Radical Convergence: Tracing the Dynamics of Mutual Radicalization Interactive Model in Britain's Extremist Spectrum

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Abstract

This research investigates the radicalization trajectories within the British extremist spectrum, with a specific focus on two groups characterized by their heightened antagonistic ideologies: the British Muslim community and the British far-right groups. The analyzed period spans from 2005 to 2013, a time marked by an upsurge in extremist hate crimes, escalating further until a significant number of British Muslims decided to abandon their lives in the United Kingdom to join the ranks of the Islamic State's caliphate. Drawing on Moghaddam's (2018) mutual radicalization model, this research analyzes three stages considered as the cornerstones in the construction of the radicalization model: the group mobilization, heightened cohesion within the respective groups, and the transformative shifts in antagonistic identity. Critical discourse analysis is applied as a method for assessment of the collected evidence, in order to evaluate the model's efficacy. Ultimately, this study underscores the model's value in comprehending group actions and processes, particularly in response to trigger events such as hate crimes or acts of terrorism. However, limitations arise when accounting for external variables that transcend the mutual radicalization's binary framework. By shedding light on the added value as well as the limitations of this model, this study provides valuable insights for future research on group radicalization, while informing the policymakers about the angles to consider when formulating counter-extremist strategies.

Key words:
Group radicalization, Mutual radicalization, Far-right extremism, Islamic extremism, Britain

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1. Introduction

With hundreds of its citizens choosing to join the Islamic State (IS) in its fight to establish a global Caliphate, the United Kingdom (UK) has witnessed an alarming increase in challenges related to radicalization. The media headlines have been filled with stories about the foreign fighters who abandoned all that was familiar to participate in IS' violent religious struggle. The public has been particularly captivated by striking examples of individuals, such as the teenage girls who traveled to Syria without anyone knowing (Moaveni 2019), or the British men known to be part of the 'Beatles' – a group notorious for mass tortures and executions under the IS (Malik 2018). Such events have not only gripped the public's imagination but also posed a significant threat to national security and social cohesion. According to the Foreign Terrorist Fighters Knowledge Hub's (2023) data, an estimated 900 individuals have left the UK to join the Islamic State, which is a considerable number compared to other European countries. This has led to many questions about how to explain such a high number of foreign fighters from Britain, prompting journalists, policymakers, as well as scholars to engage in extensive discussions and analyses.

A prevalent response to the issue was to categorize these foreign fighters as naïve victims of the IS' propaganda or "anti-Western villains" (Jackson 2021, 414). Consequently, a large number of studies have been conducted in order to trace the radicalization processes that preceded the individuals' decisions to join the terrorist group. However, such studies have often yielded limited findings, due to the challenge of applying individual-level research to group dynamics, making it even more problematic to apply such analyses to broader counter-radicalization measures. Therefore, the question of why hundreds of British Muslims decided to join ISIS has remained relatively unresolved.

Although the immediate threat may appear to have diminished following the Islamic State's loss of territorial reign in 2019, it would be overly optimistic to assume that the issue has been fully resolved. Based on data from the 2008's survey by the Centre for Social Cohesion, "nearly one third of Muslim students believe it can be acceptable to kill in the name of religion" (Daily Mail 2008), indicating deeply concerning attitudes of the British youth. Moreover, according to the Global Terrorism Index, "Islamic State […] were the deadliest terror group of 2021" (Institute for Economics & Peace 2022, 16), which proves that despite IS's loss of territory, the threat of its revival remains a significant issue. These facts highlight how important it is to comprehend the underlying factors that precipitate radicalization in order to develop effective counter-radicalization strategies.

Samuel Huntington (2002) in his seminal book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* famously remarked: "Islam's borders are bloody, and so are its innards" (258). However, is it possible to truly comprehend the radicalization of the British Muslim community based on such assumptions? Scholars have since demonstrated that such reasonings can fuel hatred, and instead of attempting to uncover the roots of radicalization, they tend to perpetuate biases that further alienate and radicalize different groups. As Abbas (2019) points out, such "sentiments suggest a set of biases and prejudices that have, unfortunately, become ingrained in liberal thinking – they are exaggerated, ideologically loaded, methodologically defunct and entirely obstructive" (147). As Kundnani (2012) suggests, "only by analyzing the interaction between the different parties in the conflict and how each interprets the other's actions is it possible to explain why the number of incidents of home-grown terrorist violence increased dramatically in Europe" (22).

Drawing from the Global Database on Terrorism dataset, Ebner's (2017) analysis highlighted an intriguing connection that "far-right extremist violence correlated with Islamist extremist attacks" (153). This connection becomes evident when examining figures such as Tommy Robinson, a prominent figure in the British far-right movement, who emerged as a vocal advocate against Islam. By organizing anti-Islamic demonstrations and perpetuating the negative stereotypes of Islam and Muslims as a potential threat to British society, Robinson amplified divisive rhetoric. Notably, he propagated baseless assertions such as that all Muslims in the UK were involved in the 7/7 bombings, and if it was up to him, he would "personally send every adult male Muslim that has come into the EU over the past 12 months [prior to the attacks] back tomorrow" (Rawlinson 2018). Such rhetoric became emblematic of the British far-right extremist faction, contributing to the growth of the English Defense League (EDL), a sizeable organization that managed to gain thousands of supporters. Ebner's (2017) research underscored that certain EDL demonstrations received indirect support from various authorities, exacerbating the marginalization of Muslim communities (163-164). For instance, the 2013 Luton demonstration triggered a retaliatory response in the form of an attempted terrorist attack by the group formed in response to the EDL, with the intention "to defend the Muslim community from anti-Muslim hate crimes" (Ebner 2017, 164). These instances underscore the presence of radical convergence – the phenomenon of interactions between adversarial ideologies that mutually fuel hatred (Moghaddam 2018).

The focus of this research lies precisely on analyzing such interactions between two groups coexisting within the same society: one group that aligns with the far-right Islamophobic discourse, and the British Muslim community on the opposite end of the

spectrum. Furthermore, this research intends to contribute to the existing literature on radicalization by conducting a critical discourse analysis of the broader sociopolitical context and its impact on group radicalization. By examining such interconnected factors and influences that fuel radicalization, the findings of this research will enrich our understanding of the dynamics involved, which can lead to the facilitation of more comprehensive and inclusive strategies aimed at countering radicalization and fostering social harmony. Specifically, this research aims to answer the following research question: *to what extent does the mutual radicalization model facilitate or limit the understanding of the increased radicalization of the British Muslim community and British far-right groups during the period from 2005 to 2013?*

2. Literature Review

The phenomenon of radicalization is not a recent one. In fact, it has persisted throughout history in various forms and contexts, attracting the interest of both academics and policymakers, given its capacity to incite disturbances to social order and potentially lead to conflict. While the term itself has widely negative connotations associated with extremism or even terrorism, the history of the term is rather complex. The subsequent sections of this literature review will provide a more in-depth analysis of this changing dynamic of radicalization by examining the main debates within contemporary scholarship since the Cold War era. Firstly, the definition of radicalization is provided, which is followed by an overview of the levels of analysis employed in prior investigations of the causal factors underlying radicalization. The last section consists of an assessment of the three periods of group radicalization scholarship, concretely the 1960s-1990s, 1990s, and 2000s-today, with the aim to highlight the main ideas, concepts, and debates, as well as to contextualize this study within the larger body of research.

2.1 Defining Radicalization

There is no universally accepted definition among scholars of what precisely constitutes radicalization. One of the key reasons behind the term's definitional issue can be attributed to its relative nature, as the term gains meaning primarily by the means of its application (Sedgwick 2010, 491; Schmid 2013, 7; Neumann 2013, 878). Dalgaard-Nielsen (2010) also pointed to this issue of relativity of radicalization, and according to her definition, "radicalization is understood as a growing readiness to pursue and support far-reaching changes in society that conflict with, or pose a direct threat to, the existing order" (798). This definition

bears significant influence upon this research due to its nuanced stance, which eschews any particular ideological association with radicalization, refrains from strictly equating radicalization with violence, and avoids attributing radicalization to either individuals or groups.

