

Sessions proposal to ASR 2017
Association for the Sociology of Religion
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Radicalization and Religious Studies. Theories, critics and Empirical researches

Submitted by Solange Lefebvre (Chair in Management of Cultural and Religious Diversity, Institute for Religious Studies, University of Montreal), and Peyer Beyer (Department of Classica and Religious Studies, University of Ottawa)

Keywords: Radicalisation, Religion, Diversity, Violence, Média

Problematic

Radicalization, de-radicalization, and counter-radicalization have become increasingly important themes, particularly in relation to Islamist extremism; even though they have a longer history beyond this more recent form, especially with reference to violent New Religious Movements in the latter half of the twentieth century. In light of the dominance in current scientific literature of terrorism and security experts, criminologists, and psychologists, ASR 2017 in Montreal provides an opportunity to invite scholars in the social sciences of religion to reflect on this issue in accordance with the conference theme, *Religion and Division: Causes, Consequences and Counters*. Presentations in the proposed session would focus on one or more of the following questions: what concepts do we use to understand the transition to violence in an individual or group, and what is the role of religion in this passage? What role do the media play in the dynamics of radicalization, de-radicalization or counter-radicalization? What new dilemmas and challenges do traditional media face in the context of the ethical and regulatory regimes that they seek to impose? How do we understand the important role that the untamed sphere of social networks seems to play in the dissemination of so-called 'radicalizing' discourses? How should social scientific research go about researching this issue? What religious discourses have arisen to talk about radicalization and its correlates? In what contexts does radicalization likely take place (e.g. prisons, ideological groups with their charismatic leaders, families, etc.) and what is the current state of research on this question?

Speakers :

Lorne Dawson and Amarnath Amarasingam

Title: The "Religious Conversions" of Jihadi Foreign Fighters:
Insights from the Fighters and Their Families

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Abstract

The precise role of religion in the motivation for “religious terrorism” remains the subject of sharp dispute. There are conceptual misunderstandings, political worries, and methodological concerns that systematically distort how scholars are conceiving the situation. We have argued that the radicalization leading to violence for most jihadi terrorists begins with an adolescent conversion experience (see, e.g., L. L. Dawson and A. Amarasingam, “Talking to Foreign Fighters: Insights into the Motivations for Hijrah to Syria and Iraq,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 40, No. 3, 2017 and L. L. Dawson, “Sketch of a Social Ecology Model for Explaining Homegrown Terrorist Radicalisation”, *The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague* 8, no.1, 2017), and as such think that religiosity plays a pivotal role in this type of religious terrorism. As with much of the research on radicalization, we initially developed this view from the analysis of case literature, based largely on open secondary sources. In addition, however, and unlike most of the rest of the literature on radicalization, we found supportive evidence in the primary data secured from our interviews with foreign fighters in Syria and the family members and friends of such fighters. This paper summarizes and analyses the pertinent findings from our ongoing interviews (twenty interviews with foreign fighters and forty with family and friends by the end of 2016), and places them in the context of debates over the relative significance of religion as a primary motivator of terrorism.

Susan Palmer

Title: Renegade Researchers and Recalcitrant Ethics Boards. New Impediments to Studying Radical Religions and Social Movements

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Since the rise of the new “ethics culture” in the USA and Canada, there has been a noticeable decline in field research on new, controversial religions and social movements (Van den Hoonaard 2011, Haggerty 2004). This study examines some of the new administrative obstacles to research, as experienced by twelve researchers in the course of negotiations with their ethics boards (“REBs” in Canada, “IRBs” in the U.S.) for ethics approval regarding projects involving “human subjects”. The twelve informants’ critiques of their ethics committees, conveyed in interviews, fall into eight categories:

- a) Unnecessary delays
- b) Poor communication skills
- c) Excessive concern for potential risk
- d) Impeding spontaneity and flexibility in field research
- e) Secrecy, Immunity and lack of accountability
- f) Maintaining an hierarchical relationship
- g) Exceeding their mandate
- h) Disregarding the well-being of human subjects

On the basis of these interviews (and previous studies), the strategic responses of North American researchers to obstacles posed by ethics committees might be analyzed as corresponding to four types: Capitulation, Adjustment, Resistance and Reform. While Capitulation appears to be a common response among graduate students, Resistance is appears to be widely practised among experienced researchers, who cooperate deceptively through “benign fabrication” (Goffman 1974:87) or “gamesmanship” (Potter 1947).

This study explores the implications of the rise of this rapidly evolving “moral bureaucracy”, criticized by scholars for inhibiting field research through the delaying or halting of research projects, distorting methodologies, and discouraging initiative and originality (Van den

Hoonard, 2011). Finally, it is argued that the ethical concern for potential harm to “human subjects” must be balanced with the right of minority groups to be heard; to tell “their side of the story”.

