

POLITICKÉ VEDY / POLITICAL SCIENCES

Časopis pre politológiu, najnovšie dejiny, medzinárodné vzťahy, bezpečnostné štúdiá / Journal for Political Sciences, Modern History, International Relations, security studies

URL časopisu / URL of the journal: <http://www.politickevedy.fpvmv.umb.sk>

Autor(i) / Author(s): Dominika Kosárová – Jaroslav Ušiak
Článok / Article: The Role of Identity in the Contemporary Global Terrorist Movement
Vydavateľ / Publisher: Fakulta politických vied a medzinárodných vzťahov – UMB Banská Bystrica / Faculty of Political Sciences and International Relations – UMB Banská Bystrica

Odporúčaná forma citácie článku / Recommended form for quotation of the article:

KOSÁROVÁ, D. – UŠIAK, J. 2017. The Role of Identity in the Contemporary Global Terrorist Movement. In *Politické vedy*. [online]. Roč. 20, č. 4, 2017. ISSN 1335 – 2741, s. 113-133. Dostupné na internete: <http://www.politickevedy.fpvmv.umb.sk/archiv-vydani/2017/4-2017/dominika-kosarova-jaroslav-usiak.html>.

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THE ROLE OF IDENTITY IN THE CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL TERRORIST MOVEMENT

Dominika Kosárová – Jaroslav Ušiak*

ABSTRACT

Members of Islamist terrorist organisations share a common worldview stemming from the radical Islamist ideology, which is a pillar of their identity. Islamist identity emerged in response to specific events in Muslim countries; however, today it has an unprecedented ability to attract also Muslims living in the West. Radicalisation in a sense of ideological socialisation represents the process by which original Muslim identity may shift towards Islamist one. Theory of radicalisation thus will be used to explain the nexus between identity and terrorism. The aim of the article is to outline a trajectory between identity and terrorism and hence to identify possible reasons and patterns of Muslim radicalisation in two different settings: Muslim countries and Muslim diaspora in the West (Europe, in particular). This article points out that a perceived threat to identity is a driving force of Muslim radicalisation in Muslim countries, while a crisis of identity is crucial within Muslim community in the West. Potential catalysts and paths of radicalisation outlined in the article are important in order to understand the roots of Muslim rage and the emergence of terrorist threat, and consequently, they need to be considered in the counter-terrorist measures.

Key words: identity, Islam, radicalisation, terrorism

Introduction

Contemporary security environment has witnessed increasing terrorist threat related to Islamist extremism. This security challenge does not concern Muslim countries exclusively, but Islamist extremists are to be found also in Western secular states. Today's trend reveals that Europe, which previously had served as a sanctuary for terrorists, has become their major target. The common

* Mgr. Dominika Kosárová, M.A. is a PhD. candidate at the Department of Security Studies, Faculty of Political Science and International Relations, Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, Kuzmányho 1, 974 01 Banská Bystrica, Slovakia, e-mail: dominika.kosarova@umb.sk.

Assoc. prof. Jaroslav Ušiak, PhD. is the Associate Professor at the Department of Security Studies, Faculty of Political Science and International Relations, Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, Kuzmányho 1, 974 01 Banská Bystrica, Slovakia, e-mail: jaroslav.usiak@umb.sk.

feature of all Islamist terrorists is their radical worldview and shared Wahhabi/Salafi ideology – they profess radicalised interpretation of Islam that legitimizes the use of violence against non-believers. Radicalisation in relation to identity plays a crucial role in the emergence and the spread of terrorism. We claim by this article that in order to understand the roots of Islamist terrorism, we should understand under what circumstances and by what patterns Muslim identity changes into radical Islamist and ultimately into jihadist identity.

The suggestion that there is a certain nexus between identity and terrorism, and that radicalisation is the process that links these two notions is not new. Several authors, including **A. Rabasa**, **C. Benard**, **P. Nesser**, **F. M. Moghaddam**, **M. D. Silber** and **A. Bhatt** claim that identity is one of the factors that have to be considered when radicalisation of Muslims and the roots of terrorism are analysed. However, by this article we suggest that it should be differentiated between the radicalisation in Muslim countries (where most of Islamist terrorist organisations emerge in the first place) and in Western secular states (where terrorist cells or lone wolves operate). Muslims encounter different circumstances in both cases, hence we believe that in each case, radicalisation is initiated by different factors related to identity, which itself has a different role to play.

The aim of this article is to outline a trajectory between identity and terrorism in two different settings. After identifying the main features of radical Islamist identity, we proceed to compare and contrast patterns of radicalisation (understood as adoption of the radical Islamist identity) in Muslim countries, on the one hand, and within Muslim diaspora in the West (with a particular focus on Europe), on the other hand. Throughout the article, a combination of the theory of radicalisation and identity theory of terrorism (as partially provided by **F. M. Moghaddam**, **M. D. Silber** and **A. Bhatt**) have been applied as methodological tools. The article contributes to a debate that is currently on the rise, and given the unprecedented scope of Islamist terrorism in Europe it is a topic that requires adequate attention. Moreover, we suggest that identity theory of radicalisation should be considered as an integral part of the counter-terrorism strategy.