2.2 Radicalization: Levels of Analysis

When it comes to analyzing the causes of radicalization, scholars have adopted various levels of analysis as a means of examining this complex phenomenon. There are three prevalent approaches employed by scholars to contextualize the factors driving the phenomenon of radicalization, concretely, the micro-level, meso-level, and macro-level approaches (Schmid 2013, 3-5; Lindekilde 2016, 535-536).

The micro-level analytical framework in radicalization research centers on the individual actors, scrutinizing their past experiences, beliefs, personality, as well as their behavior (Silke 2008; McCauley and Moskalenko 2011; Borum 2014). Such a micro-level focus can be exemplified in Walter Laqueur's (2004) work on the future trajectories of terrorism, where he asks: "How to explain that out of 100 militants believing with equal intensity in the justice of their cause, only a very few will actually engage in terrorist actions?" (53). The micro-level approaches ultimately aim to explore the interplay of various personal motivations and factors that culminate in an individual's radicalization. For instance, such factors include personal grievances and individuals' "inability to cope with stress, challenging situations, or complex worldviews" (Lindekilde 2016, 536). While micro-level research provides valuable insights into individuals' pathways toward radicalization, it is not without its limitations. Perhaps one of the most prevalent sources of criticism of micro-level analyses lies in its limited understanding of structural factors that affect individuals' decision-making. Radicalization is a multifaceted phenomenon that does not occur in a vacuum; therefore, it is essential to look at "cognitive processes, and socialization, in interaction with a specific situation" (Crenshaw 1981, 390).

Drawing from this, the meso-level research on radicalization focuses on the wider environment of individuals, known as the "radical milieu" (Schmid 2013, 4; Malthaner and Waldmann 2014; Malthaner 2017). According to Malthaner (2017), it is precisely the "radical movements and milieus [that] create 'networks of shared meaning' that shape individuals' identity, perceptions, and motivations" (380). In this sense, the meso-level analyses center on such networks that influence the individual's behavior in a way that instigates the process of radicalization. As Sageman (2004) notes in his book on the dynamic nature of terrorist

networks, to understand the phenomenon of radicalization, we need to see radicals not as "atomized individuals but actors linked to each other through complex webs of direct or mediated exchanges" (137). However, it is important to note that such social exchanges, although significant in their influence on the radicalization of individuals, are not the only interactions within a broader social system. Therefore, as Crenshaw (1981) noted, it is also important to analyze "broad political, social, and economic conditions" (380) as they are inherently embedded within all social structures.

Such broader social structures and their impact on radicalization are the core elements of analysis in the macro-level approaches. The main units of analysis in the macro-level analytical framework are groups, wider society, and their intertwinement with the broader social, cultural, and political discourses (Schmid 2013, 4). Such macro-level orientation can be exemplified in Kundnani's (2012) work on the development of the concept of radicalization where he concluded that "an objective study would examine how state and non-state actors mutually constitute themselves as combatants in a global conflict" (22). It is important to note that while macro-level approaches focus on wider interactions between groups, neither they necessarily dismiss the significance of individual processes of radicalization, nor do they perceive conflict and the radicalization associated with it as a solely global phenomenon. Macro-level approaches view radicalization as a phenomenon that "does not emerge in a vacuum; it is part of current trends in particular societies as well as globally" (Azzam 2007, 124). As Moghaddam (2018) emphasized, the macro-level radicalization "reminds us of the gestalt idea of the whole being more than the sum of its parts" (4), therefore, it is essential to examine first the social dynamics between groups, given that the individual thinking and decision-making is often a product of broader social processes. The primary emphasis of this research is rooted precisely in the realm of macro-level group radicalization, an area that has received relatively limited scholarly attention in contrast to scholarship analyzing the individual factors contributing to radicalization (Schmid 2013, 4; Lindekilde 2016, 536; Kundnani 2012, 21-22).

2.3 Evolution of Scholarship on Group Radicalization

This section introduces the main concepts and scholarly debates on group radicalization across the three periods since the Cold War era, in order to shed light on the complex nature of group radicalization and its various manifestations.

2.3.1 Revolutionary Times: Radicalization in the 1960s-1990s

The period from the 1960s to the 1990s experienced a surge in the scholarship on radicalization, due to the rise of various social and political movements challenging the established norms. This period, also known as "The New Left Wave" (Rapoport 2022, 153), was marked by the ideological influences of Marxism, Maoism, and anti-imperialism, and the concept of radicalization during this period was primarily linked to the "left-wing revolutionary movement[s] caused by oppression and exploitation" (Laqueur 2004, 49-50). For instance, Taylor (1960) in his work emphasizes how capitalism needs to be "radically re-examined" (7) due to its inherent tendency to prioritize wealth over humans and their welfare.

Additionally, the broader sociopolitical context was also the subject of research during this period, and particular events, such as "Castro's triumph in Cuba […] and the long Vietnam War [were] crucial in animating terrorist groups throughout the West" (Rapoport 2022, 151). Blackburn's (1963) article on the successes of the Cuban revolution serves as a notable illustration, demonstrating how radicalization became a source of inspiration, rooted in the resounding triumphs of guerilla campaigns. Moreover, this period saw the emergence of scholarship focused on non-conformist civil rights movements that challenged white supremacy, such as the Black Power movement in the United States (Carmichael and Hamilton 1967). Extensive literature on radical feminist movements also gained prominence, aiming "to end male supremacy in all areas of social and economic life" (Willis 1984, 91).

These examples serve as illustrations of the complex nature of the scholarship on group radicalism and radicalization during the span from the 1960s to the 1990s. Radicalization was driven by diverse ideologies that fueled revolutionaries' commitment to challenge established norms and power structures through transformative action, which ultimately showcases prioritizing macro-level research methods of broader political and socio-economic contexts that shaped these movements and their activities.

2.3.2 A New Age? Radicalization in the 1990s

The association of radicalization with leftist ideologies and movements drastically shifted in the 1990s, when the phenomenon became linked with far-right politics as well as religious ideology. The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union signified a large geopolitical shift that created power vacuums and fueled new conflicts, which created favorable conditions for the rise of group radicalization. Far-rights movements in Europe grew significantly during this period, caused by significant societal changes that created fertile

ground for the exploitation of populist rhetoric that dwelled on economic disparities and marginalized groups. The radicalization of far-right movements received significant scholarly attention, given their nearly universal presence across European countries. Mudde (2007) in his book on populism and European radical right-wing parties provides an exceptional outline of the emergence of such radical groups at the national level.

Furthermore, the literature in this period also explored the role of ethnonationalist conflicts as drivers of the formation and radicalization of armed groups. For instance, case studies on the Yugoslav Wars have examined how power struggles, ethnic tensions, as well as irredentist aspirations influenced how "social and political radicalization was gradually taking root" (Armakolas 2011, 241).

Moreover, during this period, religion became one of the primary catalysts of group radicalization, which was marked by animosity among diverse religious factions "rooted in profound historical memories" (Rapoport 2022, 199). Particularly, radicalization became widely associated with Islamist extremism, and as Neumann and Kleinmann (2013) in their work noted, scholarship slowly became "obsessed with Islam" (363). Notable groups such as Hezbollah, Hamas, and Al-Qaeda are just a few examples of radicalized factions strongly antagonistic towards Western secularism that were formed during this period. A large number of studies were conducted with the aim of analyzing ideological underpinnings and interpretations of such radical groups that have facilitated the growth of radical Islamist movements (Wiktorowicz 2005; Rabasa et al. 2006).

These examples also signify the shift of scholarly focus, since while macro-level factors remained relevant during this period, there was an increasing focus on group-level dynamics as well as individual influences on radicalization.

