Hybridizing Radicalization: Recruitment Strategies by Islamist Terror Organizations in South Asia and Europe

Introduction

Terrorism has grown to be one of the most defining security threats for many nation-States in the 21st century as various terrorist organizations target States and their institutions, deriving their incentives from a vast array of political motivations. Albeit also being present before, both Europe and South Asia have witnessed an intensification of this trend in the past twenty years, with some European States partaking in the United States (US)-led 'global war on terror' and subsequently emerging as a target for major Islamist terrorist organizations, most prominently Al Qaeda and the Islamic State (IS). As of now, the activities of terrorist and militant outfits in Europe manifest themselves primarily on a networked, underground level, with such organizations not having become openly embedded in the social fabric of European societies. At the same time, the 2020 attacks in France and Austria, committed during the COVID-19 pandemic, have ensured that the terrorist potential in Europe remains present in both the eyes of the public and the perception of lawmakers (Vidino, 2020).

The overt presence of armed non-State actors is more pronounced in South Asia and marks a stark difference between both regions. Different organizations operate in a variety of different contexts and for a variety of different reasons, ranging from the ethno-nationalist Taliban in Afghanistan to the anti-India Lashkar-e-Taiba in Pakistan to the separatist fight of the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka. A major factor of contemporary instability in the region connects back to the historical trajectory of Afghanistan, where decades of conflict following the late 1970s destabilized societal conditions, and had larger security ramifications for the region as a whole. The Afghan *Mujahideen* received extensive support by both Pakistan and the U.S. in the form of arms, finances and personnel in their efforts against the Soviet Union (Roberts, 2008). Pakistan's support for Islamist non-State actors continued following the Soviet departure from Afghanistan as Pakistan re-focused its efforts on the Jammu & Kashmir region, contested between India and Pakistan since 1947 (Gregory, 2007). In lieu of this, strategic developments in Pakistan have often been conceptualized as inextricably tied to Afghanistan's trajectory, with the Obama administration even developing a combined 'Af-Pak' strategy that viewed Afghanistan and Pakistan as one strategic space rather than two distinguishable strategic contexts (Fair, 2010).[1] Yet, armed militancy is not limited to Afghanistan: the activities of partially local and partially transnational militant/terrorist organizations have also taken their toll on other regional actors, including Bangladesh, India,

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[1] The 'Af-Pak' strategy has not been without criticism. As noted by Khan et al. (2014), the framework modifies the geopolitical context under which armed conflict takes place, theoretically rendering Pakistan another theatre for U.S.-led counterterrorist activities. Fischer (2010) also notes rejections in Pakistan that highlighted Pakistan's high socio-economic development relative to war-torn Afghanistan.

Myanmar, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Both in Europe and South Asia, terrorism has presented a multifaceted and persistent challenge for national security practices.

In terms of recruitment and financing, transnational terrorist organizations have proven apt in capitalizing on technological developments in the realms of finance and communication technologies. Al Qaeda and IS, for example, utilize crypto currencies as a means of concealing capital flows between their different franchises (Dion-Schwarz et al., 2019), and the sophisticated use of the cyberspace by Islamist terror organizations is well-established (Blaker, 2015; Gates & Podder, 2015). Radicalization in the cyberspace has raised new concerns for security agencies all over the world as individuals can increasingly radicalize and organize themselves without being in direct contact with representatives of the organization or the organization as such (Aly et al., 2017), heightening the risk of self-radicalization and 'lone wolf' attacks (Teich, 2013). As potential radicals become harder to detect, radicalization emerges as a seemingly ubiquitous threat that is propelled by the penetration of modern society by advanced communication technologies. Europe in particular, with its young and often disenfranchised Muslim population, has been a major target for the online activities and narratives of terrorist outfits (Bizina & Gray, 2014). As communication has turned more networked and concealable, State apparatuses all over the globe have struggled to formulate adequate policy responses to the novel dimensions of radicalization and militancy.

Tied to relatively recent and accelerating technological developments, cyber radicalization is a comparatively new phenomenon that has not (yet) replaced in-person forms of radicalization in Europe and South Asia. In-person radicalization can include the dissemination of radical messages, especially to young people, and is often facilitated (in the Islamist context) via civil society organizations that promote a hostile interpretation of Islam. Following the rise of the Afghan Taliban and the 2001 9/11 attacks, the purportedly radicalizing role of Pakistani *madrassas*[2] teaching hardline interpretations of Islam to later Taliban and Al Qaeda operatives received surging global media attention (Bergen & Pandey, 2006; Butt, 2012). Alternative forms of schooling that adhere to non-State regulations are often more present in countries (and areas within countries) in which the State possesses little political control, or spaces in which its control is somewhat contested, a condition that can allow for the creation of privately funded institutions that are more accessible for local populations, for instance due to lower schooling fees (Malik et al., 2015). However, such 'parallel' institutions are not constricted to developing economies, and post-9/11 media coverage in Europe and North America has also generated a growing focus on the operations of Islamic educational institutions throughout the West (Berglund, 2015; Cherti et al., 2011). Whilst the vast majority of these institutions do not preach radicalized messages, the existence of parallel institutions engenders the access of individuals and their community to partially radical social networks and individuals, often without any oversight by State authorities. As such, contemporary Islamist radicalization can be conceptualized as a hybrid

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[2] *Madrassas* are Islamic educational establishments that instruct their students on Islamic traditions and jurisprudence. *Madrassas* have existed for centuries and do not necessarily teach hard-line interpretations of the Islamic faith.

form, employing both cyber and in-person approaches that are mutually reinforcing in generating support for the activities of the group(s).

This paper sheds light on this hybridization of radicalization by examining in-person and cyber forms of Islamist radicalization in South Asia and Europe. Recognizing the complexity of contemporary radicalization means accounting for both; 1) in understanding the attractiveness of these radical narratives and 2) developing policy responses that mitigate the impact radical messages continue to have. The paper uses the notion of parallel institutions as a conceptual starting point to examine how parallel institutions respond to both broader regional factors as well as more specific, idiosyncratic ones. The paper first focuses on structural factors in South Asia before examining the case of Pakistani *madrassas.* It then moves on to structural factors in (Western) Europe, elaborating on the role of parallel institutions in the United Kingdom (UK) as a case study. Following this, the paper highlights how cyber radicalization serves a complementary function to in-person forms of radicalization, speaking to the same emotive responses of the recipient. Based on this, the paper highlights the need to develop efficient counternarratives and policies that address the grievances of the communities most affected by radicalization.

Theorizing Parallel Institutions

Focusing especially on the role of educational institutions in South Asia and Europe in disseminating radicalized messages and serving as a space for radicalization, this paper conceptually refers to such social and physical spaces as 'parallel institutions'. This notion conceptually borrows from the idea of 'parallel societies', which has been popularized in European immigration debates and refers to *"situations where there is a lack of national social cohesion and where the state lacks ability and/or willingness to handle social diversity"* (Egge & Solhjell, 2018, p. 7; quoted in Borch, 2018, pp. 80-1). Real or perceived parallel societies have grown to be the target of increased criticism in Europe in recent years due to their alleged role in promoting 'un-European' values, with the purported existence of Islam-dominated 'no-go-zones' in European cities being the epitome of this discourse (Tiflati, 2018). Parallel structures, then, are structures that exist alongside the mainstream structures of a given society, which, in turn, are primarily overseen and coordinated by the State and its institutions. As this paper will show, parallel institutions exist in a variety of contexts for a variety of different reasons, and it is key to assert that the notion of parallel institutions does not imply that such institutions are necessarily illicit or dangerous. They can, for example, provide a key social resource for minority groups within a given country, serving a social support function.

