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## The Homegrown Jihad: A Comparative Study of Youth Radicalization in the United States and Europe

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The Homegrown Jihad:  
A Comparative Study of Youth Radicalization in the  
United States and Europe

by

William Seth Wolfberg

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
Department of Political Science, Government & Intl Affairs  
College of Arts and Sciences  
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## Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my beloved, Veronica, who has supported me throughout the years and long nights, both mentally and emotionally, and has always been there to lift my spirits during my lowest points. I could not have done this without you.

I would like to thank my family specifically Mom, Dad, Zach, Keegan, Mark, Mamaw, Grandma Joannie, and Grandpa Marty. Also, I would like to thank Aunt Florence and Pops. Though you are no longer with us, your support and wisdom was pivotal to my life and my development from childhood to adulthood. I would like to thank my best friend and battle brother and sister 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Mohammed and Staff Sgt. Soondos Rashied for offering me an escape from the long hours of research and always being there when I needed you the most.

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## Abstract

Western nations continue to face potential attacks from violent extremist organizations waging a campaign of violence in the name of political Islam. Though these attacks are traditionally labeled as originating from abroad, leaders of these extremist organizations are utilizing a new tactic of radicalizing native or naturalized citizens from within Western countries in an effort to bypass the massive defensive security apparatus Western governments have put in place since the September 11 attacks.

These undistinguishable citizens turned radical jihadists, better known as homegrown terrorists, represent a clear and present danger to the security of the United States. In an effort to understand the problem, this paper seeks to identify patterns common amongst these individuals and addresses the question “How does a Muslim youth become radicalized into a homegrown terrorist?” This research will use a case study approach to identify patterns of radicalization in convicted homegrown terrorist and test the hypothesis that a failure of integration will cause some Western Muslim youth to radicalize and in some cases, commit violent crimes of terrorism.



## Introduction

“Hi Mom, I’m in Somalia! Don’t worry about me...I’m okay,” was how the mother of 17-year-old American high school student Burhan Hassan had discovered where her son had gone after he went missing for over two weeks.<sup>1</sup> It was a devastating announcement to the Minneapolis-St.Paul, Minnesota immigrant who had fled the violence and extreme poverty in Somalia hoping to seek refuge and a better opportunity for her family in the West.

Burhan was described by many in the Minneapolis-St. Paul community as a “good boy”, “a good student”, and did not have a criminal record. But what worried Burhan’s mother was not the fact that her son had run away from home and was now living in war ravaged Somalia, but “how exactly did a 17-year-old student from a relatively poor Somali community in Minnesota afford the \$2,000 plane ticket plus expenses to the strife torn country”?<sup>2</sup>

Authorities would later discover through the investigation that Hassan and several other Muslim American youths from the Minneapolis- St. Paul Somali community had been recruited and radicalized in the United States via the internet, and later transported, financed, and trained in Somalia by the Al Qaeda affiliate movement “Al Shabaab”, which like its parent organization Al Qaeda, advocates violent attacks

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<sup>1</sup> Bergen, Peter and Hoffman, Bruce PhD. (2010) Assessing the Terrorist Threat. United States Congressional Report, Washington D.C.: Bipartisan Policy Center's National Security Preparedness Group , pg. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Bergen, Peter and Hoffman, Bruce PhD. (2010), pg 3-4.

against the United States and other Western countries around the world through the use of political Islam and terrorism.

Why and how could an American youth, born in the United States, educated in the public school system, offered American opportunities for success found nowhere else, and raised with American values suddenly decide to betray his country and join a violent extremist group like Al-Shabaab? In recent years, cases like that of Hassan's have become of increasing concern as over two hundred men and women born or raised in the West have participated in, or provided support to Islamic terrorist plots and attacks. Essentially these individuals are transformed from undistinguishable Western youth to what has been coined as *homegrown* terrorists; a form of radical Islam that involves citizens and/or residents of Western countries who "have picked up the Islamic sword of the ideas", demonstrating a rapid behavioral lifestyle change, and are willing to attack their own countries, even if they are themselves or others killed in the process.<sup>3</sup>

What authorities face are individuals who are not motivated by money or luxuries, but by religious words meanings. President of the RAND Corporation Brian Jenkins best describes this as "terrorists do not simply fall from the sky. They emerge from a set of strongly held beliefs. They are radicalized. Then, they become terrorists".<sup>4</sup> The power of the word is a pivotal point of this study since it examines individuals willing to die for what they believe in. The primary cases of homegrown terrorism found in chapter one of this thesis will explain how two young men made the leap and pledged their lives in order to commit what they considered to be true "jihad" and "shahâdat" (martyrdom).

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<sup>3</sup> Thachuk, Kimberley L., Bowman, Marion E. "Spike" and Richardson, Courtney. *Homegrown Terrorism: The Threat Within*. Washington DC: National Defense University, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Gartenstein-Ross, D., & Grossman, L. (2009). *Homegrown Terrorist in the United States and Britain: An Empirical Examination of the Radicalization Process*. Washington DC: FDD Press.

The word of jihad or “struggle” as it is known in English translation are widely misunderstood in the West and have come to arouse considerable interest and in some cases fear.<sup>5</sup> The word itself has so strongly engrained itself in the Western psyche that it has produced fictional images of mass Islamic armies descending upon a helpless city and forcing the people to convert and killing those who do not. No amount of explanation can be given to debunk the myth that violence is not the intention or the meaning behind the word.<sup>6</sup> “Jihad” comes from the time of the Prophet Muhammad and from the Koran which he bestowed upon the Arabs until his death around 632 CE. The Prophet and his four Caliphs who succeeded him had governed society under Islamic law deemed as guidance from heaven seeking to build a just, egalitarian society, where poor and vulnerable people were treated with respect. This demand jihad or “struggle” to unite the community together in a common defense.<sup>7</sup> Though originally intended for the purpose of good, words can be misinterpreted and misunderstood as is human nature.

Among the Islamic thinkers of the Medieval Christian era, the meaning of the word “Jihad” as it exposed by radicalized elements of contemporary society began to emerge. The Islamic Medieval thinker Sayeed Qutib reinterpreted the word to mean revolutionary activity against all unbelievers not just hostile unbelievers in the pursuit of establishing Shari’ah or Islamic Law.<sup>8</sup> Qutib was not a believer in the idea that forcible conversion in waging jihad, but had no tolerance for any government which did not

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<sup>5</sup>Taleqani, A. M., Mutahhari, A. M., Shari’ati PhD, A., & Ayoub, M. (1986). *Jihad and Shahdat: Struggle and Martyrdom in Islam*. (M. Abedi, & G. Legenhausen, Eds.) Houston: Islamic Publications International.pg.1.

<sup>6</sup> Taleqani, A. M., Mutahhari, A. M., Shari’ati PhD, A., & Ayoub, M. (1986). Pg. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Armstrong, K. (2001). *The Battle for God: A History of Fundamentalism*. Toronto: Ballentine Books.pg. 37.

<sup>8</sup> Taleqani, A. M., Mutahhari, A. M., Shari’ati PhD, A., & Ayoub, M. (1986). Pg. 15.

strictly enforce fundamental Islamic Law on its people.<sup>9</sup> This form of governance was assumed to be necessary in order to fit a “just state” and society in accordance with the right of God. Those who have taken the ideas of jihad from Qutib and other Islamic theologians like him have associated and divided society into two categories; the right and the wrong.

Reports by leading experts in the field of terrorism Daveed Gartenstein-Ross & Laura Grossman assert “there are many different kinds of terrorists in Western societies, driven to violence by diverse motivations; for example, one of America’s most notorious homegrown terrorists such as Timothy McVeigh, a white man from a Christian background proves that this is not specifically a Muslim problem. But transnational Islamic terrorism (ranging and spanning from all over the world and including many races and ethnicities)—due to the size and capabilities of the movement, among other factors—is likely “the most threatening one to western values, interests and societies.”<sup>10</sup>

A popular stereotype common amongst the less intrepid minded Islamaphobics and the media, who tends to install fear and hate towards they see as different, would argue that the Muslim community as a whole in the West is doing little to counter the growing threat of radicalization and creation of homegrown terrorists. While it is ridiculous to assert that the entire Western Muslim community is actively engaged in acts of terrorism or compliance with the ideology; there is some margin of truth to this claim in regards to what some have noted as a “silent majority” among Muslims in the West who fail to speak out against those who radicalize or are akin to jihadist ideology. This “silent majority” which represents the broad, overarching stream of law abiding, patriotic,

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<sup>9</sup> Taleqani, A. M., Mutahhari, A. M., Shari’ati PhD, A., & Ayoub, M. (1986). Pg. 15.

<sup>10</sup> Gartenstein-Ross, D., & Grossman, L. (2009).

and secularly tolerant sides of Islam in the West is forced into a moral quagmire of sorts where a process of growing unease about Muslim loyalties and security considerations in regards to the nations where they reside and the broader community as a whole exists.

Roose & Akbarzadeh *Muslims, Multiculturalism and the Question of the Silent Majority* explains that “this process of being silent has further muffled the voice of secular Muslims caught between those that claim that Islam is the religion of Jihad and those that claim it is a religion of peace and understanding, it is hard to hear those who present Islam as a component of their identity with no outward manifestations”.<sup>11</sup> These individuals are essentially torn between conflicting loyalties, an internal struggle, of having to appear as part of “The West” while still attempting to maintain their Muslim identity. On one side of the society, they are viewed as “culturally Muslim” while on the other, they are viewed as “sell outs” of the religion.<sup>12</sup>

A secondary component to this struggle involves the threats posed by those who advocate Islam as a religion of Jihad to Muslims of a secular and cultural nature. Roose and Akbarzadeh assert that from the perspective of Islamists, “Muslims who seek to build bridges between Muslims (culturally secular) and the broader non-Muslim communities are seen as disingenuous and subversive” as Islam and the West are incompatible as some members of Fundamentalist groups have asserted.<sup>13</sup> Labels such as “disingenuous” and “subversive” can easily create a sense of fear in the culturally Muslim community and force these individuals to remain silent in their communities,

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<sup>11</sup> Roose, S. and Akbarzadeh. (2011). Muslims, Multiculturalism and the Question of the Silent Majority. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* , 321.

<sup>12</sup> Roose, S. and Akbarzadeh. (2011). pg. 318

<sup>13</sup> Roose, S. and Akbarzadeh (2011).

despite their traditionally liberal stance on secularism and pro-tolerant attitude toward non-Muslims.

However, though this fear and silence does exist within the community, it is not a delineating factor. Some members of this majority do believe in a tolerant version of Islam and speak up against those who they perceive as “hijackers” of the religion. For these individuals and greater Western society, Western Muslims do and should be obligated to cooperate fully with authorities in order to prevent terrorism as will be described in the case studies portion of this thesis.

There are efforts by US presidents and other Western leaders such as Barak Obama’s historic speech in Cairo after his election to reach out to the Muslim community and combat the Islamophobic image hyped by the media and hate mongers. Though these efforts constitute a major step in fostering understanding and building bridges of tolerance, a closer examination of what the Western Muslim communities are doing internally to stem possible radicalization from abroad is needed.

For example, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) which is by far the most vocal and well known Western group for debunking Islamophobic myths and accusations has established programs and initiatives to enable Muslim youth in the West alternative venues to voice their ideas and frustrations. Youth programs such as Leadership symposiums, internships, and connections to jobs and positions in some of the highest levels of the United States government illustrate the council’s efforts to counter radicalization in their communities and promote tolerance.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Saylor, C. P. (n.d.). *Written Statement of the Council on American-Islamic Relations On The Extent of Radicalization in the American Muslim Community and that Community's Response*. (2010) Retrieved June 28, 2012, from Council on American-Islamic Relations: <http://www.cair.com/ActionCenter/PeterKingHearings.aspx#CAIRsWorkUnderminesViolentExtremistNarratives>

Programs like the ones CAIR offers presents a possible long term solution to combat radicalization and encourage “bridge building” between Muslims and non-Muslims in the West. However, though CAIR tends to portray itself as a bridge between the communities, some remain skeptical to the true intentions of the organization specifically the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS).<sup>15</sup> The most credible evidence against the organization has been the arrests of high ranking officials and board members over the last 10 years to include supplying equipment and financial backing to listed terror organizations abroad.

