

Radicalization Analyzed by Social Sciences: Can the medium-range concepts already mobilized on urban riots explain the radicalization processes in France?

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to question the concepts that social scientists use to apprehend the processes of so-called Islamic radicalization. While some academic disciplines—such as geopolitics or psychology—provide global explanations of radicalization, sociologists tend to be more hesitant or more nuanced when it comes to analyzing the phenomenon. Moreover, the notion of radicalization is debated within the discipline. In fact, in sociology, the various approaches remain too compartmentalized to produce a consensual analysis of jihadism. The purpose of this paper is therefore to offer an inventory of some of the concepts used in sociology on urban uprisings so as to take a step back from the overhanging readings of the phenomenon. The concepts presented herein may not only shed light on certain aspects of this complex subject by closely analyzing the paths of jihadists, in the sense that their combined analysis enriches our knowledge of a controversial phenomenon.

Keywords: Radicalization, Frustration, Identity denied, Moral economy, Political Commitment

La radicalización analizada por las ciencias sociales: ¿Pueden los conceptos de rango medio ya movilizados en disturbios urbanos explicar los procesos de radicalización en Francia?

RESUMEN

El propósito de este trabajo es cuestionar los conceptos que utilizan los científicos sociales para aprehender los procesos de la llamada radicalización islámica. Si bien algunas disciplinas académicas,

como la geopolítica o la psicología, brindan explicaciones globales de la radicalización, los sociólogos tienden a ser más vacilantes o más matizados cuando se trata de analizar el fenómeno. Además, la noción de radicalización se debate dentro de la disciplina. De hecho, en sociología, los diversos enfoques siguen estando demasiado compartimentados para producir un análisis consensuado del yihadismo. El propósito de este artículo es, por lo tanto, ofrecer un inventario de algunos de los conceptos utilizados en sociología sobre los levantamientos urbanos para alejarse de las lecturas que sobrevuelan el fenómeno. Los conceptos presentados aquí pueden no sólo arrojar luz sobre ciertos aspectos de este complejo tema al analizar de cerca los caminos de los yihadistas, en el sentido de que su análisis combinado enriquece nuestro conocimiento de un fenómeno controvertido.

Palabras clave: Radicalización, Frustración, Identidad negada, Economía moral, Compromiso político

社会科学视角下的激进化：已用于城市暴乱的媒介范围概念能解释法国的激进化进程吗？

摘要

本文目的是质疑社会科学家用于理解所谓的伊斯兰激进化过程而使用的概念。尽管一些学术领域—例如地缘政治学或心理学—为激进化提供了全球性的解释，但社会学家往往用更为犹豫或细微的方式分析该现象。此外，激进化这一概念在该学科中存在辩论。事实上，社会学中的不同方法仍然太过于区分化，以至于无法就圣战主义达成统一的分析。本文目的因此是对关于城市叛乱的社会学中所使用的部分概念加以梳理，以期对关于该现象的大量研究进行广泛审视。通过仔细分析圣战分子的路径，本文所提出的概念可能不仅能解释该复杂主题的部分方面，即综合分析能促进我们对该争议现象的理解。

关键词：激进化，挫败，身份否认，道德经济，政治承诺

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1. Introduction

Terrorism and political violence have a long history in France, as the phenomenon goes back to the anarchist attacks which shook the hexagon at the end of the 19th century. In the wake of the recent attacks, journalists, media experts and other “all-purpose speakers” have occupied the space of the “small window” increasingly fed by continuous news channels. Initially, psychoanalysts, psychologists and psychiatrists have focused their interpretation on the mental aspect of the problem, invoking psychological disorders that can lead to psychopathology and nihilism. Thus, individuals influenced by *jihadist* ideology continue to be the object of interpretative endeavors that consist in finding psychiatric solutions in an attempt to “de-radicalize” them. Secondly, the “orientalist” researchers that we name, admittedly unduly. These researchers and political scientists try to interpret the terrorist phenomenon with Islam as the main stake. This analysis is sometimes contradictory or even opposed, as illustrated by the studies of Olivier Roy or Gilles Kepel. A third stream, mainly composed of essayists and editorialists, emphasizes the civilizational and “ethnocultural” issue at stake. Alain Finkielkraut or Éric Zemmour are the mainstream tell bearers of a discourse focused on the “clash of civilizations,” a narrative that now directly echoes the discourse invoking the “problem of the suburbs.” Yet with the exception of one or two sociologists with high media profiles, sociological explanations are rarely put forward in the analysis of terrorism by the media and even newspapers (Guérandel & Marlière, 2016).

The purpose of this article is to revisit the work of sociologists on the phenomenon of radicalization, regardless of their currents and “obediences.” Thus, this paper calls upon the notions or concepts elaborated by these researchers, in order to show the contributions and strengths of our discipline. Sociology, unlike other fields, does not have preconceived explanations or “omnibus” interpretations to provide to the public opinion explaining the processes that lead young people to commit attacks in France and elsewhere in the name of Islam. Nevertheless, the subject presents relevant notions to explain a set of factors, processes, or mechanisms that lead to political violence. Therefore, this article will consider the concepts that have proven their worth in the field of urban upheavals. While it is not possible to provide an overarching and definitive explanation of the *jihadist* phenomenon, sociology, with its different schools of thought, can offer a variety of complex and sometimes contradictory answers, which are undoubtedly useful for understanding events, trajectories, and situations.

In an attempt to answer this question, the main works of researchers who have tried to circumscribe the phenomenon of radicalization will be reviewed. Even though the notion is questionable and leads to controversy, and even antagonisms on the approaches to understand the phenomenon. In order to better comprehend the processes that lead to terrorism, we will then use concepts that have already been used in social sciences. Thus, we will approach the notion of

social frustration put forward by Raymond Boudon and his successors. Then, we will focus on the question of the denial of subjectivity and the recognition of the logic of actors inspired by the so-called Touraine school. Also, we will try to reflect on the concept of *politicité*, introduced by Denis Merklen, around the popular radical social movements. Finally, we will also look at the notion of moral economy initiated by Edward P. Thompson and rehabilitated by Didier Fassin. We will also illustrate how the moral economy of injustice structures the social representations of a certain youth from the “suburbs” confronted with discrimination.

