

Department  
of Political Science

Chair: Sociology of Terrorism

The Processes of Deradicalization

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## **Introduction**

This bachelor's degree thesis aims to analyze the processes of deradicalization of radical individuals. For this purpose, an extensive study of the numerous definitions of deradicalization that renowned scholars have provided is of particular interest since a generally shared definition has not been reached.

The methodology used to carry out this research is the analysis and confrontation of the thought of some of the most influential experts that have investigated the matter, from which this work shall begin. In particular, this research wants to analyze the main deradicalization programs that have emerged over the years, so as to understand the way in which deradicalization processes take place in the practice.

The first chapter is dedicated to the examination of the main definitions of deradicalization that have been proposed by experienced authors such as John Horgan, Fernando Reinares, and Daniel Kohler. While the definitions of these authors differ in many ways, all of them agree that deradicalization is not only a social or behavioral process, but also a psychological one.

Special consideration is given to Kohler in this chapter, due to the fact that the scholar underlined the connection between the processes of deradicalization and those of radicalization. Following his example, this research will take into account the importance of understanding radicalization to fully understand deradicalization by carefully analyzing the definitions of radicalization provided by the European Commission, Daniel Kohler, Mohammed Hafez, Creighton Mullins, Kees Van Den Bos and Daniela PISOIU. In addition to this, to better understand radicalization, the views of the four schools of thoughts on radicalization will be reported in this analysis as well. Finally, the chapter is concluded with the careful examination of Kohler's model of deradicalization as re-pluralization.

The second chapter is dedicated to the analysis of three of the most renowned deradicalization programs in the world: the Saudi Counseling Program, the EXIT Stockholm Program, and the American Program in Iraq. These programs are indeed object of great interest from scholars and experts in the field due to their excellent results and the low recidivism rate that the relevant institutions have recorded after the participation in these projects. The analysis of these programs will depart from the accounts of scholars such as Arie W. Kruglanski, Jocelyn J. Bélanger and Rohan Gunaratna, who carefully described the Saudi Counselling Program. Then the analysis will proceed with the reports of Froukje Demant, Marieke Sloopman, Frank Buijs and Jean Tillie on the EXIT Stockholm Program. Finally, the chapter will be concluded by the analysis of the American Program in Iraq provided by Ami Angell, Rohan Gunaratna, Arie W. Kruglanski and Jocelyn J. Bélanger.

The third chapter is devoted to the analysis of the two inconclusive deradicalization programs that were established in France: The CPIC program and the RIVE program. The events that lead to the end of these deradicalization attempts, as well as the main causes for their inconclusiveness are indeed great sources interest for scholars and experts of deradicalization. An analysis of the counterterrorism efforts of France is necessary to better understand some of the causes for the unsuccessful results of these programs. Therefore, it is exactly from this analysis that this last chapter shall start. The chapter will then carefully examine the two inconclusive programs, taking into account the reports provided by Marck Hecker, as well as specialized reviews in the field such as Foreign Policy, and The Atlantic.

In the conclusions, I am going to summarize what emerged from the study of the different theories of deradicalization. Finally, conclusions will be also drawn on what transpired from the analysis of the programs of deradicalization carried out in the second and third chapter.

# 1. Understanding the concept of deradicalization: what does it mean to deradicalize?

## 1.1 Defining Deradicalization

The aim of this thesis is that of analyzing and explaining deradicalization and the processes that lead individuals to deradicalize. In order to do this, this analysis will begin by examining the various definitions of deradicalization developed by some of the principal scholars.

A first definition that will be examined in this analysis is the one provided by Horgan in his book “Walking Away From Terrorism: Accounts of Disengagement from Radical and Extremist Movements”, in which he described deradicalization as “the social and psychological process whereby an individual’s commitment to, and involvement in, violent radicalization is reduced to the extent that they are no longer at risk of involvement and engagement in violent activity.”<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, according to Horgan deradicalization may also refer to initiatives aimed at reducing the risk of recidivism by concentrating on the main problems presented by disengagement processes. Horgan was able to develop this definition by mainly focusing on the reasons that led former terrorists to abandon organizations such as the Irish Republic Army, Al Qaeda, and the Ulster Volunteer Force.

What emerges from the analysis of Horgan’s definition, is that deradicalization is a process that takes place both at the psychological level and at the behavioral one. Indeed, according to what Horgan observed, deradicalization works by delegitimizing violence in the individual’s mind, which in turn leads the individual to completely abandon the use violence. While this definition already explains the effects that deradicalization has on individuals, the scholar takes it a step further by also describing what according to him is the main objective of deradicalization strategies. Indeed, Horgan believes the main objective of deradicalization to be that of reducing the risk of recidivism.

It is however important to note that the scholar does not take this to mean that deradicalization can lead individuals to revert back to the state they were in before radicalizing. According to Horgan, once an individual decides to take part in terrorist activities, he or she will be affected by this experience forever. Nonetheless, while there is no possibility for deradicalized individuals to revert to their “pre-radicalization” state, Horgan maintains that deradicalization can still have a significant impact on preventing individuals from engaging in terroristic activities again. This, Horgan affirms, is especially true in those cases in which the reason that led individuals to deradicalize is the

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<sup>1</sup> John G. Horgan, *Walking Away From Terrorism: Accounts of Disengagement from Radical and Extremist Movements*, Routledge, London, 2009, pp.153;

unpleasant experiences they had with the organization they were part of<sup>2</sup>.

Another relevant definition of deradicalization is the one suggested by Reinares in 2011, according to whom “deradicalization emphasizes an attitudinal change. It implies that he or she no longer condones terrorism and does not justify the individual and collective actors using such types of violence”<sup>3</sup>. Reinares presents this definition in the context of a study on former terrorists who made part of the ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna), a “Basque ethno-nationalist terrorist organization”<sup>4</sup> that originated in 1959 with the aim of achieving independence for the Basque population. It is indeed by interviewing numerous former members of the ETA on the reasons that that ultimately led them to leave that Reinares managed to develop his definition of deradicalization.

During his study, Reinares observed that individuals that had successfully deradicalized did not only stop committing violent actions, but many of them also stopped condoning the use of violence by the terrorist organization<sup>5</sup>. More importantly, the study also showed how numerous deradicalized individuals no longer supported the existence of the ETA in the first place. While the effects of deradicalization on former ETA terrorists were ultimately very similar, Reinares points out that the reasons that led them to deradicalize in the first place varied considerably among the respondents. In this regard, Reinares mainly identified three factors that can lead individual to disengage or deradicalize from terrorist organization: “structural, organizational, and personal”<sup>6</sup>.

According to Reinares, the structural factors entail socio-political transformation in the context in which the organization operates, such as the transition from dictatorship to democracy, that would render the existence of said organization no longer necessary in the eyes of its members. The organizational factors, instead, are those connected to the internal organization of the extremist group and to the tactics adopted by the leaders of the organization. For instance, during his research, Reinares observed that numerous individuals did not approve of some of the indiscriminate attacks ordered by their leaders, which prompted their decision to leave<sup>7</sup>. Lastly, the personal factors imply a shift in the preferences of individuals who no longer consider the terrorist organization as their main priority, leading them to decide to leave the organization altogether.

Finally, we have the definition of deradicalization provided by Kohler in 2017 who describes it as: “A process of re-pluralization of political values, ideas, and concepts, as well as problem

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>3</sup> Fernando Reinares, *Exit From Terrorism: A Qualitative Empirical Study on Disengagement and Deradicalization Among Members of ETA*, in “Terrorism and Political Violence”, 23/2011, p.780;

<sup>4</sup> *Ivi*, p.781;

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>6</sup> *Ivi*, p.802;

<sup>7</sup> *Ivi*, p.793;

definitions, solutions, and future visions”<sup>8</sup>. This definition was developed through a profound analysis of the available literature and studies on the processes of radicalization and deradicalization that Kohler described in his book.

According to Kohler, this definition of deradicalization entails a “growing perception of alternative options to solve a decreasingly important (ideologically defined) problem”<sup>9</sup> which has the important effect of making individuals rethink the importance of violence as a mean to achieve the political change they strive for. Furthermore, Kohler believes that this definition of deradicalization provides a very interesting insight on the processes of radicalization as well. Indeed, according to Kohler, radicalization is a process of de-pluralization aimed at reducing the political notions available to individuals until the only the political notions available are the ones sanctioned by the ideology of the terrorist organization. Therefore, what emerges from this analysis is that, in Kohler’s opinion, radicalization and deradicalization are strictly intertwined and are therefore two concepts that need to be studied together.

Another point that Kohler stresses in his book is that the definition of deradicalization he provided does not only consider the psychological factors involved in the process of deradicalization, but it also takes into account the importance of ideological factors, such as ideas and values, and the violent behaviour that is correlated to that ideology. Finally, Kohler also believes that using this definition represent an advantage in that it allows to track the progress that individuals make in their deradicalization process<sup>10</sup>.

Furthermore, as Kohler emphasized, it is only by means of knowledge on the matter that one can really evaluate whether or not certain strategies have been effective in deradicalizing individuals while also being able to identify the underlying reasons behind the success or failure of certain deradicalization programs<sup>11</sup>. Indeed, Kohler believes that taking into account this connection between radicalization and deradicalization can be really useful when designing deradicalization programs, but it can be greatly insightful when planning preventive efforts as well. This is due to the fact that, just like deradicalization strategies, prevention programs too only work successfully when they rely on an exhaustive understanding of the root causes of the events they are trying to avert<sup>12</sup>.

While, as many scholars observed, a universal definition of deradicalization may help when defining standard practices to employ in deradicalization programs, it also useful to remember that since there are many forms and kinds of radicalization processes, there will necessarily be many kinds

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<sup>8</sup> Daniel Koehler, *Understanding Deradicalization: Methods, tools and programs for countering violent extremism*, Routledge, London, 2017, p.82;

<sup>9</sup> *Ivi*, p.81

<sup>10</sup> *Ivi*, p.82;

<sup>11</sup> *Ivi*, p.65

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*;

and forms of deradicalization as well, each one targeting a specific kind of radicalization.

While the existence of different deradicalization processes to target different kinds of radicalization has already been mentioned, it is useful to mention it again since this is the starting point of the analysis of the different processes radicalization that will be carried out in the next sub-chapter and it will also be the departing idea that will guide the analysis of processes deradicalization that will be carried out in the second chapter of this thesis.

## 1.2 Understanding Radicalization

In order to better understand why individuals decide to deradicalize, it is very important to also understand how individuals radicalize. For this purpose, this sub-chapter will be dedicated to the analysis of the main definitions of radicalization presented by some of the most relevant scholars in the field.

The first use of the term “radicalization”<sup>13</sup> in political debates occurred in rather recent times. Indeed, it is only from 2005 onwards, concurrently with the London terror attacks<sup>14</sup>, that we start to register an increasing use of the notion. After the attacks, having realized the inherent threat that radicalization leading to terrorism (re)presented, many Western countries started to focus their attention on the study of the motives and processes that could lead to individual radicalization.

It is exactly from these studies that many definitions of radicalization started to arise. One of the most relevant definitions of radicalization is the one that has been adopted by the European Commission in 2015, describing radicalization as the process of “embracing opinions, views, and ideas which could lead to acts of terrorism”<sup>15</sup>. Therefore, in the eyes of the European community, radicalization is a strictly ideological process that does not necessarily need to involve violence. Indeed, it needs to be noted that there is much disagreement on whether or not violence is an important element for the understanding of radicalization. As a matter of fact, many scholars see radicalization as a process that necessarily involves violence as a means to reach a political goal.

The disagreement on whether or not the concept of radicalization needs to involve violence brought researchers to divide radicalization into two categories: non-violent and violent radicalization. Thus, according to Kohler, non-violent radicalization is intended as “the process by which individuals come to hold radical views in relation to the status quo but do not undertake, aid,

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<sup>13</sup> *Ivi*, p.66;

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>15</sup> Anita Orav, *Religious fundamentalism and radicalization*, in “European Parliamentary Briefing”, March 2015, p.2, available on <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/EPRS/EPRS-briefing-551342-Religious-fundamentalism-and-radicalisation-FINAL.pdf> (viewed on March 30, 2021);



or abet terrorist activity”<sup>16</sup>. Violent radicalization, on the other hand, does entail the use of force subsequent to the adoption of radical ideas.

Among the various attempts to provide a common definition of radicalization we find that of Hafez and Mullins. These scholars described radicalization as a combination of three core elements without which the process of radicalization itself cannot be understood: “Radicalization is usually a (1) gradual “process” that entails socialization into an (2) extremist belief system that sets the stage for (3) violence even if it does not make it inevitable”<sup>17</sup>. Therefore, the first element that Hafez and Mullins individuated is that of the graduality of the radicalization process. The second element is the adoption of extremist views, which the radicalizing individual typically acquires through the socialization with other extremists. Lastly, the third element is represented by the individual opening up to the possibility of utilizing violence to achieve the radical group’s political objectives.

Another interesting definition is that advanced by Kees Van Den Bos who described radicalization as “process of growing willingness to pursue and/or support radical changes in society (in an undemocratic manner, if necessary) that conflict with, or could pose a threat to, democratic legal order.”<sup>18</sup> Such a definition is indeed noteworthy in that it points out a common feature of radical groups, which is that of challenging democratic beliefs and systems, that has not been specifically mentioned in any other definition previously analyzed, even though the values of extremist groups vehemently oppose the traditional democratic beliefs.

