



Psychological Substrates of Religious Radicalisation

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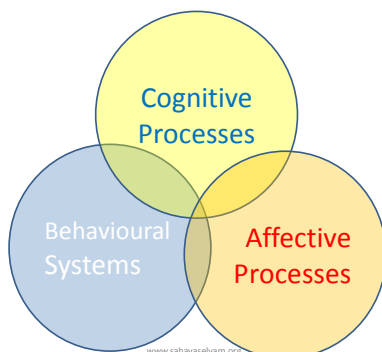
Scope of the paper

- To discuss the psychological substrates of religious radicalisation;
- **Substrates:** a substance or layer that underlies something, or on which some process occurs, in particular.
- We focus on **psychological substrates:** what are the psychological factors that underpin the process of radicalisation?

Scope of the paper

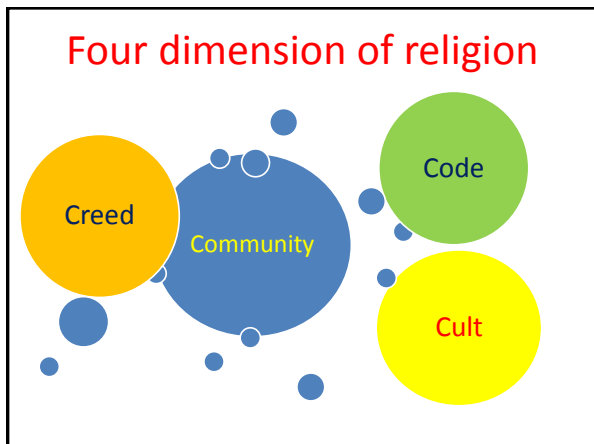
- To discuss the psychological substrates of religious radicalisation;
- **radicalisation:** is a process by which an individual or group comes to adopt increasingly extreme political, social, or religious ideals and aspirations that reject or undermine the existing order, including contemporary ideas.
- We focus on **religious radicalisation:** what are the psychological factors that confound with religious beliefs in the expressions of radicalisation?

Three components of Psychology



What is psychology?

- Scientific study of cognitive, affective processes and related behavioural processes..
- in individuals and groups;
- in humans and animals (comparative psychology);



Radicalisation

“Radicalisation is best viewed as a process of change, a personal and political transformation from one condition to another (taking up an extreme position in opposition to the present world order).”

“Recent scholars argue that becoming radicalised is, for most people, a gradual process and one that requires a progression through distinct stages and happens neither quickly nor easily.”

This slide and the following two are from:
Youth Justice Board (2012). Preventing Religious Radicalisation and Violent Extremism. UK: Youth Justice Board.

No Grand Theory!

“Each life history is unique, but of course social scientists look for trends and patterns, and studies of new religious movements have offered important lessons that can be applied to radicalisation.”

“Beliefs can provide a frame that shapes a world-view, and can be powerful motivators. Furthermore, beliefs can be or become unequivocal and non-negotiable – but this does not mean that they cannot be changed or adapted over time.”

