

REGINALD NALUGALA

RADICALIZATION AND FAMILY VALUES
THE CASE OF MUSLIM YOUTH AMONG
THE SOMALI COMMUNITY
OF EASTLEIGH, NAIROBI, KENYA

A b s t r a c t. This paper investigates the role of families in the radicalization of the youth today. The global perspective based on literature review helps to address the influence of parents on their children and how radicalization can be overcome. The findings in Eastleigh, Nairobi add value to the conclusion that the radicalization process cannot be placed on one faith like Islam but people of all faiths, creed, races, groups, can be radicalized depending on their situation. The strong point presented by the push and pull factors can have a negative impact and radicalize local communities against foreigners. Discrimination can be used by leaders as a rallying call for resistance. Those in other parts of the world, sympathetic to suffering brethren can rush in to help, at times not knowing the details of the problem at hand. The paper calls for tolerance to all people and show restraint when one's space is infringed upon by the so called foreigners.

Key words: radicalization; family values; rehabilitation and push and pull factors.

1. INTRODUCTION

Youth radicalisation towards violent extremism is a global phenomenon that threatens peace, security and stability. Countering violent extremism and terrorism is undeniably complex which requires frontline practitioners working with those vulnerable to radicalization to have the right tools to respond in a more transformative manner. They need to recognise, respond to and challenge ideologies and narratives associated with any form of radicalization

that leads to extremism. In recent years there has been a global concern that many youth from Africa, Asia, Europe and America are joining terrorist networks. Causes can be attributed to a complex set of interconnected factors. Research shows some of the factors as the political, economic, cultural, technological, legal, social and individual concerns. Religion, diverse ideologies, identity and gender also arise as key variables for further analysis. At the centre of the different presentations, discussions and data analysis, the youth are seen as the victims and interlocutors of radicalization. The returning youth from war in Syria, Yemen and Afghanistan stand accused of opening up new frontiers for terrorist activities back home. Somalia, Libya, Tunisia, Egypt and Mali are already experiencing this challenge to their own security. Neighboring countries to Somalia like Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Tanzania are not left out of this challenge. According to a research conducted by the Nordiska African Institute (Hellsten, 2016), radicalization of youths and their recruitment to commit violent and illegal activities is not unique to one group or faith. Every society has experienced recruitment of the youth by criminal gangs, ethnic sects, business gurus and local militias. At times child soldiers are as a result of radicalization. As long as Kenyan domestic politics remain divisive, corruption prevails, inequality and lack of political voice continue, the youth of all ethnic groups will be vulnerable and susceptible to believing the promises made by recruiters and getting radicalized.

We want to de-mystify the fact that radicalization can be labelled to Muslim youths only. Research shows that the youth from all faiths can be radicalized. Wright and Piper (1986), Wuthnow and Mellinger (1978), see the role of families and cults as an influencing factor to the youth joining deviant religious groups. There is evidence that even civilized societies tend to radicalize people when they feel marginalized by intruders or see their space occupied by foreigners. They develop a nationalistic agenda to build walls and segregation. Psychologists will argue that fear of unknown people can rattle society to resist interaction, if the intruder is favoured or practices a different faith. Laffer (2011) presents the case of the Jews in late 1930s who were resisted in Europe to make a strong case of economic privilege radicalization.

2. BACKGROUND OF STUDY LOCATION

This paper is informed by an ongoing survey on a group of Muslim youth of Somali community living in Eastleigh, Nairobi. This is a populous region

of Nairobi where most peaceful and hardworking Muslim families live. Kenya is home to approximately 4.3 million Muslims (10% of the population). The discussion centred on the causes of radicalization and how families can help reduce the spread. A total of twenty five (25) youth and elders took part in the survey by filling out a questionnaire and through focus group discussions. Ten (10) families that included father and mother were interviewed together. The rest were seven (7) youth who were self-employed by selling all manner of electronics. Eight (8) were running retail shops. In this category were five (5) young women from the Somali community who doubled up as entrepreneurs and students in local colleges and Universities.

The family and household as presented in this context was also complex. It meant a social structure that determines values of an individual, group or community. In the broader sense, the term family and household, in the African context, were not synonyms. The family was seen as a sub-clan or clan. Some pastoralist communities valued the family more, where everyone is referred to as brother or sister. The household can even be more challenging to define. Devereux and Haddinot (2009)¹ give a metonymy that could mean the inmates of a house, all the persons forming one family, a household or descendants of a particular family leader and those who share the same family name and authority².

3. FIRST HAND INSERTION TO RADICALIZATION

The Institute for War and Peace Reporting³ has collected many interesting narratives on the route to radicalization. In the recent research conducted by Wanja Gathu, a journalist, we reflect on this story of an eight year old boy who found himself confronted with a situation of radicalization.

