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**ISLAMIC AND DOMESTIC RADICALIZATION:
DOES ONE SIZE FIT MOST?**

by

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December 2020

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**ISLAMIC AND DOMESTIC RADICALIZATION:
DOES ONE SIZE FIT MOST?**

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ABSTRACT

Many studies have examined the process by which Islamic extremists radicalize, yielding three dominant approaches: grievance approach, social media approach, and network approach. However, over the last 20 years, the extremist threat has shifted from international and homegrown Islamic extremism to predominantly right-wing domestic extremism. The last five years have seen some of the highest numbers of fatalities by right-wing extremists recorded. As such, understanding how far-right sympathizers radicalize has become more important. This thesis analyzes three right-wing extremists: Dylann Roof, Patrick Crusius, and John Earnest, focusing on their backgrounds, radicalization history or motivations, and their respective manifestos. This information is then compared to two Islamic radicalization models to determine if key factors of these models help contribute to an understanding of each individual's radicalization. This thesis asks if those theories can be applied to the radicalization process of domestic far-right extremists. Although three case studies may not be sufficient to draw definitive conclusions, the information gathered from each subject and their respective application to the Islamic radicalization models yield a significant correlation to the process of domestic extremists' radicalization. With few alterations to existing models, it is possible to leverage earlier studies of Islamic radicals to understand the process by which right-wing extremists emerge.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|------|----------------------------------|
| ADL | Anti-Defamation League |
| AP | Advanced Placement |
| CCC | Council of Conservative Citizens |
| CEO | Chief Executive Officer |
| CVE | Countering Violent Extremism |
| DHS | Department of Homeland Security |
| FBI | Federal Bureau of Investigation |
| FTO | Foreign Terrorist Organization |
| GED | General Educational Development |
| GPA | Grade Point Average |
| GPS | Global Positioning System |
| HVE | Homegrown Violent Extremists |
| KKK | Ku Klux Klan |
| SPLC | Southern Poverty Law Center |

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I. INTRODUCTION

After 9/11, scholars put substantially more effort into explaining the process by which Islamic terrorists become radicalized and ultimately conduct extreme violent acts. Several models have been developed to explain how this radicalization occurs—for example, Fathali Moghaddam’s “staircase to terrorism,” which provides a six-step model to explain the radicalization process.¹ Another example, from Mohammed Hafez and Creighton Mullins, is called the radicalization puzzle, which suggests that there are interdependent components or pieces that fit together to contribute to radicalization.² In addition, Ted Gurr’s frustration aggression theory states that the culmination of various grievances a person suffers results in anger, and the person may join an extremist group in an effort to effect change.³ These models, and others, hope to provide understanding and possible guidance for government officials who must make decisions in the fight against terrorism.

Far less research has been conducted, however, on how domestic far-right extremists radicalize, whether as white nationalists, neo-fascists, militant sovereign citizens, or homicidally angry loners. According to the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), between 2015 and 2019, violent domestic extremist attacks from such individuals have resulted in around 282 fatalities, an increase from the 153 fatalities in the previous five years.⁴ Therefore, based on the minimal amount of research in the field of far-right extremist radicalization and the perpetual increase in violent activities by such people, this thesis asks the question, how well do the models for radicalization aimed at domestic Islamist extremism apply to non-Islamic domestic extremists? Can law enforcement, intelligence, and homeland security officials safely assume that the lessons and

¹ Fathali M. Moghaddam, “The Staircase to Terrorism: A Psychological Exploration,” *American Psychologist* 60, no. 2 (2005): 161, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.60.2.161>.

² Mohammed Hafez and Creighton Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle: A Theoretical Synthesis of Empirical Approaches to Homegrown Extremism,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 38, no. 11 (2015): 958.

³ Ted Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 9.

⁴ “Murder and Extremism in the United States in 2019,” Anti-Defamation League, March 4, 2020, <https://www.adl.org/murder-and-extremism-2019#key-findings>.

assumptions of radicalization that apply to Islamist extremism also explain or inform the extremist right in the United States? If the correlation is strong, perhaps existing Islamic radicalization models can provide a foundation on which the creation of domestic far-right extremist models of radicalization can be built.

A. SIGNIFICANCE

In recent years, the threat from Islamic extremism is being overtaken by far-right domestic extremism. According to Christopher Wray, “The FBI assesses HVEs [homegrown violent extremists] are the greatest, most immediate terrorism threat to the homeland.”⁵ The Bureau and other U.S. intelligence agencies define HVEs as people in the United States who are “heeding the call to violence from foreign terrorist organizations,” notably Islamist extremists.⁶ Yet, later in that same hearing, Director Wray also stated, “More deaths were caused by domestic violent extremists than international terrorists in recent years.”⁷ In other words, although HVEs remain a threat, the number of deaths from domestic violent extremists indicates a possible shift in threat focus. Wesley Lowery et al. of the *Washington Post* echoes the claim that right-wing domestic extremists are outpacing the foreign-oriented threat, “Over the past decade, attackers motivated by right-wing political ideologies have committed dozens of shootings, bombings and other acts of violence, far more than any other category of domestic extremist.”⁸

Empirically speaking, according to Lecia Brooks of the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), the most recent documented census was the largest with over 1,000 active

⁵ *Global Terrorism: Threats to the Homeland*, 116th Cong. (2019) (statement of Christopher Wray, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation).

⁶ Director of National Intelligence, *Homegrown Violent Extremist Mobilization Indicators* (Washington, DC: Director of National Intelligence, 2019), https://www.dni.gov/files/NCTC/documents/news_documents/NCTC-FBI-DHS-HVE-Mobilization-Indicators-Booklet-2019.pdf.

⁷ Wray, testimony on *Global Terrorism*.

⁸ Wesley Lowery, Kimberly Kindy and Andrew Ba Tran, “In the United States, Right-Wing Violence Is on the Rise,” *Washington Post*, November 25, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/in-the-united-states-right-wing-violence-is-on-the-rise/2018/11/25/61f7f24a-deb4-11e8-85df-7a6b4d25cfbb_story.html.

hate groups, including white nationalist groups that increased by half.⁹ In the same vein, Mark Pitcavage of ADL’s Center on Extremism notes that nearly all documented extremist killings were right-wing related in 2018 and they hold responsibility for more deaths in that same year than in the last 23 years.¹⁰

Models of radicalization—and the theories and concepts on which they rely—inform counter-radicalization policies and programs. Countering Violent Extremism, or CVE, is one of those government programs that use the notions found in said models. CVE, according to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), is intended to focus on the conditions and the reduction of elements that contribute to violent extremists choosing to venture down the path to radicalization.¹¹ Furthermore, “CVE efforts will be informed by a rigorous, evidence-based approach to research and analysis that addresses all forms of violent extremism. Partners in this effort include academic researchers, analysts, and program implementers, inside and outside government.”¹² To be successful, it is incumbent upon DHS to continue to utilize the models of radicalization developed by subject matter experts along with other resources to refine this effort.

Arie Perliger’s research on the far right shows that these extremists have been around for a significant time, but they are more active today than a generation ago. He states, “Although in the 1990s the average number of attacks per year was 70.1, the average number of attacks per year in the first 11 years of the twenty-first century was 307.5, a rise

⁹ Lecia Brooks, “SPLC Testifies before Congress on Alarming Incidents of White Supremacy in the Military,” Southern Poverty Law Center, February 11, 2020, <https://www.splcenter.org/news/2020/02/11/splc-testifies-congress-alarming-incidents-white-supremacy-military>.

¹⁰ Mark Pitcavage, “Murder and Extremism in the United States in 2018,” Anti-Defamation League, January 2019, <https://www.adl.org/news/press-releases/adl-commends-administrations-new-counterterrorism-strategy-for-recognizing>.

¹¹ “Countering Violent Extremist Task Force,” Department of Homeland Security, March 1, 2020, <https://www.dhs.gov/cve/what-is-cve>.

¹² Executive Office of the President of the United States, *Strategic Implementation Plan for Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the United States* (Washington, DC: White House, 2016), https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/2016_strategic_implementation_plan_empowering_local_partners_prev.pdf.

of more than 400%.”¹³ ADL chief executive officer (CEO) and National Director Jonathan Greenblatt notes:

ADL has long sounded the alarm of the severe threat from extremists across the ideological spectrum. The Administration correctly notes that right-wing extremists, like white supremacists and anti-government extremists, are on the rise. As our data shows, non-Islamist terrorism is the most lethal extremist threat within the U.S. and we applaud the administration prioritizing domestic extremism in this new counterterrorism framework.¹⁴

All this to say that the threat from the far right is prevalent within the United States and therefore an understanding of the right-wing radicalization process is imperative.

Complicating this understanding is the fact that, according to Peter Neuman, “There is no agreed definition of radicalization.”¹⁵ John Horgan defines radicalization as, “the social and psychological process of incrementally experienced commitment to extremist political or religious ideology. Radicalisation may not necessarily lead to violence, but is one of several risk factors required for this.”¹⁶ One thing that is agreed upon is that the radicalization process is linked to acts of terrorism. Riyadh Rahimullah, Stephen Larmar, and Mohamad Abdalla state, “Terrorism, a by-product of radicalization, poses a significant threat to societies across the Western world. Understanding radicalization is important to understanding and tackling this threat.”¹⁷

As Hafez and Mullins state, “Governments and their security services are under intense pressure to detect and stop budding terrorists early in their radicalization tracks.”¹⁸

¹³ Arie Perliger, *Challengers from the Sidelines: Understanding America’s Violent Far-Right*, ADA576380 (West Point, NY: Military Academy Combating Terrorism Center, 2012), <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/ADA576380>.

¹⁴ “ADL Commends Administration’s New Counterterrorism Strategy for Recognizing Range of Threats, Including Domestic Extremists,” Anti-Defamation League, October 5, 2018, <https://www.adl.org/news/press-releases/adl-commends-administrations-new-counterterrorism-strategy-for-recognizing>.

¹⁵ Peter Neumann, *The Trouble with Radicalization* (Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 874.

¹⁶ John Horgan, *Walking Away from Terrorism: Account of Disengagement from Radical and Extremist Movements* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 152.

¹⁷ Riyadh Rahimullah, Stephen Larmar, and Mohamad Abdalla, “Understanding Violent Radicalization amongst Muslims: A Review of the Literature,” *Journal of Psychological Behavioral Science* 1, no. 1 (December 2013): 19, <https://research-repository.griffith.edu.au/handle/10072/59871>.

¹⁸ Hafez and Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle,” 958.

As such, authorities and policymakers seeking to address the radicalization of white nationalist and other such domestic extremists need good models of this process for their efforts to succeed. In the *National Strategy for Counterterrorism*, White House authorities state, “Where lawful and appropriate, departments and agencies will investigate ties between domestic terrorists not motivated by radical Islamist ideologies and their overseas counterparts to more fully understand them.”¹⁹ To this end, solid models of radicalization aimed at the far right will be required in an effort to provide a better foundational knowledge and understanding to those governmental decision makers and influencers, who may not be subject matter experts, so that they may strategically design policies to thwart this process of radicalization. As soon as the process of how far-right extremists radicalize into violent domestic terrorists is understood, better programs and strategies can be enacted to thwart this process from initially occurring. It is possible that one size fits most where radicalization models are concerned, but the current scholarship is largely silent on this point.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

The study of Islamic radicalization tends to be dominated by three approaches that can be labeled as the grievance approach, the social media approach, and the network approach. Each of these approaches carries with it an associated hypothesis as it relates to white nationalism. This literature review explains those three approaches and identifies their associated implications to the study of white nationalism.

1. The Grievance Approach

The grievance approach, simply put, is derived from the notion that Muslims experience a sense of exclusion from society and economic discrimination that can leave an individual or group of people alienated, which ultimately lead to radicalization and eventual violent outbursts often identified as terrorist attacks. James Piazza conducted an extensive study in this area and his results substantiate this claim in that they reveal

¹⁹ White House, *National Strategy for Counterterrorism* (Washington, DC: White House, 2018), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/NSCT.pdf>.

economic discrimination against minorities played a significant role in predicting the onset of domestic terrorist attacks in various countries.²⁰ Furthermore, Piazza found that “Countries that feature economic discrimination against minority groups experience around six more incidents of domestic terrorism per year,”²¹ which he states was “the largest substantive effect on terrorism for all of the predictors tested in the analysis.”²² In other words, the grievances that come from widespread economic disadvantage seem to help fuel violence and terrorism.

The discrimination-grievance connection has a way of fulfilling its own predictions. Jocelyne Cesari studied Islamophobia in several countries and noted that “most updated and strengthened their security and antiterrorism laws while placing restrictions on immigration.”²³ This policy in turn led to more arrests of those who fit the terrorist stereotype. Cesari writes, “Because of this threat, states can view domestic Muslims as foreign enemies, a classification that implies a much lower level of legal and social rights and privileges than those to which ordinary citizens are entitled.”²⁴ The insinuation of lower legal and social rights could result in a level of grievance felt on behalf of the domestic Muslims in that country. For example, Cesari also notes that unemployment rates for Muslims in the United Kingdom exceeded three times that of the general population; similar rates applied to the other European states in her study.²⁵ Additionally, housing is consistently found to be “overall much poorer for immigrants, and they often face discrimination and sometimes even exclusionary violence.”²⁶ Hafez and Mullins concur: “Unemployment combines with residential discrimination and segregation to produce

²⁰ James Piazza, “Poverty, Minority Economic Discrimination, and Domestic Terrorism,” *Journal of Peace Research* 48, no. 3 (May 2001): 348, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343310397404>.

²¹ Piazza, 349–350.

²² Piazza, 350.

²³ Jocelyne Cesari, “Islamophobia in the West: A Comparison between Europe and the United States,” in *Islamophobia: The Challenge of Pluralism in the 21st Century*, ed. John L. Esposito and Ibrahim Kalin (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 27.

²⁴ Cesari, 28.

²⁵ Cesari, 25.

²⁶ Cesari, 26.

ethnically homogenous neighborhoods that are mostly dilapidated. High levels of residential concentration and poor housing conditions contribute to higher levels of criminality.”²⁷

John Bowen offers a different avenue of observed discrimination, culture and traditions and the various aspects that accompany. The main example he provides in his study revolves around the expectation, socially and legally, that practicing Muslims should abandon their belief practices in an effort to become a true French citizen.²⁸ Hafez and Mullins note, “Identity differences are exploited by opportunistic politicians of far right parties and sensationalist media personalities who engage in provocative anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim discourse, which further offends second and third generation Muslims who were born and raised in Europe and speak European languages better than they do their native tongues.”²⁹

Hypothesis 1: Domestic terrorists are primarily drawn from the ranks of socially and economically marginal individuals as indicated by low rates of education, low rates of employment, low wages, and high rates of criminality among domestic extremists.

2. The Social Media Approach

Another approach to Islamic radicalization tends to focus less on grievances and more on the enabling environment of social media. Social media has acted like a catalyst in the global communication realm. Mark Mazzetti wrote, as annotated in a 2006 National Intelligence Estimate, “The radicalization process is occurring more quickly, more widely and more anonymously in the Internet age, raising the likelihood of surprise attacks by unknown groups whose members and supporters may be difficult to pinpoint.”³⁰ Traditional media and face-to-face meetings were once how terrorists disseminated their

²⁷ Hafez and Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle,” 962.

²⁸ John Bowen, *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves: Islam, the State, and Public Space* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 17.

²⁹ Hafez and Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle,” 962.

