JOURNAL FOR DERADICALIZATION

Spring 2022
No. 30
ISSN: 2363-9849

Olivier Roy and the "Islamization of Radicalism": Overview and Critique of a Theory of Western Jihadist Radicalization

Lorne L. Dawson[a1]
[a]Professor, Religious Studies & Sociology, University of Waterloo, Canada

Abstract
Olivier Roy's argues that the radicalization of Western jihadists is about the "Islamization of radicalism" and not the "radicalization of Islam." This argument has exerted a strong influence on terrorism studies, yet received little systematic scrutiny. This article provides an overview of Roy's views to bring a greater measure of analytic order to his comments and open them to assessment, particularly the contention that religion plays little real role in the radicalization of European jihadists. Roy's argument draws on an idiosyncratic distinction between the roles of "religion" and "religiosity" in radicalization that is poorly understood and open to question. In the end, while some of Roy's ideas, such as the influence of second generation identity struggles on the radicalization Muslim youth, warrant further study, others, such as the "generational nihilism" of these youth, are counter-productive. His analysis overall is fecund and intriguing, but largely speculative and unsubstantiated.

Article History
Received Jan 9, 2022
Accepted Mar 16, 2022
Published Mar 25, 2022

Keywords: Oliver Roy, Radicalization, Jihadism, Islamisation of Radicalism

Introduction

In a series of publications (e.g., Roy, 2001, 2004, 2006, 2008a, 2011, 2015a, 2015b, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2017, 2020) the prominent French sociologist of Islam Oliver Roy presents a theory of why some young European Muslims have become violent jihadists that is both profound and intuitively appealing, on the one hand, and obscure and lacking in empirical substantiation, on the other hand. Roy argues that contemporary European jihadism is rooted in a "'no future' youth subculture" (Roy, 2008a: 7), and not religion *per se*, and he argues we are witnessing "the Islamization of radicalism" more than "the radicalization of Islam" (Roy, 2015b, 2017). Today's "terrorists are not the expression of a radicalization of the Muslim population, but rather reflect a generational revolt that affects a very precise category of youth" (Roy, 2015b). This theory has become a mainstay of discussions of jihadism in Europe

[1] Corresponding Author Contact: Lorne Dawson, Email: ldawson@uwaterloo.ca; University of Waterloo, 200 University Avenue West, Waterloo, ON, Canada N2L 3G1

and helped to shape French counter-terrorism policy (Coolsaet, 2016; Lévy, 2019; Weitzmann, 2021). The phrase "Islamization of radicalism" is part of the common lexicon of radicalization studies, yet its use often lacks sufficient contextualization.

To my knowledge, apart from the very public dispute with Gilles Kepel (e.g., Nossiter, 2016; Peace, 2016; Worth, 2017; Weitzman, 2021), Roy's work has received little sustained analysis, especially in the English-language research literature on terrorism (e.g., Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010; Mezzetti, 2017; Lévy, 2019; Burgat, 2020; Klaussen, 2021). While it is interesting and important to understand his work in the context of French politics, and the heated debates about jihadism set off in France by a series of lethal attacks since 2012 (Worth, 2017; Weitzmann, 2021), it is equally important to assess Roy's contributions in a more detached manner. If his theory of radicalization is going to influence how we interpret the jihadist threat, then we need to assess its intrinsic strengths and weaknesses. Is it a theory scholars can call upon with confidence?

My attempt to answer this question is subject to certain qualifications. The focus is limited to his analyses of Western homegrown jihadism, and not the full corpus of his related writings on political Islam, the geo-politics of the Middle East and Central Asia, or contemporary religion in general (e.g., Roy, 1994; Roy, 2004; Roy, 2008b; Roy, 2013). Second, the analysis is limited to English-language sources. A great deal of Roy's work has been published in English, however, reflecting the scope of his influence. Third, given Roy's rather unsystematic presentation of his ideas, this article aims to bring a greater measure of analytic order to his arguments, thereby opening them to systematic assessment. Space limitations mean, however, that some of the analyses are curtailed.

More specifically, this critique focuses on how Roy understands the role of ideology and religion in the genesis of Western jihadist terrorism. Some scholars have discounted the significance of religion in the explanation of this type of terrorism (e.g., Pape, 2005; Silke, 2008; McCauley and Moskalenko, 2011; Aly and Striegher, 2012; Crone, 2016; Sageman, 2017), others have criticized this interpretive tendency, arguing religiosity plays a primary role in radicalization (e.g., Bale, 2013; Wood, 2017; Dawson, 2018 and 2021a and 2021b; Dawson and Amarasingam, 2017; McBride, 2019; Cole, 2019; Larsen, 2020; de Graaf and van den Bos, 2021). As the formulation "Islamization of radicalism" indicates, Roy's work aligns with those who doubt the role of religion, and this is how this phrase is commonly

interpreted. While this is true to a degree, on closer examination, the situation is more complicated and ambiguous than commonly appreciated.

Roy's analysis hinges on a distinction he draws between "religion" and "religiosity" that does not appear to be well-understood. Descriptively, the distinction he draws parallels the usage in the sociology of religion, yet analytically it diverges in significant ways when he applies it to jihadist radicalization. When the term "religiosity" is applied to the jihadists it is contrasted, unfavourably, with an implicitly normative conception of "religion," or more particularly Islam, which Roy never fully explicates. This may be because the contrast – which is at the heart of his analysis – steps beyond the bounds of conventional social science. Roy uses the term "religiosity" to characterize a way of being religious that is shallow and inauthentic and then dismisses considering religion as a motivation for jihadist radicalization because he thinks the actions of youthful Western jihadists are about religiosity and not religion *per se*. This point has been little understood, however, since this use of the term "religiosity" is idiosyncratic and at odds with the wider practice in the sociology of religion. There the term either simply denotes the degree to which someone is religious, and sometimes how they are religious, or it refers to the "everyday" or "lived" expression of religion, which is always limited and flawed from the perspective of official or orthodox conceptions. In the perspective of most sociologists of religion, this flawed everyday religiosity is more the norm than the exception in human history, and as such it is consistent with treating the actions of those engaging in it as religious *per se*. As this discussion falls largely outside the scope of most terrorism scholars its significance has been missed, and consequently Roy's theory of radicalization is understandably misunderstood.

Roy's Approach and Theory

Roy argues that the debates over Western jihadism are distorted by the dominance of several interpretive orientations which are not adequate. He frames the options differently in different contexts, but the contention is similar in each case. In several publications (e.g., 2006, 2008a, 2016, 2017) he rejects the once popular "clash of civilizations" approach, which describes Western jihadist terrorism as an expression of the broader Muslim anger born of centuries of Western colonial domination of the Middle East combined with a resentful nostalgia for a

bygone Golden Age of Islamic civilization (Lewis, 1990; Huntington, 1996). According to this view the "revolt of young Muslims [in Europe] demonstrates the extent to which Islam cannot be integrated into the West, at least not [until] … theological reform has struck the call of jihad from the Quran" (2016: 2). A second view, he argues, "evokes the post-colonial suffering, the identification of these youth with the Palestinian cause, their rejection of Western intervention in the Middle East, and their exclusion from a French [i.e., European] society that is racist and Islamophobic" (2016: 2). Elsewhere (2008a: 2), he discusses the tendency of those seeking the roots of Islamist terrorism to adopt a "vertical approach." In this view ideology is the key, and an effort is made to trace how al-Qaeda and ISIS are building on the revolutionary linage of Middle Eastern Islamist movements and ideologues. In all these interpretations it is assumed that the young jihadists in the West care about the conflicts in the Middle East and identify closely with the plight of their fellow Muslims in Palestine and elsewhere. Likewise, they are responding to serious experiences of discrimination and humiliation in the West. In each case, the solution usually involves addressing their grievances and promoting a "good" version of Islam at home through dialogue.

Roy contrasts these perspectives with what he calls, at one point, a more "horizontal approach." "This approach is based on the analysis of the individual biographies and trajectories of people who have been actually involved in terrorist activities in the West or who left the West to perpetrate terrorist activities in the Middle East" (2008a: 2). The horizontal approach, which he favours (e.g., 2016b, 2017), recognizes that it is "more productive to establish a transversal comparison between the different forms of violence existing among the various milieus that could support terrorists" (2008a: 2) than vertical analysis of the ideological lineage of the jihadists. Or in other words, he prefers "to understand contemporary Islamic violence alongside other forms of violence and radicalism that are similar to it" (2017: 5-6). Whether Roy actually undertakes "horizontal" comparative analyses is debatable. He never engages in a serious analysis of the similarities and differences of groups, nor does he provide a systematic or detailed analysis of the paths to violence of actual terrorists. Rather, he frequently alludes to a common experience of generational revolt, an aesthetics of violence, doomsday cults, and the inclusion of conflicted individuals in larger globalized narratives, and he makes ample use of passing references to individual perpetrators and aspects of their lives and activities. He does not ground his

comments in specific findings derived from systematically developed databases. He indicates, however, that he adopts this horizontal approach because the "structural" concerns raised by the other approaches apply to a much wider swath of Western Muslims than the tiny minority who revert to violence (2015a; 2016b: 2). In other words, he invokes the problem of specificity to justify his approach.