2. Radicalization in the social sciences: a battlefield?

A. A total and global social phenomenon

For many sociologists, radicalization or *jihadism* is a holistic social phenomenon insofar as it challenges the symbolic foundations of living together in our democratic societies (Khosrokhavar, 2018). This phenomenon prompts some researchers to question the homicidal “logics” that lead young adults to take action in free and democratic societies (Van Campenhoudt, 2017). Radicalization also challenges the growing success of a totalitarian ideology that has been emerging for more than half a century within Islam and is destabilizing not only the West, but especially the Muslim-Sunni world (Dassetto, 2018). Indeed, flabbergasting and incomprehension upset our “modern” sensibilities: how is a conservative and medieval ideology likely to lead young people to their own death in order to provoke that of others in liberal societies at the beginning of the 21st century? To what extent do suicide attacks question the responsibility of our progressive and democratic societies (Asad, 2018)? Islamic terrorism is not an entirely new phenomenon, but has grown since the attacks of September 11, 2001. It even took more worrying turns in the mid-2010s with the emergence of a proto nation-state, *Daech*, that concretizes an “utopia” into a material project through the conquest of a territory and the implementation of a governance for all the *jihadists* of the world (Atran, 2016; Luizard, 2015).¹

While sociologists all, in their own way, refer to *jihadism* or radicalization as a prominent issue that needs to be approached with caution but urgency, the work on definitions, terminological references and sensitivities is far from consensual. The frequent use of the term radicalization goes back to the 2005 London bombings (Neuman P. R. & Kleiman S., 2013). While certain researchers defend this concept, despite its imperfections, as it enables us to move from the *why* to the *how* (Khosrokhavar, 2014; Crettiez, 2016), some of them note that this notion is too imprecise to analyze *jihadism* (Raggazi, 2014; Kundnani, 2015; Health-Kelly,

¹ Beyond the physical, political and symbolic attributions that the territory offers, it is also a producer of financial resources and therefore facilitates a certain political and diplomatic independence (Dassetto, *op. cit.*).

2016). Others, even more severe, apprehend the overuse of the term radicalization as a “catch-all” that definitely disqualifies its use (Coolsaet, 2011; Mauger, 2016).² The lack of consensus is the consequence of the heterogeneity of the observed phenomenon leading to controversy or even antagonism between researchers. Similarly, the notion of terrorism, which includes more than two hundred definitions to date, remains difficult to mobilize in its current state to describe the phenomenon (Raflik, 2016). The term *jihadism* is not unanimously accepted either insofar as it reinforces the amalgam with the ordinary religious practice of everyday Muslims (Marlière, 2021). This is why sociologist Luc Van Campenhoutd recommends the use of the terminological combinations of terrorism and *jihadism* through the expression “jihadist terrorism” in order to better circumscribe the phenomenon (Van Campenhoutd, *op. cit.*: 8). We are thus, for the moment, in a semantic impasse to understand a social phenomenon that it is nevertheless essential to apprehend at the beginning of the 21st century.

B. Antagonistic approaches

If there are several currents, schools, and sensibilities, as we have just seen on the subject of radicalization, it seems important to focus on the tension between researchers who see Islam as a source of violence and others who present that political violence has always existed before *jihadism*, but in other forms. For the former, we can include researchers close to the “clash of civilizations.” One of its main figures is Gilles Kepel, who prefers to seek the explanations of violence in the Muslim religion. Thus, Kepel refers to the text of Osama Bin Laden’s former right-hand man, Abu Musab Al-Suri, “the architect of the global *jihad*” with his famous call for an Islamic world revolt and highlights, since 2005, the emergence of a third generation of *jihadists* (Kepel, 2015).³ A little more nuanced, but along the same lines, the work directed by the political scientist Anne Muxel and the sociologist Olivier Galland shows through a survey in high schools, a propensity to approve or use violence among high school students “of Muslim origin” (Galland & Muxel, 2018). Finally, two very recent works by the “Kepelian movement” reactivate the idea of the “clash of civilizations.” The first shows the danger that Islamism arises in the suburbs to the West (Rougier, 2020); the second book anticipates, for its part, a probable civil war in Europe caused by incarcerated *Salafo-jihadists* wishing to wage a more strategic revenge since the defeat of *Daech* (Micheron, 2020). Finally, for Dassetto, Islamism has become hegemonic in the Gramscian sense,

2 The notion of radicalization is not without problems in terms of scales of understanding whether in terms of micro (individual), meso (groups) and macro (society) analyses as Dutch researchers show even though the meso (peer groups or comrades in arms) plays a prominent role in radicalization processes (Doosje, Moghaddam, Kruglanski & De Wolf, 2019). Moreover, the occurrence of the terminology of deradicalization in the media has definitely blurred the cognitive perspectives of the term radicalization reduced to nothing since the unsuccessful attempts to apply it at the level of public and associative policies (Beunas, 2019).

3 For Félce Dassetto, it is rather the fifth generation (Dassetto, *op. cit.*).

progressively providing the Muslim world with “baggage of reasons and justifications that make radicalization plausible and, from there, legitimize armed action” (Dassetto, *op. cit.*: 46).

The thesis defended by the political scientist Olivier Roy is orientated rather in the opposite direction. The author sees in the radical investment of current *jihadists* the translation of a kind of “*Islamization of radicality*” (Roy, 2016). Indeed, for Roy, the young people motivated to wage *jihad*, whether they are “*second generation*” or “*converts*,” reject the culture and religion of their parents. They adhere to an “*Islam of rupture*” anchored in an exacerbated individualism and an ideology of secession from society. The “*Islamization of radicalism*” constitutes in a way a transition between the revolutionary communisms of the 1970s-1980s and the new *jihadisms* that are becoming apparent in the Middle East, Europe, and Southeast Asia (Lemaire, 2016). The disappearance of communisms as a support for social protest has led to a lack of political outlets for anger that should undoubtedly be questioned today (Marlière, 2019: 98-107). Talal Asad, for his part, questions the double ethics of modern, yet progressive, societies, which exert physical, but legal, violence through preventive wars on Muslim populations forced to respond in turn, due to the asymmetry of military power relations, through terrorism and suicide bombings (Asad, *op. cit.*). Islam is not necessarily at fault in its theological foundations, as it is the symptom of political, social, and cultural *malaise* (Liogier, 2016) and thus responds to accumulated anger, which makes the Anglo-Saxon sociologist Arjun Appadurai declare that we face a civilization of clashes rather than a “clash of civilizations” (Appadurai, 2009).

