

MEIJI INSTITUTE FOR GLOBAL AFFAIRS

MIGA Column “Global Diagnosis”

September 19, 2017

Kei Nakagawa

Research Director, Meiji Institute for Global Affairs, Meiji University

Short Curriculum Vitae: Kei Nakagawa

Research Director, Meiji University Meiji Institute for Global Affairs; Professor, Faculty of Social Sciences, Hagoromo University of International Studies; and Ph.D., University of Tokyo

Assumed her present post after working as a Visiting Researcher at the Mohammed V University (Rabat), a Post Doctoral Research Fellow of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, Researcher and Cultural Attaché at the Embassy of Japan to Tunisia, and Visiting Professor at the Meiji University Meiji Institute for Global Affairs. Her specialty is Middle Eastern and North African studies. Her area of special competence is North African political history and contemporary politics. She worked as an international electoral observer during the November 2011 and October 2016 legislative elections in the Kingdom of Morocco.

Can Terrorism in Europe be Reduced? Comments on the Terrorism Incidents in Catalonia

In August of this year, a terrorist attack occurred in Catalonia, the northeastern part of Spain. On the 17th of that month, a van drove into pedestrians on Las Ramblas, a principle avenue in the central part of Barcelona, killing 13 and injuring more than 120. On the preceding night of the 16th, an explosion occurred at a house in the city of Alcanar, about 200 kilometers south of Barcelona. It is thought that the house was used for manufacturing explosives by the group of suspects. And on the 18th, the day after the terrorism in Barcelona, a car was driven toward pedestrians in the city of Cambrils, about 120 minutes southwest of Barcelona. The police shot and killed all

five persons who were in the car.

In an article he submitted to *Le Monde*, the French sociologist Farhad Khosrokhavar, an expert on Middle Eastern affairs, pointed out that the majority of the suspects were Moroccan, and went as far as to say that Morocco was exporting jihadists. He also maintained that the Amazighs (Berbers), who are the indigenous people of North Africa, were prone to run to jihadism. As for the reason why, he speculated that the Amazighs, who have been oppressed by the Moroccan government, emigrate to Europe as victimized weak whose dignity has been hurt. In his view, the second-generation immigrants find themselves in the predicament of being recognized as citizens neither in the country of their parents nor in the country of immigration where they were born and grew up, and therefore gravitate toward jihadism¹.

Is “oppression” in Morocco the cause?

However, this assertion of Khosrokhavar’s must be termed substantially unfounded if one considers the current realities of Morocco and Moroccan emigration to Europe. First, let us look at the status of Amazighs in Morocco. As the indigenous people of North Africa, the Amazighs inhabited the region from before the arrival of Arabs with Islam in the 7th century. Their descendants still live in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and other countries.

Their social status differs substantially from country to country. In Algeria, which the French directly controlled as a colony for the long period of more than a century, the Amazighs used to live mainly in Kabylia, in the mountainous northern part of the country. Because some are born with blue eyes and blond hair, they were regarded as the descendants of the Romans, who once dominated the whole Mediterranean coast, and were given preferential treatment in distinction to the majority Arab population. As a result, when Algeria achieved its independence and deployed policy for the swift spread of Arabic language, the Amazigh culture and language became the target of

¹Farhad Khosrokhavar, “ « Le Maroc exporte ses djihadistes », *Le Monde*, 23.08.2017. (http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2017/08/23/farhad-khosrokhavar-le-maroc-exporte-ses-djihadistes_5175307_3232.html : Retrieved on September 2, 2017)

oppression. Many of the Algerians who emigrated to France are of Amazigh heritage and have strong secular tendencies. It might be noted that the famed ex-football player Zidane is an Amazigh whose family came from Kabylia.

Morocco has a higher rate of Amazighs than even Algeria. Amazighs account for more than half of its entire population. Morocco was a protectorate of France, which hammered out policy favoring Amazighs, as it did in Algeria. In Morocco, however, the Amazighs and Arabs joined as brothers in the spread of the movement opposed to the French protectorate government. Furthermore, unlike the case in Algeria, where Amazigh elements became targets of oppression, the Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture was established in Morocco, where it is also easy to buy textbooks of the Amazigh language at bookstores. Morocco also has newspapers and TV programs in the Amazigh language. Under the current constitution promulgated in 2011, Amazigh is stipulated as a national language alongside Arabic. There is no distinction between Amazighs and Arabs in the national census, and no notation of ethnicity on ID cards. In fact, there is fairly widespread intermarriage between the two ethnic groups, and in many cases, such a distinction could not be made.