This paper borrows the notion of 'parallel' and discusses the phenomenon of parallel institutions in greater depth, especially in the educational sector. Parallel educational institutions can be defined as non-State educational bodies that exist alongside State-governed or State-affiliated institutions (i.e. private schools that follow State-determined curricula) and perform functions (for example providing education and social services) that the State and its institutions, for whatever reason, are incapable or unwilling to provide.

Inability or unwillingness, as will be shown below, can be the expression of a vast array of political conditions: in Pakistan, the inability to provide schooling for all can be partially traced back to the lack of the country's economic growth and the holes that are consequently left in the educational budget. In the UK, parallel institutions were actively encouraged to serve the norms of political equality. As such, inability/unwillingness are not necessarily negative terms and do not necessarily express political indifference. At the same time, inability/unwillingness are both factors that can overlap and often are mutually reinforcing: parallel institutions often emerge in social and material spaces in which the presence and social legitimacy of the State is weak or is in the process of being weakened.

Terror organizations face different constraints and difficulties based on the socio-political environment they operate in, meaning that their in-person radicalization strategies must be modified accordingly. As such, in-person radicalization is not a monolithic process but takes on different forms in different socio-political environments, both within a region and within a country. As such, some socio-political environments may be more conducive towards the emergence of parallel societal structures than others.

Parallel Institutions in South Asia: Structural Factors

The recruiting techniques of terrorist outfits in Europe and South Asia display some inevitable differences: the underlying message (e.g. the infidels must be challenged) and the sentiments this message appeals to, for instance, are likely to at least be somewhat similar. However, structural factors between Europe and South Asia also differ significantly, making it paramount to account for the contingent political environment at-risk individuals operate in. If a State is economically unable (i.e. due to budgetary restraints) or unwilling (i.e. due to partisan biases or other political priorities) to enforce its legislative regulations, the rule of law in a given country is likely to reflect the State's relative weakness in this political domain. Figure 1 below provides an indication of the comparatively weak rule of law prevalent in South Asia in 2020:

Figure 1: Rule of Law in South Asia[3]

Country	Global Rank (out of 128 ranked countries)
Nepal	61
Sri Lanka	66
India	69

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[3] No data available for Bhutan and the Maldives.

Myanmar	112
Bangladesh	115
Pakistan	120
Afghanistan	122

Source: Rule of Law Index 2020, World Justice Project (n.d.).

Seven out of eight South Asian countries are in the bottom half of the world's countries in enforcing the rule of law, reflecting the relatively weak ability and/or willingness to enforce national regulations throughout the region. Of course, this does not mean that there are no regulatory processes or that there is no willingness to enforce them: in a country such as Afghanistan, torn apart by conflict, educational regulations (i.e. what is being taught how and by whom) are simply not enforceable because of the security situation, even if the intent is there. The relatively poor rule of law marks a first structural difference between South Asia and Europe: the same index places Denmark, Norway and Finland at top of the list, with Hungary ranking on number 60 as the lowest-rated EU member State (World Justice Project, n.d.).[4] In other words, EU-Europe's poorest upholder of the rule of law still outperforms South Asia's best performer, highlighting that the socio-political environments in Europe and South Asia diverge significantly from one another in how permissive they could potentially be in enabling parallel structures to emerge. A poor or absent rule of law can be seen as a key variable shaping the emergence and sustenance of parallel institutions (without this necessarily always being the case).

Participation in parallel educational institutions can be incentivized by multiple reasons. These include:

- Economic factors: the parallel institution is more economically affordable for families, hereby being especially attractive for low-income strata of society.

- Accessibility factors: the parallel institution is the only form of schooling available in the area and is thus more likely to be used by communities with low degrees of connectivity.

- Normative factors: the teaching provided in the parallel institution is seen as normatively preferable (for instance by espousing certain religious positions).

- Qualitative factors: the parallel institution may be seen as providing better education relative to other educational bodies.

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[4] Moldova is the lowest-ranking European country on the index on rank 82.

In consideration of structural factors, point 1 and 2 deserve special attention. The material living standards and income of both a country and its inhabitants determine experiences of poverty and relative poverty (relative to the immediate social environment), also shaping access to social mobility. Put differently, growth and wealth is key for economic and human development: economic growth could, for instance, enable infrastructure investment that improves the connectivity of a country's more marginalized communities. Despite some improvement, economic growth in South Asia has been negligible, especially when compared to the EU (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: GDP per capita (in US$), the EU and South Asia
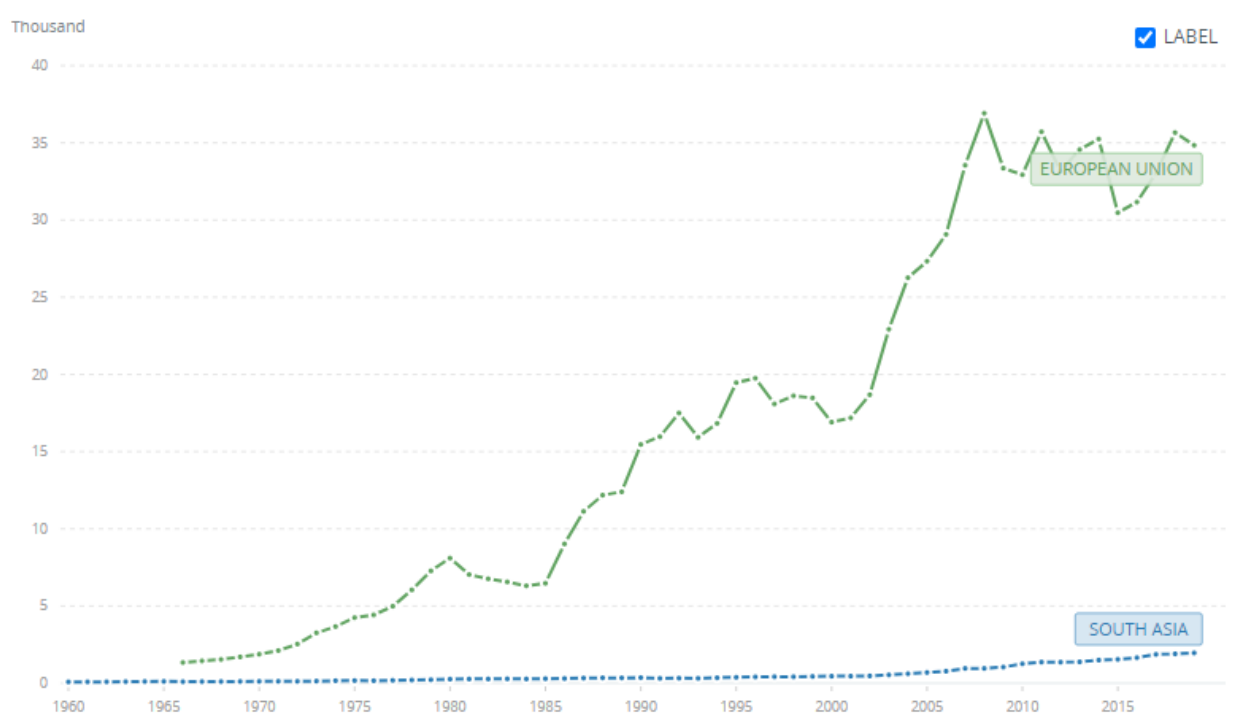
Source: World Bank data (n.d.).

