
Processual Models of Radicalization into Terrorism: A Best Fit Framework Synthesis

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Abstract

The pre-emptive turn in the criminal justice system, and more in particular in the counterterrorism context, has brought legislators to intervene as early as possible and to target remote risks. However, when drafting far-reaching legislation, hardly any attention is given to the underlying phenomena. This article therefore aims to review existing processual models of radicalization that provide insight into the sequence of the trajectory towards terrorism. These models are often isolated and comparative reviews have been scarce and partial in scope. Through a best fit framework synthesis, this contribution systematically identifies existing models and frameworks in the literature and analyses them thematically. As a result, a meta-framework, represented by an eight-phased horizontal funnel, embodies the current state of research on phase models of radicalization. The eight phases cover the entire process from pre-radicalization, to five radicalization phases *sensu stricto*, to implementation and post-implementation. In these phases, multiple concepts that relate to grievances, cognitions, groups and violence are identified. The meta-framework, or integrated funnel model, evidences the pre-crime hypothesis and shows that far-reaching criminal law provisions intervene at too early stages of the radicalization process.

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Introduction: Pre-emption within the Criminal Justice System & the Link with the Underlying Phenomena

In the twenty-first century, the criminal justice system is characterized by a growing evolution towards preventive and pre-emptive, rather than reactive and repressive, intervention (Weyembergh & Kennes, 2012). Although this pre-emptive turn is not a recent development

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(McCulloch & Carlton, 2006; van der Woude, 2010a),² the threat of terrorism has profoundly intensified the progression towards a risk society (Murphy, 2012; van der Woude, 2010b). Distinctive characteristics of this trend are the shift from a post-crime to a pre-crime society (Zedner, 2007a), from a paradigm of prosecution to a paradigm of prevention (Lomell, 2012), from due process to effective crime control and security (Fitzgibbon, 2007), from punishing the actual infliction of harm to targeting those merely suspected of being harmful (Ericson, 2008), and from putting emphasis on *what* is done to *why* an act is done (McSherry, 2004). These underlying premises are externalized in current criminal policy, and more in particular in counterterrorism measures, by extending criminal liability, lowering the threshold of investigation and expanding powers to the preceding stages of the *iter criminis* (i.e. literally ‘the route to crime’) (van der Woude, 2010b). The *iter criminis*, a central concept within criminal law, traditionally makes a distinction between the mere intention to commit a crime, preparatory acts, the start of execution (triggering the theory of attempt) and the completed crime (Stubbs & Galli, 2012). These days, the aim of attention is no longer on the punishment of the committed crime. Bearing in mind the devastating consequences of a terrorist attack, emphasis is, instead, put on averting the crime and thus intervening at an earlier point in time (Stubbs & Galli, 2012).

Scholars trained in criminal law and criminological sciences have written extensively on this pre-crime evolution and related notions such as the risk society,³ the culture of control,⁴ the precautionary principle,⁵ actuarialism,⁶ pre-emption,⁷ enemy criminal law,⁸ etc.

² The premise that only the actual infliction of harm is punished, is long gone. Offences of endangerment, inchoate offences, etc. are already incorporated in our criminal justice system.

³ A term introduced in the eighties by sociologist Ulrich Beck (1992) and often cited in literature.

⁴ Based on the well-known theory of David Garland (2001).

⁵ The Precautionary Principle is well-known in the context of health and environmental risks, but is increasingly used in criminal law theory as a rationalization of pre-crime. In short, the principle implies that uncertainty does not justify inaction. See for more information: Lomell (2012); McCulloch and Wilson (2015); Stern and Wiener (2006); van der Woude (2010a); Zedner (2007b).

⁶ According to Zedner (2007a), actuarial justice is one of the factors that appears to drive the current evolutions. She defines it as “the means by which high-risk populations are identified, classified and contained”.

⁷ Pre-emption is the term to indicate intervention at an even earlier stage than prevention. Whereas prevention targets proximate harms, pre-emption justifies acts long before the threat materializes (Lomell, 2012; McCulloch & Wilson, 2015; Zedner, 2007b).

⁸ Developed by Günther Jakobs (1985).

Multiple concerns have been expressed, especially from the perspective that these tendencies endanger the traditional Enlightenment principles of criminal law. However, research on the link between this pre-emptive turn in the context of counterterrorism and the underlying phenomena is scarce. The question arises to what extent the urge to intervene as early as possible is supported by theoretical or empirical evidence.

This paper therefore examines the state of research on processual models of radicalization, such as phase models. Phase models of radicalization are numerous represented among the efforts to map the pathways to terrorism (Bartlett, Birdwell, & King, 2010). These models often indicate the most important causes of radicalization, but mainly focus on the chronological sequence of the phases radicalizing individuals go through (Veldhuis & Staun, 2009). By contrast, other models and theories do not evolve around the consecutiveness of the process, but rather focus on the root causes of radicalization.⁹ Notwithstanding the interesting results and the added value for both terrorism research and counterterrorism policy, the identification and study of permissive factors or root causes is not the most useful research angle for the purposes of this article. Instead of focusing on the question *why* radicalization might occur (i.e. causes), this contribution concentrates on *how* radicalization occurs (i.e. courses).¹⁰ These courses will prove useful to map the phenomenological evolution in the preceding phases of terrorism and, as such, will help to determine whether criminal policy is adjusted to the realities of these phenomena and even act as an evaluative framework.

Although multiple processual models have been identified in the literature, research is highly fragmented (King & Taylor, 2011; Pauwels et al., 2014). The variations of processual models are often isolated and make no reference to each other, or existing (systematic) literature reviews on the process of radicalization¹¹ are limited or partial in scope. In most

⁹ See for example the Root Cause Model of Veldhuis & Staun (2009).

¹⁰ The differences in approach are indicated by several authors, including Bartlett et al. (2010); Demetriou and Alimi (2018); Hardy (2018); Helfstein (2012); Klausen, Campion, Needle, Nguyen, and Libretti (2016); Lakhani (2013); Veldhuis and Staun (2009).

¹¹ See for an overview: Borum (2011b); Christmann (2012); Rahimullah, Larmar, and Abdalla (2013); Young, Zwenk, and Rooze (2013).

cases, the number of models under review is limited and/or the level of comparison is relatively low. The analysis of King and Taylor (2011) can be seen as an exception in this regard. Moreover, the multitude of models is causing discrepancies and disagreement (Bartlett et al., 2010), rather than answering fundamental questions. Overarching theoretical frameworks are still lacking in the field of radicalization research (Pauwels et al., 2014). Given this gap, this article provides a review of existing knowledge on processual models of radicalization through a best fit framework synthesis (*infra*). The added value of synthesis, and thus combining research results from multiple studies into a meta-framework, lies in the more generalized and robust conclusions that can be drawn in comparison to the findings of a single study (Booth & Carroll, 2015). Not only academics, but especially practitioners and policy-makers benefit from such approach.¹²

The article is structured as follows. First, a short critical exploration of the different types of modelling in the field of radicalization sheds light on processual models, and more in particular phase models. Next, the best fit framework synthesis and its consecutive steps are clarified and illustrated in the methodology section. Thereafter, the results are presented through nine thematic sections. As a result of this thematic synthesis, a meta-framework – represented by a horizontal eight-phased funnel – is created and tested. The article ends with a critical discussion, making the link between the phenomenological realities and criminal policy while at the same time paying attention to the limits of processual models of radicalization.

Modelling the Radicalization Process: Processual Basis?

