ethnic minority enclave situated in a European
country to a village in Uganda where youth are seized and forced to become child soldiers. Second, what cultural traditions hold the greatest potential for directly revealing the radicalization process among youth through their discursive practices, storytelling, arguing, planning, expressing opinions and so on. In this sense what are the most proximate social structures that will have potentially the greatest impact on the choices of developing youth.

The range of cultural traditions of potential interest that relate to developing youth are varied and can analytically overlap. In the case of youth, exploring artistic and music cultural traditions, which has included looking more specifically through the lens of popular culture, have yielded useful insights that reveal how youth situate themselves within their particular cultural matrix of social relationships. For example, the appropriation and transformation of hip hop culture and music by local artists in Arabic cultures have revealed how a musical tradition can be reinterpreted by youth in a way that helps situate them in their particular societies as they seek to establish a sense of self in a rapidly changing world. What is particular useful in exploring Arabic hip hop is that it offers a youth perspective from an often marginalized group in the Middle East on issues in the Arab world in the Arabic language.7 While looking at a variety of cultural traditions, such as a musical tradition, that would serve as potentially useful adjuncts to my analytic approach, my framework focuses on four cultural

traditions that I view as more directly focused on youth as it relates to gaining insight into the radicalization process. The four cultural traditions that will focus and organize data collection and analysis are located in the following social structures: family, school/educational traditions, peer group, local community.

Family

The first social group a child normally encounters in life is some culturally distinctive version of a family or caretaker(s) who will provide the child with the first sustained social interactions. An important aspect of the family social structure is the prevailing parental belief system. Harkness and Super define parental belief systems as systems which “relate in systematic ways to action - including ...styles of talking to children, methods of discipline, or advice seeking from experts”. They further note:

Ultimately these belief systems exert a powerful influence on the health and development of children and they are a key component in the development of parents’ themselves. Parental beliefs represent one component of the development niche - the psychology of the caretaker.8

It is within the context of parental belief systems that ways of discursive interaction are first learned by the child that help influence the development of the child’s cognitive tools. Parental beliefs system vary greatly from culture to culture. For example, Gusii mothers of Kenya believe in close physical contact with infants, holding them at nine- to ten months of age; however, there is limited

verbal contact because of their belief that children do not understand language before the age of two. In contrast, in American culture the belief is that language acquisition begins much earlier. In addition, as a child goes from childhood to adolescence a number of changes occur in the parent-child relationship that impact a child’s sense of self as they seek to establish a cluster of identities usually around a central core. The analytic problem is compounded by the fact that the analyst cannot treat family belief systems as a homogeneous category within a cultural community but should, at best, use them as only as a guide.

Parental beliefs systems of a family in a particular cultural community may potentially share commonalities with other families belief systems in the same cultural community; however, it is through discursive analysis that the analyst will obtain a clearer idea of how well belief systems in the form of narrative are transferred from parent to child. The family social structure also embodies kinship systems that create expectations of certain rights and duties that inhere within a particular cultural community. In traditional families in the Middle East the kinship systems may be well-defined and patrilineal, i.e. rights, duties and obligations flow through the male lineage that clearly define authority and the distribution of rights duties and obligations from one generation to the next. This social structure in a traditional family generates a differentiation in the socialization of genders in which the male heirs are expected to remain a part of

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the father’s household while females grow up expecting to leave it. Globalization involving the massive migration of populations to new cultural environments coupled with continuing research to understand the impact of these movements on both immigrants and new host cultures has led to a debate that points to the changing nature of traditional societies in which patrilineal notions of the traditional Middle Eastern family are changing and being redefined. Discursive analysis can assist in gauging how a deeply entrenched family narrative is adhered to as well as help identify the challenges that children face in managing their family obligations and duties in the midst of a constantly changing cultural environment. Is the individual a second or third generation Muslim in London trying to establish a sense of self, straddling traditional family beliefs that dictate a certain trajectory while gravitating towards another version of self within the context of a European identity that generates a different set of duties and obligations? Is the family structure rooted in a relatively homogeneous traditional cultural where, for example, a child knows that he will be attending a specific madrasa when the family can arrange it?

In Western societies, a family, which includes the extended family, is referred to as a *kindred*. In this cultural family arrangement, the family is viewed as a corporate entity in which rights, duties and obligations are negotiated and are bilateral in the sense that both patrilineal and matrilineal sides of the family at
least nominally have equal status and the authority to make claims.\textsuperscript{10}

Globalization, however, has blurred the lines between traditional and contemporary families that affects how youth situate themselves in new societies as members of families struggle to adapt to new cultural realities. How well does the family social structure help a child navigate the multiple identities a youth must confront in trying to establish a sense of self in a culturally diverse setting? How well can the family social structure preserve the developing child’s sense of security and provide the necessary support and guidance to help the child meet its developmental needs?

A discursive analysis examining family relationships in which the child perceives family parenting as nurturing and protective may also provide insight into how family narratives structure a child’s social reality by inculcating specific sets of beliefs. We see how this process unfolds in the case of seven-year old Brian, a boy of English descent living in South Africa. His father is a teacher at the University of Cape Town and his mother is a mathematics teacher at the local high school. Brian provides his impression of Afrikaners, the descendants of Dutch, German and French immigrants who settled South Africa. Brian, speaking in 1975 to child psychiatrist Coles, parrots his father’s assessment:

They’re not smart, our Afrikaners; they mean well, but they’re like stubborn children, my dad says, and if you cross them, then hold on tight, because they’ll never let you forget it, and they can drive you mad with their complaints. They’re sort of simple-minded -- but they’re good for our

country, because they love to fight and we need to be strong, and pity to the native who dares challenge them. They’ll die, rather than give in and say let’s have a talk, chaps.

Brain also reflects the influence of his father narrative in comparing the British with Afrikaners:

It’s Britain’s flag, and it stands for our country’s civilization. Without the English here you’d have no University of Cape Town, tops in the country. You’d have no hospitals -- no first rate ones. You have no big businesses; we’re the ones who built up the banks and the oil-trading companies, and the insurance companies, and the mining companies. It’s all British know-how. The Afrikaners - they’re good clerks, Dad says. They have a good eye for detail, but they have no imagination.11

In sum, a discursive analysis focused on family relationships may provide insight into the nature of how a child learns their rights, obligations and duties, how they acquire their beliefs about the world and whether the family social structure is satisfying their development needs. It is in this way that we may begin to understand why youth, armed with a set of beliefs and a developing self-concept, may begin to migrate to other social structures that they believe will more directly assist their search for a sense of personal and social identity.

**School/Educational Traditions**

The various educational social structures either embodied in schools systems or educational traditions can have a profound impact on developing youth and the emergence of their cognitive abilities. Unfortunately, in attempting

to use education as an element in establishing a profile of radicals and known terrorists, post hoc correlations generally operationalized education as educational level attained rather than looking at the nature of the individual’s educational experience. For example, in Sageman’s study of 137 global Salafi terrorists, he notes that based on educational level attained, over 82 percent of the terrorists that he compiled data on were college educated.\textsuperscript{12} This conflicts with studies that look at the antecedents of terrorism in a different context such as certain madrasas known to contribute fighters to specific Islamic extremist groups. As a result, this type of analysis, using the simple measure of level of education attained, has produced ambiguous and contradictory results when trying to employ a single indicator to assess a child’s educational experience.

My framework directs attention to educational practices as a socializing system conveying not only knowledge and level of achievement but also ways of thinking, ideas of group membership and a child’s relationship to the broader community within the context of rights, duties and obligations. Examination of discursive exchanges of individuals informed by an ethnographic understanding of local educational practices and attitudes will help gain insight into how an individual’s cognitive and social development evolve and establish some of the ways the individual encounters and extracts meaning from experience.

\textsuperscript{12} Marc Sageman, \textit{Understanding Terror Networks} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 75-76.
The content and style of formal education constitutes one aspect of a child’s educational experience. In restrictive education environments a child is introduced to specific ways of thinking while being exposed to instruction that often reinforces particular cultural narratives. At the nation-state level, we can observe this process occurring in Saudi Arabia in which instruction is focused on using the curriculum to build social cohesion through a specific interpretation of Islam. For example, the *Tawhid* (Islamic monotheism) texts, which were used for grades nine through twelve in Saudi Arabia in 2001-2004, presented a “One Islam-Saudi nation” message. The students were schooled to believe that what constitutes correct belief is living the way of the “worthy ancestors” who lived at the time of the Prophet and in the centuries after his death. In essence, students were told to discard reason and draw only on the Quran and the Sunna for guidance.\textsuperscript{13} The cultural resources (textbooks) available to the individual Saudi students and discursive exchanges with instructors that reinforced a cognitive inflexibility thus positioned students to uncritically accept a specific interpretation of Islam. In this educational social structure an examination of discursive exchanges can reveal how a teacher of Islam in Saudi Arabia may engage students in discussion and debate about Salafi-Wahhabi orthodoxy while cautioning that any discussions outside of the Salafi-Wahhabi interpretation of Islam are totally unacceptable. The teacher warns that any alternative

interpretation would be deemed deviant and is therefore considered heresy. Consequently, with regard to understanding and interpretation of Islam the child becomes equipped with rigid cognitive tools that are unable to distinguish or even recognize variant schools of Islamic thought. In the process the educational system conveys to the child religious rights and obligations that are understood as inseparable from the proper exercise of Saudi citizenship.

In traditional cultural communities in the Middle East the introduction of formal education has challenged patronymic lines of authority used to exert control over children. While formal education has allowed children in these traditional societies to see a better future through school achievement, it also brought into sharp relief the inability of traditional households to support their children with the knowledge and skills to assist them in realizing their goals of participating in a modernizing world. In a study of 500 Moroccan students, Haddiya found that the students had a difficult time coping with the transition between family and school in which traditional family values conflicted with their school experiences that promoted an urban outlook.\(^{14}\) As previously noted, even in instances where students are able to successfully obtain the education and requisite skills to participate in the modern world, the lack of employment opportunities for youth in the Middle East has produced a generation of restless

youth unable to apply their newly acquired skills in hopes of realizing a better future.

Education of youth in hostile environments provides another variation on how schooling within a particular cultural context helps a child construct a unique social reality by inculcating specific community narratives. Nonie Darwish, a freelance writer, relates her childhood experiences of growing up in Gaza in the 1950s. Her father, who as the head of Egyptian military intelligence in Gaza and the Sinai, was killed when Nonie was only eight and subsequently hailed as a national hero and martyr. She recalled afterwards a high Egyptian government official visiting her house asking who would “avenge your father’s death by killing a Jew?” She remembered thinking “I didn’t want to kill anyone but was afraid to say so because people might think not wanting revenge meant that I did not love my father.” This general community narrative served as a backdrop to the formal educational institutions that were set up to instruct youth. Darwish reflects on her education.

As a child, I went to Gaza elementary school, where we learned to hate and take revenge. They told us not to take any candy from strangers because it could be a Jew trying to poison us. We were told Jews were devils, evil, the enemy of God, and dogs; dogs were unclean, so if you touched them, you had to wash. It would have been a sign of weakness to speak of peace with Jews or a sin to question hating Jews or other non-Muslim infidels so I kept my questions and opinions to myself. We learned to blame everybody else for our mistakes. Just like authority figures, governments teachers and preachers blame Israel for everything.
Every lesson in school, songs, poetry, movies and even cartoons were about the divine mission of jihad and the destruction of the state of Israel.\textsuperscript{15}

The life trajectory of Nurjaman bin Ismuddin aka Hambali, the former chief of operations of the al-Qaeda affiliated group Jemaah Islamiyah, responsible for the October 2002 bombings in Bali, reveals the importance of restrictive schooling in constructing a child’s social reality that provides the tools to interpret experience that will subsequently guide actions. Hambali grew up in a village in West Java, Indonesia in a deeply pious family and received an education exclusively in religious schools within the Darul Islam tradition in which, according to Ramakrishna, there was a “cognitive tendency to interpret the outside world through categorical, black-and-white Darul Islamist ideological lenses...”\textsuperscript{16} This type of school experience thus structured Hambali’s life choices that ineluctably led him towards life as a key member of a terrorist organization. Hambali’s life trajectory changed abruptly in August 2003 when he was arrested in Ayuthya, Thailand. As of 2012, he was incarcerated in Guantanamo where he is awaiting trial.

My framework thus views school experience as an important element in youth development. It provides a public space in which the developing child acquires both content and cognitive skills that will influence how the child


\textsuperscript{16} Kumar Ramakrishna, Radical Pathways: Understanding Radicalization in Indonesia (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2009), 121.
navigates future life choices. In this sense, school and educational traditions provide the developing child a bounded set of skills and perspectives to perceive and comprehend potential life choices that subsequently compose the child’s lived experience. And, at the same time, it can be an arena in which the traditions of family and the demands of the curriculum can be in conflict.

Peer Group

An individual’s peer group constitutes another critical domain of social experience within a specific cultural context that will subsequently influence the individual’s life trajectory. The peer group domain takes on a particular importance as a young child moves into adolescence and begins to spend more time with friends and non-adult family members. Gardiner and Kosmitzki provide a useful definition of peer group as “individuals who share certain characteristics (e.g. background, age, status, class) and interact on generally equal terms.” In contrast to their relationship to parents in the family social structure, adolescent youth rely on peer group relationships to serve as cultural referents regarding opinions, lifestyles, and shared experiences as they navigate their social world in the process of constructing a personal and social identity.17 How these peer group relationships manifest themselves in various cultural settings will differ; however, the nature and influence of these relationships will be qualitatively different from family relationships where parental authority imposes a different set

17 Gardiner and Kosmitzki, Across Cultures, 212.
of rights, duties and obligations between parent and child. In relationships with peers, developing youth do not depend on parents as intermediaries. Within peer relationships, youths begin to gain knowledge directly on matters of concern to them, for example, on how to assess risk as well as youthful perceptions on how to deal with those risks. In this sense, children, as they enter into young adulthood, are differentiating themselves from the self that is revealed to parents and other caretakers in the family structure. To what degree is developing youth able to cognitively assess various narratives that are being circulated and being given status by their peers as they try to locate themselves within their sociocultural environment? As they attempt to answer the question of “Who am I?” how well does the peer group provide potential answers to that question and engages the individual in ways that other social structures cannot? In a study by Gest, a Bangladeshi teenager in London, Tayyib laments the multiple selves he must be as he seeks to establish a coherent sense of self:

Some friends think I’m religious. Some friends I go clubbing with. Some friends I talk politics with. Some friends I do community work with. And I’m different with my family.

This search led some second generation Bangladeshi youth interviewed by Gest to seek out specific peer group associations. He notes that in the East End Bangladeshi neighborhoods a certain percentage join gangs for both a sense of belonging and for protection. According to the interview data gathered by Gest, it is the peer group in the form of a gang that provides security for those youth who have limited educational attainment and membership in certain groups. These
individuals were referred to as the “street boys” who, due to lack of parental restrictions, were allowed to congregate outside in the street of courtyards of their council estate buildings. In contrast the “house boys” were youth who remained at home whose primary social experiences were within the family structure, mosque or school events. In each instance, each peer group structure provided the individual security and a sense of identity against a backdrop of competing cultural groups within the neighborhood and dominant British society that viewed the Bangladeshi community as an insulated immigrant community. For those who joined gangs, the family structure did not provide the security and protection they needed which subsequently facilitated their migration to a peer group structure which addressed their security needs. As my case studies in the following chapter reveal, some individuals will be influenced by peer group structures embodied in religious groups that also seek to address identity and security needs of developing youth.

Peer group culture is varied and could take on many forms. In the case of xenophobic youth in Germany, aggressive youth culture represented by skinhead and Neo-Nazi groups has specific socializing rituals that define their subculture in ways that promote organization and establish discipline. In reviewing research in non-Western cultures, anthropologist Scott Atran found that peer group

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relationships were an important factor in suicide terrorism behavior in which the peer group members, within the context of a shared religious commitment, demonstrated their sense of loyalty to each other.²⁰

In sum, the availability of specific peer group relationships proximate to the individual will have an important influence on the life choices the person perceives as accessible. Consequently, it is important to identify the exact nature of peer group relationships to determine an individual’s peer group influences, which can range from one close friend to a large organization with a developed ideology.

**Cultural Community**

In addition to the proximate influences of family, school and peer group relationships, an individual is embedded in a cultural community. The characteristics of a cultural community, in which an individual shares a range of characteristics, may include ethnicity, religion, and class, serve to situate the person within a broader society and more clearly define and establish a group identity. A cultural community contains versions of history and traditions established through community narratives that the individual may draw on to help the person locate him- or herself within the local sociocultural matrix of relationships and construct a personal and social identity. It also offers another

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way for individuals to belong to their specific cultural environments. In this sense, understanding how an individual is embedded in a cultural community, whether that community is socially defined by religion, ethnicity, class, etc., provides insight into the broader conception of rights, duties and obligations that the person has available that may influence life choices. This becomes particularly relevant when children move into adolescence and their social interactions are no longer completely mediated by family members.

Cultural communities vary widely and are in a constant state of flux to one degree or another. Consider the ethnographic study of the Palestinian refugee camp Nahr el-Bared near Tripoli in northern Lebanon that came under siege in 2007 by the jihadi group Fatah al-Islam, supporters of an al-Qaeda interpretation of Islam. The jihadi group subsequently established contact with the refugee camp and attempted to convert the refugee camp members. As the refugee community members interacted with Fatah al-Islam over a period of nine months, the refugee camp resident’s initial curiosity was replaced by skepticism, followed by rejection and finally hostility. One refugee camp member reflected the feeling of many of the camp inhabitants saying “They (Fatah al-Islam fighters) came prepared for war, that was all they were good for, and they didn’t bother to explain their future plans.” In addition, another refugee camp member noted that the Fatah al-Islam militants insisted that their form of worship “was the only true way.” The group also set up Quranic classes for refugee children that were initially popular because the camp lacked Quranic instruction; however, the Fatah
al-Islam instructors would constantly invoke images of martyrdom in which dying for Islam became an obsession. The Palestinian refugee camp residents ultimately felt that the rituals practiced by Fatah al-Islam were not the same as those practiced the traditional Palestinian way. While camp residents accepted differences in the culturally defined religious practices, what they could not accept was Fatah al-Islam’s insistence that their religious rituals were the only acceptable ways to practice faith.\footnote{Michael Taarnby and Lars Hallundbaek, “Fatah al-Islam: Anthropological Perspectives on Jihadi Culture,” Working Paper, Real Instituto Elcano, December 2, 2008, 2, 6.} In this context, it was community narratives that served as a buffer against the radicalizing influences of the Fatah al-Islam Islamic extremist organization that attempted to radicalize youth through Islamic practices that were not compatible with community practice.

The investigation of cultural communities as a window into individual psychological phenomena is also important in identifying intergenerational narratives that have been passed on to youth and reinterpreted in ways that will constitute a contemporary version of cultural history that will influence their life choices. Azarian-Ceccato reports how Armenian community narratives, derived from the Armenian community in Fresno, California, have informed Armenian-American youth’s understanding and interpretation of the Armenian genocide of 1915. Over the years survivors passed down their remembrances in the cultural
The diversity of cultural communities thus requires that an ethnographic sensibility be employed to get at the community dynamics that generate the unique history and traditions, the ways of being, that will construct notions of rights, duties and obligations that will guide individual behavior in the community. Whether the cultural community is a refugee camp in Somalia, a Pakistani community in London or an economically depressed neighborhood in Casablanca, it is important to understand the community with the goal of obtaining a “thick description” to generate cultural knowledge that will better inform the analysis of discourse unique to that cultural community.

**Framework Analysis**

The four components of the framework used to focus collection will often overlap. Peer group relationships will often take place in a school or educational setting. Family interactions will be influenced by community practices. School traditions will often be used to inculcate community codes of behavior, religious belief and notions of citizenship. The principal function of focusing attention on the four components is to obtain discourse samples and extracts from individuals embedded in key social structures that I view as most proximate to the individual.

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When discourse samples are identified, positioning analysis will then be employed to understand the individual within the person’s cultural context, determine how well these social structures address the individuals developmental needs, and if warranted, potentially track the migration of the individual to a social structure that more directly satisfies that person’s needs. In sum, the combination of understanding the narratives resident in each social structure combined with the analysis of discourse that occurs within each of these social structures will provide insight into which individuals may be gravitating towards a life trajectory that leads to a diminishing range of options and ultimately to a set of categorical beliefs that are radical, irreconcilable with other belief systems and sanction violence as the only legitimate means to impose their worldview.

**Interaction Among the Components**

The four components of the framework in combination seek to capture most of the discursive sociocultural life-space in which the individual is embedded. An overlap may be necessary where the analyst must determine which context provides the best opportunity to interpret a particular discursive exchange. For example, discursive interaction among parents and child regarding where the child should go to school is better understood within the context of family dynamics while the discursive events that occur in the child’s life at school are more appropriately understood within the context of the school
component. The goal is to determine which component(s) provide(s) the richest understanding on how an individual life may unfold towards a progressively narrow range of life options that could potential lead to radicalized beliefs, opinions and perhaps behavior. For example, if a child is sent at a young age to a madrasa known to promote radical interpretations of Islam, it is more likely that the school component may have greater salience in understanding how the child acquired a set of radical beliefs even though the child’s parents were generally supportive. In this case, the two components, family and school, are linked by a common theme - the child’s education - and are tracked and followed at the individual level of analysis to arrive at some understanding regarding the role that each social structure may have played in the life choices of the individual. It is equally important to realize that by following the individual discursive exchanges in many conversations in which the person becomes engaged and viewing these through lens of each social structure within which this or that conversation occurs, we can begin to develop an understanding how each social structure supports or inhibits an individual’s life decisions. For example, do neglectful or abusive parents lead a child or young adult to migrate to a more welcoming social structure that meets the individual’s particular developmental needs at that stage of the person’s life? Does the developing child gravitate towards a street gang or to the sports team at school where the coach serves as mentor and surrogate father? What factors are involved? By tracking the individual through the various social structures of the framework the hope is to retain a
sense of the developmental dimension a child is experiencing approaching adulthood while also retaining the fluidness of *lived experience* as the individual moves from one set of discursive experiences to another.
The following three case studies have been selected to illustrate the application of my framework to understand the radicalization of individuals as their lives unfold in their unique cultural environments. In one case, a London-born, second generation Muslim, identifies himself as an ethnic Indian. Through an autobiography he relates his journey from moderate Islamic belief to radical extremist interpretations of Islam and the subsequent rejection of the radical views he had once adopted. The second case study examines the spiritual journey of a young American from Oregon who converted to Islam and turned to increasingly more radical interpretations of his faith while working for a Muslim foundation subsequently tied to al-Qaeda. He also provides an autobiographical account of his spiritual journey that led him to more radical interpretations of Islam until finally gravitating towards more tolerant conceptions of the faith, more tolerant to “kafirs” and those with more liberal views within his own community. The third case study examines the life of the so-called 20th World Trade Center hijacker, a French-born ethnic Moroccan whose radical beliefs led him down a path towards violent extremism and membership in al-Qaeda. In each case, the cultural context is different as well as the pathways towards the emergence of radical belief. My framework seeks to make the radicalization process of each
more comprehensible by providing a means to understand each individual within their cultural context and the choices they made that led to their perception of a narrowing range of life options and ultimate radicalization.

**Ed Husain**

In his memoir, *The Islamist*, Ed Husain chronicles his spiritual journey into and out of a radical interpretation of Islam that took place during his late teens and early twenties while living in London’s East End. Husain, a British-born Muslim whose father was from British India and his mother from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), provides an example of how an individual, confronted with the possibilities of multiple identities in a diverse and challenging cultural milieu, uses certain cultural resources to navigate towards social structures that address his need to establish a sense of self within a safe, secure and welcoming environment. What Husain selects to tell us is instructive in the sense that it suggests those elements that appeared most salient to Husain himself according to his understanding of the radicalization process he went through. Consequently, although Husain’s memoir can provide only his personal narrative directed at an anonymous public (the readership of the book), it offers entrée into his world as he conceives it. However, the reader must keep in mind that the way Husain relates his story and what he selects to tell the reader serves to position himself in relationship to his perceived audience as having certain specific rights and duties. At the same time he is drawing the reader towards
acceptance of his narrative version of his radicalization. Within the context of positioning theory, Husain’s autobiography represents a type of intentional self-positioning in which Husain seeks to express a unified and coherent personal identity at the core of a network of rights and duties he owes to others.\(^1\) In this regard, Husain’s act of writing an autobiography can be viewed as his attempt to make sense of his own experience and transformation.

