

Social Ecology of Becoming a Homegrown Terrorist

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Presentation

1. Context
2. Approach
3. Take-Aways

Part 1 – Context

London 2005



Boston 2013



Basic Parameters of Explanation

- problem of social action or specificity



Grievances matter, but insufficient;
are explanatory gaps

Parameters of Explanation Cont'd

- remarkably ordinary → the extraordinary
- separating how and why questions?
- rational/irrational conundrum & religion
- multi-faceted
- primary data challenge

Major Canadian Cases

- Toronto 18 (2006)
- Project Samossa (2010)
- Via Rail plot (2013)
- Canada Day plot (2013)
- Couture-Rouleau & Zehaf-Bibeau (2014)
- Quebec City, Islamic Centre shooting (2017)

Broader Reality

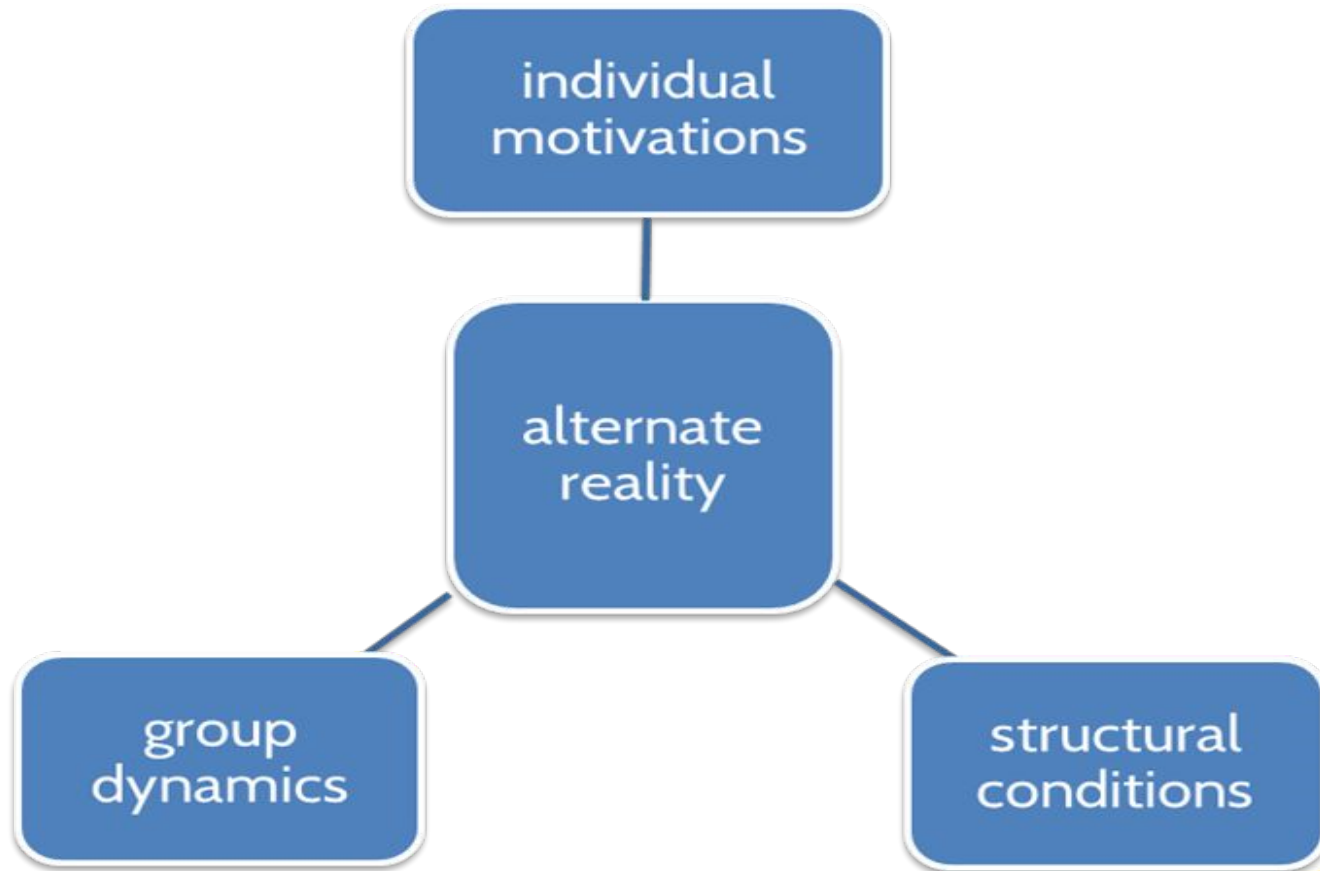
- hundreds under investigation
- large online community of supporters
- Canadian foreign fighters – 100+
(Somalia, Libya, Syria, Iraq, elsewhere in Africa)

Part 2 – My Approach

- Anders Behring Breivik (2011)



