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Journal of Contemporary European Studies

ISSN: 1478-2804 (Print) 1478-2790 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/cjea20

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To cite this article: Tahir Abbas (2024) Conceptualising the waves of Islamist radicalisation in the UK, Journal of Contemporary European Studies, 32:3, 705-718, DOI: 10.1080/14782804.2023.2204421

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2023.2204421

Published online: 20 Apr 2023.

JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY EUROPEAN STUDIES
2024, VOL. 32, NO. 3, 705–718
https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2023.2204421

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Conceptualising the waves of Islamist radicalisation in the UK

Tahir Abbas

Chair in Radicalisation Studies, Leiden University, The Hague, Netherlands

ABSTRACT

In recent years, there has been an unprecedented increase in interest in the study of radicalisation. To comprehend this phenomenon, numerous political science and sociological perspectives are emphasised to determine social movement conceptualisations. Using British Muslim youth as a case study, the goal of this article is to explore the themes of identity, resistance, racialisation, and mobilisation as antecedents to Islamist radicalisation. In other words, the few young Muslims who have turned to radicalism have done so due to fractures in their gendered sense of status and belonging at the local, national, and international levels. In this article, I conduct a theoretical and conceptual review of five distinct stages of Islamist radicalisation in the context of the United Kingdom, all of which are influenced by local, national, and international concerns. This discussion supports the argument that these waves of radicalism result from identity fragmentation in local communities and worsen as a result of international events. In the British context, the dangers of radicalism are determined by the intersections of local, global, and international events, or at the micro, meso, and macro levels, and these indicate the greatest risks linked to this phenomenon.

KEYWORDS

Islamism; radicalisation; Muslims; United Kingdom; waves

Introduction

The paper engages in a social constructivist approach to re-appraising the phenomenology of Islamist radicalisation away from a focus on ideology and towards one that provides a sociological narrative of how various waves of Islamist extremism are linked to wider macro-dynamic issues in relation to concerns about identity and belonging at a time of deepening economic inequality, where Muslim groups have felt a disproportional impact. These events have served as a backdrop for the ways in which British Muslims, confronted by exclusion at home and Islamophobia in general, have felt impelled to engage in extremist Islamism. The argument presented is that the motivations for violence that are justified by an Islamist framework are a result of economic, political, cultural, and sociological forces, and that these can be observed repeatedly in the context of the United Kingdom. Thus, this paper contributes to the discussion on Islamist radicalisation from a sociological and political perspective. The material used to inform this discussion is based on three decades of observation and case studies, with findings helping to support a growing consensus that radicalisation is a complex phenomenon with origins in the workings of society and the implications of foreign policy rather than religion or ideology per se.

This article provides a theoretical framework for examining the various waves of Islamist radicalisation in the context of the United Kingdom. While much emphasis is placed on the roles of religion

CONTACT Tahir Abbas t.abbas@fgga.leidenuniv.nl Chair in Radicalisation Studies, Leiden University, The Hague, Netherlands

and ideology in the paths to radicalisation and violent extremism (Borum 2011), this article contends that the reasons for recurring and persistent episodes of radicalisation among British Muslims, particularly since the late 1970s, reflect more on the socioeconomic and religio-cultural exclusion that groups continue to face (Abbas 2011, 2019). This exclusion is more severe and pointed than in the previous phase, yet the overwhelming narrative is that British Muslims are to blame for their own plight and that radicalisation and extremism arise from within (not without). This article seeks to dispel this myth by arguing that British Muslim radicalisation emerges in context, with each period reflecting deeper instances of an exclusionary discourse that a) shifts the focus of groups from race and ethnicity to religion and culture, b) where patterns of social divisions have disproportionately affected Muslim minorities compared to other comparable South Asian groups, and c) where racialisation, xenophobia, and Islamophobia have created a 'hostile environment'. Since the 'war on terror' began following the events of 9/11, British Muslims have suffered securitisation and racialisation issues. First, the article presents an overview of the key characteristics of the contested nature of radicalisation itself. Second, how social movement theory speaks to ideas of Islamist radicalisation is considered. Fourth, the several waves of Islamist radicalisation are recounted to suggest a level of consistency regarding the altering contours of exclusion and inclusion. In conclusion, an attempt is made to highlight an overarching conceptualization pertaining to the strands of British Islamist radicalism, which suggests implications for future research, policy thinking, and community practice in this area.