**Family**

**Early Childhood**

Husain was the eldest of four children. He had a younger brother and twin sisters. It is noteworthy that his siblings are curiously absent in his autobiographical narrative relating his turn towards more radical interpretations of Islam. Only his mother, father and the family spiritual guide, referred to as Grandpa, are mentioned. Consequently it is unclear what influence, if any, Husain’s siblings may have had on his path towards radicalization.

Husain reports experiencing early childhood as pleasant and joyful, a result of early family socialization practices that accommodated cultural diversity and reinforced tolerance of other cultures and faiths resident in his local community.

I remember my father used to buy us fresh cakes from a Jewish baker in Brick Lane. Our Koran school building has inherited mezuzahs on the

door panels, which our Muslim teachers forbade us from removing out of respect for Judaism. My birthday, a family event at our home, is on Christmas Day. My mother would take us to see Santa Claus every year after the school Christmas party. We made a snowman in the garden, lending it my mother’s scarf. Opposite our childhood home in Limehouse, a three-story Victorian terrace, stood Our Lady Immaculate Catholic church with a convent attached. We were friends of the sisters; our car was parked beside the nunnery every night. We helped out in the church’s annual jumble sale. There was never any question of religious tensions, no animosity between people of differing faiths. My mother still speaks fondly of her childhood friends, many of them were Hindu. But as I grew older, all that changed. The live-and-let-live world of my childhood was snatched away.

This mixed heritage of being British by birth, Asian by descent and Muslim by conviction was set to tear me apart later in life.²

Analysis

Husain provides a revealing ethnographic sketch of the social landscape that he inhabited as a young child. In his recollection it is noteworthy that the touchstones for his early memories are four major world religions - Judaism, Islam, Christianity and Hinduism. Husain’s positive orientation towards these faiths, mediated by his parents in his early years, provided a rudimentary introduction to the diversity of spiritual beliefs that existed in their community. It is clear that these were experienced as concrete symbols that subsequently served to generate and reinforce a set of positive expectations regarding Husain’s conception of diverse belief systems. The Jewish baker provided fresh cakes, the Koran school preserved the mezuzahs out of respect for Judaism, the family was friends with the sisters at the local Catholic church, and Husain’s mother

spoke “fondly” of her Hindu childhood friends. These symbols re-imagined within ethnic and religious categories are recalled as a product of lived experiences in which Husain begins to form a positive attitude to living in a culturally diverse community.

The story-lines generated in these specific social interactions reflect a consistent theme: People of other faiths are to be accepted as full members of the community and are not to be excluded by membership in a specific faith community or ethnic group. For example, Husain’s father positions the Jewish baker as an accepted member of the community, that is, with certain personal and civic rights and duties, through the social act of purchasing cakes from him. Through this social interaction Husain begins to learn from his father the rights and duties that are accorded to the Jewish baker with regard to the baker’s relationship to the Husain family. In another example, the development of the family’s relationship with the sisters at the Catholic church in which the sisters are positioned as religious representatives that deserve respect and acceptance provides young Husain with a story-line that reveals how personal friendship supersedes any obstacles posed by differences in faith.

The primary family narrative that Husain conveys in this passage is his parents’ respect for and tolerance of others regardless of faith or ethnicity. It is not only an abstract acceptance but a tolerance that is expressed by joining in the ritual celebrations of others - Santa Claus, Christmas parties - and by freely associating with those from other belief systems - buying fresh cakes from the
Jewish baker, friendship with the sisters at the Catholic church. Husain essentially locates his parents as tolerant, caring and actively involved in their community. Husain warns us, however, that this tolerance of other faiths nurtured in him by his parents would subsequently undergo a change that he attributes to a “mixed heritage.” This will serve as the dominant inciting element in the dramatic narrative of his life as it unfolds.

Family Beliefs

Husain describes his family as being “extremely close, not particularly wealthy, nor especially poor.” He notes that as a child, his father would occasionally take the family to London in the summer to tour the historical sites - Tower of London, the Palace of Westminster, St. Paul’s Cathedral. Husain recalls that his father was most proud in pointing out the residence of Mahatma Gandhi in Bromley-by-Bow. He tells us that his father’s second favorite point of interest was the Winston Churchill statue across from the House of Commons noting that despite their bitterly divergent visions for India, his father admired the “tenacity and leadership skills” of both Gandhi and Churchill.

Husain emphasizes that central to the life of his father from early childhood was his deep religious commitment to Islam as practiced in the Indian subcontinent. He recalls how his father would relate the narrative of their pious family tradition in which many family members were revered as “saintly” individuals. Husain describes his father as a fervent disciple of the famous
spiritual leader Shaikh Abd al-Latif, referred to by Indian custom as Fultholy Saheb. Husain notes that Fultholy was considered a father figure by his parents and was in fact introduced to Husain as his grandfather. Subsequently in his memoir he refers to Futholy as “Grandpa”.

Husain reports that he “liked” Grandpa and eventually grew to “love” him. He details his deep involvement in Grandpa’s spiritual activities when Fultholy would visit England. He recalls that in 1989, when Husain is 14 years old, he accompanied Grandpa on a trip to Birmingham and was allowed to carry the old man’s books which he considered an honor and a blessing. Husain relates how proud his parents were that he was allowed to carry the books of their revered spiritual guide. Husain writes that he toured cities in England with his Grandpa again in 1990, reciting the Koran in mosques across Britain before his Grandpa would address the worshippers. Husain, by now 15, recalls how he thoroughly enjoyed everything about his travels with his Grandpa and the spiritual world he inhabited. He most enjoyed the private religious lessons he received from Grandpa and repeatedly notes how “extremely proud” his parents were of him in earning the opportunity to be developing spiritually while mentored by such a deeply revered religious guide. He noted “That year I grew extremely close to Grandpa.” Reflecting, Husain writes:

All of this was teaching me about a mainstream moderate Muslim ethos rooted not in Britain but in the eastern Muslim tradition of seeking guidance and religious advice from an elderly sage. I was learning to be
an erudite Muslim; Grandpa and his disciples instilled in me a certain way of being gentle and God-revering.\textsuperscript{3}

\textit{Analysis}

Husain again selects childhood memories that positions his father as a man of tolerance who can accept and respect individuals whose qualities he admires despite having views potentially different from his own. Husain specifically recalls how his father held both Gandhi and Churchill in high regard because their ability to lead and persevere under difficult circumstances. It is a story-line that Husain seemingly replays in an effort to establish a normative baseline from which to measure his eventual estrangement from the family social structure that nurtured his early understandings of the dynamics of faith, ethnicity and community.

In Husain’s narrative, his father positions “Grandpa” as a towering and revered religious figure who had deeply influenced his father’s religious beliefs and those of his mother. In positioning Futholy Saheb in this manner, Husain intentionally self-positions himself as a willing acolyte and in so doing undertakes the duty to learn and understand Islam as a spiritual religion of peace. In addition, further moral depth is added to his vocation as he learns about the rights, duties and obligations inherent the relationship with Futholy Saheb. As an acolyte, Husain treated receiving instruction from “Grandpa” as his duty. For

\textsuperscript{3} Husain, \textit{The Islamist}, 15.
Futholy Saheb, Husain notes that Futholy Saheb’s duty, which he refers to as a “mission”, was “to take God’s creation closer to God.” It was Futholy Saheb’s kindness and spiritual constancy that encouraged Husain to interpret Islam as a religion of peace. The dialogic exchanges between Futholy Saheb and Husain, established a normative basis in which Husain situated his evolving understanding of Islam. Futholy Saheb essentially conveyed an interpretation of Islam as a spiritual quest in which a believer will determine how close to be to God. Husain understood Grandpa’s mission as fulfilling the duty of helping believers to bring Allah closer to them. As his acolyte, Husain too, had such a duty.

School/Educational Tradition

Husain reports positive experiences during his early school years at Sir William Burrough primary school in Limehouse. Fondly recalling his school trips to the English countryside he writes:

I remember the uninhibited joy of walking along the coast in Upnor, being invited aboard cheerful anglers’ small boats and devouring fish and soggy chips together. I recall a visit to the New Forest, removing mud from our Wellington boots at streams, swimming in rivers, and drinking hot chocolate together at night around the hearth of an old creaky floor-boarded hut. Our teachers would read Roald Dahl’s Big Friendly Giant or Kipling’s Jungle Book and then send us off to sleep for the night in rows of bunk beds inside large wooden dormitories set in a forest clearing. Often Susie Powlesland, our elegant head teacher complete with a disciplinarian streak and half-moon glasses, would come to tuck us in, dispensing goodnight kisses as required.

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4 Husain, The Islamist, 14-15.

5 Husain, The Islamist, 1.
Husain contrasts these idyllic school-sponsored adventures in the English countryside with the harsh reality of growing up in the streets of east London. Husain recalls how as a young child he was taunted on the way to school, which served as a temporary sanctuary:

‘Pakis! Pakis! F--- off back home!’ the hoodlums would shout. The National Front was at its peak in the 1980s. I can still see a gang of shaven-headed tattooed thugs standing tall above us, hurling abuse as we walked to the local library to return our books. Ms. Powlesland and the other teachers raced to us, held our hands firmly and roared at the hate-filled bigots.

‘Go Away! Leave us alone,’ they would bellow to taunts of ‘Paki lovers’ from the thugs. Little did I know then that one day I, too, would be filled with abhorrence of others.6

Husain reports that the other teachers at Sir William Burrough primary school were not always as protective of him and the other Asian students as was Ms. Powlesland. He poignantly recalls an incident that occurred at the age of nine in which he forgot to set the table during a lunch at school. He relates how Mr. Coppin, a teacher at the school, grabbed him by the arm and began to shout at him:

MR. COPPIN: Why didn’t you set the table?
HUSAIN: (whimpering) I forgot.

MR. COPPIN: (shouting) Forgot? How dare you forget? You’re in trouble, young man. Do you understand?

6 Husain, The Islamist, 2.
HUSAIN: Yes, Mr. Coppin.

MR. COPPIN: Where is your Allah now, eh? Where is he? Can’t help you?  

Nine-year-old Husain remembers feeling confused about Mr. Coppin’s outburst. At this point in his life Husain was just beginning to develop a spiritual consciousness where religious concepts were still somewhat amorphous. Referring to Mr. Coppin’s upbraiding, Husain wondered:

What did Allah have to do with it? Besides, I did not even know precisely who Allah was. I knew Allah had something to do with Islam, but then I also wondered if Islam and Aslan from _The Lion, Witch, and the Wardrobe_ were in any way linked. After Mr. Coppin’s outburst I thought it wiser not to ask.

It is noteworthy that Husain mentions that this is an incident in his life that he has “never forgotten” which suggests that this encounter with Mr. Coppin would resonate throughout his life in his search to establish his religious identity. As counterpoint to Mr. Coppin’s harshness he also recalls how a teacher named Cherie rushed him to the hospital after a playground accident in which he cut his chin. He notes how the actions of Cherie, a white, non-Muslim teacher, who took care of him and “showered him with attention” at school as he recovered, stayed in his mind and, along with the actions of Ms. Powlesland, helped him develop a belief in Britain and its values of “fairness and equality”.  

A major change in Husain’s school experiences occurred when he left Sir William Burrough primary school to attend secondary school. He notes that his

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7 Husain, _The Islamist_, 4.

8 Husain, _The Islamist_, 4-5.
parents were adamantly opposed to co-educational schooling. Despite entreaties by Ms. Powlesland that Husain attend a co-educational school, his parents enrolled him in the Stepney Green boys-only secondary school. Gone was the diversity that he experienced in Sir William Burrough. At Stepney Green the entire student population was Bangladeshi, Muslim and male. Husain laments that his first year at Stepney Green was the worst year of his life. Because of his nearsightedness, he was forced to wear glasses and was made fun of by the other children. He reports becoming “withdrawn and very introverted.” Husain underscores how different he was from the other boys at school, noting that while he lived with “news-watching” parents in a Victorian terrace in Limehouse, all the other kids lived in government apartments clustered in the same neighborhood. Husain characterized Stepney Green as a school in chaos and notes that a British tabloid had singled out Stepney Green as the “worst school in Britain.” To add to the unstable nature of the local school environment, Husain describes local Asian gang warfare in Stepney as a fact of life. Students at Stepney were expected to choose membership in one of the gangs. For Husain, involvement in a gang would be entirely out of the question. He explains that the behavior associated with being in a gang - being truant from school, wearing leather jackets, growing long hair - would be considered totally unacceptable by his parents.

Being uncommitted to any circle of friends at Stepney and not being a member of any specific gang, Husain reports becoming increasingly isolated.
He describes himself as a “loner” and a “misfit” who was bullied and often ignored. This period coincided with his spiritual development through the participation in his Grandpa’s religious activities during his visits to Great Britain. Husain’s spiritual awakening fostered by the religious living example of his Grandpa led Husain to also seek out religious instruction at Stepney. Religious instruction by Grandpa was by way of oral tradition in which Grandpa conveyed Islam as a spiritual struggle to find a way to become closer to Allah. Husain writes that at Stepney he sought out religious instruction. There he learned about Islam from the book *Islam: Beliefs and Teachings* by Gulam Sarwar. Husain notes that it was in this book that he first learned about the notion of an Islamic state. Quoting from the book, Husain provides a clear idea of the tenor and tone of the book’s content:

> Religion and politics are one and the same in Islam. They are intertwined. We already know that they are a complete system of life... Just as Islam teaches us how to pray, fast, pay charity and perform the Haj, it also teaches us how to run a state, form a government, elect councillors and members of parliament, make treaties and conduct business and commerce.

Husain emphasizes that the text commended organizations that sought to establish Islamic states and noted how Sarwar argued that “Islamic movements” that promoted Islam as an ideology were normal. This religious narrative obtained within a school setting stood in direct contrast to the religious narrative he was exposed to through the living example of Grandpa who presented Islam as fundamentally a spiritual quest. Husain reports that he would later learn
Sarwar was also behind the policy of the ‘Muslim Assembly” in which Muslim school children would be separated from non-Muslims at school assemblies. At the age of sixteen, Husain recalls that he began to wonder why his parents had failed to mention anything about the creation of an Islamic state. At this point, he notes that he begins to question the interpretation of Islam provided by his family and Grandpa, the idea that Islam had only a spiritual dimension. He recalls reflecting:

In all my discussion with traditional Muslims during the recent Gulf war, why had no one made it clear that religion and politics are ‘one and the same in Islam’? And why had none of us sought to ‘establish Allah’s law in Allah’s land’? And if this was what such movements such as Jamat-e-Islami and the Muslim Brotherhood were willing to do, well, what was wrong with that?9

Husain recalls how Grandpa was critical of the influence of Jamat-e-Islami and how his exposure to Sarwar’s textbook suddenly began to raise questions. He notes in italics - “Perhaps Grandpa was wrong.”

It was also during this time that Husain befriended Falik, a Muslim student at Stepney who was also considered a misfit by the other students at school. Falik was also the only other student in Husain’s private religion class, instruction provided by a teacher from Stepney’s religion department. Husain describes Falik as a hardworking and committed Muslim who was active in the local Muslim community. Husain seems to be questioning his own religious identity in comparison to Falik when he notes “While I was busy trying to be a ‘good son’ to

my parents by studying the Koran, helping them with the shopping, and staying away from gangs, Falik was actively contributing to the Muslim community by organizing football matches, youth camps, and study circles. It will be his school classmate, Falik, who will introduce Husain to a new peer group that will influence Husain’s spiritual journey.

**Analysis**

Husain’s narrative in which he details his school experiences relates two very different story-lines that would contribute to his confusion about his social identity and undermine a stable sense of safety and security within the school social structure. The mixed experiences in Sir William Burrough primary school and the negative experiences in Stepney Green secondary school reveal social structures that fundamentally affected how Husain positioned himself within these educational environments and the choices that he would make to help stabilize his growing sense of self.

Husain’s relationship with Ms. Powlesland reflects a story-line in which he sees her as heroically trying to carve out a safe haven of goodwill for children under her care. Husain specifically mentions that “We grew up oblivious to the fact that large numbers of us were somehow different - we were ‘Asian’.

Husain positions Ms. Powlesland as a caring, competent, “elegant” and devoted teacher of strong moral bearing. In turn, Ms. Powlesland positioned all of her pupils as valued children worthy of respect and dignity. In this sense we see how this
story-line converges with Husain’s family narrative in which his parents through their words and actions reinforced the notion of tolerance and acceptance of religious and ethnic differences.

Husain’s recollection of the incident of him and other Asian children being taunted by thugs on the way home from school is instructive. In this story-line, Ms. Powlesland and other teachers from Sir William Burrough come to his rescue and escorted him to school while verbally chastising the gang members. Husain positions Powlesand not only as his teacher but also as heroine and protector. For Husain, Ms. Powlesland represents an island of stability and support in a generally hostile social environment.

Despite the support from Ms. Powlesland and some of the other teachers, Husain faced social challenges even after he arrived at school. Husain’s short exchange with Mr. Coppin represents how some teachers at his school positioned him a quite different way than Ms. Powlesland. The story-line in his exchange with Mr. Coppin is that Coppin demeans Husain’s faith as a means to chastise nine-year-old Husain for not fulfilling his duty to set the table. The exchange is not a reasoned dialogue but essentially a rant by Coppin who has angrily positioned Husain as an incompetent young child in which he makes a stinging reference to Husain’s faith, which for Husain at the age of nine was not comprehensible. The illocutionary force of Coppin’s taunt of “Where is your Allah now then, eh?” essentially forces Husain into silence in which he begins to reflect on Coppin’s words. It is important to consider the cognitive ability of nine-
year-old Husain to sort out the potentially conflicting meanings that Coppin may be conveying in Husain’s view. In this regard, reflexive positioning of the dialogical self, i.e. Husain trying to make sense of Coppin’s reference to Allah as it relates to his forgetfulness in setting the table, becomes dependent to the degree with which Husain is cognitively able to understand the distinction between I (the self as subject) and Me (the self as known). How well can a young child assume multiple “I” positions in which he uses different “voices” to consider multiple points of view? Coppin’s diatribe clearly confused Husain in relation to his understanding of Islam. Also noteworthy is Husain’s references to The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe, co-mingling the imaginary world of fiction with the metaphysics of real life. Drawing on his brief life experiences, Husain resorts to a favorite story to try to make sense of Coppin’s vitriolic references to Islam. In addition, Husain’s vivid recollection of the incident suggests that re-imagining the encounter through an autobiographical account that post dates his passage through radicalization was a defining event in his young life. Coppin essentially forces Husain to consider the notion of a religious identity at an age when Husian was cognitively unable to sort out the possible multiple meanings of Coppin’s actions. Although he grew up in a religious family, the nurturing of Husain’s religious identity would not begin in earnest until his discursive encounters and interaction with his nominal “Grandpa” during his early teen years.
It was Husain’s search to deepen his understanding of Islam that led him to seek religious instruction from the religious department at Stepney. Ironically, the interpretation of Islam that Husain was exposed to in the text by Sarwar challenged his understanding of Islam as passed onto him through the family narrative in which Islam was considered a personal spiritual journey to become closer to God. The text, which characterized Islam as an activist ideology that seeks to promote the establishment of an Islamic state, directly challenged the family narrative about the nature and practice of Islam. When at the age of nine Husain experienced confusion about Islam in his confrontation with Coppin, Husain, now sixteen, is able to better manage his emerging multiple selves as he seeks to establish a coherent personal and social identity. Through a process of reflexive positioning Husain essentially positions himself as a rational actor within an emerging story-line line in which he believes his parents and Grandpa failed to reveal the full truth of what it means to be a Muslim. By taking the “I” position and viewing himself a rational actor, he succeeds in redefining the rights, duties and obligations inherent in his relationship with his parents and with Grandpa, i.e. through the process of reflexive positioning he acquires the right to challenge Grandpa’s version of Islam specifically questioning whether his Grandpa had been wrong about the meaning and purpose of the practice of Islam.

The introduction of his friend Falik into the narrative focuses attention on a key interlocutor, who through extensive discursive encounters, guides Husain
towards the acceptance of a new understanding of Islam. While Grandpa represents a living example of a strictly spiritual interpretation of Islam, Falik represents a living example of an “activist” interpretation of Islam that Husain began to consider as legitimate. Husain positions Falik as a “hardworking and committed Muslim who was active in the local Muslim community” while he positions himself as simply the dutiful son. The story-line that begins to emerge is that Husain questions whether the family narrative about the understanding, interpretation and practice of Islam taught to him was correct. Within the school environment at Stepney, Husain positions Falik as a “misfit”, like himself. Husain thus positions Falik in a way that underscores their shared exclusionary status within school that would subsequently serve to nurture their friendship. Within that friendship a new story-line begins to emerge. Husain writes “together we started to assert a new identity: we were young, Muslim, studious and London born.” For Husain, the rights, duties and obligations surrounding the discussion of Islam that inhered in his relationship with Falik, provided a means that allowed him to consider and begin to accept Islam as an ideology linking the textual discourse provided by Sarwar and the living example of Falik and his activist orientation to the local Muslim community. Husain continues to reflexively position himself within his autobiography as a young man on a rational search to understand his faith. In this sense, Husain positions the reader as a co-equal rational actor that would respond to what he believes are rational choices based on his circumstances that he had to face at school. An element that is lacking in
Husain’s retelling of his encounter with the Sarwar text was any mention of who was facilitating his understanding of the text. Husain records only his thoughts about the text and no discussion of the text with a teacher or other students.

Peer Group

The Young Muslim Organization (YMO)

Husain’s early teens years were marked by isolation at school in which he described himself as a misfit who was introverted and essentially ostracized by the other students. Outside of school Husain perceived his only social alternatives were either to join a local gang or to remain within the family social sphere. Because joining a gang was not a possibility for him, Husain’s social and religious world revolved around his family. His first reported peer friendship as a teenager was with Falik. Their friendship would slowly grow during the course of the religious class they were taking together. Husain describes Falik as a “better Muslim” than he and clearly looked to him as an example of what it meant to be a young, observant Muslim who sees active involvement in the local Muslim community as a religious duty. Falik is the key figure that introduces Husain to members of the Young Muslim Organization UK (YMO) that would subsequently constitute the first important peer group he encounters during his late teen years. Husain underscores the conflict that would arise with his family if they had known about Falik’s membership in the YMO. Husain explains that the YMO and the East London mosque were both “venerated” by Abul Ala Mawdudi,
a highly influential Pakistani journalist who had promoted a highly politicized and anti-Western version of Islam. Husain’s Grandpa had found Mawdudi’s version of Islam unacceptable and warned against accepting their beliefs, which meant that Husain’s father would also view those associated with Mawdudi as “enemies of God”. Consequently, Husain’s relationship with Falik required him to begin compartmenting information from parents. Husain relates that he did not reveal Falik’s ties to the YMO or the fact that Falik’s brother was a member of Jamat-e-Islami, the Pakistani political party started by Mawdudi founded on religious fundamentalism and the promotion of a theocratic form of government. He notes that Jamat-e-Islami was considered extreme by the moderate Muslim’s who attended the Brick Lane mosque.

Husain reports that he raises his Grandpa’s warnings about Jamat-e-Islami with Falik who supposedly challenges Husain to meet members of the YMO who follow the Islamic interpretations of Jamat-e-Islami. Husain portrays himself as seeking to determine whether his Grandpa’s narrative of Jamat-e-Islami as a sinister organization that demeans the Prophet was true or not. He writes “Now I could discover at first hand whether Jamat-e-Islami did indeed loathe Muslim saints, denigrate the Prophet, and want to politicize Islam.” It was against this backdrop that Husain overcame the moral force of his family narrative relating to the practice of Islam that allowed him enter the new peer relationships offered by the YMO.
Husain was highly impressed with those he was introduced to at the YMO by Falik. As I noted in Chapter One (see pages 20-21), Husain reported being welcomed by like-minded, serious, young Muslims at the YMO whom he viewed as “worthy role models: English-speaking, educated and rooted in faith”. Husain remarks that it was their interest in him as an individual, the fact that he was treated as a co-equal, that made his first encounter with the YMO memorable.