C. Beyond the social and colonial question, and the history of “suburbs”

The paths taken by *jihadists* appear to be quite heterogeneous, as reflected in research and sociological literature. First of all, one could refer to researchers who see *jihadism* as a historical continuity, whether in connection with the colonial past or through the social history of working-class suburbs. Thus, François Burgat sees in the phenomenon of radicalization a direct consequence of colonization that is still not tolerated by the populations originating from Maghreb and Middle Eastern countries (Burgat, 2016). He insists on the colonial, but also neo-colonial dimension of political Islamism. Burgat shows that the return of an orthodox Islam is to be correlated with the arrival of European powers in North Africa in the middle of the 19th century. According to him, contemporary *jihadism* is the result of a form of neo-colonialism that prolongs past Islamic claims, but in a more radical way, although current *jihadism* has its own dynamics and specific contemporary issues (Dassetto, *op. cit.*). Instead, Alain Bertho highlights the historical genealogy of urban working-class suburbs. He notes a real incapacity of the inhabitants of the “suburbs” to be democratically represented and to defend their rights. Indeed, since the March for Equality in 1983, through the “riots of 2005,” Bertho insists

on the political disillusionment of the working-class suburbs' inhabitants, leading progressively, but irremediably, to the phenomenon of radicalization among the latest generations (Bertho, 2016). Positioning themselves halfway between the colonial past and the social history of urban working-class neighborhoods' explanations, Anglo-Saxon researchers make similar observations by supporting the idea of a continuous war between Muslims and Westerners since the end of the 19th century (Hussey, 2015; Dély & Heargraves, 2016).

Instead, other scholars have emphasized the greater heterogeneity of *jihadists'* backgrounds. First of all, the historian Jenny Raflik has shown, whether for the anarchists of the 19th century, the revolutionary communists of the mid-20th century or the *jihadists* of today, the importance of the rupture with the institutional, social, or family environment, which constitutes one of the common denominators of all terrorist paths, whatever the era studied (Raflik, *op. cit.*). Anthropologist Dounia Bouzar, for her part, recalls the existence of radicalized young people, both from the middle classes who are foreign to the Muslim world, and that of the "suburbs," in the deradicalization center where she conducted her investigation (Bouzar, 2016). Ethnopsychiatrist Tobie Nathan, who has received a hundred radicalized youth in his practice, is surprised to see people from affluent social backgrounds as well (Nathan, 2017). For these researchers, Islam offers a regenerative framework for young people destabilized by a modern individualistic and competitive society who not only aspire to personal reconstruction, but also want to rebel against a political, cultural, social, and/or family order. Thus, not all radicalized youths come from working-class neighborhoods and Muslim families, just as not all youths from "suburbs" with an immigrant background and a Muslim background have become *jihadists* (Marlière, 2020: 45-65).

In our fieldwork of working-class neighborhoods, we began with the observation that the feeling of injustice structured the social representations of many of the young people we interviewed (Marlière, 2008). The political, economic, and social capacities to respond to this feeling remain limited insofar as social inequalities and discrimination persist on a daily basis without the possibility or the will to remedy them in positive and constructive ways. This observation of powerlessness accentuates bitterness and feelings of revenge (Arendt, 1972) among the new generations, both from the "suburbs" and from the middle classes in the process of being downgraded. If some researchers advocate for following the sociologist Claude Dubar on the retributive dimensions of militant commitment at the symbolic level in order to structure a field of research (Fragon, 2019), it seems appropriate to mobilize concepts applied in the human sciences on urban revolts in order to further expand the repertoire of analyses likely to apprehend a disparate, complex and controversial total social phenomenon.

3. The notion of relative frustration

A. Relative frustration: an American genealogy

The question of social frustration seems decisive insofar as the internalization of democratic egalitarian norms is assimilated by most citizens in the West. Following Raymond Boudon and Walter Gary Runciman, the sociologist Gérald Bronner attempts to articulate the themes of discrimination and humiliation, conveying the idea that adherence to terrorism is due to the social frustrations of radicalized youth (Bronner, 2016). He develops the following point: the concept of *relative frustration* emerges in the United States in an attempt to understand the behaviour of economically disadvantaged people in a more or less prosperous society. This notion has its roots in Tocqueville (Tocqueville, 1985), who argued that democracy opens up more “possibilities” and thus hope among the people. As paradoxical as it may seem, the greater openness of means of emancipation can also be the source of feelings of disillusionment and therefore of dissatisfaction likely to lead to despair. Durkheim’s analysis of suicide draws on this idea. He develops the theory that in a context of deregulation of social norms, most often in a period of improved living conditions, suicide is a social fact that most often results from unfulfilled desires causing a feeling of “emptiness” that ensues from accumulated social frustrations (Durkheim, 2007). Indeed, the concept of *relative frustration* takes into account in greater depth the importance of the social context, the economic situation and the primacy of interactions and opportunities that are offered to individuals, especially in a society perceived as free. For the sociologist Raymond Boudon, the equitable norms of democratic societies have paradoxically generated social frustration among a large number of people who have internalized egalitarian norms, but who nevertheless feel that they do not benefit from the ideals displayed by democratic societies (Boudon, 1977). Robert K. Merton insists more on the individualization of inequalities and the driving impact of the consumer society in democratic societies: these phenomena are at the origin of competition between people and accentuate the *relative frustration* at the origin of personal conflicts and multiple frustrations (Merton, 1997). The sociologist Walter Runciman analyses democratic and multicultural societies and shows that the feeling of frustration is even more acute when the individual assimilates his “failure,” not through a personal prism, but as the result of discrimination experienced by the community to which he belongs (Runciman, 1966). According to Gérald Bronner, adhering to extreme ideas relieves the individual of his discomforts by giving him a clearer and simpler vision of injustices. This observation, in certain aspects, clears the suffering person of his personal failure, thus enabling him to designate an identified enemy as responsible for his misfortunes. The question of the possibilities of success in democratic societies is therefore a potential trigger for social protest, or even revolution. The most striking example of this phenomenon is the increase in protests following the end of an economic depression and “crisis” (Davies, 1962).

