Gaps in religious understanding as a cause for violent islamist radicalization

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Abstract

The literature on Violent Extremism suggests a gap that is often referred to but never tackled. It is the assumption (shared among the majority in the canon) that radicalization is in all its aspects an active process brought about either by the grievances (environmental or psychological) of the radicalized with religion being either a licensing mechanism or by religion itself as the direct cause. In other words, Religion is either viewed as THE cause, or as a peripheral element to the phenomenon of violent radicalization. These two approaches, we argue, constitute a false dichotomy. What we advance in this thesis is that perhaps the religious element acts as a predisposing element that pushes potential radicals along the process of radicalization. We identify two causes for this false dichotomy, firstly a general lack of empirical studies conducted in the field, and secondly a disproportionate focus on large-scale causes for radicalization which translates into a neglect of the individual, psychological and interpretative causes thereof. This thesis contributes to solving this issue through the medium of a substantive/empirical research question that clarifies the linkage between lacunas in religious interpretation/understanding and violent Islamist radicalization.

Key words

Radicalization, Deradicalization, Terrorism, Active/ Macro-level causes, Passive/Micro level causes, Predisposition, Lacunas.

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Introduction

Islamic terrorism, violent Islamic radicalization, violent Islamic extremism, are but a few of the labels used in reference to one of the most pressing issues plaguing the modern polity. This has been an issue of central importance for close to 4 decades now (generally timestamped at 1979) (Fine, 2008, p. 58), but it is the events of 9/11 that were THE inflection point that started off global engagement with the issue (in terms of news coverage, and in terms of military, institutional, and scholarly engagement with the issue). Notwithstanding that the past two decades of global efforts have resulted in substantial development in approaches and response mechanisms -both offensive and defensive, direct and indirect- the issue remains largely unsolved, if not even more entrenched and urgent. A general description of the situation is that you have slow-moving, hyper-complex, bureaucratic entities (be it military, supra-national, or state/governmental agencies), engaged in an asymmetric fight with dynamic, loosely organized, and ideologically driven entities (terrorist groups). This unique setup has made it so that attempts to eradicate, counter, and/or prevent **violent radicalization[2]** have yielded unpredictable, and otherwise adverse, results.

The fact that the global community has failed to foresee, and appropriately respond to these issues just goes to show the depth of our lacking understanding of the nature, causes, and mechanisms of violent radicalization. This is not to say that there have not been studies conducted to uncover these causes. In fact, the topic of Islamist violent radicalization specifically, and terrorism generally, has been a hot topic for research, with substantial financial and human capital being funneled towards it (Heydemann, 2014, p. 3). However, the study has yet to coalesce into a solid academic structure where schools of thought could easily be distinguished from each other (Veldhuis, 2019, p. 9). There isn't much that a meta-analysis of the literary corpus yields, except that the only consensus is that radicalization is a process (Schmid, 2013, p. 19), and that there isn't much substantive, empirical research conducted in

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2- The field of radicalization studies is spanned by many definitions, each tackling the phenomenon from a different angle and highlighting different characteristics. There are about 13 most cited definitions developed by the most important authors in the field to mention John Horgan, Michael Taarnby, or Joshua Sinai amongst others (Schmid, 2013, p. 16). However a working definition according to Gunaratna is: «The process of adopting an extremist belief system, including the willingness to use, support, or facilitate violence, as a method to effect societal change.» (Gunaratna, 2012, p. 147)
This definition works best for our thesis as it accounts for the relevant variables such as **a) legitimization of violence**, and **b) the change driven agenda and motivation for radicalization.**

the field (Veldhuis, 2019, p. 9). This means that studies uncovering the causes for violent Islamist radicalization have stayed at the theoretical macro levels, and have largely steered clear of the testable, micro level. The writings of Tore Bjorgo, and Wagdy Loza are widely seen as some of the foundational writings on the topic of radicalization. However, neither Bjorgo nor Loza place enough emphasis on micro-level factors when looking into what brings about violent Islamist radicalization, and instead stick to macro-level causes. Bjorgo for instance, in "*Root Causes of Terrorism: Myths, reality and ways forward*" identifies the adoption of extremist/radical ideologies "as a consequence of more fundamental political or personal reasons" (p. 258) and names "Rapid modernization" (Bjorgo, 2004, p. 258) or "The experience of social injustice" (Bjorgo, 2004, p. 258) as causes and not micro-level, individual concerns such as education, or the psychological predispositions of those radicalized (Bjorgo, 2004, p. 258). Similarly, Loza in his article "Psychology of Extremism/Terrorism: a middle eastern perspective" also showcases a focus on the theoretical macro-level by focusing on grievances based on historical decline, corruption/political impotence of regimes, inequality of social structures, and loose psychological factors such as feelings and emotions of frustration (pp. 145-147).

Of the very few instances in which such substantive research has been conducted in the field, we can cite the research conducted in prison deradicalization programs. These programs provide direct access to consenting individuals with the promise of sentence reduction, or even freedom (Speckhard, 2011, p. 6).

These prison deradicalization programs each have different avenues to take towards, as well as different standards and criteria to assess, the deradicalization of violently radicalized individuals (Mastroe et al., 2016, p. 7) However one common denominator suggested by a comparative analysis of two of these programs (Saudi Arabia & Singapore), is that many of these violently radicalized youths have significant gaps and lacunas in their understanding of fundamental principles of the Islamic faith (Parker, 2013, p. 48). The amalgamation between a). the recurrence of this observation, b). the absence of substantive/empirical studies in the field, and c). the asymmetric focus on macro-level causes for radicalization, hence, warrants the pursuit of the following question:

What is the correlation between these observed lacunas in religious knowledge and the violent radicalization of Muslim youths?

Given the already existing literature, we hypothesize the following:

Lacunas in understanding fundamental principles of the Islamic faith (namely those related to the concept of Jihad) are a passive/micro-level that predispose Muslim youth for violent Islamist radicalization.

For the purposes of substantiating the hypothesis, and to answer the research question, we have chosen to employ a host of research strategies that consist mainly of qualitative approaches. Our focus is concentrated on a case study of the Moroccan prison deradicalization program (Mousalaha). We also cross reference the analogous programs in France (AMAL program) (Marret & Suquet, 2021, pp. 6-7) and Singapore (Rosili, 2016, p. 158), in order to establish the transferability of our conclusion and account for externalities and the impact of potentially overlooked variables (i.e culture, dominant religion, language etc…)

We have thus targeted for our interviews a total of six people one of which is a program manager, one of which is the assistant to the other, and three of which are participants in the Mousalaha program and finally is the wife of another program participant. This is to provide a complete and comprehensive view on the development of radicalization from the angle of personal experience, the angle of external observer, and of an angle that combines both.

I. Review of Literature

As established above, a close inspection of the relevant literature yields that beyond a few points of convergence, trying to find some sort of consistency or juxtaposable element in the field is like comparing apples to oranges. This even applies to the main literature that tackles the same, or roughly the same issue as this thesis to mention the very few empirical inquiries carried out by leading scholars such as Broadbent, Bjorgo as mentioned, and John Horgan (Mastroe et al., 2016, p. 7).

To situate ourselves within the academic canon, we have done a critical analysis on some of the most notable works of seminal authors in the field. The criteria for the selection of works were essentially two (**1).** recognition in the field and references, **2).** how analogous the topic tackled is to our research question). This screening process yielded the following set of authors, to name Robert Pape, Hector Avalos, Mark Juergensmeyer, Brian Michael Jenkins, Nesser Petter, Randy Borum.

