

Homegrown Terrorism and Transformative Learning: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Understanding Radicalization

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ABSTRACT International Islamic terrorism is an evolving phenomenon. In the years since 9/11, a preponderance of the terrorist attacks carried out in Europe, North America, Australia, and elsewhere, have involved radicalized Western citizens. Loosely labelled as “homegrown terrorism”, perpetrators have been autonomously organized, have had little direct assistance from transnational terrorist networks, and prepare their attacks within the countries they plan on targeting. While a consensus has formed concerning the importance radicalization has in persuading Westerners to embrace terrorism, very little research properly investigates the internal and cognitive processes inherent to radicalization. We suggest that transformative learning theory, developed from the sciences in education, rehabilitation, and medicine, provides an unconventional and interdisciplinary lens with which to study Western *jihadi* radicalization. Transformative learning theory allows for a deeper understanding of the complexity associated with processes of personal change and identity formation and explains how triggering factors, like illness, economic hardship, and other socio-political variables, can result in critical reflection of existing personal belief systems. These transformative processes guide future action and can lead to sustained behavioural change. In applying transformative learning theory to homegrown terrorism, this study illustrates how once imperturbable individuals condone, legitimize, and participate in violent behaviour.

Introduction

In the years since al Qaeda’s 2001 attack on the United States, there has been unprecedented growth in violent activity related to and inspired by radical Islamism perpetrated by individuals of European, Australian, American and Canadian descent (second and third generation immigrants, long-term foreign residents, and Muslim converts). This phenomenon, loosely labelled “homegrown terrorism”, represents a

significant evolution in the threat posed by militant *jihadism*.¹ Before recently, acts of Islamic terrorism in the West were usually perpetrated by individuals living “over there”, who held particular grievances associated with their immediate and regional environment, radicalized with the assistance of local facilitators, prepared and trained for acts of terrorism within their community, and traveled to their Western targets when ready to attack. Of course, terrorism originating from within Western states is not a novel development. A variety of domestic groups, like the IRA, November 17, ETA, the Red Army Faction, the Weather Underground, and various right-wing/supremacist, anarchist, Marxist, anti-abortionist, environmentalist, and irredentist/separatist organizations have carried out terrorist attacks in Europe and North America over the past several decades.²

The difference, however, is that homegrown *jihadi* terrorism is far more destructive, usually involves mass-casualty bombings against civilians, has the potential to kill and injure thousands, and is generally associated with broad transnational socio-political grievances (legitimate or otherwise) that are not easily addressed unilaterally at the local or regional level. On the other hand, traditional domestic terrorism (with a few exceptions) is usually isolated, involves arson, assassination, gunfire, and other small-scale attacks, and is more often related to local issues. Today’s emerging threat is a distinct and more demanding security challenge. It stems in part from the growing appeal of al Qaeda’s ideology in certain pockets of Western society. For the most part, perpetrators have been citizens and residents born, raised, and educated within the countries they attack, the groups they form and join are usually autonomous, self-generated, and independently organized, while their targets have predominantly been non-combatant fellow citizens. One descriptive study of over 200 *jihadi* terrorists active

¹ Terrorism, for the purpose of this paper, is the use of indiscriminate violence against non-combatants by non-state actors with the purpose of generating fear in order to “signal”, communicate, and advance particular socio-political objectives. This definition implies that terrorism, as Bruce Hoffman notes, creates “psychological repercussions beyond the immediate victim.” Non-state terrorist organizations act independently from states and lack sovereign territorial control. Concise definitions are muddled due to the considerable overlap that exists between terrorism and other forms of political violence (like insurgency, guerrilla warfare, and civil war) and because organizations themselves diverge greatly in terms of coercive strength, decision-making structures, financing mechanisms, ideological constructions, and state association. Homegrown (or “self-starter”) terrorism is violence autonomously organized by radicalized Westerners with little direct input from existing transnational terrorist networks. It is usually organized within the home/host country and targets fellow nationals. See Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia, 2006), 40; Daniel Byman, “Understanding Proto-Insurgencies”, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 31:2 (2008), 167-170; Frank Douglas, “Waging the Inchoate War: Defining, Fighting, and Second-Guessing the ‘Long War’”, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 30:3 (2007); Bruce Hoffman and Gordon McCormick, “Terrorism, Signaling, and Suicide Attack”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 27 (2004), 248-251; Aiden Kirby, “The London Bombers as “Self-Starters”: A Case Study in Indigenous Radicalization and the Emergence of Autonomous Cliques”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 30 (2007), 415-419; and Marc Sageman. *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century*, (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), esp. Chapters 4 and 7; U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, *The Radicalization Process: From Conversion to Jihad*, (May 2006); and Tomas Precht, “Home Grown Terrorism and Islamist Radicalization in Europe: From Conversion to Terrorism”, Danish Ministry of Justice, (December 2008), 15-17.

² See for instance, Europol, *EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report*, TE-SAT 2007, 2008, and 2009, (March 2007, 2008, 2009), respectively.

in Europe between 2001-2006 found that over 90 percent of those sampled were residents of a European country and almost 60 percent retained European citizenship.³ Recent research by Bruce Hoffman, among others, however, challenges the “grass-roots” thesis inherent to homegrown terrorism given the external contact and support some Western terrorists have had with al Qaeda and others.⁴ A 2009 survey of Western *jihadists* posits, for instance, that over 40 percent of the sample under study had travelled overseas for training (or to fight) while another 22 percent (for whom data was available) traveled to receive religious instruction.⁵ Nonetheless, these revelations do not negate the simple fact that Westerners are increasingly involved in *jihadi* violence, notwithstanding international connections.

The threat of Western militant *jihadism* is not limited to one country or region, with trends suggesting an exceptionally wide and expanding geographic area of participation.⁶ In Europe, the United Kingdom is usually considered the bastion of homegrown Islamic radicalism. Of the numerous acts of terrorism organized within and against the UK by British citizens, a few stand out: in December 2001, Richard Reid, a British convert to Islam, failed to detonate a bomb concealed in his shoe while flying on American Airlines Flight 63; in 2004, a British-Pakistani terrorist cell bent on attacking the UK was disrupted (its leader, a Muslim convert, and seven members were eventually imprisoned in 2007); two sets of suicide attacks (one of which failed) were conducted in 2005 by British citizens of Pakistani, Jamaican, and East African descent, killing over 50 and injuring 700; the foiled 2006 *liquid bomb plot* targeting transatlantic aircraft involved a number of British-born individuals and at least three converts to Islam;⁷ the mildly

³ This latter figure, however, does not control for dual- (non-EU) citizenship. Edwin Bakker (with Teije Hidde Donker), “Jihadi Terrorists in Europe: Their Characteristics and the Circumstances in which they Joined the Jihad – An Exploratory Study”, Netherlands Institute of International Relations, (December 2006), 36-37.

⁴ See in particular the absolutely scathing debate between Hoffman and Sageman: Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*; Bruce Hoffman “The Myth of Grass-Roots Terrorism: Why Osama bin Laden Still Matters”, *Foreign Affairs*, 87:3, (May/June 2008) and Bruce Hoffman, “Terrorism in the West: Al-Qaeda's Role in ‘Homegrown’ Terror”, *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 13, (Spring/Summer 2007), 91-99. See also, Jeremy Pressman, “Leaderless Resistance: The Next Threat?”, *Current History*, 102, (2004); Brian Michael Jenkins, “The View from Ground Zero: Is America Safer?” *San Diego Union-Tribune*, (September 12, 2004); Bruce Riedel, “Al Qaeda Strikes Back”, *Foreign Affairs*, 86:3, (2007); Dirk Laabs and Sebastian Rotella, “Pakistan to Europe: A Pipeline of Terror”, *Los Angeles Times*, (October 17, 2007); Souad Mekhennet and Michael Moss, “Europeans Get Terror Training Inside Pakistan”, *New York Times*, (September 10, 2007); and James Brandon “Al-Qa’ida’s Involvement in Britain’s Homegrown Terrorist Plot”, *CTC Sentinel*, 2:3 (March 2009), 10-12.

⁵ Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Laura Grossman, *Homegrown Terrorists in the U.S. and U.K.: An Empirical Examination of the Radicalization Process*, Foundation for Defense of Democracies (April 2009), 57.

⁶ See Frazer Egerton and Alexandre Wilner, “Militant Jihadism in Canada: Prosecuting the War of Ideas”, *Justice, Policing, & Security*, Metropolis (Citizenship and Immigration Canada), (May 2009), 2-5; Robert Leiken and Steven Brooke, “The Quantitative Analysis of Terrorism and Immigration: An Initial Exploration”, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 18:4 (2006), 507-510.