2.3.3 The Aftermath of 9/11: Radicalization in the 2000s-today

The terrorist attacks such as 9/11 as well as the latter 7/7 bombings have had a profound impact on the scholarship on group radicalization (Borum 2011). The global 'war on terror' led to a further merge of the concepts of Islam, radicalization, and terrorism, and "experts and officials started referring to the idea of 'radicalization' whenever they wanted to talk about 'what goes on before the bomb goes off'" (Neumann 2008, 4). This led to the creation of different models of radicalization, which perceived the phenomenon as the precursor of terrorism, and thus, violence. One of the most influential models was the one proposed by Moghaddam (2005), where he connected radicalized psychological conditions on one hand, and acts of terrorism on the other, by creating the model known as "The Staircase to the Terrorist Act" (161). This

model is rooted in the idea that as radicals "climb the staircase, they see fewer and fewer choices, until the only possible outcome is the destruction of other, or oneself, or both" (Moghaddam 2005, 161). In other words, this model is built on the idea that radicalization follows a linear path toward violence and terrorism and further showcases how the focus of research shifted during this period to the micro-level dynamics.

Furthermore, such notions of radicalization being connected to violence are part of a broader scholarly debate on the correlation between radicalization and violence. Numerous scholars argue that the phenomenon of radicalization is not an indicator of violence per se since violent behavior cannot be generalized and various other factors come into play when determining violent actions. As della Porta and Haupt (2012) pointed out, "rarely can we generalize about either the aims or the repertoires of action of the purveyors of violence" (311).

In light of this ongoing debate, researchers have increasingly advocated for more comprehensive and multidisciplinary approaches that would provide a more nuanced understanding of the processes of radicalization. In his more recent work, Moghaddam (2018) introduced an expanded model of group radicalization, where he connected the macro-level factors driving the radicalization, "including historical, cultural, economic circumstances, as well as the psychological characteristics of the groups" (22). This model acknowledges that radicalization can oftentimes lead to violence, however, it is not always the case, as "there are many situations where groups experience ingroup love and cohesion but are not hateful and antagonistic toward outgroups" (Moghaddam 2018, 20). In other words, this model takes into consideration the complexity of the radicalization processes by shifting its focus beyond the distinct levels of analysis.

2.4 Mutual Radicalization Model

The mutual radicalization model emphasizes the interactive nature of radicalization and the mutual reinforcement of extremist beliefs within and between individuals and groups. The rationale of mutual radicalization finds a parallel in the concept of 'ideological amplification', which "refers to the fact that after deliberation, people are likely to move toward a more extreme point in the ideological direction to which the group's members were originally inclined" (Sunstein 2007, 274). In other words, interactions among opposing factions tend to drive significant group polarization that leads to an adoption of more extreme attitudes and behaviors vis-à-vis the outgroup. Such a phenomenon was also described in Ebner's influential book (2017), where she characterizes it as a "vicious circle of hate that often translates into

violence" (195). Drawing inspiration from such scholarship, Moghaddam (2018) formulated the mutual radicalization paradigm that serves as a conceptual framework for understanding and potentially curbing the trajectory of radicalization.

The mutual radicalization model is categorized into three steps "each characterized by distinct psychological processes" (Moghaddam 2018, 19). In the preliminary stage, group mobilization occurs, wherein individuals experiencing comparable grievances or ideological leanings start to identify as part of a chosen group. This stage is primarily individual-centric, however, due to commonly perceived grievances, a "collective identity becomes adopted as a tool for group mobilization" (32). The interactions within the group and with the outgroup serve to validate and intensify the shared ideology, which leads to the second stage wherein the extremist beliefs are amplified through heightened ingroup cohesion. The second stage is characterized by more assertive leadership as well as followership (Moghaddam 2018, 33-34). In the final stage, group members become increasingly committed to extremist actions, which are fueled by the "echo chambers and their role in shaping antagonistic collective identities" (Moghaddam 2018, 34).

The distinctiveness of the mutual radicalization model lies in its universal applicability, as it is not tied to distinct ideologies. Throughout his book, Moghaddam (2018) tested this model on various case studies, ranging from radicalization between Israel and Palestine, China and Japan, as well as Islamic Jihad and the United States, or the Islamic Jihad and Extremist Nationalists at the EU level. While the book offers an insightful analysis of complex issues, due to the model's broad applicability, some of the case studies were based on limited empirical support (Clark Gill 2018, 115). Moreover, it is questionable to what extent is such a model's predictive capacity present. Moghaddam (2018) himself in his book mentioned that there is an "inherent fluidity of the mutual radicalization process, which depends to some degree on features of within- as well as between-group processes" (21). Therefore, in order to discern mutual radicalization, it is essential to conduct a comprehensive analysis that takes into account specific socio-political contexts and historical dynamics at play.

2.5 Conclusion

This literature review has demonstrated the complex and intricate nature of radicalization. As section 2.2 demonstrated, there are different levels of analysis when it comes to researching radicalization, however, the broader macro-level framework remains relatively understudied, particularly when compared to individual factors that influence radicalization. This research

intends to address this gap by conducting a macro-level analysis of the causes of group radicalization, while not limiting itself to this singular focus of research. As Schmid (2013) noted, such focus is crucial "to gain a better understanding of the dynamic processes driving escalation" (v). Moreover, as section 2.3 on the development of group radicalization scholarship has shown, radicalization as a concept is inherently relative in its nature, and the different historical manifestations of the term emphasize the need to adapt our understanding of group radicalization to the evolving dynamics of the global order. In this sense, context-specific and evidence-based analyses are crucial to gain a deeper understanding of the drivers of radicalization, which ultimately paves the way toward its limitation and prevention.

3. Methodology

3.1 Selected Methodology and Structure of the Research

Moghaddam's (2018) comprehensive exploration of the mutual radicalization model within diverse case studies has been instrumental in this research. However, as mentioned in the literature review, there is a gap in terms of delving into the dynamics of a single country. While Moghaddam (2018) emphasized mutual radicalization between far-right groups and Islamic extremists within the European Union, a more nuanced examination is required due to the substantial divergence among the European member states. This divergence is evident not only in the member states' approaches to extremism and radicalization but also in their decision-making and policies that are primarily dealt with at the national levels.

Therefore, this research focuses on a single case study: an investigation into mutual radicalization within the extremist spectrum of the United Kingdom. The UK serves as an ideal case study due to its historical struggle with extremism as well as the linguistic accessibility of the sources which enhances the precision and reliability of the analysis.

Spanning the period from 2005 to 2013, the chosen timeframe enables the tracing of both groups' evolution and identification of triggering events and practices that influenced their radicalization trajectories. This timeframe commences after the 7/7 terrorist attack in London, which was followed by an upsurge in extremism across the UK. It concludes in 2013, predating the significant emigration of British foreign fighters joining the Islamic State as they were likely radicalized during the examined period.

Firstly, this research aims to provide contextual backgrounds for both sides of the extremist spectrum, based on Moghaddam's (2018) model. Firstly, the group mobilization of the British Muslim community and the British far-right groups is assessed. With regard to the

far-right groups, special attention is given to a group that emerged during the selected timeframe, the English Defense League. Furthermore, extreme ingroup cohesion is examined on both sides of the extremist spectrum, with a particular focus on the group structures and the means of mobilizing increased support. Ultimately, the antagonistic identity transformation will be examined, with emphasis on pivotal trigger events that shaped the discourses of both factions. This research provides context-specific insights supported by primary and secondary sources, thus, filling a gap identified in critiques of Moghaddam's (2018) book.

To comprehend the interactions that underlie mutual radicalization within the British extremist spectrum, this research employs critical discourse analysis as the prevalent method to examine the data. Discourse is "inherently part of and influenced by social structure, and produced in social interaction" (van Dijk 2001, 352), therefore, in order to grasp the essence of mutual radicalization, it is necessary to unveil the discourse that constitutes it. As van Dijk (2001) pointed out, "in everyday interaction and experience the macro- and microlevel (and intermediary 'mesolevels') form one unified whole" (354). Therefore, the selected method proves to be relevant for this research as it encompasses a wide-ranging analysis rather than confining it to a singular aspect. This allows us to "bridge these levels, and thus to arrive at a unified critical analysis" (van Dijk 2001, 354). Four critical categories substantiate this analysis, found in Chapter 6: "members-groups, actions-process, context-social structure, personal-social cognition" (van Dijk 2001, 354). These categories allow for the assessment of the mutual radicalization model in terms of its applicability to the British extremist spectrum.

