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# TOWARDS A DYNAMIC MODEL OF TERRORIST RADICALIZATION

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**Colecția de studii IER** Nr. 27 **Working Papers Series**





**European Institute of Romania**

**TOWARDS A DYNAMIC MODEL  
OF TERRORIST RADICALIZATION**

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# **TOWARDS A DYNAMIC MODEL OF TERRORIST RADICALIZATION**

## **Abstract**

This paper attempts to develop a theoretical assessment of how radicalization is reached. For this purpose, a Dynamic Model is proposed that accounts for the interaction between an individual's motivations and the determining factors of the surrounding context. It is a process-tracing analysis that emphasizes the specific elements of each phase of the process. This sequential understanding of both individual and aggregate (societal) radicalization is extremely useful in developing adapted, efficient counter-measures. The Dynamic Model of Radicalization is applied to the case studies of Chechnya and Kosovo and shows how, once established the overall causal mechanism that leads to radicalization in each case, we can observe more clearly the specific intervening factors that have led to ultimately different outcomes. The proper understanding of the dynamics of radicalization is essential for developing effective policies to tackle with such issues as securing the EU border areas, and combating terrorism both at home, and abroad.

**Key Words:** Radicalization, Terrorism, Kosovo, Chechnya

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# TOWARDS A DYNAMIC MODEL OF TERRORIST RADICALIZATION

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## INTRODUCTION

In the present paper I will attempt to bring my contribution to the elusive search for the causes of radicalization. In contemporary conflicts, we often deal with an escalation of violence and its spiraling out of control. I claim that the causes of radicalization are not fixed, unchanging factors that necessarily lead to the same outcome, but rather dynamic forces of interaction that contribute to a process, an evolutionary pattern leading up to the exercise of extreme methods.

In the first part I will attempt to define radicalization and I will describe the working concepts of this paper. Secondly, I will look at the theoretical assumptions of innate causal factors—psychological predispositions, rationalism. I will then, integrate these individual motivations into a Dynamic Model of Radicalization. The sequences of this process are adopted from the literature, while the correlation of those sequences is a personal proposal. In this section I will also develop the notion of Vector of Involvement to dynamically ascribe a variation in the Process of Radicalization. This section will be a counter-weight to actor-centered analysis in the sense that it will describe the involvement in terrorism as *a process* rather than *a state*—‘this implies a focus not on the individual and their presumed psychological or moral qualities, but on process variables such as the changing context that the individual operates in, and also the relationship between events and the individual as they affect behaviour’ (Taylor and Horgan 2006, 586). Finally, I will look

to the case studies of Chechnya and Kosovo and I will attempt to apply the theoretical models to the empirical evidence.

## DEFINING RADICALIZATION IN CONTEMPORARY CONFLICTS

**Radicalization is ‘a process of personal development whereby an individual adopts ever more extreme political or politic-religious ideas and goals, becoming convinced that the attainment of these goals justifies extreme methods’** (Ongering 2007, 3 in Al-Lami 2009, 2).

This paper will argue in favor of such an understanding of radicalization as a process. There are several consequences of this definition. Firstly, it supposes there are several stages of radicalization that can range from legal activities of support for the cause to illegal activities of violent political action. These stages are equivalent to different levels of causation that lead to the final terrorist attack. On this issue I shall elaborate further in the second chapter.

Secondly, the definition portrays a change experienced by an individual that is animated by certain goals. This individual can be a national separatist, a religious extremist or any other kind of ideologically motivated terrorist. Therefore throughout this paper these labels will be used interchangeably when referring to radicals.

Terrorist *action/attack* is in this paper understood as the final stage of the process of radicalization, the ‘extreme method’. For this reason, it is useful to objectively define terrorism ‘by the quality of the act’ and not ‘by the identity of the perpetrators or the nature of their cause’ (Jenkins 1986

in Whittaker 2007, 265). Thus the ‘quality of the act’ will be taken to be ‘the most widely accepted and plausible definition of terrorism—the targeting of noncombatants’ (Hughes 2007, 293).

Finally, the definition of radicalization used in this paper acknowledges the *ideas and goals* that draw a person towards extremism/terrorism as being either ‘extreme political’ or extreme ‘politic-religious’. Schmid usefully distinguishes between Political Terrorism fueled by such political and ideological incentives, crime-linked Terrorism that has economic motivations and Pathological Terrorism that falls under the diagnostic and cure of psychiatrists (2008, 224). As the belief in the ideology of a group is essential in the process of radicalization, the present analysis shall focus on the Political Terrorism. This perspective will therefore imply that the very terrorist action is a form of political engagement. This holds an essential consequence: the profile of a terrorist must be that of a politically conscious person and therefore highly unlikely to be uneducated or extremely poor.

I consider the relationship between a person and the respective surrounding environment as one of synergetic, constant interaction. I believe that no substantial analysis can be conducted without simultaneously accounting for the individual and the broader context in which he lives and acts. While most of the studies on drivers of conflict and/or causes of radicalization adopt such a cumulative enquiry, there still exists a divergence of emphasis. ‘Attempts to account for the behavior of terrorists

fall into two general categories: *top-down approaches* that seek the seeds of terrorism in political, social, economic, or even evolutionary circumstances and *bottom-up approaches* that explore the characteristics of individuals and groups that turn to terrorism.’ (Victoroff 2005, 11). From the methodological point of view, this paper will attempt to reconcile the two parts of the ‘nature vs. nurture’ debate. “Nature” represents the *bottom-up approach* focused on the *innate elements, the genetics, the predisposition of an individual or a given group*. “Nurture” represents the *top-down analysis* focused on the *acquired elements, the environment, the social/political/ economic context*.

#### **ACTORS-CENTERED ANALYSIS**

In this section I will address the issue of bottom-up approaches that look for inner or proximal causes of extremism. Both Rational and Psychological assessments acknowledge the surrounding elements, but ultimately focus on the individual’s choice or predisposition.

Rational choice is generally considered to reconcile both top-down approaches and bottom-up ones, accounting for the environments as well as the individual’s specific behavior (Victoroff 2005, Taylor and Horgan 2006). Still, I will consider it here to represent only a bottom-up type of analysis as it does not account for the dynamic environment that exists in reality, but rather for a fix, known one, that constitutes no more than a frame of analysis and not a subject of analysis by itself.

Inquiries into the innate elements that predispose an individual to extremism are by definition a matter of “nature” type analysis. The psychological (and even psychiatric) explanations for radicalization and terrorist action can be separated into two distinct categories: the ones that diagnose an exclusively internal “disease”—psychopathy, sociopathy, which has been generally refuted by recent empirical evidence, and the ones that diagnose a psychological condition triggered by a negative experience with the surroundings—frustration, past abuse, deprivation.

### ***Rationalism***

Relying on individualistic logic, several studies (Azam 2005, Crenshaw 1998, Enders and Sandler 2006, Frey 2004, Gupta 2008) look at the insurgent/terrorist in a rationalistic framework. This model shows radicalization as a cost effective situation given a lack of alternatives—low opportunity costs or the surmounting benefit of the group’s overall welfare (Gupta 2008, 18) or the future generations’ welfare (Azam 2005). Victoroff observes that ‘the rare and idiosyncratic decision to become a terrorist cannot be explained by rational choice theory’ (2005, 16). Thus, I consider Rational Choice to be a poor predictor of why people become radicalized, but it can offer valuable insight on how, once radicalized, terrorists may chose to act.