He relates that he quickly took notice of the differences between the religious practices taught by his family and those practiced by the young men at the YMO. He specifically notes the differences in prayer hall rituals. In his father’s mosque Husain explains that during prayers all those in the prayer hall wore skullcaps, which served as a sign of humility. However, when asked to pray with the YMO members at their mosque, he noticed that none covered their heads. For Husain, deciding whether to pray without a skullcap took on great importance. He decides to pray with the YMO members without any head covering proclaiming “That was my first act of rebellion.” Husain reveals how he came to that decision:

I reasoned that if they, in their twenties, surely knowing more than I did, and well-versed in their religion, could pray without covering their heads, then so could I. What did it matter?

I prayed that evening with confidence, with a feeling of difference, of greater ease. And free from the need to ruin my carefully arranged hairstyle.10

10 Husain, The Islamist, 29.
Husain reports that he began to regularly associate with the YMO members at the East London mosque and soon became actively involved in the organization where each Wednesday he would volunteer to assist with administrative tasks. He points out that he concealed his YMO activities from his parents by telling them that he was still taking private religious lesson from Mrs. Rainey, the teacher from Stepney who had been providing lessons to Husain and Falik. The lessons had, in fact, been discontinued. In short, Husain consciously deceived his parents regarding his association with the YMO. Husain specifically notes “Ours was an open family, we ate together, spoke about almost everything without reservation, and yet I was betraying my parents, beginning to lead a double life.” He claims that he wanted to tell his father about his new friends at the YMO but knew he would be challenged by him. By this time, he was beginning to develop a close relationship with one of the leaders of the YMO, Siraj Salekin, who he said essentially filled the role of the big brother that he never had. He reports that his relationship with the YMO was a source of internal conflict that prompted him to seek clarity and guidance from the leadership of the YMO that would help him handle the conflict in a way that would appease his father. In response to his request for guidance, Siraj summoned Husain for a discussion about his concerns. Husain reports that Salekin was able to directly address all his questions and dispel the negative characterization of the YMO and Jamat-e-Islami conveyed to him by his father and Grandpa. He recalls how prior to their meeting, Salekin would often drive him home and take
an interest in his family, a way of deepening the bond between them. At this point in his autobiography, Husain ponder’s “Had Siraj, a seasoned activist of Mawdudi’s form of political Islam, realized that the way to a potential recruit’s heart was through his family?”

Husain recalls how impressed he was by Siraj’s “open-door policy” and willingness to critically examine Mawdudi’s beliefs. Husain reflects that “The YMO had given me friends, a place in the world. Now, as they had answered my questions, their place in my heart was confirmed.” Husain proclaims that “after five years, I had found both a friend and a cause to which I belong.” At that point in his autobiography Husain reports that the antipathy towards Mawdudi’s beliefs instilled in him by his father and Grandpa was rapidly disappearing as he began to fully embrace Mawdudi’s version of what it meant to be a Muslim. He also notes how his burgeoning relationship with the YMO had affected his social identity at school where he and Falik became known as “brothers from the YMO.” At the age of sixteen, Husain reports being deeply ensconced in YMO activities:

My evenings were filled with YMO events and meetings, my time at school in organizing and leading prayer meetings, encouraging others to join the YMO. I was sixteen years old and I had no white friends. My world was entirely Asian, fully Muslim. This was my Britain. Against this backdrop, the writings of Sarwar’s guru, Mawdudi, took me to a radically new level.11

Analysis

A key figure in Husain’s acceptance of a more extreme interpretation of Islam is facilitated by his friend, Falik, a student at Stepney Green who serves as a conduit to a set of peer relationships outside of Husain’s school setting that will forge and reinforce a new understanding of Islam. Husain positions Falik as a “better Muslim” and a model of what a young observant Muslim should be. Husain also positions Falik as a misfit in school like himself further reinforcing a sense of solidarity between them. Positioning Falik as an example of a good Muslim and religious guide has the effect of forcing Husain to reposition his father and Grandpa in which he redefines their rights as sole providers of his religious instruction. Husain no longer accepts the family narrative of what it means to be a good Muslim and consequently a new story-line emerges in which Husain questions the authority of his father and Grandpa to serve as the sole sources of knowledge regarding the meaning and practice of Islam. As part of this new story-line Falik emerges as challenger to Husain’s family narrative regarding the practice of Islam. This new story-line is reinforced by Husain’s discursive encounter with the Sarwar textbook on Islam which coincides with the presentation of Falik’s view of Islam as an activist ideology. Husain’s discursive interaction the Sarwar textbook leads Husain to reflexively reposition himself, acquiring a greater sense of individual agency in which he is able to question the teachings of his father and Grandpa and move towards a more ideological interpretation of Islam as presented by Sarwar. This process is moved further
along through Husain’s discursive encounters with Falik in which, through intentional self-positioning, Husain accepts an activist version of Islam. During the repositioning process, Husain has redefined his rights, duties and obligations as a young Muslim in order to align with Falik’s conception of being a “good Muslim.” In this sense, Husain’s establishment of a greater sense of individual agency along with the acceptance of Sarwar’s view of Islam as an ideology and Falik as the model of a good Muslim served to make Husain aware of a new way to experience his personal identity. It also marked the beginning in which Husain questions and starts to reject the family narrative regarding the practice of Islam.

A key turning point for Husain that allows him to gravitate towards a more radical interpretation of Islam is his introduction by Falik to the membership of the YMO, a group closely associated with Jamat-e-Islami. It is noteworthy that in his autobiography Husain justifies his willingness to meet members and learn about the beliefs of YMO, despite his Grandpa’s warning about Jamat-e-Islami, by generating the story-line of trying to verify Grandpa’s narrative that Jamat-e-Islami is a “sinister organization that demeans the Prophet.” Yet, Husain also notes that it was the fact that the YMO members treated him as a co-equal and took an interest in him as an individual that made an impression on him. In other words, they positioned Husain as a valued member of their young Muslim community as embodied in the YMO and allowed Husain an opportunity to reposition himself that allowed Husain to explore an interpretation of Islam that aligned with young activist Muslim youth. Husain thus begins to migrate into a
social group that addresses not only his spiritual needs but also his social needs that will nurture both a personal and social identity at a critical juncture in his life. While in the group, Husain’s reports that discursive encounters with a YMO senior leader, Siraj Salekin, repositioned the YMO and the Jamat-e-Islami as positive organizations. The story-line in Husain’s discourse with Salekin is essentially the following: Salekin tries to show Husain that his father and Grandpa were wrong about the Jamat-e-Islami through a process in which he is willing to criticize the beliefs of Mawdudi and the Jamat-e-Islami. Husain thus positions Salekin as a rational, open-minded individual who could be trusted to provide correct religious guidance based on a rational examination of Mawdudi’s beliefs. In his autobiography, although Husain continues to emphasize his spiritual journey, his search for a personal and social identity appears as equally important. The replacement of his family social structure, his principle source of personal and social identity during his late teen years, by the YMO, his primary peer group in his late teens, marks Husain’s migration to a social structure that more adequately addressed his developmental needs at that age - personal identity, social identity and spiritual guidance. Husain specifically notes that the YMO had given him friends, a cause, and a place in the world, i.e. a personal and social identity within a spiritual context.
Migration from Family Social Structure

Husain reports that he initially concealed his new relationship with the YMO even to the point of deceiving his family about his activities. He notes “My parents were becoming seriously concerned about my sudden outburst of religious fervor.” He adds that eventually they learned of his participation in the YMO. Husain notes that his parents asked him to leave the YMO. Husain reports that he refused this parents request and began to have regular confrontations with them. Husain recalls that his parents at this point were vociferous in their total rejection of his version of Islam. Husain reports the mutual rejection:

‘You’ve changed,’ my mother said, her lips quivering. ‘You’re no longer the son I raised.’ I wanted to hear no more. Abruptly, I got up and walked out of the living room. My parents shouted after me; never in my life had I walked away from my parents while they were speaking to me.\textsuperscript{12}

Husain notes he was hardly on speaking terms with his parents. He reports that the disagreement grew so deep that his father gave him an ultimatum: “leave Mawdudi’s Islamism or leave my house.” Husain writes that he went to the YMO for advice and they told him ‘You must choose between family and God’s work.’ Husain’s dramatic response: “I wrote a farewell note to my parents, left it on my pillow and crept out of our house while they slept. I left home for the Islamic movement without a penny in my pocket and with only the clothes I was wearing.” Husain notes that while his father appeared willing to forgive him, his

\textsuperscript{12} Husain, \textit{The Islamist}, 39, 44-45.
mother was not. At this point, Husain was now seventeen and went off to Tower Hamlets College where he became active in the Islamic society, which was controlled by the YMO. He reports that by secret ballot, he became the president of the group. He notes “In essence, I was running an Islamic front organization operating on campus to recruit for the wider Islamic movement and maintain a strong Islamist presence... With parental obstacles out of the way, my zeal and commitments to Islamism were unconfined.”13

Deepening of Radical Belief

Husain reports that within his peer group, embodied in his exclusive network of Islamist contacts, he accepted the Islamist narrative that understood history as a clash between Islam and the West. He notes that required reading in the YMO was Milestones by Syed Qutb, an influential Egyptian writer considered one the leading ideologues of the contemporary global jihadi movement. Qutb, hanged by the Egyptian government in 1966, is viewed as a martyr and hero by global jihadists. Husain recalls at that point in his life, “To us, being a Muslim meant being in conflict with non-Muslim society.”

In his new social environment as president of the Islamic Society at Tower Hamlets college, Husain reports that he and Falik devoted enormous time and energy to build and expand the influence of the Islamic Society on campus.

13 Husain, The Islamist, 46-47.
Husain writes that “we became popular at college as the activists who knew what we were doing.” Husain notes that students came to understand that the Islamic Society members were from the East London mosque, the religious base of the YMO and, in turn, that the YMO was part of the Jamat-e-Islami. Husain underscores that belief that in promoting his version of religious activism on campus “we acted locally, but were connected globally.” Husain reports that he propagated Mawdudi’s restrictive version of Islam through defensive strategies that included recruiting “partial Muslims” to provide support when needed. Husain also notes that as part of his defensive strategy to build and maintain support for the Islamic Society on campus he and other members of the Islamic Society would station themselves near the entrance of discos where “partial Muslims” were dissuaded from entering out of respect for the Islamic Society. Husain boasts “To offend us, was to offend God. We played on their sensitivities of guilt, shame and humiliation.”

Husain writes that while his status and influence as an Islamist voice among the student population at Tower Hamlets was strong, he notes other versions of Islamist belief were beginning to vie for the hearts and minds of students against the backdrop of the Balkan crisis that called on Muslims worldwide to support their Muslim brothers in Bosnia. He notes that the two main sources that competed with the Mawdudi’s Jamat-e-Islami were the Wahhabists and Hizb-ut-Tahrir. The Wahhabists completely rejected any scholarly

interpretation of the Koran and all schools of Islamic jurisprudence while Hizb-ut-Tahrir accepted both scholarly interpretation and Muslim jurisprudence but differed from Jamat-e-Islami by calling for the establishment of a caliphate, a more restrictive and exclusive form of an Islamic state, i.e. a more radicalized notion of an Islamic state.

Husain expresses frustration at the YMO’s concentration and focus on only the Bangladeshi community and inability to adequately address the Bosnia issue. He reports revising his views about YMO in that he was beginning to view the YMO as more “parochial” and controlling in their approach to their ongoing social activism regarding education, youth activities and recruiting. Husain notes that members of the radical extremist group Hizb-ut-Tahrir noticed his “restlessness” and began to question his commitment to the YMO.

DAVID: Why the hell are you in YMO? YMO are a bunch of losers. They’re a branch of Jamat-e-Islami in the Indian subcontinent, followers of a shallow man. Mawdudi. Jamat-e-Islami have no concerns beyond their individual countries. As Muslims, we must think globally. YMO is a national organization, limited in scope. .

Husain reports that in his internal dialogue he does not disagree with David’s assessment of the YMO but questions why David believes Mawdudi is shallow.

DAVID: Mawdudi was right to identify the need for an Islamic state as the solution for the problems of the world’s Muslims but he provides no answers. How will we bring the state into being? What is going to be its foreign policy? Its education policy? How will it deal with Israel? How will it address unemployment? Do you know?
Husain notes he attempts to explain to David that Mawdudi believes in taking power gradually by slowly gaining control of the parliament and the army through infiltration. Husain writes that in his intradialogical conversation he simply did not know how to respond to David with regard to education policy, foreign policy and the myriad of other issues David raised in their conversation. Husain reported internally reflecting in response to David's challenges that Jamat-e-Islami-affiliated organizations primary focused on seizing power, not providing policy prescriptions. Husain defends YMO focus on seizing power.

HUSAIN: If that meant adapting a democratic parliamentary system to our own ends, then why not?

DAVID: We can't do that, man. Democracy is haram! Forbidden in Islam. Don't you know that? Democracy is a Greek concept, rooted in demos and keratos - people’s rule. In Islam, we don’t rule. Allah rules. Human beings do not have legislative power the world today suffers from the malignant cancers of freedom and democracy.

Husain recalls that being only eighteen years old at the time, he felt that did not have the status to argue with David, a research student whom he refers to as a scientist. Husain records that he simply began to ask David questions to which David responded by clearly delineating the approach of Hizb-ut-Tahrir approach to how Muslims should address the problems of the world. David laid out Hizb-ut-Tahrir’s plan:

The Hizb has a clear methodology for dealing with all of the problems of the world, from Bosnia to the Gulf War, from poverty in Africa to high crime rates in the West, we have solutions. Islam is God’s system of government. Jamat-e-Islami and other groups may say the same, but we are the only group in the world who really will implement it. Our members in different Muslim countries have penetrated Muslim armies and soon we
will establish our own government. Not through democracy or parliament -- all that belongs to *kafir* system. We will deliver the Islamic state through a military coup. Very soon. God willing.\(^{15}\)

Reflecting, Husain recalls being overpowered by David’s oratory and becoming increasingly committed to Hizb-ut-Tahrir. He claims that his attraction to Hizb-ut-Tahrir was not solely based on “teenage naivety” but also on the group’s argument that the British government had colonized Muslims in countries such as India and Egypt and, as an enemy of Islam, would not allow a strong Muslim community to become established in Great Britain. Husain emphasizes that that assertion constituted a strong argument that had greatly influenced second generation immigrant Muslims. He notes that Hizb-ut-Tahrir strongly promoted the idea that establishing an Islamic state was an Islamic obligation.\(^{16}\)

Husain reports that he ultimately replaced the Jamat-e-Islami interpretation of Islam with Hizb-ut-Tahrir’s version, which called for the destruction of the existing political order. As president of the Islamic Society on campus, Husain would now become viewed by students as associated with Hizb-ut-Tahrir rather than the YMO. He reports that his old friend, Falik, stood steadfast and remained loyal to the YMO. Husain writes that he was increasingly challenged by the members in the YMO-oriented Islamic Society, many of whom he had recruited, and consequently, resigned his position. He notes that the Islamic Society had the last word when the senior committee passed a “no

\(^{15}\) Husain, *The Islamist*, 78.

\(^{16}\) Husain, *The Islamist*, 77-82,
confidence resolution” in him, essentially kicking him out of the group. The defection of Husain from the YMO to Hizb-ut-Tahrir was complete.

**Analysis**

The discursive encounters between Husain and his parents reveal two critical story-lines. The first story-line is: Husain’s religious views are rejected by his parents which is, in effect, a rejection of him as the son they raised. The second story-line is the ultimatum: Husain must reject Mawdudi’s version of Islam or leave his home. At this point Husain has positioned his parents as having no moral force in relation to providing religious guidance. Where in the past Husain’s life unfolded in way that led him to question his parent’s and Grandpa’s interpretation of religious belief, he now fully rejects his family’s narrative and position’s himself as the sole moral force empowered through individual agency to assess and interpret Islamic beliefs. Husain does try, however, to resolve his crisis with his family by seeking out the YMO for advice. Thus he positions the YMO as the decisive moral authority among his relationships more attuned to his needs, signaling that Husain has decided to migrate to another social structure, in this case a peer group embodied in the YMO, that will subsequently influence critical life decisions. The YMO essentially uses its moral authority to subtly force Husain to prioritize his loyalty, i.e. what is more important - family or Mawdudi’s version of faith. In this sense, the YMO ultimatum had the illocutionary effect of forcing Husain to define in their view
whether he was a “good Muslim” in accord with Mawdudi’s interpretation, or a Muslim who limits faith to simply a spiritual dimension.

Husain’s departure to college provided Husain the flexibility to test out his commitment to promoting the Mawdudi’s version of faith within the Islamic Society at Tower Hamlets College. When Husain gets elected president of the Islamic Society at college, he essentially becomes positioned by the Islamic Society as their voice of religious moral authority and proponent of Mawdudi’s interpretation of Islam, that endows him with the right interpretation. The election of Husain by the Islamic Society membership also serves to position Husain as a young Muslim social activist, which in turn provides him a new high profile social status that he had never experienced. Members of the Islamic Society look to him for guidance and direction thereby contributing to the development of Husain’s social identity as a young Muslim activist that he aspired to be.

Husain’s involvement in the YMO and subsequent election as president of the Islamic Society at Towers Hamlet marks a social trajectory in which, within a span of several years, he went from being self-positioned as an isolated, social misfit at Stepney Green to being positioned by the membership of the Islamic Society as president of the important Islamic student organization at his college. Husain’s life trajectory as observed through various positionings reveals that abandoning the family conceptions of faith in favor of Mawdudi’s more radical version of Islam brought him social rewards that he greatly valued - attention,
status as a religious activist, and a more clearly defined personal and social identity. The social cost for Husain at this point in his life, however, was the loss of the close, nurturing relationship of his family that he enjoyed during his early development years.

As Husain acts as president of the Islamic Society with support from Falik, a new story-line emerges in which Husain tries to expand the influence of the Islamic Society on campus. Husain engages in various activities to promote the religious views of the organization as well as increase membership. Within this story-line, Husain’s autobiography reveals how he reflexively positions himself as the “popular activist” who “acted locally, but was connected globally” all the while playing the role of the manipulator of “partial Muslims” whose behavior he attempts of influence through shame and guilt. In so doing we can see how Husain, through the retelling of his story through autobiography, is attempting to understand the construction of both a personal and social identity centered around a restrictive interpretation of Islam that would allow him to manipulate students to support the organizational objectives of the Islamic Society. In one sense, for Husain the autobiography functions as a means to reflexively explore and explain to the reader how he was able to reconcile the purity of Mawdudi’s beliefs with the tactical decision to use shame and guilt to influence students within the context of a more clearly defined religious identity which was essentially identical to his social identity.
Husain reports that his influence on campus, while strong, was increasingly challenged by two other Islamist groups that were vying for influence on campus - the Wahhabist and the group Hizb-ut-Tahrir. The Wahhabists’ rejection of the scholarly interpretation of the Koran and schools of Islamic jurisprudence led Husain to position the Wahhabists and their religious views as unacceptable, which meant for Husain they had no moral authority to provide him with religious guidance. The religious worldview of Hizb-ut-Tahrir, however, coincided more closely with Husain’s in their shared vision of the establishment of an Islamic state. Concurrently, the events in Bosnia at the time led Husain to reflexively reposition his views towards the YMO in that Husain believed that the YMO failed to adequately address the crisis facing Muslims in Bosnia. He repositions the YMO as a “parochial” organization more controlling of his activities as president of the Islamic Society. It is within this context that Husain claims that Hizb-ut-Tahrir noticed his “restlessness” and proceeds to challenge him.

In the dialogue reported by Husain with his encounter with David, the Hizb-ut-Tahirir member, Husain recalls David positioning the YMO as “a bunch of losers” who are limited and only focused on the Indian subcontinent. The illocutionary force of David’s discourse regarding the YMO leads Husain to reflexively reposition the YMO in which the YMO begins to lose moral authority to serve as his proper religious guide. Husain positions David as the superior
authority in their dialogic encounter based on his age and status as a research student which Husain claims prevented him from challenging David’s statements.

As a result of his encounter with David, Husain has reflexively positioned himself as a social activist who ‘acts locally but thinks globally’ which he uses as a normative standard to reassess and reposition the activities of the YMO. The failure of the YMO to respond to the events in Bosnia leads Husain to reposition the YMO from an organization that was ostensibly global in outlook to one that was revealed to be essentially parochial when faced with a real challenge, that is, had forfeited their rights to provide the ‘true’ interpretation of Islam. Husain thus crafts his autobiography to present a coherent transition of an emerging self to a more restrictive interpretation of Islam in line with his evolving social identity as a young Muslim social activist aligned with the global jihadi movement. In so doing, Husain reflexively constructs a story-line in which he envisions himself as being on a heroic journey in which he portrays himself on a search for a more expansive conception of faith that unifies all Muslims. He bolsters this narrative by noting that the students on campus at that point essentially positioned him as aligned with the Hizb-ut-Tahrir. Paradoxically, Husain’s search for a more inclusive notion of Islam is based on the acceptance of a more restrictive interpretation of the faith.

Husain’s trajectory towards a narrower conception of Islam is marked by his departure from the YMO. After repositioning the YMO as unresponsive to the “global” Muslim community, Husain reports that he resigns from his position
presumably with the intention of leaving the organization. Husain notes, however, that the YMO basically kicked him out of the organization by virtue of passing a “no confidence resolution.” In effect, first order positioning of the YMO by Husain resulted in second order positioning by the YMO in which Husain was essentially expelled from the organization.

Disillusionment

Husain writes that he ultimately became disillusioned with Hizb-ut-Tahir when “I began to realize how little these people knew about the Koran. I was getting older, and the Hizb seemed suddenly like pretentious, counterfeit intellectualism.” The distancing and eventual departure from the Hizb-ut-Tahrir, not the subject of this analysis, nonetheless represents another progression in Husain’s trajectory away from a more restrictive interpretation of Islam where options regarding choices of acceptable belief became extremely limited.

Community

The social impact of local community on Husain’s development of a personal and social identity was generally indirect, and in his early years, mediated primarily by his parents. His parent’s interaction with the local community generated the operational narratives that help socially construct Husain’s early perception of the world as a tolerant and welcoming social environment. Through his parent’s matrix of diverse social relationships in the
community, Husain experienced in his early years a nurturing environment filled with possibilities. This early conception of a tolerant local community would contrast sharply with the social community that Husain would have to endure as a teenager. As a teenager, he would have to confront local Asian gangs. The direct impact was to essentially lead Husain to seek support from first his family social structure and then, as he separated himself from his family, he would come to rely on his peer group embodied in religious organizations to provide for his personal and social needs. In this sense, for Husain the rights, duties and obligations to his family led to his general detachment from the broader local community that was in conflict with family beliefs. As a teenager, being a member of a gang would be unacceptable to his parents. Consequently, the impact of community on Husain was indirect and would lead Husain to seek out a more proximate peer group in the form of a religious organization that would ultimately structure his options regarding acceptable Islamic beliefs.

Daveed Gartenstein-Ross

In his autobiographical account of his acceptance of radical Islam, Daveed Gartenstein-Ross offers an example of how the radicalization process could unfold within the context of American culture. The same caveats apply when assessing Daveed’s narrative as those applied to Husain’s, i.e. Daveed is selecting aspects of his life and presenting them in the genre of a personal memoir directed at a public readership. As with Husain’s memoir, Daveed’s
memoir is a form of intentional self-positioning aimed at providing the reader with a comprehensible understanding of his unique experience of radicalization as he understood it. As with Husain, Daveed’s memoir could be viewed as an act of self-examination in which Daveed seeks to provide a coherent explanation to himself to account for and justify his decision to become a believer of a radicalized version of Islam, a belief he would subsequently reject. As a result, the writing of a memoir helps Daveed organize a personal identity around a core of newly established set of beliefs.

**Family**

Daveed provides a brief portrait of his family life through the lens of his parents’ eclectic spiritual beliefs. He notes that although his parents were from a Jewish background, they did not follow the tenets of traditional Judaism. Daveed recalls that while only a toddler, his parents joined a religious movement known as the “Infinite Way” founded in 1940 by Joel Goldsmith. Goldsmith’s teachings essentially reflected a New Age philosophy in which “The necessity for giving up the material sense of existence for the attainment of the spiritual consciousness of life and its activities is the secret of seers, prophets and saints of all ages.”