In the absence of pre-prescribed schools of thought and categories, we have imposed our own nomenclature on the relevant topical literature. The standard along which we have divided the literature lies in the main approach used to deal with the issue. As such, we have grouped the literature into the following nomenclature of **1)** Narrative Approach, **2)** Theological Approach, and **3)** Pragmatic Approach.

<u>The Narrative Approach</u>: Robert Pape, Juergensmeyer, Jenkins

The narrative approach has as the nexus of its argument, a discussion on the construction of narratives as the main cause for radicalization, thus portraying the issues as an essentially ideological matter. This approach marks the majority of the works released in the field, especially in relation to causal inquiries into violent radicalization. This approach runs the risk of staying in generalities.

Chief writings for this approach would be Robert Pape in his article "Dying to Win The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism", Mark Juergensmeyer in his chapter "Religion as a Cause of Terrorism." in the book "The roots of terrorism", and Brian Michael Jenkins in "Building an Army of Believers: Jihadist Radicalization and Recruitment". Pape's argumentation applied to our thesis would yield the conclusion that the fundamentals of the faith of Islam play next to no role in bringing about the violent radicalization (Pape, 2006, pp. 33, 36). Our concern over Pape's views lies in that he pays too much attention to the **Macro-level Active[3]** causes (strategic motivations) and not enough attention to the **Micro-level Passive[4]** factors (the cognition, psychology, and level of acquaintance with Islamic fundamentals) for predisposing to Islamist violent radicalization. Juergensmeyer's argument, applied to this thesis, suggests that there is no such thing as lacunas in religious understanding, as it is subjective and

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3- We are using **Active/Macro-level causes** here in reference to a specific category of causes for violent radicalization as identified by the relevant literary corpus. This term is loosely based on the Micro-Meso-Macro model of analysis, in that it refers to theoretical causes such as large scale societal, economic, political concerns and the dissatisfaction (academics also use "humiliation" and host of other terms) resulting thereof and that push individuals and groups to <u>actively</u> mobilize and adopt violent radical ideologies (Schmid, 2013, p. 4). This category constitutes the large majority of the causes identified by the scholars in the field and are mostly impossible to substantiate through empirical research (Veldhuis, 2019, p. 9).

4- We are using **Passive/ Micro-level causes** to similarly refer to a specific category of causes relating more to the small-scale individual, cognitive, psychological, and educational causes that <u>rather than push</u> for the active adoption of violent radical ideologies, <u>enable for the conditions</u> for its adoptions. This is to say that these causes are passive inasmuch as they enable the predisposition for violent radicalization. This idea is very much in alignment with John Horgan's idea of vulnerabilities, or more specifically what he calls the "predisposing risk factors" (Horgan, 2008, p. 84) and which he defines (functionally) as the following: "They highlight why, given two people who are exposed to the same conditions (and even come from the same family), one may step toward involvement in terrorism" (Horgan, 2008, p. 85) As such, we are categorizing lacunas in the fundamentals of Islamic religious knowledge under this category because instead of contributing to mobilizing individuals towards radicalization, these lacunas make an individual susceptible to fall for the predatory, skewed, and politically motivated narratives of belligerent institutions that claim the banner of Islam.

can be twisted in whichever way that suits the narrative (Juergensmeyer, 2006, p. 139). Our concerns with this view lie in two main regards. Firstly, it does not accord any real causal value to the individual as the main subject in relation to violent radicalization. Secondly, is his generalization of religion and attributing it with a characteristic of fluidity and interpretative malleability. The essence of Jenkin's argument lies in that the religious element only acts as a licensing mechanism, that justifies the use of violence and fills the gaps in what **is otherwise an argument based on socio-economic-political critique** (Jenkins, 2007, p. 2).

The Theological Approach: Avalos & Petter.

The theological approach, has as the nexus of its argument a discussion of the nature of the faith, and on the arguments used therein, to identify a link of causation, or the absence thereof, between religion and violent radicalization. This approach is also heavily represented in the literature, and generally runs the risk of confirmation biases.

Chief writings for this approach would be Hector Avalos' book "Fighting Words: The Origins of Religious Violence", and Nesser Petter's "JIHAD IN EUROPE - A survey of the motivations for Sunni Islamist terrorism in post-millennium Europe". Avalos argues that the fundamentals of all religion are inherently violent and that Islam is no exception to this rule (Wessinger, 2008, p. 135). Meaning that lacunas understanding fundamentals of Islam do not contribute in the least to causing violent radicalization. Our grievance with this argument, aside from its essentialist claim, is that it does not take into consideration the agency of the individual and the epistemological element in radicalization.

Nesser Petter argues that there are doctrines conducive for violent radicalization and there are others that are not, naming Salafi Islam as the extremist doctrine *par-excellence* (Petter, 2004, p. 21). Petter further breaks this down and attributes the radical element to the "Takfiri" tenets espoused by Salafism, which is in other words the strategy of excommunicating any and all that oppose the extremist tenets of this doctrine (Petter, 2004, p. 21). This analysis correctly takes into account the active elements in the narrative but not what enables their adoption (passive element: i.e. missing information, lacking understanding…) even when belonging to a supposedly more "moderate" (i.e mainstream) Islamic tradition.

The Pragmatic Approach: Borum

The Pragmatic approach, has as the nexus of its argument a discussion of the psychological and environmental mechanisms enabling radicalization. This approach is the least represented in the academia, and it is closest to the approach operationalized in this thesis, it, however, runs the risk of omitting, or glossing over essential causal factors.

Randy Borum, is one of the authors who have written extensively on topics surrounding the causal elements of terrorism. Borum's writings constitute an oasis of lucidity in the field of radicalization, as he turns the attention away from the general, macro-level scale to the individual, micro-level, by focusing on the radicalized themselves (Borum, 2014, pp. 286-305). In his article "Psychological Vulnerabilities and Propensities for Involvement in Violent Extremism" turns the inquiry lens onto the "attitudes, **dispositions, inclinations**, and intentions, {*which*} might affect a person's **propensity for involvement** with violent extremist groups and actions" (Borum, 2014, p. 1). This concept of **predisposition** developed here by Borum is what constitutes the ideational cornerstone of our thesis. Borum (2007) in his book "Psychology of Terrorism" correctly identifies the progressive, incremental nature of radicalization (p. 28), and discusses core causal elements of **a).** psychopathology (pp. 30-34), **b).** personality and character (pp. 35-37), **c).** past experiences (pp. 38-40). However, when it comes to the ideological element, <u>Borum only considers it in its capacity as a causal element only to the extent that it is a licensing mechanism</u> that could be best described as "a form of rule following behavior" (Borum, 2007, p. 47).

II. The Staircase Model

In the literature regarding violent extremism & radicalization, there are many explanatory models that have been developed to explain these phenomena. There are 3 major, most heavily cited models in the field of radicalization, and they are firstly Borum's 4 stage pathway model, Sageman's four prongs and finally Moghaddam's stairway.

