CrossMark

Radicalization and Violent Emotions

Jacquelien van Stekelenburg, *VU-University-Amsterdam*

Politics—and especially radical politics—are full of emotions. Emotions give ideas, ideologies, identities, and even interests power to motivate (Jasper 1997). Emotions are socially constructed. The experience of emotions is influenced by norms, values, and culture. Goodwin and Pfaff (2001) argue that "some emotions are more socially constructed than others, involving more cognitive processes." In their view, emotions that are politically relevant are—more than other emotions—at the social construction end of the scale. For these emotions, cultural and historical factors play an important role in the interpretation of the state of affairs by which they are generated. People might be puzzled by some aspects of reality and try to understand the world around them. They may seek out others with similar experiences and a social movement—nowadays, possibly on the internet—may provide an environment to exchange experiences, to tell their stories, and to express their feelings.

This article focuses on the process of radicalization in the context of social movements and the role of violent emotions in that radicalization. In doing so, it combines two theoretical models. One focuses on different psychological stages of violent tactics (Moghaddam 2005) while the other focuses on "emotion transformation" of violent emotions and the role of leaders in this process (Matsumoto, Frank, and Hwang 2015). Social movements are carriers of meaning and organizers and leaders do their utmost to create moral outrage and to provide a target against which this can be vented. They must weave together a moral, cognitive, and emotional package of attitudes. Organizers appeal to "attack emotions" such as anger to create "fire in the belly and iron in the soul" (Gamson 1992). However, just being angry is not enough, as Martin Luther King (1968) aptly stated: "It is not enough for people to be angry—the supreme task is to organize and unite people so that their anger becomes a transforming force." This is what organizers do—use their power, resources, and creativity to turn individual grievances and emotions into collective claims and to stage opportunities to act upon these claims (Van Stekelenburg 2014). They use discourse and identity as resources to emotionally prime members for social movement recruitment. This "emotion work" has always been key to the organization of protest (Schrock, Holden, and Reid 2004), especially in the context of dangerous or risky protest. Fear, for example, may inhibit collective action, and so organizers attempt to frame situations such that fear will be suppressed or at least mitigated (Goodwin and Pfaff 2001).

In the pages to come I will first theorize about appraisal theory of emotions. In that context, I will outline appraisals deemed to be important in the context of radical protest and the related emotions. Next, I discuss the different phases of radicalization and their related emotional transformations. The article closes with a section in which I combine Moghaddam's stages model with Matsumoto's emotional transformation theory and argue that leaders appeal to different emotions at different stages in their "emotion work."

VIOLENT EMOTIONS

People are continuously evaluating or appraising the relevance of their environment for their well-being; these appraisals help account for different emotions (Arnold 1960). Lazarus (1966) proposed the distinction between *primary* appraisal, the assessment of an event's implications for one's well-being and *secondary* appraisal, the assessment of one's ability to cope with the situation. After a fast and automatic evaluation of these first appraisal dimensions, other dimensions are evaluated: How does the event influence my goals? Who or what caused the event? Do I have control and power over the consequences of the event? Are the consequences of the event compatible with my personal values and societal norms? It is thus the *personal meaning* we give to ambiguous stimuli through *appraisals* that determines emotions we feel. This implies that it is a person's perspective at the situation, not the situation per se, that results in an emotional response. This emotional response leads to emotion expression and an action tendency (Clore and Ortony 2000; Smith and Lazarus 1990).

Emotions thus propel behavior, but perhaps even more importantly, different emotions propel different behavior. This is the basic tenet of appraisal theory of emotions (Lazarus 1991). A second central tenet is that people can evaluate—or appraise—the same event differently and consequently have different emotional responses. Appraisal theory was developed to explain personal emotions experienced by individuals. Yet, "the self" implicated in emotion-relevant appraisals is clearly not only a personal or individual self. If group membership becomes part of the self, events that harm or favor an in-group by definition harm or favor the self, and the self might thus experience affect and emotions on behalf of the in-group. As people categorize themselves as group members, individual emotions turn into group-based emotions; "I feel for us." Woven into the group's overarching narratives of life, these emotions provide guidelines and bases for making attributions about "us" and "them." Since collective action is by definition a group phenomenon, group-based emotions are an important aspect of protest behavior (Van Troost, Van Stekelenburg, and Klandermans 2013).