Roy also stresses that Western jihadism is a "youth movement," and more controversially, that radicalization is largely confined to the second generation of Muslim immigrants, along with the non-Muslim converts to Islam who disproportionately are radicalized (20115b: 6; 2016: 2). To understand and suppress the threat posed by homegrown jihadists in Europe, he argues, we must enter into the mindset of these youth to discern the reasons for their anger and frustration. We must grasp why a segment of this particular population rejects the West, and what it stands for, in favour of what he argues is a utopian fantasy of solidarity with the global *ummah* (i.e., Muslim community); a commitment that leads some to engage in a death cult dedicated to a puritanical vision of a new Muslim world order. In his evocative words, we need to understand why they have chosen to give their lives over to an "Islam of rupture – generational rupture, cultural rupture, and finally political rupture" (2016a: 3).

Before elaborating on Roy's claims, we need to note that while his statements about the second generation are plausible, he provides no data to support them. In *Jihad and Death*, he simply states: "The present study draws from a strictly French database compiled by the author and pertaining to about one hundred people involved in terrorism in mainland France and/or having left France to take part in a 'global' jihad between 1994 and 2016" (2017: 20). No further information is provided about this database, and Roy makes little or no attempt to cite empirical evidence from other sources. We are reliant on his reading of the situation, which is instructive, but largely unsubstantiated.

Roy thinks contemporary Western jihadism is an outgrowth of a generalized youth culture of revolt as specifically experienced by the second generation of immigrant Muslims. "This generational dimension," he states, "is fundamental" (2017: 2). These young Muslims are trapped betwixt and between the traditional Muslim culture of their parents and the Western lifestyle and values of their peers. The youth are very Westernized (2017: 27-28). They are intimate with the pleasures of Western society and its pop culture. As such, they are

dissociated from the traditional mores and expectations of their families, both their immediate families in Europe and their extended ones in the Middle East and North Africa. Yet in their youthful struggle for identity they are unhappy, Roy implies, with their Westernized selves too. They feel themselves to be "cultural outcasts, living at the margins of society in either their countries of origin or their host countries" (Roy, 2004; Roy, 2006: 160). In France they are treated as Arabs, while in Morocco or wherever, they are treated as Frenchmen (or women). This situation can lead, Roy intimates, to a self-hatred that prompts a search for creative solutions (Roy, 2016a: 3). For some, that solution comes with the discovery of a new "social imaginary" offered by the Salafi-jihadists. They can build their sense of self, their master identity, around a conception of the "true Muslim" that is simple and pure, because it is based on a reinvigoration of the fundamentals of the faith, stripped of the encumbering traditional cultural aspects their parents' largely nominal and habitual practice of Islam. In Salafism they find a "de-cultured" and "de-territorialized" religiosity, to use Roy's key terms, that is strong and global in scope and orientation (see Roy, 2004: 143-146; and 267, 270).

Roy says that "Salafism is the religion by definition of a disenfranchised youngster … [it] glorifies their own deculturation and makes them feel better 'Muslims' than their parents" (2015b: 11). This situation explains the high proportion of converts to Islam amongst the Salafi-jihadists as well. They are being invited to join the vanguard of revolutionary Muslims, the elect few, who, as Mohammed supposedly foresaw, are destined to finally convert humanity to Islam and lead everyone to salvation (Roy, 2017: 52).

This story of self-transformation runs throughout Roy's work. It is the focal point of his most influential book, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (2004), and elements of the argument can be detected in his response to the events of 9/11 (Roy, 2001). However, he never substantiates it or explores its nuances through interviews with jihadists or with other biographical materials. Nor does he turn to other research discussing how young immigrant Muslims experience these kinds of tensions (e.g., LaFromboise et al., 1993; Halstead, 1994; Stroink, 2007; Croft, 2012). His analysis rings true, based on my own conversations with Western jihadists (Dawson and Amarasingam, 2018; Amarasingam and Dawson, 2018)[2], the other literature on young immigrants, and many case studies of Western

[2] This also refers to conversations with convicted jihadists released from prison that have not been used yet in a research publication.

jihadists (e.g., Speckhard and Shaikh, 2014; Marone, 2016; McDonald, 2018; Thomson, 2018). It remains speculative, however, and the problem of specificity arises again, since most young Muslim immigrants figure out how to manage their two worlds and become valued citizens (Anisef and Kilbride, 2003). So what differentiates the few who turn to the Salafi-jihadist social imaginary? What further combination of proclivities and circumstances explains their deviant path?

Overall, Roy provides only indirect support for his "generational" theory of jihadist radicalization through his critique of other commonly proffered explanations. In different ways, in different writings, he argues that, contrary to what many assume, (1) radicalization does not develop out of political activism; (2) radicalization does not reflect a real concern with what is happening to other Muslims in the Middle East and elsewhere; (3) radicalization is not an outgrowth of Islamic fundamentalism (i.e., Salafism); (4) radicalization is not really rooted in an ideology; (5) radicalization is not a response to socio-economic marginalization; and (6) jihadism is not a religious phenomenon. Here I will consider each of these arguments, to give as accurate a sense of his approach as possible. Roy, however, does not take on the assumptions in any particular order, the issues overlap, and the sufficiency of his arguments are variable.

Roy on Jihadism and Political Activism

Roy is emphatic that jihadism, as enacted by al-Qaeda and taken up by Muslim youth in Europe, "has little to do with the defense of *Darul Islam*, the traditional territory where Muslims live under Muslim rulers" (Roy, 2006: 161; Roy, 2001). It is not the "consequence of conflicts in the Middle East, and the sense of humiliation they create among Muslims" (Roy, 2008a: 3). The homegrown jihadists in the West have little engagement with political activism over Middle Eastern affairs or the plight of Muslim's elsewhere, and they have never personally experienced the kind of humiliation or oppression imposed on the Palestinians and others (Roy, 2008a: 3; Roy, 2015b: 7-8; Roy, 2017: 8). "To my knowledge," he declares, "none of the jihadists, whether a convert or not, has ever been involved with the pro-Palestinian movement, or with fighting Islamophobia, or even with an Islamic NGO" (Roy, 2016c: 21). Likewise, few of the European jihadists "have been involved in domestic Islamic

radical activities in their country of origin" (Roy, 2008a: 4) and their radicalization is not the consequence of "a long-term 'maturation' in either a political movement … or in an Islamic environment" (Roy, 2015: 8). In *Jihad and Death* (2017), he asserts: "There is no direct link between social, political, and religious mobilization and the descent into terrorism" (2017: 4). Instead, he argues, these "born-again Muslims … are fighting at the frontiers of their imaginary *ummah*, and what agitates them is a consequence of their Westernization rather than any spillover from Middle East conflicts" (Roy, 2006: 162; Roy, 2008a: 4; Roy, 2017: 15).

Alternatively, Roy also suggests their rebellion "perpetuates a pre-existent tradition of leftist, Third-Worldist, anti-imperialist youth protest" (Roy, 2006: 163; Roy, 2001: 114 and 2004: 42-47). He even refers to al-Qaeda as "an avatar of the ultra-leftist radicalism" (Roy, 2008a: 6), even though this tradition has always been associated with more conventional forms of social movement activism. In the past leftist terrorism emerged from the gradual radicalization of activists frustrated with the seeming failure of their movements to effect political change (e.g., Sprinzak, 1990; Della Porta, 1992). This contradiction reflects an unresolved tension in Roy's interpretative framework, one that arises in multiple ways. In this instance, the deeper tension becomes apparent through his repeated allusions to similarities in the motives of European jihadists and leftist revolutionary terrorists in the 1960s, 70s and 80s. These allusions are introduced to reinforce his assertion that we are dealing with the Islamization of radicalism rather than the radicalization of Islam. In other words, they are being used to support his claim that jihadism is not so much religious, or really even political, in nature, as generational and personal. It is about identity issues and alienation - though he rarely uses those terms.

His interest in drawing attention to this "horizontal" comparison to highlight a specific structural similarity, is captured well in this passage from *Jihad and Death* (2017: 69):

> The two forms of protest (extreme leftism and radical Islamism) have a similar structure. They are generational. From the Cultural Revolution to the Baeder-Meinhof Gang and up to ISIS, elders are accused of having 'betrayed' the revolution, democracy, or Islam and of not handing down the truth. It then

> becomes a matter of wholesale revolt against the world order, and not a national liberation movement.