⁷ *BBC News*, “Who Are the Terror Plot Suspects?”, (August 11, 2006); and Michael Scheuer, “The London Plot: A Tactical Victory in an Eroding Strategic Environment”, *Terrorism Focus*, 3:32, (August 15, 2006).

successful 2007 car bombing of Glasgow's International Airport (along with two foiled car bombing attempts in London) involved four British doctors;⁸ and in October 2008, a

22-year old convert, "encouraged" by internet-based literature on *jihād*, detonated an improvised explosive in an Exeter restaurant.⁹ All of this has taken place on a backdrop provided by British authorities suggesting a dramatic increase in terrorist activity since 9/11, with terrorism-related investigations jumping from fewer than 250 in 2001 to over 500 in 2004 and 800 in 2005.¹⁰

The same story holds for other parts of Europe. In France, long a target of Algerian-linked terrorist organizations (like the *Groupe Islamique Armé* (GIA)) during the 1980s and 1990s, security sources now suggest that "terrorist threats have increased massively over the past few years". Four major attacks have been foiled in recent years, including a 2000 plot on Strasbourg's Christmas market, a 2001 plan to harm American interests in Paris, a 2005 plan to bomb Paris' metro, and a 2006 attack on Paris' airport.¹¹ In 2007, President Nicolas Sarkozy revealed plans for a quadrupling of the *Groupe d'Intervention de la Gendarmerie Nationale* (GIGN), France's elite counterterrorism and hostage rescue unit, by 2010 in order to contend with expected levels of violence.¹² In Denmark, three terrorist attacks were foiled between 2005 and 2007, each of which involved Danish citizens and long-term residents.¹³ In the Netherlands, the brutal 2004 murder of Theo van Gogh, a controversial artist, by a young Muslim radical, Mohammed Bouyeri, prompted the arrest of the *Hofstad group*, an organization bent on carrying out acts of violence in the country. Some experts posit that another 20 similar groups are currently active in the country.¹⁴ In Spain, the March 2004 Madrid bombings (which killed and injured over 2000) and foiled train attack one month later were carried out, in part, by Spanish citizens. Roughly one-third of the 21 individuals eventually convicted of participating in the attack were Spaniards.¹⁵ In Germany, three individuals – two German converts and one Turkish resident – were arrested in 2007 while transporting 1,500 lbs of

⁸ Andrew Pierce, "Ties that Bind Terror Car Bomb Suspects", *The Daily Telegraph*, (July 5, 2007); David Leppard, "Britain Under Attack as Bombers Strike at Airport", *The Sunday Times*, (July 1, 2007).

⁹ Jenny Booth and David Byers, "Exeter bomb suspect 'was Islamic convert'", *Times Online*, (May 22, 2008); *Daily Mail Online*, "Foiled by Toilet Lock", (October 16, 2008).

¹⁰ House of Commons Intelligence and Security Committee, "Report into the London Terrorist Attacks on 7 July 2005", (May 2006) (Para 22).

¹¹ Kimberley Thachuk, Marion Bowman, and Courtney Richardson, "Homegrown Terrorism: The Threat Within", National Defense University (Center for Technology and National Security Policy), (May 2008), 15-17.

¹² Peter Allen, "'French SAS' to triple in size", *Telegraph* (June 25, 2007).

¹³ Nicholas Kulish, "New Terrorism Case Confirms that Denmark is a Target", *The International Herald Tribune*, (September 16, 2007); *BBC News*, "Four Face Terror Trial in Denmark", (August 24, 2006).

¹⁴ Philippe Naughton, "Van Gogh Killer Jailed for Life", *Times*, (July 25, 2005), Jocelyne Cesari, "Muslims in Europe and the Risk of Radicalism," in *Jihadi Terrorism and the Radicalisation Challenge in Europe*, ed. Coolsaet, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 101; and Berto Jongman, "Terrorism and Diasporas in the Netherlands", in Hoffman, *et al.*, *The Radicalization of Diasporas and Terrorism*, (RAND 2007), 14.

¹⁵ *BBC News*, "Madrid 'ringmaster' dies in Blast", (April 2, 2004); Paul Hamilos and Mark Tran, "21 Guilty, Seven Cleared over Madrid Train Bombings", *Guardian*, (October 31, 2007); William Rose, Rysia Murphy, and Max Abrahms, "Correspondence: Does Terrorism Ever Work? The 2004 Madrid Train Bombings", *International Security*, 32:1 (2007), 185-192;

hydrogen peroxide – the compound detonated in the London bombings.¹⁶ They were planning on attacking an American military base, a nightclub, and potentially an airport. In Italy, police disrupted a plot to bomb Milan’s subway system in 2004 and arrested a number of individuals, including an Imam, in a 2007 operation that disrupted a cell active in “recruiting and training” Italians for terrorism.¹⁷ In Belgium, a group of terrorists plotting to free al Qaeda operative Nizar Trabelsi imprisoned in the country were arrested in 2007, and another six Belgians were charged with membership in a terrorist group in 2008.¹⁸ And even in Switzerland, security officials arrested several radical Islamists planning to launch rocket-propelled grenades against El Al commercial aircraft at Geneva’s international airport.¹⁹

Outside of Europe, militant *jihadi* has figured prominently in Australia, the United States, and Canada. Seventeen people were arrested in Melbourne and Sydney in 2005 in a raid that netted large quantities of chemicals, manuals on the production of explosives, and target information. Officials noted that a number of the suspects were second-generation Australians of Lebanese descent and that none had had any known links with al Qaeda or Jemaah Islamiyah, the terrorist group responsible for the 2002 and 2005 Bali Bombings in Indonesia which killed over 220 people, including 92 Australians. Six were eventually jailed in 2009.²⁰ In the US, a teenaged-boy, Charles Bishop, flew a small private plane into a Tampa-area high-rise in January 2002. While media reports characterized the event “a suicide”, a note written by Bishop and retrieved in the wreckage praised the 9/11 attacks. “God blesses [Osama bin Laden] and the others who helped make September 11th happen.” Bishop signed the statement with: “I had no other help, although I am acting on their behalf.”²¹ Other Americans, like John Walker Lindh, Christopher Paul, Hiram Torres, James Ujaama, Adam Gadahn, and Jose Padilla, all Muslim converts, participated in *jihadi* in Pakistan and Afghanistan and others, more recently, have joined groups fighting in Somalia.²² In the years following 9/11 a number of radicalized individuals and would-be terrorist groups have plotted to attack Americans in the United States proper. In Buffalo, New York, six individuals – members of the so-

¹⁶ Mark Landler, “German Police Arrest 3 in Terrorist Plot”, *The New York Times*, (September 6, 2007); Roger Boyes, “Ten Terror Plotters Still on the Run in Germany”, *The Times Online*, (September 6, 2007).

¹⁷ Kathryn Haahr, “Italy’s Underground Islamist Network”, *Terrorism Monitor* 5:16 (August 2007).

¹⁸ Raf Casert, “Six Alleged Islamic Extremists charged in Belgium”, *Associated Press*, (December 12, 2008), Alain Grignard, “The Islamist Network in Belgium: Between Nationalism and Globalisation”, in *Jihadi Terrorism and the Radicalisation Challenge in Europe*, ed. Coolsaet, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

¹⁹ For an overview of these and many other acts of Islamist terrorism organized and carried out in Europe and North America, see Petter Nesser, “Chronology of Jihadism in Western Europe 1994-2007: Planned, Prepared, and Executed Terrorist Attacks”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 31 (2008), 924-946; Bakker, “Jihadi Terrorists in Europe”, 15-29; and Thachuk, *et al.*, “Homegrown Terrorism: The Threat Within”, 9-36.

²⁰ Raymond Bonner, “Australia arrests 16 in terror sweep”, *International Herald Tribune*, (November 9, 2005); *Associated Press*, “Australian Terrorist Leader Sentenced to 12 Years”, (February 2, 2009).

²¹ Dana Canedy, “Teenage Who Crashed Plane Praised Terrorists”, *New York Times*, (February 7, 2002); see also, Curtis Krueger, Katherine Gazella, and Ed Quioco, “Picture Emerges of Teen Suicide Plot”, *St. Petersburg Times* (Tampa Bay), (January 8, 2002); and Kathryn Wezler, “Experts See Troubled Kid who Chose Copycat Act”, *St. Petersburg Times* (Tampa Bay), (January 8, 2002).

²² Lorenzo Vidino, “Homegrown Jihadist Terrorism in the United States: A New and Occasional Phenomenon”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 32 (2009), 5-6; see also Daniel Pipes, “Converts to Terrorism”, *New York Sun* (December 6, 2005).

called “Lackawanna Six” – were arrested in 2002. All were American-born citizens of Yemeni origin. In California, four men preparing to attack El Al Airline ticket counters at Los Angeles International Airport, a number of synagogues, and military facilities, were arrested in 2005. Three of the four men were American-born Muslim converts.²³ Other individuals were arrested in 2006 for planning to attack Chicago’s Sears Tower and in 2007 for a planned attack on US military base Fort Dix in New Jersey.²⁴ In Canada, Mohammad Momin Khawaja was recently sentenced to over ten years of prison for financing and facilitating terrorism in association with a plot in the UK. The Khadr family, despite the continuing controversy over their son Omar, have long been accused of having ties to Osama bin Laden and of supporting al Qaeda efforts.²⁵ And finally, of the eighteen Canadians apprehended on terrorism charges in Ontario in 2006, one has since been found guilty, another entered a surprise guilty plea in May 2009, and nine other trials are ongoing.²⁶ “What we’re onto scares us,” explains RCMP Assistant Commissioner Mike McDonnell, noting that Canadian security officials are actively investigating seven suspected terrorist plots in Canada and over 800 other national security cases.²⁷

The purpose of this paper is to investigate these emerging trends by focusing on the individual processes that are associated with the *jihadi* radicalization of Westerners. Doing so is important for two reasons. First, international *jihadi* terrorism continues to evolve in nature and scope. While remnants of al Qaeda *Central* continue to exist in some functioning form (notably along the Pakistan-Afghan border, and in pockets of Iraq, Yemen, Somalia, Uzbekistan, North Africa, and elsewhere) and carry on organizing acts of terrorism both locally and globally, al Qaeda *inspired* terrorism is an emerging and novel development.²⁸ It involves unaffiliated individuals and groups tapping into al Qaeda’s ideological message in order to justify their use of violence against Western states and citizens.²⁹ With a little encouragement, individuals who are predisposed to accept al Qaeda’s vision of international relations create small networks, near-autonomously, and self-finance and independently prepare acts of violence. The threat is

²³ Jeremiah Marquez, “Third Man Pleads Guilty in Homegrown Terror Case in Southern Cal[ifornia]”, *Associated Press*, (December 17, 2007).