³⁰ Mark Mazzetti, “Jihad Ideology Is Spreading Online; Radical Tracts Reach New ‘Foot Soldiers’,” *International Herald Tribune*, November 15, 2006, 8.

message; now social media has decentralized, accelerated, and amplified these messages. During a U.S. Senate Committee hearing, Marc Sageman offered the following:

The Internet plays a critical role in the radicalization of young Muslims into terrorists. This is a new phenomenon. The pre-9/11 al-Qaeda terrorists were radicalized through face to face interaction. After Iraq, and especially in the past three years, this interactive process of radicalization takes place online, in the jihadi forums. This online radicalization is certainly replacing face to face radicalization. The key to understanding this process is to realize that it is based on interactivity between the members, which makes the participants in the forums change their mind. Some of the participants get so worked up that they declare themselves ready to be terrorists. In a way, recruitment is self-recruitment, which is why we cannot stop it by trying to identify and arrest “recruiters.” These self-recruited upstarts do not need any outsiders to try to join the terrorist social movement. Since this process takes place at home, often in the parental home, it facilitates the emergence of homegrown radicalization, worldwide.³¹

Furthermore, Hafez expounds on how the internet coupled with social media has provided an avenue for which jihadist disseminate their message. He writes, “Combined, radicals use these technologies to provide basic information on jihadi arenas and insurgent movements, and transmit political and religious narratives to motivate mobilization abroad or at home.”³² He states that such popular social media platforms, such as “Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and myriad other new social media innovations provide horizontal communication that is user-generated, inter-active, instantaneous, highly personalized, and easily mobile.”³³ Consequently, Hafez writes, “The multiplicity of communication vehicles is mainly intended to present vivid imagery of Muslim suffering around the globe, fostering righteous indignation among potential recruits and shaming them into avenging their coreligionists.”³⁴

³¹ Committee on Homeland Security, and Governmental Affairs, *Violent Islamist Extremism, the Internet, and the Homegrown Terrorist Threat United States Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs* (Washington, DC: United States Senate, 2008), https://fas.org/irp/congress/2008_rpt/violent.pdf.

³² Hafez and Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle,” 969.

³³ Hafez and Mullins, 969.

³⁴ Hafez and Mullins, 969.

Lorenzo Vidino extrapolates from his study that 21 of the 30 plots examined were acting independently or without support from Al Qaeda or any other like-minded group or individuals, such as the case with Roshonara Choudhry.³⁵ Sageman notes, “Even where radicalized individuals or groups of individuals do not actively communicate with other like-minded individuals around the world, the Internet can provide an invaluable ‘handbook’ for lone wolf terrorists.”³⁶ Sean Reynolds and Mohammed Hafez hypothesize on the impact that social media has on radicalization and recruitment as it relates to German Foreign Fighters. They state, “Social media is a primary vector of foreign fighter radicalization and recruitment, resulting in fewer interpersonal connections among German volunteers prior to their mobilization.”³⁷ Their hypothesis provides the shell for this thesis’ second hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2: Social media platforms provide a leading pathway for radicalization and recruitment among domestic terrorists, which has resulted in single-actor attacks and few interpersonal connections among domestic extremists prior to their domestic attacks.

3. The Network Approach

The third approach found in Islamic radicalization is the network approach, which posits an interconnected clustered web in which attacks can be traced back to a common thread through social ties. A concept that is central to this social link is what David Lazer calls “homophily” or “the idea that individuals who are similar to one another are more likely to form ties.”³⁸ These parallels among individuals can come in the form of social similarities, familial ties, friendships, or others with close bonds. As Debra Friedman and Doug McAdam put it, these networks are saturated with personal ties of some kind and

³⁵ Lorenzo Vidino, “Radicalization, Linkage, and Diversity: Current Trends in Terrorism in Europe” (working paper, RAND, 2011), 15, <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a545352.pdf>.

³⁶ Committee on Homeland Security, and Governmental Affairs, *Violent Islamist Extremism*.

³⁷ Sean Reynolds and Mohammed Hafez, “Social Network Analysis of German Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 31, no. 4 (February 2017): 665, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2016.1272456>.

³⁸ David Lazer, “Networks in Political Science: Back to the Future,” *Political Science* 44, no. 1 (January 2011): 62, <https://doi-org.libproxy.nps.edu/10.1017/S1049096510001873>.

therefore their similarities link them together forming what they call a “collective identity.”³⁹

Hafez writes, “Individuals that join violent groups often do so because they have one or more family members or friends in the movement. Radicalization and recruitment are local and highly personal tasks involving interpersonal ties, bonds of solidarity, and trust.”⁴⁰ Sageman illustrates group dynamics of networks by using an example as seen in the Jihad networks. He writes, “Previously, I have shown that people joined the jihad in small groups. Several individuals lived together for a while and had intense discussions about the jihad. When one of the friends was able to find a bridge to the jihad, they often went as a group to train in Afghanistan.”⁴¹

Furthermore, Sageman refers to these smaller groups as “cliques”⁴² and says, “Dense networks like cliques commonly produce social cohesion and a collective identity and foster solidarity, trust, community, political inclusion, identity-formation, and other valuable social outcomes. Dense social networks foster intense face-to-face interactions in which collective identities are formed.”⁴³ He goes on to say that the established collective identities bolster commitment, integrity, and cohesion of the jihad and results in group conformity in behavior, attitudes, and appearance.⁴⁴

Janja Lalich also provides similar insight into network dynamics, stating, “Members also enjoy group solidarity and feel a sense of personal power and elitism; yet, at the same time, they fear peer shunning or withdrawal of support.”⁴⁵ Sageman agrees a

³⁹ Debra Friedman and Doug McAdam, “Collective Identity and Activism: Networks, Choices, and the Life of a Social Movement,” in Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller, eds., *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 156–173.

⁴⁰ Hafez and Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle,” 964. See also Mohammed M. Hafez, “The Ties that Bind: How Terrorists Exploit Family Bonds,” *CTC Sentinel* 9, 2 (February 2016), 12–14.

⁴¹ Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 152.

⁴² Sageman, 152.

⁴³ Sageman, 157.

⁴⁴ Sageman, 157.

⁴⁵ Janja A. Lalich, *Bounded Choice: True Believers and Charismatic Cults* (California: University of California Press, 2004), 256.

certain amount of uneasiness exists amongst members with questionable commitment and claims that a “Lack of conformity may also lead to intolerance of and sometimes punitive actions against persons not conforming to clique norms and rules.”⁴⁶ According to Lalich, “The longer a person remains with a group, the more invested he is, and potentially all the more complicit with group-dictated actions and behaviors. Life outside the group seems less and less an option.”⁴⁷ The network approach is a highly utilized and highly effective approach to Islamic radicalization efforts. In a study on the networks of German foreign fighters, Sean Reynolds and Mohammed Hafez postulate that, “German foreign fighters are recruited primarily through preexisting social ties as evinced by geographic clustering of volunteers and their linkages to other volunteers in a single network prior to mobilization.”⁴⁸ It is from this hypothesis that the third hypothesis is derived with relation to domestic extremists.

Hypothesis 3: The recruitment of domestic terrorists relies heavily on established, like minded relationships which can be manifested in concentrated areas of domestic extremists and their connections that link them in a single web prior to domestic attacks.

C. RESEARCH DESIGN

This thesis analyzes three different right-wing extremists: Dylan Roof, Patrick Crusius, and John Earnest. Each of these individuals has been involved in domestic terrorist attacks, and therefore, arguably, has gone through a radicalization process. In an effort to gauge whether the radicalization theories found in the literature review—articulated to explain Islamist extremism—also offer important insights into domestic, far-right extremism, I examine each of these individuals using the following empirical framework.

First, I explore the biographies of each of these figures. In these cases, the childhood of each person is examined for their individual backgrounds, personal historical context, and social upbringing. Second, I examine their organizational inspiration and radicalization

⁴⁶ Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, 157.

⁴⁷ Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, 256.

⁴⁸ Reynolds and Hafez, “Social Network Analysis of German Foreign Fighters,” 665.

history based on official reports to identify the contributing factors to their radicalization journey. Thirdly, I analyze their respective manifestos in detail to take them at their own words and to glean possible insights into further thoughts, reasonings, and inspiration behind their attacks moments before they occurred. Finally, through a critical lens, the data I uncover is used to determine how well the theories of radicalization for Islamists apply to white nationalists.

II. DYLANN ROOF RADICALIZATION JOURNEY

Dylann Roof, now 26 years old, is the man convicted of the murders of nine people in 2015, when he opened fire on a congregation—largely African American—during a bible study in a South Carolina church. An analysis of both his radically adopted bigoted views of white supremacy and adherence to accelerationism will contribute to understanding how well, if at all, Islamic radicalization models may apply to non-Islamic domestic extremists. It may also help law enforcement, intelligence, and homeland security officials decipher if one specific model will fit most cases of domestic extremist radicalization. This study first focuses on Roof’s background, his organizational inspiration, and his manifesto and then applies the information drawn from that examination to two Islamic radicalization models, the Staircase model and the Radicalization Puzzle. The environment that Roof immersed himself in, specifically the online environment, had an enormous impact on the outlook and ideologies that he adopted, and which eventually led him to act. Analysis of the aforementioned aspects of Roof’s life, and their application to these models, illustrates, in large, the potential application of existing Islamic radicalization models to domestic extremist cases.

A. INDIVIDUAL BACKGROUND

Dylann Roof appears to have had a childhood containing struggles and a lack of consistency, but nothing that appears to be so devastating that it would initiate a murderous rage. According to Frances Robles and Nikita Stewart of the *New York Times*, he came from a broken home and split his time with both parents, which resulted in Roof attending many different schools while growing up.⁴⁹ Roof grew up in Columbia, South Carolina, in the arms of a respected family, and despite bouncing from school to school, he attended largely middle-class diversified schools, according to Robles and Stewart.⁵⁰ However, they also note that, “court records suggest that his divorced parents struggled with finances

⁴⁹ Frances Robles and Nikita Stewart, “Dylann Roof’s Past Reveals Trouble at Home and School,” *New York Times*, July 16, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/17/us/charleston-shooting-Dylann-roof-troubled-past.html>.

⁵⁰ Robles and Stewart.

when he was a teenager, with his mother being evicted from her home in 2009 and his father's once-successful business, renovating historic homes falling into debt and closing a few years later."⁵¹ As a student, Roof never really did well in school, which led him to drop out in the ninth grade and later earn his online General Educational Development (GED).⁵² In addition, Robles and Nikita note that Roof could not hold a job, used drugs and alcohol, and had multiple encounters with law enforcement.⁵³

Many have described Roof as quiet, shy, strange, and awkward. Even his elementary school principal recalls, in an interview with Rachel Ghansah, how quiet Roof was.⁵⁴ While interviewing a co-worker of Roof's, Ghansah highlights an account of Roof's awkward or bizarre demeanor: "Another [co-worker] said he once asked Roof about hobbies and Dylann said he 'did not do anything; he just went home and sat in his room.' When the co-worker asked Roof if he played video games, Roof said, 'No, I literally look at the walls.'"⁵⁵ White supremacists today, as described by Ghansah, are "armed to the teeth, and almost always, they are painfully undereducated or somewhat educated but extremely socially awkward,"⁵⁶ all qualities that apply to Roof.

Although several accounts from Roof's peers during their teenage years describe him as a loner, maybe a little weird and shy, but no one recalls him holding any bigoted views or ideologies.⁵⁷ In fact, one of his former friends from middle school, an African American, recalls him not having any ill feelings toward non-whites; the former friend also states that Roof's mother was very warm and welcoming, an attitude that Roof shared at

⁵¹ Robles and Stewart.

⁵² Rachel Kaadzi Ghansah, "A Most American Terrorist: The Making of Dylann Roof," GQ, accessed July 15, 2020, <https://www.gq.com/story/Dylann-roof-making-of-an-american-terrorist>."

⁵³ Robles and Stewart, "Dylann Roof's Past Reveals Trouble at Home and School."

⁵⁴ Ghansah, "A Most American Terrorist."

⁵⁵ Ghansah.

⁵⁶ Ghansah.

⁵⁷ Robles and Stewart, "Dylann Roof's Past Reveals Trouble at Home and School."

the time.⁵⁸ Although he held a lack of racist expressions as a young man, the larger environment he grew up around may have influenced him.

His lack of social interaction and connection with peers is interesting in his radicalization because oftentimes, social networks play key roles in radicalizing, as is made evident later. Of the few friends that Roof did connect with, however briefly, was his former classmate Caleb, who still thought Roof was slow-witted.⁵⁹ Ghansah writes, “As they grew older and their interests diverged, Dylann wasn’t the sort of kid you took along with you, because ‘he just wasn’t with it.’”⁶⁰ Ted Wachter, the Rosewood elementary principle during Roof’s tenure reflects on Roof’s social associations, “He was very quiet, and he wasn’t part of the in crowd, which was more...the kids of college-educated families. He wasn’t part of that. He was with the working-class kids.”⁶¹ Additionally, as if he were not isolated enough, earning his online GED only caused further isolation as he could do so behind a computer screen in his own room.

B. ORGANIZATIONAL INSPIRATION AND RADICALIZATION HISTORY

Dylann Roof’s radicalization journey happened entirely online—and fairly quickly. Seemingly, out of the nowhere, he adopted a white supremacist way of thinking and acting, inspired more or less exclusively, by what he saw and later wrote on the internet. With that being said, he did not partake in any one particular extremist group. Peter Bergen states, “Unaffiliated with any organization, he was a classic example of what white racist Louis Beam termed ‘leaderless resistance.’”⁶² He created a website, lastrhodesian.com, which has since been removed, on which he displayed photographs of himself holding weapons and confederate flags and oftentimes white supremacy symbols.⁶³ According to Ghansah

⁵⁸ Robles and Stewart.

⁵⁹ Ghansah, “A Most American Terrorist.”

⁶⁰ Ghansah.

⁶¹ Ghansah.

⁶² Peter Bergen, *United States of Jihad* (New York: Crown Publishing, 2016), 270.

⁶³ Scott Neuman, “Photos of Dylann Roof, Racist Manifesto Surface on website,” NPR, June 20, 2015, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/06/20/416024920/photos-possible-manifesto-of-dylann-roof-surface-on-website>.

in an interview with Kelly Mcevers, Roof would engage in chat rooms, often using the name Lil' Aryan, which is an obvious tribute to Hitler and his extreme ideology.⁶⁴

The tipping point for Roof seems to have been the Trayvon Martin case. During an interview, Roof mentions that he kept hearing about the Trayvon Martin case, but did not understand the reason for the extreme outrage about it, so he read the Wikipedia page for a better understanding.⁶⁵ According to Cody Collins, after reading about the case, "Roof then typed 'black on White crime' into the search engine, hit enter and fell into a wormhole."⁶⁶ He felt that Zimmerman, the gunman, was justified in his actions against Trayvon Martin. Thereafter, he was motivated by the case to act, and claimed that African Americans had been killing and persecuting white people for a long time and nothing was being done.⁶⁷

Furthermore, in an interview with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), he talks about wishing the skinheads and Ku Klux Klan (KKK) were still active and present, which suggests a certain amount of respect and admiration for such groups. Of note, although the KKK has significantly reduced in size and activity, according to the ADL, "There are currently about 30 active Klan groups in the United States, most of them very small. There are approximately 3,000 Klan group members nationwide, as well as an additional but unknown number of supporters and associates."⁶⁸ Additionally, the ADL also highlights that the KKK has had an online presence since 1995 with the establishment of the site Stormfront, which was created by former leader Don Black.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ "How One Reporter Found Herself Writing about the Charleston Church Shooter, Dylann Roof," NPR, September 4, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/2017/09/04/548505825/how-one-reporter-found-herself-writing-about-the-charleston-church-shooter-dylan>.

⁶⁵ "Watch: Dylann Roof's Confession FBI Agents," December 9, 2016, YouTube, video, 2:01:42, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JKRoFoy_Hpc.

⁶⁶ Cody Collins, "The Miseducation of Dylann Roof: How Does a Kid Become a Killer?," *Teaching Tolerance*, 2017, <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/fall-2017/the-miseducation-of-dylann-roof>.

⁶⁷ YouTube, "Watch: Dylann Roof's Confession FBI Agents."

⁶⁸ "ADL Report: KKK Declining in Stature and Significance," Anti-Defamation League, <https://www.adl.org/news/press-releases/adl-report-kkk-declining-in-stature-and-significance>.

⁶⁹ "Hate on the World Wide Web a Brief Guide to Cyberspace Bigotry," Anti-Defamation League, January 8, 2013, <https://www.adl.org/news/article/hate-on-the-world-wide-web-a-brief-guide-to-cyberspace-bigotry>.