1 Identity in the process of radicalisation

Identity refers to a complex social construct consisting of specific values that influence human behaviour and give purpose to human action. One of the major

roles of identity is to give individuals possibility to self-identify with a certain social group based on shared cultural principles. These cultural principles stem from various often inter-dependent categories (such as ethnicity, nationality or religion) that may play a different significance when identity is constructed (in a sense that one may dominate over the others). In this context, **L. Rothenberger** and **M. Kotarac** (2015, p. 93-94) define identity as “*a process of construction of meaning on the basis of a cultural attribute [...] that is given priority over other sources of meaning*”.

The sense of belonging, fellowship and purpose is probably the strongest when religion comes into play. Religious identity is particularly powerful, as believers tend to subjugate all other elements of their identity to the faith that consequently becomes the central category of their identity. (Wright, 2015) This tendency can be observed in the case of Muslims living in Europe who according to **D. Al Raffie** (2013, p. 83) define themselves first in religious terms and only then as nationals of their country of origin. If the above-mentioned definition of identity was applied, religious identity would then refer to the process of construction of meaning on the basis of religious attributes that are regarded as superior to any other sources of meaning. Hence, believers' perception of themselves and their perception of the world are constructed in religious terms. As a result, believers who define themselves in terms of religious identity profess values advocated by their faith and behave in line with religious principles.

One of the prominent functions of identity is its ability to unite people in respect to the feeling of fellowship. At the same time, it enables to differentiate between “*us*” – those who share the same identity – and “*them*” – adherents to another identity, often depicted as out-group members. Identity thus establishes imaginary boundaries between members belonging to different social groups or categories. It is undoubtedly a very strong instrument of self-perception and, at the same time, it conditions the perception of others belonging to the out-group. However, perceived differences between “*us*” and “*them*” become usually further reinforced when the identity is endangered by some external or internal factors.

In terms of threat perception, identity has a double role to play. First, within the academic circles there is a prevailing consensus that a threat to identity may lead to progressive radicalisation. (Wright, 2015, Schwartz et al., 2009) It strengthens the feeling of fellowship and collectivity, and it may even provoke a desire to protect one's own identity and eliminate the threat by any necessary

means. From this perspective, identity (or a threat to it) may become a *driving force* of radicalisation.

The nexus between identity and radicalisation may be observed also in **Schmid**'s definition of radicalisation as "*a process of ideological socialisation*" which can be understood as a process of creating a group identity by adoption of shared ideological values. **Schmid** further states that radicalisation or ideological socialisation concerns usually young people who are at the end of the process willing to use violence in order to provoke fundamental political changes. (Schmid, 2011, p. 217) This implies that the original identity of individuals when they enter the process of radicalisation and the final identity after they have accomplished the process are not the same. The willingness to use violence is one of the major differences.

Therefore, identity becomes also *the object* of radicalisation. This means that radicalisation may transform the original identity into its more radical version. This allegation may be supported by the definition of radicalisation itself as "*the gradual and intentional process that consists of a set of activities that aim at changing the beliefs, feelings and behaviour (understood also as the constitutive elements of identity) with the intent of aligning them against the core values of societies in which individuals are based and readying them for intergroup conflict, whereby society constitutes an out-group that must be fought*" (in other words, aligning in-group members sharing the same values against "the others" who adhere to an alien identity). (Raffie, 2013, p. 72) The nexus between radicalisation and identity transformation is applicable if we accept that identity is a construction that can constantly change and re-shape. (Castells, 2010)

Given the contemporary global security environment, the relationship between identity and radicalisation is particularly relevant in relation to the religious identity, in general, and Muslim identity, in particular. In this context, **Al Raffie** refers to radicalisation also as to "*a process of first fostering an increase in religious awareness and then manipulating this awareness for political ends*". (Al Raffie, 2013, p. 90) Religious awareness in this definition is equivalent to religious self-identification (or simply religious identity) which is manipulated and changed in the process of radicalisation. Hence, it can be argued that Islamist radicalisation leads to the establishment of radical Islamist identity. Moreover, if we assume that terrorism is the extreme manifestation of Islamist radicalisation, then we can suppose that there is a certain trajectory between identity and terrorism. Several studies have at least partially dealt with the relation between

identity and terrorism trying to explain the patterns of radicalisation within the Muslim youth. Two of them are of our particular interest.

F. M. Moghaddam represents Islamist radicalisation as a narrowing staircase in a five-floor building. The starting point of his theory is the feeling of injustice, frustration and dissatisfaction perceived by Muslims occupying the ground floor. These sentiments may provoke a perceived threat to personal or collective identity. According to **Moghaddam**, a perception of threat, injustice and deprivation are necessary preconditions for the process of radicalisation. They open a window of opportunity for radical fundamentalists to provide disenfranchised people with an alternative path to address their grievances. As individuals climb the staircase, the varieties of options how to deal with their situation narrow and discontent people start to realise that they cannot adequately address their grievances. Ultimately, the use of violence remains the last and only option. Hence, those who climb to the last floor of the figurative building achieve the process of radical Islamist indoctrination. They become socialised as members of a terrorist group ready to commit acts of violence against hostile out-group members who are blamed for the suffering of Muslims. (Moghaddam, 2005)

