

Psychological Pathways to Extremism: Radical Beliefs and the Rise of Violence in the Muslim World—A Case Study of Religious Alienation

Badra Hamdi Alghanami¹ 

Abstract: This article examines the psychological dimensions of religious alienation among Arab veterans of the Soviet-Afghan War and its role in shaping trajectories of Islamic radicalization. Drawing on insights from identity transformation and cognitive openness, it identifies four key manifestations of religious alienation as central to understanding how spiritual dislocation can lead to violent extremism: the search for identity and belonging, rejection of established norms and institutions, adoption of binary worldviews, attraction to simplified moral frameworks, and emergence of cognitive openings. The article argues that the Afghan jihad served as both a catalyst for ideological transformation and a context for the psychological reconfiguration of religious obligation. It concludes that effective counter-radicalization efforts must address underlying emotional and cognitive vulnerabilities, rather than focusing solely on ideological content or security-based measures. The study offers broader implications for understanding radicalization as a human response to existential uncertainty, identity crisis, and institutional breakdown.

Keywords: religious alienation, violence, Islamic extremism, jihadist, radicalization, ummah, cognitive opening

Introduction

Religious isolation describes the experience of feeling alienated from the broader discourse within the Muslim community, leading individuals to detach themselves from mainstream interpretations of Islam. This sense of marginalization often drives extremists to construct their own interpretations of the Qur'an and religious obligations, divorced from traditional scholarly consensus. Believing themselves to possess a purer or more authentic understanding of Islam, they develop a sense of

¹ Badra Hamdi Alghanami is an Assistant Professor of Clinical Psychology at the College of Applied Medical Sciences at the University of King Abdulaziz, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Contact E-mail: balghami@kau.edu.sa

moral and spiritual superiority over the wider Muslim public. This mindset can evolve into a justification for using violence as a means to reshape society and enforce their beliefs, viewing such actions as both necessary and divinely sanctioned.

The phenomenon of religious isolation gained significant traction among young people in the Arab world following the Soviet-Afghan War (1979–1989), a pivotal moment in the trajectory of modern Islamic militancy. The war not only served as a crucible for mobilizing international jihadist networks, but also facilitated deep psychological and religious shifts among the thousands of Arab volunteers who joined the conflict. Upon returning home, many of these fighters experienced profound religious alienation; a decisive yet often overlooked factor in the rise of extremist movements across the Middle East and North Africa throughout the 1990s and beyond.

This post-conflict religious alienation is a complex and layered psychological process. Having undergone intense religious indoctrination and combat experiences in Afghanistan, these individuals struggled to reintegrate into the more moderate religious and sociopolitical landscapes of their home societies. Unable to reconcile their absolutist worldviews with their comparatively pluralist and pragmatic local environments, many isolated themselves and created parallel religious identities and communities. In some cases, this dislocation laid the groundwork for further radicalization and the eventual adoption of violent methods to impose their vision of an “authentic” Islamic order.

While in Afghanistan, Arab volunteers did not just undergo military training; they also underwent extensive religious and ideological indoctrination that completely changed how they approached Islamic practice, society, and duty. These fighters were taught radical views of Islam in training camps and on the battlefield in Afghanistan. These views stressed jihad as a permanent religious duty, rejected working with moderate authorities, and pushed for a vision of Islamic solidarity that crossed national borders. The intensity of this experience, along with the close friendships that formed through shared struggle and military success against a major power, made strong psychological ties with the ideology and community of other fighters. Being taken out of familiar social situations, the power of charismatic religious leaders, and the extreme nature of combat made extreme interpretations of religious duty seem logical and necessary.

The trip back from Afghanistan’s mountains and training camps to cities and traditional communities in Arab societies caused what can be called a deep form of reverse culture shock as the veterans’ changed worldview clashed with the religious practices they saw in their home environments. The psychological effects of this religious alienation was made worse by the fact that veterans had a hard time readjusting to communities that did not understand or appreciate what they had experienced and sacrificed. Many returning soldiers found themselves in bad financial situations, politically suspect, and socially isolated. They could not explain to their

family and friends who had stayed in normal civilian life how important their time in Afghanistan was to them. The difference between the sense of purpose, brotherhood, and divine mission they felt in Afghanistan and the spiritual emptiness and moral compromise they felt in their home communities caused them a lot of mental pain, which manifested as anger and alienation in different ways. and then a search for a group that would take them in and give them a religious and social structure.

Therefore, one of the best ways to stop people from becoming extremists in today's societies is to understand the religious alienation that young people who join extremist groups feel. This sense of being alone applies to all kinds of extremism, whether it is based on religion, as it has been in the Islamic world since 1979, or on race and culture, as it is now happening in many European countries. This paper looks at four psychological effects of religious alienation and tries to break down the psychological issues that cause a group of beliefs that all lead to the same thing: a turn toward extremism in the shape of Jihadist trend.

Search for Identity and Belonging

Among the various factors emphasized in radicalization research, the search for identity and belonging emerges as a particularly potent psychological driver, and one that extremist groups deliberately and systematically exploit to attract and retain members. This core human need, when unmet through traditional social, familial, or communal structures, creates a sense of vulnerability that can pave the way for radicalization (Sageman 2004).

The writing of Qutb (Qutb 1964, 17) and the statements of Ben Laden and al-Zawahiri (Al-Zawahiri 1999) are full of reflections of this psychological disorder in misinterpreting the prophet's hadith, which says "Islam began as something strange, and it will revert to being strange" (Muslim 1999, 158/3). This hadith, despite its varied interpretations, has been widely utilized by Jihadist ideology to justify the search of belonging.

The interplay between identity crisis, social alienation, and engagement with extremist ideologies is a deeply layered psychological process. It cannot be fully understood through individual psychology alone; it also involves broader socio-cultural and political forces that influence how people construct their sense of self and perceive their place in the world. When conventional sources of identity and community fail to offer meaning, recognition, or belonging, individuals may become drawn to alternative narratives, often absolutist and exclusionary, that offer a coherent worldview, a defined in-group, and a sense of purpose (Hogg 2014, 338–342). These narratives fill existential voids with certainty and structure, making them particularly appealing to those experiencing marginalization or dislocation.

Human beings have a deep-seated need for identity and social belonging, both of

which are essential to psychological health and social stability. Identity formation is a multifaceted developmental process through which individuals come to understand who they are, what they value, and how they relate to others within their broader society. This process is especially critical during adolescence and young adulthood, periods marked by heightened exploration and a search for meaning, purpose, and social connection (Erikson 1968).

Researchers refer to the fundamental human need to feel accepted, valued, and integrated into a community or group as social belonging. A substantial body of research in social psychology has shown that disruptions to one's sense of identity or belonging can lead to serious psychological distress, including heightened anxiety, depression, and increased vulnerability to external influence (Williams 2007, 425–452). When individuals face identity confusion or social exclusion, they often respond with compensatory behaviors aimed at restoring their sense of self-worth and connection. These responses may involve joining alternative communities, embracing new belief systems, or engaging in activities that offer structure, validation, and meaning (Tajfel & Turner 1979, 33–47). In some cases, these dynamics can make individuals more susceptible to radical ideologies that promise clarity, purpose, and a strong sense of in-group belonging.