Another motivation for his radicalization may have been the environment, as a whole, that Roof grew up in and around. Growing up in Columbia, South Carolina, Roof was exposed to a history of bigoted views towards African Americans and although his parents did not espouse these ideals, the subtle undertones of the historical environment could have provided an inspiration to Roof of days past. Ghansah states, “He was definitely raised in a hotbed of racism.”⁷⁰ Furthermore, his admiration with the history of maltreatment of African Americans, in South Carolina specifically, is made evident in the church he chose for his killing spree and the meticulous route he traveled prior to his atrocious acts. Ghansah reflects on the route from Roof’s Global Positioning System (GPS), recovered by the FBI, describing his stops:

The dots that connected it all were historical sites related to slavery and Confederate history, and practice runs to Mother Emanuel. He drove to the 400-year-old Angel Oak on Johns Island, the Museum & Library of Confederate History in Greenville, a graveyard of Confederate soldiers in his hometown, and plantations like Boone Hall in Mount Pleasant. And he spent one evening at the beach on Sullivan’s Island, a place that at one point was the largest disembarkation point in the United States for ships carrying enslaved Africans.⁷¹

According to Ghansah, “Dylann Roof, then, was a child both of the white-supremacist Zeitgeist of the Internet and of his larger environment.”⁷²

C. MANIFESTO

Dylann Roof wrote his so-called Jailhouse Manifesto to explain his self-proclaimed insights and views toward various ethnic cultures. The first several pages consist of various anti-Semitic and white supremacist drawings and symbols. He goes on to explain the transgressions of various groups against white people, and how, as a result of such offenses, white people are no longer the naturally superior race. On page four, he writes the numbers 14 and 88 with racist symbols under each number. According to the ADL, the first number represents a 14-word phrase, almost like a motto for White nationalists: “We must secure

⁷⁰ Ghansah, “A Most American Terrorist.”

⁷¹ Ghansah.

⁷² Ghansah.

the existence of our people and a future for white children.”⁷³ The ADL also asserts, “88 is a white supremacist numerical code for ‘Heil Hitler.’ H is the eighth letter of the alphabet, so 88 = HH = Heil Hitler.”⁷⁴

D. COMPARISON

This section compares the factors of Roof’s background and upbringing, his inspiration, and his ideals found within his manifesto, to the components or pieces of the Islamic radicalization models offered by Moghaddam’s Staircase and Hafez’s Puzzle models, respectively. This comparison illustrates the level of application of existing radicalization models aimed at Islamists, to the increasing number of domestic extremist activities, namely by white supremacists.

1. The Staircase Model

Moghaddam’s Staircase model offers an excellent framework for understanding the path of radicalization into terrorism and eventually to conducting terrorist acts of violence. The steps proceed from the ground floor, which is the “Psychological Interpretation of Material Condition.”⁷⁵ Moghaddam states, “The vast majority of people occupy the ‘foundational’ ground floor, where what matters most are perceptions of fairness and just treatment.”⁷⁶ The implication is that it would be entirely possible for Roof to be one of the majority who reside on the ground floor. Despite Roof’s childhood struggles between divorced parents, drug use, and trouble with the law, the perceived self-injustice or self-deprivation may lie beyond those experiences and somewhere else entirely. Moghaddam cites D. M. Taylor stating, “Perceptions of injustice may arise for a variety of reasons, including economic and political conditions and threats to personal or collective

⁷³ “1488,” Anti-Defamation League, accessed December 4, 2020, <https://www.adl.org/education/references/hate-symbols/1488>.

⁷⁴ “Hate on Display Hate Symbols Database,” Anti-Defamation League, accessed December 4, 2020, <https://www.adl.org/hate-symbols>.

⁷⁵ Moghaddam, “The Staircase to Terrorism,” 162.

⁷⁶ Moghaddam, 162.

identity.”⁷⁷ Perhaps the perceived injustice within Mr. Roof’s mind resides more in the threat to personal and collective identity in relation to the white race. As Maskaliûnaitè writes, “Another important aspect to note in the theories talking about grievance is the distinction between personal and group grievances. While both may be present in the motivation for engaging in political violence, the grievance of the group with which the individual associates him/herself is more prevalent.”⁷⁸ In his manifesto and during an interview with the FBI, Roof mentioned that he considers himself a white supremacist and talked about the collective white identity that is at risk of being decimated by other races taking over.⁷⁹ Roof perceived a threat to the white race from the killings and rapings committed by African Americans against white people, and therefore, “somebody had to do something.”⁸⁰

The first floor is called “Perceived Options to Fight Unfair Treatment.”⁸¹ The way a person perceives justice being implemented and the options available impacts that individual’s view as whether or not the action is worthy.⁸² When the action is not perceived as worthy, a person can blame others for his perceived problems and in turn, advance to the next floor.⁸³ In relation to Dylann Roof, he interpreted the killing of white people by African Americans as continuing to occur despite any involvement with the judicial process, which indicated to him that nothing was actually being done, and thus, the actions were not worthy. As a result, he placed blame on the African American race as a whole. Roof writes in his manifesto, “Well unless we take real, possibly violent, action, we have no future, literally.”⁸⁴ With that being said, a relatively strong connection appears to exist

⁷⁷ Moghaddam, 163.

⁷⁸ Asta Maskaliûnaitè, “Exploring the Theories of Radicalization,” *Interdisciplinary Political and Cultural Journal* 17, no. 1 (2015): 20, DOI: 10.1515/ ipcj-2015-0002.

⁷⁹ YouTube, “Watch: Dylann Roof’s Confession FBI Agents.”

⁸⁰ YouTube.

⁸¹ Moghaddam, “The Staircase to Terrorism,” 163.

⁸² Moghaddam, 164.

⁸³ Moghaddam, 164.

⁸⁴ Dylann Roof, “Dylann Roof Jailhouse Journal,” *Post and Courier*, 30, January 5, 2017, https://www.postandcourier.com/dylann-roof-jailhouse-journal/pdf_da3e19b8-d3b3-11e6-b040-03089263e67c.html.

between Moghaddam's first floor and Dylann Roof's perception on his available ways to fight this unfair treatment.

The next floor, Moghaddam calls "Displacement of Aggression."⁸⁵ Norman Miller et al. explains displacement of aggression as, "When that person subsequently behaves aggressively toward an innocent other, it may reflect the displacement of the aggressive inclination toward the initial provocateur."⁸⁶ In other words, displaced aggression occurs when a person responds to anger by taking retaliatory action out on someone or something other than the initial trigger. This floor becomes slightly less applicable to Roof because he admits that he himself never encountered negative interactions or injustices with someone of a different race. Rather, as has been previously stated, he developed this sense of aggression and frustration by reading online information or statistics on the subject of white and black crimes against each other. A sense of displaced aggression can clearly be seen in Roof, regardless of the fact that he would not see it that way. The provocation event however was not a tangible event, as it appears to be described in Miller's article. Instead, it is more likely that the anger Roof felt due to his perceived injustice against white people triggered him to advance to this next floor in his journey.

Moral Engagement is the next floor in sequence. Dylann Roof claims he was not a part of any white nationalist organization and little evidence exists that he was actively participating in any of the similar said groups; however, he certainly had been espousing the values found therein. With that being said, Roof did not have a group or organization that was pushing him to adopt an alternative extremist morality from the generally accepted societal understanding of morality. Instead, it might be more appropriate to say that he was inspired, to a certain degree, by the various white nationalist organizations that he saw online. More specifically he states, that the first thing that woke him up was the Trayvon Martin case from three years prior, which he also read about online.⁸⁷ Once he gathered

⁸⁵ Moghaddam, "The Staircase to Terrorism," 164.

⁸⁶ Norman Miller, William C. Pedersen, Mitchell Earleywine, and Vicki E. Pollock, "A Theoretical Model of Triggered Displaced Aggression," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 7, no. 1 (February 2003): 75–97, https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327957PSPR0701_5.

⁸⁷ YouTube, "Watch: Dylann Roof's Confession FBI Agents."

his initial inspiration from this case, he fell into the aforementioned wormhole after which his inspiration only intensified, as Roof alluded to in an FBI interview.⁸⁸ His motivation, inspired by various groups, was shown by the symbols and numbers he wrote in his manifesto, by proudly displaying the confederate flag, and by wearing racist patches on his jacket, all of which are indicative of the white nationalist movement. However, he was frustrated with those same groups because he claimed they did not put into action what they preached, and as a result, he assumed a sense of obligation to act.

The next floor is Solidification of Categorical Thinking and the Perceived Legitimacy of the Terrorist Organization.⁸⁹ In this stage, there are categories, recruits, lifetime members, and those who will carry out violent attacks that most people associate with terrorist organizations.⁹⁰ Each group is treated in a manner that facilitates a mindset of comradery and legitimacy associated with the organization. As previously mentioned, Roof was not recruited by, nor actively participating in, any white nationalist organization; rather, he is considered to have radicalized, on his own volition, online. In fact, the Southern Poverty Law Center described Roof as “a new kind of violent racist, a ‘lone wolf’ radicalized entirely on the Internet.”⁹¹ Behr et al. explain, “The internet offers terrorists and extremists the same opportunity and capability that it does for the rest of society: to communicate, collaborate and convince.”⁹² Behr et al. also states, “Firstly, our research supports the suggestion that the internet may enhance opportunities to become radicalised, as a result of being available to many people, and enabling connection with like-minded individuals from across the world 24/7.”⁹³ While it could be said that the white supremacist websites Roof frequented might have provided a reinforced sense of legitimacy to the group dynamic as described in Moghaddam’s model, this floor does not directly apply to

⁸⁸ YouTube.

⁸⁹ Moghaddam, “The Staircase to Terrorism,” 165.

⁹⁰ Moghaddam, 165.

⁹¹ Mark Potok, “Carnage in Charleston,” Southern Poverty Law Center, October 27, 2015, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2015/carnage-charleston>.

⁹² Ines von Behr et al., *Radicalisation in the Digital Era: The Use of the Internet in 15 Cases of Terrorism and Extremism* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2013), 3.

⁹³ Behr et al., xii.

Roof's radicalization journey, given the fact that he operated alone. On the other hand, it can be argued that it was possible he felt camaraderie and reinforcement in his beliefs by the information he found online.

The final floor is called The Terrorist Act and Sidestepping Inhibitory Mechanisms.⁹⁴ As it states in the title, this floor is all about the process of ultimately conducting a violent act against civilians, the "out-group," to include desensitizing recruits to persons outside of their own ideology or "in-group."⁹⁵ Therefore, as a result of the desensitization, Moghaddam states, "Thus, individuals who reach the fifth floor become psychologically prepared and motivated to commit acts of terrorism, sometimes resulting in multiple civilian deaths."⁹⁶ As it relates to Dylann Roof, he did not have any such group or training that taught him to sidestep inhibitory mechanisms when shooting his victims. Moghaddam illustrates how inhibitory mechanisms can be applied to violent acts against other humans stating, "Inhibitory mechanisms also evolved to limit the aggression of humans against one another and can be triggered through eye contact, pleading, crying, and other means when an attacker is in close proximity to a victim."⁹⁷ Perhaps, Roof carried out this violent act for this reason, while those engaged in the bible study had their heads bowed for prayer, to avoid direct eye contact, and then launched the initial trigger pull.

In sum, Moghaddam's Staircase to Terrorism model only applies to limited facets of Roof's radicalization into violence. Specifically, the first three floors provide a tangible explanation as to how Roof came to radicalize and eventually commit murder but parallels are still lacking. One such parallel within Moghaddam's model is the influence that proactive groups or organizations can have on a recruit's radicalization into violence. The correlation of Roof's online radicalization is just not the same or similar enough to apply in a coherent and tangible way. In fact, as can be expected from online radicalization, it

⁹⁴ Moghaddam, "The Staircase to Terrorism," 166.

⁹⁵ Moghaddam, 166.

⁹⁶ Moghaddam, 166.

⁹⁷ Moghaddam, 166.

appears that Dylann Roof did not have any direct outside influences grooming or training him into the killer that he became.

2. The Radicalization Puzzle “Model”

Hafez and Mullins offer a different approach to the Islamist radicalization process called the Radicalization Puzzle. The first piece of the puzzle, grievances, encompasses a broad spectrum of events and circumstances that could be perceived as a grievance. Hafez and Mullins provide examples, writing, “Grievances include economic marginalization and cultural alienation, deeply held sense of victimization, or strong disagreements regarding the foreign policies of states. Grievances could also entail personal disaffection, loss, or crisis that leads one to seek a new path in life.”⁹⁸

Of those grievances stated previously, a deeply held sense of victimization may have been very much present in Roof’s life on two accounts. The first is the divorce of Roof’s parents. Children who grow up with divorced parents can oftentimes manifest their emotions relating to the divorce in various ways including feeling victimized, which may have been the case with Dylann Roof. Not only that but Roof felt the consequences of his parent’s divorce to include going back and forth between which parent he was living with and changing schools more than a half a dozen times, both of which could leave a person feeling slightly victimized. Second, but in that same vein, his perception of the threat against the collective white race caused him a great deal of grievance and left him also feeling somewhat victimized. Once he commenced his online research about black on white crime, his perception of the findings resonated in some manner and caused a perceived feeling of victimization as a race, as Moghaddam writes about in the ground floor of his model.

Additionally, Hafez and Mullins explain how economic marginalization constitutes a grievance and can be tangibly seen throughout the Muslim community in Western societies. Such ostracism can be shaped by negative societal views, which can thus be coupled with cultural alienation. Applying this same idea to Roof, his family was respected

⁹⁸ Hafez and Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle,” 961.

throughout the community; no sense of economic marginalization or cultural alienation was apparent that had been shaped by society and no interpretation of the Roof family being viewed as a threat. However, with divorced parents, feeling the effects of financial struggles, and bouncing around from school to school and parent to parent, making friends and social acquaintances could not have been easy, which thus likely added to the feeling of individual alienation. Roof's personal disaffection and social isolation would certainly constitute a source of grievance, as he would essentially shut himself off from the world. Ghansah highlights a quote from Roof that captures his sense of alienation, "I am in bed, so depressed I cannot get out of bed. My life is wasted. I have no friends even though I am cool. I am going back to sleep."⁹⁹ Even within the extremist websites Roof frequented, he was alienated. As Ghansah states, "OK, so this is a guy who's alienated even within the sort of lumpenproletarian hate groups that he's aspiring to be like."¹⁰⁰ Consequently, it could be said that this piece of the puzzle encapsulates many aspects of Dylann Roof's life and provides a stepping stone in explaining his actions.

The next component of the Puzzle concept is networks. The concept of this piece of the puzzle, as Hafez and Mullins explain, reflects the premise that, "Individuals that join violent groups often do so because they have one or more family members or friends in the movement. Radicalization and recruitment are local and highly personal tasks involving interpersonal ties, bonds of solidarity, and trust."¹⁰¹ Many people have reflected on Dylann Roof as a person and state that he was not raised in an environment that condoned racism or bigotry, nor did he portray such ideals as he was growing up. Additionally, in an FBI interview with Roof, he was asked a series of questions relating to a possible network of like-minded people. A few of those questions and their associated answers given by Roof include the following:

FBI: Earlier you mentioned like the Neo-Nazi's and the KKK and the skinheads...

⁹⁹ Ghansah, "A Most American Terrorist."

¹⁰⁰ NPR, "How One Reporter Found Herself Writing about the Charleston Church Shooter, Dylann Roof."

¹⁰¹ Hafez and Mullins, "The Radicalization Puzzle," 964.

Roof: There are no skinheads, I wish there were but there aren't.

FBI: Are you in any groups like that?

Roof: No¹⁰²

FBI: Would you consider yourself a white supremacist?

Roof: I would consider myself a white nationalist.

FBI: What's your definition of the two then, because you said you're not a white supremacist you're a white nationalist, in your mind what's the difference?

Roof: Well never mind then how about this, I do consider myself a white supremacist sure. If white people are superior if that's what you mean.¹⁰³

A few minutes later, the interview continues with the following questions:

FBI: Were any of your views shared by any of your friends or anything, I mean...?

Roof: Oh no

FBI: Did you talk to any of them about it?

Roof: No

FBI: Who's your best friend?

Roof: Well I don't have a best friend

Roof: I've never even, you know, talked about race around, you know, other people and stuff like that because they probably wouldn't agree with me, see what I'm saying?

FBI: Well like what about at home?

Roof: No, because they wouldn't like it, you see what I'm saying?

FBI: Your dad didn't know?

