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Radicalization and Religious Violence in Western Europe

An Introduction

Thierry Balzacq and Elyamine Settoul

The most general aim of this book is to advance, if a little, our understanding of radicalization as it relates to jihadi terrorism. This calls for a word of caution, however. While our empirical cases focus on jihadi manifestations and consequences of radicalization, our conceptual chapters drive home a set of ideas, assumptions, and logics that are not unique to jihadi radicalization or violence. In other words, while the book emphasizes Islam-inspired radicalization, it acknowledges that radicalization boasts different meanings and has an equally powerful bearing on other types of beliefs (e.g., political and economic). The book sits, therefore, between conceptual apparatuses with a broader scope and reach and case studies that vet their relevance in specific contexts.

A caveat is not a substitute for stating a book's backbone. This book can also, and most obviously, be read as an attempt to explicate the various ways in which radicalization sometimes leads to violence. Contributors want to account for conditions under which some individuals holding radical views resort to violence. Our cases confirm that many do not. The book is about the others that do, and it draws attention to the diversity of motives and circumstances that push or pull them toward violent action.

Whatever their point of departure, the essays brought together in this volume are not meant to discover “root causes” of terrorism to slake a predictive policy desire. They are, rather, concerned with exploring processes of radicalization in their different facets in order to augment our understanding of the conditions under which violence becomes the privileged option for interactions.

Studying radicalization remains controversial. Although most intelligence agencies in Europe seem to have their attention fixated on jihadism, it is worth stressing that every ideological system, be it political or religious, is likely to embody manifestations of violent radicalization. To capture how radicalization takes shape, Bertjan Doosje and colleagues (2016) single out five forms of radicalization, and none, according to them, assumes a violent character a priori: nationalistic, extreme right-wing, extreme left-wing, single issue, and religiously motivated types. Beyond their obvious distinctive concerns, these different groups are described as sharing a set of basic common elements: One, these categories defend a cause that is not, or is insufficiently, dealt with by political institutions. Two, these groups believe their values to be legitimate and superior to those of others. Three, they are all receptive to the efficacy of the use of violence (Wieviorka 1993).

Be that as it may, most analysts acknowledge that the concept of radicalization is debatable and can be a source of confusion (Sedgwick 2010). Many criticisms outline its subjectivity and arbitrariness. Not unlike the word “terrorism,” radicalization catalyzes infighting over meaning and is therefore highly political. Peter Neumann observes, for instance, that someone called a terrorist by some is a freedom fighter to others (Neumann 2013, 878). The same goes for groups categorized as “radical.” This label carries a stigma (Goffman 1963) that contains a sort of performativity, for at the slightest mention of “radical” in the political context, the state narrative can either bring these groups into disrepute or glorify them. It can also adjudicate on the normal and the abnormal, the acceptable and the unacceptable within the political arena. Unsurprisingly, being labeled as “radical” carries implications for infighting within the said radical groups (Collovald and Gaïti 2006, 23), as it can strengthen the commitment and reinforce the allegiance of some, or conversely convince others to quit. The label “radical” produces contingent outcomes.

To recast the argument, this book is not a treatise on all forms of radicalization, but a work on jihadi radicalization and its link with violent action, an important problem that tends to be skirted by extant studies because the causal relation between radical opinion and violence is mostly assumed rather than tested. It is further concerned with how, and in what sense,

current theories enable us to account for not only the properties of all violent radicalization, but also what (if any) are specific to violent radicalization, that is, the distinctive character of radicalization that violent jihadism expresses. The book can, then, be taken as a comparative theoretical-empirical study of violent radicalization processes. Against this backdrop, this introductory chapter now attends first to the concept of radicalization, next to the salient features of jihadi radicalization, and finally to this book's overall structure.

The Concept of Radicalization

Before discussing how radicalization manifests itself, we need to come to terms with the different meanings pressed under the label “radicalization.” To that effect, this section outlines three conceptions of radicalization: etymological, descriptive, and critical. Doing so, we hope, furthers the cause of conceptual accuracy and ameliorates this book's use of the concept. Students of critical and descriptive views are usually different people, but they all appropriate the etymological tone of the concept. This distinction suggests, among other things, that it is primarily the divide between critical and descriptive/analytical accounts of radicalization that matters (Fadil, Ragazzi, and de Koning 2019; Patel 2011; Coolsaet 2008). There are possible variations in an individual author's commitment to either, but, as it happens, critical and descriptive approaches do not ask the same questions, and when they do, their answers spring from different diagnoses and foreground distinctive prescriptions.