As South Asian societies have remained generally stuck in their status as developing economies, immediate economic imperatives for significant parts of the local populations have remained focused on making ends meet, partially also through the use of child labor.[5] As a result, social mobility is impeded by larger structural factors and the economic incentives that families and communities can derive from these factors. In combination with a negligible investment in public education services and divides in access to education between urban and rural spaces, any access to education at all is more of a privilege than a right in South Asia (see Figure 3). The absence of well-funded State institutions and lack of educational

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[5] According to the International Labour Organization (n.d.), recent national surveys from South Asia (excluding all children laboring in Afghanistan and many children in other South Asian countries) place the number of working children in South Asia at 29 million, detrimentally impacting access to education, especially in rural communities.

investment also leaves a vacuum for private education suppliers to fill. Depending on the legislative context in the country, private institutions may also be able to create their own curriculum in return for lessening the financial strain on the educational budget.

Figure 3: Access to Education in South Asia[6]

Country	Global Rank (out of 187 countries)
Sri Lanka	73
The Maldives	103
India	135
Bhutan	136
Bangladesh	142
Nepal	145
Pakistan	146
Bhutan	136
Afghanistan	169

Source: Education Index, United Nations Development Programme (2013).

In conjunction with a generally poor rule of law and State performance, communities throughout South Asia ultimately lack access to education, creating an incentive for South Asian governments to make use of private education suppliers in order to lessen their administrative strain. This outsourcing of education comes at the detriment of governmental oversight. In combination with a precarious economic condition for many, this leads to private schools often being the sole form of education available to communities, especially in rural areas. Systemic inequities and structural dimensions of socio-economic underdevelopment, for instance in the urban-rural divide, have subsequently enabled parallel institutions to a significant extent.

The polarization of South Asia as a political space along ethnic, cultural, economic and religious fault lines in recent years may have also forged a socio-normative dimension to

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[6] Calculated using Mean Years of Schooling and Expected Years of Schooling.

further incentivize participation for communities in parallel institutions dominated by their own ethnic, linguistic or religious group. Indian Muslims, for example, despite not having a history of religious violence, face marginalization (Maizland, 2020). Bangladesh has become a major destination for Muslim Rohingya refugees fleeing ethnic violence in Buddhist-majority Myanmar, leading to interethnic tensions in Bangladesh. Bangladesh is also subject to strong partisanship, with the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and its ally, Jamaat-i-Islami, accusing the ruling Awami League of being un-Islamic (Hasan et al., 2019). Political Islam has here been introduced into the mainstream as a platform behind which to rally supporters in national party politics. The persecution of the Rohingya in Myanmar in the first place simultaneously highlights the anti-Muslim sentiments present in Myanmar, concurrently legitimizing anti-State insurrection by pro-Muslim groups (International Crisis Group, 2017). In Sri Lanka, the Sinhalese government of the Rajapaksa brothers has risen again on a rhetoric of Buddhist nationalism which, especially following the 2019 Easter bombings in Colombo, frames religious and ethnic minorities as a threat to national security and cohesion (Imtiyaz, 2020). Sri Lanka portrays a trend of growing authoritarianism that comes at the expense of Muslim minorities and civil rights more generally. The Maldives has had the largest number of IS fighters per capita, pointing towards an internal radicalization issue that has been propelled by domestic instability (Shama, 2018). The situation in Pakistan remains volatile whilst Afghanistan continues to be struck by civil war. Almost all countries within South Asia, then, struggle with growing religious polarization that seemingly legitimizes the political narratives on both the pro-Islam and anti-Muslim sides of the conversation, indicating that radicalization incentives are also shaped by contingent national trends.

Any thorough analysis of contemporary South Asian radicalization must seek to account for both contingent and overarching trends. Whilst South Asia has registered a slight improvement in economic living standards over the past decades, much of the region remains impoverished and without access to social mobility and/or social services. For different reasons and in different ways, non-State actors such as Lashkar-e-Taiba in Pakistan, the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Arakan Army in Myanmar have capitalized on this by providing social services in impoverished, often rural areas, thereby inserting themselves into the region's social fabric and legitimizing their operations by providing services that the government does not or cannot provide (von Hippel, 2004). Although the link between poverty and radicalization may not be as clear-cut as it is often assumed (Mesøy, 2013), destabilized environments contribute to precarious living environments that can incentivize support for militant outfits providing socio-economic relief and security. In addition to a poor economic performance and a weak rule of law, South Asia is marred by growing authoritarianism and populism, allowing radical elements in these societies to capitalize on the growing economic, social and political volatility. This politico-economic volatility has been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Islam et al., 2020). In some instances, regional radicalization could thus manifest a response to the growing marginalization of Muslim communities in South Asian societies at the hands of increasingly authoritarian regimes and/or the politicization of religious issues. In other cases, for instance in Pakistan, political structures are incapable of providing these services, a disposition further intensified by sectarian clashes and bipartisan conflicts.

It is ultimately the convergence of a series of unaddressed social and partially economic issues alongside the inability and partly also the unwillingness of South Asian States to address these grievances that propel radicalization in the region. Political events have contributed to this, including the 2008 Mumbai attacks, the 2019 Easter bombings and the 2019 revocation of Jammu and Kashmir's unique status in India's constitution. The Easter bombings appeared to confirm the popularized Muslim-terrorism nexus while the Jammu & Kashmir issue had already been used as a rallying call for Muslim radicals all over the world prior (Reed, 2016) - yet, the abrogation of Article 370 appeared to confirm the image of some of these Kashmiri Muslims as besieged (Zia, 2020). It would nevertheless be too simplistic to purely reduce dangers of radicalization to novel anti-Muslim sentiments and a Muslim backlash against these sentiments. Rather, in-person radicalization via interpersonal networks and civil society organizations capitalizes on the historically poor State presence and performance in vast swathes of the region, the continued marginalization of especially rural, poor communities throughout South Asia and inter-group tensions exacerbated by recent developments. This highlights that radicalization, despite requiring political responses, is a fundamentally social problem that necessitates social and economic reforms addressing the needs of those most at risk of radicalization.

Ultimately, different structural factors can either enable parallel institutions or constrain their relative societal influence. These factors differ significantly when the EU and South Asia are considered. The following section will elaborate on the role of *madrassas* in Pakistan as a case in point.

Case Study: *Madrassas* in Pakistan

Factors connected to regional radicalization respond to a combination of contingent factors and larger structural issues prevalent in some form or another in all of South Asia. The partially radicalizing function of *madrassas*, increasingly founded in Pakistan throughout the 1980s, has become part of the international discourse on Islamic terrorism following the 9/11 attacks and the rule of the Taliban in Afghanistan, many of whom had been trained in Pakistani *madrassas*. Given the disproportional attention they have received in the presumed *madrassa*-terrorism nexus, *madrassas* warrant further attention.