Roof: Oh no, because they wouldn't like it

¹⁰² YouTube, "Watch: Dylann Roof's Confession FBI Agents."

¹⁰³ YouTube.

FBI: Did you ever bring that topic up to your dad or sister, or anybody, grandparents? Did you ever even just talk about it and then...?

Roof: No

FBI: No

Roof: No

FBI: Never?

Roof: Never.¹⁰⁴

From the transcript, as well as other sources, it appears likely that Dylann Roof was not involved in a network of like-minded people nor did he perceive that he had grown up in an environment that could have molded his extremist views. Instead, it looks as though his views were adopted relatively shortly before committing his crime. Similarly, Roof's dabbling on white nationalist websites or the photos and symbols on his own website would not constitute a network, in the same manner as described in many Islamic forms of extremism recruitment, which is often rooted in preexisting relationships, such as friends and family. As Heidi Beirich writes, "most white supremacist killers [sic] spend a long time indoctrinating in the ideas. They stew in it. They are members of groups. They talk to people. They go to rallies. Roof doesn't have any of this."¹⁰⁵

Roof's online radicalization, however, was not influenced by a tangible network of people, but more likely based on something else Hafez writes within his networks puzzle piece, "Activism in a radical milieu could appeal to idealists seeking to transform an unjust world..."¹⁰⁶ Multiple times, Roof mentions that he "had to do it because somebody had to do something" and proceeds to mention perceived injustices against white people.¹⁰⁷ Roof surrounded himself with white supremacist propaganda by frequenting extremist websites and even engaging in chat rooms. Therefore, Roof maintained a kind of personally

¹⁰⁴ YouTube.

¹⁰⁵ Ghansah, "A Most American Terrorist."

¹⁰⁶ Hafez and Mullins, "The Radicalization Puzzle," 964.

¹⁰⁷ YouTube, "Watch: Dylann Roof's Confession FBI Agents."

internal passive network in which he resonated with the white supremacist movement without having any sort of tangible relationship with someone of like mind.

Ideology is the next component comprising the radicalization Puzzle. As Hafez and Mullins write, “Ideological narratives and themes are almost always present in the production of violent extremists.”¹⁰⁸ They add, “Ideology has several important functions in radicalization. Groups promote an ideology to encourage individuals to question the precepts of the prevailing order.”¹⁰⁹ Dylann Roof’s ideology coincided with white nationalism, in particular the belief that the white race is or should be superior to all other races. Hafez also writes, “Radical movements rooted in political ideologies usually identify a problematic social condition, attribute a root cause to this state of affairs, and propose a course of action in the form of programmatic steps or stages necessary for transformation.”¹¹⁰ Roof identified the problematic social condition as the sins committed against white people by black people, as referenced earlier, and associated that perceived problem with being a threat to the superiority of the white race. His ideology was a driving force that pushed him to do something. As a result of this perceived problem, Roof took matters into his own hands to make a statement to everyone or in an attempt to send a message that this “problem” has to stop. After the church shooting, he admitted in the FBI interview that he did not want to start a race war as that would be terrible, but he suggested reinstating segregation would be a step in the right direction in restoring white supremacy.¹¹¹

Roof’s ideological beliefs are also made evident through the various symbols he illustrated in his manifesto. Some of those symbols, as previously mentioned, include the numbers 14 and 88, as both have significant meaning within the white nationalist organization. Coupled with the symbols found in his manifesto, NPR found various racist photos of Roof holding the confederate flag littering his former website,

¹⁰⁸ Hafez and Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle,” 966.

¹⁰⁹ Hafez and Mullins, 967.

¹¹⁰ Hafez and Mullins, 966.

¹¹¹ YouTube, “Watch: Dylann Roof’s Confession FBI Agents.”

lastrhodesian.com.¹¹² Hafez and Mullins credit James M. Jasper when they write, “Ideology can help forge a new rebellious identity by appealing to symbols, narratives, mythologies, and rituals that give meaning to acts of personal risk and sacrifice.”¹¹³ It appears that white nationalism is what formed a rebellious identity for Dylann Roof, which provides an explanation for the symbols and narratives he drew that encompasses the promotion of white supremacy. Ideology is a significant piece of the Dylann Roof radicalization puzzle.

Enabling environments and support structures, the final piece, can take many forms and in this case, the internet was the main environment that lured Roof in and provided the support that led him to his culmination point. Hafez and Mullins write, “Enabling environments and support structures, such as the Internet, social media, or access to foreign terrorist training camps advance radicalization by providing ideological and material support for susceptible individuals.”¹¹⁴ As briefly mentioned, the internet played a far more significant role in Roof’s radicalization than any other aspect. Roof researched the Trayvon Martin case, which only further led him to research black on white crimes coming across white nationalist websites, such as the Council of Conservative Citizens (CCC). His own curiosity took him to a place from which he would never return. According to Hafez and Mullins, “Digital media expands opportunities to become radicalized by facilitating the distribution of propaganda, and validating extreme beliefs by likeminded radicals.”¹¹⁵ Cory Collins supports this claim by writing, “Google presented Roof with well-packaged propaganda—misinformation published by a group with a respectable-sounding name and a history of racist messaging, a group that once referred to black people as a ‘retrograde species of humanity.’”¹¹⁶ Roof was susceptible to the information he found on the internet and he let it mold his worldview to the point of disastrous consequences.

¹¹² Neuman, “Photos of Dylann Roof.”

¹¹³ Hafez and Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle,” 967.

¹¹⁴ Hafez and Mullins, 968.

¹¹⁵ Hafez and Mullins, 970.

¹¹⁶ Collins, “The Miseducation of Dylann Roof.”

In that same vein, Ghansah said that Roof, in the months leading up to the murders, created a Facebook account, adding 88 people, to reconnect with old friends, one of whom he stayed with prior to his incident.¹¹⁷ On that note, no evidence suggests that his friends or family held similar beliefs nor that he had conversations with them about the subject. Reports also indicate that Roof did not grow up in a home or other environment that was racially biased; in fact, Neuman recalls from the essay written by Roof on the website registered to him, “A link on the homepage of the site goes to a long, plain-text rant. In it, the author claims ‘I was not raised in a racist home or environment.’”¹¹⁸

Lastly, although he may not have been raised in a racist home, another aspect to this piece of the puzzle might have been the environment that was conducive to his ability to access guns and ammunition. Ghansah tells the story of how Roof came to acquire the gun he would later use, “On April 11, eight days after Dylann Roof turned 21, the legal age for purchasing a gun in South Carolina, he took the money his father had given him for his birthday and drove to a gun store in West Columbia called Shooter’s Choice, where he picked out a Glock .45-caliber pistol.”¹¹⁹ The unfortunate detail is that he had been previously arrested, as stated earlier, before the purchase of his gun, which should have been flagged in the background investigation rendering him unable to complete the purchase.¹²⁰ Ghansah further clarifies, “The FBI has three days to deny an application. If it doesn’t, as Ronnie Thraikill, the manager at Shooter’s Choice, testified, ‘the law allows dealers to transfer that gun to the potential buyer. That’s standard practice.’ Without any reply from the FBI, on April 16, Dylann Roof walked out of Shooter’s Choice with his gun and five magazines of bullets.”¹²¹ Ghansah also mentions that it was not until after the shooting that the FBI realized its mistake and called Shooters Choice to tell the manager that a mistake had been made and the sale of the gun should have been denied.¹²² Had a

¹¹⁷ Ghansah, “A Most American Terrorist.”

¹¹⁸ Neuman, “Photos of Dylann Roof.”

¹¹⁹ Ghansah, “A Most American Terrorist.”

¹²⁰ Ghansah.

¹²¹ Ghansah.

¹²² Ghansah.

mistake not been a mistake in the investigative process, one of the worst domestic extremist murder rampages in American history may not have ever happened.

Reviewing the radicalization puzzle, it appears that grievances, ideologies, and enabling environments are all considerably relevant to the radicalization of Dylann Roof. Networks on the other hand, were not as applicable considering the aforementioned issues and that Roof identified as a lone wolf and radicalized completely online. Overall, Hafez and Mullins' Puzzle theory provides a solid foundation and applicable explanation to the radicalization of this white supremacist.

E. CONCLUSION

Moghaddam's step-by-step approach offers a linear progression in which each floor gets narrower and closer to violence. In the case of Roof, this model offered a very clear, identifiable path to radicalizing, as if a checklist was being followed. Hafez and Mullins' puzzle approach is more piecemeal in nature, and therefore, allows pieces of the puzzle leading to radicalization to occur at any time.

Dylann Roof's case illustrates how the models of Islamic radicalization can apply to the radicalization of domestic right-wing extremists. Many of the components in each model share similarities in their application to Roof. However, although each method delivers an understanding for Roof's particular radicalization, Moghaddam's Staircase model provides the more direct and slightly better application, and is, therefore, a better fit. Given the relatively short amount of time in which Roof radicalized, having a linear step-by-step method provides a clearer view and understanding of the overall process in which Roof fell into violence. This clarity can be seen by each step in the six-floor model relating to Roof's radicalization in a slightly more significant way than the Radicalization Puzzle. With that being said, some of the areas in which the Staircase model is better applied is the first floor and the fifth floor. The first floor is the Perceived Options to Fight Unfair Treatment. This floor particularly, touches on Roof's belief that he only had one option in addressing the perceived injustice, or the fact that he had to address the situation at all. The sense of obligation he felt is vital because it was a major driving factor into his decision to carry out his crime and to push past the hesitation he felt while sitting in the

church. As stated previously, Dylann Roof appeared to perceive his options to fight as limited, stating, “I had to do it because nobody else is going to do it, nobody else is brave enough to do anything about it.”¹²³ Secondly, the fifth floor, *The Terrorist Act and Sidestepping Inhibitory Mechanisms*, offers an explanation as to why Roof may have acted when the victim’s heads were bowed and nobody could see him proceed with his actions. These two floors offer a little deeper level to the understanding of Roof’s radicalization.

The level of application of these models, specifically Moghaddam’s in this case, shows promise that existing Islamic radicalization models may provide, at minimum, a foundation for the development of domestic extremist radicalization models.

¹²³ YouTube, “Watch: Dylann Roof’s Confession FBI Agents.”

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III. PATRICK CRUSIUS RADICALIZATION JOURNEY

Patrick Crusius, a white nationalist, was 21 years old in 2019 when he committed his atrocious acts of murder at a Walmart in El Paso, Texas. George Selim, the Senior Vice President for National Programs with the ADL, states in a Congressional Testimony, “he was able to take 22 innocent lives—the deadliest white supremacist attack in the U.S. in 50 years.”¹²⁴ Unlike Dylann Roof, Crusius targeted the Hispanic community, but in his manifesto blamed the government and other corporations for allowing immigration into the United States and the subsequent threat to the white population, and referred to the anticipated cultural and ethnic replacement.¹²⁵

On the other hand, Crusius was a loner and radicalized completely online. He found himself immersed in websites, such as 8chan, which espouses white nationalist extremist ideologies and dialogues, and quickly followed that path into action.

As in the previous chapter, exploring Crusius’ personal background, his organizational inspiration and radicalization history, and the manifesto Crusius posted before the attack, offers a comprehensive understanding of how his radicalization correlates to Moghaddam’s Staircase Model and the Radicalization Puzzle offered by Hafez and Mullins, both of which were also applied in Chapter II.

A. INDIVIDUAL BACKGROUND

Crusius grew up in Allen, Texas, a largely white community, just outside of Dallas and nearly 650 miles from the Walmart he deliberately chose due to its proximity to the Mexican border.¹²⁶ Crusius attended and graduated from Plano Senior High School in

¹²⁴ *Countering Domestic Terrorism: Examining the Evolving Threat*, 116th Cong. (2019) (statement of George Selim, Senior Vice President, National Programs).

¹²⁵ Patrick Crusius, “The Inconvenient Truth,” Randall Packer, accessed November 21, 2020, <https://randallpacker.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/The-Inconvenient-Truth.pdf>.

¹²⁶ Adam Elmahrek, Melissa Etehad, and Matthew Ormseth, “Suspect in El Paso Massacre ‘Didn’t Hold Anything Back’ in Police Interrogation,” *LA Times*, August 4, 2019, <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2019-08-03/what-we-know-about-patrick-crusius-el-paso-rampage>.

2017 and even went on to complete a couple years at a community college.¹²⁷ He grew up with a twin sister and an older brother who seemed to be normal interactive individuals with many friends and social lives.¹²⁸ Despite what might be expected with such radical behavior, through research no evidence has surfaced to indicate that Crusius was involved with any form of drugs nor did he have a criminal record.

Patrick Crusius came from a broken home after his parents divorced in 2011, eight years prior to this event.¹²⁹ Allegedly, his parents' divorce was a result, at least in part, due to his father's drinking and drug use problem.¹³⁰ Yet despite the divorce, his family ties appeared strong. According to Jack Healy and Sarah Mervosh, "Two days before the shooting, the suspect had spent time with his twin sister, the family's lawyer said, and he had been at his grandparents' suburban home in Allen as late as Friday night, before the police said he made the 10-hour drive to El Paso and started shooting Saturday morning."¹³¹ His actions came as quite a surprise to many including his family, as they could not understand how their son could be capable of such malicious behavior. Healy and Mervosh capture a statement by Crusius' parents stating, "Patrick's actions were apparently influenced and informed by people we do not know, and from ideas and beliefs that we do not accept or condone, in any way," the family said in a statement. "There will never be a moment for the rest of our lives when we will forget each and every victim of this senseless tragedy."¹³²

A former neighbor, Leigh Ann Locascio, according to Elmahrek, Etehad, and Ormseth, "said Crusius was an extreme loner who always sat alone on the bus in junior high and high school. He spoke negatively of other kids who played sports or joined the

¹²⁷ Elmahrek, Etehad, and Ormseth.

¹²⁸ Erin Ailworth, Georgia Wells, and Ian Lovett, "Lost in Life, El Paso Suspect Found a Dark World Online," *Wall Street Journal*, August 9, 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/lost-in-life-el-paso-suspect-found-a-dark-world-online-11565308783>.

¹²⁹ Jack Healy and Sarah Mervosh, "El Paso Suspect Ordered Gun and Moved Out in Weeks before Attack," *New York Times*, August 8, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/08/us/el-paso-suspect.html>.

¹³⁰ Ailworth, Wells, and Lovett, "Lost in Life."

¹³¹ Healy and Mervosh, "El Paso Suspect."

¹³² Healy and Mervosh.

school band, she said.”¹³³ She went on to describe Crusius as, “‘very much a loner, very standoffish’ and someone who ‘didn’t interact a whole lot with anyone.’”¹³⁴ Still others recall walking to school with Crusius and his sister. The same source illustrates this point by writing, “Tony Locascio said Patrick Crusius only walked ahead of or behind them, never interacting and always keeping to himself.”¹³⁵ Healy and Mervosh highlight another student’s perception of Crusius stating, “Another former classmate, Jacob Wilson, said Crusius was ‘very strong-minded’ in class and would try to ‘take charge,’ but other kids refused to work with him because he was ‘irritable and had a short temper.’ He was often ‘picked on’ because of how he spoke, and because he wore what looked like hand-me-down clothes, Wilson said.”¹³⁶ Healy and Mervosh add, “Neighbors and classmates described the suspect as ‘strange’ and ‘off,’” not being part of any school social groups, and seemingly not having a single friend in a class of about 1,300 people.¹³⁷

B. ORGANIZATIONAL INSPIRATION AND RADICALIZATION HISTORY

Patrick Crusius radicalized at some point in his young life and that point is not entirely clearly defined. Erin Ailworth, Georgia Wells and Ian Lovett state:

He has told investigators that he came to his views by doing research online, according to a law-enforcement official with knowledge of the investigation, and didn’t speak to or organize with other white nationalists in person. He said he read the manifesto by the perpetrator of the Christchurch massacre in New Zealand and thought it had the right message.¹³⁸

In fact, in the opening line of his manifesto he declares his support for the Christchurch shooter stating, “In general, I support the Christchurch shooter and his manifesto.”¹³⁹

¹³³ Elmahrek, Etehad, Ormseth, “Suspect in El Paso Massacre.”

¹³⁴ Elmahrek, Etehad, Ormseth.

