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Homegrown terrorism and transformative learning: an interdisciplinary approach to understanding radicalization

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Since 2001, a preponderance of terrorist activity in Europe, North America, and Australia, has involved radicalized Westerners inspired by al Qaeda. Described as 'homegrown terrorism', perpetrators are citizens and residents born, raised, and educated within the countries they attack. While most scholars and policy-makers agree that radicalization plays a central role in persuading Westerners to embrace terrorism, little research properly investigates the internal and cognitive processes inherent to radicalization. Transformative learning theory, developed from the sciences in education, health, and rehabilitation, provides an unconventional and interdisciplinary way to understand the radicalization process. The theory suggests that sustained behavioural change can occur when critical reflection and the development of novel personal belief systems are provoked by specific triggering factors. In applying transformative learning theory to homegrown terrorism, this study helps explain how formerly non-violent individuals come to condone, legitimize, and participate in violent behaviour.

Keywords: homegrown terrorism; radicalization; transformative learning theory

Introduction

In the years since al Qaeda's 2001 attack on the United States, there has been unprecedented growth in violent activity inspired by radical Islamism and perpetrated by individuals of European, Australian, Canadian and American descent (second and third generation immigrants, long-term foreign residents, and Muslim converts). This phenomenon, loosely labelled 'homegrown terrorism', represents an evolution in militant *jihadism*. Until recently, acts of *jihadi* terrorism against Westerners were committed by individuals living 'over there', who held particular grievances associated with their immediate socio-political environments, radicalized with the assistance of local facilitators, prepared acts of violence within their community, and travelled to their Western targets to carry out attacks. While domestic terrorism originating from within Western states is not a novel development, the difference today is that homegrown *jihadi* terrorism is far more destructive, usually involves mass-casualty bombings, almost exclusively targets civilians, and is generally associated with transnational socio-political grievances not easily addressed unilaterally or at the local level. It is an altogether distinct and complex security challenge.[1]

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1   Terrorism, for the purpose of this paper, is the use of indiscriminate violence against non-combatants by non-state actors with the purpose of generating fear in order to 'signal' and advance particular socio-political objectives. This definition implies that terrorism is meant to 'intimidate a larger audience' beyond those directly targeted with violence. Non-state terrorist organizations act independently from states and lack sovereign territorial control. Homegrown terrorism is autonomously organized by radicalized Westerners with little direct assistance from transnational networks, is usually organized within the home or host country, and targets fellow nationals. Bruce Hoffman and Gordon McCormick, 'Terrorism, Signaling, and Suicide Attack', *Studies in Conflict and*

Homegrown terrorism stems in part from the appeal al Qaeda has found in certain pockets of Western society. For the most part, homegrown terrorists have been citizens and residents born, raised, and educated within the countries they attack and groups have been self-generated and independently organized. A recent study of over 200 European *jihadists*, for instance, found that over 90% were residents of a European country and almost 60% retained European citizenship.[2] While some experts challenge the 'grass roots' thesis inherent to homegrown terrorism given the assistance some have received from al Qaeda and others, these arguments fail to negate the increasingly prevalent role Westerners have in organizing *jihadi* violence against fellow nationals.[3]

The purpose of this paper is to investigate this emerging trend by focusing on the individual processes that are associated with the *jihadi* radicalization of Westerners. Doing so is important for two reasons. First, international Islamic terrorism continues to evolve in nature and scope. While remnants of al Qaeda continue to exist in some functioning form along the Pakistan– Afghan border and in pockets of Yemen, Uzbekistan, Iraq, North Africa, and elsewhere, and carry on organizing acts of terrorism both regionally and globally, al Qaeda-*inspired* terrorism is a novel development. It involves unaffiliated individuals and groups tapping into al Qaeda's message to justify violence against Western states and citizens. With a little encouragement, individuals predisposed to accept al Qaeda's vision of international relations create small networks and independently prepare acts of violence. Because radicalization is a lynchpin to the homegrown process, gaining a better appreciation of the phenomenon will allow for a more informed response. Second, research on homegrown terrorism has focused primarily on the pre-conditions and factors that prompt individuals to join or establish such groups. Much less research is associated with the processes of radicalization at the individual level, and almost none explores in particular how formerly non-violent individuals transform into persons who accept, legitimize, and partake in terrorism. The studies that do investigate the processes of Western *jihadi* radicalization are primarily oriented towards the structural characteristics of the phenomenon, identifying the various step-like phases individuals travel through on their way toward conducting terrorism.[4] What these studies do not explore is the *transformation of meaning perspective* – the individual's cognitive construction of new definitions of self and behaviour – that is necessarily associated with radicalization and violent action.

This paper addresses this research gap by employing an educational perspective of adult learning to explore the internal processes and personal transformations associated with radicalization and homegrown terrorism. It does so by investigating how *transformative learning theory* relates to the pathways of radicalization. First developed in the sciences of education,

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Terrorism 27 (2004): 243; Walter Enders and Todd Sandler, 'After 9/11: Is it All Different Now?', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49, no. 2 (2005): 260–61; Daniel Byman, 'Understanding Proto-Insurgencies', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 31, no. 2 (2008): 167–70; Aiden Kirby, 'The London Bombers as "Self-Starters": A Case Study in Indigenous Radicalization and the Emergence of Autonomous Cliques', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 30 (2007), 415–19; Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), chs. 4 and 7.

2 Edwin Bakker, *Jihadi Terrorists in Europe: Their Characteristics and the Circumstances in which they Joined the Jihad* (The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations, 2006), 36–7.

3 Bruce Hoffman, 'The Myth of Grass-Roots Terrorism: Why Osama bin Laden Still Matters', *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 3 (2008); Bruce Hoffman, 'Terrorism in the West: Al-Qaeda's Role in "Homegrown" Terror', *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 13 (2007): 91–9.

4 Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Laura Grossman, *Homegrown Terrorists in the U.S. and U.K.: An Empirical Examination of the Radicalization Process* (Washington, DC: Foundation for Defense of Democracies, 2009); Tomas Precht, *Home Grown Terrorism and Islamist Radicalization in Europe: From Conversion to Terrorism* (Danish Ministry of Justice, 2008); Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, 'Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways Toward Terrorism', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20, no. 3 (2008): 414–33; US Federal Bureau of Investigation, *The Radicalization Process: From Conversion to Jihad* (2006); New York Police Department (Intelligence Division), *Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat* (2007); and Rik Coolsaet, ed., *Jihadi Terrorism and the Radicalisation Challenge in Europe* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008).

transformative learning theory has been clinically applied to the study of rehabilitation in health science and nursing to illustrate how individuals (re)construct personal meaning perspectives when confronting and coping with health crises and injury. This article suggests that similar cognitive transformations take place in radicalizing individuals, whereby previously held conceptions, beliefs, and identities – along with associated behaviours – are reconstructed and/or replaced. By addressing homegrown terrorism from a transformative learning perspective, this investigation offers an unconventional and intrinsically interdisciplinary lens with which to study radicalization in Western society. In so doing, the article offers a more nuanced understanding of how once-passive and westernized individuals come to accept extremist interpretations of Islam, identify with international *jihadism*, condone and later endorse indiscriminate violence, and eventually participate in terrorism against their neighbours.

The argument is structured as follows. After briefly describing the homegrown terrorism phenomenon, section two reviews the literature on radicalization and the precursors of homegrown terrorism. An introduction to transformative learning theory, along with a description of its core tenets and existing research agenda within health science, nursing, and education, follows in section three. In section four, transformative learning theory is applied to the radicalization process. The article concludes by drawing out the theoretical implications of the analysis and suggests avenues for further research.