The etymological study of the word “radicalization” does not shed much light on the topic, as the Latin origin of the word, *radix*, also means “root.” It follows that being radical means, figuratively, “returning to one's roots.” In fact, this difficulty in grasping what is “radical” pertains to the fact that the adjective is used to define ideas, practices, and beliefs in a relative way that is contingently related to time and space. What is radical clearly depends on the historical and geographical context. For instance, up until recently, same-sex marriage used to be a very radical idea in many societies, and in fact this perception still prevails in many parts of the world. In short, the authors tend to agree that radicalization is a catch-all term that means many things and refers to a variety of frames of reference. That is, its intension is large and its extension is difficult to delimit. This concern with the content and remits of radicalization leads to what we call, for lack of a better word, a descriptive/analytical understanding of radicalization. Here,

it is the degree and intensity of the relation between radical opinions and violence that rivet scholars' attention. Farhad Khosrokhavar, for instance, defines radicalization basically as the "convergence of an extreme ideology and moving into action" (2014, 8. Our translation). For others, like Charles Allen, the term encompasses more and pertains to "the process of adopting an extremist belief system, including the willingness to use, support, or facilitate violence, as a method to effect societal change" (2007, 4). Despite the lack of consensus, many researchers set out to differentiate cognitive from violent radicalization. Cognitive radicalization is the process through which individuals adopt ideas in opposition to dominant norms, oppose the social order in place, and seek to replace it with another one based on a different belief system. Violent radicalization, which concerns a much smaller group of people, appears when individuals use every means possible to implement cognitive radicalization's ideas and beliefs. It should nonetheless be noted that the adoption of a radical ideology is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition that compels violent action. This reading parts ways with interpretations that assume radicalization and violence go hand in glove. For example, Eitan Alimi, Chares Demetriou, and Lorenzo Bosi (2015, 11) refer to radicalization as a processual leap from "nonviolent tactics of contention to tactics that include violent means." In this context, then, radicalization and violent action are one and the same. The problem, however, is that this view might end up countenancing policies that blur the line between holding radical beliefs and privileging violence as a legitimate recourse for action. The shortcut is alluring, but misleading. Hence, contributors to this volume demonstrate, in different environments, that ideology does not always translate into action (Borum 2011; Horgan 2006; Victoroff 2005).

Critical scholars situate the concept of radicalization within the political context that saw it rising to prominence. In the aftermath of 9/11, studies that sought to examine the root cause of terrorism were cast as a commiserating look at terrorist violence. Radicalization came across as an actionable concept able, as it were, to point policy-makers toward the "making" of a terrorist. In the words of Neumann (2008, 4), "In the highly charged atmosphere following the September 11 attacks it was through the notion of radicalization that a discussion about the political, economic, social and psychological forces that underpin terrorism and political violence became possible again." That is, radicalization was quickly adopted by various law enforcement agencies because, in the main, it empowered them to carry out certain forms of policing based on predictive models that the growing scholarship on radicalization would make available. Arun Kundnani (2012,

5) argues that the new paradigm of radicalization that took shape between 2001 and 2004 was primarily if not exclusively oriented toward a question with discriminating currents in its wake: “Why do some individual Muslims support an extremist interpretation of Islam that leads to violence?” Because, so the argument goes, such extremist violence is inspired by dangerous appropriation of Islamic thought by some Muslims, it is on that ideology and the associated community that the intellectual and policy gaze ought to focus (Silber and Bhatt 2007). Taken to its logical conclusion, this book, too, could be treated as reinforcing this trend. Three responses could possibly be offered, without calling off continual attention to the matter.