We have opted to situate this thesis within Moghaddam's staircase model, due to the reasons outlined below:

The Theoretical Framework: Moghaddam's terrorism staircase

1 What Is Moghaddam's staircase

Moghaddam's model for the process of radicalization operationalizes a well-acknowledged psychological explanatory model (Moghaddam, 2005, p. 161). This model portrays radicalization as being a multistep process, whereby a potential radical moves incrementally through 5 floors starting with a rejection of the conditions and ending with actualization of the radical ideals and perpetration of violence (Moghaddam, 2005, p. 162). This model is the model that most aligns with my thesis. The model presented by Moghaddam is analogous to some of the seminal developmental psychology models to mention Piaget's developmental stage model, and Kohlberg's theory of moral reasoning (Lygre et al., 2011, p. 2). The model is a six step model
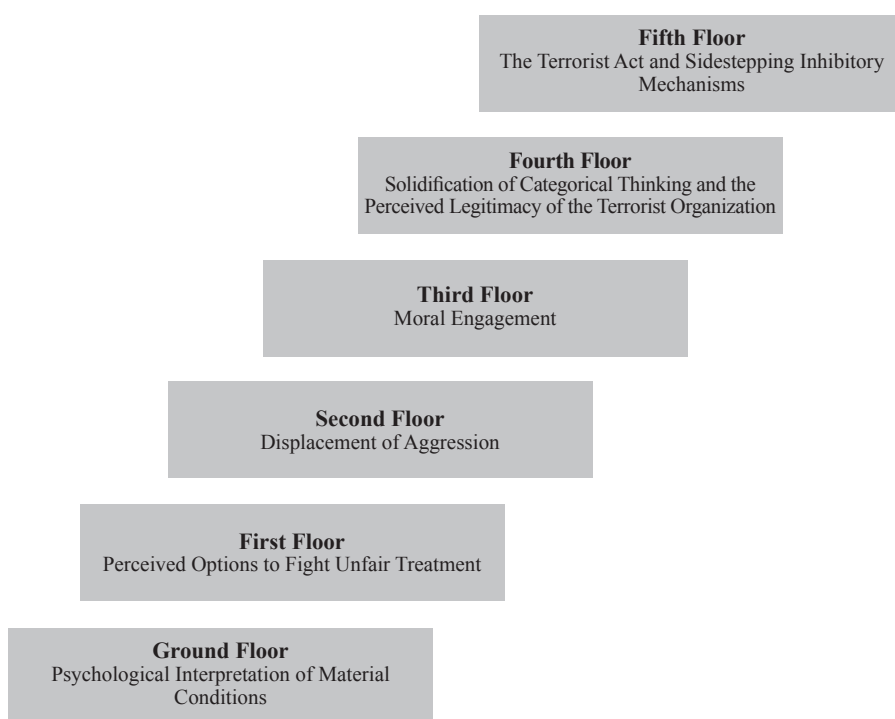
Fifth Floor
The Terrorist Act and Sidestepping Inhibitory Mechanisms

Fourth Floor
Solidification of Categorical Thinking and the Perceived Legitimacy of the Terrorist Organization

Third Floor
Moral Engagement

Second Floor
Displacement of Aggression

First Floor
Perceived Options to Fight Unfair Treatment

Ground Floor
Psychological Interpretation of Material Conditions

Figure 1- Moghaddam's staircase model (Torok, 2015, p. 67)

2 Why Moghaddam's staircase

Moghaddam's terrorism staircase most suits the purposes of this thesis due to 2 reasons. Firstly**,** the staircase to terrorism model transcends the false dichotomy of Macro-level causes and Micro-level causes, this is inasmuch as it encapsulates the understanding that radicalization is the result of both Macrolevel causes AND microlevel causes. This is portrayed by the fact that steps 1 & 2 are external grievances arising

from some sort of societal, economic or otherwise dysfunction in the context (MACROLEVEL), while steps 3 to 5 are related to the process of moral integration and the alignment of beliefs as well as the reframing of worldviews and frames of reference (MICROLEVEL) (Moghaddam, 2005, pp. 162-166).

The second reason why this model suits the purposes of my thesis as the core theoretical framework is seeing as to how Moghaddam successfully identifies the element of **predisposition** for potential radicals, this is through the portrayal of the staircase as a narrowing staircase whereby people only reach the advanced stages if they have a set of preconditions such as the propensity for violence etc… (Moghaddam, 2005, pp. 165). This makes it so that the Lacuna theory developed in this thesis fits perfectly within the staircase model particularly as a precondition for moving from step 3 (second floor) to step 4 (third floor).

To conclude, what my focus for this thesis will be is rather the "**predisposing**" elements that Moghaddam alludes to but does not substantiate. As in the push factors that condition the climber to move further up the narrowing staircase. This provides, as mentioned before, avenues for cumulative empirical research (between each of the 6 steps). However here we assess lacunas in religious understanding as a predisposing element between steps three and four. In other words we assess lacunas in religious understanding as an enabling element to the integration of categorical thinking and the legitimization of terrorist organizations. Religion in general has long been classified in the field as an element for the justification of violence. What this thesis does is pay closer attention to the granularity of that role.

III. The Moroccan Experience with Violent Islamist Radicalization

VE Locally And Internationally

The phenomenon of Violent Islamist Radicalization has undergone three mutations concomitantly both globally and in the context of Morocco. These are shifts in **1)** The nature, **2)** the means (of the terrorist operations fuelled by Islamist radical ideas), and **3)** the scale of violent Islamist radicalization, the inflection point of which is the event of 9/11.

1 Shift in Nature

Firstly, for the nature, we notice after the 9/11 both on a global scale and in the context of Morocco a shift in the nature of Islamist

radicalization. Here we take "nature" to mean the focus, ideology and narratives of belligerent organizations. This shift manifests in the re-channelling of the focus away from the "Far-enemy" agendas advanced by Bin-Laden, pursuant to the heavy American campaigns against Al Qaeda in reaction to 9/11 (Byman, 2016, pp. 153-154). This is to say that there was a return to the focus on the "near enemy" of the late 1970s and early 1980s Egypt, as espoused by the likes of Zarqawi and Mohammed Abdelsalam Faraj, who qualified the Arab regimes themselves as "Dar al Kufr" (house of apostacy) (Brooke, 2008, p. 205). This is reflected in what otherwise came to be known as neo-takfirism, represented globally in the decline of al Qaeda and the rise of ISIS, and more specifically in the context of Morocco is represented both in the increase of attacks perpetrated within the nation and in the takfiri character the proselytizing progressively took on throughout the years following 9/11.

The Moroccan experience further mirrors the global experience in that the changes in Al Qaeda narrative and its developments constitute much of the inspiration behind the uptick in attacks within Morocco. This is most pronounced in the Bin Laden's categorization of Morocco as a target "Apostate" regime in 2003 (Rogelio & Rey, 2007, p. 572).

2 Shift in the means

Secondly, for the means, (*see figure 3*) we see after 2001 a sharp increase in more radical terrorist measures represented in the rise of suicide bombings. In fact, nowhere else is the impact of 9/11 more pronounced than in the sharp increase of terrorist use of suicide bombings (Horowitz, 2015, p. 3). It is important to note that suicide bombings have been used before most notably by the Tamil tigers of Sri-Lanka, to whom the invention of the suicide belt is attributed (Ward, 2018, p. 91). However, although suicide bombing is not a total novelty, the scale to which it became used after 9/11 is totally unprecedented (Horowitz, 2015, p. 4).