Homegrown terrorism: a primer

Western militant *jihadism* is not limited to one country or region. Emerging trends suggest that a widening political and geographic area is threatened by homegrown terrorism.[5] In Europe, the United Kingdom is considered the stronghold of violent homegrown Islamic radicalism. Of the recent acts of terrorism organized within and against the UK by British citizens, a few stand out. In December 2001, Richard Reid, a British convert to Islam, failed to detonate a bomb concealed in his shoe while aboard American Airlines Flight 63. In 2004, a British-Pakistani terrorist cell was disrupted. Its leader, a Muslim convert, and seven members were eventually imprisoned in 2007. Two sets of suicide attacks on London's transit system (one of which failed) were conducted in July 2005 by British citizens of Pakistani, Jamaican, and East African descent; over 50 were killed and 700 injured. The foiled 2006 liquid-bomb plot targeting transatlantic aircraft flying from London to Canada and the US involved a number of British-born individuals and at least three converts to Islam. The 2007 car bombing of Glasgow's International Airport (along with two foiled car bombing attempts in London) involved four British doctors. And in October 2008, a 22-year-old convert, 'encouraged' by internet-based *jihadi* literature, detonated an explosive in an Exeter restaurant. All of these events have taken place against a backdrop provided by British authorities that suggests a dramatic increase in terrorist activity since 9/11, with terrorism-related investigations jumping from fewer than 250 in 2001 to over 500 in 2004, 800 in 2005, and 1600 in 2006.[6]

A similar pattern is evident elsewhere in Europe. In France, long a target of Algerian-linked terrorist organizations like the *Groupe Islamique Armé* (GIA), security officials now posit that

5   Frazer Egerton and Alexandre Wilner, 'Militant Jihadism in Canada: Prosecuting the War of Ideas', *Justice, Policing, and Security* (Ottawa, Canada: Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2009): 2–5; Robert Leiken and Steven Brooke, 'The Quantitative Analysis of Terrorism and Immigration: An Initial Exploration', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 18, no. 4 (2006): 507–10; Petter Nesser, 'Chronology of Jihadism in Western Europe 1994–2007: Planned, Prepared, and Executed Terrorist Attacks', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 31, no. 10 (2008): 924–46; Kimberley Thachuk, Marion Bowman, and Courtney Richardson, *Homegrown Terrorism: The Threat Within* (Washington, DC: National Defense University, 2008): 9–36; and Alex Wilner, *Enemies Within: Combating Homegrown Terrorism in Canada* (Halifax, Canada: Atlantic Institute for Market Studies, 2008), 5–15.

6   House of Commons, Intelligence and Security Committee, United Kingdom, *Report into the London Terrorist Attacks on 7 July 2005* (London, 2006): Paragraph 22; *BBC*, 'Extracts from MI5 chief's speech', November 10, 2006.

'terrorist threats have increased massively over the past few years'.[7] A number of attacks have been foiled, including a 2000 plot on Strasbourg's Christmas market, a 2001 attack on American interests in Paris, a 2001/02 plot against the Eiffel Tower and other landmarks, a 2005 plan to bomb Paris' metro, and a 2006 attack on Paris' airport.[8] In 2007, President Nicolas Sarkozy revealed plans for a quadrupling of the *Groupe d'Intervention de la Gendarmerie Nationale* (GIGN), France's counterterrorism and hostage rescue unit, in order to contend with expected levels of violence.[9] In Denmark, three terrorist attacks were foiled between 2005 and 2007, each involving Danish citizens and long-term residents.[10] In the Netherlands, the 2004 murder of Theo van Gogh, a controversial artist, by a young Muslim radical, Mohammed Bouyeri, prompted the arrest of the Hofstad Group, an organization determined to carry out acts of violence in the country. Some experts posit that another 20 groups are active in the country.[11] In Spain, the March 2004 Madrid bombings, which killed and injured over 2000, and a foiled train attack one month later were carried out by Spanish citizens. Roughly one-third of the 21 individuals convicted of participating in the attack were Spaniards.[12] In October 2004, Spanish authorities dismantled another cell, the self-styled 'Martyrs of Morocco', which had planned to bomb Spain's national criminal court, the *Audiencia Nacional*.[13] In Germany, three individuals – two German converts and one Turkish resident – were arrested in 2007 while transporting 1500 lbs of hydrogen peroxide – the compound detonated in the London bombings.[14] They were planning to attack an American military base, a nightclub, and an airport. In Italy, police disrupted a plot to bomb Milan's subway system in 2004 and arrested a number of individuals, including a religious leader, in 2007 for 'recruiting and training' Italians for terrorism.[15] In Belgium, a group (the 'Asparagus 18') with connections to the 2003 Casablanca bombings (which included a suicide attack on Belgium's Consulate in Morocco) was rounded up in 2004. Terrorists plotting to free al Qaeda operative Nizar Trabelsi, imprisoned in Belgium, were arrested in 2007, and another six Belgians were charged with membership in a terrorist group in 2008.[16] And in Switzerland, security officials arrested several radical Islamists planning to launch grenades against commercial aircraft at Geneva's international airport.[17]

Outside Europe, homegrown *jihadism* has figured prominently in Australia, Canada, and the United States. Seventeen people were arrested in Melbourne and Sydney in 2005 in a raid that

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7   Peter Allen, 'French SAS to triple in Size', *Telegraph*, 25 June 2007.

8   Thachuk et al., *Homegrown Terrorism*, 15–17; Jeremy Shapiro and Bénédicte Suzan, 'The French Experience of Counter-terrorism', *Survival* 45, no. 1 (2003): 67–98.

9   Allen, 'French SAS'.

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

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

12 *BBC News*, 'Madrid "Ringmaster" Dies in Blast', April 2, 2004; Paul Hamilos and Mark Tran, '21 Guilty, Seven Cleared over Madrid Train Bombings', *Guardian*, October 31, 2007; William Rose, Rysia Murphy, and Max Abrahms, 'Correspondence: Does Terrorism Ever Work? The 2004 Madrid Train Bombings', *International Security* 32, no. 1 (2007): 185–92.

13 Lorenzo Vidino, 'Islamic Extremism in Europe' (testimony, US House Committee on Foreign Affairs, April 27, 2007).

14 Mark Landler, 'German Police Arrest 3 in Terrorist Plot', *New York Times*, September 6, 2007; Victor Mauer, 'Politics and the Threat of Transnational Terrorism in Germany', in *Europe and Transnational Terrorism: Assessing Threats and Countermeasures*, ed. Franz Eder and Martin Senn (Baden-Baden, Germany: Nomos, 2008), 75–105.

15 Kathryn Haahr, 'Italy's Underground Islamist Network', *Terrorism Monitor* 5, no. 16 (2007), http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D/4378.

16 Raf Casert, 'Six Alleged Islamic Extremists Charged in Belgium', *Associated Press*, December 12, 2008; Alain Grignard, 'The Islamist Network in Belgium: Between Nationalism and Globalisation', in *Jihadi Terrorism and the Radicalisation Challenge in Europe*, ed. Rik Coolsaet (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008), 85–96. Elaine Sciolino and Hélène Fouquet, 'Belgium Is Trying to Unravel the Threads of a Terror Web', *New York Times*, October 10, 2005.

