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The Role of Narratives in Radicalisation: A Critical Examination of Causality and Agency

This study embarks on a comprehensive exploration of the intersection between narrative and terrorism, delving into the pivotal role narratives play in the radicalisation process. With a methodological approach grounded in an exhaustive literature review, employing keywords such as “narrative,” “terrorism,” and “radicalisation,” the study identifies three patterns of findings on this topic. The first category of researchers establishes a direct causal link between narratives and their impact on the opinions and behaviours of individuals, suggesting that stories can significantly influence audience actions. In contrast, the second category acknowledges the importance of narratives in radicalisation but refrains from asserting a straightforward causal relationship between narrative content and the commitment to violent actions. The third category casts doubt on the direct correlation between narratives and violent behaviours, positing that current academic discourse may overstate the influence of narratives, overlooking the critical element of individual agency. This investigation highlights the divergent scholarly perspectives on the role of narratives in radicalisation, revealing a common thread of scepticism towards the unequivocal power of narratives and underscoring the absence of rigorous, evidence-based studies. By examining the existing literature, the study seeks to address pressing questions surrounding the certainty of narrative influence on individual radicalisation and to define the narrative’s function more clearly within this complex process. The anticipated outcome is to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the narrative dimension of terrorism, challenging the existing literature’s potential overemphasis on narrative power and advocating for a balanced consideration of audience agency.

What discipline or branch of humanities or social sciences do you identify yourself with?

Security Studies

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Are you a PhD student or early-career researcher?

Yes

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