
Reconsidering the Relationship Between Integration and Radicalization

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Abstract:

Research literature suggests a number of possible causes leading to radicalization of young Muslims living in Western countries, including poverty, social marginalization, weak or threatened identities, lack of connection to native culture, etc.. Regardless of the diversity of causes, academic literature as well as governmental strategies have shown a consistent interest in the basic formula that a lack of cultural integration equals an increased threat of radicalization. The lacking evidence for the simple correlation, however, has become increasingly difficult to ignore. Based on a review of existing ideas and evidence concerning the relationship between integration and radicalization, this paper concludes that the presumed relationship needs to be reconsidered, because it is not supported by evidence, and because it can lead to ineffective or potentially harmful interventions.

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Introduction

Over the past decade or so, radicalization, specifically radicalization leading to violence, has emerged as a chief priority of national and international security concerns, and a burgeoning field of research. It has been estimated that more books were published on the subject of radicalization leading to terrorism in the five years following the September 11, 2001 attacks than in the 50 previous years combined (Silke, 2008, p. 29), and that the use of the term ‘radicalization’ in English-language press more than doubled between 2005 and 2006 (Sedgwick 2010, p. 480). Articles in academic journals and state- and organization-sponsored reports on the topic have also seen an astounding increase that does not appear to be slowing down.

While a number of root causes leading to radicalization have been suggested such as poverty and marginalization (Riddell-Dixon, 2008, p. 37), threatened identity and lack of connection to native culture (EC, 2005), or discrimination (Mullins, 2007), academic literature as well as policy documents and governmental strategies have tended to condense these findings into a one-to-one causal relationship between “level of integration” and degree or nature of radicalization, leading to the basic formula that a lack of cultural integration equals an increased threat of radicalization. Indeed, the assumption that less integration leads to more radicalization is clearly expressed across a broad range of media sources, academic literature, and official state policies (Hoffman, 2006; Precht, 2007; Leiken, 2004; NYPD, 2007; Jenkins, 2007; Stemmann, 2006).

Despite the fact that the ‘failed integration’ model has long been the mainstay of lay and expert opinions, however, the lack of evidence-based support for such a correlation has become increasingly difficult to ignore (Hoskins & O’Loughlin, 2009; Pisiou, 2007; Borum, 2011, p. 46; Goli & Rezaei, 2011; King & Taylor, 2011; Entzinger, 2014; Githens-Mazer &

Lambert, 2010; Mullins, 2012). In addition to the steadily growing body of research-based literature, interventions and counter-measures based on the assumed negative correlation between integration and radicalization have often proved ineffective, or worse yet, have backfired and the problem of radicalization has developed new, more problematic dimensions.

In what follows, we review the existing state of ideas and evidence concerning the relationship between integration and radicalization, and we conclude that such an assumption needs to be reconsidered, because it is not supported by evidence, and because it can lead to potentially harmful results. The assumption of a causal relationship between integration and radicalization, we argue, can have negative results on the one hand by harming the general fabric of the society and impeding official efforts for promotion of social coherence and integration, and on the other hand by undermining security strategies insofar as erroneous assumptions can lead to ineffective strategies at best. The general discussion here is organized under two sections. The first section outlines the basis of the failed integration assumption, and considers its impact on state policies and security strategies. The second section presents the challenges levied against the failed integration assumption, and considers discussions on the problematic usage of terms and concepts, the lack of empirical data, and the existence of contradictory facts and findings. We will conclude with a discussion of the need for reconceptualization of our models and definitions of integration, radicalization and the relationship between the two.

The 'Failed Integration' Assumption

Origins and Implications

While the concept of social integration has a long and well developed history in both academic and policy contexts, the notion of radicalization, as it is generally understood today, has only gained popular usage since the early 2000's (Neumann, 2008, p. 3). After the September 11th attacks in New York City, there was a swift and deliberate move to develop a "conceptual tool" for understanding the range of processes involved in acts of violent extremism and expressions of support for such behavior. As a result, the term 'radicalization' was broadly adopted and has since been variously conceptualized, analyzed, and applied (Neumann, 2008; Sedgwick, 2010). As Sedgwick (2010) points out, despite the ubiquity of its use across the fields of security, integration and foreign policy, the term "radicalization" remains, at best, an "essentially relative" term (p. 491), with different implications and connotations across different fields of interest, and depending on disciplinary outlook –philosophical, analytic, or official (see pp. 482 ff.). Such important observations notwithstanding, however, in practice the notion of radicalization is often used and defined in the basic terms of a process of change, initiated by a number of "drivers", such as family influence, religious conversion, persuasion by a radicalizer, etc. (CSIS, 2011), and progressing through certain stages (Youth Justice Board, 2012, p. 10). While models describing the radicalization process abound, and the number, range, and duration of such stages vary (see for example Borum's Four-Stage Model of the Terrorist Mindset (2003); Moghaddam's staircase to terrorism (2005); the NYPD's four stage model (Silber and Bhatt, 2007); or Precht's 'typical pattern of radicalization' (2007)), it has been pointed out that, overall, the various models investigate and address two main elements: thought/attitude, and action/behavior (Schmid, 2013, p.8).