17 Craig Whitlock, 'In Neutral Switzerland, A Rising Radicalism', *Washington Post*, July 20, 2006.

netted large quantities of chemicals, production manuals, and target information. A number of the suspects, six of whom were eventually jailed in 2009, were second-generation Australians of Lebanese decent and none had any known links with al Qaeda or Jemaah Islamiyah, the terrorist group responsible for the 2002 and 2005 Bali Bombings which killed over 220 people, including 92 Australians.[18] In Canada, Mohammad Momin Khawaja was the first Canadian imprisoned under the country's Anti-Terrorism Act for facilitating terrorism in Britain. The Khadr family, despite the controversy over their son Omar, has long been accused of supporting Osama bin Laden.[19] And of the 18 Canadians apprehended on terrorism charges in and around Toronto in 2006, one was found guilty in 2008, another entered a guilty plea in 2009, and nine other trials are ongoing.[20] 'What we're onto scares us', explains Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) Assistant Commissioner Mike McDonell, adding that security officials were actively investigating seven other suspected terrorist plots in Canada.[21]

And in the United States, teenager Charles Bishop flew a small plane into a Tampa-area skyscraper in 2002. While media characterized the event as 'a suicide', a note written by Bishop and retrieved in the wreckage praised 9/11. 'God blesses [Osama bin Laden] and the others who helped make September 11th happen.' Bishop signed the statement with: 'I had no other help, although I am acting on their behalf.'[22] Other Americans, like John Walker Lindh, Christopher Paul, Hiram Torres, James Ujaama, Adam Gadahn, and Jose Padilla, all Muslim converts, participated in *jihadism* in East Asia, while another 20 Americans have recently joined al-Shaabab in Somalia.[23] American *jihadists* have also targeted the United States. In Buffalo, New York, six American-born citizens of Yemeni origin – members of the so-called 'Lackawanna Six' – were arrested in 2002. In California, four men preparing to attack El Al airline ticket counters at Los Angeles International Airport, a number of synagogues, and military facilities, were arrested in 2005. Three of the four men were American-born Muslim converts.[24] Other American citizens were arrested in 2006 for planning to attack Chicago's Sears Tower, in 2007 for a planned attack on US military base Fort Dix in New Jersey, and in 2009 for positioning what the perpetrators believed were car bombs outside two New York City synagogues.

This is the phenomenon of homegrown *jihadi* terrorism. In all of these cases, citizens, nationals, and residents of the countries specifically targeted were involved in preparing and carrying out the attacks. In all but a few cases, neither al Qaeda nor any other transnational terrorist group had a significant role in organizing or facilitating these plots.

Three precursors of homegrown radicalization

Individuals who contemplate killing their fellow citizens in campaigns of terrorism do so in great measure because their beliefs dictate that murder is feasible and just. Political violence is rarely constructed in a vacuum. 'Individuals are ideologically driven', notes Rohan Gunaratna, 'not

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18 Raymond Bonner, 'Australia Arrests 16 in Terror Sweep', *International Herald Tribune*, November 9, 2005; *Associated Press*, 'Australian Terrorist Leader Sentenced to 12 Years', February 2, 2009.

19 Stewart Bell, *Cold Terror: How Canada Nurtures and Exports Terrorism around the World* (Toronto: Wiley, 2004), ch. 6.

20 Alex Wilner, 'Beyond Belief: Canadians Who Target Other Canadians', *Globe and Mail*, November 5, 2008.

21 Quoted in Ian Macleod, 'CSIS Focuses on Homegrown Terrorism Threat', *Ottawa Citizen*, March 14, 2008. See also Ian Macleod, 'RCMP has 843 Active National Security Investigations', *Ottawa Citizen*, May 7, 2008; Stewart Bell, 'Jihadists Born Here Pose New Threat', *National Post*, November 19, 2005; and Colin Freeze, 'Terror "Wannabes" Canada's Biggest Threat', *Globe and Mail*, May 8, 2008.

22 Dana Canedy, 'Teenage Who Crashed Plane Praised Terrorists', *New York Times*, February 7, 2002.

23 Lorenzo Vidino, 'Homegrown Jihadist Terrorism in the United States: A New and Occasional Phenomenon', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 32 (2009): 5–6; *Recruiting Americans for Jihad*, Directed/Produced by Matthew Orr, *New York Times Video*, July 2009.

24 Jeremiah Marquez, 'Third Man Pleads Guilty in Homegrown Terror Case in Southern Cal', *Associated Press*, December 17, 2007.

operationally driven.'[25] Lidewijde Ongering, Dutch Deputy National Coordinator for Counter-terrorism, adds that 'people who set out to kill other people for political or religious reasons first go through a process of radicalization'.[26] Radicalization is a personal process in which individuals adopt extreme political, social, and/or religious ideals and aspirations, and where the attainment of particular goals justifies the use of indiscriminate violence. It is both a mental and emotional process that prepares and motivates an individual to pursue violent behaviour. According to Brian Michael Jenkins, radicalization is the internalization of a 'set of beliefs, a militant mindset that embraces violent *jihad* as the paramount test of one's conviction'.[27] Understanding what drives violent radicalization is perhaps the most challenging aspect of confronting homegrown terrorism. Few generalizable rules seem to apply. As the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) revealed in a 2005 report, 'there does not appear to be a single process that leads to extremism: the transformation is highly individual'.[28] European experts agree. 'The paths and motivations . . . to Islamic political radicalism', writes Akil Awan, 'are many and varied, with no simple cause and effect calculus.'[29] Jonathan Githens-Mazer adds that 'the story behind how and why each individual may come to be a radical violent Islamist is as unique as a fingerprint'.[30] Nonetheless, there is a burgeoning literature on the precursors of radicalization that identifies and explores the socio-political and environmental factors that may lead to violent behaviour. Of the many factors identified as potential precursors of Western radicalization, three stand out: socio-political alienation, deepening religious identity, and anger over a state's foreign policy.

Socio-political alienation

The most commonly cited precursor of radicalization and homegrown terrorism is the lack of socio-political integration particular Western Muslim communities have with their broader society, and, relatedly, their experiences of discrimination, victimization, and xenophobia.[31] The assumption is that individuals and groups who fail to properly associate with their host or native country – the 'unassimilated' – eventually seek other like-minded individuals to associate with. In so doing they construct a narrow social network that is distinct from the broader societal one and establish identities that reflect the 'clique' rather than the nation.[32] As David Wright-Neville and Debra Smith suggest, 'alienation is replaced by identification with the group, powerlessness is replaced by potency derived from being involved in group

25　Rohan Gunaratna, 'Al Qa'ida and Diasporas', in *The Radicalization of Diasporas and Terrorism*, ed. Bruce Hoffman et al. (Washington, DC: RAND 2007), 39.

26　Lidewijde Ongering, 'Home-Grown Terrorism and Radicalization in the Netherlands: Experiences, Explanations, and Approaches' (testimony, US Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, June 27, 2007).

27　Brian Michael Jenkins, 'Building an Army of Believers: Jihadist Radicalization and Recruitment' (testimony, US House of Representatives, April 5, 2007).

28　Quoted in Bell, 'Jihadists Born Here Pose New Threat'.

29　Akil Awan, 'Antecedents of Islamic Political Radicalism among Muslim Communities in Europe', *PS: Political Science and Politics* 41, no. 1 (2008): 16.

30　Jonathan Githens-Mazer, 'Variations on a Theme: Radical Violent Islamism and European North African Radicalization', *PS: Political Science and Politics* 41, no. 1 (2008): 22.

31　Sam Mullins, 'Home-grown Terrorism: Issues and Implications', *Perspectives on Terrorism* 1, no. 3 (2007): 1–3; Precht, *Home Grown Terrorism*, 43–5; Jocelyne Cesari, 'Terrorism and Diasporas in the United States', in *The Radicalization of Diasporas and Terrorism*, ed. Bruce Hoffman et al. (Washington, DC: RAND 2007): 33; Tarik Fraihi, '(De-)Escalating Radicalisation: The Debate within Muslim and Immigrant Communities', in *Jihadi Terrorism and the Radicalisation Challenge in Europe*, ed. Rik Coolsaet (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008); Agata Nalborczyk, 'The Perception Among Muslim Minorities of Host European Counties: Influence of Legal Status and Citizenship', *Global Change, Peace and Security* 20, no. 1 (2008): 60.

32　Social networking and bonding in terrorist formation is discussed by Marc Sageman in *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 137–73.

operations, while humiliation is mitigated by participation in actions'.[33] While the decoupling of national identity does not clarify why or how individuals radicalize in the first place, it does help explain how alienated individuals might eventually rationalize attacking fellow citizens. A report by the Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD) suggests that the process of societal rejection – dubbed 'extreme isolationism' – threatens Europe's democratic political order because it 'gradually harm[s] social cohesion and solidarity' while undermining fundamental human rights.[34] As a result, some radicalized individuals distance themselves politically, socially, and ideologically from the broader community, eventually rejecting the national identity shared by other citizens, along with the collective's underlying political ideology, historical narrative, and related value-systems. Anti-democratic action and violence is a potential outcome.