Emotions function as *accelerators* or *amplifiers* (Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans 2007; 2010). In polarizing and radicalizing public debates, *accelerating* implies that, due to emotions, radical ideas and beliefs are more likely to translate into radical action, while *amplifying* means that these

© American Political Science Association, 2017
doi:10.1017/S1049096517001020
https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096517001020 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ideas and beliefs are strengthened. Obviously, radicalization is seldom the result of cold, cognitive reactions of the sort described in rational choice models, but are rather shaped and influenced by a sense of indignation or "hot cognitions" of injustice (Gamson 1992).

Halperin, and de Rivera 2007). Shared hate delegitimizes the out-group and facilitates a clear distinction between the out-group and in-group. If feelings of superiority are threatened, fear can undergo a terrible transformation into hatred and violence (Sternberg and Sternberg 2008). They

It is thus the personal meaning *we give to ambiguous stimuli through* appraisals *that determines emotions we feel.*

Radicalization requires attainment of a kind of emotional consensus in which members of a group come to share positive and negative feelings about certain actors and issues, potentially strengthened by emotional contagion (Van Stekelenburg, Oegema, and Klandermans 2010). Contagion takes place if people "catch" each other's emotions (Hatfield, Cacioppo, and Rapson 1994). If people express their indignation and anger about intergroup incidents—on social media for instance—others may read it and "catch" the emotion. The more so, if they strongly identify with the group.

An intergroup conflict may create circumstances in which in-group love is directly associated with hate and hostility toward the threatening out-group (Brewer 1999). These intimidating intergroup contexts are dominated by beliefs that foster insecurity and threat as well as feelings of humiliation (Longo, Canetti, and Hite-Rubin 2014), fear, anger, and hatred (Bar-Tal, Halperin, and de Rivera 2007). Obviously, feelings of humiliation are completely different emotional experiences from feelings of fear, anger or hate. Humiliation, for instance, is generally thought to occur in situations of asymmetric power relations where the humiliator has control over the victim. It is a major driver of political violence and radicalization, particularly a driver of support for extreme ideologies and actions. Fear, on the other hand, is a primary aversive emotion that arises in situations of perceived threat and danger (Bar-Tal, Halperin, and de Rivera 2007). Shared fear may cut deeply into the psychic fabric of society and become linked with a social ethos of conflict. It causes great mistrust and delegitimizes opponents and is a major platform for violence. People are angry, on the other hand, when they experience an unfair or illegitimate situation for which they can blame someone else. Those who are blamed could have done otherwise and, the angry parties believe, are able to do something about it now (Roseman, Antoniou, and Jose 1996). Anger is assigned an important role in driving action against those responsible, which makes shared anger the emotion of fight or attack (van Zomeren et al. 2004). Anger is observed in normative actions where efficacious and thus hopeful people protest (Sturmer and Simon 2009). In non-normative violent actions, however, anger combined with contempt appears to be the more relevant emotion (Fischer and Roseman 2007; Tausch et al. 2008). Hatred, finally, is a direct reaction to protracted harm perceived as deliberate, unjust, and stemming from an inner evil character of the hated individual or group (Bar-Tal,

propose that hatred is based on a negation of intimacy originating from disgust (Ben-Nun Bloom 2014), passion resulting from anger and fear, and decision-commitment deriving from the devaluation and diminution of the "others" based on contempt.

Matsumoto and colleagues (2015) suggest that anger, contempt, and disgust work together in combination to motivate action, devaluation of the other group, and then elimination of their members. The hostility triad—contempt, anger, and disgust—form the emotional foundation for moral judgments (Rozin et al. 1999). Contempt is paired with moral violations involving disrespect and violations of duty or hierarchy (the ethics of community); anger with violations of rights and fairness (ethics of autonomy), and disgust with violations of physical purity, such as food and sex taboos (ethics of divinity). Rozin et al. propose a gunpowder metaphor for understanding the triad of anger, contempt, and disgust, where gunpowder's components charcoal, sulfur, and potassium nitrate by themselves have their own caustic properties—like anger, contempt, and disgust do—but are not explosive. However, when compressed together, they become a dangerous, explosive mix.