Rationalistic analysis starts with an economic way of thinking (Frey 2004, 49) and an application of rational-actor models (Enders and Sandler 2006, 11) to conflict

situations. Frey (2004, 49) explains how individuals ‘are assumed to maximize their own utility, subject to constraints’. Thus, they ‘act consistently, and in this sense behave rationally’ (Frey 2004, 49). A Report on Radicalization made by NYPD observes that ‘there is a remarkable consistency in the behaviors and trajectory’ (2007, 7) of terrorist attacks that utilize ‘al-Qaeda as their inspiration and ideological reference point’ (2007, 5). The report goes on to specifically state that ‘this consistency provides a tool for predictability’ (2007, 7). Enders and Sandler agree that ‘by responding in a sensible and predictable fashion to changing risks, terrorists are judged to be rational’ (2006, 11).

Both Frey (2004) and Gupta (2008) illustrate the application of a rational-actor model to the study of terrorism with a *utilitarian analysis of cost/benefits*. Their approach aims at showing that the utilitarian calculus can be applied to terrorists as it is applied to any other individual whose goals and constraints are known by the researcher. Nevertheless, they cannot explain the incentive for terrorist activity without referring to adjacent, interpretative pieces of information such as the level of ideological fulfillment, the influence of a charismatic leadership or the in-group dynamics. Therefore, while rational-actor models could be employed to explain the conduct of insurgents/terrorists as far as the utilitarian calculus goes, they may bear faulty presumptions in the absence of additional insight. Additional insights, such as the value of the ideological fulfillment to a suicide bomber (Frey 2004, 50), are inherently interpretative and are based on

subtle notions of culture and context. Azam (2005) attempts to show how an economic model of rational choice can still be applied to suicide bombers. He portrays suicide bombing as ‘an extreme form of saving’ in which ‘the agent gives up any current consumption’ or benefits ‘for the sake of enhancing the probability of his descendent to enjoy the benefits of the future public good’ which is generally seen as political change or the sought-after concessions (2005, 196). Azam claims that such a model of investment behavior, similar to the standard dynastic family model, can reconcile the ‘stylized facts with a simple rational choice model’ (2005, 196). Other scholars also support such a synergy of methodology by claiming that ‘cultural norms may be seen as historically learned responses to collective action problems’ (Kiser and Bauldry 2005 in Keating 2008, 116). Still, my opinion is that a careful analysis of the defining elements *behind* a terrorist’s goals and constraints, *behind* correspondent benefits or costs, inevitably strays from the methodological individualism that characterizes most rational choice models.

A similar way of applying the rational-actor model to the study of terrorism is to consider the choice to perform terrorist action as a matter of ‘strategic logic’—a low-cost means of leveraging power (Crenshaw 1998). This reasoning portrays a strategic choice, a logic of engagement between the terrorists as subordinate actors and the government(s) as the oppressive actor(s). As such, it could equally be employed by both parts (state, sub-state actors) to justify the pursuit of extreme measures

in an instrumental manner. In this sense, terrorism serves a “political instrumentality” (Horgan and Taylor 2006, 589). This is the “tool” view that implies ‘the use of fear-inducing tactics for the advancement of one’s objectives’ (Kruglanski and Fishman 2006, 210). Victoroff enumerates examples of such successful substate political violence: Irgun’s bombings—British retreat, IRA—Irish Free State, Hezbollah’s suicide bombing campaign (1983-1985)—American, French, and Israeli withdrawal, ANC terrorist action—overthrow of the apartheid government in South Africa (2005, 15). In such cases, terrorist action achieved an “agenda-setting function” which means that ‘if the reasons behind violence are skillfully articulated, terrorism can put the issue of political change on the public agenda’ (Crenshaw 1998, 17).

A risk of economic reasoning in the use of violence is the ultimate impossibility to quantify certain goals and values—imponderable variables. Contemporary international terrorism is usually guided less by concrete, material goals and more by ideological, geopolitical ones that are far harder to integrate in a simple cost/benefits analysis. Religious fundamentalist terror groups use the physical destruction of lives and goods as a means to an end, the end being the bending of the political will of the opponent and the destruction of its value system. When liberal states give in to extreme measures and suppression of civil liberties because of security threats, they give the terrorists their great victory. The benefit of a terrorist group is not represented by the destruction of its target, but by the achievement of a ‘symbolic act’

with broader repercussions—‘coercion fails if it destroys the target whose compliance is sought’ (Kalyvas 2004, 101). The goal is to lead a *spectacular warfare* in which the symbolism is more important than the physical value.

Equivalently, the greater cost of a terrorist group is not necessarily the death of its members or the physical destruction of its assets, but the loss of popular support (Crenshaw 1998). For the fundamentalist there is rarely a question of costs/benefits, the mission being greater than the individual. The timeframe of the analysis must also account for the potential costs/benefits of future generations as Azam (2005) suggested. For all these reasons, one can only conclude that it is hard to analyze the rational choice of a contemporary terrorist without understanding the ideology and politics of the cause he adheres to, their history, the indoctrination to which they were subjected to and their expectations of the future.

### ***Psychological Predispositions***

As the Rationalist analysis tries to establish an individual model of terrorist action, so too does the Psychological field. Only this time, the emphasis is on the individual and its specific predispositions and less on the surroundings. This is the “*syndrome*” view, which implies ‘that terrorists differ from non-terrorists in their personality profile, and possibly present a specific pattern of psychopathology’ (Kruglanski and Fishman 2006, 210).

A first psychological explanation of an individual’s predisposition for violence

deals with the *individual’s frustration with himself*. This line of analysis looks at the sense of failure, rejection or marginalization as a fertile ground for radicalization. This is the “Narcissistic Rage Hypothesis” that assumes ‘terrorists to be mentally ill and sees the reasons in early childhood development’ (Frey 2004, 63). Another supporter of this theory is the psychiatrist Jerrold M. Post which explains how such childhood narcissistic injuries make people reliant on psychological mechanisms of “splitting” or “externalization” (in Hudson 1999, 20) that attribute the blame for an individual’s failure or disillusion to an exterior source (a person, a country, a regime) which in turn becomes the enemy. Gilligan complements this theory by observing that the experience of abuse in childhood will produce an abusive adult that will, in his turn, fuel a *generational continuum of violence* (2006). This explanation for radicalization is weak on two points. Firstly, even if it explains convincingly the predisposition for violent behavior, it does not however explain directly the predisposition for extremism as a form of political violence. The second critique is brought by Victoroff to psychoanalytical theories in general as, according to him, it is impossible to test any hypothesis based on actual or perceived abuses ‘postulated to have occurred decade before, in infancy’ (2005, 25).

A second category of psychological facilitators of violence deals with the *individual’s frustration vis-à-vis the external state of things*, its surrounding context. One of the theories that addresses the behavioral predispositions bore out of frustration is the Frustration-Aggression



Hypothesis (FAH) that ‘describes the response to frustration or blockage of one’s goal attainment’ (Horgan 2006, 10). Frey observes as well that the ‘terrorist aggression is the response to the frustration of various political, economic and personal needs and objectives’ (2004, 62). A similar hypothesis places even heavier emphasis on the economic disparities—the Relative Deprivation Theory (Gurr 1968). Relative Deprivation is defined by Gurr as ‘actors’ perceptions of discrepancy between their value expectations (the goods and conditions of the life to which they believe they are entitled) and their value capabilities (the amounts of those goods and conditions that they think they are able to get and keep)’ (1968, 1104). Still, such material explanations of violent behavior are questionable in the face of empirical evidence (Post, Sprinzak and Denny 2003, Post 2008, Merari 2008, Krueger 2007, Krueger and Maleckova 2003, Maleckova 2008, Thompson 1989) that shows a weak connection between frustration derived from poverty or lack of education.