The polarization of society into different religious and cultural groups weakens the bonds of state identity, civil association, and nationalism. Over time, the broader community in which the radicalizing individual lives is characterized as an enemy. 'The reality in Western Europe', suggests Jack Granatstein, 'is that the second and third generation of Muslim citizens are more fiercely Islamist than their parents ... their sense of themselves as Dutch or British or French ... is much less strong than their identity as Muslims.'[35] At issue is the state's failure to integrate particular individuals in society and to properly teach, diffuse, and ingrain the lessons of democracy, peaceful dispute resolution, social inclusion, and the rule of law. What results are individuals who spurn acceptance of their nation's identity and fail to appreciate the state's social and political norms, both of which ease the use of violence if and when it is contemplated. Consider these candid statements provided by 'Ousman', an imprisoned French Islamist:

> I understood that I was different, that I was not French, that I would never become French and that I had no business trying to become French either. I took it well. I was proud of my new Muslim iden-tity. That was my reconquest of myself, my burst of lucidity, my awakening ... no more desire to become part of this France that did not want me.[36]

Since the Madrid and London bombings, Western governments have tailored their response to specifically address the sort of socio-political alienation 'Ousman' and his cohorts express. In the Netherlands the focus is on preventing radicalization by promoting and strengthening socio-political integration. If an individual feels Dutch, the rationale goes, they will not easily accept attacking other Dutch. To that end, explains Berto Jongman of the Dutch Ministry of Defence, the development of 'new methods of communication between Muslims and non-Muslims' were developed with the intent of (re)integrating at-risk communities.[37] Approaches have included obligatory integration courses, language examinations that are to be administered prior to immigration, the taking of national oaths, the required viewing of cultural films relating Western values, offering 'homework support cafés' for disenfranchised youths, and augmenting government recruitment campaigns in minority communities.[38] If homegrown terrorism is the product of segregation, resentment, and public malaise, then investing in reintegration programs should help stifle its development.

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33 David Wright-Neville and Debra Smith, 'Political Rage: Terrorism and the Politics of Emotion', *Global Change, Peace, and Security* 21, no. 1 (2009): 95.

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

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

36 Quoted in John Rosenthal, 'The French Path to Jihad', *Policy Review* 139 (2006): 1.

37 Jongman, 'Terrorism and Diasporas', 14.

38 Ministry of Refugees, Immigration, and Integration Affairs, Government of Denmark, *A Common and Safe Future* (2008), 9–10; Stewart Bell, 'Make Immigrants Take Oath of Loyalty', *National Post*, March 1, 2006.

At issue, however, is the fact that homegrown terrorists, for the most part, *have been* well-integrated citizens of the countries they target. As decidedly anti-Canadian the Toronto suspects may have been for targeting other Canadians with terrorism, they nonetheless retained a certain and identifiable 'Canadianness'. Like the London transit bombers who dined on fish and chips and enjoyed watching the Champions League on the 'telly', those rounded up in Ontario looked and behaved much like other young Torontonians. As Robert Mueller, former director of the FBI, has suggested, what differentiates these terrorists from transnational ones is that they are essentially 'members of the community'.[39] Most, if not all, homegrown militants were at one time Western in both appearance and behaviour. Awan adds that the most 'striking aspects' of Western militant Islamism is 'the degree to which its proponents are ... ensconced within the majority culture prior to radicalization'.[40] This suggests that individuals might in fact retain more than one identity – a *majority* cultural identity that reflects the socio-political main-stream of the national community, and a *minority* cultural identity that reflects traditional concepts inherent to religious practice and belief. At particular times, one or another of these identities plays a more central role in determining an individual's association with others and in shaping their behaviour.

The unresolved mystery, though, is how and why does identity change in the first place. What are the triggers and processes that lead to the overshadowing of the majority identity by the minority one? That the radicalization process is often exceptionally rapid compounds the dilemma. Following the foiled 2006 liquid bomb plot, Ian Blair, London's Police Chief, expressed 'shock' at the 'apparent speed with which young, reasonably affluent ... well-educated, British-born people were converted [from] ordinary lives in a matter of some weeks' to a position where they were willing to commit suicide attacks that would have likely killed thousands.[41] Socio-political alienation and a lack of integration may be precursors to extremism but they cannot explain what tipping point catalyzes the radicalization process. Furthermore, that a vast majority of Western Muslims who suffer from real or perceived alienation do not partake in violence suggests that something else is at play.[42] Consider further that many of the radicalized Westerners who have supported terrorism are neither alienated nor deprived. The 2007 Glasgow attack, for instance, was conducted by highly-educated and successful individuals; most were practicing medical doctors and one held a doctorate in engineering. A simple frustration–aggression hypothesis offers only a weak assessment of the homegrown terrorism phenomenon and does little to clarify the processes that are involved in turning once 'normal', 'fun-loving', 'top lads' into murderous terrorists within a matter of months.

Religiosity and globalization

Militant *jihadism*, whether pursued in North America or North Africa, is intrinsically associated with Islam. Though it is extremely doubtful that its religious tenets condone the sort of indiscriminate and brutal violence being committed in its name, adherents of militant *jihadism* nonetheless self-identify as 'true Muslims' and evoke Islam to justify their actions. Just as Osama bin Laden perceives his Holy War as one pitting a 'vanguard' of pious believers against non-believers in the West (the 'far enemy') and apostates in the East (the 'near enemy'), so too do the young

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39   Robert Mueller, 'Remarks to the City Club of Cleveland' (speech, City Club of Cleveland, Cleveland, OH, June 23, 2006).
40   Awan, 'Antecedents', 15.
41   Quoted in Michael Holden, 'UK Airline Bomb Suspects Radicalized in Weeks', *Reuters*, January 24, 2007.
42   Fathali Morghaddam, 'The Staircase to Terrorism: A Psychological Exploration', *American Psychologist* 60, no. 2 (2005): 163.

radicalized Westerners who carry out attacks.[43] In a 1998 interview, bin Laden put it this way: 'Allah ordered us ... to purify Muslim land of all nonbelievers'.[44] At his trial, Bouyeri, the Hofstad member who killed van Gogh in Amsterdam, stated similarly that 'what moved me to do what I did was purely my faith. I was motivated by the law that commands me to cut off the head of anyone who insults Allah'.[45] Recent studies seem to corroborate the religious radicalization nexus. Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Laura Grossman suggest that an individual's theological understanding was a 'relatively strong factor' in their radicalization, and find that nearly half their sample explicitly claimed a 'religious motivation' for their violent behaviour.[46]

An emerging difference between bin Laden's justification for terrorism and that offered by Western *jihadis* is in the appreciation for the minutiae of religious jurisprudence. Bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, and other leaders of transnational organizations are careful to present solid religious interpretations that speak to existing religious doctrine and engage current debates when justifying their violent actions.[47] Bin Laden is particularly careful to couch his calls for violence along pre-existing and well-regarded religious discourse, thereby legitimizing his actions along religious lines while gaining the widest possible acceptance from the global Muslim community. This is quite different from the Bouyeri model. Generally, Western radicals are less well-versed in theology than their international counterparts and are only poorly equipped to appreciate the intricate nuances of their religious beliefs. Many of them have weak religious roots and lack informed and structured learning. Their education, former RCMP officer Tom Quiggin suggests, 'is usually nothing but cherry-picked Koranic statements heavily laced with poisonous *jihadist* messages that bear little resemblance to the actual message of Islam'.[48] What results is a call to arms devoid of any substantive link to accepted religious doctrine. Instead, theirs is violence calling upon Islam for justification but falling short of the mark.[49] Homegrown terrorists are less religious scholars than violent misfits who misappropriate religious labels, suggesting that while religion is perhaps a necessary factor for Western *jihadi* radicalization, it is not in and of itself a sufficient variable. Some other factor is required.