This trend is seen both globally as well as in the context of Morocco as testified by the fact that a feature of terrorist attacks motivated by Islamist violent radicalization is that they use suicide bombings (Rogelio & Rey, 2007, p. 572). What makes the Moroccan experience even more directly reflective of the global experience aside from the rising popularity in Chechnya and Iraq, is that the suicide bombings of Casablanca in 2003 came only a few days after a similar attack in Saudi Arabia (Horowitz, 2015, p. 4).
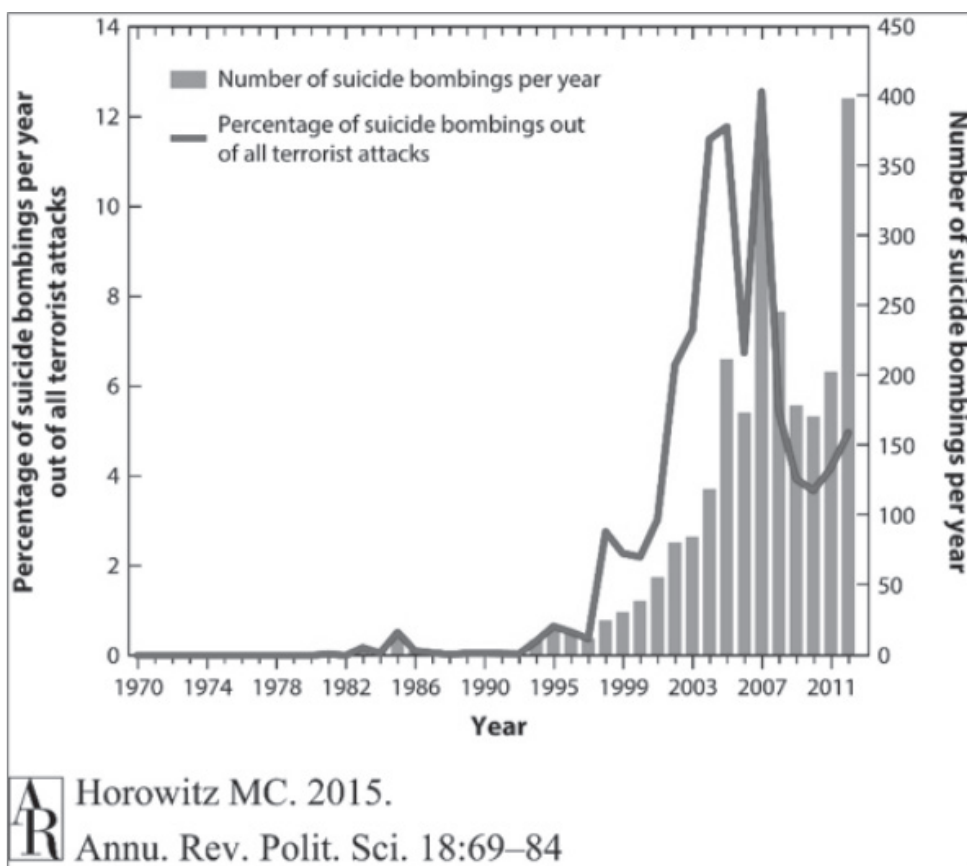
Horowitz MC. 2015.
Annu. Rev. Polit. Sci. 18:69–84

Figure 3 - Change in number of suicide bombings throughout the years
(Horowitz, 2015, p. 6)

3 Shift in the scale

Thirdly for the scale, this manifests in two ways, the scale of operations (in terms of frequency and size of casualties), and the scale of attention given Islamist Violent Radicalization and Terrorism. 9/11 was an inflection point globally for terrorist operations; According to a study conducted by the Rand Corporation looking at the aggregate of all attacks since 1968, it was established that most (about 80%) have occurred in the few years following the September 11 attacks, with Islamist violent radical organizations comprising 31 out of the 35 belligerent groups in question (Atran, 2006, p. 127). This increase in the scale of Islamist violent radicalization as a challenge is present globally -as seen above- as well as in Morocco. This is testified by the fact that whereas pre 9/11 we saw single target assassinations and some coordinated attacks with very few casualties, post 9/11 spelled more frequent, more organized, and deadlier attacks as testified by the casblanca and Argana attacks

(Rezrazi, 2018a, p. 113). This challenge is further supplemented by the fact that Morocco is facing the issue of highly radicalized returnees. This is especially considering that, until 2017, the country has had no less than 1500 citizens join Jihadist movements in Iraq and Syria according to the Directorate General of Studies and Documentation (DGED) (Khalid et al., 2020, p. 4).

In terms of scale of attention, here we cite as an indicator the research efforts funneled towards understanding violent Islamist radicalization (and by correlation terrorism). The surge in these research efforts following 9/11 Is clear to anyone conducting a meta-analysis of the literary corpus (Young, 2019, p. 325). This is testified by the fact that it grew as a field of study from a sub-field of security studies to its own self-contained research field with specialized research institutions and scholarly journals (Jackson, 2007, p. 4). The overall trend is exemplified by the research quantifying the effects of terrorism, wherein the growth curve is especially steep following the September 11 attacks. (*see figure 4*).
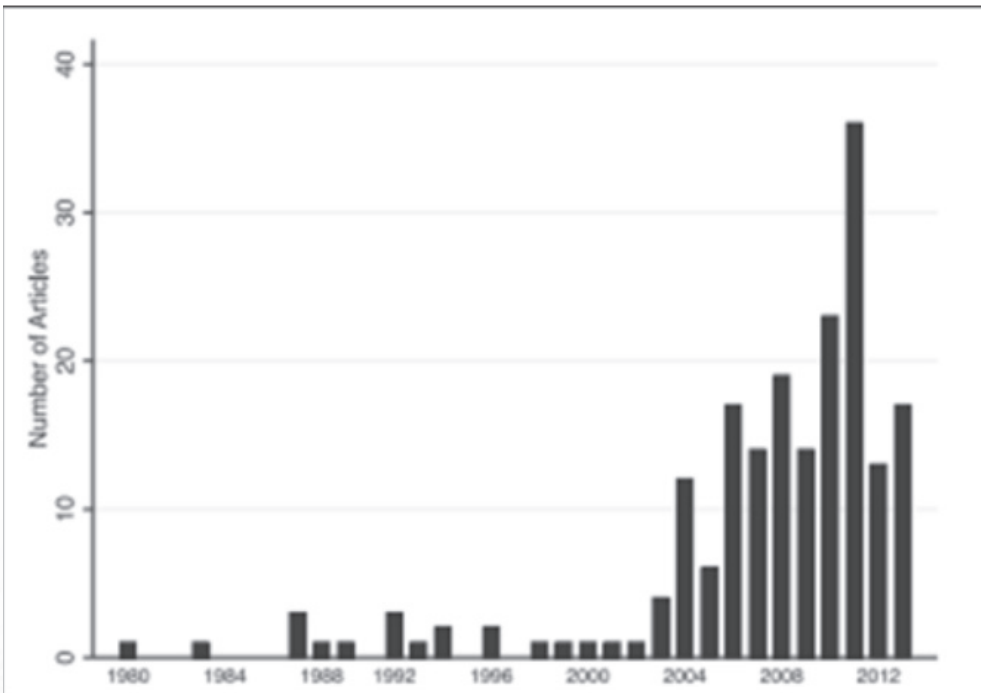

Figure 4 - Number of quantitative terrorism articles per year
in a 21 journal sample (Young, 2019, p. 325)