To begin with, this book is not about discovering “indicators” of radicalization that would allow, or better encourage, a distinctive kind of policing. Instead, contributors were asked to investigate relational features that characterize radicalization, examine the extent to which local events reverberate globally, and ascertain the merit of available conceptual apparatuses in shedding original light on the case at hand. Second, some contributors to this volume are Muslims. They have an experiential understanding of biases that a poor handling of the radicalization concept can unleash. Social scientists need to cultivate a robust ethical and reflexive attitude when they study such questions. However, they should not forsake the analysis of the subject altogether because their work might be interpreted or employed for aims other than scientific progress. The study of radicalization cannot be an indictment against all Muslims any more than the study of white supremacists is an indictment against all white people. Social scientists should recognize the danger while exploring such sensitive questions and tread the path with rigor and ethics. By the way, isn’t it what serious research standards command? Third, our book has not been supported by any funding agency and is not meant to respond to a policy-oriented tender. It is not critical, however, in the sense of critical theory. The book is analytically critical, as it questions explorations of radicalization that emphasize mono-causality at the service of prediction. Further, the book is theoretically eclectic; that is, empirical cases exhibit more varieties in the trajectories to violence than are often acknowledged by studies that are driven by the imperative of pinning down the root causes of radicalization.

Theorizing Radicalization

The term “radicalization” has just been—if briefly—introduced. Essays in this volume will unpack it more fully, though each would involve it in

a different manner. Indeed, by employing radicalization, these essays lift the veil on other rather less obvious but by no means marginal conceptions of radicalization. For now it is well to note that studies are not only using the term in distinctive fashions but are also putting forward different approaches to the phenomenon. We shall, therefore, be concerned in this section with theoretical frameworks about radicalization and the kind of inquiry they tend to be associated with.

Part of the gulf that separates approaches to radicalization stems, we think, from what they consider as the primary determinant of the transition from nonviolent to violent forms of action. Although the conceptions of radicalization found in the scholarship might be manifold, for the purpose of this book, we can, in a rough and ready way, identify three main accounts of radicalization. One focuses on the drivers and causes of radicalization; the second is concerned with circumstances or conditions that facilitate radicalization; and the third turns the arrow of investigation toward uncovering the mechanisms that sustain radicalization processes. It is in this sense that we might summarize these accounts by arguing that the first deals with “why” questions about radicalization while the second and the third are interested in the “when” and “how” questions, respectively (compare Bloom 2005; Bartlett and Miller 2012; Bergesen 2007; McCormick 2003).

When they look for root causes scholars treat radicalization as the effect of a number of factors that stand in a relation of constant co-occurrence with it. The aim is to identify processes and the underlying multifactorial causes that drive individuals with deeply implanted belief systems to engage in violence. To use David Mandel’s words, it is about understanding “what goes on before the bomb goes off” (2010, 25). These causes are both cognitive (e.g., ideology, identity crises, memories of stigmatization) and material (e.g., social grievances, inequalities). One of the pending uncertainties is whether it is possible to establish an exhaustive list of causes that underlie radicalization. Moreover, sometimes researchers who inquire into causes entertain high hopes about their ability to derive predictions from causal explanations (Juergensmeyer 2005; Stern 2003). The general problem here is collapsing explanation into prediction. Finally, the observation of an instance of regularity is not an explanation of why something happened. That many of those who were involved in the Paris attack on November 13, 2015, had suffered from the absence of a paternal authority does not tell us why they chose violence as a means to express their radical beliefs. Many children without fathers do not become radicalized, and those who do are not all terrorists. What regularity offers is a better under-

standing of patterns of outcomes, but it doesn't fare well in answering the question "why?"

Causal accounts of radicalization, in view of the problems raised above, have transformed the search for causes into an examination of precipitating or facilitating factors. Thus, what appears as a facilitating condition, that is, a factor that sometimes gives a causal force its impetus, becomes a cause in itself. The danger here lies with the propensity to call any factor that bears even the slightest effect on the emergence of violent political action a "cause." Thus, the framework designed by Tore Bjorgo (2005) features no less than four causes, including structural, accelerating (or facilitating), motivational, and triggering causes. Realizing the oddity of calling all these factors "causes," the study, rather than scaling down the number of genuinely causal elements, proposes to further amplify the list of causal factors up to 14.

Studies that focus on pathways seek to combine an interest in causal factors with an overture toward broader facilitating conditions. John Horgan (2008) provides a good illustration of this line of research. Distancing himself from the sketchy studies of profiles, he proposes to look at pathways to radicalization and investigate the factors driving individuals to join or, conversely, leave these movements. He thus points to the influence of a number of macro-, meso-, and micro-factors in pathways of radicalization: macro refers to the broader societal environment in which individuals move about; meso relates to the role of socialization processes (e.g., family) and the influence of other group dynamics (e.g., friends, clans); and micro pertains to the personal attributes of people, including their predispositions as well as the way they perceive reality.

