

THE ROOTS OF VIOLENT RADICALISATION OF YOUNG MUSLIMS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM. IMPLICATIONS ON THE FUTURE OF BRITISH MULTICULTURALISM

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ABSTRACT:

IN THIS PAPER I WILL TRY TO DEMONSTRATE THAT ALTHOUGH SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS MATTER TO A CERTAIN EXTENT IN THE PROCESS OF VIOLENT RADICALISATION OF SOME YOUNG BRITISH MUSLIMS, VIOLENT RADICALISATION IS A MUCH MORE COMPLEX PROCESS IN WHICH ALIENATION TOWARDS BRITISH SOCIETY AND ITS VALUES AND PRINCIPLES, ALONG WITH ANGER TOWARDS BRITISH POLICIES TO COMBAT VIOLENT EXTREMISM, THE OPPOSITION IN THE FACE OF BRITISH FOREIGN POLICY STEMMING FROM PERCEIVED DISCRIMINATION, MARGINALISATION CAUSES A STRONG IDENTITY CRISIS THAT FOR SOME YOUNG BRITISH MUSLIMS FINDS IT SOLUTION IN THE ADOPTION OF VIOLENT ISLAMIST FUNDAMENTALIST VIEWS.

I WILL TRY TO ILLUSTRATE THAT THE FEW YOUNG BRITISH MUSLIMS WHO DECIDE TO ENGAGE IN RADICAL VIOLENT ACTIONS AGAINST THE BRITISH STATE, OR DECIDE TO BECOME FOREIGN FIGHTERS AND GO TO THE MIDDLE EAST TO FIGHT ALONGSIDE JIHADI GROUPS LIKE DAESH, ARE OFTEN WELL EDUCATED, BUT BECAUSE OF A FEELING OF NOT BELONGING TO THE BRITISH SOCIETY, BECAUSE OF THE CONSTANT PERCEIVED MARGINALISATION, THE LACK OF A PROEMINENT VOICE IN THE SOCIO-POLITICAL DYNAMICS THEY CAN BECOME VULNERABLE IN THE FACE OF FUNDAMENTALIST IDEOLOGIES THAT MANIPULATE THE IDEA OF THE ALTERNATIVE- THE GLOBAL ISLAMIC COMMUNITY, THE UMMAH- IN WHICH ALL THESE QUESTIONS AND UNCERTAINTIES SEEM TO FIND THEIR ANSWER.

KEY WORDS: BRITISH MULTICULTURALISM, ALIENATION, SEGREGATED COMMUNITIES, IDENTITY CRISIS, VIOLENT RADICALISATION

INTRODUCTION

In 2001, in the towns of Oldham, Burnley and Bradford in the United Kingdom extremely violent race riots happened, triggered mainly by young British Muslims of South-Asian lineage, that moment representing the essential point that sparked the strong debate within the British State concerning the successful application of multicultural principles. It was considered that although British multiculturalism has tried to promote tolerance and integration of immigrant communities, while allowing them to retain their cultural identities and specific practices, this has happened at the expense of creating a common national identity, thus introducing the *parallel societies thesis*²-according to whom Muslim minorities

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² Ted Cantle, "Community Cohesion. The Report of the Independent Review Team", London, *Government Printing Office*, 2001, 9.

have become isolated from the rest of society, self-segregating and adopting isolationist practices.³ Trevor Phillips, once head of the Commission for Racial Equality warned that UK "is sleepwalking into segregation", that multiculturalism creates communities "outside mainstream society" that "will grow quickly apart from the rest of us, developing their own lifestyles, playing after their own rules"⁴, these statements highlighting the possibility of a chronic cultural conflict and fueling the process of portraying the Muslim community as a threat to British society and values. Also, Ted Cante stated in his famous report, Community Cohesion, that "many communities operate on the basis of a series of parallel lives; these lives don't seem to meet in any moment, much less overlap and promote significant interchange".⁵ David Cameron has characterized British multiculturalism as a "barrier that divides British society"⁶ and after becoming prime-minister he argued that the doctrine of multiculturalism "encouraged culturally different people to live separately from each other and away from the British society"⁷, allowing segregated communities behave in manners that go totally against British values.

