4 Pluralism and Radicalization: Mind the Gap!  

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[And the more aware they become, however vaguely, of ambitions and of threats which transcend their immediate locales, the more trapped they seem to feel.]

C. Wright Mills (1959, 3)

Although I had studied Pakistanis in the diaspora in Britain and Sufis in the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan, what could I say about September 11 from the vantage point of the small places I knew well? This was the beginning and origin of my anthropological blues.

Pnina Werbner (2010, 193–4)

Introduction

The issues of radicalization and religious extremism in Western contexts have been studied extensively over the last two decades by policy analysts, security agencies, think tanks, and social scientists. Most of the research approaches the issues from the angle of securitization. In the multiple perspectives developed, however, the analyses have ignored a key aspect of these phenomena by failing to consider the critical linkages between, on the one hand, pluralism as a framework for contemporary life and the more mundane features of radicalization on the other. Although scholars have developed an extremely sophisticated understanding of radicalization – defined as a pathological outcome of socialization trajectories whereby an individual or group adopts extreme religious views and justifies acts of violence and terrorism based on these views (see chapter 1 by Bramadat in this volume; and Thachuk, Bowman, and Richardson 2008; European Commission 2005; Abbas 2007) – they have failed to investigate it adequately as a micro-phenomenon that is the product of ordinary interactions between people who do not know each other.

Radicalization here therefore effectively designates a process of reciprocal misunderstanding that will eventually evolve into more explicit resentment. If we wish to develop a better understanding of how pluralism is actually experienced by citizens living in religiously plural contexts, we suggest suspending, at least momentarily, a reflection centred on large abstract principles and disembodied discourses and instead returning to the examination of local practices, taking these local interactions seriously as sites in which one can observe the production of meaning. In a way, we are proposing a radical shift by postulating the link between processes of radicalization and the experience of pluralism, defined here as day-to-day constraint of being with others and not only as a taken-for-granted diversity or normative aspirations. Our emphasis on radicalization as a process refers to the “mundane” social interactions that tend to harden opinions and lead to negative views of the minority by the majority or negative views of the majority by the minority. These interactions can play significant roles in the formation of a radicalized consciousness. We are arguing, then, for a more pragmatic rather than theoretical approach, although the results will undoubtedly have significant theoretical implications.

Our hypothesis is that we can offer up new insights on pluralism and radicalization for the purposes of both scholarship and policy by shifting the focus of radicalization studies from an almost exclusive preoccupation with the extreme enactments, which produce violence and terrorism, to a much larger set of processes encompassing the daily interactions of individuals living in pluralistic societies. Radicalization from this perspective stems from the way people feel about sharing common space in a pluralist neighbourhood (whether a courtyard, a sidewalk, a mall, a playground, or a line at the bank or post office) and the way they react to the constant exposure to otherness and differences. This broader framing brings us to the unspoken and silent social routine in which hate, love, rejection, or isolation emerge, influence social life, and eventually degenerate into strong hostility towards those who gradually come to embody difference. Pluralism and democracy, to which it is linked, are often primarily addressed as philosophical issues
or legal objects of study (Morag 2002). This chapter proposes to connect the present global “time of anxiety and suspicion” (Nussbaum 2012) with aspects of social interaction in daily life, as well as with the meanings and emotions that stem from these interactions. This repositioning prevents us from entering into abstract discussions about whether multiculturalism or interculturalism are right or wrong, or better or worse than secular republicanism; such arguments only further entrench the artificial juxtaposition between, on the one hand, the threat of radicalization and extremism and, on the other, the ideals of justice and equality.3

Clearly the surveillance and study of a small number of people who preach hatred and encourage violence in the name of any religious message must remain a priority for both security personnel and scholars. However, we are arguing for the need to move beyond case studies or event-related analyses to fully seize the epistemological and theoretical dimensions of the radicalization process by, somewhat paradoxically, leaving aside a principles-based mode of thinking and returning to the examination of daily experiences and practices to assess the practical features of the roots of radicalization. This analysis begins with the sense that there seems to be a cleavage, or at least a tension, between the normative or official representation of religious pluralism and individuals’ daily experiences of it. Many people in the West posit religious pluralism as an intrinsic feature of late-modern Western societies, and yet little if any scholarship has examined how ordinary people live and perceive it. Both pluralism and radicalization should therefore be considered not only as dialectically related (as Bramadat argues in chapter 1 of this book) but as primarily rooted in ordinary and daily routines that deserve at least some serious attention and examination.

This chapter will undoubtedly leave readers with more questions than answers, given that it is largely a call to action and not a report on results. Nonetheless, we would argue the urgency of reorienting some of the social scientific research on the process of radicalization. In the first part of the chapter, after a systematization of different conceptions of religious pluralism, we propose the concept of situated religious pluralism, both as a theoretical construction and as an empirical object. In the second part, we assess recent works on radicalization, showing how they tend to conceive of the process in a manner that is too disconnected from the many sociological complexities of individuals, contexts, and situations, largely because they neglect an ethnographic approach to the issue. We then discuss the possibilities for the study of radicalization offered by adopting ethnographic methodologies and conceiving of situated religious pluralism.

What Does It Take to Make an “Ordinary Trap” Operational?