IV. Morocco's Approach

In this optic, Morocco as well reflects the global struggle against Violent Islamist Radicalization in that it has spared no effort to palliate

to these concerns imposed by the aforementioned shifts in its **1)** nature, **2)** means, and **3)** scale.[5] This quote from a study conducted by CONNEKT (Contexts of Violent Extremism in MENA and Balkan Societies) on the Moroccan approaches to extremism makes salient the scope of efforts invested by the country to tackle the issue:

"Morocco is leader in the fight against terrorism, with more than 200 jihadists returning to Morocco, detained and brought to justice by 2018. Between 2002 and 2018, 183 terrorist cells were dismantled by elite Central Bureau of Judicial Investigation (BCIJ) units, preventing 361 planned attacks, said Abdelhak Khiame, Director of the BCIJ, and 62 of the 183 cells dismantled were directly linked to ISIS" (Khalid et al., 2020, p. 4)

To this extent Morocco has been conducting its fight against Violent Islamist Radicalization and terrorism in congruence with the principles of DDR (Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Rehabilitation) (Rezrazi, 2018b, p. 82). The Moroccan approach has thus been categorised into two main prongs of firstly **1).** Eradication and secondly of **2)** De-radicalization (Rezrazi, 2018b, p. 82).

1 Eradication Measures

These measures are specifically geared towards terrorist operations, communications, funding, equipment, and recruitment (Rezrazi, 2018b, p. 83). To this extent, eradication measures are used here in reference to communications disruption, policing, legal follow up, and intelligence gathering. The Moroccan security apparatus, to fulfil these functions, has constructed a complex web of classical-security, legal, Cyber security, and intelligence institutions. Amongst these, we can mention, respectively, the "HADAR" multi-agency security forces, the Central Bureau for Judicial Investigations (BCIJ), The General Directorate of Security of Information Systems (GDSIS), The Strategic Committee of Information Security Systems (SCISS), and The Financial Information Processing Unit (UTRF) (Rezrazi, 2018b, p. 85). The formulation of these institution has as a backdrop an intricate legal basis of amendments to the penal and criminal codes. This framework serves as jurisprudential justification for their operation and procedures, which has as its core the Law 03.03 issued by royal charter two weeks following the attacks of May 16, 2003 (Jamal, 2008, p. 149). In the following years between 2003 and 2007 alone, Morocco had successfully dismantled 30 Violent Islamist Radical cells (Masbah, 2015, p. 4).

5- See **page 11**.

2 De-Radicalization Measures

De-Radicalization[6] is used here in reference to measures directly targeting the Active Macro-level causes that push individuals and groups to <u>actively</u> mobilize and adopt violent radical ideologies (Schmid, 2013, p. 4). In other words, these are measures by which Morocco seeks to replace "misunderstandings or extremist ideology" (Gunaratna, 2012, p. 147) with the "the principles of moderation, toleration and coexistence" (Gunaratna, 2012, p. 147) by targeting the socio-economic and religious factors that push towards and accentuate radicalization (Khalid et al., 2020, p. 14).

i. Socio-economic De-radicalization Measures

These are measures targeting specifically the precarious socio-economic conditions that actively push youths towards radicalization. To this extent Morocco, in 2005, launched the national initiative for human development (INDH) aiming at the reduction of regional inequalities, the optimization and updating of job infrastructure, as well as at the provision of better work opportunities (Jamal, 2008, p. 150). In its 4 years of operation (ending in 2008) (Khalid et al., 2020, p. 12), the services of the INDH are shown to have reached about 4 million Moroccans, contributing to the country's 40% reduction in poverty amongst the population by 2010 (Rezrazi, 2018b, p. 86).

ii. Religious/Institutional De-Radicalization measures

Morocco attributes its success in tackling the challenge of Violent Islamist radicalization to the implementation of religious oversight

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6- This concept of deradicalization is a fairly new topic of research, with academic interest only peaking in the past 15 years (Horgan & Taylor, 2011, p. 173). This makes it so that the field is dynamic without any stable, agreed-upon definitions. But <u>a working definition that goes in accordance with the purposes of this inquiry is that as provided by Rohan Gunaratna in his analysis of different definitions provided by John Horgan and Omar Ashour.</u> Gunaratna's definition goes as follows: "De-radicalization is a comprehensive process by which a terrorist's **misunderstanding or extremist ideology** is replaced with the **principles of moderation, toleration and coexistence**. Only a small percentage of the population has extremist views that require de-radicalization. **De-radicalization involves religious engagements that seek to dissuade violence and extremism.** Cognitive skills (sometimes called life skills) training is also employed. Such skills are used to inform terrorists that there are peaceful alternatives to violence. Changing the views and ideologies of terrorists and extremists is difficult and may take more time than education and vocational training." (Gunaratna, 2012, p. 147). This definition most suits the purposes of the essay as it accounts for the cognitive micro-level variables, as well as accounts for the strategies employed in prison deradicalization programs.

measures (having only had 2 attacks since their implementation) (Rezrazi, 2018b, p. 86). These measures took the form of institutional reforms and setting up new institutions. Morocco has applied reforms at the level of the ministry of Habous/ religious affairs, the Dar Al hadith al Hassania (being one of the central religious education institutions in the country), and the high council of Ulemas. Morocco has as well, subsequently to the events of 2003, began setting up new institutions such as the Rabita Muhammadia of Ulemas in 2006 and the Mohammed VI Institute for the Training of Imams, Morshidin (male religious counsellors) and Morshidat (female religious counsellors) in 2014 (Khalid et al., 2020, pp. 11-12). Most notably Morocco has sought to regulate the religious education through a reform in 2008 that recognizes authentic teaching and closing qur'anic schools that go against the values of moderation and tolerance (Khalid et al., 2020, pp. 11-12).

3 Mousalaha: A Lens into The Mechanisms of Radicalization

Foreign terrorist fighters (FTF) present a very real threat to their countries of origin upon returning from terrorist conflict areas (Malet & Hayes, 2020, p. 7). These returnees present potential for conventional criminal or domestic terrorist recidivism (Malet & Hayes, 2020, p. 7). The year 2013 specifically marked the zenith of the recruitment of Moroccan foreign fighters, in which a period of six months between June and December was enough for more than 900 to join the fold of the conflict (Malet & Hayes, 2020, p. 5). Morocco however, has since 2015 gone through a shift in which, no longer has it had any foreign fighter departures to middle east, but instead is now presented with the challenge of the 500 combatants that have returned from these conflict areas since (Lounnas, 2018, p.11). To palliate to this concern Morocco has developed an approach that combines both prongs of its fight against Violent Islamist Radicalization.

This is essentially a prison de-radicalization program that targets inmates/detainees of terrorism related crimes (be they FTFs or domestic terrorists) in an effort to deradicalize and reintegrate them back into society. To this extent this program has been conducted in congruity between both the eradication and deradicalization approach as it is a collaborative effort between religious, classical security, and human rights institutions. The result was a multistage program aiming at the reconciliation of the inmates 1) with themselves (psychological element) 2) with the religion (theological element) and 3) with their society (social element) (Rezrazi, 2018b, p. 92).