When we think about the demographic traits of many people who join extremist movements, the link between identity, belonging, and radicalization becomes even more important (Silber & Bhatt 2007). Studies have shown that a lot of people who became radicalized had identity crises, felt socially isolated or marginalized before they joined extremist groups. These events make people mentally weak, and extremist groups are adept at finding and using these weaknesses to recruit and brainwash people (Wiktorowicz 2005). Social isolation and marginalization are two of the most important risk factors for radicalization. They make people more open to extremist stories and recruitment efforts. Cultural displacement, economic marginalization, political disenfranchisement, and social exclusion are all ways that people can feel alienated (Bhui et al. 2014). Living between cultures can cause deep identity conflicts and feelings of not belonging to any one group for many people, especially those from minority groups or immigrant backgrounds.

Discrimination and prejudice make people feel even more alone, which gives extremist groups a chance to take advantage of these feelings of injustice and anger (Schmid 2013, 1-91). People who feel like they are being unfairly treated or left out of mainstream society because of their race, religion, or other traits may be more open to stories that frame their experiences as part of a larger pattern of oppression and the need to fight back (Moghaddam 2005, 161–169). This process is especially strong for second and third-generation immigrants who may feel torn between their own culture and the culture of the society they are living in (Choudhury 2007). However, the digital age has changed this process. People can now connect with others who share their interests across geographic boundaries while still feeling disconnected from the

people around them (Awan et al. 2011). Online communities can give people a sense of identity and belonging, but they can also make it easier for people to learn about extremist ideas and join radical groups (Conway 2017, 77–98). Digital spaces can also make people feel more alone and give extremist groups a means to find and target weak people (Sunstein 2001).

Studies have shown that going through a personal crisis, trauma, or major life change can make people more likely to become radicalized by disrupting their sense of identity and belonging (Horgan 2008, 80–94). Psychological instability can make people more likely to join extremist groups after events such as the death of a family member, breakups, losing a job, or failing in school (Borum 2011). When people are feeling weak, extremist groups, with their clear answers and strong community, can seem especially appealing (Klausen 2016 67–83). Extremist groups have come up with clever ways to find and take advantage of people's needs for identity and belonging, often going after people who seem to be the most open to joining (Neumann 2013, 873–893). These groups know that giving people a strong, clear identity and the feeling of being part of something special can help them attract and maintain new members. The recruitment process usually has a few steps. The first step is to find people who show signs of feeling alone, confused about their identity, or disconnected from others (Sageman 2008).

Once extremist groups find people they want to recruit, they use different methods to slowly pull them into their orbit while also pushing them away from mainstream society (Wiktorowicz 2004). This process often starts with giving the person social support, friendship, and a sense of community that they may not have had before. Recruiters learn how to recognize and meet certain psychological needs by sending personalized messages that relate to the person's specific situation and problems. The identity that extremist groups offer usually has a few key traits that make it very appealing to vulnerable people (Hogg et al. 2010, 72–83). First, it makes things clear and certain in a world that can seem confusing and chaotic. It does this by giving simple answers to hard questions and clear rules for how to act. Second, it makes the person feel like they are part of a special group with special knowledge or purpose, which meets their needs for self-esteem and significance (Kruglanski et al. 2009, 331–357). Third, it makes strong differences between people inside and outside the group, which makes people feel very loyal and like they belong, while making people outside the group look bad (Brewer 1999).

Extremist groups often give their members a sense of belonging by making them very close to each other and relying on each other (Post 2007). Members of these groups feel valued, understood, and accepted in ways they may never have before. The fact that only a few people can join and that everyone in the group shares the same beliefs creates strong psychological ties that can be hard to break (Festinger 1956). People who are in the group often say that they have found their “true family” or “real purpose” in life through being a part of it (Stern 2003). Extremist groups also take

advantage of people's need for identity and belonging by making up new stories that change how they view their experiences and their place in the world. These stories usually show the group and its members as victims of unfair treatment or persecution, while also making them out to be heroes fighting for a good cause. Having both a victim and a hero identity can be very powerful for the mind. It can help explain problems from the past and give you a sense of purpose and meaning for the future (Taylor & Horgan 2006, 585–601).

Moving to a new place, starting college, or changing jobs can all break up social networks and sources of belonging (Schachter 1959). People may feel alone and cut off from the people and things that used to give them support and identity during these changes (Weiss 1973). Extremist groups often go after people during these weak times, offering them a sense of community and belonging to those who are having trouble making new friends (Venhaus 2010). Traumatic events, whether they happen to you or someone else, can also make you more likely to become radicalized by making you feel like you don't belong or that your life has no meaning (Herman 1992). Experiences of violence, discrimination, or loss can leave psychological scars that extremist groups take advantage of by promising revenge or justice and giving people reasons for their pain (Silke 2008, 99–123). When whole communities go through trauma together, it can also make people more likely to become radicalized. This is because shared grievances and experiences of being a victim make extremist stories more appealing.

It is important to understand how identity and belonging play a role in radicalization in order to develop good means to stop it and help people who are already radicalized (Horgan 2010, 267–291). Instead of just focusing on ideological counter-narratives or security measures, prevention efforts need to look at the psychological needs that make people open to extremist recruitment. This calls for a broad approach that includes improving positive sources of identity and belonging while also dealing with the social factors that make people feel isolated and marginalized. Community-based prevention programs that focus on building resilience and giving people positive choices instead of joining extremist groups have shown promise in lowering the risk of radicalization. These programs usually include giving people at risk a chance to be a part of community life, mentoring and supporting them, and making places that are welcoming to everyone and celebrate differences while promoting shared values. Young people can also resist extremist propaganda and recruitment efforts via education on critical thinking and media literacy (Kundnani 2012, 3–25).

Intervention strategies for people who are already becoming radicalized must deal with both the ideological and psychological aspects of being involved with extremists. This means helping people find other ways to feel like they belong and who they are while slowly pulling them away from extremist groups and ideas. Family and community support are very important in this process because they can give people the emotional support they need to successfully rejoin society. The complexity of

identity and belonging needs in radicalization processes shows how important it is to use a wide range of strategies for prevention and intervention that deal with the social conditions that lead to alienation and marginalization and build up positive sources of identity and belonging in communities (Webber & Kruglanski 2018, 131–134).

Rejection of Established Norms and Institutions

The rejection of established norms and institutions is a central psychological pathway through which individuals become vulnerable to extremist ideologies and recruitment (Wiktorowicz 2005). This process is typically rooted in a growing disillusionment with conventional sources of authority—whether religious, political, or social—that are perceived as unresponsive, corrupt, or illegitimate. As this disillusionment deepens, it creates both cognitive and emotional space for alternative worldviews that claim to offer authenticity, moral clarity, and uncorrupted truth (Hogg 2014, 338–342).