Still, as Gupta observes, although absolute poverty and other aspects of economic deprivation have a weak link to terrorism, a pervasive sense of humiliation and hopelessness does not’ (2008, 27). Gilligan elaborates even further on the issue: ‘I have yet to see a serious act of violence that was not provoked by the experience of feeling shamed and humiliated, disrespected and ridiculed’ (Gillingan 2000, 110 in Silke 2008, 246). Therefore, the Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis holds a helpful insight to the radicalization question as long as it is applied in a broader sense of perceived injury and unjust treatment.

The consequences of such perceived injury or unjust treatment are even better documented by the “Humiliation – Revenge” Model. For the analysis of this model it is useful to start by considering the definition of vengeance: ‘the infliction of harm in return for a perceived injury or insult or simply as getting back at another person’ (Cota-McKinley, Woody and Bell 2001, 343). Some even consider the inclination of humans to exert vengeance on wrongdoers as a cultural inheritance, a religious teaching (Ellison 1991 in Cota-McKinley et al 2001, 344; Armstrong 2001 in Victoroff 2005, 29). Still, there is contradicting evidence in this regard and, as psychological inquires show, there is more of an innate/interior predisposition for exerting justice, rather than just a cultural/ exterior prescription. Silke observes that humans ‘have an incredibly strong sense of justice and a desire for vengeance represents a persistent darker side to this’ (2008, 245).

This line of reasoning emphasizes the significance of the experience of injustice directed at oneself, one’s family or one’s social group, to the decision to carry out acts of violence on the part of an extremist group. This is a very broad action pattern of radicalization as it accounts for the worldwide terrorist activity and even the connection between homegrown terrorists in the Western World and their ideological affiliation to their Middle Eastern counterparts. Khosrokhavar explains how the diasporic Muslims experience “*humiliation by proxy*” in the case of the injustice their fellow Muslims suffered in Chechnya, Bosnia, Palestine, Fallujah, Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo Bay or Afghanistan

(2005, 157). In this interconnected frame of perception, the vengeful action has two objectives: *to deter future unjust treatment and to restore the self-worth* (Cota-McKinley et al 2001; Gilligan 2006). This latter objective of retrieving lost dignity through violence was central to the armed struggle in the process of decolonization, when the masses rose up to the oppressor—the colonizer, fueled by the ‘redemptive and unifying force of violence’ (Fanon 2001). While many ignore the resemblance, it is nevertheless essential to acknowledge that what we label as terrorists today would have been freedom fighters in the context of Third Worldist movements in the former colonies. Therefore, the radicalization of individuals as a reaction to oppression and exploitation is a centuries old phenomenon for which there is plenty of historical evidence.

The question remains then as to why do we perpetuate the same pattern of action-reaction, aggression-retaliation over and over again. The answer is that there is a false belief, rooted in historical ignorance, at the decision-making levels, that an offensive action of scale will deter the terrorists (Silke 2006/2008). Unfortunately, aggression does not generally trigger deterrence on the opponent’s side and a *cycle of vengeance* is installed. As Silke points out—‘Terrorist groups can endure military strikes, ‘targeted assassination’ and other harsh measures not because the people and resources lost are not important, but because the violence works to increase the motivation of more and more members then it decreases, and works to attract more support and sympathy to the group

then it frightens away’ (2008, 254). Not only is aggression counter-productive in fighting political violence, but it may even be a catalyst of radicalization of previously nonviolent supporters of the cause. Studies show that individuals have an irrational instinct towards vengeance, even at their own cost—compromising their ‘own integrity, social standing, and personal safety’ (Cota-McKinley et al 2001, 343; Knutson 2004, 1246; Quervain et al 2004, 1254).

#### **TOWARDS A DYNAMIC MODEL: ACCOUNTING FOR ACTOR- CONTEXT INTERACTION**

The idea of assessing the process that turns an ordinary individual into a terrorist is convincingly put forward by Taylor and Horgan who define the term *process* as ‘a sequence of events, involving steps or operations that are usually ordered and/or interdependent’ (2006, 586). To apply such a frame of analysis to terrorism, the latter must be taken as a dynamic action that involves a ‘reciprocal relationship’ with other actors involved—enemy/sponsoring governments, other terrorist groups, global media or/and the public. Besides causal interactivity, time is another factor of influence, as Sageman observes: ‘Terrorist networks are not static, they evolve over time’ (2004, 139). This dynamic interaction shall be discussed in the following paragraphs as I attempt to describe the Sequences and Interactions leading to Radicalization.

As opposed to regarding the whole process as a deterministic inevitable route,

one must keep in mind that it is a question of individual stories and specific motivations (Bokhari 2006). The encounters that the individual has are equally significant as the whole process of radicalization depends upon them being ‘trained both in terms of what they do (the mechanics of their trade as it were) and in terms of how they make sense of what they do (ideological formation)’ (Taylor and Horgan 2006, 595). I have to stress nevertheless, that this sequencing of the process of radicalization is a theoretical one, designed only to offer a starting point of analysis and not to establish a fixed, inevitable pattern of radicalization.

### ***Sequences and Correlations in the Process of Radicalization***

In the first part of this paper, radicalization was defined as ‘a process of personal development whereby an individual adopts ever more extreme political or politic-religious ideas and goals, becoming convinced that the attainment of these goals justifies extreme methods’ (Ongering 2007, 3 in Al-Lami 2009, 2). It was then stated that the notion of process implies certain levels of causation. I shall now elaborate on this issue.

With reservations vis-à-vis the determinism of “root causes” for terrorism, Bjorgo nevertheless defines several levels of causation: structural causes, motivational causes, facilitator/accelerator causes and trigger causes (2008, 3). He defines *Structural Causes* as ‘causes which affect people’s lives in ways that they may or may not comprehend’, and positions them at a macro-level (2008, 3). In this category, one can find social (ex: cultural patterns of

the society, demographic imbalances, class structure etc.), *political* (ex: geopolitics, regional/international relations etc.) as well as *economic causes* (ex: relative deprivation, changes on the economic life of a certain country affected by modernization etc.). *Motivational Causes* are defined as ‘the actual grievances that people experience at a personal level, motivating them to act’ (2008, 3) and can be portrayed by the previously discussed Psychological Predispositions for violence. Bjorgo underlies the importance of ideology and it’s promoters—political leaders, in linking the structural preconditions with the individual’s motivation for terrorist action (2008, 3). The way an individual concomitantly relates to Structural and Personal motivations can be exemplified by the Rationalism of terrorist action. This paper attempts to sketch an evolutionary pattern (Fig. 1) that shows how, normally, Structural and Motivational Causes by themselves aren’t sufficient for Individual Radicalization. For this purpose, it useful to look further at Bjorgo’s other levels of causation. He defines *Facilitator or Accelerator Causes* as ‘causes which make terrorism possible or attractive, without being prime movers’ as opposed to *Trigger Causes* which are ‘the direct precipitators of terrorist acts’ (2008, 3). Triggers are usually ‘momentous or provocative acts’ (Bjorgo 2008, 4) that are reflective of a more general, chronic economic/social/politic situation, but constitute a climax both at the individual level and at a broader group level. There is therefore a sort of vectorial amplification of force, from the Structural Causes to the Motivational ones and further through Accelerator and Trigger Causes (Fig.1).



