ON SELF-DERADICALISATION

Self-deradicalisation, as a self-driven process, does not seem to have ever been considered *per se*, though it is possible that many radicals remain unknown or undetected and, after a while, stop being radical on their own accord. Some theoretical corpuses deserve to be examined on this matter, as a very preliminary conceptual perspective.

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INTRODUCTION

Though both research and public debate are concerned with understanding radicalisation, more recently there has also been interest in the phenomenon of self-radicalisation. Self-radicalisation highlights an individual's ability to develop a justifying narrative to violently radicalise on their own (that is, without having contact with like-minded others) and, potentially become a 'lone-wolf'. As with 'regular' radicalisation, however, the outcome of self-radicalisation is not inevitably becoming violent.

Symmetrically, self-deradicalisation could be a-priori defined as the process through which an individual chooses to stop being radicalised and peacefully reintegrates into mainstream culture. In principle, this could occur with individuals who have either self-radicalised or radicalised while being in contact with like-minded others. Self-deradicalisation, as a specific concept, does not seem to have been studied until now. In the present focus document, we discuss some aspects of self-deradicalisation, especially from an early-stage theoretical and research perspective.

Because self-deradicalisation is mostly uncharted territory, in the absence of serious and validated data, the following remarks must be considered as very preliminary thoughts and tracks for future research.
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A TENTATIVE TYPOLOGY

Typologies are often used to describe categories of radicals. For instance, the FBI typology uses 'facilitator', 'acceptance seeker' or 'lone-wolf' as a conceptual way to represent radicalized individuals.

Similarly, a simple and provisional way to describe individuals, who may engage in self-deradicalisation, might be useful. Future research will verify or contradict the proposed and tentative typology below.

- **The borderliners:** This group includes individuals who have never been identified as radicals or who have never been arrested, thus staying on the legal side of social life. For them, radicalisation is just a latent potential for various reasons, for example, the lack of a decisive facilitator/agent of radicalisation, or of an understanding of the probable risks and consequences they could face. Such a wide and fuzzy category remains invisible to the relevant services and consequently to the research community.
- **The outsiders:** This group includes members of a radicalised group who have extracted themselves from the group and collective radicalisation. This may be due either to the individual's own dissatisfaction with the group or to the group's rejection of the individual. An analysis of this opting-out move may focus on individual variables, though group, inter-individual or other external factors can also be decisive.
- **The rehabilitated:** This group includes terrorist inmates or ex-inmates, in particular, by reason of their highly sensitive profile and potential for violence. Studying their self-deradicalisation implies focussing on their capacity and will – in such a penitentiary environment – to accept and internalise peaceful social norms. While it is widely considered that jail can be a 'polariser' for radicalisation, it is extremely important to study how some individuals can successfully proceed to deradicalise themselves in such an environment.

An assumption that can be made, in the absence of scientific assessment, that the self-deradicalisation process is complex. In the case of self-deradicalisation in jail, it is possible that jail, as a total institution, contributes to exerting decisive and deterring pressures, among other variables, on the inmates.

It is also possible that observations and findings from political sociology about the family are useful here: having a family, raising children, becoming a property owner or benefiting from a regular job position will increase the costs of turning to violent radicalisation and a-priori deter individuals from joining radical and destructive subcultures (moderating external factors).

Similarly, this could function as leverage for individuals wishing to de-radicalise. Such 'family incentives' could help any individual, and in particular, the inmates, to mobilise themselves toward self-deradicalisation.

Here, obviously, the question of self-deradicalisation 'boundaries' is critical and possibly challenges the delineation of self-radicalisation itself: What are the specific individual variables of self-radicalisation/self-deradicalisation and what are the external ones? How do they interact?

Does a 'lone-wolf' terrorist really isolate in his radicalisation or does he just act alone? In a similar way, does a self-deradicaliser act autonomously or are there (always) inter-individual or environmental factors in play?

USEFUL THEORIES?

It would be interesting to apply existing specific research corpora on radicalisation to self-deradicalisation. Such applications could possibly help orient research perspectives by offering some analogies and research/methodological directions to further the study of this phenomenon. For instance, as we previously pointed out, the political sociological work on family and some of its findings on family/social status as moderation factors involved in self-deradicalisation may be useful.

Here we mention some other research corpora that might be of interest for the study of self-deradicalisation:

Social-inhibition refers to constraining variables that pressure or that are internalised by individuals in order to live among the others. It can be defined as the conscious or subconscious constraint by an individual of behaviour of a social nature (for instance politically- or religiously-motivated violence, or alternatively, peaceful 'mainstream' values). In the case of self-deradicalisation, the constraint may be in relation to behaviour (the individual has convinced themself that politically or religiously motivated violence should never be used), appearance (the individual no longer adheres to the codes of his ex-destructive subculture, like salafi-jihadism aesthetics), or a subject matter for discussion (for instance, the white race supremacy).

There are various reasons for social inhibition, including that the individual fears that the activity, appearance or discussion will meet with social disapproval, and consequently, punishment or reprisal. Social-inhibition theory and findings might help analyse how individuals can successfully accept symbolic or real pressures, or to internalise new norms in order to go back to a full legal and peaceful life.

A broader, but correlated, approach is given by socialisation theory and findings. Socialisation is the process by which an individual learns and internalises norms and values of the society to which he belongs. It is both the result of an imposed constraint by social agents exerting a symbolic (parents, school) and real (police, justice) coercion, and an interaction between the individual and their environment.

While primary socialisation refers to childhood, secondary socialisation refers to the adulthood period. Both might be interesting to take into account for understanding self-deradicalisation, depending on the observed population/individual age. In a self-deradicalisation context, socialisation might basically be the process of learning (or re-learning) appropriate behaviour as a member of the mainstream and peaceful society.

Derived from this concept, resocialisation refers to the process of discarding former (violent) behaviour patterns and reflexes, accepting new mainstream and peaceful ones as part of a transition in one's life.

Resocialisation in general can be an intense experience: re-socialisation via total institutions, like jail or intervention programmes, in which people are isolated from the rest of the society, might require intense efforts from both the individual themself and the organisation they are temporarily living in or interacting with. Self-resocialisation might logically refer to such a process, but conducted by the individual himself.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

While other theories and research could be evoked, it should be fundamental to conduct research on self-deradicalisation – a real *terra incognita.* Such an approach would help us understand why and how individuals, during their radicalisation process or life as a radical, often eventually decide, sometimes freely, to renounce violence and go back to normal, peaceful and legal society.

Most importantly, such research could also help recalibrate deradicalisation interventions and contribute to detecting and assisting sensitive individuals into a social reintegration process, or at least, into a de-escalation perspective.

REFERENCE AND FURTHER READING

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