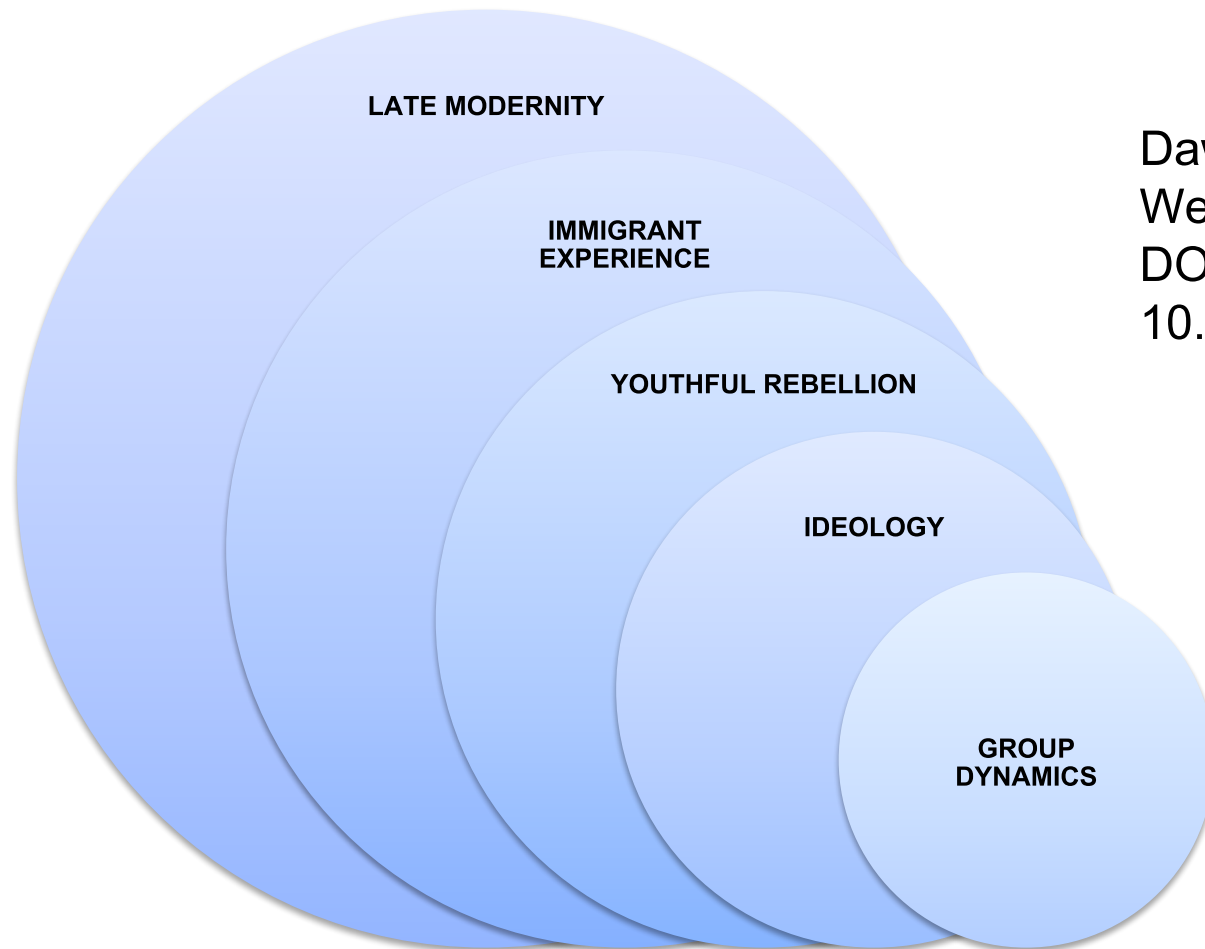
Focus: participant's "definition of the situation" & influence of each ecological niche



Five Ecological Niches

- (1) social conditions of “late modernity”
- (2) immigrant experience
- (3) youth culture & rebellion
- (4) ideology
- (5) group dynamics

Elements of the Ecology



Dawson (2017) ICCT
Web Page
DOI:
10.19165/2017.1.01

Ecological Conceptualization

- multi-factoral & multi-disciplinary
- focus on “process” (not types of people)
- develop through comparative analyses:
 - with analogs (e.g., cults, gangs, military training)

Late Modern Social Conditions

- “project of the self” & the terror of choice
- de-traditionalization & value relativism
- globalization – interpenetration of local & global

Radicalization and Immigrant Experience

- “managing two worlds”
- global *ummah* & de-cultured Islam
- relative moral deprivation & decadence of West
- ‘perceived’ discrimination & marginalization
- victimization & vicarious traumatization
- dialectic of securitization & radicalization

Youth Culture and Rebellion

- social networks & personal bonds
- propensities to risk & action
- idealistic & naïve
aspirations/assessments
- role of “fantasy” & “quest for significance”

Ideology

- linkage of “personal troubles” & “social issues”
- framing
 - problems not just misfortunes, but injustices
 - attributes responsibility
 - explains what to do
 - provides moral justification for violence
- key themes/processes
 - victimization
 - transcendent authority, purpose, & reward
 - decontesting
 - moral disengagement (engagement)
- genuine “religiosity”

Group Process

- lessons of experimental social psychology (e.g., in group/out group, group think, risk shift, perceptual & interpretive distortions)
- role of leadership – especially charismatic
- role of contingencies & context

Part 3 – Take-Aways



Radicalization: What is it About?

- (1) (emerging adult) identity struggles
- (2) with a moralistic problem frame
- (3) conditioned by an inordinate quest for significance
- (4) resolved with a religious ideology & fantasy
- (5) by way of the psychological impact of small group dynamics & charismatic leadership
- (6) identity resolution through merger with the group & cause

Practical Focus

- “In practical and immediate terms, limiting the opportunities for terrorist behaviour and focusing on the elements of the decisional calculus preceding potential terrorist action seems a more sensible strategy than seeking to change either presumed individual qualities or broad societal processes.” (Taylor & Horgan 2006)

Intervening & Countering

- timing is everything
- role of contingency & context
- recognize is genuinely moral/religious
 - religiosity encompasses politics
 - use to create new positive “cognitive openings”
- identity & existential issues at core