Daveed also notes that his parents were deeply involved in meditation, welcomed a broad range of spiritual beliefs and essentially had a syncretistic

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orientation towards faith. Commenting on his parents’ spiritual inspirations, he notes:

My parents’ love for spiritual figures and religious traditions didn’t end with Jesus, Buddha and the Old Testament prophets. They also cherished the wisdom of Rumi, St. Augustine, and Ramana Maharshi. And they drew lessons from Zen, Taoism and Sufism.¹⁸

He further adds:

Like many people, I had adopted most of my parents’ spiritual beliefs when growing up. Or at least as much of these beliefs as I could understand them; true to their liberal vision, my parents were careful not to push their views of God onto me.¹⁹

Daveed describes his father as devoted to family life and fondly recalls how he and his father had “endless walks and talks, and constantly created new games to play together.” This close relationship with his father, which he also shared with his mother, set the tone for the open discussions they would have as Daveed moved into his young adult years. Daveed portrays family discourse as safe “space” in which ideas were rationally explored in an open, caring, non-judgmental fashion. Daveed would ultimately use his parents as a sounding board to get reactions to his proposed ideas and plans. For example, when contemplating becoming Muslim, Daveed tests out the idea on his mother:

DAVID: Mom. I want to tell you that I’m seriously considering Islam as a way of life.

¹⁸ Gartenstein-Ross, Memoir, 4.

¹⁹ Gartenstein-Ross, Memoir, 6.
MOTHER: If that’s where you feel God is leading, you should follow your convictions.  

Despite the New Age orientation of his parents’ spiritual beliefs, Daveed reports he was still concerned about his mother’s possible disapproval regarding the spiritual direction he was headed given their Jewish background.

Analysis

Daveed’s brief recollection of his family life during childhood reveals a central family narrative – spirituality is broadly defined and can be found in a variety of new as well as established religious traditions and that aspects of these various traditions can be selectively incorporated into one’s life as needed. Daveed positions his parents as adherents of an admixture of New Age humanistic beliefs and selected aspects of established religious traditions, i.e. he positions his parents as unanchored in any particular religious tradition. As a young child Daveed reports that he adopts this particular family narrative, or at least the parts of it he could understand.

Several story-lines begin to emerge as a result of Daveed’s conversations over time with his parents. One story-line is: Daveed’s parents promote the importance of openly discussing and exploring ideas. Discourse is valued and is viewed as an important way to find the right spiritual path. In the realm of spiritual ideas, the role of discussion is to allow the individual an opportunity to

20 Gartenstein-Ross, Memoir, 27.
examine and determine what would be that individual’s proper spiritual path. The related story-line is: Daveed’s parents promote the idea of individual agency as a means to identify the proper spiritual direction. However, it is not reason alone that is to serve as a spiritual guide but also irrationally embodied feelings are a component of his parents orientation towards faith. In his dialogue regarding his impending conversion to Islam, Daveed positions his mother as his spiritual guide from whom he seeks approval for his decision to become a Muslim, i.e. he acknowledges her right to be consulted and have a say in his decision. His mother combines the realms of thinking and feeling when she advises Daveed to follow his convictions, if he feels God is leading him towards Islam. The family narrative of New Age spirituality as a mode of orientation to faith and the fact that his parents were not anchored in any particular religious tradition would create in Daveed a greater degree of cognitive flexibility in considering other faiths. It would be sources outside of the family that would influence Daveed’s search for spirituality in his life that would ultimately impact his life trajectory.

**School/Educational Tradition**

Daveed provides virtually no information about his formal educational experiences during his formative elementary and high school years except to recall a serious life-threatening bout of pneumonia he contracted during his final semester of high school. He begins to provide more detail about his education
relating his college experiences at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina which he entered in 1994. He simply notes that he selected Wake Forest because of a scholarship he was offered. Daveed also makes a point of contrasting the cultural differences between his hometown of Ashland, Oregon and the campus community of Wake Forest. While he describes Ashland as a “hippie” town, Daveed likens the campus environment of Wake Forest to a country club replete with “trimmed lawns, tennis courts and golf course.” He pointedly notes a class difference between himself and the Wake Forest student population recalling that he “arrived on campus in red Chuck Taylor sneakers and a flannel shirt” while the student population on campus seemed to have all come from wealthy families. Daveed underscores the debilitating impact of not fitting in, writing that “For my first couple of years there, I felt, isolated, alone.” He reports that during these first two years he devoted almost all his time between his studies and the Wake Forest intercollegiate debate team.

Daveed notes two events that occurred during 1996, while still feeling isolated at Wake Forest, that led him to consider his mortality and consequently the need to address spiritual issues. First, after the campus student health service failed to properly diagnose his digestive problem, he was eventually sent to a local hospital that informed him he had Crohn’s disease, an autoimmune disorder that results in chronic inflammation of the gastrointestinal tract. He writes that his condition forced him to remain in the hospital for two weeks and
ultimately led him to withdraw from school for a semester. He reports losing 40 pounds and returning home to Ashland to recuperate. Reflecting on his “brush with death” from pneumonia in high school and his battle to overcome Crohn’s disease he notes “I was acutely aware of the emptiness in my life.” Second, he recalls the death of his grandfather, the former dean of the medical school at Stony Brook University in New York, whom he characterized as having lived a “brilliant” life.” Daveed reports that his grandfather died during the fall of 1996 just as he himself was in the final stages of recuperating from Crohn’s disease. Daveed writes that these two events motivated him to seek answers to his spiritual questions upon his return to Wake Forest during the spring of 1997.21

Daveed reports that it was during the spring 1997 semester that he met al-Husein Madhany, a fellow student born in Kenya to South Asian Indian-American parents, who provided his first introduction to Islam. Daveed writes that his friendship with al-Husein gave him three important things that he said were missing in his life at that point - “friendship, a sense of purpose and a relationship with God.”22 He reports that it was also al-Hussein who got him directly involved in campus politics.

al-HUSEIN: There’s a rally on the quad. You should come.

DAVEED: What’s the rally?

21 Gartenstein-Ross, Memoir, 9-11.

22 Gartenstein-Ross, Memoir, 13.

DAVEED: I don’t know if going to a student rally is the best way to spend the day.

al-HUSEIN: (rhetorically) Do you care about racism? Are issues like homophobia, religious discrimination and white male Christian hegemony on campus important to you?

DAVEED: Well, they are, but --

al-HUSEIN: Then you should come.

Daveed reports that at the rally he actually spoke to the crowd when Knox had asked if anyone wanted to express an opinion. Daveed characterizes his speech as “short and disjointed” but reflects that he felt a change occurring in side of him in which he was moving from “spectator to participant.” He reports that al-Hussein was very pleased, reportedly telling Daveed “It’s nice to see you taking a stand. We need more people like you involved.” Daveed writes that later that day al-Hussein brought him to a meeting of the Asia Student Interest Association (ASIA), a group that al-Hussein had founded. Daveed recalls how he repeated his statements against racism in front of ASIA and underscores that it was after this speech that he realized it was the beginning of his stand.

Daveed also notes that it was at Wake Forest where he met his future wife, Amy. He reports that they first met in January 1998 when he was serving as a coach of the Wake Forest debate team. Amy was a second semester freshman on the team. He describes her as “a rare beauty that was matched by
a powerful intellect.” He reports that they began dating and she would become a “constant presence” in his life.

Daveed believes that it was a combination of his conversion to Islam, his deep commitment to social justice, and his background in debate that led him to choose as his honors thesis a paper comparing the Nation of Islam to more traditional Muslims groups and their appeals to the African-American community. He recalls, however, that he was totally unaware of how small doctrinal differences of the type that he had discussed in his paper could provoke deep hatred among contending Islamic groups in practice. Reflecting, he adds “And at the time, I had no idea that I would eventually come to see these small doctrinal differences as momentous.”

During fall of his last year at Wake Forest, Daveed reports that he actively reengaged in campus activism. He notes that although al-Hussein had graduated and moved on to Harvard Divinity School, they had both come to accept Bem’s self-perception theory as an explanation of attitude change. Daveed notes that, consequently, his goal as a student activist was to apply this theory by getting people engaged in activist behavior, even in a small way, - signing a petition, speak at a rally, etc. - which, in turn, he believed would promote a change in attitude favorable to the cause. Reflecting on his subsequent acceptance of a job at an Al-Qaeda linked foundation:

The interesting thing is that self-perception theory never crossed my mind when I thought about taking a job at Al Haramain. I knew as early as my first visit, when I heard Sheikh Hassan’s sermon about the duty of
emigrating to Muslim countries, that the group had a number of views with which I disagreed deeply. Yet I thought I could accept a job there, sample the group’s beliefs, pick and choose from their positive ideas, and discard the rest.

I never considered that the methods al-Husein and I had gleaned from self-perception theory to try to shape people into campus activities could, in turn, be used to shape me.\textsuperscript{23}

\textit{Analysis}

It is noteworthy that Daveed chooses to avoid providing any details of his early school years suggesting that, at least in his mind, his elementary and high school years played no foundational role in the way in which his worldview would eventually develop that would lead him towards an acceptance of a radical interpretation of Islam. Instead, he uses his memoir to construct story-lines that essentially reflect characteristics of the mythical lonely, virtuous wanderer, in search of meaning in life through the intellectual interrogation of ideas. He prepositions the students of Wake Forest as wealthy and upper class while he reflexively prepositioning himself as middle class, from a “hippie” town consequently according the wealthy, upper class students at Wake Forest the right to act in a superior manner towards him. It generates the story-line: Daveed becomes isolated when he perceives a social class difference between himself and the rest of the Wake Forest student body that makes it difficult for him to fit into the student population. He presents a narrative in which he responds to his sense of isolation by concentrating his efforts on his studies and

\textsuperscript{23} Gartenstein-Ross, \textit{Memoir}, 56.
active participation on the debate team. What Daveed chooses not to tell the reader is about any attempts to reach out socially to the other students. Consequently, it is unclear whether his isolation was self-imposed. He does not report that he was mistreated or singled out for ridicule by the other students. He mentions only that they appeared to reflect a wealthy social class that he had not experienced growing up in Ashland. In this sense, Daveed reflexively prepositions himself as an introspective intellectual in which ideas constitute his primary dialogical partners, at least in this collegiate milieu at this particular point in his life. On a broader level, Daveed uses his memoir to reflexively re-preposition himself as a rational, analytical and intellectually gifted individual who carefully considers his decisions. The high value placed by his parents on discussing ideas in an open and tolerant manner, the mention of receiving a scholarship to attend college, his participation on the debate and additional references to academic achievement, all combine to generate a narrative in which Daveed portrays his acceptance of more radical beliefs as based on a reasoned progression towards spiritual truth.

Daveed cites two serious illnesses and the death of his grandfather as key events that occurred during his teen years that subsequently provoked an ongoing intradialogical examination of his life that led him to conclude that his life was “empty.” During the course of his intradialogical exploration, he notes that his recognition of his own mortality raised spiritual questions that he hoped to explore upon his return school in the Spring 1997 that followed his recuperation.
from Crohn’s disease. The story-line generated by Daveed’s internal discourse is: Daveed seeks answers to his spiritual questions as a way to remove feelings of emptiness and ultimately find meaning in his life.

It is perhaps no coincidence that shortly after his return to campus in Spring 1997 he reports meeting and developing a close friendship with al-Husein, an individual who according to Daveed provides him with the things he needed most in his life at that point - friendship, a sense of purpose and a relationship with God, i.e., he positions al-Husein as a confidant, spiritual guide, and mentor. Daveed notes it is al-Husein who introduces him to Islam, which is eventually nurtured within the context of peer relationships beyond the campus social structure. The conjunction of Daveed’s proclamation to seek answers to his spiritual questions and the fortuitous initiation of a friendship with al-Husein shortly thereafter suggests that the memoir was constructed to project a coherent plot-driven story-line: Daveed finds a friend that helps him restore meaning to his life.

In addition, within the context of campus life, al-Husein also serves to encourage Daveed to act on his beliefs by getting involved in campus politics. He essentially goads Daveed into experiencing social issues, not merely as an intellectual exercise but on an emotional level that requires a pragmatic response. In sum, al-Husein has positioned Daveed as his trainee and as such, he redefines Daveed’s conception of duties and obligations that Daveed has to himself and to his community. In the dialogical encounter between al-Husein
and Daveed excerpted above in which al-Hussein encourages Daveed to attend a student rally, al-Hussein essentially shames Daveed into going to the rally by positioning Daveed as someone unwilling to act on his beliefs, i.e. not living up to the duties required of beliefs he claims. This first order positioning is challenged by Daveed who repositions himself as someone who will act on social conscious, i.e. to fulfill his duties. As a result of his experience of actually addressing the crowd at the rally, Daveed reflexively repositions himself, going from “spectator” to “participant.” In this autobiographical reconstruction, Daveed creates a narrative that links his intellectualism to the origins of his activism in a way that will allow him to frame his gravitation towards a more radical Islamic belief system in terms of an active, participatory pursuit of spiritual truth.

During his senior year in college, a separate storyline emerges that will also have an important influence on his subsequent life choice. The storyline is: Daveed falls in love. Daveed reports falling in love with Amy, a freshman on the debate team. He positions her as the perfect companion - rare beauty matched by a powerful intellect. This relationship will ultimately serve to force Daveed to confront and attempt to reconcile certain contradictions posed by deepening personal relationship with Amy and his growing acceptance of more radical interpretation of Islam in his quest for spiritual truth which will play out primarily within the context of peer group relationships.

It is also noteworthy that Daveed reflects on two issues from his later college years, the writing of his honors thesis and his belief in Bem’s self-
perception theory, in which he essentially positions himself in his narrative at that point as naive and idealistic with regard to his conception of faith and activism. With respect to his honors thesis, Daveed recalls that the confluence of his conversion to Islam, his commitment to social justice and his finely honed debate skills provided the basis for his decision to choose writing his honor thesis on the Nation of Islam. However, he informs the reader that he was “totally unaware” of the notion of how small doctrinal differences could generate hatred and prompt violence but notes that he himself would later begin to see small doctrinal differences as critical as he began to accept more radicalized interpretations of Islam.

Daveed’s belief in Bem’s self-perception theory and subsequent recognition that he had excluded himself from its effects when he was in the process of accepting a more radicalized version of Islam offers another example of how he positions himself as naive and unaware of what was happening to him on a deeper level. The story-line that emerges is: Daveed realizes that despite his strong intellect and commitment to Islam and social justice, he has flaws that will at times be obstacles to seeing the truth. Daveed supports his narrative by constructing the plot line of the flawed hero in search of truth, and in so doing, ultimately positions himself as a sympathetic but misguided character.
Peer Group
Friends in Ashland, Oregon

Daveed does not share much information about peer relationships during his early years. What he does share is presented within the context of religious discussions he has had with fundamentalist Christian friends who tried to convert him to their beliefs. Daveed notes “As strange as it may seem, my debates with fundamentalist Christians were milestones on the path to radical Islam.” He does, however, devote time describing his friendship with Mike Hollister, a Christian whom he met at a debate tournament during his sophomore year in high school. Although differing in religious and political beliefs, Daveed believes that their friendship was sustained by a shared interest in policy debate, a similar sense of humor and the fact that they were very different from each other. Daveed adds that Mike appreciated his “intensely analytic approach to the world.”

Daveed notes that he remained friends with Mike through college but writes that “Mike’s descent into fundamentalist Christianity disturbed me.” He recalls that Mike had gotten involved with a group called the Campus Christian Fellowship at Western Washington University where he was attending school. Daveed describes a visit to Mike’s school in the summer of 1996 in which he had a chance to spend time with Mike and his Christian fundamentalist friends, characterizing Mike’s friends as nice but “dangerously naive.” According to
Daveed’s narrative, this trip would have occurred at the time when he noted feeling isolated at Wake Forest while in the throes of spiritual disarray.

Daveed claims that it was a discussion with Mike that ultimately pushed him down a path towards Islam. He recalls a conversation with Mike in which they debate the nature of Jesus as means to convince Daveed to convert to Christianity:

Mike homed in on my respect for Jesus. At the time, Mike’s favorite Christian author was Josh McDowell, a apologist with a gift for making his arguments accessible to college-age readers. Mike shared a passage from one of McDowell’s books, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* with me.

In the passage, McDowell discussed at length C.S. Lewis’s claim in the classic book *Mere Christianity* that there were three possible things Jesus could have been: a liar, a lunatic or the Lord. Both McDowell and Lewis concluded that those were the only three alternatives, and there could be no possible middle ground. This is because Jesus claimed to be God in the New Testament. If this claim were true, then one should accept him as Lord. But if Jesus’ claim was false, and he knew the claim was false, he would be a liar who had nothing to offer students. On the other hand, if Jesus believed he was God but wasn’t, then he would be a madman. The one thing that Jesus could not be, according to this logic, was exactly what I thought he was: a good and wise teacher.

While I found the passage compelling, I was sure that I must be overlooking some fatal flaw. But the argument was put to me forcefully enough that it made me uncomfortable because it suggested that there was some incoherence in my ideas about God.²⁴

Daveed reports that while the intention of Mike’s argument was to push him towards conversion to Christianity, the argument essentially forced him to question the coherence of his own understanding about the idea of God. In this

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case, for Daveed, the argument led him to decide on which path not to take while further clouding which path he should be taking. Mike, however, makes a last ditch attempt to convert Daveed before he leaves:

MIKE: Have you thought about devoting your life to Christ?
DAVEED: I’m not ready to do that. I’m young. I have a lot of living to do before I commit to any religion.
MIKE: But you never know what will happen to you. You’re driving home to Oregon now. What happens if you have a car crash and die Will you go to heaven?
DAVEED: I'll take my chances.  

Daveed describes this attempt by Mike as clumsy and wondered why Mike would even be concerned about his personal religious beliefs. He pointedly refers to Mike as lacking experience in being able to effectively argue on behalf of his faith.

Analysis

When writing about early peer relationships, Daveed refers only to Christian fundamentalist friends that composed presumably part of his broader peer group. This section of Daveed’s narrative seems a bit disjointed in that he claims to have been brought up in a “hippie” town with liberal values but only talks about Christian fundamentalist friendships that would seem

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25 Gartenstein-Ross, Memoir, 8.
unrepresentative of what you would expect from a liberal community. He then positions his Christian friends as constant proselytizers who take themselves to have the duty and obligation to persistently try to convert him to their faith. Notably absent is any mention of other early friendships outside of a religious context. The basic story-line is: Daveed thwarts attempts to be converted to Christianity.

Daveed claims that it was his discursive encounters with his friend Mike and Mike’s subsequent “descent into fundamentalist Christianity” during his college years that essentially led him to decide to veer away from a Christian fundamentalist conception of faith. He originally positions Mike as an unlikely friend, bonded together by several shared interests but who basically held different religious and political beliefs. In Daveed’s narrative it is noteworthy that he also positions Mike as someone who admires his (Daveed’s) “intensely analytic approach to the world.” It is recurring theme that surfaces in various story-lines, i.e. Daveed is a smart, analytic thinker who carefully deliberates over decisions, thus giving him the right to his opinions.

It is during their college years that Mike discursively engages Daveed in a way that prepositions Daveed as a flawed thinker regarding his views on Christianity and so without the right to promote them. Daveed relates how the “Jesus as liar, lunatic, or Lord” argument posed by Mike challenged his beliefs about the idea of God. The basic story-line is: Although Mike’s attempt to convert Daveed to Christianity was unsuccessful, it did lead Daveed to reassess
his own views regarding the idea of God. In the final brief exchange between Mike and Daveed noted above, Mike positions Daveed as not having the right to enter heaven because he had not chosen to accept his version of Christianity. Daveed repositions himself as too young and unwilling to make a commitment to any religion at that point in his life, i.e. he does not recognize a duty to accept a faith. This repositioning does not strike me as the type of logical rejoinder you would expect from the analytical Daveed. What it suggests, however, is that Daveed is attempting to construct a narrative in which he conceives accepting religious belief as occurring during a particular stage in life, a carefully considered intellectual exercise. Nonetheless, the story-line that emerges in Daveed’s account of his final discursive encounter with Mike is: Daveed firmly rejects Mike’s version of Christianity.

In Daveed’s autobiographical account, it is important to note that he does not report any attempt to explore other less doctrinaire forms of Christianity that might have accommodated his broader sense of spirituality. We begin to get the sense that Daveed is using his narrative to establish Christian fundamentalism as the “villain” that closed off all spiritual avenues to pursue Christian belief in favor of a different spiritual path that would lead towards Islam. Here again, the narrative seems a bit disjointed in that, on one hand, Daveed generates a narrative in which he portrays himself extremely bright, analytical and deliberative in making decisions. On the other hand, he does not seem to consider the diversity of Christian belief and informs the reader that it was his discursive
encounters with and rejection of Christian fundamentalist beliefs that led him to explore Islam. You would expect someone who believes in making analytical choices about the appropriate spiritual path to follow would be more thorough in considering the variety of faith communities available, particularly after having grown up in a household in which diversity of belief was highly valued. Daveed ultimately ends up reflexively positioning Mike as an “unskilled” evangelist, i.e., not having the right to proselytize, which allows Daveed to implicitly position himself as skilled in intellectually rebuffing the “clumsy” attempts of Mike to convert him and hence have a superior right to his opinion. Within this discursive encounter, Daveed reflexively describes himself as the analytic-minded, spiritual truth-seeking wanderer, undeterred by the temptation of false faith.

Friend as Spiritual Guide

As noted in the section that explored Daveed’s school environment, the establishment of his friendship with al-Husein was extremely important to Daveed. It was al-Husein that not only would get him involved in campus activism but also introduce Daveed to Islam and facilitate contact with the Local Islamic community off campus. Daveed reports that he viewed al-Husein’s version of Islam, known as Sufism, as compatible with the liberal spiritual tradition that was fostered in him by his parents in that Sufism in general believes that the great religions share the same essential Truth,
Daveed recalls how al-Husein took him to the local mosque in Winston-Salem and helped him dispel some of notions he had of Islam being racist and anti-semitic. He notes that this introduction to Islam by al-Husein encouraged him to study Islam on his own which he writes “convinced me that the true Islam was moderate.” Daveed reasons that although he understands that there may be Muslim extremists, he argues that “Christianity had its own dark period” and believes it is wrong to declare all Muslims as extremists because of the actions of a few. By the fall of 1997, Daveed’s discursive encounters with al-Husein serving as his spiritual guide led Daveed towards his ultimate decision to join the Muslim faith. David frames his decision to join the Muslim faith not simply as a religious choice but rather as a decision to engage Islam as an all-encompassing “way of life.” Daveed reports that the first person he told of his conversion was al-Husein.

Daveed recalls that shortly after his conversion to Islam, he had conversation with a Wake Forest student, Joy Vermillion, while on a study-abroad program in Venice. He describes Joy as a practicing Christian from North Carolina, politically interested, with a beautiful voice and distinctive laugh. He notes that at this point in his life he was a somewhat defensive about others challenging his religious beliefs but viewed Joy’s questions as “honest questions.”
JOY: Would you ever consider leaving Islam for another faith?

DAVEED: No, I wouldn't. I don't think there's a reason that I would leave Islam, because I can find everything I need in this faith. I can have a mystical relationship with God. And if I'm looking for greater literalism, I can find that, too. There are plenty of directions that I can grow with in Islam.

Daveed would reflect that following what he describes as his radicalization, this conversation with Joy would be remembered as “epitomizing all I had wrong about my understanding of religion.” Daveed’s discursive encounter with Joy as recalled by Daveed during his post-radicalization period tends to portray him in his pre-radicalization stage as having an idealistic conception of Islam seemingly configured to fit within the liberal spiritual tradition that had been nurtured by his family.