Similar principle of radicalisation is suggested by **M. D. Silber** and **A. Bhatt**. They focus on the radicalisation of Muslims in diaspora, which according to them, consists of four phases: pre-radicalisation, self-indoctrination, indoctrination and ultimately jihadisation, which is equivalent to the final step of **Moghaddam's** staircase. Their theory suggests that identity plays a crucial role in the self-identification phase, when individuals start to distance themselves from their original identity and they become more vulnerable to radical Salafi-jihadist ideology. They suggest that one of the major catalysts of this shift may be identity crisis perceived especially by second and third generation of Muslim immigrants who have not fully adopted neither Western secular way of life nor Muslim identity of their ancestors. During this "cognitive opening", these individuals seek a new alternative worldview that would provide them the feeling of belonging and purpose. They ultimately identify themselves with the radical Islamist ideology and accept a new identity as self-designed holy warriors. (Silber – Bhatt, 2007)

In this article, we will provide a combination of both above-mentioned theories complemented by authors' observations. The analysis consists of two levels. In the first place, it aims at explaining the emergence of radical Islamist

or jihadist ideology¹ (that lays down the principles of Islamist identity) within Muslim countries. Afterwards, focuses on the adoption of this radical ideology by Muslims living in the West. This methodology can be justified by the global dimension of the contemporary terrorist threat which suggests that radical Islamist ideology that was in the past more local-oriented has achieved capability and willingness to address people all over the world and convince them to commit terrorist attacks even in Western countries. The perpetrators of these violent acts (regardless their country of origin) share radical Islamist worldview – it can be thus argued that they share a common identity. Hence, identity plays an important role in the jihadist movement. In order to understand the contemporary terrorist threat, the features, manifestation and catalysts of the radical Islamist identity need to be scrutinised.

2 Specific features of Islamist identity as proclaimed by terrorists

From the ideological perspective, radical Islamist identity stems from the principles of religious fundamentalism and collectivism based on dichotomous vision of the world portraying the West as the Archenemy.

Islamist fundamentalism advocates puritanical interpretation of sacred texts and glorifies traditions and norms peculiar to the Prophet's era (7th Century Arabia). Fundamentalists strictly refuse modernity, which is regarded as a threat to the traditional Muslim way of life. They blame globalisation in general for the spread of the Western concept of modernity with its secular values and principles throughout the world, and the United States, in particular, as its driving force. (Lutz, Lutz, 2008, Lewis, 2002) However, according to fundamentalists, Islam is not only a religion that influences human values and behaviour, but it is also a way of reconstructing social order. Their ultimate political aim is to establish the rule of Islamic law and restore the pan-Islamic Caliphate that is believed to be the only acceptable form of state governing over Muslims. Radical Islamist fundamentalists reject the system of nation states, democratic principles and secularism, which they perceive as incompatible with Islam. They accept God as the only sovereign and *sharia* as the only legitimate

¹ In this article "jihadist ideology" or "jihadist identity" is understood as the extreme form of Islamist ideology or identity and includes the willingness to commit acts of terrorism. Jihadist identity is thus peculiar to contemporary terrorists, while not all those individuals who adopt Islamist identity are necessarily terrorists.

form of governance; therefore, they try to protect traditional Muslim societies from the Western secular influence and from any attempt of Western states to import democracy to Muslim countries. (Hoffman, 2006) Puritanism thus serves to reconstruct society based on Islamic tenets and to purify Islam from all foreign, especially secular and modern Western influence. In other words, Islamist fundamentalists seek to protect pure Muslim identity against any foreign influence.

Anti-Westernism or anti-Americanism are the major features shared by all proponents of radical Islamist identity. Islamists believe in dual vision of the world consisting of the world of Islam – “us” – and the world of unbelief – “them”. While the world of Islam is regarded as the world of peace and those who identify with “us” are perceived as morally right, good and strong, the world of non-belief is portrayed as the world of war and evil where people are immoral, wrong and weak. (Schwartz et al., 2009, p. 541) Depiction of “us” as morally and spiritually superior to “them” is a natural consequence of radicalisation triggered by identity.

This dichotomous categorisation is closely related to the sense of collectivism – prioritisation of a group over individuals. As a consequence of collectivist values, people do not identify as single beings, but rather as members of a group – “us” – while all those who do not share the same principles and worldview belong to out-groups – “them”. The principle of collectivism enables to reinforce the sense of belonging among in-group members. At the same time, this categorical “us versus them” perspective justifies hatred towards outer groups that are blamed responsible for threatening, humiliating or doing wrong to insiders. Out-groups are usually referred to in a pejorative way in order to dehumanise their members. Dehumanisation then serves to justify the ultimate use of violence in order to convert, subjugate or eliminate enemies. Religious radicals believe in legitimacy of such acts because religion as such tends to monopolise the truth. Consequently, all other religions are considered mistaken and their proponents are regarded as misbelievers, eventually enemies.