Mathilde Vanasse-Pelletier

Title: Atrocity Tales and Stereotypes. The Dangers of Mormon Fundamentalism as Presented in the Memoirs of Militant Ex-Polygamists

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Abstract

This presentation focuses on memoirs written by ex-members of polygamist Mormon groups, in which the authors describe their pasts as part of polygamous families and/or marriages. Often rooted in sensationalism, these works range from the dramatic description of childhood abuse and trauma (ex. Jessop 2007, Jessop 2009, Wall 2008, Musser 2014, Jeffs 2009, Palmer 2004), to lyrical portrayals of a quest for independence and self-affirmation inside and outside fundamentalist groups (Allred Solomon 2003), to the highly sarcastic depiction of conversion and de-conversion to the Principle of plural marriage (Hanks 2013). The analysis is anchored in a constructivist perspective and refers to concepts and theories emerging from the study of deviance and the field of academic research concerning new religious movements. The “atrocity tales” included in the chosen memoirs generally – with diverging degrees of nuance – describe fundamentalist Mormonism as an overly patriarchal and controlling religion leaving little space for agency and individual actualization, and often refer to concepts such as brainwashing and mind control, especially when contemplating the experiences of women and children. Furthermore, the way in which some of these apostates rely on dispute broadening to portray entire groups or even an entire diversified religious culture as intrinsically psychologically, spiritually, physically and sexually abusive will be noted. Indeed, the authors of these memoirs often use their (often negative) personal experience in specific groups (ex. the AUB, the FLDS, the TLC) to paint a broad picture of Mormon fundamentalism as detrimental to the individual and dangerous for society, often through the use of the pejorative “cult” label. The different discourses presented by these career apostates’ memoirs will be linked to the broader domain of anti-cult rhetoric and stereotypes, and put into perspective within the larger media discussion surrounding Mormon fundamentalism in recent years.

Sessions II

Responding to Religious Radicalization

Submitted by Solange Lefebvre (Chair in Management of Cultural and Religious Diversity, Institute for Religious Studies, University of Montreal), Peyer Beyer (Department of Classics and Religious Studies, University of Ottawa)

Keywords: Radicalisation, Religion, Diversity, Violence, Média

Solange Lefebvre, Mathilde Vanasse-Pelletier and Imane Khlifate

Title: Radicalization in the Media on an Ordinary Day

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Abstract

Interrelations between journalistic coverage and religious issues have become more complex than ever in light of intense media proliferation. As members of an international research team on Media and Religion related to the Religion and Diversity Project (dir. L. G. Beaman, University of Ottawa), on Religion in the Media on an Ordinary Day, the team will present the results of a detailed analysis of the way religion is seen and represented in major newspapers in Quebec, on specific days during three-year period from 2013 to 2015. The presentation will include statistics, the main themes and the problematics. The project included many countries and was built around the choice of 'ordinary days' (September 17). The media, alongside other major social institutions, contributes to the interpretation and regulation of religious issues, just as they do to all elements of common culture. In the literature during the last twenty years, it seems that while certain issues frequently receive quite favourable treatment (papal elections, World Youth Day, the Dalai Lama, official national religious holidays, charitable pursuits, mainstream spiritual trends), the same does not hold true when the minority factor comes into play. Is this still the case? The main hypothesis, related to this session's theme, is the following: Islam is massively addressed negatively, as a potential 'radicalizing' religion, and even the most positive articles can have a counter effect by adding to the fear and anxiety about some 'kind of religion'.

David Hofmann

Title: How "Alone" are Lone-Wolves?: Understanding Networks of Influence, Communication, and Tactical Support among Lone-Wolf Terrorists

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Abstract

Since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, there has been an increase in violent politically-motivated incidents committed by "lone-wolf" terrorists: individuals who act independently from established terrorist organizations. In response to mounting concern among policy-makers and police, there have been concerted efforts among terrorism scholars to understand the motives and methods of lone-wolf terrorists in order to help combat this growing threat. This, however, has not been a straightforward or easy task. As noted in a recent report on lone-wolf terrorism produced by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), "...there is no hierarchical organization to disrupt, no large network to infiltrate, no group literature to monitor, and few public statements to interpret or background chatter to analyze for patterns" (Deloughery et. al., 2013, p. 2). The implication is that the solitary nature of lone-wolf terrorism presents unique and difficult challenges for security agencies, policy-practitioners, and scholars tasked with detecting, identifying, and preventing acts of lone-wolf terrorism. But, just how "alone" are lone-wolves? The available research indicates that lone-wolf terrorists do not radicalize in a social vacuum, nor do they plan their activities in complete anonymity. Despite the increasing empirical evidence that challenges this approach, much of the

current research continues to focus on the behaviors and beliefs of *individual* lone-wolves. With few exceptions, much of the current scholarship on lone-wolf terrorism overlooks the crucial role that larger social networks may have in the radicalization and operation of lone-wolf terrorists. In order to begin correcting this lacuna in knowledge, this research proposes to use a *network science* approach to conduct several in-depth case studies of Canadian lone-wolves that explore the structural characteristics and the extent of their ideological, communicative, and support networks. By focusing on the type, nature, and frequency of the relational ties that lone-wolves form during their radicalization towards violence, this research has the potential to provide unique social-structural insights with practical applications for security agencies tasked with detecting and preventing acts of lone-wolf terrorism.

