

## THE IMPACT OF SEPTEMBER 11TH, 2001 ON THE STUDY OF ISLAM IN CANADIAN AND AMERICAN GRADUATE HIGHER EDUCATION

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines a small sampling of the voluminous academic studies that appeared subsequent the attacks in New York and Washington on September 11, 2001. The examined theses and dissertations are submitted to the universities in Canada and the U.S. and they include works about Islam and Muslims. All of them were written within a decade of the events and all refer both to Islam and the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001.

*Key Words: Attacks of September 11, Study of Islam, Graduate Education*

## 11 EYLÜL 2001 OLAYLARININ KANADA VE AMERİKA ÜNİVERSİTELERİNDEKİ İSLAMLA İLGİLİ LİSANSÜSTÜ ÇALIŞMALARA ETKİSİ

### ÖZET

Bu makale 11 Eylül 2001’de Washington ve Newyork’ taki saldırılardan sonra ortaya çıkan hacimli akademik çalışmaların küçük bir örneklemini incelemektedir. İncelenen eserler İslam ve Müslümanlar hakkında olup Kanada ve Amerika’daki üniversitelere sunulan yüksek lisans tez ve doktora çalışmalarıdır. Tez ve doktora çalışmalarının hepsi olayların gerçekleştiği 10 yıllık dönem içerisinde yazılmıştır ve bu çalışmaların tümü İslam ve 11 Eylül 2001 saldırılarına dikkat çekmektedir.

*Anahtar Kelimeler: 11 Eylül Saldırıları, İslam Çalışmaları, Lisansüstü Eğitim*

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## INTRODUCTION

The attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 remain the defining event of our young century. Perhaps nothing indicates the scale of their significance more than our continued inability, more than ten years later, to reach general consensus over the purpose of the attacks or their likely ramifications for global politics. With so much at stake, it is perhaps inevitable that even the attacks themselves have come under a cloud of confusion, with a large percentage of Americans and even larger percentages of people outside the United States expressing uncertainty over what exactly happened on September 11<sup>th</sup> and who was responsible.

On the morning of Tuesday September 11, 2001, 19 al Qaeda operatives perpetrated the largest and most lethal act of terrorism in American history. In a well-planned and carefully coordinated suicide mission, they hijacked four commercial airliners, two of which flew into both towers of the World Trade Center. The third crashed into the Pentagon, while the fourth did so in a field in southern Pennsylvania on its way to Washington, D.C. These attacks instantly killed nearly three thousand people, incurred tens of billions of dollars in damages and brought about dramatic changes in both American foreign policy and the international political order. Internationally, the consequences of the 9/11 attacks are most clearly represented by the continuing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq but extend far beyond these two conflicts to include heightened tensions with Iran, growing political instability in Pakistan, tensions in the NATO alliance, deteriorating relations with Russia and a host of counterterrorism operations throughout the Muslim and Western worlds. Domestically, the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> and the events that have ensued have had a profound impact on many facets of American political, economic and social life and on individuals and communities throughout the nation (Bradford, 2009).

Whatever objectives the attackers may have intended to advance and whatever long-term consequences prove to be, the attacks have created a trauma in Western society and caused an increase in Islamophobia among many Westerners. The immediate reaction of the press following the attacks that focused the blame on Islam even before any official statement had been released points to some pre-existing sentiment of suspicion among the public that made it so easy for such accusations to be accepted as fact. “In the days, weeks, and months after September 11, many individuals in the United States who share a common ethnic and/or religious background with the hijackers became the targets of hostility” (Peek, 2005: 14). Arabs and Muslims (as well as South Asians, Latinos, Sikhs, Hindus, and other individuals who were mistakenly perceived to be Arab or Muslim) suffered threats, harassment, discrimination, racial and religious profiling, property damage, and verbal and physical assault (Bradford, 2009). It is as if the

hostility and hatred of the Christian Middle Ages had once again resurfaced. Muslims, especially those in the West, were put on the defensive and have been the target of discrimination, distrust, and mockery since. They were perceived as the enemy mastermind behind the terrorist acts of 9/11, which were unsettling for everyone, including Muslims (Shihab, 2011). American Muslims, who were on their way to what seemed to be a successful integration into the American political process, all of a sudden became suspect. The community no longer dreams of new victories, as defending and preserving the existing achievements and assets such as the nearly 2000 mosques, Islamic centers, Islamic schools and charities has become an uphill task. The Muslim community not only lost developmental momentum but its hard-earned goodwill also has dissipated.

