Social Work and Society:

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Radicalisation

Introduction

In the political context, the term radical has been applied to a wide range of figures. Both Jeremy Corbyn and Nigel Farage could be considered radical in the sense that that they are campaigning for a society based on a different set of political and economic relationships and values. However, in politics, radicalism has come to be associated with the adoption of revolutionary tactics and approaches. Radicals can come from across the political spectrum. Historically, radical has been a term that has been most closely associated with progressive politics. The tactics radicals adopt do not have to be violent - for example, being a conscientious objector and refusing conscription in World War 1 was a radical act . The Suffragettes were radical in both their aims and methods (Purvis, 1995). Radicalisation in the current political climate, is the term used for the processes, by which, individuals become involved in political groups that are committed to the overhaul of political and social structures (Kundnani, 2012). There is an implicit assumption that these radical approaches includes a rejection of parliamentary democracy as a means of bringing about lasting and fundamental change. Since the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers on 9/11, radicalisation has been largely been associated with terrorism inspired by radical interpretations of Islamic religious texts (Kundnani, 2012).

There is not the space here to discuss in depth the use of violence as a political weapon. Radical critiques of parliamentary democracy argue that it is based on a sham of equality. One person one vote acts as a cover that hides the real power and inequalities that exist in society. From this perspective, it is impossible for the gradualism of liberal political democracy to produce fundamental change. In addition, such perspectives would argue that the violence that has its root cause in capitalism is hidden or ignored. When exploring these issues, it is important to recognise that it is perfectly possible to be a radical and totally reject violence and terrorism. In addition, an understanding of the political context is required to

understand the use of the term terrorist. Famously, Nelson Mandela was tried and imprisoned for twenty-years on charges of treason and labelled a terrorist by the apartheid regime and its supporters (Joffe, 2013) . To the wider world, he was fighting for freedom and social justice. Those who become involved in political violence are often dismissed as madmen and so on. One impact of this is that the political ideas or disputes that are the root of the cause, for which, they choose to fight, are ignored. This is not a defence of political violence but a recognition that it does not occur in a vacuum.

In the 1970s, radical political groups such as the Red Army Faction (Barder Meinhoff Gang) in West Germany and the Red Brigades (Brigate Rosse) in Italy carried out a series of politically motivated kidnappings, robberies and murders. These groups had their roots in the radical student politics of the late 1960s (Becker, 2014) . There were inspired by anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism. The founder of the Red Brigades was Renato Curcio. In 1967, he set up a radical study group at the University of Trento. The group studied Marx, Mao, and Che Guevara. In November 1970, they carried out the firebombing of various factories and warehouses in Milan. In 1978 the Red Brigades kidnapped and murdered former prime minister Aldo Moro. The Red Brigade along with the Red Army Faction rejected what they saw as the cosy hypocrisy of the post war consumer society. In West Germany, the Red Army Faction also sought to highlight what they saw as attempts to avoid any examination of their parents' generation involvement in the development of Nazism (Laqueur, 2017). The acts of violence were not simply random. In Italy, the Brigate Rosse argued that the response of the state - increased surveillance, restriction on liberty and greater powers for the Police - would demonstrate the fundamental hypocrisy of bourgeois liberal democracy (Bull, 2015). This would in turn create greater support for radical political approaches amongst the working class and Trade Union movements. This proved to be wildly optimistic and naive. The arrest and imprisonment of many of the Red Brigades' leaders and ordinary members from the mid-1970s onward led to the collapse of the organization.

Post 9/11

The terrorist attacks of 11th September 2001 are clearly one of the most significant events of the past fifty years. The geopolitical ramifications include the instigation of the so-called War on Terror, the US invasion of Afghanistan and ultimately the invasion of Iraq and the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. The events and the response by Western Governments have been a key factor in the development of narratives of radicalisation, which until relatively recently came to be associated with jihadism. Four passenger airliners —were hijacked by 19 al-Qaeda terrorists. Two of the planes, American Airlines Flight 11 and United Airlines Flight 175, were crashed into the North and South towers, respectively, of the World Trade Center complex in Lower Manhattan. In under two hours , both 110-story towers collapsed. The images of the planes flying into the Twin Towers, people jumping from the buildings and individuals in the streets covered in dust and debris have become amongst the most iconic of the modern era. A third plane, American Airlines Flight 77, was crashed into the Pentagon A fourth plane, United Airlines Flight 93, was initially flown toward Washington, D.C., but crashed into a field in Pennsylvania, after its passengers overpowered the hijackers. All 64 passengers, the crew and the hijackers were killed along with 125 people in the building. 2,996 people died in the attacks and over 6000 were injured. It is estimated that the attacks caused over $10 billions worth of damage (Dwyer, J and Flynn, K 2005). As well as the deaths at the time, there have been a series deaths due to 9/11-related cancer and respiratory diseases. One of the most widely viewed images was of the Marcy Borders, a 28-year-old Bank of America employee. She was pictured fleeing from the North tower head to toe in debris. She became a 9/11 celebrity: the "Dust Lady". She experienced mental and physical health problems after this. She died of stomach cancer in 2015 (*https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/sep/21/911-dust-lady-marcy-borders-depression-rehab-back-from-the-brink-then-a-final-bombshell*)