Although structural issues play a key role in permitting parallel institutions to emerge, they are not the only factor: in the case of Pakistan, the creation of Islamic non-State schools became an imperative of domestic policy under the reign of General Zia ul-Haq, who served as the Pakistani Head of State between 1977 and 1988. Zia pursued a targeted Islamization of the country by introducing *sharia* law as the country's defining legal framework, filling judicial, bureaucratic and military positions with religious hardliners and supporting legal bodies such as the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII), which continues to play an important role in shaping government policy (Shams, 2016). Zia also Islamized Pakistan's foreign policy, becoming a main supporter of the *mujahideen* in their fight against the Soviets in Afghanistan. He received extensive diplomatic and financial support in the construction of his domestic and foreign policy by the Gulf States, led by Saudi-Arabia, resulting in what some have called the

'Wahhabization' and 'Saudization' of Pakistani society and culture (Hoodbhoy, 2017). Crucially, much of the Gulf funding went into the educational sector, most notably in the form of *madrassas* throughout Pakistan that began to teach a radicalized Wahhabi interpretation of the Islamic faith (Jaffrelot, 2017). During Zia's reign the number of *madrassas* in Pakistan grew from less than 300 to more than 2700, leaving a marked Saudi-Wahhabi imprint on modern Pakistani culture: as suggested by Majid Siddiqui, a Karachi-based journalist, *"He* [Zia] *used religion as a tool to strengthen his power.* [...] *Today's Pakistan is a reflection of Zia-ul Haq's policies, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to get rid of it* [the cultural legacy]*"* (quoted in Shams, 2016). Zia's turn towards Islam as a form of projecting political power had, among other things, translated into a profound shift in Pakistan's educational sector.

As the funding model of the *madrassas* was tied to the Saudi State and Saudi charities rather than the Pakistani educational budget, the *madrassas* were able to sustain themselves as educational institutions parallel to that of the State following Zia's death in 1988. Having shifted its foreign policy efforts to Jammu & Kashmir but still making use of radical Islamist ideology, Pakistan's political establishment treated the institutions with indifference if not active political support. The teachings of some of these institutions found resonance in the anti-American followers of the Taliban, Al Qaeda and the IS, preaching violence against non-Muslims and Muslim minority groups. By the 1990s, some *madrassas* in Pakistan began to provide military training in their facilities, exploiting the lack of oversight and/or indifference shown towards them by the Pakistani State (Johnston et al., 2006). The training provided to ethnic Pashtuns, many of which later joined the Taliban in Afghanistan, created a nexus between Wahhabism, Saudi-Arabia and Pakistan on the one hand and radical militancy in Afghanistan and Pakistan on the other hand. The Norwegian academic Thomas Hegghammer (2010) subsequently argued that,

"Saudi Arabia occupies a central place in the modern history of militant Islamism. Since the oil boom in the 1970s, the kingdom has promoted its ultraconservative Wahhabi interpretation of Islam across the world. […] *To many in the West, Saudi Arabia is synonymous with, and partly responsible for, the rise of Muslim extremism in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries"* (pp. 1-2).

In the case of Pakistan, the parallel institutions present in the country today were actively encouraged by the State, presumably with the intent to replace the country's comparatively secular education framework with a more Islamic one. The persistence of these institutions following Zia's death is simultaneously indicative of both the lack of governmental authority as well as the unwillingness to tackle radicalized messages, resulting in the creation of a multi-tiered education system that is no longer wholly controlled by the State. The prevalence of *madrassas* in Pakistan indicates that idiosyncratic contexts play an important role in shaping the development of parallel institutions. It is possible to oversimplify the impact of structural issues: Zia created parallel institutions to challenge the bodies that he viewed as too secular. As such, parallel institutions are not necessarily just enabled by those in power but can also be encouraged by them for a variety of political gains.

The contemporary relevance of *madrassas* in Pakistan reflects heavily on the State's inability to ensure that its regulations are upheld whilst also highlighting its accommodation to parallel

and partially radical institutions. Via the 2009 National Education Policy, Pakistan now formally distinguishes between three educational institutions: public schools, private schools and *madrassas*. As indicated by Figure 4 below, all three forms of schooling have different educational angles and imply different degrees of economic accessibility:

Figure 4: Three-Tier Educational System in Pakistan

	Language of instruction	**Curriculum**	**Tuition fees**
Private schools	English	Natural sciences with special emphasis on secular subjects	High
Public schools	Urdu, English	Semi-secular subjects with some coverage of Islamic studies	Normal
Madrassas	Urdu, Arabic	Religious/Islamic studies	None

Source: National Education Policy, Ministry of Education, Government of Pakistan (2009).

For many families in Pakistan, sending their children to local *madrassas* remains the only available form of education. Beyond economic incentives, the Islam-oriented teaching may provide another incentive for joining *madrassas* over State schools, and 2020 estimates suggest that between 1.8 and 3.5 million students are enrolled in *madrassas* in Pakistan today (Hunter, 2020). Reliable numbers are hard to come by - however, it has been noted (Andrabi et al., 2005) that most Pakistani families are still significantly more likely to send their children to public or private schools than to *madrassas*. As such, the indoctrination of students in radical parallel institutions might be an issue that is connected to the teachings of some ultra-orthodox *madrassas* rather than *madrassas* more generally (Dalrymple, 2005). The mere existence of parallel institutions in general hence does not necessarily equal radicalization. That said, several high-profile studies (Ali, 2009; Fair, 2008; Rahman, 2003, quoted in Leirvik, 2008) have all found positive correlations between holding militant opinions and having undergone schooling in *madrassas*, indicating how a permissive political environment can, in combination with other factors, facilitate increased radicalization, especially in societies with a weakened rule of law.

Home to only around 300 *madrassas* by the late 1970s, Pakistan now hosts around thirty thousand such educational bodies, all of which are regulated by central boards representing partially radical strains of Islam: Barelvi, Deobandi, Ahle-Hadith, Ahle-Tashih and the Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan (Rasool, 2020; Sayeed, 2019). The educational system in Pakistan has undergone immense politicization in recent decades that concurrently reflects and reinforces

the Wahhabi legacy created primarily during the 1970s and 1980s. In 2019, Islamabad announced that it would take over almost 200 schools, detaining more than 100 people in the process in a push against banned organizations (Sayeed, 2019). Partial (if only performative) efforts are thus present, at least on some level. However, as is reflected in the emergence of *madrassas* in Pakistan, the issue of parallel institutions speaks to issues of radicalism just as much as it speaks to structural-governmental failures that must be rectified. A struggling economy and a continuously impoverished rural population are likely to create immense challenges for any future Pakistani government to regain full control over the educational sector, even if genuine attempts are made.

The emergence and survival of parallel institutions is, as the case of Pakistan highlights, a multifaceted phenomenon that connects to both contingent factors as well as larger trends that exist throughout the wider region. Political and economic marginalization and growing authoritarian tendencies throughout the region could transform South Asia into a major space for radicalization if regional governments do not take necessary measures.