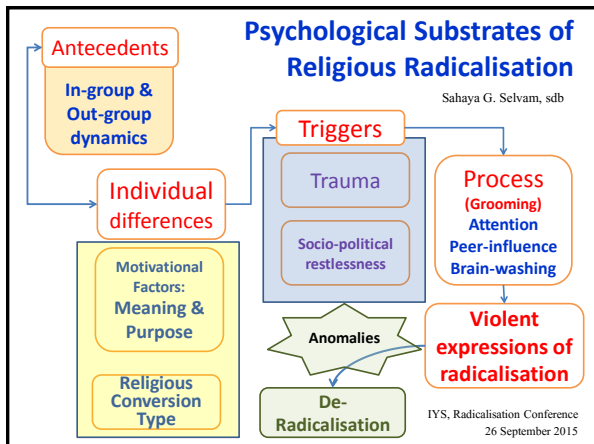
Dr Amanda van Eck Duymaer

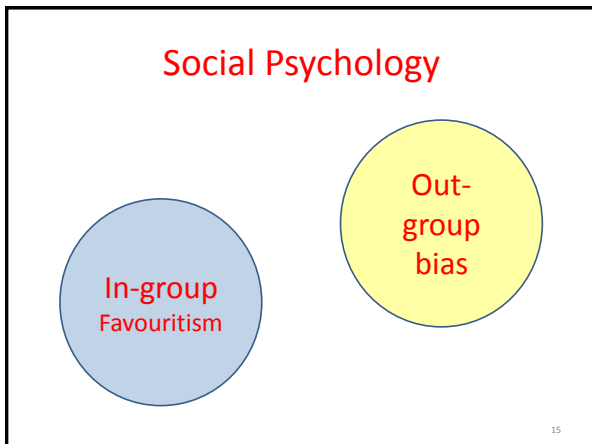
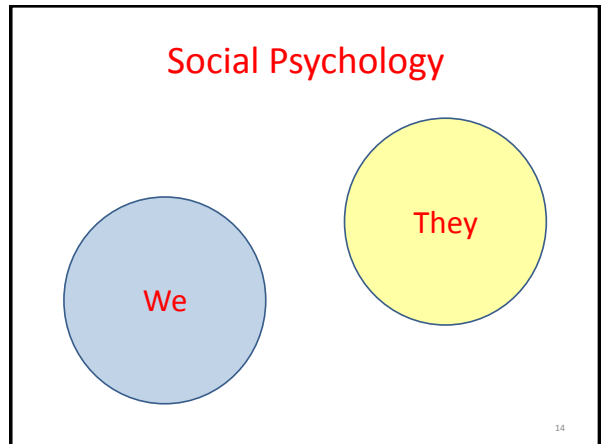
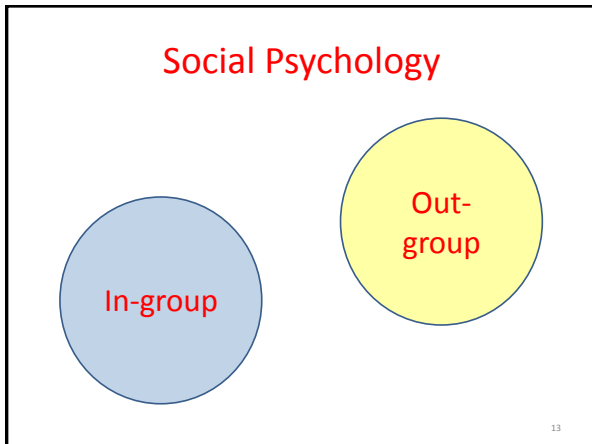
<http://www.radicalisationresearch.org/debate/van-eck-cult-members/>

No Causal Explanation!

- “Causal explanations on the level of the individual are insufficient to understand [fundamentalism and radicalisation].”
- Most psychological studies on radicalisation are only post-hoc or retrospective.
- Not possible to study psychology of individuals after the event, because the event itself has changed their psychological make-up.

Savage, S. (2011). Four lessons from the study of fundamentalism and psychology of religion. *Journal of Strategic Security*, 4(4), 131-150.





Identity question

- Pair up with your neighbour!
- Ask them 10 times: Who are you? They have to give meaningful answers?
- Exchange roles.
- Stop & Relax!
- **Analyse:** how many of your answers were associated to groups that you belong to: religion, ethnic group, religious congregation, etc

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Social Identity Theory

- The groups we belong to tell us something about who we are, and we may feel that we have some prestige from being part of the group.

Social Categorisation Social Identification Social Comparison

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. *The social psychology of intergroup relations*, pp.33-47.

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Religion & Social Identity

“The role of religion is paradoxical. It makes prejudice and it unmakes prejudice. While the creeds of great religions are universalistic, all stressing brotherhood, the practice of these creeds is frequently divisive and brutal. The sublimity of religious ideals is offset by the horrors of persecution in the name of these same ideals... Some people say the only cure for prejudice is more religion; some say the only cure is to abolish religion” (Allport, *Man and his religion*, 1954, p.444)

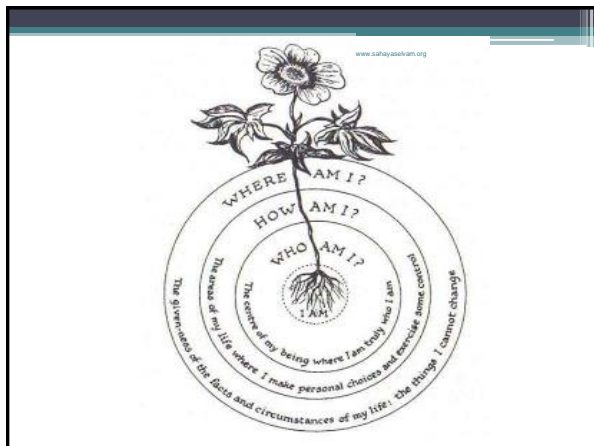
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Religion - a fertile ground for radicalisation

“Religion can be a useful emotional and rhetorical tool for those whose underlying motivations are actually political or territorial”

(Professor John Wolffe – Religion, Martyrdom and Global Uncertainties Project, Open University, UK)

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Psychological Substrates of Religious Radicalisation