Upon Daveed’s return from his study-abroad program, al-Husein would continue to be a pivotal peer friendship that would help guide Daveed’s spiritual journey. Daveed reports that his parents openly accepted al-Husein when he came to visit Daveed in Ashland, Oregon over winter break. The acceptance was reciprocated by al-Husein, who exhorted Daveed’s father to call him “Big Al.” It was also al-Husein who introduced Daveed to the local Muslim community in Ashland which Daveed did not know existed. It was also al-Husein to whom he would turn when confronted with conceptions of Islamic belief that clashed with his own. Daveed recalls how al-Husein provided clarification and guidance after Daveed heard his first radical sermon, which was given by a radical Saudi sheikh.
who now resided in northern California and would preach to Muslims in the region. The sermon took place at a gathering of the Ashland Muslim community sponsored by the local Islamic group the Qur’an Foundation.

The Holy Qur’an says, “Verily those who believed and emigrated and strove hard and fought with their property and their lives in the cause of Allah as well as those who gave asylum and help—these are allies to one another. And as to those who believed but did not emigrate, you owe no duty of protection to them until they emigrate. So as Muslims we must emigrate. We are living in a land ruled by the kufar (infidels). This is not the way of Muhammad. Prophet Mohammad, alayhi salaatu salaam (upon him be prayers and peace), described the risks of living among the kufar. Our beloved prophet said ‘Anybody who meets, gathers together, lives and stays with a Mushrik, --a polytheist or disbeliever in the Oneness of Allah--and agrees to his ways and opinions, and enjoys living with them, then he is like the Mushrik.’ So when you live among the kufar, and act like the kufar, and like to live with the kufar, then brothers, you may become just like the kufar. If you do not take the duty of hijra seriously, your faith is in danger.”

Daveed recalls that Hassan presented his sermon in scolding tone and was clearly “disdainful” of all non-Muslims. He reports glancing at al-Husein in an attempt to obtain some clarity about Hassan’s remarks and notes al-Husein shot back a glance that he interpreted to mean “Don’t let it bother you. There’s nothing to this.”

During the question and answer period that followed the sermon, Daveed recalls a “mesmerizing” theological debate that took place between al-Husein and Sheikh Hassan. In one example, he recounts how al-Husein brought up the issue raised by noted Moroccan sociologist and author Fatema Mernissi that

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26 Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, Memoir, 35-36.
certain *ahadith* (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) placing women in a subordinate position were of doubtful authenticity. According to Daveed, Sheikh Hassan’s brusque reply was “There are good, sound scholars who answer her arguments. You should read them so you can understand the problems with her.” Daveed reflects that he was “struck” by Sheikh Hassan’s reply reinforcing his earlier impression that Sheikh Hassan was a narrow-minded man who thought all those who did not agree with his views were deviants. In Daveed’s view, it was inappropriate to dismiss al-Husein without adequately addressing his arguments. He notes how Sheikh Hassan’s final parting words stayed with him as the Sheikh left the meeting, reporting being shocked when Sheik Hassan warned “You’ll be compromised if you stay in this *kafir* country. Just look at all these homosexuals.” Daveed writes that after the debate, his acceptance of a moderate interpretation of Islam was reinforced because in his view it had greater “intellectual” force than the rigid version proffered by Sheikh Hassan. Daveed’s narrative also portrays al-Husein as a peer who could stand up to the radical ideology of Sheikh Hassan, affirming al-Husein’s earlier guidance to Daveed in which he notes that in Islam “qualifications were not as important as a person’s ideas. Even a child could be right about a theological point, while an imam could be wrong.”

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Daveed’s introduction to and acceptance of Islam was in large part due to Daveed’s positioning of al-Husein as his spiritual guide. By positioning al-Husein as his spiritual guide, Daveed defines the rights, duties and obligations that al-Husein has within the context of their relationship and in so doing invests al-Husein with the appropriate moral authority to provide him with an accurate understanding of what it means to be Muslim. In addition, Daveed also positions al-Husein as a friend with its rights and duties, which serves to substantially increase their discursive encounters that otherwise would not have occurred in simply a student-mentor relationship. The ability to openly discuss Islam within the context of a friendship allowed Daveed to discover that al-Husein’s version of Islam was compatible, at least in this stage of Daveed’s narrative, with his ingrained liberal spiritual tradition that served as a backdrop in his search for spiritual truth. Daveed’s acceptance of al-Husein as a credible interpreter of Islam allowed him to employ al-Husein’s understanding of Islam as the normative standard on which to assess competing interpretations of Islam. In recalling the theological debate between al-Husein and Saudi Sheikh Hassan, Daveed, positions Sheikh Hassan as brusque, “disdainful” of non-Muslims and theologically rigid. When Daveed turns to al-Husein for clarification on Hassan’s radical interpretation of Islam, al-Husien assures Daveed that it is merely a point of view, that “there’s nothing to this.” In this sense, al-Husein deflects the illocutionary force of Sheikh Hassan’s admonition that all Muslims must return to
their homeland and, in this regard, clarifies for Daveed whether Sheikh Hassan’s
collection of the duty of *hijra as an obligation* has any moral force.
Consequently, Daveed uses his autobiographical account to position himself as
initially being a believer in a “moderate” interpretation of Islam fostered by the
authoritative guidance of al-Husein, his friend and spiritual guide.

Daveed’s conversion to Islam allowed al-Husein to position Daveed not
only as a friend but as a “brother” in faith with consequent rights and duties.
Daveed reflexively notes that being an only child, the designation by al-Husein as
a “brother” had a special meaning for him. The story-line is: Daveed finds a
friend and a spiritual guide to take him down the path towards the correct
understanding of Islam. The broader story-line is: Daveed begins to find
answers to his spiritual questions.

It is noteworthy that Daveed, as revealed in his dialogical exchange with
Joy, reflexively describes himself as essentially a naive adherent regarding his
early conception of Islam, at that point seen as a faith that can harmoniously
accommodate a range of religious interpretations. This post-radicalization
narrative reconstruction as presented by Daveed in his autobiography generates
the story-line that, despite taking himself to be bright and analytical, his
judgements regarding faith were not infallible. In doing so, Daveed appears to be
attempting to present himself in his narrative as a sympathetic character willing
to recognize his own failings.
Friends At Al-Haramain

Several important changes occur in Daveed’s life in 1998. In the summer of 1998 while at home in Ashland, Daveed reports that he sought out and reestablished contact with the Qur’an Foundation, the local Islamic group where he first met Muslims in the Ashland community and had listened to Sheikh Hassan’s sermon. Daveed writes that Pete Seda, the leader of the group, gave him a tour of their new facility, a large building on a hillside financed, Seda said, by the Saudi Arabian charity known as the Al Haramain Foundation. Daveed notes that this facility, known as the Musalla, had replaced Pete’s small prayer room in his home, which had formerly served as the group’s meeting site. He informs Pete that he plans to graduate from college in December 1998 and expresses interest in working with Pete’s group before heading off to law school in Fall 1999. Daveed notes that in Fall of 1998, Pete informs him that he had been accepted for a position at Al Haramain where he would begin working after his graduation from Wake Forest in December 1998. Meanwhile, Daveed’s spiritual mentor, al-Husein had been accepted and subsequently enrolled in Harvard Divinity School and is no longer with Daveed at Wake Forest for his final semester in Fall 1998. Without al-Husein on campus as inspiration and guide, Daveed nonetheless continues his campus activism drawing inspiration from his new found faith in Islam. In addition, he notes that his romantic relationship with Amy continues to grow.
The next significant change in Daveed’s life occurs when he begins working at Al-Haramian in December 1998. There he forms peer relationships with all the members of Al Haramain that would subsequently lead to discursive encounters, which would introduce him to and reinforce a radicalized interpretation of Islam more in line with the teaching of Sheikh Hassan, dialogic exchanges now within the context of peer groups relationships. Daveed writes that “To my surprise, I found out that the men with whom I had become Muslim, were hated by the Muslims I now worked with.” He adds that “after only a few days on the job, I could already sense an environment where religious beliefs that differed from the norm were sniffed out and condemned.”

Daveed recalls how he was taken aback by the group’s condemnation of the Naqshbandis, a Sufi order. He contrasts this condemnation with his memories of the Sufis that he had met during his trip to Italy:

I had nothing but good feelings towards the Muslims with whom I had taken my shahadah (declaration of belief). They were men of intense faith who seemed to strike a rare balance: rejecting Western civilizations’s materialism and licentiousness but remaining skeptical of the extremes of fundamentalism.” But I took two clear messages from Salim Morgan’s web site. The first was that I was not to speak well of the men who were present at my shahadah. The second lesson was more general, but just as unmistakeable: I needed to watch what I said.

I didn’t realize it at the time, but this was one of the first steps in my indoctrination.

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28 Gartenstein-Ross, Memoir, 63, 68.

29 Gartenstein-Ross, Memoir, 70-71.
Daveed reports that he initially felt “drawn” to Pete when he began working at Al Haramain because, despite having to censor himself with regard to expressing his more liberal Islamic beliefs, Pete made him feel comfortable. He describes Pete as an Iranian-born former Shia who had converted to Sunni Islam. Daveed notes that he never learned what actually caused Pete to leave Shia Islam. Daveed recalls that Pete had revealed to Daveed’s father that he became more serious about Islam after Pete’s mother had become ill and made a “miraculous” recovery after Pete had prayed to Allah. Daveed notes, however, that “I would find Pete increasingly difficult to figure out during my time at Al-Haramain.”

In his narrative, Daveed portrays Pete as an enigmatic character who, on one hand was sincere while on the other, a mass of contradictions. For example, Daveed notes:

He seemed as sincere about interfaith dialogue as he did when he busied himself learning about Jewish conspiracies. He seemed sincere while speaking of Islam’s tolerance and also while launching verbal assaults on non-Muslims.30

Daveed writes that he believed that Pete saw himself as his mentor. He notes that he did in fact view Pete as somewhat of a mentor but also characterized him as “a bit of a clown.” Daveed recounts Pete’s marital arrangement in which he had multiple wives. Daveed writes that he would subsequently learn from members of the local Muslim community that Pete had

30 Gartenstein-Ross, Memoir, 77.
several former wives that had also at some point been part of Pete’s plural marriage arrangement. He notes, however, that despite Pete’s puzzling orientation towards faith, for Daveed, Pete served as the more friendly face of rigid Islamic belief who would steer him towards the “proper” understanding of Islam, which was in contrast to other co-workers at Al Haramain who were more forceful and direct with Daveed when he began questioning their interpretations of Islam. For example, Daveed recounts an exchange he had with co-worker Dennis Green, discussing Daveed’s email response to student who had sent Al Haramain a query regarding the practice of infibulation, an extreme form of female genital mutilation. Daveed notes that when he sent an email response informing the student that infibulation was “rooted in culture rather than faith”, implying that this was not strictly an Islamic practice, Dennis confronts Daveed in the following exchange:

DENNIS: Bro, Dawood was not very happy with your e-mail.

DAVEED: What e-mail?

DENNIS: You sent out an e-mail about infibulation. Dawood was very upset. Pete thought it wasn’t a big problem, just a mistake that you made because you’re new and enthusiastic.

DAVEED: Well, what’s wrong with it?

DENNIS: Basically you and I aren’t in a position to issue fatwas on our own. We shouldn’t issue rulings about complex areas of Islamic law.31

31 Gartenstein-Ross, Memoir, 81.
Daveed recalls that he said nothing and realized that trying to debate Dennis would be fruitless. Daveed writes that he understood Dennis had been informed by Pete and Dawood that his e-mail response should not have gone out. Daveed notes because Pete and Dawood had been “serious Muslims” for a much longer period of time than either he or Dennis, Daveed writes that he did not feel he could contest the issue. Pete subsequently approaches Daveed and explains:

Bro, there are a bunch of sheikhs in Saudi Arabia just waiting to answer questions like that. We can send them a question and they’ll sit around for a whole day discussing it. So if someone sends you a question about Islam in the future, you don’t even have to try to answer it. We can take the question, send it to Saudi Arabia, and they’ll get back to us with the right answer.32

Consequently, Daveed begins to understand that the Wahhabist version of Islam as represented by Al Haramain can only be interpreted by Wahhabist scholars in Saudi Arabia.

Daveed recalls how a retranslated version of the Qur’an by Saudi scholars, distributed by Al Haramain, which interpreted the concept of jihad in more extremist terms, caused him to question this militaristic version. He reflects on how the Saudi interpretation of jihad as related to him by Dawood, conflicted with his earlier conception of jihad as an internal struggle and his ideas of social

32 Gartenstein-Ross, Memoir, 82
justice that formed the basis of his campus activism. Daveed writes:

But I was now learning that my coworkers were roundly rejecting many of my old views of the faith. I hadn’t read the essay that Dawood referred to, but I intuitively knew that it rejected my mushy, liberal ideas. I intuitively knew that the essay wouldn’t proclaim the struggle against racism to be a form of jihad. I was apprehensive about reading it because a clear pattern had already emerged. I would venture again and again into theological areas unfamiliar to me with an offhand statement or remark. In my response, my coworkers would reprimand me, tell me the proper Islamic view, and give me some material to read. I was never able to engage in debate because they thought my religious views were too rough to count.33

Daveed recalls that at the time he felt it was better to seek areas of commonality with this coworkers rather than contest their beliefs. At this stage, Daveed notes being intimidated by the “vitriolic exchanges” that he observed with those who disagreed with Al Haramain’s interpretation of Islam. He reports that he would eventually keep his “internal spiritual struggles” to himself. However, he also notes that despite Dennis’ “angry side”, he would engage in discussions with him about issues of Islamic interpretation. Daveed nonetheless refers to Dennis as a “human parrot” who would agree with anything an Imam would tell him or accept any fatwa that was published in one of Al Haramain’s books. He concedes that despite Dennis’ uncritical acceptance of a Wahhabist interpretation of Islamic faith, Dennis was viewed among members of the local Islamic community as being more theologically mature. Daveed notes that at this point, however, he still remained skeptical about some aspects of the Wahhabist belief.

33 Gartenstein-Ross, Memoir, 90-91.
In his narrative, Daveed recalls feeling trapped in a difficult position at work, disagreeing with much of the prevailing theological beliefs while lacking the confidence to challenge these interpretations of his coworkers.\textsuperscript{34}

In one telling exchange, Daveed recounts Dennis’ defense of the Taliban as practitioners of “true” Islamic principles. Daveed reports that he believed that true Islam belief would not approve the Taliban’s brutal and dictatorial application of Islam belief. Dennis’ defense was based simply on a second-hand assertion. He reports that Dennis told him “Dawood spoke to man who’s actually been to Afghanistan. He said that they were practicing true Islam there, and everything was beautiful.” In Daveed’s narrative reconstruction he writes that he probably should have questioned Dennis about what the man was doing there. He further retrospectively notes that Afghanistan had been known for its terrorist training camps. At this point it appears that Daveed’s ability to critically assess arguments has been dampened by a stronger desired to be socially accepted. Daveed informs the reader that “he tended to overlook the small signs back then. I would end up overlooking many, many more.”\textsuperscript{35} He recalls “In late summer of 1999, I wasn’t concerned about Al-Haramain’s alleged connections to the East Africa embassy bombings. Perhaps I should have been.”\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{34} Gartenstein-Ross, \textit{Memoir}, 108.

\textsuperscript{35} Gartenstein-Ross, \textit{Memoir}, 123.

\textsuperscript{36} Gartenstein-Ross, \textit{Memoir}, 166.
Daveed reports a number of discursive encounters which served to slowly nudge him toward a more extremist interpretation of Islam. He recalls a conversation with al-Husein by phone while still working at Al-Haramain informing him of his decision to give up music because he now understands that it is prohibited in Islam. He reports telling al-Husein, “What they don’t understand when they see how we practice Islam is that we don’t do these things because it’s what we want. We don’t suddenly wake up and decide we hate music or silk. We do what we do because it’s what Allah wills.” In his narrative, Daveed recalls using the the first person plural pronoun “we” to signify how he now fully identified with being a Salafi, an adherent of a literalist and puritanical form of Islam often associated with Wahhabism.\footnote{Gartenstein-Ross, \textit{Memoir}, 149.}

In addition to his peer relationships at Al Haramain, Daveed’s relationship with his girlfriend, Amy, was also playing a role in structuring Daveed’s life options. Daveed reports that upon his graduation and subsequent employment by Al-Haramain in December 1998, he and Amy decided to breakup, which he recalls deeply saddened them both. At this point, Amy was still an undergraduate at Wake Forest. Consequently, Daveed begins his employment at Al Haramain with an even greater sense loneliness as he begins his job at Al Haramain. A short time later, however, the relationship would be rekindled and Daveed would again be anchored in his most important social relationship that would endure upon him ultimately veering away from radical Islam.
Analysis

In his narrative, Daveed’s firmly positions himself as a seasoned campus activist as he enters his final semester of college at Wake Forest in December 1998. His closest friend, al-Husein, has enrolled in Harvard Divinity School and is no longer on campus. By this time, Daveed, with the guidance of al-Husein, has converted to Islam and considers himself to be a moderate Muslim. Daveed thus reflexively positions himself to project a mix of psychological and moral attributes, i.e., an analytic and deliberate person, a promoter of social justice, a moderate Muslim, which allows him to configure a religious identity aligned with his liberal beliefs and serves as a normative baseline to gauge religious belief among his new peer group as he begins work at Al Haramain.

As he returns for his final semester at Wake Forest the story-line is: Daveed tries to promote social justice by drawing inspiration from his moderate Islamic beliefs. A story-line theme that is repeated throughout Daveed’s memoir is his need to apply reason and debate as a means to establish spiritual truth and accept religious belief. It is in this regard that Daveed reflexively defines himself as a moderate Muslim to perhaps explore in rational terms how he happened to become radicalized despite being bright, analytical and skilled at debate. In a sense, he frames his internal struggle as the classic Kierkegaardian battle between faith and reason.

The critical importance of peer group relationships in Daveed’s journey towards Islamic radicalism is revealed in his discursive encounters with his
coworkers Al Haramain. The peer group narrative embodied in the social working environment Daveed first encountered among his peers at Al Haramain was a We/They dichotomy in which his new peer group positioned Daveed’s Sufi friends as non-Muslims who did not practice an acceptable version of Islam. The illocutionary force of their condemnation of the Naqshbandis positioned this Sufi order as outside Al Haramain’s Wahhabist interpretation of Islam. The perlocutionary impact of the condemnation of the Naqshbandis on Daveed resulted in Daveed’s establishment of a system of self-censorship that he would use to guide the expression of his religious views among his coworkers at Al Haramain. The story-line is: Daveed self-censor’s his verbal expressions of Islamic faith and begins to adjust his expectations regarding conceptions of Islamic faith. In his memoir, Daveed reflexively defines himself as being unaware at this point of an “indoctrination” process that he was going through and, in this way, begins to paint a sympathetic picture of himself by defining himself as an earnest but naive seeker of spiritual truth.

Although not exactly a peer, the leader of Al Haramain in Ashland, Pete Seda, essentially serves to replace al-Husein as Daveed’s most proximate spiritual guide though not within the context of the close friendship he had with al-Husein. Daveed notes that Pete positioned himself as a mentor to Daveed. Daveed concedes that Pete did serve as “somewhat of a mentor” but also positions him as a “a bit of clown.” Daveed's reflexive positioning of Pete as an enigmatic and puzzling character tends to generate a narrative in which Daveed...
defines himself as a sympathetic character who was unable to understand that at
the time he was being manipulated by Pete. In September 2010, Pete Seda,
whose real name is Perouz Sedahaty, was ultimately convicted by a federal jury
of attempting to send US$130,000 from the United States to Chechnya to
support violent religious Muslim extremists.38

A short conversation between Dennis and Daveed on the unauthorized
email Daveed sent out on infibulation reveals how small discursive exchanges
began to structure Daveed’s understanding of a more restrictive interpretation of
Islam. In responding to the email, Daveed had positioned himself as having the
competence and authority to answer the student’s questions on the topic of
infibulation. In their short exchange Dennis repositions Daveed as not being
competent nor of having the authority, that is, to have the right, to respond to the
question. Dennis discursively redefines Daveed’s rights, duties and obligations
both in their relationship and as employees of Al Haramain. According to
Daveed, Dennis specifically tells him that neither of them are allowed to issue
fatwas or issue rulings on complex matters pertaining to Islamic law. Daveed
accepts this repositioning by Dennis, essentially acceding to Dennis’ moral
authority to command him to refrain from providing Islamic guidance, i.e. he has
a right to do so. In the discursive exchange, an example of the forced positioning
by others when Dennis reveals to Daveed that Pete and Dawood were upset that

38 Federal Bureau of Investigation, “Former U.S. Head of Al-Haramain Islamic Foundation
he sent out the mail. The illocutionary effect of this forced positioning was to encourage Daveed to reassess his actions regarding the email and subsequently reposition himself as lacking the authority to send the email while recognizing Pete and Dawood as having greater moral authority, positioning them as “serious Muslims” because they had been in the faith for greater period of time and have thus has acquired the rights and duties to exert their authority.

Daveed’s “indoctrination” continues as reflected in the incident in which he fails to contest the issue of jihad as interpreted in the retranslated version of the Qur’an by Saudi scholars. He reflexively positions himself as unable to openly exercise his debating and argumentation skills in exploring points of Islamic faith. The illocutionary effect of the “vitriolic exchanges” that he had observed between his coworkers and those who disagreed with them had the perlocutionary force of causing Daveed to struggle with his spiritual questions silently. He reflexively prepositions Dennis as a “human parrot” but notes that the Muslim community had positioned Dennis as “theologically mature” and thus having the right the to speak more authoritatively about Islam than Daveed.

The cumulative effect of the dominant Wahhabist narrative on Daveed as promulgated by Al-Haramain, as recounted by Daveed, was essentially to position him as incompetent to question matters of faith, i.e. not to have that right to question the Wahhabist interpretation of Islam. Through his discursive encounters with his coworkers he was often reprimanded when he expressed Islamic beliefs in conflict with Wahhabist interpretations in addition to being
constantly reminded that he was too new to the faith to have his opinions matter. Daveed reflexively positions himself as accepting his coworkers assessment that he had neither the right nor moral authority to question the faith and certainly not openly challenge their interpretation of Islam or represent Al Haramain in matters of faith to the outside world, i.e. in Daveed’s narrative he records that being new to the faith, he was essentially deliberately positioned by his coworkers as lacking sufficient standing to decide matters of faith. He reflexively positions himself as being caught in a dilemma in which he is forced to accept the duty to confine his spiritual struggle to an internal discourse that he finds increasingly difficult to reconcile with the discursive encounters he engages in with his coworkers. The story-line that develops is: Daveed loses confidence in his ability to rationally assess the the Wahhabist interpretation of Islam and redefines his authority as being inadequate to question the version of Islam promoted by Al Haramain.

In his dialogical encounter with al-Husein regarding his decision to give up listening to music, he takes an important step towards complete indoctrination by defining himself as a Salafi and in this sense crosses the Rubicon by accepting the Salafi interpretation of Islam through both word and deed. The story-line is: Daveed demonstrates his acceptance of the Salafi interpretation of how to practice the Islamic faith.

An interesting element in Daveed’s narrative is an attempt to intellectually understand his irrationality by framing an explanation based on his belief in
Bem’s self-perception theory which conveniently allows him to reflexively position himself as essentially a pawn in a psychological group process that would negate his attempts to rationally challenge the prevailing belief system. Consequently, in Daveed’s view, his acceptance of a radical interpretation of Islam was the result of an inevitable psychological process. Daveed’s self-positioning in this manner, however, begs the question of why would he allow himself to be positioned by those he felt were intellectually less rigorous in understanding the faith and would subsequently grant greater authority to his Al Haramain coworkers on religious matters simply because they had been in the faith longer. What seems to be underreported in his narrative account is his strong social need to be accepted by those who shared his newly acquired religious identity. In this sense, he seems to grudgingly trade his intellectual honesty for a chance to strongly identity with and become a member of group that could satisfy his social and religious needs. Daveed reflexively refers to it as indoctrination and as a result uses his memoir to socially construct a contemporary personal identity in which he characterizes his radicalization as a cautionary tale in which even bright and analytical individuals could be seduced into radical belief.