3.2 Limitations

There are certain limitations of this study that must be acknowledged, stemming predominantly from the scope and focus of this research. Firstly, due to the scope of this research, not all contributing events and factors could be exhaustively evaluated. The selected timeframe, spanning from 2005 to 2013, provides a significant window for analysis, but it inevitably excludes certain events and developments that occurred before or after this period. Moreover, the analysis primarily centers on the English Defense League as a notable far-right group during the specified timeframe, however, it is essential to note, that there were also other far-right groups coexisting during this period. Recognizing this limitation prompts the call for further studies to encompass a more expansive array of groups, enriching the comprehensiveness of the dataset and broadening the analytical perspective. Ultimately, the landscape of data accessibility significantly shaped this study. The removal of primary sources

from online platforms due to the sensitive nature of the content has introduced constraints on this research. Therefore, it is important to note that the absence of such primary evidence might lead to an underestimation of the extent and nature of online interactions that contributed to mutual radicalization. It is important to note, however, that this limitation does not compromise the relevance or outcomes of this study, as any absent primary evidence was supplemented by scholarly literature.

4. Radicalization Pathways: British Muslim Community

> *"Our judgment of Islam has been grossly distorted by taking extremes to be the norm. That, ladies and gentlemen, is a serious mistake. It is like judging the quality of life in Britain by the existence of murder and rape, child abuse, and drug addiction. The extremes exist, and they must be dealt with. But when used as a basis to judge a society, they lead to distortion and unfairness"* (HM King Charles III 2022, 17:55).

As per the latest census in 2021, Muslims constitute approximately 6,5% of Britain's total population, a figure that amounted to around "3.87 million" (Muslim Council of Britain 2022) individuals at the time. This demographic presence makes the Muslim population "rank as the second-largest religious population" (Rabasa and Benard 2014, 16) in the United Kingdom. However, the emergence of Islamophobia in the UK is far from a contemporary phenomenon. Its roots extend back to the colonial era's Orientalist narratives and intertwine with more contemporary events, such as British interventionism in the Middle East which caused "a wave of immigration into Europe that greatly exacerbated domestic problems for Britain and other EU countries" (Pugh 2019, 422). This context, coupled with the global rise in terrorism and the media portrayals of Islam, alongside the political dialogues concerning immigration and national identity, has entrenched stereotypes and biases into the fabric of life in the UK. This chapter examines the radicalization pathways of the British Muslim community throughout the period of 2005 and 2013. The collected data are structured using Moghaddam's (2018) mutual radicalization model. This categorization serves as the basis for the assessment of the model's viability in the context of this specific case study, thereby reaffirming its relevance.

4.1 Group Mobilization

> *"In the five weeks after the bombing attacks, the Metropolitan Police in London recorded a sharp rise in faith hate crimes as compared to the same period in 2004. These attacks were directed predominantly at British Muslims. Reports from other parts of the UK, including from NGO sources, confirmed that the Muslim communities had become targets of increased hostility in the wake of the London bombings. […] In the UK, the temporary increase in racist incidents has made minority groups – and particularly British Muslims - feel vulnerable"* (European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia 2005, 5).

The 7/7 bombings in 2005 have left an indelible mark on how Muslims are perceived within Britain. The involvement of Islamic terrorists as the perpetrators cast a shadow over the religion itself and its adherents, propelling a strong securitization of the community. As documented by Sommers (2015), there was a significant surge in the perception of Islam as a threat, with data suggesting that "56% of people think that Islam is a 'major' or 'some' threat to Western liberal democracy." Coupled with the increase in hate crimes, the 'othering' of the British Muslim community became a standard practice.

In 2006, a remarkable controversy ignited, sparked by Jack Straw, the leader of the House of Commons, who publicly expressed his opinion that British society as a whole would benefit if Muslim women were banned from wearing veils (Sturcke 2006). This sparked a wave of heated debates that continue to resonate within British society even today. For some, veils are a form of 'otherness' that divides society, while for others, veils can "symbolize a cultural and religious identity, and women have increasingly chosen to cover themselves as a matter of choice" (Young 2003, 80). Such a spectrum of viewpoints initiated a 'veil' discourse, which not only contributed to the deepening of the divide but also further estranged the Muslim community by facilitating the 'us versus them' mentality.

A person's societal standing is fluid, largely affected by the evolving events occurring, and prevailing discourses of the time. As Anderson (2013) pointed out, "different groups and individuals can slip in and out of the community of value: sometimes accepted, sometimes marginal, sometimes examples of Britain's fine institutions, generosity, and tolerance, and other times a threat to British identity and themselves intolerant" (6). This fluidity might be deemed as an inherent facet of societies, however, when negativity amplifies, the dichotomy between

'us' and 'them' intensifies, fostering perpetual divisions and catalyzing group mobilization (Moghaddam 2018, 32).

4.1.1 CONTEST: Insights and Implications

In 2006, Britain introduced its counter-terrorist policy, known as CONTEST. The strategy was structured around "four principal strands: PREVENT, PURSUE, PROTECT, and PREPARE" (HM Government 2006, 1). Within the context of this research, which centers on radicalization dynamics, the 'PREVENT' component which intended to limit radicalization in order to prevent terrorist-related activities deserves particular attention. This rather comprehensive policy aimed at "combating radicalization in the United Kingdom by partnering with the police, local governments, and NGOs to challenge radical Islamism, disrupt those who promote violent extremism, support individuals who are vulnerable to radicalization or who have begun to radicalize, increase the capacity of communities to resist violent extremism, and address grievances that violent extremists exploit" (Rabasa and Benard 2014, 170).

However, despite the strong aspirations of early intervention and resource allocation for individuals susceptible to extremist ideologies, the PREVENT initiative sparked a wave of criticism for its over-focus on Islamist extremism. The document issued by the HM Government (2006) appeared to revolve primarily around the perceived threats posed by the radicalized Muslim community (Qurashi 2018, 2). As Rabasa and Bernard (2014) noted, the policy, in fact, contributed to "shifting the blame for terrorism to the Muslim community and its values" (173). This narrow focus not only fueled allegations of discrimination and stigmatization but also singled out and alienated the Muslim community. Moreover, the lack of clear definitions for terms like 'extremism' and 'radicalization' left room for subjective interpretation and potential misuse.

4.2 Heightened Ingroup Cohesion

Amidst a society already fragmented and marked by escalating incidents of hostility, "feelings of collective identity threat" (Moghaddam 2018, 98) tend to become amplified. In search of affiliation and acceptance, many British Muslims found refuge in communities of like-minded individuals and groups. Among these, some adopt a milder disposition, whereas others are inclined to more extremist, fundamentalist interpretations "envisioning Islam as a comprehensive political system as well as a way of life" (Appleby 2002, 506) set against the backdrop of Western liberal values.

On one hand, such communities provide emotional support while nurturing the sense of belonging, however, on the other hand, they also function as echo chambers where alternative viewpoints struggle to penetrate. This dynamic fostered an environment where extremist ideologies find fertile ground, ultimately perpetuating radicalization within these communities. The embrace of religious symbols and other markers of Islamic identity suddenly not only signified religious devotion but also became acts of solidarity with the community at large.

Media played an important part during this stage, as information could be easily disseminated, reaching even wider audiences than face-to-face encounters. Serving as both a source of grievance as well as a catalyst for ingroup solidarity, media operates as a platform where like-minded individuals can connect, persuade, and reinforce their shared (radicalized) beliefs. A case in point is the portrayal of Muslims in British media, as analyzed by Bleich et al. (2015) throughout the period from 2001 to 2012. The data showed that "Muslims are depicted in a substantially more negative way when compared to analogous groups" (Bleich et al. 2015, 958). In the subsequent sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2. of this chapter, a more in-depth analysis of the rise of in-group cohesion and the role of media is provided, while using numerous primary sources to substantiate the evidence.