The study of Western Muslim youth radicalizing and turning into homegrown terrorists is difficult to assess because cases of radicalization are unique and will not always produce an “ideal type case” such as those of Bahran Hassan, Sami Osmakac, or Mohamed Merah. Furthermore, research on the subject is problematic due to the issues of finding extensive research on the relatively new phenomenon, the rare event of such cases occurring, and establishing a “red line” of guidance in order to identify where boasting rhetoric such as radical anti-Western speech and ideals constitutes an individual crossing a threshold, and pushing them towards actually executing or preparing to execute violent terrorist attacks.

What little research does exist on Muslim sociological study, examination on the topic of assimilation, and the resulting stress into Western society in the early twenty first century seems to associate the Muslim community into two segments; the second generation youth and their parents. The experience of Muslim youth in the West differs

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<sup>15</sup> Pipes, D., & Chadha, S. (2006). CAIR: Islamists Fooling the Establishment. *Middle East Quarterly* , 3-20.

greatly from their parents. Though they physically moved to the West, they remained mentally in the in the “Old Country”.<sup>16</sup>

However, the research tends to assert the following traits of commonality: feelings of social isolation, perceived discrimination by society and the media, and an identity crisis culminating in a lack of full integration into the society. Everyday these individuals ask themselves “who am I? Muslim? American? Algerian? French? Something new”? Are individuals such as first, second or even third generation citizens identifying with their parents version of Islamic lifestyles as they know it from their homelands prior to their immigration?<sup>17</sup> How does this perception of discrimination and suspicion make them feel about their fellow citizens? Are these youths being forced by their peers to live in a social polarized world where at school and in public, they are in West as mainstream America knows it, but when they return home, they are in Yemen?<sup>18</sup> What is this doing to their identity development and does this have an effect on those who radicalize into homegrown terrorist?

### Research Question

In an effort to assist Federal Authorities and academia to understand the problem and potential threat of a homegrown terrorist, and how these individuals radicalize; this thesis will give evidence, identify patterns, and provide a new framework to answer the question “how does a Western Muslim youth become radicalized into a *homegrown*

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<sup>16</sup> Abdo, G. (2006). *Mecca and Main Street: Muslim Life in America After 9/11*. New York City: Oxford University Press. Pg. 4

<sup>17</sup> Haddad, Y. Y. (2004). *Not Quite American? The Shaping of Arab and Muslim Identity in the United States*. Waco: Baylor University Press.

<sup>18</sup> Sarroub, Loukia K. (2005) *All American Yemeni Girls: Being Muslim in a Public School*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. Pg. 1



terrorist”)? The development of the research question is formulated by first dismissing three primary assertions which have been noted in previous research such as age, citizenship, and the concept for “undeniable evidence of preparation for attacks”.<sup>19</sup>

For the purpose of this study, age is an important factor. The most common example the general public will associate with the analysis of homegrown terrorism is exemplified by the homegrown attacks by Palestinian American U.S. Army psychologist Major Nadel Malik Hasan. Hasan gained infamy in November of 2009 when he went on a shooting rampage Ft. Hood US army base in Texas. During the attack, Hasan took the lives of 13 American soldiers and injured 32 before he was shot and paralyzed from the waist down by responding security forces. By all accounts, Hasan demonstrates a clear cut case of homegrown terrorism in the United States.

However, this case is dismissed from this evaluation due to the individual’s age. The cases studied in this research as well as statistics, theories, and data sources provided for the developments of this research question indicate that the majority of individuals who become homegrown terrorists and attack are in their late twenties to early thirties.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, Major Hassan represents somewhat of an anomaly to other homegrown terrorists as he was in his late thirties and executed his attack at 39 years old.<sup>21</sup> Hassan’s case may be of a homegrown nature, but his case is not in the category of Western Muslim youth radicalizing due to his age at time of radicalization and attack.

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<sup>20</sup> Jenkins, Brian Michael. (2011). *Stray Dogs and Virtual Armies: Radicalization and Recruitment to Jihadist Terrorism in the United States After 9/11*. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation.

<sup>21</sup> Associated Press. (2012, April 10). *Major Nidal Hasan, Fort Hood Shooting Suspect, Wants Trial Delayed*. Retrieved April 11, 2012, from Huffington Post Online: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/04/10/nidal-hasan-trial\\_n\\_1414369.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/04/10/nidal-hasan-trial_n_1414369.html)

Secondly, this research question focuses mainly on individual youth who subscribe to the Islamic faith since either birth or since religious conversion who reside as identified citizens of Western countries primarily those living in the United States and Western European. For the purpose of this study, the data looks at the individual and not community level.<sup>22</sup> Above all, the individual assessed in this study must in some form be identified as citizens or residents of a Western country.

Finally, the term “radicalization” or the process whereby an individual or group adopts extreme views and justifies acts of violence, criminality, or terrorism based on those views is a distinguishing feature from other studies.<sup>23</sup> This transformation indicates that the individual has actually moved beyond boasting of anti-Western rhetoric and have gone out and actually executed, or prepared to execute a violent attack to enable chaos. This can be exemplified by individual acquiring lethal arms or explosives or other preparations for attacks on a target within the country they are living in. Therefore, simply being anti-Western or anti-American, etc is not grounds to label an individual as a potential candidate for radicalization into a homegrown terrorist.

### Hypothesis

This research hypothesizes that the radicalization of Western youth who join violent extremist organizations occurs due to a “lack of integration” into a society which will cause some youth to radicalize and in some cases commit violent acts of terrorism. This hypothesis was formulated by an in-depth study from sociology scholars, government studies on the Muslim community, case examinations, and independent

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<sup>22</sup> Jenkins, “Stray Dogs and Virtual Armies”, pg. viii

<sup>23</sup> Kimberley L. Thachuk, Marion E. “Spike” Bowman, and Courtney Richardson. Pg. 2

research on the subject of Muslims residing in Western countries. The term “lack of integration” involves the combination and examination of three specific factors; social isolation, perceived discrimination, depression, and identity crisis spawned by a failure to integrate into society.

The proponent term of “lack of integration” is an interesting component to the development of the hypothesis due to the conception of “who is ultimately responsible for its failure in the West? Is it simply a Muslim problem within the community? Is it a societal problem within communities of non-Muslims? Or is it a combination of both including factors of negative perception and predisposed bias influenced by the media?

Islam as a religion tends to seek a more devout relationship with a higher power than most secularized religions which exist in the United States. In terms of radicalization, it is by far the most targeted in the Western mainstream psyche.<sup>24</sup> However, it can be fully argued that there is an alarming trend of other devout groups in the West engaging in militancy based on religious ideals. For example, Jewish radicalization occurring in the West specifically for the purpose of travel to what Byman and Sachs have coined as “The Wild West Bank”.<sup>25</sup> In fact, some radical Jewish groups such as the Jewish Defense League or JDL have gone so far as to attempt to recruit

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<sup>24</sup> Gartenstein-Ross, D., & Grossman, L. (2009).

<sup>25</sup> Byman, D., & Sachs, N. (2012). The Rise of Settler Terrorism: The West Bank's Other Violent Extremists. *Foreign Affairs* .

<sup>26</sup> Byman, D., & Sachs, N. (2012). The Rise of Settler Terrorism: The West Bank's Other Violent Extremists. *Foreign Affairs* .

religious Jews with military training from Western countries to join West Bank settlers in somewhat of a quasi “militant tourism” to Jewish outposts in the Palestinian territories.<sup>26</sup>

The pivotal question facing the Muslim population in the West is “how does the community, family, and future generations remain Islamic in non-Muslim Countries?”<sup>27</sup> The trends associated with the Muslim community of wearing Islamic garments, growing beards, praying in public, as well as assigning life priorities and schedules to cope with the laws of Islam illustrates a purpose of identification within the community in order to show “who is Muslim” and “who is not”. The strength of this devotion essentially represents an alignment with a broader Muslim social and political agenda which virtually extends beyond the recognized borders of the Geo-political West encompassing a much more global identity.<sup>28</sup> For this community, overt display of religious devotion indicates a sense of an overarching group which is not limited to one country or another; a virtual commitment to a unified solidarity between one another.

In the second perspective of how Islamic communities in the West are viewed by non-Muslims, the perception is rooted in the idea that Islam and the cultural and religious norms and customs illustrated by Muslims are a case of perceived “backwardness” or a group which lacks “modernity” in the West. This assertion essentially coats the entire Muslim community as the virtual “other” which is exasperated by the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks and the media hype of a growing threat to Western civilization. To the non-

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<sup>26</sup> Samaha, N. (2011, September 24). *Foreign fighters support Israel's settlements*. Retrieved October 1, 2012, from Al Jazeera: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/09/201192343750232386.html>

<sup>27</sup> Voll, J. O. (1994). Islamic Issues for Muslims in the United States. In Y. Y. Haddad, *The Muslims of America* (pp. 205, 212). New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>28</sup> Al-Shingiety, A. Y. (1991). The Muslim as the "Other": Representation and Self-Image of the Muslims in North America. In Y. Y. Haddad, *The Muslims of America* (p. 53). New York: Oxford University Press.

religious and secularized non-Muslim communities in the West, Islamic traditions such as eating only Halal (Kosher foods), displaying Hijab (female head scarfs) as well as praying five times a day represent an antithesis and refutation to what it means to be American, German, French, or overall “modern in the West”.

To the non-Muslim community, “there is an inherent contradiction between all ‘traditional religions’ and modernity, and only if these behaviors are altered can they be compatible to a modern society”.<sup>29</sup> The general consensus is that these “backwards” people need the help of the non-Muslim community in order to overcome their “lack of modernity” and become “Western”. For example, recent contemporary issues in Western countries such as the outlawing of the female full body and face garment like the burka and Niqab in France illustrate that the West views these physical religious displays as against “modernity” and anti-West. Additionally, these bans also show that the general feeling among Western non-Muslim societies is that these communities need “our help” to modernize and integrate into the Western society.

#### Previous Theoretical Discussion

The first theoretical discussion in order to understand how a “lack of integration” could produce a ripe candidate for radicalization can best be exemplified in the theory of acculturation primarily focused on the idea of observable traits caused by the process known as “acculturation stressors”. The theory of acculturation stress was first explained in Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus’s *Is Acculturation Unidimensional or Bidimensional?: A Head-to-Head Comparison in the Prediction of Demographics, Personality, Self-Identity,*

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<sup>29</sup> Voll, J. O. (1994). Islamic Issues for Muslims in the United States. In Y. Y. Haddad, *The Muslims of America* (pp. 205).

*and Adjustment*. However, the Ph.D dissertation of Glenn Richard Olds from Texas A&M University (2009) on studies of religious cultural integration among Muslim Americans and how acculturation stressors may affect their integration and social behaviors into the American landscape will be the primary source for explaining acculturation stress among Muslim youth in the West.

Olds explains that “acculturation, or the phenomena which results when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups creates stress on individuals and could lead to positive and negative consequences”.<sup>30</sup> Broken down into simpler terms, acculturation stress can be understood from the story below:

*A man from country “A” immigrates to country “B” with his wife and two teenage children. When he arrives, his children are placed in Country “B”’s public school system while the father and mother remain and work in a distinct ethno religious enclave of a major Western city where they predominantly associate and work with other immigrants from country “A”. Here they are able to maintain their heritage language and culture on a daily basis. Their home life is no different than it was when they lived in country “A” to include speaking the language of country “A”, eating only country “A” food, and watching only country “A” television.*

*However, the children who go to public school come into constant contact with children from Country “B” who display accepted customs, languages, and norms associated with this country and are apt to point out the differences of the children from country “A”. The children from country “A” begin to realize that they are viewed as “outsiders”, “different”, or “the others” due to their appearance, language, and customs. In an effort to show their willingness to belong, gain inclusion, and acceptance, the children from country “A” begin to enact the survival mechanism of acculturation or replicating the norms, language, and customs of country “B” as they have learned from observing the children, teachers, and other mediums at school. The acculturation begins to lead to some degree of acknowledgement amongst the peer children in country “B” and the children of country “A” begin to gain some acceptance, but are still knowingly considered as “outsiders”.*

*The children from country “A” return to their parents home and begin to exhibit their new found acculturation traits and behaviors. This in turn causes a backlash at home as the parents of the children do not fully understand why or*

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<sup>30</sup> Olds Jr, Glenn Richard, PhD. 2009, pg. 25

*where the children are learning these behaviors because they are viewed as improper or wrong in country "A"'s society. This leads to added stress on the children as the parents begin to assert more authority and demands on what they view as "the proper norms and customs" they are expected to follow even if they no longer live in country "A". Essentially the children from country "A" begin to act like they are from country "B" when they are outside the home, but return to the accepted norms of country "A" when they return home to their parents. Two worlds are essentially created; one where integrating into society is expected and one where lack of integration is expected.*

This diverging and polarizing expectations essentially creates two different versions of country "B" where there are dual expectations placed on the children to satisfy both areas of acceptance adding stress and confusion on the children of who or what behaviors are accepted.

