

Reflections on the Radicalization of Young Moroccans

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Brief Analysis

November 15, 2017

Following the attacks in Barcelona and Cambrils, the magazine Jeune Afrique devoted the cover of its August 27, 2017 paper edition to the involvement of Moroccans in acts of terrorism, with the title: "Terrorism: Born in Morocco." This provoked a great deal of criticism and anger in Morocco.

These radicals are members of the Moroccan diaspora in Europe, often second- or third-generation. Several media sources have focused on this phenomenon in an attempt to understand why, bearing in mind that Morocco is one of the few countries in its region that enjoys lasting political stability, exemplary religious tolerance, and notable openness towards others. Furthermore, Morocco has, for a long time, diligently fought terrorism with much firmness and determination on its own soil, in addition to actively helping European countries.

However, Morocco as a country has nothing to do with the radicalization of its grandchildren in Europe. Their radicalization took place in Europe, as a result of cultural and professional marginalization, stigmatization, latent and active racism, Islamophobia, and even generational conflicts. They do not feel a sense of belonging to their country of origin or extraction, nor to their country of adoption or birth. In principle, they have evolved into an easy prey for brainwashing by religious radicals. Indeed, since the establishment of jihad in Afghanistan in the 1980s, many religious organizations—such as al-Qaeda then and the Islamic State today—have taken upon themselves the recovery of such “abandoned” youth, branded by their countries of origin as “black sheep.”

In the 1950's Europe was in great need of laborers for reconstruction. Recruiters crisscrossed the mountains of North Africa in search of young, healthy men for the task. The majority of these youth were illiterate, and many spoke only the Amazigh language. On arrival in Europe, they were first housed in ghettos, and a few years later they returned to North Africa on vacation with money and gifts. This aroused the admiration and jealousy of those who remained behind, who in turn did everything possible to immigrate to Europe, to share in its rumored wealth. Given the difficulty of acquiring a passport minted by corrupt officials, many used the same passport with different photos to enter Europe. European governments, aware of this illegal practice, turned the other way and used this cheap workforce for their thriving economies.

To better accommodate its immigrants, Europe made it possible in the 1970's, for family repatriation. Young people

were born on European soil and grew up in liberal democracies. Many took the opportunity to study, but some took the wrong path and engaged in various criminal enterprises. Today this latter group are the black sheep and, unlike their relatives attached to their country of origin and its culture and values, they have had a great challenge with identity and belonging; their families are too traditional, and their European country of birth too stigmatizing.

Thus, this culturally and psychologically traumatized youth have become easy prey to centers of Wahhabi inspiration and religious ideology, having generous access to the petrodollars of the Gulf countries. Once in the arms of these master manipulators, wrapped in a disfigured and violent version of Islam, they were gratified by easy money and comfortable belonging sought after and desired, with, as a bonus, the tempting promise of paradise and its innumerable delights.

European politicians have always preached multiculturalism and integration, and yet many Muslims all over Europe have felt marginalized on the grounds of their culture and creed. The existence, today, of the French cités, banlieues, Molenbeek in Belgium, and various ghettos throughout Europe and several other European cities commandeered by radicalism are sound proof that Europe's integration policies have failed.

For some time, the United States has praised Morocco for its efforts and actions in fighting global terrorism. Bearing this in mind, one wonders how Morocco can be a "heartland of global terrorism." Radical Islamist terrorism inflicted on Europe over the past decade is homegrown, and the countries of the perpetrators' parents and grandparents, cannot and should not be made responsible for these ignoble and horrible acts. This misbehavior on the part of Muslim youth is the result of marginalization in their countries of birth because of their culture, creed, and color. It is the responsibility of European governments to have more inclusive policies vis-à-vis their citizens, whoever they are. ♦♦

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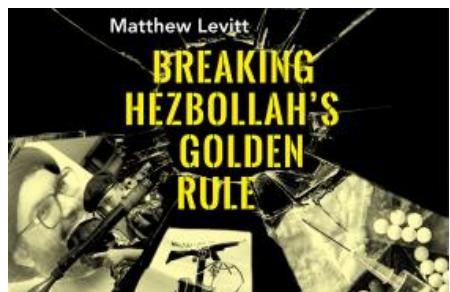
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