An interesting point of view on the methodology used by scholars to define radicalization is that of Daniela Pisoiu. The main argument advanced by Pisoiu is that many of the scholars who attempted to provide a definition of radicalization used a particular descriptive expedient to form their definition, that is the description of the principal consequences or behaviors observed in radicalized individuals. Pisoiu criticizes this methodology on the grounds that these factors are not inherently part of the radicalization process but rather the natural outcomes of radicalization processes<sup>19</sup>. Hence, according to Pisoiu, to really describe radicalization, one should primarily define the processes that lead individuals to radicalize, since it is through these processes that scholars can fully understand how radicalization takes place and the degree of radicalization of each individual<sup>20</sup>.

Indeed, Pisoiu suggests that radicalization should rather be understood as a “political ideology

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<sup>16</sup> Daniel Koehler, *Understanding Deradicalization: Methods, tools and programs for countering violent extremism*, Routledge, London, 2017, pp.67-68;

<sup>17</sup> Mohammed Hafez, Creighton Mullins, *The Radicalization Puzzle: A Theoretical Synthesis of Empirical Approaches to Homegrown Extremism*, in “Studies in Conflict and Terrorism”, 38/2015, pp.958-975;

<sup>18</sup> Kees Van Den Bos, *Why do people radicalize*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2018, p.565;

<sup>19</sup> Daniela Pisoiu, *Islamist radicalization in Europe. An occupational change process*, Routledge, New York, 2011, p.12;

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*;

with the objective of inducing sweeping change based on fundamental or ‘root’ principles”<sup>21</sup>. Such a definition sees radicalization as a process having two stages, with the first one being an increasing yearning for social and political changes, and the second one being the growing importance of fundamental radical principles. Unlike the other definitions, PISOIU offers us a depiction of radicalism which is not based on the ultimate outcomes of radicalization but rather on the desires and wishes that guide radicalized individuals. Hence, as Kohler emphasized in his analysis of this definition, this description of radicalization is of great importance for it emphasizes two major aspects of radicalism that persisted over time<sup>22</sup>.

Since, as we have seen, there is great disagreement on the definition of radicalization and on the processes involved in it, it is common practice to differentiate between four main schools of thought on radicalization: the sociological school, the social movement school, the empirical school, and the psychological school. The purpose of this section is to report the main arguments of these schools as they have been presented by Kohler and Dalgaard-Nielsen. Indeed, according to Kohler, if we fail to understand that there are different ideas on what radicalization is and on how the process of radicalization takes place, we will fail to understand why different programs of deradicalizations employ different tactics<sup>23</sup>. That is because, as the scholar emphasized, each deradicalization program is modeled on a different conception of radicalization processes and therefore requires different deradicalization strategies.

The sociological school, mainly represented by Gilles Kepel, Farhad Khosrokhavar, and Olivier Roy<sup>24</sup>, argues that radicalization is a process prompted in individuals by an identity loss in an unfriendly social environment. Indeed, according to these scholars, factors such as marginalization, group pressure, and illiteracy, have a great impact on individuals and on their decision to join a radical organization<sup>25</sup>. Nevertheless, these scholars also argue that radicalization is not a phenomenon pertaining solely to the lower social classes. As a matter of fact, factors such as the loss of identity, the search for a purpose, and the need to feel included led many middle-class individuals to radicalize<sup>26</sup>.

The social movement school, instead, has two main groups of scholars with differing approaches to radicalization: the first group, which sees Marc Sageman and Quintan Wiktorowicz as

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<sup>21</sup> Daniela PISOIU, *Islamist radicalization in Europe. An occupational change process*, Routledge, New York, 2011, p.23;

<sup>22</sup> Daniel Koehler, *Understanding Deradicalization: Methods, tools and programs for countering violent extremism*, Routledge, London, 2017, p.68;

<sup>23</sup> *Ivi*, p.69;

<sup>24</sup> Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen, *Violent Radicalization in Europe: What We Know and What We Do Not Know*, in “Studies in Conflict and Terrorism”, 33/2010, p.798;

<sup>25</sup> *Ivi*, p.799;

<sup>26</sup> *Ivi*, p.800;

the main exponents<sup>27</sup>, suggests that radicalization is triggered by group dynamics, which create a shared reality, and by “peer pressure”; the second group’s focus is on “contentious politics” which analyses “the relational aspects of violence between social movements in conflict with each other”<sup>28</sup>, showing how radicalization resulting in violence is fostered by the competitive relations between the organization militants and their challengers. According to Kohler, who analyzed these schools of thought, this shows how usually radicalism does not develop in the traditional political organizations, but rather around these. Hence, the scholars of this school of thought see these group dynamics as a determinant factor without which radicalization cannot be thoroughly comprehended. Some of the main representatives of the contentious politics theory are Bosi, Demetriou, Malthaner, Della Porta, Mc Adam and Tarrow<sup>29</sup>.

In contrast with the social movement school of thought, we find the empirical school of thought. Indeed, contrarily to the social movement school, the empirical school is mainly interested in the individual level of radicalization rather than group dynamics<sup>30</sup>. Therefore, the main object of study of the empirical school are the reasons that drive individuals to join a terrorist organization. Through their empirical analyses, the scholars of pertaining to this school of thought were able to divide the members of radical organizations into different categories on the basis of their process of radicalization, their motivations to radicalize, and their background. The main scholars belonging to this school of thought are: Nesser, Slootman, Tillie, and Bujis<sup>31</sup>.

Lastly, we have the psychological school of thought. One of the main representatives of this school of thought is Horgan, with his focus on the socio-psychological processes leading to radicalization. According to Horgan, in order to understand radicalization, it is first necessary to understand the social and psychological aspects involved in “push and pull factors”<sup>32</sup>. The importance of these factors lies in the fact that these are often considered as the main drivers of radicalization. For instance, Horgan argues that factors such as frustration with the political system, the conviction that violence is a legitimate means of achieving political change, and a strong attachment to an extremist organization, greatly influence the choice to use violence<sup>33</sup>.

In conclusion, the existence of many schools of thought with different views on radicalization is the perfect example of how divided the community of experts on radicalization really is.

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<sup>27</sup> Ivi, p.801;

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>31</sup> Ivi, p.806;

<sup>32</sup> Daniel Koehler, *Understanding Deradicalization: Methods, tools and programs for countering violent extremism*, Routledge, London, 2017, p.70;

<sup>33</sup> On this matter see Tore Bjørgo, John G. Horgan, *Leaving Terrorism Behind. Individual and collective disengagement*, Routledge, London, 2008, pp.6-7;

Nevertheless, the division also shows how different the processes leading to radicalization can be, underlining a very important aspect of radicalization, that is that of being an extremely subjective process. However, this difficulty in finding at least a common conceptual framework for understanding radicalization remains a problem in that it prevents the emergence of common views and standards to prevent and counteract radicalization.

### **1.3 Deradicalization as “re-pluralization”**

Another noteworthy attempt to define radicalization is that of Koehler, who described radicalization as “a process of individual de-pluralization of political concepts and values [...], according with those concepts employed by a specific ideology.”<sup>34</sup> According to this view, radicalization comes with the internalization of the idea that there are no alternative ways to interpret political concepts and values than the way commended by the ideology. Therefore, in embracing this radical ideology, the subject detaches himself from the “mainstream political culture”. This process, also called “de-pluralization”<sup>35</sup>, works by stripping fundamental political notions and ideas of any other meaning apart from the one sanctioned by the radical group’s official ideology. When the process of radicalization is completed, the only important goal for the radical individuals is that of attaining the extremist’s group “vision for the future”<sup>36</sup>. Hence, every other problem or matter once important to these individuals, is now perceived as irrelevant. As a consequence, newly radicalized subjects either overlook their issues or they address them according to the ideological paradigms endorsed by the radical group they make part of.

According to Kohler, the way in which radicalized groups manage to reach de-pluralization, is by slowly altering the essential values and political notions in the individual’s minds, adjusting them according to the group’s ideology, while also stressing the gravity of the main political problems the organization faces<sup>37</sup>. Indeed, terroristic groups often exaggerate the seriousness of their political problems in order to increase the devotion to the cause and the willingness to actively participate to the cause. Eventually, as the achievement of the vision becomes the prevailing necessity in the mind of the radical individual, and the availability of alternative notions, values, issues, and solutions decreases progressively, a tension is created in the individual’s mind. Past a certain point, the only way for the subject to relieve himself from this tension will be for him to use violence. This effect is

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<sup>34</sup> Daniel Koehler, *Understanding Deradicalization: Methods, tools and programs for countering violent extremism*, Routledge, London, 2017, p.74;

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>36</sup> *Ivi*, p.75;

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*;

well described in Figure 1, and is called “the time bomb effect of violent radicalization”<sup>38</sup>:

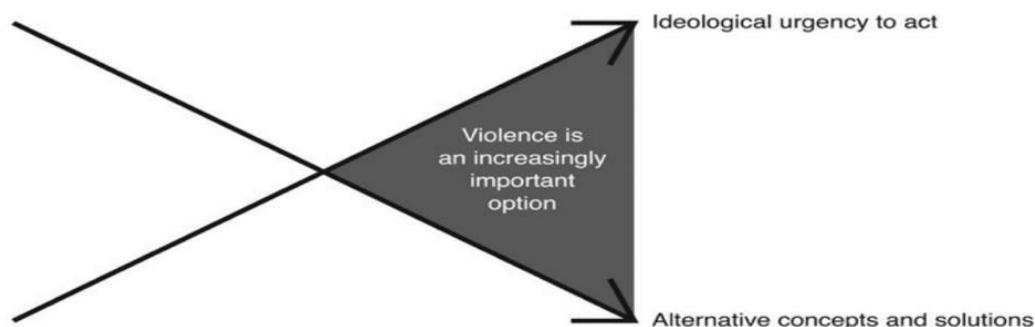


Figure 1 The time bomb effect of violent radicalization. - Daniel Koehler, *Understanding Deradicalization: Methods, tools and programs for countering violent extremism*, Routledge, London, 2017, p. 79.

However, as Kohler stressed, it is important to note that, since this process is highly subjective, the exact moment in which the individual will decide that violence is the only feasible option cannot be predicted with certainty.

Another factor that comes into play in this model is ideology which, as already mentioned, is what informs and guides the process of de-pluralization. According to Kohler, ideology can have different roles in the radical individual’s life depending on the role that the member holds in the extremist organization<sup>39</sup>. In this respect, there have been many attempts to assess the roles of individuals in radical organizations. Nevertheless, while Koehler does believe that ideology can have a great influence in the radicalization process, he recognizes that attempting to describe the exact effects of ideological beliefs might not be as useful as understanding the effects of de-pluralization<sup>40</sup>. Indeed, Kohler believes that it is this effect that is primarily responsible for the individual’s conviction that violence is the only feasible tool to relieve his tension.

Furthermore, another point that Koehler stresses in his analysis is that, with the model presented, it is possible to trace the evolution of the radicalization process thanks to precise “behavioral patterns”<sup>41</sup> that indicate the progression along the various stages of radicalization. According to him, after an individual becomes a member of a radical group, the process of radicalization he undergoes can be separated into three stages according to the behavior of the subjects and his psychological state. However, these phases will differ according to the kind of radical organization the individual has joined.

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<sup>38</sup> *Ivi*, p.79;

<sup>39</sup> *Ivi*, p.76;

<sup>40</sup> *Ivi*, p.79;

<sup>41</sup> *Ivi*, p.76;

For instance, in their first radicalization stage, jihadist recruits usually show extreme excitement and need to involve their friends and families in their “newfound wisdom”. Therefore, we are very likely to observe obsessive compartments in the jihadist recruits at this stage. With right-wing extremists, on the contrary, the first phase is usually characterized by the individuals’ detachment from society and from current conflicts<sup>42</sup>.

According to Koehler, the reason for the different behaviors displayed by individuals in different radical organizations during this first phase can be explained by the fact that each terroristic group has a precise set of political ideas and values specially tailored to the group’s goals<sup>43</sup>. Indeed, Kohler notes that jihadism is a religious ideology based on a series of ideological foundations that are accepted and shared by the Islamic population, while the same cannot be said with regard to right-wing radical groups.

The second phase is usually characterized by depressive tendencies and bitterness which are mirrored in the recruits’ behavior. Indeed, during this phase individuals start to appear tired, uneasy, and less focused. According to Kohler, the reason for this behavior lies in the inability of the individual to solve the problem he joined the cause for; as a result, the individuals willingness to acknowledge different opinions progressively decrease and the individual will show an increase in the obsession observed in the first phase<sup>44</sup>. The individual, therefore, starts to realize that simply being aware of the problem and preaching his organization’s ideology will not suffice to solve it and he starts to compulsively look for another method to solve the increasing tension that the problem generated.

The third and last phase is represented by a more controlled and confident behavior noticeable in the recruits<sup>45</sup>. According to Kohler, this satisfaction with the extremist organization and its aim is the result of a mechanism that the organization puts in place in order to solve the aforementioned inner tension. The mechanism that the organization uses is that of convincing the radical individuals to leave their native countries to join their comrades in the fight for their cause. The internal tension is thereby resolved by this newfound purpose, which the individuals consider as a solution to their problem.