In order to measure acculturation stress, Olds conducted online surveys through Islamic American websites of 229 participants of Islamic faith or background. The majority of participants are either 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> generation American and in their late teens to early thirties. Olds utilized a modified version of the Vancouver Index of Acculturation (VIA-Islamic version) (VIA, Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000) a 20-statement measure which asked participants to answer questions such as "I enjoy social activities with typical North American people." Items are broken down into two subscales of ten items each. The first subscale measures interest in heritage cultural activities while the second subscale measures interest in host cultural activities. The subscales features mirrored items such as "I often behave in ways that are typical of my heritage culture" or "I often behave in ways that are considered to be 'typically American'".<sup>31</sup>

The participants were then asked to complete an additional survey to measure the level of acculturative stress on a family level, as measured by the Social, Attitudinal, Familial, and Environmental Acculturation Stress Scale (SAFE, Mena, Padilla, &

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<sup>31</sup> Olds Jr, Glenn Richard. Pg. 26

Maldonado, 1987). These self administered reports feature “24 items that are rated on a 6-point Likert scale” and feature questions such as “My family members do not understand my American values” and “My family members and I have different expectations about my future”.

The final scale which Olds used in his measurement of acculturation stress is the Center for Epidemiologic Studies-Depression Scale. This scale has been recommended for use with non-clinical populations, non-western populations, and Muslims in particular because of the focus on affective experiences vs. severe symptomology and suicidality. Twenty responses are scored on a four-point Likert scale and feature questions such as “I felt that people dislike me” or “I thought my life had been a failure (CES-D)”.<sup>32</sup> Olds took the results of the first two surveys in order to measure the level of acculturation that the participants experienced and compared the results to the level of the participants cited depression as measured by the CES-D.

This thesis will utilize acculturation stressors and lack of integration highlighted in Old’s research as a basis for examination of the cases in chapter one. However, an additional factor is involved in the theory development in order to enhance and operationalize the “expected integration” or expected “lack of integration” component of acculturation stress. It is evolved and defined by the term *bipolar life*. This term is defined as a “polarized lifestyle”; a “life, in two distinct cultures”. As highlighted in the story mentioned above, there are essentially two worlds of “reality” in development; one which encourages integration into a society and the other discouraging it.

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<sup>32</sup> Olds Jr, Glenn Richard, (2009)



The term bipolar life can also be applied to the constraints a society places on a community or the constraints which an individual can create themselves in their own minds. For example, convicted homegrown terrorist Sami Osmakac virtually created his own bipolar life by devising a world view of “the right devout Muslim world” and the world of the “sinners and unbelievers”. Additionally, society can also create this bipolar life due to segregation. For example, the socioeconomic separation in France between the posh lifestyles of the Champs d’ Lyse and that of the French suburbs of the *banlieue* can create such a reality of two different versions of France.<sup>33</sup> This creation of bipolar life all stem from acculturation stress and a lack of integration into mainstream Western culture which could have serious effects on an individual making them potentially susceptible to radicalization.

The next theory from the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s (FBI) *The Radicalization Process: From Conversion to Jihad* will be used to examine the radicalization of the individual. The framework takes account of the individual psychological process which has been noted in other terrorist studies, but is unique because it assesses individual choice and “pathways of action” to either continue becoming more involved with violent groups or leave and return to their previous lives before beginning to radicalize.<sup>34</sup> This theory assumes that an individual will radicalize by following four steps that includes pre-radicalization, identification, indoctrination, and finally action.

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<sup>33</sup> Dallali, J. (2012, April 22). *Shout from the Suburbs: As France prepares for a presidential election, racism remains a topic of heated debate*. Retrieved May 21, 2012, from Al Jazeera:

<http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/aljazeeraeworld/2012/03/2012327134841236502.html>

<sup>34</sup> Patel, F. (2011). *Rethinking Radicalization*.

Table 1- FBI's Radicalization Process: From Conversion to Jihad

- Pre-Radicalization: Which includes motivation, conversion, stimulus and incubator opportunity to radicalize
- Identification: Individual has taken acceptance of a “cause” and begins isolating themselves from their former lives.
- Indoctrination: Individual convinced that action is required to support the cause.
- Action: Committing acts of terrorism. Individual knowingly engages in extremist activity.

<sup>35</sup> Patel, F. (2011). *Rethinking Radicalization*

This framework asserts that this trend toward radicalization occurs when individuals known as a “jilted believer” experiences a “religious awakening” that can either be due to a conversion to the religion or a “reinterpretation” of the meaning in the faith virtually making them “born again” and becomes more deeply ingrained to the faith. Though this theory identifies important patterns stemming from a “lack of integration” such as social isolation, depression, and identity crisis, it does not examine family, social pressures or motivations as a catalyst for radicalization.

This lack of added criteria as mentioned above would later delegitimize the framework for the FBI as recent homegrown terror plots did not fit neatly into this radicalization model. This would later result in FBI Director Robert Mueller to acknowledge that the threat from homegrown terrorism may have evolved to include “extremists from a diverse set of backgrounds, geographic locations, life experiences, and

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<sup>35</sup> Patel, F. (2011). *Rethinking Radicalization*.

motivating factors.”<sup>36</sup> This presumed “x factor” is essentially missing from the framework. Therefore, this theory further extends the research, but is in need of added criteria mentioned by Director Mueller in order to address the evolving threat. Creating a new framework for this evolving threat is a primary goal of this research.

Combining the work of Olds on acculturation stress to the FBI’s theory will essentially “fill the gap” to address the evolving threat highlighted by Director Mueller. When applied to the cycle, Olds theory as well as evidence of a bipolar life will illustrate a clear linkage to suggest that acculturation stressors create the “lack of integration criteria” explained in the hypothesis of this thesis and create a ripe environment for radicalization.

This thesis will combine all of the discussed theories in order to form an evaluation of the selected case studies listed in chapter one. The FBI theory will be used to assess and identify the level of observable radicalization from seemingly “undistinguishable” youth to “converts” to homegrown terrorist. Finally, the research from Olds Jr’s dissertation on acculturation stress on individuals will be used to identify factors exhibiting lack of integration and the effects of bipolar life and depression amongst Western Muslim youth.

### Methodology and Research Design

The concept of identity in regards to Western Muslim youth is of importance to this study because human beings tend to develop identity in their formative years of youth and adolescence. In the post September 11<sup>th</sup> era, the development of the Muslim identity in the West especially for the youth is a quite remarkable area of study. Though

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<sup>36</sup> Patel, F. (2011). *Rethinking Radicalization*. Pg. 18

the long term effects of the attacks and their aftermath are yet to be determined, it is an event which continues to reverberate in both the shaping of Muslim and their neighbors in the West today.<sup>37</sup>

The variables for how acculturation stress affects the individual's radicalization process are addressed below:

Independent Variable: Western Muslim Youth

Dependent Variable: Radicalization Cycle

The individuals assessed in the case study portion of chapter one must meet several criteria prior to selection. Primarily, the individual being evaluated must have spent a “significant portion of their formative years of youth and adolescence in a Western country, or must bear a significant connection to life in the West” prior to starting to radicalize. For example, Gartenstein-Ross and Gross highlight the case of Brooklyn bookstore owner Abdulrahman Farhane, “who in November 2006 pleaded guilty to conspiring to launder money in a terrorist financing case. Because Farhane did not spend his formative years in America, and there is no record of him radicalizing in the United States because he left Morocco in 1987 when he was 32 years old cases like his are excused from the study. Apparently, Farhane developed extremist views while growing up in Morocco and not in the U.S.”.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, age and self-development of an individual's formative years must be spent in the West. Therefore, those cases such as Farhane's will be excluded from evaluation.

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<sup>37</sup> Haddad, Y. Y. (2004). *Not Quite American? The Shaping of Arab and Muslim Identity in the United States*. Waco: Baylor University Press. Pg. 1

<sup>38</sup> Gartenstein-Ross, D., & Grossman, L. (2009). pg. 27

The cases studied in chapter one are addressed as individuals who share a set of common behavioral experiences. It is impossible to assess the total extent of life factors, experiences, and variables associated which may lead to radicalization. However, studying the general life experiences documented in Islamic family life such as public experiences of discrimination as well as the general life experiences; it is possible to capture a broad understanding of acculturation stressors, lack of integration, bipolar life, and what it means to be a Western Muslim youth. Additionally, the candidates assessed must display overt behavioral changes which reflect the theories of acculturation stress and radicalization process as in the previous theories. Simply spouting rhetoric or ideals is not considered grounds for evaluation.

Though it can be asserted that naivety and youthful ignorance may result in youth joining these groups, this study will examine individuals who were “ready to be terrorists” by observing noted dramatic shifts in their behavior. These observables must prove beyond a reasonable doubt that these individuals were ready to join these organizations and commit acts of violence and not just be noted for their rhetoric and boasting criticisms against non-Muslims.<sup>39</sup> For example, Anjem Choudry who advocates implementation of Islamic Shariah Law in Great Britain may be responsible for inspiring others to radicalize and displays traits and observables like the ones listed in theories above, but until he commits an act of terror, cases such as his will be excluded because it is nothing more than negative rhetoric.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Jenkins, “Stray Dogs and Virtual Armies”. pg.viii

<sup>40</sup> Choudry, A. (22, May 2012). *anjemchoudry.com*. Retrieved 5 12, 2012, from *anjemchoudry.com*: <http://www.anjemchoudary.com/>

The case studies will focus only on individuals who have been convicted of terrorism through actual attacks or planning to use acts of violence against their home countries. This can prove to be difficult as the majority of individuals who execute attacks do not live to tell their story or their motivation for radicalizing and attacking because they are usually killed in the attack. Therefore, the cases focus on homegrown terrorist who are charged either in life or posthumously. However, they must be formally charged by an appointed and recognized court of law in the West. For example, the actions of convicted homegrown terrorist Mohamed Merah; a radical Islamist linked to a killing spree in southern France who died in a shootout with French Special police was still convicted and charged for terrorism even after his death.<sup>41</sup> Simply put, if charges have been levied against the individual, they are fair candidates for evaluation.

Each case will examine “motivation” for radicalizing. This criteria is included and evaluated in order to dispel the commonly held assumption that “this individual went crazy and shot or blew people up” as this is a relatively easy scapegoat. The individual must therefore, have a stated cause, a *raison d’être* for why they made the leap toward radicalization. For example, British Pakistani homegrown terrorist Mohammed Sadique Khan expressed claims he is engaging in defensive activities prompted by British foreign policies that result in the perpetration of “atrocities against my people all over the world” highlighting cases such as Bosnia, Chechnya, Israel, Iraq and Afghanistan as examples.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> AP. (2012, March 22). *After long standoff, French terror suspect killed during police raid*. Retrieved May 7, 2012, from FOX News: <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2012/03/22/french-riot-police-set-off-explosions-as-standoff-between-authorities-and/>

<sup>42</sup> Huffman, A. O. (2011). *Homegrown Terrorism in the United States: Comparing Radicalization Trajectories in the United States and Britain*. UMI Ann Arbor . pg.28

A breadth of candidates in terms of race and ethnicity are selected in order to avoid labeling heritage nationalities such as Palestinian American, Pakistani British, or French Algerian youth, etc. as being prone to radicalization as such assertions are bound to be labeled as Islamophobic. The cases will be organized by first describing the crimes committed, followed by an evaluation of the individual's transition to radicalization prior to conviction. Additionally, these examinations will cite how each individual moved from rhetoric, to opportunities for action, and eventually became charged for terrorism by an appointed and recognized court of law.