Note that violent emotions often comprise of "dangerous explosive mixes." People can experience multiple emotions at the same time (Benski 2010; Flam and King 2007). In fact, people hardly ever experience a single emotion; instead they display a mixture of emotions.

RADICALIZATION

Following social psychologists such as Fathali Moghaddam (2005) and Doosje et al. (2016), I consider radicalization to be a *process*. Both scholars depict the process of radicalization as a staircase. Thought and action on each floor are characterized by particular psychological processes. People are located on different floors of the building, but everyone begins on the ground floor. The ground floor starts with subjective interpretations of material conditions, perceptions of fairness, and trust in politics. Individuals try to move up to the first floor, in search of ways to improve their life conditions. These individuals attempt to improve their own situation and that of their group. On this floor, they are particularly influenced by options for individual mobility and voice. When people feel their voice is listened to, they "buy into" the system. However, when they feel they are voiceless, they become more dissatisfied and detached. They may then climb up to the second floor where they come under the influence of persuasive

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096517001020 Published online by Cambridge University Press

messages telling them that external enemies cause their problems. From this stage on, social movement organizers become important in the process of radicalization. Some individuals keep climbing up to reach the third floor, where they adopt a morality supportive of radicalization. Gradually, those who have reached the third floor become separated from the mainstream norms and values of their society, which generally condemn radical activism. Those individuals who continue to climb up to the fourth floor adopt a more rigid style of categorical "us versus them," "good against evil" thinking; it is seen as legitimate to attack "the forces of evil" in each and every way feasible. They take on a view supportive of an "ends justify the means" approach. The group's isolation is an important factor in explaining its deviation from the "normal" perception of reality and strengthens this tendency toward violence (della Porta 1995). Eventually, some of these individuals move up to the fifth floor and take part in and directly support violent actions. The higher people move up the staircase to radicalization, the lower the degrees of freedom. After people have become part of a radical political group the only options left open to them are to kill, be killed, or be captured.

The strength of Moghaddam's stages model is that it elaborates the different psychological processes at play at the different stages. However, it ignores the role of emotions in propelling violent actions and the role of organizers' emotion work at play in the different stages.

EMOTIONAL TRANSFORMATION

The emotion transformation theory suggests that emotions and extremism transform over time and thus that every stage in the social-psychologial process to radicalization (i.e., Moghaddam's staircase) is accompanied by different emotions (Matsumoto, Frank, and Hwang 2015). They propose that emotions *transform* over time, often via stories, to inculcate cultures with hatred and violence. Specifically, this emotional transformation follows three phases (based on Matsumoto, Hwang, and Frank 2012):

Phase 1: Outrage Based on Anger

This phase involves the group identifying events that obstruct goals or stem from perceived injustice. It also may involve the group identifying threats to its well-being, physical safety, or way of life. These interpretations and attributions lead to or are fueled by feelings of anger toward the out-group.

Phase 2: Moral Superiority Based on Contempt

Groups begin to reinterpret anger-eliciting situations and events identified in Phase 1 and take the high road. That is, they reappraise the events from a position of moral superiority and identify links between similar behaviors or events, no matter how tenuous, thus making the attribution that the out-group is morally inferior. These reappraisals and attributions lead to or are fueled by the emotion of contempt.

Shared hate delegitimizes the out-group and facilitates a clear distinction between the out-group and in-group.

Phase 3: Elimination Based on Disgust

A further reappraisal of events and situations leads to the conclusion that distance—the mild form of elimination—is necessary between the in-group and out-group, or that the out-group needs to be removed altogether—the extreme form of elimination. These ideas are promulgated by the emotion of disgust.

The three phases of emotion transformation proposed by Matsumoto and colleagues illuminate that groups can hate, but that not all hatred leads to violence or hostility. Hatred based primarily on anger or contempt likely will *not* be associated with violence or hostility, but hatred that involves disgust—the emotion of repulsion and elimination—likely will. Additionally, I made a plea for humiliation as a pathway to violence, humiliation may contribute to, or intensify, aggressive responses to the humiliator. Hence, groups can be angry or contemptuous but, when also disgusted or humiliated, they may become dangerous.