This shift is not merely intellectual; it often involves intense emotional experiences of frustration, betrayal, and existential uncertainty. When individuals feel that mainstream institutions have failed to meet their needs, represent their values, or address their grievances, they may begin to withdraw their trust and allegiance from those institutions. In seeking alternatives, they become more open to ideologies that position themselves in opposition to the status quo and offer a coherent, albeit often absolutist, framework for interpreting the world. This process can profoundly reshape an individual's relationship with society, leading to a redefined sense of identity, belonging, and purpose grounded in the perceived moral superiority of a new in-group or cause (Hafez 2003).

Institutional rejection is especially common in religious settings where people may lose faith in what they see as the compromised or corrupt nature of mainstream religious institutions (Roy 2004). Some people think that traditional mosques, churches, and other religious places have become too accommodating to secular society, too moderate in how they interpret their faith, or too distant from their faith's original teachings (Mandaville 2014). Radical groups take advantage of this feeling of institutional failure by claiming to be the true protectors of religious truth. People are drawn to these groups not only because due to their claims of religious purity, but also because they can give clear, straightforward answers to complicated social and religious questions that mainstream institutions may not be able to do.

Research has demonstrated that individuals who eventually join extremist movements often report feeling frustrated with the perceived inadequacy of established religious leadership and institutions. These feelings may stem from various sources, including disagreement with moderate interpretations of religious texts, frustration with institutional responses to social or political issues, or a sense that religious leaders have become too integrated with secular power structures (Wiktorowicz 2004). The psychological impact of this disillusionment can be profound, as it challenges

fundamental assumptions about authority, truth, and community that may have been central to an individual's identity and worldview (Berger 1967). When traditional sources of religious guidance are perceived as illegitimate or corrupted, individuals may become more receptive to alternative interpretations that promise to restore authentic religious practice and belief (Bruce 2000).

The process of rejecting established norms and institutions is often facilitated by exposure to radical ideologies that provide systematic critiques of mainstream religious and political structures (Snow 2007, 119-136). These critiques typically employ religious or ideological frameworks to demonstrate how established institutions have deviated from their original purposes or principles. For example, radical Islamic groups may argue that mainstream mosques and religious leaders have been corrupted by Western influence, democratic values, or material concerns, thereby losing their connection to authentic Islamic teachings (Roy 1994). Similarly, far-right extremist groups may claim that traditional conservative institutions have been infiltrated or compromised by liberal ideologies, necessitating a return to more fundamental principles. These narratives are psychologically powerful because they provide explanations for personal and collective grievances while offering a path toward restoration and redemption (Mudde 2007).

Studies have shown that people who join extremist groups often say they were disillusioned with established religious leaders and institutions. There could be many reasons for these feelings, such as disagreeing with moderate interpretations of religious texts, being angry with how institutions deal with social or political issues, or feeling like religious leaders have become too close to secular power structures (Wiktorowicz 2004). This disillusionment can have grave effects on a person's mental health as they question basic beliefs about authority, truth, and community that may have been important to their sense of self and how they see the world (Berger 1967). People may be more open to different interpretations that promise to restore real religious practice and belief when they think that traditional sources of religious guidance are not valid or have been corrupted (Bruce 2000).

Radical ideologies that systematically criticize mainstream political and religious structures can make it easier to reject established norms and institutions (Snow 2007, 119–136). These critiques usually use religious or ideological frameworks to show how established institutions have strayed from their original goals or values. For instance, radical Islamic groups might say that Western values, democratic values, or material concerns have corrupted mainstream mosques and religious leaders, making them less connected to true Islamic teachings (Roy 1994). In the same way, far-right extremist groups might claim that a return to more basic values is needed given that liberal ideas have infiltrated or weakened traditional conservative institutions. These stories are psychologically strong because they explain personal and group problems and show how to fix them and get back on the right path (Mudde 2007).

Radical groups' claims to authenticity and purity can be appealing in their

uncompromising commitment to core principles. Mainstream institutions may talk to each other, make deals, and change with the times, but radical groups often act like they are completely committed to basic truths. People looking for certainty and clarity in an uncertain world find this rigidity to be a strength and an attraction (Hogg 2010, 72–83). People who have felt confused, doubtful, or morally unclear when dealing with mainstream institutions may find absolute certainty and clear moral boundaries to be very appealing (Kruglanski 1996, 263–286).

When people reject established institutions, they often turn to other sources of authority, such as charismatic leaders, ancient texts, or idealized historical periods, that they believe to be real, more legitimate, and closer to the true essence of their faith or ideology. The process of switching allegiance from mainstream to alternative authorities is complicated and involves both cognitive and emotional factors, such as the need to explain why you are rejecting old beliefs and commitments while accepting new ones (Eisenstadt 1978). Social networks and communities that support alternative authorities and undermine mainstream institutions can facilitate this process.

Digital technologies and online communities have made it much easier for people to reject institutions by giving them places to share different points of view and authorities to reach more people (Conway 2017, 77–98). People can find religious or ideological content online that goes against mainstream views, and they can also connect with others who feel the same way about established institutions (Awan et al. 2011). Digital media has made religious and ideological discussions more open to everyone, which has given non-traditional authorities a chance to gain power and respect, sometimes at the expense of established institutional leaders. Algorithms on social media and echo chambers can make alternative views stronger while limiting exposure to mainstream views. This could speed up the process of institutional rejection (Sunstein 2001).

Personal experiences of disappointment, betrayal, or conflict with established authorities can often make the psychological effects of institutional rejection stronger. People who have had negative experiences with religious leaders, politicians, or institutional representatives may use these experiences to doubt the validity of all institutional structures (Borum 2011, 7–36). When people talk about their personal problems in the context of larger stories about institutional corruption or failure, these problems can be very strong reasons for them to look for other sources of authority and meaning (Schmid 2013, 1–91). When people are highly agitated, they are more likely to listen to extreme criticisms of established institutions and less likely to listen to moderate or nuanced points of view (Moghaddam 2005, 161–169).

When people reject established norms and institutions, they often go through what scholars call “cognitive radicalization.” That is, they adopt more and more extreme interpretations of their beliefs while rejecting more moderate ones (McCauley & Moskalenko 2017, 205–216). When people change the way they think, they often also

change their social networks. They move away from people who support or represent mainstream institutions and closer to people who share their radical views. Radical communities can give people social support that makes them feel stronger about rejecting established institutions and makes it harder for them to change their minds (Tajfel 1979, 33–47). Psychological investment in radical beliefs and communities can make it very hard to stop being radical, because going back to mainstream institutions may mean accepting the validity of rules and authorities that were previously rejected (Horgan & Braddock 2010, 267–291).