The case studies begin with the examination of other groups emanating from relatively successful immigrant communities to the West who suffer from acculturation stress and radicalize into members of criminal groups. Exemplified in the case study of Korean immigrant youth joining violent gangs, this case will be used as a comparison in order to exhibit that acculturation stress, bipolar life, and lack of integration is not solely reserved to Western Muslim youth. Its purpose is to show that these factors can play a significant part in radicalizing other children of immigrant parents who reside in the West.

The final two cases assessed will focus on two specific individuals Sami Osmakac and Mohamed Merah. Both began as seemingly undistinguishable Western Muslim youth before radicalizing. The case of American homegrown terrorist Sami Osmakac will demonstrate the result of acculturation stress in the United States. The case of Mohamed Merah will illustrate the effects of acculturation stress in Europe in order to show that the problem does occur outside of the United States.

Each case will be evaluated, measured, and listed into a summarizing framework organized along the following seven observables: nationality, conversion, motivation, and evidence of acculturation stress / bipolar life, opportunity for action / incubators, and finally charges for terrorism activity. It is important to note that for the assessment of Korean youth gang activity, the observables of “conversion” will indicate becoming involved in gang life and the sections “charged as homegrown terrorist” will be changed to “charged as gang member”.

The framework will be listed in order to display the symptoms suffered by each individual enabling radicalization. In the conclusion section of chapter four, the frameworks will be listed together in order to highlight any patterns observed in the case of each individual. The comparison will prove that a pattern does occur between Western Muslim youth who radicalized into homegrown terrorists.

### Concepts and Definitions

The concepts and definitions of this research must be clearly explained in order to eliminate confusion or misdirection of the cases described in chapter one. These concepts and definitions were collected from a breadth of sources to include government agencies, academia, and private institutions. Additionally, this section includes data sources and how these terms are operationalized and measured.

First, the term conversion is explained as a noticeable change in one’s religious identity, a conscious self transformation that may take the form of a change from:



Table 2- FBI “Conversion” Observables

- Change of one formal faith to another
- Change from a secular belief to a formal faith
- A recommitment to an existing faith

<sup>43</sup> Patel, F. (2011). *Rethinking Radicalization*

The FBI, Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and the NYPD all assess measurement of converts to Islam as a series of observable changes such as physical appearances as well as an individual’s rapid behavioral change to wearing exclusively traditional Islamic garb, growing a beard, etc. However, these organizations also measure the term to include involvement, commitment, and indoctrination with other individuals suspected of illicit or violent enterprises. These individual are then connected to violent terrorist organizations abroad demonstrating a significant change in life they previously identified with before converting or discovering a “renewal” of faith. The term of “renewal” can also mean a person of Muslim upbringing or background who has found a strong, renewed interest in the religion and has begun interpreting the faith in a violent or antagonistic way toward those who do not subscribe to strict Islamic protocol as well as increased involvement in social groups who boast Jihadist ideals.

For the purpose of this research the term acculturation stress or stressors occurring as a result of the survival mechanism of acculturation which have the potential for both beneficial and detrimental outcomes, whereas “culture shock” casts the multicultural encounter in a purely negative light and consequence to include depression, social

isolation, identity crisis, and assimilation problems.<sup>43</sup> These factors produce a source for feelings of “lack of integration”.

The concept of Muslim identity will be defined as a developed, stable sense of self and resolved security in one’s basic values, attitudes, and beliefs. Developmentally, its formation typically occurs in a crisis of adolescence or young adulthood, and is tumultuous and emotionally challenging. However, the successful development of personal identity is essential to the integrity and continuity of the personality.<sup>44</sup> This term is coupled with “lack of identity” or “identity crisis” suggesting the individual is unable, incapable, or unwilling to establish as “stable sense of self” as a result of psychological issues or factors within their environment.

Integration in regards to each individual evaluated in the case studies portion of this research will be defined as “retaining some aspects of a minority identity and practice while at the same time adopting features of the identity and lifestyle of the dominant culture”<sup>45</sup> This concept is combined with the term “lack of integration” which is a broad term to describe traits exhibited as a result of acculturation stressors such as social isolation, identity crisis, perceived discrimination, etc. as outlined by Olds Jr.’s research as well as the FBI’s study of radicalization among Western Islamic youth. Furthermore, Olds’s research uses the VIA, SAFE, and Depression Index surveys to measure the level of acculturation stress.

The terms Opportunity for Action & Incubators are described by the FBI’s study as “venues or locations that provide a setting for radicalization by offering an opportunity

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<sup>43</sup>Olds Jr, Glenn Richard, PhD. Pg. 16.

<sup>44</sup> Borum, Randy. *Psychology of Terrorism*. Tampa: University of South Florida, 2004. Pg. 25

<sup>45</sup> Olds Jr, Glenn Richard, 2009, pg. 25

to meet likeminded people and by giving an individual inspiration or serving as a recruiting ground” and are an important concept to the study because a fire does not begin without a spark. These places may include “the internet, prisons, mosques, clubs or associations, private or public schools, universities, and sports activities” where the opportunity to join social cliques (electronically or in person) to spread and share a common vision of radical ideas, training, or planning can be candidly discussed.<sup>46</sup> The Tables listed on the following page provide an example of the Radicalization framework.

Table 3- Radicalization Process of Western Muslim Youth into Homegrown Terrorist						
Name	Nationality	Conversion Type (rejuvenated or formal conversion)	Motivation	Evidence of Acculturation Stress / Lack of Integration	Opportunity for Action / Incubator	Charged as Homegrown Terrorist
xxx	British	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Rejuvenated conversion to Islam</li> <li>-Increased religious observables</li> <li>- Radical change in behavior</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Atrocities against Muslims in Iraq and Afghanistan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Depression</li> <li>-Social Isolation</li> <li>-Perceived Discrimination</li> <li>-Identity Crisis</li> <li>-Family Issues</li> <li>-Bipolar Life</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Training</li> <li>-Membership in jihadi groups (online or in person)</li> <li>-Mosques associated with jihadi activity</li> <li>-Planning for terrorist attacks</li> </ul>	yes

<sup>46</sup> Gartenstein-Ross, D., & Grossman, L. (2009). pg. 23

Table 4- Radicalization Process of Korean American Youth into Gang Member						
Name	Nationality	Conversion	Motivation	Evidence of Acculturation Stress / Lack of Integration	Opportunity for Action / Incubator	Charged as Gang Member
xxx	USA	-Increased gang observables  - Radical change in behavior	-Deprivation  -Material Desire  -Inclusion in group	-Depression  -Social Isolation  -Perceived Discrimination  -Identity Crisis  -Family Issues  -Bipolar Life	-Membership in gang groups  -Venues associated with gang activity	Yes

### Assumptions

Assumptions are organized into four specific categories; source validity, lifestyle evaluation, individual choice and rationale, and freedom from fear. The research is based on a collection of second hand and third hand collection of information. Previous literature on the topic has been difficult to attain and utilize in this thesis for two reasons. First, attempting to perform studies on a large ethnic and religious populous like the Muslims of the West can be problematic since researchers must be cautious that bias against the group and discrimination does not occur.

The research utilizes famed scholar and sociologist Yavonne Haddad's *Not Quite American? The Shaping of Arab and Muslim Identity in the United States* which illustrates the development of identity among these youths. The research also illustrates observable symptoms of acculturation stress factors. In the cases Haddad uses in her studies and lectures, she demonstrates how these experiences shaped and formed the

individuals perception of the world around them and truly captures what it means to be Muslim in a Western country.

To assess the level of perceived discrimination and depression which these youths feel, the research employs the work of Loukia Sarroub's *All American Yemeni Girls: Being Muslim in a Public School*. This book provided insight into the level and experiences of perceived discrimination experienced by these Muslim youth especially after the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>. In order to bridge the gender gap, Moustafa Bayoumi's *How Does it Feel to Be a Problem? Being Young and Arab In America* explained and exemplified young Western Muslim males and females experiences since September 11<sup>th</sup> and the social isolation and discrimination they experience from the society around them.

For the case study portion of the research, this thesis utilizes a wide variety of past research initiatives on the study of homegrown terrorism such as Alexia O. Huffman's *Homegrown Terrorism in the United States: Comparing Radicalization Trajectories in Britain and America*, Brian Michael Jenkin's *Would-Be Warriors: Incidents of Jihadist Radicalization in the United States Since September 11, 2001*, and Kimberley L. Thachuk, Marion E. "Spike" Bowman, and Courtney Richardson's *Homegrown Terrorism: The Threat Within* to name a few. All of the formentioned texts illustrate indepth case studies by government, academia, and private institutions to assess individuals who were born or raised in the West during their formative years and radicalized from seemingly undistinguishable individuals into homegrown terrorists.

As mentioned in the theory evaluation section, the research on acculturation stress is not a problem solely reserved to Muslim youth in the West. This thesis utilizes

additional literature on other youth of immigrant parents in the West who have become susceptible to violent activities and lifestyles. Data for this evaluation is drawn from research on Korean American gang culture in the book *Gangs and Immigrant Youth* by Choo Kyung-Seok. Choo's research draws on the theory of acculturation stress and the effects these stressors creates among children of Korean immigrants in the United States.

This evaluation demonstrates and helps to explain cases where these stressors have led other youth from immigrant communities in the West to join violent criminal enterprises such as gangs and delinquent groups. Because terrorist groups follow a similar organizational structure as other criminal enterprises such as street gangs (I.E. enforcement wing, leadership wing, recruitment, fundraising, etc), it can be understood that these organizations need to recruit susceptible new members to grow their numbers and power similar to how a foreign terrorist groups operate.<sup>47</sup> Like the argument presented by this thesis, Choo explains that transforming an immigrant youth to gang members is not a quick occurrence but a process. One which is remarkably similar to radicalization of Muslim Western youth due to acculturation stress and a lack of integration. Therefore, it can be understood that acculturation stress leads to similar forms of "radicalization" in other minority youths of immigrant parents in Western countries.

The collected information is not from first hand interviews conducted by the author of this thesis. Though this research is an original work, it must be stated that bias by the mediums that collected the information may have not been entirely removed from the end products. An additional form of bias which must be noted is related to the background and upbringing of the researcher involved in the creation of this project. As a

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<sup>47</sup> Barker, J. (2003). *The No-Nonsense Guide to Terrorism*. Oxford: New Internationalist Publications Ltd.

white male of European descent from a middle class upbringing, I am an outsider to these groups in question; bias cannot be ruled out due to this fact.

Secondly, the research draws from cases and experiences and lifestyles which occur inside the homes and close knit inner family circles of individuals who have been convicted of being homegrown terrorists. It is possible that holes do and will exist in the information collected, compiled, and analyzed. The collectors of the information used in this thesis are assigned with the very difficult task of entering these close net communities, which is bound to be problematic as many families of convicted homegrown terrorist refute the charges levied against their kin even with overwhelming evidence mounted against them.

Because this thesis uses case study analysis of individuals, it must address the problems of psychology when assessing an individual especially when it involves the examination of choices and actions. Individual thought process, development of ideas and decisions to commit an action of violence occurs on an independent level of the mind which cannot be grouped into one solid framework or process. Therefore, this research assumes that a correct application of an individual's psychological thought process is being properly assessed.