Radicalisation as a contested concept

Radicalisation is the process by which individuals come to adopt and perpetuate political violence as a method of achieving their political goals (Veldhuis and Staun 2009; Pisoiu 2013). This is a simple enough presumption. However, it is a complex phenomenon that has attracted considerable attention over the past two decades or so, with one direction of research aiming to understand radicalisation in terms of its causes and another focusing on how it can be combatted. This article explores some of the key factors that have been identified as contributing to radicalisation, including history, psychology, micro-sociology, politics, globalisation, and counter-violent extremism initiatives, and how it helps to think about the different waves of Islamist radicalisation that have affected various British Muslim groups. Islamism and jihadism are commonly used interchangeably, yet they are different. Islamists want an Islamic government, while jihadists use violence and fear to attain their goal (Esposito 2015). When news of Islamist or jihadist terrorism emerges, many observers express disbelief that young people are drawn to violence. Such a remark misses the fact that some people join these movements for nonviolent causes (Sageman 2011). Today's terrorists did not develop a craving for blood overnight; it took years before they picked up a gun or explosives (Laqueur 1999). I draw together these themes in an attempt to develop a general theory of British Islamist radicalisation in an attempt to understand the drivers of radicalisation, and how it can be combated. It identifies three drivers.

The first driver is the desire for a sense of belonging and identity. This can be fuelled by experiences such as racism or exclusion. Some people may be driven towards extremism because they feel that they do not fit in with society; others may feel that their lives have been wasted and that they have had no purpose in life (Kaya 2021). These feelings can be exacerbated by economic or political issues or even just by poverty. The second is a feeling of powerlessness, particularly when faced with discrimination or injustice. People who feel powerless often resort to violence as a way of expressing themselves, often with little regard for the consequences this might have on others involved (such as innocent civilians). The third is an increase in social isolation due to changes in technology and communication technologies such as internet access and social media platforms such as Twitter and Twitch. These platforms can make us feel more connected than ever before, but also more isolated at the same time due to what we see other people doing online without any interaction from them directly (such as watching videos) (Albertazzi and Bonansinga 2023).

Radicalisation is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon that has been studied by academics and policymakers for years (Dalacoura 2006). The term itself has been used to describe the process by which individuals become more radicalised over time. While it is not always easy to define, many key characteristics can be observed in the process of radicalisation. A person who is undergoing the process of radicalisation may experience a gradual change in their beliefs and allegiances; they will rarely move from one position to another abruptly. The process is more likely to be incremental and gradual (Latif et al. 2020). The process of radicalisation can take place at any time during adulthood, but it is most common in adolescence and young adulthood when people are forming their identities and beliefs about the world around them (Campelo et al. 2018). It can also occur later in life when people are exposed to different ideas or experiences. Radicalisation can occur at any point in someone's life cycle, but it tends to happen when an individual feels under threat or experiences significant hardship (such as issues of severe social exclusion) (McCauley and Moskalenko 2008a).

Radicalisation is a process that is experienced by individuals who have been subjected to the same conditions of social marginalisation, inequality, and persecution (McGilloway, Ghosh, and Bhui 2015). It is a complex phenomenon that may or may not be controlled by external factors but instead depends on the individual's own subjective experiences. The term radicalisation can be used to refer to both the process and its resulting outcomes. That is, the process of radicalisation is defined as the transition from non-radicalism to radicalism, and, consequently, de-radicalisation can be defined as the process of the move from radicalisation to non-radicalisation. An individual who has been radicalised will become susceptible to extremist ideas and behaviour based on their exposure to extremist rhetoric or propaganda. This may occur through the coverage of news reports, online media, or personal relationships with extremists who are themselves susceptible to radicalisation. Radicalisation can also refer to the result of an individual's experience of being radicalised. This refers to their change in beliefs about issues such as democracy, human rights, and equality due to exposure to views held by extremists in society. The psychological effects of being exposed to such views include feelings of shame, guilt, and anger, which are often directed towards oneself rather than towards those who hold extremist views (Augestad 2020; Silke and Brown 2016).

Radicalisation is a concept that has been used to describe behaviours and attitudes that are at odds with the values, ideas, and norms of a society. The radicalisation process can be thought of as one in which individuals begin to adopt more extreme views.[1] This leads to actions being taken by those individuals against their society. The radicalisation process is something that can occur within any individual, but the term radicalisation has become more widely used in recent years due to the media attention given to violent extremism. The term radicalisation was first coined by Edward Shils (1957), who described it as the process by which people come to accept and embrace radical ideas. However, it was not until the 1980s that radicalisation became an important concept within psychology due to the rise in terrorism around the world. The micro-sociology of radicalisation refers to how radicals within a group develop their identities and ways of thinking over time (Decety, Pape, and Workman 2018). It also examines how these thoughts are shaped through interactions with other people within their group, such as family members, friends, or acquaintances, who may have similar views but may not agree with what they do outside of their group.