B. From hope to disillusionment

According to Bronner, the issue of possible adequacy between individual aspiration and personal satisfaction is at stake. If there is too great a disproportion between the two, *relative frustration* may not only determine daily representations, but also the conduct of actions (Gurr, 1971). The notion of *relative frustration* has already been developed by Dietmar Loch on the subject of urban revolts. It was applied to explain the phenomenon in France, which claims to promote and ensure egalitarian republican values, but is confronted with a large number of riots, in contrast to Germany where the relationship with Turkish immigration is much more distant. French citizens from the Maghreb, who have been socialized according to republican values, seem to not all cope well with the injustices they face, unlike the children of Turkish immigrants who have been conditioned, in a way, to accommodate to unequal situations based on their ethnic origins. Thus, since the French republican ideal of “liberty, equality, and fraternity” has been more or less internalized (Loch, 2008)⁴ by young French people from working-class and underprivileged urban areas with an immigrant background. It becomes particularly intolerable when it is not respected, in contrast to Germany, where the promises of equality to the Turkish second generation do not exist as such. According to Hugues Lagrange, these young people from working-class urban suburbs originating from former colonies are more likely to compare themselves to middle-class youth from the inner cities. Thus, “feelings of being second-class citizens provoke strong reactions” (Lagrange, 2008: 377). For these authors, *relative frustration* is therefore at the root of urban violence.

However, the question of radicalization is to a certain extent more complex. Indeed, through the notion of *relative frustration*, Gérald Bronner has questioned the role of Western societies in the rise of anger, lost illusions, but also of radicalization. The author demonstrates that these societies, through a set of values such as freedom, equality, recognition, and consumption, have developed in most people a set of aspirations and dreams that very few will be able to access in their lifetime (Bronner, *op. cit.*). Anger and bitterness are therefore all the stronger for some actors, as the frustration stems from the fact that they have built themselves through the values of freedom and equality promoted by institutions.

Thus, the race for consumption and recognition is the new Holy Grail for a majority of people today: “the equation leads to an optimal rate of frustration, which is all the more inevitable because the aspiration for distinction is always relative, which means that it is not enough to get a lot to be happy, but above all to get a little more than others” (Bronner: 261). The aspiration to succeed, whatever the domains from then on internalized as inaccessible, creates resentment towards the

4 In the majority of the interviews conducted with young people, questions relating to democracy or equality are omnipresent when we discuss discrimination, racial profiling, access to employment, or housing.

social system and its institutions. The colonial past, ordinary discrimination, and daily stigmatization have created distinctive personalities in certain young adults who are now receptive to ideological clusters of revenge and vengeance. These ideologies are all the stronger because they emerge and develop in a democratic society that *ihadists* perceive as failing. These radicalized youths have thus gradually developed systems of thought that they believe castigate the corrupt and deceptive nature of social systems. This enables them to rationalize the destruction of institutions and codify mass murders in the name of an extreme ideology. Indeed, for Bronner, adherence out of frustration can constitute a powerful lever for the radicalization of minds insofar as it “results from a biographical situation and from social mechanisms linked to democratic systems” (Bronner: 335). Relative frustration echoes the social, economic and cultural transformations that are nowadays occurring in Europe, notably through the increase in structural inequalities and the sidelining of a growing part of the working classes in a competitive and highly consumerist society.

4. Denied subjectivities and disdained identities

A. The *ihadist*: a despised youth who responds with violence

A second approach involves questioning the role of the subjectivity of the actor or the individual. This notion has a less extensive theoretical genealogy than the previous one. However it can also provide some answers as to why people produce violence in the name of an idea or a belief. According to the sociologist Jérôme Ferret, radicalization leads to extreme political violence and questions the nature of the social contract of late modernity, due to the appearance of new subjectivities generating their own self-referential system (Ferret, 2015). Thus, the question of multiple social representations of identity that seem to compete with each other constitutes a new issue for our societies. This is why identity-based subjectivities that are ostracised or denied existence have no other recourse than violence to make themselves heard or recognized. It raises the question of recognition for a certain number of actors who are diminished in the public space.

Following the work of Alain Touraine and Michel Wieviorka, Jérôme Ferret explains that violence is the product of a political community’s inability to implement the necessary conditions for a conflictual relationship between citizens and institutions: the impossibility of developing an appropriate expression engenders symbolic and social violence for stigmatized populations, in the absence of recognized or effective institutional or organizational mediation (Ferret, *op. cit.*). For this purpose, the term terrorism is not a relevant expression. In this case, Ferret prefers referring to a “total violence understood as a deliberate strategy of mindless violence, striking the civilian population according to the principle of disjunction between the victims of the attack [...] and the intended political target”

(Ferret: 21). This violence thus questions the nature of the social contract which grounds the democratic societies in which we evolve. It raises the issue of social relationships and everyday interactions that are at the heart of a co-construction of violence and reciprocal animosity, whether between people and institutions or between individuals. This analysis by Jérôme Ferret holds our attention insofar as it consists in apprehending two forms of violence within the social contract: 1) the state of the monopoly of legitimate violence of state institutions in modern society at the heart of globalization and the capacity to prevent competing ideas or to counter these new violent projects; 2) the foreclosure of violence in late modern societies and the appearance of new emerging subjectivities, in particular of young adults caught up in this modernity. In other words, the extremist violence of the latter is a response to the institutional violence of the State, the consequence of a reciprocity between terror, repression and negation that reaches the extremes that we know during attacks.