As explanatory models and preventative strategies began to develop around the concept of radicalization in the early to mid 2000s, specifically in reference to Muslim communities, one widely held notion also emerged, that "poor integration and exclusion of Muslims in Western societies might lay a significant foundation for radicalization and polarization" (Netherlands Institute for Safety, Security and Crisis Management, 2008, p. 19). Indeed, economic and social deprivation, as well as alienation and exclusion, connected to integration 'failures' have been cited by many as causes for Muslim radicalization and political violence (von Hippel, 2002; Krueger and Malec'ková, 2003; Sambanis, 2004; Sageman, 2004; Pape, 2005, as cited in Githens-Mazer, 2008, p. 26). "Successful integration," it has been stated, is "an important part of the fight against terrorism by ensuring that radicals do not have the political and moral ammunition to spread their ideologies" (Beutal, 2007, p. 8). A perceived failure to adequately integrate new as well as second- and third-generation Muslims into Western society has thus emerged as a common explanation for radicalization (Netherlands Ministry of Justice, 2004; Silber and Bhatt, 2007; Jenkins, 2007). Significantly, the development of the failed integration assumption has also been accompanied by policy and legislative developments, as will be outlined in the discussion below.

Impact on National Strategies and Policies

As notions of radicalization continued to develop in the early years of the twenty-first century, and as those notions were increasingly linked to issues of problematic social integration, political strategies of many Western states began to reflect the so-called failed integration assumption. Take, for example, the outcomes following the 2005 bombings in England. Shortly after the July 2005 attacks in London, Prime Minister Tony Blair, in conjunction with the Home Office, established a commission in partnership with the

Muslim community that would advise the government on how to create “better integration of those parts of the community inadequately integrated”, while remaining “consistent with their own religion and culture” (Blair, 2005). The same assumption, that ‘inadequate integration’ was to blame for the terrorist attacks, also led to the immediate establishment of the PET –Preventing Extremism Together –Project, which focused on various social integration agenda items, including Muslim youth engagement; imam training, and community-police relations, to name a few (Brighton, 2007). Whether or not they had experienced similar acts of ‘homegrown terror,’ many other Western nations followed suit and began to seriously evaluate their immigration and integration policies and to develop security strategies and counter-terrorism measures that similarly adopted a strong focus on integration, reflecting the underlying assumption of failed integration as the cause of violent radicalization (Lewiki, 2014).

A number of European countries, for instance, have come to the apparent conclusion over the past decade that the dominant model of multiculturalism has failed to reduce racism and xenophobia, and that it has actually contributed to the growth of ‘parallel societies’ and the alienation of diaspora groups, especially Muslims (Fried 2006; Archik, Rollins, & Woehrel, 2005). Consequently, a number of Western politicians, such as former French president Nicholas Sarkozy (Jura, 2012), British Prime Minister David Cameron (Cameron, 2011), and German chancellor Angela Merkel (Friedman, 2010) have publically declared multiculturalism a failed social policy. Public statements by Australia’s former prime minister John Howard (Poynting & Mason, 2008), former Spanish prime minister Jose Maria Aznar (Boschele, 2013), and Canada’s former prime minister, Stephen Harper, are further instances of the apparent consensus across Western states on the failure of multiculturalism as a desired model supporting successful integration.