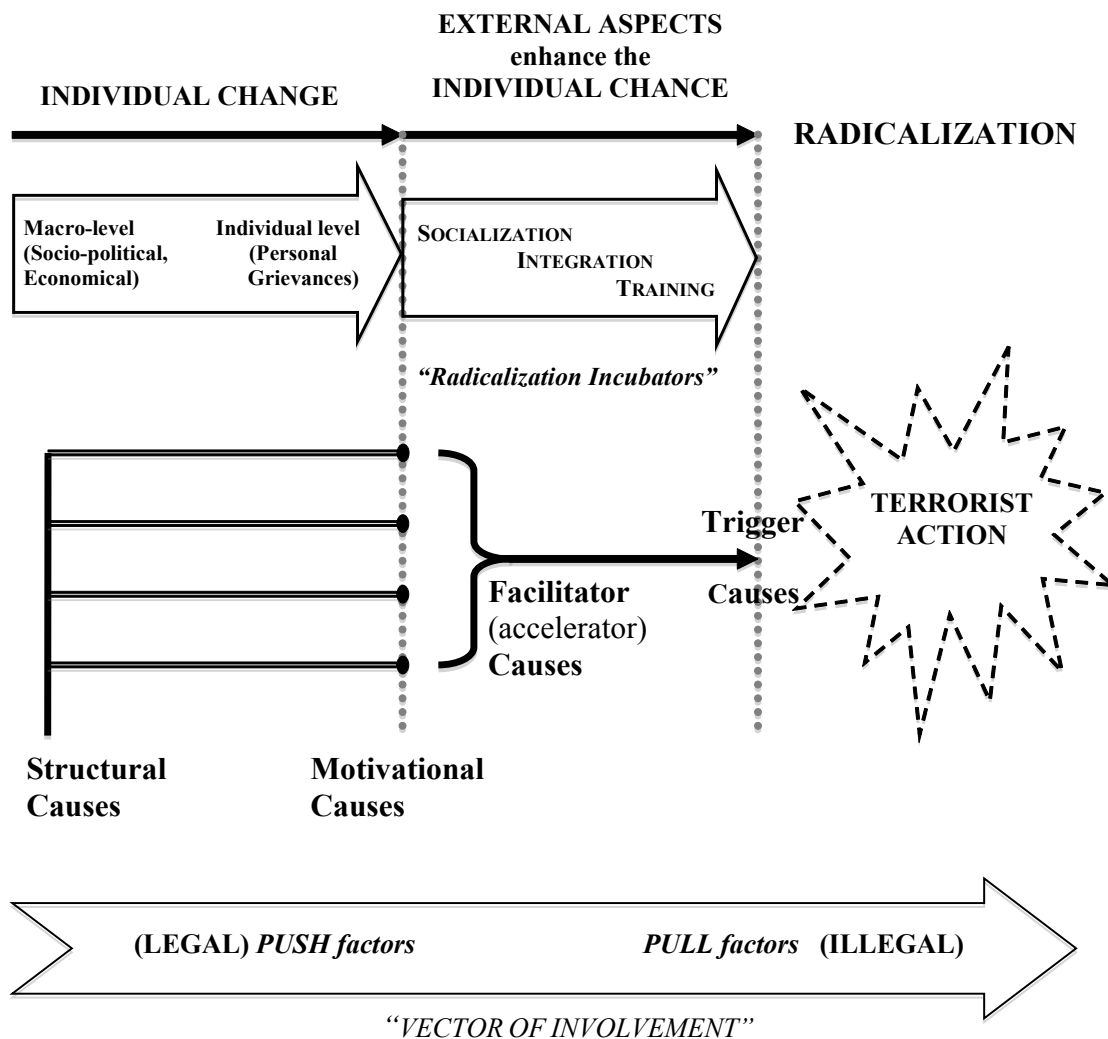


Fig. 1 The Process of Radicalization  
 Source: adapted by the author after Bjorgo's levels of causation (2008, 3), Al-Lami's Radicalization Process (2009, 2), Wiktorowicz 2004 and Gill 2007

Al-Lami confirms that with regard to the process of radicalization, "all studies agree that there is a stage of individual change ... that is enhanced through external aspects" and leads finally to violent radicalization (2009, 2). The stage of Individual Change may be approximated with the vectorial connection between Structural Causes and their "symptoms"—the Motivational Causes. In this sense, the later become derivatives of the more fundamental macro-level pre-conditions, completing the change at the individual level. The Individual

Change may be seen as a personal dynamic that draws on broader, structural processes. For example, an individual's increase in religiosity or an individual's search for identity (Al-Lami 2009) may be seen as a response to globalization or to an increasing individualism with rootlessness and atomization (Bjorgo 2008). Moghaddam supports this connection when he portrays terrorism as a *dysfunctional defense mechanism* of people who feel culturally and physically threatened and alienated (2008).

Moving even further, the Accelerator and Trigger Causes may be seen as the Enhancers of that Change, transforming a predisposition for violence into an actual involvement in terrorism (Fig.1). External Enhancers may be such Facilitators as the spread of propagandistic materials on the internet in both passive form—static Web pages, and interactive—chat rooms, forums (US Senate Staff Report 2008). “Radicalization Incubators” are venues such as mosques, cafes, prisons, student organizations (NYPD 2008, 20) which facilitate these processes. Given the global reach of terrorist networks and the increased security in the West, most of the “Radicalization Incubators” have become virtual platforms (chat-rooms, e-magazines, blogs, web-sites) where essential information and advices are passed by. For the purpose of assembling the doctrinaire support materials, full-scale regional production centers have been established by the Al-Qaeda and its affiliates: Al-Furqan Media (affiliated with The Islamic State of Iraq), As-Sahab Media (affiliated with al-Qaeda High Command), Media Commission or Media Committee (affiliated with al-Qaeda in the Land of Islamic Maghreb) or Sawt al-Jihad (affiliated with al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula) (US Senate Staff Report 2008, 6; Kimmage 2008).

Other Facilitator may be the extensive media coverage of abuses on fellow Muslims in various parts of the globe—Chechnya, Iraq, Afghanistan (Al-Lami 2009)—‘humiliation by proxy’ (Khosrokhavar 2005), or such Triggers as an outrageous act of abuse and oppression

at the hands of statist forces that calls for revenge or action (Bjorgo 2008). Another important Enhancer of Individual Change is the Facilitator Cause of socialization with members of terrorist networks or organization—‘connectors’ or ‘recruiters’, through which an individual becomes integrated in the group and becomes convinced of the supremacy of the cause and the necessity of radical action in supporting it. This is the phase in which the process of practical and ideological training referred to by Taylor and Horgan (2006, 595) occurs.

Finally, another useful distinction is that between ‘Pull’ and ‘Push’ factors. Ongerling describes the *Push factors* as the ‘forces that can alienate people or cause them to reject mainstream society’ and the *Pull factors* ‘as the appeal exerted by the radical message and the terrorist networks’ (2007, 4). In a simplified manner, one can regard the negative social experiences of an individual—relative deprivation, abuse, discrimination, as Push factors. Equivalently, the positive experiences nurtured by a politically heterogeneous group, such as belonging or empowerment can be seen as Pull factors. Therefore, if we consider the mainstream society as a normal gravitational core, the Push factors play a role of centrifugal expulsion of an individual towards its margins, while the Pull factors act as a centripetal force of attraction towards a radical new core, in the outskirts of legality (Fig.2).