²⁴ See U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Terrorism 2002-2005*, 3-29.

²⁵ See Stewart Bell, *Cold Terror: How Canada Nurtures and Exports Terrorism around the World* (Wiely, 2004), esp. Chapter 6.

²⁶ Kirk Makin, “Toronto Man Admits to Terror Plot in Surprise Plea”, *Globe and Mail*, (May 5, 2009).

²⁷ Ian MacLoed, “RCMP has 843 active national security investigations”, *Ottawa Citizen*, (May 7, 2008); Ian MacLoed, “CSIS Focuses on Homegrown Terrorism Threat”, *Ottawa Citizen*, (March 14, 2008); Stewart Bell, “Jihadists Born Here pose New Threat”, *National Post*, (November 19, 2005); Colin Freeze, “Terror ‘wannabes’ Canada’s Biggest Threat”, *Globe and Mail*, (May 8, 2008).

²⁸ Marc Sageman is a leading proponent of this thesis. “Al Qaeda,” he suggests, “is operationally dead. There is no Al Qaeda anymore. The social movement is alive and well, but the guys who [attacked] Madrid, Casablanca, and Istanbul were *not* Al Qaeda. They were people who were doing operations on *behalf* of Al Qaeda, but they were not Al Qaeda. The old Al Qaeda is hiding away in caves someplace.” See Marlena Telvick, “Al Qaeda Today: The New Face of the Global Jihad” *FRONTLINE*, Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), January 25, 2005; Marc Sageman, “Understanding Terror Networks”, Foreign Policy Research Institute, November 1, 2004. For al Qaeda global “franchises” see, Michael Scheuer, “al-Qaeda and Algeria’s GSPC: Part of a Much Bigger Picture”, *Terrorism Focus*, 4:8 (April 2007).

²⁹ Alex Wilner, “The Campaign against Terrorism: Successes and Failures”, *CSS Analysis in Security Policy*, No. 48, (February 2009).

unlikely to dissipate any time soon. Because radicalization is a lynchpin to the homegrown terrorism process, gaining a better appreciation of the phenomenon will lead to a more informed policy response. Second, academic and policy research on homegrown terrorism has, to date, focused primarily on terrorist behaviour (what it is individuals do upon joining a terrorist outfit and how these organizations function in practice) and on the pre-conditions and factors that prompt individuals to join or form terrorist groups in the first place (the environmental and motivational “root” factors informing terrorist participation). But much less research is associated with the *processes of radicalization* at the individual level, exploring in particular how once non-violent and possibly docile individuals transform into persons who accept and partake in terrorism. The few studies that do investigate the processes of Western *jihadi* radicalization are primarily oriented towards the structural characteristics of the phenomenon, identifying the various step-like phases (from “pre-radicalization” to “violent behaviour”) individuals travel through on their way toward conducting terrorism.³⁰ What these studies do not explore is the *transformation of meaning perspectives*, a term that connotes, among other things, an individual’s cognitive construction of new definitions of self. This paper is an attempt to address research gaps by applying an educational perspective of adult learning and personal change (Dubouloz *et al.*, 2007) to homegrown terrorism in order to explore how transformations in meaning perspectives might be associated with the internal processes of radicalization.

By concentrating on the processes of personal change in identity and self, our investigation sheds light on the pathways of radicalization in order to better understand how individuals come to accept extremist interpretations of Islam, identify with international *jihadism*, condone and later endorse indiscriminate violence, and eventually participate in terrorism. We do so by applying existing approaches proposed by *transformative learning theory*. Developed in the sciences of education, particularly in adult learning, and applied to the study of rehabilitation in health sciences and medicine, transformative learning theory addresses the development of personal change and the (re)construction of personal identity with respect to health crises and personal injury. We apply it to the individual radicalization pathway inherent to homegrown terrorism. Our approach provides an unconventional and interdisciplinary lens with which to study radicalization in Western society and allows for a novel understanding of the complexity associated with processes of personal change. This study is primarily a preliminary, theoretically-driven investigation, a first step towards generating new ideas. It is our hope that in analysing homegrown terrorism through transformative learning theory we can shed light on how imperturbable individuals legitimize violent behaviour and how radicalization spreads and sustains itself within a given social setting.

³⁰ For recent studies on the structural processes of radicalization, see Gartenstein-Ross and Grossman, *Homegrown Terrorists in the U.S. and U.K.* (2009); Precht, “Home Grown Terrorism and Islamist Radicalization in Europe”, (December 2008); Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, “Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways Toward Terrorism”, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 20:3, (2008); John Horgan *The Psychology of Terrorism*, (New York: Routledge, 2005), esp. Chapter 5; FBI, *The Radicalization Process*; New York Police Department (Intelligence Division), *Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat*, (2007).

Our arguments are structured as follows. The first section briefly introduces existing research on radicalization pertaining to *jihadi* violence, particularly the literature on the precursors of homegrown terrorism. The second introduces transformative learning theory, outlines its core tenets, and identifies its existing research agenda in the health/medicine and education sciences. In the third section, transformative learning theory is applied to the radicalization process. The article concludes by drawing out the theoretical implications of the analysis and suggests avenues for further research.

*Radicalization: The Precursors of Jihadism in the West*³¹

Individuals who contemplate killing their fellow citizens in campaigns of terrorism do so, in great part, because their beliefs dictate that murder is feasible and just. “Individuals are ideologically driven,” notes Rohan Gunaratna, “not operationally driven.”³² Violent actions are rarely constructed in a vacuum. In the case of homegrown terrorism, a number of factors are thought to inform extremist behaviour. As Lidewijde Ongering, Dutch Deputy National Coordinator for Counterterrorism, offered in his testimony to the US Senate, “people who set out to kill other people for political or religious reasons first go through a process of radicalization.”³³

Radicalization is best understood as a personal process in which the individual adopts extreme political, social, or religious ideals and aspirations, and where the attainment of particular goals justifies the use of indiscriminate violence.³⁴ According to Brian Michael Jenkins, a noted expert on terrorism, “radicalization comprises internalizing a set of beliefs, a militant mindset that embraces violent jihad as the paramount test of one’s conviction.”³⁵ It is a mental process that both prepares and motivates an individual to pursue violent behaviour. Understanding what drives extremism and radicalization is perhaps the most challenging aspect of countering homegrown terrorism. Few, if any, generalizable rules seem to apply. As the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) reveals in a recent (and classified) study, “there does not appear to be a single process that leads to extremism: the transformation is highly individual.”³⁶ European experts seem to agree. “The paths and motivations ... to Islamic political radicalism,” writes Akil Awan, “are many and varied, with no simple cause and effect calculus appearing to be tenable.”³⁷ Jonathan Githens-Mazer adds, colourfully, that “the story behind how and

³¹ This section is based, in small part, on previous work published by Dr. Wilner, in: Alex Wilner, *Enemies Within: Combating Homegrown Terrorism in Canada*, Atlantic Institute for Market Studies (AIMS), (September 2008), 1-32.

³² Rohan Gunaratna, “Al Qa’ida and Diasporas”, in Hoffman, *et al.*, *The Radicalization of Diasporas and Terrorism*, (RAND 2007), 39.

³³ Lidewijde Ongering, “Home-Grown Terrorism and Radicalisation in the Netherlands: Experiences, Explanations, and Approaches”, Testimony, U.S. Senate (Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs), June, 27, 2007.

³⁴ For a thorough discussion of the difficulties in properly defining and delineating between “violent, non-violent, political, and religious” radicalization, radicalism, and political manifestation, see, European Commission, *Radicalisation Process Leading to Acts of Terrorism*, (May 2008), 5-7.

³⁵ Brian M. Jenkins, “Building an Army of Believers: Jihadist Radicalization and Recruitment”, Testimony, U.S. House of Representatives (Committee on Homeland Security), April 5, 2007.

³⁶ Quoted in Bell, “Jihadists Born Here pose New Threat”.

³⁷ Akil Awan, “Antecedents of Islamic Political Radicalism among Muslim Communities in Europe”, *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 41:1 (2008), 16.

why each individual may come to be a radical violent Islamist is as unique as a fingerprint.”³⁸ Another expert suggests simply that “the overall pattern is that there is no pattern.”³⁹

Nonetheless, there is a burgeoning literature on the *precursors* (or “background factors”) of radicalization and violent *jihadism* that identifies and explores the socio-political and environmental factors that (may) lead to extremist behaviour. Originating from the “root cause” literature on international terrorism, recent research has begun to focus on the development of homegrown terrorism in particular. Of the many factors identified within the literature as potential precursors of Western *jihadi* radicalization,⁴⁰ we identify three as the most pertinent: socio-political alienation, deepening religious identity, and a rejection of foreign policy positions.

Socio-political Alienation and a Failure of Integration

Perhaps the most often cited precursor of radicalization and homegrown terrorism is the lack of socio-political integration particular Western Muslim communities have with their broader society, and relatedly, their experiences of discrimination, victimization, and xenophobia.⁴¹ The assumption rests on the notion that individuals and fringe groups who fail to properly associate with their host (or native) country and nation – the so-called “unassimilated” – eventually seek other like-minded individuals to associate with.⁴² In so doing, they construct a narrow social network that is distinct from broader societal ones and establish identities that reflect the “clique” rather than the nation.⁴³ While the decoupling of a national identity does not clarify why or how individuals radicalize in the first place, it does help explain how alienated individuals might eventually rationalize and justify attacking ‘fellow’ citizens.⁴⁴ A report by the Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service suggests that the process of societal rejection – dubbed “extreme isolationism” – threatens Europe’s democratic political order because it is a “slow process which ... gradually harm[s] social cohesion and solidarity and undermine[s]

³⁸ Jonathan Githens-Mazer, “Variations on a Theme: Radical Violent Islamism and European North African Radicalization”, *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 41:1 (2008), 22; See also, Precht, “Home Grown Terrorism and Islamist Radicalization in Europe”, 5-7.