However, the analysis of disposition of a cultural or psychological tone reduces terrorism to ideational factors attached to the individual or given group. As a consequence, any political grievances or material circumstances that might account for violent radicalization are jettisoned (Laqueur 2004, 1987). Beneath a psychological view of radicalization is the creed that knowing a person's or group's pattern of beliefs is a reliable proxy for ascertaining their likely association with terrorist violence. One could appreciate why such account might seduce counterterrorist services. It provides them with a straightforward route to prediction, though it lacks explanatory traction.

Be that as it may, this combination of different levels of analysis crystallizes a wide array of theoretical approaches that tend to focus on very different matters: some focus solely on the individual and their psychology, when others emphasize the role played by socialization processes (Silke

2008; Cottee 2011). However, understanding pathways of radicalization raises the difficult question of how to effectively differentiate objective elements from very subjective ones (micro). If experiences of economic marginalization and political exclusion can be measured and have an objective reality, experiences involving emotional components such as indignation, humiliation, and many other psychological responses to discrimination are not quantifiable.

Despite the fact that there are many pathways to radicalization, and that many personal psychological and sociological features influence individual trajectories, a growing cluster of theories is moving toward a “processual” understanding of radicalization. But processes are underwritten, according to Charles Tilly (2003, 20), by mechanisms, that is, “similar events that produce essentially the same immediate effects across a wide range of circumstances.” The study of mechanisms does not have to be linear, but a vast tract of scholarship on radicalization employs a mechanism-based approach in order to establish “what follows what” (Alimi, Demetriou, and Bosi 2015, 35). And here is the rub. In general, these views embrace linear models arguing that radicalization follows a number of distinct stages or steps that enable us to situate individuals on a scale of radicalization (Haggerty and Bucerius 2020; Bergesen 2007). Some draw on this view to bypass explanatory systems as they search for a potential existential crisis that could have sparked the radicalization process (McCauley and Moskalenko 2008).

More often than not these studies use the metaphor of a staircase to describe the gradual escalation of ordinary people taking a step too far. Fathali Moghaddam (2005), for instance, offers a six-step checklist, according to which individuals check off all the boxes when they commit violent acts such as suicide attacks. Quintan Wiktorowicz (2005) describes for his part a three-step process that starts with a “cognitive opening” that leads to “religious seeking” and ends with the “construction of a sacred authority,” during which the frame of thought of the individual finally aligns with the group’s ideology. How exactly do these steps matter? Cognitive opening, to start with, indicates when an individual is amenable to extremist ideas. It can be either created by a moral shock undergone by the person or prompted by external cues generated by radical entrepreneurs. Cognitive opening transports the individual into religious seeking, which is meant to heal the crisis by making an individual feel significant. In this way, religious seeking accounts for a quest of meaning, which religion is held to provide. This is what Arie Kruglanski, Jocelyn Bélanger, and Rohan Gunaratna term “significant quest theory.” As they argue, the need for “personal

significance—the desire to matter, to be ‘someone,’ and to have meaning in one’s life—is the dominant need that underlies violent extremism” (2019, 37). The third step that endeavors to capture why some Muslims are drawn to religious violence is the construction of sacred authority around the figure of a charismatic leader (Appleby 2012).

Each step tells us something worth heeding, but linear models convey the powerful but false idea that individuals move across different steps and, necessarily, must first experience cognitive opening before embarking on a quest for religious meaning. Linearity, we know, is a one-way street. But, as some essays in this book demonstrate, it might well be that there is no clearly discernible order of precedence among the three steps. In our view, then, it improves matters to consider cognitive opening, religious seeking, and the construction of a sacred authority as contributing factors, not as consecutive steps arrayed toward extremist violence.

Still other models—linear in their explanatory timbre—assume that the key element resides in the organization of violent groups, as many similarities can be drawn with the *modus operandi* of sects. During a process of psychological and social conditioning, individuals are stripped of their multiple affiliations and brought to embrace solely the group’s identity. The group will devise a worldview that fundamentally dehumanizes and demonizes the enemy (Flannery 2015; Stahelski 2005). Unlike linear models, Tinka Veldhuis and Jorgen Staun (2009) assume that these mental processes systematically lead up to the creation and reinforcement of a dichotomist and Manichean representation of the world. If they are helpful to model standard trajectory, these processes are nevertheless contested insofar as they only work retrospectively, if they have been completed (i.e., when individuals are fully radicalized), and they ignore individuals with similar social and psychological predispositions who have not joined the spiral of radicalization.

