Islamic Political Radicalism:
A European Perspective

Tahir Abbas, ed.
Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007. 306 pages.

As jihadi ideology shifts from articulating a perpetual conflict against the "far enemy" (read: the United States and its allies) and the "near enemy" (read: the United States' clients) within the Middle East and the wider Muslim world to taking the conflict to the heart of the far enemy in North America and Western Europe, it is time for academics to take stock of what has happened, how it has happened, and why. The "radicalization" debate, as it is called, tries to ask the pertinent question of why some Muslim male citizens of these "western" states feel so disenchanted, dis-integrated, and alienated from their immediate communities that they can perpetrate such gross acts of violence as the bombings in Madrid in March 2004 and 7/7 in London. The challenge of such violent radicalism (and it is important to qualify it as such, since radicalism traditionally has been a political virtue of the Left demanding change) affects security policy as well as the integrity and dignity of Muslim communities.

Tahir Abbas, a reader in sociology at the University of Birmingham and a leading expert on the sociology of Britain's Muslim communities, has assembled a vibrant interdisciplinary circle of specialists, comprising Muslim and non-Muslim academics and activists, to tackle this question. The collection brings together studies in political science, political sociology (the primary focus for the debate on radicalism), anthropology, psychology, criminology, and related disciplines. The contributors concentrate on Britain, albeit within a European context, and thus this book might be of value for those studying Islamism in other Muslim-minority contexts (particularly the United States) and even in Muslim-majority contexts as a base of comparison.

The title suggests a concern with the wide spectrum of Muslim radicalism, one ranging from Islamism to jihadism. One need not be a constructivist to recognize the significance of contextualization. Thus the studies examine not only internal issues within Muslim communities, but also the role of government, Islamophobia (a reality with which many Muslims have to live and which was succinctly defined in the famous Runnymede Trust report of 1997, even while it is being attacked by the Left in an ironic twist of events akin to the recent onslaught on multiculturalism), the media, and global events. The structure is remarkably coherent: part 1 sets the scene with key definitions; part 2 examines the wider European context; part 3, which comprises the bulk of the volume, focuses on Britain; and part 4 brings together a number of short reflections by key Muslim political activists in post-7/7 Britain. As such, it successfully bridges the requirements of an academically rigorous volume and the exigencies of informing policy debates.

Apart from Abbas' own introduction, a brief but excellent summary of the volume's concerns and contents, the other paper that caught my eye was Ismail Patel's examination of what one means by political radicalism on the scale from "moderate" Islamists to Salafi jihadis. His simple equation of political radicalism as a response to foreign policy is too basic, for anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism are also strong motivations for the development of modern Islamisms. Advocating mono-causal explanations is problematic. Part 1 seems somewhat unsatisfactory in that it assumes a widely held notion of what radicalism is. It also requires some disaggregation, given that there are clearly several overlapping and even mutually exclusive types of radical ideology present within Muslim communities. Yet all are objectified as belonging to a generic overarching rationale for violence that the media (and, unfortunately, many in the intelligence community) reify and simplify as "al-Qaeda." In addition, the radicalization debate often strips young Muslim men of any agency and volition. Surely people are not

"radicalized," but rather choose certain pathways due to certain conditions, motivations, frustrations, opportunities, and ideologies.

Part 2 moves to the European context. Sara Silvestri's survey of the role and perception of the European Union is an important contribution, particularly in the context of Turkey's bid for accession, as is Galina Yemelianova's study of former Soviet contexts. But what is lacking here is a study of France and Germany, the main sites of Muslim radicalism in Europe. Haris Aziz's piece on anti-Semitism is critical for understanding a particular European impetus to an element of political radicalism, but it does not directly address the question of anti-Semitism among radical Muslims in Europe today. Rather, it tries to engage in some normative analysis and textual interpretation. Alok Rashmi Mukhopadhyay's chapter raises the key issue of identity and belonging, but this is not followed up. It would also have been useful in this section to see some engagement with Amin Maalouf's musings on identity, given their ubiquity in sociological debates, despite the impression that one has of their articulating ill-digested theory and an almost vacuous nativist theory of radicalism.

Part 3 contains the volume's best contributions. Daud Abdullah tackles the key grievance of Zionism, and Gabriele Marranci examines the centrality of the frustration in some communities at the lack of social justice, a central concern of Islamism. Sadek Hamid weighs into the debate on Hizb ut-Tahrir and argues that it is not the bogeyman it is made out to be, since its ideology has remained constant before and after the rise of jihadism, although some of its recent defectors might well disagree. Two chapters examine Bradford, that quintessence of Muslim Britain in the imagination of the media, and focus on the "crisis" of masculinity. Basia Spalek considers whether exclusion is a primary issue in fostering and perpetuating grievance. The penultimate chapter in this part is theoretically the most astute and interesting. Akil Awan locates radicalism in the context of transitional identity formation and disjuncture. The final part deals with policy implications and suggests that not only does violent radicalism need to be dissociated from legitimate political radicalism, but that Islam itself needs to be extricated from the context of a security policy in which it is merely a geopolitical threat and reality.

In the growing cacophony of voices on Islam, terrorism, and politics, in which Muslim communities often "need" to be spoken for, *Islamic Political Radicalism* is a refreshing change. It represents a genuinely interdisciplinary and communitarian attempt to analyze issues and suggests serious policy implications. Notwithstanding the lacunae and need for greater theoretical

clarity, it is an outstanding contribution to the existing literature and, hope-fully, will be read profitably by academic specialists and those in govern-ment concerned with the challenges of "political radicalism."

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