

ARTICLES

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EXPLORING THE THEORIES OF RADICALIZATION

ABSTRACT: After the London bombings in July 2005, the concern of terrorism scholars and policy makers has turned to “home-grown” terrorism and potential for political violence from within the states. “Radicalization” became a new buzz word. This article follows a number of reviews of the literature on radicalization and offers another angle for looking at this research. First, it discusses the term “radicalization” and suggests the use of the following definition of radicalization as *a process by which a person adopts belief systems which justify the use of violence to effect social change and comes to actively support as well as employ violent means for political purposes*. Next, it proposes to see the theories of radicalization focusing on the individual and the two dimensions of his/her motivation: whether that motivation is internal or external and whether it is due to personal choice or either internal (due to some psychological traits) or external compulsion. Though not all theories fall neatly within these categories, they make it possible to make comparisons of contributions from a variety of different areas thus reflecting on the interdisciplinary nature of the study of terrorism in general and radicalization as a part of it.

KEY WORDS: radicalization, theories, terrorism, ideology, grievance, threat

Introduction

September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States serve as a benchmark in the discussions of the post-Cold war era of international relations and of the new impetus for the terrorism studies,

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until then a rather marginal field of investigation on the edge of a variety of disciplines, such as sociology, political science, international relations, psychology or criminology. Overnight the researchers already working in this field became celebrities, numerous others have joined their cohorts forming legions of brains probing the “whys” and “therefores” of this event, or exploring, together with the security services and the policy makers, the ways to prevent new such from happening. Terrorism became the trendiest topic. Between the pressures of policy makers to advise on what they should do given the magnitude of the threat and the demand of the public for answers on “why do they hate us,” the researchers kept following the long tradition of spilling more ink than the terrorists spill blood in trying to explain the phenomenon.

These attempts more often than not focused on remote places, with the West implicated in their internal dynamics through its foreign policy, historical legacies and cultural disagreements. With the European attacks, on March 11, 2004 in Madrid and July 7, 2005 in London, the emphasis of research shifted. “Radicalization” became a new buzz word and it is within Western societies and their integrated or non-integrated immigrant communities that the birth of a terrorist was sought. The importance of ‘radicalization’ only grew with the start of Syrian civil war and the influx of ‘foreign fighters’ with European passports into it. It will undoubtedly gain even more prominence with the attacks in France 7-9 January, 2015.

Yet, while most researchers and policy makers agree that ‘radicalization’ is a problem, there is less agreement as to what exactly the word entails. In this article, I will outline the main trends in the vast field of radicalization studies. Attempts at synthesizing this literature have already been made and in greater length than the article proposed here, however, they tend to focus on quite exclusively on the relatively new research on Islamist radicalization forgetting the rich theoretical and empirical¹ heritage of the studies of terrorism prior to September 11 attacks. The paper is

¹ Admittedly, theoretical works on terrorism outnumbered those based in empirics both before the September 11 attacks and after them (Silke, *Research on Terrorism. Trends, Achievements and Failures*) (Silke, *The Devil You Know: Continuing Problems with Research on Terrorism*) (Silke, *The impact of 9/11 on research on terrorism*), yet, there were always notable exceptions, such as Donatella Della Porta’s seminal work on the Leftist terrorists in Germany and Italy (Della Porta) or the insider accounts, autobiographies of former terrorists, give a great insights into both a decision making process attached to joining the terrorist organizations and the internal functioning of such organizations.

divided into four sections. The first section discusses the conceptual framework of radicalization and explores the different ways to conceptualize it. The other sections discuss various hypotheses regarding why people “radicalize”: the psychological traits based explanations; coercion and ‘manipulation’-based explanations; the explanations centring on grievance; and finally those of rational choice.

