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Daniela PISOIU. *Islamist Radicalisation in Europe. An occupational change process.* London & New York: Routledge, 2011. 203 pp. ISBN 978-0-415-66525-4. UK £ 80.-/US \$ 130.-

Reviewed by Alex P. Schmid

This doctoral dissertation from the University of St. Andrews has been written by a Rumanian researcher currently attached to the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg. It is a work that challenges many of the assumptions of current European governmental de- and counter-radicalisation programs. It does a good job in identifying some of their weaknesses. It is, however, less persuasive when proposing an alternative framework for viewing radicalisation. The author is utilizing a grounded theory approach whereby “ data collection...uses a systematically applied set of methods to generate an inductive theory about a substantive area” (Glaser, 1992; cit. p.4). However, the book’s Appendix contains neither the coding sheet nor the coding results from the ca. 50 mainly Austrian, German and French sources she utilizes. One can only hope that her coding of data was more careful than her spelling of names [e. g. Peter Gridling, not “Grindling” (p. 147); Benno Ohnesorg, not “Ohnesog”, p. 139]. The empirical basis for her bold conclusions is rather small; she herself conducted only one interview of one hour’s length with one “Islamist radical” (p. 171). True, she made use of almost a dozen prison interviews conducted by Farhad Khosrokhavar ( 2006), attended four terrorist trials and conducted some interviews with intelligence officials, Islamic community representatives and others, etc.. On the other hand, she has absorbed a sizeable portion of the secondary academic literature on radicalisation as well as government reports which she subjects to close scrutiny and criticism. That is the most valuable part of her book. D. PISOIU is right in stressing the utility of rational choice theory in explaining why some individuals and groups see merit in becoming violent radicals. She is also right in seeing parallels between choosing a criminal career and a terrorist career (there are also parallels between opting for such careers and opting for joining a religious sect – something she has, however, not looked into). She is also right in viewing Islamist radicalisation as a gradual process, in stressing the role of social networks in joining militant groups (p. 81-82) and in viewing it not as a *sui generis* phenomenon, but as one *type* of radicalisation (p.23). However, these are, in themselves, not new findings. Her definition of radicalisation as an “occupational change process’ like any other, however, is new and problematic. Sure, on an abstract level the categories *reward*, *recognition* and *standing*, inform the choice of both legal and illegal occupations but there are also important differences (linked to operating in illegal undergrounds where sanctions are often violent) which she does not explore. Her “discovery” that the radical Islamist occupation is a matter of rational choice, leads her to far-reaching - and in the view of this reviewer often questionable - conclusions about other existing explanations of radicalisation such as

- that grievances ...hardly apply to individual profiles, and that, more importantly, motivational development occurs along completely different lines” (p. 107) ;

- that the "...assumption that extremist groups have something to do with Islamist radicalisation" is debatable (p.150);
- - "...a lack of integration is not a cause of radicalization..."(...) "...integration ...should be taken out of the counter-radicalisation debate once and for all" (pp. 162, 166);
- "...Islamist radicalism is a process generated within European societies and that the foreign nature of ideologies or the foreign background of some of the radicals do not fundamentally impact on the way this process unfolds" (p. 163);
- "...radicalisation...is not the process leading to extremism: (p. 163);
- -"...eliminating ideology and root causes are dead-end streets"(when it comes to countering radicalisation, APS);
- "The enemy is not the ideology, and much less the ideologue..."(p.166).

These are strong statements derived from a narrow and undisclosed database. Her "most important recommendation" that "governments need to 'get the radicalisation process right', before even considering devising counter-measures" (p.166), is debatable too; governments often have to deal with problems (like epidemics) while initially not yet fully understanding the root cause. Instead of asking 'Why does one radicalize?' or 'Why or how does one become a terrorist?' we should ask, according to Dr. Pisoiu, 'What is the process through which one decides for an Islamist radical occupation rather than another one?' (p.168). This reviewer fails to see that this rephrasing of the problem radically opens new pathways to understanding and countering Islamist radicalisation. Daniela Pisoiu is more successful in questioning existing approaches to radicalisation than finding a new one. Nevertheless, her dissertation is a welcome contribution to the discussion - although it is quite pricy for its length.

***About the Reviewer: Alex P. Schmid is Editor of 'Perspectives on Terrorism'.***