Then followed the 7 July 2005 London terrorist attacks, in which four young British Muslims became the first indigenous UK domestic suicide bombers, this being the first time that British Muslim citizens, born and raised in the UK have decided to undertake acts of terrorism of this magnitude on home soil. With the amplification of the Syrian civil war and the amazing advance of the jihadi group Daesh, self-proclaimed the Islamic State, many Western European citizens violently radicalized, attracted by the jihadi fundamentalist ideology of the group and decided to leave their families to become foreign fighters in the Middle East along with these terrorist group. Immediately after 7/7 bombings, Tony Blair said that "being in a multicultural society was always implicitly balanced by a duty to integrate, to be part of the UK"⁸, and six years later, David Cameron reinforced this vision and promoted muscular liberalism doctrine in Great Britain considering that a forced commitment toward democracy, rule of law and respect for minorities is not an option but a way of life.

In addition to these developments, it is important to point out that a notable part of British and European literature has shaped a negative image of the various expressions of Muslim religious identity (the niqab, hijab) as signs of society's islamization that pose a threat to its fundamental values by being direct and irrefutable elements related to jihadist violence. In the British media there were important instances in which Islam was immediately connected with terrorism thus again fueling the image of Muslim communities as a cultural threat to UK. Also, at the level of political discourse after the Woolwich attack, British Prime Minister Tony Blair said there is a problem "inside Islam"⁹ and former leader of the far-right nationalist party, UKIP, Lord Pearson warned that there is a "growing dark side" in

³ Alejandro J. Beutel, "Radicalisation and Homegrown Terrorism in the Western Muslim Communities: Lessons Learned for America" *Minaret of Freedom Institute*, August, 2007, 2.

⁴ "Britain "sleepwalking to segregation", *The Guardian*, September 19, 2005, accessed June 20, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/sep/19/race.social-exclusion>.

⁵ Ted Cante, "Community Cohesion", 9.

⁶ Matthew Tempest, "Cameron returns to Birmingham to address Muslims", *The Guardian*, February 5, 2007, accessed June 20, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2007/feb/05/conservatives.religion>.

⁷ David Cameron, "PM's speech at Munich Security Conference", Cabinet Office, Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street, February 5, 2011, accessed June 20, 2016, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pms-speech-at-munich-security-conference>.

⁸ Philip Johnston, "Adopt our values of stay away, says Blair", *The Telegraph*, December 9, 2006, accessed June 20, 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1536408/Adopt-our-values-or-stay-away-says-Blair.html>.

⁹ Cavan Sieczkowski, "Tony Blair says "There is a problem within Islam" after Woolwich attack", *The Huffington Post*, March 6, 2013, accessed June 20, 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/06/03/tony-blair-islam-woolwich-attack_n_3379251.html.

British Muslims¹⁰– all of these elements, strongly fueling islamophobe sentiments and anti-Muslim hate in times in which the various British Muslim communities needed to be reassured and there was a need to build society-wide confidence.

The internal view in the British state seemed to be that immigrants and ethnic minority communities are those that have the responsibility to integrate into mainstream British society, but not so clear was enunciated the responsibility of the state, of other British citizens to help in this process. Such a vision has determined that the structure of British policies to combat violent radicalisation relied on simple actions of issue securitization, of enhancing supervision over Muslim communities.

I believe that a truly comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon of violent radicalisation of young British Muslims that can provide more effective preventive measures must be based on a holistic approach, however, carefully nuanced of the process that takes into account the importance of socio-political-cultural-economic factors, society's atomization, disillusionment, the discrimination and marginalization felt, thus the individual psychology and subjective negative experiences¹¹ often fueled by mass media, elements that then open the path to an identity crisis, a search for understanding and purpose that sometimes finds its solution in adopting fundamentalist Islamist violent views, which provide the alternative of a close community, a clear identity which resonates with the existential needs of many young Western Muslims.