The use of the concept of radicalisation has grown exponentially over the last two decades, although its definition is still being debated (Schmid 2013). Researchers have identified radicalisation as a 'source of confusion' (Sedgwick 2010) or a 'buzzword' used by 'political elites and so-called specialists' (Marchal and Ahmed Salem 2018) that is a total nightmare to operationalize as a topic for research' (Githens-Mazer 2012). It is considered to be 'plagued by assumption, intuition, and traditional [western] wisdom' (Githens-Mazer and Lambert 2010) and to lack scientific rigour (Neumann and Kleinmann 2013). Critics of radicalisation argue that it places too much focus on individual and psychological processes. As a result, it overemphasises ideological and religious interpretations to the detriment of social and political issues. Islamist radicalisation is presented as a pathogen that quickly and decisively spreads extremist ideologies throughout communities, obviating any specific explanation of the precise steps that occur from acquiring beliefs to executing acts of violence,

assuming such a link can be stated at all (Kundnani 2012a; Malthaner 2017). The contemporary critical movement in radicalisation studies stresses the negative impacts of radicalisation discourses in terms of securitisation, depoliticisation, and the development of 'suspect communities' through the racialisation of the archetypal 'Muslim' (Baker-Beall, Heath-Kelly, and Jarvis 2015; Fadil, Ragazzi, and de Koning 2019). There was a substantial UK influence in the establishment of the key concepts of radicalisation and counter-extremism, and other European countries, including the Netherlands, have followed the UK's lead in implementing de-radicalisation programmes and CVE (Welten and Abbas 2022).

The concept of radicalisation has proven inadequate and must be reframed. However, there is no general theory of radicalisation, and theory is sometimes devoid of empirical content. In a broader sense, the state-centric approach, which is considered an adequate justification for Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) itself, is archaic (Abbas 2021). Postcolonialism, racism, gender, and class are rarely addressed in statements about the possibility of radicalisation because of the sharp gaze on inherent individual or collective attributes. Because of the top-down policy goal, sensitive subjects like power, representation, and integration in society are left out. Consider the situation of young Pakistani-origin men from the United Kingdom who are on the verge of becoming radicalised. We may admire the predicament of any young man who has reversed their radicalisation and sought comfort in their place as a citizen of society, perceiving the potential of greater engagement as a remedy to their isolation and exclusion (cf. Archer 2009). The latter, aided by the radicalising effect of online information (Littler and Lee 2020), converges on people's sense of lack of identity and other vulnerabilities connected with it, albeit not all who encounter this content converge on violence as a consequence (Hope and Matthews 2018). While we can consider CVE to be successful at this level, it pays little attention to the broader ramifications of being a Muslim minority in the Netherlands or the United Kingdom in today's world. It also does not consider the myriad existential realities that contribute to mental health issues, as well as a general sense of malaise caused by vilification and marginalisation. Exclusionary elements like these hinder people's engagement in society. Entry points into the challenges that cause a person to seek atonement, recognition, or belonging within tightly structured ideological platforms as results are, in fact, answers to the struggles that these young people see at an everyday level (Burgat 2020). These ideological shifts are not problems in and of themselves, but they are a key aspect that is sometimes overlooked in discussions of extremism and radicalisation. Radicalisation, in other words, is a social construction, a social outcome, and, as a result, a social process (see other articles in this issue). Society creates the conditions for the vulnerable to fall through the cracks and enter a situation where their sense of themselves is reduced to such an extent that they can believe the unbelievable.

Radicalisation is a complex phenomenon that, in its broadest sense, can be defined as an individual's decision to commit violent or terrorist acts to achieve political change (Borum 2011). However, this definition does not include all of the several factors that contribute to radicalisation. It is difficult to define exactly what 'radicalisation' means because it is not limited to individuals; rather, it refers to the process by which individuals move from being non-violent activists to committing violent acts (Kundnani 2012a). The psychology of radicalisation is complex and often misunderstood (Gill and Corner 2017). The psychological distress caused by factors such as stress or trauma is one factor that contributes to radicalisation. For example, some individuals may suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of their experiences during war or disaster relief efforts. Another factor related to psychological distress is fear of persecution due to religious beliefs or ethnicity. This fear can cause individuals who have been persecuted in the past to become more extreme in their beliefs because they feel they are under constant threat of being harmed again.

Social movement and Islamist radicalisation theory

A social movement is a specific form of prolonged, organised collective behaviour whose participants either support or oppose societal change. Social movements are comprised of organisations

with varying structures, resources, goals, strategies, and methods. The consequences of social movements are such that, despite the existence of inequities in all societies, not all complaints about them result in large-scale social movements for change. In response to factors such as societal discontent and economic instability, which provide potential economic and political opportunities, social movements develop. Collective behaviour theory, mass society theory, and relative deprivation all rely on similar general causal sequences. Only in their conceptualisation do the numerous variants of traditional techniques deviate from this fundamental process. Classical approaches characterise contentious politics as spontaneous, irrational, emotional, and usually violent outbursts of social activity in reaction to perceived grievances, discontent, and apathy. These protests come from people who are stressed, alienated, unsatisfied, destitute, fractured, and marginalised as a result of economic crises, unequal distribution of welfare, social rights, and normative breakdown.

As models of structural and social constructivism, contemporary approaches to social movements can be categorised as such. The political process and resource mobilisation are examples of structural approaches, with the political process approach emphasising the political aspects of collective action and resource mobilisation concentrating on organisational and material resources. The social-constructivist perspective, on the other hand, emphasises the cognitive, emotional, and conceptual causes of conflict and focuses on how individuals and communities perceive and interpret these situations. It is broadly structured around three themes: framing, identification, and emotions. Similarly, these concepts are fundamental to social psychology approaches to protest. Social psychologists assert that people live in a perceived world. They react according to how they perceive and comprehend the world. According to social psychologists, to comprehend why people protest, we must know how they see and interpret the world. Social psychology is indeed focused on subjective factors. Social psychological approaches are, therefore, representative of social constructivist perspectives.

