RADICALISATION: A MARGINAL PHENOMENON, OR A MIRROR TO SOCIETY?

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When we hear about radicalisation, we mostly think of violent terrorist attacks. Over the last few years, European societies have been confronted with several major attacks: Paris (November 2015); Brussels (March 2016); Nice (July 2016), Barcelona (August 2017). In public opinion, these events have often been intertwined with the arrival of "Muslim refugees". However, we have to keep in mind that terrorist attacks are not only affecting contemporary Europe. Such attacks occur much more often in the Middle East and in Africa, and also in 19th and 20th century Europe there were periods where terrorist attacks were common.

Radical ideas are not necessarily bad. It is often difficult to make a distinction between "good" and "bad" radicalisation, e.g. "one man's freedom fighter is another man's terrorist." (Timmerman, Hutsebaut, Mels, Nonnemand, & Van Herck, 2007, p. 10). What is considered radical is historically and culturally bound. In the 1980s, the idea of gay marriage was "radical", today anyone opposing gay marriage could be labelled "fundamentalist" or "radical". The prevailing discourse often sees radicalisation as an individual process with ideology as a key driver. However, a recent stream of literature questions some of these key elements. An important element left out of the dominant narratives is the context in which processes of radicalisation and terrorism thrive.

Many policy-makers and European citizens are worried about the increasing radicalisation that poses a threat to social cohesion and social trust. In addition, many factors located outside the EU affect these phenomena: conflicts in the Middle East, Central Asia, Africa and IS. Controlling the circulation of information and ideologies, social media, people crossing borders or the influx of refugees are considered major challenges in the fight against terrorism. Within the borders of Europe, people are concerned about the growing number of EU citizens with an Islamic background (including converts) travelling to conflict zones to fight in terrorism-affiliated organisations. In other words, we are witnessing a trans-nationalisation of radicalisation.

Scholars argue that old certainties about identity, family values and the boundaries of one's community have been lost (e.g. Baumann, 2000) and consequently new "we's" centred on religion and nationality are gaining momentum. Research demonstrates that processes of globalisation often leave behind feelings of disappointment and betrayal, and affect the deepening of social inequalities. In such an environment, feelings of alienation, exclusion and disconnectedness become apparent. In seeking a positive self-image and a valuable social position for themselves and the

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social group(s) with which they affiliate, institutions (education, labour market, legal system, political system) play an important role. They can support and guide individuals in this quest for recognition and appreciation of their status and position in society. In contrast, when (large groups of) individuals perceive institutions as failing to address their needs, a feeling of "institutional anomie" can arise, which means that individuals' attachment to mainstream society's core institutions is fading. In the worst case, they can turn to other destructive networks or counter-spheres to look for meaning, belonging and fulfilment (e.g. Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

From this perspective, Jihadi movements can present a plausible alternative of a desirable and attainable utopian society, even with its own institutional and ideological framework (Neumann, 2015). But also right-wing and far-right groups can promise a mono-ethnic and mono-cultural utopia that many are looking for.

We have to be aware that feelings of frustration, alienation and subsequent anger cut across the entire demographic and socioeconomic spectrum (Neumann, 2015; Langman, 2006). Moreover, the vast majority of individuals with a vulnerable socio-demographic profile do not radicalise (Kruglanski & Orehek, 2011), while some well-educated, affluent and apparently well-integrated individuals do (Bartlett & Miller, 2012; Deckard & Jacobson, 2015)

Understanding radicalisation processes requires looking beyond the level of the individual, and including the broader institutional context, as well as risk and protective factors emerging from the institutional context (educational systems, civil society organisations, labour market, juridical and political system, etc.). Also, an individual's relations with significant others, and offline and online social networks (such as peer groups, religious groups, kinship networks) matter. All of these factors have to be embedded in the current macro context, including international conflicts and existing structural, systemic economic, religious and political conditions.