The attacks were carried out by members of al-Qaeda. In 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. Osama bin Laden, a member of a wealthy Saudi family

traveled to Afghanistan to support those fighting the Soviets. These guerilla fighters the mujahideen fought a guerilla war against to Soviet occupation. The invasion fo Afghanistan was a disaster for the Soviet Union playing a role in its collapse. In 1996, bin Laden issued his first fatwā, calling for American soldiers to leave Saudi Arabia - site of the holiest sites in Islam. In a second fatwā In 1998, bin Laden outlined his objections to American foreign policy with respect to Israel, as well as the continued presence of American troops in Saudi Arabia after the Gulf War. Bin Laden used religious texts to justify attacks on American and the West more generally (Burke, 2007) U.S. president George W. Bush declared a "war on terror" a few days speech to Congress on 16th September 2001. He stated that *"Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists and every government that supports them."*The War on Terror saw the establishment of Gauntanomo Bay detention camp on a US Naval Base in Cuba. Inmates have been detained indefinitely without trial. There have been reports of torture. The camp regime is considered is viewed as a major breach of international human rights by many including Amnesty International (Amnesty International, 2012) . Supporters of the regime and the use of techniques such as waterboarding argue that these are justified because terrorism requires the suspension of the normal rules of the game.

Since 9/11, there has been a series of attacks committed by groups or individuals linked to or inspired by Al-Qaeda. The 2002 Bali bombings in Indonesia.The 2004 Madrid train bombings in Spain.The 7 July 2005 London bombings in the United Kingdom were perpetrated by four UK born terrorists.The 2012 Toulouse and Montauban shootings in France were committed by Mohammed Merah. The nature of these attacks and more recent ones such as those in Nice and at London Bridge have shown that there is a loose grouping of radical groups which have taken their ideological inspiration from Al-Qaeda. Radicalisation is not a process that is limited to the radical left. As we shall explore in more detail below, the authorities are increasingly concerned by the neo-fascist right. During the EU Referendum campaign, Jo Cox the MP for Batley was stabbed and shot by Thomas Mair. Mair has links with British and US Neo-Nazi groups (Winter, 2016).

Radicalisation

The government and broader policy responses to radicalisation are based on a mixture of approaches. There has clearly been a significant investment in the development of security and other law and order approaches. These include greater security and checks at airports but also a greater presence of armed police. For example, following the Manchester Arena bombing in 2017, armed police patrolled the centre of the city. These moves are designed to both prevent further attacks but also to reassure local citizens. The security services and the police have also invested heavily in technology to identify and track potential terrorists. One of the impacts of these changes is that it targets whole communities. As Kundnani (2012) outlines, the response to terrorist attacks has been to increase surveillance on Muslim groups and neighbourhoods. This is repeating a pattern from the 1970s and 80s when Irish nationalist and Catholic communities in mainland Britain were regarded with suspicion and hostility because of the IRA's bombing campaign.

The remainder of this chapter will focus on social policy rather than Criminal Justice responses to radicalisation. It will also consider the potential implications for social work of policies such as the Prevent Strategy. Throughout the policy documents, radicalisation is   presented or regarded as a process. Thus it is argued that the role of anti-radicalisation policies should be to identify those who are "at risk" of being recruited and engage them in more constructive alternative activities that will prevent them being recruited. These approaches are very similar to anti-gang and CSE policies in that there are based on a need to prevent vulnerable individuals being drawn into exploitative situations or circumstances. One of the criticisms of this approach is that it minimises or disregards political ideology. Radicalisation in this model does not allow for the individual choices that those who commit political violence make. This is not in any way to defend such acts. It is simply to acknowledge that terrorists like other individuals exercise agency and make choices.