Social movements have a significant role in the propagation of ideas and values, with some scholars believing that the construction of meaning is the movement's most important function (Eyerman and Jamison 1991). Activists strive to disseminate their understanding of a subject to the general public by employing strategies such as consensus mobilisation and framing. A consensus of who should act, why, and how is required for participation based on shared interests or views. The phenomenon known as 'framing' refers to the effect of the spread of information through social movements on such evaluations. As a result of perceived losses or unachieved goals, social movements make every effort to communicate how they view social, political, or economic change (its diagnosis) and what should be done (its prognosis). When individual attitudes, values, and beliefs become more consistent with the behaviours, goals, and ideologies of social movement groups, the degree of sharedness grows. Considered a process of personal development by which a person adopts increasingly extreme political or politico-religious ideals and goals and becomes convinced that the achievement of these goals justifies the use of extreme measures, radicalisation is defined as the process in which a person adopts increasingly extreme political or politico-religious ideals and goals and becomes convinced that the achievement of these goals justifies the use of extreme measures. According to several definitions (as shown above), radicalisation is a transformation from one state to another. People do not become radicalised instantaneously; however, some circumstances (such as an experienced act of bigotry, a perceived attack on Islam such as the 2003 invasion of Iraq, or a moral crisis such as the loss of a loved one) might accelerate the process. All studies concur that there is a stage of individual change (e.g., increase in religiosity, search for identity) that is amplified by external factors (e.g., experienced discrimination or racism, an attack against Muslims such as the wars in Bosnia and Iraq), and that violent radicalisation typically occurs when the individual socialises with like-minded individuals. Nonetheless, these phases overlap and are not distinct. They are also not always organised in chronological order. A person may avoid phases, attain militant action rapidly, or become disillusioned at any point and choose to end the entire process.

It is also essential, when discussing or describing radicalisation, to make a clear distinction between religious fundamentalism and conservatism on the one hand and violent or militant

radicalisation on the other, given that the former does not necessarily lead to the latter. Certain Muslim extremists who faithfully practise and appear to adhere to their religion, particularly the Salafi philosophy, do not all support violent jihad. The Salafi ideology permits a variety of strategies, such as: spreading Islam's 'da'wa' through peaceful means and demonstrating strict religious discipline in daily life (the Tablighi movement); the revival of Islam through political activism and change of society through state organs (such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and *Jamate-Islami* in Pakistan, India, or Indonesia); and Salafi Jihad, which believes that the revival of Islam and the establishment of the Islamic state (the Caliphate) can be achieved through armed conflict (Sageman 2004). Mohammed bin Abdul Wahhab founded the Salafi (also known as Wahhabi) ideology in Saudi Arabia in the eighteenth century because he considered that Islam had veered off course. The philosophy calls for the revitalization and restoration of genuine Islam, strict obedience to Sharia law, and the construction of an Islamic state (the Caliphate). Sayid Qutub, an Egyptian philosopher and Islamist, widened the Salafi philosophy in the middle of the twentieth century by advocating political activism (Islamism) to topple 'false' Islamic regimes and their followers, including 'false' Muslims. This was to be accomplished through an all-out jihad ('holy war'). Nonetheless, this violent jihadi-Salafi worldview, or a perverted version or derivation thereof, has inspired so-called 'jihadi' acts in the West. The radicalisation process, therefore, is a lengthy, multi-stage process of transformation. However, this process is not linear, nor are the steps necessarily distinct or consecutive. Acceleration, deceleration, and even termination of the process depend on both internal and external factors. Given the history of people who engage in 'jihad', radicalisation is the outcome of multiple interconnected events, as opposed to a single cause. However, emotions of humiliation on behalf of a broader imagined Muslim community (*ummah*) and indignation at perceived Western hegemony and engagement appear to be prevalent underlying motivators.

The social constructivist model distinguishes itself from earlier theories of radicalisation, which are classified as being based on models of contagion, strain, and collective action, by emphasising radicalisation as a process that occurs within the political arena of society rather than within the individual. The model's societal perspective is based on past literature analysing mass radicalisation (McCauley and Moskalenko 2008b), identifying social elements impacting radicalisation (Piazza 2017), and examining terrorist activities in cost-benefit terms. Its conception of societal radicalisation builds on but departs from interaction-based understandings of radicalisation and terrorism by social movement scholars (Della 2018; Tilly 2005), emphasising discursive action as the locus of radicalisation as opposed to viewing the radicalisation of individuals and groups through their use of tactics and framings. Social radicalisation is characterised by the substitution of agonistic politics with antagonism because of deficiencies in conflictuality and resilience. Conflictuality is defined as the degree to which societal disputes are accommodated confrontationally within the political sphere, whereas resilience is defined as the degree to which the political sphere provides the instruments for antagonistic conflict. Further, it is hypothesised that conflictuality has synchronic and diachronic components, namely the political sphere's accommodation of conflict at a given time and its permeability over time, whereas resilience is seen as the result of both 'horizontal' (public engagement with politics) and 'vertical' (political participation by elites) democratic activity (government accountability). The radicalising shift from agonism to antagonism is also associated with the literature on 'securitisation' (Buzan et al. 1998), which is viewed as a framing mechanism (Watson 2012) that raises the 'securitised' issue above normal agonistic politics.