Our thinking about this issue started with a simple question that we initially asked ourselves as citizens rather than as social scientists: when it comes to analysing radicalization in religiously plural contexts, why is it so difficult to link ordinary practices with big political questions? C. Wright Mills (1959) called the former daily routines “troubles,” a term he juxtaposed against broader political “issues.”4 Mills’s framework is helpful here in many respects, mostly because it invites us to think in sociological terms about how critical social questions rely on the improvement of individuals’ basic capacities of observation and imagination. With this distinction between the particular “troubles” and the general “issues,” the question is how to document the link between religious pluralism as a feature of liberal democracies and radicalization, generally conceived of as a risk to liberal democracies. Discussions about radicalization almost always conjure up horrifying images, often supported and further consolidated by news coverage, fictional literature, and other aspects of popular culture (see Beer and Burrows 2010). There is obviously a matter of scale that shapes this response. As Webnner (2010) notes, talking about her own doubts as an anthropologist working on Islamic militancy in the West, events such as 9/11 (2001) and the London (2005) and Madrid (2004) bombings – and effectively all global terrorist acts – defy easy understanding. Thinking of anthropologists like her, working on “small places,” Webnner writes, “we mostly encounter the normal and the quotidian, not the extraordinary and world shattering” (Webnner 2010, 193). Large-scale terrorist acts seem to embody the opposite of the everyday and the local; they are hardly intelligible and always occur as unexpected catastrophes. Indeed, for anthropologists, and, we could add, all ethnographers, they evoke the dilemma of how to move from the quotidian to the cataclysmic (Webnner 2010, 194). The difference in the scale of events notwithstanding, the Western public has been educated to integrate such events into the fabric of their daily lives. For instance, through a powerful and convincing security discourse implemented in the media coverage, 9/11 has been framed as a defining moment for Western societies. This integration does not, however, imply that the meaning of 9/11 has been brought into the fabric of people’s daily lives or that they are aware of the disjuncture between their lives and the complex issues associated with 9/11. In this chapter, following Mills, we call this habit of conflating “big issues” with immediate “troubles” the “ordinary trap,” into which Western secular citizenries are locked. The ordinary trap refers
to situations in which an individual might think about life-threatening terrorist plots or cells while remaining, in daily life, enmeshed in a mostly anonymous and normal life, totally disconnected from violent radicalization. In so doing, however, these individuals are nevertheless living the realities of religious and cultural pluralism that play a role in the process of radicalization on a daily basis.

The case of the Swiss minaret ban offers a good illustration of this ordinary trap of confusing the local and the global, reality and fear, in which most Europeans and North Americans find themselves locked. In November 2009, the bill calling for banning the building of minarets was passed, with the support of 57.5 per cent of the voters. The irony of the new law did not escape some citizens. On 1 December, Chappatte, a regular cartoonist at the Swiss daily newspaper Le Temps, published a caricature showing a Swiss couple in front of a typical Alpine house located on a beautiful mountainside obviously far removed from the construed threat of Islam as well as interactions with Muslims (Figure 4.1). A journalist is asking them, “Is Islam disturbing you?”

The image is indeed a witty response to the widely reproduced and quite influential poster issued by the Swiss People Party, who initiated the anti-minaret campaign. The image on the poster (Figure 4.2) exhibits a Swiss flag covered in tall black minarets, which resemble missiles, in front of which stands a woman draped in black, a large Stopp written beneath her.

In short, the minaret has become emblematic of the threat of Islam and an Islamic takeover of Europe. In addition, the female figure veiled head-to-toe in black in the foreground of the image also constitutes an exotic fiction in a country where 90 per cent of the 400,000 Muslims originate from Kosovo and Turkey, where such garments are not customary. The Chappatte cartoon articulates the discrepancy between the alleged threat depicted in the “Stopp” political poster (the issue) and the reality regarding Islamic places of worship in Switzerland (the trouble). At the time of the vote, although there were an estimated 150 mosques or prayer rooms in Switzerland, only four of them featured minarets and only two others had plans to construct minarets (Cumming-Bruce
and Erlanger, 2009). The point is evidently that while the stereotypically characteristic Swiss couple in the comic have never actually been “troubled” by mosques or minarets, and probably never directly by Muslims, the “issue” constructed and communicated through the campaign (i.e., the Islamicization of Switzerland) not only is intelligible to them but echoes a pattern that we also find proliferating in other European countries, for instance by extreme-right parties such as in France. Here is the anatomy of the ordinary trap: when we are asked to answer “yes” or “no” to a question that has no meaning in our daily universe and with which we have never had a direct experience (as for instance when MPs in Iceland anticipated in February 2011 the possible prohibition of the burka on the island before the garment had even made an appearance there, as reported by the Reykjavik Grapevine), we still answer. This response confirms Mills’s claim: “and the more aware they become, however vaguely, of ambitions and of threats [issues] which transcend their immediate locales, the more trapped they seem to feel” (Mills 1959, 3).