Contrary to the aforementioned, if anything positive could come out of the tragedy of 9/11, it would be that the tragedy opened the eyes of many Westerners toward Islam, and, without realizing it, has raised curiosity about its teachings (Shihab, 2011). There have been reports of increased sales of the Qur'an and literature on Islam, for example, and some mosques and prominent Muslim community leaders have reported a surge in converts to Islam since 9/11 (Bradford, 2009). "There has been an upsurge of interest in and fascination with the Arab-Muslim world among the general public. Programs in Middle Eastern studies were created or expanded; enrollments in Arabic language courses increased four hundred percent between 1998 to 2006, far more than any other language (MLA, 2006); and the demand for Islamic and Arabic scholars has grown faster than appropriate PhDs can be produced" (Doran, 2008: 9). Pundits, policymakers and the general public called upon educational institutions to help foster a greater understanding of the Middle East and Muslim world. Colleges and universities struggled to respond to a growing demand for instruction in Arabic, Persian and Turkish as well as in the teachings of Islam.

To date, observers from the West and Islam in particular have attempted to thoroughly and objectively study the reasons behind why 9/11 occurred. One year after the event, clearer and rational thinking was beginning to come forth. The fundamental question, or the remaining puzzle to be solved, is what encouraged the perpetrators, people of sufficient intelligence and finances, to commit their terrorist act? The puzzle appears to be a question concerning the relationship between the religion of the perpetrators, Islam, and the act of terror (Shihab, 2011: 13).

In this sense, the present study is a contribution towards better understanding the method and content of theses and dissertations focused on the subjects mentioned above. It aims to find out to what degree those academic productions reveal broader social trends - in this regard

islamophobia, stereotypes, misconceptions - or live up to the academic standards of increasing understanding of human phenomena above ideological partisanship.

### **RESEARCH OBJECTIVE**

This research examines the impact that 9/11 has had on academic discourse in American and Canadian universities. The focus of this research is on the ways in which insecurity - both in terms of the insecurities experienced by members of dominant and minority cultures - in the aftermath of September 11 has changed the way that academics engage, understand and frame Islam or Muslims in the post 9/11 period in their research report. With this in mind, the overarching research question becomes: How do particular academic communities, within multicultural states such as the United States of America and Canada respond to specific tensions or conflicts that arise from religiously-based insecurities felt by the relevant society? The overarching question defines the nature of the research I undertook and the rationale for doing so. The following sub-questions also helped guide this research:

- (1) How did the September 11 attacks influence the academic environment in Canada, specifically in terms of both the production of knowledge from graduate studies (M.A. and Ph.D.s) as well as changes in institutional structures?
- (2) What are the research fields and topics of the theses and dissertations that focused on Islam and Muslims and submitted to American and Canadian universities after 9/11?
- (3) In what academic departments at Canadian universities were theses and/or dissertations concerning Islam or Muslims most concentrated, after the events of September 11, 2001?
- (4) What are the specific discourse features of the theses and dissertations written on topics related to Islam and submitted particularly to religious / Islamic studies departments at American and Canadian universities?

### **METHODOLOGY**

The research used a mixed-methods approach, blending quantitative and qualitative analyses to examine a small (but representative) sample of M.A. theses and doctoral dissertations that appeared within a decade after the events and referred both to Islam and the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001.

The quantitative component involved using ProQuest and the Library & Archives Canada (LAC) search engines, reachable via password and user name provided by the University of Montreal. The assumption was made that there may be theses and dissertations that may not be reachable

through ProQuest and LAC; therefore, the relevant catalogues of the libraries of the universities were also screened. Islam, September 11, 9/11, Muslim, Quran were used as keywords during the search.