There is some truth in this observation, and much is to be learned about the behaviour of these terrorists by understanding the specific emotional and cognitive proclivities of young people, given the youthful profile of the jihadists (Mezzetti, 2017; Dawson, 2017a, 2022; Harris-Hogan and Barrelle, 2020). The similarity noted, however, may obscure more than it elucidates, if not handled carefully. It is important to understand the role played by youthful rebelliousness in the surge of homegrown jihadism in the West. But how pertinent is it to reduce the divergent contextual factors of the young Maoists of post-revolutionary China, the counter-cultural baby-boomers of America and Europe, and the contemporary children of Muslim immigrants in Europe, to the single explanatory category of generational revolt? More specifically, if the two types of terrorists are so analogous, how does he account for the clear differences in the way Western homegrown jihadists and the leftist terrorists radicalized? As Roy stresses, the radicalization of the jihadists is usually much more rapid and "imaginary" in nature. Roy never addresses this discrepancy in the horizontal comparisons he draws between these forms of Western extremism.

Roy on Jihadism and Salafism

At the heart of Roy's approach is the following important thesis (Roy, 2006: 162):

> The radicalism of the terrorists has nothing to do with Islam as a culture. Neither is it the expression of the collective identity of a Muslim community. Deculturation and individualization are the two key issues in the process of radicalization, and Islam is the expression of a reconstructed self in reference to a virtual ummah.

Roy plays upon variants of this thesis in making claims about the role of Islamic fundamentalism, and hence religion (in a conventional sense) in the radicalization of Western homegrown jihadists. On the one hand, he stresses that the young jihadists tend not to come

from religious backgrounds. They "are not specifically puritanical and often live or have lived the usual life of western teenagers" (Roy 2008a: 5). In fact, he often suggests most have been involved in delinquency in various ways (Roy, 2008a: 6; Roy, 2015b: 6). They neither associate with, nor abide by the dictates, of the Muslim communities into which they were born, with its clerics, fatwas, mosques, Islamic associations, and family traditions. They "usually remain aloof from the communal group" (Roy, 2008a: 5; Roy, 2015b: 11-12; Roy, 2016b: 4). Few have "a past of piety" and most remain ignorant of theology (Roy, 2015b: 11; Roy, 2016b: 4), he declares, and "[n]o matter what database is taken as a reference, the paucity of religious knowledge among jihadis is patent" (Roy, 2017: 42, 58). It is a misnomer then, he consistently implies, to classify them as religious terrorists, and cast the struggle between us and the jihadists as a clash of civilizations or religious viewpoints.

Once again, though, these claims are made without reference to any specific data, beyond a reference to thousands of new foreign fighter recruits who rated their levels of religious knowledge in ISIS files leaked to the media. Roy notes that "70 per cent of them state they have only basic knowledge of Islam" (Roy, 2017: 42; Batrawy et al., 2016; Choi, 2016). This statement, however, is erroneous. The recruits had been asked to rate their knowledge of Shariah law, and not Islam, and as Andrew Lebovitch comments, "[t]he relative weakness of someone's knowledge of Shariah does not necessarily say much about how religious they are or want to be. For one thing, a depth of knowledge of Shariah is not particularly common for observant Muslims, and it is in many ways a construct of outsiders to think it should be" (Lebovitch, 2016: 3).

Nevertheless, Roy argues, it is Salafi-jihadism that makes the turn to terrorism possible because it provides a clear framework for restructuring the lives and identities of some Western Muslim youth in ways that engage them in a culture of rupture. When these disoriented, perhaps even alienated, youth "join jihad, they adopt the Salafi version of Islam, because Salafism is both simple to understand (*don'ts* and *do's*), and rigid, providing a personal psychological structuring effect" (Roy, 2015b:11). This decultured expression of Islam also facilities their youthful differentiation from the traditions and expectations of their parents and their roots. By "glorif[ying] their own deculturation" (Roy, 2015b: 11) it transforms a negative into a positive, linking them to a new, deterritorialized global community of like-minded people (Roy, 2017: 63).

However, Roy stresses, Salafism is not a "gateway to jihadism" (Roy, 2017: 41) because most Salafists do not become jihadists, and no one radicalizes "after pouring over the sacred texts" (2017: 42). Few scholars, of course, would argue otherwise. It is widely recognized that radicalization is a multi-factorial process, and the potential of the beliefs offered by the Salafi-jihadists to frame political action depends on the influence of leaders and the alignment of the beliefs with certain social conditions and processes (Hafez and Mullins, 2015). Yet, given the key role of Salafism in fostering the sensibilities of the few who become terrorists, there is reason to posit some meaningful connection between converting to this radical religious worldview and proceeding down the path of political radicalization. Roy, however, as I will show, is very reluctant to draw this inference.

Roy's comments on Salafi-jihadism create the impression that he is not even willing to identify it as a religious phenomenon, or at least not as he thinks it is practiced by most Western homegrown terrorists. Why is unclear in most of his writings, in part because he never provides a clear statement of his conception of religion. Things change with the publication of *Jihad and Death* (2017), but in ways that still require careful exegesis.

Seemingly, his ambivalent relationship with Salafism has something to do with the supposedly decultured and individualized nature of this type of religiosity. "[C]ontemporary forms of religiosity among second-generation Muslims outside the Middle East", he says, "are closer to those of their nineteenth and twentieth century American Christian counterparts than to medieval Islam. In short, they are examples of revivalism … [and] centered not in traditions and familial values but on individuals who experience a crisis of identity and the discontinuity of familial and communal ties" (Roy, 2006: 165). While socially conservative, such movements actually undermine the broader faith community, create a crisis of authority and theology, and foster "defiance towards legitimate holders of religious knowledge" (Roy, 2006: 166). As such, Roy observes, "Salafists contribute to the paradoxical secularization of modern society, because they isolate religiosity from the other dimensions of social life" (Roy, 2006: 165).

This represents a novel perspective, since fundamentalist movements are more often criticized for the ways in which they seek to maximize the role of religious commitment and control in people's lives. Roy's focus, however, is on the way adherents become isolated from the rest of society, in the contemporary European context. Full appreciation of his argument,

however, requires a detailed analysis of the transformation of Western Islam provided in *Globalized Islam* (2004), and that exceeds the scope of this critique.

Roy's many statements dismissing the Islamic nature of Salafi-jihadism seem to go beyond concerns about Islamophobia. His comments recollect the hostile response of French society to other imported new religious movements (Beckford, 2004; Palmer, 2011). In these situations theology is not the issue, but rather the challenge such revivalist/fundamentalist movements pose to the given social order. Roy displays a complex understanding of the tradition of laïcité at the heart of modern French society. In some ways he sees it as a cause of radicalization (see 2017: 66-67), yet his criticism of the legitimacy of Salafism imply his support for the privatization of religion and separation of religion and politics at the core of the French national commitment to laïcité.

In sum, Roy doubts that jihadist terrorism is the result of being religious, in any significant or meaningful sense, or warrants being classified as "religious terrorism," for two interrelated reasons: (1) because he seems to implicitly associate being religious with the valuation of tradition and community, and implicitly the acceptance of the modern secular social order; and (2) he does not think that the individuals drawn to Salafi-jihadism display many of the markers of conventional religious practice. Salafi-jihadists do not practice the right religion or well enough. These are normative considerations, however, and as such offer a problematic basis for a social scientific theory of radicalization.

Roy seems to consistently assume that the young men and women who become jihadists "join jihad" first, and then only secondarily "adopt the Salafi version of Islam" (Roy, 2015b: 11). Hence, he concludes, jihadism "does not explain the personal radicalisation phenomenon (even if it might provide an aftermath rationalisation)" (Roy, 2008a: 5). This needs to be demonstrated, however, and not assumed. Roy provides no specific evidence, and the assumption clashes with the findings of others. With a few exceptions, the Western foreign fighters Dawson and Amarasingam (2017) interviewed claimed they were "reborn" as Muslims, as adolescents, before they became politicized out of a new found interest in being "true Muslims." They became morally engaged with the plight of fellow Muslims around the world, they stated, as a result of their new religious identity, and then further became jihadists in reaction to the complacency of other Muslims in the face of perceived injustices. The Salafi-jihadist teachings helped to frame their emerging political concerns in ways that

justified taking action to right the wrongs, and even more, save the world. However naïve and fanciful this whole process may be, in the accounts provided the turn to political violence began with a personal religious quest rooted in identity issues. In tracing the identity issues of the children of Muslim immigrants who become jihadists Roy reverts to a dichotomized view the role of religion and politics in resolving these issues. In these situations it is more reasonable to conceive of religiosity and political or ideological engagement as co-evolving and dialectically interacting as individuals resolve their identity issues by radicalizing.

In this, and many other ways, tensions appear in Roy's analysis. On the one hand, for example, Roy thinks we should resist characterizing young Western jihadists as being religious, because they are too lackadaisical in their religious practices and not concerned enough with theology. Yet, on the other hand, he recognizes the fascination of these radicals with the teachings of the Salafi-jihadists, if only to justify their actions. In truth, individuals might be both irreligious and drawn to Salafi-jihadism, but from page to page in Roy's writings there is a tension in identifying who the jihadists really are. They are dismissed repeatedly as "petty delinquents" (Roy, 2015b: 6), with little intellectual proclivity or facility, yet somehow they are also capable and desirous of learning and espousing the religio-political rationales of the jihadist ideologues.