¹³⁵ Elmahrek, Etehad, Ormseth.

¹³⁶ Elmahrek, Etehad, Ormseth.

¹³⁷ Healy and Mervosh, “El Paso Suspect.”

¹³⁸ Ailworth, Wells, and Lovett, “Lost in Life.”

¹³⁹ Crusius, “The Inconvenient Truth.”

Furthermore, his manifesto was posted on the 8chan website, which is well known as an extremist social resource.¹⁴⁰ Posting to such a site indicates his connection to fellow like-minded extremist individuals who also frequent similar websites. Ailworth, Wells, and Lovett provide insightful information about the 8chan website stating, “The site is divided into more than 21,000 discussion boards, and the one Mr. Crusius chose, called ‘politically incorrect,’ is the same one used by the gunmen in two other shootings: the April killing of a worshiper at a synagogue in Poway, Calif., and the March killing of 51 at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand.”¹⁴¹ A website offering over 20,000 discussion board forums with individuals of like minds offers a person a sense of inclusion and connectedness, which may be the reason Crusius participated in such website.

C. MANIFESTO

Crusius wrote his manifesto and posted it online just moments before he executed one of the most atrocious domestic criminal acts of this decade. Interestingly, Crusius makes no direct reference to white supremacy or white nationalism other than stating others will be quick to call him a white supremacist. This statement is interesting because his manifesto is laced throughout with incredibly bigoted statements and beliefs towards the Hispanic community that resemble the same beliefs espoused by white nationalist or white supremacist groups. With that being said, Crusius does not necessarily target his blame only on Hispanics, but rather, he claims that the government has been conducive in the so-called invasion of Hispanics into the United States. Crusius writes in his manifesto:

Due to the death of the baby boomers, the increasingly anti-immigrant rhetoric of the right and the ever increasing Hispanic population, America will soon become a one party-state. The Democrat party will own America and they know it. They have already begun the transition by pandering heavily to the Hispanic voting bloc in the 1st Democratic Debate. They intend to use open borders, free healthcare for illegals, citizenship and more to enact a political coup by importing and then legalizing millions of new voters.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Healy and Mervosh, “El Paso Suspect.”

¹⁴¹ Ailworth, Wells, and Lovett, “Lost in Life.”

¹⁴² Crusius, “The Inconvenient Truth.”

He structures his manifesto by breaking it down into sections, which include About Me, Political Reasons, Economic Reasons, Gear, Reaction, and Personal Reasons and Thoughts.¹⁴³ Each of these sections provides a description and justification for his actions.

Perhaps the most telling part of his white supremacist ideologies found within his manifesto is the following statement, “This attack is a response to the Hispanic invasion of Texas. They are the instigators, not me. I am simply defending my country from cultural and ethnic replacement brought on by an invasion.”¹⁴⁴ These statements are indicative of his acceptance of the white supremacist theory called The Great Replacement Theory. According to Tim Arango, Nicholas Bogel-Burroughs, and Katie Benner, “The theory has been promoted by a French writer named Renaud Camus, and argues that elites in Europe have been working to replace white Europeans with immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa.”¹⁴⁵ For Crusius, he was exposed to this theory when he read the New Zealand shooters manifesto, which promoted this theory. Crusius switched his target demographic, in this moment, and wrote, “Actually the Hispanic community was not my target before I read The Great Replacement.”¹⁴⁶

D. COMPARISON

After taking a look into Crusius’ background, his motivations for his actions, and his manifesto, Crusius’s radicalization journey is analyzed through two Islamic radicalization models, as seen in the previous chapter, to determine if any correlation exists to explain the development of his extremism. The following provides a comparison to said models in an effort to determine the level of application and explanation into the development of Crusius’ extremism.

¹⁴³ Crusius.

¹⁴⁴ Crusius.

¹⁴⁵ Tim Arango, Nicholas Bogel-Burroughs, and Katie Benner, “Minutes before El Paso Killing, Hate-Filled Manifesto Appears Online,” *New York Times*, August 3, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/03/us/patrick-crusius-el-paso-shooter-manifesto.html>.

¹⁴⁶ Crusius, “The Inconvenient Truth.”

1. The Staircase Model

Moghaddam's staircase model provides a six floors approach, which includes a ground floor and floors one through five. The ground floor, the Psychological Interpretation of Material Condition, is the floor where, according to Moghaddam, most people reside.¹⁴⁷ With that being said, Crusius is no exception. Moghaddam claims, the most important aspect of this floor is a person's perception of fairness or deprivation.¹⁴⁸ Based off analytical research, Patrick Crusius does not appear to have withstood any perceived injustices or deprivation in his own life, at least none that have been made evident. In his manifesto, he does not even mention the divorce of his parents as a source of resentment or injustice, which suggests his perception of fairness was not necessarily negatively impacted by the divorce of his parents.

With that being said, perceived personal injustices do not seem to be an influencing factor on Crusius' radicalization. However, his perception of injustice seems to lie more closely to a collective identity with perceived threats both existing economically and politically. Moghaddam credits D. M. Taylor with stating, "Perceptions of injustice may arise for a variety of reasons, including economic and political conditions and threats to personal or collective identity."¹⁴⁹ Throughout his manifesto, Crusius lists reasons, both economic and political, to explain his actions and what the "Hispanic invasion" of the United States will bring. Regarding his political reasons, Crusius writes, "Hispanics will take control of the local and state government of my beloved Texas, changing policy to better suit their needs. They will turn Texas into an instrument of a political coup which will hasten the destruction of our country."¹⁵⁰ Similar to his written political reasons, his personal reasons section echoes the political justifications for his actions.

Crusius provides his own economic justifications for his actions as well. He explains the threat posed to white people and to America by the Hispanic culture invasion.

¹⁴⁷ Moghaddam, "The Staircase to Terrorism," 162.

¹⁴⁸ Moghaddam, 163.

¹⁴⁹ Moghaddam, 163.

¹⁵⁰ Crusius, "The Inconvenient Truth."

That threat, he claims, is that the more Hispanics migrate to America, the more jobs are lost for Americans, pro-immigration corporations will use the more resources, and the threat of automation taking jobs will be exacerbated.¹⁵¹ The first sentence under the Economic Reasons section of his manifesto reads, “In short, immigration can only be detrimental to the future of America.”¹⁵² As a result, it appears that Crusius may perceive this invasion as unfair and a continued deprivation to America, and thus, the prosperity of the white population.

The first floor of Moghaddam’s model, Perceived Options to Fight Unfair Treatment, is the search for a solution to the perceived unjust conduct.¹⁵³ To Patrick Crusius, multiple options were not apparent; he saw only one. In his manifesto he writes, “The environment is getting worse by the year. If you take nothing else from this document, remember this: INACTION IS A CHOICE. I can no longer bear the shame of inaction knowing that our founding fathers have endowed me with the rights needed to save our country from the brink [of] destruction.”¹⁵⁴ To exemplify his call to action further, Crusius claims, the only solution to the Hispanic invasion problem is, “So the next logical step is to decrease the number of people in America using resources. If we can get rid of enough people, then our way of life can become more sustainable.”¹⁵⁵ Lastly, he goes on to illustrate this perceived false dichotomy, action, or inaction, by writing, “I am honored to head the fight to reclaim my country from destruction.”¹⁵⁶

The next floor in the model is the Displacement of Aggression. It is evident, based on Crusius’ manifesto that he blames Hispanics for a myriad of threats to the American way of life. Miller, Pedersen, Earleywine, and Pollock write, “When that person subsequently behaves aggressively toward an innocent other, it may reflect the displacement of the aggressive inclination toward the initial provocateur. If so, the

¹⁵¹ Crusius.

¹⁵² Crusius.

¹⁵³ Moghaddam, “The Staircase to Terrorism,” 163.

¹⁵⁴ Crusius, “The Inconvenient Truth.”

¹⁵⁵ Crusius.

¹⁵⁶ Crusius.

assumption is that the actor would not have responded aggressively toward the innocent party had he not previously been provoked.”¹⁵⁷ As this relates to Crusius, he talks at length about the failures of the bipartisan government and corporations that have been nothing but catalysts to the so-called invasion of Hispanics. He further states that the Hispanic community was not his original target until he read *The Great Replacement*.¹⁵⁸ With that being said, perhaps the initial provocateur for Crusius was actually the government and its leaders, and the Hispanic community was the easy innocent other described by Miller et al. that served as the victim of his displaced aggression. To illustrate this point further, Crusius claims, “The inconvenient truth is that our leaders, both Democrat AND Republican, have been failing us for decades. They are either complacent or involved in one of the biggest betrayals of the American public in our history.”¹⁵⁹ Clearly, Crusius places blame on the government for what he perceives to be the modern threat to America, yet takes it out on the Hispanic population. In this manner, where Crusius displaces his aggression onto Hispanics, he differs from Roof who placed blame on African Americans for his perceived injustices and committed his hellacious act on the same community. Lastly, Moghaddam says, “individuals who develop a readiness to physically displace aggression and who actively seek out opportunities to do so eventually leave the second floor and climb more steps to try to take action against perceived enemies.”¹⁶⁰

Consequently, the third floor is called Moral Engagement. This is the floor where extremist persons associate their actions with the moral high ground and view their enemies as disengaged from morality.¹⁶¹ Ailworth, Wells, and Lovett state that Crusius told investigators he had no in-person interaction with other white nationalists.¹⁶² For Patrick Crusius, he was not physically part of a terrorist organization; however, it does appear that he held the belief that his actions, in the name of white supremacy, were pure and the

¹⁵⁷ Miller et al., “A Theoretical Model,” 75–97.

¹⁵⁸ Crusius, “The Inconvenient Truth.”

¹⁵⁹ Crusius.

¹⁶⁰ Moghaddam, “The Staircase to Terrorism,” 164.

¹⁶¹ Moghaddam, 165.

¹⁶² Ailworth, Wells, and Lovett, “Lost in Life.”

government and its leaders were the ones who were morally disengaged, and called them complacent and possible traitors of the American public. In fact, he states, “America can only be destroyed from the inside-out. If our country falls, it will be the fault of traitors.”¹⁶³ He also illustrates the purity of his actions stating in his manifesto, “This is why I see my actions as faultless.”¹⁶⁴ Therefore, with the exception of organizational influence on the moral development of a terrorist recruit, Patrick Crusius adheres to the third floor of Moghaddam’s model.

Crusius continued to climb the stairs to the fourth floor, Solidification of Categorical Thinking and the Perceived Legitimacy of the Terrorist Organization. The application of this floor becomes more challenging because Crusius was not directly involved with any extremist organizations, even though he espouses their ideologies. Although he did spend some time on extremist websites, such as 8chan where he posted his manifesto, no evidence is available that suggests Crusius met with, or participated in-person in, any far-right extremist groups. With that being said, he likely found a sense of connectedness in the like-minded people on the extremist websites Crusius frequented. In turn, this connectedness would have given him a sense of legitimacy in his own thoughts, which were reportedly different from his upbringing, and to the white supremacist organization.

As evidence of the connectedness found on the model’s fourth floor, according to Ailworth, Wells, and Lovett, after Crusius carried out his attack, conversations were posted on 8chan, such as, “In the hours after the attack, a discussion broke out on 8chan about his place in the history of mass shooters. Responses were riddled with racist and antigay language. One said, ‘Every shabbat,’ which a regular 8chan user said was an expression of hope that there would be a mass shooting every week.”¹⁶⁵ Another conversation read, “‘The new guys deserve some praise, he reached almost a third of the high score,’ one commenter wrote, a reference to the largest death toll in any mass shooting. 8chan users

¹⁶³ Crusius, “The Inconvenient Truth.”

¹⁶⁴ Crusius.

¹⁶⁵ Ailworth, Wells, Lovett, “Lost in Life.”

regularly refer to the death count in mass shootings as the ‘score’.”¹⁶⁶ Still another conversation stated, “‘Hail all our men of action and martyrs,’ wrote one person. ‘Hail Tarrant, Bowers...Roof, Breivik, and Ernest,’ a list of shooters who espoused racist, anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic ideas.”¹⁶⁷ Moghaddam clarifies, “Immersion in secret, small-group activities leads to changes in perceptions among recruits: a legitimization of the terrorist organization and its goals, a belief that the ends justify the means, and a strengthening of a categorical us-versus-them view of the world.”¹⁶⁸ Although Crusius was not recruited, and as stated previously, did not physically attend any groups, the significance in relation to Crusius is the possible impact 8chan may have had in developing his views. Reasonably assuming these types of conversations, which praise mass shooters for their actions, occur after each incident, it would be realistic to see how Crusius, a user of the 8chan website and other similar sites, could interpret such praises in a manner that provides a sense of legitimacy and acceptance for his own beliefs and a solidification to his contemplated future actions. Therefore, it is possible that Crusius absorbed similar changes in his perceptions by being a user and consumer of the 8chan platform.

The so-called fifth floor, the final floor, is what Moghaddam calls, The Terrorist Act and Sidestepping Inhibitory Mechanisms. Much of this floor depends on the influence of an organization’s members on recruits, and their grooming into essentially shutting off their humanity towards those who do not share the same views. Although a portion of this floor can be useful to the analysis of the Crusius case, the application is not without flaws. Moghaddam illustrates an explanation for this floor and the categorization of civilians:

Newspaper headlines announcing that a terrorist blast has killed innocent bystanders have little meaning to terrorist organizations because of the particular way in which they have categorized the world into “us” and “them” and their perception that anyone who is not actively resisting the government is a legitimate target of violence. Thus, from the point of view of the members of terrorist organizations, acts of violence against civilians

¹⁶⁶ Ailworth, Wells, and Lovett.

¹⁶⁷ Ailworth, Wells, and Lovett.

¹⁶⁸ Moghaddam, “The Staircase to Terrorism,” 165.

are justified because civilians are part of the enemy, and only when civilians actively oppose the targeted “evil forces” will they not be the enemy.¹⁶⁹

For Crusius, it appears he did adopt an “us” and “them” perspective; however, his version was more narrow in scope. He places a lot of the blame on the government’s lack of action in allowing Hispanics to “infiltrate” America; however, the government is not the target of Crusius’ violence, and nor are those not actively resisting Hispanic immigration. Instead, rather than identifying all civilians with differing views as the opposition, he saw a specific culture, the Hispanics, as the enemy, and thus, the legitimate target of violence. With that being said, it does appear that in his extremist beliefs he holds ill feelings towards other races, cultures, or ideologies as evidenced in his manifesto. His statement, “Actually the Hispanic community was not my target before I read *The Great Replacement*,”¹⁷⁰ indicates that he may have previously targeted another demographic toward which he also maintained bigoted views.

In terms of inhibitory mechanisms, according to Moghaddam, “Crime statistics (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2002) show that humans often kill other humans by means of guns and other weapons that allow killing from a distance and enable inhibitory mechanisms to be sidestepped.”¹⁷¹ Crusius states, “I have [to] do this before I lose my nerve. I figured that an under-prepared attack and a meh manifesto is better than no attack and no manifesto.”¹⁷² Therefore, it appears he felt inhibitory mechanisms at work and decided to act before they had a greater effect on his decision. He writes a whole section in his manifesto on the gear, namely the weapon, he would use in his attack. His weapon of choice was an assault rifle, which allowed him to maintain a distance from his targets and thwarted potential inhibitory mechanisms, such as eye contact, pleading, crying, and more as identified by Moghaddam.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁹ Moghaddam, 166.

¹⁷⁰ Crusius, “The Inconvenient Truth.”

¹⁷¹ Moghaddam, “The Staircase to Terrorism,” 166.

¹⁷² Crusius, “The Inconvenient Truth.”

¹⁷³ Moghaddam, “The Staircase to Terrorism,” 166.

After analyzing the Crusius case through the lens of Moghaddam's radicalization model, it is clear that the application is significant. With the exception of the major role a terrorist organization and its members directly have on a recruit, the remaining construct can be applied fairly directly to that of Crusius' radicalization.

2. The Radicalization Puzzle

Hafez and Mullins offer a different approach to Islamic radicalization where there are pieces that come together in a person's life to form the puzzle that is radicalization. They focus on four pieces: grievances, networks, ideologies, and enabling environments and support structures. Unlike Moghaddam's model, the puzzle approach does not require each piece to fall in a sequential order. Each piece may come at a different time and in a different order and still lead to radicalization. As seen in the previous analysis, Crusius is similar in many ways to Roof, and therefore, the following analysis is expected to yield similar results.