After having analyzed the main implication of his model of radicalization, Kohler proceeds to present his model of deradicalization, which is essentially based on an inversion of the process of de-pluralization that takes place with radicalization. Hereby, Kohler affirms that deradicalization should be understood as a re-pluralization mechanism<sup>46</sup>. Re-pluralization, in this sense, is a process that helps

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>44</sup> *Ivi*, p.79;

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>46</sup> *Ivi*, p.81;

captured extremists to refocus their attention not on a sole purpose or problem, but on all of the problems, purposes, and interests that characterized their life previous to their radicalization. Indeed, as we have seen, the de-pluralizing effect leads the individual to think he has no alternatives to solve his internal tension, which eventually leaves him no choice but to commit extreme actions<sup>47</sup>. With the re-pluralization process, the subject distances himself from his previous radical ideology and starts to regain conscience of the many non-violent and non-radical alternatives that are really available to him. The effect is that of a “wake-up call”, with the individual realizing that the original problem presented by the terrorist group was just a way to force radicalized individuals to think in extreme terms and nudge them towards the adoption of violent measures. Indeed, usually terroristic organizations exploit the doubts of radical individuals on what the right action should be by using “push and pull factors”<sup>48</sup> to convince them that the only way to solve their grievances is to commit to the cause and to use extreme methods to achieve the organization’s aim.

According to Kohler, since the tactics employed by radical organizations have different effects on each individual, thereby leading to very different radicalization processes, a successful deradicalization program must be shaped taking into account the individual processes of radicalization of each subject as well as the psychological factors that led them to commit to such an extremist cause. For this purpose, the scholar points out that there are numerous programs of deradicalization, each of which adopts different strategies to deal with radical individuals and lead them to deradicalize. For instance, some programs use education and “vocational training” to empower their subjects, other programs try to show how non-violence can still be a successful alternative, and others provide “confrontation with victims, alternative worldviews, and ideological interpretations”<sup>49</sup>. Therefore, despite the strategies used may differ, the main purpose of these programs is the same: showing radicalized individuals that violence is not the only viable option while also motivating them to adopt more moderate behaviors. Consequently, for Kohler, it is not so much the strategy used, as the reliability of the alternatives to violence offered to individuals that influences the outcome of these programs.

Therefore, according to the scholar, by seeing deradicalization as a re-pluralizing process, deradicalization strategies will be specifically tailored according to the observed radicalization process and according to the effects accomplished<sup>50</sup>. By doing so, Kohler believes that the successful measures can be distinguished from the unsuccessful ones for each and every participant. As demonstrated by the image below, the effect of these targeted deradicalization efforts should be that

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>48</sup> Daniel Koehler, *Understanding Deradicalization: Methods, tools and programs for countering violent extremism*, Routledge, London, 2017, p.81;

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>50</sup> *Ivi*, p.82;

of increasing the range of notions, especially the political ones, and of increasing the “perceived alternatives”<sup>51</sup> to violence while also triggering a decrease in the necessity to act created by the radical ideology; at some point on this process, represented by the intersection of these two factors, individuals will start to consider violence as an unnecessary measure and revert back to also considering peaceful alternative as solutions to their problems.

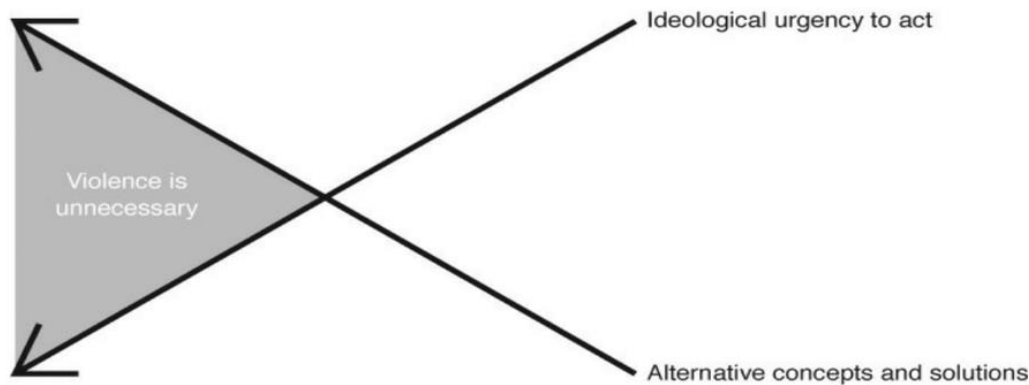


Figure 2 Deradicalization as re-pluralization. - Koehler, Daniel, *Understanding Deradicalization: Methods, tools and programs for countering violent extremism*, Routledge, London, 2017, p. 82.

As Kohler emphasizes, the particularity of this deradicalization process is that it excludes those reasons for radical behavior that have nothing to do with commitment to the cause or ideological necessity for action<sup>52</sup>. Moreover, it only features those processes of deradicalization that are based on voluntary participation, and in which there is a proven reduction in the ideological commitment of the participants.

Furthermore, according to Kohler, another great advantage that this model offers is the ease with which it is possible to track the progress of the participants during their re-pluralization process<sup>53</sup>. Moreover, there are many ways in which this progress can be measured. For example, the subjects' progress can easily be tracked through specially devised questionnaires analyzing the range of their morals and of their political notions. Another interesting way to measure the de-pluralization or re-pluralization progress is that of conducting “narrative interviews”<sup>54</sup> in order to understand the state of the subject's convictions. What is really under measurement during these tests is not the language the subjects use but their attitude when presented with ideas, notions, and morals that are

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>54</sup> *Ivi*, p.83;



then juxtaposed to contrasting outlooks and demarcations.

In conclusion, the re-pluralization model of deradicalization has proven to be a useful method for gaining more insight on the connection between radicalization, ideology, and deradicalization. This connection between radicalization and deradicalization is indeed what informed the construction of this theoretical model in the first place. And, while Kohler recognizes that his model of deradicalization will not work for everyone, he also argues that developing a model of deradicalization viable for every single radical individual would not be possible. Indeed, according to him such an attempt would result in failure since what might work in deradicalizing a certain group of individuals might not work for another group, and it is therefore essential to have different deradicalization programs to tackle the many existing types of radicalization.

## 2. The Processes of Deradicalization

### 2.1 An Overview

The main aim of this chapter is that of analyzing some of the most relevant deradicalization programs in three main geographic areas: the Middle East, Europe, and the United States. The choice to analyze these three areas is due to the great number of relevant deradicalization initiatives developed in these zones, such as: the Saudi Counseling Program, the Yemeni Program, the Swedish Program, the Norwegian Program, and the American Program. However, this analysis will only take into consideration three leading deradicalization projects in the field because of their proven results, and because of the great relevance they hold at the international level. The three projects are: the Saudi Counseling Program, the EXIT Sweden Program, and the American Program in Iraq. Before analyzing these initiatives, however, it is important to understand that deradicalization processes can take place on three distinct levels: the “micro-level”<sup>55</sup>, the “meso-level”<sup>56</sup>, and the “macro-level”<sup>57</sup>.

The micro-level is usually concerned with individual processes of deradicalization<sup>58</sup>. According to Kruglanski, Bélanger, and Gunaratna, “individual deradicalization”<sup>59</sup> can take place for many reasons. The main factors that these scholars indicate as drivers of deradicalization are the disenchantment with the objective and the activities of the organization, the feeling of dissatisfaction with the organization, and the loss of significance. Indeed, according to Kruglanski, Bélanger, and Gunaratna, some individuals may feel as though the leaders of the organization they joined are not fully dedicated to the cause, or they may believe that some of the strategies adopted by the organization are incompatible with the ideals they uphold. Other individuals, instead, may simply feel as though the way the organization treats them is demeaning and degrading, thereby leading them to experience a loss of significance rather than the significance gain they had sought. Furthermore, Kruglanski, Bélanger, and Gunaratna also emphasize that the constant stress of hiding from the authorities to avoid getting caught, and the impossibility of leading a normal life, can cause individuals to feel frustrated with the organization and lose confidence in the cause altogether.

Additionally, as Doosje et al. stressed in their own analysis, life-changing events such as

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<sup>55</sup> Bertjan Doosje, Fathali M. Moghaddam, Arie W. Kruglanski, Arjan De Wolf, Liesbeth Mann, Allard R. Feddes, *Terrorism, radicalization, and de-radicalization*, in “Current Opinion in Psychology”, 11/2016, p.79;

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>58</sup> Bertjan Doosje, Fathali M. Moghaddam, Arie W. Kruglanski, Arjan De Wolf, Liesbeth Mann, Allard R. Feddes, *Terrorism, radicalization, and de-radicalization*, in “Current Opinion in Psychology”, 11/2016, p.80;

<sup>59</sup> Arie W. Kruglanski, Jocelyn J. Belanger, Rohan Gunaratna, *The Three Pillars of Radicalization*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2019, p.139;

having a child, falling in love, and getting married, may lead individuals to abandon the organization<sup>60</sup>. The reason why such events have such a great impact on the decision to deradicalize is that, for many individuals, these experiences hold more significance than the organization can offer to them. Therefore, when confronted with the need to choose between the organization and their loved ones, many individuals will choose their loved ones over the organization. Another element that, according to Doosje et al. can lead individuals to decide to deradicalize, is the interaction with people outside the organization. Indeed, the scholars emphasize how exchanging different views and ideas with people that do not make part of the radical group can lead individuals to realize that there are other ways to deal with their problems. This may often have the effect of leading radical individuals to rethink their commitment to the radical group and to the radical ideology, possibly leading them to decide to abandon the extremist group forever.

The meso-level, instead, is primarily concerned with group radicalization<sup>61</sup>. Indeed, as Kruglanski, Bélanger, and Gunaratna remarked, sometimes groups may choose to deradicalize as well. According to these scholars, this process usually takes place in a “top-down”<sup>62</sup> fashion. Consequently, the process is initiated by the group’s leaders, who then encourage the other members to deradicalize with them. The reasons for such a decision may be many. During their analysis the scholars determined that the main reasons that can prompt this process are: the failure of one or multiple attacks, the inability to reach the political goal of the group, and the loss of the support of the population after an attack. However, as Kruglanski, Bélanger, and Gunaratna stressed in their investigation, this kind of deradicalization cannot take place successfully unless the group leaders act cohesively and are influential enough to persuade the rest of the members of the terrorist organization to deradicalize.

Finally, the macro-level is concerned with the society and all those factors external to the terrorist group that might lead to deradicalization<sup>63</sup>. For instance, as emphasized by Demant and De Graaf in their analysis, national governments can have a great influence over terrorist organization and on the decision of both individuals and group to deradicalize<sup>64</sup>. An important point that emerges in this analysis is that, while counter-terrorism strategies are a fundamental factor in macro-level deradicalization, an even more important issue is the kind of message that these strategies send to radical individuals. Therefore, the way in which counter-terrorism policies are presented to and

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>61</sup> Bertjan Doosje, Fathali M. Moghaddam, Arie W. Kruglanski, Arjan De Wolf, Liesbeth Mann, Allard R. Feddes, *Terrorism, radicalization, and de-radicalization*, in “Current Opinion in Psychology”, 11/2016, p.80;

<sup>62</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>64</sup> Froukje Demant, Beatrice De Graaf, *How to Counter Radical Narratives: Dutch Deradicalization Policy in the Case of Moluccan and Islamic Radicals*, in “Studies in Conflict and Terrorism”, 33/2010, p.409;

received from radical individuals is crucial. This is especially important in light of the fact that, as Demant and De Graaf emphasized, the actions of the government can be manipulated and distorted by radical groups to fit into their narrative, which is then used to promote radicalization. Therefore, according to these scholars, national governments should employ what De Graaf calls “neutralizers”<sup>65</sup>. De Graaf’s neutralizers are strategies intended to counteract the radical narrative and neutralize the effect of the radical ideology.

This analysis will mainly take into account the individual level of deradicalization since it is also the main focus of the deradicalization programs that will be analyzed in the next sub-chapters. Indeed, while there are initiatives that work at the meso-level and at the macro-level as well, most of the relevant deradicalization projects devised to this day mainly work with individuals, while also drawing from some of the components of the meso and macro levels.

## 2.2 The Saudi Counseling Program

The rehabilitation program developed in Saudi Arabia in 2004 is generally considered to be the most relevant and sophisticated deradicalization program<sup>66</sup>. According to Kruglanski, Bélanger, and Gunaratna, the reason why this model is so influential is the fact that Saudi Arabia has a considerable amount of experience with extremism, counting numerous Saudi-led terrorist attacks and thousands of convicted radicals in Saudi prisons. Indeed, the project was developed in the aftermath of the 2003 Riyadh bombings in an attempt to prevent further attacks from taking place.

The main aim of this deradicalization program is that of countering the so called “takfir ideology”<sup>67</sup> which accuses members of other religion, as well as other Muslims who adopt a different interpretation of the Islamic religion, of being an infidel. This ideology represents a major threat since it plants the idea in the radical’s mind that every individual that is considered as an infidel deserves to die. Therefore, the Saudi deradicalization program is committed to show individuals that there are different, more moderate interpretations of the Islamic religions that do not encourage such violent behavior.