Whether viewed as the entire picture or as a supplement and correction to individual- or group-based models, an understanding of radicalisation as a social process has significant consequences. Considering that the proposed model is theoretical, it is evident that additional work is necessary. It is challenging but possible to operationalise the essential variables – agonism and antagonism, conflict accommodation, permeability, political involvement, and government responsibility. This would allow validation of this model against known historical examples of societal radicalisation and resolution of the question of whether or not it is compatible with prevalent individualistic concepts of radicalisation. Understanding the processes of indoctrination and recruitment by which

vulnerable individuals might be persuaded to become 'extremists' is crucial, yet focusing on individuals may eventually divert from the crucial task of social capacity-building. This model posits that societies whose political spheres exhibit low accountability and engagement (and thus low resilience), as well as low accommodation of conflict and permeability (and thus low conflictuality), are highly vulnerable to radicalising mechanisms such as antagonistic amplification, which affect the political sphere as a whole and thus make the visible radicalisation of individuals far more likely, and that this vulnerability will persist regardless of the degree of the political sphere's accountability and engagement. Consequently, it is argued that addressing these systemic flaws where they exist is essential for effective counter-radicalisation.

Understanding the Islamist waves in the UK

After World War Two, imperial powers controlled much of the Muslim world. Decolonisation, military coups, and despotic regimes increasingly alienated young Muslims in the Muslim world and among Muslims in the west. By 1979, an Islamic Revolution in Iran had toppled one of these governments and inspired others to rise against their own rulers. For some young Muslims living in Britain at that time, Iran's revolution was an inspiration; it showed them they were capable of forming their own country and self-determining their own futures. As a result, many became interested in studying Islam, and several travelled to Iran to do so (Hunter 1988). In recent years, there has been a worldwide increase in violent extremism, which may be partially attributed to rifts caused by globalisation that have led to more individuals becoming radicalised in pursuit of their own interests. (Thomas 2012). This has led to an increase in terrorism, which has resulted in increased security measures being implemented by governments around the world, including those attempting to combat violent extremism through de-radicalisation programmes or similar activities aimed at preventing violence directed at other groups or individuals within a certain area.

Current social and political unrest ranks among the most challenging in recent memory. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, terrorist attacks on civilian targets in Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa have resulted in the deaths of thousands of people (Tripp 2013). This is a threat not only to physical security but also to global security, as terrorists can readily spread their message through social media. However, radicalisation, which is seen as a precursor to violent extremism and later terrorism, continues to be a difficult topic (see above). Radicalisation is a phenomenon that cannot be linearised due to its complexity. It is best understood as a collection of slight changes that accumulate over time to tell a story of transformation. While radicalisation and extremism are frequently used in public discourse, the term 'radicalisation' has been used in the media to characterise those who may adopt an extremist mindset and perform violent acts, whilst 'extremism' refers to those who advocate political views or hate campaigns. For some years, radicalisation has been a major concern for the British government and its security services. Over the past three decades, there have been four waves of reasons why young Muslims in the UK felt the need to travel abroad to engage in Jihadi missions. The first and second waves happened during the 1980s and 1990s; the third wave began after 2001; and, most recently (after 2011), there has been the apparent emergence of 'homegrown' terrorists.

Since the 1980s, radicalisation has been a characteristic of the Muslim experience in Britain (Abbas 2022). It is the belief that social and political grievances, as well as a sense of being unsupported, contribute to the appeal of radical ideas. To attract a Muslim population deemed to be technically deficient, radical viewpoints are based on an aggressive religious agenda. Young British Muslims will be attracted to radical thought as long as they are dissatisfied with the status quo and support a global jihad, both of which were evident during the last years of Blair's administration as a result of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (Rehman 2007). The first stage of radicalisation began shortly after the Iranian Revolution, when the first wave of young British Muslims left for Jihadi missions. Between 1979 and 1984, this was fuelled by the Iranian Revolution's propaganda, which made Salafism more popular. Next, jihadists such as Abdullah Al Faisal, Omar Brooks, Anthony Garcia, Richard Dart, and

Moazzam Begg were taught at international jihadist camps in Pakistan, Waziristan, and other regions (Pantucci 2015). The growing body of research shows that if lone wolf terrorists are left to stew in their extremist views and become radicalised, the likelihood of them conducting an attack increases exponentially. The internet is littered with thousands of videos, articles, and other propaganda materials that can radicalise individuals. In addition, lone wolf terrorists' social networks often provide key support in their radicalisation. Recent research by Bloom et al. (2019) shows how private messaging applications such as Telegram have been highly effective for Islamist terrorist organisations in providing secure lines of communication between recruiters and potential recruits. This enables recruiters to embed themselves within communities, build personal relationships with recruits through a plethora of instant messenger-like features, share religious teachings and propaganda, send updates on warfare against the West, images of violence against perceived enemies, and calls to action (conducted through private messages) without fear of being tracked by authorities. These sociological pressures facing young Muslims in the UK were greatest in the 1980s and until the Islamic State. Throughout this time, different waves of young Muslims went elsewhere to engage in Jihadi missions because their radicalisation became apparent at home.