This, of course, is not the only way to approach radicalization. For example, Alex Schmid (Schmid) in his study of radicalization literature starts from micro, meso and macro- level explanations of it. Randy Borum distinguishes between explanations in ‘individual, group, network, organization, mass movement, socio-cultural context, and international/interstate contexts’ (Borum 14), later focusing on the social movement, social psychology and conversion theories. Similarly, Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen (Dalgaard-Nielsen, *Studying violent radicalization in Europe. Part I. Potential Contribution of Social Movement Theory*) and (Dalgaard-Nielsen, *Studying violent radicalization in Europe. Part II. The potential contribution of socio-psychological and psychological approaches*) puts potential social science contributions into two blocks: social movements and psychology/social psychology. The literature review by Minerva Nasser-Eddine and her colleagues focused on the five theoretical frameworks, such as rational choice, structural or societal theory, relative deprivation, social movement theory and psychological theories. (Nasser-Eddine) My choice for classifying theoretical approaches into the four previously mentioned clusters is based on internal/external and rational/compulsion types of motivators for ‘radicalizing’, with the individual at the centre of the enquiry.

Two limitations were set here, with the individual processes in focus, the group dynamics and related explanations of radicalization are only briefly explored within the given framework. Secondly, due to the lack of space, the actual policies devised using these theories will be only briefly mentioned in the text, their deeper analysis and evaluation is a task for another paper.

Radicalization. What is in the Word?

Many books on terrorism start with the lament that there is no unified and universally acceptable definition of terrorism, and the experts in the area take this problem to be one of the major obstacles for the development of the field. (Stampnitzky) The term

‘radicalization’ is not exempt from such problems. In the most general way, the interest in radicalization is subordinated to the interest in stopping acts of terrorism. Therefore, in the most general sense we can see radicalization along the lines described by Peter Neumann as “what goes on before the bomb goes off.” (Neumann) Yet there are definitions that are even more general than that, e.g. McCauley and Moskalkenko see it as “development of beliefs, feelings, and actions in support of any group or cause in a conflict.” (McCauley and Moskalkenko 4)

Though historically, ‘radicalism’ and its derivative ‘radicalization’ have a much broader meaning², in the context of current studies and policy-making radicalization tends to mean a pathway to terrorism, gradual slide into extremism, fundamentalism or, even more generally, a movement towards justifying violence and finally personally engaging in it. Most definitions thus agree that radicalization is a process, what they do not agree upon is where that process leads. E.g. the European Commission expert group on radicalization sees radicalization as “socialization to extremism which manifests itself in terrorism” (European Commission Expert Group 7), similarly the US Department of Homeland Security sees it as a “process of adopting an extremist belief system, including willingness to support or use violence as a method to effect social change.” (Homeland Security Institute) Other governmental definitions see it as a pathway towards terrorism (e.g. UK definition: “the process by which a person comes to support terrorism and forms of extremism leading to terrorism” (House of Commons Home Affairs Committee))

The conflation between these terms, however, can sometimes lead to misunderstandings and result in policies that not only lack utility, but can result in the opposite of the intended effects. For that purpose one has to be clear what is meant by radicalism, fundamentalism, and extremism.

The traditional definition of radicalism, such as the one given in the Oxford dictionary, sees it as “representing or supporting an extreme section of a party.” According to Mark Sedgwick, such a definition, by opposing the “radical” and “moderate,” raises the question of what is moderate, while at the same time assuming

² I.e. nineteenth century ‘radicals’ would be viewed quite positively today often as fighters for the expansion of rights, most often reformists while sometimes revolutionaries, yet always attached to what could be called a progressive agenda of promotion of democracy and empowerment of various social groups.

that what is moderate is self-evident in a with-us-or-a-against-us sense. (Sedgwick 482) McCauley and Moskalenko make a somewhat clearer distinction of “radicalism” vis-à-vis “activism” where the former would indicate willingness to engage in illegal actions and the latter seeking social or political change through legal activities. (McCauley and Moskalenko, *Measuring Political Mobilization: The Distinction Between Activism and Radicalism* 240) Daniela Pisiou argues forcefully for retaining the term radicalism with two of its historic characteristics – going to the roots and sweeping change thus presenting the following definition of the phenomenon: “political ideology, with the objective of inducing sweeping change based on fundamental or ‘root’ principles.” (Pisiou 23) This definition emphasizes the “fundamentalist” aspect of the phenomenon, a wish for a “sweeping change,” but does not focus on the potential for violence in particular or illegal action in general.