The literature has provided an abundant amount of theories and models that offer an explanation to the processes that lead to terrorist involvement. Jerard (2015) has divided these various models into four phases in time: from “the enquiry” before 2000, to “the struggle to

¹² It is established in the literature that the way governments view the phenomenon of radicalization has an impact on the design and success of its counterterrorism efforts. See Hardy (2018).

understand” between 2001 and 2005, to “the proliferation of models and conceptual frameworks” in the second half of the decennium, to “the quest” after 2010. The majority of these theories or models range from simple, linear stage models to more complicated processual pathway approaches. Given the fact that experts differ greatly in opinion on the meaning of radicalization but agree solely upon its processual basis (Hardy, 2018; Nasser-Eddine, Garnham, Agostino, & Caluya, 2011), these process-based approaches are an established method to understand terrorist involvement (Holbrook & Taylor, 2017). However, anno 2018, scholars increasingly move away from this processual representation (Hardy, 2018). Hafez and Mullins (2015), for example, posit that the narrative of a process should be replaced by a puzzle metaphor. They argue that uniform and linear processes fail to address the multifactorial and contextual reality. Other scholars have also voiced criticism towards radicalization trajectories and phase models. Borum (2010), de Bie (2016), Jensen, Seaten, and James (2018), Veldhuis and Staun (2009), for example, have exposed the controversial nature of these models by pointing out their lack of a social-scientific and empirical basis and their methodological shortcomings. At the same time, however, it is acknowledged that these efforts “may be useful for organizing the concepts, mechanisms, and processes involved in violent extremism” (Borum, 2011b).

Whereas most of the aforementioned scholars view a process rigidly as “an orderly sequence of steps or procedures that produce an output” (Hafez & Mullins, 2015), other academics, like Taylor and Horgan (2006), refer to a process as “a sequence of events, involving steps or operations that are usually ordered and/or interdependent” but emphasize that it “does not necessarily imply a simple deterministic account”. Lakhani (2013) also opposes the term ‘process’ as a “predefined set of procedures that occur in a sequential order to one another”, but rather sees it as “a number of different factors, strains and influences that are common to a large number of individuals who become radicalized” “at their own pace and often in parallel with one another”. Christmann (2012) clarifies that stages are not necessarily sequential and that they might overlap or that a person might skip stages or abandon the

process altogether.¹³ Although many scholars agree that there are recognizable stages in the process (Hardy, 2018), there is disagreement on the proposed transitions between the stages.¹⁴ Also, the number and type of stages or steps involved differs across the models (Hardy, 2018). The determination of the “end-point” of the process is heavily influenced by the consideration whether a cognitive or a behavioral approach is favored (Hardy, 2018). More often than not, both approaches are intertwined, although many scholars have argued that there is a weak relation between attitudes and behavior (McCauley & Moskalkenko, 2017; Schuurman & Eijkman, 2015).¹⁵

Although the focus in this paper is on the ‘*how*’-question and thus processual (phase) models, the many critiques on dogmatic sequential modelling have also led to the inclusion of other “path dependent but not determinist” (Demetriou & Alimi, 2018) explanatory models. A further delineation will be made in the next section on the methodological approach.

Methodology: the Best Fit Framework Synthesis

The Method of Synthesis

In search of the creation of an integrative conceptual framework of processual models of radicalization, the “best fit framework synthesis” (BFFS) is chosen as the most suitable method of (qualitative) evidence synthesis. In short, this method entails (1) the identification of one or multiple pre-existing frameworks; (2) the thematic reduction of these theories to create an *a priori* framework; (3) the supplementing of the *a priori* framework with new themes by extracting and coding data from included studies; and (4) the transition from the resultant framework to the final conceptual model. The method as described in this paper originates from the framework synthesis approach and is based on the work of, amongst

¹³ It is, however, debated whether stages that are not necessarily linear or sequential are in fact still stages (Nasser-Eddine et al., 2011).

¹⁴ See for example Lygre, Eid, Larsson, and Ranstorp (2011).

¹⁵ McCauley and Moskalkenko (2017) are the primary example of scholars that provide for a distinction between attitudes and behavior by introducing a two-pyramid model.

others, Christopher Carroll and Andrew Booth (Booth & Carroll, 2015; Carroll, Booth, & Cooper, 2011; Carroll, Booth, Leaviss, & Rick, 2013). Although these studies are all applied in the health sector, the same method could prove valuable in the field of criminology and social sciences. For the purpose of this research, small adjustments were made to the original research method. These alterations are consistently reported.

Next to the BFFS, which was introduced fairly recent (2011), also other methods such as the critical interpretive synthesis, the realist synthesis, the thematic synthesis and meta-ethnography could provide possibilities for creating (and/or testing) theory, a conceptual model or framework (Frantzen & Fetters, 2015; Hannes, 2016). However, BFFS differs from these methods in several ways. First, it employs a systematic approach to search and select studies. Hence, complete transparency of all research stages is guaranteed. Secondly, it is unique in combining both framework and thematic analysis techniques and is, as a consequence, both of a respectively deductive and inductive nature. Relating to this, the method starts from one or multiple pre-existing frameworks and, as such, distinguishes itself from methods that generate entirely new theory (e.g. meta-ethnography or critical interpretive synthesis) (Carroll et al., 2013).

The Seven Steps of BFFS

Carroll and Booth have identified seven steps in the research and the reporting of the BFFS methodology.¹⁶ The worked example of these seven steps can be found below and is summarized in Figure 1.

¹⁶ These steps were already evident in their first introduction of the methodology in 2011 and were further refined in 2013 and 2015.

Figure 1 - Overview BFFS process (based upon the worked example of Carroll et al. (2013))

Step 1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent is radicalization seen as a chronological or sequential process? To what extent has existing research succeeded in mapping the chronological sequence of the radicalization process? To what extent are the existing models and frameworks consistent? What are the similarities or dissimilarities across the existing models? To what extent can these models be integrated as an evaluative framework of counterterrorism policy? 	
Step 2	Five major pre-existing models identified on the basis of the major review of King & Taylor (2011).	Systematically identified 23 relevant research studies.
Step 3	An <i>a priori</i> framework with 7 themes was generated from the five identified studies using thematic analysis.	Data on study characteristics were extracted from the 23 relevant research studies. The quality of the studies was not appraised.
Step 4	Findings from the relevant research studies were coded against the <i>a priori</i> framework. The themes in the framework were supported by evidence from the included studies.	
Step 5	One new theme and 14 concepts were created through thematic analysis that could not be coded against the <i>a priori</i> framework.	
Step 6	A new meta-framework was produced composing of both the <i>a priori</i> and the new themes. The meta-framework is represented by an eight-phased funnel model.	
Step 7	The synthesis is tested by exploring the differences between the <i>a priori</i> framework and the resulting model.	

Step 1. The research question. In order to ascertain to what extent criminal law intervention is based on the knowledge of the underlying phenomenon, and more in particular the trajectory towards terrorism, the research questions are threefold and build on one another:

- To what extent is radicalization seen as a chronological or sequential process?
- To what extent has existing research succeeded in mapping the chronological sequence of the radicalization process?
- To what extent are the existing models and frameworks consistent? What are the similarities or dissimilarities across the existing models? To what extent can these models be integrated as an evaluative framework of counterterrorism policy?

Step 2. Search and study selection. A differentiation must be made between (1) the identification of pre-existing models and the generation of the *a priori* framework, and (2) the systematic review of supplementing research studies. This differentiation normally results in a distinct research strategy, distinct inclusion criteria and thus a distinct study selection. Below, it is explained why this method is slightly altered.