The final assumption to be addressed is the issue of fear which exists among the individuals and the ethno-religious groups in the study. Members of the Muslim community who encounter such researchers or collectors of information are quick to assume that they may very well be accused of being a terrorist or possibly being arrested under the suspicion of terrorism. This perception of fear found in these communities also culminate under the guise that the researchers they are talking to may very well be

undercover police, Federal agents, other terrorist agents or foreign intelligence services. The main assertion of such paranoia being that the interviewer is perhaps the Israeli *Mossad* Intelligence Agency. An additional fear incurs the idea that at any time a mass surge in violence against the Western Muslim community can occur. This idea can best be exemplified in the examination of hate crimes occurring since the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks where crimes against Arabs, Muslims, or those assumed to be Muslims have spiked 1,700 percent and have never returned to their pre-2001 levels.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Bayoumi, M. (2008). *How Does it Feel to Be a Problem*. New York: Penguin Group. Pg.3



## Chapter One: Case Studies

### Effects of Acculturation Stress among Other Groups: Korean Gangs & Immigrant Youth

The follow case highlights the bipolarized life and symptoms of acculturation stress experienced by Korean American youths, and how these factors induce them to radicalize from seemingly “undistinguishable” youth into violent gang members. Following the examination of Korean communities in the United States and how this “clash of cultures” induces bipolar life such as high expectations of parents to perform, or accepting behaviors and attitudes, which are at odds with their parents, acculturation stressors, and lack of integration to include perceived discrimination, social isolation, and identity crisis will inhibit a path towards radical behavioral changes and violent behavior involving criminal gangs. Like Muslim immigrants, the Korean immigrant population in the United States is a relatively new phenomenon in comparison to other immigrant groups to the West. Despite their first major origins to the United States in 1902, Koreans have maintained a high level of unique lifestyles and attachments to their Korean heritage which consists of bonds based on social and shared culture, traditions, language and foods; they by far hold their heritage and ethnicity higher than any other Asian American group.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Choo, K.-S. (2007). *Gangs and Immigrant Youth*. New York: LFB Scholarly Publishing LLC. pg. 5.

<sup>51</sup> Terrazas, A. (2002-2012). *Korean Immigrants in the United States*. Retrieved May 6, 2012, from Migration Policy Institute: <http://www.migrationinformation.org/usfocus/display.cfm?ID=716>

Reports from the United States Census Bureau states “the number of Korean immigrants in the United States grew 27-fold between 1970 and 2007, from 38,711 to 1.0 million, making them the seventh largest immigrant group in the United States after Mexican, Filipino, Indian, Chinese, Salvadoran, and Vietnamese foreign-born immigrants”.<sup>50</sup> The Korean community also tends to cluster mainly in four distinct locations in the United States: New York, New Jersey, California, and Virginia. This clustering provides these immigrants the ability to establish enclaves where they can remain in touch with their heritage and maintain their traditions.

Socioeconomically, Korean immigrants and their children who constitute second and third generation immigrants to the United States tend to fall into the following categories.

Table 5- Socioeconomic Trends Common Amongst Korean Immigrants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High Educational Attainment of Advanced Degrees</li> <li>• High contribution and sacrifice of parent income for educational success and opportunity for their children.</li> <li>• Heavily involved in the Self-Employment Sector of The United States; most owning private Businesses or venues.</li> <li>• High rates of child enrollment in private institutions after school (Arts, Music, Extended Tutoring)</li> <li>• Median Economic Income</li> </ul>

<sup>51</sup> Choo, K.-S. (2007). pg. 54.

Though the data illustrated above provides a sparkling picture of Korean immigrants and their relative success in the United States, a darker side does exist in the

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<sup>51</sup> Choo, K.-S. (2007). pg. 54

Korean community in relation to the growing problem of Korean American youth becoming involved with criminal gangs. This emerging phenomenon within the widely claimed “model minority” (cited by many in the United States for their “hard-work ethic and children’s success) has been damaged in recent years due to the medias spotlight on viscous gangland attacks, drug dealing, armed robbery, fraud, assault, and violence committed by Korean American youths who come from Korean immigrant families who have achieved relative success in the United States.<sup>52</sup>

In the early 2000s, assistant professor of the criminal justice program at Utica College Kyung-Seok Choo embarked on a research study for his book *Gangs and Immigrant Youth*. Choo’s research wanted to explain for why these seemingly “undistinguishable” Korean American youths from well established families decided to join these gangs and how they became so prone and susceptible to engaging in a life of crime to begin with.

Choo’s research examines Korean immigrants to the United States and their first and second generation children who tend to follow similar patterns in terms of their assimilation into the United States society. Choo asserts that the Korean immigrant life in the United States has been modeled among strong bonds to social traditions, language, and cultural roots to the Korean peninsula. Despite these claims of “bondedness” towards tradition, the children of these immigrants are becoming socialized into the American society value system at a rapid rate. This rapid rate of assimilation while remaining tied to these traditions illustrates examples of bipolar life in two distinct versions of “America”.

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<sup>52</sup> Choo, K.-S. (2007). pg. 3.

This divergent life view is exemplified between the emerging generational gap between child and parent. While Korean immigrant parents adhere to a high degree of Korean ethnicity, many of their children remain confused about whom they are; American or Korean?<sup>53</sup> These two versions of reality include a Korean value centric and one American value centric affecting behaviors and habits which may be incompatible with one particular culture or another. For example, at home they speak Korean, watch only Korean shows, and are expected to adhere to their parent's version of Korean lifestyles and traditions as they know it from their lives in Korea. As a result of this tug-a-war of identity, a crisis of identity and a generational gap between child and parent can occur leading the youth to seek an alternative identity which can occur by joining a criminal gang or engaging in delinquent culture.<sup>54</sup>

Acculturation stressors such as being in an identity crisis is found to be the most common factor for Korean youth to join gangs, specifically those in the second generation category. As previously mentioned the "tug-a-war" between two distinct cultures plays a large part in the formation of these Western youths identity crisis, coupled by the emerging generational gap between their parents perceived identity of "what a Korean American should look like" in their relation to what these youths actually desire and who they see themselves as being a success in their terms.<sup>55</sup>

The most common theme Choo's research discovered in the identity development of Korean American youths who joined these gangs was the constant odds between the identities of a "twinkie" referring to a Korean American who is "Korean or yellow on the

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<sup>53</sup> Choo, K.-S. (2007). pg.153

<sup>54</sup> Choo, K.-S. (2007). pg. 9, 63.

<sup>55</sup> Choo, K.-S. (2007). pg. 31

outside” and “American or white on the inside” and “fobbies” which conveys the meaning of “fresh off the boat” in reference to Korean American youth who remain identified toward their presumed “Koreanness”. For example, “fobbies” tend to speak Korean the majority of the time, listen only to Korean music, associate only with Koreans, etc.<sup>56</sup>

This diversion of identities shows no apparent data over which identity is more likely to join criminal gangs. However, second generation “twinkies” and “fobbies” are more likely to be “street socialized” due to immigrant parents self-employment which includes long working hours, family instability, lack of supervision, and availability of venues for illegal opportunities.<sup>57</sup> An additional component of the development of these youths cultural identity is deciding “where they belong in society”.

In this area of focus, acculturation stress as a result of lack of integration, social isolation, perceived discrimination, and bipolar life are clearly involved in the radicalization process for those who join gangs. For example, during the indoctrination process of gang membership, Choo asserts that perceived discrimination led to many of the Korean American youths “forming bonds” in the face of racism in the schools they attended. Korean American gang leader known only as “Joong” attested that school teachers in their public school would make snide and racist comments toward him and other Korean students such as “what are you Koreans doing back there?” and would look down upon students of Korean heritage. Experiences such as these would lead to the formation of social cliques of Korean American youth in order to surround themselves

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<sup>56</sup> Choo, K.-S. (2007). pg. 65-66

<sup>57</sup> Choo, K.-S. (2007). pg. 152-153

with a common group and avoid social isolation from the racism and discrimination they experienced.<sup>58</sup>

The research claims that many of the gangs begin in these social cliques who form as a direct result of this discrimination, deviant labeling of these youths, and a need for friendship which had not existed amongst these Korean American youths. Simply put, the discrimination and group formation process endowed a peer social network of power; a sense of unity which had previously not existed giving these youths an identity of their own.<sup>59</sup>

Choo also highlights the fact that the level of expectation which is placed upon these youths by their parents to exceed in life is also a concern for reasons to join these gangs. The Korean tradition of social mobility through higher education is rooted in tradition and is by no means exempted from the values of Korean immigrants to the United States or their children. This passion and possibly “obsession” for their children to perform above expectation at all times can be exemplified in the private institutions (music, art, additional math and science classes) these immigrants’ children attend following the typical public school day in order to prepare for University or Colleges.

However, a significant portion of these children (especially those who have turned to gang life), did not meet their parents educational or life expectations bestowed upon them leading to cases of psychological stress.<sup>60</sup> Choo claims that in many of the youths he studied, a common claim was that too much emphasis placed on Korean youth by their parents to reach high achievement goals led many of them to become “less interested, or

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<sup>58</sup> Choo, K.-S. (2007). *pg. 91*

<sup>59</sup> Choo, K.-S. (2007). *pg. 96*

<sup>60</sup> Choo, K.-S. (2007). *pg. 8*

burned out on education” displaying possible signs of depression. Additionally, many Korean Youths who attend higher institutes of educations such as college and universities do not do so for the sake of education, but to satisfy their parent’s high expectations of them.

Venues for illegal opportunities similar to the “opportunities for action or incubators” primarily involve clubs, cafes, and bars. At these venues, Korean youth seeking memberships in the gang (or trying to increase their credentials in the gang) have access to older members who are heavily involved in the criminal enterprise. Though most Korean American youths become introduced to gang socialization in school, the implications of Choo’s research assert that these venues enable a leap from simple school yard delinquency to hardened gang life.<sup>61</sup> Once inducted into the gang, the new member’s activities range from drug selling, fighting, enforcement, extortion of local businesses, muggings, robberies, etc. The older members tend to involve themselves in a leadership decision making role and more complex crimes such as check and credit card crimes.

In summary, Choo’s research attests that the Korean American youth who join gangs do so due to their acculturation process and identity formation as a result of perceived discrimination, need for social unity, and high expectations placed on them by parents. The identity crisis includes evidence of youth living a bipolar life and a growing generational gap between parent and child expectations. These youth tend to organize based on aforementioned factors, and become more indoctrinated into a world of violence and crime due to the availability of venues and opportunities for action which they found as they became more involved with delinquency and gang life.

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<sup>61</sup> Choo, K.-S. (2007). pg. 150

The chart listed illustrates Korean gang members from the group known only as “Joong and his boys”. The framework highlights the patterns and observables of acculturations stress experienced by the members of this group leading from delinquency to radicalization to gang membership. This group was one of the primary focus groups of Choo’s studies on Korean delinquent youth and gangs.

Table 6- Radicalization Process of Korean American Youth into Gang Member						
Name	Nationality	Conversion Observable	Motivation	Evidence of Acculturation Stress / Lack of Integration	Opportunity for Action / Incubators	Charged as Gang Member
Joong & His Boys	USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Increased gang observables</li> <li>- Radical change in behavior</li> <li>-Engaged in illicit activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Need for social inclusion as a result of perceived discrimination</li> <li>-Conflict with other gangs / ethnic groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Socially Isolated</li> <li>-Depression</li> <li>- Perceived discrimination</li> <li>-High expectations placed by parents / Family Issues, Generational gap in habits and behaviors.</li> <li>-Divergent world views</li> <li>-Identity Problems: “Twinkie” or “Fobbie” /</li> <li>-Bipolar life</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Training and Indoctrination to gang life from peers and older gang members.</li> <li>-Membership in gang groups</li> <li>-Venues for opportunity; gang bars, nightclubs, etc.</li> </ul>	N/A

#### The Case of Sami Osmakac: Jihad in Tampa Bay

Osmakac was arrested by Federal agents on January 7, 2012 in connection to a potential terrorist attack against the city of Tampa. Agents from the Tampa Federal Bureau of Investigation field office attested that the FBI had been watching Osmakac for several months by posing as undercover radical jihadists sympathetic to Osmakac’s



cause.<sup>62</sup> Osmakac first came onto the FBI's radar in September 2011 when it was reported by a confidential human source (CHS) from inside the Tampa-St. Petersburg Muslim community that a "young man was asking the CHS for flags used by Al Qaeda on the battlegrounds of Yemen, Afghanistan, and Iraq". The CHS directed Osmakac to an undercover FBI agent who the source had an information sharing relationship. Osmakac contacted the undercover agent who posed as a Jihadist willing to help him commit acts of terrorism in Tampa.<sup>63</sup>

The CHS also provided the FBI with statements collected from local Islamic leaders and the Mosque where Osmakac had attended. The concerns highlighted the young man's radical behavior shift, disaffected reality, and increasing aggressiveness. For example, leaders at the Mosque claimed that Osmakac had become increasingly hostile towards those he perceived as non-Muslim or who didn't follow strict interpretations of Islam and was asked to leave after violently confronting leaders in the Muslim community.<sup>64</sup>

The undercover FBI agent posing as a Jihadist helped Osmakac in selecting targets for the impending attack. These operations culminated in the undercover agent supplying the young man with what Osmakac assumed to be a vehicle based improvised explosive device (VBIED), a suicide belt rigged with explosives, and a multitude of firearms (all of which had been rendered inoperable prior to the transaction by the

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<sup>62</sup> Johnson, C. B. Special Agent (FBI) (2012, January 7). *United States District Court: Middle District Court of Florida-Criminal Complaint*. Retrieved May 13, 2012, from USA Today: <http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/story/2012-01-09/florida-bomb-plot/52466292/1#pdf>

<sup>63</sup> Johnson, C. B. Special Agent (FBI) (2012, January 7). *United States District Court: Middle District Court of Florida-Criminal Complaint*.

undercover FBI agents).<sup>65</sup> Osmakac willingly accepted these logistical supplies from the agent and prepared for his day to attack the city.