4.2.1 In the Shadow of Aggression: Leadership and Followership

During this second stage of radicalization, Moghaddam (2018) in his book emphasizes a critical shift in terms of how "more aggressive styles of behavior [are] becoming normative for both leaders and followers" (33). As previously noted, 'PREVENT' was one of the key pillars designated to counter the spread of extremist ideologies by "deterring those who facilitate terrorism and those who encourage others to become terrorists" (HMGovernment 2006, 1). Besides the significant flaws of this policy, it is also arguable how effective it really was.

Throughout the period between 2005 and 2013, while online radicalization reached pervasive proportions, there were also many instances of direct radicalization through charismatic preachers or influential leaders within extremist groups. It is argued that after 'PREVENT' was added to the UK's political toolkit in 2006, there was a significant decline in such online and direct radicalization due to "deportation of preachers, the freezing of bank accounts linked to fundraisers, the conviction of jihadists and the disruption through curfews of those identified as facilitators" (Herrington 2015, 25). However, the evidence suggests otherwise.

When it comes to online radicalization, despite many concerted efforts, the UK failed significantly in its containment. Anjem Choudary, one of the most prominent British preachers and a representative of the extremist organization al-Muhajiroun, serves as a notable example of how the British system not only failed at preventing radicalization but even facilitated it. Choudary is perhaps best known for his advocation of the establishment of the caliphate, as well as "praising the 9/11 terrorist attacks" (Chatrath 2010, 112). His affiliation with the al-Muhajiroun organization led to the recruitment of hundreds of British Muslims, particularly "youngsters who were searching for a sense of identity" (Kenney 2019, 5).

A striking instance of the UK's paradoxical attempt to curtail such extremist organizations and their doctrines is Choudary's interview in 2010 that was nationally broadcasted and, therefore, given a platform to share his extreme beliefs. During this particular interview, a famous British journalist Jeremy Dickson Paxman, and a representative from a counter-terrorism think tank intended to challenge Choudary's views. During the interview, Choudary intended to speak on behalf of all Muslims in Britain, who are in his opinion treated unfairly:

> *"That is the Britain we live in today. It is an apartheid system. The Muslims are treated as second-hand citizens. You need to wake up to the reality of the situation"* (Choudary 2016, 4:04).

Moreover, he propagated the idea that a caliphate was the remedy against these injustices, as it would protect Muslims from the West. When the interviewer asked him about his fate (the interviewer's) in the so-called caliphate, suggesting whether he would be murdered, Choudary indirectly confirmed by answering: "you know very well that you have left the Deen of al-Islam because you side with enemies of Islam against the Muslims" (Choudary 2016, 4:19). Choudary's response, laden with aggression, was broadcasted nationally, which contributed to the dissemination of extremist ideas. While one might argue that such media interactions could deter individuals from embracing such ideologies, the reality within marginalized communities is more complex. In these contexts the aggressive discourse could potentially reinforce their beliefs, resonating with their feelings of alienation, and consequently, validating their extremist leanings when seen in British popular media.

4.2.2. Navigating Informal Networks: Conformity and Obedience

Beyond the realm of charismatic leaders such as Anjem Choudary, an array of networks was developed with the aim to "share information, make decisions, and adapt their operations rapidly in response to changing conditions" (Kenney et al. 2013, 740). In such networks, informal leadership was encouraged to ensure conformity through a shared sense of belonging and identity, whereby non-conforming voices risked exclusion or perceived retribution. Evident primarily in virtual spaces, these informal networks played a pivotal role in shaping the radicalization trajectory.

Exemplifying this dynamic, Islamic Emergency Defence (IED), a network of like-minded Muslims created for protection from threats against Muslims in Britain, serves as a notable example of such an informal network and its dynamics. On their Facebook page, the IED primarily shared news reports detailing incidents of Muslim-oriented hate crimes across the UK. Moreover, the page extended its influence by posting reminders of behavioral rules and guidelines for various scenarios. For instance, a day before the English Defense League's demonstration in Birmingham in July 2013, the IED shared a set of recommendations for safeguarding Muslims during the event, such as "to work collectively with other Muslims to deter the shaytan [evil spirit], and to appoint an Ameer (leader)" (Islamic Emergency Defence 2013). The post was written in a fairly unaggressive tone, showing a sense of preparedness and unity. However, in the comment threads, they manifested a collective resolve:

> *"I pray to Allah that the Muslims remain safe and are able to avoid any violence in Birmingham today, but if anyone is to face an attack, I pray that the Muslims are able to pull together, defend themselves and remain unscathed. I remind all Muslim men in Birmingham that it is our duty to defend and protect women and children even with our lives. Be alert and don't hesitate to step in in the event that you witness an attack - this is not illegal and is legal right in UK and your legal duty in Islam"* (Islamic Emergency Defence 2013).

In summary, informal networks such as the IDL, often established in online environments, emphasize the importance of community and shared identity to maintain conformity and a sense of belonging. The example of the IED's Facebook post demonstrates, how such networks disseminate information, provide guidelines for behavior and encourage collective action.

4.3 Culmination of Radicalization: Antagonistic Collective Identities

During the third stage of mutual radicalization, a heightened consolidation of extremist perspectives becomes not only accepted but also encouraged, often as a response to "trigger events [that] (re)ignite direct or indirect violent conflicts" (Moghaddam 2018, 35). Acts of terrorism and violence became rationalized and legitimized as a justified response to perceived oppression, injustices, and hate crimes. This phase is again facilitated by online networks, a realm with broad accessibility of radical content. Even the most vulnerable individuals can access such content, radicalizing themselves and often spreading the radicalized narrative within like-minded networks.

The case of Roshonara Choudry, a 21-year-old girl convicted of the attempted murder of the British politician Stephen Timms, serves as a notable illustration of this dynamic. Choudry's reasoning for her action was based on the feeling of anger over the British foreign policy vis-à-vis Iraq. Informed by extremist preachers' online materials, she believed that the British intervention in Iraq is was a personal attack on her and her community. In her post-event interrogation, she justified her actions based on a rationale that "I'm a Muslim and all Muslims are brothers and sisters. So if he attacked them, then he's likely to attack me too" (Dodd 2010). When the interrogator asked her, what did the preacher say that made her do this act, she responded that "when a Muslim land is attacked it becomes obligatory on every man, woman and child and even slave to go out and fight and defend the land" (Dodd 2010), which motivated her to take action herself. This exemplifies how a sense of antagonistic collective identity and shared victimhood witnesses the rationalization and endorsement of violence as a justifiable response to perceived injustices.

Many British Muslims experienced other everyday events that triggered them toward more antagonistic and aggressive actions. In the post-7/7 environment, assaults on mosques by far-right groups became disturbingly frequent and there were numerous instances of physical attacks on veiled women (Hasan 2015), casting a shadow of fear over the Muslim community. Coupled with frequent demonstrations by far-right groups such as the English Defense League, constant alienation, and the rise of the Islamic State's established caliphate, many British Muslims perceived it as their duty to defend Islam in its fight with the West.

5. Radicalization Pathways: British Far-Right Groups

Britain's far-right spectrum has always been diverse, with numerous political parties with radical ideologies candidating in the parliamentary elections every few years. Additionally, many non-parliamentary entities were established that significantly contributed to the "mainstreaming of extremism" (Ebner 2023). While there are diverse forms of far-right ideologies, for the purpose of this research, British far-right encompass "right-wing ideologies that accept democracy, i.e. popular sovereignty and majority rule, but oppose fundamental values of liberal democracy, notably minority rights and pluralism" (Mudde 2018, 2). This chapter explores the radicalization pathways of such ideologically driven groups throughout the selected period between 2005 and 2013, guided by Moghaddam's (2018) theoretical framework. Ultimately, this chapter demonstrates the factors that contributed to the far-right groups' radicalization, by primarily focusing on the English Defense League, which was established in 2009. As the far-right landscape continues to evolve, comprehending the context of a particular group's radicalization is crucial.