Educational and socioeconomic factors can affect how likely and severe institutional rejection is. Research has shown that both highly educated and less educated people may be open to radical appeals, but for different reasons. Highly-educated people may be able to make complex arguments about institutions' failures and contradictions, while people with few educational opportunities may feel left out of mainstream institutional participation (Gambetta & Hertog 2016). Social and economic marginalization can make people feel alienated from institutions, which can make radical alternatives seem like better places to find meaning and belonging. The combination of educational, economic, and social factors makes it hard to understand how institutional rejection can lead to radicalization (Bhui et al. 2014).

It is important to consider how differences between generations can affect institutional rejection, since younger people may be more likely to question established norms and authorities. When people from different generations disagree about how to interpret religion, what political issues are most important, or what social values are most important, it can cause tension. Radical groups take advantage of this by claiming to be the true representatives of traditions against corrupt modern institutions (Silber 2007). When young people, who naturally question authority and desire freedom, think that mainstream institutions are not doing their jobs or are illegitimate, they may turn to radical alternatives. Digital natives may also be more likely to come across different authorities and interpretations through online platforms that don't have to go through traditional institutional gatekeepers (Prensky 2001, 1–6).

This psychological appeal of rejecting institutions is significantly amplified by the feelings of empowerment and agency that radical groups provide their followers. In contrast to mainstream institutions, which often demand patience, compromise, and adherence to bureaucratic processes, radical movements offer the allure of immediate and transformative action. This promise of rapid change resonates strongly with individuals who feel disempowered, excluded, or unheard within existing social, political, or religious systems. By framing participation as part of a historic or divine struggle, these groups imbue their cause with a sense of mission and destiny that appeals to those searching for significance. The resulting psychological rewards—heightened self-worth, clear purpose, and the feeling of belonging to a righteous cause—can outweigh what mainstream institutions are perceived to offer, particularly for those who view those institutions as sources of frustration, failure, or betrayal

(Klandermans 1997).

To craft more credible and effective prevention and intervention strategies it is crucial to understand these psychological mechanisms that drive the rejection of institutions. Efforts to counter radicalization must go beyond defensive postures that merely reaffirm the status quo. Instead, they should engage seriously with the grievances, real or perceived, that fuel disillusionment. By recognizing and addressing failures in governance, justice, and representation, institutions can begin to rebuild trust and legitimacy among those who feel marginalized or alienated.

Prevention strategies should prioritize inclusive governance models that allow for genuine participation, particularly among youth and other vulnerable groups. Educational systems can play a pivotal role by fostering critical thinking, civic engagement, and constructive dissent, helping individuals develop the tools to question authority responsibly without resorting to wholesale rejection. Furthermore, creating space for dialogue between mainstream institutions and alternative or dissenting voices can reduce polarization and offer peaceful avenues for expressing discontent. Addressing institutional rejection as a pathway to radicalization demands a nuanced, and multi-layered approach that synthesizes psychological insights with structural reform, cultivating environments where people can fulfill their needs for identity, agency, and belonging without resorting to extremism.

“Us vs. Them” Mentality

The emergence of an “us vs. them” mentality is a powerful and deeply embedded psychological mechanism that facilitates radicalization by simplifying complex social and political realities into binary moral oppositions. This mechanism is crucial, both for the initial engagement with radical ideologies as well as for a sustained commitment to the radical group (Tajfel 1979). This binary worldview transforms nuanced social realities into stark moral dichotomies, due to complex psychological processes involving social identity formation, intergroup bias, and cognitive simplification (Brewer 1999, 429-444). This dichotomization not only justifies defensive or violent action but also reinforces a sense of moral superiority and purpose. Over time, this cognitive and emotional restructuring reshapes an individual’s entire interpretive framework towards themselves and the world around them, limiting their capacity for empathy, dialogue, or alternative perspectives. (Brewer 1999).

Social identity theory helps us understand how religious alienation can lead to rigid in-group and out-group distinctions that are typical of extremist thinking (Hogg, 1988). This theory posits that people obtain much of their sense of self from being part of social groups, and threats to group identity or status can make people defensive, which makes them more loyal to their own group and more hostile to other groups. When religious people feel that their faith community is being attacked,

misunderstood, or marginalized by society as a whole, they may respond by becoming more attached to their religious group and developing more negative views of people outside their community. This process is especially strong when people think that their religious identity is not only different from but also fundamentally incompatible with the values and practices of the society they reside in (Pargament 2007, 143–158).

Binary thinking is appealing because it can help people make sense of complicated social situations where they might feel lost, scared, or overwhelmed (Kruglanski 1996, 263–283). Instead of dealing with the complicated issues of interfaith relations, cultural diversity, and social integration, an “us vs. them” framework gives easy answers to social problems and clear rules for how to act. People who have been discriminated against, prejudiced, or socially rejected may find this cognitive simplification especially appealing because it helps them make sense of their bad experiences while also confirming their moral superiority (Schmid 2013, 1–19). Changing personal problems into cosmic battles between good and evil can give people a sense of meaning and comfort that more complex views may not.

Studies in social psychology have shown that competition and conflict between groups can quickly make people more loyal to their own group and more hostile to other groups, even when the groups are manufactured and the conflicts are small. In the real world, when religious groups face real problems like discrimination, being pushed out of politics, or cultural pressure to fit in, these psychological processes can intensify and have a bigger effect (Esses et al. 1998, 699–724). Scholars call it “realistic group conflict” when people think their religious community is in danger of dying out. This happens when competition for resources, recognition, or survival leads to zero-sum thinking, which means that gains for out-groups must mean losses for the in-group. This competitive attitude can turn normal social interactions into battlefields where every concession or compromise is seen as a betrayal of basic values.

It’s hard to overstate how important perceived injustice is in creating “us vs. them” mentalities. Experiences of unfair treatment or systematic discrimination can give radical narratives a lot of emotional power (Tyler & Smith 1998, 595–629). People may be open to ideas that say these wrongs are proof of deep moral differences between believers and non-believers when they think their religious community has been wronged by society as a whole (Klandermans 1997). People can justify more extreme reactions to perceived injustices by seeing their opponents as fundamentally evil or less than human. This is called moral disengagement. This process of dehumanization is very important for allowing violence because it takes away the moral barriers that usually stop people from hurting others (Kelman 1973, 25–61).

Digital technologies and social media sites have made it much easier for people to develop and maintain “us vs. them” mentalities by creating echo chambers where people with similar views can reinforce each other’s beliefs while avoiding other viewpoints (Sunstein 2001). Online communities can be places where people can discuss their problems, and conspiracy theories and extreme readings of religious texts

can become normalized. Many social media sites use algorithms that favor content that is divisive and polarizing compared to more moderate or nuanced material (Conway 2017). This technological amplification of polarization can speed up the growth of binary thinking and make it harder for people to find information that might challenge their worldview.