It reads, the class of the eight year olds was introduced to how to dismantle a gun and reassemble it by their class teacher. The boy went home later in the evening feeling very excited. His parents wondered why their son was full of energy that day. His mother learnt that his science teacher had taught the class how to dismantle and reassemble a gun. In the same lesson, he also learned how to shoot at targets and practiced firing at the blackboard

¹ Devereux & Haddinot discussed in the report by Grace Bediako on the Ghana Living Standards Survey, Report of the Fifth Round (GLSS, 5, 2009), p. 4.

² Grace Bediako reporting on the GLSS, 5, 2008. Since then a new team has produced a sixth round report and now the seventh is coming out.

³ Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), January 30, 2017.

with a toy pistol. According to Moses, the teacher told the class he was preparing them to defend themselves against terrorists. "I was shocked," the mother told IWPR. "I asked my son to tell me exactly when and by whom the lesson was given. He identified a teacher. I took a decision to go to school and talk to the administrators." The conclusion was that the boy did not see anything wrong from the explanation by their teacher because it was like revisiting the war games they watch on TV or Xbox. It became clear that educationalists were targeting and indoctrinating children to become potential members of extremist groups and a pose a huge threat to their families, the country and the region. The response from a clinical psychologist and educationist to IWPR was that, "If they are fed with extremist ideas and are de-sensitized to violence and murder, they become the worst kind of killers" (IWPR).

Radicalization starts with children at that tender age and grow into becoming a walking weapon. This is a great concern to the Kenya government and families. This input helped us to reflect further what is meant by radicalization. Amy-Jane Gielen (2015) had observed why families and the broader professional network of the family, including school teachers, should enable practitioners and family members can act upon early warning signals and prevent influence from family members and peers.

4. THE EXPERIENCE FROM EASTLEIGH NAIROBI

Bashir (2016) and Mulata (2015) conducted a conclusive research to give evidence that various factors contribute to youth radicalization in Kenya. The main ones include very high unemployment, marginalization of certain regions, idleness, false interpretation of religious teaching, and poverty. They also blame poor governance and government repression in the form of counter terrorism measures and lastly radicalized religious environments. The media has been blamed for irresponsible reporting, fueling discrimination and lighting embers of radicalization. Globalization issues have come into play too the youth see their fellow youth being brutalized or praised for atrocities committed. Poor integration pattern in Kenya since independence has given ammunition to radicalization. The people in counties of Mandera, Wajir, Garissa, Marsabit, Turkana and the coastal counties always felt marginalised. It is not a wonder that radicalization is strong here.

5. PUSH AND PULL FACTORS REVISITED

Most studies show the push and pull factors drive radicalization most. Push factors are the negative social, cultural, and political features of one's societal environment that are "pushing" vulnerable individuals towards violent extremism. Push factors are what are commonly known as the underlying root causes such as poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, discrimination, political and economic marginalization (Hassan, 2012). Pull factors, on the other hand, are the positive characteristics and benefits of an extremist organization that "pull" vulnerable individuals to join. These include the ideology of a group, which could emphasize on changing one's condition through violence rather than *apathetic* and *passive* democratic means. They are strong bonds of brotherhood which bring about sense of belonging, reputation building, prospect of fame glory, and other socialization benefits (Hellsten, 2016). However, a recent critique of the push and pull factors gave three important arguments. Malik (2016) argued that radicalisation has not been well understood by most politicians. The misconception has driven and shaped much the domestic counterterror policy around the world, especially Europe and USA.⁴ He cites the 2008 British MI5 study on extremism in the UK, which observed that "far from being religious zealots, a large number of those involved in terrorism do not practise their faith regularly." The report also falsely raised the social justice flag as the main contributor to radicalization that breeds extremism. The report concluded that the would-be jihadis are particularly poor, uneducated and poorly integrated. What was more astonishing, according to Malik, was the verdict from the researchers from London's Queen Mary College. Their findings were that there was a clear strong link between "social inequalities or poor education," to being radicalized and becoming extremist. Malik (2016) cites Marc Sageman who crashed the argument by the Queen Mary College. Sageman, a former CIA operative, currently a counterterrorism consultant to the US government and conducting research on causes of radicalization and extremism found that terrorists are often among the best and brightest from "caring, middle-class families." When this question was put to the twenty five respondents they could not see social inequalities as

⁴ Kenan Malik is also a broadcaster with Al Jazeera. His previous publication is *From Fatwa to Jihad*, shortlisted for the 2010 George Orwell Prize. He writes at Pandaemonium: www.kenanmalik.wordpress.com

a factor but not education. They saw a confluence of factors that led the youth to join al-Shabab.