The stakes involved with the ‘failure’ of multiculturalism are heightened even further once combined with the ‘failed integration assumption,’ which associates rising tensions with Muslim communities, and the growing threats of radicalization and terrorism, primarily with the failure of national integration aspirations. Intriguingly, the fact that the models of multiculturalism (and hence the underlying conceptions of integration) used in these countries are in fact diverse is typically ignored in reporting the presumably universal failure (Madeley, 2012). While all of these nations’ policies may be termed as liberal, clear distinctions have been made between the French assimilationist approach (Archik, Rollins, & Woehrel 2005), the more ‘laissez faire’ frameworks of Britain and Holland, and the relatively short-sighted “segregation” model deployed in Germany and Belgium (Meer et al., 2015; Fried 2006, p. 6). Regardless of differences in approach and application, however, the consensual admission of multiculturalism’s failure appears to be leading to a second area of agreement in regards to a possible solution. Social cohesion is a recurring concept in recent policy developments and there appears to be near unanimous support for the idea that radicalization may best be countered by enhancing social cohesion and improving the integration of Muslim populations (Rabasa, 2010, p. 188-89). Furthermore, it seems as though Western nations have collectively adopted ‘civic integration’ as a key strategy for improving the situation (Kymlicka, 2012; Joppke, 2007). Ironically, these strategies have in fact been traced to a Dutch policy instituted in the mid 1990s aimed at increasing the “self-sufficiency” of Muslim immigrants through more rigorous integration, especially in the education and labour sectors (Joppke, 2012, p. 2-3). A number of European countries have followed the Netherlands’ lead, and while Canada and the US were initially believed to have integration policies that were more effective in integrating Muslim immigrants and therefore reducing risks of radicalization, they too have more recently implemented policies

and counter-radicalization strategies based strongly on civic integration or ‘inclusive citizenship’ concerns (Joppke, 2012, p. 2-3).

The massive influx of academic research and literature identifying failed integration as a substantive cause of radicalization and violent extremism, coupled with the underlying presence of this assumption in national social and security policies, have worked together to establish ‘failed integration’ as a clear and conclusive cause of radicalization. With that being said, doubts and challenges regarding the taken-for-granted linking of integration and radicalization have been mounting (see Goerzig & Al-Hashimi, 2014).

Challenging the ‘Failed Integration’ Assumption

Conceptual Confusion

When the ideas, research, and social policies related to the failed integration assumption are critically considered, one of the most glaring issues is the inconsistent and ambiguous use of key terms and concepts. Integration is a complex concept, but it is generally understood as an interactional process between a host society and “immigrants” (regardless of type or generation) that is influenced by institutional structures and societal attitudes on the one hand, and migration factors such as human capital and collective social capital on the other (Frideres, 2008). While some may argue that there is wide-ranging consensus regarding the general definition of ‘integration’ (though see for instance George (2006) for a different view), the ways in which integration is measured and analyzed is a different matter. A study by Manning and Roy (2007) for example, uses a measure of integration constructed only from answers to the question: “What do you consider your national identity to be?” (2007). Others expand their measures to include the importance of religion, attitude towards inter-marriage, or the importance of racial composition in schools

(Bissin et al., 2007). And while others expand the construct of integration even further (i.e. Constant et al., 2006; Goli and Rezaei, 2011), the lack of consensus regarding operational definition and measurement renders its usage and application, especially in national policies and strategies, problematic. It appears, therefore, that the uncritical application of integration concepts across disciplines and socio-historical contexts creates “confusion and distortion” (Wieviorka, 2013, p. 2) and can lead to the mistaken confluence of rhetoric or discourse and actual social reality (Entzinger, 2014). A similar situation arises around the notion of radicalization.

The diversity and range of definitions and explanations for ‘radicalization’ demonstrate far less consistency than those of integration. Definitions range from multi-level complex notions to more concise descriptions and everything in between: “socialization to extremism which manifest itself in terrorism” (Alonso et al., 2008, p. 7); “the strategic use of physical force to influence several audiences” (Della Porta & LaFree, 2012, p. 4); “what goes on before the bomb goes off” (Neumann, 2008, p. 4), and so on. In fact, an Australian team of authors recently concluded that “about the only thing that radicalization experts agree on is that radicalization is a process. Beyond that there is considerable variation as to make existing research incomparable” (Nasser-Eddine, et al., 2008, p. 13).

As mentioned earlier, Sedgwick (2010) demonstrates the extensive diversities in the meaning, relevance and connotations of the notion of radicalization as understood and used across fields of intellectual, social and political reference. The differences, believes Sedgwick, are to such an extent as to render the term “inherently relative” (p. 479). Sedgwick especially recommends to “all agencies involved” at the level of policy to “be aware that the apparent common ground suggested by the use of the common terms “radical” and “radicalization” may mask fundamentally different agendas” (2010, p. 491).