THE CONCEPT OF VIOLENT RADICALISATION

The working definition of violent radicalisation for this paper is "*socialization in extremist and terrorist acts*".¹² Radicalisation is defined in Britain's Strategy Prevent as the "*the process by which a person comes to support terrorism and extremism that lead to terrorism*", while extremism is "*vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs; also calls for the death of members of our armed forces, whether in this country or overseas*".¹³

There is a clear awareness that violent radicalism is a phenomenon related to context par excellence, that "*these developments and experiences are deeply rooted in a historical context*."¹⁴ A solid analysis of the phenomenon of violent radicalisation of young British Muslims citizens must take into account also the state's actions not only those of ethnic minority communities, "*radicalisation taking place in a course of action and reaction in which the action of the State often plays an important role*".¹⁵

It should be noted extremely clear from the outset that attempting to identify and predict a person's potential involvement in violent radical/terrorism activities based on

¹⁰ Ned Simons, "UKIP peer warns of Muslim "Dark Side", gets hit with rebuttal from "The West Wing", *The Huffington Post*, November 20, 2013, accessed June 20, 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/11/19/islam-ukip-warsi-west-wing_n_4305623.html.

¹¹ Sadeq Rahimi, "Power, self and psychosis: Examining Political Subjectivity Through Schizophrenia", *Psychotherapy and Politics International*, 2015.

¹² Fernando Reinares (coord.), "Radicalisation Processes Leading to Acts of Terrorism. A Concise Report prepared by the European Commission's Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation", *Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation*, May 15, 2008, 7.

¹³ *Prevent Strategy*, Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for the Home Department by Command of Her Majesty, Crown Copyright, June, 2011, 107-108.

¹⁴ Jonathan Githens-Mazer, "Causes of jihadi terrorism: beyond paintballing and social exclusion", *Criminal Justice Matters*, 2008, 73 (1), 26.

¹⁵ Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, "Mechanisms of Political Radicalisation: Pathways Toward Terrorism", *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 20 (3), 2008, 430.

ethnicity, religion, difficult economic and educational backgrounds has strongly failed¹⁶, radicalized individuals often being “*unremarkable in demographic, economic and psychological terms*”.¹⁷ There is no single cause or catalyst for violent radicalisation, this being a multi-dimensional process influenced by a complex array of internal and external factors, triggers and forces¹⁸, thus contradicting the conventional wisdom that claims explaining the process of violent radicalisation in terms of mental or social fragility, abnormality or irrationality. What must be thus understood is that for an individual to violently radicalise there is a combination of various unique factors for that person, and we are not able to clearly state which factor prevails in front of others.¹⁹

It must be from the beginning mentioned that not every person with radical views becomes a terrorist and “*not all those who engage in acts of terrorism necessarily hold radical beliefs*.”²⁰ This clarification is extremely important for my paper because although many young Muslims face the same difficult socio-economic conditions, discrimination and marginalization, they don't decide as the few members of their community to embrace Islamist fundamentalist visions but on the contrary, they are fighting against extremist and radical tendencies to demonstrate that Islam is a religion of peace, respect and tolerance, constantly demonstrating that they are citizens that comply with the basic principles on which the United Kingdom is built.

I. SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS

Economic and social deprivation was considered a vital factor for the violent radicalisation of young Muslims in Western societies. With regard to the situation in Great Britain it should be noted that many young Muslims from various Muslim communities are living in segregated areas defined by poverty, strong spatial concentration²¹, living in so-called ethno-religious universes, ghettos defined not only by physical segregation, but by economic, social, cultural, intellectual and political segregation²²-closed societies, where people are still anchored in the culture and traditions of the country of origin. Also in the process of analysing the social networks inside of these segregated communities we may identify their insularity that can contribute to a state of “*identity readiness*”²³ conducive to radicalisation processes, due mainly to the lack of solid interaction with other members of the wider British society, those outside one's own ethno-religious group.

On the other hand, many young British Muslims face difficulties of educational achievements, while others although have important educational achievements fail to convert them into social class mobility relative to other groups with similar levels of education, so

¹⁶ John Horgan, “From profiles to pathways and roots to routes: Perspectives from psychology on radicalisation into terrorism”, *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 618(1), 2008, 80.