The analysis starts with the first piece of the puzzle, grievances. Hafez and Mullins provide examples of different areas in which grievances may originate to include "economic marginalization and cultural alienation, deeply held sense of victimization, or strong disagreements regarding the foreign policies of states."¹⁷⁴ As seen in the previous analysis of Crusius' background, there did not seem to be any evidence of economic marginalization, cultural alienation, or a sense of victimization. On the other hand, Crusius does seem to have very strong disagreements with the foreign policies of states, especially regarding immigration. His whole manifesto is centered on the invasion of Hispanics and how the government has allowed immigrants to enter the country and threaten American jobs and their way of life. Crusius' disdain for the foreign leanings of the government can be seen in his following statement, "The Democrat party will own America and they know it. They have already begun the transition by pandering heavily to the Hispanic voting bloc in the 1st Democratic Debate. They intend to use open borders, free healthcare for illegals, citizenship and more to enact a political coup by importing and then legalizing millions of

¹⁷⁴ Hafez and Mullins, "The Radicalization Puzzle," 961.

new voters.”¹⁷⁵ He goes on to criticize the Republican Party as well by stating, “Although the Republican Party is also terrible. [sic] Many factions within the Republican Party are pro-corporation. Pro-corporation = pro-immigration.”¹⁷⁶ Crusius is clearly aggrieved with the foreign policies, which allow Hispanic immigrants to enter America.

The next piece of the puzzle is networks. According to Hafez and Mullins, a network is an established relationship usually in the form of family or friends in which one party to the relationship is radical and leads the other to extremism.¹⁷⁷ Hafez and Mullin continue and state, “These milieus not only offer opportunities for socialization with radicals, they could also satisfy psychological needs, such as the search for meaningful relationships and a quest for significance, and they may entrap individuals through dynamics of peer pressure, groupthink, and ideological encapsulation that increase exit costs and solidify commitments to violence.”¹⁷⁸ A lot of significant information within that statement relates to Crusius. As previously established, Crusius did not physically take part in an extremist group, and therefore, the person-to-person influence as found in the Islamist radicalization models was not the same. Nevertheless, according to Ailworth, Wells, and Lovett, Crusius spent around eight hours a day on the internet where he formed his extremist beliefs.¹⁷⁹ Ailworth’s statements strengthen Hafez’s previous claim in the following ways. First, considering he spent such long hours online, which led to the adoption of extremist views, it is entirely plausible that Crusius engaged in a manner of socialization with other radicals whether that behavior was actively engaging with them or passively reading their dialogs.

Furthermore, it is also reasonable to expect other posts, such as the ones found on 8chan following Crusius’ attack that praise the action of other mass shooters. The praise could enhance groupthink, peer pressure, and even a sense of a quest for significance for Crusius, especially considering that he reportedly had zero friends. Not only that, but he

¹⁷⁵ Crusius, “The Inconvenient Truth.”

¹⁷⁶ Crusius.

¹⁷⁷ Hafez and Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle,” 961.

¹⁷⁸ Hafez and Mullins, 961.

¹⁷⁹ Ailworth, Wells, and Lovett, “Lost in Life.”

may have experienced a sense of kinship or camaraderie in surfing the internet and finding like-minded people. Ailworth, Wells, and Lovett state, “The celebratory posts on 8chan after the shooting reveal what experts say has become a motivation for many of the young men who launch attacks in public places: the desire for notoriety in the public and glory in certain corners of the internet, regardless of whether they survive or not.”¹⁸⁰ Ailworth, Wells, and Lovett quote Oren Segal of the ADL who states, “8chan not only has the manifestos, but users also have encouragement from the community that celebrates what they did and reminds all those users that if they do the same thing, they will never be forgotten. They will be lionized.”¹⁸¹ With this type of encouragement from an accepting community, the same familial or friendship ties that Hafez and Mullins describe manifests itself for Crusius.

The next piece of the puzzle is ideologies. As Hafez and Mullins explain, “Ideologies refer to master narratives about the world and one’s place in it. Usually they frame personal and collective grievances into broader political critiques of the status quo. They also demonize enemies and justify violence against them, and they incentivize sacrifice by promising heroic redemption.”¹⁸² The ADL states, “White supremacists in both the U.S. and Europe believe that they are under siege, and that changing demographics and increased immigration are destroying white European culture. They assert that whites will soon be minorities in traditionally white nations and immediate action is needed to stop these ethnic and cultural changes.”¹⁸³ As aforementioned, Crusius absolutely maintained grievances with the status quo on Hispanic immigration. He berated the government for its lack of immigration restrictions and even wrote a piece on how a Hispanic takeover of the country will occur. Hafez and Mullins provide this statement, which applies appropriately to Crusius, “Radical movements rooted in political ideologies usually identify a problematic social condition, attribute a root cause to this state of affairs,

¹⁸⁰ Ailworth, Wells, and Lovett.

¹⁸¹ Ailworth, Wells, and Lovett.

¹⁸² Hafez and Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle,” 961.

¹⁸³ “White Supremacist’s Anti-Immigrant Rhetoric Echoes Comments from Public Figures,” Anti-Defamation League, August 8, 2019, <https://www.adl.org/blog/white-supremacists-anti-immigrant-rhetoric-echoes-comments-from-public-figures>.

and propose a course of action in the form of programmatic steps or stages necessary for transformation.”¹⁸⁴ Patrick Crusius identified a problematic social condition, which, in his own eyes, was the invasion of Texas and eventually the entire United States. The root cause of this invasion for Crusius is the compliance of the U.S. government in simply allowing immigration and corporations complicit in the invasion with their pro-immigration leanings.

Additionally, Crusius provides a course of action addressing racial mixing, which he also mentions as a threat to the white population, stating, “The best solution to this for now would be to divide America into a confederacy of territories with at least 1 territory for each race. This physical separation would nearly eliminate race mixing and improve social unity by granting each race self-determination within their respective territory(s).”¹⁸⁵ Furthermore, he states, “They come here as economic immigrants, not for asylum reasons. This is an encouraging sign that the Hispanic population is willing to return to their home countries if given the right incentive. An incentive that myself and many other patriotic Americans will provide.”¹⁸⁶ In other words, Crusius is essentially declaring a call to arms as another course of action; he even claims that inaction is a choice and a shameful one to make.¹⁸⁷

The last piece of the puzzle is enabling environments and support structures. This piece, according to Hafez and Mullins will, “encompass physical and virtual settings, such as the Internet, social media, prisons, or foreign terrorist training camps that provide ideological and material aid for radicalizing individuals, as well as deepen their commitment to radical milieus.”¹⁸⁸ As previously mentioned, the physical environment was not prevalent in Crusius’ radicalization journey. The internet, on the other hand, absolutely played a key role in Crusius radicalizing into extremism. The evidence previously stated identified that Crusius spent about eight hours a day on the internet and

¹⁸⁴ Hafez and Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle,” 966.

¹⁸⁵ Crusius, “The Inconvenient Truth.”

¹⁸⁶ Crusius.

¹⁸⁷ Crusius.

¹⁸⁸ Hafez and Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle,” 961.

consequently came to formulate his extremist views from that platform. Additionally, the vast span of discussion forums found on the 8chan website gives way to a myriad of potential personal connections, which could act as an enabling and supporting environment. The praises that like-minded individuals on these websites portray, as seen previously, offers an endorsement to an extremist user's ideological views, in particular, that of Patrick Crusius. Furthermore, as an identified loner who had zero friends, the support and praise found on these websites must have provided a connection that Crusius may not have felt previously and only led him further down his murderous path.

E. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the previous Islamic radicalization models provide an excellent structure in which to apply the radicalization of the white supremacist, Patrick Crusius. With that being said, the Radicalization Puzzle offered by Hafez and Mullins seems to provide a slightly better framework for this particular case. Moghaddam's Staircase model is linear in design where each floor proceeds the next and there is essentially no forward movement without occupying the previous floor. With Crusius, his progression into radicalization did not proceed step-by-step but in more of a piecemeal approach more closely resembling the Puzzle model. Furthermore, with Moghaddam's model, significant emphasis is placed on the recruitment process and in person influence. As determined, Crusius was not recruited nor was he influenced in person by any group or individuals.

Hafez's puzzle, on the other hand, offers a better application for Crusius' online radicalization. The weak point in Hafez's model as it applies to Crusius is the network piece. Even though friends and family usually influence the network piece, absent of those, network dynamic still exists that can be established and offers similar results as found in the puzzle explanation. The other three pieces of the puzzle offer a robust explanation to how Crusius may have fallen into extremism. Although not perfectly applicable in all aspects, enough of the components and concepts of either model, apply directly, or indirectly, to Crusius's radicalization that intellectuals could use in determining how it all went wrong for him.

IV. JOHN EARNEST RADICALIZATION JOURNEY

John Earnest is included in this study because of his somewhat unexpected, yet similar, process of online radicalization into extremism as discussed in the previous two chapters. Unlike Roof and Crusius who were not particularly scholarly nor motivated to pursue a career, Earnest seemed to have a promising future in the medical field as a nurse and yet he threw that all away to satisfy his extreme bigotry in the name of white nationalism. As Elliot Spagat indicates, “The lone suspect in a fatal attack on a Southern California synagogue was a star scholar, athlete, and musician whose embrace of white supremacy and anti-Semitism has dumbfounded his family and others who thought they knew him well.”¹⁸⁹ Earnest, in fact, was a 19-year-old college student at Cal State University of San Marcos on April 27, 2019, who decided to plan and execute an attack on the Chabad Synagogue Congregation in Poway, California that killed one and injured three others.

A. INDIVIDUAL BACKGROUND

For someone to perform such a violent act, it could be assumed by many that the person performing such acts grew up in a chaotic, unloving, possibly broken and distant family with little ambition or hope for a future, which certainly was not the case for John Earnest. In fact, an analysis of his personal background reveals quite the opposite and offers important insight into his plunge into extremist radicalization.

Earnest’s childhood occurred within a caring and loving family environment that included plenty of friends; thus, making his radicalization journey into violent action, all the more surprising. According to Tarpley Hitt, Earnest grew up near Poway in a middle class neighborhood and regularly attended church.¹⁹⁰ Hitt further states, “He was an

¹⁸⁹ Elliot Spagat, “Suspect in Synagogue Attack Stuns Family with Radical Turn,” *Business Insider*, April 29, 2019, <https://www.businessinsider.com/suspect-in-synagogue-attack-stuns-family-with-radical-turn-2019-4>.

¹⁹⁰ Tarpley Hitt, “Poway Synagogue Shooting Suspect’s Parents Call Him ‘Evil’,” *The Daily Beast*, May 1, 2019, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/poway-synagogue-shooting-suspect-john-earnest-parents-call-him-evil>.

honors student and accomplished pianist at Mt. Carmel High School, where his father, also named John, works as a teacher. Earnest's father also served as board president of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Escondido, where the family attended church weekly."¹⁹¹ Furthermore, Owen Cruise, a former high school classmate, reflecting on Earnest's father, describing the elder Earnest as a popular physics teacher who went out of his way to help students and who personally had a big impact on his life.¹⁹² Cruise also mentioned that Earnest lived with his parents, was emotionally close to his father and that, "They only raised him to be the best man he could be."¹⁹³ According to Spagat, Earnest's parents, who were also shocked by their son's actions, went on to say in a statement:

To our great shame, he is now part of the history of evil that has been perpetrated on Jewish people for centuries. Our son's actions were informed by people we do not know, and ideas we do not hold. Like our other five children, he was raised in a family, a faith, and a community that all rejected hate and taught that love must be the motive for everything we do. How our son was attracted to such darkness is a terrifying mystery to us.¹⁹⁴

Another account of Earnest and his family comes from Joyce Daubert, a former school teacher at Mt Carmel High School who worked with Earnest's father and was astonished at John Earnest's actions.¹⁹⁵ She recalls her impression of Earnest and his family in a phone interview with Jennifer Van Grove stating, "I don't have enough words to say how lovely (the family is)..." According to Grove, Daubert only had minimal interaction with John Earnest, the son, when he attended staff functions with his father; however, she described him as "charming, really impressive, and so sweet and nice."¹⁹⁶ Grove simply describes Earnest as "the product of a seemingly tight-knit family with strong

¹⁹¹ Hitt, "Poway Synagogue Shooting."

¹⁹² Spagat, "Suspect in Synagogue Attack."

¹⁹³ Spagat.

¹⁹⁴ Mario Sevilla, "Family of Poway Synagogue Shooting Suspect John Earnest Release Statement," KGTV, April 29, 2019, <https://www.10news.com/news/local-news/family-of-poway-synagogue-shooting-suspect-john-earnest-release-statement>.

¹⁹⁵ Jennifer Van Grove, "Who is John Earnest, the Suspect in the Poway Synagogue Shooting," *The Sand Diego Union-Tribune*, April 27, 2019, <https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/public-safety/story/2019-04-27/who-is-john-earnest-the-suspect-in-the-poway-synagogue-shooting>.

¹⁹⁶ Van Grove.

ties to the San Diego community, although online postings suggest a preoccupation with advancing a revolution to preserve the European race.”¹⁹⁷

Julie Makinen and Tom Kiskan highlight Earnest’s academic success and extracurricular involvement, writing, “The year he graduated, John T. Earnest was honored for his academic achievements along with about 30 other Mt. Carmel classmates in a program called F.A.C.E., or Fraternity of Academic and Civic Excellence.”¹⁹⁸ Makinen and Kiskan state the F.A.C.E. program contained a short bio and in it stated, “The accompanying text said Earnest had a GPA of 4.31, belonged to the varsity swim team, had taken many AP classes, and played the piano.”¹⁹⁹ He subsequently carried his academic success with him into college making the dean’s list twice in 2018, as a nursing student.²⁰⁰

With that said, Hitt highlights a concern expressed by fellow church member, Gerrit Groenewold, who noticed that Earnest “was quiet and just wanted to have contact.”²⁰¹ Groenewold added, “It’s not good if someone is that quiet. He needs to be part of the community, to let them know what is going on.”²⁰² Another former acquaintance, Molly Brown, who went to high school with Earnest, echoed similar concern about Earnest in a news interview, noting, “My best friend and I at the time, we noticed that he isolated himself. He kept to himself. Was very introverted and didn’t really smile that often.”²⁰³ She later added that, “Senior year he came out of his shell a little bit more and openly talked about his opinions in class. He seemed to subscribe to a lot of the alt-right viewpoints.”²⁰⁴

¹⁹⁷ Van Grove.

¹⁹⁸ Julie Makinen and Tom Kiskan, “San Diego Synagogue Shooting: What We Know about Suspect John Earnest,” *USA Today*, April 28, 2019, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2019/04/27/san-diego-synagogue-shooting-what-we-know-suspect-john-earnest/3605339002/>.

¹⁹⁹ Makinen and Kiskan, “San Diego Synagogue Shooting.”

²⁰⁰ Spagat, “Suspect in Synagogue Attack.”

²⁰¹ Hitt, “Poway Synagogue Shooting.”

²⁰² Hitt.

²⁰³ “Synagogue Shooting Suspect’s Former Classmate Speaks Out,” CBS Los Angeles, April 29, 2019, <https://losangeles.cbslocal.com/2019/04/29/synagogue-shooting-suspect-former-classmate/>.

²⁰⁴ CBS Los Angeles.

As far as his criminal history is concerned, Earnest had no prior run-ins with law enforcement and did not involve himself with drug use. Hitt writes, “Earnest was not known to law enforcement prior to the attack, authorities said, and has no known ties to white supremacist groups.”²⁰⁵ However, Earnest dabbled in criminal activity prior to committing his murders. He admitted in his manifesto, “I scorched a mosque in Escondido with gasoline a week after Brenton Tarrant’s sacrifice and they never found shit on me.”²⁰⁶ Although somewhat speculative, this act was likely borne out of a sense of motivation that Earnest more than likely felt following Tarrant’s shooting in New Zealand.