As for Islam, collectivism is best illustrated by the term *umma*, which gives priority not only to group over individual, but also to religious over any other identity. *Umma* refers to the global community of Muslims regardless of their nationality and ethnicity and it is a strong instrument of mutual solidarity among Muslims all over the world. This solidarity has been exploited especially by contemporary terrorist groups that try to call on Muslims in all countries to join

global jihad against “Western oppressors” that according to them threaten Muslim people and exploit Muslim lands. Islamists claim that attack against any part of *umma* is regarded as attack against all Muslims. Therefore, it is individual duty of every Muslim to join military jihad – the fight in the name of Allah – in order to protect “the true faith”. (Hoffman, 2006) However, jihad is launched against a powerful enemy (the US or NATO in general), hence terrorism remains for people perceived as oppressed the only viable strategy.

From the perspective of Islamist radicals, “us” are all those who share the puritanical interpretation of Islam and reject Western values. Even moderate Muslims who “collaborate” with the West and oppose radical interpretation of the faith may be depicted by extremists as infidels, hence legitimate targets of their hatred and violent acts. (Hellmich, 2011) Contemporary radical Islamist ideology blames the Western civilisation and especially the US of threatening Islamic identity and independence of Muslim countries and people. As a result of collectivism, dichotomous “us versus them” perception, religious absolutism and perceived threat to traditional Islamic identity², Western nationals (the carriers of Western identity) suffer the burden of increased Islamist terrorist threat.

The contemporary Islamist terrorism has achieved global dimensions because the radical ideology (representing the pillar of collective Islamist identity) addresses not only people in Muslim countries where it has emerged, but it appeals also to Muslims living in Western states. Therefore, it can be assumed that religious identity is more important than ethnic or national identity in the process of radicalisation and recruitment of potential future terrorists.

3 Patterns of Muslim radicalisation

This article explains the global terrorist threat through the prism of Muslim radicalisation while identity has been identified as crucial in this process. In order to understand the role of identity, we need to distinguish between

² For the purpose of this article we make a terminological distinction between Islamic and Islamist. While “Islamic” is used to refer to Islam as a religion, the term “Islamist” has rather an ideological connotation that emphasizes the role of Islam in the society and politics. Similarly, while Islam refers to religion, Islamism will be regarded in this article as an ideology or a form of political Islam. Therefore, when we refer to religion-motivated terrorism (which is always a form of political violence) and to the identity of terrorists, we will use the term “Islamist” rather than “Islamic”. In some cases, we also add the adjective “radical” to emphasize the attitude of individuals, ideology or identity to the use violence.

radicalisation in Muslim countries and in Muslim diaspora in the West. This distinction will enable us to compare the trajectory between identity and terrorism in these two cases. Stemming from the identity – radicalisation – terrorism nexus, the analysis will ultimately allow us to identify the patterns of the emergence and geographical spread of the contemporary terrorist threat.

3.1 Radicalisation in Muslim countries

The emergence of the Islamist terrorist movement and radical Islamist identity is closely related to the development in Muslim countries. The roots of Muslim radicalisation and anti-Western sentiments may be identified on the background of several major events in the Middle Eastern countries in the second half of the 20th Century and at the beginning of the 21st Century. Egypt, Iran, Afghanistan and Iraq in particular can be considered as the major catalysts of Islamist radicalisation and of the global terrorist movement.

The pioneer of the Islamist ideology and identity was **Sayyid Qutb**, the leading intellectual of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in the 1950s and 1960s. He had radicalised after his visit of the United States where he was outraged by the Western lifestyle. He criticised “selfish individualism”, sexism, permissiveness and materialism in the American society that he regarded as incompatible with the pure values of Islam. Horrified of secular modern culture, he warned against the Western influence, which according to him was degrading Muslim world. Instead, he called for Islamic revolution and the establishment of true Islamic society. (Byman, 2015) **Qutb** became one of the major proponents of revolutionary Islamist fundamentalism and his ideas influenced most of later Islamists and terrorists, including **Osama bin Laden**. **Qutb** also advocated the principle of *takfir*, which enables to excommunicate Muslims from Muslim community if they violate Islamic tenets. By this principle, he denied some Muslims the privileges that stemmed from their Muslim identity. *Takfir* thus enabled him to justify the use of violence against his religious compatriots, otherwise prohibited in Islam.³ (Jihad: The men and ideas..., 2007) **Qutb** laid down the main ideological principles of radical Islamist identity as a response to a perceived threat from the Western modern influence.

³ One of the first victims of this logic was the Egyptian president Anwar Sadat who was assassinated in 1981 after he had concluded a peace treaty with Israel – the prominent enemy of radical Islamists.

Another major event that contributed to Muslim radicalisation was the revolution in Iran. Muslims in Iran were discontent with the secular governance of **Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi** who was regarded as a puppet of the West. Pro-American ruler lacked legitimacy in the eyes of his opponents and his laic rule stimulated the perception of threat to the traditional Muslim principles. As a result of prevailing discontent, the revolution broke out in 1979 with the aim to overthrow the secular regime of the Shah. Subsequently, **Ayatollah Khomeini** returned from exile and established Islamic Republic of Iran based on *sharia* with respect to religious identity of the society. (Sviatko, 2005) Islamic identity in the case of Iran became a strong mobilizing force that enabled people to unify and defend their religious identity by revolutionary means. Iranian revolution provoked Islamic awakening in other Muslim countries that found themselves in a similar situation. It served as a source of inspiration for Islamist movements that sought to replace secular governments by a pious ruler even by use of force.