2.1. In order to identify the relevant pre-existing models, Carroll and Booth developed the BeHEMoTh Procedure as a systematic approach for the research strategy. This abbreviation stands for Behaviour of Interest, Health context, Exclusions and Models or Theories. However, this approach is not the most preferable one in this context. Iterative searching of bibliographic databases and internet search engines has made clear that there is a wide variety of pre-existing models. To limit the reach of the *a priori* framework, and to leave room for the second part of the research to further supplement this framework, the choice has been made to include only a limited number of pre-existing models. The important review of King and Taylor (2011), often cited in the literature,¹⁷ will serve as a starting point. Five major studies are extracted from this review, namely the work of Borum (2003); Moghaddam (2005); Sageman (2008); Silber and Bhatt (2007); Wiktorowicz (2004).

2.2. The search strategy of the supplementing research studies combines database thesaurus terms for the phenomenon (*“radicalization process” OR “radicalisation process” AND pathway AND terrorism*)), terms for the specific focus of the research (*phase OR stage OR tier AND linear OR non-linear OR sequence OR sequential*) and terms that describe models (*model OR theory OR framework OR concept OR conceptual*). In total, eight databases were searched, of which the last two are Belgian (Dutch) databases: Google Scholar, Web of Science, HeinOnline, Tandfonline, Proquest, Scopus, Jura and Jurisquare. From these eight databases, the Web of Science and Scopus did not produce any results. The process of identification, screening, eligibility and inclusion is reported through the PRISMA flowchart (Figure 2). The inclusion criteria were the following:

- The research paper is published or unpublished (i.e. grey literature, a.o.: reports, working papers, PhD dissertations and conference proceedings)¹⁸ between 2000 and 2018;¹⁹

¹⁷ This review has 219 citations on Google Scholar, which demonstrates its impact in the field. The five therein included studies are among the most cited models in the literature, ranging from 92 (Sageman, 2008) to 554 (Silber and Bhatt, 2007). This contrasts to the other supplemented studies (see 2.2.) that have a citation frequency ranging from zero to 55 (with Juergensmeyer (2000) and Precht (2007) as an exception, with respectively 3127 and 197 citations).

¹⁸ Bachelor and master theses are excluded from the analysis.

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- The language of the research paper is Dutch²⁰ or English;
 - The research is not already included in the *a priori* framework;
 - The research must involve the creation of a model of radicalization or pathways to terrorism;
 - In order to retain the link with the research questions, the study must focus on a path dependent but not necessarily determinist process and, thus, not solely delve into the root causes of radicalization. The study must, however, provide for different steps, stages, phases, tiers, or similar mechanisms that are modelled in a certain sequence but may, at the same time, acknowledge the non-linear character of the process;
 - The research study must exceed the findings of one individual case study (i.e. event-driven) and, as such, be generalized into a more universal framework;²¹
 - Other research studies that test, explore, review or criticize existing models of radicalization, instead of creating a model, are not – as such – included in this systematic search. However, these contributions are incorporated in the paper in several ways: (1) as a literature review in section 2 on the types of modelling and the critical stances on phase models; (2) as a useful source of finding extra references and new models; and (3) as a supplementing information source on the existing models.

The search generated 889 hits, of which 816 unique citations. On the basis of a screening of the title, abstract, and/or table of content, 658 citations were excluded. 158 full papers were checked, of which 18 were eventually included in the study. Moreover, reference lists of all included studies were checked for additional citations. As a result, 23 research papers were included in the study: Cherif, Yoshioka, Ni, and Bose (2009); Chuang, Chou, and D’Orsogna (2018); Dean (2016); Dyer, McCoy, Rodriguez, and Van Duyn (2007); Easton, Schils,

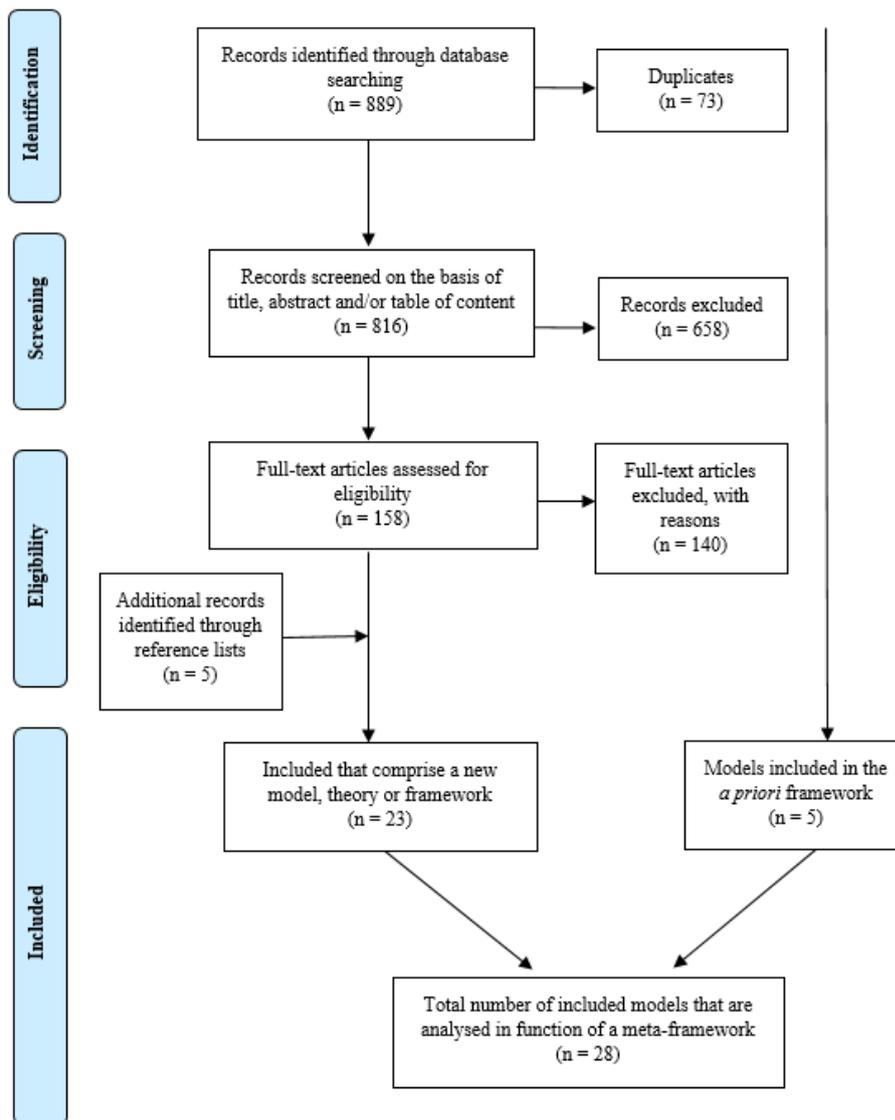
¹⁹ On the basis of this inclusion criteria, the important model of Sprinzak (1991) is excluded. This model refers to radicalization as a delegitimation process with three phases: (1) crisis of confidence; (2) conflict of legitimacy; and (3) crisis of legitimacy. Other authors, such as Buijs, Demant and Hamdy (2006) and Slootman and Tillie (2006) refer to Sprinzak (1991) as an important author in the field and use his model to explain radicalization.

²⁰ Dutch contributions are included in addition to English research papers given the native language of the author.

²¹ For this reason, the ten-step model of Dafnos (2013) (based upon the case of Anders Breivik) and the eight-stage recruitment process of Taarnby (2005) (based upon the Hamburg Cell of 9/11) are excluded from the analysis.

Waele, Pauwels, and Verhage (2013); Gill (2007); Griffin (2012); Hamm and Spaaij (2015); Helfstein (2012); Horgan and Taylor (2011); Ingram (2013); Juergensmeyer (2000); Klausen et al. (2016); Lakhani (2013); Muhanna-Matar (2017); Neo (2016); Pajunen (2015); Pauwels et al. (2014); Precht (2007); Schuurman and Eijkman (2015); Sinai (2014); Torok (2015); Van der Valk and Wagenaar (2010). No quality assessment was made in the process.