In any analysis of the recent terrorism in Spain, it would therefore be rather unreasonable to attribute the negative psychological condition of Moroccans who emigrate to Europe to “oppression against the Amazighs in Morocco.”

Of which country are second-generation immigrants considered citizens?

Another point made by Khosrokhavar is that Amazighs gravitate toward jihadism because of their inability to be recognized as citizens in either the country of their parents or the country of immigration. As noted above, however, the claim of “oppression” against Amazighs does not reflect the realities in Morocco, and it would consequently be difficult to assert that the first-generation immigrants, meaning the parents of the terrorism suspects, were not recognized as citizens of the country before they left Morocco. Many of the second-generation immigrants were born in the receiving country or taken there by their parents at a very young age and brought up there. In other words, for the second-generation immigrants, the receiving country has

been the basic stage of their life activities for just about as long as they can remember. It is not true that they were “rejected” in Moroccan society and so emigrated to Spain. On the contrary, they viewed themselves as citizens of the receiving country. The problem is that, in spite of this awareness, they did not feel completely recognized as citizens in the society there.

Many of the suspects in the terrorism recently occurred in Catalonia had lived in Spain from early childhood. The group of suspects includes four pairs of brothers. In the case of the Abouyaaqoub brothers, the elder one Younes, who drove the van in the Barcelona attack, came to Spain with his parents at age 7, and the younger one Houssaine, who was shot dead by the Catalan police in Cambrils, at age 4.

The story is similar for the Hychami brothers, who also were suspects in the Cambrils attack and shot dead by the police. The elder one Mohamed was brought to Spain at age 6, and the younger one Omar, at age 3. (The parents of the Abouyaaqoub and Hychami brothers all hailed from Mrit in Central Morocco, and the pairs of brothers were cousins.)

In the case of the Aallaa brothers, the younger one Said (who was shot dead by the police in Cambrils) emigrated to Spain at age 8, and the elder one Youssef (who apparently died in the explosion at Alcanar), at age 11.

In that of the Oukabir brothers, the elder one Driss emigrated to Spain at age 10. Driss was arrested by the police in Ripoll, about 90 kilometers north of Barcelona, after his ID card was found in the van that had been used in the terrorist attack there. Police figured that his ID had been used to rent the van. The younger brother Moussa was shot dead by the police in Cambrils. He was born to immigrant parents in Spain and had Spanish citizenship.

Mohamed Houli Chemlal, who was injured in the Alcanar explosion and arrested by the police, was taken to Spain by his parents when he was six months old, and has Spanish citizenship.

He presumably was part of the group making explosives in Alcanar that was led by the imam (religious leader) Abdelbaki Es Satty, who was a proponent of extremist

Islamic ideology (he was apparently killed in the explosion). Satty was the imam of the mosque in Ripoll, where many of the young suspects lived.

According to the UK newspaper The Guardian, the 45-year-old Satty was also a Moroccan, had been jailed in a prison on the outskirts of Valencia after his arrest and conviction on a charge of drug trafficking. It was during this incarceration that he met Rachid Aglif, who was also serving time there for his involvement in the 2004 Madrid train bombings that killed more than 190 and injured about 2,000. He was released from prison in January 2012. He began living in Ripoll in 2015, but stayed in Brussels, Belgium from January to March of 2016. It was the same March in which 32 people lost their lives in the terrorist attacks at Brussels Airport². In April 2016, Satty returned to Ripoll and became the imam of its mosque. There, he made the acquaintance of Moussa Oukabir, who was then 17 years old, and his friends³.

According to the Spanish newspaper El País, the residents of Ripoll all said that the young suspects were “good people” and had “well-integrated in the community⁴.” The youths who presented no problems on the surface and appeared to have assimilated into Spanish society probably became imbued with extremist thought through their contact with the extremist imam and the Internet.

Exclusion is not the solution

Why they were indoctrinated with extremist thought within such a short time?