¹⁷ “*Preventing Religious Radicalisation and Violent Extremism. A Systematic Review of the Research Evidence*”, Youth Justice Board of England and Wales, 2012, 31.

¹⁸ Thomas Precht, “*Homegrown terrorism and Islamist radicalisation in Europe. From Conversion to terrorism*”, Research Report funded by the Danish Ministry of Justice, December, 2007, 11.

¹⁹ HM Government, “*Countering International Terrorism: The United Kingdom's Strategy*”, Crown Copyright, July, 2006, 10.

²⁰ John Knefel, “Everything You've Been Told About Radicalisation is Wrong”, *Rolling Stone*, May 6, 2013, accessed June 20, 2016, <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/everything-youve-been-told-about-radicalisation-is-wrong-20130506>.

²¹ Tufyal Choudhury, “Impact of Counter-Terrorism on Communities: UK Background Report”, *Open Society Foundations*, Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2012, 5.

²² Muqtedar Khan, “*Understanding Muslim Radicalism in Britain*”, accessed June 20, 2016, <http://islamicmagazine.com/?p=822>.

²³ Dina Al Raffie, “Social identity theory for investigating Islamic extremism in the diaspora”, *Journal of Strategic Security* 6, no.4, 2013, 66.

they are engaged in low graduate employment; there are also unemployment rates exceeding the national percentage general correspondent²⁴, with households where there is no adult in employment.²⁵ Some young British nationals, Muslim immigrants of second or third generation, born in the British society and socialised in British schools, or naturalised after years of residency and integration, endure frustrating barriers regarding their socio-economic mobility, sometimes face discrimination as members of an ethnic minority, and all these elements lead gradually to their alienation²⁶, to perceptions of being unfairly treated or discriminated against by state institutions, thus making them vulnerable in the face of the alternatives embodied by violent Islamist fundamentalist ideologies, radical extremists exploiting this victimization psychology. However, it needs to be extremely clearly understood that while in a few situations, economic deprivation can provide the emotional impulse and the basis for moral justifications of political violence, the overwhelming majority of young British Muslims who suffer from significant deprivations do not embrace at all such extremist attitudes even more, they strongly oppose extremist, radical Islamist ideologies.

II. DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN BRITISH POLICY

The fact that some terrorist attacks on European territory were made by doctors, engineers, highlights an extremely important aspect, namely that individuals with successful professional lives, well educated, with jobs and families and who appear to be active in their local communities may also be radicalised.²⁷ Thus it must be outlined that young Muslims, well educated, living in democratic Western Nations, are not necessarily struggling with the issue of poverty but with issues of identity, belonging and radical groups messages sometimes alleviate their meaningful frustrations.²⁸ The best known example is that of Mohammed Sidique Khan, one of 7/7 London suicide bombers, a university graduate that has constantly tried to disguise his Pakistani-Muslim identity by adopting the Western name of Sid, who was fascinated by Western civilization, at one point even fell in love with the USA, who had a general indifference towards religion and culture, his friends even describing him as "very english"²⁹, a totally different picture from the one in which he had strongly criticized Western foreign policy.³⁰

²⁴ Labour market status by ethnic group: annual data, *Department for Work and Pensions*, April 17, 2015, accessed June 20, 2016, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/labour-market-status-by-ethnic-group-annual-data-to-2014>.

²⁵ Office for National Statistics, *Ethnicity and the Labour Market, 2011 Census, England and Wales*, November 13, 2014, accessed June 20, 2016, https://www.google.ro/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwjPra q3iLzNAhXD6xQKHRGIBygQFggcMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ons.gov.uk%2Fons%2Fdcpl171776_384463.pdf&usq=AFQjCNHSGwS865wWgV8RdnVRYknmGVqukg&sig2=prkZ9fnmduP1rMke6XREcA.

²⁶ Sara Wallace Goodman, "The Root problem of Muslim integration in Britain is alienation", *The Washington Post*, October 6, 2014, accessed June 20, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/10/06/the-root-problem-of-muslim-integration-in-britain-is-alienation/>.