Jérôme Ferret's studies are interesting insofar as they introduce the idea of an operational dialectic. According to this concept, the violence of terrorists responds to the symbolic negation of institutions that do not recognize these individuals' existence as subjects: destructive violence thus responds to ordinary symbolic political violence. Thus dehumanized by the powers in place, a certain youth may despise and even repudiate the institutions and people who are supposed to represent them. They may then mount insurrections against the wearers of the uniform, or even become radicalized by committing lethal attacks against anyone perceived as an ally of a system apprehended as iniquitous and illegitimate. The reciprocal negation between these two actors (institutional actors *versus* private actors) leads to a vicious circle of violence, repression, revenge, etc. The lack of recognition of an identity and the humiliations that this entails can also offer an avenue for reflection in the framework of our research program. It can therefore be traced back to the work of Alain Touraine and present that the discriminated actor is therefore unable to act individually or collectively.

B. In search of an short-lived but striking recognition

According to the readings conducted around our object of study, we can wonder if we are not able, through the recent social, cultural, and societal mutations, to attend a kind of transformation of the processes of socialization which favors individualism. And also recognition as shown by the extent of the social networks and the attitude of the new generations concerning appearance and individual competition. We should thus seek a temporary desire for recognition in order to attract the attention of a society that despises one on a daily basis. The sociologist Didier Lapeyronnie, on the subject of the urban revolts of 2005, has demonstrated that "the riot is a kind of short circuit: it allows an individual to overcome obstacles in an instant, to become a recognized actor, even in a negative, ephemeral and

illusory way, and to obtain ‘gains’ without being able to control and even less to negotiate either the recognition or the possible benefits” (Lapeyronnie, 2006: 445). In other words, urban riots reinvigorate the despised or denied subjectivities of certain young people in suburbs in order to take temporary revenge on the institutions, to occupy the street for a limited period of time and to momentarily attract the attention of public opinion and therefore of the authorities.

But it would seem that in the case of *jihadism*, expecting recognition is taken to the extreme. For the political scientist Olivier Roy, it is the hero quest that motivates some radicalized youth: to rebuild their self-esteem through the image of a conqueror for a cause, whether it is just or not, even if it means appearing to be a “negative hero.” Olivier Roy thus insists on the narcissistic aspect of *jihadism* where the emphasis on the ego takes precedence over geopolitical or political dimensions for some young people (Roy, 2016). For sociologist Farhad Khosrokhavar this even goes beyond the desire for recognition, greed for glory and success: “The promotion of oneself into an emir, for example, which replaces the dream of being president” (Khosrokhavar, 2018: 552). For certain radicalized young people from the working classes in the West who are experiencing academic or social failure and are therefore destined for a “future without a future” or for others (young people from the declassed middle classes) destined for a “future without adventure,” *Daech* ultimately represents forms of rapid social ascension, for the former, and a stimulating and exotic escape, for the latter.

5. “*Politicité*” to rehabilitate politics

A. The political commitment of the desperate

Introduced and developed recently in France by the sociologist Denis Merklen, the concept of *politicité* can also allow us to reflect on the notion of radicalization or extreme political violence. *Politicité* appears in our study as a neologism likely to offer an alternative or a complement to the analysis of the notions previously developed. Denis Merklen suggests investigating the new forms of mobilization of the working classes since the destabilization of the labour society (Castel, 1995). Analysis through the territory of the suburbs makes it possible to take into account local solidarities, the capital of autochthony and the social, territorial, and cultural supports that accompany it. *Politicité* opens up a new perspective, one that gives these terrorist phenomena an undeniably political dimension. Indeed, within the working classes, whether in France or Argentina, Denis Merklen traces the seeds and configurations in the changes in political behavior that are becoming more radical, hence the notion of *politicité* to demonstrate that “the vast majority of democracies are faced with a resurgence of their working classes and their future is compromised by a profound crisis in the systems of social integration” (Merklen, 2009: 257).

In other words, the notion of *politicité* introduces a political and a broader social dimension that is not necessarily unanimously accepted. However, this perspective can shed additional light on the heuristic level: in fact, the author posits that this notion of *politicité* be broken down into three distinct but complementary registers: 1) survival; 2) protesting; 3) partisan action (Merklen, *ibid.*). While Denis Merklen notices a change in the relationship of the working classes regarding the elites, disqualified in their eyes. The working classes are developing new forms of political and symbolic representations, most often in a more pronounced radicality (Merklen, 2012: 55-73). Like Alain Bertho, for whom the deterioration of the living conditions of the working classes for more than thirty years in the public space is manifested by the recurrent shift to urban revolts, Denis Merklen believes that “the social movement and the politics of the working classes are entirely marked by a fundamental tension between the struggle for survival and the struggle for integration” (Merklen, *ibid.*). However, according to the author, the issues of survival and economic integration are at stake, hence the need to find more energetic strategies through a coherent political organization generating a more effective political antagonism to access goods and services and thus give meaning to symbolic struggles (Merklen, *ibid.*)

B. Particular and isolated mobilizations in Europe

In South American countries, the working classes are struggling to find their place in a neoliberal society. A radical *politicité* has therefore been structured on the scale of working-class spaces and is constantly targeting the political system and the public space so that these impoverished working classes can manifest their existence (Merklen, *ibid.*). In France, the fragmentation of the working classes is more pronounced and concerns part of the inhabitants of working-class urban neighborhoods. These individuals are already isolated from other working-class milieus from the point of view of their identity and ethnicity for the reasons analyzed above.⁵ Due to their ethnic and social isolation, the political and social demands of these young people in working-class urban neighborhoods are totally discredited by the riotous action. Indeed, their grievances are transformed into «incivilities,” even into threats to the Republic, because they are not taken into account by the political parties and the unions. Protest is thus depoliticized and most often results in forms of violence such as burning libraries (Merklen, 2015). Even if these young people, heirs to the social history of the urban working class suburbs, evolve in a country that is more comfortable from an economic and social point of view than Argentina, the strategies of resistance and organization are much less easy, as they remain a minority among the working classes in France. Thus the political situation of a part of the inhabitants of the urban working class suburbs is different from the *politicité* of the working classes analyzed in South America. The latter is more unitary in the image of the French working class in the 1960s: “The

5 See the example of the “yellow vests” movement.

working class *politicit * based on the figure of a worker who finds his place thanks to his effort and pain at work will thus turn on the heirs of this same working class when they are pushed aside by unemployment [...] It is within this framework that this fraction of the working classes that is constituted by the territory around the figures of the “neighborhood” and the “inhabitant” tries to reconstitute modalities of action and political participation in the face of the loss of power of the formerly dominant forms of popular mobilization” (B roud, Bouffartigue, Eckert, & Merklen, 2016: 159).