The liberal focus on rights and representation has probably contributed to the neglect of the lived dimensions of the debates on multiculturalism and pluralism, elucidating the chasm between rhetoric and reality. This liberal emphasis has certainly made it difficult for many of us to see that expectations regarding recognition also imply struggles over principles and values, as well as struggles over ways of living, customs, and even senses. Mills’s distinction between troubles and issues is crucial here. Troubles occur within the character of the individual, within the range of his immediate relations with others — for example during the process of a conversation or interaction regarding some mundane immediate concern — whereas issues, to state it in simple terms, involve a public matter, as when some people believe that values or principles cherished in specific societies are being threatened. Issues are, however, not so easy to identify in the immediate and everyday environments of ordinary people. Other social scientists have articulated similar distinctions using different terms. For example, Geertz (1963) addressed the tension in many societies between primordial attachments and emerging civil sentiments. The latter denote a generalized commitment to an overarching and somewhat alien civil order revolving around practical demands for political efficacy, social justice, and economic progress. The former refer to specific and familiar identity markers such as kinship, race, religion, geographic proximity, and language. These primordial concepts are in a way irrational. They are constructed by history and often appear as the product of centuries of gradual sedimentation. They consist, as Geertz (1963) notes, of “congruities of blood, speech, customs” (9), and “they consist of an unreflective sense of collective selfhood that in turn is rooted in the non-rational foundations of personality” (128). Primordial sentiments and the attachments they produce rest on perceptions and beliefs. Both Mills and Geertz juxtapose the realm of individual personal experience to the realm that transcends the local environments of individuals and the range of their personal lives and understandings, such as in the example of the Islamic threat to Swiss culture discussed previously. The ensuing question of interest in this chapter is what are the major “issues” — in the sense of the term offered by Mills — experienced in religiously plural societies that connect the process of radicalization with the key “troubles” of private individuals? Ordinary “troubled” scenes of daily life and urban legends — echoing “issues” — offer a relevant focus for trying to answer this question. In Montreal, and more particularly in the Outremont neighbourhood, a story circulates, told either by people who live in the neighbourhood or by those who are just passing through it. One never knows if it is true or just a fiction designed to ridicule a minority, but it narrates an allegedly typical and frequent scenario involving a visible religious minority, ultra-Orthodox Jews, and the non-Jewish population in Outremont. The story can involve a man or a woman or both and usually takes place on a Friday evening in a street where Hassidim live: a Jewish man or a Jewish woman, sometimes together or even with children, approaches the passerby-cum-storyteller to ask him or her in English (a part of the narrative that has political connotations in a society in which some perceive the dominant French language as being under siege) to help turn on some lights, the heating, or electrical appliances, or even make a phone call, because the onset of Shabbat means that practising Jews can no longer undertake these daily gestures. The passerby enters the house, fulfills the request, and continues to walk home. Although not everyone can recount such a story, we contend that such interactions are far from rare (indeed one of the authors has had such an experience). In her remarkable master’s thesis, Alton (2011) dedicates a full chapter to these “Sabbath Hands,” gentiles helping observant Jews, a phenomenon she situates in a larger historical tradition known by Jews as the “shabbos goy” (84).

This account sets the stage for the way we would like to invite scholars to deal with radicalization in its complexity, to situate it as one possible outcome of a reciprocal process of interactions that can potentially
increase the distance between groups and harden their representations of their differences. Individuals living in plural contexts are exposed to such daily interactions that have been neglected by analysts. Unfortunately, these are precisely the experiences that develop into full-blown conflicts in the public arenas of Parliament or the media and constitute "the missing link" between, on one side, religious pluralism defined as a constraining condition of life and, on the other, radicalization conceived as a process generated by micro-interactions potentially leading to increased discrimination and xenophobia. As Bramadat noted, the meaning attributed to this interaction is potentially open, depending upon the convictions and behaviour of both the Jewish family and the passersby and their knowledge of each other's traditions; consequently, this particular interaction in Outremont could "mean" many things. It could be an opportunity to build communication (exchanges of knowledge, jokes, etc.) or on the contrary it could enlarge the gap by underlining cultural differences on both sides. This openness to interpretation is, indeed, precisely what we seek to establish, since it is one of the goals of the larger project from which our present reflection arises, to provide the Québécois public discussion on interculturalism and reasonable accommodation with empirical evidence of its day-to-day accomplishment.

The first episode of the first season (2007) of the popular Canadian television show Little Mosque on the Prairie offers another good example of such an intersection between troubles and issues involving the Muslim community, both as an empirical subject of experience and as a represented community in the political imaginary. The scenario is simple: a young Muslim man, Amar, trained as a lawyer, has been hired to serve as the local imam in a recently opened prayer room in the basement of an Anglican church in Mercy, a small town in Alberta. Waiting in line for the check-in counter at the Toronto airport, he is talking on his cell phone with his mother, who apparently does not understand the rationale for his decision to give up his law career. Playing on ambiguity in the dialogue, the script makes a woman in the same queue believe that the future imam is certainly a terrorist, as all the details of his life (change of career, stay in Afghanistan, Islamic education in a Muslim country, etc.) provided in the short conversation clearly situate him on the map of Islamic radicalism. As a vigilant, suspicious, and responsible citizen, the woman thus calls the airport security and Amar is detained for interrogation, providing other opportunities for Zarqa Nawaz, the series's creator, to highlight how stereotypes and representations shape the construction of meanings.

Interactions such as the ones briefly described here do take place all the time in cosmopolitan cities such as Montreal. However, although such scenes are usually associated with Muslims, similar experiences occur to each of us every day without our necessarily being aware that we are experiencing pluralism in its most direct form. People belonging to different religious communities continuously cross each other in daily life. Despite public controversies and political discussions about differences between Québécois interculturalism and Canadian multiculturalism, micro-adjustments are constantly being made or denied in situations where non-believers and believers of various religious traditions share public spaces and cope with features of another person's religious identity or practice, cognizant or not of what we might call the interpersonal economy associated with the interactions between people. Let us think of a few examples drawn from fieldwork conducted in Montreal by students working with us on the PLURADICAL project. Most doctors will for instance let women perform prayers for their dying babies next to their beds in the main rooms of a public hospital's neonatology services, but some will not. Most schools or subsidized daycare centres will respect pupils' specific ethnic or religious dietary requirements, whereas others will not. These few situations in which individuals decided to deny believers the right to certain practices were mostly "minor troubles" that were turned into "big issues" by the public attention drawn to them, as for instance in 2007-8 during the work of the Bouchard-Taylor Commission. Whether these incidents are the result of daily indifference, ideological opposition, or ignorance, the examination of routine social life suggests — notwithstanding the panic that seems to run through Québécois and Canadian public opinion every time such sensitive topics make the headlines — that there is, in fact, very little resistance to the accommodation of religious convictions in the dominant population.