5.1 Group Mobilization

> *"To ensure that we do not become a minority in our own homeland, and that the native British peoples of our islands retain their culture and identity, we call for an immediate halt to all further immigration, the immediate deportation of all bogus asylum seekers, all criminal entrants and illegal immigrants, and the introduction of a system of voluntary resettlement whereby those immigrants and their descendants who are legally here are afforded the opportunity to return to their lands of ethnic origin assisted by a generous financial incentives both for individuals and for the countries in question"* (British National Party 2005, 14).

The 7/7 bombings in Britain acted as a catalyst for the proliferation of far-right groups, which built their ideology around the fear of Islamic terrorism and the perceived encroachment of the 'other' upon the Western way of life. The passage above, taken from the British National Party (BNP) manifesto, offers a stark portrayal of the party's antagonism toward the UK's former immigration policies in the aftermath of the London terrorist attack. The British identity is viewed to be under threat, particularly from immigrants viewed as outsiders. As Ford and Goodwin (2010) pointed out in their analysis of the BNP's support base, the data suggests that there was a sharp increase in the number of voters in favor of this party, with voter numbers

escalating from fewer than 50 000 in the 2001 elections to nearly 200 000 in 2005 (2). The BNP party was founded in the 1980s, and by the early 2000s, it became "the most successful […] fastest growing political party in Britain" (Ford and Goodwin 2010, 1). Since the party's trajectory predates the scope of this study, this research's focus is centered on the party established by feeding on the continuous decline of the BNP, the English Defence League established in 2009.

The EDL capitalized on anti-Muslim sentiments and grievances about the impact of immigration on British culture and society as a whole. One of the leaders of the EDL, Tommy Robinson, renowned for his strong antagonistic opinions toward the Muslim community, became a prominent face of the movement. The far-right group's mobilization of public support occurred simultaneously on two levels: online and by orchestrating demonstrations across the United Kingdom. According to Allchorn's (2019) assessment, the group was responsible for "organizing over 100 high-profile and disruptive demonstrations in towns and cities across the UK since its formation" (527).

According to Moghaddam (2018), during the first step of mutual radicalization, the central aspect is that the "differences between 'us' and 'them' become exaggerated, whereas threats from 'them' become magnified" (32). This dynamic echoes in the EDL's rise, driven by a combination of fear, perceived marginalization, animosity, and nationalism, while reshaping the discourse on immigration, identity, and the essence of 'Britishness'.

5.2 Heightened ingroup cohesion

The phenomenon of increased cohesion within radicalized groups is exemplified by entities like the English Defense League, which provide a platform for individuals and groups sharing similar beliefs to unite and mutually reinforce their objective. Although comprehensive insights into the organizational structures of the EDL remain limited to members who were more vocal about their membership, substantial information emerged from ethnographic investigations involving interviews by infiltrating within. Of notable significance is Pilkington's (2016) publication, where she managed to collect data by conducting interviews with the members, thus, providing unique insights regarding the EDL's organizational structure. Pilkington's accounts demonstrate that individuals were drawn to this organization mostly because of its rather informal style rooted in notions such as that "every single one of you is a leader" (42). Such an approach appeals to those seeking not only a sense of belonging and affirmation but

also a particular sense of control. Consequently, individuals or groups seeking inclusion and influence find organizations like the EDL, which serve as platforms for self-expression.

Similar to the recruitment dynamics observed within the British Muslim community, the media played a significant role in recruiting new members, disseminating shared ideologies, and mobilizing involvement in coordinated demonstrations. Utilizing social media platforms like Facebook, the EDL managed to form a community of "approximately 30,000 members as of 2013" (Counter Extremism Project n.d.). Popular tools such as online calendars helped to keep the members up to date on local activities, effectively mobilizing considerable masses to support their initiatives. The subsequent sections (5.2.1 and 5.2.2.) delve into the instances of such heightened ingroup cohesion, concretely by exploring the nature of the EDL's leadership and followership, as well as the underpinning factors of conformity and obedience within the group's dynamic.

5.2.1 Leadership Dynamics and Follower Bonds

> *"The EDL […] 'went from being concerned about extremism, to them radicalizing themselves'"* (Counter Extremism Project n.d.).

The organizational structure of the English Defense League can be categorized as semi-formal. This structure encompassed multiple divisions strategically spread across the UK, each tailored to engage different groups and minorities, thus, customizing recruitment approaches based on specific target demographics. Among such divisions were ones oriented toward Jewish, LGBTQ, or even youth communities (Pilkington 2016, 43). Across these divisions, frequent speeches were organized to rally support for the group's cause and as Pilkington (2016) pointed out, it was apparent that "an effort was made to include local speakers, women speakers and, increasingly, young speakers rather than focusing on a single, charismatic leader" (45). In an interview with an anonymous EDL member, the interviewee suggested a profound admiration for the group's leader, Tommy Robinson, by saying: "the thing which I always liked about him was that he was just one of us. He would talk to you like he was one of us. He wouldn't look down on you" (Pilkington 2016, 45). This signifies rather tight bonds between the leadership and followership, potentially contributing to the popularity of this far-right group. Employing populist rhetoric, the leaders managed to appeal to a diverse range of backgrounds.

Beyond the charismatic leadership and populist discourse, several instances arose where local authorities seemingly facilitated the EDL demonstrations. One particularly striking

example is the case of the group's demonstration in Luton, which was met with "the apparent willingness of the Luton authorities to allow EDL demonstrations (compared to Leicester and Bradford, where numerous restrictions have been implemented)" (Ebner 2017, 164). This measure, to some degree, contributed to the perceived legitimacy of the actions of the members of this group, by granting them the freedom to spread their antagonistic ideology without any particular restrictions. This significantly contributed to the alienation of the British Muslim communities residing in the Luton area and beyond, as even local authorities appeared unwilling to safeguard their interests. Interestingly, it is noted that "after ISIS declared its caliphate, Luton became one of Britain's foremost recruiting hotbeds for foreign fighters" (Ebner 2017, 164).

5.2.2. From Concern to Confrontation

> *"With the EDL we were not going out to start trouble, to start fights, but we were always plagued, followed, abused and attacked by the far left and Muslims and you never knew when you might have to defend yourself"* (Robinson 2015, 233).

The English Defence League has gone to great lengths to portray the group as a non-violent organization, simply protesting against Muslim extremism. However, this verbal façade often diverged from the group's actions. Contrary to claims, a considerable portion of the EDL demonstrations gained notoriety for their confrontational and violent nature. Rooted in the strong sense of victimhood, the group found itself caught in a cycle of confrontation as highlighted by the quote from Robinson's (2015) book, titled the *Enemy of the State*, where he described his perspectives and the inner workings of the EDL from his point of view. The impetus for collective action within the group derived from a perceived need for self-defense against the perceived threats. Based on the strong notions of victimhood, confrontational behavior was justified by a shared mission against perceived extremism.

Given the semi-formal structure, the group's interactions created a self-reinforcing cycle wherein adherence to group norms facilitated a sense of belonging, loyalty, and purpose, while these factors, in turn, fostered the willingness to engage in aggressive actions to protect the perceived interests of the group "resulting in a spiralling violence effect" (Ebner 2017, 197).

5.3 'Us' Versus 'Them': Antagonistic Collective Identities

At the core of far-right groups, such as the English Defense League, lies an antagonistic collective identity cultivated and spread further. A disturbing pattern emerges, where any instance of transgression or action undertaken by the opposing group serves as justification for actions of the former one, often manifesting in violence. Throughout the period between 2005 and 2013, there were several trigger events that inflamed the mobilization of far-right extremist groups, with a similar resonance as the 7/7 bombings.