C. Radicalization: an antagonistic dynamic

Since young people in working-class urban suburbs no longer have a clear-cut position in social relations of production, their moral and political commitment is only found in their local setting. An urban space that is, let us remember, disqualified. This political solitude, discussed above, shows that the political activity of adolescents and young adults remains circumscribed to their own perception of situations and to their territory, because it cannot be exported to the wider whole of the French working classes today. This is why the political demands made through this localized *politicit * in the neighborhood and only in these deindustrialized urban social spaces cannot be exercised elsewhere. They appear at the same time as a form of political impasse explaining the repeated riots, the “incivilities” in a loop or the chronic tensions with the institutions. This new form of territorial politics, circumscribed to urban working-class suburbs, has been oriented by dint of isolation, political recuperation (notably the Socialist Party) and various and sundry manipulations towards ethnic-religious forms, including Islam, which plays an increasingly unifying role (Piettre, 2013: 89-129). The isolation is further accentuated when certain “suburb youth” have participated directly in terrorist actions, undeniably revealing the equation between Islam and working-class suburbs. These observations show that structural conflict with institutions is therefore impossible. Faced with these repeated failures in terms of institutional recognition or political demands, Islamic radicalization appears as the ultimate recourse for civilizational, but above all social, transformation, and definitively takes over from other exhausted or ineffective forms of political mediation.

6. A moral economy of radicalization?

A. A competition of norms and values

Another interesting point of view could just as well be mobilized around moral or value issues: that of the “moral economy.” The notion of “moral economy” is interesting to analyze issues surrounding morals, values, and principles. It introduces a new paradigm for the analysis of political violence and radicalization. All societies produce sets of norms and values. As societies grow bigger, the enlargement of the social fabric inherently leads to alternative, competing uses and customs

to rise, leading relations between individuals and senses of belonging to become extremely complex. Our so-called “post-industrial” or “hypermodern” societies no longer create univocal norms, but plural and sometimes even contradictory ones. Individuals in such societies determine themselves according to these norms and values, thanks to which they shape their moral understanding of experiences they live. As Fassin and Eideliman put it, “they are thus led to make decisions in the name of moral criteria, sometimes encountering dilemmas, and to experience affects, and even to enter into conflict with one another” (2012: 10).

Eventually, the numerous trade-offs faced by individuals on the field of morals and values inevitably leads to at best difficult coexistence, and at worst to tensions and conflicts. Moreover, individuals are summoned to make choices between individual ethics and the (perceived) collective morality. In hypermodern, globalized, complex societies such as ours, competition between values and norms is exacerbated and faced by every social group and individual.

In line with Fassin’s classification (2012: 37), we may divide the field of moral economy in two. First comes the work of Edward Thompson and James C. Scott on farmers (Thompson, 1968; Scott, 1976), whose set of morals and values the two scholars deemed to be determined as a bedrock for potential unrest, were their fundamental interest to be forgotten by the elite. Hence the formation and conservation of principles and values that would ensure the perpetuation of their lifestyle and traditions in case of a despotic government. The second trend in moral economy research rather focuses on groups’ means of dealing with rules and laws, questioning individuals and entire social groups’ sense of ethics and respect of morals. For Fassin, both approaches are essential to shape an effective framework of moral economy. We need to take into account the studied actors’ perception of their own daily life to understand reasons for (in our case) anger, deception, unrest, as well as resistance to and avoidance of rules, norms and values. This can be cheating, concealing, sabotaging but also committing acts of violence such as terrorism.

Fassin states that the notion of moral economy includes “the production, distribution, circulation and use of emotions and values, norms and obligations in the social space” (Fassin, 2012: 37). To better understand this notion, he insists on four essential points: 1) the moral economy is moral; 2) contrary to the philosophical approach, empirical work has shown that we can associate values and norms; 3) emotions are not separate from values and norms; 4) moral economies is a valid framework to understand all social worlds both locally and globally (Fassin, *ibid*).

The anthropological dimension of moral economy allows us to better grasp the contexts and framework in which norms and values find meaning. The sociological dimensions provide the tool for an in-depth analysis of actors’ interplay and the orientation of social movements. The author goes on stating that the sociological dimension helps to understand the *raison d’être* of individuals: “the study of moral economies implies analyzing both [*individual’s*] sociology [...] and

their anthropology, in the sense of transformations of values, norms, emotions, and the confrontations they foster” (Fassin, *ibid.*: 43). The notion of moral economy enables us to analyse actors’ actions, power relations, by contextualizing them and helping us understand their meaning.

B. Specific and binding standards and values

Kokoreff and Lapeyronnie have also referred to the notion of “moral economy,” although they undoubtedly focused more on Edward P. Thompson’s approach on working-class suburbs and discrimination-related issues. The two scholars write that “the moral economy of these suburbs is marked by a profound rupture of the population with the political and institutional universe. A feeling of injustice and humiliation is combined with an exacerbated resentment towards institutions to produce discursive positions such as: “The Republic does not keep its promises, it is a lie for which social housing dwellers pay the price. They feel that they do not participate in social life and, even more so, that society is a foreign, hostile universe constantly sidelining and stigmatizing them. Riots are the most spectacular expressions of this phenomenon”” (Kokoreff & Lapeyronnie, 2013: 83).