Fundamentalism as a term is less often used in connection to the outcomes of radicalization. Adoption of fundamentalist beliefs, however, is associated with a phase of radicalization. The concept itself comes from the sphere of religion and, more precisely, the Protestant movement in early twentieth century US, characterized by “premillennialism and the verbal inerrancy of the Bible” as well as being rooted in the “generalized antimodern and anti-liberal mentality.” (Carpenter 5) Currently, the term is used much more widely and not only in the religious, but also in the political settings, meaning here a strict, uncompromising attitude and an unwavering attachment to a set of beliefs. It is, however, again not necessarily violent and does not, in most cases, lead to imposing such beliefs on others by way of force.

Extremism is the third term often used in connection to radicalization. According to Alex Schmid, “extremists strive to create a homogeneous society based on rigid, dogmatic ideological tenets; they seek to make society conformist by suppressing all opposition and subjugating minorities” (Schmid 9). While in general it can be understood more in line with fundamentalism as being a strict, uncompromising, intolerant position, for those talking about radicalization, extremism is often understood as being against democratic norms, human rights, equality and tolerance.

The basic concern with regards to radicalization is the issue of people turning to violence. Yet, some definitions may result in a wrong focus for policies and/or research. E.g. if we take seriously the definition of radicalization into extremism and accept

that extremism is against democratic norms, all forms of extremism should be proscribed and governments should not engage in attracting the so-called non-violent extremists and asking for their help in the fight against their radical counterparts. (Schmid) (Pisiou) (Sedgwick) The UK program of countering violent extremism was often criticized along these lines, instead of stopping radicalization, the opponents claim, the program only creates a breeding ground for terrorism by distinguishing between violent and non-violent extremists and using the latter to “identify” the former. As according to the given definitions of extremism rejection of democratic norms is at the core of this phenomenon, such programs cultivate this breeding ground and are thus counterproductive.

For the purposes of this article, radicalization will be defined as a process by which a person adopts belief systems which justify the use of violence to effect social change and comes to actively support as well as employ violent means for political purposes. From this definition it appears that radicalization is a process, often a slow and gradual one, the final result of which is a person engaging in a violent campaign to effect social change. It identifies two different stages of radicalization – endorsing beliefs and acting upon them – without giving a temporal preference to them and without claiming that one is necessary for the other. One can adopt radical beliefs and not act upon them, and vice versa, one could act without even holding some deep and inalterable beliefs. At the same time this definition is general enough so as to accommodate different types of radicalization to different types of radicalisms. In the next sections I will look into the four clusters of theories identified in the introduction and assess what they have to say about the process of radicalization.

Radicalization Process. Assessment of Theories

According to Peter Neumann, after the attacks of 9/11 talk about “root causes of terrorism,” probably the major concern in the field, was suddenly associated with justification for the killing of the innocent and thus became a statement of a political bad taste (Neumann 4). While there were political statements about poverty breeding violence³ and attempts to establish a list

³ US President George W. Bush famously linked poverty and terrorism in his speech in March 2002, stating “We fight poverty because hope is an answer to terror” (Bush).

of possible causes of terrorism (Richardson), the major focus was on the measures directed to physically preventing and stopping the attacks or militarily dealing with terrorist bases (the war in Afghanistan being the prime example of this). Neumann argues that it was through the introduction of term “radicalization” that it became possible again to talk about the roots of terrorism and, consequently, to treat the causes rather than symptoms of this phenomenon. The research on radicalization can thus build⁴ on a rather vast number of investigations on the origins and development of terrorism linking individual psychology investigations, social movement analyses and theories arguing for understanding of structural conditions that lead to the appearance of violent political actors.

In the introduction, I suggested that theories of radicalization can fall into four broad categories according to the level of personal choice that they allow and according to whether the incentives/constraints for joining come from the “outside,” i.e. the environment, or the “inside,” of the individual him/herself. These criteria and theories grouped accordingly are shown in Table 1. I will analyse them in counter clock-wise sequence starting from the top right corner.