³⁹ Precht “Home Grown Terrorism and Islamist Radicalization in Europe”, 11.

⁴⁰ Other precursors identified in the literature include: personal/familial problems (divorce, bereavement), personal boredom/desire for adventure, an attraction to violence, economic hardship (job lose), lack of debate within Muslim communities concerning the use of violence, family ties/social connections to violent groups, and charismatic radical leadership. Facilitating factors include the Internet and radical milieus (mosques, study groups, gangs, prison, online chat groups). See for instance, Horgen *The Psychology of Terrorism*, esp. Chapter 4; Louise Richardson, *What Terrorists Want: Understanding the Enemy, Containing the Threat*, (New York: Random House, 2007), esp. Chapter 3; and Precht “Home Grown Terrorism and Islamist Radicalization in Europe”, 42-50.

⁴¹ See Sam Mullins, “Home-grown Terrorism: Issues and Implications”, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 1:3 (2007); Precht, “Home Grown Terrorism and Islamist Radicalization in Europe”, 43-45.

⁴² Jocelyne Cesari, “Terrorism and Diasporas in the United States”, in Hoffman, *et al.*, *The Radicalization of Diasporas and Terrorism*, (RAND 2007), 33.

⁴³ The importance of social networking and social bonding to terrorist formation is discussed, at length, by Marc Sageman in *Understanding Terror Networks*, (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 137-173.

⁴⁴ See Vidino, “Homegrown Jihadist Terrorism in the United States,” 11-12; and

certain fundamental human rights.”⁴⁵ As a result, some radicalized individuals distance themselves politically, socially, and even ideologically from the broader community, eventually rejecting the national identity shared by their fellow citizens, along with the collective’s underlining political ideology, historical narrative, and related value-systems. Anti-democratic action and violence is one possible outcome.

The polarization of society between different religious and cultural groups weakens the bonds of state identity, civil association, and nationalism. In time, the broader communities in which the radicalized individuals live risk being characterized as enemies. “The reality in Western Europe,” suggests Jack Granatstein, a pre-eminent Canadian historian, “is that the second and third generation of Muslim citizens are more fiercely Islamist than their parents. At the same time, their sense of themselves as Dutch or British or French citizens ... is much less strong than their identity as Muslims.”⁴⁶ For Granatstein, at issue is the widespread failure to socially and politically integrate particular individuals into society and to properly teach, diffuse, and ingrain the lessons of democracy, peaceful dispute resolution, and the rule of law. The results are individuals who spur acceptance of their nation’s identity and fail to appreciate the state’s social and political norms, both of which ease the use of violence if and when it is contemplated. Consider these candid statements provided by ‘Ousman’, an imprisoned French Islamist:

“I understood that I was different, that I was not French, that I would never become French and that I had no business trying to become French either. I took it well. I was proud of my new Muslim identity. That was my reconquest of myself, my burst of lucidity, my awakening ... no more desire to become part of this France that did not want me.”⁴⁷

Since the Madrid and London bombings, government policies across Europe and North America have been tailored specifically towards addressing the sort of socio-political alienation ‘Ousman’ and his cohorts express. In the Netherlands the focus is on preventing radicalization by promoting and strengthening socio-political integration. ‘If an individual feels Dutch’ the rationale goes, ‘s/he won’t think about attacking other Dutch’. To that end, explains Berto Jongman from the Dutch Ministry of Defense, the development of “new methods of communication between Muslims and non-Muslims” were developed with the intent of (re)integrating at-risk communities into Dutch society.⁴⁸ Approaches have included obligatory “integration courses”, language examinations that are to be administered (and presumably passed) in home countries prior to immigration to the West, national oaths, the required viewing of cultural films relating Western values and life style, setting up “homework support cafés” for disenfranchised

⁴⁵ General Intelligence and Security Services (Ministry of Interior), Government of The Netherlands, *The Radical Dawa in Transition: The Rise of Islamic Neoradicalism in the Netherlands* (2007), 9-12.

⁴⁶ Jack L. Granatstein, *Whose War Is It? How Canada Can Survive in the Post-9/11 World*, (Toronto: HarperCollins, 2007), 179.

⁴⁷ John Rosenthal, “The French Path to Jihad.” *Policy Review*, 139 (2006).

⁴⁸ Jongman, “Terrorism and Diasporas in the Netherlands”, 14.

youths, government recruitment campaigns in minority communities, and the like.⁴⁹ If homegrown terrorism is the product of segregation, resentment, and malaise then investing in reintegration programs, the thinking goes, should help stifle its development.

At issue, however, is the fact that homegrown terrorists, for the most part, *have* been well-integrated citizens of the countries they target. As decidedly anti-Canadian the Toronto suspects may have been for targeting their neighbours with terrorism, they nonetheless retained a certain and identifiable *Canadianness*. Like the London transit bombers who dined on fish and chips and enjoyed watching football on the telly, those rounded up in Ontario looked and behaved much like other young Torontonians. As Robert Mueller, former director of the FBI, has suggested, what differentiates these terrorists from transnational ones is that they are essentially “members of the community.”⁵⁰ Awan writes that the most “striking aspects” of Western militant Islamism is “the degree to which its proponents are ... ensconced within the majority culture prior to radicalization.”⁵¹ Most, if not all, homegrown militant *jihadists* were at onetime both Western in appearance and behaviour. All of this suggests that individuals might in fact retain more than one identity – a “majority” cultural identity that reflects the socio-political mainstream of the broader national community, and a “minority” cultural identity that reflects more traditional concepts inherent to religious practice and belief.⁵² At particular times, one or another of these identities plays a more central role in the individual’s associations with others from the broader national community.

The unresolved mystery, though, *is why and how does identity switch in the first place*. What are the triggers and processes that lead to the overshadowing of the majority identity by the minority one and the violent behaviour that follows? That the radicalization process is often exceptionally rapid compounds the dilemma.⁵³ Following the foiled 2006 *liquid bomb plot*, Ian Blair, London’s Police Chief, expressed “shock” at the “apparent speed with which young, reasonably affluent ... well-educated, British-born people were converted [from] ordinary lives in a matter of some weeks and months ... to a position where they were ... prepared to commit suicide and murder thousands of people.”⁵⁴ Socio-political alienation and a lack of integration may be precursors to extremism but they cannot explain what tipping point catalyzes the radicalization process. That a vast majority of Western Muslims who suffer from real or perceived alienation do *not* become terrorists and that many of the radicalized Westerners who have supported terrorism are neither alienated nor deprived, suggests further that something else is at play. The 2007 Glasgow attack, for instance, was conducted by highly-educated and

⁴⁹ Ibid., 15; Stewart Bell, “Make Immigrants Take Oath of Loyalty”, *National Post*, (March 1, 2006); Ministry of Refugee, Immigration, and Integration Affairs, *A Common and Safe Future*, Government of Denmark, (June 2008),9-10.

⁵⁰ Robert Mueller, Remarks to The City Club of Cleveland, Cleveland, Ohio, (June 23, 2006).

⁵¹ Awan, “Antecedents of Islamic Political Radicalism”, 15

⁵² Kirby distinguishes between “structural” and “identity” assimilation. Kirby, “The London Bombers as “Self-Starters””, 424-425.

⁵³ The official UK report on the 2005 London bombings suggests that the radicalization process of some of those involved in the bombings took place in a matter of weeks. “Report into the London Terrorist Attacks”, 29-30

⁵⁴ Michael Holden, “UK Airline Bomb Suspects “Radicalized in Weeks””, *Reuters*, (January 24, 2007).

successful individuals; one even had a PhD in Engineering. A simple *frustration-aggression hypothesis* offers only a weak assessment of what is actually going on. Finally, alienation does not help clarify the processes that are involved in turning once “normal”, “fun-loving”, “top lads” into murderous terrorists within months.⁵⁵

Religiosity and Globalization

Militant *jihadism*, whether pursued in Europe or Afghanistan, is intrinsically associated with Islam. Though it is extremely doubtful that its religious tenets condone the sort of indiscriminate and brutal violence being committed in its name, adherents of militant *jihadism* nonetheless self-identify as “true Muslims” and evoke Islam to justify their actions. Just as Osama bin Laden perceives his *holy war* as one pitting a “vanguard” of pious believers against non-believers in the West (the “far enemy”) and apostates in the East (the “near enemy”), so to do the young radicalized Westerners.⁵⁶ In a 1998 interview with *ABC News*, bin Laden put it this way: “Allah ordered us in this region to purify Muslim land of all nonbelievers.”⁵⁷ Bouyeri, the *Hofstad group* member who killed van Gogh in Amsterdam in 2004, stated during his trial that “what moved me to do what I did was purely my faith. I was motivated by the law that commands me to cut off the head of anyone who insults Allah.”⁵⁸ Recent studies seem to corroborate the religious-radicalization nexus. In their 2009 study, *Homegrown Terrorists in the U.S. and U.K.*, Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Laura Grossman suggest that an “individual’s theological understanding was a relatively strong factor in their radicalization.” Just under 40 percent of their sample of Western *jihadists* explicitly claimed a “religious motivation” for their violent behaviour.⁵⁹

An emerging difference between bin Laden’s and Bouyeri’s justification, however, is in their appreciation for the minutiae of religious jurisprudence. Bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, and other leaders of transnational Islamic terrorist organizations are careful to present solid religious interpretations that speak to existing ideas on religious doctrine and engage current debates when justifying their violent actions.⁶⁰ In one manner, Jerry M. Long argues, bin Laden “functions as a kind of lay *mujtahid*, one who gives independent interpretation to Islamic text,” but even then he is “not free to give just any interpretation, or else he would have no legitimacy.”⁶¹ Bin Laden is careful to couch his calls for violent action along pre-existing and generally well-regarded religious discourse,

⁵⁵ *Vancouver Sun*, “‘Nice, Normal Guy’ Accused of Leading Plot”, (June 5, 2006); Amany Radwan, “Portrait of the Terrorist as a young Man”, *Times Online*, (October 6, 2001); Paul Stokes and Nick Britten, “The Cricket-loving Terrorist whose Father Runs the Local Chip Shop”, *Telegraph*, (July 14, 2007).