Aziz Djaout

Title: Quebec counter-radicalization programs and initiatives: characteristics and hypothesis

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Abstract

An overview of the specialized literature on radicalization shows that phenomena and how to counter it are not self-evident. Researchers are still discussing the definition of this notion, its link to violence, the radical profiles, the trajectories of their radicalization, the role of religion in these trajectories, and so on. Moreover, internationally, in addition to being little studied, the counter-radicalization programs, as currently conceived and implemented, raise serious questions and criticisms about the premises on which they are based. However, what about Quebec initiatives in this area? At all levels, public authorities are seeking to involve the Muslim communities in the struggle against radicalization and terrorism. Within those communities too, several institutions or individuals have initiated counter-radicalization initiatives. In this context, our intervention will describe some of those initiatives and will then question their characteristics and their underlying premises. Overall, we will try to identify, analyze and understand the indigenous definitions of those in charge of these initiatives concerning the key concepts of radicalization and counter-radicalization by raising the following questions: what is a radical idea or a radical person from the perspective of these publics? Do they consider radicalism to be religious, ideological, political and/or psychological phenomena? What counter-radicalizing means for them? Is it to teach young people religious interpretations condemning violence or to dialogue with them on problematic political, social and / or personal issues? To offer those young people alternative ways of religious, political and / or civic engagement or to train them in the techniques of critical thinking and non-violent communication?

Aïcha Bounaga

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Title: What representation of islam do the fight against radicalization convey in France?

In the past two years, the terrorist attacks that struck France have deeply traumatized the population and seem to have marked the beginning of a new era: they have indeed brought to light the reality of a undeniable radicalization process occurring in French society, which has given rise to a great number of political and scientific debates whose aim was to decipher what factors of this violence that uses the religious framework for the purpose of violent contestation were to be highlighted. A number of experts have developed their idea of the solution: some preach a deradicalization process, and target primarily the individuals who are being radicalized or have already been radicalized, with methods that are mostly psychological and based on model of the

fight against the cults. Others preach for a counter-radicalization process to counteract the development of politico-religious radicalization through the identification of radical ideological movements, the production of a counterdiscourse, and the implementation of partnerships with Islamic agents involved in the fight against those radical movements. A whole network of new public policies have thus been born of those conceptions, to try to confront, to prevent and to contend these processes of indoctrination. They lead to question how they underline some notions about what the relationship between the state and Islam should be, notably in relation with *laïcité*. Through semi-structured interviews with individual actors involved in those policies in the name of institutions (public agents, officials), and private groups (organizations, mosques), as well as through the study of official documents related to the genesis of these policies, it appears that the discourses on the fight against radicalization in France reflect representations of what Islam should be and tend to draw a relatively explicit new line between the forms of religious practice of Islam that are to be tolerated in France and those that are to be considered as a threat.

Connor Steele

Title: "Say No to these Brownshirts!": The Construction of 'Extremism' in the Dispute over TWU'S Proposed Law School

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Abstract

According to Seymour Martin Lipset (1990) and Michael Adams (2003), Canadians are — or commonly believed to be — more liberal than their American neighbors, deferential to authority, and distrustful of anything that could be labeled extreme religion. This is particularly true with respect to attitudes both of and concerning evangelicals (Theissen 2015; Reimer and Wilcox 2015; Reimer 2003; Rawlyk 1990). Miriam Smith (1999; 2007; 2008) argues that both Anglophone and Francophone Canadians consistently identify with the *Charter of Rights*; and this identification fosters Canadian exceptionalism. It, therefore, is not surprising that an overtly political and evangelical university desirous of a law school, despite discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation and other prohibited grounds, has occasioned such impassioned rhetoric within the legal community. Along with Heather Shipley (2015) this paper will interrogate the (de)construction of a 'rights clash,' by performing a critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1989; 2000; 2003) of some of the most polemical submissions to the Law Society of Upper Canada, the Nova Scotia Barristers' Society, and the law society of British Columbia concerning the proposed program. While they are not empirically representative, they expose much of the emotional scaffolding supporting other traditional legal briefs. While the paper places particular emphasis on references to the Nazis and other totalitarian regimes, as well as the literary invocation of Shakespeare, it also performs a functionalist analysis of grammar and word choice. Hyperbolic analogies in legal rhetoric are intended to produce certain emotional states; these reactions, in turn, invoke an implied fear of religious violence or harm — or injury caused by religion's absence — apropos of nationalism and sexual citizenship (Cossman 2007; Shipley 2014; 2013; Puar 2007; Cavanaugh 2009). Hence, the analysis has broader implications for how 'extremists' are (de)constructed through historical narrativity and nationalism.