The psychological factors that cause group polarization are an important factor in strengthening “us vs. them” attitudes in radical groups. When people who think the same way talk to each other a lot, their beliefs tend to get more extreme over time as group members try to show how committed and real they are to the group (Moscovici 1969, 125–135). This process can turn moderate religious concerns into more extreme ones that see compromise or coexistence as impossible or wrong. People may take more extreme positions than they would on their own because of social pressure to follow group norms and show loyalty. People may become more radical in their beliefs and more hostile toward people outside of the group because they are afraid of being rejected by the group for not being committed enough (McCauley 2017, 205–216).

Cognitive bias, selective exposure, and motivated reasoning are all examples of cognitive biases that help keep and strengthen “us vs. them” mentalities by only letting in information that supports what we already believe and ignoring evidence that goes against it. People with binary worldviews tend to see unclear events in ways that reinforce what they already believe about how their group is different from others. This selective processing of information makes binary thinking harder and harder to change (Lord et al. 1979).

Understanding the psychological power and persistence of “us vs. them” mentalities requires looking at their emotional aspects. Radical groups can meet deep psychological needs that may not be met by participating in mainstream social activities by giving people a sense of belonging, purpose, and moral clarity. Fighting against perceived enemies can create strong emotional ties that go beyond logical thinking and lead to strong loyalty and commitment (Post 2007). People can become addicted to the psychological benefits of feeling special, chosen, or morally superior, which makes it hard for them to give up radical beliefs even when they are shown contrary evidence (Kruglanski 2009, 331–357). People may stay committed to radical groups even when the costs are high because they are afraid of losing these emotional benefits (Becker 1973).

Trauma and being a victim can make “us vs. them” mentalities much stronger by giving radical stories about intergroup conflict real-life examples (Herman 1992). People who have been victims of violence, discrimination, or persecution may be more likely to believe ideologies that see these events as part of a planned attack on their religious community. People who have been through traumatic events may feel the need to find meaning in them and turn to explanatory frameworks that put their pain in the context of larger cosmic battles between good and evil. Vicarious trauma from seeing violence against people of the same religion in the media can have similar

effects, making people emotionally invested in conflicts they haven't been through themselves (Silke 2008, 99–123).

Moreover, the process of moral elevation, when harnessed by radical movements, transforms inspirational narratives of sacrifice into powerful psychological tools for deepening commitment and polarizing worldviews. As Jonathan Haidt (2003) explains, witnessing or hearing about acts of profound moral courage or self-sacrifice can trigger emotional uplift and a desire to emulate such virtues, reinforcing this “us vs. them mentality.” Individuals are thus not only encouraged but subtly compelled to demonstrate their worth through increasing displays of ideological purity or personal sacrifice. As Kruglanski (2014, 69-93) observes, social validation and status within the group often hinge on visible signs of radical commitment, making the path toward extremism both a moral and a social imperative. Simultaneously, cultural and historical narratives infuse the “us vs. them” mentality with a sense of timeless legitimacy. According to Volkan (1997), large-group psychology is shaped by collective traumas and mythologized conflicts, which are passed down as cultural memory. These narratives embed personal grievances within a transhistorical conflict—believers versus oppressors, the faithful versus the corrupt—framing the present as part of a righteous continuum. When individuals perceive their current alienation as part of an ancient and ongoing struggle, it lends existential weight and historical inevitability to their choices. Smith (1999) emphasizes that such myths not only explain the present but also provide a script for action, giving individuals a larger-than-life role in what they perceive as a sacred or civilizational mission.

Charismatic leaders also play a pivotal role in deepening “us vs. them” thinking by skilfully influencing group dynamics and presenting themselves as indispensable during times of crisis (Weber 1978). These figures often excel at expressing collective frustrations, simplifying complex issues into persuasive narratives, and motivating their followers to make personal sacrifices for the group's cause. As followers grow emotionally reliant on such leaders, they become more open to radical interpretations of the group's identity and purpose. By controlling how group boundaries are drawn—determining who is included and who is seen as a threat—charismatic leaders wield significant influence over how their followers perceive the world and behave in response (Howell & Shamir 2005, 96–112).

To counter radicalization effectively or support individuals in leaving extremist groups, it is crucial to understand the psychological drivers behind “us vs. them” thinking (Horgan 2010, 267–291). Simply targeting ideological beliefs may not be enough if the deeper emotional and identity-related needs that such worldviews satisfy are left unaddressed. Successful interventions should aim to offer alternative avenues for fostering a sense of purpose, connection, and identity, while gradually encouraging more complex and balanced views of intergroup dynamics (Neumann 2013, 873–893). The key challenge is to acknowledge and engage with real grievances without allowing them to solidify into rigid, oppositional narratives that legitimize violence.

Simplified Worldview and Moral Certainty

One of the strongest psychological forces behind radicalization is the human need for cognitive and moral clarity, especially among those who feel isolated, confused, or uncertain about their place in the world (Tajfel & Turner 1979, 33–47). In times of social, political, or religious ambiguity, people often seek out belief systems that offer firm answers and clear moral direction (Brewer 1999). Extremist ideologies capitalize on this need by presenting simplified worldviews that divide the world into clear-cut categories, such as good versus evil or faithful versus corrupt. These black-and-white narratives provide more than just intellectual simplicity; they also offer emotional reassurance, a sense of belonging, and clear guidance for action to those struggling with the complexities of modern life (McCauley & Moskaleiko 2008, 415–433).

Cognitive psychology has shown that people often seek cognitive closure, that is, a strong preference for certainty and predictability in how they make sense of the world (Hogg & Abrams 1988). Those with a high need for closure are uncomfortable with ambiguity, contradictions, or complex realities, and therefore gravitate toward simple, clear explanations. This tendency can increase vulnerability to radical ideologies, which offer definitive answers to life's deeper questions and rigid moral frameworks. The draw of these belief systems stems less from their factual accuracy or logical strength and more from the psychological relief they provide by reducing uncertainty (Hogg & Abrams 1988).

The process of cognitive simplification in radical ideologies typically involves the transformation of complex social and political realities into straightforward narratives of conflict between opposing forces (Kruglanski & Webster 1996, 263-283). These stories often use archetypal themes like the battle between light and darkness, purity and corruption, or truth and falsehood that connect with deep psychological patterns and cultural myths. Radical ideologies can make complicated geopolitical situations seem like simple moral choices between clearly defined options by putting them in the context of these eternal struggles. This change makes it easier for people to think about things while also making them think that their choices and actions are more important (Schmid 2013, 1–91).

People experiencing what psychologists call “meaning-making crises,” when their usual sources of meaning and purpose have been disrupted or called into question, are especially drawn to the psychological appeal of moral certainty. These kinds of crises can happen because of personal traumas, changes in society, cultural conflicts, or being around people with different values that make you question what you believe. People may experience a lot of mental pain during these times of uncertainty as they try to reorient their worldviews and moral frameworks. Radical ideologies can help people feel better by giving them complete belief systems that seem to answer basic questions about identity, purpose, and morality with certainty and authority (Sherif et al. 1961).