Most scholars and commentators agree that radicalisation began as early as the 1980s, when a group of young Muslims under the leadership of Syrian-born Omar Bakri Muhammad called *Hizb ut-Tahrir* began propagating their view of Islam (Hamid 2016). By 1986, they had released their manifesto and were calling for a worldwide caliphate. Despite many arrests, *Hizb ut-Tahrir* was still going strong in 1988, and by 1989, they were calling for the transformation of Britain into an Islamic state. In 1990, *Al Muhajiroun* distributed leaflets advocating violence against Hindus and Jews. These groups were founded on anti-colonialist and pan-Islamic principles, which attracted thousands of young people from all over the world. They expressed their disillusionment with Western society through cultural traditions such as music and literature. These are just two examples among many others that show how radicalism developed in Britain before 9/11. As such, it is inaccurate to say that radicalism emerged solely because of a reaction to foreign policy, Iraq, or any other factor external to Britain itself. The evidence suggests that there has been a gradual process over decades that has led directly to terrorism today. It suggests that British extremists, with a focus on Islamist or jihadi groups, are formed within the countries of birth for most of these individuals and groups.

The radicalisation of young Muslims by Islamist ideology occurred from at least the mid-1980s. There were several key turning points when small groups of young Muslims decided to join violent Jihadi missions. Each time a new wave emerged, several factors contributed to their radicalisation: foreign wars (e.g., Bosnia), global and local politics (e.g., the Palestine/Israel conflict), domestic issues (e.g., deprivation) and security responses (e.g., the 7/7 bombings). The number of people involved was small, but it did not take many individuals to cause havoc. The issues facing young Muslims have evolved as well – for example, there was no radicalism until London's African-Caribbean communities were rocked by riots in 1981. However, these waves of radicalisation started to slow down after 9/11 because they became harder to justify with so much anti-Muslim sentiment across Europe. Those who attract and radicalise potential young Jihadists are a small group whose influence exceeds their numerical size. Some, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir, are well-known Islamist organisations, while others are merely ad hoc groups of individuals that gather around an imam preaching extremist ideas. Gender and age also help to shape terrorist narratives. Among British Muslim men who had joined Islamic State, terrorism and radicalisation created a framework for what it means to be a man (Lynch 2013). When young men have a sense of purpose and belonging (especially those who do not fit into mainstream society), they are more likely to be drawn towards certain ideas and worldviews – even if that means embracing terrorism or leaving their friends and family behind. Muslims are being radicalised once again today. But, unlike yesterday, they are being radicalised to fight on British streets rather than for a state in another country. This is a religious anomaly that puts many young Muslims in danger. Lack of integration and economic marginalisation make these youngsters more prone to extremist beliefs, as they believe they have no other option except to turn to violence.

Discussion and concluding thoughts

The 9/11 attacks, according to Githens-Mazer (2012), initiated a process of so-called 'conceptual back-formation', in which the meaning of a concept has changed due to the attachment of other signifiers and concepts. For instance, radicalisation in the nineteenth century may have meant opposing the status quo held by religious and/or political leaders (e.g., challenging the prohibition on women voting). Today, however, radicalisation is used to describe the transformation of an 'ordinary' individual into an extremist and possibly a terrorist. Githens-Mazer asserts that 'popular discourse has used the term "radicalisation" to describe the process of becoming a terrorist ever since it was desired' (ibid., p. 561). Since the inception of this controversial idea, the process of radicalisation, by which a person becomes a terrorist, has become essential to the study of the causes of terrorism (Coolsaet 2015; Kundnani 2015; Schmid 2013). However, the concept of radicalisation has become a political container word used by political actors to distinguish between the 'moderates', to which they belong, and their political and societal opponents, the 'radicals'. Thus, other terms such as 'extremism', 'political violence', and 'terrorism' have become intertwined with the debate on radicalisation. Decades of studies have demonstrated that radicals are not inherently violent or extremist. While they may share similarities with violent radicals (e.g., sentiments of discrimination and alienation, resentment against societal institutions, etc.), there are significant variances, and radical views can be expressed or addressed in a variety of ways.