Figure 2 - PRISMA Flowchart



Step 3. Data extraction. Again, this step should be divided into two sub elements: (1) the data extraction of the identified pre-existing models; and (2) the data extraction of the supplementing research studies.

3.1. This study combines multiple relevant theories as a source of the *a priori* framework. As a consequence, a customized meta-framework (i.e. framework of frameworks) is created, based on the thematic synthesis of both common and unique elements (i.e. themes) (Booth & Carroll, 2015). The selection of five equally relevant models, as identified in the study of King and Taylor, is based on a twofold reasoning. On the one hand, it is acknowledged that the theorising on radicalization has expanded tremendously in the current century. Therefore, it is not advisable to include the vast amount of theories and models in the *a priori* framework. Instead, these models will be a part of the supplementing research studies, gathered on a systematic basis, and will supplement the *a priori* framework. On the other hand, the reviewer opted to create the *a priori* framework on more than one theory, since the latter was considered as not rich and comprehensive enough. The review of King and Taylor, and the five encapsulated studies, provided for a well-balanced solution. It must be noted, however, that the “best fit” approach is conceived in a slightly deviant manner. Normally, the selection of pre-existing models is not claimed to be ideal but only fit for purpose, in the sense that that it may – for example – be constructed for a potentially different but relevant population. This is not the case in this contribution. The five models are aimed at the exact same phenomenon and supersede, in that respect, a mere “best fit”. However, they are chosen as a “best fit” for the *a priori* framework, bearing in mind their citation frequency in the literature. Supplemented with additional models and other qualitative evidence, this approach is expected to create a more comprehensive and integrative meta-framework.

The thematic analysis of the five models is presented in Figure 3. This form of inductive analysis allows to extract seven different themes, entailing both commonalities and differences within the models. These themes are defined on the basis of 18 characterizing elements of the pre-existing phase models (i.e. the creation of “concepts”) in order to facilitate the coding of data against the *a priori* framework. The characterising elements can be found

in the phases of the pre-existing models, as shown in Figure 3. Together, both concepts and themes form the “coding framework” of the research.

Figure 3 - A priori Framework

PRE-EXISTING MODELS					A PRIORI FRAMEWORK	
Borum (2003)	Wiktorowicz (2004)	Moghaddam (2005)	Silber & Bhatt (2007)	Sageman (2008)	Concepts	Themes
			Pre-radicalization		Life situation before radical worldview	Pre-radicalization
Grievance – context	Cognitive opening	Psychological interpretation of material conditions	Self-Identification	A sense of ‘moral outrage’	Receptive Grievances (personal and political)	Awareness & Grievances
Injustice – comparison				Resonance with personal experiences (discrimination)		
				A specific interpretation of the world	Perceived injustice; generalisation of injustice	
		Perceived options to fight unfair treatment			Foreclosure of ordinary options	Solution-seeking
	Religious seeking				Religious framework	Interest
	Frame alignment		Self-identification	Mobilisation through networks	Interest in the doctrine, willingness to alter belief system Identity-searching; change in behaviour Seeking like-minded individuals	
Target attribution		Displacement of aggression			Creating a target, blaming	Targeting
Distancing / devaluation – Reaction					Dehumanizing the enemy	
	Socialization and joining - fully indoctrinated	“Moral Engagement” Solidification of Categorical Thinking and the Perceived Legitimacy of the Terrorist Organization	Indoctrination		Intensifying beliefs, belief only correct one, identity-construction Increased group bonding Accepting violence as a legitimate political means Willingness to use violence Entering terrorist organization	Indoctrination
Violent tactics		The Terrorist Act and Sidestepping Inhibitory Mechanisms	Jihadisation		Preparatory acts Terrorist act	Implementation

3.2. The 23 supplementing research studies are divided according to their study characteristics. An appraisal of the quality is not made in this research. The research studies

were published or made publicly available through journal articles, book chapters, entire books, PhD dissertations and reports funded by government agencies. It is apparent that the studies differ in significant ways concerning their methodology and focus (ideology and type of terrorists). Most studies do not elaborate on their methodology or are purely theoretical and not based on more empirical data. This contrasts to other studies that have based their model of radicalization on case studies (Hamm and Spaaij, 2015; Schuurman and Eijkman, 2015; Klausen et al., 2016), interviews or surveys (van der Valk and Wagenaar, 2010; Lakhani, 2013; Pauwels et al., 2014), ethnographical methods (Torok, 2015; Muhanna-Matar, 2017), or a mathematical analysis (Cherif et al., 2009; Chuang et al., 2018). Concerning the type of ideology, it is often not explicitly stated what the precise focus is. In the cases where it is explicated, the type of ideology is almost always religiously inspired terrorism (Juergensmeyer, 2000; Precht, 2007; Dyer et al., 2007; Cherif et al., 2009; Lakhani, 2013; Sinai, 2014; Torok, 2015; Schuurman and Eijkman, 2015; Klausen et al., 2016; Muhanna-Matar, 2017), and more in particular the Jihadi-Salafi ideology-based terrorism. Only one particular publication focussed on the use of right-wing extremist violence (van der Valk and Wagenaar, 2010). Also the type of terrorists (lone wolf versus group members versus autonomous cells versus other typologies) is often not specified. However, in the majority of studies, recruitment into an organization plays a significant role in the radicalization process, and thus they often refer to terrorists as members of a particular group. Two studies concentrate specifically on the phenomenon of lone wolves (Hamm and Spaaij, 2015; Pajunen, 2015), three other delineate their model to home-grown terrorism (Precht, 2007; Schuurman and Eijkman, 2015; Klausen et al., 2016), and two research studies focus on online radicalization (Dean, 2016; Neo, 2016). One model pays attention to the role of the charismatic leader (Ingram, 2013). Referring to the debate on the linearity of the radicalization process, most studies acknowledge that their proposed sequence is an ‘ideal’ one, hereby recognizing the non-linearity of the model (in contrast to the majority of the

studies of the *a priori* framework)²². The visual representation of the modelling differs from author to author. Some do not even visualize their prototype, whereas others are renowned because of their metaphors such as the staircase model of Moghaddam (2005). Other representations are axis (Torok, 2015), graphs (Dean, 2016), pyramids²³ (Ingram, 2013), and so on. Finally, it must be noted that multiple models are based upon the well-known study of Silber and Bhatt (2007; *a priori* framework) (Precht, 2007; Cherif et al., 2009; Klausen et al., 2016; Chuang et al., 2018).²⁴

Step 4 and 5. Coding evidence against the *a priori* framework and creating new themes. The data generated from the supplementing research studies is coded against the *a priori* concepts, as established in step 3.1. This coding of data serves two purposes, namely the supplementing of these *a priori* concepts and the creation of new themes that were not accommodated by the *a priori* framework. This process led to the creation of one new theme, which refers to the last step in a phase model (post-implementation), and 15 extra concepts (characterizing elements within the phases). The coding framework is summarized in figure 4.

²² See Borum (2003); Moghaddam (2005); Wiktorowicz (2004).

²³ Also the two-pyramids model of McCauley and Moskalenko (2017) refers to the pyramid as a visual representation of the process. The model, however, is not included in the research since it does not focus on the how-question: How does one move through these pyramids? Another study of McCauley and Moskalenko does focus on the mechanisms, but does not propose a certain sequence.

²⁴ The well-known study of Silber and Bhatt (2007) is published as a NYPD report. It is important to add that this report has been subjected to criticism and has even led to a court case. The NYPD was forced to remove the report from its website due to claims of discrimination against Muslims.