Radicalization in Europe: Structural Factors

The cultural, economic and political factors that have benefited terrorist organizations in South Asia are not as prevalent in EU-Europe, where Muslims are minorities and have predominantly entered the bloc as migrants in the past before partially becoming citizens of respective EU member States. As discussed above, EU-Europe also displays a significantly stronger economic performance, lower levels of net poverty, better access to education and a higher rule of law. Many of the structural factors that incentivize the emergence of and participation in parallel institutions in South Asia are hence less pronounced in EU-Europe. That said, other structural factors do exist, especially in regards to heightened anti-Muslim sentiments and systemic forms of socio-economic marginalization that particularly impacts Muslim communities and individuals. Albeit the structural issues, then, are not the same, there are some overlaps in structural components that contribute to 'homegrown' Islamic radicalization and terrorism in the European Union. A brief historical revisitation of these structural factors is warranted.

Although migratory patterns and motivations have shifted in the past, the demographic presence of Muslim communities in Western Europe in particular has been rising steadily over the past sixty years. The first major influx of Muslim immigrants into post-WWII Western Europe occurred mostly in the 1950s and 1960s and was connected to a growing labor demand in Western Europe's quickly reindustrializing States, most notably France, Western Germany, the Netherlands and the UK. In some of these cases, Muslim migration to the EU (then still the EEC) was compounded by processes of decolonization, leading to a migration of former colonial subjects to what used to be the core of the European empires (Van Mol & de Valk, 2015). During this period, Western Europe-bound migration from developing economies was treated as a largely positive phenomenon that helped to facilitate economic growth and reindustrialization following the end of WWII (Bonifazi, 2008). As their migration was predominantly driven by industry demand, Muslim immigrants primarily settled in large

industrial cities, and, due to the conceptualization of Muslim migration in economic terms, European governments often conceived of the Muslim presence as a merely temporary development, partially resulting in lacking efforts to integrate Muslim communities into European societies on a socio-cultural level (Françoise & Souris, 2018). Lacking integrative efforts were compounded by an urban policy that concentrated Muslim communities in monolithic neighborhoods and culminated in the partial segregation of Muslim and non-Muslim social spheres in Western Europe.

By the 1970s, it had become apparent that the Muslim demographic presence in Europe was more than a momentary blip as many migrants remained eager to remain in the countries they had spent the last years working in. This led to a fundamental shift in Western European immigration regimes which now predominantly began to emphasize family reunifications rather than labor migration as a migratory framework, enabling Muslim workers to relocate their families to Western Europe in the pursuit of permanent residence (Maillard, 2010). The growing presence of migratory social networks and family structures resulted in a growing demand for Islamic community infrastructure, i.e. in the form of mosques and community centers (Françoise & Souris, 2018). Muslim immigration to Europe did not abate after the stage of family reunification, registering a growing number of refugees in the 1990s and 2010s (Hageboutros, 2016; Park, 2015). As a result of these migratory patterns, EU-Europe's share of a Muslim population has grown from 4% in 1990 to 6% in 2018, projected to rise to 8% by 2020, with incoming Muslim refugees and the comparatively higher reproductive rate of European Muslims contributing to this surge (Françoise & Souris, 2018; Hackett, 2017). Depending on the restrictiveness of European immigration policies, the share of Muslims in EU-Europe is predicted to grow to 11.2% in 2050, almost doubling the 2016 numbers (Hackett, 2017). A growing Muslim population, then, has become a key characteristic of modern-day Europe.

Although Muslims face different economic and social conditions in different European States, some larger structural trends prevail throughout the Union, painting a statistical image of Muslims as a largely marginalized strata of European society. Partially due to failed integration policies, Muslims remain comparatively poorer than the average European citizen, also registering higher unemployment and poverty rates, a greater extent of community policing, less access to higher education and less access to social mobility in general (Françoise & Souris, 2018). In other words, Muslims remain structurally disadvantaged in modern Europe.

The continued structural marginalization and exclusion of strata of society is a risk for the cohesion of any society - in the case of Europe's Muslims, these structural fault lines have been underpinned further by an othering logic that differentiates Muslims from other Europeans in cultural, economic, ethnic, racial and ultimately also religious terms. As indicated above, urban and housing policy has played a key role in this development by spatially concentrating socio-economic disenfranchisement in certain areas. The predominant settlement of incoming migrants in specific neighborhoods, often the least wealthy areas of a given urban center, has in some instances culminated in the *de-facto* economic and social segregation of Muslim communities, intensifying a perception of communal exclusion. Public attention on the role of such areas has been growing following

the 2015 attacks in Brussels and Paris, committed by Belgian and French-born individuals, with some commentators (see for example Bartunek & Macdonald, 2015; Burke, 2015) describing some of the Parisian *banlieues* and the economically marginalized Molenbeek area in Brussels as 'breeding grounds' for Islamic radicalism and militancy. This framing inevitably contributes to a further focus on the Muslim community as such rather than the structural factors that could incentivize radicalization. For many European Muslims, a sense of exclusion and marginalization ultimately operates as a defining caveat of their everyday lives, culminating in the continued experience of communal as well as individual disenfranchisement. Dissatisfaction with the political status quo is subsequently to some extent a reaction to the marginalization and lacking access to social mobility experienced by many Muslims.

The perception of Muslims within Europe has also been pivotally shaped by developments outside of Europe, most notably the 9/11 attacks and the emergence of security discourses that overtly linked Muslim communities to terrorist activities. The 9/11 attacks and the growing frequency of Islamist terror attacks in Europe has compounded public perceptions of Muslims as culturally alien and politically dangerous, validating growing criticism against Muslims on a political level. This socio-political environment has enabled the entrance of Islamophobia into political mainstream discourses, for instance in the form of parties such as the German AfD, the French Front National (now called the National Rally) and the Dutch PVV, but also the growing use of right-wing rhetoric by traditionally more centrist parties (Goodman, 2017). Beyond national politics, this securitizing discourse has been reinforced by popular media coverage that frequently links Muslims to criminal activities and accuses them of harboring terrorist sympathies, implying a nexus between being Muslim and criminal/terrorist behavior (Saeed, 2007). In connection with terror attacks committed by Al Qaeda and IS, 21st century European counterterrorism legislations predominantly target Muslim communities, securitizing Muslim institutions and individuals (Cesari, 2013) and contributing to a social climate in which Muslims are perceived as other (if not outright hostile). In connection with this, several European countries have targeted physical manifestations of the Islamic faith, for instance by criminalizing the use of clothing items such as burqas in public places (Müller, 2019). The discrimination against Muslim minorities, in combination with the structural marginalization experienced by many Muslims and a sense of injustice, inequity and humiliation towards Muslims globally (European Commission's Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation, 2008) makes this social environment more conducive for the formulation of more assertive and potentially radical political identities.

Everything considered, lacking integration efforts by European countries have created social conditions in which radicalization becomes a pertinent alternative for especially young people experiencing marginalization and exclusion in their everyday lives. Simultaneously, the continued military operations of Western countries in sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa and the Middle East can contribute to young Muslims developing an opposition to the policies of Western States, also reinforcing the idea that Muslim countries (and the Islamic faith more generally) is besieged by non-Muslims in different strategic theatres. EU member States have played a key role in creating these social-ideational spaces for radicalization. Simultaneously, the partial spatial concentration of marginalized communities has created physical spaces in

which the State lacks oversight and legitimacy and in which the creation of and participation in parallel institutions emerges as an alternative for some members of these communities. The case of parallel institutions in the UK, discussed below, serves as an illuminating example of how structural and context-dependent factors interact in evoking senses of marginalization.