Jihadi Radicalization

When Mark Sedgwick (2010) uses the term radicalization, he traces how it rose in importance after the attacks carried out in Western European capitals of Madrid (March 11, 2004) and London (July 7, 2005). This allows him to emphasize the deeds of homegrown terrorists. In fact, in contrast to the attacks perpetrated by smaller foreign groups in the previous decades, the post-2004 terrorist actions have been predominantly committed by individuals born and socialized in the very Western countries they have

attacked.¹ This specificity has since become a defining pattern, and European citizens are most likely involved in the most recent attacks (Hafez and Creighton 2015; Silber and Bhatt 2007). Indeed, the burden of this argument is that radicalization is primarily a Western phenomenon. Thus, policies that aim to address it ought to be geared toward “communities of believers on the outskirts of London, Paris, and other European cities, where Islam is already a growing part of the West” (Kepel 2004, 8).

As tempting as the development of an all-encompassing analytical model to decipher the dynamics of jihadi recruitment can be, important hurdles remain that must be overcome, the first of which is the great sociological diversity of the actors involved. Various surveys have brought to light the wide and protean array of motivations among those who wished to go to Syria and Iraq. Before the Islamic State was created in 2014, it appears that humanitarian reasons and a readiness to help played a large role in the motivations of some young Westerners to go and assist, as Syrian populations were being shelled by the regime of Bashar al-Assad in response to the 2011 popular uprising. Others joined in owing to religious beliefs to complete hijrah,² that is, to migrate to Muslim land. Recurring answers to surveys also include a quest for identity, a search for an adrenaline rush, and a morbid fascination with death. Explanatory theories of jihadi radicalization is a good reflection of the plurality of these trajectories. In France, the debate is fierce. Some paradigms seek to establish a causal relation between religious extremism and processes of violent radicalization. Gilles Kepel (2015) for instance believes that the rising Salafism of Western-based Muslim communities fuels the spread of jihadism. He argues for a “radicalization of Islam” and insists on looking into the scope and meaning of Islamic concepts (Kepel 2015, 51), thus assuming that Salafism is a gateway to jihadism (Adraoui 2020). Other researchers disagree. They focus instead on the social markers of terrorists and most of all on the rather weak degree of religious socialization. For Khosrokhavar (2014), indeed, jihadism takes root most and foremost in a deep sentiment of humiliation and on stigma that in turn becomes “sacralized in hatred,” as shown in the social trajectory of numerous young members of the most violent groups that is characterized by a criminal record, time spent in

1. There are exceptions. The attacks carried out in Paris in 1995 were perpetrated by Khaled Kelkal, a young Frenchman who grew up in the suburb of Lyon. Yet this case remains marginal, and Algerian services are suspected to have been involved.

2. The term *hijrah* originally refers to the journey of the Prophet Muhammad from the city of Mecca, where he had been physically threatened, to the city of Medina, and by extension designates Muslims returning to Muslim dominated lands.

prison, involvement in social networks online, and more often than not an absent paternal figure (see also Dittrich 2007, 57; Ranstorp 2006).

While subscribing to this line of inquiry, Olivier Roy nonetheless emphasizes the generational dimension of the phenomenon (2016, 2004). He argues that Islam appears today as the last transnational utopia available on the market of radical dissent. According to him, then, nihilism and a fascination with death are the markers of the jihadi *modus operandi*, and they stand at odds with the fundamentalist practices of religious Salafists. If death has always been a lurking possibility when engaging in Islamist terrorism, it never used to be its sole purpose, all the less so that it violates Salafist principles that “condemn suicide as it interferes with God’s will” (Roy 2016, 12). Roy explains that for this generation of jihadists, there is no plan B, no fleeing strategy. The perpetrators of terrorist acts are systematically looking for law enforcement forces for the ultimate confrontation, seeking a widely broadcasted death. In a way, then, they embrace Bin Laden’s creed, “we love death more than we love life,”³ when they deliberately choose death as the end game.