Figure 4 - Coding Framework

THEMES	CONCEPTS DERIVED FOR CODING (C)
Pre-radicalization	C1 General population
	C2 Life situation before radicalization (commonalities, profiling)
Awareness & Grievances	C3 Receptiveness
	C4 Grievances - Personal: socio-economic, including poor social integration - Political
	C5 Perceived injustice; generalization of injustice
	C6 Questioning confidence in certain leaders or policies; crisis of legitimacy existing order
	C7 Disillusionment; feelings of insignificance
	C8 Initial exposure to alternate worldviews; sense of awareness
	C9 Acquaintance with certain individuals
Solution-seeking	C10 Foreclosure of ordinary options
Interest	C11 Interest in doctrine; willingness to alter belief
	C12 Religious seeking
	C13 Identity search; change in behaviour
	C14 Social inclusion; break with former life
	C15 Weakening resilience against violence
	C16 Actively seeking like-minded individuals
	C17 Acceptance of the cause
Targeting	C18 Target attribution; blaming
	C19 Dehumanizing the enemy
Indoctrination	C20 Intensifying beliefs; belief one adheres is the only correct one
	C21 Identity-constructing
	C22 Increased group-bonding
	C23 Accepting violence as a legitimate political means; conviction that action is required to support the cause
	C24 Praising and honouring actions of terrorists; broadcasting own intent
	C25 Willingness to use violence; accepting duty
	C26 Behaviour indicative of preparation for action (e.g. going abroad, training camps, etc.)
C27 Entering terrorist organization	
Implementation	C28 Preparatory acts
	C29 Use of violence (including terrorist attack)
Post-implementation (new theme)	C30 Disengagement
	C31 Deradicalization, including self-deradicalization
	C32 Re-engagement
	C33 Reaction criminal justice system

Step 6 and 7. Producing a new framework and testing the synthesis. As a result, a final list of concepts is synthesized. The meta-framework generates more than just a list of concepts, it also establishes and illustrates the internal relationship between the relevant

concepts. A further interpretation leads to the clustering of more abstract concepts and enhances the process of theory creation. The outcome of the research is reflected into an eight-phased funnel model (Figure 5, *infra* 3.2). When conceptualizing a new framework, there is always a risk of bias. To limit this risk, the synthesis needs to be tested by exploring the differences between the *a priori* framework and the resulting model.

Results

This section focuses first on the thematic synthesis of both the themes of the *a priori* framework, supplemented with additional data of the 23 research studies, and the new themes (BFFS step 3 to 5). These themes are, for the purposes of this paper, conceived as stages within a processual model. Afterwards, the meta-framework is presented (and tested) as an eight-phased funnel model, comprising 33 characterizing elements divided into five categories (step 6 and 7).

Thematic synthesis

Pre-radicalization

Pre-radicalization is a separate stage that is included in several models and precedes the actual radicalization process. Silber and Bhatt (2007; *a priori* framework) were the first to include this stage in their NYPD-model with the purpose to describe the life situation before radicalization and to list some commonalities of factors that make individuals more vulnerable to radicalize.²⁵ Precht (2007), Gill (2007), Horgan and Taylor (2011), Cherif et al. (2009), Easton et al. (2013), Klausen et al. (2016), van der Valk and Wagenaar (2010), Sinai (2014) and Chuang et al. (2018) have followed the example of the NYPD-model by including

²⁵ Although research has pointed out that there is not one unambiguous fitting profile of radicalizing individuals, some authors have attempted to deduct general background factors for the purposes of profiling. However, cautiousness is recommended when entering the area of profiling, as the perverse effects are not unimaginable. There is significant danger that profiling will degenerate into discrimination, which, as will become clear in the second theme, will only lead to more radicalization.

a preliminary stage as the starting point of their model. However, not all scholars interpret this stage in the same way. Whereas some authors target the at-risk individuals, their social background and their reasons for receptiveness before they radicalized (Gill, 2007; Dyer et al., 2007; van der Valk and Wagenaar, 2010; Easton et al., 2013; Sinai, 2014; Klausen et al., 2016), others formulate this stage rather as a compilation of the general population (Cherif et al., 2009; Chuang et al., 2018). The former group entails concepts, which, in other models, would be comprised in later stages (and thus will be discussed in other themes), whereas the latter group has a clearly delineated first stage that visibly stands apart from later stages.

Awareness & grievances

At the start of the actual radicalization process *sensu stricto*, models often discuss those factors that lead to an increased perceptiveness for a radical worldview, namely the need for a sense of meaning, the need for a response to perceived injustice and the need for social bonding (Easton et al., 2013). In this early stage of the radicalization process, these factors are translated in a general “sense of disillusionment” (Torok, 2015)²⁶ intertwined with perceived discrimination as a consequence of undesirable events or conditions on a personal and/or political level. Only three out of the 28 models do not explicitly refer to these grievances as an important factor in the radicalization process (Dyer et al., 2007; Horgan and Taylor, 2011; Muhanna-Matar, 2017). The other 25 models have raised the issue of grievances in one way or another. Juergensmeyer (2000) focusses on major moral violations on a political level and calls his first stage “a world gone awry”. Sageman (2011) has dedicated three out of his four “prongs of radicalization” to grievances, ranging from a sense of moral outrage as a direct result of perceived violations, to the interpretation and generalization of the events, to eventually echoing this perception in their daily lives which leads to a sense of perceived discrimination. Pauwels et al. (2014) define the start of their integrated model as poor social integration and perceived discrimination, which leads to subjective alienation. Other scholars

²⁶ In Torok’s axis’s model (2015) grievances are both discussed in the axis of transformation of moral authority (moral fracturing) and the axis of moral discourse.

incorporate certain experiences and grievances rather as a push factor, pull factor, catalyst or trigger, instead of an actual stage (Gill, 2007; Pajunen, 2015; Dean, 2016). Lakhani (2013), who views radicalization as a moral career, has connected past events and relationships (on a personal, local or global level) to the contact with radicalizers (admittedly, in a later stage). Only then, these grievances take on a new meaning. Van der Valk and Wagenaar (2010) also focus in their first stage on the acquaintance with other like-minded people and even the joining of a group. Sinai (2014) describes the presence of extremist networks, charismatic leaders and accompanying ideologies as important enablers in an early stage of the radicalization process. Considering that almost all other models refer to social elements in a later stage, this is rather exceptional.

Often, the consequence of these grievances is a profound questioning of the existing order and the legitimacy of the system (Pauwels et al., 2014; Neo, 2016; Muhanna-Matar, 2017). Neo (2016) calls this the “reflection” phase in which accepted norms and beliefs are questioned.

The sense of disillusionment and perceived injustice, as described above, often goes hand in hand with a certain sense of “awareness” (Helfstein, 2012), in which individuals are exposed to alternative ideas for a first time. Griffin (2012) also describes it as a “nomic crisis”, in which individuals search for a sense of meaning in their “insignificant lives”. This evolution can best be symbolized by the term of Wiktorowicz (2004): a “cognitive opening”.²⁷ The first exploration may gradually gravitate towards a more radical interest in the new doctrine (Cherif et al., 2009), which corresponds to Chuang’s et al. (2018) progression from non-radicals to activists. This progression seamlessly leads to the next themes of this analysis, and more in particular the ‘interest’ theme.

²⁷ In the model of Ingram (2013) similar terminology is used in his first (i.e. cognitive awareness: awakening) and second stage (i.e. cognitive opening).