Considering multicultural democracy as a way of being — rather than just as a set of principles and norms — means that it entails primarily and simply the experience of living with others. Citizens engaging with democracy must be willing to engage with disagreement and differences, not just in the political realm but also with regard to socioeconomic and cultural differences. So for a democracy to qualify as multicultural, the emphasis should be on the responsibility of every citizen to adequately navigate pluralism. Recently, however, the road to democracy has been getting narrower with the further entrenchment of restrictive notions of "us" and "them" and the concomitant
shift backward towards assimilative positions on the part of larger segments of the public. We see this in the political situation in Europe, for instance, as illustrated by the rise of the extreme right in national polls and the normalization of a certain hostility to cultural/religious difference, notably through the denunciation of multicultural policies (Lentin and Tiley 2011). In the last decades a majority of Western governments have pleaded for the extension of multiple sets of rights as the most effective way to implement a just and stable multicultural society; however, this is disconnected from social expectations that regard recognition as more than rights, that it also encompasses struggles over values and ways of living. In 2009, several cities in Northern Italy – where the daily experiences of religious pluralism are, as in Switzerland, not very common – started a systematic campaign, sometimes supported by legal decisions, to “de-ethnicize” (our terminology) Italy’s historical town centers, legally banning kebab shops, phone kiosks that enable migrants to call abroad, and pubs and bars of “an ethnic nature.” As with the examples explored earlier, this movement in Italy demonstrates the ways that claims about “multiculturalism gone wild” circulate in one context and very quickly get adopted into another (Lentin and Tiley 2011). The full list of instances of such paranoia would be quite long, of course. One would need to add to this list discriminatory comments made by politicians in the 2012 Quebec provincial election. As well, one would want to include Quebec’s Herouxville controversy in which (as in similar Italian and Swiss cases) the level and type of religious diversity were imagined to be far greater, more problematic, and more immediate than they actually are in reality, thereby provoking formal political statements meant to constrain this (negligible or absent) diversity.13 All of these comments and policy statements are part of the ongoing discussion – the “issue” – of reasonable accommodation in the province, and yet all of them are also linked to what we might call the “contagion phenomenon” that is also evident in EU member states where similar stories make the headlines and show the convergence of divergent European national traditions: the centrality of the headscarf controversies in various contexts (France, Germany, Italy, Great Britain), later the bans on the burka (France, the Netherlands, Belgium), the “burkinis” being socially rejected and locally banned from Italian swimming pools and French beaches in the summer of 2009, the sharia tribunal debates and decisions in Ontario and England, and the anxieties that erupted in France and Quebec in the spring of 2012 when concerns were expressed about the presence of halal food in public schools meals program (Amiraux and Kousens 2012). Moreover, the press coverage of the “global problems with Muslims in Western contexts” certainly contributes to the problematization of Islam as a tradition that is incommensurable with democracy and liberalism. Interestingly, most often, when radicalization appears in the research literature, it is common for commentators to associate these tensions between Muslim immigrants and their host societies with the onset of the “pre-radicalization” phase in which individuals become receptive to the radicalization message and process.14 “Radicalized” individuals will thus appear as having “failed to integrate into a pluralistic, tolerant democracy, or they have turned away and integrated into a radicalized subculture that has taken root through a perversion of the freedoms afforded by multiculturalism” (Parent and Ellis 2011, 79).

The process of radicalization has been associated almost exclusively with its final result – terrorist attacks – and with its concomitant social formation: religious fundamentalism.15 Ordinarily, radicalization refers to some exceptional, abnormal, unusual, and unexpected situation. The figure of the home-grown terrorist is presented as the culmination of this process and positioned as being beyond reason. How could we reasonably understand why the “Toronto 18,” the young Muslim Canadians discussed by Lorne Dawson in chapter 3 of this volume, would plan to detonate truck bombs in the centre of the city in which they had spent their lives, gone to school, and socialized with non-Muslim friends? How can we understand their behaviour, and that of other “terrorists” in Western contexts, other than through the effect of some “pathological drift” of their lives (Collovald and Gaiti 2006)?

However, beyond studies of socialization trajectories, as Dawson suggests in this volume, very little is known about how radicalization takes root in ordinary people. Indeed, if we establish that both religious pluralism and radicalization processes are related – and this relationship is somehow assumed when the latter is mainly analysed as the pathological reaction of inadequately integrated religious believers16 – we should also recognize that radicalization processes often begin to take root in the complex soil of micro-societal interactions about which we know very little. In other words, radicalization must be assessed as a reciprocal and relational dynamic and not exclusively as the outcome of deviant unilateral trajectories of socialization. The emphasis thus needs to be put on the responsibility of reciprocal (mis)perceptions and (mis)representations that need to be talked about because they nurture feelings of hostility among social actors. The necessity to take seriously what
ordinary people are experiencing is crucial in understanding the roots of radicalization in a pluralist context. The following section reflects further on these challenges, starting with a return to definitional issues.

Situating Religious Pluralism and Radicalization

Although modern political thinking conceives of religious pluralism as a positive value that accompanies the privatization of religion, for most living in cosmopolitan contexts it is a daily challenge, a critical civil issue for citizens (Eck 2007, 760), an often unconscious constraint or negotiation we cannot escape. Defining religious pluralism to make it a useful analytical tool, rather than an abstract descriptive category of a desired condition of modern liberal democratic societies, demands thinking about it in ways that cover the three dimensions of religious pluralism highlighted by Beckford (2003, 74): First, societies differ in the extent of their religious diversity. Second, the degree to which various religious groups enjoy acceptance or recognition in the public sphere varies country to country. Third, support for the moral or political value of widening the public acceptance of religions is also variable.