The results of a survey released by a French non-governmental organization in 2016 found that about 80 percent of the households in which youths who came to hold

²The Guardian, “Spanish police focus on Ripoll imam who vanished before terror attacks,” 21st August 2017

(<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/aug/20/ripoll-the-small-town-home-to-the-barcelona-and-cambriels-attackers> : Retrieved on September 10, 2017)

³H24info, “Abdelbaki Es Satty, l'imam marocain devenu l'ennemi public n°1 en Espagne,” 20.08.2017 (<https://www.h24info.ma/monde/abdelbaki-es-satty-limam-marocain-devenu-le-nemi-public-n1-espagne/> : Retrieved on September 10, 2017)

⁴El País (English) 21.08.2017

(https://elpais.com/elpais/2017/08/20/inenglish/1503229267_859569.html : Retrieved on September 10, 2017)

extremist views were raised were “non-religious⁵.” In 2008, the French economist Marie-Anne Valfort conducted a study to ascertain the probability that Catholic, Jewish, and Islamic job-hunters would get an interview appointment after sending out their resume. In this study, she sent resumes to prospective employers under typical names of the members of each of these religious groups. The study found that the probability of getting an appointment for an interview was 20 percent for male applicants with a non-Islamic name but only 5 percent for those with an Islamic name. A similar study conducted in 2015 yielded probabilities of 17.9 percent for applicants with a typical Catholic name and 15.8 percent for those with a typical Jewish name, but just 4.7 percent for those with a typical Islamic name (for male applicants in each case)⁶.

While these studies were conducted only in France, the findings imply that second-generation immigrants who were born in or taken to a largely non-Islamic European country at a very young age (regardless of their own volitions) are exposed to certain discrimination in the society of that country, even though their lives are based in that country and its language is one of their mother tongues. When they enter adolescence, when youths are generally prone to become mentally and emotionally unstable, they react sensitively to this situation and end up being easily entrapped in extremist views, partly because they lack a solid knowledge of Islam as well. Incidents like the aforementioned terrorism attacks are liable to set in motion a vicious circle characterized by an upsurge in Islamophobia advocating “exclusion” of Islam and Muslims, and use of this social situation by the ultra-right wings for their own political ends. To simply “exclude” certain members of society instead has the effect of inducing terrorism.

In response to the aforementioned terrorism, Spain’s Interior Minister visited Morocco on August 29th for talks with his Moroccan counterpart. After their discussion, the Spanish minister stated that, while many of the suspects had been born in Morocco, they had been raised in Spain⁷. This statement presumably had the aims

⁵Bouzar, D.,Caupenne C. Et Valsan S.(2014)La métanorphose opérée chez le jeune par les nouveaux discours terroristes, CPDSI, p.7.

⁶Marie-Anne Valfort (2015) Discriminations religieuses à l’embauche : une réalité, Institut Montaigne, p.26.

⁷Media24, “ Attentats en Espagne: deux interpellations au Maroc, ” 29.08.2017 (<https://www.medias24.com/MAROC/Quoi-de-neuf/176065-Lutte-antiterroriste-l-Espagne-loue-la-cooperation-avec-le-Maroc.html>: Retrieved on September 10, 2017

of maintaining favourable diplomatic ties with Morocco, which is cooperating with Spain in anti-terrorism measures, allaying the post-terrorism situation of harassment directed to mosques and Muslims in Spain, and setting forth an official stance differing from opinion in the mass media, which were emphasizing the Moroccan heritage of the suspects.

The talks between the two interior ministers also took up cooperation in the area of religious education. As part of its measures to fight extremism and terrorism, Morocco is providing opportunities for imams not only from Morocco but also from other countries including France, Mali, and Senegal to learn about moderate Islam in Morocco⁸. Properly speaking, extremist ideology is far removed from genuine spirit of Islam. To fight it also requires management of mosques by the authorities and monitoring to prevent infiltration by imams with extremist views, not “exclusion” of the religion from the spheres of education and public administration. There is also thought to be a need to provide youths with opportunities for acquaintance with true, moderate Islam in venues of education as well as in mosques. The assurance of equal opportunity in socioeconomic terms in the country of immigration must be joined by assurance of opportunity for acquaintance with the Islamic religion and culture forming at least a part of second- and third generation youths’ background. This could be expected to function as a bulwark preventing them from being drawn into extremist ideology if when they encounter with it.

⁸Nakagawa, K. (2017) “Morocco’s Anti-terrorism Measures: Religious Policies Based on a Long-term Perspective,” in “Geopolitics of The Middle East and IS,” ed. Yamauchi M., Asahi Shimbun Publications Inc., pp. 293- 312.