Terrorism, radicalisation, and political violence are not new phenomena; they have existed for many years in various waves. Consequently, it is difficult to generalise the goals or means of the action of political violence. However, one essential relationship may be distinguished: political confrontations between governments and their adversaries give rise to violence (Della Porta and Haupt 2012). Nevertheless, the role of states and societies – the socio-political framework – is rarely mentioned or considered in contemporary discourse or understandings of radicalisation (Kundnani 2012b). According to conventional wisdom, radicalisation is a forerunner to terrorism (Borum 2011; Crone 2016), or, as Neumann (2008) puts it, 'what happens before the bomb goes off' (p. 4). In this view, terrorism is viewed and treated as the end result or product of a religiously motivated radicalisation process (Hörnqvist and Flyghed 2012), as opposed to the result of an interaction between state and non-state actors (Kundnani 2015). Numerous academics criticise the decontextualisation of radicalisation as it is an extremely context-dependent process (Coolsaet 2016; Porta, Donatella, and LaFree 2012; Kundnani 2012b; Sedgwick 2010). Today's understanding and response to radicalisation are not based on an objective understanding of the term. Since 11 September 2001, dominant conceptions of radicalisation have been developed. A combination of concepts, assumptions, and emotional presumptions have been linked to the concept of radicalisation in an attempt to explicate why Western countries have become targets of terrorist attacks over the past two decades. Policymakers and analysts have attempted to comprehend how 'ordinary' folks become 'radical'. In the prevailing public discourse, it is acknowledged that Islamic doctrine plays a vital role in radicalisation and that individuals go through a process of adopting extremist ideas that result in violent acts. Based on these understandings, counterterrorism programmes and preventive measures aim to eliminate the 'evil' effect of extremist Islam (the UK Prevent agenda is an example, as in Abbas, Awan, and Marsden 2021). The focus has been on how these processes evolve as opposed to why terrorism and radicalisation processes thrive in societies. In the prevailing discourse and narratives on the notion, the settings that facilitate the incidence of terrorism and/or radicalisation have received no consideration.

While it is apparent radicalisation is the process of turning a normal, peaceful person into a violent extremist, the process can happen gradually or be sudden. People get radicalised primarily because they see that they have been subjected to religious or ethnic discrimination (Mythen, Walklate, and Khan 2009). They may also believe that neither the government nor society as a whole represents them. Some may also be inspired by figures like Osama bin Laden, who espouse extremist ideals and invite others to join them in combating injustice around the globe. The process by which a person

comes to support or participate in extremist action is known as radicalisation. It can be brought on by a variety of circumstances, including first-hand experiences and social influences, but it is most usually brought on by an ideology or belief system. Although these are important and necessary 'push' factors, it is the 'pull' factors concerning exclusion and disadvantage that create the conditions for the motivation to radicalise. Throughout history, different waves of radicalisation among British Muslims have occurred, as discussed above. However, the radicalisation of British Muslims is a complicated matter. The origins of radicalisation are varied, with economic, political, and religious elements being the most prevalent. British Muslims have been radicalised for decades, but the first wave of radicalisation in Britain came in the 1980s, during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Kashmiri resistance to Indian occupation. This wave of British Muslim radicalisation occurred during the Cold War, when there was increased tension between Pakistan and the UK over Kashmir. Some young men became involved with groups that wanted to fight against Great Britain and its allies in support of Kashmir's independence. In the 1990s, Bosnia was visited by the second wave of refugees. The third wave of insurgents formed in Afghanistan before 9/11. This was followed in the 2000s by a fourth wave that was more violent and entailed more attacks on Western targets, especially after the illegal war on Iraq in 2003. In recent years, there has been a fifth wave of radicalisation among British Muslims, with many becoming increasingly focused on non-Western wars such as Syria or Iraq, such as the seven hundred or so British citizens who joined Islamic State between 2012 and 2016. British Muslim radicalisation, therefore, is a complex phenomenon that involves many varied factors and can manifest in many different ways. There are many different waves of radicalisation for various reasons: some people become radicalised for economic reasons; others because they feel excluded from society due to discrimination or racism against them; some people become radicalised for religious reasons; others because they feel alienated from their communities or societies around them; some people become radicalised for political reasons; others because they have experienced something traumatic like war or conflict in their lives; some people become radicalised due to social media-driven propaganda by extremist groups like Islamic State and al Qaeda, which attempts to convince young men and women that violence against innocent civilians will bring them closer to God.

In the last couple of decades, there has been a growth in radicalisation among British Muslims. It is important to understand why British Muslims are radicalising to get a better understanding of how to stop it. There are waves of Muslim radicalisation in Britain, but each wave is characterised by different forms of radicalisation, including suicide bombers and al-Qaeda-inspired attacks. The waves of British Muslim radicalisation have been a long time in the making. The reasons for this are multi-faceted but can be divided into three main categories: political, socio-economic, and religious. The political climate in the United Kingdom during this period has been characterised by racial tension and unrest; inter-ethnic tensions were high, with reports of public disorder throughout the country. It has been followed by an economic crisis in Britain, which has resulted in high unemployment rates among working-class groups. In addition to these factors, there was also a significant rise in Islamist fundamentalism[2] at this time, as well as an increase in anti-Muslim racism and violence. These waves have continued into modern times, with many Britons who are Muslims feeling alienated from society as well as being engaged in criminal activities such as drug dealing or other forms of crime like theft or fraud. Government surveillance has been used to monitor British Muslims for decades to identify those who might pose a threat if they were radicalised. This surveillance has led to many being monitored for years without any action being taken against them. There have also been numerous instances where those who have been radicalised have returned home without making any attempt at conducting an attack on an individual or group of people.