According to Kruglanski, Bélanger, and Gunaratna, the Saudi counter-terrorism approach is considered as a “soft approach”<sup>68</sup> and is usually divided into three main phases: “prevention,

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<sup>65</sup> Ivi, p.411;

<sup>66</sup> Arie W. Kruglanski, Jocelyn J. Belanger, Rohan Gunaratna, *The Three Pillars of Radicalization*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2019, p.147;

<sup>67</sup> Froukje Demant, Marieke Sloodman, Frank Buijs, Jean Tillie, *Teruggang en uittreding: processen van deradicalisering ontleed*, IMES, Amsterdam, 2008, p.171;

<sup>68</sup> Ivi, p.148;

rehabilitation, and aftercare”<sup>69</sup>. The Saudi deradicalization program is mainly focused on the rehabilitation phase. The initiative mainly targets convicted radical individuals, offering them a reduction of their sentence if they take part to the project and commit to a more moderate ideology. As the scholars observed, the program departs from the idea that extremists hold their radical ideas because they do not know the real Islamic doctrine based on peace and tolerance. The program plans to achieve this objective by encouraging a dialogue and by providing lectures to the convicts to teach them the true meaning of Islam.

According to the scholars, the strength of this program lies in the fact that it doesn’t takes into account only the ideological aspects of deradicalization, but it also deals with the motivational and social aspects of this process<sup>70</sup>. To this purpose, the project, led by an “Advisory Committee”, is divided into four sub-commissions: “the religious subcommittee, the psychological and social subcommittee, the security subcommittee and the media subcommittee”<sup>71</sup>.

The first subcommittee that was examined is the religious one. During their analysis, the scholars noticed that this subcommittee is composed by mentors, college professors and clerics whose main task is that of encouraging the individuals to re-evaluate their religious beliefs. Kruglanski, Belanger and Gunaratna, mainly identified two ways in which this subcommittee carries out their task. The first method is that of organizing separate counseling meeting with each convict. During the first meeting, the counselors will simply let the radical individual talk in order to better understand his point of view. In the following meeting, however the counselor will challenge the detainee’s interpretation of the Islamic religion together with his radical views while also offering him alternative interpretations<sup>72</sup>. The object of this process is that of leading the individual to realize that the state interpretation is indeed the right interpretation of the Islamic religion. The second method that the scholars observed is that of organizing religious lectures for the convicts to discuss the meaning of crucial Islamic notions such as Jihadism, Takfirism, as well as many other relevant concepts.

As Kruglanski, Belanger and Gunaratna emphasized, the leading ideology that informs these lectures is based on the concept of “Musanab”<sup>73</sup> derived from the Qur’an. According to this concept, the leaders have to consult with their group in order to take decisions on important matters. Thereby, the convicts who participate to this program are never pushed into making a decision but rather

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<sup>69</sup> The thought of Kruglanski, Belanger, Gunaratna has been reconstructed by Alessandro Orsini in his article *What Everybody Should Know about Radicalization and the DRIA Model*, in “Studies in Conflict and Terrorism”, 2020;

<sup>70</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>71</sup> *Ivi*, p.149;

<sup>72</sup> Froukje Demant, Marieke Sloodman, Frank Buijs, Jean Tillie, *Teruggang en uittreding: processen van deradicalisering ontleed*, IMES, Amsterdam, 2008, p.172;

<sup>73</sup> Arie W. Kruglanski, Jocelyn J. Belanger, Rohan Gunaratna, *The Three Pillars of Radicalization*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2019, p.150;

provided with different options, giving them the possibility to choose for themselves<sup>74</sup>.

The psychological and social committee, instead, is tasked with three main functions: determining the psychological status of the detainees, evaluating their willingness to cooperate, and assessing their progress. Furthermore, the committee is also in charge of providing support to the convicts and their families. Indeed, one of the greatest strengths of the program is exactly the fact that it involves the families of the convicts in order to encourage deradicalization and to maintain the progress made, even when the detainees get out of prison. To achieve this, the families are usually given financial aids by the government so as to gain their trust.

Once the convicts return to their families, the family members of the now ex-convicts are entrusted by the state with the task of making sure that they do not show any signs of recidivism. Furthermore, as Kruglanski, Belanger and Gunaratna argued, giving financial aids to the convict's families also helps preventing the "significance loss"<sup>75</sup> that the detainees could experience when they find themselves unable to financially support their loved ones. In addition to this, the scholars also observed that, when individuals are released from jail, they are usually offered a job as well as governmental subsidies. The aim of these aids is that of making the ex-convicts feel like they are important thereby reducing the risk of recidivism.

Finally, we have the security committee and the media committee which were mainly investigated by Demant, Sloodman, Buijs and Tillie in their analysis. According to these scholars, the security committee is the one in charge of determining when a convict has successfully deradicalized and can be released. An additional function of this committee that was observed by the scholars is that of offering regular counseling sessions to the released individuals. The media committee, instead, is the one tasked with finding and distributing informative material to the convicts in order to help them get a better understanding of the Islamic religion<sup>76</sup>.

According to Kruglanski, Belanger and Gunaratna, the fact that this deradicalization process has been so successful is due to the ability of the advisory committee to overcome one of the main problems afflicting deradicalization programs: the problem of "communication credibility"<sup>77</sup>. Indeed, the scholars suggest that without the trust of the participants, the individuals directing these projects cannot reach successful outcomes. As Kruglanski, Belanger and Gunaratna observed, the advisory committee solved this problem by encouraging the professors and clerics to share their experiences with the convicts in order to show them that they can be trusted. Furthermore, as Rabasa, Pettyjohn,

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>75</sup> *Ivi*, p.148;

<sup>76</sup> Froukje Demant, Marieke Sloodman, Frank Buijs, Jean Tillie, *Teruggang en uittreding: processen van deradicalisering ontleed*, IMES, Amsterdam, 2008, p.171;

<sup>77</sup> Arie W Kruglanski, Jocelyn J. Belanger, Rohan Gunaratna, *The Three Pillars of Radicalization*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2019, p.151;

Ghez, and Boucek stressed in their analysis of this program, “when members of the Advisory Committee initially meet with a prisoner, one of the first things that they stress is that they are not employees of the Interior Ministry or associated with the security forces”<sup>78</sup>.

Furthermore, as Demant, Sloodman, Buijs and Tillie emphasized, the fact that many known radicals participated in this program influenced many other convicts to take part to the initiative as well. The scholars also noted that the program does not involve any kind of torture since this method proved unproductive and, in many cases, it led convicts to radicalize even further<sup>79</sup>.

However, as many scholars noted, this program of deradicalization has also been criticized for many reasons. A first criticism to this project is the one issued by the domestic public opinion which considered the tactic used as too weak and lenient, and therefore unable to really achieve concrete results<sup>80</sup>. Furthermore, as Demant, Sloodman, Buijs, and Tillie pointed out, there is also the risk that convicts will lie and say that they have deradicalized - when in reality they still hold their radical views - just to get out of prison. Indeed, many people believe that, since the fundamental ideas and opinions of individuals are very hard to change, this process cannot be fully trusted<sup>81</sup>.

In addition to this, as Kruglanski, Belanger and Gunaratna stated in their analysis, the main problem of this initiative lies in the fact that the Wahhabism, a “puritanical, fundamentalist form of Islam”<sup>82</sup>, professed by the Saudi Arabian government is very close to the radical ideology professed by the convicts. Initially, the scholars admit that the fact that the “ideological distance between the detainees’ beliefs and that of the program officials isn’t considerable”<sup>83</sup> makes the process of deradicalization easier.

However, they also argue that, since the religion professed by the government still allows the adoption of violent behavior in the case that a Muslim country is occupied by infidels, the program does not conclusively deradicalize individuals<sup>84</sup>. Indeed, Kruglanski, Belanger and Gunaratna contend that, while this program is effective in preventing violent attacks from taking place inside the Saudi Arabian borders, it still allows individuals to “rejoin the fight outside the country’s borders”<sup>85</sup>. Therefore, the scholars admit that, if individuals that successfully participated in this deradicalization program decide to leave the country to fight infidels in another country, they do not necessarily

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<sup>78</sup> Angel Rabasa, Stacie L. Pettyjohn, Jeremy J. Ghez, Christopher Boucek, *Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists*, Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, 2010, p.71;

<sup>79</sup> Froukje Demant, Marieke Sloodman, Frank Buijs, Jean Tillie, *Teruggang en uittreding: processen van deradicalisering ontleed*, IMES, Amsterdam, 2008, p.171;

<sup>80</sup> *Ivi*, p.172;

<sup>81</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>82</sup> Arie W Kruglanski, Jocelyn J. Belanger, Rohan Gunaratna, *The Three Pillars of Radicalization*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2019, p.147;

<sup>83</sup> *Ivi*, p.150;

<sup>84</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>85</sup> *Ivi*, p.151;

qualify as recidivists<sup>86</sup>. Nevertheless, Kruglanski, Belanger and Gunaratna, as well as many other scholars, believe that the credibility and reputation of this initiative is considerably damaged by this factor.

## 2.3 The EXIT Stockholm Program

Another relevant deradicalization program is the one that was developed in Sweden in 1998. This initiative was established by Kent Lindahl<sup>87</sup>, a former right-wing extremist who left the movement during the nineties. Since Lindahl had first-hand experience and understood the danger of radicalism, he was well suited for the task of helping others abandon radical organizations.

This program has three main objectives. The first one is that of helping young individuals remove themselves from the radical organizations they joined. The second objective of this program is that of creating a community with the families of these radical individuals in order to encourage and support them. The third objective of this initiative is the broadest one, in that it aims at “developing and disseminating knowledge and methods among professionals who work with youth from violent groups.”<sup>88</sup>

According to Demant, Slootman, Buijs and Tillie, the element that made this program so unique is the fact that the majority of the members of the staff working in this program were former radicals. Therefore, they had a great deal of personal experience with extremist organizations. This element had the important effect of giving them great authority in the eyes of the individuals who participated in the program.

The program was organized and carried out following a “five-stage plan”<sup>89</sup>. According to the scholars, this project was very thorough in that it not only described the main phases of the deradicalization process the participants were expected to go through, but it also described the psychological states that could be observed in the individuals during every stage of the process. Furthermore, this plan even provided general guidelines for the staff members, describing the behavior they had to adopt during each phase of the plan.

The first stage that was described by Demant, Slootman, Buijs and Tillie is the so called “Motivation phase”<sup>90</sup>. During this phase, the individual has not joined the program yet and is still part

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>87</sup> Froukje Demant, Marieke Slootman, Frank Buijs, Jean Tillie, *Teruggang en uittreding: processen van deradicalisering ontleed*, IMES, Amsterdam, 2008, p.163;

<sup>88</sup> *Ivi*, p.158;

<sup>89</sup> *Ivi*, p.163;

<sup>90</sup> *Ibidem*;



of a radical organization, however he is starting to reconsider his commitment to the extremist organization. Therefore, this can be considered the approach phase of this deradicalization program. Indeed, during this phase the individual may get in contact with the members of the Exit program to get more information on the project. At this stage, the “Exit team” will put the subject in contact with another individual who participated to the program and who will share his experience.

The second stage is the “Disengagement phase”<sup>91</sup>. During this phase the individual has decided to leave the group and begin the process of deradicalization. Demant, Sloodman, Bujis and Tillie describe this period in which the individual abandons the group as a very complex stage. Indeed, when individuals join a terrorist organization, they often start living together with other radical individuals or become unemployed. Therefore, during this phase the Exit team is tasked with helping the individual communicate his decision to disengage to the radical group, as well providing help with finding a new home or providing financial help. During the whole duration of this phase, the team is constantly in touch with the individual.

The third stage of this process is the “Settling phase”<sup>92</sup>. During this stage, the individual has finally disengaged from the radical group. The individual is now financially independent, has somewhere to live and has either resumed his studies or has got a job. However, as the scholars observed, during this phase the individual may find himself excluded from the rest of society, “feeling empty and lonely”. Indeed, as we have seen in the previous chapter, when individuals join a radical organization, they often cut their ties with the rest of the world, often giving up their friendships, and sometimes even their families. Therefore, during this phase, the Exit team tries to support the individual by helping him to go back to the life he used to lead before joining the organization. As the scholars point out, sometimes the team even helps the subject establish new social relationships by organizing group meetings with other deradicalizing individuals. During these meetings, the individuals will discuss about their experiences with the radicalization program, helping each other overcome all the hardships imposed by the process.

The fourth stage of deradicalization is represented by the “Reflection phase”<sup>93</sup>. During this phase, the individual starts to reject the notions that informed his radical past. Therefore, according to Demant, Sloodman, Bujis and Tillie, this is the stage during which “the person begins to let go of things from the past, such as violence, crime, extremist ideology and hatred”<sup>94</sup>. Often, individuals that reach this stage fall into start experiencing depressive tendencies, alcohol addiction, sleeplessness, and many other problems. The team often helps them manage these problems by

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<sup>91</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>92</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>93</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>94</sup> *Ibidem*;

finding therapists able to treat them.

Finally, the last stage of the program is the “Stabilization phase”<sup>95</sup>. During this phase, the individual has finally returned to his normal life and is involved in many meaningful activities. Demant, Slootman, Bujis and Tillie observe that, while the individual is now considerably happier, he is nevertheless concerned that his past could influence and spoil his future. This concern is often accompanied by feelings of remorse, humiliation, and embarrassment. And, while the program is now concluded, the scholars emphasize how the team often maintain contacts with the deradicalized individuals, helping them even after the deradicalization program has terminated.