Nevertheless, Al-Lami warns rightfully that ‘these stages are not clear-cut and may overlap’, ‘they are not necessarily sequential’ and ‘(a)n individual may skip stages reaching to militant action rather

quickly, or become disillusioned at any given point and choose to abandon the process altogether' (2009, 2).

manifestation is reminiscent in many ways of the Catholic Holy Crusades of earlier centuries and therefore one should not

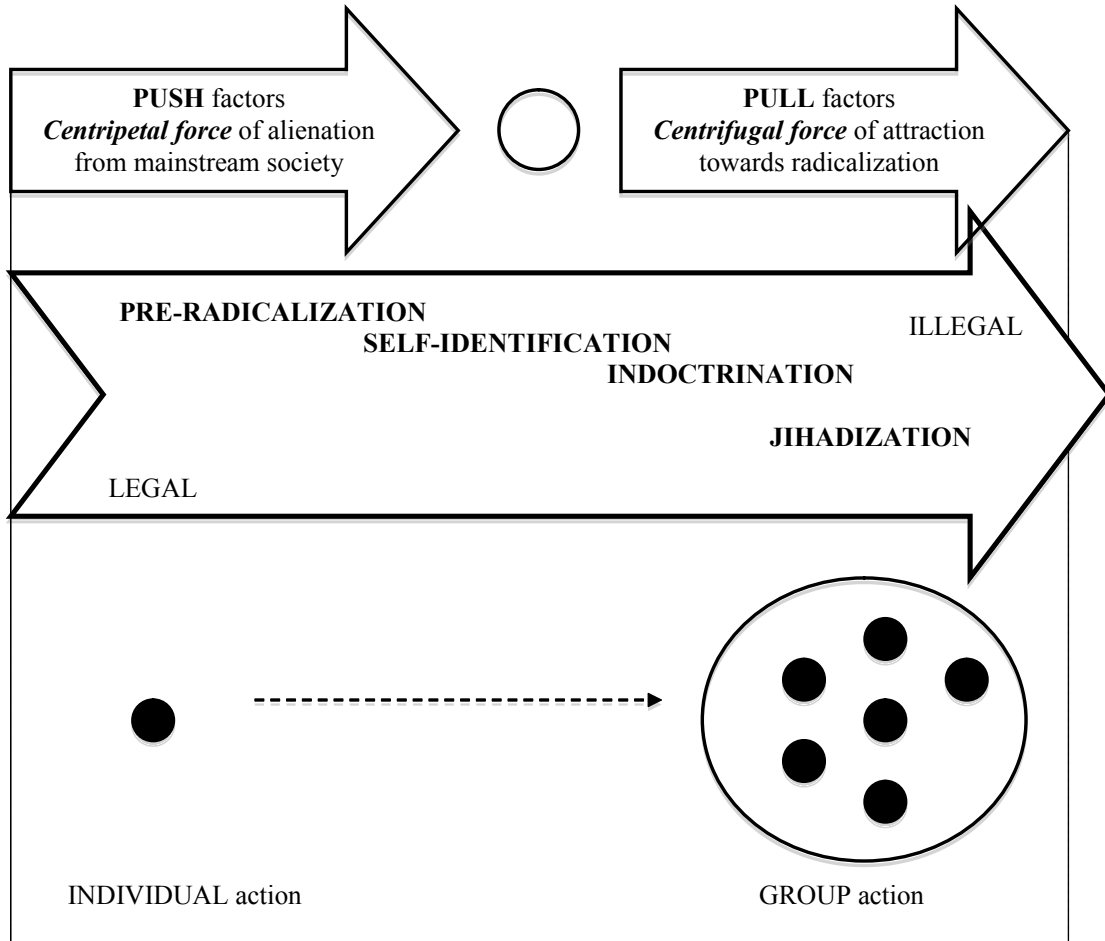


Fig.2 Islamic Radicalization Process

Source: adapted by the author after an NYPD study on radicalization (2007) by Sibler and Bhatt

### ***Focus on Islamic Radicalization***

For the specific case of religious extremism greater attention has been devoted recently as it is the most spread type of radicalization in contemporary conflicts. Religious extremism is usually represented today by acts of 'Jihad' (holy war) encouraged by the Jihadi/Salafi ideology. This militant religious

consider it specific to the Islamic faith. Also, 'a clear distinction must be drawn between religious fundamentalism and conservatism on one hand, and violent/militant radicalization on the other, as the former does not necessarily lead to the latter' (Al-Lami 2009, 2). As mentioned before, the fact that a specific community comprises of radicals does not make every member of that community a radical. On

the contrary, especially in the West where there is an increasingly disquieting form of radicals—homegrown terrorists, local Islamic communities have proven to be the best counter-radicalization medium of action (UK Department for Communities and Local Government 2007). This positive influence of a mainstream Islamic community may equally be a negative force when oppressive policies or disproportionate counter-measures are radicalizing the whole community (in the West or in conflict zones alike). In such cases, a normalization of violence occurs at a societal level and radicalization becomes extremely hard to prevent.

Silber and Bhatt (NYPD 2007) concluded that there are four distinct phases in the process of jihadist radicalization: *Pre-Radicalization*, *Self-Identification*, *Indoctrination* and *Jihadization* (Fig. 2). *Pre-Radicalization* is the life-situation of individuals before ‘they were exposed to and adopted the jihadi-Salafi Islam as their ideology’ (2007, 6). Silber and Bhatt base their conclusions of Western Islamic Radicals and as such, the exposure to the Islamic faith is voluntary. For Conflict Zone Radicalization, this phase would portray a more subtle transition from *mainstream Islam* to *militant Islam*. *Self-Identification* is the phase where individuals begin to be empathetic with certain militant Islamists and adopt this ideology as their own. This phase could be divided in Wiktorowicz’s process sequences of *cognitive opening*—a crisis renders an individual open to alternative perspectives, *religious seeking* and *frame alignment*—finding the specific religious interpretation that fits and

individual’s own views (2004). Both *Pre-Radicalization* and *Self-Identification* are components of an *Individual Change*. Further on, *Indoctrination* is equivalent with the *External Enhancement* of that change—‘*Indoctrination* is the phase in which an individual progressively intensifies his beliefs, wholly adopts jihadi-Salafi ideology and concludes, without question, that the conditions and circumstances exists where action is required to support and further the cause’ (NYPD 2007, 7). In the *Indoctrination* phase, such actions as *Socialization*, *Integration* and *Training* occur (see Fig. 1). Starting with the *Indoctrination* phase, the group in which the individual becomes integrated overrules him and the process of radicalization is carried out and reinforced through the in-group dynamics, which will be elaborated in the following section. The final phase and equivalent of *Radicalization* is the *Jihadization* in which ‘the group will begin operational planning for the jihad or a terrorist attack’ (ibid.).

This model of Islamic Radicalization is like it’s general counterpart in Fig. 1 a guideline and not a deterministic pattern as ‘although this model is sequential, individuals do not always follow a perfectly linear progression’ (NYPD 2007, 19).

### ***In-group Dynamics***

A theoretical sequencing of radicalization is extremely useful in understanding the varying degree of commitment to extremism by an individual based on the experiences he has accumulated. In this sense, Taylor and Horgan (2006, 595)

make the distinction between an *'aspirant terrorist'*—who 'belongs in a social context that is outside the terrorist life (if only by virtue of not having "crossed the boundary" to illegality)', and the *'committed terrorist'* who 'in contrast, has already crossed that boundary, has acquired skills and knowledge that binds him or her closer to illegality and to the terrorist organization, and these factors weigh heavily in the decisional calculus'. If we use once more the idea of a Vector of Involvement, starting in legality and ending in illegality (as in Fig. 1), we can position the *aspirant terrorist* at the starting point of that vector and the committed terrorist at its ending point. In addition to this scaling of involvement, one must also account for the variation in the activities involved by terrorist organization. These in their turn, range from legality (political support or solidarity with the community) to borderline activities (aid and abet, financing terrorist activities) to full-scale illegality (violent action and the afferent technical and logistical support) (Taylor and Horgan 2006).

As the level of individual involvement increases, the influence of the in-group becomes more significant and a symbiotic relationship between the individual and the group is gradually installed. Post confirms that once recruited, 'there is a clear fusing of individual identity and group identity, particularly among the more radical elements of each organization' (2008:64). A two-fold pressure is then exerted by the terrorist organization on its members: pressure to *conform* and pressure to *commit the acts of violence* (Post 1998)—as dictated by the radicals belief that there is no other

efficient alternative open to them. At this point a *Community of Practice* (CoP) is formed (Wenger 1998), as committed terrorists create common norms, propagate their knowledge and share a collective identity that prevails over the individual identity. This internal manufacture of rules and value sets focusing on the cause and the collective identity, portrays the *centrality of indoctrination* to the functioning of a terrorist organization—'The group, as a selector and interpreter of ideology, is central' (Crenshaw in Post 1998, 34).