There are a number of well-known psychological biases and heuristics that make it easier to make quick decisions but can also lead to oversimplified thinking (Tyler & Smith 1998). People with confirmation bias look for information that backs up what they already believe and ignore or dismiss evidence to the contrary. The availability heuristic makes people think that events that are easy to remember or that are emotionally important are more likely to happen than they really are. Attribution biases cause people to make mistakes when trying to explain why people act the way they do. For example, they might say that negative actions by people outside of their group are due to character flaws, while actions by people inside their group are due to outside factors (Kelman 1973, 25–61). These cognitive shortcuts can be useful in many situations, but radical ideologies can use them to keep their simple views of the world even when there is opposing evidence (Sunstein 2001).

Uncertainty-identity theory is a social psychological idea that helps us understand how the need for certainty can lead people to join radical groups and ideologies. This theory posits that when people are unsure of their identity, values, or place in the world, it makes them feel bad and drives them to look for groups that provide them clear definitions of who they are and how they should act (Tufekci 2018). Radical groups often excel at making things clear by giving members clear roles, clear expectations for how to act, and clear rules for who can join the group. The mental relief that comes from this clarity can be so strong that people may be willing to accept extreme beliefs and take financially-expensive actions to stay in groups that give them certainty (Tufekci 2018).

It's important to remember that charismatic leaders can help people feel morally certain, since radical movements often have leaders who say they have special access to truth or divine guidance (Moscovici 1969, 125–135). These leaders give followers a sense of certainty from the outside when they don't trust their own judgment or when moral decision-making has become too complicated for them. When a charismatic leader gives clear, unambiguous answers to difficult moral and practical questions, the psychological dependence that followers develop on them can be especially strong. This dependence can make followers less open to other points of view and more committed to the leader's simplistic worldview (Festinger et al. 1956).

Digital technologies and online spaces have made it much easier to develop and maintain simplified worldviews by creating information ecosystems that can filter out complexity and contradiction. Social media algorithms tend to show content that gets strong emotional reactions. This means that messages that are simple and polarizing often receive more attention than more nuanced or moderate messages. Online echo chambers can make people's simplified views stronger by connecting them with people who think the same way and keeping them from seeing other points of view. In digital environments, the amount and

speed of information can also make it hard for people to think clearly, which makes simple explanations more appealing than complex analyses (Rosen 2012).

The psychological functions served by simplified worldviews extend beyond cognitive clarity to include emotional regulation and social bonding. Complex moral questions can generate significant anxiety and emotional distress, particularly when they involve conflicts between competing values or when they lack clear solutions. Simplified worldviews can provide emotional relief by eliminating moral ambiguity and reducing the psychological burden of difficult decisions (Post 2007). Additionally, shared commitment to simplified worldviews can create strong social bonds among group members who feel united by their common understanding of truth and morality. These emotional and social benefits can make simplified worldviews psychologically addictive, creating resistance to information or experiences that might complicate their preferred narrative (Becker 1973).

People often go through a process of progressive commitment when they develop simplified worldviews. This means that they gradually take more extreme positions in order to stay consistent with their changing beliefs. When people first come into contact with radical ideas, they may hold relatively moderate views that seem reasonable or appealing to them because they feel uncertain or alone (Silke 2008, 99–123). But the need for mental consistency can make people accept more and more extreme consequences of their original promises. Radical groups that reward ideological purity and punish doubt or moderation can put social pressure on people to go through this process. People may move toward more extreme positions to resolve contradictions instead of questioning their basic beliefs because they are afraid of cognitive dissonance (Haidt 2003).

There are many ways that education and intelligence can make people more likely to adopt simplified worldviews that go against what most people think about the link between education and radicalization. Education usually encourages critical thinking and contentment with uncertainty, but it can also make people feel smart and sure that they can understand complicated problems (Pape 2005). Highly-educated people may be more likely to believe in simplified worldviews that seem smart or that offer simple explanations for complicated things (Kruglanski et al. 2014, 69–93). Also, people specialized in a narrow field of expertise may approach areas outside of their speciality in a simplistic fashion.

The psychological allure of clearly defined enemies, goals, and courses of action plays a critical role in drawing individuals to simplified worldviews. From an evolutionary perspective, humans seem to be wired to quickly identify threats and allies in times of danger (Smith 1999). Radical ideologies tap into this instinct by offering black-and-white distinctions between friend and foe, often portraying current events as urgent existential battles (White 1973). For those who feel directionless or unfulfilled, these ideologies can offer a powerful sense

of meaning. Framing their involvement as part of a larger, cosmic confrontation between good and evil gives individuals a sense of significance that ordinary life may not provide (Howell & Shamir 2005, 96–112).

The form that simplified worldviews take within radical movements is often moulded by broader cultural and historical influences. Religious doctrines, political beliefs, and long-standing cultural stories serve as frameworks that radicals adapt and streamline to fit their agendas. These simplified narratives are psychologically compelling because they tie present-day struggles to sweeping historical trajectories or transcendent purposes (Horgan & Braddock 2010). By framing current events as part of divine prophecy, historical inevitability, or ideological evolution, extremist groups create a powerful sense of urgency and significance, making individual involvement feel both purposeful and vital (Neumann 2013).

Addressing the psychological allure of simplified worldviews in counter-radicalization efforts requires an appreciation of the human need for clarity and certainty as both natural and legitimate. Rather than dismissing this need, effective strategies should provide alternative frameworks that offer meaning and emotional stability. At the same time, individuals should be gradually introduced to complexity and ambiguity in a way that aligns with their cognitive and emotional readiness (Kundnani 2012). While educational initiatives that build critical thinking and tolerance for uncertainty are essential, they must also engage the deeper psychological impulses that make rigid ideologies so compelling. The ultimate aim is not to eliminate the pursuit of meaning and certainty, but rather redirect it toward more constructive and inclusive pathways.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the radicalization of Arab veterans of the Soviet-Afghan War cannot be adequately understood without reference to the psychological mechanisms underpinning religious alienation. The five dimensions identified—namely, the quest for identity and belonging, the rejection of established norms and institutions, the internalization of an “us versus them” binary, the attraction to simplified moral frameworks, and the emergence of cognitive openings—collectively constitute a coherent psychological architecture by which individual spiritual disorientation is transformed into collective ideological militancy.

The Afghan conflict served not only as a site of political and military engagement but also as a crucible for profound religious and psychological transformation. The experience of sustained violence, moral absolutism, and ideological discipline contributed to the reconfiguration of Islamic obligation

among many veterans, privileging narratives of struggle (jihad), purity, and intransigence over compromise, ambiguity, and institutional mediation. The inability of mainstream religious and political institutions to address the existential needs of returnees, many of whom felt spiritually adrift and institutionally abandoned, created an opening that was swiftly occupied by radical actors who positioned themselves as authentic bearers of Islamic truth and moral clarity.

The appeal of these radical groups lay not only in their ideological coherence but also their capacity to satisfy deep psychological needs. The desire for cognitive closure, social recognition, and existential certainty rendered many individuals particularly susceptible to ideological frameworks that reduced complex sociopolitical realities to stark moral binaries. These binaries, forged in the crucible of war, became enduring interpretive lenses for understanding subsequent conflicts and for making sense of personal and collective grievance.