Roy on Jihadism and Ideology

Roy states that "ideology plays little role in the radicalisation of the jihadist internationalist youth" (2008a: 2). He claims that "[w]e tend to over-ideologise Al Qaeda in order to understand its attractiveness," and the study of jihadists beliefs and texts has little to do with why individuals become violent extremists (Roy, 2017: 42). "To my knowledge", he states,

> none of the arrested terrorists or suspects had Zawahiri or other books in their house, while they often have handbooks on how to make bombs or videos about 'atrocities' perpetrated against Muslims. Contrary for instance to the Hizb ut-Tahir members, who always formulate their positions in elaborate ideological terms, Al Qaeda's members do not articulate before or after having been caught a political or an ideological stand (Roy, 2008a: 5)

If, however, the specific ideology is not important, why do these rebellious youth turn to jihadism, instead of some other radical stance? To answer this variant of the specificity problem, Roy turns to two thinly supported suppositions: (1) the youth "are attracted by a narrative not an ideology" (2008a: 2), and (2) "jihad is the only cause on the global market … the ultra-left or radical ecology is too 'bourgeois' and intellectual for them" (2015b: 11; 2004: 47).

The jihadi narrative, which undoubtedly does play a strong role in winning over converts to the cause, is too simplistic, Roy thinks, to warrant being called an ideology. Moreover, as his comments repeatedly indicate, its popular formulation and presentation reflects "contemporary aesthetics," especially "schemes" taken from "video-games," as much or more than religion.

> The narrative plays on the image of movie and videogame superheroes. A typical cliché is that of the future hero whose destiny is not at first clear, as he leads an empty or too-normal life. And then he receives the call (taken in its religious sense of a sudden vocation, but with reference to the popular video game "Call of Duty") and turns into an almost supernatural, omnipotent character. Not only does he save the suffering and passive *ummah*, but he also possesses great powers, including the power of life and death and sexual power … (Roy, 2017: 49; Roy, 2016c: 22)

As such the narrative is wanting, for Roy, as an expression of ideology or religion. It does not emulate the legitimate forms of medieval Islam and other conventions of religious doctrine. It reflects, he states, the special role of an "aesthetics of violence, which is also to be found in places with no Islamic reference ('Columbine', the Mexican Narcos)" (2015: 10). Ascribing to this fanciful narrative provides the young alienated Muslims a heroic role on a global stage. They become part of the "vanguard" of a "few outstanding and devoted heroes" who will avenge the sufferings of others at the hands of the evil West (Roy, 2017: 52). In saying this, however, Roy gives no consideration to the ways in which the imagery and narratives of popular culture are drawing on a long legacy of mythic religious and cultural ideals, and not merely the imaginative musing of contemporary authors.

Al Qaeda, Roy proposes, was "the only organization present on the market that seems to be effective in confronting the 'evil' that is the West" (Roy, 2008a: 7; Roy, 2017: 69-70). He repeatedly suggests that the demise of the far-left in Europe left frustrated young Muslims no other option but to turn to jihadism (Roy, 2017: 71; Roy, 2004: 47). But there is ample evidence of the worldwide involvement of youth in radical left-leaning movements focused on the "evils" of globalization, neo-liberalism, social inequality, racism, and environmental degradation. Is there evidence that the Muslim youth who radicalized either explored these options and found them wanting or that they were just blissfully ignorant of them? Roy provides no further information to support his supposition.

When the members of the Toronto 18 jihadist terrorist group were arrested in 2006 the police found a substantial library of jihadist materials on their computers. While there is an instrumental cast to some of the documents, the list far exceeds "handbooks on how to make bombs or videos about 'atrocities' perpetrated against Muslims." Many of the texts run to hundreds of pages, with copious and complex references to foundational and interpretive materials from throughout the history of Islamic thought.[3] Similarly, Petter Nanninga points out that there are "numerous examples of Western jihadis who did pour over Islamic texts before embracing violence. Mohammed Bouyeri, to mention just one example, had not only read, but even translated writings by authors such as Ibn Taymiyya, Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, and Sayyid Qutb before killing the Dutch cineaste Theo van Gogh in Amsterdam in 2004" (Nanninnga, 2018). Donald Holbrook found that the majority of the material collected by individuals seeking to carry out attacks in the U.K between 2004 and 2017 was of a "moderate" or "fringe" nature, and not "extremist." This means, he suggests, that "the needs and concerns of terrorists are … more complex than simply revolving around violence or participation in violence exclusively." The publications focused more on "*why* violence should be embraced, occasionally *against whom* it should be targeted … but very rarely on *how* violence should be organized and carried out." Most of the material was more generic in nature and much of it was explicitly religious (Holbrook, 2021: 703-705, 714).

We do not know how the members of the Toronto 18 engaged with the literature they collected. The readings point, however, to a desire to understand relevant aspects of Salafi-

[3] I had access to all of these materials, after the relevant trials were complete, as part of a classified research project facilitated by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

jihadists thought in ways that exceed the simple parameters of the "jihadist narrative." They are indicative of a greater and genuine interest in understanding the ideological (i.e., religious) justification for their actions. Overall, the sheer volume and nature of the literature Holbrook found is inconsistent with portraying the Western jihadists as being primarily oriented to violence and only secondarily ideology. They suggest that the modern aesthetic of violence is more likely a veneer on a deeper religious impulse, rather than the other way around. The situation, however, exceeds dichotomous formulations, and greater specificity is required.

Roy finds reinforcement for his argument that the radicalization of these youth is not motivated by real political engagement or the influence of ideology in the fact that their radicalization occurs most often in small groups of peers with prior connections. In 2008 he said:

> The Europeans in Al Qaeda tend to take one of two routes to conversion: there are those who have pursued a personal path and joined AQ after having converted in a mosque, and those who followed their Muslim 'buddies', when, often after a story of petty crimes, they decide to 'go for action', usually under the influence of a group leader, seen as a guru. The 'group effect', as Marc Sageman calls it, is far more effective in terms of triggering radicalisation than reading propaganda books. (Roy, 2008a: 4)

He talks about radicalization commonly happening "inside a small network of 'peers', where nominal Muslims and non-Muslims meet because they live in the same neighbourhood, share the same patterns of petty delinquency, found themselves together in jail, or are members of the same family" (Roy, 2015b: 8; also see Roy, 2015b: 7, 2016b: 5). In Roy's view the strong role of pre-existing social networks and the social psychology of small group dynamics is somehow incompatible with the significant influence of ideology. Rarely, though, are we dealing with some kind of zero-sum relationship of social processes and ideology. When friends from a social network come together to form another smaller group dedicated to extremism, surely they are differentiated from their peers in the larger network by ascribing to the religious and political ideas that provide the rationale for the new group? They trust each other because of their shared experiences, as criminals or sporting teammates, but also because they are committed to the same beliefs.

Roy on Jihadism and Socio-Economic Marginalization

As we have seen, Roy repeatedly links the Muslim youth who radicalize with "a past of petty delinquency and drug dealing" (Roy, 2015b: 6; Roy, 2008a: 6). Yet, as I will show below, he knows this is not an accurate portrayal of many of them. So why does he so readily and frequently revert to this negative epithet? I think he does it, in part, to refute the notion that the extremism of these youth is an expression of their Muslim identity, and to alternatively suggest that their new found religiosity is rooted to a need to quickly compensate for their criminal pasts. It is not, it is implied, the result of a more deliberative or deeply socialized expression of religion. He seems intent on discrediting their claims of religious motivations by repeatedly belittling them as little more than "petty criminals" run amuck.

Roy's repeated references to delinquency are at cross purposes, however, with his efforts to also refute arguments highlighting the role of socio-economic marginalization in the radicalization of these youth – a view he seems to see as another competitor to his generational theory. Jihadists are repeatedly labeled "petty delinquents" in Roy's writings, yet he resists the common association of such delinquency with economic and social deprivations. In 2008, for example, in casting aspersions on those who place "alienation at the core of the radicalisation process," he says (Roy, 2008a: 5):

> There is certainly some truth in that, but the problem is how to define alienation. The socio-economic definition (deprivation, poverty, racism, social exclusion) is not supported by data. We find people from all backgrounds in Al Qaeda: engineers, former drug-addicts, social workers … The fringes from where the radicals come are not socio-economic.

Later in *Jihad and Death* (2017) he declares that the dominant view that jihadism is "the consequence of unsuccessful integration" is simplistic and misleading. It ignores "the masses of well-integrated and socially ascendant Muslims, and he notes, "in France there are far more Muslims enrolled in the police and security forces than in jihad" (Roy, 2017: 34). Jihadists, he stresses, do not only come from the "so-called sensitive neighborhoods" of large cities like Paris or Brussels. They come from affluent as well as working-class communities,

and even small provincial cities and rural areas, and "the profiles of jihadists include a large number of well-integrated, educated young people" (Roy, 2017: 35; Roy, 2016c: 19). Budding jihadists, then, are engaged in delinquency, but not necessarily because they are poor or unintegrated, and this delinquency is somehow a significant precursor to their extremism, one that puts the lie to assuming jihadism grows out of religiosity *per* se. But Roy never explains how the generational identity struggles he believes foster radicalization in the case of some Muslim youth lead to engaging in petty crime *per se*. It all just seems to be subsumed, without much explanation, under the repeated reference to an existing larger youth culture of rebellion and violence that itself goes largely unexplained.