Table 1. Theories grouped along two dimensions

	Choice	Compulsion
Internal	Rational choice	Psychological traits
External	Grievance	Coercion/motivation

Psychological Traits

The idea that those who engage in violent political activity in general and terrorism in particular are insane or somehow otherwise psychologically abnormal resurges now and again in media depictions of terrorist attacks, but has long been discarded by researchers and consequently policy makers as groundless. Research on the violent Leftists of the 1970s has already shown, and later studies have confirmed, that those engaged in terrorist activities were not notably different from other politically active

⁴ As Richard English writes, “history has far too often been ignored in analyses of, and responses to, terrorism; and certainly the post-9/11 period has witnessed a frequently amnesiac debate on the subject” (English 57).

people. For example, as Franco Ferracuti writes, “Psychiatric studies have not identified any psychopathological characteristics common to the Italian left-wing terrorists” (Ferracuti 60) that were under examination in his study, and the same findings were confirmed in case of (West) German leftist terrorists (ibid.). Though certain “personality disturbances” are quoted in such studies (see, e.g., Post 27) the general message is that those who engage in terrorist activities are “more like us than we ordinarily care to admit” (Rubenstein 5).

Nevertheless, the efforts to try find some common traits in the “terrorists” have not stopped and profiling of potential terrorists, while frequently criticized, (Bongar) (Moghaddam) (Huq) is still actively sought, especially in law enforcement, and is usually applied along three strands: racial-physical, psycho-pathological, and socio-economic characteristics. (Rae) The racial-physical profiling is here especially problematic as it is discriminatory, borders on racist and works by criminalizing entire communities. Yet, these types of profiling have not been completely eliminated from the law enforcement attempts to find terrorists. E.g. the NYPD report on radicalization identifies such individuals as “particularly vulnerable” to step on the ladder that leads to terrorist attacks: “fifteen to thirty-five year-old male Muslims who live in male-dominated societies” especially as part of Muslim diaspora in the West and particularly if they belong to middle-class families and/or are students (NYPD 24) This particular report has been criticized for its exactly this attempt to turn entire communities into suspects, (Muslim American Civil Liberties Coalition) and (Huq 46) the appeal of such categorizations is still palpable in their continuous resurgence in policy papers. (German)

The psycho-pathological or simply psychological profiling of who can eventually be “radicalized” enough to commit violent acts has fared a little better. One of the most prominent investigators in this area is Jerrold Post, whose theories on terrorist psychology and the notion that there are “people with particular personality traits and tendencies are drawn disproportionately to terrorist careers” (Post 27) has been quite influential in the policy circles of the US and elsewhere.

Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen identifies three paths of potentially fruitful investigations into individual psychology that could help determine the factors leading to radicalization: psychodynamic approaches, identity theory and cognitive approaches. (Dalgaard-Nielsen, Studying violent radicalization in Europe. Part II. The

potential contribution of socio-psychological and psychological approaches 5) The first rely on narcissism,⁵ paranoia⁶ and absolutist⁷ hypotheses and are linked to the Freudian tradition of psychoanalysis and the linkage of violence to past traumatic events, childhood experiences and other subconscious dynamics.⁸

Identity theory focuses on the formative stage a person's life and argues that for young people in search for identity, ideologies might assist in identity formation and "joining terrorist groups can act as a strong 'identity stabilizer', providing the young adult with a sense of belonging, worth and purpose." (Dalgaard-Nielsen, Studying violent radicalization in Europe. Part II. The potential contribution of socio-psychological and psychological approaches 7) This theory, linked to that of social networks which will be explored in more detail later, has been used to explain the involvement of the 7/7 attackers in London in terrorism. Finally, the cognitive theory links cognitive capacity and violence, and hypothesises the potential linkage between "cognitive style and individual's disposition to join a terrorist group" (Dalgaard-Nielsen, Studying violent radicalization in Europe. Part II. The potential contribution of socio-psychological and psychological approaches 8).

The usefulness of these explanations, however, has been notoriously low. "Terrorists" have been found to be physically and mentally similar to other people who do not engage in violent activities. Thus, no matter how tempting psychological profiling could be with regard to potential terrorists, the success of such endeavours

⁵ Parental neglect in childhood leads to development of unhealthy self-image and morality as result of which individuals "narcissistic grandiose fantasies, exalting the self or submerge him or herself into a group and thus let a strong group identity replace the damaged self-identity" (Dalgaard-Nielsen, Studying violent radicalization in Europe. Part II. The potential contribution of socio-psychological and psychological approaches 6).