Gill supports this idea by explaining how '(g)roup norms deepen group bonds by increasing group solidarity and aiding the internalization of a group identity' (2007, 154). He goes on to refer to the Social Identity Theory (SIT) as an explanation of how individuals make sense of the world by defining themselves and others according to the social group membership each one presents. This categorization creates the *antithesis of in-group/out-group*. A polarizing and absolutist rhetoric is usually adopted by the Ideological/Charismatic Leadership of a terrorist organization (Post 1998) creating *group stereotypes* that 'accentuate the similarities of ingroup members while simultaneously accentuating the differences between ingroup and outgroup members' (Gill 2007, 154). Accordingly, Silke observes 'a pervasive tendency to show increase appreciation of the in-group (the group which you as an individual identify with) and to denigrate members of the out-group' and that 'such denigration includes a tendency to dehumanize members of the out-group' (2008, 249).

Therefore, as the individual slides towards radicalization, he becomes a proponent of a collective (altered) consciousness to which Janis refers to as ‘groupthink’ (in Post 1998, 37). He explains how ‘groupthink’ makes the individuals *perceive the enemy as completely evil*—which in turn implies a lack of distinction between combatants and non-combatants, how it confers them with *illusions of invulnerability* and consequently a higher disposition for risk-taking which is characteristic of the radicalization phase when violent action is carried on, and finally, how an unquestionable conviction of the group morality is installed. When an individual is absorbed into this collective consciousness, he becomes entrapped into the group’s interpretations of right and wrong and tends to act unquestionably on the commands of violent action exerted upon him by the group’s leadership. Generally, this phase of mental and physical group cohesiveness is paramount to religious extremist groups as they ideologically encapsulate their violent actions and isolate their members from any alternative moral interpretations. Contrastingly, the national-separatist usually become radicalized through a more traditional, generational consistent pathway to terrorism—a ‘hatred bred to the bone’ (Post 2008) and therefore, the group dynamics are much broader, referring to an entire community or ethnic group, so the individual holds to the individuation of his action as they confer onto him a heroic identity, as opposed to a group-level representation of success.

The role an individual assumes in a terrorist organization depends highly on its individual path and to what extent he traversed the process of radicalization. Understanding the variation on the scale of involvement helps us find better remedies for extremism. Just as an infection traverses several stages before it becomes acute, so too does the support for a cause or a terrorist group/network traverses different roles. The most efficient counter-terrorist strategy would therefore be a discriminate one. The empathic supporters shouldn’t be treated the same as the violent perpetrators, as that would only contribute and accelerate the radicalization process of the individual.

Frey (2004) presents two different strategies of dealing with terrorism: the ‘stick’ and the ‘carrot’. The ‘stick’ represents a coercive approach that employs negative sanctions and is mostly ‘re-active’ as it deals with already committed attacks (2004, 27). The ‘carrot’ represents a ‘pro-active’ approach that uses positive incentives to deter actual and potential terrorists (ibid.). In my scale of involvement, a ‘stick’ strategy would be appropriate for Committed Terrorists which have crossed both the boundary of legality and (implicitly) that of reversibility of the radicalization process. On the other hand, for the Aspirant Terrorist, using coercion would be counterproductive. That is why for such individuals, that can be won back as they haven’t been absorbed into the collective consciousness of the terrorist group, a ‘carrot’ strategy could lead to better results. If we see the community that



supports/ protects a certain terrorist group to be the same as the terrorist themselves, then there is no chance for a proper counter-insurgency campaign. COIN is most efficient when it works with the population—winning Hearts and Minds, not against them. In conflict zones, not all the population is radicalized, but it is probable that most of them have some sort of affiliation with the terrorists. Therefore, quality intelligence is vital in distinguishing the insurgents/terrorists from the general population, the Committed Terrorist from an Aspiring Individual. The goal is as much to fight the Committed Radicals, as it is to prevent the radicalization of others—Silke’s battle with the Hydra (2008).

#### **CASE STUDIES: CHECHNYA AND KOSOVO**

Chechnya and Kosovo are similar on several grounds—starting with the irredentist nature of the conflict, continuing with their historical distinctiveness in the area, their traditional autonomy in the arrangement of the federative structures (USSR and SFRY/FRY) and their later violent opposition to the ruling oppressive nation (Russia and Serbia). Other similarities can be found in terms of the dynamics of conflict as in both cases, the peaceful political projects of secession led by Maskhadov and respectively Rugova, were abandoned by 1999 in favor of more radical, militant resistance led by Thaci and respectively Basayev. Both were fueled by motivations derived from identity politics—right to self-determination, and nationalism—a state’s sovereignty.

Therefore, at an overall view, the two cases seem to be examples a common pattern of radicalization. Still, when looked upon in closer detail, one can find discrepancies that caused different sequences of events in each case. Even more so, the outcome for Chechnya and Kosovo has been unexpectedly different, as the latter was the focus of international intervention and is since 2008 an independent state, while the other was largely treated as an internal matter and it took 10 years until, in April 2009, the Russian State declared the end of its ‘counter-terrorist mission in Chechnya’ (North Caucasus Analysis Volume April 2009). Whether this divergence of outcome was due to geography, geopolitics, human agency and/or normative double standards, will be the concern of the following paragraphs as I try to apply the Process Analysis defined in the previous chapter.

#### ***Causes and Pre-conditions leading to Individual Change***

It was previously established that the Individual Change is a phase of radicalization that draws equally on broader, structural dynamics as well as on the translation of those causes at the individual level. In the case of Chechnya and Kosovo, such Structural Causes and their equivalent Personal Motivations are broadly debated. On one hand there is a tendency of *historicism*—a deterministic perception of such secessionist conflicts in the Balkans or the Caucasus as inevitable acts of catharsis caused by ancient hatreds (Kaplan 1994; King 2008). Gall and De Waal (1997, x) give such “historical clues to why the

Chechens have been so rebellious”: use of guerrilla campaigns since the 19th century, social structuring around clans and religion making them resistant to assimilation by foreign occupation—“tribesmen from the hills”, mass deportations in 1944 by Stalin, and persistent poverty. Kosovo has equally been a historical land of dispute between the Serbs and the Albanians, being a historical landmark for the first, but populated by a majority of the latter.

On the other hand there is a focused view on the each *case specificities*, accusing the precise context in which the crisis in Kosovo and Chechnya erupted of holding extraordinarily propitious circumstances. This latter standpoint is a better reflection of my Dynamic Model of Radicalization. Still, I warn that such a case-based analysis has the pitfall of ‘presentism’ when contemporary events are detached from the historical flow which preceded them and to which they are linked (Tosh in Webber 2009, 448). Keeping this in mind, one cannot nevertheless fail to acknowledge that the Kosovo crisis is ‘emblematic for a particular moment in time’, ‘a product of circumstances unlikely to be repeated’ (Webber 2009, 448). Webber explains what those extraordinary circumstances were: ‘a Russia in retreat, and an interventionist United States infused with Wilsonian ideals’ (2009, 448). Such a geopolitical propitious setting is reminiscent of the causal significance of the Cold War setting to the success of irredentist/anti-colonial movements of the Third Worldism.