Solution-Seeking

A phase that is less frequent in most models is the one wherein individuals seek for a possible solution that responds to their needs. In the models of Juergensmeyer (2000) and Moghaddam (2005) a separate stage is dedicated to the, respectively, “foreclosure of ordinary options” or “perceived options to fight unfair treatment”. Pajunen (2015) and Torok (2015) have also incorporated similar concepts in their models. However, they do so in a more implicit manner as part of other stages. According to Torok (2015), “an individual will only accept the type of action that falls within their realm of moral authority” and it is thus inherently intertwined with the acceptance of a radical discourse. Pajunen (2015) has incorporated the lack of a legitimate legal outcome as an important factor in his last stage of “externalization”.

Notwithstanding the lower presence of this theme in the studied models, it is not without any importance. It is at this stage that the radicalization process is often halted, since many people – who share the same grievances – do find an outcome through legitimate means, in the form of legal proceedings or participation in the democratic process for example. It is when individuals perceive the legitimate means no longer as sufficient that they progress to further stages of the radicalization process.

Interest

This theme refers to the transformation of awareness into interest in the newly found doctrine. In this stage, primarily cognitive factors are at play. As such, ideology plays an important role in many models, although the role of ideology has been the subject of much scholarly debate.²⁸ Notwithstanding this interesting discussion, this section will focus on the steps incorporated within the 28 studied models. In the *a priori* framework, it is especially Wickorowicz (2004) and Silber and Bhatt (2007) that focus on doctrine and, in their context, religious seeking. Concerning the latter, also Juergensmeyer (2000), Precht (2007), Dyer et al.

²⁸ Although ideology has become the dominant paradigm in countering terrorism, other research has made clear that many paths of radicalization do not even involve ideology or that ideology is often transformed into an instrumentalized cut-and-paste interpretation that only appears in later stages of radicalization. As such, ideology serve the purpose of merely functioning as a justification or legitimation of violence after joining a terrorist group for example.

(2007), Griffin (2012), Torok (2015), Schuurman and Eijkman (2015) and Muhanna-Matar (2017) view the radicalization process through a religious outlook. The interest in a certain doctrine progresses to the making sense of new information and eventually leads to the willingness to alter one's beliefs (see Helfstein, 2012; Sinai, 2014; Neo, 2016; Dean, 2016; Chuang et al., 2018). To validate one's altering belief system, affinity is sought with other like-minded individuals online and/or in real-life (Dyer et al., 2007; van der Valk and Wagenaar, 2010; Lakhani, 2013; Sinai, 2014; Hamm & Spaaij, 2015; Klausen et al., 2016; Neo, 2016). As a consequence of this change, individuals struggle with their previous lifestyle and search for a new identity (Silber and Bhatt, 2007; Precht, 2007; Dyer et al., 2007; Lakhani, 2013; Ingram, 2013; Sinai, 2014; Neo, 2016; Klausen et al., 2016; Dean, 2016; Muhanna-Matar, 2017). The combination of the forging of new social bonds and the detachment of a previous lifestyle causes social inclusion from the individual's familiar environment. In other words, bonds with family or former friends are cut off (Dyer et al., 2007; van der Valk and Wagenaar, 2010; Lakhani, 2013; Pauwels et al., 2014; Pajunen, 2015; Klausen et al.; 2016; Neo, 2016). Klausen et al. (2016) and Chuang et al. (2018) observe that this is the phase in which individuals try to convince others to 'convert' to their newly found ideology. Dyer et al. (2007) summarizes these steps into an "identification" framework in which the individual ultimately accepts the cause. By Easton et al. (2013) these steps are labelled "radicalism", whereas Chuang et al. (2018) rather refer to "activism".²⁹ It must be noted that Easton et al. (2013) notice a weakening of resilience against violence in this stage, which only intensifies in later stages of the radicalization process.

Targeting

Approximately one third of the studied models has embedded the process of targeting in their framework. This process is important in attributing blame to a certain target and dehumanizing this so-claimed enemy. In doing so, inhibitory mechanisms are crossed, making

²⁹ See for an interesting discussion on the differences between activism and radicalism: Moskalenko and McCauley (2009).

it easier (in later stages of the radicalization process) to use violence towards them. Another purpose of the “Us versus Them” dichotomy (Lakhani, 2013) and the creation of a common enemy is to reinforce the cohesion within the radical group (Easton et al., 2013). Juergensmeyer (2000) labels this stage as “satanization”, whereas Moghaddam (2005) speaks of “displacing aggression onto out-groups” and Torok (2015) of “ascribing causes” and “judgment”. In Borum’s four-step process of ideological development (2003) the two last stages are also dedicated to respectively target attribution (“It’s your fault”) and distancing or devaluating (“You’re evil”). It is worth noting that Sinai (2014) categorizes the need for an external entity to blame for personal problems in his first phase of “pre-radicalization”. This is opposed to other models that place it further along their framework. Pajunen (2015), for example, sees the “vilifying of the antagonist” as part of his last “externalization” stage. Dean (2016) views the demonizing of everything and everyone that is hated as part of a “rigidification” process, and Ingram (2013) describes “an increasing essentialisation and demonisation of the perceived antagonistic Other” when individuals move towards the “violence threshold”. At his turn, Griffin (2012) defines the process as a process of “splitting” that culminates into a “theatre of cosmic war”.

Indoctrination

Save Juergensmeyer (2000), all other models refer to a certain sense of intensification of the concepts elaborated on in earlier stages of the radicalization process. The most important element in this context is the indoctrination of beliefs and the conviction that the belief they adhere is the only correct one (Wiktorowicz, 2004; Silber and Bhatt, 2007; Precht, 2007; Cherif et al., 2009; van der Valk and Wagenaar, 2010; Helfstein, 2012; Easton et al., 2013; Lakhani, 2013; Ingram, 2013; Pauwels et al., 2014; Sinai, 2014; Pajunen, 2015; Dean, 2016; Chuang et al., 2018). This results in the construction of a new identity (Griffin, 2012; Lakhani, 2013; Ingram, 2013; Pajunen, 2015; Muhanna-Matar, 2017). A reference to the prior theme of “interest” (*supra*) is necessary in this context. The theme of “interest” mentioned the search for a new identity; a search that culminates under the process of indoctrination.

Likewise, in earlier stages of the radicalization process there is a search of like-minded people, whereas in later stages an increased group-bonding takes place (Silber and Bhatt, 2007; Precht, 2007; Dyer et al., 2007; Gill, 2007; Easton et al., 2013; Ingram, 2013; Schuurman and Eijkman, 2015; Klausen et al., 2016; Neo, 2016). Other important concepts that are increasingly present in later stages of the radicalization process are the attitudes towards violence. These attitudes can take multiple forms. However, the distinction between these forms is not always clear-cut. Accepting violence as a legitimate political mean and the conviction that action is required to support the cause is among the most cited one in the existing models (Moghaddam, 2005; Silber and Bhatt, 2007; Precht, 2007; Dyer et al., 2007; Helfstein, 2012; Ingram, 2013; Pauwels et al., 2014; Sinai, 2014; Torok, 2015; Dean, 2016; Chuang et al., 2018). Other violence-related attitudes are the praising and honouring of actions of terrorists (Torok, 2015), the actively supporting of other people (Klausen et al., 2016), the “broadcasting” of one’s own intent (Hamm and Spaaij, 2015), the willingness to use violence (Moghaddam, 2005; Griffin, 2012; Easton et al., 2013; Torok, 2015; Schuurman and Eijkman, 2015; Neo, 2016), the acceptance of the personal duty to commit a violent act (Cherif et al., 2009; Sinai, 2014; Torok, 2015; Neo, 2016), and showing behaviour indicative of preparation for action (e.g. going abroad, attending training camps (religious, language or military activities)) (Silber and Bhatt, 2007; Dyer et al., 2007; Lakhani, 2013; Schuurman and Eijkman, 2015; Klausen et al., 2016). Torok (2015) makes a distinction in his axis of “transformation of moral discourse” between the general obligation, the personal obligation and the personal goal to engage in martyrdom. The last concept that is often included in this stage of the process, is the formal entering into a terrorist organization (Wiktorowicz, 2004; Moghaddam, 2005; Dyer et al., 2007; Gill, 2007; Cherif et al., 2009; Horgan and Taylor, 2011; Lakhani, 2013; Sinai, 2014; Schuurman and Eijkman, 2015; Klausen et al., 2016). Easton et al. (2013) label this stage as “extremism”.