In some ways Roy is intent on breaking some of the stereotypes about who radicalizes, yet he repeatedly chooses to identify most Muslim extremists as shallow and confused kids venting their anger through a delusional and dangerous fantasy of sub-cultural heroism. The young second generation Muslims of Europe, or at least a small percentage of them, are struggling with the identity challenges of managing two worlds, and perhaps frustrations with their prospects in European society (Roy, 2015b: 5). They are also swept up, somehow, in the traditional anti-imperialist sentiments of youthful rebellion in the West. Initially their angst is expressed through delinquency, but somehow this becomes insufficient and they find a new purpose for their aimless existence by dramatically converting to a pop-culture infused, light version, of Salafi-jihadism. The process is essentially personal, and only coincidentally religious and/or political – at least in its initial motivations. Yet somehow, once found, these youth are willing to sacrifice everything in a cult of violence and death (Roy, 2008a: 6; Roy, 2017: 16). Agreeing with others, Roy says the process does not necessarily involve any psychopathology (Roy, 2017: 35), yet, as the next section delineates, he sees the whole process as profoundly dysfunctional and he reverts to language that suggests a kind of socio-psychopathology.

Roy on Jihadism and Religion

Roy is clear that "violent radicalization is not the consequence of religious radicalization, even if it often takes the same paths and borrows the same paradigms (that is what I call 'the Islamization of radicalism')" (2017: 8). In the simplest sense this means "most Salafists are

non-violent" (Roy, 2017: 8). But Roy has something much more complicated in mind, involving a slippery distinction he repeatedly makes between "religion" and "religiosity."

At an important juncture in *Jihad and Death* (2017:41) Roy states:

> Clearly … these young radicals are sincere believers: They truly believe they will go to heaven, and their system of reference is deeply Islamic. They join organizations that want to set up an Islamic system, or even, as regards ISIS, to restore the caliphate. But what form of Islam as we talking about?

This passage, and in particular the question asked, are easily overlooked, but they are extremely important in understanding Roy's argument.

Reading Roy entails struggling with a series of seemingly contradictory claims. The assertion that jihadists are sincere believers appears to be at odds with the repeated claim that the youth drawn to jihadism in Europe are not motivated by religion. When Roy chastises the jihadists for displaying little real religious knowledge or piety he appears to be aligning himself with other researchers employing the same argument to discount the role of religion (as analysed by Dawson, 2017b, 2021a and 2021b, and in Larsen 2020). He also claims, however, that when Muslim leaders, state authorities, and secular scholars use the supposed lack of religious knowledge of jihadists to refute their claim to be religious they are relying on a mistaken modern Western association of religion with theological texts and doctrinal knowledge, when " 'religiosity' not theology is the key" (Roy, 2015b: 12). In *Jihad and Death* he states (2017: 42):

> Due to the profound secularization of both our societies and our knowledge, we have only a textual approach to religion, disregarding what I call religiosity. Theology basically involves interpreting scriptures in a comprehensive discursive system that isolates dogma from all the rest: emotion, imagination, aesthetics, and so on. But what is at work here is precisely religiosity – in other words, the way in which the believer experiences religion and appropriates elements of theology, practices, imaginaries, and rites, to construct a transcendency for himself – and not

> religion. In the case of the jihadi, this construction places him in contempt of life: his own and that of others.

There is much to unpack in this passage.

At times Roy appears to be agreeing with Dawson, Larsen, and others that it is misleading to equate a lack of religious knowledge with an absence of religious motivation, because it involves mistakenly identifying the degree of religious knowledge with the degree of religiosity. Like these other critics, he is recognizing that being religious entails much more, and that "lived religion" (or ideology) or "everyday religion," as distinguished by prominent sociologists (e.g., Hall, 1997; Ammerman, 2007; McGuire, 2008), is a more murky affair (Larsen and Jensen, 2021). Unlike these critics, however, and contrary to the scholars studying "lived religion," Roy does not seem to be identifying "religiosity" – at least as practiced by the young European jihadists – with the actual expression of religion. He says as much above when he says they are engaged in the "transcendency" of themselves – and "not religion," and associates this – somehow – with a "contempt for life."

Without clarifying the rationale for this statement, Roy muddies the waters in *Jihad and Death* by immediately following this passage with yet another rebuke of the young jihadists for the inadequacy of the ways they are religious. He compares them unfavourably with ISIS, saying they fail to engage in even the kind methodical analysis of hadith that undergirds ISIS propaganda (Roy, 2017: 43). Disparagingly, and again without citing evidence, he says (2017: 43):

> When young jihadis speak of "truth," it is never in reference to discursive knowledge. They are referring to their own certainty, sometimes supported by an incantatory reference to the *shuyukh*, the sheikhs, whom they never read. In them they thus find whatever they put there themselves.

Roy continues to hold young jihadists to a standard of religious correctness that is both unrealistic, in terms of everyday religion, and irrelevant to demonstrating that they may be motivated – "sincerely" as he says – by their religiosity. Some unspecified standard of true religion is lurking in Roy's analysis.

Roy detects some kind of malignant narcissism in the "religiosity" of the young Western jihadists. This narcissism is betrayed, Roy thinks, by three things: (1) their cavalier and manipulative approach to religious discourse and authority; (2) the infusion of their discourse with popular Western imagery; (3) and the largely imaginary (supposedly) nature of their commitment and objectives. "[W]hat is striking," Roy observes, "is the extraordinary narcissistic posturing of the terrorists, as well as their 'derealized' relationship to death. They broadcast themselves in self-produced videos before, during, and after their actions (posthumous videos). They pose on Facebook …" (Roy, 2017: 49). Roy, for example, links the recruiting success of ISIS to the new "gaming space" they opened up in the desert, and glorified on the internet; a space where "losers from destitute suburbs" become handsome heroes that girls swoon over on Facebook (Roy, 2017: 51). ISIS, Roy states, "is situated at the intersection of two imaginaries, one religious and classical (the caliphate), the other present in a particular youth culture that is also expressed in contexts having no relationship with Islam (street gangs; organized crime, as attested by the popularity of *Scarface* among young people; or even in the United States, attacks along the "Columbine" model)" (Roy, 2017: 52; Roy, 2016c: 22).

In other words, contrary to the other scholars calling on the idea of religiosity to assert the genuineness of the religious motivations for violence (no matter how theologically flawed), Roy is using the term to denote a way of being religious that is false, even if it is sincere, and hence inadequate as an explanation for their violence. He seems to be saying religion is not a driving force in the radicalization of European jihadists because the religion involved is not adequately religious. It involves the "transcendency of [the self] – not religion." But he never bothers to clarify the relevant criteria for reaching this judgement (e.g., his conception of religion) – at least not in his writings on radicalization. I doubt he can, as a social scientist, because he has strayed into the realm of normative judgements. Many of his readers likely did not notice, however, since there is a strong inclination to see the religiosity of the young jihadists as perverse, because it supports their violence, and hence to think that it should not be given credence by being recognized as a real cause of their actions.

From the perspective of the sociologists studying the everyday practice of religions, especially small and sectarian religious groups, the aspects of the worldview inhabited by the young jihadists which Roy finds so problematic are quite typical, genuine, and legitimate –

especially since the jihadist are willing to sacrifice their lives for them (Larsen and Jensen, 2021). The blending of the official and the popular, the traditional and the new, in people's religious beliefs and imagery, is more the norm than the exception in the expression of religion, especially in times of social stress and change. In the late modern world, moreover, this style of religiosity has become so common that many sociologists of religion use the term "postmodern" to describe a way of being religious in which religious beliefs and practices have become free-floating cultural resources unmoored from the strictures of tradition (Bellah et al., 1985; Beckford, 1996; Dawson, 1998; Heelas, 1998). This kind of religiosity is more individualistic than communal in its focus, in contrast with the past, but this has little to do with gauging its legitimacy or force, from a social scientific perspective.

Roy's perspective seems to have been influenced by the apocalyptic nature of the brand of jihadism practiced by ISIS (McCants, 2015), which Roy simplistically equates with nihilism. The jihadists engaged in *hijrah* to live, they say, in a true Islamic society, but Roy asserts, they "don't go to the Middle East to live, but to die" (Roy, 2017: 53; Roy, 2016c: 23).

> That is the paradox: These young radicals are not utopians, they are nihilists because they are millennialists. The "new dawn" will never be equal to their "day of glory." It is the "no-future" generation.

They welcome death, he says, because it erases their lives of sin, which also explains why they are so slack in their religious observances. They are not really interested in building a better world, of contributing patiently to the development of an Islamic society, because the end of everything is imminent, and all will be forgiven, even mass murder, in the mysticism of their sacrifice for Allah's grand plan (Roy, 2017: 53-55; Roy, 2016c: 23). "They kill," Roy declares, "because the apocalypse will wipe out everything man has created anyway", and "because the apocalypse transforms their individual trajectory into the destiny of a group" (Roy, 2017: 56).