Another factor of influence is the geographical positioning of Kosovo in the center of Europe. Judah agrees

that ‘Kosovo counts because it is in the middle of Europe’ (2008, xiv). In contrast, Chechnya was geographically remote, trapped in an area of definitive Russian influence and with little geopolitical stakes for the international community. While Tony Blair made Kosovo the center point of his case for ‘Humanitarian Intervention’ in his 1999 speech at the Economic Club in Chicago, his office did not however recognize Chechnya as anything more than an internal matter, ‘a “terrorist insurrection” ’(De Waal in Polikovskaya 2001, xxxi). Therefore, in spite of a *de facto* similarity between the two crises (extensive HR abuses, doctrine justification, etc.), the international community employed a double standard when granting Kosovo the right to self-determination, while Chechnya remained under the prevalence of Russian sovereignty. This discriminate approach of the international leaders vis-à-vis the case studies caused from the start a variation in structural preconditions.

Whether historically dictated or contextually driven, individual radicalization occurred in both Chechnya and Kosovo as a mirroring effect to the mounting societal violence. This phase of Individual Change occurred on the side of statist rulers as well as on the insurgent’s side.

Milosevici’s arrival in 1987 (while he was not yet president of FYR) at Kosovo Polije to listen to the complaints of Kosovo Serbs is widely reported (Cohen 2002, Judah 2008) as a defining moment for both his political career and for his nationalistic standpoint on the Kosovo issue. Equivalently significant for his political



career was the second Chechen War to Putin. Hughes (2007, 108) points out, based on a Levada Center's Opinion poll, that "it seemed unlikely from the viewpoint of August 1999 that Putin could emerge as winner from the highly personalized politics of a presidential election that was due in early March 2000". The Russian nationalists, mirroring the feelings the Serbs had vis-à-vis the autonomy of Kosovo, regarded the peace agreements of Khasavyurt as shameful. Therefore, both Milosevic and Putin rose to power on a nationalistic political platform and built their case around the separatist regions of Kosovo and, respectively Chechnya. This observation suggests a 'strategic logic' on the part of the Regime leadership, which instrumentally used radical action against the secessionist population in order to advance their own political ambitions.

The radicalization of the secessionist side came as a reaction to the widespread abuses of statist forces (HRW 2001/2003/2005/2006). In both Kosovo and Chechnya, efforts were made to pursue irredentist ambitions in a peaceful manner. Political leaders such as Rugova and Maskhadov attempted to build efficient, autonomous governments in these provinces. Unfortunately these legal means of emancipation were suppressed by violence and abuse. Rugova's "phantom state" (Judah: 2000) proved powerless in the face of Serbian forces and gradually the public support abandoned the political agenda of the LPK in favor of the militant KLA (Kosovo Liberation Army). Although leading a guerilla campaign against the Serbian forces, the KLA 'never lost sight of

the fact that its objective was political and its targets lay in foreign capitals rather than on the military battlefield' and it was fueled by 'nationalism, post-adolescent pride, and aggressiveness, and strengthened by clumsy counterinsurgency' (Perritt Jr. 2008, 11). These motivational causes and the instrumentality of the violence fall in line with the theoretical assumptions put forward in the previous chapter and may be seen as a line of fine equilibrium that allowed for the ultimate escape from the cycle of vengeance and violence.

The state building efforts of Maskhadov in the newly established Chechen Republic of Ichkeria proved to be equally overpowered by the militant resistance of Shamil Basayev. According to Hughes (2007, 127) Maskhadov, as a democratically elected president and an internationally respected spokesman for the Chechen cause, was the only one who could have attracted an internationally brokered peace agreement for the 2<sup>nd</sup> CW. Therefore, his assassination in early March 2005 proved to be a fortuitous event both for the Russian government who wouldn't accept any compromise and treated the issue as a counter-terrorist operation, as well as for the extremists who were set on carrying on the fighting. The weakness of Maskhadov government "allowed Moscow to make the case that an invasion was necessary to restore order to a lawless territory" (Evangelista 2002, 4). Derluguian supports this argument asserting that the "nascent nation-state was never able to disarm its erstwhile defenders and achieve the primary condition of statehood—monopolization of the means of violence" (1999, 5). The

ones that did control significant means of violence were the resistance forces led by Shamil Basayev and Emir Khattab, as Derluguian observes “Khattab’s small army was reputedly among the best equipped and the most ruthless units fighting against Russians in Chechnya” (1999, 4). The Chechen resistance being fueled by religious extremists’ physical and ideological support, descended more rapidly towards the pit of Nihilism and, with the amplifying factor of Russian genocidal offensive, the parties quickly became trapped into a self enforcing “cycle of vengeance”.

### ***External Enhancers***

When searching for the External Enhancers that transformed the secessionist claims of Kosovo and Chechnya into a bloody, radicalized conflict, one must firstly recognize the differences between contemporary conflicts and previous struggles of self-determination. According to the “New Wars” Thesis (Kaldor 2006; Munkler 2005) contemporary conflicts have suffered mutations in terms of goals, mode of warfare and finances. These mutations have been mostly caused by the process of globalization that put forward a more dramatic and harder to reconcile *identity politics* (as opposed to a politics of ideas) and has created trans-border flows of weapons, knowledge and financing—facilitating sub-state/para-state violence significantly more than before. Kaldor goes on to assign to contemporary conflicts a triple dimension: war, crime and human rights violations (2006). This concomitance

renders Schmid’s distinction between Political, Criminal and Pathological Terrorism irrelevant, as the three dimensions become overlapped in contemporary conflict. Therefore, radicalization is both facilitated and exacerbated by the context of a globalized world. Hughes explains how for Chechnya, ‘radicalization was both part of the conflict process and a cause of the second war’ (2007, 94). The motivational causes afferent to identity politics and the facilitating aspect of transnational networks are important factors in the process of radicalization in both Kosovo and Chechnya.

For the Chechen second war, an important Facilitator was the spread and accessibility of the ICTs—Internet serving as a means of preaching war and advertising the accomplishments to the sponsors in the Middle East (De Waal in Politkovskaya 2001, xxviii). Internet and other communication technologies as mobile phones still serve today as an important leverage for the remaining militants hidden in Ingush territory after the official abolition of the “counter-terrorist operation” (aka 2<sup>nd</sup> CW). Recent clashes between the armed resistance and the security forces of Kadyrov’s Moscow friendly government have been publicized by the militants via phones on Radio Liberty and to Prague Watchdog (North Caucasus Weekly 10/16) in an attempt to reassert their continuing struggle. In addition, in monthly e-magazines such as *Sada al-Malahim*, senior Jihadis offer advice on how to resist interrogation and how to lead successful Salafi-Jihadi terror operations (Terrorism Monitor 2009 7/11). Defining this situation

as an “information war”, Headley (2006, 158) explains how “Chechnya is a “virtual” war waged through the media as well as a horrific actual war”. He thus explains the branching towards terrorism such as the Beslan School Siege as spectacular acts meant to shock and attract attention towards an otherwise neglected conflict. Hughes equally characterizes the terrorist action of Chechen forces as ‘peripheral to its main use of political violence, which is directed against the Russian state’s military, security, political and economic assets’ (Hughes 2007, 307). Because of the lack of support from the International Community and the lack of media coverage of the ethnic cleansing of the Chechen population by Russian forces, the rebel forces turned to Islamic supporters.

I argue that the Islamization of the Chechen forces is again a matter of “strategic logic”, an ‘opportunistic recruiting drive’ (De Wall in Politkovskaya, xxviii)—the Wahhabist networks from Jordan and Saudi Arabia offering financial, logistic and military support and providing new recruits. In contrast, Kosovo benefited from the support of the NATO forces and, although the Albanian population is preponderant Muslim as in Chechnya, KLA’s insurgency did not echo global Jihad at any point because it was warned not to do so by its American supporters (Perrit Jr 2008, 3).