The Exit program can usually engage an individual from six months to a year. The main strength of the initiative, according to the scholars that analyzed this process, lies in the fact that the discussions that take place during these months are mainly focused on reinforcing the individual’s wish to leave the radical organization and create a new life for himself<sup>96</sup>. Therefore, the ideological convictions of the subject are never directly discussed, but they are modified through the dialogue on the possible negative results that may stem from continuing to work with an extremist organization. Slowly, the ideology is then naturally substituted by the alternative provided by the Exit team.

As Demant, Slootman, Bujis and Tillie have noted, it was estimated that from 1998 to 2001 more than a hundred people had already gotten in touch with the program to ask for their help. The “Swedish Council for Crime Prevention”<sup>97</sup> estimated that, of the 133 people that had contacted the team, 125 had been able to leave the radical organizations they were part of.

## 2.4 The American Program in Iraq

A third significant program that was described by Kruglanski, Belanger and Gunaratna, is the one established by the United States in Iraq between 2007 and 2008. This program was specifically created after observing the unfair treatment reserved to the Iraqi detainees. Indeed, as the scholars noted, many individuals were arrested and detained on the basis of “questionable intelligence”<sup>98</sup>. The perceived injustice of these arrests led many convicts to feel resentment towards the system. These feelings were often used by the extreme radical detainees in order to convince others to join them. Therefore, this program had two main objectives: help individuals deradicalize and prevent further radicalization from taking place in these prisons.

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<sup>95</sup> *Ivi*, p.164;

<sup>96</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>97</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>98</sup> Arie W Kruglanski, Jocelyn J. Belanger, Rohan Gunaratna, *The Three Pillars of Radicalization*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2019, p.159;

The program was led by Douglas Stone, a United States' General, and carried out by the Task Force 134. The main duty of this task force was that of dividing the detainees according to the level of threat they represented. The detainees that represented an "imperative security risk" could participate to the program. Those detainees that were considered as an "enduring security risk"<sup>99</sup>, instead, were thought to be unable to deradicalize and excluded from the project.

This initiative was mainly divided into different "educational programs"<sup>100</sup> through which the convicts could be reeducated while also gaining new competences. These educational programs were divided into three phases<sup>101</sup>. The first phase was the "Introductory phase", the second phase was the "Maintenance" phase, and the third phase was the "Exit from detention" phase.

The first phase was based on the application of counterinsurgency methods, such as separating radical individuals from the rest of the population by arresting them and putting them into "theater internment facilities"<sup>102</sup> (TIF). Furthermore, it also had the main aim of exposing the captured individuals to moderate views before entering these internment facilities. This initial phase started in 2008 and was carried out in a facility called "Camp Bucca"<sup>103</sup>. During this phase, detainees were offered lectures on how the detention and rehabilitation systems functioned. The participation to these lectures was mandatory.

In addition to the lectures, every detainee would also have to undergo an individual evaluation with the staff members that conducted the lectures. These evaluations offered to the staff a possibility to assess the psychological conditions of the participants, their grade of religiosity and their grade of literacy. These assessments were then provided to the TIF leader that could use them to decide in which compound each individual had to be placed.

This system provided for the perfect opportunity to test the participants as well as provide them with some information on the detainment structure. Unfortunately, the system was soon discontinued, since there was no space in the TIF structure to host the new arrivals before transferring them to the appropriate compounds<sup>104</sup>.

The second phase was instead based on changing the radical ideologies of the detainees and promoting moderation. During this second phase, individuals were offered a variety of educational courses and lectures on different topics. Furthermore, detainees were also allowed to host discussions on different matters as part of the "Train the Trainer"<sup>105</sup> program. The main objective of these

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<sup>99</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>100</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>101</sup> Ami Angell, Rohan Gunaratna, *Terrorist Rehabilitation. The U.S. Experience in Iraq*, CRC Press, Boca Raton, 2011, p.176;

<sup>102</sup> *Ivi*, p.178;

<sup>103</sup> *Ivi*, p.332;

<sup>104</sup> *Ivi*, p.333;

<sup>105</sup> *Ivi*, p.335;

discussions was that of enabling some of the participants to lead their fellow detainees by example and teach them what they had learned during the Train the Trainer program. This phase also involved the families of the participants, that were encouraged to uphold moderation as well.

In addition to this, this phase aimed at preparing the detainees to be reinserted in society. However, since these individuals were completely disconnected from the outside world and were not aware of the political and societal changes that were taking place in Iraq, these arguments were addressed during the classes as well.

Lastly, the third phase was focused on reinforcing the importance of moderation in the detainees' minds before releasing them. Therefore, the participants waiting for release were required to take a course focused on moderation and on informing detainees about the recent socio-political changes in Iraq before being allowed to leave. In addition to this, individuals were required to undergo a final evaluation as well. Once the course and the evaluation were completed, individuals would participate to a "graduation ceremony"<sup>106</sup> in which the staff would offer their congratulations to the individuals that completed the program, as well as warning them about what would happen if they re-offended. Indeed, individuals that were arrested again after completing the program would not be allowed to participate in it again. Instead, they would be kept in the maximum-security areas, and their privileges would be reduced as well. After the ceremony, individuals were then released and reinserted in society.

Furthermore, during this third phase the detainees, the individuals that were released after completing the program, and their families were all engaged in a project to spread awareness on radicalization and to reduce the risk of further extremism in Iraq.

Since this deradicalization program was mainly modeled on the Saudi and Singaporean deradicalization initiatives<sup>107</sup>, many of the strategies put in place are very similar to the ones employed by these projects. For instance, similarly to the Saudi program examined in this analysis, one of the educational programs offered to the detainees was aimed at substituting the radical understanding of the Islamic religion with a more moderate one. Contrarily to the Saudi program, however, the interpretation of Islam proposed in this initiative condemned violence under any circumstance. Therefore, according to this interpretation, violence was not justified by the Islamic doctrine even in the event of an occupation by a country considered as an enemy.

In addition to this, the scholars observed that the families of the individuals who participated to this process were involved as well. Following the example of the Saudi program, and understanding the importance of social ties, the task force managing the program allowed families to come to the

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<sup>106</sup> Ivi, p.339

<sup>107</sup> Arie W Kruglanski, Jocelyn J. Belanger, Rohan Gunaratna, *The Three Pillars of Radicalization*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2019, p.160;

prison facilities every week to visit the detainees. During this hourly visit the individuals could share their experience with their families, as well as the money they earned by working for the facility. Another important factor was the fact that the facilities also had special spaces where the children of the convicts could play while the rest of the family could have serious discussions with the detainee. At the end of these play sessions, these children were always allowed to take something home as a gift.

According to Kruglanski, Belanger and Gunaratna, while some individuals who had taken part to the program ended up joining the Islamic State, this program can still be considered as very successful. Indeed, the scholars emphasized how, often, individuals were so involved with the program that they requested to stay in the detention facilities longer in order to complete the courses they were following.

### 3. Inconclusive experiments of deradicalization

#### 3.1 An Overview of the fight against Terrorism in France.

The main aim of this chapter is that of analysing the Pontourny and RIVE deradicalization programs. The main reason why these two initiatives have been chosen as the main focus is that these are the most famous examples of inconclusive deradicalization programs according to renown scholars<sup>108</sup>. Before proceeding to examine these projects and the reason behind their unsuccessful results, this chapter will first provide a brief overview of the French experience with counter terrorism.

As Mark Hecker remarked in his study on French counter terroristic efforts, France has been mostly focused on fighting terrorism using a “security-based approach”<sup>109</sup>. Hence, following this approach, the French government mainly focused on adopting temporary security measures while overlooking preventive approaches. Therefore, while many other European countries had already been implementing prevention programs for several years, it is only in 2013 that France started to develop these kinds of initiative as well.

Indeed, as Hecker reports, the start of the first French “review of radicalization prevention” was announced by the French Prime Minister exactly in 2013. Later on, in 2014, the then Minister of the Interior<sup>110</sup> announced the development of an action plan to counter terrorism and radicalization. A crucial feature that was introduced by this is the creation of a free hotline that French citizens could call to give information about potential instances of radicalization. In order to record and process the information received during these calls, a centre called “Centre National d’Assistance et de Prevention de la Radicalization”<sup>111</sup>, or CNAPR, was established.

Following the creation of this centre, a database to record the information provided to the CNAPR, together with information provided by security services, was created in 2015. This database holds information on many individuals, which have been classified as more or less dangerous according to their level of radicalization. The more radicalized these individuals are, the more dangerous they will be, and therefore will need to be put under close observation by the security services.

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<sup>108</sup> Marc Hecker, *Once a Jihadist, Always a Jihadist? A Deradicalization Programs Seen from the Inside*, in “Focus Stratégique”, 102/2021, p.7;

<sup>109</sup> Marc Hecker, *Once a Jihadist, Always a Jihadist? A Deradicalization Programs Seen from the Inside*, in “Focus Stratégique”, 102/2021, p.7;

<sup>110</sup> *Ivi*, p. 27;

<sup>111</sup> *Ibidem*;

In order to deal with these radical individuals, the French government started to invest more and more money in counterterrorism measures. As a result of this, many individuals and associations started to get interested in the field of counterterrorism. Deradicalization soon became a business, with many new associations emerging in the field and trying to convince the government to invest in their counterterrorism methods. The government ended up establishing several collaborations with some of these private associations to create counter terrorism and deradicalization programs. However, as Hecker underlines, these collaborations were often unsuccessful. Indeed, the French government ended up entrusting the responsibility to develop deradicalization and counter terrorism initiatives to many untrustworthy individuals.

As a matter of fact, many individuals who were entrusted with the responsibility of developing and implementing deradicalization programs, as well as counter terrorism initiatives, by the French government often turned out to be unreliable. For instance, after the creation of a “deradicalization cell”<sup>112</sup>, the then-leader of the project was arrested for embezzlement of public money. Another episode that possibly led the public opinion to criticise the government’s counterterrorism efforts, was the arrest, on multiple charges of rape, of a therapist that worked with counter terroristic programs.

As Hecker remarks, these events inevitably led the Secretary General of the “Comité Interministériel de Prévention de la Délinquance et de la Radicalisation”<sup>113</sup>, or CIPDR, to make a statement in 2017 claiming that the French government would stop working with self-declared experts on deradicalization and would start to work with “mainstream social service providers”<sup>114</sup>. After the statement of the Secretary General, the French Senators Esther Benbassa and Catherine Troendlé developed a report on the French and European counter terrorism and deradicalization initiatives<sup>115</sup>.

As Hecker states, the main criticism that this report made to the French authorities was that of collaborating with a disproportionate number of private organizations. Indeed, according to the Senators, the number of individuals holding radical or extremist views was not great enough to require the assistance of so many organizations. Therefore, the senators advised the French authorities to enlist the help of less organizations, while also making sure to choose the most reliable and suitable ones.

As Hecker reported in his work, the criticism of the two French senators were not confined to the collaboration with too many organizations. On the contrary, the greatest criticisms were actually

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<sup>112</sup> *Ivi*, p. 28;

<sup>113</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>114</sup> Marc Hecker, *Once a Jihadist, Always a Jihadist? A Deradicalization Programs Seen from the Inside*, in “Focus Stratégique”, 102/2021, p.28;

<sup>115</sup> *Ivi*, p.29;

directed towards one of the first deradicalization programs that were established in France in 2016. The program in question is the “Centre de Prévention, d’Insertion ed the Citoyenneté”<sup>116</sup>, or CPIC, which was part of a plan of action to fight terrorism and radicalization. According to the senators, who visited the centre, the initiative was completely unsuccessful since it could not produce satisfying results.

Moreover, while the centre was meant to be able to host a maximum of twenty-five participants, the centre never got even close to that number of participants. Since the cost of keeping the centre operative was too high and the results obtained were so unsatisfying, the centre ended up closing in 2017. Although the Pontourny centre was supposed to be the first of many other deradicalization centres that the French government had planned to establish in France, such an ambitious project never saw the light of day.

Another program that was developed at the same time as the CPIC is the RIVE Program. While this initiative is often thought to have simply replaced the CIPC after its failure, the truth is that the RIVE program was established around the same time as the CIPC one. Apart from the fact that the RIVE project targeted different individuals, the major difference between these two programs is that, as Hecker highlighted, the RIVE one was kept secret for a long time. Furthermore, the tactics used by the team of the RIVE were significantly different from the approaches adopted during the Pontourny project. Nevertheless, this program too was terminated, and in 2018 it was substituted by the PAIRS initiative.

### 3.2 The CPIC Program

The Centre de Prévention, d’Insertion ed the Citoyenneté (CPIC), or Pontourny Program, was developed in 2016 in Pontourny, a town situated in the municipality of Indre-et-Loire<sup>117</sup>. The initiative was developed by the Inter-ministerial Committee for the prevention of Crime and Radicalization, or CIPDR. The CPIC was supposed to be the first “experimental deradicalization centre”<sup>118</sup> of its kind. The team that worked on this project was composed by twenty-five people. Apart from social workers, the team was also composed of therapists, educators and a Muslim

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<sup>116</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>117</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>118</sup> Stéphanie Fillion, *What we can learn from France’s failed deradicalization center*, “La Stampa”, September 2, 2017, available on <https://www.lastampa.it/esteri/la-stampa-in-english/2017/09/02/news/what-we-can-learn-from-france-s-failed-deradicalization-center-1.34412986> (viewed on April 20, 2021)



chaplain<sup>119</sup>. This team of experts would then work with the participants to help them deradicalize through various activities. It is important to note that the participation to the project was completely voluntary, and therefore radical individuals did not have to participate to it unless they wanted to deradicalize.