Marc Sageman (2004) departs from this interpretation. Specifically, he turns his gaze toward the importance of social networks such as religious diasporas. Sageman finds that radicalization originates from new types of networks that focus on breaking individuals’ personalities in order to give rise to new non-hierarchical radical groups, and he rejects the idea that there could be a spontaneous phenomenon emanating from a bunch of individuals surfing the web. Even if some psychopaths can feel at ease with the terrorist movement’s narrative, Sageman stresses that all terrorists do not fit the same psychopathological profile (Baele 2014). Others still concentrate on what a terrorist organization says. This is clearly seen in the work of Scott Atran (2016), whose research focused on Islamic State (IS) fighters and suggested that jihad provides youth with something they cannot find in Western societies, that is, the excitement of fighting for a sacred cause and achieving the kind of boundless power that comes with omnipotence. Atran rules out nihilism and prefers defining radicalization as an attempt to produce sacred values. In this view, groups such as Daesh are powerful countercultural movements, which provide youth with a “good fight” and a way to become heroes.

3. Quote from an interview of Bin Laden by Peter Arnett in March 1997. “Transcript of Osama Bin Laden interview by Peter Arnett.” InformationClearinghouse.info: “We love this kind of death for Allah’s cause as much as you like to live.”

Global Phenomenon, Local Dynamics

A key part of the puzzle and a driving force behind this book is still missing: the crucial role played by local influences on this global phenomenon. Consider, once more, the case of Daesh. While there is no denying that Daesh was a global phenomenon based on the number of nationalities represented in its recruits, it is important to stress the extent to which its development relied on local sociological specificities. In fact, a growing number of researchers is taking an interest in questioning these variations. Why has Belgium provided more jihadi fighters per capita than any other European country? Why have Tunisia and Morocco provided the Islamic State with respectively 6,000 and 1,200 combatants when the bordering country of Algeria has only produced 200? (The Soufan Group 2015, 8–9) The same observation holds true when one zooms in and notices that some Tunisian, Belgian, and French regions have been remarkably prolific purveyors of jihadi fighters in comparison with others.⁴ There are similar discrepancies between countries when it comes to the proportion of converts who joined these movements. Hypotheses covering a wide spectrum have been ventured to explain these territorial variations. Some trace the source of these national disparities back to the presence of high numbers of recruiters and propagandists in the territory. Those, like Raymond Taras (2012), who highlight the ethnic and religious minority integration policies and the need to review them, refer mostly to the way in which the state has been managing Islam, to the issue of Islamophobia and to the scale of discriminations that continue to plague Western societies (Khosrokhavar 2016). Still others call for a geopolitical interpretation of the phenomenon, stressing the impacts of transnational Islamic networks, lurking Western imperialism, and Western policies in the Middle East (e.g., interventions, conflict between Israel and Palestine). Finally, some analyses assume a causal relationship between the rationale for radical commitment and the consequences of colonial history. French colonization in particular has bred many forms of violence, be it cultural, linguistic, or symbolic, that only intensify the identity malaise experienced by the descendants of post-colonial migrants (Roy 2016).

In this context, a comparative approach becomes heuristically relevant to identify continuities and ruptures across time and space. Clark McCau-

4. Ben Gardane, a town of 65,000 inhabitants in the south of Tunisia, has provided nearly 15% of all Tunisian jihadists. In Belgium, 75% of Belgian jihadists come from Brussels and Antwerp. In France, the city of Nice has produced proportionally more jihadi fighters than the average of the other towns.

ley and Sophia Moskalenko (2011) offer one of the first attempts at doing this when they highlight the recurrences among the different forms of radicalization that have existed throughout history. By identifying common ground shared by movements as diverse as the 19th-century Russian anarchist organization “People’s Will” and the contemporary jihadi movements such as Al-Qaeda, they shed light upon the mechanisms through which ordinary people come to commit extraordinary acts (McCauley and Moskalenko 2011, 6). In the same comparative line of work, the report entitled *Jihadist Hotbeds: Understanding Local Radicalization Processes* stresses for its part the importance of local territorial specificities on the jihadists’ decision to engage (Varvelli 2016).

This book expands on similar works wherein local features of radicalization are accorded significant attention (Coolsaet 2008). But we contribute to that—still underdeveloped—tract of scholarship by ascertaining how and when local characteristics intersect, trump, or give way to global factors. Such a project relies on inductive reasoning, one which enables us to better understand how the contours of local dynamics both affect and/or are affected by a global phenomenon.

Book Structure and Chapter Summaries

This book aims to understand and explain patterns of radicalization in Western Europe, with an eye toward developing more robust accounts of the phenomenon. It therefore has both theoretical and empirical objectives. Theoretically, *Radicalization in Theory and Practice* combines in-depth analyses of the most advanced theoretical approaches to radicalization with focused case studies. Thus, these theories are examined, compared, and assessed as they apply to different points in time and different political and cultural environments. Theories are examined in part I.

