



# Social entrepreneurship as emancipatory work



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## ABSTRACT

Building on the ‘entrepreneurship as emancipation’ perspective, I explore the emancipatory potential of social entrepreneurship as a means to disengage individuals enthralled to ideology and trapped by their own past behavior. I studied two former religious-based terrorists from Indonesia, and their social enterprise, a cafe chain, which has successfully emancipated 10 ex-terrorists. In this paper, I show how engagement in entrepreneurship can be emancipatory through allowing individuals not only to escape some ideological constraints but also to construct new meaning in life and new social roles and connections that provide a platform for building a new future. Importantly, because social entrepreneurship as a form of organizing permits autonomy from an exclusive focus on profitability, it afforded the entrepreneurs I studied to achieve a degree of emancipation both for themselves and also for those they served. My results also have substantial practical value in elucidating a potentially valuable tool in efforts to reduce terrorist violence. I develop a grounded process model of *social entrepreneurship as emancipatory work* to summarize the study and offer avenues for future research.

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## 1. Executive summary

Despite the predominant focus on ‘wealth creation’ as a perspective in entrepreneurship research (Welter et al., 2017), we are witnessing the rise of new streams of inquiries that examine the social value added role of entrepreneurship (Zahra and Wright, 2016; Williams and Shepherd, 2016) and the notion of entrepreneurship as potentially emancipating (Rindova et al., 2009). Drawing on the ‘entrepreneurship as emancipation’ perspective (Rindova et al., 2009), I examined emancipation -- “the act of setting free from the power of another” (Rindova et al., 2009: 478), and in so doing expand the range of restrictions from which emancipation can be gained to include other forces such as enthrallment to ideology (Juergensmeyer, 2017; Sanín and Wood, 2014), as well as one’s own past behavior and the social restrictions it may impose on one’s present and future.

In efforts to understand if emancipation via entrepreneurship may remove the restrictions faced by individuals trapped by an ideology and their own past behavior that restricts them, I studied two former Indonesian religious-based terrorists (“reformers”) ‘who have been there and come back’ (joining and leaving terrorism for a better, mainstream life style) via their culinary arts social enterprise that has disengaged 10 ex-terrorists, as a research site (Merton, 1987). Based on theory-building inductive research (Glaser, 1978, 1998; Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 1997) using primary and secondary data analysis and longitudinal observations of the reformers and their clients’ behavior, I show how engagement in entrepreneurship can be emancipatory through allowing peripheral and core players in terrorism not only to escape some ideological constraints but also to construct new meaning in life and new social roles and connections that provide a platform for building a new future. From here, I extend theory about

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entrepreneurship as emancipation to the processes through which entrepreneurs and those they serve can be emancipated from constraints of both ideology and their own past behavior. Using the involvement-engagement-disengagement theory (Horgan, 2014) as an organizing framework, I theorized a process model that depicts the inter-relationships between the dimensions and processes of emancipatory entrepreneurship and its outcomes, along with several contingencies. I call this the '*social entrepreneurship as emancipatory work*' perspective.

I further demonstrate how social entrepreneurship is an important *organizational form* for this emancipation. Because social entrepreneurship as a form of organizing permits autonomy from an exclusive focus on profitability, it allowed the entrepreneurs I studied to achieve a degree of emancipation both for themselves and also for those they served. This shows how entrepreneurship in the form of social entrepreneurship can bridge the gap between emancipation as self- versus other-oriented described by Rindova and her colleagues. As a platform to create and share resources with others as a community, social entrepreneurship also serves as an *agent of social welfare* to achieve social development and thus extends the purpose of emancipation beyond its predominantly 'for-profit' context (Rindova et al., 2009; Jennings et al., 2016).