²⁷ Marc Sageman, "Understanding Terror Networks", January, 2008, 15, accessed June 20, 2016, <https://www.dialup4less.com/~gerald.atkinson/Terrorist%20Networks.pdf>.

²⁸ "United States Presidential Task Force on Confronting the Ideology of Radical Extremism, Rewriting the Narrative: An Integrated Strategy for Counter Radicalisation", *Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, March, 2009, 4.

²⁹ Akil N. Awan, "Transitional Religiosity Experiences: Contextual Disjuncture and Islamic Political Radicalism", in *Islamic Political Radicalism. A European Perspective*, ed. Tahir Abbas (Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 217.

³⁰ Mohammed Sidique Khan, Statement ('Martyrdom testament'), *Al-Jazeera*, 2005, accessed June 20, 2016, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk/4206800.stm>.

In a Report of the Home Office it was emphasized extremely clear that one of the main drivers of violent radicalisation phenomenon among young Muslims is that they *"feel they have no voice or a legitimate outlet for political expression, protest or dissent; leadership roles are traditionally held by elders, and youth may feel frustrated by their inability to get involved actively in decision-making structures"*.³¹ Also, many young people consider that politicians talk about Islam as a problematic religion, political discourse is sometimes blamed for attacking the Islamic faith and otherising its underlying concepts³², and they feel they can not express their political views, that their voices are disregarded by mainstream media, politicians, and the common element in all these cases is not poverty but the gap between these young people and conventional political processes.

Thus the perceived sense of exclusion from mainstream society and politics, that political impotence as the one illustrated in the attempt to alter the course of the Iraq war alongside the political legitimacy crisis of state institutions may lead to disillusionment with the political principles and processes, these structural elements being endemic and aggravating the distrust and isolation of young people with limited horizons, fueling antagonism and anger toward the state.³³

It has been proven that grievances relating to the situation of the global Muslim community and the rage for *"perceived Western hegemony"*³⁴ are vital considerations in analysing the causes of violent radicalisation of young Europeans/Britons and here it is important to note that the common point is in fact the perception that there is an attack/strong discrimination against Muslims and Islam. Here there are examples like that of Mohammed Sidique Khan who stated that *"your democratically elected governments continuously perpetuate atrocities against my people all over the world; 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"*.³⁵ For all of these individuals, images such as those at Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo, or the occupation of Iraq can serve as justification for their recourse to violence against the British State, underlining the role of political events in incubating and catalyzing violent radicalisation.

In this context of discontent against the manner in which the British State's foreign policy is designed and applied, extremist religious movements, such as Hizb-Ut-Tahrir who strongly criticized Western democracy and underlined the failure of preventing the Iraq war, have managed to increase their ability to alleviate the feelings of disempowerment of some young British Muslims.

III. DISCRIMINATION, ALIENATION, MARGINALISATION

In general, after every terrorist attack there has been a rise in anti-Muslim hatred. These incidents occurred in daily life where mosques were attacked, Muslim women who

³¹ "Preventing Extremism Together' Working Groups", *Home Office Report*, 2005, 15, accessed June 20, 2016, www.communities.homeoffice.gov.uk/raceandfaith/reports_pubs/publications/race_faith/PET-working-groups-aug-Oct05.

³² "Environment of Hate: The New Normal for Muslims in the UK", *Islamic Human Rights Commission*, November 11, 2015, accessed June 20, 2016, <http://www.ihr.org.uk/publications/reports/11559-environment-of-hate-the-new-normal-for-muslims-in-the-uk>.

³³ Tahir Abbas, "Introduction: Islamic Political Radicalism in Western Europe", in *Islamic Political Radicalism. A European Perspective*, ed. Tahir Abbas (Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 10.

³⁴ Youth Justice Board, 42.