Antecedents

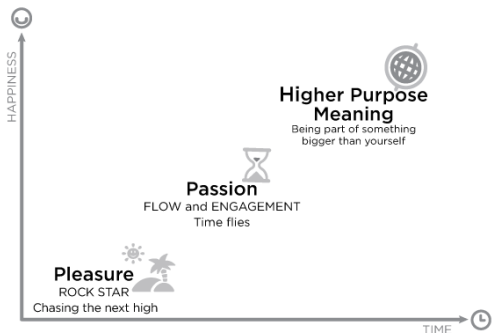
In-group & Out-group dynamics

Individual differences

Motivational Factors: Meaning & Purpose

Religious Conversion Type

HAPPINESS FRAMEWORK 3 3 TYPES OF HAPPINESS



Could the radical groups be providing significance & purpose?

- Those who lack opportunities in life may not have seriously dreamt about a purpose;
- Those who come from affluence may find life not challenging enough;
- Radical groups provide the possibility to dream!

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Means of providing significance

- **Classical Narratives:** radical interpretation of traditional texts and histories;
- **Contemporary Narratives:** some contemporary events and dynamics (secularisation, globalisation, neo-liberalism);
- **WWW** acts as a platform for propaganda of the narratives.

Kruglanski, A. W., & Webber, D. (2002). The Psychology of Radicalization. *Social Psychology, 83*, 1261-1271.

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Attachment & Conversion

1. Secure Attachment

- The child misses the mother, cries; on return runs to the mother, hugs; feels secure again and begins to explore the world.

2. Avoidant Attachment

- The child misses the mother, cries and stops; on return does not enthusiastically run to the mother, shows indifference (I-can-manage-without-you attitude); avoids mum and is angry.

3. Ambivalent Attachment

- The child misses the mother, cries in an exaggerated manner; on return runs to the mother; seems not interested in anything; could be violent to mum.

What is your attachment style to God?

Several authors see one's relationship with God as being similar to one's relationship with the primary care-giver.

1. Secure Attachment

- The person expresses deep longing for God; prays focusing on God; feels secure of the presence of God, and explores the world and functions therein in a creative manner, positively contributing to it.

2. Avoidant Attachment

- Might believe or not believe in God; Gives up prayer when God does not respond; feels self-sufficient; finds it difficult to relate to God in an intimate way.

3. Ambivalent Attachment

- Longs for God, but does not translate into prayer; not consistent in prayer.

Attachment & Conversion

Several authors see one's relationship with God as being similar to one's relationship with the primary care-giver.

1. Secure Attachment

- Gradual Conversion

2. Avoidant Attachment

- Sudden conversion.

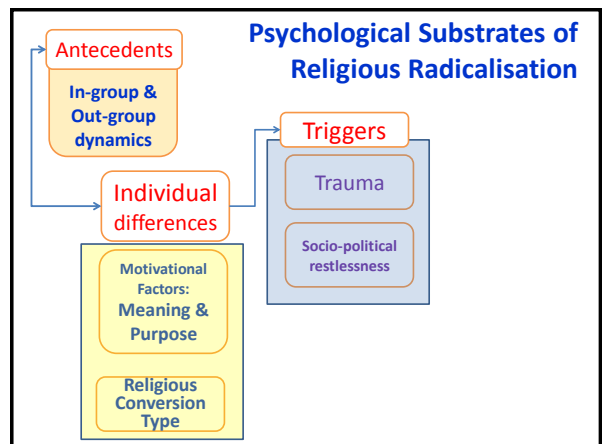
3. Ambivalent Attachment

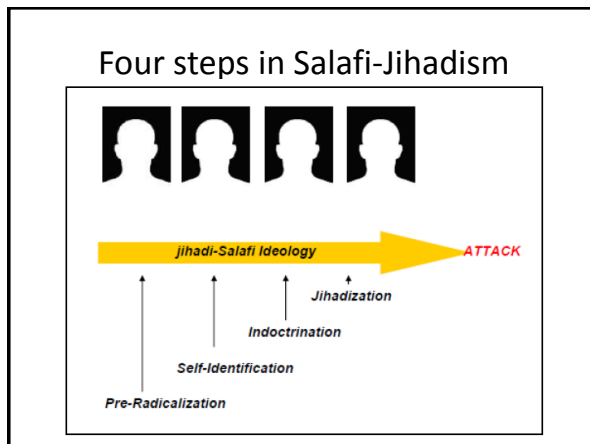
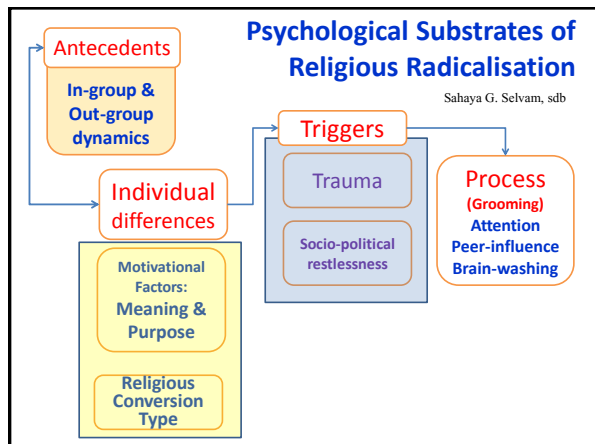
- Mixed – inconsistent.

(Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990; Granqvist & Hagekull, 2004)

Radicalisation & Conversion

- **Sudden conversion** is likely to be associated with Radicalisation.
- Radicalisation involves brain-washing; emotion-based; lack of integration of the rational faculty;
- Faith is equated with affective side of humans (emotional) and not integrated with rational self.
- Radicalism and Radicalisation could be different.





Psychological Needs Met by Being part of a radical group

- **Attention & Sense of belonging:** an immediate antidote for loneliness (Curran, 1989) and a possible solution to alienation and neglect.
- **Agency, Mastery & Structure.** Those who require structure, order, and limits, seek them in the group.
- **Power and Control.** Provides possibility to exert great power, one that offers a "quick fix" to their problems.
- **Rebellion.** Radical groups represent a hostile and extreme form of rebellion.

Influence of Social Groups on grooming

- The **peer group** is an important part of this process of grooming, it often consists of a core of followers who have been in the group the longest and who are trusted by the leader.

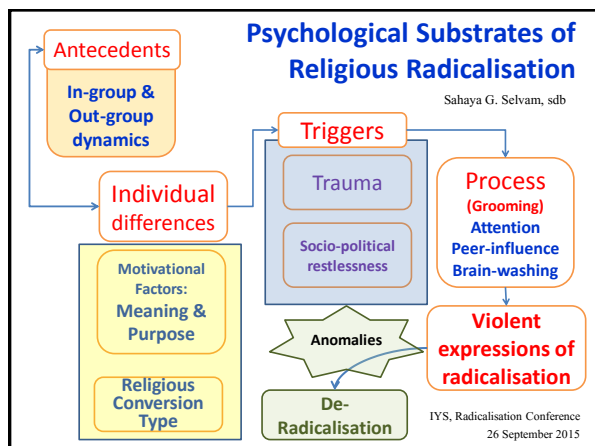
Dynamics of Brainwashing (in cults & in radicalisation)

- **Milieu control:** control of information – selective reading of literature, selective access to information;
- **Mystical manipulation:** experiences are orchestrated and planned to appear beyond ordinary;
- **Demand for purity:** the world is viewed as black and white; only the cult is in the right;
- **Confession of sins** (as defined by the group) are confessed to the leader or in public;

Dynamics of Brainwashing (in cults & in radicalisation)

- **Sacred science:** the truth held by the group is held ultimate, beyond criticism or questioning;
- **Peculiar language** and expressions;
- **Doctrine over person:** member's personal experience is sub-ordinated;
- **Dispensing of existence:** the group decides who has the right to exist and who has not.

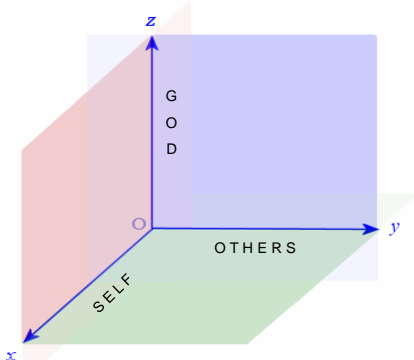
Cook, et al. (2009). p.261.



Solutions

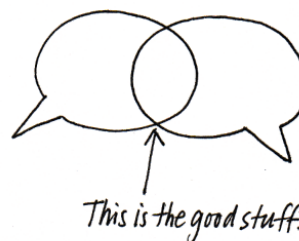
- Religion needs to focus on (individual) **spirituality** and not (group) affiliation!
- Religions need to focus on **meaning** rather than their truth-claims!

3D Religious Spirituality



Truth and Meaning

Religious truth-claims provide meaning to the mysteries of life.



Useful Online Sources

1. <http://www.radicalisationresearch.org/>
2. <https://www.livingsafetogether.gov.au/informationadvice/Pages/what-is-radicalisation/what-is-radicalisation.aspx>
3. http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/crisis-and-terrorism/radicalisation/index_en.htm
4. <https://www.issafrica.org/>

Thank You

www.sahayaselvam.org