Youth and Terrorism
A six-step interdisciplinary explanation

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Today’s talk

• 2015: Paris
  2016: Brussels, Nice, Würzburg, Charleroi, Berlin

• Terrorists in majority of attacks aged between 20 and 31

• Terrorism and youth?

• Probably, six steps from sociology to psychology. Empirical evidence for each of the steps

Meeus, 2015b
1. Adolescence as social invention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transition</th>
<th>1950</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School leaving age</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First intimate partner</td>
<td>20,5</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First marriage</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So: prolonged period of education, 6 years and of experimentation with intimate relationships, 10 years. Adolescence as life-phase and youth as group

Note: faster increase of personality maturation, agreeableness, conscientiousness and emotional stability in countries with earlier timing from school to job

Various EU and US datasets; Meeus & ‘t Hart, 1993; Bleidorn et al, 2013
2. “Don’t trust anyone over 25”

Youthcentrism

• In group-out group differentiation
  – Negative attitude against parents, strong orientation on peers
  – Critical to adult institutions (school, state) and its functionaries (teachers, police, politicians)
  – Generation gap: ‘…hope to die before get old…’
  – Young people are able to oppose the adult world
• 1965: ‘Teenage-ethnocentrism’ (Schofield), 1981
  Jugendzentrismus (Zinnecker et al.)

Scale item: ‘Young people and adults: Two totally distinct worlds’

Meeus, 1986, 1988; Ter Bogt et al., 2008
Youth centrism: Empirical findings

- Adolescents endorsing youth centrism: between 30 and 40%
- Youthcentrists: poorer relationships with parents, more engaged in youth subcultures, poor school performance, more unemployment, and most prevalent in middle adolescence
3. No Future…

• The grim aspect of youth centrism
• Latent aspect of group consciousness in all youth generations: there is no place for us in this society
• Examples: present Dutch discussion on pensions, UK discussions on Brexit, or more severe: youth violence in Paris suburbs in 2007-2008
• Real ground for No Future: in times of unemployment youth unemployment always has strongest increase
No Future: Empirical findings

- Social hedonism (cf Smetana’s Social domain theory)
  ‘Why do they simply not allow us to be happy?’
- Anarchism
  ‘This is us, and we do as we like’
- Youthcentrism
  ‘Young people and adults: Two totally distinct worlds’
- No Future
  ‘Live fast – die young’
  ‘Youth 2016: No future!’
The adolescent rebellion escalator: A cumulative scale model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Position on dimension</th>
<th>Social hedonism</th>
<th>Anarchism</th>
<th>Youth-centrism</th>
<th>No Future</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth in despair</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generation gap</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance to adults</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth oriented</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult oriented</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Meeus, 1986
4. No Future: Identity diffusion and Moratorium

Meeus et al, 2010

Achievement  Closure  Moratorium  Searching  Diffusion

Commitment  In-depth exploration  Reconsideration

Prevalence 12-20

Meeus et al, 2010
4. No Future: Identity diffusion and Moratorium

Achievement  Commitment 62%
Closure       In-depth exploration 80%
Moratorium    Reconsideration 39%
Searching     Searching 18%
Diffusion     Searching 39%

Meeus et al, 2010
Correlates of Identity diffusion and Moratorium

- Low stability of Moratorium and Diffusion
- Apart from these: Moratoriums & Diffusions are
  - More depressed and anxious
  - More aggressive and delinquent
  - Less prosocial
  - Have poorer relationships with parents and peers
- So in a state they want to get out…

Meeus, 2015b
5. Absence of commitments: vulnerability for identity change

Insecure identity is a predisposing condition for conversion (Lofland & Stark, 1965)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious conversion, predisposing conditions</th>
<th>Converts</th>
<th>Non-coverts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Experience of enduring, acutely felt tensions</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. With a religious problem solving perspective</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Self-definition as religious seeker</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. At turning point in life</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. Especially when relationships in old network are poor and interaction with new group is intense

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious conversion: the social fabric</th>
<th>Converts</th>
<th>Non-coverts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5. Meeting with recruiters and formation of affective bonds with new group</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Absence of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Emotional support parents</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Emotional support peers</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Interaction frequency with members new group</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Change of general ideas</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kox, Meeus, & ‘t Hart, 1991
The predictive power of the religious conversion model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>No conversion</th>
<th>Conversion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No conversion</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>39 (91%)</td>
<td>4 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversion</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>5 (12%)</td>
<td>36 (88%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Correct prediction for all: 89%

$\chi^2 = 62.52, p < .001$

4 of the 7 model elements contributed to the prediction
In sum

**Sociological level**

1. Prolonged adolescence
   - 2. Don’t trust anyone over 25
     - 3. No future

**Psychological level**

4. Diffusion/ Moratorium
   - 5. Vulnerability for conversion
   - 6. Change of social network
     - New (radical) identity

Needed: A European two step study to test these ideas
References