There are many reasons why British Muslims might decide to become more radicalised. One of the most crucial factors is their lack of integration into British society, and they often feel disconnected from the rest of society. This can lead them to feel alienated and angry, making them more susceptible to extremist groups such as the Islamic State or Al-Qaeda. Another factor is their lack of access to education. Many British Muslim children are not receiving an education that prepares them for life after secondary school or college. This lack of education can lead them down a path towards extremism

because it does not teach them how to think critically about religious texts or other sources of information (Iqbal 2018). Finally, some people may be drawn towards terrorism because it gives them a sense of purpose and belonging – they may never have felt like part of society before but now see themselves as part of something larger than themselves that needs fixing. British Muslims feel disconnected from mainstream society and see their religion as a way to reconnect with it. Another is that young British Muslims have been taught by their families and communities that there are problems with the West and its values, and they want to help fix those problems.

Based on an observational methodology, I argue that British Muslim radicalisation has occurred in waves, with each wave having its own sociological and foreign policy impact characteristics. It is unclear what will happen next concerning British Muslim radicalisation—but it is possible to appreciate that British Muslims are radicalised in diverse ways, and there are several different waves of radicalisation. First, British Muslims who have been radicalised tend to be those who were already susceptible to the ideas of radical Islam. This is because they have been exposed to these ideas not only on the internet but also in their everyday lives. They may have come from families where there was a lot of tension between Muslims and non-Muslims, as well as other groups such as Jews and Hindus. They may also have had previous contact with people who had gone on to become extremists. Second, British Muslims who are radicalised tend to have low levels of education and employment. This means that they do not feel accepted by society or that they can be effective by trying to work within the system; instead, they feel that they need to separate themselves from society so that they can work towards their own goals. Third, British Muslims who are radicalised tend to come from lower middle or working-class backgrounds and live in urban areas (such as London or Birmingham). Radicalisation in British Muslim communities is a complex phenomenon that hinges on many factors. While some have argued that it is a response to discrimination, others contend that the root cause is in fact poverty, which makes it difficult for Muslims to find jobs and leads them to feel they have no hope for the future.

British Muslim radicalisation can be traced back to the period of immigration to the country. Most of these immigrants originated in South Asia. As these new immigrants conformed to British culture and society, they began to integrate. During this time, however, there were also instances in which individuals felt alienated by their new surroundings or dissatisfied with life in Britain. Therefore, radicalisation should not be viewed as the problem of a few stray individuals. Instead, radicalisation is a social phenomenon, a social problem, and a social outcome; no radicalisation occurs in a vacuum. It exists because it is the tipping point a person reaches as a result of the frustrations they experience in their daily lives, where they do not have the answers to the questions they seek regarding the self and other and are pessimistic about the future due to the precariousness of their realities. Therefore, the different waves of radicalisation in the United Kingdom reflect distinct periods of economic decline and misfortune that disproportionately affected Muslim minorities.

Notes

1. Extreme views are those that deviate from the societal norm. These perspectives frequently involve a total rejection of opposing viewpoints and a willingness to advocate for them through extreme means, such as violence or radical political action. Examples of extreme viewpoints include: (A) radical political ideologies that advocate violently for a complete overhaul of the political system. Among these are fascism, communism, and anarchism. (B) Hate speech is the use of language to degrade or attack individuals on the basis of their race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or other characteristics. Discrimination, harassment, and even violence against these individuals can be justified by hate speech. These are unsubstantiated beliefs that powerful forces are conspiring to control society or the world. The Covid pandemic being a hoax and the government concealing evidence of extraterrestrial life are examples of such theories. D) Religious extremists may believe that their interpretation of the Bible is the only correct one, and they may resort to violence or other extreme measures to defend their beliefs. These beliefs reject scientific facts or principles in favour of unsubstantiated explanations. Among these beliefs are the danger of vaccines and evolution denial.

2. Islamist fundamentalism, also referred to as Islamic fundamentalism, is a political and religious ideology that promotes a strict interpretation of Islamic law (Sharia) and seeks to establish an Islamic state governed by Islamic principles. This ideology is distinguished by its rejection of secularism and its belief in the superiority of Islamic culture and values over those of other cultures and religions. Some Islamist fundamentalist organisations have been linked to terrorism and have conducted attacks against civilians and government targets in the name of their cause. To be sure, not all Islamists are violent extremists, and many Islamist movements operate within democratic institutions and procedures.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

ORCID

Tahir Abbas http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0968-3261

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