⁵⁶ See Fawaz Gerges, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* (NYC: Cambridge University Press, 2005), esp. Chapter 3; and Fawaz Gerges, *The Journey of the Jihadist: Inside Muslim Militancy* (Toronto: Harcourt, 2006), esp. Chapter 4.

⁵⁷ Judith Miller, “Even a Jihad has its Rules”, *International Herald Tribune*, (August 29, 1998).

⁵⁸ Philippe Naughton, “Van Gogh Killer Jailed for Life”, *Times Online*, (July 26, 2005).

⁵⁹ Gartenstein-Ross and Grossman, *Homegrown Terrorists in the U.S. and U.K.*, 55-56.

⁶⁰ Rohan Gunaratna, “Al Qa’ida and Diasporas”, in Hoffman, *et al.*, *The Radicalization of Diasporas and Terrorism*, (RAND 2007), 39. For a brief assessment of recent ideological debates within *jihadi* ranks, see, Robert Worth, “Credentials Challenged, Radical Quotes West Point”, *International Herald Tribune*, (April 28, 2009).

⁶¹ Jerry M. Long, “Strategic Culture, Al-Qaida, and Weapons of Mass Destruction”, Defense Threat Reduction Agency (Advanced Systems and Concepts Office), U.S. Government, (November 2006), 9.

thereby legitimizing his actions along religious lines and gaining the widest possible acceptance from the global Muslim community.

This is quite different from the Bouyeri model. Generally, young radicals in Europe and North America are much less well-versed in theology as their international counterparts and only poorly equipped to appreciate the intricate nuances of their religious beliefs. Many of them have very weak religious roots and lack informed and structured learning. Their education, Tom Quiggin, a former RCMP officer, suggests, “is usually nothing but cherry-picked Koranic statements heavily laced with poisonous jihadist messages that bear little resemblance to the actual message of Islam.”⁶² The result is a call to arms devoid of any substantive link to accepted religious doctrine. Instead, theirs is violence calling upon Islam for justification but falling well short of the mark. A report, published by the Dutch Ministry of the Interior, suggests that “religious ignorance among young European Muslims and their insufficient command of Arabic, lead to a relatively simple, often non-coherent ideology which justifies the use of violence against people with different ideas.” The result is a “‘cut-and-past’ version of Islam” which is rehashed into a “revolutionary pamphlet” of global *jihad*.⁶³ RCMP Assistant Commissioner McDonnell adds that homegrown terrorists are attracted to “sound-bite Islam” and are less religious scholars than violent misfits who misappropriate “religious labels”.⁶⁴ This suggests that while religion is perhaps a necessary factor for *jihadi* radicalization in the West – indeed, most homegrown *jihadists* share a rapid and sudden increase in their level of religiosity and observance in the period leading up to their radicalization – it is not in itself a sufficient variable. Some other factor is required.

That factor, some researchers posit, is globalization. Olivier Roy, in his monumental work, *Globalised Islam* (2004), explains that the forces associated with globalization (modernization, urbanization, secularism, displacement, hi-tech communications, and so on) creates tension for young Western Muslims who find themselves caught adhering to traditional socio-religious beliefs in a non-religious environment. What results is a confused identity. Radicalization, Roy posits, is one way disenfranchised Muslim youths in the West have gone about reasserting their religious identity within non-Muslim contexts. “In radical Islam,” writes Roy, individuals find “a way to recast and rationalise their sense of exclusion and uprootedness”, replacing missing interpersonal ties and kinship and re-establishing a sense of belonging.⁶⁵ For Roy, the Internet is a critical component of that remedy, allowing individuals to create an “abstract and virtual community of believers” that rests outside the confines of a specific city, country, or region. Instead of following a local group or religious leader – as had been the norm in previous generations – today’s youths surf the Internet and “choose, quote, or follow whomsoever he/she wants.”⁶⁶ Increasingly, radicalization is occurring well outside the

⁶² Quoted in Stewart Bell, “Nevermind Foreign Terrorists, why is Canada Growing its own Extremists?”, *National Post*, (June 3, 2006.)

⁶³ General Intelligence and Security Services (Ministry of Interior), Government of The Netherlands, *Violent Jihad in the Netherlands: Current Trends in the Islamist Terrorist Threat*, (March 2006), 32-33.

⁶⁴ Freeze, “Terror ‘wannabes’ Canada’s Biggest Threat”; Awan, “Antecedents of Islamic Political Radicalism”, 13.

⁶⁵ Olivier Roy, *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Umma*, (London: Hurst, 2004), 324.

⁶⁶ Religioscope, “Globalized Islam – Interview with Olivier Roy”, (November 8, 2004).

Mosque.⁶⁷ The result is a “de-territorialization” of religious practice and belief. That the images Western *jihadists* consume weave together events from a number of different regional contexts helps explain how and why individuals in Canada could find common ground with their supposed counterparts in Pakistan, Chechnya, and Egypt despite profound differences in their experiences.

But, as in the case with alienation and integration, neither religious practice nor globalization ferments Western radicalism in and of itself. There are plenty of converts and newly practicing Muslims (a vast majority, in fact) living in the West that do not radicalize. Instead, they vociferously and unabashedly condemn violence in the name of their religion. Marc Sageman suggests that “the terrorists in Western Europe and North America were not intellectuals or ideologues, much less religious scholars. It is not about how they think, but how they feel.”⁶⁸ Tomas Precht adds, that “religion plays an important role,” in the radicalization process, “but for some it rather serves as a vehicle for fulfilling other goals.”⁶⁹ While religious adherence and globalization may help create an environment in which *jihadi* radicalization can more easily occur, they do not in and of themselves cause radicalization. Nor does religious practice explain why one individual radicalizes and another does not.

Reaction to Foreign Policy

A third factor considered a precursor to Western *jihadi* radicalization is the reaction to, and eventual violent rejection of, a host or native state’s foreign policy. Western militant *jihadists*, some argue, are motivated by perceived injustices taking place against Muslims around the globe. Bin Laden has put it this way: “The truth is the whole Muslim world is the victim of international terrorism, engineered by America and the United Nations. We are a nation whose sacred symbols have been looted and whose wealth and resources have been plundered. It is normal for us to react against the forces that invade our land and occupy it.”⁷⁰ For reasons to do with trans-national religious solidarity, the alleged victimization of Muslims in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Palestinian Territories, Somalia, Chechnya and elsewhere by United States, its allies and other actors usually associated with the Western world (NATO, the IMF, the UN) compels Western Muslims to act. “Perceived provocation,” explains Awan, “serve[s] as a *casus belli* that sanctions the recourse to jihadism.”⁷¹ There are at least three categories of perceived grievances:

⁶⁷ This is a major finding provided by a recent study produced by the University of London on behalf of the European Commission (the executive branch of the EU). See, *Recruitment and Mobilisation for the Islamist Militant Movement in Europe*, University of London/European Commission, (December 2007), 33-65. Other venues that facilitate radicalization include prisons (see Frank Cilluffo *et al.*, “Radicalization: Behind Bars and Beyond Borders”, *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 13:2 (2007), and even real-time Internet chat rooms (Tim Stevens and Peter Neumann, *Countering Online Radicalisation: A Strategy for Action*, The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, (January 2009); and Frank Cilluffo, Gregory Saathoff, *et al.*, *NETworked Radicalization: A Counter-Strategy*, Homeland Security Policy Institute (May 2007)).

⁶⁸ Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, 155-157.

⁶⁹ Precht, “Home Grown Terrorism and Islamist Radicalization in Europe”, 7.

⁷⁰ Though keeping to the script, bin Laden blames the worldwide Jewish conspiracy for Western aggression: “The leaders in America and in other countries as well have fallen victim to Jewish Zionist blackmail”, Osama bin Laden, interview with *ABC News’* John Miller, *PBS Frontline*, (May 1998).

⁷¹ Awan, “Antecedents of Islamic Political Radicalism”, 16.

insults against Islam (i.e. the publication of *The Satanic Verses* (1988), the Mohammad Cartoons (2005), and the screening of films *Submission* (2004) and *Fitna* (2008)), Western complacency in the face of Muslim suffering (i.e. in Bosnia, Kashmir, the Palestinian territories, Chechnya, China's Xinjiang Province, and elsewhere), and overt Western military aggression against Muslims (the 1990 and 2003 Iraq Wars, the 1993 intervention in Somalia, the 2001 Afghan war, the Arab-Israeli Conflict). These and other developments, the argument suggests, humiliate and anger some Western Muslims to the point that they feel justified to take revenge against the citizens and states that condone or participate in these perceived injustices. In his quantitative study of British radicalization in particular, Brendan O'Duffy finds that "British foreign policy [is] a significant source of alienation among younger British Muslims ... [and] that attitudes towards British foreign policy interact with and often reinforce domestic social, cultural, and economic sources of discontent."⁷² The point has very little to do with whether or not some form of organized persecution, xenophobia, or dishonour against Muslims is actually taking place or whether or not Western foreign policy concerning the Arab and Muslim world is in fact biased and malicious. What matters is that pockets of the Muslim community in the West *do* accept that these grievances exist and think in terms of victimhood. Radicalization is a reaction to these and other prejudices and violent behaviour a response considered legitimate.