This program has been initiated in 2017 by the penitentiary Administration (DGAPR), with the collaboration of the Rabita Mohammadia of Ulemas, and the national council for Human rights, with further partnerships with the ministry of justice, the Public ministry, the supreme council of justice, the ministry of Habous and Islamic Affairs, the Mohammed VI foundation for prisoners reinsertion, and experts in charge of socio-economic reinsertion, and in psychological counceling (Iraqi, 2019). The main goal the program seeks is the De-Radicalization of previous radicals through a holistic approach that consists of seminars and workshops for the theological deconstruction of extremist narratives, social and professional rehabilitation, and human rights and legal counseling.

V. Theory and Practice

The alignment of both the Global and the Moroccan 1) history with Violent Islamist Radicalization and 2) its developments suggests that this phenomenon is well and truly a global challenge with common characteristics. Establishing the Moroccan experience with violent radicalization as an epiphenomenon is sufficient grounds to begin assessing the validity and universality of our hypothesis based on a Moroccan case study. To pursue this hypothesis our case study has thus been concentrated on the Mousalaha program as it provides an extraordinary lens into causal inquiries about radicalization and the mechanisms thereof. This is owing to the fact that Mousalaha is uniquely conducive for 1) empirical work as testified by the readiness of the participation of the program's graduates and 2) for an indepth look into the micro-level causes as testified by the presence of a host of experts in theology and psychology.

To this extent we went through a round of six total interviews three of which are with graduates of the program, two of which are with supervisors for the female and male inmates (Dr. Farida Zomorod, and Dr. Mohamed El Mentar who works in proximity to Dr. Ahmed Abaddi responsible for the theological guidance of the male inmates -*and who has good knowledge of the Rabita's intervention in the program even though he was not directly participating within it*-), and one interview with the wife of one of the program beneficiaries. The questions we asked were loosely based on the Moghaddam staircase model laid out in chapter 1 (TFA chapter pages 18 to 22). Below are the interview questions and the logic behind them:

1 Interview questions

Question 1: Which of the following two assumptions do you agree with the most?

- Violent religious extremism is not gradual, it is something that comes complete and fast

- Violent religious extremism is a gradual process, meaning that violent extremism has stages

Question 2: Based on your experience with and outside the program, what makes violent extremism gradual and what are its stages?

Question 3: What do you think causes violent extremism?

Question 4: Based on your experience with the program, what are the most common gaps in religious understanding among program participants?

Question 5: Based on your experience with the programme, do you think that gaps in religious understanding contribute to extremism?

- yes
- no

Question 6: Based on your experience with the program, which of the following assumptions do you agree with the most?

- Gaps in religious understanding have a direct role in causing violent religious extremism

- Gaps in religious understanding play a facilitating role in causing violent religious extremism

Question 7: Based on your experience with the program, how and to what extent might these lacunas contribute to radicalization?

2 Guiding logic of the interview questions:

i. Question 1:

The purpose of this question is to assess the respondents' knowledge of the topic

ii. Question 2:

The purpose of this question is to assess the compatibility of Moghaddam's theoretical model I am using with the experiences/observations of the interviewee with radicalization.

iii. Question 3:

This question has two purposes. The first is to evaluate the respondent's ideas in a way that is not affected by how the following questions are shaped. The second purpose is to elicit more information based on their experiences inside and outside the program, which may fill in some of the gaps their subsequent answers may have left.

iv. Question 4:

The objective of this question is to first substantiate the correlation before ascertaining whether the relationship between the dependent variable (violent religious extremism) and the independent variable (gaps in the fundamentals of understanding religion) is causal.

v. Question 5:

The point of this question is to start ascertaining the nature of this correlation and whether indeed there is a causal relationship between lacunas in the fundamentals of religious understanding and violent Islamist extremism

vi. Question 6:

The purpose of this question is to establish stronger causal links and to assess their nature

vii. Question 7:

The purpose of this question is to assess the extent and reach of this relationship

Floor 0 to floor 2:

1 Theoretically According to the Staircase Model

Floor zero, or what Moghaddam refers to as the "foundational floor", is qualified in terms of dissatisfaction with social and economic conditions, wherein the potential radical perceives their conditions as being unfair, inadequate and needing change. These are individuals who are dissatisfied and see that they are subjected to unfair/unjust treatment in terms of portrayal in the media and in terms of precarious material condition, yet they remain far from aligning with the violent ideals and world views of belligerent institutions. What matters most here however, beyond the **actual** precarity and unfairness of their conditions, is the **perceived** precarity and unfairness of their conditions (Moghaddam, 2005, p. 163). Moghaddam elaborates that a person could be living in absolute poverty yet remain satisfied, while someone else could be living in relative comfort and be dissatisfied (Moghaddam, 2005, p. 163).

Some of these individuals then move on to the next floor (floor 1) in an attempt to find ways of improving these material and social conditions with which they find fault (Moghaddam, 2009, p. 375). What guides these potential radicals' paths along their pursuit of alternative (and perhaps radical) means to palliate to their concern is whether or not they encounter difficulty in this pursuit (Moghaddam, 2005, p. 164).

The causal elements in bringing about radicalization here for potential radicals could be categorized into two based on Moghaddam's model. We could typify these two categories as being 1) the Macro/active causes and 2) the Micro/passive causes. The active causes are used here in reference to the elements that push the potential radicals along the staircase, in this case they would be the bidirectional interaction of poor social and material circumstance and the reactive consequence of dissatisfaction. The passive causes on the other-hand would be what Moghaddam refers to as Relative deprivation (perceptions of unfairness and injustice), existential anxiety, rational choice (considering that terrorism is a viable rational means for the betterment of conditions), and self-efficacy (self-trust and confidence in one's abilities to better one's own conditions) (Lygre et al., 2011, p. 2).

It is those amongst this class of potential radicals that encounter difficulties in making their voices heard and in their endeavors for social mobility that move further along the path of radicalization (Lygre et al., 2011, p. 2). They begin to displace their aggression and seek an "Other" to blame for all their troubles.

2   Empirically as Applied to Mousalaha

The causal elements as prescribed by Moghaddam go in alignment with the feedback given on some of our interviews specifically in response to questions 2 and 3 about what brings about the nature of radicalization and what brings it about. We can cite Dr. Farida Zomorod, the theological guidance supervisor for the female inmates participating in Mousalaha and director of the center for women's studies in Islam, who outlines the initial impact of the social conditions a potential radical finds themselves in, and the feelings of unfairness, inferiority, and injustice they might rouse within them. These, according to Dr. Zomorod constitute a potential entrance point to further entrench radicalization.

In the same wavelength Dr. Mohamed El Mentar Director of the center for Coranic studies at the Rabita Mohammadia of Oulemas, states that the starting point that places potential radicals in a position to be receptive of radical narratives is feelings of dissatisfaction, and

perceptions of unfairness towards skewed portrayal of Muslims, double standards, and poor conditions.

There are also two other program participants and the wife of another (all of whom shall remain unnamed for their privacy) who have mentioned specifically 1) precarious socio-economic conditions, 2) negative interaction with society, 3) the social and political conditions Muslims are facing in "Arabic and Muslim states" in response to question two and three (see chapter 4).

Floor 2 to floor 5: Where Lacunas Come Into Play.