Thus, a moral economy specific to the inhabitants of working-class suburbs inevitably leads to the aforementioned question of injustice. The authors additionally wish to stress the difference in focus between riots and the moral economy. They distinguish a greater focus on “civic” justice than on social justice, because that discrimination is more intolerable than social inequality (Kokoreff & Lapeyronnie, *ibid.*: 81), because the ethnic and identity issue prevails over the motivations linked to class membership for these populations. This is a major addition as it explains how these neighborhoods’ inhabitants, especially the young ones, then fall into a mix of rhetorical postures mixing identity, religion, ethnicity as the base of their moral economy, rather than using traditional norms and rules accepted by the wider society they don’t feel part of. Kokoreff articulates his understanding of urban riots according to four essential elements: “identification with the victims, being part of the neighborhood, negotiating one’s place, settling accounts” (Kokoreff, 2008: 201). The moral economies that structure and steer the social representations of the young people present in our field demonstrate differences in their perception of inequalities. This strongly differentiates them from the majority of the French population. This perception inherited from the group isolates them socially, thus fostering and worsening a vicious circle of misunderstanding and bitterness.

Therefore, we can analyze radicalization thanks to the notion of a moral economy. Indeed, these radicalized young people who decide to go to Syria or to shoot with a Kalashnikov at people who came to a concert at the Bataclan also respond to standards and values. Khosrokhavar’s works give us some clues in this direction by providing an extremely interesting understanding of the underlying

elements motivating radicalization, although, claiming to be inspired by Husserl's phenomenology, this author does not refer to the notion of moral economy. Khosrokhavar shows that *jihadists* try to distance themselves from a Western society they consider cold, vain, flawed and purposeless. Three points are essential to determine their radicalization: 1) perceived humiliation from living in housing estates and ghettos; 2) frustration, lack of prospects for the future, perceived constant discrimination; 3) sentiment of being under attack, and correlated enhanced sense of belonging to a group and identification as a member of the *ummah*, the community of Muslims (Khosrokhavar, 2014: 26-28). The author summarizes *jihadists'* moral economy accordingly: "Radicalization overwhelmingly arises when the following pair of feeling is combined: on the one hand, humiliation and despair, and on the other, the willingness to inflict an even greater humiliation to others and the deeply-rooted conviction of being able to achieve their utopia from a "theology of mad experience" that justifies the irenic vision of a future undetermined in time on the other" (Khosrokhavar, *ibid.*: 32).

C. Impose your values and "convert the system?"

To conclude on this point, the notion of moral economy could allow for a better understanding of the context in which radicalization processes emerge. It would enable us to understand the factors motivating actions pursuing recognition and equality even though the institutional frame is perceived as neglecting or showing despal for its demands (Marlière, 2018: 43-50).

These means of action may to a certain extent be divided along four lines: 1) spiritual line (quest for equality and ideal); 2) individual line in a world that they perceive as corrupt (quest for justice and reparation); 3) social line through a substitute identity (quest for recognition of a "cultural specificity" they defend focused on orthodox Islam) and, at last; 4) political line through the adherence to "Islam" as a structured and dogmatic value system that effectively confronts inequalities and injustice. These values seem in confrontation with society's main narratives and dominant sets of values.

7. What about the concept of Habitus ?

A. Personal dispositions, structural issues and a favorable situation for the habitus of radicalized people

Another concept seems essential to us in an attempt to reflect on the processes of radicalization qualified as Islamic: the one proposed by Pierre Bourdieu which is the habitus. Habitus is difficult to mobilize insofar as its ambition is to play the role of mediator between lifestyles and organic institutional structures while giving meaning to social practices. It is therefore a question of overcoming the oppositions between subjectivism and objectivism. If for many sociologists the evolution

of the concept of habitus between its development in the 1960s by Bourdieu and its final use at the end of the 1990s makes its operability delicate, nothing prevents us from looking at this concept for all that. try to reflect on the radicalization process as such. Indeed, Pierre Bourdieu has developed the concept of habitus on several occasions, but we are going to try to give a definition of it in the simplest possible way, taken up in his book *Le Sens Pratique*: existence produce habitus, systems of durable and transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is to say as generating principles of practices and representations which can be objectively adapted to their goal without assuming the aim conscious of ends and the express mastery of the operations necessary to achieve them, objectively “regulated” and “regular” without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of “organizing action of a conductor” (Bourdieu, 1980, pp. 88-89). This definition is therefore likely to give us a more precise orientation of the habitus and in particular on the way in which we can use it for the phenomenon qualified as radicalization. In other words, are there socialization frameworks specific to a particular category of living conditions or social trajectories at the origin of lasting and transposable dispositions and therefore generating thoughts directing conscious practices towards a form of radicalization whose would Islam be the current medium? The permanent adjustment between objective probabilities and subjective expectations produces, according to Bourdieu, the structures of the habitus which is “the product of history” (Bourdieu, *ibid.*, p. 90) or of a subjective and individual history. Thus habitus “produces history, habitus produces practices, individual and collective, and therefore of history, in accordance with the patterns generated by history; it ensures the active presence of past experiences which, deposited in each organism in the form of patterns of perception, thought and action, tend, more surely than all formal rules and all explicit standards, to guarantee the conformity of practices and their constancy over time” (Bourdieu, *ibid.*, p. 90). This is why the concept of habitus in terms of the organization of the patterns of perception, thought or action of the cognitive processes leading to radicalization can be useful. Indeed, we observe that the mechanisms that lead to the violence of which Islam is the ideological support therefore correspond to specific social paths that have been internalized from childhood. Youthful journeys with interpretative schemes that are admittedly complex and sometimes contradictory due to the competition of the norms of the dominant society and those of family values, for example, but whose dialectic gradually generates a coherence according to an aim adjustable to the “Space of possibilities.” However, when possibilities are limited for certain young people from working-class backgrounds due to social determinism and are reduced even further due to an uncertain economic situation, there is a disorganization of behavior and thought. Many radicalized people thus find themselves in objective insecurity by being confronted with a difficult present and a mortgaged future. The concept of habitus taking into account social

positions to have little and in front of infrastructures that discriminate, downgrade or exclude, can give answers on human indignity.