In 2005, the EU produced a *Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment.* The policy had three key aims

- *to disrupt the activities of individuals and networks that draw people into terrorism*

- *ensure that mainstream opinion prevails over extremism*

- *promote security, justice democracy and opportunities for all*

It should be noted that the standard response to radicalisation has focused on young men at risk of becoming involved in politically motivated violence. Sites of radicalisation have included community meeting groups, places of worship and also prisons. There are many examples of those who have committed recent terrorist acts who adopted radical views whilst serving custodial sentences. However, the development of social media has seen it become a much more powerful factor in these cases. Thomas Mair, for example, was something of a recluse but was able to access neo-Nazi propaganda very easily online. The fact that individuals do this means that their views are never challenged. Social media acts as an echo chamber. Extremist groups such as Islamic State have been particularly successful in posting videos that act as recruiting officers. The political situation in the Middle East in a potent factor here. The occupation of the West Bank and Gaza by Israel, the invasion and chaos that was created in Iraq, the civil wars in Syria and Yemen and Chechnya have all been factors in the radicalisation of individuals. One aspect of globalisation is that conflicts such as these have potentially much wider implications and effects. These include the displacement of huge numbers of people and the creation of refugees. The refugee crisis has been exploited by neo fascist groups.

There are a number of models of radicalisation that have been developed using insights from the psychological and social sciences (Kundnani, 2012). Sociological approaches have focused on such factors as poverty and discrimination. The argument being that the marginalisation of communities makes individuals within them more open to radical political ideas. One of the aspects of the ideologies of Al-Qaeda and Islamic State is the way that they link the experiences of Muslim

communities across the world. In this model, marginalisation is experienced and therefore has to be addressed on a number of levels

- *micro* - individuals experience discrimination and racism
- *meso* - the group or community experience marginalisation and stigmatisation
- *macro* - the influence of government policy but also global political events

The majority of the literature that examines radicalisation has focused on Islamic terrorism. As noted above, following the assassination of Jo Cox, MP, there has been an increased interest and focus on neo fascist groups. Mari was not the first neo Nazi convicted of political murder. David Copeland was jailed in 1999 for 13-day nail bombing campaign that left three people dead and 139 injured . He placed bombs at a gay pub in Soho and attacked black communities in Brick Lane and Brixton (Chakraborti, 2017). In the USA, prior to 9/11 the most deadly terrorist attack had been carried out by the right. Timothy McVeigh a US army veteran inspired by *The Turner Diaries* detonated a truck full of explosives out-side he Alfred P. Murrah Federal building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.Two events involving the FBI's actions against separatists added fuel to Timothy McVeigh's hatred of the government institutions: In the summer of 1992, white separatist Randy Weaver was engaged in a standoff with government agents at his cabin in Ruby Ridge, Idaho. The siege resulted in the death of Weaver's son and wife. In April 1993, federal agents surrounded the Texas compound of a reli-gious cult called the Branch Davidians to arrest their leader, David Koresh. On April 19, McVeigh watched on television as the FBI stormed the compound, re-sulting in a firestorm that killed dozens of Branch Davidians, including children. The explosion resulted in 168 deaths and another several hundred casualties. *The Turner Diaries* an anti-government polemic written by a neo-Nazi William Pierce. It includes a bombing of a federal building. McVeigh's actions were in part driven by paranoid ideas about a government plot to repeal the Second Amendment - the Right to bear arms. He was executed in 2001 (Michel and Herbeck, 2015)

There are several different models of the process of radicalisation. These are at-tempts to explain the social and psychological processes that combine and lead to an individual or group of individuals being prepared to undertake violent acts in

the furtherance of a political cause. There is, of course, a long and noble tradition of non violent radical protest and dissent. The US Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s being a prime example. These movements make a clear statement that they will not adopt violence methods. odevelopment of Borum (2003) outlines a four factors in radicalisation. The first factor is what he terms *"context"*. Radical politics obviously takes place in a specific political and economic context. Individuals are sympathetic to a particular cause or supportive of a marginalised group. For example, the Israel/Palestine conflict is seen as one of the biggest drivers of the recruitment for radical Islamic terrorism. The perceived injustice is then framed, in this model, as being overlooked or ignored in comparison to other geopolitical issues. Borum terms this *"comparison"*. In the next stage of this model, the political injustice is framed as being the responsibility of a policy, person or nation. Borum terms this process *"attribution"*. The stages of comparison and attribution can be viewed as indoctrination - they are not processes that take place in isolation. They involve the exposure of individuals to information - perhaps more accurately propaganda - about the causes. Finally, the party or nation state that is seen as responsible for the aggression or perceived injustice is seen as a legitimate target. Borum (2011) terms this stage *"reaction"*. Terrorism does not make any distinction between military or security and civilian targets. They are all regarded as legitimate. There are two elements to this. It is felt that the aggressor does not distinguish between civilian and military targets. In addition, the impact of such violence if it is aimed at civilian targets such as train stations or large public events such as a pop concert. Terrorists know that, in reality, it is impossible for the authorities to offer complete protection. In December 2016, a terrorist drove a truck into crowds at the Christmas markets in Berlin, killing 12 and injuring over 50 shoppers. Unless the police have information to intervene beforehand such attacks are difficult to prevent.