The trend to take pluralism for granted is particularly visible in the statistics and quantitative data that help scholars, politicians, and citizens to know who lives where. Ethnic neighbourhoods typify the global metropolis: “Chinatown” is expected to appear in every tourist guide of major cities in the United States; and Outremont has been relabelled the “Orthodox Jewish neighbourhood” of Montreal in such guides. Both claims speak to geographical “facts” but also to contestable political claims. Scholars working on religious minorities, in response, have questioned the reliance on categories that fail to accurately reflect the internal plural identities of believers.

Our approach to religious pluralism is that it should be conceived as an experience in which a situation is constantly and dynamically being redefined. Here we are reminded of Berger and Luckmann (1967, 117), who define pluralism as a situation in which social actors face a competition between global meanings of daily life and their institutional form. Also related is Thomas’s insistence on the dichotomy between a “definition which a society has provided” for an individual and “the spontaneous definitions of the situation” made by the individuals (Thomas 1923, 42). In these perspectives, religious pluralism operates practically both as a frame for action and as a situation in itself.

We suggest that religious pluralism is a “reality test” – a moment in which people have to justify their position and reach an agreement (Boltanski and Thévenot [1991] 2006, 40). Again, as related in the empirical illustrations we mobilized in the first section, our proposal aims at charting and making legible what most other visions of religious pluralism exclude. The various examples we mentioned earlier, from the Shabbat hands to doctors preventing parents from mourning their dead children in hospitals or the other controversies over accommodation, refer to the practical accomplishment of the encounter between individuals adjusting their respective convictions about the other in the course of the interaction. At this scale, religious pluralism is no longer a simple normative set of principles or a taken-for-granted reality but rather a practice experienced by subjects in a specific interactive setting, visible to the outside “in language differences or in modes of dress, eating, and socializing” (Wuthnow 2005, 5). In this way we might begin to think of religious pluralism even more as an ordinary condition of life in modern Western democratic societies, a fact for inhabitants who have no option but to experience it.

As well, modern pluralistic societies are distinguished by the formal regulatory structures, the sets of rules and norms that organize the public life of religious plural societies and that directly affect religious groups (Côté 2003; Saris 2010). Interactions occurring in public spaces are of course connected with it. Social interpersonal practices do not take place in a void but are framed by normative and institutional discourses. Ammerman (2010, 155) contends that there is nothing new in this situation:

[Pluralism … is the natural state of religion, everywhere and always. I want to suggest that our questions are best asked in terms that take at least some religious diversity for granted. Our task is not to delineate stages along a path from unity to diversity, nor to outline possible institutional responses to the loss of a place of singular privilege in a society. Our task is to examine how multiple religious ideas, groups, and practices constitute the dynamic social reality in any given place and time.

With such a definition, we could accept that pluralism is rather pluralisms (Beckford 2003; Marty 2007), that it is not only a social challenge and a normative ideal but also a political, civil issue, encountered in diverse ways every day by citizens of liberal democracies.
We propose to apply this theoretical framework to the phenomenon of radicalization. For twenty years, and more significantly since 9/11, radicalization has been a major theme in discussions about the current state of religious minorities (see chapters 5, 6, and 7 by Beyer, Jamil, and Jakobsh, respectively, in this volume). The emphasis in the literature on religious pluralism on home-grown, second-generation terrorist threats stands as a perfect example. According to the dominant narrative, important factors intervene in the socialization (the school, the religious group, the neighbourhood, the socio-economic status), as well as the identity formation processes (through interactions, meetings, events, discourses), of these young men. The vast list of publications that have adopted this perspective demonstrates the popularity of a vision that frames radicalization as the result of the combination of multiple structural variables (historical, political and personal characteristics (psychosocial conditions) (Stroink 2007; Krueger 2008). Unfortunately, these two forces rarely meet in scholarship. At some point, the ability of an individual to manage multiple cultural identities, his or her “pluralistic skills” so to speak, determines his or her chances of becoming a “radical.” Addressing Islamic radicalization in Europe, Roy (2007, 52) summarizes the current view by saying that home-grown radicals “all share common patterns. They speak European languages, are Western educated, and have many citizenship of a European country. They have had a ‘normal’ Western teenager’s upbringing, with no conspicuous religious practices, often going to night-clubs, ‘womanising’ and drinking alcohol. None have previous religious training.” Yet for some reason these young men become alienated from, and eventually hostile to, this very culture and lifestyle.

Recognizing that pathways to radicalization are multiple, public reports often recognize the absence of a single factor that could be considered “causal” in the radicalization process (Precht 2007, 32). Terrorists and radicals are mostly “unremarkable” (Silber and Bhatt 2007). This literature – mostly published as public reports produced by government agencies19 – sees radicalization as the result of successive steps with no identifiable timeline or set format. Generally, it addresses radicalization as a phenomenon that must be eliminated rather than understood.20 The “Causal Factors of Radicalisation” report, published by the Transnational Terrorism, Security, and the Rule of Law (2008) research project and financed by the European Commission, distinguishes for instance between causes (context, psychological characteristics, network dynamics, etc.) and catalysts (recruitment and trigger events) in understanding the trajectories of radicals. There is, however, a strong emphasis by the authors on the phenomenon of the “identity crisis” as a cause of a radicalized trajectory. Here, religious radicalization results from the individuals’ search for identity: they are “faced with the processes causing a crisis either of the model of the secular state and the privatization of religion, or else of the globalization of religious processes with the ensuing crises of identity” (Filaro 2003, 42). Radicalization is conceived as the ultimate violent outcome of failed processes of social integration. But this concentration on the deviant perspective ends up being very restrictive. Studies of radicalization tend to draw their conclusions from ideal typical figures: well-educated middle-class men suffering from identity crises are put forth as more susceptible to radicalization processes than others, but the authors often fail to adequately consider the complex and exact nature of the social relations and experiences that might underwrite such deviant choices. In terms of the approaches adopted for the study of radicalization, academics interested in criminology and terrorism have collaborated significantly (LaFree and Freilich 2012, 4) to develop scales and sophisticated questionnaires able to predict radical behaviour. Other approaches include analyses of personal documents of terrorists – letters, manifestos – and especially the reconstruction of terrorists’ lives to identify common features, with an intense interest in discerning the typical pattern of behaviour. The focus is squarely on the post hoc analysis of individuals who have become violent.