Daveed ultimately moves away from and subsequently renounces radical Islam, which in large part is due to his rekindled relationship with Amy. It is in his relationship with Amy that he finds acceptance, comfort and the emotional support he had been seeking.
Daveed describes his hometown of Ashland as “a liberal oasis in conservative southern Oregon” which he characterized as having a New Age feel and “brimming with counterculture.” It was this community’s liberal orientation that provided a welcoming social environment that allowed Daveed’s parents to feel comfortable in their beliefs and raise Daveed in a way that nurtured his sense of discovery through the exploration of ideas and the acceptance of his parent’s liberal views. Unfortunately, aside from broad generalizations about the community, Daveed does not provide much detail regarding his interaction with the community in his early years. Most of his narrative during his early years is presented within the context of his interaction with his family. It is unclear how socially engaged he was in community activities that might have influenced his development or provide an understanding of the development of his social skills. Daveed does, however, reflexively position the community as reinforcing the liberal orientation that he said he acquired from his parents.

Although Daveed refers to Ashland as a “liberal oasis” he recalls that it wasn’t until he became a Muslim that he discovered that Ashland had a Muslim community which he interacted with while at Al Haramain. Daveed recalls that the Muslim community in Ashland was essentially aligned with Al-Haramain’s Wahhabist interpretation of Islam. Consequently, the local Muslim community in
Ashland served to reinforce the Wahhabist interpretation of Islam that Daveed was exposed to through his direct discursive encounters with his coworkers at Al-Haramain. In this sense, the influence of the local Muslim community on Daveed was indirect. The community accepted Al-Haramain as its spiritual guide. Meanwhile, Daveed was ineluctably moving towards a more radicalized interpretation of Islamic faith as promulgated by Al Haramain. The Muslim community’s belief in the Wahhabist view thus provided a normative baseline in which Daveed could assess Al Haramain relationship with the local Ashland Muslim community. Consequently, Daveed could not identify any allies in the local community that could help him openly challenge the Wahhabist interpretation of Islam being propagated by Al Haramain.

**Zacarias Moussaoui**

On April 22, 2005, Zacarias Moussaoui, self-described as the 20th hijacker of the 9/11 terrorists, pleaded guilty to six counts of conspiracy. The charges were conspiracy to commit transnational acts of terrorism, to commit air piracy, to use weapons of mass destruction, to murder U.S. government employees, and to destroy property. His mission was supposedly to fly a fifth aircraft into the White House. His trial, held at the Alexandria, Virginia Court House, occurred in two phases. The first phase was to determine his eligibility for the death penalty.
The second phase was to determine final sentencing. Moussaoui referred to himself throughout the trial as the “Slave of Allah.”

Moussaoui did not always see himself that way. In videotaped testimony of Moussaoui’s sister, Nadia, presented at the trial, she said that in her conversations with Zacarias during his high school years, he expressed hatred for social injustice and openly admired the work of Martin Luther King because of his fight for the rights of black people. How did Zacarias Moussaoui go from strongly identifying with the principles of Martin Luther King to becoming a self-proclaimed “Slave of Allah” in a span of roughly six years and become willing to sacrifice his life for his religion? How can we account for the profound changes in Moussaoui’s personal identity and transformation in which his personal identity was subsumed by his religious identity founded on an extremist interpretation of Islam?

Selected aspects of the Moussaoui case will be briefly examined to illustrate how my framework might be applied to gain insight into how this transformation may have occurred. The information on Moussaoui’s sociocultural development is derived from the work of anthropologist Katherine C. Donahue who attended the Moussaoui trial hearings and reported on the testimony and court documents submitted as evidence at the trial. No direct questioning of Moussaoui was permitted. Information on Zacarias’ family background was also

obtained from the book by his brother, Abd Samad Moussaoui entitled Zacarias, My Brother. Consequently, the information in the analysis is based on secondary sources.

**Family**

On May 30, 1968, Zacarias Moussaoui, was born in southwestern France in the town of St. Jean-de-Luz located on the Atlantic Coast, near the border with Spain. Zacarias is the youngest of four siblings. His two sisters, Nadia and Jamila, were born in Morocco while his older brother, Abd Samad, was born in France. Zacarias’s Moroccan parents had relocated to France in 1967 when Zacarias’s father, Omar, went in search of greater economic security. However, court testimony from Zacarias’s sisters and from clinical social worker Jan Vogelsang, who interacted with the family, reveal a troubled and turbulent family life for Zacarias and the rest of his siblings during their early years in France. Zacarias’s mother, Aïcha, who claimed she was forced to marry Omar at the age of fourteen, divorced from Omar in 1971 after eleven years of marriage. Aïcha, was unable to support her children. The children subsequently spent time in and out of orphanages during the first six years of Zacarias’s life. However, Aïcha always managed to obtain employment in or near the institutions where the children lived and consequently tried to remain in close contact. Zacarias’s sister, Jamila, recalls that period of life as “difficult” in which her mother was constantly battling to find ways to be with her children. Jamila describes the
family as being a “very tight, strong family” until their move to Narbonne, France as they were entering their teen years.40

In a videotaped interview submitted as testimony at the court trial, Nadia, Zacarias’s oldest sister, describes family life during those early years:

We loved each other, we four children. Father was a bad father, a bad husband. He beat his wife and children, starved them, spent at the café the money he earned, we were unhappy with him. He threw a glass at Jamila which split her skull, when she was three or four years old.

Nadia went on to say how her siblings remained quiet during these incidents and how they felt “terrorized” by their father.41 Jamila agrees with Nadia’s portrayal of their father describing him as a violent alcoholic whose traumatizing impact was particularly felt by her and her brother Abd Samad.42 According to Abd Samad, Nadia essentially took over the role of being mother to the two boys with Jamila providing support.43 Nadia lovingly described Zacarias during these early years as being chubby, cute, handsome and affectionate. However, she noted that “Zacarias suffered from not having the love of his father or mother.”44

40 Donahue, Slave of Allah, 105.


44 Nadia Moussaoui, Videotaped Testimony.
Abd Samad recalls what family life was like when they moved to a housing project in Mulhouse when Zacarias was four years old:

For us real life happened outdoors. In the apartment was not much; my mother didn’t have a lot of time for us. She always had other things to do. It would have been misguided to expect the slightest tender word from her, or the merest gesture of affection.  

Abd Samad notes that Aïcha’s relationship with the children, while never particularly close, increasingly deteriorated especially with regard to Jamila. Abd Samad described his mother’s strategy of interacting with her child as “divide and rule.” Abd Samad notes, however, that this strategy never worked against him and Zacarias. He refers to Zacarias as the “ideal brother” describing him as smart, clever, and kind.

Zacarias’s first real exposure to Islam occurred during a family summer trip to Morocco when he was five and a half years old. During the visit, the Moussaoui children went with their cousins to a Koranic school where Zacarias listened to Koranic verses and participated in repeating them. Abd Samad reports that “those were lovely times.” Zacarias experienced Islam as pleasant and invigorating as he repeated the verses allowing him to escape, if only briefly, from his chaotic, unsettled life back in France. There’s no indication that he continued to study Islam when he returned to home.

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45 Abd Samad Moussaoui, Zacarias, My Brother, 16.
46 Abd Samad Moussaoui, Zacarias, My Brother, 22
47 Abd Samad Moussaoui, Zacarias, My Brother, 22-23.
The next major disturbance in family life for Zacarias occurs at the age of twelve when his mother decides to uproot the family and move them to Narbonne, France in 1980. At Mulhouse, Zacarias had discovered that he was a gifted handball player and had aspirations of becoming a professional or a coach according to his brother. Abd Samad recalls that Zacarias said, “I won’t go. Next year I want to study sports at Mulhouse.” As to the move to Narbonne, Abd Samad reflects that it must have been extremely difficult for Zacarias who, after living in a series of orphanages and finally establishing an identity in Mulhouse as an outstanding young handball player, was forced to move once again at a critical time in his life. Abd Samad notes:

> From that moment on, something inside Zacarias changed. There was a sort of uncertainty about him, an edge of bitterness and rancor. Like a very fine scar, hardly visible, which never heals.\(^{48}\)

Abd Samad reports that coinciding with the family’s move to Narbonne was the relocation of their father, Omar, to Narbonne to run a construction company. In contrast to evidence presented at Zacarias’s court hearings, Abd Samad claims, referring to his father “he’d never been mean. He’d never hit us... But it never seemed to occur to him to give our mother the slightest allowance.”\(^{49}\) He recalls that it was also at this point that Zacarias’s relationship with his mother was irreversibly deteriorating. Abd Samad recalls Zacarias saying, following his mother’s refusal to take him for his vocational school exam, “I knew she wouldn’t


do a thing to help me, but I didn’t know she was capable of doing something to hurt me.”

It is noteworthy that during his high school years, Zacarias expressed admiration for the work of Martin Luther King and his fight against social injustice, according to his sister Nadia. Nadia claimed that Zacarias “hated injustice” and supported a non-violent approach to secure the rights of blacks. Nadia notes “Since we are mixed race, metis, neither black nor white, at the time we identified with black people. We were going to vanquish through the force of love... It’s funny how things get turned around.”

In 1990, Zacarias met his cousin Fouzia for the first time. Fouzia had travelled to France from Morocco to pursue postgraduate studies in pharmacology. Abd Samad reports that Fouzia and Zacarias got along extremely well. He notes that Fouzia portrayed her family as happy and harmonious. He recalls how they regularly called her and seemed deeply involved in her life. Abd Samad writes that he and his siblings became very interested in what her family life was like in Morocco because it was so different from their own. According to press coverage at the time of the trial, Aïcha claims that it was Fouzia who introduced Zacarias to “codes of Muslim conduct that they had not experienced before.” There is nothing in Abd Samad’s account

50 Abd Samad Moussaoui, Zacarias, My Brother, 47.
51 Nadia Moussaoui, Videotaped Testimony.
52 Abd Samad Moussaoui, Zacarias, My Brother, 76-77.
to substantiate Aïcha’s claim. It should be noted that Abd Samad would wed Fouzia several years later and that they would subsequently attend a moderate mosque in Montpellier, which Abd Samad credits with leading him away from adopting Wahhabism being preached in the Saudi-financed mosque in the region.53

Abd Samad notes that in 1994 he began to notice a change in Zacarias with regard to his Islamic beliefs. Zacarias had moved to England in 1993 to study for a masters degree in business at South Bank University in London. He would periodically return to France to primarily visit his girlfriend (discussed more fully under the Peer component). Abd Samad recalls that he too had converted to Islam and had asked Zacarias to attend Friday mosque prayers with him but Zacarias refused. Abd Samad surmises that Zacarias had not yet been indoctrinated into Wahhabist belief. However, Abd Samad recounts that Zacarias also had no interest in attending a children’s Islamic cultural event with him, an event in which the children would sing Andulsian Sufi songs:

Zacarias came with me as far as the entrance to the hall, but refused to go in. He told me it just didn’t interest him, that it was all “innovation.” He was just interested only in the Koran and the Sunna. Just then the Imam arrived to preside over the party, and I took the opportunity to introduce my brother to him. A discussion ensued. I asked the imam to tell my brother how one learns the science of religion. Zacarias cut me off snapping, “Personally, all I need is the Koran and the Sunna to learn about religion. I’m quite capable of getting hold of books and studying them on my own.”54

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Abd Samad also recalls that in 1994 when Zacarias would return to France to visit, it became difficult to engage him in conversation beyond the perfunctory level. He writes that he and Zacarias could no longer speak openly or share the close, trusting relationship they had together as brothers growing up. Abd Samad notes that Zacarias also began to express harsh attitudes toward women. He recalls how he tried to reach out to Zacarias but noted that his brother remained distant and became increasingly introverted.\(^{55}\) During a trip to Morocco in summer of 1996 to visit family members, Abd Samad writes that they told him that Zacarias had been to Morocco earlier in the year and was acting strangely telling everyone that everything for him was *haram* (forbidden). He writes that the family told him that Zacarias left a “disconcerting impression.”

Abd Samad notes that he received further information about Zacarias’ from Jamila, whom Zacarias visited upon returning to France. Abd Samad reports that Jamila told him that she observed a change in Zacarias’ appearance. He now had a full beard and had shaved his head and had scolded her for the way she was dressed. Abd Samad notes that Zacarias left Wahabbist books for her to read and called a couple weeks later to see if she read the books. Jamila reported that Zacarias “flew into a rage” when he discovered she hadn’t read the books.

\(^{55}\) Abd Samad Moussaoui, *Zacarias, My Brother*, 96.
Abd Samad also noted that Zacarias had caused a stir in the local mosque in Narbonne when he addressed the congregation on Wahhabist beliefs. When the young people in the congregation who had religious training began to challenge Zacarias’ beliefs, the discussion became heated. According to Abd Samad, the Imam entered at that point and questioned Zacarias’s understanding of the Koran given that Zacarias had admitted he did not speak Arabic. Abd Samad describes what happened next:

Zacarias lost his temper. He got to his feet and tried to hit the imam. The young people intervened and threw him out. He walked off hurling insults at them, and calling them *kuffars* -- heathens.\(^56\)

Abd Samad writes that it was at that point the he knew his brother had been recruited by the Wahhabist extremists.\(^57\)

**Analysis**

The various sibling accounts of Zacarias’s early years paint a picture of a dysfunctional family in constant turmoil in which the only sense of stability Zacarias had was being part of the close relationship the Moussaoui children shared with each other during their early years together. Nadia describes her father, Omar, as “bad father” and, according to Jamila, a violent alcoholic. Consequently, Nadia positions him as unfit to exercise parental authority, i.e. he lacks the rights and duties associated with being her father. His abusive

\(^{56}\) Abd Samad Moussaoui, *Zacarias, My Brother*, 114.

\(^{57}\) Abd Samad Moussaoui, *Zacarias, My Brother*, 114.
behavior had the illocutionary effect of redefining the children’s obligations and duties to him by releasing them from their obligation and duty to treat him with respect. The perlocutionary effect of Omar’s abusive outbursts and threatening behavior was to “traumatize” the children. However, Abd Samad notes while young, he and Zacarias only had dim recollections of the arguments between their parents. Their feelings of instability were heightened by the unwelcoming conditions in the various orphanages they were shunted off to during these early years which forced the siblings to band closer together. At this point, Zacarias, the youngest, is described as “chubby, cute, handsome and affectionate” by Nadia and, “smart, clever and kind” by Abd Samad. Jamila referred to Zacarias as “the little sweetheart of the family.” They essentially preposition Zacarias as the family favorite for whom they all deeply care for and loved, i.e. the children felt an obligation to care for and protect Zacarias, who by virtue of his character and appearance has a right to their care over and above that which would derive from the sibling relationship. However, Nadia describes Zacarias as being unloved by his mother and father thereby positioning him as a “suffering child”.

An important storyline during these early years is: The Moussaoui children form a deep social bond with each in the face of dysfunctional parents who are unable to provide them with sufficient emotional or material support and otherwise provide for their developmental needs.

Abd Samad claims that his mother employed a “divide and rule” strategy as a means to manage her children consequently prepositioning her as
manipulative, thus losing or at least jeopardizing her rights as a mother. Abd Samad notes, however, that this strategy never worked against him and Zacarias, i.e. they did not position their mother as having the right to act in ways that would cause the brothers to turn on each other. In this sense, even at this early age, the tension between acceding to their mother’s demands in general and those actions that would pit one brother against the other is clearly evident. At this point, Zacarias is about four years old and Samad is five. Consequently, they had very little influence over the way that their mother imposed her rights and duties on them as their parent. The brother’s efforts to stick together in the face of the “divide and rule” strategy reflects an attempt by them to reposition their mother by placing limitations on the degree to which she is able to exercise her presumed rights and duties.

Notably absent from Moussaoui family narrative is any attempt to provide any sort of religious guidance. For Zacarias his first exposure to Islam in any significant way occurred briefly when he was six years old during a family trip back to Morocco where he had a chance to experience the practice of Islam in a calm and pleasant setting at a Koranic school with his cousins. The story-line is: Zacarias’s first exposure to Islam is a joyful event shared with siblings and cousins. Abd Samad provides this recollection presumably as counterpoint to the extremist Islamic interpretation Zacarias would later adopt as a member of Al-Qaeda.
Abd Samad claims that a critical moment in Zacarias’s life occurred when their mother decided to move the family from Mulhouse to Narbonne. Zacarias was twelve years old and began experiencing a sense of stability and coherence in the formation of a personal identity. In his memoir, Abd Samad notes it was during the time they their living in Mulhouse that Zacarias developed his exceptional skill at handball. Abd Samad describes Zacarais as a “brilliant” handball player who aspired to be a professional or a coach in the sport. He prepositions Zacarias as a highly respected handball player in Mulhouse, i.e., he had the right to compete against the best competition which in turn helped him construct a personal identity centered around being a successful young athlete. Abd Samad does not clearly articulate why Zacarias’s move to Narbonne would end his brothers dream of becoming a professional handball player except to note that his brother claimed the competition there was not challenging and subsequently he lost interest. In addition, Abd Samad reflexively describes Zacarias as a “changed person” due to the illocutionary effect of his mother’s decision to move the family to Narbonne resulting in a perlocutionary response which evoked uncertainty and bitterness in Zacarias. Abd Samad further notes that his father, Omar, also relocated to Narbonne about the same time. In an interesting turn, Abd Samad reflexively positions his father in a much different way than his sisters do. While Nadia and Jamila describes Omar as an abusive father, Abd Samad recalls that although his father was not kind to their mother, he claims that he was not mean and did not beat the children. This may have
been accurate with regard to the boys but perhaps less so with the older daughters who would have experienced much of the abuse during their preteen years, i.e., Abd Samad and Zacarias may have been too young to fully comprehend the fear that their father was evoking in his daughters. Meanwhile by the age of twelve, according to Abd Samad, Zacarias was having regular arguments with his mother who notes a particularly heated argument in which Aîcha refused to take Zacarias to an important school exam. Zacarias essentially describes Aîcha as an unfit mother resulting in unavoidable conflicts, i.e. Aîcha positions herself as having the right to impose her assumed will on Zacarias as his mother while Zacarias prepositions her as an unfit mother with no claim to rights to the rule she insists on imposing on him. The story-line is: Zacarias’s life is disrupted and dreams of becoming a professional handball player are destroyed when his mother decides to move the family from Mulhouse to Narbonne.

Nadia’s videotaped testimony, which was entered as a defense exhibit at Zacarias’s trial, provides an interesting perspective on Zacarias’ political mindset during his high school years. Nadia describes her brother as a admirer of Martin Luther King’s work to promote social and racial justice for blacks and describes him as a supporter of “non-violence and the rights of black people.” It seems that Nadia is attempting to make sense of her brother’s actions in which she describes him as a believer in a non-violent approach to secure the rights of blacks in contrast to the U.S. justice system that has described Zacarias as a
terrorist and hence having no such duty. The story-line is: As a young man, Zacarias believes in the promotion of black social justice through non-violence. In this sense, Nadia describes Zacarias as a noble idealist who had lost his way, redefining what would be his duty in the face of injustice.

The variance in recollections between Aïcha and her son Abd Samad regarding Fouzia’s influence on her cousin Zacarias’s turn towards Islam is instructive on how people reconstruct their past by reflexively positioning individuals in ways that seek to achieve their own unique coherent narrative. Speaking to the press in 2002 when her son was on trial in the U.S., Aïcha prepositions Fouzia as essentially a powerful voice with the duty to help Zacarias gravitate towards Islam, i.e. for Aïcha, Fouzia had the rights and so the duties to guide Zacarias towards the Islamic faith. There is no such positioning in Abd Samad’s account. In fact, he reflexively positions Zacarias as “protective” of Fouzia when she came to France, i.e. he took on the right and duty to provide Fouzia with guidance and assistance to make her study experience in France safe and successful. Abd Samad notes that Zacarias and Fouzia enjoyed discussing their studies and ambitions but he does not mention anything about them engaging in religious discussions or any role Fouzia may have had in directing Zacarias towards any specific Islamic belief. Abd Samad, does, however, describe Fouzia as an “peacemaker” in that she took on the duty to try to help repair the damaged relationship between Zacarias and his mother.
but failed, i.e. Aïcha repositioned Fouzia as an interfering interloper with no right to intervene on her son’s behalf.

According to Abd Samad’s recollections, Zacarias’s experiences in England had changed his brother in terms of their relationship and Zacarias’s interpretation of Islam. He describes Zacarias as returning from England introverted and suddenly untrusting of him. Abd Samad reflexively positions Zacarias as an “uncommunicative brother” no longer willing to speak openly and evidently abandoning the fraternal duty to share confidences with each other while Zacarias positions Abd Samad as an “untrustworthy brother” who no longer had the rights, duties and obligations inherent in their close relationship as brothers growing up together. The story-line is: Zacarias returns from England introverted and distances himself from his family.

Interestingly, Abd Samad did not see his brother’s refusal to attend the Islamic children’s event in 1994 as an indication of Zacarias’ acceptance of a more rigid interpretation of Islam. Abd Samad noted, however, that Zacarias never spoke directly about religion. He reports that it was also in 1994 that Zacarias began to express harsh attitudes towards women and other reactionary ideas that worried both he and his wife, Fouzia, who in past years had enjoyed long conversations with Zacarias. Abd Samad describes his brother at this point as being depressed and prepositions Zacarias as a “stranger” and thus incapable of exercising the rights, duties and obligations accorded to him as his
brother. The story-line is: Zacarias adopts harsh views that continue to emotionally distance him from family.

Abd Samad reports that Zacarias supposedly returned to England in 1995 to finish his studies but noted he was not sure and did not see his brother until a photo was released of him shortly after the 9/11 attacks in September 2001. However, in Abd Smad’s account reporting his trip to Morocco in summer of 1996, family members told him that Zacarias had been to Morocco earlier that year. They essentially described him as an “extremist” who left a “disconcerting impression” after Zacarias evidently thinking he had the right to chastise everyone for acting in ways that were forbidden (at least in his view) of Islam. In this sense, Zacarias prepositions his family members in Morocco as “bad Muslims.” i.e., they had no right to act in ways that he viewed as unIslamic and consequently were not fulfilling their obligations and duties as proper Muslims.

Abd Samad notes that he received further information about Zacarias from his sister Jamila whom Zacarias visited in Narbonne upon his return from Morocco. Jamila notices a change in Zacarias’ appearance and more importantly a change in his behavior. Zacarias chided Jamila for her appearance which shocked Jamila. She positions Zacarias as a “disrepsectful brother” who has no right to speak to her in that manner. Zacarias relents and is at least momentarily regretful for his actions but subsequently scolds Jamila for not reading the Wahhabist texts he left her. Based on this account, Abd Samad describes Zacarias as experiencing a painful internal struggle, i.e. the reciprocal
rights, duties and obligations Zacarias shared with Jamila as a family member are being transformed and replaced by a set of rights, duties and obligations of Wahabbist beliefs he has adopted. The story-line is: Zacarias painfully rejects family members in the process of forging a religious identity based on the adoption of Wahhabist beliefs.

Abd Samad describes Zacarias as a “Wahhabist extremist” following reports of Zacarias’ confrontation with the congregation and the Imam at the mosque in Narbonne in 1996. Abd Samad recounts how the Imam angered Zacarias by positioning Zacarias as unknowledgeable about Islam because Zacarias could not read the Koran in its original Arabic, i.e. Zacarias did not have the right to interpret Islamic belief for others. Abd Samad describes Zacarias as intolerant of the beliefs of others in which Zacarias subsequently positions himself as a “true Muslim” positioning those who do not share his beliefs as “heathens” thereby not according them the rights, duties and obligations of “true Muslims.”