Little in the way of evidence is provided for this interpretation of the motives of the young jihadists, beyond the frightful actions of the Islamic State. There is no analysis of data on the thoughts and feelings of those who have traversed the path to extremism. The motives of all are sweepingly determined, post hoc, by the horrific and hard to understand actions of

those wrapped up in the frenzy of conquest and repression. There is no defending these actions, but they are the product of a complex set of conditions in a time long after the initial radicalization.

The scholarship on millennialism learned long ago to offset focusing on the carnage associated with the apocalypse with a strong recognition of the hope for redemption driving it. Some followers of apocalyptic movements may be drawn by a morbid interest in destruction of the world as we know it, but millennialist systems of belief have been perpetuated more by the promise of a new day, when, as Jesus states, "the last will be first, and the first will be last" (Matthew 20:16). It is the new Zion beckoning that matters most (as also demonstrated by the research on the reaction of groups to the failure of prophecies; see Stone, 2000; Dawson, 2011). In this and other ways, Roy's brief analysis (Roy, 2017: 53-56) does little justice to the extensive scholarship on millennialism (e.g., McGinn et al., 2003; Hall, 2009; Wessinger, 2011).

For Roy, though, the real issue runs deeper. Without more proof than cursory "horizontal" references to school shooters, Timothy McVeigh, Anders Breivik, the Ordre du Temple Solaire, and the Peoples Temple, he posits that the mass and often suicidal terror of ISIS and European jihadists is a manifestation of "generational nihilism" (2017: 71-74). What distinguishes this new crop of radicals "is their hatred of existing societies, whether Western or even Muslim. This hatred is embodied in the pursuit of their own death when committing mass murder. They kill themselves along with the world they reject" (Roy, 2017: 71). This is why the apocalyptic ideology of ISIS appeals to them.

Some may find this convincing (e.g., Mezzetti, 2017), others are likely to remain skeptical. Overall, while it is plausible to describe some of the actions as "nihilistic," one can question the explanatory value of identifying "nihilism" as the primary motive for jihadist radicalization. It involves adding another emotionally charged term to the explanatory repertoire of a field plagued by implicit normative assumptions.

As Meeren ter Borg (1988, 1990) argues, tracing the intellectual history of use of the term, outside of certain metaphysical debates, "nihilism" is primarily used as a label to discredit points of view the user finds disturbing or threatening. "The use of the concept of nihilism," Borg aptly says (1990: 111), "has a nihilating function." It is a term of condemnation used to stifle understanding the nature and appeal of disturbing ideas to others.

In fact, it involves denying that the opposed point of view is founded on any real values, other than the urge to destroy. As such, the term is designed to neutralize the critique embodied in the actions and claims of opponents, more than understand them. Its use is political and not social scientific (see, e.g., the debate between Borg, 1988 and 1990, and Ungar, 1990, and Woolfolk, 1990).

Concluding Remarks

The contrast of the "Islamization of radicalism" and the "radicalization of Islam" has served Roy's polemical purposes well. It shifted attention away from a preoccupation with exclusively ideological/religious explanations of radicalization. But the rhetoric obscures as much as it reveals. It tends to support an interpretive approach that sees the contribution of ideology and social processes to radicalization in overly dichotomous terms (Holbrook and Horgan, 2019; Leader Maynard 2014; Leader Maynard, 2019; Dawson, 2021b). In seeking to minimize the role of religion in the motivation for jihadist radicalization Roy produced a convoluted analysis that is poorly understood by many calling on the phrase the "Islamization of radicalism."

In summary, Roy offers, in effect, three options as alternative explanatory considerations: (1) the identity confusion of some members of the second generation of Muslim immigrants (at least in Europe); (2) the influence of the contemporary aesthetic of violence on youth; and (3) the grip of nihilism on these youth. The three explanations dovetail, and they help to explain his repeated references to the "delinquency" of European jihadists, even while noting that many are in fact well-integrated, well-educated, and middle class youth.

Roy's understanding of the identity issues facing many second generation Muslim immigrant youth, especially in Europe, warrant serious consideration in addressing the challenge of radicalization. It provides one of the most plausible explanations for why a segment of this population would find refuge in the Salafi-jihadist worldview; an explanation, moreover, that is compatible with accepting the religious rationales proffered by these extremists (or not). It warrants being investigated much more systematically, in relation to other relevant research (e.g., LaFromboise et al., 1993; Halstead, 1994; Stronink, 2007), and

through empirical research with former jihadists. There is evidence in hand that some of those who radicalized experienced significant moral confusion as adolescents, vacillating between the push and pull of secular Western and traditional Muslim values and norms (e.g., Speckhard and Shaikh, 2014; Marone, 2016; McDonald, 2018; Thomson, 2018).

In this regard, more systematic attention should also be given, as Roy proposes, to identifying and understanding how a contemporary youth aesthetic of violence has played a role in encouraging the radicalism displayed by Western jihadists, especially those drawn to the hyper-real heroism and violence of ISIS (e.g., Mezzetti, 2017; Conti, 2017). Kevin McDonald (2018) has explored this possibility more empirically, analysing relevant aspects of the online activity of dozens of British Muslim youth undergoing radicalization.

The greatest weakness of Roy's theory, however, is the gap between his ideas and available data. The explanations offered are speculative and remain insufficiently specific. In this regard Roy makes an extraordinary claim in an essay on the motivations for jihadism (Roy, 2016c: 15):

> We have a major data source: a list, with biographies, of terrorists active in the West. Practically all the perpetrators of attacks planned or carried out in Europe and the United States have been identified by the police and their lives have been more or less fully described by journalists. For good reasons or bad, journalists have easy access to judicial and police sources, and do not hesitate to publish them. From a methodological point of view, there is no need for lengthy field investigations in order to understand the trajectory of these terrorists' lives. We have the material and the profiles.

Many would disagree, especially those actively developing open source databases on Western jihadist terrorists (e.g., Harris-Hogan, Dawson, and Amarasingam, 2020; Harris-Hogan, Amarasingam, and Dawson, 2022). It is extremely difficult to secure sufficient and reliable data from such sources. There are noteworthy gaps in the information available for even basic demographic factors, such as levels of education, employment, and travel history, let alone what the terrorists have read or were talking about. Media sources often reflect the typical biases of the broader population, and certain facts are more likely to be reported or

neglected than others. A comparative analysis of empirical studies of Western jihadist travellers to Syria and Iraq revealed, for example, many significant gaps in the data available (Dawson, 2021c). In fact, we need more and better investigative field studies to grasp the variables influencing the radicalization of different persons in different situations. The radicalization of most Western jihadists probably falls somewhere between the extremes of the Islamization of radicalism and the radicalization of Islam. Both non-religious and religious motivations are involved, and we need to understand their interactions more fully and precisely.[4]

In the end, there is no aspect of Roy's analysis of the radicalization of Western jihadists that is incompatible with religiosity playing a significant role in the process: not their second generation identity struggles, their lack of political activism, their prior delinquency, the quickness of their conversions to Salafism, the imaginary nature of their worldview, their lack of religious knowledge and/or piety, the unorthodox nature of their beliefs, their involvement in a contemporary aesthetic of violence, or even their supposed narcissism and nihilism. All of these things are compatible with religiosity, as practiced in everyday ways. Handled with more circumspection, each of these considerations, studied separately and in combination, may tell us something about the relevance and nature of the role of religiosity in influencing the actions of specific individuals. Those designing and offering P/CVE programs need to take this duly into consideration and avoid marginalizing the role of religiosity in the turn to extremism on any of these grounds, or because prior preventive efforts have counter productively focused too exclusively on a naïve conception of the role of ideology in

[4] I am aware that one of the other significant French scholars discussing jihadist radicalization, Farhad Khosrokhavar, has said something similar in his recent work. In *Le nouveau jihad en Occident* (2018: 9-10), for example, he writes: "*Radicalization of Islam or Islamization of Radicality?* Depending on the country, the neighborhood or the group of jihadists, the one or the other option may prevail and, often, the Islamization of radicalism exists before giving way to the radicalization of Islam. In France, the Islamization of radicality is much more frequent, especially among young people from the 'banlieues'. The opposite is true in other countries like England, Holland, Norway, or Denmark and Canada, where the community structure is better preserved, and the radicalization of Islam is even more recurrent than the Islamization of radicality" (cited in Willaime, 2020: 44). This may be true, but it would require much more explanation than can be undertaken here, and it is noteworthy that many terrorism researchers in the very countries Khosrokhavar mentions have advanced positions more convergent with the Islamization of radicalism perspective than the radicalization of Islam one. This is true of much of Khosrokhavar's earlier work as well (e.g., Khosrokhavar, 2015). Roy's position is in many respects – sometimes implicitly – the more dominant one across Europe and for many in the U.K. as well (see Dawson 2021d). In another context it would be interesting to pursue this geographically differentiated view, but here I am proposing that these two interpretive options should be treated more generically as the poles of a continuum that probably should be fruitfully applied to all instances of jihadist radicalization.

radicalization (on both counts, e.g., see Koehler, 2017). To this end, however, we need to acquire a lot more information about the lives, reasoning, and feelings of those turning to violence. We need to further invest in understanding the complex realities of radicalization, and those working to "de-radicalize" individuals can make an important empirical contribution to this effort. They can benefit from some of Roy's astute observations, but must resist turning his speculations into interpretive blinders.