⁶ Individuals suffering from paranoia are said to be dealing with "socially unacceptable feelings through projection," idealize the in-group and demonize the out-groups. (Dalgaard-Nielsen, Studying violent radicalization in Europe. Part II. The potential contribution of socio-psychological and psychological approaches 6).

⁷ Absolutist or apocalyptic individuals in this context are "uncompromising moralists" often with "weak identities" easily susceptible to conspiracy theories about the attempts of out-groups to destroy the in-group and thus "legitimising the use of violence in 'self-defence'." (Dalgaard-Nielsen, Studying violent radicalization in Europe. Part II. The potential contribution of socio-psychological and psychological approaches 6).

⁸ E.g. Volkan links joining terrorist organizations to childhood trauma: (Volkan).

is dubious and the vast variety of individuals involved in organizations supporting and enacting terrorism is too wide to lead to any generalizable results.

Coercion/Motivation

While the theories looking at the psychological traits try to find such personal characteristics which make an individual more likely to join terrorist groups, the investigations into compulsion or motivation look at external actors: charismatic leaders, firebrand preachers, radical clerics or intellectual gurus, and assess their role in recruiting new members for terrorist organizations. These theoretical approaches can be linked together as one looking at the process of attraction to organization/acts from below, others from above. Yet, even these theories start from the criticism of general inadequacies of terrorist psychological profiling and look at the possibilities of finding other ways to explain people's engagement in violent political acts. The researchers working in this area suggest looking at the dynamics of psychological manipulation in order to assess the radicalization process.

An article by Trujillo et al. suggests two types of recruitment to terrorism. First is self-recruitment, where a group of friends gets radicalized mainly using internet "to exchange knowledge and practices and reinforce ideological positions" (Trujillo, Ramirez y Alonso 723-724). The second type of recruitment is an outcome of "the process of systematic directed and conscious psychological manipulation, very similar to that produced by sectarian or totalitarian groups" (Trujillo, Ramirez y Alonso 724) This type of investigation sees similarities in the behaviour of individuals attracted to terrorist organizations and those engaged in religious sects led by a charismatic leader.

These theories have also been quite popular in the law enforcement circles, as they allow focusing on a number of charismatic, probably quite visible individuals whose elimination should then lead to disappearance or at least weakening of the terrorist groups.⁹ The importance of leaders has been emphasized in other contexts as well, e.g. William Zartman in his examination of the dynamics of intrastate conflict emphasizes the role of political entrepreneurs in mobilizing people around certain grievances in the build-up to

⁹ This is one of the motivations provided for the use of targeted killings of terrorist leaders.

civil war. (Zartman) In social movements theories, some emphasis is also put on movement entrepreneurs especially when it comes to recruitment of new members for the movement organizations. (Dalgaard-Nielsen, *Studying violent radicalization in Europe*. Part I. *Potential Contribution of Social Movement Theory* 8)

Yet, it is unclear how much of the leader's role is due to psychological manipulation or pressure and how much of it is simple persuasiveness that leads people to follow such leaders and finally also to engage in terrorist acts. Trujillo and his colleagues find evidence to suggest that at least in case of the group they analysed it was manipulation and psychological pressure at work. Thus it could be taken as one path to terrorism though, as the researchers themselves admit, not the only one.

In addition to the importance of the leader, two more types of pressure could be added here: peer pressure exercised in the tightly knit groups of close friends that join the cause together as is often examined in the social networks approach; second, so-called "slippery slope" radicalization (McCauley and Moskaleiko, *Friction. How Radicalization Happens to Them and Us* 35-48), when a person reluctantly moves from legal activism to more and more radical forms, eventually engaging even in violent acts. These two paths exemplify what has been termed "involvement without radicalization" which has to be considered if we want to have a fuller picture of how people end up committing terrorist offenses.

Grievance

Grievance explanations are among the most popular when it comes to evaluating political violence in general and terrorism in particular. As collective action is associated with the desire to enact some social change or right some social wrong, and political violence is understood as an extreme form of such collective action, grievance explanations seem to be the most obvious place to start. These explanations usually focus on structural level flaws and the way these encourage individuals to engage in political action and its extreme forms. Perceived injustice has been seen as one of the strongest motivators to join social movements, but also for joining violent groups.