The dynamics of globalization led to an increased tendency of integration and supra-state security institutionalization. That is why, in the 90s Europe, both NATO and the EU were carrying out the process of enlargement, integrating new members from Eastern Europe in the

hope of creating a homogenous sphere of influence. This common security block was seriously threatened by the instability of the Balkans and the attention Kosovo received because of that from the International Community prevented further spiraling of violence. Ignatieff goes even further in ascribing the geopolitical interests in the Balkan area as being imperialist—combining American military power, European money and humanitarian motive—the Doctrine of “Humanitarian Interventionism” (2003). Still, whether or not the regional dynamics of the time were integrative and cooperative, or purely hegemonic remains open to discussion, but the discriminate application of “Humanitarian Intervention” is obvious after comparing Kosovo’s and Chechnya’s cases.

### *Differing Outcomes*

In both cases, the radicalization phase of Individual Change—availability of the masses for radical action, occurred as a result of the Regime’s discrimination and abuse. In this sense, Hughes observes that the ‘use of excessive or disproportionate violence, and the targeting of civilians, recklessly or as a matter of policy (even covert policy), inevitably radicalizes and intensifies a conflict’, rallying even more popular support for the resistance forces (2007, 302). The Individual Change triggered by Structural Factors and Personal Grievances served as a fertile ground for Facilitators that ultimately tended to lead towards an irreconcilable radicalization of the parties. While for Chechnya, such Facilitators were found in the characteristics of Globalization—ICT,

transnational networks etc, in the case of Kosovo, these were counterweighted by the support of the International Community, which acted overall as a break to the process of radicalization. Both conflicts are examples of secessionist radicalization, but due to intervening variable, they evolved differently. In Chechnya, a Continuum of Radicalization was instituted as National-Separatist goals merged with the Religious Extremist ones, providing ever more recruits and justification. Kosovo passed through the same phases of the radicalization process as Chechnya did, but its progress was interrupted by an intervening factor—the neutralizing influence of the OAF. I do not claim that the KFOR had an absolute positive impact on the conflict, but rather, that their intervention changed the natural course of action, preventing the escalation of radicalization towards global Jihad and further genocidal action by statist forces, as was the case in Chechnya for more than a decade (Fig. 3).

## CONCLUSION

The present paper has attempted to determine the causal connections between a series of contextual/innate factors and the outcome of individual/ aggregate radicalization. I have aimed at reconciling the ‘nature’ and the ‘nurture’ explanations. For this reason, I have firstly explored the innate elements that draw an individual towards radicalization. These were represented by the ‘strategic logic’ of a terrorist action in certain circumstances, and by the psychological

predispositions towards violence rooted in actual or perceived injuries. I have then integrated these personal motivations into a broader pattern—a Dynamic Model of Radicalization, which is a process-tracing analysis of the path towards the use of extreme methods in the support of a political cause. I have also put forward the concept of Vector of Involvement that portrays the scaling of the Process. Accounting for this variation within the Process of Radicalization helps us make better sense of the forces that push individuals away from mainstream society and those that pull them towards the extremist groups, which is very important for efficient, case adapted counter-terrorist policies.

The correlation of this Dynamic Model of Radicalization with the empirical evidence of the secessionist conflicts of Chechnya and Kosovo showed how analytically useful it is to sequentially understand the spiraling of violence. It was thus showed that in both cases, a level of societal, aggregate radicalization was reached. Still, due to intervening factors they then evolved differently—Kosovo’s Radicalization Process was neutralized by the intervention of the International Community, while Chechnya, being treated as an internal issue of Russia, transcended into a new dimension of Islamic Extremism, descending into a self-enforcing cycle of violence. I hope this case-study application showed that the Dynamic Model of Radicalization can be a useful tool for any other case-specific analyses.

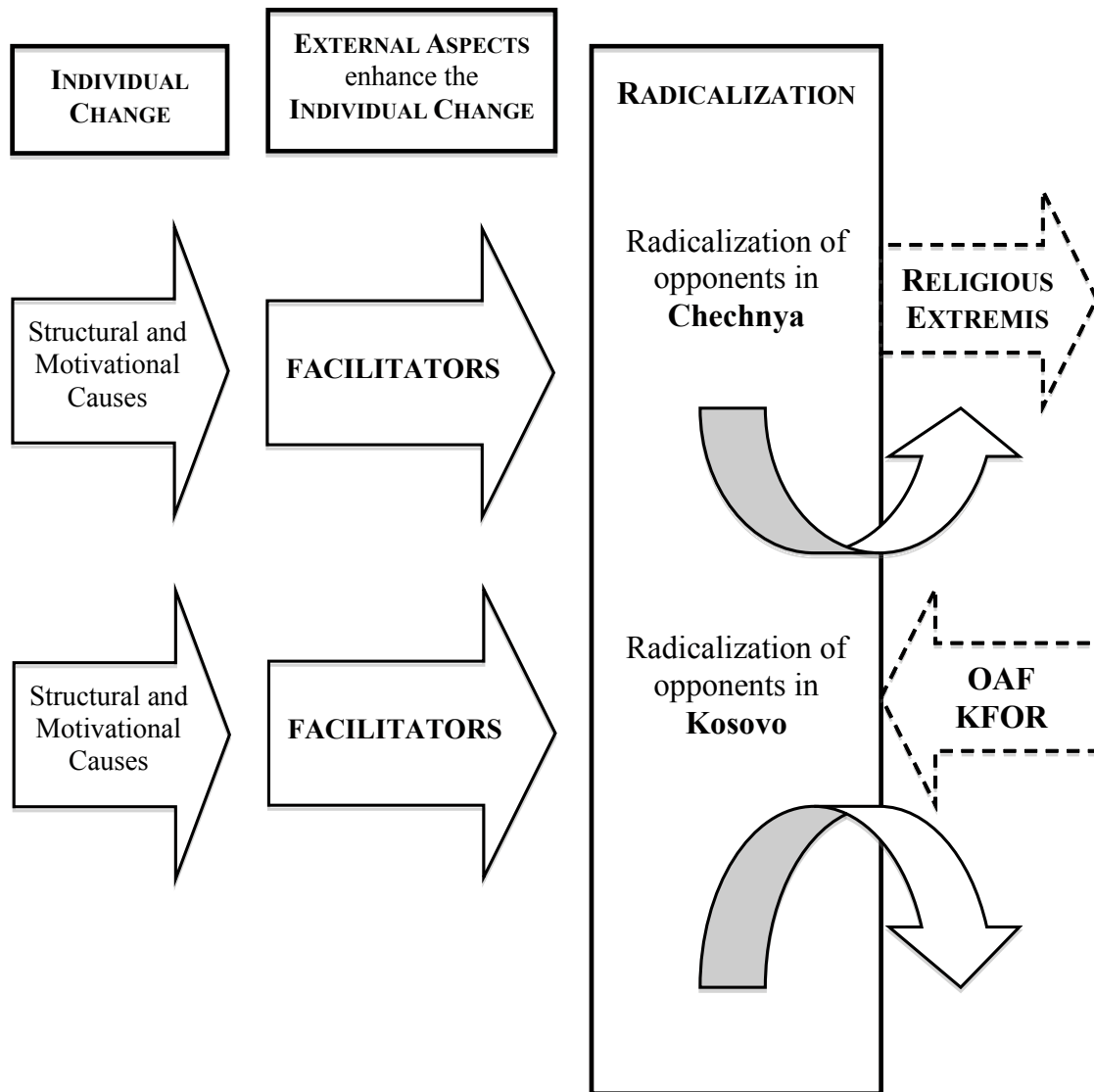


Fig.3 The Process of Radicalization applied to the Case Studies—Chechnya and Kosovo  
 Source: the author

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