The third milestone in the emergence of radical Islamist identity is related to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. In the 1980s, Muslims from all over the world joined jihad against Soviets for what they perceived as a noble cause – protection of Muslim people and country from subjugation to a foreign power. Furthermore, Muslim identity of Afghan people deeply contrasted with the communist worldview of Soviets. The ability of mujahedeen to address successfully Muslims in countries throughout the world can be interpreted by the concepts of *umma*, collectivity and the power of shared religious identity. Mujahedeen perceived the invasion to Afghanistan as a common threat to *umma*; therefore, they believed it was their individual duty to participate in jihad regardless of country of their origin. Religious identity hence played a crucial role in the recruitment of potential mujahedeen to protect Muslims in Afghanistan.

Yet, the effect of the Russian invasion was twofold. First, it led to the counter-insurgency of mujahedeen. Second, Afghan jihad brought together religious fundamentalists and revolutionaries that ultimately led to the creation of al-Qaeda in the late 1980s. Al-Qaeda (in translation the base) was first intended by **bin Laden** to serve as a Muslim fighting force that could be deployed anywhere in order to protect oppressed Muslims. However, at the beginning of the 1990s he was denied the opportunity to use al-Qaeda and oust **Saddam Hussein** from Kuwait. Instead, 540 000 mostly American troops were invited to defeat **Hussein** and defend Saudi Arabia against potential Iraqi

invasion. (Rashid, 2002, p. 54) However, protection of a sacred Muslim land by Christians (in the Islamist terminology “unbelievers”) was perceived as an insult to the Muslim identity and pride. Ultimately, this contributed to **bin Laden’s** resentment towards Americans and al-Qaeda has ultimately declared jihad against the USA and Israel. He blamed the USA for their military presence in Saudi Arabia that according to Islamists was in violation of Islamic tenets, while Israel was blamed for the suffering of Muslims in Palestine who were disabled to live in their own state and instead, they were subjugated to Israel’s oppressive rule. In the subsequent *fatwa* from 1998 **bin Laden** referred to the enemies as *crusaders* and *Jews*, which has reinforced the role of religious identity in terms of defining collective enemy. (Jihad against Jews and Crusaders, 1998) Al-Qaeda illustrates how terrorists exploit the power of threat perception and religious identity to declare jihad. The organisation calls upon Muslims all over the world to join the military struggle to revenge and protect their religious “compatriots”. Al-Qaeda has thus become the major force in institutionalisation of Islamist identity.

Finally, the above-mentioned tendencies may be well illustrated also in the case of Iraq after the US invasion in 2003. The atrocities, civil casualties and abuse of prisoners in Abu Ghraib contributed to the radicalisation of Sunni Muslims. The leading figures of Sunni insurgency, **Abu Musab al-Zarqawi** (the head of al-Qaeda in Iraq) and his successor **Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi** (the head of the later Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or Islamic State), called for jihad with the ultimate aim to liberate Iraq from foreign military presence and protect Sunni Muslims from the exploitation and oppression by the Westerners and infidels. The invasion of Iraq became the major milestone in the contemporary Islamist terrorism in Europe, which has targeted especially the states involved in the coalition forces deployed in Iraq.⁴

These four examples of religious radicalisation within Muslim countries point to the fact that radicalisation is directly related to a perceived threat to Muslim identity, which is in accordance with what **Moghaddam** partially suggested in his “staircase theory”. The analysed cases demonstrate that this threat is triggered especially by globalisation, Westernisation, secular pro-Western governments or foreign military intervention. Within Muslim countries, it may

⁴ Bin Laden in October 18, 2003 (shortly after the US invasion of Iraq) declared that al-Qaeda reserved the right “to respond at the appropriate time and place against all of the countries that are participating in this unjust war.” (Rabasa – Benard, 2016, p. 50)

provoke anti-Western sentiments and, at the same time, it reinforces adherence to the Muslim identity. In order to protect traditional way of life and eliminate foreign influence, a part of society may radicalise and gradually adopt a new identity based on a combination of fundamentalism and revolutionism. One of the features of radical Islamist identity is self-proclaimed legitimacy of the use of force in order to defend Muslim community. For this purpose, *jihad*, *takfir* and *fatwas* are usually used. These conditions provide a breeding ground for terrorism as the only way to fight a more powerful enemy. In other words, a perceived threat to the original Muslim identity may lead to the emergence of a radicalised Islamist identity that is a precondition for terrorism.

When the new identity is established within a certain community (for example within a terrorist group), it tries to appeal to other Muslims all over the world. At first, the calls for jihad usually find sympathizers in Muslim countries where Muslims experience similar situation of oppression and share the perception of immediate threat to their identity. However, Muslims living in Western non-Muslim states also increasingly seek to join jihad. They are usually second or third-generation immigrants who may be even relatively well integrated in Western societies and often do not lead a particularly religious life. They are born or raised in Western states and do not maintain any particular ties to the country of their origins. Despite this fact, under certain circumstances, they may find calls for jihad appealing and eventually they may even attack their country of residence.