The centre was designed to host a maximum of thirty participants. Each one of the participants would have to undergo a ten-month deradicalization program. The main strategy used during the program was that of re-educating radical individuals through the help of many educational courses. Therefore, the individuals who took part to this project would participate to “French history, philosophy, literature, media, and religion”<sup>120</sup> lectures throughout the whole duration of the project. Furthermore, participants were also offered music and art classes.

Individuals were also required to take part in daily therapy sessions. In addition to this, group discussions were also organized with the participants to discuss about religion and laicism, as well as discussing democratic values and principles. Additionally, the staff also worked with the participants to determine their personal experiences, their career opportunities, and to also help them understand the reasons behind their radical beliefs, so that they would start to question the validity of these beliefs.

It is important to note that, initially, the program was not supposed to offer religious lecture and discussions. Nonetheless, a Muslim spiritual guide (also called chaplain) was invited to the centre at the beginning of the project to meet with each participant separately. However, the individuals involved in the program were initially very wary and distrustful of him since they saw him as an employee of the government. Since they considered the government to be a secularized institution, they thought of it as incompatible with their religion and therefore did not trust it. However, while it is true that the French government is secular, this does not mean that France completely rejects religions. What this actually means is that the French government protects and ensures the freedom of thought and the freedom of religion without making any discrimination between different religions.

Furthermore, since the chaplain did not respect the comportments sanctioned by the halal, the participant to the project considered him as unfaithful. Nevertheless, the chaplain decided to stick around the centre to attempt to convince the participants to trust him and to work with them during their deradicalization process. Hence, during the program the chaplain kept organizing both individual meetings and group sessions with the participants. In additions to this he also offered them

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<sup>119</sup> Maddy Crowell, *What Went Wrong With France's Deradicalization Program?*, “The Atlantic”, September 28, 2017, available on <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/09/france-jihad-deradicalization-macron/540699/> (viewed on April 20, 2021)

<sup>120</sup> Stéphanie Fillion, *What we can learn from France's failed deradicalization center*, “La Stampa”, September 2, 2017, available on <https://www.lastampa.it/esteri/la-stampa-in-english/2017/09/02/news/what-we-can-learn-from-france-s-failed-deradicalization-center-1.34412986> (viewed on April 20, 2021)

two types of laboratories. The first one was a laboratory in Arabic language. The main aim of this laboratory was that of helping its participants to acquire a better understanding of the language of the sacred scriptures<sup>121</sup>. The second laboratory consisted of a lecture on the Islamic civilization's history.

Additionally, during their stay in the centre, the participants had to wear uniforms<sup>122</sup> and sing the French national hymn every morning. They also had to take part in military-like trainings and drills. This was all part of a very strict training designed to promote French patriotism. This kind of approach is the same used in detention centres for minors<sup>123</sup>. According to specialized reviews in the field such as "Foreign Policy"<sup>124</sup> and "The Atlantic"<sup>125</sup>, this approach was heavily criticised since, contrarily to the detention centres for minors, the participation to the Pontourny deradicalization program was completely voluntary. Therefore, according to the critics, the participants should not have been treated as detainees in the first place.

Furthermore, many other criticisms were moved to the Pontourny initiative that are worth analysing in order to understand why the project turned out to be inconclusive in the end. A first additional critic that was moved to the program was that, even though one of its main aims was that of addressing the main causes behind the participants' radical beliefs, as well as the psychological factors influencing radicalization, the approach was too focused on the ideological factors, and it ultimately just tried to substitute the radical beliefs with the French secular ones without really addressing the underlying causes of radicalization<sup>126</sup>.

Another criticism that was moved to the program was that it "promoted Western nationalist identities over Islamic ones"<sup>127</sup>. Indeed, according to the critics of this project, the attempt of the Pontourny deradicalization program to endorse the Western nationalist values and ideas seemed to show a tendency towards restricting the ability of Muslim individuals to practice their own religion that contradicted the principles of laicism and secularism on which the French legal framework is based. Therefore, for many critics, the heavy promotion of nationalistic and secular views that were

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<sup>121</sup> Maddy Crowell, *What Went Wrong With France's Deradicalization Program?*, "The Atlantic", September 28, 2017, available on <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/09/france-jihad-deradicalization-macron/540699/> (viewed on April 20, 2021);

<sup>122</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>123</sup> Stéphanie Fillion, *What we can learn from France's failed deradicalization center*, "La Stampa", September 2, 2017, available on <https://www.lastampa.it/esteri/la-stampa-in-english/2017/09/02/news/what-we-can-learn-from-france-s-failed-deradicalization-center-1.34412986> (viewed on April 20, 2021);

<sup>124</sup> Elena Souris, Spandana Singh, *Want to Deradicalize Terrorists? Treat Them Like Everyone Else*, "Foreign Policy", November 23, 2018, available on <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/11/23/want-to-deradicalize-terrorists-treat-them-like-everyone-else-counterterrorism-deradicalization-france-sri-lanka-pontourny-cve/> (viewed on April 20, 2021);

<sup>125</sup> Maddy Crowell, *What Went Wrong With France's Deradicalization Program?*, "The Atlantic", September 28, 2017, available on <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/09/france-jihad-deradicalization-macron/540699/> (viewed on April 20, 2021);

<sup>126</sup> Elena Souris, Spandana Singh, *Want to Deradicalize Terrorists? Treat Them Like Everyone Else*, "Foreign Policy", November 23, 2018, available on <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/11/23/want-to-deradicalize-terrorists-treat-them-like-everyone-else-counterterrorism-deradicalization-france-sri-lanka-pontourny-cve/> (viewed on April 20, 2021);

<sup>127</sup> *Ibidem*;

in complete opposition to the ideals of participants was the wrong approach. It was indeed suggested that, proposing a narrative that did not completely oppose the participant's views but rather coexisted with their views, would have been a more effective strategy. Indeed, as we have seen in the previous chapter, especially in the case of the Saudi Arabian program, proposing a narrative that promoted moderation without completely denying the participant's beliefs yielded very successful outcomes.

However, according to critics, there are many other errors that were committed during the development of the Pontourny deradicalization program. For instance, differently from the successful deradicalization programs that were analysed in the previous chapters, the Pontourny program did not have any reintegration programs. On the contrary, the idea behind this program was that of isolating the participants from the outside world<sup>128</sup>. However, the inconclusiveness of this program showed how this method was not very effective. Indeed, as we have seen in the previous chapters, programs such as the Saudi Arabian one that focused on reintegrating deradicalizing individuals in their communities had very positive results. Nevertheless, the Pontourny program did nothing of the sort, even though many scholars, psychologists and policy makers heavily criticized the choice of isolating the participants from the rest of the world instead of reintegrating them.

Furthermore, newspapers<sup>129</sup> also reported that many scholars and radicalization specialists believed that the program was based on a very superficial understanding of radicalization and deradicalization. Indeed, one of the greatest difficulties that the CIPDR encountered while creating the centre, was that of developing a program that did not mistake Muslim conservatism for radicalization. According to experts, this could be due to the fact that it is almost impossible to determine whether an individual has committed completely to a radical ideology until it is too late<sup>130</sup>. Furthermore, experts also believe that it is very difficult for individuals to understand that they are radicalized and need help. Therefore, according to these experts, making the program voluntary was the wrong choice.

Another critic that was moved to the program was that the program never had many participants in the first place, since the participation to the program was completely voluntary. As Hecker reported, many of the researchers and scholars that participated to the CPIC attributed the

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<sup>128</sup> Maddy Crowell, *What Went Wrong With France's Deradicalization Program?*, "The Atlantic", September 28, 2017, available on <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/09/france-jihad-deradicalization-macron/540699/> (viewed on April 20, 2021);

<sup>129</sup> On this matter see Stéphanie Fillion, *What we can learn from France's failed deradicalization center*, "La Stampa", September 2, 2017, available on <https://www.lastampa.it/esteri/la-stampa-in-english/2017/09/02/news/what-we-can-learn-from-france-s-failed-deradicalization-center-1.34412986> (viewed on April 20, 2021); Marie Boëton, *The reasons for the closure of the de-radicalization center in Pontourny*, "La Croix", July 28, 2017, available on <https://www.la-croix.com/France/Securite/raisons-fermeture-centre-deradicalisation-Pontourny-2017-07-28-1200866208> (viewed on April 20, 2021);

<sup>130</sup> *Ibidem*;

failure of the program to recruit enough participants to the very strict admission criteria used<sup>131</sup>. Indeed, individuals that volunteered to participate to the program still had to undergo a preselection phase. During this phase only eleven individuals out of the seventeen that volunteered were allowed to participate to the program. In addition to this, two of the individuals that were admitted to the centre later dropped out of the program. Therefore, the centre was left with only nine participants. Eventually, since there was no way to obligate the other participants to remain at the centre until the program was over, many other individuals dropped out. At one point, the centre was left with only one resident.

Having underlined and analysed many of the criticism that were directed to the CPIC, it becomes clear that the CIPDR did many errors during the design and the implementation of the program. However, the greatest errors that was committed during the creation of the center in Pontourny was that of not consulting the local authorities before opening the center<sup>132</sup>. The fact that Government created the program without consulting the Pontourny authorities was highly problematic and led to many criticisms both from the inhabitants of the town and from the local authorities. The local population went as far as creating an association that would represent their concerns about the center. Indeed, the citizens of Pontourny were very concerned about their safety since the center hosted dangerous radical individuals. Many of their concerns were also justified by the fact that three of the residents were calling themselves “The Rigorist Salafist Band”<sup>133</sup>, showing how the choice of keeping all the residents together instead than separated led to even further radicalization rather than deradicalization. Therefore, concerns about the lack of results and about the great amount of money invested in a failing project were expressed as well.

In addition to this, some months after the beginning of the project, the Pontourny citizens gathered in front of the center to protest the program and ask for the closure of the center. Because of these protests, the program’s participants started to leave the center and by February 2017 the center was left with only one resident<sup>134</sup>. In the end, this last resident was arrested for “apology of terrorism”. Nevertheless, the center ended up remaining operative without any participant to work with until the 2017 French presidential elections were over. After the elections, the center was permanently closed.

While, as we have seen, a great number of criticisms have been addressed to the Pontourny deradicalization program, there have also been some experts that were involved in this project who

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<sup>131</sup> Marc Hecker, *Once a Jihadist, Always a Jihadist? A Deradicalization Programs Seen from the Inside*, in “Focus Stratégique”, 102/2021, p.30;

<sup>132</sup> Stéphanie Fillion, *What we can learn from France’s failed deradicalization center*, “La Stampa”, September 2, 2017, available on <https://www.lastampa.it/esteri/la-stampa-in-english/2017/09/02/news/what-we-can-learn-from-france-s-failed-deradicalization-center-1.34412986> (viewed on April 20, 2021);

<sup>133</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>134</sup> *Ibidem*;

defended the program and its outcomes. An example of this is Gérald Bronner<sup>135</sup>. Indeed, while on the one hand Bronner admitted that the recruitment methods used during the Pontourny program were problematic, on the other hand he did defend the methods and tactics that were used to help individuals deradicalize. Indeed, according to him the “rationalism classes” that he taught at the CPIC seemed to have some impact on the participants. However, since Bronner did not have the resources he would need to conduct a proper scientific evaluation of the cognitive and psychological developments of the residents, he could not demonstrate that his classes had any effect on the participants.

Another expert that took a more balanced approach towards the Pontourny deradicalization program was Thierry Lamote<sup>136</sup>. According to Lamote, the project ended too early to conclude whether the methods used to deradicalize the residents were conclusive or not. In his opinion, the main problem of the program was the way in which the participants were selected. Indeed, as we have already seen, the criteria used to select participants were too strict, thereby leaving the center with only a small sample of radical individuals to work with.

What can be drawn from this analysis is that there were many factors that concurred in the failure of the Pontourny center. Too many errors and generalizations were made during the design and the implementation of the program. According to experts, the main reason why so many errors were committed is that the creation of the Pontourny deradicalization center was rushed after the 2015 terroristic attacks that took place in France. Therefore, the strong need for answers and solutions to the issue of terrorism, and the fear that people would criticize the government if it did nothing, led the government to take rushed policy-making decision that ultimately led to the failure of the program.

### **3.3 The RIVE program**

The Center for Research and Intervention Against Extremists (RIVE) was created during the summer of 2016. Differently from the Pontourny program, the RIVE program was created to deal with individuals that were placed under judicial control<sup>137</sup>. Furthermore, thanks to a modification of some articles of the French “Code of Criminal Procedure” it was possible to make the RIVE project compulsory for the individuals that were placed under judicial control.

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<sup>135</sup> Marc Hecker, *Once a Jihadist, Always a Jihadist? A Deradicalization Programs Seen from the Inside*, in “Focus Stratégique”, 102/2021, p.30;

<sup>136</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>137</sup> *Ivi*, p. 31;

Before the creation of the RIVE, individuals flagged as radical and waiting for trial were simply put under the surveillance of the “Prison Integration and Probation Services” (SPIP). However, this measure was not enough to prevent these individuals from re-offending. Indeed, in 2016, a terroristic attack was carried out by an individual who was put under surveillance before his trial. After this event, the Minister of Justice decided to offer a contract for the development of the RIVE project to the “Association for Applied Criminal Policy and Social Reintegration”, which was the only association that had come forward with a project for the center.