That factor, some researchers posit, is globalization. Olivier Roy explains that the forces of globalization (modernization, urbanization, secularism, displacement, hi-tech communications, and so on) create tension for young Western Muslims who find themselves caught adhering to traditional socio-religious beliefs in a non-religious environment. One possible outcome is insecurity and confusion over identity. 'As individuals feel vulnerable and experience existential anxiety', explains Catarina Kinnvall, 'it is not uncommon for them to wish to reaffirm a threatened self-identity.'[50] Radicalization is one way disenfranchised Western Muslim youths have gone about reasserting their religious identity within non-Muslim contexts. 'In radical Islam', writes Roy, individuals find 'a way to recast and rationalise their sense of exclusion', replacing missing interpersonal ties and re-establishing a sense of belonging.[51] The Internet is a critical component of that remedy, allowing individuals to create an abstract and 'virtual community'

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

44 Judith Miller, 'Even a Jihad has its Rules', *International Herald Tribune*, August 29, 1998.

45 Quoted in Philippe Naughton, 'Van Gogh Killer Jailed for Life', *Times*, July 26, 2005.

46 Gartenstein-Ross and Grossman, *Homegrown Terrorists*, 55–6.

47 Gunaratna, 'Al Qa'ida and Diasporas', 39; Quintan Wiktorowicz and John Kaltner, 'Killing in the Name of Islam: Al-Qaeda's Justification for September 11', *Middle East Policy* 10, no. 2 (2003): 76–90.

48 Quoted in Stewart Bell, 'Never Mind Foreign Terrorists, Why is Canada Growing its Own Extremists?', *National Post*, June 3, 2006.

49 General Intelligence and Security Services (Ministry of Interior), Government of the Netherlands, *Violent Jihad in the Netherlands: Current Trends in the Islamist Terrorist Threat* (The Hague: Government of the Netherlands, 2006), 32–3.

50 Catarina Kinnvall, 'Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security', *Political Psychology* 25, no. 5 (2004): 742.

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

of believers that rests outside the confines of a specific city, country, or region. Instead of following a local religious leader – as had been the norm in previous generations – today's Muslim youths surf the Internet and 'choose, quote, or follow whomsoever he/she wants'.[52] Furthermore, radicalization is increasingly occurring outside the mosque.[53] The result is a 'deterritorialization' of religious practice, belief, and identity. That the images Western *jihadists* consume weave together events from a number of different regional contexts helps explain how and why Europeans, Australians, Canadians, and Americans could find common ground with their supposed counterparts in Pakistan, Chechnya, and Egypt despite profound differences in their daily routines and historical experiences.

And yet, as in the case with socio-political alienation, neither religious practice nor globalization foments Western radicalism in and of themselves. A vast majority of converts and newly-practicing Muslims living in the West do not radicalize and instead vociferously and unabashedly condemn violence in the name of Islam. While religious adherence and globalization may help create an environment in which *jihadi* radicalization can more easily occur, they do not cause radicalization. Nor, for that matter, does religious practice explain why one individual radicalizes and another does not.

Reaction to foreign policy

A third precursor of Western *jihadi* radicalization is the reaction to, and eventual violent rejection of, a host or native state's foreign and/or defence policy. Western militant *jihadists*, the argument suggests, are motivated by perceived injustices taking place against Muslims around the globe. Bin Laden states: 'The truth is the whole Muslim world is the victim of international terrorism, engineered by America and the United Nations. We are a nation whose sacred symbols have been looted and whose wealth and resources have been plundered. It is normal for us to react against the forces that invade our land'.[54] For reasons to do with transnational religious solidarity, the alleged victimization of Muslims in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Palestinian Territories, Somalia, Chechnya and elsewhere by the US, its allies, and others associated with the Western world (NATO, the World Bank, the UN) compels Western Muslims to act. 'Perceived provocation', explains Awan, 'serve[s] as a *casus belli* that sanctions the recourse to jihadism.'[55] There are at least three categories of perceived grievances: insults against Islam (for example, the publication of *The Satanic Verses* (1988) and the Mohammad Cartoons (2005), the screening of the films *Submission* (2004) and *Fitna* (2008); and bans on Muslim dress); Western complacency in the face of Muslim suffering (in Bosnia, Kashmir, the Palestinian Territories, Chechnya, Xinjiang, and elsewhere); and overt Western military aggression against Muslims (the 1990 and 2003 Iraq wars, the 1993 intervention in Somalia, the 2001 Afghan war, the Arab–Israeli conflict). The assumption is that these and other developments humiliate and anger some Western Muslims to the point that they feel justified to take revenge against the citizens and states that condone and participate in these perceived injustices.

In his quantitative study of British radicalization, Brendan O'Duffy finds that 'British foreign policy [is] a significant source of alienation among younger British Muslims' and that 'attitudes

52　　Olivier Roy, interview by Religioscope, November 8, 2004, http://www.religion.info/english/interviews/article_117.shtml (accessed August 14, 2009).

53　　Frank Cilluffo, Sharon Cardash, and Andrew Whitehead, 'Radicalization: Behind Bars and Beyond Borders', *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 13, no. 2 (2007): 113–22; Tim Stevens and Peter Neumann, *Countering Online Radicalisation: A Strategy for Action* (London: The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, 2009).

54　　Osama bin Laden, interview by John Miller, *ABC News* (reprint *PBS Frontline*), May 28, 1998.

55　　Awan, 'Antecedents', 16.

towards British foreign policy interact with . . . domestic social, cultural, and economic sources of discontent'.[56] The point has very little to do with whether or not some form of organized persecution, xenophobia, or dishonour against Muslims is actually taking place or whether Western policies concerning the Arab and Muslim world are in fact biased. What matters is that pockets of the Western Muslim community accept that these grievances exist and think in terms of victimhood. Radicalization is a reaction to these prejudices and violence is, on this view, a legitimate response.

A number of studies posit that global terrorism is directly related to international conditions and Western foreign policy. Robert Pape suggests, for instance, that suicide terrorism in particular follows a strategic logic, in which terrorists attempt to 'inflict enough pain and threaten enough future pain to overwhelm the target country's interest in resisting the terrorists' demands'.[57] These demands are usually designed for democratic states and relate to their positions concerning foreign occupation and military engagement. Though his work has been criticized on both theoretical and methodological grounds,[58] Pape's suggestion that occupation and foreign policy promote and instigate terrorism retains a degree of resonance when it comes to Western radicalization. Mohammed Siddique Khan, one of the bombers involved in the 2005 London attacks, explained his rationale for killing British citizens as such:

> Your democratically elected governments continuously perpetuate atrocities against my people all over the world. And your support of them makes you directly responsible, just as I am directly responsible for protecting and avenging my Muslim brothers and sisters. Until we feel security, you will be our targets. And until you stop the bombing, gassing, imprisonment and torture of my people we will not stop this fight.[59]

In Khan's worldview, the UK and its citizens are guilty of participating in what he interprets as British aggression against his community members living in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.

Once again, however, the causal pathway connecting violent radicalization with Muslim anger over foreign policy is fuzzy. Take the 2003 Iraq war, homegrown terrorism's most often cited foreign policy precursor. A number of major attacks – notably, the 2001 shoe bombing attempt and the planning behind the Madrid attacks – predate the invasion.[60] Countries that refused to participate in the conflict (Canada, Belgium) and others that went further and unabashedly condemned the United States (France, Germany) nonetheless suffered *jihadi* violence, while a number of countries that *did join* the US have not (Poland, Romania, South Korea, El Salvador, Japan). Furthermore, countries that participated in the invasion only to withdraw (Spain, Denmark, Italy, the Netherlands) nonetheless suffered attacks, even after having retreated.

Spain's experience following the 2004 Madrid bombings is especially enlightening. Primarily meant to compel Spain to withdraw its troops from Iraq, the first attack took place on 11 March. It was timed to coincide with Spain's national election.[61] After linking the bombings

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56 Brendan O'Duffy, 'Radical Atmosphere: Explaining Jihadist Radicalization in the UK', *PS: Political Science and Politics* 41, no. 1 (2008): 37.