Parallel Institutions in the UK

As is the case with *madrassas* in Pakistan, parallel educational institutions in the UK have evolved due to a combination of regional-structural factors as well as idiosyncratic factors that pertain to the specifically British approach towards integration. The UK has been one of the key destinations for individuals and communities from Great Britain's former imperial possessions, including Muslim-majority countries such as Bangladesh and Pakistan, and Muslims are the UK's third largest religious group in total numbers (Office for National Statistics, 2018). At the same time, British cities such as Manchester and especially London have become sites of major terrorist attacks in the 21st century, partially committed by British-born individuals. Similar to the discourses on some *banlieues* in Paris and Molenbeek in Brussels, the inner-city areas of Birmingham, Leeds, London and Luton have been called 'hotbeds of radicalization' by some (Sageman, 2008). Reflecting a broader transnational discourse on Muslims and terrorism, Muslims are viewed with suspicion and as living in permanent danger of radicalization (Choudhury & Fenwick 2011; Jackson 2007; McDonald & Yaser, 2011).

Similar to other European countries, British Muslims remain structurally disadvantaged and socially discriminated against, generating a social environment in which radicalization channels a response to experiences of social exclusion. More than 50% of British Muslim communities are concentrated within economically deprived areas and possess their own community institutions (including schools and prayer spaces), leading to some critics arguing that this structure has discouraged the mixing of different ethnic and religious groups and thus negatively impacted societal cohesion (Françoise & Souris, 2018). Only 68% of British Muslims report having leisure time contact with non-Muslim individuals (El-Menouar, 2017). Muslims in the UK also have less access to social mobility, e.g. via higher education or a professional career (Françoise & Souris, 2018). Following 9/11 and the growing number of Islamist attacks on British soil, Muslims have increasingly grown to be the victim of hate crimes (see Figure 5), especially in times of heightened IS activities in the early to mid-2010s. Islamophobia also reacted to events outside the UK: following the Christchurch shooting in New Zealand in March 2019, anti-Muslim hate crimes in the UK soared by 593% within a week (Dodd, 2019).

Figure 5: Increase of reported anti-Muslim hate crimes in the UK, 2011-2015

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Increase in anti-Muslim reported hated crimes	+30%	+28%	+11.3%	-41%	+223%

Source: Françoise & Souris (2018).

The case of the UK exemplifies how socio-economic conditions and experiences can generate a demand for parallel institutions on a socio-emotional level. Parallel institutions in the UK perform not the same function as they do in Pakistan, where schooling is not readily available - rather, they provide a social outlet for socially and economically disenfranchised Muslims who exist as a minority in a country that is increasingly opposed to their presence and practices. Although case-to-case differentiations have to be made, this experience of marginalization is one that is shared by many young Muslims in EU-Europe today, highlighting how social environments can incentivize radicalization.

As in Pakistan, idiosyncratic factors, in this case the UK's institutionalized form of multiculturalism, need to be accounted for besides broader structural trends. Registering a growing number of Muslim migrants from its former imperial dominions from the 1950s onwards, the UK instilled a system that focused on racial and ethnic equality and the formation of autonomous organizational structures that were to safeguard the *"customs and religious practices"* of incoming migrants, hereby valuing ethno-religious dimensions of identity rather than seeking to reduce communal identity to national belonging and citizenship (Françoise & Souris, 2018). In the 1990s, this doctrine of multiculturalism was institutionalized by the Labour Party, which suggested that adherence to mainstream culture was not decisive for the fostering of a cohesive society (Lassalle, 2011). This approach differs significantly from other modes of integration: France, for instance, emphasizes the shared national identity of being French over ethnic and/or religious sentiments of belonging, in effect promoting assimilation into the mainstream body politic (Barou, 2014).

Following 9/11 and the 2001 race riots in Bradford, the UK shifted its multiculturalist approach towards a 'soft' form of assimilation, for instance through the 2003 Prevent Program, which launched a number of social and educational initiatives to prevent radicalization. However, the Prevent Program was heavily criticized for (1) normalizing Islamophobia by conceptualizing 'Britishness' in a way that excluded Muslims from being British and (2) over policing Muslim communities (Qurashi, 2018). Indicating the growing public dissatisfaction with an approach that was seen as being too permissive towards Islamic extremism at the advent of the emergence of the IS, former Prime Minister David Cameron (2011) went as far as declaring multiculturalism in the UK as 'failed,' suggesting that the UK had long *"tolerated these segregated communities behaving in ways that run completely counter to our values"*. Cameron's statement marked a shift from a multiculturalist approach to a more

assimilationist approach. Although the UK's ways of addressing integration have hence shifted over time, its initial approach was one that actively encouraged the creation of parallel organizations and institutions in line with its multicultural mantra, thereby enabling a supply of parallel institutions.

Parallel institutions in the UK ultimately derive from a political vacuum that allows them to emerge as well as a social demand for institutions that responds to experiences of marginalization and discrimination. Similar to some of the *madrassas* in Pakistan, many Islamic community organizations in the UK (including mosques, Islamic cultural centers and Quran schools) have been funded by Saudi charities, resulting in a prevalence of Wahhabi thought in many influential institutions (Wojtowicz, 2012). The precise educational character of some institutions is also unclear at best, with reports in 2006 revealing that some Islamic private schools were not educational in nature but were *"little more than places where the Quran is recited"* (ibid). A 2007 documentary produced by Channel 4 revealed that the Regent Park Mosque in London, funded with the help of the Saudi royal family, actively instructed its followers to disobey British law and social conventions, i.e. regarding the equality of the sexes (Doward, 2007). London's Finsbury Park Mosque helped to radicalize several Al Qaeda operatives and was the main site of teaching for the infamous cleric Abu Hamza, who now serves a life sentence in the United States for federal terrorism charges (Ax, 2015). Similar concerns have also been raised for other mosques throughout the country, for example in Birmingham (Bennhold & de Freytas-Tamura, 2017). Quran- and Islamic schools can serve radicalizing functions as well: a 2009 think tank report suggested that radical, anti-Western sentiments and non-moderate interpretations of Islam are rising in the teachings of private educational institutions in the UK (MacEoin, 2009). Of course, radical teachings do not necessarily translate into students turning out as radicals or as sufficiently fundamentalist to commit terrorist attacks. That said, the dissemination of these messages, in combination with an often segregated social environment, normalizes violent anti-Western messages that can contribute to further radicalization in the future.

Modes of and motivations for radicalization remain a complex phenomenon that plays into socio-economic factors, spatial segregation and a supply and demand for parallel institutions, both in the UK and EU-Europe. In some instances, parallel institutions have been encouraged and initially served integrative visions and purposes. Yet, and this is the case for the entirety of the EU, they would not manage to survive if there was no social demand for their potentially radical teachings: parallel institutions and their teachings provide direction and meaning in a social environment that is perceived as marginalizing, excluding and sometimes outright hostile by young and often relatively uneducated Muslims. Whilst it is important to address sources of funding and the essential supply of parallel institutions, it is simultaneously key to comprehend that they fulfill fundamentally socio-emotional functions for their attendants. The primary root cause of radicalization, namely social and economic marginalization and a corresponding sense of humiliation, will be paramount to address to generate any sustainable solution to the issue of radicalization in Europe.