At first look, almost everything about John Earnest appeared to be pointing to a normal successful young man with a bright future, until it did not. As Earnest writes in his manifesto, “I willingly sacrifice my future—the future of having a fulfilling job, a loving wife, and amazing kids. I sacrifice this for the sake of my people. OUR people. I would die a thousand times over to prevent the doomed fate that the Jews have planned for my race.”²⁰⁷

B. ORGANIZATIONAL INSPIRATION AND RADICALIZATION HISTORY

Earnest’s motivation was largely influenced by other white supremacists who came before him and who espoused the same ideas. The most influential to Earnest was Brenton Tarrant, the Australian man who began firing his weapon in two mosques located in New Zealand which killed 51 people.²⁰⁸ In fact, Earnest writes in his manifesto, “Tarrant was a catalyst for me personally. He showed me that it could be done. And that it needed to be done. ‘WHY WON’T SOMEBODY DO SOMETHING? WHY WON’T SOMEBODY DO SOMETHING? WHY DON’T I DO SOMETHING?’—the most powerful words in

²⁰⁵ Hitt, “Poway Synagogue Shooting.”

²⁰⁶ John T. Earnest, “An Open Letter,” archive.org, April 27, 2019, <https://archive.org/details/john-ternest-manifesto-8chan-pol-april-27-2019-an-open-letter>.

²⁰⁷ Spagat, “Suspect in Synagogue Attack.

²⁰⁸ Emanuel Stoakes, “New Zealand’s Grief Turns to Joy as Mosque Shooter Brenton Tarrant is Sentenced to Life in Prison,” *The Washington Post*, August 27, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/brenton-tarrant-sentence-life-prison-new-zealand-christchurch-mosque-shooting/2020/08/26/ddb9dc2a-e76a-11ea-bf44-0d31c85838a5_story.html.

his entire manifesto.”²⁰⁹ Earnest also refers to Tarrant as a sacrifice and reveres his actions, so much so that he attempted to live stream his own crime just as Tarrant did. He also mentions Robert Bowers several times in his manifesto. Bowers murdered 11 people at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh in 2018, and within Earnest’s manifesto, he calls for a remembrance of their [Tarrant and Bowers] sacrifice.²¹⁰ With the deep level of Anti-Semitic overtones in his manifesto, it is unsurprising that Earnest also lists Adolf Hitler as a source of inspiration.²¹¹

Similar to Roof and Crusius, Earnest radicalized entirely online. Spagat writes, “Earnest frequented 8chan, a dark corner of the web where those disaffected by mainstream social media sites often post extremist, racist and violent views.”²¹² According to Georgia Wells and Ian Lovett, “In the statement Mr. Earnest allegedly posted to 8chan shortly before the shooting began, he offered gratitude to 8chan and said Mr. Tarrant had inspired him.”²¹³ Wells and Lovett also indicate that Earnest stated the following online about 8chan before the shooting, “I’ve only been lurking for a year and a half, yet, what I’ve learned here is priceless.”²¹⁴

Earnest used his Christianity as a source of justification for his radicalization. Earnest illustrates this justification throughout his manifesto, writing, “My God does not take kindly to the destruction of His creation. Especially one of the most beautiful, intelligent, and innovative races that He has created. Least of all at the hands of one of the most ugly, sinful, deceitful, cursed, and corrupt. My God understands why I did what I did.”²¹⁵ Later, he audaciously claims that action taken against Jews is not the perpetrator’s

²⁰⁹ Earnest, “An Open Letter.”

²¹⁰ Earnest.

²¹¹ Earnest.

²¹² Spagat, “Suspect in Synagogue Attack.”

²¹³ Georgia Wells and Ian Lovett, “‘So What’s His Kill Count?’: The Toxic Online World Where Mass Shooters Thrive,” *Wall Street Journal*, September 4, 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/inside-the-toxic-online-world-where-mass-shooters-thrive-11567608631>.

²¹⁴ Wells and Lovett, “‘So What’s His Kill Count?’”

²¹⁵ Earnest, “An Open Letter.”

fault but the fault of the Jews, writing, “The Jew has forced our hand, and our response is completely justified.”²¹⁶

C. MANIFESTO

Earnest starts his manifesto with a somewhat pompous inflection on his ancestry. He seemingly brags about his ancestry stating, “From my mother’s side I inherited the blood of very wealthy Yankees—intelligent, resourceful, uncompromising. From my father’s side I inherited the blood of poor Southern farmers—intelligent, musically gifted, self-sufficient.”²¹⁷ He appears to draw inspiration and justification from his lineage saying, “A part of my ancestors lives within me in this very moment. They are the reason that I am who I am. Their acts of bravery, ingenuity, and righteousness live on through me. Truly, I am blessed by God for such a magnificent bloodline.”²¹⁸

It is made evident through the words Earnest writes in his manifesto, that he is condoning White Genocide theory. According to Hankes et al. of the Southern Poverty Law Center, “White supremacists commonly blame Jewish people for what they call ‘white genocide,’ a false and pervasive conspiracy theory suggesting white people are deliberately and systematically being replaced by other races.”²¹⁹ Forest Cullings illustrates Earnest’s adherence to this theory by writing, “Similar to Roof and Crusius, Earnest subscribed to White Genocide theory, which emphasizes anticipated significance loss for whites if inaction persists. In other words, this terrorism-justifying ideology provided Roof and Earnest with a means, violence, to attaining significance for himself and whites as a whole.”²²⁰ For Earnest, the threat to whites originated from the Jews. Earnest demonstrates

²¹⁶ Earnest.

²¹⁷ Earnest.

²¹⁸ Earnest.

²¹⁹ Keegan Hankes, Rachel Janik, and Michael Edison Hayden, “Shooting at Poway Synagogue Underscores Link between Internet Radicalization and Violence,” Southern Poverty Law Center, April 28, 2019, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2019/04/28/shooting-poway-synagogue-underscores-link-between-internet-radicalization-and-violence>.

²²⁰ Forest Cullings, “Alt-right Influence on the Radicalization of White Nationalists in the United States, According to Significance Quest Theory” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2020), 49–60, <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/65496>.

his distaste for Jewish people writing, “Every Jew is responsible for the meticulously planned genocide of the European race. They act as a unit, and every Jew plays his part to enslave the other races around him—whether consciously or subconsciously. Their crimes are endless.”²²¹

He goes on to list numerous transgressions that he claims are the responsibility of the Jewish culture and finishes with, “their role in the murder of the Son of Man—that is the Christ.”²²² Earnest lists the crimes committed to include the following:

For lying and deceiving the public through their exorbitant role in news media; for using usury and banks to enslave nations in debt and control all finances for the purpose of funding evil; for their role in starting wars on a foundation of lies which have costed millions of lives throughout history; for their role in cultural Marxism and communism; for pushing degenerate propaganda in the form of entertainment; for their role in feminism which has enslaved women in sin; for causing many to fall into sin with their role in peddling pornography; for their role in voting for and funding politicians and organizations who use mass immigration to displace the European race; for their large role in every slave trade for the past two-thousand years; for promoting race mixing; for their cruel and bloody history of genocidal behavior; for their persecution of Christians of old (including the prophets of ancient Israel—Jeremiah, Isaiah, etc.), members of the early church (Stephen—whose death at the hands of the Jews was both heart-wrenching and rage-inducing), Christians of modern-day Syria and Palestine, and Christians in White nations; for their degenerate and abominable practices of sexual perversion and blood libel (you are not forgotten Simon of Trent, the horror that you and countless children have endured at the hands of the Jews will never be forgiven); for not speaking about these crimes; for not attempting to stop the members of their race from committing them.²²³

He adds, “Every Jew young and old has contributed to these. For these crimes they deserve nothing but hell. I will send them there.”²²⁴ The remaining content within his manifesto echoes a vehemently derogatory rhetoric towards Jews and their supposed wrongdoings.

²²¹ Earnest, “An Open Letter.”

²²² Earnest.

²²³ Earnest.

²²⁴ Earnest.

D. COMPARISON

As with previous chapters, the aforementioned information about Earnest is applied to each component within the following models. This comparison between the models further allows an understanding of the radicalization process of not only John Earnest but also in general, domestic white extremists as well.

1. The Staircase Model

The beginning floor, or ground floor in the Staircase Model, on which most people reside, is the Psychological Interpretation of Material Condition. As noted in the previous chapters, according to Moghaddam it is, “where what matters most are perceptions of fairness and just treatment.”²²⁵ Earnest focused his hatred toward the Jewish community, claiming that every Jewish person was directly responsible for the planned genocide of the European race and the enslavement of other races.²²⁶ According to Cullings, “Earnest emphasizes Jewish culpability for a wide variety of historic and contemporary atrocities committed against white European descendants and Christians including their ‘enslavement’ of other races and promotion of mass immigration.”²²⁷ To Earnest, the feeling of relative deprivation and perceived injustice originated with these unforgivable sins, which he perceived as a direct threat to multiple races—most importantly for Earnest, the collective European race. Moghaddam states, “In conditions in which the millions of people who occupy the ground floor perceive injustice and feel relatively deprived, some individuals from among the disgruntled population will climb to the first floor in search of solutions.”²²⁸ That trajectory is exactly the one Earnest followed.

With that being said, next is the first floor, Perceived Options to Fight Unfair Treatment. Moghaddam explains that, “Those who reach the first floor seek ways in which to improve their situation and achieve greater justice.”²²⁹ Earnest perceives little to no

²²⁵ Moghaddam, “The Staircase to Terrorism,” 162.

²²⁶ Earnest, “An Open Letter.”

²²⁷ Cullings, “Alt-right Influence,” 51.

²²⁸ Moghaddam, “The Staircase to Terrorism,” 162.

²²⁹ Moghaddam, 162.

other option but to take action against the Jewish culture. He refers to Tarrant's call for action as the most powerful words in his predecessors' manifesto, which indicates his support for taking violent action. Additionally, Earnest states in his own manifesto, "It is unlawful and cowardly to stand on the sidelines as the European people are genocided [sic] around you. I did not want to have to kill Jews. But they have given us no other option."²³⁰ To illustrate further, Earnest writes:

What value does my life have compared to the entirety of the European race? Is it worth it for me to live a comfortable life at the cost of international Jewry sealing the doom of my race? No. I will not sell my soul by sitting idly by as evil grows. I'd rather die in glory or spend the rest of my life in prison than waste away knowing that I did nothing to stop this evil.²³¹

To Earnest, the only option was to take matters into his own hands and act.

Those who adamantly and even violently blame someone else or another group of people for that person's own perceived problems climb out of the first floor and onto the second floor, Displacement of Aggression.²³² Displaced aggression results when a person responds to anger by taking retaliatory action out on someone or something other than the initial trigger.²³³ Earnest did not take retaliatory action on someone other than his initial provocateur. From the beginning of his manifesto, and continually throughout, he blames Jews for a multitude of crimes committed, especially against the European race. His initial provocations were those perceived crimes carried out intentionally by Jews, and therefore, his aggression was not displaced but remained constant toward those identified as Jews.

The next floor is Moral Engagement. Moghaddam explains moral engagement as it relates to a tactic employed by Islamic terrorist organizations stating, "The terrorist organization becomes effective by mobilizing sufficient resources to persuade recruits to become disengaged from morality as it is defined by government authorities (and often by the majority in society) and morally engaged in the way morality is constructed by the

²³⁰ Earnest, "An Open Letter."

²³¹ Earnest.

²³² Moghaddam, "The Staircase to Terrorism," 164.

²³³ Miller et al., "A Theoretical Model," 75-97.

terrorist organization.”²³⁴ He goes on to credit Joyce Davis with stating, “In the context of the Islamic world, terrorist organizations have fed on interpretations of Islam that laud what outsiders see as acts of terrorism but that terrorists depict as martyrdom toward a just goal.”²³⁵ Earnest did not have a terrorist organization actively recruiting him nor pouring resources into forming his morality; however, he did spend a significant amount of his time on 8chan where, no doubt, he developed his chauvinistic way of thinking. Furthermore, like the Islamic terrorists’ depiction of violent action as martyrdom, Earnest saw his actions as pure and sacrificial. He illustrates this point by writing in his manifesto, “As more of these [violent attacks] happen, we will no longer need to film it. I do believe that it is best at this stage that I make a statement and people know that I did this. We are in the early stages of revolution. We need martyrs.”²³⁶ It is clear that Earnest has fallen away from the morality Moghaddam says is determined by the majority in society and has engaged in a morality that condones violent retaliation for the perceived wrong-doings of the Jewish culture for thousands of years.

Continuing to climb this Staircase to Terrorism, the next floor is Solidification of Categorical Thinking and the Perceived Legitimacy of the Terrorist Organization. The fourth floor poses challenges in the application to Earnest’s radicalization. He was not part of any particular white nationalist organization, and as previously stated, was not recruited by any extremist organization either. Moghaddam describes the goal of this floor as instilling a sense of togetherness amongst new recruits in an effort to strengthen the recruit’s commitment to the terrorists’ cause and increase the organizations legitimacy.²³⁷ Earnest’s lone wolf demeanor does not fit Moghaddam’s fourth floor in a tangible sense; however, with the amount of time Earnest spent online dabbling in white-nationalist websites, such as 8chan, he may have felt that sense of togetherness by reading like-minded posts from others around the world. From this point forward, it would be possible that he

²³⁴ Moghaddam, “The Staircase to Terrorism,” 165.

²³⁵ Moghaddam, 165.

²³⁶ Earnest, “An Open Letter.”

²³⁷ Moghaddam, “The Staircase to Terrorism,” 166.

felt a sense of legitimacy to the white nationalist community as a whole, which reaffirms his discriminatory mentality.

The last floor is, The Terrorist Act and Sidestepping Inhibitory Mechanisms. Moghaddam refers to Konrad Lorenz's coined term "inhibitory mechanisms" as a means that serves to limit interspecies killings.²³⁸ Moghaddam adds, inhibitory mechanisms "can be triggered through eye contact, pleading, crying, and other means when an attacker is in close proximity to a victim."²³⁹ With that being said, Earnest clearly did not have a problem with sidestepping any of these triggering actions. One reason for being able to sidestep these inhibitory mechanisms may be similar to the way Islamic terrorists sidestep them, which is, according to Moghaddam, "By categorizing the target, including civilians, as the enemy and exaggerating differences between the in-group and the out-group, terrorists psychologically distance themselves from the other humans they intend to destroy."²⁴⁰ Earnest categorized Jews as the target and painted them as the enemy and focused on their alleged transgressions against the European race and their many other crimes. In this way, he emotionally and mentally distanced himself from Jewish people to the point at which he only saw them as a cancer that needed removed. Additionally, Moghaddam highlights another factor that leads to inhibitory mechanisms being sidestepped, "The victims seldom become aware of the impending danger before the attack actually occurs, so they do not have an opportunity to behave in ways that might trigger inhibitory mechanisms."²⁴¹ With that being said, no one knew of Earnest's forthcoming attack, including those closest to him, during Passover week, and therefore, the victims were surprised, which resulted in their loss of any opportunity to employ inhibitory mechanisms.

The application of this model appears to be substantial with relation to John Earnest's radicalization into violent action. Absent a terrorist organization's tangible and

²³⁸ Moghaddam, 166.

²³⁹ Moghaddam, 166.

²⁴⁰ Moghaddam, 166.

²⁴¹ Moghaddam, 166.

direct influence on a radical Islamic recruit's violent action, much of the remaining components of Moghaddam's model can be directly applied to Earnest's radicalization.

2. The Radicalization Puzzle "Model"

The next model to be analyzed for application to John Earnest is Hafez and Mullin's Radicalization Puzzle, which looks at several factors, called pieces, involved in Islamic radicalization. Each of these puzzle pieces, that Hafez and Mullin's refer to, plays a major role in a person's path to radicalization, and they can gradually occur at various times. These pieces include grievances, networks, ideologies, and enabling environments and support structures.