References

Aly, A. and J-L. Striegher (2012). Examining the Role of Religion in Radicalization to Violent Islamist Extremism, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 35(12): 849-862.

Amarasingam, A. and L. L. Dawson (2018). "'I Left to be Closer to Allah' – Learning about Foreign Fighters from Family and Friends." Institute of Strategic Dialogue, http://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Families_Report.pdf

Ammerman, N. T., ed. (2007). *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Anisef. P. and K. M. Kilbride, eds. (2003). *Managing Two Worlds: The Experience and Concerns of Immigrant Youth in Ontario*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.

Bale, J. M. (2013). Denying the Link between Islamist Ideology and Jihadist Terrorism: "Political Correctness" and the Understanding of Counterterrorism, *Perspectives on Terrorism* 7(5): 5-46.

Batrawy, A., P. Dodds, and L. Hinnant (2016). Leaked ISIS documents reveal recruits have poor grasp of Islamic faith, *The Independent* (16 August),

Beckford, J. A. (1996). Postmodernity, High Modernity and New Modernity: Three Concepts in Search of Religion, in K. Flanagan and P. C. Jupp, eds. *Postmodernity, Sociology and Religion*. New York: St. Marin's Press, pp. 30-47.

Beckford, J. A. (2004). 'Laïcité,' 'Dystopia,' and the Reaction of New Religious Movements in France, in J.T. Richardson, ed., *Regulating Religion: Case Studies from around the Globe.* Boston: Springer, pp. 27-40.

Bellah, R., R. Madsen, W. M. Sullivan, A. Swidler, S. M. Tipton (1985). *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. Berkeley, CA: University of Californian Press.

Borg, M. B. ter (1988). The Problem of Nihilism: A Sociological Approach, *Sociological Analysis* 49(1): 1-16.

Borg, M. B. ter (1990). Nihilism Reconsidered, *Sociological Analysis* 51(1), 109-112.

Burgat, F. (2020). *Understanding Political Islam*. Translated by Thomas Hill (French original 2016), Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Choi, D. (2016). Leaked ISIS documents: The majority of recruits knew nothing about Islam, *Business Insider* (15 August), businessinsider.com/isis-recruits-don't-know-islam-2016-08.

Cole, J. (2019). Politics, Theology and Religion in Jihadist Violence, *Middle East Quarterly* (Winter), https://www.meforum.org/7265/politics-theology-and-religion-in-jihadist

Conti, U. (2017). Between Rap and Jihad: Spectacular Subcultures, Terrorism and Visuality, *Contemporary Social Science* 12(3-4): 272-284.

Coolsaet, R. (2016). Facing the Fourth Foreign Fighter Wave: What Drives Europeans to Syria, and to Islamic State? Insights from the Belgian Case, Brussels: Egmont – The Royal Institute for International Relations, http://www.egmontinstitute.be/facing-the-fourth-foreign-fighters-wave/.

Croft, S. (2012). Constructing Ontological Insecurity: The Insecuritization of Britain's Muslims, *Contemporary Security Policy* 33(2): 219-235.

Crone, M. (2016). Radicalization Revisited: Violence, Politics and the Skills of the Body, *International Affairs* 92: 587-604.

Dalgaard-Nielsen, A. (2010). Violent Radicalization in Europe: What We Know and What We Do Not Know, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 33: 797-814.

Dawson, L. L. (1998). Anti-modernism, Modernism, and Postmodernism: Struggling with the Cultural Significance of New Religious Movements, *Sociology of Religion* 59(2): 131-156.

Dawson, L. L. (2011). Prophetic Failure and Millennial Movements" in C. Wessinger, ed., *Oxford Handbook of Millennialism*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 150-170.

Dawson, L. L. (2017a). Sketch of a Social Ecology Model for Explaining Homegrown Terrorist Radicalisation, The Hague: The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, https://icct.nl/publication/sketch-of-a-social-ecology-model-for-explaining-homegrown-terrorist-radicalisation/

Dawson, L. L. (2017b). Discounting Religion in the Explanation of Homegrown Terrorism: A Critique, in J. R. Lewis, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Religion and Terrorism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 32-45.

Dawson, L. L. (2018). Challenging the Curious Erasure of Religion from the Study of Religious Terrorism, *Numen* 65(2-3): 141-164.

Dawson, L. L. (2021a). Bringing Religiosity Back In: Critical Reflection on the Explanation of Western Homegrown Religious Terrorism – Part I, *Perspectives on Terrorism* 15(1): 2-16.

Dawson, L. L. (2021b). Bringing Religiosity Back In: Critical Reflection on the Explanation of Western Homegrown Religious Terrorism – Part II, *Perspectives on Terrorism* 15(2), 2-22.

Dawson, L. L. (2021c). A Comparative Analysis of Data on Western Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq: Who Went and Why? The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, https://icct.nl/app/uploads/2021/02/Dawson-Comparative-Analysis-FINAL-1.pdf

Dawson, L. L. (2022). The Social Ecology Model of Homegrown Jihadist Radicalisation, in A. N. Awan and J. R. Lewis, eds., *Radicalisation in Comparative Perspective*. London & New York: Hurst & Oxford University Press, (forthcoming, Sept. 2022).

Dawson L. L. and A. Amarasignam (2017). Talking to Foreign Fighters: Insights into the Motivations for Hijrah to Syria and Iraq, *Studies in Conflict and* Terrorism 40(3):191-210.

De Graaf, B. and K. van den Bos (2021). Religious Radicalization: Social Appraisals and Finding Redemption in Extreme Beliefs, *Current Opinions in Psychology* 40: 56-60.

Della Porta, D. (1992). On Individual Motivations in Underground Political Organizations, in Social Movements and Violence: Participation in Underground Organizations, *International Social Movement Research* 4: 29-42.

Hafez, M. and C. Mullins (2015). The Radicalization Puzzle: A Theoretical Synthesis of Empirical Approaches to Homegrown Extremism," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 38: 958-975.

Hall, D. D. (1997). *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Hall, J. R. (2009). *Apocalypse: From Antiquity to the Empire of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Halstead, M. (1994). Between Two Cultures? Muslim Children in a Western Liberal Society. *Children and Society* 8(4): 312-326.

Harris-Hogan, S. and K. Barralle (2020). Young Blood: Understanding the Emergence of a New Cohort of Australian Jihadists, *Terrorism and Political Violence* 32(7): 1391-1412.

Harris-Hogan, S., L. L. Dawson, and A. Amarasingam (2020), A Comparative Analysis of the Nature and Evolution of the Domestic Jihadist Threat to Australia and Canada (2000-2020). *Perspectives on Terrorism* 14(5): 77-102.

Harris-Hogan, S., A. Amarasingam, and L. L. Dawson (2022), A Comparative Analysis of Australian and Canadian Foreign Fighters Traveling to Syria and Iraq, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, first version published online 17 Jan.: 1-31, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1057610X.2021.2024943?casa_token=TUiyNOI9mGgAAAAA%3AilBqWH5yGU-afdjsi6C7BHR50ViIG3Rp2t-2oavupNQSlsWeatdLTyB9H2nxCrrSFmqTT4aqb5tG

Heelas, P. (1998). *Religion, Modernity and Postmodernity*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Holbrook, D. (2021). The Terrorism Information Environment: Analysing Terrorists' Selection of Ideological and Facilitative Media, *Terrorism and Political Violence* 33(4): 697-719.

Holbrook D. and J. Horgan (2019). Terrorism and Ideology: Cracking the Nut, *Perspectives on Terrorism* 13(6): 2-15.

Huntington, S. P. (1996). *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.

Khosrokhavar, F. (2015). *Radicalization: Why Some People Choose the Path of Violence*. Translated by J. M. Todd. New York: The New Press.

Khosrokhavar, F. (2018). *Le nouveau jihad en Occident*. Paris: Robert Laffront.

Klaussen, J. (2021). *Western Jihadism: A Thirty Year History*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Koehler, D. (2017). *Understanding Deradicalization: Methods, Tools and Programs for Countering Violent Extremism*. London: Routledge.

LaFromboise, T., L. Hardin, K. Coleman and J. Gerton (1993). Psychological Impact of Biculturalism: Evidence and Theory, *Psychological Bulletin* 114(3): 395-412.

Larsen, J. F. (2020). The Role of Religion in Islamist Radicalization Processes, *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 13(3): 396-417.

Larsen, J. F. and S. Q. Jensen (2021). Everyday Religion and Radical Islamism – A Contribution to Theorizing the Role of Religion in Radicalization Studies, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, first online version published on 21 May, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1057610X.2021.1929056

Leader Maynard, J. (2014). Rethinking the Role of Ideology in Mass Atrocities, *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26(5): 821-841.