Cyber Radicalization and Extremist Narratives

Unlike in-person radicalization, radicalization via cyber networks operates more independent from interpersonal linkages and the physical access to extremist ideas or individuals and groups espousing these ideas. Owing to its existence as a networked entity, cyberspace defies the boundaries generated by States and the administrative units within States and is hence theoretically open to anyone connected to the internet. Advancements in cyberspace have subsequently allowed terrorist organizations to circumvent some of the physical anti-terror measures put in place in Europe and South Asia in recent years and decades. Crucially, digital access and proficiency have become less coupled to economic income than it has been in previous decades, with the internet now being more accessible to people of lower socio-economic standing. This is not to say that internet access is inherently egalitarian: Pakistan, for instance, is witness to a significant urban-rural divide in digital connectivity that is owed to businesses investing into technological infrastructure in cities rather than the countryside, resulting in rural areas suffering from generally poor digital connectivity (Baloch & Musyani, 2020). Cyberspace subsequently serves a somewhat democratizing function (as it enables access to information for a larger number of people) but can simultaneously reinforce the structural divides in a given society (i.e. the competition for economic capital between rural and urban spaces). It may also reinforce divides between developed economies and developing economies by reflecting inequities in the access to digital platforms. That said, radical thoughts and materials are now readily and globally available, allowing individuals to radicalize themselves without prior integration into radicalized social contexts, further facilitating the radicalization of individuals that have been born and bred in social environments without violent inter-communal conflict. This does not take away from the significance of in-person radicalization, rather serving a supporting function to the radical messages delivered offline.

Although cyber radicalization operates in a territorially less bound and constrained manner, its basic purpose and message overlaps with that of in-person versions of radicalization. Online forms of radicalization also engender stories and narratives that are to appeal to the individual consumer, thereby speaking to the individual's sentiments of exclusion and marginalization and situating the experience of the individual in the struggle of Muslims elsewhere. Cyber radicalization therefore also speaks to sentiments of degradation and exclusion - as such, it is the mode of engagement rather than the underlying messages that manifests the most palpable difference between in-person and cyber radicalization. It goes without saying that cyber radicalization as such is coupled with developments in and the expansion of cyberspace more generally, meaning that as cyberspace expands both in societal use and significance, so will its use by terrorist organizations.

Although transnational organizations such as Al Qaeda exploited initial advancements in global communication technologies in the early 2000s for propagandist means, IS is widely recognized as having perfected the use of online communication networks for the purpose of radicalization, employing a multi-layered approach that engages its consumers in different ways and on different platforms (Baumberger, 2019). The IS has popularized its narrative through different avenues, including the magazine *Dabiq*, which was mainly published on the

Dark Web between 2014 and 2015 and espoused violence against 'infidels' and the pursuit of a global *jihad* (Ingram, 2016). Similarly, the Al Qaeda franchise Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) published the magazine *Inspire* in 2010, propelling similar messages to *Dabiq* (Droogan & Peattie, 2018). Although its multimedia marketing attempts have somewhat died down since, at its peak IS also operated multiple mobile applications, including a rendition of the famous video game *Grand Theft Auto*, a militancy-based word finding game as well as the application 'The Dawn of Glad Tidings', which enabled users to track IS' activities and gains in the Middle East in real time (Veilleux-Lepage, 2014). The key difference between the use of cyberspace by IS and prior terrorist organizations is thus not necessarily the message that is being communicated but the accessibility of this message for the user. Importantly, IS' revolutionizing role in terms of cyber radicalization would not have been possible without the simultaneous advances in modern communication technologies and the generally growing public access to these technologies.

Crucial for the purposes of radicalization, both online and offline, is how social narratives situate the struggles and experiences of the to-be-radicalized individual in a grander, more global context. To generate this context for the individual, narratives, here understood as referring to *"discursive systems of meaning-making that are linked to the material world"* are of pivotal importance as they allow individuals to *"make sense of the world, to reduce its complexity, and to comprehend new information"* (Homolar & Rodriguez-Merino, 2019, p. 3). Narratives, regardless of how they are created and disseminated, consequently mark a way of making sense of the world and the individual's place, past, present and future in it. They shape the way individuals think of (and live their) lives *"by organizing the world around them based on coherent narratives rooted in credible sources [...] [thereby enabling individuals to] construct preferred ways of life"* (Toguslu, 2019, p. 95). Radicalizing narratives can operate on different dimensions and can appeal to different cognitive frameworks to incentivize alignment with the radical cause (Leuprecht et al., 2010):

- Political narrative: has a conceptually neo-Marxist take on world politics and criticizes Western hegemony and exploitation of the developing world.

- Moral narrative: criticizes the hypocrisy of Western society to formulate liberal-moral ambitions (i.e. freedom, equality and justice) without living up to them.

- Religious narrative: utilizes Islam to justify opposition to the Western crusaders.

- Social-psychological narrative: fosters an in/out-group distinction that brands non-Muslims as infidel non-believers whilst depicting the *"brotherhood of arms"* as a way of reverting social exclusion (p. 43).

It is clear that both online and offline narratives play onto caveats that, at least in Europe, are connected to feelings of exclusion, marginalization and humiliation. Muslims in Europe and increasingly also South Asia are welcome targets of this *modus operandi* precisely because of the perceived marginalization they are exposed to. Radical narratives target these negative feelings and re-write them into a radicalized identity that seeks vengeance for the perceived experienced victimization, indicating that radical ideas are enabled by perceived social environments of exclusion.

The emergence of cyberspace as a security space (that is, a space in which issues connected to (national) security take place) manifests new challenges for national and transnational security and intelligence communities. Previous forms of surveillance, for instance in the form of focusing on at-risk individuals and communities, emerge as an increasingly inefficient mode of operation. Cyber radicalization has not replaced in-person forms of radicalization, i.e. via interpersonal networks or parallel institutions espousing militant views, yet the danger of self-radicalization increases. This does not mean that necessarily more people will become radicalized but that those that are at risk of radicalization may become radicalized more quickly. Security and intelligence services are consequently faced with the dilemma of having to ensure surveillance of at-risk individuals without profiling people of certain religious and ethnic backgrounds or undermining national privacy laws. Simultaneously, the targeted censoring of certain cyber outlets may be difficult to align with the pluralist convictions of Western democracy, meaning that eradicating the presence of militant content online may be a not fully attainable goal. Rather, if it is acknowledged that radicalization derives its functioning from situating the individual (and, by implication, their broader community) in a narrative that speaks to their sentiments, the main focus must lay on identifying these sentiments, understanding them and their root causes, and, ultimately, addressing the social structures that incentivize radicalization, both online and offline.

Conclusively, it can be said that online/cyber radicalization is not in the process of replacing in-person modes of radicalization - rather, it serves a complementary function and fosters more opportunities for at-risk individuals to radicalize themselves, raising the stakes for national security services to detect early stages of radicalization. The cyberspace facilitates the access to radicalizing materials without necessarily accelerating public radicalization as such. The role of cyberspace is an essentially expansive one: it expands access to information and propaganda and is neither bound by time nor space, making content and communication available at the consumer's discretion. Although the overall impact of this is yet to be seen, the isolating effect of the COVID-19 crisis may have resulted in terrorist organizations intensifying their cyber radicalization efforts as people have more time to spend online. As is noted in a 2013 report by the RAND Corporation, the cyberspace can also have an echo chamber effect in which existing and emerging biases are confirmed and reinforced, with a lower degree of offline interaction resulting in less challenges to the individual's radicalized views (Von Behr et al., 2013). Again, it remains to be seen whether the growing internet usage in times of COVID-19 has had a lasting and enhanced effect on this. The phenomenon of cyber radicalization will require policy responses that consistently account for technological changes and how these changes transform access to digital content.