³⁵ Report into the London terrorist attacks on 7 July 2005, *Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC)*, May, 2006, 12, accessed June 20, 2016,

http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/cabinetoffice/corp/assets/publications/reports/intelligence/isc_7july_report.pdf.

wore a scarf or hijab, niqab had the veil pulled off their face, Muslim men were attacked and racist graffiti was written on Muslim graves and properties. There has also been an increase in attacks against Muslims in the online environment where they were the target of cyberbullying, cyber harassment, cyber incitement and violence threats.³⁶ All abuses suffered had a great impact on their self-esteem and confidence, leading to depression, isolation, anxiety, insecurity, fear, vulnerability, the attacks being regarded as attacks against their Muslim identity. These elements can lead to perceptions of being the “*other*” and might adversely affect the cohesion of the community because the victims feel alienated, isolated and that they “*do not belong to the British society*”.³⁷

Also, many young Muslims have pointed out the problematic way in which the media presents various events related to the Muslim community with an emphasis on highlighting the links between Islam and terrorism without providing the opportunity for moderate voices to show the true image of Islam. Thus they blame the willful ignorance towards the Muslim religion, dynamics that do nothing more than feed the us versus them rhetoric and continue portraying all Muslims as threats to British national values. The idea of a hidden enemy within Muslim communities and in British society is a recurring speech in the media.³⁸ Recent studies underlined that some young British Muslims feel a deep sense of inequality at the same time when they feel that they are unable to express their concerns, or to express dissidence, out of the fear of being categorised as “*unbritish*”.³⁹

IV. THE IMPACT OF BRITISH STRATEGY TO COMBAT VIOLENT EXTREMISM ON MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

An essential dimension of the British strategy of combating extremism and violent radicalisation was called Prevent and it was adopted in July 2006, putting an emphasis on addressing inequalities and improving educational performance, employment opportunities and living conditions for Muslims. It also stressed the need to increase community cohesion and strengthen community integration through, for example, the creation in June 2006 of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion, which was meant to address the segregation and barriers in front of cohesion and integration and to identify how local communities can be empowered to tackle extremist ideologies. It must be admitted that Prevent and the larger British government strategy meant to discourage young British Muslims from embracing radical fundamentalist views has had important results, numerous young people being directed away from the path of violent radicalisation.

However, Theresa May MP stated in 2010 that “*Prevent, the programme which we inherited from the last Government was flawed; it confused the delivery of Government policy to promote integration with Government policy to prevent terrorism; it failed to confront the extremist ideology at the heart of the threat we face; and in trying to reach those at risk of radicalisation, funding sometimes even reached the very extremist organization that Prevent should have been confronting*”.⁴⁰

The main problem with the manner of conceptualizing the Prevent strategy is that it has focused from the outset on the Muslim community as being collectively the only community under the threat of violent radicalisation, stressing that terrorism is a specific

³⁶ Imran Awan and Irene Zempi, “We Fear for our Lives: Offline and Online Experiences of Anti-Muslim Hostility”, October, 2015, 6.

³⁷ *Ibidem.*, 7.

³⁸ “*Suspect Communities? Counter-Terrorism Policy, the press and the impact on Irish and Muslim communities in Britain*”, London Metropolitan University, July, 2011, 17.

³⁹ Sughra Ahmed and Naved Siddiqi, “*British by Dissent*”, *The Muslim Youth Helpline (MYH)*, February 6, 2014, 31, accessed June 20, 2016, <http://www.myh.org.uk/sites/default/files/Research%20Report%20BBD.pdf>.

⁴⁰ *Prevent Strategy*, Foreword, HM Government, June, 2011, 1.

problem of the Muslim communities, turning them into suspect communities. There have been warnings that allegations of espionage, intelligence gathering and surveillance under Prevent are spread and that “*Muslim communities have felt unjustly targeted and named as potential terrorists, the strategy has contributed to a sense of frustration and alienation among Muslims which can increase the risk of making some individuals more vulnerable to radicalisation*”.⁴¹

In what regards British counter-terrorist legislation, the surveillance practices, along with British police increased powers of stop and search, increased controls at borders, these were considered excessive and disproportionate fueling among some members of the British Muslim communities a strong perception of discrimination on the part of British authorities which has affected their confidence in state authorities, strongly diminished their cooperation with the police. The narrow focus on Muslim communities may have fueled social divisions within the Muslim communities and between Muslims and the rest of British citizens, and the actions perceived to have violated the privacy of some British Muslims is considered to have contributed to deterring them from taking part in political dynamics, making them more vulnerable in the face of violent Islamist ideology.