The models of radicalisation that are discussed here see the individual moving from the world of liberal parliamentary democracy of campaigns and lobbying elected representatives to a world where violence is seen as a legitimate tactic. Moghaddam (2005) produced a seven step stair case model. In this model, there is a perceived deprivation, feelings of discontent and frustration. The feelings of unfair treatment lead to a displacement of aggression. These increasing feelings

of aggression lead to a tendency to sympathise with the violent and extremist ideology of terrorist groups. Some sympathisers eventually join an extremist group or movement that supports or engages in terrorist violence. The terrorist organisation is regarded as a legitimate expression of a political viewpoint. This model is criticised for being a linear stepwise one. The argument here is that radicalisation is a much more multifaceted phenomena. The steps or processes between the alienation of an individual or the attraction to radical politics and the willingness to commit a violent act are much more complicated that this reductive approach allows.

Kundnani (2012) notes that since 2004, radicalisation has become a central concept in both terrorism studies and policy making. He terms it the *"master signifier of the late War on Terror"*. The focus on psychology explanations and the identification of vulnerable individuals or groups means that the terrorist acts are presented as irrational and without any connection with the wider politics of the world. In addition, radicalisation came to associated with Islamic terrorism. This has meant that the focus for policies aimed at preventing radicalisation has been on Muslim communities at the expense of Far Right and Neo Nazi groups. The politics of race in the UK mean that the populist parties of the Right have exploited terrorist attacks to pursue an anti-immigration agenda. In tracing the development of the concept of radicalisation. Kundnani (2012) notes that there is a clear distinction made between the *"new terrorism"* which is seen to originate or have its roots in Islamist theology and the *"old terrorism"* of Irish nationalism or Leftist politics. There are some important organisational differences. The *"old terrorism "* was based on cells or an organisational structure - the IRA had a brigade structure with clear lines of command and control. The *"new terrorism"* is characterised by much looser networks. This has very important implications for the policy response. One is in the area of civil liberties as part of the focus of the policy response is to restrict the circulation of extremists ideas. As with the political violence of the 1970s, the restriction on liberties means that not only are communities subject to potential harassment and surveillance but also these processes serve to confirm that the State discriminates against minority communities (Stanley and Guru, 2015).

The model of radicalisation that is adopted has important ramifications as it underpins the policy responses. There are a number of variants of the models that have been discussed here. The focus on radicalisation and terrorism motivated by a particular reading of Islamic theology means that religious conversion - particularly in the prison context - is regarded as a key point and as a gateway to radicalisation. These models of radicalisation become policing tools that are used to justify interventions in communities but also the wider surveillance of whole communities.

Policy responses

The Prevent strategy is the key government aimed at tackling radicalisation. It was originally introduced in the UK in 2003. It formed part of an overall attempt to identify and divert individuals from involvement in terrorism. as part of an overall post 9/11 counter-terrorism approach (CONTEST), with the aim of preventing the radicalisation of individuals to terrorism.The 7/7 attacks in London on 7th July 2005, the importance of the Prevent strategy increased. The attacks were carried out by *'home-grown'* terrorists. The Prevent strategy was an attempt to win over 'hearts and minds'. It was part of the wider CONTEST strategy. It seeks to prevent radicalisation and the subsequent commission of terrorist acts. It has three core aims

- *respond to the ideological challenge of terrorism;*
- *prevent people from being drawn into terrorism and ensure that they are given appropriate advice and support; a*
- *work with sectors and institutions where there are risks of radicalisation*
  (HM Government, 2011).

- In 2015, the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act established that specified authorities, for example, Higher Education Institutions, need to have *'due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism' (*HM Government, 2015, p 2). This means that a whole range of public sector organisations have to work together to ensure that there are policies and procedures in place to identify those at risk of radicalisation, to divert them from a path to terrorist

acts and engage with communities. The 2015 Act made Channel - the programme of deradicalisation a legal requirement for public bodies. These bodies are required to identify vulnerable or at risk individuals.