However, studies of those many radicalization trajectories that do not lead to terrorism or violence are rare.21 Even scantier are studies that examine radical tendencies in majority populations. In February 2007, the Quebec prime minister established the Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences, led by Gérard Bouchard and Charles Taylor (see Bouchard and Taylor 2008), which worked for 15 months to map the accommodation practices in place in the region, identify the main challenges, look at other contexts confronted with similar situations, launch a consultation with the population, and finally formulate recommendations to the government. The committee’s public hearings were broadcast on television in Quebec for months. The debates related to accomodements raisonnables clearly illustrated how the majority was adopting more and more extreme positions towards Quebec’s minority communities (Potvin 2008). Our wider definition of radicalization allows us to factor such discourses of stigmatization from the dominant population into analyses of violent and non-violent radicals.
Radicalization studies, we argue, are looking twice over in the wrong place. First, they have adopted an overly restrictive theoretical definition of the phenomenon: radicalization as an individual trajectory. Second, they largely make a methodological choice that excludes ex ante an ethnographic approach. Moreover, affective experiences such as distrust, humiliation, betrayal, and other feelings or emotions that should be taken into account when looking at what one might call the radicalization of all members of society are rarely significant factors in the analysis of such processes. It seems, however, that radicalization as a reciprocal process is also a matter of feelings, as the Bouchard-Taylor Commission demonstrated. The next section suggests ways in which scholars might approach radicalization in a more productive manner.

Pleading for an Ethnographic Approach to the Study of Situated Religious Pluralism and Radicalization Processes

Ethnography is a way to produce data, essentially concerned with concrete social interactions that take place in given contexts. This approach might diminish the pathologizing tendency evident in most studies of radicalization. As Hemmingsen (2011, 1211) has pointed out, ethnography “enables the researcher to move beyond the extraordinary and spectacular and to begin to shed light on the everyday and the real life” of all members of a society, not just those who seem to qualify as radicals. An ethnographic approach can make sense of actors’ actions, situating them in a given context wherein social interactions are considered as constituents of social phenomena and not only as outcomes (Thomas 1923). It implies reconsidering the development of in situ observation and simple conversations with people who experience religious pluralism and those whose experience could have led them to develop a rejection of others.

The potentialities of an ethnographic approach for the study of radicalization can be illustrated by some recent empirical ethnographic studies. For instance, Buckser (2005, 142), in his ethnographic work on social interactions between two Jewish communities with strong doctrinal differences, concludes that these opposite doctrinal views are not translated into antagonistic relations in practice. Similarly, the fieldwork carried out by Hemmingsen (2011, 1208), with individuals suspected of planning terrorist acts in Denmark, provided her with “a heterogeneous collection of qualitative data consisting of observations, conversations, and semi-structured research interviews.” This collection of data forced her to change the object of her study, the focus shifting from the examination of “terrorists” to that of a “shared identity” or a “milieu.” A last example of ethnographies developed in the context of radicalization studies is the work by Kenney (2011), who undertook research in a Muslim neighbourhood of Ceuta, often described as home to Spanish people with terrorist inclinations. In his research he “tried to illustrate how ethnographic research can better inform our understanding of this marginalized community and, by extension, other places and problems of interest to counter-terrorism scholars.”

With these studies in mind, three questions emerge from this plea for the adoption of an ethnographic approach to the study of situated religious pluralism and radicalization: What should one look at? Where should one look? And how should one look at it? Consistent with our definition of situated religious pluralism, we should focus on those ordinary experiences in which common individuals experience “otherness.” As mentioned earlier, public parks, sidewalks, and public transportation constitute major places to experiment with situated religious pluralism. Such places are the where to look. In these sites, ordinary social interactions that lead to the experience of what Mills calls troubles could be identified, studied, and understood; and one might ask, do encounters between people visibly belonging to different religious communities inevitably develop into “failed interactions” (Goffman 1959)? When or how do they escape this path?

The ethnographic approach to radicalization does not mean, however, that the institutional dimension of religious pluralism may now be excluded. Although this dimension has been central to researchers’ analyses of religious pluralism, the links with radicalization processes remain largely understudied, whereas the state’s decisive role in shaping national regulatory regimes has been well documented (D’Antonio and Hoge 2006). In this context, and to consider the institutional dimension of religious pluralism when positioning interactions, we should also take into account policies of regulation, as long as their practical expected or unexpected effects are considered, in education or hospitals for instance (Fortin 2006). Public discourses contribute to framing social interactions in which religious pluralism may complicate interactions. Analysing the accommodements raisonnables controversies, Potvin (2008) demonstrates the difference between specific practical conflicts and the ones described in the media, and how this transposition from private to public discourses constitutes a radicalization of the positions, encouraging racist postures. Specifically, Potvin identifies the
suggestions an *emic* approach that would, by taking the conceptions and representations people have of these phenomenon as the starting point of the analysis, go beyond such generalizing discourses and, more significantly, overcome the *individual* trajectories of suicide bombers (Blom 2011). As Weber (2010) and Elster (2005) state, about the London 7/7 and the 9/11 terrorists respectively, underlining the uncertain efforts of public agencies to discern the main motives of suicide bombers from the videos they left behind is the recognition that we may never really know what mattered most to them and the constraints within which they were living.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has both a theoretical and a methodological objective. The former involved thinking about how the definitions of pluralism and radicalization often overlook the crucial role of what we have described as the constraining context (pluralism in this case) and the complex reciprocal processes of social interaction, where potential reciprocal alienation might begin in the fomenting of radicalization. The methodological shift we propose focuses on situations, rather than individual or structural factors, and may offer stimulating avenues for researching both pluralism as a condition of life and radicalization as a particular response to this condition of life. By looking at ordinary unease, at the day-to-day emotions emerging in the course of interactions in a pluralistic society, between people ignorant of or unfamiliar with another’s moral universe, we seek to avoid the classical and exclusive emphasis on pathological trajectories of radicalization and the functionalist modes of explanation that are often attached to studies with this focus.