Particularly consequential is the concept of cognitive openings—periods of psychological vulnerability precipitated by dislocation, trauma, or spiritual crisis—which increase receptivity to radical messaging and diminish critical engagement with ideological content. The implications for counter-radicalization policy are significant: interventions that rely solely on ideological refutation or security enforcement are unlikely to succeed unless they also address the psychological substrates of radicalization. Programs must provide alternative structures of meaning, belonging, and identity, while incrementally reintroducing complexity and ambiguity in ways that are both intellectually and emotionally sustainable.

Educational interventions should prioritize the cultivation of cognitive resilience, including the capacity to tolerate ambiguity, think critically, and engage in perspective-taking. However, these initiatives must be sensitively attuned to the emotional and existential conditions of their target populations. While this research has focused on a specific cohort with unique historical and geopolitical experiences, its findings have broader implications for understanding radicalization in other contexts marked by war, displacement, or spiritual rupture.

In sum, religious alienation must be understood not merely as a deviation from normative religiosity but as a complex psychological process shaped by legitimate human needs for meaning, belonging, and moral orientation. Effective responses to radicalization require moving beyond reductionist accounts that pathologize extremism and its adherents. Instead, they must begin from a recognition of the fundamentally human dimensions of extremist engagement and the potential for recovery and reintegration through the provision of alternative narratives, credible institutions, and psychologically informed interventions.

References

- Al-Zawahiri, Aiman. 1999. *Healing the hearts of believers*. Lahor: Al-Sahab Publication.
- Awan, Akil N., Hoskins, Andrew, and Ben O'Loughlin. 2011. *Radicalisation and media: Connectivity and terrorism in the new media ecology*. London: Routledge.
- Becker, Ernest. 1973. *The denial of death*. Free Press.
- Berger, John M. 2018. *Extremism*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Berger, Peter L. 1967. *The sacred canopy: Elements of a sociological theory of religion*. Doubleday.
- Bhui, Kamaldeep, Warfa, Nasir, and Edgar Jones. 2014. "Is violent radicalization associated with poverty, migration, poor self-reported health and common mental disorders?" *PLoS One* 9, no. 3.
- Borum, Randy. 2011. "Radicalization into violent extremism I: A review of social science theories." *Journal of Strategic Security* 4, no. 4: 7–36. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26463910>.
- Brewer, Marilyn B. 1999. "The psychology of prejudice: Ingroup love and outgroup hate?" *Journal of Social Issues* 55, no. 3: 429–444.
- Bruce, Steve. 2000. *Fundamentalism*. Cambridge, MA: Polity Press.
- Choudhury, Tufyal. 2007. *The role of Muslim identity politics in radicalisation (a study in progress)*. Department for Communities and Local Government.
- Conway, Maura. 2017. "Determining the role of the internet in violent extremism and terrorism: Six suggestions for progressing research." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 40, no. 1: 77–98. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2016.1157408>
- Eisenstadt, Shmuel. N. 2000. *Fundamentalism, sectarianism, and revolution: The Jacobin dimension of modernity*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
- Erikson, Erik H. 1968. *Identity: Youth and crisis*. Norton.
- Esses, Victoria M., Jackson, Linda M., and Tina L. Armstrong. 1998. "Intergroup competition and attitudes toward immigrants and immigration: An instrumental model of group conflict." *Journal of Social Issues* 54, no. 4: 699–724.
- Festinger, Leon, Riecken, Henry W., and Stanley Schachter. 1956. *When prophecy fails*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Gambetta, Diego, and Steffen Hertog. 2016. *Engineers of jihad: The curious connection between violent extremism and education*. Princeton University Press.
- Hafez, Mohammed M. 2003. *Why Muslims rebel: Repression and resistance in the Islamic world*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Haidt, Jonathan. 2003. "The moral emotions." In *Handbook of affective sciences*, edited by Davidson, Richard J., Scherer, Klaus R., and Goldsmith, Hill H., 852–870. Oxford University Press.

- Herman, Judith Lewis. 1992. *Trauma and recovery*. Basic Books.
- Hogg, Michael A. 2014. "From uncertainty to extremism: Social categorization and identity processes." *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 23, no. 5: 338–342. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721414540168>
- Hogg, Michael A., and Dominic Abrams. 1988. *Social identifications: A social psychology of intergroup relations and group processes*. Routledge.
- Hogg, Michael A., Adelman, Janice R., and Robert D. Blagg. 2010. "Religion in the face of uncertainty: An uncertainty-identity theory account of religiousness." *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 14, no. 1: 72–83. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868309349692>
- Horgan, John. 2008. "From profiles to pathways and roots to routes: Perspectives from psychology on radicalization into terrorism." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 618, no. 1: 80–94. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716208317539>
- Horgan John, and K. Braddock. 2010. "Rehabilitating the terrorists?: Challenges in assessing the effectiveness of de-radicalization programs." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22, no. 2: 267–291. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546551003594748>
- Howell, Jane M., and Boas Shamir. 2005. "The role of followers in the charismatic leadership process: Relationships and their consequences." *Academy of Management Review* 30, no. 1: 96–112.
- Kelman, Herbert C. 1973. "Violence without moral restraint: Reflections on the dehumanization of victims and victimizers." *Journal of Social Issues* 29, no. 4: 25–61.
- Klandermans, Bert. 1997. *The Social Psychology of Protest*. Blackwell Publishers.
- Klausen, Jetty., Campion, S., Needle, N., Nguyen, G., and R. Libretti. 2016. "Toward a behavioral model of "homegrown" radicalization trajectories." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 39, no. 1: 67–83.
- Kruglanski, Arie W., and Donna M. Webster. 1996. "Motivated closing of the mind: "Seizing" and "freezing." " *Psychological Review* 103, no. 2: 263–283. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.103.2.263>
- Kruglanski, Arie W., Chen, Xiaoyan, Dechesne, Mark, Fishman, Shira, and Edward Orehek. 2009. "Fully committed: Suicide bombers' motivation and the quest for personal significance." *Political Psychology* 30, no. 3: 331–357. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2009.00698>
- Kruglanski, Arie W., Gelfand, Michele J., Bélanger, Jocelyn J., Sheveland, Anna, Hetiarachchi, Malkanthi, and Rohan Gunaratna. 2014. "The psychology of radicalization and deradicalization: How significance quest impacts violent extremism." *Political Psychology* 35: 69–93.
- Kundnani, Arun. 2012. "Radicalisation: The journey