57 Robert Pape, 'Suicide Terrorism and Democracy: What We've Learned Since 9/11', *Policy Analysis* no. 582, (2006): 4; Robert Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005).

58 Scott Atran, 'The Moral Logic and Growth of Suicide Terrorism', *Washington Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (2006): 128–39; Scott Atran, 'Mishandling Suicide Terrorism', *Washington Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (2004): 67–90; and Scott Ashworth et al., 'Design, Inference, and the Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism', *American Political Science Review* 102, no. 2 (2008): 269–73.

59 Quoted in *BBC News*, 'London Bomber: Text in Full', September 1, 2005.

60 Claude Moniquet, 'The Radicalization of Muslim Youth in Europe: The Reality and the Scale of the Threat' (testimony, US House of Representatives, April 27, 2005). See also the two dozen pre-2003 attempted terrorist attacks listed in Nesser, 'Chronology', 929–32

61 Javier Jordan and Robert Wesley, 'The Madrid Attacks: Results of Investigations Two Years Later', *Terrorism Monitor* 4, no. 5 (2006), http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=696&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=181&no_cache=1.

to Spain's involvement in Iraq, voters defied expectations and removed the governing People's Party, which had sided with the US in sending 1300 troops to the Persian Gulf, and gave Social-ist, antiwar candidate José Luis Rodriguez Zapatero control of the government. Immediately fol-lowing his victory, Zapatero followed through with his electoral pledge to remove Spanish soldiers from Iraq.[62] Though Zapatero's election and Spain's swift foreign policy reversal were a strategic victory for al Qaeda and its supporters, Spaniards themselves could be excused for having voted for what they expected would be an end to the violence. After all, they had given those responsible for the Madrid bombings what they had wanted – a dramatic shift in foreign policy and a cessation of foreign occupation. But the terrorism did not stop. On 2 April, well after Zapatero took steps to implement his government's new Iraq policy, a second massive train bomb was located and defused. Authorities then tracked part of the terrorist cell to a Madrid apartment building. On 3 April, a short battle ensued in which the terrorists eventually blew themselves up, destroying the apartment and killing one officer. In the investigation, police uncovered another 200 detonators of the kind used on 11 March and 2 April, several kilograms of explosives, suicide vests, and a car primed to detonate, parked on the street. That the Madrid terrorists were preparing further attacks despite the fact that their supposed political grievances had been addressed suggests that something else was motivating them. Strategically speaking, there was little to gain after the initial bombings; by then, Spain had capitulated to their demands.[63]

One might retort that regardless of the Iraq war, Spain and many other states targeted with homegrown terrorism were involved in the 2001 Afghan conflict, turned a blind eye to Russia's brutal wars in Chechnya, supported the UN in Somalia in 1993, continued to favour Israel over Hamas and Hezbollah, and pursued other policies that caught the ire of local *jihadists*. The problem with this line of argumentation is that it does little to clarify the many anomalies that persist. Nor does it help identify or refine the causal pathways linking foreign policy, anger, and radicalization to violence and terrorism.[64] And then, how do we explain the violence that erupted over the Mohammad cartoons and other insults to Islam. Is this also a reaction to state policy? Writing on suicide terrorism in particular, Scott Atran suggests that terrorists are neither chiefly motivated by occupation nor foreign policy, but are rather 'inspired by a global jihadism', with suicide serving as 'banner actions for a thoroughly modern, global Dia-spora inspired by religion and claiming the role of vanguard for a massive, media-driven trans-national political awakening'.[65] Martyrdom rather than policy informs the violence. Finally, foreign policy precursors too easily (and disingenuously) simplify the history and careful designs of militant Islamist groups. The widespread inculcation of 'victimhood in the Islamic world', suggests former Prime Minister Tony Blair, has been successfully manipulated by adher-ents of militant *jihadism* to the point that it stretches 'far beyond the extremes' of plausibility.[66] While legitimate grievances afflict the Muslim world to which solutions should be sought, to argue that all or most of the community's problems are the result of Western actions is false. To then suggest that the indiscriminate killing of innocent people is somehow justified, is perverse.

These precursors to Western *jihadi* radicalization offer insight concerning the structural con-ditions that help ferment homegrown terrorism. Importantly, however, none singularly explains how Westerners come to accept and participate in *jihadi* violence. As is often the case with 'root

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62 *Associated Press*, 'Spain's New Leader Stays firm on Iraq Pullout', March 18, 2004; *BBC News*, 'Spain Threatens Iraq troop pull-out', March 15, 2004; *BBC News*, 'Spain PM Orders Iraq Troops Home', April 18, 2004.
63 Lawrence Wright, 'The Terror Web', *New Yorker*, August 2, 2004.
64 Olivier Roy, 'Why Do They Hate Us? Not Because of Iraq', *New York Times*, July 22, 2005.
65 Atran, 'Moral Logic', 139, 128.
66 Tony Blair, 'The Struggle against Militant Islam' (speech, Chicago Council on Global Affairs, Chicago, IL, April 22, 2009).

cause' investigations of political violence, none of these precursors are sufficient, or necessary, for terrorism.[67] Furthermore, while a vast number of people may share these common characteristics, only a fraction radicalizes. Though each precursor constitutes an important piece of the terrorism puzzle, none accurately informs us of the processes of personal transformation that are necessarily involved. Appreciating these internal processes demands the development and application of theories that address the characteristics of personal change inherent to radicalization. Transformative learning theory is particularly informative to this endeavour. What follows is an overview of the theory's core tenets, as they have been developed in adult education and rehabilitation and an examination of how these tenets inform the pathways of radicalization.

Transformative learning theory: concepts and applications

Theories on adult learning support the notion that individuals participate in the construction of personal knowledge and that learning is itself an interactive process of interpretation, integration, and transformation of experiences. Transformative learning theory, developed in great part by the work of Jack Mezirow in the 1990s, is one adult learning theory that offers a practical framework for understanding how change occurs in individuals. Mezirow's theory blends aspects of constructivism and cognitivism (an approach developed in psychology that investigates the mental functions of the human mind) to help explain how adults learn and adapt to new environments and constraints. 'Learning', he explains, is the 'process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action'.[68] There are five main concepts associated with the approach:

(1) *Meaning Schemes* – The specific beliefs, judgments, feelings, and attitudes which act as a frame of reference in determining personal meaning and perceptions of experiences. They are observable in behaviour and verbal interaction;
(2) *Meaning Perspectives* – A structure of assumptions, based on meaning schemes, that exist within the learner and filter perceptions and shape comprehension of new experiences;
(3) *Distortions* – Meaning perspectives that no longer fit the individual's current reality;
(4) *Critical Reflection* – The ability to critically reflect on these distortions. Reflection begins with a disorienting dilemma triggered by crises (e.g. personal loss, conflict, illness);
(5) *Process of Transformation* – An evolution or personal change that can be either abrupt or gradual.

An individual's personal change is a product of these mental and cognitive processes of transformation. Following a moment of personal crisis (the trigger), an individual tries to make sense of the event using his or her 'habitual ways' of thinking (pre-existing meaning schemes). At times, the individual will realize that habitual ways of thinking are not helpful in managing the crisis (distortions). The individual reacts by exploring new ways of thinking (critical reflection) which involves a transformation in meaning perspectives through the attainment of new knowledge and skills. Eventually, the individual establishes a competence and self-confidence in his or her new role, evident in novel behaviour that is reflective of the individual's changed perspective. The transformative process, explains Mezirow, involves 10 phases, one leading into the next:

(1) Experiencing a disorienting dilemma;

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67 Martha Crenshaw, 'The Causes of Terrorism', *Comparative Politics* 13, no. 4 (1981): 379–99; Karin von Hippel, 'The Roots of Terrorism: Probing the Myths' in *Superterrorism: Policy Responses*, ed. Lawrence Freedman (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002): 24–37.
68 Jack Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991), 12.