The qualitative component of the research involved both document analysis and interviews. After locating and downloading relevant theses and dissertations, I analyzed their abstracts, tables of content, introductions and conclusions as per the parameters established by the research questions. Institutional history data was obtained by reviewing official websites, as well as through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Islamic Studies scholars at Canadian universities.

### **RESEARCH HYPOTHESES**

The research aimed to test the following hypotheses:

- (1) After September 11, 2001, parallel to the increased curiosity in Western public opinion about Islam, growth was seen in both the number of academic units offering Islamic studies, as well as the number of students applying to these units in Canadian Universities.
- (2) The number of theses and dissertations about Islam - history, scriptures and interpretations - have increased in Canadian universities since September 11, 2001.
- (3) In the post-9/11 period, theses and dissertations on topics related to Islam or Muslims have dominantly focused on the relationship between Islam and violence.
- (4) M.A. and Ph. D. studies about Islam and Muslims after September 11 have mostly been carried out within departments and faculties related to religious / Islamic studies.
- (5) Judgmental and denunciatory language have featured prominently in the M.A. and Ph. D. studies about Islam and Muslims after September 11, 2001.

### **RESEARCH PROCESS**

The first phase of the research involved searching the catalogues of several universities in Central-Eastern Canada: University of Montreal, McGill University, University of Concordia, University of Quebec, University of Ottawa, Carleton University, University of Toronto and York University.

Due to insufficient sample size in the originally planned review of Canadian theses and dissertations the scope of the research was widened. Therefore, the study used the Pro-Quest database search engine to review theses and dissertations from all Canadian and American universities. In addition, visits to the University of Calgary, the University of Alberta, the

University of British Columbia, and the University of Victoria were included, expanding the initial research focused on Eastern-Central Canada to include Western Canada as well.

The quantitative findings (i.e. number of theses and dissertations on Islam or Muslims and the number of departments offering Islamic studies programs) are based on a sample of Canadian universities only. This is in contrast to the qualitative findings, which are based on the analysis of theses and dissertations from Canadian and American universities.

The findings are presented in the following order in this paper. In the first part the results of a statistical analysis of theses and dissertations about Islam and Muslims submitted to Canadian universities are presented. Since there are a good number of studies investigating the socio-political, socio-economical and socio-cultural effects of the 9/11 attacks on Islamic and Western societies, the second part, presents the findings from the qualitative analysis of theses and dissertations in the sample. The third part of the study presents the findings from discourse analysis of theses and dissertations in the sample that focused on the relationship of Islam and violence.

#### **QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS**

According to the results of the abstract online search, done by utilizing ProQuest and LAC search engine, a total of 105 Canadian graduate school theses and dissertations were directly related to the September 11 terrorist attacks. Most of these studies were conducted in departments of political science, mass media, sociology, modern history and educational theory.

The numbers of theses and dissertations whose keywords include “Islam” were 375 and these studies were carried out in departments of women studies, ethnic studies, health science, religious studies, Islamic studies, international relations and military studies.

One result from this research shows that, after September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 no considerable increase occurred in the number of the graduate theses whose topic was about Islam compared to that of previous decade. The numbers in the decade preceding 9/11 were 97 (70 M.A. and 27 Ph. D.) and 92 (65 M.A. and 27 Ph. D.).

#### **CONTENT AND LEXICAL ANALYSES**

When considering those post-2001 master’s theses and doctoral dissertations focused on Islam and Muslims that were submitted to non-religious / Islamic Studies departments, it was observed that most of them were not directly related to Islam proper (i.e. scriptures, history). They were rather, connected to the following topics:

### **The Perception of Islam and Muslims in The Western Media**

The September 11 attacks have greatly increased the discussion in the news media about religion, specifically Islam. The mysticism that surrounds Islam in the West has created a demand for academic research on the topic of its discussion within news media. The lack of knowledge about Islam and Muslims has set the stage for the negative, stereotypical and homogenizing chatter in the American media. Many researchers (Welch, 2003; Brookshire, 2004; Alsultany, 2005; McCafferty, 2006; Murray, 2010) believed that it is important to critically analyze the discourse about minorities in news media because of the influence they have over the way public opinion is created and shaped. In these types of theses and dissertations, written within the first year of the aftermath of September 11, the researchers examined how Islam and Muslims were represented on two or three TV channels and newspapers in the Western Media.