We argue for the adoption of an ethnographic approach in the study of radicalization, which would generate a new definition of the object studied, its nature and the identification of innovative fields to be observed. Radicalization processes are certainly more complex and more encompassing than those postulated in the theorization of the homegrown second-generation threat, and we should develop an approach consistent with this complexity. Such a shift will require “a fundamental alteration of the sociological consciousness” (Ball 1972, 66).

As some of the authors cited have expressed, radicalization remains an enigma (Blom, Bucaille, and Martinez 2007; Boltanski 2012). It is factually impossible to know the reason people decide to die as suicide bombers (Bozarslan 2004). “It is an enigma wrapped in a puzzle”
(Elster 2005), and the home-grown terrorist phenomenon continues to surprise us by the difficulty we have in reading the rationale behind these trajectories. Early in 2012, Mohammed Merah moved from petty crime to violent terrorism, killing and wounding French soldiers from the same North African background as himself as well as Jewish schoolchildren and a rabbi. As most of the media said, he had various faces, and making sense of his trajectory is problematic. Changing the scale, method, and theoretical design of research on pluralism and radicalization will not give us the power to anticipate future crises. If we begin with the assumption that personal consistency and clear predictability are non-existent (in “us” as well as “them”), then we will avoid the pitfalls of the profiles and predictive models that are currently the emphases of the dominant paradigm in the research on terrorism and radicalization. As the Merah case makes clear, even someone on the radar of the French intelligence services, known by local and national law enforcement agencies, may nonetheless commit terrible acts of brutality that we cannot anticipate. As most scholars of Salafism and radical Islam would say, he was disconnected from any terrorist cell and more of a maverick than a member or follower of any group. The social and political conditions that made his violent gesture possible remain mysterious (Burgat 2012). As we suggest, this intellectual knot, and the broader social fabric of which Merah is just a thread, would certainly be better addressed with a shift of perspective, by paying attention to how he and many others like him interact with others in the pluralist context that is the defining feature of the modern West. By being able to make connections between what is exceptional and what happens routinely, the outcome of terrorism and the situation in which it arises, the “issues” and the “troubles,” we can find some important clues to understand what has so far been an enigma.

NOTES

1. This essay stems from three years of reflection on the study of religious pluralism by V. Amiraux that led to the implementation of the PLURALICAL team, funded by the Fonds de Recherche Société et Culture du Québec (2011–13). J. Araya-Moreno has been associated with the project since its inception. All information related to the PLURALICAL team can be found at valerieamiraux.com. The authors wish to thank Dr. Valérie Behier for letting us benefit from her precious editing talents, making this text available for an English-language public. They also warmly thank Paul Bramadat and Lorne Dawson for helping them to make the argument clearer and stronger, thanks to their rich comments.

2. See for example the studies released by the Change Institute (2008) or Transnational Terrorism, Security, and the Rule of Law (2008), among many others. The literature on terrorism and radicalization is vast and cannot be exhaustively referenced here. We invite interested readers to consult the endnote bibliographies that the PLURALICAL team has made available on the website mentioned in note 1.

3. We are alluding to the “multiculturalism gone wild” discourse that has become a key issue in the European Union since 2001, especially in Great Britain and the Netherlands. This trend to equate multiculturalism with a series of problems, assumingly related to religious diversity, reflects the impact of 9/11 (see Lentin and Titley 2011 and Sijj 2010).

4. “Perhaps the most fruitful distinction with which the sociological imagination works is between ‘the personal troubles of milieu’ and ‘the public issues of social structure.’ This distinction is an essential tool of the sociological imagination and a feature of all classic work in social science” (Mills 1959, 8).

5. We could have taken the burkini discussion during summer 2009 in Italy or the burqa plus national identity discussion in France that started with the Council of State decision to deny French nationality to a Moroccan woman because of her radical practice of her religion (i.e., the wearing of a niqab), which ended up with a law forbidding people to hide their faces in public in October 2010.

6. The image from the poster was reproduced in the international press.

7. A few Québécois novels have addressed this issue of learning how to know your immediate neighbors better. The best-known are the novels of Zipora (2006) and Faroud (2012). Of course, several scholars have been working on these neighbourhoody interactions, often in relationship with legal questions; see Shaffir (2002) and Van Praag (2008).

8. Paul Bramadat, personal communication with the authors, 10 June 2012.

9. Different studies have analysed Zarqa Nawaz’s television program (see, e.g., Khan 2009 and Bibler 2008).

10. We are here referring to the way the prayer is performed (using for instance specific accessories such as incense or candles or involving loud and long hours of wailing, large numbers of people, uninterrupted loud reading of a sacred text), not the prayer per se. In this specific example, the woman was requesting the use of a prayer carpet in the middle of a highly sanitized room. This case was reported by a doctoral student.
working on Muslim women and their access to health services in Montreal hospitals.