The project was carried out by a team made up by experts on Islamic extremism, therapists, and social workers who had the job to help individuals disengage, and eventually help them reintegrate in society. Therefore, differently from the Pontourny program, the RIVE project was not designed to separate radical individuals from their loved ones and from the rest of the society. Indeed, the individuals who participated to this program were allowed to choose whether to meet with the team at the RIVE center, in public places, or at their residence.

Each individual was assigned a religious, a psychological, and a social counsellor<sup>138</sup>. These three counsellors had the duty of following the participants and helping them throughout the whole duration of the program. The participants were also required to work with educators during the program. As Hecker underlines, the final aim of all of these measures was that of helping individuals abandon their radical beliefs by offering them a more moderate interpretation of their religion. Additionally, the program was designed so as to allow the participants to become more self-sufficient by progressively decreasing the number of weekly meetings that the participants had with the RIVE team. Thanks to this method, these individuals would eventually become completely self-sufficient and could go back to their normal lives.

From the beginning of the program in 2016 to the end of the contract in 2018, there have been only twenty-five individuals who have taken part in the project. Many of these individuals had been put under surveillance for terrorist attacks or acts, and for apology of terrorism. The initial plan was that of increasing the number of participants to a maximum of fifty after an initial period of time. However, the number of participants remained the same until the end of the contract.

As stipulated in the contract that was signed by the association tasked with developing the RIVE project, the participants had to be periodically evaluated in order to ascertain that they were making progress. In order to do this, the RIVE team was tasked to make a preliminary evaluation of each participant in order to assess their initial condition<sup>139</sup>. This preliminary evaluation had to then be compared to the evaluations carried out during the course of the program in order to determine the

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<sup>138</sup> *Ivi*, p. 32;

<sup>139</sup> *Ivi*, p. 33;

amount of progress that was made. It is important to note that, while a team of researchers provided the RIVE staff with many recommendations on the methods that could be used to evaluate the participants, the staff could not successfully implement the evaluation techniques recommended. Indeed, as Hecker emphasized, the project team was seriously undertrained, and as a result could not carry out the evaluations, nor the program, successfully.

Nevertheless, according to Hecker, the inability to carry out a proper evaluation of the participants does not in itself mean that the project was a complete failure. Indeed, while it is true that the participants' progress could not be measured in a scientific way, it is also true that the individuals who participated to this program never showed any signs of recidivism. Moreover, while a consultant that was hired to evaluate the RIVE program reported the fact that she was not able to properly evaluate the effect of the program on the individuals (since she was not provided with all the documents she would need for a proper evaluation), she still described the project in a positive manner.

Since the government still considered the RIVE program as a valid project, and there was a great need for centres that could treat radical individuals that were put under judicial control, when the contract terminated in 2018 the authorities expressed a wish to extend the contract as well as the wish to open similar centres in other French cities. Furthermore, when asked about the project at a conference, the Minister of Justice even defined the program as a true success. Nevertheless, the contract with the Association for Applied Criminal Policy and Social Reintegration was never extended nor renewed. Instead, a new call for applications was published. This time the winners were two organizations: the "Groupe SOS" and the "NGO Artemis"<sup>140</sup>. A new contract was then stipulated with these two organizations.

Many criticisms were addressed to the government regarding the decision of entrusting the project to different associations instead than renewing the contract with the Association for Applied Criminal Policy and Social Reintegration. Indeed, the author analysed numerous articles<sup>141</sup> that dealt with this matter and suggested that the contract had been awarded to the Groupe SOS due to the close relation that the President Macron entertained with the president of the association. However, such claims were strongly denied by the association that maintained that the reason why the contract was awarded to them was that their project was better and cheaper than the one presented by the other association.

Furthermore, the work of the Association for Applied Criminal Policy and Social Reintegration was criticised as well. Indeed, some of the association's partners were starting to feel

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<sup>140</sup> *Ivi*, p. 34;

<sup>141</sup> *Ibidem*;

that the participants and their counsellors had become too close. The association addressed this critique saying that the intention of the program was exactly that of creating a strong link with the participants in order to earn their trust. And, as we have seen, this relationship would then be progressively discontinued so that the participants could slowly become self-sufficient. Nevertheless, this method did not convince the government as well.

When in 2018 the transition from the previous project to the new one started, the name of the initiative changed from RIVE to PAIRS. This transition was not very easy, since the RIVE staff was not expecting the project to be terminated so soon. The participants as well were not ready for the program to end. As a result, many of the participants were still very linked to their counsellors and were not ready to separate from them. Therefore, many of them kept in contact with the counsellors even after the project ended.

Another problem that was experienced by the Groupe SOS during the transition, was the difficulty in transferring the data of the participants from one association to the other. Indeed, many of the information and evaluations conducted on the participants to the RIVE program could not be legally transferred to the PAIRS team<sup>142</sup>. This caused many issues in the development of the PAIRS initiative as well.

According to Hecker, the complications experienced in transitioning from one program to another should have been the object of further consideration on the methods used to develop deradicalization programs<sup>143</sup>. Indeed, according to him, the field of counterterrorism and deradicalization is a very complex one that requires attention and caution, especially when developing initiatives such as the RIVE one. Therefore, Hecker argues that when a program such as the RIVE is terminated in such a sudden manner questions on the reasons for the cessation of the project should always be asked.

The main difference between the PAIRS initiative and the RIVE program was the quantity of support that the participants received. Indeed, the PAIRS program allowed to modulate the amount of assistance provided according to the specific needs of the individuals. The amount of support that the participants received was mainly regulated with the help of an initial diagnostic phase, during which the participants could be observed<sup>144</sup>. According to the observations collected during this phase, the PAIRS team would then structure the support program to better fit the single individual. Additionally, the PAIRS initiative also offered accommodation solutions for the participants that requested it.

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<sup>142</sup> *Ivi*, p.35;

<sup>143</sup> *Ibidem*;

<sup>144</sup> Finance bill for 2020: Prison Administration, available on <https://www.senat.fr/rap/a19-146-7/a19-146-75.html> (viewed on April 30, 2021);



In conclusion, it can be said that, while the RIVE initiative was considered a failure by some scholars, the program clearly showed some results. Indeed, as we have seen, none of the individuals that took part to the project re-offended or went back to their previous system of radical beliefs. However, the main problem of the initiative was its inability to find more participants. Therefore, while the initiative might have produced conclusive results for its initial participants, the difficulty in finding more individuals to involve in the program showed that there still were some issues in the way in which this project was designed and implemented.

## Conclusions

What emerged from the analysis carried out in this thesis, is that the concept of deradicalization cannot be reduced to a single definition. Indeed, while the impossibility of reaching a universal model of deradicalization might seem to present an issue, the truth is that analysing the matter through the lens of a single theory is not enough to fully understand the phenomenon and the extent of its implications. Therefore, this thesis has analysed and compared the definitions provided by experts such as John Horgan, Fernando Reinares, and Daniel Kohler in an effort to include multiple points of view on the issue.

Another element that was emphasised by this dissertation is that of the link between radicalization and deradicalization. Indeed, the studies on radicalization are the basis for which all the theories on deradicalization depart. Therefore, without understanding the reasons behind radicalization, and the processes leading up to it, it would be impossible to formulate a reliable theory of deradicalization.

Furthermore, the analysis of radicalization carried out in this thesis has underlined how there is no single model of radicalization as well. Therefore, given the great number of radicalization models, it is only logical that an equally great number of deradicalization models would be developed in response.

Once the main theoretical models of radicalization and deradicalization have been analysed, I decided to focus on the way in which different models of deradicalization have been translated into deradicalization programs. Indeed, the second chapter is dedicated to the analysis of three crucial deradicalization programs that have been developed to target specific types of radicalization, as well as specific terrorist groups.

The study of these programs has thus led to the conclusion that a universal deradicalization program cannot be developed and used to treat every kind of radicalization. Indeed, what might work for some types of radical individuals, might not work as well with others. Therefore, it is crucial to model deradicalization programs on the basis of the individuals being treated.

This idea is the same that guided the realization of the third and last chapter of this dissertation. Indeed, while the second chapter has presented successful deradicalization programs, the third one has been rather focused on two examples of inconclusive deradicalization programs. What has emerged from this analysis is an important lesson that should be always kept in mind: when developing deradicalization programs, a thorough understanding of radicalization is crucial for the development of successful deradicalization programs.

Thereby, while some scholars might see the absence of common definitions of radicalization and of deradicalization as an issue for the fight against terrorism, what emerged from this thesis is

that having definitions that suit the different kinds of radicalization and deradicalization is crucial to develop successful deradicalization programs.

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## Summary

Questa tesi di laurea triennale si propone di analizzare i processi di de-radicalizzazione. A tal fine, è di particolare interesse uno studio approfondito delle numerose definizioni di de-radicalizzazione che gli specialisti della materia hanno fornito. È interessante notare come non ci sia una definizione generalmente condivisa di de-radicalizzazione, ma molte definizioni diverse a seconda del modo in cui gli specialisti della materia concepiscono la de-radicalizzazione.

La metodologia utilizzata per realizzare questa ricerca è l'analisi e il confronto del pensiero di alcuni dei più influenti esperti che hanno indagato la materia, da cui questo lavoro prenderà le mosse. In particolare, questa ricerca vuole analizzare i principali programmi di de-radicalizzazione che sono emersi nel corso degli anni, in modo da comprendere il modo in cui i processi di de-radicalizzazione sono tradotti nella pratica.

Nel primo capitolo di questa tesi, dunque, vengono prese in esame le principali definizioni di de-radicalizzazione che sono state proposte da autori come John Horgan, Fernando Reinares e Daniel Kohler. Nel libro “Walking Away From Terrorism: Accounts of Disengagement from Radical and Extremist Movements”<sup>145</sup> John Horgan definisce la de-radicalizzazione come un processo sia sociale che psicologico che porta gli individui a ridurre il proprio coinvolgimento in attività radicali e violente, e che riduce il rischio di recidivismo. Fernando Reinares, invece, in una delle sue pubblicazioni intitolata “Exit From Terrorism: A Qualitative Empirical Study on Disengagement and Deradicalization Among Members of ETA”<sup>146</sup>, definisce la de-radicalizzazione come un processo attitudinale, che implica che i soggetti de-radicalizzati smettano di giustificare il terrorismo e la violenza. Infine, nel suo libro “Understanding Deradicalization: Methods, tools and programs for countering violent extremism”<sup>147</sup> Daniel Kohler definisce la de-radicalizzazione come un processo di “re-pluralizzazione” di valori, idee, concetti politici, nonché delle definizioni di problemi, soluzioni, e visioni del futuro. Mentre le definizioni di questi autori differiscono in molti modi, sono tutti concordi sul fatto che la de-radicalizzazione non è solo un processo sociale o comportamentale, ma anche psicologico.

Speciale considerazione è riservata a Daniel Kohler in questo capitolo, per il fatto che lo studioso ha sottolineato la connessione tra i processi di de-radicalizzazione e quelli di radicalizzazione. Seguendo il suo esempio, questa ricerca terrà conto dell'importanza di comprendere

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<sup>145</sup> John G. Horgan, *Walking Away From Terrorism: Accounts of Disengagement from Radical and Extremist Movements*, Routledge, London, 2009;

<sup>146</sup> Fernando Reinares, *Exit From Terrorism: A Qualitative Empirical Study on Disengagement and Deradicalization Among Members of ETA*, in “Terrorism and Political Violence”, 23/2011, p.780;

<sup>147</sup> Daniel Kohler, *Understanding Deradicalization: Methods, tools and programs for countering violent extremism*, Routledge, London, 2017;

la radicalizzazione per comprendere appieno la de-radicalizzazione. A questo proposito, questa tesi ha analizzato attentamente le definizioni di radicalizzazione fornite dalla Commissione Europea, Daniel Kohler, Mohammed Hafez, Creighton Mullins, Kees Van Den Bos, Daniela PISOIU.

La Commissione Europea ha definito la radicalizzazione come un processo per il quale gli individui accolgono opinioni, punti di vista e idee che potrebbero portare ad atti di terrorismo. Pertanto, secondo la comunità europea, la radicalizzazione è un processo strettamente ideologico che non deve necessariamente coinvolgere la violenza.

Va notato che c'è molto disaccordo sulla questione della violenza come elemento fondamentale dei processi di radicalizzazione. Infatti, mentre molti studiosi vedono la radicalizzazione come un processo che implica necessariamente la violenza come mezzo per raggiungere un obiettivo politico, altri non la considerano come un elemento presente in tutti i processi di radicalizzazione.

Daniel Kohler, ha definito entrambi i tipi di radicalizzazione. Secondo lo studioso, la radicalizzazione non violenta è un processo attraverso il quale gli individui adottano opinioni radicali senza tuttavia intraprendere o favorire attività terroristiche. Invece, per quanto riguarda la radicalizzazione violenta, secondo Kohler questa comporta l'uso della violenza in seguito all'adozione di idee radicali.