**School/Educational Tradition**

In his memoir, Abd Samad writes about their early school experiences beginning with their middle school years when they lived in Mulhouse. He sums
up he and his brother’s attitude toward school during that period:

At the time, Zacarias and I only thought about having fun. We went to school to have fun, and we came out of school and had more fun. Boys will be boys.58

At Zacarias’s trial, his defense provided copies of Zacarias’s report cards which offered a perspective on what his teachers thought of his academic progress through his high school and early college years. One progress report issued in 1980 when Zacarias was in the sixth level of middle school described him as “lazy and absent-minded.”59 He transferred the following year to Collège Jules Ferry in a middle class neighborhood where he attended from 1981-84. Abd Samad reports that he was attending Jules Ferry as well but was suddenly and without warning informed that he was no longer enrolled in the school and that he had been transferred to the Jean Moulin vocation college. Abd Samad writes how they reacted to what they perceived as the “scheming” action of Abd Samad’s school counselor:

We were by then convinced of three types of bigotry in the state educational system. One had to do with the color of your skin, another was linked to your cultural origin, and a third was to do with social class. Zacarias was shocked by the career path that had been foisted on me, possibly even more disgusted than I was. From then on, he was suspicious of everyone in the state system.60

58 Abd Samad Moussaoui, Zacarias, My Brother, 16.


60 Abd Samad Moussaoui, Zacarias, My Brother, 34.
At the age fifteen, Zacarias transferred to a technical school after being discouraged from attending the Lycee Dr. Lacroix, a high school where his middle class friends were to be enrolled. Zacarias’s report card noted that he was “overall very inadequate, making promotion to the seconde class very unlikely.” In 1986, Zacarias graduated from high school and received a vocational diploma. He passed the entrance exam to work towards an advanced vocational diploma at Perpignan, studying mechanical and electrical engineering. A report card issued to Zacarias during this period described him as “earnest but problems”. He graduated in 1990 obtaining his advanced vocational diploma but realized that it would not allow him to work as a sales technician so he subsequently decided to find another path to further his education. Zacarias moved to Montpellier where he briefly attended the university, enrolling in one course. According to Abd Samad, he also attempted to find work but failed. He notes that Zacarias was easily discouraged and believed he was denied employment due to discrimination. Abd Samad describes Zacarias at that point as becoming “gloomy and weary.”


64 Donahue, *Slave of Allah*, 110.

that he believed Zacarias felt that he had done his best to get back on track in terms of pursuing his education but essentially felt powerless to overcome the effects of discrimination that he believed were frustrating his ambitions. Abd Samad reflects that at this point Zacarias had no aims or goals.66

This period coincides with the first Gulf War (1990-91) and early reports of Serbian violence against Bosnian Muslims. These events provoked student protests and drew Zacarias into discussions with university students from North and West African countries and the Middle East.67 Abd Samad reflects on how these events personally affected he and Zacarias:

We empathized with those suffering people, not only because they were suffering but also because they were Muslims. Initially, Saddam Hussein tried to play on the empathy of fellow Muslims. But in no time at all, Arab countries sent in their armies to defend Kuwait. For we Muslims it was a disconcerting war. It wasn’t good guys versus bad guys. The truth was more subtle. The war crystalized feelings against American imperialism, political and economic. Zac, myself and our friends felt that the France that sent in troops to fight along side the Americans was not our France.

Gulf War, Bosnia, Algeria, Palestine, Afghanistan, Chechnya... Muslims were being persecuted all over the world. That disgusted us. Zacarias wasn’t the only one who felt wronged. All Muslims our age, and even those younger, were shattered. They felt deeply and personally, in their very flesh, the injustices visited on their religious brothers. As they grew older these young Muslims became hypersensitive. They no longer believed in the morality and ethics of rulers.68

66 Abd Samad Moussaoui, Zacarias, My Brother, 78.
67 Donahue, Slave of Allah, 111.
68 Abd Samad Moussaoui, Zacarias, My Brother, 80-81.
Donahue reinforces Abd Samad’s view and notes that Zacarias’s “political sympathies” were shared by many university students and others his age. Testimony provided by Nadia and Jamila also corroborated the view that Zacarias cared deeply about those causes, which Zacarias framed within context of civil rights.69 According to Abd Samad, Zacarias was first exposed to extremist Islamic beliefs in his conversations with foreign students from Africa and the Middle East who attended the university. Abd Samad believed that many of those students were associated with the Muslim Brotherhood and recalled that they were referred to at the university as the “Kid Brothers.” He notes “I think I can say without contradiction that it was by rubbing shoulders with these students that Zacarias discovered a dangerous caricature of Islam. Everything they said was marked by a desire for vengeance.” He adds, “For them, every conflict involving Muslims offered a chance to uphold the highly militant argument of the Muslim Brotherhood.”

In February 1992, Zacarias left Montpellier and moved to London where he subsequently enrolled in a master’s program in international business at South Bank University. Zacarias’s course director at South Bank, Colin Knapp, described him as “reasonably hardworking, reasonably committed, quite quiet. At first he had a problem with some of the language but there is nothing which stood out.” Knapp noted that Zacarias was a practicing Muslim but “He had no major political convictions at all.”

69 Donahue, Slave of Allah, 111.
Analysis

Abd Samad, describes he and Zacarias during their early school years as “fun-seekers” who consequently had little interest in devoting serious effort to their studies, i.e. they felt no obligation as uncommitted students to apply themselves to achieve better grades. During the 1980-81 school year when Zacarias is twelve, his teacher provides an overall evaluation of Zacarias in the form of a report card describing him as “lazy and absent-minded” essentially describing him as an unmotivated student. Although these are translated remarks from French to English, the comments written by Zacarias’ teacher seem pejorative in the English translation and suggests perhaps an underlying societal prejudice against ethnic North Africans prevalent at the time in France that will be explored in more detail through analysis of Zacarias’s peer and community interactions. My detailed review of Zacarias’s report card subject by subject reveals that his teachers viewed him as an average student, strong in some subjects weaker in others, expressing their evaluations in more objective terms. Particularly telling is Abd Samad’s prepositioning of himself and Zacarias as “victims of discrimination” of the French state educational school system, i.e. they do not have the right to compete for the same educational opportunities available to the the non-immigrant, native-born French students attending the same school. Abd Samad positions the French state educational system as a discriminatory and racist institution, i.e. the French education
system, through their institutional obligation to provide French citizens with education, failed in their duties in an unfair manner to deny the Moussaoui brothers educational opportunities that they believed they had a right to pursue. The story-line is: Zacarias becomes infuriated at the perceived discriminatory and racist attitudes and actions of the French educational system, which he positions as failing to fulfill its duty to him.

Zacarias subsequently transferred to a middle school in a middle class neighborhood where he remained from 1981-84. However, at this school he received an overall evaluation that described him as being unfit to attend a regular high school and was consequently discouraged from enrolling in Lycee Dr. Lacroix school where his middle class school friends would attend, i.e. he did not earn the right to attend the middle class high school with the middle class friends he had made. The story-line is: Zacarias fails to obtain a recommendation from his school that would have allowed him to continue his education in school with his friends and subsequently enrolls in a vocational school, his only other option at the time.

Zacarias graduated from vocational high school in 1986. He went on to obtain an advanced vocation diploma at Perpignan graduating in 1990. At Perpignan, a report card issued to him by the school described his as “earnest but problems”. Again, this is an English translation from the original French. The school administration essentially describes Zacarias as a committed student but also describes him as a “deficient student”. The story-line is: Zacarias
applies himself to his studies but still has trouble mastering his coursework in the eyes of his instructors. Abd Samad also noted that Zacarias had to reposition himself as unqualified to obtain a job as a sales technician despite earning an advanced vocational diploma, i.e. Zacarias discovered he lacked the right to pursue the job in sales he hoped to get by obtaining an advanced vocational degree when he realized the degree would not help him. Another story-line emerges: Zacarias fails to obtain the proper educational credentials that would allow him to achieve his goal of becoming a sales technician which subsequently leads him to seek a different educational path.

According to Abd Samad, Zacarias’s move to Montpellier to attend the university would lead to further frustration. At Montpellier, Abd Samad describes his brother as “gloomy and weary” noting that Zacarias positioned himself as victim of racial discrimination because was unable to obtain a job, i.e. his status as a black, ethnic Moroccan did not allow him the same rights as other non-minority French citizens. Abd Samad also reflexively recalls that Zacarias described himself as powerless, i.e. Zacarias felt he had a duty to improve his life but believed that he was not accorded the rights necessary to fulfill his duty to himself.

The personal frustrations unfolding in Zacarias’s life coincided with the first Gulf War and initial reports of Serbian violence against Bosnian Muslims. In recounting discussions with other Muslim student on campus, Abd Samad and Zacarias as Muslims were deeply affected by persecution against Muslims
worldwide and position themselves as having a moral obligation to support Muslims worldwide against what they saw as persecution and oppression. He describes the Americans as imperialists who have no rights to attack the Iraqis and describes the French as essentially co-conspirators in the Gulf War. However, he also positioned the Arab countries that sent armies to help Kuwait as the proper defenders of Muslims, i.e. the Arab nations had the rights, duties and obligation to defend Muslims against Saddam Hussein’s aggression while nations from the West did not. In their videotaped court testimony Nadia and Jamila described Zacarias caring deeply about the plight of blacks and their attempts to secure their civil rights, which essentially became an element in Zacarias emerging Muslim identity that began to congeal during his college years. The story-line is: Zacarias empathizes with the Muslim global persecution and in so doing begins to forge a more coherent personal and social identity as a Muslim among fellow Muslim students.

Abd Samad further recounts Zacarias exposure to extremist interpretations of Islam through his contact with students promulgating the Muslim Brotherhood interpretation of Islam, which Abd Samad characterizes as a “dangerous caricature of Islam”, i.e. Abd Samad describes the “Kid Brothers” as Muslim extremists who have no right to declare their version of Islam the only proper interpretation. The story-line is: Zacarias discovers that many Muslim students believe that militant Islam as practiced by the Muslim Brotherhood is the proper way to confront global Muslim oppression and persecution. In that sense,
Abd Samad positions the Kid Brothers as having the rights, the duty and obligation to secure the civil rights of Muslims worldwide by means of a militant action against perceived oppressors.

Abd Samad reflects that it was through his encouragement that Zacarias decided to move to London with the idea of improving his English and eventually going into international business together with his brother. According to the course director at South Bank University where Zacarias was enrolled in the masters program in international business, he seemed to be focused on his studies from the perspective of the school administration. However, a great deal was happening off campus within the context of peer group and community interaction that had an important influence Zacarias’ radicalization.

**Peer Group**

Abd Samad notes that during their early years in the orphanages, he and Zacarias did not mix with the other children. Abd Samad notes, “We took great care not to be like them, not to use the vulgar language they did, and to avoid the mean ones. Many of the children were suffering from a lack of emotional warmth.”

When they reached school age, Abd Samad noted that, despite living in a “problem neighborhood” in Mulhouse, he and Zacarias just thought about having fun and would in get involved with various types of mischief with other kids in the neighborhood.

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According to Abd Samad, an important change in Zacarias’ peer group came when they moved from Mulhouse to Narbonne in 1980. Zacarias is twelve at this point. According to Abd Samad they initially moved into an apartment building in a gang-infested, low income neighborhood where violence was common. Abd Samad writes that Zacarias had warned him not to get involved in gangs and claims that they avoided trouble that could lead to getting a criminal record that would ruin their chances of getting into college.

Abd Samad notes that Zacarias’s transfer in 1981 to Collège Jules Ferry, located in a middle class neighborhood, provided him with the opportunity to mix with and make friends with children from the middle class. Abd Samad reports that while Zacarias established good friendships with some of the students at Jules Ferry, he believed that Zacarias felt inferior and “humiliated by his social roots” after seeing the lifestyle of his middle class friends and witnessing the “power of money.” Abd Samad notes that it was this social disparity that prompted Zacarias to suddenly enroll in vocational school were he (Abd Samad) had been directed to attend by school authorities.

Abd Samad reports that the family moved out of their rough neighborhood to a house that Aïcha had frugally saved for and bought in the middle class residential neighborhood of Roche-Grise. He writes that Zacarias was quickly accepted by most of his middle class peers in the neighborhood. It is here, that Zacarias, now fifteen, would meet a French girl named Karine Bocat, known to
everyone as “Fanny.” Abd Samad reports she became Zacarias’s girlfriend and over time, Zacarias began to share with her some of the hardships he had faced in his life. Abd Samad reflects on their relationship:

It was the start of a real love story, a story that lasted ten years. What Zacarias could not find in his own home he tried to construct elsewhere. He was looking for harmony, gentleness, affection, honesty, loyalty, integrity - in short, emotional security. He found it in Fanny.71

Fanny’s parents did not view Zacarias as an acceptable choice for their daughter and despite making an effort to win them over, Abd Samad writes that his brother never succeeded. He believes that Fanny’s parents would not approve of him because he was an Arab. Abd Samad writes that although his brother was always polite toward Fanny’s parents, his contempt for them steadily grew as Fanny’s ill-advised decision to be openly honest about her parents feelings toward him made clear that they disapproved of the relationship because he was an Arab.72 Despite this disapproval, Zacarias and Fanny would continue to see each other while in high school and briefly live together while they were attending college. Abd Samad writes that Fanny had encouraged Zacarias to remain in France to look for a job so they could spend a quiet life together. Zacarias, however, chided her for not being realistic. Abd Samad recalls that his brother told Fanny “Do you think it’ll be easy for us to find somewhere to live, with

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71 Abd Samad Moussaoui, Zacarias, My Brother, 43.
72 Abd Samad Moussaoui, Zacarias, My Brother, 44.
my skin color? You know very well how things are, don’t you? I’d have to be a millionaire to get any respect.”

Abd Samad reports that Zacarias asked Fanny to come with him to England but she decided against it. Abd Samad notes that Fanny believed life would be hard in England for them and that after ten years together their relationship was now coming to an end. Abd Samad recalls Zacarias was “deeply wounded” by Fanny’s decision not to accompany him to England. He recounts Zacarias’s reaction to Fanny’s decision:

Out of respect he never talked about her to me, but he told me then, ‘She’s a middle-class girl. All she thinks about is her creature comforts and herself. She doesn’t really love me.’ There was a tone of scorn and pain in his voice. He was terribly disappointed. That marked the end of their love affair. Zacarias is very sentimental, all or nothing.

When Zacarias moved to England and subsequently enrolled in South Bank University he established a friendship with Nil Plant, a business student who was raised as a Muslim in Turkey but who now participated in Bible study classes because her stepchildren were Christians and she wanted to gain an understanding of their religion. In a videotaped interview as part of the court proceedings, Plant provided her perception of Zacarias during that time period while they attended school together in England:

He was very smart and a quick thinker. A bit of a misfit.... he wasn’t a proper Arab, not a proper French boy. He had a lot going for him but nowhere to go. He had all these dreams and ambitions and thoughts,
mapped out, roaring to go, nothing to channel his dreams and all the things he had in his head... I doubt that he had any guidance or anything like that. Sometimes you finish a degree, you go on to a job, meet the right people at the right time. I suppose that didn’t happen for Zac.

Nil described Zacarias as a committed Muslim when she knew him at school in 1993. She noted, however, that he was not critical of her participating in Bible study and did not attempt to encourage her to return to Islam.75

Abd Samad recounts that Zacarias had established a friendship with Xavier Djaffo, a French friend who also moved to England and where he attended South Bank University with Zacarias. Xavier was originally a friend of Abd Samad who introduced him to Zacarias where they subsequently struck up a friendship. Abd Samad reports that Xavier told him in early 1995 that while in England he had converted to Islam. Abd Samad notes that at the time Xavier did not appear to be a practicing Muslim. However, he notices a change in Xavier in the summer of 1996 in which Xavier began expressing Wahhabist beliefs in an attempt to proselytize others in Narbonne. Abd Samad reports that Xavier’s brother’s told him that Zacarias and Xavier had gone to Kuwait together to “learn religion” which to them meant Wahhabist belief. Abd Samad reports that based on the comments of Xavier’s brother, Xavier had undergone the same change in personality that Zacarias had gone through, i.e. increasingly distant, introverted, angry, religiously rigid. He recalls that both he and Xavier’s brother could not

understand how their brothers, whom they described as “lovers of life”, could become indoctrinated to accept extreme Wahabbist belief. Xavier Djaffo would ultimately die on April 12, 2000 fighting jihad against the Russians in Chechnya. A French security service report claimed that Zacarias had recruited Xavier into radical fundamentalism. Xavier’s family also blames Zacarias for radicalizing their son and recruiting him to fight in Chechnya.

Analysis

In his memoir Abd Samad describes the children at the orphanages where they grew up as vulgar and mean and consequently positions them as unfit playmates, i.e., Abd Samad saw no duty or obligation on the part of the Moussaoui children to establish and maintain a close relationship with the children in the orphanage. Abd Samad reflexively positions his two older sisters as protectors of he and Zacarias, i.e. the two older sister had the parental right, duty and obligation to protect their younger brothers with all the authority in their power. Nadia, the oldest, was positioned as the primary protector.

As preteens living in the “problem neighborhood” in Mulhouse, Abd Samad reflexively positions himself and Zacarias as “fun loving mischief-makers” who were part of the group of neighborhood kids from the local housing projects that enjoyed playing pranks and believed that they had the right to do this. At this

76 Abd Samad Moussaoui, Zacarias, My Brother, 124-125.

77 Donahue, Slave of Allah, 119.
point it appears Abd Samad and Zacarias adapted to the rough and tumble of living in a troubled low income neighborhood. The initial move to Narbonne when Zacarias is twelve marks an important transition in his life. Aïcha has moved the family into an apartment building in a marginal, crime-ridden neighborhood where many in Zacarias’s peer group were in street gangs. Abd Samad reflexively positions Zacarias as his “brotherly advisor” giving Zacarias the right to admonish him against joining or getting involved in the street gangs in their neighborhood and exercising a perceived obligation to help safeguard Abd Samad’s chances of getting into a university.

A change in Zacarias’s peer group reportedly occurs when Zacarias transfers to Collège Jules Ferry and develops a number of good friendships among the middle class students who attend the school. Despite developing positive friendships at Jules Ferry as he is entering his teen years, Abd Samad describes Zacarias as being “humiliated by his social roots” which emerges after being exposed to the wealthy lifestyle of his friends. Abd Samad describes Zacarias as prepositioning himself as lacking the social status that would accord him the same rights, duties and obligations as his middle class friends. The story-line is: Zacarias establishes good friendships among his middle class peers at his new school. However, exposure to the middle class lifestyle of his peers triggers feelings of social inferiority at a critical period of where he is searching to establish a personal identity. According to Abd Samad, it was Zacarias’s self-positioning as socially handicapped in addition to Abd Samad’s
misguided encouragement that led to Zacarias’s decision to leave Jules Ferry and transfer to vocational school which he subsequently felt was a mistake. As noted earlier, Zaracias had also been described by school authorities as lacking the aptitude to be successful at the next level of high school that would have allowed him to continue school with his middle class friends.

The ability of Aïcha to acquire a private home and move the family to the middle class neighborhood of Roche-Grise helped paved the way for Zacarias to establish more middle class friendships and a relationship that would be for the next ten years the most significant peer in his life: Karine Bocat, known to everyone as “Fanny.” Abd Samad reflexively positions Fanny as essentially Zacarias’s “soulmate” in that she embodied the “emotional security” he was desperately looking for, i.e. Zacarias accords Fanny all the rights, duties and obligations inherent in a close, loving relationship and Fanny positioned Zacarias as an equal partner in their relationship according him the same rights, duties and obligations that he has accorded her. The story-line is: Zacarias meets the love of his life.

Abd Samad reflexively positions Fanny’s parents as rejecting their daughter’s positioning of Zacarias and subsequently repositions him as having no right to be a suitor for their daughter because he is an Arab. According to Abd Samad, Zacarias first describes Fanny’s parents as “unknowledgeable parents” and believed that over time he could gain their approval once they got to know him. When Zacarias fails to win the parents over understanding that
they do not want their daughter to pursue a relationship with an Arab, Zacarias repositions the parents as racists, i.e. they lack the right to control their daughter’s relationship with him. The story-line is: The parents of Fanny are racists who disapprove of her relationship with Zacarias. A related storyline emerges: Zacarias tries but fails to obtain approval of Fanny’s parents because of his ethnic and social status. Abd Samad notes that Zacarias described himself as being “socially disadvantaged” because he was black, Arab and poor, thus lacking the social rights of the white students. He notes at that point Zacarias believed that the only way to reposition himself as socially acceptable in French society was to acquire a great deal of wealth - “I’d have to be a millionaire to get any respect”, i.e. Zacarias believed that for him, because of pervasive racism in French society against non-native French, the right to be accepted and respected in French culture could only be acquired through the exercise of power embodied in accumulated wealth. It is this line of thinking that contributed to his decision to go to England to obtain a masters degree in business as a means to fulfill his dreams of embarking on a career in international business that would bring him the wealth he sought.

The refusal by Fanny to accompany Zacarias to England that subsequently signaled the ultimate end to their ten year relationship was a critical moment in Zacarias’ life. Zacarias tries to hide his bitter disappointment by prepositioning Fanny as a “materialistic middle-class girl” i.e., she does not have the right to share a life with him based on Wahhabist belief. He takes Fanny’s
refusal to go to England with him as a sign that she does not love him anymore. The illocutionary effect of her refusal is perceived by Zacarias as a rejection of him. The perlocutionary response by Zacarias is that he takes this as evidence that Fanny does not love him anymore. Within this context, Abd Samad seeks to explain his brother’s behavior by describing him as “sentimental” which he equates with an “all or nothing” attitude. The story-line is: Fanny refuses to go to England, signaling the end of their relationship. The related story-line is: Zacarias loses the most important source of emotional support in his life at that point and heads off to England bitter and brokenhearted.

In London, Zacarias’ classmate at South Bank University, Nil Plant, describes him as smart but positions him as a “misfit” - “he wasn’t a proper Arab, not a proper French boy.” She also describes him as an “unguided student” who had ambition but no way to channel his ambitions. The story-line is: Zacarias works hard to obtain his masters degree in business despite the lack of guidance that would help him succeed. Plant also describes Zacarias as “nonjudgemental” in her conversations with him regarding religion, i.e. she had the standing to openly and freely express her opinions about Christianity. The story-line is: In discussions of Christianity with Nil, Zacarias reflects an attitude of tolerance and does not seek to encourage Nil to return to Islam. Zacarias’s exposure to radical Islam was occurring outside of his school environment while in England and was not reflected in his discursive interactions with his classmate Nil. In addition, Nil Plant’s remarks must be understood in the context of
responding to court proceedings in which she was asked to provide insight into Zacarias during his student days in England where she would have presumably known, at least through media coverage, that Zacarias had been exposed to radical Islam while studying in England.

Abd Samad’s account of Zacarias’ relationship with Xavier Djaffo provides insight into what may have been happening off campus. As told by Xavier’s brother to Abd Samad regarding the changing behavior of Xavier, Abd Samad sees close parallels in the changing behavior of Zacarias with that of Xavier. Abd Samad consequently describes both his brother and Xavier as “Wahabbist converts” who perceive their rights, duties and obligations as defining for others what it means to be a “true Muslim”. Information regarding Xavier’s death in Chechnya in April 2000 surface the specific nature of those obligations, i.e., the obligation to fight jihad in support of Wahhabist beliefs and the right to designate those who do not share their beliefs as kuffars - heathen non-believers.

**Community**

Abd Samad notes that from a very young age he and Zacarias became increasingly aware of pervasive racism in France. Abd Samad recalls that as young boys living in a housing project in Bourtzwiller where many immigrant families from North Africa lived, there were also some families who had intense dislike of foreigners. Abd Samad recounts the contacts he and Zacarias had with
the Kol family:

The parents were very racist. And when Alsatians are racist, it is quite something! Whenever the Kols bumped into Zac and me they called us ‘dirty niggers.’ Not ‘dirty Arabs but ‘dirty niggers.’ They didn’t make any distinction between Arabs and Blacks, we were simply Not White. One day for no particular reason, the eldest Kol son, who must have been fifteen or sixteen, insulted us, setting off a general brawl. He was really mean and quite a lot bigger than us. In the free-for-all he threw me against an iron post which got stuck in my back. I ended up in the hospital, and I’ve still got a scar.78

Abd Samad writes that most “born-and-bred French people” viewed his family as Black, not Arab. He recalls that as children he and Zacarias were regularly confronted with having to explain their origins. Abd Samad notes “there was something humiliating and unsettling about it -- it was as if we didn’t have a formal identity.” Abd Samad recalls a painful memory when he was ten and Zacarias was eight, speaking to their friend Rémi:

RÉMI: I can’t play with you.

ABD S. How come, why can’t you play with us?

RÉMI: Because my parents said I can’t.

ABD S. But why have your parents said you can’t play with us today? We play marbles together every day.

RÉMI: No, it’s just not today, it’s for always. They say that you are niggers and they don’t want me to play with niggers.79

In short, they do not have the right to play with white children.