(2) Self-examination (with feelings of guilt, anger, shame);
(3) Critically assessing assumptions;
(4) Recognizing that personal 'discontent' and transformation are shared;
(5) Exploring 'new roles, relationships, and actions';
(6) Establishing a course of action;
(7) Acquiring new knowledge or skills for implanting the new course;
(8) Provisionally 'trying new roles';
(9) Building self-confidence in new roles;
(10) Reintegrating into 'one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective'.[69]

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

Mezirow's transformative learning theory has been an important framework for research in the context of adult learning. But, significantly, his insight has been utilized well outside the study of education. His 10-phase process, for instance, has been applied (and greatly refined as a result) to research on the perceptions of individuals adapting to illness and injury.[70] Over the past decade, healthcare scientists have been exploring the process of transformative learning in patients coping with and adapting to debilitating disabilities and illnesses that require entirely novel ways of behaving. For example, victims of spinal cord injury require major adaptation to daily living (with a reliance on the use of a wheel chair in some cases) that accompanies a loss of mobility. Multiple sclerosis and rheumatoid arthritis, both degenerative illnesses, can result in progressive loss of function which entails major life modification. In the context of physical health, Paterson and colleagues find that patients with diabetes experienced a process of personal transformation that was significant for obtaining positive outcomes in health interventions.[71] Other empirical research has been conducted on adults living with kidney transplants, strokes, traumatic brain injuries, breast cancer, Turner Syndrome, and HIV/AIDS.[72]

Claire-Jehanne Dubouloz and colleagues have recently identified three distinct transformative phases in rehabilitation: the trigger phase, the process of change phase, and the outcome

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69 Jack Mezirow, 'Epistemology of Transformative Learning' (paper presented at the International Conference on Transformative Learning, 2003); Jack Mezirow, 'Transformation Theory of Adult Learning', in *In Defense of the Lifeworld: Critical Perspectives on Adult Learning*, ed. Michael Welton (New York: SUNY Press, 1995), 45–52.

70 Claire-Jehanne Dubouloz, Jacques Chevrier, and Lorraine Savoie-Zajc, 'Processus de transformation chez un groupe de personnes cardiaques suivies en ergothérapie pour une modification de leur équilibre du fonctionnement occupationnel', *Revue Canadienne d'Ergothérapie* 68, no. 3 (2001): 171–85.

71 Barbara Paterson et al., 'Living with Diabetes as a Transformational Experience', *Qualitative Health Research* 9, no. 6 (1999): 786–802.

72 Jack Edward Clevinger, 'Exploring Transformative Learning: The Identification and Description of Multiple Cases among Kidney Transplant Recipients' (PhD diss., University of Tennessee, 1993); Dorothy Kessler et al., 'Meaning Perspective Transformation Following Stroke: The Process of Change', *Disability and Rehabilitation* 31, no. 13 (2009): 1056–65; Laura Kroupa, 'Forced to the Edge: How Adults Learn to Build Meaningful Lives after Traumatic Brain Injury' (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 1996); Helen Hays Eckmann, 'You Are With Someone who is a Fighter: Constructing a Model of Transformation which Can Occur in Surviving Breast Cancer' (PhD diss., University of San Diego, 2003); S.F. Kagan-Kreiger, 'The Struggle to Understand Oneself as a Woman: Stress, Coping and the Psychological Development of Women with Turner Syndrome' (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1999); Bradley Courtenay, Sharan Merriam, and Patricia Reeves, 'The Centrality of Meaning-making in Transformational Learning: How HIV-positive Adults Make Sense of Their Lives', *Adult Education Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (1998): 65–84; Bradley Courtenay et al., 'Perspective Transformation Over Time: A 2-year Follow-up Study of HIV-positive Adults', *Adult Education Quarterly* 50, no. 2 (2000): 102–19; Lisa Baumgartner, 'Living and Learning with HIV/AIDS: Transformational Tales Continued', *Adult Education Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (2002): 44–59.

phase. In each case, the catalyst for movement from one phase to the next is an individual's 'readiness for change' (Mezirow's 'taking action') that allows the patient to actively engage the transformation process.[73] The trigger phase begins when patients experience illness or disability that stops them from functioning in ways they desire. For example, Ashe and colleagues describe a patient's recognition of the impact of her illness on her ability to continue working:

> A year ago I became very tired and one day I broke down in the office. The arthritis was in a flare up big time. I had never missed a day of work because of my arthritis. I fought it and went to work but this time, I couldn't fight it anymore.[74]

These events are disorienting dilemmas that propel patients to question how exactly they are going to live with their new realities. Asking this question is itself a fundamental driving force that compels an individual towards a readiness for change moment. One of the participants involved in another study, for instance, describes his readiness for change in this way:

> I'd go somewhere else in my mind, go to a happy place. If they had a problem, it would snap me back to reality. Eventually, I began to realize that it was still my body and I had better attend to it a bit more.[75]

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

The changing process ends when individuals actively engage in a third phase which moves them to fully accept and participate in their new lifestyle. In this outcome phase individuals gain new perspectives on life, new feelings, and adhere to novel behavioural routines. For example, in the cardiac rehabilitation programs described by Dubouloz and colleagues, participants developed new beliefs concerning work and health.[76] Other research has identified changes in beliefs concerning dependency and self-caring, in relation to accepting social support, housekeeping, and personal and medical assistance from family, friends, and healthcare workers. One participant had this to say:

> So, now instead of being an independently fit person, I'm an independently disabled person [laugh], no ... chronically ill person who occasionally needs help you know. It's all relative to the position you're in.[77]

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73   Claire-Jehanne Dubouloz et al., 'The Process of Transformation in Rehabilitation: What Does It Look Like?' *The International Journal of Therapy and Rehabilitation* (under review, 2009).

74   Quoted in Brenda Ashe, Maurice Taylor, and Claire-Jehanne Dubouloz, 'The Process of Change: Listening to Transformation in Meaning Perspectives of Adults in Arthritis Health Education Groups', *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy* 72, no. 4 (2005): 280–88.

75   Quoted in Christine Carpenter, 'The Experience of Spinal Cord Injury: The Individual's Perspective – Implications for Rehabilitation Practice', *Physical Therapy* 74, no. 7 (1994): 619.

76   Dubouloz, et al., 'Processus de transformation', 175–85.

77   Quoted in Claire-Jehanne Dubouloz et al., 'Transformation of Meaning Perspectives in Clients with Rheumatoid Arthritis', *American Journal of Occupational Therapy* 58, no. 4 (2004): 398–407.

Research on the transformative learning process from these studies in physical rehabilitation has helped identify which specific meaning perspective undergoes transformation. They include self-worth, independence, altruism, and self-respect. Shifts in these perspectives facilitate life-style changes that are reflected in novel behaviour, like new eating habits, a diminution of the perceived threat of loss of self-worth, adaptations to daily activities, and the establishment of new meaningful activities.

It is our working assumption that the theoretical propositions outlined in transformative learning along with the practical and clinical findings from the sciences of rehabilitation, shed light on the individual processes involved in radicalization and inform the literature on the precursors of terrorism. The transformation of an individual's meaning-perspective and associated changes in behaviour parallel certain aspects outlined in adult learning theory. What follows is an exploration of these parallels along with a discussion regarding their importance in refining theoretical debates concerning the precursor of homegrown terrorism.

Radicalization as transformative learning

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

From a transformative learning perspective, the previously mentioned precursors of radicalization, whether socio-political alienation, religiosity, or rejection of government policy, are better understood as factors that help shape an individual's personal context of living. These are the conditions that mark an individual's immediate environment. They can be felt and interpreted in ways that facilitate a transformative learning process. Just as illness or injury in the study of rehabilitation is thought to trigger a transformative learning process within patients by changing their environmental living conditions, so too, within the context of homegrown terrorism, might socio-political alienation, foreign policy, and other factors trigger a process of radicalization.