A number of studies on international terrorism posit that violence is directly related to international conditions and Western foreign policy. Robert Pape, for instance, suggests that suicide terrorism in particular follows a strategic logic, in which terrorists attempt to "inflict enough pain and threaten enough future pain to overwhelm the target country's interest in resisting the terrorists' demands."⁷³ Those demands, Pape finds in his quantitative study of suicide bombings, are in most cases tailored against democratic states and relate to their policy positions concerning foreign occupation and military engagement.⁷⁴ Though his work has been criticized rather successfully on both theoretical and methodological grounds,⁷⁵ Pape's suggestion that occupation and foreign policy are related to terrorism retains a degree of resonance, especially in cases of Western radicalization. Mohammed Siddique Khan, one of the four suicide bombers who

⁷² Brendan O'Duffy, "Radical Atmosphere: Explaining Jihadist Radicalization in the UK", *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 41:1 (2008), 37.

⁷³ Robert Pape, "Suicide Terrorism and Democracy: What We've Learned Since 9/11", *Policy Analysis* (CATO Institute) No. 582, (2006), 4.

⁷⁴ See Robert Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*, (New York: Random House, 2005); and Robert Pape, "The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism", *American Political Science Review*, 97:3 (2003); Robert Pape, "Methods and Findings in the Study of Suicide Terrorism", *American Political Science Review* 102:2 (2008). See also, Bruce Hoffman, "The Logic of Suicide Terrorism", *The Atlantic Monthly* (June 2003).

⁷⁵ Scott Atran suggests that Pape's work, which analyzed data for just over 300 acts of suicide terrorism between 1980 and 2003, was outdated following a 24-month period that ended in 2006 in which another 300 suicide attacks occurred worldwide. Relying on this new data, Atran suggests that Pape's "occupation" thesis misinterprets the emerging historical record. See Scott Atran, "The Moral Logic and Growth of Suicide Terrorism", *The Washington Quarterly*, 29:2 (2006), 128-139; and Scott Atran, "Mishandling Suicide Terrorism", *The Washington Quarterly* 27:3, (2004). For methodological critiques of Pape's work, see Scott Ashworth *et al.*, "Design, Inference, and the Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism", *American Political Science Review* 102:2 (April 2008), 269-273.

attacked London's transit system in 2005, for instance, explained his rationale for terrorism as such:

Your democratically elected governments continuously perpetuate atrocities against my people all over the world. And your support of them makes you directly responsible, just as I am directly responsible for protecting and avenging my Muslim brothers and sisters. Until we feel security, you will be our targets. And until you stop the bombing, gassing, imprisonment and torture of my people we will not stop this fight.⁷⁶

In Khan's worldview, the UK and its citizens were guilty of condoning and participating in what he interpreted as British aggression against his fellow community-members living elsewhere in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.

Once again, however, the causal pathways connecting violent radicalization to Muslim reactions concerning foreign policy are fuzzy. Take the 2003 Iraq war, perhaps the most oft-cited foreign policy precursor for homegrown terrorism. A number of major attacks – notably, the 2001 shoe bombing attempt, and, according to some, the planning behind the Madrid attacks – predate the invasion.⁷⁷ Countries that refused to participate in the conflict (Canada, Belgium) and others that went further and vociferously condemned the United States (France, Germany) nonetheless suffered homegrown *jihadi* violence, while a number of countries that *did join* the U.S. have not (Poland, Romania, South Korea, El Salvador, Japan). And countries that participated in the invasion but later withdrew (Spain, Denmark, Italy, the Netherlands) nonetheless suffered attacks even after having pulled their troops. Spain's experience following the Madrid bombings is especially enlightening. Primarily meant to compel Spain to withdraw its troops from Iraq, the first attack took place on March 11, 2004.⁷⁸ It was timed precisely to coincide with Spain's March 14 national election. Defying expectations, voters, after linking the Madrid bombings to Spain's involvement in Iraq, removed the governing People's Party (which had sided with the U.S. and sent 1,300 troops to the Persian Gulf) and gave Socialist, antiwar candidate Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero control of the government. Immediately following his victory, Zapatero followed through with his electoral pledge to withdraw Spanish soldiers from Iraq, a conflict he lambasted as "a fiasco".⁷⁹ Though Zapatero's election and Spain's immediate foreign policy reversal were deemed a strategic victory for al Qaeda and its supporters, Spaniards themselves could be excused for having voted for what they expected was a secession of terrorism. After all, they had given those responsible for the Madrid bombings what they had wanted – a dramatic shift in foreign policy. But the terrorism did not stop. On April 2, well after Zapatero took steps to

⁷⁶ *BBC News*, "London Bomber: Text in Full", September 1, 2005.

⁷⁷ See Claude Moniquet, "The Radicalisation of Muslim Youth in Europe: The Reality and the Scale of the Threat", Testimony, US House of Representatives, April 27, 2005. See also the nearly two dozen pre-2003 attempted attacks listed in Nesser, "Chronology of Jihadism in Western Europe", 929-932

⁷⁸ See Javier Jordan and Robert Wesley, "The Madrid Attacks: Results of Investigations Two Years Later," *Terrorism Monitor*, 4:5 (2006); and William Rose, et al., "Correspondence: Does Terrorism Ever Work? The 2004 Madrid Train Bombings", *International Security*, 32:1, (2007), 185-192.

⁷⁹ *Associated Press*, "Spain's New Leader Stays firm on Iraq Pullout", (March 18, 2004); *BBC News*, "Spain Threatens Iraq troop pull-out", (March 15, 2004); *BBC News*, "Spain PM Orders Iraq Troops Home", (April 18, 2004).

implement his government's new Iraq policy, a second train bomb failed to detonate. In the ensuing investigation, authorities tracked part of the terrorist cell (including its leader) to a Madrid area apartment building. On April 3, a short battle ensued, in which the terrorists eventually blew themselves up, destroying the apartment and killing one officer. In the investigation, police uncovered another 200 detonators of the kind used on March 11 and April 2, several kilograms of explosives, suicide vests, and a car, primed with explosives, parked on the street. That the terrorists responsible for the Madrid attacks were continually preparing for more violence even though their supposed grievance had been addressed suggests something else was motivating them.

One might reasonably retort that most of these states listed here were involved in the 2001 Afghan conflict, that many turned a blind eye to Russia's war in Chechnya, had supported the UN in Somalia in 1993, continued to favour Israel over Hamas and Hezbollah, and so on and so forth. The problem with this line of argument is that it does little to clarify the many anomalies that persist or refine the causal pathways. And then, how do we explain the violence that erupted over the Mohammad Cartoons and other "insults" to Islam? Are these also a reaction to foreign policy? Writing of suicide terrorism in particular, Scott Atran suggests that terrorists are neither chiefly motivated by occupation nor foreign policy, but are instead "inspired by a global jihadism" with suicide serving as "banner actions for a thoroughly modern, global Diaspora inspired by religion and claiming the role of vanguard for a massive, media-driven transnational political awakening."⁸⁰ He continues, in a passage worth citing in full:

When Egyptian Bedouin are dying to kill European tourists and the Egyptians who cater to them; when British citizens blow themselves up along with other British because of the country's involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan; when jihadis exclusively target co-religionists linked to the secular government in Bangladesh, which is not a particularly close friend of the United States or its allies; when Malaysian bombers kill Australians and Balinese Hindus in Indonesia as "self-defense" in a "clash of civilizations" between Islam and the United States; and when Arabs from more than a dozen countries rush to embrace death in Iraq in order to kill Shi'as, who are probably more supportive of Iran than they are of the United States, *it is quite a stretch to identify the common thread as a secular struggle over foreign occupation of a homeland*, unless "secular" covers transcendent ideologies, "foreign occupation" includes tourism, and "homeland" expands to at least three continents.⁸¹

Finally, foreign policy precursors too easily (and disingenuously) simplify the history and careful designs of militant Islamist groups. The widespread inculcation of "victimhood in the Islamic world", suggests former Prime Minister Tony Blair, has been successfully manipulated by adherents of militant *jihadism* to the point that it stretches "far beyond the extremes" of palpability.⁸² While legitimate grievances afflict the Muslim world to which

⁸⁰ Atran, "The Moral Logic and Growth of Suicide Terrorism", 139, 128.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁸² Tony Blair, "The Struggle against Militant Islam", Speech delivered to the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, April 22, 2009.

solutions should be vigorously sought, to argue that all (or most) of the Muslim worlds' problems are the result of Western actions is false. To then suggest that the indiscriminate killing of innocent people (a majority of which end up being Muslims themselves) is somehow justified is unreasonable.