78 Abd Samad Moussaoui, Zacarias, My Brother, 17-18.

79 Abd Samad Moussaoui, Zacarias, My Brother, 62-63.
According to Abd Samad, the racist attitudes toward North Africans also persisted in school. He recalls one teacher at the La Fontaine school had a “visceral hatred” for North Africans to point where he actually hit North African students in the bathroom. Abd Samad reflects that as a child he did not understand what was happening to him. He only understood that some people were mean and that a child develops an intuitive sense about racists. Abd Samad recalls that when they experienced racism, they would tell their mother, one of the few instances they would actually seek their mother’s support. Abd Samad reports that their mother would get angry at the way her sons were treated and helplessly call out “They’re all racists! They’re all racists!”

The basic story-line: The Moussaoui boys grow frustrated at the pervasive racisms they are experiencing at the hands of French society.

By the mid-1980s as Abd Samad and Zacarias were about to enter their teen years, the rise of Jean-Marie Le Pen’s *Front National* political party that promoted an anti-immigrant policy, was creating tensions in the country. Donahue notes that the increasing strength of Le Pen’s party coincided with an increase in attacks against immigrants, including attacks against the Moussaoui brothers. As noted during the discussion of Zacarias’ relationship with Fanny, Zacarias also had to endure the racist attitude of Fanny’s parents who disapproved of her relationship with him because he was an Arab provoking

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80 Abd Samad Moussaoui, *Zacarias, My Brother*, 64.

Zacarias’ silent contempt and increasing his sensitivity to racism in a very personal way.

By the time Zacarias arrived in England, he had reportedly faced a lifetime of discrimination in France, both in school and in the local community, based on being a black North African and an Arab. In England, Zacarias began to attend the Brixton mosque where he had interacted regularly with Imam Baker, the chairman of the mosque. In videotaped testimony presented by the defense at Zacarias’ trial, Imam Baker described Zacarias’ as, at first, “eager to learn and pleasant to be with” but later transitioning into a “distant, brash, and even defiant member of the mosque.” He noticed a change in Zacarias’ appearance in which he grew a beard and at times would wear a long white robe usually worn by Saudi men. Imam Baker said he finally asked Zacarias to leave when one day Zacarias arrived at the mosque in military fatigues and backpack, pressuring Imam Baker to direct him to the next *jihad*. Imam Baker said that Zacarias had been attending sermons by radical imams such as Abu Qatada and Abu Hamza al-Masri. Imam Baker surmised that Moussaoui was targeted by these extremists for recruitment.82 The story-line is: Zacarias rejects mainstream Islam beliefs and reflects attitudes consistent with radical interpretations of Islam.

The Finsbury mosque where Islamic extremist Abu Hamza gave sermons was also known as the center for Takfir wal Hijra, an extremist group that was

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allegedly partially financed by Usama Bin Laden and whose philosophy included killing Muslims who were not “sufficiently observant.” Zacarias was also known to frequent gatherings at the Four Feathers Youth Centre, the organization where Abu Qatada preached sermons that subsequently led to Abu Qatada’s detention.\textsuperscript{83} In sum, circumstantial testimony at Zacarias’ trial revealed that, while in London, an embittered and isolated Zacarias became attracted to the radical Islamic community in London that welcomed him and essentially targeted him for recruitment to participate in the global \textit{jihad} movement.

\textit{Analysis}

According to Abd Samad’s account, the Mousaaoui children constantly faced discrimination growing up in France. He notes that it was particularly disconcerting when he and his brother were very young because they did not fully understand people’s racist attitudes towards them. In each community setting during the early years, Abd Samad reflexively positions certain members in the respective communities as “racists” who have claimed as a right, duty and obligation, the authority to deny Abd Samad and the Moussaoui children the same equal rights as due other French citizens. Alternatively, he notes that he and Zacarias had often been positioned as “dirty niggers” i.e., they had no right

to claim the same standing as other French citizens because of the perceived inferior racial background.

This attitude is painfully played out in the short exchange between Abd Samad and his playmate, Rémi, who was told by his parents he could no longer play with Abd Samad and Zacarias. In the exchange, which took place when Zacarias was eight and Abd Samad was ten, Rémi’s parents deliberately positioned Zacarias and Abd Samad as unacceptable playmates for Rémi, i.e. Zacarias and Abd Samad were positioned as not having the right to play with Rémi because of their race.

As the children grew older and came to understand the nature of racism as expressed among certain elements of French society, their feelings of frustration from discrimination were also being reinforced by their mother, who positioned all white, native-born French as “racists’ i.e. in her view, white native-born French assumed the right and duty to deny minorities their legitimate rights and duties as French citizens.

Another glaring example of discrimination that deeply affected Zacarias on a personal level was the disapproval of his relationship with Fanny by her parents. Abd Samad reflexively describes Fanny’s parents as positioning Zacarias as an unacceptable suitor for their daughter because he was an Arab, i.e., he did not have the right to pursue a relationship with their daughter because of his ethnic background. Abd Samad reflexively notes that Zacarias positioned
Fanny’s parents as “racists” i.e. Fanny’s parents assumed the right to dissuade their daughter from developing a relationship with Zacarias.

Abd Samad notes that by the time he is a young adult, Zacarias had essentially become obsessed with and frustrated by the racism that he had experienced throughout his life. Within the context of a recent dissolution of his relationship with Fanny and a sense of bitterness of and exclusion from French society, Zacarias arrives in England isolated and directionless. While Zacarias’ attendance at South Bank University provides some structure, Zacarias gravitates towards religious social structures that will address his social needs for inclusion and sense of purpose. According to court testimony, Imam Baker positions Zacarias as the “perfect target for proselytization” because he was bright, had a questioning nature and did not have a deep understanding of Islam. i.e., he claimed the right to potentially question mainstream Islamic beliefs and had the obligation to listen to and accept the beliefs of those who claimed greater authoritative knowledge of the proper understanding of Islam. Through Zacarias’s changing behavior and appearance that reflected an acceptance of radical Wahhabist beliefs, we can infer that Zacarias positioned radical Imams such as Abu Hamza and Abu Qatada as “authoritative interpreters of Islam”, i.e. they had the right, duty, and obligation to present their version of Islam as the “true version.” In short, Zacarias was able to identity a social support network that accommodated his need for social acceptance and inclusion. This was accomplished through the consolidation of a personal identity into an all-
encompassing religious identity centered around radical Wahhabist beliefs oriented toward participation in the global *jihad* movement.
CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS

The primary aim of this study was to propose and demonstrate the validity of an interdisciplinary framework utilizing a discursive approach for studying the radicalization of individuals within their own cultural context. This chapter will draw preliminary conclusions in two fundamental categories to help assess claims of validity. First, I will discuss selected substantive insights generated by the methodology and application of the framework to the case studies. Second, I will assess the performance of the framework in establishing the appropriate analytic focus to efficiently direct attention to the most salient aspects of the radicalization process.

CASE STUDIES

One of the themes that surfaces in each of case study is the notion of the individual “not fitting in” to their particular sociocultural environment at a specific point in time, subsequently leading to an increased sense of isolation. In the case of Ed Husain, while his family social structure initially served as an emotional safe haven for him as he was growing up, he faced constant racial taunting from neighborhood gangs in the community and subtle discrimination at the hands of some teachers at his school. His transfer to an all boys school
intensified his feelings of isolation when he refused to become part of the
gang culture prevalent at the school. As a consequence, he was often bullied at
his new school leading him to cast himself as a “misfit” at a critical developmental
stage of identity formation in his early teen years.

For Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, his sense of not fitting in surfaces when
he leaves his family and the familiar community surroundings of the “hippie town”
of Ashland, Oregon to attend Wake Forest University. There he perceives the
student body as wealthy, and class conscious, which for Daveed served as a
social barrier to developing friendships among his classmates during his first two
years at college. It would seem that Daveed would certainly have had a choice
to reach out and establish friendships among students across the social
spectrum within the context of a university setting but chose during those first two
years to withdraw and focus on his studies and the debate team, meanwhile
lamenting how he felt isolated and alone. It underscores the notion that it does
not matter how many life options are available to an individual, but rather it is an
individual’s perception of available options that will subsequently influence a
person’s life trajectory. It is also a reminder that life unfolds as a series of
perceived options that an individual decides to act upon or to ignore.

The sense of exclusion that Zacarias Moussaoui experienced, as told
through the narrative of his brother, Abd Samad, reveals that overt discrimination
against French citizens of black North African heritage emerged as a powerful
influence in Zacarias’ early life against the backdrop of an unstable family
environment. As young children, Abd Samad notes how he and his brother struggled to make sense of overt acts of racism and how they came to have a clearer understanding of racial discrimination and its pernicious nature as they grew older and were the targets of physical attacks. In contrast to Ed Husain and Daveed, Zacarias drew support from his brother and sisters who served as protectors during his chaotic childhood. However, it appears that a combination of overt acts of discrimination and channeling through the French educational system towards vocational occupations, created a feeling of racial injustice within Zacarias that Abd Samad believes became an obsession with Zacarias by his late teen years. However, his relationship with Fanny provided Zacarias with an emotional outlet that allowed him to perceive a broader range of potential life options from which to choose. Fanny’s parental disapproval of Zacarias based on his ethnic background and Fanny’s refusal to accompany him to England combined to force Zacarias to reassess his life choices in ways which severely limited his perceived range of options and compounded his extreme sense of isolation. Zacarias’s first two years in England contributed to his sense of isolation that led him to distance himself even from his family according to Abd Samad’s account.

In all three cases, the sense of isolation contributed to a felt need to establish a clear sense of self within a welcoming social environment that could somehow address their need for inclusion and personal acceptance. In this sense, each seemed to recalibrate the way they assessed life options that for Ed
Husain and Daveed, temporarily led them down the path of radicalization. In the case of Zacarias, he perceived only an extremely limited range of life options that culminated in his choice to fully commit to an extremist interpretation of Islam as means to establish a clear personal and social identity in a way that addressed his need for acceptance. His fight against perceived racial injustice was now understood within the context of an extremist interpretation of Islam.

A second notable element that the analysis of the case studies reveals is the provisional understanding of religious belief in the minds of developing youth. Ed Husain noted, that at the age of nine when confronted by his teacher with derisive remarks about Allah during their discursive exchange in the cafeteria, he expressed confusion about what the teacher actually meant. According to Husain, he claims he was not sure who Allah was except that he knew Allah was somehow related to Islam. However, he also chose to consider the fictional source *The Lion, Witch and the Wardrobe*, as a possible means to interpret his teachers reference to Allah. This underscores the notion that the cognitive strategies of developing early youth to handle abstract concepts such as religion are different from those of teens and young adults who have become more fully socialized in specific ways of thinking that subsequently influence the interpretation and understanding of religious belief. Later, Husain takes on the spiritual interpretation of Islam as promoted by his father and nominal grandfather only to later replace that understanding during his young adult years with an interpretation of Islam as an ideology that subsequently facilitated his
acceptance of more extreme interpretations of Islam as he migrated from the
YMO to Hizb-ut-Tahrir. Husain frames this progression as an intellectual journey
that paradoxically leads to increasingly narrow interpretations of Islam that he
subsequently chose to accept. In this sense, it becomes clearer to see how
social concerns for acceptance through the establishment of a particular religious
identity begin to override an ostensible cognitive-based search for religious truth
through the rational examination of belief.

In the case of Daveed, he portrays his early exposure to religious ideas
as a type of relativistic New Age smorgasbord in which his parents encouraged
consideration of a range of religious and secular ideas, and when accepted, were
syncretistically incorporated into one worldview as a means to attain spiritual
truth, i.e. though nominally Jewish, Daveed's parents did not socialize him into
accepting any specific religious tradition. Consequently, as conveyed in
Daveed's narrative, he was not anchored in any particular faith. He provides no
specific information about his early childhood understanding of faith. He choses
to summarizes this period in his life by saying he essentially inherited the beliefs
of his parents as well as their strategy of intellectually exploring ideas as means
of arriving at spiritual truth. Consequently, similar to Husain, Daveed views his
search for spiritual truth as an intellectual exercise undertaken against a
backdrop of professed isolation and loneliness during his early college years.
However, his growing interest and ultimate acceptance of Islam coincides with
the initiation of his social activism on campus that serves to help him establish a
personal and social identity suggesting that it was the social importance of acceptance by the group rather than the intellectual exploration of Islam that influenced his life choices. Consequently, although Daveed understands his progression towards his acceptance of a rigid Wahhabist interpretation of Islam as an intellectual journey, it seems more likely that he rationalized his attempt to overcome some of his objections to Wahhabist beliefs as a means to sustain social contact with a religious organization that provided him with an all-encompassing religious identity that satisfied his developmental need at that particular point in his life.

Of the three case studies, Zacarias had the least exposure to Islam during the early years of his life. Except for a brief but happy experience visiting a Koranic school with his cousins in Morocco at the age of five and half, Abd Samad reports that Zacarias did not become interested in Islam until his early adult years. Consequently, he had no religious foundation in Islam to serve as a basis to actively question and assess various Islamic interpretations against some moderate interpretive standard of Islamic belief. For Zacarias, lacking a critical understanding of Islamic belief allowed radical imams to appeal to Zacarias’ social conscious and perceived exploitation by French society to promote an extremist version of Islam as the only means to becoming a “true Muslim.” The process of Zacarias’s radicalization was not based on an intellectual engagement of ideas but rather on the recruiter’s assessment of Zacarias’ social need to dissociate himself from French society and become part
of a social group to channel his feelings of anger in response to societal discrimination. In this regard, Zacarias found solace by gravitating towards Islamic groups espousing extremist interpretations of Islam as a means to restore a personal and social identity in the form of a religious identity embodied in the role of a global jihadi warrior fighting against social injustice against Muslims, providing him with an overwhelming duty.

A third element that surfaces in each of the three case studies is the challenge of reconciling multiple identities in often hostile social environments. In the memoir of Ed Husain, he constructs a narrative in which early on he conceives of his foray into radical belief as an intellectual search prompted in part by a need to reconcile his “mixed heritage of being British by birth, Asian by descent and Muslim by conviction.” How his life unfolds becomes dependent on his perception of various life choices he sees available to him and the choices he makes that help him resolve personal and social identity issues. For example, for some youth at Stepney Green, joining a street gang was an option. For Husain, because of his acceptance of a family narrative that precluded any consideration of engaging in gang activity, he could not conceive of joining a gang as a possible option for him. Consequently, his life unfolds in a different direction in which he sought to resolve personal and social identity issues within the context of an exploration of Islamic belief systems. It is noteworthy that Husain constructs his narrative to emphasize the intellectual aspect of his
spiritual journey rather than the social status and benefits he derived from his rise to a position of importance in a religious group composed primarily of his peers.

In the case of Daveed, he too, constructs a narrative to reflect his search for spiritual truth as an intellectual journey. Similar to Husain’s memoir, there is a tension in the narrative where the progression towards radical belief is presented as a reasoned acceptance of more extreme forms of Islamic belief. However, while Daveed establishes himself as a bright and effective debater, skilled in the art of argumentation, his willingness to accept radical interpretations of radical belief because others at Al-Haramain had been practicing the Muslim faith for a longer period of time, tends to undermine his contention of rationally considering and accepting the Wahhabist interpretation of Islam. As with Husain’s account, there appears to be an important social imperative on Daveed’s part to be accepted by the group to help reconcile his personal and social identity issues. He had initially reached a point in his early college years where he described himself as isolated until he met al-Husein who subsequently served to provide him with “friendship, a sense of purpose, and a relationship with God.” When al-Husein left to attend Harvard Divinity school, Daveed’s life unfolded in a way in which his employment at Al-Haramain provided a new set of life options that, at least temporarily, allowed Daveed to become part of a social group that would enable him to address his personal and social identity issues within the context of his newly adopted faith.
The challenge facing Zacarias in terms of reconciling his multiple identities appears even more daunting considering his unsettled childhood, dysfunctional parents, and the endemic racial and ethnic discrimination he experienced growing up in France. In Abd Samad’s account, he and Zacarias when young were often confused and frustrated when people asked to explain their cultural background. According to Abd Samad, for Zacarias his reaction to racial discrimination had become an obsession which in part helps us understand why Zacarias gravitated towards an identity that embodied an extremist interpretation of Islam. This interpretation involved the rejection of French society in the way that Zacarias perceived that French society had rejected him. It appears that his relationship with Fanny had kept him tethered to his French identity until finally, when the relationship dissolved, Zacarias left his old life behind and gravitated towards a social structure that could address his need for affiliation and a sense of self now embodied in a religious identity that allowed him to assume the role of an “Islamic warrior” fighting against social injustice. In this sense, Zacarias seemed to be creating a narrative in which he could finally emerge as the hero in his life story and in so doing finally establish a clear personal and social sense of self and identity that had been lacking throughout his life.

In sum, the application of the framework tended to reveal pathways that supported the primary research hypothesis, that is, individuals will gravitate towards social structures that fulfill their developmental needs. In these milieu
radicalization is viewed as an individual’s migration towards a social structure that enforces a belief system that is in irreconcilable conflict with belief systems outside that social structure. Husain gravitated toward a peer group structure that promoted Islamic extremism as promulgated by Hib-ut-Tahrir. Daveed migrated towards a peer group structure in the form of the Al-Haramain organization that promoted extremist Wahhabist beliefs and was ultimately linked to terrorist organizations. In both cases, Husain and Daveed successfully left their restrictive peer group social settings when those social environments no longer met their developmental need to establish a personal and social identity more aligned with their future goals and objectives. For Zacarias, his recruitment into the global jihad and subsequent association with Al-Qaeda structured his life choices that led him down a restrictive radical path that ultimately led to his arrest and incarceration. Although I can make no definitive claims about the validity of the hypothesis on the basis of three case studies, the results of the analysis appear to support the general contention that individuals will tend to migrate towards social structures that address their personal and social identity needs during critical moments as their lives unfold.

ASSESSMENT OF THE FRAMEWORK

Although the limited number of case studies presented in this study could not presume to capture the enormous diversity in the various cultural environments in which radicalization occurs, they do provide an opportunity to
gain some insight into how effectively the framework functions and generates insights into the radicalization of individuals as it occurs within their unique cultural context as a product of lived experience. By drawing on the ethnographic tradition of anthropology to establish the cultural components of the framework - family, school/educational tradition, peer group, community - the framework was able to direct attention to key social structures that helped configure an individual’s life options. In particular, it focused attention on the often neglected developmental dimension of early childhood that affects the unfolding of an individual’s life trajectory over time. Positioning theory and the application of the positioning triad of social meanings, rights and duties and story-lines proved effective for gaining access to the psychological phenomenon at the individual level that conditioned individual choices, which in turn, incrementally constructed individual life trajectories in an undetermined narrative. In this regard, the framework helped identify narrative structures as they existed in critical social structures that influenced individual choices as well as narratives that were created by individuals in the process of making their choices that led towards more radicalized belief. Consequently, in examining how individual choices are structured within particular social environments at specific points in time, this interdisciplinary approach seemed well-suited for surveilling the radical pathways that an individual may traverse as their life unfolds in a particular sociocultural context.
The framework was particularly effective in identifying competing narratives that served to structure an individual’s options at a specific point in time within a particular social context that allowed an examination of radicalization as an unfolding dynamic process. In the case of Ed Husain, his acceptance in his early teen years of the family narrative that conceived of Islam as a spiritual journey was later challenged by a peer group interpretation during his late teens that viewed Islam as an ideology with political objectives. Focusing on salient social structures that were critical influences during an important developmental period in Husain’s life allowed a more nuanced understanding of how Husain came to reject his family’s interpretation of Islam in favor of a peer group interpretation that conceived of Islam as an activist ideology. In this regard, the framework was able to track and highlight Husain’s migration to a peer group social structure that he perceived as more effectively addressing his personal and social identity needs through the reconceptualization of his religious identity.

The case of Daveed offers a glimpse of how the framework can surveil radical pathways from a very different social background. In contrast to Husain and Zacarias, Daveed did not seem to experience any overt discrimination in his developmental years growing up in the “hippie town” of Ashland, Oregon. In contrast to Husain, an examination of Daveed’s family narratives that he grew up with revealed that he did not have a foundational grounding in any specific religious tradition and consequently lacked a normative baseline to compare
various versions of Islamic interpretations. In Daveed’s particular case, the framework surfaces two narratives that seemed to generate a great deal of tension during the process of establishing a personal and social identity. On one hand, he saw himself as a bright person who valued the process of rationally examining ideas. On the other hand, as Daveed was seeking to establish a religious identity in his young adult years, he seemed to compromise his belief in the critical examination of ideas in favor of rationalizing acceptance of Wahhabist extremist beliefs in order to remain as part of the Al-Haramain staff and thus retain membership in his religious peer group. It evolved into a conflict between the inherited family narrative of critical examination of ideas and tolerance of all religious traditions versus the Al-Haramain narrative of unquestioned belief in the Wahhabist interpretation of Islam as a means to establish the claim of being a “true Muslim”.

The framework was also able to identify important gaps in information that would have been useful to have to conduct a more thorough analysis. For example, we notice that in his memoir Daveed does not provides any significant detailed information on his formative school years or his social relationships during that time period. Most of what we know about Daveed’s early years is gleaned within the context of his family interaction, i.e., although he notes having friends growing up we do not have any idea about the nature of these friendships and whether they endured in any significant way during his early developmental years. The memoir leads us to speculate that he might have been socially
introverted but the framework directs our attention to this potentially significant area of Daveed’s life that may have provided insight into his choices later in life had we had access to them. In the case of both Husain and Daveed, we must recall that the information we are getting about each is from their memoir and thus we have only their personal version of what may have occurred in their lives. A full examination would require considering third person accounts and perspectives to place into a broader context what may have been influencing their individual choices. In the case of an autobiographical account, the author in many respects is attempting to create a coherent narrative as a means to make sense out of the past and establish the next iteration of their personal and social identity. In the case of Zacarias, the framework was able to assemble a plausible radical pathway that led Zacarias towards recruitment into the global Jihad. However, what was lacking in the Abd Samad memoir and obtained only indirectly through the testimony of Imam Baker, was the discursive encounters between Zacarias and potential jihadi recruiters in England. Although not overtly available, this information may have been available to British and French intelligence services as well as British law enforcement and consequently would fill an important gap in understanding Zacarias’s progression towards full recruitment into the global jihad.

One drawback to the framework is its reliance on a large volume of detailed data to understand and reconstruct individual radical pathways that may lead some individuals to become susceptible to recruitment by terrorist
organizations. Although it may limit scholars working out of the law enforcement or intelligence arenas, it should be less of a problem for analysts who are working in classified environments and would have access to classified information derived from law enforcement and intelligence investigations directed at specific target populations. The framework also has, however, the added advantage of providing a means to identify and assess potential at-risk youth populations before individuals within those populations begin to migrate towards social structures that enforce strict adherence to specific irreconcilable belief systems.

In sum, it is my contention that my proposed framework has adequately demonstrated its ability to serve as an effective analytic tool to better understand the radicalization process affecting at-risk youth across diverse cultural milieus. In so doing I also contend that the framework has established its validity on two grounds. First, its demonstrated analytic power in understanding the radicalization process across diverse cultures provides law enforcement and intelligence agencies with an effective culture-specific, context-sensitive methodology to assist in identifying and anticipating near-term potential threats to national security.

Second, on a broader level, the framework focuses attention on the vulnerability of youth and the circumstances that may lead certain youth to gravitate towards radicalized belief systems. In this sense, the framework provides a means to organize the collection of data that educators in the human
rights arena can draw on to fashion educational programs and training courses to mitigate the pernicious affects of intolerance that afflict cultural communities facing challenges to social stability through the infiltration of extremist beliefs. In keeping with the aims of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the framework provides a methodology to potentially integrate the information generated by the fieldwork of international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in the field of human rights to identify and assist at-risk youth. International organizations and NGOs in regular contact with various youth populations throughout the world are well-positioned through their social programs to apply the framework to assess and analyze their susceptibility to radicalizing influences within their social environments. Understanding local narratives and the discursive environments children find themselves in may be one way of understanding the developmental challenges that at-risk youth must face within their own unique worlds. Ultimately, the respect for universal human rights will be a function of our commitment to understand the problems afflicting youth within their unique cultural environments and our ability to respond to their developmental needs as they navigate towards adulthood.


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