We therefore introduce a multilevel conceptual model to study radicalisation (see fig 1):
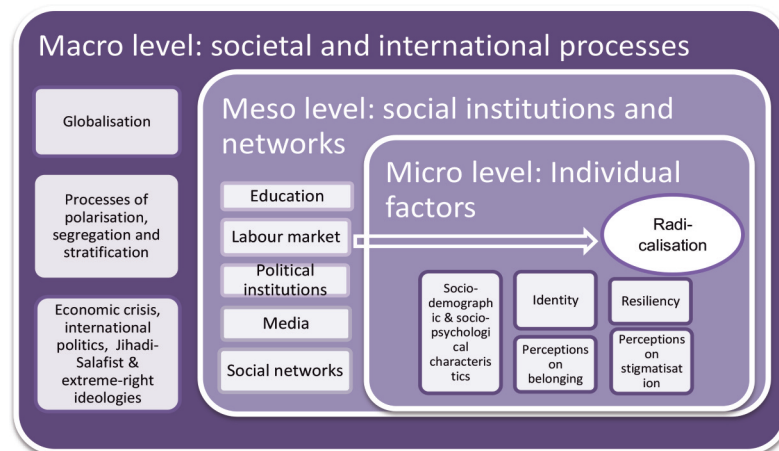
Additionally, several theories can help in grasping the mechanisms explaining radicalisation. The Institutional Anomie Theory (Messner, Thome, & Rosenfeld, 2008) based on Merton's Anomie Theory (1938) states that anomie is caused by discrepancies between culturally defined goals

and the legitimate opportunities to achieve those goals. This situation occurs when social institutions are weak and their ability to control behaviour diminishes (Bjerregaard & Cochran, 2008). This paves the way for the emergence of anti-social networks (e.g. right-wing extremist and Jihadi-Salafist networks) as well as counter narratives and counter public spheres, e.g. the idea of a potential utopian society for ethnic, cultural or religious "pure and true" individuals.

Another relevant theory is the "Social-psychological model of relative deprivation" (Pettigrew et al., 2008). This theory explains why certain (groups of) individuals are more receptive to institutional anomie than others. Individuals judge themselves in comparing themselves with their group of reference. When people consider themselves or the group they belong to unrightfully worse off, they may be upset about the relative deprivation of their "imagined community", even though they individually are better off (Pettigrew et al., 2008). This explains why often more affluent and resourceful individuals take the initiative in radical movements (Taspinar, 2009).

The Staircase to Terrorism model (Moghaddam, 2005) provides us with the metaphor of a narrowing staircase resembling different psychological processes, each becoming more extreme and ending in the engagement with violence and terrorism. Each successive step onto this staircase decreases opportunities and "ways out". On every floor individual psychological processes are influenced by internal (such as individual resilience) and external (such as the nature of the networks one has) risks and protective factors. Complementary to this is the Supply and Demand model (Mellis, 2007) that focuses on the meeting of individuals' needs and the resources available in their network. If positive/constructive supply-networks with an appealing worldview with which people can identify are absent, they can for example turn into negative/destructive ones, such as Jihadi-Salafist ideology/extreme right. Depending on one's position on the staircase, extremist ideologies are a viable option or discarded as not relevant.

Lastly, there is the Exit-Voice-Loyalty-Neglect (EVLN) model (Dowding, John, Mergoupirs, & Van Vugt, 2000), derived from the framework of Hirschman. When people are confronted with feelings of dissatisfaction/frustration, the model provides four ideal typical courses of action, along two axes: active-passive/constructive-destructive: Exit is an active-destructive reaction (e.g. climbing the staircase to terrorism); Voice is an active-constructive reaction (e.g. by engaging in societal organisations, political activism, etc.); Loyalty is a passive-constructive reaction (e.g. not to conduct any action out of loyalty) and Neglect is a passive-destructive reaction (e.g. not to conduct any action even if the situation deteriorates).

To conclude, we should not underestimate the important role of information and communication technology. It allows for a global "performance" of people's locally grounded unease and radical or terrorist choices. Frustrations that are often linked to local situations can be framed within a global context. Finally, we assume that the dominant narratives of radicalisation as "an individual process with ideology as a key driver" is highly problematic. It does not only lead to an incomplete narrow understanding of the concept, it also increases stigmatisation of Muslims and other minorities, and polarisation in society. It therefore reinforces institutional anomie in society, the breeding ground for radicalisation processes.

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