Osmakac was arrested by Federal agents on January 7, 2012 in connection with alleged plans for a homegrown terrorist style attack. His plan, according to the FBI, was to set off explosives based in vehicles in the area known as Ybor City near downtown Tampa; a popular area for residents and tourists. Osmakac also planned to take hostages and use them as leverage in order to release Muslim political prisoners, and also target law enforcement installations throughout the Tampa Bay area in an effort to avenge what he perceived as “crimes against Muslims by the United States and to strike terror into his victim’s hearts in Tampa”.<sup>66</sup>

Sami Osmakac was born in 1986 to a Muslim family in the secluded hamlet of Lubizde, Kosovo of the former Yugoslavia where his father ran a small bakery. By the 1990s, violent ethnic clashes fueled in the region as the Yugoslavian state began to disintegrate into chaos and anarchy as Serbs and Muslims fought for control. The Lubizde area was heavily hit during the war and the Osmakac family, caught in the whirlwind of the violence decided to leave their home and flee to safety, and seek a better set of opportunities for their children, including 13 year old Sami. The family decided to

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<sup>65</sup> Levesque, W. R., & Thalji, J. (2012, January 10). *Feds accuse man of planning bomb and gun attacks in South Tampa and Ybor City*. Retrieved October 4, 2012, from Tampa Bay Times:

<http://www.tampabay.com/news/courts/criminal/article1209814.ece>

<sup>65</sup> Tampa Bay Times Staff. (2012, April 26). *U.S. wants Tampa terrorism case evidence under wraps*.

Retrieved October 1, 2012, from Tampa Bay Times: <http://www.tampabay.com/news/courts/criminal/us-wants-tampa-terrorism-case-evidence-under-wraps/1226802>

<sup>66</sup> Duell, M. (2012, January 9). *Sami Osmakac Planned to Cause Havoc in Florida*. Retrieved May 2012, 2, from Daily Mail UK: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2084327/Sami-Osmakac-planned-cause-havoc-Florida-car-bomb-assault-rifle-explosives-belt.html?ito=feeds-newsxml>

immigrate to the West, moving first to Germany and later to the United States settling in the quiet suburb of Pinellas Park, FL near the city of Tampa.<sup>67</sup>

Sami's father set up his own bakery and grocery store selling traditional goods and Balkan baked deserts to the community. The family was noted by neighbors and extended family members as a "very good family, who were quiet and subtle, mostly keeping to themselves". Shock would later overtake the family and the greater Tampa community as their son Sami, now a 25 year old man and naturalized citizen of the United States would be arrested and charged as homegrown terrorist.

Assessing the radicalization of Sami Osmakac and identifying patterns which concur to the previous research data listed in this thesis have been problematic at best in identifying stressors which caused him to make the leap and execute an attack for two main reasons. First, prior to his conviction, Osmakac or "Abdul Samia" (reported as one of his many aliases) boasted streams of YouTube videos which declare his growing inability to live in a world where Muslims are persecuted, and the *kufir* or infidels (to include deviant Muslims) enjoy a free reign of lifestyles in what he considered a "life of sin against God".

Osmakac frequently identified groups who in his view offended God's word to include slanderous contempt of Jews and Christians living a life of sin.<sup>68</sup> These videos serve as an indicator of Osmakac's life, but fail to assess the man before radicalization

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<sup>67</sup> Levesque, W. R., & Thalji, J. (2012, January 10). *Feds accuse man of planning bomb and gun attacks in South Tampa and Ybor City*.

<sup>68</sup> Osmakac, Sami (\*and Aliases). (2010, December 6). *O Muslims Fight Your Desires And Do NOT Follow Them!* Tampa, FL, USA. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=Uf5QemxhWtI#!](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=Uf5QemxhWtI#!)

<sup>69</sup> Levesque, W. R., & Thalji, J. (2012, January 10). *Feds accuse man of planning bomb and gun attacks in South Tampa and Ybor City*.

making these videos unable to provide insight into acculturation stressors. However, as will be discussed later in this section, these videos do explain another factor critical to this research in terms of the formation of a bipolar life in the West.

The second problem in evaluating Osmakac is the inability of his family to express detailed references to his upbringing and events which may demonstrate evidence of acculturation stressors and bipolar life. To this day, his family still refuses to acknowledge the crimes their son is charged with or the radical behavioral shifts and observables they witnessed. According to the family, “it is a concocted lie by Federal authorities”.<sup>69</sup> Therefore, the majority of data on Osmakac has come from previous high school friends, news briefs, posted videos by Osmakac, and the commentary from extended relatives which paint a picture of a worthy candidate for identifying patterns associated with radicalization into a homegrown terrorist.

Sami Osmakac was not always so violent or radical. High school classmates would describe Osmakac and the few friends he did associate with as loners with testimonies claiming that Osmakac was an outcast.<sup>70</sup> As he grew older, friends say Osmakac begin to grow increasingly confrontational. Further accounts of his friends include a particular recording sessions where Osmakac used to rap with his friends. On one particular instance, Sami concluded a rap song with slogans about killing Jews and setting off explosives. The lyrics of the song struck Sami’s friends as something “outside

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<sup>70</sup> Tampa Bay Times. (2012, January 15). *Tampa terror suspect grew distant, penned violent rap lyrics*. Retrieved October 2, 2012, from Tampa Bay Times: <http://www.tampabay.com/news/courts/criminal/tampa-terror-suspect-grew-distant-penned-violent-rap-lyrics/1210743>

<sup>71</sup> Tampa Bay Times. (2012, January 15). *Tampa terror suspect grew distant, penned violent rap lyrics*. Retrieved October 2, 2012.

<sup>72</sup> Tampa Bay Times. (2012, January 15). *Tampa terror suspect grew distant, penned violent rap lyrics*. Retrieved October 2, 2012.

the realm of acceptance”.<sup>71</sup> An additional confrontation with friends includes discussion of religion. According to the friend, upon hearing a friend state that he was a Christian, Osmakac reportedly laughed and began acting smug about it. These instances would be one of many bringing his friends to start questioning his beliefs and further push him away from socializing with him and bringing him closer towards radicalization and highlighting his social isolation.<sup>72</sup>

In the summer of 2008, the Osmakac family returned to their hometown of Labizde to visit family who remained in their hometown. The family began to return regularly for summer trips to the country. Osmakac’s aunt would later recount to the media following Osmakac’s arrest that she had began noting a particular change in Sami Osmakac’s behavior over the last few years. As she explains, “Sami, who was now growing a beard, donned only religious garments, and was frequently accompanied by two devout Muslims from Albania and two from Bosnia. He also began to shun his relatives during his trips to Kosovo much different from the Sami they had previously known in his younger years.”<sup>73</sup>

Osmakac’s last visit to Labizde in October 2011 seemed the most bizarre and indicating that the Sami Osmakac’s they had previously known had radically changed. Osmakac’s relatives had heard from neighbors that Sami had returned to Labizde, but did not stop by and see his aunt or any relatives. Authorities in Kosovo who regularly coordinate on terrorism related issues with the United States had been tracking Sami’s

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<sup>73</sup> Tampa Bay Times. (2012, January 15). *Tampa terror suspect grew distant, penned violent rap lyrics*. Retrieved October 2, 2012.

<sup>74</sup> Tampa Bay Times. (2012, January 15). *Tampa terror suspect grew distant, penned violent rap lyrics*. Retrieved October 2, 2012.

<sup>75</sup> Qena, N., & Lush, T. (2012, January 14). *Friends: Fla. Bomb Plot Suspect was Radical, Loner*. Retrieved May 16, 2012, from CBS News Tampa: <http://tampa.cbslocal.com/2012/01/14/friends-fla-bomb-plot-suspect-was-radical-loner/>

activities in the country for some time. According to the Kosovo authorities, Osmakac used this final visit as a venue to meet with other noted Islamic radicals in the area.<sup>74</sup>

The increased aggressiveness, social isolation, and confrontational attitude would culminate into an assault charge filed by a Tampa-area activist; a Christian preacher from the highly controversial Westboro Baptist Church. According to the charges, Osmakac had been arguing with the Westboro Baptist Preacher over the legitimacy of the Islamic religion outside a Lady Gaga concert. Osmakac became angry and lashed out; the activist claimed Osmakac physically assaulted him causing minor physical damage. The individual's partner was able to record the event on video. Osmakac was later jailed on charges that he head-butted and physically assaulted the man".<sup>75</sup>

In terms of bipolar life Osmakac may have experienced prior to radicalization, the inability and unwillingness of family members to describe in detail Sami's upbringing makes the identification of a possible patterns difficult to conclude. However, Osmakac may have very well created his own version of bipolar life without his family's inclusion. The video stream which Osmakac proudly posted on YouTube illustrates a divergent individual attempting to live in two distinct versions of the West; the first, being the mainstream United States society where Sami Osmakac enjoyed rap music and the second being the world where there was a "proper way for Muslims and moreover the entire world population to live in accordance with the laws of God".

In one particular video titled, *O Muslims Fight Your Desires and Do Not Follow Them!* featured on YouTube, Osmakac boasts about the two different societies that existed in his view; one of the Kufr or infidel and unbelievers and one of the true

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believers of God: the Muslims.<sup>76</sup> The expressed notion of two different worlds this individual observed is evidence for bipolar life and identity crisis suggesting that these divergent existences were possible factors in his radicalization.

In conclusion, the case of Sami Osmakac serves as a clear example of radicalization into a homegrown terrorist due to acculturation stressors, bipolar life, and opportunity for actions he experienced ultimately leading to his transformation. Had Osmakac succeeded in his attempts to set off these devices, it would have caused untold damage and loss of life in Tampa Bay. Though FBI agents were able to identify Osmakac before he could execute these attacks, it is clearly evident that all the signs were present. The following framework details Osmakac’s radicalization patterns.

Table 7- Radicalization Process of Western Muslim Youth into Homegrown Terrorist						
Name	Nationality	Conversion Type (rejuvenated or formal conversion)	Motivation	Evidence of Acculturation Stress / Lack of Integration	Opportunity for Action/ Incubators	Charged as Homegrown Terrorist
Sami Osmakac	-USA  Naturalized Citizen from the former Yugoslavia	-Rejuvenated conversion to Islam  -Increased religious observables  - Radical changes in behavior	-Atrocities against Muslims in Iraq and Afghanistan, Kosovo  -Disgust at lives of un-devout Muslims and Kufr.  -Potential war trauma from childhood	-Social Isolation  -Perceived Discrimination  -Family Issues  -Bipolar Life \ Muslim and Kufr worlds.  -Identity Issues	-Presumed meetings with Balkan based Islamic Radicals  -Internet (YouTube, etc.)  -Mock Training by Undercover Federal Agents	Yes

<sup>76</sup> Osmakac, Sami (\*and Aliases). (2010, December 6). *O Muslims Fight Your Desires And Do NOT Follow Them!* Tampa, FL, USA. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=Uf5OemxhWtI#!](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=Uf5OemxhWtI#!)