3.2 Radicalisation in Muslim diaspora in the West

Identity has an important role to play also in radicalisation of Muslims in diaspora - especially in Western secular states. Stemming from **Silber** and **Bhatt** we suggest that in this case the major catalyst of the radicalisation is not a threat to identity, but rather a perceived identity crisis. Within Western countries three different path of radicalisation may be observed, all of them related to the crisis of identity. In each case different factors trigger the crisis and subsequent radicalisation, which may ultimately lead to the adoption of jihadi ideology (as the element of radical Islamist, or jihadist identity). This part will focus especially on the Muslim diaspora in Europe, while the primary attention will be paid on the second and third-generation Muslim immigrants – those who are at present the most vulnerable to the recruitment by terrorist movements.

The first path of radicalisation stems from the sentiment of relative deprivation, which is classified as one of the pre-eminent reasons why European Muslims decide to join jihad. (Nesser, 2015, Rabasa – Benard, 2015) Relative deprivation results from the immigration status of Muslims even though they may be born and raised in Europe. Expectations of second and third-generation Muslims often exceed opportunities and they often have unqualified jobs that do not adequately reflect their education and skills. The research conducted by **A. Rabasa** and **C. Benard** (2015, p. 66) showed a significant gap between the level of education and profession occupied of 31 British Muslims linked to terrorist activities from 2002 to 2006. Although 79% of them were enrolled in college (not necessarily finishing it), only 35% had adequate jobs. Even though many Muslims in Europe lead a secular life in line with Western modern norms, their social status often reflects their immigration roots. The lack of opportunities and inability to elevate one's social status trigger the feelings of frustration, discrimination, disrespect and alienation from the society where they live. Ultimately, this leads to social crisis and crisis of identity. Such individuals become more vulnerable to radicalised ideas that provide them with a sense of recognition and purpose.

Another scenario of how identity crisis and subsequent radicalisation may occur, concerns the second and third generation of European Muslims who often feel torn between two identities. Although they may be well integrated in school or in job, where they lead a secular Western lifestyle, their parents (the first-generation immigrants) often lead a religious life with respect to Muslim traditions. Hence, Muslim youth is torn between modern Western culture of their host country and traditional Muslim culture of their parents. (Rabasa – Benard, 2015, p. 4) In consequence, they may feel that they do not belong to either of the communities and they do not fully identify with none of the two identities and cultures. They start to alienate from the society where they feel they do not fit. Consequently, they start to seek their own place in the society, a new identity and community where they could fully integrate.

These individuals are more prone to establish a new identity by rediscovering their religious roots. According to **Rabasa** and **Benard**, this trend is increasingly present within the Turkish community in Europe. They point to the fact that third-generation Turks are less assimilated in comparison to the previous generations (this may be related also to their higher expectations and feeling of relative deprivation). Instead of adapting to secular culture, they define themselves increasingly by reference to their Muslim religion. A research

conducted in Germany showed that from 2000 to 2005 the proportion of Turkish immigrants living in Germany supporting the idea that Muslim women should wear headscarves increased from 27% to 47%. A significant increase was observed also in regard to those who opposed mixed-gender educational activities (from 19% to 30%). (Brandt – Meyer, 2007) Hence, in comparison to the second-generation Turks, contemporary youth is more conservative, religious and disassociated from Western culture. These de-integration tendencies make young people more vulnerable to potential radicalisation.

During the process of religious seeking young Muslims may encounter a number of jihadist websites and visit mosques where radical Salafi preachers may advocate strict interpretation of Islam. Yet, disenfranchised and frustrated people with no defined place in the society find strict rules appealing because they provide a sense of stability, safety and meaning. Moreover, on the websites and in radical mosques they discover more about the suffering of Palestinians and other religious compatriots in various countries (including Chechnya, Kashmir, Bosnia, Afghanistan and Iraq), which is often used as a tool of propaganda by terrorist networks to recruit new members or gain sympathizers for their cause. The perceived injustice committed to Muslims stimulates among young Muslims in Europe hostility towards the Western countries that are usually blamed for this oppression. It further deepens disassociation of Muslims from the secular culture of their host country and facilitates self-identification with Islamist ideas and military Islam.

Hence, internally perceived cultural conflict makes young Muslims more vulnerable to extremist ideology, which offers them a higher purpose, a sense of “religious renewal”, a new identity and a new place in the society. Extremist Salafi/Wahhabi ideology resonates within the “lost” and self-seeking generation of European Muslims because it provides clear answers to identity related question. (Rothenberger – Kotarac, 2015) *Who are we?* Holy warrior or freedom fighters. *What do we do?* We fight in the God’s name for the right cause – to defend, protect and revenge Muslims all over the world. *Who are “the others”?* Unbelievers (Jews and Christians, in particular) and their allies – in other words Western secular states led by the US.