While others have similarly expressed concern over the ambiguous and non-consensual nature of the term (Hornqvist & Flyghed, 2012, p. 323), Schmid enumerates some specific problems:

Unfortunately the concept of radicalization, as used in many government-linked quarters, suffers from politicisation, is fuzzy, applied one-sidedly (only non-state actors are assumed to radicalize, not governments), often lacks a clear benchmark (e.g. adherence to democratic principles and the rule of law, abstaining from the use of violence for political ends), and is linked too readily with terrorism (broadly defined) as outcome. (2013, p. 19)

Furthermore, a significant distinction has been introduced by Bartlett and his colleagues, who have pointed out the significance of distinguishing between radicalization that leads to violence and radicalization that does not lead to violence (e.g. Bartlett & Miller, 2012). Being a radical, they argue, does not necessarily mean being violent: “Some radicals conduct, support, or encourage terrorism, whilst many others do no such thing, and actively and often effectively agitate against it” (p. 2). After analyzing the results of a series of interviews and comparing the ideas and behaviors of radicalized terrorists with non-violent radicals, Bartlett and Miller report that “many of the claims regularly deployed to explain terrorism apply to far wider, non-violent populations” (p. 16). They also conclude from their comparisons that a significant yet little explored factor in violent radicalization seems to be of a psychological nature, rather than simply religious, or political. In a related line, Koehler (2015) seeks to move the notion of violent radicalization towards further clarity. Radicalization, he suggests, leads to violence when through a convergence of ideological, political and psychological elements, a process of “de-pluralization” takes place and the individual reaches a point of view simultaneously hyper-focused on certain interpretations of existing problems, and bereft of the capacity to imagine alternative solutions beyond

those provided by an exclusionary narrative.

Clearly, the lack of agreement as to the most basic aspects of the foundational concepts of integration and radicalization introduces considerable challenges into both the theoretical and the applied sides of this issue. Additionally, it is no surprise that this conceptual ambiguity contributes to further inconsistencies and problems in related research.

Research Gaps, Inconclusive and Contradictory Findings

Despite the widespread adoption and application of the failed integration assumption, there is a broad consensus that empirical research on radicalization in general, and specifically its relationship to integration, is lacking (Silke, 2004; Borum, 2011, p. 46; Goli & Rezai, 2011; King & Taylor, 2011). It has been estimated that only 20% of published articles on terrorism provide any substantially new knowledge about the subject (Silke, 2008, p. 101) and that less than 5% of all published articles on radicalization and terrorism are based on any sort of empirical data (Getos, 2009). While empirical studies and direct interview research have increased over the recent years, the evidence base for conclusions drawn around radicalization and violent extremism remains weak (UK Home Office, 2011). Overall, most researchers working in the radicalization field would agree on the need for “more systematic interviews informed by a clear and consistent research methodology as well as a comparative analysis of such interviews”, which would help clarify and disentangle the concepts in question, and also help fill the gap for reliable and valid data (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010, p. 812). Beyond the general lack of empirical studies, additional problems arise around particular research gaps that exist in the field.

The most obvious limitation within existing research is the lack of clarification it offers on why some individuals become radicalized while others, even those from similar

backgrounds and living situations, do not. Jonathan Githens-Mazer, a top British researcher in the field, goes so far as to suggest that “failed-integration theses of radicalization are at the very least methodologically suspect,” largely because “they fail to take into account the basic fact that despite the few examples of non-integrated Muslims in Britain who do become radical violent takfiri jihadists, countless others are equally socially excluded, yet do not participate in this, or any other form of violence” (2008, p. 26). In addressing methodological problems, research designs that include control groups have also been suggested to help “increase our understanding of a broader question, which is not fully answered by existing studies—the question why structural- or individual-level drivers of radicalization lead to radicalization for some individuals, but not for others” (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010, p. 811). Additional areas in need of further study include radicalization among incarcerated populations (Useem & Clayton, 2009), the role of women in radicalization groups and processes (see Laster & Erez, 2015), and the characteristics and motivations of radical leaders (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010). Moreover, critical perspectives on the study and interpretation of radicalization and attendant issues are also lacking – “critical research,” claim Jackson, Breen Smyth, and Gunning (2009), “has rarely been published in the main terrorism studies journals or included in its conferences, and to date, it has arguably failed to influence the general focus and approach of mainstream, international relations-based terrorism research” (p. 1). Further complicating the matter is the fact that what research *does* exist is far from conclusive, especially concerning the presumed relationship between integration and radicalization, and, in fact, often ends up challenging or contradicting the failed integration assumption (Komen, 2014; Entzinger, 2014; Githens-Mazer & Lambert, 2010).