6. THE RELIGION AND POVERTY ARGUMENT

Religion as a factor argument was flawed and did not convince the youth as the main conventional radicalisation thesis. Kenan Malik argued that it is not religion that drives aspiring jihadis to terror but the politics.⁵ There is evidence that Western intervention in Muslim-majority countries, had pushed many young Muslims into the hands of the jihadists. The convergence is where the conventional thesis focuses on the “pull” factor of fundamentalist Islam and the “push” factor led by the Western foreign policy. Taspınar calls it ‘relative deprivation’ and refers to ‘frustrated achievers,’ those youth who are educated and ambitious but lack real opportunities to go forward.⁶ Youth frustration increases when they begin to compare their circumstances with those of the wealthy elites around them. Also when they compare their own reduced prospects for progress with better opportunities in the developed world. The inability to perceive progress over prolonged periods of time back home could also result in disillusionment that breeds radicalization. The psychological and social strain of these circumstances on young individuals could lead them to seek a sense of purpose through other avenues that change course and challenge the status quo.

7. MIGRATION PATTERN

Global Push factors related to migration and resistance from recipient countries has driven the radicalization agenda. The youth from Eastleigh are lucky they can run their own enterprises and keep the laws of the land even if they came from Somalia. The global phenomenon of migration today keeps altering patterns of living (Espisova, Ray, 2009). Tension created breeds

⁵ Kenan MALIK, “The Push and Pull of Extremism Radicalisation is a Process Born out of Alienation and our Atomised World.” *Al Jazeera* 2016, October 7.

⁶ Ömer Taşpınar is a Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution; Professor of National Security Strategy, U.S. National War College. See his article: “ISIS Recruitment and the Frustrated Achiever,” retrieved on January, 31, 2017, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/amer-tapaenar-/isis-relative-deprivation_b_6912460.html (updated November 8, 2016).

radicalization. According to United Nations (2016) the total number of migrants across the world had increased from 150 million in 2000 to 214 million in 2010. It meant that over 3.1 percent of the world's population was composed of migrants. In a study conducted by SUNY Levin Institute⁷ shows that by 2012 worldwide migration had grown to 230 million people (*The Economist*, 2012). These migratory trends have arisen largely in response to the surge of international capital investment and manufacturing business in search of cheap land and labor. For example, Chinese emigration also includes lower skill labor groups, who may utilize unauthorized means of migration (Song, 2013). Europe has experienced a big rise immigration. Some countries have taken it well (Arango, 2013). Willsher (2012), in the Guardian UK wrote that immigration has been at the forefront of French election campaigns. This led to widespread resistance to immigration by the French citizens. President Nicolas Sarkozy pursued highly restrictive immigration policy during his term until 2012. In 2011 alone, over 33,000 immigrants were deported from France. According to *The Guardian* (2012) the new right-wing government members pushed for additional limits on legal migration as well. These are some of the push and pull factors that can fuel radicalization if not well managed.

This argument shows that resistance to foreigners could fuel radicalization. It also generates what Seth J. Schwartz et al. (2009) presented as identity crisis within their own countries and where one has migrated to, could be a factor that drives radicalization. Seth Schwartz argued that terrorism represents a confluence of cultural, social, and personal identity to underscore the intertwined nature of religion and nationality in their sense of identity. However, it does not necessarily indicate religious zealotry, of the youth. It particularly underlines the role of a cultural identity strongly rooted in collectivism where prioritizing the group over oneself could lead to accepting terrorism. The Eastleigh youth did not see this as a problem where they live despite the global trend in chasing away migrants. The local community of Eastleigh has been very accommodating and supportive. One of the interviewees summed up the discussion as follows,

People who encourage young people to form these views are not true believers and cannot call themselves Muslims. Young people believe these views as they are impressionable and want to fit into some sort of group so will do accept misguided views in order to fit in a group (Hassan 2012).

⁷ SUNY (State University of New York), retrieved from: <http://www.globalization101.org>

Families do not like to see their children enter crime or take part in activities that break the law. For Islam breaking the law is punishable harshly.

8. FAMILY VALUES AND RADICALIZATION

Many Muslim families are aware that Islamic teachings can disrupt any society. They also know harming any living person is considered a grave sin. Therefore any acts of terror is not condoned by Islam. Muslims believe that Islam is a peaceful religion thus any support given to the radicalization of youth is a contradiction of the Islamic faith. During the focus group discussion the youth were asked whether they knew friends who had joined any extremist group. The unanimous answer was that they did not know anyone who had joined rebel groups but they had heard from people. 'There might be some who are not in our bracket of friends but from our circle there were no youth joining extremist groups nor Al Shabaab.' It emerged from the discussion that the youth were not for the idea of joining extremist groups. They did not agree with the ideologies presented and found them baseless for joining extremist groups. A stable family that promotes good social values had a positive impact on the youth.