These precursors to Western *jihadi* radicalization offer important insight concerning the structural conditions and factors that help ferment homegrown terrorism. Importantly however, none of the factors identified here (or the various others elaborated upon within the literature) singularly explains how Westerners come to accept and participate in *jihadi* violence. As is often the case with "root cause" investigations of violent behaviour, none of these precursors are sufficient, or necessary, for terrorism. Furthermore, while a vast number of people may share these, and other, common characteristics and backgrounds, only a tiny fraction eventually radicalize.⁸³ And finally, though each precursor constitutes an important piece of the terrorism puzzle, none accurately informs the processes of personal transformation that are necessarily involved in Western radicalization. Gaining a better appreciation for these internal processes requires the development and application of theories that address the characteristics of personal change that underpin radicalization. To that end, transformative learning theory is particularly informative.

Transformative Learning Theory: Concepts and Applications

Theories on adult learning support the notion that individuals participate in the construction of personal knowledge and that learning is itself an interactive process of interpretation, integration, and transformation of experiences. Transformative learning theory, developed in great part by the work of Jack Mezirow in the 1970s, is one adult learning theory that offers a practical framework for understanding how change occurs in individuals. Mezirow's theory blends aspects of constructivism and cognitivism (an approach developed in psychology that investigates the mental functions of the human mind) to help explain how people, adults in particular, learn and adapt to new environments and constraints. "Learning," he explains, is the "process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action."⁸⁴ There are five main concepts associated with the approach:

- i) *Meaning Schemes* – The specific beliefs, judgments, feelings, and attitudes which act as a frame of reference in determining personal meaning and perceptions of experiences. They are observable in behaviour and verbal interaction;
- ii) *Meaning Perspectives* – A structure of assumptions, based on meaning schemes, that exist within the learner and act to filter perceptions and comprehension of new experiences;

⁸³ Precht, "Home Grown Terrorism and Islamist Radicalization in Europe", 32-33.

⁸⁴ Jack Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, (San Francisco: J-Bass, 1991), 12.

- iii) *Distortions* – Meaning perspectives that no longer fit the individual’s current reality;
- iv) *Critical Reflection* – The ability to critically reflect on these distortions. Reflection begins with a *disorienting dilemma* triggered by crises (personal loss, conflict, illness);
- v) *Process of Transformation* – An evolution or personal change that can be either abrupt or gradual.

An individual’s *personal change*, then, is a product of these mental and cognitive processes of transformation. Following a moment of personal crisis (the trigger), an individual tries to make sense of the event using his/her “habitual ways” of thinking (pre-existing meaning schemes). At times, the individual will realize that habitual ways of thinking are not helpful in managing the crisis (distortions). The individual reacts by exploring “new ways” of thinking (critical reflection) which involves a transformation in meaning perspectives through the attainment of new knowledge and skills. Eventually, the individual establishes a competence and self-confidence in his/her new role, evident in behaviour that is reflective of the individual’s new perspectives.

The transformative process, writes Mezirow, involves these ten phases:

Experiencing a disorienting dilemma → Self-examination (with feelings of guilt, anger, shame) → critically assessing assumptions → recognizing that personal “discontent” and transformation are shared → exploring “new roles, relationships, and actions” → establishing a course of action → acquiring new knowledge/skills for implanting the new course → provisionally “trying new roles” → building self-confidence in new roles → reintegrating into “one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s new perspective.”⁸⁵

Of critical importance to the transformative learning process, Mezirow argues, is taking action, which involves an empowered sense of self, a critical understanding of how one’s social relations and culture have shaped one’s beliefs and feelings, and the establishment of strategies for new behaviour. In the end, an individual’s transformed meaning perspective allows him/her to learn to get past a crisis, to live with new environmental constraints, and adapt to an evolving daily routine.

Mezirow’s transformative learning theory has been an important framework for research in the context of adult learning. But importantly, his insight has been applied well outside the study of education. His ten phase process, for instance, has been applied (and greatly refined as a result) to research on the perceptions of individuals adapting to illness and injury (Dubouloz *et al.*, 2001). Over the past decade, health care scientists have been

⁸⁵ Jack Mezirow, “Epistemology of Transformative Learning”, International Conference on Transformative Learning (2003), 4; Jack Mezirow, “Transformation Theory of Adult Learning”, in Welton (ed), *In Defense of the Lifeworld: Critical Perspectives on Adult Learning*, (NYC: SUNY Press, 1995), 45-52.

exploring the process of transformative learning in patients coping with and adapting to debilitating disabilities and illnesses that require entirely novel ways of behaving. For instance, victims of spinal cord injury require major adaptation to daily living (with a reliance on the use of a wheel chair for example) that accompanies a loss of mobility. Multiple sclerosis and Rheumatoid Arthritis, both degenerative illnesses, can result in progressive loss of functions which entail major life modification. In the context of physical health, Paterson and colleagues (1999) found that patients with diabetes experienced a process of personal transformation that was significant for obtaining positive outcomes in health interventions. Other empirical research has been conducted on adults living with kidney transplants (Clevinger, 1993), traumatic brain injuries (Kroupa, 1996), breast cancer (Eckmann, 2003) Turner Syndrome (Kagan-Kreiger, 1999), and HIV (Baumgartner, 2002; Courtenay, Merriam, & Reeves, 1998; Courtenay *et al.*, 2000).

Dr. Dubouloz's own research on physical rehabilitation has identified three distinct transformative phases: the *trigger phase*, the *process of change phase*, and the *outcome phase*.⁸⁶ In each case, the catalyst for movement from one phase to the next is an individual's "readiness for change" that allows the patient to actively engage the transformation process.⁸⁷

The trigger phase, according to Dubouloz, begins when patients experience illness or disability that stops them from functioning in ways they desire. For example, Ashe *et al.* describe a patient's recognition of the impact of her illness on her ability to continue working:

A year ago I became very tired and one day I broke down in the office. The arthritis was in a flare up big time. I had never missed a day of work because of my arthritis. I fought it and went to work but this time, I couldn't fight it anymore.⁸⁸

These events are described as *disorienting dilemmas* (introduced above) that propel patients to question how exactly they are going to live with their new realities. The asking of this question is itself a fundamental driving force that compels an individual towards a readiness for change. One of the participants in Carpenter's study, for instance, describes his own readiness for change in this way:

I'd go somewhere else in my mind, go to a happy place. If they had a problem, it would snap me back to reality. Eventually, I began to realize that it was still my body and I had better attend to it a bit more.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Dubouloz, C.J., King, J., Ashe, B., Paterson, B., Chevrier, J., Moldoveanu, M. "The Process Of Transformation In Rehabilitation: What Does It Look Like?" (Under Review), *Patient Education and Counseling* (2009)

⁸⁷ Likewise, however, the phases are iterative, so that learning new ways of being, seeing, and doing can bring the individual back to the process of changing phase and lead to other outcomes.

⁸⁸ Ashe, B., M. Taylor, M., & Dubouloz, C-J, "Enabling Occupation through Client Experiences in Arthritis Education Groups", *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 72:5, (2005), 284.

⁸⁹ Carpenter, C., "The experience of spinal cord injury: The individual's perspective-Implications for rehabilitation practice", *Physical Therapy*, 74:7, (1994), 619.

Through realizations like these, patients are ready and motivated to enter the second phase, the process of change. This stage is framed by the participant's critical reflection of existing biopsychosocial and spiritual issues he/she encounters while living with a disease or disability. Of particular interest is the *deconstruction* and *reconstruction* of meaning perspectives as integral to transformation. As we described earlier, meaning perspectives are articulated as beliefs, values, feelings, and knowledge about self, identity, and ways to manage daily activities. During the changing phase, meaning perspectives are restructured, redefined, or constructed anew. Consider these examples: acquiring knowledge of a given illness can empower a patient to regain self-control over his/her new life and thereby gain renewed self-respect; an individual transforms his/her understanding of independence (from total autonomy in life management) to include aspects inherent to interdependence (allowing others to be part of the daily living modification effort); redefining personal-worth, from once-powerful employment positions, for instance, to life-worth.⁹⁰

The changing process ends when individuals actively engage in a third phase which moves them to fully accept and participate in their new lifestyle. In this outcome phase, individuals retain new perspectives on life, new feelings, and adhere to novel behavioural routines. For example, in the cardiac rehabilitation programs described by Dubouloz *et al.*, (2001) participants developed new beliefs concerning work and health.⁹¹ Elsewhere, Dubouloz *et al.* (2004) identify changes in beliefs concerning dependency and self-caring especially in terms of accepting social support, housekeeping, and personal assistance from family and friends. One participant had this to say:

So, now instead of being an independently fit person, I'm an independently disabled person (laugh), no ... chronically ill person who occasionally needs help you know. It's all relative to the position you're in.⁹²

Research on the transformative learning process from these studies in physical rehabilitation has helped identify which specific meaning perspectives might undergo transformation. They include self-worth, independence, altruism, and self-respect. Shifts in these perspectives facilitated life style changes that were reflected in new eating and pacing habits, a diminution of the perceived threat of loss of self-worth, the proper integration of needed adaptations to daily activities, and the establishment of new meaningful activity.

It is our working assumption that the theoretical propositions outline in transformative learning, along with these practical and clinical findings from the sciences of

⁹⁰ Transformations in meaning perspectives like these are not without their barriers. Ashe *et al.*, for instance, describe a patient's expectations over finding a permanent cure as one potential barrier. Ashe, *et al.*, "Enabling Occupation through Client Experiences", 286.

⁹¹ Dubouloz, C.-J., Chevrier, J., & Savoie-Zajc, L., "Processus de transformation chez un groupe de personnes cardiaques suivies en ergothérapie pour une modification de leur équilibre du fonctionnement occupationnel", *Revue Canadienne d'Ergothérapie*, 68:3, (2001), 171-85.