Implementation

The phase of implementation is the ultimate culmination of the radicalization process. However, it must be noted that only a small minority of people that progresses through certain stages of the radicalization process eventually commits a terrorist act (i.e. non-linearity, *supra*). Not all models included in this study end their framework with an implementation stage. Wiktorowicz (2004), for example, stops his analysis at the moment an individual formally joins a terrorist organization. Also Torok (2015) speaks of martyrdom as a personal goal in the end-state of his axis, but does not actually incorporate the committing of violence. Dean (2016), who describes the framing of challenges of online violent extremism, does not explicitly refer to the use of violence in his neurocognitive model. Instead, the ‘radicalized mind’ is seen as the outcome of the radicalization process. Others, like Juergensmeyer (2000), do provide for an implementation stage wherein “symbolic acts of power” are displayed, but at the same time it is clearly stated that terrorism is but one of the many ways to express power. Griffin (2012) calls it the “bliss of completion”. Sageman (2011) ascribes the becoming of a terrorist to the mechanism of “network mobilization”. Other labels for the implementation stage are not as unique, in the sense that they refer to “terrorism” (Easton et al., 2013; Sinai, 2014; Hamm & Spaaij, 2015; Moghaddam, 2005; Precht, 2007), “implementation” (Helfstein, 2012), “operational” (Neo, 2016), “action” (Dyer et al., 2007; Klausen et al., 2016), “engagement” (Horgan and Taylor, 2011; Ingram, 2013), “externalization” (Pajunen, 2015), “violence” (van der Valk and Wagenaar, 2010; Pauwels et al., 2014), “attack” (Schuurman and Eijkman, 2015) or, for those frameworks focused on Jihadi-Salafi inspired terrorism, “jihadization” (Silber and Bhatt, 2007). Cherif et al. (2009) is one of the few scholars that makes a further distinction in the implementation stage among radicals between “foot-soldiers” and “leaders and operatives”. Gill (2007) has delineated his framework merely to “suicide bombers”.

Post-Implementation

This theme is no part of the *a priori* framework, but is added during the analysis of the 23 supplementing research studies. Although only a small minority of models (four out of the 23) focus on stages that take place after the implementation of a terrorist act, it is of important value in this review. The “arc of involvement, engagement and disengagement” (IED) of Horgan and Taylor (2011) is one of the few models that aim attention at post-implementation by envisaging three scenarios: disengagement, deradicalization and re-engagement. The distinction between disengagement and deradicalization must be further explained. Disengagement refers to the change in behaviour and thus the averting of the use of violence, whereas deradicalization involves a change in attitudes which are deemed conducive to terrorist behaviour. Muhanna-Matar (2017) also includes deradicalization in her research, but specifies it to only aim at self-deradicalization and the “limit-experience”³⁰ some individuals go through. Dean (2016) defines his post-implementation phase as a phase of “cognitive loosening” which entails a “disillusionment process”. The disillusionment of everything that held so much attraction before causes a fading in intensity of attitudes and behaviour. In the prison radicalization scenario of Sinai (2014), no reference is made to a decrease in intensity. Instead, another option of “post-attack re-incarceration” is incorporated in the model which triggers the recommencing of the radicalization process all over again (i.e. a circular model).

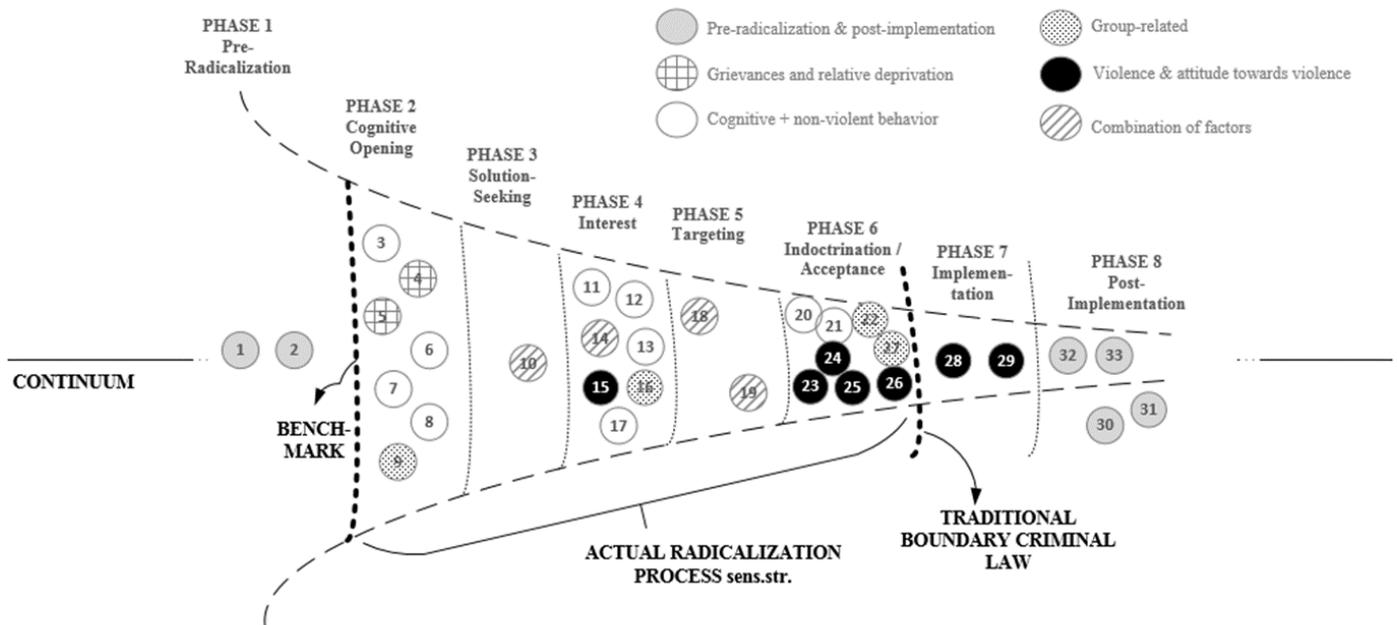
Creation and testing of the meta-framework

As a result of the thematic synthesis of 28 existing processual models of radicalization, a meta-framework is created (Figure 5). The eight themes represent the different stages that individuals typically go through and comprise the 33 concepts as formulated in the coding

³⁰ Muhanna-Matar (2017) uses this concept of Foucault and describes it in the following manner: “Within this understanding, self-deradicalisation happens with different accelerations and contingent outcomes due to the particularity, as well as the intensity, of experience of each person. This experience may jeopardise a person’s life, social and political continuity, or/and faith in meeting the desired change. This is what Foucault calls a ‘limit-experience’. Limit-experience occurs when a person, through discursive practice of a particular identity, reaches “a certain point in life that is as close as possible to the ‘inlivable’, which can’t be lived through”. Thus, questioning or problematising a radical identity does not occur without a person generating “the maximum of experience intensity and the maximum of impossibility to go on with the identity it establishes” (Foucault 2000, 241–242).”

framework (Figure 4). The author has opted to integrate all of the concepts in order to ensure the “thickness” of the meta-framework. Moreover, it is necessary to include both micro and macro mechanisms in order to contribute to the usefulness of a framework (Borum, 2011a). The meta-framework is visually represented by an eight-phased horizontal funnel placed on a continuum. The funnel shape makes clear that the radicalization process does not follow a linear progression. In other words, not all individuals who progress through some phases continue to the end phase of implementation. In reverse, this also suggests that in order to attain a certain phase, the previous phases are no necessary conditions. In addition to the funnel shape, the dashed line also enhances the whole ‘skip steps, take steps back or completely step out of it’ theory. As a consequence, it must be acknowledged that the meta-framework is inherently and necessarily an oversimplification of a complex reality and that push/pull factors or other triggers slow the process down or, conversely, speed it up.