## The Case of Mohamed Merah: American vs. French Radicalization Patterns

During a Sunday afternoon on 11 March, 2012, a 30 year old French Airborne Paratrooper Sgt. Imad Ibn-Ziaten was shot dead by an unknown gunman behind a French school in a quiet district of Toulouse in southern France. Four days later in the town of Montauban, France Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) captured the shooting of three other uniformed French Paratroopers; 24 year old Corporal Abel Chennouf, 26 year old Private Mohamed Legouad, and 28 year old Corporal Loic Liber. All three men were shot at close range by the gunman as they stood in line to withdrawal money from an ATM machine. Witnesses described the gunman as a small man wearing all black with a black motorcycle helmet, who took his time to patiently reload a new magazine into his pistol after shooting the three soldiers, turn over one of the wounded soldiers and shoot him three more times screaming “Allah Akbar” or “God is Great” before fleeing on a motorbike.<sup>77</sup> Chennouf and Legouad were announced dead at the scene of the crime by French authorities, while Liber remained severely wounded and in a comma.

Having no leads in the investigation as to who the gunman was or why the victims were specifically targeted, French authorities began the largest manhunt in French history for the suspected gunman. Four days later, the gunman struck again this time at the Ozar Hatorah Jewish School in Toulouse. Witness statements suggested that the gunman wore the same black clothing and motorcycle helmet and walked up to the gates of the school and began firing wildly and indiscriminately at anything that moved.

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<sup>77</sup> BBC. (2012, March 22). *Shootings in Toulouse and Montauban: What we know*. Retrieved May 7, 2012, from BBC: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17428860>

<sup>78</sup> BBC. (2012, March 22). *Shootings in Toulouse and Montauban: What we know*.



In the attack, the gunmen killed 30 year old Rabbi and teacher Jonathan Sandler as well as his two sons Gabriel aged four, and Areih aged five. The final victim in the rampage was the school's headmaster seven year old daughter Myriam Monsonego who was reportedly grabbed by the hair and shot dead at close range by the gunman.<sup>78</sup> As the gunmen fled, witnesses reported that the suspect had taken the time to switch weapons from a 9mm to a .45 caliber handgun and had filmed the entire attack through a mounted video camera on his helmet. Police, the French community, and the world were stunned by the barbarism. French authorities still had little evidence to conduct an investigation other than the gunman used two handguns, wore black, and road a motorcycle. Authorities were given their first clue on the gunman's identity by a Toulouse mechanic who received a series of strange questions from a patron asking "how it was possible to disable the anti-theft GPS system on a Yamaha T-MAX motorbike" the same model used as a getaway vehicle in the attacks.

The second clue came from Ibn-Zaiten's email inbox. According to the emails, Ibn-Zaiten had been advertising the sale of his motor scooter online and an "interested party" wanted to set up a meeting with him to purchase the bike behind a school in Toulouse where he was gunned down. In one of the emails, Ibn Zaiten had identified his employment as a French paratrooper which struck police as a possible motive for the murder.

The "interested party's" email address and server profile led two French police officers to an address at a Toulouse apartment complex. After knocking on the apartment door for several minutes, a barrage of bullets were discharged by someone inside the apartment. The rounds penetrated the door wounding the two police officers. French

authorities had found the gunman responsible for the atrocities in southern France. He was a 23 year old French citizen of Algerian descent named Mohamed Merah.<sup>79</sup>

A mass mobilization of French authorities quickly descended on the apartment complex in the Toulouse suburb. The elite RAID police commando units began negotiations with Merah to surrender peacefully. As he hid in his apartment, Merah regularly exchanged volleys of rounds with police from time to time. Merah reportedly used a variety of weapons he had stock piled to include not only the two pistols used in the attacks, but also an AK-47 assault rifle and an UZI 9mm machine gun.<sup>80</sup> After 32 hours of failed negotiations, RAID commandos entered the apartment in order to subdue Merah. Media crews on the scene captured the ensuing gun battle between the suspect and police, reminiscent of a foreign battleground in Afghanistan or Iraq. Merah in the shootout attempted to escape, by jumping out of an apartment balcony, firing his weapon wildly, only to be shot dead by a police marksman.<sup>81</sup> On March 22, after nearly two weeks of panic, carnage, and terror which gripped the country, Mohamed Merah, the homegrown terrorist, was dead and charged posthumously with murder and terrorism by French authorities.

The following investigation of Merah's death by French authorities discovered the videos Merah had taken while executing his attacks against the Jewish school. The films also included derogatory rhetoric about the involvement of French forces in Afghanistan,

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<sup>79</sup> BBC. (2012, March 21). *France shootings: Police lay siege to Toulouse suspect*. Retrieved 7 May, 2012, from BBC: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17446999>

<sup>80</sup> BBC. (2012, March 21). *France shootings: Police lay siege to Toulouse suspect*.

<sup>81</sup> BBC. (2012, March 21). *France shootings: Police lay siege to Toulouse suspect*.

<sup>82</sup> Al Jazeera. (22, March 2012). *Merah: From petty criminal to killer*. Retrieved May 9, 2012, from Al Jazeera: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2012/03/201232211333224295.html>

<sup>83</sup> Allen, C., Howse, P., Robinson, A., & Fox, M. (2012, March 23). *As it happened: Toulouse gunman dead*. Retrieved May 7, 2012, from BBC: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/17471313>

the suffering of Palestinian children at the hands of the Israelis, and the French instituted ban on Muslim women wearing the full faced veil in public. Further controversy from the French public came when it was announced that Merah had been on the radar of French authorities and intelligence services for some time.<sup>82</sup> The investigation also discovered that Merah had traveled to Afghanistan and Pakistan where he claims he met and trained with Taliban and Al Qaeda militants. According to Merah, he was able to execute these attacks on behalf of the Al Qaeda leadership.<sup>83</sup>

Though deceased, the background information available on Merah is widely available and points to a young man caught between two very distinct lives in France. He was seen as a loner, who suffered from social isolation, identity crisis, and most likely perceived discrimination and depression. The majority of data sources come from friends, extended family, and neighbors who express Merah was by no means an “ideal” type for terrorist radicalization and was by all accounts undistinguishable.<sup>84</sup> However, further examination indicates the signs were overtly apparent that Merah contained all the necessary ingredients to become radicalized.

Merah was born on October 10, 1988 in the French suburbs of Toulouse to a Muslim French father and Algerian mother and grew up in the suburbs of Izards. Like most children in the *banlieues* or French suburbs known for their relative socioeconomic disparity and high immigrant populations, Merah, his parents and his four other siblings

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<sup>84</sup> Al Jazeera. (22, March 2012). *Merah: From petty criminal to killer*. Retrieved May 9, 2012.

<sup>85</sup> Alexander, H., & Govan, F. (2012, March 25). *The making of a jihadi killer: How a thief from a Toulouse suburb eluded French security with a double life that ended in a nine-day murder rampage*. Retrieved May 9, 2012, from Ottawa Citizen: <http://www.ottawacitizen.com/news/making+jihadi+killer/6355783/story.html>

lived a relatively quiet life despite the poverty, low-employment opportunities, and minor scrapes with the law.<sup>85</sup>

At age five, Merah's parents divorced and his biological father would later return to Algeria in 2008. His mother would later be remarried to Sabri Essid, "a member of a Toulouse terror network that tried to recruit fighters in France to join the ranks of al Qaeda in Iraq against US and coalition forces. Essid was later convicted in a French court in 2009 after being detained in Syria in 2006 where he was running an al Qaeda safe house".<sup>86</sup> It is believed by French authorities, that Essid may have been the first of many influences to expose Merah to radical Islam.

At age 17, Merah was noted by French authorities as being a poor student in school and having consistent run-ins with the police for small offences such as vandalism and petty theft. Despite his record with the law, friends would describe Merah even after his death that the young man was quiet and respectful and enjoyed soccer, motorbikes, and cars. He did not express any interest in Islam or politics.<sup>87</sup> Merah would later be expelled from school and enrolled in a vocational training center where he began a career as an automotive mechanic in Toulouse.

In 2007, Merah was sentenced to prison for 18 months after violently mugging an elderly woman in Toulouse. French chief prosecutor of Paris François Milons, believes that during his prison sentence, Merah was exposed to and embraced Salafist political Islam. For Merah, prison served as an incubator for his radicalization. After his release in

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<sup>86</sup> Cruickshank, P., & Lister, T. (2012, March 26). *How did Mohammed Merah become a jihadist?* Retrieved May 1, 2012, from CNN: <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/03/26/world/europe/france-shooting-suspect/>

<sup>87</sup> Ungaro, C. (2012, March 21). *Mohammed Merah: Profile Of Toulouse Shooting Suspect Who 'Led Two Lives'*. Retrieved May 12, 2012, from Huffington Post: [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2012/03/21/gunman-suspect-description\\_n\\_1370148.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2012/03/21/gunman-suspect-description_n_1370148.html)

<sup>88</sup> Ungaro, C. (2012, March 21). *Mohammed Merah: Profile Of Toulouse Shooting Suspect Who 'Led Two Lives'*.

2008, Merah would declare to family members that he had rediscovered Islam after having largely ignoring his family's faith during his upbringing. Merah began to show radical behavioral changes in his appearance including shifting styles of "wearing military fatigues one day to high end fashion the next. He reportedly became obsessed with violent online videos depicting beheadings and torture".<sup>88</sup>

The event of Merah being exposed to Salafist ideology during his time in prison is an interesting component to the examination of radicalized individuals and will most likely become a booming consideration in the future study of homegrown terrorism. In the case of prison radicalization, the FBI asserts, "prisons literally provide a captive audience of disaffected young men (and women) easily influenced by charismatic extremist leaders. These inmates, mostly minorities, feel that the United States has discriminated against them or against minorities and Muslims overseas. This perceived oppression, combined with a limited knowledge of Islam, makes this population vulnerable for extremists looking to radicalize and recruit".<sup>89</sup>

The idea of prisons becoming opportunities for action or incubators to recruit and radicalize potential homegrown terrorists is best exemplified by Gillo Pontecarvo's 1966 film *The Battle for Algiers*. The film portrays colonial Algeria under the rule of Gaullist France in the early 1950s. The storyline depicts a burgeoning and tense bipolar society in Algeria where two versions of the country exist. One a society where French settlers to the North African country known as *pied-noirs* tend to enjoy a life of primacy and luxury

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<sup>89</sup> Ballas, D. A. (2010). *Prisoner Radicalization*. Washington DC: Federal Bureau of Investigation: Law Enforcement Bulletin.

in the European quarter of the city of Algiers, and the other a society of the native Algerian Arab population who are subjected to neglect, oppression, and humiliation while confined to the much more economically poor *Casbah* quarter of the city.

It is at this time in the film that we meet the story's protagonist Ali La Pointe; a young, illiterate Algerian Arab "street hustler" and labeled juvenile delinquent. La Pointe, is consistently growing disaffected and hostile toward the Pied-noirs who he views as the source of his problems. While running from a policeman for a petty crime in the European quarter of Algiers, he is tripped by a group of French youths and retaliates by physically assaulting one of them landing him in prison.<sup>90</sup>

While in prison Ali La Ponte witnesses a member of the Algerian Arab resistance group known as the National Liberation Front (FLN) which advocates for an end to French imperialism in Algeria and the establishment of a united Algerian country based on Islamic principles. The FLN member is brutally executed by the French authorities via the guillotine; however his impact on La Pointe is life changing. Following the execution, it can be easily interpreted by the viewer that La Pointe has found a new, blossoming identity and a reason for living. He has found purpose and solace in a group dedicated to something bigger than himself; nationalism through Islamic inspired terrorism and advocated violence against the French colonialists.

This execution and exposure to the FLN mission allows La Pointe to gain not only a sense of identity, but an outlet for his anger and disaffection toward the authorities and French Pied-noirs who have disenfranchised him throughout his entire life. La Pointe is essentially transformed from this induction to the FLN ideology from Simple Street

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<sup>90</sup> Pontecarvo, G. (Director). (1966). *Battle for Algiers* [Motion Picture].