### **The Phenomena of Conversion to Islam**

Given the considerable number of conversions to Islam in the period after September 11, the study found that researchers at the level of master and Ph. D. had used qualitative techniques to analyze the personal stories and experiences of these converts. Such studies (Maslim, 2008; Bowen, 2009; Cullinane, 2009; Robinson 2010) investigated the reasons for conversion to Islam as well as perceived religious support and emotional functioning. For example, Robinson (2010) attempted to answer the following questions: (1) Why have Americans converted to Islam subsequent to 9/11? (2) What were their perceptions of Islam and Muslims before converting? (3) What were some of the changes they made in their life while converting to Islam? (4) How was their life different after converting to Islam? Findings show that the reasons of conversion are based on theological/moral values, as well as personal and social factors. Dissatisfaction with their former faith orientation and the desire to solidify identity were also frequently endorsed. Active reasons for conversion, which include theological/moral and personal factors, were found to be more important and popular than passive ones, i.e., social reasons. Passive reasons also related to the experience of depression and the turning to religion, and in this case, Islam, as a means of alleviating depression symptoms. Conversely, perceived religious support was related to better emotional functioning (Robinson, 2010).

### **The Political Mobilization of Muslims After September 11**

September 11 has created a stressful atmosphere where Muslims have had to struggle against different traditional and new forces. They have been caught between traditional patriarchy, a sense of victimization, and a hosting community adopting anti-Muslim policies. They have been trying to

cope with the new changes in the American community, to create solidarity among the Muslim community, and to redefine their roles in a way that enables them to accommodate or resist the segregationist policies aimed at isolating the Muslim community from the American melting pot. In theses and dissertations focused on this issue (Elhalawany, 2003; Windmueller, 2005; Sarebanha, 2007; Ashour, 2008; Alkhaolany, 2010) the researchers found that Muslims started engaging in political organizations and activities with the impulse of self-introduction and defense of the faith after the September 11. According to these researchers, the years which followed brought about an increasingly mobilized, better organized group of Muslim Americans who made a decision to become more active members of American society through participating in the political system, something very difficult if not impossible in their native countries (Sarebanha, 2007). For example, the election of the first Muslim congressman to the House of Representatives and use of the Quran for taking oath as an affirmation required by the U.S. constitution reflect the increased political activity and recognition of Muslims in America.

#### **The Schools Founded By Muslims and Their Activities**

Islamic schools in the West have been criticized by some media outlets for teaching religious intolerance and promoting hatred in the minds of their students. It has been alleged that their programs do not fully embrace the ideals of citizenship, pluralism, and democracy. “Their critics also claim that these institutions adopt imported curricula that encourage violence against non-Muslims” (Elannani, 2007: 7). In studies about this subject, the schools established in North America by Muslims and the activities of Muslim theological schools (Madrasa) in various Islamic countries were scrutinized (Chanicka, 2007; Elannani, 2007; Jones, 2007; Memon, 2009). They present an objective and deep understanding of Muslim schooling in the West. “An important contribution towards this understanding is to find out the extent to which the educational experience of Islamic schools reflects the ideals of democracy, pluralism, and the common good of society” (Elannani, 2007: 7). In addition, these studies sought to reveal the diversity and complexity of Islamic schools and the various interpretations by Muslim educators of the nature and practice of Islamic education in the American context. They attempt to achieve two overarching objectives: firstly to trace the historical growth of Islamic schools in North America and secondly, to explore the ideological and philosophical values that have shaped the vision of these schools (Memon, 2009). To do this, curricula of the schools and the profiles of the teachers of these schools were studied. Most of these studies concluded that Muslim schools are one more chapter in the history of religious diversity and pluralism in America. Muslim schools bring together many immigrants from different countries of the world and connect families,

students, and teachers to a common religious identity and a common aspiration to be full members of a modern society and citizens in a democracy (Elannani, 2009). According to the researchers these schools represent a special blend of practical educational achievement and spiritual enrichment in an atmosphere that is tolerant and open to the larger society.