B. Habitus to better understand the pathways of individuals in connection with decisive contexts

As Isabelle Sommier shows in an article already cited, the process of radicalization goes back a long way: “So radical engagement is obviously a process. First, because, unlike what common expressions such as “enter into radicalism,” “go into armed struggle” or a fortiori “fall into” suggest, an individual does not “fall” into terrorism. It arrives there in successive stages which can, in fact, be difficult to date, even to identify, to the point that one could speak of a “commitment by default,” consecutive to “small successive choices” of which none “appears significant in itself but which in the end, through the effects of thresholds and ratchets, make it difficult to go backwards or, in this case, to de-escalate” (Sommier, 2012, *op. cit.*, p. 23). If the author makes no mention of the concept of habitus in her article, we can clearly see through this passage here the common thread that constitutes the person’s life story combining structural context, economic opportunities, and individual values. It is not a question of giving in to the biographical illusion either, but it is clear that the notion of habitus through a reconstruction of individual historical paths taking into account the contexts and issues can provide us with elements of analysis. Indeed, the processes that lead to radicalization can be confused with the concept of habitus and can only be understood through a life story in order to trace the biographical threads of the social trajectory of the person where the notions of socialization and commitment are, so to speak, essential: “Everything takes place as if habitus manufactured coherence and necessity out of accident and contingency” (Bourdieu, 1980, *op. cit.*, p. 134). But how, through this concept, to discern the mechanisms or processes likely to lead to radicalization?

Habitus is therefore a “structuring mechanism that operates agents from within, although it is not strictly speaking neither strictly individual nor, in itself, completely determining behavior” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2014, p. 56). But the big question then that arises at this point is whether there is an essential over-determination which leads young people to engage in terrorist activities? If the divisions of social work, of classes and of sexes direct an overdetermination in terms of bodily mobilization, in terms of class values or else according to the gendered separation of roles, it is much more difficult to be able to define within the habitus concept of the mechanisms that lead to Islamic radicalization. Now Bourdieu shows us that the habitus can manifest itself in certain circumstances or certain precise conjunctures: “the habitus is revealed only—we must keep in mind that it is a question of a system of dispositions, that is, —to say of potentialities, of potentialities—in relation to a determined situation. It must be conceived of as a kind of spring that is waiting to be triggered, and, depending on the stimuli and

the structure of the field, the same habitus can generate different, even opposing practices” (Bourdieu, Wacquant, *op. cit.*, pp. 184-185). Without making any bad puns, the verb trigger turns out to be the catalyst for possible action for people whose journeys may lead at one time or another to violence. But, as Bourdieu asserts, the same habit depending on changing situations can react differently or even lead to opposite actions. It is therefore difficult at this stage to specify whether there are specific habitus leading to radicalization as the patterns incorporated according to conjunctures or circumstances may react in distinct ways in a similar context.

Depending on the surveys carried out here and there on the question of Islamic radicalization, it is very difficult to define whether there are overdeterminations favoring the passage to violence insofar as the trajectories are not only multiple between the working classes and the middle classes, between the sexes but also between the ethno-cultural origins: only the youth constitutes an explanatory variable at the level of the “passage to the act” for the moment. It is therefore difficult, at the present time, to establish specificities in terms of habitus in terms of patterns of incorporation or disposition that lead to jihadism. But nothing prevents, as sociologist Marc Joly emphasizes, from developing “investigative and conceptualization procedures allowing for the contingency of situations, experiences and necessary concatenations that need to be implemented. “Habitus cleavages” and “cleavage habitus” appear to be inherent in differentiated and unequal human societies. They are even, probably, the most widespread psychic manifestations of domination relations” (Joly, 2018, p. 176). All that remains is to understand how our societies have become what they are and above all, for what interests us here, how certain radicalized individuals have come to commit attacks and mobilize at the risk of their existence and that of others, to fight a society they hate and consider corrupt while other young people think the opposite when they sometimes have similar backgrounds.

The concept of habitus is not only intended to promote the reading of actions, thoughts and communications between individuals since it also sets itself the function of reorienting “the scale of the bio-psycho-sociological thought regime of humanity” (Joly, *op. cit.*, p. 169). Hence the great ambition of the concept to take into account both group values but also the choices of the person as an individual within a given institutional and cyclical framework. This is why empirical studies based on the concept of habitus could guide us on the aptitudes to identify the processes, paths and trajectories likely to lead to violent political actions. They could also inform us about social contexts, economic conditions but also the structural configurations in place. This would require micro-social and detailed surveys around a few people with similar social backgrounds in order to understand the similarities but also the divergences that lead to radicalization processes among certain young people.

Conclusion

The phenomena of Islamic terrorism, *jihadism*, and radicalization question the very foundations of our modern, democratic societies. However, despite this essential critical aspect, the social processes that lead young Westerners to radicalization remain to be investigated. In order to take effective action against *jihadism* and the processes of radicalization, this article recommends endorsing a multi-disciplinary approach to overcome methodological debates between academics and scholars. Multiplying statistical surveys and empirical research could provide researchers with a detailed summary of the main trends in modern *jihadism*. This ideology has produced a complete sub-system, with its paths, sensibilities, rules, sense of belonging, social representation (Dassetto, *op. cit.*).

The concepts applied so far to urban riots and separatism cannot explain the phenomenon of Islamic radicalization in its generality. However, it could facilitate the production of classifications and typologies for specific individuals depending on their personal life paths. Gaining an empirical knowledge of personal contexts in which *jihadists* evolved would definitely facilitate an in-depth analysis of the reasons for individuals to adhere to such extreme ideologies. For example, the experience of (perceived) exclusion and subsequent frustration and anger, combined to feelings of “denied personality,” may be at the roots of cognitive sensibilities to radical stances. The brutal encounter between felt injustices, urban segregation, and discriminations, with society’s constant promotion of notions of consumption and competition between individuals have fed misunderstandings and dissent, the bedrock of long-term political violence. Finally, the concept of habitus could show us how the internal divisions imposed by structures, cyclical issues and socialization processes are likely to lead individuals to want to destroy institutions through a deadly ideology.

In other words, Merton’s “middle range” concepts may help us to grasp how events occurring in young people’s early years may turn them into *jihadists*. At this stage, we could be able to elaborate typologies of important psychological breaks that would open the way for an effective identification of the core components of radicalisation. This underlines the essential role of social sciences, thanks to its distinctive nuance, distance and reflexion, to combat *jihadism* and other radical ideologies questioning the founding precepts of our progressive and liberal societies.

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