Therefore, most of the focus youths argued that those who became radicalized cite peer groups, radicalized religious institutions as push factors. They agreed that to stop youth from radicalization there is the need to create more job opportunities, reduce ignorance in the society by creating awareness. According to Hassan (2012), *Push factors* cover a wide range of issues like unemployment, break down of family values due to globalization influencing behavior of the youth. Hassan shows that al-Shabab paid well (\$50-\$150 monthly, depending on the employment offered. However, the Eastleigh youth joining extremist groups for money was very simplistic because some of the youth who have been radicalized tend to be well off financially through wage and self-employment.

9. COUNTERING RADICALIZATION FROM WEEKLY SOCIAL GATHERINGS

The focus group discussion with five youths brought out the argument that where the youth have had created space for coming together to share daily challenges helped to reduce radicalization. The Muslim youth who meet

weekly for prayers and also work have not time for extremism related activities. Amy-Jane Gielen (2015) has presented interesting models used in some European counties like Denmark, Belgium and Germany to allow families to connect with their youth in extremist groups and convince them to come back home. Denmark has (Aarhus) family talk groups were set up by the municipality or by affected parents, 'Les parents concernés' in Belgium. The weekly forums can be used to educate the youth on positive values of life. For instance, why killing is wrong and joining gangs is not accepted in any society. The youth also concurred that in order to curb radicalization there is a need for the government to stop the marginalization especially in the North Eastern counties of Kenya.

The government through county authorities should channel more funds to creation of employment programs that will keep the youth occupied. More educated youth and support for families in poverty can help change ideologies of radicalization. This can be done through proper schools, faith based centres of worship like churches, temples and Mosques. Anna Mühlhausen (2017) has observed that conflict management, transitional Justice and de-radicalization can occur through process of reconciliation in post-conflict societies, negotiations and the renouncement of violent means.

This approach could help African governments to disengage from past strategies adopted like hard-power responses, disproportionate and arbitrary response from law enforcement, relentless operations which have intensified hatred among marginalized communities and reason for extremism. Anna Mühlhausen (2017) sees re-integration can be achieved by re-opening communication with the radicalized youth.

The Kenya Government needs to adopt a more robust, comprehensive, multifaceted and inclusive terrorism counter-strategy driven by a human rights approach as its central pillar, would be an efficient way of dealing with radicalization.

10. CONCLUSION

The dominant literature on radicalization has been very Eurocentric and pro the west. This simple study has raised fundamental causes of radicalization and removed the stigma that Islam is to blame. Every community that feels marginalized and disillusioned by the dominance of a particular group in society can push one into radicalization and extremism. High level of education did not necessarily stem radicalization in such situations. The level

of radicalization caused by migrating communities across borders and continents fuels radicalization especially when denied the opportunity to stay. Migration of people is a human phenomenon that requires tolerance and understanding. Some of these pull and push factors are economic but some are caused by the natural phenomena i.e floods, earthquakes and plagues can cause people to migrate. Should society deny people freedom of movement to safer places? Great humility and tolerance can help control radicalization and bring sanity into society. Radicalization can also be fueled by the interests of businessmen by giving them arms to protect their enterprises. The youth will tend to pledge allegiance to their own clan members rather than question the right motive behind the feud about the nature of business. Seth Schwartz (2009) made a strong case why terrorism represents a confluence of cultural, social, and personal identity in society.

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RADYKALIZACJA A WARTOŚCI RODZINNE.
STUDIUM SOMALIJSKIEJ MŁODZIEŻY MUZUŁMAŃSKIEJ
W DZIELNICY EASTLEIGH (NAIROBI, KENIA)

S t r e s z c z e n i e

W artykule jest analizowane zagadnienie procesu radykalizacji wśród młodzieży. Jak zauważa autor, radykalizacja nie może być utożsamiana z konkretną religią, ale jest problemem międzyreligijnym oraz międzynarodowym. Według niego zdarza się, że radykalizacja kieruje niechęć młodych przeciwko obcokrajowcom, co często jest wykorzystywane przez polityków lub inne siły do osiągnięcia własnych celów. Autor analizuje sposoby promowania tolerancji w wyżej opisanych przypadkach.

Słowa kluczowe: radykalizacja; wartości rodzinne; czynniki wpływające na procesy resocjalizacji.