### **The Effects of September 11 on Muslims**

The impact of stereotyping and prejudice on Muslim individuals and communities in Western society, after 9/11, was examined using qualitative research techniques. These studies (Johnson, 2004; Peek, 2005, Bradford, 2009; Bryan, 2009; Ghaffari, 2009; Robertson, 2009) examine the ways in which members of the American Muslim population have been affected by the attacks of 9/11 and the events that have ensued thereafter. Specifically, they examine how increased suspicion as well as heightened prejudice and discrimination have impacted patterns of self-identification and attitudes regarding civic and political engagement among members of the Muslim population. The researchers analyzed the individual stories of persons within Muslim communities by determining certain experimental groups (e.g. female, student, working class and etc.) through pre-defined questionnaires. The studies combined comprehensive literature reviews, interviews with individuals and the surveying of Muslim organizations in order to study the methods Muslims use to cope with backlash and the role community organizations play in helping them to cope.

### **The Governmental Policies of Pre- and Post-September 11**

Since September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, much of the international relations discourse has focused on analyses of Muslim communities. Some scholars have been critical of the focus on religion, and specifically Islam within the international relations literature and have suggested that there are more nuanced explanations for why communities abroad might think ill of the United States. Theses and dissertations, especially those conducted in political science departments, dealt with the policies of the western countries over Islamic countries in a critical manner to understand, inform, influence and engage citizens abroad to help further U.S. foreign policy goals. In these (Watson, 2005; Larsen, 2006; Brown, 2010; Lean, 2010) studies, Western foreign policy was suggested as the cause of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. As for the policies employed after September 11, they have been criticized on the basis that they involved unrestrained and disproportionate use of power. For instance Muedini (2006) examines the impact of U.S. domestic anti-terrorism security policies following the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 on the feelings of safety and identity amongst Muslims in America, and in turn overall Muslim identity in relation to the international system. Cutberthson (2005) examines U.S. responsibility in terms of creating the conditions that

led to 9/11. In doing so, he explores two primary themes: First, the Soviet-Afghan war in general, with particular attention paid to the role of the United States their allies in the resistance, such as Saudi Arabia. Second, Cutberthson (2005) looks at the rise of militant Islamism, showing how and why the war in Afghanistan was the catalyst, which facilitated its growth throughout the 1990s. He argues that the act of 9/11 is simply "blowback" for U.S. policy toward Afghanistan and the Islamic world in general.

### **The Representation of “The West” in Arab Media**

In this type of theses, researchers (Samy, 2004) have studied editorial type samples of writings from Arab newspapers as well as samples from TV discussion panels to determine Arab ideologies and opinions in response to the attacks against America on September 11, 2001, and to expose the understanding of the incident and the image of the West among Arab nations. Coen (2009) seeks to address the empirical question that lies at the crux of this debate: Are negative perceptions of America in the Middle East driven primarily by American policies or values? Utilizing a multi-method approach that considers evidence from large-n survey data, face-to-face interviews and a quasi-experimental focus group study, he conducted an in-depth case study of Egyptian perceptions of the United States. His findings challenge the "Clash of Civilizations" approach to anti-Americanism, as Egyptian perceptions of America appear to be rooted overwhelmingly in policy-driven rather than civilization variables (Coen, 2009).

In addition to the above categories and corresponding to the main objective of this research, when the theses focused particularly on Islam (i.e. scriptures and history of Islam), it was found that such studies dominantly explored the relationship between Islam and violence. Specifically, a common thread shared across the studies included in the sample was the question of whether or not religious violence is primarily the product of beliefs, doctrine and scripture, or whether or not religious violence is the result of other factors such as cultural, political, social and economic circumstances (Gregg, 2004).