Emotion Work, Radicalization and Emotion Transformation

The three emotional transformation phases neatly align with the social-psychological stages as described in Moghaddam's staircase to radicalization. People located at the first three floors of Moghaddam's staircase (i.e., ground floor: psychological interpretation of material conditions, first floor: perceived options to fight unfair treatment, and second floor: displacement of aggression) align to Matsomoto's first phase. At this stage we will observe outrage based on anger. On the third floor—"Moral Engagement"—anger is expected to be accompanied by feelings of moral superiority based on contempt. At the fourth and the fifth

They propose that emotions transform *over time, often via stories, to inculcate cultures with hatred and violence (ibid.).*

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096517001020 Published online by Cambridge University Press

floors—categorical us-vs-them thinking and violent acts, respectively—people are expected to experience feelings of elimination based on disgust. Moreover, and important in the context of my "emotional work by organizers" argument, Matsumoto and colleagues show, by analyzing leaders' speeches in different stages, how organizers mobilize different violent emotions at different stages. Through the careful use of language and nonverbal behaviors, leaders motivate, escalate, or defuse situations and incite action through emotion transformation (Matsumoto, Frank, and Hwang 2015). Hence, combining Moghaddam's staircase to radicalization with Masomoto's emotion transformation theory provides an analytical tool for understanding the thorny process of radicalization. ■

REFERENCES

Arnold, Magda B. 1960. *Emotion and Personality*. New York: Colombia University Press.

Bar-Tal, Daniel, Eran Halperin, and Joseph de Rivera. 2007. "Collective Emotions in Conflict Situations: Societal Implication." *Journal of Social Issues* 63 (2): 441–60.

Ben-Nun Bloom, Pazit. 2014. "Disgust, Harm, and Morality in Politics." *Political Psychology* 35 (4): 495–513.

Benski, Tova. 2010. "Emotion Maps of Participation in Protest: The Case of Women in Black Against the Occupation in Israel." In *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*, ed Dr Patrick G. Coy, 3–34. Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Brewer, Marilynn B. 1999. "The Psychology of Prejudice: Ingroup Love and Outgroup Hate? *Journal of Social Issues* 55 (3): 429–44.

Clore, Gerald L., and Andrew Ortony. 2000. "Cognition in Emotion: Always, Sometimes, or Never." *Cognitive Neuroscience of Emotion*.

della Porta, Donatella. 1995. *Social Movements, Political Violence and the State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Doosje, Bertjan, Fathali M Moghaddam, Arie W Kruglanski, Arjan de Wolf, Liesbeth Mann, and Allard R Feddes. 2016. "Terrorism, Radicalization and De-radicalization." *Current Opinion in Psychology* 11: 79–84.

Fischer, Agneta, and Ira Roseman. 2007. "Beat Them or Ban Them: The Characteristics and Social Functions of Anger and Contempt." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 93: 103–15.

Flam, Helena, and Debra King. 2007. *Emotions and Social Movements*. London: Routledge.

Gamson, William A. 1992. *Talking Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Goodwin, Jeff, and Steven Pfaff. 2001. "Emotion Work in High-Risk Social Movements: Managing Fear in the US and East German Civil Rights Movements." In *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements*, ed. Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, and Francesca Polletta, 282–302. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hatfield, Eliane, John. T. Cacioppo, and Richard L. Rapson. 1994. *Emotional Contagion: Studies in Emotion and Social Interaction*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Jasper, James M. 1997. *The Art of Moral Protest. Culture, Biography, and Creativity in Social Movements*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

King Jr, Martin L. 1968. "The Role of the Behavioral Scientist in the Civil Rights Movement." *American Psychologist* 23 (3): 180.

Lazarus, Richard S. 1966. *Psychological Stress and the Coping Process*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

———. 1991. "Cognition and Motivation in Emotion." *American Psychologist* 46 (4): 352–67.