V. IDENTITY CRISIS THE ALTERNATIVE- ISLAMIST FUNDAMENTALIST IDEOLOGY

The violent radicalisation process often begins with a search for identity in a time of crisis when the individual feels that he does not belong to society, that he is marginalized, discriminated against by the socio-political system that should have protected him and in which he has put his entire confidence, and this “*shakes potential radical’s psychological frames of reference and lead them question what it means to be a Muslim*”.⁴² There is a strong tension and competition between the values of secular Western states and the traditional religious values of ethnic communities, and young British are often trapped between the contradictions between the values of the society in which they were born and those of their parents. The identities of resistance⁴³ are created by disempowered youth as a solid opposition in the face of the principles that underlie the British society.

An extremely important aspect is that consistent answers to questions of identity of young Muslims in an environment defined by islamophobic behaviors in which they perceive themselves as “*ever-beleaguered by a popular culture that regards Islam and Muslims in antithetical terms; a neo-Orientalism that places Islam as the bogey of society*”⁴⁴ can no longer be given by traditional Muslim religious institutions/organizations. That's mainly because they explain traditions and customs of their culture of origin with which many Muslim young people born in the UK have no connection, often presenting them in another language and not in English. Although there are Muslim leaders who promote the values of multiculturalism and make all possible efforts to combat radicalisation, there are also traditional leaders, with strong immigrant roots, which are sometimes culturally isolationists, theological conservatives-the so-called traditional ulema. They are no longer able to connect with today’s youth and to respond to their questions of identity, they are not considered

⁴¹ “*Preventing Violent Extremism*”, House of Commons, Communities and Local Government Committee (CLGC), March 30, 2010, 11–17.

⁴² Darren Thiel, “Policing Terrorism A Review of the Evidence”, *The Police Foundation*, 2009, 23.

⁴³ Basia Spalek, “Disconnection and Exclusion: Pathways to Radicalisation”, *Islamic Political Radicalism. A European Perspective*, ed. Tahir Abbas (Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 192.

⁴⁴ Spalek, *Disconnection and Exclusion: Pathways to Radicalisation*, 192

representative, and there is also a strong divergence linked to “*who holds the legitimacy of religious authority, who has the moral authority to guide*”.⁴⁵

In this highly complex context, in the process of radicalisation we must pay special attention to the radical religious ideologies because in adopting radical Islamic fundamentalist views, the whole worldview of those young people changes, everything that fails to conform to this perceived moral clarity is doomed and this perspective is facilitated by a almost manichean separation of reality in good and evil, often accompanied by a worsening/breaking family relations, social contacts. The concept of ummah, the abstract, transnational “*community*” of all Muslims is largely manipulated by radical Islamist organisations because the concept manages to offer the sense of membership, collective identity, purpose and meaning⁴⁶, security, self-esteem, trust for young Muslims, which were confronted with identities void of meaning, feelings of powerlessness and lack of self-determination, perceived societal disconnectedness, an absence of a cultural attachment toward the state they were born in and their parents origin country.

There are, however, some European citizens who decide to violently radicalise out of pure desire for adventure, the risk assumed in the theatres of war in the Middle East alongside the various jihadi groups being one highly intriguing on the one hand and on the other hand allowing these individuals to strengthen their status among friends, family, community, of obtaining glory and reputation in front of others.⁴⁷ Grievances are not sufficient for an individual to violently radicalise, and as Jamie Bartlett and Carl Miller argued, other factors are important such as: “*an emotional desire to act in the face of injustice; enthusiasm, status and the internal code of honor, peer pressure*”.⁴⁸ It should be clearly noted that although the role of extremist religious ideology is an important one in the violent radicalisation of some European citizens, providing a really important vehicle for engaging individuals in terrorist acts, articulating jihadi groups narratives and offering consistency to the group and its beliefs, this is not always the primary reason that young Europeans decide to violently radicalise. Much of Western foreign fighters entering the process of radicalisation, do not hold religious extremist ideologies, at least not initially, violence against enemies being initially legitimized “*through less reference to ideology or political strategy and more through diffuse feelings*”.⁴⁹

CONCLUSIONS

What must be understood is that although the overwhelming majority of British Muslim communities is composed of citizens that have fully internalized the rules and principles on which the British state is built, loving and cherishing Islam as a peaceful and tolerant religion, there are also some young British Muslims who feel they do not belong to

⁴⁵ Robert W Hefner, “Modernity and the Remaking of Muslim Politics”, in *Remaking Muslim Politics: Pluralism, Contestation, Democratization*, ed. Hefner, R. W (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 6.