Even though not every radicalised Muslim embraces terrorism to counter the enemy, there is a non-negligible number of those who eventually do. Two main scenarios are possible. They may be inspired and self-radicalised by ideology promoted on jihadist websites and commit an attack as lone wolves without establishing formal contacts with other jihadists. Eventually, they may search for

like-minded people in order to join their community. In the second case, the so-called entrepreneurs⁵ or preachers play an important role in bringing together frustrated youth and providing them with a new sub-culture that involves a new identity and companionship. (Nesser, 2015) Extremist ideologies encourage disaffected Muslims to identify with a global community of Muslims (*umma*) and to take political violence to address their grievances. **Abu Qatada** was one of the most prominent and influential Islamist ideologues and identity builders. Until his imprisonment and deportation to Jordan, he served as a Salafi cleric in London in the 1990s and early 2000s. His radical preaching (even while imprisoned in the UK until 2013) influenced a number of disaffected Muslims in Europe who ultimately decided to join jihad.⁶ After joining radicalised community, many young Muslims travel to war-torn countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, Syria or Yemen to undertake training in a terrorist camp. Finally, once they are fully indoctrinated and trained, they either join jihad abroad (usually in the Middle East) or they return to Europe as members of a terrorist network willing to attack eventually their country of residence. A similar pattern of recruitment may be observed also in case of the Hamburg cell, responsible for 9/11 attacks. The core operative leaders including **Mohammad Atta** were radicalised in the mosque in Hamburg while living in Germany. Afterwards they joined training in Afghanistan and finally they perpetrated attacks against the USA. (Nesser, 2015)

The third way of radicalisation may be triggered by a perceived discrimination and disrespect towards Muslims in Western states. This was the case of French ban of headscarves, which was exploited by jihadist propaganda in order to reinforce radical anti-Western sentiments. Moreover, terrorist attacks in Europe usually lead to mass arrests of suspect Islamists that is again used by jihadists to depict Western states as oppressors that discriminate and hate Muslims. In addition, a wave of anti-Western sentiments emerged after the cartoons of the Prophet Mohammad were published in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* in 2005 and later in the French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*. The cartoons were perceived by Muslims as an insult and provoked

⁵ Nesser defines entrepreneurs as usually charismatic and intelligent Muslims living in the West who maintain connections with extremist networks in conflict zones. They are members of a terrorist cell where they usually represent a natural authority. (Nesser, 2015)

⁶ While living in London Abu Qatada maintained ties to Islamists in Algeria, Chechnya, Bosnia and in the Middle East and he served as a spiritual ideologue for radical Islamist organisation such as Algerian GIA or al-Zarqawi's Tawhid group based in Jordan.

further radicalisation and rage that eventually culminated in the terrorist attack against Charlie Hebdo office in 2015. Therefore, it can be observed that rigid anti-immigration policies, raising xenophobe attitudes or racially-based actions within Western societies provoke among Muslims feelings of marginalisation, disrespect, exclusion and rejection as fully-fledged members of the society. This opens door to potential radicalisation and adoption of the radical Islamist worldview.

It can be thus alleged that Muslims living in the West become vulnerable to radical Islamist ideology as a result of identity crisis. This crisis may be triggered by relative deprivation, perceived discrimination and disrespect or by the feeling of non-belonging and alienation from the Western society. The identity crisis provokes the quest for a new identity usually related to Muslims' religious roots. However, this search entails grave risks as it may drive vulnerable Muslims to the hands of radical individuals who provide them an alternative Islamist identity involving a strong feeling of companionship and meaning.⁷

The change of identity usually manifests by the change of behaviour as well as physical appearance. In most of the cases, European Muslims who became radicalised and adopted radical Islamist ideology started to attend mosques and pray regularly, they gave up alcohol, cigarettes, gambling and all other activities associated with the modern Western lifestyle (although before the crisis broke out they were not particularly religious). Usually they also changed the way of clothing, started to wear traditional Islamic robes, and grew beard. (Silber – Bhatt, 2007) These features materialised and visualised the transformation of their identity and integration to a new community. Moreover, new members of radical Islamist community may be granted a new name, which was a common practice of al-Qaeda. Even though the change of names was done primarily as

⁷ This path of radicalisation may be observed not only within disaffected youth of Muslim origin, but it concerns also converts. (Chambraud, 2017, Garcin, 2014) They usually opt for Muslim identity in order to cope with their personal problems that may be also related to identity crisis (for example as a result of lost allegiance to the Church or disappointment with the moral permissiveness of secular society). Conversion is a way of breaking with the past and starting a new life as a "re-born". Converts find in Islam a practical guideline how to lead a meaningful life but their poor knowledge of Islamic religion makes them susceptible to adopt radical Wahhabi/Salafi preaching. It may be well illustrated by the case of France, where an estimated number of 30,000 to 50,000 Muslim converts live. (Rabasa – Benard, 2015, p. 90) Already in 2005 French police claimed that 1,610 of converts were linked to criminal activities and radical groups. (Smolar, 2005) The most serious situation is probably in prison, where almost 44 percent of those who convert opt for radical preaching, and 17 percent even join radical Islamist groups. (Rabasa – Benard, 2015, p. 91-92)

a security measure, it may be regarded also as a symbolic abandon of the original identity and the adoption of a new one. It can be thus claimed that radical Islamist and terrorist movements offer an identity through appearance (beards, traditional *jalabiyya* and headscarves), rituals (regular prayers) as well as powerful symbols (such as the use of flags and logos) and jihadist hymns. (Nesser, 2015, p. 24) However, it is important to note that jihadists do not identify themselves as terrorists, but they believe they are freedom fighters or holy warrior fighting for a noble cause. New jihadist identity may give previously disengaged and frustrated Muslims sense of a divine purpose, respect, recognition and belonging.