Figure 5 - The meta-framework: an eight-phased funnel model



The meta-framework adds three important gradations in the funnel model. First of all, a benchmark is positioned after the stage of pre-radicalization. This benchmark reflects the standard against which the level of radicalization can be compared and thus mirrors the boundary from which point onward a deviation of the mainstream is noticeable. Deciding otherwise, and thus placing the benchmark at an earlier point of the continuum, would implicate that more – if not all – people would be considered a risk, that more measures would be warranted in a too early phase and that the entire process is over-inclusive. Secondly, after the benchmark the actual radicalization process *sensu stricto* commences and ends before the phase of implementation. Thirdly, the phase of implementation (including preparatory acts) triggers the traditional boundary of criminal law. As the introduction and the discussion of this paper demonstrates, this boundary is subject to changes throughout time.

When comparing the meta-framework to the *a priori* framework, it is noteworthy that all concepts were confirmed by the 23 supplementing models. Moreover, only one extra

theme was created that did not fit within the seven themes of the *a priori* framework. This demonstrates that the five *a priori* models are among the most renowned in the field of radicalization research and that other models are often inspired by these models. More in particular, several models were explicitly grounded on the work of Silber and Bhatt (2007). The 23 supplementing models did bring new concepts to light, but – except for those related to post-implementation – could all be categorized within the seven *a priori* themes. However, some inconsistencies were observed concerning the sequence of certain concepts. Especially with regard to the process of targeting (C18 and C19) and the formal joining of a terrorist organization (C27), certain differences could be established (as discussed in the thematic synthesis). Again, this confirms the non-linearity of the process. Nonetheless, this does not necessarily affect the content of the meta-framework.

The 33 concepts are coded in five different categories (see Figure 5): (1) elements that precede the actual radicalization process or come after the implementation of a terrorist act (*grey*), (2) elements related to grievances and relative deprivation (*gridded*), (3) elements related to cognitive factors, such as ideology and belief systems and connected with this identity-issues and non-violent changes in behavior (*white*), (4) group and social network related elements (*dotted*), and (5) elements related to violence and the attitudes towards violence (*black*). Some elements are a combination of the above (*striped*). All existing models are the result of a combination of these different categories. When observing the concepts together in the meta-framework, it is clear that, in general, grievances are situated in the beginning of the radicalization process and violence-related factors are mostly placed at the end. Cognitive factors and group-related factors can be found throughout the funnel, from phase two to six. However, cognitive factors will weigh more in the first half of the funnel and group-related more in the second half.

Discussion and Conclusion

This contribution has presented a meta-framework that integrates existing knowledge in the field of processual models of radicalization. More in particular, 28 existing models have been identified, analysed and compared in function of their commonalities and dissimilarities following the ‘best fit framework synthesis’ method. The resulting meta-framework has unravelled a certain sequence of a ‘typical’ radicalization process from pre-radicalization to post-implementation, while bearing in mind its inherent complexity and highly individual nature. As a prototype, this understanding views radicalization as a gradual non-linear process subjected to a number of factors which is often set in motion by grievances and feelings of injustice, salvaged by seeking refuge in an alternative set of ideas and worldview, fuelled by group processes, leading to changed attitudes toward violence and possibly, but not necessarily, ending in a violent act. As a result, this overarching theoretical framework fills a gap in the field of radicalization research.

This framework could also prove useful in the policy context. As Hardy (2018) rightly states in his work, a governments’ understanding of the process has a significant impact on both the design and success of their counterterrorism efforts. When studying the current counterterrorism policy of certain Western-European countries (e.g. Belgium, the Netherlands, France and the United Kingdom), a tendency can be witnessed that, through the years, more behaviour is criminalized that corresponds to early phases of the radicalization process. Whereas in the beginning of the twenty-first century only the actual commission of a terrorist attack and its attempt were criminalized (phase 7), criminal liability is extended to preparatory acts and even risk-involving behaviour (prior to phase 7, especially within phases 4 to 6). Multiple examples demonstrate this statement: from criminalizing indirect incitement (or even mere glorification), to gathering specific information, to travelling with a specific intent, to attending certain places. Especially the combination of an expansion of substantive criminal law provisions and the lowering of the threshold of the procedural set of tools of investigation has led to an increasing governmental intervention in early stages of the

radicalization process. For example, seeking out like-minded people could trigger a criminal law procedure in the context of attendance offences. Likewise, showing interest in a new doctrine could lead to suspicions under certain information gathering offences. Also charges of glorification or incitement could result from the weakening of resilience against violence, the acceptance of the cause, targeting processes and the praising or honouring of certain actions. This evolution does not only raise questions towards the legitimacy of these criminal law provisions in terms of their compatibility with fundamental principles of criminal law and human rights law, but also defies the scholarly findings in the field of radicalization. As frequently repeated throughout this contribution, radicalization is not a linear process. Many people that enter the funnel, do not undertake any violent action. As such, certain criminal law measures can even lead to counterproductive results.

Some critical notes on this study must, however, be addressed. First, as Borum (2011a) states, radicalization in the sense of “developing or adopting extremist beliefs that justify violence” is but one of the many pathways to terrorism. Consequently, this paper is limited in its scope and does not provide an all-encompassing overview of possible trajectories towards terrorism. Second, the multiple critiques on phase models have shown the methodological pitfalls ranging from the lack of empirical knowledge to backward reasoning, the inability to generalize conclusions due to its case-specific nature, the risk of selection of the dependent variable, the risk of applying ‘statistical discrimination’ and the risk of its real-life use (for example as conclusive proof in court or as a basis for deradicalization programs) (Veldhuis & Staun, 2009). These models might enhance our understanding why, or rather how, some individuals radicalize towards violent extremism or terrorism, but do not address the question why others do not. The interesting model of Reidy (2018) that focusses on a benevolent pathway of radicalization, for example, sheds a different light on the same phenomenon but is not incorporated within this paper. Third, not only are there substantial drawbacks of existing phase models, the limitations of this review must also be acknowledged. The review has been conducted by only one reviewer, instead of a team of several researchers. Inevitably, this leads to a more subjective approach of (1) the search and

study selection; (2) the data extraction; (3) the coding process; and (4) the producing and testing of the meta-framework. However, subjectivity is an inherent component of many research studies. Furthermore, the author is aware of the fact that multiple models of a different nature were integrated in the meta-framework. No distinction was made between those models that specifically focussed on, for example, online radicalization (versus real-life), lone wolves (versus group members), right-wing extremism (versus religiously inspired), et cetera. As a recommendation for further research, it should be established to what extent the meta-framework is consistent with empirical data, while also including valid comparison groups, and to what extent differentiations should be made in the meta-framework in terms of the type of ideology and the type of terrorists. In addition to this recommendation, research should subject certain criminal law provisions that intervene in early stages of the radicalization process to a critical legal analysis. Not only scholars, but also policy-makers should reflect deeply on this subject prior to the implementation of far-reaching legislation. Notwithstanding the limitations of the research, this contribution offers an initial incentive to transcend the fragmented approach in the field of radicalization research, while making the link to its importance on a policy level.

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