### **The Relationship Between Islam and Violence**

“In the wake of September 11<sup>th</sup>, policy analysts, journalists, and academics have tried to make sense of the rise of militant Islam, particularly its role as a motivating and legitimating force for violence against the West” (Gregg, 2004: 3) Religion, particularly Islam, was therefore a favorite explanation of what had happened and the stream of articles and television programs grew, claiming to lay bare the Islamic roots of terrorism. The religious ideology behind terrorism that virtually everyone would come to hear about was *jihad*, described as the Islamic concept of holy war against

the infidel. “The unwritten assumption was that there is something about Islam that makes it bloodier and more violence-prone than other religions” (Gregg, 2004: 3). For example, much attention has been paid to Islam’s doctrine of *jihad*, or holy war, as the source of Islam’s bellicosity (The New York Times, 2001). “Likewise, scholars and journalists have pointed to Islam’s doctrine of martyrization as another source that promotes violence within the faith (The New York Times, 2001). Still others have suggested that Islam is a repressive if not backwards religion that is incapable of adapting to modernity, evidenced by women dressed in veils and the degree of social, economic and political chaos in countries that are predominantly Muslim. According to such a perspective, therefore, September 11<sup>th</sup> was an act of frustration against the premier country of modernity, the U.S.” (Lewis, 2002: 14-15). Moreover, some have insisted that unless and until the Islamic world is radically reformed, the extreme danger of terrorism in our so-called age of jihadism will remain (Asad, 2007).

“Regardless of the evidence cited, Islam has been on trial since September 11<sup>th</sup>, with the charge that there is something uniquely violent about its beliefs, doctrines, and practices” (Gregg, 2004: 15). In the following section, the findings from the discourse analysis of theses and dissertations in the sample that focused on the relationship between Islam and violence is presented.

To begin, the study found that a constructive, positive and descriptive approach was used in the graduate theses submitted to religious / Islamic Studies with respect to the relationship between Islam and violence. The studies included in the sample mostly sought to investigate the assertion above (that there is something about Islam that makes it bloodier) and to find out whether Islam can be rightly argued to be the predominant ideological bridge justifying the use of violence and terror acts (Aiken, 2005). Researchers focused on a range of tactics and topics to investigate the relationship between Islam and violence: by analyzing verses of the Qur’an, the life of the prophet Muhammad and the history of Islam as whole (Boyer, 2010; Cutler, 2008; Miraly, 2006); by examining cases of terrorism, violence, and war, in which Islam appears to be a significant factor, and comparing them to examples of Christian, Jewish, Buddhist and Hindu bellicosity (Gregg, 2004; Aiken, 2005); and, by providing insight into understanding the ideological foundation of Islamist terror figures through exhaustive analysis of the influential individuals and circumstances which led to the radicalization of such figures (Carey, 2008).

Researchers in the sample put forth a range of arguments concerning the relationship between Islam and violence, for example, that all the world’s major religions (Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism) have

gone through periods of violence as a means of attaining specific goal (Gregg, 2004); that terrorism is more clearly attributed to grievance felt by a particular Islamic community as a result of concentrated structural weaknesses within the regions they reside and appears less driven by religion than assumed (Aiken, 2005); that religious violence is the result of specific interpretations of a religion's beliefs and scriptures, not the religions per se, and that violent interpretations of a religion are the product of individuals - usually religious leaders- who are grounded in specific circumstances (Gregg, 2004). Although some verses in the Qur'an appear to promote violence, on closer inspection it becomes clear that the Qur'an limits, not licenses, violence. So the justification of violence or of exclusivism is a symptom of politicking and denies the Qur'an's actual message, which is one that stresses the peaceful, pluralistic interaction required for human well-being (Miraly, 2006).

However, the conclusions of some theses and dissertations were not as benign as those mentioned above. For example, Cutler (2008) argues that the theological doctrine of Islam is inherently violent on the basis of his historical analysis of Qur'anic revelation and the actions or inaction of Muslims during that period. In essence, Cutler's argument proposes that radical jihadists or extremists take action as a result of an interpretation of the Qur'an in its proper context: thus, "they are not radicals, they are purists" (Cutler, 2008). Cutler has come to this conclusion by taking into consideration the progressive nature of Islam and the doctrine of abrogation. His study demonstrates four instances of progression in Islam:

Personal progression, historical progression, the corresponding progression in Qur'anic revelation, and the doctrine of abrogation. Pious Muslims experience a personal progression in their spiritual lives from the uncertainties of their salvation (*fitrah*, the natural state without moral deficit) to the participation in supererogatory acts such as jihad, which guarantee a favorable eschatological outcome. Muhammad's ministry evolved from a weak, persecuted group of religious believers emphasizing a prohibition on violence to a dominant force in Medina with a proclivity towards unrestrained and open-ended prescriptions of violence. The Qur'anic revelations corresponding with this historical paradigm evolved, as the early Meccan Suras emphasized tolerance while the later Medinan Suras emphasized intolerance. These three instances of progression bolster the claim for the fourth: the doctrine of abrogation—the utter epitome of progressive Islam. It is through this doctrine (grounded in the Qur'an) that earlier verses emphasizing peace were abrogated by later verses

emphasizing violence. This doctrine recognizes the need for revelation to adapt to changing circumstances. In order for an expanding Muslim empire in Medina to survive, the abrogation of earlier Meccan revelations was necessary, as injunctions associated with the prohibition of violence (early Meccan Suras) would not enable the simultaneous expansion and protection guaranteed by the injunctions associated with violence late Medinan Suras (Cutler, 2008: 90-91)

The notion that the interpretation of the religion triggers the violence, a common idea expressed by the researchers under examination in this study, was exemplified by establishing parallelism between historical context and the Qur'anic messages (Carey, 2008; Gregg, 2004; Boyer, 2010). According to Carey (2008), the emergence of radicalization and extremism is usually based on the interpretations of Qur'anic verses by some of the educated class of Muslim legal scholars, called Ulama. "Therefore in order to understand the conditions under which these violent interpretations of a religion occur, one needs to identify, first, who is interpreting the religion and by what authority; second, the social, political and economic circumstances surrounding these violent interpretations; and third, the believability of these interpretations by members of religious communities" (Gregg, 2004: 16). At this juncture in order to shed light on the relationships among religion, interpretation of religion, violence, and authority in Islam the example of Ibn Taymiyya, considered by many to be the true "Grandfather of Jihad", and events along with the effect of his era's socio-politic environment transformed Muslim individuals from modest and conservative into a Muslim extremists. After providing insight into the social and political conditions of 13<sup>th</sup> century Carey (2008) concludes that "because the Mongols continued to practice Yasa code and deviate from Shariah law, Ibn Taymiyya issued an unorthodox fatwa setting a precedent claiming the invaders were living in sin and consequently not Muslims" (Esposito, 2002: 46). Therefore, true believers had a duty to revolt against the Asian trespassers and to remove them from the lands of Islam (Laqueur, 2004). From the day the Sheikh of Islam issued it, this famous fatwa has been debated among religious authorities (Carey, 2008).

Radicalization was theorized by some of the researchers in the sample as being not only a product of particular Qur'anic interpretations; rather, one must also consider the role of believers as well as the interpretations of ulama since "belief affects behavior and rhetoric has the potential to bring about action" (Boyer, 2010). When the rhetoric of ulama promotes violence, as in the case of the ideology of Islamism, and accepted as truth by believers, then this could be an important stimulator of violence

(Boyer, 2010). This is what Osama bin Laden, Hizbut-Tahrir and his contemporaries have been constantly striving to do at any cost (Carey, 2008).

In order to bring out the distortion of ulama in their interpretations of the religion and in particular the religious ideology behind terrorism (i.e. jihad), Mahallati (2006) examined the history of the wars at the time of prophet Muhammad, noting that classical and contemporary interpreters of the Qur'an did not take adequate consideration of this history in their analyses. As a result, it was concluded that, the Qur'an does not sanction unprovoked and primary offensive wars; that the main causes of legitimate wars are the breach of contracts and defensive / deterrent exigencies; that reciprocation in war is limited to the removal of an actual threat; that in situations of conflict outbreak, it is the leadership of the warring party, and not its subordinates, that must be subject to punishment; that faith by itself cannot be the motivation of physical conflict and finally that peace is essential in the scripture.

The attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> and the overwhelming counter-attacks by some of the western states on some Islamic states, as well as the endless Palestinian-Israeli disputes, are the result of the misunderstandings and misconceptions that Islam and the West have of each other (Naji, 2007). In order to build a bridge between the West and Islam, the communication channels should be kept open among politicians so as to prevent misunderstandings. At this reasoning Naji's (2007) study could be evaluated as a single brick. His dissertation seeks to show how the world's various legal traditions can benefit from each other. It attempts to do so by introducing the Islamic system of *diyah* (the compensation made obligatory as a result of an offense which shall be paid to the victim or his heirs) and showing how it can interplay with and impact on the interpretation of international law (Naji, 2007).

Boyer's (2010) urge on Muslim Reformers to provide a positive alternative to Islamism could also be considered as an attempt to endeavor of build a bridge between two civilizations. Since bellicose interpretations of the faith by themselves are not enough to cause religious violence; rather, it is necessary for these interpretations to be accepted as true by practitioners (Gregg, 2004), Muslim reformers have to reach out to Muslim youth in the United States and Europe to provide a positive alternative to Islamism and engage them before they are recruited by organizations like Hizbu-t Tahrir that communicate a narrative that places the blame of Islam's struggles at the feet of the West (Boyer, 2010). Beside this, a remarkable virtue of Islam, called *Hilm* (the ability to restrain oneself and to control one's nature from anger or hasty action) should be applied by Muslims, as well by Westerners, to neutralize the influence of interpretations and rhetoric used by radical circles directed towards violence (Mahallati, 2006).

## CONCLUSION

In the beginning, the study intended to include only those theses and dissertations regarding Islam (as well its history, scriptures, and interpretations) completed at Canadian Universities after September 11, 2001. But since the qualitative data was not sufficient to make a robust academic evaluation the scope of the study was expanded to include relevant graduate work on Islam and Muslims completed at American universities in the same period.

The most important effect that the September 11 attacks had on Canadian Universities is the increase of the number of departments offering degrees in Islamic studies. On the basis of institutional history and interview data, we can conclude that 75 % of the departments of the Islamic studies were opened after September 11, 2001 and that 9/11 was one of the reasons for this change. Many of the departments offering degrees in Islamic studies were established post-9/11. Furthermore, the participants interviewed for this study indicated that the attacks were one of the justifications for the establishment of these new departments.

Though September 11 was perceived as a religiously-motivated terrorist attack (i.e., Islamic terrorism), the majority of theses produced since then have been conducted by students in departments of political sciences, mass media, sociology, modern history, and educational theory, rather than departments of religious / Islamic studies. There were many master's theses and Ph.D. dissertations on topics related to the socio-cultural, socio-political and psychosocial effects of September 11 on western and Islamic societies. This group of theses and dissertations analyzed a range of topics including the representation of Muslims in the western media, the increase of conversions to Islam, the psychological and social changes in people's lives, the victimization of different social groups (i.e., as the students, the women and the immigrants) after the terrorist attacks. It was observed that the researchers used a neutral and descriptive language for their interpretations.

Though the number of studies on Islam, Islamic history, Islamic sources and Islamic interpretations did not quantitatively increase after 9/11, the content review revealed that the focus of these studies converged on the relationship between Islam and violence. The researchers, who tried to be constructive, positive and descriptive, concluded that when the Qur'anic scriptures and the history of Islam were taken as a whole, Islam basically rejects violence and promotes peace. Moreover, these studies noted that the Islamic interpretations endorsing violence were reductive exegeses of the Qur'anic messages and the historical sources of Islam.

On the basis of the above results, it now appears that only one of the five hypotheses identified at the beginning of this study was correct: That after September 11, 2001, parallel to the increased curiosity amongst the Western public about Islam, there was growth in the number of academic units offering Islamic studies.

### **SUGGESTIONS**

Surprising was the seemingly weak interest amongst Canadian departments of religious/Islamic studies to try to use research and scholarship on the core of Islam (i.e. its history, scriptures, and interpretations) to counter the negative media representations and commentary on Islam and Muslims. Future qualitative and comparative research is recommended to better understand the nature and dynamics of religious / Islamic studies departments, particularly in relation to wider socio-cultural and political trends. Also, it will be important to analyze graduate studies that did not deal with Islam directly and categorized under 7 sub-titles within this paper, in terms of methodology, procedure and conclusions separately on the basis of their categories; to bring out which category was discussed at what frequency, how and why.

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