One area where research has contradicted ingrained assumptions regarding racialization, is profiling, where a specific list of characteristics is used to identify potential

radicals. While a number of qualities – typically based on ethnicity and religion but also related to economic and educational background, were previously assumed to be useful in identifying and predicting an individual’s involvement in radical and terrorist activities, it is now a generally agreed upon fact that “attempts to profile terrorist have failed resoundingly” (Horgan, 2008, p. 80). This conclusion has been strongly supported by studies on “homegrown” varieties of radicalization, where many have demonstrated that radicals follow no definitive ethnic or socioeconomic pattern, can be from first, second or third generation immigrants or native-born, can be of Muslim heritage or new converts, and range in age from 13 to 70 (CSIS, 2014; Bergen & Hoffman, 2010; Difo, 2010; Homeland Security Institute, 2009; Johnson, 2010; Parent & Ellis, 2011; Tahmincioglu, 2010; Zoll, 2010). One study based on several hundred in-depth case studies of individuals in Britain known to be involved in, or closely associated with, violent extremist activity, concluded that it was impossible to determine a typical profile for radicals or extremists (Youth Justice Board, 2012, p. 31). The finding that radicalized individuals are decidedly “unremarkable” in demographic, economic, and psychological terms, contradicts the once widely held assumption that profiling was an effective tool of prevention and identification (McGilloway, Ghosh, & Bhui, 2015; Silber and Bhatt, 2007).

Numerous contradictions within radicalization research and theory make it difficult to draw sound conclusions, and complicate the development and institution of effective policies. Take for instance the issue of religious identity and the idea that higher religiosity, particularly among Muslims, is a key factor predisposing individuals to the radicalization process. Some sources indeed confirm this idea, noting that religiosity “plays an important role – or at least cannot be disregarded in the radicalization process” (CSIS, 2011, p.22). Others have directly related Muslim religious practice, sometimes referred to as Islamic ‘spiritual intoxication,’ to radicalization and terrorism (Stern, 2003, p. 281; Jackson, 2005,

pp. 54-55; Shore, 2006; Silber and Bhatt, 2007, p. 12). However, there are also those who argue against the importance played by religion in radicalization processes (Karakaya, 2015). Gould, for instance warns that Islamic religious commitment on its own is unable to account for violent radicalization (2005), and in a case study analysis of an Australian radical, the authors contend that “religion plays a far lesser role in radicalization” than many popular theories suggest (Aly & Striegher, 2012, p. 260). Other research also calls into question the simplistic assumption that high religiosity equates with poor integration and increased radicalization (Bartlett, Birdwell, and King, 2010), and finds instead that “increased religiosity and active membership in traditional conservative Muslim groups often translates into high political and/or civic engagement” (Bullock and Nesbitt-Larking, 2013, pp. 15-16) and moreover, that Islamic religiosity “fosters support for [American] democratic values” (Dana, Barreto, & Oskooii, 2011, p. 504). Thus, when it comes to the role of religion in radicalization, both sides of the debate are strongly represented, making conclusive deductions difficult to achieve.

The role played by the new technologies of information and communication, specifically the Internet, in radicalization processes is another example of a core issue fraught with contradictions and non-consensus. A more widely held position asserts that the Internet is a breeding ground for recruitment and an important facilitator of the radicalization process (Koehler, 2014; Awan, Hoskins & O’Loughlin, 2012; Thompson, 2011; UN/CTITF, 2008). Schmid asserts, “there is no doubt that the Internet with its low cost, ease of access, speed, anonymity, de-centralisation, size, global connectivity and weak or lacking regulation has played an important role” in supporting the growth and development of radicalization through a number of diverse channels. (2013, p. 33). With that being said, research also lends support to the opposite view. One Canadian survey study found that as an “often claimed driver of radicalization,” the issue of Internet use

actually “appears to have little significance” (Skillicorn, Leuprecht, & Winn, 2012). Another report concluded that “while much has been written and implied concerning the role of the Internet in radicalizing young people, there is little actual evidence that it plays a dominant role in radicalization (Youth Justice Board, 2012, p. 30). In addition to debates regarding the general role of the Internet in radicalization processes, other contradictory positions have been taken up around particular issues such as the role and impact of online communities, and whether the Internet increases or decreases risk of radicalization by providing outlets and opportunities for identity development and expression (Archetti, 2015).

It is an undeniable fact that the Internet enables the development and expansion of virtual communities; however, what is less clear is whether these online communities contribute and potentially increase the risk of radicalization among users, or if they protect against radicalization, making users resilient and less likely to engage in radical behaviours by providing “safe” virtual spaces for expression of frustration and anger. For those holding the former view, the Internet is seen as creating a platform for the coordination and recruitment of extremist organizations (Weimann, 2010; Atran, 2005; Bunt, 2003). Those on the other side, who contend that the Internet and its facilitation of online communities actually reduces risks of radicalization say that digital communities enable cathartic expression and social connection by “relieving identity stress, providing identity support, enabling experimentation” and eventually “incorporating the hybridity” that many Muslim immigrants experience after leaving their home countries (Brinkerhoff, 2009, p. 205; Awan, 2007).