Alienation can create feelings of anxiety and fear while foreign policy can produce anger and despair. Both can lead to a process of critical reflection or 'cognitive opening' that involves a personal reassessment of one's life, future ambitions, current social position, personal relationships, and so on.[78] With that, a restructuring of an individual's existing meaning perspective and interpretation of his or her living environment follows. Again, just as a patient's health limitation or lack of physical function can initiate a personal process of transformative learning that attempts to adapt to new realities, so too with radicalization might socio-political factors that conflict with an individual's existing interpretation of self and society instigate a process of change. While precursors inform the radicalization process, they do so in much more subtle ways than is usually assumed. Rather than simply compelling an individual to participate in violence, precursors influence the individual's context of living in ways that make him or her susceptible to new experiences, perspectives, and beliefs.

It is within these evolving contexts of living that the reception and interpretation of critical information by impressionable minds can instigate the process of identity deconstruction and

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78 Precht, *Home Grown Terrorism*, 36; Wright-Neville and Smith, 'Political Rage', 93–5.

reconstruction inherent to radicalization. Recall from Mezirow's 10 steps that self-examination is associated with feelings of guilt, anger, and shame that can lead to a reassessment of existing behavioural assumptions. With *jihadi* radicalization, critical information elementally rooted in religious ideals spurs an individual to reinterpret international politics and history, reassess the distinctions between justice, defence, and aggression, and re-evaluate their own relation with the immediate and global community. Rather than foment violent behaviour, religious belief and practice offers the individual new knowledge, while globalization helps disseminate and popularize the message. Thus, while a 2007 New York Police Department report finds a link between specific triggers (like losing a job, suffering a death in the family, going through a divorce, experiencing racism, etc.) and increased religious participation (dubbed 'religious seeking'), transformative learning theory goes further to suggest that religious practice offers the individual a novel narrative and new perspectives upon which to base his or her actions.[79] New-found religiosity provides some of the knowledge that may lead to a redefinition of meaning perspectives.

To that end, a particular message offered by a previously radicalized individual (a terrorist leader or religious ideologue, for instance) could trigger a search for a new meaning perspective that takes a particularly slanted position. Here, religious identity plays an important role. Extremist versions of Islam promote an interpretation of global affairs that is based on an inherent and deep-seated schism between the Islamic world and the West. Gartenstein-Ross and Grossman find that almost 40% of American and British terrorists viewed 'Islam and the West as existentially incompatible'.[80] As individuals critically examine their Western identities and begin shaping new meaning perspectives, the Islam–West dichotomy provides a lens with which to focus their energies. Images of conflict and war that purport to show global injustices carried out against Muslims around the world, from Abu Ghraib prison to the shattered streets of Grozny, can be easily accessed via the Internet and internalized as accurate information.

From the context of transformative learning theory, these images and messages strengthen the disorienting dilemma that helps contradict previously-accepted knowledge upon which self-identification and behaviour had been constructed. What results is a feeling of self-doubt, confusion over identity, and intense personal debate to the point of identity deconstruction. Instead of interpreting oneself as a 'Western citizen' or 'member of society', the newly acquired reality forces a stronger identification with a beleaguered and victimized international minority. At this point the majority cultural identity is overshadowed by the minority one. This is in keeping with Mezirow's notion of the exploration of new roles and relationships following identity re-assessment, and relates well with Roy's work on globalized Islamic identity. Of further interest is the fact that this (re)conceptualization process reflects a subliminal readiness for change moment, a tipping point whereby the patient, or in this case a radicalizing individual, comes to realize that the old reality simply no longer exists and a new one must be established. This realization facilitates the process of identification with the newly internalized reality and encourages a change in behaviour later on.

Radicalizing images and information can be manipulated, as is the case with *jihadi* propaganda, in a manner that persuades a susceptible individual to recognize an international crisis or conflict as a personal plight. Of importance is that this sort of information provides the adhesive that is critical to strengthening and eventually cementing the individual's new identity. Using Mezirow's words, this process is about an individual 'trying new roles', from a content citizen to a militant *jihadi*. In turn, new roles lead to the reorganization of the individual's existing value and belief systems. Instead of passivity, egalitarianism, and cooperation, values that

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79 NYPD, *Radicalization*, 30–31
80 Gartenstein-Ross and Grossman, *Homegrown Terrorists*, 45.

might be associated with the role of 'citizen', other values linked to the role of 'militant', like rebelliousness, non-compliance, and aggression, become internalized.

The strengthening of the new identity comes with socialization and in-group acceptance. In order to establish a meaningful understanding of their new reality and identity, individuals search their social environment, daily routines, and personal contacts for validation. As previously suggested, socio-political isolation and clique construction support the process by allowing the individual to interact with others that have either gone through, or are going through, a similar process of transformation. This is a finding that complements Sageman's 'social bonding' thesis of terrorist group formation, Max Abrahms' 'social solidarity' thesis for terrorist participation, and Wright-Neville and Smith's notion of 'psychological socialisation' for emotional attachment.[81] With peer-based validation, the transformation of meaning perspective is reinforced and the new identity, having been accepted by the individual's immediate social group, acquires value and strength. The individual, in his or her new role, gains self-confidence and eventually pursues his or her life on the basis of the new perspective. From there, violent behaviour is a product of the individual's newly acquired value system, where revenge and active defence in light of perceived Western aggression is not only justified but expected.

Conclusions

Applying transformative learning theory to Western *jihadi* radicalization and homegrown terrorism offers a promising interdisciplinary approach to evaluate an emerging phenomenon. While existing studies on radicalization offer important insights on the causes of homegrown terrorism, and on the behaviour of terrorist organizations, they fall short in not properly investigating and identifying the internal cognitive processes inherent to identity transformation. Radicalization is first and foremost a process of personal change in which non-violent individuals come to accept and promote violent activity. 'Terrorists do not fall from the sky', posits Jenkins, 'they emerge from a set of strongly held beliefs. They are radicalized. Then they become terrorists.'[82] This article, in applying theories of transformation proposed and developed from a variety of fields, helps to identify the process of *jihadi* emergence in Western society.

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

Second, future research will have to investigate the pathways inherent to incomplete transformation and transformative reversals. That is, why do some individuals fail to complete the radicalization process? What factors cause a deceleration in the momentum of radicalization? Relatedly, why do some individuals radicalize, ideologically and politically speaking, but nonetheless reject violent behaviour? And finally, why do some radicalized individuals later recant

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81 Sageman, *Terror Networks*, ch. 5; Max Abrahms, 'What Terrorists Really Want: Terrorist Motives and Counterterrorism Strategy', *International Security* 31, no. 1 (2008): 96–103; and Wright-Neville and Smith, 'Political Rage', 95.

82 Brian Michael Jenkins, preface to Gartenstein-Ross and Grossman, *Homegrown Terrorists*, 7.

their positions and de-radicalize? If radicalization is a prerequisite to terrorism then building a better appreciation for the processes related to transformation and change will be critical to dissuading and containing the threat of homegrown terrorism. To that end, transformative learning theories might well reveal important insight into de-radicalization and conflict resolution.

Finally, this article is but a first step. It is principally a preliminary, theoretically-driven investigation intent on generating new ideas. The paper provides the contours of a transformative framework for studying radicalization and approaches the phenomenon of homegrown terrorism from a novel position. It does so, however, on theoretical rather than analytical grounds. An obvious suggestion for future research is to quantify and systematically analyze the theoretical propositions derived from the transformative framework. A number of recent studies on radicalization suggest ways to do so.[83] Quantitative and qualitative analysis of homegrown terrorists along with the communities that support their efforts would help generate the sort of data required to test the indicators, characteristics, and pathways of radicalization identified in this paper while further demonstrating the utility of applying transformative approaches to the study of homegrown terrorism.

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83   Bakker, *Jihadi Terrorists*; Precht, *Home Grown Terrorism*; Kirby, 'The London Bombers'; NYPD, *Radicalization*; Leiken and Brooke, 'Quantitative Analysis of Terrorism and Immigration'; O'Duffy, 'Radical Atmosphere'; and Gartenstein-Ross and Grossman, *Homegrown Terrorists*.