Grievances explanations are also among the oldest ones when it comes to theorizing about why people revolt or engage in other acts of political violence. Ted Gurr's study *Why men rebel* (Gurr) with its focus on relative deprivation has not lost its appeal even forty years

after its publication. In the recent re-publication of the work, the author admitted to using the term grievance as a synonym for relative deprivation in the later works (see, preface to the edition) and argued forcefully for its continuing relevance. Theories on terrorism have also long focused on structural conditions that imbue the individuals with a sense of injustice prompting them to action.

A number of structural conditions have been said to contribute to the sense of grievance. Tore Bjørgo suggests examples such as “civil war or deep-rooted conflicts, invasion and occupation by foreign military forces, economic underdevelopment, bad governance and corruption penetrating the state at all levels, rapid modernization or technological developments like the rise of internet and social media” (Bjørgo 39) Lack of political opportunities is often added to such a list as well as social exclusion, disaffection of a religious-ethnic minority, wrongful foreign policy, etc.

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. According to McCauley and Moskalenko, individuals engaged in terrorist action often exhibit high levels of altruism, strong reciprocity and group identification (McCauley and Moskalenko, *Friction. How Radicalization Happens to Them and Us* 26-29) thus linking the structural conditions that produce grievance with the individual psychological traits that help translate them into action.

A major criticism of grievance-based explanations is the so-called specificity problem (Pisiou 40, Schmid 26). The factors that are supposed to influence an individual’s decision to support violent action or engage in it are quite widespread across social groups and societies, yet only a tiny minority of individuals actually do actively support/perpetrate such acts. At the same time, the lists of potential grievances are so long that they become unhelpful as more and more circumstances have to be added to them for them to have any explanatory value. E.g., lack of political opportunities should create grievances in non-democratic states, yet, there are many such states which do not face terrorist violence while there are many democracies which do. In this case, the democracies get classified as those which offer fewer political opportunities for young people (e.g. Italy in the 1970s) or those which support autocratic governments abroad (e.g. Britain or the US today). The diaspora groups in different countries may suffer different hardships, discrimination,

economic or social marginalization, but again, terrorism is much less pervasive even in such difficult circumstances. Fewer diaspora communities give birth to even fewer terrorists. In other words, the conditions that could potentially produce terrorism are much more widespread than the terrorism itself and grievance explanations have a hard time accounting for this “lack.”

Rational Choice

The most promising theory of radicalization so far links the process to a series of rational choice decisions. This type of analysis sees engagement in terrorism as a part of cost-benefit analysis that an individual conducts with regard to any serious activity. E.g. for Martha Crenshaw a group chooses terrorism after it assesses costs and benefits of such action taking a decision that is collectively rational. (Crenshaw) Ronald Wintrobe in his article “Can suicide bombers be rational?” argues that suicide bombers are also perfectly rational individuals and that suicide bombings can be seen as a kind of rational activity that is “an extreme example of a general class of behaviour in which all of us engage.” (Wintrobe 2)

The rational choice theorists are therefore interested in behaviour rather than in psychological traits. They assume that individuals are rational and make choices based on (though maybe not always explicit) calculation of costs and benefits. Daniela Pisiou takes this approach to analyse Islamist radicalization in Europe and suggests that becoming an engaged Islamist radical can be seen as an “occupational change process.” Individuals choose to follow a “career in terrorism” as they choose any other career, evaluating its downsides, but also the “reward, standing and recognition” (Pisiou 55) that it conveys. Standing, similarly to social prestige, is one of the most important reasons for joining. A sense of heroism and a type of elitism are also linked to this factor. Recognition depends on perceived support and approval from the referent community or social surrounding that are given to the perpetrated actions and reward can be both material gain, but also emotional satisfaction. (Pisiou 85-106)

The rational choice approach to radicalization also has links to social network theory. In its first perceived phase of radicalization, the probing in Pisiou’s terminology, chance encounters mean a lot, but much of the consequent engagement in radical political action depends on the entry into social networks that support and promote such engagement. Later these network help maintain a focus on action and make it difficult to leave the organization/group.