The Role of Counternarratives

Assessing the role of cyber radicalization in relation to in-person radicalization reinforces the analysis that radicalization as a phenomenon is a distinctly social development that consequently requires predominantly social responses. This is not to say that short-term solutions, such as removing content from social media platforms, does not matter or should not be continued. That said, radicalization is an issue that must be addressed in its root cause,

namely the feeling of exclusion and marginalization. Any other policy response will be a mere short-term fix that does not provide a sustainable way of addressing the issue at hand. Developing counternarratives thus differs from other policy approaches (such as content removal) by seeking to address the social dimension of radicalization (i.e. the roots of radicalization) rather than the physical/digital manifestation of this radicalization (i.e. in the form of available and/or consumed content). At this point in time, terrorist organizations have proven effective in 'winning' the contest for the socio-political narrative, appealing to sentiments and capitalizing on the echo chamber effect. To reclaim some of the lost control, societies faced with Islamist radicalization must seek to reclaim the control over the narrative and the normative assumptions of what it means to live in a pluralist European/South Asian society. Leuprecht et al. (2009, p. 33) identify four key caveats that must be included in any efficient counter narrative:

- Disparage the idea that Western countries and societies are fighting Islam more generally. This notion, the authors argue, remains powerful and is unlikely to be dismantled as long as there is a significant Western military presence in Muslim countries and the Arab world in particular (Leuprecht et al., 2009).

- Counter the idea that Muslim terrorists protect the values of Islam/Muslim societies more generally.

- Delegitimize the notion that terrorist attacks on Western civilians or fellow Muslims (in this context viewed as collateral damage) are valid forms of political resistance and expression.

- Discourage the idea that non-terrorist Muslims are morally and religiously obliged to aid terrorists in their activities.

The arguments provided here generate a comprehensive framework through which to counter the way in which terrorist narratives make sense of the societies that surround them. If such an approach is pursued, this can aid in discouraging radicalization and promoting community engagement. Importantly, the creation of counternarratives must not seem imposed in a top-down manner: although the State and its institutions inevitably will play a key role in facilitating these narratives, it is paramount that the narratives are coordinated with and organized and supported by the communities they seek to speak to. In this context, governments and their agencies must work closely with non-State actors, both within the communities and outside of them to ensure the legitimacy of the narrative and, thus, the legitimacy of the operation as such. Counternarratives can be employed in both online and offline contexts, for instance in the form of targeted social media campaigns as well as forms of community engagement that teach individuals about the forms and implications of cyber radicalization without patronizing them. These are not easy requirements for any governmental institution to fulfill, highlighting that to be efficient, a bottom-up approach that engages at-risk communities is of utter importance. Reclaiming social narratives is likely to be a long-term process, yet it is key for governments to engage in to prevent a further deterioration of ties between the government and the strata of its at-risk populace.

It will be concurrently key for governments to analyze the idiosyncratic renditions of radical narratives and how different forms of narrative pertain to their own national context. Naturally, there will be overlaps in radical narratives, especially on a regional level: without being identical, the grievances of Muslims in Belgium and France will share intersections, meaning that the narratives used by radical bodies will converge, too. That said, specific local and national contexts must be considered when counter narratives are developed as Muslims, despite their partial similarities in experiences, also face different issues that are largely determined by the political structures of the country they live in. A Syrian refugee in Poland, for instance, is likely to face other struggles than a third generation British-Pakistani living in a predominantly Muslim neighborhood. These differences need to be acknowledged and the counternarratives modified accordingly. The same applies in South Asia: incentives for radicalization in Muslim-majority countries such as Pakistan and Bangladesh are likely to differ from radicalizing incentives in non-majority Muslim countries such as India, Myanmar and Sri Lanka. Although regional coordination in terms of counternarratives should be welcomed, an oversimplified 'one-fits-all' approach should be avoided. Governments and their institutions must recognize both the overlaps with the struggles of other countries elsewhere as well as the specific factors that legitimize radical narratives in their own context.

Narratives matter by making sense of the world, creating the cognitive framework through which people perceive their surroundings. Yet, it would be erroneous to treat counternarratives as mere substitutes for genuine social change: narratives can merely shift the way individuals and communities conceptualize themselves in relation to their broader structural environment, meaning that a potential change in perception must be accompanied with a change in social circumstances. In other words, narratives emphasizing the values of a pluralist society will have little effect if the society then fails to live up to its self-declared values. In this context, it would be outright dangerous to reduce the perception and ideas of at-risk (or radicalized) individuals to their mere interpretation of reality - rather, as the chapter on marginalization in the UK has shown, discrimination and marginalization is real, and the narratives of terrorist organizations merely provide a social framework with which to contextualize the experience of the self and the surrounding community. Political environments in both Europe and South Asia need to change in order to have long-lasting and satisfactory effects.

Conclusion

The face of Islamist radicalization has changed in some facets over the past two decades, capitalizing on accelerating developments and trends in the realm of communication technologies that have rendered information and digital content almost ubiquitously accessible. These processes have transformed some of the channels through which radicalization of the individual (and broader communities as a whole) can take place, in particular raising the dangers of self-radicalization. Whilst this raises new concerns for intelligence and security services, especially concerning the early detection of at-risk individuals, it cannot be deduced that the ultimate character of radicalization, namely its social and normative dimension, has changed as well. Radical messages and those espousing

them continue to speak to those marginalized by societies and their institutions, providing a framework that provides sense, meaning and context to the suffering of the individual and the individual's partially transnationally imagined social community. Put differently, cyber radicalization has shifted aspects of how radicalization technically takes place without fundamentally shifting the underlying reasons for why radicalization takes place or radicalizing more people at a higher speed. The advent of a globally accessible digital space has not undermined the role and significance of previously more dominant channels of radicalization, including the work of radical Islamist parallel institutions that have increasingly become integrated into the educational and social fabric in countries all over Europe, the Middle East and South Asia. Contemporary Islamist radicalization can consequently be treated as a hybrid in which both dimensions of radicalization, in-person and online, serve complementing rather than competing functions.

In this context, it is paramount for civil society as well as governmental institutions throughout South Asia and Europe to reclaim the narrative regarding the advantages (rather than disadvantages) of living in pluralist and often heterogeneous political communities. Counternarratives, created in accordance and engagement with the needs and desires of the communities most affected by radicalization, can and should serve a useful practical approach towards this process of reclaiming the narrative and, thus, making sense of political communities in a different way. However, reclaiming a social narrative will be insufficient to generate long-lasting change without an accompanying attempt to genuinely integrate Muslim communities into European (and, in some contexts, South Asian) societies and address the structural economic issues underlying radicalization.

Only if the emotive root of radicalization is addressed, namely that of individual and group-based perceived experiences of marginalization and exclusion, counternarratives will be capable of serving their ultimate purpose.

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