The globalized nature of contemporary life is said to have an intense effect on identity (Meuleman, 2002), and the challenge of managing multiple identities has been identified as a contributing factor to radicalization among Muslim immigrants for instance

(Stroink, 2007; Fukuyama, 2006). Writing on the case of Muslim identity, Roy (2004) believes current circumstances have created a situation where “Islam has become *detrterritorialized* in such a way as to throw open the whole question of Muslim identity” (p. 10). In Muslim contexts, online communities take on further special significance as they relate to the central Islamic notion of *ummah*, which denotes an abstract, transnational “community” of all Muslims around the globe. Benedict Anderson’s (1983) seminal notion of “imagined communities” has been used by leading scholars of Islamic communities to conceptualize *ummah* and Muslim diaspora interactions online (e.g. Roy, 2004, 2010; Lewis, 2002). With new developments in technologies of information and communication, *ummah* has assumed brand new significance (e.g. Roy, 2004, 2010). In Spalek and Imtoul’s (2007) words, “[Islamic] militants now join an “imagined community” that works through minds, attitudes and discourses rather than geographical locales or through social and familial ties” (p. 194). This increasingly important “community” born of an exceptional convergence of traditional ideology and postmodern technology, however, has rarely been the topic of research. This is particularly disconcerting given the core significance of *ummah* in Muslim discourses of identity, and that one of the most universal and consistent beliefs among radicals is that the *ummah* is under siege from the West (Githens-Mazer, 2008, p. 27). Issues surrounding the *ummah* in the digital age are thus well deserving of closer and more meaningful investigation.

The above examples have been offered simply to illustrate the diverse, sometimes lacking, and often contradictory nature of radicalization-related research and academic literature. This illustration also serves to explain the growing skepticism, if not outright rejection, of the failed integration assumption among academic and intelligence communities alike (Hoskins & O’Loughlin, 2009; Psoiu, 2007). A recent report by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), for example, summarized findings from

interview research with radicalized Canadians, concluding that “one of the reasons frequently cited as a driver for radicalization (poor integration or assimilation), does not seem to apply in Canada” (2011, p. 12). It appears that many are arriving at the similar conclusion, specifically in reference to Muslim communities, that “trying to improve the conditions of Muslims in the West, and specifically trying to improve levels of integration, is not the sole answer” (Mullins, 2012, p. 127). Indeed, when Goli and Rezai (2011) tested the hypothesis that “sociocultural and socioeconomic integration and Radical Islamism are inversely related among migrants from Muslim countries living in a Western democracy” (p. 86), they found that their data “do not support the idea that failed integration in a Western nation is a major cause of radicalization” (p. 104). In reflecting on these results, and on the fundamentally voluntary nature of integration, the authors wonder if, instead of struggling to induce integration through measures that constrain attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of the citizens, “respectfully encouraging autonomy in immigration policies and practices might be even more productive?” (Goli & Rezai, 2011, p. 107). Goli and Rezai’s conclusions seem to contradict the logic inherent in recent policy shifts (discussed above), where the ‘civic integration’ strategies adopted by many Western states are enforced through increasingly rigid and involuntary requirements and processes.

In addition to directly challenging the failed integration assumption, the gaps, contradictions and non-consensus discussed above reveal a weak theoretical foundation underlying much of our recent research, policies, and counter-measures related to radicalization. Reflecting a sentiment distinctly similar to what the preceding review and discussions have driven home, Schmid (2013) complains, “the lack of clarity and consensus with regard to many key concepts (terrorism, radicalization, extremism, etc.) – ill-defined and yet taken for granted – still present an obstacle that needs to be overcome” (p. 3). Indeed, conceptual confusion is directly related, and inextricable from the theoretical

confusion that defines this area of investigation (Richards, 2015). In the section to follow, the need to reconceptualise existing theoretical frames of reference will be established based on the limitations of the current focus on individual psychological factors, and on the failure of adequately recognizing the wider, historical and socio-political factors at play.