This tendency has been observed in various underground political groups, where over time the primary motivator for continuing engagement becomes loyalty to the group members rather than any great belief in the action itself. (Della Porta)

The rational choice approach does not offer a panacea from all the ills that trouble radicalization research. A number of issues still remain – e.g. the specificity problem, why actually only some people choose to become terrorists. (Pisiou 49) Are there any personal characteristics that induce some and not others to choose such an occupation? The social networks approach helps answer this question, but it then raises a doubt as to how rational that choice is. If a group of friends decide to become, say, jihadis, and two out of five are very committed to this idea while the others have some doubts, yet just decide to follow their friends, on what level can we talk about the rationality of the choice? Is it rational for them as a group? Or is it rational for all the individuals involved? One answer again is that it could be rational for all the individuals involved, but their values are different – for those who want to get engaged, it is the political action that is valuable and for those who follow them without much convincing, it is the solidarity factor that is key. Though such detours to other frameworks may explain a lot, the parsimony of theory does suffer in the process.

The question also remains as to what the policy implications of this model are. While looking for terrorist traits leads to profiling, coercion hypotheses to attempts at elimination of terrorist leaders and grievance explanations to focus on the socio-economic conditions, where does the rational choice take us? One possibility would be to increase the costs and lower the benefits for joining the terrorist organizations, yet this suggestion lacks precision. Daniela Pisiou's recommendations after using the model focus on "deconstructing radical interpretative frameworks" and countering radical frames (Pisiou 164). This sounds like a proposal to develop better strategic communication, yet we have not seen much result from this approach over the last ten years of concentrated effort.

Conclusions

Radicalization is currently on the top list of priorities of policy makers, law enforcement agencies and researchers working on the issues of political violence and, especially, terrorism. A number of analyses of this vast literature have appeared over the last years, trying to assess

what we know about this phenomenon. This article presents another attempt to systematize this knowledge, looking at the phenomenon of individual radicalization through four types of approaches: individual psychological traits, coercion and motivation, grievance and rational choice. A number of different theories or parts of those theories work within this framework. Somewhat less attention was paid here to group dynamics as an explanation of radicalization, though it was mentioned in all parts in connection to individual processes.

To summarize, what we note from these theories are the following features of radicalization:

1) It is understood as a gradual process. Here, I focused rather exclusively on this process as it looks for an individual, but similar processes can be observed in groups and even entire societies (McCauley and Moskaleiko, *Friction. How Radicalization Happens to Them and Us*).

2) It is a process that can stop at any particular step. An individual who adopts quite radical political/religious beliefs does not necessarily act on those beliefs and does not necessarily move from a legal political action to an illegal one.

3) At the same time, it is a process that can take a number of different routes. Motivations for engaging or not engaging in terrorist activities differ and circumstances in which people become engaged in radical actions differ as well.

4) An enormous variety of factors that may influence individuals' adherence to a terrorist organization make profiling of potential terrorists an impossible task, yet, given that the radicalization more often than not is facilitated by social networks, observing the formation and dynamics of such networks could be a useful way of identifying potential offenders.

5) There is more evidence to suggest that engagement in terrorist activities as a result of radicalization is a process based on rational choice than an outcome of processes beyond individual's control. Yet, such factors as peer pressure and the "slippery slope" have to be taken into account.

6) Social networks are of a crucial importance when "deciding" to engage in violent action. Evidence both from older (such as Red Brigades or ETA) and contemporary groups suggests that decisions to engage in violent activity are easier taken when a group of friends takes such a decision together. (Sageman) This factor also helps to understand different levels of motivation behind the joining, as some members of a group might be less enthusiastic about violence while others are more so.

7) Few theories quote ideology as the most significant factor in radicalization. In fact, none of the serious theories treat it as something determining engagement in violent action even if it can serve to provide justification for it. Rather, the shape of political activity is determined by what Tilly and Tarrow would call “repertoires” of action in the given community or the existing outlets for frustration (Tilly and Tarrow).¹⁰

The discussion above, hopefully, has shown that there is much we already know about radicalization. Even if it might not be possible to profile a potential terrorist and to identify each and every individual who might have an inclination to join ISIS, Al Qaeda or FARC we have a better understanding of the processes that may lead to this engagement.

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¹⁰ Olivier Roy emphasizes that there is nothing specifically “Islamic” about the contemporary political violence and states that “Twenty years ago these men would have joined a radical leftist movement, but such movements have disappeared from the space of social exclusion...” (Roy 48).

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