11 As in the case of the Centre à la petite enfance (public child care center) Gros Bec, where a preschool teacher had made an informal agreement with a Muslim father not to give pork to his son (Rioux and Bourgeois 2008). This agreement was later discussed during the accomodements raisonnables debate because it generated a legal decision. This case points to the common existence of such informal and interpersonal agreements between parents and teachers. CDPDF [c. Centre à la petite enfance Gros Bec, 2008 QCTDF] 14.

12 The commission was created by the prime minister of Quebec in February 2007 and asked to assess the practice of reasonable accommodation related to cultural differences.


14 “Pre-radicalization describes the many general background factors that make individuals receptive to extremism just before the actual radicalization process begins” (Precht 2007, 34).

15 See, for example, the reports released by the Change Institute (2008) or Transnational Terrorism, Security, and the Rule of Law (2008).

16 See the list of recommendations given in most of the reports on terrorism and counterterrorism initiatives in Western contexts produced by the Change Institute (2008) or Transnational Terrorism, Security, and the Rule of Law project (2008).

17 This positive valence of choice when it comes to religion (freedom of conscience as a freedom to believe or not to believe) is particularly explicit in the literature or the Islamic headscarf in Western contexts. The umbrella of choice makes religious convictions more intelligible to secular publics (Amiraux 2009; Fernando 2011).

18 “Definition of the situation” is probably Thomas’s stronger contribution to the sociology of interaction. It is a clear invitation to look at on the one hand the meaning of situations and on the other the situated meanings within them as the actors are experiencing them. As a consequence, actions as well as interactions stem directly from this definition of the situation. The notion of the latter here does not refer simply to the conditions in which something is happening: a situation is not a scene or a stage. It is a process by which the point of view of the actor is central, which echoes Nussbaum’s idea mentioned earlier in this chapter. Functional consequences are not at the core of Thomas’s interests: the definition of situation expresses his interest in looking at “existential causality,” which offers a very different locus of explanation than the one usually offered to understand social conducts (Ball 1972). The process of situational definition is “a causal agent itself in

the social conduct of self-determining, volitionally active persons, located in situations they construct and invest with meaning” (Ball 1972, 65). This is what we would like to map by working on situated religious pluralism: the way actors located in their day-to-day business define the situation in which they are located. Nothing can be taken for granted and there is so to say no “personal consistency” to be looked at in such a perspective.

19 Sageman (2008) is a good illustration of this trend, working for the US State Department on profiling from a psychological perspective.

20 Out of the 20,000 pieces of literature about terrorism analysed by Lum, Kennedy, and Sherley (2006), only seven were based on a rigorous scientific strategy and were able to provide effective policy recommendations.

21 Non-violent radicalization processes are also defined with reference to violence. For example, Bartlett, Birdwell, and King (2010, 8) define non-violent radicalization as “the process by which individuals come to hold radical views in relation to the status quo but do not undertake, or directly or abet terrorist activity.”

22 Consider Jacob Levy’s warning: “the danger of bloody ethnic violence, the reality that states treat members of minority cultures in humiliated ways, the intentional cruelty of language restrictions and police beatings and subter measures which remind members of a minority that they are not full citizens or whole persons, there are the focus of attention” (Levy 2000).

23 Just as the notion of situation helps elucidate and provide new definitions of pluralism, Goffman’s notion of footing can be helpful when it comes to ethnography of radicalization. Footing is a concept he developed which suggests that the “[p]articipant’s alignment, or set, or stance, or posture, or projected self is somehow at issue.” The notion entails that inside a unique frame “[a] change in footing implies a change in the alignment we take up to ourselves and the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production or reception of an utterance. A change in our footing is another way of talking about a change in our frame for events.” According to this theoretical perspective, social interactions in the context of religious pluralism – and that could include processes of radicalization – are footed in specific settings on multiple stages (Goffman 1981, 128).

24 See in particular looks at the Multani case.

25 The emphasis on the multiplicity of the potential interpretations of daily routines and specific gestures in the US context of the war on terror is illustrated well in the successful TV series Homeland. The show narrates the complex story of a US Marine returning to the States after he was a prisoner of al-Qaeda. Homeland’s plot is inspired by a successful Israeli TV series (Haputanim) in which three Israeli soldiers return home after 17 years as prisoners in Lebanon.
REFERENCES


5 Securitization and Young Muslim Males: Is None Too Many?

PETER BEYER

Introduction

The context of this chapter is the idea and fear of what sometimes is called “home-grown radicalism,” “home-grown terror,” or more specifically and simply, the radicalization of young Muslim males in Western countries. Since 9/11, many of the more spectacular violent and terrorist events in Europe and North America have been perpetrated by young Muslim males who grew up in the West, including the Madrid train bombings in 2004, the assassination of Theo van Gogh in Amsterdam in 2004, the London subway and bus bombings of 2005, the attempt to set off a car bomb in Times Square in New York in 2010, and the murder of three soldiers, three Jewish children, and a rabbi in France in 2012. In Canada, the “point-to” event has been the arrest of the “Toronto 18” in June 2006, 11 of whom were eventually convicted on “terrorism”-related charges. All of those convicted were young Muslim men1 who had either been born in Canada or arrived as children aged 12 or younger (i.e., they are part of the “1.5 generation”) (Teotonio and Javed 2010; chapter 3 by Dawson in this volume).

Two sorts of questions commonly arise from this context: How widespread is such radicalization among young Muslims, specifically in Canada? And, to the degree that it happens, what factors can be associated with such radicalization, that is, what “causes” it? Much more pointedly in this regard, if such radicalization occurs predominantly – but by no means exclusively – among young men (generally adolescents and young adults in their 20s), and if the radicals under scrutiny are at least nominal Muslims, what does Islam have to do with it? The fear, in other words, is that there is something about Islam that specifically...