Mohamed Hafez e Creighton Mullins hanno invece definito la radicalizzazione come una combinazione di tre elementi fondamentali, senza i quali il processo di radicalizzazione stesso non può essere compreso: il primo elemento è la gradualità del processo di de-radicalizzazione, il secondo elemento è l'adozione di idee estremiste, mentre il terzo elemento è l'apertura dell'individuo alla possibilità di utilizzare la violenza per raggiungere i propri scopi politici.

Un'altra definizione di grande interesse è quella che è stata presentata da Kees Van Den Bos. Lo studioso ha descritto la radicalizzazione come un processo per il quale gli individui sono sempre più disponibili a sostenere cambiamenti radicali nella società, anche a costo di mettere in pericolo i principi democratici sui quali la società si basa.

Secondo Daniela PISOIU, invece, per descrivere realmente la radicalizzazione è necessario descrivere i processi che portano gli individui a radicalizzarsi, poiché è attraverso questi processi che gli studiosi possono comprendere appieno come avviene la radicalizzazione e il grado di radicalizzazione di ciascun individuo. Per questo, Daniela PISOIU definisce la radicalizzazione come una ideologia politica che ha l'obiettivo di indurre un cambiamento radicale sulla base di idee estremiste. A differenza delle altre definizioni, PISOIU ci offre dunque una rappresentazione del radicalismo che non si basa sulle conseguenze ultime della radicalizzazione, ma piuttosto sui desideri e sui bisogni che guidano gli individui a radicalizzarsi.

Poiché, come abbiamo visto, c'è grande disaccordo su come descrivere la radicalizzazione, è pratica comune distinguere tra quattro principali scuole di pensiero sulla radicalizzazione: la scuola sociologica, la scuola del movimento sociale, la scuola empirica e la scuola psicologica.

La scuola sociologica, rappresentata principalmente da Gilles Kepel, Farhad Khosrokhavar e Olivier Roy, sostiene che la radicalizzazione è un processo indotto negli individui da una perdita di identità in un contesto sociale ostile.

La scuola del movimento sociale, invece, è composta da due principali gruppi di studiosi con diversi approcci alla radicalizzazione: il primo gruppo, che vede Marc Sageman e Quintan Wiktorowicz come i principali esponenti, suggerisce che la radicalizzazione è innescata da dinamiche di gruppo che creano una realtà condivisa; il secondo gruppo si concentra invece sulla radicalizzazione creata dalle relazioni competitive tra i militanti di organizzazioni in conflitto tra loro.

In contrasto con la scuola del movimento sociale, troviamo la scuola di pensiero empirica. Infatti, contrariamente alla scuola del movimento sociale, la scuola empirica è interessata principalmente al livello di radicalizzazione individuale piuttosto che alle dinamiche di gruppo.

Infine, abbiamo la scuola di pensiero psicologica. Questa scuola di pensiero, di cui il maggiore esponente è John G. Horgan, è principalmente interessata ai processi socio-psicologici che portano alla radicalizzazione.

Infine, il capitolo si conclude con l'analisi del modello di de-radicalizzazione presentato da Daniel Kohler. Lo studioso parte dalla definizione di radicalizzazione come "de-pluralizzazione" per presentare il suo modello di de-radicalizzazione come "re-pluralizzazione". Infatti, secondo Kohler, la radicalizzazione e la de-radicalizzazione sono due fenomeni molto simili e strettamente connessi. Kohler descrive la radicalizzazione come un processo di de-pluralizzazione per il quale gli individui interiorizzano l'idea che non ci sono modi alternativi per interpretare concetti e valori politici diversi da quelli suggeriti dall'ideologia radicale. Una volta che il processo di radicalizzazione è completato, l'unico obiettivo degli individui radicali è quello di realizzare la "visione del futuro" voluta dal gruppo terroristico di cui fanno parte. Alla fine, quando il raggiungimento della visione diventa la necessità prevalente nella mente dell'individuo radicale e la disponibilità di nozioni, valori, problemi e soluzioni alternative diminuisce progressivamente, si crea una tensione nella mente dell'individuo che può essere risolta solamente con la violenza.

La de-radicalizzazione secondo Kohler è invece il processo contrario a quello appena descritto. Dunque, la de-radicalizzazione è un processo di re-pluralizzazione che aiuta gli estremisti a comprendere come gli stessi valori e concetti politici possano essere interpretati in maniera differente da quella suggerita dall'ideologia radicale, e che più soluzioni ai loro problemi siano possibili. La tensione è dunque alleviata e l'individuo non sente più la necessità di commettere atti



violenti per risolvere questa tensione, ma inizia invece a vedere come alternative più pacifiche siano percorribili.

Il secondo capitolo è invece dedicato all'analisi di tre dei più rinomati programmi di de-radicalizzazione nel mondo: il “Saudi Counseling Program”, l’“EXIT Stockholm Program” e l’“American Program in Iraq”. Secondo Arie W. Kruglanski, Jocelyn J. Belanger, Rohan Gunaratna, i processi di de-radicalizzazione possono avvenire su tre livelli distinti.

Il primo livello, detto “micro-livello” o livello individuale, si occupa di processi individuali di de-radicalizzazione. Il “meso-livello”, invece, si occupa principalmente della radicalizzazione di gruppo. Infine, il “macro-livello” si occupa della società e di tutti quei fattori esterni al gruppo terroristico che potrebbero portare alla de-radicalizzazione. I programmi di de-radicalizzazione analizzati in questo capitolo si occupano principalmente del micro-livello di de-radicalizzazione, seppur incorporando anche elementi del meso- e del macro-livello.

Il programma di riabilitazione sviluppato in Arabia Saudita nel 2004 è generalmente considerato uno dei programmi di de-radicalizzazione più avanzati. Lo scopo principale di questo programma di de-radicalizzazione è quello di contrastare il “takfirismo”, un’ideologia che accusa di infedeltà tutti coloro che praticano un’altra religione, insieme a tutti i musulmani che adottano un’interpretazione della religione islamica diversa da quella professata da questi individui radicali. Questa ideologia rappresenta una grave minaccia poiché inculca nella mente dei radicali l’idea che ogni individuo considerato un infedele meriti di morire. Pertanto, il programma di de-radicalizzazione saudita si impegna a mostrare agli individui che ci sono interpretazioni più moderate della religione islamica che non incoraggiano alla violenza.

Un altro importante programma di de-radicalizzazione è quello sviluppato in Svezia nel 1998. Questa iniziativa è stata fondata da Kent Lindhal, un ex estremista di destra che ha lasciato il movimento negli anni Novanta. Questo programma ha tre obiettivi principali. Il primo è quello di aiutare i giovani ad allontanarsi dalle organizzazioni radicali di cui fanno parte. Il secondo obiettivo di questo programma è quello di creare una comunità con le famiglie di questi individui per incoraggiarli e sostenerli. Il terzo obiettivo di questa iniziativa è il più ampio in quanto mira a guadagnare conoscenza sull’argomento e sviluppare metodi da condividere con tutti i professionisti che lavorano con giovani radicali.

Infine, il terzo programma analizzato in questa tesi è quello istituito dagli Stati Uniti in Iraq tra il 2007 e il 2008. Questo programma è stato creato appositamente dopo aver osservato il trattamento ingiusto riservato ai detenuti Iracheni, spesso arrestati sulla base di informazioni discutibili fornite dall’intelligence. L’ingiustizia di questi arresti ha dunque portato molti detenuti a provare risentimento nei confronti del sistema. Questi sentimenti sono stati spesso usati dai detenuti

radicali per convincere altri detenuti ad unirsi a loro. Pertanto, questo programma ha due obiettivi principali: aiutare gli individui radicali a de-radicalizzarsi e prevenire ulteriore radicalizzazione.

Il programma è guidato da Douglas Stone, un generale degli Stati Uniti, e portato avanti dalla Task Force 134. Questa iniziativa è stata principalmente suddivisa in diversi programmi educativi attraverso i quali i detenuti possano acquisire nuove competenze oltre ad essere rieducati attraverso l'esposizione a idee più moderate.

Infine, il terzo capitolo è dedicato all'analisi di due programmi di de-radicalizzazione che si sono rivelati fallimentari: Il programma CPIC e il programma RIVE. Gli eventi che hanno portato al fallimento di questi tentativi di de-radicalizzazione sono grandi fonti di interesse per gli studiosi della de-radicalizzazione.

Il Centro per la Prevenzione, l'Integrazione e la Cittadinanza (CPIC) è stato sviluppato nel 2016 a Pontourny, una città francese situata nel comune di Indre-et-Loire. Il CPIC avrebbe dovuto essere il primo centro sperimentale di de-radicalizzazione del suo genere. Il principale obiettivo di questo programma è stato quello di rieducare gli individui radicali attraverso varie attività e corsi educativi.

Tuttavia, il progetto ha presentato molti problemi sin dall'inizio, che ne hanno segnato il destino irrimediabilmente. In particolare, dall'analisi delle critiche rivolte al programma è emerso come il programma fosse basato su una comprensione molto superficiale dei processi di radicalizzazione e di de-radicalizzazione. Per questo, a differenza dei programmi di de-radicalizzazione analizzati nel secondo capitolo, il CPIC ha tentato di imporre valori nazionalisti e idee occidentali invece di promuovere una visione più moderata dell'Islam. La tendenza a limitare la capacità degli individui musulmani di praticare la propria religione ha dunque pregiudicato il successo del programma sin dall'inizio.

Inoltre, secondo gli esperti troppe generalizzazioni sono state fatte durante la creazione del programma. Il motivo principale per cui sono stati commessi così tanti errori è che la creazione del centro di de-radicalizzazione di Pontourny è stata affrettata dopo gli attacchi terroristici del 2015 avvenuti in Francia. Pertanto, il forte bisogno di trovare una soluzione al problema del terrorismo ha portato il governo a prendere decisioni politiche affrettate che alla fine hanno portato al fallimento del programma.

Il Centro di Ricerca e Intervento contro gli Estremisti (RIVE) è stato creato parallelamente al CPIC nell'estate del 2016. A differenza del CPIC che è stato creato per trattare gli individui radicali su base volontaria, il RIVE è stato creato per trattare gli individui posti sotto controllo giudiziario. Infatti, grazie ad una modifica di alcuni articoli del "Codice di procedura penale" francese è stato possibile rendere la partecipazione al programma RIVE obbligatoria per gli individui posti sotto

controllo giudiziario.

Prima della creazione del centro RIVE, infatti, gli individui radicali in attesa di processo venivano semplicemente posti sotto la sorveglianza del "Prison Integration and Probation Services"<sup>148</sup>. Tuttavia, dopo che nel 2016 uno degli individui sotto sorveglianza è riuscito a portare a termine un attacco terroristico, il Ministro della Giustizia Francese ha deciso di offrire un contratto per lo sviluppo del centro RIVE.

Il progetto è stato portato avanti da un team di esperti, terapisti e assistenti sociali con il compito di aiutare le persone a de-radicalizzarsi, per poi essere reintegrati nella società. Pertanto, a differenza del programma Pontourny, il progetto RIVE non è stato progettato per separare gli individui radicali dai loro cari e dal resto della società, ma per aiutarli a reinserirsi dopo essersi de-radicalizzati. Per questo motivo, agli individui che hanno partecipato a questo programma di de-radicalizzazione è stato permesso di scegliere se incontrarsi con il team al centro RIVE, in luoghi pubblici, oppure presso la propria residenza.

Ad ogni individuo è stato assegnato un consulente religioso, psicologico e sociale con il compito di seguire i partecipanti e aiutarli per tutta la durata del programma. Ai partecipanti è stato inoltre richiesto di lavorare con degli educatori durante tutto il programma. L'obiettivo finale di tutte queste misure era quello di aiutare gli individui a sostituire le loro idee radicali con un'interpretazione più moderata della loro religione.

Inoltre, il programma è stato progettato in modo da diminuire progressivamente il numero di incontri settimanali con il team così che, una volta terminato il progetto, i partecipanti potessero tornare alla propria vita normale in modo completamente autosufficiente.

Nonostante questo programma non sia stato considerato un completo fallimento, e i soggetti che hanno preso parte all'iniziativa non abbiano mostrato segni di recidivismo, il contratto stipulato nel 2016 non è mai stato rinnovato. Invece, dopo la terminazione del contratto RIVE, un nuovo contratto è stato assegnato ad un'altra associazione, segnando il passaggio all'iniziativa PAIRS.

Infatti, nonostante i risultati ottenuti, il centro è stato criticato per i forti legami che si erano venuti a creare tra i partecipanti e lo staff. Lo staff, secondo molti, sarebbe dovuto rimanere neutrale invece di formare legami con i soggetti radicali. Inoltre, proprio come il CPIC, il centro RIVE ha avuto numerosi problemi nel trovare partecipanti per il proprio programma di de-radicalizzazione, che alla fine ha portato al fallimento di entrambi i progetti.

In conclusione, il presente elaborato si propone di dimostrare che la de-radicalizzazione è un fenomeno che richiede grande attenzione e conoscenza. Infatti, nella lotta al terrorismo, conoscere i

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<sup>148</sup> Marc Hecker, *Once a Jihadist, Always a Jihadist? A Deradicalization Programs Seen from the Inside*, in "Focus Stratégique", 102/2021, p.31;

processi di de-radicalizzazione e le cause che li possono scatenare fornisce un vantaggio considerevole per gli esperti della materia. Per questa ragione, lo studio della de-radicalizzazione è tanto importante quanto lo studio del terrorismo e dei processi di radicalizzazione.