Reconceptualising Theoretical Frames of Reference

Researchers and governmental organizations alike have come to admit that, when it comes to radicalization and the social factors influencing its processes, it is extremely unlikely that any single model or theory would adequately integrate the range of known possible drivers, influences, or pathways (CSIS, 2011, p. 16; McCauley & Moskaleiko, 2008, p. 429). Some have gone so far as to suggest that “it is futile to try to develop strategies for preventing these processes as no such measures will be able to fit them all” (Alonso, et al., 2008, p. 11). After evaluating existing theories of radicalization, Borum (2011) notes that the majority are “conceptual, rather than empirical,” and that, with the exception of very few ideas, they did not appear to be coherently informed by existing social science theories (p. 38). Building on the critique outlined above regarding the lack of empirical research, Borum’s words confirm also the need to evaluate and rethink the theoretical premises upon which radicalization in general, and the failed integration assumption in particular, are based. To start, one of the core problems relates to the overemphasis on the individual, and especially of individual psychological traits, which is a basic feature of most approaches to radicalization. Even a brief foray into radicalization literature reveals a clear and definite focus on individuals, often divorced from their personal histories and social contexts. Typifying this trend, Wilner and Dubouloz (2010) operationalize the following definition in their research on the subject. “Radicalization,”

they say,

is best understood as a personal process in which the individual adopts extreme political, social, or religious ideals and aspirations, and where the attainment of particular goals justifies the use of indiscriminate violence. (p. 8)

Explicit individualized focus is also clearly evidenced by a number of new terms commonly employed in the field such as ‘lone wolf terrorists’ (Bates, 2012) or the notion of ‘self-radicalization’ (Barlett & Miller, 2012; Jenkins, 2007). By minimizing broader social and contextual processes, and by failing to adequately incorporate complex geo-political and historical factors into the explanatory models employed, such approaches have remained severely limited in what they stand to contribute in terms of in-depth knowledge and pragmatic preventive and counter measures. Clearly, more nuanced and holistic frameworks are required, if the phenomenon we term radicalization is to be better understood and addressed; and at the center of what is missing lies a mode of understanding individual psychology and subjective experience as socially, politically and historically embedded (Rahimi, 2015a,b).

One such effort for broadening the scope of radicalization research is demonstrated by Alonso et al. (2008), who both acknowledge the critical role played by personal experience and recognize that precipitant factors, including “historical antecedents of political violence, excessive repression by state authorities in the recent past and profound social changes” are also essential pieces of the puzzle (2008, p. 15). McCauley & Moskaleiko (2008) also address the need to move beyond individual frameworks by exploring mechanisms of radicalization at three inter-related levels: the individual, the group and the mass-public. By focussing on inter-group dynamics, the authors highlight the subtle notion that “the same mechanisms moving people toward radicalization and terrorism

will operate as well in those who react to radicals and terrorists” (p. 430). In their estimation, radicalization of individuals, groups, as well as mass publics occurs “in a trajectory of action and reaction in which state action often plays a significant role” (p. 430). And further to this, they contend that “the degree to which radicalization of non-state groups occurs in response to the actions of others must be the starting point for understanding these groups” (p. 430). Radicalization, in other words, needs to be always contextualized, understood, and measured *in relation to* the cultural, social, and political context in which it is studied. In a conceptually related vein, others have also attempted to move beyond rigid individualized formulations of political affect by going against the common perception that “radicals” and “terrorists” should be understood as psychologically troubled (Silke, 2008), or by attempting to draw on the micro, meso, and macro contexts impacting radicalization processes in their analyses (Schmid, 2013). Put in other words, there seems to be a growing, though still feeble, realization that radicalization is a “context-bound phenomenon par excellence” and that “global, sociological and political drivers matter as much as ideological and psychological ones” (Alonso, et al., 2008, p.7). In reality of course, there is ample evidence that political grievances, particularly “grievances concerning the plight of the Muslim community internationally and anger at perceived Western hegemony” are vital considerations (Youth Justice Board, 2012, p. 42) and that it would be a deeply misguided and fruitless effort to analyze such affect and deep rooted experiences in a “historical vacuum” (Githens-Mazer, 2008, p. 26).

International relations, especially historical injustices and colonialism are thus essential factors of radicalization and, as Githens-Mazer suggests, “An overemphasis of social exclusion and/or individual psychology fails to grasp the cultural ‘canvas’ on which subsequent events and actions are painted and understood.” (Githens-Mazer, 2008, p. 27). Given that integration involves a wide and dynamic range of psychological, social, cultural

and political factors that are “dynamic and interactive and that evolve over time” (Goli & Rezaei, 2011, p. 106), and given the deeply embedded tradition of understanding individual experience in narrow and “atomistic” terms, it is hardly surprising that adequate conceptual frameworks are underdeveloped. It is also clear that there is still significant need for more nuanced and context-specific research that may lend deeper insights into the complex relationship between integration and radicalization among Muslim immigrant communities.