⁹² Dubouloz, C.-J., Laporte, D., Hall, M., Ashe, B., & Smith, C.D., Transformation of Meaning Perspectives in Clients with Rheumatoid Arthritis, *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 58:4, (2004), 398-407.

rehabilitation, help shed light on the radicalization processes inherent to Western *jihadi* terrorism. The transformation of an individual's meaning-perspective and associated changes in behaviour parallel, we suggest, certain aspects outlined in adult learning theory. We explore how in the section below.

Transformative Learning in the Radicalization Process

As mentioned, the transformative learning process includes three central phases: the trigger phase, the process of changing phase (identified as the deconstruction and reconstruction of meaning perspectives and identity), and the outcome phase (in which new meaning perspectives encourage and are reflected in novel behaviour). We suggest that while the radicalization process is triggered by strong social, political, and environmental forces, individual radicalization takes place during the changing phase in which a combination of personal reflection, knowledge acquirement, and identity reassessment occurs. Violent behaviour takes place in the final phase and is a reflection of the solidification of the individual's new identity, values, and belief system.

From a transformative learning perspective, the "precursors" to radicalization outlined above are perhaps better described as variables that inform and shape an individual's "personal context of living". These are the conditions that mark an individual's environment. They can be felt and interpreted in ways that facilitate a transformative learning process. Just as illness or injury in the study of rehabilitation is thought to trigger a transformative learning process within patients by changing their immediate environmental living conditions, so to, within the context of radicalization, might socio-political alienation, foreign policy, and other factors trigger identity recalibration. Alienation can create feelings of anxiety and fear while foreign policy can produce anger and despair. Both can lead to a process of critical reflection (or "cognitive opening") that involves a personal reassessment of one's life, future ambitions, current social position, inter-personal relationships, and so on.⁹³ With that, a restructuring of an individual's existing meaning perspective and interpretation of his/her living environment can follow. Again, just as a patient's health limitations and lack of physical function in daily living can instigate a personal process of transformative learning that attempts to adapt with new realities, so to with radicalization might socio-political factors that jar with an individual's existing interpretation of self and society instigate a process of change.

It is within these evolving contexts of living that the reception and interpretation of critical information by impressionable minds can instigate the process of identity deconstruction and reconstruction inherent to radicalization. Recall from Mezirow's ten steps that self-examination is associated with feelings of guilt, anger, and shame that can lead to a reassessment of existing behavioural assumptions. With *jihadi* radicalization, critical information (religious or otherwise) might spur an individual to reinterpret international politics and history, reassess the distinctions between justice, defence, and aggression, and re-evaluate the individual's own relation with his/her immediate and global community. The 2007 New York Police Department report, *Radicalization in the West*, suggests a strong link between specific triggers (like losing a job, suffering a death

⁹³ Precht, "Home Grown Terrorism and Islamist Radicalization in Europe", 36.

in the family, going through a divorce, experiencing racism, *etcetera*) and increased religious participation and affiliation (dubbed “religious seeking”).⁹⁴ It is this new-found religiosity that provides some of the new knowledge that leads to a redefinition of identity and potentially, radical and militant milieus.

To that end, a particular message offered by a previously radicalized individual (a foreign terrorist leader or religious ideologue, for instance) could trigger a search for a new meaning perspective that takes a particularly slanted position. Herein, religious identity plays an important role. Extremist versions of Islam promote an interpretation of global affairs that is based on an inherent and deep-seated schism between the Islamic world and the West. Gartenstein-Ross and Grossman’s study reveals that almost 40 percent of American and British terrorists viewed “Islam and the West as existentially incompatible.”⁹⁵ As individuals critically self-examine their Western identities and begin shaping new meaning perspectives, the Islam-West dichotomy provides a lens with which to focus their energies. Images of conflict and war that purport to show global injustices carried out against Muslims around the world (from Iraq’s Abu Ghraib prison to the streets of Grozny) can be easily accessed via the Internet and internalized as honest information. In the context of transformative learning theory, these images and messages strengthen the “disorienting dilemma” that contradicts previously-accepted knowledge upon which self-identification and behaviour had been constructed. What results is a feeling of self-doubt, confusion over identity, and intense personal debate to the point of identity deconstruction. Instead of interpreting one’s self as a “Western citizen” or “member of society”, the newly acquired reality forces a stronger identification with a beleaguered and victimized international minority. This is in keeping with Mezirow’s notion of exploring new roles and relationships following identity re-assessment and relates well with Roy’s work on globalized Islamic identity. Of further interest is the fact that this (re)conceptualization process reflects a subliminal “readiness for change” moment, a tipping point whereby the patient, or in this case a radicalizing individual, comes to realize that the old reality simply no longer exists and a new one must be established. This realization facilitates the process of identification with the newly internalized reality and encourages a significant change in behaviour later on.

Radicalizing images and information can be manipulated (as is usually the case with *jihadi* propaganda) in a manner that persuades a susceptible individual to recognize an international crisis or conflict as a personal plight. What is important here is the idea that this sort of information provides the adhesive that is critical to strengthening and eventually cementing the individual’s newfound identity. In Mezirow’s words, this process is about an individual “trying new roles”, from a content citizen, for instance, to a militant *jihadi*. In turn, new roles lead to the reorganization of the individual’s existing value and belief systems. Instead of passivity, egalitarianism, and cooperation (values that might be associated with the role of “citizen”), other values linked to the “militant” role, like rebelliousness, non-compliance, and aggression, become internalized. Eventually, a shift in belief systems will be reflected in a change in behaviour.

⁹⁴ NYPD, *Radicalization in the West*, 30-31

⁹⁵ Gartenstein-Ross and Grossman, *Homegrown Terrorists in the U.S. and U.K.*, 45.

The strengthening of the new identity comes with socialization and in-group acceptance. In order to establish a meaningful understanding of their new reality and identity, individuals search their social environment, daily routines, and personal contacts for some form of validation. As previously suggested, socio-political isolation and clique construction might support the process by allowing the individual to interact with others that have either gone or are going through a similar process of transformation. This is a finding that compliments Marc Sageman's "social bonding" thesis of terrorist group formation and Max Abrahms' "social solidarity" thesis for terrorist participation.⁹⁶ With peer-based validation, the transformation of meaning perspectives is reinforced and the new identity, in having been accepted by the individual's immediate social group, acquires value and strength. The individual, in his/her new role, gains self-confidence and eventually pursues his/her life on the basis of the new perspective and identity. From there, violent behaviour is a product of the individual's newly acquired value system, where revenge and/or active defence in light of perceived Western aggression is not only justified but expected.

Conclusions

Applying transformative learning theory to Western *jihadi* radicalization and homegrown terrorism offers a promising interdisciplinary approach to evaluate an emerging phenomenon. While extant studies on radicalization offer important insight on the causes of homegrown terrorism and on the behaviour of terrorist organizations, where they fail is in properly investigating and identifying the internal cognitive processes inherent to identity transformation. Radicalization is, first and foremost, a process of change, in which non-violent individuals come to accept, and promote violent activity. "Terrorists do not fall from the sky," posits Brian Michael Jenkins, "They emerge from a set of strongly held beliefs. They are radicalized. Then they become terrorists."⁹⁷ This paper, in applying theories of transformation proposed and developed from a variety of fields helps identify the process of *jihadi* emergence in Western society.

Further research is needed in three areas. First, transformative learning, when applied to the study of adult education, health and rehabilitation, and medicine, is usually considered a *positive* process of change. In health science, for instance, the process is one of individual recuperation and healing following tragic accidents and illnesses. It is primarily about human achievement in surviving and adapting to life-changing events. Radicalization, on the other had, is anything but. It is a *negative* process in which individuals come to reject democratic ideals, promote in-group isolation, hate their neighbours, and choose death over life. Theoretically speaking, do these differences matter? Do positive and negative transformations share a common set of inherent principles and variables applicable to the universe of transformative cases? How important are diverging starting points? These questions will need to be addressed, first in theory and then in practice.

⁹⁶ Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, esp. Chapter 5; and Max Abrahms, "What Terrorists Really Want: Terrorist Motives and Counterterrorism Strategy", *International Security*, 31:1 (2008), 96-103.

⁹⁷ Brian M. Jenkins, Preface, in Gartenstein-Ross and Grossman, *Homegrown Terrorists in the U.S. and U.K.*, (April 2009), 7.

Second, future research will have to investigate the pathways inherent to *incomplete* transformation and transformative *reversals*. That is, why do some individuals fail to complete the radicalization process? What factors cause a diminishment in the momentum of radicalization? Relatedly, why do some individuals radicalize, ideologically and politically speaking, but nonetheless reject violent behaviour? And finally, why do some radicalized individuals later recant their positions, that is, *de-radicalize*? If, as Jenkins suggests, “radicalization is a prerequisite to terrorism”, then building a better appreciation for these processes related to transformation and change will be critical to dissuading and containing the threat.⁹⁸

Finally, as suggested, this article is but a first step. It attempts to provide some insight on homegrown terrorism by approaching the phenomenon from a novel position, but it does so on theoretical rather than analytical grounds. An obvious suggestion for future research is to quantify and analyze our theoretical propositions. A number of recent studies on radicalization (Gartenstein-Ross and Grossman (2009), O’Duffy (2008), Precht (2007), Kirby (2007), NYPD (2007), Leiken and Brooke (2007), and Bakker (2006)) suggest potential ways to do so. Each of these studies offer quantitative and qualitative analysis of homegrown terrorism and test indicators, precursors, and characteristics of radicalization by compiling comparative data on hundreds of cases of terrorist participation. Doing as much with a model of radicalization derived from transformative learning theory would help generate important and cumulative insight.

In Text Citations

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⁹⁸ Ibid., 8.

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