Conclusion

We may concluded that the role of identity in the contemporary terrorist movement is twofold. First, it serves as a driving force of Muslim radicalisation that may ultimately result in a terrorist act. However, circumstances that stimulate radicalisation are different when we compare Muslim countries where terrorist ideology and identity has emerged and Western states, where individuals got in touch with already well established radical Islamist worldview. Figure 1 provided below illustrates the patterns of radicalisation in both cases and figure 2 provides a simplified version of the nexus between identity, radicalisation and terrorism.

In Muslim countries radicalisation is driven by a perceived threat to identity, usually as a result of foreign Western influence (triggered by globalisation, secular rulers cooperating or co-opted by the West, or foreign military presence). In such circumstances, religious identity becomes a particularly strong instrument of self-identification. Members of Muslim community (including Muslims from other states that encounter similar experience of threat and oppression) seek to protect the identity peculiar to *umma*. However, the lack of effective means to face the threat establishes a breeding ground for radicalisation, while terrorism represents its extreme form.

In the second case, radicalisation is driven rather by a crisis of identity, which may result from relative deprivation, perceived disrespect and non-belonging to neither Western nor traditional Muslim society. Crisis of identity may be triggered also by a perceived threat to identity in a sense that Western states are blamed for discriminating Muslims by anti-immigration policies or for insulting and ridiculing their faith. However, this is not perceived as an

existential threat to Islamic way of life, rather it deepens sentiments of being torn between two different cultures and not belonging to any of them, or simply of being a disrespected stranger despite holding citizenship of the host country. Crisis of identity leads frustrated individuals to seek a new identity usually by rediscovering their religious roots. In these vulnerable circumstances, they risk to be influenced by radical Islamist ideologies (usually via internet or radical preachers).

Islamist communities and terrorist groups are particularly attractive to disengaged individuals because they provide them a new identity (as holy warriors), new meaning (fight for the right cause – protection and revenge) and a new belonging (global *umma* or a terrorist group). Previously frustrated individuals hence find a purpose in joining extremists and eventually in joining jihad. Crisis of identity perceived by Muslims in diaspora thus enables terrorist organisations to recruit and indoctrinate Muslims living in the West, provide them with training and encourage them to commit terrorist acts even against their host country.

Fig. 1: Patterns of Muslim radicalisation in respect to identity – trajectory from identity to terrorism

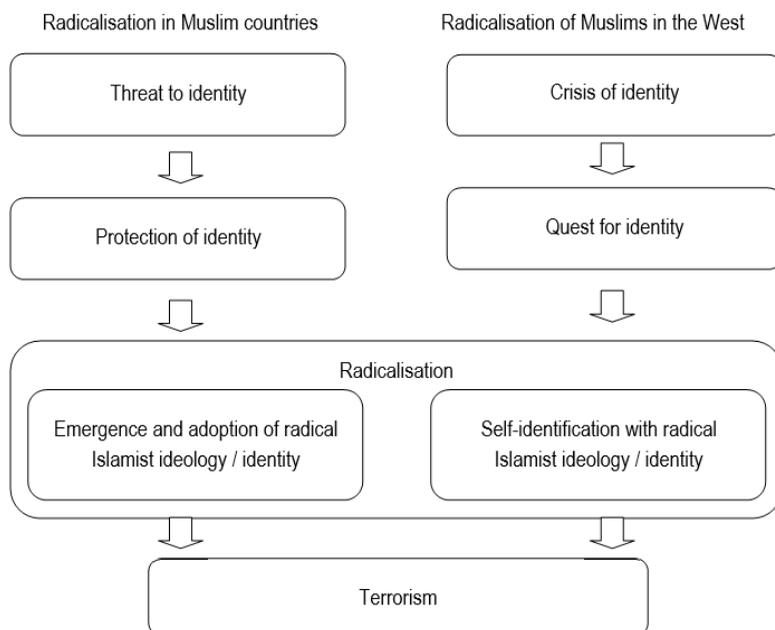
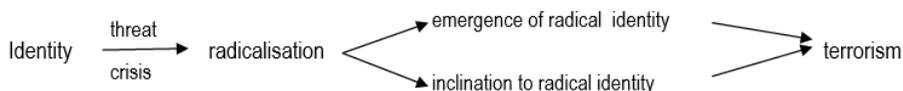


Fig. 2: Simplified illustration of nexus between identity, radicalisation and terrorism



Therefore, identity serves not only as a driving force of radicalisation, but radicalisation ultimately leads to the creation of a new identity. Once, such a radical identity had emerged (as a reaction to oppression in Muslim countries), those individuals that share feelings of oppression or disengagement (in Muslim countries as well as in Muslim diaspora in the West) may find it appealing to integrate into Islamist community, where they would be respected as fully-fledged members or glorified as holy warriors, eventually martyrs.

These observations are important in order to understand the roots of the contemporary global terrorist threat. At the same time, they suggest in what areas the prevention and de-radicalisation should focus when confronting contemporary terrorism. It is, however, important to note that this article provides only one of the possible ways of Muslim radicalisation. A threat to identity or identity crisis are by far not the only driving forces of radicalisation, but still we consider the role of identity (as a catalyst and as a transforming object) as crucial in order to understand today's terrorism.

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