<sup>91</sup> Pontecarvo, G. (Director). (1966). *Battle for Algiers* [Motion Picture].

criminal to radical. This can be exemplified following his release from prison when he begins to notice the dual or bipolar Algerian societies in terms of economic well being and opportunities. La Pointe begins working for the FLN as an assassin, executing informants and police officers for their role in the Occupation of Algeria. Eventually, La Pointe becomes a fully fledged militant hero against the French army before he is killed in action.<sup>91</sup>

The events depicted in Pontecarvo's film illustrates that a young, disaffected, oppressed youth living in a bipolar society can easily become radicalized in prison and become more prone to engaging in acts of terrorism as prisons essentially create a ripe environment and incubate potential radicals.<sup>92</sup> In the West, cases like La Pointe and Merah indicates that the potential exists for more disaffected young men and women to radicalize in prison as a way to cope with their bipolar lives in society, gain identity, and discover an outlet for their frustrations against the authorities they blame for their dismal existence and problems. In future research on the study of homegrown terrorism, prisons and studies of former prisoners may become the next top incubator of concern for authorities and should not be discounted.

Following his release from prison, Merah attempted to commit suicide on Christmas day. He was ordered to a psychiatric facility for 10 days and later referred by French medical authorities to psychiatrist Alain Penin who cited Merah as having "normal intellect but a disposition toward anti-social behavior". Penin also noted that

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<sup>92</sup> Ballas, D. A. (2010). *Prisoner Radicalization*. Washington DC: Federal Bureau of Investigation: Law Enforcement Bulletin.

<sup>93</sup> Alexander, H., & Govan, F. (2012, March 25). *The making of a jihadi killer: How a thief from a Toulouse suburb eluded French security with a double life that ended in a nine-day murder rampage*.

<sup>94</sup> Alexander, H., & Govan, F. (2012, March 25).

Merah was “courteous, correct, and talkative young man” fitting in with statements made by Merah's friends who said he was "calm, gentle and loved by everyone".<sup>93</sup>

However, Penin also cited Merah's dark behavioral side. According to Penin, “Merah made statements such as "I like to sit in my corner," and that he had claimed to have severed connections with the bad company he was keeping and didn't want to see anyone.<sup>94</sup> After his release from the hospital, Merah found little chances for employment following his incarceration in prison and the psychiatric institution. Merah attempted to join the French army and later the French Foreign Legion, but due to his criminal and psychological record, his application was denied.

In 2010, he was accused by a Muslim family in his neighborhood for snatching a young man off the street and forcing him to watch violent beheadings in Afghanistan on the internet. Merah's mother supposedly reported the event as well as her growing concern about the radical change she saw in her son's behavior, but according to her statement to the media “police do not care about assaults of Arabs against Arabs”.<sup>95</sup> Following the assault, Merah left France and travelled to Pakistan and Afghanistan in order to join Taliban and Al Qaeda militants. He returned to Afghanistan in 2011, but the trip was cut short due to his contraction of hepatitis A. Upon his return in October 2011, he was questioned by French domestic intelligence services about his travels to the region, but due to lack of evidence, he was released.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Alexander, H., & Govan, F. (2012, March 25).

<sup>96</sup> Irish, J. (2012, March 21). *Road to Mohamed Merah's radicalization goes through Afghanistan: French shooting suspect ran from delinquent childhood in Toulouse*. Retrieved May 8, 2012, from MSNBC: [http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/46813803/ns/world\\_news-europe/t/road-mohamed-merahs-radicalization-goes-through-afghanistan/#.T8P1zNVtpCg](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/46813803/ns/world_news-europe/t/road-mohamed-merahs-radicalization-goes-through-afghanistan/#.T8P1zNVtpCg)



The aspects of bipolar life in the case of Mohamed Merah are less easy to indicate due to the limited information about his upbringing inside his home in Izards and Toulouse. While it is noted that some of his family members were extremely religious, there is little evidence that this affected Merah personally as he was a frequent patron of nightclubs, bars, and more over lived an ideal life of a 23 year old French youth. However, the examination of the bipolarized life Merah may be found in the socioeconomic plight of French citizens of North African descent living in the French suburbs.

France is home to the largest Muslim community in the European Union constituting 6 million Muslims or 10 percent of the population. However, the *banlieues* or suburbs of France where most of the Muslim community lives is far from the posh lifestyles of the postcard picture of Paris and the Champs d'lyse. These suburbs in France are well noted by the society as containing the majority of immigrants to France as well as high levels of abject poverty and socioeconomic disparity. This division between the greater French high society and the residents who live in these suburbs has in essence segregated and alienated these citizens from the French larger society.

The social and economic conditions of the banlieues deliver little hope to the impoverished citizens (particularly the youth) at the chance for upward social mobility as the rate of unemployment amongst the young men of these areas is as high as 40 percent.<sup>97</sup> With little opportunities for work, the banlieues are an epicenter for boredom as severely underfunded state programs in the local school and community centers

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<sup>97</sup> Laurence, J., & Vaisse, J. (2005, December 1). *Understanding Urban Riots in France*. Retrieved October 4, 2012, from Brookings Institute: <http://www.brookings.edu/research/articles/2005/12/01france-laurence>

<sup>98</sup> Laurence, J., & Vaisse, J. (2005, December 1).

continues the cycle of disparity among the residents as these areas become even more disconnected from mainstream French society.<sup>98</sup>

These satellite communities and closed knit groups who reside in these areas have effectively produced “two distinct versions of France”; one version featuring high posh lifestyle living in relative security and another where French authorities seldom intervene to provide citizens basic social services. What has been produced in this absence of authority are the establishments of parallel institutions such as private schools, religious centers, clubs, and other associations which breed contemptuous ideals toward the French society leading many French Muslim youths toward extremism.<sup>99</sup>

French residents in these areas also claim this segregation is due to the high rates of discrimination against French citizens of Arab or North African descent. Residents in these communities have long complained that police single them out for identity checks and arrest. For example, a 2007 independent study by social experts confirmed “French police widely use ethnic profiling as a tactic of stop, search, and arrest of those perceived as being of immigrant origin”.<sup>100</sup> Though it has never been cited, it is safe to assume in accordance with Merah’s constant run-ins with the law that he very well had been subjected to these profiling and molded by these contemptuous institutions; exacerbating his bipolarized world, identity crisis, and perceived discrimination.

In conclusion, the attacks, planned, orchestrated, and executed by French homegrown terrorist Mohamed Merah illustrate a clear cut case of acculturation stressors,

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<sup>99</sup> Thachuk, K. L., Bowman, M. ", & Richardson, C. (2008). *Homegrown Terrorism: The Threat Within*.

<sup>100</sup> Dallali, J. (2012, April 22). *Shout from the Suburbs: As France prepares for a presidential election, racism remains a topic of heated debate*. Retrieved May 21, 2012, from Al Jazeera: <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/aljazeeraaworld/2012/03/2012327134841236502.html>

bipolar life, identity crisis, and discrimination. Unlike previous cases addressed in this research, Merah was able to achieve his intended goals and strike terror into the French society. Additionally, Merah's case illustrates that the patterns associated with acculturation stress and bipolar life are not solely reserved to one particular Western country. The chart listed cites Merah's radicalization patterns.

Table 8- Radicalization Process of Western Muslim Youth into Homegrown Terrorist						
Name	Nationality	Conversion Type (rejuvenated or formal conversion)	Motivation	Evidence of Acculturation Stress / lack of Integration	Opportunity for Action / Incubators	Charged as <i>Homegrown</i> Terrorist
Mohamed Merah	French (Algerian Descent)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Rejuvenated conversion to Islam</li> <li>-Increased religious observables</li> <li>- Radical changes in behavior</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Atrocities against Muslims in Palestine and French involvement in Afghanistan</li> <li>-French involvement in Muslim citizen's affairs i.e. French ban on veil.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Social Isolation</li> <li>-Perceived Discrimination</li> <li>- bipolar life</li> <li>-Identity Issues</li> <li>-Depression</li> <li>-Family Issues</li> <li>-Bipolar Life</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Internet</li> <li>-Travel to Pakistan and Afghanistan to train with militants</li> </ul>	Yes

## Conclusion and Findings

The traits and patterns associated with the theory of acculturation stress symptoms and bipolar life clearly support the hypothesis that a “lack of integration” into a society will cause some Western youth to radicalize and in some cases commit violent acts of terrorism. Though each candidate in the list of case studies may have differed from motivation to nationality to opportunities for action, the research concludes that acculturation stress, bipolar life and lack of integration were all found in each case. The chart below singles out this category by each case studied.

Table 9- Patterns of Acculturation Stress / Bipolar Life / Lack of Integration by Case		
Joong and His Boys (USA)	Sami Osmakac (USA)	Mohamed Merah (FR)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Socially Isolated</li> <li>• Perceived Discrimination</li> <li>• High expectations placed by parents / Family Issues, Generational gap in habits and behaviors.</li> <li>• Bipolar Life , generational gap</li> <li>• Depression</li> <li>• Identity Problems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Isolation</li> <li>• Perceived Discrimination</li> <li>• Family Issues, shunning relatives</li> <li>• Bipolar Life, Muslim and Kufr worlds.</li> <li>• Identity Issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Isolation</li> <li>• Perceived Discrimination</li> <li>• Bipolar Life, French segregated societies</li> <li>• Family Issues, divorce</li> <li>• Identity Issues</li> <li>• Depression</li> </ul>

The findings from each of the case studies detail a pattern of steps each individual or group took before completing the radicalization process, and executing an attack or

joining into a violent crime organization. The research concludes that bipolar life and discrimination had a major factor in all three cases. For example, the Korean American youths turned gang members and Sami Osmakac all listed the divergent societies they lived in as reasons for joining violent groups or choosing to execute violent attacks. Merah, on the other hand, never commented on the segregated French societies noted in Thachuck, Marion, and Richardson's work on the study of homegrown terrorist in the suburbs of France. However, it is safe to assume and consistent from other research on French citizens of Arab or North African descent that these factors were ever apparent in his run-ins with French police and socioeconomic problems he experienced in Toulouse and Izards.

The pattern of social isolation also tended to play a deep part in the radicalization of these groups and individuals. Each cited that they either turned to these lifestyles as a result of feeling "lonely" or outside social inclusion. Merah and Osmakac were previously noted as being "loners" with few friends to speak of or kept to themselves most of the time. Joong and his boys tended to describe themselves as loners prior to joining the group as a need to become involved into a collected peer social network as a result of this isolation, identity crisis, and discrimination they all claimed to have experienced.

The family issues pattern found in each of these cases is problematic due to the limited findings and forthcomings of these individuals' parents. Due to the nature of the lifestyles, their children seceded to as well as the crimes they were accused of, or charged with committing is an emotional and hot-button subject to say the least. However, in each case, family issues were cited such as divorce, generational gaps of understanding of

behaviors and habits, and high expectations were apparent in each individual prior to radicalization.

Finally, the acculturation stressor of depression was noted in examination of Korean American youth and the case of Mohamed Merah, but was not cited in the case of Sami Osmakac's radicalization. The reasons for this lack of insight into Osmakac's psychological status at the time of radicalization and preparation for conducting the attacks may result from two causes. First, Merah as well as Joong and his boys were assessed by certified psychiatrists and scholars who are able to levy such a diagnosis. For example, Choo used his understanding of the high expectations placed on Korean American youths to exceedingly perform in relation to the amount of these youths who "get burned out or depressed with school and life". Merah was evaluated by a French psychological institution who labeled him with depression and anti-social behavior.

The second possibility is that though there is evidence that Osmakac stated to federal authorities that "he was ready to die" and that once he had a suicide explosive belt, "they [law enforcement] could take him in five million pieces" a complete psychological profile of the individual has yet to be released by authorities.<sup>101</sup> Though Osmakac's testimony paints the picture of a depressed individual, until references of reputable credentials can be found in regards to his mental health; his pattern of depression cannot be noted in this study.

As stated previously in this thesis, FBI Director Robert Mueller acknowledged that the threat from homegrown terrorism may have evolved to include "extremists from a diverse set of backgrounds, geographic locations, life experiences, and motivating

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<sup>101</sup> Levesque, W. R., & Thalji, J. (2012, January 10). *Feds accuse man of planning bomb and gun attacks in South Tampa and Ybor City*.

factors.”<sup>102</sup> It is the hope and desire of this M.A. student of Political Science, that the examined research may help organizations like the Counter Terrorism units in the FBI, DHS, etc, to develop a new framework for evaluating and indicating potential homegrown terrorist before they radicalize.

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<sup>102</sup> Patel, F. (2011) *Rethinking Radicalization*. Pg. 18

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