My results have substantial practical value in elucidating a potentially valuable tool in efforts to reduce terrorist violence. The *social entrepreneurship as emancipatory work* perspective offers new possibilities to reframe the questions about religious terrorism away from "punishing or correcting" terrorists, to "emancipating" them and understanding its processes and contingencies. This can be achieved by using "reformers" as trusted and legitimate emancipators, through the 'brotherhood economic model' that replaced the brotherhood the clients had developed or hoped to develop by joining terrorist groups, engaging them to perform humbling work to understand others' needs and perspectives, using hospitality-based entrepreneurial ventures (e.g., cafes) as "spaces of encounter" that broadens clients' social networks, and encouraging clients to work harmoniously with all stakeholders, among others.

This study offers new avenues for future *social entrepreneurship as instrument of emancipation* research including exploring and testing it on larger samples of core and peripheral terrorists and in various institutional contexts where entrepreneurship may be a more or less well-respected and high social status occupation in the society and thus a viable "escape route" for terrorists. It also opens up new opportunities to compare the efficacy of hospitality based versus to non-hospitality based ventures as enablers of terrorist disengagement and between the emancipatory approach versus confrontational- and counseling-based approaches more broadly. The study also opens new avenues to study how ideologists socially and discursively construct reality and how reformers and repented terrorists re-construct social reality and their 'competitive dynamics' in the market for ideology. Theoretically, each of these results and questions expands and can inform research on entrepreneurship as emancipation in a wide variety of contexts, most of them less challenging than creating new lives for ex-terrorists.

## 2. Introduction

Entrepreneurship research has conventionally focused on 'wealth creation' as the fundamental objective of entrepreneurial activities (Welter et al., 2017). In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in the broader social value of entrepreneurship (Zahra and Wright, 2016). Rindova et al. (2009) called for new research directions that considered entrepreneurship "outside of its traditional contexts including the activities of explorers, artists, and scientists...to migrant workers turned winemakers" (p. 489); those that focus on the pursuit of *freedom* and *autonomy* and that seek to disrupt the status quo and the social order. They believed that entrepreneurship research required "a bit of emancipation" [of new theoretical perspectives and contexts] (2009: 478) and proposed the notion of entrepreneurship as emancipation.

Rindova and her colleagues (2009: 478) used the term emancipation to describe "the act of setting free from the power of another" (Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary, 1996). One's freedom and autonomy, however, can be restricted not only by the power of another (person, organization), but also by other forces. These include one's own acceptance of restrictions, such as through enthrallment to *ideology*, as well as *one's own past behavior* and the social restrictions it may impose on one's present and future. Ideologies are ideas and tools to interpret and shape social reality towards preferred ends, and are tied to concrete power interests within the society (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). For example, the mass killing of the Tutsis by the Hutus in Rwanda has been described as carried out under an ideology – the Hutu Power supremacist ideology – driven by political and economic interests (Straus, 2006). A person's past behavior (e.g., an executioner or a survivor in the Rwandan genocide) could restrict one from living a 'normal' life and reintegrating into society. Prior research on entrepreneurship as emancipation tells us little about whether or how an individual may be emancipated from enthrallment to ideology or from the social restrictions of their own past behavior. In this paper, I seek to address the following research question: *How can social entrepreneurship emancipate individuals from the constraints of ideology and their own past behavior?*

I conducted this study within the context of *religious terrorism*, a type of terrorism that typically legitimizes violence as a religious, God-given imperative (Hoffman, 1995; Victoroff, 2005). This is an ancient social problem that has gained momentum in recent decades, in both developed and developing countries (Fox and Gilbert, 2016; Putra and Sukabdi, 2013). Scholars of religious terrorism emphasize how religion provides the ideology that legitimizes violence as part of an unbounded struggle against the forces of evil (Juergensmeyer, 2017) and also provides strategic guidance on how and where it is legitimate to carry the fight (Hegghammer, 2013). Despite the burgeoning research on religious terrorism, little is known about the *mechanisms of disengagement* from terrorist ideology or about the individuals who have disengaged from religious terrorism and the processes that have allowed them to do so (Horgan, 2009). Prior research has shown how the use of the logic of confrontation such as punishment-and-deterrent approaches (e.g., any form of 'War on Terror') (Schneider et al., 2015), and to a smaller extent, the logic of

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