Longo, Matthew, Daphna Canetti, and Nancy Hite-Rubin. 2014. "A Checkpoint Effect? Evidence from a Natural Experiment on Travel Restrictions in The West Bank." *American Journal of Political Science* 58 (4): 1006–23.

Matsumoto, David, Mark G. Frank, and Hyisung C. Hwang. 2015. "The Role of Intergroup Emotions in Political Violence." *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 24 (5): 369–73.

Matsumoto, David, Hyi Sung Hwang, and Mark G Frank. 2012. "The Role of Emotion in Predicting Violence." *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin* 81: 1–11.

Moghaddam, F. M. 2005. "The Staircase to Terrorism: A Psychological Explanation." *American Psychologist* 60: 161–69.

Roseman, Ira J., Ann Aliki Antoniou, and Paul E. Jose. 1996. "Appraisal Determinants of Emotions: Constructing a More Accurate and Comprehensive Theory." *Cognition and Emotion* 10 (3): 241–78.

Rozin, Paul, Laura Lowery, Sumio Imada, and Jonathan Haidt. 1999. "The CAD Triad Hypothesis: A Mapping between Three Moral Emotions (Contempt, Anger, Disgust) and Three Moral Codes (Community, Autonomy, Divinity)." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 76 (4): 574–86.

Schrock, Douglas, Daphne Holden, and Lori Reid. 2004. "Creating Emotional Resonance: Interpersonal Emotion Work and Motivational Framing in a Transgender Community." *Social Problems* 51 (1): 61–81.

Smith, Craig A., and Richard S. Lazarus. 1990. "Emotion and Adaptation." Handbook of Personality: Theory and Research.

Stürmer, Stefan, and Bernd Simon. 2009. "Pathways to Collective Protest: Calculation, Identification, or Emotion? A Critical Analysis of the Role of Group-Based Anger in Social Movement Participation." *Journal of Social Issues* 65 (4): 681–705.

Sternberg, Robert J., and Karin. 2008. *The Nature of Hate*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Tausch, Nicole, Julia C. Becker, Russell Spears, Oliver Christ, Rim Saab, Purnima Singgh, and Roomana N. Niddiqui. 2008. "Emotion and Efficacy Pathways to Normative and Non-Normative Collective Action: A Study in the Context of Student Protests in Germany." In *Intra- and Intergroup processes' pre-conference to the 15th General Meeting of the EAESP (Invited paper)*. Opatija, Croatia.

Van Stekelenburg, Jacquelien. 2014. "Going All the Way: Politicizing, Polarizing, and Radicalizing Identity Offline and Online." *Sociology Compass* 8 (5): 540–55.

Van Stekelenburg, Jacquelien, and Bert Klandermans. 2007. "Individuals in Movements: A Social Psychology of Contention." In *The Handbook of Social Movements Across Disciplines*, ed. Bert Klandermans and Conny Roggeband, 157–204. New York: Springer.

———. 2010. "Radicalization." In *Identity and Participation in Culturally Diverse Societies: A Multidisciplinary Perspective*, ed. Assaad Azzi, Xenia Chryssochoou, Bert Klandermans, and Bernd Simon. Oxford: Blackwell Wiley.

Van Stekelenburg, Jacquelien, Dirk Oegema, and Bert Klandermans. 2010. "No Radicalization without Identification: How Ethnic Dutch and Dutch Muslim Web Forums Radicalize Over Time." In *Identity and Participation in Culturally Diverse Societies: A Multidisciplinary Perspective*, ed. Assaad Azzi, Xenia Chryssochoou, Bert Klandermans, and Bernd Simon. Oxford: Blackwell Wiley.

Van Troost, Dunya, Jacquelien Van Stekelenburg, and Bert Klandermans. 2013. "Emotions of Protest." In *Emotions in Politics: The Affect Dimension in Political Tension*, ed. Nicolas Demertzis, 186–203. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan Publishers.

van Zomeren, Martijn, Russell Spears, Agneta H. Fischer, and Colin Wayne Leach. 2004. "Put Your Money Where Your Mouth Is! Explaining Collective Action Tendencies Through Group-Based Anger and Group Efficacy." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 87 (5): 649–64.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096517001020 Published online by Cambridge University Press