- of a concept.” *Race & Class* 54, no. 2: 3–25.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0306396812454984>
- Lord, Charles G., Ross, Lee, and Mark R. Lepper. 1979. “Biased assimilation and attitude polarization: The effects of prior theories on subsequently considered evidence.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 37, no. 11: 2098–2109.
- Maher, Shiraz. 2016. *Salafi-jihadism: The history of an idea*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mandaville, Peter. 2014. *Islam and politics*. New York: Routledge.
- McCauley, Clark, and Sophia Moskalenko. 2008. “Mechanisms of political radicalization: Pathways toward terrorism.” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20, no. 3: 415–433. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546550802073367>
- McCauley, Clark, and Sophia Moskalenko. 2017. “Understanding political radicalization: The two-pyramids model.” *American Psychologist* 72, no. 3: 205–216. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000062>
- Moghaddam, Fathali M. 2005. “The staircase to terrorism: A psychological exploration.” *American Psychologist* 60, no. 2: 161–169.
- Moscovici, Serge, and Marisa Zavalloni. 1969. “The group as a polarizer of attitudes.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 12, no. 2: 125–135.
- Mudde, Cas. 2007. *Populist radical right parties in Europe*. Cambridge University Press.
- Muslim, Bin Al-Hajjaj. 2019. *Sahih Muslim*. London: Islamic Foundation.
- Neumann, Peter R. 2013. “The trouble with radicalization.” *International Affairs* 89, no. 4: 873–893.
- Pape, Robert A. 2005. *Dying to win: The strategic logic of suicide terrorism*. Random House. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12049>
- Pargament, Kenneth I., Trevino, Kelly, Mahoney, Annette, and Isralea Silberman. 2007. “They killed our Lord: The perception of Jews as desecrators of Christianity as a predictor of anti-Semitism.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 46, no. 2: 143–158.
- Phinney, Jean S. 1990. “Ethnic identity in adolescents and adults: Review of research.” *Psychological Bulletin* 108, no. 3: 499–514.
- Post, Jerrold M. 2007. *The mind of the terrorist: The psychology of terrorism from the IRA to al-Qaeda*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Prensky, Marc. 2001. “Digital natives, digital immigrants part 1.” *On the Horizon* 9, no. 5: 1–6.
- Qutb, Sayyid. 1964. *Milestones*. Islamic Book Service.
- Rosen, Larry D. 2012. *iDisorder: Understanding our obsession with technology and overcoming its hold on us*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Roy, Olivier. 1994. *The failure of political Islam*. Harvard University Press.

- Roy, Olivier. 2004. *Globalized Islam: The search for a new ummah*. Columbia University Press.
- Sageman, Marc. 2004. *Understanding terror networks*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Sageman, Marc. 2008. *Leaderless jihad: Terror networks in the twenty-first century*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Schachter, Stanley. 1959. *The psychology of affiliation: Experimental studies of the sources of gregariousness*. Stanford University Press.
- Schmid, Alex P. 2013. Radicalisation, de-radicalisation, counter-radicalisation: A conceptual discussion and literature review. *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism Research Paper* 97, no. 1: 1–91.
- Sherif, Muzaref, Harvey, O. J., White, B. Jack, Hood, William R., and Sherif, Carolyn W. 1961. *Intergroup conflict and cooperation: The Robbers Cave experiment*. University Book Exchange.
- Silber, Mitchell D., and Arvin Bhatt. 2007. *Radicalization in the West: The homegrown threat*. New York Police Department.
- Silke, Andrew. 2008. “Holy warriors: Exploring the psychological processes of jihadi radicalization.” *European Journal of Criminology* 5, no. 1: 99–123.
- Smith, Anthony D. 1999. *Myths and memories of the nation*. Oxford University Press.
- Snow, David A., and Scott C. Byrd. 2007. “Ideology, framing processes, and Islamic terrorist movements.” *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 12, no. 2: 119–136.
- Stern, Jessica. 2003. *Terror in the name of God: Why religious militants kill*. Ecco.
- Sunstein, Cass R. 2001. *Republic.com*. Princeton University Press.
- Tajfel, Henri., and John. C. Turner. 1979. “An integrative theory of intergroup conflict.” In *The social psychology of intergroup relations*, edited by Austin, W. G., and Worchel, S., 33–47. Brooks/Cole.
- Taylor, Max, and John Horgan. 2006. “A conceptual framework for addressing psychological process in the development of the terrorist.” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 18, no. 4: 585–601. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546550600897413>
- Tufekci, Zeynep. 2018. *Twitter and tear gas: The power and fragility of networked protest*. Yale University Press.
- Tyler, Tom. R., and H. John. Smith. 1998. “Social justice and social movements.” In *The handbook of social psychology*, edited by Gilbert, D. T., Fiske, S. T., and Lindzey, G., 595–629. McGraw-Hill.
- Venhaus, John M. 2010. *Why youth join al-Qaeda*. United States Institute of Peace.
- Volkan, Vamik D. 1997. *Bloodlines: From ethnic pride to ethnic terrorism*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Webber, David, and Arie W. Kruglanski. 2018. “The social psychological makings of a

- terrorist.” *Current Opinion in Psychology* 19: 131–134. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2017.03.024>
- Weber, Max. 1978. *Economy and society: An outline of interpretive sociology*. University of California Press.
- Weiss, Robert Stuart. 1973. *Loneliness: The experience of emotional and social isolation*. MIT Press.
- White, Hayden. 1973. *Metahistory: The historical imagination in nineteenth-century Europe*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Wiktorowicz, Quintan. 2004. “Joining the cause: Al-Muhajiroun and radical Islam.” *The Roots of Islamic Radicalism Conference*, Yale University.
- Wiktorowicz, Quintan. 2005. *Radical Islam rising: Muslim extremism in the West*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Williams, Kipling D. 2007. “Ostracism.” *Annual Review of Psychology* 58: 425–452.

Бадра Хамди Алганам

Психолошки путеви ка екстремизму: Радикална уверења и пораст насиља у муслиманском свету—студија случаја религијске отуђености

Сажетак: Овај рад разматра психолошке димензије религијске отуђености међу арапским ветеранима Совјетско-авганистанског рата и њену улогу у обликовању процеса исламске радикализације. Ослањајући се на увиде о трансформацији идентитета и когнитивној отворености, ауторка идентификује четири кључне манифестације религијске отуђености као централне за разумевање начина на који духовна дезоријентација може довести до насилног екстремизма: потрагу за идентитетом и припадањем, одбацавање успостављених норми и институција, усвајање бинарних погледа на свет, привлачност поједностављених моралних оквира и појаву когнитивних отвора. У раду се тврди да је авганистански цихад послужио и као катализатор идеолошке трансформације и као контекст за психолошку реконфигурацију религијске обавезе. Закључује се да ефикасне стратегије супротстављања радикализацији морају узети у обзир дубље емоционалне и когнитивне рањивости, уместо да се фокусирају искључиво на идеолошки садржај или безбедносне мере. Студија нуди и шири тумачења радикализације као људског одговора на егзистенцијалну неизвесност, кризу идентитета и институционални распад.

Кључне речи: религијска отуђеност, насиље, исламски екстремизам, цихадизам, радикализација, умма, когнитивна отвореност