Leader Maynard, J. (2019). Ideology and Armed Conflict. *Journal of Peace Research* 56(5): 635-649.

Lebovich, A. (2016). How 'religious' are ISIS fighters? The relationship between religious literacy and religious motivation, Rethinking Political Islam series, Brookings Institution (2016), p. 2; URL: https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Andrew-Lebovich_FINAL-2.pdf

Lévy, E. (2019). Does Jihadist Terrorism Have Religious Foundations? Jihadist Attacks and Academic Controversies in France (2012-2017), *Dilemas-Revista de Estudos de Conflito e Controle Social* 12(2): 217-238.

Lewis, B. (1990). The Roots of Muslim Rage. *The Atlantic Monthly* (Sept.).

Marone, F. (2016). "Italy's Jihadists in the Syrian Civil War," The Hague: The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, Research Paper (August), https://icct.nl/publication/italys-jihadists-in-the-syrian-civil-war/

McBride, M. K. (2019). Unforced Errors: ISIS, the BAATH Party, and the reconciliation of the Religious and the Secular, *Politics, Religion and Ideology* 20(2): 170-191.

McCants, W. (2015). *The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

McCauley, C. and S. Moskalenko (2011). *Friction: How Radicalization Happens to Them and Us*. New York: Oxford University Press.

McDonald, K. (2018). *Radicalization*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

McGinn, B., J. Collins, and S. J. Stein, eds. (2003). *The Continuum History of Apocalypticism*. New York: Continuum.

McGuire, M. B. (2008). *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Nanninga, P.G.T. (2018). Review of *Jihad and Death: The Global Appeal of Islamic State*. Olivier Roy. Oxford University Press, 2017. *Journal of Religion and Violence* 6(2): 298-302.

Neumann, P. R. (2016). *Radicalized: New Jihadists and the Threat to the West*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Nossiter, A. (2016). 'That Ignoramus': 2 French Scholars of Radical Islam Turn Bitter Rivals, *The New York Times* (July 12), https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/13/world/europe/france-radical-islam.html

Mezzetti, G. (2017). Contemporary Jihadism: A Generational Phenomenon, ISMU Foundation, https://www.ismu.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Mezzetti_Paper_Jihadism_July2017.pdf

Palmer, S. J. (2011). *The New Heretics of France: Minority Religions, la République, and the Government-Sponsored "War on Sects".* New York: Oxford University Press.

Pape, R. A. (2005). *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*. New York: Random House.

Peace, T. (2016). Who Becomes a Terrorist and Why? *The Washington Post* (May 10), https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/05/10/who-becomes-a-terrorist-and-why/

Roy, O. (1994). *The Failure of Political Islam.* Translated by Carol Volk. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Roy, O. (2001). Bin Laden: An Apocalyptic Sect Severed from Political Islam, *East European Constitutional Review* 108: 108-114.

Roy, O. (2004). *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Roy, O. (2006). Terrorism and Deculturation, in L. Richardson, ed., *The Roots of Terrorism*. New York: Routledge, pp. 159-170.

Roy, O. (2008a). Al Qaeda in the West as a Youth movement: The Power of a Narrative. Brussels: Centre for European Policy Studies, Policy Brief No. 168.

Roy, O. (2008b). *The Politics of Chaos in the Middle East*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008

Roy, O. (2011). Al-Qaeda: A True Global Movement, in R. Coolsaet, ed., *Jihadi Terrorism and the Radicalization Challenge*, 2nd ed. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate.

Roy, O. (2013). *Holy Ignorance: When Religion and Culture Part Ways*. Translated by Ros Schwartz. London: Hurst.

Roy, O. (2015a). "Le djhadisme est une révolte générationnelle et nihillisté," [Jihadism is a generational and nihilist revolt] *Le Monde*, (24 November).

Roy, O. (2015b). What is the driving force behind jihadist terrorism? A scientific perspective on the causes/circumstances of joining the scene. BKA Autumn Conference, International Terrorism: How can prevention and repression keep pace? 18-19 November, https://www.bka.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/EN/Publications/AutumnConferences/2015/herbsttagung2015Roy.html

Roy, O. (2016a). France's Oedipal Islamist Complex, *Foreign Policy* (January 7), (English version of *Le Monde* article referenced above), https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/01/07frances-oedipal-islamist-complex-charlie-hebdo-islamic-state-isis/#

Roy, O. (2016b). The Islamization of Radicalism, *Mada Masr*, www.madamasr.com/en/2016/01/11/opinion/u/the-islamization-of-radicalism/

Roy, O. (2016c). Can We Understand the Motives of Jihadists? *Pouvoirs* 158(3): 15-24, translated and published by Cairn-Info International, https://www.carin-int.info/journal-pouvoirs-2016-3-page-15htm

Roy, O. (2017). *Jihad and Death: The Global Appeal of Islamic State*. Translated by Cynthia Schoch. London: Hurst & Co.

Roy, O. (2020). Olivier Roy: France's government fails to understand the nature of radicalisation. Interview with Nadia Henni-Moulai, *Middle East Eye*, 23 November, https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/france-islam-olivier-roy-authorities-failure-radicalisation

Sageman, M. (2017). *Misunderstanding Terrorism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Silke, A. (2008). Holy Warriors: Exploring the Psychological Processes of Jihadi Radicalization, *European Journal of Criminology* 5: 99-123.

Speckhard, A. and M. Shaikh (2014). *Undercover Jihadi: Inside the Toronto 18 Al Qaeda Inspired, Homegrown Terrorism in the West*. McLean, VA: Advances Press.

Sprinzak, E. (1990). "The Psychopolitical Formation of Extreme Left Terrorism in a Democracy: The Case of the Weathermen," in Walter Reich, ed., *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Pres, pp. 65-85.

Stone, J., ed. (2000). *Expecting Armageddon: Essential Readings in Failed Prophecy*. New York: Routledge.

Stronink, M. L. (2007). Processes and Preconditions Underlying Terrorism in Second-Generation Immigrants, *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 13(3): 293-312.

Thomson, D. (2018). *The Returned*. Translated by Gregory Flanders. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Unger, S. (1990). Is Nihilism Dead? *Sociological Analysis* 51(1): 97-103.

Weitzman, M. (2021). France's Great Debate over the Sources and Meaning of Muslim Terror, *The Tablet* (May 24), https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/news/articles/roy-kepel-marc-weitzmann

Wessinger, C., ed. (2011). *Oxford Handbook of Millennialism*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Williame, J-P. (2020). Integration, Laicity and Islam in France," in A Körs, W. Weisse, and J-P. Williame, eds., *Religious Diversity and Interreligious Dialogue*. Switzerland: Springer, pp. 43-58.

Wood, G. (2017). True Believers: How ISIS made Jihad Religious Again, *Foreign Affairs* (Sept/Oct), https://www.foeignafairs.com/reviews/review-essay/2017-08-15/true-believers

Woolfolk. A. (1990). Toward a Theory of Nihilism. *Sociological Analysis* 51(1): 105-107.

Worth, R. F. (2017). The Professor and the Jihadi, *The New York Times Magazine* (April 5), https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/05/magazine/france-election-gilles-kepel-islam.html

JOURNAL FOR DERADICALIZATION

Spring 2022
No. 30
ISSN: 2363-9849

About the JD Journal for Deradicalization

The JD Journal for Deradicalization is the world's only peer reviewed periodical for the theory and practice of deradicalization with a wide international audience. Named an "essential journal of our times" (Cheryl LaGuardia, Harvard University) the JD's editorial board of expert advisors includes some of the most renowned scholars in the field of deradicalization studies, such as Prof. Dr. John G. Horgan (Georgia State University); Prof. Dr. Tore Bjørgo (Norwegian Police University College); Prof. Dr. Mark Dechesne (Leiden University); Prof. Dr. Cynthia Miller-Idriss (American University Washington D.C.); Prof. Dr. Julie Chernov Hwang (Goucher College); Prof. Dr. Marco Lombardi, (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore Milano); Dr. Paul Jackson (University of Northampton); Professor Michael Freeden, (University of Nottingham); Professor Hamed El-Sa'id (Manchester Metropolitan University); Prof. Sadeq Rahimi (University of Saskatchewan, Harvard Medical School), Dr. Omar Ashour (University of Exeter), Prof. Neil Ferguson (Liverpool Hope University), Prof. Sarah Marsden (Lancaster University), Prof. Maura Conway (Dublin City University), Dr. Kurt Braddock (American University Washington D.C.), Dr. Michael J. Williams (The Science of P/CVE), Dr. Mary Beth Altier (New York University) and Dr. Aaron Y. Zelin (Washington Institute for Near East Policy), Prof. Dr. Adrian Cherney (University of Queensland).

For more information please see: www.journal-derad.com

Twitter: @JD_JournalDerad
Facebook: www.facebook.com/deradicalisation

The JD Journal for Deradicalization is a proud member of the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ).

ISSN: 2363-9849