⁴⁶ Brendan O’ Duffy, “Radical Atmosphere: Explaining Jihadist Radicalization in the UK”, *Political Science & Politics*, Vol. Issues 1, January, 2008, 38.

⁴⁷ Scott Attran, “*Pathways to and from violent extremism: the case for science-based field research*”, Statement before the Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities, March 10, 2010, accessed June 20, 2016, <http://edge.org/conversation/pathways-to-and-from-violent-extremism-the-case-for-science-based-field-research>.

⁴⁸ Jamie Bartlett and Carl Miller, “The edge of violence: Towards telling the difference between violent and non-violent radicalisation”, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol.24, No.1 (2012); Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, “*Individual and Group Mechanisms of Radicalisation*”, in *Protecting the Homeland from International and Domestic Terrorism Threats: Current Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives on Root Causes, the Role of Ideology and Programs for Counter-radicalisation and Disengagement*, ed. Sarah Canna (College Park: START, January, 2011) 89.

⁴⁹ Fernando Reinares (coord.), “Radicalisation Processes”, 13.

the British society, passing through significant identity crises. In this paper I have tried to show that the violent radicalisation process that is developing within the framework of Western European States and within the British State is a highly complex process that cannot be attributed exclusively to the socio-economic difficulties faced by young British Muslims because many British homegrown terrorists and radicalised British individuals were actually educated, seeming to be integrated into Western society. However, regardless of these appearances, the perceived feelings of discrimination, marginalization, lack of belonging to British society, the counter-terrorism surveillance policies considered to be excessive and disproportionate, the British foreign policy approach, determined them to adopt violent radical views, some young British Muslims choosing as justification for their political violence, the fundamentalist Islamist doctrine. The identity fluidity, the identity crises, the society's atomization are essential elements with which some young Muslims in Western societies are confronted. They are estranged from their parent's origin countries culture and principles, they seem to not find their place in the society in which they were born, and thus are determined to seek alternatives to resolve the need for meaning and belonging, appreciation, and in the current strongly unstable international context, fundamentalist Islamist organisations with jihadi worldview are likely to draw them on their side.

I do not believe that multiculturalism has failed as it is strongly promoted even by British leaders, but that it was thought and applied according to some incorrect assumptions, and a revival of its principles will require a radical rethink of British policies to combat extremism, policies to combat terrorism, social, economic, cultural, political policies that would take account of the views of moderate, though critical voices of young people in the different Muslim communities, an admission that there is a solid existential dimension of the violent radicalisation of young British citizens, that violent radicalisation is not a problem of Islam, or even of the poisonous ideology of Islamist fundamentalist views, but of the alienation felt by some young Muslims due to the discrimination and marginalization from their everyday lives.

What is needed is a political and a public media discourse to promote a solid inclusion of all British Muslim communities, to try to alleviate feelings of being perceived as the threatening other in order to rebuild trust and respect between Muslim communities and the state, to enhance cooperation and communication with young Muslim people that could then have the courage to express all anger and beliefs, to meet their need for knowledge and identity rediscovering, to demonstrate that the British State does not question their loyalty. I conclude that the United Kingdom should no longer rely so much on the rigid construction of the extremely vague concept of "*britishness*" previously considered a vital element that had to be demonstrated by the Muslim communities often at the expense of their own identity, because Muslim people in Great Britain through their constant dedication towards the basic pillars of British democracy demonstrate in the most simple and natural way what it means to be truly British. This battle for the hearts and minds of young Muslim people can truly be won!

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