Empirically, the book identifies the mechanisms that explicitly link radical religious beliefs and radical actions. In doing so, it develops a richer view of the processes that underpin radicalization than has been previously achieved. Analyzing some 260 publications that came out between 1980 and 2010, Scott Kleinmann and Peter Neumann conclude that if the vast majority of them used qualitative methods, many demonstrate what the authors deem to be poor methodological rigor (2013). The sensitivity of the issues at stake in this research is seen as impeding the access of researchers to primary data, when it does not discourage them altogether from using quantitative methods. As a consequence, theoretical generaliza-

tion becomes most unlikely, as these publications offer mainly descriptive and partial conclusions (Dalgaard-Nielsen 2010). By dwelling primarily on firsthand empirical investigations, the book aims to build a new framework of analysis from the ground up. In this light, the goals of the book are: (a) to encourage the quality of theorizing in this area; (b) to enhance the quality of methodological inquiries; and (c) to articulate security studies insights with broader theoretical debates in different fields, including sociology, social psychology, economics, and religious studies. Cases are discussed in part II.

Part I: Theories

The narratives on radicalization often focus on discrete theories, examining the nature of radicalization, the factors that drive it, and whether radicalization is a condition or a process. This book also discusses the nature of radicalization, but nudges it into a new direction: It posits that radicalization is less a condition than the result of a family of processes, and the book foregrounds a range of theories that are often overlooked by existing accounts of radicalization, including social psychology and conversion theories. The book starts with rational choice views, which offer a contrasting picture against which other approaches situate themselves. The section moves from generic theories that are often employed in explaining a variety of violent contentions to more specific approaches that deal with jihadi kinds of violence. However, the chapter on social psychology comes at the end of part I because it makes explicit some of the connections that are left implicit in the previous chapters.

In chapter 1, Daniel Meierrieks and Tim Krieger consider the concept of radicalization using an economic approach. The authors ground their analysis on concepts derived from the economic domain and which revolve around the idea of a rational agent and notions of costs, strategies, and profits. They note in their analysis, however, that the influence of socioeconomic factors varies widely depending on the stage reached in the process of radicalization. In chapter 2, Daniela Pisoiu highlights the relevance of theories of social movements in interpreting radicalization. These theories, widely used in historical analysis of left-wing and nationalist movements, allow radicalization to be connected with more classical types of political violence. They underline the logic of confrontation between the state and certain groups, or between rival groups. Pisoiu nonetheless stresses that phenomena of jihadi radicalization have specificities that these theoretical tools cannot comprehensively account for.

The next two chapters deal with approaches derived directly from the study of religious forms of violence. Specifically, in chapter 3 Mohamed-Ali Adraoui examines Islamic doctrine as a way to grasp the connection between the religious imagination and geopolitical developments. He identifies the emergence of a new type of jihadism in the form of a mass counterculture in which propagation is no longer based on a *command*-type logic but a *viral* one. In chapter 4, Juliette Galonnier explores the complex relationships between phenomena of religious conversion and radicalization. In addition to highlighting the overrepresentation of converts in radicalized populations, she favors an approach that analyzes this phenomenon as a special sub-category in the factors behind conversion. This method takes into account common denominators between conversion and radicalization, notably in terms of how the individuals work on their own bodies or the importance of the social environment in influencing their path in society. As John Morrison shows in chapter 5, these interrelationships play a particularly important analytical role in terms of social psychology. This approach underscores the profound links between psychological and sociological factors (micro/macro). Individuals going through this process are seeking a positive identity, a grand cause and meaning in a welcoming social environment. According to this logic, they tend to be absorbed by a group that offers them a form of psychological and emotional stability.

Part II: Patterns of Radicalization in Western Europe

The book adopts a comparative international approach to identify and characterize the patterns that, going beyond the specific contexts of individual countries, enable us to structure our understanding of these social trends. More specifically, each chapter addresses the following questions: What elements of continuity and variations can we observe from one national territory to another among European countries? Where can we see the signs of cohesion or division from one national territory to another? What aspects can be defined as local dynamics, and which are of a global or transnational nature? What does the case teach us about the mechanisms and theories discussed in part I? One of the persistent problems in radicalization studies is that many authors often draw on secondary data, assembled by others, sometimes for different purposes, in order to answer specific questions. Thus, a distinctive feature of *Radicalization in Theory and Practice* is that the authors brought together draw primarily on data they collected themselves, through intensive fieldwork.