For instance, in 2013, the media were filled with headlines about child grooming cases in Rotherham. This revelation triggered a significant public outrage, further intensified by the presence of Muslim individuals among the convicted. According to the official report issued by the representative of the Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, Alexis Jay (2014), it was estimated "that approximately 1400 children were sexually exploited over the full inquiry period, from 1997 to 2013" (1). The way the leader of the EDL, Robinson (2015) interpreted this abuse, was that it was an "ideologically motivated rape, specifically targeting non-Muslim girls and it needs to be made a national issue of" (468). Notwithstanding the presence of victims from Muslim backgrounds and perpetrators with no ties to Islam, far-right groups disproportionally directed blame toward the entire community and the religion itself (Kassimeris and Jackson 2015, 179).

In the same year, a British serving soldier Lee Rigby was brutally murdered by individuals motivated by Islamist extremism (McEnery et al. 2015, 238). Prior to police intervention, the perpetrator was recorded justifying this murder in the name of Muslim oppression. He stated: "the only reason we have killed this man today is because Muslims are dying daily by British soldiers and this British soldier is one, it is an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" (5 News 2013, 3:11). This horrific event served as a rallying point for far-right groups, particularly the EDL, intensifying their rhetoric surrounding perceived threats posed by Islam and multiculturalism.

The far-right groups' responses to these events underscore how antagonistic collective identities can be strengthened through selective interpretations and exploitation of emotions. By capitalizing on fear, anger, and outrage, extremist far-right ideologies use such sentiments to advance their own agendas and foster an 'us versus them' mentality.

6. Deconstructing Mutual Radicalization Dynamic: Critical Analysis

This chapter explores the interplay between radicalized British Muslims and far-right groups, by conducting a critical discourse analysis. Employing van Dijk's (2001) methodological approach, this analysis aims to demonstrate the underlying conditions that underpin the relationship between the two factions. The central objective is to establish whether the complex pathways toward radicalization within Britain's extremist spectrum can indeed be fueled by mutually reinforcing practices. According to van Dijk (2001), there are four aspects that should be taken into consideration when it comes to critical analysis of interactions: the interplay between members and groups, the dynamics of actions and processes, the influence of context and social structures, as well as the personal and social cognition (354). In the further sections of this chapter, each aspect will be assessed in relation to Moghaddam's (2018) theory of mutual radicalization as well as the broader literature, in order to critically engage with and challenge the respective model to establish its relevance in the context of the British extremist spectrum.

6.1 Members - Groups

The interactions between members and groups dimension suggest, that individuals are part of broader social groups, and are both influenced by and exert influence upon their respective groups and fellow members (van Dijk 2001, 354). In the context of the British far-right spectrum, the data presented in the previous chapters indicate that both parties engaged in discourse and actions as members of distinct social groups. In accordance with Moghaddam's (2018) mutual radicalization model, the British Muslim community felt threatened by the far-right groups, while on the other hand, British far-right groups perceived a threat from British Muslims. Each group interprets the world and situations around them through a unique lens. The dominant discourse of the British Muslim communities revolves around their communal identity, rooted in religion as well as the historical context and the threats against this identity. Conversely, far-right groups construct their discourse around depicting British Muslims as a significant menace to British values, culture, and social cohesion.

But does the radicalization of these groups solely stem from their antagonism and opposition to each other? The mutual radicalization model indeed serves as a lens to comprehend the underlying dynamics and ideologies motivating both individual and group behavior. Yet, it would be overly reductive to perceive the British extremist spectrum exclusively as a product of these two antagonistic factions. As demonstrated in Chapter 4, while

certainly threatened by the presence and actions of far-right groups, the radicalization of British Muslims was affected by multiple other factors. Beyond direct confrontations, the media's negative portrayal of Muslims, authorities' passive response to anti-Muslim rallies, but also historical grievances all contributed to the alienation of this community. As Modood (2005) pointed out, "besides beliefs that I might call part of the primary self- definition of a group, there are other beliefs that, as it were, have got historically or sociologically stuck on a group" (121). In this sense, the perceived injustices of British Muslims were also rooted in historical experience, thus, it is questionable to what extent can the radicalization of this group be attributed to far-right extremism and their anti-Muslim rhetoric. Similarly, in the case of far-right groups, there is a long history of nationalist parties with strong antagonistic sentiments against Muslims, preceding the establishment of the English Defense League. However, its populist rhetoric of safeguarding 'Britishness' suggests "that the EDL is not just the sum of its anti-Muslim and anti-Establishment discontents but also (rather unsuccessfully) tries to key into more mainstream notions of national identity" (Allchorn 2019, 537). Therefore, the pathways of radicalization are far from monolithic, as there are different grievances and motivations for members to act on.

While the member – groups concept sheds light on the role of group identity in the trajectory of radicalization, it also challenges the comprehensiveness of Moghaddam's (2018) thesis. The notion that British Muslims and British far-right groups engage in discourse as members of distinct social groups indeed highlights the significance of mutually constructive discourse permeating the British extremist spectrum. However, this perspective can also be interpreted as an indicator of diversity within these groups. Not all members necessarily harbor extreme ideologies, as a broad spectrum of beliefs exists within each group. In this sense, Moghaddam's (2018) theory regarding the members and groups and their mutual radicalization can be applied to only a small fraction of the population – one that is driven by pathological hatred, compelling them to "inflict pain and loss on the other, treating such pain and loss as a gain for the self and the ingroup" (30).

6.2 Actions - Processes

Another element that is important to analyze is the relationship between actions and processes, whereby "social acts of individual actors are […] constituent parts of group actions and social processes" (van Dijk 2001, 354). The data examined in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 demonstrate

strong support for such interactions between the actions undertaken by each distinct group and the further processes that emanate from such actions.

For instance, the resonance of the 7/7 London bombings or the murder of a soldier Lee Rigby were interpreted by far-right groups as direct attacks on British cultural identity. This lens translated the actions of radicalized individuals into a discourse against the entire Muslim community. In turn, the Muslim community perceived such discourse as rooted in unjust accusations, since the acts were committed by a small radical subset not the community as a whole. A similar narrative unfolded with the child grooming scandal that filled the British media in 2013. Far-right groups translated the actions of perpetrators as rooted in Muslim culture, which is perceived as intrinsically violent. In parallel, such rhetoric amplified the perceptions of British Muslims as being unjustly vilified.

In all instances, there was an apparent reinforcement of the 'us versus them' mentality, which served as a catalyst for mutual radicalization. However, were these actions and respective processes exclusively catalyzed by the respective groups, fueling a cycle of mutual radicalization?

After the 7/7 London bombings in 2005, the British counter-extremism and radicalization initiative intended to mitigate the fear and impact of the terrorist attack within British society. Paradoxically, the PREVENT policy in particular led to heightened profiling of Muslim communities, perceived by these groups as an extension of marginalization. Moreover, the attempted murder of the British politician by Roshonara Choudry in 2010 as well as the brutal murder of a British soldier in 2013 further complicate the mutual radicalization narrative, as the acts proved to be motivated by the dissatisfaction with the British foreign policy, notably its intervention in Iraq, rather than actions of the far-right groups. Additionally, the media also provided platforms and an "enabling environment" (McCauley and Moskalenko 2017, 210) for radicalization. As Hoskins and O'Loughlin (2009) argue, the British media oftentimes contribute to the phenomenon known as "hypersecurity, as the new contingencies of threats reflexively feed in to shape responses that exacerbate the very fears they propose to mitigate" (107). In light of these diverse factors, the notion that these two selected groups radicalized exclusively through their interactions with each other falls short.

Indeed, the mutual radicalization model is an influential tool for assessing the actions and the subjective implications within both the group under scrutiny and its opposing counterpart. However, it is important to acknowledge that the actions and subsequent processes do not operate in isolation. Factors beyond binary interactions of such groups, such as national

decision-making, foreign policy decisions, and media discourse, all influence the perceptions and reactions of these groups, suggesting a more complex interplay of influences.