One of the major concerns for social work is that Prevent and other approaches involve social workers in a policing role. Social work is in the broadest sense involved in the management of marginalised groups. However, whether it be in child protection or mental health this is usually in a complex role that requires the balancing of the rights of individuals against those of the wider society. This role seems very different. One of the major concerns is that these approaches pathologise Muslim communities (Guru, 2010 2012). The narrative of the *"war on terror"* implies that all Muslims have some responsibility for terrorist attacks. This discourse also overlooks the many factors lie at the root of causes of radicalisation. These include key areas that social workers have traditionally sought to work with individuals and communities to tackle - inequality, discrimination across a range of areas - high rates of unemployment, low wages, lower rates of educational achievement, increasing rates of imprisonment. In addition, Islam is subject to vilification. The *"war on terror"* has been increasingly presented as part of Huntington's *clash of civilisations* (Huntington, 1996). David Cameron in 2011, made a speech, in which, he argued *"state multiculturalism"* had failed. He argued the UK needed a stronger national identity to prevent people turning to all kinds of extremism.

Guru (2010) argued that social work as a profession largely absented itself from debates about the impact of the *" war on terror"*. She argues that this is a modern manifestation of a core dilemma for social work practice. Stanley and Guru (2015) highlight the possible implications for social work practice of the Prevent agenda. There are a number of concerns here. As noted above, the strategy is based on the identification of those who may be potentially at risk. Stanley(2018) argues that there is a need to deconstruct the discourse of risk. It is clear from a wide range of social work settings (Webb, 2006) that the discourse of risk can and usually does lead to a much more managerialist and interventionist form of social work practice. In this context, it is always complex and difficult for social workers to intervene in areas that can be seen as matters of family choice and faith. In addition, there is a danger of a moral panic creating an atmosphere were all Muslim

families are seen as posing a risk. This is clearly nonsense but also adds to an environment which is hostile to minority communities. There is a danger that such policies add to the marginalisation of certain groups thus adding to wider resentments. It is also not really clear what social workers are being asked to do in response to some of the concerns that are being raised. The discourse and processes of risk have within them the potential for false positives. The implications of these for the families and individuals involved need to be examined. Finally, there is a danger of overreaction. In August 2018, a nursery in Brighton had its Ofsted rating downgraded because inspectors felt that staff did not know how to protect children from potentially being radicalised (https://www.theguardian.com/education/2018/aug/02/anger-ofsted-claims-nursery-failing-guard-against-radicalisation-brighton

Conclusion

Political violence and terrorism are not a new political phenomenon. It should be empahised that radical political views do not necessarily involve a commitment to carry out violent acts in a political cause. The Civil Rights movement in the USA in the 1950s and 60s showed that it is possible to committed to non-violent means to achieve radical political goals. Since 9/11 radicalisation has been a term largely associated with acts of terrorism committed by those inspired by a particular interpretation of Islamic texts. This focus on radical Islamic groups ignores or minimises the fact that fascist and neo Nazi groups. A commitment to the use of violence in the furtherance of political aims cuts across the political spectrum. Current approaches to radicalisation focus on the psychological and sociological processes whereby vulnerable individuals become attracted to a political cause. Such an approach has been criticised for depoliticising the protest and for ignoring the geopolitical contexts, which give rise to the protest. The Prevent Strategy requires public authorities to work together to identify at risk individual. It has been criticised for limiting legitimate political debate.

Critical questions for readers
- *Can acts of political violence and terrorism ever be justified ?*
- *Are restrictions on civil liberties introduced in response to terrorism necessary or a loss of freedom?*

- *Are there circumstances, in which, liberal democratic governments should negotiate with terrorist organisations?*
- *To what extent are the criticisms of the current Prevent strategy justified ?*

Further Reading

Guru, S; (2010) Social Work and the 'War on Terror', *The British Journal of Social Work,* Volume 40, Issue 1, Pages 272–28

Guru, S; (2012) Under Siege: Families of Counter-Terrorism, *The British Journal of Social Work,* Volume 42, Issue 6, , Pages 1151–1173

These two papers examine the impact of the War on Terror on communities and families. They examine the involvement of social work in these processes

Kundnani, A., 2012. Radicalisation: the journey of a concept. *Race & Class,* 54(2), pp.3-25.

This article outlines the development of the concept of radicalisation as a process post 9/11

Moghaddam, F. M. (2005). The staircase to terrorism: A psychological exploration. *American Psychologist,* 60, 161–169

This paper outlines radicalisation as a psychological rather than a political process

Tony Stanley. (2018) The relevance of risk work theory to practice: the case of statutory social work and the risk of radicalisation in the UK. *Health, Risk & Society* 20:1-2, pages 104-112.

Stanley, T., & Guru, S. (2015). Childhood Radicalisation Risk: An Emerging Practice Issue. *Practice: Social Work in Action* I, 1-14.

These two papers examine the impact of the Prevent strategy in the context of children and family social work. They discuss the ethical challenges that such work presents.

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