Grievances constitute the first puzzle piece being examined; however, it does not mean that it has to be the first piece of the four aforementioned pieces in this model's explanation of the radicalization process to occur. According to Hafez, grievances include cultural and economic alienation, a sense of victimization, disagreements with foreign policies of states, personal disaffection, loss, or crises.²⁴² With regard to Earnest, with a loving family, friends, and a promising future, it is difficult to pinpoint a source of grievance in his life. The closest source of grievance that would apply would be his personal disaffection and slight amount of social disenchantment. Although he was an astute student, musician, and athlete, his aloof nature labeled him a loner and extremely introverted. As stated previously, multiple accounts from former colleagues or associates remember Earnest as quiet, reserved, or to himself, with one person recalling him only opening up while in advanced placement (AP) government class. With his academic, musical, and athletic success, options for positive social interaction were prevalent; thus, his personal disaffection and social disenchantment seem to be largely a personal choice.

Networks compose the next piece to the radicalization puzzle. Simply put, Hafez and Mullins explain, "networks refer to preexisting kinship and friendship ties between ordinary individuals and radicals that lead to the diffusion of extreme beliefs."²⁴³ No

²⁴² Hafez and Mullins, "The Radicalization Puzzle," 961.

²⁴³ Hafez and Mullins, 961.

evidence exists that points to Earnest having any sort of kinship or friendship ties that led him to fall prey to such bigoted anti-Semitic views. Instead, he found his form of network perusing through fringe social sites, such as 8chan, where he spent a significant amount of his time. Hafez and Mullins further mention, “These milieus not only offer opportunities for socialization with radicals, they could also satisfy psychological needs, such as the search for meaningful relationships and a quest for significance, and they may entrap individuals through dynamics of peer pressure, groupthink, and ideological encapsulation that increase exit costs and solidify commitments to violence.”²⁴⁴ It is likely that Earnest felt acceptance and belonging while surfing these extremist sites because of the shared radical mentality pervading throughout the users. Davis and Winkley contrast this newer form of online networks to that of networks formed by traditional extremist groups. They write, “Unlike the traditional Ku Klux Klan or skinhead gangs, these online communities lack hierarchy, organization and face-to-face connections that have bonded acolytes in the past. The forums have instead created loosely affiliated networks of like-minded people who can easily and anonymously engage from the privacy of their homes.”²⁴⁵ Furthermore, the users of 8chan and other similar sites offer praise to those who take violent action. Such praise could have facilitated a sense of connectedness and approval of the extreme ideals Earnest held. This point is applicable to Earnest as he writes in his manifesto, “To those who are brave—know that your sacrifice is the greatest act of love for your race. Your sacrifice will be remembered. Always.”²⁴⁶

Another possible network source could be found in the online video game, Minecraft. Earnest talks about the high score or kill count several times throughout his manifesto, which is a reference to Minecraft. He even writes, with a tone of admiration, “It is so easy to log on to Minecraft and get away with burning a synagogue (or mosque) to the ground if you’re smart about it. You can even shoot up a mosque, synagogue,

²⁴⁴ Hafez and Mullins, 961.

²⁴⁵ Kristina Davis and Lyndsay Winkley, “Online Forums Pave Evolution of Hate Views; 8chan and Other Sites Incubate Far-Right Extremism that Shaped Alleged Poway Killer,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 5, 2019, B1, ProQuest.

²⁴⁶ Earnest, “An Open Letter.”

immigration center, traitorous politicians, wealthy Jews in gated communities, Jewish-owned company buildings, etc., and get away with it as well.”²⁴⁷ In these online video games, it appears that user are in control and can escape to a world where they are accepted and may even provide an opportunity for the user to live out their potential extremist dreams.

Ideology is the next piece in Hafez and Mullin’s puzzle model. Hafez and Mullins write, “Ideological narratives and themes are almost always present in the production of violent extremists.”²⁴⁸ Furthermore, Hafez and Mullins add, “Radical movements rooted in political ideologies usually identify a problematic social condition, attribute a root cause to this state of affairs, and propose a course of action in the form of programmatic steps or stages necessary for transformation.”²⁴⁹ Earnest subscribed to the problematic social condition of white genocide theory, legitimately believing that the white race was being erased by “intruders,” and in this case, the Jewish culture. Additionally, Hafez credits Carrie Rosefsky Wickham with the idea that, “Ideology can facilitate the reprioritization of values so that material benefits, career, family, or personal risk take a back seat to collective identity, transcendental values, and group solidarity.”²⁵⁰ As noted earlier, Earnest had a loving family, friends, was very good at music and academics and participated in sports, yet he states the following in his manifesto:

To my family and friends. I can already hear your voices. “How could you throw your life away? You had everything! You had a loving family. You had great friends. You had a church. You were doing well in nursing school. You could have gone so far in your field of study. You could have made so much money and started a happy family of your own.” I understand why you would ask this. But I pose a question to you now. What value does my life have compared to the entirety of the European race? Is it worth it for me to live a comfortable life at the cost of international Jewry sealing the doom of my race? No. I will not sell my soul by sitting idly by as evil grows.

²⁴⁷ Earnest.

²⁴⁸ Hafez and Mullins, “The Radicalization Puzzle,” 966.

²⁴⁹ Hafez and Mullins, 966.

²⁵⁰ Hafez and Mullins, 967.

I'd rather die in glory or spend the rest of my life in prison than waste away knowing that I did nothing to stop this evil.²⁵¹

Clearly Earnest's ideology facilitated a reprioritization of values to the point that he would throw away his promising future for the "benefit" of the collective society Earnest sees as the threatened white race.

The last piece to be covered is Enabling Environments and Support Structures, which includes "internet, social media, or access to foreign terrorist training camps."²⁵² Of these examples listed, the internet and social media are what influenced Earnest's radicalization. In this case, enabling environments and networks are very similar, as the environment Earnest radicalized within was virtual. With that said, the significant time he spent on social media fringe sites, such as 8chan, provided him plenty of exposure to like-minded people who promoted violent action. Cullings writes, "It was on one of these platforms, 8chan, which Earnest found a community of white nationalists who spouted hateful ideologies and promoted and celebrated violence carried out against Muslims, Jews, and immigrants."²⁵³ Additionally, the ADL claims that 8chan "serves as a platform for radicalization, providing new members (known as "newfags") with exposure to white supremacist propaganda and grievances—and even to participate in calls to action."²⁵⁴ Hafez and Mullins indicate the significance of the radicalization process by noting that various social media platforms "provide horizontal communication that is user-generated, inter-active, instantaneous, highly personalized, and easily mobile. As such, they could assist in forging a sense of communal belonging that is likely to appeal to some alienated individuals."²⁵⁵ Escaping to a virtual environment that enabled Earnest to voice his radical ideals enabled him to continue down the path to violence.

²⁵¹ Earnest, "An Open Letter.

²⁵² Hafez and Mullins, "The Radicalization Puzzle, 968.

²⁵³ Cullings, "Alt-right Influence," 60.

²⁵⁴ "Hatechan: The Hate and Violence-Filled Legacy of 8chan," Anti-Defamation League, August 7, 2019, <https://www.adl.org/blog/hatechan-the-hate-and-violence-filled-legacy-of-8chan>.

²⁵⁵ Hafez and Mullins, "The Radicalization Puzzle," 969.

E. CONCLUSION

The examination of the previous stated radicalization models provides a comprehensive understanding of how John Earnest radicalized to the point of violent action. The application of each model is fairly fluid. However, the Radicalization Puzzle offers a better overall analysis and explanation of Earnest's particular radicalization.

The one puzzle piece that may present a sticking point for some in the Hafez and Mullins model is grievances. This piece is still very applicable; it is just not as clearly identified in Earnest's case due to his positive and encouraging upbringing. Despite the slightly more convoluted application of the first puzzle piece to Earnest's case, an examination of the contents of every piece of the Radicalization Puzzle resulted in a practical application that was easily identified.

Moghaddam's Staircase model, on the other hand, struggles to find comparable applicability within each floor when compared to each piece of Hafez and Mullins' Puzzle model. In particular, with the second and fourth floors, Displaced Aggression and Solidification of Categorical Thinking and the Perceived Legitimacy of the Terrorist Organization, any attempt to associate those floors with Earnest's radicalization struggles because both floors are heavily reliant on a person being physically part of a terrorist organization. While Earnest is labeled as a white nationalist, as stated previously, he was not directly involved with any organization. Also, like Roof and Crusius, previously studied, Earnest radicalized online by himself, which rendered the application of these two floors subpar.

V. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This thesis sought to answer the question, how well do the models for radicalization aimed at domestic Islamist extremism apply to non-Islamic domestic extremists? It applied two models for Islamic radicalization, the Staircase Model offered by Moghaddam, and the Radicalization Puzzle offered by Hafez and Mullins, to three case studies of domestic terrorism within the United States. This thesis determined that substantial evidence exists supporting a strong association between these models and the radicalization of each of the extremists studied.

A. SUMMARY

This thesis reached that determination by establishing in Chapter I the significant threat that domestic extremism has become in the United States. It is no longer, statistically, the international Islamic terrorist threat that plagues the United States, but rather the domestic extremist. DHS reiterates this emerging threat, noting, “Domestic terrorists—a phrase typically used to denote terrorists who are not directed or inspired by FTOs [Foreign Terrorist Organizations]—have caused more deaths in the United States in recent years than have terrorists connected to FTOs.”²⁵⁶ The subsequent three chapters first provided an analysis of the lives of Dylann Roof, Patrick Crusius, and John Earnest, three extreme white nationalists driven by their bigoted views and motivated by their far-right extremist predecessors to carry out fatal atrocities. Specifically, a look was taken into each individual’s background or upbringing, their organizational inspirations or other motivations, and their manifestos were examined for both common and distinct factors. The information gathered was then analytically applied to the components comprising the two-radicalization models noted previously. Applying the information gathered, gave an opportunity to decipher whether the level of application was significant enough possibly to explain the radicalization of domestic extremists.

²⁵⁶ Department of Homeland Security, *Department of Homeland Security Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism and Targeted Violence* (Washington, DC: Department of Homeland Security 2019), https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/19_0920_plcy_strategic-framework-countering-terrorism-targeted-violence.pdf.

Throughout this research process, several bits of information have become clear. These case studies revealed that racist ideologies could be held by anyone with little to no revealing characteristics. In other words, no singular description appears that depicts who will become a violent extremist. For example, Roof and Crusius were very quiet, to themselves and considered loners and although Earnest was also quiet and somewhat to himself, he had friends, did very well in school, participated in sports, went to church, and was praised for his musical abilities. Very limited if any instances occurred that would have warranted concern from anyone of his impending violence. To reinforce this point, Randy Borum states, “If the profile is the gatekeeper of who poses a threat, defenders will be soundly defeated by a known, but unfamiliar-looking enemy.”²⁵⁷ It is thus very difficult to identify, in advance, someone who will radicalize. Another point the case studies revealed is that the origin or tipping point that leads someone to the next Google search that leads them to the eventual violent extremist act is something that seems as though can happen for no particular reason. Roof admitted that the Trayvon Martin case was his tipping point that led him to a series of online searches and eventually to the white nationalist websites he frequented. However, it is unclear as to why it became the tipping point for Roof other than he just “couldn’t understand what the big deal was.”²⁵⁸ Roof even says that because of looking up the Trayvon Martin case, “for some reason it made me type in black on white crime,”²⁵⁹ which indicates that there seems to have been no known reason even to him. Crusius is another example in which no reason appears for why he radicalized in the first place. Lorenzo Vidino highlights this issue by stating, “Yet few issues have proven more divisive and controversial among experts, both within and outside government, than trying to identify the reasons that drive people to embrace radical views and then to act on them in violent ways.”²⁶⁰

²⁵⁷ Randy Borum, *Psychology of Terrorism* (Tampa, FL: University of South Florida, 2004), 37.

²⁵⁸ YouTube, “Watch: Dylann Roof’s Confession FBI Agents.”

²⁵⁹ YouTube.

²⁶⁰ Lorenzo Vidino, *Countering Radicalization in America Lessons from Europe* (Washington, DC: United States Institute for Peace, 2010), 3.

Additionally, these case studies revealed that the process of radicalization for domestic right-wing extremists is, in general, very similar to the process in which Islamists radicalize, as seen from the models studied. With that being said, the areas that saw some minor, yet distinct, differences were found in Hafez and Mullin's Networks piece of the Radicalization Puzzle and the Perceived Legitimacy of the Terrorist Organization, found in the fourth floor of Moghaddam's Staircase Model. The biggest difference with regard to the networks is, Hafez and Mullins claim the networks are comprised of familial or non-extremists who join the network and then adopt friendship connections and thus radical views.²⁶¹ However, as seen from the analysis within each chapter, none of the three individuals studied had family or friendship ties to extreme ideologies, or bigoted views for that matter. Instead, their extremist networks formed through online fringe sights like 8chan. This network, like the Islamic radicalization networks, provided a similar like-minded and influential atmosphere without being physically present in the network. Reflecting on the hypothesis provided in Chapter I, the second hypothesis is supported by way of these online networks. Hypothesis 2 stated that social media platforms provide a leading pathway for radicalization and recruitment among domestic terrorists, that resulted in single-actor attacks and few interpersonal connections among domestic extremists prior to their domestic attacks. The other difference is with Moghaddam's fourth floor and is much greater. This floor relies heavily on the recruitment and influence the terrorist organization has on a person. Roof, Crusius, and Earnest did not have any of the influences of a tangible organization and were not recruited, which rendered its application null.

B. CONCLUSION

After examining Roof, Crusius, and Earnest, it is clear to see how well their radicalization journey's fit into the existing Islamist radicalization models. As such, the purpose of this thesis was to identify whether the aforementioned question could be answered with a significant level of application or otherwise. Consequently, the conclusion was reached, based on an effort to answer the question, that a significant correlation existed

²⁶¹ Hafez and Mullins, "The Radicalization Puzzle," 961.

between the Islamic Radicalization models and processes in which domestic extremists radicalize.

Furthermore, this strong correlation indicates a possible direct, albeit slightly modified, application of existing Islamic radicalization models to domestic extremist radicalization in general. The significance of such direct application lies in that these models provide a solid foundation in which to develop future models specifically geared towards explaining the radicalization of far-right domestic extremists. In other words, it is not necessary to reinvent the wheel with reference to constructing domestic radicalization models from scratch. Using these future developed models may be able to increase significantly the ability to identify a person's source of and development into radicalization. As a result, authorities may be able to use the information gathered from these models and aid in tracking potential imminent violent attacks, and perhaps stop them before such attacks occur.

Additionally, it appears that the boom in the online atmosphere over the last decade or so has played a significant role in the radicalization process of domestic extremists, as evidenced from these three case studies.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS

A few recommendations can be made based on the findings of this thesis. First, DHS should utilize the Islamic radicalization models from Hafez and Mullins and Moghaddam as a framework to develop radicalization models aimed at domestic extremism. With that said, it would also be recommended to alter the terrorist's organizational influence in such a way as to focus much more on the influences of online fringe social media sites and how to limit the exposure of their contents to people.

With the continuous growth of the technological world, DHS should dedicate a fair amount of focus to perusing through the fringe social media sites and monitoring hateful speech and speech that incites violence.

Lastly, continued research and analytical application of existing models of radicalization with a greater number of domestic extremists to analyze, will offer a deeper

look into the claim this thesis holds, that one size does indeed fit most as it relates to existing Islamic radicalization models explaining domestic extremists' radicalization.

D. AREAS OF FURTHER RESEARCH

With any study, it is important to continue to research and refine. Areas of further research with reference to this topic are threefold. First, all three individuals studied were extreme far-right white nationalists. Therefore, it would be beneficial for further research to focus on additional subjects who identify as far left extremists. This focus would allow any different idiosyncrasies to be identified and compared to the radicalization models used in this thesis to see if the correlation remained strong.

Additionally, the environment in which Roof, Crusius, and Earnest radicalized was all online. Therefore, it would be useful to study some domestic extremists who radicalized mostly, if not entirely, within a physical group, vice online. This approach would theoretically be closer in relation to the Islamic radicalization models because of the physical influence from a like-minded group, which was absent in these case studies.

Lastly, while this thesis offered a comparative analysis between the Islamic radicalization models and the application to domestic extremists, it was not the focus of this thesis to touch on deradicalization efforts. Deradicalization efforts and the resources available for Islamic radicals and HVEs have been established and employed. Consequently, because of the significant threat that domestic extremists pose within the United States, it is absolutely imperative that, once a better understanding is established of how domestic extremists radicalize, resources are allotted to aid in the creation of deradicalization options or programs for domestic extremists.

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