3 Theoretically According to the Staircase Model

The second floor of the staircase consists mainly of the displacement of aggression. This is to say the potential radical begins to identify a specific target to displace their pent-up aggression, frustration, and anger towards. This "other" is then identified as the cause for the perceived injustice, unfairness, and grievance causing precarious social and material circumstances (Lygre et al., 2011, p. 2). This displacement of aggression onto an identified "other" is facilitated, according to Moghaddam, to the contribution of institutions and organizations that foster radical ideas, attitudes, and behavior. These are institutions that advance binary systems of morality, and fundamentalist ideas that draw a clear distinction between an Us and a Them (Lygre et al., 2011, p. 2).

Individuals that successfully integrate these ideas and showcase a preparedness to put these ideals into action are those that move on to the next floor and begin to solidify this prescribed world view adopting it as their own (Moghaddam, 2005, p. 165). This is where the potential radical becomes a fully-fledged radical as they begin to align with the morality of the belligerent group and disengage from the conventional morality of their social milieu. Moghaddam argues that in this phase the radicalized individual fully integrates categorical thinking and vilifies the "other" prescribed by the group (Moghaddam, 2005, p. 165). Moghaddam does allude to an interpretative element mentioning that these groups adopt interpretations of Islam that encourage terrorism, and recruits are kept engaged to this morality through a host of manipulation mechanisms of isolation, secrecy and fear (Moghaddam, 2005, p. 165).

The causal elements to make this step from floor 2 to floor 3, according to Moghaddam, fall mostly under the category of Micro-passive causes as we are dealing with moral engagement which lies in the realms of cognition and psychology. The causes identified by Moghaddam are the 1). displacement of aggression, 2) dehumanization, and 3) social

categorization which refer to the identification and vilification of the "other" as the cause of grievances and hence as a target for aggression (Moghaddam, 2005, p. 165). Although Moghaddam does mention that these are all attributes of the morality adopted by the radical groups, he fails to address the step that precedes this integration, as in what predisposes the adoption of this morality in the first place.

2 Empirically as Applied to Mousalaha

This same concern is substantiated by the interviewees in that all of them outline the existence of an element that precedes and enables the integration of radical narratives. A predisposing element that facilitates this move from vilifying an "other", to adopting supportive narratives that license violence against this other.

The wife of the program graduate that has participated in the interview, in response to question 2 points out psychological processes that are very much analogous to those of 1). displacement of aggression, 2) dehumanization, and 3) social categorization layed out by Moghaddam. She does this by laying out phases that she has observed her husband go through, from being amicable and easy going, to irritable and lashing out violently in response to some circumstances that he deemed in conflict with the faith. She also mentions a degree of rigidity in moral judgement and the skewed interpretation of religious text, aligning with a single opinion in a question of morality, when in fact there are multiple (she says "50 or more") sayings of erudites on the matter clarifying all of its nuances.

Doctor Farida Zomorod elaborates further in these observations by laying down this process in response to questions 2 and 3.[7] Dr. Farida Zomorod clarifies that this process of violent radicalization begins by first isolation and the othering, this, once in conjunction with a radical religious justification, mutates into passing of judgement on this other, and then vilification (as a "Fasiq" depraved, or even "Kafir" apostate and rescinding their Islamness), then finally they move onto acts of "licensed" violence. This explanation as well bears much similarity with Moghaddam's enunciation, but has an additional active element of the acquisition of radical religious justification. Dr. Zomorod, in response to questions 4 and 7, clarifies that this adoption of radical ideals is facilitated by "superficial understandings" of the tenets of sharia law, explaining that most of these radicals in question (female as well as male) do not have high degrees of religious education.

7- Refer to Chapter 5 for questions and guiding logic

This same idea is built upon by Doctor Mohamed El Mentar and two of the participating previous Radicals in response to questions 3, 4, and 7. They state that these "superficial understandings" of Islamic Jurisprudence are specifically concerning the concept of Hakimyyah (governership of Allah) presented by Sayyid Qutb and Abu Al A'la Almaoudoudi, the concept of Hukm Addiyar "حكم الديار" (categorization of house of apostasy or house of Islam), the concept of Al Wala Wa Lbara, passing by concepts of the Khilafah but **most specifically as related to the concept of Jihad.**

This, as clarified by Dr. El Mentar and some of these previous radicals, is all based on very few writings such as the "المقاومة الإسلامية العالمية" of Abu Masa'ab Al Suri, and the writings of Al Maqdissi, Omar Abd Al Rahman, and Abu Qatadah Al Filistini amongst others.

This is supplemented according to Dr. El Mentar by a lack of understanding of the Maqassid Asharia or the Purposes of Jurisprudence which guide the understanding of ayat usually cited by Violent Radicals to justify their beliefs and actions such as **Ayat 191 and 216 of Surat Al-Baqarah** both of which relate to the concept of Jihad:

2:191: "Kill them wherever you come upon them and drive them out of the places from which they have driven you out. For persecution is far worse than killing. And do not fight them at the Sacred Mosque unless they attack you there. If they do so, then fight them—that is the reward of the disbelievers." (Quran, Surah Al-Baqarah, 1-286)

&

2:216: "Fighting has been made obligatory upon you "believers", though you dislike it. Perhaps you dislike something which is good for you and like something which is bad for you. Allah knows and you do not know."

This concept of Jihad, as advanced by Dr. Ahmed Abaddi in his book "*Mafhum Assilm Fi Al Islam- The Concept of Peace in Islam*", is highly contextual, as it takes different manifestations according to the context wherein it is placed. However, the common denominator for Jihad, considering the totality of its mentions is the pursuit of self-obligation even if the ego dislikes it. Outside of this, only the institution of the Imamah (taken to mean state leadership in the modern context) has the capacity to issue or prescribe the time/context appropriate for fighting. As such, Jihad is a struggle against self to illuminate the mind and the being, and to withhold one's passions (Abaddi, 2019, p. 168). Specifically as pertaining the verse 191, the concept here is

geared towards the protection of the weak and innocent as well as the protection of life (Abaddi, 2019, p. 168). This becomes especially salient considering the verses before and after (2:190-192)

"And fight in the way of Allah with those who fight with you, and do not exceed the limits, surely Allah does not love those who exceed the limits" (Religious Rehabilitation Group)

…

"But if they desist, then surely Allah is Forgiving, Merciful." (Religious Rehabilitation Group)

Another example would be the concept of Hukm Addiyar (Dar Al Islam, and Dar al kufr) found in the following :

"But once the Sacred Months have passed, kill the polytheists 'who violated their treaties' wherever you find them,[1] capture them, besiege them, and lie in wait for them on every way. But if they repent, perform prayers, and pay alms-tax, then set them free. Indeed, Allah is All-Forgiving, Most Merciful." (Quran, Surah at-Tawbah, 1-129)

Violent Islamist Radicals use this verse, which they refer to as ayat Assayf (verse of the sword) as reference for the connection between war and the ruling of whether a nation is a house of apostacy or a house of Islam (إقبال, 2021, p. 88). However, they do this while ignoring the fact that this ruling concerned specifically the Arab polytheists who had repeatedly broken agreements and conspired to do harm (إقبال, 2021, p. 88). This is further supported by the very verse that precedes it and which clarifies:

"As for the polytheists who have honoured every term of their treaty with you and have not supported an enemy against you, honour your treaty with them until the end of its term. Surely Allah loves those who are mindful 'of Him'." (Quran, Surah at-Tawbah, 1-128)

This, as per Dr. El Mentar, ties into the core necessary finalities or Maqasid Asharia, which lie in that of preservation of 1) Life (النفس), of 2) Religion (Faith, Laws, Morality, and Ethics/الدين), 3) (الكرامة و النسل /عرض) Dignity and continuity of the species, of 4) Mind and Reason (العقل), and 5) of Property(المال), which in turn harbor within them the value of mercy and work towards the assurance of Happiness in both lives.