Even a brief overview of some of the main issues associated with current work on radicalization on the one hand undermines the assumption of direct and causal links to an isolated concept of integration, and on the other hand makes it clear that individual based social-psychological frameworks fall short in addressing an intricate socio-politico-psychological phenomenon such as radicalization. Thus, despite the fact that the correlation between poor integration and increased radicalization is reflected and supported in both popular belief and official policies, the emerging picture points us towards a conceptualization of Islamic radicalization that, if not altogether unrelated to the question of integration, is certainly not a natural by-product of failed integration.

Conclusion

After considering the origins and implications of the so-called failed integration model of radicalization, and critically examining certain limitations related to the practical applications and theoretical underpinnings of the idea, at least two basic points have become abundantly clear. Firstly, while the notion of failed integration features prominently across lay discourses, academic literature and policy strategies, in concrete reality it plays “at best, a background or distal factor” in relation to the process of radicalization, “and then not a necessary one,” to quote a Youth Justice Board’s report (2012, p. 26). Second, to attempt to

explain or understand radicalization as a consequence of simple causes and direct pathways is not only naive but also dangerous. It is dangerous since it can lead to ineffective, or worse, counterproductive interventions that may damage intercommunal trust and push certain groups to their limits of resilience. These points are important and well evidenced by numerous studies that report the actual causal roots and pathways to radicalization as diverse, intricate, and culturally and historically contingent.

It became apparent early in our review of literature that there is simply no solid and dependable basis upon which the assumption of a causal relationship between integration and radicalization can be defended. As we delve further into the underlying issues that challenge the more or less intuitive attribution of a relationship to integration and radicalization, a number of questions stand out as significant points of reference that need to be addressed before any meaningful conclusion concerning the nature of radicalization or its relationship to integration can be drawn. These include such questions as the nature and role of identity, specifically in terms of a move from traditional ego-based models to new theories of subjectivity which promise culturally and historically embedded models of subjective experience and political affect. As discussed earlier, such models may provide much more robust means of investigating issues such as radicalization, precisely because they can unpack sociocultural, political and historical ingredients of human psychological experience and political affect much more effectively. On a more concrete level, in addition to the need for more nuanced and comprehensive models of identity, subjectivity and affect, group processes related to collective identity also need to be addressed directly, and to be incorporated into our analyses of how such processes as radicalization can take place. Such issues as the concept of *ummah* within the Muslim community, for instance, are not simply exotic abstract notions to learn about. We need to understand that identities and identity processes are strongly culture- and context-dependent, and it would be misguided to cast

our culture-bound models of psychocultural processes on different global communities and expect meaningful and realistic results. Ironically enough, however, we need also to realize that questions of radicalization within Muslim communities needs to be understood as a global phenomenon and thus analyzed in reference to global events, processes and emerging trends and narratives.

The Muslim *ummah* as an imagined global and singular community of all Muslims should be incorporated as a constant backdrop of our analyses of even the smallest apparently isolated Muslim communities. By that same token, however, the broader features and effects of our globalized communications and information sharing should also form an important dimension of our local “data” and its analysis of those same communities. In addition to historical and political factors, the central notion of *ummah* and the dynamics of globalization are also generally regulated by new technologies, specifically new technologies of information and communication. While many have made references to the role of these technologies, specifically the Internet, in radicalization, not many seem to be aware of the deep and organic ways in which the development of these new technologies need to be incorporated into studies of both radicalization and integration of Muslim communities in Western societies. It is not difficult to notice inherent threads that entangle the *ummah*, the imagined global community of all Muslims; the essentially political, social, and historical processes of globalization; and the new technologies of information and communication. It is so far difficult, however, to find studies, policies or intervention models that address and include this entanglement in a meaningful and methodical fashion in their vision of what violent radicalization is, what its relation to integration might be, or how it should be prevented.

And last, but certainly not least, in addition to and indeed as a result of the absence of a coherent nuanced theoretic model informing much of the work done on radicalization,

the existing literature reflects an urgent need for developing a language and a taxonomy of concepts that inform our academic and political discourse on the topic. The nature, implications and impact of such phenomena as religiosity, fundamentalism, extremism and radicalization are currently so interlaced and, worse yet, so often used interchangeably as to make the development of a clear and precise terminology and conceptual taxonomy an urgent priority in this field. The catch, perhaps, is that similar to development of a more productive analytic methodology, development and organization of conceptual taxonomies depends on an appropriate and rigorously delineated theoretical model.

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