6.3 Context - Social Structures

Another crucial aspect that needs to be addressed is the link between the context in which communication and discourse take place and the larger social structure since "'local' and more 'global' contexts are closely related, and both exercise constraint on discourse" (van Dijk 2001, 354). Within this aspect, historical events and geopolitical considerations shape the context, within which the interactions unfold.

Previous section underscored, how violent perpetrators such as Roshonara Choudry were not exclusively driven by religious motives. Their actions found a basis in the perceived injustices within broader social structures – her rationale represented dissatisfaction with the broader narrative of 'West versus Islam' within a globalized world. Globalization has fundamentally reshaped the nature of interconnectedness, which also affected the context in which mutual radicalization occurs. Such interconnectedness has intensified the exchange of ideas, identities, and grievances across borders, affecting the context within which these groups interact. As demonstrated in the previous chapters, the ease of access to radical content poses an alarming concern, particularly within vulnerable communities that are prime targets for extremist recruitment. Online platforms and social media contribute significantly to the amplification of radical narratives. Furthermore, global events and crises involving Muslim-majority regions can heighten feelings of solidarity or shared responsibility, influencing how British Muslims perceive their role in the broader international Muslim community (Rabasa and Benard 2014, 192). In parallel, British far-right groups can exploit globalization-driven fears, framing themselves as defenders of a distinct national identity in the wake of widespread immigration and "homogenization of culture(s)" (Mudde 2007, 191). Oftentimes inspired by counterparts abroad, such groups are intertwined within larger social structures that transcend the boundaries of the state.

As analyzed in the literature review, the development of scholarship across time emphasizes the evolving nature of radicalization, which is tightly connected to contemporary concerns of the time. The spectrum of approaches dealing with radicalization, ranging from micro- to macro-orientations, showcases the dynamic and complex nature of it. However, the mutual radicalization model with its binary focus seems less a strategy to bridge these levels and more a potential constraint by limiting the binary focus to two factions that mutually

radicalize themselves without taking into consideration broader social influences. As Schmid (2013) noted, “global, sociological and political drivers matter as much as ideological and psychological ones” (6).

In this context, the “context-social structure” aspect highlights how broader social structures and events shape the narratives and collective memories of both groups. Mutual radicalization cannot be fully understood without acknowledging the historical dimension and the origins of perceived injustices, which are highly context-dependent and amplified by global reverberations. Radicalization does not emerge solely as a result of immediate interactions, but it is intertwined with historical legacies as well as broader social structures that shape identities, perceptions, and grievances.

6.4 Personal - Social Cognition

The interplay between personal and social cognition is a critical factor in understanding mutual radicalization as “social actors have both personal and social cognition: personal memories, knowledge and opinions, as well as those shared with members of the group or culture as a whole” (van Dijk 2001, 354). The mutual radicalization model proved to serve as a valuable tool in analyzing the discourses that motivate both individual, as well as collective action. The previous chapters have demonstrated, how British Muslims draw from personal experiences of discrimination or marginalization, intertwining these individual narratives with the broader social representations of Islamophobia. Similarly, British far-right groups were highly motivated by personal frustrations or perceived cultural threats with their shared representation of a perceivably threatened national identity. Such personal and social cognitive interactions often contribute to the reinforcement of ‘us versus them’ polarization, which is the main driving force behind mutual radicalization. In this sense, the mutual radicalization model proved to be useful in demonstrating such polarizing discourses.

At the same time, this model proved its inability to provide specific understandings, as it is rooted in a highly generalized rationale. It is important to acknowledge that individuals within both of these groups do not universally embrace extremist beliefs. Variations exist within these communities, as personal experiences and cognitive processes can lead some individuals to resist radicalization or question the narrative perpetuated by the respective groups. While Moghaddam (2018) expressed that this model “follows a cyclical pattern” (36), based on the analysis of the British far-right spectrum guided by this theoretical framework,

the trajectory of the model seems to assume certain linear assumptions, which limit its ability to reveal the nuanced realities of radicalization.

In this sense, the model is influential in addressing 'how' questions – how the discourse of the opposing group shaped the beliefs of the former, how the interactions contributed to heightened group saliency, or how the trigger events were weaponized to bolster the opposing groups' agendas. However, the 'why' questions remain largely unresolved, precisely due to the model's generalizing tendencies that limit the understanding of the uneven personal as well as collective cognitions.

7. Conclusion

This research explored the radicalization pathways of the British extremist spectrum, concretely the British Muslim community and British far-right groups, based on Moghaddam's (2018) mutual radicalization model. Firstly, the radicalization pathways of both groups were examined, throughout the selected period from 2005 to 2013. The radicalization of the British Muslim community was marked by high levels of perceived injustices in the aftermath of the 7/7 bombings and the discourses surrounding this event, further alienating this group within British society. Coupled with the British counter-extremism policy, the resonance of the historical interventions of Britain in the Middle East, as well as the media that perpetuated hateful antagonistic narratives, the radicalization of the British Muslim community proved to be a complex phenomenon. In terms of the British far-right groups, this research predominantly focused on the radicalization of the English Defense League, a group formed during the selected timeframe. Radicalization of the EDL was marked by strong antagonistic narratives rooted in the Islamophobic discourse, mixed with nationalist aspirations of the safeguarding of 'Britishness'. By organizing frequent violent anti-Muslim demonstrations, as well as targeting different demographic groups, the group managed to mobilize a large number of adherents.

After providing an extensive literature review, the radicalization pathways were analyzed in Chapters 4 and 5. Guided by Moghaddam's (2018) theoretical framework, mutual radicalization was rooted in three stages, concretely group mobilization, extreme ingroup cohesion, and antagonistic identity transformation, with emphasis on trigger events that shaped the discourses of both factions.

Using the critical discourse analysis method, the evidence was analyzed in Chapter 6, based on van Dijk's framework (2001), in order to arrive at conclusions of this research, specifically, whether the mutual radicalization model serves as an effective lens for

comprehending the radicalization of the British extremist spectrum. Firstly, the analysis proved that the mutual radicalization model offers valuable insights into the dynamics of the radicalized factions of the British Muslim community and British far-right groups. However, the limitations of the mutual radicalization model also came to light when examining the specific context of the British extremist spectrum.

The analysis showed that the mutual radicalization model is highly effective in assessing actions and processes within the groups, highlighting how events like terror attacks and violent incidents led to the creation of antagonistic collective identities and group mobilization. However, the model falls short in explaining the complexity of these actions, as it fails to consider external influences beyond mutual radicalization, such as counter-extremism policies, foreign policy decisions, or the role of media. These external influences demonstrate that the pathways toward radicalization cannot be solely attributed to interactions between the two factions.

Furthermore, the context-social structure aspect further emphasized that radicalization is deeply rooted in historical events, global interconnectedness, and broader social dynamics. The mutual radicalization model's binary perspective limits our understanding of such external factors that contribute to the radicalization of both groups.

Ultimately, the personal-social cognition dimension underscores the importance of individual beliefs and cognitive processes in radicalization. The model effectively highlights how personal experiences shape group ideologies and actions. Nevertheless, its generalized approach disregards the diversity within these groups, where not all members universally embrace extremist beliefs.

In conclusion, the mutual radicalization model offers valuable insights into the interplay between the radicalized British Muslim community and British far-right groups. While it illuminates the dynamics of mutual antagonism and its effects, its limitations lie in oversimplifying the complex factors contributing to radicalization and overlooking the broader context, external influences, and individual diversity. As a result, while the model aids in understanding 'how' interactions between these groups contribute to radicalization, it falls short of providing comprehensive answers to 'why' these interactions occur and the deeper motivations behind them.

In light of these findings, future studies in the realm of mutual radicalization should address the identified limitations of the model, particularly if the model is intended to serve as a basis for the formulation of policy recommendations. By addressing the identified gaps through further research, scholars can provide a more nuanced understanding, which in turn

facilitates the development of focused strategies that promote social cohesion, tolerance, and resilience against extremist ideologies. Furthermore, longitudinal studies that extend a specific time frame are encouraged, since such analyses would allow a deeper understanding of the ever-evolving dynamics of group radicalization.

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