What is the rationale behind our case selection? The different empirical cases chosen allow the scope and validity of the theories set out previously (in part I) to be verified. At the same time, they enable us to test the role of local, contextual variables in the phenomenon. These variables relate to social integration policies targeting the most vulnerable populations, the particular counterterrorist policies developed at a national level, or specific approaches in managing religious diversity. Statistics show that half of the Western fighters who joined Daesh came from three countries: France, Britain, and Germany. Belgium and Spain offer contrasting cases that ameliorate the comparison further. Belgium stands out insofar as it exported the most jihadi fighters per capita than any other European country, it experienced the first terrorist action of the Islamic state in Europe,⁵ and finally the country served as a logistical support base for the attacks that targeted Paris in November 2015. In chapter 6, Sarah Teich shows how the Belgian case is striking for the dynamism of its Islamic organizations. Religious groups such as Sharia4Belgium have played a prominent role in the recruitment of Belgian jihadi fighters for Daesh. She explores the dynamics of radicalization in Belgium by using concepts from the social movement theories. The contribution concerning France focuses on the diverse motivations of French jihadists who left France to join the Islamic State. In chapter 7, Elyamine Settoul investigates the similarities that can be drawn between jihadi engagement and enrollment in a national army. The comparison between these two types of enrollment borrows methods from social psychology and suggests a shift away from a purely ideological-religious interpretation of jihadi engagement. Drawing on the theory of social movements, Robert Pelzer and Mika Moeller illustrate in chapter 8 the variety of factors that lead a group to radicalize or not. Through a comparative analysis of the development of two Islamists, Denis Cuspert and Hasan Keskin, they show how the actions of the state and the psychology of the subjects influence the process of radicalization. Like Belgium, Spain offers an interesting case to understand the generational element involved in radicalization, since it is only recently that the Muslim community has come back to this country. Thus, in chapter 9, Rut Bermejo-Casado analyzes the radicalization experiences of Spanish jihadists. She establishes sociological points of comparison between members of the Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA), the perpetrators of the attacks in Madrid on March 11, 2004, and those who carried out the attacks in the Barcelona area in 2017. She observes that most jihadists had experienced a rather successful social

5. Attack against the Jewish Museum on May 24, 2014, perpetrated by Mehdi Nemmouche in Brussels.

integration. Further, she notes the crucial role of recruiters from terrorist organizations (e.g., Al-Qaeda, Islamic State) and of prison experience in the social development of certain jihadists. Finally, Bermejo-Casado observes a shortening of the period of radicalization among the perpetrators of the 2004 and 2017 attacks.

In chapter 10, Tahir Abbas also underlines the social and political aspects of religious radicalism in the United Kingdom. Deindustrialization combined with spatial relegation and declining social status have favored inward-looking forms of identity among the most marginal groups. Abbas highlights the processes of mutual self-reinforcement between the public, headline-grabbing discourse of the far right and the attraction of Islamist ideology for populations in a state of anomie.

In the concluding chapter, Valérie Amiraux summarizes the argument of the book, weaves the threads, and sketches research paths that the foregoing studies open. She returns to the central themes explored in the volume, including disciplinary and theoretical innovations as well as empirical issues, which enable this work to bring to light how different factors, contexts, and commitments—not all of which are known—account for a similar outcome (Schanzer 2014, 599). Amiraux argues that it is in the nature of the label “radicalization” to alter the perception of certain people and transform interactions between actors. Thus, if the scholarship on radicalization is to ameliorate our understanding of a phenomenon whose sources and dimensions remain irreducibly diverse, it needs to stand against the “consensual varnish” around the issue and stray from the “‘solvent’ effect,” that is, “diluting [various phenomena] within a unifying and standardized term [namely, radicalization]” (Amiraux, this volume). As such, our understanding of radicalization must be more specific than often assumed. This book, then, constitutes a step toward clarifying the shape of the territory radicalization occupies and in exploring the concepts and theories within and through which research is conducted. With detailed case studies, Amiraux argues, researchers are not captive to the concepts and theories they have conceived. The conclusion’s final section sets out prominent ethical questions that stalk research in radicalization.

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