This thus positions lacunas in the fundamentals of religious understanding, specifically those as related to the concept of Jihad, firmly as predisposing elements for the adoption of systems of "morality" that according to Moghaddam nurture the 1). displacement of aggression,

2) dehumanization, and 3) social categorization and push towards the integration within belligerent terrorist institutions. In other words, **Lacunas in the fundamentals of religious understanding are Micro level Passive causes for the radicalization of Muslim Youths.**

It is at this step that radicals finally make the shift from an Islamist al in thought and beliefs to a Violent Islamist radical in floors 4 and 5, or in other words, a terrorist who has completed the solidification of their categorical thinking. This is to say that at this point, the radical has fully integrated the bureaucratic structure of the belligerent organization, has fully demonized the "other", and has undergone training to become fully equipped and fully capacitated to carry out terrorist operations.

VI. from Active to Passive and from Macro to Micro

Assessment of Transferability

Beyond establishing that the Moroccan experience with Violent Islamist Radicalization is reflective of the phenomenon on a global scale, our conclusion necessitates an extra-layer of substantiation to fully establish the universality of it. This is so as to make sure that no externality or potentially overlooked variables such as the cultural character specific to Morocco, or the dominant religion, or even dominant language have skewed our observations so far as to falsely assume causation between lacking understanding of the fundamentals of Islam, and Violent Islamist Radicalization. To this extent we have taken into account 2 other of the most cited programs in France (AMAL program) (Parker, 2013, p. 48), and Singapore (Rosili, 2016, p. 158).

Firstly, The Amal Program in France, which concluded in 2016, was a pilot program designed for the deradicalization of violent Islamist radicals in two prison centers. This program was set up by the French Directorate of Prison Administration. the below included quote underlines the presence of the same observed lacunas:

"This observation underlines, among many other examples not described here, how much knowledge of Islam was partial, even incomplete, oriented towards justifying purposes of jihad and involvement in the Syrian crisis (confirmation bias), among the beneficiaries. detainees, in particular the youngest

[…] *A posteriori*, we consider that certain results are rather consolidated and deserve a recommendation of implementation: the use of the Islamic theological corpus to legitimize the use, in a second step, of tools likely if not to be rejected, makes sense. and proves to be

particularly «deployable» on a population of beneficiaries who often have only an *ultra-* applicative knowledge of Islam (justification of violence and moral management of daily facts between *halal* and *haram* , the pure and the impure), and the Arabic language - an incomplete practice even limited to a few well-felt, but poorly pronounced formulas." (Marret & Suquet, 2021, p. 6)

Beyond simply observing the presence of superficial understanding of the fundamentals of the Islamic faith however, the program does not go too deeply into their bearing on bringing about radicalization. It is however acknowledged, as presented in the above quote, that such linkages should be explored, and the religious element should be brought in for a more complete De-Radicalization approach.

The Jemaah Islamiyah, a violent radical groups with militant Al Qaeda aligned ideals infiltrated Singapore in early 2001 with the purpose of establishing an Islamic state. Thy had made plans to conduct terrorist attacks within Singapore but was intercepted by the security services. Recognizing the threat the Ministry of Home affairs contacted the Islamic religious council of Singapore and other members of the community to help construct an ideological approach against Violent Islamist Radicalization. In 2003 the Religious Rehabilitation Group Program was constructed, which targets prisoners held on charges of violent islamist radicalization (Parker, 2013, pp. 34-35). Within this program, many of the same observation as in the Amal program were made as is clear in the below quote;

"To assist all members of the RRG in their counselling work, the RRG has written two manuals as a guide to rehabilitation work […] The first manual addresses JI's key ideas that have misinterpreted Islamic concepts. The second "goes beyond addressing misinterpretations of Islamic concepts to deal with broader issues, like how one becomes radicalised and what could induce feelings of hatred towards others. The guide aims to better help the Muslim scholars convince hardcore detainees and self-radicalised individuals that their extreme beliefs are not part of Islamic teachings" (Hassan et al., 2011, P. 27)

This quote underlines that this observation is mirrored by the experts conducting the de-radicalization programs in Singapore, who recognize that **the presence of lacunas in fundamental religious understanding is a relevant causal element in bringing about and entrenching violent Islamist Radicalization**. This is further testified by the fact that essential to their deradicalization program is the clarification of the concepts of **Jihad**, of Wala & Bara, and of Khilafa as detailed by the program's online portal, similarly to our findings in this study (Religious Rehabilitation Group).

Conclusion

The study of Violent radicalization is rife with equivocation, politicization and overgeneralizations, but most specifically the field is suffering from two main issues in particular. Firstly, there is not much consensus except on the procedural nature of radicalization itself (Schmid, 2013, p. 19). Secondly the field of radicalization still finds itself in a general lack of empirical research, making for a disproportionate focus on large scale Macro-level explanations for violent radicalization (Veldhuis, 2019, p. 9). The combination of these two factors when considered in conjunction with the recurrence of the observation that there is a prevalence of lacking religious understanding among violent incarcerated Islamist radicals, presents us with a need to pursue the question of:**What is the correlation between these observed lacunas in religious knowledge and the violent radicalization of Muslim youths?**

To this extent we have conducted an empirical study on a prison de-radicalization in Morocco called Mousalaha in which we interview six people, three of which were previously radicalized program graduates, one of which was the wife of one of the program graduates, one of which was Dr. Farida Zomorod responsible for the theological supervision and counseling for the radicalized women, and one of which was Dr. Mohammed El Mentar.

The Logic of our study essentially goes through three basic steps, first is establishing that the Moroccan experience is sufficiently reflective of the Global experience with radicalization to be able to make extrapolations with a sufficient degree of validity. Secondly, we juxtapose our study's observations with Moghaddam's theoretical model to situate them in the process of radicalization and clarify the nature of the processes we are referring to. Thirdly we establish the transferability of our conclusion based on the shared observations in programs in France and Singapore to account for variables that might have slipped our attention.

Based on this logical process we have come to establish that **Lacunas in the fundamentals of religious understanding are Micro level Passive causes for the radicalization of Muslim Youths.**

However, the depth and the nature of this causal relation has yet to be substantiated. All this study does is show the need that there is indeed a lack of understanding in relation to the causes of Violent Islamist Radicalization, specifically those related to the more Micro level elements, be they psychological, or cognitive, but most particularly interpretational.

This work is hence an attempt at perhaps carving a path towards more avenues for substantive research that go more in-depth into the role of "predisposing" or as we call them "Passive/Micro-level" causes in bringing about this phenomenon of Violent Islamist Radicalization, and maybe ultimately make way for more comprehensive more effectual measures and approaches that seek to inoculate against this virus. More similar studies need to be conducted within and outside of similar prison de-radicalization programs to be able to further clarify these linkages.

Aside from this, the study remains limited in that we have encountered a few methodological difficulties in our efforts to conduct the empirical part of our research. First is that there were conflict of interest (familial ties) concerns that have limited the scope of people we could interview in order to maintain academic integrity, and second is that the Covid-19 pandemic had restricted some of our interviews to be written interviews thus limiting the amount and quality of information that could be gathered.

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